

A WAY OF SEEING ARCHITECTURE

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I don't think I have ever faced an architecture project with a view to publishing and disseminating it through the press or the media and now looking back on all this work (and there have been many others besides the ones gathered here), I see that it has been a life filled with work, joy and intense activity. Perhaps this is the way I am, Intense and Active, but also joyous, with a zest for life and a taste for the good things in life, like going to the beach, bathing in the sea, contemplating a beautiful sunset with some friends, living in contact with the forces of nature that the sea always reminds us of.

Of course, in this I also include architecture as one of the best things in life. Like creation, invention, people, friends and students, the challenges, the uncertainties, our secret desires... and on another level, the respect and admiration for ideas, experiences, instabilities, utopias, which are expressed through plastic arts, sculpture, cinema, theatre, so many writers and authors who also influence us and touch us profoundly and that, just like the north wind, cannot be seen but is felt (and how!) here in this small city of Espinho, where I live and that provides us with a huge amount of happiness and therefore joy, humour, but also profound intensity.

I think that it is not possible to appreciate these works without understanding a difficult and complex system of concerns, of which the work is a testament or, in other words, an attempt to resolve them. Consequently, these architectural projects in some way close an autobiographical record, of thoughts, doubts, some certainties, pure experiences, be they formal, methodological, constructive, typological... which the projects make it possible to bring to fruition and, in that sense, they seem to have an experimental flavour.

They are mostly concerned with not creating a style, which I have always refused to do and that scares me deeply. Hence the anxiety of an almost perpetual endeavour to not repeat formal or spatial models that I have employed in other works. I always try to add another viewpoint, another framework, another difficulty that will stimulate and motivate me in the creation, in the resolution of programmes, of places, of orders and of needs, which my clients, friends and collaborators request of me.

It was never my concern to compile a work, to demonstrate principles or to discover new and wise methods for the discipline, which will always live on fine without us. Nevertheless, I also never tried to reproduce methods, forms, "styles", tendencies, ways of designing – from this or that school – if they were not my principles too, my ways of perceiving, my learning, my journey,... with my entire responsibility.

The proximity of the sea, the beach and the sun, provides us early on with security in our body and our nakedness, so living by the sea teaches us to have a good relationship with Body and Matter, without complexes or ambiguities.

Perhaps that is why I decided to have my own workspace from early on. It has its advantages: conceptual freedom, methodological independence, responsibility for choices and strategies,... as well as disadvantages: multiplication of errors and their maintenance, slower learning, in

terms of managing an office, searching for the organisation of a project and the way to behave in front of clients and their orders,... and I discovered this is not a perfect world... and that is just as well!

My interest in such areas as drawing, painting, set design, theatre, music, photography, furniture, interior design, cinema, animation, comic strips, graphic design means that I have not created an office centred exclusively on architecture or on architectural project, “pure and simple”!

As a result, I created the CNLL atelier with the areas of architecture, engineering, set design, furniture design and production, which has design and drawing, creation and invention, as a common basis and which are later structured and organised into different methodologies, processes and objectives.

It is precisely this methodological process that this book seeks to underline. More than projects or singular architectures, genius masterpieces which I never meant to do, the intention was to discover paths without fear of making mistakes, or rather, where the mistake – ageing, blending – can be a part of the actual work process too.

The idea of architecture, in this process, is not seen as something definitive and stable (it is not a foregone conclusion) but a process that is reinvented, a wave that comes and goes and that sometimes erases the promise of love that we draw in the sand.

Drawing is a subtle addiction, it is an instrument to create, to invent objects, to establish relationships, to stimulate experiences, which provoke feelings, express conflicts, heighten desires, passions and rages that the outlines that I try to do seldom come close to the ideal synthesis, taking other courses we know so well and always against the flow!

I always paid attention to this idea of Miller’s which tells us that “According to the Japanese aesthetic, poetry should be like silk, smooth and elegant. But supreme poetry is like an ordinary paper and should maintain a certain roughness”. As it is definitely not poetry, the architecture that we try to do nevertheless pursues this ideal of “roughness”, of the quest for a “certain roughness”.

This is why my projects are not like crystalline water (if there still exists anything crystalline?!), they certainly are not! They are projects imbued with situations, circumstances, a daily life, which we desire to be rich and of confrontation, where the contamination of other views, other experiences, other disciplines, are its wealth and testament, and therefore they are not crystalline, nor do they focus on themselves or exclusively on the discipline of architecture.

There are other motivations, other texts, other ideas, other risks that are meant to be explored. Sometimes more evident, at others less so. Yet, and given the diversity, there are some concepts, ideas, strategies or intentions that in some way traverse the way of projecting or working and which are always present like a code or DNA.

Concepts like verticality, compression, vertigo, transfiguration, light, movement, body and its spatiality,... are themes that the sense of the “sensual” can systematise and that, in some way, may characterise the journey of investigation and creation of objects, spaces and events, which I have produced. Architecture is overwhelmingly the most meaningful one.

Therefore, in each project that is developed, either continuity is given to the experiences of others, or strategies are redefined, or ideas are recycled, or materials are experimented with, or questions are raised about the programmes and the specifications, the places, the clients, our own idea, the certainty or uncertainty of our idea, the thrill of creating another five different

approaches to the same problem, but always with plenty of dedication, conviction and joy that we have not done it yet.

Henry Miller said: *“At this point I have lost many illusions, but fortunately not my enthusiasm, nor my joy of living, nor my unquenchable curiosity. It is perhaps this curiosity about everything that makes me the “writer” that I am. It has never left me. Willing to listen! Even the most boring thing can arouse my interest.”* And I agree.

I learnt with Thomas Bernhard about the perils of comfort, the fear of the new and the taste for stability, and that this process leads us to the transformation and acceptance of the classic or, in other words, that today nothing is questioned because *“today Humanity is at home!”* The classics, literature, classical painting does not bother us and architecture rapidly becomes a classic – even football games become “classics” – and what is necessary nowadays, according to this author, is to disturb. A worthy artist must disturb, always disturb, he told us in *“Minetti – portrait of an artist as an old man”*, a play I worked on with Ricardo Pais at the D. Maria II Theatre in Lisbon in 1990.

Of these disturbances I highlight three areas that contaminate my thought, my approach, my existence: plastic arts, theatre and literature. Though literature, the written language, is somewhat constraining guided by a central thread, previously defined by an author where it is not possible to take shortcuts, to diverge or intersect readings like in painting where we are free to “create” our vision – from left to right, from top to bottom or vice-versa, global or partial vision. Theatre is the art that best combines, confronts and visually expresses ideas, concepts and visions so distinct or contradictory that the huge success and influence that this art form has had on Man is understandable as it is able to turn its emotiveness into its own legitimacy. The emotion, the dramatisation of space, the light, the wonder, the disturbance, the space, the colour, the time and the non-linearity of time, are some of the factors that make us systematically reassess our own journey.

It is project and a divergent methodology that enable me to work in such diverse areas as jewellery design, the creation of corporate identities, the design of a planetarium, the creation of a new model of toilets or the lighting design for an exhibition. This means I do not separate my field of work as an architect into compartmentalised areas where it is necessary to “put on or take off a uniform” to design a house or plan part of a city, to redistribute the functional layout of a factory or conceive a new model of bank branches, or to design a city’s seafront, for example. Thus a theme like Architecture is always limiting, when Architecture is always so much more than what we build and design and extends beyond what the eyes see.

Some of these works merely seek to reflect some of the diversity that Architecture projects can bring into being by creating buildings that began as desire, then drawing, followed by creation and later representation and design, in a central thread filled with moments and circumstances, a chain reaction of situations and stories, of myths, individual and collective memories and therefore vehicles of culture, so typically ours that it seems to want to touch the sea.

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