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BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN ARCHITECTURE

POMIĘDZY TRADYCJĄ I NOWOCZESNOŚCIĄ W ARCHITEKTURZE

Abstract

Nowadays, subsequent technological achievements, combined with rapidly changing fashions and lifestyles, as well as ultra-consumerism and surrealistic materialism, impose a focus on what is present and future. It seems that there is no time to look back – in the past, in the direction of tradition. In art, including architecture, currently the most interesting is what's new, unique, exciting, breaking yesterday's patterns. The most amazing works breaking the media are stereotypes. This is where questions arise about the value of new works, created in a hurry, often without a context, with a shallow cultural, intellectual and emotional foundation. So, in the conditions of homogenization of all scientific disciplines, can a new valuable art, including architecture, be created without taking into account the continuum of tradition? Is it possible to preserve cultural heritage based only on modern materials, technologies and current doctrines? Should thinking in terms of sustainable development of space take into account the balance of tradition and modernity?

Keywords: tradition, modernity, cultural heritage, architectural identity

Streszczenie

Współcześnie kolejne zdobycze technologiczne, połączone z szybko zmieniającymi się modami i stylami życia, a także ultra-konsumpcjonizmem i surrealistycznym materializmem, narzucają skupienie się na tym co teraźniejsze i przyszłe. Wydaje się że na oglądanie się wstecz – w przeszłość – w kierunku tradycji, nie ma czasu. W sztuce, w tym architekturze, obecnie najbardziej interesujące jest to co nowe, wyjątkowe, podniecające, przełamujące wczorajsze wzorce. Do mediów najbardziej przebijają się dzieła coraz bardziej zadziwiające, łamiące stereotypy. Tu rodzą się pytania o wartości nowych dzieł, powstających w pośpiechu, często bez kontekstu, o płytkiej podbudowie kulturowej, intelektualnej i emocjonalnej. Czy zatem w warunkach homogenizacji wszystkich dyscyplin naukowych nowa wartościowa sztuka, w tym architektura, może powstawać bez uwzględnienia kontinuum tradycji? Czy jest możliwe zachowanie dziedzictwa kulturowego w oparciu jedynie o nowoczesne materiały, technologie i dotychczasowe doktryny? Czy myślenie w kategoriach zrównoważonego rozwoju przestrzeni powinno uwzględniać równowagę tradycji i nowoczesności?

Słowa kluczowe: tradycja, nowoczesność, dziedzictwo kulturowe, tożsamość architektoniczna

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tradition and modernity can be in opposition and complement each other. Tradition, associated with existing patterns, forms, canons, consolidation of experiences will be perceived as a status quo. Modernity *vice versa*, having connotations with youth, energy, rebellion or risk will be associated with development.

The identity of society is based on tradition, handed down from generation to generation. Nowadays, subsequent technological achievements, combined with rapidly changing fashions and lifestyles, as well as ultra-consumerism and surrealistic materialism, impose a focus on what is present and future. It seems that there is no time to look back – in the past, in the direction of tradition. In art, including architecture, currently the most interesting is what's new, unique, exciting, breaking yesterday's patterns. The most amazing works breaking the media are breaking stereotypes. At the same time, the contextual references to tradition that are taken out of context are often of a commercial nature or for the infantile recipient. The situation in every corner of the globe, with each passing year, seems to follow a disturbing direction of cutting off the roots. There are questions about the value of what is new, usually created in a hurry, often without a context, with a shallow cultural, intellectual and emotional foundation. So, in the conditions of homogenization of all scientific disciplines, can a new valuable art, including architecture, be created without taking into account the continuum of tradition? Is it possible to preserve cultural heritage based only on modern materials, technologies and current doctrines? If not, what threats can we face? If so, are we able to predict what path we will follow? Should thinking in terms of sustainable development of space take into account the balance of tradition and modernity?

2. BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Over the millennia, both the development of the sphere of architecture and all artistic matter has been a series of constantly interweaving ideas and thoughts. In every age, both traditional and modern art existed. But even the most radicalized novelty remained in dialogue with tradition, strengthening this continuity. Regardless of whether the dominant element was the element of tradition or modernity, the transitions between even very different worlds, even Romanism and Gothic, took place in an evolutionary way. Sometimes almost imperceptibly. The variety and richness of forms influenced the building of bonds of local societies. The construction of societies living in the continuum of culture was based on maintaining a sense of continuity. Tradition perceived as inspiration did not have to be a ballast for modernity – it was the basis of functioning in society, helping to find itself in the surrounding reality. It was the basis for dialogue with the new.

Probably the most spectacular discrepancy between tradition and modernity occurred with the appearance of the Modern Movement, assuming a total departure from historical styles and any stylization. The new creative method, which derives the form, function and construction of the building primarily from standardized material conditions, has marginalized the context of the place, its uniqueness and diversity. Traditional solutions that naturally take into account sustainable development have been replaced with universal ones. The easiness of their repro-

duction has led to supralocal spreading, contributing to the simultaneous destruction of natural tissue in space, and at the same time built by generations of cultural wealth. Of course, the new language did not have to ignore local traditions, which confirms the work of such architects as Alvaro Aalto, Imre Makovecz or Alvaro Siza.

For transformations on an urban scale, modernist operations taken after the Second World War were particularly devastating, when in the name of progress, the classic forms of many cities were deformed. The introduction of multi-lane routes of circular communication intersecting historical urban tissue caused not only irreversible degradation of space, but also serious and irreversible social, health and environmental problems. Large housing complexes, often in the form of identical blocks, focused on a small space, have changed the traditional concept of living, neighborhoods, loosening social ties. At the end of the twentieth century, initiatives to restore the balance of space became a reflection on the break with cultural tradition. The reference to tradition and well-established patterns directed actions aimed at returning to the modern European city rejected by modernism.

The accusation of certain well-established rules of conduct, ways of interpreting phenomena and customs in the world could be a source of loss, a crisis of values and ideas, chaos, dehumanization, insecurity. Breaking down, passed from generation to generation, fixed over the centuries or even millennia of the rules of shaping space, contributed to the destruction not only of the environment in the material dimension, but also social, economic, health, environmental and cultural.

Nowadays, in the era of the incredible pace of globalization, the selected information flow, societies are cut faster and more effectively from natural sources of patterns. At the same time, during the last few decades, if you did not break up, it was the most serious in the history of the world that it violated the relationship with nature. All this has become the source of deepening the ideological chaos of both individuals and entire societies. The paradox of modern times is the return to tradition, perceived in terms of modernity. In the past, roads and all infrastructure related to motorization were evidence of modernity of cities. Today, it has become a luxury to limit car traffic and free space for pedestrians and cyclists.

One hundred years ago T.S. Eliot in the essay "Tradition and individual talent" (1919), in reference to literature, wrote about a strong relationship of tradition and modernity: *Novelty is possible only through tapping into tradition*². The poet draws attention to the importance of the cultural continuum as a base for the emergence of a new one that is to remain in dialogue with the work of its predecessors. Ignorance of the cultural context condemns the works of art, including architecture, to a fiasco in the mental dimension. Juliusz Żórawski was right when he wrote that *Even the most fanciful fantasy of an individual is unable to create something completely new, something that is not stuck in an element in some form and is not compact in its field of internal state*³. The Catalan philosopher Eugenio d'Orsa tells us: *Everything is not tradition is plagiarism*⁴.

Juhani Pallasmaa draws attention to the fact that *The constant and obsessive search for newness has already turned into a distinct repetitiousness and monotony; unexpectedly the*

² Eliot T.S., *Tradition and Individual Talent* [in:] *Selected Essays*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York 1964.

³ Żórawski J., *O budowie formy architektonicznej*, Arkady, Warszawa 1962, p. 160.

⁴ Pallasmaa J., *An Archipelago of Authenticity. The Task of Architecture in Consumer Culture* [in:] Caicco G. (ed.), *Architecture, Ethics, and the Personhood of Place*, University Press of New England, Hanover-London 2007, p. 46.

quest for uniqueness seems to result in sameness, repetition and boredom. Newness is usually a formal surface quality without a deeper mental echo that could energize the work and its repeated encounter⁵. Departure from the original motives of taming time and space causes that Architecture withers into a meaningless formal game when it loses its echo in the timeless myths and traditions of building⁶. Álvaro Siza, whose work Kenneth Frampton includes in the trend of “critical regionalism”, treating tradition as complementary to innovation, states: *It is impossible to make something entirely new. But the reality is that nothing is new but modified or transformed. The new only comes from new combinations and materials, but nothing is completely new. We, architects are constantly being influenced by what is around us*⁷. In his well-known aphorism, “Architects do not invent anything, they just transform reality” expresses humbleness for the continuum of tradition. What is new, therefore, arises from our experiences, comparisons, reappraisals, memories, images, forms and signs from the past. Similarly, in music, literature, theater or design, artists are not ashamed of their inspiration by tradition, interacting with the achievements of their predecessors. In the process of creating, in particular, folk art can be a rich intellectual, spiritual and emotional background (Ill. 1). References to the past do not have to include quotes, but they can remain in dialogue. Conscious or unconscious references to tradition are and will remain natural, in particular with regard to architectural form – *Creative imagination cannot create entirely new things. Some that have never existed anywhere in any way. Those that would exceed human imagination or human psychic capacity*⁸.

A visible problem of ultra consuming societies is the necessity of constantly inventing newer and more spectacular forms. The pressures of the media, investors, time and, above all, money cannot, however, be the sole inspiration for creating valuable architecture. Objects detached from the context of the environment and not respecting tradition usually contribute to the destruction of space, as well as social changes. It’s a kind of vicious circle.

Therefore, the question is whether the situation in which we move too far away from the roots of tradition may change? What mechanisms and means will be able to resist cultural entropy? How can innovations inherent in new products contribute to the protection of cultural heritage?

2.1. IMITATIONS OF TRADITION

Tradition in modern spaces can be a kind of supplement to authenticate modern spaces. This phenomenon is present in many spatial contexts. They can be observed in “pseudo-places” or “non-places” opposing classically understood places in space, related to a specific, local culture⁹. These artificial, anonymous, functional only functional hybrids created for deformation deform traditional, proven spatial systems, both in architectural and urban scale (Ill. 2). Big shopping centers, deprived of emotional layer, continuation, atmosphere and mood, perform new func-

⁵ Pallasmaa J., *Tradition and newness. Continuity and meaning in architecture and art*, Autoportret, 2017, no. 2, p. 30.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

⁷ Belogolovski V., an interview with Álvaro Siza: *Beauty Is the Peak of Functionality!* 11.01.20117, <https://www.archdaily.com/803250/interview-with-alvaro-siza-beauty-is-the-peak-of-functionality> (access: 30.06.2019).

⁸ Żórawski J., *op. cit.*, p. 181.

⁹ Marc Augé, French ethnologist and culture anthropologist, in work: *Non-places: Introduction to an Antropology of Supermodernity* conducted research on global cultural changes in the context of new spaces, presenting complex theory of supermodernity.

tions, reserved until recently for traditional places – street, market square. Transit airport spaces, with standardized functions in almost every corner of the world, offer quasi-regional images colored with gadgets torn out of the context. Interiors that support selected elements of tradition create a climate of false familiarity. Similar dummy traditions, not building relationships, deprived of identity, can be found in other “quasi-places” around the world: railway stations, metro stations, hotel rooms or public transport.

In Poland, adulteration of space with pseudo-traditional elements includes, on the one hand, the invasion of Highland architecture and its mutations, and on the other – new objects that have connotations with the old form of the Polish mansion (Ill. 3). Cultural culturally alien objects that serve residential or gastronomic functions are to value their owners, or perform only a utilitarian function. This is unfortunately a kind of cultural phenomenon that distinguishes our country from among other Western European countries, including our southern and western neighbors.

A thinking person surrounded by more and more dummy must feel manipulated and cheated. In view of the mass of the phenomenon and the lack of alternatives to take advantage of other offers, the process of formatting the individual and, at the same time, entire societies, is progressing and seems to be irreversible.

2.2. CULTURE HOMOGENIZATION

Culture homogenisation is an important reason for the disappearance of unique local cultures. The forgiveness of “who are we?” And “where did we come from?” Is supported by the progressive mass production, globalization, commercialization of the world and the massification of symbolic culture. The problem concerns, in particular, countries or regions that have excessively opened themselves to the influence of different dominant cultures or have quickly grown rich. An alarming phenomenon has become ignorance or underestimation of one’s own history and culture.

In Asian countries, new, imported architecture, deprived of local identity, expressing primarily utilitarian values, usually international corporations, is increasingly replacing or dominating traditional regional architecture. In China, as well as in the Arab world, including the United Arab Emirates, the openness to Western culture has become the cause of irreversible transformations in space. Uncritical reliance on imported building styles can be associated with a lack of trust in traditional methods, often associated with poverty and delays. Thanks to this, it makes it easier to introduce culturally foreign, context-free elements to the circulation. The increasing openness to the participation of Western architecture indicates the greater acceptability of these methods as more appropriate than local ones. For the societies of the Middle Kingdom, it is not a problem to copy not only the single most-known objects, but also urban assumptions, mainly from the West European culture. It is amazing to remove valuable historical buildings and replace them with commercial architecture.

We are therefore witnesses of constant, almost revolutionary changes. Fading artefacts that build the identity of societies are irretrievably erased from memory. Probably the most devious effect may be the loss of respect for yourself and your own identity.

2.3. CULTURAL HERITAGE: TRADITION VS MODERNITY

The protection of cultural heritage will always be associated with tradition. Traditional methods and technologies have ensured durability of monuments for centuries. At present,



the excess of valuable objects, created also in the last two centuries, forces us to constantly search for ideas for their new development and, perhaps most importantly, find sources of their financing. Due to the scale of the problem, it becomes obvious that the preservation of cultural heritage must also allow modern materials and technologies. There is still an open question about the acceptable scope and choice of methods of interference.

The contemporary reconstruction of the Paris cathedral of Notre-Dame is currently a real challenge for today, in which a fire broke out on 15 April 2019. Reconstruction can have at least a few scenarios: from relying only on traditional ones, to an increasing share of modern materials and technologies. The way of reconstruction, as well as conducting renovation and restoration works, will in a specific way integrate tradition and modernity. The choice of technology and materials, and above all the idea for reconstruction, today and in the future, will always remain controversial. The use of historical and traditional materials in their entirety seems almost impossible and at the same time very debatable. Nowadays, it is difficult to imagine social acceptance for rebuilding a roof truss in its original form and the related cutting out of about 1,300 oaks. In the era of the particular importance of ecology, will such a large amount of old-growth be acceptable to a secularised French society? The problem would also be time-consuming work and the lack of craftsmen working with historical methods in wood. Therefore, it may be necessary to look for a new construction material – probably steel. The planned announcement of the competition for the reconstruction of the burnt spire above the presbytery may suggest its modern form. But will the modern form of the spire harmonize with the preserved part of the cathedral? Probably the decisions taken will have a significant impact on other activities in the historical tissue. The new will affect historical and vice versa. Will the current doctrines, therefore, keep up to date? In the context of other activities, including frequent church demolitions in France, will they require re-evaluation? The decisions taken will undoubtedly have an impact on the protection of cultural heritage in the future.

Preserving the heritage of the past in the long-term will require constant searching for a *modus vivendi*. Disregarding tradition can lead to irreversible damage: on an architectural scale, ignorance of traditional technologies and materials can cause devastation of a historic substance, while on an urban scale it can destroy not only space, but also disturb social, economic and cultural balance.

3. SUMMARY

The idea of development is well reflected in the aphorism of Albert Einstein: *Life Is Like Riding a Bicycle. To Keep Your Balance You Must Keep Moving*. Living only with the past and the present time essentially exposes us to stagnation. It seems, therefore, that development must take into account the advantage of modernity. Moving in the impossible to stop the development of all spheres of life inevitable, but also necessary, is to look into the future in a way that takes into account the element of modernity.

- III. 1. Inspired by the tradition a modern office building in The Museum of the Opole Village in Opole-Bierkowice, arch. Arch. I. Wilczek M. Tenczyński, photo by P. Opałka, 2018
- III. 2. Architectural details taken out of the original context, the airport in Mumbai, photo by P. Opałka, 2016
- III. 3. “Bida” Inn in Opole, Highlander folklore in Opole Silesia, photo by P. Opałka, 2018

Today's architecture, which is avant-garde, created in a specific social context under the pressure of ultra: technology, commercialism and consumerism, tomorrow can only remain a venerable tradition. Preserving past achievements, though very important, will result in slow dying. The combination of tradition and modernity can sometimes remind us of a different approach to the architecture of conservators and architects. Relying only on tradition, without looking for a new one will be a symptom of stagnation, dying of culture. Lack of progress would condemn man to existence at the tribal level. The prospect of creating architecture only based on modernity, apart from falsehood and inauthenticity, may result in dangerous social consequences. Architecture created without tradition can be a non-communicative source, create a crisis of cultural trust. The proof can be the uncompromising nature of modernism. The history of architecture constituting a sequence of permanent repetitions, references to the past and the surroundings should be a signpost here.

It seems a truism to say that creating good architecture takes time. What comes quickly passes even faster. Meanwhile, in the era of globalism in every area of life, every day, every year, every decade, we are in a hurry. And man as a creature immersed in history constantly needs references and contexts, which by definition are themselves connected by tradition. References do not have to mean stagnation – they should be a leaven for creating a new one. The closer to the more understandable for the recipient. In interaction, of course, what is tradition, with time, from a different perspective, may take on a different meaning.

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