JOSE ROMERO. THE FORGOTTEN ARCHITECTURE OF A MAN
Carlos Labarta

Twenty years have gone by since José Romero prematurely left us one 8th December while he was chopping firewood in his modest country house in El Burgo de Ebro, Zaragoza. Perhaps there has been too much silence around his architecture and life, and this article sets out to fill in this unjustified gap.

The periphery also exists. We should also write about lesser-known architects, people you do not find on the academic circuit or in professional journals. In the communications era we seem to have got used to thinking that only that which is published exists or has existed. This phenomenon has also reached the world of architecture. It may be true that you only become well-known if things are published about you (although I have my doubts), but the existence of architecture on the periphery may lead to lateral discourse. The architecture of José Romero is an example, and moreover it adds the value of anonymity. His total lack of interest in the exterior projection of his work beyond his immediate customers means that others (with a certain degree of embarrassment) have to present his successes. These are not so much sure achievements (success is so uncertain and ephemeral) as the result of a meditated cohesion between thought and action.

The origin of the first interesting work of Romero is directly based on classical and vernacular traditions, as in the projects for a Residence for the Jesuits in Zaragoza (1952), the Church at Valdefierro, Zaragoza (1953) or some housing projects such as those in Calle León XIII (1956) and Pedro María Ric (1957) in the city of Zaragoza.

The analysis of the first phase of Romero’s work is approached from a perspective of the relationship between the classical element (and its derivations towards rationalism) and influences from the vernacular tradition, as a heritage of local construction traditions. The architect reaffirms the need for logic in composition and construction. These two elements are understood as interdependent, with no need for arbitrary external factors (which would be considered a betrayal of the sincerity of the construction style). Romero’s architecture later evolved towards concepts that were closer to the legacy of the regionalist revisions of the Modern Movement. One of the keys to his career is that he did not forget these early lessons and maintained the cohesion between construction and composition.

On an international level, the architecture of the 1970s is characterised by the phenomenon of decentralisation, the rise of local phenomena and their relation to the universal. In connection with the first phase, Romero’s work in the 70s and the 80s is not unaware of the conditions of the discourse of alternatives to modernity. Among his projects, the following stand out: the University Hall of Residence and Parish Church for the Carmelites (1963), the Benedictine Monastery (1968), the apartments in Calle Isabel la Católica (1969), the Convent and Residence for the Adoratrices nuns (1970) or the Children’s Home of the Hermanas Dominicas (1972). All these works are found in the city of Zaragoza.

Romero shows us, without any great pictorial or complicated pretensions, how to achieve a balance between the architect’s means of expression and constructed reality, the final and sole objective of architecture. Rather than getting involved in rhetorical discourse on drawn architecture Romero draws “almost” constructed architecture. Romero explores the still-to-be exploited possibilities of the modernist approach in combination with things that occurred to him from local references. The architect tries to emphasise scenic and topographical values, in which architecture and Nature can blend. His architecture borrows from the surroundings in a clear move away from the internationalist postulates of previous decades.

In Romero, the acceptance of vernacular construction (illustrated in this project in the use of inclined tiled roofs and brick load-bearing walls) ‘sweetens’ the modern approach without aiming at false or facile populism. This acceptance leads him to explain the plastic possibilities that emerge from traditional construction, with an architectural style that is close to Expressionism.

The architect has left us his work, and also his ‘attitude’. His work is firm, elegant, suggestive. A visit to his buildings shows the spatial, formal and constructive virtues of a sincere form of architecture. Sincere with his customers, and faithful to his commitment and his time, Romero gives us the chance to consider integrity and personal propriety as the best way to approach architecture. Architecture cannot have Ethics, as can the architect.

Romero, who was not at all interested in being remembered or praised, continues to show us the silent presence of his attitude, reflected in his work.

OF GEOMETRY AND ARCHITECTURE
José Antonio Ruiz de la Rosa

This article sets out to make a short contribution to the analysis of the role of Geometry as an operational tradition in Architecture throughout history, and its importance for the formal control carried out by architects in different eras.

Initially, the hypothesis is put forward that this Geometry has developed in two possible directions: practice (fabrorum) and theory (erudita), which have the same origin but a different evolution. The former (the older) has to do with empiricism and practical application; the second, with the intellectual reflection that becomes science. Both are parallel yet connected, and each one takes from the other the elements that are of interest to it.

Fabrorum geometry was the origin of the development of theoretical geometry. Once established it would have a notable effect on practical geometry in those basic questions that can be resolved with a rule and metre, necessary and sufficient instruments for the architect. Later it was to move away from practical geometry and remained restricted (and almost lost) until the period between the end of the 15th century and the French Revolution, a phase in which they converged again and became the new tool of practitioners from Humanism to the present day. We also look at how this hypotheses can be traced in manuscripts and treatises.

The second part selects a specific document as an example of research possibilities. A document attributed to the architect Hernán Ruiz II in a crucial phase, the transition period from Gothic to Renaissance in the XVI century, helps to support the final hypot-
The City, Between Tradition and Rupture

José Luque

There was a time when Modern Architecture tended to see itself as a radical break with past experience. This attitude has marked historical research, converting it into a mere search for referents and predecessors, in which anything that does not fall into line with established thinking is rejected.

In Theory and Design in the first era of the machine, Banham revealed the tension between tradition and rupture, and delved deeper into the subject to discover the possibilities of Modern Architecture.

This article sets out in this direction, focusing on the field of town planning. It presents the theoretical contributions of three academicians: Eugène Hénard and Tony Garnier, students of L’École des Beaux Arts and disciples of Guadet, and Otto Wagner, who trained at the Bauakademie in Berlin and the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts.

The three propose urban work focused on architecture, thereby overcoming the protagonism that engineering had taken on in urban construction. To do this, they base themselves on their academic training and their mastery of architectural composition. Despite starting from similar bases they would, however, achieve radically different results.

Hénard sees the city as a unit, a mechanism broken up by a series of dysfunctions that take operational capacity away from it, defects that have to be worked out individually while always paying attention to their influence on the whole. Garnier breaks with the immediate past and proposes an ex novo city that emerges from new industrial needs in which each element plays a specific role in the final composition.

Wagner proposes a regulated design that allows the indefinite growth of the Grossstadt. He defends the unity of art forms and the supremacy of architecture, thanks to its aesthetics, over engineering disciplines.

The discourse of the three authors makes the need to link architecture and town planning clear, and responds to the construction of a city through a discipline which, like the city itself, should be continually changing and adapting while maintaining its identity at all times.

CLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE. AN ARCHITECTURE OF URBANITY

Joaquín Lorda

Classical architecture is studied as a mode of social presentation, developing ideas put forward by Gombrich in his book The sense of order. Architecture is included in what Irving Goffman called face, and the technical development of the new French ethno-sociology deepens its relationship with manners and rituals before our period. Architecture has great power of representation. Classical architecture was, above all, the architecture of great occasions (the ‘Grand Manner’, according to Reginald Blomfield). The history of classical architecture shows that it was indeed the Western way of presentation in public: the one that has accompanied public life.

Understood this way, classical architecture does not identify with the great architectural types (church, palace, house) and has developed independently. However, the devices of classical architecture complete them and (particularly) highlight their category.

Both classical types and devices are symbols that express their function and rank. They do not only do this, however, they provide beauty, which is the best way to express dignity, as the Ancient Classicists showed us. As modes of presentation the devices of classical architecture share the characteristics of formalities or manner of treatment. In the Western world, the most important characteristic of manners or ways of treatment is that they should be pleasant, out of respect for others. Classical architecture also had this quality: its devices were developed so that they should pleasant (and beautiful). In the past, Western world buildings had to be courteous and urbane, in the widest sense of the word ‘urbanity’. By doing so they achieved a pleasant closeness in the spaces they occupied. There is a brief theoretical tradition, from Emerson to Trystan Edwards, that speaks precisely of the need for architectural courtesy.
fiable’ building owing to its variety of styles and historical re-
ferences, but particularly as a result of the combination of classical
elements and patently modern forms and spaces. Such is the case
that Moya (especially for this building) has been judged by recent
critics to be heterodox within Classicism, the creator of a unique
and surreal architecture. It is therefore not surprising that during
the 1980s, within the ephemeral postmodernist recovery of
Classicism, some saw precedents from the Italian Tendenza in
Moya’s building, a model of the complexities and contradictions
referred to by Venturi, or a magnificent example of late Western
Classicism that many would wish to emulate.

All in all, any understanding of the classical in Moya, without for-
getting his predilection for strange, ludic and surreal elements, lies
within the great classical tradition in architecture. It is possible that
his extensive knowledge of history and his great sensitivity to
architecture led him to express all the possibilities offered by the
tradition in this particular building. He moved within a dual regis-
ter: virtuosity and innovation. However, innovation, heterodoxy,
licence or breaking away from the norm (all found in abundance in
the University of Gijón), are not so much signs of an anti-classical
spirit but rather a highly original example of some basic elements
of the classical tradition.

To set out this idea, we will analyse the influence of Sebastiano
Serlio’s architecture on Luis Moya, with emphasis on the concept
of licence, mixture and the use of primitive forms that Serlio inven-
ted and disseminated in his treatise. This concept of licence and
primitivism has its origins in the art of classical rhetoric, particu-
larly in the works of Cicero. These concepts, through Cortesano de
Baldassare Castiglione, were to have a decisive influence on the
architectural classicism of XVI century Italy.

It is precisely these strange classical registers, these discordant,
heterodox effects that give the tension, expressive force, perennial
vitality and interest to the work of Luis Moya.

ARCHITECTURE AND MORALITY. MORALITY AS COMPARED TO
MORALISM, HISTORICISM AND MODERNITY
Juan Miguel Otxotorena

As of not long ago the way of going about architecture began to be
seen as subject to moral valuations and indeed to ethical judge-
ments. The phenomenon is at present ebbing. However it is con-
nceted to an image of the architect that has presented a remarkable
predicament in the recent past. This predicament came about when
the architect appeared and was seen by himself as an ideologist, as
a political activist and as an agent of deep social transformation.
Even though this image is not apt today, but rather raises a certain
skeptical curiosity, one is dealing with quite a well spread attitude
within the vanguard and ‘advanced’ circles of the profession. This
so-called Modern Movement in recent times is indeed characteris-
tic of a limited approach towards architecture. This movement has
been seen as a sort horizon, a beacon and a historical enterprise. If
one looks carefully such a phenomenon is fittingly modern: this is
the conclusion if one relates the idea of modernity to the underlying
cultural attitude and state of consciousness that this word has come
to mean and was identified with at its zenith. It is worth warning of
the series of consequences that are derived from this observation.

Among other things this provides the necessary perspective for a
considered analysis of the complex trappings of postmodernist spe-
ch and the assorted reflections in this area of architecture. It also
provides bases consequentially better founded for the composition
of an updated, critical vision of the situation within the discipline.

CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE:
ORIGINALS OF COMPLEX SIMPLICITY
José Manuel Pozo

The architecture of the Modern Movement has been characterised
by open rejection of architectural forms linked to tradition and his-
torical styles. Nevertheless, it was born from these roots.

The contradiction, always present in different schools of thought
(above all in art), is particularly obvious in theoretical or practical
approaches to modernity.

International architecture, geometrically pure and abstract, delib-
erately rational and logical, feeds off the Expressionism of the ferti-
ile 1920s. It transforms the formal complexity of Expressionism
into intellectual complexity: the simplicity of forms that architec-
ture now uses requires a greater effort of understanding thanks to
its greater richness of content, in contrast to the geometrical purity
and simplicity of the volumes through which it is expressed.

Apparent simplicity hides great real complexity. The lower level of
‘popularity’ that architecture enjoys nowadays in relation to that of
‘historical forms’ is largely due to the fact that architecture now
expresses itself through a more intellectual, less intuitive ‘langua-
ge’, which therefore belongs to a higher order.

As a spatial reflection of the society that uses and develops it, its
apparent ‘impopularity’ is a (contradictory) manifestation of the
progress it has achieved.

CORNERS IN TWO BUILDINGS BY FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT.

Fernando Zaparain Hernández

This study deals with some of the resources used in two buildings
designed by Wright, in which his utopian vision of Man and the
world are reflected. We will refer to the office building for Larkin
Co. in Buffalo, N.Y. (1904) and the Unitary Church in Oak Park,
Chicago (Illinois), from 1906. Both are clearly related to each other
and belong to the non-residential work that F.L.W. did in his early
years as an independent architect. They have features in common,
such as their imposing air, the use of symmetry, severe volumes,
flat projecting roofs, large windows and the abstract composition of
ground plans, so characteristic of later work by Wright.

What brings these two buildings together in this study is the strong
definition of the corners, (1) either because this is a manifestation
of profound content in the conception of the building’s character
(as a symbolic combination of motherliness and masculinity), (2)
or because it an efficient apology for diagonal projection mecha-
nisms, (3) or because it plays a key role in understanding the rou-
tes and accesses, of the ascension through Architecture towards a
new order (4) or because a complex geometrical weft is involved.
The summary of this analysis is the dynamic character that Wright
imposed on his buildings. Even in apparently aesthetic cases like
those studied, the complex presence of paths, wefts and tensions is
clear. Wright wanted to be close to Nature, always alive and in con-
tinuous movement, and he managed to communicate an extraordi-
nary speed to his architecture. This dynamic character is yet anot-
er factor that enables us to say that FLW was authentically modern.

THE RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE JOŽE PLEČNIK
Ángel Medina y Milan Vancura

Jože Plečnik must be placed in the history of architecture as a cen-
tral figure of architectural Modernism. This significance of Plečnik
is dictated by the uniqueness of his themes and images both in his
civic and in his religious architecture in Vienna, Prague, Ljubljana
and elsewhere. Plečnik's religious architecture has a double empl-
hasis: publicly, it gives rise to the type of urban church that gave
support to the emerging democratic states and to the type of rural
church that gave support to nationalist, populist piety; privately, it
provides expression to the architect's wrestling with the problem of
mortality. As Plečnik grew older, this latter preoccupation translated
itself into a subconscious "compulsion to repeat" or, formally, into
a "constructive mania" much closer to traditional Nordic forms than
to Classical forms. In all of his religious work, Plečnik synthe-
sized, both metaphorically and metonymically, the contributions of the
materials and the craft to the constitution of contemplative (world)
and visionary (tradition) forms of the imagination. Since their com-
ponents can be distinguished but not separated from each other,
such forms are at the same time realities and symbols, therefore
they cannot be identified with the radical fictions of traditional and
Post-modern art. As symbols, Plečnik's tectonic and decorative
forms should not be considered arbitrary, linguistic, signs; they are
instead natural, as the forms and expressions of life.