



Aleksandra Kunce
Maria Popczyk

Into the Noise
Anthropological and
Aesthetic
Discourses in Public
Sphere



Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



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in Public Sphere

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Maria Korusiewicz

On a Sunny Day, under a Tree, Chatting: Towards the Aesthetics of the Everyday

So it came to this: I am sitting under the tree,
Beside the river,
On a sunny morning.
It's a trivial event
And history won't claim it.¹

Sitting beside a river, on a sunny day, for no particular reason and with no clear purpose, without having to have “the arid plain behind me” and “London Bridge falling down”² before my eyes, or cleaning the kitchen on a chilly morning or chatting with the friends over a cup of hot cappuccino still appears to be an untrustworthy experience, unauthenticated by philosophical tradition, almost awkward in the perspective of the legacy of modernity with its divorce between the kingdom of art and aesthetic perception and the realm of the everyday. The tradition of modern Western aesthetics has not prepared us for such a trivial event, although on numerous occasions – in the works of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson or Archibald Alison and finding its epitome in the Kantian philosophy – it did

¹ Wisława Szymborska, “Może być bez tytułu,” in Wisława Szymborska, *Wiersze* (Lesko: Bosz, 2003), p. 16. Translation mine.

² T.S. Eliot, “The Waste Land,” in T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), p. 47.

embrace the territory much wider than the artistic object, reaching towards the aesthetics of the beautiful, the picturesque and the sublime to be found in our environment – in nature.

Aesthetics, an offspring of modern rationality, was originally supposed to be a discursive discipline, “a younger sister of logic”.³ Kant’s contribution, revolving around the idea of disinterestedness and distance of a subjective, yet necessary and universal, judgment of taste, left us with the world divided into the separate realms, where the aesthetic was separated from the scientific, the ethical, and, most importantly, from the *praxis* of life. The rift was deepened by the Hegelian idealism, where the proper object of philosophical reflection was primarily a work of art, a lofty product of the spirit. Aesthetic thought, still resonant of the Platonic visions, claimed the idea of representation, constructing the order of being and its evocation, recapturing or illumination in art. Representation, perceived as creating an image that stands *in-between*, on the *island position*, transgressing both the sphere of thought and the sphere of the world, was considered a distinct plane and activity. Thus, the issue of the position of art in reference to other human activities was usually resolved in favour of aesthetic isolation. Its foundation was “a belief in ontological discreteness of aesthetic perception and the corresponding removal of art objects from the other objects and activities that surround us.”⁴

However, since the 1960s, this arbitrary position, almost automatically accepted by the successive generations, has seemed to be fading away, imperceptibly turning into one more black-and-white sketch on the estimable pages of the history of Western thought. Rediscovering its half-forgotten origins under the thin paving of theory isolating the

³ Franciszek Chmielowski, “Filozofia, estetyka, metafizyka,” *Diametros* 3 (March 2005), p. 10.

⁴ Arnold Berleant, *Re-thinking Aesthetics: Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and The Arts* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), p. 59.

aesthetic *zone* within the *temple* of art, aesthetics reaches toward the glimmering abundance of life itself recognizing its interrelatedness and processuality, elusiveness and ambience. The autonomous and self-contained term *aesthetics* seeks support of the adjectives in order to move forward: we would rather talk of *pragmatic aesthetics*, *engaged aesthetics*, *cognitive aesthetics*, *functional aesthetics*, *everyday aesthetics*, *practical aesthetics*, or *social aesthetics*, or direct our attention to the particular aspects of reality and develop, among others, the aesthetics of violence, power, or politics, the aesthetics of the environment, built and natural, of public spaces or, so appropriate today, the aesthetics of ruins. This broadened perspective has revealed the power lingering within the aesthetic: the judgments of taste, conditioned by culture, politics, ideology and religion, and shaped by emotional needs, appear to be less subjective than the Kantian philosophy claimed. Our aesthetic sense can be guided or even manipulated to serve a specific agenda. On the other hand, we are more and more aware of the fact that it is aesthetic attraction and emotional attachment that enable us to cultivate a respectful attitude to the world around us.⁵

Art as the model of an aesthetic object

The expansion of the scope of aesthetics has been interwoven into the major changes in the Western approach to *what is*, epitomizing the progress in science and decompartmentalization of reality perceived as processual, interrelated and dynamic. In the dust of the falling towers of metaphysics, the only way out seemed to be the reorientation of philosophy and a great ontological comeback – into the greening territories of direct experience threatening us with temporality and ruled by the principles of uncertainty.

⁵ Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 72.

This altered – considerably humbler – worldview has opened up new perspectives for the dialogue between non-Western traditions and Western philosophy, encouraging the tendencies familiar to the Eastern thought: the radical turn to the human subject as the source of power to find a proper dwelling in the world; the processes of melting down the firm “I” of the modern idealistic philosophy into the multiplicity of *drives* or *aggregates*; the emphasis on the phenomenological “presentness” resulting in the re-evaluation of experience as both the source of and the guide to an understanding of the world.⁶

The new paradigm has also manifested itself in the expanded scope of what we perceive and appreciate as art. Having torn down the conventional genre boundaries, the limitations of the self-contained identity and the traditional forms of presentation and reception, art has literally become *frameless*, blurring the established standards of the aesthetic evaluation. The new functions of art have required both art and artists to acquire new *virtues* – the increased self-awareness, the courage of a mythical warrior and the sharpness of sight, since art should not only be able to keep pace with the human journey into the core of our existence but it also has to move forward to the vanguard and become not so much the answer as the precious Promise of an answer to the persistent asking about the Sense. This impossible task has involved the permanent revolution in the name of the truth concealed within the world but “setting” itself in a work of art. (“The nature of art would then be this: the truth of beings setting itself to work. [...] The art work opens up in its own way the Being of beings.”⁷) Thus, art

⁶ Cf. Maria Korusiewicz, “Between the Fields of Fear and Gardens of Compassion: The Approach to Nature in Western and Japanese Tradition,” in *Civilisation and Fear: Anxiety and the Writing of the Subject*, eds. Wojciech Kalaga and Agnieszka Kliś (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).

⁷ Martin Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Art and Its Significance*, ed. Stephen David Ross (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), pp. 259, 261.

has grown to the status of discourse, opening the space of freedom explored by arbitrary artistic choices.

However, freedom and autonomy have also brought about some perturbing consequences, almost transparent for the audiences. The barriers set by the traditional perception of the ethical or the moral as inherent in art have melted down allowing for harsh diagnoses.⁸ In spite of its *shrill sonority*, art has come before the abyss of *silence* becoming the “pitiless art” of Paul Virilio.⁹ The reality of the “outside” world has once more become just an inexhaustible reservoir of resources, used or disregarded at the whim of an artist rarely burdened with any concern except the final artistic vision.¹⁰ Art, despite its ostensible “mixing” with reality, breaking through all the barriers of the past and being apparently embedded in the lambency of life, in fact *never* loses its distinctiveness, its own narration. John Cage’s 1952 composition “4’33”, performed in the absence of deliberate sound, has served as the illustration of this distinctiveness

⁸ Art employing the Heideggerian concept of *aletheia* – the concealed truth that requires unconcealment, unearthing – has been fated to the indifference and anaesthetization of a surgeon’s instrument cutting into the body of our existence (Walter Benjamin’s term, p. 534), and brutalization of means (Andrzej Zybertowicz, *Poznanie i przemoc: stadium z nie-klasycznej filozofii wiedzy* (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 1995). Contemporary debates eagerly place modernism with its visions of transformation of the world, revolution and rebirth at the foundation of fascist concepts (Cf. Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* [London: Palgrave, MacMillan, 2007]) developing much older statements: “Instead of being based on ritual it begins to be based on another practice – politics.” Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility,” in *Art and Its Significance*, ed. Stephen David Ross (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), p. 529.

⁹ Cf. Paul Virilio, *Art and Fear* (Continuum: New York, 2006).

¹⁰ Freedom in its best form should be founded as a moment of construction of one’s identity in relation to the context of the world. Cf. Maria Korusiewicz, “Czy pozwolić bytowi być, czyli zapiski o rytuałach wolności w sztuce,” in *Rytuały codzienności*, eds. Anna Węgrzyniak and Tomasz Stępień (Katowice: Wydawnictwo WSZOP, 2008), p. 72.

for the last six decades. Within the time frame of four minutes and thirty three seconds the everyday with all its implications is cut out of its context and raised to the meta-level, becoming a complex semiotic entity.

The distinctiveness of art was paralleled by the distinctiveness of aesthetics seen as the philosophy of art. Its famous “crisis”¹¹ repeatedly proclaimed in the twentieth century was just another name for the quest for more efficient demarcation lines that would preserve the separation of art from the factual. Aesthetics, overlooking the importance of the world beyond art, failed to account for the major part of our aesthetic life. The wide range of propositions, from the formalism of Clive Bell and Edward Bullough and “art-as-experience” of John Dewey to Arthur Danto’s powerful idea of “the artworld,” Monroe Beardsley’s contribution, or the texts presented in the bulky anthologies edited by Joseph Margolis and William Kennick,¹² despite the crucial differences in the construction of aesthetic paradigms, revolved around the work of art as a model object of aesthetic appreciation. As Berleant and Carlson state:

At one extreme is the old idea of disinterested contemplation of the sensuous and formal

¹¹ One of the most influential publications on the subject was *Kryzys estetyki*, ed. Maria Gołaszewska (Kraków: PWN/Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1983).

¹² Cf.: Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1914); Edward Bullough, “‘Psychical Distance’ as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle,” *British Journal of Psychology* 5 (1912): 87–117; John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934), vol. 10 of *The Later Works, 1925–1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987); Arthur Danto, “The Artworld,” *Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964): 571–584; George Dickie, *Aesthetics, An Introduction* (New York: Pegasus, 1971); Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1958); *Philosophy Looks at the Arts; Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. Joseph Margolis (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1962); *Art and Philosophy; Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. William Kennick (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1964).

properties of isolated and solitary objects of art and, on the other, the new paradigm of emotionally and cognitively rich engagement with cultural artifacts, intentionally created by designing intellects, informed by both art historical traditions and art critical practices, and deeply embedded in a complex, many-faceted artworld.¹³

Today, at the beginning of the new century, what seems to be a challenge for Western art appears to be an almost natural path for aesthetics; the transgression of its established boundaries is a pending process. So, we have left, as Arnold Berleant argues, “the beautifully cut diamond of an art object in order to immerse ourselves in its environment discovering its aesthetic dimension.”¹⁴ Challenging traditional theory, Berleant postulates the need of aesthetics that would be open to both art and the non-art. Wolfgang Iser, discussing similar issues, goes even further, suggesting that aesthetics that would embrace the full scope of human sensuality and human experience should place the aesthetic at the foundation of human existence in the world.¹⁵ However, according to the majority of scholars,¹⁶ in order to succeed, it needs its criteria, objectives and hierarchy of values to be redefined with respect to the variety of fields of interests, in which neither the distinctive space of the artworld nor the communication

¹³ Arnold Berleant and Allen Carlson, Introduction to *The Aesthetic of Natural Environments*, eds. Arnold Berleant and Allen Carlson (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2004), p. 13.

¹⁴ Arnold Berleant, *Prze-mysleć estetykę*, trans. Maria Korusiewicz and Tomasz Markiewka, (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), p. 10.

¹⁵ Cf. Wolfgang Iser, *Estetyka poza estetyką*, trans. Katarzyna Gućzalska (Kraków: Universitas, 2005).

¹⁶ Christopher Dowling has proposed a more limited task, relying on the criteria associated with the paradigmatic art. For Dowling critical significance and discursiveness are a guaranty of high aesthetic value and cannot be replaced by elusive criteria and intuitive opinions. Cf. Christopher Dowling, “The Aesthetics of Daily Life,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 3 (2010): 225–242.

necessary in the practical applications of the theories based on the expressive functions constitute a sufficient plane of reference. Thus the perception of the aesthetic blooming around us, beyond the limits of art, forces us to start such an investigation from new locations: from the multiplicity of phenomena of the everyday, approached, as Yuriko Saito maintains, on their own terms.

The everyday and aesthetic thought

The aesthetics of the everyday constitutes an influential field within the contemporary aesthetic theory with dozens of publications and growing impact on the altered perception of the nature of aesthetic experience.¹⁷ Its origins are usually found in the proposition of John Dewey, who, as early as in 1934, suggested redirecting attention from the

¹⁷ The early studies pointing towards the everyday include: Joseph Kupfer, *Experience as Art: Aesthetics in Everyday Life* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983); David Novitz, *The Boundaries of Art: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Place of Art in Everyday Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Crispin Sartwell, *The Art of Living: Aesthetics of the Ordinary in World Spiritual Traditions* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995); Thomas Leddy, "Everyday Surface Aesthetic Qualities: 'Neat', 'Messy', 'Clean', 'Dirty'," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 3 (summer, 1995): 259–268; Kevin Melchionne, "Artistic Dropouts," in *Aesthetics: The Big Questions*, ed. Carolyn Korsmeyer (New York: Blackwell, 1998); Yuriko Saito, "Everyday Aesthetics," *Philosophy and Literature* 25, no. 1 (2002): 87–95; Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); and Richard M. Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). (The above choice of literature is based on the list included in Kevin Melchionne's publication "Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Life: A Reply to Dowling," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 51, no. 4 (2011) 51: 437–442. Within the last decade the major publication appears to be *Everyday Aesthetics* by Yuriko Saito, a Japanese philosopher currently living and lecturing in the United States. The study is the outcome of the author's research conducted for more than twenty years. Cf. Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

world of so-called art to the practices of everyday existence, granting the still ennobling status of aesthetic experience to the sound-vision-and-smell of “the fire engine rushing by” or to “the delight of the housewife in tending her plants.”¹⁸ Although particular aspects of Dewey’s account are frequently criticized for clinging to the artistic object as a model of aesthetic appreciation (the idea of qualitative unity, closure or consummation) his general concept is still valid today.

Contemporary approaches cover a large field of interests and issues, yet, despite the multiplicity of arguments and concepts, they seem to share some traits that most authors recognize and define.¹⁹

Firstly, the turn towards ordinary moments of our existence entails the re-evaluation of the full scope of human sensuality, including the neglected contact senses of smell, taste and touch.²⁰ Thus the notion of aesthetic experience, contemplative and (frequently) disinterested in the case of art, should also embrace action-oriented, often unreflected, or intuitive judgments and the emotionally engaged appreciation of phenomena whose qualities have never been included within the traditional scope of aesthetics. The messy, the neat, the dirty and the clean, the new, the fresh or the prime and the old, the decayed or the decomposed, or even the blooming or the withered, the dried out or the muddy: these qualities marking the temporary stages of the ever-changing, transient world around us have been traditionally inscribed into the plane inferior to the paradigmatic art of the Western tradition. We should not forget that in our history the common factor for the denigration of the phenomenal reality, both in religious and philosophical terms, was its major inherent feature:

¹⁸ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Recognizing the significance of Yuriko Saito’s contribution I will frequently refer to her concepts as the most influential in the field.

²⁰ Cf. Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste; Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). The subject is also discussed by Arnold Berleant, Emily Brady, and Richard Shusterman.

its phenomenal, temporary nature, the impermanence of all things and, consequently, their imperfection. The inherent properties of bodily experiences, their natural relation to the basic instincts of sexuality and survival, were perceived as offensive both to the Western sense of morality and the idea of beauty, typically identified with the aesthetic. However, if we look underneath the surface of the philosophical tradition, it appears that the contemptuous approach to these experiences, which threaten us with the close contact with broadly understood contamination and dirt, derives from the depths of our biological and human history, as Mary Douglas proves in her famous study *Purity and Danger*.²¹ Therefore, the task of changing this position undertaken by everyday aesthetics seems to be a challenge, requiring educational projects and carefully prepared campaigns.

The other issue, frequently brought up by the cognitivists, among others Allen Carlson, is the need for some structuring of “free” and direct experience of the everyday in order to find the space for the necessary minimum of a contemplative, intellectual element. This gesture towards the Kantian aesthetics is accompanied by acknowledging the relevance of knowledge, derived from both common sense and science, and some training in aesthetic perception of things.

We cannot appreciate everything; there must be limits and emphases in our aesthetic appreciation of nature as they are in our appreciation of art. Without such limits and emphases our experience [...] would only be ‘a meld of physical sensations’ without any meaning or significance. It would be what William James calls a ‘blooming, buzzing confusion’.²²

²¹ Cf. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

²² Allen Carlson, “Appreciation and the Natural Environment,” in *The Aesthetic of Natural Environments*, p. 71.

The validity of this viewpoint may be questioned within the scope of environmental aesthetics, especially the aesthetics of nature, weather, and the similar, where the metaphysical element is always powerful and allows for pure elation, it seems well justified in reference to the built environments and the artefacts of the everyday.

Another crucial issue is the authorial identity and the originality of a work of art. These essential requirements of a modern artwork have no equivalent in the everyday where the individual “author” is usually nonexistent, and things happen, exist or function as a result of cumulative efforts, circumstances and, frequently, chance. Thus instead of discursive properties and the quest for the author’s message and intention, we talk about sensual experience, pragmatic sources of appreciation, practical values of a given *object*, and possibilities of further transformations due to human activity or natural causes. Here, things can be modified, repaired, re-painted, cleaned, put into parts, or organized into collections, they are subjected to environmental factors, biological or geological processes, climate changes and so on. On the other hand, *natural* objects or phenomena – a thunderstorm, a flock of birds in the sky, grey pebbles in the river – are frequently beyond our reach. Their aesthetic qualities also change, just as the ways of experiencing them aesthetically, since no stable identity is required within the realm of the everyday. The very nature of reality makes us experience things as forming the general pattern of life, since objects, moments, actions and phenomena never appear separately, like framed paintings in a museum or successive pieces performed by an orchestra. The ontology of the everyday is its interrelatedness.²³ Let me quote Saito:

When we experience non-art objects, we do identify objects in many ways: the corner stone, the oak tree in my front yard, my black dress, Old Faithful, my office at school, and so on. However,

²³ Melchionne, *Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Life*, p. 6.

they are subject to vicissitudes and are always experienced in certain temporal context which changes the nature of our experience.²⁴

The third frequently observed trait is looking for inspiration in non-Western traditions, especially Japanese culture famous for its aesthetically-oriented design objects enhancing the quality of everyday life. The aesthetic sensibility and appreciation of the temporal, transient phenomenality is the core of the Japanese aesthetic tradition, where gestures and actions, objects and the environment constitute a dynamic, aesthetically vibrant reality, which, however, does not affect the importance of more *Western* kinds of artistic phenomena such as literature, theatre or fine arts. The paradox of simultaneous distinctiveness and unity of both *types* in terms of their aesthetic evaluation seems to be the most intriguing question for Western observers.

The traditional Buddhist philosophy also offers some irreplaceable notions grasping the aesthetic values reflecting the impermanence of things and dynamic unity of all beings. The most basic one is the famous idea of emptiness. Originally understood as no-thing-ness, over the centuries has been transformed into a virtue of emptying one's ego in order to "see" the world: to become one with the world while remaining oneself.

Cultivation of artistic excellence requires 'emptying' one's ego, whether painting, poetry-making, garden design, arranging flowers, tea ceremony, or martial arts. The treatment of materials and subject matters in these art forms helps us cultivate an aesthetic sensibility by listening to the object's voice, respecting its native disposition.²⁵

²⁴ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, p. 25.

²⁵ Yuriko Saito, "Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics," a presentation prepared for the conference *Old World and New World*

When we replace the typical confrontational model of relationships of the Western world with the one derived from the ancient Buddhist idea of all-encompassing compassion²⁶, we come close to understanding both the paradigm of the logic of paradox – *is and yet is not* – underlying the process of *emptying* the ego to raise it to its *fullness*, and the continuity of all forms, separate, yet forming a unity.²⁷

Zen Buddhism as a philosophy is extremely controversial. Its opponents claim that the essence of Zen is non-mental, and conditioned by “no method. Man only attains correct vision from the moment when no idea, no fabrication of the mind any longer comes between him and the fact.”²⁸ Others argue that behind the meditative practices of Zen hides a deep and sublime philosophy, developed over the centuries.²⁹ The logic of paradox as the core of Zen Buddhism also constitutes the underpinnings of aesthetic appreciation in Japanese culture; it is direct, yet mediated by tradition, just like famous traditional viewing of blooming cherry trees, watching the moon, or tea ceremony.³⁰

Perspectives on Environmental Philosophy 2011 in the International Society of Environmental Ethics, Nijmegen, 14–18. 06. 2011, p. 2.

²⁶ “Compassion always signifies that the opposites are one in the dynamic reciprocity of their own contradictory identity [...]. If the concept of compassion has not been foundational for Western culture then I think there is a basic difference between Eastern and Western cultures in this regard.” Kitaro Nishida, *Last Writings. Nothingness and the Religious Worldview* trans. and ed. David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 106.

²⁷ The logic of paradox (Jap. *hari no ri*) based on the contradictory identity of the opposites, is claimed to be the dominant logical paradigm of the Japanese Zen Buddhism philosophy. Cf. Agnieszka Kozyra, *Filozofia zen* (Warszawa: PWN, 2004), p. 10.

²⁸ Robert Linssen, *Living Zen*, trans. Diana Abrahams-Curiel (New York: Allen and Unwin, 1958), p. 46.

²⁹ Masao Abe, *Zen and Western Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), p. IX.

³⁰ Japanese aesthetics also recognizes the aesthetic distance and the contemplative type of experience, i.e. enjoying the view of a dry garden (*karesansui*), or viewing the moon.

Much more “liberated” way of appreciating things aesthetically is suggested by the authors echoing Taoist tradition, the most frequently quoted among which seems to be a cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan.

An adult must learn to be yielding and careless like a child if he were to enjoy nature polymorphously. He needs to slip into old clothes so that he could feel free to stretch out on the hay beside the brook and bathe in the meld of physical sensations; the smell of the hay and of horse dung; the warmth of the ground, its hard and soft contours; the warmth of the sun tempered by breeze; the tickling of an ant [...] the sound of water over the pebbles [...]. Such an environment might break all the formal rules of euphony and aesthetics, substituting confusion for order and yet be wholly satisfying.³¹

The Taoist concept of *wu wei*, letting things go, accepting them as they are and immersing oneself in the flow of existence, poses a challenge for Western thought scared of *substituting confusion for order*, or losing control over the *polymorphous* experience. However, Chinese insights seem to be more tempting for the aesthetics of the natural environment, as the numerous studies of Graham Parkes demonstrate.

Old cultures of the Far East are hardly the only traditions in which we seek models of the long forgotten communion of man and the world. Similar intuitions and the opulence of motifs is also found in these cultural traditions which pre-date art, or in contemporary tribal cultures, i.e. Australian Aborigines or Native Americans, which tend to see the world as the continuum of processes, with the aesthetic and the moral, the spiritual and the mundane,

³¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, quoted by: Allen Carlson, “Appreciation and the Natural Environment,” p. 70.

the individual and the common rarely separated. So-called folk art, crafts, traditions, rituals and myths reveal the social functions of the aesthetic qualities of the everyday phenomena, creating what today we would like to call “the aesthetic welfare,”³² so desirable in our troubled times. On the other hand, while learning from the others, Western aesthetics of the everyday is deeply interested in its own “here and now”, and “does not need to be exoticized to justify its importance and claim its full impact.”³³ What it aims at is the aesthetic awareness that opens our senses and our mind to the world we live in.

The forth, and the last issue is the blurred distinction between the ethical or moral and the aesthetic. The growing recognition of the ethical dimension of aesthetic choices, judgments and experiences has significantly changed both the theoretical and practical approaches to the functions of the aesthetic in private interpersonal space as well as in public spaces. The ramifications of this link are so far-reaching that it deserves a closer examination.

The aesthetic of the everyday and public spaces

The aesthetics directed towards our environment and our everyday existence plays “a crucial role in our collective project of world-making.”³⁴ The results of its application can range from the threatening, negative impact to the positive influence on people’s life. The twentieth-century experiences of ideological and political relevance of the aesthetic in public spaces revealed its violent manipulative power and its persuasive strength. It possesses all the properties of the perfect instrument to control people’s

³² Yrjö Sepänmaa, “Aesthetics in Practice: Prolegomenon,” in *Practical Aesthetics in Practice and in Theory*, ed. Martti Honkanen (Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 1995), p. 15.

³³ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, p. 3.

³⁴ Saito, “Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics,” p. 2.

emotions and sentiments, to shape group identities or instil nationalistic or ideological pride. The type of architecture, urban design, colours of the flag or stripes on a prisoner's jacket convey messages whose influence is irresistible, yet the codes remain almost transparent. The invisible wars are being fought before our very eyes. The public space appears to be neither the space of a free person, as the Greeks claimed, nor of the consensus of the well-educated promoted by the Enlightenment idea described by Jürgen Habermas.

The downfall of the public space is brought about by the impossibility of a rational debate, which is prevented by the fact that the discourses taking place within this space involve a whole range of contradictory interests. In the fragmented reality it seems more effective to allow for a number of diverse discourses, which are transient but exist both in the institutional sphere and beyond it. Art is best positioned to fulfil this role when it annoys, provokes and criticizes, but at the same time comments on the events taking place in this reality. And whereas the place of art in the contemporary Western cultures appears well-established: art is critical, the status of traditional aesthetics is ambivalent.

This ambivalence is diminished in the approach suggested by everyday aesthetics: the positive aesthetic qualities manifested in the everyday facilitate the conscious building of *good* relations with our environment and with people around us. The foundation of such good relations is knowledge, empathy and attention enabling us to approach otherness without violating its nature "on its own terms." Saito, the author of this concept, derives it from the definition of a *good person* given by Yi-Fu Tuan.

One kind of definition of a good person, or a moral person, is that the person does not impose his or her fantasy on another. That is, he or she is willing to acknowledge the reality of other individuals, or even of the tree or the rock. So to

be able to stand and listen. That to me is a moral capacity, not just an intellectual one.³⁵

The moral urge to “empty one’s ego” expressed by kindness and benevolence is a matter of pedagogy rooted in the traditions of a given society, community or family. This moderate cognitive approach is shared by James Howard Kunstler, the author of *Geography of Nowhere* (1993), who looks for remedies for our deteriorating landscapes, “housing tracts, mega-malls, junked cities and ravaged countryside that make up the everyday environment” we have to face. Kunstler argues that “the culture of good place-making like the culture of farming or agriculture is a body of knowledge and acquired skills.”³⁶ Therefore, it requires educational efforts directed towards the cultural traditions and aiming at the future positive development. However, our contemporariness does not conduce easily to such projects of community making; we suffer a shortage of tools which would provide desirable solutions. Our cultural *core* is formed by autonomy, independence and weak social ties and networks, hence the necessity of supplementing them with additional layers of skills and emotions that would build tight social ties and promote our participation in social networks.

Among the possible options, everyday aesthetics has been gaining ground. Its major advantage is that it combines the aesthetic and the ethical as two essential components of culture generating values and shaping relations with the environment. Their association echoes the estimable

³⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, after: Yuriko Saito, “Appreciating Nature on Its Own Terms,” in *Nature, Aesthetics and Environmentalism*, eds. Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 151.

³⁶ James Howard Kunstler, after: Wendy McClure and Fred A. Hurand, “Re-engaging the Public in the Art of Community Place-Making,” in: *Downtowns: Revitalizing the Centers of Small Urban Communities*, ed. Michael A. Burayidi (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 107.

ideas of the past where *kalos* was close to *kagathos*, and philosophical theory was meant to serve the *praxis* of life. Linking the two spheres has a profound impact on the evaluation of traditional instrumentation of art-centred aesthetics.

Aesthetic value fit for disinterested contemplation of a work of art, alienated from the ethical sphere and from the natural world and, eventually, informing the view of the world becomes a *false* value,³⁷ a sign of passivity and helplessness in the face of the cumulating dilemmas of contemporariness. Overcoming the comfortable habits of looking through the pane of glass and engaging aesthetics in the affairs of the daily life, as postulated by Berleant or Saito, is a reasonable proposition since our aesthetic response to them has a surprising degree of power in shaping the world and, subsequently, the quality of life.³⁸

Aesthetics directed towards the everyday, engaged and active, cannot avoid the ethical evaluation, taking into account the relationship between people's aesthetic reaction to a given phenomenon and their decisions. The positive reaction encourages protective gestures, the negative one results in indifference, neglect or rejection. The impact of such evaluations on our environment hardly needs an explanation. What is more, the appropriation of this power of the aesthetic may serve specific social purposes, from environmental policy, through health services or educational projects, to so-called participative designs engaging the public in building the common space. This strategy, however, in light of historical facts, "needs to negotiate between two poles: aestheticizing certain objects and phenomena and at the same time being mindful of the agenda it is meant to serve."³⁹

In this perspective aesthetic judgments should be both informed and in accord with ethics. Saito emphasizes the

³⁷ Berleant, *Prze-mysleć estetykę*, p. X.

³⁸ Cf. Saito, "Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics," p. 1.

³⁹ Cf. Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, p. 246.

fact that the basis of everyday aesthetic is moral-aesthetic judgments of artefacts and actions relating to the vibrant fabric of everyday existence. There is enough room there for trivia – wrapping and unwrapping of gifts, setting the table for the family reunion and cooking for your loved ones, or using bleach to preserve the wonderful whiteness of your clothes and driving a huge SUV, the trendiest of status vehicles. However, more consequential things are also in focus – designing people-friendly public buildings, preserving endangered species even if they are not attractive to an average viewer, or putting hoardings in the middle of pristine landscapes and localizing garbage dumps in the vicinity of a public beach.

Let me call these judgments “moral-aesthetic” for want of a better term [...] I hold that these judgments are aesthetic judgments insofar as they are derived from our sensuous (often bodily) experience of the objects, different from other moral judgments.⁴⁰

These judgments refer to the notions that are rarely brought up in the context of aesthetics, but in this case, do affect the aesthetic values: *respect* for the matter and/or creative process, respect for the people participating in these processes and for intended users⁴¹; *humility* in the face of the task; *responsibility* for one’s actions, and, most importantly, *care*. Donald Norman, the author of *The Design for Everyday Things*, puts emphasis on the fact that what really matters is “care, planning, thought and concern for others.”⁴² All of these can be epitomized in the concept of thoughtfulness, “Thoughtfulness is beautiful.”⁴³

Transgressing the private space, thoughtfulness appears to be the essential prerequisite of two powerful ideas: the

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 208.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 207.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Mariel Semal, quoted in: Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, p. 208.

concept of the basic life good within the sphere of the commons, and the notion of aesthetic welfare achieved through the working of our emotional system engaged in the social patterns of positive communication. Helmut Hirsch, an American neurobiologist, points out:

There is a saying, – It is our emotions that make us think. As I see it, an increase in goodness requires going beyond the intellectual approaches to the situations we face: we must reach into the deeper and hopefully broader emotional underpinning of all that we say and do. To increase goodness we must develop perspectives and approaches that include it all.⁴⁴

Nourished by our emotions, the aesthetic founded on thoughtfulness would also refer to the category of work as defined by John Locke, i.e. determining the intuitive *sense of property* and the natural need to direct our efforts to improve what is perceived as *ours*, yet shared with others. Using the title of Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott's book we may say that the path leads *From Beauty to Duty*.⁴⁵

In this context Saito poses a controversial question opening the door to the normative aesthetics: "Can't environmental aesthetics include not only an analysis of what 'is' our aesthetic response, but also an exploration of an 'aesthetic ought'?"⁴⁶ The issue, threatening the freedom of aesthetic judgments, remains unsolved but most aestheticians within the field of non-art aesthetics tend to agree.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Helmut Hirsch, "Confronting Our Emotional Brain. A Neuroscientist Views Humans at a Crossroads," *Old World and New World Perspectives on Environmental Philosophy* 2011, p. 9.

⁴⁵ Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott, *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2008.

⁴⁶ Saito, "Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics," p. 6.

⁴⁷ Those include Marcia Eaton, Emily Brady, and Ronald Hepburn, among others.

Hence the link between the notion of thoughtfulness and the idea of the civil commons, with all its rights and duties, understood as a “human agency in personal, collective or institutional form which protects and enables the access of all members of a community to basic life good.⁴⁸” Basic life good will not grow without properly maintained channels of communication which can be supported by the aesthetic literacy directed towards the full scope of human environment, including art. To this end, everyday aesthetics functions as a form of positive social communication introducing the natural and built environment into the space of social relations. There emerges the notion of *environmental justice* in reference to the people, animals, plants, and places we live *with*.

This short presentation of everyday aesthetics would be incomplete without at least signalling the issue of its general orientation towards the totality of existence, and the shift away from the purely anthropocentric point of view. *Social* communication embraces the non-human sphere as well, challenging the traditional western notions of *nature* and *culture*. Instead of placing them in opposition to each other, we should rather see them as the dynamic existential continuum of common existence.

The most promising way to approach this continuum with respect, care and thoughtfulness and to retain the ability to wonder and enjoy its flow is the appreciation that would recognize the value of the category of *gift* with all its implications. According to Peter Barnes the social and natural environments we inhabit

have two common characteristics: they’re all gifts, and they’re all shared. A gift is something we receive, as opposed to something we earn. A shared

⁴⁸ John McMurtry (2001), quoted in: Daniel Mishori, “Conceptualizing the Commons: On the Rhetoric of Environmental Rights and Public Ownership,” *Old World and New World Perspectives on Environmental Philosophy* 2011, p. 12.

gift is one we receive as members of a community, as opposed to individually. Examples of such gifts include air, water, ecosystems, languages, music, holidays, money, law, mathematics, parks, the Internet, and much more. These diverse gifts are like a river with three tributaries: 'nature, community, and culture'. [...] Indeed, we literally can't live without it, and we certainly can't live well.⁴⁹

Final remarks

The development of the aesthetics of everyday, frequently used as an umbrella term for manifold aesthetic discourses focusing on the phenomena constituting our everyday environments, has brought about major changes in aesthetic theory. Everyday aesthetics is of limited autonomy, guided, at least partially, by knowledge provided by natural sciences and humanities. As the "engaged aesthetics" depending on emotions, sensuality and the directness of experience, it embraces the full range of forms of aesthetic appreciation, from contemplative through participative to active creation. It also has functional ramifications and the practical, teleological dimension. After all, "we are moved to act more often, more consistently, and more profoundly by the experience of beauty in all of its forms than by intellectual arguments, abstract appeals to duty, or even by fear."⁵⁰

Its impact on everyday life signals the need of normative everyday aesthetics to be developed alongside the descriptive and meta-aesthetics (however, such decision would affect the subjectivity and freedom inherent in our aesthetic evaluations). Nevertheless, the return to moral-aesthetic

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁵⁰ David Orr, quoted in: Saito, "Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics," p. 5.

judgments forming the space of the *ethical aesthetics* opens the gates to new territories, rarely visited by philosophers, where cultural traditions of the moral and the ethical intertwined with the aesthetic may surprise us.

Even if the future of everyday aesthetics is not obvious yet, it appears to be a positive turn in our philosophical tradition. The aesthetic discourse which has spread to the public or interpersonal spaces of our daily life returns to the dialogic situation, to the intimacy of an encounter. The functions of manipulation and control, so powerful in the institutionalized sphere of the commons, seem to have been weakened with the rise of aesthetic awareness of the value of the everyday, offering – together with cultivating aesthetic education – an alternative to the emphasis on mass culture or culture industry with its instruments of competitive pressure. We have an opportunity to re-discover the specific value of care, respect, and thoughtfulness in the realm of impermanence and imperfection, where the aesthetic engagement offers a possibility of designing our dwelling in the reality, a chance to find a place that suits our hand, a place of mutuality. In our daily life the implications of the aesthetic exceed the mere *surplus* of culture; it is a necessary condition of the “aesthetic welfare” of Yrjö Sepänmaa, “an ingredient necessary for a good society, along with justice, equality, freedom, and social welfare.”⁵¹ Aesthetic welfare as such should be included in the fourth generation of human rights, improving our common project of making a more friendly and more beautiful world.⁵²

⁵¹ Saito, “Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics,” p. 3.

⁵² The classification of human rights is based on the idea of Karel Vasak, who in 1979 divided them into three generations, accordingly to the French Revolution’s motto of *liberty, equality, fraternity*. Thus the first-generation human rights deal essentially with the issue of freedoms. The second-generation human rights are related to equality, i.e. to institutions of social life. The third-generation human rights cover group and collective rights, such as community, the tribe and family, as well as healthy environment, intergenerational equity and sustainability. Today, most authors speak of the *fourth* generation of rights such as communication, privacy or copyrights.

Thus, sitting beside a river and reading a book, or resting under a tree and watching the ants, or eating home-made cookies and chatting with friends appears to be a serious matter. Especially, on a sunny day.

Part One

In Search of Description
The Spatiality of Discourse
and the Spatiality of Art

Aleksandra Kunce

Wonder and Anthropology*

1. Wonder and philosophy

What is wonder, astonishment – το θαύμα? It is a wonder, a thing of wonder, a wonderful picture, but also a state of wondering, of being astonished and amazed. Astonishment provokes stupefaction and fear. Hence θαυμάζω (*thaumadzo*)/θαυμαζειν (*thaumadzein*) means to wonder, to be astonished and amazed at something, to admire and applaud, to highly appreciate but also to venerate something.

In his work *Theaetetus* Plato writes that wonder is typical of philosophers, that there is no other way to start philosophizing but to be astonished and amazed.¹ Aristotle repeats this conjunction of the origins of philosophical thinking and wonder.² We learn that to love myth is to be in a way a philosopher, as myth is what satisfies wonder as a pure demand for knowledge, even though the orders of *mythos* and *logos* are diverse. Of the essence here is his

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¹ “I see, my dear Theaetetus, that Theodorus had a true insight into your nature when he said that you were a philosopher, for wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder.” Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, section 155D, accessed July 15, 2011, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/theatu.html>.

² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. William David Ross, A2, 982b 18 ff, accessed July 16, 2011, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.html>.

pointing to the degrees of wonder and to the absence of practical interest, which sets wonder free and leads to rational investigation, or one that seeks reason-based foundations of things.

Astonishment is a stimulus which, in Jaspers's words, is a constantly renewable source of philosophizing and not just a mere beginning in time that passes away. Therefore, wonder is a source of knowledge. What is *thauma*? It is a shock that goes with the recognition of things for the very first time. The old is recast as the new because it is first truly brought into focus. Astonishment upsets the usual order of things, especially in matters of everyday existence, it unsettles the routine of perception and questions the former experience and legitimization of things. Finally, it results in asking questions about the nature of the universe. It means recognizing something anew. But it is also a condition which, besides being open to the "new," does not neglect of the "old."³

Wonder stimulates us to pose a philosophical question – in disbelief, faced by the lack of clarity, out of concern. Wondering makes us discover our own ignorance. Hence the Socratic ignorance becomes the first step on the road to the real insight into things. Heidegger adds that astonishment is what constantly pervades philosophy and constitutes it anew each time.⁴ According to Krzysztof Pomian, philosophizing begins with the simultaneous experience of "recognizing the reality of what is seen and being struck and dumbfounded by the unreality of it." Therefore, astonishment arises out of a sense of disparity between what is seen and what is expected.⁵

One should ponder the relationship between wonder and doubt. It begins with a common experience which gets transformed once the representation of reality ceases

³ Dariusz Kulas, "O nomadycznej filozofii," *Anthropos* 6–7 (2006).

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. William Kluback and Jean T. Wilde (London, 1968), p. 83.

⁵ Krzysztof Pomian, "Heidegger i wartości burżuazyjne. Rozmowa z Cezarym Wodzińskim," *Aletheia* 4, no. 1 (1990).

to be obvious. Is it, therefore, the case that wondering always means being in doubt? These are two great figures of thinking in philosophy, whose conjuncture is a driving force not just behind the growth of knowledge but also that of wisdom. Therefore, wonder and doubt are not only to help the philosopher gain a deeper insight but also to augment his or her wisdom. Hence the condition of being constantly astonished – which amounts to listening and observing in a different way, to being ready to renounce one's former position, in a word, to being no longer rooted – is a self-effacing gesture of probing deep into reality, as well as an exercise in wisdom.

2. Wonder and human condition

“Wonder is the basic characteristic of the human condition,” writes Jeanne Hersch.⁶ Very soon, however, doubts arise as to whether animals do not wonder too and whether the wondering of the *homo sapiens sapiens* species should indeed be so glorified. Yet what is most important is the very complexity of the typology of wonder. Hence I wish to point to various kinds of wonder of different epistemic and existential significance.

One can wonder about something unusual also in a quick and superficial manner. This kind of astonishment is only a brief contact with a curiosity that soon fades away. It does not give rise to reflection, remaining just a condition of perpetual wondering that does not present an existential challenge. It is the sort of amazement felt by tourists in Capri,⁷ a commonplace of wonder, and, as Nietzsche sarcastically remarks, cows too “sometimes

⁶ Jeanne Hersch, *Wielcy myśliciele Zachodu. Dzieje filozoficznego zdziwienia*, trans. Krzysztof Wakar (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2001).

⁷ Ryszard Kapuściński, *Lapidarium III* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1997), p. 8.

have a look of wondering which stops short on the path of questioning,” while the thinking of a sage is like a cloudless sky, the Horatian *nil admirari*.⁸ And, although Nietzsche does not deny the value of wonder as such, as I am going to argue in a little while, he does object to the folly of transient amazements and raptures. Such triviality and ordinariness of wonder does not translate into an activity that may be defined as “returning wonder to the world.” It refers to a situation when a sense of astonishment is fundamental and transformative enough to change the world. The interweaving of the philosophy of wonder with that of action is the noblest thing a human being can achieve. As discussed above, however, wonder, being ordinary and superficial, does not contribute anything to the world, and leaves a human intact. It is simply flat.

To do full justice to a constellation of meanings the word spans, it is important to notice still another aspect. Natural as our capacity for wondering is, it is as common for us to turn our back on wonder in favour of a familiar image, a clearly defined order of things that is not subject to questioning. The fear of wonder entails a flight into long-established systems of knowledge and affirmation of one’s social space as self-evident. We long to feel stable, trusting the immutable. But we also, at the same time, subject ourselves to the well-known regime of phrases like “normally,” “as ever” and “as it should be.” Is not wonder, therefore, traceable to the local? This is an idea I wish to discuss. I find it vital to point out that being amazed by place, one’s local environment, does not necessarily mean something negative. The anthropological rule of experience should make us conclude that amazement at the local is just a first step to examine one’s locality.

In the typology of wonder it is essential to emphasize the possibility of true wonder. One can be amazed and

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, section 313 “The Monotone of the ‘Sage’,” accessed April 12, 2011, http://www.lexido.com/EBOOK_TEXTS/THE_WANDERER_AND_HIS_SHADOW_.aspx?S=313.

stupefied by nature, the experience of which is an encounter with the sublime, the ineffable and the infinite. It found its literal expression in the seventeenth-century work *Telluris Teoria Sacra* (Sacred Theory of the Earth) by Thomas Burnet, who wrote, recounting his experience of the mountains, that human thought naturally rises up to God and His magnitude, and anything that has the mere semblance of the infinite (which is whatever transcends our understanding) fills our mind with its immensity and excess, plunging us into a pleasant state of stupefaction and amazement.⁹ A sense of the sublimity of nature abounds with wonder.

Yet true astonishment is also one that affects human life and finds anxiety a source of transformative energy. It is the kind of astonishment that does not let certainty solidify. That is why Nietzsche called on his listeners to allow themselves to be surprised: he knew the pressure of an existential experience and moral image combined. In his words, whoever wants to see himself as he really is, has to allow himself to be surprised, with the torch in hand; as the spiritual is parallel to the corporeal, whoever has grown used to his looks in the mirror, forgets about his ugliness.¹⁰ Hence astonishment is what lets one empty oneself of the knowledge possessed and makes one ready to question the former perception of things. Wonder then becomes tantamount to an existential metamorphosis. And this is a formula expressed most clearly but also most radically by Jean-Paul Sartre: is there anything more epistemically extreme than the experience of nausea stemming from the perception of the humdrum rhythms of street life?

This sort of creative wonder is important because without it there would be no receptivity to the new. Therefore, one should reconsider Nietzsche's remarks on

⁹ Thomas Burnet, *Telluris Teoria Sacra* IX, in *Historia piękna*, ed. Umberto Eco, trans. Agnieszka Kuciak (Poznań: Rebis, 2005), p. 284.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human. A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. Reginald John Hollingdale (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), vol. 2, part 2, section 316.

the thinker's absent-mindedness, since all that interrupts our creative thinking and "disturbs" us in a colloquial sense, should not only be received with calm,¹¹ but also, to complete the philosopher's statement, with receptivity to what is unheard-of and unpredictable. In the field of cultural *praxis* this notion of coming to terms with the unfamiliar was echoed by the formalists in their research on literature. In 1919 Viktor Shklovsky wrote his essay on art as a technique of defamiliarization which has to make its objects of description unusual and strange and is for that reason a form of perception marked with increased difficulty.¹² Art being a result of discarding the routine of perception and hence an invitation to wonder was also an idea entertained by Bertold Brecht in his well-known formula of the "estrangement" effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*).¹³

The concern with wonder is frequently manifest in the figure of the child and childhood as a state of open-mindedness and propensity for wondering. It does not stress infantile behaviour but an ever-expanding curiosity with the world and never-ending delight in knowledge. It is also a view quite easily found in Nietzsche's writings. The philosopher is noted for having said that one needs to "know how to be little," as this refers not only to the inclination for constant amazement but also to being as close to flowers, grass and butterflies as a child who is hardly taller.¹⁴ Yet there is more to this remark than just an emphasis on the penchant for wonder: being "little" is to simultaneously affirm one's position in the local, close to the earth, in natural experience. It refers to a sense of being rooted, without the usual alienation of a human from the environment. It also alludes to a dismissal of excessive

¹¹ Ibidem, section 342.

¹² See Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 17–23.

¹³ See Anna Burzyńska and Michał Paweł Markowski, *Teorie literatury XX wieku* (Kraków: Znak, 2007), p. 119.

¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, section 51.3.

humanism as, in Józef Maria Bocheński's words, a form of "human idolatry."¹⁵

This kind of wonder stems from a personal attitude fuelled by curiosity. Curiosity in the face of an event gives rise to a sense of astonishment – which is easiest to arise while travelling, Ryszard Kapuściński points out, following as he does in Herodotus's footsteps. To the question why indeed a person would make all the effort to go on a journey he would answer: out of curiosity, curiosity about the world.¹⁶ The main reason behind going abroad is a desire to understand oneself through the others. To be curious is to be ready to accept wonder as a shock.

Yet the kind of wonder stemming from curiosity does not necessarily lead to wisdom, as Leszek Kołakowski wrote in his lecture on travel, quoting the Latin proverb that those who run after wisdom overseas are more likely to affect the sky than their own minds – otherwise sailors would be wiser than theologians.¹⁷ One could argue, though, that to experience the world by contacting a concrete different culture, by enduring the hardships of a concrete journey, by wandering, is to empirically exercise oneself in wisdom better than through abstract reflection aimed at satisfying one's curiosity. Is not a sailor wiser than a theologian? And what about a sailor theologian? Can a theologian exercising his mind and wisdom repudiate being a sailor? Let us, however, leave the question now as it is going to surface again in the discussion of anthropology, as an important clue, an indication that wonder is not just a matter of abstract thinking but requires also some sort of empirical experience.

Another aspect of wonder is worth emphasizing here: one that concerns things within reach which are suddenly turned upside down, seen in different light, radically

¹⁵ Józef Maria Bocheński, *Sens życia i inne eseje* (Kraków: Philed, 1993), pp. 23–39.

¹⁶ See Ryszard Kapuściński, *Travels with Herodotus*, trans. Klara Glowczewska (New York: Random House Inc., 2008).

¹⁷ Leszek Kołakowski, "O podróżach," in *Mini-wykłady o maxi-sprawach* (Kraków: Znak, 2003).

transformed. The world of one's own may also constitute an object of amazement, one that startles, puzzles, menaces and alienates. In his 1919 essay "Das Unheimliche" Freud describes it as a force capable of throwing our existence into complete disarray.¹⁸ *Unheimlich*, the uncanny, is the opposite of *heimlich*: that which is familiar, intimate, obvious, native, belonging to the home, cosy; the uncanny is threatening precisely because it makes strange what used to be one's own. In this sense wonder, as an experience of the uncanny, is always uncomfortable: it is so because it lies beyond the comfort and self-evidence of familiar things. This seems also to bear on the theme of the local. The local has to be experienced as uncanny and menacing. It is necessary to leave one's locality and then come back, a return that will never be a recurrence of the same.

3. Wonder and textuality in field anthropology

Wonder is the basic figure of thinking we come across in field anthropologists. Lévi-Strauss wondered and recommended wondering to others, as a force allowing one to sidestep the formerly established conventions of perception, in Ludwik Stomma's anecdotal commentary.¹⁹ Anthropology is an apotheosis of wonder and amazement at the diversity of the world's cultures. It is where it posits its mythological starting point. Notes in diaries, memoirs, and monographs create a textual realm that is hardly homogenous but has somehow been unified by wonder. The tension and divergence between, for example, a field diary and a monograph, today often viewed as a dissonance, is finally reinterpreted as a desperate attempt at fashioning

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 154–167.

¹⁹ Ludwik Stomma, "Wstęp," in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Smutek tropików*, trans. Aniela Steinsberg (Łódź: Wydawnictwo "Opus", 1992), p. VII.

one's identity through narrative, to employ James Clifford's reading.²⁰ Yet is it not rather a "proof," an indication of problems with astonishment? Furthermore, should these problems not provoke us to pose questions of methodology? For instance, how does anthropological wonder affect the lost localness, one that we take with us on a journey and then come back to, but also one that is imagined and imaginary? This is what I wish to consider. I am puzzled by the very dialectic of wonder. The anthropologist is a person who has to cherish wonder but at the same time cannot yield to it unconditionally, for that would mean surrendering to the exoticism of discourse.

What does the dialectics of experiences look like then?

Textual testimonies show that the anthropologist has to be amazed by the familiar. It is an amazement stemming from a sense of estrangement: what used to be one's own cannot be any longer taken for granted. Unsettling the self-evidence of one's environment, rules of thinking, paradigms of behaviour, or systems of values means being alienated from the image of culture one previously appropriated and lived in. This image ceases to be the only possible and right one. It is a painful experience that Freud would probably have located in the already discussed idea of the *unheimlich*. The anthropologist has to be amazed by his or her own culture, in other words he or she has to find out that his or her matters and images of culture are no longer self-evident. It is a motif running through the work of all anthropologists. In terms of autobiographical narratives this kind of self-alienation and fashioning of identity is investigated by numerous theoreticians such as James Clifford, whose research revolves around the textual self-creation in Bronisław Malinowski's work and the interpretation of functionalist discourse as a social and existential need.

²⁰ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 21–54.

Self-alienation portrayed as a shock is a notion present in Lévi-Strauss, for whom the researcher analysing culture is usually a subversive figure, a social misfit, one who has lost his or her roots.²¹ And when he or she has gone “there,” to the other side, they become highly conservative. But the estrangement from the familiar and absolute acts as a promise of the other, of that which expands mental horizons and reconnects with other people. It is quite another matter, however, that an anthropologist of the past would usually resort to the support of science; his escape was only seemingly neutral, a confirmation of European relativism. This is what puzzles researchers nowadays providing descriptions of cultures on the meta-level. Meta-anthropology aims at a radical review of the rules of neutrality, scientific objectivity, the alleged view-from-nowhere of the discipline, its standards of certainty and detachment. It conducts a close analysis of the ethnocentrism of thinkers whose habits of familiarization and cultural adjustment were based on European science. The meta-anthropological discourse cultivates the researchers’ wonder precisely on the meta-level, by trying to solve the problem why, indeed, one could have been so epistemically optimistic. Why did the amazement and doubt on the level of discourse never affect the discipline itself? It is, however, a question that belongs more to the history of ideas and historical changing of scientific paradigms.

What is important here is a recognition of these two divergent aspects of wonder. One of them entails an affirmation of the home of one’s space as strange, no longer self-evident, one that has to be repudiated, together with its habits of absolutization. The other concerns a rejection of the self-evidence of the anthropological home conceived as the discourse of the discipline – whenever the anthropological writing turns out to be amazingly lacking in transparency.

²¹ Lévi-Strauss, *Smutek tropików*, p. 380.

The next experience I would like to mention here is a sense of amazement at the diversity of the world that one has to feel in order to be motivated to start one's research. "The other as a source of wonder" has been a crucial motive for anthropology. However, in recent years when the object of anthropological research has itself been subject to much scrutiny, there has been a growing awareness of the way otherness was built on myth, and, what is more, on the key European myth created by the likes of Montaigne and Rousseau. On the one hand, it made for the higher status of the Other, no longer treated in the patronizing manner typical of conquerors and conquests, included instead (though somehow tentatively) in the human family; on the other hand, it was responsible for thinking about savages in terms of their supposed separateness and purity, which gave rise to the researcher's desire to reach the primary uncontaminated culture awaiting to be discovered by the white.

The desire for what we dub here "white discovery" has been a great concern of European science, but also its great responsibility and, consequently, an important factor in its profit and loss account. "I wish I had lived at the time of real travelling," confessed Lévi-Strauss, who wanted to touch uncontaminated worlds. This kind of wonder felt by the white who made themselves at home in an indigenous culture unknown to the Western world was rare even back in the 1930s, due to the rapid shrinking of areas that had not been explored yet by researchers. One is doomed to relive the predecessors' experiences without much enthusiasm, but also without a shock, bemoan anthropologists.²² And even if one finds one's "own savages," as Lévi-Strauss did, one has the feeling that they are much too savage to be understood, that there is no key to them, because one does not know the language and there has not been any research done, and therefore one has to come back to already explored terrains, to "domesticated" savages, to continue one's research.

²² Ibidem, p. 324.

I find the fragment essential because it makes me aware of the fact that the desired otherness turns out to be its own punishment and that otherness as such is impossible to comprehend.²³ At the same time, the promise of wonder will not materialize for most anthropologists who are conscious of the history of conquests and their encroaching upon territories marked by the previous contacts with the white – which leads to important dilemmas related to the absence of pure wonder. Not only Lévi-Strauss but also other anthropologists were aware that one always “loses” in confrontation with the field. An honest researcher concludes: no shock. If we are still amazed by anything, it is the strictly binary, either-or character of the situation. Yet on making the effort to go to the field, the anthropologist has to humbly accept this law of wonder which is a dialectic of longing for the promised amazement and the actual lack of amazement. Without the field experience and without knowing the dialectical way wonder works, one could not understand fieldwork at all. The tension is what allows for better insight into anthropological texts which are then read through the community of experience. This is what Nigel Barley touched upon, remarking that he was able to detect which fragments had been written in the manner that was deliberately vague, evasive, and artificial, or even which data were untrue and trivial, something he had not been capable of noticing before doing fieldwork.²⁴ The tension and the final verdict “I have lost” is then no failure but an affirmed experience of the field worker, because it brings about social bonds and an awareness of the power of wonder. Is it possible to make sense of anthropology without taking into account this power of wonder to which one has to submit while in the field?

Afterwards, however, the anthropologist has to bring wonder under control. He or she becomes familiar with

²³ Ibidem, p. 331.

²⁴ Nigel Barley, *Niewinny antropolog. Notatki z glinianej chatki*, trans. Ewa T. Szyler (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 1997), p. 210.

the lack of self-evidence of his own culture. He or she is just curious about the difference and dissimilarity of distant worlds which are to be illuminated, ordered and explicated through systematic analysis and the whole scientific machinery. They are not supposed to be a source of wonder but to illustrate a rational construction of different cultural patterns. So an anthropologist translates, interprets, provides descriptions and includes in the community of human culture, at the same time removing the stigma of otherness, exoticism and the uncanny from what is different. Knowledge restrains amazement. The anthropologist does not wonder or, we should rather say, does not wonder any more, because he or she has previously undermined what is their own and assimilated it to the other; he or she has also seen many things that have then been rendered epistemically familiar, as a result of scientific schematization. Their otherness is thus no longer strange. A text exemplifying best this absence of wonder and a resultant sense of dejection is Malinowski's diary, where suspension, "blurring" of vision and fatigue drive wonder out. If the author is still amazed by anything, it is undoubtedly he himself. But the obsession to overcome fatigue and to eliminate all slackness makes him curb his wonder in favour of the monotony of research and the mundane rhythm of the diary.²⁵ It is like a confession of an experienced person who is hardly ever astonished, nevertheless still hoping that suddenly something will upset his or her balance and self-evidence: the first wonder as an epistemic shock. It is like waiting for a caesura, for the moment of epiphany in the life of the researcher bedeviled with constant disenchantment, a sense that there is no wonder and thus no source of power, as Lévi-Strauss noted.²⁶ For he was less astonished than he had wanted.²⁷

²⁵ Bronisław Malinowski, *Dziennik w ścisłym znaczeniu tego wyrazu*, ed. Grażyna Kubica (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002), pp. 470–472.

²⁶ Lévi-Strauss, *Smutek tropików*, pp. 34–35.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 78.

This absence of wonder makes the researcher of culture the opposite of a traveller. The latter's sense of amazement, longing for adventure, freedom, individualism, struggle with oneself and insecurity provide a counterbalance to anthropological thinking. In anthropology the "I" has to be suppressed, what is behind is a scientific method, very often a whole school of research; this kind of formal thinking forces an individual to restrain his or her wonder and liking for adventure. In Geertz's words, unlike the travel text, which by its very nature "describes one damn thing after another," the ethnographic text has a thesis.²⁸ That is why the first sentence of *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) is still one of the most significant sentences ever written in anthropology: "I hate travelling and explorers."²⁹ The purpose of the anthropologist's expedition is not to wonder, and the slides documenting it are not to torture friends or acquaintances from travelling societies. The anthropologist travels as if he or she did not travel at all. And, at the end of the day, which is actually a dramatic experience, he or she is very much surprised to find out that the hated travel is also there, that it has caught him or her off guard, something they wished to avoid at all costs. He or she is afflicted by identity problems and a sense of void. Yet it is only seemingly the researcher's failure, since on second thoughts it remains a significant achievement, part of an exercise in humility during fieldwork. The weakening of methodicity of an expedition is interesting because it makes way for a human being. And this is not only a question of the anthropologist's identity but also of the fact that in this seeming failure, in accepting inconsistency and contradiction in his or her research, the anthropologist proves that he or she has just touched upon the problem of recognizing what a human being is. The

²⁸ Clifford Geertz, *Dzieło i życie. Antropolog jako autor*, trans. Ewa Dżurak and Sławomir Sikora (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR, 2000), p. 57.

²⁹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Russel, accessed April 15, 2011, <http://www.citeulike.org/user/chikuwabu/article/272344>.

failure to grasp something because it is difficult to classify unequivocally and not reducible to a system is clear proof of recognizing a problem.

This dialectic of wonder also leads to another revelation. The researcher is amazed by everything in the field. Conducting research means wondering at an every step. The very fieldwork is an object of wonder because it is not as transparent as one assumed, its order is not such as one expected, the work does not proceed linearly in stages, the natives do not play the role they are usually ascribed in books of methodology of field research, the anthropologist is not an objective and impartial researcher, notwithstanding the declarations, he or she fails to study what he or she wanted and comes across something else instead that is hardly unequivocal and definite enough to provide clear exemplification, etc. We are amazed by the fact that the future fieldwork experiences we project are so dramatically different and incompatible with what we encounter on the spot. The result is a clash. The relationships with the natives are at variance with the theory the researcher brings with him- or herself. Barley is constantly amazed by the field.³⁰ Lévi-Strauss bemoans trickery, deceit, theft, inequality of relations and the myth of equality one leaves Europe with and has to revise in order to be able to conduct any research whatsoever.³¹ Contemporary anthropology is capable of adapting this wonder for its purposes, as it well understands that cultures under examination do not constitute fully integrated beings which can be diagnosed and predicted while planning one's research. But for classical anthropology wonder was no reason to boast about as the surprises and a sense of astonishment arising in the course of research led to a series of failures. Yet what interests me is still another consequence: the anthropologist is stunned by the local he or she encounters. This foreign localness is more than he or she can stand as it goes beyond

³⁰ Barley, *Niewinny antropolog*, p. 107.

³¹ Lévi-Strauss, *Smutek tropików*, pp. 126–135.

the boundaries of familiar understanding and experience. On second thoughts, however, the work of the local, which is actually its major strength, resides in its capacity for stunning us with its otherness, for provoking simultaneous terror and delight. In epistemic terms, the contradiction is what wonder is all about.

It is also worthwhile to focus on another aspect of the experience. The researcher is a person of wonder to all – no one's behaviour is more bizarre. He or she walks around, asks questions, exchanges gifts, makes sketches and notes, intrudes, is a busybody who never counts as one of "us," and may not even be one of "them" (colonizers, missionaries, soldiers, administrators) because he acts in the name of scientific knowledge. Incidentally, bizarreness is also what protects him or her. This was witnessed by Barley, who wrote that he was about to join those "weird people."³² Doing research in the field means oscillating between the insider's and the outsider's view, without too much institutional involvement on the native ground.

The researcher is however primarily a person of wonder to him- or herself. He or she is alarmed by his or her narcissistic inclinations in the foreign land, familiar mental and moral habits, stable images of a human being and local time-space that have been brought to the new place. This is well documented by an anthropological diary: no other form of writing has been host to such an explosion of narcissism. It is a strange genre, fundamentally non-literary, rhetorically isolated from the world and not stylized as the display of intellectual acumen. The fieldwork diary is directed at an audience of one, since it is a message from the writing to the reading self, as Geertz wrote examining Malinowski's *Diary*. And he asked if the inflation of the subject does not make the object shrink.³³ It is not true that the tension has only recently been discovered by postcolonial discourse since the anthropologist was puzzled and alarmed by

³² Barley, *Niewinny antropolog*, p. 24.

³³ Geertz, *Dzieło i życie*, p. 111.

themselves beforehand. This accounts for the mixed feelings Kenneth Read had on saying farewell to the Papuans in the 1950s and visiting them again in 1981 and 1982, when he was so much amazed by the changes and uneasy about his sense of contentment once he left the place (as the anthropologist should not feel relieved to leave the field). The relief is not only psychological but also an epistemic one.³⁴ It is due to wonder that anthropological thinking is able to appropriate this kind of epistemic anxiety. And thinking is only reliable when sustained by anxiety.

The researcher's wonder may still lead to different results. Wonder itself is always a risk one takes both in scholarly and existential terms. It may be positively applied to the realm of research, yielding the readiness to receive each and every unique experience. This is the case even when the final image of culture obtained from the research bears less and less resemblance to the structure, system and hierarchy one projected initially. Wonder makes one amend one's research, a fact readily acknowledged by Malinowski, who, in spite of his obsession with method and the idea of the whole, pointed out that one should accept all kinds of unique things, opinions, and voices, that one should be receptive even if the contents received goes beyond the embrace of methodology.³⁵ Finally, wonder may lead to a radical call to abandon the former "habitus of fieldwork" in favour of experiments conceived as various ways of doing fieldwork where the places researched provide the resource of fragmentary knowledge, and are engaged in critical dialogue and respectful polemic, as Clifford wanted in his wanderings, visits to museums, tourist trails, and heritage parks.³⁶ Yet the planning of research on the move, marked by instability and hybridity, is made possible by wonder,

³⁴ Kenneth E. Read, *Return to the High Valley: Coming Full Circle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 246.

³⁵ Malinowski, *Dziennik*, p. 650.

³⁶ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 91.

which plays the role of a subversive force facilitating displacement, renegotiation, or reconstitution. It cannot be repudiated once we enter the realm of the postcolonial and postexoticist reading.

I think it was precisely anthropological wonder that eluded the grasp of exoticism. And it is wonder, with its inner tensions and epistemic contradictions, that makes it impossible to confine anthropological writing to the fashionable perspective of contemporary postcolonial studies.

Yet the rhythm of fieldwork experience makes us ponder still another consequence. Wonder may be applied differently – when it lets us reject what is astonishing in epistemic terms, what does not suit the formula or explodes the method. It translates into the commitment to the invariable instead of variants, to the trust in the centre instead of the marginal, to the recognition of the repeatable and general instead of the unique and individual. It may contribute to the reduction that introduces order into the world examined. Actually counteracting wonder, the activity involves the movement of totalization but also that of ordering. The dislike of adventure, accident, and danger, as well as the wish to see everything developing according to a plan, with no surprises on the way, with the projected aim of research being gradually achieved almost in the manner of the Cartesian linear method, is what Lévi-Strauss dreamt about. He wrote that we are bothered by thousands of unnecessary events in the course of the expedition, that our existential experiences are trivial and mere obstacles, that “the nonsense of diaries,” even though their writing is obligatory for the researcher, is a waste of time.³⁷ And all of it in the service of “drastic clarity,” as Geertz wrote about Edward Evans-Pritchard’s ethnography which sought to make everything clear.³⁸ And, one should add, to dispose of wonder.

³⁷ Lévi-Strauss, *Smutek tropików*, p. 380.

³⁸ Geertz, *Dzieło i życie*, p. 97.

Wonder, if conceived of correctly in all of its contradictory contexts, is desirable and commendable. It allows us to provide the dynamic description of cultural practices, sustaining their otherness, but, at the same time, not reducing them to the inventory of wonders and curiosities. This first wonder, adapted, restrained, and properly applied to preserve its tension, is what leads to the descriptions we know from anthropological discourse. Can Malinowski's painstaking concentration on the details of the Trobriand canoe, a description which spans over 600 pages, be understood without reference to the power of wonder? Due to wonder, headhunting is not conceived as something exotic but constitutes an ordinary cultural practice that calls for interpretation and detailed examination illuminating its diversity.

Therefore, wonder, starting from a sense of amazement at the other, including the other in oneself, to the astonishment one feels in the relations with the subjects of research, to the contradictory methodological attempts at handling it, is indeed a driving force behind the research. It lets one oscillate between epistemic arrogance (everything is transparent and can be explicated) and humility (many a times have we been caught by surprise) towards that which cannot be easily captured and grasped, determined and situated within familiar and well-known typologies. Sustaining one's propensity for wonder is a necessity for the researcher, as the one who is used to discarding roots. On the other hand, trusting wonder without reservations would make one follow mere curiosities and seek the ill-conceived unusual quality in things, while anthropology is to teach and evoke understanding for the ordinariness of human experiences, no matter what they are and how much they conflict with our views of the world.

Can wonder help save anthropology today?

Does wonder interfere with the experience of culture if it is burdened with the myth of amazement at the other? Or is it, contrary to postcolonial insights, capable of redeeming

anthropology? As Geertz once wrote, having read Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, anthropology has finally arrived at the end of the smooth icy surface it used to slide upon and entered the rough ground, which meant that it has given up its habit of making sweeping generalizations and referring to universality and impartiality of the researcher, in favour of local knowledge and the fragment. "Anthropology is exploring the rough ground,"³⁹ a statement that researchers of culture find highly instructive, points out that the fixed and cumulative view of culture has been abandoned, and what we get instead is no more than a blurred image.

I have to ask, though, whether that roughness was only discovered once the discipline moved from the paradigm of scientific knowledge to a new formula dismantling the image of the world of separate cultures. Is it a clear caesura? Or has the roughness been constantly eroding the field for a long time?

Perhaps we should search for the tendency to reinforce the roughness within anthropology itself, not just as a figure of thinking whose sudden emergence affects the description and style of research, but on the level of fieldwork experience. Was it not wonder that sustained that roughness, since it was wonder that showed the discrepancy between what was expected and what actually happened in the realm of culture, that taught uncertainty and questioned established orders, that was directed at the radically other and subsequently helped undermine that otherness? Wonder has been present in many spheres. Its presence points to the confusion in the heart of research – nothing is as holistic and certain as we would like it to be to make matters simple. Cultural paths of communication and its points of intersection are confused and so is the researcher's identity. But this is what the work of wonder

³⁹ Clifford Geertz, *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. XII.

on the level of methodology and fieldwork experience has always demonstrated. There is no other way to account for the tension between diaries and monographs from fieldwork, no other way to understand the strenuous effort to construct elaborate conceptions of culture and to erect edifices of knowledge capable of placing single phenomena. It cannot be reduced to identity tensions Clifford wrote about. A lesson that comes with wonder has always led to the rough ground in the descriptions of culture. It has always led outside, beyond the known. Desperate attempts to counteract its influence have been aimed at familiarization, yet it is the subversive work of wonder that has prepared the anthropologist to be open-minded and receptive to the new.

The potential of anthropological wonder consists in the way the abstract philosophical formula was translated into empirical experience. It was the desired conjunction of theory and practice, of the theologian and the sailor that Kołakowski talked separately about. I think wonder in experience is what makes for knowledge that is truly on the move, one that does not stem from armchair reflection, which, according to Nietzsche and his philosophy, is a curse. It is a *walked* knowledge, knowledge originating in interaction and benefiting from the tension between theory and the empirical in the field. Anthropological writings, which always embraced the tension, have recently become, more or less successfully, the object of research in postcolonial studies and, especially, meta-anthropology, yielding the image of the anthropologist as a person implicated in ideology and colonial vision, as well as the exoticist perception of the other. Yet it seems that the critical discussions have not been able to capture the essence of the dynamic of wonder which is still present in anthropological texts.

Wonder provided the knowledge, one that the theory of the time ran away from, but it also made way for the new discovery that had long been seeping through – the discovery of culture as confusion. Hence anthropological amazement at the confusing and intricate relationships

between the individual and the collective, the original and the common, the certain and the uncertain clearly paved the way for what was then named the entrance of the discipline onto the rough ground. But the very commitment to wonder and the call “towards the Other!” – very often contrary to the researcher’s intentions – already meant inviting elements of confusion which anthropology constantly multiplied even though it claimed to order them by constructing systems. For the more we attempt to order things, the more doubts we raise.

Therefore, I think, that the roughness of anthropology should not be solely located in the change of the scientific paradigm which has led to embracing the other and transformation of research. This roughness should instead be sought on the level of fieldwork experience which has been there “from the time immemorial,” subject to the power of wonder. It is wonder that brings roughness of both the epistemic and existential kind.

Maria Popczyk

Aesthetics in View of the Art on Display*

The culture of modernity is burdened with a formidable task of reconciling contradictions originating inside it. It struggles with the rupture which has developed as a result of producing the new in the fields of both technical and artistic endeavours, and with the constant need to distance itself from the past through determining and extracting what is dated and no longer valid. And it is in the museum that the effects of these contradictions are being mitigated and various attempts at a resolution are being made. The museum practice is focused on the culturally significant content, and within the space of a museum the dilemmas concerning what is art, how history should be studied and presented, what is the cornerstone of cultural identity and how multiculturalism should be approached are being resolved. Therefore, the museum from its very beginnings has given rise to many a heated debate engaging academics, politicians, artists, critics and the general public. We see among them the enthusiasts who view the museum as an antidote to the ills of modern times, the proponents of the notion that art needs a special place, in which its educational, artistic and aesthetic qualities can be best brought out. On the other side there are ferocious opponents of the museum who construe collecting, storing and displaying artworks as a political act. They take up

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arms against the museum in defence of the genuine origins of art on behalf of artists, of the contexts which have been left out, of the absent. The ongoing debates and disputes revolve around the fundamental issues concerning the overlapping domains of art, theory and the institution in charge of organizing social practices: the issues determining the character of the museum. And the shape of museums themselves are also subject to change brought about by the adoption of particular theoretical principles and influenced by directors,¹ which ultimately results in an emergence of a multitude of various museums in the era when museums are becoming increasingly more specialized and individualized rather than generalized.

From the perspective of art itself, both its material and axiological dimensions are in the hands of artists. They are the ones who amaze us with their artistry, their skill in subjecting the matter to the discipline and the rules. They move us deeply and inspire our reflection. Although their works are created with the particular audience in mind, years later they are capable of unifying a different community: the community of museum-goers as well as the one, not tied with any specific place or time, the community of commentators. Art does not exist in the intellectual vacuum. On the contrary, from the beginning of philosophical thought it has constituted an important element of philosophical systems concerned with artist's works and the nature of a creative process, which were analysed from various perspectives, like idealism or contextualism. At the time of Vitruvius artists already wrote their treatises, whereas modern art is accompanied by artists' manifestos containing what Władysław Tatarkiewicz called the implicit aesthetics. In the mid-eighteenth century Alexander G. Baumgarten introduced the academic aesthetics and finally unified those theoretical

¹ Directors as a significant aspect of an exhibition are mentioned by Lyotard. Jean-François Lyotard, *Über Daniel Buren*, ed. Patricia Schwarz, trans. Alexandre d'Alleux and Patricia Schwarz (Stuttgart: Ed. Schwarz, Galerie Kubiński, 1987), p. 41.

endeavours. At the same time the relationship between theory and artistic practice was established: aesthetics became the philosophy of fine arts, the science of sensory perception, which was to be superordinate and normative with respect to every existing and future work of art. It is significant that at the same time we see the development of the public sphere, which, however, was not a simple extension of informal personal relationships bringing art lovers together in private collections, but created a completely new lifestyle: “a life led among strangers.”² Artworks underwent the change in status and became institutionalized, historized and aestheticized – now they were works on public display.

A number of theoreticians point out the fact that the establishment of aesthetics and the founding of first museums coincided. However, they offer different interpretations of this fact. Wolfgang Iser emphasizes the educational function. In his view, aesthetics provides the general public with the instruction how to view works of art, how to react to them, what to look at and what to ignore. Odo Marquard stresses the compensatory role of the museum and the aesthetic experience, which proves to be crucial for the mental well-being of a modern person for whom the museum offers the deliverance from the pressure and strain brought on by the pace of the modern technologized life.³ Carol Duncan associates the rise of the theory of taste with the formation of the secular ritual legitimizing the scientific truths in the aesthetic medium, the ritual giving the authorities the means to control the society.⁴ She argues that a major role in imposing discipline on society is played by the aesthetics of taste and an aesthetic

² Richard Sennett, *Upadek człowieka publicznego*, trans. Hanna Jankowska (Warszawa: Muza, 2009), p. 36.

³ Odo Marquard, “Wegwerfgesellschaft und Bewahrungskultur,” in *Macrocosms in Microcosmo. Die Welt in der Stube. Zur Geschichte des Sammelns 1450-1800*, ed. Andreas Grote (Opladen, 1994), p. 916.

⁴ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 8–9.

experience, which in the museum acquires a quasi-religious quality and serves as a kind of enlightenment elevating the viewer above and beyond the realm of everyday activities. Thus the status of aesthetics proves to be not only highly ambivalent but also rather unclear. On the one hand, the philosophers highlight the aesthetic and artistic values made accessible in an artwork regardless of social practices or political ideologies. This is the conception of art behind Kant's, Hegel's and Schopenhauer's works on aesthetics, or Ingarden's phenomenology. Its underlying principle, although not in the systemic form, has survived into the modern times, as theoreticians are still keen to speak about the axiological character of art.⁵ On the other hand, when the selected aspects of the philosophy of art are translated into the space of an exhibition (for instance, when neutral conditions required to contemplate a work of art are created), it is turned into a tool of symbolic violence, as pointed out by Pierre Bourdieu in his social critique of the judgement of taste. However, it has to be underlined that the process of the aesthetization of art is taking place in two distinct domains: in aesthetics as a branch of philosophy, the philosophical conception of art constitutes a measure according to which a work of art is judged, while the museum exhibition practices are concerned with the arrangement of physical space to prepare the viewing public for the specific sensations and experiences. Thus the philosophical aesthetics of an artwork and the aesthetics of an exhibition, of which a work is a component, have to be studied separately, since they constitute two distinct orders which cannot be reconciled, two different ways of speaking about art,⁶ which, however, can and do interact with each other. Yet it is impossible

⁵ Andrzej Basista, *Architektura i wartość. Architecture and Values* (Kraków: Universitas, 2009).

⁶ Which can be demonstrated by comparing Roman Ingarden's phenomenological conception of a work of art with Jerzy Świecimski's phenomenologically-oriented conception of an exhibition. Cf. Maria Popczyk, *Estetyczne przestrzenie ekspozycji muzealnych. Artefakty przyrody i dzieła sztuki*, Kraków: Universitas, 2008), pp. 149–160.

to translate a philosophical system into the space of an exhibition, even though the reverse phenomenon is fairly common: art lovers seek the confirmation of an aesthetic theory in the museum and the architectural design of a museum or the layout of an exhibition are frequently confronted with a philosophical concept.⁷ What is more, the same historical display of artworks can be supported by contradictory theories. Some scholars claim that the space of exhibition corresponds to Kant's aesthetics of a disinterested pleasure, according to which a viewer learns nothing but merely enjoys the "free play" of the imagination and delights in the beauty of lines and shapes. Others, by contrast, maintain that it is most appositely expounded by Hegel's aesthetics: viewers discover different kinds of beauty manifesting itself in the histories of particular nations and then by reflecting upon them they can break away from the specific examples and capture the timeless beauty. It becomes even more complicated when museologists' views are taken into consideration, since they have their own notion of how exhibits ought to be perceived. Jerzy Świecimski distinguishes a "non-professional" ("tourist") approach and an aesthetical-experiential approach with its variants: a cognitive approach and a academic-analytical approach.⁸ Thus the philosophical theory of an artwork and exhibition practices constitute separate domains with disparate objectives.

The charges levelled against the philosophy of art tend to be aimed at the theory of an autonomous artwork. Philosophers search for the essence of art and they analyse artworks as discrete forms which require a special kind of approach, the aesthetic approach, which disregards everything that is taking place around the work: they are unconcerned with the architectural setting, the idea behind an exhibition or the layout of exhibition rooms. In

⁷ Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 290–302.

⁸ Jerzy Świecimski, *Wystawy muzealne. Studium z estetyki wystaw*, vol. I (Kraków: Jan-Kajetan Młynarski, 1992), p. 23.

terms of exhibition practices it means that the theories of contemplation sanction the displacement of works from their original context (the artist's workshop, the temple, the private space) and at the same time they strengthen the context imposed on artworks by the institution and the mechanisms which use knowledge to legitimize the authority. The fact that they isolate an artwork from exhibition practices is the major reason why they come in for so much criticism. Philosophers may go to the museum to see paintings and sculptures, but in their subsequent writings on the value of the works and their experiences they neutralize the original context of the works as well as the context of the exhibition, which they do in order to highlight the value of an artwork itself. Few of them approve of the way museums display works of art, they are more inclined to demonstrate how unsuitable they are for this task. Hans Sedlmayr is indignant at the fact that artworks are subjected to the classification requirements of positivist science. John Dewey believes that the museum is founded on political doctrines instead of growing out of the nature of art. Theodor W. Adorno sees the museum permeated by the economic element which stifles the pleasure which should arise from admiring works of art. In other words, the public space suppresses the true aesthetics, and the aesthetics which reigns there belongs to the culture of mass production. This is why Martin Heidegger discredits both museum exhibition and the corresponding aesthetics, namely the aesthetics of an artwork on display. He uses the example of Raphael's Sistine Madonna to lament the loss of the world in which people gathered around it in the provincial church in Piacenza. He rejects the mobility of museum pieces travelling from one exhibition to another.⁹

⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Über die Sixtina*, in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens 1910–1976* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983), p. 120. For an interesting commenraty regarding the origin of an artwork, see Werner Hamacher, "Expositions of the Mother. A Quick Stroll through Various Museum," in *The End(s) of the Museum* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1995), pp. 91–95.

Marice Merleau-Ponty regards the museum as a threat to painting, whose uniqueness is extinguished by the space of exhibition: "The museum kills the violence of painting." Therefore, he places the museum in the realm of history rather than aesthetics.¹⁰ In other words, the philosophers criticize museum exhibition in defence of the unique qualities of artworks and their social role outside the museum. In their view, it is the philosophical reflection that protects artworks from political, academic and economical meddling.

It seems, however, that all that criticism notwithstanding, it may be worthwhile to demonstrate the usefulness of the aesthetics whose aim is to analyse and expound what an artwork on display in a museum is. Yet it cannot be done from the viewpoint of the philosophy of art, which has never developed appropriate terminology. Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of the relationship between *ergon* and *parergon* established by Kant and the following conclusion that no framework, whether theoretical or physical, is natural but is always a construct,¹¹ allows us to undertake this task from the standpoint of the new trends in aesthetics, which take into consideration the most contemporary art as well as contextual conceptions of an artwork. What deserves a closer look is the nature of an artwork on display, which in the museum becomes aporetic: created by artists and exhibition organizers it points to the unique creativity of an artist but also to the museum surroundings. This task becomes even more urgent since aesthetics has been abolished from the study of art, or at least its explanatory power has been depreciated on the grounds that philosophers are believed to suffer from the incurable affliction which manifests itself as visual essentialism, diagnosed by Micke Bal as an inclination towards seeing

¹⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Mowa pośrednia i głosy milczenia," trans. Ewa Bienkowska, in *Oko i umysł: szkice o malarstwie*, ed. Stanisław Cichowicz (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 1996), pp. 147–149.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *Prawda w malarstwie*, trans. Małgorzata Kwietniewska (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2003), pp. 68–71.

a work of art as autonomous and neutralizing its social relations.¹²

The theoretical discomfort associated with the assessment of an artwork status in the museum is caused by its entanglement in a myriad of contexts, including academic, educational, economic, and political. Therefore, scholars tend to select one of those contexts as dominant and use it as a foundation for their subsequent observations. However, if the space of exhibition is regarded as an environment,¹³ the complex status of an artwork, oscillating between autonomy and the lack thereof, can be preserved. The environment of an exhibition constitutes a cultural artefact and it creates a dynamic situation in which an audience can participate. It is a product of the compromise between a number of diverse practices, such as museology, aesthetics, the history of art, the art market and education combined with whatever is brought into the museum by viewers, their predispositions and the depth of their involvement. It constitutes an organized selection of sensual parameters which coordinate an architectural design, an exhibition and exhibits, thereby constructing the physical, psychological and social space. In relation to the selection of the senses which are allowed to participate, it might force viewers to remain passive or, on the contrary, it might stimulate their corporeality. This is how particular cognitive processes are stimulated and the particular (individual, cultural, social) identification is bolstered. In this sense each museum

¹² Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures. The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

¹³ Arnold Berleant uses the notion of environment with regard to the art museum, but he does that in the normative sense: in his opinion museum space is not an environment in itself, it can only be transformed into one with the crowds removed, silence and viewers adjusting their perception to the nature of an artwork. He opposes the objective and qualitative treatment of artworks (he rejects the Cartesian kind of museum space) and he opts for organizing the conditions of an experience in the sense established by Dewey. Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), p. 114.

can be regarded as an environment, irrespective of the fact whether we deal with the modernist museum, which separates exhibits and subordinates the entire experience to the visual perception in order to fulfil its educational objectives through the linear narrative, or the museum in question is open, pluralistic, focused on demonstrating the hybridization of cultural phenomena and creating the multisensory surroundings for the viewers' participation, which is the case of the museums of modern art founded at the end of the twentieth century, which provide the space for artists' active involvement. The tendencies to shift museum practices towards people's surroundings, such as musealization and the rise of ecomuseums, confirm that the museum is environmental in its nature and constitutes the place where various relationships converge and can extend beyond the museum walls. The museum of the modernist kind and the environment of the open museum represent the extreme manifestations of museum environments, with a full spectrum of intermediary forms between them, as each museum constitutes its own unique environment. The emergence of such a multitude of diverse environments within the museum, the pluralization of museums, must be attributed the paradigm shift in European culture which affects all its aspects. However, works of art have been collected and displayed in various ways since the times of private collections.

A work of art displayed in a museum affects the environment of a museum and is, in turn, affected by it. An artist's intention might be distorted by the environment of a museum but it is just as likely that artwork parameters will dominate the character of such environment. In order to adequately characterize and assess the status of a work on display, the environment of an exhibition has to be described taking into consideration sensory perception and anaesthetic, so that its exact nature can be defined. Subsequently, a work on display should be examined in the context of the community which formed its original target audience.

Wolfgang Iser suggested that the scope of aesthetic research should be extended so that, apart from the sensations arising from the experience of art itself, it would encompass the realms of everyday life, including both sensual sensations and spiritual ones.¹⁴ He shifted the focus of aestheticians' concerns with an aesthetic experience towards the wide spectrum of sensations, which he supplemented with the anaesthetic: the absence of sensory perception, insensitivity, indifference. Aesthetics and the anaesthetic complement each other, they are like two sides of the coin which cannot exist separately. Each sphere of stimulation contains in itself the sphere of anaesthetization and the relationships between the two should be studied by *aisthesis* in place of aesthetics understood as the philosophy of art. The philosopher based his observations on the research carried out by the psychology of perception and the phenomenology of perception, namely the theory that seeing one thing we become blind to another in the same field of vision. He believes that the culture of aesthetization makes it imperative to study the anaesthetic, all the more so because contemporary artists tend to incline towards it. It is worth mentioning that the project of aesthetics as *aisthesis* corresponds with the suggestions made by the scholars in the field of visual culture. According to William J. Th. Mitchell visual studies should include the investigation into what is invisible, impossible to see and what is perceived. They should go beyond the analysis of the image and embrace everyday events as well, taking notice of their multisensory qualifications.¹⁵ Likewise, aesthetics in the form of *aisthesis* offers the rehabilitation of multisensory nature of sensory perception. Iser maintains that the aesthetization of all aspects of life ought to draw philosophers' attention to its companion,

¹⁴ Wolfgang Iser, "Estetyka i anestetyka," in *Postmodernizm. Antologia przekładów*, ed. Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Baran i Suszyński, 1997), p. 521.

¹⁵ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture," *Journal of visual culture* 2, no. 1 (2002), pp. 165–181.

the anaesthetic, and thereby expose the latent and ignored contents, called in other dictionaries “scopic regimes”, absence or discourses pushed to the margins of social consciousness. When applied to the space of a museum, Welsch’s conception enables us to see the environment of an exhibition as a well-planned and well-structured field of stimulation and anaesthetization. The museum rather than constituting homogeneous or unequivocal space represents an area where contradictory tendencies and purposes coexist, which by no means prevents exhibition practises from merging exhibits so as to create a coherent narrative and provide an audience with the sense of unity. Such practices, however, need to be demystified, the relationship between sensory perception and anaesthetization specific to every museum environment needs to be brought to light and given a name so that the public is aware of the cost at which the coherence is achieved.

The issue concerning the complex nature of an artwork on display is brought up by Didier Maleuvre, who claims that it is its character itself that calls for the museum to be set up, as the museum and artworks contribute to the processes dynamizing the modernity. He chooses to disregard the relationship between knowledge and power within the museum and instead concentrates on the internal contradiction in a work of art itself, characterized, in his opinion, by non-identity.¹⁶ A work of art cannot be identified with an empirical object, since it oscillates between sensual and conceptual spheres; it creates a distance from the directness of life as well as from the directness of cultural representation itself, thus it cannot be wholly identified with culture. According to Maleuvre, it is artworks that are responsible for the paradoxical nature of museums, which displace them and at the same time assimilate them: “[...] the museum embodies the antagonistic drive of culture, at once striving for self-invention and pulling

¹⁶ Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories. History, Technology, Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 38.

backward to self-preservation and the status quo. The great paradox of museums is that they implement culture's program of self-preservation by preserving the thing by which culture ungrounds itself, the artistic gesture."¹⁷ The process of displacing and re-settling of an artwork in a museum, assisted by positivist theories, ideologies or, as it is the case nowadays, curatorial decisions, is by no means limited to the modernist environment, such as the temple of art style museums or "white cube" museums of modern art, but is still in operation and still being used as a means to reinforce stereotypes. Therefore, the question arises whether the original context and the artist's intention are preserved in an artwork or the environment of an exhibition creates an entirely new context which replaces the original one.¹⁸ Maleuvre suggests that the solution lies in the unique character of a work of art rather than in the exhibition organizers' intentions. An artwork is created in a specific period of history, but it is ahistorical in itself. It oscillates between an object and a notion, and its fundamental feature is that it is ahead of its times. Its originality and uniqueness cannot be directly inferred from – nor are reducible to – its historical circumstances, which distinguishes it from technological inventions whose innovative character stems from improvement on the existing devices. Maleuvre recognizing that the world of an artwork is separate from the real world points out that it contains a historical attribute in that it makes the past manifest in the present. This historical attribute is inherent in the work itself but it also contains the original intention. The historical exhibition not only demonstrates the chronological sequence of historical events but also exposes "a creative act" contained in an artwork, in other words, the instants when it is torn out of its historical

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ M. Quatremère de Quincy, Martin Heidegger and Donald Preziosi, among others, argue for the complete annihilation of the context, whereas W. Benjamin underlines the oscillation between the aura and the exposition.

circumstances, although the context of their construction is retained. Therefore an artwork is a *Différance* in the historical sense, while an exhibition communicates an experience of dialectical history apparent in artworks.¹⁹ Thus the aporetic character of a museum piece entails the dual reference to time (the past and the present) while at the same time it embodies timeless values. All these instants are incorporated in a work of art. Maleuvre advocates a novel way to see a museum exhibition, which merges a work and the idea of the museum, and argues that there is no contradiction between them, contrary to what the opponents of the museum like to point out.

Undoubtedly, a work of art acquires a double status in the era of museums. As it becomes a work on display, it is subject to a kind of uncertainty principle: it oscillates between the past and the present, between the creator's intention and the requirements of style, between the life which brought it into existence and the theoretical framework in which it is installed. In the terms of aesthetics, it can be described as autonomous, pointing to itself, but at the same time it is inextricably interwoven with the exhibition and as such it is not autonomous. In a sense it is that ambiguous nature of a modern artwork that Friedrich Schiller refers to when he emphasizes the significance of an individual experience of beauty, taking place beyond the realm of everyday affairs. And for him only such an autonomous experience is capable of setting in motion an aesthetic revolution or bringing about a moral transformation in society. Thus in the environment of an exhibition the viewer is anaesthetized against the original context. This anaesthetic of displacement prevents viewers from experiencing any sensual attributes relating to the original site or social rituals, to the home or the artist's workshop. In the space of exhibition, however, an artwork attains new qualities and meanings, arising from the idea behind the exhibition, for instance, a work might become

¹⁹ Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, p. 71.

a historical construct, it might represent a particular trend in art or a recognized variety of aesthetical qualities. Paweł Florencki explains how the environment of exhibition is destructive in the case of an icon. For him “only in the temple, in the surrounding corresponding to its essence, will an icon acquire its artistic meaning and reveal its full magnificence as an artwork before the viewer’s eyes.”²⁰ The neutralization of the context, however, is gradable, so despite the explicit intention behind certain exhibitions, it is still possible to access and appreciate the value of artworks on display. Thus the *Degenerate Art* exhibition, mounted by the Nazis in 1937, is also remembered as the first exhibition of Expressionism and its ideological context was unable to obliterate the works’ artistic value. Although a work on display certainly contributes to the environment of an exhibition, it never ceases to be an autonomous entity and it never discards completely the elements of its past, its original context, a life and a creative act incorporated in it – it preserves them somehow so that they still can be accessed.

It is true that, as scholars maintain, modernistic exhibition environment suppresses the abovementioned duality contained in an artwork on display, as a consequence of the epistemological foundations of the museum practices and its insistence on the autonomous character of works of art. An exhibition is construed as an academic message conveyed by means of a sensual spectacle; its purpose is to tell the story of how trends develop but also the story of emancipation. Moreover, it constructs metanarratives in the sense defined by Lyotard. The parameters of the environment are subordinated to theoretical views while the eye-centred organization²¹ is reinforced by the anaesthetic

²⁰ Paweł Florencki, *Ikonoostas i inne szkice*, trans. Zbigniew Podgórzec (Białystok: Bractwo Młodzieży Prawosławnej w Polsce, 1997), p. 41.

²¹ Bennett Tony, “Civic Seeing: Museums and the Organization of Vision,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, 2011), pp. 267–275.

of the visitors' other senses (smell, touch, corporeality), as a result of which they have no choice but to focus their eyes on exhibits. The proscenium-like arrangement of space allows viewers to assume but one posture: they are forced to stand passively in front of a work. The exhibition based on the dominance of optical perception directs the attention to central and peripheral phenomena, so that viewers will have the impression of the transparency and continuity of historical processes taking place in the world of art, while the whole range of objects left out from the selection becomes concealed from sight. The general public has only limited access to works and therefore has to rely on the choices made by art historians, who build the authority of the museum, thereby becoming anaesthetized to the unselected works and subjected to the anaesthetic of exclusion. Even though there are several types of the modernist exhibition,²² the one that comes in for most criticism is the academic exhibition, since it tends to be regarded as the only proper – the only objective – form of displaying artworks. Through an exhibition, the academia legitimises political education. The example of this is the communist regime appropriating Princess Izabela Czartoryska's (*née* Countess Fleming) private collection and handing it over to the academia in 1950. The exhibits placed in the glass display cases were intended to impose the discipline, to unify the private mementoes, the relics testifying to the historical achievements of Poland in order to subordinate them to the new political order. Thus the notion of the national mausoleum evoking patriotic sentiments had been excluded from the public space.

Independently from the activities within the framework of the modernist exhibition environment, avant-garde art, the major opposition against the institution of the academia and the museum, also gains a strong position.

²² Hall Margaret, *On Display. A Design Grammar for Museum Exhibitions* (London: Lund Humphries, 1987), pp. 14–15; Świecimski, *Wystawy muzealne*, p. 149.

The experiments with the space of an exhibition, such as El Lissitzky's or Mondrian's works and Marcel Duchamp's *Mile of String* (1942) contributed to the expansion of the scope of art itself. The abovementioned works inspired a host of activities undertaken by the artists belonging to the 1960s avant-garde movements, notably those whose objective was to expose the mechanisms of museum practices normally hidden from the viewer's sight. Artists were particularly fond of museum spaces where, next to traditional artworks, they placed natural objects or biological specimens in order to initiate a debate with the arrangement of the space in a museum, with the anthropocentrism and the consequences of scientific developments. Socially-conscious art has taken over the territories belonging to the museum, and it by no means limits its actions to modern art museums, and as a result a new, so far unknown, type of museum appears: the environment where the primary objective of artistic activities is to expose the contradictions intrinsic to the nature of an exhibition understood as an act of conferring meanings and establishing values. The activities of this type, including the most extreme such as Marcel Broodthaers's artistic deconstruction of museum practices,²³ are inextricably linked to the museum, both on theoretical and spatial levels, they need a museum to come into existence, and this fact has made it finally possible to recognize and appreciate the links between an artwork and its spatial and theoretical surroundings. The artists' activities have led to the total transformation of the conception of the museum itself, as they have altered all the sensual parameters of the space of a museum, which has led to the institution of open museums. Although it is used by Jean Clair to criticize tourism and the economy of globalization permeating modern museums,²⁴ the notion of

²³ Broodthaers: *Writings, Interviews, Photographs*, ed. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh. Essays by Rainer Borgemeister (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988).

²⁴ Jean Clair, *Kryzys muzeów. Globalizacja kultury*, trans. Jan Maria Kłoczowski (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2009).

openness can also be associated with what Maleuvre calls “the laboratory where art overcomes its aesthetic isolation”, and as a result of the artists’ theoretical activities in its realm, it is works that determine “the way in which we reach art and how we communicate with it.”²⁵ Both an artist and an audience participate in the events produced by the neo-avant-garde works within the framework of the space of an exhibition.

The open character of the environment of an exhibition is characterized by the individualized harmony of sensory stimuli and space: artworks, exhibits and artefacts are frequently linked and they point to the experience of everyday life, the ambient sounds evoke emotions and the narratives follows from oral traditions. The homologous and timeless space of modernist museums is supplanted by a host of various spaces and temporality exposed in the process. The environment of an exhibition becomes a dynamic mediated field characterized by fluidity and the interplay of many various themes. Theatricalization acquires a new dimension when the staging of a secular ritual is replaced by the performative pedagogy.²⁶ Such an environment gives rise to a number of exhibitions of varying level of openness, geared up to present problems from a range of disciplines, whereas local issues are typically shown against the backdrop of global transformations, and artists and their works participate in the construction of natural, historical or ethnographic exhibitions. Museum exhibitions reflect the plurality of rationality which comprises cognition, morality and aesthetics, whereas different branches of culture are presented as interconnected with no attempt to establish a hierarchy among them. A new exhibition form emerges: an interactive exhibition. The example of such an exhibition is the Fryderyk Chopin

²⁵ Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, p. 56.

²⁶ Jem Fraser, “Museums-drama, ritual and power,” in *Museum Revolutions. How Museums Change and Are Changed*, eds. Simon J. Knell, Suzanne MacLeod and Sheila Watson (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 299–301.

Museum in Warsaw where the modules arranged into a clear narrative present the successive stages of the composer's life and at the same time serve as interfaces of virtual reality. Without an active user they do not say much. Only when touched with an individual chip will the particular module run its track of images, sounds and texts. Although they take up physical space and make it more or less rhythmical, the classical division of space between an exhibit, an exhibition and an audience does not apply. What distinguished an open museum is the space of an exhibition which cannot be taken in at a glance: despite the signs and labels, instead of providing visitors with the clear view of the whole, the spatial arrangement confuses them, generating as a result what can be called diffused seeing. Visitors are equipped with the map, which they can use to pick their own routes and make up their own narratives of the exhibition. Exhibitions of this kind, typically displaying modern art, give emphasis to the distinctive character of works and installations, their unique visual-audio-tactile sensorium. In extreme cases, like the Biennale Beyond Mediations (Centrum Sztuki Zamek Ujazdowski, Poznań 2010), it can result in a sense of chaos, which, however, is absolutely intended and whose purpose is to demonstrate that there are a number of phenomena in art which cannot be subordinated to one general idea. Additionally, it points to the hybridization of culture: "The world is chaos, once liberated from the corset of ideologies imposing order."²⁷

If we presume the open character of the exhibition environment, open to the critical activity and the audience's participation, we may wonder whether its modernist attribute is still preserved, whether the museum still keeps order in a community, passes judgements, imposes discipline. The character of aesthetics in open museums is also problematic, since artworks displayed there are not included in the canon of autonomous art.

²⁷ Ryszard Kluszczyński, *Pochwała różnorodności*, in *Beyond Mediations* (Poznań: Centrum Sztuki Zamek, 2010), p. 21.

Pierre Bourdieu sees no fundamental changes in the modern museum. Two mechanisms of consecrating a work, by introducing it into the public circulation and by arranging the conditions for disinterested experience, are still in operation.²⁸ Which means that Manet's paintings, Pollock's abstract expressionism, Kosuth's texts or Nisch's quasi-ritual actions fit well into the aesthetics of taste. Little variety is offered as far as spending time with art is concerned and art itself provides few new ways in which works can be appreciated. The museum space allows for no dialogue, no dispute, no criticism. Even the introduction of popular art into the museum has by no means changed those invariable objectives pursued by artists, the institution and art lovers alike. It seems, however, that despite the mechanisms of sacralization, eagerly exploited by artists themselves, for instance Daniel Hirst, well-developed critical awareness prevents the museum from being reduced to one-dimensional space. Thanks to critics and theoreticians who have been exposing exhibition practices for a long time, exhibitions presenting classical art or art of other cultures give rise to the reflection regarding their cultural contexts and the structures which they have entered. Their work is far from completed, since every exhibition poses new challenges in this respect. Global and national museums are more interested in reinforcing stereotypes, which are convenient for the authorities, than the smaller ones situated in the same metropolis. More importantly, however, a number of different discourses on the same subject are now possible.²⁹

²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Reguły sztuki. Geneza i struktura pola literackiego*, trans. Andrzej Zawadzki (Kraków: Universitas, 2001).

²⁹ This point can be exemplified by the exhibitions organized to mark the anniversary of the battle of Grunwald. Syrewicz's multimedia installations in the National Museum in Warsaw reinforced the nineteenth-century myth of Poland defeating Germany, whereas Anda Rottenberg's exhibition in Berlin (2011) exposed this myth and attempted to remedy it.

On the other hand, Jean Baudrillard conjures up a pessimistic apocalyptic vision where no aesthetics exists and the formal value of an artwork is no longer accessible, the example of which are Andy Warhol's paintings: empty, deprived of any meaning and as such capable of initiating a permanent spectacle. This is the museum proposed, according to the philosopher, by postmodernism.³⁰ Both Bourdieu's and Baudrillard's positions reduce the museum to a few fixed functions: it serves the educational purpose or provides entertainment; it is one-dimensional, because its contradictory, aporetic character is not taken into consideration. In this context, museum exhibitions also serve the purposes subordinated to one principle. Scholars see artworks on display as the realizations of superficial aesthetization, which, according to Bourdieu, leads to continual attempts at creating the illusion of autonomous aesthetic art within the framework of an exhibition, whereas according to Baudrillard, all this results in is aesthetization produced by blurring the distinction between a work and its context.

The way out, beyond those two different stances, is provided by Jean-François Lyotard's exhibition *Les Immatériaux* organized in the very centre of the modernist type museum, in the skeleton-like structure of the Pompidou Centre, with its fluid exhibition space shaped on an ad hoc basis by movable panels. Lyotard defines the philosophical principles of a modernist exhibition and points out that within its framework the Cartesian character of space defines both artworks and the way they are perceived. And, in such a space, with the extensive use of modern media, he arranges the situations in which the audience is given an opportunity to experience the inability to present objects as clearly categorized static images. The geometric character of this space in the order of sensory perception literally

³⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Spisek sztuki. Iluzje i deziluzje estetyczne z dodatkiem wywiadów o „Spisku sztuki”*, trans. Sławomir Królak (Warszawa: Sic!, 2006), pp. 63–68, 85–101.

ceases to exist and its mathematical divisions vanish in the relationships and mediations. Lyotard blurs the boundaries between the order of exhibition and the diverse fields of art, science and everyday life. In the process he invites a visitor into the space of the mediated nebula, where the itinerary can hardly be signposted, and instead of an exhibition ("exposition") he proposes an overexposition.³¹ Lyotard's Paris exhibition did not abolish the Cartesian character of space in existing museums. There is no doubt that the museum's *raison d'être* will gravitate towards the unification of contradictions. Modernity continues to prevail in the museum, which still constitutes the aesthetic space of exhibition, in the sense of anaesthetic of displacement and exclusion as well as the aesthetic of an artwork and exhibition. The plurality of artistic activities, however, introduces alternative solutions into its domain or just next to it, the solutions which obscure the clear-cut divisions not just in the space of a museum but in all spheres of culture, including knowledge, education and art: space as well as society.³² This way the insolubility enters the space of exhibition.

Since the environment of exhibition is so diverse, it is hardly possible to speak about one universal type of aesthetics originating in the philosophical principle. It seems more practical to recognize several alternative forms it can assume in relation to a particular exhibition. Each of these types of aesthetic contain three spheres: the biological, the constructive-contextual and the universal, which are inextricably linked to one another. The first one

³¹ Jean-François Lyotard, "Les immatériaux," *Art & Text* 17 (1985): 47–54. For Baudrillard, the nebula generated by media images leads to the communication breakdown, lack of communication.

³² Huyssen argues that in the postmodern museum global exhibitions grant the opportunity to build a cultural identity in a multicultural "melting pot." Cf. Andreas Huyssen, *Escape from Amnesia: The Museum as Mass Medium*, in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 16, 32–34.

refers to the aesthetics of sensuality where the essential role is played by the biological determinants of perception. Zbigniew Żygulski (junior) discussing the psycho-physiological aspects of an exhibition lists the following properties of museum space: "grandiosity-intimacy, spaciousness-incommodiousness, brightness-darkness, warmth-cold, dryness-dampness, airiness-stuffiness, flatness-multi-levelness or inclination, curviness-cubicity (angularity), colourlessness-colourfulness, non-decorativeness-decorativeness, odourlessness-smell (the particular kind of smell is also significant)."³³ The convergence of these parameters of the space of exhibition generates other types of aesthetics expressed explicitly, which relate to the particular type of art requiring the audience's interpretation, activity and response. It applies to the formal interpretations of exhibition space as well as to critical art. For example, Lyotard recognizes Buren's and Kosuth's works as the types of activities which produce a particular interpretation of an exhibition in opposition to the ways of seeing established by this exhibition. In his view, "the essence of an exhibition is not evident," what unfolds before the viewer's eyes conceals in the process what is hidden, another side, the back, the sides, and whatever evades presentation but is also visual.³⁴ Lyotard examines Buren's work and sees it in the perspective of the game of language, one of those played by painting.³⁵ The game takes advantage of the interpretation of a work and the associated narrative apparatus as well as the theories on which the interpretation is founded: an artist's work is a reaction to the interpretations of an exhibition, artworks constitute polemics with the existing interpretations. Among various types of aesthetics relating

³³ Zdzisław Żygulski Jr., *Muzea na świecie. Wstęp do muzealnictwa* (Warszawa: PWN, 1982), p. 147.

³⁴ Lyotard, *Über Daniel Buren*, p. 34.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 14. See Jean-François Lyotard, *Vorbemerkung Über die Pragmatik der Werke (Insbesondere zu den Werken von Daniel Buren)*, in *Philosophie und Malerei im Zeitalter ihres Experimentierens* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1986), pp. 79–95.

to the context we can find performative aesthetics, whether in the sense of a social gathering ascribed to it by Pierre Bourdieu, or in the form of artistic actions, to which Arthur Danto gives a term participatory aesthetics. The third sphere includes the types of aesthetics which are related to what is universal, shared by a given community. Here we can find the sphere of consensus, valued so highly by Habermas, as well as the timeless subjects, such as death and love, exploited by artists. Finally, there is a place for the aesthetics of beauty and Lyotard's post-utopian aesthetics of the sublime.

These three spheres never occur separately but coexist and together establish the fields of mutual influences and interrelationships. In the space of an exhibition visitors move through these fields being sensorily stimulated or anaestheticized, encouraged to remain passive and undertake an intellectual effort or invited to corporeal participation.

Aleksandra Kunce

Anthropology of Points: Towards the Pedagogy of Human Space*

Anthropology of points outlines a research perspective which makes it possible to interpret culture, but it also leads to the foundation of the pedagogy of human space. To read culture through points is in fact to learn to comprehend the envioning and alien space, but also to learn to understand oneself. Anthropology of points as a mental and pedagogical project is today a challenge. The strategy here is to follow the notion of a point. It is a key term which both establishes and concludes this humanistic undertaking. It is vital to point out that it serves not only as a tool for ordering the world, aimed at classifying and enclosing the living tissue of culture within a scheme. Its purpose is rather to uncover a way of experiencing what is specific to a human being.

One should start from the question “What is a point?” A point is an abstract entity, but also something tangible in human life. It is therefore essential to determine the circumstances under which the question can be asked, as it requires the presence of a landscape, people, texts and things. What is a point? What is an anthropology of points? How is such a *point-like* reflection possible? Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari state that there is no heaven

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for concepts,¹ since concepts simply do not await us ready-made, shaped once and for all. Following in Friedrich Nietzsche's footsteps,² one has to acknowledge that they need to be refined, processed and created anew. Even primary concepts have many components, as Deleuze and Guattari stress,³ whereby they are defined; hence they are not self-evident.

A point is a concept which has its restricted domains within science. It is highlighted in geometrical discourse, which is a theory of space and objects included therein, as one of its rudimentary concepts. A point is the smallest non-dimensional geometrical object which is indispensable to describe complex mathematical relations and constructions. A point is a site without dimensions.⁴ Sciences discuss a point as an object, attempting to define, enumerate, prove, segregate, or explicate on the basis of definite points, but they do not focus on their own point-like mode of thinking. They do not inquire about the presence, frequency and perhaps even the necessity of point-like thinking, since this is the field of the humanities. It is their task to pose the question of what point-like thinking is from the philosophical or anthropological perspective; furthermore, it is their job to ask why it is important for human experience to stop the thinking process at a point, to observe the objects at a point, to guide thinking from point to point. Theory of a point, constructed not for the purpose of sciences, but for the humanities, is a considerable challenge today. Not because it could aspire to become a new methodology, intended as a tool for ordering the world of texts, objects, ways of behaviour and mental conventions. That would just prove its broad utility. Something else seems of greater significance, namely showing that a "point-like" quality

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (Verso, 1994), p. 5.

² Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Tako rzecze Zaratustra. Książka dla wszystkich i dla nikogo*, trans. Waław Berent (Warszawa, 1990), p. 270.

³ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*..., p. 15.

⁴ Jan Zydler, *Geometria* (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 1997).

describes a human mode of experiencing oneself, the others and the world. Why then is it worthwhile to explore the concept of a point in the humanities?

The Latin *punctum* introduces us into the world of that which pricks. *Punctum* (*pungere*) means in classical Latin to pierce, to prick, as well as the mark left after piercing.⁵ It also signifies a full stop as a diacritical mark and a punctuation mark. Besides, it denotes a spot (of a leopard), a spot on a die and a number on the scales which equals the mark of division. But it is also a ballot in elections. Construed differently, it is a mathematical point, a tiny element which has its position in space, but also in time since *punctum* means also a while, a moment. In medieval Latin it stands additionally for a middle, a praise, a fragment, and one of the squares on the chessboard.⁶ The Latin *pungō* (– *pungere*, *pupugī*, *punctum*)⁷ explicitly reveals the world of action because it means: to pierce, to sting, to harass, to move, to penetrate, to have a bitter taste, to cause pain. Etymologically close words such as *punctim* (to prick), *punctiō* (a prick), *punctulum* (tiny prick), *punctiuncula* (delicate prick, gentle touch)⁸ multiply the references to the space of experience and thinking of that which pricks and touches, at the same time subtly differentiating its intensity.

The Latin *punctum* opens up an interesting space of thinking since it is not only a point in space and time, a point of record, a point of specification, but also a point which pierces, which is a trace in itself. And since it is the space of that which hurts and cuts to the quick, it steers us towards point-like thinking. We create points of description

⁵ *Cassell's Latin Dictionary* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1968), vol. 4, pp. 389–390; *Słownik łacińsko-polski*, ed. Marian Plezia (Warszawa: PWN, 1974), vol. 4, p. 389.

⁶ *Mittelateinisches Glossar*, eds. Erwin Habel and Friedrich Gröbel. Mit einer Einführung von Heinz-Dieter Heimann (Paderborn-München-Wien-Zürich, 1989), kol. 322.

⁷ *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*; *Słownik łacińsko-polski*, vol. 4, pp. 389–390.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 389.

but at the same time we realize that we are created by the points of experience. In this way we indicate the genuine nature of human experience which is close to what is tiny but also to what harasses and deeply moves.

Although we are anchored in this Latin heritage of *punctum*, we also need to refer to the primary linguistic perspective for us, that is to say to the Greek language. As it has already been mentioned, Euclid in *Στοιχεία* (*Stoicheia*), *Elements*, uses the term σημείο (*semeío*)⁹ to denote a point, a term which in Greek is connected with a symbol. Such a point, in geometry, has for Euclid its tangible shape, as we have stated before. Nouns το σημα (*séma*) and το σημεῖον (*semeion*) refer however to a recognizable mark, a miraculous sign, but also to a grave, a proof – these are the meanings we find in the Scriptures.¹⁰ In the New Testament το σημεῖον denotes a sign which augurs something, warns against something and at the same time is a miracle performed by Jesus. We will come back to that point when the relationship between a sign, brand and *axis mundi* is discussed. In Pythagoras, a point is understood as “a monad which has a place”¹¹ — μονάδα (*monáda*). A point is also connected with στίγμα (*stigma*)¹², from *stizo* (stick, stab) which refers to the mark left after cutting or hitting. It is a scar, a puncture, as well as a brand on the slave's

⁹ Euclid, *Elements*, in *The Thirteen Books of Euclid's Elements*, edited and translated by Thomas Little Heath (New York: Dover Publication, 1956), book I, definition 1.

¹⁰ Some examples of such understanding of the term in the New Testament are the following fragments: Mt 26,48; Lk 2,12; Cl2,12; 2Thess 3,17; Mt 12,39; Jn 3,2; Jn 20,24–29; 2Cor 1,22; Acts 13,14. Cf. The Bible. Revised Standard Version (Westlea and Swindon: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1981).

¹¹ Magdalena Prokopová, “Public and Personal Interpretation of the Point, a Straight Line and their Relation: A Comparison of Phylogenesis and Ontogenesis,” in *Researching the Teaching and Learning of Mathematics: Proceedings of MATHED Intensive Programme 2003*, eds. Brian Hudson and Klaus Esner (Linz, 2005), p. 165.

¹² *The Perseus Digital Library*. Tufts University, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

body, signifying the mark of possession. The feminine form *στιγμή* (*stigmé*) steers us towards a moment, a while, but also towards a very small point, a punctuation mark. Thus a point related to *στίγμα* and *στιγμή* has a broad spectrum of meanings, recalling a sign, a prick, a full stop and a point in time. Aristotle uses the term *στιγμή* (*stigmé*) in *Physics*, *Mechanics*, *On Indivisible Lines*¹³ to designate a mathematical point. In Greek there is a fusion of different meanings of a point as a stain, a spot (on an animal's body), a brand, a mathematical point, a full stop, an iota, a moment in time, and a wink of an eye. It opens up the broad space of a point as a space created by human experience.

The concept of a point is further reinforced in a different linguistic context, for instance that of the English language, where a point denotes a concrete place, a moment in time, a full stop (American English *period*), an argument and an outlook (*point of view*); but (in the plural) it may also refer to a junction of railway tracks in which a pair of rails can be moved so that a train can be directed onto either of two lines (American English *switch*). It could also express somebody's right reasoning (*That's a point!*), a fundamental reason (*to get to the point*), as well as sense (*there's no point, what's the point of doing something*).¹⁴ Besides, it refers to grasping an idea and appreciating what somebody is proposing (*take somebody's point*), to what is relevant, essential (*to the point*) or partly true and acceptable (*up to a point*). The verb *to point* means to direct attention to, to show the position or direction of. The adjective *pointed* describes objects which are sharp; figuratively, it refers to sarcastic or cutting remarks or a type of incisive wit; a *pointer* is a stick used to point to things on a map, etc., an indicator on a dial or balance. These are not all of the meanings but they reveal in the English context the semantic field of that which is

¹³ Aristotle, *Fizyka, Mechanika, O odcinkach niepodzielnych*, in *Dzieła wszystkie*, trans. Leopold Regner (Warszawa: PWN, 1993), vol. 4.971a 23–28, pp. 746–747.

¹⁴ *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), vol. II, p. 643.

fundamental, essential; what is more, they underline the fact that all that is pointed is, at the same time, directed towards something, and shows something to somebody; as well as the fact that a point refers to something that is the heart of the matter.

If a point encompasses whatever is tiny, sudden, what is a short interval and a full stop, something piercing, moving, causing pain or annoyance, then it opens up the space of human experience. It is significant that in a point (even etymologically) the spatial and the temporal, the beginning and the end are all conjoined. In a point we recognize the primal (which eludes defining), that which is a distance, a focal point, a prick and a cut, and the opening of a space of different configurations. This combination of multifarious meanings is conducive to humanistic thinking since it indicates a field of research that needs to be explored, but it also makes it clear that each experience contains that richness *punctum* implies. The temporal point is in the everlasting “now”. It brings up the epistemology of a moment, of that which is sudden and quick, of “a wink of an eye”. Furthermore, a point is inscribed in the perpetual rhythm of return, of the Nietzschean Eternal Return,¹⁵ which transforms the recurrent “now” into the perennially actual. Yet, points can form lines, temporal cause-and-effect chains, linking past and future. Hence, they can become less distinct in the total organization of the figures of thought; still, each time we endeavour to specify time, it turns out that we have to focus on points once again, points which reveal interrelations, proportions, distances, but also the temporal “now”. A point of view is situated “here and now”. The post-Kantian view of the way the object is perceived and created by the subject¹⁶ was ennobled by Nietzsche as the knowledge of the fact that a point of view circumscribes the object, that it is created

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Tako rzecze Zaratustra*, p. 271.

¹⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Krytyka czystego rozumu*, trans. Roman Ingarden (Warszawa: PWN, 1957), vol. I, p. 436 (A 250).

anew upon each estimation; but also as the knowledge that there is no fixed and stable point of view and point of the object, that the human world is entangled in the dynamics of observation-knowledge-living-responsibility.¹⁷

If we consider a point in relation to the function it performs, we realize that it could be a detail which we single out as part of a greater whole. Hence, we can regard it as a minute item, as something which is very tiny, almost microscopic. It is something irrelevant to the entire structure, it may even be an unnecessary immaterial gesture. A point as an ornament is always “next to” that which is significant, entire or primary. But this being “next to”, “close to” is at the same time being “between” what is crucial. It is much more than just an appealing *intermezzo*. Strangely enough, a detail can be regarded as a turning point in an interpretation of events. Such a point turns out to be a clue, a noticeable trace, a key to the description and interpretation of data.

There is, however, still another way to think of a point as a centre, a focus, that which combines meanings, mingles types of conduct, merges thoughts. Such a point lies at the heart of the matter – it relates to the system of signs, to mechanisms of communication, to existent culture codes, to the hierarchy of information or to the principles of discourse. This is a point that binds, establishes the relations of dominance and subordination, of the formal and the marginal. A point is what organizes and focuses thoughts but also what standardizes all variation and difference by placing it exactly in a point. It is a stigma. It is a wound, a brand, an eye-catching colourful stain; it is a disgraceful experience, a distinctive characteristic, a point of convergence, a power point. It builds up its own context. It refers everything that surrounds it to itself. It makes localization distinctive. Like the Renaissance eye of

¹⁷ Vincent Descombes, *To samo i Inne. Czterdzieści pięć lat filozofii francuskiej (1933–1978)*, trans. Bogdan Banasiak and Krzysztof Matuszewski (Warszawa: Spacja, 1996), p. 226.

the perspective, it reigns over the structure of the whole, dictating the ontology of a work of art and its reception. As *punctum*, a brand burnt on the slave's body, it labels and separates. But, at the same time, it has explicit social connotations – establishing symmetries and asymmetries of the communal order. These hierarchies of existence, of actions, of thoughts, of the world make us appreciate that which is focal, that which a point leads us to. Yet, a point is not only a focus, a place of convergence, but also a place of divergence and splitting. It maintains its separateness only to decentralize the structure, rewrite it into the marginal. A point of divergence tears apart interpretative continua, as in Barthes, when it interrupts and distracts the continuity of *stadium*, a conventional reading.¹⁸ *Punctum* changes the interpretation, it injures and pricks. It is a turning point of perception which sharpens the vision of an image. Such location of a point clearly leads to dislocation.

That is why humanistic reading needs to decipher points which bind and blow up at the same time, which lead to what is irrelevant and at the heart of the matter. This is the foundation of thought which controls the incoherence of thought. Finding and distributing points, repeating, combining together, liberating them from the abundance of comprehensive meanings and from the presence in the structure – these are the tropes of thinking. On the one hand, the whole, the structure to which points are subordinate, is appreciated, but on the other, a comprehensive and all too synthetic reading raises doubts. The hermeneutic perspective¹⁹ puts emphasis on the openness of a text and instability of interpretation. Still, the wish to restore order seems to be the nostalgia for the lost whole. A more radical formula is the postmodern tendency to do away with the unity of things altogether, without cherishing the hope to restore order, as in Baudrillard's

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *Światło obrazu. Uwagi o fotografii*, trans. Jacek Trznadel (Warszawa: KR, 1996), § 10.

¹⁹ Katarzyna Rosner, *Hermeneutyka jako krytyka kultury: Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Myśli Współczesnej, 1991).

vertiginous exhaustion and superfluity of meanings.²⁰ It is a distrust of the totalizing thought and action in culture, realized in different forms. Trust in the text's ability to form a whole – in the classical semiological understanding of the text as a discrete and cohesive construction – seems to be almost lost. Yet one cannot get rid of the whole, as was shown by *Gestalt* psychology which regarded it as a primary mode of thinking, urging that all points are conjoined within structures. The way we perceive an object depends on the field where it is situated, is the *Gestalt* diagnosis.²¹ We cannot eliminate systematic thinking, as it is noted by Ludwig von Bertalanffy,²² who stresses both the processes of homeostasis (the maintenance of equilibrium within a social group, person, etc.) and the processes of heterostasis (the dynamics within a system). Still, thinking through points is what applauds ambiguity; it is not easily arranged into stable blocks of knowledge, it is indeterminate, epistemologically inconclusive. It always eludes generalizations since this is the nature of a point.

The crucial questions for anthropology all derive from a point, no matter to what extent our cognition opens up towards what is human, all too human, non-human, animal-like or divine. Why does a human being need points in order to perceive things? Why cannot a human, while experiencing herself or himself, the others and space, do without the points of support he or she constructs? Why are perspectives as points of view (disregarding the statements of universality or relativity of one's judgments) the only traces after the movement of thought that can only be point-like? Why is a human only to be grasped through points of convergence or divergence within the network

²⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation. The Body, In Theory: Histories of Cultural Materialism*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

²¹ Calvin S. Hall, Garney Lindzey, John B. Campbell, *Theories of Personality* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1997).

²² Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1976).

of relations? Why is the fragility of a human uncovered at particular points of his or her existence rather than in the continuum of her being? Why is a point, something tiny, marginal and strange, the place that is genuine? Why is it only a point that is capable of revealing a human being in his or her basic existential dimension, without ideologizing and mythologizing of the world? Why shall the ethical horizon of events that we delineate around a human concentrate on the points of his or her experience, points of his or her existence or critical points (as long as it is genuine and does not solely constitute the body of knowledge)? Why does a human bring up the truth of the area on condition that he or she is presented through points and at a particular point of space-time continuum? Why is it only by following molecules of the matter point by point that one is able to show the complexity of the world? Why is the point-like description to be regarded not only as a mere escape from the burden of synthesis and generalization but as a movement of thought that attempts to get as close as possible to a human and the nature of events? Last but not least, there is also a question of the form of the humanistic reflection that is point-like because it is close to a human in its thinking.

What would the Anthropology of Points be Like?

What would pedagogy be construed as a strategy of thinking and experience which aims at the transformation of human space?

Why do we seek support from anthropology? Due to its broad interests and diversity of methodological tools, this field of scholarship makes it possible to coordinate cultural research which is not unequivocally allotted to one of the existing disciplines. Yet the abovementioned approach of the anthropology of points is less a specialized and institutionalized academic field than a humanistic practice that seeks to unearth anthropology in its etymological reference, not only by combining *anthropos* (Greek άνθρωπος) and *logos* (Greek λόγος), but also by recognizing the imperative to follow and closely read the

human. Construed as such, anthropology remains prior to the scientific division of labour that differentiates between physical, social, cultural and philosophical branches of anthropology. Bearing in mind the distinction between the Kantian question "What is a man?"²³ followed by his pragmatic anthropology project and Max Scheler's and Helmuth Plessner's view of philosophical anthropology, as well as the distinction between a discourse that situates a human empirically in terms of functional, structural or configurationist anthropology,²⁴ and the kind of anthropological space cultural studies posits,²⁵ we have yet to inquire about this primary dimension of the study of a human being. Anthropology touches upon the human in its immediate environment, it inquires about human experience in the dynamic relationship between what is individual and what is common, furthermore, it bridges the gap between the universal and the contextual, between the recurrent and the unique. Anthropology stripped of its cloak of scientific divisions is able to once again pose a question of what a human is, seeking a narrative that would embody human experience. That is why it is essential to place it beyond any further divisions of the study of a human being (anthropology of image, anthropology of music, anthropology of architecture, etc.). Such an approach, in connection with the inquiry into human experience, may raise doubts: is it not the case that anthropology in general is a risky formula and an imprecise umbrella term under which diverse research orientations are located? Still, while defending the status of undivided anthropology we

²³ Immanuel Kant, *Logika. Podręcznik do wykładów*, ed. Gottlob Benjamin Jäsche, trans. Zygmunt Zawirski, „*Filo-Sofja*”, Bydgoskie Towarzystwo Naukowe. *Rocznik Komisji Filozofii* 2 (2002), A 25, p. 141.

²⁴ Applied (empirical) anthropology has its methodological basis in tools created and utilized in empirical research. Cf. Alexander M. Ervin, *Applied Anthropology: Tools and Perspectives for Contemporary Practice* (Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2004).

²⁵ John Storey, *Cultural Studies & The Study of Popular Culture. Theories and Methods* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

appreciate the absence of separate fields within the study of human, which does not translate into a thorough and systematic view of a human being. Contrariwise, we wish to stress the point-like character of human thoughts and actions. Our approach contributes to the self-fashioning of a human who is able to alter her inner disposition by being attentive to points in her reception and understanding of the world. Education in the spirit of the anthropology of points is a strategy that leads to the opening up of pedagogical methods and pedagogy itself, in order to provide a basis for thinking within other academic disciplines.

Anthropology of points is an attempt to frame a research perspective which focuses upon a point, measures from point to point and marks distinctive orientation points as well as limit points. It records the density of the distribution of points, of their regularity and irregularity, and finds its starting points in observations and recognizable figures of human thought and conduct. At the same time, it yields a provocative question of how to carry out a point-like investigation which is true to the point-like nature of experience. It wonders whether it is possible for a point-like interpretation to act as an effective way of avoiding synthesis and generalization in the constructs of knowledge. It discusses the role of configurations of points by indicating that they are singled out by syntagmas and metasntagmas, that is to say, they contribute to the making of relationships, all-inclusive structures and systems. What could be stressed here is either a whole figure drawn or a point as an autonomous entity. Anthropology of points, far from disregarding the dynamics of the whole and the part, claims that a point exists within a network of connections. However, all the conjunctions, even systematic ones, are unable to obliterate the distinctiveness of a point. Anthropology of points is focused less on static forms that would form human knowledge and experience as figures and solids, than on the ceaseless movement of transformation and mediation between the point-like and the figural. That is why it is primarily interested in points

in the perception of data, perspectives as points of view, and points of support we construct while experiencing ourselves, the others and space.

A point is not just a static element in the geometry of human conglomerations since it belongs to action and movement. It forms lines or figures which constitute the substance of life. One should not contrast line and point, as Kandinsky did,²⁶ claiming that it is only the former that is dynamic, a trace of a point in motion. On the contrary, the two are coupled and constantly interacting. We can perceive a point as a dynamic point of activity, a junction of forces. A point is an accumulated activity. In and through points something of a human being is captured. Anthropology implies looking at a human being through the points of her accumulated activity. It aspires to the integral knowledge of a human. It fuses the empirical and general, all that a reflection on a human is concerned with. That is why anthropology needs a point as a mental construct in order to capture a human being in the sudden occurrence of his or her experiences and to reveal a number of particular, along with general, dimensions of space-time continuum. It makes use of the hermeneutic notion of experience,²⁷ as well as of Lévinas's ethical experience of the encounter with the Other but it cannot be reduced to any of them.²⁸ Anthropology focuses on the point-like quality of experience, that is to say, on its constant being in motion, on that which is common, momentary, unstable but also perennial, on that which is only partly graspable

²⁶ Wasył Kandinsky, *Punkt i linia a płaszczyzna. Przyczynek do analizy elementów malarskich*, trans. Stanisław Fijałkowski (Warszawa: PWN, 1986), pp. 53–55.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Bycie i czas*, trans. Bogdan Baran (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2007), pp. 81–145; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Prawda i metoda. Zarys hermeneutyki filozoficznej*, trans. Bogdan Baran (Kraków: Inter Esse, 1993), pp. 324–337.

²⁸ Emanuel Lévinas, *O Bogu, który nawiedza myśl*, trans. Małgorzata Kowalska, prefaced by Tadeusz Gadacz SP, (Kraków: Znak, 1999), pp. 59–61, 225–234.

and heterogeneous. To focus on the experience of culture is to concentrate on what occurs to us daily.²⁹ Hence the possibility of reinforcement through a particular experience construed here as Benjamin's momentary (point-like) event³⁰ or as Simmel's pulsating and microscopic forms of social experience.³¹

To get hold of a human in the community may mean today to concentrate on the points of his or her experience in order to manifest the fragmentary nature of perception of the object under scrutiny and to trigger thinking through points that does not conceal its creativeness but at the same time is focused on the object, exhibiting the old anthropological humility towards truth. Nowadays, the challenge is to create a new perspective, no longer methodological, freed from epistemological arrogance, one that would be able to highlight the point-like mode of experience, which can be ornamental, focal, central, momentary, situated on the margin or at the intersection of social relations, which hurts, cuts to the quick, pierces and reveals a landscape that is fundamental to a human being and allows one to transgress one's individuality.

Such humanistic study halts its reflection at a point, attempting to scrutinize the nature of experience, trustful towards details rather than a synthesis. It carefully selects points of view, deeply aware of the fact that perception is never continuous and systematic. It makes a point by stating that its observations are made from a certain point of view which has been constructed. It indicates the points of support wherein its own philosophy of culture is anchored, yet it is readily affected by the questioning of its own statements, often altering its perspectives and localizations of the scrutinized object. Undoubtedly,

²⁹ Aleksandra Kunce, *Tożsamość i postmodernizm* (Warszawa: Elipsa, 2003).

³⁰ Walter Benjamin: *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyrical Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London, 1983).

³¹ Georg Simmel, *Most i drzewi. Wybór esejów*, trans. Małgorzata Łukasiewicz (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2006), p. 185.

it is a deeply focused reflection, moving from point to point, although not in straight lines or in one direction. This type of thinking frequently retracts, repeats, stops, suddenly accelerates, mediates and triggers various modes of perception. It does not invalidate the existing and stable networks of relations or conventional cultural routes, but when choosing points of intersection it attends to dispersion, vagueness and incoherence.

Such perspectivism is not only close to the human epistemological condition but is also what delineates the ethical horizon of events. It detects a human in what is tiny, concentrated, dispersed, fragmentary, fragile, wary of synthesis, yet close to the event and object. Point-like thinking and point-like observation, followed by their record, are mindful of the complexity of things and take great pains to stay near the nature of events. It is both necessary to single out and mark something with geometrical precision, and to situate it in a network of points, drawing straight lines, indicating intersection points, and delineating the domain of a point, as is the case with a static drawing made with great precision by a draughtsman on the vellum. And yet anthropology eventually goes beyond such fixity. It undermines the all too simple geometry of thinking. What a point leads us to and what formerly found its expression in Archimedes' measuring of the earth, in his desire to measure each and every grain of sand, displays an important attribute of point-like thinking, an imperative that the world be fathomed in its foundations, in that which is minute, point-like. Yet, this measurability can easily be replaced by a mere wish to penetrate the grain of sand without the mathematics in the eye, as was the desire of William Blake who all of a sudden turned towards the genuine and primal.³² Blake was far from valuing the measurable and limited world. Still, anthropology of a point cannot dispense with the will to measure, since it wishes to measure humbly, describing

³² William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence* (Yardley, 1975).

the world in its very foundations, in proximity to what is elementary, even if it appreciates suddenness and eschews conclusiveness. It refers a point to time, to space and to motion. On the basis of the primal and minute, it explains other attributes, without skipping a point on the way. The smallest is treated as fundamental, the discriminate as something that is not bound by a system and cannot be defined by anything else. Extreme and critical points, border points, points of convergence and divergence, gravity points – all of them define the principles of anthropological thinking which needs to find the way to express what is beyond a word, a cultural reality which is not directly graspable. Yet the task of this anthropology is not only to mark points in that space, and to recognize boundaries that are significant to a human being as her acts of separation, but also to indicate the blurring of the sacred delimitation points. It follows the idea that we experience the world in a point. It explores points of waning, dead points within the communal space, those that enclose the space and help delineate the horizon of events. It investigates poles, cardinal points, gravity points, density points within places and human relations, recording in a point-like manner the differences in the condensation of cultural matter. A point becomes a stigma, a sign, a concrete form inscribed on the body, a stream of relations. It is what cuts to the quick. It is a climax, a destination of the anthropologist's expedition to the ends of the world, a turn towards the Other as well as to oneself, the beginning and the end, alpha and omega. It constitutes *axis mundi*, it reveals itself in stations, frontier posts, unimportant and stable places which give support and mislead. It is present in the places of junction and contiguity of objects, in both the stable and the dynamic. Anthropology passes quickly all the information points or measurable points that perform a useful function within cultural space, and gets an insight into those sites of culture that represent various perspectives of experience and thinking, different logics of defining space-time continuum and human relations.

The research perspective rooted in the notion of a point opens up a space around a human being, in accordance with the principles of geometry and drawing which recognize the potential of a point. It has a sudden quality. Whereas drawing is what closes up since a line marks the end by providing a distinct outline of things, a point is what opens the world. A point is a place where life is pulsating. It opens up towards other points, creating networks of references, being constantly on the move. A point opens the world by bringing together different orders of nature, social life and metaphysical existence. Anthropology of points explores this dynamics and allows us to decipher human space by means of the epistemologically refined notion of a point.

It seems that the presented project of the anthropology of points may also be utilized as a pedagogical strategy, on condition that it is treated as a broad worldview underlining concrete educational proposals. Not only is it capable of transforming existing pedagogical methods, but it may also become an exacting philosophy of education which, by altering the tools for knowing the world and fashioning one's self, reorganizes social relations and human space. At the end of the day, anthropology of points is as yet an uncultivated land, a project of insight into the space of experience waiting to be applied, but it is also a chance to invent new educational strategies capable of recognizing the contemporary world as dispersed and indeterminate. For education cannot be solely based on the reference to moral and aesthetic values, or concepts and categories derived from scientific, national, international and multinational schemes of knowledge. The knowledge of what is in-between (inter-) and remains correlated with the idea of solidarity, tolerance or communality, needs to be anchored in a novel style of thinking which thoroughly teaches how to confront oneself and the Other within the common space, while the care about this thorough modelling of one's participation in the social is solely derived from the choice of an anthropology as a select interpretation of a human being. An interesting proposal here is that of the anthropology

of points, which could be found conducive to shaping a human and developing methods in the field of education. For it is a point-like interpretation of the world, an ability to respond in a point-like manner to fragile human bonds, and a point-like outline of knowledge capable of dismantling petrified edifices of ideology or national narrative, that provides an opportunity for an insightful and precise, far from superficial, reading of lived experience. It is also a chance to develop creative and markedly humble projects of the self in the dispersed and multicultural, and hence dialogic, world.

The condition of being dispersed and point-like is not a fault and a blind alley of the post-thinking but an affirmation of the route of a point which raises doubts and dismantles ideological beliefs and all-too-domesticated structures of knowledge. Although the point-like quality leads to the discovery and propagation of epistemological impotence, it does not translate into the weakness of the humanities. Undertaking enlightened social (and educational) projects that would explore the notion of a point and create a space for the anthropology of points is not an intellectual fashion. It is a necessity of embarking upon new humanistic projects based on *punctum* which would correspond to a dispersed nature of social reality and contribute to the transformation of ourselves as we learn to humanistically shape the substance of culture.

Punctum as that which is minute and fragile, which injures and has a bitter taste, which can be a focal point, a sign and a stigma, which can be curious, peripheral and cardinal, what can melt away, etc., is a promising route combining scholarly insight and pedagogical strategy.

Aleksandra Kunce

Towards the Integral Humanities*

Despite many attempts at reconstituting the humanities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the concern about its current condition is hardly *passé*. Discontent with the very shape the humanities take is common to the advocates of scientific research on nature – who confide in hard science as the march of facts – and to the followers of arts as a field of interpretation which yields truths about a human being in a distinct metaphorical language. This article attempts to answer the question of how the humanistic reflection may be conceived of as long as it is discussed in the framework of the philosophical presuppositions of postmodernism. Does it contribute to the integral vision of the humanities?

The postmodern thought is significantly embedded in the history of ideas. One of such focal points is the reflection of Friedrich Nietzsche, a philosopher who sought to unify art and theoretical insight, who urged that there be no divisions, who allowed linguistic creativity and metaphorical expression in the humanities, and finally who shunned sedentary and cautious knowledge, one that was cultivated by scholars in the cool shade.¹ This is a reference

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¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 237.

to the humanities which are close to living, close to the flux of reality; but also to the humanities which impose ethical obligations. And this trail is what we have to remember.

Another important moment in history is the antipositivistic turn in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which brought about the notion of “spiritual sciences” (*Geisteswissenschaften*) coined by Wilhelm Dilthey, or Rickert’s “cultural sciences” (*Kulturwissenschaften*). Demolishing positivistic conclusions, it moved closer to living – by treating the very subject of inquiry, mainly a complex sociohistorical reality, as distinct, and by selecting a distinct methodology based on understanding. In 1883, Dilthey resolved that *Geisteswissenschaften* should approach living at the intersection of life, expression and understanding.² This is where postmodernism, as a conceptual edifice, has its foundation.

One of the most significant aspects of postmodernism is an attempt at reinterpretation of the modernist world-image. The modernist perspectivism is what in the European culture determines the path of attachment to the whole, truth and reason. Only that which guarantees totality, necessity and evidence is able to offer an adequate way of cognition, explication and even understanding.³ At the end of the day fragments always constitute the whole, analytical reasoning leads to synthesis, the only right progress implies attaining ever higher degrees of knowledge, and difference becomes subordinated to identity. To know truly is to acquire synthetic knowledge of the One, Complete and Essential. This widespread language practice is obviously

² Wilhelm Dilthey, *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften in Gesammelte Schriften* (Stuttgart-Götingen, 1958–1982), vol. 1.

³ René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason, and Seeking Truth in the Science*, in René Descartes, *A Discourse on the Method. Meditations and Principle*, trans. John Veitch (London: Orion Publishing Group, 2004), pp. 3–61; Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (New York: Prentice Hall, 1956).

far removed from pragmatist contingency.⁴ What is its aim? To close, bring to an end and complete the process of thinking. The movement of totalizing thought – always audacious in its undertakings – is synchronized with the European culture in full spate. Its global enterprises – such as territorial expansion – are merely a reflection of the formed mental space.⁵ “Behind the surface, into the depths, towards the essence” – the echoes of this call can easily be heard in methodological, economic and political pursuits. The first ones are of most interest here. To explore the deep structure of thinking, to arrive at the basic oppositions governing cognition is a task that faces the most European of European methodologies – structuralism.⁶ To determine necessity, to complete thinking and to merge in the name of totality and systematicity is an aim of the Philosophy of Certitude.⁷ To reintroduce unity into a number of scattered traces, to rediscover the relationship through understanding, to indirectly get to the bottom of things, to take root in language – is an aim of the less so certain methodology of hermeneutics.⁸

These are just a few routes of European cognition. But would it be so simple as to allow us to think that there is a parallel or criss-crossing undercurrent of discrepant thinking: the cult of a fragment, difference and

⁴ Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Univeristy of Minnesota Press, 1982); Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 73–95.

⁵ Pierre Chaunu, *La civilisation de l'Europe des Lumières* (Flammarion, 1997).

⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 2000), pp. 277–381.

⁷ Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*.

⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley and London: Univeristy of California Press, 1977), pp. 3–17; Martin Heidegger, *List o „humanizmie”*, trans. Józef Tischner, in Martin Heidegger, *Znaki drogi*, trans. Seweryn Bladzi et al. (Warszawa: Fundacja Aletheia, 1995), pp. 129–168; Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2003).

indeterminacy – the micro-current? Is it simply about the Manichean hierarchy of importance: either Parmenides or Heraclitus, either structuralism or postmodernism, either Hegel or Nietzsche? Can one believe in the opposition of micro- and macro-style of thinking? Does the thought develop simply by following the path of either mythos or logos? The duality was repeatedly questioned by Jacques Derrida, who traced the area of shadow, boundary, and the uncertain within the exemplary philosophies of essentialism, like those of Plato or Edmund Husserl.⁹ We have also seen Jean-François Lyotard on the trail of the postmodern in Kant or Aristotle.¹⁰

The main finding of postmodernism is that the very thinking is a movement simultaneously prone to macro- and microscopic influences. Let us trust the unity and inability to separate with reference to the humanities. Postmodernism – this is what interests us here – transgresses the divisions of the modernist project of scholarship. It denotes openness to an integral field of knowledge, one that additionally binds elitism to the popular, while stressing the necessity of a sense of moral duty as well as the everyday concern for communal betterment and what stems therefrom.

Suspicious scholarship

Modernist scholarship in its post-Enlightenment (and especially neopositivistic) version was supposed to provide definite answers.¹¹ Postmodernism finds this imperative

⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Jacques Derrida, *Kres człowieka*, trans. Paweł Pieniążek, in *Pismo filozofii*, ed. Bogdan Banasiak (Kraków: Inter Esse, 1992), pp. 129–160.

¹⁰ Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud, *Au Juste* (Les Editions de Minuit, 1979), p. 52; Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

¹¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

irrelevant and outdated. Besides, the scholarship, as scientistically conceived, was to be consistent through systematicity and unambiguous through application of logical rules – which were treated as a revelation of the highest laws of thinking (in the tradition of Aristotle or Descartes) and not merely as rules of a rhetorical game (in the tradition of Greek sophists). Finally, modernist scholarship was to be marked by completeness. René Descartes, laying the foundations of the modern horizon of scholarly investigation (together with Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton), set in motion a methodological machinery which was to control thinking and to guarantee its veracity manifested in simplicity and evidence.¹² Induction or deduction – both paths of inquiry were to legitimize the correctness and veracity of conclusions. Such scholarship had to put faith in denotative sentences – which are questionable insofar as they are open to verification as a gesture of confirmation Thomas Kuhn wrote about,¹³ or to falsification, which in Karl Popper's words is a guarantee of progress.¹⁴ Such scholarship needed a “lodge of legislators” to become an institutional game appealing to many due to its well-developed and long-sanctioned rules, with legitimacy and correctness of an utterance as a guarantee of its quality.

Such scholarship has had to give rise to justifiable postmodernist suspicions, a topic repeatedly broached by Zygmunt Bauman¹⁵ or Jean-François Lyotard.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is still a recognized academic practice, immensely popular and difficult to dispose of. As Kuhn notes, scholarship is

¹² Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, pp. 3–61.

¹³ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 10–34.

¹⁴ Karl Reimund Popper, *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 4–51.

¹⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2000), pp. 53–90.

¹⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 11–17.

based on puzzles which are formulated by scholars of great eminence and then solved by them according to system rules in order to confirm and strengthen their professional status. They work to provide us with a transparent world-image, one already disclosed. Such scholarship, particularly disturbing to the humanities, becomes closed and presents itself as a model of the world which – in Michel Serres's view – has long imposed the imperative to combat disorder, to pursue coherence at any cost, to stay separate from other domains of life, to refuse to face the fact that foundations of all theories crack because reality itself is unstable.¹⁷ Such scholarship is alien to the god Hermes, who borrows, mediates, initiates and breaks the discourse open. And it is contrary to the thought of postmodernist-minded Serres, who inclines towards whatever is open, changeable and discontinuous in reflection. This is another important theme for the postmodern humanities.

Modernist scholarship is far remote from art and the experience of mystery. The undecidable is no subject of inquiry, it is deferred or postponed in accordance with the belief in the development of research tools and methods. Scholarship, if confronted by a mystery, has no difficulty in dealing with it – simply declares its surrender. In this way institutional scholarship frequently incapacitates itself, as it is confined to social praxis which makes a distinction between the rational and the wise. Entrusted with solving puzzles instead of approaching mystery, the scholarship turns into an efficient and functional lifestyle, accompanied by an analogous way of thinking. Not necessarily a demanding way of being in the world, it is what scholars actually desired, having distanced themselves from metaphysicians in order to make their pursuit more efficient. If there is any mystery in modernist thinking, it can be found in a discourse radically different from the

¹⁷ Michel Serres, *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, eds. Josue V. Harrari and David F. Bell (Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

scholarly language, the discourse of great thinkers and critics of Western scholarship, such as for instance Martin Heidegger. He wreaked havoc with the Western calculating thinking, and in doing so, he wished to plant anew and cultivate the concern for *Holzwege*, a contemplative insight and closeness to mystery.¹⁸ The route of mystery is a well-known path of reflecting; it is however a much unappreciated path of scholarly practice.

A scholarship which would reestablish its connection to the first questions without seeking to eliminate mystery and ambiguity might be the most favourable environment for contemporary humanistic thinking. The contemporary world is consumed with the conflict between incommensurable orders of knowledge; to remedy the situation one need not, however, try to constrain the plurality (in itself a desirable condition) in the name of unity. On the contrary, one should emphasize it even more, or foreground the existing tension, the entanglement, the unique rhythm of living. It is behind the conceptual wars fought in the name of rationality and irrationality that the same ostentatiously manifested unpredictability, inability of self-expression, ambiguity, absence and intangibility resides. This is what in fact is lacking in scientific thinking (which remains ever on guard against the vague, inexplicable and non-falsifiable), but this is also what paralyzes postmodernist thought (by its reference to the abyss and metaphysical depths, while the most promising developments are associated with events, writing and surface).

Contrary to appearances, the underlying mystery is visible in the shreds of discordant knowledge: in the methodological credulity of natural sciences, in the discourse of analytical philosophy, in the theological approach to particular issues, in the rational fondness for solving puzzles in social sciences, in the positivistic developing of any histories of facts and ideas, in the

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Holzwege*.

empirical-based argumentation in social anthropology, and, last but not least, in the inclination towards metascientific investigations into the old scholarly discourse, as well as the fondness for the postmodern mode of reflection, one confiding in paralogy, creationism and artistry of language.

Mystery is a false bottom of postmodernism and modernism, both of which attempt to steer clear of obscurity on various levels. This is why we need to address the problem of integrity. Obscurity identifiable as mystery proves crucial to postmodernism inasmuch as it is the reverse of the apologia of the surface. Because while the post-trend flees from the source, essence, depth, metaphysical mystery, it also recognizes their significance, even if it seeks to invalidate them by preaching a cheerful play with surface (in)scription.¹⁹ Postmodernism is after all well-aware of the fear of the mighty old narrative of mystery which translated into diverse social orders, ones seeking to legitimize even extreme violence by means of the mythology of the depth they created and fostered. Therefore, postmodernism yearns to be freed from the obsession and obligation to serve the compulsory mysterious interpretation of the world, whether in the name of metaphysical reality or the ascent of the spirit, the idea of purposefulness of history, universal human progress or civilizational primacy.²⁰ The obscurity of mystery is then transferred onto the level of superficial opacity. The discourse becomes flat, devoid of fundamental issues. But we can ask: Does it not provide a heightened sense of the obscurity of the world? It is not only the nature of things that becomes impenetrable; it is also the sphere of linguistic convention or behavioural code that tends to be blurred. Contrary to common opinion, postmodernism sides with the simultaneous yet incoherent recognition of the power of mystery and apologia of impenetrable surface.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

²⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

It is not just an innocent play in the name of (dis)sense. Obscurity, emphasis on paralogy, deferment, absence and openness – these are signposts that paradoxically lead to rootedness in the consideration of mystery. The humanities are humanistic insofar as they make a sustained effort to face up to mystery and obscurity of things without yielding to the temptation of easy solutions to the human existential puzzle. And this is the common basis of different humanistic disciplines which cannot remain separate as long as they guard mystery. In this sense postmodernism is what bridges gaps and mediates between various fields of knowledge.

Towards the integral humanities

The integral humanities, which are not totalized, may be aided by the ambivalent cognitive situation of the researcher. This seems to apply to a sociologist, philosopher and anthropologist alike, who are encouraged to cherish their cognitive impotence. Obviously it will only take place after they have recognized their own inability and debunked the illusions harboured by their predecessors as to the conclusiveness of intellectual speculations. Hence their sense of satisfaction will stem from some kind of confidence in their cognitive powers; otherwise they would not be able to regard anything as unknowable. Paradoxically, cognitive impotence is thus tantamount to potency. It is connected with one's powers being based on the acknowledgment of the obscurity of the world and on development of linguistic formulae that would make it possible to describe the obscurity. It is however quite pointless to talk indiscriminately about all the seekers after obscurity and transparency. It seems that those who announce their epistemological impotence – after the postmodernist reworking of key categories – are marked by humility manifested in refusing the title of priest, master, teacher or judge. One is merely a participant in language

games that society plays;²¹ but a participant with moral duties. There is also an element of excessive pride but it is rather tied to one's linguistic self-awareness, whereby the individual does not attempt to conceal his or her creativity and contingency of his or her vocabulary, as Richard Rorty puts it.²² Eventually what dominates is a sense of one's cognitive impotence and a concern related to the inability of stating the truth in the clear bivalent logical description.

The strength of the humanities lies in that they refuse to assimilate to hard science and are not prone to fragmentation while eschewing from giving simple diagnoses and drawing easy conclusions. And it is postmodernism that casts a new light on the humanities. It testifies to the inability of arriving at the truth of the world and, by projecting an image of things that focuses on the unpredictable, chaotic, inaccessible and unnameable, it celebrates the aforementioned route of mystery. With all its emphasis on anonymity and intertextuality, it is a truly original current, one originally preaching "the death of the author" and creatively juggling patterns. The creativity of the knowing subject actually means establishing the principle beyond all principles. It concerns a principle inherent in us, in our response to the old order, a principle that denies transparency. This principle, contingently erected and trusted, is simply obscurity. The key, present in the tradition and used to disentangle meaning, fails us, as does our learned epistemological attitude – powered by the will to know and belief in the systematicity as well as in the effect measurable both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Another crucial aspect of obscurity, one often broached by the humanities, is writing. This is one of postmodernism's greatest achievements. It consists in signalling – by

²¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999); Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

²² Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 73–95.

means of the adopted style of thinking and description – a departure from the notion of language as a mirror of nature.²³ But also in showing the inapplicability of logical rules or the absence of a system. This in turn is connected with the practice of following textual displacements by pointing to the dissemination of (dis)senses, unmasking gaps and ruptures in the essentialist discourse, creating ever new metaphores in the hope of developing interesting language games, and breaking open holistic accounts in favour of fragmentation. The postmodernist discourse ostentatiously celebrates its stylistic obscurity, which is a further testimony to the existence of cognitive impotence. Above all, however, it points to the literary quality of scholarly accounts by stating that writing is an instrument for producing metaphors. Each scholarly text is literature. And this is an important remark for the humanities, which self-consciously embark upon scholarly considerations, having first acknowledged their provisional character and rhetorical appeal.

The uncertainty underlying the humanities, which is both their distinctive feature and a guarantee of their integrity, contributes to the description of a human being. The tension between an apologia for and rebellion against the order of culture, between the simultaneous taking root in and uprooting oneself from the soil of collective ideas merely paves the way for the description of a human. But it is the simultaneity that provides a clue to humanistic thinking – an insight which, by formulating systems of knowledge, reinforces the belief in the power of rootlessness. It achieves this aim by constructing tools which serve to dismantle blocks of knowledge. It stresses the instrumental and contingent function of language, which we can use, in Rorty's words, like a toolbox, searching for ever more appealing metaphors.²⁴ It requires a creative activity that would withstand disharmony within the human being

²³ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pp. 73–95, 3–22.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

and world – a Nietzschean demand for writing that would tantalize language conceived of as an existential call.

This is how, by blurring the gap between the domains of knowledge and art (as well as ethics), the humanities dismiss the possibility of human fragmentation. The humanities come close to the simultaneity in human experience and by doing so they protect themselves against one-track knowledge, one developing a single line of thinking and generating various theories of human and world development with one central idea and a closed list of categories in mind. We could say that the humanities need a sudden vision of the human being – which is in a sense a total, instant and frayed image. They cannot act as a shell that rigoristically forces manifestations of human activity into established orders and gives encyclopaedic overviews and classifications. Significantly, the humanities should never overshadow a human being, separating him or her by means of various fields of knowledge. Their task is to guard the good cover, one that does not allow ostentation and medical precision in thinking, does not permit annihilation of chance and, of the same time, does protect the human. It is the cover that prevents from being stripped by a method and protects against the abuses of the bombastic faculty of cognition. Paradoxically, shielding a human being from the possessive knowledge that takes place in the humanities bears much resemblance to protecting the individual from being exposed in cultural practices. It secures the acts of taking root and uprooting, a good secret of a human.

The gesture of demolition obliges since it gives rise to a sense of responsibility for the whole construction. Nietzsche, in stressing the role of destructive energy, set unprecedented requirements with reference to the genius and greatness of created effect.²⁵ Heidegger, in his *Letter on Humanism*,²⁶ contesting forgetfulness in the Western thinking on Being, erected a new edifice, a new world-

²⁵ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

²⁶ Heidegger, *List o „humanizmie”,* pp. 129–168.

image which alternatively, through destruction, restored a human being. No thinker more than Derrida eschewed an unequivocal interpretation of destruction and repudiation,²⁷ yet the idea of deconstruction was well anchored in the past and attached to textual experimenting. Above all, it was a gesture of responsible friendship which inquired about ways of sublating humanism and metaphysics. Destruction, deconstruction and reconstruction are a merit because they guard the cover with its good “darkening” quality, or what provides the shelter in the humanities. Such humanities are a challenge, but most of all they presuppose duty and aim to protect a human being. In doing so, they become a field open to exploration in the realm of language as a descriptive tool, but first and foremost in the sphere of creation and reinterpretation of concepts, as well as creation of mental space which is marked by the tension between the cultural and the particular.

Let us repeat, the humanities are still a challenge and duty. We could figuratively say that the humanistic insight is simultaneously a matter of lightness and burden. Hence the requirement to conceive humanistic generalizations – as long as they wish to address the complexity of phenomena – as a sort of light covering of well-disposed (“friendly”) theory for the items being researched or constructed. And the theory, as long as it desires to approach things, should be close to life and cracked. We exist in the mental space of displacement, transplantation and transformation. That is why all the attempts at undermining and silencing cultural narratives which grow humble faced with the indeterminate course of events are a challenge. That is why the discourse which dismantles the systematicity of seeing – through reflection revolving around the exhausted, the unnameable, the ineffable, the unknowable, the silenced and the dispersed – multiplies gaps that allow us to sense the rhythm of experiencing. The humanities watch over epistemological borders within which we approach

²⁷ Derrida, *Kres człowieka*, pp. 129–160.

things. In this sense, the integral humanities protect and preserve cracks and scratches, impossible steps in research, incoherence of the system, any blurs or specks that testify to the missing route to transparency.

We can conclude that the contemporary humanities – as long as they do not settle for the simple fragmentation of knowledge – have to take account of the postmodernist narratives highlighting the obscurity of the world. If the humanities are to provide any sort of lively description and not just a sample of academic systemizing, they have to be contaminated with obscurity, not merely on the linguistic level but also on the level of ideas. The long-term aim of humanistic thinking is a creation of an interdisciplinary platform combining philosophy, cultural anthropology and art theory, but also borrowing metaphors and findings from natural sciences. Most importantly, the humanities need to be well anchored in ethics, since, as we said before, they are supposed to protect a human being and blur the gaps between scientific and ethical domains. Admittedly, though, the construction of the humanities as a field open to exploration in the realm of language, in the sphere of creation and reinterpretation of concepts, as well as creation of open mental space – is a difficult task. But one that poses a cognitive and ethical challenge.

Maria Popczyk

Art Museum: The Place of the Visualization of Modernity*

The public display of artworks is so inarguably valuable and self-evident that it raises no suspicions, especially among the general public. The atmosphere of the communion with artistic, aesthetic and cultural values makes it possible for the discourses of modernity to enter into the social consciousness effortlessly and smoothly. Art museums enjoy a unique position in this respect, since in the aesthetic medium, that is the medium which preserves the social sense of security and, at the same time, assuages the sense of guilt, it visualizes the myth of progress, the myth of the emancipation of the Spirit,¹ the myth of the superiority of the Western culture over other cultures. When Georges Bataille likens a museum to a mirror, not without a touch of irony and clearly referring to the Lacanian mirror stage, he also stresses our innate need to create the image of the world in its totality with which a community can identify. Donald Preziosi sees a museum as an optical device, the machine which focuses the viewer's sight on the object and in the process

* The chapter first published in Polish as: "Przestrzenne praktykowanie muzeum," *Anthropos?* 14/15 (2010): 82–91.

¹ What Lyotard calls metanarratives. Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *Kondycja ponowoczesna. Raport o stanie wiedzy*, trans. Małgorzata Kowalska and Jacek Migasiński (Warszawa: Fundacja Aletheia, 1997), p. 19.

allows the culture of the West to create its own image and measure other cultures against its standards.² Thus the museum is the place where order is being imposed, the world tamed, and chaos brought under control. However, the museum generating the systems of meanings which delineate the boundaries of the cultural and individual identity undergoes transformation itself, due to the fact that, as time passes and the world around changes, some forms of museum exhibition lose their explanatory power. Modernity negates itself and the transformation of the present is destructive as well as creative, as demonstrated by Jürgen Habermas, who recognized Hegel's philosophy as paradigmatic for modernism. The visualization of progress in arts and science essentially dominated in museums up to the 1950s, although particular exhibitions might have taken different shape. Only in the second part of the twentieth century did it slowly give way to other forms of exhibition, which cannot be easily categorized or assessed. The museum has attained a plural character, and consequently, alongside global museums and world-class collections, new types of museums emerge, frequently initiated by private collectors or small communities. Therefore, the discussion on the visualization of modernity is not limited to historical narratives but encompasses a variety of ways a museum exhibition can be employed to express social or communal attitudes towards the world.

Thus the question arises whether these transformations possess some unchanging qualities or whether we deal with completely new forms of exhibition and expression. Studying the transformations of modernity from the anthropological point of view, Odo Marquard supports the

² Donald Preziosi, "Brain of the Earth's Body: Museum and the Flaming of Modernity," in *The Rhetoric of the Frame. Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, ed. Paul Duro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 106; Tony Bennett, "Civic Seeing: Museums and the Organization of Vision," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, 2011), pp. 267–278.

values represented by the museum seeing its emergence as an active process of supplementing losses and deficiencies created as a result of demystifying the world and modernization. Having lost its biblical inviolability and becoming open to human interference the reality lost its beauty as well. A human being, however, has taken the helm of responsibility and, through the creation of artworks, has been trying to rescue the beauty.³ The experimental and technical brain has an alternative in artists' works, aesthetics and art history. So when people find themselves under the pressure of tribunalization and the constraints of legitimization, they can take refuge in the museum which, being a domain of beauty and sensuality, offers them the reprieve from judgement.⁴ The institutionalization of a sense of taste is a result of the efforts to deal with the deprivation felt by people denied the Providence's protection and guidance.⁵ The aesthetization of art in the museum constitutes an intrinsic trait of modernity whose significance cannot be overstated since it is the process of stripping the evil of its attributes. The museum collecting different types of art rehabilitates ugliness, the Dionysian, anxiety, or, in other words, all the things which need to be redeemed. Art invests them with value which in reflection is recognized by humanities.⁶

The systems of values and meanings constructed through collecting and displaying works of art provide a means of resistance to the disintegration of the world, which is why each successive generation undertakes this

³ Odo Marquard, *Aesthetica i anaesthetica. Rozważania filozoficzne*, trans. Krystyna Krzemieniowa (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa, 2007), p. 10.

⁴ "The aesthetization of art is a relief from the Last Judgement [...] the state of grace in the world which is no longer eschatological" (translation mine). Ibidem, p. 11. Other spheres of escape are nature, travels and individuality.

⁵ Odo Marquard, *Rozstanie z filozofią pierwszych zasad. Studia filozoficzne*, trans. Krystyna Krzemieniowa (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa), p. 44.

⁶ Marquard, *Aesthetica i anaesthetica*, p. 13.

task anew. Moreover, art from its very beginnings has provided the primary medium enabling the individual to settle down in a community, as it combines individual and communal experience. Artworks constitute an integral element of worship as well as both religious and secular rituals. They represent the people's surroundings and their concerns. They express mental and emotional states. They help to set up a community of interpretations and experience. They create the world which is intimate, close and sensual. From the Renaissance the noblemen's palaces were the places where art, politics and prestige united members of a given class and at the same time they delineated clear dividing lines between different groups of people. In modern times this is the role of public places while in art museums the historical process of works settling down has become the way of uniting a secular community and its rules are guarded by the authority of the state.⁷ The aesthetic quality of space and works allows a visitor to participate in what Hannah Arendt refers to as permanence, "lasting belongs to a higher order [...]. And in the permanence of art [...] the intuition [...] of the immortal created by a mortal hand becomes tangible, it can shine and be seen [...]."⁸ Jerzy Świecimski points to another aspect of such permanence, "The perception of certain objects which can only be viewed in their original form in the museum in some cases may evoke very strong emotions which exhibit the traits of genuine exhilaration."⁹ Although the experience is arranged in public, it is experienced intimately and this neutralizes the sway of a metanarrative.

In the nineteenth-century museum, the temple of art, artworks brought in from different places and collections

⁷ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 280.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Kondycja ludzka*, trans. Anna Łagodzka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo „Aletheia”, 2000), p. 185.

⁹ Jerzy Świecimski, *Wystawy muzealne. Studium z estetyki wystaw*, vol. I (Kraków: Jan-Kajetan Młynarski, 1992), p. 12.

were accorded meaning and values were to form a complete whole. The success of the process enabling a secular society to settle down – and develop a sense of familiarity with what belongs to the past – depends on the forms of exhibition adopted, on how the environment of an exhibition is arranged. In the museum environment of a modernist type,¹⁰ it is art history that helps visitors to become familiar with the past: it establishes the historical, geographical or axiological order in which artworks are to be presented with the canon of classical beauty serving as a determinant. The spatial layout of rooms allows viewers to feel as if they were placed in the heart of the artistic history of Europe. The sequence of trends, formal and qualitative differences between various painting schools, will demonstrate the transformations of art. And the bigger the collection, the stronger the sense of satisfaction resulting from being granted access to the history of art almost in its totality and from the participation in the myth of progress. This process of setting an individual in the course of history contributes to his or her identification with it, which is additionally strengthened by the individual discovery of various forms of beauty in his or her subjective aesthetic experience. Interestingly, in the nineteenth century, the heyday of the museum, Honoré de Balzac in *La peau de chagrin* described a private collection of human and divine works, where stuffed snakes and monkeys sit next to china, a Moorish weapon and masterpieces of fine art, and this “philosophical chaos”, the ocean of everything evokes the dark, infernal powers.¹¹ In museums the rational system of classification is an exorcism performed by the enlightened mind in order to expel the mysterious, unique or ambivalent and it also manifests itself in the division of the space of

¹⁰ I refer here to the Enlightenment type of art museums, the temple of art, as well as a modern museum of a historical type with the white cube space.

¹¹ Honoriusz Balzac, *Jaszczur*, trans. Tadeusz Żeleński (Boy) and Julian Rogoziński (Kraków: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1999), pp. 22–29.

exhibition separating fine arts from natural objects and artefacts produced by other cultures.

The scientific exhibition, being self-evident, becomes an authoritative statement, since it draws its power from the ideology of scientism, according to which science never creates the laws of the world but discovers them. In a well-planned manner it conveys a general message and creates sensual stimuli and at the same time it anaesthetizes a visitor against the stimuli which it sees as undesirable for the appropriate reception. The space of exhibition and the architectural style of the building, rather than merely providing the background or being an addition to the artworks inside, comment on them and supply them with the context, so that the myth significant for the community can be established. This is the myth that unifies the community, transports it into the sphere of the invisible, to use the terminology employed by Krzysztof Pomian who determines the community-forming role of collecting objects (*semiofors*). The nineteenth-century museum of art, referred to as the temple of art or the house of arts, provided the stability of spiritual experiences. It was the space where a spiritual human being was at home and which stood in opposition to the changeable outside world filled with risks, undergoing modernization and as such incapable of providing any guarantee of security. It seems that nowadays the need to find such a place still exists, even though different means are employed in the search for it. The arguments substantiating such a claim can be found, for example, in the way the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao likens its foyer to the interior of a temple in the audio guide available to visitors. Half a century after futurists exhorted people to burn all museums, the newly-founded museum attempts to provide the temple-like experience, ignoring Frank O. Gehry's architectural design as well as the message conveyed by the artworks displayed inside. In other words, it reverts to the old mechanism, which Pierre Bourdieu terms the sacralization of art: museums grant visitors access to the experience elevating them above

their everyday concerns, which in turn helps museums to attract crowds of tourists. At the same time they arrange the environment in a visitor-friendly way, conducive to interaction with art, which frequently rejects the aesthetic quality, and by this they determine the status of the works on the art market.

If we assume that what connects old and contemporary museums is the need for stability, which entails appropriate surroundings, physical space arranged to accommodate artworks, then we have to ask what is the source of it. Traditionalists maintain that it comes directly from the spiritual condition of a human being who requires a material medium to transcend finiteness. Sceptics, those who criticize the culture of the museum, emphasize the fact that it is a constructed, fictitious world, whose function is at best therapeutic. It seems that if we look at the museum as an entity which combines contradictory tendencies and goals, it is possible to reconcile the efforts to provide an audience with the values of higher order with the spectacle. According to Giddens, a modern person is deprived of the relationship to the cosmic powers, which used to be established by means of rituals handed down by tradition. The loss of the ritual is "the loss of capability of taking part in these [cosmic] structures."¹² Secular rituals may be modelled on the religious ones, especially with regard to their aesthetic aspects such as monumental, ceremonial character of the architectural design, a sense of sumptuousness following from the accumulation of works, the staged itinerary of a visit, etc., but ultimately instead of granting us access to transcendence they anchor us in our own world. Marquard's theory of compensation presents a similar view, which is also shared by Krzysztof Pomian, who argues that the objects in a collection play the role of *semiofors*: endowed with added significance they can

¹² Antony Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. „Ja” i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności*, trans. Alina Sułżycka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001), p. 278.

transport a community into the invisible sphere of values and meanings, and in the process they allow the members of the community to exchange thoughts and ideas.¹³ This is the reason why every major reorganization of an exhibition requires serious reflection due to the fact that it entails the reorganization of the system of values within a particular community.

Although a museum exhibition is at the centre of exhibition practices, museums by no means monopolize them. The home of an artist, especially a living one, enjoys a parallel unique and privileged status. Such a place embodies the unity of a creative life with art as a way of living and as such it constitutes a manifestation of settling down in the world. It attracts all those who subscribe to the particular conception of art proposed by the artist. Artists' homes epitomize various forms of how an individual life can be fulfilled in art, and at the same time they stand in opposition to institutionalized academic forms of granting access to art, which tend to even out the unique character of an artwork, obliterate the aura of intimacy surrounding the artist's life. Nowadays the homes of artists from the past have become museums displaying the life contained in the objects and the fact of their emergence expresses the persistent need to visit the places of past dwelling. The founding of such museums as Rembrandt's House reconstructed at the beginning of the twentieth century and other biographical museums, including the Jan Matejko's House or the Fryderyk Chopin Museum, follows not from the myth of scientism but from the desire to enrich one's own life with the experience of familiarity with the place, the material aspect of everyday life and at the same time the work of those illustrious personages. The experience offered by those places transcends the usual aesthetic-cognitive experiences typically associated with museums and assumes

¹³ Krzysztof Pomian, *Zbieracze i osobliwości. Paryż – Wenecja XVI–XVIII wiek*, trans. Andrzej Pieńkos (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2001), pp. 41, 63–64.

the quality which Stephen Greenblatt calls resonance,¹⁴ that is a sense of transitory nature and fragility of the human world which used to fill this particular place with activity.

Greenblatt extends the notion of an exhibition to any cultural objects, from plastic art works and artefacts to literature, and refers to them as exhibition showcases, a kind of “‘textual’ relics”¹⁵, revealing at the same time the culture-forming function of exhibition. Tracking the migration of objects and rituals from one exhibition zone to another, from a private home to the theatre and then to the museum, allows the historian to expose the social processes which initiate these travels and determine how their meanings change in the process. The added bonus is that treating those diverse areas of culture as exhibition practices diverts the attention from their autonomous character and focus on their affinity with one another, which in turn points to the same driving forces which endeavour to claim the world as their own.

On the other hand, not every exhibition constitutes a creative reworking of outdated images of the world, capable of getting the message across to viewers and providing them with lasting impressions. Jean Clark and Jean Baudrillard believe that the democratization of art is bound to result in its dumping down and transformation of exhibitions into a mass spectacle which trivializes even the most highbrow art.¹⁶ Other critics call our attention to the ideological objectives of global exhibitions. Whatever doubts might be raised by the ideological and financial wheeling and dealing that goes on behind the scenes of major exhibitions, it must be stressed that they involve

¹⁴ Stephen Greenblatt, *Poetyka kulturowa. Pisma wybrane*, trans. Krystyna Kujawińska-Courtney (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), pp. 174–175.

¹⁵ Ibidem, pp. 159–160.

¹⁶ Jean Clair, *Kryzys muzeów. Globalizacja kultury*, trans. Jan Maria Kłoczowski (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2009); Jean Baudrillard, *Spisek sztuki. Iluzje i deziluzje estetyczne z dodatkiem wywiadów o „Spisku sztuki”*, trans. Sławomir Królak (Warszawa: Sic!, 2006).

activities, innovative and experimental in principle, that seek to devise a wide range of new formulas for displaying artworks. These activities entail the revisualization of old contents, updating the ways in which the art of other cultures, or art from the past in general, is perceived, as well as attempts to find a creative way to introduce the contemporary art, typically perceived as difficult and demanding, accessible only to a sophisticated audience, into social circulation.

Thus one can observe a number of trends/efforts seeking to find appropriate means which will make the unique character of artworks from other cultures accessible to the general public, not through the translation of one culture's values into another's, but through building the platform of transcultural experience. This is how Andreas Huyssen sees the primary role of museums. After the times of metanarrative and the universal museum, the symbol of colonialism, the priority is given to individual experiences and small histories. "More and more people want to see and listen to other stories, to see and listen to the stories of others, whilst the identity is being formed in multi-layered endless negotiations between me and others, instead of being established once and for all."¹⁷ Since for a long time the museum espoused the colonial discourse and it is still tempted to do so, now, according to Huyssen, is the time to overcome one-sided ideological thinking. Artists and independent curators are the most ingenuous and convincing in this respect and their presence in museums proves that the institutional space has become open to alternative discourses, which contributes to the gradual dissolution of the established patterns of seeing.¹⁸ Each

¹⁷ Andreas Huyssen, *Escape from Amnesia: The Museum as Mass Medium*, in: *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 34.

¹⁸ On putting non-Western art on display, see, among others, the chapter: "The Study of Nation and the Museum," in *Museum Studies. An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 221–310.

exhibition, however, conveys an ideological message, puts forward a conception, an interpretation, which is the source of its power as well as its weakness, since in so doing, it puts aside some other ideas and interpretations, disregards other possible versions and perspectives. Injustice cannot be removed because it is inherent in the very conception of an exhibition, as Jean-François Lyotard puts it, there is no possible way to construct an exhibition containing all possible interpretations of its subject. Jacques Rancière shares this view, but he emphasizes the fact that an art exhibition establishing space and time automatically establishes the social space.¹⁹ The collection of artworks, the selection of specific works combined with the layout of a particular exhibition organizes a community of people who are united behind the idea underlying this organization, regardless of the fact whether or not they are aware of that. While for Lyotard the statements expressed by a particular exhibition are untranslatable, so one can merely multiply them to accommodate every new interpretation and devise new ways to articulate the needs of those unable to speak out on their own behalf, Rancière believes that many people may like an exhibition but the invisible force will unite only a certain community, since it speaks to what is shared by this specific community. From this perspective each art exhibition constitutes the visualization of the contents vital for a particular group, a community: explicitly or implicitly it unifies and excludes with the same gesture.

This might very well be the reason why independent curators and artists place the emphasis on the relations between people rather than on the place and the established time-space of a museum. Jan Hoet suggested that private homes should replace museums as the place for displaying art, so that the audience could see artworks in the specific

¹⁹ Jacques Rancière, *Estetyka jako polityka*, trans. Julian Kutyła and Paweł Mościcki (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2007), pp. 24–25.

space of dwelling.²⁰ Even though the people living in the household allowed art to interfere into the privacy of their home, it certainly blasted out the warmth and intimacy of the home. On the other hand, it gave an opportunity to enrich the home with what is different, to let in the other, the visitor. Nicolas Bourriaud, in turn, points out that an exhibition could also function as a social gathering.²¹ In his view, art creates a peculiar kind of social contact and as such it can foster alternative political and cultural models. He follows Marx, who noticed that barter bypasses the economic circulation of capitalist economy and is located outside the capital market. In an exhibition in the form of an event Bourriaud finds a niche free from the influences of institutions in change of displaying artworks. A staged artistic event promotes the social aspect of art and when the performance is underway the meanings emerge spontaneously and collectively. What it amounts to is that an exhibition as a statement given to the audience to interpret is supplanted by the practice of art as its core. No ready-made story, which could constitute the subject matter of an exhibition, exists any more. Instead the activity is initiated by an artist and the audience joins in, and in the process the story develops while the meanings which emerge in the collective effort as well as emotional bonds never achieve a permanent expression but vanish when the exhibition ends. The work and the story appear in the practice. Art construed as a social gathering develops consistently from works designed to stimulate an audience, from the anti-museum works which continue the avant-garde ideas of Duchamp, El Lissitzky, Buren and others. Bourriaud holds that the art of this kind is accompanied by relational aesthetics. Arthur Danto seems to have the same in mind when he discusses Joseph Beuys's actions and

²⁰ Cf. Jan Hoet and Rainer Metzger, "Chambres d'Amis, Gandawa 1986," in *Kunst im Käfig. Thesen zum Thema Kunstausstellung*, ed. Brackert Gisela (Frankfurt am Main: Black Spring Verlag, 1970), p. 238.

²¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 2002), pp. 14–21.

every kind of artistic activity based on social relationships, which cannot be subjected to documentation. This extra-museum art has its own aesthetics, which Danto refers to as participatory aesthetics.

The historical museum is also undergoing transformation not only by adapting new media encouraging visitors to act but also by employing the ideas of new historiography,²² which believes that the testimony of the past is provided by a subjective account, oral tradition, memory and emotions, rather than the construction of historical narrative. Theodor Adorno's well-known observation referring to the possibility of writing poetry after Auschwitz becomes the herald of new art, whose purpose is precisely that – the expression of trauma. What is significant, trauma does not lend itself to presentation or representation, nor can it be understood. Therefore an exhibition cannot merely provide the information, present victims and perpetrators, but it has to put a viewer into the uncomfortable state of melancholy. Frank Ankersmit insists that the Holocaust is a kind of occurrence which should be remembered in a special way. He writes: "The memory of Holocaust has to remain an illness, a mental affliction which we can never stop suffer from."²³ The inconceivability of the Holocaust poses a challenge for artists whose works, installations and artistic projects keep a viewer in a peculiar state of tension.²⁴ In the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław the exhibition of the

²² I refer to such scholars as Frank Ankersmit, Hayden White, or LaCapra

²³ Frank Ankersmit, *Narracja, reprezentacja, doświadczenie. Studia z teorii historiografii*, ed. Ewa Domańska (Kraków: Universitas, 2004), p. 425.

²⁴ Jill Bennett, follows Hartman and LaCapra, and speaks about affect and empathy as the properties of art whose purpose is to shake a viewer from their indifference rather than helping them to come to terms with trauma; intellectual and emotional instants are merged in this experience. See Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 10–11.

contemporary art and craft (stained-glass windows, tiles, door handles), as well as medieval church sculpture, is situated in the post-Bernardine church converted into the exhibition hall. Visitors walking around the display cases and installations suddenly hear a persistent male voice: "Why didn't you hide Jews in this basement?" (Mirosław Bałka, 2008). Only after a while do they see the dots of light on the floor and notice the speakers from which the voice has come. The persistence of the repeated question affects everybody: young people are compelled to face up to the past and take the responsibility for their ancestors while for those who remember the times of the war it is an accusation, it makes them feel guilty. It also questions victims themselves in a painful way.

Museums always find a way to rationalize the memory by transforming it into a narrative, for example for educational purposes. However, the homogeneity of the environment of exhibition becomes disrupted, broken by the areas where the sense of loss, emptiness, suspension are experienced, as illustrated by the Holocaust Tower in Libeskind's museum in Berlin. The permanent exhibition *Kraków, the Times of German Occupation 1939–1945* (The Historical Museum of the City of Kraków) undertakes a similar attempt to tie history with memory, intellectual narrative with emotions. The viewer becomes the participant-witness of the events taking place in successive rooms, which are like theatrical or film settings representing a particular place (the "Photographer's Studio", the "Barber's Shop", the "City Square"). The confrontation of everyday activities with the dramatically changing situation in which the city's residents, Jews in particular, lived introduces optical-audio tensions. The dramatic effects of the acoustic landscape (private conversations, wailing, the sounds of announcements, soldiers' orders, the sounds of gunfire) resonate with the diversified character of space (narrow streets, a meandering itinerary) and the setting of particular sites. The environment of the exhibition reflects a new way in which history is staged: participants of the exhibition

become its components with their perception, knowledge and emotions.²⁵ Multiple narrative threads finally reach their culmination in the “Hall of Choices” where sayings, prayers and simple sentences (“I couldn’t make the ends meet”) spoken in different languages acquire a prayer-like sacral dimension, and the impression is additionally strengthened by the whiteness of the walls, rhythmically spinning prayer wheels, music and the white dome directing the participant’s sight beyond the present and the historical time. This way the memory of the moral choices, pain and the degradation of the victims becomes sacralized. Despite of the linear chronology which relates the successive years of German occupation, a viewer seems to be torn out of it by the multisensory installations.

Other solutions worth mentioning are those which seek to transform the museum experience in its entirety, especially those which relate to the plural rationality, the reality which is divided and experienced in many different ways. The Museum Insel Hombroich (Fig. 1) situated near Düsseldorf illustrates such an approach. It was initiated between 1982 and 1988 by the private collector Karl-Heinrich Müller and originally based on his own collection, and after his death the running of the museum was taken over by the Insel Hombroich Foundations. The eclectic programme refers to the essential *topoi* present in European culture: the symbiosis of nature, art and religion.²⁶ The collector bought a vast area of forests and meadowland, later expanded with the land belonging to the military base, and filled it with sculptures and small pavilions housing the finest artworks, including both old and modern art, masterpieces by European masters, artworks from Far East, Peru, Africa

²⁵ Rosmarie Beier-de Haan, “Re-staging Histories and Identities,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, 2011), pp. 192–193.

²⁶ The nineteenth-century museums established the following relation: fine arts provided metaphysical experiences, while nature, examined and dissected, represented scientific achievements. Both art and science underwent sacralization in such museums.

and Indonesia, exhibits representing fine as well as applied arts. Approaching the site of the museum in a car or a taxi (buses do not go there), a visitor follows the route to reach sixteen pavilions scattered on the museum grounds. He or she will face the vagaries of the weather, the road meandering through the forest wilderness and wetlands peppered with sheltered “galleries” of the white cube type containing Mycenaean masks, Rembrandt’s etchings or Indian sculptures.



Fig. 1. “Labyrinth” Gallery, Insel Hombroich, 2010
(photo by Maria Popczyk)

In Müller’s founding text we can read that the quintessence of the museum is its insularity, which is femininity. For femininity, instead of dividing people, unites them. It constitutes the place of birth, the place of communal togetherness providing support. It is the place when one serves others but also the place of individual liberation. The island museum does not constitute the male field of organization, power and the demonstration of viewpoints, instead it opens the possibility for communal experiments integrating diverse areas of art, which is granted an equal status, as is nature: *Kunst parallel zur Natur* reads the motto

by the painter Gotthard Graubner.²⁷ The imagery of island and femininity used as the premise of the exhibition is an express gesture rejecting the modern view of the museum as a place of education as well as political propaganda and the means of disciplining the audience. As such it attempts to formulate a conception agreeable to the post-utopian sensibility seeking formulas for the communal activity.

Thus it is hardly surprising that the museum is free of the flamboyant architectural concepts omnipresent in newly-founded museums. Since the times the first museum was built, architecture has been employed to express its ideological programme. What the Museum Insel Hombroich offers instead is the humble raw brick buildings designed by the architect Erwin Heerich whose elegant minimalist shapes blend in with the ubiquitous nature. Visitors enter directly from the gravel path, there is no cloak room for coats, bags or backpacks, even prams are allowed. Nature spreading unchecked appears to embrace the visitor from all sides. The itinerary offers no picturesque scenes of nature enclosed in fenced-in frames.²⁸ Although the harmony of architecture and nature is billed as the finest quality of a number of museum buildings situated in parks or the ones employing the effects of water and transparency as exemplified by the Beyeler Foundation Art Museum designed by Renzo Piano in Riehen, none of them is a match for the Hombroich. The uncontrolled growth of vegetation is used to illustrate the pacific values with the creepers winding around the sculptures of soldiers (Fig. 2).

²⁷ Karl-Heinrich Müller, "Hombroich – An Open Experiment," in *Museum und Raketenstation* (Stiftun Insel Hombroich, 2002), p. 251. The motto can be found on the museum website, accessed August 20, 2011, <http://www.inselhombroich.de/kontakt.htm>.

²⁸ Phil Macnaghten and John Urry suggest that instead of creating aesthetic views of nature providing optical pleasure but being the indication of our control over it, spatial practices should be initiated; they refer in their views to the notion of dwelling formulated by Martin Heidegger. Phil Macnaghten and John Urry, *Alternatywne przyrody. Nowe myślenie o przyrodzie i społeczeństwie*, trans. Bogdan Baran (Warszawa: Scholar, 2005), pp. 264–265.



Fig. 2. Insel Hombroich, 2010 (photo by Maria Popczyk)

It is all by design: the gardener's intention was to create a bucolic landscape.²⁹ In summer the grass reaches up to an adult person's waists, so a city-dweller, accustomed to manicured lawns, experiences a sense of disorder. The freedom of choice is also incorporated in the routes open to a visitor, especially when one has to choose between a number of winding paths. It is easy to lose one's way but one always reaches one of the pavilions on the way walking past an unexpectedly charming pond or a group of sculptures seemingly abandoned in the forest. The structures of the pavilions, the obelisks, the sculptures in the field or under the trees are all permeated by nature which creates a principal context for them determined by the scale and grandeur. What we deal with here is hardly visiting the attractions in the traditional sense: the reception of art undergoes a complete transformation. The modern and old artworks, furniture, terracotta works, theatrical costumes and installations are situated in close proximity

²⁹ Claude Monet's garden in Giverny was an inspiration. Cf. Bernhard Korte, "Topos," in *Museum und Raketenstation*, pp. 254–255.

creating in effect what André Malraux called the singing of transformation, the music of forms. The exhibition does not set apart different thematic, genre or geographical fields and thus it refrains from imposing judgements on the visitor. Instead its democratic character points to the fact that creative activity has been present in every aspect of life for centuries.

The traveller will come across pavilions designed for work with children, artists' workshops, private building, but also empty pavilions, the acoustic sculptures inviting visitors to engage in vocal and physical activities (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Graubner Pavillon, Insel Hombroich, 2010
(photo by Maria Popczyk)

There is also room meant for religious and philosophical reflection. Among the trees we can find Ludwig Soumagne's hermitage (*Dichterklause*), the testament of his stay there in the times when the artists' communal work initiated the museum (1982–1984), which was not open to the public yet.³⁰

³⁰ Accessed September 1, 2011, <http://www.kunstmeditaties.nl/index.php?in=meditaties/insel-hombroich-soumagne>.

What catches a visitor's eye in the open space is not only frozen sculptures of soldiers, huge stones and installations, but also religiously marked objects which invite a traveller to meditate. This is what the pavilion situated on the slope is intended for, with the philosophers' works inspiring contemplation. And memory, an indispensable element of every museum, is symbolized by the grand circles marking the gatherings of previous generations: stone circles with an oak in the centre, the circle of chairs for murdered Jews (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Insel Hombroich, 2010 (photo by Maria Popczyk)

The premise of the Insel Hombroich is that the exhibition is the statement encompassing all areas of culture and as such it constitutes a form of settling down, that is, the introduction of contents and initiated spatial practices into the sphere of individual experience.

The imagery employed by the Insel Hombroich is worth another look, since the association between an island and femininity brings to mind also other meanings apart from those suggested by the museum's founder: it evokes the image of femininity which is as beautiful as

treacherous and seductive. Jean Baudrillard is perhaps the one responsible for drawing our attention to seduction as a strategy employed by postmodern culture. This culture, however, is meaningless and deprived of any roots: settling down is no longer possible. Another motif points to the island claimed as one's own: the figure of Robinson Crusoe associated with the myth about the modern society, the myth of the male conquest and the male rule over objects and nature illustrated by Daniel Defoe.³¹ These two thematic fields, however, are absent from the premises of the Insel Hombroich. The interpretation which seems more appropriate construes the island as "the cosmos in miniature", as Kopaliński explains, it is "complete and perfect, with highly concentrated cult value."³² The cosmos which provides the refuge from the world and in which the space undergoes transformation and becomes the place of dwelling, the place of intimacy and community while the participation in the processes of creation is building which offers the sense of dwelling.³³ Graubner, the painter who took an active part in the first stage of museum establishment, sees the island as a place of unity of writers, musicians, journalists, actors and politicians. What the visitor sees is the effect of the process of shaping the space, of the effort undertaken by artists working together in the pavilions erected one after another. Up to this day workshops and meetings take place here, but it is those times (1982–1988) that shaped this place which enables each visitor to gain the sense of settling down in culture.

To sum up, it can be said that a lot has changed since the scientific exhibition visualizing the achievements of science

³¹ Michel de Certeau, *Wynaleźć codzienność. Sztuka działania*, trans. Katarzyna Thiel-Jańczuk (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2008), p. 137.

³² Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1990), p. 483.

³³ Walter Biemel, "The Happenings of Truth," in *Museum und Raketenstation*, p. 245. The author draws inspiration from Martin Heidegger's writing.

was established. With time the growing awareness of the fact that practising science contributes to the construction of world models has enabled us to introduce a wide range of practices into the public space. A variety of different forms of displaying artworks, that is, a variety of diverse types of rationalization, has become a tool to impose order on culture, and at the same time it has allowed an individual to define his or her place within it.

Part Two

Public Space The Responsibilities and the Practices of the Institution

Maria Popczyk

The Presence of the City The Identity of the City. Berlin*

The presence of the city manifests itself in a sensual impression as the presently observable moment of the presence, of its architectural and human substance in the process – impermanent yet ceaseless – of growth and fading, movement and silence, birth and death. This inevitable process allows Lewis Mulford to compare a city to an organism, since it contains the potential for various forms of absence. Richard Shusterman identifies one of them lying deep in the phenomenal fabric of a city and pertaining to everything that manifests its presence through a range of signals, yet remains beyond the scope of direct experience. In this sense, absence represents a physical distance from the source of the signals and points to the presence taking shape “elsewhere.”¹ This sensual kind of absence defines the uniqueness of a city and belongs to the spirit of the place, although it by no means exhausts it. Just like the toll of bells, the smell of water and the clamour of voices mingle to form a sensual map of Venice, in Berlin it is composed of the clatter of an approaching train, the beat of techno music

* The chapter first published in Polish as “Berlin – miasto widzialnej nieobecności,” in *Dylematy wielokulturowości*, ed. Wojciech Kalaga (Kraków: Universitas, 2004), pp. 239–261.

¹ Richard M. Shusterman, “Pragmatist Aesthetics and the Uses of Urban Absence,” in *City Life. Essays on Urban Culture*, ed. Heinz Paetzold (Maastrich: Jan van Eyck Akademie, 1997), p. 77.

and the districts which, according to Siegfried Kracauer, are still redolent of the smell of political unrest. It is this inextricable link of presence and absence which makes up the identity of every city, and which in the case of Berlin is exceptionally striking.

The visual distancing of the presence was the process to which the Reichstag building was subjected. Stripped of its dome, abandoned, empty, its walls covered with inscriptions made by Soviet soldiers, its doors sealed after the division of Germany, it stood like a mute symbol of the lost national unity. In the summer of 1995, after years of preparations and negotiations, Christo and Jeanne-Claude organized an outstanding spectacle of wrapping the old building in front of the crowds gathered to witness the event. One can agree with Shusterman that this act reinforced the building's visibility and its presence in the space of Berlin. Tim Martin saw it as an exorcism expelling evil spirits of history. For others it represented the nation swathed in the shroud.² Under the rolls of fabric the work of



Fig. 5. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Reichstag 1971–1995* (after: Jodidio Philip, *Nowe formy. Architektura lat dziewięćdziesiątych XX wieku* (Warszawa: Muza S.A., Taschen 1998), p. 146)

² Cf. Tim Martin, "Signs of Tragedy Past and Future: Reading the Berlin Reichstag," *Architectural Design* 70, no. 5 (October 2000): 32–35.

art gradually came into being: its columns, sculptures and windows vanished and the whole building turned a light colour and assumed a uniform, nonfunctional character (Fig. 5). The artistic actions neutralized the burden of history, liberated the audience from painful memories and replaced them with an aesthetic experience. A spatial shape of an imposing scale, angular volume and pleated texture was revealed in front of the viewers' eyes: it took a warm colour in the light of the setting sun whereas at dusk it shone illuminated with artificial light.

Art proved to be a powerful tool of transformation soothing the memory of the nation: the old Reichstag became momentarily absent in its function and detail, invisible. Wrapped in the fabric it was like a blank screen ready to accommodate every possible projection. Thus the artistic project brought up the fundamental problem of transforming the semantics of the building, which paved the way for Norman Foster and his project to invest it with a new meaning.

In the stronger, not sensual sense, the presence of a city relates to the existence of a form construed both as a spatially organized arrangement with the clearly marked centre and as a shape which can be captured visually. Benedetto Benvolo discussing the essence of a fully-developed city refers to this image of the European cities' old centres growing over generations. This model of a city still constitutes the point of reference and theoretical backdrop for the identification of a city in the era of a post-city, but in the case of Berlin it has never gone beyond the planning stage. The specific character of the city,³ an island agglomeration founded away from the major economic and cultural routes, where provincial mentality and stagnation alternate with the exceptional pace of transformations and changes driven by ideologies, has prevented each successive project of its reconstruction in

³ Philipp Oswalt, *Berlin – Stadt ohne Form* (München, London and New York: Prestel Verlag, 2000), p. 27.

the name of each new regime from achieving an intended and completed form. The endeavours aimed at establishing meaning, which embraced the plans of redevelopment as well as the ideological message of each particular building, arose every time from the political status of Berlin. Among them we find Karl Schinkel's designs, brought up by Kurt Foster in the debate concerning the centre of the city after German reunification, Adolf Hitler's plans and the places tainted with the brand of Nazi regime as well as the projects to build two separate centres of East and West Berlin. In the mid-nineteenth century, Berlin could still be described as a city where geometry served the military monarchy. Józef Ignacy Kraszewski wrote in his diaries: "[...] streets in a straight line, houses in a row forming squares like battalions, even monuments are dressed in uniforms, the military element pervades [...]."⁴ Under Hitler's rule, on the city's main thoroughfare, Unter den Linden, the cheering



Fig. 6. Unter den Linden, 1937 (after: *Stadt der Architektur, Architektur der Stadt. Berlin 1900–2000*, published by Thorsten Scheer, Josef Paul Kleihues and Paul Kahlfeldt (Berlin: Nicolai, 2000), p. 195)

⁴ Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, *Kartki z podróży 1858–1864*, vol. II (Warszawa: PIW, 1977), p. 415.

crowds marching along the file of lamps and pillars merged with the symbols of Nazism to resemble war totems (Fig. 6).

Each time the presence was established on the foundation of the new order's rules, the authorities divided the space of the city into zones, erected new statues and destroyed the old ones, changed emblems and symbols, gave streets and squares appropriate names. Yet, for the city this process of generating and focusing the being in the presence, which Jacques Derrida sees as a demonstration/display of power, proved transitory, although not less painful than the trauma of the war.

1

The founding of two German states in 1949 initiated the process of crystallization of Berlin's dual identity. East Berlin was transformed into the capital of a new state and as such it gained a political and administrative advantage, while West Berlin became an island encircled by the borders of the foreign state. Although urban planners and architects in charge of creating the identity of the respective parts had at their disposals different legal and ideological instruments, a modernist designer starting from scratch could not hope for better initial conditions: deserted areas covered with rubble, degraded places, ruins of building, and people on the move: the residents returning to their homes and the refugees in search of a place to live.⁵ The predominance of destruction over construction is the reason why Oswald calls Berlin the city of Modernism, distinguished by the culture of destruction, understood

⁵ Oswald, *Berlin – Stadt ohne Form*, p. 55. The history of urbanistic plans and their completion is comprehensively presented in the publication accompanying the exhibition which took place in Berlin in 2000: *Stadt der Architektur, Architektur der Stadt. Berlin 1900–2000*, published by Thorsten Scheer, Josef Paul Kleihues and Paul Kahlfeldt (Berlin: Nicolai, 2000).

so well by the dadaists active in the city, which permeated Berlin both during and after the war.⁶

The territory of East Berlin encompassed the old, historic part of the city, yet the authorities concerned with the identity of the socialist state's capital altered the direction of the urban arrangement to the east. The new face of the capital's centre was formed by the continuous monumentalized space marked with the fixed points: the Fernsehturm (TV Tower) towering over the city, the layout of the buildings on Alexanderplatz whose walls proclaimed the socialist ethos of the nation and the Karl-Marx-Allee, with the statue of Stalin, heading east. The government buildings, such as the Staatsratsgebäude (the Council of State building) and the Palast der Republik (the Palace of the Republic), were situated near the former Berlin Stadtschloss (Berlin City Palace) while the former Göring's Reich Air Ministry building in Leipziger Straße housed the Parliament building, the culture centre and the Council



Fig. 7. The demolition of the Berlin City Palace, 1950
(after: *Stadt der Architektur, Architektur der Stadt. Berlin 1900–2000*,
published by Thorsten Scheer, Josef Paul Kleihues and Paul Kahlfeldt
(Berlin: Nicolai, 2000), p. 231)

⁶ Oswalt, *Berlin – Stadt ohne Form*, p. 55.

of Ministers. The reconstruction was completed in 1979. The historic space of the city was reduced to the museum-like rhetoric: the alley of Unter den Linden lined with the reconstructed buildings led to the Brandenburg Gate closed off with the Berlin Wall in 1961. This city gate transformed into the triumphal arch modelled on the Propylaea in Athens, the symbol of German unity, the site where revolutionaries gathered and which the Nazis marched out from used to be located on the main communication artery of the city. After Germany was divided, the border crossings were situated in its vicinity and it became the gateway to nowhere. To stress the departure from the past in 1950 the Berliner Stadtschloss (Berlin City Palace), the residence of the Hohenzollern, was demolished (Fig. 7). This symbolic gesture was intended to reinforce the new state's new forms of identification.

The Palace, however, was not completely destroyed. One of the balconies, Liebknecht's balcony, was preserved and incorporated in to the structure of the Council of State building situated in the vicinity. It owed its preservation to Karl Liebknecht who had declared the German Free Socialist Republic from this balcony on 9th of November 1918. For years the preserved balcony reminded Berliners of the demolished Palace which left the empty site. After the reunification of Germany, in the 1990s the advocates of the reconstruction of the Stadtschloss recreated the façade in the form of a natural-size painting, which created the illusion of its actual volume. The imitation evoked memories and called for the Berliners to take a stance. Now we know that the Bundestag has decided to rebuild the Palace and perhaps the preserved balcony will return to its original site. The dynamic and relatively fast rebuilding of the eastern section of Berlin which gave it a characteristic look with the dominance of block-type architecture posed a challenge for the urban planners on the west side of the city.

West Berlin was made up of the outskirts and unconnected districts which, left without the old centre,

required radical urban planning solutions.⁷ One of the attempts to define the identity of the city was made in 1957. Although never completed it reflected the apocalyptic attitude towards the space of Berlin. The proposal involved the construction of tower blocks surrounded by greenery in its centre, while the residential area was to be located in the suburbs, not unlike Le Corbusier's *Villa Contemporaine*. If the project had been approved, the pre-war tenement buildings would have had to be demolished and the residents relocated. Another project, completed between 1954 and 1961, incorporated the ruins of the old Gedächtniskirche (Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church) designed by Franz Schwechten, which was heavily bombed during World War II, into the new church designed by Egon Eiermann, boasting the prismatic structure constructed of metal and cobalt-coloured glass from which the blue glow emanates at night. However, despite a number of architectural competitions, no comprehensive programme of the reconstruction of West Berlin was ever accomplished. It is worth noting that the urban planners in West Berlin represented two viewpoints regarding the space of the city: some of them strove to develop a layout of a new western centre, while the others considered the city in its entirety. Those two stances can be found in a number of public statements and projects concerning the redevelopment of the city, and in the case of the latter the border dividing the city was often disregarded.⁸

The new attitude towards the historic fabric of West Berlin, critical of the urban redevelopment ideas of the 1950s, was represented by the Internationale Bauausstellung,

⁷ It must be borne in mind that West Berlin was under the administration of three different Western Allies: the British controlled the planning institutions according to their own law, the French promoted the philosophy of functionalism (CIAM) which stood in opposition to the historic face of the city and the local projects, while the Americans focused on the housing problems.

⁸ Klaus von Beyme, "Ideen für eine Hauptstadt in Ost und West," in *Stadt der Architektur*, p. 248.

IBA (the International Building Exhibition, Berlin). Its high status and significance was attested to by the participation of the architects of international renown as well as by the comprehensive approach to the problems of the city reconstruction. The objective of the IBA was to rebuild the centre of Berlin and give it a look befitting a metropolis as well as meeting the residents' housing needs through architectural solutions and the reconstruction of the old houses of the city. The programme was scheduled for completion in the 1980s (in 1987 Berlin celebrated its 750 anniversary). From the initial conceptual stage to the actual construction work, the IBA created a platform initiating a discussion regarding the shape of the city and its identity, whereas its pluralistic approach to the city's housing entailed the active involvement of the residents.⁹ In those times Berlin's lack of identity was construed as the lack of context, therefore the attempts were made to define the essential constituents of the actual character of the city. The space of the city was seen as the existential space where its identity could be recreated in the sphere of dwelling: this conception of the city space was suggested by Christian Norberg-Schulz and Leon Krier invited to the Berlin programme.¹⁰ The important component of the project was its exhibition aspect present in its name and represented by its institutional organizational structure which encompassed publications (maps, magazines), museum exhibitions, congresses and conferences which later gave the interested parties (specialists, tourists) the

⁹ The programme and the analysis of the particular solutions in the special issue of *International Building Exhibition Berlin 1987* ("A+U", 1987). W. Miller, "IBA's 'Models for a City': Housing and Image of Cold-War Berlin," *Journal of Architectural Education* 46, no. 4 (May 1993): 202.

¹⁰ Norberg-Schulz Christian, *Bycie, przestrzeń, architektura*, trans. Barbara Gadowska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Murator, 2000), pp. 14–36. The Krier brothers call for the small scale and public space to be restored to cities, cf. Krier Leon, "A City within a City," *Architectural Design* 3 (1977): 207.

opportunity to visit certain routes in order to compare the actual development with the original intentions. The space of the city under construction was treated as a prolonged exhibition which offered the opportunity to see Peter Eisenman's buildings (Checkpoint Charlie), Arata Isozaki's blocks and Charles Moore's and Robert Stern's housing development in Tegel Harbor district. The exhibition gimmick was employed again in 2000 when the large part of the urbanistic process of unifying the city was already completed. The number 100 double-decker bus took tourists for a drive around new Berlin. In both cases the exhibition practices had the unifying value with the image of the city being created in various spatial dimensions: in the conceptual space by means of the blueprints and scale models, in the conceptual sphere by the people living there, and in the aesthetical dimension when visitors created the image of the city on their own by associating and consolidating its numerous diverse fragments.

Rem Koolhaas, steadfast in his scepticism concerning the possibility of creating a uniform image of West Berlin which would combine the past (buildings of the old type) with the present (the solutions reflecting the modern trends in architecture), together with Oswald Matthias Ungers opposed the plans of Berlin redevelopment as proposed by the IBA. According to the architects, to stay true to the history of the city one should not strive to restore it to its past appearance but rather to preserve what is so characteristic for Berlin: the damage, the division, the split inherent in its history.¹¹ Eisenman represented a new approach to design and architecture. At that time he departed from the conception of the building constituting a site and representing clear meanings and introduced additional grids into the layout of the building adjacent to Checkpoint Charlie, as a result of which the building does

¹¹ Rem Koolhaas, "Housing Kochstrasse/Friedrichstrasse, Berlin, Germany, 1980," in *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large. Office for Metropolitan Architecture*, eds. Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau (Rotterdam: The Monacelli Press 1995), pp. 257–258.

not form a static place but rather a series of spaces slightly dislocated in relation to one another.

Apart from the officially approved projects there was always a tendency, partly included in those projects, to look at Berlin in the context of the capital in its entirety. The example of such an approach is the construction of Kulturforum on the outskirts of the city in the vicinity of the Berlin wall and, non-existent at the time, Potsdamer Platz, which only now appears to make sense when the south side of Potsdamer Platz is filled with the Sony Centre. Similarly, certain sites were left empty, intended to house future government offices long before the reunification of Germany while some of the communicational links were designed in such a way that the city motorways seemed to come to an abrupt dead end, but after the reunification were easily connected.¹² Although the political differences were partly responsible for the striking stylistic disparities on the opposite banks of the Spree River, they can also be explained by the efforts aimed at constructing urban references. Thus the grand scale of Ernst-Reuter-Platz was to be equivalent to Alexanderplatz, whereas the cityscape designed by Hans Scharoun was intended as a juxtaposition to the monumental axis of the Spree on the east side of the city.

2

The establishment of the separate identities of Berlin through the rearrangement of the space divided by the wall, after its collapse revealed the polycentrism, formlessness and unconnectedness/discontinuity of the city. Geometry and spatial composition, which could guarantee the eternal presence, could only be seen in the fragments of the buildings embodying the ideas of past ideologies, and the prevalent diversity resulted in the city resembling

¹² Beyme, "Ideen," p. 249.

Derrida's Tower of Babel characterized by the excess of architectural orders and languages. As Oswald points out, the identity and structure of the city resulted largely from the unplanned, uncontrollable elements and its growth was influenced to a greater extent by automatic urban planning than ideal designs or organized development. In this context, the reconstruction of Berlin in the 1990s turned into the Europe-wide debate on the difficulty inherent in the articulation of the identity of the city and on its recognizable formlessness and inbuilt disparities.¹³

Derrida proposed a new approach to the reconstruction of Berlin. He saw the act of founding a new city not by disposing of the old in the name of the new founding myth, but in the name of construction which would accept the responsibility for the past and find its fulfilment in the act of creation free from the rules: "Berlin is not recreated but created anew."¹⁴ Thus the law constituting the foundation of a newly-founded Berlin would be Berlin itself, its inhabitants together with the existing condition of the city and whatever was absent – materially or spiritually. Although the idea of the communal creation taking the city as its medium must inevitably bring to mind the association with a happening and its audacity is amazing, what seems to be the point here is the attempt to formulate a new approach to the city's openness construed on a number of levels as well as the design as a rational definition of this openness. Derrida proposes that the imperfection, the incompleteness of actions should be introduced into the design, while Foster acknowledges the completeness of the design but he intends to dismantle the project while under construction. It is worth mentioning here that Koolhaas describing a modern city as a featureless area, the peripheral rather than historical city, points to the end of designing: the sentiment echoed in Oswald's

¹³ "The Berlin City Forum. Jacques Derrida, Kurt Foster and Wim Wenders," *Architectural Design* 11-12 (1992): 46-53.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 47.

automatic urbanization. The introduction of the elements of imperfection, incompleteness and dislocation into thinking about design constitutes a deliberate attempt to offset the administrative activities aimed at centralization, it presents an opposition to the processes intended to create a complete, spatially closed Berlin. This fear of a design too narrow in its identification of the city expresses a negative attitude towards the Eurocentric rationalism and goes far beyond planning problems of Berlin, especially with its twentieth-century history proving that it is the city of failed plans rather than completed designs. Even the IBM's pluralistic intentions never yielded expected results due to financial and administrative constraints, which were ultimately responsible for the unplanned elements being introduced into the original plans. Now, urban planners, architects and philosophers want to include the incompleteness in their designs so as to preserve the uniqueness of Berlin, whose true face is revealed not in the dialectics of the new and the old, presence and absence but rather in "the multi-layered game [...] of absences."¹⁵ Thus whereas Derrida wants to expand the openness of the city with new dimensions, such as responsibility, Oswald points to particular traits of openness and instability in Berlin, such as ugliness, vulgarity and emptiness: "Berlin is hideous but intense."¹⁶

¹⁵ Shusterman, *Pragmatist*, p. 79.

¹⁶ Oswald, *Berlin – Stadt ohne Form*, p. 29. The example of reconciliation with the history of Berlin combined with the responsibility for its architectural heritage is provided by the current accommodation of the ministries: the Foreign Office has moved into the former Reichsbank building, the Federal Ministry of Finance has its headquarters in the former Göring's Air Ministry Building (which in the German Democratic Republic was the *Haus der Ministerien*, House of Ministries), the Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs is located in the building formerly used by Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry whereas the Chancellor's offices found their place in Honecker's Bundesrat (although they were relocated to Bundeskanzleramt, the new Chancellery building in 2001); after Rumpf Peter, *Städtebauliche und architektonische Entwicklung von 1990 bis 2000*, in *Stadt der Architektur*, p. 370.

Let us have a closer look at emptiness, which seems to constitute one of the forms of deliberately attempted visualization of absence. Aldo Rossi in his notable work on the city describes emptiness in negative terms, as the lack of architecture, that is the lack of the authentic testimony of what is human, spiritual.¹⁷ By contrast, in the debate concerning the image of Berlin it turned out that the city planners were required to leave empty spaces. For Koolhaas, empty spaces are supposed to provoke active interpretation. Wim Wenders recalls the old Berlin and proposes that no buildings should be erected in the empty mid-spaces, which could trigger off unexpected activities, for instance pitching circus tents. Furthermore, he argues that “the quality of a city relies on the fact that one can see the sky” and these empty areas set Berlin apart from other metropolises: in Berlin we can watch the sky. And he does not mean spaces which are intended to be remain empty or the sites intended for viewing, but the places where nothing is going on, where one passes through the areas which are not occupied, apparently left behind.¹⁸ For Oswald, emptiness is ambivalent: it is “the place of memories and the place of what will be.” It is spatially and temporally unstable. It is a state of “not any longer” and “not-yet.” It differs from the permanent and determined build-in areas due to its openness, willingness to accept everything in an unconditional, unrestricted way following from the fact that it has no structure, no form, no direction.¹⁹ The campaign for the preservation of emptiness is set against the process of filling the city with the fabric of buildings and streets, but it has to be borne in mind that the emptiness was inbuilt in the divided Berlin and, alongside the wall, comprised the centre of the city. It also epitomized this division: it was the border zone, the territory where the road and railroad tracks terminated; it was the land of confrontation,

¹⁷ Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1991), pp. 100–101.

¹⁸ “The Berlin City Forum,” p. 53.

¹⁹ Oswald, *Berlin – Stadt ohne Form*, p. 62.

the “place” of death, the no man’s land where those who wanted to get to the other side died. After the reunification the same empty areas were gradually filled with buildings: this was the manifestation of the unwillingness to confront the emptiness. Emptiness can be seen as a vague field of absence of something or somebody that can only be revealed through the effort of memory. Absence of this kind cannot be returned to presence, it is not a distant signal or the form of a city but resembles the Berlin wall whose aura of division can no longer be reconstructed. And yet the attempts are being made to make this kind of absence visible in the space of Berlin in order to make it part of the present. The visualization of absence involves the exposure of destruction as well as the aesthetization of absence which entering into the realm of architecture reveals the harbingers of absence. Such an approach to emptiness seen as the arranged visualization of absence is exemplified by the Jewish Museum Berlin designed by Daniel Libeskind. The site of the Museum, on the intersection of old baroque streets whose glory is long forgotten, appears to serve as an invisible matrix triggering the process of bringing back the memories of centuries-old relationship between Germans and Jews. The entire conception is based on the clash of four aspects and each of them is dominated by the dimension of emptiness (the Void) construed as what is invisible and absent.²⁰ The Void, the empty space, is not only a marked out area of the museum, but it also constitutes the space for whatever cannot be put on display. Libeskind recalls the names and addresses of the deceased Jews, including artists, poets, composers: the real people who used to live in Berlin. They were the ones who contributed to the city’s glory, they were *Berliner Luft*. Their addresses, the places which no longer exist, form a grid of intersecting lines serving as an anchor for the project. In addition to this,

²⁰ The project is presented by the architect in the text: “Between the Lines”, in *D. Libeskind Radix-matrix. Architecture and Writings* (München and New York: Prestel Verlag, 1997), p. 34.

Libeskind has chosen Arnold Schönberg's unfinished opera, *Moses und Aron*, which was written when the composer lived in Berlin. Cut off in the second act, it is continued in the architectural dimension where two lines intersect. Another aspect is associated with the lists of the names of the Jews deported during the Holocaust. In one of the Museum rooms the information about the dates and places are displayed on the transparent helium flowing from the ceiling (the exhibition in 2000). It is worth noting that the inscriptions are not engraved in granite but, due to their ephemeral luminous form, they fade away. This moment of calling the people by their family name and surname appears on the structural level: the scale models of the subsequent segments of the building are fixed to the floor on which the names are printed, creating the impression that the walls of the museum emerge from the virtual space of individual lives. The final aspect is associated with Walter Benjamin's *One Way Street* whose content is an inspiration for the building's zigzag shape representing the apocalyptic vision of Berlin. Emptiness is not nihility wiping everything out, but the absence of what is distant and forgotten, obliterated. The Voided Void materializes in the Holocaust Tower. Marked in such a way it belongs to the hidden structure of the building and becomes an open field of endless calling – of names, events and facts. Libeskind offers the following comment: "Emptiness and what is invisible constitute structural features which have been gathered in the space of Berlin and exposed in the architecture, in which what is unnamed remains in the silent names."²¹ The attempt to resurrect the distant events, to revive the forgotten individuals, whose routes intersect in the spaces of Berlin, becomes extended with the material

²¹ *Jewish Museum Berlin D. Libeskind* (Berlin: G+B art International, 2000), p. 30. Derrida highlighted the differences in the way both terms, emptiness and absence, are understood, pointing to the relation of emptiness and place and structure and also to differentiate it from *chora* and *chiasma* in: Jacques Derrida in "Between the Line", in *Daniel Libeskind, Radix-Matrix*, p. 111.

tectonics of the building (Fig. 8) which is intended by the architect to determine the future shape of the city.



Fig. 8. Daniel Libeskind, the Jewish Museum Berlin (interior), 2008
(photo by Maria Popczyk)

The emptiness constituting the space between the thought and the reality, between the past and the future demonstrates what it means to be an inhabitant of the place founded on the places which exist no longer. Emptiness possesses no symbolic meanings, since it does not refer to any latent senses, but constitutes the field designed for temporal discontinuity and spatial

disruptions: introduced into architecture it counters the beliefs that the objective of architecture is to communicate obvious and expressible contents, which for Libeskind equals violence. What Libeskind's building is opposed to is a fossilized, ideologized way of expressing identity in architecture, inseparably linked with the administration of power.

Libeskind's work makes us aware of one more aspect of absence, which is a murdered alien, a fallen alien. Here we touch upon the issue of the nation, extremely important for the German mentality and inextricably linked to the determination of whom it comprises: the community of the people sharing the same language, territory and law, or the people participating in the common tradition, religion and culture. In this context, it is crucial to formulate Germans' attitude to other nationalities, Jews in particular. Oswald argues that the population of Berlin is not, and has never been, homogenous. For the most part it is deprived of its roots and successive migrations, deportations and emigrations make the city open to new arrivals with each wave of refugees contributing to the city's varied changeable identity.²² Even the most superficial knowledge of the status of Jews in pre-war Berlin demonstrates that they were very well assimilated and participated in all areas of the city's life. After the war, the issue of Jews was ignored, distorted or manipulated for propaganda purposes.

When Helmut Kohl was the Chancellor of Germany, the initiative to build the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe was created. Two competitions for its design gave rise to a great deal of controversy. It was decided to situate it in a special place: on the site below the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate, on the other side of Potsdamer Platz. The winning proposals of the first competition were eventually vetoed, while in the next competition the Bundestag decided in favour of the design by Eisenman and Serra, which ultimately went under construction. The

²² Oswald, *Berlin – Stadt ohne Form*, p. 28.

designers intended to cover the irregular area with four thousand rectangular slabs or “stelae” varying in height with the tallest reaching seven metres. They were to be arranged in rows leaving the paths so narrow that only one person could walk between them. The entire construction formed an abstract space separated from its surroundings by the road. The traditional notion of a monument, since the times of the Roman Empire understood as a spatial figure designed for viewing and evoking memory, was radically altered, since here not viewing, but penetrating, exploring the mass of condensed space became the only way to trigger experience. A participant introduced into another dimension of space, moving among the pillars, was to become a living element, a component of the memory.²³ Such a building deprived of either narrative or aspects of spectacle, offering a visitor nothing but the exertion of



Fig. 9. Peter Eisenman, *The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, 2008 (photo by Maria Popczyk)

²³ Astrid Schmeing, “Eisenman’s Design for the Berlin Holocaust Memorial – a Modern Statement?” *Architectural Design* 70, no. 5 (October 2000): 62–63.

the strenuous wander among the huge austere blocks of stone could prove to be repressive in reception. An anti-monument preventing visitors from performing social rituals would be ambiguous, multifunctional. However, the project as described above was not approved and the proposed changes significantly altered its original message, which also resulted in Serra pulling out. Eisenman's new version, likened to the field of corn, amended the scale of the slabs and their number (2,711). They no longer dominate the surroundings with their strangeness, but enclosed by the trees are incorporated in to the surrounding area. The grid pattern of the rectangles forms a shape modulated like a rippling sheaf of corn, which can be viewed from a distance (Fig. 9).

Interestingly enough, the stelae not only can be viewed, but also used. Tourists are eager to sit on them and children play on them: on the edge on the east side they form low rectangles. They can also be seen, however, as the rows of anonymous graves bringing to mind not only absent Jews but also German soldiers killed in war. This way the application of the universal form has united religions and nationalities. This version of anti-monument is the answer to the Alien, but the Alien is not identified as a Jew or as a victim. The objective seems to be getting to know the Alien through the place beyond the place. Bernhard Waldenfels points out that the "place from which we respond to the alien does not belong to us: it is extraterritorial, it is a blank space on the map and the calendar of history."²⁴ The field of concrete slabs varying in height nevertheless forms the open grid of slabs/graves deprived of the centre. It enables the imagination to extend it ad infinitum. In fact Eisenman wanted the slabs to enter into the fabric of the city, which, however, did not meet with approval. Eisenman's version of anti-monument has appealed

²⁴ Bernhard Waldenfels, *Topologia obcego. Studia z fenomenologii obcego*, trans. Janusz Sidorek (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2002), p. 155.

to Jews as well, since it reminds them of the graves in Jerusalem and the names of all known Jewish Holocaust victim can be found in the “Place of Information”, the archives located underground. Those who venture into the depths of the slabs, enter another reality of sorts, and slowly become cut off from the surroundings. The road descends while the slabs become taller and taller so that the entirety of the structure disappears from sight (Fig. 10).

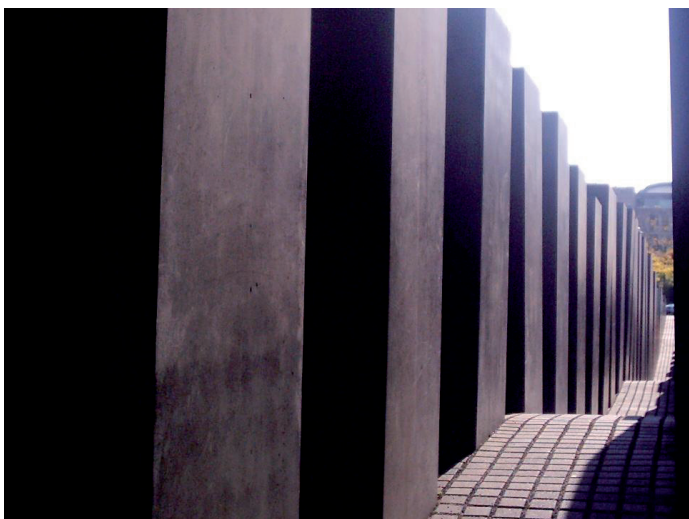


Fig. 10. Peter Eisenman, *The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, 2008 (photo by Maria Popczyk)

The sense of claustrophobia and confusion triggers a specific sensitivity to light, sounds, the oppressive tactile weight of the slabs. In such a state of mind a silhouette visible for a fraction of a second makes us realize how fragile human existence is and how enormous it is that thousands of people were wiped out from the face of the earth.

The presence of the city is experienced in the present and crystallizes in the memory as a permanent veduta. The identity of the city substantiated by its material and visual presence directs our awareness towards the future. The

identity of the city, however, is complemented with a variety of forms of the visualization of absence, which makes it fuller and richer though at the same time ambivalent and impossible to express in words or clear vedute.

Aleksandra Kunce

On European Epistemological and Ethical Tropes: Honour, Dignity and Shame*

What are *honour*, *dignity*, and *shame*? To what extent are these tropes important in disclosing the epistemology of European culture? In what way do they indicate dominant cultural modes of comprehending Man?

The object of reflection in this chapter are the transformations of European thought leading to the evolution of identity models, worked out by its intellectual tradition and manifesting themselves in the *écriture* of the humanities. The discourse presented here concentrates upon the identity models developed respectively by modernity and postmodernity, both understood as positions symptomatic of European thinking about culture, man, and ethics.¹ Such a distinction is useful for the purpose of my argumentation,

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¹ The complex approach of postmodernism to "its own modern version" is well exemplified in a variety of texts, including: Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Jacques Derrida, *La Voix et le phénomène: Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1967); Wolfgang Iser, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag GmbH, 1994).

as its very application seems to be inseparably bound with the issue of belief in the feasibility of the potentially viable project of modernity: the project stressing such qualities as continuity, causal relations, the interconnectedness of the past and the future, utopia, universality, the importance of classification and categorization, acknowledgment of the primacy of reason and of the self-presencing I.²

A modernist view

The basic question to be addressed in the context of the relationship between the three central concepts of these considerations and the modern identity is how honor, shame and dignity contribute to its construction.³ In order to answer it, it is useful to approach each of these categories in terms of their cultural significance in each of the two discourses of my interest.

In modernist perspective, honour is a clear indication of ourselves, since it univocally defines our value, our singularity, and our status. It testifies to the existence of a precisely delineated subject. To Aristotle, honour defines a righteous man, excludes ignominious deeds or untamed emotions – such as shame.⁴ To Aristotle, honour is synonymous to emotional maturity, rational, socially approved “tameness.” In other words, to the Greek philosopher honour is an adopted and internalized knowledge of who one is, in respect to what, and in the

² See Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity – An Incomplete Project”, in Thomas Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheat, 1993); Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition*.

³ One of the clearest stances with respect to the modernist identity may be found in Anthony Giddens’s work. See Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), also Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Christopher Rowe, ed. Sarah Broadie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1107a–1138b.

light of what principles, conjoined with our own righteous, rational I. Honour thus understood performs distinctive functions: it establishes division lines and warrants man's value.

Conversely, shame, in such a rationalized, European perspective, appears to be but a "low," second-rate emotion, which seems to unspecifically relate to *Anyone*; an *Anyone* understood instrumentally, i.e. *Anyone* in the context of breaching cultural norms. Shame, ashamedness – writes Aristotle – relate to an affect, yet without being a virtue; shame and ashamedness are corporeal, carnal entities.⁵ Shame as such is never ascribed to a person (hierarchically) singled out in his righteousness; it is only an attribute of the irrational, uncertain, and yet simple behavioral norms. Shame is the opening up to what is collective and common, while honour definitely excludes the participation of *Everyone*. Such a state of affairs is the consequence of the attachment of the culture of antiquity to hierarchical solutions selected on the basis of the criteria of *ratio*, the certainty of the path of cognition, and the clarity of the I vs group relationship.

The exclusive quality of honour is even clearer in the perception of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who locates honour in the neighborhood of esteem, status, fixed division between the possibility and impossibility of separation.⁶ It vouchsafes the hierarchically legitimized identity, its right to make claims, to assert its rights, to demand respect. It represents the realm of Someone's possibility, and thus it indicates a coherent I, which is impossible to destroy, if destructive actions are dictated by rules negating honour. Such honour clearly programs our actions, which will thus always be nothing else but realizations of given laws. In the context of furthering the only proper vision of itself, a vision different from random, contingent aspects,

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107a–1138b.

⁶ See Maria Ossowska, *Ethos rycerski i jego odmiany* (Warszawa: PWN, 1973).

incompatible with the rules of certainty, honour locates itself evidently within the space of the right of usurpation. Likewise, in the view of Charles de Montesquieu, it is in the nature of honour to claim acknowledgment, elevation, priority.⁷

Irrespective of cultural differences between the intellectual upshots of the German, French or Greek thought, one has to arrive at the conclusion that in their overall, schematic, potential limits, the concepts under research are understood in a similar fashion. It is so, since they have been formed on the basis of the same hierarchical patterns of thought and action, which evolved in Europe. What one encounters in the course of a scrutiny of these concepts is the common “pan-European” attachment to generality, universalization, hierarchization, acknowledgment of divisions traditionally rooted in the culture (including consensual epistemological limits) – and of the separation of that which is the same from that which is radically different. Finally, the analysis of the concepts in question indicates the shared tendency to rely upon the rational I, guaranteeing the “domestication” of emotional uncertainty, a quality rudimental in European thought.

This form of thinking has translated itself not only into the actions of the Europeans oriented towards economic, political and intellectual expansion onto the areas of “otherness,” which potentially is “given to be subdued,” but – first and foremost – into the positive valuation of all entities related to, or associated with Europe. It is especially clear in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s thought, which is nothing else but one of many texts of culture, reifying European perspective in the same fashion.⁸ Reason, conceptuality, freedom, spirit, development, self-consciousness, distance

⁷ Charles de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, trans. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), book III, chapter 7.

⁸ Georg H. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B. Baillie (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949).

with respect to oneself, to objects, and to the world – all mark the same goal, which we incessantly strive to attain: ordering the world.

Summing up what has been written so far, it is possible to say that hierarchical thinking points to an “I” and that it allows one to adequately define moral horizons, i.e. not to extend their limits to include everything and everyone, but to reduce their capacity to entities of importance, capable to indicate Me, Us, merged in the same, honour-bound existence. Honour is inextricably bound with elitism. One is thus a separate(d) being, functioning safely in one’s own personal sphere, the limits of which one meticulously guards in order for the guard to retain the sense of stability, to live by his or her own, personally developed and unique principles of sanctioning and disqualifying the Other, and eventually to prevent the blurring of the lines of the carefully protected social order. Honour is founded upon separatedness, upon thinking in terms of identity and difference – *one is who one is*, and *only who one is*, and not someone or something else. Only someone *like me* – i.e. one participating in our *Us* owing to the fact that he or she is subjected to the same clear principles defining honour and dishonour – is capable of predicating of *Me*. Our similarity – in the epistemological reception of reality (i.e. in the shared evaluation of what is rational and what is emotional) – is the basis of the common discourse and of the presence in the unceasingly running process of *identification*, based on instances of confirmation and falsification. By virtue of the sameness of rules conditioning the elitist character of our *Us*, we are the same.

Shame, conversely, in its inferiority with respect to honour, is much less *subjective*; bearing in mind the modernist understanding of the subject as certain and rational, shame appears to be no more but a crippled regulator of behaviours.

Regulation of behaviours and social control as aspects of the discussed phenomenon were acknowledged by a number of thinkers, including representatives of the

Tartu school,⁹ or scholars following the methodological principles of Eliasian psycho- and sociogenetic analysis.¹⁰ It must be admitted, however, that shame may also point to itself, i.e. it may disclose itself and present itself in the context of experiencing shame before oneself, and not before others.¹¹ Nonetheless, subjective presence, which shame discloses, appears to be much less certain than it is the case of the agency of honour. Shame – as it seems – is related to the level of *praxis* to a much greater extent than it is to the “meta-level.” It represents the values of *hic et nunc* repetitiveness, *hic et nunc* decidability, but, first and foremost, it is bound with emotionality and egalitarianism. It does not represent the space of reason, so helpful in constructing cognitive social space; instead, it locates itself in the realm of emotional being, of unitary control. It refers to particular, concrete situations rather than to the existence of rationality or righteousness as such. What shame-related acts or qualities disclose is not a rational I: one might even risk the claim that what they make present is nothing but aspectual existence, deeply immersed in a multiplicity of behaviours, in norms requiring instantaneous confirmation, in social roles. Shame, thus, appears not to indicate Me; rather, it indicates the limits of the cultural norms, commonly accepted principles and thus also of the negotiated aspectuality of the cultural I. At the very best, shame discloses the I (invisible amidst the multiplicity of social behaviours) in some of its profundity for no more than a fraction of a second. The subject, understood as *self-presencing I*, is only a “flash,” while the guarantee of self-certainty appears to be at most a vague sense of a possibility of some deeper reference to *Oneself*.

⁹ Jurij Łotman, *O semiotyce pojęć strach i wstyd w kulturze rosyjskiej*, trans. Jerzy Faryno, in *Semiotyka kultury*, ed. Maria Renata Mayerowa (Warszawa: PWN, 1970).

¹⁰ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process. The History of Manners*, trans. Edward Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, ed. M.J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Shame allows an individual to locate him or herself within the frame of cultural actions, it controls the “I”, and warrants the positive, socially functionalized image of the I, which is neither certain nor rational. At the same time, it awakens incessant concern about the image and about the social perception of the “I”. Shame lays bare what seems to be the lack of solid foundations to underlie our pragmatic righteousness. It is no more than consensual certainty, one decided upon in each particular situation and without reference to any general level, one founded upon a rational and elitist view of reality.

Shame, undoubtedly, remains within the space of equality, yet neither the equality of shame, nor the egalitarian character of playing with shame opens up space, in which the highly individualized *Everyone* could be legitimized; at most, it may account for the egalitarian *being of Everyone* within the frame of the same mechanism of shame. Shame, activated in certain situations, accompanies everyone; it is too visible in its psychophysical tangibility for one to feel entirely free from it. Besides, it is impossible to univocally associate shame and freedom. Shame leaves one inert, and represents collectivity, stands guard to norms we interiorize and exteriorize most clearly when we are ashamed. Shame always prefers the collective Us, which dictates conditions. Thus, it appears to relate to the ethical discourse of freedom, rationality, or righteousness to much lesser extent than the honour does. It corresponds solely to the social aspect of the active I, which encounters itself and others when it is ashamed. It discloses the regions of shame and shamelessness and strips naked cultural taboos, i.e. it discloses spaces that provide the matrix in which *what we are*, rather than *who we are*, is univocally molded.

Shame seems to be of local, momentary character, even though it leads to the disclosure of constant norms. It acts *hic et nunc*, restoring the social I into order. It is therefore less manifestly demonstrated; cultural presencing becomes its share less frequently than in the case of honour – and for those reasons, shame does not readily lend itself to being

tamed into the verbal order. Indeed, it is difficult to speak about honour, and yet it is always possible to find vocabulary fitting the general description of the I, Us, inseparably unified in the solidity of the state of righteousness. With shame, the situation is much worse. It is immersed in the space of behaviours to such an extent that the results of any attempt to single it out and to tame it verbally always appear inadequate. Shame is *experienced*, and not *exemplified*. In any case, shame is less open to possible endeavours of exemplification than is honour.

Let me complement the argument built above by weaving into its fabric a new thread: the concept of dignity. The understanding of dignity present in the European tradition is twofold: on the one hand, dignity is conceived of as a distinctive marker; on the other, it is understood as a quality referring to every person. The first understanding of the concept is akin to the perception of honour and pride, and serves the purpose of recognizing *those who possess dignity* (i.e. those striving towards self-development, defending values and expecting respect on the account of it), and distinguishing them from *those devoid of this quality*. Such exemplification, derived from the Aristotelian concept of righteousness, informs the work of Maria Ossowska.¹² However, it is only the second sense of dignity that appears to disclose its proper understanding in the context of the European cultural discourse, as it does not blur the limits of the concept in question in the homogeneity of what is honourable, respectful, righteous. Instead, it introduces a sharp definitional distinction, thus attributing dignity its own, separate sense. Dignity is “an ineradicable and non-gradable value of humanity, deserving self-respect and the respect of others, to which every person without exception is entitled”¹³.

¹² Maria Ossowska, *Ethos rycerski i jego odmiany* (Warszawa: PWN, 1973); Eadem, *Normy moralne. Próba systematyzacji* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1971), pp. 59–61.

¹³ *Filozofia. Leksykon PWN*, eds. Włodzimierz Łagodzki and Grzegorz Pyszczek (Warszawa: PWN, 2000).

Such a concept of dignity appears to be the most universal and neutral of all available. It informs not only the discourse of philosophy, but also that of social practices, which manifests itself most evidently in the character of European institutions. In this context, it should be mentioned that much is owed to Immanuel Kant's philosophy, whose contribution to the development of thinking about dignity is hard to underestimate. To Kant, dignity is a state in which *Everyone* is entitled to participate; it leads one to the concepts of Me and Us, who are all the same in our humanity.¹⁴ Likewise, dignity informs the development of the eighteenth-century egalitarian revolution, which not only appreciated the equality of *Everyone*, but also recognized the possibility of questioning *Everyone* by *All*, outside of the discourse of separate and subdivided spheres of culture. This is the period, in which the language of identity changes.¹⁵

In the culture, thinking in terms of "Everyone dignified" marks the paths of globalization attained in consequence of the development of the concept of a common man attributed personal dignity. The world is a space of identical individualities sharing the same moral horizons and the same degree of responsibility. "Everyone dignified," nonetheless, informs the development of individualization, since "Everyone" is not the homogenous "All." And yet, at the same time, such an approach triggers communal thinking, which reconciliates individual freedom with individual's *being for him/herself* and *for others*. Egalitarianism, after all, goes hand in hand with expressivist thinking: everyone dignified, everyone obliged, everyone potentially given to him/herself in order to become a self-presencing I. Humanity defines Me, which has the power to both delineate, and to transcend limits.

The vein of thought based on the category of dignity gains key importance in the work of philosophers building

¹⁴ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*.

¹⁵ See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

their notions of humanity in relation to the concept of a person. Such a stance may be observed in the oeuvre of Max Scheler, Emmanuel Mounier, Jacques Maritain, Karol Wojtyła – and many others. Modernist philosophy of humanity adopts dignity as its leitmotif – and yet, it is clear that the currency of the concept of dignity is not limited to modernism alone: it is easy to observe that dignity reverberates in the postmodernist reflection as well.

Even though postmodernists do away with the concept of the person, give up the idea of the presence of a legible subject, they do not surrender *Everyone*: the Everyone, who simultaneously is individualized and identical in his/her dignity, and who shares the same ethical claims and obligations with respect to him/herself and Everyone else.

A postmodernist view

What aspects of the postmodern identity does one encounter when referring to the concepts of shame, honour and dignity?

Honour, when referred to in the context of postmodern creeds, appears to be an unsuited notion. It is only through negation that the concept of honour finds its applicability in the postmodern discourse. Negation makes it possible to claim that postmodernity is not hierarchical (or, at least, the hierarchy is not founded upon any durable, culturally rooted order, but upon economic divisions – erected, altered and redone afresh). It does not rely upon any objective order of things, it does not trust honour which could be comprehended as a constant state that is to provide guarantees, decide, define and separate established order from disorder.¹⁶ No certain subject is present, there are no

¹⁶ In the context of the discourse of the postmodern identity see also: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London and New York: Continuum, 2004); Mike Featherstone,

concretizing attributes, legitimizing us “since the beginning of all time.” Nothing remains of the former attachment to the elitism, nothing is left of the reference to honour in terms of identity, whose relationship, formerly, used to be guarded with special care. Such statements, reductionist and simplistic as they may be, may be formulated in the course of an analysis of the identity of the postmodern self.

The notion of honour does not have application in the times of egalitarianism and globality. And yet, if treated as an experimental methodological category, honour may help disclose empty spaces, crevices, and absences, which have ostentatiously been retained in the culture after the downfall of the dominance of values that gave rise to durable distinctions drawn with reference to the modernist concept of honour.

If we assume that continuity and constancy are important elements of culture, it is also possible to admit that postmodernity retains traces of the former type of reference to honour. Such instances, however, are remnant in character and aspectual at best, written out in the medial uprooting of former senses and cultural distinctions. It is certainly possible to encounter instances of reference to honour spectacularly blown-up or distorted for the purposes of some pragmatic goals or ideologies, but it does not mean at all that their momentary activity should promise the reinstating of the former, stable presence of resolutions based on honour. Hence, the postmodern identity proves not to lend itself to being disclosed by means of the key-trope of honour. Reference to honour may serve as nothing more than a convenient tool to indicate discontinuities, cracks and metamorphoses within the discursive body of participation in the European tradition.

If honour does not apply, can the postmodern identity be read through the spectacles of shame? At first sight,

Consumer Culture and Postmodernism (London: Sage Publications, 1990); Christopher Lash, *The Culture of Narcissism. American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (London: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1991).

such a choice promises to be efficient. Shame discloses our emotionality and our sensual self-reference: *I know that there is some I* (even if it is deprived of some of its certainty), *because my emotions disclose this fact to me*. Moreover, shame indicates our engulfment in the social norms, in activities incessantly juxtaposed against accepted or rejected rules. This is what postmodernity frequently emphasized proposing the I of a player in a game, the I of social roles, the aspectual I, the pragmatic I. In this sense, the emotional, socially controlled, pragmatic shame provides a favourable context to non-subjective resolutions.

And yet, at the same time, shame, apparently helpful in deciphering postmodernity, may as well prove treacherous. Clearly, it no longer is the agent holding the reins; no longer does it control behaviour, no longer does it reinforce one's compliance to norms, no longer is it a stabilizing factor, making one refer to one's own "tame" self. It is so due to the fact that the very presence of borderlines grew to be somewhat rickety. Shame, indeed, is present in the culture; it is experienced in the instance of transgressing mental and behavioral limitations – but, as it seems, it no longer is capable of performing the function of an efficient tool which could set the world in order for the man of today. It fails to durably separate the spheres of the shameful and the shameless, it does not brand the transgressor, it does not "domesticate" morality. It is only used on a *hic et nunc* basis, incapable of leaving any enduring results of its action. It constitutes a presence in our culture, yet a presence devoid of the powers to legitimize our identity.

The case is similar with shamelessness, the power of which appears to be faltering as well. The spaces of shamelessness seem to be common and – at the same time – expansive. By that token, shamelessness slowly ceases to function as a sharp opposite of shame. Shamelessness embodies provocation (rooted in postmodern creeds) and yet, owing to its ostentatious character, it does not breach cultural taboos in any profound fashion. Shamelessness represents continuity – but not a substantial continuity, not

a continuity univocally marked with non-norms, powers of chaos, peril.

Apparently, shamelessness, too, came to be functionalized after the postmodern fashion: it is there, but it has no force of powerful communication. It represents modernist vestiges of the old game, played in a postmodern way.

Hence, it is possible to generalize that shame comes in handy when we investigate postmodern phenomena only indirectly, as it cannot do more than help to indicate tensions in the emotional map of contemporary culture or allow one to notice the weakening of the once powerful spheres of cultural continuity. The way to postmodernity leads through emotions – nevertheless these emotions are insufficiently concretized or, in other words, insufficiently defined in culture, and therefore incapable of becoming landmarks in one's search for postmodern identity. These emotions become blurred as they mix together to translate themselves into mentally unstable acts of experiencing; they are both untheorized and untheorizing.

Having acknowledged the above, it is still hard to resist the question whether it is admissible to suspect that under the surface of behaviours pointing at the remnants of shame and shamelessness the durability of cultural values, the cultural continuity of norms of thought and of action might still be smoldering, prone to momentary disclosures.

Postmodernity warns one not to trust such questions; thinking in terms of surface and depth has proven to be burdened with fallacy. Yet, might it not be the case that, paradoxically, having questioned the value of invariants and durable "truths," postmodernity keeps running into them time and again? Might it not be the case that, postulating the game of vestiges, postmodernity should call some unique presence of shame or dignity into existence, even if this presence should be a different quality than that of the times past?

Of the categories discussed so far, postmodernity seems to have invested most confidence in dignity, the concept compatible with our mentality. In the course of retracing

the postmodern understanding of dignity, it must be noted, as Charles Taylor claims, that the discovery of the importance of Everyone, the self-presencing of identity procedures based upon the moral dimension of equality, necessitates the appreciation of the importance of the individual creation, of the communal moral horizon, and of the social compromise, which consists in negotiating one's own definition of oneself against concepts developed by others.¹⁷ In such a context, dignity, when applied for the purpose of the description of our reality, proves to be a notion of greater efficiency and markedly more neutral than others. It is not so much an "arbitrary" warrant of order, a "superordinate" mode of reference to a person or to oneself, as it is a moral, pragmatic necessity.¹⁸ And even though to many dignity may still be a habit of thought, which makes one refer events to general axioms (e.g. humanity),¹⁹ it nonetheless appears to have its place in the postmodern discourse.

However, the postmodern approval for the concept of dignity discloses some of the more complex traits of the general postmodern discourse. Beyond doubt, one of them is the postmodernist consent to acts of moral assessment of culture, in which the impotence of the revealed division of axiological space into truth and falsity, knowledge and ignorance, lawfulness and lawlessness is replaced with dignity possible to find at each end of each opposition. The concept of dignity may be used in reference to various activities as well as to the privacy of the constructed, functionalized, insubstantial I: the I no longer conceived of in terms of certainty, presencing itself in its own ethically or rationally disclosed *Person*.

Thus dignity, formerly an agency of order, has been transformed into a tool designated to protect the weakened I.

¹⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

¹⁸ See Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993).

¹⁹ See Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Dignity is no longer supposed to point to itself; rather, its task is to stand guard to all possible traces of individuality that might – for any reason – be exposed to danger. Such dignity, albeit impoverished in sense, testifies to the impasse of postmodernist identity. After all, the main concern of contemporary man is to retain what proves fleeting in the context of the experiences of absence, illegibility, disorder and instability: one's own unstable, non-identical identity. Today, dignity – based on absence and non-subjectivity, discursively functionalized – becomes the master-key to the fears of postmodernity.

Summarizing these considerations, it is possible to conclude that the application of the concepts of shame, honour or dignity for the purpose of description of modern and postmodern identities may prove efficient. As tropes, they disclose discursive tendencies coinciding in their orientation with the paths of our own quest for the keys organizing the reading of the world – including, first and foremost, the perception of the self. The fates of the three concepts disclose the continuity and discontinuity in the discourse of culture, constancy and change, consistency and contingency of thought, apotheosis of the unifying whole and of the disjointed fragments, and, eventually, tendencies to stress the essence, the basis, or functionality of values in the context of the organization of the world. Most clearly of all, however, the functioning of the three concepts in the history of culture indicates epistemological problems inextricably bound with the process of “domesticating” oneself and the world: problems as old as hills, and yet ever-returning, ever-green and always brand-new.

Maria Popczyk

The Art Museum: The Space of Freedom and Violence*

The museum is a theater of anamorphic (and autoscopic) dramaturgy; a palace in which it is not so easy to tell which is the spider and which the web, which the machinery and which the operator.

Donald Preziosi

The museum of art embodies the Enlightenment ideas of reason, according to which knowledge, aesthetics and education work together towards the intellectual and moral formation of a human being. These noble goals still constitute the mission of the museum, in which collections are exhibited for the dual purpose of education and entertainment. The concept of freedom, although not explicit in the definition of the museum, is expressed through the principle of the general public having free access to the artistic achievements of various historical eras and cultures. Museum collections are brought together and analysed by academics, since, as Hans Sedlmayer emphasizes, museums are fundamentally academic institutions and the spirit of knowledge permeates them to the core. And Jean-François Lyotard argues that in the museum the discourse of knowledge takes precedence over other – artistic, aesthetic or moral – discourses. It must

* The chapter first published as: "The Art Museum: The Space of Freedom and Violence," *Art Inquiry* (2010): 199–211.

also be added that for Lyotard knowledge is the source of power. And although the viewers choose to see the works of ancient or contemporary art of their own free will, they are, in fact, introduced into the carefully arranged space, in which they become, in Preziosi's words, the components of the machinery, listening, as Micke Bal points out, to the voice of the authoritative narrator who states categorically: look, this is how it is.¹ The viewer in the museum does not see works of art but exhibits, the objects characterized by high interpretative density which constitute the components of the larger whole: the exhibition. And the exhibition communicates messages going beyond the realm characterized by art: it promotes national values and the ideals of scientific progress, it conveys ideological contents and reinforces cultural stereotypes.

This explains why, since its beginnings, the museum has given rise to antagonistic views, strong emotions and heated debates, which have involved intellectuals and theoreticians as well as artists. The museum is not a homogeneous place, nor is it free of ambiguity. It is an environment in which a number of diverse practices interweave and frequently compete with one another. Museum-lovers appreciate the historical insights and aesthetic experience; the experience which, despite its public context, is profoundly personal. The opponents of the museum regard it predominantly as a place where works of art, artistic creativity and the public are violated. And it is not only the symbolic violence, identified by Pierre Bourdieu, but all sorts of manipulation to which works of art – which are supposed to be the expressions of creative freedom – are subjected. Paul Valéry comparing the museum to the salon, the school, the prison and the graveyard thinks of the aporia, in which both works and the public find themselves, as well as the aporia spread between freedom and enslavement. The dialogue of praise and criticism, which has its origins in the nineteenth

¹ Micke Bal, *Double Exposures. The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p. 2.

century, has revealed the numerous dimensions of the museum and contributed to its transformation, in which artists have played the major role. At the end of the twentieth century, the museum underwent the transformation from the closed modernist model to the open postmodern one. It does not mean, however, that it has become the space of unrestrained freedom of artistic expression and public reception, but that the freedom and violence within the museum have assumed different forms. The museum is involved in the processes that are to rationalize reality. As such it combines entertainment with serious research and interpretative work aimed at investing cultural phenomena with meaning and intellectual expression.

The modernist model of museum (the nineteenth-century concept of the temple of arts and the modernist white cube) creates the autonomous environment which is closed spatially as well as ideologically. In the space of the city it represents the elitist highbrow culture as opposed to the cheap entertainment of public spectacles or world fairs.² It displays the achievements of human genius and knowledge in the carefully arranged space, in which both exhibits and the public are subjected to strict discipline. It separates the acquisition of knowledge from the contemplation of beauty by splitting the collections and thereby the fields of knowledge. The linear order of exposition defines the historical narratives, which explain to the viewer the nature of art seen in the light of progress. Upon entering viewers are immediately exposed to the power of authority, which provides them with the binding definitions of reality supplied by intellectuals who, as Zygmunt Bauman points out, in the era of modernism, transform uncertainty into certainty, sort things out and classify them, and make authoritarian judgements.³ The history rationalized by means of

² Cf. Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 18–21.

³ Zygmunt Bauman, "Prawodawcy i tłumacze," trans. Anna Tanalska, in *Postmodernizm. Antologia przekładów*, ed. Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Baran i Suszyński, 1997), pp. 293–297.

universalistic constructs is used to build the national and cultural identity. Additionally, such rationalization offers the public the sense of belonging to the higher order and the opportunity to participate in the experience of permanence within the aesthetic medium and in the atmosphere of a secular ritual.⁴ For Odo Marquard there is no doubt about the significance of the art museum in modern times, as it is the product of the process of self-regulation within culture aspiring to homeostasis. Museums are founded in the times when people become painfully aware of the pressure that the pace of development and modernization put on them, and when they lose their sense of belonging to the world ruled by the divine providence – in the times when nature becomes desacralized. That is when those places, separated from the everyday life and dedicated solely to the aesthetic experiences and the cultivation of historical consciousness, come to serve the function of an oasis in which an individual person can regain their sense of belonging. The art museum offers the break from tribunalization, an antidote to the sense of finite and fragmentary nature of human existence and access to the lost sense of unity – the experience which is not available any other way.⁵ There modern people can reclaim their freedom from stresses and strains of their everyday life and at the same time, being exposed to the multitude of aesthetics and histories, broaden their horizons. Underlying this belief is Kant's understanding of the aesthetic experience as a disinterested, unrestrained play of imagination enabling a human being to transgress the inexorable laws of science and moral duty.

However, for the advocates of art works concerned with the conditions in which the exposition spaces place them, the museum itself is a symptom of the cultural decline. It transforms works of art into exhibition objects by removing

⁴ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 7–20.

⁵ Odo Marquard, *Aesthetica i anaesthetica. Rozważania filozoficzne*, trans. Krystyna Krzemieniowa (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2007), p. 7.

them from their native artistic and cultural context and replacing their genuine value with the values and meanings developed by the history of art. This is what Quatremère de Quincy, who witnessed Napoleon's plundering works of art subsequently acquired by the Louvre, finds lamentable. In his view, works of art removed from their context are deprived of their value, the social and moral role which they could have fulfilled in the places for which they were intended. The works, which used to constitute the integral components of the community life, once placed in the museum and classified by art historians according to artificial, abstract concepts, become fossilized caricatures, riddles with no solution.⁶ Didier Maleuvre comments on the views of Quatremère de Quincy, who was the first to realize that works of art are objectified. Maleuvre bemoans "their becoming fetishes of alienated consciousness" and claims that

[t]he museum thereby testifies to modernity's failure to preserve the past unmaimed. Abstracted from any context, stripped of living history and shrouded with scholarly history, artifacts lie in the museum as corpses in an ossuary. Culture becomes synonymous with preservation, not production. [...] Art, as the expression of vital culture, is only there to be contemplated as a hollow shell of its former life.⁷

Contrary to what Enlightenment writers believed, the museum of art separating art works from life neither promotes education nor contributes to the development of human moral sense. It does not activate artistic creativity, either. These views are shared by Martin Heidegger, who criticizes the process of concealing the truth in the culture based on the subject-object paradigm. He believes that

⁶ Antonie Ch. Quatremère de Quincy, *Considération morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l'art* (Fayard, 1989), pp. 47–48.

⁷ Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories. History, Technology, Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 16–17.

Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* torn from the sacred space and placed in the museum is uprooted, placeless, since in its essence it is a picture-altar (*Altar-Bild*) which belongs to the ritual.⁸ In the Dresden gallery, where it is exposed to the aesthetic consumption and transferred from one exhibition to another, it becomes nothing more than a tool. Hans Georg Gadamer voices a similar sentiment when he says that in the museum works of art are desecrated: they say nothing about human life any longer and their significance is restricted to purely aesthetic.⁹

Here we can see a clash of two different positions on the rationalization of culture, and what follows, two diverse attitudes to history, aesthetic values and creativity. According to one of them, man is the creator of the world, both history and beauty are his creations, and the most exquisite works of humanity should be admired in the museum. The uprooting and preservation of art are two sides of the same process of emancipation.¹⁰ For the opponents of the museum, however, people participate in life and can obtain nothing from history but what is immanently inherent in themselves. People get to know themselves through participation rather than by means of any external conceptions. From this point of view, artistic works reveal what constitutes the potential for perfection in life itself. It is this, let us call it romantic, position which sees works of art detached from the flow of life as dead and worthless.¹¹

⁸ Martin Heidegger, "Über die Sixtina," in Martin Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens 1910–1976* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983), p. 120.

⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Prawda i metoda. Zarys hermeneutyki filozoficznej*, trans. Bogdan Baran (Kraków: Inter Esse, 1993), pp. 162, 176.

¹⁰ On uprooting as a fundamental feature of modern institutions, cf. Antony Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. „Ja” i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności*, trans. Alina Sułżycka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001).

¹¹ Adorno likens the museum to the mausoleum. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Muzeum Valéry Proust*, trans. Andrzej Noras, in *Muzeum sztuki. Antologia*, ed. Maria Popczyk (Kraków: Universitas, 2005), p. 91.

The flourishing of art museums in the nineteenth century led to the question of the appropriate place for works of art – the place which would bring out their best qualities and give voice to the freedom in which they were created. Charles Baudelaire sees this place in the bourgeois drawing room, others in the artist's own home, the house-museum like this of Gustav Moreau's, where the artist's life is interwoven with their work, and which Andrzej Pieńkos calls "reliquaries of creativity or temples of the artist."¹² In the 1960s Daniel Buren still believes that it is in the artist's studio that art has its proper place.¹³ The new practice was introduced by Curbert who chose the exhibition space for his works single-handedly, thus investing them with the context and at the same time freeing them from the Academia's judgements.

However, Gadamer concedes that even though the museum is far from being conducive to the hermeneutic insight, works of art still retain their source within them, which means that their inner truth can still be revealed.¹⁴ In other words, as Walter Benjamin puts it, although in modern times works of art become the objects of exhibition and lose the aura they used to have at the time when they pertained to the religious ritual, the aura is not lost irrevocably, as the reception of the work varies from ritualistic to expository.¹⁵ These remarks are significant, since the museum of art is gradually becoming the home to art: the only place with access to works, the only place where they can be appreciated by the public. And despite

¹² Andrzej Pieńkos, *Dom sztuki. Siedziby artystów w nowoczesnej kulturze europejskiej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2005), pp. 186–212.

¹³ Daniel Buren, "Function of the Studio," in *Museums by Artists*, eds. A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), pp. 61–68.

¹⁴ Gadamer, *Prawda i metoda*, p. 137.

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, "Dzieło sztuki w dobie reprodukcji technicznej," in Walter Benjamin, *Anioł historii. Eseje, szkice, fragmenty*, ed. Hubert Orłowski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1996), pp. 212–213.

the fact that the musealization of art works deprives them of their uniqueness and singularity, a great many artists take no notice of uprooting and classifications and still want their works to be placed there, in the vicinity of the works which are deemed immortal.

There is, however, one more important reason why museums are objected to: the political agenda behind the uprooting of works, the fact that the art museum is used for political purposes. John Dewey points out bitterly that the museum has its roots not in the nature of art itself but in the powers of politics and authority, which are fundamentally alien to art.¹⁶ It must be noted, however, that from the mid-eighteenth-century museums had sprang up spontaneously, and it was not until the times of the French Revolution that the Louvre bound the museum and politics for good. All sorts of uprooting violate art, but the worst kind is undoubtedly the confiscation of art as a result of warfare, which makes them into spoils of war, loot of colonization. Such violation dates back to the times of Roman emperors who held the triumphal parades demonstrating their trophies. The museum exhibition serves a similar role demonstrating the power of the conqueror through the exquisiteness of works and the splendour of the conquered culture. The moral aspect of uprooting demands that the question of ownership be resolved, as still only part of the stolen property has been recovered by its rightful owners. The debate concerning the Elgin Marbles demonstrates how thin the line between the preservation of ancient artefacts and common theft is.

The most dangerous aspect of the alliance between art and politics is its concealment by which the exhibition is given the appearance of political neutrality. The key factor here is the arrangement of the exhibition space which gives the public the impression that art works are autonomous objects displayed only for their aesthetic value. This goal

¹⁶ John Dewey, *Sztuka jako doświadczenie*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Warszawa: Ossolineum, 1975), pp. 11–12.

is achieved by the temple-like atmosphere of the vast celebratory spaces of the museum-temple of art whose architecture alludes to ancient temples and palaces, but also by the sterile white rooms of the modernist museum designed to neutralize any context. The strategy of removing works from their own context and investing them with the new aesthetic-historical one proves highly effective for the authority.¹⁷ This is why Micke Bal suggests that we ignore the aesthetic surface of the exhibition, which is the only way to disclose the scheme of the narrator operating behind it.

Upon taking on the role of the educator of the society, the museum inevitably becomes a tool in the hands of the authority. And as such, it selects the works which will mould the society's consciousness as required. The precise selection of those works which promote the revolutionary authority, national socialism, or communism is nothing else than censorship, and violation through exclusion. The political objectification differs from the academic one, its point being ideological rather than aesthetic. However, the academia is frequently in league with the political authority and validates its selection. It goes without saying that the violation of art is at its worst when it leads to the actual physical destruction of works. This includes all acts of iconoclasm conducted in the name of the matters of overriding importance.

Citing the examples of censorship and destruction of art in Germany, Walter Grasskamp states that it is barely hardly possible to maintain "the fiction of politically neutral museum."¹⁸ Furthermore, he points out that selecting

¹⁷ This is how Daniel Sherman interprets Adorno's point about the similarity between the museum and the mausoleum, Daniel J. Sherman, "Quatremère/Benjamin/Marx: Art, Museums, Aura, and Commodity Fetishism," in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, *Museum Culture. History, Discourses, Spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

¹⁸ Walter Grasskamp, *Museumsgründer und Museumsstürmer* (München: Verlag Beck, 1981), p. 42.

and displaying the selected works the political authority integrates the community, and describes the process as *a community ritual* which entails the transformation of “the viewing masses into the politically conscious individuals.”¹⁹ The King of France’s collection appropriated by the revolutionary authorities unites the society as victors. And Napoleon’s spoils of war displayed in the Louvre allow the viewers to identify themselves with the emperor’s triumphs. Thus even though the exhibition creates the atmosphere of disinterestedness with the aim of concealing the underlying ideology, the act of viewing and admiring works of art is far from disinterested. The aesthetic rapture implies the approval of the authority and its principles, while the manifestation of disapproval equals the contempt for the excellence of art works, and this is how the beauty of works of art in the museum and the symbolic violence are secretly bound. The viewers are unaware that admiring art they approve of all the political agenda which made this art available to them.

For Maleuvre the crucial social ritual in the museum regards the fact that the identity is imposed on the public, as “Rightfully, it seems, the traditional museum has been compared with the disciplinary institutions of the bureaucratic nation state that enforce control over persons, spaces, and objects by pigeonholing them and curbing their nomadic tendency.”²⁰ In this case the discipline is not imposed by the authority’s excessive demonstration of power, but it refers to the ordinary peaceful times, the holiday tourism when the renowned art museums open its splendid collections to the general public. Nevertheless, those classical historical displays of old masters, because it is basically the classical art which is in question here, position the public in the role of the passive observer who will receive approvingly both the collections and the ideology behind them.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 43.

²⁰ Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, p. 11.

Thus the museum becomes the school which teaches the public the discipline with regard to the aesthetic taste so as to shape the social identity and retain the social divide between the art lovers and barbarians. The hidden mechanism of symbolic violence works with the full cooperation of the public, as Bourdieu proves.²¹ Despite the fact that people respond to art differently because of the educational inequalities, those who are instructed by culture as to what to look at and what to be moved by, see themselves as the elite established on the grounds of nature rather than culture. As Bourdieu observes, “museums betray their true function, which is to reinforce for some the feeling of belonging and for others the feeling of exclusion.”²² This practice results in the popular consent to the seizure of property and the manipulation of art works and collections, as well as investing them with arbitrary meanings.

Museums, especially the global ones, unite the public around a given cultural identity. This is why Preziosi describes museums as the device for concentrating. And it is the museum that made it possible for Europe to construct and establish its own position as the standard by which the value of other cultures is judged and through which they are objectified.²³ Jean Baudrillard in his turn argues that the museum is dominated by the violence of the production of exhibitions, which is not very much different to the turnover of goods, and in consequence, the complex processes taking place within museum are overlooked.²⁴

²¹ Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Darbel and Dominique Schnapper, *The Love of Art. European Art Museum and Their Public*, trans. Caroline Beattie and Nick Merriman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 212. According to Bourdieu: “So that cultured people can believe in barbarism and persuade the barbarians of their own barbarity [...]”

²² Ibidem.

²³ Donald Preziosi, “Brain of the Earth’s Body: Museum and the Flaming of Modernity,” in *The Rhetoric of the Frame. Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, ed. Paul Duro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 106, 109.

²⁴ On the Pompidou Centre, Jean Baudrillard, *Symulakry i symulacja*, trans. Sławomir Królak (Warszawa: Sic!, 2005), p. 92.

Babylon. Myth and Truth,²⁵ the exhibition in Berlin, immensely popular with the public and the critics alike, exemplifies the issues mentioned above. It demonstrates how the exhibition based on clearly defined opposites explains cultural phenomena to the public, condemns vices and proposes to rectify the wrongs by means of education. The whole process is made more accessible to the public, since it is immersed in the aesthetic medium and the exhibition achieves its educational goals through the presentation of exquisite original works and artefacts of a foreign culture. On entering the viewer is first introduced to the scientific truth about the ancient Babylon, which is represented by the splendid collection of exhibits demonstrating the grandeur of its culture and civilization. The display includes its architecture, its legal and scientific achievements, the variety of cult objects and everyday items, and the gold of its rulers. This collection, prepared by a team of researchers, is juxtaposed with the myth, revealing the dark side of the soul of the European who tends to associate Babylon with the Whore of Babylon, the cruel Nebuchadnezzar and the Tower of Babel. The distorted image of Babylon can be found in some of the finest works of art, including those by Cranach, Dürer and William Blake, but also in Zbigniew Libera's *Lego Blocks*, which are meant by the curators to demonstrate the totalitarian consequences of the popular consent to the myth. The exhibition claims that Europe has inherited the Babylonian myth from Judaism and Christianity and that the myth is still very much alive in the mass culture. Nonetheless, the exact sense of the myth is never clearly defined. There are definitions written on the staircase walls, including those by Eliade, Cassirer and Barthes, but brought together and removed from their theoretical background, they give contradictory

²⁵ The exhibition *Babylon. Mythos und Wahrheit* (Pergamon Museum, Berlin, June–October 2008), under the auspices of the minister Frank Walter Steinmeier, gathered the exhibits from a number of renowned museums, including the British Museum and Musée du Louvre.

explanations and make the actual message of the myth even more obscure.

The public are presented with the arbitrary picture of the truth and the caricature of the myth. In fact the myth serves an important function in the society, as it allows us to ask fundamental questions concerning the meaning of the physical world. It expresses the faith in the purposeful order of the universe and the lasting values of human culture. The myth and knowledge constitute two fundamental spheres of human existence: "the mythical arrangement of the world is always present in culture."²⁶ And in spite of the fact that the myth and the truth merge even in empirical science, the Berlin exhibition assigns the responsibility for preservation and affirmation of eternal values solely to knowledge.²⁷

There is a familiar story about the rational and irrational sides of European culture and the heroic struggle of knowledge guarding the truth. The moral of this story is to preserve the memory of other cultures, since the moral lessons based on them will be willingly accepted by people enthralled by the fabulous culture of Babylon. The need for knowledge is socially grounded, because in the light of knowledge we can openly acknowledge the existence of evil inside ourselves and deliver ourselves from this evil with the help of education and aesthetic therapy. All this is possible because the works which have been uprooted, divested of their own message and removed from their context have in turn been invested with the senses allowing for such a story.

Lyotard, like Bourdieu, is convinced that violence cannot be eradicated from the museum; he identifies it as injustice and locates it on the level of perception. He conducts the phenomenological analysis of the way the exhibition is

²⁶ Leszek Kołakowski, *Obecność mitu* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1994), p. 48.

²⁷ As Leszek Kołakowski points out: "The world of values is the mythical reality." Ibidem, p. 33.

perceived²⁸ and demonstrates that the origins of injustice lie in the very nature of seeing, and that they are primal in relation to the social practices of exhibition and prior to the mechanism of the symbolic violence. Lyotard's position constitutes the theoretical basis for the critical activity of the artists who, since the 1960s, have been deconstructing the contexts and premises of the museum exhibition. According to Bourdieu, such criticism is utterly impossible, since there are no practices external in relation to the ones which have already been approved and permitted by the institutions: every exhibition sacralizes works and trains the public. Lyotard sees the matter differently. He maintains that the public prefer the simplicity of expression, the realism in painting and the frontal view of an exhibit, which guarantees the sense of reality, and the public, whether bourgeois or proletarian, needs such a guarantee. However, "the essence of exhibition is not obvious,"²⁹ it is not free of assumptions, it is not homogeneous and a number of factors lie hidden in the visual, which follows from the nature of perception itself. We are incapable of grasping a visual object in its entirety: there is always something – the back, the sides – which is kept out of sight.

The museum exposition exploits the imperfections of perception, which allow it, in the name of social mission, to determine the accepted conditions of seeing, both in terms of spatial arrangements and by pointing to the particular contents of works. Thus a work of art might always be used as a component of a wider format and lose its own message, which is the case of Libera's *Lego Blocs* on the Berlin exhibition. In this sense the modernist character of the museum is inherent in its nature. Museum directors³⁰ speak in the name of humanity, and their decisions are informed by the public interest. Thus, they speak in vague terms so as to prevent a political crisis or to maintain the status quo. In

²⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *Über Daniel Buren*, ed. Patricia Schwarz, Stuttgart 1987, p. 34.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 34.

³⁰ On museum directors and artists, cf. ibidem, pp. 40–42.

other words, they methodically foster injustice. Their asset is the fact that they promote simple ideas, realism and the frontal exposition. Therefore, it is the artist's task to develop a game which will reveal the ambiguity of the conditions of the exhibition itself and expose the rules of parergon logic, which constitutes the *raison d'être* of the academia and the museum. With regard to freedom and violence within the museum, which is the subject of this chapter, there are basically two major approaches adopted by the critical art: the conceptual and the narrative. The former entails the manipulation of the exhibition space, which leaves the public in certain discomfort (Daniel Buren, Joseph Kosuth). The artists adopting the latter approach take up certain subjects concerning politics, gender or colonialism and present them by means of suggestive – often ironic or graphic – scenes (Hans Haacke, Fred Wilson). The “museum” art of the second half of the twentieth century tried to protect the work from becoming an instrument in one of the discourses in the museum and, as a result, to enable it to establish the discourse of its own.³¹

Interestingly, Lyotard associates the critical power with the first approach and is interested in the work by such artist as Daniel Buren, who “visibly” display “what is invisible in the exhibition itself in order to relentlessly follow and display the invisible.”³² His installations of the coloured stripes occupy the spaces which are normally not meant for art and left empty. The exposure of injustice follows in this case from the fact that the familiar exhibition conventions are disturbed by the artist unwilling to conform to the conventional display of a work of art: a picture on the wall. The dialogue between the works and the wall or the exhibition space leads to the transformation of the nature of the work itself and is aimed at the institutional framework

³¹ On the museum as a place of critical discourses, see among others James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (London: Thames&Hudson, 2001).

³² Lyotard, *Über Daniel Buren*, pp. 34, 42.

of the museum.³³ Such installations appear innocuous. Apart from the stripes, they include the display of the objects not normally meant for exhibition, such as boxes used for transport, empty containers, or picture frames. There are also doors leading to exhibition rooms which are boarded up or the gallery halls left empty. As there is no message, no content, it is impossible to manipulate the art work, but at the same time the artists make a political point: they do not act in anybody's name, they do not seek to express any truth, but stand up against the establishment. Some of these environmental installations violently take possession of the site itself. Marcin Berdyszak (*Fresh Fruit Table. Homage a Matta Clark*, Cologne 1996) smashes 140 kilograms of lemons with a chainsaw, marking the site for a long time, and as a result, makes it impossible to hold another exhibition there.

The departure from representation ultimately offers the public anaesthesia: lack of sensations allows artists to enter into the dialogue with the public, since they provide no pleasant experience as opposed to the modernist exhibition. The viewer is expected to engage into the work intellectually, to approach it critically, and frequently to make a physical effort, while the habits formed by the traditional exhibition become useless. The role of the artist has changed, as they no longer educate or explain, serving as an extension of the authority of the institution, but instead they question the interpretations. It took time for the critical art to secure its place in the museum, but with time the space of the museum itself has undergone the transformation, and the postmodern museum is open to a variety of discourses, including the critical ones. Still there is no doubt that the institution exercises its control over the exhibition, so not all of the artists' ideas are approved of.³⁴

³³ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986), p. 69.

³⁴ Cf. Piotr Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki. Od melancholii do pasji* (Kraków: Universitas, 2007).

As we can see, apart from the dialectic struggle between freedom and discipline, there are new elements emerging in the postmodern museum. Artists working directly in the exhibition space cannot complain about the uprooting, since the museum of modern art is becoming the laboratory open to a whole range of artistic experiments. However, the victim here is not only the neutral exhibition space conquered by installations, but, first and foremost, the public. Viewers are constantly forced to change their mental and perceptual habits and they are frequently ill-equipped to deal with the intellectual puzzles or, as it is the case of consumerist art, with the things apparently too obvious to be considered art. The awareness of the mechanisms imposed on artists and works as well as the public by the exhibition space gives a potential viewer a certain advantage, so it might be a good idea to follow Adorno's advice and only go to the museum to see one single work of art.

Aleksandra Kunce

University and Thinking*

What is the taste of thinking that is subject to university education? Does it have any taste at all? The issue concerns the thinking of students, lecturers/thinkers/poets, which is produced and supervised within the institution, within the mental space of the university. Let us therefore find out more about the taste of the university.

Universitas

Each university constitutes a different reality, the very idea of the university remains however the same. *Universitas doctorum et studentium* is the overall framework bringing together those who teach and those who are taught. It is about different aspects of universality: *universitas magistrorum*, *universitas scholarum*, *universitas scientiarum*. It is thus about the general idea of students, teachers and scholarship. The Latin *universitas* hints at the trope of comm-unity composed of various clues, of unity of the universe and also of the concrete place where both students and masters meet. In other words: the whole, the common, the universal, the unified, the versatile, the situated. The clues are of crucial importance as they set the path of thinking we are about to embark upon.

* "University and Thinking," *International Journal of Learning*, vol. 12, issue 2 (2006) 131–136.

University is however irreducible to the Latin trope even though the latter constitutes the core of its meaning. It is essential to refer here to Plato's Academy which was founded in 387 BC. But it is equally indispensable to take account of alternative cultural space. There is the Persian Academy of Gundishapur (founded in 271 AD) and the Al-Azhar University in Cairo (set up in 988 AD). There is also another important educational centre — Nalanda in Bilhar, India, established as early as the fifth century BC. The accurate presentation of educational universality is crucial if one wishes to illustrate the Latin idea of generality and versatility.

For the European tradition — presented here as central to the university ideology — two types of the university are of vital significance. They need to be mentioned here as they introduce a certain kind of dialogic tension into the relation of students vs scholars. The tension is detectable in the common notion of the lodges of legislators, hierarchies and university egalitarianism, and remains highly problematic. In the case of the medieval university it could be either an Italian-type corporation of students that elected a chancellor and was concerned with the proper functioning of the university and recruitment of the teaching staff (Bologna), or a French-type elitist corporation of professors in charge of the whole university (Paris).¹ These two poles represent some of the important European standards determining the range of authority and cooperation within a given university. One of the crucial issues affecting the image of the university has been the very transition to the modern type of university. It involved a project of Wilhelm von Humboldt, who in the years 1809–1810 created a modern model of the university in Berlin where the value of scholarship for its own sake were to become a stimulus to the development of thinking and

¹ Etienne Gilson, *A History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd., 1995); Georges Duby, *The Age of the Cathedrals. Art and Society 980–1420*, trans. Eleanor Leveux and Barbara Thompson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).

education. The project shows an obvious correlation with a speculative metanarrative, but at the same time a conflict with another grand narrative which portrays modernity as reliant on the French tradition of relating knowledge not only to the spirit but also to the Enlightenment emancipation of mankind.²

Duty to the reason or duty to the mankind?

These are two standards of modern mentality, but simultaneously of a modern university, that originated in Europe.

In writing about modernity we have departed from our subject, i.e. the medieval organization of the university. The first idea of a single community of masters and students gave way to a modernist organization which was actually a series of communities and actions under a common name and with common aims. We should also mention here the distinct character of new universities set up in America which were to create a novel type of an institution described by Kerr as one that “is not really private and [...] not really public.”³ It is these universities that much more often have had to grapple with the problems of duty and service, commercialism, and the question of how to work out a proper compromise between the pragmatic needs of modern society and the concern for autonomy of scholarship and research. The idea of university and its autonomy is endangered.⁴ There arises a problem of how to strike the right balance between the profitability of a given institution, its public financing and the value of independent research. This is also a question

² Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

³ Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University* (Harvard University Press, 2001), chapter “The Idea of Multiversity,” p. 1.

⁴ Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Idea of University. A Reexamination* (Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 3–10.

of an existing disproportion between the humanities and sciences with regard to their social significance.⁵ As James Duderstadt points out, the major challenge for the twenty-first-century university is developing an awareness of the conglomerate of economic, social and technological forces shaping the image of the institution.⁶ Following the global tendencies of conscious commercialization, we can observe a gradual transformation of universities into corporations with a number of technical institutions around, cooperating in business enterprises and technology transfer in all countries including those of Europe. This is a huge problem in terms of the autonomy of university and thinking. However, it is not just the differences between American, European, Asian, Australian and African universities that are at stake here. The issue concerns a certain whole which, while being heterogeneous — here we need to go back to the idea of *universitas* — manages to save the spirit of unity and versatility supposed to be autonomous and thus typical of the university.

Preoccupation with the problem of higher education and the mission of university is clearly noticeable and common nowadays. The considerations are haunted by a sense of university crisis and attempts at remedying the status quo. As an example one could cite the situation of the Old Continent and *Magna Charta Universitatum* signed in Bologna, on 18th of March of 1988 by chancellors of European universities. *Magna Charta* is a proclamation of basic principles that are binding on universities. It stresses the significance of the university as an autonomous institution amidst burgeoning social life and the importance of both research and education in supporting culture. On the one hand, university should keep up with the changes and demands of modern society; on the other, it should

⁵ Derek Bok, *University in the Marketplace. The Commercialization of Higher Education* (Princeton University Press, 2003), chapter “The Benefits and Costs of Commercialization,” pp. 99–121.

⁶ James J. Duderstadt, *A University for the 21st Century* (The University of Michigan Press, 2000).

protect the freedom of scientific research and education. Furthermore, university is both to sustain the European humanist tradition and to transcend the political and geographical borders in order to emphasize the necessity of exploring other cultures. Finally, and more concretely, it should have at its disposal effective means to achieve intended ends. The latter resolution has translated into the system of clear and universally comparable university degrees, system of credits within ECTS, undergraduate and graduate programs of study, and promotion of the European mobility and cooperation. All the aims of university education were further underlined in the Sorbonian declaration signed on 25th of May 1998, which stressed the need for the mobility of citizens and creation of new opportunities on the labor marker. In anticipation of the nearing enlargement of European Union, another Bolognian declaration passed on 19th of June 1999 tried to define the potential problems facing Europe as the “community of knowledge” which strives to meet the challenges of the new millennium.

These institutional efforts have led to certain decisions, actions and reflections on the university but they have not touched upon the issue of the very thinking that is characteristic of the university and makes it different from an academy or technical school. The potential crisis of scholarship and higher education seems to reside not so much in the social praxis as in university thinking. And it is a kind of thinking that cannot be constrained by being simply defined through a vision of exchange, competition and cooperation with others. The very mobility is no solution to all the problems of thinking and ideological attitudes that actually determine the rank of a given university and are not easily translated into any rating criteria.

One should therefore repeat the initial remark: What is the taste of thinking that is subject to university education? Does it have any taste at all?

Such “educated” thinking has great prospects but it also faces dangers associated with institutional knowledge.

The following text is an attempt at presenting briefly the most sensitive issues bound up with its existence.

System

University thinking is systematic and directed by a certain agenda; consequently, it faces the necessity of constantly working out new formulas which would erode the already existing structures and allow individuals to cross barriers. The very recognition of the necessity proves extremely difficult. It requires a gesture of “beneficial destruction” which both purges and re-constructs. The system is what guarantees the university its stability and secure existence. However, it is also a burden which must be constantly displaced so as to avoid the production of repetitive, fossilized, schematic or methodical thinking that is finally contained in a handbook. Thinking “by the book” or inherited canon is a danger to the university, which while setting standards needs to make room for enough flexibility to change and erode the system. Systematic thinking is limited in that it works to the advantage of the system but is unable to go beyond the established horizon. Shortcomings of this kind of thinking such is the necessary condition of the university existence are compensated by the freedom of interpretation and ideological attitudes. First and foremost, however, by the freedom of *Weltanschauung*.

Scholarship

University thinking is connected with scholarship treated here as a great European achievement. By scholarship we mean a systemized worldview that is socially legitimate, normalized through the application of methods and instruments and permeated by the discourse

of confidence in modern deduction, induction and countability. Above all, however, European scholarship is about the desire to explore, to discover the essence of things, to search for the Truth, to have trust in intellectual and social progress. It thus stems from a certain project of emancipation and expansion, which is tantamount to mythologization and hyperbolization. This takes place irrespective of the profound anthropological awareness which makes us humbly contrast various kinds of symbolic human activity, various objects, ways of conduct and orders of knowledge, beside which scholarship emerges as just one of many forms of activity in the world. Furthermore, as one which is legitimized only for a certain group of people who find it clear, patent and crucial. University thinking does well when it is conscious of its contingency, but also of the unique character of scholarly activity. It does well when it appreciates the spirit of scientism without overrating it, so that it is still able to take a fresh look at the artistic, religious, mythological and magical ways of perceiving the world. It seems that it is not only a sense of contingency but also of one's own creativity that reinvigorates the service in the name of scholarship. One needs to view university thinking as one of many ways of reflecting which leads to the construction of a possible world – not the only conceivable, and by no means privileged way. The recognition of artificiality, an awareness that what we create is a theoretical surrogate for intellectual experience and understanding of the world lends scientism an artistic quality. Bearing in mind that university thinking resembles artistic one we refer to the art of scholarship, art of research, art of discourse, art of education, art of tolerance, art of responsibility and art of the encounter with the Other.

The aura of the community

Such thinking has an air of communality which translates into the common concern for knowledge not always

accompanied by the concern for freedom of thinking. That is why a striving after freedom of thinking within academic space should be given top priority. It corresponds to the solidarity of social community which while giving moral support to the solemnity of actions admits difference and encourages the freedom of thinking. The aura of the university should be imbued with enthusiasm so that freedom and creativity are not outweighed by a penchant for administering and classifying as well as caution. A welcoming atmosphere is conducive to such thinking as it determines it in intellectual and moral terms.

The aura does not yield a uniform ideology.

The concern for the aura of community is the concern for a welcoming, hospitable ground – the Derridean *Différance*⁷ which is not the Same. The academic community cannot be too homogeneous, a mechanism working with monotonous efficiency. It cannot trust routine procedures which produce uniform people. The university is a place which should provide shelter to people of radically different worldviews and orientations. To put it metaphorically, within the same mental space there should be room for lifestyles and ideological attitudes as different as those of Kant – who confines himself in a fortress to create in solitude – and of Socrates – who goes out, knocks down the walls and limits of education, and is eager to confront others. There should also be place for the multifaceted attitudes of modern scholars who following the idea of mobility travel from one institution to another lecturing and teaching, and thus distance themselves from the very idea of attachment. But it is equally vital to mention the other scholars who prize allegiance to one's own *locum*. The university needs to protect variety and diversity. What it should expect from the diversity is eminence. It is necessary to protect all the weirdness, alternative worldviews, petty ideas and controversial actions in the name of greatness that must

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

be saved for the sake of community. The greatness works both for the societal ethic and for the cognitively gifted community which is concerned about scholarly achievement irrespective of the ways it is brought about. The aura of the university cannot overwhelm or be a hindrance. It should give a boost and provide assistance to those searching for their identities, but it cannot set intellectual principles. It should rather act as light, dispersed matter.

Archive and the correctness of knowledge

It is not good when the effort of university thinking gets reduced to memorizing a compendium of facts and ideas, when it resembles an archive which only accumulates and at most processes information. That thinking embedded in the tradition and subordinated to the narrative of the history of ideas is both advantageous and formative. It is well-known that the continued existence of an institution is part of its strength, while a scholastic necessity of giving an account of the predecessors' achievements is also widely accepted. However, laying too much emphasis on the idea of the edifice of accumulated knowledge is burdensome and impedes creativity. While it is possible to produce something novel, the very necessity of reproducing the past, of documenting and classifying what is officially accepted, deprives the individual of the fresh perspective which should be part of the university potential. To learn and to inculcate in others the excessive correctness of thinking is to breed attachment to "lingering" knowledge and to develop a sense of duty to ill-conceived authority.

Authority

This is another issue the university has to tackle. Authority is a guarantee of hierarchy and legitimization

of knowledge, but it is simultaneously a static and limiting factor. If well-conceived, authority furthers creation, entails variety, wisely controls the thinking of others, does not force them to follow established procedures, allows freedom of choice, and finally welcomes their refusal to slavishly obey the master. True authority derives strength and joy from the students' open-mindedness, from their gesture of subversive renewal. It encourages action. As Nietzsche would say – it tempts.⁸ It infects people with a type of thinking and ideological attitude. Intellectual and moral authority does not care about submissive postures, it emanates charisma. There is also a kind of harmful, pretentious authority which usurps the right of precedence due to its assigned rank. It demands recognition and subservience while identifying with its social role. It is a form that imposes obligations in the name of hierarchy, that decrees a certain order of thinking and subservient behaviour. However, it does not instill an impulse to create which is able to terrify. It does not constitute a responsible individual. All it does is involve in an institutional order and manipulate while playing down moral courage.

Established knowledge, nomadic thought

The university cannot play down the courage of those who wish to present their own points of view even if politically incorrect or considered heresies in relation to official truths of science defined by Kuhn as one that works to confirm the established paradigm.⁹ Confidence in what is acquired, revised, learned and confirmed as an accepted way of verifying or falsifying knowledge cannot become the major concern in our investigations. The solidarity of

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999).

⁹ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

academic community resides in other regions than that of observing procedures of recognition, admittance, inclusion or exclusion. The very idea of receiving a university degree and cultivating a traditional, feudal order is an important European legacy since it brings back the memory of a strong continent, the Europe of cathedrals. But it is meaningful inasmuch as it proves to be a form that does not limit and restrict but gives rise to thinking and open-mindedness, keeps searching, at times subverts existing orders and is responsible rather than fearful. A strong university cultivates the system without allowing it to petrify. The university cannot be a community that lacks dynamism, which, however, does not mean a frantic scramble, a corporate sequence of momentary meetings, of international involvements which while expanding the *curriculum vitae* do not expand thinking. A dynamic community presupposes economic stability, but at the most crucial level it involves the possibility of creating such mental space that has soft and flexible procedures of including and recognizing something as momentous, of absorbing the new, of subsuming and reconstructing itself. The production of open-minded attitudes is about bridging the gap between the established and nomadic, “uprooted” forms of knowledge.

Humility and nonchalance

Paradoxically, in the world of universities characterized by stability, evidence, verifiability, one’s thinking should be marked with nonchalance. Despite a sense of humility instilled by the university, what supplements best education and research is a but of daring necessary to harbour subversive thoughts. Confidence in dispersal, in revolt against the recognized and accepted is a guarantee of continued existence of the university – no less. It reinvigorates, revives and follows the other while managing to sustain its identity. This is hospitality of the place, the

university's *genius loci*. It is the guarding spirit of the place that makes us trust nonchalance so that forging, cultivating, fostering, rapid growth, transplantation and final separation of thoughts could be both a stimulus to constant feverish activity and a guarantee of dignified calm. Nonchalance in the space of the university does not indicate lack of dignity. It is a luxury that only intellectually potent academic centers can afford.

Interdisciplinarity

It is a great challenge and also problem to the university. Interdisciplinarity is not just about the disciplinary or disciplined separation of certain areas of knowledge, methodologies, and metalanguages. It does not boil down to an attempt at making everything within one structure work for the sake of unity, so that constituent parts would add up. There is nothing like the total sum of knowledge about the human being, while the confidence in connecting what we know and thus arriving at the semblance of unity has been steadily eroded over time.

Interdisciplinarity is concerned with transplanting and mediating between various ways of thinking, between various languages of self-presentation. It is about overcoming one's own narcissism which plagues each form of creativity, especially within the university. It provides us with the means of communication not only within one discipline, which just seeks to apply other methods and refers to related disciplines in order to better handle or fully interpret the subject of its investigation. What is needed is some kind of alternative space within the university discourse, one which stems from the very idea of the university. The space is localized somehow beyond (*meta*) particular disciplines, but it is at the same time inside, since it lies at the very heart of university thinking. The space concerns and embraces all the humanities as it deliberates in general on the crucial aspects of human existence in the

world. This is a kind of perspectivism which absorbs and wants to express despite differences and barriers between academic languages. What it trusts is experience. One of the discursively mediating disciplines that may substantially contribute to the making of such intermediary space is undoubtedly anthropology and philosophy of culture.

The garden of university thinking

The kind of thinking which is grafted, cultivated, tended, gathered (all the life-giving metaphors are used here deliberately) must be embedded in what belongs to culture, what is one's own. The garden of university thinking is always one's own garden. It is small – in the positive sense. It cannot deny its own character, its own rhythm and type of thinking. It cannot be unrelated to the motherland, its people and objects. Academic thinking must be identical with the place it originates from. But it also needs to be crosscultural, translatable, ready to confront the others. Furthermore, what serves as a context must not hamper thinking in universal terms and commitments this entails. The kind of thinking must be general, universal, comprehensive, it must simply belong to the university. The aim is to notice and appreciate the small, minute and local, applying theories that universalize without erasing the contextual, instead of erecting a monstrous edifice of universal abstractions that may stifle it.

Knowledge, wisdom, vitality

University thinking faces a special task of acquiring a combination of knowledge, ability of efficient ordering, and trust in wisdom. How to furnish knowledge with wisdom? This is a challenge that the university is best equipped to meet as an institution spanning different methodological

orders, demanding versatility, transcending the usual role of intelligence and knowledge which deal with wisdom only discursively. It is not just a place to learn one's profession, but one that requires enlightenment, open-mindedness and responsibility. The concern for knowledge furnished with wisdom requires also another complement. It calls for vitality whose significance was earlier stressed by José Ortega y Gasset¹⁰ when he wrote about the need for linking rationalism with philosophy of everyday life, as well as ideological attitudes, both individual and communal. Vitality of thinking means its rapid growth, richness, unrestricted flow, fluency, and dynamism. It is about its beneficial renewal. What it also requires is the attention of the poet regarded by Nietzsche as superior to the scholar, because the latter is able to kill a flying bird with its ruthless inspecting eye.¹¹ The poet, concerned about his or her intimacy with being and awareness of the seductive power of language, rejects cramped space which becomes prison and invites insignificant thoughts. Therefore, university thinking should protect itself against "lingering" knowledge and be armed with lyricism to adequately control the production of the discourse on the human being. And it is to the consideration of the human being that each academic discourse can be reduced, as each discipline formulates its views and judgments through the prism of the human and related categories. The university is in need of poets, thinkers-seducers who create the space for thinking as well as the space of university sensitivity, who infect but do not demand slavish obedience.

It must be a kind of thinking which provides a challenge, which gives an expected boost of the creativity of individuals and of community.

¹⁰ José Ortega y Gasset, *What is Philosophy?* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1960), pp. 47–70.

¹¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

Taste

Such is the taste of thinking whose task is to transfigure, to bridge, to cultivate and not to suppress passion. It must confide in the idea of education equipped with a system. What it needs to transform is only those commonsensical epistemologies that do not admit difference, do not allow one to focus on suspicious issues and repudiate the very possibility of pondering on the supposedly obvious, socially established categories. University thinking subverts the discourse of unquestionable common sense by inviting other discourses. But it also trusts simplicity and basic feelings. Sometimes after following the path of universal doubt, as it was in the case of Descartes, it goes back to the idea of everyday reality which imposes a natural and sensible order on the world.¹² But this is another kind of simplicity and common sense, one that has accepted its own destruction through the mechanism of self-negation. This is openness. This is the taste of institutionalization which due to the system has to grapple with the dangers of being an institution, which cannot be merely a school, an institute, a research centre, an association, a corporation, but needs to have a distinct quality. A quality that through its ideological stance yields a certain educational profile. A quality that once again has its taste and poses a challenge.

So in the end the thought which is institutionalized and moulded by the university may have its own taste.

¹² René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999).

Maria Popczyk

The Secrets of the House Ur*

Analysing the concept of deception it seems vital to indicate in the first place its peculiar function within the realms of art which, it might be said, distinguishes art from the variety of human cultural activities. It predominantly concerns the pure art, which is neither utilitarian nor is it a test of artist's creative skills. In case of fine art misleading is the element of the game which demands higher skills from a participant. Gorgias points out that art deludes a conscious person, so according to him the one who misleads is fairer than the one who does not as well as the one who agrees to be misled is wiser than the one who does not.¹ There is a question, however, whether it is better to deceive or to be deceived. Since Gorgias values the deception in art so high, it seems that we deal with an issue much more serious than an innocent game. It requires the participant's wisdom which allows him or her to take the risk and solve its principles.

One of the most familiar ways of misleading is the deception of the senses. It is interesting that the ancient found the proof of the convincing power of the optic illusion in the behaviour of the animals bereft of reason, which were not able to see through the nature of deception.

* The chapter first published as: "The Secrets of the House Ur," *Outis Deception*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Majkut (San Diego: Publication of the Society for Phenomenology and Media, 2004), pp. 73–78.

¹ Plutarch, *De glor. Ath.* 5, 348 c; frg. B 23 Diels.

Erich Gombrich – following Gorgias – claims that the magic of performance does not lie in the resemblance of the picture and its object but rather in the suggestion that the presented possesses the causative power. What is significant here, however, is not the animation, such as in the Pygmalion myth, which is determined by the art of seducing and the power of desire, but the artist's advantage over a spectator who will regard the lifeless object as real. At first, we are disoriented and it takes time before we realize that the object, picture or view which seemed to be the element of the reality does not follow the rules of sight and only then we are able to recognize the duality of the world: the illusion and reality. The exposure of the deception needs time; it is a process of interpretation accompanied with the strong emotional reaction. However, when we learn how our senses were misled, we are willing to be deceived again so as to consciously experience the incongruity in the world of phenomena. The deception of the senses assumes that the clear distinction can be drawn between the world where the rules and references are relatively stable and the illusion which contradicts them.

Contemporary variations of illusionism are holograms of the spatial objects displayed in the specially designed exhibition halls. What we are interested in, however, are the phenomena which can be seen on the streets and squares of big cities. A person who travels between two buildings in Miami Beach can see the hotel overlooking the sea in the background (Richard Hass, Miami Beach, USA, 1985). Seen from a car the impression of the depth is so realistic that only the close inspection lets us distinguish the gigantic painting from the real architecture. The tricks with perspective in architecture and painting, which have been known since the antiquity, are meant to bewilder us; they go contrary to our perceptive habits so as to introduce the sense of disorientation. And although in time we will realize that our senses have been deluded, it is the power of the experience itself which is fundamental in this case. In 1999, the sculptures resembling ordinary passersbys were

set up on the squares and streets of Berlin. The silhouette of a man crouching to take a photograph of the charming passage on the Savigny Square (Fig. 11), the fiddler with the open case full of bills and coins on Unter den Linden. At the first glance the lifeless figures do not stand out from its surroundings, but after a while they arrest the attention of a perceptive observer. A passerby who realizes that the figure inscribed in the cityscape is a sculpture is



Fig. 11. A photographer on Savigny Square, Berlin 1999
(photo by Maria Popczyk)

surprised and amazed how easily it blends with the urban environment. Encouraged by its authenticity we join the game of real/fictional and toss a coin into the fiddler's case or the box at the photographer's feet.

This kind of deception stirs the spectator's imagination and skillfully blurs the borders between the phenomena not only to shock but also to provoke action. It is characteristic of the art which encourages us to consciously join the game and participate in illusion. It also proves that the important element of the deception is exhibition. Especially when a work is installed in the city area where the spatial distance introduced by the gallery hall is removed.

Another type of deception concerns the soul. The artist introduces us into a fictional deceptive world and makes us feel as if we were its participants. The three-dimensional film which lets us experience the ride on the Ferris wheel is a relatively innocent even if exciting experience. However, there are situations in which the spectators' involvement results in the consequences that are more serious and triggers them to act in a way shocking even for themselves. Opening to the charm of theatrical fiction unexpectedly enables the audience to discover their own desires and fears. Shakespeare's Hamlet in his soliloquy about the magic of art demonstrates its enormous influence on the spectator's soul. The actor's performance of a crime makes the spectator confess his own crimes in public.² According to Gorgias, art deludes imagination and is capable of misleading the soul: it captivates it, seduces and alters it with its charm. Only the one who will trust art and absorb its contents can undergo the alteration. Only when we agree to be led by appearances will we find in ourselves something we have never noticed before. In this case the art of deception has a cognitive character.

² – I have heard

That guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have, by the very cunning of that presently
They have proclaim'd their malefactions.

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*
(London and New York: Methuen, 1982), p.272

A certain variation of the deception of the soul is when the spectator goes through the profound and moving experiences but without the satisfaction of being altered, as he or she can recognize neither the purpose nor the principles of the deception. What we deal with here is neither optical illusion nor the expression of response. Spectators start to recognize familiar issues and situations in a world of fiction but their inability to solve the problems presented makes them face the mystery. At this point it seems worthwhile to have a closer look at the works of Gregor Schneider. Schneider constantly rebuilds his family home in Rheydt,



Fig. 12. *Totes Haus ur*, Rheydt 1989–1993 (after: Gregor Schneider, *Totes Haus ur*, La Biennale di Venezia 2001, ed. Udo Kittelman (Bonn: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001), p. 7)

which he shares with his parents and brother (*House ur*). The fragments of the house carefully reconstructed are presented on the number of exhibitions. The considerable part of the house ur interior were reassembled at the Biennale di Venezia (Venice, 2001, *Dead House ur*, Fig. 12). Each visitor enters alone and only after the previous person has left the pavilion so that there are no more than five people inside. Opening the door immediately transports us into the interior of a house with the flight of stairs leading upward and the door in the hallway.

The innocent trick: blurring the border between an exhibition pavilion and an installation throws the visitor into the intimacy of the artist's home. Schneider takes an advantage of the formal and anachronistic mode of exhibition in separate national pavilions in order to make us experience the abolition of borders between art and the surrounding: the moment we enter the building, we find ourselves in its typical scenery. And although there is a sharp distinction between the interior and the walls of the pavilion, both of them are related to each other and form the entity associated with the home. By this simple trick the artist with no interference in the structure of the pavilion makes the visitor participate and share in the secrets hidden in the sphere of a dead house, the dead house of the artist.

Following the route of their choice, walking through the succession of rooms visitors are impressed by the places they encounter. Forced to open the doors, to climb the stairs and going downstairs they encounter the traces: the arrangements of furniture, tunnel-like passages with low ceilings, bright or dim light. This movement makes the places visited arrange into the unclear and disturbing history of the house. The visitor forgets about the others: the sounds they make only intensify the growing anxiety. Unexpectedly we are introduced into the sphere of events whose meaning cannot be determined as they are only suggested: the descent into the dark cellar, the mattress torn in half in the middle of the room or the bathtub next to the bed in the quasi-bedroom (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13. *Liebeslaube*, Rheydt 1995–1996 (after: Gregor Schneider, *Totes Haus ur*, La Biennale di Venezia 2001, ed. Udo Kittelman (Bonn: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001, p. 59)

These pictures stir the memory, evoke the forgotten emotions which are usually associated with the atmosphere of the kitchen, the cellar, and the bedroom. The experiences impose the questions about the house inhabitants and the supposed events which happened there. The visitor is truly deceived as leaving the house he or she has no solution, no answer. The secrets of the house cannot be solved and the necessity of accepting this fact results in a sense of insufficiency, leaves the participant in the state of the cognitive discomfort.

Thus we reach the issue of the exhibition of the artist's house, which certainly is the unusual one. Imbued with the extreme intensity of being, it retains the traces of the person and the creator; it is a testimony of the dramatic dialogue between the artist and the personae of his or her imagination. The houses of such artists as Walter Scott, Pablo Picasso or Henry Moore, which are open to public, are places where the familiar works were born. They constitute the environments of creativity, the areas *in-between* the person and his or her creation. The visits to such houses allow us to compare and confront the image of the artist we know from his or her works and biography with the interior of the house. It is also known that such writers as Victor Hugo or Honoré de Balzac would create their own public image and make their tastes visible in the sophisticated way their houses were furnished. Others only realized their ideas of the beautiful and perfect interior in texts, like Edgar Allan Poe in his *Philosophy of Furniture*. In each case, however, it is easy to draw the border between the artists' house and their works, at least on the spatial level. The house can give us plenty of information about the author's personality and put some light in his or her works, as the theoreticians with the psychoanalytical approach claim, nevertheless it is the separate tangible world which cannot be directly identified with the artist's psyche and personality. Such houses-museums, the places where the objects and works froze in the static numbness cannot give rise to strong emotions. Schneider's house is not a complete and finished work. On the contrary, it is an inhabited work of art under construction.

The process of building a house is completely different. Carl Gustaw Jung considered the building of the house in Bollingen as the integral part of the long-lasting process of achieving maturity and identity. The work on the house was imposed by the strong self-conscious impulse which urged him to build the second floor as well as the tower.³

³ *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and edited by Jolande Jacobi (New York and London: Panteon, 1962), pp. 223–237.

The house under construction turned out to be the sphere where the process of the self integration and the extension of the encounter with the ancestors materialized. The ancestors' names and pictures engraved on the wall boards added new dimensions to the house they peopled. Jung reconstructed his link with the past, with the generations of his close ancestors. At the same time he erased the sense of uprooting so characteristic of the contemporary people dissatisfied with the culture they happen to inhabit and he released himself from the civilizational pressure to head towards the new. Jung's house proved to be the medium of the universe which can be rebuilt. From this perspective he looked at life which manifested itself in its entire greatness which becomes and passes. Thus building and rebuilding the house was the process of integration of various elements of the psyche which emerged following its own internal dynamics. In contrast, Schneider turns building into the endless process of lasting in disintegration and shows life as infinite unsettlement. Whatever alterations are made there is no advance as the changes direct neither toward the past nor toward the future. His stance contradicts both Jung's hope of building the universe and Gaston Bachelard's faith in possible retrieval of the original idea of the house as the safe shelter. According to Bachelard, dreaming makes the original intimacy of home capable of restoring continuity to a human being and protecting us from the pressure of randomness of the existence. Home prevents a human from getting dispersed. The pictures of home are arranged according to the logic of dream and emotion. They evoke the memories of the dark and disturbing cellar and the mysteries of the attic, at the same time, however, they always lead us to the experience of the home as the cradle, the protective place of our birth.⁴

The issue of the crisis of getting settled at home brings to mind Martin Heidegger, for whom art as well as the artist's

⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetry of space* (Toronto: Beacon Press, 1969).

existence allows the truth (*aletheia*) to happen.⁵ The artist is the one who experiences being in the womb of the ontological difference, who constantly puts his life at danger and who is rather an exile than a settler, but this enables a work of art to reveal the access to the truth. Schneider challenges the conviction that art opens the sphere of the truth. Instead he proposes the existence based on the straying between short-lasting temporary dwellings. A human appears as a homeless creature. Feeling at home is an illusion which is shown through the impossibility of building the house. The house under construction demonstrates the nomadic character of the human condition and human existence. Schneider demystifies the idea of the safe dwelling; his work cannot be placed in any familiar context of order. The artist deceives the spectator who is introduced into the situation requiring motory, emotional and intellectual activity but denied a solution. Deprived of the conclusion or explanation the spectator is left in suspension. The sense of being deceived is the consequence of the fact that the nature of life cannot be made accessible to general public. The act of exhibition is the act of killing one's own creation. In case of the work under construction, each transfer of the elements from the artist's original family home involves cloning one of its part or even the whole house. Only the House ur in Rheydt is a work of art. The house exhibited is the dead one because it is cut off from the living organism. Schneider, however, makes efforts to display its corpse knowing at the same time that according to his own words "Exhibiting is always a killing off the works."⁶ He does not criticize the act of exhibiting but makes a persuasive statement to make us realize what it really means for a work of art: exhibiting and

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950); see William J. Richardson, "Working, Dwelling, Thinking," in *Heidegger. Through Phenomenology to Thought*, prefaced by Martin Heidegger (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), pp. 583–588.

⁶ Udo Kittelmann, *Haus ur, Rheydt versus Totes Haus ur*, Venice, in *Gregor Schneider, Totes Haus ur*, La Biennale di Venezia 2001 (Bonn: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001), p. 17.

watching destroy the vitality of a work which is cut from the real life. The only advantages of the exposition of the dead house are that it is a work in the realms of the institution, in the realms of the prepared and neutral gallery halls. The warmth of home, the pulse of life when exhibited turn into the illegible empty traces.

In the traditional sense, following Gorgias, deception is an important element which belongs to art as a distinctly human domain linking experience and cognition. In the first place art shows the borders of sensory cognition, then it leads the spectator to the self-knowledge or provokes action. The situation when spectators overcome with shock or excitement temporarily lose control over their senses or emotions can ultimately be embraced by cognition, even though it remains beyond the realm of discourse. In aesthetics this idea can be found in Aristotelian theory of tragedy as well as in the category of sublime described by Edmund Burke which was reinterpreted by Immanuel Kant who however, did not alter its basic sense: the experience of negative pleasure indicates the ideas of reason.⁷

As far as modern art is concerned, the example of which we find in the works by Schneider as well as Bill Viola, Jannis Kounellis or Mark Wallinger, deception is a unique feature of art which is beyond the control of general principles. The deluded spectators are left to their own emotions and speculations. Schneider provoking the spectators' experience gives them no explanatory context which places him in the privileged position: he is the one who misleads and has the access to the inexpressible. He admits the spectator to the intimacy of his house but at the same time indicates that the artist's authentic existence cannot be presented. Thus the communicative function of deception is challenged.

⁷ The relation between deception and sublime needs a more thorough analysis, especially taking into consideration the fact that Lyotard applies the term sublime to the avant-garde art freely using deception.

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Aleksandra Kunce, Maria Popczyk

Into the Noise. Dyskursy antropologiczne i estetyczne w sferze publicznej

Streszczenie

Into the Noise... to zbiór esejów autorstwa Aleksandry Kunce i Marii Popczyk. Są one poprzedzone wstępem napisanym przez Marię Korusiewicz, który porusza problematykę estetyki codzienności, stanowiącej przeciwwagę dla dyskursów instytucjonalnych.

Rozważania autorek są efektem antropologicznych i estetycznych eksploracji przestrzeni publicznej. Autorki analizują dyskursy, które nadają kształt wspólnotom przestrzennym. W centrum uwagi znalazły się problemy opisu antropologii punktów, perspektyw antropologii integralnej, instytucji uniwersytetu, tożsamości europejskiej, figur zdziwienia i humanistyki, a także zakorzenienia epistemologicznego. Kluczowe są rozważania estetyczne dotyczące miejsca dzieła sztuki w przestrzeniach publicznych miast (na przykładzie Berlina) oraz zorganizowanych instytucjonalnie wystawach muzealnych.

Autorki analizują działania artystyczne będące rodzajem dialogu z zasadami organizacji przestrzeni publicznej. Estetyka jest tu pojmowana jako dziedzina krytyczna nawiązująca do osiągnięć nowej muzeologii i kultury wizualnej, a nie jako filozofia sztuki. Perspektywa antropologiczna i estetyczna uzupełniają się, oświeclając z odmiennych punktów widzenia debaty toczone na temat przestrzeni publicznej.

Aleksandra Kunce, Maria Popczyk

Into the Noise. Anthropologische und ästhetische Diskurse im öffentlichen Raum

Zusammenfassung

Into the Noise... ist eine Sammlung von Essays, die von Aleksandra Kunce und Maria Popczyk veröffentlicht und von Maria Korusiewicz eingeleitet wurde. Das Buch hat zum Thema die Ästhetik der Alltäglichkeit als eines Ausgleichs für institutionelle Diskurse.

Das Buch ist das Ergebnis der anthropologischen und ästhetischen Erforschung des öffentlichen Raumes. Die Verfasserinnen analysieren die den räumlichen Gemeinschaften Gestalt gebenden Diskurse und die damit verbundenen Probleme mit der Darstellung von: der Anthropologie der Punkte, Perspektiven der integralen Anthropologie, der Institution – Universität, der europäischen Identität, den Figuren: Verwunderung und Geisteswissenschaft und epistemologischer Verwurzelung. Die wichtigsten ästhetischen Betrachtungen betreffen die Stelle des Kunstwerkes im öffentlichen Raum der Städte (am Beispiel Berlins) und auf den von den Museen veranstalteten Ausstellungen.

Die Verfasserinnen untersuchen die künstlerische Tätigkeit als eine Art Dialog mit den Regeln nach denen der öffentliche Raum organisiert wird. Ästhetik erscheint hier als ein sich auf die Errungenschaften der neuen Museologie und der virtuellen Kultur beziehender Kritikbereich und nicht als Kunstphilosophie. Anthropologische und ästhetische Betrachtungsweise ergänzen sich und beleuchten aus verschiedenem Blickwinkel die Diskussionen über den öffentlichen Raum.

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ul. Jacewska 89, 88-100 Inowrocław



Aleksandra Kunce Professor, PhD

Associate Professor at the University of Silesia, Katowice
and the author of the following books:

Tożsamość i Postmodernizm (Identity and Postmodernism),
Elipsa, Warszawa 2003;

Myśleć Śląsk (Thinking Silesia) co-authored with Zbigniew Kadłubek,
Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2007;

Antropologia punktów. Rozważania przy tekstach Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego
(*The Anthropology of Points. Deliberations on texts by Ryszard Kapuściński*),
Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2008.

Aleksandra Kunce is a member of the Common Ground,
the International Cultural Research Network
and the Polish Society of Cultural Studies.

She is the editor-in-chef of the journal *Anthropos?*

(<http://www.anthropos.us.edu.pl>).

Her main interests are anthropology and the philosophy of culture.



Maria Popczyk PhD in Philosophy

An Assistant Professor in the Department of Cultural Studies
at the University of Silesia, an aesthetician and art theoretician.

Her work focuses on the aesthetics of museum exhibition,
the aesthetics of nature and the aesthetic aspects of emotions.

She is the author of a book *Estetyczne przestrzenie ekspozycji muzealnych. Atreafakty przyrody i dzieła sztuki (The Aesthetic Spaces of Museum Exhibition. Natural Specimens and Works of Art)*, Kraków 2008.

She is also the editor of multi-author publications,
most recently *Przemysleć przyrodę (Rethinking Nature)*
published by *Kultura Współczesna* 2011 (1).