Material quality in organic architecture. Enrico Tedeschi’s building for the Faculty of Architecture in Mendoza
Silvia Alvite

Alongside the theoretical flourishing of an organicist architectural trend around the concept of space, promoted since the mid-1940s by some Italian architects, a parallel line of research developed the path of biostructures as support systems integrated into the envelope. In Argentina, both sides had experimentation channels during the 1950s, and a case that uniquely condenses the maturity of those proposals is the building of the Mendoza Faculty of Architecture, designed by Italian architect Enrico Tedeschi between 1960 and 1964. The project explores systematality, constructive rationality and organicity, rejecting material neutrality in favour of the exploration of a tactile field in which the limits of space are perceived blurred by effects of shadows, transparencies and dynamism accompanying a soft naturalistic mimeis.

ENRICO TEDESCHI AND THE EXPRESSION OF SPATIAL CONTINUITY

One protagonist in that Italian discussion group was Roman architect Enrico Tedeschi (Rome, 1910 - Buenos Aires, 1978), whom in his youth briefly developed his professional activity in Rome, during the 1930s. After the Second World War, he worked as an urban planner in some plans to reconstruct Italy; together with Zevi, Piccinato, and other Italian architects, he was part of the Associazione per l’Architettura Organica (APAO), as well as of the executive board of Metron journal. In 1948, he emigrated to Argentina, where he became a distinguished professor at different universities. While he mainly devoted himself to teaching, he was a versatile figure within the disciplines of architecture and urbanism, as a designer, theorist and urban planner. His greatest academic achievements were attained as dean of the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Mendoza, between 1961 and 1972. Afterwards, he dedicated his last years to research, advocating an ecological approach to architecture through the development of solar energy technologies applied to house design.

In the 1950s, Tedeschi was a representative of organic architecture, by way of his pedagogical programmes and publications in Spanish. He promoted the same spatial ideas posed by Zevi, albeit without his politically-tinged arguments, inappropriate for the Latin American context. Through a call to formal freedom, Tedeschi opposed figurative abstraction as a design tool, identifying it with a standardising homogeneity; instead, he affirmed the re-valuing of the human factor and its singularity, in order to “...overcome the cubist experience, which values above all volume and proportion”. In 1965, he devoted a critical essay to the figure of Frank Lloyd Wright, highlighting in his work the use of materials in their natural expression, an affinity with landscape, a free formal expression, and the role of space in plastic generation. Some years later, he further developed this approach, adding certain aspects defined by an environmentalist matrix which drew him near to a particular interest in structures and climate. Those were times in which psychological and perceptual factors had been brought into the methods of the architectural project, incorporating the variables of viewing space in movement and transparency.

Tedeschi was sceptical that technology could solve aesthetic issues, although he neither favoured an artisanal or vernacular view in relation to materials. He was interested in industrial improvements, and welcomed the experiments with modular prefabrication systems developed in post-war Europe. The success of these systems, according to Tedeschi, was that standard elements, regulated by networks, yielded flexibility, growth capacity and aesthetic interest, so long as they did not become monotonous:

“This is the system we have so strenuously tried to avoid in recent years, so as to achieve expressions of spatial and plastical continuity, closer to our dynamic view of the outline”.

On the occasion of publishing an article on structural design in architecture, Tedeschi illustrated the search for aesthetic value and creativity in structures with the examples of Wright’s
envisaged as urban lighting poles, but were used in this work for the mezzanines and the roof, while others were originally intended as beams and precast tiles, made of prestressed and reinforced concrete, used for the mezzanines. Codina's studies on the project reveal that underlying this façade's composition is the golden ratio, integrating the network's slope angle to a 2.44 m modular system, yielding 3.20 m vertical intervals between the upper levels of the slabs. A mathematical order which would represent a rationalisation of certain natural logics, just like Argan saw in Wright's design processes (fig. 06). However, the design's organic character is not only a consequence of geometrical knowledge, but also of other holistic and material factors: first of all, each element is integrated into a greater complex, wherein each part occupies a definite position, bringing about a network arrangement, a relational – not hierarchical – structure among the elements. The relation between structure and space, through the permeability of both the pattern and the transparent surfaces behind, avoids the wall curtain façade and simulates a diaphragm between the inner and outer treatment (fig. 07). The structural mass becoming lighter in weight as it ascends allows for the illusion of natural growth. Finally, the concrete's greenish colour enhances the visual effect of continuity between building and surroundings (fig. 08).

The design of articulations exhibits a delicate attachment between the pieces, leaving no room for brutalist interpretations (fig. 09). As Adagio remarks, the building is part of a set of works completed during the 1960s, which coincide with a process of great development in the reinforced concrete industry in Argentina, and with an interest in prefabrication, combined with on-site, artisanal construction techniques. Nonetheless, unlike other contemporary local works, the systematisation of the pieces, the construction process and the structural design do not explain the project's global concept, whose objective is not giving materials a central role. The dominating aspects, instead, are the effects of multiple reflections, a result of the shadows cast by the external structure towards the parallel surfaces of the rear glass walls enclosing the workshops, and towards the flat perpendicular planes formed by the front galleries, clad in a reddish smooth cement. The organicist conception we find in this design shifts the focus from figure to material, since here formal ideas are not limited to a figurative naturalistic analogy, but yield results of great haptic sensitivity. This orientation can be better understood if we consider that in Tedeschi's theory of architecture, architectural form is defined by a triad comprising the concepts of space, plastics and scale, wherein plastics contributes "the formal character of the constructed elements limiting space", not only owing to their geometrical properties, but also to material qualities, such as texture, light and colour, always serving a spatial purpose. On the occasion of explaining the mushroom columns designed by Wright for the Johnson building, Tedeschi asserted:
Silvia Alvite
She was born in Buenos Aires in 1977. She graduated with a degree of Architecture from the University of Buenos Aires; with a Master in Theory and Practice of Architectural Design, from the Polytechnic University of Cataluña; and with a Doctorate in Architecture, from the University of Buenos Aires. She is currently Adjunct Professor of Theory of Architecture I and II, at the National University of San Martín, Argentina. Her doctoral thesis studies the evolution of ideas in the thought and works of Italian architect Enrico Tedeschi, within the background of theoretical and practical changes in the discipline during the second half of the 20th century in Latin America.
E-Mail: silvia.alvite@fadu.uba.ar

Notes
03. ZEVI, B., Storia dell’architettura moderna, Einaudi, Turin, 1960.
05. ARGAN, G. C., “Introduzione a un progetto”, in Metron, 1947, 18, p. 10.
09. MOHY-LAGY, L., Vision in Motion, Paul Theobald, Chicago, 1947.
12. SEVERUD, F., “La naturaleza es una fuente de inspiración estructural”, in Metron, 1945, 4-5, pp. 21-29.
16. This work’s design and construction process was studied in depth – and for the first time – by Leonardo García Codina in his master thesis. See also: CO-
18. The Italian company SCAC (Società Cementi Armati Centrifugati) was founded in Trentino, Italia, in 1920, and was dedicated to manufacturing concrete elements for architecture and civil construction work. In the 1950s, the company set many industrial facilities in Argentina. See also: GIOVANNARDI, F., Enrico Tedeschi dal sogno alla tragedia argentina, Pátton, Bologna, 2016.
24. On Tedeschi’s environmental sensitivity in his views on Peruvian baroque architecture, see: ALVITE, Silvia, “Enrico Tedeschi y la crítica fotografica en el paisaje arquitectónico latinoamericano”, Anales del IAA, 45, pp. 73-89.
Rescatando la machine à habiter: la villa palladiana en la segunda vida de los grands-ensembles transformados de Lacaton y Vassal

Ana Tostões
Jaime Silva

A partir de algunas de las cuestiones planteadas en la llamada “Ontología orientada al material”, como la Estética y ética de la sostenibilidad, este trabajo sostiene que la acción de reciclar viviendas sociales representa un modelo de regeneración social.

En 1995, la galardonada película La Haine reveló al mundo el caos diario en el que vivían los habitantes de los grands-ensembles (viviendas sociales francesas de la posguerra): el desempleo, la criminalidad y la violencia eran algunos de sus compañeros habituales. Ante esta realidad incuestionable, el Estado responsabilizó rápidamente a los modelos urbanísticos y arquitectónicos, poniendo en marcha un ambicioso plan de demolición-reconstrucción que sigue vigente a día de hoy. Desde 2004, los arquitectos Anne Lacaton y Jean-Philippe Vassal se oponen activamente a esta política injustificada. Han demostrado, no solo mediante la literatura sino también a través de su obra, que los grands-ensembles merecen una segunda vida. Tomando como su principal “materia prima” el contexto ya construido, han rescatado sucesivamente la machine à habiter del movimiento moderno llevando los espacios de transición de la villa palladiana a cada uno de los apartamentos habitados.

Paris, año 1995. Un grupo de tres hombres jóvenes toman un tren al centro de la ciudad. Al amparo de una noche seductora, caen en un espiral de drogas, delincuencia y violencia, extendiendo una telaraña de agitación por los tranquilos barrios bobo1 de París. Al amanecer, uno de ellos acaba siendo “accidentalmente” asesinado por un policía con prejuicios. Probablemente proceden de Chanteloup-les-Vignes, una ciudad satélite situada a las afueras de la capital francesa, construida para alojar viviendas sociales después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Colosales bloques residenciales