

TRADITION AS PART OF ARCHITECTURE IDENTITY

TRADYCJA JAKO ELEMENT TOŻSAMOŚCI ARCHITEKTUR

Abstract

The author's considerations in the presented article include a discussion on the issues of continuity and modernity. Is continuation a weakness of art? Is preserving the continuity of tradition only a conservative art? The author tries to define the place of tradition as a basis in relation to the criterion of modernity. Modern means something new, always more modern in relation to something earlier. The identity contained in the tradition is an indispensable element for determining the present in the material used by the architect. The modernity of getting rid of any reference to tradition can not be described in this manner. Tradition in architecture does not have to be an uncompromising enemy of the avant-garde work.

Keywords: architecture, creativity, tradition, identity, continuation

Streszczenie

Rozważania autora w prezentowanym artykule obejmują dyskusję nad problematyką kontynuacji i nowoczesności. Czy kontynuacja jest słabością sztuki? Czy zachowanie ciągłości tradycji jest jedynie sztuką zachowawczą? Autor próbuje zdefiniować miejsce tradycji jako podstawy w odniesieniu do kryterium nowoczesności. Nowoczesne to coś nowego, zawsze bardziej nowoczesnego w stosunku do czegoś wcześniejszego. Tożsamość zawarta w tradycji jest nieodzownym elementem dla określenia współczesności w twórczym, którym posługuje się architekt. Nowoczesności wyzbywającej się jakiegokolwiek odniesienia do tradycji nie można określić tym mianem. Tradycja w architekturze nie musi być nieprzejednanym wrogiem awangardowego dzieła.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, twórczość, tradycja, tożsamość, kontynuacja

The basic tasks that allow us to carry out our deliberations in a precise manner is the question: what is the tradition, identity in art and architecture. In what situations can we talk about these phenomena, whether they occur and whether they are a kind of “touch” when formulating an architect's work. Using the language and opinions of philosophers, one can state the following: Tradition, according to the Dictionary of Foreign Expressions, is *passing on from generation to generation customs, views, beliefs*.² In architectural creativity, it is the art of building, spatial structures erected for a specific function, and finally the art of creating the everyday, the most beautiful world possible for the inhabitants of the planet. What is identity in art in turn. Deter-

¹ Ph.D. Arch. Maciej Olenderек, Department of Architecture and Urban-Planning, The Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Environmental Engineering, Lodz University of Technology; ORCID 0000-0001-6926-9735.

² J. Tokarski (ed.), *Słownik wyrazów obcych*, PWN, Warszawa 1980, p. 767.

mination of creativity, Dictionary of Polish Language states: *being the same, that something is the same, identical, the same.*³ Identity gives us a sense of attachment to the space embedded in our culture, creating its continuity, historical longevity and value for specific communities. The identity of architecture will thus be communication realized with the help of artistic material in a given area of influence. Architecture in general is a unique material combining creation as art, with building as an engineering activity. It is an activity connected with art, though not as it is, deprived of location and not belonging to such a strictly defined medium. The architect's work will always be closely related to the place of creation and, in the vast majority of it, the compromise realization of the expectations of the client and user. We still need to define the notion of modernity as the proper new times, contemporary, present – not backward. So, can we treat tradition as a non-modern art? If so, we will continually look for the pedigree of contemporary architectural thought. Does creating today take place between yesterday and tomorrow? The tradition defined in the time interval as yesterday will be the starting point for thinking and designing today. It will be a kind of collection of contemporary choices from the past, for the sake of the present and future. Let's think about the division of time into sequences that arise as time intervals in the history of the world. We must also remember that the creator always accompanies the identity of the place where he operates. Another feature that characterizes and influences shaping possibilities is creativity, indispensable when formulating, compiling and inventing new structures, often with features of avant-garde thought. This concept, which is a synonym for the adjective "creative", was only widespread in Poland in the 1930s. Creativity as a concept, though unanswered if it is identical to the term "creativity", was presented at the inaugural lecture of the American Psychological Society, which was presented by J. P. Guilford in 1950. Władysław Tatarkiewicz believed that this is an ambiguous expression, because in history it changed meaning and goes back to ancient times. The Romans used the term "creator" or "creator urbis". The creator as a synonym of the artist appeared in the 19th century. Creative terms and creativity were used in relation to the work of artists. In fact, the 20th century brought the use of these terms in relation to architectural creations. Today, the concept of creativity encompasses an exceptionally broad spectrum of products of activity, both artists and technicians or scholars. Creation and creativity must be treated as multi-dimensional matter, included both in art and in related works. They can't be included in a single paradigm. We can only talk about various aspects of creativity: attribute (creativity as a product), subject (person, creator), processual (creativity as a mental process). It is often defined as a new product, judged as valid and useful. Creative in relation to the product or form, the spatial structure that is the result of the creator's unique personality. It is the process of developing your "I" in comparison with reality. Creativity defined by philosophers is a potential ability that all people have. The entire population is widely recognized as having a creative personality. Władysław Tatarkiewicz believes that creativity covers all spheres of human activity, it should not be limited to repetition and imitation. Everyone can be creative. Creativity is the primary need of man, results from the pursuit of self-realization. A human being is equipped with a natural creative instinct and has internal creative abilities. Since most thinkers think that it can be developed, education and the education process play a very important role. Education in the direction of creativity can be and becomes a reason for development. Often, it seems apt to use both terms as synonyms. Differences and similarities should be considered in the relation between the producer and the product. When confronting creative phenomena, behaviors, ventures or persons, it is necessary to

³ S. Skorupka (ed.), *Mały słownik języka polskiego*, PWN, Warszawa 1968 p. 832.

distinguish what is elaborate and what is new and valuable for the individual or the community. Creativity is man's ability to create new, valuable things in terms of aesthetics, practicality or science. It makes our world better and more beautiful. People who work on new tasks, including, of course, architects, building something new, are guided by creative thinking.

A great example of such unique creativity based on tradition and subjected to creative thinking was the famous, unfortunately dismantled after 50 years of great functioning, and creative transformation "building number 20" – a temporary barrack built during World War II for the needs of the *Radiation Laboratory*. This "temporary" building was used for half a century. Scientists could freely modify it by changing the layout of the interior. It is considered one of the most "productive" buildings at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The productive term refers to its utility values and the inventions of constant interpersonal "collisions". The success of the building results from its temporary nature. It was supposed to last only a few years. Users could freely manipulate its space. One of the scientists working on the atomic clock, in order to make room for a three-story cylinder could cut holes on two floors of his laboratory. This flexibility and freedom of creation kept the building alive. According to Richard Rogers, it was *architecture like music and poetry that users can change, the architecture of improvisation*. The facility has become a legend of innovation, one of the most creative spaces in the world. It provoked (due to a complicated structure) to informal meetings, it supported discourse. Accidental meetings in the elevator ended (as scientists mentioned) in the lobby, leading to technical discussions. This building combined (in its construction and the possibility of contacts), a sort of ancient Greek agora, British teahouses from the 18th century, or Parisian cafes from the early 20th century. It has become the place of the most creative spaces. Scientists exchanged ideas, discussed technologies. They participated in an informal discourse driven by passionate commitment.

Let's try to consider how modern architecture can support the same kind of creativity to meet current needs. The author of the article has been working for many years as an architect in professional and academic manner and has close ties to the design of commercial products as well as modern technologies. In the last decade, he feels as if he was in the middle of some uncontrolled process, where words such as innovation and creativity fiercely fight each other. This is completely insane. However, this apparent chase is caused by fighting – by proposing contemporary solutions and at the same time the author's responsibility for current creative doctrines and the values of the identity of places and communities for which we design. That's what's happening. The climate change. Technology. Uncertainty. We constantly ask ourselves what is next, what modernism is, are we tied up in it, and whether it is possible, based on new mathematically constructed worlds, to create an avant-garde form detached from heritage and history (as the continuity of ideas). What is art, pure art? No matter what we do, we have to be innovative. Otherwise, we do not exist. Not so long ago we have seen the same thing happen with the concept of sustainable development. Putting this problem aside, let us return to the enzymatic components of the phenomenon of innovation and creativity. In the world of architecture, we have become accustomed to the evaluation system, in which the quality of a building or a project is assessed on the basis of its appearance, spatial constructional and material qualities. We do not even need to know what problems it solves. Creating an impressive building with amazing shapes is a great skill – it means we are "clever" enough to reflect the spirit of the time in which we live. This great object is probably not innovative at all. But it really means being

contemporary, which is the opposite of traditional, conservative. At all costs, we often reflexively chase the prevailing fashions, refusing to continue good traditions. We fight for membership in the circle of mainstream architects. Most of the time, when we're innovative and creative, nobody notices it because most of the time we're part of a team that solves real problems. Every architect knows that when you start working in teams with engineers and other designers, it's very difficult to keep your extravagant, special sensitivity to beauty. Certainly beauty is beauty, but consider user experience that does not fit the concept of a romantic enlightenment artist. As architects, we are happy when we find a way to solve the problem as a result of standard procedure. Solving a problem tailored to the given needs with the use of favorite parametric tools, obtaining a complex structure, while still managing to talk about the parameters of sustainable development and energy efficiency. I'm not sure if that's what we should search for. Creating a work of art consists of introducing a new combination of elements. The elements existed before, but not in the same combination. The creative process is expressive and it is necessary to show more than the artist creating something. Caution must be exercised at this stage. Creating art is about expressing yourself, it is an expression of feeling, though not necessarily your own feelings for humanity. The expressive view of artistic creation is the response of the romantic movement, according to which the expression of feelings is a work of art, just as philosophy and other disciplines are an expression of an idea. One should take into account the emotions and creative attitudes. Artistic work is an expression process, more specific than rest and relaxation. One of the views expressing emotions in art is that they are preceded by excitement resulting from a vague cause, as to the origin of which the artist is uncertain and therefore restless. The artist architect expresses feelings and ideas through shaped form and its material structure. It seems that the purpose of this theory is that artists, concerned about the inaccuracy of their ideas, feel relief because they expressed what they wanted to. The theory of expression of creation, including architecture understood as art, speaks only of the artist's feelings, whereas creation appears in the artistic media and only says anything about a work of art, which would be interesting for the audience or users. The activity of building a bridge based on an architect's plan or constructing a brick wall or a piece of furniture like a thousand other items that the craftsman has already finished is craft, not art. The craftsman knows at the beginning of the processes exactly what kind of final product is desired. A good and efficient craftsman knows how much material is needed, how long it will take to complete the task, what tools to use, and so on. A creative artist can not work in this way. Architects do not know what they intend to express until they do. They can not predict in advance what the finished work will look like. The process described as art, not craftsmanship, characterizes all kinds of creativity. We can therefore talk about creating a sculpture or a new theory, but rarely about a bridge, unless the builder was also the architect who designed it. The word creation is used to determine the genesis of the idea for a bridge, not its implementation. Do you have to talk about expression, in contrast to creation, to bring out the difference between art and craft? It seems that there is no real generalization about the creative processes of all artists or great artists. Sometimes artists are consciously active, knowing very much what they want in advance, wondering how to do it. Some architects create only during physical contact with the medium. The main difficulties in accepting the conclusions regarding the creative process in art is that artists differ so much from each other in their creative processes that generalizations that are both true and interesting or of any significance can not be obtained. Creating a work of art, we pass the next stages, such as: preparation, inspiration, which is associated with tradition because it gives the image of form as a choice from those which the artist has seen before and the final elaboration. This lasts throughout the entire creative process.

The artist begins with a problem that is gradually developed in the process of creation, but the holistic vision of an artist leads the creative process from the beginning. Is it possible to say that architecture expresses sadness or joy in the sense as a process? The design of the building is visible. Very simple combinations of shapes and colors seem to express certain features of life. For most people, it is virtually impossible to see art only as a series of sensory stimuli. Even if the picture does not contain a story, a program, the viewer receives a certain scenario, assigning works of art to the qualities of people's moods, feelings and emotions. In art, every perception is full of affect. The problem is that certain perceptions express certain affects but often viewers do not feel emotions. They can imagine them or, if they do not, they feel very different from those they consider to be expressed in the spatial creation of the architect. If they watch the same work, included in popular project catalogs, they feel boredom or tiredness, at the same time believing that the design was an expression of joy. Real analysis of expression in art must be more complex. It is not that the building evokes specific emotions, and that they are necessarily contained in the building. Most relations start with noticing some similarities or analogies between the features of the building and human feelings. Physical additions to the mood, say, anxiety, have their spatial equivalents. When viewers define a form as sad or joyful, they say that it literally has these features, you can see them in it.

What is the tradition in architectural design, how you can qualify design based on what the past brings us the architects. We are in a certain time structure – what has been the past for architectural youth, the middle generation, is the present. This time cycle is a very important element of continuity. The value of tradition is invaluable especially in the construction of continuity, the identity of places important for a given culture of using materials or a specific form. What is tradition today for the contemporary architect? How the great names, the great space creators, perceive the continuation? Examples of what was modern and what passes and becomes tradition.

Let's analyze this problem on several examples. We celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus creation. How did the creators of this design school approach tradition? It seems that when it comes to furniture designs or the implementation, they're based on traditional crafts, despite the design of futuristic, avant-garde shapes. The structure of apartments and buildings was also based on the continuation of the thought of creating functional systems, derived from the history of architecture. Another example is the work of Eileen Gray, a great artist creating spaces of the house based on the "cosiness" of historical designs. She created in opposition to the Bauhaus in a certain way, but accepted the value of contemporary avant-garde creative thought brought by Gropius' school. What Mies Van Der Rohe brought from German practice? His structural, crystal, plain buildings have common features with the Roman villas based on clean, clearly divided space. And finally, Corbusier, his famous "apartment machines." Based on the Modulor, discovered many centuries earlier by Leonardo da Vinci based on the size of ergonomics. Another great person is Aalto. Creations by this wonderful architect based on traditional Scandinavian art. Using the values contained in traditional regional materials. In times of postmodernism, great artists such as Venturi, Stern or Stirling were using a freely chosen form, without the tradition of the place, masterfully reshaping traditional detail from the Neo-Baroque period, classicism or the Victorian art. Finally, another group of contemporary artists such as Nouvel, Hollein, Zaha Hadid or Behnisch. They build architectural forms as art connected or detached from the place of construction. They are based on traditional associations of forms and functions appropriate for a given location. They search for the genius loci of the place.

In conclusion, all these examples give us an idea of the great value of the continuity of architectural thought and show how creative use of the history of building and the tradition of the culture of creating world heritage. What a wonderful inspiration for the modern-day avant-garde based on the structure of intelligent digital programs. They create a new world based algorithm. However, there is always this freedom of action on computer-created projects, linked to the historical achievements of the ancestors. The Vitruvian doctrine is still valid. The architects of Europe are trying to visualize this by publishing white books in which they remind us what the architect is for. They say: *the architect should ensure the use of appropriate regional materials in shaping cities and public spaces, ... formulate global ideas and encourage local activities, creating and strengthening the sense of local and regional identity.*⁴ A responsible architect should act and create the new in connection and based on old proven patterns and structures. Avant-garde architecture is also possible in this configuration, although we constantly wonder if we are still suspended in modernist architecture. It is important that the teaching of future architects is possible, based on tradition and its creative transformation. The place of the architect and his professional responsibility is defined by the Code of Professional Ethics. Principle 1, General Obligations Chapter describes: *architects uphold and develop their knowledge of art and architecture, respect all architectural achievements and contribute to their development.*⁵

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Author's note:

PhD engineer architect, graduate of the Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Lodz University of Technology, since 1979 he has been a research and didactic employee of the Lodz University of Technology, deals with teaching drawing and painting and issues of professional ethics, author of many low-energy, pro-ecological objects, specializes in the renovation of Łódź cultural goods and in designing contemporary residences. Since 1985 he has been running his own architectural design office in Łódź.

⁴ E. O Cofaigh (ed.), *Europe and Architecture Tomorrow*, Architects' Council of Europe, Bruxelles 1995, pp. 100–101.

⁵ *Kodeks Etyki Zawodowej Architektów*, Izba Architektów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2005.