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FROZEN IN TIME

ZATRZYMANE W CZASIE

Abstract

The author presents the little-known and somewhat hidden from the eyes of passers-by places of Paris, which are covered passages, which began to arise at the end of the eighteenth century. The first passages were created as a response to urban and social needs of the city. The growing importance of trade, the terrible condition of the streets of the French capital led to the creation of internal streets shielded with glass on iron structures. Individual passages had a separate character. Some of them served only commercial functions, others were the place where the inhabitants of Paris met in cafes during the day and in the evenings. Passage gates became a border beyond which space provided basically the same thing as a city, but in a completely different dimension. The text is a kind of wandering around the passages of Paris.

Keywords: architecture, Paris, covered passages

Streszczenie

Autor przedstawia mało znane i nieco ukryte przed oczami przechodniów Paryża kryte pasaże, które zaczęły powstawać pod koniec XVIII wieku. Pierwsze pasaże powstały w odpowiedzi na społeczne potrzeby miasta. Rosnące znaczenie handlu, a przy tym fatalny stan ulic francuskiej stolicy doprowadził do powstania wewnętrznych ciągów komunikacyjnych osłoniętych szkłem na żelaznych konstrukcjach. Pasaże różniły się skalą, wystrojem, a przede wszystkim pełniącymi funkcjami (m.in. handel, rozrywka, gastronomia). Bramy pasaży stawały się granicą, za którą przestrzeń zapewniała w zasadzie to samo co miasto, lecz w całkiem innym wymiarze. Tekst jest rodzajem wędrówki po pasażach Paryża.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, Paryż, kryte pasaże

*The painters might have overtaken the poets
in loving the world as well as escaping²*

That might be. However, one can find also many arguments and proofs contrary to this assumption. Is it worth to engage in such a discussion? Or to dive into the competition problem? A better solution might be to understand that „*Each time a masterpiece explains the world in a different manner*”.³ We can find this love for the world and at the same time the

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² J. Hartwig, *Wierszopis mówi o malarzach* [in:] *Życie to podróż, to ocean. Z Julią Hartwig rozmawia Artur Cieślak*, Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2014, p. 95.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

way of escaping it in extraordinary places which are the covered passages of Paris. They originated at the end of 18th century and were a parallel reality compared to what the city had to offer. They were so different from the outside world that they almost seemed unreal. While staying in them one has an impression that the outside world stopped existing. Walter Benjamin once assumed that these buildings, just as dreams, are missing the exterior. So, what were they and what are they? A dream or a reality, a painter's illusion or the word of a poet? Maybe every single one of these things. Wojciech Saloni-Marczewski, while attempting to analyze what the scenography of the feature film is, noticed that “ *the humankind over the years has searched for different from its own, parallel reality in which the evil (and automatically the good) becomes the allotment of others*”.⁴ He also referred to the book of Lewis Carroll which develops the plot in reference to the parallel, intersecting world, which according to him, unconsciously and involuntary foretold the birth of the cinema. When we enter the terrain of Paris passages, we feel like film extras, transported directly to the film set. And not one, but different film genres. And although the first one was created long before the birth of the cinema or even photography, they had something in common with the world of theatre. W. Saloni-Marczewski while analysing feature film scenography, established some important features. First, it must appear attractive to the camera, which French theoretician Louis Delle described as photogenia. The important element is also the symbolic side, but we can also point out the allegory, metaphor, but also realism, space, adequacy and coherence. All these features are present in the passages. The gates of the passages were the border, behind which the space delivered in fact as much as the city did, but on a completely different level. Space build as scenography of form and architecture detail produced the impression of being in a different world. It is because Paris habitants loved to visit the passages. But at the same time – one was obliged to be there from time to time. It was there, where all the social life of the part of the society which would not afford to house their own lounge meetings took place. The meeting place was provided by numerous cafes and confectionaries. They lured in the clients with the decoration, richness in detail and even the pageantry. Each of the passages had not only different interior, but also the character determined by its function, formed by its location. Their development is inextricably linked with the process of development of the city. First passages were as a response to the social and urban needs of the city. Paris, still in the second half of the 18th century still possessed the structure so characteristic for the middle age cities. They were constructed of the narrow, sinuous streets without pavements, which during rainy days turned into massive overflow of water. On rainy days moving around the city was considerably more difficult, and through most of the year the streets were noisy and crowded. The period of the French Revolution, apart from the changes of social and political nature, brought also massive changes in the ownership of land and property. The church and aristocracy property were confiscated. In the second decade of the 19th century most of the impounded property returned to the market. It caused the major decrease in the land and property prices. What is more, the part of the estate of the people who emigrated was given out, free of charge. It has been established, that during French Revolution and the times immediately after one third of the real estate changed its owner. After a short period of decrease of the value of real estate the major speculation over land and real estate began, which in fact caused the rapid increase in prices. The economically bought buildings were sold with considerable profit which caused the middle class of the society to grow wealthy rapidly. It resulted in

⁴ W. Saloni-Marczewski *Scenografia filmu fabularnego, czy istnieje?*, PWSFTViT, Łódź 2016, p. 31.

a market growth and therefore in a considerable increase in the number of shops. Slowly in the place of the city's marketplaces and market streets, the enclaves of market, appeared to be organised in a new way. It was then when the idea of covering the streets with glass over iron construction appeared. Thanks to that they could function at any part of the year, disregarding the weather conditions. At first the constructions had double slope form, like most primitive wooden structures. Later, glass barrel vaults were used. At the most prestigious passages one can encounter the glass domes of the significant size. The covered passages as a spacious form have their roots of the inspiration in the arcades of the ancient Greece and Rome, as well as middle ages monasteries. At the same time the Renaissance palaces of Florence and Rome were formed in such a way that its inner courtyard could be walked around, while being protected from rain or burning sun.

Paris passages were raised on the right bank of the Seine, the area which was dominated by manufacturers, markets and the craftsmanship. The covered passages were hidden on the inside of the quarters and connected the surrounding streets. The entrances were underlined only by portals, while the interiors offered theatrical effects: rich decorations lit by sun or gas light, differentiated levels, some of them containing dioramas and theatre rooms. Paris passages, while maintaining the scale adequate to the human scale, provided intimacy and calmness. The covered passages were concentrated on the four, not so far apart, regions of right-hand bank Paris. The passages were located in the centre in the regions that were always full of movement, which provided for a significant number of customers. A sort of the first covered passage in Paris was rue de Rivoli, which was built on Napoleon's initiative, realised by Charles Percier and Pierre Léonard Fontaine (1802–1855).

A sort of model for the covered passages of Paris was also the Galerie d'Orléans, created in the gardens of Palais Royal, which in 1780 became a property of the prince Philippe Égalité. The palace gardens were the favourite place for Paris inhabitants' strolls. This idea inspired the prince to create market passages around the garden, and to raise some income from the shop rent. An architect Victor Louis, the author of the neighbouring Théâtre-Français (the present Comédie Française) created on three sides of the gardens connected to the palace three identical buildings with arcade, along which the small shops were located. Surrounded by the new construction the garden was supposed to be separated from the palace side by stone colonnade, the construction of which was stopped at the foundation level. Nevertheless, they were rapidly put into use and in 1786, on the existing foundation the Galeries de Bois, numerous shops were open. Deplorably the finish standard was far from the representative shops located under the colonnade. The wooden galleries were the prototype for the Paris covered galleries. They were a wooden bunkhouse formed in three rows. They were divided by two, covered with glass passages, which were called galleries. The dirt, disorganisation as well as the deterioration of moral values led to the swift removal of the galleries. These provisional constructions survived till 1829, when Percier and Fontaine replaced them with the brick construction disassembled only in the year 1935.

In 1799 one of the first covered passages of Paris was created – *Passage du Cair*. Its name is not by chance. A year earlier Napoleon set out to conquer Egypt and to stand up to the English trade hegemony in the Mediterranean Sea. It stirred the vast interest both in Egyptian culture and contemporary society. The vogue of the exotic Egypt, began by Vivant Denon

in famous *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute-Égypte (1802)*, contributed to giving streets the names associated with Egypt (i.e. the Nile, Alexandria). The covered passages were inspired by the Arabic souks' appearance. The passages located in the region of the Saint-Denis Street up till now are the place of trade as well as the production of the clothing by Turkish, Pakistani and Arab people that inhabit this area. This way *Passage Brady* is occupied by Pakistanis and the visitors from India. It is a place of fruit sale and of exotic restaurants. *Passage du Cair* is a place of work for the immigrants from Egypt and Turkey. The only exotic element of the architectonic appearance is the entrance to the Cairo Square, which is flanked by two columns with some Egyptian motives. In the middle of 19th century the passage was the headquarters of small printing shops, it was there that most of Paris postcards, visiting cards and street ads were produced. Right now, at *Passage du Cair* the mass clothing trade takes place. Tourists are rather hesitant to enter the labyrinths of the half-kilometre long streets. One can encounter mostly delivery boys and porters with massive packages. The technical state of the passage (leaking roofs, hanging electricity cables and hollow paving) is also not that inviting. The cellars of the shops are usually storage places. Above ground floor two levels are situated: The living and the workshops, in which the needlewomen are working in terrible conditions. Almost at the prolonging *Passage du Cair* the tiny *Passage du Ponceau* is located. It has the similar finishing quality but is equally deserted. In this region, close to Porte Saint Denis we can encounter *Passage du Prado (1826)*, which is the centre of mass clothing sell. A bit further to the south we can encounter *Passage Bourg-L'Abbé* built in the similar times. It is exceptionally short, in which the small, often single-person, workshops are located. Around 1835 the *Passage du Grand-Cer* was built on its prolonging. It has a completely different character. After crossing the narrow, dark *Bourg-L'Abbé* passage we enter the lit space of 20 meters of height with its delicate and elegant finish. Contemporarily, the trade is dominated by boutiques with art crafts and interior design. Two levels of flats are located above the ground level. After the Second World War the condition of this passage gradually deteriorated, the outflow of merchants of the nearby Saint-Denis street was also not favourable. In the end it got closed and it seemed as if it would disappear from Paris landscape forever. In the eighties it was bought by the *Arcade* agency, which decided upon its revitalization. The former greatness of the passage was restored and its insertion into registry of monuments forced its restoration to the primary finish. All the shops of the ground floor were restored according to the original and some flats were planned above.

The passages created west of the Opera have completely different character. It was there, where the increased activity of cultural and social life took place. In the evenings Paris inhabitants eagerly spent time in theatres which became the meeting place for the rich middle class. In the second District of Paris, in the beginning of the nineteenth century one could find 15 theatres. The first passages as well as numerous coffee shops were created around the theatres. After the shows the nightlife of Paris transitioned there. That is why the passages such as *Choiseul*, *Feydeau*, *Jouffroy*, *Panoramas* were full of life, not only during the day but also during the night. The non-existent Passage of Feydeau had two theatres – Feydeau Theatre (1791, with 1720 seats) and le Théâtre des Nouveautés (1827). The passage *des Panoramas* (1800) was located near the *Variétés* (1807) theater. In the *Jouffroy* (1847) Theatre, which is the continuation of the *Panoramas*, the *le Petit – Théâtre* got located. Two halls were adhered to the *des Panoramas* Passage, where the panoramas were shown. It is where the name *Deux Panoramas*, and then – *Panoramas*, comes from. The panorama theatres had usually 50 meters

of diameter and 16 of height. The platform was in the centre from which the viewers could appreciate the view. One of them showed Paris panorama painted from Tuileries. The panoramas were installed by an American ship constructor Robert Fulton, who, on Napoleon's order, created the first submarine *Nautilus*. The passages *Panoramas*, *Jouffroy* and *Verdeau* constitute the prolonging of the north-south axis by interlocking perpendicularly Boulevard Montmartre. They were located in the neighbourhood of the new *Chaussée d'Antin* quarter and were visited by rich Parisians, artists and the youth of Paris.

Musée Grévin, opened in 1882, existed in the *Jouffroy* Passage. The originator of the museum was in 1881 Artur Moyer, the publisher of *Le Gaulois* Magazine, which since 1879, was an organ of the monarchy movement. In the museum one can see the representatives of all the major personas of the contemporary times. The first figures drawings were commissioned to a drawer and caricaturist Alfred Grévin whose name was used to create the name of this new type of the museum. The museum has been a constant success since the times of its creation. Directly next to Musée Grévin the *Chopin* Hotel has been created. *Passage Jouffroy* is located on two levels connected by a staircase. Initially it took three loots between Montmartre Boulevard and Grange-Batelier Street, which has led to the necessity of its creation on the refracted line. The glass roof was constructed on the steel construction. The passage was incredibly popular, with trendy boutiques, a couple of restaurants and cafes. In the subterranean level it had a dancing hall, a small puppet theatre and from 1860 a Chinese theatre of shadows. Nowadays bookstores and antique shops lead their prime.

Trade passages were the first public spaces which were lit by gas in the evening. In 1817 the first display of gas lighting took place. The passages allowed for calm shopping, they were separated from the hustle and bustle of the city, protected from unfavourable weather conditions and at the same time offered the sensation of street climate or even one of the salons. For proper underlining of their importance the entrances were usually shaped in a form of triumphal arcs. At the same time the gates were purely functional, closed at nights, and now around 8:30 p.m. The interior of the passages, similarly to the whole architecture, was dependant on the current vogue and tendencies. Till 1830 the neoclassic style was dominant. Unfortunately, most of the decoration does not exist anymore. Changes of the vogue enforced the change of exterior decoration of the shops. *Galerie Vivienne* designed by François Jean Delannoy is an example of neoclassicism. The whole has a unified character, which is worth special attention are the floors, whose decoration was inspired by the shapes found in Pompei and Herculaneum. In modestly finished passages the floors were simple, concrete floor was usually used. All passages had a unified elevation structure. On the ground floor glass elevation was divided into three. A semi-circular or rectangular window of mezzanine was placed above. Above the mezzanine – one or two floors of the owners. Shops were divided within themselves by pilasters or doubled colonnades, light of the lanterns was reflected on the display windows, lit them, and provided the theatrical show among the dark streets. The passages, similarly, to boulevards, were the places where one should show up. At the times of its prime it reflected the taste of the society, provided not only the possibility of purchasing common goods, but also was a meeting place. Numerous cafes, *salons de thé*, or even *cabinets de lecture* helped to accomplish this goal. At the beginning of the 19th century 140 titles were published here. With the small payment one could rent the set of newspapers and calmly immerse in reading with a cup of coffee in

the hand. in cosily finished reading rooms. The passages have their own rich literature – artistic history. In *Passage du Caire* Paris printers found a location for their shops and many publishers set in the more representative *Galerie Véro-Dodat*. In the cafes contemporary painters showed their arts. Up till now today *Passage Verdeau* has retained its extraordinary character connected to literature. That is where antique dealers have their shops. At number 14–16 A photography shop at number 14/16, where one can fix or buy old cameras, has existed since 1901. There is a special atmosphere there, the passers-by are usually lovers of the old books which are displayed outside of shops.

One of more elegant passages was *Passage des Princes* connecting the Richelieu Street and Boulevard des Italiens (1860). It was at the same time the last covered passage of the nineteenth century Paris. The interior design reminded of neoclassical decorations of the former Vivienne and Colbert passages. Its plan initially refracted at the obtuse angle was later rebuilt at the right angle, to streamline the interior organisation. The renovated dome from the thirties was created from the coloured glass, artificially lit. The whole has been taken over by toy shops.

The alteration of Paris done by Haussmann caused the complete change of the urban scale of the streets which provided the undisturbed, parallel functioning of the transportation and trade. This difference in scale allowed the shops to walk out to the streets with what they offered. The doings of Haussmann also influenced the scale of public space. The passages began to miss the momentum. The difference in scale was also to be felt in the constructed at the time massive department stores. The alteration has reverted the rules of functioning of the city. Everything which was the most representable, provided comfort and delivered entertainment in the passages was moved to the boulevards, which offered more space, light and allowed to meet more people. The passages, which so naturally originated from the urban tissue of the Middle Ages slowly got lost or were shortened. This way, for example creation of the Sebastopol Boulevard vastly shortened *Bourg-l'Abbé and Brady*. Due to the alterations of Haussmann – the separation of the commercial and craftsman space from the living space of the owners took place. The passages used to be places of trade and service but were at the same time linked to the houses of salesmen and craftsmen. Now exclusive shops take the ground floors of front of buildings, the smaller trade and services move to the more remote quarters of the city, outside of the city centre. The creation of new train stations in the middle of 19th century – *Gare du Nord, and Gare de l'Est* created not only different urban situation in this part of Paris. The competitive trade passages were created, but deplorably they did not possess the same ambient anymore. That is a shame, since as Walter Benjamin noticed, in Paris passages *the trade of the trade of luxuries flourished. To increase the income the tradesmen wove the art. The passages became the sight of wonder and contemplation for the contemporary. They long remained the tourist attraction*⁵. And although how Baudelaire stated *Paris is no more (as the shape of the city changes, faster even than the heart of the person)*⁶ the old passages of Paris do not change so fast. They change at a pace of self-created flâneur, the leisured observer of the every-day life, the passages still live at their own pace isolated from the clamor and changes taking place in Paris.

⁵ W. Benjamin *Pasaże*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2005, p. 47.

⁶ Ch. Baudelaire, *Le Cygne*, <https://fleursdumal.org/poem/220> (access: 11.05.2019).

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