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## ARCHITECTURE IN TRANSITION

This article is devoted to the problem of the place of architecture in the permanent processes of the transformation of a built-up space. Undoubtedly, architecture is a generally accessible achievement of material culture. Architecture and the space it defines shape contemporary man's living environment and the climate of the places local communities identify with which can be recognized by strangers as well. The durability of architectural works in transition is a necessary condition for finding the roots of culture.

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Transition is a certainty – the inevitable effect of birth, the appearance of new matter. Duration is an uncertainty burdened with risk. In the world of architecture, besides the tragedy of cataclysms caused by the forces of nature or man, it is the risk of losing the utilitarian and esthetical values or desirable physical features of the matter an object is built of. The loss of these values may cause the intense destruction of an architectural object and the final annihilation of its material form. The non-existent shapes of architectural works or some inconspicuous, anonymous objects often stay in memory for some time or are preserved in iconography, sculpture or literary texts; they witness their epoch even when nothing is left of its other, seemingly more durable products. *Exegi monumentum aere perennius...*, wrote Horace [1].

The duration of architecture may be also threatened by the economic account regardless of the durability of its abovementioned features. If an object – a work of architecture – is not protected by the law on account of its historical and cultural values or is protected unsatisfactorily, it may be eliminated from a built-up space in order to yield a place to some

more economically justified entities despite its good technical condition and high utilitarian or esthetical values. We deal with this uncompromising struggle for room and profits more and more frequently.

The loss of utilitarian values need not directly threaten the existence of an architectonic form. Contemporarily, we do not attach much importance to the durability of the original functional features of an object and the relationships between meanings defined by a form and further manners of using its interior [2]. New commercial, cultural or residential functions – lofts in postindustrial objects – are generally accepted. A new life of architectural objects, also with other, earlier intended uses, is a chance for their enduring in a space – significant for the preservation of the identity of a place, its history and the characteristic climate of the space it co-creates. At present, this process of the functional adaptation of objects with the complete or partial preservation of their original architectonic form is more and more frequently a phenomenon related to the revitalization of degraded areas within cities regained for central functions.

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HafenCity – photographs of the Kesselhaus (HafenCity Infocenter) model (photo by J. Gyurkovich)



Using the characteristic features of a place in order to emphasize its relations with the past, transition and cultural continuity is the trump card in shaping new urban areas and reshaping those which are changing their function. Maintaining objects which make *mighty forms* after necessary thorough functional, technical and architectural adaptation can make it easier to keep the identity of places and spaces in spite of some significant transformations inside them.

The rehabilitation of Vienna's Gasometers – four remaining monumental edifices out of five objects of the former city gasworks Wien Simmering – is an interesting example of restoring some edifices and spaces, never associated with the urban tissue before, to the city. Europe's largest gas tanks came into being on the southern city outskirts in the peripheral industrial districts in 1899 and were meant for the public system of illumination. These days, they are situated deep inside the areas of intensive urban investment. They were still used till the late 1980s. After falling into disuse, one of the five buildings was pulled down in 1962. In 1995, the municipal management took a decision on a necessary design of rehabilitating these edifices meant for social flats and service functions. Four authors were asked to prepare the design: Jean Nouvel (Gasometer A), Coop Himme(l)blau – Wolf D. Prix and Helmut Swiczynsky (Gasometer B), Manfred Wehdorn (Gasometer C) and Wilhelm Holzbauer (Gasometer D) [3].

After implementation in the years 1995–2001, the four historical buildings together with three new objects, which complement the functional programme, form the new urban centre of this district, the so-called "Gasometer-City" – a virtual *city within the city*. To a large extent, these historical buildings preserved their original appearance even though only the external casing structure – the walls with a multitude of historical details – was left. The buildings were covered with modern steel and glass domes facilitating

additional illumination of the interior. Buildings A, B and C have got internal central patios opened above the public space to the covering domes. The dome in Building B is not glassed-in, while the internal atrium is opened and naturally aired. Office and service rooms on the lower storeys related to the public space and the flats and apartments situated above them on the upper floors surround the internal yards. Vienna's Gasometers exemplify *regained places* – regained for the city, its tradition and urban community [4].

The revitalization of the former port of Rheinauhafen in Cologne, located in the present city centre one kilometre from the Cathedral, is an interesting example of enterprises related to the processes of the contemporary transforming and restructuring of urban tissue. *Rheinauhafen deserves attention as a case where an architectural and urban idea, selected at a competition, was almost ideally adjusted to the creative climate of Cologne's business community* [5]. The organization of the entire process of investment, which made it possible to gain a high-quality open and public access space, even though privately owned, implemented and maintained with private means, deserves special attention. Significant elements of urban marketing, which strongly influence the success of an investment, are its compositional and spatial values, including the creation of those characteristic objects, signs in the space – "harbour crane buildings". Three 60-metre-tall buildings whose form refers to the tradition of this place – old harbour cranes – make unique forms for the spatial reception of the new urban complex. They also resemble the futuristic unimplemented concept of the Russian constructionist El Lissitzky – "Cloud Iron" (1924). These objects, forming a new quality of the urban space, are the most important edifices in the composition of the place which legibly situate them in the urban tissue of the centre of Cologne.

They make an important, recognizable sign in the system of city visual information making it easier to identify this new, significant public space located on the internal edge of the city, on the Rhine riverside close to Cologne's Old Town [6]. The revitalization of the old port of Rheinauhafen in Cologne is also an example of possible compromises in the sphere of politics, economy and restoration. Owing to the decisions taken in the field of thorough adaptations of historical buildings for contemporary functions with the use of the newest technologies and architectural details, including permission to extend or heighten buildings, they managed to save a number of historic buildings, important for the identity of this place, which preserved their traditional silhouettes and architectural climate. It was possible to prolong their duration in this new urban tissue which teems with life. The contemporary architecture of the new objects establishes a dialogue with the adapted 19<sup>th</sup>-century port buildings as well as increases their esthetical value. It proves the necessity of rejecting routine procedures, beginning an open dialogue in the municipal policy and organizing processes of investment [7].

The new central district of HafenCity in Hamburg (126 ha of land and 31 ha of water) is coming into existence as a result of revitalizing the degraded port areas. This investment comprises an area almost eight times bigger than the former port of Rheinauhafen in Cologne (15.4 ha of land and 5.7 ha of water). Cut off from the mainland and deeply furrowed by the port canals, the islands make a spatially complex structure with the unusually extended outer edges forming the walls of the bodies of water. The architecture of these edges can be seen in farther perspectives from the Elbe mainstream sheets and from the internal bodies of water – from the boulevards on the opposite riverbanks and from the bridges which form marinas

and public walking sequences. The tissue of the buildings is dominated by contemporary architecture designed by many artists, selected at competitions, framed by the ordering lines of buildings and the limiting outlines defined by the masterplan – the urban concept of the entire layout. Significant elements of this contemporary urban substance are preserved and adapted historical objects from diverse periods. On the north side, across the Binnenhafen canal, the meeting point with the historic buildings of the centre of Hamburg is secured by the preserved waterfront on both sides of this peninsula formed by the 19<sup>th</sup>-century clinker architecture of port buildings. On the western promontory, a contemporary object preserving its limiting outlines and colours is excellently adjusted to the spatial climate of this place. Behind another canal Kehrwiederfleet, on its north side only, 19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings were preserved, adapted for new functions and sometimes complemented with contemporary details. For instance, the former boiler house Kesselhaus (HafenCity Infocenter) was restored with two reconstructed tall chimneys in an openwork steel spatial construction. New buildings which complement the substance of this waterfront edge, e.g. a multilevel car park with openwork clinker walls or a local dominant – a glass roller in clinker frames accentuating the western promontory, are adjusted to the climate and colours of the historical buildings. Contemporary forms of this architecture do not imitate adapted historical objects but are inspired by the climate and tradition of the place. Contemporary adaptations of preserved historical objects, which guarantee their durability and new quality, include two objects significant for the identity of HafenCity: Internationales Maritimes Museum Hamburg [8] and Elbphilharmonie Hamburg [9]. Even now, before the end of its implementation, the new philharmonic hall is an important building for the city silhouette seen in far perspectives from the Elbe and its opposite

south bank. Built of glass, as if cut out of the Elbe low currents and high waves, situated on a 37-metre-long pedestal – an adapted old modernistic port storehouse from the 1960s [10] – this body of water forms an edifice whose height is 110 metres. This building is certainly a *mighty form* aspiring to the role of a new landmark – a symbol of the city [11]. It is an original example of adapting an existing edifice for new needs – prolonging its duration in space-time in a new configuration of bodies which, with the adopted material solution, makes it possible to interpret the original shape of an old object.

Cities keep changing their image – people, who fill the physical shape of a city with their variable everyday lives, are the first to fade away. The material structure of a city also alters in response to the changing needs – spontaneously, intentionally or as a result of various cataclysms. Most cities undergo constant processes of transformation. The building tissue which fills the frontages of streets and squares is exchanged much more frequently. City plans are reshaped to a lesser degree although we know lots of examples of implemented modernizing actions. New

urban structures, related to the territorial expansion of cities, are formed.

The historical urban structures of our cities are an embodiment of a *tame* space, a space with a humane scale, using the understandable language of forms. An important feature of historical urban complexes is the hierarchical structure of spaces and related edifices which form this language. They also include such characteristic features as the complexity and uniqueness of forms being the effect of the overlap of edifices which sometimes come from various, distant epochs and stylistic periods, in a tissue whose structure undergoes numerous transformations and frequent exchange of individual elements but comes under the legible principle of urban regulation building a bridge over time. The need for *diversity* in man's spatial habitat is related to the conditions of the human psyche and the impact of stimuli with diversified features coming from the perception of the surroundings. In this context, the *duration* of architectural objects – also by adapting, modernizing and adjusting preserved objects to new building structures – is a definitively positive phenomenon.

## ENDNOTES

[1] Horace – Quintus Horatius Flaccus – (65–08 BC): *I built a monument more durable than bronze...*

[2] Blake P, *Form Follows Fiasco. Why Modern Architecture Hasn't Worked*, Boston-Toronto 1997.

[3] *Art, Architecture, Design*, November 2–30, 2001, Shanghai Art Museum, 2001, pp. 90–97.

[4] Gyurkovich J., *Architektura w przestrzeni miasta*. Wybrane problemy, Cracow University of Technology, Kraków 2010, pp. 111–117.

[5] Zuziak Zb. K., *Od architektury do urbanistyki i od urbanistyki do architektury*, Technical Transactions 7-A/2010/1, Cracow University of Technology, Kraków 2010, pp. 311–317.

[6] Kranhaus 1– Mitte (design and implementation from November 2006 to September 2008) and Kranhaus Süd (2008–2010) two buildings with an office function and the usable area of 22,680 m<sup>2</sup>; Kranhaus Nord (Panadion Vista) residential building (2011). Designers: Architekturbüro Bothe Richter Teherani, Linster-Architekten Trier-Aachen-Luxemburg.

[7] Gyurkovich J., *Kolonia – rewitalizacja terenu dawnego portu Rheinauhafen*, Technical Transactions, Cracow University of Technology, Kraków 2011; work resulting from research done with the means of *Operational Programme Human Capital – The 21st Century University of Technology – Best Quality Education for Future Polish Engineers*.

[8] The International Maritime Museum in Hamburg is located in an adapted former storehouse on Waterfront Kaspeicher B from 1878–79 (architects: Wilhelm Emila Meerwein and Bernhard Hanssen); author of adaptation: architect Dietmar Feichtinger (2008).

[9] Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Herzog & de Meuron, 2007–2013/15.

[10] *Kaispercher* – former port storehouse for coffee, cocoa and tea; (1963–66, architect: Werner Kallmorgen).

[11] *mighty form* – see [in:] Gyurkovich J., *Znaczenie form charakterystycznych dla kształtowania i percepcji przestrzeni. Wybrane zagadnienia kompozycji w architekturze i urbanistyce*, Monograph No. 258, Cracow University of Technology, Kraków 1999.