
Summaries in English

ER(R)GO. Teoria–Literatura–Kultura nr 1 (6), 185-186

2003

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Summaries in English

Zygmunt Bauman

“On the Exigencies of Identity in a Tight World”

Zygmunt Bauman's essay begins with an analysis of the political and social situation in selected European countries where leading politicians nurture xenophobia and pander to fears of crime. Bauman describes population and immigration surpluses in terms of “human waste” produced by the introduction and imposition of social order and economic progress. This has led to the emergence of the “social recuperation” industry. At the same time the traditional division of the world into the homely and civilised places which “we” occupy and isolated no-man's-lands as well as uncultivated expanses in need of colonisation has disappeared. The world has become a tighter place to live in.

In those globalised circumstances the question of identity is particularly pressing. Bauman argues that the identity fostered by such circumstances cannot be a product of self-definition. Rather, it is forged and imposed by others, beyond the control of its bearer. Thus identity appears to be an agonistic notion which makes us seek and castigate the other/alien in us. The trouble with identity, Bauman concludes, is a global issue: it cannot be solved on a local scale.

Ewa Kosowska

“The Spaces of Identity”

“The Spaces of Identity” explores the problematic status of identity and some of its postmodern implications. Kosowska discusses the emergence of this notion in the discourse of Western science, its dependence on linguistic determinants and its relation to the notion of difference/differance. She identifies the beginnings of contemporary interest in identity with the development of non-Euclidean geometry and philosophical reflection inspired by Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology. Kosowska argues that identity has become a notion which is responsible for constituting beings. Thus it is necessary to pose the question where identity exists. Does it exist in time or in space? Either answer will leave us with many problems unsolved. However, the category of identity may function as an approximation which signals a postulated and idealised relation dependent on the kind of human perception and cultural principles of classifying phenomena.

Andrzej Szahaj

“The Ideology of Multiculturalism – a Philosophical and Political Context”

The ideology of multiculturalism was born in the 1980's although its earliest traces go back to Horace Kallen's notion of cultural pluralism introduced in 1925. In the context of multiculturalism Szahaj explores Charles Taylor's views – with particular emphasis on his notion of “the politics of recognition” – as well as Will Kymlicka's insistence on the necessity to respect and recognise other cultures. Also, Szahaj offers an overview of social, political and educational consequences of multiculturalism in the United States of the 1980's and 1990's. He sees the value of multiculturalism in its exposure of the illusions of assimilationism and its attendant mechanisms of political and economic oppression. However, Szahaj is wary of multiculturalism's pitfalls which include its problematic understanding of culture as such and its underlying assumption of the equality of all cultures (which leads to relativism). Thus he concludes, following Richard Rorty's position presented in his essay “The Unpatriotic Academy”, that multiculturalism is acceptable only in its moderate version which assumes respect for other cultures and their differences, without antagonising particular social groups and reversing the already existing social hierarchies.

Ewa Rewers

“Transculturalism or Glocalism? Two Discourses on the Postmodern Condition”

Following Lotman’s position on the necessary coexistence and overlapping of two or more languages, Rewers argues that multiculturalism is not just a cultural or social postulate but a basic, primordial situation of the post-modern world. Alongside globalisation it has become a key notion, used to describe what Rewers calls the ground level in the study of culture. Further, she explores Florian Znaniecki’s approach to cultural space and Ronald Robertson’s notion of glocalisation as a global perspective adapted to local circumstances and conditions. Rewers singles out urban spaces as the most interesting areas for the study of cultural space. She puts forward a project of transcultural and transdisciplinary studies focused on urban space, which should become part of what she describes as critical cultural studies.

Edward Możejko

“A Great Chance or an Illusion. Multiculturalism in the Age of Postmodernity”

“A Great Chance or an Illusion. Multiculturalism in the Age of Postmodernity” takes as its starting point a discussion of Charles Taylor’s essay “Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition”. Możejko, following Taylor, reconstructs the development of the ideological and philosophical foundations of multiculturalism. However, he points to the fundamental difficulty connected with the definition of multiculturalism, the impossibility of solving its ambiguity and reducing its polysemy. Możejko distinguishes official multiculturalism (characterised by the assumption and recognition of the equality of all cultures in terms of their geography, races and religions) and unofficial multiculturalism (which implies a form of activity meant to prevent the repression of selected social and ethnic groups and their identities). What remains the central issue in all discussions of multiculturalism is our attitude to the Other and the relationships which originate from an encounter with other cultures and identities.

Wojciech Kalaga

“The Obligation of the Other. The Third”

Any identity (an individual, a community, a nation) exists with an inherent debt towards the Other, since – as an identity – it constructs itself to a large extent through the difference from and of the Other. This ontological predicament inevitably involves an ethical question – the question of reciprocity: one’s obligation is to repay the debt. That ethical question is frequently annulled through an essentialist construal of the concept of identity. If we reject or want to avoid essentialism, however, we have to recognize the obligation and find ways of fulfilling it: through obliterating clear-cut boundaries and construing identities as nebular densities rather than as reified objectivities and, consequently, through internalizing the difference and through accommodating the Other into the space of one’s own identity. Yet, since reciprocity is of itself a symmetrical concept and must work both ways, the question of obligation must also be reversed: what are the obligations of the Other? Can the obligation to reciprocate be waived from the Other in certain circumstances? Or will it rather be an incapacitation of the Other through deprivation of responsibility? The problem becomes particularly acute in the circumstances of displacement: exile, emigration, or even hospitality. All these circumstances involve a misbalance of power, an interpenetration and a conflict of values, legitimisation of individual and communal expectations. In such a context, while keeping in mind the ethical aspect of obligation, one must also be aware of its political and axiological implications, especially when the problem of reciprocity is approached in terms of racial, ethnic and cultural difference. The objective of the essay is to explore those multifaceted aspects of the obligation of reciprocity and to place them in the context of post-Cartesian notions of subjectivity on the one hand, and of multiculturalism, on the other hand.