THE DURABILITY OF ARCHITECTURE. SEVERAL REMARKS

The topic of duration of the architecture evokes associations with the concept of time. In the 20th century have specified two different attitudes. Giedion understood architecture as the spacetime. Norberg-Schulz solved an architecture with a time of human existence. This avoids the explicit definition of the term architecture. Distinguishing architectural space as a place and as a road, the latter case gives the opportunity to show the multiplicity of time’s layers in architecture.

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Nothing exists that does not exist, wrote Czesław Miłosz (To the Hazelwood, 1997). If it is true, architecture exists and endures as well. The durability of architecture depends on what it really is. As the discovery of God’s order recorded in Ezekiel, architecture is eternal. In the twentieth century, the catastrophist Oswald Spengler left no room for illusions: People were – and are – too superficial and cowardly to bear the fact of the fleetingness of everything that lives. So, they decorate things with the rosy optimism of incredible progress, conceal them with literature, hide them under the cover of ideals – the important thing is not to see them. But fleetingness, appearance and disappearance are the forms of everything that is real: from the stars, whose fate we cannot predict, to the unformed human mass on our planet. The individual life of an animal, a plant or a man is as impermanent as the lives of peoples and cultures. Every creature falls down, every thought, every deed, every invention sinks into oblivion. (Spengler O., 1990). These days, after so many disasters, some people claim that everything is fluent, including architecture, which can be seen in numerous designs and implementations; others say that finding some remains of values in a pile of debris and reconstructing them carefully can save us.

The theme of the durability of architecture asks the question about relationships between architecture and time which was repeated twice in the twentieth century. Architecture seems to be beyond time too frequently. It is an event, a show watched from one point, even from many points which are motionless. This motionlessness may result from the fear of passing or boldness while trying to touch the absolute. In his work, Siegfried Giedion includes architecture in a scientific, physicalistic concept of the space-time of the universe (Giedion S., 1968). In the title of his book, Christian Norberg-Schulz restored a homocentric point of view by exchanging Giedion’s time as an element of space-time for being – the time of human existence marked by the rhythms of pulse, heartbeat and breath and constrained by worldly life as well as memory and imagination (Norberg-Schulz Ch., 1971). Human time includes numerous dimensions, also those cognized and examined by science. Time and the motion inside it determined by the rhythm can be received as linear unidirectional, as closed or open,
segmental, recurrent, intentional, punctual, pulsing, continuous. This diversity of the time of human existence is also expressed in an architectural space. He restored the spiritual dimension of architecture, too, by the concretization of the notion of genius loci usually treated as elusive (Norberg-Schultz Ch., 1980). He did it with the help of five categories where time plays the key role. The category of a thing is the most obvious. Another category – light – makes us realize that we see things in a suitable light. The dynamic of light introduces the category of time, whereas the related rhythm leads to the category of order. The last category is character which directly indicates the spirit of a place. We notice time owing to the diverse changeability of light. In order to grasp this diversity, Norberg-Schulz introduced three kinds of genius loci: romantic, cosmic and classic which put each category in order. Romantic time is lively and dynamic. Surprise depends on the timetable, while general instability is emphasized by contrasts between the seasons and frequent changes of weather. Cosmic time is static rather than dynamic. The temporal dimension does not introduce any contradictions – it approximates eternity. Classic time is neither static nor dynamic – it can be called organic. The regular rhythms of day and night have got a ritual meaning (Królikowski J. T., 1999). The architectural space including a multitude of durability situations belongs to the structures of times. Time in a specific architectural space is usually individual and combines romantic, cosmic and classic time in various proportions.

Duration is not just the durability of a form and a substance like in a pyramid. Duration happens through the rebirth of forms, repetition, recreation from a new substance. Ancient and contemporary Japanese architecture gives a lot of examples of such metabolism of a form. The ambiguously assessed rebuilding of the Old Town in Warsaw proves that architecture endures through inventory and painting record as well as through the record of memories and feelings. The ambiguity of assessments results from different comprehensions of the durability of architecture. In this case, we mean the durability of a sign and a meaning. We know cases when the meaning itself caused the end of the existence of architecture, for instance the Orthodox cathedrals in Saski Square in Warsaw and Litewski Square in Lublin. The durability of an object may be intended or accidental. Sometimes architecture created as momentary, ephemeral, occasional lasts much longer than the situation for which it was formed. The durability of a trend, a style, architectural tendencies does not result from replacing one form with another. In modernist days, it seemed that ancient orders would not return; in postmodernist days, it was thought that the epoch of block bodies was all over. The Renaissance was expected to be through with Gothic which, in fact, lasted for long years waiting for neo-Gothic.

Notions live, develop and vanish. The notion of the durability of architecture depends on people rather than on architecture. Witold Krassowski reminded us that architecture appeared in Poland when Christianity was adopted together with the Mediterranean culture (Krassowski W., 1985). We may venture a hypothesis that the notion of architecture will persist as long as Christianity. Too frequently, an architectural space is perceived from one point of view. Even if it is watched from several viewpoints, they are not interrelated. Architecture is not just a place and a body but also a way which Norberg-Schultz exemplifies with the Renaissance central edifice and the Gothic cathedral. Architecture as a way may be interpreted in many contemporary buildings. Then an architectural space becomes the shield of a number of repeated and recurring ways which disclose sequences of views.
There are few cases when this way is described by its user as well. It concerns the Seminary of the Community of the Resurrection in Kraków whose member, Dariusz Tabor, indicated a close relationship between ways defined in an architectural space and the seminarians’ spiritual ways [1]. We are all on our ways but being in a seminary is a special way, a dynamic, a transition, in religious terms – Passover. This Passover takes place in a specific architectural space, on a way. The way of architecture extends between the City and Nature, between Civilization and Creation, while its direction is a virtual Exodus, leaving the City in pursuit of a desirable objective. In order to answer a question about the objective, we must traverse the Way of Four Gates. Leaving the city, we go towards the seminary which is fenced by a tremendous wall with some clearances. We notice a gap in the wall – it is the Gate of Initiation. It introduces us to the mysteries of architecture. A question arises if it also introduces us to the mysteries of life. Dariusz Tabor puts the mysteries of architecture on a par with the mysteries of life. He shows that initiation in the Christian meaning means baptism, sinking into the torment and death of Jesus Christ, a fundamental moment in our lives. The first gate is the Gate of Initiation. It is a wide gap in the wall which leads to the Courtyard of Longings. According to Dariusz Tabor, it symbolizes the dilemmas of a young man who is approaching the decision to enter the seminary. Another gate is called the Gate of Hope. It is formed by a rip in the wall which reveals a monumental portal leading to the House whose three wings form the Courtyard of Youth. The House is occupied by seminarians and their teachers, by hope which accompanies youth and the seminary formation. The third gate – the Gate of Knowledge is created by a clearance between two staircases of the character of towers located on the wing edges. The gate is crossed by a cascade of stairs hiding an assembly hall connected with an educational block from behind, dominated by the tall, massive seminary church. Knowledge combines two realities – Sacerdotium, a church with prayer and liturgy, and Studium – an assembly hall and an educational block with a library meant for study and a scientific search for Wisdom. We should not separate study from prayer because they are both contemplation, the highest human activity. However, we must pay attention to the internal directions of prayer and study. The first one is vertical, goes up, its picture is the dominant of a chapel, whereas study is horizontal just like the library edifice. These lines can be connected when, climbing the stairs to the mastabah top, we see a cross inside. The horizon of limestone crossed by the Resurrection Column is the meeting point of Norwid’s two lines: earthly (horizontal) and heavenly (descending from the sky). The mystery of the Cross, the cross itself has become a gate, the Gate of Faith. It can be noticed if you know, it can be seen if you believe. Dariusz Tabor writes, It is the fruit of Initiation, Hope, Knowledge. Our destination point, the end of the road. Christ Resurrected, triumphing, eternal, eschatological. Further on, there is only brightness, eternity. The Resurrection of Jesus gives a more profound meaning to our choices, efforts, prayers, studies. A Christian is a man with an eschatological perspective. He is a ‘sighted’ man. He is a prophet. His life is a constant eschatological prophecy. Our lives ought to be like that (Tabor D., 1994). The interpretation of an architectural space may depart from the contents given by the designer (Buszko A., 2006), but it makes architecture endure. If it is supposed to persist, it should lead to eternity, should be the gate to eternity. In human time, architecture persists when it is understood, interpreted, experienced, when it leads to understanding and experiencing – it all persists in time. Haste and speed kill and annihilate architecture. Entering and traversing an architectural space needs time. Time must persist.
ENDNOTES


BIBLIOGRAPHY


