

NOTHING ORIGINAL

Eastern culture, as Byung-Chul Han argues, “does not trace the being or the origin, but the changing constellations of things” (2016:14). The South Korean philosopher indicates that the value of the ‘original’ is only relative, because the past never rests, since it is reconstructed in each new interpretation being made from the present. Thus, to base a concept on its etymological definition not only ignores the transformations imposed by culture, but also eludes fundamental questions such as: is there an original? And if there is, does it always make sense to go back to it?

However interesting the origins of a subject may be, ARQ would rather focus on its contemporary aspects so as not to lose track of the changes enacted by the present. Regarding references, for instance, we observe the logics of copyright in the interview with Miljački and in Weizman’s project; the idea of tribute in the buildings by Jacob or Arraigada; the reference as a design motif in Loos’ Chicago Tribune, Holl’s *oeuvre* and in Moráis’ text, and as a critical tool in Walker’s courses and Soriano’s entry; the idea of the project as an assemblage of sources in the works by De la Cerda and Correa, Carreño-Sartori and in Sato’s text; the notion of moral referent present in Celedón and García de Cortázar’s article; or even the current logics of self-reference, which Groys analyzes. This emphasis on the contemporary not only seeks to update a topic whose meaning takes us to the past, but also to emphasize that a magazine is not an anthology.

Nevertheless, this does not prevent us from specifying the concepts we speak of. In semiotics, the referent is neither the signifier (word) nor the signified (concept), but is about to what these refer. Its translation to art in Joseph Kosuth’s “One and three chairs” (1963) clarifies the idea: there is the definition of ‘chair’ (the signified), its image (the signifier), and the chair as a physical object to sit on (the referent), that is, the physical anchoring of what would otherwise only be in the realm of ideas. Scientific research, on the other hand, does not understand the reference as a real anchor but as an epistemological one; hence research must show bibliographic ‘references,’ with ‘quotation’ as a formal mechanism to connect novelty to what has already been done. Even when looking for a job, candidates are asked for former employers ‘references’ in order to check their background. The same happens when applying to academic programs in which applicants are requested ‘reference letters’ from valued ‘referees’ within the academic circuit.

When it comes to architecture, however, these notions show flaws. Namely, when the referent is meant to justify those architectures that have neither signifier nor signified – the ‘aphasia’ Tafuri (1989:138) criticized in Rossi;

when the reference stops being the anchor to become the objective (works that do not advance on what is already known); when used in a conservative fashion – as a ‘disciplinary’ guarantee – and ends up atrophying intellectual development; or even worse, when the requirement of ‘references’ from ‘referees’ becomes a way of consolidating castes.

The Modern rebellion – with its manifestoes and *tabula rasa* – may have been aware of these flaws. However, as Groys (2009) argues, doing something new is a requirement for Modern art, as you cannot repeat what has already been done; that is, the new presumes the knowledge of precedents in order to move forward. The blank page is filled with previous inscriptions.

A century after these Modern debates, and having witnessed how the quest for originality turned into spectacle-architecture, many argue that it is necessary to rethink this logic. Thus, when Urtzi Grau and Cristina Goberna (paraphrasing Kenneth Goldsmith, who in turn cites Douglas Huebler) claim that “the world is full of buildings, more or less interesting; we do not wish to add any more” (2013:18), not only do they question the need to create something new, but also they do so through references and quotations. Without taking this position to extremes, we now know that it is impossible to disregard references. Even if we try to hide them, today’s flow of information will sooner or later make a fool out of us. But we also understand its risks and that the big question is how to avoid them.

In this issue of ARQ, the use of references is no longer naive. It does not entail ‘killing the father,’ nor does it imply imitating, venerating, or using it as an endorsement to justify individual risks. Rather, it is a face-to-face dialogue that removes the reference from its sacred condition and turns it into something productive. These are explorations that, as Han argued about the Chinese culture of copy, are indeed proud of having nothing original. **ARQ**

Referencias / References

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