

English texts

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DEBATE

Spain and Portugal in the 21st Century

Luis Fernández-Galiano

The great achievements of Iberian architecture during the initial beats of the 21st century tend to be looked back on with a mix of melancholy and repentance. Melancholy for a time of unbridled prosperity and optimism that might never come back, and repentance for the excesses that no doubt existed too. Avoiding both complacency and flagellation, perhaps the best chronicle of those years of change could be a narrative or a journey able to link the thematic to the geographic, tracing the peninsular perimeter – the northern coast, Atlantic Portugal and the Mediterranean shore – before going inland, and ending at the geometric center and largest city, Madrid.

In the current panorama of disappearing practices and emigrating young architects – due to Europe's serious economic, social and institutional crisis – maybe an answer is to be found in the mottoes of three international congresses that were held in Spain, in 2010, 2012 and 2014: 'More for Less', 'The Common' and 'Necessary Architecture'. Faced with the current scarcity of resources, let us try to offer more efficiency, more sustainability and more beauty with fewer materials, less energy and less money; and faced with the present fragmentation of interests and needs, let us put emphasis on the places, spaces and buildings that we all share. The crisis calls for austerity, but also for solidarity; only in this way can we address a world in mutation.

Rafael Moneo. A Theoretical Profession

Francisco González de Canales

This paper traces back Rafael Moneo's influence on Spanish recent architecture. It discusses how in the 1970s his impact on an immediately younger generation of architects mainly occurred through his teachings and his understanding of architecture reflexively as a body of knowledge that he promoted among his students and academic collaborators. The paper later focuses on his relation with younger generations of architects which ultimately broke with Moneo's positions, while in the long term they still kept a shared interest in combining teaching, critical writing and practicing, an ambition for international exposure and the need to intensively investigate current academic interests through their unbreakable link to the architectural practice.

Cosmopolitanism vs Internationalism: Távora, Siza and Souto Moura

Giovanni Leoni

'Internationalism' stands out as one of the key concepts of 20th Century European architectural culture, in

which appears in varying forms, yet is however always as a dialectic between one or more of the more of hegemonic culture's processing 'centres' and a periphery that is more or less critically attached to this dominant culture; or it refuses this, or is refused, thereby isolating itself. The main purpose of this essay is to show how the design methods of Porto's three most important architects during the second half of the 20th century shared a substantive refusal of Internationalism. One of the oft-repeated phrases by Fernando Távora, and just as often cited by his two 'students', clearly inverts internationalism's viewpoint: «The more local something is, the more universal it becomes». The quite different, international successes that the three enjoyed, as well as their not being part of the architectural internationalism system, may undoubtedly be traced back to the heteronomy that the three practiced in architecture, based on cultural prerequisites that were, in part, profoundly different. The language of others is always used in order to make their own more precise, more effective and more specific; it is left to speak, if deemed appropriate and useful, as an auxiliary form of an awareness raising, interpretation and transformation process that refers back to local, specific, unique conditions, one work at a time. This confidence with architectural forms, both history's as well as those in the present, is missing that principle of inclusion/exclusion that instead lies at the core of internationalism, just as it lacks any idea that there are dominant centres and ancillary peripheries.

New Spanish Architecture. Dense Cores and Centrifugal Currents

Sol89. María González, Juanjo López de la Cruz

The economic crisis which started the last decade in Spain has precipitated a generational shift in which the protagonist offices of previous years have given way to a new generation of architects whose work represents a clear change in operating conditions. Some of the defining characteristics of Spanish 'different schools and territories' – are still present, however, the need to re-think the existing context, attention to the everyday before the event, working with cultural references from various fields and constructive thinking as a way of establishing ties with the context, are recognizable work strategies in the current scenario of new architects. We could say that reality, understood from its whole complexity, is again the poetic and constructive play field, a renewed interest recognizable in the traditional dense cores of Barcelona and Madrid but also today, perhaps as most defining generational characteristic, scattered in centrifugal currents associated with the country's periphery.

Italy/Spain. Relationships and Influences Since the Postwar Period Until Today

Tommaso Rossi Fioravanti

Since the beginning of the totalitarian Francoist period, Spain looked at Italy as an example of architectural experimentation and even more as a cultural reference that could compensate for the lack of internal production caused by the regime. Already since the late forties, great personality such as Sartoris and Ponti began to excite the minds of Catalan architects with thrilling conferences in defense of modern architecture that became real events. Moreover, the Spanish architects also began to travel again and, for example, during the CIAM in Venice, in 1952, Coderch met Gardella and became friend of Gregotti. Paradigmatic example of Italian influence was the housing by Coderch and Valls, built at Barceloneta between 1951 and 1954; clear tribute to the Borsalino employees housing, it became a cult architecture itself, studied and imitated although loosely based on the building of Gardella. 'Casabella-continuità', also because in the Iberian peninsula it wasn't published anything, became the most influential review in Spain and the passionate editorials by Rogers were the only ones which could provide answers to technical, social and cultural problems in that period. Particularly Oriol Bohigas and Federico Correa contributed to the diffusion of Italian architecture; even through the 'Arquitecturas bis' review and the FAD prize, they bound architects such as Rogers, Gregotti, De Carlo, Aulenti, Gardella and Magistretti to the Spanish adventure.

RESEARCHES

The Contemporary Art Centre in Cordoba by Nieto and Sobejano: a Game of Mirrors and Spaces

Gianpaola Spirito

The essay describes the creative process through which Nieto and Sobejano shape spaces. It is a complex process based on a «mirrors game», a play of multiple reflections that evokes places and architecture which they have visited and combine them with the place's features, contemporary condition and their way of interpreting all of them. As Nieto and Sobejano say: «Our projects already exist, unconsciously, in our memory. They reappear unexpectedly, triggered by strange associations of which we are scarcely aware. At one point, a forgotten memory, an image, a sound or a phrase we recorded reappears in the process of every project: an indication that guides us toward a certain path», that suggests us the idea of the project.

In Cordoba, the mosque and its space structure, defined by the repetition of a single element and continuous grafts and transformations that determines its present shape, suggest Contemporary Art Centre's one. It is composed by a sequence of spaces, generated by repetition of an element. The element is a hexagonal space, illuminated from above by concrete cones. It takes different shapes and sizes, it is both an outdoor and an indoor space, so their combination shapes a multiple and isotropic space.

This sequence of spaces is enclosed between two linear buildings that define the two main facades. These are covered, like all the other part of the building, by a single material: GRC, prefabricated concrete fiberglass panels and are perforated by several polygonal openings which make the facades plastic. The holes of river facade contain LED lamps, which generate images and texts that will be reflected on the river's surface.

The Light Captured by Campo Baeza in Zamora

Maria Argenti

The headquarters for the Consejo Consultivo di Castilla y León is one of those works of contemporary architecture that, despite its strong character, manages to insert gently itself within a historical context.

The works of Campo Baeza are always unitary microcosms rooted to both a geographic location and a historic context.

They are transparent even when closed. Carved monoliths, animated by light; they exceed (in the wake of Mies) the concept of the limit, circumscribed or fluid, between what they enclose and what they exclude.

In Zamora Campo Baeza explicitly declares his reference (as he had done in 1995 with the project for the Centro Balear de Innovacion Tecnologica in Inca, Majorca) to the concept of the hortus conclusus.

The idea of beauty that characterises this work has no need for special effects. It is St. Augustine's beauty of truth, and it transcends the very physicality of architecture using the most immaterial of materials: light.

For Campo Baeza light is the only real material for constructing architecture that is not limited to simply satisfying a function. Light is the theme of architecture. Yet the light he seeks is not something vague, impalpable or fleeting. It is solid matter, and pure energy. This is why in Zamora he accompanies the massiveness of stone with the transparency of glass. Because he finds it «emotionally stimulating to rediscover ancient and at the same time simple mechanisms». He works more with excavation than with surface. He favours subtraction over addition.

Toni Gironès. The Center of Interpretation of the Megalithic Mound/Dolmen in Seró, Lérida

Giovanni Longobardi

The project has been occasioned by the discovery of a megalithic grave dated around 2400 BC, in which some sandstone menhir from a previous era were been reused. The uniqueness of the discovery and the great quality of the stone plates gave rise to their museographical display in an area located just over a mile from the site, on the edge of Seró.

The spatial structure of the building is a complex architectural promenade, composed of numerous episodes between external and internal environments that return different sensory experiences. At first glance, the impression is of being in a construction site, or in a not yet completed building, but it is actually a combination of raw materials carefully composed.

Other projects by Toni Gironès have similar elements of simplicity, that seem to belong to some gradually distilled tools. There is a clear attention to saving resources, to the sustainability of building components and their recyclability, and to the containment of the management costs. The Catalan architect seems to have found a language to translate this ethical and political position on a purely disciplinary level, that knows how to involve the body with the basic tools of architecture, very far from the conceptual and material miseries of the international minimalism.

Pitágoras Arquitectos in Guimarães. Architecture of the Public City

Susanna Ferrini

The architectural complex of the Plataforma of Arts and Creativity, designed by Pitágoras Arquitectos, is one of the most strategic urban regeneration projects promoted by the city of Guimarães on the occasion of his appointment as European Capital of Culture in 2012.

The new set recovers the area of the former municipal market, arranged on a rectangular court and on the plot of the marble processing plant, bordered by the irregular shape of the ancient paths. The project involves a different degree of intensity in the transformation of the market buildings: ranging from the full recovery of the exterior facies (facade) through complete reorganization of the interior space to the design of the new longitudinal body that flanks the southern front of the site. The project starts from the recovery of the large central market square, symbolically imagined as a real scenic 'plataforma' (stage), which becomes a wide and continuous horizontal surface that accommodates a multitude of activities and installations. The project seeks a strong functional mixité and the cultural center is thought of as a multifunctional space dedicated to artistic, economic and social activities. The envelope is a ventilated facade, based on the repetition of the same architectural detail, the thin vertical tubular slat made of brass, which is slightly diagonally mounted and, through means of combinations, represents the only element that configures the total volume of the building.

A Way of Getting City. The ICTAM Hospital in Seville by MGM Arquitectos

Francisco Gomez Diaz

The Cartuja Institute for Advanced Medical Techniques, ICTAM, built on the island of la Cartuja in Seville by MGM Arquitectos, answers the question of how to use architecture to contribute to urban surroundings. Far from limiting itself to solve a functional program on a specific lot, the building tries to implicate itself within the urban plot, becoming in a connection between the two parallel streets which delimit it, Américo Vespucio and Leonardo da Vinci.

The mechanism is a passage which is added to a series of longitudinal courtyards that articulate the functional bands. Not only does it provide an access to the medical center through the main lobby, but it also serves as an intermediate space, as a transition between public and private space.

The complexity of the program is stratified, from a semi-basement intended for diagnosis, operating and treatment rooms, to a ground floor with the entrance, emergency and administration areas. The upper floors are dedicated to hospitalization, where each level seeks its own formal expression on an abstract basis unified by an envelope of perforated metal sheet.

Thanks to the patios the rooms can be optimally oriented to the south. The resulting lighting and ventilation conditions contribute to the therapeutic effect. The halls located on the different floors not only channel movement, but become meeting places and viewpoints over the city and the landscape as well.

But this building breaks all the traditional hospital moulds. Its implantation on the lot, its functional disposition and its connection with urban elements beyond its limits all support an idea of enriching the city with architecture.

The building, product of a restricted competition, has been recognized with the 2013 Spanish Architecture Award and the 2014 AIT Award «Interior Best in Interior and Architecture».

The Window and the City. The Project for La Lira Theatre in Ripoll

Fabrizio Toppetti

In the path of RCR, marked by a strong experimental and creative dimension, combined with rigor and painstaking research, the project for «La Lira» Theatre in Ripoll is an exemplary moment of interesting synthesis.

The question highlighted by the announcement of 2003 was clear: convert an empty urban space into public space of the city. It was the result of the rift of urban tissue, an accidental crossing space generated from the demolition of historic theater, located between an inner road that leads to Plaça de Sant Eudald and the Eastern Front on River Ter.

An issue that raises questions respecting to the project for the historic center that are often addressed in the abstract: the relations between old and new, between solid and empty, between shape and background, between physical structure and intangible values.

They spend about ten years from the competition to the realization. An amount of time in which the project was exposed to a slow decanting phase, necessary for the development of an extraordinarily balanced and efficient result.

The goals are three. Keep the print of empty, enhance the permeability of perception, take advantages of the situation to make a connection with the other side of the river. The operation is solved in two moves. The three-dimensional frame, off scale, defines the virtual volume, it suits well the total height of the block and the planimetric urban structure conforms plastically the invaded space, it recreates the block at the top with the result of a covered accessible space opened on both free sides. A pedestrian walkway, having right dimension, crosses the river off-center in relation to a portal that defines the prospectus.

A Project and Its Genetic References. MUNCYT Building in La Coruña by Acebo y Alonso

Fernando Agrasar Quiroga

The project MUNCYT of La Coruna, by the architects Victoria Acebo and Ángel Alonso, is the result of a complex set of elements taken from other architectures, which highlight the interests and representatives of the authors.

The building appears as a construction of prisms grouped around a vertical axis of communication, totally contained in a large cube that brings the translucent walls of the building.

The MUNCYT of La Coruna reflects in its architecture the genetic characteristics inherited from other works, representing a contemporary way of interpreting the architectural idea: as a complex system of relationships between the known elements.

This building in La Coruña offers a complex kinship that comes from the works of avant-garde Russian and Dutch, and other recent architectural experiences. In this building there are works such as *The City Dynamic Klutis*, or the *Against-constructions of Van Doesburg*, as well as the double house in Utrecht of MVRDV, the Museum of Zumthor in Bregenz, the embassy of Berlin and, above all, the Library of Seattle by Koolhaas. The systems of relations which arouse from all these works are the basic ingredients for the design of MUNCYT of La Coruna, which is one of the most intense and precious architectures of recent years in Spain.

Over the Traces of the Past. The Praça Nova at St. George Castle by João Luís Carrilho da Graça

Fabio Cutroni

The projects of João Luís Carrilho da Graça seem to arise almost spontaneously from a preliminary identification of the principles that govern each specific urban structure, analyzed in its intimate relationship with the topography. Every work of architecture, therefore, finds its deeper reasons outside itself, in the intertwining of natural and artificial signs, visible or hidden signs – sometimes erased signs – where are settled the history and the memory of a place. In this conceptual and methodological framework is included the design for the archaeological area of the Praça Nova at St. Jorge Castle in Lisbon. Carrilho da Graça accepts the jumble of remains of urban stratigraphy in their complex totality and shows that, even in the presence of archeology, the architectural project can always qualify itself as a transformation project. The strategic line of the design action research an oppositional dialectic between the rough, grainy archeological traces and the clear, distilled contemporary intrusions, overwritten on the archeological text so to query its deeper meaning, to resume and actualize a process of transformation left hanging, thus finding the continuity of a dialogue between the inheritance of the past, the reality of the present and the vision of the future.

Aires Mateus Architectures. Between Poetic Tension and Formal Severity

Domizia Mandolesi

The project for the new Telecom Call Centre in Santo Tirso, a town of 72,000 residents in the municipality of Porto, represents a mature fusion of the research of Aires Mateus and the invariant elements of their poetic. Their work is marked by three recurring themes: the creation of architecture through a system of basic elements comprised of enclosures, rooms and paths; the definition of spatial quality through the modulation of natural light; the search for an osmotic relationship between the building and the topography of its site.

The leitmotif of this specific project is the interpretation of the notion of the urban edge. The new construction is situated on a lot suspended between a consolidated urban fabric and a broad agricultural valley. This condition, coupled with the particular topography of the terrain, are assumed as initial inputs and transformed from obstacles into fundamental resources. The expressive strength and character of the building are born of the clash between a clear partition and the physical characteristics of the site, and the tensions generated by a coupling of opposites: artificial/natural, rectilinear/articulated, solid/void, internal/external, light/shadow, closed/open. The voids, the cavities in shadow and those flooded with light that model a dynamic and multi-directional space, where walls do not separate, but instead mark the passage between contiguous spaces, with different qualities, generating a suggestive sequence of spatial situations.

Álava Archaeological Museum by Francisco Mangado

Marina Pugnaletto

The Archaeological Museum of Álava is an interesting work that solves well the complex system of relationships between archaeology, a museum, building rehabilitation and the insertion of a new building in an historical urban context.

The presence in the lot of Palacio de Bendaña (5th century) has made a strong constraint for the architect. The BIBAT Museum complex, wanted by the Diputación Foral de Álava, created a court of common access from the Archaeological Museum and the Naipes Fournier Museum that, like a great dug space, connects two different realities in continuous dialogue.

The Museum is characterized by a skin of U bent bronze foils, which constitutes the coating of the opaque parts of the walls and the sunscreen system of those transparent and translucent. This almost continuous surface is the exterior coating of peripheral walls of great thickness that contain showcase, multimedia projection systems, pillars and technical equipment; it is interrupted by few splayed openings of large dimensions that allow to give a look from the inside on the contemporary. Light inclined prisms protrude from the roof as lanterns into the night and cross the interior spaces, covered with very dark wood. The stair, shielded by a wall of glass with bronze sunscreen system, overlooks the courtyard access.

Urban Metamorphosis in Mérida: a Vital Dialogue Between Architecture and Archeology

Alessandra Capuano

In Mérida public institutions have taken the task and the responsibility to promote the activation and renewal, over time, of a fruitful and constructive dialogue between past and future. The project of José María Sánchez García is part of a complex of actions very articulated, which was inaugurated with the creation of the Museum of Roman Art by Rafael Moneo in 1985. The process is carried on with the construction of the Lusitania bridge by Santiago Calatrava in 1991, which doubles the ancient Roman bridge and has been designed as a gateway to the city, continues with the realization of the Office of Extremadura Regional Council Chamber by Navarro Baldeweg of 1995 and will continue with the Visigoth Museum of Paredes y Pedrosa, not yet built. Are all architectural and urban interventions that activate a new relationship between the archaeological context and the contemporary city establishing, from time to time, a particular and specific dialogue with the past, building on, under, next to the ruins new parts of the city. Here the stones that shaped ancient architecture are preserved, but are also open to new interpretations that insert them in a regeneration process of contemporary re-signification of the past.

The Proportion of Guillermo Vázquez Consuegra Architecture. The Visitors Center in Baelo-Claudia

Luca Lanini

Baelo-Claudia is an ancient roman town on the outskirts of Bononia, near Cadiz. The topic that was offered to Guillermo Vázquez Consuegra in 1998 (completed only in 2007) is a Center for the visitors of the archeological compound containing exposition and pedagogical area as long as administrative and logistical spaces.

The program is organized in a compact and thick volume slightly deformed that becomes part of an 'architectural promenade' conducting to the discovery of the archeological ruins of the Roman town.

An architecture dense and Mediterranean, compact and enclosed, opening to the outside only through a system of four patios, each with different size and formal outcome, constituting a lock sequence of spaces within the building to set a complex set of relationships with interiors and with views.

A building facing the difficult relationship among modern architecture, landscape and ruins.