Title: Research approach to post-industrial places : introduction

Author: Aleksandra Kunce

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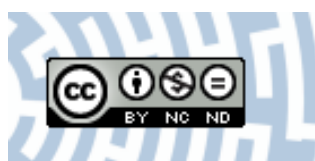
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Research Approach to Post-Industrial Places. Introduction

The project of the National Programme of the Development of Humanities: "Development" 2.b entitled *Post-industrial Places as the Subject of Transdisciplinary Studies. From Design to Rootedness* stems from the need to develop a transdisciplinary research path in order to radically complement and transform the existing understanding of post-industrial space design with a complex analysis of philosophy and anthropology of a place. The foundation we base on is cultural studies which already, as Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska indicates, constitute a particular trans-discipline within the humanities.[1] Cultural studies still remain *fröhliche Wissenschaft*, to use Clifford Geertz's term designating anthropology.[2] However, it is important for us to turn the cultural studies discourse into the direction of both philosophy and anthropology of

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[1] See: A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, 'Granice współczesności granicami „-znawstwa"? Kilka uwag o miejscach skrzyżowania badań kulturoznawczych z badaniami historyków,' in: *Kulturo-znawstwo: dyscyplina bez dyscypliny?*, eds. W.J. Burszta, M. Januszkiewicz, Warszawa: Academica 2010.

[2] C. Geertz, 'Pożytki z różnorodności,' in: idem: *Zastane światło. Antropologiczne refleksje na tematy filozoficzne,* trans. Z. Pucek, Kraków: UNIVERSITAS 2003, p. 89.

a place as well as further, towards the field of fine arts and creative activities of designers and cultural practitioners. Although such a perspective combines previous studies carried out in many fields, it does transgress them. The transition from the concept of design as a purely artistic and social intervention in post-industrial space to design understood as penetration into a complex cultural interpretation of a place – a region, identity of a place, axiological and metaphysical foundations of a community, cultural experience – is crucial for us. Searching for a place, rootedness and home in post-industrial space design requires combining cultural orders of thought and experience – to create a research path which would be sensitive to time and place, cultural and historical depth. Revealing the potential of post-industrial past also became a call for responsible interference in a place.

The heritage of post-industrial society could be easily located in terms of research in the perspective of sociology, art studies, scientific information, history of ideas, media studies, design practice or economics. In scientific and social imagination post-industrial space seems to exist in the field of theory and creative practice slightly "beyond culture" – without the characteristic of the identity of a place and rootedness in the idea of home. Inherited "non-place," to use the term introduced by Marc Augé,[3] becomes revived by post-industrial design, however without a significant reference to a culture or place. Such a place, reduced to the functionality (as, for example, lofts) of an unrooted sign and design, is an experimental and socially useful sphere "without a place." We want to look at the post-industrial in a perspective of a place in order to reintroduce the concern for the experience of a cultural place into the experimental space. Therefore, we consider it reasonable to develop a transdisciplinary research path which would combine design with the idea of being rooted in a cultural place – the idea which is broader and deeper than a mere (post-)industrial characteristic. The combination of

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[3]   See: M. Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, London-New York: Verso 2008.

the concepts of rootedness and design in order to extract a new quality is related to understanding the humanities as a specific perspective which discerns benefits resulting from the bond between design and rootedness. Every scientific, cultural or artistic activity is always a moral act which evokes strengthening or devastation of a place. We believe that the proposed research perspective can provide a fair view which might be a methodological basis for understanding artistic practices shaping the space of Polish and European cities. It is crucial in the context of the discussion about the development of Polish cities and the usage of post-industrial design as well as creative industries and innovation.

Unrootedness, decontextualization constitutes a basic element of modernity, as Anthony Giddens suggests, it is a constant process, it refers to places and people.[4] Once unrooted, places remain desolate areas surrounded by fears and a sense of cultural injury. The unrooted, however, opens up to re-settlement. A specific situation occurs in the case of post-industrial places which either become objects for other purposes – galleries, shopping centres – or are transformed into museums; or they become tangible emptiness, a sign of the lack of life. In the latter case, lost places open up to the fascination of abandoned space and aesthetics of negligence by documenting the emptiness. In numerous cases adaptation of post-industrial places does not occur with respect to the existing cultural context, experience of people related to them, it becomes only an element of a show of a designer's work which is focused on a visual effect – cold space, deprived of emotional and cultural content. It is crucial to answer the question how architecture, artistic practice and social activities affect creation of rooted places in degraded areas, which can certainly be theoretically inspired by Richard

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[4]   A. Giddens, *Konsekwencje nowoczesności*, trans. E. Klekot, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 2008; A. Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. „Ja" i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności*, trans. A. Szulżycka, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 2001.

Shusterman's concepts applied to the study of body and place,[5] Juhani Pallasmaa's ones referring to architecture and image,[6] and Ewa Rewers' ideas referring to urban studies focusing on the relations between city and art.[7] However, we want to take the research questions and the respective answers even further, to the field of anthropology and the philosophy of place. Do creative activities only revive the empty and the abandoned by means of design, while being only an incentive to build one's own close relationship with a place? Or do they lead deeper to a cultural experience which opens up to rootedness stronger than everyday practice and participation in the community of images? The answers to these questions are necessary to make a further attempt to develop a transdisciplinary research path which would bind design with the idea of rootedness in a place. We believe that a man is not only Hans Belting's "place of images."[8] Opening up to a deep experience of a place provides a different perspective also on the problem of designing post-industrial places.

It is not only about an attempt to mechanically transfer humanistic concepts to a new, yet undeveloped academically, field of design practitioners; it is not only about broadening conceptual vocabulary of the humanities with notions, definitions and categories characteristic of design creators and cultural practitioners. Renewal of the humanistic glossary stems from a dialogue and transformation of thinking. It is design aware of cultural gravity which differentiates post-industrial space. Design achievements, unless they refer to the cultural power of a region, become only an effective and functional spatial design in

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[5]   See: R. Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body. Essays in Somaesthetics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012.

[6]   See: J. Pallasmaa, 'Geometry of Feeling,' in: *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture. An Anthology of Architectural Theory*, New York 1996.

[7]   See: E. Rewers, *Miasto – twórczość. Wykłady krakowskie*, Kraków: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych im. J. Matejki w Krakowie 2010.

[8]   H. Belting, *Antropologia obrazu. Szkice do nauki o obrazie*, trans. M. Bryl, Kraków: UNIVERSITAS 2007, p. 70.

a story, located in a similar trend of experimentation. Similarly, if one analyzed spatial design only due to a comparable history of industry, it would be equally difficult to reveal cultural work of a place. The concept of design needs the concept of a place which brings us to the gravity of identity, community of fate and experience.

Undeniably, "old topographies" – as Dariusz Czaja indicates – have been relocated and destabilized.[9] When we look at the story which comments but also produces the world, we will notice the movement of a place shift: Marca Augé' non-place, Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, Stijn Reijnders' *lieux d'imagination*, Michel Foucault's heterotopias.[10] It is complemented by a list of displacements: dystopia, utopia, eutopia, etc. We repose a question about components of identity, about the central and the peripheral, the established and the spontaneous, the old and the new, the present and the virtual. However, our stories about "loosening a place" are not able to cover its meanings. Yet, they can effectively cover the philosophy of locating oneself. We want to look at the post-industrial in the perspective of a place in order to reintroduce the concern for the experience of a cultural place into the experimental space.

Post-industrial heritage remains both historical and current, and the effect of its impact will probably be felt for a long time in the history of societies. It is not a marginal phenomenon, quite the contrary – it is of huge importance; it is a global and original phenomenon for national and, at the same time, regional cultures, which constitutes one of the foundations of the contemporaneity, a phenomenon whose value is undeniable. We care for the interpretative layer, based on searching for the depth of thinking about settlement, which leads to unveiling

[9]   D. Czaja, 'Nie-miejsca. Przybliżenia, rewizje,' in: *Inne przestrzenie, inne miejsca. Mapy i terytoria*, ed. D. Czaja, Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne 2013, p. 8.

[10] See: M. Augé, *Non-places*, op. cit.; M. Foucault, 'O innych przestrzeniach. Heterotopie,' trans. M. Żakowski, *Kultura Popularna*, no 2, 2006; S. Reijnders, *Places of the Imagination: Media, Tourism, Culture*, Farnham–Surrey: Ashate 2011; P. Nora, *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de mémoire*, vol. 1–4, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2006–2011.

of similarities and differences recurring in the orders of thinking and experiencing post-industrial areas. Tracing affinities demonstrates the specificity of the fate of communities actualized by the history of cultural territories and the development of industry, but it also shows separateness of designing life practices, emotions and memories in the newly built "designed" post-industrial places. It is of utmost importance for creation of the context for Polish spatial practices which require the anthropological view on the relation: place – cultural experience; community – individual; place – body; memory – *novum*; rootedness – emptiness; settled – designed.

Examination of post-industrial places in the space of Polish, and more generally European, cities brings us to the question whether the design phenomena and trends result from global mechanisms of re-working post-industrial areas or whether they are an original concept inscribed in the specificity of regional or national solutions, patterns of thinking, visions of a territory, the sense of bond with time and place. A sense of distinctness and individuality of a community enables a separate view of relations between design and a place. Cultural domestication of post-industrial places, not reducing them only to a designer's show or a unifying fashion for reviving abandoned places, becomes particularly important in Poland nowadays. Because the moment of social transformation is uniquely palpable in Polish culture and society in terms of both a political and economic change, and changes in life practices. Culture in Poland – existing in the layers of memory narratives, constantly marked by changes, including the phase of transition from an industrial to an information society which is actually still coping with this moment of its history – faces developing original projects of post-industrial places. Studying a post-industrial place in the context of rootedness allows to notice the importance of creating bonds between theoreticians and cultural practitioners and artists, it also allows to acknowledge as absolutely necessary responsible design of creative activities respecting an anthropological specificity of a place.

Shifting the emphasis from industrial to information society is an issue felt not only in science but also in politics and social awareness. Because of a complex history of our country, the phenomena which were elaborated on and analyzed a long time ago in the Western culture, are still in the phase of development in Poland. One of such phenomena is post-industrialism, which still lacks a satisfactory perspective that would significantly contribute to the development of the humanities not only in Poland but also abroad. The proposed perspective constitutes not only an attempt of a new elaboration of the phenomena which is extremely important for our culture but it is also a discussion of the cooperation between the humanities and other disciplines and various types of non-academic activities. Today, in the moment when the humanities are often a depreciated discipline, there is a need to strengthen their position, develop new methods which would be applicable to further research, and this is one of the most important tasks for the development of the humanities. An important element of the humanities is an attempt to answer questions related to a man's place in the post-industrial reality, help in defining identity and conscious perception of phenomena surrounding the man's place in this reality. It seems that post-industrialism constitutes a significant issue in searching for the answer to the above mentioned questions for Polish society for whom post-industrialism still offers more questions and doubts than solutions. The currentness of undertaking this issue in Poland results from the discussions about post-industrial heritage, is an attempt to develop a transdisciplinary research path which would reveal the significance of thinking about a place in the context of post-industrial projects of space planning. It is thus a rejection of an abstract design thought which is unrooted in a cultural place, focusing on experimentation and imposing a concept on post-industrial areas. Reflection on post-industrial places is a conscious work of placing the significance of a place on its previous layers (not only in terms of design but also of experience and culture), which is crucial to Polish practice. Driven by the desire to develop a transdisciplinary path of research on post-industrial places we decidedly

propose such an approach to man, environment and culture which enables rootedness. We hope that the elaborated tools can be applied in the diagnostics of phenomena related to cultural animation, which is an additional enrichment of knowledge in the scope of the theory of architecture, museology and life practice-oriented aesthetics. There is also "added value" – seeing creative activities in post-industrial space with regard to building citizenship which is particularly important and failing in the context of Polish culture.

We face the challenge of building responsibility for the common good. It is very important to reverse the negative trend of perceiving the public and the common as belonging to nobody. This seems particularly needed in perceiving the phenomenon of grassroots social activity, the proverbial taking matters into one's own hands, realising the impact on the immediate environment and, consequently, the quality of life. While thinking about the research headquarters we chose University of Silesia in Katowice to become the spatial centre. It seems that Katowice, a model city in the Polish context, reworks the effects of deindustrialization by trying to create an alternative, more sustainable model of urban functioning. Challenges evoked by the collapse of heavy industry, but also its multicultural past, make the city complicated and ambiguous in terms of identity. However, although locating the research centre in the University of Silesia we also turn our studies towards Łódź, Warsaw, Cracow, Bilbao, Ostrava and Manchester because it is crucial for us to have a holistic view on a post-industrial place due to the concern for settlement and rootedness. What is secondarily artistically arranged often turns out to be a rash and irresponsible design. The context of Polish cities demonstrates designers' struggles with former factories which are transformed into shopping centres, offices, galleries, museums, apartments, restaurants, etc. Concern for design and functionality often occurs without any reference to the culture of a place and without the care for rootedness. Ecology, innovation and usability meet more often than design and cultural places. And although we do not aim at creating a catalogue of

Polish and European post-industrial places – due to a different purpose and subject of research – the context of designed places is important for us. Revitalization projects of old mills and paper mills in the Italian province Salerno, project of a residential district in an old Ford factory in Bucharest, Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao occupying a former industrial area, Silesian Museum in Katowice created in transformed space of a mine, comprehensive revitalization of the former Zollverein mine in Essen, project of developing the areas of former Norblin Factory in Warsaw, adaptation of the Karol Scheibler's spinning mill into lofts in Łódź, Żytni Młyn (Rye Mill) in Szamotuły near Poznań transformed into a residential building, project of lofts in the paper mill buildings in Wrocław, revitalization project of the objects of Powiśle heat and power station in Warsaw, project of the adaptation of the brewery in Wrzeszcz, project of adaptation of the brewery in Kraków for residential and service purposes, restoration of the Peterson mill in Bydgoszcz for residential purposes, adaptation of the spinning mill in Zielona Góra, restoration of the old boiler house in Gliwice and the lamp room in Bytom for residential purposes, project of transformation of the old china factory in Katowice into a technological park – these are only several examples of designers' post-industrial struggles.

Development of a renewed perspective on a post-industrial place is profitable in terms of research. It leads to the study of post-industrial design forms in terms of cultural rootedness, revealing anthropology and aesthetics of "designed places," transformation of thinking about post-industrial design and place or development of transdisciplinary research path emphasising the importance of thinking about a place and the necessity to reflect upon one's own location.

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Aleksandra Kunce