

Interdisciplinary Links in M. K. Čiurlionis Music, Paintings and Texts

In recent years both in the arts and research the category of interdisciplinarity transformed into usual area of creative work or study. What is interdisciplinarity really? Sometimes we just hear the words, however its true meaning remains undisclosed, as well as the understanding may vary according to the country, culture, field etc. The most common understanding of interdisciplinarity most likely emerged from the world of *academia*, and is very much connected to the roots of higher education and research. Interdisciplinarity in universities would most likely be described as combining two and more fields or approaches into one discipline. This includes crossing borders between more closely related subjects, as well as crossovers between humanities, sciences, social sciences, and the arts. If we can say, that in research interdisciplinarity connects very much to the pursuit of common goal to perform a specific task or solve a specific problem, in the arts usually it results in a creation of an artwork, which has a features of several disciplines, according to the boundaries of our European tradition. On an abstract level, interdisciplinarity in all of its forms faces similar challenges, both of a cultural and practical kind.

Very good recent example of interdisciplinarity connected to the arts is the result of international educational project, financed by European Commission, Erasmus intensive programme “Sound Art in City Spaces” (S.A.C.S.), which was implemented annually during the past three years (2009–2011) in Verona, Porto, and Vilnius. S.A.C.S. was organized and coordinated by the Verona Conservatoire. Each year 20 students and 10 teachers from eight different European arts higher education institutions were meeting in particular city and engaging in an innovative creative experience. The project worked across artistic boundaries: visual arts, performing arts, new technologies, as well as social aspect. Each project tried to consider the following aspects: sound, visuals, movement, society, technology, space.

The first event, which took place in May 2009, was selected by the Italian Ministry of Education as an example of “good practice to illustrate the European Year of Creativity and Innovation (2009)”.

The main aims of the project were:

a) to teach students from different disciplines to use their skills and work with sounds in new ways; to take sound-art into the city; to work in the public spaces as a democratic right; to communicate with citizens and surprise them in the street with sound-art performances in an innovative way; to be “producers” and “artists” and have control over their projects.

b) to create a meeting ground where students and teachers find ways of working together; where everyone is given the possibility to make changes, participate and learn of the different ways of handling problems; and in which there is discussion on future developments in the academy curriculum.

After three years of work, despite all the obstacles faced, aims were clearly reached. However, are these ideas really new, where do they come from?

Interdisciplinary cooperation is a valued element in the innovation process, which is important not only as the final outcome, but also concerns the aspect of its conduct and implementation. Such processes (with the participation of specialists from various fields) often contribute towards finding of new approaches. On the other hand, they are difficult to define, in each separate case non-traditional problems are encountered, which are unsolvable by conventional means. Especially in recent years interdisciplinarity became a panacea, which should solve many of the issues raised in the new age. Unfortunately, such a declarative approach often is superficial and leads to its reasonable criticism.

The real interdisciplinary innovation arises from the break of social boundaries of perceived disciplines. Not only today, when in the reality of so called “knowledge economy”, it is often the case that the right knowledge to solve a problem is in a different place than the problem itself. There are also many problems that need more than one kind of knowledge or experience to solve them. To my understanding, interdisciplinary trends in innovation lead us from “knowledge economy” to “creative economy”, which pinpoints, that features and abilities, which are traditionally classified as typical for artists are essential for the future of any contemporary field, including economy and bussiness.

Interdisciplinary approach can be detected in the source of development of European culture, traced during the course of history and identified in its currently recognized form in movements of the second half of 20th century. Interdisciplinarity in the broadest sense is the counterpart of specialization. Probably from this hails a controversy, most accurately described as a threat to professionalism. The success of interdisciplinarity is often attributed first of all to the combination of skills and features of people, who are first of all remarkable experts in their own field. However, knowledge boundaries cannot simply be ignored or removed.

It is often believed that people with different training have difficulty communicating because they have learned differently, they have learned different skills or languages. There is bigger challenge to that – they are reaching to achieve different goals. Different disciplines have different values, different culture. In order for a new interdisciplinary collective or creation to become effective, it must develop its own shared values and culture. This can take a long time and is quite unpredictable process. Much of the research on interdisciplinarity can only describe “new” disciplines which emerge, rather than discovering how it actually happens and how the process is managed. We can definitely say just that it happens when certain conditions which lead towards creative freedom are met. This leads towards the modern concept of so called “intellectual ecosystem”, where anything can occur and lead us to the new ways.

The features of an artist are essential in such ecology, even more – in case of artistic creation – the “team” sometimes has to co-exist within one human person. Especially today, when the amount of information grows exponentially, it seems that it is impossible for one person to become an universal professional, and the Leonardo da Vinci phenomenon will not repeat. However, the reality of 21st century, which is raising new problems, at the same time offers solutions. In particular, the present position allows us to look into phenomena seemingly analyzed long time ago and to discover relevant points. Such analysis first of all is essential for the development of new ecosystems and economies in our society and managing this process as a whole.

The work and life of Lithuanian composer and painter M. K. Čiurlionis serves as relatively early example of what we consider an innovative way of thinking. Interdisciplinary dimension of M. K. Čiurlionis oeuvre is heterogenous. First of all, he has acquired professional training both in music and fine arts. This is closely related to the mentioned controversy of interdisciplinarity and specialization, as confirmed by informal discussions of Lithuanian artists, where professional musicians are more impressed by M. K. Čiurlionis paintings, and professional fine artists – on the contrary – his music.

Another dimension opens up in terms of synaesthesia and its relation to the conception of the importance of creativity in all fields, which is very popular today, as described before. It is difficult to assess the extent of neurological synaesthesia properties attributable to M. K. Čiurlionis, however when we look at his creative work there is no doubt that deep ties exist between the creative origins of his musical and visual legacy. By the way, the research of this aspect itself is a perfect example of the need for interdisciplinary approach to reveal the essence, as the professionals of arts history and criticism, psychology and neuroscience need to be involved. Expertise of just one of the fields is insufficient.

The analysis of M. K. Čiurlionis case could reveal fundamental ties between synaesthesia and creative personality traits. Maybe synaesthesia is just an extended dimension of creativity? A speculation for now, however recent researches in similar areas hint, that it is likely. It is connected first of all to the openness, flexibility and divergence of mind. Strong opinion exists, that these features exist in kids, however they get educated out of it and finally put into the boundaries of existing paths and disciplines.

Looking from a position of an all inclusive creativity, openness to interdisciplinarity is a natural state of mind. In the most simple sense it is just a broad view of the cultivated person, which can be deepened with the acquisition of the expertise in different fields (or through the assistance of appropriate specialists). In such way it is possible to get free from existing standards, which are determined by the educational, social and aesthetic traditions of each field. It is safe to say, that such divergent thinking was typical for M. K. Čiurlionis.

M. K. Čiurlionis artistic works include music, paintings and texts, and we can easily relate his creations to interdisciplinarity, as described above.

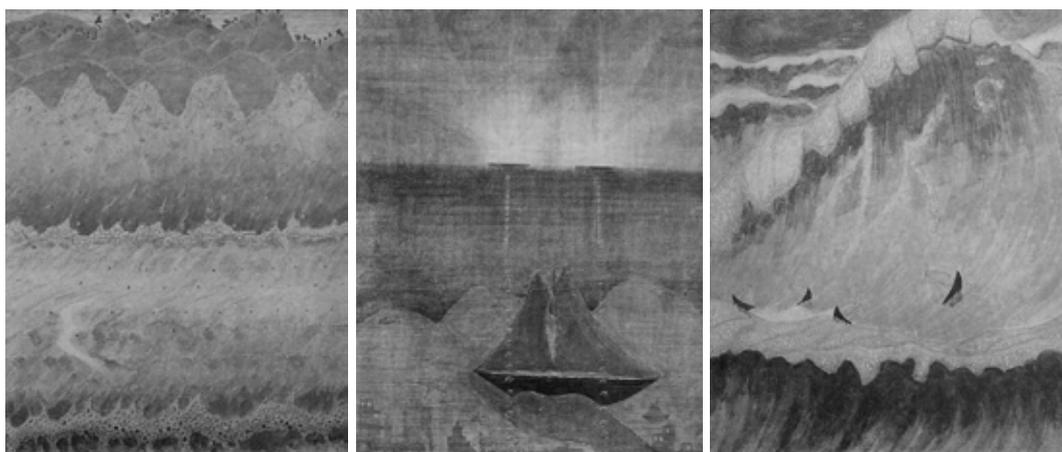
Just to give one clear example – certain symbols or entities exist throughout all of the work of M. K. Čiurlionis. One of the strongest is the sea.

The excerpt from his letters:

“Do you remember that black sunset and the sea? Do you remember, how waves played and sung for us? Do you remember, how you were offering to me the ball of light? Do you remember? ...but we didn't know each other then” October 11, 1908.

Already from this citation it is very clear, how both musical and visual it is. The same concept exists in M. K. Čiurlionis painting cycle “Sonata of the Sea”, painted in 1908. [See Example 1]

Example 1. M. K. Čiurlionis. *Sonata of the Sea* (Allegro. Andante. Finale)



It is agreed, that music of M. K. Čiurlionis exists in visual form and vice versa. The cycle of 3 pieces names “The Sea. A cycle of small landscapes” (also written in 1908) interconnects with paintings as a “inversion” (musical piece named as a painting, and paintings named as musical pieces), and – again – they are very much similar in their “tones”. The mood and tempo of 3 pieces also very clearly correspond to the painting cycle. [See Example 2.]

Example 2. M. K. Čiurlionis. *The Sea. Cycle of Small Lanscapes* (excerpts)

JŪRA MAŽŪ PEIZAŽŪ CIKLAS **THE SEA. CYCLE OF SMALL LANDSCAPES**

I. VL 317(a) (1908)

Moderato e liberamente

II.

VL 317(b) (1908)

Andante

p *pp* *p* *pp* *meno p*

III.

VL 317(c) (1908)

Allegro impetuoso

mf *cresc.* *string.* *sul basso* *f* *dim.* *slent.*

Through the analysis of the oeuvre and particular examples of M. K. Čiurlionis work from the discussed perspectives, emerge the characteristics of his interdisciplinary dimension. Its main feature is a coherent entirety, where interdisciplinarity exists in an universal form, which is by no means superficial or trivial. The M. K. Čiurlionis continuum of creative qualities and its perception in the 21st century is particularly relevant to reach a new level of quality in interdisciplinary cooperation and creative work. As described by Sir Ken Robinson – creativity is the ideas, which have value. Čiurlionis legacy has a value today – be it artistic, research or economical one, and we build on it further, as even this very conference and publication shows.

Santrauka

Tarpdisciplininės M. K. Čiurlionio muzikos, dailės bei tekstų sąsajos

Tiek meno, tiek mokslo srityse pastaraisiais metais vis dažniau išskiriama tarpdiscipliniškumo kategorija tampa įprastine kūrybos ar tiriamojo darbo sritimi. Tarpdisciplininė perspektyva tapo svarbiu kūrybinių procesų elementu, skatinančiu naujų požiūrių paieškas. Antra vertus, tarpdisciplininiai reiškiniai yra sunkiau apibrėžiami, kiekvienu atveju dažniausiai susiduriama su netradicine problematika. Ypač pastaraisiais metais tarpdiscipliniškumas pradėtas laikyti panacėja, galinčia išspręsti daugybę naujajame amžiuje iškilusių estetinių klausimų. Deja, kartais tarpdiscipliniškumas sąlygoja pavišutiniškumą ir yra pagrįstai kritikuojamas.

Tarpdiscipliniškumas plačiąja prasme yra atsvara specializacijai. Greičiausiai iš čia ir kyla kontraversija, tiksliausiai apibūdinama kaip grėsmė profesionalumui. Tarpdiscipliniškumo sėkmė dažnai priskiriama visų pirma kūrybiniame procese naudojamų įgūdžių ir kompetencijų deriniui. Ypač šiandien, kai informacijos kiekis auga eksponentiškai, atrodo, kad vienam žmogui tapti nepakeičiamu bei universaliu profesionalu neįmanoma ir Leonardo da Vinčio fenomenas nebepasikartos. Vis dėlto iš XXI amžiaus perspektyvos galime kitaip pažvelgti į, atrodytų, seniai išanalizuotus reiškinius ir atrasti aktualių dalykų.

M. K. Čiurlionio kūryboje egzistuojantis tarpdisciplininis matmuo yra nevienalytis. Visų pirma kūrėjas įgijo profesionalų išsilavinimą tiek muzikos, tiek dailės srityse. Menininkas, kilęs iš lenkakalbių, sutikęs būsimą žmoną ėmė mokytis lietuvių kalbos. M. K. Čiurlionio tekstai, ypač laišakai, gali būti laikomi svarbia jo kūrybinių idėjų išraiška dar viena forma.

Kita dimensija atsiveria kalbant apie sinesteziją ir ją siejant su kūrybiškumo koncepcija. Sunku vertinti, kiek sinestezija kaip neurologinė savybė buvo būdinga M. K. Čiurlioniui, tačiau žvelgiant į jo kūrybą nekyla abejonių dėl gilių tiesioginių ryšių tarp garsinio, vizualaus ir tekstinio kūrybinio palikimo pradų. Iš tokios perspektyvos M. K. Čiurlionio kūrybos fenomenas padeda nustatyti esminius ryšius tarp sinestezijos bei kūrybiškos asmenybės savybių, kurios šiandien yra laikomos svarbiomis.

Žvelgiant iš visa apimančio kūrybiškumo pozicijų, atvirumas tarpdiscipliniškumui yra natūrali būseną. Pačiame paprasčiausiame pavidale tai yra tiesiog platus išsilavinusio žmogaus požiūris, kuris gali būti gilinamas įgyjant kelių sričių profesionalo bruožus. Tokiu būdu galima išsivaduoti iš egzistuojančių normų, kurias nulemia edukacinės, socialinės ir estetiškos tradicijos. Galima drąsiai teigti, kad toks nestandartinis mąstymas buvo būdingas M. K. Čiurlioniui.

Tiriant M. K. Čiurlionio muzikos, dailės ir tekstų sąsajas, ryškėja menininko tarpdiscipliniškumo charakteristika. Pagrindinė jos savybė – nuosekli visuma, kurioje tarpdiscipliniškumas egzistuoja universaliu pavidalu, kuris jokiais būdais negali būti pavadintas paviršutinišku ar trivialiu. Šis M. K. Čiurlionio kūrybinių savybių kontinuumas ir jo suvokimas XXI amžiuje yra ypač aktualus siekiant naujos tarpdisciplininės ir kūrybinės veiklos kokybės.