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THE INTUITIVE PATH TO ARCHITECTURE
AND ITS MESSAGE BROADCAST
IN THE PUBLIC MEDIA ON THE EXAMPLE
OF “WEJCHERTOWIE”, A DOCUMENTARY FROM 1979

INTUICYJNA DROGA DO ARCHITEKTURY
I JEJ MEDIALNY PRZEKAZ
NA PRZYKŁADZIE FILMU “WEJCHERTOWIE”
Z ROKU 1979

A b s t r a c t

I would like, based on the example of the documentary entitled “Wejchertowie”, to analyse the aforementioned topic. The documentary was made in 1979 and its theme focuses on the presentation of the Wejchert spouses working on the design of Nowe Tychy in Poland and its further implementation in a several decade span. I would like to find out how the architecture and the image can become the basis for the ideas propagated among others by Manfredo Tafuri in relation to media coverage of the municipal space and its relation with the intuitive path to architecture.

Keywords: architecture, modernism, city, a documentary film

Streszczenie

Jako pole badawcze do swoich rozważań przywołam film dokumentalny pt. „Wejchertowie” powstały w roku 1979, którego głównym tematem jest prezentacja pracy małżeństwa Wejchertów nad projektem i realizacją miasta Nowe Tychy na przestrzeni kilkudziesięciu lat. Spróbuję zdiagnozować, w jaki sposób architektura i obraz mogą stać się kanwą dla koncepcji głoszonych m.in. przez Manfreda Tafuriego, związanych z mediatyzacją przestrzeni miasta i jej związków z intuicyjną drogą do architektury.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, modernizm, miasto, film dokumentalny

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1. Introduction to intuition in architecture

Manfredo Tafuri¹ [1935–1994] perceived architecture as a structure that is part of ideology, which, in turn, can be demonstrated intuitively. From the contemporary point of view – each ideology leaves tangible footprints behind it in the form of buildings, towns or images. A film image, during its creation, becomes a recording of the moment grasped². After many years, contrary to the intention of the authors, in many instances such an image becomes a recording of the intuitively generated past. History recorded in film images can be deemed as part of modern concept of media coverage of the past combined with the idea of propagation of cultural heritage of Polish modernism of the 1970s. New interrelations of architecture and other disciplines of science and arts were identified, among others, in the considerations of Juhani Pallasmaa, let me quote his words “Since the late 1970s, architecture has fervently sought connections with other fields of art. Inspiration for breaking through the prevailing paradigm of architecture, petrified by quasi-modernist professional praxis, has been sought in painting and sculpture, as well as in literature and music.” [Pallasmaa, 2000]. Such a search for the relations may also refer to architecture of the past, which has become a tangible testimony of the fact that a spatial environment has been intuitively created. On the one hand, it might have been the intuition of the author of a given architectural work, and on the other hand, the intuition of the place itself or the intuition of the space encompassing architectural development based on new spatial forms.

2. The culture of the 1970s expressed in the architecture of the city

In the 1970s European architects sought new means of expression for the emerging post-modernism. This trend in architecture then served as a certain counter-balance to the achievements of modernist architecture. Nevertheless, an attempt at a return to ideas already known from the past was not well received by architects. In the case of Polish architecture of the period, we can observe the adherence and propagation of the ideas and trends related to modernism. The town concept “Nowe Tychy” [1950–1982], designed by Kazimierz Wejchert [1912–1993], his wife, Hanna Adamczewska-Wejchert [1920–1996] and their team of designers may well serve as an example of the very perception and definition of spatial reality of the Poland of the 1970s.

The process of shaping new a spatial reality in the Polish People’s Republic triggered the emergence of numerous designs of new towns which were meant to serve a certain type of educational space for the new citizens of a socialist country. The design of Nowa Huta in Cracow [construction dating back to 1949–1954, designed by Tadeusz Ptaszycy and his team is the first example thereof]. The second, as regards its size and media focus, was the concept of Nowe Tychy by the Wejchert spouses.

¹ Italian architect, specialist in the theory of architecture and its reviewer.

² This article constitutes part of the studies the author carried out at the Faculty of Architecture at Poznan University of Technology within the framework of the research project entitled the “Architecture and the city in Polish feature films of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s”, stage V.

I would like to analyse the topic posed here on the example of the documentary entitled “Wejchertowie”, directed by Władysław Wasilewski in 1979³. The main theme of the documentary focuses on the presentation of the Wejchert spouses working on the design of Nowe Tychy in Poland and its further implementation over a several decade span. Furthermore, I would like to find out how the architecture and the image can become the basis for the ideas propagated among others by Manfredo Tafuri in relation to media coverage of the municipal space and its relation with intuitive path to architecture.

3. Film and architecture

The aforementioned M. Tafuri was of the opinion that visual communication, including film, enables us to preserve the signs, buildings and structures without the so-called “false consciousness”. For the history of architecture, time becomes, on one hand, the measurement of the passing of time, and on the other hand it helps the time lose a certain type of ideological ballast. Modern architecture, in this case here Polish architecture of the second half of the 20th century, was inspired by European experience and theories. Obviously, accounting for the ideological conception of the country, its implementation was rather more creative than theoretical, though not deprived of a particular template. Bruno Zevi, in his book, “Architecture as Space, How to look at architecture”, refers to identifying the interrelations between architecture and film image as follows: *The researches of Edison and the Lumiere brothers in the 1890’s led to the environment of a camera geared to carry film forward continuously, so that a series of exposures could be taken in rapid succession, making it possible for photography to render an illusion of motion. This discover of the motion picture was of enormous importance in the representation of architectonic space, because properly applied it resolves in a practical way, almost all the problems posed by the fourth dimension* [Zevi, 1974, p. 58–59].

The media coverage and, in a certain way, educational assets of the film image have, over the years, played an important part in shaping the opinions and views of European architects on architecture as a phenomenon which is not only spatial but also part of the media. The architectural space presented in the documentary under our analysis here, allows the viewer to see the creative effects on the one hand, but on the other hand, it also becomes synonymous with rational values. An architect’s intuition focuses on the understanding of creative and conceptual processes expressed in the dialogues going on between the Wejchert spouses in the film as well as in the opinions of their direct co-workers. Some of them were the team members from the onset of the design project of the new town – Nowe Tychy One of the educational assets of the film image is an opportunity to listen to the architectural jargon of the late 1970s.

Industry-specific vocabulary or such professional terms included in the dialogues as form, space, view, perspective, design, and others make up an important part in the discourse between rational and intuitive approaches to architecture.

³ Film filed in the archives of the The Educational Film Studio in Łódź.



III. 1. A view to a housing estate in Nowe Tychy, frame from the film “Wejchertowie” [1979] directed by Władysław Wasilewski. Film filed in the archives of the Educational Film Studio in Łódź. Author’s frame

4. Architectural studio venue for intuitive activities?

We may also consider that the image of an architectural design studio shown in the film frames carries educational values. As regards Poland in the post-war period, all architectural design studios were state run design offices in charge of urban planning in the territory of the Polish People’s Republic in the years 1945–1989. The space of an architectural design studio is the venue of conceptual work as well as the stage where the drawings, designs or mock-ups are performed. When designing, architects used tools, which from the view of modern technology are outdated now. The designs were drawn on tracing paper with the use of ink technical pens. Architect’s tables were used for precise drawings. For a contemporary viewer familiar with the specific nature of the profession of an architect, plastic stencils used for manual inclusion of pieces of furniture in the premises or details of bathrooms or toilets in the drawings would be a certain type of novelty.

At this stage we should pose the question whether the craftsmanship work performed in an architectural studio has anything to do with intuition. In those times, the restrictions posed on architectural work disregarded the emotions, rationality of solutions prevailed in the spatial reality of those times. Nevertheless, if we look at the images of the city presented in the film images we feel baffled at how immaterial and poetic the architecture of Nowe Tychy can be in the eye of the camera. The camera shows various spaces, in this that of an architectural studio.

The architectural studio presented in the film is also a place of conversations among the architects. For students of architecture, this film may be a bit surprising as it features numerous meetings of the Wejchert spouses with their co-workers and dialogues of their mutual consultations ongoing in the film. The image of the Wejcherts’ studio of 1979 is the focus

of dialogue, the meeting place of a master and an apprentice. What strikes us in the film is the respect shown by the co-workers for the Wejchert spouses. For many of those who appeared in the film, the studio in Nowe Tychy was the first workplace after graduation. It had also become a place where they could face the reality of architectural designing outside the university walls. Without doubt, working in such a big team was a big challenge for the architects featured in the film. As Lech Niemojewski [1894–1952], a great architect, once wrote in 1948 *The profession of architect is not a craft but a mission*. [Niemojewski, 1948, p. 11]

At present the issue of an architect's mission is no longer remembered. The aforementioned documentary, from the view of architectural education on the perception of the profession of architect is an invaluable example of the designer's work, viewed not just as earning money and developing designs but as using one's know-how and position to create living or working space of better form or function for other people. In my opinion, this approach to the profession of architect no longer exists. This is the reason why I think this film is an invaluable source of education for students of architecture, which shows the perception of an architect's work ethics in the old days.

5. History with a story to tell

Another aspect I would like to focus on here is the script with a story to tell. In the case of the film under our analysis the story is shown on two planes: verbal and visual. The words and sentences expressed by the architects in the film form an image of the workload required at first at coming up with a conception and then during the toilsome construction of the new town. The story, which is today so extensively used, becomes a recording of the past. Without doubt, the words which accompany the images are an asset of the film. The image would not have been complete but for the words. From today's point of view, the film as such is a story, yet its message can be defined as a recording of the past. The film may be viewed as a cycle of images enclosed in the frames of the epoch. The drawing is one of the most important tools used by the architects, nevertheless, in case of this film, the spoken language is an important part of the message. Voice depth, its intensity, gestures, facial expressions are all added values of the developing story of an important urban and architectural project of Nowe Tychy and the story of the emergence of the town as well as the stories of the people behind the construction and designing.

6. Rationality of modernism of the 1970s

I would like to consider one more visual aspect of the film images, namely the image of modern architecture. Space, presented in the documentary, is an interesting motif thereof. The film director sees it as a certain type of play, the living space and the lived space. A static image frozen in a photograph is not able to represent all the subtleties that are present in the film image. Sun rays falling on the building façade, the circulation of the housing estate dwellers in the borderlines of its space, trees swaying in the wind, all these components create a very ephemeral image of the urban space of Nowe Tychy in the documentary. Because the film was made in black and white, the play of light and shadow and proper framing are the techniques used to intensify its atmosphere.

In our modern world media are very important tools in architectural education. Because we use the image, drawing, we can show certain processes in a more transparent way. The film image, due to its nature and specific features, becomes a frequently used tool. Without doubt, if we are able to show architectural objects in motion, we can much better diagnose them than in a photograph. A natural feature of an architectural piece is its sensual perception by the viewer. Every building structure accommodates places or spaces that are designated for circulation or for sensual reception of our sight. Motion pictures let us move along the space designed by an architect in many cases as any passer-by would have moved and to perceive it similarly.

The film image in architectural education from the point of view of heritage becomes a recording of history. This medium makes up perfect teaching material. It, moreover, offers the viewer or the student the opportunity to sense the space in its original form just after erection of respective facilities – in many cases the presented buildings have so far been changed or transformed. The history of a particular architectural piece or urban complex, recorded in the film image, allows us to sense it in its neutral form, soon after erection.

7. Analysis of time and space conception

As already mentioned, the film image is a very interesting research area, which may fall within the research over the phenomenon described by M. Tafuri as a concept of analysis of time and architecture. As regards the time, we can observe how architectural facilities are shaped depending on particular time periods or artistic trends. Each such facility can be attributed with respective spatial and visual assets. Nevertheless, every facility presented in the film image becomes part of space set in respective time. Depending on the sensitivity of the viewer, the viewer will be able or not to define his/her sensory experience differently from the film director. Time and architecture are in a way suited to one another, making a pair that cannot part.

Modern architecture featured in the Polish film, in this case a documentary of the 1970s, is a reflection of our modern tendency of digitalisation of the past. It seems that today's students of architecture would feel more familiar with film images for the reason of their rhetoric and visual message options than with plans and cross-sections, also important from the point of view of cognition and sensual perception of architecture. The phenomenon of interdependencies between architecture and film images has been widely discussed and commented on at many European universities.

In Poland we have no such phenomenon. I am of the opinion that the opportunity of using films as supplementary material in teaching the history of architecture, I mean here Polish architecture, is an invaluable chance for education. The modern world, which digitalises space in a number of ways, could benefit from the images of the architecture created by Polish architects of the second half of the 20th century. Modern education should use all types of educational prompts to get the feedback from the participants in the didactic process. Here, we can well use feature films and documentary films as a supplementary medium for education.

Independently made feature films and documentaries can easily make up proper research material as regards the issue of architectural intuition. Such films could promote Polish architecture of the 1970s if uploaded in the Internet, in my opinion, they would contribute to sparking the interest in this period of Polish architectural conceptions.

The film image, in the case of this article a documentary, can be deemed a certain type of architectural story, where architecture (here: modern architecture) is a prevailing motif. As regards the film under our analysis, the passing of time has become an interesting example of a recording of an architectural idea conceived by a team of enthusiastic architects translated into tangible examples of implemented spatial assumptions. From the perspective of rationality, media coverage of architectural space is without doubt an asset of its authenticity in the context of achievements accomplished in the 1970s in Poland and other European countries.

8. Conclusions

The cognitive assets of architecture presented in a particular film let us assess it also from the point of view of the history of architecture. Each architectural piece irrespective of its utilitarian assets, in the course of time, becomes a work of certain engineering thought and also a recording of creative activity of architects. The ideological layer of architecture of the 1970s ceases to exist in the contemporary architectural discourse. What we are left with is the image and a recording of a particular moment grasped on the film, at present free from any ideological connotations. The ideology which accompanied Polish modern architecture of the 1970s is at present only a memory not worth coming back to. In conclusion of my considerations here, I would like to quote the words of Bruno Zevi again *All the techniques of representation and all the paths to architecture which do not include direct experience are pedagogically useful, of practical necessity and intellectually fruitful; but their function is no more than allusive and preparatory to the moment in which we, with everything in us that is physical and spiritual and, above all, human enter and experience the spaces we have been studying. That is the moment of architecture.*

There has always been an intuitive path to architecture, irrespective of the historical epoch, and intuition has always had a strong impact on architectural output. The combination of rationalism falling from experience on the one hand, and intuitive creation of the urban spatial reality of Polish towns on the other has always been a multivalent phenomenon. Architecture in a film image gives us another impetus for the search for an intuitive path to modern architecture on principles similar to a confrontation of an idea with the actual product.

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