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DRAWING? LET'S ABOLISH IT!

RYSUNEK? ZLIKWIDOWAĆ!

Abstract

The article concerns the so-called “artistic subjects”, such as hand drawing, painting and sculpture, which are present in the syllabuses of architectural schools. The aim of the present study is to define the true significance and the inalienable role of the fine arts experience in the process of shaping attitudes and competence of future architects. The study is based on an analysis of the changes that are currently taking place, namely: the deepened integration of the majority of subjects that are being taught with the process of architectural design, the need to reveal “measurable” effects of the educational process and the parameterization of technical university ratings. For the above-mentioned, positive phenomena also generate a number of negative results – such as (self)censorship of the subject-matter of classes, with the view of proving their “short-term” usefulness, as well as denying the need for the existence of independent organizational units employing artists and architects.

Keywords: hand drawing, painting, sculpture, architectural education

Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy przedmiotów „artystycznych”, jak rysunek odręczny, malarstwo i rzeźba, obecnych w programach uczelni architektonicznych. Cel badań stanowi określenie prawdziwej, istotnej i niezbywalnej roli doświadczeń z zakresu sztuk plastycznych w kształtowaniu postaw i kompetencji przyszłych architektów. Opracowanie opiera się na analizie zachodzących zmian: pogłębionej integracji ogółu nauczanych przedmiotów z procesem projektowania architektonicznego, konieczności wykazywania „wymiernych” efektów kształcenia i parametryzacji ocen uczelni technicznych. Te pozytywne zjawiska generują bowiem również negatywne rezultaty – jak (auto)cenzura tematyki ćwiczeń, pod kątem wykazania ich „doraźnej” przydatności, oraz negowanie potrzeby istnienia samodzielnych jednostek organizacyjnych zatrudniających artystów i architektów.

Słowa kluczowe: rysunek odręczny, malarstwo, rzeźba, edukacja architektoniczna

1. INTRODUCTION

During World War I, young Ludwig Wittgenstein, who did his military service in Galicia (also in Cracow), simultaneously worked on his treatise entitled *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. In his book published in 1921, one can come across a passage which has been regarded as one of the most significant ones in the history of human self-reflection.¹ “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” wrote Wittgenstein, but it was the blunter and cruder version of the above statement that has found its way to the general consciousness,

¹ L. Čumba, *Wittgenstein: wiadomo, że...*, Iskry, Warszawa 2019, passim.

namely: “The limits of my language set out the limits of my world.”² Contrary to the author’s intentions, the above enunciation may be regarded as the motto of the lexical abuses that characterize 20th-century totalitarianisms – but not only. The information revolution which we are experiencing in the 21st century does not always ensure a better understanding of the reality around us, but often offers us an escape from it into a virtual world with a much reduced reservoir of concepts.

It turns out that the progressing marginalization of the “fine arts” in university syllabuses has its source more in the changing narration about the needs of an architect’s know-how than in the real transformations of these requirements. In reality, no one has managed to undermine the validity of the expectations formulated by Vitruvius in relation to an architect who is worthy of this appellation – namely, expectations which bid an architect to benefit from the generous excess of the acquired knowledge and practical skills, within the spectrum that stretches from philosophy, through art, to technology.³ In an era of designing with an ever broader assistance of digital tools (and even by means of these tools), when the process of creation becomes gradually transformed into indirectly controlled (?) “generation,” “an architect [...] must be familiar with the principles of drawing, so that he could easily create an image of the intended work by means of his sketches.”⁴ Even and maybe particularly in a situation when we do not directly create a volume geometry, due to the sheer scale or degree of complication of the design projects – the acquired know-how and artistic competence should at least allow us to make an informed and optimal choice from among a number of alternatives offered by the digital media. In the 21st century, the Vitruvian triad: *utilitas*, *firmitas*, *venustas* (commodity, firmness, delight), continues to rule supreme on the Pritzker Architecture Prize medal – the Nobel of architecture.

Unfortunately, it is becoming more and more difficult for these simple laws to break through the barriers which are raised by fashionable words and phrases, such as “innovation,” “rationalization,” “integration” or “parameterization”; consequently, it is the latter which currently appear to shape the so called general consciousness. In turn, the above-mentioned general consciousness finds its reflection in the current and anticipated realities of the process of architects’ training – for as it is succinctly expressed by George Orwell in his novel *Nineteen Eighty Four*, “what happens in every one’s head, happens in reality.”

2. THE TRUTH OF ARCHITECTURE AND THE GREAT LIE (?) OF ART

The dominant worldview in our culture introduces a fundamental distinction into a world of science and that of the arts. Science is understood as representative of the sphere of normalcy and rational, objective knowledge, while art is perceived as a realm of subjective, emotional and fundamentally irrational impressions. The former is associated with an instrumental and operational value, whereas the latter is regarded as a form of exclusive cultural entertainment.⁵

² B. Wolniewicz, *Wstęp* [in:] Wittgenstein L., *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, PWN, Warszawa 1970.

³ Vitruvius, *O architekturze książ dziesięć* [*The Ten Books on Architecture*], PWN, Warszawa 1956, passim.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 11–12.

⁵ J. Pallasmaa, *Myśląca dłoń. Egzystencjalna i ucieleśniona mądrość w architekturze* [*The Thinking Hand. Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*], Instytut Architektury, Kraków 2015, p. 131.

Architect and university lecturer, Juhani Pallasmaa, polemicizes with the above rather superficial, if not fundamentally false dichotomy by postulating the necessity of a return to a holistic vision of architecture as well as architectural instruction and practice. “Apart from operational and instrumental knowledge as well as professional skills, a designer and artist needs an existential knowledge which is shaped by life’s experiences” – writes Pallasmaa.⁶ The theory which proclaims an elitist and irrational character of art, is juxtaposed by him with the view that all forms of art – whether it be “sculpture, painting, music, film or architecture – constitute specific types of thinking.”⁷

In accordance with this view, it is difficult to even imagine how these forms of reflection could be eliminated from a student’s or architect’s know-how and training. The methods of digital assistance used in the design process certainly make it faster and cheaper – but they do not diminish the responsibility which rests on the creator. On the contrary, operating within the thicket of solutions generated by new solutions which go far beyond the scope of purely human, “analog” experiences – requires even greater abilities, sensitivity and intuition. The burning need to develop them through creative thinking, science, memorization, developing one’s imagination and accumulating a wealth of experiences – are threatened by the realities of the information civilization.

“Digital technology [...] exerts a detrimental effect on our powers of concentration and our attention span. It disturbs the educational process, instead of reinforcing it, as is often maintained”⁸ – proclaims psychologist Manfred Spitzer. The unprecedented, universal accessibility of information only seemingly exempts the mind from the obligation to absorb, record and transform information into useful knowledge. Spitzer dispels the myth of the extraordinary “media competence” of the young generation which is supposedly to constitute a panacea for the shortcomings of the educational process.

The above-mentioned media competence erroneously suggests the existence of the ability to cope with fragments of information of unknown origin which has nothing in common with intelligence, the ability to think logically, with perseverance and willpower. [...] The art of understanding, otherwise referred to as hermeneutics, finds its applications precisely in the era of information technology. For neither the computer, nor the internet have changed anything in the rules governing the processes of human thinking and understanding. The screens have not changed anything in the way we perceive reality, either. On the contrary: it is only once someone has learnt how to see things in nature, that he/she is able to take advantage of a monitor. [...] New knowledge can be acquired exclusively thanks to the one that is already in one’s possession.⁹

The problem of the substitution of bona fide education with information derived from internet browsers, treated as “windows to the world” which supposedly broaden one’s horizons, has been drawn attention to by sociology professor, Tomasz Szlendak.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 132.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

⁸ M. Spitzer, *Cyberchoroby. Jak cyfrowe życie rujnuje nasze zdrowie* [Cyber diseases. How digital life ruins our health], Wyd. Dobra Literatura, Słupsk 2016, p. 266.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 211, 212–213.

Authorities are substituted by artificial intelligence which profiles your consumption and offers you products that are similar to the ones you have been consuming previously. This blocks your access to new and interesting commodities; it also restricts your access to new solutions or aesthetic stimuli¹⁰

– writes professor Szlendak, revealing a specific vicious circle of ignorance. Yet, according to Juchani Pallasmaa, the greatest threat posed by the information civilization and levelled at the process of shaping and development of the individual is the risk of impairing one's imagination.

The exceptional nature of the human condition consists of the following elements: we live in potentially multiple worlds created and sustained by our experiences, memories and dreams. [...] The excessive flood of non-hierarchical and meaningless images – the incessant stream of images, as Italo Calvino had put it – flattens our imagined world. [...] The effortless animations relieve and replace our imagination. The hypnotic stream of images separates them from their historical, cultural and human contexts.¹¹

Professor Szlendak seems to support the above opinion when he declares that: “Electronic tools kill our imagination and make the world flat; at the same time, they flatten our brains.”¹²

That is precisely why at present, more than at any time in the past, students of architecture need autonomous training in hand drawing, painting and sculpture – treated not merely as tolerated “auxiliary” or declaratively “humanizing” subjects introduced into serious engineering studies. It is necessary to perceive their inalienable role of a tough school of sovereign thinking, creative imagination and manual proficiency, as well as of a treasure-trove of unique existential experience! It is only art which is treated seriously that is capable of opening up the way to complete control over the ever more perfect and precise digital tools – and to a conscious use of them in everyday architectural practice that would be devoid of a humiliating dependence. As Professor Spitzer puts it: “Our objective here is not enmity towards technology, but a critical attitude towards its adverse side effects – just as it happens in pharmacology, where one is dealing not only with beneficial and desirable consequences of drug use.”¹³ To put it simply: “Intelligence, thinking and manual skills must also be discovered anew.”¹⁴

It is only the magnificent lie (?) of the art that allows one to come closer to the truth of architecture.

3. ZVI HECKER, JAN KANTY PAWLUŚKIEWICZ, PIOTR LEWICKI

However, do not the above speculations constitute merely a symptom of our inclination towards theorizing and wishful thinking? Do they find real reflection in the experience of architects and their professional practice? The answer to the above queries may be found

¹⁰ A. Willma, *Wywiad z prof. Tomaszem Szlendakiem, socjologiem z Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu [Interview with Prof. Tomasz Szlendak, a sociologist from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń]*, *Dziennik Polski*, 5.01.2018, p. 7.

¹¹ J. Pallasmaa, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–147.

¹² A. Willma, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹³ M. Spitzer, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁴ J. Pallasmaa, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

in an analysis of the opinions of the creators themselves; the latter belong to three different generations and although at first glance they appear to differ considerably, yet as it turns out, at the threshold of their career, they had all been associated with the Cracow Faculty of Architecture.

The first of them is Zvi Hecker, an Israeli architect who enjoys a well-deserved reputation as one of the leading representatives of deconstructivism and organic architecture. His original work is additionally distinguished by the creative process itself in which the key role is played by innumerable hand drawings combining line, color and text in a masterly way; the latter ones may – by all means aspire to be called autonomous works of art. Yet, Hecker himself does not agree with such an interpretation, declaring that the above works should not be looked upon as paintings or museum sketches – but merely as records of thinking. “I draw because I have to think” – he declares with emphasis. The curator of one of his exhibitions adds:

In the sketches sometimes things change, as one cannot hold the hand steady the way one would wish to, but then the hand is guided by the subconscious and suddenly reveals to us another context and opens up new possibilities. [...] The coupling of the hand with the head is a unique and most creative experience and it cannot be replaced by yet another, even the most perfect device or apparatus.¹⁵

Another artist whose testimony is worth recalling in this context is Jan Kanty Pawluśkiewicz. In turn, this renowned composer, cabaret artist, painter and drawer is a person who is not actively practising his profession; he is “an architect outside architecture”. Yet, his answer to the question why he chose architecture as the main area of his studies focuses on the very essence of the requirements which should invariably be set before the prospective graduates of architectural studies. “I was quite good at drawing (...) and I liked to draw. Not commercially, not figuratively, but I liked simply to hold a pencil in my hand and doodle. Outside regularity and discipline, that’s what really interested me”¹⁶ – he declares. Yes, it is precisely this penchant for exploring areas “outside regularity and discipline”, which is so often criticised today from the so-called “rational” point of view, that allows one to develop imagination and creativity – the two attributes without which it would be futile to expect genuine “innovations” in architecture!

The third voice in the discussion belongs to Piotr Lewicki, a well-known Cracow architect-designer, winner (together with Kazimierz Łatak) of the highest architectural prize, the Honorary SARP (Polish Architects’ Association) Award for 2018 – for lifetime achievement. As he modestly admits, he became an architect “because his drawing skills were not good enough to ensure his entry into the Fine Arts Academy” – but at the same time, he does not try to conceal the fact that in his work it is precisely “hand drawing and manual methods of work” that he likes the most. When asked about the sources of his inspiration, this lover of classical music replies: “It’s everything that I saw and experienced. Other buildings, sculptures, paintings and graphic art. Books.” Asked about his greatest architectural dream, he mentions “a project in a prestigious locality moderated by the client’s budget and his own sensitivity, realized without the supervision of urban, construction and conservation

¹⁵ B. Stobiecka, *Zvi Hecker – dom Neumeistrów. Szkice*, ARCH, 2019, no. 1 (51), pp. 114–119.

¹⁶ W. Krupiński, *Wydaw z Janem Kantym Pawluśkiewiczem [Interview with Jan Kanty Pawluśkiewicz]*, Dziennik Polski, 5.06.2015.

services.”¹⁷ A fulfilled designer who may pride himself upon numerous significant and truly prestigious realizations, here reveals the soul of an artist who is dreaming of being able to create a fully autonomous project!

Can one give a more emphatic testimony of the genuine, though unfortunately immeasurable role of the fine arts and personal existential experiences associated with them in the process of an architect's education and professional career?

4. ARE ARTISTIC SUBJECTS REALLY IN DANGER OF BEING ELIMINATED?

The last quarter of a century in Poland is a period of catching up with numerous forms of cultural backwardness; this process has not bypassed the sphere of architectural didactics and the entire process of architectural design. It is particularly the process of the implementation of the use of new digital tools that is characterized by a certain abruptness and a high dose of uncritical enthusiasm characteristic of neophytes. The so far undisputedly high status of hand drawing, painting and sculpture in the teaching programmes has begun to undergo a process of gradual erosion. The earlier concessions made in favor of the exact sciences, descriptive geometry, technical drawing or else sketching subordinated to the direct requirements of design classes, the use of color and constructing models – were not associated with the negation of the fundamental usefulness of the competence in the sphere of fine arts.

The “competition” created by the new digital media has changed everything in this respect by offering the ever more refined imaging techniques (CAD), and even an alternative philosophy of the design process itself (BIM). Paradoxically, the “freeing” of the ability to draw, paint and sculpt from the prosaic functions in architectural design was not conducive to putting stronger emphasis on their fundamental and inalienable role. On the contrary, artistic subjects are currently more and more often denied their obvious role in shaping independent thinking, developing unrestrained imagination and authentic creativity; in reality, they tend to be perceived as relics of the template “academic” educational model.¹⁸

The progressive changes taking place on the market of architectural services, the requirements associated with EU membership and the postulates of the trade union authorities (Architects' Chambers), have led to the introduction of the “educational standard” extending to all national universities.¹⁹ The latter one became the basis for the drafting of a new “Program of the 1st and 2nd level of architectural studies” which was to become mandatory at the Cracow Faculty of Architecture as of the year 2020/2021. A superficial analysis of both documents does not seem to confirm the above-formulated fears and doubts. One may even

¹⁷ A. Bulanda, *Piotr Lewicki i Kazimierz Łatak laureatami Honorowej Nagrody SARP 2018* [Piotr Lewicki and Kazimierz Łatak Winners of an Honorary Award of the Polish Architects' Association 2018], ARCH, 2019, no. 1 (51), pp. 12–14.

¹⁸ P. Setkowicz, *Free Hand Drawing – a Sovereign Way to Architecture* [in:] T. Kozłowski (ed.), *Defining the Architectural Space. Rationalistic or Intuitive Way to Architecture*, vol. 7, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Krakowskiej, Kraków 2018, pp. 43–51.

¹⁹ Rozporządzenie Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego z dnia 18 lipca 2019 r. w sprawie standardu kształcenia przygotowującego do wykonywania zawodu architekta [The Decree of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 18 July 2019 concerning educational standards preparing candidates to the architectural profession], Dz.U. 2019 item 1359.

get the impression that the role of the fine arts in the educational process has become fully appreciated. The sum total of the number of didactic hours to be devoted to hand drawing, painting and sculpture (~330) may even incline one to triumphalism. On learning that in the new syllabus, the total number of hours allotted to CAD and BIM computer technology as well as to mathematics and descriptive geometry – the two integrated subjects, is a mere 210 hours, even compulsive malcontents should ultimately become convinced.

Yet, it is certain words and expressions that still remain the source of anxiety. For time and time again in the new program, hand drawing and painting are being referred to as “workshop techniques” or else as “traditional imaging techniques,” whereas sculpture is additionally being identified with “modeling.” The scanty and rather inadequate information on “inciting one’s creativity” and the unique ability to “create spatial relations that have a symbolic character” is drowned in a flood of narration suggesting an anachronic and illustrative-reconstructive nature of instruction in art subjects. Such an interpretation is additionally reinforced by simultaneous references to all activities resorting to the use of the computer as “modern” and “advanced.” A specific justification of the presence of drawing, painting and sculpture instruction in the new program of studies is made up of “comments” which invariably refer to these subjects as areas which “fulfil the role of the project know-how that will ultimately become integrated with design subjects in the course of the individual semesters.” The above conception puts into question the results of the previous efforts aiming at establishing fruitful cooperation. Indirectly, it also puts into question the sense of realizing autonomous art classes by the students of architecture and even appears to undermine the legitimacy of the existence of the Department of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture within the structure of the Cracow Faculty. Finally, the continual emphasis on the need to define in a preliminary way the “detailed effects of the educational process” and the tangible competences acquired by students during classes – inevitably leads to an escalation of simplifications and a denial of the very essence of the individual art subjects.

5. SUMMING UP

Beyond all doubt, hand drawing constitutes “the most direct way of recording conceptions and a research tool which has been granted the right to experimental error.”²⁰ Within an array of architect skills and tools, a similarly creative role is also played by painting and sculpture – constituting at the same time an inexhaustible source of both current and future inspirations. Unfortunately, the rapid development of digital tools which facilitates many aspects of the design process, is not conducive to making use of the full potential which is inherent in the “fine arts”. Changes introduced into architects’ educational and training programmes pose a serious threat that art subjects will ultimately become reduced to the role of studies in disused imaging techniques. Whereas in an era of a terrifying deficit of sensual experiences, every independently drawn line, every splash of color or formed block, constitutes a genuine “innovation” and a unique experience which involves the use of one’s hands, the intellect and

²⁰ K. Kachel, *Wywiad z dr Agnieszką Jankowską-Marzec, kuratorką wystawy “Czarno na Białym. 200 lat rysunku na krakowskiej Akademii Sztuk Pięknych”* [Interview with Dr. Agnieszka Jankowska-Marzec, curator of an exhibition ‘Black-on-White. 200 Years of Hand Drawing at the Cracow Fine Arts Academy’], *Dziennik Polski*, 31.05.2019, p. 10.

intuition – in the service of creation. Drawing, painting and sculpture invariably belong to the domain of shaping independent, creative thinking which is indispensable in architectural design. The thus understood partner relations do not require any deepened “integration”!

Student activity in the field of the fine arts, creates a chance for a temporal “brain logout” – teaching one how to take advantage in a conscious and sustainable way of the unquestionable benefits of the information civilization.²¹

6. CONCLUSIONS

A threat to the status of hand drawing, painting and sculpture in the programmes of academic instruction is not a consequence of ill will or any real changes in the requirements imposed by the architectural profession. What is responsible for it is the growing dictate of “newspeak” belonging to the realm of falsely understood “innovations” and “intergration” – which effectively distorts the real role of art subjects. The purely “ad hoc” interpretations displayed in syllabuses, openly contradict the long-term needs and the more subtle educational goals. According to the current vision of “architecture and urban planning” perceived as a separate discipline, designers, graphic artists, painters and sculptors, employed as didactic workers, become imperceptibly, no more no less but inconvenient outsiders. Together with architects specializing in the teaching of hand drawing, they become entangled in the process of proving the axioms concerning their own usefulness. One of the elements of this process is a specific form of self-censorship which leads to a liquidation of the more ambitious classes or a conscious concealment of their deeper sense, thus allowing one to meet the trivialized programme requirements. What is at stake here is not only the problem of the very existence of independent structural units that group artists and architects, which tend to disappear from architectural faculties... The issue that is of fundamental importance is to do with the very status of our profession.

Do we still long for architecture understood as a noble craft and a refined art? Answering the above query in the affirmative is synonymous with the necessity of opposing the false narration which unfortunately is becoming a truth of our time.

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