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TRUTH-ANTITRUTH. TO DEMOLISH WHITEHALL

PRAWDA-ANTYPRAWDA. ZBURZYĆ WHITEHALL

Abstract

Truths in architecture, as all truths of the mortals, belong to *time*. In the 20th century, the modernists believed that the truth of space transformation was dictated by science. One of such utopian ideas was to demolish Whitehall in London and to replace it with “modern and rational” buildings. Martin Heidegger claims that *art* (poetry) is a direct emanation or manifestation of *existence*. However, *existence* is virtually inaccessible to thinking of mortals on Earth because it is *concealed* and associated too closely with being. This is a consequence of *time* in which truth (in Greek: *aletheia* – unconcealed) is imperceptible by thinking. On the other hand, *art* is the impartment of truth. Nowadays, truths still exist in the message of tradition and their nature can be examined there. The ancient Greeks perceived truth of art as *kalos kagatos* (*kalokagatija*) – beauty-good. Nevertheless, truth as beauty can swap places with evil and turn into anti-truth which is indistinguishable from truth.

Keywords: truth in architecture, demolition of Whitehall, art as a manifestation of existence, aletheia, art as impartment of truth, truth as beauty-good, anti-truth

Streszczenie

Prawdy w architekturze, jak wszystkie prawdy śmiertelnych, należą do czasu. Moderniści w XX wieku wierzyli, że prawdę przekształcania przestrzeni dyktuje nauka. Jedną z takich utopijnych koncepcji było zburzenie Whitehall w Londynie i zastąpienie „nowoczesną, racjonalną” zabudową. Martin Heidegger twierdził, że sztuka (poezja) jest bezpośrednią emanacją, przejawem bytu. Byt jest prawie niedostępny myśleniu śmiertelnych na Ziemi, bo przesłonięty, zbyt ściśle związany z byciem. Jest to konsekwencja czasu, w którym prawda (greckie *aletheia* – nieprzesłonięta) jest nie do zauważenia przez myślenie. Natomiast sztuka to udzielanie prawdy. Dzisiaj prawdy istnieją jeszcze w przekazie tradycji i tam możemy badać ich naturę. Antyczni Grecy prawdę sztuki widzieli jako odkrytość (oczywistość) i *kalos kagatos* (*kalokagatija*) – nierozłączne piękno-dobro. Prawda jako piękno może zamienić się miejscami ze złem – w antyprawdę. Jest ona nie do odróżnienia od prawdy.

Słowa kluczowe: prawda w architekturze, zburzenie Whitehall, sztuka jako przejaw bytu, aletheia, sztuka jako udzielanie prawdy, prawda jako piękno-dobro, antyprawda.

*Truth is something which is, as opposed to something which exists only apparently.*¹

Thus, Józef Tischner claims after Aristotle (*Metaphysics* in traditional translation: “To say that which is, is not, is a falsehood. To say that which is, is, and that which is not, is not, is true”) that truth certifies that something exists, in contrast to nothingness – untruth, appearance, illusion. On the other hand, Dariusz Kozłowski argues that “architecture is the construction of fictitious things so that they look real.” In his opinion, “ARTIFICIALITY of art and a magnificent lie are the most important to architecture.”² He also claims that architecture is a game.

1. SCIENCE

In his book, *Uczniowie cieśli* (*Carpenter's Apprentices*) of fundamental significance to architects, Lech Niemojewski writes:

When we raise our eyes to the sky on a cloudless starry night, stellar enthusiasts point at constellations and name them: this is Cassiopeia, this is Andromeda, and that is Perseus. [...] Moreover, when we take a look from the heights of the Capitolium at the Roman Forum in the light of a scarlet sunset, when the Palatine Hill begins to cast elongated shadows on the Forum strewn with chunks of columns, porticos, foundations of temples and steps which no longer lead anywhere, and when we compare what we see with a plan striving to reconstruct the crumbled architecture of that time, then the whole picture appears to us like the stone firmament of the ancient Rome's sky and the plan held in our hands seems to be an outline of this firmament, enlivened with a mythical constellation people. [...]

Among the chaos of marble shards, three lofty Corinthian columns of luminous translucent Parian marble soar into the sky. A high pedestal supported by fifteen steps has borne for centuries the three most beautiful columns that Roma Aeterna – “the city of columns and porticos” – prides itself on. [...]

Three columns on the Roman Forum.

They may be the symbols of three fundamental ideas of our gorgeous art: truth, beauty and wisdom.³

Lech Niemojewski considers truth to be one of the three ideas on which the art of architecture is based. Moreover, he explains that this truth (truths) is defined by science: “a group of cognitive achievements in which the attraction force of this ideal [of truth – B.S.] has been manifested is called science.”⁴

However, as Professor Niemojewski further claims, only

Wisdom demands that science should provide rational measures for comprehensive reflection and understanding of every task that needs to be solved. Wisdom requires science to find the center of gravity of a problem. This center may shift towards issues that are predominantly

¹ J. Tischner, *Rozmowy o prawdzie*; debate Tischner – Woleński, Litosfera, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3fn8vbWorg> (access: 19.03.2020).

² *W świecie fikcji, opery wspaniałego kłamstwa i betonu*, an interview with Dariusz Kozłowski, BTA, 2012, no. 1, pp. 17–18.

³ L. Niemojewski, *Uczniowie cieśli*, Trzaska, Evert i Michalski, Warszawa 1948 (1999 edition), pp. 1–7.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

financial or mostly social, primarily hygienic or chiefly economic. Alternatively, it can fall outside the scope of science into the realm of art. [...]

Wisdom demands that architecture – art, in actions ordering the components of a work, should neither distort values obtained from science nor bend them for the purposes irrelevant to the essence of the work or contrary to science.⁵

The founders of the modernist movement, especially in the heroic 1930s, claimed that this movement should be guided by the scientific rules of building cities and houses. Famous Le Corbusier's Five Points of Architecture or the provisions of the Athens Charter⁶ were supposed to contain only rational and scientific premises and the objective was the common good.

At the beginning of 1964, Sir Leslie Martin, an extremely influential architect of the London County Council (LCC), was commissioned by the government to draw up a "Master Plan" of the government district in the UK's capital city. This was not an idea of the Labour government but of the previous Conservative cabinet (H. Wilson was a Labour Prime Minister in 1964–1970 and A. Douglas-Home was a Conservative Prime Minister in 1963–1964). At that time, in the early 1960s, it was decided that the building of the Foreign Office should be demolished.

The first complex erected in this area, in the International Style flourishing at that time, comprised three 66-meter blocks of 22-storey office buildings at Marsham Street (Marsham Towers, 1964–2003). The Towers, designed by Eric Bedford and built in 1963–1971, housing three ministries, were described by Nicolaus Pevsner as "the very image of faceless bureaucracy." They were pulled down in the 1980s and commonly regarded as a mistake (*the three ugly sisters*).

In the Author's opinion, the 20th-century "Master Plan" by Sir Leslie Martin was drawn up in opposition to that complex. The plan provided for demolition of all 18th- and 19th-century buildings, including the ones at Great George Street, Bridge Street and Richmond Terrace. Many people claimed that the "Master Plan" exceeded the government's commission by far. However, there is no denying that the authors were consistent and took a scientific and technological approach to development of this megastructure. The originators of spatial changes in the government district – the Conservative cabinet – referred to the friendly "white" technology since the early 1960s.

The megastructure proposed by Sir Leslie Martin offered all technological developments serving the urbanists of our times. Troublesome roadways were hidden in tunnels and connected by an interchange with a gigantic complex of offices which could be used flexibly, depending on the growing or declining needs for space. Several-storey high offices of the government administration were located around small courtyards whose stepped structure on the north side offered good natural light. The axis of the complex was a covered multilevel pedestrian arcade, lit with skylights, certainly inspired by the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan. This horizontal megastructure, with scientific justifications resembling those for Le Corbusier's hospital in Venice, was supposed to stretch from the Thames to St James's Park.

The detailed character of this vision proves beyond doubt that the architecture had all the features of a "true" modernist, technologically and scientifically designed space. It was enlivened with a heroic spirit of innovation referring to the 1930s, even though its dimensions allowed for spatial dominance of the Westminster Abbey and the Parliament left among the greenery. The Scotland Yard building was also preserved as a historical monument, even though surrounded by new buildings.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 207–208.

⁶ Cf. e.g. A. Flint, *Le Corbusier. Architekt jutra*, Grupa Wydawnicza Foksal, Warszawa 2014.

However, even such a highly regarded and eminent architect as Sir Leslie Martin, the author of the Master Plan, an influential member of the London County Council – LCC (1889–1965), did not have strength to overcome the resistance of the “preservationist lobby.”

He summed up the years of his efforts to implement the “clear plan” of redeveloping Whitehall with a bitter letter to the ordering party, dated July 1970: “Please do not bother replying.”

2. POETRY

In Book X of *The Republic*, Plato claims that poetry is something infinitely far from truth. This is due to the fact that truth – genuine knowledge (*logos*) – is first an idea (Demiurge’s creation), then an awkward image (in the human mind), and finally a work of hands and talent of a craftsman or an artist, resembling this image only slightly. Hence, poetry is distant from truth threefold. Consequently, Plato argues that poets are not necessary in an ideal state.⁷

However, in other works (e.g. *Phaedrus*, 257B), Plato praises poetry inspired by gods which reaches divine truths, unattainable even by philosophers. In other Plato’s texts it is also possible to find a more poetic thought than he admits in Book X of *The Republic*. Philosophers point out these contradictions in Plato’s writings. On the one hand, Plato “expels poets from the state, to tolerate himself as a poet there,”⁸ on the other hand.

In order to discuss the architecture of Dariusz Kozłowski, cited above, we need to refer to the poetic symbols – the Way of Four Gates: Initiation, Hope, Knowledge and Faith. Architecture should be experienced at Monteverdi’s music. In Peter Zumthor’s manifestos, the author resorts to poetic metaphors and associations numerous times. He mentions the magic of reality surrounding a viewer of architecture or landscape. Furthermore, he writes that “a building has a soul” or that it is “a sensitive container for the rhythm of footsteps on the floor.” It is important to him that architecture should be experienced also in relation to other branches of art: music, literature. He talks about the atmosphere of a sonata which is sensed immediately: “the atmosphere created by sounds, which shrouds and moves me, which puts me in a special mood.”⁹ In his opinion, architecture ought to have a similar effect.

Zumthor claims that a house should be as avant-garde as avant-garde music. He confesses that daylight has “an almost spiritual quality” for him and writes about a “transcendental aspect” of his work; emotional “temperature of space”, its “weight” or “intimacy level.” He writes: “[...] even if it hints at mysticism – let us imagine that all alien sounds are eliminated from a building, and when we try to envisage what would happen if there was nothing left, nothing to take away, nothing at all, a question arises: Does the building still have sound?”¹⁰

John Pawson makes architects seek inspiration for atmosphere of houses constructed by them in the most distant “poetic lands”: shapes of dunes, arrangement of seaside stones, outline of a stony cliff, but also a 15th-century Japanese tea bowl or a marble or wooden step of a temple, time-worn during centuries.¹¹

⁷ Cf. J. Domański, *Pradawna waśń filozofów z poetami*, Fundacja na Rzecz Myślenia im. Barbary Skargi, Medytacje filozoficzne w Łazienkach Królewskich 12.04.2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACg-Nhl_Cdk (access: 28.03.2020).

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ P. Zumthor, *Myślenie architektury*, Karakter, Kraków 2010, p. 83.

¹⁰ Cf. P. Zumthor, *Atmospheres*, Birkhäuser, Basel 2005, pp. 32–33.

¹¹ J. Pawson, *Minimum*, Phaidon, London 2001.

3. HANDICRAFT

Over Martin Heidegger's desk in his *Hutte* (a hut) in the Black Forest mountains with a wide view of the Swiss Alps, the following sentence hung: "Handicraft is something rare and valuable." Paradoxically, Peter Zumthor, who talks about architecture with metaphors and riddles, regards technical drawings of a project as the closest to the architectural truth. Such drawings are direct equivalents of a carpenter's or a stonemason's work. They bring an architect closer to the wood and stone matter. Drawings convey the truth of constructing, similarly as weight of a stone or a resinous fragrance of wood.

4. ART

We live at the time when truth has not only become uncomfortable but also rather undesirable. Demobilization has covered the truth of reason, that is theoretical truth, but also all other truths which have been sought: "truth of art, truth of revelation, truth of 'life'" – writes Bogdan Baran in his reflections on Martin Heidegger's "way of thought."¹² The following two problems emerging in Heidegger's thought are of key significance for us: *art* conditioned by *being* the understanding of which leads to the understanding of art.

Truth "is still available [...] as the message of tradition" – Bogdan Baran writes further

Postmodernity, an epoch of writing after the enlightened mind became exhausted, has extended the disbelief in modern truth to all truths. [...] Thus, on the one hand, postmodernity would be an epoch when metaphysics winds up, but on the other hand – when thinking winds up. In the light of Heidegger's writings this would seem contradictory, because winding up of metaphysics was supposed to give room for thinking of being. Nevertheless, Heidegger himself expressed the *clou* of his thinking in the language of the writing epoch. The *clou* of the philosopher's reflection is to erase being: ~~being~~. [...] Hence, winding up of metaphysics makes room for writing and in this sense postmodernity would belong to the history of being described by Heidegger. The formula "to write is to think" – and: "to think is to write" – expresses demobilization of metaphysics as a domain of subjective truth or, in Heidegger's language – "truth of being."¹³

In his opinion, truthfulness (truth) as *adaequatio rei et intellectus* – the agreement between thing and thought – does not reach the ontological dimension of truth. Heidegger returns to the word *aletheia* used by Greeks to describe truthfulness: unconcealedness. What is true is unconcealed, disclosed. Thus, the phenomenon of truth should be sought in "the existential openness of existence."¹⁴

In order to understand Heidegger's discussion of art, we should recollect his thinking about *existence*. This *existence of being* – the relationship between *Da-sein* (existence) and *sein* (being) does not consist in mere differentiation between the two. To explain their mutual relations, Heidegger uses the metaphors of "vibration" or "state of suspension."¹⁵ As we are

¹² B. Baran, *Heidegger*, Inter Esse, Kraków 2004, p. 238.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 239.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

¹⁵ M. Heidegger, *Budować, mieszkać, myśleć*, ed. K. Michalski, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1977, p. 47.

thrown into the time-existence-world, we notice this difference very rarely, at exceptional moments. "In the abyss of terror, bravery recognizes almost unfrequented space of being, through clearing of which (die Lichtung) all existence returns."¹⁶

At the same time when Heidegger expressed these reflections (*The Essence of Truth*, 1930) he also studied Plato's writings (*Plato's Doctrine of Truth*, 1930/31). He pointed out that duality of thinking could be observed in Plato's *aletheia*: truth as unconcealedness and truth as rightness. Heidegger claims that in Plato the ideas "which shine" are the real being and factual things are their shadows. The essence of the ideas is their visibility – unconcealedness. In consequence, *aletheia* in the world of *ideas* – to which everything refers – must also mean *adaequatio* that is rightness of factual things in the light of ideas. In another text he uses a Latin word *rectitudo* (rectitude, uprightness) to define truth, which narrows down its meaning considerably.¹⁷

In Martin Heidegger's opinion, a work of art is one of the ways truth happens. Truth in a work of art does not mean correct reproduction of reality but disclosure of the "whole existence" in the form of a strife between the world and the earth. Existence, disclosed in such a way, demonstrates itself, shines through – "emerges from between." And this is beauty. Hence, in the nature of beauty there is fight and tension, and not indifferent "harmony." Beauty is a manifestation, an idea (Plato's *eidos*) of appearance, and it is the strife between the world and the earth that is manifested and takes the form of a work.

"Art is [...] creation of a work and impartment of truth."¹⁸ This truth, clearing and unconcealedness / concealedness of existence emerge as poetry.

Heidegger leaves unanswered the question "whether art in all its forms, from architecture to poetic works, exhausts the essence of poetry."¹⁹

5. ANTI-TRUTH

Fyodor Dostoevsky said provocatively, through the mouth of Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*, that "beauty will save the world." However, he soon added a reservation that "beauty is a riddle" and "beauty is horrible". In the margin of his writings, Dostoevsky noted: "Future Antichrist will beguile the world with beauty."²⁰ Beauty is supposed to sparkle and tantalize with "the ideal of Madonna" and "the ideal of Sodom" which are indistinguishable. In the Eastern tradition, an icon is a window through which "transcendence glances at the reality." Antichrist emerges in the role of Christ. Indistinguishable. "Antichrist takes a place at the top, Christ descends into the underworld."²¹ The contemporary infernal world is filled with "iconic" architecture.

¹⁶ M. Heidegger, *Czym jest metafizyka?* [in:] *ibidem*, p. 52.

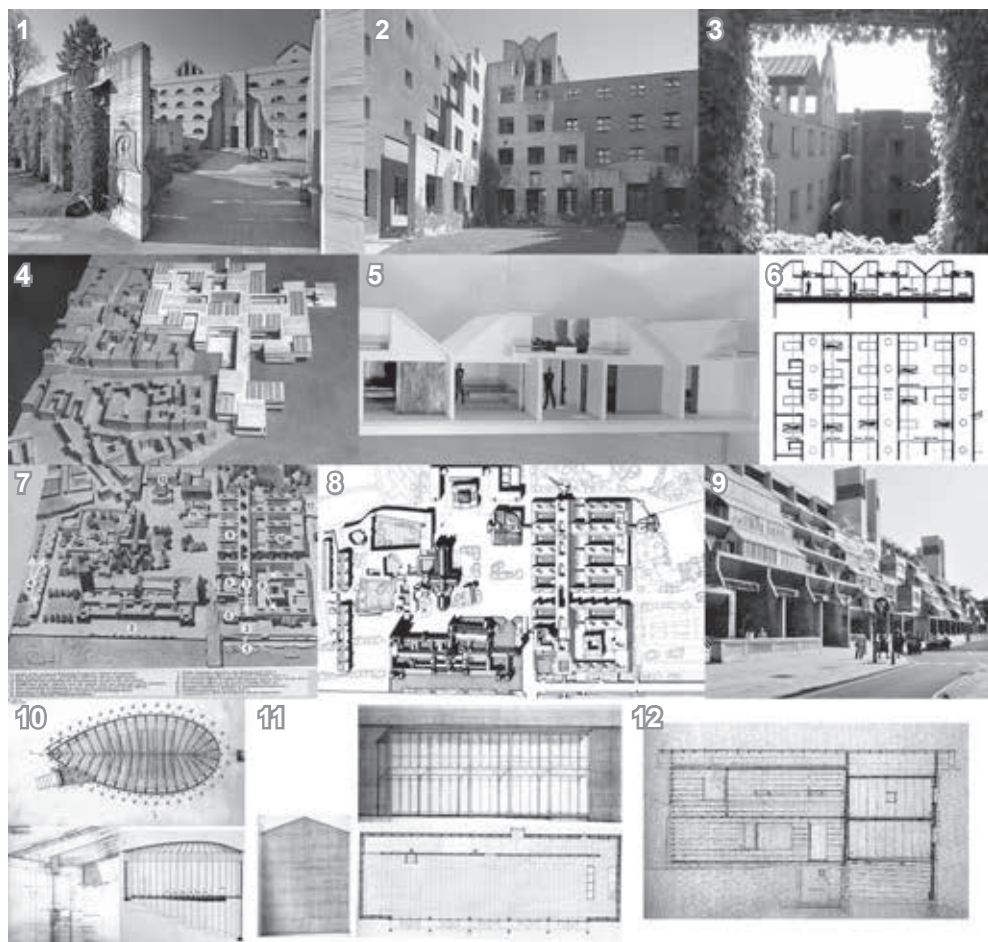
¹⁷ H. Ott, *Martin Heidegger. W drodze do biografii*, Wydawnictwo Aletheia, Warszawa 2013, p. 189.

¹⁸ B. Baran, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

¹⁹ M. Heidegger *Drogi lasu*, Fundacja Aletheia, Warszawa 1997, pp. 61–62.

²⁰ B. Uspienski, *Religia i semiotyka*, Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, Gdańsk 2001, p. 58.

²¹ C. Wodziński, *Trans, Dostojewski, Rosja czyli O filozofowaniu siekierq*, Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, Gdańsk 2005, p. 29.



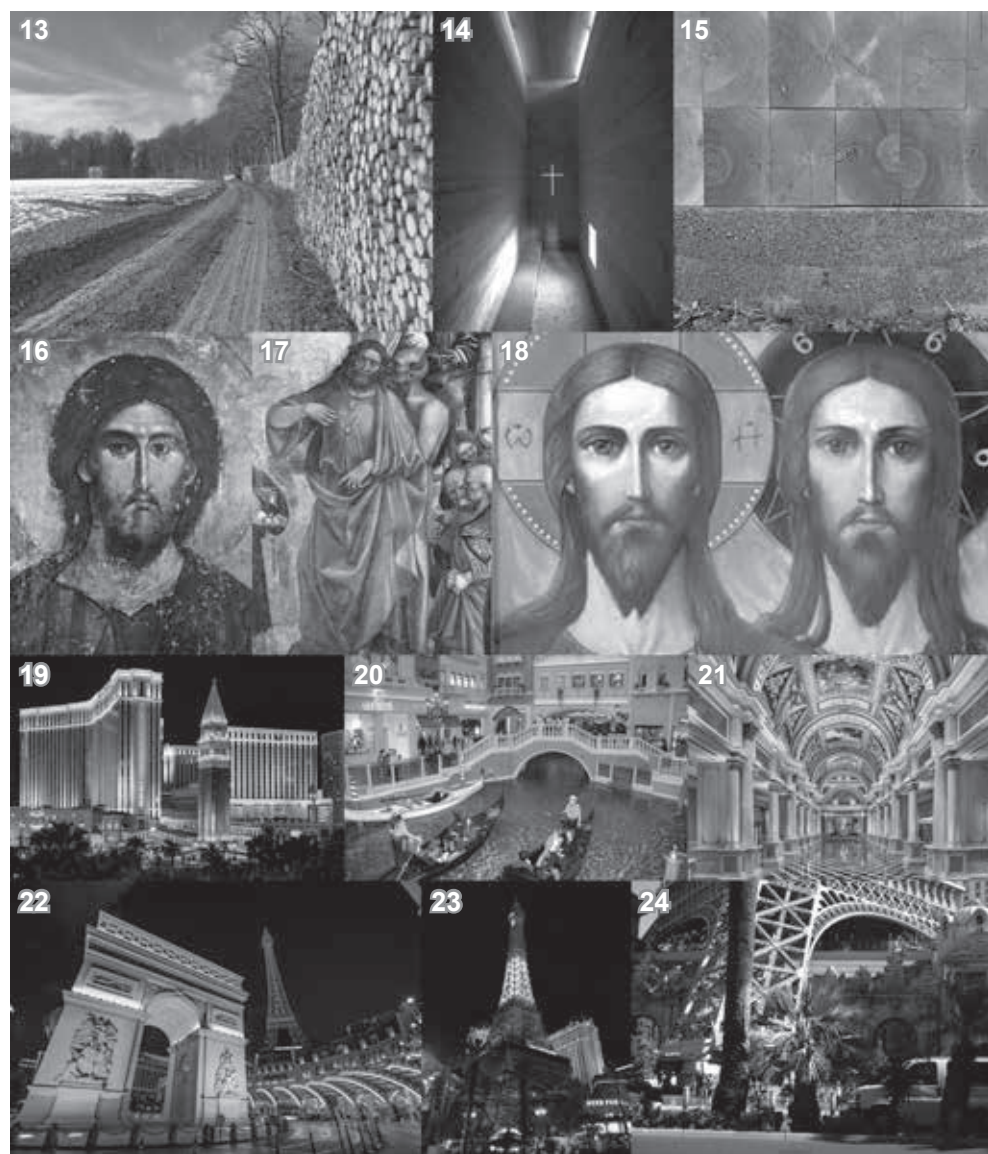
Ill. 1. Brunswick Centre, London, 1967–1972, architect: Patrick Hodgkinson

Ill. 2, 3, 4. Priests Major Seminary Zmartwychwstańców, Cracov, 1985–1993, architect: Dariusz Kozłowski, Wacław Stefański

Ill. 5, 6, 7. Hospital project in Venice, 1964, architect: Le Corbusier

Ill. 8, 9. Master plan of Government offices Whitehall, London 1964–1969, architect: Sir Leslie Martin

Ill. 10, 11, 12. Drawings of architectural projects, author: Peter Zumthor, 2007



Ill. 13, 14, 15. Wooden container chapel, architect: John Pawson, Unterliezheim, Germany 2017–2018

Ill. 16. Christ Pantocrator, icon, 6th century

Ill. 17. Antichrist

Ill. 18. Christ and Antichrist

Ill. 19, 20, 21. Venetian Hotel, Las Vegas

Ill. 22, 23, 24. Triumphal Arch with Eiffel Tower

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