## Konrad Kucza-Kuczyński*

# Dilemmas of teaching professional ethics in the times of architecture of liquid modernity

The subject of this conference regards ethics in architectural practice: that is correct because indeed its practical application is the goal. We can say that it is an inseparable *element of architectural skills*. I presented such an approach in the title of my first paper on ethics of the architect's profession – unfinished postdoctoral dissertation: unfinished due to fears of my "postdoctoral" advisors who claimed then at the beginning of the 1980s that this dangerously borders on the field of science of architecture [6] …

That incident convinced me even more that professional ethics is not a natavistic moral conviction or the Decalogue – as many architects still believe today – but it's specific knowledge which is necessary in architectural practice. And the first step in its direction is didactics at a university level. When in 1982 I began to give regular lectures on that subject, first at the Technical University in Białystok and then since 1985 until today in Warsaw, sometimes as a visiting lecturer in Łódź, the times to teach that subject were morally favourable, but materially and mentally difficult. The martial law provided a clear black or white background and against that background it was easier to look for proper attitudes and values. It was easier to draw from Lech Niemojewski and his sometimes almost naive but actually true interpretations of the relation between ethics and architecture equally evident in its true message. This is how still in 1996 Mario Botta saw *ethics in buildings* (Ethik des Bauens): through the prism of clear geometry of his neo-modernistic architecture [3].

Out of three main areas of responsibility which form the basis of professional ethics: responsibility to the client, to other architects and for the work itself, in my opinion the responsibility for the work itself is most difficult to judge, especially if it's the architect's own work.

The first two are, regardless of changes or, on the contrary, taking them into account, relatively well codified in the provisions of the *principles* and *codes* both Polish and European. The responsibility for your own work is the very core of Botta's reflection. Already at the beginning of the 1980s, it seemed that the principles of 'solid' *modernity* and judgment of the value in its architecture started to corrode. It was the time after false ideas of postmodernism, and in Poland after architecture of sub-standards inherited after communism. I myself wrote then that it was still possible to use in judgment such notions connected with the creation of work as its *consequence* [7] or so well described later by Stróżewski the designer's *maximum,* recalled as Tatarkiewicz' *perfection* which […] *in the theory of art means either what is "complete" or what is "successful"* [9, p. 173].

It's been twenty five years. Already. We now live in different times of so popular philosophical doctrines and architecture related to it. These are the times of *liquidity* and *fluidity* and as Zygmunt Bauman willingly calls this new *stage in the history of modernity* [2, p. 7]. At the same time, he confirms that this stage causes *liberation from* […] *a dense network of ethical obligations* [2, p. 9]. Permanence is replaced with *temporariness (annulling the resistance of space and dissolving the materiality of things)* [2, p. 195]. It seems that the latter already threatens the principles which applied only a quarter of a century ago. Bauman puts is bluntly: […] *in the times of temporariness, the "rational choice" means a desire to achieve satisfaction without any exposure to consequences, and especially without any responsibility for those consequences* [2, p. 200].

What does it mean that in works of modern architecture there are no *consequences* and no *responsibility* which provide pillars for modern architect's professional ethics? We often pretend that we understand these changes or that this is not a problem; even more often we cyni-

* Faculty of Architecture, Warsaw University of Technology.

cally accept them. It's true that the *liquid way* is effective in architecture and when sometimes it smoothly turns into a *labyrinth* which is – as Jacques Attali put it – *governed by coincidence and surprise,* it is not our problem [1, p. 215].

But when we stand in front of the latest works by Zaha Hadid, Asymptote or Ben van Berkel, which until recently were clearly evident, and admire their technical and formal perfection; their computer, justified as parametrically "drawn", aren't we, however, sometimes too hopeless in the formal judgment of the new language? If we are, how then can we translate that into ethical judgment, into *consequence* of a work as a feature, let alone the old rules of classical composition and harmony? How can we find permanent features of ethical consequence of a work? Is the liquidity of form alone, which is evidently consistent, even semantically (snow caps?), in the four funicular stations by Zaha Hadid near Innsbruck, enough to make judgment? And how can we classify the whole group of *blob-architecture* initiated by Greg Lynn if this jargon term alone causes protests (*drop, smudge)?* This situation is brilliantly described by Sławomir Gzell who

while writing about understanding architecture in the city says that […] *it is not easy to distinguish one from the other:* i.e. *tasteful architecture* from *tasteless architecture* [4, pp. 59–60].

A special attempt at saving a chance to judge was made by the influential "theoretician of conservatism" Roger Scruton who claims that *culture is judgment* and that *judgment counts*, and furthermore that searching high culture provides a chance to make *an ethical reflection* [8, p. 23, 28]. But his examples of specifically Anglo-Saxon, neo-classical post-modernism in architecture by Guinlan Terry [5, p. 92] or criticism of degradation of American cities do not explain what this *high culture* is in the realm of architecture.

And thus we are left a little helpless with the questions and discussion; the full title of the book by Scruton reads: *Culture Counts. Faith and Feeling in a World Besieged.* But we are obligated to tell future architects during the lectures in the architect's professional ethics (as well as young architects in the workshops) what can be their ethical support in practicing this beautiful and – as it seems – ethically dangerous profession.

## *References*

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## *Dylematy nauczania etyki zawodu w czasach architektury płynnej nowoczesności*

Etyka zawodu to nie natywistyczne odczucie moralne i Dekalog – jak sądzi do dzisiaj wielu architektów – ale konkretna wiedza, i to wiedza niezbędna w praktyce architektonicznej.

Z trzech głównych działów odpowiedzialności budujących bazę etyki zawodu: odpowiedzialności wobec klienta, drugiego architekta i samego dzieła, najtrudniejsza w ocenie jest, moim zdaniem, odpowiedzialność za dzieło, szczególnie własne. Szansę oceny odpowiedzialności architekta za dzieło dają takie pojęcia związane z tworzeniem dzieła, jak jego konsekwencja [7] lub tak dobrze opisane  przez Stróżewskiego twórcze maksimum, przypominane jako tatarkiewiczowska doskonałość, które […] w teorii sztu-

ki oznacza bądź to, co „skończone", bądź to, co „udane" [9, s. 173].

Obecna epoka płynności i ciekłości, jak najchętniej nazywa ją Zygmunt Bauman powoduje uwolnienie z […] gęstej sieci zobowiązań etycznych [2, s. 9]. W miejsce stałości pojawia się momentalność (anulująca opór przestrzeni i rozpuszczająca materialność rzeczy) [2, s. 195]., dążenie do zaspokojenia bez ponoszenia konsekwencji, a zwłaszcza bez ponoszenia odpowiedzialności  za owe konsekwencje [2, s. 200]. Co oznacza w dziełach architektury współczesnej brak konsekwencji i brak odpowiedzialności, czyli filarów współczesnej etyki zawodu architekta?

**Key words:** professional ethics, responsibility, evaluation of architect's work

**Słowa kluczowe:** etyka zawodowa, odpowiedzialność, ocena dzieła architekta