

UNA ARCHITETTURA COME ME

About the architecture of César Ruiz Larrea

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In 1980, an interesting text by J. Hedjuck was published in Domus about the house that Libera built for Malaparte in 1938 in Capri. This text's title "A house come me" resumed quite well the author's identification with his work, so common to creators. It is also so with César Ruiz-Larrea. There is such identification with his architecture that we could properly say that he makes a "come me architecture" just as Libera did. That is what great creators, great architects, have always done. If I had to synthesize some of his attributes as an architect, I would talk of the great simplicity of his approach, his strong constructive clarity and sharp spatial transparency, all of which could be applied both to his work and his life. All these notes comprising his architecture are usually counterpointed by some architectural heterodoxy as if introducing that point of contradiction exposed by Venturi. Thus, in Ruiseñada house, the fact of supporting the high porch's side element by bladed pillars convey a defying "Why not?". The result is not only curious but also of a great plastic efficiency.

Sometimes, I think that the strength of his work lies on the architect's vehemence in drawing his students while teaching at Madrid's Architecture Technical College. I've already pointed out that attending one of his classes is like being injected a pure dose, of architecture in vein. It is additive. Teaching has always been a good way of having that tools that build up architecture always ready to be used. That endless exercise of analysis and synthesis you do in class with your students, keep the teaching architect in the first-rate line.

We can now go on to comment some of his works.

EL HIERRO ISLAND HOUSE (A SPIDER'S WEB IN THE LANDSCAPE)

This house expresses a wish of fusion with nature, with the environment, present in many of his works. Without mentioning the tectonics and the stereotomics, a strong contrast is established here between a part of his architecture, linked to that land formed by lava, in the well assumed lesson of terraced agriculture and on the other hand, a strictly ordered structure, painted in white, that colonizes the landscape fitting it into a framework formed by this "Spider's web" like subtle net that gives every perspective and detail its own value. On that spatial network the pieces containing the characteristic functions of living in that lost paradise are conveniently included, opened and closed.

OFFICE BUILDING AT ALCALÁ GALIANO STREET (A SPIDER'S WEB IN THE CITY)

When some things and works are analytically looked at from the distance given by time, one can find stunning coincidences. Trying to find reasonings to analyze the Alcalá Galiana Office Building, such coincidences are found when proving that the same octagonal scheme that captures El Hierro's landscape into a spider's web is also present

here, this time by means of a huge Vierendel beam structurally containing the town's web.

To begin with I must say I've always considered this building, sited in the very center of the city, magnificent. After my first visit to it together with Ruiz Larrea himself, I've gone through it many times just to go on confirming his sensible choice. And I don't know why it always reminds me of The Maison Verre by Pierre Chareau. Could this be because it is also set up into a big city's courtyard? If that parisian performance prevented the ugly neighbouring fagades and courtyard to be seen by means of its traslucid skin, what Ruiz-Larrea's performance in Madrid (completely diaphanous) does is to incorporate it by drawing it to his own grounds instead of rejecting or denying the contiguous scene, making of this inner workspace to be enlarged by the air of a communal courtyard. A real success.

GÜIMAR PYRAMIDS (AS THE LAND ITSELF)

The building for the Ethnographic Park at Güimar Pyramids has a double attribute. On the one hand its presence has the strength endwed by its huge walls, enhancing the dark stone terraces of the place. On the other hand, they seem to disappear in the quiet space they produce. The ancient courtyard resource, in chiaroscuro sequencing, provide the whole place with a strong archaic character quite suitable to its functions. Water, always present (sounding, flowing, vibrating) accompanies all along the route. And the light, filtered by those courtyards, falls with the same weight as if it were water getting down from above, like a curtain.

If I had to highlight some spatial effect or sensation that would be horizontality. It is as being stuck to the ground, as if being «inside the ground itself», as a modern cave with a strong stereotomic sense. Definitively, it is an impeccable exercise of dominion over light and gravity. It is what all architecture must do.

CANAL PLUS BUILDING: (EVEN MORE)

About the building for Canal Plus -now in process of being built- I will only repeat what I already said as a member of the panel of judges for the open contest, pointing out those most outstanding values that deserved this project the first prize. It is a well-ordered space, very well sectioned by means of a very neatly measured structure (how important it is to propose adequate generic measurements for large dimensions). With a very efficient section in its understanding of light (how important it is to solve adequate dimensions in a lineal building section). With very interesting complex convergence spaces (how important it is to solve access areas in complex program buildings). The structure is always not only that element endowing the ground with gravity but also and basically, that transmitting element that creates the building spatial order.

When I was invited to be the only judge for that open competition, I was given the names of contestants and their projects but without relating names to projects. I managed not to label them and tried to analyze them very rigorously. The winning project happened to be that of César Ruiz-Larrea and, I think, those parameters I've already mentioned at the beginning: order, light and well resolved spaces. Always light and gravity are brought under control, they are clearly solved in This project, coming into life while this is being written.

A MATURE ARCHITECT

I applied for astronomy. Of the 4.000 students at College only 15 boys and 14 girls looked up to de sky. Ali the others run outside at the athletics tracks. They looked down to their feet.

With this beautiful statement written by Ray Bradbury in *Death is a lonely matter* I have started my classes more than once. And I think that it perfectly suits to César Ruiz-Larrea in that overwhelming activity of his architecture that is also his life. He is an architect that passes through life "looking up to the sky". He still keeps that catching enthusiasm of the first day, when he decided to choose architecture, and what is best, also his architecture manages to catch us, to provoke that enthusiasm. This is not only due to the architect's attitude when developing and explaining it but also, and mainly, because of the great quality of his built works. Thus, in his last work, the small house in Ruiseñada, one could say it is the work of a newcomer, one with a great «projecting ambition». Such is the freshness of his planning, the radical nature of construction, the beauty of its spaces, being at the same time a mature work, plenty of serenity, of this attentive gaze at landscape. His is, definitively, a complete architecture, one of a mature architect, that of someone who creates beauty.

Alberto Campo Baeza