

LETTING OUR EMOTION THINK

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Letting our emotions think (“laisse penser tes sens”) is what the poet Paul Fort suggests in moments of reflection or of confrontation with processes or even simple tasks. As for architecture, this way of thinking and this emotional vision is appealing to think about.

Upon reviewing some of the work we have done, it is impossible not to recall its production process, its emotiveness and the denseness of the trials and experiences we have gone through over the past ten years of professional work in this small peripheral country that is “Atlantic” by nature but universal in its people’s convictions.

It is in the north of this rapidly changing country, just fifteen kilometers from the city of Porto, in a small coastal fishing town where the sea and the northern wind are always present, that the atelier, where most of our architectural design and production takes place, is located.

With its beaches, hotels and casino, Espinho is a beach resort of great interest and with a life of its own, despite it being predominantly peripheral compared to major urban centers. The city, which has developed along the shore line, takes the sea as its vast horizon and matrix of its identity.

It is in this geographical context that architecture is developed, designed, and thought out interactively, getting the city and its inhabitants involved in a direct and permanent manner.

Having said this, the architecture we have developed in some way aims to mirror and evoke the country in accordance with its difficulties, including its lack of technological capabilities in addition to a significant increase in economic limitations, duly resulting in an attempt to create motivations and ambitions where everyday life, reality and art find their inspiration and their place.

The place, the location, the people and their habits, their ideas, their difficulties, their desires and lack thereof, are constantly the creative force behind our architectural thinking. Happiness, quality of life, the solving of social problems, the enhancing of a street or a city, and lifestyle, are also part of a lexicon that an architect should know how to develop and perpetuate as time goes by.

Much of our work is located in geographical areas where the mixture of desire and knowledge distances it from conventional architectural practice. They are complex human geographies that are conditioned by and currently experiencing economic difficulties, dramatic stories of desire, highlighting the lack of economic means for guaranteeing a secure and professional practice that is so desired.

Having said this, these projects are contrivances of possible portrayals of reality and thus suggest a different way of doing things and acting. They are built around stories and people from many diverging social backgrounds. They are built out of humanity, happiness and suffering, excesses and shortcomings, (mis)understandings, and with a short amount of time for the necessary compressions etc. Some are great victories because they are full of insignificant

conquests that at times transform modest ambitions into dignified and comfortable spaces where the project's creativity was just an intelligent desire to build a happy place.

Methodologically, projects look for experimentation geared to an ideal of rigor, this being the common place – the foundation – for their acceptance and inclusion in the different disciplinary areas outside architecture that influence, inform, carry out and illuminate architecture in the projects and spaces we design.

The work process during the developmental stage of a project is somewhat fragile and discontinuous. It is a “living” stage in constant confrontation and conflict, a place of sharing and interference, where the idea of conceptual synthesis is always a motivation. Designing means communicating. It conveys a place and a time to a client while expressing a certain risk and doubt otherwise never confessed to fellow architects, constructors, technicians, citizens who put our projects to use, and even to ourselves... It is a way of confronting and constructing modernity, which is constantly changing.

An architect's work is volatile and constantly “injured” by secret desires and diverse understandings of things to which a sought-after ideal, a miracle or perfection is subjacent – a place where our mind lingers and is omnipresent, thereby communicating something about us in return. In this sense, architecture encloses within itself an autobiographical reflection for it is a physical manifestation of confrontations, values and standards.

These are our projects and not others... inhabited homes, occupied places, walls enclosing life, ideas with memories, designs with a destiny. Endless are the projects devised and transformed by a continuous yearning to improve and adapt to aesthetic eye, to hereditary knowledge and to the regulations education has given us, in a symbiosis of textures and signs and non-central or peripheral places.

Designing is the exercising of critical consciousness guided by a strategy of thought and action in a certain context. The peripheral context of the imperfect, of interrupted thought and unfinished place that both Wenders and Amodóvar exemplify, is what motivates, enthuses and legitimizes some of the designs we have studied and developed.

In turn, the context is the place of constant confrontation, choice and decision; it is, overall, the place where action prevails, even if only to maintain one's identity.

It is the place of common sense, the place of daily praxis, the place where the yearning for a desired form of non-fundamental modernity is reflected and where the opposing desire for the past and its conservative tastes are constructed. It is the place of secret battles and it is the battlefield for innumerable architectural and urban theories, distant and thus disengaged and uninvolved.

Architecture that is developed in this context asserts itself as it is put into practice. It results from confrontation and, in part, from provocation being “a rule of the game” that working in the periphery establishes. It is not about proceeding without criticizing the unfolding of daily life, abundant in situations and fashions, but rather the result of continuous reevaluation of needs and a quest for solutions to reassess and invert the general tendency towards physical and urban degradation that the constant transformation and non-consolidation of places lead to.

Paradoxically, the working ideal in the urban, cultural or social periphery encloses within itself a sense of centrality and hegemony that superposes a homogeneous reading of an area and its places. It is done through the creation of successive moments where discontinuity and surprise guarantee these people's identity, whose vision of themselves is as being helpless, humble, yet also capable of extraordinary feats and for whom the word “future” is never far behind that of

“present”.

Thus, it seems difficult to design and build any architecture under these conditions, especially if we view Portugal as a country with a sequence of cultural blocks where various time periods and stages of evolution seem to be omnipresent and in constant opposition.

From the architectural tradition being revealed in Portugal, which Alves Costa describes as being between “authority and permissiveness, projecting and spontaneity, centralism and regionalism, nationalism and internationalism, radical adventure and stagnating conservativeness, experimentation and scholastics, reason and sentiment”, we work to develop and build a type of architecture where, more so than linguistic coherence, efficiency regarding solutions and executions can be achieved within the country’s diverse social-cultural context.

We search to create a connection between a time, a place and its people in a process that respects an architectural identity based on the constructive values of the country, on a study of its traditions and on knowledge of its economic and social difficulties, but the desire for architecture that is open to innovation, provocation and modernization is beyond geographical limits for it is inserted in ideological and conceptual thinking that is more global and thus more international.

This requires proper and non-isolated research, where “this” or “that” work of architecture is not looked for, but rather “this” or “that” strategy, “this” or “that” sensation. At times we work on a certain sense of humor or subtle sensuality, but we always look to develop a concept, an ideology, expressed in design and that can flood space.

Feelings of emotional rationality can be found in these aspirations regarding work and space to which I have devoted myself over these past few years while working in various creative areas. From architecture to design, stage design, television, magic, furniture design and art galleries/studios/etc., I strive to show and work towards a creative standard, which history at times has revealed as being possible.

The resulting work almost always explores and intercepts this complex world of knowledge and distinct methodological approaches, in an ideal of happiness and of contamination, and thus, free form problems or drama but with the tranquility of those who believe in its “fado”, a sentiment that is very Portuguese and very genuine, and now – more than ever - ...very universal.

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