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GAMES OF ARCHITECTURAL FICTION

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Abstract

The contemporary world is full of coexisting different architectural forms whose creation included a game with the viewer/observer among their objectives. The Dutch art historian Johan Huizinga points out that play constitutes the basis for all human activities. The playing, the game becomes an indispensable element of contemporary art, it is an expression of the viewer's intelligence and the creator's perversity, together with construction, it creates a new poetics of architecture which is sometimes difficult to comprehend.

Keywords: architecture, game, art, avant-garde

Streszczenie

Świat współczesny jest pełen współistniejących różnych form architektonicznych, których jednym z celów powstania była gra z widzem, obserwatorem. Holenderski historyk sztuki Johan Huizinga wskazuje u podstaw wszelkiego ludzkiego działania zabawę. Zabawa, gra staje się nieodzownym elementem współczesnej sztuki, jest wyrazem inteligencji widza i przewrotności twórcy, tworzy wraz z budowaniem nową poetykę architektury czasem trudną do zrozumienia.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, gra, sztuka, awangarda

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There is architecture that we perceive as play, but there is probably nothing wrong with that, since even Friedrich Nietzsche wrote that: “Maintaining cheerfulness in the midst of a gloomy task, fraught with immeasurable responsibility, is no small feat; and yet what is needed more than cheerfulness?” [11, p. 5]. There are also such architectures that intentionally blur cheerfulness under the cover of metaphors, signs, and all kinds of associations, deluding the viewer with their apparent seriousness, demanding some knowledge from the observer. Seeking the relationship between objects and what they form, Marteen Seel writes: “The aesthetic appearing of an object is a play of its appearances. No matter how handy this definition, it is nonetheless quite complex. Its three components are at the centre of attention: the object, its appearances, and their play.” [13, p. 48]. The 1980s bring us the first really visible games with the viewer. It was then that having abandoned Modernism and adopting eclectic assumptions, architecture tried to create a new approach to design and to use a metaphor. This is what happens with *The Way of Four Gates*¹ in Cracow. This building disguises its ludic nature so cleverly that is perceived as something intricately non-superficial. *Homo Ludens* will pass it without interest, not suspecting that it was designed as an expression of play, an intellectual game (a bit one-sided on the part of the author). The work hides from the recipient’s inexpert eye the pretexts forming it and afterimages from the architect’s adolescence. Mocking the passer-by unaware of anything in such a way is an expression of extreme perfidy or faith in the emancipation of [sic] the modern recipient. The building combines two currents of play: the sacred as a pursuit of God and profane as school, something ordinary, slightly flippant. Here, the search for beauty (as it appeared in architecture) makes use of Władysław Tatarkiewicz’s statement: “Beauty is a manifestation of ideas of the ‘archetype’, of the eternal model, the highest perfection, the absolute” [14, p. 156–158]. And this can become the motto adopted as a certainty to describe the postmodern building. The two temples are nothing but the image of the architecture memorised from childhood; not literal, though. It is no longer the absolute or perfection, it becomes a game, the architect at play. The remembered elements now appear at a different scale and in a new role. The brick and plastered façade of Bernardine monastery and church in Radom turns into a concrete sculpture. The town cemetery with gravestones is also a remembrance, expressed here in the already “new” stone and non-sepulchral proportions. Things become named, the name becomes important: *The Temple of the East* and *The Temple of the West* denote not just the parts of the world. The author explains: “The realisation of *The Way of Four Gates*, the thought, idea, myth, or perhaps only – the monastery’s mystery – was based on afterimages of traditional notions of a monastery. The composition of the architectural compound is supported with an axis whose continuation reaches far beyond the seminary buildings. Its beginnings find their way to Kraków’s Main Market Square on one side, on the other they permeate the massif of the Twardowski Rocks. The language of the seminary’s architecture recalls its origins. What will happen, however, if the idea of *The Way of Four Gates* is forgotten? Then there will remain: gates, courtyards, portals, temples, towers, buildings – structures appearing in the light, murk, and darkness. After all – “Architecture is the art of building fictitious objects in such a way as to make them look real.” [10]. Creating a description of postmodern architecture and such an “invented” fiction, Charles Jencks might have had this building in mind: “1. Multivalence

¹ *The Way of Four Gates* – Higher Theological Seminary of the Resurrectionist Congregation, ul. ks. Pawlickiego/Zielna, Kraków. The authors: – Dariusz Kozłowski, Waclaw Stefański, Maria Misiągiewicz. The expansion of the House of the Sisters to the Provincial House, the authors: Dariusz Kozłowski, Maria Misiągiewicz; The interiors, the authors: – Dariusz Kozłowski, Maria Misiągiewicz; The record of *The Way of Four Gates* concept: – Dariusz Kozłowski; design: 1984–1988; implementation 1985–1993.

is preferred to univalence, imagination to fancy. 2. “Complexity and contradiction” are preferred to over-simplicity and “minimalism”. 3. Complexity and chaos theories are considered more basic in explaining nature than linear dynamics; that is, “more of nature” is nonlinear in behaviour than linear. 4. Memory and history are inevitable in DNA, language, style and the city and are positive catalysts for invention.” [8. p. 152]. Emphasizing the fiction of his art himself, Dariusz Kozłowski compares it to play, perhaps a performance, establishing and detaching from prototypes, since “the Spirit of revenge and resentment are the rebellion, the inability to accept the past” [1. p. 53]. This spirit gives new insights into the past and present of art, it becomes a driving force for deconstructing archetypes and creating a new/old architecture in the same way as Igor Mitoraj did with his sculptures. This method builds the “new”, but already in isolation from the original function of architecture, from which it draws only ornamentation. As usual in avant-garde art, the architect does not want to remember, but cannot forget. Shaftesbury, the eighteenth-century philosopher wrote: “That the Beautiful, the Fair, the Comely, were never in the Matter, but in the Art and Design; never in Body it-self, but in the Form or forming Power. Does not the beautiful Form confess this, and speak the Beauty of the Design, whene’er it strikes you? What is it but the Design which strikes? What is it you admire but Mind, or the Effect of Mind? ’Tis Mind alone which forms.” [5. p. 160].

Contemporariness frees the creator from the need for utility, gives him free rein in creating. After all, leaving the cinema, we recollect whether the film was good and we do not remember that the seats were uncomfortable (although such a problem is sometimes more important than the film screening itself). The building may be an illustration of Umberto Eco’s theory about polysemous works of art: “All this explains how contemporary art can be seen as an epistemological metaphor. The discontinuity of phenomena has called into question the possibility of a unified, definitive image of our universe; art suggests a way for us to see the world in which we live, and, by seeing it, to accept it and integrate it into our sensibility. The open work assumes the task of giving us an image of discontinuity. It does not narrate it; it is it.” [3, p. 198]. Buildings and their “names” are part of the author’s “play” with the viewer. Guessing architectural prototypes after the disclosure of his reminiscences or perhaps more consciously prototypes by the author, the work takes on even more meaning which we can again only guess, since the author retains the whole truth selfishly only for himself. To figure out the best-known contemporary architectural metaphor of the inscription on a residential building in Berlin by Álvaro Siza – *Bonjour Tristesse* – one needs to resort to poetry. And perhaps the poem *Barely Disfigured* by Paul Éluard, which was probably a pretext for the architect, will be helpful in understanding the work (or just the opposite).

“Adieu Tristesse
 Bonjour Tristesse
 Farewell Sadness
 Hello Sadness
 You are inscribed in the lines on the ceiling
 You are inscribed in the eyes that I love
 You are not poverty absolutely
 Since the poorest of lips denounce you
 Ah with a smile
 Bonjour Tristesse
 Love of kind bodies



- III. 1. *The Temple of the East, The Way of Four Gates* – Higher Theological Seminary of the Resurrectionist Congregation, ul. ks. Pawlickiego/Zielna, Kraków. The authors: – D. Kozłowski, W. Stefański, M. Misiągiewicz. Foto. M. Gała-Walczowska
- III. 2. Tomb at the cemetery in Radom
- III. 3. Façade of the Bernardine’s monastery and the church in Radom
- III. 4. *The Temple of the West, The Way of Four Gates* – Higher Theological Seminary of the Resurrectionist Congregation, ul. ks. Pawlickiego/Zielna, Kraków. The authors: – D. Kozłowski, W. Stefański, M. Misiągiewicz

Power of love
 From which kindness rises
 Like a bodiless monster
 Unattached head
 Sadness beautiful face” [4, p. 32].

Here the text of the poem gives new meaning to the building, the author plays a kind of game with us, changing the sense of architecture. “The fact that the text is suitable for comments places it within the symbolic language” [15, p. 94], Adam Ważyk wrote in 1948, emphasizing the intellectual nature of the architect’s activities. We live in a period of post-modernism and “[t]oday, the main reason for the existence of art is not aesthetics, but the need to catch some meaning” [6, p. 117], sometimes more important than the construction of functional forms. We are not sure if the author has created a good place to live in, but we already have confidence that they have created a poetic work of art.

One of the features of modern architecture is its ludic character. The ludicity of art consists in meeting the viewer or user’s need for entertainment. It is now becoming the main feature of mass culture, which is based on imitation. Repetition does not have to carry pejorative connotations, after all, “Roland Barthes used... such a wording: he says that myth operates with ‘stolen language’” [2, p. 135], so easy to receive, because it is already familiar. People used to read stories, they watch them today. *Homo ludens*, the playing man is the main recipient of contemporary art. The Dutch art historian Johan Huizinga points out that play constitutes the basis for all human activities. The modern world cannot do without entertainment and related “advertising” value of architecture, which is considered today to be more important than function.

These days, one more element of art appears – fiction. It expresses itself in detachment from reality and the lack of a literal imitation (lack of style). Architecture must be an expression of the artist’s personal vision, his departure from the customarily accepted shape of the work. Yet, Barthes’ words may explain the simple idea that a man likes primarily what he already knows, what he has heard or seen (everyone bears the memorized forms inside). Images and signs recorded in childhood are stuck inside us and we feel them after years (subconsciously). Greek beauty and goodness diverge today. Currently, they can no longer be aesthetic determinants. The good understood as something purely functional lost its literal meaning in architecture long ago (world functional architecture died at 15:32 on July 15, 1972 in St. Louis), it happened in an ordinary and unobtrusive way. Can anyone today praise a football stadium for the perfect arrangement of seats in the audience? No! The Platonic triad of “beauty, goodness, truth” is simply passé today. There is something new – “play”. It is not understood as something frivolous and worthless, play, as Huizinga explains, is deadly serious. “...Sheer play constitutes cultural basis and factor” [7, p. 17]. Play must have fixed rules, which in the case of architecture can be explained by the necessity to complete a construction project or just the possibility of construction. However, it happens that these two postulates are difficult to satisfy; Zaha Hadid was unable to transform her paintings of *The Peak Leisure Club* into the constructed work. And most importantly, “inside the playground an absolute and peculiar order reigns” [7, p. 24.], Unfortunately, such a postulate in contemporary architecture is often unobvious, and in the architecture of Deconstruction it is virtually impossible to fulfil.

Unfortunately, the games of modern architecture are becoming more readily received and copied by the public (mostly in caricature form). Perhaps the reason for this is that they do not stem from rebellion or revolution, but economic calculation. Fryderyk Schiller expressed a similar concern: “So far, we have only discussed the shortcomings arising from the exaggerated sensitivity to beauty of form and too far-fetched aesthetic claims concerning thinking and understanding... It admittedly makes desires refined and gradually increasingly harmonious with the claims of reason, but even this may eventually result in a considerable threat to morality” [12, p. 147]. All revolutionary artistic activities carried utopian ethical postulates, because

man intrinsically feels the hunger for information and the need for truth. And so it is today. Looking at the modern buildings, the viewer is convinced that what he sees is art, because for some reason the works have been created, they have been constructed. Let us remember that it is not beautiful what is beautiful, but what is considered beautiful, as it is related to human emotionality. Today, “art” has a different purpose. The ease with which the contemporary world receives the “avant-garde” architectural currents is connected with the reception of TV programs. The viewer is presented with mobile, short, unstimulating forms. According to sales experts, modern viewers can focus their attention only for eight seconds on one communication (a commercial). Maybe that is why the art shown in films becomes generally accepted and accessible art. The determinant of style is no longer an art gallery, but a “housewife” from the TV show, Nietzsche is certainly turning in his grave, looking at such games and play of contemporary people. However, the discussion must continue and one must discuss, as: “The judgement of taste is based on concepts; for otherwise, despite its diversity, we could not quarrel about it (we could not claim for our judgement the necessary assent of others).” [9, p. 279]. And finally let us remember that we will not be able to have a discussion with Kant. The last one to succeed in this was Woland, but he is probably still in Moscow.

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