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UNINTENDED BEAUTY

PIĘKNO NIEZAMIERZONE

Abstract

Art has been trying to negate all tradition since the times of Duchamp. Architecture as technical art has had a problem with this approach to creation for years. Contemporary times, free from technical and financial problems, can already build forms that predecessors could only dream of. Detachment of function from the form of the building, or perhaps detachment from any function, gives architects the opportunity to create buildings in the shape of sculptures as in the drawings of expressionists from the early twentieth century. Architecture frees itself from the constraints of composition and follows a straight path to novelty. However, we do not know whether this trend will last long. Recipients are getting bored even faster with supernovelty and are eager to return to tradition – the one that is not digital.

Keywords: architecture, beauty

Streszczenie

Sztuka od czasów Duchampa stara się zanegować wszelką tradycję. Architektura jako sztuka techniczna miała przez lata problem z takim podejściem do tworzenia. Współczesność wolna od problemów technicznych i finansowych może buduje już formy, o jakich poprzednikom mogło się tylko śnić. Oderwanie funkcji od formy budynku a może oderwanie się od jakiegokolwiek funkcji daje dziś architektom możliwość tworzenia budynków w kształcie rzeźb jak z rysunków ekspresjonistów z początku XX wieku. Architektura wyzwala się z oków kompozycji i dąży prostą drogą do nowości. Jednak nie wiemy, czy taka tendencja potrwa długo. Odbiorcy coraz szybciej nudzą się nawet supernowością i chętnie powracają do tradycji – tej już niecyfrowej.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, piękno

1. QUEST FOR NOVELTY

One of the protagonists in Pier Paolo Pasolini's film says that *apparently, poets can only talk about things they have not seen*. Such words can make us think of total novelty and suggest a paraphrase whereby architects should not copy, but create only that which they have not seen. At the moment of its birth, every new art presents itself as the only and most contemporary art. Its creators try to present it as genuine and entirely diverging from all imitation and traditional perception of creation. Painting has always found its way to the unknown faster than architecture. However, one should remember that painting is free from technical habits and the functional purpose of architecture. In painting, its uselessness may

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become an expression of the pursuit of sheer beauty. With its structural modules and optimal room dimensions, architecture can only be envious of it. The tradition of building based on Vitruvius' theories forced architects to adopt an imitative and functionalist approach, and even if it offered them some freedom, it still imposed the final shape of the building. The audience was satisfied, the forms of the buildings they knew were assigned to their purpose and did not disappoint. Everyone knew they had seen it somewhere before, and they are familiar with it. Let us remember that we like the songs we know or have already heard somewhere before. However, revivals may also be perceived as novelty. Perhaps not the total one, but changing technology in architecture may result in a new perception of even the most familiar shapes. Buildings known from expressionist drawings from the beginning of the 20th century are now perceived as novelty. They do not introduce any new shapes, but they are simply new. They allowed themselves to be built in a modern way and thus created a "copied" novelty that had been previously unknown. Such architecture is revived without the pejorative epithet – neo, post or new.

Contemporary architecture tries to follow a similar path towards uniqueness and previously unknown fictionality. The words of the philosopher can be helpful here. Giorgio Colli presents such a need for art: "The field of art confirms the hypothesis of the world as an expression: art is an expression that establishes itself alongside a natural expression. The artist creates an object: a painting, a poetic word and so on; such objects are expressions by themselves, but for observers and consumers they become representations and invocations of life. However, natural expressions are then expressed in a chain that moves towards concrete, while artistic expressions are final. Their representational continuation is purely fictional [...]"². This may lead us to an innovative outlook on architecture and the need for the unreality of a contemporary building and perhaps even the whole architecture. This idea aims to depart from the linkage between the style of the building and its function and its representational character. Perhaps to depart from any shape and to create an abstract unreal sculpture, to the absolute novelty.

It is not since today that architects have been trying to free themselves from the habits and fetters of tradition. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, an uncompromising ideologist of futurism, presented such desires as early as 1909. He exhorted: "Let us leave good sense behind like a hideous husk and let us hurl ourselves, like fruit spiced with pride, into the immense mouth!... Let us feed the unknown, not from despair, but simply to enrich the unfathomable reservoirs of the Absurd"³.

All tradition was "absurd" to him. He proclaimed: "Beauty exists only in struggle. There is no masterpiece that has not an aggressive character. Poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man"⁴, as well as: "We are on the extreme promontory of the centuries! [...] What is the use of looking behind at the moment when we must open the mysterious shutters of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the absolute, since we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed"⁵. Futurists did not manage to last long, but the texts of their theories have had an undeniable impact on successive generations of creators and architects.

² G. Colli, *Filozofia ekspresji*, Kraków 2005, pp. 113–114.

³ F. T. Marinetti, *Akt założycielski Futuryzmu*, 1909 [in:] T. Kireńczuk, *Od sztuki w działaniu do działania w sztuce*, Kraków 2005, pp. 275–276.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 277.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

2. NEW MUSEUMS AND NON-REPRESENTATIONAL ARCHITECTURE

The contemporary times abandon the memorized canons of building. However, the world has changed and has been dominated by ubiquitous commerciality. The creators have adapted themselves and there is already a different explanation for one of the needs of the avant-garde from the beginning of the 20th century. Grzegorz Gazda stresses that one of the aims of art was the demand for “[...] active participation of artists in the reality stimulated by civilization processes”⁶. A similar goal can be found in the work of Daniel Libeskind. Presenting his approach to the meaning of architecture, the great artist tries to explain his negation of tradition: “I see the world as something open. It has a mystery that will never be solved by any science. Architecture is very crucial to understanding many things because it provides space to see the sky, to see the street, to see others as they enter through the door”. The words that seem to be significant here are: *will never be solved by any science*. Perhaps it is the indescribable magic of the sky that can provide the answer to the question of what architecture should be. Frequently described by poets, the “sky” becomes a background for an architect as if it were a romantic painting, for a great expressive building. The project builds the whole concept, trying to combine two trends in design or, as we can easily see, two opposing parts of the building. The first one is a historically existing building, which was probably created as an expression of beauty and composition, while the second one is already fully modern. It already has a new, previously unknown form. It becomes an expression of sheer advertising and is also absolutely modern in form – deconstructivist and destructive. The whole concept constitutes Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr. The museum was completed in Dresden and is an extension of the building of the former armoury built between 1873–1877. The original structure was erected in the classical form of a palace with a body and two rear wings that form a kind of a courtyard. The main element of the extension is the wedge or maybe the bow of the ship, cutting or sailing out from behind the old building. It could be considered more the Kriegsmarine museum than the Bundeswehr one. The wedge pierces the existing part and emerges in the rear courtyard. This form is visible from both sides of the whole and decomposes the axiality of the original structure. It reveals itself to us, cuts the front and becomes a visible sign – an advertisement of the whole, seen from afar, creating a uniform structure with the original buildings. The protruding part, however, does not form a façade, it is built of metal elements that allow the light to pass through. From the outside, it is difficult to tell what is hidden inside. Yet the transparency of the form allows the observer to peek inside and discover the poetic uselessness of the new form. The whole of Libeskind’s work shows us that function is not important here. Perhaps it is an expression of another demand of the futurists: “We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice”⁷. Here the architect is not a coward, the form is uncompromising, it is probably pure art. The building is an expression of one of the definitions of architecture by the great creator. The combination of the two elements seems natural to the observer, but also visible in its entirety only from the sky. The classical palace complex with its axial layout is broken down in a contemporary way. The metal designed element wedged into the building can be described as a damaged letter V. We cannot see it in its entirety, the whole can only be seen by flying birds. And again the futurists with their love for the destruction of memorized shapes: “It is in Italy that we are issuing this manifesto of

⁶ G. Gazda, *Awangarda, nowoczesność i tradycja*, Łódź 1987, p. 5.

⁷ F. T. Marinetti, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

ruinous and incendiary violence, by which we today are founding Futurism because we want to deliver Italy from its gangrene of professors, archaeologists, tourist guides and antiquaries. [...] Museums, cemeteries!... Truly identical in their sinister juxtaposition of bodies that do not know each other. Public dormitories where you sleep side by side forever with beings you hate or do not know. Reciprocal ferocity of the painters and sculptors who murder each other in the same museum with blows of line and colour”⁸. Here, the whole form is a sculpture, but probably not a cemetery. Despite the difference in aesthetics between the two parts, the whole appears before the observer’s eyes as an unusual symbiosis. The architect departs from symmetry, rhythm, he does not strive for the memorized beauty. This is how Libeskind describes his objective: “It was not my intention to preserve the museum’s façade and just add an invisible extension in the back. I wanted to create a bold interruption, a fundamental dislocation, to penetrate the historic arsenal and create a new experience. The architecture will engage the public in the deepest issue of how organized violence and how military history and the fate of the city are intertwined”⁹. He wants to create an absolutely innovative work of art, but in his own recognizable “style”. The intersection of the existing building becomes a metaphor. The abstract form allows one to hide such a layer of meaning from the audience, if there is one in this non-representational architecture, it has to be told by the author himself. Knowing Libeskind’s games with the audience in the Berlin museum, however, we could guess that there must be something hidden in the form here, which the author does not want to literally and directly reveal to us. Nevertheless, the relation between the two museums is noticeable, not only in the words of the author: “The destruction of Europe and European cities by the Nazis is part of the story of the destruction of Dresden. One cannot separate the Shoah and the museums that deal with memories from the history of Germany and Dresden”.

It should be remembered, however, that, after the period of modernism, contemporary architecture has been trying to abandon the literal understanding of the function of buildings. It is no longer necessary or a pretext for building a form. The world of art is already accustomed to the works of futurists and expressionists. The building can also be described in the words of Maria Gołaszewska, who writes that “art is a function of the state of culture at a certain level of human development”¹⁰. The contemporary world and its development, as we can see, create new art – abstract one. Such art is one that neither resembles nor suggests reality to the recipient. Contemporary continuators of the expressionist thought want to detach themselves from the reality of the existing architecture. The present-day abstraction of architecture can, however, be perceived as a continuation of tendencies that have long since emerged in art. Unfortunately, despite the artists’ actions, we can perceive it as a continuity of thought from the previous epochs. This is obviously intellectual continuity rather than purely literal one.

3. NEW BEAUTY

The pursuit of novelty creates a new aesthetic category with time – the unintentional beauty. Milan Kundera presents such a problem from the point of view of a writer: “Beauty in the Euro-

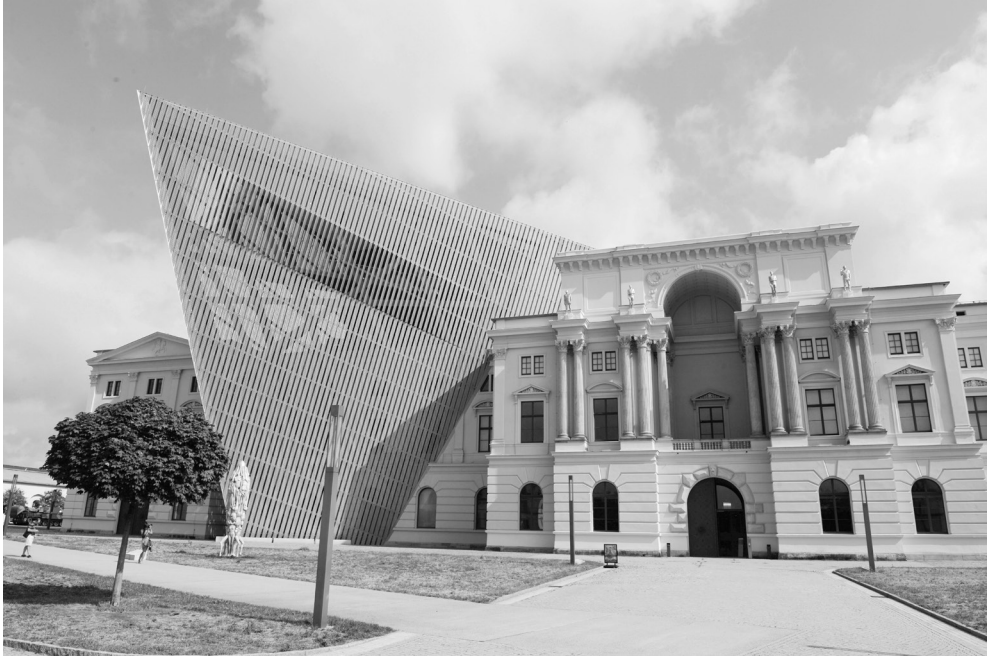
⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 278.

⁹ <https://www.archdaily.com/172407/dresden%25e2%2580%2599s-military-history-museum-daniel-libeskind> (access: 30.08.29019).

¹⁰ M. Gołaszewska, *Zarys estetyki*, Warszawa 1984, p. 190.



III. 1. Studio Libeskind, Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr, Dresden 2011, photo by WK



III. 2. Studio Libeskind, Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr, Dresden 2011, photo by WK

pean sense has always had a premeditated quality to it. We've always had an aesthetic intention and a long-range plan. That's what enabled Western men to spend decades building a Gothic cathedral or a Renaissance piazza. The beauty of New York rests on a completely different base. It's unintentional. It arose independent of human design, like a stalagmitic cavern. Forms which are in themselves quite ugly turn up fortuitously, without design, in such incredible surroundings that they sparkle with sudden wondrous poetry. – Unintentional beauty [...]. – Yes. Another way of putting it might be 'beauty by mistake'. Before beauty disappears entirely from the earth, it will go on existing for a while by mistake. 'Beauty by mistake' – the final phase in the history of beauty"¹¹. When writing at the beginning of the 20th century, Heinrich Wölfflin could not have foreseen the emergence of deconstructivist architecture and the movement of art towards novelty rather than beauty. His prophesy that "Painting can be tectonic, architecture must be. Painting only fully develops its own peculiar values when it takes leave of tectonics. For architecture, abolishing the tectonic framework would be tantamount to self-destruction"¹² did come true. Despite Wölfflin's pessimistic prophecies and the literal releasing architecture from the bonds of tectonics, the contemporary architecture of the deconstructivist era along with Zaha Hadid's first painterly works and the already constructed ones by Frank Gehry and Günther Domenig did not succumb to self-destruction. One could even say that these actions have led to the creation of a new "style" for a while. They have become a determinant for the quest for contemporary absolute novelty. They have also become a foreshadowing of a new

¹¹ M. Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, London 1984, p. 100.

¹² H. Wölfflin, *Podstawowe pojęcia historii sztuki, Problem rozwoju stylu w sztuce nowożytnej*, Warszawa 1962, pp. 166–199., III. *Forma zamknięta i forma otwarta*, p. 194.

way of perceiving the new needs of recipients and new non-representational architecture. The architecture, which owing to its abstraction, has been able to introduce a novelty to its form in the shape of the previously unknown dynamics of form, as seen in Libeskind's work. In his work *Dynamics*, Rudolf Arnheim explains an interest in representing dynamics in art: "Moreover, by using formal criteria rather than referring to subject matter, the theory avoids limiting the effect to images of mobile objects. It can explain why pictures of trees or mountains may look strongly dynamic and why this may also be true for wholly "abstract" shapes in art or architecture"¹³. Such an attractiveness of "unstable" contemporary architecture is not only of interest to professionals. The forms of contemporary buildings become attractive due to their unpredictability and the obvious detachment from their vertical and horizontal arrangement. An example of a certain way of creating architecture as an abstract composition is the aforementioned building housing the Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr.

The building may become an illustration for the thesis presented by Leon Chwistek, theoretician of Polish Expressionism – Formism: "There are genres completely independent from the notion of content, namely music, ornamental art, and architecture in a sense. While we are talking about the musical illustration, it is easy to realize that the relationship between the juxtaposition of tones and conceptual content can be achieved only by artificially added explanation, and in a number of ways. Also, a knight's helmet, a swan, a female figure can be discerned in the ornaments filling e.g. Persian rugs, but one will soon see that not only does this way of looking not help us to empathize with the beauty of these items, but it will also soon cause fatigue and distaste. A similar phenomenon occurs in architecture, which has long been rightly juxtaposed with music"¹⁴. Such a lack of content once disqualified architecture. However, we are now after modernism or even postmodernism that abandoned literality in design. Such a picture of architecture would probably be difficult for Abraham Moles and his reflections on kitsch. He presented functional art as its opposite: "This is one of Gropius's fundamental theses on art: he discerns an additional element in beauty, the perception of adequacy. He distinguishes a certain type of rationality based on function. Gropius states: »Adaptation to purpose is, among other things, beautiful«, placing the emphasis on a *suffixal*, additional character of beauty, which is the result of the proper use of means for specific purposes"¹⁵ and further: "This attitude is extremely contradictory to kitsch, it is its purest opposite and that is why we are interested in it. Its enormous influence on the future of human relations with the environment has been permanently embedded in rationalism, which is one of the fundamental elements of European thought. A concept of the environment that could disregard the existence of functionalism is not possible today, not even if it rejects it, just as no figurative school disregards perspective, even if it resigns from it". However, architecture that abandons its functionalist connotations does not become kitsch. It is widely acknowledged, which does not bode well for its long-lasting life, as it usually leads to boredom of the recipient and opens the door to some yet unknown, but even newer art.

Nevertheless, the architecture of contemporary expressionists is an expression of absolute novelty heading towards unintentional beauty and nothing suggests today that it is their final say.

¹³ R. Arnheim, *Sztuka i percepcja wzrokowa*, Łódź 2014, p. 439.

¹⁴ L. Chwistek, *Formizm* [in:] T. Kostyrko (ed.), *Leon Chwistek. Wybór pism estetycznych*, Kraków 2004, p. 97.

¹⁵ A. Moles, *Kicz czyli sztuka szczęścia*, Warszawa 1978, p. 142.

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