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Practicing a Post-Industrial Place. 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 both develop a transdisciplinary research path and to show how a post-industrial place is practised in culture. And it is the sphere of *praxis* which is the subject of this volume. A view combining perspectives of culture theoreticians and practitioners as well as designers is crucial in the study of phenomena related to post-industrial heritage. For the humanities it is important to capture the moment of transition from design issues to cultural reflection upon designed places/things/concepts. The retreat from industrial production as “manufacturing things” to producing and processing the ideas is marked with a trail of technological transformation and the emerging service industry. A departure from the planned and mass towards the individual, at least potentially, opens us towards design practices which transform what is unrooted, abandoned, ancient, degraded. Analyses of cities, design, economics, social environment open to research domestication of the explosion of design in the inherited post-industrial space. A place, no matter how overexerted today, is still a challenge in humanistic thought.

The problem, especially in the case of Polish achievements, lies in the fact that creative activities aimed at transforming post-industrial space, which are connected with designing and using new technologies in the process of constructing the identity of a place/city (using mobile media, social media, online applications as well as interdisciplinary projects at the intersection of art, design and new technologies. social actions, network initiatives, etc.) are burdened with insufficient cultural sensitivity to a place. On the other hand, however, one cannot accuse them of a lack of creative impetus and thus, owing to the creative potential, they initiate reflection upon too solidified images of a place. Exploring the ways of using new technologies in order to shape the identity of post-industrial places, with particular regard to activities in social media as well as interdisciplinary projects implemented at the intersection of art, design and new media, seems crucial in constructing understanding of a multidimensional post-industrial place. It is particularly important in view of the fact that these tools – often associated with cultural globalisation and universalisation – may really serve the purpose of creating places and rooting. Artists' design ("semantic design," "responsible design" and "design of services") is interesting in this context as a tool for building the identity of a post-industrial place when creative activities aim at rootedness, domestication and responsibility for a place. Design activities in the scope of semantic design (objects, gadgets, fashion, games, publications, street art) and design of services (activities, workshops, services, meetings, initiatives, actions) aim at constructing an identity of places in cities which are especially marked by post-industrial landscape.

In a number of places around the world a bottom-up defensive reaction to the increasing globalization and unification of material culture products can be observed. After the wave of industrialization, mechanization and standardization the value of crafts and local products increases once again. This phenomenon does not concern only production of items, it also refers to creation of places, events, activities adjusted to specific communities and places. A picture of the activities

can be a region or a city, but it is often a smaller unit – a residential district, surroundings, a street, a yard, a park, a building, post-industrial space (e.g. a slagheap, a former production plant area). The language of design understood as a process of deliberate designing may meet the needs of a local community and help in rooting in a given place. The proximity to a place, a sense of being at home initiates citizenship, greater responsibility, desire to cooperate, to introduce positive changes and improvements in the functioning of given space. Responsible design, which is open to human re-settlement, may serve the purpose of creating bonds with a post-industrial place. To what extent can a man settle in a post-industrial place which has been designed anew and created? What is the awareness of a designer in creating experimental reality written on a former layered cultural reality? Where does the designer leave empty places which will be later filled by the receiver? Is it possible to design an identity in which both an individual man and a cultural community will later exist? Is it actually possible to artificially create an identity from the outside? The questions we find while exploring post-industrial places are closely linked with the questions about a post-industrial identity. They develop in the course of recognizing the relationship between a former well-established place – post-industrial space – creative activities – an attempt to settle in. Recognition of the phenomenon of post-industrial places exploitation leads to a certain extent to understanding of their ideological and material heritage. It is a particularly strong experience in communities whose geohistory is marked by expansive development of industry, where the sense of being doomed to post-industrial stigma affects development and future. By relating post-industrial design to the idea of settling in a place we establish good practices combining the humanities and life, that is a responsible inscribing in a place.

Reflections of design practitioners and theoreticians as well as culture theoreticians and practitioners have so far existed apart. They have often ignored each other or have only slightly referred to achievements and accomplishments of others. Design theory, which constitutes a basis

for practitioners' activities, is not sufficient. The attitude of the humanistic reflection nowadays also has to relate to available effects of designers' works. It is important to constantly re-pose a question about a possibility to combine those perspectives and their parallel functioning, cooperation and their current confrontation with social needs as well as social and cultural effects of such ventures. Separating theory from artistic practices, creative activities and life practices seems difficult to maintain. It is worth paying attention to the very moment of designing – not only the physical preparation of a project but also cultural preparation to designing. Opening up to a place is not only a desire to cope with post-industrial design, similar in various parts of the world, but it is extraction of the original in an identity story about a place and a community. Implementation of the effects of a designer's work becomes replaced by "settling" in the idea of a place. Designed reality cannot be "invented" or unrooted in the memory of a place, in its signs and identity narratives, in axiological choices of a community or in the metaphysics of individual and collective experiences. Responsible design, opening up to or closure to a cultural place mark the trail of design achievements in the cities of Poland and Europe. We do not assume the creation of Polish or European case studies, yet the selected *exempla* demonstrate the struggle with post-industrial space, which is so difficult to deeply domesticate in terms of culture in Poland.

An important lead is methodical pointing at recognition of the cultural potential in industrial heritage in the form of both post-industrial objects and civilization achievements and know-how in the scope of manufacturing items. Hence the need to explore in culture the design of post-industrial places and creative activities undertaken by the creators of grassroots culture of cities – such as authors of websites, guides, profiles in social media, culture commentators, bloggers. The methodical challenge is to recognize and map the above mentioned activities because of the digital tools used in "building" a post-industrial place. In order to achieve this we want to suggest enrichment of tools and methods going beyond a traditional academic apparatus: various forms

of space mapping, research on the Web, automatic data processing and data visualization. In this regard we use research tools and methods (using elements of the digital humanities apparatus, e.g. automatic analysis of website content) developed in Medialab, a cultural institution of “The City of Gardens.” In interdisciplinary teams the participants (young designers, cultural practitioners and theoreticians) of specially arranged research workshops applied methods of acquiring and analysing data from the internet, mainly related to activities of social media users, while preparing material for further studies and then, at the intersection of thinking orders, made an effort to develop a path linking design, new media, urban practices with cultural rootedness in an “inherited” place. Cooperation of the representatives of humanistic academic circles with the representatives of art schools and practitioners of “creative urban culture” made it possible to view the problem of identity of post-industrial places from various perspectives, but, at the same time, it enabled development of an open model of research which resulted in combining practice with theory in order to elaborate research tools linking design, new media, urban practices with cultural rootedness in an “inherited” place.

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