

Architecture & Poiesis – some practical thoughts

Today I woke up wanting to do exactly what is actually still missing (!) on the internet. Are you familiar with this almost indescribable feeling to type in a search term for which there is still NO single answer? No video, no picture, nothing. It brings up a feeling of that good old digging-for-gold mood.

Anyway: that's how glorious I feel around this new blog. Because it seems pretty rare to find a person 40+, who not only wants to study architecture for the first time but also to write about it. To me, studying in the more "advanced" stage of life offers the possibility to combine the new learning directly with life experience.

To give you an example: on vacation I am sitting on the toilet in the apartment's bathroom and look nice and relaxed at the mountains in the distance from the large panoramic window, which is DIRECTLY to the right of me. Unfortunately, at this very moment, a complete stranger looks - also very relaxed - from the street directly into my window and therefore into the bathroom. Ergo, my relaxation is gone, my privacy too. One question immediately pops into my head: what's wrong with planning the adjacent sink right next to the window to create a more private area for the "privy"? So little planning effort for so much more quality of life!

This kind of misplanning can also be found in the modern shoebox buildings that have for years been shooting out of the ground far too close together in major cities. The list of non-practical things in residential buildings seems almost endless to me: barely usable balconies in the shady north of a house. Noisy bathroom and kitchen drain pipes of the neighboring apartment that go directly pass one's own bedroom. Wasted storage and living space due to inconveniently placed doors and walls.. Can you think of more? I look forward to hearing even more examples.

Architecture, which at the moment is a concept that still only exists in my head but hopefully one day I will help build, is in contrast quite "practical"- especially when taking into account the above experience. By the way, I don't mean aesthetic subtleties or individual preferences, which may be different for each person and which also change socially in the course of time. I mean the basic and necessary things for every s i n g l e human being who needs accomodation. At least in our hemisphere.

Practical is defined as "especially well suited to a particular purpose; very useful; expedient." Etymologically, this purpose is linked with action: doing something. On architectureJJ.com I like to understand it as "linked to living". To good living, that is, which brings me quite quickly to something that I believe I can bring to architecture and to this blog, among other things: namely at least a touch of practical philosophy. More precisely, of "poietic philosophy".

In this "Poiesis" (ancient Greek ποιέω: to make) which I to be honest got slightly lost in (which may be due to the fact that the only good "textbook" on it seems to have been written with a lottt of passion and dedication). Key Fact - who invented it? The ones in Greece, of course. So at least it seems that it was Plato and Aristotle who probably wrote it down for the first time, the latter ultimately being more associated with the term.

In his philosophy, Aristotle distinguishes the "theory" (object of observation sui generis = "existence" in the broad sense), the "practice" (object of observation - roughly said everything "subjectively made by man") and the "poiesis", which represents the **process of practice**. [6] Poiesis has always something to do with movement. **It is the enabling of possibilities from non-being into being**. I think this is beautifully phrased, but also had a "Huh? What?" on my lips when I first read it.

In terms of architecture, I have not found a better explanation anywhere and consequently I would like to start filling this research gap up - even on the small scale:

As an architect I have an idea or a possibility of a building in my head. By designing, I "discover", so to speak, my possibilities that have existed so far in non-being (they are, after all, only virtually in my head) and transfer them into "being", ergo: I design so that something is actually built.

Thinking is poiesis, designing is poiesis, and the "art of building" is also poiesis, as Aristotle explicitly notes. The distinguishing feature from the "praxis" of his philosophy is the purpose orientation: in poietic action there is always (!) a purpose present from the outside. I design and build only in order to produce an object, i.e. building, which then in turn continues to exist without my poiesis. For my architectural poiesis I need

matter, nothing comes from nothing. Building materials, for example, only serve to materialize the poetic movement.

Now what does all this have to do with the practical (!) problem of the not-so-privy "privy" mentioned at the beginning? It becomes clear if I use a more appropriate expression: that of pragmatism. In this philosophical school of thought, which emerged in the 19th century, practical utility or success is the focus of human action. Pragmatic-poietic success, in the case of bathroom architecture, would thus be if the design/planning/building had been conceived in such a way as to achieve my happiness as an individual. In other words, if I could enjoy the SILENCE of a space that respects my privacy "while I'm doing my business." Practically, pragmatically or poietically, I would therefore like to close this short essay with an - albeit taken in good humour- imperative:

So for Pete's sake, don't plan the toilet right frickin next to a humongous and very easy-to-look-into window! Thanks, JJ.