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COUNTER-ARGUMENT AGAINST THE ALLEGED VISUALITY OF ARCHITECTURAL ART

KONTRA PRZECIW DOMNIEMANEJ WIZUALNOŚCI SZTUKI ARCHITEKTONICZNEJ

Abstract

Drawing, frame, silhouette, panorama, perspective, vision, image, composition, canon – these constitute the “crowning evidence” for the visuality of Architecture – the play of solids in the light. However, outside of the control of the vigilant, sensitive and intelligent eye, there is a parallel, tactile game of Architecture. It is evident in: form, module, distance, ergonomics, models, typhlographics, even affordances, suspended between sensory worlds. The aim of the author’s research is to demystify the paradigm of the alleged visuality of Architecture and to show the role of touch as the fundamental language of this art. Using the method of transferring concepts between literature, colloquial language and architecture, the author carries out critical analyses of currently functioning myths. The result of study is to show that the haptic beauty of architecture constantly touches us – hidden in the touches of the architect, the recipient and the Architecture itself.

Keywords: multisensory architecture, touch in architecture, tactile perception, haptic perception, kinesthesia

Streszczenie

Rysunek, kadr, sylweta, panorama, perspektywa, wizja, wizerunek, kompozycja, kanon – to „koronne dowody” na wizualność Architektury. Poza kontrolą czujnego, wrażliwego, inteligentnego oka toczy się jednak równoległa, taktylna rozgrywka Architektury. Jej potwierdzeniem są: forma, moduł, dystanse, ergonomia, model, tyflografika, nawet afordancje, zawieszone pomiędzy sensorycznymi światami. Celem badań autorskich jest demistyfikacja paradygmatu wizualności Architektury i wykazanie roli dotyku jako fundamentalnego języka tej sztuki. Stosując metodę transferu pojęć pomiędzy literaturą, językiem potocznym a architekturą, autorka dokonuje analiz krytycznych obecnie funkcjonujących mitów. Wynikiem badań jest dowiedzenie, że haptyczne piękno architektury dotyka nas nieustannie – ukryte w dotykach architekta, odbiorcy oraz samej Architektury.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura multisensoryczna, dotyk w architekturze, percepcja dotykowa, percepcja haptyczna, kinestezja

1. INTRODUCTION

Architecture touches us through images – this is a great, timeless myth of Architecture. It is founded on a significant body of evidence that the play of solids in the light is a game for the eye, and beauty (or originality) is manifested precisely in visuality.

This myth is reminiscent of the truth – with our eyes we perceive, get to know, register the whole arsenal of architectural views. We discover unusual buildings, embrace wide

panoramas and catch tiny details, we glide along the outlines of the horizon. We recognize canons and precedents, we read symbolism, meanings, metaphors, even hidden nuances. We are active observers. We consciously change the viewing perspective and frame the space we see. We reach for the artificial eyes of cameras in order to stop and then be able to recall past images on demand. We “visit” places and buildings with our eyes whenever we want – in albums, films, and the Internet. Today, in the era of the dizzying career of the eye, when the biological evolution of sight is supported by numerous extensions (devices and machines facilitating the achievement, preservation, processing, and multiplication of views), oculo-centrism seems to be an indisputable dogma of Architecture.

This view though is only an illusion. A phantom, a mirage for a bewildered observer of architectural scenes and events. Outside of the control of the vigilant, sensitive and intelligent eye, there is a parallel – tactile – game of Architecture. It allows buildings to really exist in space and be more than just a wonderful projection.

The author’s intention is to demystify the paradigm of the alleged viscosity of Architecture and to show the role of touch as the fundamental language of our art. As the author proves, Architecture arises from touches, experiences with them and constitutes itself on them. The haptic beauty of architecture constantly touches us – albeit without the applause of theoreticians and critics.

2. ARCHITECTURE ARISES FROM TOUCHES (I.E. ABOUT THE ARCHITECT’S TOUCH)

“Touch is a meeting of two forces: ‘the strength of things’ and ‘the strength of me...’”¹ An inherent feature of touch is reciprocity. Reciprocity, dialogicality – inevitably the relational nature of the encounters of beings.

The relational nature of Architecture is based on touch. Co-existence, co-being of the work and its recipient. Through the work, the viewer is touched not by matter but by the creator – the architect. There are different types of touches – after all, their intentions and the final results differ.

The first is the creative touch – it is where Architecture is born. In the beginning there is a sketch, a project, sometimes an architectural model. A creationist, causative (though at times uncertain) gesture of the designer, gradually emerging from non-existence, bringing into existence what did not exist before. Specifying some ideas, imaginings, expectations, values. An architectural experiment made with a restless line that looks for meaning, or a model hastily stuck together from what was at hand. To catch the thought. Without touch, only visions would remain – vague, elusive, fleeting phantoms inside the designer’s imagination. From that moment on, the touch becomes mindful, precise, and disciplined. A design emerges from the chaos of creation – a perfectly smooth, digital line or a perfectly precise relief cut by a scorching beam of a laser.

The creative act itself is actually a sequence of thousands of (un)touches. When designing architecture: I arrange, juxtapose, separate, open, extract, cut, move, invert – so I constantly touch the invisible forms with my mind, and manipulate them within an

¹ T. Sławek, *Cienie i rzeczy. Rozważania o dotyku* [in:] J. Kurek, K. Maliszewski (eds.), *W przestrzeni dotyku*, Miejski Dom Kultury „Batory”, Chorzów 2009, p. 16.

imaginary space. It's amazing to be able to change and transform reality long before it becomes a fact.

In order for the recipient to be able, at some point, to physically touch the real architectural object, you will also need another touch – the builder's effort, and yet another – the work of construction machines. A tremendous team effort to overcome the resistance of matter and architectural material.

The omnipresent touch is the caring touch of architects – most likely growing out of the sensitivity and empathy inherent in artists. It is a manifestation of intuitive mission of one's own profession. The belief that architecture creates the stage for human life. The alphabet of empathy instilled in students becomes, over time, a habit of caring, maturing into an attitude of professional responsibility for others. It is more than literal compliance with the construction laws and professional ethics. It is a tribute to a specific, anonymous, and sometimes imaginary recipient. Imagining their needs, possibilities, desires, aspirations, and meeting them. This gesture is sometimes full of acceptance and selfless concern, even tenderness, towards human imperfection, differences, fears and fragility. An architect involved in human affairs gifts their work like a best friend would: through architecture they help, support, reassure, enable, protect.

There are many pitfalls for the architect-guardian. For example, the temptation to homogenize the recipients, make them illusory and mould them into a certain shape of a model or modulator. And then duplicating such an incredible creation into a nameless, formless, impersonal crowd. It is impossible to take care of someone who is not there.

Or the theatrical, proud protectiveness. Help – a manifesto, implemented through special (spectacular) facilities. People with disabilities do not want a spectacle, they want normality.

On the other hand, care that is too strong, too fervent can easily turn into control and compulsion. Being convinced of your own righteousness, you can almost strangle the recipient – with good intentions, talent and ambitions. Then you have to undo it all – for example through social participation. And this form of care – putting control in the hands of a dilettante – can be deceptive.

There is also an intentionally controlling touch of the creator, sensitive to and influencing human behaviour, sometimes deciding about each step of the recipient. Authoritatively connecting, separating, zoning, isolating. Such a touch does not necessarily mean anything bad. It can stand guard over public order and orderliness, culture, tradition and rites of passage, it can safeguard comfort and health, and ensure safety. It can define healthy boundaries of the space for individual and collective existence, and also support various forms of interactions: personal, social, public. Control is sometimes naive, unnecessary, unacceptable, even oppressive. Then there appear holes in fences and well-worn paths on new lawns. Sometimes you even have to collectively tear down a wall.

Also, there is an imperious touch in architecture – a demonstration of strength, power and possibilities. Here, the Architect rarely acts on their own behalf. Much more often they are a spokesperson for a broader system: ideology, dictatorship, state, organization, religion or market, or a faithful servant of a specific, personal master. Such a touch can clearly define relationships. It can show who is in charge, who comes to whom, and whose place is where. To intimidate and constrain the recipient – with the perspective, scale, size, bloated dignity of forms and sophisticated detail. Or to dazzle with power, wealth and dignity. Superiority and domination are everywhere because there are human ambitions everywhere. In every, even

the smallest, community, in totalitarian dictatorships often disguised as utopian, egalitarian systems that equate citizens, and (how much!) – in democracy.

The problem begins when architecture becomes a tool of oppression. Instead of admiration, it generates overwhelm, threat, and fear. An architect's touch can be an oppressive touch. Demolishing, destructive, brutal, damaging, bringing devastation and even extermination and death. Leaving behind emptiness and ruin, or a completely redefined order. Monuments of the new triumph that has just replaced the old one. As if the old one had never been there. Building can also mean destruction and annihilation. Spaces, buildings and interiors bear scars of architectural violence, manipulation, and often cruel profanation as well. "Stain" or "contamination" by bad touch in Architecture can be so strong that after such an experience, "the landscape can no longer give aesthetic pleasure and talking about the beauty of the landscape becomes inappropriate."² But it doesn't always go that far. Architecture is also full of small, everyday, not necessarily dangerous oppressions, done in good faith and often with good results. Architectural forms block, intersect, force out disordered buildings, annex new areas (but beware: sometimes they force their way into unauthorized places – it is careless to downplay this type of touch).

After the oppression, the architect's healing touch comes to the rescue – repairing, restoring the disturbed order, soothing architectural and human suffering through a tender intervention – renovation, refurbishment, restoration. Stitching up wounds left behind by walls, borders, tears. A gentle facelift or a serious operation on the open heart of architecture. Saving what is beautiful but crumbles, turns to dust. Reconstruction of what we loved and what, for various reasons, has disappeared. A touch of resuscitation or resurrection. However, not all ruins need to be rebuilt. Sometimes the wound has to heal by itself.

Reversing time is not always possible and a new breath is needed – revitalization or revalorization of space so that it can live again. Things are not obvious here. It is easy to damage something by repairing it. The original has to be looked for under many layers of history. It is not always worth reaching as far back as possible. New as old is sometimes artificial, and brand-new is sometimes foreign, out of place, devoid of roots and identity.

There is also a touch that rehabilitates spiritually, does justice, restores dignity or due honor. It is an act of homage given to the desecrated space, a brave phoenix rising from the ashes. Or a spatial monument to the therapy of human emotions – the transition from despair, pain, anger, rebellion, disagreement to acceptance, understanding, forgiveness, hope and strength.

The touch of eternal memory blends with it – serious and holy. A reminder never to forget, through trace, imprint, freezing, emptiness, nothingness – the matter and anti-matter of Architecture. A tactile return to pain, a brave entry into trauma or a warning gesture made to posterity. This is, in fact, one of the touches that take you back in time. Freely migrating from here and now to past times and places. Because "touched objects and places, especially those bearing traces of past events, can take us to the distant past, make it present, tangible, touchable."³

² K. Koprowska, *Haptyczność krajobrazu pamięci w poezji Henryka Grynberga* [in:] A. Łebkowska, Ł. Wróblewski, P. Badysiak (eds.), *W kulturze dotyku? Dotyk i jego reprezentacje w tekstach kultury*, Nomos, Kraków 2016, p. 106.

³ A. Kłopotowska, *Architectural Imaginarium of Touch* [in:] T. Kozłowski (ed.), *Defining the architectural space. The truth and lie of architecture = Definiowanie przestrzeni architektonicznej. Prawda i kłamstwo architektury*, vol. 3, Oficyna Wydawnicza Atut, Wrocław 2020.

The ordinary, everyday memory of touch in which routine resides, is also extraordinary. It enables us to feel in the dark, sometimes to sleepwalk safely in a familiar space. A nostalgic touch can also teleport in time. Cultivating the best memories, glorifying the past. Touch – a bridge of closeness between events made distant by time. On the other hand, the future is a touch that accepts aging and is prepared for the passage of time. It is wonderful to allow the material to “weaken”, to let it age with dignity. Patina is the physical experience of time and the tactile reality of the material. On the other hand, there is a touch that renounces the inevitable, that denounces time and change – as something terrible. Perfect, artificially smoothed glass panes. The immaterial ghosts of architecture.

And finally, the flirting touch – funny, joyful, surprising. Playing on all human emotions. Having fun with experiences taken straight from life: a messy room, moving a heavy piece of furniture, a silly tumble, crushing an empty bottle, a mad dance – told by architectural forms. It is a touch that directly provokes interaction, sometimes even absurd behaviour and antics. For example, reminding adult bodies that they were once children. They stood on their heads, swung, climbed, and joyfully rode down the hill. You can also play by safely frightening the recipient – with instability, suspicious static, chasm, labyrinth. It must be said that this game brings a thrill, although it is not always well-aimed. Haptic illusions are an interesting trick – architects’ deliberate lies that will pull the wool over the viewer’s eyes. Artificial materials pretending to be something completely different, stone-like, concrete-like, rust-like, false texture, colour, temperature of the material. Such an illusion is sometimes great fun, but it can also be very disappointing. Deliberately built antinomies of Architecture can also be an attractive game – absence, immateriality, unreality, anti-gravity, weightlessness, drifting.

Intermodal tunnels are often one of the strategies of flirting. Tactile traps or temptations set for sight or hearing. Sometimes they are so strong that they do not only stimulate the senses, but also provoke real touch. Architects are sometimes masters of such synesthesia. Here pre-perception can explain things. I react by touch to my sight or hearing because I used to touch when seeing or hearing. Touch is both a consequence and a source of visual experiences.

The architect’s touch is sometimes poetic. Discovering the layers of feelings, touching the most sensitive strings of the psyche and spirit. It can be lyrical, ephemeral, gentle as a brush of a hand, or solemn, powerful, pounding into the ground. It can be festive, celebrating space, memories or events – a touch from the Architectural Gallery. Designed so that what counts is “slowness, inactivity, a gentle gliding along the smooth surface of a stone as if on skin, caution and uncertainty of every touch, and finally – growing with each subsequent touch and brush – the conviction that you are communing with something special.”⁴ “Barthes’ concept of punctum is important here – meaning being ‘touched from the inside’ – a man’s encounter with a work of art through puncture, wound, affection, sting, piercing, pressure.”⁵ On the other hand, a common, painfully ordinary touch can also be moving – such as the praise for bustle in Brach-Czajna’s “Cracks of Existence.”

⁴ K. Tkaczyk, *Johan Gottfried Herder. Sensualistyczny bunt wobec klasycznej estetyki* [in:] A. Łebkowska, Ł. Wróblewski, P. Badysiak (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁵ A. Łebkowska, *Arfirmacja dotyku w dyskursie współczesności*, [in:] A. Łebkowska, Ł. Wróblewski, P. Badysiak (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

3. ARCHITECTURE EXPERIENCES WITH TOUCHES (I.E. ABOUT THE TOUCH OF THE RECIPIENT)

Touch is also a unifying experience. In Architecture, the viewer does not only look at the work of art, but really meets it and even merges into one with it.⁶

In human touch, contact is never a neutral act. It is expressed in co- (or counter-) action, confrontation, intentionality, activity of the parties. "The tactile contact of one person with another is always immersed in axiology." It is similar when you meet with Architecture, each time a unique relationship between the participating parties is established – between a man and a work of art, and it always has meaning: cognitive, emotional, moral.⁷

I appreciate architecture with my eyesight, but I check it – with my body. We touch continuously, from birth to the end. In the subsequent stages of ontogenesis only human needs related to touch change. Closeness, presence, cuddling, warmth, softness, rocking, a crib and then a support to stand (overcoming gravity) – this is Architecture tailored for a baby. Helpless, completely dependent, unaware of their own separateness. So infinitely trusting that their body is only protected by unconditional reflexes built into the touch system. A growing child is an explosion of inept independence. They need expansion as well as designated boundaries of space. A place for movement, dynamics, exploration, and a tight cave, tent, cabin in the closet, and the first table for the development of creativity and manipulation. Exercising their own distinctiveness – running away and safely returning to their mother. Finding comfort and shelter in her arms after a painful confrontation with hard architectural matter – the floor, the edge, the drawer that is not closed.⁸ On the other hand, young people – loosely suspended between worlds, with their eternal negation, defiance, aggressiveness (covering uncertainty and lack of acceptance of what is supposed to be their own but suddenly changing bodies) – loudly demand freedom, separation, even isolation. At the same time, they (hopefully) look for a safe haven, support in a group of similarly lost people. They dream of space for experimentation, self-expression, turbulent closeness, eroticism. In architecture, adulthood, a time of fulfillment and disappointment, is about settling down, finding stability, solid land, building something permanent, settling permanently. Comfort and convenience are important, space is no longer for receiving but for giving to others: care, support, tenderness. It is also about emanating your own success. Your own or borrowed aesthetic taste – according to social status and prosperity. Finally, old age, which no one is waiting for anymore, because it inevitably brings everything we fear. Fatigue, decline in physical condition, physical pain, illness, confusion, loneliness. Architecture cannot protect against old age, but it can provide: familiarity, stability, balance, acceptance of weakness, warmth, closeness. Sometimes it also provides space for treatment or therapy.

Ergonomics combines all these matters – a great test of the physical adjustment of Architecture to its recipient. Touch – a verification of safety, comfort, convenience and adequacy of the designed space.

It is certain that touch in Architecture is also emotional. The recipient can feel, be moved, experience the space internally. Such feeling covers the entire scale of human emotions,

⁶ J. Pallasmaa, *Oczy skóry. Architektura i zmysły*, Instytut Architektury, Kraków 2012, pp. 16, 77, 79.

⁷ E. Skorupa, *Dotyk jako wyraz emocji. Pozytywistyczno-modernistyczne realizacje literackie* [in:] A. Łebkowska, Ł. Wróblewski, P. Badysiak (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁸ See: A. Giczewska, *Fenomen dotyku: stymulacja systemu taktylnego i jej wpływ na rozwój psychoruchowy dziecka*, Centrum Aneta Giczewska, Środa Śląska 2005.

such as peace, bliss, soothing, excitement, strength, overwhelm, threat, fear, embarrassment, intimacy, irritation, fear, panic. Also opposing feelings, inseparable pairs which can only be experienced by comparison: familiarity – strangeness, harmony – mismatch, stability – instability, closeness – distance, seriousness – cheerfulness.

Body responses to various mental experiences are also interesting, for example: spontaneous twisting of the body, tilting of the head, an overwhelming desire to touch, caress, scratch, automatically reaching out for support, a desire to fit into a space with your body. Sometimes the architectural emotion is so great that it, again, touches us physically. It shows in goose bumps, tingling, muscle tremors, feeling cold, hot, throbbing, relaxation, tension or stiffening of the body, standing still, clenching hands or squeezing eyelids.

The intellect also takes part in architectural touches. I use my mind to check the compliance with and deviations from the rules, verify the usefulness, truthfulness, adequacy, assess the quality, fit and contrast. I identify, distinguish important and secondary elements, rank objects, classify phenomena. I place it in the context of time and space. I see and understand symbols, metaphors, quotes – hidden messages, architect's secret codes. I orient myself, I remember, I know, I teach, I have an opinion, I recognize.

From the spiritual powers comes the moral dimension of touching – giving human values to spatial architectural facts and phenomena. For example, the element of good instinctively attached to creative acts – the alleged value in bringing new buildings to life. Understanding or disagreeing with some asymmetry of architectural relations. Spiritual pain caused by the unlawful appropriation, destruction, annihilation, and profanation of space. Pride in the successful reconstruction, commitment and dedication to saving an endangered object. The burden of being pushed aside, separated, left behind the ongoing life of Architecture.

Capturing of notions – templates (or notions – symbols) also has spiritual lineage, perhaps even permanently embedded in human nature. In Architecture such concepts include: closeness and distance, interior and exterior, whole and part, center and periphery, proud verticality and common horizontality. In addition: circle, bond, cyclicity, path, container, shelter, fire. There are also unique dimensions of spirituality of touch, characteristic of certain regions, communities, times, economic systems, cultures or religions. We recognize them as the identity, the spirit of the place. In architecture we find imprints of norms, principles, boundaries of architectural touches as well as touches in intimate, interpersonal, social and collective communication. Architectural intimacy, rank, privilege, respect, defense, violation, defilement, contempt, profanation, rape. Touch allowed, preferred, desired, undesirable, not allowed, excluded. The whole touch code of Architecture.

Finally, a transcendent touch, on the verge of being. Spiritual connection with Someone, Something greater than us. Life-giving grounding – grounding, anchoring, skin contact with the earth, grass, trees, stones, mountains, water. Metaphysical contact with the sacred – a Higher Power. Or shamanic magic in the touch “for good luck” or “to ward off fate.” In Architecture, it can be an all-body, physical experience. Walking on your knees, bending your back under an opening, an effort to climb stairs, resistance when opening a gate. Physically approaching, bowing, placing of your hand, kissing. Or, on the contrary, an anti-tactile experience. Just getting closer to secrets, not necessarily grasping them. Immaculacy, sanctity of places made distant by lifting them beyond the sphere of the body's reach, distance, hiding from touch. And also, the idolatrous touch of novelty – the idealization of places where no-one has stood, lay or walked before us. Like the pleasure of leaving your own footprints on an unspoiled patch of snow.

4. ARCHITECTURE IS CONSTITUTED BY TOUCH (I.E. WHAT REALLY TOUCHES IN ARCHITECTURE)

“The work of art functions like another person you’re unknowingly talking to,”⁹ says Pallasmaa, adding: “There is a peculiar exchange then; we lend our emotions to the work, and it gives us its power and aura.”¹⁰ But what are these powers and auras, and what is the true medium of Architecture – sight or touch?

The facts cannot be questioned – the game of solids in the light is played out before our eyes. However, this game would not be possible without the prior existence of solids – and this is a matter of body and touch. A solid, form, spatial shape of an object is always the result of some physical work, action, pressure of one body on another, overcoming the internal resistance of matter in order to deform or consciously displace the body.¹¹ Materiality and real presence, separateness, individuality, dissimilarity, dimensions, a location in space, structure, morphological structure, a whole and parts, geometry of shapes, roundness or sharp edges – these concepts are constituted by touch, and with our eyes we only perceive their designation. So I see with my eyes not the mass but its image, only a shadow from a Platonic cave.

It is similar with the concept of space, fundamental in Architecture, which derives directly from human movement and displacement. “We experience space directly as something we move in”, argues Yi Fu Tuan.¹² “We have a sense of space because we can move ...” – confirms E.H. Gombrich.¹³ So it is in the act of moving, directly – with our body, that we experience space and its attributes. Directions: forward, backward and side to side, up – down, right – left; distances: far – close, high – low; spatial relations (dependencies): above – below, inside – outside. Also modules – duplications of movements that Architecture is full of. The sense of scale – it is nothing else than projecting your own body onto the experienced space, resulting from constant, unconscious measuring¹⁴ – “I confront my body with the city; my legs measure the length of the passage and the width of the square; my gaze unconsciously projects my body onto the facade of the cathedral [...] sensing the size of the recesses and protrusions.”¹⁵ Eyesight scanning the space is a great measuring tool, but it would be useless without mental libraries of data obtained from the past, of strictly bodily experiences.

The advantage of touch is overwhelming in experiencing texture. And this, in architecture, has an infinite number of aesthetic effects. Flatness, convexity, concavity, smoothness, slipperiness, wetness, roughness, brittleness, porosity, hardness, softness, sharpness, flexibility, pliability, delicacy, fluffiness, bumpiness, flowability, stickiness, also the warmth of the material – these are not only functional features but a strategy of architectural game, a whole range of sensual impressions. Sometimes a texture is basically asking to be touched.

⁹ J. Pallasmaa, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ E. Klekot, *Przedmowa. Przestrzenność rzeczy myślącej* [in:] J. Pallasmaa, *Myśląca dłoń. Egzystencjalna i ucieleśniona mądrość w architekturze*, Instytut Architektury, Kraków 2015, p. 13.

¹² Yi-Fu Tuan, *Przestrzeń i miejsce*, PIW, Warszawa 1987, p. 23.

¹³ E.H. Gombrich, *Sztuka i złudzenie. O psychologii przedstawienia obrazowego*, PIW, Warszawa 1981, p. 152.

¹⁴ J. Pallasmaa, *Oczy skóry, op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

Sometimes it is even sensuality, a kind of magnetism, of the material submitted to special treatment. Although the temptation seems visual, it is again only an echo effect – recalling the memory of old touches. When it comes to recognizing texture, eyesight can sometimes be a poor, naive advisor. You have to touch to see if there is any fraud here.

Haptic truth is a trace or an imprint of a hand or a tool that moulds the texture. There is often a touching story to it. Someone's effort, endeavour, evidence of artistry, or maybe a mistake – a tactile encounter of something that was with something that is.

Composition seems to be a non-obvious issue in Architecture, because it seems to emanate all visuality. We say that you can be born with an unusual sense of aesthetics, or you can train your eye in search of dependencies, regularities, the system of internal forces, accents, and dominants. However, these are only shadows – images of facts that can only be really known by the body. The concepts of balance, statics, dynamics, stability, instability, intimacy, monumentality, mass, weight, squat, compactness, lightness, airiness, freedom, simplicity, complexity, emptiness, overflow, surrounding, horizontality, verticality – all these are body experiences, various adventures, the truest stories of movement, touching, entering, climbing. Also, the concepts of fit and harmony (and their antinomies) come from the experiences of adjusting the body to the space and children's games like “put the block into the hole with the right shape.” Likewise, rhythm – repetition and interval, like a steady sequence of our steps. The role of touch in the reception of compositions is also appreciated in large, more complicated spaces. It is not sight, but kinesthesia and touch that build mental maps. The composition of the city, zone or a vast complex of buildings is based mainly on touch, not an image – lost in perspective, obscured, incomplete – revealing only fragments and not the whole, and not the rules of organization.

Models or mock-ups are then very helpful – smaller, spatial representations of architectural space, created to show the value of the composition. It is not only about comfortable viewing with the eye, but physical proximity, accessibility, simultaneous accessibility of the entire system, convenience, freedom of orientation, skin contact with the solid object. Bauchauz's cult of such models was not unfounded, because beauty – truth is available through bodily contact with matter, even if it is minimized. What a pity that models of designed objects are so rarely available for touching. Protected behind the glass, they lose their value. The exception are street models – aids dedicated to the visually impaired¹⁶. Touching in the dark is an extraordinary and real experience – the naked beauty of Architecture, devoid of visuality.

Imperceptibly, beyond the control of Architecture, a new type of architectural drawing developed – the so-called typhlographics (tactile graphics for people with visual impairments). Some of them contain visual elements – the so-called universal drawings, also intended for those with reduced vision. Others, on the other hand, are single-color, sometimes transparent reliefs or embossings. They show best that Architecture can exist without an image, but it cannot without a form (even the one that is present only in the imagination).

On the borderline between touch and sight there are Gibsonian affordances – visual incentives to examine with your body. Seating, reclining, support, shelter in a niche or under a roof – these are domains of the body and touch, although perfectly legible to the eye. “In the images of architecture there is an internal suggestion of action, of a moment of an active

¹⁶ See: A. Kłopotowska, *Tactile Architectural Models as Universal “Urban Furniture”* [in:] IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering, 2017, vol. 245, art. 082039.

meeting or the ‘promise of function’ and purpose.”¹⁷ The hierarchy of senses is determined here (again in favour of touch) by the “verb” (and not noun) approach to architecture.

5. SUMMARY

The haptic act is essentially an act of creation. I touch, so I make a space or a solid real, present, material, I humanize it, I supply it with my own energy, I create or examine it with my body – I bring Architecture to life!

The act of creation is in fact a haptic act. The artist’s and recipient’s touches produce what we perceive as architectural beauty or originality.

Drawing, frame, silhouette, panorama, perspective, vision, image, composition – these provide insufficient evidence for the visual nature of Architecture – the play of solids in the light. Outside of the control of the vigilant, sensitive and intelligent eye, the real, tactile game of Architecture takes place. It is evident in: form, module, distances, ergonomics as well as models and mock-ups – all arising from body contact. Moreover, typhlographics – a new, tactile type of drawing that has permanently joined the list of representations of built space. Also affordances – visual prompts to examine with your body – show us the truth about the hierarchy of senses in Architecture. The haptic beauty of architecture constantly touches us – albeit without the applause of theoreticians and critics. Sometimes tenderly and sometimes drastically, it undermines the paradigm of sight as the fundamental language of architecture.

“Seeing is touching with your eyes,” says Merleau-Ponty.¹⁸ Because touch is always one step ahead of sight. If we see an architectural image, it is a sign that touch has already been, and is, there.

It is not true that by breaking the biological rules of perception, Architecture touches us with its visuality – images of forms. It touches us simply – using our sense of touch. It’s just that it does it sometimes through eyesight.

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¹⁷ J. Pallasmaa, *Oczy skóry*, op. cit., p. 75.

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