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# **REINVENTING – THE EFFECT OF COMPROMISE IN THE DESIGN**

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# ABSTRACT

Re-in-venting, understood as a rethink of new architectural projects, is provoked by what I refer to as errors coming as a consequence of compromise. These errors are due to the following reasons: transience, loss of universal values and the frequent designers' incongruity with their own beliefs. The error of transience consists in that designers ignore this phenomenon. It manifests itself in the designers' insufficient taking into account the importance of variability of functions and the impact of the pace of civilization changes on spatial conditions. The above mentioned tendencies lead to a rift between architecture and its time. The second error is compromise that the universal value system is subject to. This error is provoked by post-modern individualism. In this age of post-modernity, transience and departure are impossible to explain and how difficult to accept. The lack of stable values also creates serious ethical obstacles to space design. It is difficult for us to distinguish what is good from what evil brings. Legal norms are created which presuppose dishonesty. The Public Procurement Law is a bizarre compromise between people (designer, employer, contractor), the essence of design in space and the law itself.

As part of this compromise, the designer has been deprived of the right to freely form creative project teams, freely choose materials and equipment. As a result of these assumptions architecture is subject to a process of

dehumanization. The third plane of this compromise is the quite common paradox of disagreement with one's own beliefs, which often happens to designers. To a large extent, we depart from our own ideas. I mean new currents or architectural ideas that (as designers) we see, admire, co-author but, for various reasons, we abstain from their implementation

## **KEYWORDS**

architecture; interior architecture; designing; design theory; design ethics

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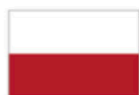
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## **Architect – dictate – compromise**

### **Such a dictate**

The architect occupies a place at the top. This raises fear and hope. Makes it possible to discover the dimension of space and the scale of one's self-worth. It forces you to search. Makes it necessary to take risks. Commands to act and accept responsibility for action. Being at the top means loneliness.

No one has ever been and is not as lonely as the man standing on top of the post-modernity.

The design is an authoritatively expressed statement. It is a kind of dictatorship. There is nothing surprising about this because the design requires categorical, binding and lasting decisions. Questioning them could potentially cause a disaster with a series of endless adjustments because a good design is a series of decisions that are mutually connected. Even an experienced designer often finds it difficult to fully predict which design decisions are adjustable and which changes will nullify the design.

It should be remembered, however, that the formation of the design dictatorship is accompanied by constant doubts, hesitations and fears caused by concern for the good that is to result from the decisions made. Doubts arise from the search conducted in the sense of one's own design power, but also in the face of doubt in it.

## **A compromise or a dictate?**

The agreement reached through mutual concessions is reflexively seen as something generally expected. This feeling seems justified, especially when we refer directly to the design as a marketed and socially active field of creativity. Design arts seem eternally doomed to compromise.

A deviation from principles, assumptions or views in the name of important objectives or for a practical gain is socially recognized because it is associated with coexistence between all actors involved in a particular task.

However, how should the compromise be combined with the authoritative nature of the design? It can be said that in design there is time for compromise and the moment of a departure from it.

When we think a little deeper about the essence of creative activities, we will quickly find that compromise definitely does not reconcile with the essence of art. This work opposes any form of compromise. "Where the compromise starts, there the art ends", the person "standing at the top" says to me. "Without the fruit of this tree, there is no creativity. The statement expressed here is the most ordinary consequence of events. The fruit of the tree of cognition has already been picked", reminds me the voice from the "top".

## **The coexistence of good and evil**

Does creativity carry with it an element of coexistence between good and evil? This view should not come as a surprise. After all, we participate in the real world. Reality has trouble with the contrast between white and black. The reality is grayscale. This does not change the fact that taking an authoritative position causes us understandable anxiety. We tend to see as an oppressive person someone who exerts a kind of dictatorial pressure on their environment. In practice, however,

creativity is reluctant to profess the utopian principles of democracy and far-reaching conventions. It has a more masculine beauty of character. It's a little rough.

We can discuss and argue, but the final decision must be on the creator's side. On the side of the one who has control over the orientation of the whole task. His determination should not be disturbed. This would be an unreasonable, unfair and, above all, erratic rivalry because, in any case, it would harm the final result. If we want to stand in the way of the designer, we need to realize that then someone else will have to take the initiative.

It should be presumed that the design dictate not only expresses the designer's personal preferences but also defends the quality of the place and the needs of people tying their fates to the place to be designed. We are not authorized to raise suspicions about dishonesty of anyone's intentions. The dictatorship of the design can therefore defend the public good, while defending the creativity and personal views of the designer. We will never know whose intentions were pure. Failures can also be real. We will not know who and how much erred and how much this person has actually strayed. We will not know how much this straying enriched or impoverished the errant and their environment and the beneficiaries of the proposed sites. We will not know who is more mistaken: the designer supporting dialogue and compromise, or the one adopting the dictator's attitude.

We are all responsible for spaces around us. They will stay after us and testify to our awareness of the understanding of space. First of all, they have to ensure that the generations following us can still use these places. Once a place has been touched, it can no longer be restored to its previous state. In the above sense, the places in which we live deform permanently. In view of the above, it is very difficult to find a place to compromise in architecture.

## Reinventing – the effect of a compromise

### Reinventing

*Reinventing* – according to the intention of the hosts of our discussion at the 5th AW Biennial, is to be about the spaces realized today, not historical ones. The assumption adopted by the hosts provokes special reflection.

You will ask: “Why would a compromise be responsible for *reinventing*?”. It should be noted here that this question does not necessarily suggest a negative or questionable meaning of the term *reinventing* or a particularly positive meaning. It can be considered “something” staying in harmony with the nature of things. Just as natural are: error, loss of value, the paradox of being in dissent with

oneself, or the passing. Nor should we feel threatened on account of embracing our accomplishments under the heading *reinventing*.

*Reinventing* with a compromise combines the association of an error enforced by the compromise. This is not an objective error of a kind of a spelling error but a mistake contained in the nature of things. For instance, the passing can be such an error for a person while the ignoring of the phenomenon could be the error for someone else. The passing occurs directly in proportion to the rate of changes taking place around us, as well as revaluations so frequent and fashionable today. Revaluations, redefinitions – they are the engine of the passing. They are the catalyst for the departure and the following of nothingness. Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger have already written extensively about this problem. They called it “nihilism”. The compromise we go to with “something” or “someone” enforces a kind of an “error”, which gives room for what we might call *reinventing*.

## Compromise – the “error” of the passing

Let us consider why “something – after all – still quite new” we need to rethink, rediscover.

Firstly, it provokes a **mistake** that I would describe closer as the “**error of the passing**”. This is a kind of a design error driven by a compromise that forces you to ignore the passing.

We do not want to pass away but the passing is inevitable. Due to the loss of a culturally established system of values we cannot find ourselves well in the face of the inevitable nature of the passing. Therefore, we subconsciously run away from it or at least want to erase it from our consciousness or ignore it. In this sense, we are going to make a kind of compromise with ourselves. We want to treat the passing as a mistake of nature. We often do not want to accept the aging of the surrounding places and materials in our environment, and yet it is a natural turn of things and on this principle constitutes the beauty of materials.

I observed an interesting phenomenon in Gdansk: designers were required to use indestructible materials, unaging, always brand new. While strolling through streets of Krakow, I was surprised how often degradable materials were used here, even in places exposed to weather. The past and testimonies of the aftermath of the action of time are present in Krakow. We can go back almost at any distance, pointing to specific tenement houses, places, laying our hands on specific walls. There is also the continuity of witnesses of time as persons physically familiar to us who witness the passing. In view of the complete pacification of Gdansk (I mean the consequences of World War II), everything is new in Gdansk. Even historic monuments are new because they have been rebuilt. New are the Main Town and the Old Town. Also the population of Gdansk has undergone an almost complete exchange. In Gdansk we have no experience of the passage of time and of the aging of



materials in our environment. We do not have immunity to the passing and no experience of its course in space. We do not even have the graves of loved ones and testimonies of those close to us in our places and our space. That is probably why we want new and unaging things around us.

It is even more difficult to come to terms with the passing of views on the understanding of space. The lack of readiness for their variability is probably the effect of aging, the effect of the passing.

The **error of the passing** also includes troubles with the acceptance of the progressive variability of functions of architecture. The function of buildings passes away faster than it used to be. True, it is extremely difficult to abstract to the functions of architecture. On the other hand, we should look for a formula of objects that are as functionally universal as possible. Note here that while architecture loses its relationship to the function, its interiors retain it. Except that today the function of the interior changes faster. The basilica, in a sense, can be an archetype of a spatial solution open to the variability of functions. This kind of experimental search for architecture open to the variability of functions requires designers to react quickly, resulting in flexibility in design and design courage. The schemes of developed and profitable design reflexes should be denied. One would also need to take the risk of inspiring a new architectural idea. Architects would have to regain, or re-develop, the right to seek and formulate ideas. The designing of creative risks in architecture is a task in itself.

Taking into account the modern realities of space, including the passing, some designers try to give architecture an increasingly less obliging form to demonstrate its fleetingness, willingness to change and even depart. While writing about the form, I do not mean only the shape of the architectural body or its individual elements but the general way of treating it, creating it. We will see this trend mainly in the selection of materials, technologies and the resulting dependence of a specific tension within the message and the importance of architecture. Its very form often testifies to a great amount of creative expression and sometimes, as in the case of materials and technology, it is withdrawn from the ambition for its particular importance. This phenomenon can explain the view that what is intrinsically doomed to flimsiness because of the rate of the passing cannot be sustained.

The pace of these changes is underpinned by the development of information dissemination systems and the technological progress behind it. This is particularly true of modern digital technologies. Under its influence we undergo rapid transformations. In other words, the passing.

The correspondence between virtual reality and real reality for individual generations is undoubtedly established in a completely different dimension. Young people are able to very freely associate virtuality with reality. Others, the more conservative (in their understanding actually “stable”), less ready for the interfusion of virtuality with actual reality, will talk about **the error of the passing** manifested by the mixing of the two forms of reality mentioned here. They will see it as an error arising as part of a compromise to allow the stability and sustainability of architecture to be compromised.

Too common attachment to the traditional form of architecture and urban order, ignoring inevitable changes, becomes a problematic compromise of our time. Reinventing is a salvation, an opportunity to restore architecture to its modern requirements. It is a form of “tuning”.

Inside **the error of the passing** is also the fall of authority. In view of the level of the current mean of the average education, the (not always justified) self-esteem of individual individuals increases. In general, real knowledge makes us aware of the vastness of the area of ignorance that each of us faces. The day of social messaging (especially online) drowns out the natural sense of distance to self-worth in favor of the desire to entrust in the strength of a celebrity attitude. Therefore, for example, educated architects who urge reason are listened to with reluctance. It is easier to set the ear on the call to follow fashionable, easy, but little responsible procedures.

The phenomenon of pauperization of projects, as well as the level of criticism of them, can be approached differently. It is important that the burden shifts from substantive knowledge to knowledge that builds individual, autonomous feelings. People verbalizing these individual (very personal) feelings because of their being used to the existence of universal values want to see their feelings as universally applicable.

## Compromise – the error of the loss of the system of values

The basic **universal system of values** is subject to compromise. The existing system of Christian ethical foundations of our Western European culture, built on the foundation of the Mediterranean culture, is losing its importance. From the point of view of the narrative of the ideology of the modern and post-modern world, it almost does not exist anymore. If it still lives, it is only in human hearts. I would be inclined to consider any claim that there is a new, modern, post-modern and universal value system only as someone's individual idea of it. Joseph Campbell, on the pages of “The Power of Myth”, says: “Greek, Latin and Biblical literature was once a part of the average education. When they were removed from it, the entire Western tradition of mythological information was lost. In the past, it was usually the case that these stories were in people's minds. When you carry one story or another in your mind, you see its relationship to what happens to you in life. It gives you a certain perspective in which you put what happens to you. With the loss of such a story, we have lost something significant because we do not have any comparable literature in its place. These passages of information from ancient times, related to things that helped people live, built civilizations, and shaped religions throughout millennia, also have a close connection with deep internal problems, spiritual mysteries and the thresholds we must push and if you don't have any signposts on this path, you have to work them out for yourself”<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Potęga mitu. Rozmowy Billa Moyersa z Josephem Campbellem*, ed. B.S. Flowers, transl. I. Kania, Znak, Krakow 2013.

In addition to J. Campbell's thesis above, it is appropriate to cite the opinion expressed by André Malraux in his reflections on the Museum of imagination: "The fundamental order imposed on the world by Christianity (and especially by Catholicism, because Protestantism did not erect cathedrals or the Vatican) has disappeared. The order of the great monarchies lost its rationale, which the mind brought out of the spiritual order, and lost its untouchable character. The reason lost when trying to build its own order (...). Unable to build its cathedrals and even its palaces, reluctant to repeat what its predecessors had built, the new civilization is also incapable of inspiring the great expression of the world, the great expression of man"<sup>2</sup>.

In the modern world, the view on reality is changing with the system of values. The understanding of art is also changing.

André Malraux claims that the language of the sculptures created by Fidias had the same specificity as the language of the creators of ancient buildings, or masters of Romanism or Gothic. The language of the forms created was intertwined with the process of mastering the technique, including the technique of using the illusion to push the creators towards discoveries so that they could create the unreal<sup>3</sup>. They did so in fact because, before modernity, in their eyes the unreal was really present. Malraux claimed that Michelangelo could not erase his sins with the characters he created because, even within Buonarrotti's understanding, they were only reminiscences of creation, reminiscences of God<sup>4</sup>. Here was the limit of man's creative power. God kept his rights. On the one hand, he somewhat limited the role of man, on the other hand he gave man a special dimension of freedom by leaving him an area of unreal space. It is a sphere of materially non-existent beings (subject to experience and imagining of them) but actually permanently existing and taking a real part in human life. How important this area is for those of us who see the real being of what is intangible, but it clearly is. What to say about love?

Until the end of modernity, man did not usurp the right to create as a building of substance and the meaning of his being. He did not enter into the role of God. he did not create a system of values.

André Malraux discovers for us the concept of the "museum of imagination". He writes: "The Romanesque crucifix was not a sculpture at first, Cimabue's Madonna was not primarily a painting, even Athena Fidias was not a statue from the beginning." In this way, he lets us know that in the works of the creators gathered in museums we do not see them ourselves but something completely different. He then elaborates on the statement, giving his thought a deeper meaning: "If the bust of Caesar, the equestrian portrait of Charles V, is still Caesar and Charles V, then Prince Olivares is only

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<sup>2</sup> A. Malraux, *Muzeum wyobraźni*, Warsaw 1978 (Studia estetyczne, 15), p. 359.

<sup>3</sup> Tamże, s. 353.

<sup>4</sup> A. Malraux, *Ponadczasowe*, Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1985, s. 10.

Velázquez. What do we care about identifying the *Man in a helmet* or the *Man with a glove*? They are called Rembrandt and Titian. A portrait ceases to be primarily someone's portrait. (...) The Museum does not know the holiness of either the saint, or Christ, or the object of worship, likeness, imagination, ornaments or property, there are only images of things, different from the things themselves and deriving from this specific difference the reasons of their own existence. The museum is a confrontation of metamorphoses"<sup>5</sup>. André Malraux presents the effect of a variety of realities. Individualism sanctioned by post-modernity puts the individual in such a high position that we no longer see the culturally written world of values but we see the value perceived by the individual and the overarching role of the individual.

The author of the term "**museum of imagination**" referred to the concept he created for the perception of art. Today I would be inclined to transfer the character of the **museum of imagination** to the whole picture of our reality. This peculiar form of individualism also radiates to the image of architecture. On this basis, I would like to prove that authors (including architects) today mainly use **creative imagination boost**. The place of developed principles, reflexes, methods and systems of values is occupied by an individually built idea that consists of the sum of events, phenomena – artifacts (artifacts understood here by me as a product of human imagination). These are images of their kind resulting from sensations and experiences, constantly and almost subconsciously collected by man. The process of this accumulation takes place from the moment of birth to the present day. We design using these images, these resources. They give content to our works. I think that from the very habit of having a permanent value system, which until recently and eternally was assigned to us, today we are still reflexively looking for it. The **creative imagination boost** fills this gap.

"I grabbed it by going into my aunt's garden. Even today this handle appears to me as a special sign of entering the world of various moods and smells"<sup>6</sup>. Zumthor associates his power of **imagination** with education, work, but also with his childhood experiences: the experience of the garden, the shape of the garden door handle remembered by his hand, the ordinariness of the rooms he was passing through at the time, and which later – through the memory of their ordinariness – acquire some special meaning. They are witnesses of the establishment of our human existence, of being. The testimony of the special importance of these paintings constitutes their re-experience by the mature architect<sup>7</sup>. It is a kind of *re-inventing*. Zumthor adds: "Such memories contain the most deeply embedded architectural experiences I know. They are the backbone of architectural moods and paintings that I try to explore as an architect"<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> A. Malraux, *Muzeum wyobraźni*, dz. cyt., s. 345.

<sup>6</sup> P. Zumthor, *Myślenie architekturą*, transl. A. Koźuch, Karakter, Krakow 2010, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

It must therefore be considered that the universal system of values is displaced by the sum of individual **imagination boosts**. Therefore, like never before, we are exposed to the creation of our own architecture, the architecture of our own feelings.

The principle of abandoning the universal values, which I describe, has multifaceted and often very practical effects.

I am referring here to the law governing public procurement rules. The legal norm mentioned here, and especially our native way of interpreting it, is a form of a bizarre compromise concluded between man as a designer, investor, contractor, and the essence of the design in space and the law itself. As part of this, not entirely healthy, compromise proposed by this law, the designer has been denied the right to freely form creative teams (I am thinking of executive teams) and the freedom to choose materials and technologies to be used in architectural designs. This law overturns all the rules for creating good architecture, denying architects the right to make binding design decisions. As a result of this particular compromise, architecture is becoming an industry (such as sanitary and electrical ones) operating inside a project event. The role of the architect is taken over by an enigmatic **investment process** led by a group of its decision-makers, and a significant impact on the entire investment remains mainly on the side of the inspector general of the contractor. And this person, even if most competent, is not ready to create architecture.

It is worrying that, within the meaning of this law, a person is treated in advance as a potential criminal. It should be noted that the law does not outline the consequences of possible offenses, but presupposes that they will occur and creates a system of theoretical prevention of such offences. A similar principle of treating people guided the Soviet totalitarianism as one of the many forms of oppression of the time. That is why we are particularly sensitive to this phenomenon in Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, the presumption of intent of honesty, in view of the wording of the law described here, ceases to apply.

In our country, this law grew on the basis of post-Soviet reality. As a result, we are also victims of what the well-known philosopher and priest Joseph Tischner called the *homo sovieticus* syndrome. The syndrome consists not only in a low level of self-appraisal but also in the imperative of relying on someone stronger as more competent to make decisions. The man in the Soviet system had no right to make binding decisions. The Soviet syndrome cuts the man off from the right to enjoy the benefits of any system, now or in the future, because it commands to see himself as someone worse off because of the backwardness caused by the Soviet past. As a consequence, the *homo sovieticus* syndrome is characterized by the feeling that we do not have the right to create our environment and rules of action, but we have to accept them from the outside. Moreover, these external principles must be adopted in an even more ruthless and demanding form than that in which others, those who have not been through the trauma of Sovietism, accept them. Perhaps that is why the Public Procurement Law is even stricter than in the West. Moreover, our society, which is highly specialized

in circumventing such “difficult” legal provisions, is more focused on improving this specialization than on improving the law itself.

It should be added that the perverting of the Public Procurement Law described by me concerns not only post-communist countries, which is a particularly nagging conclusion. This law operates in a similar way in the rest of Europe. The architecture resulting from it loses detail and thus the scale of its user-friendliness. It is becoming more and more dehumanized.

Among other things, based on the aforementioned principle of treating man as incapable of functioning honestly in the society, and hence the crisis of mutual trust, I am observing the collapse of the system of values. Of course, this is not the only symptom of the departure of values. First of all, it is necessary to recall the dominant nature of individualism, as mentioned above.

## **Compromise – the paradox of disagreement with one's own beliefs**

In addition to the **error of the passing** and the **collapse of the system of values**, in a sense we remain deaf to what we think of architecture. The third plane of this compromise is therefore a fairly common **paradox of disagreement with one's own beliefs**. To a large extent, we ourselves give up the ideas we create or, simply, tastes and preferences. I think of new currents, architectural ideas that we see, sometimes we verbally support them, but we often abstain from implementing them in the face of the reality that becomes stronger than us. This reality demands compromise.

Architects are not exempt from the obligation to include a message in their proposed works. I stress the essence of the message contained in architecture because I am afraid that design art carries a certain margin for abandonment in this field under the pretext of solving the so-called problem. In the field of architecture, this would be a functional-spatial solution. In addition to any other narrative, the message of architecture should still be a story about the designer's current attitude to people, place and space. This can certainly be achieved by providing only obvious and repeatedly verified categories of responses. But this is a very specific situation. It would be just as unique as the intention to limit literature solely to reportage, and music to the sounds coming to us from behind the window. Of course, a completely different situation is the one in which the author himself consciously declares to withdraw from his ambitions to remain a step behind the craft and from this position to control the project. Any consciously accepted attitude towards the obligation to communicate (to take the risk of conscious expression, communication in the project) is the responsibility of the designer



To point out the difficulties facing the architectural message I will quote Peter Zumthor's significant statement: "Time and time again I come across buildings that are shaped by large investments and the will to give them a unique form, and I feel irritated. The architect who committed this thing is absent but he speaks to me constantly through every detail of the building and constantly tells me one and the same thing, which I soon lose interest in. Good architecture must accept man, allow him to live and dwell, not to tell him something"<sup>9</sup>. In the midst of these considerations, I consciously seek to find judgment that makes it difficult to understand too simply a creation (message) in space. As designers, we must be able to maintain moderation also in what is lacking. I continue to argue that in architecture there is no reliable message to be distinguished from chatter. Here we should give a hand to the quoted architect. On the other hand, it should be noted that the author of this statement has a real ability to speak with architecture, despite the formal self-limitation. He, too, despite his obvious absence, fortunately, is quite clearly heard in his statements.

P. Zumthor also cites another sentence that points to the poetic context of architectural narrative. It seems particularly significant to me. It comes from a discussion of poetry in which the Italian essayist Italo Calvino firmly states: "Only a poet of precision can be a poet of indeterminateness!"<sup>10</sup>. This is a very specific statement that I would recommend to designers as a priority. For an architect who sees, moreover rightly, the metaphorical, therefore poetic, language of architecture, it can be a signpost.

There is something about architecture to understand poetically because the language of the poetic metaphor is appropriate to describe the meanings that define the sense of reality. An architectural utterance usually touches on areas that are principled for our participation in the world. It is difficult to speak literal language about them, so as not to fall into the shallowness that P. Zumthor warns against.

For the aforementioned reason, architecture, like poetry, uses rhythm, as well as the very demanding logic of the language used in it. Today it is a little more difficult to define in the both fields: both poetry and architecture. Poetry, like architecture, has its own design and structure: a certain order of syllables, the number of verses, rhymes and their kind. Especially the sonnet may to be architectural. The question is: does this kind of poetry and architecture have the right today to exist in the face of the crisis of the values, which I have mentioned?

Just as poetry sneaks off from the area commonly discussed (almost every high school student wrote poems once), so too architecture loses its place in space. The question remains about our longing for poetry and architecture at the level of a clear message, which is a poignant expression of the "poet of precision".

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

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