

NINA JUZWA¹

BEAUTY IN ARCHITECTURE

PIĘKNO W ARCHITEKTURZE

Abstract

The subject of this publication is the attempt to ‘touch’ the problem of beauty in architecture. This idea is comprised in two parts.

1. Understanding the beauty

The attempts to answer the question on how our brain reacts to beauty are still undertaken in modern science. It is generally known that beauty is a biological phenomenon. It is a kind of desire which needs to be satisfied. Beauty is a subjective, private feeling. It is not based on universal principles. It does not possess a homogenous set of principles, but it changes depending on the established output values.

2. In search for beauty

The criteria introduced by Bernard Tschumi were used while looking for beauty in architecture. The division includes: architecture consistent with the context of place, which draws the idea from history or traditions of the region and the architecture presenting new form, which may become the beginning of a new tradition and new integrity of the place.

Keywords: beauty, architectural form

Streszczenie

Przedmiotem publikacji jest próba „dotknięcia” problemu piękna w architekturze. Myśl tę zawarto w dwóch częściach.

1. Zrozumieć piękno

We współczesnej nauce czynione są próby odpowiedzi na pytanie w jaki sposób nasz mózg reaguje na piękno. Wiadomo dziś, że piękno to zjawisko biologiczne – jest swego rodzaju pragnieniem, które domaga się zaspokojenia. Jest piękno uczuciem subiektywnym, prywatnym. Nie jest oparte na przesłankach uniwersalnych. Nie posiada jednolitego kanonu, zmienia się w zależności od ustalonych wartości wyjściowych.

2. W poszukiwaniu piękna

W poszukiwaniach piękna w architekturze posłużono się kryteriami Bernarda Tschumi. Podziałem na: architekturę spójną z kontekstem miejsca, która ideę czerpie z historii, bądź z tradycji regionu oraz na architekturę o formie nowej, która może stać się początkiem nowej tradycji, nowej tożsamości miejsca.

Słowa kluczowe: piękno, forma architektoniczna

¹ Prof. D. Sc. Ph.D. Arch. Nina Juzwa, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Environmental Engineering, Lodz University of Technology, nina.juzwa@p.lodz.pl; ORCID 0000-0001-9627-0782

Beauty? – According to an esthete and philosopher it is a positive esthetic property of an entity resulting from keeping proportions, harmony of colours, sounds, moderation of usability received by senses. There are different kinds of beauty namely: ideal, spiritual, moral, physical, objective and subjective. It is a concept related to the theory of esthetics, truth and goodness. In metaphysics beauty is one of the transcendental properties of entity, expressing its consolidation, translucency, internal proportion and perfection.³

Beauty was once attributed to God and king. We are still enchanted by the beauty of the vault painted in blue with gold stars in the King's Chapel in Louvre. Nowadays it is willingly set against the beauty of a small village chapel Bruder Klaus Kapele designed by Peter Zumthor. We even compare the beauty of glass technology in a small **Apple Store** in New York, which in its interior houses the God of consumption.

The examples show how various thoughts may accompany the creation of beauty in architecture.

The majority of architects avoid answering the question about beauty in architecture. However, if we enter beauty in the search bar, we will find a great number of websites. The majority of them refers to hairstyle and fashion as well as the accessories related to fashion. At the same time, every day thousands of tourists set off in search for architectural beauty. They spend huge money, actively creating lucrative branch of tourism looking for beauty in buildings, rural landscapes and architecture. Thus, beauty is a very important value not only to the development of culture but also to the economic development.

Professor Bruno Zevi, the author of neuroesthetics, lecturing in London says that beauty is a key part of our life. It is a kind of desire, which as any other one needs to be satisfied. He divides beauty into: biological such as beautiful faces, landscapes and artificial which includes works created by a man like beautiful buildings and beautiful cars. While talking about biological beauty, for example the beauty of the face, he notices that we have a pattern of beautiful face or body in our brain. So according to such pattern, biological patterns are similar or at least they possess visible common features. However, different people may differ in their choices.

Biological beauty is more resistant to cultural influences than 'artificial' one. We do not possess preferential standards regarding artificial works of a man, therefore we should be pleased with various patterns, depending on cultural conditions different in different regions. Esthetic experiences associated with beauty are always connected to the feeling of pleasure (Bruno Zevi).

1. THE FIRST THOUGHT. UNDERSTANDING BEAUTY

What is architectural beauty then?

If we consider architecture as the activity which stays in the circle of culture and art, let me quote the words of Albrecht Durer: 'A painter who is to paint a picture should do it in the

² A. Rottenberg, interviewed by Białkowski Ł., *Należy sobie zaufać*, Znak, 2016, no. 736, pp. 26–34.

³ W. Tatarkiewicz, *O doskonałości*, PWN, Warszawa 1976, pp. 42–56.

best way he could. Yet, what beauty is I do not know'.⁴ This is what one of the most famous painters in the Western world said.⁵

Throughout centuries the problem of *beauty* was the domain of church and theologians. Some thought that beauty favours religiousness and is created to praise the Creator, others that it expresses the man's attachment to material goods. Even then the argument between the beauty of glittering gold and the magnificence of tabernacle as well as the loftiness and the simplicity of towers created by the Surger abbot was present.

Today in the times of general relativism, we think that *beauty* is the value which is born in the mind of the viewer rather than it exists in the value of the object itself. Beauty as a criterion of values in architecture is present in the philosophical thoughts. Moreover, in the discussions about architecture the topic of value as an element which enables to characterize and estimate the description of the building appears very often.

In the common approach, the value of the object equals its price. In the axiological discussion however, we do not talk about the price. On the other hand thoughts about beauty as a value which is a special quality of the object available to a man's cognizance look interestingly. This value is a constant quantity whereas variable are only the possibilities of its study.

Mentioning the representatives of this field enables to look closer onto the problem of beauty in architecture. Hans Georg Gadamer, who is the closest to my thoughts says that beauty is the value standing above all other values like: time, technical excellence, usability. Such statement makes the beauty prove correct as a criterion of excellence of the object.

Max Scheler recalls three thought circles from the history and three traditions namely: Christian – Jewish tradition, ancient – Greek tradition, natural – modern tradition and genetic – psychology tradition. These three traditions are mutually not coherent enough, however, they give a complex view of modern times. They show unity and at the same time duality of 'the entity of a contemporary man'.⁶ Scheler created a pyramid of values where beauty as an esthetic value is placed on top of it, in the second position among spiritual values just after absolute values. In the lower layers of the ladder there are vital and utilitarian values.

Similarly, the beauty is found in the works of Roman Ingarden. Polish phenomenologist also placed beauty in the second position, in cultural values just after moral values which are placed on top of the juxtaposition.

Ingarden regards the work of art as an intentional object which exists in the layers. He distinguishes four layers in the literary work namely: the layer of wording, the layer of the appearance of the object, the layer of object itself that is its contents and the layer of meaning. The two latter layers are always present in the work, they create the painting image. Ingarden also regards the reader as a coauthor.⁷

The phenomenologist's thinking may be transferred into architecture. The idealistic approach to art in which the esthetic value is inseparable from the ethic value of the work is important to Ingarden. Wherein while looking for beauty in architecture, the ethic dimension of the work seems to be more complicated than esthetic one.⁸

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

⁶ P. Waclawik, *Antropologia, filozofia Maxa Schelera: jej geneza i przedmiot*, Folia Philosophica, 1998, Vol. 16, pp. 103–113.

⁷ R. Ingarden, *Studia z estetyki*, PWN, Warszawa 1958, pp. 115–160.

⁸ Compare Jencks.

Andrzej Basista,⁹ in his book *Architektura i wartości. Architecture and Values* also presents a table of values which could be found also in architecture. He uses two columns; the left includes values related to the usability of the object and the ethics. The right one includes those associated with culture and esthetics and also with beauty.

Due to the visible usability of the building and formal solutions, architecture transers the culture of place and time in which it is created. Another important element for modern buildings is materiality and technological solutions related to it. The use of matter in the characteristic way for the time of realization dates the work, usually also shows the place of its creation.

Technical and technological excellence of modern architecture make its relations with business and politics stronger. In fact architecture means business and so always somebody has to pay the bills. In the old times these were mighty of the world and aristocracy, nowadays economy or politics. These connections become more and more important due to its growing number of investment costs. Modern banks are not only the trustees of costs but they invest in architectural beauty, especially when taking into consideration the marketing role of architecture. It's worth quoting here the unusual beauty of **Bre Bank in Bydgoszcz designed by Bulanda, Mucha, 1995.**

Anna Rottenberg, the author of books, a critic and art historian thinks that beauty requires understanding, acquisition and spreading. Something which has not been generally acquired is not regarded as beautiful. Spreading means that a new, avant-garde work entered the existing canon of beauty. The author says:

'The works which go beyond an accepted canon, are not regarded as beautiful as long as they do not spread. Then they enter a new canon, and then they stop being fashionable and they again become ugly.'¹⁰

This statement is convergent with an old thought of Immanuel Kant, who thought that beautiful is what is commonly and selflessly liked. He distinguished taste from the idea of excellence. In both statements political character of art sounds loudly therefore even beauty may be politicised.

Similar thoughts may be found in the works of Władysław Tatarkiewicz, who distinguishes proportions and adequacy in the beauty of architecture. **Proportion** is understood as architectural form, proportion and harmony of interior, also understood as harmony of projection and integrity of interior solutions and exterior of spatial arrangement. **Adequacy** means functionality of the object as well as ethic-moral values¹¹ of the building. Likewise Tatarkiewicz, Ingarden¹² too accentuates integrity of the building with the surrounding very clearly. He draws attention to enlisting the newly designed building into the existing context of surrounding.

2. THE SECOND THOUGHT – LOOKING FOR BEAUTY IN ARCHITECTURE

Each historic period introduced a feature characteristic for culture into architecture and also disclosed technical and technological abilities of this time. While observing the adjustment of variabilities and smoothness of needs in the modern architecture, at the same time

⁹ A. Basista, *Architektura i wartości. Architecture and Values*, Wydawnictwo Universitas, Kraków 2005.

¹⁰ A. Rottenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 24–31.

¹¹ W. Tatarkiewicz, *Dzieje sześciu pojęć*, PWN, Warszawa 1975, p. 137.

¹² R. Ingarden, *op. cit.*

the growing ability and ease in joining different materials in functional solutions. Sometimes they are mutually alien. Such connection of little coherent materials yet formally attractive is also observed in material solutions as well as aesthetic ones. However, connecting material solutions, aesthetic and little coherent is more often seen in big public utility buildings. It is also observed in the examples quoted in the introduction.

The first example is the personification of traditional beauty. We are still enchanted by the art of constructing the form, which is seen in the vault of the old **St. Mary's Chapel in Louvre**. Juxtaposed with the village chapel **Bruder Klaus Kapele of Peter Zumthor** it still preserves traditional canon of courtly beauty. What is more it highlights the distinctness of contemporary beauty. This distinctness is seen in the simplicity of form and the brave use of wood, an old traditional material in an atypical form. In order to call the work art according to the intention of organizers, the talent of architect should be added. The talent which may be described in the following way: 'a cross between Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Proust with perhaps a tiny bit of Bob Dylan thrown in.'¹³

The third example – a small glass cube of **Apple store** is located on the crossroads of Columbus Circle and the Fifth Avenue in New York. It presents a technology of high quality glass and architecture which serves marketing for a commercial giant. The building, which apart from the technology of glass used as a main material for architectural form, astonishes us with its story expressed by functional solution. This small cube, with practically no function, is situated beneath a big building of Mercedes, at one of the busiest crossroads in New York. In the middle of this glass box there is a glass lift and a glass, winding staircase. Both glass elements serve as the entrance to the place of sales. The shop is located below the glass cubic and is far from the busy and noisy crossroads. Here, in complete silence we can see neatly placed small masterpieces of modern technology of the famous Apple brand.

The scenography of the entrance recalls the entrance to a temple of an eastern rite on the East of Poland. There we cannot enter the place from the street, we have to go through the 'gates'. Likewise in Apple store, it cannot be entered from the street.

The examples show how the abilities of looking for beauty in architecture become liberal and how they widen. When we think about beauty in buildings the problem seems important or even more important. What I mean are the buildings which serve the inhabitants due to the widely understood function of culture. After the year 2000 many were created also in Silesia. Finally the buildings backed by the faith in own intuition of choice were awarded.¹⁴

These are:

- **International Congress Centre in Katowice, 2015**, arch. JEMS Architects
- **Place of Meeting of Cultures in Lublin, 2016**, arch. Stelmach and Partners Architectural Office Ltd.
- **NOSPR in Katowice, 2014**, arch. Konior Studio
- **Silesian Museum in Katowice, 2013**, Riegler Riewe

These buildings are important to inhabitants due to their social values and creation of high quality urbanity. They are important because they create the beauty of new public spaces.

¹³ P. Goldberger, *Swiss Mystique*, Vanity Fair, 2001, <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2001/07/peter-zumthor-architect-buildings>, translation of the website, (access: 12.06.2019).

¹⁴ Leanness of place and above all the principle to describe only buildings touched in situ, restrict the number of presented buildings especially in Silesia. Final choice is supported by faith in personal evaluation.

Large buildings more expressively than others show how important integrity of solutions of all elements is, as well as proportions, interior harmony and the harmony in the context of a new object and its surrounding to the architectural beauty.

The way of thinking presented by Bernard Tschumi contained in the texts in 'Event Cities'¹⁵ seems to be quite interesting in this topic. The building is an event, which in order to arise has to possess certain features. The building – event does not then exist without a function, that is without what is going on inside or without a context in which it is placed. And yet, regardless of the justification of the important features, the most important thing for Bernard Tschumi is the idea, the concept of an architect. The concept or the idea of a project may be the result of thoughts and associations with history and identification with the place, or it may derive from tradition of this region. It may also arise from quite new thoughts and ideas, which in future may create a new identity of place.

This is an idea-concept of an architect from which the way the new form of the building reacts to the functional conditioning and how it is placed in space. A new form may interact with the context in various ways:

- may be a neutral form to the context.
 - may be a mutual form, which takes place when both forms complement one another or when they enter mutual relationships,
 - the third example takes place when both forms are in mutual conflict.
- Each strategy may be used by the architect while building the architectural conception.

Within the last couple of years, a lot of buildings were created in Poland, which deserve attention as architectural beauty. The choice is not easy. Having in mind theses presented by organizers and especially the one expressed in thought about memory-amnesia, I used the classification of Bernard Tschumi concerning mutual form, that is the form which put into the urban context, preserves mutual respect of an old form and the new designed one.

Returning to large buildings and the conception of Bernard Tschumi, the conception of MCK building made by JEMS architects may be called an interesting memory image about Silesia. The remaining buildings are formally neutral, do not interact with surrounding apart from visible formal solutions. They are more like the announcement of new identity of place.

The classification of Bernard Schuman was an occasion to choose the next group of buildings situated in built-up buildings, each being an element or closing of a street string.

These are:

- Maloposka Gardens of Art in Kraków, designed by Ingarden and Ewa Bryła
- Centre of Science and Education Symphony in Katowice, 2008 designers Tomasz Konior and Barysz (cooperation)
- The Department of High Film School in Katowice, 2008, Grupa 5 Architekci, BAAS architects, (Małecki Design Office in Katowice, executive project)

The ideas which stand at the top of their conceptions may be defined as if they were excavated from the World Memory Museum. They talk about the beauty of façade which preserves the sanctity of the regulatory line. They talk about the ceramic tradition of this region and the history of place.

Summing up, we observe that the beauty in architecture is in close relationship with functionality and durability of the building. Thus architecture is an integral work, which

¹⁵ B. Tschumi, *Event-Cities 3: Concept vs. Context vs. Content*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2004.

is created to please our eyes. It is a work which serves people and usually loses its value when the use value of the building undergoes degradation.

References

- [1] Basista A., *Architektura i wartości. Architecture and Values*, Wydawnictwo Universitas, Kraków 2005.
- [2] Ingarden R., *Studia z estetyki*, PWN, Warszawa 1958, pp. 115–160.
- [3] Tatarkiewicz W., *Dzieje sześciu pojęć*, PWN, Warszawa 1975.
- [4] Tatarkiewicz W., *O doskonałości*, PWN, Warszawa 1976.
- [5] Tschumi B., *Event-Cities 3: Concept vs. Context vs. Content*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2004.
- [6] Waclawik P., *Antropologia, filozofia Maxa Schelera: jej geneza i przedmiot*, Folia Philosophica, 1998, Vol. 16, pp. 103–113.
- [7] Goldberger P., *Swiss Mystique*, Vanity Fair, 2001, <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2001/07/peter-zumthor-architect-buildings>, translation of the website, (access: 12.06.2019).
- [8] Rottenberg A. interviewed by Białkowski Ł., *Należy sobie zaufać*, Znak, 2016, no. 736, pp. 26–34.

Author's note:

Graduate of the Wrocław University of Technology, from 1999 to 2005 Dean of the Faculty of Architecture of the Silesian University of Technology; Honorary Professor of the Silesian University of Technology, she combined work at the Silesian University of Technology with work in design offices in Poland and abroad; member of the Architecture and Urban Planning Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Her motto in life is not to lose sight of her dreams in pursuit of everyday life.