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THE LINE BETWEEN TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD IN ARCHITECTURE

GRANICE POMIĘDZY PRAWDĄ A FAŁSZEM W ARCHITEKTURZE

Abstract

Architectural works, which have been created over the centuries and are still impressive to this day, were shaped on the basis of beauty patterns appropriate for their times. However, its essence is completely subjective, far from rigid rules and ways to proceed. Due to the strong commercialization of today's world, contemporary architects face a particularly tough dilemma. The challenge to design in accordance with their own beliefs is increasingly difficult. So where is the line between truth and falsehood in contemporary architecture? In order to stay on the market, is it necessary to compromise the "truth"?

Keywords: truth, beauty, aesthetics, utility, functionality, falsehood, disorder, disproportion, disharmony, randomness

Streszczenie

Powstające na przestrzeni wieków dzieła architektoniczne, które zachwycają po dziś dzień, kształtowane były w oparciu o adekwatne dla swych czasów wzorce piękna. Jego istota jest jednak całkowicie subiektywna, daleka od sztywnych reguł i sposobów postępowania. Z uwagi na silne skomercjalizowanie dzisiejszego świata współcześni architekci stają przed szczególnie trudnym dylematem. Coraz większym wyzwaniem jest projektowanie w zgodzie z własnymi przekonaniami. Gdzie zatem leży granica pomiędzy prawdą a fałszem we współczesnej architekturze? Czy aby utrzymać się na rynku, należy sprzeniewierzyć się „prawdzie”?

Słowa kluczowe: prawda, piękno, estetyka, użyteczność, funkcjonalizm, fałsz, nieład, dysproporcja, dysharmonia, przypadkowość

*And from the poems that were written only those live
that did not fear to become the truth or music.*

Jan Twardowski

The search for truth in architecture ought to start from realizing the role it plays in the life of every human being. Architects are the creators of living space, they create the scenery which is the background of the human fate. Their task is to act for the benefit of the user. To quote Alexander Franta "Without architecture there is no life. [...] even if we want to hide in deep backwoods, we will have to build ourselves a hut or an igloo or arrange a cave. Without architecture, we will perish."¹ The realization of this reveals the psychological aspect of architecture,

¹ F. Springer, *Księga zachwytów*, Wydawnictwo Książkowe Agora SA, Warszawa 2014, p. 3.

according to which it should shape positive emotions in humans. Given the above arguments, it may seem that architects should only work in the service of user functionality.

However, it is impossible to ignore the fact that architecture is undeniably a field of art. Already in ancient times, creators were required to make architectural works evoke and fuel the viewers' sense of beauty and aesthetics. Although the patterns have been changing strongly over the years, there is a constant desire to achieve balanced proportions, and consequently to produce avant-garde and unique works. Despite the differences in the subjective perception of beauty by individuals, common aspects determining the success of the work can be distinguished. So, what makes the overwhelming majority of the reality around us attack with its inconsistency?

"In the simplest sense, beauty is associated with tranquility. It means harmony, no contrasts, no drama. This applies both to our everyday life, which is beautiful if it is tranquil, and to the perception of space."² As statistical studies show, the aesthetic value is on the tenth position of the list of criteria that customers use when selecting an architect. One would therefore expect that an experienced architect with knowledge supported by years of study would be trusted by the client. However, very often the relationship is completely different. The architect is under pressure from the investor, meeting their expectations, acting against their beliefs. This is how "false" architecture is born.

At this point, it is worth to quote the statement of the Grand Master – Mies van der Rohe:

Never talk to a client about architecture. Talk to him about his children. It is a very simple policy. He will not understand most of the time what you have to say about architecture. An architect of ability should be able to tell the client what he wants. Most of the time the client never knows what he wants. He may have, of course, very interesting ideas, but I am not used to saying that these ideas are very thoughtless. People who aren't familiar with architecture don't know what's possible and what's not.³

This statement is quite radical, but it's hard not to agree that it's still valid and true.

There is no doubt that the customer must be treated with due respect. A great deal of patience is essential. An architect is a profession with special responsibility, has a kind of mission and should be aware of the duty to shape a better space. When the investor is going in the wrong direction, presenting contradictory visions, he cannot flow with the current but should turn back taking his client with him.

One can get the impression that the more difficult the relationship, the better the result. The discussion forces us to think, develop concepts, and create new, unusual solutions.

An excellent example of climbing to the heights of creativity in the face of a difficult client is the By the Way House of Robert Konieczny. As the author himself says, the client drew him a plan of the house – a design he expected. Moreover, the drawing depicted a projection of the building in which he lived and where the conversation took place. Naturally, the architect refused to accept the order, claiming that it was not a task for him, but the man did not give up.

The plot on which the building was to be located, although beautiful, posed another problem – it lacked the access road. As it turned out later, however, this aspect was transformed

² S. Kuryłowicz, *Pejzaż nie byle jaki* [in:] Tygodnik Powszechny, 12.05.2007, www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl (access: 6.9.2020).

³ V. Watson, *Never talk to your client about architecture*, The Journal of Architecture, 2002, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 313–317, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1360236032000040811?journalCode=rjar20> (access: 6.9.2020).

into an advantage, making it the leading theme of the project. The whole is made up of a ribbon containing a functional layout adapted to the needs of users. All the drawbacks were effectively covered by this element, and also made the house merge perfectly with its surroundings. Located in the middle of the communication path connecting water and land, it seems to complement the picturesque landscape of the area.

... Let's wrap this ugly, detached from the garden house to hide it ... The wrapped road creates ceilings, roof, and walls of the building, and in the middle remains this dream functional arrangement. We have one theme that sets the whole. By the Way House.⁴

Looking at the building, it is hard to believe that the accepted architectural concept was based on the necessity of "hiding" something.

Certainly, there are significant differences in the perception of an architectural object by the creator, the user, and an outside viewer. This difference is anchored in a number of associations resulting from coded cultural patterns. Sensitivity to beauty also plays a decisive role. The richness of experience shapes the scale of assessments and allows them to assign known terms. But what happens when an architect becomes his boss? One can get the impression that like an unrestrained vision of the creator, it should raise him to the heights and lead to the pure truth in architecture.

A good example of a freely depicted thought is Peter Cody's Bohermore House. This building resembles an architectural sculpture, and its individual parts do not even seem to connect from certain perspectives. The whole composition is made up of five single-story cubes lying at right angles. They are arranged alternately on opposite sides of the axis. This axis constitutes the internal communication between the individual rooms in the building, and the spaces between the volumes have become terraces.

The degree of functionality of the building is surprising. Quite expansive actions within the form did not affect its usability. The relationship that was created with the surroundings of the house is also extremely important. As the author himself stated: "For people, I build suburban houses, which are scaled and detached from their setting. I felt a strong need to build a house with architecture sensitive to the surrounding landscape". Without a doubt, this architect is aware of how important it is to create a proper relation between the building and its surroundings. However, one can guess that in the case of most clients it would be difficult to count on the understanding and full confidence in the realization of this unusual concept. The strength of the vision of traditional construction anchored in the human mind makes it difficult for them to even think about going beyond the scheme.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's observation is excellent: "The difference between a good and a poor architect is that the poor architect succumbs to every temptation and the good one resists it."⁵ It is difficult to disagree with him because nowadays it is increasingly common that giving another person false applause is a more profitable solution than serving the truth. The world around us, however, is not a utopia, but a struggle with the brutality of everyday life. The book by Piotr Sarzyński "Wrzask w przestrzeni" (Scream in space) perfectly illustrates the problem of quality of architecture. The title word "scream" is crucial here. The narcissistic approach of an architect, and more often than not of an investor, is the result

⁴ Dom po drodze [in:] KWK PROMES, <https://www.kwkpromes.pl/dom-po-drodze/151> (access: 6.9.2020).

⁵ Pejzaż nie byle jaki [in:] Sztuka architektury, <https://sztuka-architektury.pl/article/4468/pejzaz-nie-by-le-jaki> (access: 6.9.2020).

of a building that seems to “scream” to the viewer, and when you put several such objects together, you can easily notice that each of them does it on a different tone. As a result of the desire to demonstrate “class” and wealth, a huge disharmony in space is created. The lack of cooperation is very often built on contempt for what is around.

There is no denying that architects who serve the truth and thus make their mark on the pages of history are above all brave people. Without taking the risk, it is difficult to realize a memorable work. In creativity, changeability, lack of attachment to any schemes, and the need for permanent search are particularly important. A good architect must understand how important it is for him to live in harmony with change because it is the driving force behind the idea. The architectural “ideal” is the result of constantly starting again and again.

The innovative approach in form and design is illustrated by a concept which, despite being created more than forty years ago, still seems to be up to date and extremely inspiring. The experimental house near Warsaw was designed by Jan Szpakowicz in the ‘60s and illustrates the designer’s radical approach to space creation. The concept was born out of the desire to live in a part of the forest, without being separated by a structure. It involves the creation of nine blocks connected by ceilings. The whole consists of a house together with a space open to the landscape. Although there are some quite significant drawbacks, the architect acted according to an idea to which he remained faithful. The cognitive creation of space, the main assumption of which was to create a relationship between what is open and what is closed, influenced the definition of the object’s character. The building can also be treated as an answer to the then standardized mass residential buildings in Poland.

Another, more contemporary, significant example of the demonstration of courage by an architect, which resulted in the birth of true architecture is the Mieczysław Karłowicz Philharmonic in Szczecin. The concept was selected based on competition and the winner was the Catalan studio Estudio Barozzi Veiga. The plot of land located at the intersection of Malopolska and Matejki streets was filled with a sculpted white block of extremely economical means of expression. It seems that it is a cut block of ice. The whole structure gives the impression of a temporary experiment as if a raw model was set on the layout of the city temporarily, to check the relation and context.

Only a deeper analysis leads us to find clear and very purposeful connections. The frayed roof corresponds to the historic buildings of the area, is a tribute to the typical post-German architecture of the city. Undoubtedly, there is also a strong reference to the function of the object. Multiplication, movement, and dynamics of the body reflect the music that resounds inside.

No wonder that the object aroused numerous controversies among the residents of Szczecin. Many accused it of looking like a “corrugated metal barrack.” Although, at first sight, it may seem that it was made of this material, they could not be more wrong. The facade of the object is semi-transparent, thanks to which it can be illuminated in different colors, depending on the occasion.

Although not everyone will be fond of this building, it will surely write itself down in the pages of history as an icon of Polish architecture. It is not difficult to notice that people need to mature into some solutions in space, get used to them in order to appreciate them, and this building certainly does not let itself be forgotten. It attracts the viewer’s eyesight with magnetizing power and makes them reflect. It acts with such force that one can also say that it “shouts.” In this case, however, it happens in such a tone that it is not a voice opposing the tissue in which it is placed, but it is connected with it.

Without a doubt, the truth about architecture is also defined by the use of appropriate materials. The properties of a material determine the sense of the matter. Everything that

is artificial/pretended is a lie. The combination of the material and the solid in the creative process gives the idea of formal final character, and effective synthesis of the matter is responsible for the identification of the object. It is becoming common to believe that concrete has been transformed into a synonym of aesthetic transformations in contemporary architecture. Concrete, unlike stone, does not have a “permanent” form; it is therefore completely united with the structure it defines. It has the privilege of forming the idea it expresses.

You must know the nature of concrete, what it really wants to be. Concrete wants to be granite, but it will never fully become it. The reinforcing bars play the role of a secret creator which makes this so-called cast stone appear to be a wonderful product of the human mind [...] What concrete wants to be: the product of the human mind.⁶

The lack of a permanent definition of the matter of concrete is therefore its greatest advantage.

Therefore, the above arguments allow us to conclude that there is no indication that concrete could be considered as a manifestation of falsehood in the object it represents. The quintessence of the work of truth in the architecture, of which concrete has become the carrier, is the monastery of Sainte-Marie de la Tourette by Le Corbusier. The sincerity and simplicity of the tools express the deepest sense of form. “Only the truth is beautiful. In architecture, truth is the result of a calculation made to satisfy a necessity with the materials provided”⁷. The plasticity of the expression of the structure is unquestionably exemplary for this object. The metaphysical dimension of the project is also clear – the lifting of the structure above the ground manifests the rejection of what is human, the form is a perfect reflection of its function.

Undoubtedly, the truth expressed in concrete can also be found in the architecture of the contemporary Master, Tadao Ando. Through the most basic geometric forms, he realizes the highest level objects. His UNESCO Meditation Space in Paris is a perfect example. Although the scale of the object is small, the building seems monumental. The cylindrical form creates a feeling of infinity. As Dariusz Kozłowski stated, the architecture is built here using “sensual quality reinforced concrete structures.”⁸ The walls of this building are devoid of decoration and detail. This role in this case is played by emptiness. Additional realism is revealed by the lines created by dividing the formwork, as well as by the assembly traces. Nothing in this project is pretended.

The modern world, which is in a constant rush, makes it necessary for people to choose between good and evil. It is also incredibly tangible for the architectural profession. The role it plays in society, although often underestimated, is nevertheless extremely important. Significant responsibility comes with this profession because it is inseparable from the strong influence it has on human life. Due to the fact that architecture is also art, the emphasis must be placed not only on functionality but also on the element of beauty. Service to the user should therefore be supported not only by good spatial planning but also by the selection of appropriate and balanced means of expression and proportions. Undoubtedly, it can be concluded that only courage in action and not giving in to the temptation of a strongly commercialized world are the guarantors allowing finding the truth in creating architectural works.

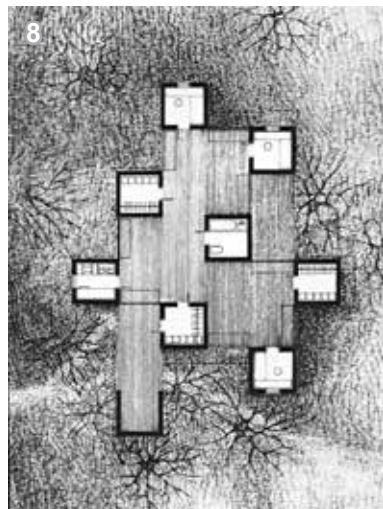
⁶ R. McCatrer, *Louis Kahn and Nature of Concrete*, Concrete International, 2009, vol. 31, no. 12, pp. 26–33.

⁷ N. Pevsner, *Pionierzy współczesności*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1978, p. 180.

⁸ D. Kozłowski, *O naturze betonu – czyli idee, metafory i abstrakcje* [in:] D. Kozłowski (ed.), *Architektura betonowa*, Polski Cement, Kraków 2001, p. 11.



- III. 1. By the Way House, Central Poland, source: <https://sztuka-architektury.pl/article/11469/dom-po-drodze-nowa-realizacja-architektoniczna-roberta-koniecznego> (access: 7.9.2020)
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- III. 3. Bohermore House, Graiguenamanagh, Ireland, source: <https://www.archdaily.com/112442/house-in-bohermore-boyd-cody-architects/5007734028ba0d4148002470-house-in-bohermore-boyd-cody-architects-image> (access: 7.9.2020)
- III. 4. Bohermore House, Graiguenamanagh, Ireland, source: https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/pressland-cms/cache/___original___/rz/6988488-bohermore-house-boyd-cody-architects.jpeg (access: 7.9.2020)



- Ill. 5. Philharmonic Hall, Szczecin, Poland, source: <https://archello.com/story/45700/attachments/photos-videos/1> (access: 7.9.2020)
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- Ill. 7. Jan Szpakowicz House in Zalesie Dolne, Poland, source: <https://przekroj.pl/public/upload/articles/hero/5d778e7522723.jpg?1568116424> (access: 7.9.2020)
- Ill. 8. Jan Szpakowicz House in Zalesie Dolne, Poland, source: <https://przekroj.pl/public/upload/articles/media/medium/5d778e7606bad.jpg?1568116342> (access: 7.9.2020)



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