

# Plan as Social Structure and Section as Emotional Enclosure – a Complementary Pair of Ordering Principles in Contemporary Architecture



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## Theoretical Background

"A building," Alberti wrote, "is a kind of body, composed, like all other bodies, of contours and matter" [1]. What Alberti calls contours (lineamenta) contains complete and detailed information about the form and appearance of a building created by the intellect, regardless of the construction work (structura) and before it is undertaken [1 (p. 422)]. On paper, the outlines took the form of lines. However, the drawing was not understood as a trace of a gesture, but as a geometrical projection of a conceptual image [2]. Alberti's lines have their source in the geometry of Euclid's forms – their nature is abstract [3]. In this way, the space drawn on paper is – as Alena Yaneva and Bruno Latour [4] note – a world completely separate from the one in which real buildings rises and inhabits. According to architectural

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design theorist Lars Spuybroek, architectural drawings are more descriptive than prescriptive; described more than recommended [5]. Due to the growing interest of architects and critics in attitudes that defend the primacy of processes over results, and that value methods and procedures over works as such that prioritize genre over concrete<sup>1</sup> we should ask ourselves why the quality of the material of architecture is an end in itself currently rejected? In other words, how should our working methods change?

## Methods and Materials

The article presents practical methodology of implementation of designing within spatial studies. Scientific research is of analytic nature: it is the search of objective truth and permanent truths, the pursuit of

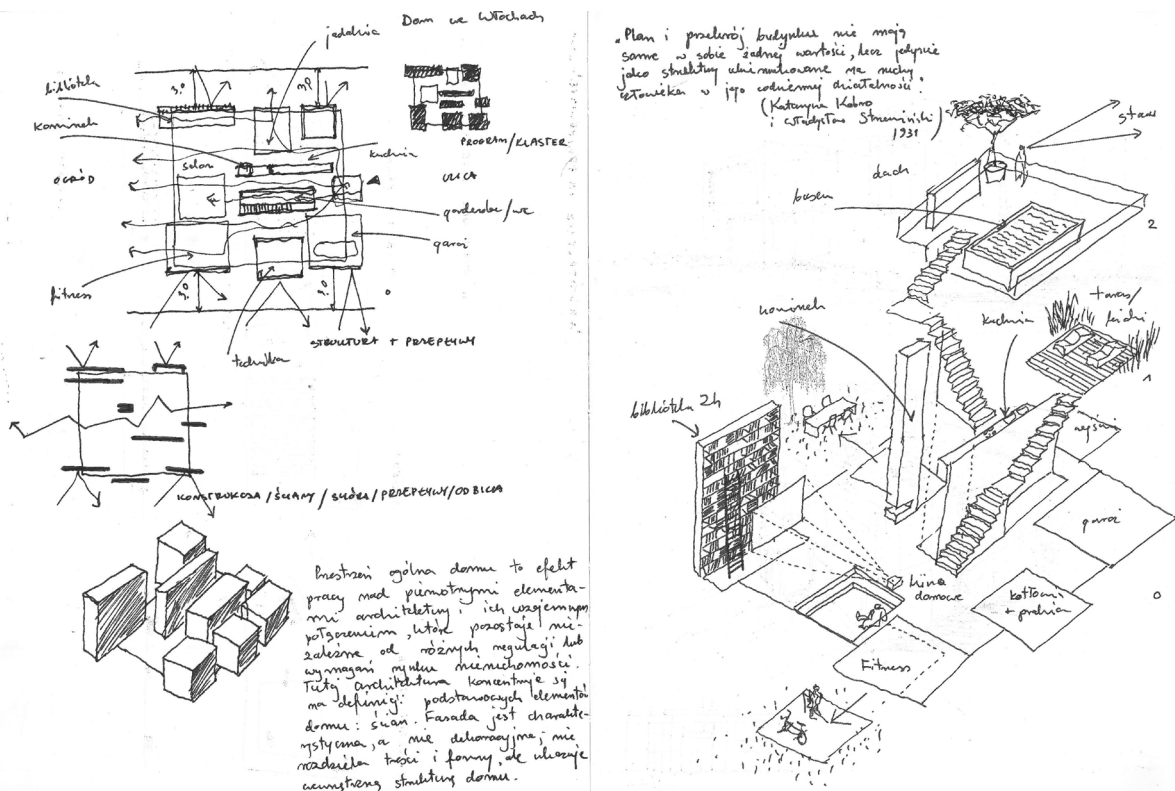


Fig. 1. Study sketches – 'diagrams of intent'

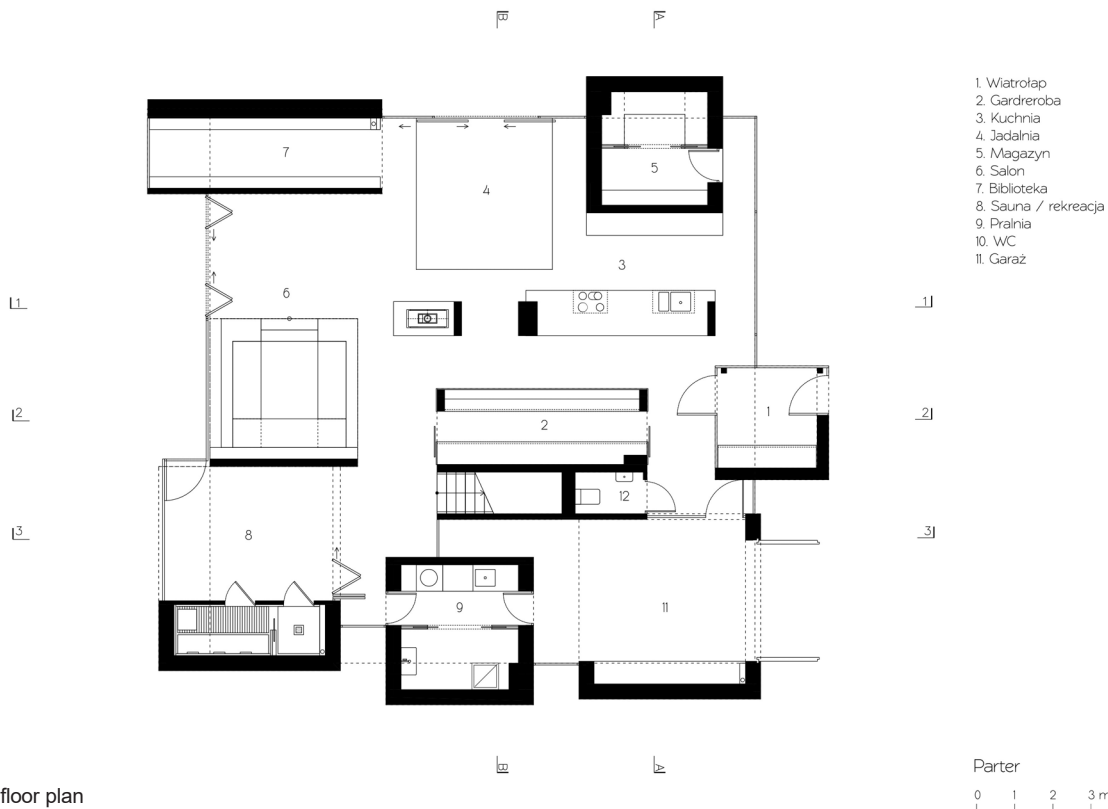


Fig. 2. Ground floor plan

universal application is cumulative. On the other hand, design is described as explorative and innovative, crossing borders of knowledge both methodologically and theoretically. The main question here is how research could be generated thanks to the designing process and new knowledge could be gathered with the use of methodology and designing processes. Research by design constitutes a type of academic research within the frames of which a design as a method of research is studied [6]. In the hereby article author is using three criteria applicable for design as a scientific activity: the design needs to provide a solution to a set of problems, the methods of thinking and rules used in the designing process must be documented and such design should generate new knowledge and skills or indicate how existing knowledge and skills were used to generate a new and unique solution.

### Discussion

In recent years, a complementary pair of ordering principles has been increasingly important in the generation of the work of such studios like Elemental (Pritzker Architecture Prize winner in 2016) or Grafton Architects (Pritzker Architecture Prize winner in 2020), that being their distinction between the respective experiential potentials of the horizontal plan and the vertical section. The architects conceive their floor plans as composing and constructing spaces that engender social experiences – the plan as a shaping of the social – while they conceive their sections as composing and constructing spaces that inspire emotional responses – the section as an enclosure of the emotional. What can be seen when analyzing the work of these studios is that they begin each project by endeavouring to understand the place where the building will be constructed in both its rational and emotional characteristics, and to connect these to the experiential qualities of the architecture for its inhabitants. In describing their concept of the relationship between plan and section, Yvonne Farrell, from Grafton Architects, says: "We discuss the plan as being logical and the section as being emotional. By this we mean that relationships in plan are usually based on function – social connections, certain hierarchies if they exist,"... Shelley McNamara continues: "The section on the other hand is the new world between ground and sky – the new modulation between gravity and light... The section is protector, definer. It creates the enclosure" [7].

### Case study – Villa A

In Author's project of the Villa A<sup>2</sup> in Warsaw (2018 r.) individual volume of the house is arranged in a loose pattern, creating the maximum amount of open space for building. The floor plan is defined by solid elements that accommodate auxiliary functions, leaving the remaining space for open living. In its approach to the making of floor plan as the shaping of social connections and events, project of Villa A is very close to Louis Kahn's ideas, particularly in his understanding that "the plan is a society of spaces". According to Kahn, it had to be first establish the individual character of each room, after which it was possible to reconceive the composition of the floor plan as the ordering of these independent spaces into a social structure, their spatial relationship articulating the collective institutional purpose of the building. In section – living space exists as a continuous vertical ribbon between three layers: city/home/landscape, a ribbon within which each programme is treated equally – car space, living room, bedrooms, wardrobe etc., – thereby allowing the dweller to manipulate the spaces to suit their personal desires, their degree of introversion or contact. In this case the section as emotional enclosure is fused with the plan as social structure when inhabitants move through spaces, having both planned and unplanned meetings – the latter of which Kahn believed are the generators of culture.

<sup>1</sup> An architectural work is not an object, but a thing, and the role of an architect – like the role of any competent specialist – is, as we know from Paul Klee, not so much to implement a pre-viously conceived idea – new or not – but to join forces and flows. Material that brings the form of the work into existence and following them. The work invites the viewer to join the artist / architect on his journey and watch with this work how it becomes in the world, and not look behind it in search of some initial intention of which it is the final product. Following Deleuze and Guattari (philosophers to whom the 21st century is believed to belong) – the process will go our way if we make proper use of the material's propensity and favorable conditions, and not when we try to implement form.

<sup>2</sup> The Villa A project is part of the original research project: In search of a modern home. The aim of the researches conducted since 2014 is to establish, through a comparative analysis, verified criteria for assessing the concept of a home inherent in the current residential architecture. The issues developed in the research are: the desired image of the house as a free-standing building, its spatial organization in the face of socio-cultural changes, the balance between the rational production of housing resources and the quality of architecture, and the mythical relationship of the collective to the landscape.

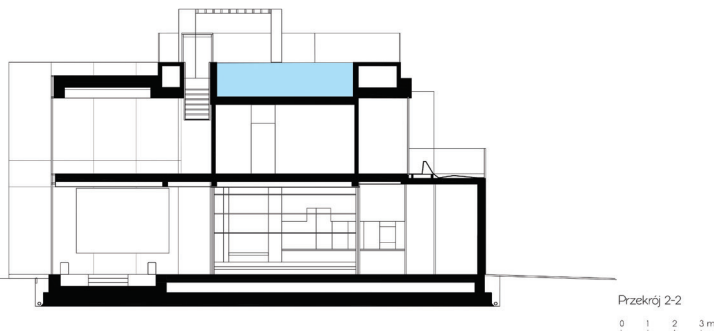


Fig. 3. Cross section

### Conclusions

Reconsidering the relationship public/private, city/landscape, movement/permanence, home/consumer item and depersonalized/individual space, resulting from the redefinition of the criteria for understanding and constructing contemporary architectural space, should go hand in hand with the new treatment of plan and section in our profession, as those that represent these new accounts. We can no longer assume, as Christopher Alexander did, that form is "the ultimate goal of design" [8]. Following Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, we should strive to change the way of thinking about the production of things (including architectural things), one that gives priority to shaping processes rather than end products.

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**Abstract:** The title of the article is a paraphrase of the title of an essay by Wilfried Wang: *SiteSpecificity, Skilled Labor, and Culture: Architectural Principles in the Age of Climate Change* [9]. While Wang raises the fundamental problem of the need to change the architect's attitude in the design process in a climate crisis, paying particular attention to the need to "reconnect the building with the context"<sup>3</sup>, the author discusses the very workshop of the architect's work, and more precisely – the basic drawing tools. He puts forward theses about what the title issues should be for architects today.

**Keywords:** Architectural drawing, plan as social structure, section as emotional enclosure

**Streszczenie:** PLAN JAKO STRUKTURA SPOŁECZNA I PRZEKRÓJ PIONOWY JAKO ZAMKNIĘCIE EMOCJONALNE – UZUPEŁNIAJĄCA SIĘ PARA ZASAD PORZĄDKOWANIA WE WSPÓŁCZESNEJ ARCHITEKTURZE. Tytuł artykułu jest parafrazą tytułu eseju Wilfrieda Wanga: *SiteSpecificity, Skilled Labor and Culture: Architectural Principles in the Age of Climate Change* [9]. O ile Wang porusza zasadniczy problem potrzeby zmiany postawy architekta w procesie projektowym w sytuacji kryzysu klimatycznego, zwracając uwagę zwłaszcza na konieczność ponownego „połączenia budynku z kontekstem”<sup>3</sup>, to Autor podejmuje rozważania na temat samego już warsztatu pracy architekta, a dokładniej – podstawowego narzędzia, jakim jest rysunek. Stawia tezy mówiące o tym, czym dzisiaj powinny być dla architekta tytułowe zagadnienia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rysunek architektoniczny, rzut poziomy jako struktura społeczna, przekrój pionowy jako element emocjonalny

<sup>3</sup> "Global climate change is impacting civilization's collective consciousness. The limits of conventional modes of living, of lifeworlds, have been reached; their continued validity is being questioned. Design principles that seek to show sustainable approaches to the transformation and development of buildings and settlements should be site-specific and employ skilled labor so as to make lasting contributions to their local cultures." [9 p. 53].



Fig. 4. Main elevation view