

Summary

The Culture of Mundane Experience. Semiotic Aspects of Everyday Life. Essays

The book is a collection of essays on various aspects of current Polish culture, its identity and the changes it has undergone over the last fifteen years. The departure point is provided by the concepts of mundanity and the commonplace as categories which, from the perspective of the culture's user, describe some aspects of experiencing it. This is the perspective initiated by Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, Piotr Sztompka and Roch Sulima, and by the analyses of the experience of reality conducted from the sociological, linguistic and anthropological perspective.

The book consists of five chapters, each pertaining to a different phenomenon evident in Polish culture in the recent years. The assessment of this culture begins with theoretical reflection on the functioning of today's culture as a constellation of texts (in the semiotic understanding of the term) and a concrete social practice. In today's global culture, traditional divisions separating the order of high-artistic events from the order of events destined for a wide audience no longer possess their former power to differentiate. This is because a correlate of what culture actually is at any given moment evolves in the awareness of each of its users; in addition, each user has different perceptions of this subject, developed on the basis of his/her contact with the media and with concrete cultural events. *Praxis* of this type may be described as the culture of mundane experience. These issues are addressed in the chapter entitled *The Culture of Mundane Experience and the Spaces of Text Migration*. The aim of the book is to describe cultural transformation and cultural permanence by means of terms that would combine the individual and social experience of reality with its lingual expression; this is associated with the use of milieu-related formulas and labels, as well as the formulae of event description which have a more or less durable lifespan in the social discourse. The issues pertaining to the creation of reality by means of utterances that describe it are discussed in

the chapter entitled *Mundanity and Utterance. A Supplement to the Anthropology of Everyday Life*.

The ways of inscribing cultural events into individual experience of the users of culture are the topic of the second chapter of the book. One of the examples of cultural alteration is the image of fashion for pregnant women and its evolution in the recent years. *The Marginalia of Culture: on the Images of Pregnancy and Their Meanings in the Culture of Today* is an essay on the symbolic meanings of pregnancy in the Polish culture of today, revealed as a sign of a very definite system of values, social status and ideological convictions. This part of the book, namely the chapter *Experiencing Texts of Culture*, contains reflections on the role and function of demonstrative signs in coding our perceptions about the past, and their meaning in constructing convictions regarding truth (*Representation and Truth*). The analysed material includes stills from Roman Polański's film *The Pianist*, photographs from the archive of the Justice and Police Museum in Sydney, and anonymous photographs of Krakowskie Przedmieście street during the Warsaw Uprising.

The third chapter focuses on the role of statements and tales referring to the past, which often testify to the phenomenon of interpreting facts, stories and personal experiences. The essay *Speech and the Altar* contains a semiological analysis of the behaviour and statements of Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to Poland, namely at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The main aim of this part of the book is to attempt to typify current forms of public statement; hence the background examples were selected from famous speeches by 20th-century public figures, such as Martin Luther King, Lech Wałęsa and Pope John Paul II. The pope's speech at Auschwitz has been analysed from the point of view of political and sacral functions. The essay *Edelman: the Tale, the Discourse of Awareness, the Conflict* refers to specific features of tales about the past that is a part of the narrator's experience. It analyses the semiotic and cognitive functions of such tales, which are both a recreation and a construction of the past, as well as an expression of the individual experience filtered through narrative matrices.

The fourth chapter refers to various aspects of public communication in the media and in political discourse in Poland in the last decade. This part of the book consists of five essays referring to linguistic aspects of constructing identity and transformation in the current and former social discourse. The article *Aggression and Quarrel in the Media Versus Colloquial Linguistic Behaviour* describes the role of these phenomena in the public debate in radio and TV broadcasts in Poland. Conclusions drawn from the obser-

vation of social communicative practices pertain also to colloquial speech acts. The material under analysis consists of statements of Polish politicians dating from 2009. The essay *The Language and Social Change*, presenting and categorising recent changes on the political map of Poland in the context of linguistic communicative practices typical to specific political parties, constitutes an attempt at developing a pertinent typology. It refers to the discourse of power in the period before the systemic transformations, the public statement patterns utilised in the rhetoric of the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość party, and the possibility of applying the categories introduced by the 20th-century linguist Émile Benveniste in order to describe the relationships and interconnections between language and society.

The problem of the erosion of today's public communication and the gradual devaluation of the Polish political discourse from the level of a rhetorical tool to the level of a collection of tricks used to discredit political opponents is discussed in the article *Between Rhetoric and Eristics. Poland as Text*; it is, once again, an attempt to apply the semiotic and linguistic method to the analysis of statements referring to what today's Poland is and what it should be; the essay presents the symbolic images from the present-day collective awareness as they are revealed in the public discourse. Chapter 4 is supplemented with a short thesis referring to the language and national identity in a version familiar from the linguistic experience of Finland in the 17th century, which was very different from, and thus contrasting with the ways in which the Polish national awareness was reflected in the language. This part of the book is, in practice, a gloss to the work *Język potrzebny od zaraz* [A Language Needed Right Away] by Łukasz Sommer.

The last chapter of the book contains two essays referring to film. The first focuses on the role of pigeons in the film *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* by Jim Jarmusch and constitutes an appreciation of the ways in which commonplace perceptions are transformed into film signs. The second, entitled *Dr House: the Game and Semiology*, is an analysis of the construction of the well-known television show about a diagnostician in the context of the vast international popularity of the series.

Overall, the book presents an interpretation of various most recent phenomena observable in today's culture, selected according to the principles of synecdoche, and an analysis of their diagnostic functions in the context of culture-related social change.