

MACIEJ JANOWSKI¹

TRADITIONAL SPACE/MODERN PLACE

TRADYCYJNA PRZESTRZEŃ/NOWOCZESNE MIEJSCE

Abstract

The essence of architecture is to give shape and properties to human environment in a dialogue with the broadly understood context. In modernism, that negotiational model was replaced with designing space and its types. The twentieth century was the century of space; the foundations had been laid by cartography, the engine and the telegraph that compressed time and distance to a previously unknown degree. The twenty-first century is the century of place, and more precisely of the struggle for its importance that is being questioned by the attributes of liquid modernity: perfectly designed, repetitive non-places, and also places and spaces of virtual worlds and communities rooted in non-time. At present, creation of the Place with which one can identify as an individual and as member of a given community becomes the most avant-garde aim of architecture.

Keywords: landscape, space, place-core, inhabit

Streszczenie

Istotą architektury jest nadawanie kształtu i właściwości środowisku człowieka w dialogu z szeroko rozumianym kontekstem. W modernizmie zastąpiono ten negocjacyjny model projektowaniem przestrzeni i jej rodzajów. XX w. to wiek przestrzeni, którego fundamentami były kartografia, silnik i telegraf, które doprowadziły do kompresji czasu i odległości w stopniu dotychczas nieznanym. XXI w. jest wiekiem miejsca, a właściwie wiekiem walki o jego znaczenie, które jest poddawane pod wątpliwość przez atrybuty płynnej nowoczesności: perfekcyjnie zaprojektowane, powtarzalne nie-miejsca oraz osadzone w beczasie miejsca i przestrzenie wirtualnych światów oraz społeczności. Współcześnie tworzenie Miejsca, z którym identyfikuje się człowiek jako jednostka i członek wspólnoty staje się najbardziej awangardowym z celów architektury.

Słowa kluczowe: krajobraz, przestrzeń, miejsce-rdzeń, zamieszkiwanie

The twenty-first century is the age of place, the age of fighting for its significance that is being questioned by architecture that focuses on buildings and objects, operates with transparency, reflection and technically sophisticated *anti-gravitational*² acrobatics of forms put in sequentially treated spaces.

¹ D.Sc. Ph.D. Arch. Maciej Janowski, Division of Public Architecture and Housing, the Institute of Architecture, Urbanism and Heritage Protection, Faculty of Architecture, Poznan University of Technology, maciej.janowski@put.poznan.pl; ORCID 0000-0002-3290-208X

² It is worth quoting a fragment of *The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus* (1923): *a new aesthetic of the horizontal begins to develop, which endeavors to counteract the effects of gravity. At the same time the symmetrical relationship of parts of the building and their orientation towards a central axis is being replaced by a new conception of equilibrium which transmutes this dead symmetry of similar parts into asymmetrical but equal balance.* Source: Gropius W., *Teoria i zasady organizacyjne Bauhausu* (1925) [in:] Grabska E., Morawska H. (eds.), *Artyści o sztuce. Od van Gogha do Picassa*, PWN, Warszawa 1969, p. 396. Quotation translator's own translation.

The transparency of forms, overlapping and shifting of plans and a multitude of viewpoints – all that replaced the Renaissance perspective, just like the accessibility of the constantly developed means of transport (rail, then passenger cars and airplanes) made distance less significant and changed people's lifestyles. Communication devices (telegraph, telephone, satellite connection, the Internet) globalized information, ideas and contacts. Architecture has been suited – in line with Walter Gropius's postulate – to *our world of machines, radio, fast cars*, through the *determination of the form of space*³. That synergy of the language of abstract forms and movement with the *truly miraculous widening of the life horizons of every man* resulted in the situation when *no corner of the world is closed in its geometrical area and its life becomes in many moments the life of the remaining parts of the world*⁴. Industrialization of time and space, turning them into a kind of commodity that can be controlled and traded, has entirely changed people's relations with their environment. Likewise, the environment itself – landscape – as a natural plane of reference was replaced by cityscape. Marcel Proust wrote: *The places we have known do not belong solely to the world of space in which we situate them for our greater convenience.*

The man was transferred from a place into space; technical progress has made it possible for the man to shape space as he pleased, and he also could experiment with it, knowing that it was endless, just like the possibilities of its transformation. Axonometric buildings by Bauhaus and de Stijl architects, Le Corbusier's compact composition, collisions of displaced lattices in Eisenman's numbered houses, residual spaces by Tschumi and Coop Himmelblau, curving and morphing of forms by Greg Lynn, combining material architecture with virtual spaces and parametric architecture are other results of those experiments, with the direction of those experiments remaining changeable and not clearly defined. It was Charles Jencks who described the development of architecture as *a series of discontinuous narratives*. The architect, just like Bergson's artist, is a *contester and a tracker of novelty*, whose task is to *praise every form of originality, also the impudent and the boldest one giving up all the motives and themes already used*⁵. Such a radically formulated postulate led to *inventing new architecture every day*, with the originality of the shaped spaces as the main criterion and other determinants, including context, becoming secondary. It has become a modern tradition to shape architecture as various kinds of space perceived in subsequent dynamic sequences – as Henri Lefebvre stated: *each definition of architecture requires analysing and explaining the concept of space*⁶.

On the one hand, the imperative of avant-gardism – operating freely with space and form – leads to unquestionable development of the means of expression in architecture, but on the other hand it causes the focus of attention to shift towards abstract notions with lack of guarantee that specific and long-term results will be achieved. Because, as Aldo van Eyck says, *Whoever attempts to solve the riddle of space in the abstract way will construct the outline of emptiness and call it space. Whoever attempts to meet humanity in the abstract way will speak with his echo and call this a dialogue. The result is close to a crime*⁷.

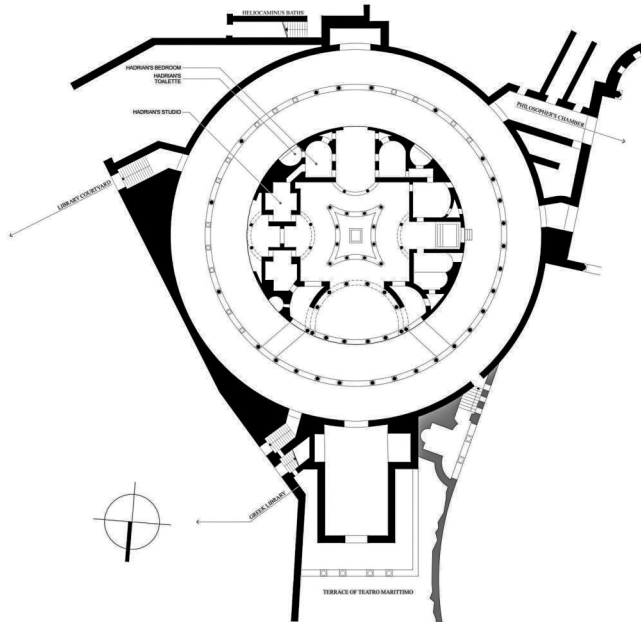
³ *Ibidem*. Quotation translator's own translation.

⁴ Ortega y Gasset J., *Bunt mas*, Replika, Poznań 2016, pp. 49–50. Quotation translator's own translation.

⁵ Boccioni U. *et al.*, *Manifest malarzy futurystów* [in:] Grabska E., Morawska H. (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 150. Quotation translator's own translation.

⁶ Lefebvre H., *The production of Space*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1991, p. 15.

⁷ van Eyck, A. *Place and Occasion*, 1965, http://www.geocities.ws/mitchellmosesstudio/place_and_occasion.pdf (access: 07.06.2019).



III. 1. Hadrian's Villa as a prototype of the architectural portrait and the place-core model at the same time (Maritime Theatre as the emperor's secret studio) the extension areas of the garden and libraries, the philosophers' room, theatre, etc. (photo and drawing by the author)

Constant experimentation with space (including, among other things, the discontinued 1990s experiments with virtual reality in architecture), with form, with the very design process and with users made the situation resemble the architectural Casanova syndrome; topics are undertaken and admired to the moment when temporary goals and spectacular results are achieved, and then abandoned for new ones to be treated in the same manner.

Thinking in terms of space, designing its various types, was widespread already in the 1960s (*Zeitgeist* + curtain walls), and nowadays it has become a tradition well-grounded in both theory and practice. Meanwhile, the essence and the aim of architecture is giving shape and properties to human environment in a dialogue with the widely understood context or, in the words of Juhani Pallasmaa, *giving space sense, transforming the continuum of physical space into experimental places and making space usable, both in the practical and the mental aspect*⁸. At present, creating the Place with which one can identify as an individual and as a community member becomes the most avant-garde aim of architecture, mainly because creating a place is closely connected with the two basic and yet complex subjects remaining in dynamic relations: nature and man.

1. THE IMPULSE OF THE PLACE

The first impulse is the nature of the environment. Traditional architecture is a continuation of nature and, just like nature, it exerts its influence on various areas of human sensory experience that interact with one another. Thus, the human body experiences the environment of which it forms part through movement and senses. As Charles W. Moore and Kent C. Bloomer write: *each genuine place may be memorized, partly because it is unique and partly because it has an influence on our bodies and generates enough associations to keep it in our personal worlds*⁹. Following that line of thinking, one should assume that the place created by architecture should contain a ‘trace’ of kinship with nature that would be recognizable for the user. The user, meanwhile, should be able to read that trace on the basis of memorized experience¹⁰ on the sensory and emotional level, but also cosmological one. Norberg-Schulz aptly remarked that the man when creating his dwelling place *builds what he has already seen*, complementing the natural landscape with *what is missing* and making the natural structure more definite. Combinations of characteristic landscape features, colours, scents and sounds are memorized and identified as typical and “proper”, and then labelled as belonging to a specific place. For a human being, the sum of sensory impulses provided by staying in a landscape arranges itself into a matrix to which all the other models

⁸ McCarter R., Pallasmaa J., *Understanding Architecture. A Primer on Architecture as Experience*, Phaidon, London 2012, p. 405.

⁹ Moore Ch., Bloomer K., *Body, Memory and Architecture*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1977.

¹⁰ Christian Norberg-Schulz, representing the phenomenological approach to the nature-man relation, terms this process “natural understanding” and defines its four categories: objects, cosmic order, character, light and time. While objects and order relate to space, character and light shape up the atmosphere of the place. Time, as a factor determining stability and changeability, makes space and character parts of the *living reality described as genius loci* Source: Norberg-Schulz Ch., *Genius loci. Toward a phenomenology of architecture*, Rizzoli, New York 1976, pp. 23–32.

are compared and adjusted – including forms and spaces, colour schemes created by the man himself or materials used by him¹¹.

A person who has the aforementioned natural model in his or her mind is able to evaluate the relations between architecture and its environment. He or she is able to undertake actions, both collective and individual, whose scale, forms, spaces, the employed materials, textures and colours will be an adequate reaction to the environmental context. By the ‘adequate’ reaction here I mean the one that either continues or restores the original order. Relations based on domination over the environment, which lead to ignoring the context thus understood, will occur less frequently.

Deriving architectural forms from the nature of a given place is a condition of its quality, as it testifies to the inhabitants’ ability to *make the natural structure more definite – building what they have already seen*¹². The key notion is the authenticity of places and architecture, understood as multi-valued reaction to permanent natural factors¹³ that influence the lifestyle and behaviour of the people and the location of the structures built by them (which in turn are subject to variable human factors). Thus understood, authenticity – or, as Adolf Loos terms it, truth¹⁴ – makes architecture legible, gives it sense by *anchoring* it in the place and its history on the one hand and referring to the future on another.

Thus, buildings and places are very sensitive “recording devices” of changes in society, habits, culture and construction technologies. If we assume that people and communities that they form are the integral part of the environment (place) where they live, then the impact of *genius loci* is a constant factor – it only achieves subsequent levels of complexity resulting from the interaction of forms introduced later with the forms from the past, i.e. those whose relations with the landscape and nature are more direct, reaching the archetype. Authenticity consists in the continuation of a certain model developed at the meeting point of nature and architecture, with that continuation understood as developing and improving the model. In that approach development, or more precisely evolution, contains the aspect of natural order that occurs organically – gradually and on the basis of negotiations with the already existing surroundings, with co-operation of other participants/inhabitants. Christopher Alexander in his concept of *the nature of order* assumes continuity of architecture and its gradual, almost biological development. Similar views are held by Kenneth Frampton, who thinks that the

¹¹ Hence the significance of organized activity, undertaken towards the end of the 19th century, aimed at leading people (even temporarily) out of the city of the industrial era, chaotic on the one hand due to its rapid growth and precisely planned and demarcated. That industrial city became the “natural” human environment, and its later incarnations (including the city of the atomic era) derived from the necessity to eliminate subsequent mistakes. Those mistakes mainly related to residential places – access to green areas, light, space – attributes and replacements of the natural environment.

¹² Moore Ch., Bloomer K., *Body*, *op. cit.*, pp. 17–18.

¹³ Making a reference to Heidegger, Edward Relph defines the authentic attitude towards the place as a *direct and authentic experience of the full identity of that place – not borrowed or transformed by arbitrary and intellectual fashions that dictate us what kind of experience that should be, neither following any stereotypical conventions*. Source: Relph E., *Place and Placelessness*, Sage Publications, London 2008, p. 64.

¹⁴ In his essay *Rules for Building in the Mountains* (1913) Loos wrote: *Nature treats seriously only the truth. (...) Remember that the truth, even the one that is hundreds years old, has more connection with our innermost feelings than the mendacity that paces alongside us*. Source: Loos A., *Ornament i zbrodnia. Eseje wybrane*, Fundacja Centrum Architektury, Warszawa 2013, p. 183.



III. 2. Siena, the city – *cluster of places* and a place in itself thanks to adjustment of the entirety and its fragments to the local landscape and climate and the lifestyle of its inhabitants (photo by the author)

building form should equally derive from the *pre-history of the place, its archaeological past, later cultivation and transformation*¹⁵. Irregular buildings of Siena matched to the local landscape forms, the tectonics of house shapes in Provence or the Swiss canton of Grisons – all this translates the surrounding landscape into the language of architecture not only in the formal sense but also sensorily. Haptic, visual and olfactory contacts with rough surfaces of brick walls and floors, the roundness of wooden beams or the rough light plaster have their counterparts in elements of the natural landscape. They had been experienced by the people who adapted them for the needs of the micro-cosmos they were creating for themselves¹⁶. Architecture of the place makes it possible to experience stimuli similar to those that one is experiencing in the local landscape. The diversity of those stimuli is intensified and broadened by the works of modern architecture.

2. THE MAN-MADE PLACE

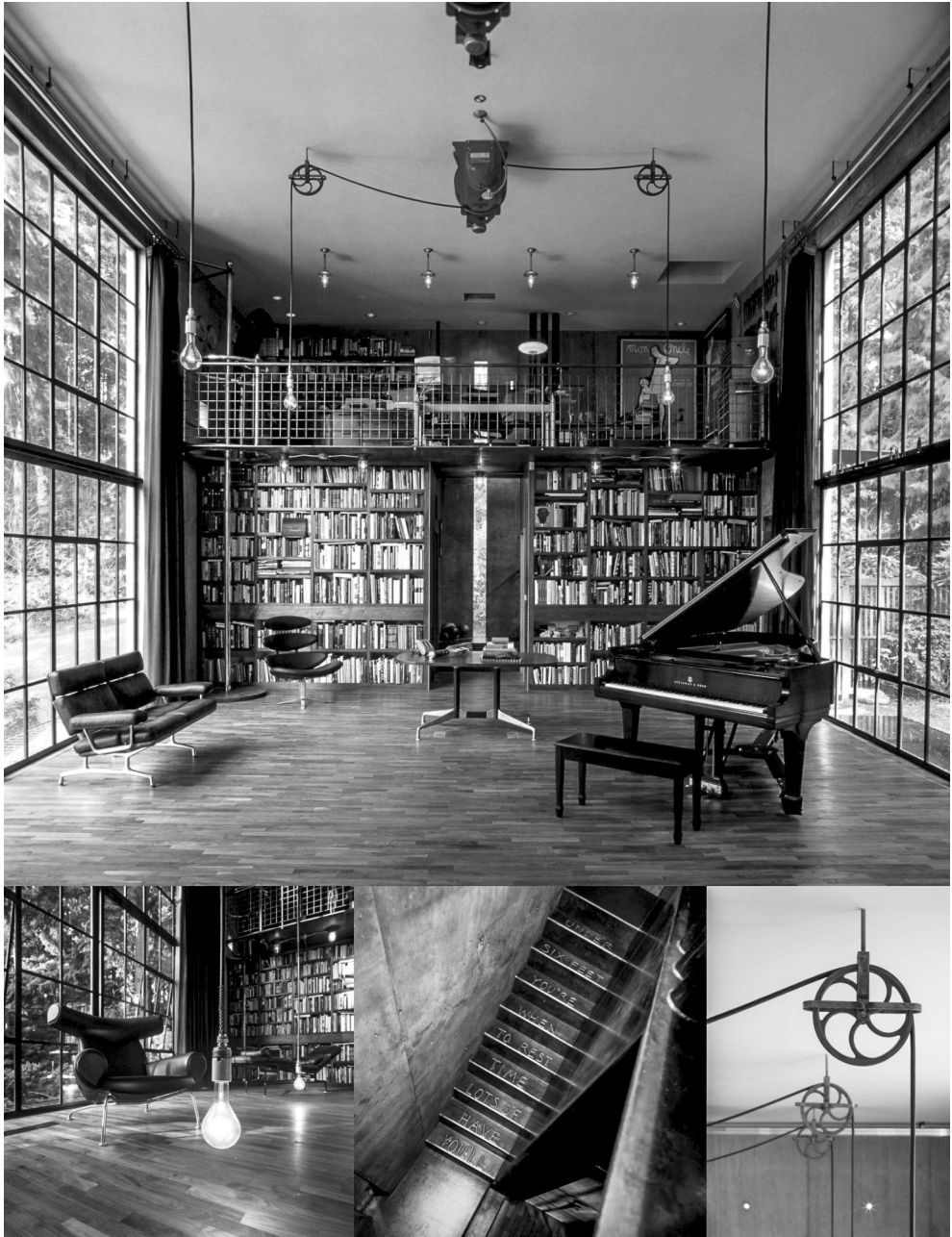
The model derived from the natural environment influences architecture through traces in the subconscious knowledge of its creators. It is a universal and collective process, based on continuation and the use of common experience shaping the city as a whole, as well as its particular elements. It creates a framework for personal places, according to the definition by Aldo van Eyck, who stated that a city, just like a home, is a *cluster of places*. Such a place has its own definite structure consisting of a core, extension areas, and auxiliary areas. The core is the place shaped and adjusted to satisfy a person's intellectual, sensory and emotional needs. As Augustyn Bańka remarked, *the more diverse the human personality, the more diverse space the person is likely to require in order to satisfy his or her needs*¹⁷. People look for diversity and variability in all areas of their activity, but it is in the place-core that their involvement with space is the greatest. The result is giving a place its personal aspect that keeps progressing: the development of human personality triggers the process of diversification of the *place-core*. The owner keeps changing it and thus retains a high level of identification with it, is able to control its diversity and the intensity of stimuli experienced within that place. When the place-core is of a confined nature, the intensity of the stimuli and the density of forms and objects of special meaning is gradually rising, accompanied by careful – meaningful – selection, which in turn translates into changes of behaviour within that place and vice versa – behaviour stimulates changes in the structure of the place. Own House by John Soane, Merzbau by Karl Schwitters or The Brain designed by Tom Kundig for David Wilde – these are examples of gradual densification of forms and artefacts the choice, meaning and function of which are known only to the inhabitants themselves.

In case of open type place-cores, that dynamic relation between them and the personality of the owner may lead to the emergence of new places by occupying and personal

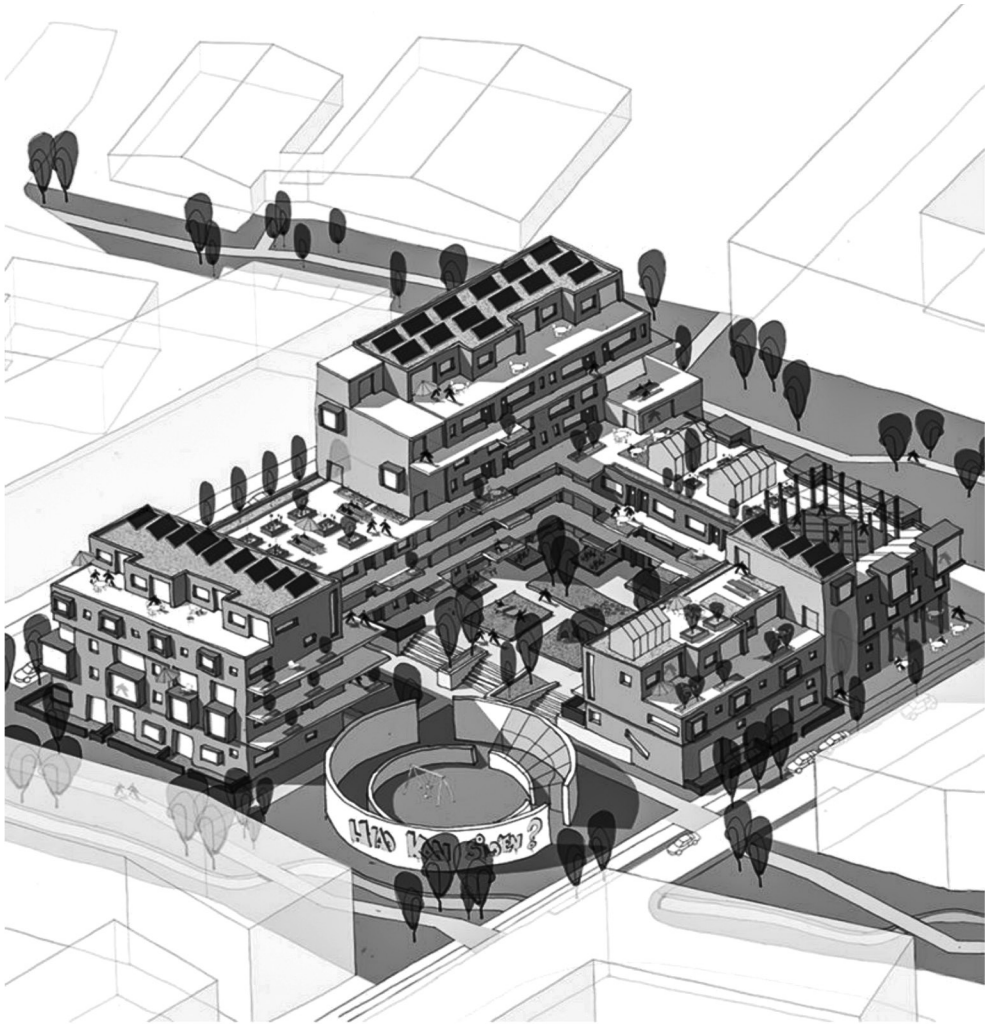
¹⁵ Frampton K., *W stronę krytycznego regionalizmu: sześć zasad oporu* [in:] Jencks Ch., Kropf K. (eds.), *Teorie i manifesty architektury współczesnej*, Grupa Sztuka Architektury, Warszawa 2013, p. 124.

¹⁶ Writing about the creation of the world, M. Eliade remarked that settling a given place or building a house is a decision that relates both to an individual and to the entire community. *The thing is to undertake the creation of the world that one has chosen as one's dwelling place*. Source: Eliade M., *Sacrum. Mit. Historia*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2017, pp. 73, 77.

¹⁷ Bańka A., *Architektura psychologicznej przestrzeni życia. Bahawioralne podstawy projektowania*, Gemini, Poznań 1997, p. 77, Quotation translator's own translation..



Ill. 3. Tom Kundig, The Brain, Settle, USA, 1998–2001. The Brain was built in close proximity to the main house and constitutes an important extension of its basic functions. In this case, the extension area became as important as the core-place due to its personalization with the taste, aesthetic preferences and collecting passions of David Wilde. Source: <https://olsonkundig.com/projects/the-brain/> (access: 14.12.2008)



III. 4. Vandkunsten Architecten, design by Køge Cost Housing, Køge, 2017–2020. The design is prepared in co-operation with future inhabitants, who *have an impact on the physical frames into which they intend to move, both on apartments and on common areas*. The method of place-creation based on the concept of *baugruppe*. Source: <https://vandkunsten.com/en/projects/co-building-koge> (access: 02.02.2019)

branding of subsequent areas. A certain hierarchy is observed in this process, as on the one hand such new areas (e.g. a workshop) complement the place-core, on the other they are much less personalized. In other words, the structure of the place-core may become more open while retaining its central character. This resembles the structure of a place intended for creative activity and reflection, the prototype of which was Hadrian's villa and its later manifestations were the 18th century residences of the *diletanti* – poets and writers, collectors and travellers: Alexander Pope's Twickenham, William Shenstone's The Leasowes, Richard Boyle's Chiswick or Horatio Walpole's Strawberry Hill. That last-mentioned

example is particularly worth noting due to the variety of forms used in that *small Gothic castle* reflecting Walpole's interest in history and art as well as his *folly* (according to the American writer James F. Cooper). The castle, being a combination of literary scenography with an art gallery (exhibiting both ancient and modern art) was supplemented with a *forest chapel*, being both a retreat for the writer and his working studio.

The contemporary counterparts of the houses of Walpole and others are the Koln houses of Oswald Mathias Ungers: House II, being an illustration of the Albertian principle of designing a house like a city, has the structure of a palimpsest with streets and squares, while House III is a place of retreat for an artist-architect, a form *without properties* placed in the middle of the *hortus conclusus*, stripped of any *themes, symbols and metaphors*.

The author's realization *Domus_Iter* (Traveller's House) has an even smaller scale. Apart from the place inside the house intended for working, reading and watching movies, the owner also expected the architect to design a library in the loft and two garden pavilions, one for contemplating the garden and one for *resting in solitude and thinking*. In response to those expectations, the architect designed a semi-open and partly mobile form of a *pavilion-gazebo* and adapted the former henhouse for a *den/cave* – the place to do thinking. The unifying element is the garden, re-designed in the manner that on the one hand corresponds with the flora of the nearby Warta river wetlands, and at the same time allows the owners to discreetly arrange stones and plants brought from their numerous journeys.

In that case, the garden and the library serve one more function in relation to the place-core: they are its extension areas. They enlarge and complement the formal diversity through their changeability and lack, or fuzziness, of boundaries at the same time making the inhabitant able to control them. Predominantly, however, the extension areas provide additional sensory, psychological, social and cultural stimuli or, just like their name indicates, expand the scope of occurring stimuli as compared to the place-core. They are also shared with other users and/or inhabitants, which heightens their social significance, as they may overlap with the areas occupied by other inhabitants and users. This makes them assume negotiational character, as it is the community, not the individual, that decides about their shape and degree of openness. Thus, the place matrix is supplemented with selected models of social and cultural conduct. Their combination (reference to the form and relation of the place-core and its extension areas) has an impact on the evaluation and the types of behaviour in other places. In other words, the human mind contains an image of the Place shaped up by complex and equivocal relations between man, the place-core and the extension areas. Just like the image of the environment nature, it is a *doxa* – a belief rooted deeply at the subconscious level, not a thought that one thinks but with which one thinks.

In the heroic period of modernism, avant-garde consisted in transferring painting and sculpture experience, and later experience from the field of photography and cinema, to architecture; nowadays, avant-garde architecture is created at the intersection of biology, environmental psychology and sociology plus *patient search* for the ways of communication with architecture's object and subject – man. This requires the revaluation of hitherto employed design and implementation strategies and return and re-thinking of (too) lightly discarded trends and directions of shaping man-inhabited environment. In the face of the arrival of post-humanist architecture, heralded by – among others – Rem Koolhaas and William Mitchell and the crisis of the architecture recipient, this seems to be a rational solution.



III. 5. Hermann Czech, Adolf Krischanitz, Werner Neuwirth, Generationen Wohnen, Vienna, 2007–2011. A complex of buildings with apartments for people of various ages. Inhabitants can shape their interiors according to their individual preferences and arrange common spaces (photo by the author)

3. DOXA AND TECHNE

The presented theory of evaluation and forming of a place on the basis of individually developed place-core patterns extended by supplementary areas is an imagined model, although one based on some observations and experiments. Nonetheless, imagination should be separated from experience, despite the fact that it is the observed and experienced phenomena that allow us to imagine the whole. Credibility is achieved by the works of Samuel Mockbee, Gion A. Caminada (Vrin Project), Hermann Czech, Adolf Krischanitz, Werner Neuwirth (Generationen Wohnen) or Vandkunsten Architekten (Køge Coast Housing), in which both factors making up the whole participate: landscape and man. For man (not *population*) participation means education and the resulting knowledge how to create a *shelter for the soul* (in the words of Mockbee). In this context, designing and building the Place, and not merely buildings, is tantamount to departure from the tradition of designing architecture just as a form and organization of physical space. On the one hand, this requires the use of the notion of *genius loci* and nature, the influence of which people have learnt to ignore (a contemporary metropolis is an artificial environment functioning outside time or climate) as the basis, but on the other hand it requires relying on the human subconscious more and more often shaped by Relp's subtopias, in which redundant and chaotic complexity replaces complexity with sense and meaning.

Modernity is rooted in progress and progress is related to the attempt to attain perfection. The seedlings of modernity were cartography, the steam engine and the telegraph; constantly developed, those inventions enabled humans to conquer space and time. Maps were becoming more and more detailed, engines smaller and more efficient, means of communication faster and more accessible. That required solutions based on knowledge and practical application of mathematics and geometry, mechanics and quantum physics. Similarly, the knowledge about man is also being developed in many fields – including human relations with architecture, and the discourse is undertaken from many, often contradictory, points of view. The unidimensional approach boiling down to designing buildings – objects in space is anachronistic and fails to take into account the knowledge about the human being as the object and subject of architecture, neither it cares to anchor architecture in the environment, whatever that environment might be. Modernity leads to utilizing that knowledge in many aspects, and the practical result is inclusive architecture demonstrating such significant features as matching the cultural landscape, taking responsibility for the social and ecological sphere, creating frames for individual expression, mutuality practices and focus on long-term operation of positive factors with the simultaneous elimination of negative ones. All this is complemented by the axiom of monitoring the impact of the building on the place and on the inhabitants.

In this context, modernity consisting in experiments with space seems easy, as it only relates to the sphere of *techne* and architectural material. Architecture, understood as the ongoing process of shaping the Place by the man and for the man, is a much more complicated process with much less certainty as regards its long-term results.

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Author's note:

Maciej Janowski (1968) architect and urban planner, associate professor at Faculty of Architecture at Poznań University of Technology. Author of numerous articles about human residential environment, new forms of local architecture and interactions between space and place. Author of the book *Contemporary Architecture of Private House and their Transformations*. Runs his own architectural practice.