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ARCHITECTURAL GAMES
WITH HISTORYGRY ARCHITEKTURY
Z HISTORIĄ

Abstract

The text discusses architectural games related to the conservation of historic monuments. Two museum designs are presented connected by an innovative design approach despite being fifty years apart. Between 1957 and 1974, Carlo Scarpa began an architectural game with the museum building in Verona. In the twenty-first century Daniel Libeskind continues Scarpa's unusual approach to design, but does so in an even bolder way, abandoning modernism and creating his own unique style.

Keywords: architecture, game, art, conservation of historic monuments, museum

Streszczenie

Tekst opowiada o grach architektury związanych z konserwacją zabytków. Przedstawiono dwa projekty muzeów, które, mimo pięćdziesięciu lat różnicy, łączy nowatorskie podejście do projektowania. W latach 57–74 Carlo Scarpa zapoczątkował gry z architekturą budynku muzeum w Weronie. Daniel Libeskind w XXI wieku kontynuuje niecodzienne podejście Scarpy do projektowania, ale dokonuje tego w jeszcze odważniejszy sposób, zrywając z modernizmem i tworząc swój niepowtarzalny styl.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, gra, sztuka, konserwacja zabytków, muzeum

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1. In architecture all sorts of games can be found: cheerful, joyful, recognizable, intellectual, imitating. However, there is a kind of architecture that conceals its games deep inside, and once we guess them, they are serious, not to say restrained. These are the restorers' games. The precept of *First, do no harm – Primum non nocere* – may intimidate builders who do not want to prejudice existing monuments. This precept derived from the very serious science of medicine, usually leads to a certain conservative approach to design, which is not treated as a pejorative term here. *Nulla regula sine exceptione – No rule without exception*, which may be a rule in the art, as which architecture should be considered. Architectural conservators or more broadly architects designing within the sphere of historic monuments face the problem of integrating new into the old fabric, not always treating a historical building with the seriousness it deserves. Nowadays, it seems, conservation actions are conducted with tongue in cheek.



Ill. 1–4. Carlo Scarpa, Castelvecchio, Verona, 1959–1973

2. The first major architectural game with historic monuments can be seen in the work of Carlo Scarpa from the years 1957–1974. What first comes to mind here is the fact that the architect did not think of the Hippocratic Oath, and perhaps just the opposite. Castelvecchio museum in Verona is located in a converted mediaeval castle. Carlo Scarpa created what one should call an architectural artwork, as it certainly was not a mere modernisation, combining two aesthetics – historical and modern. Known for his passion for concrete forms, the architect creates its temple here. Despite its technical shortcomings, it is not a usual material, but rather “the sophisticated concrete of Carlo Scarpa”, as described by Dariusz Kozłowski [3, p. 86]. The whole was connected with indissoluble bonds, and does not mean the durability of concrete here, giving the observer the ability to perceive the architect’s interference in the historical matter. The work is thoroughly modernist and fits Andrzej Kadłuczka’s description of modernism: “[it] is a concept as broad as ambiguous... in architecture, trends for the detachment from historicism, quests for simple forms or the use of rationalist functional and structural solutions” [2, p. 56]. The architect adorns everything with modern concrete additions. The stairs do not seem comfortable, but that was probably not the creator’s intention. Although being completely modern, the massive door fittings are reminiscent of mediaeval handicraft. According to Ewa Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich, despite the passage of time “... his recipes showing how to separate raw concrete or iron details from historic substance proved successful and are still up-to-date” [8, p. 56]. Perhaps the rationality of the applied means and integration in the historic walls was to be the beginning of a certain *Gesamtkunstwerk*, allowing one to perceive the combination of the destroyed castle, architectural work and exhibitions accompanying the whole. Perhaps it was just the architect’s game with a confused observer, the Futurists’ dream about the lack of ornamentation. After all, Antonio Sant’ Elia wrote in the Manifesto of Futurist Architecture from 1914: “No architecture has existed since 1700. A moronic mixture of the most various stylistic elements used to mask the skeletons of modern houses is called modern architecture. The new beauty of cement and iron are profaned by the

superimposition of motley decorative incrustations that cannot be justified either by constructive necessity or by our (modern) taste, and whose origins are in Egyptian, Indian or Byzantine antiquity and in that idiotic flowering of stupidity and impotence that took the name of neoclassicism.” [6, p. 306–307]. One will not discover whether the said Scarpa’s design would have been futuristic enough for the Futurists, but the museum certainly makes a great impression on the average visitor.

3. The world of contemporary museums is already completely futuristic. Scarpa’s tentative creation was a mere prelude to what was to come in fifty years. In creating a new form, Daniel Libeskind goes much further than his predecessor, oblivious to our likings and fears. Admittedly, there is no struggle of concrete here, but it is, as described by Tomasz Kozłowski, the struggle of an expressive single crystal with a historical object [4, p. 103]. Daniel Libeskind constructed the Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr in Dresden in 2011. It is an extension of the existing museum building which houses the arsenal from the years 1873–1877. The building was erected in the form of a palace with a body and two wings forming a kind of courtyard. Seen for the first time, the design seems to be an expressionist reference to (overturn of?) Ieoh Ming Pei’s Pyramid at the Louvre. The extension takes the form of a huge wedge which tries to scythe through the building. Decomposition of the whole is accomplished by penetrating to the inside of the back courtyard and breaks open the entire historical intent. The abstract form grows out of the cuboid installation shaft,

and disturbs the monumental the building's axiality. One can look inside the disquieting element whose façades are covered with metal, perforated, translucent elements. The interior, however, reveals constructions to us. The whole, it seems, is a pure form created probably to bolster the architect's ego. The function of this "ornament" may be that of any other artworks – uselessness. Modern architecture today has to be abstract, as the contemporary work of art is, after all, abstract. According to Ewa Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich: "it seems that abandoning the previous established order in architecture, deconstruction, has blurred the boundaries between possibility and impossibility of implementation. An architectural work – like a trembling, restless sculpture – stands in stark contrast to the surroundings. It often consciously creates a new value positioned within the historical structures," [8, p. 190]. The form of the "new" building is the most paramount, more important than its function. After all, Paul Valéry claimed that "what we call content is only an impure form" [7, p. 200]. Perhaps this is a source of modern architects' reluctance to emphasize the role of functions, or perhaps they are no longer able to design as in the past.

4. Bonawentura Maciej Pawlicki recalls: *Prepon – aptum – decorum* – Aristotle's three principles of the correlation of content and form, but they are no longer valid in modern art. "This category obliged the space shaping masters to use different structures and forms, depending on the type of buildings so that they become more beautiful, more magnificent and more enticing" [5, p. 109–110]. Like the words of Vitruvius two thousand years ago. He asserted three qualities of architecture: *firmitatis, utilitatis, venustatis*. Also those words can no longer be treated in a literal way as the exponent of beauty today, in the twenty-first century, in the era of information and continuous alterations in building assignments. Once museums were constructed according to the canon, style. They were recognizable, monumental, sometimes pompous, but even Le Corbusier used to say that "styles" are a lie, which gave us the basis for these considerations. After all, we are in the museum and here everything is, or at least should be, art. Let us remember that "...nothing is really beautiful but that which cannot be made use of..." [1, p. 52]. Therefore, let us praise even the useless shapes of buildings where equally beautiful useless items can be found.

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