

PIOTR OPAŁKA

ORCID: 0000-0002-7798-4787

University of Applied Sciences in Nysa, Poland

SPACE OUTSIDE THE MARGIN OF TRUTH

PRZESTRZEŃ POZA MARGINESEM PRAWDY

Abstract

Elements of truth and lies in art, including architecture, have been present since ancient times. They are one of the important elements of reflection on a work of art. It seems that every conventional style, having its beginning and end, was connected with the assessment containing elements closer to the truth in the initial phase. The declining phase, from the perspective of the new trend devaluing the existing one, was assessed in terms of lies and falsehood. This kind of alternation ratings has significantly changed with the advent of modernism. Nowadays, a reflection evaluating work of deceit and lies is still present, although due to its multiplicity and heterogeneity, the assessment can be fluid and difficult. The same work, assessed by different art receivers, can be received radically differently. Today's falsehood may be true tomorrow. And vice versa. The paper presents the action in the space outside the margin of truth, including: kitsch, borrowings, plagiarism, aesthetic primitivism, and destruction of cultural heritage.

Keywords: truth, lies, plagiarism, destruction of cultural heritage

Streszczenie

Elementy prawdy i kłamstwa w sztuce, w tym architekturze, są obecne od czasów starożytności. Stanowią jeden z istotnych elementów refleksji nad dziełem sztuki. Wydaje się, że każdy umowny nurt, mający swój początek i koniec, związany był z oceną zawierającą w początkowej fazie elementy bliższe prawdzie. Faza schyłkowa, z perspektywy nowego nurtu dewaluującego zastane, oceniana była w kategoriach kłamstwa i fałszu. Ten rodzaj naprzemienności ocen uległ istotnemu przewartościowaniu wraz z nadejściem modernizmu. Współcześnie refleksja wartościująca twórczość na poziomie fałszu i kłamstwa nadal jest obecna, choć ze względu na jej mnogość i niejednorodność ewaluacja może być płynna i trudna. To samo dzieło oceniane przez różnych odbiorców może być odbierane diametralnie różnie. Dzisiejszy fałsz jutro może być prawdą. I odwrotnie. W artykule przedstawiono działania w przestrzeni poza marginesem prawdy, w tym: kicz, zapożyczenia, plagiat, prymitywizm estetyczny i destrukcję dziedzictwa kulturowego.

Słowa kluczowe: prawda, kłamstwo, plagiat, destrukcja dziedzictwa kulturowego

*Everything we see can be seen in another way.
Therefore, I ask myself: isn't everything an illusion anyway?*

Sandro del Prete

1. INTRODUCTION

The reception of a work of art, in addition to the sense of beauty and ugliness, statics and dynamics, harmony and disharmony, originality and secondaryness, can also evoke truth or lie. The perception of architecture is also associated with these two inseparable categories

of evaluation. Moving beyond the truth can mean: kitsch, trash, borrowings, plagiarism, aesthetic primitivism of form, structure and content, chaos and space deformations. Truth (truthfulness) and lie (falsehood) in a work of architecture, depending on the cultural or social context, can be assigned different meanings. The communication tool, which is architecture, in the hands of its actors who have specific motivations, can shape the space balancing between sometimes seemingly extreme feelings. The quality of public space can be a barometer of trends.

2. LIE IN THE HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE

The debate on the problem of truth and lies in architecture probably dates back to the beginnings of man-made construction activities. The question about the first lie in space may be interesting. Was it about the discrepancy of its external form with function and design? Or maybe disharmony of the external form of the object and its interior. The history of architecture provides continuous examples of these contradictions. Human vanity, and the resulting desire to show yourself better than in reality, could have commanded an incomparably more attractive external form of architecture. And vice versa – an ascetic, often defensive form, isolating space from the environment, could hide a wealth of forms.

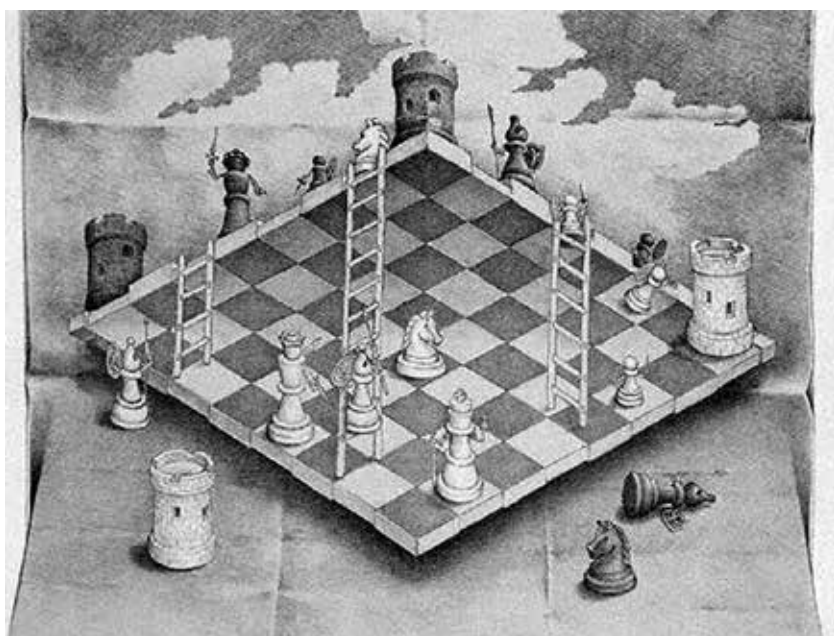
In the discourse on the assessment of architecture, a breach from the principles that define design could be treated as a departure from the truth, including balance: durability (*firmitas*), utility (*utilitas*) and beauty (*venustas*). Politics and money have always been a threat to this raw food triad, defining architecture for centuries. The more democratic the system, the more open, logical, balanced shaping of space. And vice versa. The threats to Vitruvius were probably similar. Nowadays, for both the creator and recipient of architecture, they seem to be more severely felt. So, was the cave and the first huts the most honest architecture?

An example of harmless balancing between truth and falsehood in architecture has always been spatial illusions exploiting the imperfections of human sight. Swiss painter Sandro del Prete, author of the famous lithograph *Folded chessboard* notes that: “Everything we see can be seen in another way. Therefore, I ask myself; isn’t everything an illusion anyway? Reality is but a question of perception, and perception inevitably varies according to one’s viewpoint. Different viewpoints lead to different dimensions”¹ (Ill. 1). Spatial illusions have been known for at least two and a half millennia. All the preserved objects on the Athenian Acropolis were consciously erected using spatial illusion, thanks to which massive stone buildings seem lighter than if they were built without the knowledge of optics. Probably, the first artist to use spatial illusion and a linear perspective was Agatarchos of Samos (490–415 B.C.), a Greek painter and stage designer in the theater of Aeschylus. Spatial illusions were also used in later centuries. In the Milan church of San Spirito, Donato Bramante designed an apse with a painted perspective, which is one of the first examples of *trompe l’oeil* in the history of art (Ill. 2). The apse, due to the Via Falcone road behind the church, could have been only 90 cm deep. The spatial illusion in the Baroque era reached its apogee, combining architecture, sculpture and painting.

¹ Sandro del Prete, *Illusoria*, Benteli, Bern 1987, also: Sandro del Prete, *Illusion and Reality* [in:] D. Schattschneider, M. Emmer (eds.), *M.C. Escher’s legacy: a centennial celebration*, Springer, Berlin 2003, pp. 125–129.



III. 1. The Bramante's perspective illusion choir viewed from the nave and from the west transept, Church of Santa Maria at San Satiro, Milan, author's photo, 2016



III. 2. Sandro del Prete, *Folded Chess Set*, 1983, stone lithography, source: <https://www.depop.com/products/marikomichael-sandro-del-prete-the-warped-chessboard> (access: 14.6.2020)

Architecture from ancient times, as a physical, tangible object in space, materialized in space, as a manifestation of a specific idea or trend, usually first articulated in literature, painting and sculpture. The early phase of each of the conventional currents brought a breath of freshness, innovation and truth. On the other hand, the decline of each period is usually associated with the exhaustion of ideas and the undermining of established views. The new trend, devaluing the existing reality, assessed it in terms of secondary, “passe”, falsehood, lie. So, the history of art in one layer is an alternating continuity of truth and lies. Modern art pioneers’ manifestos radically denied all historicalisms – “Ornament is a crime!”² Architecture in the denominator had honesty, truth, improved human existence, building the perfect community of residents. Undoubtedly, the ideas were right. Nevertheless, later trends criticized the distortions of modernism mainly for dehumanizing architecture. The crowding of entire societies into large-panel construction contributed to the breaking of interpersonal relationships and the development of social pathologies. Functional zoning in city planning has fundamentally violated their natural, sustainable development. Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*³ and Robert Venturi in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*⁴ accused modernism of lack of expression and soullessness.

Or was the first lie about borrowing new forms not known in traditionally grounded shaping of space? Foreign influences could be voluntary or forced. It may be interesting to study the motivations, methods and effects of these activities. New forms of architecture and organization of space brought in by invaders from the perspective of victims of aggression were usually perceived as lying, false. However, from the aggressor’s perspective – the new, including architecture, has always been true (and of course, in the view of the aggressor it was a blessing for the victims of the crusades, who were unaware of what lie they have lived so far). A classic example of antinomy. The discourse in this matter can lead to surprising, contradictory conclusions.

Baroque style in Latin America, implemented by Spanish and Portuguese conquistadors, was alien to local societies was a kind of hypocrisy. The new architecture also changed their religion, culture and social order. Processed on new ground forms and the use of local material has become an inseparable element of the new space. Like the Palladian style, grafted onto all continents except Antarctica, which mainly because of its representativeness and universality, is still being replicated.

Nowadays, frequent copying of the most famous works of architecture as well as entire urban assumptions can hardly be regarded as other than lying. The implementation of plagiarism in historical space irreversibly transforms it, often destroying valuable cultural heritage. The new shaping of space in the Arab Emirates and some Asian countries seems to lack legitimacy of authenticity. Today, most of the new buildings erected there are rated in the category of construction, not architecture. It is also an example of implementing new architecture on the domestic soil, this time as an element of ennoblement and at the same time unfairly covering one’s own cultural heritage. However, it should be presumed that in the future the new shaping of space and generated phenomena will go down in the history of architecture.

² A. Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays (Studies in Austrian Literature, Culture, and Thought. Translation Series)*, Ariadne Press, Riverside 1998.

³ J. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Random House, New York 1961.

⁴ R. Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1966.

3. PLACE, ACTORS, MOTIVATIONS AND METHODS

The place for a kind of “game” of truth and lie can be both material and, more often, immaterial space. Increasingly, we observe the penetration of both spaces in which their actors move – creators and recipients of art, having specific motivations and using specific methods of their implementation.

Material space can include an architectural and urban scale, as well as a wider landscape. In particular, the area undergoing rapid, uncontrolled transformation may be at risk. A classic example was the industrial revolution and the related not only degradation of space, but also social order. Evaluation of space transformations from the recent past may indicate space falsification, often irreversibly. Ignoring the experience of shaping space nowadays results not only in local disasters, but systematically destroys our planet. Placing burdensome industry in seemingly distant countries, mainly Asian, has an impact on the climate of the whole world. Nowadays, the transformation field, lying under the centuries-old DNA code of cities, are even areas subject to the processes of economic, social and cultural gentrification.

The intangible area of transformation increasingly embraces more and more virtual reality. Technological progress directly affects the artist, defining today, as never before, the profession of architect. For the client the LEED or BREAM certificate may be more important (and more often it is). Will design based on technical parameters leave room for a design that takes into account tradition and spatial context? If not, the architect profession may not be needed. The global requirement to use BIM (Building Information Modeling) software inevitably changes space. Increasingly restricted access to software, in conjunction with legislation marginalizing the copyrights of an architect, will obviously limit the field of architectural creation. Access to a computer, on the one hand, opened up almost unlimited creative possibilities, while clearly setting boundary conditions. Like technological progress, it made humanity dependent on the most popular social medium.

The creation of a hypocritical space has always had its actors: politicians, developers, architects and society. Money as a driving force of development, including architecture, fundamentally determined the shape of space. Traces in the space of authoritarian power are objects and spaces alien to the human scale designed to satisfy specific ambitions (*vide*: architecture of the Third Reich, socialist realism). These are spaces that define power and society in specific relationships. Democracies, from ancient to modern, save space in a more or less sustainable way. The margin of creative freedom is open to sources of identity and stylistic pluralism. On the other hand, the poor quality of architecture and urban planning, as well as landscapes in which environmental degradation occurs more often, is a reminder of weak authority, often functioning in the reality of ineffective legislation.

4. LIE ON BORDERS WITH HISTORICAL TISSUE

Along with the civilization development, we collect an increasing amount of resources of objects and complexes of historical objects. In addition to methodological, technological and material aspects, the survival and preservation of the most valuable material cultural heritage will always be determined by funds and ideas for the optimal adaptation of the monument to a new function. The driving force behind actions aimed at “saving a monument” is usually politics and money. However, the greatest risk of space deformation is the combination of

politics and money with the uncontrollable man's ego. Particularly tempting is the attempt to reconstruct historical objects and complexes that remain intact in their original form.

In the years 1899–1905, Sir Arthur Evans conducted archaeological excavations on an extensive scale at the Knossos palace complex in Crete and attempted to reconstruct it. Particularly disputable was the use of concrete on a large scale, in which a significant part of the preserved artifacts was embedded. Also in concrete, molds imitating original wooden constructions were cast. Therefore, visitors cannot experience an authentic monument in the form of ruins preserved for hundreds of years, but the reconstruction carried out according to Evans's personal ideas. Over the decades, this hypocrisy of space has become established in social consciousness so much that we cannot imagine the Knossos Palace otherwise than arranged according to Evans's narrative (Ill. 3).

In the year 2000, a controversial decision was made to rebuild the ruins of the royal castle in Bobolice (Ill. 4). The castle, belonging to the group of strongholds called the Eagle Nests, was built in the mid-fourteenth century. It has remained in ruins for the last three hundred years. In the year 2011, despite the lack of any plans, drawings or sketches, the castle was rebuilt. A plaque was placed in front of the entrance informing in one breath about the builders – King of Poland Kazimierz Wielki and Senator Jarosław Wacław Lasecki. The reconstruction of the castle in a form that we can mostly guess can be an incentive for other similar investment activities. The participants of the undoubted hypocrisy of the space, in addition to the initiator and sponsor of the investment, were specific architects, art conservators and conservation services.

An analysis of historical objects nominated in this year's "Modernization of the Year & Construction of the 21st Century" competition indicates that one of the "conservation methods" may be the demolition of a monument and its reconstruction. An example of such hypocrisy of the space can be "modernization of the barn building with modern educational facilities in the tourist and catering area of the Upper Secondary School Complex in Biedrzychowice"⁵ designed by MSc. Peter Palatinus (Palatinus International Design). The modernization of the facility consisted of its almost complete demolition and reconstruction in a form similar to the original. An analysis of photographic documentation indicates the abandonment of historical technologies, the use of modern materials and the rescaling of original architectural detail. This is one of the many examples of deformations of historic buildings that lack proper conservation protection. Accepting methods that ignore knowledge and conservation doctrines, and even more so distinguishing them, is an element of hypocrisy of space.

Space falsification can have different effects. In Poland, a vivid example of hypocrisy of space are the transformations of architectural and urban tissue in the so-called (reclaimed after 1945) Recovered Territories. The centuries-old continuity in shaping space, taking into account the context of the place, tradition, minimizing the nuisance of industry, threats to nature and many other factors, has been interrupted here. These transformations were complemented by further transformations after 1989, made possible by ineffective planning legislation or the lack thereof. Space planning without local land use plans has resulted in

⁵ *Modernizacja budynku stodoły na nowoczesne zaplecze kształcenia w obszarze turystyczno gastronomicznym Zespół Szkół Ponadgimnazjalnych w Biedrzychowicach*, <http://www.modernizacjaroku.org.pl/pl/edition/1691/object/1954/modernizacja-budynku-stodoly-na-nowoczesne-zaplecze-ksztalcenia-w-obszarze> (access: 14.06.2020).

many negative phenomena, including shaping low quality spaces. This condition, due to the relatively small coverage of the country with local spatial development plans, is still being strengthened. It is a hypocrisy of space in the majesty of law. Barometer of the scale of these phenomena can be even compare to the practice of shaping space in the Czech Republic.



III. 3. Concrete entablature and column head detail, Knossos Palace, Crete, author's photo, 2009



III. 4. Zamek w Bobolicach, author's photo, 2013

There can be many sources of refraction. In Poland, instilling lies begins almost unknowingly at the level of pre-school and school education. Neglect in native art education, marginalized against the background of education of Western European and Scandinavian countries, is a haven for future manipulations and distortions in space. The lack of good models

translates into acceptance of a culturally alien, non-functional space that devastates not only the space itself, but also the natural environment and social relations.

5. CONCLUSION

Today, aesthetic reflection at the level of falsehood and lies is still present. Architecture can appeal to the recipient as true or vice versa. The same work, assessed by different recipients, can be received radically differently. In addition, today's meaning of truth or lies in the future may take on a different meaning. Despite the contemporary assessment of interference in historical tissue (if not negative, then controversial), in the long run, today's actions may be perceived differently. A sharp definition of truth and lies in art can therefore be fluid and difficult. Often, in addition to the substantive aspects, temporary tastes and preferences may be more important. The concepts of truth and lies in the area of cultural heritage require special sensitivity, knowledge and responsibility. Our interventions may be irreversible. The introduction and use of untrue, false forms, symbols and meanings in architecture, urban planning and landscape can displace natural, rooted in tradition building space elements. The authenticity and quality of public space, which can be "good – real" or "bad – false" seems to be paramount here.

References

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Author's Note:

Piotr Opalka, Ph.D. Arch.

Architect (2000) and civil engineer (1995). Assistant professor at the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Applied Sciences in Nysa. Since 1994, he has been running the architectural studio "Archi-Concept". Head of the disciplinary court at the Opole Regional Chamber of Architects. Co-founder and member of the Polish Green Building Council. The scope of research includes protection of cultural heritage.

opalka1@o2.pl