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# Fragmentation of Public Space – An Attempt at Recomposition

Public space of the post-modern epoch is a conglomerate or blend of discontinuous functions, a collection of loosely connected fragments, increasingly more frequently unrelated to a city. People compose for themselves their own town from individual trajectories that are outlined by means of motor roads.

Neo-liberal logic of city development recognises the rule of spontaneity wherever the interest of big capital groups dominates, pushing onto the sidelines the more important task of contemporary urban planning – the protection and development of public spaces. Due to the crisis it is undergoing at present (commercial pressure), the efforts are taken to regain its social and spatial significance. The purpose of these transformations is bonding public spaces with broader surroundings (with open terrains, waterside zones, promenades, playgrounds, etc). Such recomposition is part of a regeneration process that unites the city and reconstructs the identity of the place where relationships of inhabitants with their urban environment were not completely abandoned.

The sources of the fragmentation of urban space are usually sought in the speed and dynamics of changes in social life, and in the crisis of urban mass society (Mikułowski-Pomorski 2006). In a developed democracy, no one analyses whether any attempts at redressing this situation should be made, but rather what should be done in order for such attempts to produce most socially favourable results, and to prevent further fragmentation of urban space. Although they are more and more frequent, the solutions proposed rarely produce expected results as it is extremely difficult to control the complicated and multifaceted issues related to modern cities. Nonetheless, efforts do not cease. By referring to such efforts as 'recomposition' we would like to emphasise that the purpose of the exercise is to restore or re-create something after its temporary disintegration. "Old ties are still in place, and have even retained some strength in their important aspects, which allows a given phenomenon to continue, even if only to make it stronger" (Mikułowski-Pomorski 2006). Recomposition is a part of the regeneration process, and in some cases only a 'rectification' of the situation (markings, tree plantings, street furniture, etc.). Such measures transform fragments into comprehensive ideas and programmes, while relating to the environment and reinforcing social and cultural values of a given area of the city. And even though it is not an easy task, as tendencies towards integration compete

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with trends towards dispersion – it is an important step to improve the quality of life in the city. This is proved by many discussions and meetings which invariably address the issue of public space.

## A citiless city

In a traditional city, public space was made up of a maze of streets and squares which together formed logical sequences and a hierarchised, coherent whole permeated with social meaning. The inhabitants would encounter an infinite number of common points of reference. The notion of the 'centre' and the 'periphery' was unambiguous, space had a well-defined scale, and travelling from one place to another did not take too much time (Vázquez 2007:29). In the past, the market square was one of the cardinal features defining a city. Nowadays, according to Bohdan Jałowiecki (2007a:12), metropolises in themselves represent giant markets, commodities and information. Cities of the developed world compete against one another and tend to focus on highly specialised services, creative industry and culture (which provides 'content' for the thriving electronic media), consumption and tourism (Buchanan 2007; Urry 2007; Krzysztofek 2005).

The process of city fragmentation gradually unfolded throughout the twentieth century. The Athens Charter explicitly questioned the logic of capitalist city formation and ascribed a cardinal role to the 'new sophocracy' (urban planners, architects and planners) (Szczepański 2005:237; Jałowiecki 2007:13). The Charter had a profound influence on modern architecture and urban planning, ripping apart the urban texture and urban society. It also resulted in loneliness and social alienation, that is, in a loss of the sense of security. According to Peter Buchanan (2007:52), these phenomena in their extreme form assumed the form of 'capsularisation'[1] of the city and the society. In cities, 'capsules' can refer to gated communities and office block complexes as well as the privatised spaces of shopping malls – everything under CCTV surveillance, saturated with electronic entertainment, isolated from any external context, connected via the safe, mobile capsule of the car. Regardless of their pretences, most of the buildings held to be icons are merely embellished capsules, parodies of the pathologies of the waning modern era which – importantly – belittle the dimension of «being»".

In the process of the dispersing functions, places and people, the new 'city users' are playing an important role; among them, Saskia Sassen primarily counts corporations and businesspeople who have the most to say with regard to the transformations and organisation of the city and the cityscape. The architecture

[1] The term 'capsularisation' comes from a book by De Cauter (2004). The underlying factors for the phenomenon of 'capsularisation' lie in the transformations of contemporary life based on accelerated technologisation of life, suburbanisation and polarisation (simulation, fear, exclusion). As De Cauter writes, societies more than ever want to hide in 'capsules' such as for example: shopping malls, gated communities, entertainment parks – seeking there a sense of security. Architecture has become an indispensable part of the political and social context.

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of the city and its environs reflects the interests of corporate capitalism. The process of restructuring the spaces of modern cities in effect leads to the privatisation and fragmentation of large parts of the city (Harvey 1985; Jałowiecki 2007a).

The city is transformed by advanced information technologies which transmute it according to varying patterns, dependent on different contexts (be they historical, territorial or institutional) (Castells 2007:400; Sassen 2007; Jałowiecki 2007b). Although an information city is not a form but a process characterised by the prevalence of the flow function, it manifests a certain power capable of restructuring urban space. The higher the position of a metropolis in the new information network, the greater the role of advanced services in the business environment, and the more intensive restructuring of the city's space (Castells 2007:405; Sassen 2007). And, at the same time, "the more ambitious those autonomous metropolitan enclaves, the more they will weaken the real city centre, its cohesion and ethnicity" (Koolhaas, Mau 1998:843).

We can say therefore that space reflects all major phenomena and processes occurring in the society; space is its manifestation and 'crystallised time'. Owing to the freedom to organise work and to social 'networking', societies are becoming more and more mobile, and places – more and more individual. As Manuel Castells puts it, people are increasingly managing services from their homes. This does not mean the end of the city, but does certainly change both the significance and dynamic of places (2007:400). "Shrinking distances and the speed of changes that characterise the present era find one of their most extreme forms existing in the electronic space in communities of individuals or organisations from across the world which have real-time and concurrent interactions, these being possible thanks to the world wide web and related electronic networks" (Sassen 2007:14).

Public space in the postmodern era is a conglomerate of non-discrete functions, an array of loosely connected fragments which have no relation to the city. Distances do not matter and similarity does not breed intimacy. People compose their own city from individual trajectories, determined by motoring routes (cf. Robert Fishman's city *à la carte*). Cities in miniature (Beaubourg in Paris, Eaton Centre in Toronto, Hotel Bonaventure, etc.) guard 'privacy' in a quasi-public space, with the 'hypercrowd' which does not give a fair picture of the city's community.[2] Architectural achievements such as atriums or sky-high passageways connecting skyscrapers have produced a result about which Rem Koolhaas wrote that: "If you dare to enter this system, you will not feel like seeing the rest of the city centre, there is no escape" (Koolhaas, Mau 1998:841). According to Koolhaas, an architect of the contemporary Neo-Avant-Garde, the city is a space of change, movement and diversity. Subjected to the regime

[2] The clinical example of urban isotropy can be found in Lubbock (Texas). The city offers substitutes of social interactions in the form of giant shopping malls, equipped with a 'traditional' set of urban furniture: benches, lamp posts, flowers in pots (Vázquez 2007:32).

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of free market forces, it eludes any rules or planning principles. Koolhaas expressed this view in the concept of the 'Generic City' ("the post-city being prepared on the site of the ex-city") (De Cauter 1999:253).[3]

Marc Augé (1995) writes about the problems of public space in a similar vein, but seen from an anthropological perspective; he also claims that we do not create new places which would serve as continuations of the existing urban life. Spaces dominated by their transit character and functional programming are by assumption developed as *non-places,* thus depriving people of the possibility to generate 'collective ideals' in the Durkheimian sense. Their indifference and neutrality corresponds with the design assumptions based on 'controlling – managing the crowd', from airports to railway stations or shopping mall atriums. Robert Fishman speaks about the city *à la carte*, with a selective choice of places depending on lifestyles and affluence. More and more frequently, this means choosing between the world resembling a curiosity museum, a kind of a city in miniature (Beaubourg in Paris, Eaton Centre in Toronto, The Bonaventure) and opening up to a living and unpredictable space.

Functionalisation of public spaces is characteristic not only for *non-places*, but is becoming a more and more widespread tendency in urban development (Hołub 2002). Contemporary societies are quite willing to choose from a wide package of offers concentrated in one place (hotels, fitness clubs, banks, medical and entertainment centres: cinemas, cafés, clubs, recreational parks). These are not public spaces which correspond to their traditionally conceived senses. It happens very seldom for shopping malls to be erected on the place of the former streets, thus creating a consistent whole and making it possible for the residents to enjoy the city atmosphere (Gzell 2007). The fallacy of pleasant and manipulated consumption, designed in the form of places resembling public space, leaves no room for illusions. This in itself would not be a bad thing, if their private function did not overlap with the (quasi) public function.

What cities need today the most is the need to protect their public space. But where is it to be found? Not every public space determines the future of urban life. Those of its forms are regarded as most desirable which promote "both modern ambitions to eradicate or obliterate differences and postmodern strivings to emphasise such differences by distinguishing and isolating them. This applies to public space which appreciates the creative and life-giving value of diversity and acknowledges the need for an active dialogue between differences" (Bauman 2007:123). When it is allowed to flourish in the activities of people, their beliefs and behaviours, the area for showing oneself as a person (collective entity) is expanded – to include other people than those one knows due to bonds of blood, friendship and private relations. *Public* is what can be seen and heard by everyone and has the widest 'audience' (Arendt 2000:56).

[3] The authors of New Urbanism take a different view. They promote models of integration through form (proponents of the neo-avant-garde approach focus on the contemporary nomads on the move).

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**A city without theory?**

The period of experiments in contemporary architecture began in the late 1980s – in all possible directions (Jodidio 1997:6). The variety and diversity of approaches has continued uninterruptedly until today. Some say theories have come to an end. Others claim that the time is ripe for a new 'ism' after modernism. Search for new ideas generates new ideas, but none of them solves problems that subsequently crop up. Architecture and theory parted ways after the modernists' attempt to build a better world for the masses, based on functional assumptions.

At present, the symbols of progress include the pursuit of individuality and aversion to trite and tepid urban structures. According to Charles Waldheim (architect from the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Toronto), the contemporary architectural discourse focuses on issues related to the still pertinent criticality and 'postcriticality', and on the question of problematic (distant) authorship. The process of creating and transforming the environment gravitates towards fluidity and negotiability of the relationships between urbanisation and environment. "The traditional hierarchies between urban form and landscape emptiness are reversed, and development that does not disturb the ecological equilibrium becomes most important." This helps develop a certain sensitiveness to designing the so-called built environment. In this perspective, a new vagueness in the *laissez-faire* mode encroaches upon postmodernity, which is indifferent to the needs of social or formal criticism (Waldheim 2007:39). The proposal put forward by James Corner of Field Operations for the bank of the Delaware River in Philadelphia (2003) can serve as an interesting example of the issue thus defined. The rehabilitation of this place involved the cleaning of the contaminated area and indicating the possible form of its future development. Here, we can observe a characteristic tendency whereby architectural forms increase their dependence on the existing land forms and are more and more open to the market requirements (ibid.).

In the era of modernism, theory either generated form or justified the choice of form. One always followed the other. Currently, there is more tension in the relationships between theory and practice which are due to the dynamic and expansive character of modernity. A different assumption is also adopted – that theory no longer functions as an overriding set of unquestionable principles, and becomes yet another tool, a 'different aspect of practice'. This is underpinned by a way of thinking which focuses on seeking ever new possibilities hidden in a given era, without giving precedence to any of the elements in the pair of theory and practice. Such an approach can be found in many creative artists, for whom theory "proves representative, shapeless and open at the same time" (Schafer 2007:74–75). In this case, openness can also mean negotiability of the conditions of the place, programmes and materials, as well as repetitiveness of the designing process. Therefore, it is better to combine, in an interdisciplinary way, designing and writing about architecture than divide them into different

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intellectual categories. As both theoreticians and practitioners want us to believe, this allows for a better use of various means and methodologies to express the same or similar concepts and to cooperate with many players (Schafer 2007:78–79).

However, resistance to change is an inherent feature of architecture, due to its being a static medium. "And although there are tens of examples of buildings which would change over time owing to extensions, additions, redevelopments (the Louvre), refurbishments with significant changes (the Pantheon in Rome), all these transformations did not affect the overall appearance and identity of the original. The difference between those homological changes and open structures is that in the latter case, when we make any alterations, we anticipate changes and exceed parameters which define the original" (Schafer 2007:82). According to Ewa Kuryłowicz: "Reflections on the integrative role of architecture manifest a pursuit of a new definition of city-creating architecture, and are based on the phenomenological paradigm and on the assumption that the role of emotions in the creation of and reaction to architecture, which establishes authentic social relations and restores to the city a democratic spirit of a *polis*, should be emphasised" (Kuryłowicz 2008).

In Peter Buchanan's opinion, the 'flirt' of contemporary architecture with art and theory involves an aspiration to create eye-catching and attention-grabbing works, seductive through manipulations with 'form, materials, patterns and textures', contextually inedible and symbolically mute (2007:45). "By resigning from many types of relationships which architecture can establish with its users and the environment, buildings which attract attention prefer to earn admiration, while remaining irritatingly enigmatic (…). In ripping apart the adjoining urban texture, they do not fulfil their task – they do not help to integrate the city or re-create the identity of the place" (ibid. 2007:45). In the postmodern paradigm of the city, great narrations, universals and hierarchies are discarded, which – according to Buchanan – breeds a mixture of tolerance and narcissism.

To illustrate the growing interest in non-discrete environment that dynamically responds to changes taking place in the contemporary world, let us take an example of Koolhaas' architecture. The author of many well-known (and well-received) forms so significantly departs from modernism that on every occasion he wants to change the paradigm, go beyond the framework, alter the scale and turn his back on the context (*fuck the context*). Modernism was all about the framing of the division into what is inside and what is outside. According to Koolhaas, when we depart from modernism, we depart from the context (Latour 2007:44). Bruno Latour, who questioned the accepted tenet of modernism (time runs from the archaic to the rational), suggests a different option: time runs from small-scale hybridisation to large-scale hybridisation. Koolhaas' entire work is dependent on the question of size and scale. "We can no longer make do with repeating that millions of people living in city centres are surrounded with suburbs inhabited by billions of irrational individuals. Modernism, just like the centres of historic cities, intersected with cosy pedestrian streets, is Asterix's

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deserted village. It is time we started thinking about the twenty-first century using different tools than those inherited from the fascinating and repulsive twentieth century. Isn't it what Rem Koolhaas is doing, breaking with conventions and stale patterns, and presenting a rare combination of a practitioner, philosopher and pragmatist, as well as a theoretician and soothsayer?" (Latour 2007:44).

The model project submitted for the Yokohama Port Terminal (YPT) competition can serve as an interesting illustration of breaking all the boundaries between form and structure, creative balancing between programme and material. The authors of the YPT (first prize) distanced themselves from any architectural idea or concept. They claim that "following the model of Delueze's radical materialism, they are interested, first of all, in the material form of the building (*body*), to later see that, just as any gesture in life, it can adopt (accommodate) not one idea, intention or interpretation but a variety of them – variety of points of view, of discourses – without giving preference to any of them" (Winskowski 2000:136).

As a result, the city of late modernity is full of undefined meanings, false identities and messages of stereotyped 'otherness' provided by entertainment parks, shopping malls and gated communities. "These new entertainment technologies are a characteristic feature of both everyday environment and 'lures' for tourists." (Edensor 2006:116)

## Culture changes the city. Towards postmodern extravagance

David Harvey asks: "How many museums, culture centres, galleries, hotels, port districts and boulevards can one bear?" (Urry 2007). This generalised way of looking at urban tourism does not always produce the desired results, but does offer an answer to the identity crisis of contemporary societies, and a proof of an inclination to look at the past. Formerly, museums operated as temples of art. Contemporary museums, galleries, libraries (just as other entertainment, retail and culture centres) are being transformed into a peculiar sanctuary of undefined identity and represent an important aspect of competition in an era of globalisation. John Urry dubs them 'postmodernist museums', owing to new presentation techniques and value criteria; they radically change the role of visitors who turn from passive observers into active participants of the event – the exhibition. Museums are being transformed into institutions for the wider public because this is the only way they can survive – by accepting the market logic.

Thus, they open up to broad prospects of cultural and spatial development. The easily recognisable design of postmodern culture and art facilities automatically enhances the place's prestige and economic value. Icons of world architecture very willingly agree to design public utility buildings (Peter Zumthor, Jean Nouvel, Daniel Liebeskind, Bernard Tschumi, Steven Holl, David Chipperfield, etc.) because they see in it unlimited opportunities for creating a modern environment which combines varied functions (be they social, tourist or informa-

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tive, etc.). Consideration for the unique character of the existing architecture sometimes leads to the transformation of the area or even the whole district into a tourist attraction. For example, this was the case of the Guggenheim Museum, which is a destination for tourists from all over the world (90% tourists come to see the building, and not its collection).[4] The 'Bilbao effect' is now a recognisable brand of spectacular architecture and a concept for enlivening space. More and more architectural works show how indistinct is the borderline between architecture and exhibits (e.g. Musée Du Quai Branly in Paris, Atelier Jean Nouvel). Understating space and playing with colour make the building overwhelming and imposing upon the visitors.

The sensitivity of cultural institutions to novelties, a certain melting pot for old and new, nostalgic and futuristic patterns, high and low culture, modernism and postmodernism – all these make the contemporary market for culture which, according to Urry (2007:136), blends "exclusivity and trash, outdated fashions and modern mockery into one, perfectly trite *bricolage*. Style is everything, and everything can be style". The dialogue of the contemporary and the historical can be successful and sometimes gets its reward (for example the Acropolis Museum designed by the Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi, who freely draws on the ancient ideas and combines them with modern technologies: light, movement and materials),[5] but sometimes raises controversy. Time will show which opinions were true.

Matthias Sauerbruch (2002:327) points out that if museums are to remain places for the contemplation of art, they must fulfil two conditions: have contact with their surroundings and be places of isolation, places of refuge. A museum should be furnished with cafés and souvenir stands, playgrounds for children; it "must be a live place for human interactions". Today, one can find examples of museums (galleries, libraries) which are open to integration with the city and at the same time to the world of artists (as this Berlin architect would wish). The Art Museum in Stuttgart (Kunstmuseum Stuttgart) is a place like this; owing to the neutral form of its building, it very well blends with the local context – on its one side, it is located in a row of commercial buildings, and in daytime it vanishes in the open vista of the central plaza situated along the street axis. One can peer in though the glass façade, and also observe city life from inside the building. Under the partly glazed, opening roof, generally accessible multi-functional area has been located. City life is bustling in the newly arranged square in the front of the Museum.

[4] A similar situation is in Prague – in terms of the number of tourists, the popularity of the constructivist 'Dancing House' is comparable to the Charles Bridge. The architecture of 'global' masters in itself acts as a magnet attracting expected masses of curious tourists. Frequently, this is sufficient both for the investors and the users.

[5] The opponents of Tschumi's work claim that large glazed surfaces are not ecological as they will require huge amounts of energy for the air-conditioning system to maintain the building in an acceptable condition both for the visitors and the exhibits (even though stone goddesses will certainly not lodge any complaints) – Krenz 2008.

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Norman Foster attained a similar goal in his Great Court of London's British Museum. At first sight, this seems to be an enclosed space, located in the building of the Museum, but it has been arranged in such a way as to attract people who do not come there to visit the galleries. Central city location, free admission, picturesque glass roof, numerous benches and tables – all this attracts people as would a nicely kept park or square. The plaza now has attributes of a public space, due to the expanding of its accessibility and integrating it with the wider environment. The Museum, located in Central London, attracts visitors not only with its collections but – similarly to cultural facilities referred to above – has become a space which is attractive to various kinds of users. It can serve as yet another example of recomposition which has resulted in 'placemaking'. The Museum in Tilburg (van Berkel & Bos) can also be seen as a bridge between people and the wider surroundings, and has been designed as a continuation of the city's planning structure. The emphasis falls on the movement in the building, unpredictable events related to the choice of the path to go (Nyka 2006). In the space of a postmodern city, every place can potentially become a catalyst of changes and unexpected events. The choice of new materials and structures (which is frequently experimental) sets an environment for perishable materials, with a possibility of their quick adaptation to the atmosphere or ad hoc needs. Ewa Rewers writes that an event involves a change in thinking about the world at large, which implies a departure from the analytical, Cartesian method of reasoning. "To try and understand the event-related urban texture does not mean taking the city's mechanism apart but also establishing contacts, strands of events which make up actual city life, along with its space, urban imagination and experience" (Rewers 2005:79; 1998) .

Although a building with a unique individualistic quality, the Kunsthaus Graz creates a flexible environment for its users. Its silhouette is easily memorable, and it is a well-accessible and user-friendly institution. In urban planning terms, this Art Museum, situated on the 'inferior' bank of the river, has improved the image of its most immediate vicinity and won the trust of the local residents (cf. Fourier 2007).

This mode of approach to the functions of modern culture facilities is even more distinctly visible in the history of the Tate Gallery (Herzog & de Meuron) in London, which was built on the site of the former Bankside Power Station. Here, art has powerfully transformed the forgotten city district. The huge exhibition hall (Turbine Hall) opens up to the street and to the plaza. The 'Cathedral' (as Herzog dubbed his work) amazes viewers with the simplicity of its architecture and the way it addresses the contemporary needs of the visitors. The building also has outstanding visual characteristics. This has been a complete revamping of the gallery's image and function – from a static institution to a dynamic facility which tries to establish contact with its surroundings. Thanks to it, one of London's oldest districts is now bustling with activity, thereby becoming a variant of the agora. "For instance, on Friday evenings Tate Modern houses London's largest gathering of singles" (Sauerbruch 2002:324).

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In addition to their traditional functions, the interiors of museums and libraries offer new services related to recreation, information and science (cafés, winter gardens, venues for local council meetings, conferences, etc.). There has also been a change in the relationship between the museum as such and various other social institutions which begin to resemble museums. "For example, the chic shop windows of some shops look like museum exhibitions of exclusive goods, and are intended to lure the passers-by to 'visit'. In such places as the Albert Dock in Liverpool, which houses Tate Gallery of the North, a sea museum and a number of stylish shops, it is not easy to know what makes us think they are shops, as people walk around them and look at the merchandise as if they were 'exhibits'" (Urry 2007:193).

Today, shopping resembles a ritual in which museum objects are admired, and becomes an experience from the sphere of culture. Desacralisation of museums has been replaced by the commercialisation of their function (Urry 2007:193). This is mainly due to the development of values in the postmodern world, which focus on consumption supported by the culture and entertainment industry. The world's metropolises compete in competitions for the best arranged and best organised space for socially and ethnically varied groups of visitors. Museums have their competitors in centres of culture, which either develop or improve their authenticity standards and – perhaps more interestingly – "collect just about anything" (Urry 2007:198).

The Tyne and Wear Museum advertises as follows: "In our Museum, the emphasis is on action, participation and fun. No obsolete display cabinets whose contents must be examined in silence and concentration. We offer professional exhibitions, working models that you can play with, fully furnished historical rooms with visual effects, where you can browse" (after: Urry 2007:192; see also: Hein 1990). Here, we can see playing with the conventions and accepted norms. Events are as important as form. The cause-and-effect relationship between the form of the building and its function no longer matters, even though, according to Tschumi, it can be a real source of inspiration. The juxtaposition of space and events is like a transposition of surrealist paintings by René Magritte, "where familiar objects and motives meet, but they are put together in a way that destroys the commonly accepted relationships between objects" (more in: Warchoł 2007).

The Library

> *...is open to the public and gives the young a fortunate bait, the old provides with the source of the life's pleasures, the idle – with a show, those who love work – with a repose, those who study – with an abundant collection of knowledge, and provides everyone with a souvenir, that will make its Founder immortal.*

(fragment of an inscription from 1747 on the building of the Załuskis' Library in Warsaw)

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As before, libraries open their doors to the wide public, but in addition to offering an 'abundant collection of knowledge', they become attractive venues more and more vividly responding to the needs of the contemporary era. The library in Aalborg has been designed in such a way that its interior is a natural extension of a grid of old city streets. Obliterating the boundary between the interior and exterior of the building produced very interesting results, allowing easy access. The social space of the street and the social space of the library penetrate and complement each other (Kowicki 2003).

This can also be seen in the Royal Library in Copenhagen. The historic building has been extended by a modern complex, which 'goes out' into the sea. It is intersected by a busy street, which divides the library into two parts. The glass façade reinforces the building's connection with the sea, blurring the border between the open space and the cubage. The emphasis falls not only on the visual image, but mostly on the creation of public space at the point of contact between the building and the wider surroundings.

The Public Library at the Urban-Loritz Square in Vienna also deserves attention. The institution has been included into a revitalisation programme for western Vienna, in order to eradicate the negative impact of the railway line which divided the city into a more affluent and prestigious district and a poorer and neglected one. Therefore, the public space at the intersection of the two districts plays a revitalising function. "Ernst Mayer (project author) emphasised that the 'passage' through the library is intended to encourage people to at least stop for a coffee, and the number of people who daily pass by is about 30,000. Three thousand of them come to the building purposefully, for example in order to go onto the roof, offering a superb view of the city" (Zyśk 2007:11).

The design of the Public Library in Amsterdam was informed by a similar philosophy. The symbiotic merging of its functions with the urban texture and the natural environment indicates new perspectives in thinking about public spaces. The object functions as a kind of a cultural 'bridge' bringing the city together and transforming public spaces via a reinforced inside-outside relationship. A survey of contemporary European libraries shows that they are important landmarks of their cities and frequently visited public spaces.

The Warsaw University Library (BUW) and the University of Gdańsk Library capture attention not only owing to their form. Thanks to their additional functions (which are especially well developed in BUW), they transform the face of their surroundings. The Warsaw University Library can be viewed as a component of the global trend whereby tradition mingles with modernity.

Restoring public space and extending its boundaries is also done through smaller-scale activities, which include footbridges, forgotten railway embankments, flyovers, small bridges, etc. Thanks to daring concepts and groundbreaking ideas, many European (also Polish) cities have now new transport routes, passageways, paths, passages, panoramas. The Passerelle Simone-de-Beauvoir across the Seine River in Paris, a pedestrian bridge located between the National

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Library and the Bercy Park, is also used for cultural (exhibitions and artistic events) and social functions (there are cafés and bars on both sides of the bridge, encouraging the passers to stop by).

Admiring views, nature's creations, have become as interesting an activity as admiring monuments of culture. It has become a performance which can be added to other shows, "even though in many cases the entrance is not guarded by 'gates' where the fee for consumption is collected" (Urry 2007:235). In a more ecological perspective, contact with nature obliges. In the 1960s, Viennese artist Fiedensreich Hundertwasser (1928–2000), in his declaration entitled *Your Tree Duty*, demanded that the 'debt' to nature be paid off, and proposed to plant gardens on top of buildings and on terraces, covering façades with green climbing plants and growing plants in balconies (Zaraś-Januszkiewicz, Rabsztyn 2002:97). It is being 'paid off' by many buildings and facilities, e.g. Warsaw University Library, Le Jardin Naturel in Paris, parks in post-industrial areas, André-Citröen Park in Paris or Bryant Park in New York with an extensive lawn growing on the roof of this two-storey library.

For the mobile and change-oriented societies of late capitalism, these are spaces to which culture refers us, "suppressing the natural world to the point where nature is artificially restored ('protected') as a cultural form – as this is the real meaning of the ecological movement: to recreate nature as a certain ideal cultural form" (Castells 2007:474).

Picturesque landscapes, archaeological excavations and other monuments of the past, traditional housing estates, parks, squares, nature reserves and different kinds of open areas, farming land, water areas (lakes, rivers, marshes, sea coasts) are becoming the highlights of global tourism and part of practices addressing the issue of environmental protection. Such a reflection allows to choose the least harmful activity, and to develop it in a more sophisticated form, e.g. biomorphism. The past meets the dream of the future, in between now and then, as is the case of the Kunsthaus in Graz or the Selfridges in Birmingham. Both these objects are regarded as examples of Blob Architecture (blobitecture, blobism or blobismus)[6] (the 1990s). Works which drew on organic forms and were created with the assistance of the computer (manipulation of algorithms using a computer modelling platform) represent the highest technological level and attract a lot of interest from both local residents and tourists.[7] Sometimes, they change the face of the city, at least with regard to its neglected parts (dilapidated or degraded earlier). "At the turn of the twenty-first century, man has more mundane matters within and, without, much more technology which, apart from unquestionable benefits, produces more and more subtle problems. Architecture, which has accompanied man since time began – be it technically sophisticated or extremely simple – can

[6] 1958 saw the release of the sci-fi movie *The Blob*, which tells a story of an attack of a voracious, shapeless alien on an American town.

[7] The façades of popular works show paintings, texts, advertisements – elements of new aesthetics, producing a landscape full of visual and sound signs.

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help man in a variety of ways, can enrich man's perception of nature and of himself, seen as part of nature" (Winskowski 2000:192).

**The city-planning renaissance**

Post-industrial architecture is almost a contradiction, due to a hiatus between aversion to a working factory and fascination about its shell. The giant has turned from an aggressor to a victim and now is winning our warmer feelings, as Robert Harbison wrote. In the society well familiarised with machines, industrial ruins have lived to see a kind of a renaissance. For example, in Manchester post-industrial space is managed according to the newly-adopted *Regulations*. The *Regulations*, prepared by the city council, define the rules based on clear requirements concerning the broader context and promoting pro-societal assets of the constructed environment. Now, investors have to be aware of sanctions for breaching principles set out in the *Regulations* – the key element of the planning process in the city (Franta 2007:36). The spatial environment is made up of many factors; some of them directly and some indirectly perform a specific role in building a foundation for the future. The *Regulations* have been phrased so as to emphasise the special significance of 'place', quality', 'cohesion and mixed functions' as well as 'good streets' (and, more broadly, public spaces) (ibid. 2007:36). In this case, recomposition involves a consolidation of components which in the past were responsible for an unambiguous image of the industrial city, and nowadays, due to restructuring processes, have become fragmented and their continuity has been broken.

In Groningen (the Netherlands), Toyo Ito brought out from the shadows a part of the city located between one of the peripheral post-industrial areas (Europark) and the historic city centre, of which the city residents had not been aware. "The motivation for such interventions is always similar – areas which could be regarded as the city's landmarks, were no longer perceived as such. Although they exist on city maps, they are not present in the perceptions of people who go through the city" (Nyka 2007:117). Many studies and observations indicate that people like places which are recognisable, visually interesting, and which testify to the unique features of the identity of the city that they live in.

In Birmingham, the second largest metropolitan region in the United Kingdom and once an industrial city, the changes have been rather wide-ranging, and involved much more than a recomposition of a small area. The assumption underpinning the revitalisation was to combine new public spaces with the existing urban texture. Owing to daring and cogent ideas, Brindleyplace, situated on the canals and near the city centre, has acquired new values while retaining the traditions of the place. The mainstream of transformations is generating spaces geared at satisfying consumer and entertainment needs (pubs, clubs, restaurant complexes, cafés) and open spaces (as for example *Britain in Bloom*, a flower exhibition laid out as a trail four kilometres long or the dragon boat race). In the agora, that is the central place (Central Square, 4,729 sq m), there are places en-

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couraging for meetings (café in the middle of the square), and the stairs, sculptures and other high quality street furniture superbly highlight the *genius loci* of Brindleyplace.

The surveys conducted by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment showed that linking the public space with the city centre largely helped to attract investors and boosted the image of companies located there. The place is extremely popular with the city's residents. "However, one can criticise Brindleyplace for the excessively commercial nature of its public space, which is open but monitored at all times" (Bradecki 2007:18). Likewise, the wide offer of services does not fulfil all the conditions of a good space. In addition to traditional lunch and dinner hours, this space is lifeless.

Another large-scale project, the Paradise Project (Liverpool, England), points to the ever stronger tendency to enclose diverse functions within one area, without being blind to the existing spaces (in this case – water and the historic Albert docks). As part of broad projects related to the renewal of the historical city centre, the Creative Ropewalks Programme (1997–2004) was developed. The project included activities aimed at protecting cultural values and improving the quality of public spaces (development of small squares, improvement and extension of pedestrian infrastructure, connecting shopping, office and recreation spaces with networks of roads and paths, arrangement and development of new meeting places, etc.). The public and private partnership enabled realisation of important social objectives consisting in the strengthening and reconstruction of local identity. As a result of the Integrated Action Plan (IAP), which aimed also at cooperation with the inhabitants of the revitalised areas, a consistent system of roads and public spaces was developed. Streets regained their public space functions[8].

Barcelona is commonly regarded today as a model city with regard to the development of public spaces. The activities started 25 years ago changed the face of the city. They were possible owing to the social and political transformation of Spain. In the wake of the programme of the city's democratic revitalisation, the city acquired new public spaces. The process was greatly enhanced by young public officials, the best architects and students of architecture – the so-called 'golden pencils'. Berlin should also be mentioned in this context – as a city with a clear-cut direction of development, oriented to building spaces for people from all walks of life: families with children, businessmen, alternative artists, elderly people and the handicapped. This is a city that is liked and admired.

The project to develop a contemporary public space completed in Bydgoszcz (Bulanda-Mucha Architekci) is also noteworthy. The redevelopment of two historic granaries involved the construction of a promenade along the Brda River – which became one of the favourite destinations both for tourists and local

[8] In many materials on Liverpool Rope Walks, we can read that "The completed scheme has created a coherent high quality network of streets and public spaces with a strong local identity." See more in: D. Bartlett, *Architect with grand designs on home town Liverpool*: www.liverpooldailypost.co.uk/liverpool-news/regional-news/.

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inhabitants. The secret of this success in creating friendly public spaces lay in the cooperation of architects with the city authorities.

Owing to the initiative of the Brazilian urban planner and politician Jaime Lerner, the project *Urban Acupuncture* came into being. In his anthropological look at the degraded urban texture, we will find a lot of room for social involvement, responsibility and dialogue. Lerner treats the city as a living organism. This was the origin of urban acupuncture, which rests on four assumptions: the city for pedestrians, public transportation (bus–tram–metro), intensive development and recycling. Inspired by this concept, Silesian students from the *amkr* design group were awarded the Grand Prix for their design in the "Urban Acupuncture" competition held by *Architektura–Murator* monthly (2007). The young designers' concept for reviving the city was especially recognised for the idea that quality of the surrounding space can be improved by small activities, "punctures" as in the Chinese acupuncture. According to the authors, it is sufficient to paint a piece of a wall and a bench. Such a fragrantly fresh, shining spot will contrast very strongly with the grey and dirty environment. They claim that by showing a better quality in a tiny area, they suggest to people that the rest is in their own hands. Not coercion, but reflection is proposed (Malkowski 2007).

Carlos Martinez Architekten and Pipilotti Rist made an interesting attempt at the recomposition of the public space by its 'domestication'. The authors of the 'red square' in the city centre of St. Gallen, Switzerland, revamped the city's face and gave it an open and comprehensive look by blurring the border between the inside and the outside, and between the private and public sphere. Closing the square for traffic and the characteristic 'furniture' made in energising colours added a new quality to the public space.[9]

Another interesting public space project, in the middle of the square at Plac Grzybowski in Warsaw was authored by Joanna Rajkowska. It was dubbed 'Oxygenator' (*Dotleniacz*). "The Patriotic Bookstore, where you can suffer a heart attack on account of the deluge of anti-Semitic and nationalistic toxins hanging in the air, a few steps from a synagogue and the Jewish Theatre (*Teatr Żydowski*). The toxic dullness of space, toxic behaviours of the visiting young Israelis, accompanied by bodyguards. I wanted to add oxygen to all this – says the artist" (*Dotlenianie*... 2007).

Jan Gehl and Lars Gemzøe from the research centre of the Faculty of Architecture in Copenhagen, authors of many publications on designing social spaces, claim that a lot needs to be done in the sphere of education. Gemzøe observed that too much attention is devoted to statistics, and too little to the inhabitants themselves and to their needs. The Strøget promenade can serve as an example of how serious this problem is. Closed for motor traffic since 1962, it is perceived by its users as a most attractive location. In summer, regardless of the weather and time of day, thousands of people walk this street.

[9] The function of the car – here, covered with rubber – has been suspended or, as Pipilotti Rist says – "swept under the carpet"; cf. "Plac…" 2007.

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Here, Gehl sees an important correlation between the type of urban activity and the level of satisfaction with the quality of life offered by the city. He distinguished three types of activity: necessary activities (*what you have to do*), optional (*what you get tempted to do*), and social activities (*meeting your fellow citizens*). The first does not offer much leeway in using municipal services (from the system of city municipal transport: bus stops, tram stops, terminals, etc.). What matters in this case is the quality and accessibility which satisfy the existential needs of the residents (transport, health, leisure, etc.). The second type of activity is linked with the diversity of places. The proofs of their attractiveness, as Kevin Lynch wrote, include paths, roads, places for rest, street furniture and details. According to Gehl, in order to be able to speak about its optionality, space should invite and suggest the directions of possible further roamings in the city.

Social activities flourish in places which are 'interpreted' by the local residents, and as such are familiarised and appealing to imagination (Gehl 1999). Parks and other open areas are good examples. In ideal assumptions, these are centres of urban and social life, places for building and strengthening social links. This produces two types of benefits: direct (employment and generation of income) and indirect: increasing prices of the local real property, impact on revitalisation, increased profits from tourism (after: Comertler 2007:26). Bryant Park in New York has been successfully transformed from a neglected area into a public space meeting the demands of the twenty-first century.

The approach to thinking about public space is beginning to change, from an 'expert's' approach to a user-friendly approach. "The ability to formulate a clear concept of changes, to negotiate, to combine different needs into a coherent whole and persuading other to cooperate seem to be the most characteristic" (Lewandowski 2007). Fred Kent, the founder and president of the organisation Project for Public Space draws on the idea of a 'good place'. First and foremost, such places should be *public* in the broadest meaning of the word. Furthermore, they must be cared for if they are to be valuable and appreciated by people (Stangel 2007).

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