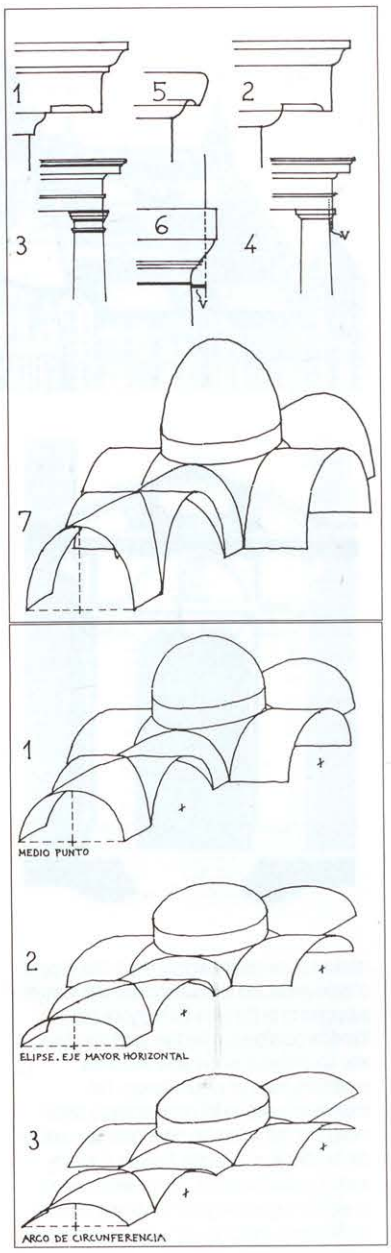
ENGLISH

English translation by **David Cemlyn-Jones**

On the meaning of classical architecture

Luis Moya Blanco

The architect Luis Moya Blanco at Madrid's Contemporary Art Museum, coinciding with the major exhibition Architecture after the War, delivered the conference that we reproduce here titled Recovered Text. Because of its obvious interest, it was published with some additions by the author on Gothic style and with the consent of the organisers.



1. Introduction

Among the many ways of making architecture that have been recorded throughout history, the most remarkable has been the classical because of its durability in the western world. The endurance of a style is not rare in oriental and pre-Hispanic American cultures that we believe were characterised by their static and slow developing nature. It is a strange phenomenon, however, in the area dominated by European culture whose energy powered the incessant search for something better and different in all activities of human endeavour. Novelty is the inspiration of the West, as has been often stated.

This durability is due to the uniqueness of classical style that appears in the ancient Greek temples of the 6th century BC and was still being produced until the middle of this century, at least in Stalin's Russia. The style has enjoyed a life span of about 2,500 years. There was a major interruption in the Romanesque and Gothic periods in Europe from the 11th to 15th centuries. It was an extraordinary occurrence for two reasons. Firstly, because of the sudden emergence of Gothic form in all its splendour prior to 1200 and the relegation of the little that remained of the classical in Romanesque structures to oblivion. Secondly, because of the disappearance of such brilliant creative activity that followed the rebirth of old classical standards. This issue will be discussed further on because its explanation leads to the problem of the rejection of creative freedom that seems to be inseparable from man.

2. Definition

We understand classical architecture to be the connective juggling of a limited number of forms through some set rules. This repertoire of forms can be classified in two groups:

a) Lintelled architecture that employs the Ancient Greco-Roman Order and its Renaissance and neo-classical systematisation's.

b) Arched architecture based on the semicircle and the ellipse, the semicircular and elliptic cylinder, the exact and raised half-sphere, spherical domes and simple combinations of these geometrical figures.

The system has its limitations and admits extensions. Ellipse and elliptic cylinders usually have larger horizontal axes and are rarely vertical. Lowered vaults and arches are admitted, but always when treated with circumference arches. Mannerism and baroque styles, such as Solomonic and frontally split columns revealing canonical proportions and the connective rules of Antiquity, are included. The so-called styling and usual simplifications of this century are not admitted. The moulding process has fixed rules that are not rationally justifiable.

Generally, practically nothing in this lintelled style is rationally justifiable, neither as a construction nor as a utility. Rules are arbitrary and their application leads to different results regarding their approximation to the rules of a good construction, depending on whether those corresponding to the Greek Doric order or the five orders of the Renaissance are used. The Greek Doric rules are, in fact, different from those pertaining to other orders. The latter were the only ones accepted during the entire Renaissance period as Greece was discovered by the neo-Classics of the 18th century and not without some uproar and debate on the emergence of a classical style that did not comply with accepted rules but which brought new ones with it. Eventually these had to be accepted, but within their own ambit, that was to produce Greek Doric constructions at the end of the 18th and in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Washington Lincoln Monument is an example.

Regarding the classical dome, rules are adequate for a good construction and for a wide range of solutions, maybe because they are not so rigid as the previous ones, those pertaining to lintelled architecture.

3. Area of Application

It can be seen that both the lintelled system and arches and vaults have been used in any system of building construction. The Parthenon is just as classical as the Pantheon and both are of simple organisation just as St Peter's in Rome, the Escorial, the Prado Museum and Washington's Capitol are of complex.

It is only wrong to apply the system, according to the rules of the game, to buildings in which functions cannot be ordered hierarchically. A gigantic order, for instance, can contain three floors of different categories as has occurred with Madrid's Royal Palace. It is not permissible, on the other hand, to use the order to insert three similar floors as was done with some American skyscrapers and office and residential buildings in Europe.

Nor is the classical style linked to a certain way of arranging a set of buildings. At the beginning of the style, the sanctuaries, market places and acropolis of the Greeks were only arranged visibly, within conditions imposed by practical or liturgical needs; not even an orthogonal arrangement was made. The latter did not even appear in the Roman Forum. The introduction of the orthogonal network was tardy in reaching the classical world and began in Ionic Greece, in Asia Minor, with clear Middle East influence. Later, more distant oriental influences would arrive and with them floors of buildings similar to any mandala of Tibetan origin were made as can be seen in the Trajan Forum and in the great Roman Termas. The system re-emerged in the Renaissance with such perfect mandalas as Bramante's project for St Peter's in Rome, the Palace of Caprarola, El Escorial, and many more buildings. There were so many that this type of construction came to be identified with the classical style.

4. Essence of the system

In the previous lines non-classical architecture was described. It is not a special system of construction, because there are others, both lintelled and vaulted that are not classical and more rational and practical. Nor is it a method of making buildings, because it is applied to many different types of composition. Nor is it a kind of plan of urban settings, because throughout its history it has adopted all sorts of planning, sometimes irregular and at others regular.

Excluding all this, what remains is a limited set of forms and some rules to link them and make them articulate. It is the structure of a language – the catalogue of forms is like a dictionary, and the rules are the grammar. Observing the history of classical architecture it can be seen that as in every language, regular and figurative grammar has been used. Regular grammar "asks that the link up be made in the most logical and simplest way". The figurative "authorises the use of figures of construction to give the expression of thought greater energy or elegance".

It is a plastic language existing among many other possible ones. As in every language, its application is limited to a certain culture; the limits are not geographical.

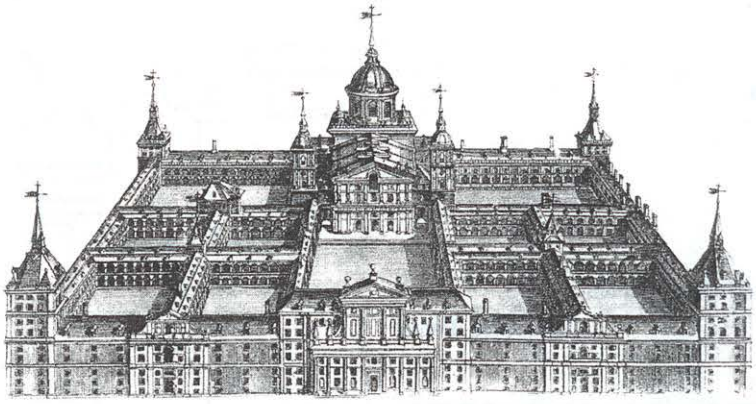
This view of classical architecture as a simple language is not new; it was the subject of talks made to the British BBC by John Summerson in 1963 which were collected in the very well known work of this author The Classical Language of Architecture (Methuen & Co. Ltd., London EC4, 1964). Now the purpose of this sign language, which is more efficient expressively than spoken language, must be determined. This will help to explain its long life in western culture.

5 Mental contents expressed by this language

The history of the formation of this language is the key to discovering its meanings, because by following this history alongside the march of time, that is by starting off from the known in historic times to arrive at its pre-historic origins, a very coherent succession of reciprocal relationships between meanings and forms that express them are revealed. The latter gradually approach classical language that is codified in two categories: the classical Doric Greek and the Greco-Roman, both the ancient and that of the Renaissance.

The prehistoric origin is found in humanity's first architectural experiences: the menhir, the dolmen and the cave. Added to these were other less ancient forms such as the cornice and the stairway. All, and especially the first three, left a lasting mark on the consciences of individuals and races.

However, with the passing of time the marks of these first experiences were lost for the consciences, were submerged in the subconscious, and finally were stored in the collective unconsciousness where they constituted part of the wealth of humanity's archetypes, according to Jung. His theory supported the stated, but at the same time adduced architectural facts support the said



theory with new evidence as Jung hardly penetrated the architectural field that would have been so fruitful for his work.

To summarise, the classical language in western culture expresses unconscious contents of the collective mind and the subconscious ones of the individual mind. The one and the other are "ineffable"; they cannot be communicated by the spoken or written word. The value of classical language consists in having known how to form a classical expression, arranged and aware of these contents that are buried in the minds; in the "depth of the spirit" as the 16th century mystics said. They are Jung's "archetypes", part of western nations and more removed from the primitive magic of oriental "archetypes". The latter conserve in their designs traces of magic figures that, in virtue of their regularity, keep away the demons that symbolise and produce natural disorder and unforeseeable dangers. The circle and square are the simplest figures – the first is the symbol of the sky and the second of the earth. Many mandalas stem from a combination of both and also from some monuments from India and China. Such a mandala appears in Bramante's project for St Peter's in Rome in a strange way as has been mentioned in paragraph 3, and even more forcefully in the Palladio Villa Retonda. These mandalas have four symmetrical axes; monumental ensembles and single building with one or two axes abound in the East and those with two are only found in ancient Greece. But in the latter, as stated in paragraph 3, the ensembles are never mandalas. They are so, on the contrary, in Imperial Rome, the Renaissance and particularly in French academic work of the 18th century. Durand classified them and linked them to classical style in his Leçons d'Architecture (Paris, 1821), and since then they have become the basis for academic teaching, especially in France. The Villa Rotonda model is the only mandala that really exists in Europe.

It would be interesting to study the relationship between beliefs and mandala architecture. In a first approximation, it seems that in periods of firm religious beliefs, architecture tends towards free organisation; this occurred in ancient Greece and during the Middle Ages. When beliefs are weakened or become routine, magic with regular architectural forms emerges; that was the case in Greek and Roman times, during the Renaissance, and in the 18th century Age of Reason.

The subject cannot be treated lightly nor without great historic precision, but if what has been stated is true, the most usual classical architecture, that which dispenses with the Greek Doric, would be of the magical kind. It would be like an exorcism against the disorder of nature and the vicissitudes of life.

6. The legacy of the "archetypes"

As has been stated, the archetypes derive from humanity's first architectural experiences and are alive in the archaic mind, though at times vaguely. There is a hereditary, cultural and genetic, that is a spiritual, transmission. The latter's instrument is the archaic brain that every human possesses which is conformed to act on the orders it

receives of the equally archaic mind. This deposit of experiences and forms associated with them is supposed to be the same for everyone and is therefore considered collective, apart from being also unconscious for everyone with a few exceptions made for circumstances. The impression a déjà vu felt on observing a certain monument that in fact has never been seen before can be cited as an example. Perhaps it was the work of distant ancestors of the viewer in whom an experience submerged in the depths of his or her lineage for centuries and millenniums springs forth at that instant.

The great accomplishment of classical culture was to produce codified and comprehensive form for cultivated societies, the shapeless archaic expressions that are archetypes; signs that state very concrete things, to such an extent that a relationship can be established between the main ones.

a) The menhir: symbol of the Father Sun, creator of life. This is the origin of two forms: the obelisk and the column. Related to the first are the stela, the totem pole and, expanding in size, the Egyptian pillars, the tower-pagodas of India and China, and finally the skyscraper. This relationship is not classical.

The column started out being an object of worship, isolated in the centre of sacred ground; later a small statue was added to indicate what divinity resided in the column. Regarding form, it resembled future Ionic and ornate columns. In pre-classical times Greek anthropomorphism increased, and thus the divinity was transferred to the image but surrounded by columns that did not lose their sacred nature and with it augmented that of the image. The Parthenon, whose columns are distributed rationally as signs but irrationally as building elements, developed from this. The column also developed the primitive dwelling, with its wooden shafts functioning as supportive elements. When these shafts were made of stone or marble they adopted the form of sacred columns, but the unitary character of their domestic origin was preserved. In this sense they were used in civil buildings, or rather civil-religious buildings such as propileos, stoas and theatres.

In Rome temples were built like the Greek ones, but in true Roman architecture columns were "demythologised"; they were prestigious, propagandistic or merely objects of simple decoration as exemplified by the Coliseum. Their mythical character returned in the Renaissance with a new meaning: as an emblem of revived Antiquity, of Humanism. Later, as in ancient Rome, they became symbols of the power of the state, of private pride and the importance of money. Numerous political examples have abounded since the end of the 18th century, mainly in Washington and Leningrad (from Peter the Great to Stalin). In these two cases the classical column was linked to the foundation of two great empires and is thus sensed in the collective unconscious. In both classical art is a symbol of triumphant unity over localisms. The creation of Italian and German unity in 1870 is a different case. At a time of artistic disorder and a lack of deep meaning, the classical column was not understood by people as a true myth, but as a conventional form chosen by authority among others available in the art of the period. It is sufficient to note that the characteristic monuments of the two recently created nations were the Victor Emmanuele statue in Rome and the Reichstag in Berlin to understand the banality of the architecture that accompanied the two political novelties. When the fascists and Nazis attempted to exalt the unity of their respective countries and represent them through a classical style, they were unable to do so and were left with a hybrid art that was essentially anti-classical.

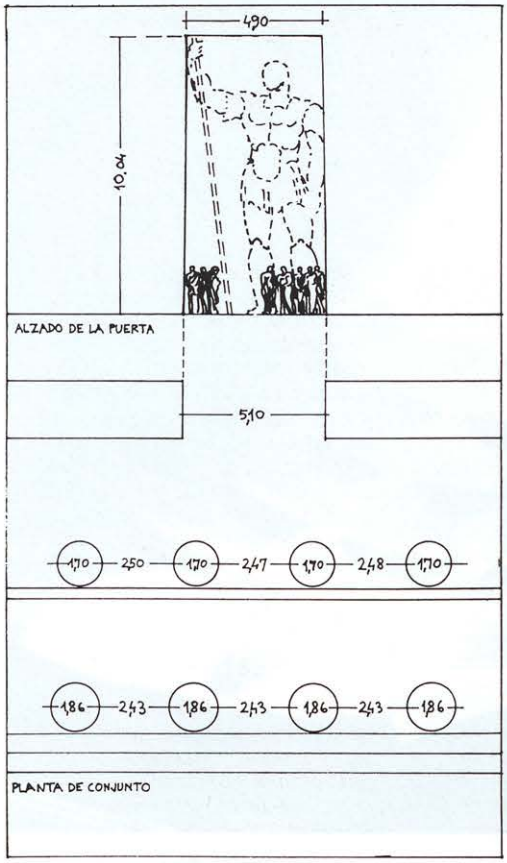
b) The dolmen: symbol of the Gateway, the passage of one reality to another. The colonnade or portico already mentioned is multiplied as at Stonehenge. The important thing is its linking aspect between an exterior reality and another interior one, and thus it remains in the collective unconscious with a mythical and religious sense. A porta inferi libera nos Domine is chanted at the rites for the dead. Large entrances are frequent in Antiquity. In the Parthenon where the free space between the central columns is less than 2.4 metres it is 5x10 metres. It is the passage from the profane to the sacred and that is the reason for its importance rather than its utility as its width of five metres is not serviceable behind the mentioned columns. However, in this case two justifications for its size can be found: firstly, for being the only illumination of the naos, and secondly, for the passage of the peplos in the Panateneas procession that required a height of 10 metres.

In Antiquity great entrances continued to be made for religious and civil-religious buildings; the height was usually double the width. This height was not generally justified by practical reasons, and therefore, it can be assumed that entrances served as a passage for people, ideally regarded as a gigantic unity according to Greek anthropomorphism. The myth of the great gateway returned with the Renaissance but now not as a symbol of social unity but as a symbol of public or private power. This genre arrived with false high entrances of stone but divided by disguised metallic flooring in banks and business buildings of the beginning of this century. With the symbolising unity broken, the next step was low and wide entrances, characteristic of today's shapeless masses.

c)The cave: symbol of security, protection, the maternal cloister, the bunker and air raid shelter. At first it was a place to worship the divine beings that lived in them. When there was greater security caves were no loner lived in and became places of more or less secret worship. Cupola-shaped imitations were constructed that with time enriched their religious significance with the image of the cosmos, which the ancients believed to be round. This led to the Pantheon of Rome, where the image is linked to cosmic reality through the great round hollow that allows the sunbeams to cross the interior surface of the compound. The same effect is achieved in St Peter's dome with transparent stained glass windows. The cave has moved from being a primitive enclosure for security to a place of secret worship and to a place of public and finally total religious form. But afterwards the dome was deconsecrated to become a symbol of political power, like the Washington Capitol, and even of financial power. The dome has returned with Buckminster Fuller who covered a locomotive engine depot with one. But what is more interesting is his project to enclose a town of 150,000 residents under a dome which will isolate the population beneath this transparent cupola in an artificial ecology, protected as in the original cave. This is a return to the primitive meaning of this sign.

d)The cornice: its purpose for the Greeks was limitation, so that the building did not escape upwards. Dread of the infinite made it necessary. Races who did not impose limits on their conception of the world, like the Hindus, did not use it in their temples nor did those with unlimited material ambitions, such as the builders of skyscrapers. The cornice limits the human world: it is large in civil buildings like Rome's Farnesio Palace, but is more slender in religious edifices like St Peter's in Rome so as not to upset the ascending movement of the dome, but though it is small, it exists in order not to exaggerate this movement. Gothic architects in their quest for exaggeration did not use it when they lost the sense of the classical that was still retained in Paris's Notre Dame. The cornice reappeared in the form a great massive strip that crowns the building, feigning an enormous protective flagstone. This fashion was a sign of general fear of the future.

7 The significant and meaning



In the adduced examples and in many more that could be included, a game between classical forms and the meaning society attributes to them can be observed. Any form, for example, started out as a magical sign and ended as a commercial symbol, after attaining various intermediary meanings. The significant form has been forced to change, but in classical architecture the change of forms seems to have been less than the change of meanings that have been attributed to it for centuries. It is like saying that the collective unconsciousness has become so glued to these forms that it prefers to conserve them even though they have lost their original meaning, rather than accept other newer ones that better suit the new significance. It is similar to the case of language; the words and grammar that served to write Don Quixote are the same as those used today in scientific treatises apart from the inclusion of a few new terms.

The consistency of a language that is so adaptable to circumstances that are so different can be applied to classical architecture when it is seen how it has been the expression of different religious, cultural, social and other conditions.

8. The classical as language

The classical has been used as pure expression in different ages. It was used in ancient Rome. In Spain there are two extreme examples of linguistic consideration of classical themes, accompanied by a deliberate ignorance of what could be a classical structure. The first is El Escorial. It has two great fronts, one at the exterior and another in the Royal Courtyard. Both are façades of a church; the first imposed on the main façade, and the second on the church itself. Neither has any relationship with the body of the building to which they are applied, to the point that in both the great entablement stands at half the height of the area that lies behind it – this is the library in the first, and the friars' choir in the other. The exterior is a fairly accurate copy of a three-nave basilica façade designed by Serlio, and which seems to have been adapted deliberately to the body of the building in a poor fashion. It is like a simple announcement that this contains a church, though the church is not where the sign indicates. As to the building itself to which these classical touches have been applied, and many others, to the extent that it has been described by some historians as an Italian Renaissance construction, it is easy to establish that it does not compare in any way to any Italian building nor to any fantasy project of any part of Europe. On the contrary, it does look similar to Middle East buildings, such as the citadels of Mxatta, Balkuvara and Ukhaidir from the 5th to 9th centuries. It can be assumed that Felipe II's subjects did not know them, but it is known that the description of a glorified temple of Solomon was studied in depth by Ezequiel.

Clearly this vision of the prophet would be supported in existing buildings in his period (4th century BC) that would be the direct precedents of the mentioned citadels; precedents too of El Escorial through literary testimony. This once again shows the nature of the pure expression that was given to classical themes, because they were applied to topically oriental construction.

The second example is the Prado Museum. Villanueva, a man of emphatic ideas, knew El Escorial very well. He would not have been pleased by the grafting of language elements to the bulk of the building, as they would have struck him as confusing. In his first draft for the museum he separated the useful from the expressive, and designed something unique: a purely "functional" building, and in front of it, separated by more than 10 metres, a double arcade of complex organisation that alone would speak in name of the whole building. Later, in the reality of the construction, he had to superimpose the two arcades, give a distinct character to one, and attach them to the real building. Reality curtailed, but not completely, what would have been the real definition of classical style accomplished materially: a language for the depth of the human mind. When the definitive plan for the present museum was approved in 1785, the rationalisation of thought had already been initiated. The consequence has been the loss of understanding of this language by present society.

9. The future of architectural languages

To make primitive mythical thought rational has been the ambition of western countries from ancient times, at least since the pre-Socratic 6th century BC. But generally it has been understood that reason was not everything in thought and that, in reality, not everything was demonstrable rationally. This is how Plato reasoned on the myths that existed and the ones that he invented. Ancient people realised that the human mind had higher and deeper levels than rational conscience, such as feelings that they perceived that could not be reduced to concepts, and they also knew that these perceptions could be communicated through unspoken and unwritten languages. Eighteenth century rationalism sought to reduce thinking to reason alone, and boiled it down to mathematical logic. Hegel's famous phrase "everything rational is real and everything real is rational" revealed the contempt for deep realities that constituted artistic achievement and much more.

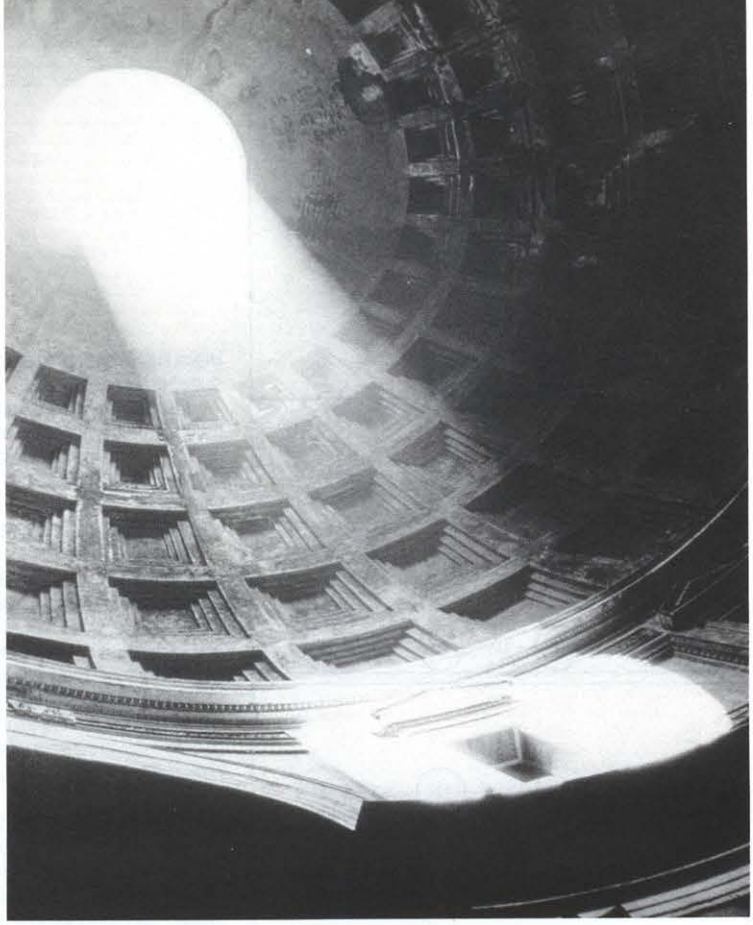
This destroyed a wealth of archetypes that had turned the unconscious into a storehouse of experiences unknown in normal life, but ready to leap into the conscience as an aid for full psychic life. Classical architecture, as any other ancient architecture, was a mythology. Furthermore, in Gothic architecture there was a rational technical element that converted it into a more complicated system than the classical. The latter only had its own rationality of language, but as such a language it achieved perfection; for this reason it could perform as a rational expression of the collective unconscious in many different countries and periods. Now, with prevailing rationalisation and demythologisation, there is nothing to express. But as the mind's subconscious forces cannot be destroyed and continue to act confusedly in search of new myths and new archetypes, it is hoped that a time will arrive in which new styles of architecture will create a repertoire of expressive signs that the collective unconscious will be able to convert into firmly rooted and ordered "archetypes" as were those of classical architecture. From them a new language of the ineffable that will be within the grasp of the masses must emerge. At the present time, the excessive speed with which changes of architectural expression occurs make it impossible for them to be absorbed by the collective mind. This has led to a great inertia due to its enormous mass that prevents it from following the rapid changes that the minority of artists and intellectuals can produce.

The physical laws of gravity can be applied to the deep mind.■

23 December 1977.

The idea of Stereotomy. The Pantheon

Jesús Aparicio



The Cave

The cave is the archetype of stereotomy. Nature is absorbed in it and produces the idea. Cave architecture only includes in its space the still life that creates it (the rock). Rocky material, however, transcends its own nature and turns itself into a material capable of sublimating the idea.

The architecture of stereotomy is universal, because it is created from the sublimation of the idea. This universal idea is wall and interior space and detaches itself from the place. Only the sun and the sky, the most stable geological elements and, therefore, the most abstract of exterior nature form a part of the architecture of stereotomy.

The Pantheon is the idea of cave made architecture in the 2nd century (diagram 1); a central spherical space that is surrounded by a wall at the front, behind, above and below. The brick transcends its essence, transforming itself into a walled density in shade, light, form and space.

The Pantheon is a universal space that emerges from the idea of centrality enclosed by walls in a spherical space.

The sun and sky penetrate the stereotomy of the Pantheon. The architecture separates itself from the place. From the interior, reference to the nearby exterior surrounding the space is lost, abstracting nature with distant, almost infinite elements, like the sun and sky.

Continuing with the idea of stereotomy and accepting that spaces are created from a universal idea that is detached from an exact place, we can state that the space of stereotomy is discontinuous with respect to the exterior.

The wall and darkness

The wall in stereotomy is a continuous wall whose parts are integrated with the whole. This walled entity is the exterior of the space in stereotomy. The wall is an idea full of material.

The wall in stereotomy can be compared to a fabric in which all the fibres of different materials and colours are connected in a continuous whole. A piece of this fabric speaks of the whole that it belongs to (diagram 2). Everything is enclosed and props up the fabric.

The missing parts (doors and windows) of the wall in stereotomy are created by removing a continuous material that existed before these hollows were opened. The wall in stereotomy disappears with the removal of material (diagram 3).

The Pantheon could be in Greece or Spain instead of Rome. Only the climate and latitude define the place. The Pantheon's change of locality is possible because its space has no continuity with the exterior and is detached from the place. The oculo (a round hollow) is a window to the sun and sky, constant elements in different places. Only their shade and inclination change.

The wall in the space of stereotomy is a continuum of material. The spatial discontinuity between interior and exterior space is discerned from the walled continuity. The wall is an instrument that shapes the architectural idea generated in an interior space detached from its surroundings. Its walls are continuous and their density contains the function, material and form as a material whole. What it contains, encloses and covers is a whole unit. The material is the wall that limits space and that links with the exterior through the great bronze door and the oculo.

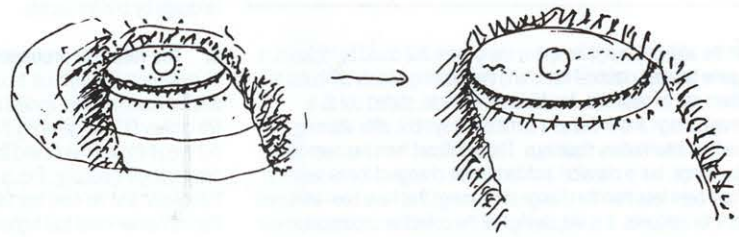
The oculo and space

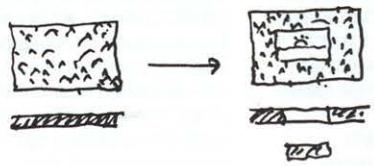
As space in stereotomy is created from a universal idea detached from the place, it has a more intimate, introverted and spiritual character. Feeling in stereotomy is feeling denuded of senses. Space in stereotomy is created from material that pre-existed the idea; it penetrates the interior transforming it into architecture. In terms of light, it is proximate to a chiaroscuro.

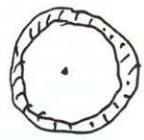
In the Pantheon, the wall closes off an interior space to the exterior and vice versa. The wall is a continuum whole that shapes the idea. Space emerges on opening the oculo that by uniting the exterior and interior through light and vision produces emotion. A man standing still feels this emotion of the soul that flows from the interior thanks to the light and vision that penetrate through the oculo (diagram 4).

The frame of the sky, sun and light bordered by the oculo has a static and eternal character. It is a sacred plain enclosure that, when transgressed by something mobile and temporary, replaces the emphasis on that inertia through contrast. For example, a bird crossing the Pantheon's oculo makes it human, brings it to life and is in scale (diagram 5). A being in movement not only gives a human scale to vision, it also transforms the plain of the frame in space, makes the temporary eternal, gives resurrects lifeless objects petrified in the wall and gives motion to the inert.

It seems obvious that conceptually the Pantheon's oculo is another extraction of the spherical whole rather than the non-







construction of a cover. Space in stereotomy has a static nature where emotion is provided from looking at it in stillness.

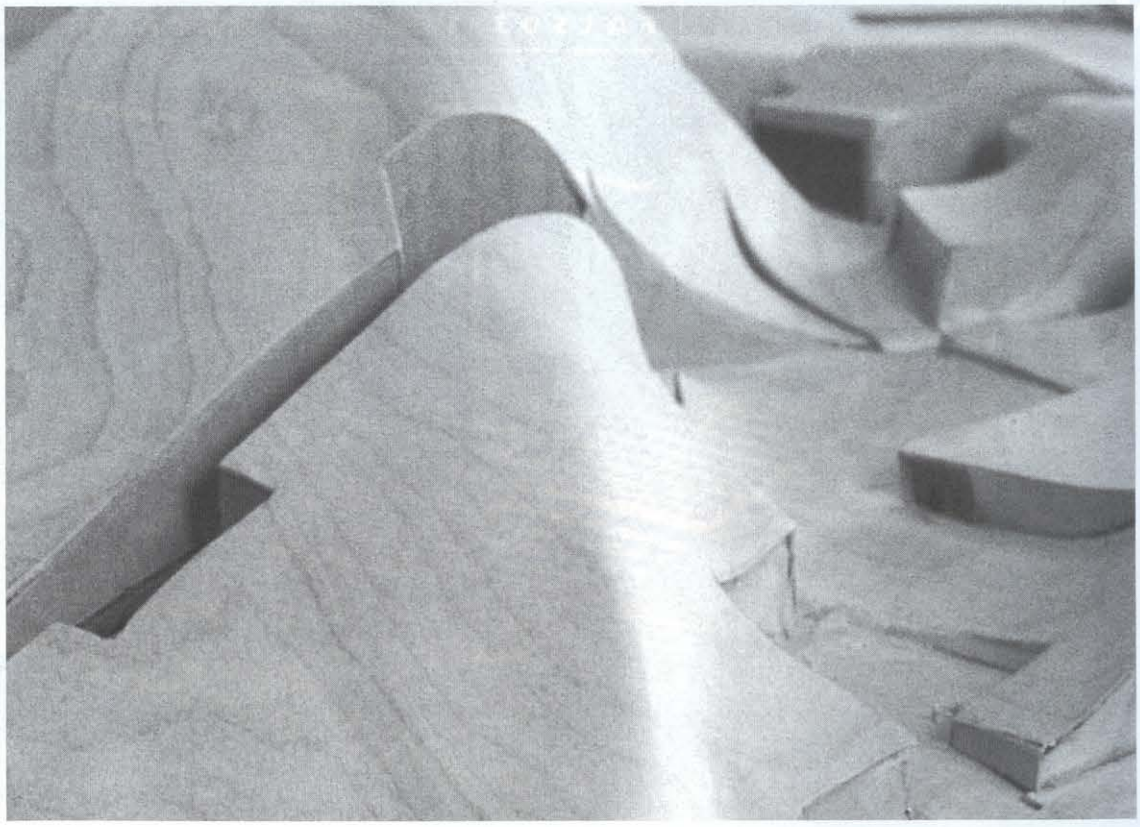
Frames of light and vision that create space form the missing bits extracted from the wall. Motionless man observes a picture of static figures where light is in slight movement. When someone or something penetrates this space, the emotion of movement is produced on the inert level of the picture. The idea of space in stereotomy has a double vertical and horizontal character.

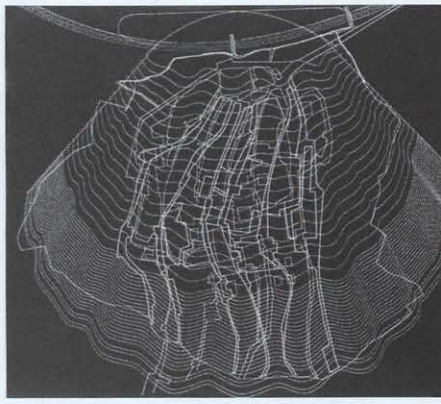
Once again the Pantheon serves as an example of these extremes. This is a central space limited by the walls that have no continuity with the exterior. The wall is architectural material in an intimate, introverted and closed space (diagram 6).

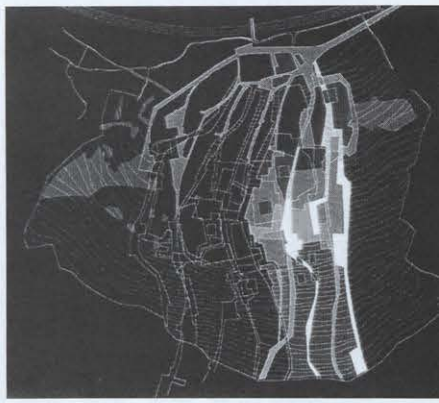
The oculo is the counterpoint of this introverted space where the infinite exterior is sublimated. In a similar, though contrary way, Tugendhat House's onyx wall is the counterpoint of fossilised material in a continuous space of a live nature. The Pantheon contrasts with a vertical space, created with inanimate material, an oculo through which the abstracted, infinite and changing exterior penetrates (diagram 7). On the other hand, the Tugendhat House tightens a horizontal space, created with live and changing material in space and time, with a vertical onyx wall that is dead and eternal material.

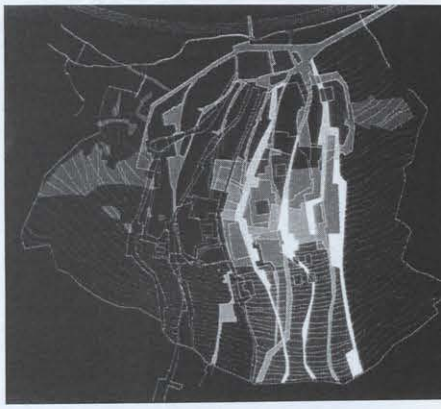
This interior evaluation of inactive material in the idea of stereotomy, in the Pantheon, the cave, implies a feeling of the soul and spirit.

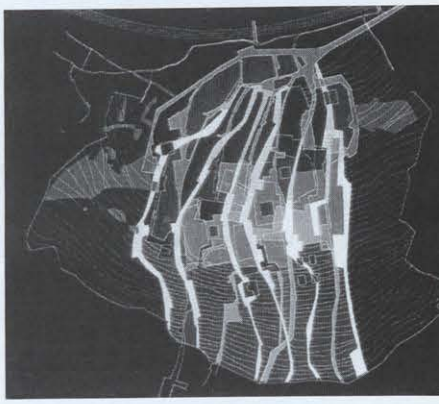
We could say that the walls create mass and the lack of walls, by allowing nature to penetrate through it, creates space in this mass. The mass of the Pantheon is a space without light or sky or scenery. In other words, mass is a space without nature. The oculo is a lack of material that is born from an architectural idea, echoing the idea of nature. Thus, idealised nature in the Pantheon becomes fine walled material in the missing zenith.■











"The violence appearing today is of an altogether different kind... an implosive violence no longer resulting from the expansion of a system but from its saturation and contraction...

Jean Baudrillard

The Beaubourg Effect, 1977

Some thirty years after the students of 1968 took their revolutions to the streets, we find ourselves still facing an unresolved urban condition: an implosive one resulting from a saturation of media and information technology that is no longer able to expand outward but rather must contract. If the force of this contraction remains almost totally unintelligible to us, it is because our entire image repertory is oriented to a logic of expanding systems. Architecture today continues to address and approximate the expansionist paradigm, amplifying its gestures as it attemps to hide from itself futility of its effects.

Given the logic of today's implosive reality, it is no mystery that models of randomness are rapidly superceding models of determinacy and classical causality. This change expresses the passage from definite systems of expansion to multidirectional system of matter -both expanding and contracting- a pulsation of surface, Baudrillard argued over two decades ago, "capable of infinite and interstitial saturation."

Architecture has traditionally been a semiotic system expressing a defined expansion of matter. As we reach the end of the millennium, we are passing from a time of liberation and release of energy into a phase of implosion and social inversion. This implosion marks the shift away from a representation-obsessed semiotic culture - with its overabundance of information- to a new sensibility, to a tactile, plastic, and mobile culture of affect.

While we might desire to replicate and duplicate the architecture of the past (such as the historic center of Santiago), this is no longer useful or meaningful. The post-semiotic sensibility, the culture of affect, is one where seeing is no longer necessary to understand the distinction between representational signs and their signifieds but rather to know what to touch-tactile manipulation. Our proposal for the Center for Culture in Santiago then represents a tactile response to a new social logic: that of genetic coding.

The genetic sources of our project are the coquille shell (the symbol of Santiago), and the plan of the old city center. In first-century sarcophagi in the Holy Land, the shell was often used as a symbolic medallion. When the sarcophagus of St. James was brought to Santiago, the shell motif became a symbol of the city. For example, when the Reconquistas went out on their crusades, the shell was a prominent emblem on their banners.

Our project takes this ancient symbol of Santiago and injects it into the plan of the old city center to create an internal genetic program for contemporary Santiago. This act removes the former symbolic resonance of the shell and the old city, turns them inside out, and transforms them into an encoding device. The shell emerges as a warped surface bearing smooth and striated conditions simultaneously. It represents neither figure nor ground but both a figured ground and a figured figure.

As a condition of the implosion of contemporary secular culture, and as a deliberate gesture against obsolete explosive models, the new center for culture develops a powerful new figure/figure urbanism. Rather than see the project as a series of discrete buildings -the traditional form of figure/ground urbanism- the buildings of our center are literally incised into the ground to form a figure/figure urbanism in which the buildings and topography merge into figures. The secular center is defined physically as a different form from the religious center below, while expressing the trace of the old center as its genetic foundation.

The coding process

While the original center of Santiago is medieval, it still conforms to the Cartesian model that is the foundation of striated figure/ground urbanism. The buildings are figural and the streets residual. When the original town center is placed into the ground of our site, the figure-ground urbanism is superceded. The trajectories of new pilgrimage routes are then mixed with the initial grid, deforming boht the grid and the corresponding streets and buildings. These deformations are treated as a series of surface-like forms which, like the shell, are both smooth and striated.

Contraction and implosion are intermeshed into the folded and warped surface of the shell (neither figure nor ground but both at once) which activates the town plan and produces a new kind of center, one in which the coding of Santiago's medieval past appears not as a form of representational nostalgia but as an active present found in a tactile, pulsating new form -a fluid shell.■