

On Symbolic Challenges for Education and Identities: Locality and (Dis)placement

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Summary

In the introduction, the author points out the dual tensions and pathologies of identity that education must face. Next, a framework of considerations is created by indicating two poles of identity strategies, which create a continuum and a duality through various determinisms and creative metamorphoses. Then, the challenges of caring for the quality of identity in confrontation with the difficulties of adapting to complex life situations are considered. Emphasis is placed on the gravity carried by perceiving the lifeworld in terms of a pandemic of thoughtlessness. Next, ways of giving meaning to places for their educational role are mentioned. Finally, in lieu of a conclusion, there is an attempt to reflect on being on the road in the face of difference. The substantive background of the text consists of references to various perspectives on understanding the complexity of the world, including hermeneutics and hermeneutic sociology, critical pedagogy and semiotics of culture, psychoanalysis, and theology, with special mention of such figures as Mikhail Bakhtin, Zygmunt Bauman, Erik H. Erikson, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Tillich, Florian Znaniecki, and others.

Introduction: Dual Tensions and Identity Pathologies

As a dimension of the functioning of individuals, social communities, and institutions, identity is always entangled in the tension between separateness and its symbolic closure and openness to interaction with Others, which expands its horizon of universality. Contemporary processes of identity formation among individuals and communities inevitably take place between two poles: the pole of increasingly virtualized references, up to globality and embeddedness in a community network rooted in the Internet, on the one hand, and the pole related to the need for emotionally close relationships that strongly motivate closed identification, increasingly called neo-tribal, on the other hand. The quality of the symbolic space of such identifications, which pertains to their potential, and the possibility of

treating the diversification of such space as requiring tolerance, which extends to respect and the ability to treat its meanings as an opportunity, are questions that constantly come into play. This space of tolerance also means creative openness to the Other without prejudices, aggressive claims, and degrading gestures. An intermediate link in the space of differences is occupied by environmental identifications, such as communities referred to as regional or profit-oriented by virtue of their concern for greater visibility and the recognition of their specificity as deserving of brand promotion. This is supposed to provide subjectivity that increases exchanges with visitors, at the very least in the form of attracting interest (in tourist traffic) for the specific benefits of a given place.

In these considerations, I am interested in the question of how educational resources and programs can influence the formation of identity in the processes of directing development toward the value of cultural symbols and their universalization. Current subjectivities have their ranges of selectivity toward potential stimuli. Still, the processes of spiritual development must serve to add to such space limitations meanings that go beyond the usual identity frameworks related to self-concept and competence to act. These subjectivities are sometimes locally pathologized in the way described by José Ortega y Gasset with the category of “mass syndrome” (Ortega y Gasset, 1982).

Two Poles of Identity Strategies: Determinisms and Creative Metamorphoses

In philosophy (including postmodernism) and the social sciences, there are two polarized ways of describing how people’s individual identities are created, maintained, and developed in their lives and the social world. These poles are individually differentiated, of course. Still, they lend to being distinguished and radically differentiated, leaving open the question of whether there is not a third solution to them, one which would overcome their extreme antagonism. It seems that this third path can also be differentiated by grouping, on the one hand, unreflective existence in the local world, wherein life is dominated by everyday survival and the struggle for existence in conditions of local management by impoverished possibilities of self-care, and on the other hand, sophisticated experimentation with the self, making the nexus of identity, including the body, into an object of transformations, along with refusing to settle down into the established world of social order. Here, neither (temporary) work,

nor place of (continuously temporary) residence, nor (usually poor) education, nor previous decisions and life solutions and identifications, constitute the framework for programming the future, as is expressed, for example, by the attitude of the vagabond per Zygmunt Bauman, or the rebel or postmodern artist who is deprived of strong characteristics of “style,” or even permanent “properties,” desires, and goals of subjective aspirations.

In addition, this “third way” in the face of these separate poles does not have to take the form of a continuum, but there is also a variant that brings these poles together in cooperation, beyond their dispersion, and not only in polarized dualism. What comes into play here is a formula that points to the – not only sociologically important – *homo duplex* or even *homomultiplex* model when the above-mentioned factors act simultaneously or alternately (Manterys, 1996, pp. 27-48).

The model of this situation from cultural history represents the classic “Janus face,” which indicates an identity with profiles that are revealed in turns. In education, one must be able to operate with such doubled or multiplied attitude profiling, which requires the use of aesthetics of behavior and interaction in an oscillating mode. This form of combining poles is complemented by pointing to situations in which identity requires taking into account complexity that, at the same time, puts the subject in the face of a double danger referred to as the trap of Scylla and Charybdis from the fate of Odysseus. Relocation in such a situation is not without risk and costs, and the traditional search for the “golden mean” does not apply here.

Let us, therefore, first consider in more detail the nature of the identity poles themselves in the version of their radical opposition. On the one hand, we have solutions that are determined and largely independent of the entity’s actions. Psychologists tend to distinguish personalities and their features or conditions, such as temperament or biological factors, including programming according to DNA code. Sociologists emphasize the determinations inherent in social decisions, including the mechanisms of socialization and the pressures of local and historical circumstances. At the interface with anthropology, the instructive model of “intergenerational distance” per Margaret Mead has emerged (Mead, 2000), which shows how the mechanism of identity formation in this context changes depending on the pace of the social dynamism of transformations when the hitherto dominant, long-term stability of the world of the past is displaced by a world that pushes the older entities into the margins and forces the young generation to adapt to the revolution or modernization effected by the decisions of the dominant generation of adults. Ultimately, there appears a

dynamic in which change happens multiple times within the lifetime of a single population, and the world of adults is subject to processes that only the identities of the generation of young people can keep up with, which stimulates transformation to such an extent that adults have to learn from the young. Here, the future feels many times over, and educational institutions cannot continue to function as they did in the past unless they become blockages on development and generators of degradation of transmitted knowledge.

It is not without reason that the formulation that has emerged to the fore says that a person does not so much “come into the world” in the act of birth but rather is “thrown into the world” in a way that predetermines the limits of his/her being “himself/herself.” In the extreme case of esoteric traditions, there are even suggestions about the determinism of cosmic star constellations or in the mode of supernatural forces and “divine” will. This may also occur in the anthropological sense of the dominance of patterns that are supposed to represent individual Zodiac signs or through separate birth dates seen “numerologically,” which also has its own extensive tradition. Other cultural modes ultimately highlight eras, such as the types of years according to Chinese tradition. Otherwise, the fate of the human condition is diagnosed in this rich trend through entries read through Tarot cards, which in this tradition provide the opportunity to read or decode the fate that has occurred and that awaits the individual. There are also provisions sanctioning determinations expressed in the arrangements of selected bodily fragments. I do not intend to depreciate any of these traditions but only to comment on their impact on the life attitudes of entire communities, social circles, and media and cultural influences. These are ways people can perceive their identity as a human being, a citizen, or a fragment of a community, which can be given a particular meaning (through identification with the characteristics of a sect) or further shape their actions and lives according to and around it.

On the other hand, we are dealing with a vision of a fluid identity constantly coming into being, characterized by a space of “actual events” that can become significant in the “historical path of life,” as Albert N. Whitehead has put it (North Whitehead, 2021). Life is then entangled in processes of interactions that can shape an ever-current and changing hybrid that is subject to the effort of constantly renewed and temporary synthesis. It essentially depends on one’s own acts of self-determination, a choice that determines the idea of its rationality and consequences, or – on the contrary – entanglement in contingency and unpredictability. Identity can also be

perceived as emerging in the modes of the creative attitude of an individual who consciously shapes himself in actions and decisions (choices) similar to artistic acts. This may happen thanks to a will to adopt aesthetic and existential attitudes through voluntarily performed acts or accidental relationships and events considered as the source of one's self-fulfillment, which does not have to have any decision-making scheme in its background as a constantly valid mechanism.

In the history of contemporary philosophy, we have many cases of thinking about the human being with concepts that are free from determinisms and even normatively recognize human subjectivity in the "postmodern" spirit, as it is often called, or representing a "posthumanist vision of the subject" (Chutorański, 2013, pp. 109-124) deconstructed in terms of difference. One of the dominant formulas in this approach is Michel Foucault's provocative call: "Don't ask me who I am, and don't make me be who I was" (Kwiek, 1998). We have a different formula in Richard Rorty's vision, which affirms the attitude of an ironist in contemporary culture, in which man is doomed to constantly search for himself and a way to express himself. Even the mechanisms of influence of religious content may be included in the "process theology," in which identity is constantly constructed, including divine identity and particular faith traditions and denominations that evoke a "supernatural" but fully real world (Patalon, 2012, p. 271).

In the space of the problems under our consideration, we are facing various aspects of the condition of individuals and cultural conditions that can be dealt with by a philosophically mature intercultural education that tries to bridge the gaps between the different identity separatisms that constitute a curse for the modern world. This is not about creating a melting pot that mixes opposing extremes but about making space for possible encounters within the scope of diversity capable of mutually influencing without imposing one version of current experiences. Otherwise, one of the separatisms will consider itself authorized to press the nuclear button or trigger another civilizational catastrophe for all humanity. The processes of "disclosures" seem necessary here if our future is to be measured on a cosmic scale.

The Challenges of Caring for the Quality of Identity Confronted with the Difficulties of Adaptation

My considerations arise from noticing the destructive nature of the social phenomenon in the form of the growing loss of the symbolic aura in everyday social life with the participation of education, standardized beyond the concern for local roots in cultural meanings and for deepening their impact on the emotionality and cultural richness of the imagination. The extinction of living meanings in the residence space, which is increasingly dynamic and often temporary, degrades the quality of identity processes that concern residents and the aura for newcomers, not only tourists. Emigrants and refugees have particular problems with this as they build their relationships with the local world, where the previous identity, as a foreign one, maybe an obstacle, and the new one is not an easy space to identify and settle. One of the poles often comes to the fore: being confined to one's own environment or being open to processes that blur the historical conditions of one's own genesis and functioning values. Hence, it is very difficult to strive for the existence of identity as a "third value" (Mostwin, 1984), to go beyond such polarized reactions of emigrants or refugees, and to ensure that the "disclosure" of previous identifications contributes to a pluralized set of identities enriching the space with new interactions. However, this requires educational "desocialization" as a move beyond socialization seen as a "vortex of reduction of the cultural complexity of the World," or to put it another way, care for activating the mechanism of developmental "decentration" in the sense of the process characterized by Jean Piaget in his genetic epistemology and carefully transferred to the mechanism used in the theory of communicative action, which was created by Jürgen Habermas (Habermas, 2002) in order to affirm a type of decentered rationality distinct from the instrumental and consensual version of this action.

We know from Danuta Mostwin's research (Mostwin, 1984) how difficult it is to establish this "third value" in terms of the processes of creative adaptation to an environment that poses an identity challenge. Usually, the crucible mechanism works by blurring the differences, merging them into one magma, or locking oneself into one's original spiritual world in a way that excludes the possibility of broader integration. A creative approach to the process of growing into social space, as emphasized by the humanistic psychology of Kazimierz Obuchowski (Obuchowski, 1985) includes the attitude of identification with a "long-term task," which requires a long-term effort to work on becoming oneself without any guarantee of final success

that can be concluded with a satisfactory result. It is worth remembering that migration processes in the modern world are increasing on a massive scale from life-threatening zones, which makes “saving spiritual life” (Witkowski, 2023, pp. 347-357) a challenge that also requires the involvement of education, even if it is organized only temporarily. In general, the adaptation strategy focuses on short-term survival in a way that further degrades identity apart from the source trauma and through the domination of suffering and a feeling of injustice and rootlessness.

On the Pandemic of Thoughtlessness

I am, therefore, particularly interested in the orientation of care, as opposed to the increasingly automatic and widespread loss of the importance of symbolic places in the realities of everyday life. This happens when places of residence (or temporary stay) are perceived only superficially and instrumentally. Therefore, the entities involved in them remain detached from their semantic roots in the tradition from which they arise and when they are deprived of other functions (e.g., aesthetic) apart from utilitarian ones. The rush of everyday life focused on the episodic present, ritually organized and reduced only to the goal of survival in the mode of an axiologically superficial life experience fragmented by activities makes these symbolic meanings invisible and devoid of influence for the inhabitants, both culturally and existentially. The names of significant people or references to historical events inscribed in the names of places or objects become dead references, devoid of the aura of uniqueness and depth, and therefore stripped of the associations that give them meaning and even more so value. Although symbols always “give food for thought,” as we know well from the hermeneutic classics, this remains a challenge for education because the effects and relationships are often unpredictable.¹

¹“Education does not mean safer, more predictable, and risk-free formal arrangements: Sometimes, it is a way of finding oneself stranded between promise and hope. This promise applies to a vision of life which everyone entertains differently. Moreover, everyone is radically responsible for the development of this vision. No one can take this responsibility from a human being, even where the human being would be pleased to be rid of this incubus. The promise cannot be predicted on the basis of results taken from the past. The promise, *ἐπαγγελία*, is what reveals itself to us. Its biggest enemy is calculation, spiritual parsimony. And its greatest friends are uncertainty, consent to risk-taking, talent, and determination. The promise of education is not an anticipation of, and a calculation for, future results, but an invitation to courageously clash with life as a task, to look into the future which cannot be determined by our desires and expectations alone. The risk of education is the danger of not noticing the potential that lies in the development as a human being, an inability to imagine the almost unlimited personal possibilities of maturing and growth. Education is not the multiplication and accumulation of the information that gathers momentum around a human being and in its living environment, but constant growth of the human being as a human being (*Zuwachs an Sein, an increase in Being*). The focus on development and growth becomes a way of being that

Meaningful impulses may not be received, heard, noticed, or emotionally internalized beyond a superficial semantic association with a dead but communicatively useful name, usually reduced to a more minor, abbreviated narrative formula with only technical information content. The individual may be “absent” from their significant space, as lacking “readiness to engage in the encounter” in the sense of presence following Jacques Maritain, and when understanding a significant encounter, as Hans-Georg Gadamer does, as requiring the emergence of a profoundly experienced “sense of community of experience.”

Meanwhile, when such symbols are reduced in everyday perception, they can be perceived – under the influence of spiritual work against the background of cultural references related to them – as potentially profound sources of rooting and developing the cultural identity of individuals, groups, and environments, as well as social institutions. They can facilitate the processes of recognizing one’s genesis, the complexity of its sources, and the course of events leading to their distinction in the field of recognized and emotionally experienced meanings. We encounter the “loss of space for reflection” recognized in cultural and social diagnoses in many ways, including as it is inscribed in the rush and action of education in the practice of being a resident settled in a specific, ritually shallow rhythm of everyday life (Baudrillard, 1998). Thus, the ability to “objectify one’s own subjectivity” is lost since it requires a reflective approach.² This is also the case in educational processes and institutions and self-education practices or their substitutes, adapted to pathological institutional requirements and evaluations often in educational processes. There is no room here for the necessary glimpses of deeper meanings and their emotional rooting in one’s own vision of oneself and one’s world.³ Jean Baudrillard and Peter Sloterdijk (Sloterdijk, 2008), in their critical reflections on the identity challenges of modern times, and Olga Tokarczuk, in her Nobel Prize message, clearly point out in their contexts of analysis this symbolic atrophy,

makes education possible. This way of being, despite an apparent weakness, uncertainty, and unpredictability in itself, not only allows a human being to reach his/herself but also represents the chance of opening oneself to the other. The hermeneutics of education, understood in this way, becomes at the same time the hermeneutics of hospitality. It is an invitation to take the risk of education on the chin bravely. In this sense, the risk is not a deficiency (*defectum*), but a way of discovering life, which is a constant challenge and call issued to all individual persons.” Andrzej Wierciński, *Hermeneutics of Education. Exploring and Experiencing the Unpredictability of Education* (Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2019), 320-321.

² See the concept of “revolution of subjects,” in Kazimierz Obuchowski, *From Object to Subject* (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Akademii Bydgoskiej, 2001).

³ Martin Heidegger’s intuitions and categories for diagnosing various collapses of being in the world become necessary here, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Bogdan Baran (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994).

which has long since been growing with the involvement of educational institutions, the media, and the overlooked “epidemic of thoughtlessness” (Tokarczuk, 2021) that deforms the functions of individual institutions and media. This deformation appears as a “norm” tamed as an identity that permanently accompanies the lives of subsequent generations and social circles, imposing its way of negating the effort to establish bonds with symbolism historically rooted in works of a rank requiring a more profound cultural background. It is not for nothing that Florian Znaniecki (Witkowski, 2022) compared urban life to the situation of the inhabitants of Plato’s cave, unaware that they are entangled in a reduced reality and are satisfied with substitutes for meanings in the density and haste. They thus reduce their own being in the world to *ad hoc* functionality, identifications detached from the symbolic depth of a place, in accordance with the processes that create virtual bonds through the Internet and gadgets enabling distance communication, up to global identifications on the Internet with placeless communities. Reflexivity in the attitude toward symbols increases with the ability to read signs in their ambiguity and semantic orientation, thus requiring the practice of using the vaccine of reading literature, which immunizes against socialization reductions in ideas about norms or standards.

Attitudes Toward Culture as a Source of Meaning in Life

The considerations undertaken above combine a hermeneutic and critical approach that highlights – as something that needs to be overcome – the phenomenon of the modernization paradox, which concerns the disappearance of the meanings inscribed in the symbols that mark places in urban space. At the same time, I am interested in the question of whether it is possible to counteract this loss of meaning educationally, what new cultural practices are necessary, and what modifications to ideas about school and its programs involve. There is also the separate issue of community activities outside the framework of dominant institutions for building conditions to unify practices beyond the logic of instrumentalization for the very value of community experience in a space saturated with an emotional aura. The condition for changing the emotional bond with the place of “being in the world” turns out to be activating and awakening the motivation to engage in maintaining the meaning of symbols for identity as understood per Roman Ingarden and his *A Little Book about Man* as determined by “the act for which I take responsibility” (Ingarden, 2006). One

of the implications of Ingarden's analyses is a fundamental suggestion against the domination of educational introduction to professional roles, when, in the face of growing "free time" within a prolonged life, that is time which is empty and dangerous at the same time, a person is supposed to be prepared to deal with the emptiness of meaning in his/her existence, whereby there is an experience of a crisis of identity that requires a "new birth" (Witkowski, 2015). In particular, the point is for a person to obtain educationally radical "empowerment"⁴ to stand up for themselves and take care of themselves in creatively creating the meaning of their own lives, which, as Paul Tillich has repeatedly emphasized, requires the capacity for "self-transcendence."⁵ Furthermore, the point is to ensure that a person is not condemned only to professional external support in the form of advanced logotherapy (Frankl, 2018) or other forms of psychotherapeutic influence, which is impossible without a "covenant" to work on one's own broken identity.

This can be accomplished by implementing the cultural practice of building multi-generational communities of people and environments around the symbols of particular active places, affirming these symbols as a significant basis for their identity. This allows for fusing together the collective identity as distinguished in a valuable way from the environment by giving living meaning to the symbols it recognizes. Cultural attitudes and educational strategies require engagement in "recovering meanings," which is possible by "capturing texts," or even their fragments, to use one's own identity, which is enriched by being rooted in culture at the level of individual symbols and events.

Examples of such may be communities gathering around the name of a street or the name of a square, or they might pertain to giving meaning to places such as a school or theater, church, etc. This is possible by engaging in activities around them – separate from the standard functioning of the role of these places – and creatively developing the meaning and deepening their function of bringing communities together, also using artistic means and practices. For example, murals on houses can participate not only in the aestheticization of a place devoid of creative impulses but also in building an emotional bond with the symbolic

⁴ This is postulated by "critical pedagogy", also called "radical", see Henry A. Giroux, Lech Witkowski, *Education and the Public Sphere. On the Experience of Radical Pedagogy* (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", 2010).

⁵ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I-III, trans. Józef Marzęcki (Kęty: Editions Antyk, 2004, 2005). See also: Monika Jaworska-Witkowska, *Challenges of the "Self-Transcendence" of the Spirit in the Face of "Polarity" of Being (Reading Paul Tillich's Systematic Theology for the Humanities)*, "Er(r)go" vol. 48, 2024.

uniqueness of the place, the meaning of which is thus revived and inscribed in the cultural identity of the environment here, rooting its place in the world. Then, the dead walls begin to live and communicate in a space with seemingly no room to communicate essential meanings. It is also possible to highlight the intersections of diverse sets of symbolic content, characteristic of the diversity of places within their more giant mosaic, as constituting the symbolic richness of a place rooted locally in various traditions and styles associated with different environmental saturations in the scope of meanings that united individual communities in earlier historical periods.

I intend to draw attention to developmental difficulty and its consequences in encouraging individuals to “care for themselves” in the sense of Michel Foucault (Foucault, 2000). This indicates the requirement to couple educational processes with the processing of their transformational significance for the personality (including adults). The symbolic revitalization of the residence space and its significant places, which are simultaneously reduced instrumentally in everyday life to their practical functions, requires recognizing the phenomenon of identity crisis and counteracting it by stimulating symbolic engagements. When unrecognized and insurmountable, this crisis deepens by becoming less emotionally rooted in cultural meanings and even more so in values. This leads to the disappearance of the living presence of culture in human identity as “symbolic memory,” constituting the “soil for identity,” as understood by Helena Radlińska’s social and cultural pedagogy (Witkowski, 2014). This soil, as an “invisible environment,” requires not only care in terms of the quality of access to symbols and the meanings and values concealed therein but also their real presence in identification gestures and the entire identity attitudes of entities wanting to have access to the “symbolic profit,” in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu, that can be mediated through them. Significant enrichment of the perspective revealing the possibilities of rooting identity in urban space is the trope of praising “passages,” developed by Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 2005), as revealing a new complexity of the paradoxical relationship: place *versus* “non-place” in culture and social space. Caring for “anthropologically significant places,” which are significant through the event of encountering them for the spiritual development of sensitivity and imagination that is essential to identity, turns out to be educationally significant. This also allows us to think about education strategies in this context as “being on the road,” where common associations with the attitude of a tourist, a vagabond, or a passer-by

(*flâneur*), as Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman, 1996) called it in his significant typology, cited here illustratively, are not enough. As we know, it requires restoring the dramaturgy of the “pilgrim’s” attitude in the same approach, affirming axiological communities, and experiencing the importance of the place and the value of the movement itself, which for the identity involved in this process is neither merely a meaningless episode nor a fragment isolated from the remaining content of the experience. Moreover, this attitude of the law does not allow for irresponsibility for the function of this “spiritual” event in further life as being on the road by such an entity.

On Giving Meaning to Places

In developing the perspective indicated here, I am essentially referring to the findings contained in the considerations in my book on the importance of “capturing texts”. (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2016). The city’s space of meanings requires an engagement analogous to “text culture,” which is developed more fully there. Mere fragments or traces highlighted against a background that have lost the invitation to mindfulness, when they are replaced only by a flash of afterimages that are unable to add meaning to the lost whole, are not enough. It was no coincidence that Marek Nowakowski based his accounts of urban peregrinations on the idea of “afterimages.” Because they are as just natural as they are insufficient and as their spiritual message tends to be lost.

Places can be marked minimally significantly (like numbering streets in New York), and symbolic struggles can be waged over them by means of political pressure (naming schools, squares or streets after even controversial figures) or erecting monuments. Meanwhile, such symbolic gestures of distinguishing places, even those marked with surnames, may result in a complete degradation of meanings and a lack of interest in what a given surname could mean culturally for the recipient’s identity. This is the equivalent of the well-known paradox pointed out by literary theorists that giving a classic text the status of compulsory reading in the school curriculum may lead to its degraded reception in the interpretation of shallow didactics. In this context, the intuition of the Polish classic of cultural sociology, Florian Znaniecki, seems to be accurate when he suggested that the city can be viewed as “Plato’s cave,” which means that it does not facilitate the easy extraction of symbols and their meanings as ideas that can reshape the spirituality of those who in this place have become at home in this world of everyday life without profound thinking (reflexivity). All of this

requires a reevaluation of the quality of education as a basis and path for building the foundations of cultural identity, as well as the practice of growing into the symbolic space of the city, so that these two complementary processes are not reduced to meaningless and therefore valueless — from the point of view of care for spirituality and identity — units and collectivities in contemporary culture.

Just as cultural masterpieces can be “silent,” that is, say nothing and mean nothing to the recipient of their narrative who does not have the culture to read (decode) them, so can places endowed with the quality of *genius loci* as their unique cultural aura (if only because of their culture and the historical figures associated with them) be indifferent or empty, lacking an emotional bond. This bond requires the pursuit of immersion in their symbolism, both cognitively and performatively, through community and cyclical events, such as meetings and initiatives, establishing a tradition that is alive and significant for subsequent generations. This may involve deepening the understanding of the cultural significance of the patrons of places, including streets or institutions, as well as making them symbolic names of forms of distinguishing events, such as competitions and festivals, or through awards, scholarships, and modes of granting status, e.g., through the names of academic departments. Without this multi-faceted effort, the names of streets or significant places in the city will only mean as much as the numbers assigned to streets in downtown New York.

A separate challenge for caring for the importance of the place of life is the approach to the dilemma inherent in the tension: modernization *versus* tradition, where a mutual deepening of the perspectives inherent in these poles must replace convenient and imposing dichotomizations. In this unifying approach, it is necessary to refer to the clash of new functions and solutions with the legacy of historical objects, including their incomplete traces, which are sometimes obscured by subsequent modifications. This sometimes concerns the removal of these modifications, which turn out to be based on erroneous premises, such as the trivial removal of green areas (parks, squares) that take up space for, e.g., new transport solutions alleged to be functionally necessary. This approach destroys the greenery and gives way to concrete parking spaces, increasing the air temperature in such a destroyed zone. Economic calculation and the instrumental approach to space are only ostensibly accepted here in the long run, as has turned out to be the case from the fate of such solutions that lay concrete over green squares or demolish old buildings for much more impressive places.

In Lieu of a Conclusion: On Being on the Road in the Face of Difference

All of this serves indispensable educational, social, and creative efforts that aim to prevent the disappearance of the importance of symbolic places in the cultural identity of their residents and their communities. Such efforts influence the sense of settling in the social world, civic attitudes, and the readiness to engage in community rituals and the existentially significant experience of the value of the place in which one is rooted in more than a formal way. The hermeneutics of the city calls for supporting active efforts to promote the life-giving nature of meanings and transform them into symbols that shape the spiritual identity of individuals and the cultural community of their collectivity. This is achieved through their emotional presence in a space that is saturated with impulses that strengthen the sense of settling into an aesthetically and semantically valuable layer of social existence.

Finally, it is worth adding (with a view to opening new considerations) the historical diagnosis of Alfred N. Whitehead from *The Adventures of Ideas* that in the history of civilization, “[a]lmost every reason for the development of cities has been thoroughly modified along with the development of civilization” (North Whitehead, 2020, pp. 116-117). This involves considering both their disadvantages and positive functions; this concerns changes in functions: from defense or mobilization of power, or the ease of trade, assistance, and coexistence, to the value related to “the concentration of possible aesthetic and cultural experiences” (North Whitehead, 2020, p. 117). Therefore, it concerns phenomena that are decisive for the identity-building processes of individuals and communities and their involvement in using modes of interaction and spending time. This is the case insofar as it also remains possible to notice the dynamics of changes in the organization of social space in cities, which can be captured by discovering the functions of passages or galleries in terms of the possibilities of using time. This happens in the mode of experience referred to in Zygmunt Bauman’s hermeneutic sociology as “being on the road” (Bauman, 1996) by a character looking for a pleasant way to spend time in attractive places, which is reflected in the term “unhurried passer-by” (*flâneur*).

It is abundantly clear that the identity of urban space and its participants is constantly changing regarding the symbolic meaning of its places and their impact on social life. From the urban “jungle” to social “salons,” stadiums, and galleries, even extremely opposing opportunities and threats manifest themselves in such a space. Dealing with the world’s

complexity without education means becoming a victim of radical simplifications and antagonisms. It, therefore, becomes necessary to redefine the concept of the border from its function of separation to the function of the life of culture in its saturation with difference, which Mikhail Bakhtin described as the “border effect” (Witkowski, 2000) i.e., the result of a constant change in the perspective of understanding oneself and building a hybrid whole, at the same time learning many different considerations which become increasingly fused into a rich whole thanks to the integrated diversity.

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