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THE GAME OF DEFINITION

GRA W DEFINICJĘ

Abstract

Architecture is a complex discipline, and works of architecture are diverse and constantly changing. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the range and essence of architecture and create a definition. This paper analyses the problem with definitions of architecture on the basis of semantics, aesthetics, and metaphysics. It considers the question of identity and essence, and the cause, purpose and consequence of defining.

Keywords: architecture, philosophy, definition, metaphysics, the essence

Streszczenie

Architektura jest złożoną i szeroką dyscypliną, a dzieła architektury są różnorodne i podlegają ciągłym przemianom. Dlatego trudno ustalić zarówno jej zakres jak i istotę, trudno o jej definicję. Artykuł analizuje problem definicji architektury na tle semantyki, estetyki i metafizyki. Rozważana jest kwestia tożsamości i istoty pojęcia, przyczyna i cel powstawania definicji oraz sens definiowania i jego wpływ na architekturę.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, filozofia, definicja, metafizyka, istota

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Architecture has existence, but it has no presence. Only a work of architecture has presence, and a work of architecture is presented as an offering to architecture. [5]
L. Kahn

What is architecture? This question appears in the discourse with infinite number of answers. Despite this, in the daily "language games" the meaning of the word "architecture" is perfectly understood. Why then are there problems with its definition? And why is architecture defined?

"Definition" is to clarify the meaning of the word. In turn, "to define" has an additional connotation; precisely, to specify something, to draw the line, determine the essence [10]. In the case of the definition of "architecture" this ambiguity is somewhat akin to the distinction of definitions; reporting and designing, regulating and persuasive, normal and partial. Here is an example of normal, reporting and regulating definition of architecture: "The art of creating order in the environment in order to adapt it to meet the diverse physical, material and cultural needs of the people by the planned transformation of the natural environment and construction of forms and separation of space for various purposes" [2].

This complex definition lists a number of important architectural features. It links them with conjunctions, which makes them all necessary conditions. The definition becomes narrowed and sharpened. However, it appears that some of these conditions are debatable, and the range of the name definition is wide and blurred. This raises questions about the status of these conditions in contemporary architecture.

Is architecture an art? What place does architecture have in art? What is its relationship with today's art? Discussion on whether architecture is an art has long continued. This issue is important when we want to distinguish architecture from "building". The choice of whether architecture belongs to the realm of art, or whether it is to remain purely functional, determines architecture. It seems that a purely unilateral decision gives a poor effect, either too primitive, or useless. Therefore, the principle of finding a skilful unity of these essential characteristics is still valid. What distinguishes architecture from building are values, meaning and artistry. And what distinguishes architecture from the fine arts is its purpose. Does architecture need to have a function? If so, what? Are an aesthetic impact and impression enough? Are the coloured towers by Luis Barragán – the city gate standing in the midst of a busy road – architecture, but the desert monoliths by Richard Serra not? Establishing borders is collusive. There are works of architecture that are difficult to distinguish from works of art, and there are those that belong to both worlds at the same time. In such cases, the definition is an act more intuitive than analytical.

What is man's place in architecture? The development of computer-aided design takes creating forms for building increasingly out of human control. This raises new questions about the place and role of man in architecture and the intentionality of the creative act. In an era in which a robot is an opera star, it is not difficult to imagine a building designed by computer, built by robots, and going even further, built for other robots. Would it be still regarded as architecture? Does architecture need intelligence, emotions, a sense of aesthetics and the artistry of the creator? Or, maybe just the judgment of a conscious observer. Does

it have to be a man? Will architecture still be an architecture after humans leave the Earth? Would "aliens" landing on Earth appreciate our craftsmanship? "What will happen, when colours fade, explanations, theories, guiding ideas are forgotten, the language of architecture becomes unintelligible, and conventions are considered bizarre and unnecessary? Will there remain "buildings", "gates", "towers", „temples" or just forms appearing in the light, and gloom, and the darkness – architecture will remain", says Dariusz Kozlowski [7 p. 25]. Questions related to the far-reaching visions of post-humanism do not make reporting sense but may be useful to look critically at architecture. The issue of the privileged place of man in the world is widely discussed in ethics, philosophy and the arts; it is also extremely important in the context of architecture. Currently, we see that theoretical considerations about ecology, the environment, and nature have replaced those about forms and styles.

Is reality a border line? Architecture is often defined as creating an environment/space of human activity. Does it have to be a real space? Or, can forms associated with human activity in virtual space also be considered as architecture? If so, then when? If architecture was virtual, must it have aesthetic qualities similar to those real? Will the degree of immersion be the decisive factor? "Immersion is defined as *diving* into the (electronic) environment so that the body does not pay attention to what happens outside this world and does not allow external stimuli" [1]. What if this immersion was to be complete and thus the boundaries between the real world and the virtual were unnoticeable?

Does architecture have to be associated with the act of building (real or intentional)? Is the relationship with its primary cause (protection against the physical world) an indispensable condition of its essence? There are non-existent objects in the history of architecture. We talk about buildings yet to be built, about objects that used to exist (e.g., the WTC), finally, the junction of the two cases – things that were designed but did not arise (e.g., the Tatlin's tower). There are known drawings of things never constructed which are of great importance in the history of architecture. They include those whose intention is to be impossible to build (e.g.. Escher). There are also architects who consider architecture as pure thought – an architectural creation of the imagination. There are also those for whom architecture is just a pure idea.

Can we say anything about architecture, not knowing what space is? Or time? Is defining architecture not doomed from the onset to be a metaphysical speculation? Or maybe architecture does not require an understanding of what space is?

These are just a few examples of the problems that concern the meaning and identity of the word "architecture". It seems that none of the examined conditions of the definition is absolutely necessary. Due to the very broad range of the discipline, diversity and variability of designations and positions contrary to each other, an agreement on a single, complete, reporting definition of architecture seems impossible. Despite this, the word "architecture" has a clear and understandable use. Ludwig Wittgenstein stated that the meaning of the word is determined by its use in our "language games". Concepts for whose object it is not possible to identify the characteristics which are necessary and sufficient, he called "open concepts". What connects the designations of such terms, he described as "family resemblance" [12 p. 51]. Rather than one meaning, there are many intersecting denotations. So a flexible

configuration of selected features is sufficient to be described as architecture. Therefore subjective (intuitive) judgement will be decisive. Architecture is defined at various levels; axiological, ontological, existential, etc. So, for each it is a product of individual decisions dependent on the fundamentals of worldview – the problem will be seen differently by the idealist and the nominalist. Each will choose a different, individual range – his own definition, his own theory, his own architecture.

The construction of such individual definitions is similar to the alternative definition of art by Władysław Tatarkiewicz. While creating it, the philosopher remarked that the subject of the word "art" has changed so much that identity has been lost and there is no essence shared between different subjects of "art". He proposed a definition which uses an alternative linking up of different properties [11, p. 52]. Joseph Kosuth noted that the search for a theoretical answer to the question "what is art?" makes no sense because it has become a subject of neoavant-garde art [6 p. 246]. The denotation of a word "architecture" is fluid, but what about its subject? Is it (specifically works of architecture) clearly definable? Is it identical in history? In contrast to art, architecture did not change so much and so rapidly. There are known examples of experimental groups in the 60s, such as, for example Archizoom, which use utopian projects to question the theory of architecture. Such radical, revolutionary ideas, however, were rare, and across architecture we can observe a smoother evolution. Did contemporary architecture evolve far enough that it can undermine its historical identity? Does the work of Gehry, Kapoor or Heatherwick cross the border of traditional architecture (i.e., giving up the Vitruvian triad)? Or maybe they provoke and ask what architecture is today? Despite many changes the substantial unity and continuity of ancient architecture can still be seen today. As long as architecture is the creation of an individual living in a real world, all necessities resulting from the cause, purpose and matter are immutable. Works of architecture are very diverse and often contradictory in their theoretical assumptions. Yet, one can have intuitive impression of substantial consistency. The need to define the essence of architecture is mostly visible among architects.

Le Corbusier wrote: Architecture is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light [8 p. 80]. Mies van der Rohe claimed that it is the structural clarity brought to its own expression [9 p. 53]. These sentences show what was for each of them the essence of architecture, as it is reflected in their works. But these are two different essences, just as the chapel at Ronchamp and the Seagram Building are two different architectures. As we know, both ways of thinking about architecture found many followers. We can conclude that certain specific (different) indications had a profound influence on architecture. Definitions which are partial, individual, personal, show what the author's essence of things is. They are not fully definitions, but rather attempts to define (search). To define is to set a research range and explain a specified meaning. They have a persuasive function, explain and justify the architect's artistic decisions and try to convince others. They result from the need to share a personal experience of the creative act and the work of architecture. They bring closer sense and meaning (which might not exist). Just as the overall definition is a result of individual decisions, so is the essence a result of personal experience.

The act of creation and aesthetic experience of the work of art is an experience in which feelings and contact with the work cease to be verbalised. Thus Roman Ingarden describes it: "Aesthetic experience leads to the constitution of the specific – aesthetic – subject that cannot

be equated with anything real (...)" [4 p. 97]. Individual definition is an attempt to describe this experience. According to Martin Heidegger, the metaphysical research area is an experience and its content, rather than the conceptual apparatus and its properties. A description of experience should acquaint us not with how we think of being, but rather, how we exist. Putting metaphysical questions has, Heidegger says, its cause in human nature, in its need to resist nothingness. *Why be-ing, after all, and not rather no-thing?* [3 p. 88].

Architecture leads to metaphysics from both sides, theoretical – considering theory of architecture, as well as practical – creating and experiencing architecture. Metaphysics provides a foundation both in cognitive and practical terms as points of reference, aspirations and goals. It deals with the explanation of being and knowing its properties; essence, cause, purpose, necessary relations. "The idea is that the sciences effect a rapprochement with the essential in all things" [3 p. 74]. Metaphysics is that which cannot be separated from the object, which cannot be extracted, which cannot be analysed, but is rather an intuitive penetration of the object. There is something in the harmony of design solutions in architectural problems that makes architects often refer to it as "ideal being". Just as mathematicians are stunned by the beauty of the solutions to the problems they work on. The complex multilayer architecture seems to be particularly inclined to metaphysical questions. Architecture touches almost all relevant questions of philosophy, which does not have a single answer. Therefore, the search for definition is not intended to discover one truth, one essence and one meaning. It aims for critical consideration and updating assumptions, justification, awareness and a sense.

To define is to question being. The search for answers to the questions of what architecture is and what its essence is is important even if there are no easy answers. Socrates devoted his whole life to the quest for definitions and though he did not provide any, his actions prove that he understood perfectly the essence of virtue or justice. So maybe this philosophical game is not to find the definition but just to search?

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