

## JOSE ROMERO. THE FORGOTTEN ARCHITECTURE OF A MAN

Carlos Labarta

Twenty years have gone by since José Romero prematurely left us on 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 can 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 hypoth-

hesis proposed. The document, known as the *Libro de Arquitectura*, contains a series of books, among them one on geometry. It is sufficiently comprehensive to trace several questions of interest.

One of the main books has been selected due to the fact that its concept has survived in architecture over time. It poses a problem of equivalence of areas, and provides both an empirical solution (based on practical experience) and a scientific one based on appropriate 'propositions' from the *Elements* of Euclid. It is, therefore, a key element in understanding the qualitative leap produced. This analysis marks the end of this brief contribution to the enthralling relationship between science and practice.

#### 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 be 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.

#### 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.

#### CLASSICISM, LICENCE AND RHETORIC IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF LUIS MOYA. ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50 TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LAYING OF THE FIRST STONE OF THE UNIVERSIDAD LABORAL DE GIJÓN

Carlos Montes Serrano

This year is the fiftieth anniversary of the start of work on the *Universidad Laboral de Gijón*, the last great building of Classicism and the most outstanding work of the architect Luis Moya Blanco (1904-1990).

To commemorate the occasion, a congress attended by architecture lecturers and art historians was held in Gijón to analyse this building's contribution to the history of Spanish architecture. This article corresponds to one of the conferences given in the congress, in which the author analyses the Classicism that Moya built into the *Universidad Laboral de Gijón*.

The University of Gijón has always been considered an 'unclassi-

fiable' building owing to its variety of styles and historical references, 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 forgetting 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 register: 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 invented and disseminated in his treatise. This concept of licence and primitivism has its origins in the art of classical rhetoric, particularly 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 judgments. The phenomenon is at present ebbing. However it is connected 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 sceptical 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 characteristic 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 speech 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 historical 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, deliberately rational and logical, feeds off the Expressionism of the fertile 1920s. It transforms the formal complexity of Expressionism into intellectual complexity: the simplicity of forms that architecture 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 'language', 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 routes and accesses, of the ascension through Architecture towards a new order (4) or because a complex geometrical web 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, webs and tensions is clear. Wright wanted to be close to Nature, always alive and in continuous movement, and he managed to communicate an extraordinary speed to his architecture. This dynamic character is yet another factor that enables us to say that FLW was authentically modern.

#### THE RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE JOŽE PLEČNIK

Ángel Medina y Milan Vancura

Joze Plecnik must be placed in the history of architecture as a central figure of architectural Modernism. This significance of Plecnik 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. Plecnik's religious architecture has a double emphasis: 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 Plecnik 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, Plecnik synthesized, 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 components 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, Plecnik's tectonic and decorative forms should not be considered arbitrary, linguistic, signs; they are instead natural, as the forms and expressions of life.