

Know how with no why, no more

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Know-how with no why; no more.

by Angelo Bucci

A flash of time

I would like to refer to architecture in that very specific time: right now. It means architecture as an action. Or better, as suggested by Rafael Iglesia/em, architecture as a verb. At that moment, when both thinking and action are joined and take place, space and time seems to be flattened, the whole world seems to be condensed in one point toward which converge all precedents and all knowledge.

Which world has been condensed in that time? This question is, at once, source and target for that action.

What follows is addressed specifically to that flash of time and aiming to delineate our current world.

About proportion and balance

Actions operate — according to Milton Santos, a famous Brazilian geographer/em — on space necessarily in three different fields: normative [or formal], technical and symbolic; than the question: have these three fields been properly balanced? The answer is clear: not at all. Technical issues have been hegemonic over normative and in particular over symbolic issues which are barely considered or completely disregarded.

In addition, actions must evoke a broad range of knowledge to be designed — imagined or conceived —; thus, a similar question can be placed: has this range been properly considered? Again, the answer is clearly negative. When we consider that knowledge comes from two major sources and as a result it is basically organized in two main groups: human sciences and natural sciences; the first was unfolded in history, theory, aesthetics, ethics, art and many others, while the second one, physics, all knowledge about material, structures, engineers, technic, construction etc. Out of any doubt, the second one has been largely hegemonic over the first in the current architectural actions.

Anything to oppose to technical knowledge and field, or even of any small branch of it, we need to evoke that knowledge to engender our actions as we need that field to operate in space. The point here is to highlight the problem that results from the lack of proportion between knowledge groups and the unbalance relationship among those three fields

through which actions take place. The point is not to renounce what we have achieved but to be aware of those branches of knowledge we have been trained to disregard.

That is why we often feel that 'know-how with no why' seems to be the supreme law leading our design process; we feel that 'lots of resource and lack of meaning' seems to be guiding our actions in the space. By experiencing this feeling as an evidence of the predominant forces, we realize that the world condensed in that flash of time is the techno scientific hegemonic world.

The know-how is the expression of this hegemony in construction, while all those branches of knowledge that we disregard imprint the lack of why.

The problem is that integrity of our activity in architecture is based in a well-balanced duality: body and soul, lyric and music, physical and mind, form and function, theory and practice, think and action and so on. This duality can be expressed in countless ways. Thus, the hegemony of one part makes our action incomplete. The lack of proportion and balance deforms designing process and tends to cancel the effect of a live, or innovative, action. Therefore, no matter how much or for how long we produce, anything changes.

The role of the poetic approach

In this scenario, the poetic approach assumes a remarkable role. It is a tool which works in all those three fields: symbolic, normative and technical. It fulfills the lack, it brings to light all sort of knowledge silenced by the hegemonic power. The poetic approach recovers our integrity. At same time, in an unbalanced scenario, we have to double our attention and not overpressure the role of poetic approach in the design process as giving a pragmatic function to it.

Let us go back to that flash of time when one engenders actions during the design process. It is a process because it is an enchainned succession of choices. What guide us in the process? Ethical standards, aesthetical principles and beauty criteria, or essentially the answer that seems to summarize all elements is the poetic approach. How to ensure a live and innovative approach to the process? Again, we will be lead to the same answer: poetic approach. Because it is by working on the limit of language that we can achieve some new configurations, that we can arrange possibilities unknown until that time. I mean innovation, not novelty.

More than this, poetic approach allows us to arrange things in a meaningful relationship. It is clear that each piece or each fragment existing in the world is part of an aesthetical whole. The poetic approach and aesthetics as a science has no substitute for the continuous and endless reconstruction process of the whole.

Poetic approach and its structure on the design process

In a poetic arrangement there is a clear structure that guides the process. Actually, it structures our own thinking and it plays a crucial role as a guide for the successive choices demanded by the designing process. This structure holds aesthetical criteria. It is, at the same time, defined enough to guide us in a clear way and open enough to not constrain and not anticipate the result. At once, it is reliable and intangible. It is the most powerful way to put all fragments, or elements that come up during the process, in a consistent relationship. It is the only possible bound to link unconnected elements which come from specific demands and approaches encompassed by the design process.

Disregard this structure, as we have seen, produces losses that cannot be replaced by any other approach.

A word as the key

As seen, we know, through clear evidences, that the world condensed in that flash of time is the techno scientific hegemonic world, which is superimposed over any other knowledge or field. Thus, there is a question: How to better balance the knowledge evoked by the design process? How to recover the integrity of our activity, how to link again, in the time we act, those two main groups of knowledge nature and human sciences?

The answer holds no secrets at all. Actually, it was coined since a long time ago in one single word. A composed word that was created exactly to show how those two main groups of knowledge must be linked: words and numbers, poetry and physics, art and technic, theory and practice, thinking and to action, human sciences and nature sciences. The duality in which rests our integrity is the same duality once combined to composed this word, a key with no substitute.

A word that must be honored, otherwise, emacording to Renato Rizzi/em, we will be renouncing the title of our everyday activity.

Short and clear, actually the answer is fully condensed in one single word which guides us with know-how and know-why toward an action full of poetic meanings, this key-word is so obvious that sometimes seems hard to be seen.