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## ANTI-MONUMENT IN CITY ARCHITECTURE – CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN THE SACRAL ARCHITECTURE IN METROPOLISES

### ANTY-MONUMENT W ARCHITEKTURZE MIASTA – WSPÓŁCZESNE TENDENCJE KSZTAŁTOWANIA ARCHITEKTURY SAKRALNEJ W METROPOLIACH

#### Abstract

Architecture expresses the spirit of a given era. For centuries, cathedrals, bell towers, towers and domes of churches have symbolically dominated the silhouettes of cities, bearing the characteristics of monuments. It seems that nowadays this tendency is undergoing a thorough transformation. The text analyzes the thesis that new sacral buildings in cities bear the features of an “anti-monument”. Research based on selected projects of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, is an attempt to tackle this phenomenon. Their results indicate that in some developed countries one can observe architectural trends that may be placed within the so-called “anti-monumental architecture”.

*Keywords: anti-monument, anti-monumentalism in architecture, anti-monumental architecture, monument*

#### Streszczenie

Architektura wyraża ducha danej epoki. Przez wieki katedry, dzwonnice, wieże czy kopuły kościołów symbolicznie górowały nad sylwetkami miast, nosząc cechy monumentów. Wydaje się, że współcześnie ta tendencja ulega gruntownym przeobrażeniom. W tekście poddawana analizie jest teza, iż nowe realizacje sakralne w metropoliach noszą znamiona „anty-monumentu”. Badania na podstawie wybranych realizacji końca XX i początku XXI wieku stanowią próbę opisanego tego fenomenu. Ich wynik wskazuje, iż w części krajów rozwiniętych można zaobserwować tendencje projektowe wpisujące się w nurt tzw. architektury anty-monumentalnej.

*Słowa kluczowe: anti-monument, anti-monumentalizm w architekturze, architektura anty-monumentalna, monument*

### 1. INTRODUCTION. THE SOUND OF AN ERA

Architecture is one of those fields that uniquely reflect the spirit of a given era. It expresses social, civilizational and ideological evolutions. The art of building responds to changes in

human life (e.g. new needs), in the world (e.g. climate changes) and new trends or tendencies (in fashion, design, etc.). The consecutive epochs provided new materials, building typologies and theories, and technical progress expressed, among other things, in increasing engineering and technological possibilities, directed and is still directing architecture on new tracks. “The best work, like all good architecture, shows the basic temper of the times and, as Ruskin said, judges its character”<sup>1</sup> – notes Charles Jencks, and Adolf Loos would add: “People of those times were in harmony with the architecture of their Times”<sup>2</sup>.

Art, which includes architecture, is recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as “the noblest activities of man’s genius”<sup>3</sup>. In its history, the solutions used in sacral buildings often had a precursory character and emanated on the style of a given era<sup>4</sup>. For centuries, characteristic church towers, slender bell towers, sloping roofs of churches, and impressive domes of cathedrals dominated the silhouettes of cities. Designed and erected as monuments, they were most often located in key locations. They symbolically dominated the surrounding buildings.

It seems that nowadays the aforementioned tendency to build sacral buildings in many metropolises is undergoing a thorough transformation. Observing the cathedrals, churches, or chapels erected today, one can get the impression that the role of the Church in directing art onto new tracks has dramatically decreased in the last decades, and the alphabet of architecture used by artists has been transformed. In this paper, the thesis is analyzed that among contemporary projects and implementations of Roman Catholic sacral architecture in metropolises of developed countries, one can distinguish those that bear the features of “anti-monument”. Research based on the implementation of the late 20th and early 21st centuries and the literature query are an attempt to answer the above issue. Selected sacral realizations – such as a parish chapel, a church, or a cathedral – were analyzed in terms of features attributed to anti-monuments.

## 2. MONUMENT IN THE CITY

Since the dawn of time, there has been a need in man to commemorate the most important events, to highlight significant places, or to expose what represents the most important values in life, including faith. Using the form of a monument, the above was articulated. Presumably, such a monument constituted an integral component of every city – a kind of dominant of the place. The monument gives meaning to the location. Its presence signals abiding in a place of a special character. The task of the monument is to remind about something important, or to admonish people. In sacral architecture, its role is to draw attention to what is most important for believers. It can be a sacral building – such as the soaring Cologne Cathedral,

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<sup>1</sup> C. Jencks, *The Iconic Building: The Power of Enigma*, Frances Lincoln, Londyn 2005, p. 7. All quotations from foreign publications, unless otherwise indicated, are provided by the author in his own translation.

<sup>2</sup> A. Loos, *Architektura, 1910* [in:] *Ornament i zbrodnia. Eseje wybrane*, Centrum Architektury, Tarnów–Warszawa 2013, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup> The Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, Rome 1963, n. 122.

<sup>4</sup> Such groundbreaking and precedent-setting ideas and innovative measures include, for example, the pendentive dome used for the first time in the monumental and majestic Hagia Sophia basilica.

a majestic sanctuary – Mont Saint-Michel in Normandy, a slender bell tower – St. Mark in Venice, or the tomb of the Brion family in San Vito di Altivole, designed by Carlo Scarpa, with a profound force of impact.

The term *monumentalism* is associated with the quality of something that is considered monumental<sup>5</sup>. And the term *monumental architecture* (also sacral) is attributed to the characteristics of architecture “of great size”, “of lasting value and great importance for culture”, having monumental features, “full of solemnity and sublimity”<sup>6</sup>. What is worth noting, the Latin term *monumentum* refers rather to the memory itself, and in architecture to a monument, tomb or building erected in memory<sup>7</sup>, rather than what is commonly attributed to the meaning of a monumental building. Not every large building automatically becomes a monument. Louis Kahn, many of whose works are attributed to monumentalism (e.g. the Unitarian Church in Rochester, USA, or the building of the National Assembly in Dhaka, Bangladesh), is fully aware of its mysterious character. He states: “Monumentality is enigmatic. It cannot be intentionally created. Neither the finest material nor the most advanced technology need enter a work of monumental character”<sup>8</sup>.

## 2. AN ERA OF TRANSFORMATION

On the pages of the history of architecture mainly objects of monumental architecture got recorded – primarily the places of religious cult and the residencies of rulers. Until the eighteenth century, theories and treatises on architecture covered almost exclusively these buildings. No one paid much attention to the other areas. The Great Theory<sup>9</sup> of Beauty, with various modifications, was considered a valid and leading concept until the eighteenth century. At that time, it began to come to an end, under the pressure of empiricist currents in philosophy on the one hand, and Romantic currents in art on the other<sup>10</sup>. Subjectivist theories and concepts such as “taste”, “imagination” and “feeling” appear more and more often, which – as Umberto Eco points out – allow us to better understand how the new concept of beauty was created<sup>11</sup>.

The 20th century brings to the world of art and architecture innovative trends that often undermine the existing canons and archetypes of buildings. When asked what actually constitutes the deepest essence (difference) of the current and former culture, Romano Guardini will answer that it is a new attitude towards nature. He calls this process “the dissolution of

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<sup>5</sup> Entry: *monumentalizm* [in:] S. Dubisz (ed.), *Uniwersalny słownik języka polskiego*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2003,

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, entry: *monumentalny*.

<sup>7</sup> J. Pieńkos (ed.), *Słownik łacińsko-polski*, Wydawnictwo Prawnicze, Warszawa 1996, entry: *monumentum*.

<sup>8</sup> K. Frampton, *Modern architecture. A critical history*, Thames and Hudson, London 1985, p. 240.

<sup>9</sup> The Great Theory – the theory of beauty initiated by the Pythagoreans consisting in the perfect structure, i.e. in the properties of numbers, their order, juxtaposition and proportions. The theory, with various modifications, is considered to be the longest in force in the history of art, lasting from the 5th century BC to the 18th century AD (...) – W. Tatarkiewicz, *O filozofii i sztuce*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1986, pp. 179–194.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 183.

<sup>11</sup> U. Eco, *Historia piękna*, Dom Wydawniczy REBIS, Poznań 2005, p. 275.

the old order”<sup>12</sup>. Buildings that have not received so much attention before (or such types of buildings that did not exist previously) gain monumental character – multi-family buildings, office buildings, museums, exhibition pavilions, boutiques. Tom Dyckhoff in his book *The Age of Spectacle: Adventures in Architecture and the 21st-Century City* (2017) notes that spectacular buildings have been built throughout human history, but never in such numbers as today. “Exaggeration used to be exceptional and reserved for special buildings, but now the exception has become the rule. Today we call such buildings ‘icons’”<sup>13</sup> – he outlines.

Probably in a modern metropolis such as New York or London there are more buildings bearing the characteristics of a monument (only in the sense of large size) than all those in ancient Rome put together. Taking into consideration the changes throughout history – we can clearly see that action generates a reaction. Something that once aspired to be an icon or a monument is now intentionally designed in a completely different way. Such a tendency can be observed today also among some works of sacral nature.

### 3. ANTI-MONUMENTALISM. TENDENCIES IN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

A relatively young and still valid phenomenon in art is worth noting – anti-monumentalism. “Anti-monumentalism”, more often called “counter-monumentalism”<sup>14</sup>, in literature, is a contemporary trend that questions many features of traditional monuments and memorial sites. It’s being recognized that traditional monuments “may only displace memory”, i.e. they reduce visitors to the role of simple spectators, instead of stimulating them to reflect on what has been commemorated<sup>15</sup>. The discourse on anti-monumentalism has been extensively described in the literature basing on the examples of memorial sculptures and memorial sites in Germany and Austria as an expression used by artists dealing with the memory of the Holocaust. Examples of anti-monumentalism include: The “disappearing” over the time Monument Against Fascism by Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz (*Mahnmal gegen Faschismus*, 1986, Hamburg, Germany). The figure who is credited with coining the term “counter-monument” at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s is James E. Young. According to Young, an anti-monument is “Ethically certain of their duty to remember, but aesthetically skeptical of the assumptions underpinning traditional memorial forms”<sup>16</sup>.

According to Stevens, Franck, and Fazakerley, the elements that anti-monumentalism questions in relation to the traditional monument include five aspects: subject (i.e. expressing

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<sup>12</sup> R. Guardini, *Listy znad jeziora Como*, Narodowy Instytut Architektury i Urbanistyki, Warszawa 2021, p. 80. (English translation from Polish by B. Skrzyszewska).

<sup>13</sup> T. Dyckhoff, *Epoka spektaklu. Perypetie architektury i miasta XXI wieku*, Karakter, Kraków 2018, pp. 18–19. (English translation from Polish by B. Skrzyszewska).

<sup>14</sup> The term *anti-monument* is used interchangeably with terms such as *counter-monument*, *anti-monument*, *non-monument*, *anti-memorial*, etc. In order to ensure order and precision, the nomenclature of *anti-monument* and *anti-monumentalism* has been adopted for the purposes of this article.

<sup>15</sup> Á. Eröss, *Geografia (przeciw)pomnika: rola przestrzeni i przestrzenności w miejscu pamięci* [in:] M. Smolińska, E. Domanowska (ed.), *Rzeźba dzisiaj 4. Anty-pomnik. Nietradycyjne formy upamiętniania*, Centrum Rzeźby Polskiej w Orońsku, Orońsko 2020, p. 121.

<sup>16</sup> J.E. Young, *The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today*, “Critical Inquiry” 1992, vol. 18, no. 2, p. 272.

commonly overlooked events/people/ideas in a non-glorifying way), form (a non-traditional form that makes it difficult to interpret the work unambiguously), location (site – i.e. locating objects in non-obvious places, so that they would often remain invisible at first glance), visitor experience (i.e. changing the experience in contact with the work seriousness/distance/sublimity in favor of closeness/corporeality/lack of distance) and meaning (i.e., unlike traditional monuments, the interpretation of such a work is not obvious in reception)<sup>17</sup>. It should be noted that these criteria are complementary and not exclusive. Therefore, the sacral objects under analysis may show certain aspects in one or more dimensions.

### 3.1. HIDDEN PARISHES

One of the most expressive contemporary implementations, which can be attributed with the features of an anti-monument, is the new parish center with a chapel in Poznań (Ill. 1 and 2). The decision to locate it in a block of flats between an apartment sales office and a dentist's office is an unprecedented event in Poland. In 2022, a new Roman Catholic parish was established in one of the fastest-growing housing estates in Poznań – Polanka, also known as Łacina. It is located about two kilometers from the Poznań Market Square. Just behind the huge Posnania shopping center, in a six-story block of flats at Czesław Niemien Street, a ground floor commercial premises with an area of approximately 100 m<sup>2</sup> was rented from a private person; previously, there was a shop in it. The glazed display window, which is indistinguishable from the neighboring premises, has only a small neon sign “Jesus+us”, which reveals its presence to the fullest after sunset. Architects from the Bidermann+Wide architectural office in Poznań are responsible for the arrangement and interior design. Bidermann explains that the project consists of three parts: the *sacrum* with a chapel, the *profanum* with a social section serving the faithful, and a small zone separated by a curtain – with a kneeler and a confessional. In the first one there is a chapel with an altar, a tabernacle, a cross on the wall, a pulpit and seats. In the second zone, there is a living room with a sofa, a kitchenette with a coffee machine, a large table and a toilet adapted for people with disabilities and a changing table – everything to best serve the congregation. The whole place has been designed in the spirit of simplicity, taking into account natural (pine wood) and low-emission materials (e.g. zero-emission linoleum on the floor). The initiator of such a vision and undertaking is Father Radosław Rakowski, who considered building a community, not a building, as the most important thing. “The building is not the goal, it is there to shield us from the sun and rain, but the goal is the people who will come here, to talk to each other and share the Gospel”<sup>18</sup> – he explains. The space is to serve as a place of prayer, meetings, help and integration. Perhaps in the future the time will come to build a proper church, because the local spatial development plan of “Rataje-Łacina part A” envisions a space for a free-standing church on a plot classified as a “sacred service development area”. The anti-monumentalism of the chapel constituting the heart of the parish manifests itself in its location in a residential block with services, in its form and

<sup>17</sup> Q. Stevens, K.A. Franck, R. Fazakerley, *Counter-monuments: the anti-monumental and the dialogic*, “The Journal of Architecture” 2012, vol. 17, no. 6, pp. 951–972.

<sup>18</sup> J. Józefowicz, *W Poznaniu powstała kaplica w bloku. Po mszy na parafian czekają gorąca kawa i czekolada* [in:] *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Poznań, 4.09.2022, <https://poznan.wyborcza.pl/poznan/7,36001,28866231,w-poznaniu-powstala-kaplica-w-bloku-po-mszy-nich-na-parafian.html> (access: 20.06.2023). (English translation from Polish by B. Skrzyszewska).

meaning that do not hint on sacral functions, and in the experience of visitors, in a space of a “non-intimidating” nature.

### 3.2. BACKGROUND CHURCHES

When it comes to the latest sacral realization by the Italian studio TAMassociati in Viareggio (Italy), the motivations of the architects and clients may also exemplify anti-monumental tendencies in architecture. The new church of Resurrection (Ill. 3) of the Lord was built in 2016 in the Varignano district in place of the existing church, which was no longer to properly meet the parish and pastoral needs related to the celebration of the Eucharist. The current project is the result of an architectural competition organized by the Italian Episcopal Conference (IEC). IEC wanted to redefine the model of a sacred building that would adequately serve the legible transmission of the Gospel, taking into account environmental and social sustainability tendencies. According to the assumptions of the creators, the project was to avoid any kind of “monumental approach”<sup>19</sup>, which was considered as inappropriate to the place and its history. The new concept emphasizes openness and integration of the congregation. Despite the fact that the project has been designed for 400 worshipers and consists of a church with a large square, a parish section with numerous rooms, a garden and a bell tower, it is part of the design tendencies towards anti-monumental expression. Its dimensions (low shape and approx. 1,700 m<sup>2</sup> of usable area) are definitely lower than the surrounding buildings, from four- to six-story blocks of flats. The anti-monumental features should also include the fact that the project in its external appearance reduces religious symbolism, making the body of the church itself almost anonymous. Modernist form fits into the landscape of cubic buildings in the vicinity. Only the simple bell tower standing at the entrance indicates what kind of function we are dealing with. Many contemporary realizations of churches in cities are characterized by similar anti-monumental features. Among them could be mentioned i.a.: church of St. James de la Lande in Rennes (France) designed by Álvaro Siza Vieira, the church of Christ of the Hope of the World in Vienna designed by Heinz Tesar, or the church of Our Lady of Pentecost in the La Défense district of Paris designed by Franck Hammoutène.

### 3.3. CATHEDRALS OF PARADOXES

It would seem that the time of building cathedrals in Western Europe has passed, and for many they are only a sentimental memory. The architecture of these most important church buildings in the hierarchy is identified with objects of monumental character. Cathedral of the Resurrection (Ill. 4), erected in Évry near Paris, designed by Mario Botta, is full of paradoxes. It is the only one built in the 20th century in France and one of the few built in Europe at that time. It was erected in one of the satellite cities of Paris. In the last decade of the 20th century, an international architectural competition was organized for the development of the city center and the construction of the cathedral. Although, in terms of scale, the building designed by Botta could be attributed with the features of a monument, it becomes problematic when it comes to other aspects. The body of the cathedral

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<sup>19</sup> Author’s description of the project, S. Harrington (ed.), *Call for Architectural Best Practice Examples for Security by Design for Places of Worship*, Brussels 2023, p. 45, [https://soarproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/D6\\_3\\_Booklet\\_ArchitecturalBestPracticeExamples.pdf](https://soarproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/D6_3_Booklet_ArchitecturalBestPracticeExamples.pdf) (access: 10.06.2023).

itself consists of two cylinders inserted one into the other, cut at an angle of 45 degrees. The design of the Swiss architect, as in the case of his other buildings, is based on basic geometric figures – in this case circles. Thanks to this solution – in contrast to the traditional, longitudinal arrangement of cathedrals with several naves – the project is closer to the post-conciliar guidelines of spatial organization concentrating the worshippers closer to the altar. On the roof of the temple, around the skylight, 24 linden trees were planted. There are accusations against the building that if it were not for the information sign (and the metal cross crowning the whole thing), the building could resemble “a masonic headquarters, a crematorium or a theater, but never a church”<sup>20</sup>. Cezary Wąs negatively assesses that the cathedral in Évry can be “considered a work full of contradictions”, which “implements the concepts of local urban planners and state authorities to a greater extent than serves the worship of God”<sup>21</sup>. Its form and character is not similar to French historic cathedrals. While in the past analogous buildings were erected over the centuries, only seven years (1988–1995) passed from the first sketch to the consecration of the temple in Évry. The erection of a cathedral in secular France in modern times, and what is more, the co-financing of its construction by the Republic was an unprecedented event. Perhaps for this reason it is characterized by paradoxes. Certainly, despite its large scale, the cathedral in Évry is characterized by a non-traditional form, not identified with the cult buildings of the Western Christian circle. In addition, locating the only modern cathedral in France in a satellite city may amaze. All this makes it possible – ambiguously – to qualify the project as anti-monumental architecture. It seems that a similar accusation in terms of external form could be made against one of the largest cathedrals in the world – of Our Lady of the Angles in Los Angeles designed by Rafael Moneo (1996–2022).

#### 4. SUMMARY. BACK TO THE SOURCES

Anti-monumentalism is an important theory and tendency in the world of contemporary sculpture. Similar features can be attributed to some of the contemporary sacral buildings. Many cathedrals, basilicas, churches, church towers or bell towers, which in the past were “programmatically” characterized by a certain monumentalism, are now designed according to completely different patterns – in simplicity, restraint, modesty or concealment... “The monumental style as we remember it from the past no longer exists today”<sup>22</sup> – Kozłowski and Początko boldly note. The main features of anti-monumental architecture include the use of non-traditional form and meaning, non-obvious location and a different experience of the building’s architecture by visitors – an awe-inspiring distance gave way to closeness/corporeality/lack of distance/simplicity. The aforementioned tendency, which could be described as anti-monumental, takes place (most of all) in the so-called developed countries of Western civilization.

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<sup>20</sup> C. Wąs, *Antinomies of the contemporary sacred architecture = Antynomie współczesnej architektury sakralnej*, Muzeum Architektury, Wrocław 2008, p. 126. (English translation from Polish by B. Skrzyszewska).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> T. Kozłowski, M. Początko, *On monumentalism – the problem of style and stylishness in architecture = O monumentalizmie – problem stylu i stylowości w architekturze*, “Teka Komisji Urbanistyki i Architektury” 2021, vol. 49, p. 242.



It seems that the anti-monumental tendencies in sacral architecture reflect the spirit of the age. Perhaps it is just an attempt to tune in to the sound of the present times and the rhythm of modern man's life. By means of generalization, one can conclude that the factors having an impact on this question should include, e.g.: worldview changes (such as progressing secularization in many developed countries of Western civilization), changing the role of an investor/founder and patron of art and culture (from the Church, rulers and aristocracy to private and public investors, foundations or global corporations), new tendencies in art and architecture (e.g. minimalist tendencies), means of expression, new technological possibilities and typologies of buildings (high-rise buildings with which there is no competition in terms of scale), but also the attitude of the artists themselves. For many of them, art has ceased to be a means of expressing the Inexpressible<sup>23</sup>. Observing the retreat from the faith and the Church, Joseph Ratzinger (later Benedict XVI) in 1958 predicted: "From the crisis of today the Church of tomorrow will emerge – a Church that has lost much. It will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning. It will no longer be able to inhabit many of the edifices it built in its palmy days (...) [The process of crystallization and clarification] will make it [the Church] poor and cause it to become the Church of the meek (...)"<sup>24</sup>. The aforementioned "poor/meek Church" will probably become closer to the architecture of the anti-monumental trend, which will express its essence in this way. It should be remembered that for the first four centuries of Christianity, no grand buildings were erected, gathering rather in private houses adapted to the needs of Christian worship (*domus ecclesiae*). Perhaps the new trends are signs of a return to the origins of sorts...



Ill. 1. View of the chapel of the Jesus Name parish in the frontage of the block of flats in Poznań, Poland, proj. Bidermann+Wide, phot. Paweł Drętkiewicz, courtesy of Bidermann+Wide.

<sup>23</sup> J. Turbasa, *Ukryte piękno. Architektura współczesnych kościołów*, Towzystwo Więź, Warszawa 2018, p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> J. Ratzinger, Fragment of the lecture on Hessischer Rundfunk, broadcast on December 25, 1969, under the title: *Was heißt katholisch?* from *Die Kirche im Jahr 2000*; J. Ratzinger, *Wprowadzenie w chrześcijaństwo*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 1970, p. 145.





Ill. 2. Chapel of the Jesus Name parish in Poznań, Poland, proj. Bidermann+Wide, phot. Przemysław Turlej, courtesy of Bidermann+Wide.



Ill. 3. Church of Resurrection of the Lord in Viareggio, Italy, proj. Studio TAMassociati, phot. Andrea Avezzù, courtesy of Studio TAMassociati.



Ill. 4. Cathedral of the Resurrection in Évry, France, proj. Mario Botta Architetti, phot. Author.

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