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## SCHROEDINGER'S CAT AND ANTILOGIES OF CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

The notions of permanence and transience seem to appoint the antilogies of contemporary architecture, but herein the intuition is an inappropriate guide. The coexistence of these phenomena creates the face of architecture, especially in its modern incarnation. The article is a contribution to the discourse on the area of scientific analysis of the architecture – the debate to be separated from the extra-scientific criticism. Considerations focus on the use of permanence and transience to explore the specific features of architecture as a scientific discipline.

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The question of durability and fleetingness is an umbrella term in a discourse on architecture with anthropic references suggesting that the models of architectural manifestation are bound with man's functioning cycle, that they absorb his creative touch as well as his weakness, elusiveness, instability. In my opinion, it is also a form of the point of a recent, significant concept of perceiving architecture as the area of human activity which – being inspired by the disciplines of art rather than problem spheres allowing a bigger dose of objectivization or evaluation – combined the process of forming a spatial environment with an expediency, with the relativized role of a place and a space. Two manners of interpreting the fleetingness of architecture confront the natural process of the deterioration of a material component with the process of the programmatic rejection of permanent ideological elements. The former, present for ages and interpreted by creators as the ultimate challenge, has been the factor which inspired them to attempt to struggle against time and its destructive potential. The latter often appears as a hypocritical action or

a planned lack of control which both cannot cope with an eternal contradiction related to exchanging one idea for another, concepts regarded as exploited with proselytic determination to prove that changeability can be controlled by a creator and act as a durable carrier of values.

However, I conclude that an answer concerning the durability and fleetingness of architecture must reach farther, under the layer of a theoretical coating which distorts the perception of architectural reality even though – considering the self-independence of "architecture beyond architecture", a group of participants in this architectural discourse for whom an idea is a cynical tool for popularizing attitudes that reject any responsibility for the proposed theses – providing it may be extremely difficult if it is possible at all.

Every year brings new outlooks, new analyses of architecture as a discipline, of works, creative activities, architects themselves. We may have the impression that the scale of the integration of the apparatus diagnosing the condition of architecture

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is so important that it begins to compete against an observed area, that it is transformed into an independent discipline trying to take control over its source – over architecture implemented with a deed. Naturally, the usurpers are not only critics or experts because designers – revelling in the possibilities of building narrations, less demanding and less hampered than the schematics of implementing architectonic objects in social, cultural or economic reality – contest (intentionally or unconsciously) the definition of this discipline. They blot out the thin borders and shift them so far that the problem is not an attempt to define the borders but the very distinctiveness of architecture.

Like no other discipline, architecture requires us to reconcile apparent contradictions – to discover spatial relations which cannot be strictly controlled by man even though he creates them. The intuitive perception of the logic of dependences and impacts between an architectonic object and its surroundings opposes durability to fleetingness [1]. It is not right.

Architecture encourages and enables us to ask fundamental as well as the simplest questions in spite of the risk of treating these questions as insufficiently motivated from the scientific point of view. It also obliges us to find the crux of the matter preserving the plainness and awareness of the limited potential – knowing that the role of a designer does not give enable him to gain a demiurge's attributes, that he is just a catalyst of phenomena, events, processes which happen around him and can give them an individualized form. I get the feeling that all peregrinations into the area of the theory of architecture must, out of necessity, seek out the laws without any a priori directions or an "esthetical" discourse which is often dominated by the projection of tastes instead of an attempt to evaluate things in an objectivized manner [2].

In my opinion, only by abandoning taxonomical opinions and discussions on tendencies and styles, we can try to understand the superpositions of the states of architecture where parallel meanings and coexisting ideas are rightful because they cannot be appropriated by anyone, even the author. Catalysis uses the potential of a social and cultural environment and transforms it into a temporary aggregate, pulsing and dynamically changing, not on account of transformations of outlooks, assessments, social needs but holistic modifications of the surroundings and an object itself; first and foremost – of ideas, values and meanings it carries. Thus, an architect may attempt to master a little segment of these oscillations, choose an aspect of the existence of an architectonic object which – in the light of the accessible methods of constructing design solutions – can be evaluated in the context of time and its impact on an object but he must always take the unpredictable into account [3]. Does he plan the future? No, he just approximates it in order to adjust his design to the indefinable reality of the time to come. Let us pay attention to the fact that this relation is completely independent of the problem of background or foreground architecture, from conservative or experimental architecture, spectacular or vernacular architecture – these classifications are unimportant.

A form is just a tool for articulating a structure, while a structure is a record which successfully or clumsily synthesizes a defined ideological message regardless of the designer's will. A form is a symptom, not the cause or – which would be a more erroneous assumption – the objective of architecture. A discussion on a form is a discussion on the generator of sensual stimuli, not on what becomes a durable component of the environment. It is easier to notice misleading trails when we search for the echoes of historical forms which return here and there in the shape of sometimes undistinguishable copies with a totally different semantic load.

The durability of architecture must be considered as a phenomenon limited by man's will and consciousness. In a sense, an architect is – as I have already mentioned – just a catalyst of a reaction produced by a tension between a community which uses a given habitation and components created by nature. It equally concerns works fixed in a specific reality and virtual ones seemingly unrelated to the material world but borrowing the rules of the natural environment, even purely mathematical ones. Fleetingness must be seen as an immanent process of existence because even the extension of demolished, nonexistent architecture – included in the cherished memory of any community – will eventually find its end. However, it causes two different, interesting consequences. One of them is the variable state of architecture and its interpretation which causes the sudden or slow disappearance of one of its aspects. Even if the rest remains unmodified, and the stamp of exploitation has not been left yet, we cannot talk about an untouched object. Partial decline becomes the closure of an entity in a defined state, the liquidation of the possibility of preserving the imagined and perhaps desired status quo. The other result is acknowledging and sanctioning the rules of coexistence, characteristic of the patterns found in nature, in an artificial product of civilization. Yielding a place, erasing, even conscious forgetting may not be just negative – sometimes it is the only way of coping with complexity, by cleansing, resetting the conditions of a given location [4]. Then, fleetingness is like human oblivion – the last possibility of being saved from excessive items of information and stimuli which requires filtering and spotting whatever is worth preserving although it is not always successful in relation to all that is important.

It seems to me that one of the possible manners of interpreting architecture and finding its meaning

is the consideration of three problems which I would call: the problem of deformation with a measurement, the problem of purposefulness and the problem of absorption and conciliation.

Firstly, the comprehension of architecture must allow for the fact that a semiotic interpretation of an architectonic object – preceding its construction assuming *a priori* that saturation with a meaning will be successful – causes such a deformation of an architectural value that the effect of a design inevitably departs from the initial premises. It resembles the physical principle of indetermination transferred onto the ground of cultural and environmental relations. The problem of measurement may only be overcome by accepting vagueness – a design is just an approximation of its premises, a conventional authorial interpretation provoking a record of those values which can but need not be similar to the architect's intentions. Fortunately, the awareness of the inability to define the manner of the functioning of architecture deterministically becomes the foundation of a search for those elements of programming and designing architecture for which we can formulate a definition or get closer to it.

Secondly, the problem of purposefulness indicates the necessity of cleansing the process of designing and analyzing architecture from those components of this analysis which would be immeasurable. Individual criteria, esthetical as well, may be freely applied for verifying the degree of defining the purposefulness of architectural actions provided that an architect is able to keep the evaluation of his design within a given criterion if this evaluation departs from an objectivized layout of reference, i.e. a mechanism of assessment which may reveal the values of the design and give a chance of an objective assessment or at least an objectivized one (relativized to a redefined interpretation of criteria). Purposefulness reflects an architect's need or obligation to look for the factual causative

forces, motivations, initiating factors, guiding intentions in the process of searching for an architectural solution or the process of assessing or analyzing an architectonic object.

Thirdly, the problem of absorption and conciliation expresses an ability to synthesize what an architect plans with what he will never be able to control. A designer's objectives may not be fully coherent with the potential of the environment and real conditions defining architecture. Analogically, the goals of an analyst of architecture may not follow the objectives architecture implements in reality (according to the designer's idea or against it). In both cases, the ability of a subject (an architect, an analyst or a researcher) to accept uncontrolled conditions and learn the truth about a discipline from them is principal. The absorption of these conditions in the process of designing or evaluating the effects of design is a necessity and leads to negotiating an attitude towards an architectural problem which can respect the coexistence of durability and fleetingness that is natural in architecture.

Schroedinger's memorable intellectual experiment, which challenged some directions in the field of the sciences, showed that even a clever mechanism *reductio ad absurdum* used out of seemingly logical

motives, considering a separated frame of reference as the leading frame (logic and intuition – in fact – based on experience), could not endure genuine observations which confirmed the multi-state character of the examined components of matter. The cat was dead and alive at the same moment. The solution did not lie in the choice of a reason, in a discussion on a preferential scenario of events, but in the acceptance of the observed behaviours of objects, of the existence of apparent paradoxes and an ability to search for what distinguishes a real paradox from an apparent one.

Surprisingly, a quest for absolute patterns in architecture, for esthetical or systemic canons often finishes with finding a collection of principles which prove the inability to introduce such patterns and the inbuilt resistance of a discipline to any symptoms of determinism. An equally surprising fact is that the presented relativistic (in the strict sense of the word) inspirations or the relativist background of reality, suggesting the abolishment of the principles, introduce a new rule which has pretensions to being common and gives an insight into relations naturally appearing and happening within an examined discipline. Schroedinger's cat was the teacher of those who found courage to treat it as something more than a mere intellectual joke.

## ENDNOTES

[1] An analogy to this idea may be Massumi's rumination on the coexistence of the real and abstract sphere, their intermingling in life, also with reference to architecture (Massumi, 2005, 256).

[2] This observation is consistent with Saunders's remarks related to the need for changing the quality of the criteria

and principles of formulating architectural criticism (Saunders, 2007, 146–147).

[3] Cf. Barełkowski (2010, 239).

[4] Cf. Battle and McCarthy's ruminations on the cycles of the functioning of cities and their ability to endure in the structure of a sustained process (Battle and McCarthy, 2001, 73–75 and 88–95).

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