

# SUMMARY

## **Design of the blot. Social history of fountain pens**

It is a pioneering monograph on writing instruments in Poland, as well as one of the first books in the world literature devoted to the social and cultural functions of fountain pen design in the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The book presents how the civilizational changes taking place in the world at that time influenced the development of these instruments and how their evolution in turn influenced the lifestyle of the people writing with them. This view allows us to show the creative function of design in creating social relations in which the shape of the human world became involved, subjected to enormous pressure of technological, economic and cultural challenges at that time.

Through this approach to design in the development of modern and then postmodern literacy, I wanted to show how the inventors of fountain pens, their designers and producers, as well as advertisement creators, sellers and users in the 20<sup>th</sup> century became actors in a spectacle directed by writing instruments. Fountain pens have this in themselves that due to the ability to perpetuate thoughts and feelings, they are peculiar mediators between the material world and the spiritual experiences of people. Therefore, they belong to the tools that form the basis of our civilization, which make human subjectivity deeply present, while maintaining their own, substantive intentionality. This is due to the emotional ties that connect these instruments with their owners, who often see them as an extension of their writing hand, which in no way one can experience in relation to a computer keyboard.

With this in mind, I looked at fountain pens and their users (as well as the times that brought them together) a little bit in a way Jorge Carrión did in his book *Bookstores*, showing an image of the world through the prism of book trade and the culture-forming role of the places where they were sold. That is why the content and composition of the *Design of the blot* reflects the complex dialectic of the life of the fountain pens and the fate of the people who designed, produced, traded and used them to write. Each of the ten chapters is devoted to one of the fountain pens, emblematic for a given decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which at that time most accurately reflected technology and design, and also made the social aspect of the factual and symbolic functions of writing instruments more present. The text of the book consists of 250 pages of a standard typescript, accompanied by over 80 carefully selected, black and white illustrations, creating the visual context of the story, as well as a kind of metatextual narrative.

Therefore, the action of this story covers the years 1900-2000, although I often go back to the distant past, and also look into modern times. It takes place on three continents:

America, Europe and Asia, where the conditions necessary to undertake the industrial production of fountain pens occurred the earliest. Their history takes place in seven countries, which played the biggest role in the development of literary design at that time, and also had a powerful impact on the fate of humanity during this period. Therefore, the reader travels through time and space, observing changes in the design and technology of fountain pens and also tracks how these metamorphoses shaped the rituals of everyday life in distant parts of the world. This allows one to look at the past century as a kind of “century of things” – times when objects mediated and created social relations in an unprecedented way, substantively transforming our civilization. So this is a story about how by changing the design of fountain pens we changed ourselves and how it affected the world we live in today.

As an inspiration for writing a book about it served my long-term research into the literature of the olden days, in which I was particularly interested in the authors’ writing workshop, understood not so much as the art of narrative, but as the material furnishings of their studio. Recently, I returned to this issue, discussing the impact of fountain pen design on writing culture, and thus on the substantive dimension of literature in several articles. These issues, so far overlooked and neglected, are gaining more and more interest in the world today, mainly due to the reception of Bruno Latour’s works and the research “return to objects”. In Poland this approach is still outside the mainstream of humanities research, which made me even more reflective.

When writing the *Design of the blot*, I was also guided by other important considerations arising from the premises of the “new humanities”, which suggest a change in the traditional poetics of scientific discourse. Dispassionate, sterile and lacking in emotive references narrative style subjected to criticism here, postulating a new way of describing the subject of research that goes beyond the boundaries of “scientific” language. That is why in my book I decided to move away from the “objectified” narrative towards the freer poetics of the essay, with its expressive means of expression, engaging the curiosity and imagination of readers. Maintaining the scientific rigor of verifiability (footnotes, bibliography) and text communication, I gave it a more nuanced literary shape, better reflecting the essence of humanistic cognition. I was prompted by Susanne Langer’s works, whose creation initiated the “affective turn” in the study of art, which is still considered an experiment in our country, although it has been accepted and recognized in the world for years.

Finally I was wondering over the recipients of my book, which I treat as an academic essay, not devoid of any popularizing or journalistic qualities, which allows me to think about a wider audience. The connection of fountain pen design with phenomena shaping the civilization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century means that the danger of niche issues, which could distract potential readers from reading, disappears here. Therefore, I think that the original perspective of the fountain pen narrative will make many people reach for the *Design of the Blot* interested not only in the design aspect of these items, but also its social and culture-forming functions.

The book is dedicated to everyone who wants to broaden their understanding of the world with a new, surprising point of view, which creates a reflection on the role that fountain pens played in the experience of the last century. It is intended for readers who in their relations with objects see today the important context of everyday life, as well as inspiration to reflect on the truth of things. I am convinced that designers, culture scholars, historians, sociologists, design researchers, as well as literary scholars and literature critics can usefully use *Design of the blot*. I think this book will also be interesting reading for those who are still writing with fountain pens and feel an emotional connection with them. Among them is the rapidly growing group of collectors in Poland and in the world who have so far used mainly foreign literature and the Internet.