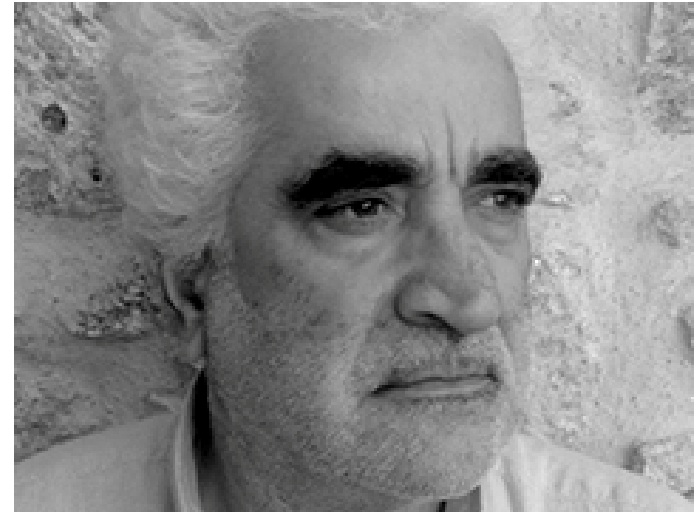*Ideia/Conceptualização*, *Intuição* e *Retórica/Argumento* **no processo de projecto**
Architectonica Percepta de Paulo Providência

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Licenciatura em Arquitetura pela Universidade do Porto (1988);

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Professor de Projeto no Departamento de Arquitectura da FCTUC (desde 1990)

Notes on the Idea, Heristic and Craft of Architecture. *In Architectonica Percepta, Texts and images 1989-2015.* **Zurich: Park Books, 2016, p. 121-129**

Temas:

- inter-relação entre ideia/conceptualização e acção pragmática/razão no projecto de arquitectura;

- interacção entre intuição e retórica/argumento na acção de formulação de hipóteses/teste de hipóteses;

- o processo de projecto (como todos os seus instrumentos) como campo de confronto e síntese entre essas duas dimensões, e encontro entre poética e retórica, entre interpretações de contexto e uso, e a natural resposta a um problema.

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Architectonica Percepta

Texts and Images 1989–2015

PARK BOOKS

We all know from experience that there can be no architectural design without an idea. And that idea may arise in response to a brief, a context or, more generally, to a perceived need. It is the idea that arrives in a blazing epiphany. It is what selects the key elements to be considered by the project and drives the production of models, and of the graphic and written elements. The translation of the idea into a project is what becomes the object of criticism and evaluation. Thus, the idea is as much the origin and motivation for the project as it is arising out it, for it not only stimulates research into a hypothesis, interpretation or motif, but may also appear when the design hypothesis is tested or developed on different levels. This process is not continuous, or even irreversible, as it is often necessary to reformulate the idea or starting point behind the project, or even change the idea itself. This occurs when a particular idea is found to be inadequate, in which case it may be kept for another occasion, another circumstance, another design hypothesis (this is why some architects keep idea banks for concepts that have not yet been tested, or which have been filtered out of a project at an early stage).

Considering that the idea is the main motivation for the architectural craft (a specific desire to transform the real), let us linger a little on how it comes about, and on the role it plays in the architectural project. For, of course, what characterizes a project most of all is its synthetic and unitary nature, and the consequent application of a compositional principle that brings together interpretations of context and use.

As it is the idea that structures the architectural response, we may consider two different ways in which ideas arise. According to the first, which is Platonic in origin, the idea precedes the design, that is to say, it can be found in a potential state in the heads of the operators. This account of architecture's origins is close to the process used in artistic production. There is no reason for the architectural response other than an inner conviction—a certainty that a particular response deserves to be explored, an intuition that overrides any argumentation. For the second, however, the design precedes the idea. The objective of architecture is to seem like a natural response to a problem—as Aristotle suggested in his *Poetics*. This account is closer to a technical response—like learning how to draw a particular shape or achieve verisimilitude in the architectural response—and involves the gradual construction of the argument of the project, something that is ultimately rhetorical in nature.

However, no architecture originates purely from one of these types. There will always be an argument constructed over a Platonic intuition, just as there will be intuitive moments in a rational response to a project argumentation (Le Corbusier was the great master of this, as Tim Benton has shown in his studies of rhetoric in Corbu[1]). Thus, as it is neither a purely Platonic idea nor the pure application of a rule, we need to consider the relationship that is established between the idea for the project and the process of constructing it, as the process will be either the confirmation of the idea or the opportunity for it to manifest itself.

It is more or less taken for granted among the architectural research community that architecture is the result of a design process. Even if we consider the project to be "a response to a problem," or believe that the process is more than just an alternation of moments of "analysis and synthesis," the imponderable and somewhat random nature of what is conventionally called "lateral thinking," or "divergent thinking" (as acclaimed in advertising, graphic and object design, and creative practices in general) does not completely explain the convergence of the idea in the construction of the project, or (as it is sometimes called) the desire for design intelligence.

Architectural heuristics (the study of how ideas occur in architecture) claims that ideas arise through analogy, which thus leads to the question of the analogical construction of the project, already formulated by Leon Battista Alberti in his time. But how do analogies arise? How is it that, before a particular design problem, an analogy comes to mind? At what moment do these analogies—so necessary to the idea—arise? The answer to this question takes us back to our starting point in that they both precede and follow the design. However, without devaluing that initial moment, this epiphany that is both the desire for and engine of the project perhaps proceeds by means of an infinite number of creative moments, momentary ideas that appear in a succession of steps right up to the final materialization of the project. When ideas are externalized (as designs on paper), the architect studies them, interprets them, and sets to work on them. And it is the capacity for representation (as each design produced in the process, from a quick sketch to a slow geometric outline, transmits a specific idea), which in turn responds to a new need, a new context. Architectural heuristics arises from the desires and skills of representation.

In the cycle of lectures entitled "Architecture as Craft," organized by Michiel Riedijk in 2009 at the Department of Architecture of TU Delft and subsequently published in book form,[2] architecture as craft is considered from three perspectives: architects' attitudes to the design process and production of the building, and their relationship to the result of their actions; architectural composition and the resources that architects use to produce projects (such as models and drawings); and the meaning of materialization in architectural thought. Two texts in the section on composition, by Enrique Walker and Jan De Vylder respectively, illustrate the two kinds of conception described above.

For Jan De Vylder, whose project construction is eminently narrative, the design process tells a story—the story of the project—in which context cannot be overlooked. The "drawing is everywhere," enabling project narratives to be constructed through its mode of graphic representation. This process, which is by nature iterative (as the very repetition of graphic elements such as elevations, ground plans, or cross sections leads to the discovery of other motifs, the association of ideas, composition schematizations and the insertion of textures), is what drives the design process. In these representations childlike communicative expressions are combined, and it is

those elements that lead, through successive approximations, to the production of the final acceptable version in a process that greatly enriches the results. It is those graphic elements, which record the changing intentions of both the client/developer and the architects themselves, that are the object of design research. Here then, the design is both the reality and final goal of the architectural craft. These are not so much beautiful designs to be framed and hung on a wall, but rather records of changing ideas and partial intentions, which nevertheless converge upon the final unity of the work. Thus, the various designs which follow on from one another generate new ideas, which are tested and incorporated (or not) into the project. From this perspective, the craft of architecture appears to be really the craft of drawing. The design, though eminently manual in nature, may also be produced on the computer, which is understood to be one means of graphic expression among others (manual designs, photomontages, models, etc), and it is ultimately irrelevant if the design was drawn by hand or printed on an inkjet printer. This form of production questions normative design practices, which approach the process with pre-established solutions. By exploring the process of graphic production, it allows the project a new freedom, the freedom to linger on solutions that best serve its purpose.

Walker, reflecting on the famous posthumous text "Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres," by French author and father of surrealism Raymond Roussel, which reveals the techniques of narrative construction that Roussel himself used in his own writing, argues that it is precisely the subjection of architecture to forces external to composition that frees the architect from the need for self-imposed constraints as a productive mechanism. This means that attention to those "external forces" has caused architecture to stray from its "internal purposes." While it submitted itself to problem-solving practices, it demonized constraints, because they limited the architectural imagination. For Enrique Walker, architecture tolerates voluntary constraints only when those forces are weak or disguised by narratives of necessity, which hides its potential. He concludes by saying that practices of using self-imposed (and therefore arbitrary) constraints bind the architect to a deliberate formulation of the problem; and this decision without commitment, if accurately calibrated, may result in unexpected production routes. To illustrate his argument, Walker uses dozens of examples from both cinema and literature in which authors impose a creative limitation upon themselves (ranging from Thomas Bernhard's one-paragraph book to Georges Perec's novella constructed without using one particular letter; and from Friedrich Murnau's unsubtitled silent movie to Michelangelo Antonioni's film, whose outcome is revealed only in the very last minutes). In this case, purity of form (a platonic attribute) seems to be achieved by the mental operation of a "breakdown" in the desired conception (the self-imposed constraint), like a kind of language game, accentuating the idea as an epiphanic attribute of a revelation ("what if ...?"). Though conceived as a learned dialogue between producers, this compositional strategy (in the broadest sense) suggests that constraints of place, technique, or use may be other productive routes for architecture as craft, and that their incorporation may perhaps help architecture to respond better to its ultimate remit: to construct a house for man to live on earth.