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"THE SEAMY SIDE OF THE CITY": MARGINAL LANDSCAPES AND CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE*

Abstract. The topic of people thrown to the sidelines of life is considered in a double frame—in the context of the way the urban space is arranged and in the context of modern visual culture (feature films, video and photo blogs, videos on popular YouTube channels). The most hyped-up type of marginal landscape in modern media is slums. The otherness of such spaces has always been a subject of interest and curiosity, for "gazing"—interpretation, perception and entertainment. In modern mass culture, the "location" of the global south slums is especially trendy. In such exterior, hyper-popular feature films such as *Slumdog Millionaire* have been shot, causing a new cultural phenomenon—mass slum tourism. This phenomenon seems to be ambiguous from an ethical point of view; but from the point of view of visual culture, it is voyeurism brought to the level of an art and everyday life practice. The second type of marginal urban landscapes is local "invasion" into the decent and institutionalized city space. This art form serves as a "location" for a psychological drama of superfluous people. Features of national identity are most clearly manifested on its seamy side rather than anywhere else.

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* Translated by Anna P. Evstropova.

Japanese townships of the homeless, incorporated into central and well-to-do areas, are no strangers to order and aesthetics; while Russian realities—chaos, departure from norms and underground—are completely opposite. Classic films devoted to this issue—*Dodes'ka-den* by Akira Kurasawa, *Promised Heaven* by Eldar Ryazanov, *The Lady in the Van* by Nicholas Hytner—model these seamy spaces and their peculiarities inherent in national culture. Very popular now are YouTube channels about the life of homeless people, which show real characters in their real habitats, introducing marginal spaces into the rank of a hot-topic visual culture. This type of visualization provokes another cultural phenomenon—the perception of marginal loci and their inhabitants as an interactive performance. Interactivity can vary from attacking to fraternization, from preaching to charity. Odd as it may seem, hyper-visualization and aestheticization of social ulcers contributes to their social invisibility. It is a problem, which no one is going to solve anymore; it has become a part of modern culture with its own philosophical and aesthetic arguments—and in a certain sense they act as its justification.

Keywords: city, slums, marginality, cultural landscape, visual culture

In modern humanities, the concept of marginality is quite broad and polysemantic and is usually interpreted as "a marginal, borderline or interstratous position of an object. [...] a marginal person is an individual without a specific culture who is forced, due to various reasons, to master new, sometimes hostile cultures" [1, p. 61]. But no less relevant is a highly specialized social approach. "Within the framework of the concept of social marginality, the latter is considered mainly in sociological terms as a consequence of poverty, unemployment, and social crisis" [2, p. 4], as well as alcoholism and drug addiction. Therefore, marginality is understood, first of all, as a problem related to superfluous people, rejected by society and often denying social values, that is, living "on the edge." In this study, marginality will be considered in this particular context.

The ontological essence of culture is most poignant where no one sees or looks for it—in marginal spaces. These are places outside social norms, and if there is something human left in them, it is exactly what belongs to this culture. These are the exceptions that prove the rules. If we are speaking about the cultural landscape, these are a sort of "black holes" that are imminently incorporated into its structure and at the same time are an integral active agent of meaning creation.

The designated topic of marginal landscapes with reference to visual culture is a kind of a matryoshka, a box inside a box, and a frame in a frame.

First, it is the problem of marginality in a frame of the cultural landscape arrangement, in its structure. Second, it is a visualization frame—on the Internet, on blogs, on YouTube channels, in feature films—that will address marginality in the context of the cultural landscape. Third, it is the everyday practices generated by visual culture, such as slum tourism and interactive performances involving the homeless.

1. HISTORY

Studying of urban areas of concern has a long history, mainly within the frameworks of **social** and **urban studies**. Various forms are being studied—ghettos, informal settlements, refugee camps, that is, the most visible socio-spatial formations, in which economically, politically and socially marginalized urban dwellers live. There has been a large amount of field and theoretical research in sociology, anthropology, and critical urban geography, including the classic Chicago school, in particular Harvey Zorbaugh's book [3], and later works from the neoliberal period [4]. The early works of the Chicago school contributed to the perception of urban marginality and spatiality as closely related and mutually constitutive [5]. The modern approach involves the study not so much of social phenomena as of numerous structural processes that lead to the emergence of marginal spaces in the city. This approach, in particular, was declared in a special issue of the *Anthropological Forum* journal devoted to urban marginality [5] and other articles [e.g., 6].

Scientific research on urbanization, urban poverty and initiatives goes beyond European science. Asian scientists arrange complex studies on the implementation of various initiatives and social programs aimed at changing the quality of life in slums and possible solutions to this problem in a global perspective; such as, for example, the research on Bangladesh slums [7; 8]. An Indian study of the most famous slum in the world, Dharavi in Mumbai, combines dialogues with their inhabitants, visual series, which is part of the narrative, and discussion of social problems [9]. New studies of slums in India from the standpoint of neo-Marxism and the crisis of urbanism are of immediate interest as well [e.g., 10]. In Russian socio-philosophical studies, there are precedents when the otherness of the homeless' subculture is comprehended philosophically against the background of the culturological concept of the Other [11].

Since the 2000s, a new discourse has begun to be discussed—the **performativity** of marginal spaces, their visualization in modern media,

documentary and fiction films, and, as a consequence, the emergence and development of a powerful trend known as slum tourism. A whole series (2012) edited by Fabian Frenzel, Malte Steinbrik and Ko Koens [12] and a book (2018) by Tore Holst [13] were devoted to it. In connection with the topic of slums, the topics of sexuality and the rights and liberties of women and their images in modern media are being explored [14]. The very spatiality and structure are also viewed as a performative force, in which materiality and affectivity are interrelated [15].

Another topic in question is the so-called "spatial stigmatization"—places with a high concentration of poor—and the possibilities of managing their inhabitants and their integration into society and "monetizing social and spatial reproduction" [6].

Matthew O'Brien, a renowned explorer of underground settlements in Los Angeles, author of *Beneath the Neon* [16], has recently released a new book, *Dark Days, Bright Nights*. In it, the problems of marginality and homelessness are described through the stories of real people, as a collection of life's tragedies [17].

In film studies, performativity and visual images of slums have received their attention, too. In his recently published book, *Slums on Screen* [18], Igor Krstić suggests neorealist and documentary aesthetics to be thought of as ways for representing reality. He illustrates how the slums were visualized through history, from the beginnings of photography to digital cinema. He also analyzes existing cinematic images of the slums.

Thus, we see two fairly clear directions in the study of marginality—in the framework of social urbanism and in the framework of critical studies of contemporary visual culture.

This article attempts to combine these discourses in the context of the cultural landscape conception, where the visualization and spectacularity of marginal spaces are considered as "bearing" elements of its semantic structure. And, of course, a distinctive feature of this study is the appeal to Russian visual material, which remains beyond the field of attention of foreign researchers.

2. MARGINALITY AS PART OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE STRUCTURE

The cultural landscape is defined differently in different scientific disciplines, but everybody agrees that it is a functional unity of culture and the space containing it. This unity includes not only manmade objects, but also energy and information. The semiotic concept of the cultural landscape, which

will be used in this article, assumes that for the most part the information includes: 1) signs, into which toponyms, hills, rivers, cities and individual artifacts on the earth's surface are transformed, as well as 2) signs and codes, originally existing in culture, which influence the perception and new designation of space.

Inside this space, transformed by culture into a sign system, there are inevitably places which the classic of American humanistic geography Yi-Fu Tuan defined as "topophobic": they evoke fear and negative feelings, and have the corresponding semantics of the "seamy side" of a comfortable everyday life.

While in prehistoric times topophobia referred to untapped wild areas (mountains, forests, etc.), now topophobic places are concentrated inside the most developed loci—cities. And while earlier the objective causes of fear were some infernal or natural forces, now it is the people themselves. It's just "other" people "with low social responsibility", as they are politically correctly called in Russia. These people reclaim from the city a place to live, and it becomes taboo for everyone else.

Here we will just touch upon the topic of crime-ridden neighborhoods as topophobic areas of a modern city (which can be located in the city center and look quite well); instead, we will focus on territories chosen by the homeless and/or marginalized people living on the outskirts of social life within their own system of values.

An important category in this discourse is the "home—homelessness" dichotomy, which undergoes a semantic and practical inversion. Traditionally, "one of the salvational principles of human existence is the home, and the destructive principle is the absence of a home or homelessness. At the same time, home as a phenomenon is usually endowed with such a basic characteristic as sedentism, and mobility is a property attributed to homelessness. In this case, homelessness is made of mobile people" [19, p. 115]. But spiritual pilgrimage, which used to be synonymous with homelessness, has nothing to do with socially conditioned homelessness. In the latter case, mobility tends to a minimum even in the absence of a house: the homeless settle in some specific places and, whenever possible, begin to equip their life, at least arrange a permanent sleeping accommodation, at most—an illegal squatter. Both are just a phantom of the house, since any squatter building can be demolished by the authorities, and the cot can be burned by hooligans. Thanks to this quasi-settledness, it is possible to speak about the spatial structures of marginality.

Marginality is often correlated with intermediateness—not in the sense of a state of transition, but in the sense of filling the voids, since it fills the "pores" of a city, squeezes in between the controlled and organized areas. "The in-between-ness of minoritarian spaces refers […] to the fact that they are surrounded by other more institutionalized spaces. Most importantly, however, the way in which such 'being surrounded' takes place in practice makes interstices more or less livable, more enclave-like or more threshold-like" [20, p. xix].

3. MARGINALITY AS A SPECTACLE

Ideally, planning of a city space implies creation of many subspaces, carefully packed to minimize the risk of contact with mavericks.

On the one hand, the commodification of everyday life requires that spaces of different quality used by different social groups be separated by some boundaries. Ideally, these boundaries should be tacit and implicit, and spaces should be structured by the stable images of difference.

On the other hand, the diverse spaces of the city were and are in constant interaction. The traffic has always been two-way. In search of easy earnings or alms, beggars and homeless people tend to the richer districts of the city, get driven away, but always return.

"Interstitial" spaces evoke not only fear, but also affection, they "fascinate, incite, excite and inspire people from all walks of life. They have been visited, revisited, researched and reported ever since their first appearance" [21, p. 66]. World literature testifies to a long tradition, a practice that was originally created by jaded aristocrats as a recreational pastime. In the 19th century, "flânerie" comes into fashion—strolling around the city and observing the lower classes while not forgetting about safety, however. "From the late nineteenth century and up until the second world war, visiting the poor areas of a town or city represented an escape from social constraints backed by a romantic imaginary but also a place for well-off upper-class women to provide charity in order to raise their own self esteem" [22, p. 1319].

In the first case, the main driving force for the "expulsion" into a different social space is economic (marginal spaces are always economically dependent on institutional ones), while in the second case it is emotional and existential. "The attempt to make sense of in-between-ness generates a polysemous discursive field oscillating between connection and disjunction: the interstice is sometimes a rapture and sometimes an opening up" [23, p. 21].

When assessing the desire to enjoy the view of the slums, modern researchers speak of "voyeurism" and "the aestheticization of poverty." Analysis of slums as a spectacle through the lens of a prosperous society "offers ways to think critically of how urban space is reordered and urban knowledge is produced and circulated" [24, p. 431].

Stigmatization—the consolidation of negative labels—becomes the subject of not only comprehension, but also preservation as visual images; and this process, which was supposed to act as a means of emphasizing differences, is being rapidly commercialized.

In a sense, when observed from the outside, marginal spaces acquire the qualities of a low farce—a performance on city streets, which, among other things, carries a kind of moral instruction and forces viewers to experience catharsis, to renew spiritually.

Before cinema was invented, literature played upon these spaces, causing a wave of burning curiosity around the object of description. People interact with literary texts and feel the desire to immerse in the cultural context giving rise to such texts—in order to observe how other values and meanings emerge and exist, and thus how new narratives are born.

For example, after Charles Dickens' *American Notes* were published, the Five points slum became the most visited tourist attraction in New York [25]. In Europe, interest in marginal spaces was fueled by the novel *The Mysteries of Paris* by Eugène Sue and works by his many imitators.

Fyodor Dostoevsky did not make the Petersburg slums the main background for his novels. However, there were some characters related to the slums, who caused painful compassion. But while the western flânerie was rather distanced, its Russian variation, a movement called "going to the people," especially popular in the 1860s-1870s, was set towards active missionary driven by either the desire to spark people's wrath or to show mercy and steer the lost souls onto the right path.

The Lower Depths by Maxim Gorky, although not tied to any specific locus, is genetically linked to the Khitrov marketplace, the worst den in Moscow, and was originally written in the genre of a play (that is, targeted at a viewer). Konstantin Stanislavski, the artists and actors who were then working on the production of the play went to Khitrovka for impressions, where they observed and made sketches in order to reconstruct the slums on the stage.

Modern understanding of the visualization of marginal spaces in cinema and media leads to the categorical attribution of photo and video images to

"epistemological background," when people and places in the focus become "background" in the knowledge obtained from their images [26].

4. SPATIAL SELF-ORGANIZATION OF MARGINALITY AND VISUALITY

If we start from social problems that affect the spatial pattern of the "seamy side of the city" and its character, semantics and visual representations, then we can list such phenomena and problems as invasive culture and its relationship with the "indigenous" culture, the problem of separation from or integration into the social space and, accordingly, the problem of borders, the problem of seasonality, constancy and temporality of marginal loci, the problem of family and personal loneliness.

4.1. SLUMS AS A PERFORMANCE AND A BRAND

The most widespread and the most represented variant in modern visual culture are **slums and ghettos—vast areas** inhabited by the poor. As a sight and as an everyday practice, slums have a powerful potential for creating alternative urban images. "Slums offer a challenge to our sense of reason and morality as well as our sense of beauty or place" [27, p. 170].

The United Nations define slums as a place where people have an unsecure tenure status. This means that they do not have a legal right to housing and land and do not have access to the basic blessings of civilization—clean water, sewage, medical care, etc. [28]. Therefore, their dwellings can be demolished or taken away by the authorities at any time, which is what often happens.

The layout pattern and the quality of marginal places in a city space depends not only on the diversity of climate and social problems, but also on cultural characteristics. The slums around Rio de Janeiro are not at all like the famous Kond [29] in Yerevan, which is a pseudo-slum—an area with poor and shabby but legal houses inhabited by honest hard-working people.

Classical slums are spatially and visually separated from the main "body" of the city, they look like some kind of extraneous "outgrowths" and "corridors." Structurally, these are "escheated areas" arising on land that is inconvenient for urban development, such as ravines, for instance, the corridor-type slums in Caracas, Venezuela [30].

And at the same time, slums are genetically related to both the metropolis and the cultural landscape of the country as a whole. This is the result of false urbanization, migration of citizens from villages and small towns to urban areas in search of (often illegal) higher income.

In such enclaves, there are many social problems in different contexts: segregation and stigmatization; statelessness (people without documents, refugees); marginal social positions that limit residents' access to safe urban spaces and resources [5].

Slums are a distinctive feature of the global south, where squatter areas are an integral part of any large city. There are adobe, slate or sometimes even brick shacks about two by two meters. There are unsanitary conditions, gutters turned into landfills, criminal gangs completely controlling the area. But the paradox is that modern slums are becoming part of the city's economy. Small businesses are flourishing (if we can put it this way) there, there might even be large enterprises like waste recycling, and besides, a significant part of the population works in the city. Slums are an enclosed space that includes broad economic, political and cultural ties in a rather unpredictable way.

It is the slums, as integral and concentrated spaces of poverty and otherness, that have become the most demanded spectacle for the jaded public and, accordingly, one of the essential international tourist destinations. This happened before, but films like *City of Joy* (Roland Joffé, 1992) and especially *Slumdog Millionaire* (Dany Boyle, 2008) (Fig. 1) have provoked a surge of interest.

Fig. 1. Photo from the filming location. Fun facts about the *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008)[1]

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[1] See the image source: https://in-w.ru/slumdog-millionaire-2008/ (03.03.2021).

The films themselves are regarded by critics and cultural experts as a Western, colonial view of Asian reality. The slum world appears as sexualized, exotic or primitive spaces that are also overly romanticized: "When one of the largest slums in Asia is extolled as 'a model for the world', something has gone wrong" [31, p. 45].

The screen space is projected into real space, and the tourist becomes a new type of viewer—a viewer indeed, since his or her interactivity is minimized. "The tourists 'enjoy' a 'sanitized' version of the slums which does not seek to challenge the dominant representations from the films that they have watched. […] There is little linguistic interaction with the local people which increases the sense of the tourist 'gaze'" [22, p. 1328]. They are mere passive spectators, voyeurs viewing the happenings. The abundance of travel companies and journalists suggests that the largest slums exist not only as a reality, but also as an idea generated from the outside [32].

"Unsurprisingly, slum tourism carries negative connotations like 'safari', 'zoo tours', 'negative sightseeing', 'poverty tours', 'poorism', 'social bungee', 'peeping', and exploitation. The idea of treating poverty as a tourist attraction is seen as morally questionable" [33, p. 207].

Romance and "a model of contentment and neighbourliness" created by filmmakers turn life on the verge of starvation into a new buffoonery, so that "western visitors <get> transformed by 'life-changing', 'eye-opening' and 'mind-blowing' experiences" [31, p. 37]. Interview-based case studies record the emotional excitement experienced at the sight of naked female bodies while bathing, when participating in price negotiations with prostitutes, at the sight of old people left to die [34]. The experience provoked participants to reflect on their good "luck", but also justified a sense that they had taken the right life choices and of cultural superiority [24, p. 433].

The children who starred in *Slumdog Millionaire* were indigenous to Dharavi, Mumbai's largest slum. After the success and fame, their lives got back to the way they were. This, too, became the reason for the media performance: for instance, the journalists from a British tabloid *News of the World* came as buyers to the father of the leading role, and the father was not at all opposed to selling his daughter, since the family received nothing for the film [35].

Non-European slum cinema raises sensitive social issues and tries to minimize romance. Such are, for example, little-known Filipino films *Slingshot* (orig. *Tirador*) (Brillante Mendoza, 2007), *Grandmother* (orig. *Lola*) (Brillante Mendoza, 2009), etc. "Many of these new wave Filipino films draw their stories

(as well as 'found' actors, props and sets) from a documentary approach to filmmaking" [18, p. 172].

The Cannes Film Award-winning Lebanese feature film Capernaum (Nadine Labaki, 2018) (Fig. 2) about slum of Beirut provokes little desire to follow the filming locations, perhaps due to cultural geography. Slum tourism does not emerge in every poor region of the world, its "development seems to be triggered by certain events and specific socio-cultural contexts" [36, p. 50]. In contrast to Mumbai, Beirut is not explored by European tourists because of its uncontrollability and danger for a wandering viewer.

Fig. 2. Poster for the film *Capernaum* (directed by N. Labaki)[2]

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[2] See the image source: URL: https://vfl.ru/fotos/foto_zoom/5a3751f929795749.html?antid=1 (01.03.2021).

Slums as a spectacle and as a problem have spawned a myriad of documentaries. All these films actively use the "familiar—strange," "beautiful—terrible" dichotomies. In his three-part documentary *Kevin McCloud: Slumming It* (2010) [37], McCloud, an architecture critic, captured his two-week stay in Dharavi. Interestingly, the journalist himself is constantly in the frame, very expressively showing his surprise, bewilderment and even delight—for example, over the beauty of local women who manage to look clean and elegant.

On the Russian Internet, there are many illustrated text and video blogs about the largest slums, for example, about that same Dharavi [38]. Russian YouTube travel bloggers have also been expanding into slums recently. However, unlike Western tourists, they tend to skimp on security and contracts with local travel agencies. That is why Russian visual tours to slums are a game of roulette, in which reckless Russians either fraternize with everyone, or get "a pain in the butt." This is, on the one hand, an amateur documentary that recreates the laws of the art genre, where action is essential; and on the other hand, a reality show where the expected happy ending is completely different—the blogger takes a chance and survives.

The slums have also become the setting for high-rated television shows. BBC's *Rich, Famous and in the Slums* (2011) is a two-part reality television program, in which four "rich and famous" personalities—Lenny Henry, Reggie Yates, Samantha Womack and Angela Rippon—spend several weeks in Kibera, the largest slum of the Kenyan capital, living side by side with the indigenous slum dwellers. It all ends happily: each of the main characters helps someone to get out of their social hole.

Missionary work associated with help in embedding the marginal slum space into the institutional space of the city, charity, the creation of schools and missions for the poor [39] give rise to another option for visualization—films made by charitable organizations in order to attract donations. Such is, for example, a video about the wards of the Maltese Aid Service [40].

On the other hand, television shows and soap operas are becoming an integral part of the social life of slums themselves. A case study, which was held in one of the Brazilian favelas, revealed that unemployed women literally live in a virtual word, watching up to six hours of telenovelas a day, often during hard physical labor at home. Their real-life suffering correlates with the spiritual torments glorified in TV shows; in their minds, reality and fiction, real poverty and fictional wealth are intertwined [41].

An interesting divagation, a bright spot on the gray canvas of slum life and its visual representation are videos about the Central African dandies. On the dirty clay streets of the poorest regions of Congo, Kenya and some other countries, you can often find men (not women!) in posh and unusual outfits. This is a unique subculture, which becomes a fairly common plot for travel blogs [e.g., 42] and documentaries, including famous The Swenkas (Jeppe Rønde, 2004) and films on YouTube channels [e.g., 43]. This socio-cultural phenomenon can be interpreted as "performance from the inside": these people are not observers to the performance, they create it with their own lifestyle, thereby brightening up and ennobling the marginal space.

The inversion of sociocultural values against the background of visual culture reached its climax in an attempt (which was failed, by the way) to turn one of the favelas in Rio de Janeiro into an open-air museum. This indicated the expansion of the semantic spectrum of a favela: in the recent years, the state started to perceive it not only as the city's problem, but also as its legacy, worthy of demonstration, preservation and visiting [44, p. 83]. The representation of slums through turning them into museums might become a state-recognized practice, which is nonsense in itself.

4.2. INVASIONS OF MARGINALITY, PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA AND ENDLESS NARRATIVE

In contrast to slums in terms of spatial organization and, in fact, visualization, **separate loci** are areas where sparse representatives of marginal subcultures are nesting. Most often, such a pattern of the city's "seamy side" may be found in harsher climates and under more severe political regimes, where any noticeable squatter construction will inevitably be plowed over by excavators.

For example, in the United States, the city authorities destroy the tent camps of the homeless as soon as they grow large enough, and, in fact, as soon as they become organized well enough to provide some security for their residents [45, p. 66].

A typical example of "cluster marginality" are Russian megalopolises, where a marginal subculture is forced to hide in the backyards, between garages and train stations, under railway platforms.

This type of marginality has spawned a distinct visual culture—from psychological drama to endless narrative, absurd and merciless. It can be assumed that the psychological perspective is set here precisely by the type

of spatial self-organization within the city's cultural landscape. For many of their inhabitants, slums, although they are functionally connected with the city space, are largely self-contained and self-sufficient—people are born, live and work, and die here. Invasiveness, on the other hand, presupposes stronger ties with a prosperous lifestyle, both genetic (many of the outcasts hail from here) and day-to-day ones. This gives rise to numerous personal tragedies, which are comprehended anew by writers and filmmakers. Such feature films evoke great sympathy for the characters, they have a deep philosophical meaning that makes the viewer feel responsible, at least for a while, for what is happening on the screen and in life.

The vector of psychological drama was set as early as in the Gorky's play *The Lower Depths* and developed towards the aestheticization of marginal space in feature films. This immortal play was projected into Japanese historical realities by Akira Kurosawa in 1957.

The theme was continued by Kurosawa's *Dodes'ka-den* (1970), a classic of the genre. Movie scholars usually describe this film as the life in a Tokyo slum; although the locality and not totality of the marginal space presented on the screen and the continuous communication between the characters and the off-screen prosperous city makes it possible to speak exactly about invasion.

Shooting was mainly interior; simulacra of the marginal spaces were artificially created. The composition of almost every frame is so perfectly balanced that the visual imagery, which in theory should reflect and symbolize the seamy side of city life, is perceived as aesthetically correct and perfect, like any work of art.

It is worth mentioning that Kurosawa does not by and large stretch the truth. Japanese marginal subculture and its "cluster" spaces have in fact a fair amount of order and aesthetics. Everything in them is quite logically organized, and the daily routine is minimized. At the same time, people living there remain socialized, many of them are employed, some even have small businesses selling homemade products or reselling basic necessities to their companions in misfortune. These are not space-consuming stone or adobe squatter developments like favelas; these are cardboard boxes that fit under bridges or even literally on the streets, wherever there is a quiet nook. There is no chaos or mess. Surprisingly, people are trying to decorate their wretched dwellings: in their cardboard box towns, doorways are covered with clean curtains, walls are embellished. All this indicates that even in difficulty people tend to organize their life and fit up their dwellings against all odds.

One of the most iconic films in European cinematography is *The Lady in the Van* (Nicholas Hytner, 2015), dedicated to the personal drama and the intrusive, relatively mobile type of marginality. A lady lives in a van moving from one house to another in a nice neighborhood, until finally she settles next to the house of a writer suffering from a multiple personality disorder. Thanks to the decency of the British mentality, a marginalized lady blends in the local cultural landscape both optionally and functionally. She uses the utility systems of the private house near which she parked her van: she washes her hands, goes to the toilet, and no one raises a single objection—respectable citizens are too polite to drive the poor woman away. She herself was once part of this respectable world, but after hitting a motorcyclist her mind broke down, and she broke off her ties with the world—on the one hand, to escape punishment, and on the other, choosing a homeless life as self-punishment. Again, all this looks very beautiful from the screen, including the dimmed colors, typical of English aesthetics, in which the film was shot, and the expensive grunge-looking outfits of the lady, who has not lost her aristocracy. Again, we see the inversion of style, the inversion of aesthetic preferences...

Among Russian films, Eldar Ryazanov's *Promised Heaven* (1991) was and remains the most powerful in terms of emotional impact. The setting—a dump near the railway station—is a marginal space very typical of the Russian reality. The "home" for the homeless here is a railway car that has served its purpose, which is also quite realistic: abandoned cars are rather suitable for living in them during cold winters, so they often become the shelter for the homeless. The drama of superfluous people represented by the top-class Soviet actors, brilliant camera work—all this once again contributes to the aestheticization of marginality among the gross audience. An important moment is the time when the film was shot—the chaotic nineties, when the Soviet way of life ended, and a new identity was forming, when many people unwillingly found themselves "overboard" and had to switch to the underside of life. Since then, it so happens that Russian marginalized people are not necessarily those who were born in poverty and inherited it. To this day, "more than half of the homeless have a secondary education, a quarter has secondary vocational or secondary technical education, which means that the majority of them are fairly educated people, many have demanded skills" [11, p. 42]. For the most part, these people were simply unable to overcome life's challenges and went down the hierarchy, sometimes quite deliberately and fast.

The awareness of choice and a distinctive philosophy of marginality was brilliantly noticed by Gorky more than a century ago and crystallized in Satin's monologue: "Man! It is glorious! It sounds—oh—so big! Man must be respected—not degraded with pity—but respected, respected! […] When I'm out on the street people stare at me as if I were a scoundrel—they draw away from me—they look after me and often they say: 'You dog! You humbug! Work!' Work? And what for? to fill my belly? [Roars with laughter] I've always despised people who worry too much about their bellies. […] Man is loftier than that! Man stands above hunger!" [46]. In the film *The Lower Depths* (orig. *Na Dne*) (Vladimir Kott, 2014) (Fig. 3), the monologues from Gorky's play were slightly edited and shortened, the story was updated to the present, and the setting moved from an uptown shelter to a city dump.

Fig. 3. Satin's monologue. Russian trailer for *The Lower Depths* (directed by V. Kott)[3]

An isolated urban dump is certainly not the same as an invasive marginal space and appears to be a kind of light-version of the southern slums. It is a separate world where corruption merges with marginality, a good basis for investigative journalism and documentaries, both Russian and foreign. One of them is the BBC film *Something Better to Come* (Hanna Polak, 2014) [47]. The forty-minute documentary became the essence of the director's long-term narrative—filming at a dump near Moscow lasted fourteen (!) years. Just like many Western reality shows, there was a classic happy end: with the crew's

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[3] See the image source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnRR5JIP1rw&t=14s (18.03.2021).

help, Yula, the main character, managed to solve the housing problem and move to appropriate conditions together with her mother and her boyfriend.

As for the modern narratives, they emerged in the Russian media zone not so long ago and quickly gained great popularity. There are many such channels on YouTube; in two of them, the topic is stated in the titles: *Lyudi ub(h) lyudi*, which can be translated as "scum people" [48] (27 thousand subscribers) (Fig. 4), and *Den' bomzha*—"homeless' day" [49] (42 thousand subscribers). Such videos leave no place for psychological drama, as long as their lengthiness, the excessive use of long takes (even if there are some cuts), the abuse of streams, in essence, do not contribute to maintaining tension, ruefulness and philosophizing. One could say that such videos, on the material of a marginal subculture, realize Pasolini's idea of an infinite film about people's lives.

Fig. 4. *Headquarters*. Scum people Breakfast at Savka [the Savyolovsky railway station] | Kolya is back | Homeless' day (Radio Bashka YouTube channel)[4]

Speaking about media coverage, such projects have associated channels in social networks; as for commerce, they offer paid subscriptions with early access to new episodes, additional information about the heroes of the videos, and contacts with advertisers.

The main semantic message here is not only performativity, peeping, but also active participation, including that of subscribers. Unlike slums, an invasive space is relatively safe for the viewers, so the narrative acquires some

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[4] See the image source: URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_W77nj0dA5o (15.03.2021).

properties of interactivity, of reaching another world with different personal goals. "Anyone who has become a homeless person loses their status or simply ceases to exist: you can stumble over them and not notice, you can stand and look at them, pointing with your finger, you can come up and take a picture with them or hit them if you are in a bad mood" [50, p. 98]. Each video might be (and is) followed by thugs with bats or compassionate women with food, who come to places where homeless people can be encountered.

The comments under the videos are a separate topic. The audience is polarized: some say that living like this serves the characters right, others want to help the homeless. Girls write love letters to especially remarkable characters, but after a couple of seasons the character ceases to be as remarkable, since the camera dispassionately captures progressive alcoholism and personal degradation.

These channels perfectly capture the interconnection of marginal spatial self-organization with the peculiarities of the national mentality.

An interesting phenomenon of Russian YouTube is the video blogs of the homeless themselves. The most striking characters are Zhenya Yakut [51] and Oleg Mongol [52]. Zhenya Yakut is "the pioneer (or at least the first known) of the 'marginal' Russian YouTube. He launched his channel in the spring of 2015, but died of pneumonia six months later, on October 29th. During these months, Zhenya Yakut posted 39 videos" [53]. The more successful Oleg Mongol does well out of his channel, he went to Thailand for a vacation, had his teeth replaced and participated in several talk shows.

Trash is declared as the content of many videos (as a hashtag), implicated in philosophical considerations like the above monologue of Satin—the denial of the blessings of the material world for the sake of "freedom," a kind of semantic inversion of the famous statement of Grigori Skovoroda: "The world tried to catch me but could not."

If we depart from the position of feature films, it becomes obvious that in modern Russia the "seamy side of the city" is in most cases the result of the end-stage alcoholism of its inhabitants. This determines the visual and qualitative characteristics of the microlandscapes in which they live. Excessive alcohol consumption is considered a national trait of the Russian people, and it is especially clearly manifested in the marginal subculture: its representatives are deprived of their families, housing, and work for this very reason. This is why the habitats of Russian homeless people, even if it is heating pipe mains, railway stations, garages, strips of wood and not dumps, turn into a dump

anyway—people simply do not organize and ennoble their patches of land, there is always garbage, empty alcohol bottles and filth.

Instead of being a brand and performance, visualization of cluster marginality can become a tool in suppressing the invasion of marginal spaces into the regular city spaces. Though such cases are rare. In particular, in the summer of 2015, a surge in public anxiety about the strangle of the homeless in New York City resulted in the police announcing of an anti-homeless campaign "Peek-A-Boo, We See You Too." The citizens photographed the homeless on the street, tagging their location and uploading the photos to a dedicated website [26].

As a consequence, the US marginal subculture is forced to be mobile. With all their belongings in a trolley borrowed from a supermarket, homeless people move from place to place, because as soon as they settle down, here come problems. That is why the episodic homelessness assistance programs in the States include the distribution of one-person mobile cabins in which one can sleep and store things.

The spatial localization of the marginal subculture is associated with **the problem of boundaries**. On the one hand, these are the boundaries between prosperous and disadvantaged areas. On the other hand, in terms of invasive marginality, the entire environment of the city can turn into a borderline, liminal space with appropriate laws. This phenomenon is somewhat similar to the frontiers in the American Old West, where the border between the reclaimed and undeveloped territories became a place of settled life and gave rise to a special subculture taking it as normal that anyone could grab a pistol and start shooting. The total **ubiquitousness of marginality** within the institutionalized "body" of the city can be observed, for example, in Lima, the capital of Peru, where all the well-to-do and "average" houses, that is almost all houses in the city, are coiled up with barbed wire or electrified wire, because the streets are a danger. Thus, the entire city turns into a border area.

When **the city itself is a semi-marginal environment**, then, like in a wild forest, there emerge well-trodden paths. Just step off it, and you immediately find yourself in an undeveloped hostile space. And this can happen not only on the outskirts, but also at the historical center of a city. When in Barcelona, if you leave the well-known La Rambla and go straight towards the Fundació Joan Miró Museum (author's personal experience), a couple of households away from La Rambla you encounter a completely different environment, where there is no place for tourists and law-abiding citizens. But this environment is a

seamy side of particularly La Rambla, with its abundance of people and money. A little further, an almost deserted, abeyant urban landscape begins, where there is neither people nor money.

The ubiquitousness of marginality is not necessarily total, it can be point-like, too—one can speak of its **scatter or dissolution.**

Scatter is when the marginality loci are not grouped within the city space, but represented by individual colorful (or not) characters. Scatter is most vividly represented on the streets of Buenos Aires, where there are people living on the streets in a totally prosperous historic center. These are upcountry people and emigrants who come there with families, bear children there; the mattresses they sleep on become stationary centers, and volunteers provide them with hot dinners every evening. Many illustrated blogs about Argentina describe this order in detail [54].

Dissolution is when burgher and marginal subcultures are mixed in the concrete jungle, and there are no special trodden paths for the average citizens and tourists. This feature is typical, for example, of Indian cities: amidst both fancy and backwater areas there are people who sleep on straw mats on the street and live by begging. In India, marginality permeates the urban space, it is almost everywhere, like air. At the same time, it does not feel like living within borders, and the city does not create a sensation of a fortress. The national feature is a philosophical approach to life, conditioned by the concept of reincarnation—there is no point in struggling to achieve material well-being in this life, if it will be given in the next life. Many of the people living on the streets come to the city from the countryside, where they have a house of some sort, that is why they do not feel like they have sunk in the social scale. They do not set up their dwellings, but at the same time do not make them a mess. And this, too, generates distinctive visualization, for instance, a viral photo by Gautam Basu [55] (Fig. 5), one of the winners of the CIWEM Environmental Photographer award: the mother is getting her daughter ready for school sitting in a concrete pipe, which is home for them.

Another variant of invasive marginality are **dungeons**—a way of keeping the city's stigma from prying eyes. If we address the Russian-language classics, the reference point is the story In *Bad Company*, better known in Russia as *Children of the Underground* (1881–1884), by Vladimir Korolenko. It is a romantic psychological drama about a homeless family living under an abandoned chapel in a cemetery. In the modern Russian version, these are basements and underground heating plants; in many cities of the global

Fig. 5. Mother preparing to send her daughter to school. Gautam Basu[5]

south, these are old cemeteries, where people were buried in crypts, now actively used for dwelling. The largest underground city—the Los Angeles storm sewers—is a place where police don't like to be, so it is rather stable, unlike tent towns. Some inhabitants set up their living space thoroughly and comfortably, while the major part of the underground city is a shelter for drug addicts and criminals. This is a place with a hint of peculiar aesthetics—the storm drain walls are covered with graffiti, sometimes quite professional. Journalist Matthew O'Brien gave the underground city its visual and textual representation: his website [56] contains links to his reports and books *Beneath the Neon* [16], *Dark days, bright nights* [17], *My week at the Blue Angel* [57]. The latter was created in tandem with renowned photographer Bill Hughes. Underground cities have received attention in some of the Russian blogs as well [e.g., 58].

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[5] See the image source: https://hatefsvoice.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/india12.jpg (18.03.2021).

5. CONCLUSION

To sum up, marginality is always built into the urban cultural landscape. The cultural mentality and the national cultural landscape define its spatial structure. It is associated with a whole spectrum of social problems, which, again, provoke and shape spatial structures, their visual qualities and the ways to represent them in texts, films and media. The problem of marginality, on the one hand, exists as a reality in the geocultural space, and on the other, as images captured in documentary filmmaking and feature films. Video images accumulated by human kind over the past half century now fill the Internet space, creating an information environment for every taste and interest—from romance to trash. Exploration of the city's stigmas by art leads to an inversion of aesthetics and ethics. Cinema and documentary video narratives are becoming a precedent text in the context of culture. Looking at a marginal environment through a camera touts it as normal, arouses curiosity and even pleasure, provokes a desire to visit the "location"—either as a gazer or as an active figure. Through the prism of the precedent movie texts, the text of a real cultural landscape begins to be read. Marginalization is increasingly perceived not as a problem, but as a spectacle and an interactive performance. Interactivity can be different—from releasing one's aggression at the expense of socially unprotected people to trying one's fate in a potentially dangerous environment, from hobnobbing to charity.

Apart from the problems of homelessness and pseudo-urbanization, which seem to occupy a central place, the information conveyed through visual images reflects the peculiarities of the semantic structure of cultural landscapes. It forms a visual epistemology of an unsafe, strange, "other" urban space. This epistemological background becomes a necessary basis with which it is possible to interpret marginality both as hyper-visuality and as social invisibility—as a matter of fact, the focus related to social shifts to a certain degree from discussing the causes and solutions to mere observation, taking photos and recording videos.

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