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Sculpture in the Urban Space

Sculpture in the urban space is the subject of my dissertation. Such a broad and general issue surely must be limited to certain place and period so I have chosen Wrocław, the city I have lived in since I was born, and I am concentrating on post war objects and most particularly installed after 1989 (so called transformation).

Urban sculpture is a three-dimensional object, a way of organizing space and – on the same time – a sign, a carrier of ideas understandable to community, connected with its values (or a sign of foreign occupation or enforced ideology). Urban context can strengthen or weaken its meaning; on the other hand a purely decorative form in certain surroundings may gain unexpected significance.

Wrocław is particularly good example to show it because of its history, whose traces - historical monuments – had to function in changing cultural and urban context or be destroyed. The period I have chosen - from 1989 onwards - surprised me by the evident cultural conflict going on in the public space. The interested parties are: euroenthusiastic (post)modernists ashamed of tradition and wanting to get rid of it and very much aware of history traditionalists who waited all the time of communist regime to commemorate some traumatic events, the memory of which was so long forbidden.

The conflict is not only about what to commemorate but also how to do it. Monumental statue on high postument or an object of modest size on the ground level? The latter idea is generally supported by “euroenthusiasts” to whom usually local authorities belong having all the means to enforce their decisions. The traditionalists are forced to adapt some kind of guerilla tactics sometimes resulting in objects of questionable artistic value or wrong location. This problem of symbolic violence and resistance certainly belong to my area of interest.

Another important question I am interested in is how much alive the contemporary public sculpture is, how much connected with community forced to look at it. To what an extent

does it continue traditional functions of sculpture such as religious, sepulchral, landmark, status symbol, or propaganda. Is it the same phenomenon that inspired Paleolithic hunters to carve little human images carried whenever they moved or something essentially different, some kind of postmodern game accessible by chosen ones free to express themselves in the public space?

To whom the public space belongs or should belong is another important question. How much local authorities, experts and artists should have to say on the matter what objects should be placed there? Are expectations or values of community limitation for the artistic freedom or perhaps a challenge? Is there or should there be parallel freedom of viewers? Should they be forced to accept some kind of compulsory aesthetic education or ideological indoctrination? Can particular objects be treated as voices in a debate, in which all the participants have equal rights and means to express their opinions?

Another important problem I am dealing with is purely formal description and analysis of the objects and its surroundings, the spatial context. The tool I am using is Urban Interior Theory published by Kazimierz Wejchert in his *Elementy kompozycji urbanistycznej* (*Components of urban design*) according to which any urban view can be described as an interior with the floor, walls, ceiling and furniture placed within. This part of my dissertation is expected to have some practical use since I am writing it as a doctoral candidate attached to (Institute of Painting Drawing and Sculpture at) Architecture Department of Wrocław University of Technology.

I was trained and got my MA degree as an art historian (at Catholic University of Lublin) and also spend 2 years studying painting and sculpture at Wrocław Academy of Fine Arts as a postgraduate student.