

KRYSZYNA PAPRZYCA

ORCID: 0000-0003-0112-1456

Cracow University of Technology, Poland

THE TRUTH AND LIE OF ARCHITECTURE. TWO PHENOMENA COMPLETELY OPPOSITE

PRAWDA I KŁAMSTWO ARCHITEKTURY. DWA ZJAWISKA ZUPEŁNIE SOBIE PRZECIWKSTAWNE

Abstract

Truth and lie in architecture. Two phenomena completely opposite. Truth allows us to know. The path of knowledge is the path of conversion and turning back from lies. The light of reason and knowledge enables the exploration of the world and people. It is a synthesis of positive values, which is a starting point of the article. Moreover, the truth is a sign of hope and optimism. Our reality is often grey, full of selfish, consumerist lifestyles. Hence the need for man to constantly seek the truth. Man is forced to live in a world of objects. Reaching the highest good is an implementation of the spiritual potential of man and reaching the truth also in architecture. The philosophy of materialism, global consumer culture gradually leads to the collapse of the “public man”, the collapse of public culture and thus the collapse of the community. The “new world coming”, new reality, have a huge impact on the sense of social commitment. It also influences the perception of the authenticity that surrounds us, the perception of truth or lies in architecture. Relationships with the buildings, places, objects and people around us are becoming more and more fleeting and short-lived. We move away from man, being fascinated by prosperity, science and research.

Keywords: The truth and lie of architecture, world of values, culture, identity

Streszczenie

Prawda i kłamstwo w architekturze. Dwa zjawiska zupełnie sobie przeciwstawne. Prawda pozwala poznawać. Droga poznania to droga nawracania, zawracania od kłamstwa. Światło rozumu, wiedzy, pozwala poznawać świat, ludzi. Jest w artykule kojarzone z symbolem, który stanowi syntezę pozytywnych wartości. Punktem wyjścia artykułu są pozytywne wartości, prawda jest znakiem nadziei, optymizmu. Nasza rzeczywistość jest często szara, przepełniona ludźmi egoistycznie nastawionymi, konsumpcyjnym stylem życia. Stąd potrzeba człowieka nieustannego poszukiwania prawdy. Człowiek zmuszony jest żyć w świecie przedmiotów. Dotarcie do najwyższego dobra stanowi realizację potencjału duchowego człowieka, stanowi dotarcie do prawdy również w architekturze. Filozofia materializmu, globalna kultura konsumencka stopniowo doprowadzają do upadku „człowieka publicznego”, upadku kultury publicznej, tym samym do upadku wspólnoty. „Nowy nadchodzący świat”, nowa rzeczywistość, mają ogromny wpływ na poczucie zaangażowania społecznego. Wywierają również wpływ na odbiór otaczającej nas rzeczywistości, dostrzeganie prawdy czy kłamstwa w architekturze. Związki z otaczającymi nas budynkami, miejscami, przedmiotami, ludźmi stają się coraz bardziej ulotne i krótkotrwałe. Oddalamy się od człowieka, będąc zafascynowani dobrobytem, nauką, badaniami.

Słowa kluczowe: prawda i kłamstwo architektury, świat wartości, kultura, tożsamość

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of truth and lie in architecture is both a moral and aesthetic category. True and deceptive forms have been intertwined for centuries, shaping the human environment. They were the result of specific theories and doctrines. Therefore, the phenomenon of truth or lies in architecture can be considered on many levels.

“What is the truth?” The question, although simple in its form, also today leaves many difficulties with giving an unambiguous answer. The philosophers have also tried to answer this question for centuries. Heraclitus thought that sensual perception is the first degree of getting to know a man. “Eyes and ears are bad witnesses for people with barbarian souls.”¹ He used to say: “Man is never evil voluntarily.” From Socrates’s point of view, it is really “worth looking at knowledge as a factor that helps us act rightly. It is a reason enough to strive for it and deepen it.”²

The Socratic vision of truth was developed by Plato. He claimed that “Learning is to embrace the ideas and sensual perception is not suitable for such learning because ideas can only be learnt by thought; therefore, the task of philosophy is only partially to know the truth; more important is the relationship of the soul with what is moral and beautiful.”³ Plato’s student Aristotle also gave his interpretation of the truth. However, his approach to the issue was different than Socrates’s and Plato’s. To answer the question of what truth is, he based his considerations solely on the power of reason and was not guided by his senses. According to Aristotle, “neither matter nor ideas exist on their own; they are abstractions; in fact, there are only sets of matter and form; from things, we know what is contained in their notions, and therefore, we only know the form; hence the conclusion that matter is unknowable.”⁴ Kant’s position on the lie is presented by the following phrase “To be truthful (honest) in everything we say, is, therefore, a holy and unconditional order of reason. An order which cannot be limited by any conventions.”⁵

What is a lie? According to the classic term ‘lie’, provided by the Polish dictionary, it is ‘a statement inconsistent with reality, intended to mislead’⁶. This term can also be defined as ‘not telling the truth’. In such circumstances, we can assume that it is deliberate, i.e. when the speaker knows the truth. However, not telling the truth is not always considered as lying. The concept of lies is linked to the principle of truthfulness.⁷ Truthfulness is the supreme value, it is a duty not only towards another human being but towards the truth itself. It is the man who should serve the truth, not the other way round. Andrzej Ostrowski in *Philosophical*

¹ W. Kopaliński (ed.), *Słownik mitów i tradycji kultury*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1988, p. 925.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ P. Domeracki, „Deontologia kłamstwa: czego możemy nauczyć się od MacIntyre’a [in:] Repozytorium UMK, 2009, p. 3, <https://repozytorium.umk.pl/bitstream/handle/item/1156/Deontologia%20k%C5%82amstwa%20-%20art.%20DOMERACKI%20Piotr.pdf?sequence=1> (access: 10.07.2020).

⁶ *Kłamstwo* [in:] Słownik języka polskiego, <https://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/k%C5%82amstwo.html> (access: 10.07.2020).

⁷ B. Wolniewicz, *O pojęciu kłamstwa i zasadzie prawdomówności*, Edukacja Filozoficzna, 2012, vol. 54, http://www.edukacja-filozoficzna.uw.edu.pl/index_pliki/ef54/wolniewicz.pdf (access: 10.07.2020).

Review believes that

due to the consequences that may arise from the fulfilment of the obligation of truthfulness, it turns out, that the matter is not so simple. Serious doubts, for example, are seen by Lew Shestov, whose philosophy will serve as a premise for further considerations. (...) The scientist frequently repeats to himself “You should not lie,” and yet he cannot overcome instinctive fear and lies, lies, lies. Not because of the shallow personal convenience, the kind of *primum vivere, deinde philosophari* – we are not interested in this kind of case. The scholar lies, guided by higher considerations, obeying the dictates of his conscience. It seems to him that if he starts to tell the truth and if the truth becomes known to people, life on earth will become impossible.⁸

Hans-Georg Gadamer believes that

the statement that is aimed to tell the truth, must not only satisfy the conditions of logical analysis. [...] It is not enough that what is given is also given in the statement. The problem is whether everything is given so that it can be delivered in speech and whether giving what you can give does not prevent you from recognizing something that is also experienced. [...] Each of us must recognize the verifiability of the results of cognition as ideal. But we also have to admit that this ideal is rarely achieved, and those of the researchers who try hardest to achieve it usually don't have any important things to say.⁹

2. AN IMPERSONAL, LONELY CROWD

Returning to the topic of considerations related to the truth and lie of architecture, one should remember that architecture is primarily a realized “fantasy” on a given topic. What we think and feel is a kind of illusion that gradually arises in our head. If we reflect further, we can discover that we are constantly influenced by the system of requirements, rules and instructions. We are also constantly “loaded” with new rules, desires, needs, tastes and attitudes. And we constantly feel unsatisfied. Our attachment to certain principles, rules, of which we often become prisoners, contributes to the restriction of the freedom of thought and creation. In addition, the world, which is constantly changing at a rapid pace, begins to spin out of control, thus leading to frustration, anxiety and uncertainty, which limit the freedom of creation. All this often leads to a situation in which we perceive the world selectively, incorrectly, hastily, without thinking, often through someone's point of view. When a person loses his innate flexibility, openness, vigilance, he becomes suppressed, unwilling to change, create, or think.

It is worth recalling Socrates's warning: “Mindless life is not worth living.” So, what was the truth for Socrates? According to him, everyone has only apparent knowledge, which due to external factors and visualizing ignorance, leads to further search for knowledge and, as a consequence, allows to learn the truth. Therefore, according to Socrates, truth is something very natural for man.

⁸ A. Ostrowski, *Filozof wobec kłamstwa koniecznego – analiza problemu na przykładzie filozofii Lwa Szestowa*, Przegląd Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria, 2011, vol. 20, no. 1, p. 96.

⁹ M. Kuźniak et al., *Słownik myśli filozoficznej*, Park Edukacja-Wydawnictwo Szkolne PWN, Warszawa-Bielsko Biała, 2011, p. 474.

Formerly man created himself in the public sphere, while in the private, through his experience, he fulfilled himself in the family. 18th-century capitalism radically changed people's attitudes and behaviour. Nowadays, people who take any action are guided by selfish ambitions and goals. The value of mutual support is becoming less and less important. People are becoming more and more separated from each other, strangers. The idea of meeting strangers that helps people to develop is getting lost.¹⁰ Strangers don't play an important role in our lives. By taking the risk of wanting to meet others, we have the only opportunity to enrich our own experiences. This reluctance to make any contacts stem from the fear of strangers. According to Riesman,¹¹ in a society consisting of such people, public affairs will be entrusted to state officials and bureaucrats. People will be less and less willing to get involved emotionally. The latest computer and visual techniques allow the creation of virtual buildings, not only on the monitor screen but also through holographic presentations in real space. Hans-Georg Gadamer's statement seems valid for the author of the article and the fragment being discussed, as Gadamer believed that "There is no such statement that could be included only because of its content if you want to capture it in truth. Every utterance is motivated [...] The fact is that [...] each utterance has its own situational horizon and is directed at someone."¹² What we call the truth, openness, non-secretiveness of things has then its temporality and its historicity. In all our attempts to seek the truth, we perceive in amazement that we cannot tell the truth without addressing or responding to someone, and therefore without a community of obtained agreement."¹³ So how do we seek truth in today's community?

3. THE TRUTH AND LIE OF ARCHITECTURE

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the beauty of the world is a reflection of absolute beauty. All beautiful things are always good.

Thomas states that beauty is not only about harmony or proportion but also about the radiance (claritas)... We know for certain that, according to Thomas Aquinas, beauty is the radiance of truth, it is the dominance of form (i.e. the flash of form – splendor formae) over matter while maintaining the individuality of a given thing. Beauty consists of wholeness (integritas), also called perfection (perfectio), proportionality (proportio), also called harmony (consonantia), and radiance (claritas). Some truths present themselves in a form that is pure enough for us to be joyful in the act of expressing them clearly.¹⁴

Since science can be considered as a slow turning of the soul towards knowledge, it can lead to the Platonic triad of Good-Beauty-Truth. According to Plato, reaching the idea of Good, which facilitates intellectual and spiritual development is the absolute goal of human life and its highest value.

¹⁰ R. Sennett, *Upadek człowieka publicznego*, Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie Muza, Warszawa 2009.

¹¹ D. Riesman, *Samotny tłum*, Wydawnictwo Vis-à-vis/Etiuda, Kraków 2011.

¹² M. Kuziak et al., *op. cit.*, p. 474.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 476.

¹⁴ P. Tandra, *Od filozofii światła do sztuki światła*, Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie, Kraków 2014, p. 121.

It was the romantics who rejected the positivist faith in reason. They were mainly guided by emotions suggested by intuition. We can find intuitive and artistic attitudes in the architects of ancient Greece, India and China. One can only assume that the creators in this period appreciated the values associated with emotions, feelings that are inextricably linked to the search for beauty. Beauty played a significant role in building while function and construction had a subordinate value. Today, all design and construction activities are becoming increasingly detached from intuitive motivations, becoming more rational.

Proponents of rational attitude believe that the architect's main task is to meet the needs, and the form exists only to perform the function.

Forms of the original buildings can be considered true. Builders erected them according to techniques and methods developed and perfected for centuries. They were the result of using local materials and their properties and characterized by simplicity of solutions, structural logic, functionality, comfort – features that are a clear interpretation of architecture. In this way, the building and its structure have obtained a high aesthetic value in itself.

The precursors of modernism thought that every period in history is reflected in architecture. Function and construction were the main determinants shaping the architectural form, where truth was one of the most important architectural values. Referring to the truth, the simplicity of the material used in the buildings was meant to reveal its true character and features. Owing to the features and properties carried by the material, the recipient should have experienced specific feelings.¹⁵

Let's try to refer to modern times and, for example, large-scale facilities, shopping malls, often created by impersonal designers – designers to whom the street model and city squares were transferred. They are a consequence of many phenomena typical of our time – globalization, the market economy, consumerism. The goal of these places is to attract as many diverse consumers as possible by creating magical, “captivating spaces.” Large-scale galleries are similar in all cities in the world. Nowadays, these centres meet the diverse social needs of people: contact with others, artificial nature, playgrounds, restaurants, and all this takes place while shopping. These objects give people of modern times a sense of comfort and community. They affect the creation of new cultural patterns, experiences and social bonds.

However, these places create “cultural ersatz” without affecting the formation of good human-place interactions, as these are superficial reactions. Similar experiences can be obtained at any other consumption centre.¹⁶ In his book *Places – Non-Places*, Marc Augé¹⁷ claims that in the hyper-modern world, non-places are the expression of our time. He adds that these are places of idle expectations. They are also, according to the author of the article, a denial of the Platonic triad of Good-Beauty-Truth.

Today we can also find examples of objects whose authors – artists representing a certain fashion associated with their specific thinking, seek the truth. According to philosophers, beauty is not only in the world of ideas, matter has its own beauty that helps the man in intellectual and spiritual development. Tadao Ando is an architect from Osaka with a huge

¹⁵ J. Sławińska, *Problematyka formalizmu i symboliki w architekturze współczesnej*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Wrocławskiej, Wrocław 1993.

¹⁶ J. Baudrillard, *Spółczesność konsumpcyjna, jego mity i struktury*, Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warszawa 2006.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

impact on the nature of emerging architecture around the world. His works are characterized by a rigorous approach, along with the development of modernist means of expression.

Mario Botta, one of the most famous contemporary Swiss architects who grew up on the buildings of Carlo Scarpa and acquired the experience in the ateliers of Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn, found his own unique style. He designs around the world, and his buildings, especially of religious character are a display of technical possibilities combined with the creation of the master. In his geometric shapes, the artist masterfully uses natural stone and brick. Each of his works refers to the context, the specificity of the place, and the play of light, striving for the perfect unification of light and form, the integration of the material and immaterial world, in a unique way that affects our senses.

Apart from such famous works as the cylindrical cathedral in Evry or the Chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli (Monte Tamaro in Switzerland), he designed many churches that bear a very clear mark of the Botta style: the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels, the church of M. dedicated to Saint John the Baptist.

The Santo Volto Church in Turin, which is a part of the Holy Face complex, is a building created on a heptagonal plan, surrounded by seven chapels crowned with skylights. Botta creates with a sense of place, matter and shape, introduces harmony by applying the basic rules of geometry: proportion, symmetry. His architecture is characterized by a passion for creation, individuality, the pursuit of perfection, but his buildings also represent specific values that are important to men, such as identification, integration, information-communication, cognitivism, emotions and aesthetics.¹⁸ The listed buildings of the great creators affect not only with physical, directly perceived features but reach further into the consciousness of the architecture recipient. They move us, slowly turning the soul towards knowledge, which can lead to the Platonic triad of Good-Beauty-Truth.¹⁹

4. SUMMARY

We live in a time of constant change and searching. Changes that take place in culture, science, affect the worldview of man. Architecture is increasingly under pressure from the changing needs of people, a unified and consumer society, sometimes shaped by the human pursuit of otherness.

Also, the attention of many designers and architects is devoted to new technologies, materials, and possibilities of the latest computer techniques that allow creating virtual buildings on the monitor screen as well as in real space through holographic presentations.

These searches related to new materials, technologies and building structure have led architects to a variety of solutions that will probably set new trends. The problem of truth and lies in architecture is presently a vital issue.²⁰ It refers not only to physical, directly perceived features, but reaches into the depths of the architectural recipient's consciousness. From this point of view, the phenomenon of imitation, lies, concerning both the function and construction or materials used in the building is dangerous. The easiest way to interpret lies

¹⁸ A. Wallis, *Socjologia i kształtowanie przestrzeni*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1971.

¹⁹ H.G. Gadamer, *Aktualność piękna: sztuka jako gra, symbol i święto*, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 1993.

²⁰ W. Niebrzydowski, *Imitacje w architekturze – zarys problemu*, Teka Komisji Architektury, Urbanistyki i Studiów Krajobrazowych, 2008, no. 04b, pp. 150–163.

in architecture is pretence: imitation of certain material by others, or using false facades and elements, e.g. architectural details. Another aspect of lying is construction imitation, which creates the appearance of a given construction solution. Imitation, copying concerns not only details or construction solutions but also issues related to the creation of spaces – non-places without a spirit, the so-called cultural ersatz. “Space is an area where man creates or performs physical work,” wrote Tange, “but at the same time this space shapes and transforms the man. Architecture and urban planning fulfil their tasks only if they become a symbol of human values. I think that many creations of modern architecture and many cities are devoid of these symbols.”²¹

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Author's Note:

Krystyna Paprzyca, Assoc. Prof. D.Sc. Ph.D. Arch.

Professor at Cracow University of Technology. Completed real estate economics postgraduate studies at Bielsko-Biała School of Finances and Law. Real estate agent license No 115116, Estate manager license No 16829, Member of the Polish Chamber of Architects No MP1194.
kpaprzyca@pk.edu.pl