

Petr Gibas, “Representation, process, experience: (post)industrial landscape in anthropological-geographical perspective“ (dissertation)

Reviewer: Doc. PhDr. Csaba Szaló, Ph.D.

I have gone through the text of Petr Gibas with great interest. In general, the dissertation is very well-written, carefully composed and clearly-argued. I fully accept the author’s interpretive strategy which is not aimed at challenging received views and academically established interpretations but to give enriched and detailed thick description of its empirical material. The work consistently exceeded my expectations both on the level of arguments and analysis. It shows evidence of a deep engagement of the author with the field.

The following are my comments that may be critical, nonetheless are not supposed to question the competence of the author and the relevance of his approach.

The core of the work can be found in the concept of landscape. One can claim that from historical times there are almost everywhere signs of human being’s attempts to transform their place of existence. Through the text the word “landscape” signifies either (i) *a place* or (ii) *an image*.

As the author stresses: landscape is a way of organising the world in visual terms. Visual representations as well as their historical/social groundings are stressed in all empirical cases. Landscapes analysed in this dissertation express a human desire to make meanings. The author brings to terms an understanding that human beings make meanings through their creation and interpretation of landscapes. Urban landscapes deciphered in this dissertation take the form of images that refer to objects and acts, odours, sounds and so on. In fact anything, a building, a crowd, a sculpture, a wall or a mountain, can be an element of a landscape as long as “someone” interprets it as signifying “something”.

This “something” that elements of a landscape stand for plays a crucial role in the work. At the level of analytical categories there is no doubt, anything can figure as an element of a landscape as far as the author interprets it as an element of a landscape. Let me stress that this is not to be treated as a deficiency of his approach. It is just to claim that the work implicitly shows that various elements of a landscape have no intrinsic meaning nor factual meaning and become elements of a landscape only when there are human beings who invest them with meaning. Landscape is there only for “someone” who interpret its elements as referring to “something” other than themselves.

Urban and (post)industrial landscapes analysed in the dissertation refer to ways of seeing. However, these are ways of seeing, interpreting things as signs, as elements of landscapes. In other words, let me suggest that landscapes signify ways of seeing things as constitutive elements of our places.

The work is an excellent demonstration (at least in my reading) of the analytic relevance of cultural hermeneutics: one interprets particular “things” as elements of an urban landscape by relating it to a familiar set of pre-understandings either referring to traces of the past or to disclosures of the future.

I recommend to mark this dissertation as excellent.

Brno, 28.05.2016