

On the day when I was asked to write the afterword to this book, I and the students of my “Concept and Interpretation” seminar at the Faculty of Architecture were discussing how practicing architects write about architecture. I had had a chance to look at the book beforehand, and it occurred to me immediately that it is primarily about *place*.

My students and I were discussing Daniel Libeskind’s notion that people seek out the architecture of old buildings because it is capable of arousing emotions in them, of touching them. One student asked, “*Is it really because of the buildings? Isn’t it about the place?*” Another cited Adolf Loos: “*May I take you to the shores of a mountain lake? The sky is blue, the water green and everywhere is profound tranquillity. The clouds and mountains are mirrored in the lake, the houses, farms, and chapels as well. They do not look as if they were fashioned by man, it is as if they came straight from God’s workshop, like the mountains and trees, the clouds and the blue sky. And everything exudes an air of beauty and peace... But what is this? A discordant note in the tranquillity. Like an unnecessary screech. Among the locals’ houses, that were not built by them, but by God, stands a villa. The creation of an architect. Whether a good or bad architect, I don’t know. All I know is that the tranquillity, peace and beauty have vanished. (...) And therefore I ask, why is it that any architect, good or bad, desecrates the lake?*”¹ A beautiful description of place. We can nevertheless polemicize with Loos as to the role of the architect. Yes, sometimes it is true that the best architecture is to build nothing. But otherwise, should not good architecture be capable of not just shaping a place, but also of sensitively adding to it and often even raising it to a higher level? That is its mission, and those are its abilities – if there is the will. The book you hold in your hands shows that it is possible.

¹ ADOLF LOOS, “Architecture,” in *On Architecture*, trans. Michael Mitchell, Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2002, p. 73.

Sometimes it happens that a word becomes fashionable. Often, this causes it to lose its inherent meaning, sometimes even its truthfulness. This has, in my view, happened to the idea of *architecture as place*, which has, as a result, become even less visible in the real world of contemporary architecture. Even today, buildings are being created that are, as Rostislav Švácha would call them, autistic... although a perhaps more accurate description would be “uncommunicative.” Autism is an illness; an uncommunicative building is conscious ignorance and

arrogance on the part of client and architect alike. They are buildings that do not listen to their surroundings. They are oblivious to and uninterested in them.

It should be said that communication is a two-way street. Not only does a building respond to its surroundings, but the surroundings respond to it. And if the surroundings do not listen to the building, then it is they who destroy both the place and the building.

Let us try to use a word with a broader meaning than *place*, and that is *environment*. Above all, of course, we mean a fixed and material environment, because such are the primary tools of architecture. It is, we should add, the overall environment in which we live, including layers such as sounds, light, smells, the wind, the flight of birds, fog, rain... and also the associated interpersonal relationships, societal values, life. In this context, the most fitting word would appear to be *situation*, which expands the concept of environment to include events and activities. And architecture influences all these things.

Because they are built on private property and serve the privacy of their inhabitants, we do not usually see single-family homes as part of our shared environment. Of course, outsiders are not allowed into such a space. But the building’s relationship to its surroundings is larger than that. The only fully private part is the interior space within its walls. All else is part of our shared environment: the view (from up close and from a distance) that we see every day when we pass by, the trees that have been added or that have been removed, the new sounds or those that have disappeared, the shading or how it lets the sun through... The owner of a family home must be interested in its surroundings to the extent required by law. All else is a question of choice. Which is why it is all the more valuable when he sees the building as part of our shared environment and feels a sense of responsibility for how it is shaped.

Just the choice of photographs included in this book tells us much about the authors’ approach to architecture, for they tell us more about the places than about the buildings themselves – and thus they perhaps also reveal something about the architects’ philosophy and what they aim for in their work. May their efforts continue to be fruitful and may the surrounding environment of their buildings treat them with the same respect and sense of mutual belonging.