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AVANT-GARDE IN SACRAL SPACE

AVANTGARDA W PRZESTRZENI SAKRALNEJ

Abstract

The article is dedicated to the avant-garde directives of architecture, which are changing the era of temple construction and shaping the sacred space as a whole. Directly pathetic and dramatic, absurd and fantastic, but at the same time denying of traditions, entering into conflicts with a healthy mind, the avant-garde became a breakthrough for its hour, brought out new creativity, which brought the appearance of new features in art¹.

On the eve of the First World War, after the revolutions, against the background of modernism, over the streets of eclectic forms, the "Manifesto" of Futurism is being built.

The suprematism of Malevich, performance of Lisytzky, graphic fantasies of Chernikhov make the frontier of the European avant-garde. Their creativity and the works of Gropius and Taut, Sharun and Rigfeld influenced the development of constructivism and functionalism in the 20s and 40s of the last century. It is established that the scientific and technological revolution, the formation of transnational markets have caused a breakup between tradition and the avant-garde in the interwar period of the 20th century². The trends in shaping the sacred space in the 20th century were revealed.

The *skin and bones* architecture of L. Mies van der Rohe showed pragmatism, minimalism, limited resources for ambitious design solutions added brutalism.

The work of Le Corbusier, a representative of 20th-century architecture, an innovator, a great master of detailed planning and new forms, an urbanist and a master of water sculpture, consistently asserted the supremacy of light, material and form in architecture, was considered.

The outstanding master of the Chicago Synagogue, Frank Lloyd Wright, was the last creator of organic architecture, which is reflected in the formation of his sacred works. Deurbanists affirm that water, wood, stone shatter life, but they become organic. Costa and Niemeyer, Tanga and Kurokawa gave the light of avant-garde architecture to develop national traditions. In searches of freedom, form in space, metabolism is growing.

Keywords: avant-garde, sacral space, postmodernism, symbolism, architecture, temple, religion, art, tradition

Streszczenie

Artykuł poświęcony jest awangardowym nurtom w architekturze, które zmieniają epokę budowy świątyń i kształtowania przestrzeni sakralnej jako całości. Po prostu żałosne i dramatyczne, absurdalne i fantastyczne, ale jednocześnie wbrew tradycji, wbrew zdrowemu rozsądkowi, awangarda stała się punktem zwrotnym swoich czasów, dała nową twórczość, która nadała sztuce nowe cechy.

¹ L.R. Gnatiuk, *Contradictions in the Formation of the Artistic Image of Sacred Space in XX Century architecture. Suchasni problemy arkhitektury ta mistobuduvannja. Naukovo-tekhnichnyj zbirnyk.* – Vyp. 56. – K.: KNUCA, 2020. – C. 17–31. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32347/2077-3455.2020.56.17-31>.

² L. Gnatiuk, *Avant-garde modernism in the sacred architecture of Central Europe Theory and practice of design.* Collection of scientific papers. – Issue 25. – K.: NAY, 2022. – pp. 39–48. DOI: 10.18372/2415-8151.25.16777.

W przededniu I wojny światowej, po rewolucjach, na tle modernizmu nad ulicami eklektycznych form budowany jest „Manifest” futuryzmu.

Suprematyzm Malewicz, performance Łyseckiego, graficzne fantazje Czernikowa wyznaczają granice europejskiej awangardy. Ich twórczość, podobnie jak prace Gropiusa i Tauta, Sharuna i Rigfelda, wpłynęła na rozwój konstruktywizmu i funkcjonalizmu w latach 20 i 40 XX w.

Rewolucja naukowo-techniczna i pojawienie się rynków ponadnarodowych spowodowały przepaść między tradycją a awangardą w okresie międzywojennym XX w.

Ujawniono tendencje kształtowania się przestrzeni sakralnej w XX w. Architektura „skóry i kości” L. Miesa van der Rohe zademonstrowała pragmatyzm, minimalizm i ograniczone zasoby, aby ambitne rozwiązania projektowe dodały brutalizmu.

Prezentowana jest twórczość Le Corbusiera – przedstawiciela architektury XX w., innowatora, wielkiego mistrza szczegółowego planowania i nowych form, urbanisty i mistrza rzeźby wodnej, który konsekwentnie podkreślał dominację światła, materiału i formy w architekturze.

Wybitny mistrz, autor chicagowskiej synagogi, Frank Lloyd Wright, był ostatnim twórcą architektury organicznej, co znalazło odzwierciedlenie w tworzeniu jego dzieł sakralnych. Durbaniści mówią, że woda, drewno i kamień niszczą życie, ale stają się organiczne. Costa i Niemeyer, Tanga i Kurakawa dały światło awangardowej architekturze rozwoju tradycji narodowych. Metabolizm wzrasta w poszukiwaniu wolności, formy w przestrzeni.

Słowa kluczowe: awangarda, przestrzeń sakralna, postmodernizm, symbolika, architektura, świątynia, religia, sztuka, tradycja

1. INTRODUCTION

The first scientific reports on avant-garde architecture appeared at the time when Historiography turned out to be the main factor in strengthening the positions of modernism, and its successive representatives – Zevi, Banham, Benevolo³ – were even more concerned with *writing* architecture and creating postulates for the future. In many ways, modernist architecture appeared only on the pages of the works of its historians, and the few manifestations of works of this style, realized in material reality, so “absorbed” into historical texts that this type of architecture was studied for some time, as a linguistic phenomenon⁴.

Changes in architecture itself, as well as in its historiography, greatly complicate the tracking of modernism in church buildings. Modernism experienced its heroic period in the 1920s, after the Second World War, simplified stylistic forms became common in many types of construction, but their development weakened significantly. The impasse in which modernist architecture found itself, tried to break the postulates contained in the works of Zevi or – later – Banham, but they were never implemented.

After many epochs, in which beauty played a major role in artistic creation, the era of hostility towards beauty, art⁵, ornamentation and ornament began with the birth of the 20th century. In the slowly growing understanding of the opinions of Horatio Greenough, William Richard Lethaby, Thorstein Veblen or Adolf Loos, ornament was understood as an

³ H.R. Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1967.

⁴ P. Tournikiotis, *The historiography of modern architecture*, The MIT Press, Cambridge–London 1999.

⁵ L.R. Gnatiuk, *Creating a spiritual atmosphere of sacred space. Modern problems of architecture and urban planning. Scientific and technical collection*, KNUCA, 2021. – Vyp. 59, pp. 16–27. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32347/2077-3455.2021.59.16-27>.

ailment the use of which indicates primitivism or degeneration. In his essay *Architecture* (1910), Loos described the development of culture as the path from ornament to lack of ornament⁶.

Gottfried Semper presented a more balanced position regarding the decoration of architecture. According to his theory, the ornament reveals the structural principles of the building and carries information about the ideal purpose of the artefact (for example, a temple). The detailed elements of this theory, however, entailed negative consequences for the ornamentation of architecture. Semper noticed that the parts of the building (structural elements) that have lost their practical application are decorated. In this way, the ornament is a reminder of the relationship between the work and its original form, when it still had a purely functional purpose. Following Semper, Friedrich Theodor Vischer undertook the treatment of the artistic properties of a building as a language of communicating the tradition of a certain type of building, creating one of the starting points of the method of iconological research of Aby Warburg and Erwin Panofsky, in which the symbolic values of a work of art express specific problems of the epoch. More often, however, this aspect of Semper's thought was referred to, from which it could be concluded that the ornament is a relic of an earlier stage in the development of a certain type of building⁷. For Otto Wagner and his students, it was an incentive to remove traditional decorative forms and seek expression for new technological solutions (hence, among others, the heads of screws that did not fasten, were used as decorations to emphasize the use of the steel structure). Wagner, following Semper, assumed that the decisive issue in architecture was the necessity to solve functional problems, which led to the exclusion of architecture from the sphere of art and treating it as an area of rational satisfaction of purely material needs. A feature of buildings created in the spirit of such assumptions was the progressive disappearance of artistic aspirations in relation to their shape and ornamentation. The defence of the position of beauty and art at that time focused on arguments that were easy to refute. A critic of the mechanistic implications of Semper's theory, Alois Riegl, emphasized the freedom⁸ inherent in artistic creativity and its achievements in the struggle with function, material and technique. At the same time, however, he saw the sources of this creativity in the biological pleasure derived from the forms of beauty, a specific drive to decorate and derive satisfaction from decorations. In this theory, too, beauty had no transcendent reasons. The drawback of Riegl's theory was the fact that critics of beauty and art also drew attention to their sensual character (Loos) and regarded the suppression of the senses (as in Freud's case) as a manifestation of the evolution of culture and the victory of the intellect over biological drives. For Le Corbusier, brought up in the Calvinist environment, whitewashing the facade was of an eminently moral character and was supposed to curb sensuality. Emphasizing the moral aspect of modernist formal solutions was also undertaken by those supporters who, apart from theories, also – like Pevsner – developed the history of architecture. Their views contributed to such a lowering of the position of some architects that it was only after several decades that the process of their rehabilitation began.

⁶ W. Wang, *The Architecture of Adolf Loos*, Arts Council of Great Britain, London 1985, p. 104.

⁷ R.S. Lindstrom, *Creativity and contradiction. European churches since 1970*, American Institute of Architects Press, Washington 1988.

⁸ E. Heathcote, I. Spens, *Church builders*, Academy Editions, London–Chichester 2001, pp. 25–101.

2. CREATION TENDENCY IN SHAPING SACRAL ARCHITECTURE OF THE 20TH CENTURY

From an art historical perspective, capturing its visual components is essential to understanding the new style. In the first few decades of modernism, this question seemed quite obvious. The earliest definitions are those created by Hitchcock, who drew attention to the emergence of forms dependent on new building materials and new building systems. The changes made possible by technology concerned both the appearance and new ways of organizing the interior space. Forms of technical origin were supplemented, in the opinion of this scientist, by such aesthetic elements as simplicity, reduction to geometric forms, horizontality and asymmetrical balance, which would become characteristic of the works of the avant-garde.

The work of Frank Lloyd Wright is profoundly different from the traditional attitude to the church building. An outstanding avant-garde creation in the field of church construction is, first of all, the first object of this type erected by him – the Unitarian church in Oak Park, Illinois (Ill. 1)⁹. The Neo-Gothic¹⁰ building, the former meeting place of this exceptionally liberal community of followers of the Protestant faction of Christianity, burned down in 1904. Since Wright's family belonged to a religious community in Oak Park, he was the one approached about the project, which began in 1905 and the entire site was built between 1906 and 1908. The new building does not belong to any known historical style, although the columns visible from the outside were decorated with motifs of Aztec and Egyptian roots. The church was built as a concrete monolith – Wright's first use of concrete in a public building in his career¹¹. The complex, both externally and internally, does not have any signs by which it would be possible to recognize its purpose.

The Unitarian complex was located on three busy streets, which prompted Wright¹² to carefully separate it from the hustle and bustle by covering the lower floor with windowless walls and to separate the terrace from the street with a solid wall in front of the entrance to the Church.

The interior is decorated with an ornament of contrasting geometric stripes of stained oak. Similar to the spectatorial nature of worship, the absence of any figurative or symbolic motifs within was deeply rooted in Protestant traditions. The rejection of traditional forms and sacred symbolism corresponded to the liberal and democratic nature of the unitary commune, but also in this environment constituted a radicalization of the Protestant tradition.

⁹ T.A. Heinz, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, "Architectural Monographs" 18, Academy Edition, St. Martin's Press, London–New York 1992.

¹⁰ L.R. Gnatiuk, *Traditions of transformation of Gothic forms in the sacred architecture of the end of the XIX – the beginning of the XX century. Modern problems of architecture and urban planning. Scientific and technical collection.* – Vyp. 57. – K.: KNUCA, 2020, pp. 26–42. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32347/2077-3455.2020.57.26-42>.

¹¹ J.M. Siry, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Annie M. Pfeiffer Chapel for Florida Southern College: Modernist Theology and Regional Architecture*, "Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians" 2004, 63, 4, pp. 498–539.

¹² N. Levine, *The architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1996, pp. 40–46.



III. 1. Frank Lloyd Wright, Unitarian Church, 1906–1908, Oak Park, Illinois. Source: Frank Lloyd Wright Trust, <https://flwright.org/researchexplore/unitytemple> (access: 14.09.2022).



III. 2. Chapel in Ronchamp. Architect Le Corbusier (left). Chapel altar in Ronchamp, 1950–1955 (right). Source: AD Classics: Ronchamp / Le Corbusier, <https://www.archdaily.com/84988/ad-classics-ronchamp-le-corbusier> (access: 14.09.2022).

The most avant-garde work of Le Corbusier¹³ of the 1950s is the Ronchamp Chapel (III. 2). It can be said that for the first time a church building appeared which completely departed in its architecture from the canons and traditions. The liturgical hall of the shell-shaped

¹³ J. Cullen, F.A. Praeger, *Le Corbusier, The chapel at Ronchamp*. New York 1957.

chapel is connected to the exterior architecture by an external open altar. Unexpected pure forms organically fit into nature. Numerous planning and plastic finds of this structure in the future will become widespread: the wall goes beyond the plan and easily deviates, niches of various sizes, openings, external stairs. Forms seem to grow out of the relief, a modest structure complies with the rules of grand architecture, and plasticity is brought to the level of sculpture. The sacred idea of church towers or domes as sources of heavenly (God's) light¹⁴. The towers of the chapel are unusual, thanks to the system of openings and light-reflecting planes they become light-producing devices. The chapel in Ronchamp is a complex synthesis of the architecture of plastic art, an example of the acceptability of innovation even in such canonized architecture as church¹⁵. The free plan, independent of walls and structures, opened up new possibilities in the formation of architectural space.

The Church of Corpus Christi (Ill. 3), designed by Schwartz, perhaps the most important religious building of the 20th century, shows its correct intentions and complex artistic and ideological values. Sometimes the features of the Aachen Church are briefly consistent with the formal origins of the Neues Bauen, but have a different ideological meaning. Another contradiction in the work is that the ideological content of the work of a deeply religious master does not correspond to the basics.

The basis of the Church of the Body of God is a composition of two recumbent cubes, which form the main nave and side nave, with a tower – the third cube, resembling a monumental pillar. It would seem that there cannot be a building further from the Gothic examples and close to the Neues Bauen examples, but everything is exactly the opposite. Schwartz came to the final form precisely because of the interpretation of the Gothic structure with new materials and a new aesthetic.

At that time, there were several options for the formation of the church.

The first consisted in the wide use of examples of historical buildings, since the method of historicism can be presented in a drastic simplification. In their work, expressionists tried to limit the number of forms taken directly from the past, penetrate the spirit of Gothic and find certain principles worthy of continuation. The next generation (including Behm) turned to archaic, more primitive forms. Schwartz's method can be described as the next step close to Husserl's phenomenological reduction. Starting from historical forms, Schwartz searched for essential forms. Contrary to the growing tendency to separate form and content, Schwartz believed that the resulting form cannot be independent of the previously assumed meaning and not perceive the understanding of form as a source of primarily aesthetic experiences or considered it as a consequence of correctly resolved functions. He also noted that the interpretation of the form as an addition imposed by the artist leads to the form of a kind of ornament similar to historicism. He expressed serious reservations about the absolutization of purposefulness in its materialistic sense and the reduction of the goal to a flat utility detached from the immaterial needs of a person or community¹⁶.

¹⁴ L.R. Gnatiuk, *The role of art and symbol in the formation of sacred space. Modern problems of architecture and urban planning. Scientific and technical collection.* – Vyp. 58. – K.: KNUCA, 2020. – pp. 32–47. DOI: 10.32 347/2077-3455.2020.58.32–47.

¹⁵ I. Linder-Gaillard, *The Aesthetics of Contemporary French Catholic Churches: Fortresses of Resistance?* [in:] W. van den Bercken, J. Sutton (eds.), *Aesthetics as a religious factor in Eastern and Western Christianity*, "Eastern Christian studies" 6, Peeters, Leuven 2005, pp. 225–239.

¹⁶ S.J. Schloeder, *Architecture in Communion. Implementing the Second Vatican Council through Liturgy and Architecture*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1998.



Ill. 3. Rudolf Schwarz, Corpus Christi Church, 1930, Aachen. Source: Corpus Christi Church, Aachen, <https://arquitecturaviva.com/works/iglesia-del-corpus-aquisgran> (access: 14.09.2022).

Minimalist architecture and minimalism as a style of design are now again relevant, although their roots go back to the 30s of the last century. Dutch group “De Stijl” presented minimalism as Suprematist architecture (pure wall planes, lines, colouring). Ludwig Mies van der Rohe¹⁷, the ideologist of “skin and bones” architecture, said that only the most necessary are: the beauty of the structure, the lack of decor, the combination of functions in one element. Minimalist architecture, however, used traditional materials (stone, wood, glass), placing high demands on their quality.

A distinctive detail is the use of elements made of chrome-plated steel. Simple geometric shapes form the volume. As a rule, other volumes are derived (scaled) from the main one. Even in color, minimalism was consistent. White and gray tones predominated.

Light played an important role in minimalist architecture. The squares of large window openings, glass ceilings, skylights developed the concept of light in architecture, which was laid down in the days of Art Nouveau.

Minimalist architecture gained a second life in the 60s of the last century, but already in high-rise buildings. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, minimalism becomes one of the most sought after in architectural design. In this direction worked Claudio Silvestrino, Tadao Ando, John Pawson.

The most striking examples of minimalist architecture include the Temple of Light in Ibaraki (Ill. 4–5), Osaka, designed by Tadao Ando¹⁸. Laconic planes of concrete, compositions of parallelepipeds, square towers, glass bands, water pools are restrained, expressive, stable¹⁹. Ando himself says that he took up architecture under the influence of the works and drawings of Corbusier²⁰.

¹⁷ L. Mies van der Rohe, *A chapel. Illinois Institute of Technology*, “Arts and Architecture” 1953.

¹⁸ T. Ando, *From the Chapel on the Water to the Chapel with the Light*, “The Japan Architecture”, 386, 1989, p. 455

¹⁹ L. Gnatiuk, *Aesthetics shaping sacred space. Theory and practice of design*. Collection of scientific papers. – Issue 11. Technical aesthetics. – K.: NAY, 2017. – pp. 42–56. DOI: 10.18372/2415-8151.11.11874.

²⁰ R. Coombs, *Mystical themes in Le Corbusier's architecture the chapel Notre-Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp. The Ronchamp riddle*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston–Queenston–Lampeter 2000.



Ill. 4–5. Temple of Light. Ibaraki. Japan. Architect T. Ando (left). Temple of Light, interior (right). Source: Architecture and Details by Tadao Ando, <https://the189.com/architecture/architecture-and-details-by-tadao-ando/> (access: 14.09.2022).

3. CONCLUSIONS

Already previous studies show that the churches of the 20th century can be grouped into two large, contrasting collections: traditionalist churches (works of late historicism) and churches belonging to avant-garde modernism.

Great styles have evolved so far to create a tangible set of shapes. The history of traditionalism and modernism was different. Late historicism consisted in various possibilities of formation of forms and, moreover, in many different artistic and ideological attitudes. Similarly, with avant-garde modernism, which was associated with an additional complication, which consisted in the fact that, in addition to profound changes in the course of its development, its theoretical and historiographical approaches changed.

Avant-garde modernism in architecture is one of the most vivid embodiments of a type of modern symbolism. The starting point was the need to achieve harmony between the character of the era and art forms, a postulate arising from the doctrine of historicism, which assumes the presence of internal correspondence between various manifestations of the culture of a given time, the coherence of its achievement, essential, spiritual foundations.

Each change of style has its representative manifestations in the field of church construction.

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