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THE GAME AND PLAY AT ARCHITECTS IN THE EXAMPLE OF POLISH FEATURE FILMS FROM THE 1960s

GRA I ZABAWA W ARCHITEKTA NA PRZYKŁADZIE POLSKIEGO FILMU FABULARNEGO LAT 60. XX WIEKU

Summary

The goal of this paper, in relation to the conference topic, is to show how a female architect was shown in movies from 1960s. The author presents this in two views of the life of women architects: passive – set in the realization of everyday career goals, and creative – set in creating the architecture of the future. He also emphasizes that, in retrospect, the creative attitudes of presented movie heroines are an excellent record of the times, when being a female architect was associated with the choice in the career path of little creative engagement on behalf of creative activity that could not achieve results because of the social reluctance in the time of the Polish People's Republic (PRL).

Keywords: architect career, movie pictures, femininity, architecture

Streszczenie

Prezentowany tekst odnoszący się do tytułu konferencji ma na celu pokazanie, w jaki sposób postać architekta kobiety była ukazywana w obrazie filmowym lat 60 XX wieku. Autor zwraca uwagę na ukazanie dwóch postaw życiowych kobiet architektów biernej nastawionej na realizację codziennych celów zawodowych oraz twórczą nastawioną na tworzenie architektury przyszłości. Zwraca także uwagę, iż postawy twórcze bohaterek omawianych filmów stają się z perspektywy lat doskonałym zapisem epoki, w której bycie kobietą architektem związane było z wyborem drogi zawodowej o małym zaangażowaniu twórczym na rzecz działania twórczego, które nie przynosi rezultatów z uwagi na niechęć społeczeństwa epoki PRL.

Słowa kluczowe: zawód architekt, obraz filmowy, kobiecość, architektura

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1. An architect in a Polish feature film from 1960s

The image of the architect – the creator of architectural work – underwent a lot of changes in Polish cinematography due to both social and political determinants. The '60s, in regard to the differing manifestations of the creative activities of architects in feature films, were and still are undiscovered territory waiting for academic analysis and diagnosis. This text aims to present the formation of the image of the architect and their creative activity as perpetuated in film. Film as a medium contributed to recording the moment, which at the time of filming was treated in the present perfect tense. From the historiographic point of view film can be considered as a record of the past with all its nuances, the mood of the moment and the professional and everyday life problems of architects. Because of the times we are talking about, from the point of diagnosis of the past, it's a very valuable platform for searching topics and spatial phenomena¹.

The image of the architect in Polish 1960s film was presented in a variety of perspectives. On the one hand we see them at work on the drawing board, building models and developing architectural concepts. On the other, we have the opportunity to accompany them in their everyday life outside of work, we share their fears, expectations, dilemmas, defeats and victories. If we look at the first of these images of architect-creator, it does not differ from standard, cultural codes. Leaning over the drawing board in the state studio, he composed, created and repaired space using his imagination. The image of the architect shown in Polish 1960s movies did not differ significantly from that which took place in many European countries. The inherent attribute of architect's clothing in the 1960s was a white apron with pockets. This garment evokes the figure of a doctor who is not treating the body and soul, but is dealing with the therapy of a larger organism, which, in this case, is the modernist city.

The image of the architect in film differs according to genre. In comedy, the architect is a person with their head slightly in the clouds, absent-minded, and not very organized. In the case of psychological movies, the image is more balanced, static and free of uncontrolled behaviour. An interesting social theme of movies from this period is that the figure of the architect was often portrayed as a woman.

In the case of the heroines presented in this text, the main characters are architects. For each of them, architecture is a different kind of challenge, both professional and creative. The first character, in the film 'Remedy for Love' ('Lekarstwo na miłość'), Joanna (Kalina Jędrusik), is a very joyful and lively person. Another type of personality is represented by Małgorzata (Lucyna Winnicka), the main character in 'Game' ('Gra'), who takes her job as architect very seriously, even, we might say, as a mission. The heroines view their profession differently, they have different approaches to the importance of architecture in their lives. For each, architecture is a significant addition to life, they deal with it professionally and creatively. Another theme that appears in these films is the design studio. Typically the protagonist's workplace is a modernist office space characterized by large scale and a view of the skyline, in this case Warsaw.

¹ Presented in this paper research is the part of a research no. 10/04/DSPB/0073 titled „Architecture and the city in a Polish feature film of 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, phase II” („Architektura i miasto w polskim filmie fabularnym w latach 60, 70 i 80 XX wieku, etap II”). led by the author on a Faculty of Architecture, Poznan University of Technology in the Division of History of Architecture and Urbanism.

2. The image of the architect in the movie *Remedy for Love* (*Lekarstwo na miłość*) from 1966, directed by Jan Batory

The main character in the romantic comedy “*Remedy for Love*”², Joanna, is an example of an architect who linked her lifelong career with a design studio. The numerous adventures of the main character partly influence her design work – actually preventing it from happening. In the first scenes Joanna is earnestly trying to write a text on contemporary aesthetics in residential areas. Unfortunately, we do not know for whom the text is to be prepared, whether it is for a meeting in the studio or publication in a journal. This text never arises, the trials and tribulations of love of a young lady architect stand in the way to completing it. We often evaluate architects by the space they live in. It is in some sense a determinant of their talent, preferences and tastes. In the case of Joanna’s apartment, we can recognize in it artistic disarray. The apartment is located in an eclectic building whose windows open up a panorama of a modern city – in this case large-panel prefabricated blocks of flats. As with the house, her flat decor is also characterized by an accumulation of various kinds of furniture and knick-knacks. It’s a peculiar mix of modern design of that period and historical elements like an inherited couch, where Joanna works and writes.

The main workplace of the heroine is, as I mentioned, the design studio. In several scenes of the film, we see Joanna working in a white apron over a model of a housing estate, very similar to that which can be seen from the windows of her apartment. From the dialogue, we can also infer what status our heroine has in the studio. One of her colleagues says to her, “Joanna, now go and plant the trees”³, which gives evidence of her low position in the hierarchy. Summarizing this part of the analysis, it should be stressed that the picture of this young lady architect is very positive and friendly. The film shows the architect’s work with a pinch of salt; you could get the impression that this profession is mainly about coming to the office and planting trees on physical models of the housing estates. It should of course be remembered that, because it’s a comedy, some areas of the plot were treated in a manner not entirely related to reality.

3. The image of the architect in the movie ‘*Game*’ (‘*Gra*’) from 1968, directed by Jerzy Kawalerowicz

The main character in the movie directed by Jerzy Kawalerowicz, Małgorzata⁴, is also an architect, but due to a fact that this is a psychological movie her character was shown in

² Screenplay was based on the book by Joanna Chmielewska “*Wedge*” (“*Klin*”). Directed by Jan Batory, written by Joanna Chmielewska, Jan Batory. The cast, the main characters: Kalina Jędrusik (protagonist, Joanna), Krystyna Sienkiewicz (Janek, a friend of Joanna), Wieńczysław Gliński (Janusz head of a gang of counterfeiters), Andrzej Łapicki (captain of Citizen’s Militia).

³ Quote based on the soundtrack to the film “*Cure for Love*”, authoring.

⁴ She is an architect, he is a man of a high position. After twelve years of marriage they are experiencing a deep crisis. She is fighting for her independence, but is afraid of being alone. He cares only about appearances. She finally betrays him with a young student, and when they both attempt to rebuild their feelings, it turns out that the husband had a mistress for years. Brief description of the plot from <http://www.filmweb.pl/film/Gra-1968-5913/descs#>, access 20/05/2015.

a different light. Unlike Joanna, Małgorzata is an actively operating architect, for whom, as I mentioned earlier, work is a kind of mission. In one scene, the main character walks the streets of Warsaw with her husband. In the background we see the demolition of 19th-century buildings to make way for a new housing development in the Eastern Wall⁵. The couple talk about architecture or, to be exact, about the creative achievements of the protagonist, which in perception of her husband are insignificant. During this conversation the husband gives the heroine a very sarcastic summary of her creative achievements: ‘What did you get from it? Only that they presented your models at a presentation of projects not awarded. A presentation of architectural thought, what kind of idea is that? You have neither the materials nor executors. You do not know what steel, aluminium or synthetics look like’⁶. This diagnosis of Polish architecture is not accidental. The main character, in dealing with the creation of the image of utopian architectural concepts, is aware of their unsuitability for the present. However, she is trying to meticulously follow the creative attitude inculcated in college and she hopes that her theoretical design work will change the image of Polish cities.

The director also shows Małgorzata’s workplace in a different way. As in the previous example, it is the architectural studio. From its large glass windows you can see the crowded streets of Warsaw and a crowd of people passing through. Watching these scenes one might gain the impression that the architect is a creator whose work takes place in closed glass laboratories. Despite the attempts to achieve or create a space to live and work for a modern society, it’s possible only on the drawing board or a model. The racing crowd on the streets seems to take no notice of her titanic work and struggle for modernity.

It can be assumed that the director wanted to show the kind of solitude of an artist whose work is far from the reality of everyday life. It’s undoubtedly a sad picture of both the architect’s work, which is in many cases only conceptual, condemned to failure, and of the architect herself, with her lack of sense of self-realization in modern society.

4. Games and playing at architect in Polish feature film of the 1960s

The movies discussed show different images of the architect-creator depending on the genre – comedy or psychological drama. In the first the profession is treated as a joyful addition to everyday life, in the second it is a profession associated with an unfulfilled mission whose ethos was brought from college. Playing at architect in the case of Joanna is an action associated with everyday life. The main character has no aspirations to make her work recognized as an outstanding act of creativity in the field of architectural design. She performs the design tasks entrusted to her without much commitment; her work is merely an addition to the adventures of everyday life.

In the case of Małgorzata, we are dealing with some kind of a game in which the protagonist tries to overcome adversity and rejection of her career as an architect. Despite criticism from her husband she doesn’t intend to cease being the architect-creator to become an architect in a studio. It is a very interesting moral attitude, which in my opinion deserves recognition and some kind of moral support. However, both of these movies bear

⁵ Building by Zbigniew Karpinski, Jan Klewina, Andrew Kaliszewski from the years 1962–1969.

⁶ Quote based on the soundtrack to ‘Game’ movie, author’s editing.

an interesting image of our profession. They are also an excellent diagnosis of the state of public awareness of contemporary Poles and their perception of architecture, in this case modernist. Modernism, because of its scale and dazzling geometrisation of space, could be perceived as incomprehensible and challenging. On the other hand, its interwar elitism has been downgraded as a result of the everyday reality of communism. What in an earlier period was synonymous with modernity, in communist Poland has become synonymous with poverty and poor quality.

The main heroines, Joanna and Małgorzata, to some extent show the two faces of our profession, which can be characterized as having fun in everyday life and a game of survival. Just as it is today, as architects-creators, we can choose one of these options and it purely depends on us what we achieve in it.

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