

The present research was inspired by a quite personal experience regarding the nature of language. Namely, during my stay in the USA, one of my colleagues, a very devoted New Yorker, once was making a comparison between New York and Washington DC. He told me that the main point (feature) of New York as a city was its 'urban fun' which Washington did not have. Urban fun. Turning these words over in my mind and trying to get deeper insight into the meaning of this word combination I realised there were definite local specifics for this notion. It is quite evident that the typical English definition has to do with a vast range of things, starting with urban architecture as a matter of reality on the one hand, and finishing with its mental projections (including psychology), on the other. It also has to do with both language and urban semiotics, as well as with the issue of modern visual perception. Some fundamental concepts of modern culture are to be involved in discussion of the issue, so the latter is considered in the background of both temporally distant and recent cultural traditions.

Consequently, in my approach 'urban fun' is considered an element of modern visual perception in its correspondence to verbal and culture codes. The issue is regarded in the context of some universal cultural contrapositions and is scrutinised through some manifestations of 20th century art history. The main problem I am going to discuss deals with the problem of in which segment of urban space – visual perception or aesthetic presentation – this notion should be slotted, and with which features it may be associated. In other words, how to get in touch with 'urban fun', how to comprehend it – and whether it is possible to extend the notion to any non-English-speaking environment. In other words, the issue should be examined as a universal feature with local manifestations regarding its mental projections in culture.

According to Webster's Dictionary *fun* is derived from *to be foolish* and conveys a meaning close to *amusement*, *gay play* and *enjoyment*. Play comes into being

when the elements it consists of get into an unpredictable collision, and this very collision produces some pleasure. Amusement or an inclination to play, regarding an urban environment, can be detected in the vast diversity of the modern city, which articulates itself as a multilevel 'text'. In regard to architecture 'urban fun' can be detected in a variety of historical styles and the consistency of its visual message. The urban diversity of a modern megalopolis manifests itself in many aspects of the city as a kind of human dwelling. This is a location full of joy. The amusement is based on infrastructure and appears in the diversity of a visual urban text. The performance of the urban text is highly spectacular: it turns into a show by means of a joyful variety of shapes, colours, different media of ads, etc. The multinational issue of a city population should also be taken into consideration. The latter is of particular importance since it contributes to a variety of languages and mixes different cultures with each other. Urban fun could also be observed in an inspiring freedom and dynamics of the trends in street clothes, a diversity of fast food restaurants, or street music with the impressing appearance of its performers. All these elements form a consistent mixture of the city's sounds, shapes, smells and looks. It implies and creates multiplicity (diversity) of a human substance.

Homo urbanus in his 20th century manifestation, regardless of his inclination to novelty, operates with the entity based on an archaic past. *Homo urbanus* appeals to the past to carry out a specific inversion of the text of cultural basics. Among the most important universal contrapositions, which are in an intensive way operated by present-day humans, is the contraposition own–alien. It may clarify the issue of modern urban fun in regard to a townsman. The issue of 'alien' related to 'urban fun' means multinational diversity. It is emphasised in the perception of the modern city and contributes a lot to the feelings of joy and pleasure. National areas of the city (China Town in NY, for example) and other manifestations of everyday urban life define the specifics of a modern megalopolis. The multicoloured city crowd contributes a lot to the perception of 'urban fun': it provides the megalopolis with a sense of virtuality by conveying an unrealistic and utopian spirit of entity.

The next contraposition relevant to the issue is the contraposition static–dynamic. It can be considered by evoking Heinrich Wölfflin's pairs of categories in which the static–dynamic opposition is one of the most significant ones. This opposition brings to light some romantic inclinations resulting from culture/

nature interactions. Culture/nature interactions became highly visible in 20th century culture and evoked some corresponding metaphors. Namely, some links between the city and wilderness are emphasised. One can trace it in language and commonplace similes and metaphors: water and crowds, animals and cars, city as a jungle, skyscrapers as rocky mountains. The similarity between skyscrapers and rocky mountains corresponds to the resemblance between the city square and the plains of natural scenery (landscape). The protestant philosopher Paul Tillich mentioned a special existential emotional experience, which he called an 'oceanic feeling'. According to him the feeling of ocean is often produced by a crowded city, by a city crowd. The clash between the vertical and horizontal zones and shapes or static and dynamic features in the city embodiment is the force that can activate the feeling of 'urban fun'. One can conclude that the specific New York urban fun owes a lot to the static–dynamic entity of Manhattan architecture. Surrounded by flat surfaces of water, the rocky mountains of the Manhattan skyscrapers perform an impressing mythological action of eternal fight between human beings and nature.

The opposition static–dynamic should be applied not only to architecture. It also implies the static–dynamic state of a town in a sense of physical perception of a natural environment. Here urban fun may be generated by water in its cultural context (fountains, bridges, embankments, avenues, etc.). The dynamic features of a modern city are evidently defined by its mobile image as well – regardless of whether it can be observed and perceived as a feature of reality (as traffic – its static constituent – I mean traffic jams – just adds to the dynamic image) or experienced in any other way (like mobile communications, etc.). In this respect our civilization gets tightly linked to the archaic past as long as it activates the bionic and environmental background of the routine city activities.

The other contrapositions worth mentioning are outer–inner and whole–partial. A specifically archaic way of thinking comes into being in the inversive nature of outer–inner. It deals with the corporeality of a city that means with a city as a collective body. The bodied city does away with a border zone between *own* and *alien*, *inner* and *outer* space. In the 20th century, a 19th century town was transformed into a kind of an ecstatic body and all its energy was accumulated into one point. 'Ecstatic body' is a term introduced by Valery Podoroga to describe the specific embodiment of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's prose (Podoroga 1995). In combination with the above-mentioned 'oceanic feeling', the ecstatic

body produced by a city crowd implies that a self-sufficient inner body gets turned inside out. The human body loses its limits. It becomes an aloof element of a crowd, an organic part of human medley. This abandoning of the personal corporeality, of Self-Body's limits, creates a specific sense of play, or in other words – 'urban fun'. A modern city as a visual object is interfered with by the self-corporeality of a town dweller as a sort of active–passive participant in a city performance.

The city's corporeality can be described as a feature of multiplicity (plurality) and as a principle of infinite inversions in which the body crosses its own limits. Amplification of space by means of body alienation and intensifying the very feeling of extension evidently traces back to European Baroque heritage and its folklore references. We should also mention Mikhail Bakhtin, who brought to light the cognition of the Baroque and avant-garde poetics through the issue of the corporeal beneath. The type of corporeality based on the body beneath corresponds to a specific type of urban body fun such as having a meal out (to go out instead of having dinner at home is fun) or consuming drinks in some of the city's locales (that means – in public places, among a crowded city). It may add to the understanding of the tendency to create glass walls in modern city restaurants on the one hand, and the American restriction of consuming drinks from a bottle on a street on the other hand. The former refers to the city inclination to a feeling of unlimited communal body; the latter reveals the totalitarian nature of some American regulations. In addition to food and drinks we should also mention such specifically urban features as prostitution, the homeless and beggars, urban smells and garbage. All these manifestations of the city corporeality are based on a body beneath. They mark some specific zones of a city's corporeal consistency such as markets, public traffic, garbage collectors and pedestrian areas. The obsession with cleanness so typical for modern civilization may also be considered in the context of corporeal issues of a city as a reverse side of the body beneath.

The lower corporeality turns the convention of social hierarchy upside down. The human body gets transformed as well. It becomes saturated with a play and joy against the background of city semantics. The street fashion is full of joy and extravagant body performance. It can also be comprehended as an important element of 'urban fun'.

If we now consider the opposition own–alien in context of 'urban fun' we can

detect some other semantic manifestations reaching back to the past. A medieval town originated from a combination of a fortress/tower and a market place by its outside walls. The ancient fortress set up the boundaries between the zones of own and alien, as well as the outer and inner space providing a separation. At the same time, the market broke the boundaries in a semiotic sense. It brought together own–alien as well as outer–inner, establishing them into a new formation called ‘town’. So in the historical and semiotic roots of a modern city we can reveal the overcome contrapositions. The traces of these oppositions as a principle of permanent inversions are quite evident in the issue of urban fun. The latter can be treated in the context of urban text as a palimpsest, i.e. as a speech figure based on inversion. Urban fun irradiates a sense of the absurd, appearing as a grotesque body of the megalopolis. It evidently involves the spiritual experience of the avant-garde revolt in 20th century art. Baroque heritage and avant-garde innovations meet in the manifestations of urban fun.

How much avant-garde culture defines the present-day perception of the city can be seen in the predominance of subjectivity over objects. We should also mention the interactions of verbal and visual elements in the text of the city, which is emphasised by the constitutive elements of ‘urban fun’. In urban fun such fundamental concepts as *urbs* and *logos* are closely linked to each other. A sense of game as a characteristic feature of urban fun brings together irony and the absurd. It elicits some rhetoric figures typical for verbal signification, so through the issue of urban fun one can see how much the visual culture of modern times owes to the verbal substance of human culture.

To conclude the above-said, urban fun should be located somewhere between a city as a sort of architectural reality and the mental reflections on this reality. There is no equivalent to the English notion of ‘urban fun’ in Russian, as well as it can hardly be applied either to modern Russian urban architecture or to the so-called text of Moscow–St. Petersburg of Russian culture in general. An attempt to detect urban fun in the urban Russian mentality can only be made in the context of urban perception tracing back to the Russian avant-garde movement, which has been discussed above. A sample of the perception of urban fun reveals itself in the piece *An Englishman in Moscow* (Fig. 1) by Kazimir Malevich. In the artist’s evolution the piece is located in-between so-called cubofuturistic realism and suprematism. The artist named the stage under consideration ‘paralogic form’. It represented a preliminary step towards his glorious

Black Square. Although a number of futuristic city landscapes were created at this time by Russian avant-garde artists – among them some works by Olga Rozanova, pieces by Aristarkh Lentulov, etc. – predicting the perception of urban fun, I believe the piece by Malevich is of particular interest for the topic since it reflects the most profound levels of the issue of urban fun. It fully demonstrates a variety of urban-corporeal meanings that are mixed together and convey the specific avant-garde sense of the absurd.



Figure 1] Kazimir Malevich, *An Englishman in Moscow* (1914, oil on canvas, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg).

The composition represents a chaotic conglomeration of forms, letters and allusions demonstrating a lack of commonplace logic. The objects on the canvas have some connotations with reality though they can hardly be connected into a single whole. There are some Christian symbols like a church, a ladder, a fish, a

candle, some objects of everyday life like a wooden spoon, a fragment of a saw, and a candle that can be regarded in the same register as well. There are also some enigmatic things like a sabre, an old-fashioned gun and a kind of a sign – an arrow. Finally, half-covered by other elements, there is an image of a man in a top hat – presumably that very Englishman. There are also two inscriptions made out of torn letter combinations of an obscure meaning that say ‘partial eclipse’ and ‘race society’. The latter is supposedly related to the Englishness of the main character. It may explain the reason for his being in Moscow: horse races. Meanwhile, Moscow as such can hardly be detected here. There are no indications of the location but a church which could be treated as a metonymy of the city. The integrity (entity) of the piece is reached by means of a consequent principle of a multidimensional entity formed by a combination of free association. Moscow as an urban reality appears not on the visual, but on the verbal level – that means, in the title of the picture. The verbal components of the image are set up by inscriptions on the canvas, deliberating the visual parts of composition of their literal meanings. Verbal and visual components of the city symbols are imposed one upon the other, forming a transparent structure. One can see a kind of a palimpsest created on the basis of urban signs that are more of a mental than a physical nature.

In 20th century art and literature Moscow became a location of highly paradoxical manifestations and at this point the city bore the palm from St. Petersburg. The absurd and the city of Moscow are closely linked in such works as *Master and Margaret* by Mikhail Bulgakov, *Moscow* by Andrey Bely, etc. The saturation with absurdity in Moscow increased since the capital of the state had been moved there – one can detect the direct causality between the whereabouts of authorities and the rise of the irrational mentality of the location in the Russian mentality. Turning back to the picture by Malevich we can confirm the presence of a number of contradictions which are declared both on verbal (including the title) and visual levels. City fun can be seen in the clearly articulated sense of absurdity which came into evidence by means of the composition and symbols of Moscow. The great problem is whether Moscow can be perceived as a city conveying ‘urban fun’ or not. But the examination of the picture by Malevich from the viewpoint of the essence of ‘urban fun’ may convince us that in modern society ‘urban fun’ has been elevated by the whole avant-garde paradigm of the previous century and it should not be limited to any specific location or

city environment. 'Urban fun' has much more to do with the modern urban mentality than with any local characteristics of a city.

'Urban fun' can be comprehended as a feature that helps us to get insight into the nature of a modern city in its integrity, where the past and the present, the mental and the corporeal, rational and paralogical are brought together.

References

P o d o r o g a 1995 = В. Подорога. *Феноменология тела*. Москва

Linnalõbu (*urban fun*)

Kokkuvõte

Artikkel käsitleb "linnalõbu" ideed nii keelelise iseärasusena kui modernistlikust linnamentaliteedist tärganud tsivilisatsiooni omadusena. Linnalõbu vaadeldakse kui verbaalsetele koodidele vastavat modernse visuaalse taju elementi. Mõttekäigu selgitamiseks on seda probleemi käsitletud universaalsete kultuuriliste vastandpaaride kontekstis ja 20. sajandi kunstiajaloo kaudu.

Nähtuse kirjeldamiseks ei piisa linnaarhitektuuri tavapäraest kontseptsioonidest, mistõttu arutluse tuleb kaasata rida linnasemiootilisi teemasid. Linnalõbu mõiste määratleb eeldatavasti moodsa linna mitmepalgeline olemus, kus põrkuvad oma ja võõras, sisemine ja väline, osa ja tervik, dünaamiline ja staatiline. Linnalõbu kontseptsioonis põimuvad linna ja inimkeha problemaatika. Ülalnimetatud vastandpaare eraldavate piiride kadumise tõttu muutus linn kollektiivsest organismist 20. sajandi suurlinna (megalopolise) näol omamoodi ekstaatiliselt kehamiks. Moodsat linna kui visuaalset objekti mõjutab linna-etenduses aktiivselt või passiivselt osaleva linnaelaniku kehalisus.

Linnalõbu mõistes on omavahel tihedalt seotud põhjapanevad kontseptsioonid *urbs* ja *logos*. Mängulises linnalõbus ühinevad iroonia ja absurd. See toob esile verbaalsele tähistusele omaseid retoorilisi figure, linnalõbu probleemistiku kaudu ilmneb kaasaegse visuaalse kultuuri otsene sõltuvus kultuuri verbaalsest traditsioonist.

Iseäranis tüüpilisena avaldub linnalõbu idee Ameerika vaimulaadis. Kohalike, ameerika inglise keelt emakeelena (sh. “kultuurikeelena”) kõnelejate meelest on New York linn, mida iseloomustab linnalõbu, vastandina Washingtonile, kus selline nähtus üldiselt puudub. Vene keeles puudub vaste linnalõbu mõistele, samuti saaks seda vaevalt kasutada modernistliku vene linnaarhitektuuri või üldisemalt vene kultuuris sisalduva nn. Moskva–Peterburi teksti puhul. Linnalõbu elemente kui omalaadset urbanistlikku tajumisviisi võib vene linnamentaliteedis alates vene avangardismi aegadest siiski leida. See avaldub näiteks Kazimir Malevitši kubofuturistliku perioodi teoses “Inglane Moskvas” (1913–1914). Maal peegeldab suurepäraselt tervet hulka linlik-kehalisi tähenduskihte, mis on omavahel läbi põimunud ning kannavad erilist avangardistlikku absurditaju.