

ARCHITECTURE – LIFE AFTER LIFE

ARCHITEKTURA – ŻYCIE PO ŻYCIU

Abstract

Nowadays the way we reject timelessness and the passing of time as the fundamental determinant of values of architecture changes. The aim of this study is to prove that ancient tradition of „constructing forever” has given new way to new technologies, transformations, mobility. Modern interpretation of historical place may give a new meaning and offer its users a range of new values, among which, authenticity of the transformed space is the most important (in terms of: changeability, temporariness, being up-to-date). In summary – thanks to the nostalgia, emotions connected with the place, once in the contemporary ritual, they gain better representation.

Keywords: architectural transformation, pop/high culture, value, meaning, genius loci, contemporary history, conversion, time

Streszczenie

Nie każda przestrzeń publiczna czy funkcja decyduje o przyszłości miejskiego życia. Współcześnie coraz częściej odrzuca się kryterium odporności na wpływ czasu jako podstawowego wyznacznika wartości w architekturze. Zachodzi nieustanny proces transformowania miasta, technologia informacyjna przekształca je wedle zmiennych wzorów i kontekstów. Celem niniejszej pracy jest udowodnienie, że starożytna tradycja „budowania na wieki” została zamieniona na podatność na zmiany, wdrażanie nowych technologii, mobilność. Współczesna interpretacja miejsca historycznego może nadać nowe znaczenie i zaoferować użytkownikom szereg nowych wartości, wśród których najważniejszą jest autentyczność przekształconej przestrzeni (pod względem: zmienności, tymczasowości, aktualności), co autorka stara się udowodnić.

Słowa kluczowe: architektoniczne transformacje, kultura pop/ kultura wysoka, wartości, znaczenie, genius loci, nowoczesna interpretacja, przekształcenia, czas

*The age of landfills is also the age of memorial places.
A modern trend of 'retreat' from magic is – in a specifically
modern way – compensated by the magic of aesthetics (...) ²*

The main concerns refer to whether or not, and in what way, urban policy should create a framework to possibly limit the spontaneous creation of such places. This paper is an attempt to redefine the perception of contemporary culture. Is popular culture, as an important causal agent, always a synonym of cultural homogenization, the negation of values and the cultivation of the catchy and common aspects of life? The hierarchic perception of culture

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² Marquard O., *Sceptsis als Philosophie der Endlichkeit*, Bouvier, Bonn 2002.

presented by American publicists-traditionalists in the 1960s, as seen in a book of essays by Czesław Miłosz³, has to be re-evaluated when many elements, formerly renowned as part of low culture (movies, concerts, music videos), have recently been re-classified as high culture. The identity of a city is largely a representation of the cultural functioning of its inhabitants, forms of sociological functioning, leisure, integration and dialogue between the citizens. Historical analysis supports the statement that the functional schedule of an individual was divided into time spent on work and on celebration, centered on higher matters, their religious/traditional aspects or customs. With the creation of the rules of economics, a work organization policy was implemented, together with a distinction between work and leisure time created by restrictions on working time.

During an analysis of the views presented by different publicists, which more or less treat the subject strictly and bear undoubted anxiety towards the progression of mass culture, it is important to notice that many of the aspects of mass culture criticized at that time nowadays would be included as a part of “high” culture (film [in general], jazz music and many others). The midpoint between high and low culture has definitely changed its position compared to where it had been traditionally settled.

The tendency to give additional meaning to historical buildings by using them in a novel way, suitable to social needs, has recently become popular. The building becomes a basis on which the creation of a different space takes place; such space is on the other hand inseparably connected to that building and could not exist without it. Especially tempting and intriguing is the fact that these buildings have strong historical roots. As an example, the old town in Warsaw is not attractive to local communities (it is rather a tourist space) and was set aside in favor of historic objects with a new function, here an entertainment function, designed and arranged without any referral to the primary character of the building and sometimes in a dramatically different style. Referral to the primary function of such a building is of additional value to its recipients. The perceived feeling that the place of relaxation differs spatially from a working place is also of great value. Architecture of the typical offices, shops, services and even schools becomes more and more ascetic and modern.

The issue of historic architecture which might become „unnoticeable” in the context of various attractive social activities was brought up by architects from the Park Associati Studio (design team: Filippo Pagliani, Michele Rossi, Alexia Caccavella, Alice Cuteri, Lorenzo Merloni). They noted that some historical objects (palaces, tenement houses) that serve as town square frontages and are dominant features in their surroundings are becoming almost museum-like: they lend a certain air to the area, but have either lost their own message, or that message has become indecipherable to observers. The team has picked out several examples of objects (the tenement houses that flank the Piazza Duomo in Milan (Ill. 1) or the Parc du Cinquantenaire in Brussels) whose architectural charms are being captured by tourists in photos, but the process is completely thoughtless. In order to counter it, they have designed an ultra-modern pavilion which was placed on the roof of a landmark building so that its futuristic form would create a contrast and thus draw people’s attention to the historical and spatial features of the landmark.

The Cube (Ill. 2), as this structure was called, was designed as a light portable cube constructed from easily assembled perforated modules, with a dark wooden floor and a Corian interior. The structure can be transported by ship, helicopter, or train. Its aluminum mesh, steel

³ Miłosz C. (ed.), *Kultura masowa*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2002, p. 176.

elements, and strong mounting rails make the pavilion suitable for all types of surfaces (roofs of houses, cliffs, beaches, platforms, etc.) and various climates.



- III. 1. Pavilion The Cube; Park Associati (Design Team: Filippo Pagliani, Michele Rossi, Alexia Caccavella, Alice Cuteri, Lorenzo Merloni), on behalf of Electrolux company. Installed in Milan on the roof of the tenement house next to the cathedral Duomo, as an “one-month show”; 2011. Close view. Photo by Marek Lorens
- III. 2. Pavilion The Cube; Park Associati (Design Team: Filippo Pagliani, Michele Rossi, Alexia Caccavella, Alice Cuteri, Lorenzo Merloni), on behalf of Electrolux company. Installed in Milan on the roof of the tenement house next to the cathedral Duomo, as an “one-month show”; 2011. From the square’s Duomo perspective. Photo by Marek Lorens
- III. 3. The Waterhouse at South Bund / Neri&Hu Design and Research Office (Design Team: Lyndon Neri, Rossana Hu, Debby Haepers, Cai Chun yan, Markus Stoecklein, Jane Wang. Location: by the new Cool Docks development on the South Bund District; Shanghai; four-story, 19-room boutique hotel,-former three-story Japanese Army headquarters building from the 1930’s. The boutique hotel fronts the Huangpu River and looks across at the gleaming Pudong skyline. The architectural concept behind Neri&Hu’s renovation rests on a clear contrast of what is old and new, 2010. Photo from Archdaily archives.

This universal, energy efficient structure is capable of housing 18 persons. It comes with a triangular, ca. 50 square meter terrace that opens heretofore unavailable visual perspectives.

However, it was not meant to dominate historical spaces – as was the case with, for example, the mobile Chanel showroom designed by Zaha Hadid. It was noticeable only after a while, and a passerby who did not raise their gaze above the ground floor would probably not be able to spot it. At the same time, it successfully animated its historic surroundings.

At a time when museums (particularly buildings which are museums in and of themselves) are tripping over each other in attempts to make their cultural offers more attractive, the barely 140 cubic meter structure installed on the highest rooftops completely changes one's perception of its surrounding space. This object, which is a product of its commercial and gastronomical function, and its pop culture form, exists in a symbiosis with timeless temples of high culture. It's an example of an advertisement and advertising object coming to life in full bloom, and an answer to the question: how to create in a public space a spectacle featuring an object seen from a dramatic perspective, against a historical backdrop, with a sublime view that lends a completely new dimension to historical architecture.

In the era when computers, mass media, internet and comprehensive virtual phenomena are present in almost every aspect of life there is a natural need to empirically experience the living space. Lofts attract with their perceptible atmosphere, the feeling of real existence. They also give an impression of a stopping, so important and demanded in world of constant changes to which people must adapt and follow.

At a time when space, its virtues, and the potential adaptations of historical buildings are all highly appreciated, architects are searching for ways to modernize landmarks, giving them both new functions and new meanings. One of the chief examples of this type of endeavor is the reconstruction of the former Japanese army headquarters (built in 1930) in Shanghai, China. This case is particularly interesting in that “breathing new life into architecture” consisted here of assimilating elements that were seemingly ill-suited to the building's new function, and searching for its advantages – not in terms of accentuating obvious beauty (understood as picturesqueness, wealth of historic detail), but as using the spirit of the building's constituent materials in an attempt to capture the authentic emotions conjured up by architecture.

Architects from the Neri&Hu studio noticed that the emotions stirred up by the building in its former function – a sense of dread, oppression – could be used to create a new scenario for contemporary architecture. They modernized and redesigned the former Japanese army headquarters into a boutique hotel. This controversial approach yielded a very strong statement in terms of the expression of the revitalized object: namely that turpism, which by definition suffused the building, combined with contemporary, but still materially related to the converted object's nature (materials: Corten siding, raw concrete –can make understanding the mood of the place, and the city, easier and evoke authentic emotions. The building was turned into a boutique hotel and, as the designers stated, hotels are buildings which should be rooted in the history of their surroundings, allowing visitors to experience and understand it. Buildings in which you spend but a few days should have a strong message and a clear narrative (Ill. 3).

Every epoch and culture develops its own system of values and makes it very difficult to find the universal one. Architecture, which is subject to the influence of popular culture, is interested in such values as relevance, openness, appeal. It is open to changes, latest trends and solutions.

When designing, we may look at a fragment of a city as if it was a kind of model in which we introduce current, fast and necessary modifications. We can consider architecture

is a method of creating our everyday lives, the only conscious form of social organization. Thanks to new technologies, computer generated models, we can trigger events which define the urbanism of contemporary cities.

Architects from the Rare studio took a different approach to modernizing historical objects and giving them new functions. Obviously, the converted object in question hails from a completely different realm, as we're talking about the reconstruction of the 20th century London city hall (2010 project, Patriot Square), however the intention here was also to turn the building into a hotel. In this case, the complete change of function was achieved through expanding and interpreting historical details from a contemporary perspective. It is a way to modernize buildings and make them understandable and current to their users, and simultaneously attractive in a completely different context. The architects used methods such as: partially "packaging" facades into new facings, adding details that echoed the Art Deco ornamentation present in existing details, but were this time, for example, cut into the steel facing of the new façade using lasers. Therefore, they drew from the decorative nature of the building and attempted to interpret it through contemporary beauty standards. Because the immediate surroundings of the former city hall are completely undefined and chaotic from an urban planning point of view, panels that filter light and cast picturesque shadows onto the floors show the building in a different dimension and, in a sense, impose some sort of order upon the space.

The idea of this design is based on reality redacting (...)
Michel de la Costa Gonzales, Rare.

Another important example of "breathing life" into historical architecture is the expansion of the Ordrupgaard museum near Copenhagen by Zaha Hadid. Since 1997, the Ordrupgaard Museum has been located in the private home of the popular Danish architect Finn Juhl (1912–1989). Given the fact that it was home to one of the most interesting collections of French art in Northern Europe, a competition was organized for the expansion of this small building, so that it could house a bigger collection and become a full-fledged public facility.

The art collection was initially split into two sections, located in two segments of the house, which were sitting at a right angle towards each other. One of them contained (and still does) a large drawing room and a small study, and the other – the kitchen, the dining room, bedrooms, and the bathroom.

Both segments are connected with a hallway that opens onto a garden. The house is an early example of an open plan, as its layout offers a characteristic view. Even though each of the rooms has a distinct function, they are arranged into an enfilade – moving through the house, we always see the connecting rooms from the one we're in, and we always see the garden.

Thanks to Zaha Hadid's additions, the surface area of the museum has doubled. A fluid, concrete form was added whose futuristic nature communicates the fact that it houses a collection of contemporary art.

The house is made of brick, and its façade has been plastered white and gray, which gives it a soft, matte finish. This makes the house seem bright against the dark backdrop of a forest. For the original architect, the interaction of the rooms in the house with their surroundings was very important – it is an example of designing "from within". Zaha Hadid's building is an expression of perceiving space and shape as boundless, fused with the surrounding landscape and the historical architecture, but devoid of any superfluous references to its form

or details. What they have in common is their approach to space. You smoothly move from one room to another to the point where it's hard to say where the transition from old to new actually happens. Inside, the building opens up as "liquid space" where it's difficult to spot where exhibition rooms morph into hallways, not to mention the transitions between ceilings and walls. The shapes of the individual rooms always correspond with the surrounding landscape, while the ceiling rises and falls as we move through the building. At Ordrupgaard, as in many of her other projects, Hadid attempted to decode and interpret the building's natural surroundings. Before she set to work, she conducted a landscape survey in the park, and her building, in keeping with Juhl's original vision, was designed as a sort of extension of nature.

Setting the landscape as the starting point led to the creation of a very refined, graphic shape which almost "hovers" above the gently rolling area and fits right in with its topography.

One could confront this concept with the idea of Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa (SANAA), the curators of the 2010 Venice Biennale – expressed in the words and film of Wim Wenders:

If Buildings Could Talk... (...) some would just whisper, some would loudly sing their own praises, while others would modestly mumble a few words and really have nothing to say. Some are plain dead and don't speak anymore (...)

... Don't get me wrong: this is not a metaphor. Buildings DO speak to us! They have messages. Of course. Some really WANT a constant dialogue with us. Some rather listen carefully first. (...)

... The building you will encounter is a particularly gentle and friendly one, made for learning, reading and communicating. Its hills and valleys (yes, they exist in there) are eager to welcome you, to help, to be of service, and to be, in the best sense of the word, a meeting place. (...)⁴

Architecture can change the meaning of existing places: add values, availing itself of the potential and authenticity of a place, change it and make the perception attractive in this new context.

The most typical approach to historical buildings is to RECOMPOSE them. This consists of using elements that bring to mind historical architecture, evoke emotion, appeal to sentimentality and a sense of being "of a certain period". The Rotor Studio⁵ presented a surprising and astoundingly "directed" exhibition at that same, 2010 Biennale in Venice, offering a look at architecture through the lens of the aging of materials, the relationship between shape and time, structure integrity lost vs. value gained through the passage of time. They presented an incredible tale about the marks users "leave" on parts of buildings, and about the marks of the passage of time left upon building materials over the course of repeated interference and actions undertaken by their users. They showed the relationship between the deteriorating elements of buildings and their scale, as well as how the wear and tear can be perceived within an aesthetic context. They focused our attention on scale and materials. The exhibition showed a couple of artifacts excised from public facilities – fragments of bannisters, facings, pavement tiles – composed in a way that made them appear as works of art: sculptures, paintings in macro scale... But at closer inspection, it turned out that we were seeing weathered building fragments of questionable value.

⁴ Wenders W., *If Buildings Could Talk* – a short film (12 min.) made on request of SANAA Architecture Studio, as an installation of the 12th Venice Biennale of Architecture, text, Venice 2010.

⁵ Rotor, „Usus, Usures” Exhibition.

This resulted in a deep reflection on the meaning of materials, the value that can be found and extracted in relation to the passage of time, and the architect's mission in analyzing the original historical design, which has frequently been subject to conversion or renovation.

The discussion on approaching historical architecture in a modern context was taken up in a very astute and novel way by Rem Koolhaas. In Venice, at the 2010 Biennale, OMA presented their project of regenerating and animating the Fondaco dei Tedeschi (Ill. 4).

For the purposes of this exhibition, the architect demonstrated a new interpretation of a multi-functional space within the Fondaco, which is attractive for the visitors (feast places, concerts, exhibition halls) and reveals quite a different view of the contemporary values of a historical place.

We are creating a kind of skansen which dominates the contemporary, new architecture and hinders its development, – commented the architect.

Koolhaas concludes that adaptation and modern interpretation of a historical place may give it a new meaning and offer its users a range of values, among which authenticity and relevance of the transformed space are the most important.

Rem Koolhaas, in a retrospective exhibition Cronocaos 44, staged in co-operation with OMA, highlights the aspect of authenticity of architecture confronted with the passing of time and the current needs it should react to. He concludes that wrongly understood protection of monuments poses the biggest threat to the development of contemporary architecture. His examples include: The State Hermitage Museum, as an artefact of obsolete, outdated, unchanging space, or extension of Harvard, which is a copy of historical buildings, accord – ing to a wrongly interpreted rule of preservation of the old urban fabric, or a relatively new Maison à Bordeaux (OMA, 1998) which was put on the World Heritage List.

Rem Koolhaas tries to show that many buildings which are protected only because of their age and not the value of their historical architecture are far from being authentic.

Currently, Fondaco dei Tedeschi is a living commercial and cultural space which has been woven into the fabric of the city in a very modern way that also fully respects its genius loci. Koolhaas's idea, born at the Biennale, was made flesh in Venice (Ill. 5, 6).

A similar hallmark of this project is a tower of old, post-industrial buildings covered with 24-carat gold. Gold is essentially a cheap material for the exteriors, compared to marble for example – says Koolhaas. It is therefore not the most “precious” material in this project. Light matters as well – golden walls throw warm, beautiful reflections on raw, grey buildings. Architecture binds crude, grey materials with those that are precious and shiny; the old with the new; luxurious with universal. Apparent kitsch, pop-cultural shade force the perceiver into deeper analysis of this extraordinary, functional, and meaningful structure of high culture.

Architecture is no longer built to “last ages”. Modern architecture transforms, the way it changes with time needs to be foreseen.

Here are some examples of projects that analyze the way materials change with time, allowing the addition of new values:

- Atelier by Herzog de Meuron, steel wall with water running down. The process of rusting defines and creates this architecture.
- Rotor Group, *Usus, Usures* exhibition on Venice Biennale in 2012 – pieces of buildings (balustrades, pavement blocks, pieces of facades) presented like works of art in a gallery. Only after a while we can see what they really are, and that they are wearing down. That process is valuable in architecture.

- Bund Waterfront Hotel (Neri & Hu) – rebuilt from an old Japanese army building. Concrete with corten steel (covers with rust due to oxidation, but rusting does not destroy the material, so it is often used to fill old buildings, connect the old with the new), so these are generally esthetically unpleasant. However, this boutique hotel is pure and authentic in its form, allowing the guests to understand the primary characteristics of this place, and its history, without ornaments.
- Through design we can relate to the historical appliance of the material, as well as its cultural meaning, since architecture is an important part of culture.



Ill. 4, 5, 6. OMA's restoration of the 16th Century Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venice; (Design Team: Rem Koolhaas, Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli, Francesco Moncada, Silvia Sandor). First constructed in 1228, located at the foot of the Rialto Bridge across from the sh market; Sestiere di S. Marco, 5339, 30124 Venezia. Programmed as contemporary urban department store staging a diverse range of activities, from shopping to cultural events, social gatherings; 2016. Photo by Anna Lorens

- Aravena made an exhibition in Venice in 2016, where modern forms were created by using historical materials and methods of joining bricks. Traditional forms of architecture can also be combined with new technologies and materials. This shows, how important are materials in the content of architecture. Not only the type of material matters, but also its structural specifics.

In 2008, during the Venice Biennale, the curators of the Disco Zachęta⁶ exhibition at the Polish pavilion, took up the discourse on contemporary architecture confronted with the passage of time and emerging new needs, thus in a way anticipating Koolhaas's idea.

They came to the conclusion that architecture and urban planning had to respond to yet another challenge and create an alternative for the virtual world. In design, as never before, the user has been replaced with the consumer and functionality has been turned into an analysis of ever new needs and criteria that space has to meet in order to be sufficiently interesting to draw our attention. A derivative of popular culture, "imported" together with broadly understood freedom, has become a need to liberate oneself from the places dictated by the primary life needs. What do we do with a 200 meter tall skyscraper, or Norman Foster's Metropolitan building once the speculation on the real estate market leads to a crash, or the model of office work changes? How will we handle burials once we run out of space for cemeteries? Cultural transformations of modern times, connected with globalization, mass popularization, accelerated forms of life and work as well as cyberculture, recall Bauman's opinion about the new, time-consuming forms of communication which according to the philosopher have started to dominate and have even eliminated our need for space.

*We suspect, anticipate and guess at what needs to be done. We don't know the shape or form of what will eventually come. We can, however, be certain that it won't be a familiar shape. It will be different from everything we've grown accustomed to.*⁷

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⁶ HOTEL POLONIA Disco Zachęta: *The Afterlife of Buildings*, Curators: Grzegorz Piątek, Jarosław Trybuś, Artists: Nicolas Groszpiere, Kobas Laksa; Venice, Golden Lions Award, 2008.

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