reactive proactive architecture

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UNIVERSITAT POLITÈCNICA DE VALÈNCIA
ESCOLA TÈCNICA SUPERIOR D'ARQUITECTURA
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BLOCK 2: ETHICS, CRITICAL THINKING AND NARRATIVE IN ARCHITECTURE

CHAPTER #2.01

HISTORY AS A DESIGN ELEMENT: DIALOGUE BETWEEN EXISTING AND CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

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1. Introduction. Continuity as matter for architeture

There is a relationship between the past and the contemporary manifestations that directly influences the debate on the design and construction practice of architecture, on its role and destination, on its relating to the complex context of the discipline.
The dialogue between conservation and innovation is still far from glimpsing a horizon of encounter and sharing, today accompanied by reductive theories capable of exclusively proposing the deletion of one of the two factors at play.
The enhancement of the Italian landscape, and more generally European, interpreted through a social meaning, is based on the reading of the culture of places and the denial of a homologated growth of a territory that, in its diversity, expresses harmony, beauty, value. In Italy, an idea of architecture that is not related to the concepts of memory and identity, related to environmental, historical and cultural logics is not conceivable (Gregotti, 1999).
On the contrast between the power of history as a guardian of memory and identity and the architectural project as a means of innovation, Ernesto N. Rogers writes: "The present work serves as a link between the past and the future; it is not a moment of pause but the obligatory point of passage of history from yesterday to tomorrow. The guarantee of the validity of a work of today is precisely in obliging history to pass through new inventions, in such a way that it wouldn't be possible anymore to continue without them when considering the human being's needs to transform them through their unavoidable evolution" (Rogers, 1981).
The paradigm of continuity is an intellectual, as well as a material act in relation to the theories and experience gained within the post-Second World War Italian architectural culture. "The theory - Paolo Portoghesi writes - is that architecture, every architecture, emerges from other architectures, from a non-fortuitous convergence between a series of precedents that are combined through the imagination of a process. A process that involves the solitude of thought and the togetherness of collective memory" (Portoghesi, 1992).
A phenomenon of *intellectual recycling of the theory* that is based and evolves on the terrain of existing theory: be it in assonance, or in dissonance with previous positions. The historical fields and the pre-existences symbolize, in a complete way, the reality and its transformation over time.

2. Methodology. Historical and contemporary architecture: a dialogue in theory and practice.

In the binomial continuity-discontinuity, or even, assonance-dissonance, contemporary action proposes itself as mediator between history and elements of the landscape.
The combination of pre-existences and culture of an era represents the link that constantly traces the history of modern and contemporary architecture: the dialectic link between history and contemporaneity, and the theoretical-operational orientations deriving from it, identify the founding elements of the urban phenomenon. The integration between the expression of the contemporary and the footsteps of the past involves design and construction practice and its interaction with the wide and complex territory of architecture; traces in which evident contradictions remain.
The *past* becomes a phenomenon in-itself-concluded, self-referential, non-reconcilable with the present: the disagreement between existing architecture and contemporary spatiality is amplified by a cultural attitude that, on the contrary, should underline the value of the present precisely because of its dialogue with history. Manfredo Tafuri, in 1991, from the pages of *Casabella*, sees an additional key to understanding the phenomenon, saying that "in a moment of strong delegitimization of architectural languages (...) the legitimation is often sought precisely in the intervention on historical objects" (Tafuri, 1991).
For Ignasi de Solà-Morales, "the contrast between the old and the new would transform, not only as the result of a radical contraposition, but also in the perceptual process within which each of those would establish, mutually, their dialectical meaning in the metropolitan city complex, it would change" (de Solà-Morales, 1985). Architecture represents the *barometer of an era*, the same way as the city represents the *theater of diachronic confrontation of the eras*, a real opportunity for discussion and debate on the redefinition and redesign of the territory.
The history of the places is to be understood in the same way as the history of the project and of the evolution of places: continuity, permanence and history are the engines of the project, elements of a renewed approach to the contemporary. The harmonic continuity of space and places is the key to understanding the semantic value of the *new* with respect to the *existing*. There is no single road: project approaches are many and sometimes they are conflicting, other times complementary.
In 1951, the 8th congress of CIAM was held in Hoddesdon, England, whose theme was the fate of the city's historic core. On that occasion J.L. Sert anticipates a current situation by declaring that the city is born within its public spaces and that in the empty spaces lies the heart of the city, understood as the real urban condition (Faroldi, 2011).
Memory becomes the deposit for the transmission of knowledge and the foundation of the recognizability of places, constituting the essential requirement for the development of a culture. Designing for the addition or subtraction to the memory involves a specific cultural attitude within communication with the pre-existences, inside which the new projects outline the threshold between past and future. The faculty of the mind to preserve and recall memories and experiences constitutes a fundamental element of the individual and collective identity of the city. Identity foresees the ability of a community to remain recognizable, constituting the expression of a civilization and a culture, also in changing times and fashions and in confrontation and contact with other cultures and civilizations (Settis, 2004).
The contemporary project must therefore possess the power to draw upon the memory in order to confirm the identity throughout a substantial activity of the period it represents.
The architectural language, its semantics, are genetically transformed based on some indicative characters of the places, recovering the compositional, morphological and measuring aspects: a valid relationship both by assonance and by explicit opposition.
Old-new theme, conservation-innovation, such terms as Aldo Rossi also affirms, "can no longer be placed only from the point of view of the relationship between old and new (...) but from the point of view of the necessary modification that is produced with each intervention" (Rossi, 1972).
Working in Italy, and more generally in Europe, represents for us architects a simultaneous action of opportunity and responsibility. Opportunity as the constraint of history as an element of comparison in the project action implies an inevitable phenomenon of assimilation and comparison with this legacy, by introducing stimuli and energy into the project. On the other hand, there is the cultural debt, and therefore of responsibility, towards an area that brings with it values and signs of its own DNA.
Faithful to the concept for which the constructed work can constitute a *theoretical manifesto*, the story is accompanied by some images, which identify some works created by the office of architecture EFA_*Esperienze Forme Architettura* (Emilio Faroldi, Maria Pilar Vettori, Pietro Chierici, architects), aimed at translating thought into matter.

Figure 1. EFA_Esperienze Forme Architettura (Emilio Faroldi, Maria Pilar Vettori, Pietro Chierici, architects), Historical Garzoni Garden, Collodi 2005-2007..

An architectural tale that, in diachronic form, starts from the heart of the Italian landscape as a theater capable of hosting, in the hills of the village of Collodi, a cross-section of the territory's history and its identity represented here by the eighteenth-century Historical Garzoni Garden and some artefacts that innervate it: the Villa Garzoni, the Palazzina dell'Orologio, the Bagnetti and many others. The restoration of the entire system constitutes a representative experiential episode, connected to the recovery of a piece of landscape that clearly identifies the value of the protection of architectural cultural heritage in a logic of their exploitation and new usability.
Inside it, there is the Butterfly House, a dynamic and interactive museum where, not only metaphorically, hundreds of flying flowers - tropical and equatorial butterflies - reproduce, live, feed and fly freely in a "garden in the garden" where opacity and transparency blend with the nature that surrounds contemporary architecture, immersed in the historical Tuscan basin.

Figure 2. EFA_Esperienze Forme Architettura (Emilio Faroldi, Maria Pilar Vettori, Pietro Chierici, architects), Collodi Butterfly House, Collodi 2006.

The story arrives in Parma, where inside the Farnesian Palazzo della Pilotta, three installations are exhibited. These installations are able to stimulate a proactive dialogue with the main spaces that host them: content and container are seen as one at the service of the discovery of the other. The Palatine Library welcomes the *decorations, the projects, the drawings and the engravings of the architect Ennemond Alexandre Petitot*; the monochromatic Farnese theatre unveils the *colorful sculptural clothes by Roberto Capucci;* the National Gallery waits for the guests at the canteen exhibiting *Damià Campeny's table triumph.*
At Alberi di Vigatto, there is the Church of San Lorenzo, from the Romanesque period. Its restoration of the entire parish complex, through the joint grafting of a sacred objects suspended between the lightness and rigor of the sign, represents the enhancement of its system, based on the relationship between countryside, avenue and place of worship.
In Salsomaggiore Terme, in the province of Parma, the Art Déco and Liberty flavor find a new identity by means of recovery, functional redevelopment, redesign and urban reorganization of its beating heart: Piazza Lorenzo Berzieri.

3. Conclusion. Memory and Identity of Architecture

Memory and history impersonate, through decoding contemporary architecture, the invariants of transformation strategies strongly affirming the identity and the image of the Italian landscape: the city and the urban system express the values founded on the inheritance, together with global principle ones aimed at the plurality of contemporaneity.
Buildings, like men, are an integral part of a system consisting of a constantly changing network of roles in the name of flexibility that is expressed in terms of the city's temporal use, an instrument and support for a flexible and contingent socio-economic system, aimed at the definition and implementation of new solutions and control of the future city in full respect of what has been delivered to us by history. "We need to know the history in order to forget it and be ourselves" (Rogers, 1981), Rogers wrote over half a century ago, with an ability to anticipate the phenomena that makes today's architecture decomposable and interpretable only through decoding of the past, in an absolutely avant-garde logic, which seems contradictory, but it is not.

Figure 3 a, b, c. EFA_Esperienze Forme Architettura (Emilio Faroldi, Maria Pilar Vettori, Pietro Chierici, architects), Church of San Lorenzo, Alberi di Vigatto (Parma) 1993-1994

Figure 4. EFA_Esperienze Forme Architettura (Emilio Faroldi, Maria Pilar Vettori, Pietro Chierici, architects), Exibition in Palazzo della Pilotta (Parma), Roberto Capucci al Farnese 1996

Figure 5-6. EFA_Esperienze Forme Architettura (Emilio Faroldi, Maria Pilar Vettori, Pietro Chierici, architects), Exibitions in Palazzo della Pilotta (Parma) Feste Fontane Festoni a Parma nel Settecento. Progetti e decorazioni, disegni e incisioni dell' architetto E.A. Petitot (1727-1801) 1989 and La "Tavola dell'ambasciatore : il trionfo da tavola di Damia Campeny" 1999.

Figure 7. EFA_Esperienze Forme Architettura (Emilio Faroldi, Maria Pilar Vettori, Pietro Chierici, architects), Lorenzo Berzieri Square. Salsomaggiore Terme (Parma) 2008-2010.

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