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SHAPING PLACE IN ARCHITECTURE. DIVERSITY AND HARMONY

KSZTAŁTOWANIE MIEJSCA W ARCHITEKTURZE. ODMIENNOŚĆ I HARMONIA

Abstract

Contemporaneity is characterized by the need for constant changes and the inability to accept something which persists in an unaltered shape. This idea is also visible in the strive for diversity and changeability of shaping in architecture. Ever since the times of the Industrial Revolution, such ideas call into question many fundaments of civilizations, earlier ideas, and patterns.

Architecture is not an exception, however, the paradox is that the rate of changes in the thinking, and the rules of designing, and building, do not fit in with the durability of the material out of which architecture is made. It sometimes happens that the idea, the concept for a building ages quicker than the building is completed. Such unavoidability of the too frequent changes of the cultural code leads to temporality. What, then, can be considered avant-garde today? Is it not a return to tried patterns? Or perhaps it is a reference to tried patterns, a reference to a broken cultural code, which for centuries created the basis and the means of communication in shaping space.

Hope can be seen in conscious self-limitation, which will replace the ever-present pluralism, also due to worries about the environment – finding the long-awaited exceptionality in the harmony of the planned building with its surroundings. The illustration of these ideas are the designs of the author of the text prepared in Konior Studio.

Keywords: avant-garde, diversity, harmony, architecture, nature

Streszczenie

Współczesność charakteryzuje potrzeba ciągłych zmian, niemożność akceptacji czegoś, co trwa w niezmienionym kształcie. Myśl ta widoczna jest także w dążeniach do odmienności i zmienności kształtowania architektury. Od czasów rewolucji przemysłowej coraz częściej pojawiają się myśli podważające wcześniejsze kanony i wzorce czy wręcz fundamenty cywilizacji.

Architektura nie jest wyjątkiem, jednak paradoks polega na tym, że tempo zmian w myśleniu o zasadach projektowania i budowania nie przystaje do samej istoty architektury, jej trwałości, wartości materiałów, z których powstaje. Zdarza się, że czas starzenia się pomysłu na budynek, jego koncepcji jest krótszy niż proces powstania budynku. Owa nieuchronność zbyt częstych zmian kodu kulturowego prowadzi do tymczasowości.

Co zatem dzisiaj można nazwać awangardą? Czy przewrotnie nie staje się ona powrotem do sprawdzonych wzorców, nawiązaniem do przerwanego kodu kulturowego, który przez wieki tworzył podstawy i język porozumienia w kształtowaniu przestrzeni? A może awangarda jest dużo szerzej rozumianym powrotem do natury i zgodności z jej istotą?

Wydaje się, że nadziei trzeba poszukiwać w świadomym samoograniczeniu, które może zastąpić wszechobecny pluralizm, również w trosce o środowisko – znajdując wyczekiwaną wyjątkowość w harmonii planowanego budynku z otoczeniem. Ilustracją tych myśli są projekty autora wypowiedzi, przygotowane w pracowni Konior Studio.

Słowa kluczowe: awangarda, odmiennność, harmonia, architektura, natura

1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of this year's Conference – Defining the Architectural Space is architectural avant-garde. The idea partially expressed in the abstract has led me to ponder the subject of the shaping of the place where architecture is created. The undertaken subject covers two aspects, which differ mainly due to different surroundings of the land which is to be developed. In order to emphasize these differences, my thoughts concern the creation of a place both in an urbanized area as well as an area untouched by human hand, which thanks to the erection of the building will attain the status of an area with landscape value.

Taking into account the premises of the organizers of the meetings which concern the definition of architectural space, and which aim to start a discussion among architect-teachers as well as architect-designers, we often ask ourselves is architecture a science? The answer is inconclusive. It is definitely knowledge that takes advantage of the achievements of contemporary science. Knowledge about architecture brings together records of creating place or architecture of the created buildings. Frequently these are records important for designers, recalling the achievements of professional knowledge, and even more importantly forcing them to reflect on the needs of the changing reality. As a result, there are many stories about architecture created by the greats of the world. Among those principal figures whose thoughts had been recorded for posterity, there are but a few architects. And yet contemporary times of change and flow, as well as the strive for competition between various experiences in the scientific community as well as ideas, which lead to pragmatic comparisons force us to attempt again and again to create records of our own thoughts. Being part of this trend, I would like to share a part of my own experiences, regarding the creation of places, which are a result of my work as a designer.

In urbanized areas, the restoration of a degenerated location is generally based on the construction of a new structure, with a function corresponding to current needs, however not always in harmony with the environment. Creating a new place, which is to give an impulse for further often a new direction of development, is usually connected with the creation of a building with a spectacular architectural image.

Currently, the problem of the quality of place apart from functionality is often defined by the significance of the quality of the architectural image. This is further confirmed by specialist research, conducted by neurobiologists, who notice the significance and the weight of human desire for beauty¹, also in his surroundings. Thus, the image of architecture – the beauty of a building influencing the quality of place – becomes an important factor in shaping, but also developing the environment.

Spectacular examples of this include the construction of the Oslo Opera House and the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. On the local scale, examples of this are the legendary Spodek in Katowice or the International Conference Center situated on the premises of the former “Katowice” mine, whose influence on the development of the whole city or even region is undeniable. Such examples are frequent indeed, because more and more often the architecture of a new building changes the face of the degenerated district introducing new quality and new life, thus setting out new trends in the development of a place.

¹ N. Juzwa, *The Beauty in Architecture* [in:] *Defining the Architectural Space – Tradition and Modernity in Architecture*, E. Celadin (ed.), vol. 1. ATUT, Wrocław 2019, after: S. Zeki, M. Binder, A. Binde, *Blaski i cienie pracy mózgu*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2019.

The problem equally often occurs in areas which are most “sensitive” for the shaping of architecture, on the outskirts of the city, meaning in the zone where the city buildings come in contact with the landscape areas, which unfortunately generally has not retained much of the natural environment. These areas more often than others undergo processes of stagnation, revitalization, or planning of new buildings. Newly planned buildings in such an area have a double role to play. They are to be not only functional, but due to their architectural attractiveness or even exceptionality, should become an important element of the development of the PLACE.

Designing in an urban setting and following the thoughts expressed by Aldo Rossi, the architect should organize geometrical elements of the design referencing the memories and history of the place. Such architecture harmoniously integrating itself into the city, may positively influence passers-by, inviting them to become familiar with a place². Rossi himself was able to follow the lessons of classical architecture, without replicating them. His buildings echo the past, using forms of universal, gripping quality. His work is both courageous and ordinary, original, but not novel, refreshingly simple in appearance, and extremely complex as far as content and significance. In a time of various trends and influences, Aldo Rossi avoided fashionable and popular styles in order to create his own architecture (ibid).

On the other hand, the value of a place stems from the time of the oldest concepts of the city. The idea, which is slightly forgotten, is presently being revitalized. It is recalled by Jan Gehl, an urban design consultant and humanist when he talks about *a city for people*³. The need to meet connects ideas of culture and culture creation with the center-creating dimension of architecture. In this way, the identity of a place is built. In a multi-volume work entitled *Event Cities*, Bernard Tschumi⁴ also says that a building always exists in specific surroundings; geographical location or a historically, culturally, or economically defined context. The architectural concept in defining the final form, and also the materiality of the designed building may have various connections with the context, the architect does not need to take into account all of the conditions of the surroundings. In emphasizing the importance of the context, Tschumi introduces three categories into the discussion:

- *indifference*, meaning the independence of the concept from the context,
- *reciprocity*, when the concept of the new facility and the spatial context complement each other, or when the planned building is an architectural response to existing buildings,
- *conflict*, between the existing surroundings and the newly designed structures, which generally leads to the possibility of changing the context to the structure (ibid).

The relations of the architectural concept to the context, allowing for the simultaneous consideration of the locational and cultural context, make it possible for the architect to choose various approaches to the relations between the spatial and cultural context of the place. Taking into account the principle of balance, we generally follow the conditions important for this paramount thought in the planning of a building, but also important due to care for the environment. For the architecture of a building, the harmony of form and materiality of a building toward the surrounding context is quite significant. Distinctness

² Aldo Rossi of Italy Elected 1990 Pritzker Architecture Prize Laureate, www.Pritzkerprize.com/laureates/1990 (access: 17.09.2019).

³ J. Gehl, *Miasta dla ludzi*, RAM, Kraków 2014.

⁴ B. Tschumi, *Event Cities 3*, MIT Press, London 2005.

is a feature of shaping space, which distinguishes the building in a specific place, and is important from the point of view of its exceptionality.

I would like to discuss and illustrate the topic which I have undertaken using two examples completed by the author of the article prepared in the Konior Studio design office. These are:

- the expansion of the Academy of Music in Katowice by adding the “Symfonia” concert hall, designed by Tomasz Konior and Krzysztof Barysz, 2005, and
- The Press Glass Office Building in Konopiska near Częstochowa (arch. Tomasz Konior, 2020).

2. THE EXPANSION OF THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC IN KATOWICE BY ADDING THE “SYMFONIA” CONCERT HALL BUILDING

The “Symfonia” building is part of the urban built-up area of the peripheral zone of downtown Katowice. The brick, delicately sculpted architecture of the hall is an example of incorporating a new form into the old urban tissue in place. The “Symfonia” building was erected in an area filled with residential and office buildings from the end of the nineteenth and the start of the twentieth century, as well as a historical cemetery. Despite a contemporary form, it seems to blend in with the pre-existing neighborhood. At the same time, its architecture fits in well with the new architecture of present-day Katowice – it is an effect of a creative process in which *concept and context*, but also functionality requirements, meaning *content*, create the foundation for the selection of the materiality of the building. In this way, the *idea-thought* of the architect inscribed into the architecture’s materiality becomes a building, which takes into account the spatial context of the surroundings. For the functionality, but also the beauty of the planned structure, it is important for the principal *thought*, and *idea* to be clear and to last, controlled from the time of its inception, from creating subsequent design studies, until the completion of the building.

The expansion of the Academy of Music, which was preceded by a competition, is one of the first important investments in the new century. In 2007, Tomasz Malkowski wrote that the “Symfonia” building “seems to be a turning point in the architecture of Katowice. Because finally after years of meaninglessness here is a building that is an event”⁵. The new concert hall of the Academy emerges directly next to the historical building from 1898. The large, rectangular, brick body with few windows is separated by a glazed atrium from its richly decorated neighbor. As a result, the richly sculpted façade of the old building creates the interior of the hall of the new building. The elevations of both buildings are made of brick, however, their shape and decoration distinctively show that they come from two different periods.

The new form of the exterior of the “Symfonia” building evokes positive associations with the modernism of the interwar period. It is adorned with delicate protrusions of bricks from the elevation face and its highlighted window form, which is expressed in the brick façade with vertical cracks. From the hall of the building, foot walks lead to various floors of the old part of the Academy. Incorporating the building into time and place while also referencing local tradition with the materiality of the architecture or form of the building is one of the most important tasks but also one of the pleasures of the designer, and furthermore the essence of the complexity of the design process. In the “Symfonia” building this is definitely the case.

⁵ T. Malkowski, *Ceglana melodia*, “Architektura i Biznes” 2008, No. 6, p. 64.



Ill. 1. Academy of Music in Katowice, photo: TK, KS archive.

The hall, connecting both parts of the Academy is also an entrance to the concert hall for nearly 600 listeners. This is the first concert hall in Poland, which utilizes variable acoustics, using the so-called reverberation chambers. This solution allows for a changing of the hall's cubature and influences its acoustic properties. The precursor of the "Symfonia" building was the concert hall in Lahti which is also equipped with reverberation chambers with openable doors.

The interior of the concert hall in Katowice is characterized by harmony and modesty, while wood finishing allows for the appropriate listening experience, but also shapes the esthetics of the solution.

The principal thought, and at the same time designing idea, is architectural cohesiveness with neighboring buildings with simultaneous formal distinctness. The glazed atrium connecting both buildings is a public space with a café, shop, and a small amphitheater. It is also a meeting and resting place for students and the inhabitants of Katowice. The building has received positive reviews not only from the local community but also on an international scale⁶.

⁶ Grand Prix Architecture of the Year of the Silesian Voivodeship 2008, Best Public Space of the Silesian Voivodeship 2008 (category Modernization), the SARP Annual Award 2007 for the best com-

3. HEAD OFFICE OF PRESS GLASS S.A. IN KONOPIKA NEAR CZĘSTOCHOWA⁷

This is an office building, situated in a rather unexpected location. It was built as the head office of the rapidly developing company, which produces glazing units. It was erected in a natural area, free of any other buildings, an area which the contemporary critic and architectural historian Charles Jencks pinpoints as an inherent element of the environment connected with human civilization. Moreover, according to the author, it is more important than culture, he believes that nature as an element of the environment is constantly open to new interpretations. It may become an asylum or a source of tranquility for a person. Therefore, Jencks reminds us that inspiration from shapes that were created out of nature is still present in both design and architecture⁸. Let us add that the development of digital technology facilitates the material interpretation of such designing thoughts. Designing a building in an open landscape, the designer strives for the planned building to symbolize fluidity of form, connection with nature, and more importantly a temporal departure from the principles of right-angle geometry. The building is to express fluid forms inspired by landscape.



Ill. 2. Head office of Press Glass in Konopiska, Konior Studio, photo: Nate Cook.

pletion of a structure, SARP Award for the best structure built with the use of public funds in 2007, Friendly and Inclusive Space Award at the XXIII UIA Congress in Torino, nomination for the Mies van der Rohe Award, Highly Commended Award in the European Commercial Property Awards in the category Public Service, 1st class Award of the Minister of Infrastructure for outstanding creative achievements in the field of Architecture and Civil Engineering.

⁷ Press Glass Building – A'DESIGN AWARD & COMPETITION – AWARD WINNING DESIGN, GOLD A'DESIGN AWARD, 2021.

⁸ Ch. Jencks, *Ecstatic Architecture: The Surprising Link*, Academy Editions, New York 1999, p. 20 and ff.

The head office of Press Glass was created in a location that is quite unusual for office buildings. It is located on the edge of the Polish Jurassic Highland. It was built in an area of unused agricultural fields and groves, which the investor turned into a broad, picturesque golf field. Along with the new function, the land changed its image, in the past overgrown with various kinds of trees, filled with numerous watercourses, and small water reservoirs, it has now been cleaned up and prepared for the new function, thus complementing the building.

The golf fields along with the Head Office of Press Glass were created out of the dreams of the investor, whose ambition was to create the modern headquarters of a company on a green plateau, while also creating a natural enclave to spend free time. The architecture was to express the dynamic character of the company, while at the same time ensuring its employees of contact with live nature. The arrangements were based on the idea of the cohesiveness of nature and technology. Soft shapes and colors which are naturally observed in nature played a decisive role in the character of the image of the building, making it consistent with the green, hilly landscape.

Looking for a form that would supplement the narrow land plot intersected by a watercourse, open to the space of the golf course, many possible solutions were considered. Finally, it was decided to prepare a plan drawing in the form of a triangle. Subsequent stories of the building vary due to the size of the outline, which decreases towards the top. Such a *procedure* influences the reduction of scale, thus increasing the sensation of fluidity at the intersection of architecture and landscape. The focal point of the arrangements is an open, internal courtyard made in the image of an exotic garden, which contrasting with the landscape of the golf courses creates an extraordinary place.

Concrete, which is generally a construction material, is also used in the finishing of the structure. The elevation of the technology building and the columns of the main entrance are made of exposed concrete with an imprinted formwork or coarse texture obtained via the *graining* method. Pre-tensioned prestressed concrete allowed for the use of non-standard spans. The ready-made, large construction modules, and building components, which were used for the elevation, roof, and edges of terraces and balustrades, account for the character of the building exterior.

Glass in the Press Glass building is an important, but not dominant material. Put together with the massive materiality it influences the feeling of modernity and *lightness of the building*. The flat glass surfaces, as well as the bulky, rounded glass in the corners of the external elevation and the courtyard, are one of the most important elements which shape the character of the transparent “architecture without borders”. Details of the assembly out of polished, stainless steel create an elegance of the solution, while the use of reflexive glass blurs the boundaries between interior and exterior – the size of the building seems to be indefinable.

The material which supplements the character of the building is wood. It was used on the cladding of the installation shafts, external walls, and fragments of the floors. It creates a specific softness, difficult to achieve, but one that is especially important when it comes to official and representative places. Wood is also the material used in the finishing of the terraces, railings of the balustrades, doors, and furniture.

The roofs of the buildings are filled with photovoltaic cells and play the role of green terraces. They are covered with plants that are easy to maintain: sedums and vines. Natural greenness used in large spaces becomes a building material that is present here on equal terms with traditional building materials.

4. CONCLUSION

Creating man-friendly places is part of the contemporary architectural and urban discourse. It is important to create the environment by introducing a new structure that changes the pre-existing character of a place in such a way as to make it friendly for people. It is of no less importance to understand the context, which may be an urban or a natural environment. In the available texts, most examples refer to an urban setting. The author, introducing two different designs attempts to present the similarities and differences, but above all the significance of the discussed elements for two diverse spatial situations, especially of place: one structure is situated in an urbanized city context, the other – on the border of the natural environment and the environment created by man. At the same time, an important element of development is the emphasis on the equality of the social and esthetic aspects of architecture. These values, which in the past were considered subjective, in the presented examples translate to the functionality of the structure and its economic viability. They allow for the creation of a place, but also for architecture that is exceptional, which in creating a new value of place becomes a spatial framework for diverse human activity, greatly increasing the significance of the importance of harmony with the external surroundings of the building as well as the palpable distinctiveness of architectural quality.

The future of architectural avant-garde is seen in moving towards nature – a departure from the passive observation of nature and the imitation of its shapes in exchange for an in-depth familiarity with its dependencies and a harmonious symbiosis with it.

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Author's Note:

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1994: graduate of the Faculty of Architecture of the Cracow University of Technology; 2019: dissertation entitled "The Evolution of Public Space in Houses of Music", 1995: private design studio Konior Studio. Over 200 designs, approx. 50 completed buildings, approx. 50 national and international prizes and awards, significant works: the National Symphonic Orchestra of the Polish Radio Building in Katowice, the expansion of the Academy of Music in Katowice by adding the "Symfonia" concert hall, the State Music School Complex in Warsaw, the reconstruction of the National Library in Warsaw, the head office of Press Glass in Konopiska.

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