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THE CONTEMPORARY MONUMENT
OF CONCEPTUAL ARCHITECTURE – ON THE BASIS
OF THE *NEW CRICOTEKA* IN KRAKOW

WSPÓŁCZESNY POMNIK ARCHITEKTURY
KONCEPTUALNEJ – NA PRZYKŁADZIE
REALIZACJI *NOWEJ CRICOTEKI* W KRAKOWIE

Abstract

The introduction of a new museum space in the vicinity of the relics of the past is associated with the erection of modern conceptual architectural monuments. The stronger the contrast between the old and the new, the stronger the expression of the work on the environment. The author undertakes an analysis of the *New Cricoteka* in Krakow as an example of architecture that represents, collects, and that is art – a game, an intellectual dialogue, a spectacle engaging the viewer into the action.

Keywords: museum, "Cricoteka" Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor, a game of shapes, conceptual art, new architecture in a historic context

Streszczenie

Wprowadzenie nowych przestrzeni muzealnych w sąsiedztwie relikwów przeszłości wiąże się ze wznoszeniem współczesnych pomników architektury konceptualnej. Im silniejszy kontrast pomiędzy starym i nowym, tym silniejsza ekspresja dzieła na otoczenie. Autorka artykułu podjęła analizę *Nowej Cricoteki* w Krakowie jako przykład architektury reprezentującej, gromadzącej oraz będącej sztuką – grą i zabawą, dialogiem intelektualnym, spektaklem wciągającym widza w głąb akcji.

Słowa kluczowe: muzeum, Ośrodek Dokumentacji Sztuki Tadeusza Kantora „Cricoteka”, gra brył, sztuka konceptualna, nowa architektura w zabytkowym kontekście

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In his realisations of theatre, painting, and those on the borderline of conceptualism, Tadeusz Kantor very often used the chair – an object that belonged, according to him, to the reality of the lowest rank. ‘The fact that I take a chair,’ he explained, ‘is crucial for me because I reveal its constant feature – very low and ridiculous – which I do not find in other objects’ [15].

1. Introduction

“Architecture is a thought out, perfect, wonderful game of solids in light,” [9, p. 30]. The shape added to the object of the old Podgórska power station is another game that could be called a statement by the master Corbusier. The spectacularly overhanging construction of the Centre for Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Krakow is a kind of *Impossible Monument* referring to the work of the artist himself, architecture, and conceptual art. The starting point for building the new spatial form was the idea of using the figure “*Man carrying a table on his back*”, also referring to the artist’s work. The sketch served to develop ideas about the ideological recording of the centre. Later deformed for the purpose of function, the solid rectangular form takes a minimalist-constructivist and Dadaist expression through its reference to the object of daily use with a “status that is neutral for art”. Dominated by the simplicity of the initial form, syntheticity, and the expressive minimalism of treatments [11]. The modern individual is looking for the easiest and most sensible solutions to everyday problems, seeking a rational layout, peace and balance in the surrounding space. He is constantly trying to jump over himself, to strive constantly towards the unattainable to surprise, delight, shock once again.

2. Once upon a river

The Vistula valley with its varied bends and kinks introduces the viewer to a surprising and emotional spectacle. Following the “Krakow boulevards” before our eyes is a moving panorama of the historical city comprised from year to year of increasingly diverse and shocking new elements in the “game” of architectural creation. On the way walking from the Zwierzyniecki Bridge downstream to the barrage on the Dąbie we pass, inter alia, the exotic architecture and undulating roof of the Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology, and then equally interesting flowing ICE Conference Centre, whose creator needs no introduction. Next we find the persistently daunting Forum Hotel lit up recently by an amusement park. Dynamic in form, the Father Bernatka footbridge moves us from the Kazimierz district to Podgorze, where we can admire the newly opened Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor, whilst bearing in mind that nearby is the five-year-old, invisible from the river, post-factory MOCAK – Museum of Contemporary Art. In recent years, the city authorities have undoubtedly invested in cultural and artistic development, the new art centres give rise to very strong emotions.

As described, in the architectural space that goes along the banks of the river it is hard to find a completely coherent vision. Perhaps at this point there is something like the “*Junkspace*” described by Rem Koolhaas [12, p. 38]. But it also stems from the artistic character of the city, striving for individuality. The relationship between the city and the water is

an important factor in building the identity of the place. It's hard to discern the Krakow here that will always remain faithful only to itself, and this seems to build its irresistible artistic beauty that attracts crowds of admirers.

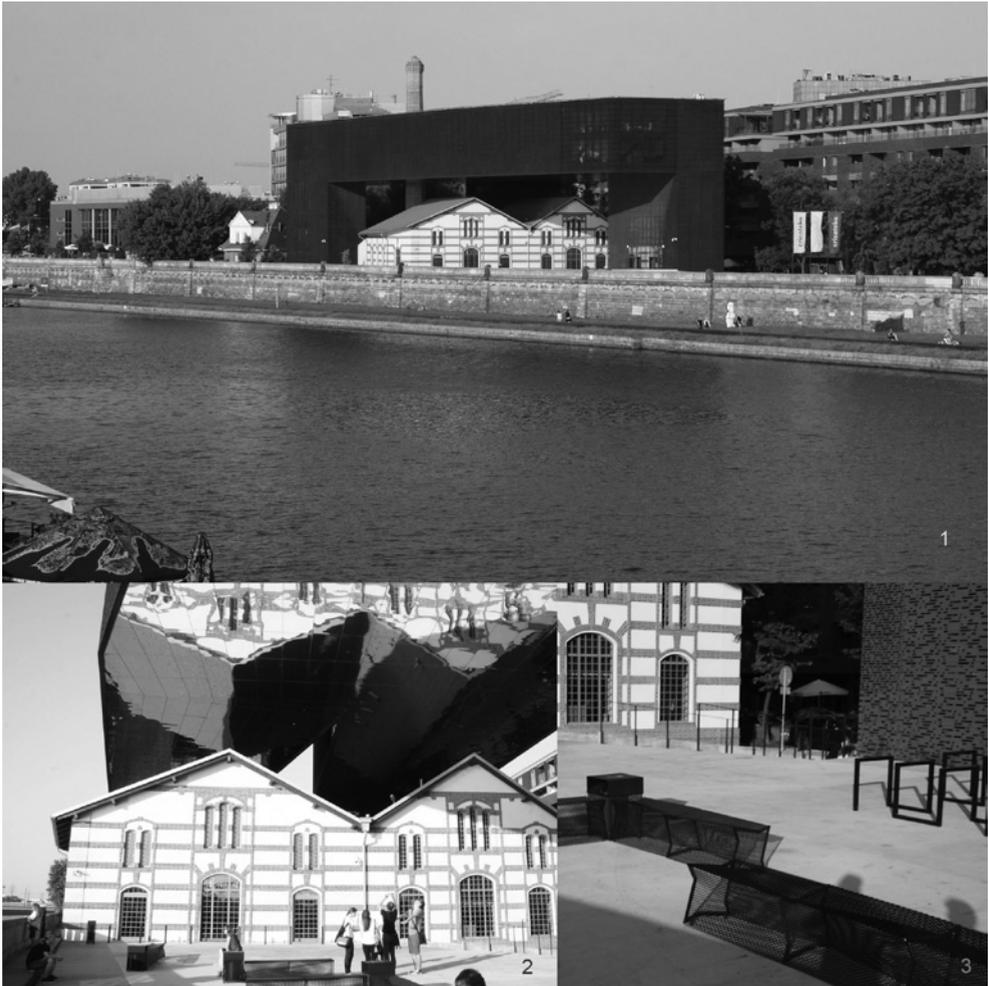
This area was covered by a “competition for the concept of zoning,” whereby in 2008 first prize was won by the Proxima Project Group working under the direction of architect Boris Czarakczew [13]. There was also a competition for the project of the Tadeusz Kantor Museum, as part of the conceptual contests at the Biennale of Architecture in Krakow of 2004. But when the winning concept was seated in the superstructure concept of the historic pavilion at the eastern facade of the Krzysztofory Palace, in the form of a hollow cuboid by Katarzyna and Marcin Charciarków, it was rejected by the City Historic Preservation Officer, the regional authorities proposed the degraded areas of the municipal power plant I Podgorze as the site for the investment. In 2006 an international competition was announced to adapt the historic disused power station and construct of a new space including in its program features that go beyond the traditional museum. The exhibitions were to interpenetrate a zone of teaching, a reading room and archives, as well as freshly existing as a centre for cultural events invigorating in multidirectional development the abandoned areas of the Vistula region of Podgorze. Victory was justifiably awarded to the architects from the Wizja and nsMoon-Studio offices from Krakow. The authors of the Cricoteka building were actually the IQ2 consortium, whose leader was the nsMoonStudio sp. z o.o., with designer general architect Sławomir Zieliński, while the consortium member was the Wizja sp. z o.o. bureau. and Piotr Nawara (from nsMoonStudio sp. z o.o.), Agnieszka Szultka (o nsMoonStudio sp. z o.o.), and architect Stanisław Deńko (founder of the architectural studio Wizja sp. z o.o.). Also helping on the project were Tomasz Gomulka, Michal Marcinkowski, Marcin Kowalewski, Adam Wereszczyński, Marzena Surowiec-Doton, Monika Mackiewicz, Lukasz Skorek, Karol Grec, Katarzyna Ceran, Bartłomiej Lobaziewicz, and Ewelina Sistrzewitowska [3, p. 28].

3. The effect of astonishment

Contemporary architecture, implemented in the historic environment, is the art of adding new value to the existing spatial and cultural context – regardless of the harmony or contrast,” [14, p. 5]. A common aesthetic surgery was the construction of new buildings with glass facades which could greatly enhance the introduction of new technologies in the historic context in a relatively unobtrusive way. In the case of the *New Cricoteka* a mirrored ceiling effect was used above the old power plant building. An equally frequent stylistic treatment is the entrance to the museum leading underground. The adapted powerplant becomes a high ranking cultural value when looking at it from the lower perspective. Everything added maintains a distance from the restored building by building a framework as if to emphasize the image and the new multimedia space. You get the feeling that this procedure was essential here.

4. Games and fun

“The creative process is the action of an individual, is an intellectual game, a revelation, a rapture, an organizing, a rejection, a choice” [14, p. 237]. Art becomes more complete, however, by clear references to the cultural and artistic messages known, by establishing a relationship,



- III. 1. Art Museum of Tadeusz Kantor seen from the Kazimierz District, the author's photograph;
 III. 2. Old Podgórze Powerplant reflected in a mirror ceiling under New Cricoteka bridge,; the author's photograph
 III. 3. Details of landscape architecture in public space of the Tadeusz Kantor Centre for Documentation of the Art in Cracow; the author's photograph

a dialogue with the viewer and the environment. Comparing photos of this facility prior to commencement of the project and after the opening of the facility we observe how the chaos and ordinary green surroundings with landscaping takes the form of an ordered space engaging with neighbouring buildings. The vertical of the remaining chimney and duplicate span of post-factory settings are compositionally quietened and complemented by the strong horizontal line of the patterned retaining walls on the Vistula side. The character of a museum building, like other cultural or public utility centres, should be an “event” in the real world of balanced

everyday life, attracting by the geometry plotted by the artist. The effect of the extraordinary is achieved by masking the spectacular design modules overhung with perforated, corroded metal sheets. In combination with the perfectly restored historic fronts of the powerplant the artificially aged “wrapping” elements of the new spaces become of inverted importance. The method of masking the interior is also not accidental, referring to Kantor’s work called *Emballages* [16]. “Simple solids have large areas that find diverse expression.” [9, p. 191]. They can be packaged, obscured, unifying their expression, giving clear character, fitted into the environment.

5. The Challenge

The new “Bridge” design, as it is defined by the authors and engineers Czesław Hudorek and Andrew Soboń, is the proverbial nail of the program giving the fundamental effect of a monument impossible to implement. Despite the many obstacles linked not only with the difficult calculations and implementation of the asymmetry overhanging the form, but also a change in wind standards in July 2009 and the flood of May 2010 [6] the construction was finished. The skeleton steel frame, based on two shafts of concrete and a third steel rocker support, for a long time aroused an internal question of whether the effect of “Skeletor” from the Mogilskie Roundabout in Krakow had been repeated. The idea of a bridge over the historic building and not directly the river, but next to the river is one of the strongest contrasts in the expression of the form. The idea of the city on poles we already find in the work *In the Direction of Architecture* by Le Corbusier and we see in the body of the former Forum Hotel.

6. Metamorphoses

The interior of the newly renovated hall of the powerplant was adapted as centre of the intellectual work of the artist and a new theatre stage – a reference to the organization Cricot 2, an anagram of the phrase *To cyrk* [This is a circus – transl.]. The theatre founded by Tadeusz Kantor and other artists was associated with an old tenement on Kanonicza Street. April 6 2015 marked the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the artist. The anniversary of Kantor was celebrated and supported by the solemn opening on Museum Night 2015 of the public space at the current powerplant with a positive social charge. The layout of the building foundation’s scheme is somewhat similar to London’s Tate Modern. There is a river, a footbridge leading to the vicinity of the building, the use of post-industrial halls, a café overlooking an attractive skyline, a similar taking on of an aura of mystery on the outside, and inside various types of exhibitions and purposes for usable space. The Polish version is more modest, but also seems to work well in practice, attracting visitors.

7. Conclusions

No empty words – a plan, one idea, boldness and uniformity of design, basic shapes. A healthy morality.” [9, p. 192]. This quintessence Le Corbusier drew from the study of the architecture of Ancient Rome. The eternal city still influences us. Especially in today’s realizations, architecture

is returning to its roots, drawing from distant history, referring to basic functions and human instincts, to, as nearly as possible, enter into the life “of the city – the new image / new works of art” [9, p. 21]. The *New Cricoteka* Building in a simple but thoughtful pure crystallized way heals the fabric of the city, respectfully refers to well-known existing cultural values, turns towards the river, building a relationship with the audience with a surprising circus held before their eyes. Undoubtedly, the newly opened museum building raises a lot of controversy, pushes for discussion, an exchange of views and a variety of ideological messages arising from the purpose of the museum. More than aesthetics, it primarily presents intellectual beauty. However, this gives rise to a strong impulse in the passer-by to visit the exhibition [10]. The building is and will remain a re-sounding event in Krakow’s art and cultural circles and a joy for visiting guests. And the “sense of *Cricoteka*’s existence undoubtedly stems from the huge legacy that Tadeusz Kantor left.” [15]

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