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THE WORLD OF DIGITAL ART. ON THE VALUES OF ADOLESCENT ARTISTIC CREATIVITY PRESENTED IN CYBERSPACE

Formulation and justification of the relevance of the problem. Discussions on the value of adolescent art in postmodern world, where life continues from a challenge to a challenge and from an episode to an episode,

emotions, cause disputes, reveal misunderstandings spark, but also inspire one to reconsider traditional approaches and to embrace and accept alternative proposals. However, we are still far from fully capturing this issue, because in

the realm of artistic creation, axiological issues are characteristic for a peculiar kind of multidimensionality. One deals here with a number of value attribution perspectives, sometimes intertwining, sometimes separate, and sometimes contradictory. These phenomena are particularly visible in an area relating to the axiology of creative work, the dominant mark of which is its existence in the cyberspace.

Namely, transformations in culture, including the change of culture's character from verbal to audiovisual caused *inter alia* by new media, have brought about artistic creations that often go beyond the material sphere and are no longer physically set in space or time. Such physical setting is no longer necessary, because creative work can be generated. However, a creation not only appears in the cyberspace; increasingly often, it becomes multimedia – as a matter of consequence, we deal not only with new methods of creation, but also with new possible ways of perceiving creative work.

The purpose of the article. The potential of e-space is more and more often noticed by young people, because the process of using virtual space for the purpose of presenting one's own works to others is becoming a conceptualization of reflective identity. The aim of the article is to research the world of digital art as it is viewed by young people, precisely it is used as a tool for searching some points of reference.

The main material of the study. Skeptics believe that the emerging «electronic drugging» is a contradiction of young people's «genuine» creative output, because sites such as www.deviantart.com, www.digart.pl, or www.tumblr.com feature more and more productions that are saturated with technology and another identity. However, it seems that if one acknowledges everyone's right to become a *homo creator*, one should not be afraid of homogenization of artistic expressions utilizing multimedia tools, because – as emphasized by Saul Bellow [11, p. 55] – everyone has a handful of their own poems; Eugene Delacroix [11, p. 55] rationalized this claim by referring to the unique personality of each individual. Such unique personality ensures creation of one-of-a-kind, genuine and new works, even if only their creators see them along these ways. The internet only provides new ways of expressing one's own self.

Creative output of young people as a source of values in globalized world.

When discussing the transformations taking place in the world, referred to by Zygmunt Bauman as «liquid postmodernity» [1] it is necessary to remark that such a world makes young people's lives highly complicated. Namely, questions about how to live wisely and happily and how to come to terms with oneself and with

others are becoming increasingly difficult to answer. A life that more often than not is accompanied by an «uninterrupted carnival of cruelty» [2], failures, unexpected crises, or even ordinary yet difficult events, makes more and more young people feel helpless and unable to affect the changes that surround them. While no event, however traumatic it may be, will automatically stigmatize an individual for the rest of their life and the path of their further development does not need to be irreversibly marked by some specific history of experience, without support from others young people can fall victim of their own past and present, as they are a «a patch of parchment densely filled with minuscule hieroglyphs» [20, p. 10].

In addition, it turns out that the currently prevailing «ideology of success» becomes insufficient. Young people, enslaved by new media (or – as Paul Levinson puts it – new new media), often fail to notice the borderline separating the real world from the world of illusion. However, they keep searching for opportunities allowing them to become detached from phenomena and problems, but also to rebuild their frequently distorted relations with themselves, with the world and with others. Although an important role in optimizing these orientations is played by values preferred by the individual in question (as well as his/her perceptive style and emotions), art too can be important in the process of creating one's own existence. The processes of creation and reception become a kind of journey to one's own self, because art – just like a mirror – reflects one's outer and inner world.

Importantly, the issue of education and self-education through art is rooted in the pedagogy of culture that promotes interaction between objectively understood culture (i.e. humans' works, or output) and one's individual self-development. As explained by E. D. Hirsch, cultural education is not so much the knowledge of facts, but the ability to experience values [14]. Therefore, in a particular way we should begin to notice and appreciate the value of young people's creative works in the postmodern world because – to use a quote from Bogdan Suchodolski, formulated over sixty years ago but by no means outdated – «In our era there are no entities – other than the world of us humans – that could shape humanity. The realm of people's inner lives, including in particular feelings, imagination and will, have no guardian other than our own, man-made culture» [29, p. 211].

The same aspect was also emphasized by Herbert Read (1976), the author of the concept of education through art, who openly compared the contemporary human to a wounded bird. Contemporary people cannot fly in harmony

because the wing of feelings and imagination has been broken, and the wing of intellect does not work properly because «single-dimensionality» will always constitute a serious limitation in the process of self-completion, thus preventing one from becoming creative, open and capable of making the most of one's own potential in interacting with the world.

When referring to the particular importance of art, both experienced and «produced» by oneself, in the development of self-knowledge and self-education of young people, it is obviously necessary to remain moderate. Such moderation is particularly required when promoting the idea of creativity, as it tends to disregard any limitations when it fails to respect humanistic and social values. Already quoted Herbert Read drew attention to this in his analysis of contemporary art, where he pointed out to its nihilism. However, a critical view and an ability to relate to those values of art that enrich our vision of the world prevent one from being biased, for instance in assessing the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic value of young people's creative works.

However, what seems to me to be of particular importance in the process of creating art by young people is the meaning of one's own values obtained through being involved in the process of artistic creation. Such values develop both while an individual discovers the sense of his/her actions, and while he/she realizes that artistic activity is also about discovering new senses. Values that accompany artistic creation allow one to reach a level of secondary harmonization, characterized *inter alia* by autonomy, self-awareness, empathy, or – as noted by D. Kipnis – reflective consciousness [20].

The issues exposed in the course of an analysis of the area related to aesthetic and extra-aesthetic values of creative artistic activities undertaken by young people allow one not only to make references to general axiological notions, but also to look at them first of all from the particular perspective of young people's world – their experiences, developmental needs and changing creative activity. In other words, things that are valuable are those that are important from the point of view of life, development and activity. While such values undergo transformations generated by various factors and conditions and their hierarchy is constantly being sharpened and fine-tuned, one must not forget that values embraced by an individual are closely linked to the needs which – while belonging to the world of one's own experience – are also universal in nature.

Whether something is considered valuable or not depends on historical, cultural and social context. When raising the question about values attributable to young people's creative works,

including in particular those referred to as Digital Art, I well realize that I am entering a territory where a number of different disputes are currently going on. The issue of values that currently dominate young people's world is rather complicated, and so is the axiology of creative output: to what extent its values are appreciated by its audience.

The assessment of art created by adolescents largely depends on other people's views and opinions on the genesis of those dispositions and on what they mean to the young person. Proponents of the theory that sees art as an exceptional phenomenon (in their opinion, such dispositions are first of all innate and hardly susceptible to external influences) would disagree with those who – while stigmatizing nativists and proclaiming an egalitarian approach to art – tend to be highly inconsistent when asked about the value of artistic «achievements» of young people.

Both the first and the second type of young art's audiences forget that when asking about aesthetic and extra-aesthetic values one should see the diversified aspects of the picture of creative activities – one should talk about multiple notions and multiple pictures of creative art, although seeing an individual as a maker of culture could be a common denominator here. Proponents of macroscopic theories present an interesting approach to this aspect. They refuse to continue the tradition of explaining art in terms of talents, factors or features of an individual and «stress» the role and importance of the discipline of creative art, its structure, semantic codes and selection criteria that affect the results of creative acts [24, p. 50]. They also assume that it constitutes a dynamic system whose mental and cultural components interact and yield results that could not be achieved by simple aggregation of individual elements.

Accepting this perspective one can notice that although the values of young people's creative output escape descriptive definitions, they seem to reflect the search for the three categories of values based on selection in the absolute sense. These are good, truth and beauty. They are autotelic values, characterized by universality and durability. Also, specific functions can also be attributed to them: **(1)** integration of motivation towards activity, thus instilling a meaning on life and allowing one to see the world in a perspective; **(2)** orientation (in this particular function, values are a kind of an evaluation criterion and an orientation – they generate these in accordance with such indicators as benefit, happiness, truth, beauty); **(3)** meta-decision making – values help one make a decision in the case of contradictory motivations or reasons; **(4)** socialization – this function is fulfilled by ethical values or social ideas; **(5)** gratification – fulfilled by values from

which satisfaction is derived [19].

A common meaning of these values can be found in a conviction that the value of young people's art not only consists in activities measured by the quality of its products, but first of all «has its internal, personal sense: it constitutes a kind of an attitude (...) towards the world» [28, p. 330–331].

Thus, the process of artistic creation undertaken by young people leads also to a reorientation in choosing the values of life – even when creative work is distributed over time and results are not immediate, the values of such work are nevertheless being experienced all along the way. This creates a sense of a kind of fulfillment consisting in combining the richness of experience with the richness of the world created in the course of human activity. Such creation inspires the individual, opens up greater possibilities of processing the world, because «if in our dreams we do not reach out directly to the real world, when (...) we usually do not keep our inner world involved, then in creative activities we build a bridge that allows our imagination to materialize and helps our feelings penetrate the created work which from now on belongs in the real world; our reason becomes a source of wisdom acquired in the course of the difficult processes of self-materialization in the world» [25, p. 154].

Therefore, young people's creative art brings about undeniable values – it becomes necessary and possible to an extent that is incomparably broader than before, because it allows one to go beyond boundaries set by contemporary consumerism. Consumption is inherently recurrent, and the process of creation allows one to go beyond that level and to take actions that have some intrinsic value. By channeling their potential towards real tasks and values, young people first of all build their own selves.

Digital Art – an alternative form of existence.

An analysis of artistic works referred to as Digital Art (Net Art being part of it) helps one realize that although the world of this particular art has certain characteristic features, just like any other process of authentic creation it allows people to discover new dimensions of their own actions. An individual becomes more capable of going beyond personal and social borders of his/her own existence – more can be experienced, inner needs (such as the need to express oneself or to search for a sense of community with others) grow bigger and more diverse. Equally important is searching for such artistic forms and content that could become a kind of catharsis.

Even the simplest thought on values that can be observed in various forms of this art allows one to notice that they belong to the world of humans, rather than to the world of media. New technology

is merely a tool used in the creative process. Values are generated when an individual instills sense and meaning on things. Thus, values derive both from existing reality and from the human being itself. Young people, using media tools both in the creative process and in presenting «traditional» art on internet art sites, first of all want their online output to be a genuine expression of their personalities – a one-of-a-kind message based on intentions, interests, observations, thoughts or the desire to communicate to others what is important and meaningful from the perspective of the author's individual needs.

By creating art, a young person learns how to communicate with his/her self and with others. Determinants of this creative effort include searching for new forms of expression, independence, novelty, extraordinary articulation (not necessarily obtained through the use of new multimedia techniques, although they too can play an important role in the message conveyed by author), sometimes referring to the author's experiences and feelings, and sometimes only to ephemeral emotions reflected in the produced work. The work itself often appears in the cyberspace fairly unexpectedly, but it can disappear equally suddenly as well, being replaced by with something closer to what is currently on the author's mind. The following question can be asked here: «What is this artistic creation posted on online art sites, known as Digital Art or Net Art, sometimes uploaded from a tablet where the original drawing was made, and sometimes created using a flash animation, Java scripts, php, html, dhtml, hypertext, 2D/3D computer graphics, ASCII graphics?» Are forms appearing in the cyberspace, such as experiments with non-linear hypertext narration, net-activism, performance broadcast via webcams [26, p. 25], all possible resources and capabilities of this art?

Nevertheless, it is not my intention to search for a clear answer to these questions. Regardless of any doubts that may arise, what is important from my perspective is that most works referred to as Digital Art or Net Art (even if – contrary to what media theorists and authors of such art would like to believe – they are not always interactive projects allowing the audience to be actively involved in the creative process, oriented at multi-levelness or abstract spatiality of the web) **in each case** (my emphasis) allow one to create an artistic expression constituting a form of a message. A message that sometimes is a manifestation of rebellion against the reality, but still allowing one to self-reflect and to enter into dialogue with others, or even to blur the line between the author and the audience. Every now and then one can encounter the so-called *pure form*, constituting a structure made of freely

chosen elements – colors, sounds, words, signs incorporated into a visual content or constituting its «content», sometimes totally independent from the so-called meaningful message, reality of the outside world, or any real life likelihood. Such pure form constitutes a form of communication where «becoming over time», defined in purely formal terms and independently from certain content or jointly with it, ushers in a new dimension of experiencing – the realm of metaphysical feelings. Possibly, this «pure Witkiewicz-esque form», simple graphical form appearing in young people’s visual artwork, but also sublime images uploaded from a tablet, allow young people to reach values that could never materialize in offline creations. It is not unlikely that this particular method of creating and presenting one’s works to others helps the author identify with his/herself or search for his/her own identity.

While young people’s artistic output generated (or simply presented) in the cyberspace is not always consistent with generally accepted canons, it should be remembered that today, in the age of all sorts of cultural influences and downfall of all authority, in the age of a movement that is not only multi-dimensional, but also chaotic, it is only natural to obliterate existing canons of cultural communication. Thus, the principles and rules of creation cannot be defined and creation cannot be limited. Young people posting their works on art sites are sometimes regarded as provocative, unprofessional, not refraining from imitation or stylization, as if their critics have forgotten that «art is created in response to the world» (Guzek, <http://free.art.pl/qg2001/hubpfr.htm>), and that – as Friedrich Schiller used to say – art «creates its own rules» («Kunst ist was sich selbst die Regel gibt»).

Young people’s art presented in the cyberspace is a living art that escapes any classification, does not give in to standardization, simple description and explication. This kind of artistic creation is not only a peculiar form of self-making, but also an opportunity to instantly present one’s own work and to quickly reach the audience visiting art sites or online blogs written by young people. Some of those visitors enter such sites intentionally in search of «artistic worlds», while others are redirected by their search engines or sometimes visit the site by chance. But even an accidental click, originally aimed at displaying a structured reality of text or advertisement, may take a viewer to an unusual world that not always can be opened with a simple key – while searching for a template, known schemes, content and meaning, the viewer begins to discover that multiple perspectives exist, that they are not necessarily simple, unequivocal,

«ready-to-read» messages and that the reception of a creative work and its careful «reading» not only gives one an opportunity to discover and make a sensory and extra-sensory evaluation of what is being presented, but also to communicate the results of such evaluation to the author. It is not uncommon that a virtual meeting of the viewer and the author becomes a process eventually leading to a reflection of some sort, and «(...) such reflection enters the life of another person and imposes on him/her something that in essence is identical to his/her own incomplete, individual experience (...)» [5, p. 306].

The potential of e-space is not only noticed, but also appreciated by young people because the process of using virtual space for presenting one’s own creative output to others is more and more often becoming a peculiar form of conceptualizing a reflective identity. As young «artists» put it:

«(...) you don’t have to call me an artist, (...) it’s just Me and my world. I can search for myself here and discover that I’m constantly changing (...)» [Wojtek, aged 16],

«(...) finally no-one tells me what is nice, what is “art” and what is not, I don’t have to shelf anything. Maybe others see things along the same lines, but they just don’t realize it yet. Sometimes I want to talk to them about it at DeviantArt, and sometimes not (...)» [Krystian, aged 15, attends a fine arts school, already had a solo exhibition],

«(...) my arts teacher at school says that your works must be “understandable to others” and she means all others. She would show my works to the class and say «Tola is off-topic again». And I don’t want my works to be just nice, simply because they illustrate something (...) sometimes my «little works» are just colors, some signs hidden in between them. No-one but me understands them and it’s just fine. (...)» [Tola, aged 13, creates computer graphics and interactive stories]

«(...) I love Net Art and I like even those who say they’re not impressed or don’t understand why I make such weird creatures, people who don’t look like humans, because this lets me think about why I do it. (...) I draw, make graphics, cartoons, because every single time it is a different Me, I’m still searching for my own self in these «weird things», I change them constantly, the number of combinations is unlimited, sometimes I add music, because I change as well. (...) But perhaps I’m also looking for those who will notice something in here (...)» [Kaja, aged 16; has published on art sites for three years]

Contrary to appearances, the visual language of online art is an unusual form of communication. Cursory and passing as it may be, it functions in the virtual world and frequently remains confined to it. However, those who believe that it is first of all a meaningless form of

fun and entertainment, direct graphical induction based on stereotypes or clichés, fail to understand its essence. Artistic output presented by young people in the internet constitutes a particular network of meanings and messages, creating the «third space» [4]. By nature, the visual language used by young artists has multiple meanings; sometimes it also distorts conventions that can be defined as «unwritten and non-established expectations originating from experiences shared by the members of a given society» [8, p. 104]. Works presented online often require the viewer to depart from his/her stereotypes and schemes and encourage (or even provoke) an alternative approach to visual signs and symbols, because – as John Berger insists: «The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight» [3, p. 7].

It is a *sine qua non* condition for the creative message to be «read» by others and for the communication between the author and the viewer not to be blocked for instance by cultural differences or subcodes.

Discussion.

When analyzing Digital Art as a specific space for young people’s artistic creation, it makes sense to ask not only about the extent to which such art is the discovery of some previously undeveloped capability of transmitting and receiving artistic messages, but also about the extent to which it makes it possible to express not-yet-discovered meanings, develop new capabilities of one’s imagination, feelings and intellect. To what extent does the new form of artistic communication with Me and You allow the sender and the receiver to discover and satisfy the needs that can hardly be satisfied in the real world? Is Digital Art merely a temporary fascination with technical capabilities, or – as indicated in the above deliberations – is it rather a process that helps one adapt to reality and to transcend it, a quest for something new and a triumph in given situations?

An in-depth analysis of digital art seems to indicate that young people, being «doomed to freedom», use it as a tool for searching some points of reference. This is how they fill in the inner void, insatiety, sense of loneliness, sometimes absolute nihilism. For most of them, digital art is a philosophy of life – the viewer has a variety of possible interpretations to choose from. As Marcin puts it: «(...) It will probably sound silly, but when I’m creating I can simply feel that I Am (...) Sometimes it is pure reality, but sometimes this world is different than the real one. A piece of me is always here and there» [Marcin, aged 15].

Therefore, it seems that the creation and presentation of one’s own works sometimes change the lives of young artists by directing them towards the new. It allows them to build new forms of coming to terms with the outer and inner world, to find their own place in a constantly changing reality.

Perhaps we should agree with Bogdan Suchodolski, whose voice seems to be particularly relevant in this discussion: «(...) if it is true that humans develop by doubling thanks to their activity that transforms the world, then creative work is the most perfect method of such multiplication» [25, p. 153].

Conclusions and prospects for future research directions. Creative works «saved» on the internet are sometimes a way of escaping from the obviousness of the world, specific rules, signs and messages related to the pedagogy of power [9], a way of escaping «to freedom» and «from freedom». And it is not about the elusive artistic freedom, but about McLuhan’s «Medium is the Message» (a digital environment will always be a factor that models the structure (or the method) of presenting the artistic message), but about the possibility to create a new code of signs and meanings. In fact, watching young people one may sometimes have an impression that in looking for ways of self-expression they wander in the wilderness, search in darkness and not always know what they are looking for. But possibly, what is valuable is the search itself, gaining new experience that allows young people to define themselves. Maria Gołaszewska calls it «searching for searching’s sake», a journey for a journey’s sake, «not intended to find something and to reach some place, but rather meant not to remain stuck and satisfied with the status quo» [12, p. 88].

Not unlike in the case of purely offline works, the ability to perceive the world in a unique way and to respond to changes, to propose bold hypotheses, to create interesting models and metaphors, to blur the sequences between the present, the past and the future seems to be an undeniable value of young people’s digital art. The particular form of self-expression helps them discover themselves, their needs and capabilities.

One can notice here echoes of the ideas present in the concept of Abraham Maslow, who believed that creative works should be considered as self-development, improvement of one’s capability to experience the meaningful and a condition of mental health. The same is true for the concept of Erich Fromm, who stressed that creativity is about making something new in artistic or scholarly disciplines, or alternatively an attitude and a personal feature. Thus, it may become both an attitude towards the world, or a lifestyle. The quality of artistic output is irrelevant, because (...) the differentiating criterion

is the sense of creation and pursuing one's own plan. Similarly, just like the lifetime history of each individual is an implementation of his/her genetic plan, each creative work turns the author's concept into reality, thus leaving a meaningful trace behind» [18, p. 142–143].

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