

THE TRADITIONAL HOUSE AS AN EXPRESSION OF CONSERVATIVE VALUES AND THE CULTURE OF CONTINUATION

DOM TRADYCYJNY JAKO WYRAZ WARTOŚCI KONSERWATYWNYCH I KULTURY KONTYNUACJI

Abstract

The article presents the thesis that residential homes built in historical styles, and especially residential homes built from traditional materials, are closely linked to the conservative values of their inhabitants. The introduction puts forward the theoretical basis for the essay, in the form of Demetri Porphyrrios's understanding of classical architecture, as well as the link between material and society according to Hannah Arendt and Leon Krier. Further on, the article raises the question of material as a tool in the hands of the architect for rooting a building (in a philosophical sense) in time. Then it looks at examples of modern projects by Quinlan Terry, as well as the ideas of current architects. Modern realities are also presented in the article, in the form of an analysis of Polish approaches to residential homes. At its conclusion, the article returns to philosophy and reveals the link between the physicality of architecture and the materials themselves with the perception of values and rootedness.

Keywords: culture of continuation, traditional home, classical architecture, natural materials

Streszczenie

Rozdział prezentuje tezę, że domy mieszkalne budowane w stylach historycznych, a szczególnie domy mieszkalne budowane z tradycyjnych materiałów, łączą się ściśle z konserwatywnymi wartościami ich mieszkańców. We wstępie przedstawiona zostaje teoretyczna baza pod rozważania w postaci rozumienia klasycznej architektury według Demetriego Porphyriososa oraz związku między materiałem a cywilizacją według Hanny Arendt oraz Leona Kriera. W dalszej części rozdziału podniesiona zostaje kwestia materiału jako narzędzia w rękach architekta do osadzenia budynku w (filozoficznie pojętym) czasie. Następnie przytoczone zostają przykłady współczesnych realizacji Quinlana Terry'ego, a także myśli współczesnych architektów. Współczesne realia zostają także przez autora przywołane w postaci analizy polskiego podejścia do domu

* D.Sc. Ph.D. Arch. Artur Zaguła, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Environmental Engineering, Technical University of Lodz.

mieszkalnego. W zakończeniu następuje powrót do filozofii i wykazanie związku fizyczności architektury i samych materiałów z odczuciem wartości i zakorzenienia.

Słowa kluczowe: kultura kontynuacji, dom tradycyjny, architektura klasyczna, materiały naturalne

I would like to present here the theses that houses built in historical styles, or referring to architectural traditions, including the vernacular, are most usually based on a set of values emerging from a conservative view of the world. The first, and fundamental thing, is the worldview in which the culture of continuation constitutes the basis of human existence. I want to show that homes of this type refer to family, social and religious traditions. They foster the creation and cultivation of a society that bases its existence in a sense of community. A traditional home is the centre of family life, in which interaction with other people is of fundamental importance, and not that of the nuclear family enclosed in its own, little circle. On account of the restrictions on size, I shall, however, limit my analysis above all to the use of natural materials by the creators of such homes. I endeavour to show that this use is strongly related to the conservative values displayed by their inhabitants.

To begin, I shall present the understanding of classical ideas of architecture created by Demetri Porphyrios, which will be used in the following considerations. I shall show how this broad definition refers to the narrower issue of the materials used in a building. Demetri Porphyrios, a Greek architect and theorist of architecture, stresses the applicability of the classical method of thinking to modern problems and the issues of today's life. In his texts, with extraordinary perspicacity, he analyses the features of classical architectural solutions. Seemingly tired and dated, when viewed through the clear understanding of Porphyrios, they emerge as universal and timeless. In his best known book, *Classicism is not a style*, from 1982, the Greek states that classical, traditional thinking, unlike positivist thought, does not seek objectivity, but immanence¹. This is an accurate observation which contains a rarely perceived feature of classical thinking, which enables me to direct my further considerations here toward the subject of classical architecture. I therefore propose, following the author of the manifesto, to view the traditional approach to building as a timeless carrier of civilizational values.

The juxtaposition of immanence and architecture is also found in a paraphrase of the words of Hannah Arendt: *no public space or group culture is possible without the potential immortality of buildings and cities*². This idea was taken and viewed from an architectural angle by Leon Krier in his book "The Architecture of Community". He writes: *synthetic materials cannot, by definition, create a culture of authenticity. In addition, they are doomed to disappear together with the exhaustion of fossil and nuclear fuels*³. Krier interprets Arendt's idea not on the symbolic level, but in the most literal form of immortality – the potential immortality of the architectural material. Let's try to develop the issue of the durability of architectural material.

Three fundamental ways of viewing the durability of materials can be discerned. These are closely related to the approach of the architect to his "temporal work":

¹ D. Porphyrios, *Klasycyzm nie jest stylem*, in: Jencks C., Kropf K., *Teorie i manifesty architektury współczesnej*, Grupa Sztuka Architektury, Warszawa 2013, p. 211.

² Krier Leon, *Architektura wspólnoty*, Słowo/obraz/terytoria, Gdańsk 2011, p. 250.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 257.

Durability in the vitruvian (traditional) sense refers to the “immortality” of a building in the material world. This does not mean that it does not age, but that the ambition of its creator and investor is to put up a building which aspires to last forever. It is an attempt at referencing the most essential human problem of immortality. Human mortality is “exceeded” by erecting eternal buildings. Despite the fact that this view is closer to the traditional mode of thinking, even some modernists have raised the matter. It was beautifully expressed by the renowned modern creator – Louis Kahn. He wanted his buildings to show, *what has always been and what will always be*⁴. His dream was that a building should function in a thousand years as an equal of the remains of antique temples⁵.

Another approach is represented by the moderns, suggesting that architecture’s goal is to oppose the tyranny of time. Modernist buildings have been made, and still are, from materials which do not show the effects of time passing. The creators desire that the building evokes the impression in the viewer that it exists outside time. Modernist architects attempted to achieve the illusion of an architecture “adjacent to time” through adopting means in which the material is full of internal contradictions. The frequently used glass is a barrier – but see-through, the steel constructions bearing huge loads seem to be delicate and with no constructional role. Modernity wants to be non-material, transparent, weightless⁶. New buildings seem to appear instantaneously, and the effects of ageing are not welcomed, even “forbidden”. A good example of this is high-tech architecture, where any sign of the passing of time destroys the material essence of the building. This ideal of perfection unconsciously retreats from reality⁷.

Currently, the temporariness of a building is often emphasised. This impermanence may relate to the function, form and also the material from which the building is made. The ever more rapidly changing reality makes the issues of transformability and ephemerality important considerations. This is also connected with the new types of building materials of low “longevity.”

Nowadays, the second and third approaches dominate, however, as the case of Kahn demonstrates, the first way of thinking, although scarcer, still has many adherents. Among them is a group of creators using traditional designs, many of whom create residential homes.

I can mention here one of the most famous architects working in the vein of traditional architecture – Quinlan Terry. Talking about the clients for his highly classical homes, he (perhaps unconsciously) reveals the strong link between his projects and the values of their inhabitants⁸. The majority of the homes built by Terry are commissioned by conservative members of British or American society. The fundamental principles are craftsmanship, natural materials and above all the longevity of the building, both materially and visually. Long-lasting, fully natural materials are also an expression of care for human community as well as

⁴ J. Lobell, *Between Silence and Light. Spirit in the Architecture of Louis I. Kahn*, Boston – London: Shambala, 2008, p. 54 after: Miłobędzki M., *W świecie nowoczesnych prymitywizmów*, Autoportret 1 [48] 2015 Materiał/Materialność, Małopolski Instytut Kultury, Kraków, 2015. p. 51.

⁵ M. Miłobędzki, *W świecie nowoczesnych prymitywizmów*, Autoportret 1 [48] 2015 Materiał/Materialność, Małopolski Instytut Kultury, Kraków, 2015. p. 51.

⁶ J. Pallasmaa, *Materia, haptyczność i czas. Wyobraźnia materialna i głos materii*, Autoportret 1 [48] 2015 Materiał/Materialność, Małopolski Instytut Kultury, Kraków, 2015. p. 5–6.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁸ R. Blumenthal, *Roll Over, Moses: It's a Centrum Lincolnensis*, New York Times, 08.12.2000, source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/08/arts/roll-over-moses-it-s-a-centrum-lincolnensis.html>, last viewed: 30.05.2016.



- III.1. Quinlan Terry, Gothick Villa, Regent's Park, London, 1989–91
- III.2. Quinlan Terry, Ionic Villa, Regent's Park, London, 1988–90
- III.3. Quinlan Terry, Corinthian Villa, Regent's Park, London, 2000–02
- III.4. Quinlan Terry, Regency Villa, Regent's Park, London, 1989–91
- III.5. Quinlan Terry, Tuscan Villa, Regent's Park, London, 2002–04
- III.6. Quinlan Terry, Veneto Villa, Regent's Park, London, 1989–91

a link with the past. Materials like stone, brick, wood or lime rendering display not only longevity, but also have a low carbon footprint during construction and can easily be recycled, so they are environmentally friendly. As Terry writes: *The classical tradition developed over thousands of years, in ages which had no lifts, no electric lights, no air conditioning, no hi-fi, no easy transport and yet they lived and prospered in all climates, took little out of the earth, produced no toxic chemicals and no waste – everything was recycled*⁹. An example of this approach to conservative values can be seen in one of the architect's most effective projects. The Ionic Villa at Regent's Park in London is home to Lord Bagri. The pediment bears his family crest, carved in stone, of course¹⁰.

Another example of this kind of thinking is the Vitruvian House by Thomas Gordon Smith. Appointed Director of the School of Architecture at the Catholic University of Notre Dame, the architect decided to build a home for his own, relatively numerous family. He decided, together with his wife, that it should be embedded in local traditions, and also be an appropriate place for their collection of antique furniture. It became to a degree a kind of manifesto of conservative lifestyle in the modern world. Richard John summarised the task architect's intentions thus: *Smith intended this house to be far more than an attractive and convenient residence for his large family. His intentions in the iconographic programme are easily interpreted: the Labours of Hercules signify his own commitment to executing the difficult task he knew lay ahead in transforming the school. On a less explicit level, other layers of significance can be divined in the house. First, it drew together with impressive ease all those themes and interests which Smith had explored during the past fifteen years; secondly, it allowed him to apply in practice his scholarly study of the text of Vitruvius; and, finally, and perhaps most importantly, it helped him resolve the direction he wished to pursue in his architecture in the future: a literate application of classicism, drawing freely on the entire twenty-five centuries of tradition, That is at once both rich and rigorous, balancing rule and invention, and which, above all demonstrates its ample suitability for contemporary life*¹¹.

A host of other examples of such architects could be mentioned here, including: Allan Greenberg, Demetri Porphyrios, José Baganha, Pier Carlo Bontempi, or the Fairfax & Sammons practice. They all design houses with the use of natural materials for families with tradition. The longevity of their homes also suggests the longevity of their family links. The *American houses of Fairfax & Sammons* – writes Adele Chatfield-Taylor – *look as though they'll truly be lived in. One imagines the waxing and waning of families over time – through Thanksgivings, Christmases, christenings – vibrant families that will grow with the generations*¹². Such homes, albeit still not often, indicate a certain tendency which seems to be slowly growing. Namely, that the modern concept of the house as a machine for living is fading into the past.

⁹ Quinlan Terry: *The Richard H. Driehaus Prize 2005*, School of Architecture, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, 2005, p. 37.

¹⁰ D. Watkin, *Radical Classicism. The Architecture of Quinlan Terry*, Rizzoli, Nowy Jork 2006, p. 66.

¹¹ J. Richard, *Thomas Gordon Smith. The Rebirth of Classical Architecture*, Andreas Papadakis Publisher, London, 2001, p. 81.

¹² A. Chatfield-Taylor, *Introduction* W: M. Miers, *American Houses. The Architecture of Fairfax & Sammons*, New York: Rizzoli, 2006, p. 7.

Hence, today not only traditionalists think that existential values are important in designing a house. I can refer here to Juhani Pallasmaa, who openly opposes the dictate of ocularcentrism in his articles. He encourages young architects to look closer using senses other than eyesight. He often discusses the issue of material, texture and their relations with the human body. He refers to Gaston Bachelard, who states that “material imagination” designs more profound and exalted experiences, memories and associations than “formal imagination”¹³. Peter Zumthor writes in the opening words of his book *Thinking Architecture* about the house considered as a set of small details. For this architect, guided in his professional practice by phenomenology, it is precisely the material nature of the metal doorhandles of the family home, or the waxed wood of the stairs¹⁴.

The first years of the last century broke drastically with such a romantic approach to the surrounding world. Modernity, at the beginning of the 20th century, was full of references to travel, but the delight at it had nothing to do with the richness of the experience of the sense of touch. Modernism praised the development of transport technology, art déco presented travel as one of the most luxurious forms of relaxation and recreation. Today, once more the feeling of returning home following these journeys is gaining significance. Among the crowd of impulses and signals from ever more remote parts of the world, the peace and feeling of rootedness and belonging is enjoying ever greater popularity. *In architecture a sense of material, of sensuality is beginning to express itself. The sense of tradition evokes the willed experience of the natural durability of culture and memory* – considers Pallasmaa¹⁵.

According to Claude Kaufmann, we are part of the fabric of a home, and the home is a part of us. It stores our memories and emotions. The home is a bearer of values which are important to us, its inhabitants. The concept of the home is identical to our most intimate and closest experiences. An interesting example of the home understood in this way is the case of removing this idea of inhabiting from the walls of an actual building. We are talking here about nomads, eternally wandering without a permanent address. They pour their imaginative life and memories into their laptops, where they store their photographs and “contacts”.¹⁶ They record themselves in virtual form, instead of in a material place of residence. They live in a world where material things are not of primary importance. Is it possible to possess a “home” without building a house? *We are material, and we are built of material* – the architect Kengo Kuma writes in *Complete Works*, almost verbatim quoting Kaufmann above.

Of course, it is not material nature alone that determines the object, but its “material nature confronted with imagination”, as Pierre Bourdieu puts it¹⁷. The situation is even clearer when we look at an architectural object. A building, just like any work of art, exists simultaneously in the two dimensions listed by Bourdieu – the material and the imaginative. Artistic creativity is freely interpreted by everyone through the second dimension. Anyone standing in front of the *Sunflowers* by van Gogh, when asked what they see, will say – some flowers in a vase, or rather – oil on canvas. Architecture can be placed precisely somewhere between

¹³ J. Pallasmaa, *Materia, haptyczność i czas. Wyobrażenia materialna i głos materii*, Autoportret 1 [48] 2015 Materiał/Materialność, Małopolski Instytut Kultury, Kraków, 2015, p. 5.

¹⁴ P. Zumthor, *Myślenie architekturą*, Karakter, Kraków 2010, p. 7.

¹⁵ J. Pallasmaa, *Materia, haptyczność i czas. Wyobrażenia materialna i głos materii*, Autoportret 1 [48] 2015 Materiał/Materialność, Małopolski Instytut Kultury, Kraków, 2015, p. 10.

¹⁶ M. Łukasiuk, *Redefinicje współczesnego domu*, „RZUT +8. Dom”, nr3/2015, p. 8.

¹⁷ M. Łukasiuk, *Redefinicje współczesnego domu*, „RZUT +8. Dom”, nr 3/2015, p. 8.

a functioning object and a work of art. It is, on the one hand, a solid, physical construction, but it is also an *imaginative, spatial-temporal metaphor*¹⁸. What is the relationship between the materials used to build a house to its non-material aspect? Traditional materials have an additional advantage. The stories inscribed in them don't have to disappear together with the building, but can be transported in large fragments. Modern materials have to be transported and recycled. Traditional stone or brick walls can be taken down, removed, even in large pieces, and reused in another location¹⁹.

The traditional house should be built of natural materials, such as wood, brick and, above all, stone. They demand real craftsmanship, together with the knowledge acquired over generations. The craftsman has to engage with the material and submit to its superiority and try to work with what has always been present within it. Patience and humility become, through the material, a permanent part of such a home. A home built of traditional materials is a metaphor for the continuity of time. Every material has its language, which we all understand. Stone speaks of its durability and innate longevity, like family ties. Brick evokes associations of earth, fire, weight and ancient building traditions, even bronze evokes an image of the extreme heat accompanying its production. The latest materials applied in architecture with increasing interest during the last half century are one-dimensional in the imaginative sphere and lack age²⁰. Their inability to speak enables them to be shaped into any form, which for precisely that reason seem to be bereft of logic, to have no sleeping, latent power.

Almost all Poles decorate their homes as if they were to be that way for ever, and their liking for sturdy materials is incredibly strong. The local Polish context is an excellent example of traditional thinking about living. According to Eurostat data, in Europe, only the Latvians and Romanians display lower residential mobility than Poles²¹. We move rarely, and we like to own our homes (according to Eurostat, Poland ranks 6th in Europe in the percentage of population that owns their accommodation)²². Significantly, this trend has grown a lot in recent years. A cause of this may well be precisely this symbolic perception of the home, which for most of Poland's citizens is above all associated with the family. The family is, for a conservative person, the greatest guarantee of stability in life. It is immeasurably more important than money or social position.

The American magazine on traditional architecture, *New Old House*, directly promotes these associations and this approach to residential construction by architects: *Residential homes don't require trends. They should be a reflection of the people who live in them, and not a period in time.*²³ The author makes it absolutely clear that homes should be inspired by the personalities of their owners, and not some hyped idea as a "zeitgeist". This equally concerns the material which, like any tool, can, in the hands of a skilled architect, say something about a building. We're not talking here about the function of a building, but about the

¹⁸ J. Pallasmaa, *Materia, haptyczność i czas. Wyobraźnia materialna i głos materii*, Autoportret 1 [48] 2015 Materiał/Materialność, Małopolski Instytut Kultury, Kraków 2015, p. 7.

¹⁹ A. Zaguła, *Klasycyzm*, design_pl. Wielkopolski Magazyn Projektowy, nr 3, 10–11.2011, p. 81.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

²¹ source: <http://wyborcza.biz/biznes/1,147758,20088979,polacy-nie-lubia-sie-przeprowadzac.html?disableRedirects=true>, last viewed: 30.05.2016

²² Eurostat, source: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do>, last viewed: 30.05.2016.

²³ S. LaMotte Crane, *North Carolina Cotswold Cottage*, *New Old House*, winter 2008, source: http://www.jamescollinsarchitect.com/publications/NOH_Winter_2008.pdf, last viewed: 30.05.2016, p. 57.

message it transmits. A house (especially for Poles) should speak about the family currently inhabiting it, about the previous generations that lived happily in it in the past. This strength and unbroken line is best expressed in stone. Michał Podgórski writes: *we imagine certain people fitting a particular space, and vice versa – which places belong aesthetically to these specific people. This suitability takes place on the basis of “harmonising” the parameters of places and people, space and its users. Dissonance can occur both when we imagine, say, a tramp at the opera, or a grand lady in jewellery in a homeless shelter. So, certain people, in certain places become “unimaginable”*²⁴.

The sequence of *imaginable* associations here, connected with the place of residence, seem to be entirely justified. Home and family. A classical home for a multi-generational family with conservative values. The article has tried to show that for people cherishing conservative values, such as unbroken tradition, responsibility and family, a common choice is of a home built from traditional materials. Their longevity, potential immortality and the naturalness with which they age become an ideal metaphor for traditional life in harmony with nature. These features are much more visible in contrast to the so-called “modern” homes, which due to the coldness of their unfavourable materials fail to attract large numbers of families and which most often become attractive to young, single types. The creators of such homes are unable to persuade families to live in them through warm associations, and must instead resort to convincing clients through intellectual gymnastics, advertising them as “intelligent”, “ecological”, or “smart”.

References

- [1] Dowling E. M., *New Classicism. The Rebirth of Traditional Architecture*, Rizzoli, New York 2004.
- [2] John R., *Thomas Gordon Smith. The Rebirth of Classical Architecture*, Andreas Papadakis Publisher, London 2001.
- [3] Krier L., *Architektura wspólnoty*, tłum. Piotr Choynowski, wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2011
- [4] Łukasiuk M., *Redefinicje współczesnego domu*, RZUT+8. Dom, nr 3, Warszawa 2015.
- [5] Miers M., *American Houses. The Architecture of Fairfax & Sammons*, Rizzoli, New York 2006.
- [6] Miłobędzki M., *W świecie nowoczesnych prymitywizmów*, Autoportret 1 [48] 2015 Materiał/Materialność, Małopolski Instytut Kultury, Kraków, 2015.
- [7] Pallasmaa J., *Materia, haptyczność i czas. Wyobraźnia materialna i głos materii*, Autoportret 1 [48] 2015 Materiał/Materialność, Małopolski Instytut Kultury, Kraków, 2015.
- [8] Porphyrios D., *Classical Architecture. The Living Tradition*, McGraw-Hill, New York 1992.

²⁴ M. Podgórski, *Rewitalizacja – pomiędzy odnową a degradacją tkanki miejskiej*, Kultura i społeczeństwo, Tom LIII, nr 2, 2009, p. 68, after: Łukasiuk M., *Profilaktyka w kontekście socjologii architektury – cz. IV*, source: <http://www.profnet.org.pl/profilaktyka-w-kontekście-socjologii-architektury-cz-iv/>, last viewed: 30.05.2016.

- [9] Porphyrrios D., *Classicism Is Not a Style*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.
- [10] *Quinlan Terry: The Richard H. Driehaus Prize 2005*, The University of Notre Dame, School of Architecture, South Bend 2005.
- [11] Smith T. G., *Vitruvius on Architecture*, The Monacelli Press, New York 2003.
- [12] Watkin D., *Radical Classicism. The Architecture of Quinlan Terry*, Rizzoli, New York 2006.
- [13] Zaguła A., *Arystotelesowskie i religijne źródła Nowego Klasycyzmu w architekturze współczesnej*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Łódzkiej, Łódź 2013.
- [14] Zumthor P., *Myślenie architekturą*, Karakter, Kraków 2010.