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AVANT-GARDE CITY BLOCKS AND CONTEMPORARY HOUSING HYBRIDS

AWANGARDOWE KWARTAŁY I HYBRYDY WSPÓŁCZESNEJ ZABUDOWY MIESZKANIOWEJ

Abstract

The paper discusses contemporary city blocks and hybrid housing whose uniqueness may predestine them as present-day architectural avant-garde. The research analyses selected iconic examples of multifamily architecture whose experimental approach to shaping form and communal spaces may indicate their avant-garde character. The temporal scope covers buildings constructed after 2000. The territorial scope focuses on the area of Western culture in the broadest sense (Europe, USA). The examples described here have a distinctive and original spatial idea to show the main directions of transformation and introduce typologically new, often one-off, solutions with a prototypical design approach. Thanks to contemporary engineering, technological and material possibilities, even the boldest visions can find grounds to realise works that go beyond the usual patterns, offering a pretext to consider them avant-garde. The research findings indicate significant features that should shape the present-day architectural work that aspires to be avant-garde.

Keywords: avant-garde, residential city block, architectural hybrid, iconic multifamily architecture, BIG, MVRDV

Streszczenie

Tematem badań są kwartały i hybrydy współczesnej zabudowy mieszkaniowej, których wyjątkowość może predestynować je do miana dzisiejszej architektonicznej awangardy. Badania opisane w tekście prezentują analizę wybranych ikonicznych przykładów architektury wielorodzinnej, których eksperymentalne podejście w kształtowaniu formy i przestrzeni wspólnych może wskazywać na ich awangardowy charakter. Zakres czasowy obejmuje budynki powstałe po 2000 r. Zakres terytorialny badań koncentruje się na obszarze szeroko rozumianej kultury zachodniej (Europa, USA). Opisane przykłady mają wyrazistą i oryginalną ideę przestrzenną, celem ukazania głównych kierunków przekształceń i wprowadzania typologicznie nowych, często jednorazowych rozwiązań o prototypowym podejściu w projektowaniu. Dzięki współczesnym możliwościom inżynierskim, technologicznym czy materiałowym, nawet najśmielsze wizje mogą znaleźć podstawy realizacyjne dla dzieł wykraczających poza utarte schematy, dając pretekst do uznania ich za awangardowe. Rezultaty badań wskazują na istotne cechy, które powinny kształtować dzisiejsze dzieło architektury aspirujące do miana awangardowego.

Słowa kluczowe: awangarda, kwartał zabudowy mieszkaniowej, architektoniczna hybryda, ikony architektury wielorodzinnej, BIG, MVRDV

1. INTRODUCTION – THE PHENOMENON OF THE AVANT-GARDE IN CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

The unequivocal identification of the avant-garde in contemporary architecture, especially with regard to multi-family city blocks, is not an obvious matter, nor is the very attempt to define the term in the broader context of the contemporary arts. Nevertheless, the attempt to find a common denominator for the diverse phenomena of artistic or architectural creativity reveals certain features of the avant-garde for new lines of thinking about space and form. This denominator may be, for example, the experimental nature of the work or the very manner of transforming or reinterpreting already proven typological architectural patterns in a new unprecedented appearance. Original shapes are also one of the distinctive features that may predestine a work of art to be considered avant-garde. Stimulating aesthetic sensations and enhancing emotions resulting from direct contact with a work of architectural art that goes beyond established spatial patterns is also a feature of avant-garde creative endeavours. Moreover, nowadays one tends to speak of avant-gardes in the plural rather than of one particular phenomenon of the avant-garde, just as one speaks of different styles in architecture. The difference, however, is that the styles have involved a certain continuation of development or transformation of the canons of architecture established over the centuries, whereas the phenomena of the avant-garde have resulted from a negation of the past achievements and the invention of novel phenomena, usually remaining in detachment from historical connotations, often departing from the principle of the Vitruvian triad – the beauty, durability and usefulness of architecture. An indispensable feature of avant-garde movements in architecture is therefore the questioning of the prevailing principles of spatial design and the demolition of the rules for the composition of building forms established by historical and social consensus. Avant-garde movements are often ephemeral – they appear, arousing interest and gaining a small circle of sympathisers and often radical followers. In the public perception, they are often treated as a creative “quirk”, an oddity or an artistic joke, and most often fail to gain wider understanding and applause among the masses. While avant-garde movements tend to be short-lived and impermanent phenomena, the works created within these movements, or by individual artists, frequently gain the status of icons or monuments in the history of postmodern architecture. The phenomenon of the avant-garde in architecture is not an obvious one. When reaching back to the thoughts, theories, manifestos and ultimately the works of the early twentieth-century avant-garde movements, it is necessary to articulate the need for a new perception of art and a definitive split with the historical past of architectural achievements. The Futurist, Expressionist, Dada and Surrealist movements, as well as other broadly defined modernist phenomena in art, ultimately interrupted the continuation of established canons from the world of historical architecture. Today, we seek spectacular solutions which catch the eye with original shapes and give the impression of uniqueness. The avant-garde characteristics of a work of art are still determined by breaking through stereotypical solutions and finding new spatial values for the present. In this context, one should pay attention to the city blocks and hybrid housing, distinctive in their idea and original in their shape. They have turned seemingly trivial, although from the point of view of man the most important function into a field for experimentation where the way architecture is formed constitutes an element of the organisation of social life that meets contemporary challenges. The search for the avant-garde in contemporary multifamily architecture requires a separation

of values seeking a distinct language of expression from the commercial layer, focused on creating original concepts for organising space based on ideological and artistic solutions. The rearrangement of established standards and the creation of new spatial values using the achievements in science, technology and advanced engineering put architecture on the path of sustainable development and ecological solutions, subordinating the world of abstraction to new creative challenges.

2. IN SEARCH OF THE AVANT-GARDE ARCHITECTURE OF PRESENT-DAY CITY BLOCKS AND HYBRID HOUSING

The residential city block is one of the typologically basic elements that make up the fabric of modern city districts. The basic feature of this development is the creation of clear urban interiors with a greater or lesser degree of semi-public character. While looking for the avant-garde aspects of such developments, it is important to consider not only the form of the building itself, often distinguished by its original shape but also the way in which this form solves the problem of organising the integrity of neighbourhood spaces belonging to specific residential communities. The contemporary residential city block is a type of development which is naturally designed to create spatial experiments within urban structures. It is a primary city-forming structure which organises an architectural setting around a specific building interior for the interpersonal relationships that build the local community. What characterises a city block is a typologically established range of proven spatial solutions. Each departure from established standards and patterns becomes an element that enriches the way life is organised in the architectural structures of multifamily buildings. While searching for spatially original solutions, often aspiring to the contemporary avant-garde status, attention should be paid to selected projects that attempt to implement bold ideas which seek ideal forms for living in multi-family structures. It is the experimental nature of the architectural idea, resulting from local conditions and values derived directly from the context of the place, that most often determines the emergence of avant-garde solutions. Walter Gropius claimed that “there is no end in architecture – only constant change”¹. Those designers who understood this fact and were able to propose daring and original solutions that went beyond the standards through experimentation could aspire to be the pioneers of modernity and thus become the avant-garde architects of their time.

Nowadays, the phenomenon of building hybridisation can also be observed more and more frequently in architecture. It involves the creation of complex architectural concepts based on different forms and functional programmes which, as a result of frequently surprising new combinations, are capable of creating innovative and original works with their own visual identity, often with a unique and iconic character. It is the diverse juxtaposition of forms, functions, technologies, materials, and the mixing of typologically pure compositional principles that fosters the creation of hybrid buildings. They are usually characterised by multifunctionality and versatility, as well as striving for the functional and spatial self-sufficiency of the designed structure to the extent of super-units, whether in the context of the building itself or a building complex. In his text *Hybrids – new elements in the structure of cities*, Michal Palej argues that:

¹ W. Gropius, *Pelnia architektury*, Karakter, Kraków 2014, p. 106.

Hybrid buildings seek unexpected, hard-to-predict relationships. They also show many faces and have their personality, as they result from an individual and unique creative process. Hybrids usually combine a private – intimate – sphere and a public – communal, social zone, which makes them live 24 hours a day. Accessibility, events and human activities in such buildings are not controlled by pre-imposed time schedules. They live by their very own rhythm, thus creating a new typological category – the building of continuous use. The relationship between form and function can be either clearly visible or deliberately concealed in hybrid buildings. In the former case, the form is made up of expressive components; in the latter, the formally unified hybrid plays the role of a container concealing the wealth of different functions contained within.²

In this context, hybrid buildings appear to be an ideal creative field for new architectural experiences and solutions, and thus for the creation of contemporary works that aspire to be considered present-day avant-garde. This is especially true in the context of residential architecture and often arouses the interest not only of the residents themselves but above all of the architects. In his text *Villas, blocks or hybrids? How to live in a 21st-century city?*, Ryszard Nakonieczny notes that:

It is an interesting solution nowadays to mix single-family housing with multi-family or other types of housing, which leads to hybrid formations. These were not only developed by well-known architects in the past but also today form an important component of the settlement areas in the contemporary city. The latter seems to be the most effective way to prevent gentrification and urban sprawl.³

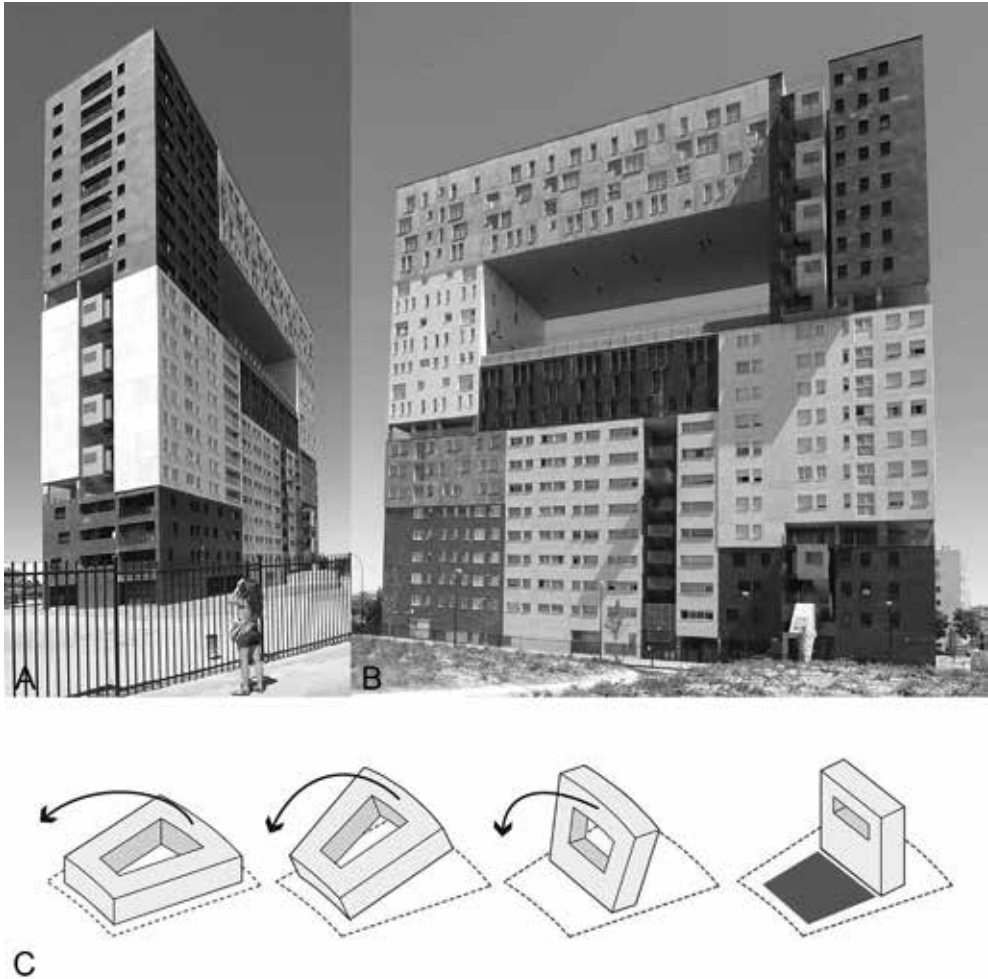
This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in countries that are regarded as leaders in the development of modern forms of housing and have high architectural and building culture which takes holistic care of the quality of the residential environment, such as the Netherlands and Denmark. Among the numerous architectural offices and studios with worldwide creative activity, some have placed questions of architectural originality of ideas as a priority in the design of contemporary residential city blocks or other forms of hybridisation. Offering innovative solutions, they have created several recognisable icons of contemporary multifamily architecture that many might consider avant-garde. Design studios such as BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group) or MVRDV (Winy Maas, Jacob van Rijs, Nathalie de Vries) should be mentioned here.

2.1. *MIRADOR*, SANCHINARRO, MADRID, SPAIN, 2005,
PROJECT: MVRDV (WINY MAAS, JACOB VAN RIJS, NATHALIE DE VRIES,
IN COOPERATION WITH BLANCA LLEÓ)

Mirador (Ill. 1a, 1b) is a unique building created between 2001 and 2005 (Spain, designed by MVRDV) that presents an original conceptual approach to the development of the city block. The architects from MVRDV proposed to turn the typologically traditional city block so

² M. Palej, *Hybrydy – nowe elementy w strukturze miasta*, “Czasopismo Techniczne / Technical Transactions” 2010, 6-A, Issue 14, p. 58.

³ R. Nakonieczny, *Wille bloki czy hybrydy? Jak mieszkać w mieście XXI wieku?*, [in:] A. Twardoch (ed.), *Mieszkać w Mieście*, Vol. 1: *Sprawy mieszkaniowe*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, Gliwice 2015, p. 39.



III. 1. *Mirador*, Sanchinarro, Madrid, Spain, 2005, project: MVRDV (Winy Maas, Jacob van Rijs, Nathalie de Vries, in cooperation with Blanca Lleó); a, b – general views of the building, source: photo by P. Mika; c – drawn diagram explaining the idea of the *Mirador* vertical city block, source: <https://www.mvrdv.nl/projects/135/mirador?photo=15774> (access: 4.10.2022).

that the body of the building stands vertically, placing the interior of the city block at a certain height. This is well illustrated by the succinct drawings explaining the idea behind the concept of the building (III. 1c). Here, the traditional interior of the urban block takes the form of a terrace covered by a structure housing the upper floors of the building, creating a unique kind of neighbourhood space – the so-called *Sky Plaza*, with a semi-public character, providing views of the nearby surroundings. This type of design action can be considered avant-garde, making this building a typologically new type of development – that is, a “vertical city block”. The building offers a variety of housing types as opposed to the standard mass repetition of units, which allows it to cater for the different needs of social groups and chosen lifestyles associated with living in an urban context. The residential units were

grouped into small forms – sections with different colours and architecture which were glued together to form a vertical super city block. The whole was tied together by an original form of circulation that wraps around the building, providing access and linking the individual residential sections of the building, with the red colour scheme becoming a telling feature. It consists of a series of stairways, corridors and platforms that, within the architecture, introduce a new interpretation to the space of urban alleys or intimate streets within the building structure. The publication *Densidad Density: New Collective Housing* states that: “This building contains an extensive mosaic of situations and housing types to accommodate contemporary diversity and individuality. It is about integrating different lifestyles. The large vantage point provides a privileged public space and a global identity”⁴. This experimental approach against the backdrop of the proposed solutions from the immediate context of the new development allows one to look at Mirador in the context of the present-day avant-garde, which is characterised by an original idea based on a certain contradiction of creating from such as a horizontal thing as a typical residential city block, providing a pretext for the idea of a vertical block. The MVRDV architects write that:

Mirador is a collection of mini neighbourhoods stacked vertically around a semi-public sky plaza. The building acts as a counterpoint against the massive uniformity of the surrounding housing blocks. It frames the distant landscape of the Guadarrama Mountains through a large ‘lookout’ located 40 meters above the ground. This also provides outdoor space and a community garden for the occupants of the building, monumentalising public life and space.⁵

The avant-garde nature of the proposed spatial, structural and aesthetic-material solutions is further enforced by the iconic nature of the building’s architecture, whose recognisable form has created a new identity for the wider context of Sanchinarro.

2.2. 8 TALLET, ØRESTAD SOUTH, COPENHAGEN, DENMARK, 2009, PROJECT: BIG (BJARKE INGELS GROUP)

A unique city block called 8 Tallet (Ill. 2a, 2b), referring to its plan in the shape of the number “8”, has been located in the southern part of the Ørestad district, adjacent to the Copenhagen Canal. The original idea for the building proposed by the Bjarke Ingels Group is clearly explained in the simplified diagrams, which indicate the transformation of the traditional rectangular shape of the city block, measuring approximately 110 x 230 m and with a height of approximately 30 metres, to create the original form of a bipartite city block with distinctive slopes that provide favourable light and views. In addition to the residential zone, which dominates on the upper floors with a variety of functional layouts (476 units in total), there are also offices and commercial areas on the lower floors, turning Copenhagen’s “Eight” into a versatile unit that provides accommodation, workplaces, services and leisure within the structure of a single building. It is also an implementation of *Mixed Use Architecture*, i.e. the integration of the predominant residential functions with recreation, services, commerce, work and leisure and sports facilities, as well as accessibility to cultural venues and good public transport. The provision of such a variety of functions occurs through the consolidation

⁴ A. Fernández Per, J. Mozas, *Densidad Density: New Collective Housing*, a+t ediciones, Vitoria-Gesteiz 2006, p. 256.

⁵ <https://www.mvrdv.nl/projects/135/mirador> (access: 25.09.2022).

of activities whether within its immediate vicinity or the diversified building structure itself as is the case in the *8 Tallet* city block to a considerable extent. Apart from its attractive and original form, this building is distinguished by the way in which part of the residential area is organised right next to the sloping promenade running along the façade up to the top floors. This allows one to walk around the building from the best viewing angles. The avant-garde nature of this solution consists in turning this promenade into a kind of new type of urban street formed from the architectural structure of the building, around which the daily life of the residents takes place. Here, the spatial concept and the organisation of circulation around the bipartite building became a pretext for finding new solutions and a kind of framework for living in a neighbourhood community. Architecture shaped in this way serves to build social relationships based on a new concept of inhabitable space. Avant-garde solutions based on new principles of spatial organisation can be found in this field of experimentation with space.



Ill. 2. *8 Tallet*, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009, project: BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group); a – general view of the city block, source: photo by P. Bigaj; b – view from inside the city block with a characteristic view opening to the nearby landscape, source: photo by P. Bigaj.

2.3. *MARKTHAL*, ROTTERDAM, HOLLAND, 2014, PROJECT: MVRDV (WINY MAAS, JACOB VAN RIJS, NATHALIE DE VRIES)

Markthal (Ill. 3) was built in the historic Laurenskwartier in the heart of Rotterdam. Its construction began at the end of 2009. It is a building that uniquely combines two dominant functions – a residential programme and a commercial marketplace. It is an original example of an architectural hybrid. The architects from MVRDV write that:

The Markthal is a sustainable combination of food, leisure, living, and parking, a building in which all functions are fully integrated to celebrate and enhance their synergetic possibilities. A secure, covered square is nestled beneath a large arch, conceived as an entirely new take on a typical market square and its surrounding buildings.⁶

The avant-garde nature of the design solution is based on the creation of the space for a modern covered urban market with commercial and service functions, which is formed by a huge hall in the form of an arch, housing flats in its main body and commercial premises in

⁶ <https://www.mvrdv.nl/projects/115/markthal> (access: 1.10.2022).



Ill. 3 *Markthal*, Rotterdam, Holland, 2014, project: MVRDV (Winy Maas, Jacob van Rijs, Nathalie de Vries), source: <https://www.mvrdv.nl/projects/115/markthal?photo=15059> (access: 4.10.2022).

the lower parts. The front façade and the back enclosing the hall space are glazed with one of the largest structures of its kind, providing adequate transparency and light, as well as protection from adverse weather conditions and the effect of excessive ventilation and air movement in the interior of the market. *Markthal* is an architectural experiment not only on a local but also on a global scale, creating a kind of super-unit with a centre-forming character. In his publication *Multifamily Housing. Design Basics*, Jan Pallado mentions this building in the context of current trends in multifamily housing design, to which a new typological term of house-piazza has adhered, understood as “a multifamily house with service functions and extensive public or semi-public space in the interior. It represents a new type of covered urban space, integrating the residential part with other parts of the building in terms of functionality and visual impact”⁷. This hybrid mix of service market and residential units consists of 102 rental flats and 126 freehold flats, including 24 penthouses ranging in size from 80 square metres to 300 square metres. 96 stalls were located in the space of the market hall itself. The ground and first floor of the hall accommodate 20 retail units. On the first underground level, there is a supermarket⁸. A notable feature is the mural *Cornucopia* (authors: Arno Coenen, Iris Roskam) covering the vaulted interior of the approximately 11,000 m² hall, which is a collage of images of fruit, vegetables, grains, fish, flowers and insects. The distinctiveness and cohesiveness of the form, as well as the unusual way in which the residential programme

⁷ J. Pallado, *Zabudowa wielorodzinna. Podstawy projektowania*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, Gliwice 2014, p. 133.

⁸ <https://archello.com/project/markthal-rotterdam> (access: 1.10.2022).

was combined with retail and services, made the building an icon of contemporary Rotterdam architecture virtually from its first days. The architectural vision, involving the reinterpretation of a market hall, a marketplace with multi-family housing, has resulted in a unique building that anticipates stereotypical solutions, drawing on experimentation in combining different spheres of space – public, semi-public and private. In this field of courageous experimentation and the search for novelty and originality of architectural solutions, one can find qualities inherent in thinking and creating in the spirit of the avant-garde understood in the contemporary criteria of technological progress, moving towards new directions of thinking and creating unprecedented building prototypes.

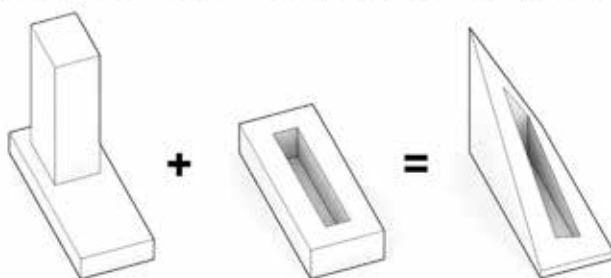
2.4. *W57 – WEST 57TH STREET*, MANHATTAN, NEW YORK, USA, 2016, PROJECT: BIG (BJARKE INGELS GROUP)

Constructed between 2011 and 2016, *W57* is an iconic building that stands out from the Manhattan skyline with its unusual form (Ill. 4a). The avant-garde nature of the idea behind this project lies primarily in the introduction of a typologically new type of building into New York City development – the *Courtscraper*. It is nothing more than a particular hybrid combining American high-rise architecture with the city block known from European cities (Ill. 4b), whose key element of composition is the common space of a green courtyard. The expression of the building has been brought out through a distinctive truncation that creates a slender vertical gable from one corner, creating the massing of an asymmetrical residential mountain with a cut-out courtyard of elongated rectangular shape. The building's architecture and aesthetics are indicative of the aesthetic style known from contemporary Danish projects, combining material and colour restraint with the clarity of the idea. The building programme includes not only the dominant residential part but also numerous additional functions related to active leisure, recreation and culture, which are concentrated in the lower parts of the building around the courtyard. *W57* can be considered avant-garde because of the new spatial and structural values it managed to implement into the challenging context of Lower Manhattan with its numerous high-rise buildings. The avant-garde nature of the solution also results from overcoming a certain contradiction by the creators of *W57* explained by Bjarke Ingels: "In an unlikely fusion of what seems to be two mutually exclusive typologies – the courtyard and the skyscraper, the Courtscraper is the most recent addition to the Manhattan skyline"⁹. The original idea of a courtscraper demonstrates a search through experimentation for hybrids based on different building forms, the results of which produce interesting spatial solutions, introducing typologically new forms into the dictionary of contemporary architecture. The BIG designers have proposed a building that is unique in the Manhattan skyline. Its shape differs from the more or less transformed cuboid high-rise buildings. It introduces a panoramic focal point, an eye-catcher. It was not the height that allowed this massing to emerge visually, but the diagonal line of the form that stands out against the verticals of the high-risers. The context has further brought out the shape of the conceived thing, introducing an unconventional element of a novel concept and perhaps an architectural quirk interrupting the ossified rule for composing skyscrapers in New York. The architects opted for an avant-garde solution, creating one of the icons of present-day metropolitan multifamily

⁹ [quoted after:] M. Początko, *W labiryncie struktury*, "Środowisko Mieszkaniowe / Housing Environment" 2019, Vol. 26, p. 56.

architecture. Analysing the *W57* example, among others, in his text *In the Labyrinth of Structures*, Marek Początko states that:

Today, iconic original buildings, which are supposed to reflect the contemporary achievements and ambitions of society, have priority in creating new districts and cities. The role of a contemporary house in the city remains unchanged – it is to provide the possibility of dwelling, a feeling of security, and sometimes luxury and prestige. Its structure evolves according to the changing conditions of use and aesthetics. Yet, does it satisfy the need for beauty? It is impossible to resolve this.¹⁰



III. 4. *W57* – West 57th Street, Manhattan, New York, USA, 2016, project: BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group); a – view of the *W57* against the city skyline, source: <https://big.dk/#projects-w57> (access: 4.10.2022); b – diagram explaining the idea of the *W57 Courtycraper*, source: <https://big.dk/#projects-w57> (access: 4.10.2022).

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

It is the originality of the structure and the iconic expression of the form distinguished from its context, among other things, that determine the possibility of considering specific works as being avant-garde. These criteria can attest to the fact that *W57* goes beyond standard solutions in many respects, creating a new and unique quality befitting the contemporary avant-garde.

2.5. *SLUISHUIS*, AMSTERDAM, HOLLAND, 2022,
PROJECT: BIG (BJARKE INGELS GROUP) AND BARCODE ARCHITECTS

On the south-eastern outskirts of Amsterdam, the unique *Sluishuis* residential block was erected in 2022 (Ill. 5). The building is located on the water, in an artificially raised area, but the whole was arranged in such a way that it gives the impression of “floating” architecture. Dirk Peters, the co-founder of Barcode Architects, says that: “With iconic architecture and new residential typologies, high-quality outdoor spaces and breathtaking views of the IJmeer, *Sluishuis* is a new landmark for IJburg and Amsterdam”¹¹. The uniqueness of the project focuses on the way the two opposite corners are shaped. The first, facing the IJburg district, rises stepwise upwards and has a narrow slit that invites one into the interior of the block. The second one has a sloping undercut opening up to the water and bringing it into the interior of the block. At the peak of its form, this corner is enclosed by the massing



Ill. 5. *Sluishuis*, Amsterdam, Holland, 2022, project: BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group) and Barcode Architects, source: <https://www.archdaily.com/985419/sluishuis-residential-building-big-plus-barcode-architects/62d088e3211070016683bc78-sluishuis-residential-building-big-plus-barcode-architects-photo> (access: 4.10.2022).

¹¹ <https://archello.com/project/sluishuis> (access: 30.09.2022).

of the last two storeys. The building as a whole creates an iconic structure, strongly dominating its surroundings; the impression of a cohesive form is further enhanced by the water surrounding the building. The idea of the building captures the dynamism and expression of the overhang in the shape of the corner through which water enters the inner courtyard and where the possibility of mooring boats is provided. The angled undercut also provides an attractive view of the vast expanse of water from the inside of the block, creating the typical Amsterdam atmosphere of a city at the interface between land and water. Andreas Klok Pedersen from BIG emphasises that: “The world-famous urban environment of Amsterdam was created by the fusion of water and city. The new *Sluishuis* is born of the same DNA, merging water and a perimeter block and expanding the possibilities for urban life forms around the IJ”¹². This modern architectural narrative shows an avant-garde shaping of form that has imposed a new visual identity on the site through very simple means of expression – cascading faults with terraces and a diagonal undercut. Bjarke Ingels, the founder of BIG, describes the development as follows:

Our *Sluishuis* is conceived as a city block of downtown Amsterdam floating in the IJ Lake, complete with all aspects of city life. Towards the city, the courtyard building kneels down to invite visitors to climb its roof and enjoy the panoramic view of the new neighbourhoods on the IJ. Toward the water, the building rises from the river, opening a gigantic gate for ships to enter and dock in the port/yard. A building inside the port, with a port inside the building.¹³

The original memorable shape of this architecture creates a new symbol of Amsterdam’s IJburg district. An unquestionable advantage of *Sluishuis* is the possibility of experiencing the building from different directions in ever-changing ways, producing a startling effect and a variety of attractive frames and symbolic meanings. On one side, it creates an inviting hill to climb, with a path wrapping around the building around the observation deck, and on the other, the symbolism of a grotto opening onto the mysterious interior of a “bay” hidden from the world. The block, which dominates the landscape, additionally impresses the viewer with its monumentalism resulting not only from the volume of the block located on the surface of the water but also from the means of expression, such as the impressive undercut suspended above the water. A promenade and a pier for mooring boats were laid out at some distance from the façade, further emphasising the maritime relationship of the building with the water. The block contains 442 residential units with different layouts, including two-storey units, dedicated to different groups of residents in terms of income and age categories. In addition to the flats, the ground floor level also houses attractive services such as a sailing school, a water sports centre and a restaurant. The building is environmentally friendly and is also considered one of the most sustainable to have been built in recent times with an Energy Performance Coefficient (EPC) of 0.00¹⁴. All these aspects contribute to the fact that this city block is considered innovative and ahead of present-day standards so that it can be regarded as a contemporary avant-garde residential architecture.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ <https://big.dk/#projects-sluis> (access: 30.09.2022).

¹⁴ <https://www.archdaily.com/985419/sluishuis-residential-building-big-plus-barcode-architects> (access: 30.09.2022).

3. CONCLUSIONS – RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Mirador, *8 Tallet*, *Markthal*, *W57* and *Sluishuis* are five exceptional buildings which merely illustrate a part of the changes taking place before our eyes in multifamily architecture around the world. They illustrate a set of certain characteristics that indicate the avant-garde nature of the design solutions adopted. The avant-garde in its essence is characterised by many pioneering solutions. Avant-garde architecture usually involves some form of experimentation with composition, shapes and spaces, resulting in a building prototype that goes beyond the usual schemes or typologies and directly defies the established classifications. This contributes to the visual originality and uniqueness of the chosen idea, which has been given a material form. The media success of the project is determined by the favourable opinion of the artistic and architectural community, art critics and ultimately the users themselves. The avant-garde does not always follow this path; it is oriented towards confrontation, creating a completely new set of trends, directions and beliefs that do not always gain acceptance. It is only with the benefit of hindsight that one can judge the validity of the chosen creative assumptions and perhaps the status of the avant-garde. The fact that a building has become an architectural icon does not automatically establish the avant-garde nature of a work of art, but it may indicate a set of characteristics that warrant considering such architecture in the context of the present-day untrodden path to becoming avant-garde. Such works do not reproduce reality but seek their own language of expression. They became the leaven of the foundations of the modernity of the era, treating art as a precursor element in animating urban life in society. Many a time, a work of architecture has become a manifesto through which cultural change has taken place. It seems that the avant-garde needs a non-trivial, sublime or monumental subject matter to exist. The examples mentioned in the text show that even in such a mundane, commercially oriented function as present-day multifamily architecture, it is possible to smuggle original housing-related ideas that can be seen as avant-garde. The residential city block, which in its transformation and extension of the functional programme with new functions initiates a process of hybridisation of residential architecture, turns out to be an exceptionally graceful subject for the attempts made. A fundamental feature of the buildings presented here, which were created in the BIG and MVRDV offices, is the programme complexity, the dominant part of which is still the various forms of accommodation while accompanying or complementary functions integrate the realisation of the *Mixed Use Architecture* postulate within a single building. Jan Pallado notes that:

Contrary to the modernist principle of the segregation of functions, a trend towards the integration of residential, service, production and leisure functions, as well as circulation and transport is noticeable in the shaping of housing estates and complexes. This integration applies both to large complexes with an extensive functional programme and a complex circulation system, as well as to small, cosy housing complexes providing for the diverse needs of the inhabitants within a limited area and walking distance.¹⁵

This encourages the hybridisation of contemporary buildings and a gradual departure from the modernist postulates of functional zoning within separate urban districts and directs the focus towards multi-functional super-unit buildings with a dominant residential area. Irrespective of their occasionally commercial connotations, *Mirador*, *8 Tallet*, *Markthal*, *W57* and *Sluishuis* all display avant-garde solutions, offering the potential to achieve exceptional spatial

¹⁵ J. Pallado, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

and functional value through the search for new typologies, transformations and transitions, manifested in an original form with a unique structure, aesthetic expression and acquired the iconic status of contemporary housing architecture. The avant-garde is not only a rebellion against the existing reality and a search for a new path, but it is also an architectural achievement that goes beyond established patterns and draws inspiration from scientific and technical achievements, posing further challenges for subsequent generations of architectural creators.

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