

Mental Image of the City

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Abstract:

The purpose of the article is to investigate the significance and mechanism of creating a mental image of the city. To solve the task, the semiotic approach was chosen. The city is considered as a multi-layered topological object. It is noted that, inherent to urban space, the paradigm of the commercial rationality has ceased to play a major role in the development of cities.

The article deals with the decoding of the city text in literary works in the key of the semiotic tradition. As two examples of creating a mental image of a city in the fiction literature of the early 2000s were considered, Pamuk's *Istanbul: Memories and the City* and Ackroyd's *London: The Biography*. Two different approaches to the formation of the image of the city, its cultural and historical features, are analyzed. The basis of the image is not only the object but also everyday practices that merge into the event of life.

The humanization of the city, the analysis of the existential experiences caused by the urban space, expand the instrumental management capabilities. We get an anthropological basis for determining the destination of the city, the representation of the image of the city, the development of event technologies.

Keywords: Urban space, Mental image, Humanization of the city, Urbanistic ideology, Semiotic, Rationality.

The main discovery of urban studies in the twentieth century is a city as a complex topological object, where spaces of different nature and etymology repeatedly overlap. In the works of A. Lefevre, M. de Serto, and U. Eco, the city appears as a system for the production of spaces. These authors proposed methods for describing the causal links between the mental image of the city, social practices and physical objects of the urban infrastructure. This research paradigm interprets the city as a plurality of spaces which is imprinted in the texts on the city. Multilayered

things, places, and values form not only the visible architectonics of the city but also its mental image. Urban physical objects design a functional environment for the life of people and communities. At the same time, this ensemble of things and relationships form a special way of life with its own system of assessments, motivations and explanations (Artemenko 2017). City acquires humanistic characteristics, and its physical objects get the meanings that eventually dictate the logic of social relations and build the anthropological code of urban space. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to investigate the significance and mechanism of creating a mental image of the city.

Today, the idea of a new urbanism is regarded in connection with the trends in the development of civilization in the 21st century. The starting point of urban research was the rivalry of the ideologies of modernist and social urbanism. For modernist urbanism, the key properties of a modern metropolis are mobility and density. Hence the specificity of the development of the city with an emphasis on the construction of skyscrapers and hyper-saturation of urban space appears. Social urbanism (Garc 1995) or new urbanism (Lefevre 2002) makes investments in affordable housing, public transport systems and the development of local communities. In their pure form, these ideologies have completely exhausted themselves and, as a result, a third ideology, named by V. Wachstein, “Hipster Urbanism” (Vakhshayn 2014), appeared. It combines the features of previous ideologies but changes of the perspective and the optics throughout city is observed. This ideology assumes investment in comfort but does not depart from the idea of the city as a structure that makes money. The city is perceived as a scene, a place of events where the representatives of the creative class form a new productive cluster (Landry 2000).

As can be seen from the nature of urbanist ideologies, the city became a hostage to the mass production and consumption. U. Eco noted that by creating the city, we cannot disobey the technological and economic demands of the market (Eco 1998, 301). The urban space is imagined as practical, highly functional and having commercial significance. The production of urban space is a kind of echo of the culture of mass consumption. For this approach, existential motives are only instrumental and secondary ones. In connection with this, G. Simmel noticed that in such a city “formal justice is combined with merciless cruelty” (Simmel 2002, 3). Perhaps, therefore, sentimental feelings do not fit into the rationalism of commercial urban planning. This cruelty is fully demonstrated by the dynamics of urban space. It is similar to the modernization of the production facility, which is ruthless in relation to machines, walls and people. Commercial expediency creates dehumanized objects and dehumanized relationships.

While in the early 20th century, the consequences of the dehumanization of the city were marked by G. Simmel as “increased nervousness”, at the late 20th century, J. Baudrillard speaks of hatred which becomes not a personal feeling but grows into “objective and causeless rage born in the urban desert”. The dehumanized city turns into a dump of material, human and structural garbage. In this case, as J. Baudrillard points out, this happens if you want to create an ideal city. Paradoxically, the desire to transform the space of a city produces a desert around where spaces, like humans, are wastes (Baudrillard 1997). A terrible feature of a big city discloses itself: it is a leveling of a person, its absorption by a socio-technical mechanism. We see a steady trend of dehumanization

of urban space which is a transformation of the city into an environment not for life. But at the same time, while modern urban studies connect the development of cities with the development of human potential, the city should be understood as a space of human existence, where things have a humanitarian meaning (Artemenko 2015). This trend manifested itself in fiction about the city of the early 2000s, for example, in books of O. Pamuk *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2003) and P. Ackroyd *London: The Biography* (2000). These works represent different approaches to the perception of the city, but they open the theme of a city as an anthropogenic space. J. Ortega y Gasset argued that the presence of human in the world deprives the thing of its self-sufficiency. And since a thing, a body creates space, the presence of a person gives to it a humanistic meaning. A person in this environment becomes a producer of cultural languages that organize space into a text.

Modern researchers see in the urban space the visualization of sociality, communication in the public environment (Fisher 2009) and ways to label cultural and social frames (Goffman 2004). Methodologically and thematically, these problems are intertwined with the direction of the sociology of technology and its discovery of the active nature of physical environment (Lator 2015; Knorr Cetina, 2006). In the 2000s, the Manchester School of Sociology effectively applied the concepts of the actor-network theory, research of science and technology in the urban sociology (Guy 2007; Yaneva 2005), which allowed a new appreciation of the relationship between human and the city.

In his work *Objects and Spaces*, J. Law formulated the idea of the object as a network of relations (Law 2006, 230). This gives us a new idea of the causality of the social processes. And it is with this assertion that the understanding of the city comes not as mutual exclusion, but as a mutual complement of the material and social system, language and structure, mental image and social ties. All these components constitute a holistic complex of a city as an object, where a change in the ensemble of its components in any sphere leads to a change in the entire the object. Therefore, for us, the city is a derivative of stable sets and networks of relations.

This approach removes the problem of the causal primacy of descriptive language or physical space. They do not compete, they are not equivalent, but are mutually disposed and mutually interdependent, just like infrastructure objects, groups, interests, practices and other elements of the city description.

If the infrastructure objects of the city form the physical space, then the “mental city” forms the existential acceptance of social space. The image of a city which is created in the representations of its inhabitants, guests, and neighbors, is the basis for its humanitarian appeal which often is not reduced only to the life conveniences. G. Simmel paid attention to this phenomenon at the beginning of the 20th century, noting that the deepest problems of modern life stem from the individual's aspirations to protect his independence and identity from violence by society, the historical tradition and the external culture and technology of life (Simmel 2002, 1).

Criticizing approaches to the study of urban space, M. de Serto notes that urban studies prefer anonymous and everyday phenomena, focusing on details representing the whole (Certeau

2013, 61). As a result, we get a mechanically assembled design, where the parts seem not to be organic and functional elements of the ensemble, but a lot of physical objects randomly assembled in one “spatial box”. In the same time, the production of space initially assumes the plurality of perspectives and perspectives of each of the objects, and this is insisted by one more creator of the theory of space production, A. Lefebvre. He notes that any thing can get into any “set” of locus content, and so any part of the content can take on anything at all (Lefebvre 2015, 173).

Of course, we remember the plans for the development of the city, which are created within the framework of technical or commercial rationality. But the material object is overgrown with humanitarian meanings. There are many examples where objects of urban space lost their original humanistic significance. In this case, a city acquired a frightening image. Let us recall how after three centuries of the rule of Christianity, the inhabitants of Constantinople forgot the assignment of statues adorning the city, and urban folklore from the 8th century created the image of these statues as dangerous, sinister objects. If the burning of pagan books and the destruction of statues in Constantinople under Justinian I was carried out meaningfully with an understanding of what is being destroyed, in times of the Dark Ages such actions were caused by mystical fear, based on the forgotten meaning of artifacts.

A similar situation can be traced in the description of Istanbul in the 17th century made by Evliya Chelebi. Surprisingly, not only the archaic history of the city takes on a mythical form, but also the closer historical time of Mehmed II (1432-1481) turned urban folklore into a legend where real historical events can be traced quite arbitrarily. Their material evidence is perceived as amulets or talismans of the urban community. This was not a feature of Istanbul alone. P. Ackroyd gives an example of London’s history of so-called the stone of Brutus. But in the created image of the city, it is important to discover not a distortion of facts, but a story in which the space of objects turns into a space of meanings. We are interested in creating an image of the city which contains only clear, acceptable and mastered phenomena.

The architectural text of the city was constantly “re-read” by its inhabitants. As a result, a new space of a city is produced. P. Ackroyd is right saying that there are always a lot of temporary spaces in the city at the same time (Ackroyd 2009, 17), but O. Pamuk, who affirms the simultaneity of living spaces, is just as right. Stories about the city give us an opportunity to assess the gap between the original image and its secondary production in a new cultural and social environment. The gap is paramount in creating a mental image. It is thanks to it that a recombination of objects occurs and the emergence of a new space of the city appears.

This process is reflected in the novel by O. Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories and the City*. We trace this gap, literally from the first chapter, where another Orhan appears. The author admits the plurality of spaces of the described city. And they are self-sufficient and complete images. Gauthier, Flaubert, Melling, as well as Ahmet Rasim, Yahya Kemal, and Reshat Kochu presented their space of Istanbul, but in ideal, not a mimetic way. This is what creates the tension of Pamuk’s text because the author feels a break with these spaces. Even if the objects depicted are still accessible to physical

contemplation, then their understanding. This is presented, for example, in the fourth chapter of the novel, which presents pictures of the collapsing Istanbul palaces. Pamuk stresses that the stories of their inhabitants were perceived as evidence of a different historical reality. These are objects that, in the minds of the author's contemporaries, received the same significance as pagan statues for Christians or Byzantine ruins for the Ottomans. The children of the Atatürk Republic created a new mythology of this urban space.

However, according to another scheme, a mental image is created in P. Ackroyd's work *London. Biography*. Here the author achieves the monolithic experience of the city, finding continuity even in the poverty quarters. Considering London of the past and using for this the description of the authors from the past, Ackroyd seeks to create the same perception of the city from the reader of either Defoe, Engels, Dickens or Orwell. He insists that it is the same city: "London is eternal, for it contains everything" (Ackroyd 2015, 436). But does this include a person? Ackroyd's London is at first like the body of a young man, but then the image transforms into a kind of bodily formation that does not resemble a human body. This strange spatial formation absorbs a person ("oven", "abscess", "furnace"). Distance is possible only in time which compresses material traces into layers of walls, streets, garbage heaps. There is no "lost" London because it is eternal. Ackroyd's mental image of London is depersonalized: "London is any city that ever was and will be" (Ackroyd 2015, 436). This space is human-made but not anthropomorphic itself. Despite the fact that the book is called *London. Biography*, the author expresses doubt that this is a living object (Ackroyd 2009, 436). This frightening depersonalization of urban space in Ackroyd is expressed in epithets "severe", "ruthless", "terrible", "frightening". This place disfigures people, turning them into violent, bloodthirsty and ruthless crowds (Ackroyd 2009, 36). But at the same time, it generates the euphoria of impersonality. "Elements of novelty and change are whimsically intermixed, merging with joyful excitement from the fact that you are one of an incalculable multitude. You can become anyone." (Ackroyd 2009, 436). The city becomes an actor, changing the person I am, giving the opportunity to "be born again". This is the humanism of Ackroyd's city. The city is an integral structure that gives the chance to be a different person. This is a historical structure, but "the remains of the past now exist as part of the present" (Ackroyd 2009, 438) and therefore, there is no conflict in their perception.

The space of the city accessible for living and the recombined space of the story about the city are completely different. And we see the process that M. de Certeau calls "intellectual synthesis", the result of which takes the form of not the discourse but the decision itself, the act and the way the case is "grasped" (Certeau 2013, 51). Through this grasp, "invisible space production" is carried out. So, in the eleventh chapter entitled "Four lonely writers", O. Pamuk notices in his description of the city that he can't do without the images of the city of other writers. But his Istanbul is different and does not look like the Istanbul of Melling or Flaubert. (Unlike P. Ackroyd, for whom the descriptions of his predecessors are identical to his representations). These are the different grasp and different spaces. They are appropriated ("my own Istanbul"), and this "my

own”, according to M. de Serto, is the victory of the place over the time (Certeau 2013, 50). In the creation of the space of Istanbul, O. Pamuk, in chapter 34, ascertains the gap between “my” and “their” city. The purity and authenticity of “their” Istanbul are possible as a mental image. But for us, it's a strange city. The foreshortening, ensemble, context create the anthropogenic space of the city. The sadness of the ruins, picturesque on the outskirts and the view of the European - all this will be a representation of the unique urban space, a “victory of the place over time”, as it is an individually grasped or produced space.

What happens to the space of the city, when it is re-read by the new author-reader? In fact, we see the process of re-assembling of the city, fixing various ways of social marking the breaks of spaces (temporary, symbolic, functional). And together with this, there appears a living space of the city, giving an impression on the same uniqueness. O. Pamuk defines city beauty as “accidental”, which can be seen in the violation of the beauty of a well-thought-out, the classical one. But the most important thing is the discovery of the heterogeneity of this space. In M. de Certeau's opinion, the reader introduces inside the author's text his own techniques of enjoyment and methods of appropriation (Certeau 2013, 53). In this way, with the advent of the reader, an element of chance appears, which reveals a new beauty of the city space.

O. Pamuk in the 27th chapter (“Picturesque on the outskirts”) tells about the desire of the Istanbul people to understand themselves, to find a common and unifying image of their city. We are interested in the practice of creating this image as a multi-layered space. We see a declaration of distance – “aliens from Europeanized Beyoglu” create the image of an ideal quarter. The urban landscape of the outskirts inspires them for the birth of the city image, as their daily practices are located in the environment of another Istanbul. At the same time, drawings and engravings of Europeans from the 18th and 19th centuries became the tool for creating this idealized image. That is, the layering of the space of a new city is perceived as a palimpsest. This creates an idea of the inadmissibility of simultaneous co-occurrence of these spaces. So, in the reflection of the city appeared “The Lost Istanbul”, by Ara Guler, and the experience of the lost Istanbul of O. Pamuk with his old American cars, porters, cemeteries etc. But this is “Istanbul's own”, where time wins the place. It is the same appropriated space that is carried out beyond the limits of everyday practice. This is why the conflict between “I” and the city becomes obvious for O. Pamuk.

Material objects of the appropriated space of the city generate images. In this situation, the background and the environment have an active nature; they are the actants representing the *mental* city. Shops, pasha palaces, wooden houses, walls, ruins, and streets - all these are the objects not just making up the environment or the background of life in the city, but the tracks that build the tracks of man's interaction with the world, his everyday practices, which O. Pamuk calls “our world”. The subject world of the city is the circumstances that turn us from the viewer into a participant. This is the essence of the environment, when physical objects organize the interaction of people, set them direction and significance. The description of Istanbul made by O. Pamuk shows us how urban space and social practices create a unique object where practices and objects are defined as

projections of each other. The experience of a childhood home splashes out onto the street. Irrevocability of bright childhood experiences, associated with things, photos, smells, domestic habits, grow into the experience of a city or even a civilization that has gone down in history. Ottoman mansions destroyed or turned into schools, hospitals or district administrations form a new layer of the city's living. This is no longer a thing of childhood, but a larger object - the sadness of a lost culture and a non-existent empire. We see a humanized Istanbul. The displacement of burned mansions by high-rise buildings is not considered as following the commercial rationalism of urban space. This, according to O. Pamuk, the desire to get rid of things soaked with bitter memory and escape from unbearable memories.

The change in urban space is perceived as an act of one's own movement, its continuation through another thing. While the use of a thing passes without effort and resistance, then we do not feel the external border of contact with others. The border becomes transparent, dissolves with the thing that is used. Transparency creates the impression of taking space and going beyond your own physical limits. This is how O. Pamuk's black and white Istanbul appears, sadness, pictures of Istanbul. All this is collected in a single appropriated space "MY CITY", where anguish flows from city to person and back, and their mutual doom is felt.

Surprisingly, in P. Ackroyd's book, there is no "my city" combination. In this biography, the description of life is clearly distanced. This is not "my life", but just the medium of "my life". There is no such conflict between the I and the city as it is given by O. Pamuk. "London is any city that ever was and will be", i.e. space outside of time which does not live in person. The humanism of London is not in its anthropomorphic nature, but in that it allows one to change the form of the person himself, turning him into a part of the crowd or creating conditions for changing his face or to be reborn.

In any case, the works of P. Ackroyd and O. Pamuk deserve special attention as examples of creating a mental image of the modern city. They are united by the idea of humanizing the city. The city is the space of human life. For one writer, these are memories, for another - condition for changing one's own self. The city of O. Pamuk lies outside of time because he lived and his space is appropriated. The city of P. Ackroyd is also timeless because it is the time itself that is appropriated by a person. But in any case, the presence of a person as a reference point is required. We see the opposite side of the reality of the world. The thing presupposes the practical meaning of "for what". And the city as a space created by things acquires this meaning through the presence of man. Even for P. Ackroyd, "burning" of London - this is the hope to find himself.

Both P. Ackroyd and O. Pamuk have a historically formed integral image of the city, expressed by its cultural and historical peculiarities. The basis of this image are objects that are not just visually perceived, but are "lived through". They are involved in the everyday practice which is turned into an event. And this event has its temporal projections, both in general history and in personal experience. We see how the mental image of a city is expressed in an abstract concept. For O. Pamuk - this is *hüzün* - sadness, melancholia. For P. Ackroyd this is severity. But the images of

these authors demonstrate the removal from the sociological or economic models of the description of the city. The mental image of the city implicitly roots a man. The urban space is humanized, allowing the individual to retain his individuality. At the same time, the city becomes a means of creating a spatial and temporal totality of human presence.

The mental image is the basis for constructing the future reality of the city. That's why modern urban studies pay attention to the visual, emotional and associative mechanisms that form the individualized image of the city. A generalization of the set of such images leads to the creation of an image. Even if we return to the idea of the city as an economic structure, its image becomes a part of the economic toolkit of city management and planning. This is one of the key positions of the struggle for human resources. The humanization of the city, the analysis of the existential experiences caused by the urban space expand the instrumental management capabilities. We get an anthropological basis for determining the mission of the city, the representation of the image of the city and the development of event technologies.

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