

# Fractal Opus: An Echo of Portoghesi - His Listening to Space

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**Abstract:** *Paolo Portoghesi's opus can be perceived as segmented, fragmented, where a matrix is formed in the form of a fractal whose parts are a reduced copy of the whole. His creativity is such that it is a matter of a historian, an architect as well as a theoretician, where it is difficult to determine the primacy of dominance of an individual position. Therefore, the fractal becomes a method of perceiving space, time, theory, realized architectural work. In this research paper, it starts from individual premises such as the fractal and the work of Paolo Portoghesi itself - and, whether it is historical, architectural or theoretical, would not a disjunctive judgment about the architectural position be made by the method of deduction.*

**Keywords:** Portoghesi, fractal, architectural position, disjunction

## 1. Introduction

For the term fractal itself, it can be said that it is a "geometric figure" that can be broken down into smaller parts so that each of them represents a somewhat reduced copy of the whole. It is also said that such a character is similar to itself. The term was derived by Benoit Mandel in 1975 from the Latin word *fractus*, which means "broken", "divided". [21]

A fractal as well as a fragment, part or segment is a specific structure in general, independent of the architectural discourse. Thus, in psychoanalytic theory, an empirical discourse, as Heinz Kohut points out, fragmentation occurs spatially in the form of a loss of bodily cohesiveness, as well as in time in the form of a loss of the sense of the duration of the time axis. [3] There is an instability of pre - psychological entities body - mind - self which, according to Kohut, represent the stage of autoeroticism. A healthy counterpart to fragmentation is cohesion, which in psychoanalytic theory represents a converging - mirror - like approving object. The self, as the center of the psychological universe, cannot be known absolutely by means of introspection and empathy, as a method of psychoanalysis as an empirical science, and thus the self represents a relatively low - level psychoanalytic abstraction. It is, in fact, a permanent structure within the mind that has its own continuity in time, it has temporal contours as well as a psychic location. Fragmentation, fractality is the lack of integrating parts by the self - object in childhood, the loss of continuity in time and cohesiveness in space [3].

Therefore, in the architectural discourse, a fractal, fragment, segment can be perceived as an incoherent structure that superposes with other "substructures" thus building an inconsistent whole where, just like in the case of the psychoanalytic post, it is characterized by discontinuity in time and incoherence in space.

## 2. Methodology and Objectives

The methodology of this research work is based on the deductive method where it starts from general attitudes or premises such as the psychoanalytical fragmentation of the self and the premises of Paolo Portoghesi himself and goes

towards an individual conclusion, a conclusion or a syllogism. Syllogisms can be hypothetical, categorical and disjunctive. It can be said that this work can be based on a disjunctive judgment that consists of several predicates, i. e. actions that may or may not be excluded. In this case, it is about fragmentation, listening, ie. copying, and mirroring. The problem, as the starting point of this work, can be seen in the form of an undetermined architectural position, specifically Paolo Portoghesi. As a goal of further research, one can assume the incorporation of the author's position in some of the discourses, whether it is contemporary or not.

## 3. Portoghesi – the problem of an undefined discursive position

Portoghesi is born in 1932 in Rome. It is not just about an architect, but about a true erudite who dealt with both history and theory. He possesses some kind of retention memory [13], so that in addition to intuition as an architect and associativeness, he also has the knowledge of a historian. For Portoghesi, what is confusing for some is a creative act. His opus was created as a parallel between the past and everyday life. Since he was born on the outskirts of the city, the protest against the architecture of the outskirts of the city was also born. [13] It can be said, and according to psychoanalysis, history in him is the psychoanalyst, from which criticism is born. In the beginning it was a "clock", as Portoghesi points out, in part "L infanzia delle machine", referring to the time - measuring machine, the clepsydra. Portoghesi alludes to this issue by thinking about the watch, ie. the passage of time itself and the construction of both the house and the city. He is impressed by Proust as a writer and his vision of time and space. Thus, in "The Search for Lost Time" or more precisely in "Combray", Proust talks about the displacement of the self outside the time - space axis, since if there is any displacement outside the protocol of time and space, the subject, i. e. the hero of the work is surprised by the existence of the primordial sense of existence through space - time travel itself.

Paolo Portoghesi in his theoretical, as it is supposed to be non - deterministic, fractal opus raises a number of topics, which are so current today in the domain of theoretical and practical aspects of architecture, and therefore he should not be ignored

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as an excellent theoretician who does not hesitate to base his work on philosophical discourse, which makes it very lucid. He can be said to be a visionary of contemporary architecture and urbanism. Through his theoretical work, the problem of "rooting" architecture that lacks primordial unity and fixity is highlighted. As the thesis of his work as a theoretician, historian and architect, it can be assumed that it is about the act of gathering the original memory.

Portoghesi, as a member primarily of the postmodern movement in architecture, however, not decisively positioned in this historical discourse, does not shy away from critically referring to the radically changed idea of an architectural work in a negative context. For him, society is "travested", devoid of any form of aesthetic appeal. Contemporary architecture is beyond any form of "iconology", thereby losing the relationship with the user that has a poetic thread and a direct intimate tone. Portoghesi perceives architecture as a kind of icy objective mirror in which a not at all optimistic image of the modern city is reflected. The goal of his theoretical and practical activity in the field of architecture is a cry for not distancing architecture from the past, as well as blocking the automatism that reproduces the impotence and alienation of the architectural practice itself.

## 4. Results/ Discussion

### 4.1. The modern city and its contradictions - a persistent fractal

In order to achieve the goal of strengthening the architecture itself, it is first of all necessary to detect the truths of the city's values as well as the expressed contradictions. For Portoghesi, the city stripped of all symbolism, turned into a dormitory and a kind of factory reproduction is precisely a partial "counterspace", something that should not be related to architecture in general. Foucault himself, referred to by Portoghesi, points to the actuality of partial struggle and the absence of total revolutionary strategies, which hints at the presence of plurality and contradictions in every domain of both science and art. Namely, culture, according to him, should be freed from ambitions and echoes of ideologies. [13]

But let's return to Portoghesi's vision of the city. According to him, the city should be a reflection of history, a historical space, and not a city devoid of monumental values, as well as a city that becomes a place of daily spectacle, a daily port and a place of crowded dormitories. He also has a critical attitude towards the so - called experimental space in which the desire for the incomplete is expressed. However, the question arises whether this assumption is valid for every example of an experimental city. Also, the question is what is actually an experimental space. Is he devoid of any kind of convention? What is it for? Does it meet the needs of users of this type of space? Does it contain iconology and an intimate experience. What is the perception of time and space in experimental frameworks? Nevertheless, it is an indisputable fact that it is a part of a detached reality in which we are increasingly participating.

Such a space gives the primacy of time over the place itself. Namely, the modern city is also a kind of space where a transformation occurs at the level of the primary structures of

the urban fabric, and as Portoghesi himself points out, there is no way of interpretation that goes beyond intuitive sensibility. He is critical of the avant - garde, considering it responsible for the creation of a homogenous culture. However, it is precisely this avant - garde that creates an experimental space with all those values that Portoghesi himself refers to.

Alternative identities of cities and architecture are becoming increasingly popular. Namely, they are impermanent, unrooted without "the continuity of the collective feeling of form". Also, new symbols of mass culture are ubiquitous. Portoghesi, therefore, has a kind of apocalyptic vision pointing to the inevitability of the perspective that testifies to the end of civilization. Architecture is perceived as "second nature", some kind of reserve of experiences of generations that becomes alarming and dramatic. Architecture acquires a new identity in the form of "passing youth" and the inability to "mature with dignity", since the collective memory and representations of the collective space and the city are ignored.

The city center is its lifeblood, and therefore Portoghesi points to the need for the expansion of historical centers which, as he criticizes, are "embalmed" in the role of "reservoirs of values and symbols". In order to avoid this effect, it is necessary to rediscover identities through a local pre - mental, but not megalomaniacal reality and establish a dialogue with nature, as well as some kind of autonomy of architectural values. On the contrary, as indicated by Portoghesi; the city becomes some kind of formidable cement structure. [13] The victory of the scenography and the success of Portoghesi's "Strade Novissima" (was synonymous with the victory of the street and the square at the first architectural international biennial. [18]

As a result of this general socio - cultural environment, fantasies about an ideal city, about some kind of non - city [10] arise. This is primarily a consequence of the non - existence of the continuum of the ancient city, which indicates the need for as many psychological stimuli as possible and continuous exchanges and encounters in a pejorative sense, which indicates contradictions in modern architecture, since the aim is to establish some kind of "history", "rooting" at the same time. However, this type of aspirations is reflected in the creation of a simulacrum, a copy without an original [20].

However, architecture itself represents a universality that resists plurality. Unfortunately, there is an annulment of the traditional architectural lexicon and the emergence of dogmas that would represent potential "language generators". While modern, according to Portoghesi, is an "empire of experiment", postmodernism is given the epithet of an American product. Postmodernism carries within itself something that moves away from an adequate perception and reading of architecture, since it is deformed to the degree of caricature, the path from "positive" to "negative form", the creation of metaphors, irony, and plastic re - presentation. Linguistic freedom represents an ambitious program of postmodernism aimed at reviving the symbolic basis through archetypes. Can we then say that the backbone of postmodernism is heterotopia? Heritage is perceived in such a way that it can be classified as museum exhibits, and therefore postmodernism can also be seen as a rejection,

rupture, "abandonment of the need for contemplative experience" and nature. Namely, the need to create a new utopian momentum through the use of linguistic means that have the most diverse origins is highlighted. Creating a bricolage of images and concepts.

#### 4.3.1. History vs. mainstream culture

Porthghesi points to the very importance of the judgment derived from critical reflection, which, in addition to the recognition of limitations, would also indicate the necessity of verification through the analysis of historical discourse, as well as its need to fit into the contemporary environment. Namely, it is not a mere condemnation, but the distribution of the work itself, architecture, artifacts in a context close to man, which does not at all mean their displacement as something else and irreversible. According to him, the court is reconstructed through parameters such as progress and reaction, which is not even similar to the evolutionary ambiguity of positivism. At the same time, the dialectic of architecture itself indicates the possibility of establishing hypotheses that would refer to the evaluation of the socio-cultural engagement of architecture itself. The necessity of a post - priori position that aims to reconstruct a position outside of history.

It is interesting that Portoghese himself refers to Hegel, who points out that all great historical events and personalities repeat themselves twice. The first time, as Portogezzi points out, would represent a tragedy, while the second time would have the epithet of farce. [3] Is this the state of contemporary architecture today? Contemporary heterotopias, simulacrum, non - places, point to the farce of architecture itself, where we should not forget the users who belong to mass culture, which according to many theorists, including Kasper Maze, is located in the decade before the First World War. Satisfying a new pseudo - aesthetic experience determined the direction of modern art. However, what characterizes this type of art is its brevity due to the presence of strong stimuli from a tired, but at the same time too demanding audience, which directs its interests towards entertainment. Popular arts, as indicated by Maze [6], provided some kind of basis for real social communication. However, is that so? Is their epilogue the extinction of those social relations and some kind of alienation of individuals in all that dazzling spectacle that is offered to them, a farce that is impossible to avoid today? Is the ultimate stage of certain historical forms their comedy, as evidenced by postmodernism as a movement to redefine historical forms. We should not forget the aforementioned plurality and rapid reproduction of forms, which is characteristic of the twentieth and twenty - first centuries. Casper Maze points out that the popular culture of the twentieth century is not characterized by sharp boundaries, but by the mutual effect of certain genres and levels, i. e. discourse [6].

#### 4.3.2 Baroque and fold

Paolo Porthghesi's opus exudes the baroque spirit and the need for reanimation of this discourse where different fractal effects are superimposed, and therefore we will talk about the baroque as perceived by some of the contemporary philosophers.

When opening up this topic about the mutual influence of different discourses, it is inevitable to mention the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who points to the concept of "fold". Namely, the fold itself, as indicated by Deleuze in his work "Foucault", has the possibility of being integrated into reality itself, and at the same time outside it into layers that can be external and internal at the same time. Namely, the fold itself is positioned in strategic zones where there are different levels and layers where historical texts and images are archived from which it can "exit". It is, in fact, an example of the permeation of diverse discourses, both those bearing the epithet of contemporary and historical, comic and farce. Baroque, for Deleuze, is the best example of "folds". Namely, he represents the eclecticism of the most diverse styles. On the other hand, Portogesi, who has an affirmative attitude towards the baroque, indicates that the baroque spirit is characterized by the presence of tradition and revolutionary zeal, courtly and popular, restrained and self - willed, etc. Namely, baroque finds a suitable ground for further development in the layered urban fabric. The contemplative character of the baroque itself, as Portogesi points out, highlights the freedom it celebrates with metaphors, but the whirlwind of time inhibits and thwarts it in order to survive in reality. Truth and illusion coexist in the Baroque not in the form of eclectic naivety, but as a product of a rigorous and anti - schematic method. [13] Baroque finally offers freedom. Namely, the dialectic and the permeation of the most diverse discourses that characterize the baroque create a kind of cultural experiential nucleus, a phenomenon of contemporary architecture, and therefore the baroque is interesting as a digression on the topicality of Portogesi's thinking in the domain of architecture, history, theory, etc.

However, the question arises as to why history possesses the nature of said influence. The goal is for humanity itself to part with it with some semblance of cheerfulness and elation. Did we part with her the right way? Do the current spaces of the present point to pathetic nostalgia and the need to return to history in a new and extremely phenomenological way? It is not about the academic tradition, which, according to Porthghesi, aims to assimilate the tradition through non - unionist criticism, to somehow neutralize it within the framework of its closed form. The process of involution indicates, on the other hand, the impossibility of accepting significant achievements from the historical period in terms of architecture and urbanism, and implies the forcefulness of typological contamination affecting the appearance of the simple and elementary psychologism that characterizes contemporary architecture.

As Porthghesi himself points out, the interest in the infinite, little for the gradual contraction of an artistic theme is a frequent occurrence in the Baroque and finds expression in the way of approaching the theme where imagination and logical rigor are involved. Porthghesi sees the baroque form as the impossibility of axial vision, which has the sole task of connecting the episodes of a continuous narrative that, for example, characterizes the facade envelope of an object. In such objects, the lighting is usually hidden and serves to emphasize the value of the image. Porthghesi points out that Borromini introduces a new language in his work that would directly give the architectural form marked exclusively by

whimsical juxtapositions or correlations, but taking on the nature of a dialectical synthesis. [6]

Baroque, therefore, with the spirit of sturlaka, does not interpret the past exclusively as a history that should be concretely continued, while refusing to be understood as a continuity of the classical heritage.

The contemplative character of the Baroque is inspired by the attitude pointing to freedom and celebrating it with metaphors.

#### 4.4. Fractal of communication - "complative" aspirations of architecture

Let's go back to modernism as a significant phenomenological phenomenon in architectural frameworks, in order to better understand the consequences it left on contemporary architecture, due to a sudden break with history and to some extent its negation. Porthghesi indicates that rationalism itself has reached its epilogue without reaching a level of maturity. However, despite the mistakes and compromises that modernism made, it as a movement carries within itself the value of moral strength and combativeness and experimental ideological struggle. However, on the other hand, modernist language is characterized by poor communicativeness. As a result of this deficit, linguistic enrichment occurs, using a strong palette characteristic of the postmodernist movement. The myth of a city that would be extremely hermetic, without any cohesion, is being promoted into a city that strives to return to history and nature. However, is mass culture ready to carry such a strong ambition? The answer is that she creates places according to her affinities and aspirations. After modernism and postmodernism, what actually happens? Hybrid forms are created, as if architecture has reached its ultimate domain in every sense. Porthghesi refers to Gromsci, pointing to the split of the psycho - physical connection of profiled artefacts that implied activity in the field of intelligence, imagination, to be reduced to a physical - mechanical aspect.

Mainstream culture lives in an environment of impoverished inherited values, declaratively renouncing memory, which to some extent represents an elitist act characteristic of contemporary art, which represents a renunciation of immediate communicativeness. The rigid monotony of contemporary architecture indicates a contradiction in the belief in abstract order, impoverished everyday life. Therefore, it is not absurd why modern man cries out for simulacrum. Portoghese points to Romantic individualism and utopianism, which represent two aspects of the same crisis. The act of abandoning the rooting of architecture in the domain of culture and society represents the very act of powerlessness, giving up, recklessness, passivity, lack of interest, absence of communicativeness. information, and therefore architecture becomes a screen or rather a scenography of impoverished everyday life. However, there is always a space that possesses certain contradictions and potentials that imply the emergence of revolutionary movements. Therefore, one should not be extremely pessimistic when it comes to digestible architecture.

In his article "Autopsy or vivisection of architecture", Portoghese points out precisely the uncertainty of the relationship between architecture and society, where the architect perceives himself as the bearer of a prophecy, and not as an indicator of the direction towards absolute and autonomous progress, beyond good and evil. Architecture loses its ideological function and devastates its role in terms of capital. Images of culture are integrated into the framework of capitalism in the form of an indication of tendentious danger in the absence of communication with spatial actors. [3]

In another article, "The Inhibition of Contemporary Architecture," Portoghese quotes Goethe as indicating that writing history is one way to get rid of the past. A dramatic cultural experiment is necessary in order not to create the nucleus of a culture whose primary characteristic would be confrontation with mainstream society and a new interpretation of cultural heritage and strengthening aspects of communication.

As it was emphasized at the very beginning, the aim of the work is to incorporate the authorial position of Paolo Portoghese into some of the discourses, which, as already mentioned, is assumed in this case to be a non - classical postmodernist discourse characterized by fractality, loss of continuity in time and cohesiveness in space, which can be seen on the example of the Baldi house.

#### 4.5. Architectural fractal - Baldi house

The Baldi House is a way of incorporating non - typical architecture as neorealistic architecture into contemporary architectural discourse. Portoghese's work is an artist's dream to enter into communication with everyone, a journey to borderlands that implies further exploration of unknown territories.

The Italian liberty movement was based on the domestic craft language in the years leading up to the First World War. It became part of the customs created under the influence of utopianism. The climate in which Italian realism was born represents an attempt to avoid utopianism. Realism itself succumbed to the influence of the idealized representation of the Italian working class. Then comes neo - realism (Baldi house) in the form of an extremely anachronistic movement that initiates the need for the constant engagement of critics and architects.

The Baldi House can be considered, as explained in the contemporary architecture of Inhibition, a manifesto of the "poetics of listening" by Paolo Portohezzi. Next to the house are the remains of a Roman tomb, which over the centuries resembled a "trunk surrounded by giant plant roots". The Baldi House originates from a process of inverted architecture that leads to uncertainty. The walls of the Baldi house itself open under the pressure of the wind, creating a distorted geometry, and the windows become an arrangement between surfaces, through which the landscape itself is captured. [22]

This is an example of the fiery connection between man and the environment, and bringing the past closer together. The fractals of this architectural position are reflected in

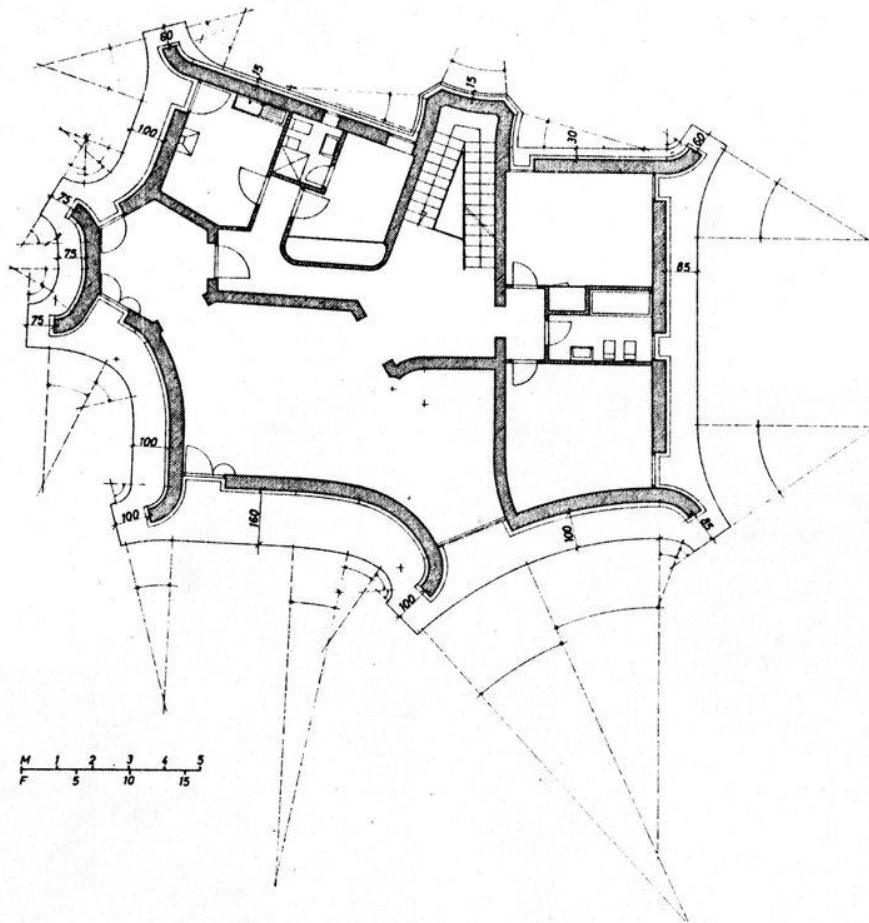
opportunism, pluralism, ambivalence and openness. On the example of this object, it is possible to see the collective imagination.



**Figure 1:** The View of the Baldi house, Rome, 1960. [24].

At a distance of twelve kilometers from the ancient Via Flaminia, the Baldi house, now located outside the core of ancient Rome, by its form indicates the return of nature as the protagonist of the landscape, incorporating and standing in juxtaposition with the ancient archaeological squares and the Roman tomb itself. In a hilly environment primarily used as a quarry, Paolo Portoghesi, at the age of twenty - eight, designed one of his most lucid youthful works. The spirit of the place, the spatial fractal, is what Portoghesi himself was guided by when designing the Baldi house, which is not only distinguished by the fact that it is implemented in the environment as an artifact that simulates its immediate environment, but it is a project that has historical and cultural references, emphasizing tradition in the most noble way.

The Baldi house is built on three levels where the walls "move" in accordance with the configuration of the hilly terrain on which it is located. The surrounding walls are materialized from tuff blocks that have the same dimensions as in the framework of the ruins of the immediate tomb, while the building itself is built of stone from the quarry in equal - sized regular blocks that are used in full thickness. The concave walls of the Baldi house are characterized by the positioning of blocks pressed together, while the convex surfaces are filled with wedges of yellow tuff. The rhythm of the walls is not interrupted by openings, but they are incorporated in the very points where there is a convergence of parabolic partitions, which achieves that the light continuously and gradually illuminates the rooms from the inside to the outside.



**Figure 2:** Floor plan of the Baldi house [24].

Residential buildings such as the Baldi house are in the domain of historical discourse and trends from the 1950s, such as the international style, possessing a wealth of references from brilliant creators such as Borromani and Gaudi. The Baldi House is a kind of conceptual foundation of Portoghesi's aesthetics, where the architect himself indicates that the building was conceived in such a way as not to reconcile the richness of imagination with strict rationality, indicating that he himself carried a contradictory and conflicting attitude throughout his architectural career. Therefore, it can also be concluded that Portoghesi does not have a decisive position in the history of architecture, since he is not exclusively a postmodernist architect, and therefore his opus, as emphasized, exudes an echo of listening to space, and not of the current spatio-temporal environment in which he lived and created it.

From 2019, the Baldi House, after the restoration carried out by Portoghesi himself, is intended for commercial activities in the form of an exhibition space and an event space, maintaining the original architectural style.<sup>8</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

I am of the opinion that the world can be changed by a change in the approach of viewing the architectural discourse itself, even though the frames still bear the epithet of discontingent. Architecture should be seen as a means of knowing, not as a consumable. As Portoghesi himself observes, buildings must

speak without limitation, but from the entire repertoire of history. The eclecticism of culture indicates the creation of a bricolage of heterogeneous segments obtained from art and history. Contemporary architecture represents a somewhat closed system without representative meaning and a return to a completely new horizon beyond iconology and the communicative relationship to the spatial actor. The triumphalist tone she carries is extremely discreet and intimate. Nostalgia, which characterizes certain contemporary architectural forms, does not imply a journey back, because as Portoghesi points out, it suggests movement through a space that was considered regressive. About such a "regressive" space with the potential of creating a cultural fractal. This spatial fractal is recognized as having an abundance of metaphors, linguistics, representativeness where the role of the artist and the architect represents an alliance in setting the ladder up. The revival of such spaces represent the intensification of new social relations characteristic of an archaic city. They are spaces without norms that are characterized by diversity and in which the desire for the unknown is expressed. Paolo Portoghesi directs us to think about contemplative spaces that, in other words, initiate a dialogue with users. Therefore, the work of the architect Paolo Portoghesi can be classified as atypical, which does not belong to the spatial or temporal discourse in which the architect himself worked, which was also intriguing in relation to this architect who started my thinking about contemporary spaces in architecture in terms of fractal discontinuous. My previous research was based on the concept of heterotopia, places outside of all places, places of

otherness, where there is also a time - space discontinuity. The goal of my previous research work was the formation of criteria that would be used to detect contemporary heterotopia spaces in architecture.

## 6. Future Research and Focus

This research paper also indicates the possibility of further dealing with topics such as architectural positions derived from atypical deductive methodology, where it is attempted to introduce concepts atypical for architecture as a discipline as a starting point for further research. Therefore, the contribution of this work can be seen in the effort to affirm, in this case clearly determined architectural positions seen through a kaleidoscope, where time - space determinants are disjunctive positions.

Further future research is based precisely on atypical methodology, new terms such as fractal, listening, mirroring. Therefore, the contribution of this research work itself is in the fact that, through new concepts, guidelines were obtained, the backbones of which can be further detected on contemporary architectural problems.

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