MARIA MALZACHER[*]

GAMES AND PLAY BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE AND ART IN VIEW OF THE PERCEPTION OF SPACE

GRY I ZABAWY ARCHITEKTURY ZE SZTUKĄ W KONTEKŚCIE PERCEPCJI PRZESTRZENI

Abstract

This paper is focused on reflections concerning games and play of architecture with art, taking place in the context of a new paradigm of interactive perception of sensual space, analysed on selected representative examples. In the face of globalization, games and play with architecture in the form of ironic or whimsical designs offer diverse aesthetic perceptions, bordering on kitsch and consumer and commercial mega-gadgets.

Keywords: games, plays, architecture, art, perception of space

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono refleksje na temat gry i zabawy architektury ze sztuką rozgrywane w kontekście nowego paradygmatu percepcji interaktywnej przestrzeni sensualnej, zanalizowane na wybranych reprezentatywnych przykładach. W dobie współczesnej globalizacji odmienne doznania estetyczne oferują też zabawy z architekturą w ironicznych i żartobliwych koncepcjach projektów z pogranicza kiczu, megagadżetu konsumpcyjno-komercjalnego.

Słowa kluczowe: gry, zabawy, architektura, sztuka, percepcja przestrzeni

---

[*] PhD. Arch. Maria Malzacher, Department of the Design, Theory, and History of Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Silesian University of Technology.

1. Introduction

Recent architecture integrated with art at the turn of the 20th century abolishes the so-far stabile material order of the universe, introducing new visionary and hybrid labile structures into the game of the perception of space, in contradiction of the Vitruvian triad principles of: durability (*firmitas*), usability *(utilitas)* and beauty *(venustas)* [7, p. 32]. Modern architectural realizations, based on state-of-the-art technology and digital software, intervene in the reality, and, have introduced, in the last few years, an extended concept of space and architectural perception.

Architecture as an art of space formation, in accordance with the traditional definition of modernists, had an explicitly defined place among the arts. The place of architecture in the arts and the mutual relations have been the subject of theoretical research and important discourse in "post-medialization". The issue of the role of architecture in our modern art system was the main concept of Gabriela Świtek's book: *Games of art with architecture. Modern affinities and modern integration of the arts*, in which the author, from the point of view of an art historian, investigates the co-dependence between architecture as a spatial art and visual arts, against the wide and retrospective historical and modern background, entwining various forms of mutually connected games in the narration [6]. The author draws in readers by evoking the emblems of the famous *Blur Building* pavilion (2002), created by Elizabeth Diller and Ricard Scofidio, New York, which is an accomplishment bordering on architecture and the art of modern architectural installation, compiled with previous Warsaw designs (unimplemented) of *Clouds Creator* (1999) by artist Jarosław Kozakiewicz simulating the concealment of The Palace of Culture in Warsaw and *Cloud* installation (1994) at "Piłsudskiego Square" in Warsaw by architect Jan Damięcki, which are appropriate examples of the modern affinities of arts pertaining to the new theory of architectural space.

2. Games of illusion in architecture

The abovementioned architectural works are connected by the common symbolic idea of "a cloud/ pall" difficult to define in the category of art. As accurately stated by Gabriela Świtek: "Clouds slip the traditional systematization of arts: they are neither architecture, nor sculpture, nor painting". Following *A Theory of Cloud* by Hubert Damish, Świtek states: "A cloud has no body, no surface, no definite colour, no shape and no limits (...), yet, you can still see it" [6, p. 11].

This description exactly corresponds to the *Blur Building*, a misty pavilion, which interlines the recent history of art as one of the symbols of the 21st-century architecture. This spectacular exhibition pavilion was built for Swiss Expo 2002 on Lake Neuchatel, and, according to its authors' intention, was to paraphrase a cloud suspended over the Lake and introduce spectators to the world of ephemeral space by means of the game of illusion. The mist generated from the Lake water by state-of-the-art technologies – a system of nozzles spraying steam – floats above the Lake, it has variable spatial parameters and shields the actual construction, causing sensory disorientation and leading to the loss of the sense of time and real space among the participants of a live spectacle [2, p. 110]. One may dare to recall the role of artificial clouds generated in the staging of Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk,* which were devised to blur the boundaries between the scene, orchestra and spectators [6, p. 12]. The

intention of architects Diller + Scofidio was to invoke the game of emotions in the perception of a variable space, which they expressed by stating: "Unlike entering a space, entering Blur (…) is like stepping into a habitable medium, one that is formless, featureless, depthless, scaleless, massless, surfaceless, and dimensionless" [2, p. 110]. Roman Rutkowski, describing the emotional state accompanying the penetration of the space of the pavilion, poses a question: "Is the Blur building the same thing that we know so very well from computer monitors: a space without end and beginning, a space in which nearly everything is possible?" [5, p. 49]. The concept of the pavilion was a form of criticism and devious game of reaction to modern trends in world exhibition design, packed with hyper-technologies and digital visual stimulation. "High definition has become the new orthodoxy. By contrast, Blur is decidedly low-definition," according to the architects of this project [2, p. 110]. They also admitted that it was inspired by the works of Japanese artist Fujiko Nakaya, who created "misty sculptures", and, in particular, the misty pavilion at Expo'70 in Osaka [5, p. 50].

In the last few years simulations have frequently been used by practising architects and modern artists to create a dynamic architectural space. According to Beata Juchniewicz: "Such a condition changes the status of architecture, which becomes increasingly devoid of matter, which operates on light, transitory images generated by screens, emerging from the illusion of mirrors and glass facades". Juchniewicz also states that: "Thanks to advanced technologies, it is possible to create mobile space of variable conditions, not only limited to lighting conditions" [3, p. 353].

A master of creating the illusion of space, often by means of the visual effects of steam, mist, lighting illuminations and mirror representations is Olafur Eliasson, a Danish artist of Icelandic origin. In his works Eliasson concentrates on the perception of the landscape through the prism of the four elements: water, air, earth and fire. *The Weather Project* is one of his most recognized spectacular installations at the borderline of art and architecture, presented within the frameworks of Turbine Hall exhibition, Tate Modern in London, 2003/2004. The concept of the project was based on a subjective weather experience and meditations on metamorphic space. Inside a huge empty hall, the author created a metaphor of the sky and gigantic sunset constructed by a system of lamps emitting mono-chromatic light. The subtle, ephemeral effect of the atmosphere of a variable aura of space was reinforced by delicately sprayed mist, cumulating clouds, and the slabs of mirrors mounted on the entire surface of the ceiling. By such arrangement of the interior of the mirror images, the author generated a variable space with user participation, introducing, through the play of light and effects of artificial mist, the illusion of a natural space of the external landscape, experimenting with its dislocation and creating a friendly atmosphere of recreation, play and contemplation, master architectural magic of mysterious space [2, p. 116].

Olafur Eliasson's project compels to recall the inspirations by the works of famous Renaissance and Baroque masters of illusion, who, by creating visual mirages and blurring the borderlines between the tangible and imaginary worlds, drew spectators into the game of space. In particular, there are strong connotations with "di sotto di su" techniques and paintings, as well as with the Italian non-collinear perspective technique, the "quadrature" of architectural space, which created the illusion of the depth of infinity in the interiors, above the spectators' heads [8]. The association between "di sotto di su" and the *Weather Project* boils down to a similar approach to forms reflected in the ceiling of the mirrors, as if floating in the expanse of the sky; however, in a reversed "upside down" view, and not, as typical for "di sotto" perspective, from the feet upwards.

3. Games of sensory architecture

Nowadays in the perception of architectural space, the sensory field is being broadened by the engagement of the recipients' other senses. The renaissance of the interest in sound in architecture has led to a focus on sonic research and experiments involving the use of the sense of hearing in the experience of space. The reflections of this trend are spectacular realizations bordering on architecture and art, for example: the distinguished 2012 Polish Pavilion by artist Katarzyna Krakowiak at the 13th International Biennial of Architecture held in Venice: "Common Ground". The author defined her work as "a sculpture of sound" and labelled it as: *Making The Walls Quake as if They Were Dilating with the Secret Knowledge of Great Powers*, which is a quotation from Charles Dicken's novel: *Dombey and Son* [9]. Similarly to the already discussed *Weather Project* by Olafur Eliasson, the pavilion was a minimalist presentation of the form of the object with the main emphasis on the interpretation of the game played between the spectators and their perception of sensual space. The concept of the project assumed an intriguing game between architectural interaction and sound, experienced by spectators by emitted sounds of buildings and coded conversations, trembling of the walls, detection of complicated equipment and the system of sensors. "Such a space makes it possible to hear, not only see," as expressed by the Jury Committee of this most prestigious architectural exhibition in the world [9]. The advancement of new technologies and interactive media extends the range of sensual perceptions in the experience of space. The integration of architecture with sound is also presented in *Son-O-House* in Ekkersrijt exhibited in 2004 following Lars Spuybroek's design in cooperation with composer Edwina van der Heide [2, p. 290]. This Dutch interactive sound pavilion, reacting to the movement of the visitors by changes in the modulation of sound, entices the game with the spectators, drawing them into space exploration. According to Ewa Cisek: "The architecture of Son-O-House may be compared to a continuous process, in which human movement creates the sound existing in space (...) In such confrontation, visitors unavoidably participate in the creation of new sounds (…) Man and architecture become a part of the connected field of co-feeling and complementariness" [1, p. 47, 50].

4. Plays with architecture

As far as games with architecture may be treated as a kind of intellectual activity, in the modern globalized culture, we are facing a separate category of the play of architecture perceived as ironic and playful realizations of projects bordering on kitsch. The ongoing machinery of consumption and commercialism addressed to accommodate the taste of an average recipient introduces in the public space a new alternative species, bordering on pseudo-art and entertainment architecture. Such are the numerous quizzical designs of houses or installations in the type of mega-gadgets, which are purely aimed at tourism or recreation. Such a category entails world-wide trends and realizations of "upside down" houses that multiply at a threatening speed, spoiling the traditional cultural landscape. Currently, in Poland, there are several cases of such architecture, among which the best known is *Crooked House* (2003) in Sopot, *Upside Down House* (2006) in Szymbark, Kaszubskie Lake District, *House Otherwise* in Zakopane and similar inverted houses in Władysławowo, Łeba, Kołobrzeg, Miłkow near Karpacz afar others. The inspiration for these houses was, undoubtedly, Ewin Wurm's *House*

Attack (2006), which is perched in a precarious position into the roof of the Modern Kunst Museum in Vienna. Among other realizations of similar design are: *Wonder-House* (Orlando, Florida), *House of Katmandu* (Magaluf, Majorka), *Sakasa Resuto* (Matsumoto, Japan) [10].

5. Recapitulation

Closing the circle of reflections, it should be emphasized that the games and play with architecture happen in the field of variable time limits, creating a new quality of sensual space. Modern architecture is open to the dynamics of ongoing processes and it creates its own unpredictable scenarios. The ever-lasting principles of Vitruvius: durability, usability and beauty, in the context of modern ephemeral architectural realizations – variable, temporary, interactive – have somehow been endowed with anachronism. The aesthetics of modern architectural forms is often difficult to qualify according to the category of beauty, often fascinating and sometimes amusing. Accordingly, architecture in its integration with art attempts to make the world aesthetic and give it a new image. In conclusion, it is worth recalling the statement by Henryk Kiereś: "Aesthetics is an art of games and play (...) the number of possible games – the synthesis is infinite, so accordingly, the game becomes a metaphysical deposit of culture" [4, p. 56].

R e f e r e n c e s

[1] Cisek E., *Interaktywna architektura dźwięku (Interactive architecture of sound)*, Technical Periodical, No 15, Architecture, 7–12, 2010, p. 46–51.
[2] Jodidio P., *Architektura dzisiaj 3 (Architecture Now! 3)*, Taschen 2004.
[3] Juchniewicz B., *Iluzje architektury (Illusions of Architecture),* Technical Periodical, No 15, Architecture, 7–12, 2010, p. 350–354.
[4] Kiereś H., *Spór o sztukę (Dispute about Art)*, Lublin 1996.
[5] Rutkowski R., *Blur*, Architecture & Business, 2/2003, p. 44–51.
[6] Świtek G., *Gry sztuki z architekturą. Nowoczesne powinowactwa i współczesne integracje (Games of architecture and art. Modern affinities and current integrations)*, Toruń 2013.
[7] Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, Warsaw 1999.
[8] http://www.opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/I/S/jak_slonce.html (access: 20.05.2015).
[9] http://www.tvn24.pl/kultura-styl,8/polski-pawilon-jak-szpiegowska-centrala (access: 20.05.2015).
[10] http://www.najbardziej.com/kreatywne/84-niesamowite-budowle-swiata/ (access: 25.05.2015).