

**Review of Doctoral Thesis
of mgr Marcin Wysocki
Academy of Fine Arts Katowice**

reviewer:

doc. Mgr. art. Marcel Bencik, ArtD.

Mr. MW

I will limit the obligatory part of the review regarding education and professional work of Mr. Wysocki to the necessary minimum, due to the fact that this information is included in the documentation submitted by the doctoral student.

Mr. Marcin Wysocki was born in 1981 in Katowice. He did his studies in Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice from 2000 till 2005 and was awarded with master degree in Visual Communication. From 2014 he is on doctoral studies also at Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice. He cooperated with numerous significant institutions such as Muzeum Śląskie, Orkiester Stołecznego Królewskiego Miasta Krakow, CSW Kronika Bytom, Rondo Sztuki, Biblioteka Śląska, Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków, Silesia Film, Festiwal Filmowy NH, Festiwal Filmów Niezależnych KilOFF etc. In his academic career he was at adjunct position at ASP Katowice (Pracownia Projektowania Tożsamości Wizualnej). He took part in workshops and trainings: Projektowanie usług w praktyce in Zamek Cieszyn, Modern City in The Making and REversal of Roles by Medialab Katowice and others.

Mr. Wysocki is designer with many awards and distinctions: (selection) Polish Graphic Design Awards (2019), PTKW Najpiękniejsze Książki Roku 2017, Śląska Rzecz 2017, 2016, 2013, 2012.

Jumping-off place

Marcin Wysocki is remarkable designer/creator with great portfolio of comprehensive realized design works as we can see on his web page: <http://www.marcinwysocki.pl> or on <http://www.behance.net/MarcinWysocki>. There is no doubt about this fact and his enthusiasm and passion for work of designer. I believe that his undying faith is bringing rapturous applause in professional world and general public reflection.

One of his flagship projects (that will be whispering all around is Centre of Contemporary Art Kronika in Bytom – CSW Kronika w Bytomiu)

But at this moment I received the confidence to write review about his doctoral thesis. His doctoral work is strongly re-bound with his designers existence and I hope in this review I draw closer to its positive and negative sides and mainly to open wider discussion about designing for cultural institutions especially art museums or art galleries.

Accumulation

Marcin write in his Documentation notebook of his thesis: “Warto podkreślić, że sztuka współczesna bywa wyzwaniem dla odbiorcy. Często wymaga własnych poszukiwań, szczególnej wrażliwości, znajomości różnych kontekstów i zapoznania się z dodatkową wiedzą. Rolą projektanta w tej sytuacji jest często pośredniczenie między artystą a odbiorcą jego sztuki. Z jednej strony projektant tworzy materiały wizualne, które zachęcą odbiorcę do poznania twórczości artysty, do odwiedzenia galerii. Z drugiej strony, kolejne materiały pomogą mu, już w samej galerii, zrozumieć myśl twórcy stojącą za jego pracami. Miałem świadomość, że od tego, jakie wybiorę środki projektowe będzie w dużym stopniu zależało, jak prezentowana sztuka może być odbierana.” (*Dokumentacja*, p. 6)

Marcin Wysocki perfectly described role of designer (him) in the institution and defined the guidelines of his work. Him as designer takes responsibility of bypassing between art and visitor. between the artist (equally the curator) and the spectator. Wide research is based on existing methodology and it is empirical implementation in monothematic (but comprehensive) project.

Presented work of Mr. Wysocki consist of:

Theory Methods: SWOT Analysis (p. 20), Map of recipients of the institution's activities (p. 21), Target groups (p. 22), Persona (p. 23), Map of recipient journeys (p. 26), Scenarios (p. 32), Emotional maps (p. 33), Detailed plan of service (service blueprint) (p. 34), Consumer lifecycle (p. 35); Research – theory: Observations (p. 44), Accompanying interviews (p. 44), in-depth interviews (p. 45), survey (p. 46) and their implementation in to the Practical Methods: SWOT Analysis (workshop) (p. 52), Map of recipients of the institution's activities (p. 57), Target groups (p. 60), Persona (p. 66), Map of recipient journeys (p. 76), Scenarios (p. 81), Emotional maps (p. 96), Detailed plan of service (service blueprint) (p. 101) and as very important his implementation in real life Kronika projects...

All these are bulletproof arguments of the doctoral thesis or better to say the bulletproof theoretical and methodical part of submitted document. Not easy to “break the wall” and find some “peep-hole” for doubts and thoughts to start physical/virtual discursus with Marcin.

All his research, theory basis, empirical experience are closed in his book: ***Wystawa sztuki współczesnej jako usługa. Raport.*** and represents his perspective of universal material that can be helpful for designers working for art or generally cultural institutions. His thesis book is accompanied by smaller notebook: ***Dokumentacja projektu.***

Therefore I will not use my text to describe and comment each chapter in detail rather put my thoughts in context and open other questions of work for cultural institution.

Playground

“Kronika is the only centre of contemporary art at Silesian region. Already for many years is ensuring for its citizens the access into the art of the highest worldwide rank ancasing it by its rich programme.” (6.0 – *Anex*, p. 234)

“Kronika that is Centre of Contemporary Art, based in heart of industrial Bytom in Upper Silesia dealing with exploration compounds between contemporary theory and practice in arts and music, policy and social sciences, education, theater, film, alternative tourism, design and architecture. Kronika was founded in 1991 and it is place of knowledge. After reorganization and radical renovation of the headquarter in 2006 Kronika became its new stage of its activities.” (<http://www.kronika.org.pl/main-features>)

Cultural institutions (e.g. as museums, art museums, NGO cultural institutions, music and dance clubs and “weird” underground places) for decades were the laboratories and crucial hubs and points for creating, developing and testing all kinds of small and big ideas and methods and being enclosing macro/micro environments of evolution of society. More and more while institutions become to be such a place they took the action on their shoulders. Institutions are taking the responsibility for development of culture in general but simultaneously for people that are the creators and people that are the consumers (audience). Buzzing between the creators and consumers brings a never ending nightmare and at the same time lovestory as a critical clash of entities. Clash as a consequence of inovations vs. stereotypes, urges vs. comfort, offers vs. queries, expectations vs. expectations and many more.

Working as designer in such melting pot brings enormous pressure to our decisions and responsibility. What is the best way of creating the methods of our work in such institution and along to coming up with such extraordinary results? Who are we working for? What is our role? What is our mission? What is our position? Is it “up” or “down”?

There is not such clear answers to non of these questions. There is not the RIGHT path to walk or slide on. Each of us is choosing one with all the advantages and disadvantages. With the concequences of our action. Some of the paths lead us to momentaneous success, some to the patient meantime, some to suffering dark future. Which path was choose by Marcin?

“Institutions, however, have a responsibility to maintaing and preserve spaces in which it is possible to think freely, to work, and to act. Institutions should not determine the potential of these spaces, but should keep the spaces “sense of possibility” open. While the concept of autonomy has on one hand been rightfully deconstructed in the case of work of art, it might on the other hand well take on this institutional political valence. Autonomy, independence, is given to the curator by the institution and manifest itself primarily as an advanced working period that is largely unregulated, with the curator only answering to him – or herself.” (*Beatrice von Bismarck, Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer (eds.) Hospitality. Sternberg Press, (p. 56)*)

One of the closest cooperators of curator (the self-centred think-thank power of the institution) is designer (extended hand of the law with his/her self-centered brain). And this is the absolute base of my extended thoughts about Marcin Wysocki's doctoral thesis and the conflict between the visitor-centered (consumer-centered) orientation represented by Mr. Wysocki and content-centered orientation preferred by my review.

Selfhood (Role I).

“After 3 years working in CSW Kronika, realizing dozens of posters, a lot of publications and other visual materials I found out that demands and motivations of the artists and also curators can be different from the demands of the guests of the institution. I wanted to know how – as a designer – I am bound to answer all of the diverse demands by choosing to accurate design tools and design strategies.” (*Documentation of the project, p. 7*)

The role of designer in creating methods of design for cultural institution (whatever it means). What is the border between “listening” and “self” exposing?

Who are we designing for?

For the institution (as a subject)?

For curators and exhibiting artists (as a content makers)?

For the public audience? (as the object of our interest)?

These are questions of perplexity (dilema)?

Viewer's – Recipient's – Visitor's – entric approach

Marcin Wysocki based his designers strategy on visitor's – centric approach. Our “target” is our challenge – objective – our ritual subject...

... it is important to attempt to find gestures that make guests feel welcome: such as, offering a guided visit of the whole building, providing water and coffee during discussions, inviting guests for lunch or dinner, or picking them up personally at the entrance of the location where the talk is taking place, or (if they are foreigners) giving instructions to help them find their way from the airport to the institution. (*Beatrice von Bismarck, Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer (eds.) Hospitality. Sternberg Press, p. 55*) Isn't this the correct “listening” of demands of our audience? Do we let them to go into “the kitchen” to cook with us or cook for us? Shouldn't us designers offer prepared final “dish”? Shouldn't be the audience “just” our goal but not our challenge?

Marcin Wysocki proposed one way of designer thinking. I have no doubts about his approach and used comprehensive and detaily drawn up methods and implementation. But who are we trust in and who trust us? Marcin made good approach to defining his role in Kronika designing and also concentration on the recipients needs but I would suggest him to be more deliberated in such direction.

... and rather propose:

The “public” does not simply exist; it has to be constantly created through discussions and working processes. (*Beatrice von Bismarck, Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer (eds.) Hospitality. Sternberg Press, (p. 53)*)

Besides we need to communicate with other professions: artists, museum pedagogues, psychologists, philosophers ... and audience... etc. Working for cultural institution is based on fundamental team. Team that creates and form the audience.

Director – curator – designer. Working in the “celestial” triangle.

Institution covers all kinds of roles (professions) from the ones that may seem unimportant up to ones that shape. Every person working/being/visiting the institution enclose his/her competency. How much we let audience expectations to have influence into the design process? Total democracy of audience influence may be retardative in future impact.

Diversity as a system

Building coherent system of design for cultural institution perhaps art museum brings pluses and minuses that designer (who creates the system) should be aware of. System brings regulations that keeps the concept stable and prevents it from the misunderstandings and failures but simultaneously brings hermetical and cyclical preservation.

By going through Marcins book over and over I did feel the risk more and more. Rescuing by this fear is diversity of approaches maintained in the book with discovering, researching, analysing and comparing different methods – strategies – approaches – wins and fails. And! This is the biggest missing link in the book. All the research and implementation is concentrated on one institution. I am sure that Mr. Wysocki did explore the strategies of other institutions that would enrich his research and the publication. Kronika case however it is comprehensive from point of designer is just one case study. No matter if we call it Report or Advisory book or whatever else without research clash it is difficult “to believe” of a peremptory system.

Marcin’s visitors centered approach can be the winner but where is the artist centered, curator centered, content centered or “celestial” centered approach as I mentioned above? I clamour for to dare to choose... or at least to verify.

To find very good example of such diversity of approaches close from my studio is strategy of Slovak National Gallery in Bratislava where I had the chance to cooperate on several projects. About decade ago they left one directed method of identity of communication its programme (exhibitions and additional programme) and left the total residency of one or couple of designers and exhibition architects. Every single exhibition and event is built by the system on “green field”, each is new, authentic with different model of collaboration and target (not just in sense of target group). Total diversity of creators freedom (artists, curators, designers etc.) of used strategies brings every time unexpected

and singular (surprising) results. Surprisingly this “non-controlled missile” brings much more connectivity to the institution, content and miraculously to the audience on the pedestal. Why? Simply, because this non-threaded chaos needs much more responsibility and sensibility of every individual activated in every project than universal threaded system based on someone's necessity for the whole institution.

kompromis (in Slovak language):

– accommodation – compromise – compromissum – give and take – give-and-take – medium – middle course – submission – temper – trade-off – tradeoff (<http://slovník.aktuality.sk/preklad/slovensko-anglicky/?q=kompromis>)...
... we should be aware from. Designer of Mr. Wysocki's rank should open discussion about “How we design for art museum” rather than creating exclusive method of designing.

Between years 2003 and 2007 I was designer of significant cultural centre Stanica Žilina – Zárčie. Seventeen years ago I was trying to build something similar as Marcin Wysocki and it was great experience and knowledge that rope the culture into a singular system was failure. I left the indelible footprint but if I would look at the problem of designing institution I would probably choose not the same path.

Marcin Wysocki did enormous work in his doctoral thesis. Very detailed analysis are at least positively well rounded and I am very happy that his work made instead of criticise the methodology and implementation (because there is no doubt about it) knock out many new questions. It gives for thought that how much us – designers are willing to use or build systems and diagrams that are bundle us in our work just with the thought that we can set the world around us. Break through the conventional methods and strategies that is our potential for experiment, risk and final real change of the cultural environment that we are a motive part of.

I believe Marcin Wysocki will continue in his research beyond his doctoral thesis and will be active element of forming of culture in Poland and elsewhere.

Przedstawiony do recenzji dorobek projektowy i dydaktyczny pana Marcina Wysockiego, a przede wszystkim jego praca doktorska pozwalają poprzeć wniosek Rady Dyscypliny Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Katowicach o nadanie panu Wysockiemu tytułu doktora sztuki w dziedzinie sztuki plastycznej, w dyscyplinie artystycznej sztuki pięknej.

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