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ARCHITECTURAL IMAGINATION – PLAY WITH FORM AND SPACE

ARCHITEKTONICZNA WYOBRAŹNIA – ZABAWA FORMĄ I PRZESTRZENIĄ

Abstract

Architecture as an artform is an expression of countless emotions, perceptions and feelings. It creates an image of a real form and space, which we, the recipients may not only admire, but also use. Through exposing the effects of play with shape, light, colour and detail, architecture draws on the achievements of new technologies that offer increasing opportunities to create architectural shape, taking diverse forms adapted to the prevailing trends and tendencies.

More and more visibly, architecture is turning towards nature, using principles of sustainable design and eco-technology; it surrenders to the elements of nature exhibited particularly clearly already in the Secession – the period in which floral motifs dominated both architectural details and painting, sculpture, and ceramics. Art Nouveau generated a new look at the ornamentation of architecture – its detail. Both in the past, as well as today, it is perceived as a distinct work of art – the effect of play with organic shapes, light and colour deciding on their craftsmanship and value.

Apart from the detail, the play in architecture is also facilitated by colour, sound and light, as well as interactive forms co-operating with the user.

Keywords: architecture, form, area, architectural vision, play of architecture

Streszczenie

Architektura jako rodzaj sztuki jest wyrazem niezliczonych emocji, wyobrażeń i uczuć. Tworzy obraz realnej formy i przestrzeni, którą my odbiorcy możemy nie tylko podziwiać, ale również użytkować. Architektura eksponując efekty gry kształtem, światłem, kolorem i detalem czerpie z osiągnięć nowych technologii, które stwarzają coraz większe możliwości w zakresie kształtowania formy architektonicznej przybierającej różnorodną postać dostosowaną do panujących trendów i tendencji.

Coraz wyraźniej architektura zwraca się ku naturze, wykorzystując zasady projektowania zrównoważonego i ecotechnologii; podporządkowuje się elementom przyrodniczym eksponowanym szczególnie wyraźnie już w secesji – w okresie, w którym motywy roślinne dominowały zarówno w detalu architektonicznym jak i malarstwie, rzeźbie, czy też ceramice. Secesja wygenerowała nowe spojrzenie na zdobnictwo architektury – jej detal. Zarówno w przeszłości jak i dziś jest on postrzegany jako odrębne dzieło sztuki – efekt zabawy organicznymi kształtami, światłem i kolorem decydującym o jego kunstwie i wartości.

Poza detalem inicjatorem gry w architekturze jest kolor, dźwięk i światło, a także interaktywność form współpracujących z użytkownikiem

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, forma, przestrzeń, wyobraźnia architektoniczna, zabawa w architekturze

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1. Play with form and space

The image of the modern city is a kaleidoscope of unusual, popular, and frequently visited places as well as forgotten non-places. Amid those spaces, dormant and suspended are “between places”, which are also accompanied by architectural forms – objects of different scales and individual characteristics. All these elements create a spectacle within the city’s interior – a kind of play and game, in which the viewer and the user become the player. The play is possible only if there are willing players, some rules and principles which must be obeyed, as well as architectural imagination – the author initiating the fun.

A special role in the game can be played by: detail, colour, sound, light and the ability of the form to interact. These elements co-create the mood and the event. You can try to assign the event to the game; it appears that it may exist along with the event. Following this line of interpretation of the architectural play occurring in the urban space, the time and place in which the event appears gain significant importance; if we consider that space and time are taking a proactive “yes” attitude in opposition to the Leibniz philosophy of “monads”. In her book, E. Revers [4, p. 81] recalls a picture of the event in the city while describing a car journey, accompanied by a monotonous landscape. Suddenly, a silhouette of the city appears – a two-dimensional form which is an anticipated event. It may be either the illumination of architecture, or the rhythm of the city, etc. However, it always occurs in a particular place, time. The event must be noticed. Therefore it needs observers, players, and thus it must stand out from the environment.

E. Revers notes that the observer encountering the form of a silhouette of the city experiences it in his life more than once. Why then, does he see it as a unique phenomenon? “Is this sudden intrusion of the man invented, but similar to the natural form, indeed interfering with the harmony, or more precisely – the monotony – of the natural landscape? Does it disrupt the order of the scattered, careless look, submitted to the routine caused by a long journey? Why does it immediately focus all our attention?” [4, p. 82].

There are probably many causes. The first is the visual dissimilarity from the view that the observer is experiencing during the journey; the second reason is the perception of the silhouette, which appears to be the goal of our trip, and the third is the scale, proportions, and game of the solids.

Why can an architectural event be interpreted as play, an architectural game? Both are associated with satisfaction, activity and interaction. All of these are provided by architecture that surprises – focuses attention, invites you to observe and engages the senses. It triggers positive emotions among the observers of the spectacle owing to the play of the forms with individual characteristics. These features can be influenced by the detail, which is reflected in the architecture of Art Nouveau, including the great designer Gaudí.

2. Detail

Detail in architecture obtained a significant importance during the Secession period. It was inscribed in the work of A. Gaudí. His mastery, so highly valued in the world, resulted from the unparalleled magic of the architecture that he created, and its enormous individuality – you might say the play and game of co-creating elements. Sometimes it’s a mosaic on the facade of the building, shimmering like the scales of a fairy dragon; other times these are

organic shapes of the balconies resembling the eyes of a bat, or columns that look like massive elephant feet.

Gaudi's architecture, rich in detail, is a peculiar kind of play with form, and shape, yet also for the observer it is a game of associations. Our feelings are greatly involved in this play – it is a test of our sensitivity to beauty. These emotions were described by Professor Kenji Imai, who spoke longingly about the interior of the Sagrada Familia: “When I said good-bye in the rain to the temple, my heart was filled with sadness and froze in pain” [2].

Art and architecture understood as one trigger feelings. Gaudi himself associated them with love, truth, beauty and freedom.

Currently detail in the architecture has adopted a slightly different dimension – together with the object, it creates a coherent whole. Often, it cannot be distinguished, as it is impossible to separate the architecture and art that permeates each other, in other words, coexist.

Eberswalde University Library designed by architects from Herzog & de Meuron is a great example of this notion. The library is located in a park; it therefore creates a contrast to the environment. The detail shaping the object is a print made on concrete in conjunction with printed glass on the simple form of the cuboid. It was covered with ornament of multiplied figurative prints in white. “The pictures are part of a *Newspaper Photos* series by Thomas Ruff – an artist photographer. The project was implemented from 1981 to 1991, and its goal was to collect and segregate photos printed in the German press. 17 selected reprints were placed in the elevation in 17 rows and multiplied 66 times. Each row of glass panels uses a different subject of the photo. The building gives the impression of a monumental art installation “. [1, p. 70]

The advocates of detail in architecture appreciate its individual character, taste and uniqueness, which often makes the form determine the identity of the place, becoming a recognizable sign in the space, an object with which people want to identify themselves. It may also be added that architecture supported by architectural detail often improves the quality of the place in which it occurs. It is the element that makes the place recognized and remembered.

Others value ascetic forms, simple, devoid of ornamentation. They consider detail to be an unnecessary element that obscures the transparency, simplicity, class and elegance. This view was rooted in modernism, when ornamentation applied was simple, non-disruptive to functionality and usability of the architecture, based on simple and geometrical compositions, in line with the motto of Mies van der Rohe “less is more”.

3. Colour

In addition to the detail, a significant role in architectural play can be attributed to colour. It decides on the degree of exposure of the form and emphasizes its character. Frequently, the right colour of the architecture is linked to the culture and tradition of the region, due to customs (in Malopolska the house-owner painted it blue when he wanted to marry off his daughter); For example, in warm countries, building development is dominated by very bright colours, in order to protect it from overheating. The colour determines the mood of the object – warm, sunny colours, accompanying the form trigger joyous emotions. Grey is associated with stability and seriousness.

Also in past times a colour scheme was used deliberately. And so Secession was a period of bright, pastel colours highlighting fanciful architectural form. Modernism emphasized its simplicity with white or colours related to the construction materials – natural concrete and stone. Today, architects and artists boldly and increasingly are willing to experiment with colour. They bring the colourful facades of modern buildings into the urban space, realizing that they follow the whim of fashion, which can change relatively rapidly.

An interesting example, especially because of the play of light and colour, is the complex of La Defense office buildings created by the architectural studio UN Studio. “The building for the IRS (Belastingdienst) and the Centre for Work and Income (CWT) from the outside give the impression of calm and balanced object with light, silver colour blending into the surroundings of grey, brick buildings... The closed complex consisting of four clusters of buildings with different proportions (length and heights) associated with the adjacent park, amazes with the magic of its colours, light and reflections filling the plane glass facades of the buildings. The frontages were covered with a special foil that changes colour depending on the time of day, angle of the sun and the position of the viewer. The inner courtyard located in the middle of the object becomes a place where you can watch the illumination of facades of the buildings changing colours: yellow passes into blue, and red or purple – into green” [3, p. 228]. Additionally, this game is enhanced by the play of light and shadow, applied in the floor of the assumption. The change of colours in the floor creates an optical illusion – the illusion of shadow. In fact, it is only a change of lighter colour into darker in the plane of the floor of the square, at the complex of La Defense buildings.

4. Interaction in architecture – “intelligent ” play with form and space

Imagination being the motive for the play and architectural game is also stimulated by the interaction that occurs between the shape and the audience. Interactive architecture introduces the user to the space of the game and play, acting on all his senses. The red cranes positioned inside the “theatre square” of Schouwburg-plein in Rotterdam are a great example.

It is an assumption enhanced by revitalization activities, which consists of the central station, the municipal theatre, and a complex of concert halls. The most important elements of the square, determining its interactive nature, include three red cranes – hence the square is often referred to as a square of the cranes’ ballet. Each user of the space can change the shape of a crane by means of a control panel, steering the position of interactive elements of the interior, equipped with headlight responsible for night illumination of the square’s fragments. Interactive assumptions of the space and architecture allow the users to shape them freely. At the same time, images of such spaces and forms are dynamic, variable. They undergo constant transformation.

5. Closing remarks

The play with form and space creates architecture seen as a game in which we participate. There are many interpretations of architecture. Among other things, it is compared to a drama – the stage is the urban space with its accompanying forms; we ourselves are the actors. This

interpretation enables us to create other, new associations, based on the idea of architectural play. It is shaped by the form and space created by the imagination of the authors and initiators of the game in which viewers and users are the participants – players.

Fun, which requires the user's activity is created by interactive architecture, facilitating the necessity of cooperation between the form and the recipient to whom it is dedicated. Interactivity is often supported by computer software which enables sound effects to be created that accompany the architecture, associated with dynamics – traffic and lighting effects.

The game is also formed by the unique compositions of the solids, generating an event within the space. Attractive, surprising architecture, becomes an event which we observe, or an event in which we actively participate. A form contrasting with the surroundings is noticed, unusual – phenomenal even – it becomes an event, which we look forward to, admire or one that surprises us.

Architectural game is frequently shaped by light and colour emphasizing the character of the form, creating its mood to an even greater extent. A fairly common phenomenon is the usage of light and shadow through a skilful combination of colours of the materials in the floor.

A separate element of architectural play is the detail seen in the past as a unique work of art, now a multiplied element forming a kind of graphic game on the facades of architectural objects. Fun and games in architecture makes us curious and desire to take part in its life. Do we need it? It seems that due to the development of technology and science, all our lives – the way we work or communicate – is subordinated to the achievements of informatics, thus also in architecture this phenomenon appears to be inevitable. On the other hand, modern man seeks liberation from the excess of electronics, urge, dynamics and surprising effects, and this makes the desired game and play often, in spite of everything, willingly replaced by a valuable calmness and serenity, and so escape from the network of unexpected events.

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