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CULTURE: MEANINGS AND VALUES OR A MULTISENSORY ORGY?

ABSTRACT

The article presents a unusual take on the subject of culture not from the point of view its internal, abstract, immeasurable, yet accessible to cognition content, but from the point of view of its vehicles, or artifacts. The author of the text placed language among the most important external manifestations of culture and focused on how the relationship between language and culture works in practice. The article is divided into three parts, each focused on a different aspect of this relationship. The first one presents a series of theories on meaning and the material and immaterial manifestations of culture as discussed in the humanities. The second one is devoted to physical and corporeal meanings of language. The author presents observations in the field of semiotics which were initiated in the classical era and experimentally confirmed in twentieth-century studies. The third part of the article focuses on the issue of meaning as a biological phenomenon. The author deliberates on the meanings in language that stem from the sounds of words, articulation, and their psychological dimension.

Key words:

culture, language, egocephalocentrism, noscorpocircularism, linguistic studies

1. Humanities: from egocephalocentrism to noscorpocircularism

In social sciences and humanities culture is most frequently defined in terms of abstract meanings and values, for which observable material objects or physical behaviours are merely insignificant vehicles for what is the most important – the readable and comprehensible content. A few reasons can be indicated for such a state of affairs. One of them is the prevalence of the phenomenalist approach, sanctioned especially by neopositivism¹, which eliminated the previously basic concept of substance from many sciences. As early as 1921, Czesław Znamierowski lamented over this fact, writing: “physics without the matter, psychology without the soul, sociology as science not of the society, but rather of social phenomena” – these are manifestations of the same trend, disturbing and strange (he added), for in each occurrence there must be something that occurs, and in each change something that changes...² In sociology, the validity of the anti-materialistic approach was substantiated by Durkheim, who, having returned from Germany, eventually abandoned the recognition of determinism of “material social facts” in favour of “spiritualist” treatment of social life in all its manifestations³. “Social life consists essentially of ideas”, he wrote in his “Suicide”⁴. Also, culture studies (both in their American version – for instance cognitive anthropology, and the European symbolic anthropology), despite a number of significant differences in their basic assumptions, stressed the importance of ideational order, minimizing the significance of artifacts. These currents recognized culture in terms of a system of collective symbols present in individual minds, and thus reduced it to mental facts subordinated to rational procedures such as understanding or interpreting.

Apart from neopositivism in natural science or Cartesian dualism in philosophy, Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic theory also significantly influenced the shape of the discussed fields. Consistent elimination of both actual signified, as well as any material qualities of the sign itself through the reduction of what is signified, that is *signifie*, not to an object, but to its “concept” (*idée*), and the signifier not to the sound, but the “idea of a sound-image” (*image acoustique*), deprived the language of any physical references, basing its semantic value solely on an abstract relation to other signs⁵ (de Saussure 1991) – a relation additionally ex-

¹ G. Lukacs, *Introduction to the Ontology of Social Being*, Warszawa 1982.

² Cz. Znamierowski, *An Object and Social Fact* [in:] *A Hundred Years of Polish Sociology*, J. Szacki (ed.), Warszawa 1995, p. 560.

³ S. Lukes, *Durkheim*, Warszawa 2012.

⁴ E. Durkheim, *Suicide*, Warszawa 2006, p. 393.

⁵ F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, Warszawa 1991.

tracted from intellectually and not sensorily recognizable binary oppositions of features considered to be significant. All these trends led to the consolidation of the approach named by Jean-Claude Kauffman “egocephalocentrism”, understood as replacement of social and cultural reality with essence contained in the subjective consciousness of individuals – single entities, whose sole attribute is a mind endowed with the ability to reflect, but not a body equipped with senses⁶.

The assumptions, which transformed not only that which is social and cultural, but also the entire being and the entire world into “a sense of being and a sense of the world”⁷ necessitated the application of specific research approaches in the fields of sociology and anthropology. In sociology, this resulted in a concentration of attention on the knowledge, views, and opinions of respondents. Secondly, on the basis of the content found in their consciousness, were the shape of social being or cultural patterns reconstructed, recognized no longer directly and objectively, but always with a humanistic coefficient (and thus in a manner relevant to a certain group), or in a fairly subjective manner. The process was accompanied by a conviction, perhaps the most clearly expressed by Peter Winch, that social relations resemble relations between concepts, thus one must abandon causal explanation and replace it with understanding. As a result, instead of naturalistically understood deterministic correlations, the researcher receives logical relations of sense as basis of social life ontology⁸. Also, anthropologists using a broad interpretation of culture were willing to reduce the phenomena that interested them to “increasingly disembodied continents of Meaning”⁹ – to a pattern of symbols absolutely unsusceptible to naturalistic analysis, but such that call for interpretation, which in turn, according to them, begins with the recognition of the postulate that it is by no means the physical shelter, clothing or sustenance decides on human existence, as a layman would be inclined to think, but instead – exclusively webs of meaning do so. Finally, the traditionally oriented sociology of culture, having restrictively narrowed its field of interest with the help of three criteria: semioticity, axiology and the autotelic quality¹⁰ to a sphere of disinterestedly contemplated phenomena in the field of “high” art, treated the processes of its social function as equivalent to purely cognitive decoding of meanings. The basic term serving as description of so intellectualistically understood participation in culture was the

⁶ J.-C. Kauffman, *Ego. Sociology of the Individual*, Warszawa 2004.

⁷ J. Tischner, *Thinking in Values*, Kraków 1982, p. 22.

⁸ P. Winch *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, Warszawa 1995.

⁹ C. Geertz, *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture* [in:] *Culture Studies*, E. Nowicka, M. Kempny (eds.), Warszawa 2003.

¹⁰ A. Kłosowska, *Sociology of Culture*, Warszawa 1981.

notion of “competence” reduced to most erudite possible knowledge of works from national, European or world canon and corresponding to decidedly elitist criteria of education and standards of taste¹¹.

Against the loss of the sense of objective existence, material reality and the inordinate prevalence of the understanding approach, which in social sciences and humanities resulted in the focusing of attention on texts, discourses, narratives and representations, increasingly loud voices of protest have been heard for at least two decades. Instead of remaining satisfied with the “boring formula” that everything is a language, that the subject always creates the object, and that culture is firstly “written”, and then “read”, historians are beginning to demand that the silent, but tangible, things be noticed, that the brutal trivialities of the practical world be recognized, and for it to be accepted that objects do not need to be constantly constructed and deconstructed by man, but they in themselves display a considerable “executive power”¹². Correspondingly, sociologists dejected by the condition of the “labyrinth researcher”¹³ lost in the fluid post-modernity have expressed a longing for tangible reality and declared the need to include in their research “organic” subjects – remaining not only in intellectual, but also emotional and corporeal relation with the world¹⁴. Even anthropologists, for whom culture is primarily an intricately and densely woven “web of meanings”, have begun to notice that analysis carried out in such a way loses connection with “biological and physical needs of man” and the “hard surface of life”, and they advocate the practice of “behavioural hermeneutics”¹⁵. Finally, culture sociologists in their analyses dispense with mentalistically understood concept of “participation” in favour of the category of “cultural practices”, which do not involve the passive reception of cognized contents, but rather active co-shaping and experiencing the contents that can be felt with the senses.

Common to the authors, questioning the adequacy of the existing paradigm is the resistance to the dominant logocentrism, which they term a “linguistic perversion”. In their assessment, the meanings that function in social life and in culture cannot be reduced to language, however, individual researchers vary of course in

¹¹ M. Czerwiński, *Contributions in Contemporary Anthropology*, Warszawa 1988.

¹² B. Olsen, *Material Culture after Text* [in:] *Theory of Knowledge of the Past*, E. Domańska (ed.), Poznań 2010.

¹³ A. Zybortowicz, *Labyrinth Researcher* [in:] *Histories: One World Too Far*, E. Domańska (ed.), Poznań 1997.

¹⁴ A. Wyka, *Sociologist and Experience*, Warszawa 1993.

¹⁵ C. Geertz, *Making Experience, Authorizing Selves* [in:] *The Anthropology of Experience*, V. Turner, E. Bruner (eds.), Kraków 2011.

the degree of radicalism of their views. The furthest in this respect are philosophers who, like Richard Rorty, emphasize strongly the non-verbal character of the “brutal” phenomena, such as hunger or violence¹⁶. Similarly, Theodor Adorno very strongly expressed the belief that generally accepted conventional means of expression cannot do justice to the experiences of a “wounded life” (by which he meant not only spiritual dilemmas, but primarily physical pain). “The somatic stratum of life, distanced from reason, is the scene of suffering, which in the camps without a word of comfort burnt out all relieving aspects of the spirit and culture as its objectivization”, he wrote in “Negative Dialectics”¹⁷. Also anthropologists are skeptical as to the possibility of expressing in language all human experiences, especially extreme ones. So does Kirsten Hastrup, who, while writing of a virtual “ontological gap”, formulates the postulate for “ethics of inarticulatedness”. The author claims even that purely human “truth” lies decidedly beyond the dictionary of social sciences, and concepts used there do not allow one to relate the experiences that people go through. As evidence she gives examples of situations wherein the experience of permanent hunger or pain, with which victims of violence or members of marginalized social groups come into contact, is neutralized, or even repressed by linguistic conventions imposed on them from outside, which “play their games” on the surface of the phenomenon¹⁸.

The issue of meaning, only partially communicated by language, is in turn interestingly developed by Paul Willis, whose proposal goes beyond the banal statement that “the tongue gives lie to the voice, and the voice gives lie to the thought”. He argues that “the meaning embodied in physical form frequently is not reflected in language, and sometimes it is even arranged so as to oppose language”¹⁹. To confirm his thesis, the author proposes an analysis of the biker culture (that of young motorcyclists) based on the homology principle. Between the choice of a brand and such procedures as the removal of the silencer from the exhaust pipe, the addition of chrome elements, mounting a steering wheel in the shape of cattle horns, etc. and the identity of bikers – “thick-skinned, self-confident, raw and masculine”²⁰ the researcher would notice “similarities”, “correspondence” and “transitivity” that he termed as homology. All actions, even unconscious, carried out by users on the material form of the given object were for him manifestations of

¹⁶ R. Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, Warszawa 1999.

¹⁷ T. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Warszawa 1986, p. 513.

¹⁸ K. Hastrup, *A Passage to Anthropology*, Kraków 2008.

¹⁹ P. Willis, *The Ethnographic Imagination*, Kraków 2005, p. 47.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 49.

“bottom-up creation of meaning”, a practice universal especially in disadvantaged groups, where – in view of poor language competence (with the so-called limited code at their disposal) – expressing one’s views or displaying one’s identity is realized in expressive behaviour rather than in taking up discussion with a far more eloquent interlocutor. Such groups, according to the author, “do not verbalize their resistance against the content that is being impressed on them, but rather express their stubborn disobedience physically in a studied manner”²¹.

Recognizing the existence of equivalent “physical” and “corporeal” meanings, their presence in language the researcher is willing to treat merely as “a part of the continuum which consists of various ways in which man creates meaning”²². The essence of this continuum – and this seems to be particularly important – is expressed in mutual translatability of the material, somatic, behavioural, and symbolic dimensions. For Willis, drawing attention precisely to the usually underestimated materiality of culture is a chance of making up for deficits of the narrowly discursive approach. “This materiality seems obvious”, he writes, “when it comes to material culture, clothing, interior decoration, etc. However, it is to a similar extent distinctive in relation to forms the materiality of which seems less obvious, such as music, in which the practice of expression, irreducible to notation, possesses a purely physical dimension – beginning with the vibrations of the eardrum and the cochlea in the ear, through the movement of the chest and the rhythmic movement of the whole body in dance”²³. Yet another case, which illustrates well the importance of the physical meaning of the words used, are swearwords as discussed by Paul Willis. “In many languages – quite possibly commonly – swearing is usually combined with granting the uttered word a physical and corporeal dimension, which leads to non-encoded moments of physical expression corresponding to spitting. “We spit out curse words”, explains Willis, “by touching our teeth or lips with our tongue as we pronounce the fricative ‘f’ and ‘k.’ *Fuck* is quite possibly the archetypal swearword. Cursing is frequently accompanied by an expressive body movement and tone of voice. Violent confrontations reveal the extent to which the continuity between linguistic and physical systems of meanings is unavoidable, when raised fists and the threat: ‘I’ll blow your fucking head off’ function interchangeably”²⁴.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 35.

²² Ibidem.

²³ Ibidem, p. 47.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 57.

The examples that the British explorer shows prove how many meanings are contained in the seemingly transparent and irrelevant material side of cultural products. Even in the case of such a developed and conventionalized semiotic system as language, which signs seem to have no “natural” correlation to what they denote, sensual features of the message do not remain irrelevant. They are capable of enhancing the sense of an utterance, they add new content, or even deny the verbally articulated meanings. A further couple of examples will allow to better justify this opinion. They show that the ability of non-reflective, yet effective use of the possibilities inherent in the linguistic material and its modes of use is quite a common skill. Most people use it spontaneously to differentiate the mood of an utterance, of giving it a subtle “meaning”, emphasizing social distances or increasing the bluntness of their reaction. These colloquial stylistics cover almost all the means mentioned in textbooks on speech: the tonal organization of words, their instrumentation, rhythm and intonation, the choice of vocabulary and the pattern of larger systems, as phrases or sentences.

A good example of such abilities is, for instance, the description of amateur singing manners found in English pubs, thoroughly analyzed by Richard Hoggart: “The manner of singing is traditional and displays permanent characteristics”, wrote the researcher. “It is to embody the intensity of feeling, it is emotional, but in these circumstances drawing a thick line is in order, a simplification boldly turning into a caricature of emotions. In such a way the ‘visceral’ style of singing used by folk artists is achieved. Here the voice soars and falls rapidly, and each emotional phrase is drawn out and prolonged. The effect is further increased by nasality – a feature most easily recognized is the drawing out of the ‘r’ (aa) sound and its emotional role, which comes from, in my opinion, partly the need of squeezing every bit of emotion from the waves of rhythm, and partly from the desire to emphasize the pattern of emotional declaration”²⁵.

The studies of ethnomusicologists likewise show that the performance mode is extremely significant, and to an at least the same extent certifies the identity of the artists through the repertoire (themes, vocabulary, and musical motives). “Using traditionally established tempi, volume, vocal registration and manners influencing the vocal colour or the modes of communication (phrasing, accenting) seems best to express the identity of a particular group”, writes Anna Czekanowska, “although without always achieving the rank of stereotype. Their effect functions more in the

²⁵ R. Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy*, 1976, pp. 200–201.

realm of feelings rather than fully conscious experiences”²⁶. Only the form further clarifies the meaning of an utterance, and that is why the analysis of linguistic practices does not grant one the access to volatile, yet highly significant physical meaning, which is irreducible to grammatical and lexical one. “The form of utterance is the most local and hermetic vehicle of meaning”, confirms Ewa Klekot²⁷.

Edward Wilson, who focused his attention on the title of Nabokov’s “paedophile” novel, provides other evidence of the intervention of the material, physical meaning of language. In the word “Lo-li-ta”, as he writes, the mere way of articulation suggests certain content (“the tip of the tongue descends in three footfalls along the palate, so as to touch the teeth on ‘three’”) and thereby “by using anatomical precision, the alliteration of repetitive ‘l’ sounds and the poetic meter, Nabokov immediately permeates the character’s name, the title of the book and the main theme with an aura of sensuality”²⁸.

At times, the ability to properly use non-verbal linguistic elements would become part of good manners, instilled in young people from the upper classes. Erving Goffman quotes parts of a nineteenth century manual on etiquette, where precisely these nuances are pointed out: “Commands should be given gently, with dignity and reserve. The voice should be composed, and friendly or familiar tone are to be avoided. When addressing them, it is better to speak with a raised intonation and by no means lower it at the close of a sentence. The most well-bred people would always address the servants with expressions like: ‘I’d be much obliged in you did this and that’, ‘If you would be so kind as to’ in a gentle voice, but with a very high intonation. The excellence of manners in this respect consists in conveying in the words that the task to be performed is a courtesy, and in the intonation – that it is a duty”²⁹. However, sometimes it happens as well that particular intonation is chosen unconsciously and can serve as an indicator of certain processes taking place in society. Jeremy Rifkin points to such a case in *The Age of Access*: “Among the rich youth in industrialized countries there can be observed more and more frequently an interesting phenomenon. The tone of voice used by teenagers is almost always rising and suggests that what they say is a question rather than a statement, as if to try it out. Psychologists and sociologists are intrigued by this widespread habit and they wonder whether it is not a symptom of

²⁶ A. Czekanowska, *The Act of Musical Performance and Ethnic Identity* [in:] *Musicologist and the Musical Work*, M. Woźna, Z. Fabiański (eds.), Kraków 1999, p. 396.

²⁷ E. Klekot, *Ethnography and the Nikiiform. A Sketch* [in:] *The Humanities and Domination*, T. Rakowski, A. Malewska-Szałygin (eds.), Warszawa 2011, p. 143.

²⁸ E. Wilson, *Consilience*, Poznań 2002, p. 336.

²⁹ E. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, Warszawa 2006, p. 63.

a change in personality, from autonomous to relational. The open and conditional nature of this new way of talking suggests that one's own thoughts remain in a constant correlation with other members of society who certify their meaning. A declarative sentence, so characteristic of the autonomous nature, seems to subside before the question asked by a more relative self³⁰.

Descriptions pointed out by different authors indicating the importance of "physical" or "corporeal" meaning (as Willis calls it) should be the subject of further reflection, as treated not simply as insightful observations, but in a far more serious sense – as evidence of a new way of thinking of culture and society – they can contribute to the formation of a paradigm in the humanities that could rival "egocephalocentrism". In contrast to the approach focused on abstract meanings and values contemplated by individual minds, "noscorpocircularism" that is being advocated here would assume that culture and society are primarily various things and bodies circulating around, which communicate to each other material and somatic meanings, only sometimes expressing them in discursive form. Such perspective seems to be interesting not only from a purely theoretical point of view, as a counterbalance to previous assumptions that leave more and more doubt in their wake, but also in view of its empirical accuracy. As indeed for a long time researchers have been suggesting that in a globalized world the flow of people, goods, and symbols leads to a process of hybridization of meanings given to objects in an absolutely arbitrary and uncontrolled way. If one adds to this the well-known phenomenon of dramatically low cultural competence in a considerable number of members of contemporary societies, one can reasonably ask: what exactly are the elements of cultural communication that are actually received by today's consumer of the broadly understood culture? Is it really possible to continue to maintain that they know how to properly decode the message of the symbol reaching them from a distant time or space, if their knowledge of their nearest, local, or national heritage reveals most embarrassing shortcomings?

If one was to give up the idealistic beliefs (the social function of which, among others, is masking the ambitions of elites as to the hegemony that they are allegedly entitled to, or to holding a "government of souls") cherished by traditional humanities, it turns out that the only layer of a presented object accessible to an ordinary recipient are its organoleptic features (and hence its physical meanings). The average man in the street will react somatically to them (that is, he will emit corporeal meanings), meanwhile the intelligible content requiring interpretation will go over his head. Of exactly such reactions (physiological, not mental) wrote

³⁰ J. Rifkin, *The Age of Access*, Wrocław 2003, p. 221.

Edmund Leach while reflecting on the specific perception of an object completely culturally foreign. In his opinion the recipient is experiencing “specific experiences related to biological, animal aspect of human nature”, and those experiences are “an answer to a mixture of messages consisting of tactile stimuli, fragrance, movement, taste and visual aspects”³¹.

2. Physical and corporeal meanings of language

To examine the prevalence of physical and corporeal meanings in the following sections of this paper, arguments that have been long since used in the dispute over natural or conventional nature of language will be called forth – the most important medium of social life and at the same time a matrix frequently used in studies of other semiotic systems. Due to the point of view chosen in these considerations, their main advantage is a clear indication of the interdependence of sound, the physiological side of articulation of sounds, and sense given to the words that they form. Those observations made first in the ancient times, considered through modern rhetoric, but also experimentally confirmed in twentieth-century studies, appear to be consistent with the classical theories in the field of semiotics. What is more, analyses of these theories made by the most perceptive commentators create the premises to regard them in the context of the biological understanding of the process of semiosis, and thus the whole culture – an approach that is growing popular once more. This all makes the well-known concepts a certain new entity, worthy of re-thinking and use in the current discussion on the limitations of traditional humanities.

Variation between the idea of *physei* and *thesei* (nature and convention) has accompanied the reflection on language from its beginning. As early as in the first European treatise on linguistics – Plato’s *Cratylus* – the sophistic thesis of agreement as the basis for the giving of names is brought into doubt. Hermogenes speaks in favour of it, explaining his position as follows: “I cannot believe that there is other principle of naming other than convention and agreement. It seems to me to be that if someone gives a name to something, it is correct, and if someone changes it to another, the other is no less valid than the first. Just like when we change the names of our servants, the second ones are not worse than the ones originally granted. As it is not from nature that a name arises, but by the law and

³¹ E. Leach, *Levels of Communication and the Problem of Taboo in the Reception and Understanding of Primitive Art*, „Polish Folk Art” 1986, No. 3–4, p. 163.

custom of those, who usually give names³². The eponymous Cratylus is of a different mind, and he is the one to confront the sophistic belief that the link between the word and the object is arbitrary with arguments which are to prove the correlation between the sound of words and their meaning. According to this notion the vibrating and expressing movement sound “r” (“rho”) is present in such words as rhein – to swim, rhoe – current, or tromos – tremor by no coincidence, “as the giver of names noticed that in the case of this consonant the tongue rests the least and vibrates the most (p. 44), whereas the consonant “l” (“lambda”), during the articulation of which the tongue as if slithers, is present in the words: leia – that, which is smooth, liperon – oily, kollodos – sticky. As one can see, Plato’s interpretation goes beyond ascribing the function of evoking particular sensual impressions to the tonal values of language and he reaches far deeper, that is to their articulatory substructure (“iota” is convenient for “determining all things light, which are able to penetrate everything”, as it is pronounced with a strong aspiration; “delta” and “tau”, pronounced by compressing and squeezing the tongue, were used in the words “bonds” and “rest”). It in fact generates the “sound sense” of individual sounds and then creates clear suggestion concerning the meaning of words that contain those sounds. The “principle” of names, consisting in this precisely, means that the phonemic and phonetic properties of sounds are a kind of reflection of the mechanics of the external world (p. 44), and this – the confirmation of the prevailing order.

Even more attention to the sound quality of words was paid in the ancient treatises on style, by which was meant both using the relevant figures (tropes) as well as the esthetic side of the language, perceived by the senses. “Some sounds caress, others tease and embitter, some others, in turn, soothe” – explained Dionysius, and therefore from different sounds “soft and coarse, smooth and rough voices are created, which fill our ears with sweetness or bitterness, they make us mourn or rejoice³³. It is difficult to think of a more accurate way to express the thought that the words we utter affect not only the mind, but also the senses of the listener, they have therefore both a conceptual and a physical meaning, and the latter is conditioned by corporeal attributes of the man capable of articulating different sounds and of their perception (also dependent on the capabilities of the human body). Many interesting observations to this effect were made in the art of pronunciation and a number of specific guidelines were made as to using those non-discursive ways of persuasion. In view of the fact, as was commonly believed, that “a”

³² Plato, *Cratylus*, Lublin 1990, p. 4.

³³ *Three Greek Styles*, M. Madyda (ed.), Wrocław 1953, pp. 199, 208.

sounds the most pleasantly, especially if pronounced in a prolonged way (“as with this vowel the mouth opens very wide, and the air exhaled rises to the palate” – p. 204), it was recommended to use such nicely sounding phones in words reserved for objects with positive connotations – for instance Aias. In turn, the most unpleasant sounding consonant, that is “r” (which additionally is invested with “the highest energy load – p. 205) is suitable for objects and phenomena with negative connotations – such as “bebroke” (he devoured). In appreciation of this principle of sensual analogy between the sound of a work and its reference, Homer was presented as model, as by using long or short, pretty or ugly sounds “only through their construction he expresses the length of time, the size of the body, excessive agitation, the immobility of a standstill or some other similar phenomenon (p. 209).

The same reasons (adapting a link between the qualities of sound, the way it is emitted and the relevant physical-spatial associations) played a role in the characterization of meters, which first and foremost should be suitable to the chosen topic and its importance. An iamb (two syllables: low and high, unstressed and stressed, short and long – according to the ancient principle, or just unstressed and stressed – according to the contemporary standard) was held to be a common measure, appropriate to the spoken language (“most people unwittingly speaks in iambs” – p. 96) and that is why it was suitable for satires or epigrams. A trochee (two syllables: long and short – according to vowel length, or stressed and unstressed – according to the accenting principle) was judged to be “too akin to a wild dance” (p. 27). An anapaest (three syllables: two unstressed and one stressed) was called the Sotadean measure after a renowned pornographer, Sotades, and therefore it was used to expressing obscene content: because of its “effeminate tempo”, “degenerate pace” and “broken, vile measures” (p. 136). The six-foot hexameter, in turn (first four syllables – dactyls, the fifth one – dactyl or spondee, the sixth one spondee or trochee) was held to be the heroic measure, suitable for themes grand and lofty – as one cannot write the “Illiad” with Archilochus’ iambs! (p. 83). The idea of hexameter was beautifully explained by Ortega y Gasset: “words are subordinated to discipline and seem to have little to do with banal existence, which they related to in everyday speech. As if a hoist, hexameter holds words upwards, suspended in imaginary air, not letting their feet touch the ground. It is a symbol. Such was the intention of the poet: deliver us from everyday reality. Sentences display a ceremonial character, turns of phrase are lofty and somewhat hieratic, and the grammar is ancient”³⁴.

³⁴ J. Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on 'Don Quixote'*, Warszawa 2008, p. 99.

Due to such major physical, material meaning of language also the ancient rhetoric dealt with the selection of appropriately sounding words (euphony), their intricate system (tropes) and rhythmic course (meters). Not only “figures of thought” (consisting in the relationship of the word with the speaker or the reality – for instance irony, allegory), or “figures of sense” (referring to the meaning relations, for instance metaphor) were analyzed, but also “verbal figures” (based on the sound qualities – for instance “pretty” or “ugly” sounds, short or long, rhythm used, inversion). That is why out of two principal aspects of pronunciation (ethical and pathetic), the former, *ethos*, referred to the mores and morality represented by the speaker and shared by the group, whereas the other, *pathos*, contained elements of persuasion aimed to influence the audience, such as body expression, theatricality of passions and reference to sensual representations. Only a combination of all these elements would justify the conviction expressed by Gorgias: the word is “a great mighty one”, he argued as one of the first great orators, “which with the help of a small and hidden organ (tongue) calls forth things divine. For it is capable of both alleviating fear and chasing concern away, awakening joy and increasing compassion”³⁵. Accordingly, it was assumed that apart from discursive arguments “during speech other factors play a part, such as the voice of the speaker, its volume, tone and rhythm”³⁶. As Roland Barthes wrote, “in ancient times rhetoric included a part that is now forgotten, censored by classical commentators: *actio*, the system of physical manifestation of discourse; it was about the theatre of expression, about an orator-actor ‘expressing’ his indignation, his compassion, etc.”³⁷. As part of this “entire presence of human mouth” Barthes included the patina of consonants, the wantonness of vowels, the links between body and language (and not only sense and words), therefore the whole materiality and corporeality of pronunciation, along with the sensuality of breath, or even hoarseness. For the ancients the world was “to be heard”, which for twenty-five centuries the Western thought has been trying to forget.

The conviction of the dual power of impact of rhetorical oration led in subsequent centuries of its development to the distinguishing between the logical, rational part in texts, containing the “main ideas” and the emotional, “pathetic” part, containing “additional ideas”, which was to reflect the duality of the heart (Nature) and mind (Reason) and was based on the conviction of the dual nature of language, capable of presenting ideas, but also of expressing emotions and actions. It also

³⁵ Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, “Humanities Review” 1984, No. 3, p. 35.

³⁶ M. Meyer, M. Carrilho, B. Timmermans, *History of Rhetoric*, Warszawa 2010, p. 56.

³⁷ R. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, Warszawa 1997, p. 97.

meant for it to be recognized that rhetorical figures are dictated not only by the human mind, but also the human body. In the words quoted by Meyer, Carrilho and Timmermans de la Chambre: “nature, having destined human for civic life, was not satisfied with giving him a tongue, so that he would discover his intentions. It also wanted to emblazon on his face and in his eyes the images of his thoughts, so that when his word was to give lie to his heart, his face could deny his word”³⁸. And it is with this second dimension that the part of rhetoric pertaining to elocution was concerned (clearly distinguished from the rest of its fields called “invention”, “disposition” and “delivery”) and concentrated on such means of expression as pronunciation – that is style – and gestures. Many centuries later this dual sense of the phenomenon of speech the Jansenists of Port-Royal (Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole) contained in the “theory of added significance”. By this they understood the pattern which causes “a word to awake in the mind not only the main idea, considered to be its proper meaning, but also a number of other ideas, which could be termed as added ideas. To these additional ideas no attention is paid, in spite of the fact that they influence the mind”³⁹.

The confirmation of the validity of all these observations emerged from the scientific findings from the early twentieth century. Thanks to the achievements of psycholinguistics, Roman Jakobson characterized the “symbolic of sounds of speech” and their not only expressive, but also cognitive features of significance – no longer intuitively, but in a systematic and confident way. He emphasized also that the so-called double articulation theory refuses single sounds “their inherent”, “natural” meaning and it ascribes them merely a distinctive function within a given language system, as the ability to construct sense (based now only on convention) it reserves for words and sentences. Meanwhile, according to the researcher, more and more studies seem to confirm the existence of a “direct and independent meaning in the life of a language of units forming the sound shape of words”⁴⁰. For him as well, the sensory qualities, triggered by the sound of phones, were to be the result of the way they are articulated. Therefore, the “bright” vowels (for instance “i”) are suitable for expressing “subtlety, smallness, delicacy, softness and associate terms” (p. 287), as they are articulated “to the outside of our bodies” (p. 292), whereas vowels such as for instance “a” – articulated “to the inside” – are imagined as “dark”, because “the further you enter the body, the darker it is there (p. 293). Tests

³⁸ M. Meyer, M. Carrilho, B. Timmermans, op.cit., p. 157.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 187.

⁴⁰ R. Jakobson, *Magic of the Sounds of Speech* [in:] *In Search of the Essence of Language*, Warszawa 1989, p. 282.

conducted with the participation of Hungarian children and adults showed drastically different and shared by the vast majority of respondents qualifications of the sound “i” and “u”: “i” was “faster” than “u” for 94%, “smaller” for 88%, “prettier” for 83%, “friendlier” for 82%, “harder” for 71%, whereas “u” was “thicker” for 98%, “fluffier”, and “darker” for 97%, “sadder” and more “blunt” for the 92%, “more bitter” for 86%, and “stronger” for 80%. Equally instructive are the answers regarding the symbolic relationship between “r” and “l”: the first was “wild, fighting, male, ongoing and harder”, and the latter “wetter” (p. 295). These observations, confirmed by tests carried out on the material of different languages, demonstrate the universality of the phenomena, which Jakobson explains by the fact of the existence of rooted oppositions of the kind: light/dark, light/heavy, small/large, etc. in elementary structures of perceptual distinctions available to man, and so – by reductionist reasoning – in his biopsychological equipment.

The confirmation of the need to take into account both dimensions of a given object of culture can be found in reflections of Roman Ingarden, who proposed that each work of art be interpreted as a multi-layer product, consisting of formal moments, but also of the qualitatively specified essentials. In the case of music, the philosopher pointed to the presence of structures built from sounds next to purely tonal qualities of those sounds. In literature he distinguished a layer of significance units, a layer of appearances and a layer of objects presented, but also a layer of verbal sounds, present even in a quiet reading (“hearing the words”). In painting he could see coloured patches of a given shape and layout, but he also ascribed an important role to the sensory (visual) qualities of these colors – “clear visibility”, “alignment of pure qualities”⁴¹. In order to limit the scope of this article to verbal creations, it is worth noting that Ingarden found a sensory basis and a ground for the instantiation of sound in those material qualities. The researcher emphasized that the phonemic features of words (such as its colour – light or dark, the phones – rough and clean, the language melody, rhythm, tempo, etc.), even though they are devoid of sense, are not indifferent to the meaning they accompany – rather they colour it, and not only emotionally: “significance entireties out of necessity call for linguistic-sound material”⁴², and sometimes even they are able to completely replace them, constructing certain meanings in themselves. On this basis the philosopher showed a significant difference between the original version of the beginning of the invocation in “Pan Tadeusz”, which read: “Homeland, my Lithuania!” and its final version: “Lithuania, my homeland!”

⁴¹ R. Ingarden, *Studies in Aesthetics*, Vol. II, Warszawa 1966.

⁴² R. Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, Warszawa 1988, p. 98.

Ingarden found an interesting, because “marginal case” of a literary work in “Słopiewnie”, and especially in “Mirohłady” by Tuwim, wherein one can in vain search for meaning of words and sense behind sentences, and despite which those “creations posing for words”, devoid of link to reality, exist for their own sake, and their sensory qualities carry a “nebular core of the world” – certain associative content triggered by euphony, rhythm, tone. “Tuwim undoubtedly notices something valid”, observes Ingarden and points to a situation in which even “a ‘normal’ literary work can to a certain extent be transformed into such ‘mirohłady’ when the reader doesn’t know the words that appear in it”⁴³ or when “with an inappropriate attitude of the reader those sounds can ‘cloud’ the remaining content of the work”⁴⁴.

3. Meaning as a biological phenomenon

Reflection listed here on the presence in language of meanings set by the sound of words, that is their phonemic aspect, and the way they are articulated, that is their physiological dimension, constituted a further development and at the same time support of theses formulated today by anthropologists regarding the existence and important role of physical and corporeal meanings. On this basis, it can be assumed that meanings appearing in social life and culture function in varied forms, as by partially preserving, and partially modifying their sense, they move from one medium to the other. A convenient theoretical perspective that contains the assumption of continuity and transformation of meaning is offered by the concept of Charles Peirce, long since appreciated in sociology, as well as its interpretation put forward by Charles Morris (accepted especially in Polish sociology of culture – Kłoskowska). It is therefore worth to recall their most essential assumptions in the context of the analyses being performed.

The category of continuity has in Peirce’s line of thought a semiotic reference (the idea of translation of a sign into another sign), a metaphysical one (identical meaning travelling from one medium to another, therefore the ability of physical meanings to turn into emotional or abstract ones), and an epistemological one (practical knowledge is to be subordinated here to the “habits of action” and scientific knowledge to “habits of thought”). If the semiotic aspect authorizes the recognition of meaning as a result of a translation of a sign into an another system

⁴³ R. Ingarden, *Studies in Aesthetics*, Vol. III, Warszawa 1970, p. 179.

⁴⁴ R. Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, Warszawa 1988, p. 96.

of signs, and the metaphysical aspect refers one to the pragmatic interpretation (the meaning of the sign is the action, experience or sensation caused by the sign), it implies that the epistemological dimension assumes the constitutive role of meaning for the intersubjectivity of a community that shares certain habits and uses them as directives for action or learning. Precisely these of Peirce's lines of thought make it so attractive for sociologists and culture scholars. Namely, it turns out that the dynamic status of the transferred meaning in strings of different signs can be described as a semiosis process synonymous with "life" of the mind on one hand, but on the other it also shows that the activity of a sign is capable of going beyond the realm of thoughts and enter a strictly social sphere of action. What follows is that the universe of thought is capable of influencing the social reality through the directives of acting and thinking coded also somatically or mentally, and what remains identical (despite the change of the way of manifestation) is the meaning freely circulating between objects, bodies, and minds. So although semiosis in the broadest sense can be understood as a trans-epochal and trans-cultural process of exchange of ideas, and the whole world as one big system of signs, which allows one to see in the philosopher the "father of anthropological hermeneutics"⁴⁵, it does not result from it by any means that the meaning contained in mental concepts should be convicted only to exist in the realm of the intelligible.

"We can conceive of a sign so broadly", claims Peirce, "that its interpretant will be no longer an idea, but an act or experience. We can even expand its understanding so that interpretant of a sign will turn out to be a simple quality of an emotion"⁴⁶. This is why the philosopher admits the existence of three types of interpretants, understood as the effects of signs circulating in a given community. He clearly distinguishes emotional interpretants (feelings generated by the meanings contained in signs), energy interpretants (such as physical effort necessary in a response activity to a given sign) and only as third he lists the logical interpretant (intellectual sign – in contrast to the other two not an individual but a general one, because it takes on the form of a habit of thought or action shared in a given group).

It is only this whole rather complicated and far from clear context and a multitude of distinctions (subordinated to the triadomania characteristic of Peirce's concept) allows one to fully understand the basic message of his version of prag-

⁴⁵ F. Turner, *Reflexivity as Evolution in Thoreau's Walden* [in:] *The Anthropology of Experience*, V. Turner, E. Bruner (eds.), Kraków 2011, p. 105.

⁴⁶ Ch. Peirce, *A Selection of Papers on Semiotics*, Warszawa 1997.

matism: “words cause physical effects”. This is because the thoughts dressed in words influence the material realm, but one must remember that the matter containing thought also influences the human body and human emotions. If the philosophical conclusion of such a vision of reality can be a final denial of the Cartesian and then Kantian dualism and consequently the overthrow of all barriers between subject and object, then for a sociologist the conclusion from Peirce’s pragmatism has to be as follows: we cannot speak of separation of what is human and what is material in a society. Things and people, subjects and objects are in fact in constant interaction constantly exchanging “meanings” expressed materially, somatically or conceptually and in the same way substantiated in the process of reception.

An interesting development of the semiotic concept of pragmatism (or rather: a pragmatic concept of semiotics) was made by Charles Morris, heavily influenced by Peirce, but also by George Herbert Mead. From Peirce Morris took over the belief that to determine the meaning of a sign is nothing else than to determine the activity that the sign causes. In turn, he shared the conviction with Mead of the inseparability of the processes of experience, action, and symbolization, and therefore of the necessity to examine the personality, self, and society as a process, and not a separate phenomena. Just as Mead, Morris understood meaning as reaction, an action of the organism rather than a phenomenon associated with reflective consciousness.

He was not, on the other hand, interested in the finalistic perspective (close to Mead) of the “universe of conversation” as the broadest, final context of acting and thinking of man in society, nor – what is noticeable in Peirce’s thought – was he interested in the final logical interpretant. Instead of universality of shared reactions Morris dealt more with extemporaneous activities of subjects responding to stimuli in a manner appropriate to all biological organisms. Thanks to such attitude, Morris saw the examination of the process of semiosis in terms of a decisively interdisciplinary enterprise. Semiotics was to be a general theory of signs in all their forms and manifestations: animal and human, normal and pathological, linguistic and non-verbal, individual and social. This in turn led him to the conclusion that such a wide range can only be supported by a biological theory, reducing comments about the signs to statements about the behavior of living beings, and more specifically – to statements about muscular and glandular reactions of the sign’s interpreter.

It is precisely this aspect of the American researcher’s thought that Janina Kotarbińska points out: “it is therefore about a biological theory of the sign, about biological semiotics, a discipline that would be part of the natural sciences and

which would permit to explain and predict 'sign behavior' basing on general laws governing the behavior of animal organisms. The characteristics of the sign should be formulated in terms describing tendencies of behavior caused by this sign in its interpreters"⁴⁷. In the case of "communication" understood this way, considering consciousness in the process of transmission or reception of meaning becomes superfluous, which is emphasized by understanding sociology and anthropology based on the interpretative paradigm, and since the operations taking place with the participation of reflection constitute merely the margin of social life, the shape of these disciplines and the entire humanities should be rethought.

Voices pointing to such a need have been in any case appearing for a while now. The authors dealing with the philosophy of the social sciences, Ted Benton and Ian Craib, call for realism, or even "critical" naturalism and claim that "non-interpretative anti-positivism, which would be a clear return to a different social ontology, and thus to quite a different concept of the relationships between the natural and social sciences" is feasible and promising⁴⁸. The current binding vision of social life, according to which the researcher is to take interest only in "sensible, rational, social action, action which the actor gives meaning to and which is directed towards other people in order to achieve practical goals in the world" is, according to them, impossible to maintain⁴⁹. Key features of society composed of people are in fact completely incomprehensible, "if you do not treat them as physical beings with organic and functional needs and weaknesses. That is why", they write, "we are essentially social beings through our physicality, not only because of mental life"⁵⁰. And because the physical equipment of people determines their essential connection "with other animate and inanimate beings: the physical spaces, materials, tools and machinery, domestic and wild animals or plants, agricultural and semi-natural ecosystems, buildings, highways, etc." all those elements deserve to be considered as "elements of the overall metabolism of society"⁵¹.

Also Jurgen Habermas, closely tracking the progress of neuroscience, believes that "the image resurrected these days by the cognitive science of a conscious monad recursively closed in itself, remaining in an unspecified relationship with the organic substrate of its brain, is false"⁵². Therefore he calls for a break with the Cartesian doctrine of two substances and Kant's idea of two worlds, instead opting

⁴⁷ J. Kotarbińska, *Theory of Science and Theory of Language*, Warszawa 1990, p. 189.

⁴⁸ T. Benton, I. Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science*, Wrocław 2003, p. 154.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 95.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 149.

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 150.

⁵² J. Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, Warszawa 2012, p. 18.

for the concept of agency rooted in the body and the life course. Even if there is some intangible “spirit”, in which humanists believe strongly, it must be embodied in “material substrates of signs perceived acoustically or visually, and so in observable actions and communicative forms of expression, in symbolic objects or artifacts”, writes the philosopher⁵³. Ascertaining the appreciation of the naturalistic theories in contemporary humanities, the author strongly advocates the concept of society is governed by the laws of nature. While ascertaining the appreciation of the naturalistic theories in contemporary humanities, the author strongly advocates the concept of society as governed by the laws of nature.

Finally, Doris Bachmann-Medick, who follows subsequent “turns” in culture studies, highlights the need formulated by many researchers to link them with the latest discoveries in the fields of biology and neurophysiology, which may result in a fundamental paradigm shift, that is one which “removes or overcomes the boundaries between cultural studies and natural science framework of reference”⁵⁴. In this new perspective, “without falling into contradiction, the spirit, consciousness, volition, and freedom to act will be treated as natural processes based on biological processes”, claims the author⁵⁵. Of course, along with the adoption of the new guidelines, it will be necessary to develop a new conceptual apparatus, where terms such as humanism, individualism, and freedom or the categories of subject, text, and value will completely lose their importance. Their place will probably be taken by terms which already appear in sociology and anthropology. To underline their importance and extensive background in the form of reflection of language, that “heart of cultural life forms”⁵⁶, as well as classical semiotic theories was the aim of these reflections.

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⁵³ Ibidem, p. 153.

⁵⁴ D. Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns*, Warszawa 2012, p. 466.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 468.

⁵⁶ J. Habermas, op.cit., p. 153.

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