

What is worth knowing

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What is worth knowing

Intellectuals are a complaining class. A class that, according to W. Lepenis, "knows no states other than melancholy and utopia". A state that is almost always associated with a sense of guilt because of the state of the world.

Now, as far as teaching of architecture is concerned, I think that first we must break free from that annoying feeling of guilt. Guilt for not practicing that teaching above all suspicion – that no one knows for sure what it is. Guilt, anyway, because the grass of our neighbor's yard is always greener than ours. The old Lusitanian syndrome.

This is the picture we very zealously paint, for the record. Now, I think if we do not have to prove that we are the best, we do not have to prove that we are the worst either ("What is this, friend, that puts you on good terms with others and bad ones with yourself?"). It is enough that we get used to living with lucidity the contradictions and uncertainties inherent in the teaching of architecture – and there are many. We will have to live with them without nostalgia or mortification; and philosophically, say like Leonardo: if you cannot do what you think, at least think about what you do. Philosophers have always been bitter people. In this regard, and to dedramatize the painting, I would like to recall two or three things.

1_ that the path of learning is not the path of the sun, a straight-line progress, from less to more. On the contrary, it has ups and downs, advances and setbacks, fast times, and slow progression times.

It even happens that sometimes the period of greater receptivity and motivation of the student does not coincide with his academic cycle. As the one who knew everything about love said, "the important thing for a good love relationship between a man and a

woman is not that they love each other very much, but that they love each other very much at the same time".

2_ that the student's mind is not an empty box that mechanically becomes busy as he advances in his studies. On the contrary, the mind is forming, structuring, and qualifying in step of his experiences and knowledge acquired. Until he reaches that luminous moment when he can formulate an architectural thought... Which, other than a natural gift, is the hardest thing to achieve, as we well know. So, and only then, he is ready to go his own way.

Besides that, the student brings within himself, as any human being, a vast experience of space, lived at all scales (from the room to the house, from the neighborhood to the city, from nature to...). An experience that needs to be raised to the level of consciousness that he then projects in his acts of learning, internalizing the idea that architecture is a thing of ours... of everyone's.

3_ that not all individuals have the same time and the same pace of apprehension of facts and knowledge when taken and held in the same learning situation. We all have different noses; and we have the right to have them. This condition is insurmountable under the current conditions of mass education, aggravated by the fact that the school population has long since ceased to be a single and homogeneous body, because it is made up of individuals with different cultural structures.

4_ that teaching is an admirable thing, if one keeps in mind that what is worth knowing is not taught, it is learnt.

If this is true, as I think it is, the greatest function of the university will then be to teach the student to learn. Learn not only in university, but also later in life, in the exercise of the profession.

Self-teaching – with or without a master – is not a sin, a stigma, or the product of a teaching deficit. It is, on the contrary, a superior way of learning, on the sole condition that the student has a strong motivation to do so. It is this motivation that at every step must be stimulated.

The whole philosophy of teaching architecture is for me contained in these simple words of Wittgenstein: "It is as if I have lost myself and asked someone the way home. He says he will show it to me and accompany me along a pleasant and quiet path. It ends suddenly. And then my friend says to me, now all you must do is look for your way home from here".

5_ In all learning situations in which we teachers involve the student, he must always recognize what is being taught to him. Rather, the student should be led to the discovery of what is being taught to him. This simple statement of principle configures for me the true value and meaning of the heuristic method, the exact opposite of the dogmatic method. It is therefore permissible to say that the value of the method cannot be understood only in final terms of achievement, but above all in formative and cognitive terms. To know at every moment what one is doing.

Now.

I would like to give you an idea that, in the meantime, I was developing, not only as a teacher, but also as an architect. And this idea is that no matter how hard you turn, architecture is learnt by practicing. And this is for the simple reason that architecture is not a discipline, in the common sense of the term, that is, a "corpus" of laws, concepts and formative theories of a knowledge institutionalized by practice. And hence the difficulties we all encounter in teaching, and in its ingrained experimentalism.

But how to do it, if we cannot reproduce in this place the real conditions of professional practice?

Well, unless it is feasible in the current conditions to reproduce here a contemporary version of the Pombaline Casa do Risco, what can we do but put our nose in the wind and eyes on the horizon and try to rationalize our didactic apparatus, courageously assuming its own logic, its contradictions and aporias.

This pathway involves, in my view, the creation of the three types of learning situations that are already being practiced today but need to be restored to their own internal logic.

One is the STUDY OF REAL CASES (from the remote or recent past, or current one). This study will be based on the central idea that the disciplinary contents (geography, philosophy, tastes, technologies, sociology, economics, history, etc.) are established in their own architectural form and persist in it for as long as this form lasts. That is why architecture is an open book to the reading of sociology, history, economics, etc., of a time and a place.

It is, therefore, to the perception and discovery of this process of formation – more than to the form itself – that the student must be led:

this exciting exercise of decoding or deciphering signals. But for this to work is condition number one that always is inculcated to the irrevocable integrity of the architectural fact.

In fact, in all the démarches of approach to architectural facts – practical, theoretical, historical – its integrity must always be observed.

This will be perhaps the best antidote against the practice of the decomposition of the ancillary sciences of architecture in which he (the student) finds himself entangled, and which are addressed separately and, who knows, if necessarily?

To analyze a nut, you need to break it. However, if necessary, this scientific precept of analysis must always be confronted with its opposite: synthesis, embodied in architectural form. And nothing better for this purpose than the actual case studies.

Another modality or situation of learning lies in short-term and short-target or "halfway there" actions.

- These actions are not intended to simulate anything: they are FICTIONS in the true (scientific) meaning of the term, since that to be accepted and judged, their products only

must be justified, never proven (this is the true "y" of the problem of the apprentice gin our profession by academic means);

- They appeal to the invention, dispatch, ingenuity, fantasy, imagination, and practical sense of the student: to his life experience;
- They revolve around problems intentionally closed and very consonant to the student's (presumed) knowledge, but whose resolution may result in openness to new questions, and so on to new knowledge:
- to strengthen the student's discursive thinking in logical and conceptual terms: the art of talking about drawing, or of ritualizing the act of thinking, doing; where before the analysis was the rule;
- to put situations that induce the student to problematize the architectural space and build ideas and new experiences about their own awareness of this space.

With these actions/essays it is not intended to imitate the real world of the profession. Instead, it is about creating learning situations around "minimal problems", or fragments of problems, discharged from the programmatic, logistical, and interdisciplinary emphasis of professional practice, which by its very nature cannot be reproduced in academic practice.

Another learning situation, customary because irreplaceable, consists in the practice of simulated project acts: LET US PRETEND. However, the simulated project act will only have didactic value if the distinction between what by choice is clearly retracted from the "real act" that is simulated and what is imperatively rejected.

And if this choice is arbitrary, variable, and conventional, as it cannot fail to be, then it can be affirmed that each case generates its own theory.

This, the thin and delicate margin of realism where it is lawful to practice the game of "pretending" in academic learning.

Likewise, the product can only be observed and evaluated on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with the rules of the previously negotiated "game" and never by analogy or similarity to the product of professional practice... but the product will not be less authentic, less serious than this.

Otherwise, the continued practice of "pretending", "as if..." fallacious is the very sense of the real that comes out distorted, atrophied, to the point of presenting itself to the spirit of the student as the finished model of the exercise of the profession: the craft of architect reduced to the proportions of a drawing-making man and that is exhausted in it. At the same time, it deludes and omits the sense of responsibility inherent to the project itself, and that in all instances of teaching must be exercised. The simulated act, the "pretending", when not rationalized infuses a harmful state of irresponsibility that if it is not contradicted, can come to reproduce in professional life since its result will never be submitted to fireproof that is the construction...



Imagine what will be a fine arts student spending his school time making painting sketches or sculpture models; or a young scientist formulating theories without ever deducing a hypothesis or designing experiments without ever taking them into practice. Also, the architecture student will only watch the "halfway there" of creative activity.

Was it not for the student's occasional and fortuitous contact with real life of the profession, and on leaving the course would he see it in an inverted image? Too late or never the image of oneself, as an architect, will remake itself of this shock. The legendary dissatisfaction of the young architect out of schools is due less to his dissatisfaction with the present (as it is thought to be proper to youth) than to the eternal misfit between the idea of profession built by faculties and reality. It should also be said that the skill, the dexterity demonstrated by the student in the simulated acts of design, being an indication of progress, is not in itself sufficient for the student to gain awareness of the sense of civic responsibility of the professional act.

Finally, I also propose a fourth learning situation: RESEARCH. It formulates hypotheses and takes the use of verification. Unlike "pretending", that assumes, most often, an imaginary intervention even when on a real problem, investigation should always be situated in the plane of reality.

Without prejudice to the openness to reality and concrete problems of the community, the major field of research should be in hinge areas of architecture with sciences and techniques, considering that it is in this fringe or web of intersections that occurred the great innovations that make architecture move.