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DRAWING
– A SEROUS CRISIS OF AN IMPORTANT GAME

RYSUNEK
– POWAŻNY KRYZYS WAŻNEJ ZABAWY

Abstract

In an era of ever more perfect digital tools, the ability to draw is no longer regarded as necessary in the execution of the architectural profession. Yet it is precisely the hand drawing that continues to be regarded as the irreplaceable instrument of creative intuition which surpasses even the most user-friendly "procedures". A rediscovery of its advantages for both didactic purposes and architectural creativity is becoming an urgent need.

Keywords: hand drawing, game, architectural design

Streszczenie

W erze coraz doskonalszych narzędzi cyfrowych umiejętność rysowania przestaje być uznawania za niezbędną przy wykonywaniu zawodu architekta. Jednak to właśnie odręczny szkic pozostaje wciąż niezastąpionym narzędziem twórczej intuicji – przewyższającym nawet najbardziej przyjazne „procedury". Ponowne odkrycie jego zalet dla potrzeb dydaktyki i twórczości architektonicznej staje się pilną potrzebą.

Słowa kluczowe: rysunek odręczny, zabawa, projektowanie architektoniczne

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1. Introduction

The word 'change' seems to fully reflect the climate of studies undertaken at the Cracow Faculty of Architecture in the year 1990. A sudden flood of "imported" architectural solutions and the visual attractiveness of these conceptions may have easily convinced the neophytes of its often quite illusory significance. That is why we were quite ready to ignore the voice of reason and identify all references to tradition and experience with backwardness, and the calls to a timeless order with doctrinairism. Apart from "post-modernisms" and "deconstruction", the youthful revolt had one more all-powerful ally, namely, the computer. This tool, which at that time was still semi-mythical, expensive and hardly accessible in Poland, was to change the architect's method of work and the character of architecture itself. It seemed that the computer would not only ultimately liberate us from a painstaking "drafting of the project in ink", but that it would change the incalculable creative effort into – a sort of game.

2. An Architect of Beauty

In the constantly changing didactic program of the first half of the 1990's, one could observe a growing tendency towards decreasing the number of hours devoted to the teaching of drawing, painting or sculpture [1, p. 127]. Yet, the "modernization" and "rationalization" of the didactic process thus understood stood in stark contradiction to the remarkable lectures given by Prof. Wiktor Zin. At the same time, the fundamental subject-matter of his lectures constituted the basis for his timeless reflections, built by live word and images, and relating to the human condition and the existential dimension of Architecture. It was also a form of a sophisticated game with the recipient (prospective architect), whose goal was to sensitize the future graduates to Beauty. As Jerzy Skrobot puts it, "In Prof. Zin's aesthetic conception, beauty is a category one does not argue about. Here there is no room for chaos, ugliness, deformation or artistic experiments" [13, p. 33]. We students, who were obliged to make sketches and take notes of the lectures, envied Professor Zin the ease with which he portrayed the reality and the poignancy of the choices he had made with an apparent flair and panache. We were naïve enough to forget that the foundations of this play with form were based on "hard and titanic work", experience, and at the same time on the always puzzling artistic impression that did not give in to routine [13, p. 9; 88]. When "justifying" his own work, Prof. Wiktor Zin himself very poignantly and humorously defined the ever so important discipline of the drawn and written architectural sketches: "If I am attacked by literary men, I will admit in all honesty that I do not know the first thing about writing. (…) If, on the other hand, I am attacked by artists, I will explain that I am neither a painter nor a graphic artist. And architects? The latter always criticize me anyway – I have already grown used to it", he wrote in the preface to his book *Piękno nie dostrzegane* /Unperceived Beauty/ [15, p. 7]. The genius of Prof. Zin (and of other drawing architects) [7] is based precisely on such a "superficial" versatility which had been postulated already by Vitruvius. Unfortunately, failing to notice its overall significance, it is very easy to criticize its selected aspects, or else postulate its gradual elimination as apparently quite superfluous in the career of the architect in the 21st century…

Yet what seems far more dangerous than the institutional attacks and the postulated changes of the curriculum, in the spirit of "practical utility", is the attitude of the students themselves, as well as their state of consciousness and personal sensitivity, or rather lack of it. Did we as

students of architecture at the beginning of the 1990's constitute an ideal audience for Prof. Zin? Unfortunately, not any more. "The lack of a direct bond between the lecturer and the audience is sometimes quite astounding," he wrote [15, p. 6]. It seems that this ability to show empathy for the lecturer was inversely proportional to the degree of fascination with the novelties of civilization already then. Wiktor Zin was a master of drawing and of the spoken word who became a "TV personality" – although he had been shaped by quite different circumstances. "I became an expert at drawing by practising this skill from my early childhood. I observed nature maybe in a slightly different way than it is done by others. I devoured it with my pencil and brush," he emphasized [15, p. 5]. We, his students, including even those who drew and painted spontaneously, stood no chance of attaining the same degree of concentration, as from our earliest years we were exposed to the impact of the very intense stimuli generated by the mass-media. That is why, sometimes, we remained quite blind to the Beauty, which Prof. Zin had tried to teach us to perceive; we also remained blind to the virtuosity of the message itself. Yet the ultimate measure of Prof. Zin's greatness was the fact that, disregarding the obstacles, he consistently tried to treat us as equal partners in his subtle "game".

3. The Ability to Contemplate and Create

Film director Lech Majewski, creator of a series of sophisticated "movie images", draws attention to progressing disturbances in the reception of subtle messages, initially associated with the popularization of television and even radio broadcasts. Earlier on "...the journey of household members inside the pictures hung up on the wall was an issue which was important to the whole family. They talked about what they perceived; they shared various interpretations and meanings; they journeyed together through the world presented by the painter. The paintings became a part of their inner life. (…) Today this is quite impossible" [14].

But the continuing expansion of digital media has ploughed through the human sensibility even more profoundly. "The technologies centred around the computer define our times," wrote David Bolter already in the 1980's [2]. "At the present stage of development of the audio-visual culture, it is impossible to separate the real elements from what has been borrowed from the media," observes Mirosław Filiciak in his book entitled *Wirtualny plac zabaw* /Virtual Playgroud/ [6, p. 13].

Computers as well as the computer network have fulfilled many, but not all of the expectations associated with them. Nicholas Carr formulates his accusations and objections with regard to the computer and the net from the position of an enthusiast of the new technologies. "A serpent of doubt has crept into my information paradise. (…) It seems to me that the Internet does harm to my ability to concentrate and contemplate. (…) By means of numerous advantages and amenities, the computer screen removes or sets aside our various doubts. It is our most humble servant, who is so obliging that it would seem almost tactless to mention that it is also our ruler. (…) I am beginning to miss my former brain," he writes [4, p. 27; 17; 13; 28]. The results of the studies quoted by the above author are thought provoking. For although surfing the Internet and computer games lead to a development of certain visual and spatial functions as well as the ability to multi-task – they tend to develop at the expense of our concentration, deeper reflection and the broadening of our imagination [4, p. 145–178]. Moving away from the "obsolete" model of education, based on memorizing facts and transferring the function of remembering

from the brain to the computer, leads to a decrease in the number of newly-created synaptic links. This objective, physiological impoverishment poses a threat not only to cultural identity, but also exerts an impact on the level of intelligence and creativity [4, p. 219–241]. Using sophisticated computer software also makes it difficult to "build stable structures of knowledge". It lessens one's personal involvement in the performed tasks and paradoxically, in the majority of cases, promotes the selection of stereotyped solutions [4, p. 260–270].

Architects and university lecturers also warn us against becoming infatuated with the possibilities offered by digital tools. Augusto Romano Burelli emphasizes the danger of an atrophy of the individual style of design and a slow process of perfecting the conception. "In the old days, a bad architect drew his poor conceptions in an ineffectual way; whereas now, he creates equally inept solutions, but presents them in a sensational or at least attractive way. This fact pleases him and encourages him to continue his work," he writes [3, p. 75]. In his book *The Thinking Hand*, Juhani Pallasmaa emphasizes the importance of hand drawing in the contemporary process of designing and the special value of creative uncertainty. "The use of the computer complicates the first stages of conceptual work which are most delicate and defenceless, as it is at this very moment that the essence of an architectural project is defined (…). What I am especially afraid of is the false precision and the apparent perfection of a digital image, which contrasts with the natural imprecision and hesitation which is characteristic of drawing. (…) Personally, I like the stains and crossings out, as well as the traces of erased lines, trials and errors, additions and corrections which accumulate on a piece of paper when I am working on a conception. (…) These traces help me maintain for as long as is necessary the state of mental uncertainty and indecision that is indispensable in the process of creation" [11, p. 91; 105–106].

Pallasmaa also recalls the opinion of Alvaro Aalto concerning the need for a balance between play and responsibility in an architect's work. The above view acquires a new dimension in an era of the domination of digital tools. "I have a profound intuitive conviction that in an era dominated by work, calculation and utilitarianism, one should preserve one's belief in the fundamental importance of play for the creation of a society that remains at the service of people – these big children. The above conception will no doubt be shared, in this form or another, by all responsible architects. Yet a one-sided vision of play could lead us to playing with forms, structures and ultimately with the bodies and souls of our neighbours – which would be equivalent to a failure to treat play seriously. (…) Therefore, one should combine serious work with the spirit of play and conversely. We shall find ourselves on the right path only at the moment when the elements of construction and the logical forms that result from them, as well as our entire empirical knowledge, will acquire something that could in all seriousness be defined as the art of play. Technology and economy should be able to preserve this element of pleasure which constitutes the salt of life" [11, p. 72–73].

4. Summing up

As far back as in the middle of the 20th century Martin Heidegger warned that the technological revolution may "(…) captivate and infatuate man to such an extent that one day, the only binding and universally practised way of thinking will be a calculative one". The

ability to contemplate was to become a victim of development [8, p. 16; 18]. Today, architects themselves, as well as people from outside the architectural profession are really beginning to speak of the art of architecture mainly in terms of "business services": "The necessity to quickly implement innovations is of fundamental importance in the sphere of architecture and construction. In the majority of cases, success depends on the quality of the design solutions. (…) Yet, quality must be perceived not as an aim in itself, but as a key to keeping costs under control and as an element of the realization of a business strategy" (sic!) [9].

The design practice is gradually passing into the hands of the representatives of a generation which no longer even remembers the "analogue" reality, not to mention the style or method of work which is deprived of computers. In the case of the next generation, which is currently commencing architectural studies, the experience of digital tools precedes instruction in hand drawing and seems at times to undermine its sense and value [12]. "A child acquires its sense of identity and an awareness of its own body, the moment it enters the mirror phase – when it is able to perceive itself. In today's world, the mirror seems to have been replaced by a screen". [6, p. 189]. For a present-day accomplished architect, digital media are almost like additional "senses". That is why the postulates put forward by Juhani Pallasmaa as well as by many other pedagogues that students should first become proficient at drawing and making their own models of the designed structures, and only then to pass on to working with computers, seem more and more detached from contemporary realities.

The state of awareness defined as "digital exclusion" can no longer be reinstated.

5. Conclusions

Therefore can we conclude that hand drawing is becoming superfluous? On the contrary! For the more difficult it becomes to defend this skill as a prosaic need, the more evidently it looms to one as a simple necessity of a "higher order". A loss of one of the senses contributes to the sharpening of the remaining ones. Thus, one may risk the hypothesis that acquiring an additional sense impairs to some extent the senses that one already possesses. This phenomenon poses a special threat to the successive generations of architects as well as to all those who will decide to blindly trust the ever more perfect digital tools and cold calculation – forgetting about the humanistic and ludic dimension of genuine creation. Like no one else, Professor Zin knew how to arouse his students' dormant sensibility. We do not have to attempt to build it from scratch! In the 21st century, hand drawing remains both an important and a serious game. It is a direct tool of creative intuition – a sense which continues to be more perfect than even the most user-friendly "procedures" [10].

Today, it does not suffice to repeat this truth. Hand drawing deserves to be rediscovered by those who are only just beginning their adventure with Architecture. They should be able to observe that this skill will allow them to control and make use of the creative potential offered by digital tools even better.

Genuine art is born out of "a unique juxtaposition of the rational order of geometry and of irrational mystery" [5, p. 5].

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