

Teksty Drugie 2016, 1, s. 279-297  
Special Issue – English Edition



# **In-Between-Space. Anthropologies of Everyday Life, of the City and of Literature in Miron Białoszewski's "Chamowo"**

Agnieszka Karpowicz

---

Agnieszka Karpowicz

---

## **In-Between-Space. Anthropologies of Everyday Life, of the City and of Literature in Miron Białoszewski's *Chamowo***

---

DOI:10.18318/td.2016.en.1.16

The academic work financed within the „National Programme for Development of the Humanities” funded by the Minister of Science and High Education (2014-2017), the project „Topo-Graphies: City, Map, Literature.”

---

### **1. “To Tinker with «the Obvious»”**

In the introduction to one of his books, Roch Sulima suggests that Miron Białoszewski's literary output, his “spoken anthropology,” may be closest to “the ideal of anthropology of everyday life.”<sup>1</sup> In the *Epilogue* to his publication, the scholar openly writes that reading Białoszewski's poems and prose was to him “the school of «reading» everyday life” (A, 191).

This intuition has nothing in common with the already hackneyed discovery of the following similarity: the anthropologist, just like the writer, does nothing beside writing, i.e. creating narrative fiction which interprets the cognized reality.<sup>2</sup> There is more to this, of course; there is yet another dimension to this relation: being a specific writer – intentionally not creating fiction, but drawing

### **Agnieszka**

### **Karpowicz –**

Associate Professor at the Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw. A literary and cultural theorist. She is the author of *Kolaż* (2007) and *Proza życia* (2012). She researches the literature and (neo)avant-garde art of the 20th and 21st centuries. Her work was published in, i.a. *Konteksty*, *Second Texts*, *Kultura Współczesna*, and *Pamiętnik Literacki*. Contact: agnieszka\_karpowicz@wp.pl

---

1 Roch Sulima, *Antropologia codzienności* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2000), 8. Further quotations from this publication will be indicated by the symbol „A.”

2 Clifford Geertz, „Opis gęsty: w poszukiwaniu interpretatywnej teorii kultury,” in *Interpretacja kultur. Wybrane eseje*, trans. Maria Piechaczek (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2005).

from the poetics of personal documents and from everyday life; in addition, it is not so much through writing as it is through mediating between the oral nature of speech and its record, between the act of live, everyday communication and literature, that one can get closer to the ideal of anthropology of everyday life.

Sulima's introduction and epilogue only signal this equivocal intuition, but it nevertheless stimulates imagination and tempts us to think over the relation between Białoszewski's literature, the anthropology of everyday life designed and consequently implemented by Sulima, and the anthropology of the city whose everyday quality is the subject of the majority of texts collected in the latter's book; Białoszewski's biography and his spatial poetics are very much immersed in urban space.<sup>3</sup> It should be added here that both of them speak of the same city. In short, let us recall the assumptions of anthropology of everyday life and try to think what could be the connection between them and Białoszewski's poetics and what would allow us to sense that his literature may teach the anthropologist of urban everyday life an important lesson.

"To tinker with «the obvious» that is rooted in something unacceptable. [...] The anthropologist acts against this certainty and does not acknowledge the division in the reality of the periphery and the reality of the centre because our everyday life is always where we currently are" (A, 9) – this is how, in the introduction to his book, Roch Sulima formulated the basic methodological, but also philosophical, assumption of the anthropologist of everyday life who deals with urban space. Obviously, in this case, the reality is close in proximity and known to the scholar, not "somewhere THERE but NOW and HERE" (A, 10) which corresponds with one of the main postulates of anthropology of everyday life pursued by Sulima: "The anthropologist feels both "familiar" and "strange" in everyday life, capable of being fascinated by drama and banality. To find artificiality in what is obvious" (A, 8). This also means the ability to temporarily suspend a part of the researcher's own identity – to a great extent culturally – shaped by his or her urban roots. When everything one passes by almost every day is known, obvious and unproblematic, and to such a degree that it is unnoticeable, adopting this attitude is a real challenge. Such difficulty does not concern work in remote, exotic territories: "Anthropology may begin at home, as Bronisław Malinowski implied. For the anthropologist

3 See „*Tętno pod tynkiem.*” Warszawa Mirona Białoszewskiego, ed. Agnieszka Karpowicz, Piotr Kubkowski, Włodzimierz Pessel, Igor Piotrowski (Warszawa: Lampa i Iskra Boża, 2013). On the subject of geo(bio)graphic roots of the writer see *Miron. Wspomnienia o poecie*, ed. Hanna Kirchner (Warszawa: Tenten, 1960). On the role of history of Warsaw in Białoszewski's life and literary output, particularly see Stanisław Prószczyński, *Poezja, teatr, muzyka*; Irena Prudil, *Znałam kiedyś chłopca*).

of everyday life – everything is a source, everything is a territory” (A, 7). Even anthropologists of everyday life working in their own culture, for example in a city well-known to them in their quarter, must be able to look at it from the outside. Even though they are inevitably part of it themselves, they need to be “inside and at the same time “outside” of it” (A, 10). Effectively, this is always related with being suspended in the autonomous sphere of “in-between” – between the participant’s involvement and the observer’s distance, distinctly indispensable but also troublesome since, in fact, this everyday life is not strange to the scholar both existentially and culturally, so that when:

anthropologists of everyday life make “little conquests” and present “little stories”: about the home, neighbours, the nearest surroundings, they also prove it with their presence using themselves as tools of cognizing the world. (A, 11)

When Sulima (referring to Michał Głowiński’s works on Białoszewski’s everyday genres) suggested that between the poet’s output and anthropology of everyday life practiced in the city also being the “home” of the scholar who feels “familiar” in it, *Chamowo* had not been published yet, but it seems that the spatial poetics proposed in this book by Białoszewski and his artistic organization of Warsaw’s everyday reality of the 1970s let us comprehend these similarities – not only to confirm the researchers’ intuition but also to develop and complement it.

## 2. “They do not Acknowledge the Division of Reality into the Periphery and the Centre.”

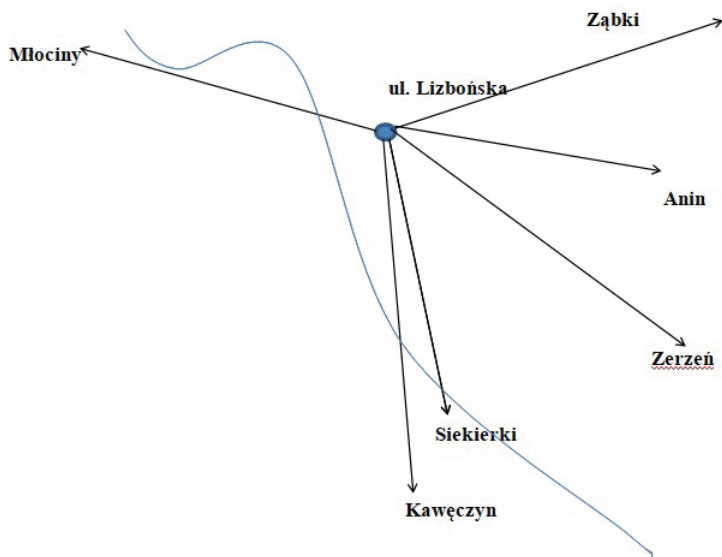
The very name of the housing estate built in Saska Kępa, the titular *Chamowo*, already indicates the provincial and peripheral character of this area: “From afar, you can see hot small factories; it’s neither the country nor peripheries, and smells like railways”<sup>4</sup>; and elsewhere he writes: “Desert. No view from the window. Boredom. Wasteland. Villagey. [...] The city ends, meadows” (Ch, 42). “[Łazienkowska] Avenue rustles, but poplars also rustle, they give a lot of shade, there is grass and a path, like in the country” (Ch, 57) – such images of 1970s Warsaw are dominant in *Chamowo*. There are more bushes, trees and weeds than elements typical of the city fabric. The surroundings of the title estate built on the borders of old Saska Kępa where the narrator moved to, he calls the “steppes” (Ch, 127) or the country: “One walks in smells,

<sup>4</sup> Miron Białoszewski, *Chamowo* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2009), 42. Further quotations from this book will be indicated by the symbol “Ch.”

in the shadow, like in the country. [...] It's our meadow, our village" (Ch, 15). Siekierki seen from the window of his new flat and which he personally often "checks" (Ch, 114) are particularly intriguing to him: "The turn from Czerniakowska is unexpectedly rapid, into the dust, weeds, cobblestone next to the knoll. [...] Roads, turns, houses, enclosures, trees and bushes, people waiting at bus stops" (Ch, 116).

There is no doubt that we continuously move around Warsaw as the city is defined by the names of streets, squares, roundabouts, numbers of the city bus lines. The space is embedded in specific time by means of daily notes characteristic of journal writing. We learn from them that the metropolis is observed by the poet as it undergoes modernization: Białoszewski registered the construction of the Warszawa Centralna Railway Station, Łazienkowska Avenue and modern housing estates. However, in *Chamowo* we mainly find the least urban elements of the city, as if in defiance of the metropolis' feverish modernization. Constructing space seems to be a deliberate action since the narrator rides the buses in the least expected times of day and night in order to imbibe such landscapes:

I got off on the cobblestones by the poplars. [...] Various weeds and flowers grow here. The closer to the embankment, the denser. [...] It turned out that there is another meadow of wild herbs behind the embankment, then Vistula" (Ch, 125-126).



The territories of Warsaw used by Białoszewski to build the literary space of the city are, therefore, of a similar status – they have concurrent meanings contributing to the continuity and coherence of time and space. It should be added here that this space is not typical of an urban landscape as such,<sup>5</sup> especially when we talk about the capital city. The narrator's spatial practices include trailing little meadows, bushes, gardens and peripheries overgrown with weeds, even though they are sometimes located near the metropolitan centre. In other words, Białoszewski uses the city in a way that is usually associated with the suburbs or areas right outside the city and affiliated with leisure time, vacation, strolling and relaxing, identified with the weekend rather than with the everyday urban flow of life; in this way he abolishes oppositions between habitually created spatial categories. If we look at the routes the narrator chooses for his excursions, starting from his new place at Lizbońska Street, it is noticeable that he consequently omits the centre and treats it as a point of transit easing the way to other suburban sites, though most often still being within the city's borders.

Lizbońska street becomes Białoszewski's personal, private city centre, and what is important to reiterate is that it definitely has a suburban character as it is located on the edge of Śródmieście (where Białoszewski lived before), considered by the poet as a strictly urban district; that is also underlined in his earlier volume *Szumy, zlepy, ciągi* [*Hums, Lumps, Threads*]. The "eulogist of Marszałkowska"<sup>6</sup> becomes here a vigilant "examiner" of the city's bushes and thickets. Moreover, these areas in fact only began to get "civilized" or urbanized in the 1970s, gaining a more metropolitan character.

Further away from Białoszewski's new place of residence, his main destinations in Warsaw (as shown in the chart above) are marked with arrows leading from Lizbońska Street. They are semantically very coherent. Looking at the map of Warsaw back then, they would indeed mark green spots, forests, fields, meadows, and what is meaningful is that to a large extent they have remained the same up to this day. Białoszewski goes to Młociny at 1 am to see the aurora:

I chose the right time but on that day I could see no streamers. There are more skyscrapers. From the side of Powązki, some unknown and remote

5 Dobiesław Jędrzejczyk, „Krajobraz kulturowy miasta,” in *Geografia humanistyczna miasta. Od architektury cyrkulacji do urbanistycznych krajobrazów* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Gdańskiej, 2006); Lucyna Nyka, „Przestrzeń miejska jako krajobraz,” *Architektura* 2 (2012).

6 Miron Białoszewski, *Szumy, zlepy, ciągi* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1989), 333.

rocks protruded. Grass and trees have grown since I came here last. But the viewpoint has still remained. (Ch, 77)

The Młociny housing estate borders with the commune of Łomianki and Bielański Forest and before the war it was one of the city inhabitants' favourite leisure sites where, in 1913, the (partially realized) plan was to create the city-garden Młociny. Siekierki, on the other hand, is a settlement which was incorporated together with the entire Mokotów district into the territory of Warsaw in 1916, but it still managed to keep its character, intriguing Białoszewski: "at night it's pretty lush, doggy, country-like" (Ch, 120). Earlier, Siekierki had been an agricultural and wickerwork base of the capital, but also a place for leisure, beach activities and recreation.<sup>7</sup> Kawęczyn, incorporated into Warsaw in 1916, is of a similar character, a village on the outskirts of Rembertów and situated between Ząbki and Olszynka Grochowska, also associated with a nature reserve. The narrator of *Chamowo* visited Kawęczyn to compose his famous bouquets:

I thought that my bouquet was missing the smell of a bastard balm.  
I dared to presume that they were still blooming.  
– To Chełmżyńska to get bastard balms! Past Kawęczyn! (Ch, 85)

During his bus trips, the narrator also visits his friends in Anin – integrated into Warsaw after World War II and even now known for nearby forests. He sometimes goes to Zerzeń, a part of the Wawer district only since 1951, whose history goes back to being a medieval village. The particular quality of this settlement is its low-rise buildings, not synonymous with the "metropolitan style" of either today or the 1970s when the term was associated with tall blocks of flats, one of which Białoszewski lived in. For some reason, in addition to going to Dąbrowski Square where Białoszewski's former flatmate lives<sup>8</sup> and visiting friends on Hoża Street, or sometimes in Żoliborz, the poet chooses very specific places: the historical or truly peripheral districts, but also places which have kept traces of their territorial affinity or obtained it due to the after-war destruction of the capital, reconstructing it, and then rebuilding it again. What is significant in *Chamowo* is that these territories are described more meticulously than the city – it

7 See *Korzenie Siekierki. Historia pisana losiem rodzin*, ed. Joanna Mikulska (Warszawa: Dom Kultury Doróżkarnia, 2010).

8 I wrote more broadly about the function of these spatial practices in the article "Autobusiarńia by Miron Białoszewski," *Kultura Współczesna* 2 (2012).

is the “steppes” that become the centre of the city, of the world or even of the cosmos.<sup>9</sup>

Młociny, Ząbki, Gocław, Siekierki and other places where Białoszewski goes to pick flowers, weeds, and twigs are not exposed in *Chamowo* by accident; they have some important features in common and they also shape the space of Warsaw. They create a metaphor of the real space and of the way it is subjectively experienced. This space is composed of sites that are peripheral, marginal, non-urban or, by definition, suburban. This makes them share one more quality: they are potential, temporary sites which may soon become (and they did become) construction sites to satisfy the accommodation needs of Warsaw residents. On the one hand, they will probably be gone soon, since during one of his night excursions to get flowers, the narrator comes across a small meadow full of cut-down twigs (Ch, 155) and notes: “They are lying there freshly pulled out, I do not know whether it’s in progress or it’s the end of the rage. Who cares about it. Huge, wet-green burdock, sorrel, horseradish. Will they cut it down too? I threw myself to pluck some. Since they are already doomed to annihilation” (Ch, 155). On the other hand, they foreshadow something they will be in the future or they have been in the past, which Białoszewski activates by the power of memory and summons in the narration, referring to the territorial specificity of the place before the war, as in the case of Kawcza Street in Grochów which he finds “peripherized” (Ch, 88).

What is important in this context is the lack of spatial identity of “Chamowo” itself – neither an entirely rural nor a completely urban construction site – emphasized by the new housing estate’s name which alludes to provinciality, but also due to the sociological profile of the residents moving there from the suburbs: “How I felt like going into the world again. Far from this province cramming up to the ninth floor” (Ch, 42). This place does not belong to *Saska Kępa*, but it is being glued to it in the process of modernization and its inhabitants pejoratively mark the strangeness and the less than stellar topographic lineage of the new residence, hence the latter’s lower social status. The main trait of the housing estates’ architecture noticed by Białoszewski is unreadiness, continuous incompleteness causing constant changes in the nearest iconosphere:

From the courtyard-in-between, common to some of our 10-story blocks, the concrete is flatted down, street lamps put up, there will be

9 I wrote more broadly on the subject of cosmic metaphors and their functions in *Chamowo* in chapters devoted to Białoszewski in my book *The Prose of Life. Speech, Writing, Literature* [*Proza życia. Mowa, pismo, literatura*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 2012).



less disorder, a workers' camp is still on the left, bare ground with some trash, a stall and a hut, some wagons. (Ch, 25)

Another element of this urban landscape are people, their interactions, social relations with which the city map usually corresponds (provided that the city's fabric is architecturally and historically sustainable) and the process of modernization also tears it apart and demands its reshaping. The estate partially becomes a metaphor of the whole of Warsaw as an unstable space which is incessantly translocated and shifted, the space of changeable and uncertain categorizations, in which one cannot be sure of even the most basic categories such as "the centre" or "the periphery."<sup>10</sup>

### 3. "The Anthropologist Feels both «Familiar» and «Strange» in Everyday Life"

One of the book's themes is Warsaw's modernization, but it is described not by means of noticing new elements, but rather registering Białoszewski's morning and night excursions to places which disappear or are about to disappear due to this process. The author acts paradoxically: he describes the construction of new housing estates not in pursuit of recording every novelty and change, but focusing on things that are disappearing, even such ephemeral elements such as certain "views." Such an approach is endorsed in his *Secret Diary [Tajny dziennik]* from the same period: "The view on the left – Goćław, already half-built. Luckily, there is a wild meadow in the foreground – it will remain bare."<sup>11</sup> He focuses on the destruction of the old elements of the city, especially logging as trees are cut for new construction sites. While the city is being modernized, he is fascinated with weeds and abandoned meadows. Places spotted by Białoszewski bring to mind green isles between the proper, recognizable elements of the city which define it and symbolize its spatial identity. The narrator uses bus stops in the city centre only as transit points,<sup>12</sup> helping him reach what is most important: the suburbs and marginal areas – eventually, these places become central themselves. From the perspective of the urban infrastructure, meadows, brushwood and scrub, described by Białoszewski with true pleasure, are unfunctional; their earlier usefulness has

10 About problems of locating the centre of Warsaw, see especially Jerzy Jarzębski, "Zniszczenie centrum," in *Miejsce rzeczywiste. Miejsce wyobrażone. Studia nad kategorią miejsca* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 1999).

11 Miron Białoszewski, *Tajny dziennik* (Kraków: Znak, 2012), 640.

12 See the concept of non-place, Marc Augé, *Nie-miejsca. Wprowadzenie do antropologii hipernowoczesności*, trans. Roman Chymkowski (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2001).

long been lost while not having gained a new one. From a practical perspective, they exist there completely for themselves and without a clear need or interest, we could almost say that the narrator identifies with them, mainly due to the similar nature of his existential practices and his ways of living in the city.<sup>13</sup> They are located:

on the verge of socially useful and are “the borderlands” of such spheres of everyday life that are usually of no interest not only to citizens but also to researchers.<sup>14</sup>

They do not belong to anyone and they are undoubtedly a marginalized element. The narrator, therefore, proposes to look at the city in a way that is familiar not only in terms of the anthropology of everyday life but also of empty spaces: “Instead of reading written text, we read its background. Instead of looking at black letters, we look at white spots between them.”<sup>15</sup> After moving to Śródmieście, Białoszewski perceives the city as a space composed of such spots – in this case they are green and gradually disappearing.

Of course we could see it as a gesture of constructing an “anti-city” or a “social anti-space”<sup>16</sup> of these spaces, opposing the structured order imposed by the functionalized urban space, its goal and functions. This is also acknowledged by the anti-structural and non-normative, alternative way of using the city by Białoszewski after moving (e.g. riding around the city “for a whim” or “for a half-whim” (Ch, 26) at any time of day or night) and before that as well, but with one stipulation: Białoszewski is aware of the lack of such structure because he does not notice it and if he does mention it, he is in a state of unsteadiness as deregulation brought on by modernization not so much improves the rhythm of city life, but rather disorganizes it (e.g. by fostering changes in regular bus routes). Warsaw shaped in *Chamowo* is an unobvious, interesting city as it is unstable, mysterious and unpredictable, subjected to the permanent movement of people, borders and spatial categories.

<sup>13</sup> I explain this similarity more broadly in the chapters of the book *Proza życia*, which are devoted to Miron Białoszewski.

<sup>14</sup> Jerzy Kociatkiewicz and Monika Kostera, “Antropologia pustych przestrzeni,” in *Pisanie miasta – czytanie miasta*, ed. Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Fundacji „Humaniora,” 1997), 75.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

It is well known (from Ryszard Nycz's works above all) that Białoszewski is a master of noticing all that is absorbing and mysterious in what is most banal, obvious and transparent, even boring in its transparency and, as we remember, this is one of the postulates of the anthropology of everyday life, understood not even as an element of the methodology or the theory, but as a perspective, an outlook or an interpretational inclination. Białoszewski himself assesses Warsaw in the period of modernization and right after it – the same city which, in *Chamowo*, became a place of exotic conquests and exciting journeys into the unknown – as not a very intriguing place:

It seems to me that, for the first time, Warsaw is uninteresting. [...] I do not know whether this period now, these blocks, whether from [my] perspective... anything interesting will happen. It does not seem so to us. It's been 20 years like this and these are such unrewarding views. [...] Unless this tape is played once these blocks are already bombed. Some say that these blocks can be easily bombed because they would just fall apart, simply disintegrate but I feel that it's hard to bomb so many blocks.<sup>17</sup>

What is striking in *Chamowo* is the process of recognizing and checking places, records of looking at one's own city as if it was unknown. The motivation for that is the act of moving out of city centre, leaving the familiar feel of Śródmieście: "New systems. I can't find a library. I feel like being on vacation" (Ch, 25). In other words, the narrator introduces himself as someone who ceaselessly learns Warsaw, even though we know that he spent his whole life there, and his earlier works were also set in the inalienable biographical context of the city. The narrator, therefore, literally "checks" and visits sites unknown to him, a strange city whose beaten and harmonious rhythm of the landscape, unavoidably connected with habits and spatial practice, is from time to time interrupted by something new. Significantly, he does not focus on the stable, material city fabric and its structure because he has surely gotten used to the fact – living in Warsaw since he was born – that elements considered to be material, physical and stable in fact are not characterized by such features at all, and perhaps this blariness, uncertainty and instability of the "city on quicksand"<sup>18</sup> is its invariable essence, at least as defined by

17 The recording from the collection of the Museum of Literature in Warsaw, tape no 1417, track 1, 27:30-33:05. I am grateful to Joanna Łojas for transcribing the recording and making the transcription available.

18 The expression after Marta Zielińska, *Warszawa – dziwne miasto* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1995).

Białoszewski. In one of his notes, we can clearly see the impermanence of the new space and the reason why it is impossible for it to be fully rooted in reality, even finding it necessary to keep some distance from reality:

Nearby, remnants of another one. On the corner of Emilii Plater and Jerozolimskie. Blue walls protrude, cracked, in dust, as if bombed. I will become attached to this old building, over night, at the bus stop – unfortunately – due to all the waiting. (Ch, 60)

Białoszewski's Warsaw in *Chamowo* is in fact built of many overlapping spaces from different times and from different needs, but existing here and now, simultaneously, in heterogeneous spatial collages of images of the city tied to each other – remembered, just noticed, heard, told about by someone or derived from the imagination. The poetics of loose associations, as especially observed by Jacek Kopciński and Ryszard Nycz,<sup>19</sup> is the core of Białoszewski's literary technique, but it is often ruled by a very precise logic. And so associations, which at first seem to be random and linking completely separate phenomena, are very often based on meanings or stories related to a specific urban space.

In *Chamowo*, the most spectacular example of these associations' urban roots is a note concerning Siekierki:

I imagined that the Mother of God could appear before some children in the bushes of Siekierki, the crowd gathering in the rain, the bushes rustling, the meadow full, the Vistula river surging, everybody waiting for a miracle. (Ch, 125)

It seems that Białoszewski virtually refers to his imagination, perhaps led by some religious clichés taken from literature, painting and other widely understood texts of culture. However, if we know the history of Siekierki, the meaning of this sentence shifts somewhat. "I imagined" means: "I imagined that what people talk about could really take place"; this way he confirms that after visiting Siekierki, he is able to believe in the stories he heard. Particularly, it is about a very specific event connected with the history of the city: apparitions during the occupation period attracted masses of worshippers to a place

19 Jacek Kopciński, *Gramatyka i mistyka. Wprowadzenie w teatralną osobowość Mirona Białoszewskiego* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1997); Ryszard Nycz, „Szare eminencje zachwytu. Miejsce epifanii w poetyce Mirona Białoszewskiego,” in *Pisanie Białoszewskiego. Szkice*, ed. Michał Głowiński and Zdzisław Łapiński (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1993).

where on 3 May, 1943, a 12-year-old girl saw St. Mary on a cherry tree visible from her window<sup>20</sup>. “Checking” the place personally confirms the truth of the story about the miracle, justifies it and is an evidence of its probability. The importance of such context also reveals in a different light Białoszewski’s comparison of the thermal-electric power station in Siekierki to a medieval castle. Without learning – via an interpreter – the biographical-urban context of the book, some metaphors and literary statements are not fully readable. Similarly, without knowing about the burning of the settlement by the Nazis in 1944, we would treat the word “smoke” differently when encountered in the narrative and poems by Białoszewski in the context of Siekierki.<sup>21</sup> Only when we combine the knowledge about the past with the fact of the power station functioning there – as registered by Białoszewski, “smoke” obtains a meaning that is precisely contextualized, resulting from the overlapping of several periods of time with one space – all of the meanings being condensed in the word “smoke.”

It is worth stressing here that by designing and practicing the anthropology of everyday life, Sulima – invoking Richard Rorty’s words – acknowledged the existence of observed phenomena and things in their own context as one of the main goals of research because all of them “emerge together with the contexts they relate to.” (A, 9) Recontextualization, i.e. the reconstruction of the urban context present in Białoszewski’s work, would correspond here with the anthropological approach to the space of the city being something that is invisible rather than something that can be seen with the naked eye. This approach is about listening to someone’s story about a place – giving him or her the opportunity to “speak out in every possible language” (A, 7). Furthermore, as we know, listening and story-telling are the most elementary practices Białoszewski uses to develop his original literary technique.

Practicing anthropology as postulated by Sulima demands the researcher to go beyond his or her own culture in order to be able to observe it from the outside. This process also inherently leads to going beyond the researcher’s own “I,” to the temporary necessity to suspend part of his or her identity which, eventually, is culturally motivated and co-shaped. As James Clifford wrote, in an anthropological situation, the researcher’s “I” is and must be in

20 For testimonies and memories related with apparitions see e.g.: [http://www.swzygmunt.knc.pl/MARYapparitionsPOLAND/HTMs/1943\\_MARYappPOLAND\\_SIEKIERKI\\_01.htm](http://www.swzygmunt.knc.pl/MARYapparitionsPOLAND/HTMs/1943_MARYappPOLAND_SIEKIERKI_01.htm), accessed January 8, 2011.

21 Miron Białoszewski, the cycle „Siekierki,” in *Wiersze. Wybór* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2003).

a position to “mediate between contradictory worlds of meanings.”<sup>22</sup> This experience was granted to Białoszewski precisely due to his urban and biographical background: first, in the afterwar period, when Warsaw was absolutely unidentifiable with the city it had been before the war in a very material, architectural and urban sense, Białoszewski tried many different methods to check whether it was possible to find its traces;<sup>23</sup> and second, after moving out, when the rebuilt, renewed and modernized city failed to remind the poet of the urban atmosphere which he had managed to get used to and which had seemed much truer to his earlier experiences with regards to its urban architecture. The narrator himself is fully aware of the fact that he partially belongs to all these “Warsaws,” or rather, that he does not belong to any of them, functioning somewhere in-between, trying to keep his distance to each of them and – as we remember – not to get used to the new shape of the city because it will surely change soon.

The city itself is interpreted here as a “city-in-between,” movable, changing in time. In Białoszewski’s Warsaw, one simply lives between the city which has been and the city which will be; like between the centre and the periphery. The image of “Chamowo” and its surroundings as a transitory place – the place “in-between” – bolsters Białoszewski’s comparison of his living on Lizbońska Street to being on exotic holidays, in a summer house, that is his association of this area with a place and time beyond place and time. Bearing in mind Białoszewski’s characteristic word formative power, this place could be given an expression modelled on the term “dog-in-between” [“międzypies”]<sup>24</sup> which defines a dog as running in a flash between two blocks of flats. It is a “city-in-between,” a “place-in-between” which does not resemble at all the “non-places”<sup>25</sup> because it is in endless motion, in the phase of becoming, in unreadiness, conception, and potentiality, shortly transforming into something which it is not yet.

Examining the unfamiliar and unknown city space, Białoszewski simultaneously keeps discovering his own strangeness in the face of its shifting shape and problematizes his identity by taking the position of “threatened commonness” (Ch, 68), protecting weeds and bushes from annihilation or being surprised with his reflection in a bus mirror which he does not entirely identify with himself as the younger person. The very space is strange to him,

22 James Clifford, “O etnograficznej autokreacji: Conrad i Malinowski,” trans. Maciej Krupa, in *Postmodernizm*, ed. Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Baran i Suszczyński, 1996), 268.

23 Igor Piotrowski, “Alef. Ulica Chłodna jako pustka i złudzenie,” in *Tętno pod tynkiem*.

24 Miron Białoszewski, “Na jedno tele,” in *Wiersze*, 242.

25 Augé, *Nie-miejscą*.

of course, as it knocks him out of the city centre's customary hubbub and from beaten paths of everyday life. Strangeness, old age, otherness, locality, marginality – such experiences of the urban space offer a short (and incomplete, of course) list of subjects touched upon in *Chamowo*. They are universalized on the level of details, specific topographic elements, urban features, most often marginal and not necessarily noticeable in the course of everyday life. In this way, we may suspect that this work is impregnated with the author's anthropological sensitivity.

#### **4. "They also Prove it with Their Presence Using Themselves as Tools of Cognizing the World"**

Sulima ensures that each of the texts collected in the volume *Antropologia codzienności* [*An Anthropology of Everyday Life*] was earlier "walked about" (A, 8) according to the poetic method developed by Julian Przyboś. In *Chamowo*, Białoszewski acts similarly, or at least he gives textual suggestions that walking about the city, checking it, measuring it with one's own steps and confronting memories or views of a given place from a distance while experiencing it with one's own eyes and also legs is prior to literature. Walking about as an urban spatial practice, and at the same time, a research method postulated by Sulima, is additionally connected with two other ways of practicing an anthropology of everyday life close to Białoszewski's artistic practices. Firstly, it leads to the conclusion that the anthropological text needs to have autobiographical roots; secondly, that it is impossible to be alienated from one's own experience of everyday life in the research process. Simultaneously, Sulima considers the subjects of his research to be "subjects of struggles, that is elements of real life scenarios" (A, 9) related with being the participant of analyzed events and described culture. Sulima admits that in a sense, *Antropologia codzienności* "is an autobiographical book" (A, 10).

Miron Białoszewski's literary notes are artistic and nearly daily records of his (factographically and historically proved) life in "Chamowo," and in the text, the identity of the narrator and author are brought to light with an individual, journal-like method of writing. Białoszewski notes down his physiological states and frustrations related to quitting smoking and moving out, his fear in the face of aging and death, his sensual experiences during strolls in the park, acutely scrutinizing his own illness and the process of getting old. At the same time, he creates a profound picture of the real, urban space in the time of transformation, of current social relations and distortions in reality during the 1970s which was gradually becoming alien to Białoszewski and in which he felt increasingly alienated. This is, perhaps, one of these cases when the autobiographical record easily alters and fluently turns into

an “anthropology of itself,”<sup>26</sup> also becoming the interpretation of the cultural reality filtered through the participant’s own experience and self-observation.

Between the literary technique represented in *Chamowo* and contemporary, anthropological approaches to the analyzed reality, more analogies can be found. Listening to the housing estate’s sonic landscape and earlier, to conversations and noises typical of the city<sup>27</sup> long before formulating the postulates of “devisualization” of the anthropological research on urban space, the poet claimed that the urban experience may be described by means of sounds emitted by its participants and audial experiences related with interpersonal relations – a type of social co-existence.<sup>28</sup> And even though in *Chamowo*, urban space beyond the blocks’ area is more visible than audible, it is still the space that has been experienced, not only while walking, but also while perceiving and cognizing it with all other senses through sensual and physical experiences. Walking, running and “flying about” Warsaw also has this sensual, almost physiological dimension, “but rhythmical threads agree with our physiology. They are of the same faith as blood circulation” (81). When the narrator of *Chamowo* is hurting behind the bridge [translator’s note: in Polish “mostek” means both the bridge and the sternum], it means both the fragment of his body and the place in space where the body is located. In this particular moment, Białoszewski is returning to his new home, crossing Łazienkowska Avenue by the bridge called “African” due to the name of the nearby street. The narrator sometimes seems to be organically linked with the landscape he sees:

Right away I thought that it’s me between the earth and this moon in the window – that I, taken from here to Śródmieście, will change. Because the whole system will change. It’s hanging very near, smelling like the Vistula – the moon – the distant, greenish afterglow. (Ch, 121)

Sulima’s intuition concerning the anthropological reading of urban everyday life granted by Białoszewski is most complete when it is confronted with the practices of contemporary autoethnographers<sup>29</sup> who also attempt to create

26 Magdalena Zatorska, „Uwarunkowanie lektury. Michel Leiris,” in *Doświadczenie świata, doświadczenie lektury*, ed. Magdalena Radkowska-Walkowicz (Warszawa: DiG, 2011), 39.

27 See Agata Stanisław, „Audiografia i dewizualizacja antropologii w badaniu miejskiej audiosfery,” *Prace Kulturoznawcze* XIII (2012).

28 I wrote about it more broadly in the subchapter *Audiosfera* of the book *Proza życia*.

29 See Douglas R. Holmes, George Marcus, *Przeformułowanie etnografii. Wprowadzenie do antropologii współczesności*, trans. Konrad Miciukiewicz, in *Metody badań jakościowych*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln vol. 2 (Warszawa: PWN, 2009).



a language of experience, itemize the analysed otherness through personal records and draw conclusions from the very well-known fact that all methods of linguistic description of the analyzed reality fail – they only give the illusion of objectivism but in fact they speak for someone else, on someone's behalf; they falsify the described reality which also belongs to someone else. Reflective, autothematic writing becomes a sort of documentation permeated with autobiographical elements.

In many ways, autoethnography resembles autobiography. Both of them are variants of the personal essay, touching upon subjects important to human life, breakthrough moments and turning points in trajectories of personal stories...<sup>30</sup>

The anthropologist's text intentionally begins to acquire the features of a diary. "What I call anthropological observation is in fact a kind of methodical, autobiographical work which I perform interacting with my own experience transformed into thoughts and words,"<sup>31</sup> writes one Polish autoethnographer. Formally, these notes mysteriously begin to echo the literary language focused on locality, filled with metaphors, understatements, interpretational riddles. Autoethnography may appear as a remedy to a situation in which we already know that the experience is untranslatable to its record, to text; that the rhetorical, narrative structures of the language alter or sometimes even falsify live experiences because the text and the recording always detach the subject from the source – the voice, the source event, the fact, the element of reality to which they should refer. In autoethnographic texts, the researcher does not have to hide either his or her presence or identity, still working with traditional methods typical of anthropology and ethnography. However the very text is shaped in such a manner that researchers are often accused of not having a knack for writing.<sup>32</sup>

30 Joanna Bielecka-Prus, "Normana K. Denzina projekt etnografii interpretacyjnej," in Geertz. *Dziedzictwo – interpretacje – dylematy*, ed. Adam Szafrański (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012), 38.

31 Marcin Kafar, *W poszukiwaniu straconej lokalności. Fragmenty autobiograficzne*, accessed May 25, 2013, <http://zew.info.pl/files/kafar17.pdf>

32 See Tony E. Adams, Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: an Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 1 (2011); Sara Delamont, "The Only Honest Thing: Autoethnography, Reflexivity and Small Crises in Fieldwork," *Ethnography and Education* 4 (2009); Marcin Kafar, *O przełomie autoetnograficznym w humanistyce. W stronę nowego paradygmatu*, accessed May 25, 2013, <http://www.etnokolo.umk.pl/>

If we speak about “using oneself as a tool of cognizing the world” and translating this knowledge to writing, in the case of Białoszewski this tool is exceptionally sensual, physical, sensitive to dainty, almost unnoticeable tremor and vibration of urban everyday life, but most of all it is able to mediate linguistic meanings between everyday life and literary language, between experience and text. Perhaps this happens because Białoszewski’s writing brings to mind “spoken anthropology,” as Sulima noticed, taking from live speech perfectly transmitted to literature, capacious, translated to text together with the context.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the autobiographical transmission of the “I” and the literary transplantation of live experiences via oralizing<sup>34</sup> the literary work is implemented to the fullest extent in Białoszewski’s literature – capable of what appears impossible, that is building literary meanings upon the context, not only upon the decontextualized meanings included in the words of text. If it is supposed to be an ideal example of anthropology of everyday life, not only due to similarity of these two perspectives but also – or maybe above all – due to capacity of literary language unfettered by any “crisis of representation” or alleged impenetrability of the world and the word that falsifies it, we should also remember that it is also connected to an ability of flexibly creating genres that are ephemeral, situational, partially created out of the momentary need or current activity.<sup>35</sup> Let us recall some of them after Sulima: “impressions” [“zanoty”], “strollings” [“spacerniki”], “reality denunciations” [“donosy rzeczowości”], and we should also add “eavesdroppings” [“podśluchy”]. It is Sulima – occupied with the anthropology of everyday life – who suggests that as far as “reports” and “giving evidence” being exemplary to his anthropology are concerned, diary writing and “belles-lettres are most advanced” (A, 9). If we recall the aims of today’s Polish theoreticians of culture, anthropologists and sociologists examining urban space, it turns out that not only visual messages, but also field research help unveil what is invisible and unseen.<sup>36</sup> This process may also be supported by literature. Is it not true that one of the currently most popular projects of this type (the *Invisible City*) is about bringing out ignored, amateur, peripheral, “separate” or provincial places and

33 I refer here to the relations between oral messages and text in Walter J. Ong’s interpretation, *Oralność i piśmienność. Słowo poddane technologii*, trans. Józefa Japola (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 2011).

34 I wrote more broadly about the role of this technique in Białoszewski’s literary output in the chapter devoted to the writer in the book *Kolaż. Awangardowy gest kreacji* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 2007), and in the subchapter *Audiosfera* in the book *Proza życia*.

35 Michał Głowiński, “Białoszewskiego gatunki codzienne,” in *Pisanie Białoszewskiego*.

36 See *Niewidzialne miasto*, ed. Marek Krajewski (Warszawa: Fundacja Bęc Zmiana, 2012).

urban practices which are not always compatible with the picture of the contemporary metropolis? Is it not also an attempt of bring to light seemingly unimportant, informal, sometimes non-normative and alternative functions and methods of developing urban space?

According to the postulates of humanistic geography, the researcher: "identifying some places in the landscape [...] at the same time creates meaningful space, [...] that is assigns the «humanistic factor» to it,"<sup>37</sup> makes it an "interpreted entity."<sup>38</sup> Contemporary studies of space, especially humanistic geography, promote interpretations of the city and the place in the categories of the ways they are seen, focusing the analysis on phenomena related with activity and perception of the subject which co-shapes its surroundings, structures the place and makes it meaningful – the place observed and experienced by the subject and in which he or she functions.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, the perspective of geopoetics and the topographic turn in the literary theory<sup>40</sup> legitimizes linking literary studies with urban studies and underlines the significance of literature in examining the city.

As we have seen, in given realizations such as Białoszewski's literary output, the way of perceiving the city and its specificity may also turn out to be crucial to understanding literature when we agree to grasp it anthropologically and try to recontextualize it in interpretations, for example in compliance with the indications formulated by Wolfgang Iser who states that "literature creates something that is undeniably absent in human life, however through making the absent visible, it reveals the ways culture functions."<sup>41</sup> If decontextualization is a literary movement detaching the statement (e.g. records, texts) from the situational and cultural context, the proper interpretative step should be recontextualization of this statement. If this happens, there are no obstacles for spatially rooted literature – especially literature to creation of

37 Jędrzejczyk, *Krajobraz kulturowy miasta*, 213.

38 *Ibid.*, chapter VII.

39 *Ibid.*

40 See Elżbieta Rybicka, „Geopoetyka (o mieście, przestrzeni i miejscu we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach kulturowych),” in *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, ed. Michał Paweł Markowski and Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas 2006); Elżbieta Rybicka, „Zwrot topograficzny w badaniach literackich. Od polityki przestrzeni do polityki miejsca,” in *Kulturowa teoria literatury 2. Poetyki, problematyki, interpretacje*, ed. Teresa Walas, Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2012).

41 Wolfgang Iser, „Czym jest antropologia literatury? Różnica między fikcjami wyjaśniającymi a odkrywającymi,” trans. Anna Kowalczewicz-Pawlik, *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2006): 23.

which the category of “autobiographical place”<sup>42</sup> is crucial – to be the right research material for humanistic geography, providing it with new interpretations and images of urban spaces.

It seems that in particular cases, and one of them certainly is Miron Białoszewski’s *Chamowo*, it may even teach the humanities-oriented researchers of urban space not only the “humanistic factor” in approaching the material, real, tangible urban space, but also the “anthropological imagination”<sup>43</sup> which Roch Sulima refers to in his Epilogue of *Antropologia codzienności*. An attempt to arouse students’ imagination – as he writes in the epilogue – inspired him to conduct workshops which partially contributed to writing the book. It seems that literature may arouse it as well and not only in the minds of anthropologists of everyday life or “readers” of urban space, but also of literary theoreticians. Undoubtedly, Białoszewski’s literary output teaches such lessons of reading as well.

*Translation: Marta Skotnicka*

---

42 Małgorzata Czermińska, “Miejsca autobiograficzne. Propozycja w ramach geopoetyki,” *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2011).

43 Andrzej Mencwel, *Wyobraźnia antropologiczna* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 2006); Andrzej Mencwel, “Wyobraźnia antropologiczna,” in *Antropologia kultury. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów*, ed. Andrzej Mencwel (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 2005).