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TEORIJA IN PRAKSA

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THEORY AND PRACTICE IN

ARCHITECTURE, a reflection

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DISCUSSION

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The theoretical analysis is that complex and deep plot that links the technical, artistic and critical activities of each architect (not always present at the same time) to his vision of the world. The term¹ derives from the greek theory theorein which means contemplate, look at, see, observe, attend an event. But, also, meditate, judge, compare, investigate. And all this has, as a synthesis, which result, certainly a choice (of meanings, values, posi-

1 The term theory (from the greek θεωρέω theoreō »look, I observe«, composed by θεά Thea, »goddess« and ὁράω horào, »I see«) implies, in common language, an idea born on the basis of some assumptions, conjecture, speculation or theory, even abstract than reality. In science, a theory is a set of interconnected assumptions, statements and propositions in order to explain natural phenomena in general or, more generally, to formulate systematically the principles of a scientific discipline.

In physics, the term theory typically indicates a complex mathematical equations derived from a small set of basic principles, able to predict the outcome of experiments in a certain category of physical systems. One example is the »electromagnetic theory«, which is usually taken as synonymous with classical electromagnetism, the results of which can be derived from Maxwell's equations.

The theoretical term, when used to describe a certain phenomenon, which often implies that a particular result was predicted by a theory but has not yet been observed or experimentally confirmed. For example, until recently, the holes blacks were considered theoretical. It is not unusual in the history of physics that a theory makes predictions then confirmed by experiments.

tions). Choosing is itself a projection, a project forward its position, it means somehow design. Therefore make a theoretical reflection, investigate theoretically, is nothing more than a meta-design action. Different, within common choices, the results of theoretical reflection and flow in built-up areas (in the »practice«², in the practical application) for each author, more or less authoritative. Different, also and above all, because of any particular historical era.

Any theory in architecture influenced, as in every field of human trials, the events that characterize its time. It is the zeitgeist of each era that influences, guides, »builds« theories and approaches that will inevitably bring

2 S practice. f. [from the Gr. πράξις 'action, course of action, der. πράσσω to 'do'].

1. In general, the practical activity, esp. as opposed to theoretical or speculative activity. In common parlance:

a. The exercise of an activity, a profession, an art, and all of the rules that govern it: the p. medical, legal, journalistic.

b. Proceed as usual, customary in a particular activity, esp. with reference to activities governed only by general rules and incomplete, not codified in a law or a regulation: p. administrative, p. Constitutional p. parliamentary p. protocol, follow the p., comply with p., is p. Current, in these cases, follow the hierarchical order.

with them a wealth of experience, emotions, multidisciplinary influences. A successful project must not only respond effectively to the specific issues that have requested it: desires of the customer relationship with the context, specific local and contingent, but also to the fundamental questions, to their own instances of his era. Architecture, as known, it always has an absolute value because the value is not something that belongs to the form itself, but to the form as a response to some questions³. Questions, moreover, that are not strictly disciplinary but which are widely interdisciplinary⁴. It is above all the great movements of thought to impose, in some way, lines of research, especially in architecture (for the long time necessary for its realization / implementation), is explicit in subsequent decades.

So it was for the modern movement, born after the end of the great empires, in the affirmation of new social classes, permeated by an unquestionable faith in progress, in science and mechanics. And so it was for all the other »movements« of the last century and the beginning of the current one. Theoretical research in literary and philosophical contexts have led to the emergence of postmodernism, deconstructionism: how not to think of the writings of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze to better understand Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind, Zaha Hadid, a certain period, to the works of Claes Oldenburg to understand Frank O. Gehry, Zygmunt Bauman to analyze the Sendai Mediatheque by Toyo Ito, or Paul Virilio, Marc Augé, and many other authors who have been the basis of many theories of the contemporary. Similarly, it is useful to relate to Sigmund Freud, Karl Kraus, Peter Altenderg (writer), Arnold Schoenberg⁵ (composer and painter), Ludwig Wittgenstein (philosopher devoted himself to architecture), Gustav Mahler, Arthur Schnitzler, Gustav Klimt to better understand Loos or other contemporary authors.

In every age, is known, it would trigger deep relationships between critical design, theory, in each other's perspectives with implications that affect the great movements of thought typical of a particular historical period: these paradigms serve as guides to scientific research and to any type of research, including the theoretical and design in architecture. But, beyond these

3 cf. the well-known aphorism of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe on the form: »The shape is really a purpose? It is rather the result of the process of giving shape? It is not essential to the process? A small change in the terms does not result in a different outcome? Another form? I do not object to the form, but form only, as its purpose. I do this on the basis of a series of experiences and beliefs derived from these. The form aims always leads to formalism.«

4 It seems to me fundamental reflect on the fact that, in the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius tackles the subject of renewed unity of the arts, fostering the encounter between the emerging avant-garde (Klee, Kandinsky, Theo Van Doesburg), a »new theoretical synthesis«, linking the needs of industrial production to the total renovation of the environment »from the spoon to the city«. Gropius wanted to involve the most advanced of the modern, rationalist component from the neo-expressionist.

5 Interestingly, in this regard, re-read some of the same considerations Schoenberg on scientific research: »It's our duty to meditate continually on the causes of each artistic result, without ceasing to start from the beginning, always watching and always looking for our order, considering how data elements only the phenomena, the artistic facts, which can be held stable at greater right of every famous speech about art. Because we know for sure, we will have the right to call »science« what we know of them. Observe a series of works, classify them according to some common characteristics, deduce the laws. That's right, if only for the fact that there are no other possibilities. These laws are true for the works seen up to that point, they can no longer be so for future works.«

considerations perhaps discounted, it seems interesting to dwell on how the individual theories, the individual theoretical investigations have also characterized, more or less, the work, the architecture built by some authors. If, for example, it is the big match in the work of Mies and / or Hannes Meyer than theorized: »build, for Mies, was nothing but build, follow the technique with extreme caution« and »build was a problem of knowledge« to Meyer, the same cannot be said for some of the contemporary authors like Greg Lynn, where, according to the writer, to sophisticated architectural theories have not paid equally sophisticated architectural results (the case of the Presbyterian Church of New York is the most example: a building far from representative of the theories of the author expresses himself in a sort of replica of absolutely superior rationalist experiments) or, even, and similarly, the theories of some interest on the architecture of »hypersurface« disclosed by the Columbia University by Stephen Perrella at the end of the nineties, which did not produce buildings of large-scale but small size production objects. It is clear that the end of the last century in the theoretical architecture (especially comparing it with that of the full nine hundred) has gradually become more hybrid and fragmented (as well as in many other disciplines), operating a form of reflection and language of the doubt and withdrawing (son of nihilism proliferating and thought weak due no doubt to the influence of authors such as Gianni Vattimo). The theory, in architecture, has become the order of 900, the preferred form of expression, probably because the architects have started to produce little (and they were, after all, little capable of producing »buildings«), and because the center of the discussion was the written text (the project design or the literary text). In the main schools of architecture (a phenomenon prevalent in Italy) was taught much more architectural culture that architecture itself, and the theme of reflection was really centered on the project, on designed architecture.

It is no coincidence that the major newspapers »educated« people (mainly Italian ones) have paid, at the end of 900, large and more attention to the fantastic architectural drawings of Franco Purini, Massimo Scolari, Arduino Cantafora, rather than the architecture that were realized. And it was the same Purini stating that, after all, the architecture is exhausted into the project design, and the work accomplished, realized, was nothing more than a mediation between the architect, enterprise, client, economic parameters, etc. Indeed, that architecture in its realization, was distorted. However already the first author's works: the House of the Pharmacist or the square of Gibellina show excellent compatibility between the architecture and design of the Opera made. Purini takes the justification of his works, characterized by a strong theoretical coherence and style, right from the design, the Representation of Architecture. The »House of the Pharmacist« in Gibellina, with its four sides are all different from each other due to the context, focus on the subject matter: the architecture is what has been previously shown (and therefore, the author theorized, or even, theoretically experienced before). The architecture for Purini, led its design, which is a research tool through its graphical complexity, placed beyond the typical function of the architecture and the design in which it is to justify the architecture and not

vice versa. Purini⁶ as the first Aldo Rossi⁷ at the bottom is written proponent of architecture rather than built. And it also links him to one of the leading contemporary architects (the second largest writer) Peter Eisenman. Interestingly, in this regard, to retrace the text (and drawings) CHORA L WORKS of Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman published by Monacelli Press by Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser. In this text, as in the numerous writings, it is clear the close relationship that exists - for Eisenman, between theory and design, between theories and projects, in all the different phases of his work: in the first case numbered sequentially, where the experimental geometry regulates and governs the space (much more than they do other components such as the needs of the user, or the light ..., ... or other components of the project), architecture flows from the Rebstock Park in Frankfurt at the Max Reinhardt in Berlin (designed the routes of aircraft flying over the city), or the Theatre of Bruges, drawn from the diagrams of the tides.

Theoretical experiments that manifest physically in the architecture of Santiago de Compostela, making the project look like, assimilating the project to the land it occupies. And certainly not less important than the contemporary theoretical reflections of Robert Venturi shown in the famous text *Learning from Las Vegas* and *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* at the base of the majority of 80s post modernists, certainly founding of architecture of the same Venturi and other famous authors such as Leon Krier and Michael Graves⁸. Or *Delirious New York* and *SMLXL* for Rem Koolhaas and *KM3* for MVRDV, affirming principles and theories in the experimental design and then applied in professional practice.

Different position than others, of that »trend« that could be ascribed to an experimental neo-rationalism Mediterranean. And the case of authors such as Alberto Campo Baeza, Henri Ciriani, João Luís Carrilho da Graça, Eduardo Souto de Moura for which the architecture is and remains the subtle play of forms under light, a kind of poetry made where the Man is at the center of the Architecture and emotions continue to animate and characterize theoretical approaches and works. They are, after all, among the authors of contemporary poetry, for which the transmission architecture is implemented through the universality of the works constructed. For whom, that is, despite the debt to the ideas (the project, each project was born from ideas to become idea built), it is in practice, which is expressed in the built architecture. They are (to use the words of Campo Baeza, but I believe that also applies to the other), the authors of »essentiality« of »more with less«, the poets manufacturers architectures that have »their origin in the Idea, in Light the first material, Space willingness to get more with less«.

6 With the exception of the period of maturity where more professional opportunities and especially the advent of digital fundamentally alter the approach to the project.

7 Until the early 80s Rossi writes about architecture much more than projects; *Autobiography* scientific public in 1981. In this work the author, »in discrete disorder«, brings back memories, objects, places, forms, notes on literature, quotes, lights and tries to retrace things or impressions, describe, or look for a way to describe.

He says himself: »I thought, in this book, to analyze my projects and my writings, my work, in a continuous sequence, including them, explaining them and at the same time redesigning them. But still I have seen how, writing about all this, you create another project that has something unpredictable and unexpected.«

8 The seven dwarfs used by Graves as Caryatids are the extreme theories expressed by Venturi in *Learning from Las Vegas*.

But to return briefly to the discourse on the »Design Architecture« (which I consider central to developments nowadays), to remember that in this scene he saw leave the point of view from the »build« to the »design« or better the »draw«, typical of historicism (at the bottom of the Portuguese's Strada Novissima - The Venice Biennale underpinned by the presence of the past - had brought back the Beaux Art experience in Architecture), the seventies and eighties, this attitude has developed mainly as a result from deconstructivism / deconstructionism in the eighties-nineties - both debtors of linguistic theory from structuralism to post-structuralism. And as, subsequently, and to date, it is highlighted a kind of multiplication-pluralization-differentiation of viewpoints, reflections from the same fragmentation and instability. The frequent overlap between the subject and body has developed to date a wide proliferation theory emerging in every form of discourse increasingly blurring the boundaries between theory, criticism and project-is the case mentioned by Peter Eisenman, but it is also the case of Bernard Tschumi, in its stress (in *Architecture and Disjunction*) the incapable need to rethink the limits of architecture to »bring the architecture to the limits,« or Wolf Prix, - how not to think of the UFA Cinema in Dresden, to the experimentation California designed or implemented within the models, or even to the »heart« of the Biennale by Aaron Betsky and the latest BMW WELT, a building wonderfully catastrophic, a terrible »whirlwind« into the ground to become paradoxically solid architecture.

The theory has become more and more, for architects, a stage, a thought designing and drawing, as well as speaking, writing, teaching.

The theory is today, on the one hand, together represented by projects and thoughts of every architect, from his writings, reflections and experiences that lead each author, consciously, to produce arguments, objects, architecture, projected, to paraphrase the Angel History of Walter Benjamin, towards the future and on the other the »theory« seems to have been devoid of its foundation and its weight by a new »environmental syndrome«, as he called Pierluigi Nicolin, which has opened new avenues suspended between ethics and aesthetics, inaugurated, probably, with the Biennale of Fuksas in 2000.