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SHADES OF INTERPRETING THE TRUTH OF ARCHITECTURE

ODCIENIE INTERPRETACJI PRAWDY ARCHITEKTURY

Abstract

Architecture, being an imaginary, fictitious interpretation of reality, has a natural thread of particular deceit at its very origin. On the other hand, an object, as a medium of information transmission, can present or interpret its actual structure in a transparent way. The essence of the research is to indicate the possibility of evaluating the interpretation of truth in architecture, in the context of its various aspects. The stages of simulation and simulacrum, used as analysis tools, indicate types of interpretation. Determining them facilitates establishing the goal to be pursued and the direction of actions and methods in design.

Keywords: architecture, simulation, simulacra, truth in architecture

Streszczenie:

Architektura, będąc fikcyjną interpretacją rzeczywistości – ma w samym początku naturalny wątek swobodnego fałszu. Z drugiej strony – obiekt, jako medium przekazu informacji, może w transparentny sposób przedstawiać rzeczywistą swoją strukturę bądź ją interpretować. Istotą badań jest wskazanie możliwości oceny interpretacji prawdy w architekturze, w kontekście różnorodnych jej aspektów. Etapy symulacji i symulakry, zastosowane jako narzędzia do analizy – wskazują rodzaje interpretacji. Wyznaczenie ich ułatwia określanie celu, ku któremu się podąża oraz kierunku działań i metod w projektowaniu.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, symulacja, symulakry, prawda w architekturze

*Appearance is a grave matter, not only because of what it makes "transparent",
but also because if it is not as it should be, in unfavourable social conditions
it may transform us into an evil man...*

Thomas Carlyle,
Sartor Resartus

The truth exists – only fictions are invented.

Georges Braque,
Le jour et la nuit: Cahier 1917–1952

1. THOUGHT

"Nature is so uncomfortable," Oscar Wilde wrote in *The Decay of Lying*. "Grass is hard and dumpy and damp, and full of dreadful black insects. [...] If Nature had been comfortable, mankind would never have invented architecture." The links between Architecture

and the broadly construed context are complemented by the Thought of an architect Dariusz Kozłowski: “Architecture is building fictional things so that they look like real things”¹.

Of the many definitions – Architecture as a consequence of Bruno Zevi’s reflections on the separation of space – the author considered the most suitable. Thus, its conscious construction consists in associating Thought with Space. The words of Szymon Syrkus that “it is not only for utilitarian purposes, [...] it is for abstract purposes”² are also extremely relevant. So, there is no Architecture without inspiration and interpretation. They both construct it – innovatively, shaping new spaces – or imitatively, resonating functioning, commonly existing stereotypical solutions, reproducing non-originalities in an unoriginal way... Separation of space is made by architectural means which, when deliberately used, are ultimately an emanation of all other activities. On the one hand, the idea, consistency in its realisation and harmony between the designed elements of the structure of the whole, and on the other hand, inspirations and references to contents other than Architecture, which can be emanated as a means of communication – are important for the conscious shaping of the idea of an object. *Concinnitas*,³ the Alberti’s harmony of architecture contemporarily understood as a harmony of the whole in a structure, i.e. a specific relevance in everything that impacts the space of an object, is expressed in the right proportions in spatial shape, utility, adequacy of form and content... *Truth and untruth* in the presentation of the individual elements and the interrelationships between them are intrinsic attributes of assessment.

Invenzione – is an Alberti’s literary idea in the treatise on painting.⁴ Architecture is a permanent story. An object or concept is a means of this *invenzione*, an idea for a narrative and, at the same time, a means of information transfer. The *space of house-building* and *city* treated equally, transferring information and impacting people’s behaviour may be constructed in multiple ways. The narrative conveyed to the user is the shaping of space. It influences people’s behaviour in a constructed structure; it can inspire or suggest types of actions, their sequence and locations. Also here, the concept of interpretation of truth and untruth is crucial.

Georges Braque claimed that “the truth (already) exists – only fictions are invented” – in this sense, everything that is imitative is a kind of lie.⁵ Architecture, being an imaginary, fictitious interpretation of reality, has, therefore, a natural thread of certain deceit at its very origin. As it is the case of any other imitation, even the one initiated by an inspiration other than the original. Contextual – it is an imitation of the interpreted environment, and acontextually abstract – it is a pretence of an alleged lack of inspiration by anything as if it was possible at all. Being an artificial representation of reality, architecture shows it in various ways. An object, as a medium of information transmission, may transparently present its actual structure or interpret it in various ways.

¹ D. Kozłowski, International Scientific Conference, *Definiowanie przestrzeni architektonicznej*, Tezy, Kraków, 2015; also: Pretekst, Zeszyty KAM, nr 1, Kraków, 2004, p. 4.

² S. Syrkus, *Kwartalnik Modernistów, Praesens*, czerwiec 1926, no. 1, pp. 6–16.

³ Alberti Leon Battista, *De reaedificatoria libri decem*, 1541.

⁴ Alberti Leon Battista, *De pictura*, 1435.

⁵ *La vérité existe. On n’invente que le mensonge*; Braque Georges; *Le jour et la nuit: Cahiers 1917–52*: <https://citations.ouest-france.fr/citation-georges-braque/verite-existe-invente-mensonge-3373.html> (accessed 19.10.2020).

Therefore, the truth in Architecture manifests itself to the observer and the user transparently, in a coherent structure of the whole concept or object, in the conformity of the formed space, in the adequacy of all its elements: the skin-facade with the internal and external separations of the space, as well as the constructed *form with the practical and ideological content of the whole*. It is a *specific falsehood* – in the lack of transparency of the message, as well as in the lack of this consistency and in the interpretations, concerning the construction of the structure of oneself.

2. CONCEPTS OF INTERPRETATION

The essence of Architecture is its emergence alongside the development of social thought. Apart from the keywords, universal concepts are also important, whose interpretation in architecture significantly helps to move when quoting Jean Baudrillard “...there is no map and territory, the difference between what is real and what is imagined vanishes, and the existing signs of hyperreality – interpret the reality.”⁶

Let us look at the interpretation of selected terms, which referred to the Architecture, due to the adequacy of the expression of the essence of the phenomenon, may be useful in assessing the Truth or the Lie of the presented spatial concepts. These are:

- *semantic deconstructivism* – a reinterpretation of meanings, a kind of semantic juggling; it reverses the meaning of concepts (good-evil, truth-lie, beauty-ugliness, usefulness-uselessness);
- *discordianism* – in the case of religion, it parodies monotheistic religions: Buddhism and Hinduism; in the case of architecture, by creating a kind of patchwork, it reproduces or parodies fragments of other people’s works;
- *pataphor* – is an extremely extended metaphor, it creates an absolutely new context of understanding, forging a world where the original, primary text of non-figurative language ensuring ontological safety is abandoned.

Other terms are – *post-truth*, and also, a growing *cult of alleged professionalism*...

A specific common architectural amuse does not allow an incidental user to see the full content recorded in the architectural object. It also does not allow to see the truth or lie of Architecture. It is obvious – similar to advanced musical or literary works, whose perception is multi-layered, depending on the sensitivity and intellectual potential of the listener or reader.

According to Thomas Carlyle, “[...] Appearance is a grave matter, not only because of what it makes ‘transparent,’ but also because if it is not as it should be, in unfavourable social conditions it may transform us into an evil man – clothing is an emblem of soul.”⁷ In this piece, Thomas Carlyle formulated a kind of universal truth, inspiring further comparisons. External logic suggests an internal one, lack of external logic implies lack of the internal one. The outfit reveals integrity or corruption. It may indicate righteousness and aesthetic harmony or demagogically demoralise the user and the observer. Its

⁶ J. Baudrillard, *Symulakry i Symulacja*, Sic, 2005, p. 6.

⁷ T. Carlyle, *Sartos Resartus*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2000; also <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1051/1051-h/1051-h.htm> (accessed 19.10.2020).

incompatibility with the interior suggests a lie. Clothing is a part of an architectural object, the outfit, i.e. the external appearance is its skin. When, as Rem Koolhaas claims, buildings functioning in the public space become a specific form of public enlightenment then the understanding of the importance of the message concerning clothing and the emblem of the soul gains a significance.

The outfit is a temporary staffage or a materially durable facade concealing the shaped mechanism of the object. It covers it from the outside as a façade or covers its internal structure inside. In special cases, it combines this temporality with a permanent superficiality. The incompatibility of the external appearance with the structure of the spatial system and, regardless of interpretation, the conversion of the substantiality of the object content message into eristic suggests a lie. An exterior façade or interior design coating, shaped differently from the space concealed behind it, also enable various references to the truth, including those referring to the stages set by simulacra and simulation. One can, of course, contemplate whether the clothing influences the character of a person or whether it is a kind of emanation of their character. In Architecture, as it can be a means of communication – clothing is an emanation of a character constructing It, it also influences the behaviour and feelings of users.

Two objects by Jaques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, the *Allianz Arena* in Munich and the *Messe Basel* in Basel illustrate that durability, transparency and simulacrum define the character of the skin and the interior of the object and that their mutual relations have different effects on the specific, *added value*.⁸ They point out that in architectural art, we may allow a temporal or partial transgression, authorising the creation of works from the boundary of sense and dream, and that today it is adjacent to the shows ruling the souls of the “trends-of-reality” participants. However, the neighbourhood does not mean that there is no border; on the contrary, there is no borderless neighbourhood.⁹ The colour changing of the *Arena* abstract façade, made of inflated plastic cushions, ideally emphasises its lightness. The form suspended in the air, created by the façade – hides the real character and function of the object’s interior, reversing the meaning of previously understood signs, provoking an ontological discussion about the evanescence of the unambiguous perception of an object in time. This is a yet another step towards the perception of unreality, more real than reality since space which is separated by the material *skin* of the casing – can after all also be constructed by immaterial elements of the emanation of information: temperature, colour, light, texture, sound. An immaterial fabric may also be the *skin* itself. The next stage is the already realised examples of synthesis of real and virtual space.¹⁰

The character of the content conveyed by the *Messe Basel* is also constructed by the *skin* – a multi-faceted curtain that opens above the City Lounge square towards the sky, in a gigantically inverted crater. The façade separates from the context and simultaneously hides the object, dominating the perception of other elements with abstract content.

⁸ G. Nawrot, *Concrete in architectural space. Skin versus structure* [in:] *Definiowanie przestrzeni architektonicznej. Transmutacja betonu*, vol. 5, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Krakowskiej, Kraków 2017, p. 91.

⁹ S. Gzell, *Wykłady o współczesnej urbanistyce*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Warszawskiej, Warszawa 2015.

¹⁰ The reference is creation of a specific Liquid Architecture described by Marcos Novak in *Liquid Architecture in Cyberspace* ([in:] M. Benedikt (ed.), *Cyberspace. First steps*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1991).

“To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true.”¹¹ Such an approximation in describing the essence of truth, expressed in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* is close to a common understanding. The truth, in the common understanding, is not subject to redefinition – it is unambiguous: its shades do not exist; however, there are subjectively expressed shades of its interpretation. To put the truth in the formula is just to relativise it. For Thomas Aquinas – *veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*, for Oscar Wilde this *veritas* is a matter of form, for William Blake it is *everything possible to be believed* and for the American science-fiction writer Ursula Kroeber Le Guin – it is imagination. All of them find references in architecture.

3. INTERPRETATIONS OF REALITY

These four interpretations can be associated in turn with signs representing successive stages of Jean Baudrillard’s simulation.¹² The first one – simulacrum is a true image of reality. The second one is a distortion of this reality: however, indicating its existence, it reflects the relationship of the constructed copy with reality. The third masks the lack of deep reality, pretending to be a true copy of it: it is a copy without the original. The fourth is a pure *simulacrum*: the imitation has no connection with reality, the signs of hyperreality only mirror other signs that claim to be the reality.

The concept of truth in Architecture seems to be unambiguous. The creative discussion about It, expressed by the construction of new spaces, is, therefore, a discussion about aesthetic or structural interpretation. A creative Architect, doctor *mirabilis* – is a master of appearances in creating wonders of this interpretation, in the perception of which – unreality seems to be more real than reality. Its shades are undoubtedly attempts at relativisation: from the most extreme, peculiar semantic deconstructivisms, through Discordianisms, to pataphors... This applies to the Thought, Space and relations created through their association... Also, Vitruvius’s *firmitas*, *utilitas*, *venustas*, where strength should stand still, the functionality should be legitimate and functional for the community, and beauty should delight people and raise their spirits.

Therefore, Architecture is a language capable of conveying meaning and influencing users’ behaviour, and an architectural object is a specific *place*, in a separate space. Its form and structure are an emanation of various tasks that it can perform: those of unequivocally utilitarian nature as well as references going beyond this field. The latter construct from it a means of conveying information about the professed values, references to the place where it is located and its closest neighbourhood, presented requirements of social prestige... The information provided may be synergic, and modern telecommunication and information technologies make them concern both the material and virtual world.¹³ Every single one can be examined individually in terms of truth or untruth. In the case of a collection of information that constructs in the mind of the observer, the interpretation of the overall image of an object or architectural ensemble, the following can be understood:

¹¹ Arystoteles, *Metaphysica. Metafizyka*. vol. I. Lublin, 2000, p. 207

¹² J. Baudrillard, *Symulakry i Symulacja*, Sic, Warszawa 2005, pp. 11–12.

¹³ G. Nawrot, *Simultaneity and compilation versus image of a place*. Budownictwo i Architektura, 2018, vol.17, no 2, pp. 29–38.

- the truthfulness of the set of information constructing a concise transmission of an object's image
- compatibility of individual information with other information, within the internal structure of the whole.

In the first case, the essence is to understand architecture as a medium that affects the observer: being a summary image of the whole, it shows true or untrue content which the observer is asked to read as true. In the other case, a specific professional efficiency in the impressionistic synergy of the message, expressed in the harmony of constructing the whole, i.e. the mutual compatibility of individual elements: the facade with the usable division of the internal space, the adequacy of the form with the structure, the colour of materials with their physical properties, etc. In the case of the first one, a specific “dressing up” of Architecture in subsequent interpretations is crucial for understanding its truthfulness or deceit in the context of Jean Baudrillard's four stages of simulation. Four spatial assumptions can be indicated as their illustration.

The first is the *Lanckorona Houses*, designed by JEMS. These are contemporary, contextual, single-family housings for residents whose houses suffered a building disaster as a result of a landslide. The project can be an illustration of the first stage of simulation. The form of the buildings is appropriate for a coherent and transparently presented structure, content and functional arrangement. Despite contemporary articulation of space creation, it provides users with a sense of ontological security. The simulacrum is a true image of reality.

The second is the *Vitra Design Museum*, designed by Gerry Partners. The object is an example of semantic deconstructivism in architecture. The acontextual form, inadequate to the spatial layout of the building expresses a specific artistic manifesto. The inscription *Ceci n'est pas un Musée* (it is not a museum) – placed on the wall of the museum building – emphasises the fictionality of the message. The object illustrates the second stage of simulation: the externally perceived form of the building is not a reflection of the internal spatial and functional system, suggesting, however, the existence of such a system, it reflects the non-existent relationships of the constructed copy of the alleged reality with the real one. The simulacrum is a distortion of reality.

The third one is the corridor *Promenade of the Oliwa Park* in Gdańsk, designed by Multidecor, an example of contemporarily created immaterial or hybrid (material and immaterial) space separation and relativisation of a place which is an apparent metaphor of a compact *edifice*. To say that an “object” is architectural, is of course, questionable in the light of the definition of Architecture according to the canons of the Vitruvius triad. The promenade is not a permanently separated space, and its usefulness is not unequivocal. Separation and usability are suitable for the temporary need to create events. They are subject to a real and metaphorical “extinction” when they are not needed. The perception, especially at night, of the whole “facade” suggests a volumetric object, reflecting the third stage of simulation. The simulacrum masks the lack of deep reality, pretending to be an exact copy of it: it is the one without the original.

The fourth one is a contemporary *Rehabilitation Centre* in Łapalice, designed by an unknown author. It is believed that the functioning name does not reflect the intended purpose of the building and the real author is not an architect, but an investor, sculptor and owner of a furniture company who fulfils his dream. The project (currently approx. 6,000 m²) was started based on a 170 m² building permit for a detached house and continued intuitively,

without an approved design. The object is an example of architectural Discordianism. By creating a specific patchwork, composed of seemingly historicising elements, it imitates and interprets – frequently unconsciously parodying fragments of other people’s works. It is also an architectural pataphor – it creates an entirely new context of understanding and a world in which the original, model text of non-figurative language is abandoned. The incompatibility of the external form with the useable and ideological content of the whole is of crucial importance. It is specific deceit – in the lack of transparency of the message, as well as in the lack of conformity and in the interpretations concerning the construction of the structure of itself. The concept reflects the fourth stage of simulation: a pure *simulacrum* where the imitation has no connection with reality, and the signs of hyperreality reflect only other signs that claim to be the reality.

The key to evaluating the truth or deceit is the reasonability of the design activities undertaken, as well as the text of the message perceived by observers and users and its conformity with reality. Beauty is not always an emanation of truth... The specific, beautiful timbre of the voice of Architecture, in which every word sounds *like truth* does not have to be truth – expressed in an innovative concept, perfection of the technique, nobility of proportions and durability of materials used – tempts to make further interpretations of shades of illusion...

4. SUMMARY

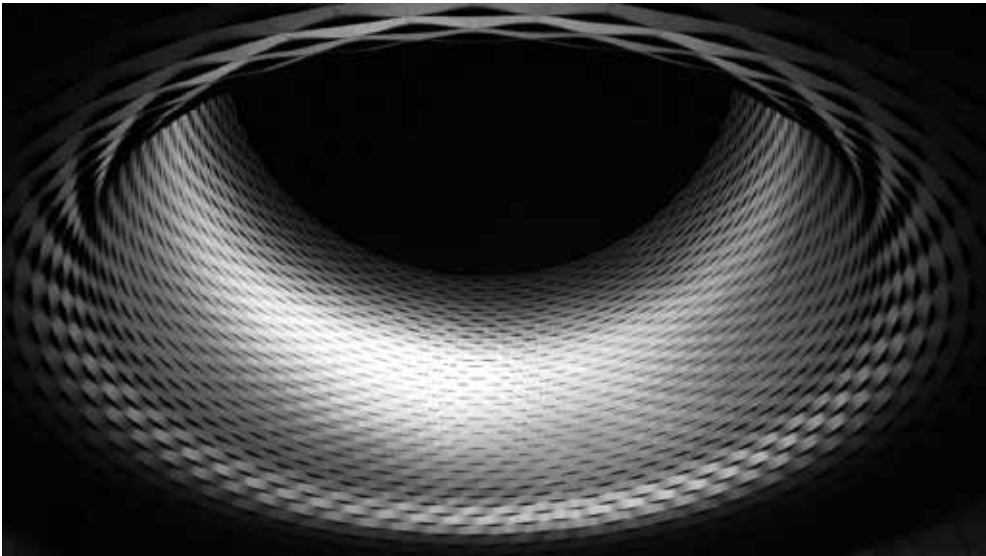
The conscious construction of an architectural concept consists in associating Thought with Space. The essence of evaluating truth or lie in Architecture can be reduced to two criteria. The first one – general, expresses the essence of undertaking all design activities and the second one – interprets them.

In the first case, assuming that Architecture, being an imaginary, fictitious interpretation of reality, having a false thread at its very origin – It is, like every imitation, a kind of lie.

In the second case, the interpretation of the constructed space is evaluated – the truthfulness of the message, expressed in the adequacy of the elements constructing its separation:

- the spatial and formal solutions applied, in the context of the time of the creation of the object and the development of social thought,
- the interpretation by the object structure of the Thoughts and Information transmitted,
- the perceived wholeness of the object, the conformity of the façade appearance and structure,
- the cohesiveness of signs occurring in the structure of the concept, their mutual adequacy and adequacy to the essence of the structure.

Debussy once said that music begins where the word loses its power to express the inexpressible. Words can express the truth or a lie. The same is true of architecture. It can suggestively convey thoughts, feelings, sensations, moods, impressions that are not communicable with words. True or false, and also those that do not exist...



- III. 1. Clothing is a part of an architectural object, the outfit, or external appearance, is its skin. Appearing as a temporary staffage or materially durable facade coating, it hides the formed mechanism of the object behind it. It covers it as a façade or shields its internal structure inside. In special cases, it combines transience with a permanent semblance. Here, too, the concept of interpretation of truth and untruth is crucial. *Allianz Arena* in Munich; design by Jaques Herzog & Pierre de Meuron; photo: G. Nawrot



III. 2. Architecture, using various inspirations and being an artificial representation of reality, can however, interpret it in different ways. Two inspirational buildings with similar functions: the acontextually abstract facade of the *Brandhorst Museum* (designed by Sauerbruch Hutton) and the facade of the *Swiss Museum of Transport*, Lucerne, (designed by Annette Gigon & Guyer Architekten); photo: G. Nawrot



III. 3. Contextual single-family housing. The first stage of simulation: the form of the buildings is adequate to the structure, content and functional layout. The simulacrum is a true picture of reality. *Houses in Lanckorona*; design by JEMS; photo by G. Nawrot



III. 4. Semantic deconstructivism. The acontextual form of a kind of artistic manifesto. The second stage of simulation: the externally perceived form is not a reflection of the internal spatial and functional system, suggesting, however, the existence of such a system, it reflects the non-existent relationships of the constructed copy of the alleged reality with the real one. The simulacrum is a distortion of reality. *Vitra Design Museum*; designed by Gerry Partners; photo: G. Nawrot



- III. 5. Immaterial or hybrid separations of the space. The third stage of simulation. The simulacrum masks the lack of deep reality, pretending to be an exact copy of it – it is without the original. A corridor *Promenade of the Oliwa Park* in Gdańsk; design by Multidecor, photo by G. Nawrot



- III. 6. An example of architectural Discordianism – a kind of patchwork composed of seemingly historicising elements parodies fragments of other people's works. Also: architectural pataphor – creates an entirely new context of understanding and a world in which the original, primary text of non-figurative language is abandoned. The incompatibility of the external form with the functional and ideological content of the whole. A specific falsehood – in the lack of transparency of the message, as well as in the lack of conformity and in the interpretations concerning the construction of the structure of oneself. The fourth stage of simulation: pure simulacrum – the imitation has no connection with reality; the signs of *hyperreality* reflect only other signs, claiming to be the reality. Contemporary *Rehabilitation Centre* in Łapalice; designed by an unknown author; photo: G. Nawrot

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