Architectural representation and project critique. New fields of meaning

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ABSTRACT
The paper introduces a discussion framework about the representation concept in architecture. This approach proposes that the validity of the representation strategies is based on its capacity to link the discursive field (theory) with the operating field (project). Based on this condition, it is possible to propose that the emergence of the representation in architecture is linked to the project concept that defines architecture in the context of modernity. However, in the second half of the twentieth century, new variables are incorporated to the traditional concept of project. Considering this evolution, it is possible to identify the critical potential of architectural representation that allows the opening of the concept of the project, extending the disciplinary boundaries of architecture.

THE PLACE OF REPRESENTATION IN THE REALM OF ARCHITECTURE

> «No plan or photograph can replace the direct experience of forms, light, sequence, rhythm, etc., and even so,

this other type of documentation may improve and widen the reading of the work itself» (Curtis, 1998, p. 112).

The experience of perception and understanding of architecture is possible from the link established between the inhabitant and the physical presence of the work. However, the analytical reading and the reflexive possibilities that allow us the architectural exercise are not restricted to such a tangible aspect. Architecture is also the materialization of an idea, the transformation into forms, volumes and technological definitions of a first theoretical concern.

A concern that is at the same time conceptual support, able to articulate the reflexion field around the work, giving meaning to architectural interventions and subordinating the orientation of each one of the operations performed. It is precisely this intersection between idea and materialization that allows us to value the "process", the road outlined between theoretical wills and the elaboration of specific responses. An instance in which the emergence of representation is fundamental as together with the language, written and architectural, it has consolidated as an expressive channel, inseparable from the architect´s work.

Along these lines, and in spite of the evidence of previous data, it is possible to suggest that the relationship between architecture and representation is

determined by the project character that has defined the discipline since the Renaissance, which is still valid in the contemporary context. From the 15th Century, architecture will be understood as a project, that is to say, as an intellectual will built later, that is thought of and then executed. An understanding that we can recognize in De re aedificatoria by Leon Battista Alberti, who will also explicitly state the link between thought and representation through the term "outline", "a particular and uniform written form abstractly conceived" (1991, pp. 61-62).

Thus, the relationship between architecture and representation transcends the merely instrumental (communicative capacity), transforming it into an essentially analytical operation. That is, the representation strategies, two-dimensional as well as three-dimensional, not only allow describing or documenting a specific building in the eyes of the observer or of the passing of time, but they rather constitute an area of speculation from which it is possible to have access to the conceptual work frame, making its discursive contents visible.

MODERNITY, PROJECT AND REPRESENTATION

Modernity is distinguished by its capacity of "self-construction" as far as it "extracts its normativity from itself"

as set out by Jürgen Habermas, (1989, p. 18). A cosmovision whose origins we can recognize in the Renaissance which will be consolidated in philosophical terms in the 18th Century, making way for an organizational structure that will determine the context of the interaction between subject and reality.

In this scenario, in order to reach the evidence of a world within the capacity of man´s understanding, a difference will be established between things and their manifestation, which becomes essential to understand the scope of the term "representation". Precisely, as from this distinction, it is possible to construct the modern world, requiring a rhetorical density that names and defines things and events. Thus, the world is trapped in language, replacing what is real by its codes of representation, a moment that will be defined by Martin Heidegger as "the age of the world picture", as long as "The whole being is understood in such a way that it only exists and can exist from the moment when it is set by the man that it represents and produces" (1998, p. 75). In other words, what essentially differentiates modernity is this capacity of capturing and apprehending that is expressed and manifested in the representational space. A production that, as it is set out by Roger Chartier (2002), gives meaning to the practices and structures that configure the world.

On the other hand, if modernity is origin and at the same time, working system, its transforming vision will understand the future as a key to progress, that is to say, as a time "to be constructed". In the case of architecture, such condition will allow the already mentioned differentiation between idea and materialization, defining the capacity of anticipation typical of the project. In this context, the architectural work and the configuration

of cities will suppose an eminently modern exercise, linked to the generation of behaviour patterns, giving value to concepts such as planning, function or zoning. A predictive vocation that intends turning space into something available within the reach of the wills of architectural or urban design.

It is precisely such predictive and transforming condition of the projectual exercise that requires a specific field on which to express its procedures and interventions. If modernity defines its own scope with regards to language, representation in architecture establishes a symbolic space that circumscribes the limits of action of the project, separating it from the realm of experience. As stated by Stan Allen, "In order to legitimate its repetitive procedures, practice calls for a project: a theoretical framing (encompassing) construction, defined from another place and expressed in a different language from that of the daily practice discourse" (2000, p. XIV).

Therefore, in a process whose fundamental precedent is the representational autonomy reached by the perspective and development of geometry in the 18th Century, the concept of space will be equivalent to its representation, making way for the consolidation of synthetic views that are expressed even as "instructions for use". Along these lines, an emblematic case will be the graphic production of Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand at the beginning of the 19th Century, which will suppose the pedagogical institutionalization of the projectual system, reducing such process to the combination and assembly of classical forms. Durand's work can be understood as a means of induction of the architectural and cultural ideals of

the time, accounting for the narrow link between project and representation. This, as long as the procedure of composition and design is produced from the representational repertoire shown by Durand, which makes the possibilities of choice and legitimation of architectural responses visible.

A look that supports the description and definition of the architectural object, understood as an availability that may be manipulated and transformed inside the representation space. Along these lines, the axonometric development and the increasing abstraction that will dominate the first half of the 20th Century will strengthen the autonomy of a representation that occasionally will liberate itself from any type of human or contextual reference. An image in which it seems to converge the increasing scientific predominance, which analyses "from outside", constructing an approximation in which the explicit point of view that shows the presence of the subject disappears. As we can appreciate in Theo van Doesburg´s Construction in Space-Time II, *it is a unitary and reversible expression that accounts for the representational predominance over the forms that define the architectural composition.*

As Ernst Cassirer (1968) argues, the emergence of abstract space as a "place" for the modification of reality can be understood as a symptom of the emancipation inspired by modernity, turning the world into something intelligible. An autonomy or distance from which we can think about the critical readings on modernity that appeared towards the middle of the 20th

Century, that reflect and question the normative procedures implicit in this world view and its restrictive implications on daily life.

A critical point of view originated inside modernity itself, as we can see in authors such as Theodor Adorno (2001) or Walter Benjamin (2009). In the case of Benjamin, where modern logics displays strategies based on the concatenation of events and the organization of a lineal and irreversible time, his look warns us about the possibilities of a link between elements not previously related, capable of articulating a field of meaning in permanent transformation. An opening that will interrupt the conventional construction of language: montage, collage, citation methods, and so on. An approximation capable of relativizing the narrative articulation ruling modern life, allowing the emergence of alternate vectors that can also be thought of inside the architectural exercise.

NEW MODES OF MEANING. EXPANSION OF THE BOUNDARIES OF UNDERSTANDING AND READING

The questioning of the normative vocation of modernity will make evident the need to open the ways outlined by the strategies of representation. An opening that will be translated into a production that will reflect upon its own reading codes, modifying traditional expectations of emission and reception of the message.

The scope of this expansion may be seen in various disciplinary areas, in the work of artists like Marcel Duchamp, whose critical view is ostensibly "ahead" of the transformations that will be seen later in the world of art, or in music, through John Cage´s notational system, which will make room for what apparently does not have a place in the

systems of representation consolidated under modern optics: indeterminacy. If modernity tries to overcome the distance between reality and representation from the autonomy of the latter, the emergence of these new modes of meaning will account for the crisis of authenticity typical of representation, understanding it no longer as a tool replacing tangible space, but rather as the subject-reality relationship, opening the statu quo of meanings. In front of the language that organizes and arranges reality, the degree of awareness reached by these expressions shall allow exhibiting the disassociations and complexities present in reality itself, disarticulating the barriers that restrict the expressive capacity of language.

In the case of architectural representation, this has the capacity to cause the crisis of those conventions that allow "reading" the proposals on paper. The use of drawing as a source of expression that is not restricted to Aldo Rossi´s specific technique or production mode, the radicalization of abstraction in the representation of Peter Eisenman´s early works or in Bernard Tschumi´s recording of space as a kind of event, account for a search that tries to overcome the traditional link between architectural object, representation and observer. In the case of Tschumi, it is a notational system that demonstrates uses and behaviours, avoiding the description of forms and volumes, testing a representation of the "experience of space", "putting under judgement the modes of graphic representation generally used by architects: plans, sections, axonometrics, perspectives" (1999, p. 481).

Just as perspective and octagonal projection (plant-cut-elevation) contributed considerably to the definition

of "one way of seeing" reality, from the second half of the 20th Century it is possible to see a questioning of the role assumed by representation inside architecture. A prevailing and necessary questioning in the contemporary context that allows us arguing that architectural representation has the capacity to take a distance from its point of origin: initially conceived as a project strategy, it can derive towards a scenario that questions such condition, allowing the interruption of those structures normalized by that daily experience.

TOWARDS A CRITICAL PERFORMANCE OF ARCHITECTURAL REPRESENTATION

Trying to elucidate the place of representation in the architectural field, it has been suggested that such position is shaped in relation to the project consolidation as an operating system. A paradoxical procedure that, in order to influence reality takes a distance from it, obviating daily complexities and particularities. Thus, the representation makes the project normativity visible in the tangible space.

A fracture that, as stated by Dalibor Vesely (2004) requires to be reflected upon, as long as it separates and distances architecture from the realm of experience, relating its practices to productive systems and with overtechnologization dominating contemporary world, mediating between the subject and the reality he inhabits. For Vesely, it is necessary to establish a reconciliation between the technological field and the "visible world" (2004), a question that would redefine the scope of the architectural project and its representation strategies. Vesely's reflexion may be complemented with what is suggested by Stan Allen, for

whom it is necessary to abandon the predictive view that rules the project, moving from the object to the "field". A look that understands architecture as a discipline of circumstances, in a permanent link with dynamics of change (political, historical, social, economic and so on) that form the scenario where this is inserted (Allen, 2000), questioning the architectural expressions that far from facing and contrasting reality, try to generate a narrative that legitimizes decisions and procedures, a question that specifically occurs in the representational space. Allen supports "the acceptance of reality with all of its confusion and unpredictability" (1997, p. 24), disassembling the sequence of predominance of theory over practice or vice versa, incorporating the variables and the unexpected of the environment as a source of the processes of the architectural design.

Along these lines, the work Made in Tokyo, of Atelier Bow-wow, allows visualising another way of representing and "mapping" the contemporary city. It is a guide without an apparent conclusion, depicting scenes in permanent transformation, which understands the city of Tokyo as an unfinished space widening the mechanisms of visualization. Made in Tokyo turns context into a resource, inverting the project predominance imposed over reality as this is what activates architectural proposals. Likewise, the experience derives into recording methodologies from the "peculiarity of the unknown", in which it is fundamental "to develop a method of representation that does not lose the quality of the observation" (Kaijima, Kuroda, & Tsukamoto, 2010, pp. 148-149). A "phenomenological" guide that enriches the field of vision of the city of Tokyo, understood as a territory in permanent

process of construction and destruction, accumulating overlapping events.

A critical understanding of the representation strategies that are even more necessary in the context of contemporary architecture, marked by the fragmentation of information and the indiscriminate display of images. In this scenario, following Fredric Jameson's line of thinking, it is opportune to rethink representation as a resource capable of generating new "cognitive maps" that promote the "practical reconquest of a sense of place (...) that the individual can map and correct taking into account the moments of movable and alternative trajectories" (1998, pp. 69-70), allowing us to rethink conventions, encouraging our interaction with a complex reality. A representation that is not only understood as an image or normative icon, but, rather, as a scenario open to interpretation and modification, displaying its resources as an expression, enriching the significant capacity of what is represented, restoring again and again the boundaries of its reading, making unresolved tension explicit. Thus, we shall be able to understand the representational field beyond the constitution of norms or faithful reproductions of reality that, from its impossibility to predict the space experience or depict it in full, allows open relationships that stimulate the spectator´s participation, renouncing the control vocation that tends to define the boundaries and limits of architecture. ▣

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