

Research Study “The Memory of Place,” Realized in Lisbon on the Basis of the A/r/t/ography Concept

Pavla Gajdošíková

Department of Art Education, Faculty of Education, Charles University Prague
pagajdosikova@gmail.com

Abstract

The research study “The Memory of Place” follows on the “Pathways” study realized as a workshop in March 2017 at the Lisbon Polytechnic Institute’s College of Education in Portugal. The subject of the study is the mutual interaction and overlap between architecture, art, and art education, and the common “language” shared by these fields. The main research tool is the collection of students’ verbal and artistic statements, which help the researcher to understand the influences and relationships that help to shape young people’s attitudes towards the history of a particular place and thus affect how they perceive this place.

Keywords

Architecture, creative reflection, experience interpretation, methods in pedagogy, spatial forms.

The Research Project

Basic characteristics and project objectives

The Project “Phenomenon of Architecture and Its Pedagogical Implications” is part of ongoing outcomes of doctoral studies at the Dpt. of Arts, Charles University Prague, Czech Republic. Its objective is to investigate this phenomenon through artistic creation mediated to students and to explore the possibilities of using the findings about the creative processes in educational situations with university students. The Project is based on the current public discussions about how architecture influences our apprehension of public space, and the quality of life connected with it (Melková, 2013). The topic follows up on the artwork series of the researcher, called The Subjective Urbanism.

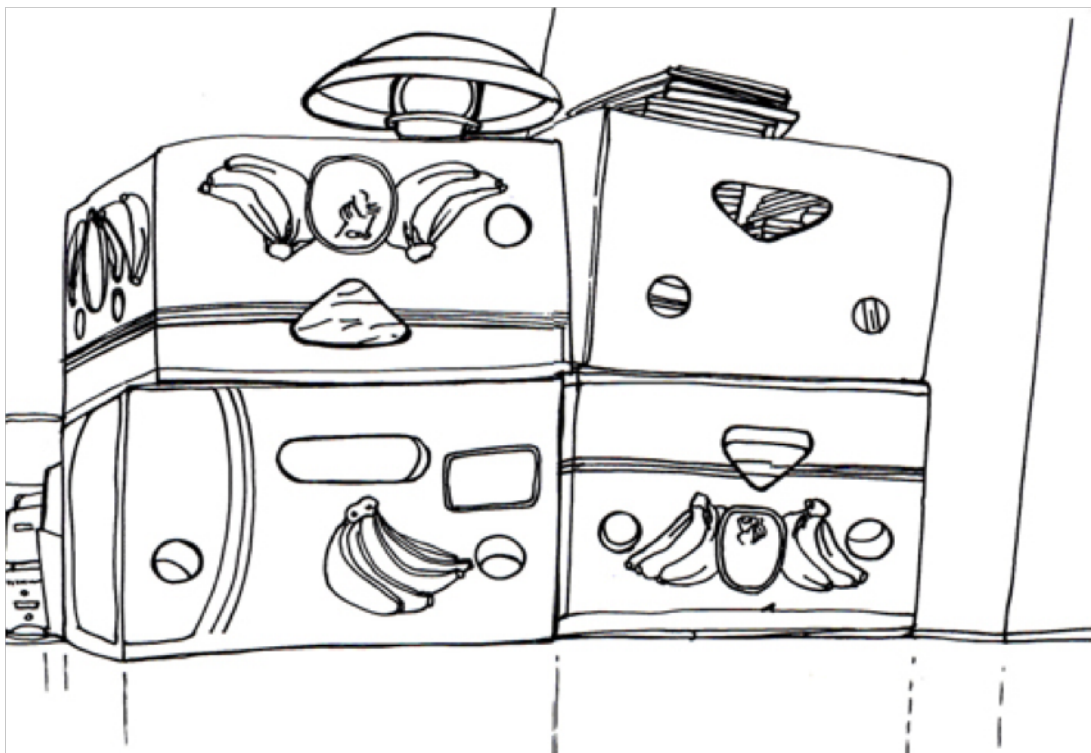


Figure 1: Pavla Gajdošíková, Staring at the Corner, drawings, 2005 – 2018

Project Rationale

Architecture is an inseparable part of (not only) our visual world and human existence as such. Its contents is stretched between its utilitarian and artistic function, it is both *res publica* (public affair) and *politica* (political affair). The topic of our relationship to architecture and the environment is currently very up-to-date, yet it is not being adequately treated on society-wide strategic level.

Relation to space is essential for man, as we cognitively grasp the environment since we were born, structuring interpersonal relationships according to the so-called basic concepts (Číhalová, 2008), still before learning how to speak or other symbolizing systems. People spend practically their whole lives in ‘built’ environment, which is being recognized and constructed *vis á vis* its opposite, i.e. the open landscape. Perceiving, experiencing and realizing space thus has always played an essential role, which has both subjective and social (cognitive and educational) connotations with economic consequences.

However, the topic of architecture is almost absent at schools and in teacher training programs in the field of arts. In our experience such discussions take only exceptionally place not only in elementary and junior high schools, but unfortunately also at secondary schools, colleges and universities.

Research Probe “ The Memory of the Place” – Implementation

The Research Probe “ The Memory of the Place” was implemented in March 2018 as a probe of participatory type at the Lisbon School of Education, Polytechnic Institut of Lisbon, Portugal, in cooperation with Teresa Pereira, a Portuguese researcher and educator. Whole 180 minutes were devoted to it in the framework of painting. The sample chosen for the research were 22 students aged 19 – 24 years.

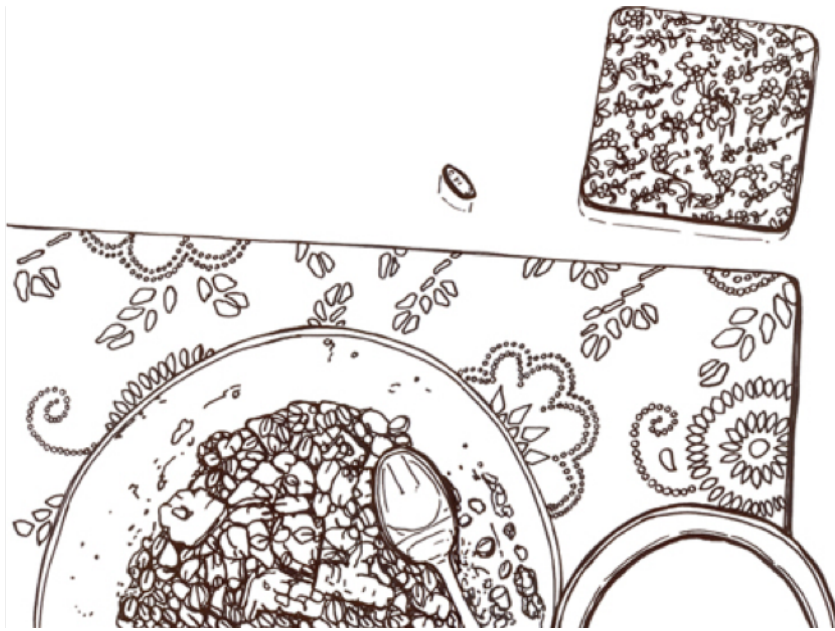


Figure 2: Pavla Gajdošíková, Staring at the Corner, drawings, 2005 – 2018

Research Theoretical Postulates

In theoretical postulates we focus mainly on the semiotic concept of art education. In art education, semiotics is a powerful concept, which can be used to revise traditional educational processes; it has strong impact on the topics, focus of the study, and the research method itself. (Fulková, Tipton, 2008)

This time the character of our research was inspired by phenomenological approaches, based on the assumption that a phenomenological subject is understood as a so-called “speaking subject” (i.e. for instance a human, a student, me). The forms of voices, i.e. their utterances, are then in close relationship with those subjects, who are by their very nature aware what they say and at the same time invite reflection. (Kotzmannová, 2013; Fulková et al., 2013)

In our case we applied methodology related to the research of artist and designer creation (art-led and practice-based research, artography) (Irwin, 2004). Especially the reflective-practice concept of Donald A. Schön was used for our probe. This approach, which arose from

Schön's observations of students of architecture, is a reflection on learning as a tool of gaining knowledge everywhere, where the linear learning model fails and expert knowledge is torn from practice; he also vindicates the implicit tacit knowledge of the practitioners. (Schön, 1983).



Figure 3: Pavla Gajdošíková, *Something Somewhere is Happening*, Galerie Entrance, installation view, Prague, 2017

Research Problem – Research Questions

The research probe analysis took place in several steps and had the form of responding to research questions, which were asked one by one during the course of the research.

1. What are the existing attitudes of both Czech and foreign undergraduate students to architecture and other forms of spatial art?
2. Can these attitudes be changed during the joint meetings of the teaching artist and students over the phenomenon / topic of architecture?

3. What are the phenomena students focus on when perceiving their lived space? What and how they speak about it? Which are the phenomena they mention most frequently?

The topic assigned and workshop progress

The assigned topic “The Memory of Place” was oriented at perceiving and realizing space and at the ability to subsequently conceptualize an artistic solution. We tried to assist students in developing new artistic sensibility and interdisciplinary creativity, which is often missing in their professional knowledge. (Hazuková, 2010)

In the first part of the workshop the students got acquainted with the creative portfolio of the artist researcher Pavla Gajdošíková, who tackles the topic of space and architecture in her artwork. After that the students were invited to discuss and critically reflect upon the artist’s



Figure 4: Pavla Gajdošíková, *Something Somewhere is Happening*, Galerie Entrance, installation view, Prague, 2017

work.

Then the participants were asked to depict the space of their home, or the place where they lived at the moment, by means of a variety of techniques (drawing, painting). The assigned topic was focused on perceiving and realizing space, and the ability to consequently conceptualize an artistic solution.

Method of research findings processing

The research material from implementing the above mentioned probe was subject to a three-step analysis, methodologically based on the above-described Schön's concept of reflective practice. Each step (level) of reflections obtained was subject to at first open, and later axial coding. Each coding gave a list of codes based on which concept maps were outlined. These maps were further reflected upon and evaluated. All conceptualizations obtained during coding were triangulated. (Fulková, 2008; Hendl, 2005)



Figure 5: Students of the Lisbon School of Education, Polytechnic Institut of Lisbon, Portugal during the research probe

III. Evaluating reflection on the contents and progress of the workshop – research probes

We have chosen both Czech and foreign students for our research probes, to take into account possible differences in apprehending architecture and space in different cultural environments.

What comes out of the students' reflections in the probe is a finding that the topic of architecture and related topic of apprehending and experiencing space are absent also in local educational system. However, the students demonstrated willingness or even eagerness to investigate and deepen this topic more, including their interest in conceptual approach to the topic, which was employed in this case.



Figure 6: Students of the Lisbon School of Education, Polytechnic Institut of Lisbon, Portugal during the research probe

The importance of the whole process of the workshop is also expressed in statements of the

Summary of findings from the realized survey

We have decided to call the overall final concept map on which the many different statements and approaches come together an “a/r/t/ographic subject-position.” It synthesizes the various analyses of the approach to the given subject and to artistic and educational work. Several different semantic nodes come together here: self-realization, place, and self-revelation.

The findings thus confirm the ideas of the educator and researcher Jan Slavík, who identified several points of similarity and congruence between art and education: a delimitation of space and time, composition, and the beauty of the work. (Slavík, 1996)

This fact refers to the overall understanding of the realized a/r/t/ographic educational model, in which the artist/teacher/researcher works in a kind of “third world” where his various identities become intertwined and begin to influence one another.

Having verified these research findings, we can draw the following conclusions: The subjects, which were approached from the viewpoint of several different “situations,” are assessed identically, with just minor deviations. The place of memory, its space of experiencing or remembering, essentially forms the personality of the teacher and students and influences them. The study’s participants perceive and experience this space or architecture very intensively on the basis of their own positive or negative experiences. We may take it as proven that perception influences how we interpret the world, but also that the opposite is true: our interpretation of the world plays a role in how we perceive a particular place. The criteria for evaluating architecture are thus associated with this experienced phenomenon. Memory is a basic precondition for us, a connecting link that allows us to identify with a place, with our home, and thus also with ourselves.



Figure 8: The artworks of students from the Lisbon School of Education, Polytechnic Institutit of Lisbon, Portugal

Conclusion

Based on our research probe findings we arrived at the following conclusion:

If the teaching artist renders this topic in an innovative way and gives the students an idea even by introducing his or her own artwork, the students show high interest. Thus we conclude that it is important for the students (teachers to be) to experience space and architecture intensely, based on being aware of their subjective experience, as well as having direct contact with their teaching artist.

Richter confirms the idea: “Only a teacher who has personal experience in resolving visual arts problems can articulate teaching units. Motivation that is methodologically and educationally well prepared requires the teaching artist’s own practical work in the field.” (Richter, 2017,

p. 253)

This topic is highly relevant and inspiring both for an art teacher and artist, making it almost a must for him to deal with it as part of his professional practice, thus handing his or her experience further again. We arrived at a conclusion that investigating phenomenology of architecture in connection with the semiotic concept of art education is indispensable both for the teaching artist and the student. We deem it is a perpetual task of architecture to create an existential metaphor that gives our being in the world concrete shapes and structure. Architecture reflects upon, materializes and immortalizes ideas and images of an ideal life. Space and our perception of it make us capable of structuring and also understanding the shapeless flow of reality and last but not least to realize what we are.



Figure 9: The artworks of students from the Lisbon School of Education, Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon, Portugal

What follows each and every experience like this is the action of remembering, recalling and comparing. Memory plays an essential role as a basis for our recall of space and place. We “redraw” all places we lived, and all spaces we knew, in the embodied memory of our bodies. Our home merges with and grows through our identity, becoming part of our own body and existence. (Pallasma, 2012)

There will be a follow-up to the “ The Memory of a Place “research probe, in the form of other research probes’ analyses, namely “Paths” and “My Home”. The research findings are meant for art teachers and students at teacher training institutions. We see the contribution of our research for the art education theory in verifying the functionality of the new methodology in a concrete educational environment and with concrete findings that can be used in teaching practice.

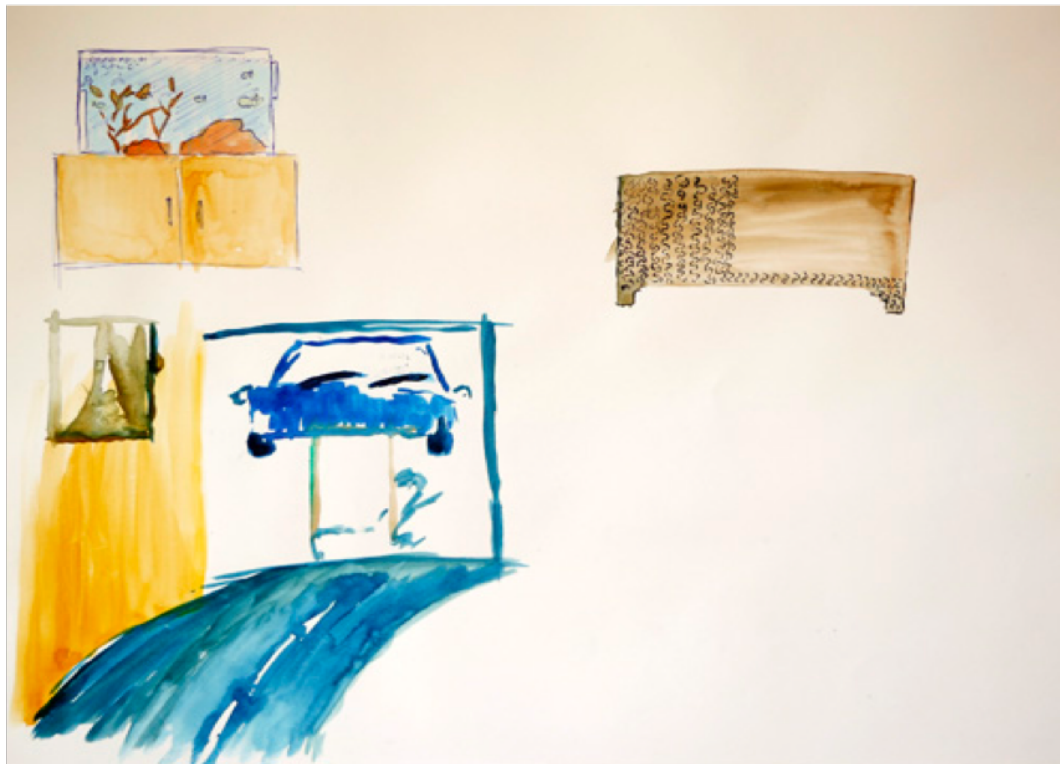


Figure 10: The artworks of students from the Lisbon School of Education, Polytechnic Institit of Lisbon, Portugal

Acknowledgements

The Research Project Phenomenon of Architecture and Its Educational Implication was supported by the Charles University Grant Agency (GAUK No. 250357) and has been carried out at the Charles University Prague, Faculty of Education. This text is part of preparatory studies for the topic of visual literacy, supported by the research program of Charles University Progress Q17.

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