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TRUTH – AN OPEN FORM

PRAWDA – FORMA OTWARTA

Abstract:

The question about the truth of architecture has its origin in the statement that architecture is a philosophy of space. The symbolic and historical role of architecture, its image in literature and artistic interpretations are further analyzed. The research reflections are accompanied by the thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Analyzing the particular fields in which architecture is present, we arrive at the conclusion that truth is an open concept and architecture expresses its truth through various forms of existence.

Keywords: architecture, truth, philosophy, space, art

Streszczenie

Pytanie o prawdę architektury ma swój początek w twierdzeniu, że architektura jest filozofią przestrzeni. Dalej refleksji poddana jest symboliczno-historyczna rola architektury, jej obraz w literaturze i artystyczne interpretacje. Rozważaniom i badaniom towarzyszy myśl Hansa-Georga Gadamera. Analizując poszczególne pola, na których architektura jest obecna, dochodzimy do wniosku, że prawda jest pojęciem otwartym, a architektura wyraża swoją prawdę przez różne formy istnienia.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, prawda, filozofia, przestrzeń, sztuka

1. INTRODUCTION

“No one is as unforgiving as someone who wants to prove that what he says is true”¹ – this is what Hans-Georg Gadamer states when studying Nietzsche. Is then proving the truth a dangerous process leading to opinions that are authoritarian and deprived of empathy? Let us hope that it is not always the case. And not always what was the truth of the beginning remains the truth of duration. The truth of an architectural design is subject to interpretative transformations – after many years, an object may become another truth, regardless of the original assumptions. It may also become the source of artistic interpretation, lose its fundamental “truth,” which is three-dimensionality, and as the “image” of architecture become the truth of art or not have a “body” at all and arise from words. In interpretative and artistic transformations, architecture definitely goes far beyond its useful and aesthetic function. It becomes a pretext for philosophical reflections or considerations, a guardian of history, a heroine of literature and art. The notion of truth which is derived from ancient Greece means “non-secretiveness.”² Therefore, the very pursuit of discovering the truth implies

¹ H-G. Gadamer, *Rozum, słowo, dzieje*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2000, p. 36.

² *Ibidem*, p. 38.

further questions and broadens the field of “secretiveness.” Similarly, architecture hides in its interior – in the objective and in the subjective one – other “truths.” The following text will be just about this – about selected faces of the truth of architecture in relation to the philosophical reflection of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

2. PHILOSOPHY OF SPACE

The relationships between architecture and philosophy have been studied by many authors. Jan P. Hudzik calls architecture a metaphor of philosophy.³ For me, architecture is a philosophy of space. “Wherever something is known, there is no philosophy any longer”⁴ – wrote historian of philosophy Bogdan Baran in his *Introduction to Truth and Method*. However, since philosophy “is based on the vision of the principle of the world,”⁵ as Baran continues, it can be concluded that architecture is based on the vision of the “principle of space,” so it can also be assumed that architecture is a philosophy of space, in spite of the knowledge it represents. Just as philosophy is a “love of wisdom,” I see architecture as a “love of space.” Architecture is a philosophy of space because it constantly asks questions about its meaning, shapes it, and questions it. Architecture conducts a permanent dialogue with space, which is renewable in every age and expands fields of interest. I think of architecture as a philosophy of space because in its complexity it goes beyond construction (knowledge) – modern architecture has not so much questioned the Vitruvius triad (*Firmitas, Utilitas, Venustas*), but rather expanded it with new meanings. Therefore, not only and not always durability, usefulness, and beauty because nowadays it also encompasses responsibility, mobility, memory, experiment, manifesto, and reaction. Architecture conducts a dialogue not only with space *sensu stricto*, but also with spaces that are emanations of problems of modern civilization. In the Berlin government district, next to the Bundestag, at the foot of concrete architecture, the fleeting tents were pitched by the homeless by hammering pegs into the gaps between the evenly arranged slabs. These two architectures exist agreeably in their philosophical question about the meaning of existence. Many contemporary theorists and architects notice the philosophical potential of architecture. Juhani Pallasmaa writes:

Buildings and cities create a horizon for understanding and confronting the human condition. Instead of creating pure objects of visual seduction, architecture binds together, mediates and designs meanings, taking a stand in the likeness of contemporary art. It expresses views. The ultimate goal of any building lies beyond architecture; it refers our awareness to the world and to our sense of subjectivity and existence.⁶

Architecture is therefore a medium which transfers man from utility to the question about the universe. Experiencing architecture, I always get the impression that architecture, when closing space and putting physical boundaries (walls) in space, at the same time opens up to metaphysical spaces, frees space from infinity, marks it and creates conditions for

³ J.-P. Hudzik, *Architektura jako metafora filozofii* [in:] E. Rewers (ed.), *Przestrzeń, filozofia i architektura*, Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora, Poznań 1999.

⁴ B. Baran, *Wstęp* [in:] H.-G. Gadamer, *Prawda i metoda*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2013, p. XI.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. XII.

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

interpretations. Architect and lecturer Steen Elier Rasmussen also notices the problem of defining the boundaries unequivocally – “Architecture does not consist of just a simple combination of plans, sections and façades. It is something else and something more powerful. It is impossible to explain exactly what it is because its boundaries are not clearly defined.”⁷ Even if the boundaries “are not clearly defined” we try to set them and then try to overcome (or cross) them in pursuit of truth. Because every truth needs a reference point, even if this point changes coordinates. The architect, therefore, designs a map of reference points in search of the truth, creates a path to reach the truth, and forms questions to which space is to answer. And considering a dialogue with space as the foundation of the essence of architecture, it is worth wondering whether an architectural object is a question or an answer. The first thought – architecture is a response to design assumptions. But only this? Does not an architectural object become a question during its space-time presence? It seems so. It seems that the original form of the answer transforms into a series of questions. An object enters the contextual sphere, becomes a renewable question, and a living element of the social exchange of thoughts. ‘The priority in logic is not an opinion but a question [...]’⁸ More important, therefore, is not what the architect meant, but what kind of question architecture becomes, and how it is interpreted. “There is no statement that could be expressed only due to the content it includes if one wants to express it in its truth. [...] Each statement has some assumptions which are not uttered. Taking these assumptions into account is a condition for exploring the truth of a statement.”⁹ If we put an architectural object in place of Gadamer’s statement, we can see how far the truth of architecture can be distant from the data recorded in the project. If the project is considered to be a starting point for truth, then its fullness can only occur when confronted with time, man, and a context. Those “unspoken” assumptions constitute an essential part of fullness. So, what is the “conviction that accompanies architects and makes them reconstruct truth in the service to humanity”¹⁰ from the last sentence of the book by Walter Gropius?

3. THE TRUTH OF MEMORY

Is architecture innocent, doesn’t it bear consequences? Is it possible to blame architecture in any way? Can we forgive it, after all it was not architecture that intended itself for these and no other purposes? And yet – just architecture remains. A symbol. Evidence. People die, names fly away from memory, traces disappear, but architecture still testifies to historical truth. “To claim that a statement is more than to present a given state of affairs means above all that this statement belongs to the whole of historical existence and is contemporary to everything that may be present in it.”¹¹ As part of the continuity of history, within the framework of research into the innocence of architecture and its role of collective memory, from the need to try to understand what Leszek Koczanowicz described as “deliberate transgression of moral norms,”¹² I made a trip and here are my impressions from it:

⁷ S-E. Rasmussen, *Odczuwanie architektury*, Karakter, Kraków 2015, p. 11.

⁸ H-G. Gadamer, *Rozum, słowo...*, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ W. Gropius, *Pelnia architektury*, Karakter, Kraków 2014, p. 229.

¹¹ H-G. Gadamer, *Rozum, słowo...*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹² L. Koczanowicz, *Lęk i olśnienie*, Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa 2020, p. 35.

Brzezina. The golden 1920s, good interwar years, mythical ones. There are still manor houses among trees, cutlery and pottery with an ancestral monogram, rituals, and passions. Iwaszkiewicz, Wajda, Olbrychski. The aura of cinema. The sun, light wind, sounds of birds, and lush grass. Brzezina is so well associated.

Birkenau. Brzezinka. The final station. The entrance gate resembles the stations of the narrow-gauge railway, which can still be found along the Coastal Narrow-Gauge Railway. From a distance, the area resembles an open-air museum visited by crowds of tourists. Wooden barracks grew in the middle of nowhere, evenly in rows. Stumps of brick chimneys stand knee-deep in the grass. The Gate of Death has the indifference of architecture which has already seen so much that it no longer shows any emotions. It is neutral and inconspicuous. Raw brick, no decorations, or unnecessary additions. Short hair, no makeup. It endured heavy shoes of guards, it now endures sports shoes of tourists. Overloaded trains travelled between its arms, it could not do anything, it stood. That was its task: to stand invariably. To take in further shipments of human bodies for milling, to cut off the return route. To be the beginning of the end. Not to show compassion, not to try to help. To observe. To watch. And it still stands there. It still lets people through. If they had seen what it did. If they had seen what was happening on the ramp during selection. If they had seen what was happening on the ramp, probably high school students from all over the world would not take those cheerful photos there. If they had seen those wagons that went along the rails through its belly. If they had seen those wagons that went along the rails, they probably would not be lying between the rails for a short rest. They would not be picking dandelions, or tickling their companions with dandelions. You were lucky. You were lucky not to be born at the wrong time. The gate is tired. It sees the barracks from above. Some have fallen apart, better for them. Others stand on their last legs and with conservation support they testify to the Holocaust. Every morning they open the bolted doors to show empty interiors which are tight from the memory of those bodies. Stone floors remembering tired feet of increasingly lighter people. Wooden walls remembering the crush of misfortunes that they kept at nights. The brick barracks in the second part of the camp are in better condition. More solid structures are thoroughly sad. If architecture can be unhappy, this one is indeed. Dry gravel rasps under feet. In the narrow entryways, tourists rub shoulders with other visitors, bump into each other in former cells. Everyone seems to be out of place. There are paintings in the children's barrack, depicting pupils going to school in a colourful picture. "Schule" – the text in the faded illustration reads. At the bus stop you can take the bus with the displayed name of Auschwitz and travel to Oświęcim. By the road leading from camp to camp there is an accommodation advertisement that reads "sleeping by the fireplace." It is hard to believe in this text in this context, however, it was on the fence. A number of coaches are parked there. It is hard to walk between blocks. It becomes even harder. Our legs do not want to lead us to further interiors, they are unwilling to give our eyes tours of any more exhibitions. After looking at the photos of starving prisoners, the question arises: does the restaurant which is located at the exit have enough consumers? Are you able to eat anything in these surroundings? The exhibition rooms resemble old classrooms from which furniture was removed, leaving individual showcases and blackboards. The bright sun beams are stopped by semi-transparent foils stuck to the planes from the south. The light in these rooms becomes pleasantly lavender and discreetly soothes the atmosphere. Block number 4, block number 5. The things which belonged to the former prisoners are piled up into silent heaps. Dentures, a pile of dentures, disability corsets, and crutches. A swimming pool filled with bowls, jugs, and mugs. Blue inscription of *Cocoa*

on an enamel can. Almost two tons of hair. Braids without colour, without heads. Thousands of trampled shoes, some tied in pairs. A dusty cherry high heeled shoe. A right one. Gold false teeth, which in reports is referred to as dental gold, obtained from gas chamber victims shortly after their death. Moist and dark block number 11, the ultimate one. With lilacs and poplars which were planted in the camp, the brick buildings have an innocent look. Green became a constant fear, the sky became a ballast.

Birkenau-Auschwitz, May 2018.

Without modernity, including architecture, it would not have been possible to destroy so many lives. The bureaucratic death machine needed architectural infrastructure.¹³ We look at the camp barracks with hostility, we look at the entrance gate with hatred, we look at the crematorium buildings with pain. Although it is not their fault. However, it is architecture that becomes the source and object of negative feelings, and the images of architecture reappear in our memories. It is probably hard to preserve these facilities, take care of the crematorium walls, and strengthen the doors of barracks. It is not easy to mow camp lawns, sweep dust, guard the exhibition. It is a difficult role for architecture to prove the Holocaust. It is a difficult role to be a symbol of evil.¹⁴

4. ARCHITECTURE OF WORD

After what I've said, it no longer matters whether Zenobia should be perceived as belonging to happy or unhappy cities. This division does not make any sense because cities are divided into two other types, i.e. into those that through years and changes still impose their own form on desires, and into those in which desires either manage to blur the shape of the city or the shape of the city obliterates them.¹⁵

Architecture not only interprets space, it is not only historical memory. Architecture is also an object of interpretation. Parallel to its own presence in space, it is also present as a motif in the works of contemporary artists. Poets and writers describe architecture, cities, and interiors – by reading their words we create three-dimensional objects from their words and our own imagination. Quarters, street networks, portals, colonnades, catacombs, towers, and rooms appear in our thoughts. Is architecture, which is built of words and seen in thoughts, just an illusion?

¹³ Zygmunt Bauman thoroughly analyzes the process of bureaucratization of the Holocaust, indicating how the achievements of civilization were used in the extermination of Jews. "Since there were possibilities for a mass murder, they should have been used. Therefore, experts created objects for their actions in order to be able to use their expert knowledge". Architecture was also among the civilization achievements used in this process. Z. Bauman, *Nowoczesność i Zagłada. Holocaust – choroba czy produkt cywilizacji?*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2009, p. 227.

¹⁴ It is also difficult for architecture to be accused of causing crime (modernist housing estate layouts) or perpetuating poverty and inciting aggression (poor housing estates in South America). Such events as the exhibition *Smutek modernizmu. Opresja i depresja (Sadness of modernism. Oppression and depression)* at Galeria Miejska (City Exhibition) in Wrocław referred to criticism of modernist architecture, (8.03–24.04.2019, curator: K. Zahorska), whereas M. Caparros also wrote about poverty districts and their impact on the standard of living in the book *Glód [Hunger]*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2016.

¹⁵ I. Calvino, *Niewidzialne miasta*, Wydawnictwo W.A.B., Warszawa 2013, p. 30.

In the book by Italo Calvino, Marco Polo tells stories about the cities he visited as the emissary of Kublai Khan. His words outline the borders of the empire, unusual and peculiar cities emerge from the stories. However, Marco Polo warns Khan – “you should never confuse the city with the words that describe it. And yet there is a relationship between them.”¹⁶ Invisible cities described by Calvino are one of the most realistic cities, they arise in our thoughts, we feel their temperature, smells, and shapes. The truth of words becomes the truth of architecture because “[...] the language carries its own truth, i.e. ‘discovers’ and releases something that begins to exist from now on.”¹⁷ The architecture which is imagined through literature is therefore a real experience, seen and felt by us. The more we cut off the real world, the more the imaginary world becomes real. Which one is truer? Is it possible to compare both truths at all? Is such a comparison necessary and needed? Is it not better to believe in the truth of both cities – those realized from desires and those from imaginary desires?

It is said and written that this Alexandria was idolized by him, and although it was a domestic deity, however, thanks to poetry, the city where he was born and where he spent most of his life was exalted and made less realistic, namely it was made mythical. Or to put it differently: Kavafis revived mythical Alexandria, updated its legendary status, contrasting the imagined with the real.¹⁸

Konstandinos Kawafis, an outstanding Greek poet, located the centre of his creative activity in the city. The city is a stage design and a space where poetry is created. The city is sometimes a hero of the foreground, sometimes it gently moves across the horizon, sometimes only in the subcutaneous pulse its pervasive presence is felt. In most of the poems, however, it has a name – the poems of Kawafis take place in an ordered urban space – gloomy rooms, walls, a theatre, houses, and blind alleys. The city is matter woven of memories, architecture, people, conversations, feelings, desires, and myths. It is hard to imagine the poetry of Kawafis without the city. Without a city – a place, without a city – a myth, without a city – a witness, without a city – a metaphor. For the poet, the urban space is more than just surroundings.

In the same space

“The setting of houses, cafés, the neighborhood
that I’ve seen and walked through years on end:
I created you while I was happy, while I was sad,
with so many incidents, so many details.
And, for me, the whole of you has been transformed into feeling.”

For the poet, urban space is even more than the aforementioned feeling. You will not run away from the city, you will not find another better city – the poet writes in the poem *Miasto* (City). For the city will follow you, you will always get to the same city.¹⁹ You will not avoid your fate as you will not avoid your city-place on earth. Architecture becomes destiny and

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

¹⁷ H-G. Gadamer, *Prawda i metoda*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2013, p. 519.

¹⁸ G. Jankowicz, *Nic do stracenia* [in:] Kawafis K., *Wiersze wszystkie*, Austeria, Kraków-Budapest-Syracuse 2019, p. 5.

¹⁹ K. Kawafis, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

defines everyday life. And what about wandering in the city obsessively all day and making the city a symbol of modernist literature?²⁰ Or to make the city a symbol of economic decline?²¹ Or to describe a definitive disappearance of the city? Stone by stone?²²

5. IMAGES OF ARCHITECTURE

Cities built with words are really moving and durable. Even those that are gone or never existed. It is similar with images of architecture recorded in paintings. Can a two-dimensional image of architecture be an image of “truth”? The history of archiving architecture on canvases and after the invention of photography in pictures is an extensive art history field. However, those works that are not documentary in nature seem to be particularly interesting and architecture becomes an artistic challenge. When in 2013 I prepared a collective exhibition entitled *Dyfuzja. Inspiracje architekturą w malarstwie* (*Diffusion. Architecture inspirations in painting*)²³ for the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, I found out how diverse – and yet all true – are the images of architecture in contemporary art. Until today, I can see the architecture of the Polish People’s Republic as Maria Kiesner painted it, and post-industrial Lower Silesian factories as Joanna Pałys painted them. I have been observing the creative activity of these two artists for many years. Their paintings of architecture accompany my imaginations and my memory. In 2010, I was the curator of Maria Kiesner’s exhibition *Re:WUWA*. The artist was inspired by the objects of the Housing Exhibition from 1929 before the housing estate was revitalized and WUWA in Wrocław became a popular place not only among historians, but also among tourists. Kiesner painted earlier paintings – objects of the PRL architecture – from the position of an objective observer looking at buildings from a suitable distance and taking them holistically from the perspective of squares or streets she created pictures-documents. The recurring motif is, among other things, the legendary Warsaw Supersam designed by Jerzy Hryniewicz, Maciej Krasiński and Ewa Krasińska – the icon of modern architecture was demolished, and the pavilion remained in the paintings. Which one is truer – the one that was demolished or the one still present on the canvas? With a painterly gesture, the artist took part in a discussion about the disappearing outstanding objects of post-war architecture, about objects that did not manage to become monuments and about those which were not given the chance for due conservation protection. A similar approach is presented by Joanna Pałys who portrayed abandoned pre-war factories that have been deteriorating for several decades, in the vicinity of newly created, much less formally interesting objects. Pałys paints harmoniously designed façades in detail – rhythms of windows and proportions of the particular parts. What remains is the truth about the attitude to architecture and a sad picture of a lack of responsibility. The loneliness of these abandoned objects is expressed in the colour tone, negligible light, and a melancholic atmosphere.

Kiesner presents objects of WUWA in a different way, i.e. they were portrayed in the way a model is portrayed. In a selected optimal frame, with properly adjusted light, and

²⁰ J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, Znak, Kraków 2013.

²¹ C. LeDuff, *Detroit. Sekcja zwłok Ameryki*, Czarne, Wołowiec 2019.

²² F. Springer, *Miedzianka. Historia znikania*, Czarne, Wołowiec 2017.

²³ Exhibition *Dyfuzja. Inspiracje architekturą w malarstwie* (*Diffusion. Architecture inspirations in painting*), curators: K. Jaklewicz, M. Czyż, The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, 14.05–4.08.2013.

with a sensitive look. At close range. Looking at the paintings, I am sure that the image of architecture is real in them and that they were like that at their prime – full of vitality, energy, optimism. The absence of a third dimension does not mean a lack of architectural spatiality since Kiesner cares for strong light modelling bodies and painting images of objects become symbolic images of architecture. The architecture of modernism accompanies the artist to this day – her recent works were presented at the *Gdynia-Tel-Aviv*²⁴ exhibition in POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Joanna Pałys also followed the trend of modernist architecture while painting objects by Le Corbusier which were created in India. The paintings were presented at the exhibition “Absence”²⁵ in Galeria Socato in Wrocław. Here, too, architecture became the truth of art, in its pure form, with a classic modernist line, modified to meet the needs of the Indian climate. If we recognize that architecture is becoming the truth of art, the question remains: what about the truth of art? Gadamer cites Platonic criticism of art, which the ancient philosopher considers false because “art only imitates what things are”²⁶ and it is known that things are only imitations of their actual characters, i.e. ideas. Art is, therefore, “an imitation of imitating and an immeasurable distance separates it from what it really is.”²⁷ However, I am closer to the view of Gadamer who constantly finds a newly emerging order, his own one which is independent of things and reality in art. “What happens in a work of art is an example of what we all do by existing: an example of the constant construction of the world”²⁸. It is difficult to challenge the truthfulness of existence. Art is credible because it manifests itself in form. Form is the truth of art. “The truth of art is not a matter of faithfulness to some prototype [...]”²⁹

6. SUMMARY

So, if form manifests itself in different shapes, and truth is form, it means that all the faces of architecture are true. Those conceptual, literary, artistic, and constructional. Architecture is therefore a philosophy of space – a reflection on its complexity, having sources of truth both in the very matter of architecture and in experiencing architecture, which in one form or another is the companion of every existence. However, it is impossible to come to any truth without a dialogue – Gadamer emphasizes, seeing the conversation a condition of constructing a real community. Architecture itself does this by establishing a dialogue with space, it strengthens this communal dialogue by talking about architecture in all those contexts that become a horizon of questions. Because words are a form of knowing the truth. “The limits of my language are the boundaries of my world”³⁰ – said Ludwig Wittgenstein. No truth will cross the border of silence.

²⁴ Exhibition *Gdynia-Tel-Aviv*, curator: A. Tanikowski, Muzeum Polin, Warsaw, 13.09.2019–3.02.2020.

²⁵ Exhibition *Nieobecność*, curator: K. Jaklewicz, Galeria Socato, Wrocław, 6–30.11.2015.

²⁶ H.-G. Gadamer, *Rozum, słowo...*, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 156.

²⁹ B. Baran, *op. cit.*, p. XVII.

³⁰ L. Wittgenstein, *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*, 5.6 (org. Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt.), <https://people.umass.edu/klement/tlp/tlp.pdf> (access: 10.06.2020).

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