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Shaping the World Picture: Notes on Andrzej Piotrowski's Architecture of Thought: Part II

Kształtowanie "światoobrazu". Wypisy z książki *Architecture* of thought Andrzeja Piotrowskiego. Część II

Słowa kluczowe: Dziedzictwo architektury, odbiór fenomenologiczny, analizy niewerbalne, technologia myślenia, aksjologia przestrzeni, ontologia, prezentyzm

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Introduction

Architecture scholars and theorists rarely reach for the non-verbal areas of its design and study. Just as they rarely draw on the sphere of the non-visual perception of transforming space. The confinement to visual perception of transforming space was inherited from the Greeks. It entered our culture through, among other means, Plato's work, as Plato "[...] had the visual eye of a Hellene, an eye equal in terms of nature to the one with which Polykleitos recognized the canon and the same nature that the Greek mathematician who directed towards pure geometric forms." This was possible because of λόγος (logos)—Greek wisdom (and word) took on the form of a canon. Greek art excellently confirms this. Architecture and sculpture in Greece was based on a "canon" (which corresponded to nomos, the law that governed music). Canon (differently than rules applicable in other cultural communities)

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expresses an essential "rule of perfection," which the Hellenes recognized in perfect proportion that could be expressed in numbers.2 In this context, we should remember the deepest meaning of the word "to look" in ancient Greece. "In various forms of cultural activities, one thing was common: looking, gazing." To the Greeks, as K. Kerenyi noted, "looking and festivity were linked with each other by their very nature."3 And: "the correct fulfilment of Greek religiosity can be characterized—from the side of a subjective experience—as a special type of seeing: as the visual knowledge of people in a festive mood." This is why the religious experiences of the Greeks are, according to Kerenyi "primarily a visual experience [...] if we want to characterize the style of Greek religion in terms of its predominant experience, we are in the right to call it a religion of vision."4

As our entire Latin cultural circle was shaped by this viewing and thinking of classical Greeks, it is difficult to find the matter of transforming space in non-verbal analyses or ones that are detached from "retinal" (Pallasmaa) perception. Especially as all philosophies after Plato developed in his shadow. His rules that governed existence: one that births ideas that give birth to objects

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and phenomena, will come to be found in varying degrees and configurations, yet unchanging.

One exceptional scholar who analyzes and problematizes space in a phenomenological view, which is verbal, is Andrzej Piotrowski of the University of Minnesota. To highlight the transformation of space as the work of a thought process (an architecture of thought) even more, Piotrowski reached to experiencing space by cultures as different as those of Mesoamerica, Byzantium or of the Victorian period.⁵ We have already discussed his greatly interesting analyses of the architecture of the Lublin Renaissance and Byzantine and Gothic architecture in the context of religious and political doctrine on the pages of the "Journal of Heritage Conservation," as an important contribution to viewing cultural heritage.

He stressed, as did Guardini, that it is responsible for the complete domination of human thought by "rationalism." Present since the Renaissance, towards the nineteenth century, a world shaped by machines gained supremacy.

However, it is difficult to agree with Piotrowski's presentism, which presents the history of the Pan-American conquest from a present-day perspective. Of course, axiologically, the age of slavery in North America, the conquests of the Spaniards and the Portuguese in South America, or the European wars of religion are shameful, but they are so by contemporary standards; this does not contribute any new impulses to the image of today. Nietzsche warned against retrospection, which is the domain of the conscience, and against projection, which is the imposing of Platonic ideals that we have not risen up to in the past, into the future. "My conclusion is-Nietzsche writes-that the actual man presents a much greater value than a 'coveted' man from any of previous ideals."7 Nietzsche pointed to the tragedy of being that obscures existence ahead of Heidegger—he separated the ontological from the ontic.

This paper is the second critical text on Andrzej Piotrowski's book *Architecture of Thought*. The first, which was published in "Wiadomości Konserwatorskie – Journal of Heritage Conservation," concerned Piotrowski's non-verbal analyses of Byzantine, pre-Columbian architecture and—which is especially significant to us—that of the eastern lands of Poland of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁸

Shaping the world picture

We easily agree with Piotrowski that the verbal perspective of presenting the process of a work's creation and experience "usually eliminate what makes architecture unique—the inherent ambiguity of its meanings. [...] Buildings and urban spaces have an inexhaustible capacity to reveal the traces of previously overlooked cultural and political phenomena. It is as if material constructs that surround people and frame their interactions record life in its fullest complexity."

It appears that we must also discuss other exceedingly important thoughts by Piotrowski, which refer to the world picture, as Martin Heidegger described contemporary existence. 10 The essence of today's architecture as a part of popular culture appears to be completely obscured by the "shroud of being." It appears exceedingly important to scholars of monuments or contemporary cultural treasures¹¹ in the light of the humanist thought proposed by Piotrowski. In his studies, Andrzej Piotrowski presented how, over the span of a century, space became taken over, as a commodity; how consistently it shaped not only objects of perception, but also, and more importantly—imposed a manner of designing and creating this perception. Categories of perceiving space were imposed, a specific "technology of thought," as the author wanted it, was imposed. "Architects compete because the market constantly monitors their performance and rewards those who produce better, or rather more spectacular, responses to comparable programs, sites, and budgets. This approach would not be possible, however, without a less obvious assumption: an uncritical trust that people are actually aware of what they need and can articulate what they desire. This trust produces an impression that, for example, architectural fashion is benign, a mere expression of the freedom of choice and somehow capricious attitude that clients have toward aesthetic preferences. Complex issues of contemporary buildings—ways in which they are infused with meanings and partake in shaping people's identities and aspirations."12

Our contemporary form of shaping the space of the world picture emerged slowly over the course of evolution, which has rapidly picked up the pace during the reign of industrial capitalism. This civilizational formation, via science, philosophy and art, learned to control thought, the technology of thought, as presented by Piotrowski.

"[...] technology of thought emerged the way architectural ideas evolve. Architects became only a fraction of those who started to design lived reality. Buildings and cities were included in the category of mutable constructs that could explore the same issues probed by viewing devices and mass media. In this way, architecture was aligned with forces that succeeded in developing permanently ductile modes of symbolic thought—the foundation of the market economy and the culture of consumerism."13 The material symbols of change in the manner of perception were massproduced "instruments for looking." Inventions of optical devices, which were the practical consequence of Isaac Newton's (1643-1727) discoveries and those of his successors, contributed to a complete change in modes of seeing and in the viewer. Piotrowski, citing Jonathan Crary, indicated that along with the industrial production and sale of optical inventions, a fundamental change took place. The previous model, shaped by direct experience, or camera obscura, was replaced by devices whose goal was to compete with traditional vision, "a surface of inscription on which a promiscuous range of effects could be produced."14 However, in contrast to Crary, Piotrowski noted that one of the "scientific toys" with the most profound significance was the kaleidoscope. Today we can find it at any flea market stall. However, at the time, it attracted interest among the elite and has forever (at least until today) changed the form of perception and its shaping. The novelty it introduced was change for change's sake, successive alterations without a hierarchy of mutual links or purpose. It is a play with variable (kaleidoscopic, as we now say) forms, purely for enjoyment. Differently than in nature, where changes in form are a strategy of genes that dictates the behavior of a species, the changing view in a kaleidoscope only serves entertainment. Scholars like Crary, cited by Piotrowski, highlighted the greater significance of inventions like photography, the stereoscope or the kaiserpanorama. However, it appears essential that increasing techniques of photorealism replaced drawings in popular pictorial messaging. "The emerging market of mass-produced commodities was the most discernable force behind the industrial revolution. It needed fresh ways of representing, interpreting, and evaluating reality."15

"[...] mechanically replicated images hold the key to the process of creating interest and assigning meanings to things [...] In a repetitive manner, magazines and posters could repeat and refi ne successful practices, as well as disseminate their messages to masses of people. Commercial advertising closed the financial feedback loop." Illustrated magazines appeared—a new tool of influencing opinion and advertisement. [...] The improvement of accuracy in image reproduction was crucial in shaping this function of newspapers. When illustrated, they gained a kaleidoscopic quality. Images functioned like pieces of tinsel in the kaleidoscope." Photorealism became a tool that allowed freedom in piecing the perceivable world and to manipulate its image as in a kaleidoscope on the pages of the magazines.

One excellent case of such activity was the "Illustrated London News" ("ILN") that Andrzej Piotrowski analyzed. The editors of the magazine, during the Great Exposition in London (May–October 1851) decided that their goal was to "speak to the eye." "Pictures… have the great advantage over words, that they convey immediately much new knowledge to the mind they are equivalent, in proportion as they approach perfection, to seeing the objects themselves; and they are universally comprehended."¹⁸

Piotrowski noted that steadily improving methods of presenting reality are accompanied by a development of subtle methods of manipulating these presentations. He pointed to the growing divide from perfect photoreal images from the content of symbolic shapes produced and affirmed by cultural patterns as myths, and historical, philosophical or religious narratives. Thus, on the one hand, newspapers verify "objective truth" by using scientific instruments that merely reproduce reality, whole on the other they deliberately and subtly alter this "objective" image to obtain the correct reac-

tion. Using convincing cases, the author demonstrates that images "create an impression that they disseminate truthful information about empirical reality, while at the same time they operate in the unverifiable realm of perceptions, emotions, or desires. By shaping reasons for observing, implying a correct way of viewing and interpreting, and legally affirming the truthfulness of the mechanical reproduction of appearances, they identify and target essential aspects of meaning production."19 We can also observe how such activities affected the shaping of the enthusiastic reception of a scientific perception of the world, including the so-called taxonomy and autonomy of academic disciplines. "Emblematic of the nineteenth century, totalizing orders or evolutionary sequences would not have been so widely and uncritically accepted if not for the representational training—symbolic practices that created interest and presumed trust in things invented or scientifically justified. Images, those printed in magazines as well as the holistic visions painted in one's mind, were instrumental in these process."20 Using the case of the "ILN," Piotrowski demonstrated an evolution in the application of the "technology of thought" to manipulate the reception of information and thus shaping opinion.

In successive examples, he shows how successive experiments with composition, information, a mosaic of truth and falsehood, important and trivial things (such as technical drawings of major inventions mixed with technically identical drawings of evidently ignorant inventions) test and train public reception. "These were all experiments with blurring the distinction between commercial promotion and representations of lived reality—a fascinating spectrum of which were published in the 'ILN.'"21 One key method was maintaining an apparently fundamental division into commercial and non-commercial messaging, with the latter suitably modified so that its presentation "seemingly protected purity, truth, honesty, or at least elegance, in things worthy of knowing and discussing."22 These were trainings mainly at the subliminal level, whose desired perception was obtained by a "kaleidoscope effect" and the proper composition of images. "These were all experiments with blurring the distinction between commercial promotion and representations of lived reality."23

A separate issue, yet closely linked with the above-presented causes of the author, is the evolution of advertising in this context. Piotrowski, tracing advertisements of the Pears Soap Company over the decades, showed the techniques the company had been using, such as subconscious associations with the might of the British Empire, "aging" the product's origins, and referencing to classical sources of Anglo-American culture or overtly sexual subtexts and voyeurism. Another form was to add the advertised product or its name to an image from high culture, for instance by a recognized artist. The discrete addition of the soap's name to the content of an academic painting shows this mixing of symbolic meanings; or religious, political, or

academic contexts (independent science experts). In more general terms, advertisers sought "symbolic vulnerabilities in lived reality," wrote Piotrowski.²⁴ One method that was devised at the time was contrast and shock induced in the reader. As a part of using such measures, one advertiser placed—and depicted in an advertisement—a gigantic advert on the Cliffs of Dover. As the Cliffs of Dover are "a traditional symbol of defiant British sovereignty," defacing it with "slogans touting soap" induced a commercially profitable shock. Although it did lead to the passing of one of the strictest anti-advertisement acts of Victorian England—the Dover Corporation Act.²⁵ All these practices led to the development and widespread use of sophisticated techniques of presenting and thought, as manipulating the symbolic thinking of viewers (technology of thought) in the first decades of the twentieth century. During the industrialization period, it was acknowledged that it is advertisement makes an ordinary object something desirable (Marx). "Capitalism created people who operated like viewing devices, who could see any physical or cultural reality as open to commodification. They no longer needed physical manipulation of fragmented images to transform the world. They could, for example, employ a photographic camera, an apparatus guaranteeing the scientific accuracy of a recorded view, to photorealistically represent such worlds as the repository of means necessary to generate profit"-Piotrowski concluded.²⁶ It was at this time that a typically Victorian product was created and "objectivized" as an obvious concept of "good taste." Even today, it allows one to impose a measurable, irrefutable opinion while also co-creating and pursuing constantly changing fashion. It is essential that these actions dominated these kaleidoscopic change for change's sake. They have the desirable limitless flexibility of relations between symbolic and material structures. The world changed into a financial-political system of rewards—when one was an obedient consumer, or punishment—when one could not afford to make their dreams come true.

To us, from a perspective of architecture as a discipline, including heritage conservation doctrine, as a part of national cultural treasures, the reflections on contemporaneous understanding of architectural styles are of particular interest. As seen in the text under discussion, most theorists abided by their academically correct interpretations. Gottfried Semper presented a different approach, as he had seen, as Piotrowski quoted, industrial buildings without ornamentation as unconditional progress: "the free will of the creative human spirit is the first and most important factor in the question of the origin of architectural styles," and their changes drive "powerful individuals or corporate bodies." 27 He saw progress in the collapse of traditional forms of production and spatial forms. However, his arguments on clothing and decoration, in which he encapsulated the quintessence of contemporaneous "technology of thought," as Piotrowski presents it, were extraordinary. Semper associated ornamentation

and attire with theatrical practices, claiming that "the denial of reality, of the material, is necessary if form is to emerge as a meaningful symbol," and an artist or architect can be said to have achieved the greatest success when they have "masked the material of the mask."²⁸ According to Piotrowski, this summarized an already well-grounded belief that polarization and free operation with material and symbolic aspects were necessary to apply the latter to mask the former. "Only when the material structure was presumed meaningless could a building [...] carry various masks of meaning. Arbitrarily selected and arranged, pieces of meaningful appearances could then be glued together by themed narratives to create an impression of symbolic integrity. In this way, buildings could indiscriminately admit symbolic references, historical styles, or commercial messages."29

The peak achievement of advertising in this context was the Pears building that had been built in London at the time, and which the "ILN" described as follows: "a palatial edifice in New Oxford Street, London. The ILN heralded it as 'one of the grandest architectural works' constructed during the Jubilee Year of Queen Victoria and reaching 'the highest grade of artistic advertising." 30 The eclectic architecture built in the late 1980s and 90s was erected not only as a loose mixture of styles freed from the rigors of canon. "it celebrates the total control of meanings and the disappearance of any need for architecture-specific qualities, those visual and material phenomena that could clutter literal symbolism. It equates architecture with referencing a well-formed system of signs and constructing a narrative that holds a collage of signs together. This businessman's vision represents the complete dismantling of the old ways of thinking about buildings, and the new modality of perception and sense-making mirrors the capitalist techniques of meaning production." 31 This is how Piotrowski summarized the sequence of his study of eclectic architecture, of developing Victorian capitalism.

Another area of discussion of the "technology of thought" in architecture that Andrzej Piotrowski investigated in his book Architecture of Thought, was Le Corbusier's High Modernism. It is to Le Corbusier's genius that we owe the radical change in the shaping of space in the twentieth century. The works of his acolytes in 1960s and 70s Poland are a meaningful contribution to the heritage of Polish culture, and as such should be placed under statutory conservation.³² Contrary to architects of the Victorian era, Le Corbusier saw no conflict between the mission of an architect—a classically educated artist—and that of a pragmatic engineer—a personification of modernity. His departure from the legacy of the nineteenth century was to create a new audience, a new man, who would live in "machines for living in" and "ideal cities." A symbolic proof of this was the replacement of the classical canon of proportions—the figure of a man inscribed into a circle and square, with the "modulor"—a new grid of proportions based on the "golden ratio."33 The aporias of

the harmonic courses of a distance of 173 cm (Le Corbusier's height), when measured against 189 cm (the height of Jerzy Sołtan)³⁴ are a good illustration of the dogmatism of the rational hypotheses from "Corbu's" teachings.

In his book, Andrzej Piotrowski studied one of the less known, or rather less documented aspects of the image of the great architect, one which he himself wanted to preserve for us. He argued that Le Corbusier excellently combined the tradition of nineteenthcentury capitalism, not only in his house designs, but in creating the manner of perceiving his message and his figure. For instance, Piotrowski presented how he had manipulated a photo of grain elevators from the famous article by Walter Gropius in 1913.35 These forms, now canonical for Modernism, which were to testify about the "pure, geometric, cubist forms" were used by Le Corbusier to illustrate his artistic arguments after precise interpretation. Clear retouches of the original, borrowed photograph, clearly show his overt intentions. Although honesty was a prime tenet of Modernism, the architect retouched reality, bending it to his assumptions; "Such modifications were often more competently executed, but these types of pictures illustrate many of his books and a variety of subjects. He even altered depictions of famous historical monuments"—noted Piotrowski.36

Citing research by Beatriz Colomina, it can be stated that conceptual work never ended: even the photographs of completed houses had been manipulated. "Photography and layout construct another architecture in the space of the page."37 Le Corbusier's allencompassing "technology of thought" began to emerge already during formative tours, noted down on the pages of early photographs and sketches. Firth photographs, and then—better—sketches presented an evolution of informed reception and the transformation of conscious perception. Photographs and drawings, initially narrative, utilizing established symbolic messaging, became denotative, thy pursued a new means of communication. These later drawings experimented with the perception of reception, focusing his attention on a created image.

Among examples of this directing of the draftsman's attention, and thus creating perception, are three sketches made by Le Corbusier on the same day, from the same place, the pretext for which supposedly came from the view of Michelangelo's dome from the Vatican gardens. It is visible how greatly the imposed theses of perception affect the end result, without any practical relation to the matter that provided the impulse to create. "Designers should actively participate in that ordering; they should not only compose the material world but, first of all, they should constantly organize perception and thinking itself"38—stated Piotrowski. Le Corbusier was able to put his talent as a creator of perception to use as the publisher (financial head) of "L'Esprit Nouveau," which was published thanks to advertisements, and later of his own books. The aforementioned correction of images to steer perception is a matter of course here: when he discussed the strength of spiritual impact/perception of a "pure" interior, he simply "purified" it by retouching the photo. He administered this procedure as if "right before the eyes" of the reader. As claimed by Andrzej Piotrowski, Le Corbusier had made use of the fact that after over a century of training, readers had come to accept that images are intended to actively shape specific forms of seeing and interpretation, as if they were sketches. "When he graphically alters old monuments of architecture or keeps redrawing his own projects long after they have been physically constructed, Le Corbusier does nothing more than act as a modern designer of symbolic thought."39 He quoted Le Corbusier himself: "'the true purist work should conquer chance and channel emotion; it should be the

rigorous image of a rigorous conception' which offers 'facts to the imagination.' "40 Nineteenth-century colonialism and well-established capitalism initiated the manufacture and use of total scientific knowledge covering history and nature. Scientists and inventors offered humanity new ideas that holistically organized the lives of societies and individuals. Capitalism, as a consequence, abolished pre-existing, traditional hierarchies of values and axioms encoded in symbolic structures.

The twentieth century and its most significant thought current-Modernism-normalized the use of science, knowledge and rational solutions, whose apparent goal was progress. The architect "disciplines" of CIAM held a firm belief in the role of modern architecture in the progressive shaping of a progressive society and a progressive man. In Andrzej Piotrowski's book we can find a well-known photo from the "L'Esprit Nouveau" from 1925 Paris, in which Le Corbusier gives the French minister of public education and the arts a tour of a pavilion that he had designed. The architect and the lawmaker are seen hunched over the Plan Voisin—a design that featured the demolition of half of Paris and the relocation of hundreds of thousands of residents to gigantic skyscrapers, which were intended to replace the traditional city. How close are we in symbolism to a photo of Albert Speer and Ado-If Hitler going over a model of a gigantic Berlin—the capital of the Reich of a Thousand Years. Such totalitarian powers as those known from the twentieth century, which brought totalitarian visions of societies and transforming space, would not be possible without the silent approval of the majority, which places its faith in such visions. As argued by Piotrowski, this approval was programmed, tested and trained for over a century of experiments with the technology of thought, the potential to steer the reception of communication. The method of Andrzej Piotrowski's view of the transformation of space—of architecture—undoubtedly meaningfully enriches the critical body of analyzing the ways in which its design emerges and how it affects its audience.

Romano Guardini observed that contemporary people, that is "Modernist and Postmodernist," use borrowed terms in their reception of space. Its perception is completely secondary. The moment of the "rupture" of humanist design and perception, as understood by the Greeks and the "inhuman" (or modern and timeless) took place around 1830–1870 according to Guardini. Around this time, as demonstrated by Andrzej Piotrowski, there appeared a completely new view of the shaping of the perception of the transformation of space and the criteria of assessing its transformation.

However, these are not purely epistemological studies, as Piotrowski would have it. These analyses are backed by partially axiological arguments. Which in itself is not incorrect, when one is aware of it. The greatest limitation any investigation faces is the investigator. Here we enter a dispute on worldview, or even personality—about the definition of progress. It is clearly evident in the putting forth of axiological arguments by

Piotrowski. All we can do is quote the words of Rainer Maria Rilke from *Requiem*: "Who is speaking of victory? To survive is everything."

We must become used to the contemporary formula of axiological correctness—the rewriting of history from the position of the descendants of slaves and the oppressed, and those of sexual and religious minorities. Nowadays this is morally well-received, yet it is epistemologically fruitless.

It also appears that such presentism distances us from insight into architecture as a discipline of art, as defined by Rainer Maria Rilke: to him, art appeared an individual's pursuit to, above discomfort and darkness, communicate with all things, both the smallest and the greatest, and through such ceaseless dialogues come closer to the quiet sources of all life. In his view, the mysteries of things meld inside the individual with their own deepest feelings and manifest as if in its own yearning. Beauty is the rich language of these intimate confessions.⁴³

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- ³⁹ Ibidem, p. 246.
- 40 Ibidem, p. 251.
- ⁴¹ R. Guardini, *Die Technik und der Mensch. Briefe vom Comer See*, Mainz 1990, letter 2 p. 7 and others, transl. by K. Markiewicz, manuscript of the translation is in possession of the NIAiU.
- ⁴² R.M. Rilke, *Requiem*, transl. M. Jastrun, Kraków 1974, p. 193.
- ⁴³ Idem, *Druga strona natury. Eseje*, listy i pisma o sztuce, poezja nowoczesna, transl. and comm. T. Ososiński, Warszawa 2010, p. 14.

Abstract

Phenomenological studies are of fundamental significance to the discipline of architecture and urban design. Gaining insight not the transformation of space by coming into contact with space "in and of itself" has an essential weight in a period of Heidegger's world picture. Such rarely encountered non-verbal analyses are presented by Andrzej Piotrowski in his book Architecture of Thought. The authors, in recognition of the weight and originality of Piotrowski's studies, point to the "axiological trap" that is based on a partial formulation of evaluative hypotheses instead of epistemological analyses. We can therefore accuse them of presentism—an ahistorical perception of phenomena and mechanisms. In this context, it is necessary to bring up the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, that only the present exist. The past and future are illusions. His concept of time forces a phenomenological perception of reality, here and now, as well as an ontic reflection via an existential, individual experience of each and every one of us.

Streszczenie

Dla dziedziny architektura i urbanistyka zasadnicze znaczenie mają badania fenomenologiczne. Poznanie przekształcania przestrzeni poprzez obcowanie z przestrzenią "samą w sobie" ma w dobie heideggerowskiego "światoobrazu" zasadniczą wagę. Takie rzadko spotykane niewerbalne analizy prezentuje Andrzej Piotrowski w swojej książce Architektura myśli (Architecture of Thought). Autorzy artykułu doceniajac wagę i oryginalność badań Piotrowskiego, wskazują na "pułapkę aksjologiczną", która polega na częściowym stawianiu tez wartościujących zamiast epistemologicznych analiz. Można tym samym zarzucić im prezentyzm – ahistoryczne postrzeganie zjawisk i mechanizmów. Trzeba w tym kontekście przypomnieć myśl Fryderyka Nietzsche, że naprawdę istnieje tylko czas teraźniejszy, przeszłość i przyszłość to iluzje. Jego koncepcja czasu zmusza do fenomenologicznego odbioru rzeczywistości, tu i teraz, do refleksji ontycznej poprzez egzystencjonalne indywidualne doświadczenie każdego z nas.