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FALSE FORMS, TRUE SITUATIONS

FAŁSZYWE FORMY, PRAWDZIWE SYTUACJE

Abstract

Pretentious forms of contemporary architecture, designed globally, fail to meet the identified needs of man and fail to establish relations with the time, place and natural environment other than monovalent (limited to a short-term visual excitation). These forms are designed with no regard to man and his environment and, as absolutely autonomous creations, are founded on false concepts and ideas. The crisis of the role public space and users' identity, depletion of natural resources and problems connected therewith underlie a wider and wider detachment of form and its user. Construction of complex architectural forms has ceased to be a technological problem, this has, however, entailed other issues, namely the deprivation of form of its true and actual sense via the exclusion of any sensual and emotional reactions of the users and exclusion of complex relations with the surrounding context from the design process.

Keywords: fast-form architecture, procedure of the truth

Streszczenie

Spektakularne formy współczesnej architektury tworzonej w globalnej skali nie realizują znanych potrzeb człowieka, a ich związki z czasem, miejscem i warunkami naturalnymi są jednowartościowe i sprowadzają się do wizualnej krótkotrwałej ekscytacji. Tym samym są formami niezależnymi od człowieka i jego środowiska, zatem są oparte na fałszywych koncepcjach i pojęciach. Sytuację tę pogłębia kryzys znaczenia przestrzeni publicznej, użytkownika i problemy związane z wyczerpaniem się zasobów naturalnych. W sytuacji, w której tworzenie najbardziej złożonych form architektonicznych przestało być problemem technicznym, szczególnego znaczenia nabiera nadanie im rzeczywistego – prawdziwego sensu przez uwzględnienie w projektowaniu zmysłowych i afektywnych reakcji człowieka oraz złożonych relacji z kontekstem.

Słowa kluczowe: fast-form architecture, procedura prawdy

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of truth has always accompanied art and architecture, and so have the laments of scholars and architects that the truth has been lost. Painting and sculpture presumed that truth was the equivalent of precise and honest imitation of nature, reinforced with the moral truth.¹ Compared to other disciplines of art, architecture was in an ambivalent position, however, practising architects have always aspired to prove that architecture as well can truthfully

¹ A.A. Cooper, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions*, vol. 3, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1737, p. 303, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/shaftesbury-characteristicks-of-men-manners-opinions-times-3-vols> (access: 20.03.2020).

represent nature. Andrea Palladio wrote about “the true, good and beautiful method of building” (1570), Marc-Antoine Laugier maintained that his design of the church was *natural and true*. Carlo Lodoli was of the opinion that beauty cannot be found in architecture that does not originate from the truth, and Andrea Memmo, quoting Carlo Lodoli, further implied that the truth arose from the merger of function and representative form. According to Tony Garnier “all architecture based on false principles is an error,” and truth, which is tantamount with beauty, “is the result of calculations made to satisfy the known necessities with known materials.”² Ludwig Mies van der Rohe claimed that “architecture is the will of an epoch translated into space.”³ Whereas, the gentle manifestos of Robert Venturi allowed for the coexistence of the truth and lie, somehow, continuing both the decorative and theatrical Baroque style as well as the way of reasoning of John Ruskin who believed that “the soul of architecture was contained in the veneer of decoration that concealed” the structure.⁴

At present, the representative form and the veneer of decoration have entered the cannon of characteristic features displayed by more and more formally complex buildings. The technological development has made it possible for the architects to create both the *Decorated Sheds* and the *Ducks*.⁵ In both cases, space, structure and program of functions are impeded and deformed by the expression of form which fails to result from the satisfaction of known needs of man but which rather stems from the media created need of the excitation with the novelty and ingeniousness combined with technological sophistication and precision. Architecture has become part of the entertainment business and as such fails to address the true problems faced by man in contemporary times. Works of the gurus in architecture are like the cinema blockbusters, whereas competitions between the developers and architectural design corporations for the highest and largest buildings resemble the Olympic Games more than honest work dedicated to the satisfaction of true needs of man.

2. FALSE FORMS

This expensive and energy consuming architecture, that maintains only monovalent relations with the user and the place, only aggravates the crisis of the meaning of public space and the crisis of the user-place relationship, contributing to the depletion of natural resources. This *fast-form architecture* is erected in a too large scale (globally) and too fast, thus it is impossible to forecast its impact on the as-is condition of the environment and the long-term effects thereof. Assigning dominant meaning to a form detached from its place and the actual needs of man shall translate into the satisfaction of temporary, and sometimes even false, excitation needs artificially created in replacement of the true cognitive needs of any human being.

Faced with aggravating problems of civilisation arising among others from uncontrolled urbanisation, we need to consider alternative methods of designing our living space. The

² T. Garnier, *The Builder*, lxxx, 1901, p. 98.

³ L. Mies van der Rohe, *Architecture and the Times*, 1924, www.modernistarchitecture.wordpress.com/2010/10/25/ludwig-mies-van-der-rohe%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Carchitecture-and-the-times%E2%80%9D-1924/, (access: 26.12.2017).

⁴ J. Ruskin, *The works of John Ruskin*, vol. 8, E.T. Cook, A. Wedderburn (eds.), London: George Allen, 1904, p. 2.

⁵ R. Venturi, D. Scott Brown, S. Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1972.

previously applied methods have resulted in a slow accumulation of relationship problems within man-architecture-environment chain, the major one being a gradual disappearance of human traffic from public space and its appearance in the social media. As a result, we are witnessing an unprecedented in history individualisation. Traditional interrelations and bonds between people in small and medium communities settled in a given place have loosened due to the development of technology and increased mobility of people. Limited abilities of the community have been replaced with unlimited options of market services accessible to a contemporary man without any restrictions.⁶ Public space, intended to serve public utility and adjusted to the scale of the community – streets and squares – historically served a variety of communal needs of interactions – trading, negotiating, social meetings or political activities – used to be shaped by way of negotiations and so were the public utility buildings constructed therein. With this subtle network of interrelations broken, the multi-functional public space ceased to be needed and was replaced with highly specialised commercial space, which, even if it repeats the traditional layout of the streets and squares, applies the mechanisms of control and exclusion and, for that reason, it is only called public space but has largely detached from its true meaning. In fact, it is the property of a business, a corporation etc. and thus, any interactive behaviour therein stems from *automated situations* and is strictly controlled and deprived of any spontaneous relations. What's important, such space is perceived as safer than space of traditional squares and streets. Subtle pluralism of form designed and constructed in consensus with others reached over an extended time period has been replaced with artificial form diversity, mainly characterised with ostentatious appearance intended to evoke excitation.

Residential architecture has been assessed more positively. Even if we can observe increased functionality and aesthetics of residential development, as well as its better customisation and adaptation to the needs of the residents in various ages, public space seems to be marginalised, its functional program reduced and it seems to be controlled similarly to the commercial space in the shopping galleries. Zones designed for the common use of the residents, if free of any food corners, seem to be unable to attract users. Even if the zones offer relaxation in green areas, this function seems to be reduced to a nice window view – it is pleasant to look at but fails to be visited. The residents opt for peace and quiet, order, individual comfort and independence rather than spontaneous contacts within the communal zones. That independence can potentially turn into alienation. Paradoxically, today modern office towers are provided with a much more extended program of social integration functions, intended to serve various forms of relaxation than a multi-family development on average. This, on the one hand, is the result of commercialisation of social life, and, on the other hand, the reason behind the identity crisis of modern man. His work environment will be so designed to render his best work performance, similarly his leisure is intended to generate the expected work efficiency. Professionally organised and controlled activities, interpersonal contacts and leisure affect the personal lifestyle, which, free of any automated situations, becomes chaotic, purposeless and monovalent. Moreover, homogeneous communities seem to be reluctant to accept any diversified environment

⁶ Some sociologists such as Martuccelli, Touraine and Castells are even more radical in their claims, maintaining that we are facing a crisis of a society in its traditional meaning rather than a crisis of public space and its users. They predict that, due to increasing diversity and complexity of individual lifestyles, new forms of social integration and organisation will be created, where the key social communication function between individual members will be performed by the electronic network media.

(natural environment and traditional public space), perceiving it as foreign. Thus, we arrive at short-term communities formed based on simplified rules of adherence, which tend to ignore the complexity of human behaviour. The fan pages, *peg communities* randomly connected via significant or trivial concepts and ideas,⁷ virtual guilds and network communities of players are nothing else but virtual equivalents of human relations in real life, deprived of any sensual factors and materiality of the meeting venue. In exchange, the community members can enjoy an unlimited options of participation and absolute freedom in changing the community adherence. As Susan Sontag wrote

Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience. All the conditions of modern life—its material plenitude, its forms of narration [...] conjoin to dull our sensory faculties. [...] What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more.⁸

Alternatively, Juhani Pallasmaa postulates the sensory engaging architecture, which is oriented not only on vision but on all the senses and whose form results from negotiations and inclusion of variable needs of man, and which, furthermore, distances itself from taking into account averaged human tastes and expectations.⁹ Such architecture will require the reinterpretation of design and construction methods, with particular attention paid to various forms of social participation adapted to local traditions, but above all, it will require the restitution of active participation of man in shaping his life environment.

Detachment from materiality of a place and its specific conditions, thus, its topography, climate and history, and domination of visual aspects in architecture translate into inappropriate management of natural resources. Concrete, steel and glass used in construction bring about changes in the natural landscape (either due to production of these building materials or due to the scale of implemented urban planning and architectural design solutions). Singapore or Dubai, extending their surface space, or the Chinese artificial islands on the South China Sea can serve as examples of man-made landscape, whose construction and use requires high energy consumption and destroys the natural habitat. Architecture continues to be perceived as indispensable landscape complementation and its dominant landmark rather than an imperfect tool to create symbiotic relationship between man and nature. In 1910, Adolf Loos wrote as follows:

What is that discord, that like an unnecessary scream shatters the quiet? Right at the center of the farmers' houses, which were not built by them, but by God, stands a villa. Is it the product of a good or bad architect? I do not know. All I know is that beauty, peace, and quiet have been dispelled. [...] why is it that every architect, whether good or bad, desecrates the lake?¹⁰

At present we need to base designed architecture on its basic components: form, structure, materials and functions, as they can largely support the disrupted balance of local ecosystems and will, as sustainable architecture, affect the quality of life of its users.¹¹

⁷ Z. Bauman, *Społeczeństwo w stanie obłączenia*, Sic!, Warszawa 2006, p. 204.

⁸ S. Sontag, *Przeciw interpretacji i inne eseje*, Karakter, Kraków 2018, p. 25.

⁹ J. Pallasmaa, *The Eye of the skin. Architecture and the senses*, John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey 2012.

¹⁰ A. Loos, *Ornament i zbrodnia. Eseje wybrane*, Centrum Architektury, Warszawa 2013, p. 144.

¹¹ The pioneers of such solutions are among others: Ken Yeang, Glenn Murcutt and Baumshlager & Eberle, who adhere to *form follows climate* idea, rejecting the advanced “environmentally-friendly” technology, whose production and use contributes to a significant carbon footprint.

The aforementioned problems generate further problems that in total make the relationship of architecture with the surrounding world more and more complex. Problems of architecture, like problems of modern society, “do not concern the preservation of heritage, be it through education or otherwise. But continuous creation of otherness seems to be the prevailing issue”¹² [Author’s own translation]. Architecture is becoming, or probably has already become, a discipline of art, which puts above all else, even above rational solutions of complex social, psychological and environmental issues, a visual image, an effect of otherness. This status quo is being legitimised by major market forces and reinforced by the attitude of the architects shaped, among others, by their education system.

3. FIVE COUNTRIES, THREE CONTINENTS

The aforementioned system of education and further architectural practice focus on the sensitisation of vision (visualisation) of form and to a large extent neglect the issue of complex relations of man and its living environment, work environment, relaxation etc. and its understanding. Ryszard Kapuściński remarked that an image might pose an obstacle in the acquisition of knowledge, even if it allegedly was supposed to foster and facilitate it. It might prevent one from comprehending what one saw and might efficiently distract one’s attention from seeking the reasons.¹³

Traditional model of architecture	Alternative model of architecture
Designing visual architecture Architecture as an image	Designing haptic architecture Architecture as a multi-sensual experience
Development of spatial imagination Excitation with the visual form, landmark, a spectacle where the audience are passive observers/consumers Planning Advertising and sociotechnics	Development of situational imagination Identity, situational ethics, “stage management of small events”, where the participants take part in choosing the venue and writing the story plot Vibrancy and spontaneity Negotiations, participation, consensus
Universal problem solutions, networking Buildings in space, spaces in buildings Globalisation Temporariness	Contextual problem solutions, point-by-point Localism, places and not buildings Regionalism Continuance
An architect as a participant in the investment process Hired professional Opportunism, a ‘yes-man’ type	An architect as a representative and activist Professional participant Contestation, assertiveness

Table 1. Comparison of two models of architecture: applicable and postulated

Focusing on visual aspects of architecture is nothing else but a deprivation of architecture of its true purpose, namely the realisation of important material needs of man being

¹² N. Luhmann, *Observations on Modernity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1998, p. 3.

¹³ R. Kapuściński, *Jak media odzwierciedlają świat?*, 20.12.1988, <https://kapuscinski.info/jak-media-od-zwierciedlaja-swiat.html> (access: 31.01.2020).

a community member, on the one hand and an individual, on the other hand.¹⁴ Teaching how to design technologically sophisticated and visually attractive facilities, in view of the cultural development, results in a deceptive satisfaction of artificially stimulated needs. Yet, it meets the expectations of the investors who do not care about addressing particular social problems as they see the value of architecture elsewhere. Thus, adapting the words of Kapuściński to the specifics of architecture, one can say that the value of architecture is measured with its attractive image.

Modern methods of design seem to prefer taxidermy, i.e. dissecting an object, taken away from its habitat, to preserve it by modelling for display purposes. They, furthermore, focus on solving problems that arise within the object itself, in particular those related to function, structure and technology. This means that an architect, designing a building in a given place, is only in superficial contact with the surrounding environment, i.e. the *genius loci* formed by certain historical landmarks as well as human activity, the language, gestures, rites etc., which he sees only as the analyses and charts in a sophisticated graphic form and which often fail to truly represent the surrounding context. In other words, the architect is unable to experience the systematic phenomena that appear in acts of consciousness underlying the *genius loci*. He only justifies the selection of a given solution to be implemented with the tools chosen. The ancient concept of *genius loci*, brought to light again by Norberg-Schulz, and postmodern contextualism seems to have gone out of date. A modern architect, operating in five countries, on three continents, has neither appropriate tools nor methodology to create architecture that “suits, responds to, and intermediates in the surroundings.”¹⁵ In this context, sensitisation of the architects to the relations with the environment, local community, cultural diversity and the ability to sense the *genius loci* is crucial. It will allow us to define and solve true problems, not just those selected or created by the architect himself.

4. (UN)HAPPY DECEPTION

Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy defined imitation in art and architecture as *happy deception*, whose exposure is a source of pleasure for man, and so is the act of his succumbing to its illusion.

Let us no doubt about it, it is through this happy deception that man enjoys the pleasure of imitation in architecture. Without such a deception, there would be no place for that pleasure which accompanies all the arts and their charm. This pleasure of being half-deceived, which endears man to the fictitious and the poetic makes him prefer truth disguised to truth naked.

¹⁴ This phenomenon was discussed by Christopher Alexander in his *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*. According to him, “concepts and categories [of a modern designer], besides being arbitrary and unsuitable, are self-perpetuating. Under the influence of concepts, he not only does things from a biased point of view, but sees them biasedly as well. The concepts control his perception of fit and misfit-until in the end he sees nothing but deviations from his conceptual dogmas, and loses not only the urge but even the mental opportunity to frame his problems more appropriately.” C. Alexander, *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1964, p. 70.

¹⁵ C. Jencks, *The language of post-modern architecture*, Academy Editions, London 1984, p. 110.

We like to find it in art a lie, through it should not impose too much; it is a deception to which we submit willingly, because it lasts only as long as we wish, because we can always undeceive ourselves of it. [Quatremère de Quincy assumed] that we can always undeceive ourselves of it fearing to discover the truth as well as the lie. Man fears the truth as much as the lie: he likes to be seduced but not led astray.¹⁶

This optimistic attitude may rather sound naive in the times of manipulations with form images, when the manipulators deceiving others are also happy to be deceived with their own technological perfection and extraordinariness of manipulation. At the same time, the forms that are senseless to the users are met with absolute indifference. The users will expect excitation and feel excited for a short while but refrain from any deeper relations with such forms. As a result, neither the form, space or their user are in any way transformed. Paraphrasing Alain Badiou, a philosopher, no generic procedure of truth has been implemented that might result in a unique relationship transforming space into a place and the observer into an active participant.

Architecture perceived as the procedure of truth transforms the activities of all the participants in the process of its design, construction and use. Such a process must not be understood as the process of creating defined forms but rather as placemaking – creating Places for the people with the involvement of the people. Thus, architecture shall activate people or as Peter Zumthor wrote “[serve as the] background for life which goes in and around it, a sensitive container of the rhythm of footsteps on the floor, for concentration of work and for silence of sleep.”¹⁷

An alternative model of creating architecture should, thus, focus on three basic aspects: designing haptic architecture, development of situational imagination in contrast to imagination formally dominated with the sense of vision and context-oriented problem solving strategies. This attitude requires changes in the design methods because it transforms the sense of architecture as such. It does not focus on designing buildings but on creating specified social, communal or personal situations. In the times of the identity crisis, man must aspire to revive his identity and to be included as a stimuli receiving and generating element of his living space, whose multivalence corresponds to the complex nature of man and the community where he belongs, which he co-creates and in which he participates.

Activities undertaken in various scales and in adherence to various points of view will always render measurable benefits to the environment and its inhabitants. Their use and transformation, so far only on a small scale, testify to the emergence of a positive phenomenon of co-participation in urban evolution processes intended, among others, to preserve a legible layout of the historical urban structure and to introduce well-thought over, non-profit and indispensable changes resulting from social, economic and technological development. To successfully stimulate the placemaking process, we first need to increase social awareness of the potentials of the existing structures and to work out a wide range of educational activities directly focused on modern urban development.

¹⁶ A.C. Quatremère de Quincy, *Encyclopédie méthodique, Architecture*, vol. 2, p. 115, quote from: A. Forty, *Words and buildings*, London, Thames & Hudson 2012, p. 297.

¹⁷ P. Zumthor, *Thinking architecture*, Birkhäuser, Basel 2006, p. 12.



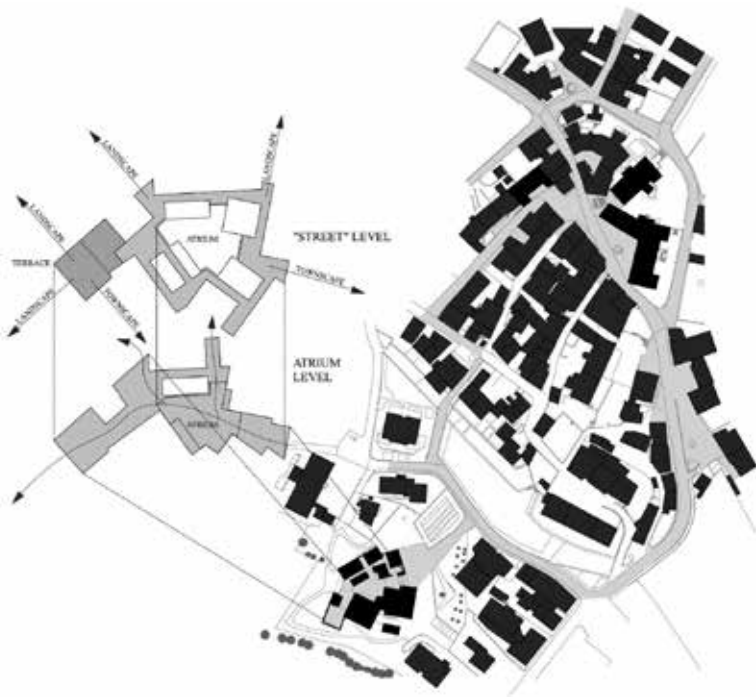
III. 1. Dubai – instant metropolis erected in omission of traditional, sequential stages of urban space development. Technologically advanced architecture that makes it feasible to operate outside the framework of time, place and culture (photo of Robert Jankowski)



III. 2. Zaha Hadid, Dongdaemun Design Park, Seoul, 2009–2014. A building detached from context, ignoring the tradition and history of the place, similar to other works of Hadid (e.g. Opera House in Guangdong) but visually attractive. The construction of this world's *biggest atypical building* devoured the entire area of the municipal park (<https://divisare.com/projects/328000-zaha-hadid-architects-julien-lanoo-dongdaemun-design-plaza#lg=1&slide=3>, access: 31.01.2020.)



III. 3. New development in Berlin at Bernauer Str. (Designed among others by Ebers Architekten and XTH-berlin). Diversity of architectural forms and subtle stratification of public space and semi-private space affect the sense of identity of the inhabitants (photo by the author)



III. 4. Dominik and Isler Gysel / bhend.klammer, Seniors' Centre, Maienfeld, 2008–2011. The hybrid building intended to serve the seniors and other age groups. The site plan shows continuation of the historical public space in the form of an atrium and the south terrace (drawing by the author based on: www.map.geo.gr.ch/gr, <https://www.bhendschlauri.ch/8378804/alterszentrum-bundner-herrschaft-maienfeld>, access: 10–12.10.2019 and author's own measurements and drawings)



Ill. 5. Common areas in the Seniors' Centre: the south terrace and atrium link the building with the landscape (photo by the author)

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