

The Architecture of Time

WHAT IS TO COME - DESIGNING AS RESEARCH

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"Time is our flesh. We are made of time. We are time.

We see something and it no longer exists. Therein lies its supreme beauty. The last ray of light illuminating a column of a temple in Selinunte at dusk, the reflection in a puddle of water of the outline of a house, before the rain once again ripples the surface.

*These are fleeting moments. They will never come back. Yet they continue to fill our existence. In memory, the light of that moment spreads over us. Time, in waves, brings it back to us."*¹

Architecture incorporates time into all its disciplinary fields and this is sometimes treated as the potential past that we share and sometimes as a progressive vision of the future. From its inevitable transdisciplinarity, we know for sure - from Rilke to W. Benjamin - that man's temporality, his transience, generates this gaze that is always turned backwards, while moving forward. This vision is not just of something that is there, but it is the sum of a series of visions: Proust's Madeleine ² opens up to the relationship between time and memory, between memory and nostalgia. This relationship between time and memory is of particular interest to us.

Paulo Mendes da Rocha, whose architecture we admire, says that "all invention is the mobilization of memory, (that) invention is an arrangement of what we know in a peculiar way"³; agreeing, we are pleased to articulate this necessary mobilization of memory, in the 'construction of the idea' in architecture, to that disseminated by Agustina Bessa-Luís in Portuguese literary culture. This author, opposing memory to imagination, two primary resources for creative work, warned of the difficulty of creating without recourse to the knowledge accumulated in memory, which, like us, she gave absolute prominence to and stressed that, without memory, we would have to "create only with the help of imagination,

¹ PEREGALLI, Roberto. (2022) "I luoghi e la polvere sulla bellezza dell'imperfezione" La nave di Teseo editore, Milano, p. 27

² PROUST, Marcel. (2003) *Em busca do tempo perdido*, ed. Relógio D'Água

³ ROCHA, Paulo Mendes da. (2007) *Conversaciones com Paulo Mendes da Rocha*, Ed.GG

which is always more precarious and more fragile [...] because it is born of the exaltation of thought and not of practical knowledge.”⁴

It is in this context that we share a *modus operandi* that, we believe, began at the renowned Porto School, was consolidated between the tutoring in Eduardo Souto Moura's practice, in the research for the PhD in Architectural Design carried out in Barcelona under the guidance of Professor Hélio Pinón in the course The Meaning of Modern Architecture and, finally, in practising Architecture.

At this school we learned that architecture depends on how the author – the architect – interprets the meaning of history, tradition and local cultures and decides to act in relation to them, taking them into account as another practical condition of the design process. To this end, it was essential to grasp ideas from the past and use them as a useful tool to clarify the path that leads us to the present and the future, in a timeless motion. This perspective was also endorsed by peers whose practice was recognized, such as Livio Vacchini, who said: « *The works of the past must not 'survive' (a hypocritical form of forgetting) but must be transformed into 'different' works (a noble form of memory)* »⁵ and the relevance of his quote confirms the value of reflection resulting from practice.

It was confirmed in those early years that, in order to Design or Teach, the ability to critically examine one's own work and the work of others is essential, a skill that emerges from academia into practical activity and, returning to academic activity, allows progress to be made. It was concluded that without a critical sense centered on the disciplinary issues of the project, progress is inconceivable. It is therefore argued that the construction of knowledge in architecture is expanded in the research of the architect who designs and teaches, constantly seeking the relevance of a theory of design and its articulation with practice in the construction of the future.

Confident in the value of this transdisciplinarity, Eduardo Souto Moura admires Jorge Luís Borges who, in literature, says: “No one can claim originality (...); all writers are (...) translators and annotators of pre-existing archetypes”⁶, and transposed this idea to architecture, saying: “Historical changes have always been punctual in architecture. *The Turbinenfabrik, for example, made by P. Behrens for A.E.G. is a classical temple, an expression of continuity. But*

⁴ ARÍS, Carlos Martí. (2012) *Cabos Suelos*. Madrid: Sánchez Lampreave

⁵ ARÍS, Carlos Martí Arís. (2009) Livio Vacchini - *Cabos Suelos, Palabras en memoria de Livio Vacchini*, Edición - Ricardo S. Lampreave, p. 209

⁶ BORGES, Jorge Luís. (1998) *Obras Completas* de, Editorial Teorema: Lisboa

*the columns were made of iron: a small detail, a fundamental difference... It is by looking at things in this way that I refuse to believe in the idea of rupture. Changes are made little by little, with advances and setbacks."*⁷

Both, reverberating Paulo Mendes da Rocha or Livio Vachini and concluding their research through practice.

In fact, Souto Moura's statement in 1987 (when he was a 4th year Project teacher at FAUP) was "a stonewall" - because no one at the time claimed that modernity didn't break with the past - claiming that only distance and time could offer us a change in our critical outlook. This approach will allow for late compensation which, in addition to compensating for flagrant injustices to certain authors, will contribute to the (re)construction of a more lucid idea of the History of Architecture.

Above all, it will allow us to use history as another design tool, using it with the rigor that architecture and its construction demand, a valuable design and research tool.

And Souto Moura would insist already in the 21st century, registering the same idea in an interview (not published), saying about his analysis of the city of Brasília, that "in Architecture, time is more important or as important as space". And that he had visited that city, investigating and verifying the qualities he had identified in the design and concluding that "the fundamental thing is to design and plan the base, the support and the typology", adding: *"And then you have to leave it to chance. Because that's how it was in Rome, Athens and Miletus. In New York, for example, there is a beginning and then there is a process of becoming that makes the city even more wonderful. Layers, overlays, that spontaneous naturalness with which things appear and complete the so-called artificial urban design. The thing about Brasília is that it's still 200 or 300 years away, especially when compared to other cities. That's why it's time that makes these things remain in history. And what is to remain in history? It's the collective joining in. So, nobody says: Romanesque is good, Gothic is bad. The Renaissance is good and the Baroque is bad. Nobody is a moralist when there is a historical distance that allows the differences to be identified (...) in fact - concludes Souto Moura - I think that the downfall of post-modernism was exactly this fallacy or this lie of clearing up history in a short space of time in an artificial way. And it became ridiculous."*⁸; It is usually a long way down the

⁷ MOURA, Eduardo Souto de. (1987) em revista de arquitectura Faces Journal, n.º 5/6 "Printemps 1987 – Un pays en voyage – a propôs de deux réalitions d'Eduardo Souto de Moura".

⁸ OSÓRIO, Matheus Nunes. (2012) *Lúcio Costa – O Projecto Moderno*, FAUP, 2012, Porto, pp.145

road that we understand what has been left behind, since history is by no means static. And its particular interest, as well as its beauty, lies precisely in this dynamic, and it is undoubtedly the different generations who write it over time, each moving through a map of references, investigations, crossings and discoveries that slowly guide this writing. This, we know, depends on the selection made by the cultural imaginary that surrounds them, often crystallizing only in what results from "the subjectivity of the criteria adopted by the narrators of the history of architecture"⁹.

However, if the role of disseminating architecture and its research has been delegated to the historian - (pre)occupied with stylistic, economic, political and social genealogy, precisely because his purpose is to accurately situate the work and its author in time - or to the critic (pre)occupied with judging, today there is a group of architects who believe that "if we judge, we no longer understand, because judging implies condemning or absolving"¹⁰ promoting design research which, needing this tool that is our heritage, by revisiting the works that history reveals and taking advantage of the action of time on it, extends the power of its reach and, at the same time, disseminates it.

« Theory must be made in order to be put into practice, and practice must obey theory. Only those of superficial spirit disconnect theory from practice, not seeing that theory is nothing but a theory of practice, and practice is nothing but the practice of a theory (...) In a higher life, theory and practice complete each other. They were made for each other »¹¹

And above all, they are not mutually exclusive.

⁹ Domingos Tavares. (2016) em António Correia da Silva, *Arquitecto Municipal*. DAFNE Editora CEAU- FAUP

¹⁰ ANTUNES, António Lobo. (2017) *"Escrito na Pedra"*, Jornal Público

¹¹ PESSOA, Fernando. (1986) *Páginas de Pensamento Político. Vol II*. (Introdução, organização e notas de António Quadros.) Mem Martins: Europa-América, p.131. 1ª Publ. in Revista de Comércio e Contabilidade, nº 4. Lisboa: 25-4-1926.