

Grażyna Ewa Karpińska

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2102-774X>

University of Lodz, Faculty of Philosophy and History

Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology

Culture-creating activities in the city space: examples from Lodz. Anthropological contexts

Działania kulturotwórcze w przestrzeni miasta: przykłady z Łodzi. Antropologiczne konteksty

Abstract

Space not only provides a frame, or an arena, for human life, but it is also an important factor of change and an effect of the society's organisation. This is one of the reasons why grassroots culture-creating activities aimed at marking human presence in a certain place, and altering the perception of space, materialise there. In the article, I present examples of culture-creating practices addressed to the residents of two streets in Lodz; streets which are relatively isolated in terms of space and social contexts and which have been categorised by sociologists as an enclave of poverty. I describe actions by the performance artist Agnieszka Ziemiszewska and the circle of culture animators centring on the "White Crows" Foundation for the Living Culture [Fundacja na rzecz Kultury Żywej "Białe Gawrony"], treating them as means to recognise the context and character of grassroots culture-creating practices aimed at reformatting the socio-cultural identity of a particular area of a city.

Key words: city space, grassroots culture-creating practices, performativism, intervention projects, socialisation projects, discovering local resources, Lodz, Poland

Przestrzeń jest nie tylko ramą czy areną życia ludzi, lecz również istotnym czynnikiem będącym przyczyną zmian i efektem zorganizowania społeczeństwa. Między innymi z tego powodu w jej obrębie materializują się oddolne kulturotwórcze praktyki, mające na celu zaznaczyć obecność człowieka w określonym miejscu oraz przeobrazić myślenie o przestrzeni.

W artykule prezentuję przykłady kulturotwórczych praktyk skierowanych do mieszkańców dwóch łódzkich ulic, względnie izolowanych przestrzennie i społecznie, przestrzeni zakwalifikowanych przez socjologów jako enklawa biedy. Przedstawiam działania Agnieszki Ziemiszewskiej, performerki i artystki, oraz

animatorów kultury skupionych wokół Białych Gawronów, czyli Fundacji na Rzecz Kultury Żywej. Traktuję je jako rozpoznanie kontekstu i charakteru oddolnych kulturotwórczych praktyk zmierzających do re-formatowania tożsamości społeczno-kulturowej określonego fragmentu miasta.

Słowa kluczowe: przestrzeń miasta, oddolne praktyki kulturotwórcze, performatywizm, projekty interwencyjne, projekty uspołeczniające, odkrywanie zasobów lokalnych, Łódź, Polska

Odebrano / Received: 31.01.2020

Zaakceptowano / Accepted: 20.05.2020

Space, in both its physical and symbolic dimensions, creates certain living conditions; it breeds potentials and limitations; it is explored, tamed and furnished, filled with layers of values and meanings; it is fashioned through human work. Hence, space must be perceived not only as a frame, or an arena, for human life, but also as an important factor of change and an effect of the society's organisation. It can be viewed in terms of the actions undertaken by the residents, artists, activists and animators of culture. Such practices not only signal the human presence in the given space and time, but also create the channels of dialogue and they themselves become a channel for representing cultural messages. Many scholars pointed to these characteristics of space, among them the socially sensitive Henri Lefebvre, who credited the city's residents with a particular title to repossessing it, and thus also its spaces, through action,¹ David Harvey, who proclaimed the right to the city, that is "a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts' desire", and stressed the shared decisiveness with respect to the surrounding space and the role of civic activity, especially in creating the common good,² and Michel de Certeau, who wrote about creative cultural actions occurring in every person's space, often seeing them in opposition to the official, institutional actions.³

In recent times, initiatives undertaken not by those who wield power and possess political or social preponderance, but by the actual users of the given space, i.e. their residents, present challenges to alter the thinking about the city, and the city space – either because they cause resistance and breed extreme emotions (witness Joanna Rajkowska's art project *Pozdrowienia z Alej Jeruzolimskich*, 2002), or because they mobilise – that is, they identify, publicise and promote – local and cultural values. In the current text, I shall analyse grassroots actions focused on mobilisation, carried out in city spaces which were physically degraded and an arena of increasing social problems.

I shall present here two examples of strategies based on the standards of performativism, deliberately aimed at changing the meaning of space by means of its reformatting

¹ Lefebvre, 1996.

² Harvey, 2012, p. 4.

³ de Certeau 1984.

(as termed by R. Drozdowski⁴), that is, by revising the socio-cultural stereotype referring to a given area of the city in opposition to this area's commonly held collective image constructed on the basis of its spatial and social features and its symbolism. Performativism is characterised by a focus on the action-related (dynamic) aspect of the functioning of symbolic/cultural constructs created/recreated/utilised by a range of space users in the varied practices of connecting with the city.⁵

Actions in the city space to be presented in this essay were produced by the performance artist Agnieszka Ziemiszewska and by the circle of culture animators centring on the "White Crows" Foundation for Living Culture [Fundacja na rzecz kultury żywej "Białe Gawrony"]; they took place towards the end of the first and early in the second decade of the 21st century. Their culture-creating practices referred to two streets in the centre of Lodz (Wschodnia and Włókiennicza) and were addressed to their residents. It was an area relatively isolated in terms of space and social contexts and characterised by low social integration; a neglected area with a bad name elsewhere in the city, settled „mostly by a population whom historical processes had relegated to the margins of social life”.⁶ The actions of culture animators in the area of Wschodnia and Włókiennicza streets, were organised – as they themselves emphasised – with the aim of changing the perception of this particular fragment of city space. These actions are herein perceived as extraordinary events in the residents' daily existence; events that exceeded the mundane run of their lives and required them to be active but also to reflect. They are perceived also as a contribution to a debate whether such practices truly help to revise the schemata of reading city spaces. In addition, practices described herein present the socio-cultural margins of the ways of utilising space, that is, ways that exceed the economic and social conditions of the residents' lives.

Introducing the territory: Wschodnia and Włókiennicza streets

The two neighbouring streets of Wschodnia and Włókiennicza are located in an area where the industrial section of Lodz began to develop in the 19th century. Until the Second World War, its residents were mainly Jewish;⁷ it was a population, by and large, poor, which fact materially influenced the character of the area. Residential buildings in this area were built before 1915; many of them date from the middle of the 19th century. They were two- or three-floor tenements with contiguous street frontages; most of them contained one- and two-room rented lodgings with no facilities, toilets being located in backyard outhouses, annexes or on mezzanines and water drawn from a communal well.

⁴ Drozdowski, 2007, p. 199.

⁵ Cf. Zeidler-Janiszewska 2007, pp. 433–440; Domańska 2007.

⁶ Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jankowski 2013, p. 7.

⁷ Cf. e.g. Puś 2001, pp. 44–45; Spodenkiewicz 1998, p. 21. Spatial arrangement was largely parallel to the location of real estate owned by Jews.

Floor plans were identical on all the levels, but rooms on the ground floors contained small shops and service workshops; they were of the same size as rooms on the upper floors and without any special display windows.⁸ Streets and yards were filled with shops and artisan workshops owned mainly by Jews.

During the Second World War the Jews were evicted and the vacated apartments which had a better standard were taken over by the Germans. Jews returned to some of those spaces in the course of the first four post-war years;⁹ they left them forever in the late 1960s and early 1970s. After the war, most of those tenements were settled by Poles who in their majority worked in the local textile mills. After the collapse of Lodz textile industry, when the locals lost their jobs in the mills, the area was categorised by sociologists as an enclave of poverty. De-industrialization caused a change in the profile of the residents of those increasingly dilapidated buildings: those more resourceful residents moved out, and their flats were taken over by men and women evicted from their previous accommodation, heavily reliant on social services, often alcohol dependent.¹⁰ Włókiennicza Street in particular was settled by members of stigmatised groups, the “dregs of society”, i.e. persons for various reasons excluded from the job market and barred from access to culture, typified by high occurrence of unemployment, poverty and social deviancy. In 2017, the processes of revitalisation began in Włókiennicza Street; in 2019 the last residents were moved out from its tenements. Currently the street and the tenements are undergoing a thorough restoration, which according to plan will be completed in 2022.¹¹

Culture-creating activities in the city space

The *Nothing Personal* and *The Invisible Wschodnia* projects

The performance artist Agnieszka Ziemiszewska is a graduate of the Department of Graphics and Painting at the Academy of Fine Art in Lodz. Her project *Nothing Personal* [Nic osobistego] pertains to public spaces in the city. It was presented in 2013 in two places in Lodz (at Off Piotrkowska and in Wschodnia Street), as well as in Warsaw and Lublin. On the project website, Ziemiszewska wrote:

“Nothing personal” is a deceptive title: on the one hand, it suggests that the visual-and-verbal messages which in their lingual stratum are communicated in the first person singular do not relate to the domain of subjectivity, but may be articulated by any “I”; on the other hand, it suggests compliance with the rules of the public media, which ignore the

⁸ Popławska 1982, s. 24–33, 60–61.

⁹ Rykała 2010, s. 273, 277.

¹⁰ Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jankowski 2013.

¹¹ <https://rewitalizacja.uml.lodz.pl/dzialania/1-okolice-ul-wlokienniczej/ulica-wlokiennicza/>, accessed: May 2019.

subjectivity of the message's addressee. The idea behind the project is to turn the recipients' attention to the apparently forgotten fact that human beings still exist in the public space, among the multitude of messages and an avalanche of communications that are no more than a collection of images that collectively create the visual aspect of the city – and that those human beings are the most important in that space. Ultimately, it is human beings who impart meanings on images, who make choices, who make distinctions between the personal space and the public one; yet we still tend to treat the public sphere in global categories which seem not to pertain to individuals – we treat it as nothing personal.¹²

In shop windows and on the façades of tenement blocks at Wschodnia Street – that is, in spaces usually reserved for visual messages educating the viewers, informing them as to specific issues, or encouraging them to purchase something – Agnieszka Ziemiszewska placed billboards of varying sizes, which were ostentatiously aggressive and, from the visual point of view, graphically unified, brightly coloured and typographically simple. On these billboards, she displayed sentences in the first person singular, e.g. “I have an ID to prove I exist”, a sausage captioned “I like animals”, a crown captioned “I govern myself”, a keyhole captioned “I know my neighbours by sight”, a bathtub captioned “I’ll travel far”, a bone captioned “I don’t know what I’ll leave behind”. In this way, Ziemiszewska challenged the hegemony of consumer culture in urban iconosphere, protested against the appropriation of urban space by advertisers and wished to remind the residents and users of the street to carefully look at the surrounding space and notice to what extent it is permeated by visual messages that treat their recipients instrumentally.

To enter a relationship with art, a person needs to have proper competencies for sending and receiving it. Not all the billboards designed by Ziemiszewska for the *Nothing Personal* project had an easily discoverable semantic structure; not all of them were legible – as a message and a meaningful whole – to everyone. This is clearly demonstrated by the statements of passers-by at Off Piotrkowska: they had various ways of interpreting the captions, as can be heard in the film recorded as a part of the project. However, in the case of Wschodnia Street, Ziemiszewska talked the problem over with its users, she installed the billboards together with them; in other words, they did not appear before their eyes in a sudden and unexpected way.¹³ This was Ziemiszewska's involved educational action aimed at effecting a change in what “the Wschodnia Street folk” – the main recipients of her project in this part of the city – were thinking about themselves and the world.

¹² <http://ziemi.art.pl/filter/ACTIONS/Nic-Osobistego>; http://www.lodzart.eu/wydarzenia/agnieszka_ziemiszewska, accessed: May 2019..

¹³ <http://ziemi.art.pl/Nic-Osobistego>, accessed: May 2019..

At the same time, Ziemiszewska combined the *Nothing Personal* project with another one, entitled *The Invisible Wschodnia*, which was also effected in Lodz, but was only seemingly local in character. Although it focused on an existing street in Lodz and was planned as an action meant to turn the recipients' attention to the one-sidedly negative perception of this street (i.e. its association with poverty, pathological behaviour, and various forms of social exclusion), the artist's intention was to emphasise its interventional aspect; in reality, the project referred to urban space as such, it pointed to difficult issues associated with identity: of people and of places. The message projected by *Nothing Personal* was expressed even more strongly in *The Invisible Wschodnia*. Ziemiszewska said that although, in general, people are important in public spaces, it is crucial to note that it is the daily practices and experiences of "ordinary" people living and working at a given street that transform it into those people's own space. In the window of 4x4 Pub, Ziemiszewska displayed a poster of *The Invisible Wschodnia* whose design resulted from her cooperation with "the Wschodnia Street folk". In their conversations with her, they related experiences which helped them to organise their own space, including the construction of situational, temporal and social perceptions of the "quotidian space".¹⁴ The poster contained an address-oriented "inventory" of a stretch of the street, i.e. photographs of selected locations and a few sentences long description containing concise information about the people connected with it or about what this location used to be "long ago". The contents of the poster activated the memories of many people living and working at Wschodnia Street. Among them were, at 27, Wschodnia St., Pan Zbyszek, a watchmaker, the street's living chronicle; at the Gate / 34, Wschodnia St., Paweł, Krystian and many other well-known locals who create the history of this place; or, at Pierożek / 36, Wschodnia St., where "long ago" one could buy a wedding dress, then there was a shop crewed by Pani Agnieszka, whose life was a story in itself and currently there is a shop offering tasty and healthy food. The poster became a tool for communication within the community, also because – which is an extremely important point – it was created by the residents of the street (including men and women usually marginalized and deprived of channels of expression because they were perceived as an "undesirable social element"), as well as the owners of the local shops and artisan workshops, all of them working in cooperation with the artist. Ziemiszewska's venture pulled them into a discourse about local identity, developed their sense of belonging in the given place. They drew inspiration from their own everyday lives, their perceptions of their street, and their opinions about it.

I described Agnieszka Ziemiszewska's project *The Invisible Wschodnia* in detail in another publication;¹⁵ here, I will only stress that it had a performative character, and it symbolically linked the past with the present. Through this project, many residents and

¹⁴ de Certeau 1984.

¹⁵ Karpińska 2017.

users of the street activated the process of reconstructing it from “then” to “now” and, in effect, they learnt to see *Wschodnia* as a different street than the one to which they had become habituated, that is, not only as a physically and socially degraded one (as indicated by the visual aspect of its space). They noticed that a single place may have varying aspects, unobvious layers that must be tamed as spaces occupied by other people’s lives. In addition, the locals discovered that *Wschodnia* Street actually fulfilled many conditions for being a “good place” as defined by Kevin Lynch, that is, it was a locus for communication within a community and a potential site for collective celebrations and rituals, while at the same time it lent itself to projections of personal memories, emotions and values.¹⁶

The Sun Rises at Wschodnia project

Over three subsequent years (2007–2009), the activities of “White Crows”, or the Foundation for the Living Culture [Fundacja na rzecz Kultury Żywej “Białe Gawrony”], focused on carrying out *The Sun Rises at Wschodnia* project. In the essence, the project was addressed to children from *Wschodnia* Street and *Włókiennicza* Street which branches off it, the latter being generally considered one of the most dangerous streets in Lodz. The aim was to pull those children out from the “shadow zone”.¹⁷ The opening issue of *Gazeta Wschodnia*, a periodical published by the foundation, the White Crows team shared their plans, dominated by the idea of altering this urban space through activation of its residents and improvements to its aesthetics:

The *Sun Rises at Wschodnia* project is intended to unlock the potential of this street, to make it more colourful and lively [...]. We see two issues as particularly urgent: to organise the children’s after-school time, and to neaten the courtyards and patches of greenery. In both these areas, however, all the residents should work together.¹⁸

In the daily life of a tenement block, a courtyard is a space where communication routes of all the residents come together and which constitutes the space for this daily life to unfold. Essentially, the experience of courtyard space is correlated with the ways of life, which change as the person grows older, and with the process of constantly entering new social roles; however, this space belongs, first and foremost, to children; to childhood as such.¹⁹ Courtyards at *Wschodnia* and *Włókiennicza* are surrounded on all four sides by wings, forming shaft-like enclosed spaces (which in Polish are known as *podwórko studnia*, literally: water-well courtyards) – an architectural design typical of

¹⁶ Lynch 1988, p. 142.

¹⁷ Bielski 2008.

¹⁸ *Stońce wschodzi...*, 2007.

¹⁹ Karpińska 2000.

Lodz. In the past, there were trees growing in some of those courtyards; today, filled with parked cars, those spaces became a bone of contention between the car owners and parents, dog owners and persons involved in the drunken revels occasionally organised in those courtyards. In an interview with *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Piotr Bielski, an animator of culture, sociologist and co-creator of the White Crows venture, recounted how the activists changed to courtyard at 45, Wschodnia Street:

[...] A tall water-well courtyard, concrete, perhaps a carpet-beating rail. An absence of greenery. What can one be doing, sitting day after day in such a place? I decided to breathe some life into the courtyards. I wanted only a half of the space to be available for parking the cars, and the rest to be occupied by a children's playground. This was not easy. Removing the concrete required many permits. For this reason we created an recycle garden. We filled old car tires with soil and planted trees and shrubs in them.²⁰

The idea was supported by some of the locals, who “began to water the surviving plants and look after them”.²¹ “People came, looked in through the windows, asked: ‘What are you here for?’. The men standing in the gate would invite me for a beer,” recalled Bielski²². This was the beginning of the animators’ and recipients’ shared involvement, which made it possible to accumulate social capital,²³ even though residents of particular courtyards greeted the activities of the White Crows team with reluctance, indifference, or even dislike. Piotr Bielski reminisced:

When the workmen unloaded sand in the yard, the kinds began to build sandcastles. So I say to a neighbour: “It would be great to make a sandbox for them”. And she says: “You’re stupid. For thirty years there were no sandboxes and now suddenly there are to be, just because you appeared here?” [...] We prepared posters. Our volunteers were putting them up in courtyards. Suddenly a stocky teenager runs in, throws crumpled posters in my face and yells: “Which one of you put these up in my courtyard without my permission! I’ll kill [that person] and I’ll set fire to your place”. Next day he and his friends seized our bucket of paint and spilled the paint onto our door. These unpleasant incidents ceased only when we asked a friendly neighbour to have a word with him. He even came to a concert we organised for the Wschodnia Street Festival, he would occasionally come in to do a bit of rap. And when he sees me in the street, he throws me a “Hi there”.²⁴

The White Crows’ initiative hauled the 45, Wschodnia Street courtyard out from featureless space and started the process of building its new identity. The next step

²⁰ „Obcy” to „Żyd”..., 2007.

²¹ Bielski 2008.

²² „Obcy” to „Żyd”..., 2007.

²³ Putnam, 1995, pp. 664–665.

²⁴ „Obcy” to „Żyd”..., 2007.

consisted of various supporting actions, helping this place to elicit a response in every resident, that is, helping it to reveal itself through the “deeds, thoughts, proxemics, objects” proper for a lived-in place.²⁵ This was the intention behind the “making courtyards lively” venture, which relied on suggesting ideas for courtyard games to the children and encouraging them to be active through various contests, art workshops, pantomimes and circus shows. Art groups were in operation for a whole year, teaching the young residents of Wschodnia Street and stimulating their sensitivity. This is Piotr Bielski’s description of those activities during the Wschodnia Street Festival in 2008:

[...] in the morning we opened two fronts. The southern front, 45, Wschodnia Street, was all about the fine arts and crafts. Both the young children and the slightly older ones attached mosaics to the walls, artists stencilled patterns on a grey wall, Piotr Pasiewicz painted compositions of circles and triangles. I, in turn, was fighting on the northern front, that is, in the courtyard at Reymonta Street. We were playing with a large colourful shawl, one looking like a parachute, and we also offered some circus games: spinning plates, juggling, playing with balls and magical objects, such as a diabolo or a devil-stick. Boys from Wschodnia and Włókiennicza were particularly enthusiastic about playing the devil-stick, which is an electrostatic baton that gets twirled with two hand-sticks. They turned out to be very creative, they tossed the batons to each other in teams, they threw them behind their backs, they devised their own combinations. Plates for spinning and weights on ropes, the so-called pois, for fire-dancing were also very popular. The plate is a device that helps a person to learn patience, so while the impatient ones got swiftly discouraged by the first failures, the patient ones were able to throw a plate up, or spin it on a stick held between toes, on an ear or a tongue, after only after a few hours of training. In the morning, musicians from the Lodz Philharmonics organised musical games in the Reymonta Street courtyard. There were some competitions, in which sometimes one no-longer-young bloke would cut in and say, in place of the children, that a trumpet is a brass instrument, but there was also a lot of dancing and laughing going on.²⁶

“We decided to show the residents that there is more to life than standing with a bottle in the staircase for hours,” said Bielski²⁷. So they also took care to draw adults out of the houses by organising, for instances, badminton tournaments or by “bringing culture” to street spaces: poets from the Polish Writers Association recited their poems and posted manuscripts of poems on tenement façades, one of the courtyards was taken over by musicians from the Lodz Philharmonics with a Vivaldi and Mozart medley, choirs gave songs from gospel to The Beatles, and children were taken to the Philharmonics for a concert.

²⁵ Kuncce 2007, p. 96.

²⁶ Bielski 2008.

²⁷ „Obcy” to „Zyd”..., 2007.

After two years of work at Wschodnia and Włókiennicza streets, Bielski said:

We have a feeling that we have managed to awaken the needs of those children to a very great extent. They are now beginning to seek various forms of activity on their own. They come up with fantastic games. Recently I paid a brief visit to our office and as I walked across the courtyard, I saw that the kids had set up an employment agency in one of the windows. There was a notice board with announcements, and newspaper cuttings. I would never have imagined that you could play a game about a job centre.²⁸

Actions undertaken by the White Crows were intended to create the residents' sense of shared responsibility for the space, as well as to build the status of a certain space and the community inhabiting it – a community whose identity was founded on the shared experience of poverty and exclusion. The aim was to help this community go beyond their “rhetorical country” (to borrow a term from Marc Augé),²⁹ to further the development of a social bond between a group of the excluded and the city. Also, actions undertaken among the residents of the two streets were intended to recreate the diminished social capital on both sides of the interaction. A parade that opened the two-day festival of the street in the years 2008 and 2009, in which the residents of Wschodnia, Włókiennicza and the neighbouring streets took part – and which passed through the very centre of Lodz, from Wolności Square along Piotrkowska Street to Pasaż Rubinsteina, and from there to the 50, Wschodnia Street courtyard – was a very great asset of *The Sun Rises at Wschodnia* project. „Quite a lot of children and young people from Wschodnia and Włókiennicza took part in the parade, dressed as fairies, gypsies, cats and various fairy-tale beings,” recounted Bielski.³⁰ This loud, colourful, dancing cavalcade that passed through the central streets of Lodz was reminiscent of a carnival parade, and the fact that it was embedded in the carnival convention made it possible to, on the one hand, explain the visual and auditory emphasis on the presence of certain groups in the public space, and on the other, to link these forms of behaviour with the therapeutic interpretations of the phenomenon, according to which the performative convention makes it easier the live in a world ruled by the laws of official culture.³¹

The other action-related element of the project was the guided walk – a tool for socio-cultural animation which is still eagerly used by various entities. The guided walk around Wschodnia Street, which was advertised in the daily newspapers of Lodz, was addressed to both the residents of the street itself and to the residents of other parts of the city. Piotr Bielski recalled how the participants

²⁸ Szrejner, Wojna 2009.

²⁹ Augé, 1995, p. 108.

³⁰ Bielski, 2008.

³¹ Cf. Skubaczewska-Pniewska, 2000, p. 67.

were taken round by the Lodz guide Ela Pędziwiatr, stylishly dressed in a costume from the period of Reymont [i.e. the early 20th c.]. A relatively large group of Lodz residents listened to her tales of the old synagogues, of the city's first coffin factory, which used to be located in this street, about Reymont, Piłsudski and Osiecka. On the corner of Pomorska and Wschodnia streets we recalled the blind Max, a pre-war Robin Hood of Lodz, who used to have his "request agency" there and who truly set accounts to rights.³²

A city walk is a way of getting acquainted with a certain space; a way of creating one's private city and building a relationship with it.³³ Also, as put by two Warsaw anthropologists, it is a "performative way of altering one's own city, one's own district; it is a step 'tactically' taken by the residents towards 'growing into' their city, towards becoming interwoven with its fabric".³⁴ Regrettably, it is not known to what extent the residents of Wschodnia themselves were interested in the guided walk of their locality as organised by the White Crows.

Towards a conclusion, or, the results of the actions

The above examples present practices aimed at a local community defined through a shared dwelling-place (neighbouring streets in a city) and the shared experiences and problems arising therefrom. Despite the differences in form and contents, the actions described above were interventional in their nature. The White Crows and the performance artist were strangers to the residents of the streets in which they worked – they were "outside" persons who came in to activate and educate them. This resulted in the risk of a certain "colonization of a community" (as termed by Katarzyna Niziołek³⁵). This is because – as discussed by Weronika Plińska and Tomasz Rakowski while presenting social perceptions regarding the perspectives of local existence of the residents of villages and small towns – the topic of stimulating someone's professional or social activity, as well as the topic of social and cultural development, usually trigger concealed discursive mechanisms: against the background of references to the desired spheres of values, these residents are shown as "deprived of access to cultural property and, in a sense, short on potential, 'qualifications' or 'social integration' [...]; the lack of meaningful social life, the lack of 'culture' [are pointed to]".³⁶ This aspect is present in the pro-active campaigns conducted by the White Crows, and it can be found in the reports of their leader. In order to prevent such situation from arising, many culture animators depart "from the category of intervention (help), which is burdened by arbitrariness, and move towards

³² Bielski 2008.

³³ Cf. de Certeau 1984.

³⁴ Dudek, Sikora, 2018, p. 85.

³⁵ Niziołek, 2015, p. 294.

³⁶ Plińska, Rakowski, 2009, p. 33.

the category of interaction which is, on principle, egalitarian, enriching to both sides (the community and the animators), and which provides a shared ground for a range of values, views, and means of expression".³⁷ In this scenario, the animators assume the roles of initiators and supporters of actions intended to reinforce the given community's sense of identity and to release its stories and its memory. Such work is based on a dialogue with the group and on communal activities, and it is performative in nature. These were the features of Agnieszka Ziemiszewska's projekt *The Invisible Wschodnia*. Although that project, too, was interventional and aimed at socialisation; yet Ziemiszewska accentuated the process of discovering the local resources: places and people with stories embedded in the space of the street. She focused on highlighting those elements within a given space which, although visible, are ignored as too obvious, because they happen and are experienced every day.

The final issues that need to be addressed here are what such practices give the community and whether they truly contribute to the revision of the schemata following which urban spaces are deciphered.

On the one hand, such practices have the potential of influencing everyone, even those who are not sufficiently prepared to receive them. Each activity described herein helped to generate the community's relationships in the space and with the space; each of them produced a greater or lesser involvement. Each participant was able to experience the process of constituting an informal, grassroots community with no special concentration or connection was being required. Each participant could allow their experience to dissolve in a sea of situations and impressions – or to allow themselves to be carried away by emotions. From this perspective, the social resonance of the practices described above must be noted as positive.³⁸ On the other hand, however, I wish to emphasise that these practices offered the residents only a short respite from the mundane, monotonous rhythm. The events described herein only temporarily imparted a privileged status on both the space and the group of residents associated with that space, who were traditionally perceived as inferior and despised. This condition was not transformed into a permanent one. The practices of the White Crows or the performance artist did not invalidate the feeling of cultural superiority which the "city people" felt towards the residents of Wschodnia and Włókiennicza. They did not strengthen the status of their of these streets; they continued to be considered unsafe, unfriendly and ugly.

However, as suggested by Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska (and it would be difficult not to agree with her on this point), the very involvement and activeness of the residents of these streets may indicate "small changes on the level of perception and symbolic articulation" and they may prove "a catalyst for social changes. In this sense, even an ephemeral art performance may become a gesture which produces tangible results, one which

³⁷ Niziołek, 2015, p. 294.

³⁸ Cf. Dziadzia, 2015, p. 21.

reconfigures the space of social perceptions or triggers a change of attitude towards the environs”.³⁹ Grassroots practices, including those whose contents is similar to the projects described herein, offer a suggestion as to what can be done in order for a space and people to become receptive to a mutual (if brief) dialogue concerning issues of importance to the residents in that space. These practices demonstrate what tools can be used in the struggle for the right to dignified living in an urban community and by emphasising the importance of the local population’s direct involvement, they initiate situations conducive to social interactions. They reveal the ways of triggering processes of creating a new public space: a space through which the city may be recovered by its residents – not only by the privileged ones, but by all of them. This newly created space is one in which people acquire the opportunity for face-to-face contact, even such an ordinary one as a conversation while sitting together on a bench or standing by a patch of greenery in the courtyard – after all, such meetings allow people who may live in neighbouring tenements but otherwise are complete strangers to get acquainted with one another and with the history of their area, to exchange news, to ask for and offer advice, to begin conversations and find shared issues that need to be seen to. In addition, such contact teaches its participants how to fill the space with positive energy that brings people closer and creates (if only for a moment) a new configuration within the community. This is, importantly, a way of forming a civic society. However, if such grassroots practices are truly to result in a change in the perception of a space and if they are to “perform a social change”, it is crucial that they be conducted unremittingly and consistently.

References

- Augé M. 1995, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Verso Books, London.
- Bielski P. 2008, *O tym jak słońce wschodziło na Wschodniej po raz drugi, czyli meldunek z frontu*. <https://publicystyka.ngo.pl/o-tym-jak-slonce-wschodzilo-na-wschodniej-po-raz-drugi-czyli-meldunek-z-frontu> (accessed: June 2019).
- de Certeau M. 1984, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by S. Rendall, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Domańska E. 2007, „Zwrot performatywny” we współczesnej humanistyce, „Teksty Drugie”, no. 5, pp. 48–61.
- Drozdowski R. 2007, *Re-formatowanie przestrzeni miejskiej. Od cichej rewolucji wlepek do cichej kontrrewolucji graffiti i na odwrót*, [in:] M. Krajewski (ed.), *Wizualność miasta. Wytwarzanie miejskiej ikonosfery*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań, pp. 199–210.
- Dudek K. J., Sikora S. 2018, *Pustynia kulturalna? Siedem szkiców o działaniu na Grochowie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Katedra, Gdańsk.

³⁹ Rejniak-Majewska, 2014, pp. 281–282.

- Dziadzia B. 2015, *Kiedy sztuka wytwarza kapitał. Zaangażowanie i sztuka w przestrzeni publicznej*, [in:] B. Dziadzia et al. (ed.), *Sztuka w przestrzeni publicznej. Artystyczne wymiary wytwarzania kapitału społecznego i kulturowego*, Fundacja Animacji Społeczno-Kulturalnej, Bielsko-Biała–Cieszyn, pp. 15–34.
- Harvey D. 2012, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, Verso Books, London.
- Karpińska G.E. 2017, *Ulica Wschodnia. W poszukiwaniu przestrzeni codzienności*. "Studia Etnologiczne i Antropologiczne", vol. 17, pp. 289–303.
- Karpińska G.E. 2000, *Miejsce wyodrębnione ze świata. Przykład łódzkich kamienic czynszowych*, Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, Łódź – "Łódzkie Studia Etnograficzne" vol. 38.
- Kunce A. 2007, *Miejsce i rytm. O doświadczeniu miejsc w kulturze*, [in:] Z. Kadłubek (ed.), *Genius loci. Studia o człowieku w przestrzeni*, Fundacja Art, Katowice, pp. 93–119.
- Lefebvre H. 1996, *The Right to the City*, translated by E. Kofman, E. Lebas, "The Anarchist Library", <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/henri-lefebvre-right-to-the-city>.
- Lynch K. 1988, *A Theory of Good City Form*, MIT Press, London.
- Niziołek K. 2015, *Sztuka społeczna. Koncepcje – dyskursy – praktyki*, vol. 1, Wydział Historyczno-Socjologiczny Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Fundacja Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Białystok.
- „Obcy” to „Żyd”, czyli wróg, 2007, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 7 May. http://lodz.wyborcza.pl/lodz/1,35136,6583535,_Obcy_to_Zyd_czyli_wrog.html, accessed: September 2019.
- Popławska I. 1982, *Architektura mieszkaniowa Łodzi w XIX w.*, Politechnika Łódzka, Łódź.
- Plińska W., Rakowski T. 2009, *Badanie – rozumienie – działanie społeczne. Projekt etnografii animacyjnej i etnograficznie zorientowanej animacji kultury*, "Kultura Współczesna", no. 4, p. 32–50.
- Puś W. 2001, *Żydzi w Łodzi w latach zaborów 1793–1914*, Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź.
- Putnam R. 1995, *Turning In, Turning Out: the Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America*, "Political Science and Politics", vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 664–683. <https://www.uvm.edu/~dguber/POLS293/articles/putnam1.pdf>, accessed: June 2019.
- Rejniak-Majewska A. 2014, „Alternatywna taśma montażowa” czy nieszkodliwy performans? O artystycznym aktywizmie i porowatym polu sztuki. "Praktyka Teoretyczna", 4(14), pp. 271–286, <https://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/prt/article/view/2821>, accessed: September 2019.
- Rykała A. 2010, *Łódź na mapie skupisk żydowskich Polski (po 1945 r.)*, [in:] A. Lech, K. Radziszewska, A. Rykała (eds.), *Społeczność polska i niemiecka w Łodzi po 1945 roku*, Wydawnictwo UŁ, Łódź, pp. 267–332.
- Słońce Wschodzi na Wschodniej – już teraz*, 2007, "Gazeta Wschodnia", no. 1, pp. 2–3.
- Skubaczewska-Pniewska A. 2000, *Teoretycznoliterackie i światopoglądowe „śsiedztwa” teorii karnawalizacji literatury*, [in:] A. Skubaczewska-Pniewska (ed.), *Teoria karnawalizacji. Konteksty i interpretacje*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, Toruń, pp. 47–68.
- Spodenkiewicz P. 1998, *Zaginiona dzielnica. Łódź żydowska – ludzie i miejsca*, Łódzka Księgarnia Niezależna, Łódź.

- Szrejner M., Wojna K. 2009, *Animatorzy wyciągają dzieci z bramy i sprzed komputera*, "Dziennik Łódzki", 14 November, <https://dzienniklodzki.pl/animatorzy-wyciagaja-dzieci-z-bramy-i-sprzed-komputera/ar/185563/4>, accessed: May 2019.
- Warzywoda-Kruszyńska W., Jankowski B. 2013, *Ciągłość i zmiana w łódzkich enklawach biedy*, Wydawnictwo UŁ, Łódź.
- Zeidler-Janiszewska A. 2007, *Perspektywy performatywizmu*, "Teksty Drugie", no. 5, pp. 34–47.

Online sources

- <https://rewitalizacja.uml.lodz.pl/dzialania/1-okolice-ul-wlokienniczej/ulica-wlokiennicza/>, accessed: May 2019.
- <http://ziemi.art.pl/filter/ACTIONS/Nic-Osobistego>, accessed: May 2019.
- http://www.lodz-art.eu/wydarzenia/agnieszka_ziemiszewska, accessed: May 2019.

The Author:

dr hab. Grażyna Ewa Karpińska, prof. UŁ

Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, University of Lodz

e-mail: gekarpinska@gmail.com

