

The Art School

by Thomas Huber

Let me, at this point, commemorate a misadventure which happened quite a long time ago at an art school. At that time, when it happened, they reported on it everywhere. The place of misfortune, the art school, resounded throughout the land. The blame for the misfortune was a member of the faculty of the art school, the art painter and art school professor S. In the course of the process which followed the misfortune, he was lawfully declared guilty, and the court adjudged him to perennial imprisonment.

The missions of an art school, which are the problems of relation between art and teaching, are often covered all over with theories or blanketed with pedagogical methods, so that any discussion concerning the art school, unfortunately, too often misses the truth of this place.

I hope that with the commemoration of this unfortunate incident I will be able to deliver insight into the real antagonisms and problems of an art school and lead the discussion closer to the practical questions.

Hence, it seemed most obvious to me to have the say of the art school professor and art painter S. to let him describe the misfortune and the circumstances of this misfortune to an interested professional audience. I asked the prison administration for visiting permission and soon after received positive response. There was a quite long letter from the art school professor and art painter attached to the official permission in which he manifested his preparedness to talk about the misfortune. Of course, as he wrote, he regretted that our conversation would have to take place in a prison. If this should be unpleasant for me, as he assumed, he could only emphasize that as for him, he had never accustomed himself to that place, had never accustomed himself to the prison, just as little as he had ever accustomed himself to the stay at the art school.

He wrote that at that time, at the art school, he had felt as biased as he understood himself now being imprisoned in jail. He had been imprisoned all the time by the absurd and compulsive relation of art and teaching at the art school, he had been unsolvably entrapped by the alliance of art and teaching. As it could be clearly comprehended by his current

residence, his coup, his try to escape, unfortunately had not changed much on his life situation, except that the relation of art and teaching would have meant a lifelong bondage, would have meant the lifelong status of a civil servant's entanglement, whereas from here he would have been released in the foreseeable future. The appointment as professor at a German art school was a subtle form of deprivation of artistic liberty, he wrote, in prison he had become aware of the fact that the appointment of an artist at a German art school meant the liberty-privative entanglement in an unsolvable task. Not until imprisoned in a German jail he had been able to free himself from the prison of a German art school or rather would be freed in the foreseeable future. But, he wrote, he didn't want to anticipate our conversation and would be looking forward to my visit.

Soon after that I met him in the prison's visitors room. There we had a longer conversation which I'll try to depict in the following, as far as my capacity for remembering allows me to do so.

Yes, he said after the salutation, yes, he said, I've ignited the art school. I have ignited the art school, and then the art school burned down. I have bled off the art school. A fire, I can tell you, he said, you've never seen a fire like that before. In all his born days he had never seen a fire like that, like the one when the art school was burning. The flames of the burning art school, he said, had risen up to the sky. Up to the clouds the flames of the burning art school had been rising. There had never been a time when the art school had been closer to the sky as then, at the time when the art school had burned in bright flames. During all his teaching activity he had tried to perceive the art school in more wide-ranging contexts, but not until he had seen the whole art school in flames, when even the clouds above the art school had been enlightened in red colours by the flames, he had perceived the art school as a whole in its inner structure. To the foundation walls the art school had burned down, he said.

The roof had burned away completely and all inserted ceilings of the building had burned away. All wood boardings, all doors, all the furniture of the art school had burned up. The easels and modelling blocks, the workbenches and drawing desks had burned up. The garages and studios had fallen victim to the flames. And also the administration had been burning, had been burning for a long time, he said, there had been an affluent amount of things to nurture the fire. The files were burning, he said. The endless amount of memorandums and ordinances of the art school were burning, all exam papers, all journals

of the hearings of appeals, the journals of the department committees meetings, the journals of the senate meetings, the journals of the council meetings were burning. The countless number of confirmations of his duty, the annotations of attendance in the journals of all the thousands and thousands of committees meetings, which he had all passed, were erased by the flames, he said.

His journalized contributions to the budget commission, the planning commission, the study commission, his requests to speak during the unmanageable amount of self administration committees of the art school, his thousands of signings under thousands of enactments, memorandums, exams, ordinances, instructions, commitments and contracts became all null and void in the fire. Down to the cellar the art school was burning, he said. Especially in the cellar the art school has burned long and persistently. The exam results of all study years had been stored there. The results of the trimonthly examinations, the results of the three days or five days or three weeks examinations, the works of the master students' colloquiums, the diploma graduation works, the results of the teaching degrees exams for primary and secondary schools, all was burst into nothing in a blazing fire, he said.

Oil colour burns like hell. Oil colour on canvas burns brilliantly, he said. The same with water colour paintings, basically everything which is painted, drawn, printed on paper had been burning furiously, he said. The paintings, the whole painting department had been literally swept away by the flames in seconds. There had been emitted so much heat from the painting department that all installations and so-called objects had burned up immediately. Most of the things had been made from wood or easily flammable plastic anyway, he said, especially the sculptor department had coloured the smoke of the burning art school in the most adventuresome colours. Particularly the sculptor department had been burning very colourfully, and actually the sculptor department, except for those few examples of pieces from notorious stone beaters and cast-bronze makers, had completely burned up.

Surprisingly, also the New Media had burned well, he had not expected the New Media to burn that well, surely that had not only been due to the photography department which he, at this point, to simplify matters, would count among the New Media. The New Media department had not only been burning, but popping, he said. There had been a huge noise produced by the New Media. You had, he said, the impression that by the New Media, the art school would go off. With the New Media, the art school has not only been burning, he

said, but was literally burst in the air by explosions. Retrospectively, he said, all art genres have burned well, and, he said, there was one thing which had never happened during all that long time before he spent at the art school: in the fire, the different art genres burned at one, they fired one another in the blaze of the art school, he said.

At first, his studio had burned, he said. The fire had broken out from his professor studio. You always start, he said, at yourself, at your own work. The basis of teaching at an art school is the own studio. Either the fire emanates from your own studio, or it doesn't burn at all, he said. The seat of fire, he said, must be in your own images. The own images are the place of origin. Artistic production at an art school. And when occupying yourself with images, he said, that's what he had told to the art school students again and again, you need an image conception. Without any basic image conception or rather any notion of the image, that is to say, without any view on images, that's what he had told them, you cannot produce any images, he said, this is what he had told to his students again and again.

To his regret, he said, he had two notions of image, he admitted honestly to have two notions of image, that means two views on images; of this indecisiveness he could rightly be accused, but this would be too late for him because he had always accused himself of this indecisiveness, he said. It bothered him to have two image conceptions. A hot image conception he had, and a cold image conception, a fiery image conception he had, and an aqueous image conception. At the beginning of his time at the art school, he had completely been concentrating on the cold image conception.

At the beginning, when he had come to the art school, he had been a cold artist. I was a cold artist, he said, but one should not get that wrong. One should associate this coldness with the coldness of clear cold water. With the clearness of cold and chilly water. My notion of image, he said, related to the chilly clearness of cold water. This notion of image was, after all, a notion of tidiness. His notion of clearness had been a notion of tidiness. His notion of image as a notion of clearness had been, after all, a notion of cleanliness. With a notion of image as the notion of cleanliness he had started at the art school.

And, he said, the art school was the opposite of my notion. The art school was dirty. Dirty and untidy. He said, he didn't know any place on earth which was as dirty and untidy as an art school. Art schools are the most dirty and untidy places on earth, he said. The art school's

dirt is the most dirty and untidy one which ever exists. If you entered a studio in the art school, you would be struck by the art school's dirt, struck by the look of the art school's dirt, he said. The art school's dirt was not only the most dirty, but also the quickest dirt on earth. When having swept away the art school's dirt – and, heaven knows, in the beginning he had been doing nothing than sweeping at the art school, he had entered the art school only with a broom – the art school's dirt had just been returned in no time at all.

And, he said, the art school's dirt was not only quick, but also dangerous, maliciously dangerous, because the art school's dirt depressed you, he said. Whoever stays at an art school gets immediately depressed, he said. That's because of the art school's dirt, that's what he had always said, he said. The art school's dirt doesn't bugger up your clothes, but your soul, that's what he had always said. The crisis of sense and then the life crisis and then the art school studies' crisis and finally the art crisis, this symptom, which everybody had to suffer at the art school, derived from the art school's dirt. The art crisis rooted in the art school's dirt.

The art school's dirt was a danger for the soul, that's what he had always said, he said. The hygienic circumstances, the soul-related hygienic circumstances at an art school were disastrous, that's what he had pointed out again and again, he said. From the beginning, immediately he had pit himself against the force of the art school's dirt. With his notion of clearness, with his notion of tidiness that had derived from his notion of image and which could just be called a notion of cleanliness, he didn't mind that, he said, so with his notion of cleanliness he had been fighting against the art school's dirt, and, he said, lost the fight. With his pedagogical concept as concept of clearness and finally as concept of cleanliness, he had drowned in the art school's dirt.

And, he said, in this drowning, his pedagogical concept had dragged along his artistic concept. Both of them, his artistic concept and the pedagogical concept which had derived from the artistic concept, had drowned in the art school's dirt. It had been of no avail, he said, that he had defended his concept of clearness by a concept of century. His concept of cleanliness, as he had always said, was the modernity's concept of cleanliness. The aspired cleared out, clean, whitewashed image room was the modernity's image concept. The concept of cleanliness is a modern concept, as he had always said. And his concept of clearness which he had borrowed from modernity had been contaminated, that much

contaminated by the art school's dirt that he had not been able to recognize his own images any more. His notion of image had been blurred. His image conception and the modernity's conception had been dragged into the mud, he said. He himself and the modernity had not survived the art school's dirt.

As his images had become so shabby in the art school's dirt and no remedy had helped to make them presentable again, as his conception of clearness as cool conception had broken down, he then had tried with the hot conception. With fire he had tried to turn towards his images which had been distorted by the art school's dirt. I've heated up my images, he said. I couldn't figure out anything else. I set a blaze in the images, he said, it was due to the art school's dirt, but it was also due to the understanding that I collapsed with my cold conception as pedagogical conception. That's why I heated up my images, and that, he said, leads me directly to the misfortune I want to tell you about.

The fire, he said, had not stayed inside the image, the fire had dropped out of the image space. The fire dropped out of the image space and encroached on the art school, he said. The fire didn't stay inside the image, where he would easily have had it under control, he said, but it had dropped out of the image and had furiously been spreading all through the art school, because he had lost control of it. At the moment where the fire had been encroaching on the art school, he had lost control of it, he said. Thereupon, the art school burned down completely, he said.

He had slipped up at a basic point, it was an error in his thoughts, he said, a conception error. He had integrated his notion of image space into the educational establishment of his pedagogical notion. He had built his image spaces inside the pedagogical educational establishment, yes, he literally had nested the image space and the educational establishment into one another. That's why the fire had been able to encroach so easily from one to the other. In the same way as the art school's dirt, coming from the art school, had originally infiltrated his images, the fire, coming from his images, had now, in the opposite way, immediately encroached upon the art school; two catastrophes, he said, resulted from his inattention, one would tend to say, an architectural conception error, a culpable carelessness regarding most simple safety precautions, for which he, in the case of that fire, had been jailed, but for which, in the other case, actually the art school would have to be imprisoned.

After all, it had dragged him, him and modernity, into the mud, he said, but for that, unfortunately, nobody would be imprisoned. But he took comfort in understanding that the art school had already been jailed for a long time, that the art school not only was a prison, but was imprisoned in its own jailhouse, he said. He would be released one day, but the art school would not be released any more, that's what he wanted to say at this point, he said. As already stated, due to his error in reasoning, his conception error, the art school had been burning. And of course, he had been very much scared at that moment. In view of that huge fire, he had been in fear of death, he said, but he had also been worrying about the others. He had been worrying about the art school students, and also about his art school colleagues, the art school professors, he had been worrying. And, he said, he had been running through the burning art school immediately and had been searching for art school students and art school professors who could have been in trouble because of the fire.

He had been shouting and screaming, he said, and he had been running through the burning corridors of the art school and had been running into the burning studios; I have, he said, been running through the burning art school and I came across nobody, not a single soul. The art school was empty. There was no art school professor and no art school student inside the art school. The art school was burning on an ordinary workday, and it was empty. From the cellar to the attic the art school was burning, and not one professor and not one student fell victim to the fire.

For, he said, art schools are always empty, notoriously empty. Indeed there are art professors and art students at art schools, but in the essential moment, they are always somewhere else, he said. Art schools are abandoned places. If you visited an art school, you would indeed recognize that there had happened something some time ago, but that at the very moment when you arrived, nothing happens. All work at an art school was always in the state of already being elapsed, he said. In former times, they have been working at the art school, whoever you ask will affirm that, he said, but at the moment, nobody is working, because all of them have just shortly gone out, or are ill, or are visiting a seminar or are at home writing a theoretical essay or are having an art crisis.

The only thing you can always find at the art school, he said, is, as he had already stated, the art school's dirt. The art school's dirt had permanent and not displaceable presence at an art school. And the art school's dirt had assimilated that notorious absence of teaching staff and

students, yes, had literally sponged it, and in that state of notorious absence, the art school's dirt bummed around. The art school's dirt, he said, is the substance, is the essence of that eternal and perpetually endured absence at the art school.

The only thing, he said, which burned down on that unfortunate day, had been the art school's dirt. He regretted the burning of the art school, he was regretting it immediately and at the very first moment. I am aware of my guilt, he said. My guilt is my error in reasoning. I got from an error in reasoning into a conception error. I was lagging the ludicrous thought to be able to form the art conception to a pedagogical conception. I thought I would be able to convert my image conception as art conception into a pedagogical and finally into an art school's conception, he said. In one case, my images were disgraced, in the other case, the art school suffered.

This error in his reasoning, his conception error, had brought about nothing else than victims, and he had not yet talked about those victims which are of highest number. He had, he said, not yet talked about the art school students. The conversion, the culpable conversion of the art concept into an educational concept, directed the students, just like blind chickens, right to the edge of a deep, big, dark hole. And even there, standing at the abyss, the scales were not removed from their eyes, but instead, there, at the end of their studies, they fell senselessly down that hole. Blinded by gestures of forgivingness, fooled by the efforts to reconcile the art conception and a pedagogical conception, they were lured into destruction.

The ruin, he said, was that through the pedagogical conception, through the educational conception, they were also put upon with a professional conception. But that had not been enough, and finally a success conception was supplied right after. At the art school, the art conception was converted into an educational conception, then into a professional conception, and then into a success conception, and they had almost reached the point at which they would convert it into a life conception and marriage conception and children conception.

All that, however, was a death conception, because the mediation of the art conception into any other conception means death for the art conception. The art conception, he said, is unplaceable, it is immediate. The art conception can only be experienced through its immediateness. The art conception is irreconcilable. The art conception is an impertinence for

all other conceptions. The art conception as an irreconcilable impertinence insisted on its immediate unplaceable otherness, because it was committed to a fundamentally different thing which had to face charge in no category outside its own reference.

He could only repeat again and again, he said, that the art conception was an incommensurateness and that hence the most evil enemy of the art conception was the question for meaning. The question for meaning was, for his sake, a religious question or a philosophical question or a social question, but the question for meaning was not a question of art. The question of art differed from all those many other questions in the fact that it was not a question of meaning, he said. The question of meaning, he said, was thrown back from the art conception. And vice versa, if the question of art was made a question of meaning, it brings nothing other than disasters; keeping in mind what disastrous outcomes had previously occurred as a result of an art conception being converted into a political conception, the blaze in the art school had been a small fire – but this had just slipped his lips. It would be enough, he said, if at the art school, they discontinued to convert the art conception into whatever kinds of conception.

There is, he said, no artist by profession, no professional artist, and there has never been a successful artist, but there has only been the irreconcilable, the unacceptable artist. He would like to explain to me in detail where this irreconcilability comes from, but at this point, it had surely been enough to recapitulate the various misfortunes which had resulted from the disregard of this irreconcilability.

Then he said, visiting time is over. Heaven knows, he had been talking enough. I should please pardon that, he just did not have much opportunity to talk here, so he had been talking due to accumulated needs. These accumulated needs you could, at the end of our conversation, consider as a catchword, as a catchword for the art school. It has also some accumulated needs to talk, he said.

At art schools, there has been talked too much. In the committees of the art school an unproductive rant has spread itself to boredom. In the studios they talk to the students under the pressure of success conceptions, a useless talk, missing the point of possible art conceptions.

What would help, he said, was the conversation. A conversation circling around art conceptions and which is not any more put under pressure by any other conception. It would be a conversation in a pleasant environment, in a clean environment, without any of those traces of work which, in any case, are just keeping up appearances. Work, anyway, could be done much better in other places. Then you could name this place, this house, a small house by the way, just academy. For his sake, you could also choose another name. The most important thing was that the irritating word school did not appear any more.

But now, he said, his speaking time is really over. That's how he finished the conversation, and we said goodbye.