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FREEHAND DRAWING – MYTH OF INTEGRATION, SPECTRE OF ELIMINATION

RYSUNEK ODRĘCZNY – MIT INTEGRACJI, WIDMO LIKWIDACJI

Abstract

The paper concerns the changes in the education of Polish architects whose an unexpected apex occurred during the SARS CoV-2 pandemic. The aim is to determine the impact of the departure from the elite character of architectural university courses on the capabilities of the graduates, their career prospects and aesthetic stands of architectural creation. The paper is based on the analysis of reforms that are presented as rational and innovative, particularly in relation to the digitalization, including education and even online enrolment. An alleged triumph of the pragmatism turns out to be a harmful myth – replacement of preparation to real creation by mere preparation to be a part of the development projects.

Keywords: drawing, painting, sculpture, architectural university courses

Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy zmian w sposobie kształcenia polskich architektów – których niespodziewanym apogeum okazał się okres pandemii SARS CoV-2. Cel badań stanowi określenie wpływu, jaki odchodzenie od elitarnego charakteru studiów wywiera na umiejętności adeptów, ich perspektywy zawodowe oraz estetyczne standardy kreacji architektonicznej. Opracowanie opiera się na analizie reform przedstawianych jako racjonalne i innowacyjne – zwłaszcza w odniesieniu do cyfryzacji – w tym edukacji, a nawet rekrutacji online. Rzekomu tryumf pragmatyzmu okazuje się szkodliwym mitem – zastąpieniem przygotowania do prawdziwej kreacji jedynie wdrażaniem do uczestnictwa w procesie inwestycyjnym.

Słowa kluczowe: rysunek, malarstwo, rzeźba, studia architektoniczne

1. INTRODUCTION

Can you predict the future accurately? Yes. An excellent example is Stanislaw Lem (1921–2006), a philosopher and futurologist who lived in Krakow for most of his life. His birth centenary and the Lem Year in Poland are an excellent opportunity to remember this man. Lem was a writer whose work became the science fiction canon, was nominated to the Nobel Prize in literature and his books were translated into 49 languages. He was one of the few real “science” fiction writers, and was awarded the honoris causa doctorate by numerous universities and in many fields – first and foremost in cybernetics, but he still preferred a typewriter to a computer. But his greatest phenomenon was the accuracy of his predictions. Lem was the first to see the inevitability of creation of the worldwide information web and its far-reaching

consequences. “The technologies have their bright obverse, but also a reverse – a dark reality,” he warned. The later development of information technology corroborated his sceptical forecasts. The web did not become only a form for free exchange of information or a treasure of generally available knowledge, but also as he put it a “Cloaca Maxima of humanity” – an ocean of unverified or intentionally manipulated content amongst which valuable things are lost. “I hadn’t known there were so many idiots in the world until I started using the Internet,” Lem used to say with his typical black humour.

He voiced further serious warnings in his series of short stories “Fables for Robots” (1964) and “The Cyberiad” (1965). It is a new part of wide Aesop’s Fables, presenting in a humorous manner the real dangers and challenges of the 21st century for which the mankind is completely unprepared. Lem saw virtual reality as one of the greatest dangers. In line with the findings of psychology, he saw it not as an educational opportunity or innocent entertainment, but as a treacherous trap, unprecedented in the history of mankind. According to his forecasts, the creation of fully immersive world based on the digital technology would not be the beginning of “multiple realities,” but an irreversible extinction of the sense of reality and the of possibility of returning to it.¹

Although the virtual worlds of today are still very far from the “resolution of the reality,” we see growing generations for whom “analogue life” has lost all its charm. “Unreality can be for a man a reality of a higher order, that is more real and attractive than the existing, tangible reality.”² Treacherous cyberaddictions that do not show the negative symptoms early, begin to rule among other behavioural additions. The insufficiencies of permanently improved virtual realities are successfully compensated by aggressive marketing.

To make things even worse, the digital technologies not only cut us off from reality, but also impair unique human capability of creating own immersive worlds by a free play of imagination, dreams and, last but not least, art. Although “the history of mankind is a change of perception, from natural to that based on technical means, increasing the range of detection and imagination capacity,”³ the offered someone else’s “daydreams” do not favour creation, do not encourage reflection or self-improvement. To the contrary, they rather restrict us and make us indolent, being a source of compulsive desires for passive “consumption” of increasingly banal content. Until recently we could comfort ourselves that the choice to use “electronic cocaine,”⁴ albeit a growing temptation, still remains a matter of free choice. But does it?

2. ONLINE

Even Stanislaw Lem could not foresee that the virtual reality in order to finally defeat the real world would not have to match it in perfection. The SARS CoV-2 pandemic made the digital tools a necessity and compulsion, and on the global scale. The last doubts and fears concerning digitalization disappeared or were pushed aside. The change in education – also the education of future architects – was particularly sudden.

¹ Rok Lema, <https://roklema.pl> (access:18.05.2021).

² A. Bańka, *Spółeczna psychologia środowiskowa*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2002, pp. 261–262.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 260.

⁴ L. Sonik, *Cały ten zgiełk. Elektroniczna kokaina*, Dziennik Polski, 10.08.2020.

Until recently, we tried to convince the young people immersed totally in digital worlds that there was a sphere of experiences and activities that are not being provided by electronic media.

It was claimed that only human brain is the source of real creation, and that hands are the most perfect and “innovative” tool. It was assured that only real, existential experiences allow you to control the increasingly complex process of architectural creation supported by digital media (CAD, BIM).⁵ The whole narrative fell like a house of cards, and the students, in their belief, received an empirical proof of something quite opposite. The entire domain of art, represented at the Faculty of Architecture of the Krakow University of Technology by the Chair of Freehand Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, was among the biggest losers as it had to implement the remote teaching as a matter of crisis urgency. Certainly, we can console ourselves that it is only a temporary process forced by absolute necessity, we can assume that the changes will be fully reversible, and after the pandemic the logout and return to normal offline activity will be just a formality. Unfortunately, there is a lot of evidence that this optimistic scenario will simply not happen.

There are multiple voices on the global scale claiming that the tragic pandemic is a unique opportunity to complete the necessary “revolution in education.” “If it was not for the pandemic, it would have taken us a few long years. We were forced to manage in the digital reality (...). The education will never be the same,” Dariusz Martynowicz writes enthusiastically.⁶ Is it possible to return to the “analogue” past once you have tried to teach the architectural design and painting online? The defence of “real” becomes weaker every day. Even Professor Bogdan Achimescu, the Pro-rector of the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, hesitates between the criticism and cautious apology of the existing situation. On one hand, as an artist he emphasizes that the “culture has been systematically marginalized and destroyed for years and the pandemic has only accelerated that process.” He also clearly sees the absence of development prospects for people dealing with art in the virtual world.

He is frank that the creation of accounts for cooperating models at the Academy’s portal and allowing them to pose online (sic) is a desperate attempt to save jobs rather than an epochal innovation. On the other hand, as an academic teacher, Professor Achimescu wants to join the choir of the “only right,” progressive opinions:

Paradoxically, the pandemic is an opportunity for a digital revolution in our Academy. This accelerated course is taken not only by models and students, but also by the teaching staff. This is clearly an advantage. This is a new form of working with students.⁷

On the other hand, the avant-garde Krakow theatres defend the “real” steadfastly and these theatres won their reputation by courageous experiments, including multimedia and now are forced to go online. Krzysztof Pluskota, the Director of the STU Theatre underlines the fundamental importance of direct contact and is succinct about the online activity: “It’s like giving an IV to a dead man.”⁸ Bartosz Szydłowski, Artistic Director of

⁵ J. Pallasmaa, *Myśląca dłoń. Egzystencjalna i ucieleśniona mądrość w architekturze*, Instytut Architektury, Kraków 2015, passim.

⁶ J. Tęcza-Ćwierz, *Nauczyciel szczerze o edukacji zdalnej: To przewrót na który nie byliśmy gotowi*, Dziennik Polski, 17.04.2020.

⁷ M. Kęskrawiec, *Prof. Achimescu: Większość artystów zmaga się z wizją nadchodzącej biedy*, Dziennik Polski, 24.04.2020.

⁸ A. Piątkowska, *Kraków. Jak teatr przetrwa czasy zarazy? Jak radzą sobie krakowscy aktorzy? „Szykuje się pół roku bez grania”*, Dziennik Polski, 29.04.2020.

Łaźnia Nowa Theatre echoes: “We don’t believe in an online theatre, because the theatre is a four-dimensional art.”⁹ This is exactly the right thing to say about studying architecture and art online!

A question appears, why people in the education, even when not blinded by the possibilities offered by digital tools, are not ready to admit that the online activity is only a substitute for a direct contact with the real creation, the art. The answer is very simple. The teachers must constantly prove their active attitude, constant improvement and obtaining better teaching results. That is why, unfortunately, we can assume that, in the collective assessment, the online teaching in the time of pandemic will be perceived equally effective as the teaching with the traditional methods. A sort of collaboration with the “forces of progress” and acceptance of the popular progressive narration becomes a natural choice. It is so much easier to prove your usefulness by supporting fashionable novelties than by painstakingly convincing that it is the “traditional” creation techniques, that require a constant adaptation to the needs and predispositions of successive generations, are an indispensable tool of real innovation.¹⁰

The crisis of freehand drawing, painting and sculpture as the most intuitive methods of design and not anachronic “illustrating” techniques of architectural designs has been going on for years. The pandemic can deliver only the *coup de grâce*...

3. TWO ERAS – TWO EXTREMITIES

Paradoxically, somehow contrary to the pathologies and absurd of the communist times, during the Polish People’s Republic, Krakow was among the Poland’s strongest centres of architecture and an important hub of urban studies.¹¹ On the other hand, the fall of communism in 1989 and the following decades of change have not brought only the favourable results. The Europeanization and globalization meant also a new diktat: commercial development projects which meant speed. Today, the healthy, quality-based competition, on the market of architectural services is being replaced by rivalry in how to better and more effectively fulfil the will of the employer, without any attention being paid to the aesthetics and the uniqueness of the work and its context in terms of city planning and landscape. The growing business pressure has also left its mark on the education of architects.

The principles of mass education have also entered the architecture departments. New conditions have had a significant impact on the elite character of architectural university courses (...) This change had an institutional dimension to it, too. A new structure of professional association was set up in 2000 – the Chamber of Architects (...) As this new body emerged, the Polish Architects Association SARP has lost importance. It was the Krakow division of

⁹ J. Kałęba, *Łaźnia Nowa na internetowej scenie. Majowa ramówka teatru*, Dziennik Polski, 5.05.2020.

¹⁰ P. Setkowicz, *Rysunek odręczny w świecie cyfrowej architektury – anachronizm czy awangarda?* [in:] J. Flizikowski, G. Rzepecki, K. Pawłowski (eds.), *Integracja sztuki i techniki w architekturze i urbanistyce*, vol. 3, Wydawnictwa Uczelniane Uniwersytetu Technologiczno-Przyrodniczego w Bydgoszczy, Bydgoszcz 2015, pp. 329–343.

¹¹ M. Wiśniewski, *Architektura jako miernik rozwoju metropolitalnego Krakowa na przełomie XX i XXI wieku* [in:] J. Purchla (ed.), *Kraków – metropolia*, vol. 3, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków, 2018 p. 237.

SARP which organized Architectural Biennale, numerous competitions, and also moderated the debate on the urban space.¹²

Although correct in principle, the aforementioned statements can mistakenly suggest that the “earlier” teaching was better and the activities of Chambers of Architects contribute to the lower standards of architectural design. These conclusions are obviously wrong. The real problem is a harmful tendency to go from one extreme to the other. The “elite” character of the architectural studies in practice meant also the education in terms of challenges and exceptional events as the Biennale or prestigious architecture competitions.

Such approach led however to neglecting the “prosaic” skills or the necessity to follow the changing standards. Apart from educating future excellent creators, the previous system is also responsible for life failures of “demiurges,” incapable of teamwork or passing the state architecture licence exams. But it was the elite vision of “architecture as art” that allowed the teaching of freehand drawing, painting and sculpture to flourish. In the absence of a wide access to the digital tools that were already available in developed countries, the position of manual imaging tools among the architect’s skills seemed unwavering for a long time. The indispensable role of artistic subjects in developing imagination, creativity and aesthetic sensitivity among the apprentices of the “space shaping art” was an axiom. The sense of necessity made the employees of the units responsible for teaching freehand drawing, painting and sculpture, mainly artists, tend to implement “ambitious” curricula, largely unconnected with the real needs of future architects. The attempts to establish a peculiar “state within a state” or a “Small Academy of Fine Arts” in the structure of faculties of architecture met with dislike of the academia. On the other hand, many students could not see the connection between the “art” curriculum and the overcoming of difficulties which they faced when doing simple design exercises.

Such a situation led to a natural “rebellion” of architects, supported to their being rapidly open to the world, dissemination of digital imaging techniques and acceleration of all development projects. Today, by the law of contrast, new curricula attempt to reduce the visual arts to a purely servile role, strictly subordinated to the needs of design exercises. This does not mean however that freehand drawing, painting and sculpture are regarded as basic tools of creating really unique forms of which the only source is consciousness, subconsciousness of the author and his hands. Unfortunately, the role of freehand imaging techniques is too often limited to the recording or presentation of the finished product. In this field, they are doomed to lose finally to the digital photography and computer rendering. That is why the voices calling to further limit or finally eliminate the arts in the faculties of architecture are becoming louder.

4. SUMMARY

Any discussion on the long-term effects of teaching future architects freehand drawing, painting and sculpture seems almost exotic in comparison with new rules of evaluation and categorization of science disciplines applied in a university. During the 2018 consolidation in line with the OECD recommendations, “architecture and urban studies” only with a great difficulty defended their independence within the “science and engineering” field, avoiding being assigned to the more “measurable and rational” civil engineering. It is not difficult

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 270.

to guess that artists employed by the Chair of Freehand Drawing, Painting and Sculpture of the Krakow University of Technology, that is the representatives of the discipline of “visual arts and conservation of works of art,” are becoming double outsiders in this context. The theses of this conference rightly question the pure scientific nature of architecture, but it does not change the fact that the three criteria of university evaluation are now the level of the scientific activity, financial results of R&D and its impact on the society and economy¹³. Although the evaluation of individual disciplines differs, allowing the contribution by artistic work, also the existence of the Chair of Freehand Drawing, Painting and Sculpture depends in practice on the number and quality of published papers! Selected scholars show an admirable activity in this area, publishing numerous high-scoring papers for the benefit of the Faculty of Architecture and the University. But another paradox appears here: in connection with the global trend to depart from manual imaging techniques in favour of digital techniques¹⁴, it is increasingly difficult to find a forum for discussion about such issues. That is why the subject matter of most publications is not a direct, theoretical basis for the further existence of the Chair. Freehand drawing, painting and sculpture are drawn into a vicious circle of marginalization, no matter how hard they try to survive and thrive.

In addition, as already mentioned, the reality of SARS-CoV-2 pandemic created further precedents and abolished the last tabus. Suddenly, it turned out that the prestigious entrance exam to the Faculty of Architecture in Krakow can (because it has to) be online. Architects, painters and sculptors had to prove by their online achievements that in order to maintain detachment to the reality it is not necessary at all to learn it first, and the mastering of manual imaging techniques is not a prerequisite for the full control over digital tools used.

5. CONCLUSIONS

“There are no books with knowledge how to create an architectural form,” we read in the conference theses. Such knowledge cannot be found online, that’s for sure! Architecture is not fully a science and not purely an art. It is a skill which partially is based on reliable knowledge, partially on experience, and it is also a “gift” which nobody knows how they have acquired. Studying the arcana of drawing, painting and sculpture serves precisely this purpose.

Without it, we will be left with a digital compilation or permutation of what has already been or an impersonal, uncontrolled “generating,” depriving us once and for all of the status of creators.

But there is no time for art in the architectural *metier* today – time is money. There is no place for it in the marketing language where the goal is the shortest possible time until the “product” is put in the wastebin. It becomes an unnecessary ballast in the curricula that mythologize short-term “measurable effects of education.”

When the pandemic dies out, will it be possible to work out a balanced model of teaching art, a model that allows for an “integration” with the needs of design exercises and at the same

¹³ L. Peters, Ewaluacja po nowemu, Nasza Politechnika, 2021, no. 2(210), pp. 5–7.

¹⁴ D.R. Scheer, *The Death of Drawing. Architecture in the Age of Simulation*, Routledge, London–New York 2014, passim; P. Setkowicz, *Drawing? Let’s abolish it!* [in:] T. Kozłowski (ed.), *Defining the architectural space. The truth and lie of architecture = Definiowanie przestrzeni architektonicznej. Prawda i kłamstwo architektury*, vol. 8, Oficyna Wydawnicza Atut, Wrocław 2020, pp. 31–39.

time not losing the long-term, not fully measurable, benefits of communing with art? Will the price for survival of the Chair of Freehand Drawing, Painting and Sculpture be the loss of its identity and the deeper sense of its existence? And perhaps it will be easier to eliminate the problem than to solve it?

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