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Culture or tact in architecture?

Poland lies on the outskirts of the West and on the outskirts of the East – at the meeting point of many cultures. This location was the foundation of the phenomenon of many Polish cities combining in architecture the traditions of (...) nations, denominations and cultures¹.

One could consider the question: *Culture² or Tact³ in Architecture?* to be groundless. However, the meaning of these two terms – *culture* and *tact* – should be distinguished. Architecture comprises both of them. *Culture* – as a broadly explained semantic expression – is embedded in the history of philosophy and aesthetics. *Tact* is rather *parvenu* in this comparison but it provides a less restrained, less historical and philosophical, approach to *culture*. Culture is our common good connected with historical heritage and architecture, as one of the most permanent arts, is its special expression.

In 2009, on the initiative of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage Mr. Bogdan Zdrojewski, the Congress of Polish Culture was held in Cracow. A document which presents in its more detailed part an approach to immovable historic monuments but understood in their broader sense as cultural heritage was developed for the meeting⁴. Numerous questions were also asked; for instance: *“Is there*

no alternative to Polish ‘today’ than: epigonic historicistic thinking of heritage or another ‘hint of modernism (...)’⁵. In the final notes, it was stressed e.g. that so far the experiences after 1989 have demonstrated an urgent need to change approach and treat the cultural legacy not as a burden but as an opportunity as well as a need to look at culture as an element of economy not as an unproductive thing⁶, especially in the context where the current legal system does not include all elements allowing for adapting objects of architecture to changing conditions. There is no “social debate” on the role of historic monuments and the latest cultural assets in valuation of that heritage⁷. This is the origin of the need to approach architecture also from the position of “tact” and not only from the position of “culture”.

Architecture is closely connected with the art of knowledge. For knowledge to be possible what is needed, as Roman Ingarden proved, is discovery of cognitive values⁸. In this case it could be architecture, both historical and modern, in culture. We learn architecture through its

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¹ Kysiak M., *Miasto kultur, religii narodów – wielki bazar architektury*, conference materials from the Congress of Polish Architects: „Architektura miasta w dialogu kultur, narodów, religii”, Białystok, May 20–22, 2005, passim. The deliberations regard Poland but they include issues regarding activities between cultures. Both the “meetings” and “knowledge” which provides a broader context for communication and differentiation: what subjectively is culture and what is tact [6].

² *Culture* has here two meanings. On the one hand, it is spiritual and material legacy and on the other hand, it is an expression of high development or skill, education, knowledge.

³ *Tact* (Lat. taktus=touch) should be understood here especially as maintenance of moderation and principles of decency in architecture of “yesterday, today and future, some gentleness.

⁴ Publication edited by Jacek Purchla, *Raport o systemie ochrony dziedzictwa kulturowego w Polsce po roku 1989*, National Culture Center, Warszawa, 2009 [7].

⁵ Op. cit., p. 10.

⁶ It is evident that architecture is important e.g. in tourism, which in the theory of culture is called cultural tourism. The term “cultural-tourism” which appeared in the theory of culture is not connected only with historic sites but also with modern ones as well with those which are connected with “addition and subtraction”, which is closely connected with culture or tact/culture and tact. Cognition can be in this case multicultural.

⁷ This also regards modern designs (20th and 21st centuries) which “consume” the existing environment: both cultural and natural.

⁸ Ingarden R., *Studia z teorii poznania*, PWN, Warsaw 1995, passim. He also writes this about values: (...) *a value is never something that exists for itself, but it is always the value of something. Regardless of their kind [usefulness, moral, artworks – abbreviated by MW]. (...) There is no value which whatsoever which exists which would exist without that something of which it is a value, [in:] Przejście – dzieło – wartość*, Kraków 1966, pp. 92–93; [after:] W. Juszcak, *Fragmenty*, Zamek Królewski w Warszawie 1995, p. 65 [4].



Fig. 1. Cinema "Kijów" in Cracow, 2004

impact and message – communication of ideas, functional or sentimental and historical message. This knowledge allows for placing a given object or architectural and urban complex in culture of a given community⁹. The character of this knowledge is "open": it is in fact not limited by any definition. Consequently, depending on context we can perceive architectural activities as connected with "culture" or we will consider them "tact". A lot of theories¹⁰ have been developed for the events which cannot be defined as knowledge and only as listing¹¹. They regard e.g. styles and rules of analysis and perception of events and buildings as well as in the scope of continuity in architecture and continuity connected with culture or tact. This enables us to look at architecture in a broader historical context also at present in the times of pop-culture¹². In this context it becomes evident that it is possible nowadays to look for differentiation of meanings. Mass culture, however, should require *tact* from what is historical and

culture in creating for the future, depending on adequacy in capturing quality of a given architectural structure and with subjective assessment of modification possibilities. Of course, as the precursor of pop-culture Andy Warhol put it, "everybody will be world-famous for fifteen minutes" but it is the activities taken now that, despite their subjectivity, should be cognitive and not only informative or presentative. They should also serve cultural communication, especially in respect of such permanent artwork as architecture.

Due to its concrete character and relative permanence, architecture is a firm "physical foundation" of other arts such as painting, sculpture, mosaic and as such it ranks high in cultural heritage. This harmonization is evident in both historic buildings and complexes and in some modern buildings – but it is also less and less frequent mainly for economical reasons. This is where culture and tact in continuity is missing: addition or subtraction in a new space development as well as creative space. Due to its special time spread architecture is vulnerable to change and transformation but new activities do not always demonstrate creative properties¹³. This results from the changing weight of semiotic and ontological values, which translates into experience and perception of activities perceived as *cultural* in the case of meaning resulting from education or *tactful* in the case of experience.

In perception of activities connected with architecture, what is important is architectural education which is an indicator of culture of a given society. In Scandinavian

⁹ It should not be forgotten that culture and tact will be understood and differentiated in a different way by recipients from one social culture and those from other cultures because what will be needed then is understanding between cultures – cultural communication based on aesthetics.

¹⁰ A. D'Alleva claims, however, that the borderline between theory and methodology is fluid. Com.: Anne D'Alleva, *Metody i teorie historii sztuki*, Universitas, Kraków 2005, passim [1].

¹¹ Listing also regards judgments and aesthetic convictions which exist in a given culture, in this case in Western culture. When deliberating the need to list and place, U. Eco notes that (...) *it is difficult to say how a given image can present things and still suggest some 'and so on (...)*. *Infinity in aesthetics is a subjective feeling of something that surpasses us (...)* it is a feeling that comes from a finite and perfect wholeness of admired thing (...). *This presentation modality will be called a list, index or a catalog.*", [in:] *Szaleństwo katalogowania*, Rebis, Poznań 2009, pp. 9–17, passim [3].

¹² In the opinion of W. Burszta pop-culture of the 21st century is the domain of simultaneity. Com.: Wojciech J. Burszta, *Świat jako więzienie kultury*, PIW, Warszawa 2008, passim [2].

¹³ W. Tatarkiewicz indicates a contemporary definition of creation where the notion of novelty is general as *Every creation implies novelty but not every novelty implies creativity*. Furthermore, he claims that (...) *creating a new work can have different results – theoretical and practical*. W. Tatarkiewicz, *Dzieje sześciu pojęć*, PWN, Warszawa 2005, pp. 309–310 [8].



Fig. 2. Cinema “Kijów” in Cracow, 2010

countries, e.g. in Finland¹⁴, great emphasis is placed on this kind of social education, just like on cultural education in general. As Jacek Woźniakowski put it: there are countries where children are exposed to culture which is a “living value of tradition and necessary progress”¹⁵. And since architecture is the common root of all arts, its significance is synthesizing, both for the recipients and authors of architectural works in which and with which other arts harmonize, constituting a culture-forming ele-

ment. However, in order to understand and experience architecture the “eye and mind” should be developed as well as the whole “apparatus” receiving graphic stimuli to which people with their psycho-physicality are exposed¹⁶. This is exactly the purpose which architectural education serves because the very term *culture*, without architectural education, easily escapes purely theoretical definition, and more intuitive, closer to *tact*, definitions seem more applicable. *Culture* subjects itself to certain rules, whereas *tact* uses some implied freedom of activities, complementing or excluding each other in art and architecture. However, they are both connected with creating and with Vitruvian “propriety”¹⁷.

The term “sustainable development”¹⁸, which is currently quite popular, is used in reference to more and more aspects of our life. What does it really mean? It is my experience that so called sustainable development has always been present in culture as an element of continuity and heritage and “sustainable design” is the answer to the necessary adaptation of design in architecture to the conditions resulting from more and more complex activities connected with the environmental protection in its broad

¹⁴ M. Włodarczyk, *Architektura Finlandii a edukacja architektoniczna społeczeństwa*, Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University of Technology 2009. In chapter II – 8.4, p. 46 on the role of education he states that special attention needs to be paid to the fact that the significance of the influence of architecture on the general cultural and social sensitivity is universal [in Finland – note by MW], which results in both architectural culture in designing and tact for the context of the place and time. The author writes that *Finland decided that education through art, including architecture, is important element of policy of the state and by extension educational system. In the sixties, [1960s – note by MW] an educational campaign began (...). It was decided to educate conscious consumers.* He also quotes Dariusz Śmiechowski [in:] *Budowanie systemu edukacji architektonicznej w Polsce: Respect for our own environment testifies to the level of our national culture. The development of the sensitivity to the quality of surroundings at young age (understood as both built and natural environment) determines future behaviors connected with the use of space in our country. Investing in education and knowledge, including architectural education of children and youth (...)* belongs to the most effective policy [11].

¹⁵ J. Woźniakowski, *Czy kultura jest do zbawienia koniecznie potrzebna?*, SIW Znak, Kraków 1988, p.176. The text regards also other aspects connected with culture which demonstrate that the European culture is “alive” and its properties include pluralism as well as a large scale of issued connected with different time and different places. The author notes that masterpieces are not created every day but they set the direction of efforts and possibilities, and only by creating culture they can be preserved. He stresses that (...) *in a sense man is the greatest masterpiece of culture.* In that context it is especially important to pay attention to the significance of education in architecture as developing man’s experiences and thus himself [12].

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 197.

¹⁷ In his treatise *The Ten Books on Architecture*, Vitruvius lists the component elements of architecture which include for instance beauty (eurhythmy) – the proper arrangement of members and propriety (decor) – perfection in appearance composed of individual members which are considered good. Currently that approach could be denote new meanings and contemporary connotations with good continuity or sustainable development in architecture design [10].

¹⁸ *Sustainability* (e.g. renewability, durability, balance). Often used without translation in the field literature, including architecture. Apart from infrastructural and technical activities in the scope of designing buildings, this term can also regard aesthetic and cultural aspects. This means that in architectural activities there may appear a need to look at prospective behavior of future recipients in respect of the connection between cultural and natural environments.



Fig. 3. House at Szczepańska Street 5, Cracow – before remodeling; former Restaurant “Pod Trzema Rybkami”

sense, including urban and natural landscape. The context of the place and time as indicators of culture in architecture is here a “supplementary” element. At present, in a sense, the word *culture* is replaced with the term *sustainable development*. A similar thing can be observed also in activities connected with architectural heritage where for a long time now *conservation* more and more often has been replaced with a broader term *revitalization*.

Let us focus on some examples. Is covering a building with advertising banners cultural? It is not. The person who was commissioned to design a building did not design a holder for banners. The plague of advertising

banners destroys not only historic buildings but modern ones too: without any culture and without any tact. Unfortunately, this also regards objects of so called high culture such as museums, theaters or cinemas (Figs. 1–2). People who take such decisions evidently violate copyright unless the author has given a permission but I have never noticed in my career that efforts at obtaining such permits are made. The building and conservation authorities say they have no legal capacity to do anything about that. It is not exactly true because “anything that is not prohibited by law is legal”, so these institutions are allowed to inform potential law breakers about applicable



Fig. 4. House at Szczepańska Street 5, Cracow – after remodeling; at present “Hotel Stary”

regulations and consequences of their violation. Similar problems regard thermal modernization of buildings. Where is then culture in architecture? It is rather rare (Figs. 3–4). So called “right continuity” principle is vanishing¹⁹. It is not supported by “sustainable development”. However, *tact* could be useful in this situation but this seems to be rare as well.

The deliberations presented above provoke reflection on the problem in general. However, maybe the question asked at the beginning was asked in the wrong way. Maybe not *culture or tact* but *culture and tact*. This could be a logical conclusion. Without harmonization of those apparently synonymous terms and sensitivity in approach to what is culture and what is tact in architecture, there

will never be any culture or any tact. The same way a cultured man should be tactful and a tactful man should be cultured (although it is not always so). One can be cultured in general that is “educated” but at the same time with no tact at all. And the other way around – one can be extremely tactful that is “considerate” and know nothing about culture and in this sense not be cultured. I think that it is similar with architecture in which we are dealing with both culture and tact and we keep searching for the answer to the question: “culture or tact?”. Everybody will look for the answer in their own way. One thing, however, seems to be certain – right continuity and reflection over the past, presence and future encompass both meanings of seemingly the same notion. Paraphrasing a philosophical thought: we satisfy the soul not when we know much about culture, but when we understand and feel²⁰. In culture, like in nature, development takes place gradually and slowly and (...) *intellect enjoys, in a sense, sensual pleasures although coming not directly from senses, intellect enjoys aesthetic pleasures*²¹. Ultimately then it is *culture and tact* in architecture, and not *culture or tact*.

¹⁹ J. Żórawski, *O budowie formy architektonicznej*, Arkady 1973, passim [13]. In his book J. Żórawski notes the psychological aspect of experiencing architecture. He stresses the juxtaposition of subjective and objective experience in the theory of architecture and adds that development evolves towards subjectivity. So the more in architecture, “good continuity”, which is an element of culture in designing and activities regarding architecture, is important to experience it. He continues similar deliberations and writes that *It will be a mistake if we do not find the input form in the derivative form but we will see other formal values. (...) architecture operates only through adding or subtracting parts. (...) architecture is exclusively about constant and permanent continuity of existing systems. (...) Most probably we will achieve that by experiences and not by reasonable inquiries*, [in:] *Wybór pism estetycznych*, Universitas, Kraków 2008, pp. 148–152 [14].

²⁰ Ignatius of Loyola: *What fills and satisfies the soul consists, not in knowing much, but in our understanding the realities profoundly and in savoring them interiorly*, [in:] W.E. Lynch SJ, *The integrating mind*, Sheed and Ward 1962, p. 82; [after:] J. Woźniakowski, op. cit., p. 292.

²¹ I. Kant, *Antropologia w ujęciu pragmatycznym*, Warsaw 2005, pp. 175–176.

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Kultura czy takt w architekturze

Wydawać by się mogło, że postawione pytanie: kultura czy takt w architekturze jest bezzasadne. Niemniej jednak należy rozróżnić wyrazy: kultura i takt. Jedno i drugie w architekturze występuje. Kultura jako szerzej pojmowane semantycznie wyrażenie jest umocowane w historii filozofii. Takt jest bardziej „parweniuszem”, ale jednocześnie pozwala na swobodniejsze podejście do wyrazu „kultura”. Poruszając się wśród przykładów: Czy kulturalnym jest obwieszanie budynków reklamami? Nie jest. Ktoś kto projektował na czyjeś zlecenie, nie projektował „wieszaka dla reklam”. Osoby decydujące o takim działaniu naruszają prawo autorskie. Chyba, że autor wyraził zgodę, ale z moje dotychczasowej

praktyki nie wynika, aby takie starania o zgodę były czynione. Władze architektoniczne i konserwatorskie zasłaniają się niemożnością działania. Nie jest prawdziwe, bo w świetle obowiązującego prawa to, co nie jest zabronione, jest dozwolone. I nic nie stoi na przeszkodzie informowaniu potencjalnych entuzjastów naruszania tego prawa o wynikających z tego konsekwencjach. Podobnie jest z występującą obecnie powszechnie tzw. termoizolacją. Gdzie jest zatem kultura w architekturze? Jest niestety wyjątkiem. Znikła tzw. dobra kontynuacja. Nie wspomaga jej też obecnie modny „zrównoważony rozwój”. Mógł by być tu pomocny „takt”, ale jego też najczęściej nie ma. W końcowej refleksji: jednak kultura i takt.

Key words: culture, tact, architecture

Słowa kluczowe: kultura, takt, architektura