

# **Subjective Experience and Narrative as a Source of Subjective Development Accompanying Visual Creation – Constructivist Approach<sup>1</sup>**

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The subject of these reflections is the subjective development. Subjectivity is “*a set of attributes thanks to which a person has influence on the way of his or her own functioning*” (Jarymowicz 2008:10).

A manifestation of subjective development is the deliberate directing of behavior, expressed in activity of the individual in the formulation of life plans and in taking action to fulfill them, in accordance with the established objectives and values.

The developmental change remains associated with an increase in the level of cognitive and emotional functioning, and manifesting itself in the improvement of the subjective and social functioning, which should be associated with an improvement of problem solving skills and improved self-knowledge.

The basis of developmental change is the subjective experiences. In literature on the subject, experience is presented in two ways - as a state or process (Tylikowska, 2003). Experience conceived as a state refers to the knowledge acquired by the individual and (or) certain forms of behavior as a result of contact with the environment and one's own activities. It includes remembering and storing in memory the information relating to events that remain in relation to external and internal reality (Czyżowska, 2003).

In turn, adopting the functional perspective, experience is considered as a process of creating a mental representation, in which participate sensory experiences and ideas. The source of sensory experiences is the reception of qualities of sensory data in contact with the

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object, which Moore (1995) defines as *sensibilia*. Representations, in turn, are mental images of reality, analogous to observations, with the difference that they are formed in the absence of the object to which they refer. They can be extracted from memory directly, or be the result of constructing images from the items stored in memory (Maruszewski 2002). Antoni Kępiński (1981, 1992, 1996; Maciuszek 1996) links the two perspectives, examining the subjective (individual) experience in terms of system in which they are treated as its elements. Thus, the subjective experience includes experiences defined as a cognitive process represented in the subjective dimension and the knowledge that results from prior knowledge.

The art forms the space, in which the specific experience are generated. The source of it is contemplation and perception of values contained in the artistic structure and creation of new values. This experience should be considered as the esthetic experience.

Originally, the type of knowledge characteristic of art, encompassing sensuality and emotional response of the subject, was defined as an aesthetic experience. In the beginning it was only referred to the act of watching a work (its reception), later its use encompassed the experience of beauty caused by the perception of objects with specific qualities. (Tatarkiewicz, 1960)

One of the best known and most theoretically substantiated is the phenomenological concept of aesthetic experience of Roman Ingarden (1957). The author treats aesthetic experience as a "*specific state of emotion*" caused by a specific quality, revealed in the concretization of the work. This is a multistage process, initiated by a so called initial emotion caused by the aesthetic quality (emotional and aesthetic emotion), which leads to perception (visual perception) of this quality and then free production of aesthetic object by the artist or adopting an attitude towards the observed work.

The concepts of aesthetic experience refer to the one-sided relationship between the individual and the work of art, the essence of which is the perception of a work based on his contemplation which does not cover all possible forms of contact with art, especially that realizations of contemporary art move away from the concept of work described in the traditional way as a material creation which is subject to perception, product offered to the audience new forms of participation in the arts, including the possibility of participation of the "spectator" in its creation. This resulted in the need to broaden the debate on the impact of art to encompass the active aspect of its reception, or its experience.

In the original sense the experiential aspect of the aesthetic experience involves the assignment to the individual activity in the reception of the aesthetic qualities, related to their subjective interpretation. First to point it out was Augustine, perceiving in the aesthetic experience two components: sensual, associated with sensual recep-

tion and intellectual, amounting to the interpretation made by the experiencing subject (Tatarkiewicz, 1960). It was also noticed by Ingarden (1966), who identified aesthetic experience (especially its final phase) with aesthetic experience, seeing it as an emotionally-contemplative experience of "harmony of quality" and value (p. 14).

The concept of aesthetic experience formulated on the basis of pedagogy<sup>2</sup> refers to the duality of art expressed in two forms of experiencing it: by reception and creation, attaching creation to aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience in the light of these views thus includes perception, "dream and focus" activating in it (Tatarkiewicz, 1972), but also the caused emotions, ideas, thoughts, interpretations as well as the readiness for creative response (Wojnar, 1976).

In the discussion conducted here on subjective development in the space of art it was assumed after Dewey (1975), that aesthetic experience is identical with the general experience, having its source in everyday life. It is recognized in the perspective of aesthetic engagement - as full perceptual integration in the aesthetic field, sensory experience of the whole person including sensual and sensuous acquisition of knowledge, stemming from the contact with the world of real events that took place in the space of art<sup>3</sup> (Berleant, 2007). It is assumed, after the author, that the essence of the aesthetic experience is the subjective relationship with the work (object, artistic situation), which takes the form of active involvement in the perception of art, as well as involvement in the process of creation (Berleant, 2007).

In the accepted meaning, aesthetic experience is, therefore, the experience of the subject which has its source in active participation in the arts through involvement in the creative process. It consists of a knowledge generated on the basis of sensual experiences, their interpretation and emotions.

So understood aesthetic experience, which enables reaching the created reality, also the internal one, constituting the experiences of the „viewer“, takes place in contemporary art forms, which include action art and performance art. They assume involvement in the creative process through provocation. It is the result of response to an artistic situation arranged by the artist and it is connected with its change. The source of subjective experience are thoughts and emo-

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<sup>2</sup> based on the views put forward in the movement of "New Education", included in the concept of the aesthetic experience of John Dewey (1975).

<sup>3</sup> characteristic for the classic views is the distinction between sensual and sensuous cognition; the first involves the use of the so-called aesthetic senses: sight and hearing, allowing a "spiritual" contemplation of art thanks to the distance - physical separation from the work, the second is based on the taste, smell and touch, which are excluded from the aesthetic experience (Berleant, 2007). Berleant proposed the abolition of this diversity, in favor of integration of spirituality and physicality.

tions. They show favorite value and method of interpretation by person. The essence of described activities is to determine the new reality, not expression the reality, which to exist (Fischer-Lichte, 2008).

The starting point adopted constructivist assumptions, according to which there is no possibility of objectively reaching an reality. The individual builds their representations in the mind based on the interpretation of stimuli coming to them. The environment provides content that is intentionally assimilated into mental models, their choice is determined by compliance with the current structure of the mind (Piaget, 1977), which means that the final shape of the created representations of reality is influenced by prior knowledge of the subject.

The basis for the creation of representations of reality is experience. Processual understanding of subjective experience assumes the development of a mental representation of reality (the world) based on sensory perceptions and experiences. In the space of art mental representations of reality are based on subjective experience, which consists of sensory experiences, ideas, emotions caused them, thoughts, interpretations and active actions. They concern the inner reality - experiences, thoughts, emotions, of the creating subject.

It is assumed that the method of constructing the image in the mind is narrative. In psychological terms narrative is treated as cognitive ability in structuring experiences and giving them meaning, a particular form of cognitive representation of reality - a cognitive schema that contains the complete knowledge of the individual about the object, and generally operating the information about it (Bruner, 1990; Trzebiński, 2002).

Giving meaning is understood in two ways: (1) the interpretation of events and turning it into a personal experience or (2) a reflection on the story. Interpretation allows one to understand the data coming in from the outside and generated by the mind. It always refers to the knowledge that sets focus on specific aspects and the importance attributed to them. Sense given to experiences is an expression of personal beliefs and aspirations. Observations and experiences of the individual caused by are experienced as part of the story. In turn, a reflection on the story is linked to the adoption of a particular attitude. Activating the knowledge systems is a manifestation of the cultural embedding of the views of the individual. Reflection is abstracted from individual experiences, and its form is highly verbalized (Maruszewski, 2002).

Structuring of experiences that takes place in narration corresponds to the style of interpretation presented by the subject who creates the story, which manifests itself in the selection of a certain pattern of narrative. The adopted scheme suggests the occurrence of certain content and rules of interpretation, which allow one to create a rather coherent story, whereby each individual has relatively fixed

rules of interpretation, set in their knowledge of the world (Trzebiński, 2002).

Narrative diagrams are designed by the culture and acquired in the course of socialization (Ricoeur, 1989). Narrative schemes are based on codes containing universal narratives that refer to archetypes (Grzegorek, 2003). They are engaged in the interpretations of subjectively important experiences, and relate to the aspirations, needs, goals typical of the lifetime. Hence, despite the subjectivity of symbols used by the subject, the symbolism of the narrative can be read by people in the same cultural circle.

Subjective experience includes constructing intrapsychic reality, relating to the knowledge of oneself. It is a self-narration, which object is the individual's life - the events that it is composed of and the method of their interpretation (Trzebiński, 2002).

Self-narration contributes to the construction of autobiography. It is assumed that the interpretation of reality autobiography included in the symbols becomes a kind of reality - it is assumed that an individual can have access to life events only through interpretation. Language of interpretation thus sets the boundaries of reality (Grzegorek 2003).

In hermeneutic terms autobiographical narrative is a story about life, in which thanks to the commitment of the subject insight and increased knowledge about oneself is reached, including the understanding of oneself and one's own life.

Self-discovery is achieved by interpretation taking place in the narrative. Its essence is the concentration on the selected thread, important for the subject, or the way of narration itself, defining the narrative structure of the story, its drama, composition and the accompanying emotions. The narrative reveals by the preferred method of assessing life events, for example oriented to drama, identifying failures, or conversely focused on the positive aspects of life. This process is responsible for the final shape of biography constructed by the individual. Space of interpretation occurring in the narrative is dialogue. In the case of an autobiographical narrative, the dialogue is run by one person - the subject exists at the same time as knower and the known, at the same time the narrator and protagonist of the story created. Subject that creates self-narration - the narrator engages in dialogue with its hero, with whom he identifies, as the author of the story he can change the characteristics attributable to the hero, evaluation of the events and change the action. This leads to changes in the content of the narrative, which constitutes self-knowledge.

The subjective development is effected by means of self-narration formed on the basis of the interpretation of events. That interpretation leads to generation of new content about "self", contributing to the individual's perception of the sense of biographical events. The

contents shall be included in the cognitive structures forming self-knowledge, which is accompanied by modification of content. Described the process of expanding/modifying the content of self-consciousness is part of the subjective experience in space of art.

The self-narration is accompanied by a visual creation in the space of visual art. The representation of the "self" is constructed on the basis of the visual code, reflected in the form of the visual object being created. The basis for metaphors and self-narration are visual symbols. It can be used as tentative representations of self-knowledge that are subject to modifications triggered by the current form of the created object - its artistic structure. The transformation process of self-narration created during visual creation is associated with its specific features involving the handling of different codes - visual, verbal, abstract and multiple passages between modalities - visual and verbal.

Multiple recodings of information comprises two types of transformations - formal, relating to changes in the artistic structure of the created object and mental, related to the manner of interpretation and reflected in the constructed narrative.

Interpretation of content stored in the visual code (desymbolization process) using generalizations and metaphors leads to self-narration revealing the essence of the knowledge of "self". Interpretation of symbols introduces subjective elements to the content of self-narration, expanding awareness in terms of one's own goals and aspirations. In turn, the value of symbolization is its creative nature - created metaphors are not subject to the cultural limitations, which allows insight into the "self".

Another quality of the content forming self-narration is granted by the transition from figurative to abstract code via a verbal code (visual code - verbal code - abstract code). Verbalization of symbolic contents expressed in visual code depends on their categorization which allows for structuring of information contained therein and then giving them meaning (semantization), which makes the experienced states and their reasons as well as effects comprehensible.

Thus, the visual creation forms the space of mental transformations inspired by the artistic structure of the created artistic object. The symbolic form of the resulting visual object, as a result of concretization - completion with subjective content (Berger 2000), is an expression of subjective experience initiated in creation. This experience includes a reinterpretation of self-knowledge and expanding it with new values, at the same time it is a measure of the subjective development accompanying creation.

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