

AESTHETIC ENERGY OF THE CITY

EXPERIENCING
URBAN ART & SPACE

EDITORS
AGNIESZKA GRALIŃSKA-TOBOREK
WIOLETTA KAZIMIERSKA-JERZYK



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NOTES ON THE PHOTOS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The photos in the book illustrate not only single (individual) articles but sometimes refer also to the issues raised in several texts.

The full description and credit line details of illustrations in the book are included in the List of Illustrations, not in the abbreviated photo captions (pp. 171–174).

The role of graphs opening each chapter is explained in the introduction (pp. 10–11).

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE & ITS COMPONENTS

URBAN ART & ITS TYPES

**COMPLEX FACTORS:
ECONOMY, POLITICS, SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

CITIES & PLACES



Photo 1. The historic power generator in the power station EC1, Lodz, 14/33 Kilinskiego Street, September 2015, photo by W. Kazimierska-Jerzyk

INTRODUCTION

Energy is the capacity of a physical system to perform work – this is the simplest definition of energy. Energy as a physical quantity is manifested in many forms – as heat, kinetic, mechanical, and chemical energy, or potential energy. In this book, metaphorically referring to the concept of energy, we wish to point out that it is also possible to talk about aesthetic energy and that this concept is very useful in the discussion on the subject of the city. This energy in the context of the city can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, a given place with its own aesthetic nature has its own potential of energy. After all, the city physically, with its space, landscapes, architecture and art, is an object of permanent aesthetic experience. Can this potential be transformed into work? These aesthetic experiences make people abandon certain places and admire others; some cities fall, while others grow. The aesthetic object – and it should be noted that among aesthetic qualities we experience not only beauty or harmony, but also the sublime, tragedy, ugliness and kitsch – in itself, affecting its recipients, may become a source of specific exploitative but also creative activities. The other meaning in which aesthetic energy is understood is related to revealing the aesthetic aspect of human activities. Are we not willing to perform some work in order to save the aesthetic experience or participate in it? It is not difficult to note that the movement of this energy in favourable conditions takes place in a circle: the energy of places affects people's behaviour and people create places full of energy.

Lodz is an interesting example of flows of aesthetic energy, it can be said that the city is inherently related to energy. Lodz was established in the 19th century and within just a few decades it transformed from a village of only 939 inhabitants (1827) to the thriving city of textile industry (314,000 inhabitants in 1900), acquiring aesthetic landscape of the city unique in the country, compared to Manchester or Lyon: brick factories, chimneys, workers' settlements, eclectic tenement houses and villa-style residences of industrialists. The sudden collapse of the industry caused a general decline of the city in the 1990s. In the present time, a huge effort has been made to revitalise the city. Appreciating the value of the places that have lost their functionality, the possibility of the city's development is seen in connection with culture and science. Its dormant energy is sought in the ethos of "industrial Lodz", but not in energy of machines driven first by water, then steam and finally electricity, but in its architecture, space, and most of all in the people who – moved by the history of the city and its post-

industrial face – are willing to work for its sake. The symbol of this transformation is the currently revitalised EC1 power plant whose Art Nouveau buildings were put into operation in 1907 (photo 1). In the past, the place used to provide electricity to the entire city and it worked until 2001. Today, as part of a complex covering 90 ha, it becomes the New Centre of Lodz. Whether the concept of seeking energy in that which is aesthetic is appropriate will be soon shown based on this particular example. Therefore, the reader should be forewarned that we will often refer to this particular city in the book.

We ask representatives of various specialisations about the possibility of obtaining and maintaining aesthetic energy, therefore different research perspectives and seemingly distant objects of research – from architecture and urban space through street art and parkour to aesthetic theories – appear in individual chapters. The reflections of our authors always revolve around the aesthetic object or the aesthetically experiencing entity. Thus, we begin with great ideas of urban and aesthetic theories, which found their practical solutions in European cities (A. Remesar), and at the same time we show, based on specific examples, what kind of energy can be hidden in unfinished or even bankrupt ideas (S. Stamatovic Vuckovic, W. Kazimierska-Jerzyk). Aware of the aesthetic potential of art, we point to its effects in urban space (A. Gralińska-Toborek, S. Hansen/D. Flynn). We write about all users of the city, great visionaries and anonymous inhabitants, though additional attention is paid to the tourist (J. Mokras-Grabowska) and *traceur* (J. Petri). We see them as curiously contradictory entities experiencing the city aesthetically: the first one is subjected to a public offer of the city, while the other one privatizes the city through experience, exceeding the established barriers of this experience. We also show how complex a challenge it is to attempt to separate that which is public from that which is private in our experience (E. Chudoba). We finish the book with statements made by practitioners – culture organisers from non-governmental organisations who use art to transfer energy to people and recover aesthetic energy of places (H. Bensaid, J. Mróz). These kind of manifestos also illustrate the circulation of aesthetic energy: private organisations protect public/social values, draw attention to the condition of public places and recover these places for the individual, personal aesthetic experience.

We still owe the reader an explanation. Instead of talking in more detail about the content of the book, each chapter is preceded by a graphic commentary and an illustration of its content. We have been inspired to do so by Antoni Remesar, who by means of a graph sums up his reflections on urban decorum. Therefore, we have decided to visualise, with the use of overlapping circles, the network of relationships that make up the issues addressed in the texts, as well as the

perspectives from which they are observed. Yellow marks strictly urban issues – places and spaces (we indicate the names of the cities mentioned in the text); red – art contexts; blue – issues related to aesthetic experience; green – complex issues (sociological, political, economic) that are not dominated by a particular discourse. The concepts included in the circles are not keywords provided by the authors, but rather the terms which, according to the editors, describe the content and relate its meaning to the context of aesthetic issues. They are often contradictory terms, as energy is also released through the action of conflicting forces. We hope that as a result of our own, mutually corresponding, though sometimes polemical positions, we will give birth to work that will be directed towards the aesthetic development of cities and the improvement of the quality of our experience.

Agnieszka Gralińska-Toborek
Wioletta Kazimińska-Jerzyk

I

AESTHETIC ENERGY OF ART, IDEAS, PLACES AND HUMAN RELATIONS

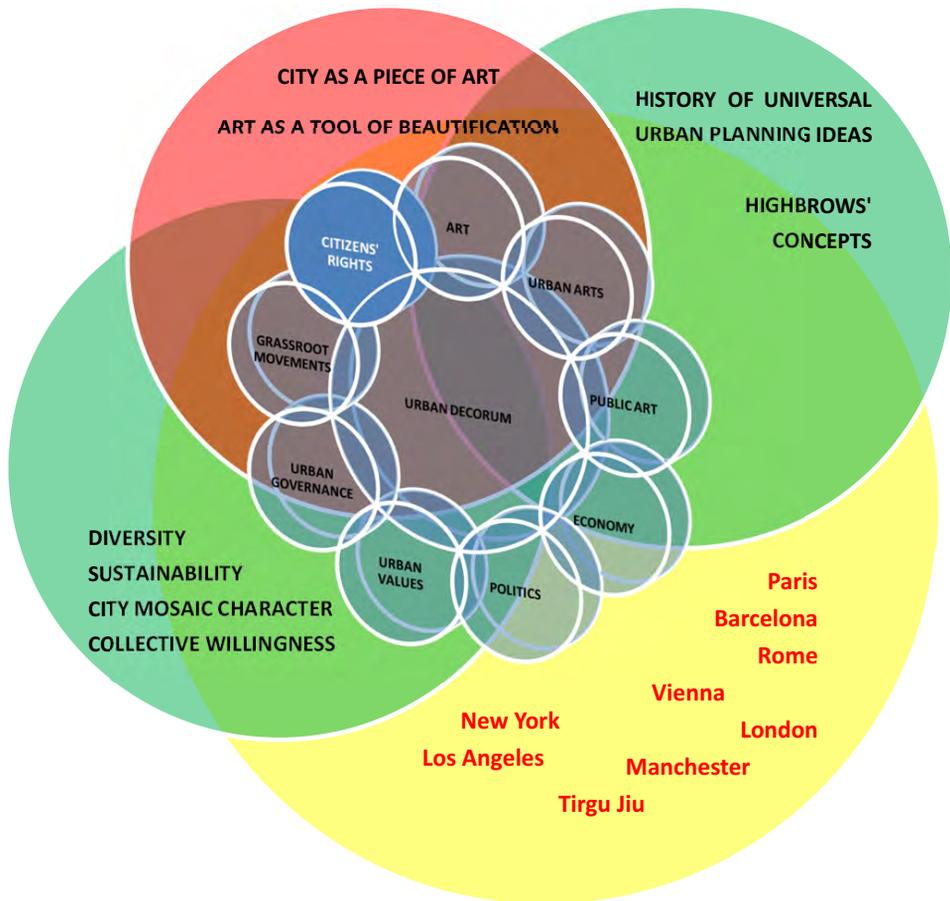


Photo 2. The example of the subject of urban decorum discussion: a tram stop, arch. J. Galecki, Mickiewicz Street, Lodz, photo by A. Ostrowska

ANTONI REMESAR

**NEW URBAN DECORUM?
CITY AESTHETICS TO AND FRO**

Soon the streets of the cities will shine forth as white walls. Like Zion, the holy city, the capital of heaven. Then we will have succeeded.

A. Loos, "Ornament and Crime"

ART URBAIN

Since the Renaissance, to make a beautiful city is a recurring matter in Western urban theory and practice. A to and fro topic, a recurring one. In the background of this problematics, we can place the big theme of urban decorum, "the 'fit' of expressible means to expressed content" (Tafuri 1968). Classical treatise writers¹ stated the main ideas for an organised and beautiful urban setting. Another manifestation of these ideas was the monumental use of sculpture in public places, by placing a statue or an obelisk at the centre of a square, a tradition that was adopted widely after the sixteenth century. While it was not the first, we can consider as paradigmatic the design of the Capitol Piazza (Giedion 1952; Mandanipour 2007) (Campidoglio) by Michelangelo on the Capitol Hill in Rome, which he was commissioned to design in 1537.

¹ "The street that runs inside of the city shall come so beautifully ornate by two porticoes of identical design, and houses will be lined both sides and equal in height, besides the fact that it must be absolutely clean and well paved. However, the parts of the street itself where to apply the appropriate ornamentation are the following: the bridge crossing the square, the place destined for shows. The square is indeed a wider crossing; and the space intended to shows is nothing but a square surrounded by bleachers" (Alberti 1452: 349).

We do not intend here to trace the history² of the notion of Urban Decorum. Generally, decorum refers to the suitability of a design. In the past, designers had to articulate the significance of a building, defined in terms of use, social status, and physical location. Architectural decorum insisted that a design should agree with its purpose and be appropriately adapted to its audience, namely other buildings and the public at large. “Decorum was therefore a central feature of a broader idea of civic eloquence. Decorum pervaded architectural and urban theory before the nineteenth century” (Kohane, Hill 2001: 64). In any case, the notion of decorum has persisted over the centuries but taking on different meanings that we will explore.

Art Urbain (Urban Art) means building and planning the space of cities such as they were theorised from Quattrocento and, gradually, put into practice during the Renaissance, the Classical Age and the Neoclassical Period.

[Art Urbain] Urban Art introduced in western cities the proportion, regularity, symmetry, perspective, by applying them to the roads, squares, buildings, and to the treatment of their relations and their connecting elements (arcades, colonnades, gates, arches, gardens, obelisks, fountains, statues, etc.) (Choay 1989: 84).

In this sense, in the late eighteenth century, Quatremère de Quincy specified that art urbain and urban composition, by means of their material forms, were creating possible buildings expressing intellectual qualities and moral ideas, or, by the agreement and the convenience of all their constituent parts, expressing their nature, their property, their use and destination. Quatremère added, “the more the decoration of a city contributes to the convenience of the inhabitants, the more it approaches perfection” (Quincy de 1788: 180). To some extent, this text shows that throughout the eighteenth century a certain shift towards considering the role of ornament in urban art started. The shift that will continue for over more than a century through the “Beaux Arts” training of architects. Moreover, in the early nineteenth century, different agents wishing to participate in the construction of the city adjust their interests and those of administration whose primary objective is the figurative control of urban space. A basis for these

² “Decorum in Western architectural theory derives from the treatises of Vitruvius (*On Architecture*) and Alberti (*De re aedificatoria*, 1485). In Vitruvius, appropriateness (decor) binds form to function, so that the siting of a building, its approaches, aspect and choice of order are determined by its purpose. Alberti amplifies Vitruvius’s concern with fitting dignity (*dignitas*), introduces the term *concinntitas* (from which the dignity derives) and makes the architect’s judgement of decorum so decisive [...]” (Gaston 2014).