Chapter 3

Design and Restoration: An Ecological Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study uses a design-based approach that is focused on the human dimension in all its complexity to give value not only to a functional or rational use of spaces, but also to an experiential one, gaining further significant inspiration from the memory layered in complex historical spaces. Interestingly, psychological studies highlight the collective base characterizing a number of disorders and suggest that changing the outside world can be just as therapeutic as changing the subject’s feelings, indicating that psychology merges with ecology. From an interdisciplinary approach, emphasizing a cultural inclination more than a technical attitude, opportunities seem to develop to promote beauty, identity, and memory as essential dimensions for collective and individual wellbeing. Design-oriented processes could bring out the potential of the built environment, promoting multiple functions and reuse methods, inspired by quality and capable of creating hospitable and welcoming physical and relational spaces.

INTRODUCTION

The use of places and the abuse of nature have produced unprecedented historical and natural transformations, requiring an incisive rethinking of the human dwelling conditions. The most conscious sectors of the population have understood that only a global perspective can allow to face the two main problems of human migration and the planet survival, since they are destined to find a common solution. The urgent need to stop the systematic consumption of land, energy, built and natural heritage, calls for increased attention being given to the potential of existing assets for both housing and experience. This puts interior design ahead of the key challenge of reusing existing urban spaces, often characterized by relevant historical architectural features, as providing hospitable interior atmospheres. Preserving his-
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torical buildings has been traditionally the purpose of restoration, the object of which has progressively expanded from monumental buildings to a diffusely built patrimony and eventually to the landscape, thus basically covering the world where people live every day. Besides, in the sixties of the twentieth century, the relationship between architecture, memory and psychology was dealt with for the first time (Pane, 1987) in addition to the aesthetic and historical duality which Brandi had put forward as the base of architectural preservation (Brandi, 1963). On the other hand, psychology seems to have widened its scope, going beyond its traditional confines which correspond to the limits of the subject, and moving towards the urban space.

In the chapter, reciprocity and mutual influences between restoration, psychology and interior design will be discussed, by analyzing some concepts such as perception, place and memory which seem relevant to all the disciplines considered. An innovative attempt will be made to integrate different fields of knowledge that have commonly been held separate, with the aim of creating connections and meeting places rather than lines of exclusion. Assuming that unusual points of view may be useful for each discipline to step outside its own boundaries - to “get lost”- in order to find its reasons also in adjacent areas, to promote a greater sensitivity toward urban and environmental spaces and to open wider design possibilities.

PERCEPTION

During the sixties of the twentieth century, new interdisciplinary approaches were promoted and the first researches of the neo-discipline of Environmental Psychology and Architectural Psychology started to spread, aimed at recovering intangible values of the common heritage and pursuing the community well-being. An inclusive debate involved sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, economists, architects, planners, philosophers, politicians, supporting a growing trend towards a participatory social planning. Within this framework, a fruitful encounter between analytical psychology and architectural restoration was certainly to be attributed to R. Pane as well as other intellectuals (Giannattasio, 2017).

Starting from Jung’s works, Pane deepened the relationship between human beings and their physical environment and posed general psychoanalytic and anthropological considerations as a foundation for natural and built environment preservation (Morezzi, 2010). According to Pane, the environmental stratification is a precious inheritance because it constitutes an irreplaceable memory heritage. In his opinion, ecological conditions and peoples’ psychic lives are reciprocally subordinate, every external modification implying an inner reflex. Ancient patrimony is not only a document to be admired, but the testimony of a history of which people are a live stratification. The reason why that object is still necessary is that it is part of peoples’ psyche (Pane, 1987).

It is worth mentioning Kevin Lynch (Lynch, 1960) who, criticizing contemporary urbanism for not being able to result into concrete operational solutions, outlined ways to define a new image of the city. Inspired by Gestalt psychology, American pragmatism and psychology, it is based on perceptive experience and, beyond the rational threshold, is able to draw also from the knowledge acquired in the field of Biology, Physics, Sociology and Psychology (Giannattasio, 2017).

As pointed out by Gian Carlo Guarda in his Introduction to the Italian version of the book, Lynch captures “an existential meaning for the shape of the city” (Lynch, 1960, p. 13) and thus seeks to give to the urban space forms able to satisfy the human life.
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