

ADAM NADOLNY

ORCID: 0000-0003-3766-7020

Poznan University of Technology, Poland

JAKUB KACZMAREK

ORCID: 0000-0002-0169-1785

JAKON TM Sp. z o.o., Poland

## THE TRUTH AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE CITY

### PRAWDA I FRAGMENTACJA MIASTA

#### Abstract

When exploring the meaning of truth in relation to the city in this research, we would like to refer/ relate to some authors for whom the meaning of “urbanity” involved the search for new directions. In our reflections, we would like to focus on the following authors and their concepts: Henri Lefebvre’s philosophical approach to the city and search for the truth of its existence, Aldo Rossi’s notion of the city as a spatial concept, Manfredo Tafuri’s concept of the city defined from the point of view of the theory of architecture.

*Keywords: architecture, truth, fragmentation, mapping*

#### Streszczenie

Poszukiwanie znaczenia prawdy w odniesieniu do miasta w niniejszych badaniach chcielibyśmy odnieść do kilku postaci, dla których znaczenie miejskości było pewnego rodzaju poszukiwaniem nowych kierunków. Jako materiał badawczy do rozważań skłamy się na autorach i ich ideach: Henriego Lefebvra’a ujęcie filozoficzne miasta i poszukiwanie prawdy jego istnienia, Aldo Rossiego znaczenia miasta jako koncepcji przestrzennej, Manfredo Tafuriego koncepcja miasta w ujęciu teorii architektury.

*Słowa kluczowe: architektura, prawda, fragmentacja, mapowanie*

### 1. CITY AND TRUTH. INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCUSSION

The city is a set of values that have been shaping its form over many decades. The city components – squares, streets, parks, etc. – together form a kind of labyrinth that, while being decipherable, cannot be diagnosed in a straightforward manner. That diagnosis enables us to ponder the question how we can presently search for the meaning of truth in relation to the phenomenon of the city. The city’s changeability brings new spatial values, but also new challenges, every day.

Recalling the history of the development of urban structures, one should definitely go back to antiquity. In his reflections on the phenomenon of the city, the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), brings that paradigm to our attention in the following manner: “There is another tradition of Greek origin which is that of the City. It is the place where

civilization, culture and art develop. It is in the City that art appears and is produced.”<sup>1</sup> In this case we may define the phenomenon of truth in connection with art that undoubtedly has a considerable impact on forming its (*the city*) values.

The city space may be subject to changes and this we know for sure; however, there still remains the question of diagnosing that phenomenon in relation to contemporary values. From many points of view, space mapping becomes a process as creative as the process of building the city itself. In a sense, one can perceive mapping as a kind of search for the meaning of truth. The long-time values of space, diagnosed and described, may give inhabitants an illusory feeling of fulfilment and satisfaction of their needs and expectations.<sup>2</sup>

In this research, we would like to confront our search for the meaning of truth in relation to the city with the views of several authors who understood urbanity as a kind of search not so much for revealed truths but for truths of philosophical, spatial, architectural and metaphysical significance. Therefore, we intend to focus on the following theoretical works treating them as material for further considerations: philosophical approach to the city and looking for the truth of its existence in the theory of Henri Lefebvre; search for the meaning of the city as a spatial concept as perceived by Aldo Rossi; finally, understanding the concept of the city from the point of view of theory of architecture on the basis of reflections of Manfredo Tafuri.

## 2. CITY AND TRUTH IN THE INTERPRETATION OF HENRI LEFEBVRE

The question of urbanity was repeatedly addressed by Henri Lefebvre in his numerous writings. The city is a form; not only a spatial form but also a space in which various interactions are taking place. It would seem that the meaning of truth in relation to the question of urbanity is an illusory discussion of sorts. Creating the city as a structure based on the principle of cause and effect has been a common practice for many years. The reason behind the formation of urban spaces is a question of forming a new paradigm, a form consisting of lines, planes and edges. All those elements give the observer a certain sense of safety and comfort of living in the city. Still, those forms are also a certain illusion that we may compare to a different kind of truth. Do we really know what a contemporary city is: a set of truths, lines, illusory views or – as some claim – a work of art? Henri Lefebvre asked himself the same question in his reflections on the creation of space. As a conclusion for that part of the text, we would like to quote the following passage: “[...] we all know, or think we know, where discussions of truth, illusion, lies, and appearance-versus-reality are liable to lead.”<sup>3</sup>

The production of space in the form of the city has been accompanying mankind for centuries. On the one hand, the produced space was (and still is) supposed to provide shelter against the outer world; on the other hand, it becomes an illusory form that continues to exist despite numerous adversities and changes. The concept of space in which lines and planes allow for closing certain spatial phenomena becomes a challenge to the user. Another question arises in the philosopher’s reflections that can be associated with the following

---

<sup>1</sup> H. Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 1996, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> This article was written within the framework of the research project entitled “Mapping of architectural space, the history, theory, practice, contemporaneity” the author participated in at the Faculty of Architecture, Poznan University of Technology.

<sup>3</sup> H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 1991, p. 7.

passage: “Theoretical and practical questions relating to space are becoming more and more important. These questions, though they do not suppress them, tend to resituate concepts and problems having to do with biological reproduction, and with the production both of the means of production themselves and of consumer goods.”<sup>4</sup>

Production of space becomes a real phenomenon, as it begins to result from strong external determinants. The modern city is not devoid of defects or shortcomings that intensify in extraordinary times, e.g. during the pandemic. What seemed to be a safe space or form changes drastically due to external factors. It turns out that the city structure resulting from many centuries of tradition, indicating prestige and wealth, is not the space that generates the truth about the city anymore. Due to posing health hazards to inhabitants, city streets, squares and parks, no longer serve their purpose. No matter how splendidly a given space is designed, its splendour has been lost in the times of health crisis. Henri Lefebvre commented in the following words on human fascination with urbanity and the tendency to perceive it as a spatial construct consisting in the organizing of space with regard to particular groups producing that space: “The town, the city, has fascinated people for centuries. They have developed a sense of parish pump politics, or parochialism. Only in this sense did they take an interest in the organization of space, form groups that produced space.”<sup>5</sup>

In the times of pandemic, city fragmentation referred to in the title of this work may be defined as the process of slow decline of the city’s urban functions. Access limitations, segregation of people, putting up additional barriers – all those elements make the true image of the city disappear right before our eyes. The moment a threat like that arises, any discussions about transportation problems, overpopulation and other similar issues mercilessly fade into the background. In the times of pandemic, disease and death become part of everyday life no matter how hard we try to forget about them. The image of the city known from various scientific publications, e.g. those by Kevin Lynch, becomes irrelevant. The research that we were conducting fails to grasp the new truth about space; therefore, awareness related to the creation of new research directions is essential.

In that somewhat sad picture of the city in contemporary times lie the seeds of its new future. Doubtless, the truth about the contemporary city has been shaken. Still, the phenomenon of urbanity, the production of space will go on regardless. The reflections of Henri Lefebvre presented in this section allow on the one hand to diagnose the existing condition, and on the other to look into the future with hope. The city together with its truths is a universal phenomenon and the one we will always attempt to improve. Every form of changes that take place in its space is important and precious for its future functioning. One should hope that the times of pandemic will enable us to revise our approach to the problems of the city and contribute to its betterment.

### 3. CITY AND TRUTH IN THE INTERPRETATION OF ALDO ROSSI

Forming the spatial phenomenon of the city is a kind of journey through various forms, spaces, formally important points and other points. Aldo Rossi (1931–1997) attempted to diagnose that condition in his writings. Even today the city remains a phenomenon whose

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> H. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2003, p. 183.

form has been shaped by historical determinants, area topography and geographical layout. This undoubtedly interesting common denominator may be perceived as a sign of new creative explorations in that respect. Regarding the question of the already mentioned spatial determinants for the city formation, A. Rossi wrote as follows: “We must therefore concern ourselves with urban geography, urban topography, architecture, and several other disciplines. The problem is far from easy, but not impossible, and in the following paragraphs we will attempt an analysis along these lines.”<sup>6</sup>

City and truth is also a spatial concept in which the question of context is of utmost importance. Context, i.e. everything that surrounds us, becomes a reliable source of new meanings for architecture and reinterpretation of spatial phenomena. The placement of an object in the context of a historical city is always a design challenge, as well as an intellectual one. Each of the components of an architectural work “immersed” in the historical city comes into existence on the brink of various spatial phenomena, the already defined spaces and the spaces awaiting their definition or creation. Aldo Rossi goes a step further in his writings, stating that: “As for the term context, we find that it is mostly an impediment to research. To context is opposed the idea of the monument. Beyond its historically determined existence, the monument has a reality that can be subjected to analysis; moreover, we can design a ‘monument.’ However, to do so requires an architecture, that is to say, a style.”<sup>7</sup> Can this statement be applied to the phenomenon of truth with regard to the question of the relations between a historical monument and a modern city? The accumulation of objects that allow, by their form and spatial message, to set up a certain division into visible and invisible objects. The historic area of the city becomes a design challenge. At present we are fighting another pandemic that has caused the world to stop dead in its tracks. An interesting question from the research point of view is how the truth of a historic monument can be interpreted anew with observing the sanitary regime. One may wonder whether the required spatial distance allows one to sense the truth about the city in the way it used to in the past.

The issue of context can be found in many writings of Aldo Rossi. It may be interpreted as the search for the phenomenon of truth: the truth of the space, the truth of an architectural work, the truth of artistic intentions. All those elements make it possible to create a kind of catalogue of procedures. But does the search for the meaning of truth for a spatial concept such as urbanity allow for the origination of a new operating algorithm? Context as the indicator of the search for a good fit becomes a new form of the meaning of truth in architecture. The truth of the material, shape, perception of history as a multi-faceted phenomenon – all those elements combine into a kind of search for the genuineness of the architectural form. Aldo Rossi wrote about it in the following way: “We have tried to show that a correspondence exists in the city between sign and event; but this is insufficient unless we extend our analysis to the problem of the genesis of architectural form.”<sup>8</sup> Architectural forms resulting from history may be perceived as the sign of truth in architecture. Shaping of a certain archetype of that phenomenon also took place in the past. The form, being the benchmark of creative exploration, also becomes a kind of message. In this case, the form will both be an answer to the user’s demand and the context-matching element. Doubtless, the mutual relations that occur between form and context become the ground for search for a common mode of action.

---

<sup>6</sup> A. Rossi, *The architecture of the city*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1984, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 126.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 127.

Truth and the city in the approach of Aldo Rossi is often the truth about the phenomenon of context. Search for the possibilities to match new elements to the existing pattern becomes one of the postulates formulated by that architect. It should also be stressed that in this case truth is also the truth of material: stone, brick and concrete have been our companions for ages. In them, the history of the city as a conglomerate of space, functions and sights is recorded. The city is also the truth of experiences, feelings, enthusiasms and disappointments alike. So far, we architects have succeeded in building cities, erecting buildings. But perhaps the coming future is going to change that tendency, advocating the use of existing structures, not building new ones. Perhaps this is the truth about the city?

#### 4. CITY AND TRUTH IN THE REFLECTIONS OF MANFREDO TAFURI

The city is not only a built-up space, it is also a certain type of relation between form and nature. In his writings, Manfredo Tafuri pondered the question of shaping the city as a human artefact, but the one that cannot exist without connections with its natural environment. "The city, inasmuch as it is a work of man, tends to a natural condition."<sup>9</sup> In a sense, each city attempts to blend with the landscape; that union is the result of many years of history of the city as a spatial form. As we are well aware, the city developed from nature. When we recall Greek architecture, many of its motifs were taken from the natural surroundings. Over the centuries, people learnt how to make use of nature and began to fragment and destroy it. They transformed soft lines taken from the natural landscape into the city's urban panorama. Ultimately, that process of varying space allows for a new landscape to develop. From today's perspective, one should ask oneself the question about the direction in which that spatial defragmentation will continue. "[...] the city is no longer seen as a structure that, by means of its own accumulator mechanisms, determines and transforms the processes of the exploitation of the soil and agricultural production."<sup>10</sup>

In the context of the thoughts of M. Tafuri, the city becomes a mark of the present times, its true form is a conglomerate of activities from the past epochs, as usually in history. An interesting aspect is perceiving the city as a form that combines knowledge and experience on the principle of cognition. M. Tafuri frequently returns to that line of thought, explaining that much of the splendour of today's city is the outcome of the development, expectations and fulfilled aspirations of the bourgeoisie. He also ponders the question of whether a modern city can be created by a primitive society and replies that no such city can be built, as a social group is required for that purpose that would be the driving force for modernity. The question of truth and the city in this case is the question of the state of mind, the willingness to listen and the possibility to look into the future without fears. "Instead, there is a truth that must be recognized. That is, that the entire cycle of modern architecture and of the new systems of visual communication came into being, developed [...]."<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> M. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia Design and Capitalist Development*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1976, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 178.

The city is also a relation of cause and effect, its form being an indicator of political activities, not social movements. Very often politicization of the city imposes certain patterns of behaviour on its citizens, introduces limitations, etc. Such a state of affairs causes certain over-interpretation of the meaning of the city and architecture as aesthetic issues. In the history of the city, aesthetics was not always connected with the clear direction of its development. Let us recall the modernist city and its contemporary problems. Referring back to the links between the meaning of truth and the form of the city, it is a kind of game between political economics and political criticism. That connection may influence the perception of the city, but those directions should not be allowed to dominate it entirely. To conclude that part of the work, I would like to quote M. Tafuri again: "This truth is, that just as there cannot exist a class political economy, but only a class criticism of political economy, so too there cannot be founded a class aesthetic, art, or architecture, but only a class criticism of the aesthetic, of art, of architecture, of the city itself."<sup>12</sup> Will truth and aesthetics allow for diagnosing the city nowadays?

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The reflections presented in this text concerning the meaning of truth in the concept of the city were based, as mentioned in the beginning, on theoretical writings of Henri Lefebvre, Aldo Rossi and Manfredo Tafuri. The framing device for those discussions was the question of fragmentation. Each of the quoted researchers presented the concept of the city differently. Still, a question arises whether those separate narrations lead in the general discourse to be connected by a common denominator. Regardless of the direction in which the city has been heading, its whole has always been composed of fragments. That fragmentation in many cases took place in relation to true boundary conditions. Creating the city as a structure consists in composing its whole out of small elements. We are dealing here with the main components of the composition, such as streets, squares, lines, boundaries and other. Such a state of affairs allows one to compose the city by adding true elements to the actual structure.

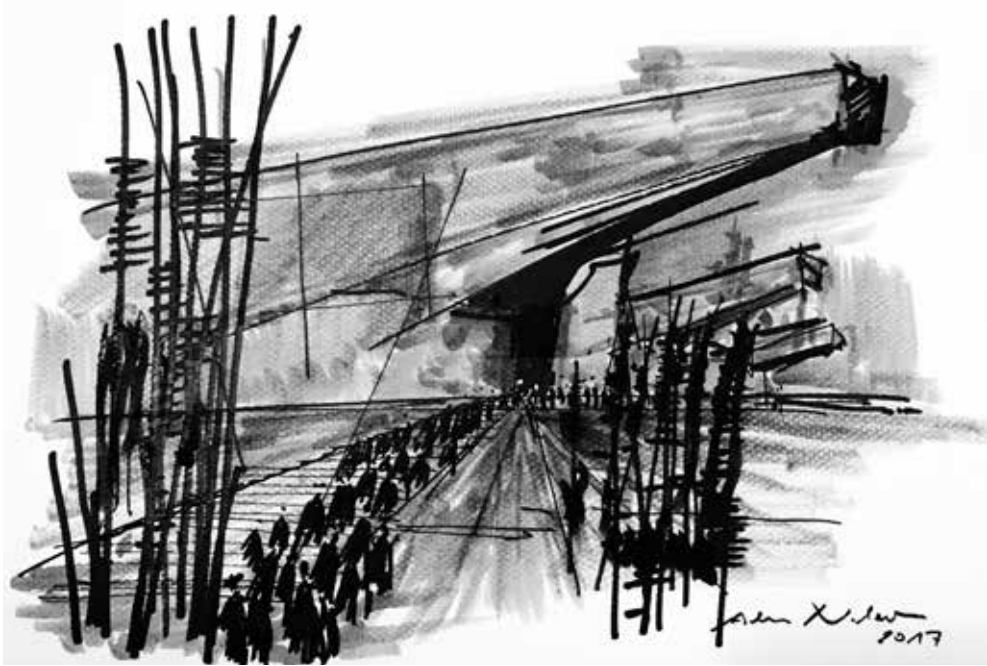
The already mentioned mapping of spatial phenomena in the city structure serves the purpose of diagnosing its condition from the behavioural perspective. The concept of truth and the information contained in this research offer us the possibility of a comprehensive view on the spatial phenomenon of the city. Both the philosophical reflections of Henri Lefebvre and Aldo Rossi's concept of the city enable further commenting on the spatial phenomena that contributed to its formation and in some cases also to its fall. The truth of the city, as seen by Manfredo Tafuri, is primarily the city of social classes. He attributes its current shape mostly to the social class of the bourgeoisie which he places within the range of his interests. Nonetheless, the meaning of truth and the city is linked to the concept of human attitudes, e.g. in new urban movements of the 20th century.

In the search for truth of the city we were discussing its spatial production, looking for the signs of history, and tried to find the common denominator linking the question of truth with philosophy, theory of architecture, and history. All those components of the concept of this work served the purpose of proving how various disciplines attempt to define the notion of truth.

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 179.

The truth about the city does not consist of unidimensional elements only; their three-dimensional aspect relates both to formal questions and design questions. Defragmentation may take place as a creative process, yet recently it has acquired a more negative sense. No matter how we attempt to compose fragments, their truth will be all the more disputable due to the lack of genuine intentions shaping the concept of the contemporary city.



III. 1. City and truth, 2017, drawing, ink on carton. Author: Adam Nadolny

#### References

- [1] Lefebvre H., *The Production of Space*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 1991.
- [2] Lefebvre H., *Writings on Cities*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 1996.
- [3] Lefebvre H., *The Urban Revolution*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2003.
- [4] Rossi A., *The architecture of the city*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1984.
- [5] Tafuri M., *Architecture and Utopia Design and Capitalist Development*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1976.

## **Authors' Note:**

### **Adam Nadolny, Assoc. Prof. D.Sc. Ph.D. Arch.**

Since 2006, as regards his professional practice and scientific research, has been working at the Faculty of Architecture at Poznan University of Technology. At present, he holds the position of an associate professor in history of architecture at the Division of History, Theory and Heritage. He is the author of over 80 scientific publications dealing with such issues as the history of the Polish architecture of the second half of the 20th century, the history of urban planning and the relations between architecture and film imagery. He was a visiting professor at such European Universities as Politecnico di Milano, Università degli Studi di Roma, Università di Cagliari, BTU Cottbus and others. Since 2018, at the Faculty of Architecture at Poznan University of Technology, he has been carrying out the research project on "Mapping of architectural space, history, theory, practice, modernity".

adam.nadolny@put.poznan.pl

### **Jakub Kaczmarek, M.Sc.**

In 2017, graduated from the Adam Mickiewicz University with an engineering degree in the field of Spatial Management. In 2017–2018, he studied at the Gdańsk University of Technology at the Faculty of Architecture where he obtained a master's degree in urbanization. During his studies at the Gdańsk University of Technology he participated in the international project of the Gdańsk University of Technology in cooperation with Hafnen City Universitat Hamburg creating new development opportunities for the Nowy Port district in Gdańsk. He also took part in the international expert seminar and Nexus Food Water Energy workshops. In 2018, took up work for Jakon Inwest as an investment preparation specialist.

jakub.kaczmarek@jakon.pl