

**Agnieszka Gralińska-Toborek**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5250-3676>

University of Lodz

[agnieszka.gralinska@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:agnieszka.gralinska@uni.lodz.pl)

## THE LEFTOVERS MANIFESTO – ABOUT THE VIABILITY OF FRIEDENSREICH HUNDERTWASSER'S IDEAS

### Abstract

Friedensreich Hundertwasser's architecture sparks controversy and stirs emotions. For tourists and residents, it is an attraction that elicits enthusiasm, while specialists often regard it as a curiosity. His aesthetic elements – kitsch, camp, bricolage, DIY, and ecology – appeal to contemporary users and motivate their creativity. An extraordinary example is a community of homeless people in Jaworzno (Poland), who revitalized an old, over-century-old building gifted by the city authorities and are renovating another in Hundertwasser's style. Their fascination with Hundertwasser stems not just from admiration for his buildings but from his ideas in numerous manifestos. A deeper reading of his texts and personal experience of his art allowed amateurs to identify with his pro-environmental and pro-social views, actualizing them in place-making activities. This community's efforts reflect the vitality of Hundertwasser's aesthetics and architectural theory, encouraging creativity and action as part of the broader DIY culture

### Keywords:

Hundertwasser, Bethlehem Association in Jaworzno, DIY aesthetics

## INTRODUCTION

In the small town of Jaworzno (about 90,000 inhabitants) in Poland, a community of homeless people, together with volunteers, have independently revitalised an over 100-year-old building leased to them by the city authorities. There would be nothing special about this initiative, were it not for the fact that the homeless people were fascinated by the buildings of the Austrian artist and designer Friedensreich Hundertwasser. After renovating and rather superficially changing the style of the historic building, they decided to build another house, this time literally modelled on the designs of their favourite architect. In their case, however, their fascination with Hundertwasser does not spring from a superficial admiration for the specific appearance of his buildings but goes



much deeper into the ideas contained in his numerous manifestos. A deeper reading of his texts and personal experience of his art allowed amateurs, people without artistic competence, to identify with the neo-avant-garde artist's pro-environmental and pro-social views and actualise them in place-making activity. The activities of the community can be categorised as part of a very broad phenomenon called DIY culture (Kuznetzov and Paulos, 2010) The analysis of these activities allows us to capture several characteristics of DIY aesthetics. It also demonstrates the vitality of Hundertwasser's aesthetics and architectural theory, which does not remain the utopian fantasy of an eccentric artist, but shows the power to encourage action, to evoke creativity.

### HUNDERTWASSER ARCHITECTURE AS CURIOSITY

Friedensreich Hundertwasser, born Friedrich Stowasser, was an Austrian painter, graphic artist, performer, ecological activist and author of over 50 architectural projects. This information can be found in his biographies. However, his name does not appear in handbooks and dictionaries of the greatest architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although the buildings he designed enjoy enduring popularity among residents and tourists in Vienna, Magdeburg and Osaka, they have not received the approval of the architectural community. Instead, they often evoke indulgent smiles and disregard, as Arthur Danto has bluntly described it: 'Everyone officially connected with art made a point of saying how much they hoped I did not like Hundertwasser, since they hated him (Danto, 1996, p. 32).

This is not surprising, as Hundertwasser radically broke with the basic principles of modernist architecture. He rejects straight lines, proportion, harmony, vertical and horizontal divisions, and instead treats buildings in a painterly manner. He introduced intense colours and undefined forms that did not correspond to traditional architectural elements. Vegetation is incorporated into roofs, terraces and balconies in an amorphous manner, further emphasising the amorphous forms (see Fig. 1–3). Even postmodern architects have not embraced such extravagance.

From a broader and urbanistic point of view, Hundertwasser's buildings can provoke outrage, especially those in city centres such as Vienna or Magdeburg. They do not relate to the historic cityscape; their scale and form are unceremoniously conspicuous. They do not enter into a dialogue with their surroundings; on the contrary, they dominate, proliferate and take up space. However, their attractiveness is appreciated by city authorities as they bring popularity to the cities.



Fig. 1. Hundertwasserhouse, Vienna, Austria, 2019. Photo by author.



Fig. 2. Hundertwasserhouse, Vienna, Austria, 2022. Photo by A. Świętosławska.



Fig. 3. Kunst Haus Vienna, Museum Hundertwasser, Wien, Austria, 2022  
Photo by A. Świętosławska.

### **Kitsch**

One of the main criticisms of Hundertwasser's architecture is its flirtation with kitsch.

Kitsch is an aesthetic category that is currently very difficult to define and value. What was easy for any art connoisseur to define until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when avant-garde art became high art thanks to its admirers (Adorno, Greenberg, etc.), is no longer obvious in postmodern pluralism.

Theorists who have tried to deal with kitsch have looked for its characteristics (Broch, 1969; Moles, 1977; Kulka, 1996). The problem, however, lies primarily in where we locate this category: in the immanent characteristics of the object, in the style of reception of the given object, or in the intentions of its creator.

Among the characteristics of an object, we can mention such diverse features as excessive ornamentation (an excess of ornamentation), poor workmanship, cheap material (usually pretending to be something more noble), pastel colours (especially pink), realism that leaves no room for understatement, change of scale – miniaturisation or exaggeration, repetition – mass production, while the content focuses on emotion at the expense of logic, rationality and truth, and literalism that leaves no room for interpretation.

It should be noted, however, that the same objects can be kitsch for some people and not for others, because the phenomenon of kitsch is also a style of reception (or rather consumption) based on the subject's characteristic relation to the object, which may depend on competence, but also on external factors – the historical moment, local tradition, etc. An important feature of the reception of an object that has the characteristics of kitsch but is not understood as such by the recipient is a sentimental and emotional attitude – unreflective and uncritical. Even an object that does not have the above characteristics, but is treated in a naïve manner, can be considered kitsch in a distanced analysis. It is therefore better to regard kitsch as an aesthetic situation or phenomenon rather than as a feature of an object.

The third element in this situation is the intention of the creator of the object. Aiming for quick satisfaction of the viewer, mass positive reception, lack of criticism and awareness of one's own imperfections, lack of ambition to change the world (maintaining the status quo), cynical use of art for other purposes (e.g. low-quality copying, mass reproduction on gadgets).

And although the elements listed here are only a small part of the characteristics mentioned by theorists, it is already apparent that they cannot serve to formulate a useful definition. A whole network of characteristics, behaviours and intentions make up the phenomenon of kitsch, which can only be grasped by those who have a negative attitude towards it. However, a consciously positive attitude towards kitsch transforms it into something else, camp, which will be discussed later.

However, returning to Hundertwasser, it is problematic to classify and value his architecture as kitsch. Danto, when objecting to Hundertwasser being called a “Viennese Koons”, states: “Koons uses kitsch to make artistic points, whereas Hundertwasser really just is kitsch” (1996, p. 33). Is Hundertwasser and his oeuvre an essence of kitsch situation? His buildings are characterised by their colourfulness and excessive ornamentation, which fail to reveal any structural logic or order. The fairytale-like, irregular, and unpredictable shapes, reminiscent of exaggerated, giant children's toys look like Disneyland. What

distinguishes these structures from the pavilions of Disneyland is their unique character, apparent lack of adornment, and the sincerity and heterogeneity of their materials. These buildings are widely recognised due to their eccentric forms, which makes them a popular tourist attraction. Upon closer examination, however, they sometimes arouse uneasiness. The colours are not as intense as in photographs, the textures are not as friendly to the hand as children's toys. The real size of buildings is also often surprising in either its vastness or miniature size.

Conversely, these structures are also locations where everyday life occurs. Residents reside in these buildings, lock their doors, defend their privacy, or look down upon tourists from the heights of their terraces (Kraftl, 2009, p. 123–127). The fairytale palaces are revealed to be permanent, solid architecture rather than papier-mâché scenery. The public toilets, so eagerly designed by Hundertwasser, are revealed to be real toilets that require cleaning. In addition to the superficial perception of a large proportion of tourists, who are primarily interested in collecting selfies with the attraction in the background, there are also the users of these buildings, including residents, employees and permanent residents who interact with them on a daily basis. Their experiences and assessments are varied but grounded locally and historically. *Green citadel* in Magdeburg still provokes irritation in some residents, while others enjoy it as a break from Soviet-era architectural uniformity (Mars, 2014, 5.0–6.30 min.).

The third component of the kitsch situation is the artist's own intentions. Hundertwasser was known for his unusual behaviour – he dressed in his own tailored clothes and even shoes, and at the same time delivered his manifestos naked – so he could be treated as an eccentric artist, a local freak. His behaviour, however, can be seen as a consequence of the ideas he proclaimed and not as a performance easily sold to the media. Certainly, Hundertwasser did not want to flatter his audience, often insulting specialists from Artworld and especially avant-garde artists and architects, whom he accused of cowardice, falsehood, mafia relations (Hundertwasser, 1981; Schmied, 1981/2004)<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, he himself acted like an autocrat or guru instructing and claiming to know better. He criticised the avant-garde at the same time as belonging to the avant-garde and reproducing many of its strategies (Schmied, 1981/2004). This resolute tone can also arouse resentment and suspicion in the present day, which has resulted in criticism of the avant-garde in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as exemplified by the de-branding of Joseph Beuys (Riegel, 2013). His work commissioned by private investors may also have aroused suspicion, although he fundamentally presented himself as anti-capitalist. Throughout his life, Hundertwasser has been the subject of criticism, and this is unlikely to cease as long as his art interes anyone.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Hundertwasser texts taken from the Hundertwasser Foundation website: <https://hundertwasser.com> [accessed: 09.11.2024]

However, there is no doubt that all his kitsch activities and artistic practices were geared towards change. This is also not denied by Danto, who concludes his report from Vienna with the statement:

The only artist likely to change reality very much is Hundertwasser, whose gilded smokestack visible from the windows of the Lichtenstein Palace, when the Museum of Modern Art is installed is in serious competition with the Ferris wheel to be Viennas defining symbol. It certainly distills many good ideas from the *Jugendstil* past overcoming the distinction between art and decoration, between pure and applied art, between fine art and craft, between aesthetics and utility (Danto, 1996, p. 34).

### **Camp**

Hundertwasser was not indignant about kitsch; on the contrary, he manifestly declared that it was essential to human life:

The absence of kitsch makes our lives unbearable. We can't manage without romanticism. The garden gnome symbolises our right to dreams and our yearning for a fairer, better world' (Hundertwasser, 1990).

He saw kitsch as a longing for beauty in times of avant-garde terror:

We live in an absurd anti-time. Values are topsy-turvy. Ugliness is considered honest and worthwhile. Beauty is branded populist kitsch (Hundertwasser, 1990).

When conscious kitsch is employed as an instrument of expression, it effectively ceases to be kitsch. In contemporary culture, exaggerated, imitative, manifest, and positively valued kitsch is revalued as a tool of camp. It is evident that Hundertwasser's architectural style, along with the broader aesthetic context it evokes, does not align with the characteristics outlined in Susan Sontag's seminal text on camp: *Notes on 'Camp'* (Sontag, 1966). Nevertheless, according to Sontag, the most exemplary instance of the camp aesthetic is Art Nouveau and Gaudi's work. Hundertwasser, in this view, is the direct successor and heir to this style. His architectural works and his attitude can be considered exemplars of the pure, naive style that Sontag terms "dead serious" (Sontag 1966, p. 282). And while there are ongoing arguments about whether camp should be attributed solely to its source, homosexual milieu as a political tool of cultural critique (Medhurst, 1997; Meyer, 1994) or whether it can be used as another aesthetic category universal to many cultures (Sontag, 1966, pp. 277–278), it is used much more widely today than its theorists would like. The non-obvious nature of camp allows for the subversion of objects or concepts that were not

necessarily designed to be perceived as camp. It is a handy category for dealing with and naming somehow that which escapes the prevailing markers of good taste of the time. When we do not want to negatively value as kitsch something that sometimes even in a shameful way captivates us, we have at our disposal a campaign that aesthetically justifies both us – the viewers and the work of art together with its creator. Thus, it is increasingly common to find Hundertwasser's architecture regarded as camp. Karolina Jaklewicz defends it by claiming that his buildings are not kitschy,

but they arouse aesthetic dissonance among viewers who are accustomed to established canon – either to the historical beauty of harmony or to the dramatic beauty (or ugliness) of the avant-garde – precisely because they are camp (2023, p. 27).

The issue, however, is that one of the defining characteristics of camp is its artificiality, which represents an escape from the natural world (Sontag, 1966, p. 279). “Nothing in nature can be campy” (Sontag, 1966, p. 279). Camp does not seem ecological and yet Hundertwasser is actually a precursor of modern ecology in architecture. His ecology was quite naïve, straightforward, not tied to technical solutions, but which returns to primordiality and instils it in the city. And it is not a rococo pastoral camp, but postulates promoting coarse hummus toilets (Hundertwasser, 1979). Hundertwasser is thus partly a dandy through his eccentricity, but his return to simplicity and naturalness distances him from the camp.

### **Infantilisation**

Another feature of the Viennese artist's architecture is the childlike styling visible at first glance. The buildings' shapes with twisted turrets crowning golden, onion-shaped domes, spiral terraces, and facades painted with irregular spots of intense colours with outlined windows and doors undergo infantilisation. This conscious return to childhood can be considered Hundertwasser's way of expressing authenticity, naturalness, and uninhibited creativity.

The dogmatic world of architecture is reluctant to acknowledge that the most appropriate architectural style for humans is to be found in children's drawings and fairy-tale books. It should not be a significant challenge to transform the ideas conceived by children into tangible reality.

The concept of infantilisation, defined as the conscious imitation of creations of children's imagination or even putting oneself in the shoes of a child (Kazimierska-Jerzyk, 2008, p. 179), can be observed in art from the period of the first avant-garde. The works of Paul Klee, Joan Miró, Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova exemplify certain stylistic features often associated with naive art, including foregrounding, distorted proportions, intense colours, flat

stains, simplified forms and clear contours. The avant-garde fascination with children's and primitive (folk and non-European) art was primarily driven by a search for a new identity for 20<sup>th</sup>-century art (Penkienier and Weld, 2014, p. 5). At the same time, the belief in the naturalness and unconventionality of children's art was perpetuated. Interestingly, it was in Vienna that the formation of opinions on the subject of uninhibited child expression was concentrated, thanks to the activities of Franz Cizek. As early as 1897 he opened a private Juvenile Art Class in which he did not teach technique but guided children towards spontaneous, as he claimed, creativity. As Wilhelm Viola, an admirer of his work, wrote in 1936:

Cizek is first of all the liberator of child from the slavery of senseless and boring "art instruction" which deadened spontaneity and even endangered real talent. Cizek has freed millions of children from art "drill". And more, he has liberated the tremendous creative energy of the child which had been neglected for untold generations" (1936, p. 12).

Ideas of liberation from the terror of tradition, convention and the academy towards natural expression, supported by tangible evidence in the form of exhibitions of children's art shown all over the world, coincided with the needs and demands of avant-garde artists as well as Hundertwasser himself (Hundertwasser, 1959). However, contemporary scholars have concluded that the creative abilities of children are not entirely independent; they are influenced by cultural factors and patterns of imagery present in a particular time and place (Kouvou, 2010). Consequently, children's creativity is changeable and can be shaped by early education. It is often the case that children create under the influence of adults, fulfilling their expectations. The return of adult artists to natural creativity may therefore be a return to the visual environment in which they were raised as children. Moreover, it is possible that the youngest generation may not necessarily perceive what their parents perceive as childish.

Children's spontaneous visual imagery is unavoidably influenced by television, internet, comic strips, video and cinema as well as all the various forms of digital imagery that today provide them with schemata, but also the new emerging forms of art like installations, performance and intermediate forms (Kouvou, 2010, p. 11).

Thus, when Hundertwasser proposed a return to children's drawings and fairy-tale books, for today's children it would perhaps be manga or Disneyland. Many of Hundertwasser's buildings with the so-called "onion towers" may be

more associated by audiences brought up in pop culture with Disneyland than with fairy tales about kings or with the history of the wars with the Turks, as their creator intended (Hundertwasser, 1985).

It is important to note that Hundertwasser did not directly appeal to children's creativity or consider infantilisation as a means to an artistic goal. Rather, it is in the viewing situation that the impression of infantilisation of the forms of his buildings arises. This consists mainly of surprise, a sense of otherness and a kind of inadequacy. The doughy masses, covered in an unconventional and unpredictable manner with multicoloured patches of colour and irregular mosaics, the winding spiral approaches, turrets and onion-shaped domes – viewed from a distance, they resemble children's castles built of sand and decorated with pebbles. However, upon closer examination, they are revealed to be surprisingly massive and durable. It is challenging to comprehend how such an impression of carelessness, unevenness, and lack of seriousness can be achieved in a field of art as technical and serious as architecture. However, Hundertwasser argued that this is the essence of humanising architecture: an impression of spontaneity, dexterity, and organicity, which is the antithesis of technicisation. Freedom from the straight line is freedom from the terror of modernist rationality and functionalism (Hundertwasser, 1959).

Any modern architecture in which the straight line or the geometric circle have been employed for only a second – and were it only in spirit – must be rejected. Not to mention the design, drawing-board and model-building work which has become not only pathologically sterile, but absurd. The straight line is godless and immoral. The straight line is not a creative line, it is a duplicating line, an imitating line. In it, God and the human spirit are less at home than the comfort-craving brainless intoxicated and unformed masses (Hundertwasser, 1959).

The assessment of the Viennese artist's architectural style as infantile may be attributed to another association: the construction of sandcastles and spontaneous play with form are activities that can only be undertaken in free, "unproductive" time, such as childhood, holidays and retirement. This is a secular vision of paradise, where one is a happy creator not subject to judgement or consequences. It is therefore not surprising that designs were commissioned from Hundertwasser by owners of hotels, spas and museums. Even the social housing was to be designed with the intention of creating a sense of harmony with nature, rather than simply providing accommodation.

Hundertwasser's architecture appears frivolous, yet it fulfils the postulate of the German philosopher and aesthetician Odo Marquard, who expected art to bring serenity to people (1989, p. 48; Gralińska-Toborek, 2018), and there is nothing more serene than childlike irreverence. When viewing Hundertwasser's architectural creations, aesthetic pleasure is derived solely when the judgment of

taste and the rational assessment of functionality are suspended in favour of a multi-sensory experience and a detachment from the urban context. This represents a kind of infantilisation, a return to the sensibility from which Hundertwasser's work originated.

His thinking and his specific interaction with things and nature resemble those of a child. He thinks directly and sensuously concrete as children do; his relationship to nature is equally pure. He immerses himself completely in everything he does and thinks, with his entire body, inner thoughts, his dreams and all his perceptions (Schurian, 2004).

Some of the buildings, in particular the *Hundertwasserhaus* in Vienna, demonstrate another intriguing aspect: they appear to have been constructed by an individual lacking professional training who utilized the means and materials at his disposal in a manner that diverges from the conventional norms of art. The striking combination of diverse materials, including concrete, brick, metal, and glass, the integration of traditional and modern forms, and the incorporation of found objects, such as bottles, irregular, broken tiles, and concrete sculptures, give the impression of an architectural conglomerate. The irregular columns, the upside-down staircase windows, the trees growing out of the balconies that appear to be self-sown, the various windows that do not maintain any common margins either horizontally or vertically, all indicate a lack of professionalism or a rejection of conventional building principles and traditions.

### **Bricolage**

The individual responsible for the construction of the buildings described could be considered a bricoleur, a concept evoked by Claude Levi-Strauss to describe mythical thinking. This figure contrasts with the craftsman on the one hand and the engineer on the other (Levi-Strauss, 1966, pp. 16–28; Johnson, 2012; pp. 361–368; Louridas, 1999, pp. 2–5). It denotes a person who is cleverly able, by means of substitute resources and materials (including reclaimed materials), to create something new or to repair, patch up something old. This capacity to integrate architectural elements into a unified architectural complex, as exemplified by the *Hundertwasserhaus*, is a quality that brings the creator into close proximity with the bricoleur (see Fig. 1, 2). Here, an artist from outside the architectural community proposes to construct a social building of unconventional form, overgrown with trees, which is visually incongruous with its surroundings, situated close to the city centre, in a street lined with historic townhouses. In support of his project, he presents a utopian narrative replete with metaphorical references. And indeed, he succeeds in his goal. As a consequence of this realization, his ideas spread further. A *Hundertwasser Village* is created in the building of an old workshop and traces of this aesthetic are visible

in the surrounding gift shops. The stories and creations of the bricoleur endure and continue, they are in constant process.

In the art sciences, the term bricolage has been used to describe Dada or arte povera works:

Bricolage took on a political aspect and it was used by artists to bypass the commercialism of the art world. Arte povera artists constructed sculptures out of rubbish in an attempt to devalue the art object and assert the value of the ordinary and everyday (*Bricolage*).

In the context of neo-avant-garde theory, the bricoleur is not an amateur, but a rebellious artist, reaching for non-artistic materials and means to challenge existing standards. Hundertwasser also created with the aim of criticising modernist art and commercialising housing itself. However, by reaching for surprising means and materials, he gave his buildings a certain nobility and uniqueness, emphasising individuality, “offhandedness,” ingenuity. For him, these were further ways of humanising architecture. Hundertwasser is a bricoleur in the sense of Levi-Strauss, creating a work of art that is coherent with his own story. This is in contrast to the rationalism of architectural art, which functions well and is continued by those who most need this very story. His metaphorical nickname “doctor of architecture” is also evidence of this.

The *bricoleur* (...) may be a marginal figure, and *bricolage* a “survival” of older practices which are now tolerated only as hobbies or pastimes in modern industrial societies (...), but his function in Lévi-Strauss’s text is clearly a didactic one. The marginality of the *bricoleur* is also his singularity: he works alone and independently of the institutionalized division of labour which defines the modern scientist or engineer, (...). The economy of *bricolage* is one of “make do and mend,” based on the recycling of extant materials which retain their historical and human depth; the activity of the *bricoleur* is an embodied, manual activity, in which he “may not ever complete his purpose [*projet*] but he always puts something of himself into it” (Johnson, 2012, pp. 367–368).

## DIY

The term “bricolage” is now frequently employed to describe the DIY aesthetic, particularly in the context of DIY urbanism. This encompasses a range of positive elements, including grassroots activism, recycling, and anti-consumerist resistance (Finn, 2014). This culture is primarily created by amateurs, although it does not exclude the participation and collaboration of professionals, provided that their involvement is not driven by commercial considerations (Kuznetsov and Paulos, 2014). Furthermore, the motivation for engaging in DIY activities can also be purely for the purpose of allowing unfettered creativity and a sense of agency.

In his artistic practice, Hundertwasser is a professional who acts like an amateur. Interestingly, it is difficult to say unequivocally whether he is a professional. He dropped out of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna after three months and took up building design at the age of 55. However, his designs were implemented by professional architects such as Peter Pelikan and Heinz Springmann. On his list of “healthy contemporary architecture,” in addition to the works of Gaudi and the Viennese Jugendstil, were The Tower of Watts by Simon Rodia, slums and handmade, peasants’ houses and workers’ allotment houses (Hundertwasser, 1958). He thus affirmed everything made by oneself, amateurishly, for one’s own use. For tenants of flats, he proposed the concept of “window rights,” which allowed everyone to decorate their window on the façade as they wished, within arm’s reach. But while the DIY movement was often directed against the political and social decisions of municipal authorities, Hundertwasser got on well with them and often created on their order. This, by the way, was part of the criticism within the urban planning and architectural community:

But despite his popularity and innovative ideas, his architecture is often not taken seriously by mainstream architects, and his works are seldom studied as part of the core architectural curriculum. This may be explained by his often harsh criticism of modern architecture (...) and the fact he benefited from opportunities to realise his ideas through the popularity and political connections that others did not have (Barak, 2022).

Hundertwasser created a do-it-yourself culture, promoted a sense of individuality, sewed himself shoes and clothes and lived on a barge for a long time. This corresponded to his theory of the five skins: the epidermis, the clothes, the house, the social environment and the identity and the fifth skin: the global environment – ecology (Restany 2001). On the other hand, he was a commissioned designer and a kind of celebrity with a strong media presence. His work can therefore be described, using the distinction proposed by Lourdias, as self-conscious design as bricolage, because throughout the process he emphasised creativity as a human activity that changes the human condition (1999, pp. 11–15).

One might contend that Hundertwasser’s architectural designs are popular in their accessibility and appeal to a broad audience, which attracts tourists as a sight or even a curiosity. However, beneath this aesthetic surface, the artist's work also expresses a series of important ideas. Hundertwasser has written almost a hundred manifestos since the year 1947, and these can be accessed on the official website for the Hundertwasser Foundation. The texts are as engaging to read as the artist’s architectural projects, and they confirm the belief that they are prophetic.

The ecological and holistic message he preached from the mid-1960s may have initially appeared somewhat naive and hippie-like, but today, a significant proportion of humanity that is concerned and fearful about the state of our planet is implementing what Hundertwasser advocated 40 years ago: rooftop gardens, recycling, zero waste, tolerance for self-seeders, and finally, the idea of DIY (from clothes to building a house). Hundertwasser was dubbed the “doctor of architecture” for his endeavours to rectify the detrimental impact of modern architecture and urban planning on the natural environment. He advocated for planting trees and grass on every horizontal plane so that cities would resemble forests from a bird's-eye view. His slogan encapsulated this vision:

The horizontal belongs to nature, the vertical to man. So, everything that is horizontal under the sky belongs to vegetation, and man can only claim for himself what is vertical. In other words, this means: free nature must grow wherever snow falls in winter (Hundertwasser, 1971).

He also invited trees onto balconies and terraces, and even left space for planting trees in windows, considering trees as equal inhabitants (see Fig.1).

The tree tenant is a giver. It is a piece of nature, a piece of homeland, a piece of spontaneous vegetation in the anonymous and sterile city desert, a piece of nature which can develop without the rationalist control of man and his technology (Hundertwasser 1981).

For him, planting trees on every horizontal surface was a way of forestating cities, which he saw as an absolute necessity, the only action that would save humanity from ecological catastrophe.

He spoke candidly about the use of waste, especially human waste, and a return to what we now call permaculture. He believed that living in unity with nature was the only hope for the future.

If we do not treasure our shit  
 And if we do not transform it into humus  
 In honour of god and the world  
 We lose our right  
 To be present on this earth  
 Waste is beautiful  
 To divide the different types of waste  
 And to reintegrate them into the cycle  
 Is a happy occupation, full of joy  
 Homo – humus – humanitas  
 Three words, the same origin, the same destiny (Hundertwasser, 1979).

The rhetoric used by Hundertwasser in this manifesto entitled: *THE SACRED SHIT – THE SHIT CULTURE* may today seem somewhat blunt on one hand and dogmatic on the other. However, he had a sense of mission and pursued it very consistently, just like his neo-avant-garde peers. Indeed, despite his strong criticism of the avant-garde, particularly in its conceptual guise, his own intellectual and active engagement is an integral part of it. The uncompromising and consistent way in which he translated his ideas into his own lifestyle is the most visible fulfillment of the avant-garde demand to merge art with life.

### THE CONTINUATION OF HUNDERTWASSER'S IDEAS

Hundertwasser's style continues to spread and proliferate even after the author's passing. Several of his projects were completed post-2000, with the most recent being The Hundertwasser Art Centre with Wairau Māori Art Gallery in Whangārei, New Zealand (2022). This complex not only implements Hundertwasser's aesthetic ideas according to his design and model of building, but also continues the ecological ideas. The almost 30-year struggle for the creation of this centre, the ongoing controversy over the funds raised for it (Pierce, 2017) meant that ecological issues were given special attention during the construction:

Ecological sustainability is a central tenet of the construction, which alongside enduring new materials from New Zealand and Europe, uses 40,000 recycled bricks, 1600 cubic metres of recycled native timber of the original building, 5,000 recycled pavers and 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> of locally crafted tiles. (Hundertwasser Art Centre).

Furthermore, it is now easier to construct ecologically than it was during the time of Hundertwasser, who was repeatedly criticised for the discrepancy between his declarations and the actual process of building his houses.

The extent to which “vertical forests” and “tree tenants” actually live up to their energy-saving and ecological promises is of course disputed and often critiqued due to the greenhouse gas emissions associated with construction, use of concrete, intensive maintenance, and for a possible “greenwashing” of high-value real estate. Yet it is worth mentioning that the Hundertwasserhaus is used for public housing, and that Hundertwasser insisted on working to the same budget as any other 50-apartment public housing building in Vienna, to show that an alternative architecture was possible (Barak, 2022).

## BETLEJEM ASSOCIATION IN JAWORZNO – CASE STUDY

Pierre Restany, one of the most important biographers of Hundertwasser, observed:

If one watches the metaphors that nurture Hundertwasser’s acts and speech, one notices that they are anticipatory fables endowed with a delayed-action morality, they are veritable “parables” (...) At bottom, Hundertwasser speaks to his epoch as Christ spoke to his, with the aid of parables which to begin with simply expressed pure obvious truths. His close friends are, like the apostles, the first to appreciate their essence. Today Hundertwasser is beginning to harvest the spiritual seed of his “parabolic” teaching (2001, p. 19).



Fig. 4. Betlejem House, detail, decoration of window, Jaworzno, Poland, 2022. Photo by author.



Fig. 5. Betlejem House, detail from the chapel, Jaworzno, Poland, 2023. Photo by author.

Unexpectedly, the spiritual seeds of Hundertwasser’s ideas found fertile ground in Poland, particularly in the Betlejem [Bethlehem] Association in Jaworzno, a community founded by Catholic priest Mirosław Tosza that serves the homeless. In 1996, the municipal government provided a more than a century-old

house to the residents of the community, which was in a state of significant disarray. The residents of the community undertook the renovation of the building themselves. Since 2011, the residents of the Betlejem Association in Jaworzno have been inspired by the work of the architect Hundertwasser. Initially, they were inspired by the architect's houses depicted in albums, and then by visiting his buildings in person. Consequently, they undertook the effort to learn how to utilise the mosaic technique, which, at first glance, appears to be relatively straightforward but in fact requires a significant time investment, particularly when it comes to avoiding the use of straight lines and right angles (Tosza and Zworski, 2021, p. 89, transl. by author). The house, therefore, exhibits numerous characteristics that reflect the influence of the "doctor of architecture." The bathrooms, corridors, dining room, and chapel are decorated with colourful mosaics crafted by hand (see Fig. 4–5).

The association is sustained through a ceramic workshop, overseen by Anna Wyjadłowska – an artist and instructor – where products in a style reminiscent of Hundertwasser are produced. Mirosław Tosza explains:

Ania oversees the form and, above all, the colour palette. She has considerable experience, having taught at a design and fashion styling school for many years, with the majority of her students being female. She now works with men and endeavours to persuade us that there are other colours besides blue, black, and red. (Tosza and Zworski, 2021, p. 91, transl. by author).

The homeless from the association were able to save money by selling the products they created in the studio, among other things, which enabled them to go on trips to Vienna and Germany. In this capacity, they observed the work of Hundertwasser and acquired a comprehensive understanding of the techniques employed by the Viennese artist to construct and embellish his creations. They are aware that their home is part of an idea that has spread worldwide.

The latest project undertaken by the Bethlehem community involved the placement of two columns, constructed from elements fired at the Ebinger factory in Bad Ems, situated in the vicinity of Frankfurt am Main (Fig. 6). This is the same factory where Hundertwasser ordered ceramics for all his projects in Europe, the United States, Japan, and New Zealand (Sprengr, 2015, p. 3).

### ***The Leftovers Manifesto***

The fascination with Hundertwasser's work was not just an aesthetic enchantment but also an understanding of his ideas of recycling, not only on a material level but also on a human level. Hundertwasser declared:

Human society must again become a waste-free society. For only he who honours his own waste and re-uses it in a waste-free society transforms death into life and has the right to live on this earth. Because he respects the cycle and allows the rebirth of life to occur (1983).



Fig. 6. Betlejem House, new pillars, Jaworzno, Poland, 2023. Photo by M. Tosza.

This concept was taken to heart by the homeless community. In 2013, for the inauguration of the Hundertwasser-inspired bathroom in the Betlejem house (it is noteworthy that the Viennese artist had numerous toilet projects in his oeuvre), the homeless collectively authored the *The Leftovers Manifesto*. This coincided with the release of the Pope's Francis encyclical in which the pontiff addressed the issue of social exclusion.

Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a “throw away” culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the “exploited” but the outcast, the “leftovers” (2013, p. 46).

In 2016, the homeless community produced a second version of their manifesto, which they used to defend the dignity of people they referred to as ‘leftovers’. They did so with a particular focus on using colorful images, metaphors and religious references.

They're broken by various burdens, battered by suffering and harm, crushed by poverty and hopelessness – rejected by themselves, disrespected by the mighty and influential, existing in last category places, third and fourth worlds, travelling through life in the lowest-class carriages, often without a ticket, which they cannot afford... (*Manifest resztek*, transl. by the author).

Hundertwasser is a very important reference in this manifesto:

Let’s collect the Leftovers! Ceramic leftovers are used to create colourful mosaics, broken glass is used to make stained glass, old yarn is used to make warm patchwork blankets... What will People’s leftovers be used to create? Stained glass windows of gratitude, mosaics of joy, warm blankets of friendship... Let's collect the Leftovers! With love and attention, with respect and devotion. It won't be easy... We'll be considered dreamers and fantasists, ridiculed and derided, called communists and idealists, told that we don't know our stuff, that we're wasting our time, that we're creating communities of kitsch and grandeur (...)

*If we dream alone, our dreams remain only dreams, if we dream together, our dreams become the beginning of a new reality... (...)*

Let’s collect together! Friedensreich Hundertwasser’s words that inspire us and ignite us to fight. Let us make our homes places of hospitality for those whom no one welcomes. Let us accept the simple gifts of the poor with humility and gratitude. Let us not just want to give gifts... The poor have their gifts too! The Holy Family in Bethlehem received rich gifts from the Wise Men and poor gifts from the Shepherds. Let us imitate her in hospitality (*Manifest resztek*, transl. by the author).

In this way, the Austrian artist – a Jew by origin, who appreciated the spirituality of many world religions but remained free of all religious doctrines – became a patron and authority for the Christian, Catholic community.

### The No/Straight Story

The next ambitious project of the community members is to rebuild another house that will be even more closely aligned with Hundertwasser's architectural style. This new house will allow them to host guests and realise their extensive plans. To achieve this, they purchased the modernist one-storey building next to the first house (a typical 'cube house' built in the post-WWII era in Poland). Subsequently, they met with Peter Pelikan in Vienna and then with Małgorzata Kubica, who collaborated with Hundertwasser for a decade on the realisation of his spectacular thermal complex Rogner Bad Blumau near Graz. Together with her husband, architect Andrzej Lipski, they prepared the project for the house, which is planned to be completed by the end of 2024.

The house is named "An Non/Straight Story" a reference to the 1997 film by David Lynch. The artistic inspiration and fascination of this film stem from the uneasy life experiences of each member of the community.

The edifice has undergone a series of modifications, including the addition of a floor and an irregular attic storey, as well as the insertion of windows of varying dimensions within colorful frames (see Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Two buildings of Betlejem Association, Jaworzno, Poland, 2024. Photo by M. Tosza

The construction process is documented and disseminated on social media, as the edifice is erected through the combined efforts of fundraising and private donations. It is evident that a significant proportion of the financial resources required for the project have been sourced from within the community itself.

This has been achieved through the sale of handicrafts and the organisation of artistic workshops. It is noteworthy that these individuals, prior to their involvement with the homeless community, had rarely encountered art in their lives.

The latest initiative connected with the No/Straight Story house is the announcement of a competition for young people to design the façade decoration. Following the receipt of numerous submissions, the design created by 13-year-old Małgosia Surmacz was selected as the winning proposal. Her artistic ideas will be incorporated into the façade decoration of the building. (Surmacz, 2024). Interestingly, in order to select the best entry, the organisers showed all the designs at the Hundertwasser Foundation in Vienna.

The proliferation of Hundertwasser style is characteristic of most of the places where his houses were built. The visual appeal makes cities, organisations, institutions and private businesses seize on it to promote themselves. In Jaworzno, the city authorities asked the association to decorate the city benches near their headquarters. Thirteen benches will be covered with 130 square meters of mosaic made from recycled material – old tiles glazed at the Bethlehem workshop and the Ebinger factory mentioned above.



Fig. 8. Hundertwasser, McDonald's Bad Fischau, Austria, 2024. Photo by A. Bartczak.



Fig. 9. City bench made by community members, Jaworzno, 2024  
Photo source <https://www.betlejem.org/> [accessed: 09.11.2024]

## SUMMARY

The case of Jaworzno provides an illustrative example of how the apparently simplistic and appealing style of Hundertwasser prompts an in-depth engagement with the artist's profound ecological and humanist aesthetic commitments. The characteristics of this aesthetic, as discussed at the outset, include kitsch, camp, infantilisation, bricolage and DIY, and ultimately, ecology. These characteristics accompany those who wish to pursue the Austrian artist's ideas. The members of the Betlejem are aware of the assessment of their own work as kitsch, yet they are equally proud to emphasise that they are engaged in an artistic practice that requires significant commitment and specific skills. As a means of combating social exclusion, the artists utilise art as a means of re-entering society, but above all as a vehicle for differentiation within that society.

One illustrative case is the anecdote of the Christmas parcel donors being given a tour of the residence by one of the residents. At the bathroom, which was designed in the style of the Austrian architect, the guide inquired whether the guests had heard of Hundertwasser. When the embarrassed ones denied it,

the resident, previously embarrassed by the generous gift, was able to demonstrate his own wealth by informing them of the Austrian artist's work (Tosza, 2021, p. 92). This is an example of the camp effect, which can be defined as a sense of distance, playfulness and role reversal.

The interest in children's creativity is evident not only in the house façade competition and the children's workshops. The infantilisation and romanticisation that was characteristic of Hundertwasser's thought is revealed above all in the *Leftovers Manifesto*:

Let's awaken the child sleeping in each of us – what more beautiful than the gaze of a child, with all the innocence, trust, honesty and fantasy. A world seen through the eyes of a child where everything is possible – the desire for a fairy tale world – this world is colourful, sunny and beautiful. How little it takes to see dreams in a little fantasy. A few pebbles, twigs, mud, something else and we have a castle, a moat, we feel like a prince, a knight, a conqueror.

The bricolage nature of Hundertwasser's works and his DIY demands gave a boost to people who had never dealt with art before. The artworks, created by the participants themselves, were both clever and attractive, and made from recycled materials. These works restored the participants' rightful place in society. This humanising character of art and especially of architecture, which, according to its 'doctor', is supposed to be a good place to live, encouraging creativity, development and the establishment of interpersonal relationships and relations with nature and responsibility, is fully realised in the activities of the Betlejem Association.

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## MANIFEST RESZTEK – O ŻYWOTNOŚCI IDEI FRIEDENSREICHA HUNDERTWASSERA

**Streszczenie**

Architektura Friedensreicha Hundertwassera wywołuje kontrowersje i emocje. Dla turystów i mieszkańców jest atrakcją, która budzi entuzjazm, podczas gdy specjaliści często uważają ją jedynie za ciekawostkę. Estetyczne aspekty tej architektury: kicz, kamp, bricolage, majsterkowanie i ekologia – przemawiają do współczesnych użytkowników i motywują ich do własnych działań. Nadzwyczajnym przykładem w Polsce jest społeczność bezdomnych w Jaworznie (Stowarzyszenie Betlejem), którzy odnowili stary, ponad stuletni budynek подарowany przez władze miasta i odnawiają kolejny w stylu Hundertwassera. Ich fascynacja Hundertwasserem wynika nie tylko z podziwu dla jego budynków, ale także jego idei zawartych w licznych manifestach. Głębsza lektura tekstów austriackiego artysty i osobiste doświadczenie jego sztuki pozwoliły amatorom utożsamić się z jego proekologicznymi i prospołecznymi poglądami i urzeczywistnić je w działaniach na rzecz kształtowania miejsca. Wysiłki tej społeczności odzwierciedlają vitalność estetyki i teorii architektonicznej Hundertwassera, zachęcając do kreatywności i działania jako części szerszej kultury DIY.

**Słowa kluczowe:**

Hundertwasser, Stowarzyszenie Betlejem Jaworzno, estetyka DIY