

ENGLISH

English translation by Paula Olmos

The milky way

Miguel Ángel Baldellou

The "Dream Factory" provided us, mature and future architects, with fascinating models. We, then just children, occupied our seats impressed by that Gary Cooper, an architect capable of building and destroying whole skyscrapers just for the sake of his creative volition. Those images of the architect/totem, mounted on top of his enormous, apparently endless, tower under construction, surpassed by far any other contender on screen.

There was something rather unreal, though, in all those images. Everything was somewhat excessive. The piece of architecture the architect felt so uncritically proud of did not seem to justify our main character's heroism. Its style was suspiciously obvious.

The film's main issue was, nevertheless, the possibility of an exceptional behavior, a passionate life devoted to a single, and apparently simple, "mission"; that of practicing our individual freedom. This particular aim seemed to find some kind of affinity in the intense sense of revelry so common then among architects and so necessary for our own self-respect.

Those cinematographic images and others which followed them, others which emphasized some particular aspects of them, others we even had to fight against, were, in some sense, a fundamental part of our "Sentimental Education" as architects. Some of the architects belonging to the latest generations have been to a certain extent guided in their "vocation" by some Film Stars. This, if none other, is a sufficient reason to examine in a careful way the enormous phenomenon originated by motion pictures. This question about the professional orientation based on cinematographic fiction and the problems derived from it is not a trifle one. In the particular case of architecture, one of the world's oldest professions and one of the least known by the general public, the distance established by the screen is as good a pretext as any other to create mythical images of these professionals who unfailingly appear as egocentric.

Our list of models provided by the film industry, a rather varied one as should be expected from the enormous diversity of scripts and directors, presents, nevertheless, a common attribute: the completely unrealistic characterization of the authentic architects regardless the fact that some might feel that the heroic attitude and inner conflicting thought of the film stars are their own. From the days in which the leaders of the historic avant-garde proposed, as others rather efficiently had already done, a rupture which the models of the past, architects have gradually modified their manners and appearance in order to obey the market's

requirements.

Some gestures like dispensing with the sack coat (but keeping the bow tie) or trying to maintain the countenance of a "free man" just attached to the prairie and the "lost horizon" made of people like Le Corbusier and Wright authentic "film heroes". Although Mallet-Stevens just mocked at the Swiss' "machine à habiter" in his "L'inumane" and Roark was a visible farce of our Talliesin master in "The source", the intransigent mystification of egocentrism as synonymous to genius is something unbearably evident in "The architect's belly", something conceded without reflection and precisely applied to an art which is, almost by definition, subsidiary. The real situation has really nothing to do with films. Leaving aside the possibilities of using the architect's image in a sociological or anthropological film script, nowadays it seems that our profession has lost the aura it enjoyed not so much ago. From heroes to "men with no particular characteristics", our descent has been traversed too quickly to have been properly assimilated.

The cinematographic image of the architect is, nowadays, so chimerical, that any attempt to imitate it becomes almost comic and fairly unsuitable. Some years ago, Xavier Sust, published a marvelous book in which he proposed the adoption of the Michelin Guide system of classification in modern architecture guides to cities. Nowadays it seems as though we had to do the same thing with the architects themselves. A good friend of mine used to talk about "five pencils" architects obviously referring to the hotels classification system. But this question of classifying architects (with pencils or any other criterion) is, nevertheless, something rather opposed to our acknowledged "corporate spirit". We had to do something, though, with the enormous and uncontrolled number of professionals coming out of so different training centers (and so different education programmes). Our future seems to threaten or peaceful way of living together, something which is completely characteristic to us in the present society. The "Hermandad" (Medical Society for Architects) seemed to understand it when it modified its principles to adapt them to our tough reality. Our professional colleges, though, are yet trying to resist the apparent attempt of the central power to divide and defeat them, "old vestiges of past authorities", in order to establish modernized social structures once the present ones dissolved.

But, in spite of the evident character of the present situation, many architects seem to be yet willing to be considered "five pencils" professionals. This cultural inertia is,

nevertheless, rather contradictory to the also very fashionable search for notoriety by means of the widespread use of the most obvious tricks, precisely practiced by those who pretend to be singular. It is also true that the present state of concurrence forces professionals to strive for recognition among the multitude, but the curious result of all this is the reproduction of the same unifying gestures.

In the pages of this same magazine Alberto Campo Baeza invited us to "resistance". But this resistance might well lead us to a narcissist and unreal isolation that might well end in self-destruction.

In any case the only possible way to "salvation" seems to be in "sacrifice". A sacrifice that means renunciation, better still, silence. Renunciation to the adulation of society. Because we do not agree with that society's aims, if they exist at all. And a thunderous renunciation might well disturb our reason, if not take it away from us. Passive resistance might, on the contrary, stop their yelling. There is so much confusion. Shooting stars are just able to remain in our firmament if they follow a common path. Integrating ourselves within a "milky way", and inevitable tradition, can be our only solution.

Now that the century is finishing we can see that a certain period is about to end; the period commanded by some masters which now seem untouchable to us. Their substitutes, which will inevitably be elected

among us, are not yet defined. We can mention some names capable of being the figures in this change, but it is our opinion that their works lack the inner coherence of those who just try to perfect themselves secluding their labor from outer confusion. If we consider the silences, which are more significant than the outstanding manifestations, we must say that our guiding stars for the next millennium are yet undefined. Their qualities are probably those of the long distance runner, who goes completely concentrated straight towards a distant finishing line, administering his resources, perfecting himself minute by minute. In any case, they are surely working now, unaware of ephemeral mirages. If we recall the diverse heroic attitudes proposed by film makers for the image of the perfect architect and assuming the necessary effort employed in the architectural practice nowadays, I must say that the athletes of "Fire Chariots", excelling themselves once and again, are the closest portrait to my own model.

I would even like to affirm that when we employ little effort in making our merits known it is because we are employing it in acquiring them. That is what reflection means and that is what justifies it. This is a call to labor, to silent labor as the only way to become something. I now that, giving the circumstances, this challenge will be most probably unheard. And yet it must be throw out. ■



Dangerous Liaisons

José M^o Fernández Isla

Are film makers really so blind not to see architectural matters with a bit of insight? It seems that, at least in this country, they are. From newspapers to the highest authorities of cultural diffusion, not forgetting the most active and wealthiest contractors, nobody seems to be interested deeply enough in architecture. The representatives of the Seventh Art had no reason to be an exception. In the Centenary history of film making there are, in fact, very few examples in which architecture appears on screen in a coherent and unprejudiced way. Only a few authors (Lang, Hitchcock, Antonioni and Ivory could be the most representative) have been able to have a personal view of the matter, daring to explore the power of architecture in the conception of their stories.

That is probably why there are so very few examples to be remembered in which architecture (more precisely "architectural language") is used with enough equanimity. The most significant ones, though, seem to be TV productions. But these are, also, the least interesting because they are, generally, more related to documentary works than to narrative fiction. So far, the most coherent work from this particular point of view is that of the late Renato Castellani, an architect and film director connected to Neo-Realism, whose most famous work, "Romeo and Juliet" (a real piece of art not to be mistaken for Zeffirelli's clumsy version) was, precisely, the end of the mentioned movement. Form the privileged point of view of his camera's lens, Castellani takes advantage of the opportunity of working for a powerful company, the R.A.I., to create a "cultural landmark" by taking us inside the Sixtine Chapel in an almost fifty minutes voyage around Michelangelo's architectural discourse.

Another example is "Le Corbusier. The Ville Savoye" a short film shot by Nick Levison for another TV Broadcasting Network, the B.B.C. (meanwhile our T.V.E. is lost "who knows where"). This documentary production analyzes in a most skilful way this famous architectural work. But film making spirit has not, even in this example, seemed able to reveal architectural essence. It just tries to reflect in a learned and efficient way Le Corbusier's ideas as they appear in his own texts. But always with a most detached and dispassionate attitude which penetrates the images which could have formed a vibrant sequence and are just a correct succession showing one of the key works of modern architecture. It cannot satisfy architectural nor even film enthusiasts.

We can conclude that either there is a problem of communication between both arts (one of Antonioni's (the only one who deserves to be called "Michelangelo" among us, according to Rosellini) main concerns) or film makers just show themselves simply unable to get closer to architectural matters in a more satisfying way, transcending the mere idea of scenography. Because they have just confined themselves to show architecture as a mere object, impersonal and manageable as any other one, completely detached from its own expressive capacities.

The coincidence in time of the beginning of film making and modern architecture, seemed to announce a closer relationship

between this two twentieth century cultural landmarks. If our kind readers would allow us, we would like to review some aspects of this primeval times of both arts in order to clarify some dark points of our own discourse.

1895 was a troubled and exciting year. At the end of a century, society seems to be involved in violent changes. Everybody talks about Progress in intellectual circles and also in other completely different realms. Progress is a word which can sum up many things and can be used to explain almost everything: from the invention of the first tires to the construction of Kiev's Channel or the mysterious discovering of the also mysterious X-Rays. In this fabulous current of the machinery civilization, the city of Lyon witnessed the birth of a machine "to impress life", according to L'Herbier, which was to create a fabulous world of myth and dreams.

Louis Lumière was the first one to "impress" films, together with his father Antoine and his brother Auguste who run a photographic atelier in Lyon. Persuaded by the success of their first attempts, they decided to held a public presentation of their invention in the capital city. The date selected for this event was the 28th of december 1895. The programme included ten really short films of just seventeen meters which showed everyday life scenes and ingenious images among which the famous "Sortie des ouvriers".

There was nothing new nor extraordinary shown in this first exhibition, but the seed was planted and evolution would not be delayed. Film making was to be transformed into the most widespread mass means of expression of the twentieth century.

We have already mentioned, about the "ville Savoye" short, how his director confined himself to reproduce architectural space without any commitment with the building's own meaning, conferring it a kind of immutable quality. But the basis of cinema as an expressive art (not a simple means of reproduction) was precisely the annihilation of the "fixed space" (the theatrical scenery which was, at the beginning, the only object the camera was "impressing"). It was necessary to "invent" the montage technique and the new figure of the design craftsman, a man capable of building a story with just shots. The idea was not anymore shooting a scene, but a sequence of different instants of that scene: approach the camera, magnify the figures on the screen when necessary, or make them smaller, replace the theatrical scenery with a visual ground selected by the director which actors enter and leave. So far, cinema was just motion photography. But since that moment its basis would be the succession of shots.

During the shooting of one of his most famous films, "Intolerance", Griffith, moved by the beauty of his main actress (the incredible Lillian Gish who once tried to be herself a film director and then abandoned saying it was not a job for a lady), decided to repeat a shot by putting the camera closer to her face and then inserting that image in the main sequence. That was the beginning of the close-up. This anecdote shows us how this master of silent films progressed in film making without trying to disturb the actors' playing, just modifying the size of their image on the screen and, thus



changing their relationship with the spectator. In this way, a hitherto unnoticed possibility was revealed; that of including the passive element (the spectator) within the action, offering him different points of view in spite of the fixed camera and the unchanged ground.

This succession of different shots (that is, the independence of the cameraman in relation to his object) made possible the use of film shooting as a means of artistic expression. From this moment the image (the succession of deliberate and meaningful images) was able to replace observation with election.

We have seen now how the bi-dimensional projection of images over a white cloth became a mass phenomenon. Can we establish, then, some relation between this factory of dreams and the search for a new reality undertaken by the architects of this same period? Let us see what is happening in this different field at the end of the late century.

The germ of modern architecture was the English "Arts and Crafts" movement commanded by William Morris. Its first significant example would be Philip Webb's Red House, William Morris mansion. In "The French Lieutenant's Woman" (Karel Reisz 1981) we can see a lucid homage to this movement and to building craft in the last sequences. The Red House was like a manifesto of the movement's principles. They supported a return to purity in artistic expression and to craftsmanship in order to avoid the threat of the machine.

At the end of the 19th century, the crisis of the visual arts coincided with the beginning of an era of technology with the invention of new materials and the substitution of the so far accepted models. According to Benevolo's "History of Modern Architecture": "...our age has economic and social needs rather different from those of the past; in our times, the housing block has replaced the castle, the palace and the temple, and new buildings so far unnoticed as the hospitals, stations, factories and skyscrapers have taking the place of the old monumental structures..."

We can see the strong contrast between the beginning of modern architecture and that of film making. Modern architecture began as a reaction against technology (Morris and his supporters proposed a "revival", "looking backwards" attitude) and then became a desperate search of "functionalism" based on the new discoveries. Cinema, instead, was a product of machinism that gradually got independent from it, trying to transform reality by building a more aerial world with a mix of fantasy and imagination. But let us follow the steps of modern architecture. After Morris'

death, the English group gradually lost its leading position: now the initiative would be in the rest of Europe and the U.S. Progress was now mainly understood as something related to technology, and the latter was mainly symbolized by the machine. Machines would not be anymore aggressive and dangerous objects, but even beautiful works.

This new Gospel was proclaimed by a selected group of intellectuals; mainly writers and poets: Zola in his novels and Walt Whitman in his odes expressed their admiration for the progress of civilization and the modern industry. The first architects to praise machines and understand their main role in progress as well as the close relationship between design and architecture were two Austrian, two Americans and a Belgian: Otto Wagner (1841-1959), Adolf Loos (1870-1933), Louis Sullivan (1856-1924), Frank Lloyd Wright (1869-1959) and Henri Van de Velde (1863-1924). We should also add the name of the Irish poet Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), although his appreciation of machinism could be considered one of his many tricks for "épater la bourgeoisie" which he subsequently loved and loathed. In 1882 he would, nevertheless, say that "Any machine can be a beautiful thing, even if it has no trace of ornament. Let us not try to decorate it; beauty is just possible when power and creation work together".

Of all the mentioned names, Louis Sullivan, with his sentence "form follows function", was probably the most influential in this sense.

Now, if we analyze the different ways in which both means of expression advanced, we will notice how, in spite of their coincident birth, each took a completely different road. Architecture became tri-dimensional, spatial, in its particular search for functionalism, which, in time, would be its main aim and relate it to a pragmatic and objective reality. Film making, instead, would become a kind of magic lamp, capable of realizing every dream, of taking us beyond every frontier in spite of our own fixed location; just by means of the projection of bi-dimensional images in a well determined screen, detaching ourselves from everyday life.

The former applies to your brain, the latter to your instinct. So when films try to show the essence of architecture, it is always for their own benefit and not with the intention of penetrating its deepest sense; just taking in account their own priorities of expression.

That is why it is so difficult to find in the movies a language based on a translation of the architectural means of expression. Theirs is a dangerous liaison. ■

Outdoors/indoors

Javier Macua

Those who read for the first time a film script are usually surprised by a certain particularity of this type of texts: the narrative material in them is organized in such a way that it is the unity of place, above the other classical ones of action and time, which is clearly prevailing. That is precisely the meaning of the cinematographic "sequence".

Our virgin reader will surely become more stupefied when he would realize that every unit/sequence -in addition to its ordinal number and a summarized reference to the particular place ("Someone's Bar", "Empty ground", "Someone's House"...)- unfailingly bears a typical twofold attribute. From the very beginning, even before the real description of the scene, we (supposedly professional readers confronting the script: one of the fundamental pieces of the cinematographic process) must know if the sequence occurs in the night/outdoors, the day/outdoors, the night/indoors or the day/indoors. Such labels are, obviously easy tokens in order to facilitate the subsequent labor of those taking part in the whole process, because each one of the four cases requires different shooting equipment and strategies. But it is a rather remarkable fact that, from the very beginning, the question of the in or out is something which determines to a great extent the nature of the film process.

This particular paradigm is also architecture's *raison d'être*. If we listen to Le Corbusier's words, architecture just divides real space into an outer and an inner sub-spaces. Better still, architecture erects walls (with or without holes/windows) and lays roofs to reduce inclemency, that is, create closed atmospheres, shelters, indoor spaces.

The unroofed interior and the "shrinking man" effect

This classification of sequences into those shot in roofed and unroofed spaces is one of the fundamental elements of the cinematographic technique. We usually relate it to the alternate use of artificial or natural light. But the relation between these two attributes is not always so simple as in the equations

roofed=artificial light, unroofed=natural light. Let us examine two points.

(1) The usual link between indoors sequences and artificial light can be modified by the presence on the walls of holes connecting the interior and exterior spaces (doors, windows, clerestories, etc...). These let the natural light in and provoke the coexistence within one single take of the two types of space (indoors/outdoors) which our first classification tried to separate. The simultaneous presence of both types of light in the sequence results in serious technical problems which the set designer and the lighting technician must solve. In most cases they just try to avoid them by means of shutters, curtains or any other thing secluding the inner set from outer infiltrations. But sometimes, they decide to represent this transition, this contrast, and they must make use of sophisticated procedures which are costly and take their time.

It has always been cheaper to shoot an indoors sequence from outside than vice versa. In economical productions (of any quality), when a camera is placed inside and in front an indoors set with a window and a landscape in

the rear, the operator has no other choice but to choose between both fields and focus on one of them. If he chooses the interior, the outer landscape becomes a mere blotch of light with no clear definition, something which has nothing to do with what a real eye would see if placed there.

(2) We must also keep in mind that, in the first motion pictures, indoors sequences were shot with faked walls but without ceilings (indoors with outdoors light), because natural light was the only one capable of impressing the yet insensible celluloid. So, curiously enough, the first interior sequences where shot in unroofed inner spaces, the view of the ceiling was impossible because it did not exist. The situation persisted even when the film sensibility and the lighting devices were improved, because the unroofed sets provided an ample extra space above to place lights and microphones. Nowadays we are still shooting in "natural interiors" because the missing ceiling is always the perfect place for all type of devices that must not in any case be spotted by the spectator... (we should notice, among other aesthetic novelties, the continuous presence of the ceilings in *Citizen Kane*)

That is how the basic paradigm of architecture (in/out) is apparently assumed by film makers, but just to subvert it, to reduce it to mere simulation. They just need the walls to build an interior.

This unroofing procedure applied to cinematographic interiors becomes a practical solution if we take in account the form and dimensions of the classical framing. This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the canonical oblong rectangle (chosen instead of the circle, the pentagon, the trapezoid or any other geometric shape) used in movies (and also in painting but not in such an unfailing way). It is clear, though that the prevailing horizontal character of the image simplifies the vanishing of the ceilings into the off-space above. We must notice that the dimensions of real buildings are approximately the opposite to those of the sets. We usually see vertical rectangles with the smaller size as base in real architecture, while in cinematographic architecture the horizontal lines prevail.

Moreover, in the classical Hollywood studios, and in many films shot nowadays, the unroofed sets have also another strange characteristic: the walls are strangely higher than they should, they are oversized, there is a voluntary misrepresentation of the scales. The height of the set walls is rather superior to that of a normal interior wall, what makes of the actors strange inhabitants of an oversized space while they keep their usual size. The Hollywood classical movies present, therefore, a certain distortion which we can call the "incredible shrinking man effect" which is, nevertheless, almost annulled by the spectator/consumer's habit.

The process of replacing the studio sets with natural locations has not eliminated this "shrinking man" effect. Every film maker knows how difficult it is to shoot realistic images in the houses of the poor. The scarce distance between walls frustrates any play with the camera. Distortions can just be avoided with deformed angle objectives. In a small house, you just can take close-ups. That is, in a poor

house it is impossible to take general shots. So when film directors try to locate natural interiors for their shootings, they usually chose something larger than what they want to represent: a small interior is always shot in a bigger place. (Those interested in this particular question of the artificial and natural sets sizing, refer to chapter entitled "La distancia" from my book "El Docudrama, en las fronteras de la ficción", published by Cátedra in the "Signo e Imagen" collection).

Interiores

In modern films, as Buster Keaton in "Sherlock Holmes Jr." and Woody Allen in "The Purple Rose of Cairo", we always feel as though we were inside the space represented on the screen. No matter how many shots compose the sequence, we feel ourselves complete, always in the same place, motionless, centered, without perceiving any shaking effect, any break in spite of the changes in the frame, identical to ourselves, skipping over the discontinuous quality of the cinematographic language. But, how is it possible to create, by means of the montage technique, this sensation of being "inside" (inside a two-dimensional surface!), in which the "motionless traveller" (in Burch's words) becomes ubiquitous and can locate himself in any position without feeling any de-centering effect?

In the brief history of cinema the position of the spectator has not always been that of the motionless traveller which is now the norm. In the first period (what Noel Burch calls Primitive Representation Mode, P.R.M.), motion pictures were made out of completely autonomous, individual shots. Like vignettes. There was no intention to create a continuum, an imaginary space in whose "interior the spectator would live, in a placid way, the proposed adventure". In the first stages of film production, the spectators just "entered" the screen and "went out" of it in every subsequent shot; like a salmon fish, they got into and out of the narration just by leaps. Their immense credulity was constantly betrayed. They thought the train was coming out of the screen, it would be derailed and sweep them away. They were probably terrified and crouched under their seats. They let themselves go in the confusion of images and reality. But they were immediately banished from the screen in each cutting and invited again to join the action (just when they were descending onto their real seats) to be propelled into a nuptial suite.

But instead of this Salmon/spectator of the P.R.M., what we have today is the I.R.M. spectator (Institutional representation Mode in Burch's classification; or just Hollywood mode to make ourselves clear). He goes through the narration, instead, in a single dive, from the beginning up to the very end, without being diverted between shots. He is completely trapped, hypnotized, magically immersed (magic understood, as Piaget does, as one of the children's phases in the development of intelligence). He cannot keep his distance (in Brecht's sense).

But let us go back to our question. How is it possible for Hollywood Mode films to create faked interiors from real (studio or natural) sets?

By means of the montage technique, putting together pieces of impressed film.

The cinematographic interior is just a mirage composed of minimum pieces of interiors (interiores) juxtaposed according to

different "racord" laws, which make possible for today's spectators to become motionless travellers.

The film industry creates its own space, its own interior, with pieces, with minimum fragments, which can even be taken from distant places, have diverse and rather heterogeneous origins. The cinematographic indoors space is like Frankenstein's monster, a brick-a-brack made out of architectural carcasses found in rather distant cemeteries.

Every film maker knows how he has to shoot the different takes of a single indoors sequence in different dates and even using different real sets (the takes will be juxtaposed in the montage process). When an actor opens a door and enters a room out of sight and then we meet him again on the other side, what we see is something that was not, in most cases, behind that door. It is another set, located somewhere else, in some distant place.

Thus, our cinematographic indoors space is just a mechanism which does not necessarily coincide with real space. In fact it is usually a correction, an amendment of the real space. Set designers combine images from completely different real sets in order to build a new design. The indoors space of the movies is, almost by definition, a "virtual" space created by means of the montage technique.

The best way to understand it is examine the way in which film sets designers work. The good ones know very well that the "set" is a collection of differently lighted fields; he does not have to design the set as a whole, but fix it bit by bit; the sum of all these fragments will build the final result: the cinematographic indoors set, a virtual reality which does not exist as a whole, not even as a faked space.

An interior designer: Hitchcock

Some film makers work with full framing, shooting exterior or interior pre-existing architectures which they deprive of certain characteristics which are not suitable for their own aims. That is the case with Rossellini. The other extreme is that of the directors who work with empty framing as Alfred Hitchcock. In this latter case, it is easy to notice the artificial character of his interiors. Hitchcock was probably among the best cinematographic architects.

Not just because of his apparent capacity to maximize the possibilities of pre-existing architectures, as in his spectacular action scenes (North by Northwest is possibly the best catalogue)... Not only because of his love for scale models of exterior sets announcing gloomy interiors (as Manderley's scale model in *Rebecca*)... But, fundamentally, because of his own concept of movie making.

As everybody knows, Hitchcock's idea of the perfect film was that of a movie shot and processed without his contribution. Once the script and the story-board created, once the work organized: actors, operators, designers etc... all of them would be the real realizers of his plans, a labor in which, everybody obeying, he was completely dispensable.

Hitchcock's attitude was surely rather similar to that of an architect. As any architect, Hitchcock worked, first of all, on paper, on a surface; he worked on the script, on the story-board; he imagined the film (an object that, as opposed to the architect's buildings, would be developed always in a two-dimensional support), a film that, once the material selected, others would build under his supervision. ■

A room With a view

Victor López Lucas

"This is a simple job, you just have to get your lines by heart and try not to stumble over furniture"

Spencer Tracy

1. Space

"Mr. Arkadin", a film directed and produced by Orson Welles in 1954, is easy to remember for two things: the amazing fable of the scorpion and the frog and the moment in which Paola Mori, pointing at the Alcazar of Segovia tells Robert Ardan without a blush: "That's my father's castle".

Her father, and then husband, was, of course, Arkadin who, besides producing a film in Spain, was then living that part of his own biography in which, as an Emperor after a Conquest, he had to clean and rewrite his past in order not to lose the magnificent and glamorous things he had surrounded himself with.

This line of dialogue reveals Welles' attitude towards the settings which he selected to shoot his films in and also their unavoidable decay along the shooting. His hunger for creation took him to a constant pilgrimage, constant exile, in search of better conditions to set sail, as his beloved John Silver, or experience the touch of the mud obstructing the wheels of Fastaff's and his Prince's wagon.

World has been his subject. Arrested by night, contemplating the lights of a feast beyond the lake: a prey for an adolescent hunter.

Just when the spectators shrank to let the workers get out of their factory, movies entered our Romantic imagination with the promise of a futuristic holographic perfect reproduction: the artistic performance of the 360 degrees.

A home built just on the Elephants' Way suggests, more than progress and colonial conquest, a strange dream about the duplication of matter, a relaxed fantasy too close to unconsciousness. An impudent bubble floating among the heavy objects. In this sense, the movie setting is somewhat of an excavation in an opaque matter which permits us to reproduce, in the obscure ambience of a movie theatre, the giddiness of a switchback.

Movies have silent films as a premise as well as theatrical scene; that is probably why the essence of cinematographic space seems to be always out of the camera's range, somewhere among premonitions and memories, and the nature of its rhythm recalls us the interval between two clouds. The presage about the possibility of real space returns now in the form of a solid body of dense matter and not anymore as a box of light or a depot of images. It is something that presses us, causing uneasiness, weariness; something with a massive quality, a ballast, sometimes fatal, as the pressure driving Hayworth (or Gilda) towards her downfall, just while she leaves the scene to merge within an invisible Buenos Aires.

There is something rather strange but powerful, as a viper hidden in the cavity of any tree, which alters, in a fatal way, the course of

events. The place where these things happen is like a crowd which swallows you. Tourists getting dizzy at Pompeii. World is never as distant as when we look at it.

2. Scenery

The necessity of controlling, of selecting images has prompted us to create a parallel world in which to shoot films. This need has multiple answers; there have been outstanding interiors built, streets, fake wildernesses, even whole cities. In "2001" the whole Universe had to fit into Pinewood Studios and, in this way, we began to travel beyond our own galaxy.

But it is not always necessary to built new places reproducing the main traces of their real models; sometimes we can just simplify the matter offered by natural locations and try to reduce to a minimum the heavy shooting paraphernalia.

These two extremes are the limits between which movies have been born and could even serve us to establish a scale in which to trace the different tendencies along film-making history. The different doses employed of the Méliès component and the Lumière one, the portion of effort dedicated to create and film what does not exist and that employed in reproducing reality.

When films began to show fiction stories, sets had to be furnished. A domestic garden and a hose-pipe could serve at the beginning, but soon it was necessary to increase the "atrezzo". Soon enough they needed someone to think about the modern aspect of the furniture to match Myrna Loy's tailored dress, or the correct appearance of Bagdad to match María Montez's eye shade.

In spite of the camera's exactness, movies where never strictly realistic (Cecil B. de Mille's bathtub is a good example) and, from the beginning, set designers decided to control the chromatic effect of the objects on scene (also in black and white films), to place them in such a way as to harmonize with the actors' movements and soon enough to distort the real aspect of a Tudor refugee or the proportions of Lana Turner's plain apartments. Always for drama's sake. The space of the movies, though maintaining some of its conventions, cannot be considered a simple reproduction of theatrical space.

Although the classical Italian scene "overflows" the stage at its sides, theatrical reality is always a frontal view and depth in it is just an effect of relief, as in the superimposed backdrops of the gridiron. The spectators' lack of anonymity sets some limits to the quantity of realism that can be born. Although actors are real, their presence becomes an isolated act, petrified by the convention of their very words. Even in modern "action" performance in which the parts are reduced almost to mere noise, the actor's physical puissance cannot avoid the powerful attraction of the scene.

The scene which is the minimum unit of the drama's scenery, a concrete point in the whole performance. In the theatre, real space is just something which is recovered behind the stage (movies have showed it so many times), in the runnings towards the dressing rooms, in the producer's nerves, as in an engine room, life is then spent in order to achieve the necessary energy for the performance, in order to achieve a moment of silence before the applause.

In 1948, Hitchcock shot a real experiment, "The rope", in just one take. The intellectual duel between the killer students and their teacher, played by James Stewart, John Dall and Farley Granger can be compared with the strange dance of the mobile point of view of the camera as opposed to the continuous theatrical presence and action of the actors. Each movement of the camera, which implied rearrangements in the set and lightings during the shooting, is finally perceived as the somewhat awkward movements of an astronaut outside his capsule. It seems as though, the real drama were not the inner fight in the killers' minds but their own physical uneasiness showed by their clear inability to stay in the lateral rooms, being once and again propelled to the central scenery in whose centre, taking the place of an imaginary spectator, lays the corpse.

In spite of the frenetic mobility endured by the apartment's elements and furniture during the shooting sessions, the spectator just perceives them as mere fixed circumstances, a datum within an unsolved problem.

Most of the novels are narrated by a grammatical third person, but in the movies we usually find screenplays with at least two different stories which, depending on the point of view, make us transcend the idea of absolute time and life. We can say that, most cinematographic stories have an inside view and an outside view; two worlds contemplating each other. Basically, and trying to go beyond a rudimentary theory of story telling technique, according to which the supposedly secondary elements, as the music and artistic direction, should just emphasize the diverse aspects of the main drama, we affirm that the setting is perceived as the physical counterpart of the very actors and that the later create their personages in their personal confrontation with these elements, which are finally destined to destruction.

This state of confrontation and destruction can imply just a subtle alteration of the atmosphere, as the unexpected pass of the crows over a wheat field driving Van Gogh to suicide or, on the contrary, might well end in a dramatic devastation as in the case of Atlanta's fire or San Francisco's earthquake, all in just one afternoon. Film makers have carefully devoted themselves to destroy most of what they had erected, just for the sake of dramatic expression.

A small "cottage" cannot oppose the madness of Laurel and Hardy. From the very beginning, comedy settings had to bear attacks probably conceived by a Swiss watchmaker, terrorist mind. The power of destiny, on its part, burnt to ashes the mansions of melodramas and the frightening and dreary castles of suspicious scientists, even the sophisticated metaphors built by Dr. NO's breed were successively bombed, in a most frigid way, by Her Majesty's Intelligence

Departments. The powerful river of life destroyed weak old hulks, sank whole fleets, engulfed whole islands and brought their ruins to a distant beach.

Film settings act as living, sometimes aggressive, animals. Sometimes they obstruct any possible exit, as in the pharaoh's pyramid or they appear in the form of a simple banana peel under Margaret Drummond's shoe; we have no choice but get them by surprise. The same strange yearning of becoming a shipwrecked person, encourages Enmanuelle Riva in Hiroshima's lost afternoons and Superagent 007 in his classical ends, when he switches off all his connections with M, every possibility to go back home.

But it is in the real scenery of destruction, in post-war Berlin, Rome or Vienna, shook by the images of Concentration Camps and the desperate run of Ana Magnani pursuing a truck, that film setting attains its adulthood. Open spaces had been used in film making from the beginning but the shooting conditions and production decisions had taken it towards strictly controlled interiors and even fake urban exteriors in which lighting and photography technicians exerted their dictatorship. The influence of Caligari and Expressionism had imposed the cult of image and everything seemed to be too conventional. Just in the comedy, probably the most durable silent genre, actors had to confront a somewhat rebel scenery. In this sense, the most interesting film makers have always been those who have led their actors towards the boundaries of the setting, that immense, concave gadget.

3. The architects and the cinema

As compared with the inescapable charm of the law agents (in either side of the law), the everlasting allure of emergency medicine and the villain magnetism of lawyers, architects are among the less available professionals on screen characters, our possibilities in a casting session are almost none. We must, therefore, talk about our presence as authors of the buildings sometimes used by setting designers. But when they made a direct use of Wright's Johnson building, though, producers transformed it into a sinister office in which poor Jack Lemmon made extra hours while others occupied his apartment.

The International Style was just an excuse when it was necessary to create a modern prison or the frosty and inhuman atmosphere of future times. Gilded prisons, including Shangri-La. Tati made a satire about us in "Mon Oncle" and we have just proved ourselves able enough to decorate that enormous Art Deco vestibule in which most contemporary films seem to have been shot up to coloured films. Just villains and really frivolously unoccupied people seem to have shared our taste. "Noblesse oblige" us to mention James Mason in "North by Northwest", with his magnificent Wright style villa at the foot of the Rushmore hills or the complete Caribbean Mafia, owners of most of the interesting houses published by the G.A. magazine and happily slaughtered by Don Johnson in Miami Vice.

In any case, architects make a really short list as first characters and, in most cases, these are redoubtable guys, as the terrible Howard Roark, played by Gary

cooper, in "The Source" or that Benito of "Huevos de Oro". A really dangerous path based on the principle that a dramatic film must begin with something like a train crash and then go further.

That is probably the reason why the architects' revenge was to take a more visual and less dramatic turn during the late modernity while "weaker" thought took the lead and became fashionable. Just imagine. Hope in pastel colours as in Edward Scissor-hands. The tactile sense of Win Wenders' Paris-Texas and the legendary comfort of Woody Allen's apartments might modify in some way the prevailing idea among film makers about the tyrannic and brutish brain of the architect driving humanity to an unvarying Metropolis. In this particular point they agree with Prince Charles, another fanatic adversary of our profession.

It seems as though no good manner could be imposed without a touch of intolerance; it is true that, for the sake of a clean air, we are capable of putting smokers up against a wall. We cannot be amazed by the fact that common people (the perfect comedy character, simple people who ignore the terrifying intellectual depths of modern architecture or just hide such worries away, where they keep their manure or the

children's pram) should be not just insensitive towards the radiant visions of, let us say, Lubetkin, but even should contemplate the figure of a demanding architect, midway between distrust and admiration, as a mere curiosity, a megalomaniac, a Hannibal Lecter without his wit.

Those clients who would voluntarily endure any torment before leaving their lots in such inspired hands as those of Morphosis or Enric Miralles were already warned, in a most severe way (even with bombs), by Gary Cooper of the weakness of their position. Without embracing such extreme attitudes (taking into account that we lack Patricia Neal's magnificent support), the only truth is that time cannot be stopped and that film makers have not been able to avoid the connections between modernity and the image of the big cities. There has been a film shot about every street profession (taxi drivers, constables, gamblers, Red Cross Ladies, simple Ladies etc...), about every particular type of building (big hospitals, big hotels, Pennsylvania Station or the Eiffel Tower), and they have had no remedy but showing, in a most frivolous way, the charming comfort and happiness associated to Doris Day's kitchen cabinets. ■

In favor of essential architecture or Alberto Campo Baeza's architecture

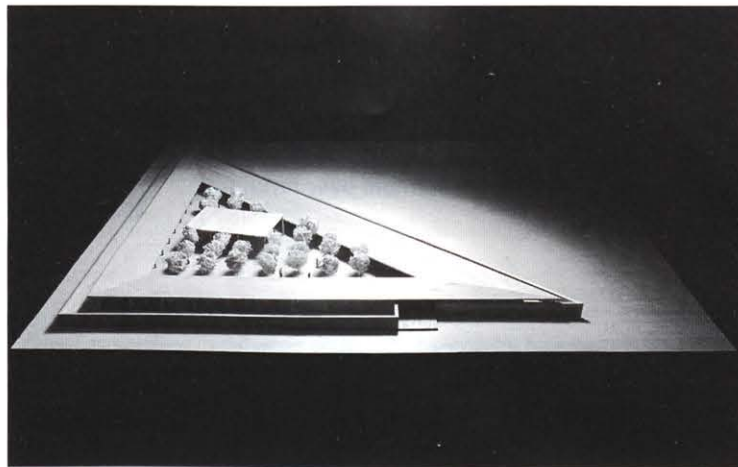
Colette Jauze

This self-confident and convincing, radical and profound architect is like the spit of a volcano, like a troubled stream. Slow but burning, as magma going down a slope, this architect traverses the many paths of Architecture. With leisure and yet with enough energy. And, at the same time, as fresh and juvenile as a rushing stream. Flooding. He can charm his pupils and fascinate all those who attend his lectures. He just accepts the commissions he really wants to work on. And wins all the awards. Not just because of his brilliance, he always tries to be simple, but because of his powerful and convincing arguments. Weighty and mature. As a burning spit of magma, bit by bit, he will completely cover the slope.

Exactness.

If we should choose a single word to describe Campo Baeza's architecture, we

would have to say that it is exact. Exactness is what defines the ideas behind and beyond it. Exactness is present in the way he manages light. Exactness, in the structures he builds. He is an exact architect. Some have classified him among the Minimal designers. But he has always made clear he is not a Minimalist nor his architecture Minimal. But he likes to talk about exactness instead. He likes to make use of the "exact number of strictly necessary elements" in his built architecture. Sometimes, this strictly necessary elements are really very few. He builds his architecture with so little. Almost nothing. The cathedral square in Almería, with just a few palm trees hovering over a white marble pavement, was, in this sense, an amazing work that earned him Moneo's praise and his vote while a member of the jury in a 1977 Competition. As amazing as the also very few orange trees planted in a travertine marble case opened



Mallorca

towards the sky in his beautiful project for Mallorca for which he was awarded by not other than Olza. But this exactness, this strict sense in architecture is not an obsession on detailing nor a perfectionist mania. On the contrary, his architecture can admit a certain amount of inexactness. A concept to which he is particularly devoted, as he has made clear in his text: "A praise to inexactness".

Timelessness

Campo Baeza's architecture, with both its inexactness and exactness at the same time, seems to be willingly out of any precise time. It seems to resist time. I remember one day, not long ago, when I saw a small piece of paper on the architect's board on which there was a word written in large characters: Time. And, along with it, another word: Silence. I asked him about the meaning of these words, and he talked to me about his willing his architecture to resist the pass of time. His determination to achieve that quality that makes buildings appear as real archetypes and not just particular solutions to concrete conditions. Open responses, general, universal statements valid for a wide range of programmes and specific situations. That is why it is possible to trace in Campo Baeza's architecture close relations, both transparent and mysterious, between, for example, the Turégano House and a Palladian Villa, between the Gaspar House and a Roman House. Between the Caja General Building and Granada's Cathedral or between his last project in Mallorca and the spatial structure of Saint Melezi's Monastery. He makes types out of his projects, although he does not like to talk about typology.

Essence. Gravity, Light, Measure.

Campo Baeza's aim is always trying to achieve architectural essence, the very core

and heart of architecture. And he finally gets at it in a most natural way. His natural quality is as easy as bare logic. This is what he calls essential architecture.

And regarding Gravity, the structure is what builds and organizes the space in his works. Although it well might not be visible, as in the Turégano House or really apparent as in the Majorca project. Gravity builds space, says the architect.

And he adds, Light builds time. Time that makes space alive, strains it for the man who inhabits it. Light is the Central Theme in Campo Baeza's architecture.

But, in order to achieve this very core of architecture, in order to control that gravity which builds the space and master that light which builds time, he reveals us how architects must also dominate measure, dimension, scaling: "to think and measure, to measure and think".

Thus, light, gravity and measure are Campo Baeza's basic tools in designing his "more with less" architecture whose beauty is a present for humanity.

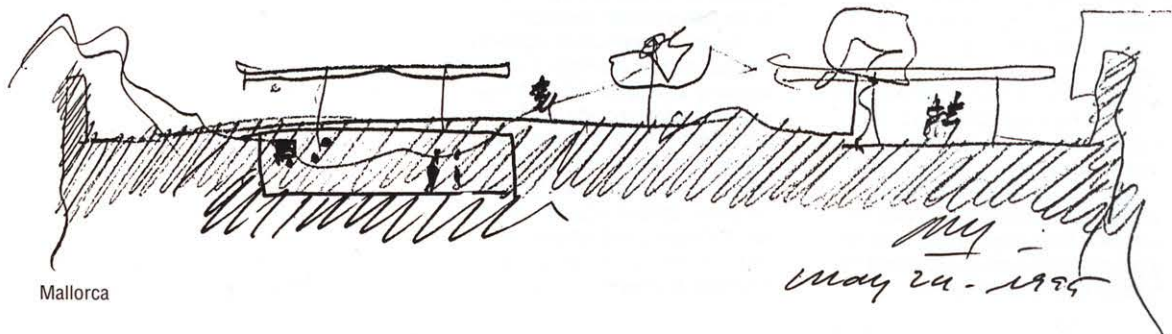
Works

But. What are Campo Baeza's works like? Or better: What are his works? Which are those ideas he says to have built? What is the relation between his ideas and his works?

Our architect likes to synthesize in a few words the deepest meanings of his works. Thus, the Gaspar House is an "hortus conclusus" and Majorca's building a "secret garden". The Caja General Building in Granada, a "light impluvium". And, thus, with every single work, not many, just one every year, following the tradition of those he wants to name his masters: Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. They accomplished just a few works and they were influenced by their own profound architecture. "Each project has its own time and tempo". Always an educator, he adds some gastronomic examples: "rice must be cooked not less than 20 minutes nor more than 30". Now we can understand the enormous influence of Campo Baeza's few works in the architecture of the younger generations.

Boxes, cases, chests

It seems as though the architect would carefully put all those wisely distilled ideas into boxes. For his works are just boxes, cases, cubes... As Lubetkin, the London based Russian architect, so cherished by Campo Baeza, who, at the end of his career,



Mallorca

on the occasion of receiving the R.I.B.A.'s Gold Medal, said he thought all he had done where just shoe cases. Campo Baeza seems to be doing the same as the architect of the English penguins.

For the Turégano House is a cubic white box, and the Valdemoro House an elongated one and the Gaspar House a lower and flatter case. The Caja General Building in Granada is a big golden box bursting with light, that same light whose many shades colour all his tense architectural boxes.

Like Le Corbusier's "boîtes à miracles". For: the very Pantheon, isn't it a box? And La Tourette and the Savoie Villa, aren't they boxes? And what about the divine box which is the Farnsworth House? And the marvelous stone boxes which made up Utzon's House in Majorca? And Tadao Ando's works, what are they but boxes? And Barragán's softly shaded boxes? And Melnikov cylinders, as enormous cigar cases. Boxes, boxes, boxes. Boxes, cases and chests.

Publishing

Thomas Reese, in an article about the image of Spanish Architecture in foreign issues, names him as the most mentioned architect. Not in Spanish magazines, though. Because Campo Baeza has always been a rather independent professional. Probably too independent. He has not indulged in any temptation nor obeyed anyone. The price he has paid is that of not being mentioned as he should have been in Spanish issues. It is rather surprising to learn that San Fermin's School, one of his most praised projects (COAM Award, Madrid's City Council Award, exhibited in Paris and Bourdeaux, published in Taschen's History of Architecture, front cover in Rizzoli's book on Architecture and Design, etc...) has never been published in a Spanish Architectural magazine. This curious situation, though, is somewhat counterbalanced by the widespread diffusion of his works abroad. In magazines as well as books. We can take as an example John Welsh's recent and rather well known book published by Phaidon which includes his latest and most representative houses. His Gaspar House, showed on the front cover, is present at the showcase of almost every bookstore in Paris.

Texts

Campo Baeza writes a lot and writes well. Clear and loud. Very educational. As a real teacher. He is, clearly persuaded about the soundness of his own ideas and can easily persuade us. One notices at once his educational commitment in the way he analyzes the works of other architects. He hits at the specifically architectural aspects of their work. Moreover, his texts are legible, neither boring nor simplistic, nor, what is rather worse, complicated, as they usually are in my own country. He always tries to include really graphic exemplary images, even in his most abstract texts. A good example is that of "Bernini's Light Charts" in his well known text on Light. Or the deeply committed and provocative essay on Restoration in which he boldly calls ignorant and wicked all those who criticized the labor of the architects working on the Sagunto's Roman Theatre restoration project. Or the recipe for the French Omelette included in a recent essay on young Swedish architecture.

His strong determination to transmit his

interest in architecture to society makes him send every year a communication to "EL PAIS" Year's Book. And numerous articles to different newspapers as the rather well known about the future of architecture entitled "One minute before the last Explosion", published by Diario 16 which has been recently translated into English and reproduced in several media.

Campo Baeza claims that an essay is like a project. You must know what you want to say and how you want to say it. And then "build" it with words. We, that make our living on writing, know it but too well. And he builds it with an technique learnt, according to himself, from poetry. And, as poets, as good poets, he works on his texts up to exhaustion. He corrects them up to seven times. He goes back to them and muses upon them. As with his projects. Without haste.

And finally, the Madrid's College of Architects has decided to publish his "Uncollected Texts", a rather good and well organized collection of essays published under the title: "The Built Idea: Architecture under the light of words". I cannot but recommend it.

Education. Lectures.

He has devoted himself in these latter years to make his ideas circulate, his built ideas, as he likes to call them. Firstly from his post as "gastdozent" in the prestigious ETH in Zurich, during the 89/90 Academic Year, which he punctually attended every week. Then in his periodic lectures in Philadelphia, Dublin or Naples. His conferences in Cornell, Strassburg, Darmstadt, Aagen, Milan, London or Lausanne. And even Ljubljana where he even had an exhibition displayed at the Dessa Gallery.

In his public lectures, instead of just describing his own works as other architects do, he tries to analyze them with a surprisingly strong logic as translations of his own ideas. As the built expression of the ideas which have generated them. This original approach (he likes to say it is not a question of originality but radicalness-rooting, which is and always has been the basis of architecture) is the cornerstone of his educational and convincing power.

Campo Baeza is a born educator and he acts accordingly from his post as Professor in Madrid's School of Architecture. He used to be the youngest professor there. During his pupil years, he was lucky enough to have Alejandro de la Sota as a teacher. And he fell architecturally in love. His first project in the Master's class was already a glass cube for a house by the sea shore. Sota told him, then, that he would be an educator but also that he should spend at least five years outside the School once his studies finished. In order to mature, to toughen himself. Campo Baeza complied with this careful programme. He reentered the School in 1976 under Olza's patronage after getting himself rid of some who were already annoying him. He has always been good at escaping. And then, without haste, at his own pace, he became professor in 1986, sooner than any other in his generation. As if it just were to comply with Sota's designs. And he is still one of the most demanded teachers, and one among the most beloved.

He has achieved a perfect, and for him irreplaceable, balance between teaching and designing. Being able to explain his ideas,

display his own personal means for analysis and synthesis, and even built them. I have already mentioned how he amazed his Zurich comrades with a Swiss punctuality so unexpected in an Spanish subject. Well, he is as punctual at Madrid's School. Although many may think his attitude is just provocation. He is able to combine his classes with a rather active life abroad. His only condition for his foreign mentors is that they would respect his weekly classes at Madrid's School. His pupils have the sensation he has nothing else to do but take care of them. That is what they say.

An end with Light

We finally would like to find a single characteristic to define Alberto Campo Baeza's architecture. And we can easily name Light. Every time I have read in his texts or hear him say his motto "more with less", I have think about the appropriateness of replacing it with

a more adequate "more with light".

His master treatment of light and his always explicit determination to use light as another building material, the most important material, in fact, in Architecture are rather apparent. He is not only a theorist of light, of its materiality, its body quality, the adequacy of its control; his works are, moreover, experimental and visible demonstrations of all this. Light slips into the Turégano House as in Rembrandt's paintings, but in a more vivid way. In the Gaspar House, the morning bluish white light fills with calmness that quiet space. And, thus, we could mention all his works.

Because, this lover of poetry would like his works to be living examples of Blake's proposal:

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.* ■

The essential and the consistency On architecture of Alberto Campo Baeza

Charles Posay

"Je suis peut-être enfoui au sein des montagnes. Solitaire, comme une veine de métal pur"

R.M. Rilke

The Essential

In "Le Chef d'Oeuvre Inconnu" by Balzac, a marvellous little story full of wisdom, Maire Freinhofer addresses Nicolas Poussin in the following terms :

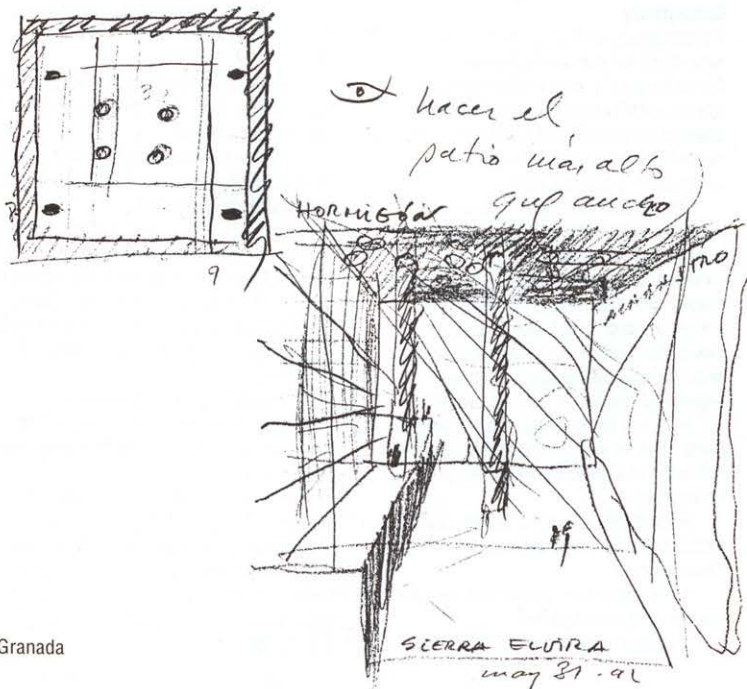
"To be a great poet, it is not necessary to know your syntax in depth, nor write without mistakes. An artist's mission is not to copy nature but interpret it."

Rare is the poet today who does not let himself be distracted by current trends and

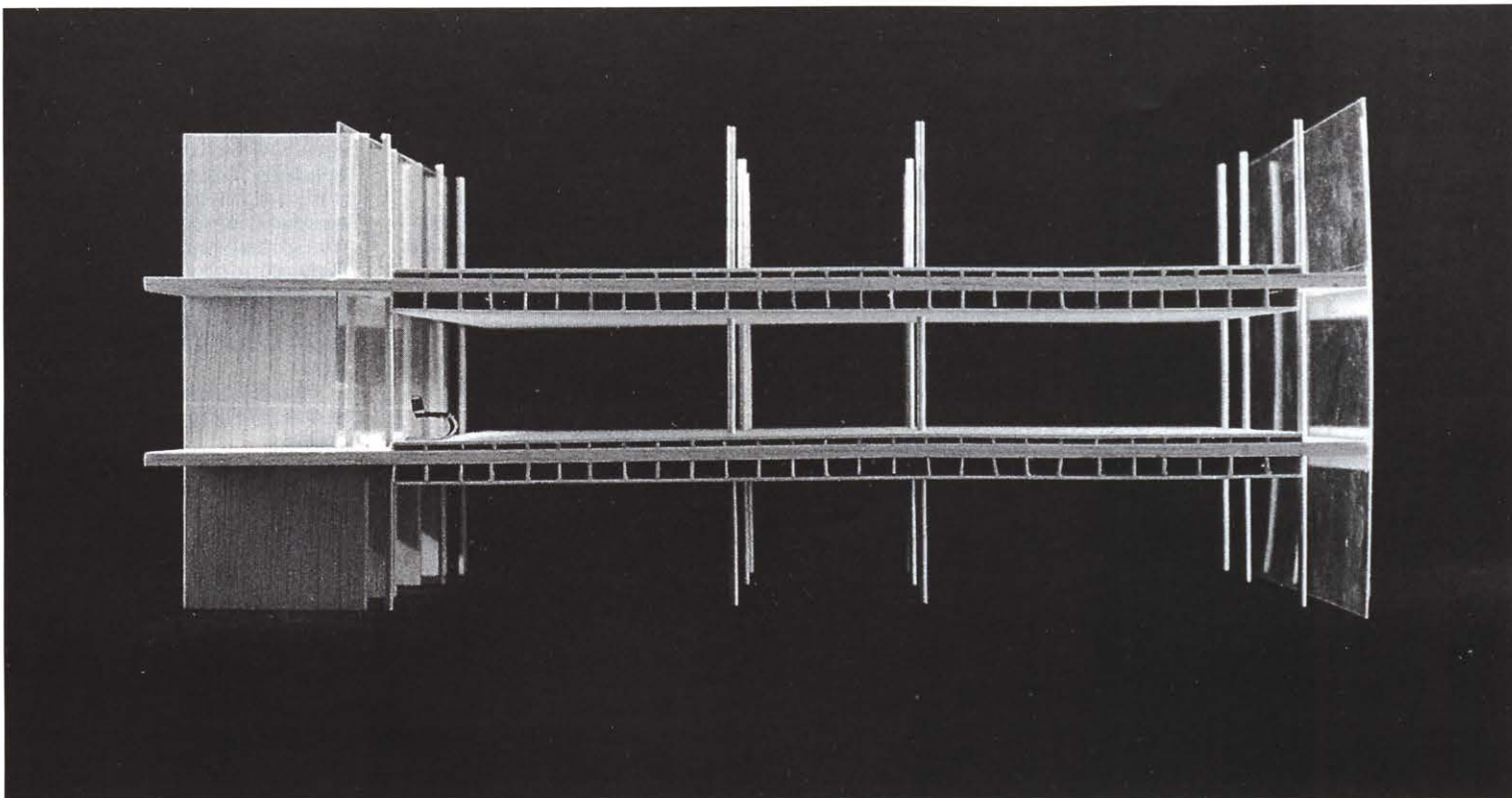
who, in pursuing his passion invested with an inexhaustible energy, seizes, in the lucidity of his vision the spirit of all time and all things : the Essential ; and then transmits it to us.

The work engaged upon by Alberto Campo Baeza is entirely in this vein. Putting aside all subterfuge, turning its back on clichés and fashions, his architecture is formed of poetry, appositeness and emotion.

It is not nourished by a romantic formalism nor a particular esthetic, but rather



Granada



Granada

by pure emotion driven by unsubordinated passion, clear reflection and critical reason.

We are led to think of these timeless creations which subjugate us: the Pantheon in Rome, the Pavilion of Barcelona, the Malaparte house, the church of Ronchamp... or perhaps the "Caja Metafísica" of Oteiza and the works of Caro or Chillida.

He, who transforms passion into poetry, space into emotion, an act of the present into history, thought into architecture; is truly an marvellous alchemist.

These essential works, are they not those which resume, in their way, history, adding their minute variations, sometimes imperceptible, but always fundamental.

Consistency

The architecture of Alberto Campo Baeza is a work nourished and built by thought.

By "architecture" I mean mental explorations that come from a rigorous procedure which develops the founding IDEA and transforms the architecture into more than just a construction: a resonant object.

The architect elaborates his work in the same way as Wim Wenders, whose each films engages us in an intense reflection on construction and the consistency of things and images. With their underlying affinity they interpellate us on the perception and point of view of the observer, the "promeneur" of the work, and also the manner in which we organize our space and live in our world.

In each of his buildings, Alberto Campo Baeza redefines with his implacable logic the edification of architecture and of all our environment.

His architecture is not a "constructive" architecture. It is neither tectonic nor stereotomic.

It is a "diachronic" architecture, fluid and resonant, luminous and free.

They are constructions of Time-Space,

fragments of voids and solids, linked and folded together.

All is condensed by a minimum of effect and words, where each line and each movement is measured and purified.

He creates the maximum of tension which is necessary to achieve equilibrium and serenity.

The buildings of Alberto Campo Baeza are like Haiku, like the traces and signs of Tapiès.

The materials that he uses are of course physical states rather than just visual imagery.

His chosen materials are SPACE, expanded or compressed; LIGHT, fluid or concentrated; MATTER, dense and heavy or light and suspended; and also the MEASURE of time and space; that is to say, conscience.

A. Machado has said that: "there are two modes of conscience: one is light and the other patience."

The slogan of Alberto Campo Baeza, "Idea must generate form" finds substance in his each and every project.

But beware of confusing form and formalism; there is a world of difference between feeling and formula.

The Gaspar House, the Turegano House, the library of Orihuela..., or the bank in Granada could never have existed as resonant objects without the preliminary and founding IDEA, and without the calling into play of these reactive materials: SPACE, LIGHT, MATTER and MEASURE.

Heidegger in "Building-Dwelling-Thinking" defines the act of building as that which edifies the place, founds and assembles a space, with thought and in measure.

"Poetry is born when the poet takes the measure" and restores man's respiration.

Alberto Campo Baeza brings Architecture to its supreme expression, and by this path, leads us to reflect upon the creation of an Idea-Place (Idea); the art of creating and that of thinking. ■

Theo Van Doesburg's architectural criticism on late 20's spanish architecture

Carlos Sambricio

During the first thirty years of the present century, most of the Spanish reviews published thorough information about the European urban planning and architectural trends. Leaving aside the current debate about a supposedly "local style", it was the European situation of those years, the reconstruction works after the war, the housing policies, the different attitudes towards the general "call to order" or the theories about the "New objectivity" that had a real impact in our country. Thus, we had many articles published both written by and about the main characters of the architectural debate. First of all in the "Civitas" magazine, published by Montoliu in Barcelona and, after a while, in "Arquitectura", Madrid's architectural issue. The current activity of European avant-garde was gradually acknowledged in Spain. Moreover, thanks to Mercadal, the people of Madrid could even meet some figures as Gropius, Le Corbusier, Mendelshon or Luthy at the Students Residence... and recent research has revealed us the enormous impact produced by their visits. But, thinking about those personalities who visited Madrid and Barcelona, we can wonder about how did they find our Spanish reality?, what were their conclusions after those visits and what did they tell their country fellows about it?

Most of them had already many works built. Well known and widely published in different magazines. But one among those who came to Madrid and Barcelona was also an active theorist dedicated to architectural criticism: Theo van Doesburg. He came to Spain in 1930 to read a conference in Madrid

and Barcelona under the title "L'Esprit fondamental de l'architecture contemporaine" (published in 1974 by Baljeu). Van Doesburg's was a rather expected visit in Madrid's architectural world, mostly because he had already published in Madrid's architectural magazine, "ARQUITECTURA", a long essay about "Modern Architecture in Holland" in 1927 and 1928. This text was a deep commentary about the architectural ideas and concepts which Sánchez Arcas had already exposed in 1926. A hint of Van Doesburg's importance in Spain during those years can be seen in the fact that he was included in the famous inquiry published in 1928 by "LA GACETA LITERARIA" about the new European architects (Le Corbusier, Van Doesburg, Mellet-Stevens...). During his visit, he was able to publish some articles and interviews in Madrid's magazines as well as in Barcelona's LA VEU DE CATALUNYA and L'AMIC DE LES ARTS. So Van Doesburg came clearly rather in touch with the Spanish architectural world and was, therefore, able to give his Dutch readers a learned opinion about it in HET BOUWBEDRIJF, a magazine through which our architect had already provided the Dutch public with thorough information about the European activities of those years. Van Doesburg had previously published, in this same HET BOUWBEDRIJF, Perret's and Freyssinet's projects, Le Corbusier's urban planning proposal, some examples of the new Czech architecture, the new Italian currents promoted by Sant'Elia or the Milan based "Gruppo 7", Tatlin's and Lissitzky's architecture and the O.S.A.'s building programme, as well as

Moholy-Nagy's most fundamental texts. So he had a perfect knowledge about the European current architectural debate. Then, in addition to all these articles about the mentioned European leading architects (and many others from France, Italy, Germany and Austria, Yugoslavia and Poland, the U.S.S.R. and Czechoslovakia), he began to publish (between 1929 and 1930) five long essays about the Spanish architecture and Madrid's and Barcelona's avant-garde architectural world.

In these five articles, he tried to center on particular architects (Bergamin, Blanco Soler, Levenfeld, Mercadal and Fernández Shaw, from Madrid; Alzpurúa and Labayen from San Sebastián; Churrua, Sert, Torres Clavé and Fábregas from Barcelona) and not on any supposedly general current nor outstanding group. He decided not to mention Mercadal, whom he had met in Paris and afterwards in La Sarraz. The images accompanying the texts included Sert and Torres Clavé's Sanatory, Fernández Shaw's peculiar Gas Station in Madrid, the small house for the Marquis of Villora, by Bergamin, the Nautical Club in San Sebastián and the urban redevelopment plan for Larache's city center, by Blanco Soler. His selection of images was, therefore, rather peculiar, but not so much as his own text in which Van Doesburg seemed to assume an amazingly romantic vision of the mystic Spain.

In these articles, Van Doesburg develops two fundamental ideas: on one hand, he assumes the fact that Spanish architects must confront their old, pseud-religious heritage of gothic-arab (!!!) tradition. As an example of this interaction, he names Gaudí's Sacred Family Shrine, a work he deplored once and again in successive texts. On the other, he criticized the dull character of Spanish avant-garde architecture. According to Van Doesburg, the mimetic assumption of Modernistic formal schemes results in vacuous solutions in which the main aim is to offer a new image avoiding any deeper architectural commitment. He had already assumed this position in previous discussions with Mercadal, whom he considered an extremist. So, although he mentions Barcelona's architecture as that most related to the European Modern Movement, he has no fear to criticize it saying that "...instead of arabesque ornament... our young Catalan architects demand 'pure architectural grace', beauty just based on the correct use of architectural elements. So we are not dealing with constructive nor functionalist architecture, but with a clearly formalistic approach in which Spirit prevails over Matter...", and adds "... in Barcelona there is not yet a clear idea about this most healthy architectural conception. This circumstance can be noticed, for example, in a recent aircraft-shaped project for an aeronautics factory. A project which is, nevertheless, interesting for more than one aspect..."

Persuaded about the formalistic and mimetic character of Spanish modern architecture, Van Doesburg blames the shallow way in which Le Corbusier's new ideas have been assumed: "... the influence of the Swiss Expressionist, Le Corbusier, has resulted in a notorious attention paid to these secondary aspects of architecture. It is well known that Le Corbusier has tried to imitate the technology and aesthetics of packet boats and huge transatlantic ships. His critique is, nevertheless, rather close to that of Lacasa who, in the famous inquiry published by LA GACETA LITERARIA, confessed he had more things in common with Tessenow, 'a somewhat humble

architect", than with Le Corbusier, 'a talkative journalist'. Lacasa tried to defy those who mistook architecture for a bunch of dubious, unclear slogans expressing confused ideas, those who demanded for modernity just to avoid silence. Van Doesburg, on his part, persuaded about the disastrous consequences of this confusion, did not hesitate in stating that "... Le Corbusier's authority in the Spanish architectural world is rather regrettable..."

Among the small group of Catalan architects whose work he praises as representing the looked for "New Objectivity", he just names Ramón Sastre, the author, according to Van Doesburg, of a brilliant text introducing an architectural exhibition that had taken place in Barcelona (possibly the catalogue of the GATCPAC (Group of Catalan Architects and Technicians for the Progress of Modern Architecture) exhibition, hung at the Dalmau Gallery). But the truth is that Ramón Sastre was not an architect nor had ever designed anything. He was a journalist who had published some articles about architectural matters in non-specialized issues. He was the author of, for example, an article published in 1928 by Badalona's magazine "Joia" whose title was "Architecture: reflections on Le Corbusier's theories". His texts had a strong impact on our Dutch friend who even quoted some paragraphs: "...the new architecture engendered by our powerful race will just be satisfying if it is born out of a Modern Spirit, that means, if its value is based on geometric beauty alone..."

Catalan architecture is here considered a synthesis of a supposedly Mediterranean spirit and matter and, therefore, as something rather independent from the German and Soviet models.

Van Doesburg did not even mention the GATCPAC in his articles. He said nothing about Sert or Torres Clavé. He was, probably, but too conscious of the radical character of such views, clearly opposed to the "official taste". His final commentary regarding Madrid's architecture is rather significant: "Then, we have seen that Spanish architecture tends to be rather classical. There is a group of Catalan architects who has taken the lead of 'modern architecture', but Madrid's classical approach to housing programmes and urban planning seems to be rather more practical and effective" ■

N O T E S

The mentioned Van Doesburg's articles were:

- "Mystic and Melancholy; on Spanish mentality", Sept. 1929, pages 401-404.
 - "A purely architectural grace", Nov. 1929, pages 472-474.
 - "Romantic cement; Hipster-Baroque Antonio Gaudí", Jan. 1930, pages 60-62.
 - "A correct artisan production", Mar. 1930, pages 145-149.
 - "Madrid: the new airport by Bergamin, Soler and Levenfeld", May 1930, pages 219-222.
- Not mentioned in Evert van Straaten's Bibliography, Milan 1993.
- The issue belonging to LA GACETA LITERARIA is N° 32, 15th April 1928, recently reproduced by A. Piza in his 32U magazine. Van Doesburg's texts published in Catalonia can be found in "L'Amic de les Arts" N°25, Sitges, May. 1928; "La Veu de Catalunya", N° 1266, 1929. Van Doesburg's lectures in Madrid and Barcelona were reviewed in "La Construcción Moderna", 1930, page 158; "El Matí", 18th May 1930 and "La Vanguardia", 13th May 1930, page 11.
- Madrid's architectural magazine "ARQUITECTURA" published Van Doesburg's obituary in its N°144, pages 145-146. The "AC" magazine, N°5 (page 28), published some notes on his views and works.



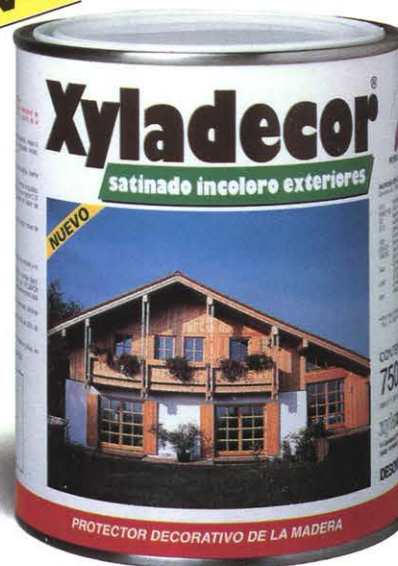
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