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PERMANENCE IN ARCHITECTURE

CONSTANS W ARCHITEKTURZE

Abstract

Architecture as a method of separating and depicting the space is subject to change. Time and people redefine the constructed architectural objects, once assumed to be *unchangeable*. Built to perform a task outlined in an undefined time – still specifically *durable* – they are adapted to the conditions in which that task is contemporarily being performed. Materials used for constructing a spatial concept and methods of separating space which are subject to a specific *best before* are its consequence. *Permanence* referred to Architecture, analysing the *object* and *place* – demonstrates the unchangeable. Determining it, constituting a specific foundation for the concept of constructing, facilitates defining the goal pursued, direction of the undertaken activities and methods in designing.

Keywords: Architecture, durability in architecture, place, frame for events

Streszczenie

Architektura zmienia się jako metoda wydzielenia i przedstawiania przestrzeni. Czas i ludzie redefiniują wybudowane, z założenia niegdyś *niezmiennie*, obiekty architektoniczne. Skonstruowane dla spełniania, określonego w niewyznaczonym czasie zadania, nadal swoiście *trwale* – są dostosowywane do warunków, w którym owo zadanie jest realizowane współcześnie. Zastosowane materiały, konstruujące założenie przestrzenne, a także metody wydzielenia przestrzeni, podlegające swoistemu *best before* – są tego konsekwencją. *Constans*, odniesiony do Architektury, analizując *obiekt* i *miejsce* – wskazuje niezmiennie. Wyznaczenie tego – stanowiąc swoisty fundament dla konceptu budowania, ułatwia w określaniu celu, ku któremu się podąża oraz kierunku działań i metod w projektowaniu.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, trwałość w architekturze, miejsce, rama dla zdarzeń

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*A tree forms itself in answer to its place and the light.
Explain it how you will, the only thing explainable will
be your explanation*

Sabbaths 1999 IV, Wendell Berry

*Isidora, therefore, is the city of his dreams: with one
difference. The dreamed-of city contained him as
a young man; he arrives at Isidora in his old age. In
the square there is the wall where the old men sit and
watch the young go by; he is seated in a row with them.
Desires are already memories...*

Invisible Cities, Italo Calvino

1. INTRODUCTION

Architecture is a language capable of conveying the meaning and ordering the behaviour of the space users who are inside it². Referring to the George Berkeley's thought, the reality is perceived through *imagination* i.e. *experiences*. Architecture as an element of this reality and a medium of communication having an impact on the transferred information – it is *experienced* through them – via senses. The interpretation made in the mind of the observer is of importance. Discussing forming of Architecture as *separating space*, from the point of view of the sensual data perception – two essential models of cognition may be evoked: *representative* and *naïve realism*³. The first one, following John Locke's words that *...no man's knowledge may move beyond his experience* – perceiving separation of the space as multi-layered and spatial, is a reference to the whole context: experiences, genius loci, and ultimately, a broadly interpreted structure of the object – constructed also by intangible means. The other – sees it through selective, identifying information⁴. From among *firmitas*, *utilitas* and *venustas* – the *durability* of Architecture, against universally present, modern evanescence of everything, is not only its essential attribute, but also a key element of evaluation.

2. PERMANENCE IN ARCHITECTURE

The present does not exist for the Idea of creating Architecture. Discussing time of its formation we speak about the past, i.e. about something which was realised, or about the future – i.e. about something which has not been completed so far. The Idea which is realised contemporarily belongs to the past – as it was then that it was formed. Architecture construed as a medium of thought transmission also does not have a reference to the present, it talks about what used to be or what will be – speaking the language of the past or the future. In both

² Nawrot G., *O współczesnych formach zamieszkiwania w mieście*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, Gliwice 2015, p. 164.

³ Dual interpretation of John Locke: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 1689.

⁴ For example: colour, form of façade, etc.

instances, the present is a specific, tiny *point*, separating their vastitudes. The tinier the point is, the better the Idea of constructing the space realises the philosophical metaphor of *edifice*. That is the characteristic contradiction of the essence of architecture: the more it unitarily is a metaphor of the *unchangeable* – the more dynamically it is *changing* as a whole. The context of thinking about Architecture is changed as well as Ideas for its concepts. According to the universal conviction there is however, something that is permanent – the Place. The Place – a written down set of information from various disciplines. Important even by ostentatious ignoring, in the manifesting statement of Rem Koolhaas...

Architecture, like any other functional thing, wears out and becomes a thing of the past⁵. It is true that things are becoming more and more evanescent, they serve for shorter and shorter time and their appearance or disappearance does not cause any stir. The only serious consequence they bring is compelling us to adapt to the time which is grasped as compressed, deprived of memories and sense of passing...⁶ The essence of architecture development is its formation corresponding to the development of the social thought. Repetition becomes an element of a specific civil enlightenment, and repeatable, cloned buildings, as Rem Koolhaas claimed, become its currency⁷. Resonating of the idea of their apparent durability – is also such currency.

The essence of architecture development is its formation simultaneously with the development of the social thought. Formation however, is only the beginning of lasting. It appears as prospectively *important* or *less important* i.e. *permanent* by definition, whatever this may mean these days, or *temporary*, stigmatised, with the determined expiry date – the *best before*... The *best before* Architecture will not be granted graceful ageing... And what does this durability really mean?

Is it the technical durability of the manufactured mechanism of a car or place, or rather a universal *firmitas*, that is more important than the durability of packaging form for something more vital, located inside and with that thing – constituting a structure of an architectural object...?⁸ Durability of the object is defined by the material. It may be discussed in the context of physical survival: on the one hand – resistance, primarily to the external factors, and on the other – a reasonable need for the object to exist.

A specifically interpreted difference of value between *permanent* Kraków Cloth Hall and liquidated hypermarket hall in Sosnowiec, constituting a framework for the already useless content, is very adequately depicted by the statement about the existence of buildings that are old and obsolete.

Development is the subsequent stage. It is of essential importance for the Architecture of transformable space, in a negotiative way taking up the Vitruvian *solidity* as unchangingly basic, defining it attribute. It is difficult to identify the metamorphic *lasting* – with its different levels of progressing transformation of the object whose emanations are: the transfigured structure of the whole and communicated information, different from the original one – with the unchanging *durability*.

⁵ Misiągiewicz M., Kozłowski D., *Tezy Konferencji*, 2018, <https://niaiu.pl/definiowanie-przestrzeni-architektonicznej/> (access: 7.11.2019).

⁶ Cray J., 24/7. *Późny kapitalizm i koniec snu*, Karakter, Kraków 2015.

⁷ *Repeatable cloned buildings become the currency of the civil enlightenment...*: Koolhaas R., *Śmieciowa przestrzeń. Teksty*, Centrum Architektury, Warszawa 2017.

⁸ Nawrot G., *Intuitive Rationality* [in:] M. Perinkova, S. Juttnerova, L. Videcka (eds.) *10 Architektura v perspective 2018*, VSB – Technická univerzita Ostrava, Ostrava 2018, p. 17–18.

Adolf Loos claimed that the form of an object should last, i.e. should be bearable, as long as the object lasts physically...⁹ Modern materials and technologies enabling to construct civil engineering facilities and urban planning concepts appropriately for the utility objects give them the upfront determined durability. It is no more the physical *durability of the object*, but its usefulness which becomes a determinant of durability of the *form*. That usefulness reduced the meaning of the object value, giving it the attributes of *bigness* category – a specific container for the function¹⁰. The *form*, once a flexible emanation of value – metamorphically lost its original meaning, becoming a mechanism to synthesise the material and virtual world, combining synergic civil engineering structures with contemporary tele-technical and information technologies. It is not the *appearance of something*, it is rather the Aristotle's conceptual essence of the object: a *manifestation* or a *set of coordinated elements*.

On the other hand, durability – and also the meaning of symbols and manner in which the space is formed – provides ontological security: it determines a situation, where an individual thanks to involvement in repetition of actions which usually deliver the expected results gains the sense of identity and control over conditions of their life¹¹. Lack of ontological security is of vital importance for the perception of Architecture.

It would be a simplification to state that the basic attribute of the whole, contemporarily created Architecture is evanescence nurturing the specific *transience*. However, it is the *evanescence* in various forms – that has a significance which is difficult to overlook. It may be discussed from different perspectives. In common understanding *durability*, unequivocal with an unspecified *long-lastingness*, was relativized by the *best before* feature semantically becoming a certain oxymoron.

The dynamics of information events and limited supply of construction areas do not facilitate longevity of architectural objects. Built to perform a specific task over a certain period of time, still *durable*, they are simultaneously adapted to time when that task is performed. Materials used for constructing a spatial concept and methods of separating space which are subject to a specific *best before* are its consequence. In the first instance, the properties of a certain packaging for specific events are obtained, whose transience arises from their content or chosen form of communication. In the other instance, transformability of space and the use of intangible methods of its demarcation become the attributes¹². In both cases, it is difficult to identify the objects which are not vehicles of durable content with continuity of traditions or with any progression at all. They disappear in the blink of an eye, with the outdated content for which they are the packaging. This is related to the general perception of the world...

The principles of Berkeley's immaterialism, expressed with the words *Esse est percipi*¹³ question the existence of things and events from the very moment we stop looking at them. It is particularly accurate in relation to creating architectural *frameworks for events*, intended

⁹ Loos Adolf: *Ornament and Crime*, 1908.

¹⁰ Rem Koolhaas uses the term *bigness* (measured value – volumetric) as a specific opposition to *greatness* (greatness – uncommonness: the quality of somebody or something rising them above the average level); Koolhaas R., *op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹¹ According to Anthony Giddens, ontological security means sense of lasting and order of events, including events exceeding the area of immediate experience of an individual: Giddens A., *Nowoczesność i tożsamość*, PWN, Warszawa 2007, pp. 50–78, 150–197.

¹² Light, colour, sound, temperature, consequences of cultural behaviours of the users, etc.

¹³ *To be is to be perceived* (lat.); a principle of Berkeley's idealism (immaterialism).

to be filled with a defined content – and required as long as they may be a place useful for the purpose.

Architectural space constructed in that way, losing the applied topicality – *fades away* as soon as *we cease to perceive it* as a useful place to be filled with content. Taking into consideration that it may be built also of intangible elements or be a hybrid of material and intangible elements, it *realistically fades away*, becoming a specific cemetery for the *spirit of place* as soon as the immaterial elements cease to be used for its separation¹⁴. Contrary to the historical concepts, a characteristically durable element of this type of objects, is only the *place*. A car park and bar situated therein are, depending on the needs, replaced with a petrol station, and the latter one with a hypermarket, which in turn is replaced with a logistics centre, etc...

Architecture is an image of idea, i.e. materialisation of space by means of a Thought. Demarcating the space, it encloses the ongoing processes – organising people's lives. It is not the only one of its facets. These are also broadly construed means of expression. So interpreted, paraphrasing the words of Claude Debussy about music resembling It, Architecture, which itself may be a specific medium for information, starts where the immaterial information loses the power to express the unimaginable¹⁵.

It is a recorded, previously selected, set of information producing in the mind the power to express that what is material is not always imaginable... The space delineated by means of intangible methods, though it is unequivocally determined at a certain moment, however intangible methods of its demarcation suggest potential evanescence of the delineation.

Separating the space for place may be interpreted in two ways: it appears in the minds and it is constructed materially. In both cases it appears as a specific *palimpsest* resetting the old content with the new one, or as *overwriting* – leaving the previously recorded elements.

The essence of an architectural object interpretation is hence the interpretation of the Place. The Place – interpreted both mentally and materially – is a context for constructing Architecture developing in a material space. It comprises both what is past and what is future. Past – what is written in it. Future – an architectural object or urban planning concept which will be created. Present in the use of a place is the aforementioned, specific, tiny *point*, separating vastitudes of the past and the future... Freedom is a state of mind¹⁶. According to John Milton in *Paradise Lost*, “the mind it is its own place, and in itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven”. Freedom is born in the mind. The concept of Place, similarly to Freedom – variously interpreted – is ultimately also born in the mind. Freedom and Place get intermingled in a way. Interpretation of place depends on interpretation and sense of freedom; the place may be a mentally closed fortress or a continuum opening in the space¹⁷, it may be a prison fence built for the collection of curiosities or an intimate shelter.

The history of the world consists of an infinite sequence of facts frozen in the form of things¹⁸ and the Place is born at the intersection of the human world and the matter¹⁹. On

¹⁴ Evanescent – intangible elements demarcating the space: light, sound, temperature, etc.

¹⁵ Claude Debussy claimed that... *music begins where the word loses the power to express the unimaginable*.

¹⁶ *Freedom is a state of mind...*; Gandhi Mohandas Karamchand.

¹⁷ As *coquilles* subsequently opened in the space... see Moles A., Rohmer É., *Psychologie de l'espace*, Tournai, Paris 1972.

¹⁸ Benjamin W., *Pasaże*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2005, p. 46.

¹⁹ Rembowska K., *Miasto postmodernistyczne. Perspektywy badań geograficznych*, Acta Universitatis



III. 1. A specifically interpreted difference of the objects' value is very adequately depicted by the statement about the existence of buildings that are old and obsolete. The pictures present different commercial facilities with their immediate context. The Cloth Hall in Kraków versus a liquidated hypermarket in Sosnowiec. *Durability*, unequivocally identified with the *long-lastingness* versus durability relativized by the specific feature of the *best before*. In the second case, contrary to the historical concepts – only the place is permanent. Within it, depending on the needs – car park and bar are replaced with the petrol station, the latter one with the hypermarket, and the hypermarket with the logistics centre, etc... – Photo Kraków: Grzegorz Nawrot, Photo Sosnowiec: Aleksandra Helbin., source: money.pl., published by the consent of the author and money.pl.

the other hand, more and more contemporary facts lose the capacity to become frozen in that stability which makes the place *durable* – a specific yard for locating various *evanescent* events and appearing and disappearing objects. It is a specific framework for events: its evanescent part, being a consequence of the method of use, may be transformable, that however, does not change the fact that its essence – the said framework for events – is not transformable.

The space of a place is constructed from higher and higher number of elements. The Place – separated from an anonymous space, is built from the material which is a compilation of material and intangible elements, as a *specifically expanded space* – a hybrid *metaversum*. That compilation of functionalities and archetypal meanings arises from the recorded events, material and virtual elements used and the relationships between them.

Its potentially usable multilayeredness is a consequence of overlapping of various interpretation possibilities: political, social, economic and also of building the interpretations of contemporary references to values, formation of rituals, integration, etc.²⁰ Construction of a place, separated from the architectural space, is made through heterotrophic, individually internalised by the inhabitants subjectively understood intangible partial elements. The following are of importance:

- awareness of the sense of identification and its emanation (noticeability),
- satisfying the needs (usefulness),
- capability to store events (recording in the inhabitants' memory),
- emanation of the stored events (potential capability to play the recorded events in memory),
- impacts on the inhabitant (manifold – also via the recorded content).

The key attribute is a *durable* capability to record current and past content within it; and that capability becomes essential for separating the Place from the anonymous space: naming it and delineating its boundaries.

3. SUMMARY

The essence of architecture is its formation adequately to both the times when it was created and the development of social thought. The concept of durability in Architecture, discussed in the context of materials it is built of changes its unequivocal, Vitruvian nature. This applies to the object of Architecture, which has so far been perceived within categories of a metaphorical, stable *edifice* situated in a specific *place* designated by the invariant and material boundaries. This applies to the place as well, which though still durable in its essence, defined by a specific *durable framework for passing events* in the extended space of *metaversum*, finds new attributes and values. The essence of an architectural object interpretation is the interpretation of the place where it is located.

*One should not get old before one becomes worthy...*²¹ It would be a simplification to state that the fate of the majority of contemporary objects is evanescence however, a vast majori-

Lodziensis, Folia Geografica Socio-Oeconomica, 2008, no. 9, pp. 3–13.

²⁰ Max Scheler – argued the objective hierarchy of five types of values, where each higher value gives sense to the lower one: values of the holy (the holy related also to the objective reality), mind, vitality, pleasure, utility.

²¹ Words spoken by Fool to King Lear: *Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise...*; *King Lear*, Shakespeare William.

ty, characteristically interpreting the meaning of *durability* concept in Architecture, indicate some transience of their existence, differently from materially durable, constructed by added experiences of the subsequent events *genius loci*.

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