

Reading Muranów. Memory of a place / memory of an architect Commentary on the postwar work of Bohdan Lachert

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Abstract

The text concentrates on the concept of South Muranów – a residential quarter / monument realised in the area of the Warsaw ghetto by the architect Bohdan Lachert. It attempts to show this work as an artistic myth created by the artist. An analysis of the architect's texts and a reconstruction of the circumstances in which the project was realised, as well as the details of Lachert's biography reveal new layers of this architectonic palimpsest. Clear references to the bold visions of Śródmieście (City Centre) by Maciej Nowicki and an adaptation for the purposes of residential quarter / place of memory experiments at transforming rubble, popular in the 1940s, provoke questions about the originality of the concept of Muranów, whose unquestionable value is the spatial composition stemming from pioneering experiments by Katarzyna Kobro, organic architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, and Nowicki's *new functionalism*. The history of the quarter is at the same time a microcosm of the initial years of rebuilding Warsaw and of the socialist realist chaos after 1949, as well as a record of the search for artistic subjectivity of a Modernist architect in a new reality.

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Introduction

[1] The quarter of South Muranów was created in the centre of Warsaw in the years 1948–1955 and it spanned over the present streets of: Generała Władysława Andersa, Solidarności, Żelazna, and Nowolipie. The urban and architectonic plan was conceived by Bohdan Lachert (1900–1987), a prewar Modernist architect. Located on the area of the demolished Warsaw ghetto (1940–1943), the quarter was built according to the author's concept as a quarter-memorial from prefabricated rubble-concrete air-bricks, in keeping with the arrangement of the previously existing streets. The controversial idea, developed in the atmosphere of complete freedom in which postwar architecture emerged, was reformulated in 1949 after the introduction of the doctrine of socialist realism and, after the elevation was covered with plaster and architectonic decorations, it

lost the exterior character of experimental architecture. Lachert gave up directing the construction of Muranów (1951) and handed the work over to Janusz Stępkowski, who continued the construction under his supervision.

[2] Muranów is considered a sensational project in global architecture as the only residential quarter constructed from ruins and on ruins, thus constituting a memorial of the ghetto. Its name originates from the Venetian island Murano, the place of birth of the architect and decorator Józef Szymon Bellotti (d. 1708), who erected here his palace and gave it a name referring to his town of origin.

[3] The term "South" refers to the part of Muranów realised soon after the end of the war (1948) by "Muranów" architecture studio led by Lachert, and later by Stępkowski. This project was followed up by North Muranów, whose concept was developed (in the years 1952–1955) by Stanisław Brukalski, Barbara Andrzejewska-Urbanowicz and Stanisław Szurmak.

I got used to the fact that my projects have almost always been controversial. Neither in Poland nor abroad have the best of them been realised. As for Muranów... it's another story. After 1950 there was a very unfavourable period of a break in the views on architecture, which became subject to the rules of socialist realism. This period complicated the initiated work on the quarter of Muranów. Its present form is very far from my original intentions that inspired the project. The intervention in the urban plan and architecture design, as well as the tendency to eliminate any signs of the author's original concept do not let me feel full satisfaction of the effort I put in this project (Bohdan Lachert, 1979)¹.

Muranów: a double perspective

[4] In a monographic study by Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak titled *Getto warszawskie. Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście* [*The Warsaw Ghetto. A Guide to a Non-existent City*], the area of the former ghetto, where the present South Muranów was erected, was defined as the *place-after-ghetto*, which is to express any material testimony of the previously existing urban structures.

The place-after-ghetto is empty (though it is covered with architecture), it is emptied and dead (though filled with lively activity). The place remains, yet it had been emptied, deprived of its »content«, its »inside«. The ghetto that was here was destroyed, yet this »here« remains, covered however with the presence of the present Muranów. What remains is frames that contain a different reality altogether, just a topographical point, a cartographic abstraction. Walking today in the area of the former ghetto, we experience a particular kind of paradox of the presence of emptiness. This experience comes with a kind of broadened vision, a doubling of perspective. Suddenly, we start to see what we cannot see (an imagined reconstruction of the ghetto); while in a sense we no longer see what we actually see (the reality of here and now). The topography of contemporary Muranów becomes in a sense a transparent curtain that covers what we really want to see. Absence suddenly becomes present, the place-after-ghetto becomes real, and the ghetto itself – this non-existent city – is recovered in memory².

¹ "»Rozbić bryłę«. Rozmowa z prof. Bohdanem Lachertem" [interview by Wojciech Adamiecki], in: *Literatura* 37 (1979), 1–3, here 3.



1 Muranów, 28 Nowolipie Street, 1934. Photograph by H. Khalówna. (Collection of IS PAN, Warsaw, negative, No. 7446)

[5] South Muranów, constructed on a rubble scarp made of rubble-concrete prefabricated elements in the area of the former Northern District³, is situated in the centre of Warsaw. Separated from the city like a fortress with a dense borderline structure, it is preceded with a wide terrace with free-standing columns, visually closing the W-Z route (from the side of Generała Andersa Street, previously called Marcelego Nowotki) and opening with a monumental gate in the form of a triumphal arch – elements drawn from the residential quarter at Moscow's Rostovski Boulevard designed by Alexey Shchusev (1933)⁴. The form of the present-day Muranów is different from Lachert's initial concept, hence the unrealised postwar architecture could also be defined with a metaphysical phrase "a double perspective". The concept of the residential quarter-memorial developed by the architect was to stem from the roots of the ghetto and store the memory of the place, combining its past and new reality on the level of the topography of streets and architecture characterised by a rough texture of ground rubble in grey-pink colour. Lachert's original project, gradually transformed in the course of realisation, was finally reduced to a failed architectonic experiment. Nevertheless, it was the original idea that had special impact on the present perception of the postwar structure and contemporary artistic initiative undertaken in the public space of Muranów (such as the design of *Osiedle Pomnik Muranów* [Quarter Memorial Muranów] by Odblokuj Association, 2013).

² Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, *Getto warszawskie. Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście*, Warszawa 2013, 837.

³ Northern District – the name used to refer to the area inhabited by the Jewish community in Warsaw before the Second World War.

⁴ Roman Higer, *Projets des Habitations en URSS 1917–1933*, Moscou 1935, 73.



2 Anna Koźbiel and Adam Walas, a now non-existent mural commemorating Bohdan Lachert, 2012. Photography by the author

[6] As a result of an initiative by the Association of Cultural and Social Initiatives "Stacja Muranów", in 2012 one of the gates of the estate at 17, Nowolipki Street there was created a mural devoted to Lachert and Józef Szanajca (1902–1939), made by Anna Koźbiel and Adam Walas (no longer existing)⁵. The two architects were presented separately, on opposite sides of the wall. A clear portrait of Szanajca (from the side of Nowolipki Street) was inscribed in a neoplasticist composition, referring to the prewar avant-garde work of Lachert & Szanajca⁶. The figure of Lachert, presented as a thinker, was kept in grey and blue colours on the background of a fragment of the plan of Muranów. The images of architects were based on photographs. Lachert's image was modelled on a photograph published in *Literatura* magazine, accompanying an interview conducted by Wojciech Adamiecki (1979)⁷. The historically inaccurate narrative of the mural, presenting the plan of Muranów (1948) and the image of the architect thirty years later (1979), accidentally illustrates one of the most significant motifs in the history of Muranów. More or less at the same time (1976), the architect made an attempt to summarise his experiences of constructing the estate and produced a typewritten text titled "Historia powstania osiedla Muranowa Południowego w latach 1948–1952" ["The history of construction of South Muranów in the years 1948–1952"], as suggested by the architect's granddaughter, Ewa Lachert-Strykowska:

By the end of his life, my grandfather gave me something like a diary, or his notes on the construction of Muranów (1949–1950). He discusses his project and explains why finally he refused to finish the construction, even though it was his design. What I find the most interesting part of the history of Muranów is the idea of prefabricating the rubble. The buildings were supposed not to be covered with plaster (so that the rubble would have been visible). My grandfather wanted Muranów to be a monument of what happened there during the war – it was

⁵ Association of Cultural and Social Initiatives "Stacja Muranów", established by Beata Chomętowska, the author of the book *Stacja Muranów* (2012), is located in Muranów at 13, Andersa Street. The mural commemorating Lachert was painted over through a decision by the Housing Cooperative to renovate the gate at 17, Nowolipki Street.

⁶ Bohdan Lachert and Józef Szanajca worked in the years 1926–1939 as a studio called Lachert & Szanajca. Szanajca died on 24 September 1939 in Płazów during a night patrol in his own sports car Tatra.

⁷ "Rozbić bryłę", here 1. The photograph is also stored at the archive of the Warsaw Division of SARP.

supposed to be a monument of the Ghetto. However, there came a decision from higher up to cover the buildings in plaster, to make designs of all the details, friezes, attics. In fact, at this moment my grandfather's idea was completely destroyed. This was the main reason why he decided to leave "Muranów" studio. He couldn't cope with that, despite the fact that he was always a part of the entire system – he was a Party member, after all, which he never tried to hide⁸.

[7] The family no longer holds the Muranów diary. The document was referred to by Wojciech Włodarczyk and Waldemar Baraniewski in their pioneering publications on the architecture and visual arts of socialist realism⁹. The latter paraphrased the contents of the notes – several typewritten pages of copy-paper. This cast away any suspicions that the document had a form of *Dziennik Pracowni MDM [A Journal of MDM Studio]*¹⁰ posted in the Internet. Fragments of Lachert's memoirs were included in Piotr Matywiecki's book *Kamień graniczny [The Border Stone]*, whom the architect had given the typewritten text¹¹. Selected excerpts include the description of a rubble desert, economic and technical conditions of leaving / removing the rubble, a brief draft of the concept of the quarter-memorial, and the imposed changes of the original concept (putting plaster on rubble-concrete elevations and making the architectonic structure denser) after the introduction of socialist realism (1949). The notes were not – as could be expected – in the form of a personal narrative, but constituted merely a short commentary limited to descriptions published in professional magazines at the time when Muranów was being constructed¹². The description of the destruction of the architecture, provided by Matywiecki, appeared in Lachert's texts already before the beginning of the work on the Muranów quarter. He described the methodical demolition of the Northern District (the ghetto) in an opinion titled "Zniszczenie Warszawy. Zamierzenia Niemców w stosunku do Warszawy w aspekcie opracowań urbanistycznych..." ["The Destruction of Warsaw. German plans for Warsaw in the context of urban planning..."] (1946), working as an expert witness in the trial against Ludwig Fischer at the Supreme National Tribunal¹³.

⁸ Małgorzata Radzikowska, "Rody architektów. Rodzina Lachertów", in: *Architektura-Murator* 2000.

⁹ Wojciech Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska 1950–1954*, Warszawa 1991; Waldemar Baraniewski, "Ideologia w architekturze Warszawy okresu realizmu socjalistycznego", in: *Rocznik Historii Sztuki* 22 (1996), 239-242.

¹⁰ [Józef Sigalin and Stanisław Jankowski], *Dziennik Pracowni MDM, 1.03.1950–28.03.1952*, www.naszastolica.waw.pl (accessed 24 September 2012).

¹¹ Piotr Matywiecki, *Kamień graniczny*, Warszawa 1994, 492-495.

¹² Bohdan Lachert, "Muranów-dzielnica mieszkaniowa", in: *Architektura* 5 (1949), 129-137; Bohdan Lachert, "Muranów. Z doświadczeń 3 lat prac urbanistyczno-architektonicznych", *Miasto* 9 (1952), 29-32.

¹³ Bohdan Lachert, "Zniszczenie Warszawy. Zamierzenia Niemców w stosunku do Warszawy w aspekcie opracowań urbanistycznych z 6 lutego 1940 r. »Warschau die neue deutsche Stadt«", in: Czesław Pilichowski (ed.), *Ekspertyzy i orzeczenia przed Najwyższym Trybunałem Narodowym*, vol. 9, Warszawa 1982, 306-308.

Muranów: the memory of an architect

"What is a myth, today? I shall give at the outset a first, very simple answer, which is perfectly consistent with etymology: myth is a type of speech."

Roland Barthes, *Myth Today*¹⁴

[8] When writing "The history of construction of South Muranów", the architect was seventy-six years old. Why did he decide to write a summary of the process of shaping the place almost a quarter of a century after he developed the original concept? One of the reasons was the jubilee of 50 years of his creative work, for which he prepared a statement "Wspomnienia Bohdana Lacherta – architekta i urbanisty" ["the Memories of Bohdan Lachert – an architect and urban planner"], read at the Faculty of Architecture of the Warsaw University of Technology, where he mentioned Muranów as an incomplete and unfinished work¹⁵. The same year, Helena Syrkusowa published a vast study titled *Ku idei osiedla społecznego 1925–1976* [*Towards the Idea of a Social Residential Estate 1925–1976*]¹⁶. The history of Muranów completed the reflections of the architect with whom Lachert had professional and personal relations, lasting continuously since the establishment of an avant-garde group Praesens (Lachert, Szanajca, Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski, Szymon and Helena Syrkus, 1925)¹⁷. The idea of the quarter-memorial was the only example of this kind of social residential estate.

[9] The need to commemorate *the place-after-ghetto* was related to the personal experiences of the architect, who during the occupation worked in conspiracy. He got involved in it through his wife, Irena Lachertowa, an activist of the Rada Pomocy Żydom [Council to Aid Jews] (Żegota) and of Związek Walki Zbrojnej [Union of Armed Struggle], who described the story of her family in an unpublished "Pamiętnik Agaty Kowalskiej (Ireny z Nowakowskich Lachertowej), Warszawa, wrzesień 1939 – lipiec 1944" ["The Diary of Agata Kowalska (Irena z Nowakowskich Lachertowa), Warsaw, September 1939 – July 1944"], stored in a family archive. From this source we know that the Lacherts were hiding in their house in Saska Kępa, at 9, Katowicka Street, a twelve-year-old Piotr, among others, the son of Maksymilian Goldberg and Alicja Godlewska. Goldberg, an avant-garde architect, a graduate of the Faculty of Architecture at the Warsaw University of Technology, a professional partner of Hipolit Rutkowski, had relations with the Modernist circles of Praesens group, while Goldberg & Rutkowski were before the war competing with Lachert and Szanajca within the field of avant-garde architecture and

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, "Myth Today", trans. Anette Lavers, in: *Mythologies*, New York 1972, 109.

¹⁵ Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe (NAC), Dział Nagrań Dźwiękowych, [The National Digital Archive, the Department of Audio Recordings] signature T. 6801, "Wspomnienia Bohdana Lacherta – architekta i urbanisty" (1976).

¹⁶ Helena Syrkus, *Ku idei osiedla społecznego 1925–1976*, Warszawa 1976.

¹⁷ Cf. Helena Syrkus, "O młodości, przyjaźni i talencie", in: Zofia Gunaris, selection., Olgierd Czerner, ed., *Bohdan Lachert, Józef Szanajca. Architektura*, ex. cat., Wrocław 1980, nlb.

innovative designs. As the "Diary" and the materials stored at the Jewish Historical Institute suggest that the Lacherts wanted to persuade Goldberg to leave the ghetto. Finally, Lachert took from the building of the court in Leszno only Goldberg's son, Piotr¹⁸. Anna Kubiak, employed at the Institute, conducted in 1950 interviews with selected architects titled "Wywiady o zmarłych architektach Żydach" ["Interviews about the deceased Jewish architects"]. Her interviewees were to verify Goldberg's biography written by his wife, who noted¹⁹:

[My husband] decided to go to the ghetto – he thought that by staying in Warsaw at houses of friends who offered him shelter he was putting them at risk. In the ghetto, in a very difficult atmosphere, he was teaching young Jews at a construction school about the rules of construction, how to speak and write in Polish because all his life he considered himself and was considered Polish. Visits of his friends and meeting them in *Courts* were very relaxing for him. By drawing and writing he fenced himself off from the terrible reality. Barbara Brukalska aptly noted at the time, Maksymilian was saving himself as an artist and as a human being, but not his biological existence. The main reason why he was not trying to save himself was the fear that he would pose a threat to someone, that's why he rejected offers of his colleagues and friends²⁰.

[10] Lachert added to the biography a short commentary about the artist, preserved in Kubiak's notes: "[Maksymilian Goldberg], one of the greatest architects. A phenomenal memory. A subtle and sharp intelligence. Great speaker and great satirist. I agree with his wife's biography that he died while still being alive and that's why he cut himself off from reality even though he still had a good sense of this reality"²¹. Goldberg died on 28 August 1942, probably transported to the camp in Treblinka. Lachert's idea to create a quarter-memorial of the Warsaw ghetto probably drew also from the need to preserve the memory of his architect friend.

Muranów: quarter/memorial

[11] The beginnings of the development of the idea date back to the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (19 April 1948), when near the ruins of Muranów there was unveiled the *Monument of the Ghetto Heroes* – the effect of the collaboration between the sculptor Natan Rapaport and architect Leon Mark Suzin. Lachert expressed then his opinion about the architectural and sculptural concept in the magazine *Głos Plastyków* (1948)²². His opinion contained many hypothetical hints for the future creator

¹⁸ Piotr Goldberg survived the war at the house of his parents' friends, the Lacherts. *Pamiętnik Agaty Kowalskiej (Ireny z Nowakowskich Lachertowej)*, Warszawa, wrzesień 1939 – lipiec 1944, p. 18.

¹⁹ Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (ŻIH), materials of Anna Kubiak, "Wywiady o zmarłych architektach Żydach". Interview No. 11 with Bohdan Lachert, Warsaw 24. 07. 1950".

²⁰ ŻIH, materials of Anna Kubiak, "Życiorys Maksymiliana Goldberga napisany przez żonę zmarłego Alicję Godlewską" [1950].

²¹ ŻIH, materials of Anna Kubiak, Interview No. 11 with Bohdan Lachert.

²² "Pomnik Bohaterów Getta" [statement by Bohdan Lachert], in: *Głos Plastyków* 9 (1948), 55-57, here 56-57. As well as opinions by Franciszek Strynkiewicz, Tadeusz Breyer, Bohdan Pniewski and Jan Cybis.

of the architectural plan of Muranów and it is possibly then when – still on the level of vision – the idea for the spatial form of the memorial appeared. Lachert commented on it thus: "A project of an architect responsible for the construction of Muranów should not diminish these artistic accents of highest quality that were created by the sculptor Rapaport in great sculptures of bronze and granite, perfectly completed with a general arrangement of the monument by the architect Suzin. The monument, located on the site from where the rubble was removed, grows – in a way – from the area of the Ghetto uprising, from the area of the former, past life. The cleaned streets of Muranów are valleys among the rubble, lying on nowadays even two-metre-thick layer. This rubble should be left on the site in the biggest possible quantity to commemorate the days of terror and struggle – to form the ground on which new city and new life will be erected. The visual perception of the two levels of former streets and the new buildings will evoke the historical cataclysm, the historical break"²³. The formal arrangement of the future architectonic structure had a prewar genesis, drawing from the experiments of Katarzyna Kobro, an artist member of Praesens group²⁴ ("Unist sculpture, which promotes the organic unity of sculpture with its surroundings, proposes that the shape of sculpture is not a value in itself, but it is an expression of the spatial relations"²⁵). In Kobro's art, the dematerialisation of the form (sculpture) was achieved by separated layers linked by colour, whereas Lachert separated the elements of a coherent structure through the differences of levels, by delineating given sequences of movements in the space of Muranów (which is still relevant).

[12] What was crucial for the emergence of the idea of the quarter-memorial was also the architect's experience as a sculptor. During occupation, in 1943 or 1944, Lachert made a bust portrait of Józef Szanajca (this was the only full-formed sculpture in his *oeuvre*). Due to limited materials available during the war the structure made of wire and medicine bottles was filled with plasticine²⁶.

[13] After 1945 Lachert established a cooperation with Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, a sculptor and nineteen years his junior, with whom he developed several architectonic-sculptural projects, among others one of the first monuments devoted to the Red Army, planned on several levels (stairs, platforms, and amphitheatre, 1946)²⁷. Lachert provided an extensive commentary on the merging of sculpture and architecture (as well as close

²³ Monument of the Ghetto Heroes.

²⁴ The architect designed the space of his own house in Saska Kępa drawing from Kobro's spatial experiments. The impact of artistic practice of Kobro and Strzemiński was emphasised by him in "Rozbić bryłę"... and "Rozważania o niektórych cechach twórczości architektonicznej", in: *Architektura 1* (1983), 23-31.

²⁵ Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński, *Kompozycja przestrzeni. Obliczanie rytmu czasoprzestrzennego*, Łódź 1931, 43.

²⁶ Information provided by Rudolf Lachert, Bohdan's son.

²⁷ "Pomnik Mauzoleum Zwycięstwa", in: *Biuletyn Informacyjny BOS*, 64 (1946); "Konkurs nr 33 na pomnik-mauzoleum zwycięstwa", in: *Architektura 1* (1947), 15-17.

collaboration between the sculptor and the architect in shaping public space) in a survey published in *Głos Plastyków* magazine (*Współpraca rzeźby, architektury i malarstwa [The joint work of sculpture, architecture, and painting]*, 1946)²⁸. This statement was reflected in his practice as an architect – the same year saw the emergence of the first post-war projects referring to the stylistics of the 1930s, in which noble materials were replaced by siding and ornaments from rubble-concrete. These were: PKO building at 124 Marszałkowska Street (1946), post office in Targowa Street (1946, based on projects developed with Szanajca in 1939) and modernization of Katowicka Street in Saska Kępa as the representative artery of the Office for the Reconstruction of the Capital (Lachert lived there from 1929). All these projects put special visual focus on the cross bond of brickwork, while the rubble-concrete is used as a starting point for the shaping of architectonic detail together with a grey-pink covering layer (siding). The means of transforming rubble-concrete and its technical qualities were examined at the time by BOS (1945–1948). After the announcement of a competition for the reuse of the rubble in 1945, Lachert, as the head of the Department of Architecture and Engineering at BOS, wrote an opinion about the concept of prefabrication undertaken directly on construction site:

The idea allows for using rubble as material for light concrete. The new material will have considerable thermal value, which will make it possible to reduce the thickness of walls. As a consequence, the weight supported by foundations will be reduced and laying foundations will become cheaper. It is possible to produce this material in the shape of large blocks with sizes adapted to mechanical installation of walls. It is possible also to use it in the form of powder and this way freely shape it in the boards of formwork. It will contribute to the freedom of the architect when working on the design. The porous structure of rubble and possibility of forming it into particular construction elements make this material easy to apply in the mechanized organization of modern construction work²⁹.

[14] Before developing his concept of a housing quarter on ruins and of rubble Lachert had already had practical experience, wide technical knowledge, as well as – resulting from the character of the competition – an entire range of possibilities of processing and using this material. The method of reusing the existing material was also examined at the time by other Warsaw-based architects, among others Bohdan Lewandowski (the building of Towarzystwo Reasekuracji [Association of Reinsurance, 1947–1949) and Kazimierz Marczewski (Dom Słowa Polskiego [The House of Polish Word], 1949–1950). The possibility of various ways of shaping the rubble-concrete mass was used by Jarnuszkiewicz in his design of architectonic details: grids, openwork interlace, and relief decorations on the facades of the PKO building and houses in Katowicka Street.

²⁸ Bohdan Lachert, "Współpraca architektury, rzeźby i malarstwa. Ankieta *Głosu Plastyków*", in: *Głos Plastyków* 7 (1946), 67-68.

²⁹ "»Jaką wartość przedstawi nowy pomysł zużytkowania gruzu?«. Opinia Naczelnika Wydziału Architektury BOS, inż. arch. prof. B. Lacherta", in: *Biuletyn Informacyjny Biura Odbudowy Stolicy* 132 (1945).



3 Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz & Bohdan Lachert, rubble-concrete grid at 8 Katowicka Street in Warsaw, 1946.
Photograph by the author

[15] Rubble-concrete ornaments designed in the 1940s have hardly survived until the present day, yet the wide spectrum of new elements developed at the time and recorded on projects and photographs represents the style dominating in the first years of reconstruction works. The rubble-concrete bas-reliefs – "sculptures with motifs that represent the content of the buildings [...]": 1. caring for children, 2. the significance of knowledge and learning, 3. social bonds, 4. competition and labour leadership etc."³⁰ as well as purely decorative elements – were to be used in the planned architecture of Muranów. A valuable experience that preceded the work on this project can be found in the construction of the PKO building from rubble-concrete prefabricated materials prepared on the spot, in which construction the author used the ruins of the burned "Russia" Insurance Company ("the immersion" of the ground floor and two floors from the side of Marszałkowska Street). The characteristic openwork grids, dominating on the facade, covered the structural merging of the old and new parts of the building. The act of shaping architecture growing from the place (the ruins) was – apart from purely technical motifs – a sign of the architect's sensibility, inspired by the contemporary concept of *thinking with architecture* developed by Peter Zumthor, the designer of the Kolumba, the Diocesan Museum in Cologne, erected on the ruins of the church (2003–2007)³¹.

[16] In 1946, when the PKO elevation was being covered with rubble-concrete siding, the first concept of Muranów came into existence on drawing boards of Warsaw

³⁰ Bohdan Lachert, "Muranów – dzielnica mieszkaniowa", in: *Architektura* 5 (1949), 129-137, here 136.

³¹ Cf. Peter Zumthor, *Myślenie architekturą*, trans. Artur Kożuch, Kraków 2010.

architects, referred to with name of "Tigers" – namely, Jerzy Wierzbicki, Kazimierz Mokrzycki and Waclaw Kłyszewski from the Department of Urban Planning of the BOS. In the detailed project description, published in *Skarpa Warszawska* (1946), adapting the character of new buildings to their historic surroundings and to the well-preserved network of previously existing streets became a central idea (standardized 3-storey houses). The housing estate was divided into nine subdivisions of *housing units* according to the concept of Clarence Arthur Perry, the author of *Housing for the Mechanic Age* (1939), supplemented with the complete social infrastructure. The Department of Urban Planning of the BOS consulted the concept of Muranów with the Department of Architecture and Engineering (AI), managed by Lachert. The women architects of the AI developed projects of several types of buildings: a high-rise building – Zofia Dziewulska, a corridor house –Anatolia Hryniewicka-Piotrowska, a high-rise building with two-story apartments – Eleonora Sekrecka, and a kindergarten – Janina Jankowska (Nina Weinfeld-Jankowska)³². *Biuletyn Informacyjny Biura Odbudowy Stolicy* [*The Information Bulletin of the Office for the Reconstruction of the Capital*] from 1946 includes also the following statement:

[Lachert's] Department of Architecture and Engineering is developing a plan for the residential district of Muranów, considering all guidelines concerning communication, the division into housing estates and the like, submitted by the Department of Urban Planning of the BOS within the framework of the general plan for Warsaw architecture development. Muranów studio's task is to design the architecture of the estate as a part of the entire quarter. These works make use of a detailed plan of the district, drawn up by the Urban Planning Department. The accurate architectonic development of the estate requires Muranów studio to develop detailed programs for each of the buildings devoted to public use, such as the house of culture, youth centre, entertainment facilities, craftsmen workshops and typical residential housing³³.

[17] Lachert did not take part in the works on the plans for Muranów discussed above. He made use of them later on, as the main architect of the estate, after the establishment of Zakład Osiedli Robotniczych [Workers' Housing Estates Company] (1948). What incited him in 1948 to start developing the concept in which he used all his previous experience in the fields of architecture, sculpture, and technology?

Muranów: an experimental estate

[18] On 18 January 1948 Lachert joined the Polish Workers Party division working at the BOS. He was introduced by architects Syrkusowa and Ryszard Karłowicz³⁴. In March 1948 Syrkusowa presented at the CIRPAC (International Congresses of Modern Architecture) meeting in Paris her project of *Warszawa socjalistyczna* [*Socialist Warsaw*],

³² "»Muranów – dzielnica mieszkaniowa«. Oprac. Wydziału Urbanistyki BOS, arch. Kłyszewski Waclaw, Mokrzyński Jerzy, Wierzbicki Eugeniusz", in: *Architektura* (1946), 8-12.

³³ "Przygotowania do budowy dzielnicy mieszkaniowej Muranów", in: *Biuletyn Informacyjny Biura Odbudowy Stolicy* 46 (1946).

³⁴ The Archive of the Warsaw University of Technology (APW), Personal survey [10 February 1956].

which drew from the earlier project of *Warszawa funkcjonalna* [*Functionalist Warsaw*] by Syrkus and Jan Chmielewski (1934), calling for the reconstruction of historic architecture, creating a new communication network, and the construction of new residential estates. Muranów was supposed to be the first socialist estate, whose initial project was published by Lachert in *Architektura* (1949)³⁵. The innovative housing estate made of prefabricated rubble-concrete was an example of "experimental architecture" that he promoted³⁶. It corresponded with the experimental project of *The Case Study House* (1948-1966), financed by the magazine 'Arts & Architecture', developed with such architects as Richard Neutra, Charles and Ray Eames, and Eero Saarinen. The plan was to produce designs for functional and inexpensive houses, intended for mass production (Los Angeles, San Francisco and Phoenix, Arizona). At the same time, Alvar Aalto built his own experimental house in Muuratsaalo in Finland using various kinds of bricks (1949). Lachert, a designer of his own experimental house built in 1928–1929 from cellular concrete, had developed this idea much earlier.

[19] The concept of the experimental quarter-memorial included a spatial, multi-level colour composition (red / pink / grey / white), united with the surrounding landscape, where the gorges of former streets and the light-red rubble symbolised the memory of the ghetto, while the level of the rubble scarp symbolised new life (new reality)³⁷. The motif of the scarp came back several times in the architect's work (initiated in his graduate project of *the architect's own home on a scarp*, 1926), being also an important element of Nowicki's visionary plans of reconstruction of Warsaw, inspired with the location of the city and the line of the river. Just like Lachert several years before, Nowicki was an assistant of Professor Rudolf Świerczyński at the Department of Architecture of Warsaw University of Technology, and later they both were lecturers at the Municipal Construction School of the second degree (*Städtische Fachschule für Bauwesen*)³⁸. In 1933 the two architects worked together on graphic design projects – Lachert and the duo Nowicki & Stanisława Sandecka designed covers of books of a constructor Stanisław Hempel for a publishing series of *Zespół Praesens*³⁹. Nowicki was also involved in attempts at transforming rubble, as proved by the preserved sketches of structures of flat cupolas made of prefabricated rubble-concrete elements designed for the new buildings at Aleje Jerozolimskie⁴⁰. The architect proposed a reconstruction of this central artery on several levels of rubble, in a similar fashion to the architecture of

³⁵ Lachert, "Muranów – dzielnica mieszkaniowa", 129-137.

³⁶ Bohdan Lachert, "Budownictwo eksperymentalne", in: *Architektura* 4 (1948), 1-6.

³⁷ The Monument of the Ghetto Heroes.

³⁸ APW, portfolio 3050, Bohdan Lachert's file, biographical note, 1965, 3.

³⁹ Stanisław Hempel, *Drewniane konstrukcje inżynierskie: z 49-ma rysunkami, 4-ma tablicami i dwoma wykresami*, Warszawa 1933; *Konstrukcje szkieletowe żelazne*, Warszawa 1933; *Statyka*, Warszawa 1934.

⁴⁰ I would like to thank Marta A. Urbańska, the author of a doctoral dissertation "Maciej Nowicki – humanista i wizjoner", for giving me access to sketches.

Muranów, which was designed on a rubble scarp. The streets were located on a lower level, while the buildings on the higher level, which allowed for the separation of the pedestrian routes and car routes⁴¹. Among his sketches there can also be found an unrealised project of an estate in the district of Grzybów, located in the former ghetto, with regular grid of streets and buildings diversified in terms of height. The Workshop of Architectural Discussion at the BOS, managed by Nowicki, working from March to May 1945, developed a concept of a contemporary garden city that used the outline of older streets, running in gorges between new buildings, and legible later in the network of small streets of Muranów (Karmelicka Street)⁴².



4 Muranów, Karmelicka Street. Photograph by Teodor Hermańczyk, 1966–1972. Collection of IS PAN, Warsaw, negative, No. 123 892

Muranów: organic residential estate

[20] What was also significant for the concept of Muranów was a cycle of articles by Nowicki, illustrated with visionary pictures, published in *Skarpa warszawska* (1945). The architect promoted the *new functionalism* (*new humanism*) based on the definition of architecture as a design that produces a sense of the whole, and drawing from Frank Lloyd Wright's concept of organic architecture.

The sense of the whole [...] – he wrote – needs to be a relation between the following senses: 1. the sense of ground (topography, organic features, growth); 2. the sense of shelter; 3. the sense of material; 4. the sense of space; 5. the sense of proportion (with this one needs to be born – it is instinct); 6. the sense of order (heightened by cultivating the sense of proportion); 7. creative means and possibilities – individual technique⁴³.

⁴¹ "Wspomnienie Tadeusza Iskierki", in: Tadeusz Barucki, *Maciej Nowicki*, Warszawa 1986, 11.

⁴² Maciej Nowicki, "Oczyma wyobraźni. Warszawa przyszłości", in: *Życie Warszawy* (1945), cited in: Grzegorz Sołtysik, Jerzy S. Majewski and Robert Maciej, *Warszawa. Ballada o okaleczonym mieście*, Warszawa 2006, 7.

⁴³ Maciej Nowicki, "W poszukiwaniu nowego funkcjonalizmu", in: *Skarpa* 3 (1945), 1-2.

[21] Wright's concepts were widely known in the circles of prewar Modernists after the publication of his "Manifesto", as well as articles by Michał Antoni Kostanecki, who for a short time worked with Wright⁴⁴. One of the most interesting examples of the adaptation of Wright's ideas by the avant-garde was an unrealised minimalist glass Polish pavilion designed by Lachert for the exhibition *Sztuka i Technika w życiu współczesnym* [Art and technology in contemporary life] in Paris (1937), whose form stemmed directly from the shape of the landscape. The organic relation between architecture and nature was also emphasised by the way the Paris pavilion was designed in a series of views from above, including a gradual evolution of the object connected with the topographical map of the area⁴⁵. The shape of Muranów was emerging in a similar fashion, having as its starting point a network of older streets seen from above⁴⁶. The changes of the density of architecture, raised by the architect as an intervention in the shape of his original concept, is not fully legible from this perspective⁴⁷. As is suggested by the initial draft of the estate from September 1949, the space of the estate was filled with buildings of the kindergarten, nursery, school and cultural centre (the House of Books), not included in the original design⁴⁸. At the same time, however, (1949) the architect included them in a detailed description of the planned quarter:

The colonies of Muranów form a unified line of architecture around the centre of the estate, containing kindergartens, nurseries, and services (laundries, bicycles and car garages, transformers, waste chutes etc.)

[22] In the same study, he included an extensive discussion of the shape of the landscape and spatial dynamics achieved by the difference of levels⁴⁹. And so it seems that the interference in the shape of Muranów raised by him concerned most of all the composition of the space of the monument, and only subsequently the structure of the estate. The brief characteristic of Muranów as a monument seems to suggest the combination of two different forms of artistic expression, yet in the process of construction the differences between them seemed gradually to deepen. The architect

⁴⁴ "Manifest Franka Lloyd Wrighta", in: *Architektura i Budownictwo* 2 (1931), 45-46; Michał Kostanecki, "Rozwój nowoczesnej architektury amerykańskiej", in: *Architektura i Budownictwo* 1 (1932), 33-48; Michał Kostanecki, "Twórczość arch. F.L.Wrighta", in: *Architektura i Budownictwo* 6 (1933), 179-187.

⁴⁵ Archiwum Muzeum Architektury we Wrocławiu [The Archive of the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław], MA IIIb-752-1, a project for the pavilion designed for the exhibition in Paris.

⁴⁶ Bohdan Lachert, "Historia powstania osiedla Muranowa Południowego", in: Matywiecki, *Kamień graniczny*, 492-495.

⁴⁷ Information about the change of the urban plan of the estate was given by the architect in conversation with Waldemar Baraniewski: "Before we met I was convinced that he had planned this form of the estate from the very beginning. I had no idea that the initial plan was changed. It was only Lachert himself who made me realise that". Cited in: Beata Chomętowska, *Stacja Muranów*, Warszawa 2012, 306.

⁴⁸ A collections of plans, measurements, and architectonic sketches of IS PAN, No. Z/153: *Warszawa. Muranów. Osiedle II - plan sytuacyjny 1:0000*. Signed: inż. B. Lachert, Z. Borowiecki, 12 września 1949 r.

⁴⁹ Lachert, "Muranów – dzielnica mieszkaniowa", here 136.

realised in practice his visual idea of the spatial monument to which he subjected the shape of the housing estate.



5 Muranów, Gen. Karol Świerczewski Street (at present Solidarności Avenue), 1966–1972. Photograph by Teodor Hermańczyk. Collection of IS PAN, Warsaw, negative, No. 124 108

Muranów: the identity of the place

[23] After 1949 the criticism of Muranów (centring on its barracks-like appearance and monotony) increased⁵⁰. From the very beginning, the estate was a ground for experiment – the first houses were erected in quick-pace system, given up soon after the construction work began due to the low technical level, low quality, as well as the chaotic look of the uneven line of bricks. The change of the original concept of Muranów included covering of the rough rubble-concrete texture with light plaster, which changed the appearance of the buildings and at the same time enhanced the thermal qualities of the walls.

[24] After many years, the intervention in the original project, namely the covering of the facade in plaster, which Lachert saw in symbolic terms, no longer evoked such emotions as it did at the time when this decision was put into practice, with the exception of the moment when this idea emerged⁵¹. In his *Diary 1954* Leopold Tyrmand noted that the architect agreed to include postulated changes⁵². The architect's resignation from running the Muranów studio stemmed finally from the subsequent circumstances relating to the construction of the monumental gate – a socialist realist dominant in the otherwise Modernist space. The introduction of elements of architectural scenography in the final

⁵⁰ Feliks Weber, "Słowo o Muranowie", in: *Stolica* 42 (1949), 4.

⁵¹ "[plaster siding] cannot, however, completely transform the basic visual structure of the buildings", Lachert, "Muranów. Z doświadczeń 3 lat prac urbanistyczno-architektonicznych", here 32.

⁵² Leopold Tyrmand, *Dziennik 1954*, Warszawa 1999, 197.

phase of construction was supposed to grant representative character to the district and to set it in the structure of the city centre (among others through stylistic references to the Mostowski palace situated in the vicinity), which led to the elimination of the powerfully emphasised identity of the *place-after-ghetto*. The critical point was the opposition of the chief architect of Warsaw, Józefa Sigalina, against the inclusion of a sgraffito decoration with the name *Muranów* on a cartouch placed on the top of the gate (the cartouch remains empty until this day)⁵³.



6 Muranów, Nowolipki Street. Photograph by Leonard Sempoliński, the 1960s. Collection of IS PAN, Warsaw, negative, No. 176 365

[25] Actions defined by Lachert as "interventions by third persons"⁵⁴, led to his resignation from running "Muranów" studio (1951) and handing over the supervision of main works to Stępkowski, with whom he designed Dom Książki [The House of Books] with an arched colonnade (1951). Although all these facts seem to form a logical sequence, the actual circumstances of his decision to resign remain unclear. After the wave of criticism, the architect tried to cut himself off from the project that he briefly summarised in the text "Muranów. Z doświadczeń 3 lat prac urbanistyczno-architektonicznych" ["Muranów. The 3 years of experience of urban planning and architecture"] (1952)⁵⁵. Despite the expressed opposition against the imposed changes, Lachert accepted the socialist realist doctrine. Already in 1949 he designed the monumental structure of Mauzoleum Żołnierzy Radzieckich [The Mausoleum of Soviet Soldiers], an urban-landscape project (drafted in collaboration with Jarnuszkiewicz and Stefan Lisowski), for which he received the National Award of the 1st degree. In 1951 he made a project of the Polish pavilion for the Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow (with an attic with the motif of hammer and sickle), while in 1954 he designed the Arch of

⁵³ Archiwum Państwowe m.st. Warszawy [The State Archive of the City of Warsaw], files of the Chief Architect of Warsaw, no. 38: "Muranów (korespondencja)" ["Muranów (correspondence)"].

⁵⁴ NAC, Dział Nagrań Dźwiękowych [department of Audio Recordings], signed, T. 6801: *Wspomnienia Bohdana Lacherta – architekta i urbanisty* (1976).

⁵⁵ Lachert, "Muranów. Z doświadczeń 3 lat prac urbanistyczno-architektonicznych", 29-32.

Liberation in Lublin (with Jarnuszkiewicz and Henryk Dąbrowski). From 1950 onwards, for four years he was the dean of the Department of Architecture at the Warsaw University of Technology – at the time Professor Lech Niemojewski was removed from the university, of which a direct cause was his permanent opposition against the system, and the rejection of his book *Uczniowie cieśli. Rozważania nad zawodem architekta* [*Carpenter's Apprentices. Reflections on the Profession of the Architect*] (1948). Perhaps it was under the pressure⁵⁶ that Lachert issued a self-criticism of his prewar, independent work⁵⁷. He also intervened in the graduation projects of architects that did not conform to the socialist realist doctrine⁵⁸. The history of South Muranów is, then, not only an architectonic narrative about a place, it is also a fragment of a biography of an artist entangled in the political system, searching for his own version of creative expression under any circumstances, just like the character from Czesław Miłosz's *Zniewolony umysł* [*The Captive Mind*]. In one of the pictures of the estate stored in the archive of the Art Institute of PAN (see fig. 8), the artist's profile was accidentally photographed – an unintentional joint portrait of an artist and his work, preserved in the memory of the photosensitive membrane.



7 Bohdan Lachert & Janusz Stępkowski, Muranów. Dom Książki [The House of Books], 1951. Photograph by W. Wolny, 1972. Collection of IS PAN, Warsaw, negative, No. 105 945

Translated by Karolina Kolenda

⁵⁶ Stefan Tworkowski, "Sześćdziesiąt lat zmagania. Bohdan Lachert – honorowa nagroda SARP-u w 1984 r.", in: *Komunikat SARP 6* (1984).

⁵⁷ Jan Minorski, *O polską architekturę socjalistyczną*, Warszawa 1950, 65-66, 154.

⁵⁸ "The project I designed under his [Lachert's] supervision — a department store — was almost finished and it was perhaps during our final consulting meeting, which took place after the famous congress of the Party architects, that the professor told me to consider which style could best express the character of a department store: Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian". For a longer version of this statement see: Andrzej Pinno, "Wędrówki architekta", part 1, http://www.architekturaibiznes.com.pl/start.php?opt=sites&item_id=787 (accessed 12 May 2013).

