

TRADITION AND INNOVATION²

TRADYCJA I INNOWACJA

Abstract

We live immersed in time, submerged in the current of a river whose waters, independently of our will, drag us towards the unknown, towards the future. Only our experience allows us to venture what is yet to come, that is the reason why in the current of time we are always looking back, towards our memory, our only way of intuiting the future. We project the architecture of the future by constantly looking back. We build architecture in the past and from the past, listening to history, innovating tradition and preserving heritage. It is no coincidence that the term “projecting” also means throwing, throwing, throwing or shooting, an action of the present that projects an intervention in the future using the knowledge of the past.

Tradition is not what confines, saves and guarantees the memory of the past, as some believe, but the substance that guarantees the future, the continuity of culture, the permanent encounter with other equilibria.

Keywords: tradition, innovation

Streszczenie

Żyjemy zanurzeni w czasie, zatopieni w nurcie rzeki, której wody, niezależnie od naszej woli, ciągną nas w nieznaną, ku przyszłości. Tylko nasze doświadczenie pozwala nam podejmować ryzyko związane z tym, co dopiero nadejdzie, i to właśnie dlatego w tym nurcie czasu zawsze spoglądamy wstecz, ku naszej pamięci, naszemu jedynemu sposobowi wyczuwania przyszłości. Projektujemy architekturę przyszłości, nieustannie spoglądając wstecz. Budujemy architekturę w przeszłości i z przeszłości, wsłuchując się w historię, wprowadzając innowację do tradycji i zachowując dziedzictwo. Nieprzypadkowo termin „projektowanie” sprowadza się również do rzutowania, to działanie terażniejszości, która rzuca interwencję w przyszłość, wykorzystując wiedzę z przeszłości.

Tradycja nie jest tym, jak wierzą niektórzy, co pozwala zatrzymać, zachować i zagwarantować pamięć o przeszłości, ale materią gwarantującą przyszłość, ciągłość kultury, trwałe obcowanie z innymi rodzajami równowagi.

Słowa kluczowe: tradycja, innowacja

Tradition is not the past but an impulse, an itinerary, a journey, a vector that is based on the known and points to the unknown, a vector whose trajectory begins at some point in the past, touches the present for an instant, and is lost in the future.

We live immersed in time, submerged in the current of a river whose waters, independently of our will, drag us towards the unknown, towards the future. Only our experience allows us to venture what is yet to come, that is the reason why in the current of time we are always looking

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² This text has been rewritten and expanded based on the content of the chapter “La esencia de las cosas”, published in the book: *La tradición innovada. Escritos sobre regresión y modernidad*, Arquíu-tesis, Barcelona 2013; Translation of Valentín Trillo Leyva

back, towards our memory, our only way of intuiting the future. We project the architecture of the future by constantly looking back. We build architecture in the past and from the past, listening to history, innovating tradition and preserving heritage. It is no coincidence that the term “projecting” also means throwing, throwing, throwing or shooting, an action of the present that projects an intervention in the future using the knowledge of the past.

Faced with tradition, a term that evokes regressive concepts, we always place ourselves somewhere impossible between laudation or rejection. The current of time seems to flow between the past and the future, and never the other way around. I believe that this is the reason why the concepts linked to our memory, personal or collective, are enveloped in anachronistic frames that alter their true meaning. Terms such as inheritance, patrimony, codes, origin or history are affected in our present because they have reached us in the current of time, because they are concepts that belong to the past. If we continue with the analogy of the river these concepts would be branches of a tree that float in the flow and that reach the shore of the present necessarily wrapped in other elements or concepts, as it happens with the objects that float on the real rivers. The tree of tradition reaches the shore of the present covered with litterfall. Residual litter that not only prevents us from seeing the tree in its entirety, but also clouds and deforms its understanding.

Tradition is the transmission of news, literary compositions, rites, doctrines, customs..., so its essential quality is to guarantee the continuity of our activities. Tradition in culture operates like organic matter: when bodies cease to be alive, they decompose and begin a complex phase of transformation that leads them from an apparent homogeneity to a profound heterogeneity that concludes with the transmutation of form and matter. The vital period that we usually identify with the life of beings is just an interval, a waiting time, a moratorium, as it is said now, which awaits the chemical reaction of decomposition that will release energy and carbon, essential substrates for the beginning of other vital periods, basic to guarantee the continuity of life. Tradition is not that which confines, keeps and guarantees the memory of the past, as some believe, but the substance which guarantees the future, the continuity of culture, the permanent encounter with other balances. I heard the architect Francisco Javier Sáenz de Oiza say in the last years of his life that for him death was something natural, a way of belonging back to nature, the transit of all living beings from the individual to the collective, a return to the origin, the integration of all with everything, a permanent process that guarantees life. Oiza said, and I share this opinion, that he was proud to be part of this egalitarian process. Beings and objects assume the permanence of this renewing, continuous and interminable tradition.

In contemporary art everything is decomposed, unco-jointed, fractured, dismembered, fractured, divided, split, ground, fragmented, sectioned, split once and a thousand times and, once and a thousand times reconstructed, glued, united, adhered, composed, sewn, glued and reconstituted. As with children’s games, we need the antonyms “destroy/construct” to introduce ourselves into the environment in which we live, to know more about our environment, to advance in its reproduction. Modernity has taught us that in a section of any object we will find more information about it than on its surface and that in each of its fragments we will find as much or more data than in the original unit; it is enough to section the apparent to come into contact with the structure, not necessarily deep.

The skin is a limit where light and other bodies are reflected, it is a meeting place, a wrapper, a kind of agreement or intersection of realities that belong to both sides of the limit. Under the skin is the hidden, as Italo Calvino taught us in one of his fantasy tales, “the essence of things”³. Skinning can become an act of love and recognition, as shown by the preparatory sketches of Da Vinci or Michelangelo for the realization of his paintings and sculptures, with analysis of muscular structures that, freed from the skin, are exposed to the light of knowledge in an authentic formal recognition of the origin of the movement of the human body. In the same sense, Leonardo Da Vinci’s sketches on the conformation of Leda’s hairstyle are primarily pedagogical. Preparatory drawings for the execution of the canvas Leda and the swan, with a final image in which the frontal position of the nude hardly allows the viewer to appreciate Leda’s hairstyle. To section is also to link and connect; when we break ties we provoke others, we create expectations, we produce crossroads and we liberate creative entropy. It is possible that what we call tradition and innovation is nothing more than an endless sequence of the process of construction and destruction. The sciences and the arts dissect the known reality to show them in parts, both actions contemplate this unfolding of pieces, of fragments. Artists and scientists observe the decomposed materials, select between them and construct new realities.

The thread of every narrative, of every story, is a montage. To publish a book or article is to stop and freeze, to obtain a fleeting snapshot of a continuous movement. For some time now, I believe that, induced by the pragmatism of the age in which we live, I have come to think that we could continue to evolve without creating anything, without doing anything from the beginning, without anything *ex novo*. In the cinema we could use the recorded images and assemble them in a different way. Think of a possible World Archive of Recorded Images, where all the films made during the last two centuries would be located, both the frames that formed part of the final montage and those that were discarded; in the reports of all the televisions, in the family films, in the videos of the mobiles, in the security and surveillance cameras of all the buildings, in the cameras that control the traffic... The archive of images and recorded scenes is immense and grows exponentially day by day, it would suffice with the script of the story that we would like to tell, an adequate selection on the existing material and a montage, to return to the origin, to be original? to obtain new and innumerable stories. I cannot avoid making reference to the intellectual and polysemic beauty that the identification of fragments of old films inserted in new ones, an almost explosive load of meanings, a renewed version of Marcel Duchamp’s ready-mades would produce for us.

“I hate to death the shooting itself. It’s the most terrible thing of all (...) Shooting is the worst thing and I think almost all directors have the same thing. Then I really enjoy the editing again. It’s the part I really prefer, the final stage where you’re alone with the images and create, now you do, the film. For me it’s paradise, the only time when there’s no fear”⁴.

The admired Wim Wenders not only seems to join this economic system of production, the theory of decomposition, but also differentiates artistic activity in parts, underlining the essential importance of assembly as opposed to other tasks of the trade.

³ Calvino I., *Nuestros antepasados, El vizconde demediado*, Alianza, Madrid 1990. Original title: *Il Visconte dimezzato*, 1952.

⁴ Wenders W., *Conversaciones con Peter W. Jansen*, published in the book: *El acto de ver*, Phaidós, Barcelona 2005. Original title: *The act of seeing*, 1992.

In a recent conference⁵, Juan Navarro Baldeweg referred to the display, the art of presenting things, as an alternative and precedent of the ready-made. In his opinion, all architects of all times have practiced this almost culinary art that comes from an oriental Japanese and Chinese tradition, and that has its origin in the thirteenth century, mainly rooted in the selection and exhibition of natural stones (Ryoan-ji Petrean Garden in Kyoto). An activity that focuses on searching and finding. Juan Navarro claims to have followed the guidelines of the display in some of his installations and architectural projects, “when there is a lot done, continue doing almost nothing,” he says. My proposal is something more radical: it is about not writing more sentences, not drawing more plates, not shooting more scenes ..., only reuse as a fragment, as technical material, what has already been done. To recompose over and over again the world, texts, sounds, architectures, stones or films; – to act as if a strange saramaguian accident had left us without cameras, without pencils, without paper, without factories, without means.

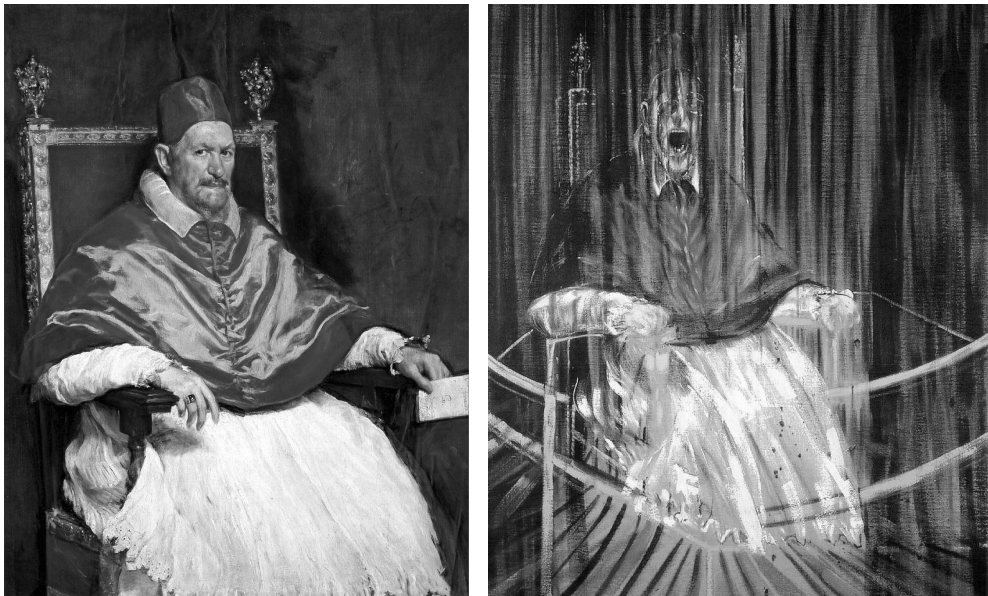
It is not so much a process of production as of reorganization, a tautology of languages, the art of connecting and disconnecting links (I remember the telephone switchboards of the sixties). It is a question of having a reality with alternatives, of remaking crossroads to stop before them again. A formal purification that would operate as a distillation: with each action we would obtain a purer and more collective matter.

I am concerned about the amount of data we store, the excess of unstructured information we store. Just twenty years ago in architectural studies it made sense to archive and order the propaganda on materials that was received, now it is an absurd task. Not only there are mountains of data that oppress and paralyze us, but the insecurity of the computer environment forces us to reproduce it by means of backups, copies that ensure the existence of the useless, if not of the despicable. Our family photos have long since ceased to be images printed on pieces of cardboard piled up in a drawer or arranged in an album, they are now matterless files that are reproduced in many memories and computer networks. There is a remarkable resemblance between the current proliferation of data and the multiplication and heterogeneity of the decomposition of organic matter. In the next few years, although we continue to make progress in the technical development of compressed files, we should stop reproducing and storing so much useless data and act with almost nothing. As the one who cleans a cupboard up, we must choose what is important and throw away what is accessory, focus our activity on research or pure creation, on the assembly or practice of the display, on the presentation of what is already known, but essential.

The example of cinema is sufficiently transparent in the exemplification of this theory, which is not so evident in other artistic activities such as literature, painting or music. In 1897, Julius Vernes published *The Sphinx of the Ice*, as a continuation, sixty years later, of the story initiated by Edgar Allan Poe: *The Adventures or Stories of Arthur Gordon Pym*. This type of encounter between authors, of crossed histories, has always existed in all the arts. The extreme quality of Sevillian Diego Velázquez’s painting has generated enough energy to encourage later painters to prolong the themes of his paintings; in 1953, Francis Bacon offered us one

⁵ In a recent conference of Juan Navarro Baldeweg given at the Official College of Architects of Málaga, on February 12, 2013. Subsequently I read an article by the same author, published in *CIRCO* magazine, no. 181 (2012), entitled: “Ready-made / display”, in which he insists on the proposed theme.

of the most acidic and cruel critiques of the Church in his copy of Pope Innocent X's portrait, and in 1957, Picasso transcribed *Las meninas* contributing to his immortality. In music the "encounters" between composers is the origin of many scores: Boccherini is paraphrased by Luciano Berio, Brahms reinterpreted by Schönberg, Schumann copied by Mahler, the Schubert of *The Wanderer's Fantasy* is adapted by Liszt, even Bach and Webern, distant two hundred years, come together to offer us the *Ricercare* of the musical offering BWV 1079⁶. It would always be possible to tell a new story using sentences already written, the more new the more used the materials. Language is itself a continuous organization of already invented words, it could not be otherwise. The full display would mean a continuous quotation of paragraphs and phrases that, in their new location, in their new context, would alter the initial meaning. Every scenario, natural or not, is a display, the recycling of images already filmed: the earth, animals, trees, crops, clouds, the observer, architecture, light... are the materials that build all landscapes.



Ill. 1. Left: Portrait of Pope Innocent X. Author Diego Velázquez, year 1650. Right: Portrait of Pope Innocent X. Author Francis Bacon, year 1963

How much past is there in each artistic or scientific activity, what is the difference between the actions of innovating or renewing? Every activity is a version of the work of Italo Calvino, *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, which brings together scientists and artists instead of lost walkers⁷. Every story, every narration, is a composition of times and time. Life and death are always present in all activity, a kind of organic vitality, of energy in transformation. As Octavio

⁶ The musical references that were described formed part of the program of the 2009/2010 season of the Real Symphony Orchestra of Seville, a program designed and made by Pedro Halfter and based on arrangements, versions and transcriptions of the History of Music.

⁷ Calvino I., *El castillo de los destinos cruzados*, Siruela, Madrid 1992. Original title: *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, 1973.

Paz detected in his essay *Los hijos del limo*⁸, the great paradox of modernity is to pretend the change of change, since change becomes a historical tradition during the 20th century as the conclusive stage of romantic ambiguity.

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⁸ Paz O., *Los hijos del limo. Del romanticismo a la vanguardia*, Seix Barral, Barcelona 1974.