

LOOKING AT THE WORLD HEAD ON OTHER WAYS OF DOING AND OF BEING HAPPY NUNO LACERDA LOPES

There is a text by Sophia de Mello Breyner where she says:

“Above all we must avoid the lack of love. Of all the arts, architecture is simultaneously the most abstract and connected to life. Those who do not love nor space, shadow, light, concrete, stone, lime neither his fellow, cannot create good architecture. “

The same can be said of those who do not love what is beautiful, or anything that relates to taste, to the joie de vivre, they cannot create good conditions for the miracle of life, be happy. And that applies both to architecture and to design, to teaching and to all professions where the other, our fellow man, is at the heart of the activity. So I do not try to distinguish between architecture, scenography, design, creation or invention. In professional practice, this work should focus on our fellow men, to make us happy.

Nevertheless, as an architect I always think that the pursuit of multiple activities would be very enriching, which often leads me to invade other territories that are not part of my exclusive training. However I always try to mind and, above all, respect both the disciplinary practices and the methodologies, that are different but which are not sealed or closed in on themselves.

To that extent I have always believed that knowledge and education are not exhausted nor are they the exclusive property of a single scientific field. On the contrary, gone are the days when there was only one form of knowledge and a single scientific truth. That is, this new paradigm in which we find ourselves leads us to believe that we are in a time to learn and, above all, in a time to contribute with our knowledge or discovery. But it is not only the scientific model which sometimes restricts or moves us away from this necessity that Sophia calls for, sometimes it is everyday life, common sense and apathy that leads us not to disturb, to lull, or numb our creative and plural vision.

We see this in the need to promote innovation, creativity, research and study associated with the need for consolidating design as a profession that the country requires, “like the bread that feeds us”, defending, promoting and explaining the differences between design and designer, between creating and copying, between industrial design and designer and individual product design, for an industry that has remained with its archaic and irrational know-how, has fed on the ailing process of amendment and copy, to the point of total bankruptcy, in a Europe where design, more than a business, was already a tradition.

On the other hand, being a furniture and interior designer in Portugal, and especially among architects, was a state of grace. I think this situation still prevails today, in spite of the countless deliberations of many authors on the subject, of the various plans to create new schools and new courses for old faculties. Furniture design is a “poor relative” of Architecture and, often, the

enemy of our beautiful and idyllic Architecture that always presents itself, in the magazines in the field, in an empty image, without anything ruining it and without people to judge it.

In these circumstances, the process of designing and conceiving a piece, an item of furniture, or a solution, appears in a territory of freedom and disengagement, even with industry, and departs from the current way of doing, recovering traditional values and practices that it knew well and you work directly on the matter, the function and the manufacturing process, independently and in line with the workshop and the studio which designs, produces or redesigns, with time.

I can say that each piece of furniture, each drawing, each register almost carries with it a hidden house. A dream house, a house of life and of an intense everyday experience. Full of will and ambitions, of constraints and life histories, of discourses, of buildings, memories, technologies, ideas and feelings ... but especially of cities, of artificial environments, of intensities and intimacies that memories betray, but furniture fixes.

How many of these pieces of furniture are simply complex cartographies, "islands", cluster-houses that we try to build, always in an unfinished way. With the illusion of being a finished form when after all they are objects waiting to be. Just as a home begins only when inhabited, when people, families become involved in that permanent (re)construction.

Delfim Sardo once said that my furniture could be used in the bedroom or in the living room, that it never had a definite place, it quickly acquired the status of a familiar being, part of the family, and that it came to life and so wandered around the house, finding it sometimes in a bedroom, or in the kitchen or welcoming us at the entrance. At first it was strange but then we got used to the idea and to the permanent invitation to change and the resistance to the resistance, the presence of the arbitrary, in the reinvention of everyday life that M. Certan describes and presents to us admirably.

To talk of furniture is to talk of lives, of secret enigmas, of innocence and words, of inhabited landscapes, of Man and Woman, of relations, of objects, of busy hands, and of the past, sometimes of beauty and splendor, of desire and dream, of souls and also of the shrewd exercise of a power that Helder tells us about. Of complicities and atmospheres, of simple tastes, small discoveries, natural harmonies and celestial motions, which Kepler mentioned in his making happy, that brings us closer to our inhabiting, and that also builds our Being in the World.

Le Corbusier said that the basis of his work was the search, the constant quest to find "houses of Men" and not "houses of Architects" where existing signs and the humanity of who builds, their identity, is erased. The relationship between architects, designers, creators and their customers, and the pre-existing spaces, the "islands" they invade, is complex, as is the "relation" people establish with the spaces, with the houses and with the objects.

Spaces, houses, are increasingly imbued with symbols, excesses and discourses. They are places we frequent, where we sometimes worship them or instead incorporate other devotions, in a strange ritual where we inhabit and are inhabited, where we are actors and spectators, agents and re-agents, and we are lost among men and architects, between science and fiction.

Hence the difficulty in finding the Universal Man that Le Corbusier aspired to. It is easier to design for these houses of architects, of designers, or any other condition that fixes canons, that systematically becomes a classical thing, that defines conceptual alignments, paradigms and new certainties, continuities and indicates trajectories. But our real home, our true body, is made of purposes, of a constant here and now, of the present and not of retrospectives, perhaps of "prudent knowledge for a decent life" (Boaventura de Sousa Santos), where the subject is present and creation, architecture, design is the everyday. (Távora)

This is the memory I keep from childhood, from adolescence, the everyday life, of invention, of drawing, of discovery, of experimentation, of change and constant transformation. Drawing was a tool, a vehicle, an ongoing process of discovery, a reason to depart, to reach a collective ideal of happiness, of peace and sociability. It is therefore natural that the drawings reflect that freedom, that understanding, and that some pleasure, some humor, some history, smiles and invocations, negligence, feelings and also mere impressions taken seriously spill over. Written texts where geometry is the spoken word, is the meeting point.

I have always liked the idea of a meeting – of people, of ideas – of sharing, the meaning, the relationship and the harmony of the places of objects and of people, and architecture is the art that best gives us that space for meetings, those multiple encounters that people construct throughout their lives. Also full of ‘misencounters’, it’s true. We work so that our work is used, modified, corrected, provoked, but above all encountered. I feel the same way about the furniture and the pieces, they should excite, they should interact, create a place, for a meeting, because they too are the result of many and complex encounters that we try to know how to interpret.

Also in another way, I like the idea, the sharing, and the commitment applied when seeking to communicate and the generosity of what’s on offer; the thoughts, doubts and certainties that knowledge shapes us, so that some didactics can be found in a few of those houses that I now re-examine, with more time and with other responsibilities, with another, now more built, spontaneity.

Like the spaces that we frequent, our objects are not dead things, or fixed or non-dialectical objects. I always think of the furniture that I design as a living being, a link in a chain, an element that the world needs to be balanced and strengthened. This is the only way one should create, to integrate and not exclude, in the mythical image of the city we seek without stigma, with a lot of fantasy, enabling, triggering and also finding the necessary utopias.

I listen to a variation by a well-known composer, a piece from Pachelbel, it is neither a reduction nor an interpretation, but a variation! Music has these particularities; I think that Architecture, Design, and the Plastic Arts do too, though it’s never spoken of. The pieces of furniture, the ones profiled now, are also some variations of scores with no author but with many instruments and many interpretations ... registers of good moments around a story, a way of life, a relationship, especially a result of being happy, accompanied by a fine Vintage Port, the ideal of communion is practiced.

So go to the cabinet, to the cellar, find a good wine, put it on the table, choose the appropriate glasses, watch the light, move the chairs, call your friends, and make a toast ... to you, to everyone, to the world, to design, to architecture, to knowledge and to the souls that produced all this.

I particularly like an idea by Henry Miller that I try to carry on and which has to do with freedom, with the state of grace and the enjoyment of the exercise of creation, when he says: *“One of the important things I learned about making watercolors was not to worry, not to care too much. I think it was Picasso who said, ‘not every picture has to be a masterpiece’. Precisely. To paint is this thing. Paint every day. Not to produce masterpieces. Even the Creator, when making this world had to learn this lesson. Certainly when he created Man he realized that he was preparing for a long headache. And Man, who also likes to play the role of Creator, finds out along the way as he realizes himself, or if you wish, reaches a state of grace, that something exists beyond the simple act of creation. He eventually realizes that there is no need to paint or describe in words what he sees around him. Learns to leave things as they are. Discovers that only by looking the world head on everything that is found is a bit of a masterpiece. Why try to improve it? Why make a fuss on the subject? Enjoy what you see, it is more than enough. The man who can do it is the true artist. His creative merit lies in the ability to identify and recognize what has been created and will escape forever his limited understanding.”*

This is my invitation, and if in these pieces of furniture, these creations, you find some of this vision, it was worth buying this book, because the furniture itself was, clearly, worth being made! Without rhetoric, without anxiety, herald, they seem to be merely expressions of a desire, an ideal of happiness, a certain roughness which leads me to think when designing a piece of furniture: "*Forgive me, but I am happy*".

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