



SEMINARIUM IN PLACE

10.10.2013, ul. Smolna 36, Warsaw

Kamil Julian

Mariusz Tchorek: Man-Place

Foreword

Proposed in Mariusz Tchorek's paper delivered during the First Symposium of Artists and Scientists in Puławy in 1966, the Theory of Place was conceived as a programme statement for the newly established Foksal Gallery. This provides one framework for interpretation of the text as a manifesto of an art gallery, locating it in a narrow category of materials documenting the history of a particular institution. The Theory of Place also tends to be discussed within the context of neo-avant-garde tendencies in Polish art in the 1960s, especially in relation to the emergence of the medium of environment (an artwork defined as inextricably linked with its surroundings) in Poland. The latter approach falls into the domain of the history of art. Both research perspectives are detached from the intention of the originator¹ of the Theory of Place,

¹ Tchorek's strategy involved adopting a flexible and nomadic approach to theory, oriented towards cognitive exploration of artistic practice of particular creators in their original "inherent" context without prior expectations or judgement – a model similar to the work of a counsellor, whose objective is to assist other people in gaining self-cognition and developing awareness of their own conditioning, limitations, virtues and vices.

which highlights yet another dimension of the text and reveals the core of the idea as a result. The same text signals the impossibility of describing the Place with the categories of reason as “it cannot be an object of virtue”. When it comes to the Place, participation, professional distance and attempts at scientific objectivisation are in contradiction to the very subject of research. It is chiefly involvement that allows cognitive insight into the Theory of Place. Personal involvement.

This is why I have chosen the figure of Mariusz Tchorek and his commitment to the Place as the subject of my paper. Tchorek’s biography may furnish us with clues about the significance of the ideas conveyed by the Theory of Place. And vice versa: the Theory of Place may help us discover coherence in the seemingly nonlinear biography of Mariusz Tchorek, at least to a certain extent. The objective of this approach is to steal away the Theory of Place from the historical/artistic discourse based on the paradigm of modernity and placing it again in the original context – exactly where it came from: in Mariusz Tchorek’s life. It is thus only natural that my attention has also focused on the long life (or the second life) of the Theory of Place – since its proposal in 1966, the only permanent location for the theory were Mariusz Tchorek’s thoughts and actions, rather than the Foksal Gallery. Although the biography, which is about to be related, constitutes documentary source material, it must be pointed out that the formulation of the subject matter as “Mariusz Tchorek: Man-Place” is obviously an interpretation. My final goal is to provide basic facts about Mariusz Tchorek’s life as well as to outline main areas of his professional activities and interests, with special emphasis given to those that are related with the Theory of Place.

1. Mariusz Tchorek before the proposal of the Theory of Place

Mariusz Tchorek was born in 1939 in Warsaw. His parents were both artists: his father Karol Tchorek was a sculptor and his mother Zofia Tchorek née Kochanowicz a textile artist. An artistic background seems to have significantly affected Mariusz Tchorek’s life; when he was 16, he was introduced by his father to Henryk Stażewski, a pre-war avant-garde

artist, and Maria Ewa Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska. Because of a disability in his right hand, Tchorek could not sit the drawing exam, obligatory for candidates applying to study the History of Art at the Warsaw University. This is why in 1956 he became a student of English Philology at the same university, attending seminars on art history and philosophy at the same time. His first critical essay to be published was an 1958 article entitled *O wykorzystaniu nowych możliwości materii* [On the Usage of New Possibilities of Matter] dedicated to works by Ewa Jaroszyńska (his then wife) displayed at an exhibition held by the Warsaw Literary Club. In the late 1950s Tchorek made contact with Grupa Zamek [Castle Group], a circle of artists from Lublin who published a magazine called “Struktury” [Structures] and that was where Tchorek’s essay *W poszukiwaniu trzeciego wymiaru* [In Search of the Third Dimension] appeared in 1959. He also met young Lublin-based art critics, Anka Ptaszkowska and Wiesław Borowski. The early 1960s saw his career as an art critic progress, starting with his collaboration with the Krzywe Koło Gallery [Crooked Wheel Gallery], the only art gallery at the time that was at least partly autonomous from communist arts policy; two of his texts were printed in catalogues published by the gallery. His knowledge of English made it possible for him to read clandestinely distributed articles on contemporary art printed in the West. He was thus updated on what was going on in the world art. One of those texts, as far as I know, was John Cage’s *Lecture on Nothing*, translated by Tchorek for private use; he then handed out the translation to his friends. His rendering of Henry Moore’s *Notes on Sculpture* was printed in “Struktury”. His acquaintance with art, not limited to Polish contemporary art, would later constitute his contribution to the Foksal Gallery (independent from Tadeusz Kantor, who had a passport and was allowed to travel).

In the mid-1960s, Wiesław Borowski informed Mariusz Tchorek of his intention to found a small art gallery in an outbuilding of the Zamoyski Palace in Foksal Street in Warsaw, which was the seat of the Visual Arts Studios (PSP). Since the closing of the Krzywe Koło Gallery, the place for independent, experimental art in Warsaw had remained to

be taken. The Foksal Gallery was to occupy it, with Wiesław Borowski, Anka Ptaszkowska and Mariusz Tchorek as a trio of art critics responsible for its programme. The independence and autonomy of the Foksal Gallery from dominant ideology and artistic practice was not unlimited as its programme was supervised by the party; the gallery could be closed down or absorbed by communist power structures anytime. In my opinion, the Foksal Gallery offered a chance to be free as far as particular historical circumstances allowed; it constituted an alternative to ossified, ideologised artistic venues. In an essay (known as the “inaugural text” or the “programme text”) from the catalogue accompanying the first exhibition staged by the gallery, in 1966, the founders of the gallery communicated the intentions behind establishing it: they wanted to question the conventions of making exhibitions. They announced that the gallery would “uncover the *conditions* and *situations* related to their creation, rather than merely displaying an ‘artwork’. Secondly, it would treat these *conditions* and *situations* as *organic elements* of an artistic exposition. The division between two separate fields of artistic activity: the studio where an artwork is created and the venue where it is exhibited was to be disturbed.” The inaugural text became the first theoretical basis for the Foksal Gallery, and its main ideas were later developed in the Theory of Place.

2. The Theory of Place

Mariusz Tchorek advanced his Theory of Place in a lecture delivered during the First Symposium of Artists and Scientists in Puławy in 1966. The Theory of Place was then published in 1967 as *An Introduction to the General Theory of PLACE* in the Foksal Gallery Programme. It was in the form of a printed text that I have acquainted myself with the Theory of Place (it remains to be discovered whether and how this text differed from the lecture). The style of the piece can be seen as one of its distinctive features – it is specific as the text seems to open, to unfold and to reveal itself. Rather than being “poetic”, the text displays a degree of weightiness; it has an almost material character and

phenomenological gravity. Its obliqueness, or even ambiguity, results from the fact, as it is usually the case with manifestos, that the theses and postulates it advances derive from a different approach to the world, from an attitude that relies on departing from a certain way of thinking and adopting another that remains, however, largely undefined; as a consequence, the theses of the Theory of Place seem unmotivated and arbitrary. Particular arguments in the text may convey an impression that they have been ordered according to no specific pattern, although the text is typographically divided – the middle fragment is in bold type. The part preceding the bold type, or the first part, continues with the criticism of the convention of exhibiting art – already discussed by the “inaugural text” – regarding alienation of artworks from the gallery as observed in the dominant practices of artistic exposition. The second part of the text, which is the crucial one, proposes/delineates the concept of Place, which is both allegorical and physical, a site where the rules that govern the world fail to operate. The very idea of Place is never explained – it is defined by negation: the Place is neither a framework nor a platform, the Place is not a gallery, as well as by its function: the Place is shaped by those who participate in it, “it is only in the Place [...] that »art is created by all«”. The third part provides an outline of the historical background of the Place.

Replicated in literature on the subject, the division into three parts obscures the picture to some extent and makes the specificity of the concept hard to grasp. I suggest that we should focus on two dimensions of the text, rather than on its three-part structure, which seems to be supported by what Mariusz Tchorek told Joanna Mytkowska in an interview: “*The Theory of Place* was received [*interpreted*] at two – deep and surface – levels. It was at the surface level that it was considered to be a Polish example of the theory of environment...” What would the deep level of reception involve? There is no answer to this question in the interview as Mariusz Tchorek’s thought remained unfinished, which was marked by the ellipsis in the process of editing the conversation.

What conclusions can be drawn from the article *An Introduction to the General Theory of PLACE*? First of all, the Place is some sort of

space. It is a space that belongs to the world and is outside of it at the same time, in suspension, a space which is heterogeneous in relation to the world. The space is ever-changing, susceptible, ephemeral and transient – the place is not self-contained and its existence depends on being recognised by the outside world. The Place is not an abstract category (like, for instance, heaven, hell or purgatory) – it exists here and now, in the real world, beyond any doubt of reason, experience, morality or intuition. It is a sort of sensed presence (which does not necessarily have any connection with art) – the Place is where live presence is. The Place is life – if it is not there, if there is only a memory of life, a trace of life, representation of life or an archive of life – then life is not there, and the Place is not there. Like a Platonic idea, there is only one Place – sublimated, abstracted and projected into an ideal space. Although, as has been stated above, the Place is real, the concept of it is idealistic and certain requirements must be satisfied for it to actually exist – it is normative.

At the same time, rather than in the horizontal dimension of contact with the Absolute, the Place appears in the subjective domain of self-cognition and apprehension of others, in the – to use Kantian terms – intersubjective dimension (“The Place cannot be called into being by **purely** [all emphases in the text by KJ] private endeavours”). The Place is the experience of a subject, it is space **within** a subject. Therefore, human beings constitute a fundamental requirement of the existence of the Place – not their eyes, language, cognition but conscious presence and voluntary participation. The Place is a gap in the human being, “a sudden gap in the utilitarian approach to the world” – or in giving priority to one’s own interest, in the primacy of ego. A gap – an act of negation, of being different from others, unexpected realisation of something. The Place exists in diversity – the identity of the Place cannot be contained in language. The Place exists in the diversity of me versus the other. The abyss in me that leads me to others via searching, learning, conversing.

The Place is intersubjective community spirit: this is the ultimate requirement of the Place. The Place is participation, it is

involvement. The Place has an inclusive and egalitarian nature. It is a priori senseless; what happens in the Place makes sense exclusively in reference to its own internal logic (similarly to the meaning of a text which becomes invalid outside it). Existing independently of divisions or the logic of binary oppositions, the Place is neither utilitarian nor non-utilitarian. The only “law” that applies to the place requires one to be open to cognition and understanding of the world. **The Place is participation autonomous from any power – autonomous from everything that elevates:** this is not a stage, a pedestal or anything that calls for obsequiousness. The Place signifies openness and hospitality. These are not relative features or traits; openness is or is not there.

The Place is an area, but it is not space that determines its position in the world. It is set up by an artist. An artist: the one who has already been “suddenly astonished”. The one who freely creates what is around him or her; the one who is aware of the fact that he or she creates – and that the result of the creative act may not be an “artwork” or an object, it could as well be a conversation, a feeling, a situation, a change in consciousness or an emotion. This is why everyone can be an artist in the Place. **The Place is participation in creation.** The Place is a plan of a meeting that involves elementary respect for and equality of each and every participant. After all, “in the Place art is created by all”. This concept brings multiple associations to mind: firstly, hippies and hippy communes; secondly, Buddhist philosophy, New Age movements or philosophical and religious syncretism; thirdly, cognition-orientated psychotherapeutic work and possibly more. These associations, which I suggest should be used as interpretations of the Theory of Place (and more precisely, as Mariusz Tchorek’s authorial interpretation, retroactively reconstructed) are based on Tchorek’s biography – events and interests parallel and subsequent to his announcement of the Theory of Place.

3. Hippies, Tadeusz Kantor, Tchorek's other activities at the Foksal Gallery, leaving the gallery and emigration

The idea of being together and enjoying equal rights at the “Place where art is created by all” might constitute a connection between Tchorek and the hippy movement. Advocating liberty, hippies believed in art as much as they believed in freedom from any power; consequently, they believed in art independent from the power of art galleries or artists. Hippies did not need an “experimental” art gallery – the whole world was artistic space. Questioning of conventions established in the art world, fetishisation of artworks and the safe way of visiting art exhibitions was just one element in a larger process of questioning the society and its “traditional values” (including family, work and growing rich). Both, the Theory of Place and hippies dissociated themselves from the found hierarchical social model and criticised the inauthenticity of established manners. Both, hippies and the Theory of Place presented the demand for a change in the fundamental line of thought, both were determined to participate in “something more spiritual” and – which I believe is the way the Place should be understood – both emphasized the communal and egalitarian nature of being (“being together”), proposing a radical **reformulation of the boundaries of subjectivity**. In both cases, there are elements of institutional emancipation and freedom philosophy. It is hardly possible to claim that hippie philosophy inspired the idea of the Place (hippies first appeared in Warsaw in 1967, the year in which *An Introduction...* was published); it seems, however, that there was a shared inspiration, or some intuition preceding these phenomena (“there was something in the air” as the saying goes). A communal sense, typical of hippie demands, was also experienced by Mariusz Tchorek, which I am going to discuss in a moment. In a broader sense, the concept of the Place can be situated against the background of movements known as New Age, an eclectic philosophy of life inspired mostly by Asian religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and others.

I know nothing about any direct relations between Mariusz Tchorek and the hippy movement and yet the two worlds very distinctively came into contact – or “explosion”, as Mariusz Tchorek put it – in January 1969, during Tadeusz Kantor’s happening entitled *An Anatomy Lesson According to Rembrandt*, which was part of the Winter Assemblage at the Foksal Gallery. Invited by Kantor to take part, a group of hippies arrived to find an inscription on the wall of the gallery saying “no more so-called participation!” (Kantor had placed it there several days earlier during another action, *A Typewriter with a Sail and a Helm.*) Tadeusz Kantor, who modelled his artistic persona upon the romantic idea of a demiurgic artist, highlighted his own privileged position as an artist, assigning the role of passive models, if not “living objects”, to his hippy guests (and, additionally, to other “co-authors” of the work). It was him, the author, who attributed artistic meaning to them – participants were not allowed to supply their own senses to a happening that was entirely his creation. Kantor drew a “dividing line” separating his (gallery-)guaranteed artistic position from “aspiring” contributors to the process of creation, rejecting the idea of participation. That was when the differences in Tchorek’s and Kantor’s approaches to the world came to the forefront; that was also when Mariusz Tchorek and the Foksal Gallery definitely parted. For Tchorek, the end of participation invalidated “the Place where art is created by all”, “the experience of the primary situation of the participant”. Announced by Kantor loud and clear, “the end of participation” became an unhealed wound that kept reappearing in Mariusz Tchorek’s later statements, even though it was “the final nail in the coffin”, rather than the main reason behind his leaving the gallery.

Mariusz Tchorek’s involvement in the affairs of the Foksal Gallery in the early years of its activity was rather limited, which resulted from the tension between him and Kantor who had accused Tchorek of plagiarism immediately upon his delivering the Puławy paper. Tadeusz Kantor’s growing importance at the Foksal Gallery meant that Mariusz Tchorek’s role there diminished. For the latter, that period was a “permanent crisis”. In spite of the conflict with one of its most significant

artists, Mariusz Tchorek kept collaborating with the gallery. He published two articles, *The disclosed picture (1)* and *Anonima in Warsaw* w the Foksal Gallery Programme. He edited a catalogue accompanying Edward Krasiński's exhibition (already in 1966), in which he juxtaposed his *linear sculptures* with a quotation on line from Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*– a well-known story in the history of art about rivalry between Protogenes and Apelles over who can draw a thinner line. Mariusz Tchorek also wrote an essay for the catalogue of Krasiński's next exhibition in 1968. Usually providing theoretical commentaries on art, Mariusz Tchorek initiated and organised an exhibition of Edward Narkiewicz's paintings and edited the catalogue. His involvement came to an end before 1969. For a short period, he worked at the State School of Stenotypy and Foreign Languages in Warsaw. In 1970 he emigrated.

4. The Place beyond the context of art: practice in a commune, Mariusz Tchorek's counselling practice and theory

The late 1960s and the early 70s witness Tchorek's growing fascination for Tibetan Buddhism, Sufism, Carl Jung's writings, and others. The common denominator for Mariusz Tchorek, the idea of the Place, his preoccupation with such forms as happening, meditation and practice in general (which would later lead to his counselling career) was encounter. As soon as 1968, he went to Copenhagen where he stayed in Kirsten Delholm's commune in Christiania. In 1969 he organised a meeting *36 godzin milczenia* [36 Hours of Silence] in his Warsaw apartment, a happening type of event; his guests spent 36 hours together without uttering a single word. Invited participants included hippies, artists from various circles and Michael Ranta, a composer who was visiting Poland at that time. In December 1970, Mariusz Tchorek and his wife left for Munich, where he studied Tibetan Culture at the University of Munich in 1971-73. He then moved to Amsterdam and later to the United Kingdom, where he spent four years in a Sufi commune.

In the late 1970s, Mariusz Tchorek started out on his counselling career. During a stay in Poland, he underwent training in the Synopsis

Group in Warsaw, given by psychologist and psychiatrist Kazimierz Jankowski. He was among the first students taking a course in person-centred counselling supervised by Brian Thorne at the newly founded experimental Norwich Centre. From the mid-1980s to 1995, Mariusz Tchorek worked as a therapeutic counsellor at the Norwich Centre as well as at the University of East Anglia in Norwich. He kept developing the theory of therapy mostly on the basis of the concept of the Place (for instance, counselling room as the Place). He conducted individual and group sessions. In his practice he adopted the humanistic approach as defined by Carl Rogers. He wrote several essays on counselling, including *The Quality of Mystery*, which were never published.

After leaving the Foksal Gallery, Mariusz Tchorek no longer dealt with art. Nevertheless, he stayed in touch with Henryk Stażewski as well as other artists and friends: Henryk Waniek, Edward Krasieński, Andrzej Urbanowicz and Anka Ptaszkowska. He did not, however, abandon art altogether; in the 1980s he collaborated with George Hyde on a series of lectures in literature and theatre (regarding Jerzy Grotowski's and Kantor's plays) at the University of East Anglia. In spite of the conflict with Kantor, he translated (with Hyde) his play *Wielopole, Wielopole* into English. After the death of Karol Tchorek in 1985, Mariusz Tchorek registered his Warsaw studio in Smolna Street as Karol Tchorek's Collection, wishing to protect the legacy of his father, and became its curator.

5. The late period of Mariusz Tchorek's activity as an art critic: between the Place, the body and the source

Upon resuming his activity in the Polish world of art, Mariusz Tchorek tended to visit Poland more often since the 1990s; one reason for this was his encounter with British artist Katy Bentall, who was to become his wife, in 1993. Jaromir Jedliński, the Director of the Museum of Art in Łódź, invited Tchorek to deliver papers within the framework of three symposiums held at the institution, accompanying exhibitions commemorating the hundredth anniversaries of the birth of Władysław

Strzemiński (1993), Henryk Stażewski (1994) and Mewa Łunkiewicz (1995). In *A Body on the Stretcher, or the (In)Tangible Given of Unism*, Mariusz Tchorek explored Strzemiński's concept of painting, discussing Unism thirty years after the theory had been proposed. Questioning the erasure/lack of the body in the theory of Unism, Mariusz Tchorek chose the body of the artist, Strzemiński's own corporal experience to be the focus of his paper. He claimed that Strzemiński and Kobro's idea of "space-time rhythm" originated in the former's experience of being in a minefield at the Belorussian front during the Great War – the experience of a spatial body in motion, trying to avoid stepping on a mine. That was a dramatic change in the approach to Strzemiński's work: from the perspective of the theory of painting in the 1960s (in an essay accompanying an exhibition at the Krzywe Koło Gallery) to a cognitive analysis of corporal experience. Echoes of the "inaugural text" can be found here: "rather than displaying 'artworks' in their 'finite' form, **conditions and situations related to their creations ought to be revealed**". This private, in a sense unofficial, view on Strzemiński does not come from Mariusz Tchorek as an art critic but from a critic and a counsellor: critic-and-counsellor. The embodied interpretation of Strzemiński's work seems to converge with the views of two philosophers, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, both whom Mariusz Tchorek knew and thought highly of.

In his 1995 essay *O Mewie czyli pełni inności* [On Mewa, or Filled with Otherness], dedicated to Mewa Łunkiewicz – again, possibly more to the figure of the artist than her work, Mariusz Tchorek pointed at her experience of alienation and withdrawal from communist Poland, internal emigration. "Filled with otherness", or "other in language". Mariusz Tchorek referred to their shared ability to communicate in a **foreign** language (he spoke English, she spoke French); I recognise here the influence of Julia Kristeva and *xenos*, "strangeness within the self", confirmed by Katy Bentall. Mariusz Tchorek's correspondence from the 1990s supports the claim that he was interested in philosophy and psychoanalysis, including Lacanian psychoanalysis. He used this synthetic, critical/artistic/counselling approach also in 1994 as a guest

instructor at the seminar *Principe d'Egalité* conducted by Anka Ptaszkowska in Caen, France. Having removed any potential sources of hierarchy in the room, Mariusz Tchorek attempted to change learned behaviour of listeners, who were assigned the role of students.

In 1997 Mariusz Tchorek gave Joanna Mytkowska from the Foksal Gallery an in-depth interview to be printed in a book on Tadeusz Kantor and the gallery. It remains his only public statement. In the light of what the interview pertained to, Mariusz Tchorek focused on the early years of the gallery and discussed the attitudes and activities of people connected with it. First and foremost, however, Mariusz Tchorek provided a detailed (authorial) commentary on the Theory of Place, outlined the history of its reception and explained how the gallery waived the theses advanced in the text that formed its theoretical foundation.

Mariusz Tchorek's last appearance before he died in 2004 was the 2000 lecture *Miejsce narodzin, narodziny Miejsca* [The Place of Birth, the Birth of the Place], delivered at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, where he was invited by Paweł Polit. Mariusz Tchorek talked about returning to the "Place of birth", to Puławy, where the Theory of Place was first proposed, to the origins of the Ujazdowski Castle and Warsaw, where he was speaking, and to his childhood. For him, the *Skarpa warszawska* embankment was the spine of Warsaw as well as the key to its nature: socialist propaganda about modernity separated the people living in the capital from the Vistula with traffic (Wisłostrada, Wybrzeże Helskie and Szczecińskie), while the W-Z and Łazienkowska roads cut across the embankment. Mariusz Tchorek wanted to give the embankment repressed from the city's language – *arche*/archive of Warsaw, back to the city. Like in the essay *A Body on the Stretcher...*, in which Mariusz Tchorek restored/placed the artist's body into a theoretical discourse, in *Miejsce...* he placed the reflection on the repressed body of the city in the genesis of the Place, expressing his fascination with Warsaw embankment – bioenergotherapeutic, metaphysical and mythological fascination. Mariusz Tchorek also claimed that the essence of the Place, unlike in the case of art, is its recognition of a universal right to creative self-actualisation. He saw the

source of authentic experience of the Place in the return to the origins of *Dasein* (a term coined by Martin Heidegger, used by Tchorek), in the return to one's place of birth.

6. Summary

Mariusz Tchorek's articles on art written in a period of more than four decades did not form one codified system of art criticism. It would be more right to claim that they contained recurrent interests and intuitions. His oeuvre remains dispersed and hardly available. He wrote when he got a commission, he lectured when he was invited to do so. Some of his texts were written to be delivered and subsequently published in that form; apart from finished pieces there are ones that were never completed or only started. His choice of arguments is hugely complex; the literary value of writing was very important to him. There are twelve texts by Mariusz Tchorek altogether, including the "inaugural text" of the Foksal Gallery, co-authored by Tchorek.

It would be wrong to claim that Mariusz Tchorek was interested only in avant-garde artists who created abstract paintings or whose work was described as conceptual. He collaborated and remained friends with artists who were omitted in studies on Polish art of the second part of the 20th century, Teofil Ociepka, Edward Narkiewicz, Andrzej Urbanowicz and Henryk Waniek. Mariusz Tchorek's letters clearly show that his interest in Henryk Stażewski was not inspired by the historical status as a "living legend" of the constructivist avant-garde of the interwar period which the artist enjoyed; he respected him as a person and an artist, someone with whom – for instance – he could discuss Sufism. The fact remains, however, that Tchorek's egalitarian preoccupation with the work of various artists failed to be reflected in his achievement in the field of art criticism: his essays were dedicated to figures recognised in the history of 20th century Polish art.

Tchorek early essays on abstract painting, which show some influence of Structuralism, are founded on modern theory of art and aesthetics. Roman Ingarden's phenomenological conception and his

definition of the dual nature of a painting – as a painted image (the essence of what has been represented, i.e. what has been depicted) and as a genuine object keep recurring in his texts. The Theory of Place, like the “inaugural text” before, marked a split or separation and had a clear critical dimension. Criticism of clichéd expositions of the 1960s was not the point; it was – if I may say so – only a symptom. The critical dimension of the Theory of Place involved redefining the concepts of “artist” and “art” as they were known in the professionalised Western artistic culture. Since the proposition of the Theory of Place Tchorek adopted a syncretic and poststructuralist attitude. He tended to combine the achievements of psychotherapeutic theories and feminist philosophical critique into his own research method in a most apt and evasive fashion. The later texts display a shared feature of referring to personal experiences of discussed artists, revealing Tchorek’s knowledge of counselling. Carl Rogers’ concept of self-actualisation, which became the foundation of client-centred counselling, seems to constitute an integral part of his approach. The idea of self-actualisation applied to the process of analysing art disturbed the art-historical canon both of old and contemporary art as well as disciplinary limitations of artistic discourse. Tchorek theoretic work was very flexible and nomadic; it explored work of particular artists in their original, “inherent” context without prior expectations or judgments – a model reminiscent of the practice of a counsellor who is there to help other people in self-cognition and understanding their own conditioning, limitations, virtues and vices. Putting artistic biography into the centre of theoretical attention Tchorek analysed artistic practice and the way in which art is talked about. He also seemed to agree with Julia Kristeva that subjectivity and the body form an indivisible unity. The ideas of body-subject and art as self-actualisation challenged the concept of art as operating within a bodiless impersonal discourse. Tchorek restored art not so much to the history of art but to the histories of its authors. He then reinterpreted thus reintegrated work, constructing references to previous cultural achievements with a semiotic lightness.

Practice and theory were inseparable in his life and work. As a theoretician, he emphasised the significance of practice, which was reflected in his own life. He believed that encounter was the crucial dimension of the Theory of Place and practices of group meetings constituted the inspiration behind as well as an instance of the application of the Theory of Place in practice (hence his positive attitude towards involving hippies in artistic activities). Coexistence of people in a given environment, regardless of context – in an art gallery, a Sufi commune or a therapeutic room – constituted the foundation of his sensitivity.

Translation: Monika Ujma