DISMANTLING, REASSEMBLING, COMPOSING ANEW

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Reflecting on the Milano CA2RE conference's results about Comparison, several aspects emerge as central cores for a deeper debate within this international stage that encloses a plurality of research perspectives and traditions. Without the ambition to be considered in-depth and exhaustive, this brief contribution aims to open a frank discussion, moving through a kind of oscillation between constraints and overcomings about DDR. Three specific aspects are presented here in the form of notes and through an unavoidable personal perspective, concerning the balance between individual talent and collective knowledge framework, the research scopes and objectives, and the working method.

(Design Driven) Research is not a solitary journey
In any field, the research process is a constellation of obstacles and saltos, failures, and dead ends. In short, it is a non-linear process that reminds us of the first *Canto dell'Inferno incipit*, where Dante describes this context as «a gloomy wood, that the straight way was lost» (Dante, Inferno, 1-4).

But Dante's journey is not a solitary one; it is not even an individual path. For the Italian poet, indeed, the path towards knowledge has a broader frame embodied by his ideal mentor Virgilio, the only one who can guide and instruct him in his discovery process. Virgilio's allegoric figure represents the knowledge background, elected by Dante, in which the action (of research) must be placed in. In Design-Driven Research, the relation between personal inclinations and the necessity of tracing enlarged cultural and disciplinary perimeters is even more crucial. Obviously, we are not talking about tracing "the state of art" within a design-driven research, where a high degree of individuality is present since research interest could be based on personal practices. Yet, it is about the research positioning within a shared spectrum and in the scientific community to question the real relevance of the (personal) research work. It refers to a critical selection about the starting perspectives and frameworks in which the research question is posed, and it should be a strongly oriented and partial selection.

Originality vs. Relevance
«Originals are, and ought to be, great favourites, for they are great benefactors; they extend the republic of letters and add a new province to its dominion: imitators only give us a sort of duplicates of what we have, possibly much better, before» (Edward Young, 1759).

In 1852 the first patent office was established in England, and later on, in 1883, the Paris Union Convention signed the protection of industrial and intellectual properties. The patent system defines a new research relevance as a quantifiable expansion of scientific knowledge, whose requirements respond, inter alia, to the sphere of originality and intrinsic novelty, set by international conventions. It gives value to invention rather than to continuity, to novelty rather than to tradition, and this new setting ultimately succeeded deep influencing our cultural routes. However, in a wider scope, the problem of originality is not about 'the new' but about the rediscover[i]. In *Meno*, the Socratic dialogue on the production and transmissibility of knowledge, Plato states that knowledge occurrence is not a linear or original product. Instead, there must be a preexistent condition that comes to light in the form of re-finding, a circular process «because to search and to learn are in their whole reminiscence (anamnesis)».

This is a significant move because, along the research process, we usually address originality as a precondition, where actually it is just a result of the process itself, even if based on an initial intuition. In that sense, the term eureka, 'I found it', remembers us that originality is the answer to a research question but should never be placed as premise. At the very least, we should be aware that research must have the potential to be effective in its disciplinary domain, leading to results that can be implemented. Indeed, research relevance is the capacity to bind the knowledge production and the society avoiding the effect of 'lost in translation' or the failure of its possible implementation.

An internal perspective
«If it is assumed that the art of reading is confined to the printed page, we cannot go far. But if we broaden and quicken our sense of reading until it appears to us, in its more vital aspect, as a science, an art of interpretation, we shall go very far indeed.

(…). Then will our minds have escaped slavery to words and be at liberty, in the open air of reality, freely and fully to deal with things. Indeed, most of us have, in less or greater measure, the gift of reading things. » (Sullivan, 1906)

Architectural research primarily refers to 'phenomena', to society and its related dynamics. This is even particularly clear when we look at architectural theories and practices that mainly use external references. In that sense, architectural and design-driven research, even when looking to their statutes and generative codes, inevitably merge with several other disciplines, finding the specific value in the ability to intersect and bind a plurality of voices and to re-conduct them to the internal discourse. But this implies, quoting Pierce, «a working method able to cut the various levels of reality», not just interdisciplinarity. The attempt we usually make, as architects and as 'reflective practitioners', to understand phenomena or to read things, is to reduce their complexity to singular or simpler facts. It can be described as a process of dismantling the whole to re-ensemble it by different parts. This working method starts from an internal perspective and acts by a combinatory process, which is quite common in creative thinking as the «ability to combine pre-existing elements into new combinations, which are useful» (Poincaré, 1908).

More than defining it as an interdisciplinary approach, it can be addressed as a way to proceed from margins to the core of design research by combinatory actions. This working method, or research process, has also been recently pursued by several philosophers (Zingale, 2004) and primarily applied in design-driven (architectural) research and practice (Rocca, 2017), using instruments such as analogies, metaphors, and montages to explore the potential and critically transposing and combining figures, methods, or external theories to rethink, and composing anew, the internal debates.

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[i] **εὕρηκα** (*èureka*) in Greek means discovery and it comes from the verb εὑρίσκω (*heurískō*) that is the act of finding, 'to find,' and indeed means 'I found it.' Similarly, the term **ἰδέα** (*idea*) comes from εἶδον (*éidon*), aorist of the verb ὁράω (*orào*) that means 'to see,' also eidon means 'form' itself. Both the terms, which we usually consider as depending on our intellectual and interior activity, have another meaning related to the exterior condition, 'to re-find/to re-see,' i.e., something already present outside us.