

## ***Flashback/Carrilho da Graça. A network of interlocked lines.***

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"Lei crede che ogni storia debba tenere un principio e una fine? Anticamente un racconto aveva solo due modi per finire: passate tutte le prove, l'eroe e l'eroina si sposavano oppure morivano. Il senso ultimo a cui rimandano tutti i racconti ha due facce: la continuità della vita, l'inevitabilità della morte" (CALVINO, 1994: 304)<sup>1</sup>

In 1979, the book *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, by Italo Calvino, was published. A novel about "the pleasure of reading books", with an unorthodox narrative structure. The protagonist is the reader who, for reasons beyond his control, cannot finish the book, and is forced to start a new one every time. Calvino, therefore, writes the beginning of 10 different novels, by imaginary authors, with personal and autonomous styles where, in each case, more than how the story ends, it matters how it begins, what it evokes and the relationship between the different stories. In this regard, Calvino himself explains that we could introduce another variant in the reading, ordering in sequence the titles of each story so that together they form the beginning of a new one: *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore/Fuori dall'abitato di Malbork/Sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa/Senza temere il vento e la vertigine/Guarda in basso dove l'ombra s'addensa/In una rete di linee che s'allacciano/In una rete di linee che s'intersecano/Sul tappeto di foglie illuminato dalla luna/Intorno a una fossa vuota/Quale storia laggiù attende la fine?*<sup>2</sup>

What story there in the background awaits an ending? With this beginning, we approach the exhibition and the homonymous catalog, *Flashback/Carrilho da Graça*, which could be visited between April 2022 and January 2023 at the Casa da Arquitectura de Matosinhos. An exhibition that from the entrance produces the need to go to the bottom, "laggiú", to know the end, but the arrangement of the tables in strips and the definition of a route in 10 stages, forces us to go slowly. In addition, the same arrangement of the elements and the construction of the itinerary, makes the outward journey different from the return: a double zigzagging path, with a dynamic and linear tension along the strips, with stays and pauses at the ends of each table, due to the presence of video projections made by various artists, that refer to other stories about each project. A narrative structure that makes us start over every time.

There are ten chapters that define the trajectory of an architect, and are archetypally named: 'Terminal'; 'Castle'; 'Bridge'; 'Auditorium'; 'Church'; 'Pavilion'; 'Monastery'; 'School'; 'Pool'; 'House', ordered according to an inverted chronological criterion from the most recent to the oldest and where, through a narrative by "flashback", the strictly chronological sequence of the story is altered, connecting different moments (relationships with other projects, paintings, works, literary and poetic references or experiences) and intermittently transferring the action to the past as a constant connection to the present.

The catalogue takes us to another reading. An "entry" through 10 double-page photographs that immediately immerse the reader in the atmosphere and ambience of each project, with a subsequent reverse chronological narrative structure of the selected works, which alternate with texts by renowned authors: architects, landscapers, engineers or historians. The writings literally "intrude", create autonomous and intermittent episodes and are strategically placed, so that the reader can relate them to the projects, or ramble and interpret them in an open way.

These are 5 texts of reflection by Delfim Sardo, João Gomes da Silva, Kenneth Frampton, Guilherme Carrilho da Graça and Marco Mulazzani and 3 debates and dialogues crossed between several authors, Delfim Sardo, Jean-Louis Cohen, João Luís Carrilho da Graça, Álvaro Siza, Eduardo Souto de Moura, Gonçalo Byrne and Manuel Aires Mateus, with the moderation of Marta Sequeira, the curator of the exhibition and the catalogue. A "flashback in the flashback", through writings that link directly with the works of Carrilho da Graça, but also with the design process, with his references, with his work instruments, with his life.

Italo Calvino explains, in the introduction to the aforementioned book, that one of the most common questions about this novel is the reason for the 10 "beginnings" of imaginary authors. However, for him what matters most is to ask himself something else: Why these and not others? Each beginning corresponds to an archetype of a "possible" novel, because it contains themes and variations. He is responsible for leaving us an obvious trace of this structure and elaborates a scheme with the keys to reading each novel<sup>3</sup>. Each theme chosen, in the end, implies others discarded: "for me this book is a kind of autobiography in negative".

In the same way, looking and going through the pages of the *Flashback/Carrilho da Graça* catalog, again and again, we think *why these and not others?* Inevitably, the chosen projects refer to the "discarded" projects and acquire the role of "chosen"

because they represent the others not selected. In some works, explicit and at the same time evocative relationships are shown, with very varied references: in 'Terminal', with the drawing of a female nude, Avalon LA, by Carrilho da Graça (from the personal collection of the Portuguese artist Julião Sarmento), or with the painting by Barnett Newmann, Blue, Red, Yellow, by the same artist (belonging to the personal collection of Carrilho da Graça); in 'Castle', with the book *Islamic Architecture* by John D. Hoag; in 'Pavilion', with the project of Paulo Mendes da Rocha of Museu Brasileiro de Escultura e da Ecologia in São Paulo, Brazil; in 'School', with Russian constructivism through the sculptures of Kasimir Malevich and the paintings of El Lissitzky; in 'Pool', with the Rothschild house in Israel, by Oscar Niemeyer, with a drawing published in a book by Wittkower, which shows the urban relationship between three churches in Venice, Italy, and with a painting by Malevich; finally, in 'House', with a *Geographical Study of the Pianura Padana per l'Atlante Territoriale*, by Saverio Muratori and with the documentary *Thomas Bernhard – Drei Tage*, by Ferry Radax, where the writer sitting on a white bench in a Hamburg, Germany, park full of huge old trees, talks for three days about his struggles with writing and his praise of obstacles as "material for the brain".

"Quería vivir, y todo lo demás no significaba nada. Vivir y vivir mi vida, como quisiera y tanto tiempo como quisiera. Entre dos caminos posibles, me había decidido esa noche, en el instante decisivo, por el camino de la vida. Si hubiera cedido un solo instante en esa voluntad mía, no hubiera vivido ni una hora. De mí dependía seguir respirando o no. El camino de la muerte hubiera sido fácil. El camino de la vida tiene igualmente la ventaja de la libre determinación. No lo perdí todo, seguí teniéndolo todo" (BERNHARD, 1978: 102)<sup>4</sup>

All the external references related to the projects, define a kind of chronological and geographical traceability in the work of Carrilho da Graça, which make us look again at his projects looking for these traces, that he himself is responsible for leaving us. Calvino speaks of *the continuity of life*, Bernhard of the *path of life*, and both refer to the need to choose. A path of choices or "discards", between references and design decisions, which allow the architect to situate himself in the world and which are concretized in works, through a continuous exploration: approaches, methods and instruments are intertwined according to a cyclical scheme.

With the documentary and the words of Thomas Bernhard we reach the "end" of the catalogue and the exhibition, but the immediate feeling is that we start again: the project of the House, which is the first in chronological order, contains all the others. Carrilho da Graça's work is a constant fluctuation between opposites: generosity/austerity; uniqueness/unity; method/adaptation, and above all, abstraction/place that reveals a formal unity in multiple paths, without each work losing its uniqueness.

A new imaginary landscape of real projects is configured, where the understanding of the forces of the territory and the places, obtains an answer through architectural abstraction. Therefore, the use of geography and place as data for urban architecture and for the social appropriation of the territory, is not an illusion, but a common argument concretized in the works through archetypal solutions. The projects provide solutions and responses to location conditions at high points, slopes, or low levels, forming physical, visual and functional continuities, which translate into systems, links or reference points in the landscape.

Borders at low elevations on the waterfront (Terminal de Cruzeiros de Lisbon, Portugal; Pavilhão do Conhecimento, Lisbon); connections, extensions and viewpoints in areas sloping or projected towards the landscape (Musealização da área Arqueológica da Praça Nova do Castelo de São Jorge, Lisbon; Ponte pedonal on Ribeira da Carpinteira, Covilhã, Portugal; Escola Superior de Comunicação Social, Lisbon; Théâtre Auditorium of Poitiers, France; Municipal Swimming Pool of Campo Maior, Portugal; Casa Fonte Fria, Portalegre, Portugal); or also enclosures, which configure new interior landscapes in urban environments or open to the landscape (Igreja de Santo António e Centro Social de São Bartolomeu, Portalegre, Portugal; Extensão e adaptação do Mosteiro de Flor da Rosa para Pousada, Crato, Portugal)

Returning to the beginning of Calvino's book, the novel collects fragments of conversation that the reader articulates in his imagination, and that seem to have no other function than to represent the daily life of any and all provincial cities.

"The novel begins in a railway station, where a locomotive wheezes, a swaying of pistons covers the opening of the chapter, a cloud of smoke hides part of the first paragraph. Amidst the smell of the station, a blast of the smell of the station's canteen passes"

But for our traveler,

"The stations all look alike; it matters little that the lights fail to illuminate beyond their unwashed halo, total this is an environment that you know by heart, with the smell of train that lasts even after all the trains have departed, the special smell of the stations after having departed the last train. The lights of the station and the phrases you are reading seem to have the task of dissolving rather than indicating the things that emerge from a veil of darkness and fog. I have come down at this station tonight for the first time in my life. It seems to me to have spent a lifetime in it" (CALVINO, 1980: 8)

The works of Carrilho da Graça seem to speak of all possible territories: equal and different. The different locations, programs and size, with unique conditions of geographical and urban insertion acquire an archetypal function and seem to us groupable in a combinatorial way: they are all transitional architectures, projected towards a landscape or creators of enclosures with new landscapes. *Flashback/Carrilho da Graça* is an operative story, a "deck of cards of instrumental alliances for the future of architecture", in the words of curator Marta Sequeira, who not only makes a historical review of his thought, methods and work, but projects his work as a set of lessons, to make us "know by heart" the Portuguese architect. A territory-archipelago of urban architectures, of reinterpreted places, a set of elements composable according to a multiplicity of sequences and possible relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Do you think every story should have a beginning and an end? In ancient times, a tale had only two ways of ending: once all the tests were passed, the hero and the heroine married or died. The ultimate meaning to which all the stories refer has two faces: the continuity of life, the inevitability of death'. In the introduction, Calvino explains that his intention was that the different novels would not end. But there are several critics, who do not deny himself, who believe that each story says everything it had to say, that they are complete. (Calvin, 1994. Introduction p. IX).

<sup>2</sup> 'If one winter night a traveler/On the outskirts of the city of Malbork/Looking out over the rugged coast/Unafraid of wind or vertigo/Look down, where the shadows thicken/In a network of interlocked lines/On the carpet of moonlit leaves/Around an empty well/ What story there in the background awaits an ending?'

<sup>3</sup> As a closing of the introduction to the book (Calvino, 1994. Introduction p. XV).

<sup>4</sup> I wanted to live, and everything else meant nothing. Live and live my life, as I wanted and as long as I wanted. Between two possible paths, I had decided that night, at the decisive moment, on the path of life. If I had yielded a single moment in that will of mine, I would not have lived an hour. It was up to me to keep breathing or not. The road to death would have been easy. The path of life also has the advantage of self-determination. I did not lose everything, I kept having everything.

Thomas Bernhard, *The Breath*, 1978. Due to a serious lung disease, the writer was confined from 1949 to 1951 in a sanatorium. That experience reconciled him with life.