ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIOGRAPHY AND STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS *

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Bearing the awarewness of the traumatic influences that technological and social transformations create in the field of architectural design necessitates research in the direction of a more objective historiography. Only through the use of a more scientific method it becomes possible to find an identity, both historical and cultural, for a complex phenomenon such as architecture.

Even though history is an ideographic science where the individuality of events is the main protagonist, the effort to guide historical research into a methodological context, is the necessary key to a better understanding of architecture at all levels, including the operational In this study the integration of historicism and the structuralist method is discussed as a solution to the problems of architectural historiography. It is through this process which involves two basically antagonistic philosophies that one may reach a satisfying solution to the critical problems of architecture, problems that due to the specificity of the discipline may not be adequately understood with the use of just one of the above mentioned philosophies.

In order to reach this conclusion and propose such a solution, it is necessary first of all, to look into the history of historiography and the historiography of architecture, pointing out the similarities and differences between historiography in general and the more specific one dealing with our realm of concern. The individuality, causality and selectivity of the historical events identified as being the main principles of historiography are discussed at two levels; general and specific (architectural). It is through this analysis that the relevance of our thesis emerges. The above mentioned integration of two opposing philosophies implies the involvment of both the diachronic and the synchronic dimensions of time. The verifiability of the method requires the use of semantic models. These can be summarized as denotative, connotative and meta—lingual codes which will enable the researcher to read and understand the architectural work beyond its factual appearance.

The first problem that must be faced when dealing with architectural historiography is the difference between this specific historiography and the other historiograhies such as that of politics. Basically, the history of architecture (and of art as well) is a history sui generis. Even so, it still bears the general problems of historiography in general such as individuality, causality and selectivity—contemporaneity. Being a special type of history it bears its specific problems in addition to the above mentioned.

Whenever the subject of architectural historiography is discussed, a series of misunderstandings, prejudices and voids come to being. For many, this concept denotes, above all, a research oriented to the past, to a patrimony of ancient buildings of which it is necessary to have knowledge of in some way or another. However, since history does not repeat itself, the knowledge of history is futile if not harmful. Others see history as an immense process of codification and self—justification of every incident that has taken place. This approach paralizes creative action directed to the future. Others still consider the history of architecture as being an inventory of forms from which it is fair to pick out periodically, a certain amount of citations, usually a museum to which one may look upon, in periods reigned by a general crisis of inventiveness.

These are some of the attitudes of architects towards history. Similar attitudes may be encountered in the vagueness that one may come across in the works of historians belonging to different philosophical and ideological schools. Therefore it would be proper at this stage, to give a definition of the history of architecture.

First of all, it is a fact that the role of history in the curriculum of architectural education has increased due to the crisis that reigns over it. This increase of importance is related to the fact that any true teaching of architecture, even if in a peculiar way, has been a historical education. The didactical problem is being followed by the more general (and most debated) problem of the relation between history and design. History proceeds from the present to the past. Through this experience an orientation for the future may be acquired. Therefore the authentic role of history is of an operational nature.

The clarification of such a role requires, primarily, a definition of historical selectivity. When selection is discussed, one refers to the theme of research, before anything else. The theme, in the past, turned out to be sufficiently oriented towards a determined direction. This orientation was a product of architectural tendencies of a certain era. The historical studies, instead, were influenced by the thoughts of a different period. Today the situation is quite different. In fact, we are faced with a plurality of alternatives of such pro-portions that the latest historical production is extremely eclectic. This pluralism brings up the problem of choices to be made. The rich literature, the detailed monographies, the illustrated volumes that are largely available to the scholar compel us to question ourselves on just which of these are really history and which ones are just book titles. Only descriptive and philological historiography produces book titles which in fact give no knowledge of past events and do not in any way, have incidence on the current dramatic urban and architectural situation. The same can be said for ideological historiography which deforms events and ancient historical contexts in favor of contemporary objectives and therefore is reduced to nothing more than mistification. Obviously history should not be thought as being a formal guide to contemporary operational activities.

That the past is a precious value and that it must be safeguarded at all levels is a widely accepted assumption. We may go as far as to state that the relation between the ancient and the new is the dominating problem in architectural criticism and evaluations. There does not exist, at an operational level, a method of historical research that may meet the demands of any problematique

concerned with the relation between the ancient and the new other than those same methodological positions and those same critical and operational hypothesis that describe contemporary architecture. There can be no monography on a single work, or author, no historical analysis of a style or a period bearing similer characteristics to ours that may answer our problems. There certainly is a risk of doing theory rather than history but every choice has its risks. It is important to know with what methodological framework one may proceed to a research so that the research itself may be verified at all times. It does not matter how the research is classified. The validity of any research depends on the results that are produced and for the capacity that the research in question has to follow or modify the critical and operational reality.

The problem is not, therefore, to theorize history or to historize theory but rather to escape from the vicious circle of contemporary architectural history. In doing this, it should be known that the numerous problems that need a solution in history may not be solved within the context of historiography. This problem has been debated among historians belonging to opposite poles. On one side history is conceived as the materialization of a superior design. On the other hand, we are faced with a historical relativism which resulted in the identification of facts and values. This ontology has been in fact the cause of a false line for so many historical studies. It is from this ontology that ideological historiography derived.

There have been scholars that have detached themselves from this polarity without omitting the historicity of the events. They have tried to investigate the events and above all the works beyond their factual appearance, to pick out their basic conformation, the internal relations, the latent significances and the structures. As a consequence, they have substituted for that ontology and that positivism, a structural methodology made of systems, codes, referential parameters certainly not statistical and normative because linked to the themes of a conscience that structures. Only in being so, it can constitute an alternative to ideologism and to the weights of "events". It is therefore significant as De Fusco assesses:

1   R. de Fusco, Storia e Struttura, Napoli: ESI, 1970, p. 18

> this structuralism ante litteram was for the greater part born right in the sphere of the historiography of art, with the concept of 'style' to be conceived as one of the ideal types theorised by Weber, It has indicated, may be the first structural model.[1]

These frequent schematisms are open to objection, yet it is the inevitable price to be paid for a vision which craves to be systematic, the only in a way, that enables man to look at history with a meaning. And since there cannot be historical knowledge without a system (or structure) so it is unthinkable, as the first orthodox structuralists assessed, to conceive a system outside the experience of history.

If we are to analyze the differences that exist between the historiography in general it would be useful to begin by taking a look at the distinction that exists between historical events and the (studies made on) them (res gestae and historia rerum). It is true that all historical events come to being at the cross point of the coordinates of time and space. Similarly, even in a specific way, manifestations of art emerge with such particular characteristics as to require a specific history. In fact, while with events remaining outside of the realm of art, conclusions may be drawn through the analysis of intrinsic facts, documents, written prose and sometimes oral descriptions, those of art and architecture become objects of history primarily for their intrinsic characters, for their existence in our time. This point is clearly expressed by Argan.

2 G.C. Argan, La Storia dell 'Arte, Storia dell' Arte, n. 1 Jan. 1969

> The history of art is the only one that can be approached in the presence of the events and therefore there is no need for them to be remembered, nor for them to be reconstructed. What needs to be done is to interpret an existent work. This characteristic is both an advantage and at the same time the major draw back of the historiography of art. [2]

Obviously the knowledge of art history is enriched with information on the culture, on the social conditions and ideas of a period, but if these are necessary they certainly are not sufficient. The direct experience of the work itself will always say more than all the philological researches related to it.

The artistic event expresses itself as a historical object, before anything else, in its "fullness of life" as Ruskin would say. It is a phenomenon that bears in itself all the historical width. That this characteristic is not only physical but that it also implies a different intentionality is proven by the fact that the translation in historiographical terms of the artistic event is of a type quite different from that of other historical events. While the events of civil history, for example, may be approached in as much as they are translated into a language extraneous to them, in other words, in terms which are neumonic, literary or iconographic, the work of art, considered as such, is untranslatable in terms which are extraneous to it. It would not be wrong to say (with a large degree of approximation) that for art and architecture, history and historiography coincide, or more exactly, that one cannot do historiography in the absence of the work, in other words of that event that for the other histories is on the contrary absent or past.

The following citations from an essay by Berenson reflect the above mentioned differences most appropriately.

3 B. Berenson, Estetica, Etica e Storia nelle Arti della Rappresentazione Visiva, Milano: Electa Editrice, 1963, pp. 295—297.

> Unlike the history of politics or of any other succession of past and terminated events, the history of art enjoys the advantages and suffers the disadvantages inherent to all attempts of writing on happenings still in course, on problems which are still unsolved, on persons still living......... The history of art deals with masterpieces that remain with us, that still appeal to us as living entities, as energies which are manifestingly living ...... The art of the entire world is either alive and therefore contemporary to us or dead. We can imagine ourselves as being able to learn about past life from written sources but no written work can help us to imagine what was a visual art of which no example survives to our days. [3]

Corollary to this vitality of art is the different time span of the events of art in respect to others. That the remains of human civilization are related to artistic doings, that a sculpture lasts more than a battle, that a building may survive the constitution of a nation are not factors which are limited to the physical property of the materials, but also denote an intentionality of operating artistically, to which it is necessary to give consideration in order to define the characteristics of the particular historiography under examination.

In the limits of the duration of human endeavor, the other historical events, throughout the span of their occurence, in their tendency to change, reflect a dynamic dimension. The artistic events, at least until a recent past, aimed at satisfying that "parmenidean instance" of the absolute and stable which is also present in the reflection and the fantasy of man From here comes the unsubstitutable value of the monument, precious not only because of its unrepeatability, but also for its intentionaliy of lasting beyond time and the cultural seasons. And if it is true that in its etimological meaning, the monument implies something else, or the remembrance of an event, a symbolic wave of art, it is also true that before reading or decodification is done the monument in fact denotes itself.

Besides, the value of stability does not contradict at all the idea of architectural work or the art object in general, eternally alive and present, that has been discussed above. As Argan observes:

> As ancient as it may be, the work of art is given as something which is happening now. What we call judgements, positive or negative that they may be, are in reality, acts of choice, the taking of positions. We cannot abstract ourselves from the work of art and pronounce cold blodded, detached judgements for an event which is in course: we have to decide whether we have to pay attention or not, whether to accept or refuse. And what is being accepted or refused is in realiy the co—existence with the work, which, although belonging to the past, is physically present and occupies a position in our space and in our real time. We have no alternative, it is a fact of our existence.[4]

4   G. C. Argan, La Storia dell 'Arte, Storia dell' Arte, n. 1, Jan. 1969

From the few observations exposed above, the particularities of the historiography of art compared to the other, forms of historical knowledge may be easily deduced. And if to these particularities the specific problems of architectural historiography are added, then the field of research crystalizes into a determined shape. But this specificity does not exempt the study from examining and applying to architectural historiography the methodological main themes of general historiography. Then what are these main themes?

If one proceeds from the theoretical foundation of history to the questions of method, the prevailing tendency in contemporary historical researches (setting aside the concepts of historical world or of universal history) is based on the plurality of the forms of historical knowledge, on the philological material available, on the principles which guide the historiographic choice and on those that allow their verifiability. Nevertheless, the tendency is, wherever it is possible, to set aside the philosophical aspects of historiography in favor of the methodological and operational aspects, one having set some basic criteria. From this angle the characteristics of the historical object assume a primary

5   N. Abbagnano, Critical Existentialism,
Garden City: Anchor Books, 1969, pp. 190—
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importance. According to Abbagnano, these characteristics corresponding to the principal problems of historiography are: (1) The uniqueness or individuality of the historical event, (2) the co—relation of the event with the others that facilitate its comprehension, (3) the significance or the importance of it, in order to justify the choice and historical evaluation. [5]

As a consequence it can be easily assessed that the main themes of historiography are: (a) the individualizing knowledge for which, operating as an ideographic science, it is concerned with the singularity of the event in counter position to the nomethetical sciences which tend to the formulation of laws; (b) the conditional causal knowledge, necessary every time one may want to historize an event by answering the questions on its origins; (c) the selective knowledge that implies the problem of evaluation of the perspective from which the analysis is conducted and the assumption of history's contemporaneity. This third theme explicitly renounces any pretense of absolute objectivity for the process of continuous interaction between the history and the event itself. Adopting this scheme, obviously conventional, it is possible at this point to orient the research towards the examination of these main themes of historiography.

As the above mentioned main themes are applied to the history of art and architecture, with a greater methodological conscience, once again the problem of the degree of specificity of art's particular characteristic has to be examined. Panofsky defines this characteristic as the pretense of the object of art of being considered in a way which may not be completely historical.

Panofsky's definition of "pure historical" research is the one which explains a phenomenon by referring to other phenomena of the same kind without referring to sources of knowledge belonging to a different level. This conforms with political history, taken as the history of human behavior but not with artistic history, which according to him, does not represent just the manifestation of subjects but instead are formal phenomena, in other words not events but results. Nevertheless the exigency of finding a principle that explains the artistic phenomenon is necessary in the consideration of art, not only in its existence but beyond this, in the conditions of its existence.

Further analysis will show how Panofsky, acknowledging a "meta—empirical" component in the experience of art, will contribute to understand the artistic phenomena beyond their phenomenic sense. At this point it is of interest to note the implications of a research on art that goes beyond historicism.

Art itself, maintaining its value beyond its time and needing an interpretation which not only is historical requires recourse to another methodology which should be integrative instead of being substitutive. The same main themes of general historiography, the principle of individuality, of causality and of selectivity constitute the foundations of a historiographical method but certainly do not suffice to solve all the related problems.

When an ontology becomes void or is just put aside and therefore the coincidence between the events and their value is doubted, it is nowadays a common tendency to consider architecture and its history as a system of systems. This system is such that one has to penetrate it with rational means and referential codes, conferring to the research a scientific rigour and a high degree of verifiability, certainly do not allege normative pretexts, nor an absolute objectivity. One tends to study architecture and its history with criteria that work at explaining the conditions of the existence of phenomena their

conformation with their synchronic and diachronic dimension without presuming to pick out the essence that in any case would remain inexpressible.

It would not be untrue to observe that what has been mentioned above is the discussion of the structural models and of structuralism, at least in its most convincing interpretation. It is a process in which sense and validity lie above anything else in transferring the discussion on essences to one of the methodological and operational type, an action tending at resolving ontology in methodology. Brandi seems to reach the same conclusion when he refers, with a certain ambiguity, to a judgement by Merleau-Ponty in which the notion of structure would be nothing more than a simple substitute of the notion of essence. He assesses that "to investigate the structure of reality seems to be nowadays the only possible ontology in our cultural era." [6]

Being conscious of the polyvalence of the many propositions formulated on the idea of structure and being aware of the limitations of historicism, one can maintain that the ambiguities of the first and the crisis of the second may find a positive solution right at the confrontation and in the integration of the historical method with the structural. This integration is most fruitful for the history of architecture. In fact, where design factors are close to structure and to a mind that structures beyond the historical conception and condition, memory is not sufficient to carry out the task of being contemporary history without a system that reveals its structure and its meaning.

6   C. Brandi, Struttura e Architettura, Torino: Einaudi, 1967, pp. 26—27.

ÖZET

TARİH YAZIMI VE YAPISAL ÇÖZÜMLEME

Mimarlık gibi karmaşık bir olgu için tarihi ve kültürel bir kimlik bulabilmek ancak daha bilimsel bir yöntemin kullanımıyla olasıdır. Bu nedenle Mimarlık tasarımının gelişmeleri üzerindeki toplumsal ve teknolojik değişimlerin çarpıcı etkilerinin bilincinde olarak daha nesnel bir tarih kuramı doğrultusunda araştırma yapmak gerekmektedir.

Tarih, her ne kadar olayların tekilliğinin egemen olduğu ideografik bir bilim dalı ise de, her düzeyde (uygulama dahil) mimarlığı en doğru biçimde algılyabilmek için tarihi araştırmaları yöntemsel bir bağlama doğru yöneltmek en uygun çıkış yoludur. Bu doğrultuda bir amaç güdüldüğünde bu tezde tartışılan tarihselcilikle yapısalcılığın bileşiminden türeyen yöntem mimarlık tarih kuramının sorunları için bir çözüm olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Birbirine aykırı düşen bu iki felsefenin birlikteliyle mimarlığın karmaşık sorunlarına doyurucu bir çözüm bulunabilir. Sözü edilen sorunlara, özgüllükleri nedeniyle, tarihselciliğin veya yapısalcılığın tek başlarına uygun bir çözüm getiremiyecekleri bir gerçektir.

Önerilen yöntemi oluşturabilmek için öncelikle tarih kuramının ve mimarlık tarih kuramının tarihine bakmak ve bu genel ile özgül tarihler arasındaki benzerliklerle farklılıkları saptamak gerekmektedir. Tarih olayının tekilliği, nedenselliği ve seçiciliği tarih kuramının başlıca ilkelerini oluşturmaktadır. Her ilke genelde ve mimarlıkta olmak üzere iki açıdan ele alınmaktadır. Bu incelemenin sonucunda tezin geçerliliği ortaya çıkmaktadır. Sözü edilen felsefelerin bileşimi zamanın iki boyutunu içermektedir (synchronic—diachronic). Yöntemin geçerliliği semantik modellerin kullanımıyla olanaklıdır. Bunlar denotative, connotative ve meta—dil olarak özetlenebilir. Bu modeller araştırmacının mimarlık yapıtlarının nesnel görüntülerinin ötesindeki anlamları kavramasına olanak sağlayacaktır.

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