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Almost human architecture. Examples of Polish architecture where the human factor co-creates the concept of the buildings

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Abstract

The article presents authors reflections on objects co-creating the new image of the cities and encouraging creating an interactive, multicultural space. The presented problems discuss architecture in the context of transferring information and activation of public places in the city. They are an element of research concerning the role of functions dominating the composition of a city that is being conducted by the team of researchers from the Silesian University of Technology and the Lodz University of Technology. The text discusses two groups of problems: 1) the question of the selected objects belonging to a predetermined to significant group; 2) an attempt to analyse the factors creating the human context in architecture.

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1. Introduction

The direct stimulus for the title of this work was a TV series about the friendship of two policemen one of whom has an artificial leg and the other is a cyborg with a sensitive soul. Their differences, as well as the “imperfections” of human nature, did not interfere with their male friendship in solidarity. Also, they did not constitute obstacles in carrying out their job above the average.

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Something very similar seems to be happening in architecture: each year many new objects are created which organize the urban space. They are correct in their functionality and spatial solutions, they do not cause objections, nor emotions – and this is all that can be said about them. Next to them, other objects are created, albeit rarely, objects that do for the urban space a bit more – they can move us or our mind, they make us positively reflect on human needs and possibilities. Each cultural period introduces its most characteristic feature, an idea that is followed by architectural works. The Vitruvian principle (1st century B.C.) of durability, functionality and beauty of buildings, for which humans developed a construction logic, is the reason why we consider Greek temples or Gothic architectural works as impressive or why we are still moved by the rationalism of the modernists.

The dynamically changing reality introduces the need for change in the surrounding world – a need for cognitive fluidity of impressions stemming from a variety of aesthetic experiences. We are moved by the combination of influences originating in film, music, fine arts as well as from a variety of areas of architectural interaction: identity, familiarity, prestige.

The world seen from the perspective created in a constant interaction with a city does not surprise us by a lack of unity, a tendency to cumulate contradictions. The reality appears as a multitude of maximally differentiated needs of the society striving for variability, which has a changing dimension. Also the spatial record seeks to freely interpret the activity that is expressed by the variety of architectural concepts. A concept in architecture is closely related to the overriding idea located at the peak of the design process. It is this architectural idea that creates the cohesion of the concept of a building [1]. It is the concept, not the form, which differentiates architecture from plain building.

Bernard Tschumi [2] states that there is no architecture without a context. An architectural work always comes to existence in a given setting, in a geographical localization, or in the context defined historically, culturally or economically. This does not relate to the visual dimension of an object only. Many examples of modern architecture show that the concept of a building corresponds to its program content to a varying degree. Here it is worth to add, that methodology of qualitative research for the evaluation of objects is recognized in Klaudiusz Fross publications [3]. The architectural idea often precedes the introduction of the program contents however usually it is the program content that confirms the generally accepted weight of the object. For there is no architectural space without that “something” that happens inside it. Bernard Tschumi appreciating the weight of the context introduces into the discussion three strategies, three relationships possible to obtain between the architectural concept of an object and the context:

- Mutual indifference meaning the independence of the idea from its setting in any context. The object and its architectural idea coexist in the space independently, not interacting with one another.
- Mutual cohesion is seen when the architectural idea of the object and its setting in space are complementary, often so deeply that it seems that they smoothly unify.
- A conflict between the concept and the context sometimes results in the need to work out a consensus for this separation (*op. cit.*).

2. Presentation of the architectural objects which were built last time in Poland

Such assumptions influenced the authors in their choice of discussed objects. For presentation we chose three groups of objects located in Poland, which can be characterized as follows:

- A. Objects of seemingly neutral context and hidden contents: Museum of History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, the seat of the National Symphonic Orchestra of the Polish Radio in Katowice, the building of the Interactive Centre of History of Ostrów Tumski also called the Gate of Poznań;
- B. Objects having in common the context of the place: the branch of the BRE Bank in Bydgoszcz, the seat of the Philharmonic Orchestra in Szczecin and the Opera House in Białystok;
- C. Objects created in the context of architectural familiarity: the building of the Służew Culture House in Warsaw, the Chopin Museum in Żelazowa Wola, Malopolska Centre of Culture (Malopolska Garden of Arts) in Kraków.

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