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Artistic Inspiration: Initiation of an Artistic Communication

Mieczysław Wallis used to say that the purpose of creating art is to evoke aesthetic experiences. Yet for that to happen, a special covenant between the creator and the recipient is necessary. It requires an “understanding of a work of art”, which Wallis defined “as an intellectual act through which a work of art we see or hear becomes, provided several other conditions are met, the object of our aesthetic experience, and actually such an experience as the work’s author intended.”¹ Those “other conditions” include properly organised perceptual elements served by the artist. Interestingly enough, historical conditions alter the interpretation of a work of art.²

Currently, we are witnessing an interesting phenomenon of assigning new meanings to sculptures which exist within public space. On 28 July 2018 Komitet Obrony Demokracji (Democracy Defence Committee) of the West Pomerania Region organised a happening which consisted of hanging a t-shirt with the word KONSTYTUCJA (constitution) on the statue commemorating president Lech Kaczyński. According to the statement on the official KOD website:

it was a form of manifesting our attachment to the values closest to us, and an attempt at drawing people’s attention to the fact that president Andrzej Duda, despite numerous citizen protests, signed the act which changed the Supreme Court into yet another, after the Constitutional Tribunal and the National Council of the

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1 M. Wallis, *Przeżycie i wartość. Pisma z estetyki i nauki o sztuce 1931–1949*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1968, p. 81 [Unless indicated otherwise, English quotations were translated from Polish].

2 Ibid., pp. 81–82.

Judiciary, mere shadows of what they were as the act clearly remains in violation of the supreme legal act, i.e. the Constitution.³

Soon afterwards, similar t-shirts with the word “KONSTYTUCJA” began appearing on various statues in different Polish cities and towns. One of those was the famous “Mermaid” statue, which has been unequivocally perceived as the symbol of Poland’s capital, and associated with Warsaw’s emblem, but in the summer of 2018, we also saw it as a character defending the constitution. The meaning of the statue changed, though only briefly, and the “Mermaid” became a statue telling a completely different story than it used to.



Photo 1. KOD, <https://www.ruchkod.pl> [accessed on: 12.09.2018]. On the left-hand side, there is the poster “Konstytucja” by Luk Rayski, on the right-hand side, a “Konstytucja” t-shirt on the statue of the “Mermaid of Warsaw” by Ludwika Nitschowa.

Regardless of one’s attitude towards the initiative, the new formula of using existing and established sculptures for emotional expression was evident to all. Prior to the events, the statues and Luk Rayski’s “Konstytucja” poster, which served as the basis for the t-shirt design, existed separately from one another in perceptual terms. They became temporarily linked in a joint message for as long as was relevant for society.

The situation spurred me to pose the following question: When and why is an artistic communication initiated? I do not intend to evaluate the communal attitude of political expressions. It is irrelevant who initiated the happening, and when. In these events, I registered moments of artistic inspiration. What became significant for me was the ability to artistically engage with the existing reality and to change the original meaning into one which is completely different or new. The reason for that might be that as a sculptor I constantly struggle with the problem of initiating artistic expression.

³ Statement of Komitet Obrony Demokracji, 3 Aug 2018, <https://www.ruchkod.pl/oswiadczenie-komitetu-obrony-demokracji/> [accessed on: 20.08.2018].

In works presenting even the most perfect, the most masterful depictions of reality, referring to the material world is not the only goal of an artist. Usually they value such a combination of figurative motifs with other means of expression which evoke specific aesthetic and emotional experiences. Thus, the depiction of a part of reality should be considered a carrier of aesthetic and emotional value, not a completed act.

The complexity of a message and the understanding of an artist's intentions are, according to Władysław Strzemiński, the creator of *The theory of vision*, related to the two-stage mechanism of vision.⁴ The first stage is the evaluation of the biological organ of vision, i.e. the eye, while the other is the "awareness of seeing", the understanding of that "which people realise in that seeing. Only that which they realise – that is what they see. The rest remains outside their awareness, unidentified and thus unnoticed."⁵

By following Strzemiński's theory one might define the moment of realising that which the organ of vision perceives as the moment when creative inspiration forms. It is necessary to both parties: that which creates a work and that which receives the artistic message.

Michael Fleischer offered a somewhat different approach to the problem. Based on the references to communication processes within diversification and differentiation, he directed the result of an action through the appropriate choice of selected variants of that action. The distinction between diversification and differentiation is that, in the case of the former, what becomes more pronounced are the elements from inside a system, so it is structured internally, while in the case of the latter, what is important is the variety of systems with ever newer elements produced by those.⁶ The multi-system nature, it seems, shifts the "purpose" to the background, and the process of communication manifestation, including the process of the initiation of an artistic communication, comes to the foreground.

4 "There are two evolutions in terms of vision. One is the evolution of our organ of vision, i.e. the development of the eye, which once, in the simplest of organisms, was a mere concentration of skin cells slightly more sensitive to light than other skin cells. Through various types and versions, it became that which it is now: the regular human eye. [...] Apart from the first process, there is the other one: the development of the ability to use vision" (W. Strzemiński, *Teoria widzenia*, Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Łódź 2016, pp. 51–52) [Unless indicated otherwise, English versions were translated from Polish].

5 Ibid., p. 54.

6 M. Fleischer, "Dwa rodzaje reprodukcji systemów – dywersyfikacja i dyferencjacja", [in:] *Komunikatywizm w Polsce. Wybrane zagadnienia z teorii i praktyki*, G. Habrajska (ed.), Primum Verbum, Łódź 2011, pp. 222–223. He defined diversification as "copying elements of a system together with its structure understood as the system's producer; diversification occurs, therefore, within a structure", while differentiation as "transporting the elements of a system and creating towards that end own structures for those elements; differentiation, therefore, develops from structures and occurs between them". (ibid., p. 221)

Fleischer, following George Spencer-Brown and Gregory Bateson, assumed that “whatever activity takes place, it begins with differentiation, i.e. observation.”⁷ Activity or observation are the basis for communication, which becomes the initiation for the development of new things.⁸

This study only aims to cover matters related to “the basis for communication” within the system of art. I transformed the term “basis for communication” into the “initiation of an artistic communication”, as I consider the latter as closer to artistic discourse. At the same time, I agree with Niklas Luhmann who stated that: “When viewing a work of art, one might assume that the artist had something in their mind when creating it, and one might see that others see what they themselves think about the fact that the artist could have had that particular thing in mind; that in turn may induce an artist to talk about their art.”⁹

In my publications currently being prepared for printing: *Relacje artysty za światem* and *Przestrzeń tworzenia*, I discussed the aspect which covers the auto-ethnographic approach to one’s own output. Both books concern the sculptor-artist’s self-observation while conducting their artistic activities. Yet they differ in terms of their attitudes: the former is based on the attitude of an internal observer, while the latter on that of an external observer. *Relacje artysty za światem* consists of two parts: the first part includes my original retrospection discussing the process of the formation of a single sculpture: the statue of Rajmund Rembéliński,¹⁰ while the second part is an analysis of those actions in terms of the social relations between an artist and the surrounding society, which I developed using the ethnographic analysis of Clifford Geertz.

I developed *Przestrzeń tworzenia* using Fleischer’s theory of reasonable constructivism as a basis. In its final remarks, I included, for example, the conclusion that a creator assumes one of two attitudes depending on the circumstances they are in. The first one could be defined as pre-creative, while the other as creative.

The pre-creative attitude is a condition leading to achieving an appropriate goal – reaching a state of inspiration, while the creative attitude means achieving a state of inspiration. One should not confuse it with the fact of fulfilling that which one invents. The moment of inspiration, or revelation, if you will, lasts but a moment.

7 M. Fleischer, *Kapitał niestety nie()ludzki*, Libron – Filip Lohner, Kraków 2014, p. 25.

8 “Distinctions are not recognised as states of things (differences) but that they mean a call for those because otherwise one could not mark anything, which would mean nothing could be observed, which would mean that nothing could be continued” (N. Luhmann after: M. Fleischer, *Kapitał...*, p. 26).

9 N. Luhmann, *Pisma o sztuce i literaturze*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2016, p. 119.

10 Rajmund Rembéliński, who in 1816–1832 was Chairman of the Masovia Voivodship Commission, led to the establishing of Łódź.

The time which follows, i.e. the fulfilment of that which had been invented, is mere craft. In retrospect, I defined the creative state as follows:

I stood in front of my easel. I knew that it was a good day, and yet I was irritated. That is an important sign. With it my creative process usually starts. It's always like that. Irritation of which I need to get a handle, make sure it does not progress into anger, so that it stimulates my concentration. I don't know what would happen if at that moment someone walked in, telephoned me, or wanted something from me. Or maybe that had already happened, but I failed to hear or see it. I cut off from reality. My husband knows it well when not to come into my part of the workshop. The door is closed even for him.

It's a wonderful feeling when my lines become stronger and more confident. The synthesis of thoughts comes naturally, without me consciously willing it. It is important not to have too many lines; I cannot strike not even one more than necessary.¹¹

Based on further deliberations, it appeared that the progression of concurrent events constitutes a kind of basis for perceptions, which in turn may contribute to forming the creative initiation. Within the discussed attitudes, one could identify two groups of perceptive processes: spontaneous (independent of a creator's will), and provocative.

The creator has no other choice but to constantly observe their surrounding reality. In the introduction to my first portfolio, *Przekroczyć próg*, Janusz Głowacki wrote: "As everyone knows, no one is an artist, you are only an artist from time to time. It is a long path of experience, experiment, dead ends, and many adventures with the world and oneself."¹² That which Głowacki defined as "experience" and "adventure" I understand as the start of the process of the "initiation of an artistic communication." I experienced more than once that in order to draw or sculpt a fragment of nature, you must first learn that fragment by heart. The passage through the process of observing and remembering the observed reality constitutes a *sine qua non* stage leading to the development of an artistic expression. I am not, of course, only referring to representative art. Abstract works, as we commonly refer to them, require not only extensive knowledge, but also, or maybe mainly, the interpretation of that which an artist noticed around them.

In *The theory of vision*, Strzebiński explained that as people gained more knowledge of reality, their awareness of vision also increased. There exists a self-propelled mechanism, a type of a *perpetual motion* of that which we perceive, and

¹¹ Z. Władyka-Łuczak [publication in progress].

¹² J. Głowacki, "Przekroczyć próg", [in:], *Przekroczyć próg*, BILBO Graficzne Studio Komputerowe, Łódź 2001, p. 7.

how we perceive and understand it. It should not come as a surprise: the more we understand, the more we process, the more we perceive; and the more we perceive, the more we process and understand.¹³

The comparison of the two realities, i.e. the inspiring and the interpretative, offers probably the simplest definition of the work of a sculptor with their model. I do not mean the simple division: into a sculpture as the interpreted reality, and a model as the inspiring reality. A sculpture, being an object marked by interpretative subjectivity, also plays the role of an inspiration trigger. The sculptor's task is to constantly observe reality, find and indicate points of inspirational-interpretative narrations, and properly connect them. From that point of view, an interpreted reality exists at the moment of creation. Once created, it becomes the inspiring reality.¹⁴

It does not seem to work otherwise:

any action always happens in simultaneity, as past and future exist only as communicative concepts, which are used to satisfy certain needs of a system. Therefore, since what is available is only simultaneity (and simultaneity cannot be controlled as it occurs right at this moment), we, being cognitive systems, need process interrupters to be able to operate.¹⁵

There must occur somewhat spontaneously, without any control, a closing of the state of simultaneity, state of inspiration, if you will, for a communicative concept to form.

What is that? In the case of visual activities, it may be a sketch, sometimes a stage of the production of a drawing, a painting, or a sculpture.

What is that process interrupter? It is a stage of internal negotiations – the acceptance or rejection of that which had been created earlier, in other words, the inspiring reality.

13 "Vision is not only a passive biological act of receiving visual stimuli [...]. We learn about the world not only by seeing it, but also by thinking and learning from every visual experience, which fragments of the knowledge on the world come to us through the eyes – in short: through the analysis of visual experiences, their generalisations and re-verification. The extent of our vision is defined not by some 'innate' 'normal' vision, but the process of work which occurs in mutual relationships and relations between biological vision and our thoughts. Thus our visual awareness forms, which decides how many elements of the world we came to know using the eye." (W. Strzemiński, *Teoria widzenia*, p. 53).

14 Z. Władyka-Łuczak [publication in progress], *op. cit.*

15 M. Fleischer, *Kapitał...*, p. 19.

Strzemiński explained it thus:

Painting is a matter of eyesight, the hand, and the mind. One must constantly train one's eyesight, see that which was once omitted, expand one's visual content, and enrich one's visual culture and hand dexterity. The mind should organise and introduce a system into the scope which eyesight gains, and sometimes show it the path in its searches.¹⁶

In summary, the pre-creative attitude is the interpreted reality which exists as an interrupter of communicational processes. The creative attitude is the inspiring reality, the trigger of an artistic communication, which exists as the communicational concept. Together they form an activity formula, which can be recorded as:

Pre-creative attitude → creative attitude [...] → pre-creative attitude

No one knows the figures regarding the transitions between pre-creative and creative attitudes, yet it is clear that the process is opened and closed by the pre-creative attitude. We begin and end work within the communicational concept by releasing our work to new internal and external negotiations of meaning. The creative attitude is transformed into a concept which may, but does not have to, become an inspiring reality.

Does a pre-creative attitude always transition seamlessly into a creative attitude? I wrote as follows in the retrospection:

Every sculpture is a challenge which requires a process of searching, constant negotiations and accepting that which one has done. The fact of eliminating unsustainable solutions entails by default the experience of negative emotions. I know perfectly well the emotion of elevated irritation associated with the complete negation of oneself. Always, though, I find a way to creatively use that condition; I have never abandoned the easel or the sculpting table at that moment. It always constitutes a path to success. I step away when I experience an emotional void and I feel my failure in that void. Creation entails high emotional costs. It demands attention. It requires one to face one's deficiencies. And most of all, it demands patience when awaiting the coveted arrival of the sense of self-acceptance [...] To abandon does not mean to forget. Frankly speaking, I don't know how it works. It's not like when I'm away from the easel or the table I constantly think about my work. I honestly don't know how the second or the third attempt changes me enough that it enables me to

16 W. Strzemiński, "Bilans modernizmu, 'Europa'", [in:] *Powidoki życia. Władysław Strzemiński i prawa dla sztuki = Afterimages of life: Władysław Strzemiński and rights for art*, J. Lubiak (ed.), Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Łódź 2012, pp. 115–116.

reach my goal. [...] I am stubborn. I have never abandoned a task I had undertaken. Sometimes it takes a lot of time, but it always gets completed.¹⁷

What triggers a creative attitude? I do not know. Based on my autoethnographic analysis I can conclude there exist two paths: a spontaneous one, and a provoked one.

The spontaneous one is phenomenal and uncontrolled. The provoked one requires searching, practice, skills, and self-restraint. You develop it over many years. I discussed the topic in the article *Geopoetyka materii rzeźbiarskiej – poszukiwanie rzeczywistości*:

Before stepping into the realm of art, a drawer, a painter or a sculptor learns reality. They learn about it not only through observing it and reproducing the external world but also themselves. It is not a question of sensitivity, intuition or knowledge, but rather of striking new lines, placing new blobs, pressing, tossing or removing sculpting material. [...] [It lasted] many years when to sculpt a bird meant to learn how it was built, how, e.g. the shoulders connected to the wings, what the distances between them were, or what their shape was. At the same time, I learnt the capabilities of the human body – my body. I learnt that the hand connected with the shoulder to form a compass, and the natural human motion is an ellipsis or its fragment. I also learnt that the elbow, the wrist and the anatomical structure of the hand constitute yet another tool for drafting an ellipsis. The drafted ellipses face the resistance of matter. To what extent and how also constitute lessons in reality.¹⁸

Observations of the external world, and observations of oneself – those are the resources of provocation. Awareness of one's intentions and actions. One must know not only their goal, but also how to achieve it, know the value of the traces of the gestures they leave, and the motions of the hand in matter. Visual artists often mention the word "seek" – seek forms, shapes, colour, texture, etc. We understand them perfectly; seek in other words means: observe, learn reality, and draw conclusions.

It's not like I know the final appearance of my work when I first start working on it. I know my general assumptions, yet that is not equivalent to a photographic vision of the creation. I do not possess the image of the finished sculpture imprinted under my eyelids. I need to find its final form. I constantly undergo the same process. By experiencing it regularly I realise that to create means to seek. An artist is a person who constantly seeks inspiration [...]

¹⁷ Z. Władyka-Łuczak [publication in progress], *op. cit.*

¹⁸ "Geopoetyka materii rzeźbiarskiej", [in:] *Strategie twórcze w działaniu*, G. Habrajska, J. Ślósarska (eds.), Wydawnictwo Primum Verbum, Łódź 2016, p. 362.

I am convinced that the search for form consists of continued observations of reality. It consists of an acceptable transfer of the noticeable elements from an inspiring object onto the object being created. The search for a form is an act of evaluation of own actions. The constructed form will either be accepted or rejected.¹⁹

What does 'learn to observe' mean, and what does the search look like? As an example, I shall use my reports on the progress with the work on the portrait of Rajmund Rembéliński, a figure in *Pomnik Początków Miasta Łodzi* (Monument to the Beginnings of Łódź).



Photo 2. Pomnik Początków Miasta Łodzi

The figure's face is one of the major areas of the monument sculpture. One must consider many factors, such as: similarity to the person being depicted, proper inclusion, proportions, arrangement, and the direction of the gaze. Much attention is devoted to it.

At that stage, I created two consecutive faces. Yet I could not accept the first one. I evaluated it as too young and excessively realistic, with insufficiently pronounced features. The other one, the accepted one, was free of those errors.

In that example, the creative moment was when I decided to remove the clay from the failed portrait. I had already completed the period of pre-creative searching, and I faced the period of skilled fulfilment of the objective based on my experience. The moment of making the decision, of inspiration was short. What took me

¹⁹ Z. Władyka-Łuczak [publication in progress], *op. cit.*

the longest was to learn the reality, and to analyse the face being portrayed. The execution, i.e. the correct sculpting of the portrait, took me the time necessary to mechanically reproduce the reality I had learnt.



Photo 3. Work on the portrait of Rajmund Rembéliński. Photograph on the left: the rejected version of the portrait, photograph on the right: the accepted version.

A creator is constantly in a state of pre-creative inspiration. The observations of reality are crucial for developing the skills of artistic vision. It is also true that the awareness of vision also increases the development of manual dexterity. In my case, the process is not parallel. The awareness of vision always surpasses my manual skills. A new sculpture is a new challenge which requires a separate study. To find an answer to such a challenge means new experience, new skills, and a new extent of the awareness of vision.

Regardless of whether I am working on a sculpture which was commissioned or a sculpture for myself, the processes of triggering pre-creative and creative states are similar. I always begin work by collecting the material. In other words, I work as constructivists would like me to: I study the elements which refer to various differentiation systems. At that stage I am keen on everything. I know the expected transition from the pre-creative to the creative state can happen at any moment. Today, after many years, I already know that it is not worth evaluating the gathered material – the triggering of the creative state is going to happen either way.

Is it just me who knows this? I believe the same applied to the triggering in 2018 when the members of Komitet Obrony Demokracji decided to hang a t-shirt

with the word “KONSTYTUCJA” on sculptures which had existed for many years. I understand that in that case the pre-creative attitude was related to the negation of the political reality and the search of a means (matter) of artistic expression. The creative attitude appeared at the moment of combining actual carriers of notions, i.e. t-shirts with the KONSTYTUCJA caption with existing sculptures. The fulfilment of a pre-set goal, and the creation a communicational concept clear for all formed the basis for the emergence of new pre-creative attitudes. Which ones? We are still waiting for the answer to that question...

The sketch pad is one of the most fool proof means of gathering experience. I have one, too. When I sketch in it, I do not feel pressured. Anything I create there might prove useful. It is intended to help me transition from the pre-creative to the creative state. And only that. Most of those sketches wait with me for the transition, for the time of the new formation, just as the one below.



Sketch 1. Sketch of young storks

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Zofia Władyka-Łuczak

Inicjacja przekazu artystycznego

Streszczenie

Przedstawiony artykuł to próba odpowiedzi na pytanie: Kiedy i z jakiego powodu pojawia się inicjacja przekazu artystycznego?

Analiza kierująca do końcowego wniosku została przeprowadzona na podstawie autoetnograficznej analizy z procesu tworzenia *Pomnika Początków Miasta Łodzi*. Głównym jej wątkiem było poszukiwanie granicy pomiędzy stanem przedtwórczym a twórczym w trakcie pracy artysty nad dziełem.

Z przeprowadzonej analizy wynika, że: „Niezależnie od tego, czy pracuję nad rzeźbą, która została zlecona, czy rzeźbię tylko dla siebie, proces inicjacji stanów przedtwórczych i twórczych wygląda podobnie. Zawsze rozpoczynam pracę od zgromadzenia materiałów. Postępuję tak, jak chcą tego konstruktywiści, przeprowadzam rozpoznawanie elementów odnoszących się do różnorodnych systemów dyferencyjnych. [...] Mam świadomość, że oczekiwany stan przejścia ze stanu przedtwórczego do twórczego może nastąpić w każdej chwili. Dzisiaj, po wielu latach, już wiem, że nie warto oceniać wartości zebranych materiałów, inicjacja stanu twórczego i tak przyjdzie sama”. Istotą zainicjowania postawy twórczej jest wykształcenie umiejętności obserwacji otaczającej artystę rzeczywistości, a co istotniejsze – wykształcenie umiejętności wydobywania z niej tego, co już w całym tym skomplikowanym procesie jest tym, co zwykliśmy nazywać inspiracją. Granica stanu przedtwórczego a twórczego po-

wstaje w chwili, w której artysta podejmuje decyzję o przeniesieniu zauważonego fragmentu rzeczywistości do tworzonego właśnie dzieła.

Ocena wartości dzieła sztuki to osobne zagadnienie, które w artykule zostało pominięte.

Słowa kluczowe: twórczość, komunikacja wizualna, kompozycja, struktura formalna obrazu, narracja formalna, teoria widzenia, komunikat werbalny, komunikat wizualny.

Artistic Inspiration: Initiation of an Artistic Communication

Summary

The article is an attempt to answer the question: When and why is artistic communication initiated?

The analysis which leads to the final conclusion was conducted on the basis of an autoethnographic analysis of the process of creating *Pomnik Początków Miasta Łodzi* (Monument to the Beginnings of Łódź). Its main element was the search for the border between the pre-creative and the creative states during an artist's work.

The analysis indicated that: "Regardless of whether I am working on a sculpture which was commissioned or a sculpture for myself, the processes of triggering pre-creative and creative states are similar. I always begin work by collecting the material. I work as constructivists would like me to: I study the elements which refer to various differentiation systems. [...] I am aware of the fact that the expected transition from the pre-creative to the creative state can happen at any moment. Today, after many years, I already know that it is not worth evaluating the gathered material – the triggering of the creative state is going to happen either way."

The core of triggering the creative attitude is the development of the skills for observing the reality which surrounds an artist, and even more importantly: the development of the skills of extracting from it that which we are used to calling inspiration in the whole complex process. The line between the pre-creative and creative states emerges in the moment when an artist decides to transfer a fragment of the reality they noticed to the work of art they are creating.

The evaluation of a work of art is a completely different issue, which was omitted in this article.

Keywords: output, visual communication, composition, painting's formal structure, formal narration, theory of vision, verbal communication, visual message.

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