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Postwar**

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Italian and Spanish Architecture in the Postwar

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Abstract

After the Second World War, Italian and Spanish architects abandon Rationalism to explore new possibilities for architecture. They rethink and renovate the fundamental elements of the project with the aim to evolve Rationalist concepts and apply them in specific cases. They do not have an explicit programme but they just have a common cultural background made of rationalism, vernacular architecture and Scandinavian architecture.

In the Fifties and Sixties, after the destructions caused by war, Italy and Spain upheld an important “Economic Boom”. In this period, architecture is called to realize a huge quantity of buildings in a very short time, with poor materials and without an industrialized building process. Italian and Spanish architects get inspired from the conditions and experiment a new architectural attitude. So architects as Gardella, Ridolfi, Albini, Moretti in Italy; Coderch, Cabrero, De la Sota, Ferdandez del Amo in Spain, observe the local traditional architecture to find the solutions they need in their context. They are helped by reviews like “*Casabella*”, “*Domus*”, “*Arquitectura*”, “*Quaderns*” which promote this attitude.

Several composition items are abandoned like the roof garden and the ribbon windows. The shape of the volume is decided according to the traditions and the relationship with the context in order to integrate the building in the city. Buildings are made of local materials and labour forces.

Today, studying the Italian and Spanish themes and architecture means to have a model of working with history and local peculiarities without falling in camouflage or historicism.

Keywords: Italy, Spain, Postwar, Vernacular, Rationalism.

Introduction

In the Postwar, Italian and Spanish architects developed a new architectural attitude. They investigated the relationship with a poor tradition, with the physical context, and found the best way to project in a context of poverty and weak industrialization of the building process. The architectural production of that period becomes totally innovative.

This article is composed by four parts: the first and the second shall define the historical and cultural context in which the new architecture is developed. The third and the fourth analyze the architectural problems investigating the topics and the elements and the elements. In this way, it is possible to define the entire phenomenon and emerges as the conditions influence the architectural languages.

Postwar Conditions

The Postwar for Spain and Italy is a period of deep changes and transformations.

In the Fifties, the economies of Italy and Spain experienced a very positive period. While Italy is helped by the Marshall Plan from 1947 until 1951, Spain signed the *Pact of Madrid* with United States in 1953, receiving substantial funds while permitting the establishment of American military bases. Such foreign investment assistance was determinant in expanding the “*Economic Miracle*” experienced in both nations.

For the Spain of dictator Francisco Franco, the *Pact of Madrid* meant the end of international isolation and a new role in the global market. Such receptiveness would gradually open restrictions elsewhere, for instance with the Spanish Government's liberalization of the press in 1966, allowing a more flexible cultural opening to the world.

In Italy, as underlined by Tafuri (2002), the peasant population moved to the big cities like Rome, Milan, Turin which became subject to pressures to grow to host migrants from the rural exodus. That increased the availability of labor forces but also the need of building new neighborhoods. While the cities of North Italy were developing an important industrialization, Rome becomes a very dynamic artistic environment. During the Fifties artists from all around Europe move to Rome to meet each other, a common trend as Italian Cinema diligently highlights. The notorious film *La Dolce Vita* of Fellini (1960) describes Rome as an ideal city as it was in that period. While the city center experiences its very favorable period, the difficult conditions of periphery are well described by the Neorealist Cinema of De Sica and Rossellini.

Spain does not take part in the Second World War but its own bloodshed in late Thirties concentrates power dynamics in the hands of Francisco Franco as Civil War victor. In the Fifties Spain is divided in a strong latent dualism between its most important cities: Madrid and Barcelona. The capital is the city in which the dictatorship shows its power, and it chases the opportunity to

build new neighborhoods for immigrants that settle in a city in continuous growth.

The political leaders were applauded for its urban greatness in Madrid, whereas Barcelona expanded as a bourgeois city, taking some advantages from foreign openness while continuing its jealous industrialization process. While the instructions for the growth of Madrid come from the Government, in Barcelona the private sector invest to build the new city.

Italian and Spanish Architects

Italy

During the Postwar period, almost all the Italian architects who took part in the Rationalism begin to work in new directions. This attitude is very different with respect to the European tendency. In fact, while in the whole Europe Rationalism is the key for the reconstruction, the Italians choose to experiment different models. Architects like Figini and Pollini, Gardella, Ridolfi, Moretti, Libera decide to follow the way traced by Giuseppe Pagano and his Exposition about Rural Architecture in the Triennale in 1936 (Pagano 1936). Actually Italian rationalists never follow a pure way of the International Style (as demonstrated by the buildings of Giuseppe Terragni, Luigi Cosenza, Bernard Rudofsky, Ignazio Gardella, Luigi Moretti) but always try to integrate it with another attitude (classical for Terragni, baroque for Moretti, rural for Cosenza, Rudofsky, Gardella or Figini and Pollini) that confers complexity and symbolic richness to their projects.

Pagano, with his investigation about the Italian Rural Architecture, tries to demonstrate that the task of Rationalism is to look and learn from the logic and useful buildings and not just to the shapes. He finds in the Rural Architecture a deep respect for the logic of construction.

It is important to underline that Fascism spent important energies in ruralizing Italy to make possible its autarkic policy. So the effort of Pagano was encouraged by the government that considered it a support for its policy. Meanwhile Bernard Rudofsky does his studies about the not-official architecture and publishes some of the results in *Domus* (Rudofsky 1938) ; but it is necessary to wait the Exposition at Moma in 1964 (Rudofsky 1964) to see the complete publications of his researches. This delay is due to the resistance of the architectural critic to recognize the importance and influence of not-official architecture.

The Italian Postwar period is deeply conditioned by the politics. Most Italian architects develop a strong relationship with the Communist Party and often they take part in it (Ridolfi and De Carlo for example). For this reason usually the collaboration among architects is not just professional but it involves also their personal beliefs. This fact influences the historiography of architecture because it creates a solid relationship among some of architects while others are intentionally forgotten (as it happens for Luigi Moretti).

Spain

The Spanish architects have had a very difficult time since the Civil War to the early Fifties. In that period the crisis of the building sector affected the Spanish Rationalism.

In the Twenties and Thirties Spanish architects demonstrated their very good skills, reflected in the numerous possibilities they have to build also in strategic places of their cities. Thanks to the relationship with the close France, Rationalism affirmed itself during the second half of the Twenties and in the first half of the Thirties by achieving very good results, as demonstrated by the projects of the GATCPAC of Barcelona, by the Nautic Club of San Sebastian, projected by J. Manuel Aizpurúa and Joaquín Labayen, and in Madrid by the Cine Barceló of Luis Gutiérrez Soto, the Edificio Carrión in the Gran Vía of the year 1933 by Luis Martínez Feduchi and Vicente Eced, the Frontón Recoletas of Eduardo Torroja and Secondino Zuazo. The same Torroja has planned the hippodrome of Madrid, an important building that demonstrates a deep attention for the structural theme. During the Thirties the expressionist current influenced many projects.

Among many others, one has to remember Fernando García Mercadal and in particular Joseph Ll. Sert that during the Civil War migrates to Paris in the Atelier of Le Corbusier and in the Fifties represents a key of connection between Catalonia and France. Except him and Torroja, all the other architects stop their production in 1936 and Spain opens a period of theoretical reflection that lasts until the Fifties.

Common Interests

The protagonists of the Spanish architecture of the Postwar period are people different from before. While Italian architects are ready to experiment new ways, Spanish architects need to find a model to follow. They do not want to copy foreign models but they want to define an own way. For this reason they decide to evoke the vernacular architecture and look at Italy and Finland to find the way to develop it.

Italy elaborates before Spain the new attitude for two reasons: on the one hand because the way toward a definition of a new semantic and syntax has started during the Thirties, on the other hand because of the difference of age between Italian and Spanish architects. While the Italian architects, protagonists of the Postwar period, are born in the early years of the Twenty Century, most of the Spanish architects are born approximately fifteen or twenty years later. Spain and Italy also have a common historical and cultural background: a similar urban structure, a similar climate condition, a common history and overall a similar language. Language is very important because permits an exchange of texts and reviews.

The Spanish Postwar period experiences a dualism between Madrid and Barcelona. In the Capital architects like Francisco Cabrero, José Luis Fernández del Amo, Alejandro de la Sota, Rafael Aburto work for the government and realize institutional and public buildings. The commitment of Barcelona is generally private and architects like José Antoni Coderch, Josep

M. Sostres, Ricardo Bofill, Federico Correa y Alfonso Milà, Oscar Clotet y Lluís Tusquets realize overall private buildings, office buildings, unfamiliar villas or apartment blocks.

There are very few notable architects out of Madrid or Barcelona: the most important among them is Luis Peña Ganchegui with his projects in the Basque Country.

Italy and Spain have a common admiration for the Scandinavian architecture. In fact Alvar Aalto, Gunnar Asplund and Siegur Lewerentz are very studied as architects that introduce in Europe a modernity different respect to the Rationalism.

At the same time Bruno Zevi (1948) introduces in Italy the idea of Organicism of F.L.Wright. He elaborates a new definition of the concept of Space and Time and focuses the attention on the living space (making no difference between the building and the city).

The Spanish architects that in the Postwar period visit Rome are surprised to discover a very modern city. Julio Lafuente for example admires so much the modern Italian architecture that decides to settle in Rome. Francisco Cabrero after his journey in Italy changes the topics of his research. The same happens for many others Spanish architects. Some of them received also a studentship to pass an year in the Real Academia of Roma that assumes a very important role for the exchange of ideas.

Architecture follows the same way from the early Fifties until the end of the Sixties when important texts, that open new ways to architecture, are edited: "Contradiction and Complexity in Architecture" of Robert Venturi (1966), "L'architettura della città" of Aldo Rossi (1966) and "Il territorio dell'architettura" of Vittorio Gregotti (1966). These texts allow a change in architecture, first of all due to the reform of the schools of architecture after the revolution of Sixty-eight and due to project as the Cemetery of Modena of Aldo Rossi (1971), and the University of Florence, the winner project of Vittorio Gregotti and Franco Purini.

In Spain, at the end of the Sixties, as the number of students consistently increases in Universities, the Government decides to change the cultural lines of the Schools of Architecture, and nominates Rafael Moneo Professor in Barcelona, José Luis Fernández del Amo in Madrid and does not accept Alejandro de la Sota as Professor in Madrid. Those decisions change the destiny of the Architectural Schools that in the following years start new kinds of researches.

Reviews

Reviews in this period have a very important role of transmission of the ideas, because, as affirmed by Ricardo Bofill, "*The architects of Barcelona are influenced and many times copy not from the realizations, but from the reviews and specialized book that come from Italy, Finland and countries which features are similar at the Catalan ones.*"(Bofill 65)

Reviews transmit ideas by permitting to establish new points of contact between Italy and Spain. It is important to consider that only *Domus* can enter

in Spain until the law about the freedom of press in 1966. That law permits to accede to *Casabella* of E.N. Rogers. Another important Italian review is *L'architettura. Cronaca e Storia* directed by B. Zevi.

If on the one hand the Italian reviews are read in Spain, on the other hand local reviews as *Nueva Forma*, *Arquitecturas Bis*, *Quaderns de Arquitectura*, *Arquitectura*, testify the effort to elaborate a new architectural attitude.

The role of *Domus* is very important because it describes very carefully the research of the Catalan architects like the first projects of Coderch and also focuses on the rural architecture (consider for example the article of 1949 about the Architecture of the Baleari in which is described the vernacular tradition). It is important to underline the friendship between Giò Ponti (Ponti 1949) (director of *Domus*) and Jose Antoni Coderch, the most influential Catalan architect of the Postwar. This friendship is testified by many visits that they made each other or by their epistolary relationship. Coderch is also the author of the Spanish Pavillon at the Triennale of Milano in 1951.

In these years Coderch keeps himself connected with the Italian environment owing to his presence at the Ciam Summer School in Venice, his relationship with the Triennale and by attending to the Team X in which he meets G. De Carlo. Sometimes also his collaborator Federico Correa participates in the reunion of the Team X. In some of these reunions he meets other Italian figures as Mario Ridolfi. It is important to underline that two exchange axes exist: Rome-Madrid and Milan-Barcelona. The first couple represents the architecture (and architects) of the political power and public institutions, while the second couple unifies two bourgeois cities in which private enterprises lead the reconstruction and the growth of the cities. There are two very different conditions for the architects of these cities. Consequently the architects establish connections with the group in similar situation.

In 1953, after standoff from the war, *Casabella* starts to be edited with the name of *Casabella-Continuità*. It is directed by E.N. Rogers and the team is composed by him, V. Gregotti, M. Zanuso and G. De Carlo. Since the initial numbers one can notice its cultural line. Rogers talks about the “*Preesistenze ambientali*” (1955) underlining that architecture has to establish a relationship with the site in which is placed. Rogers considers not only the physical ambient but the whole environmental conditions of the place. So the architecture has to interact with the existent and enrich it: it is not a renounce to build in a modern style but an effort to dialogue with it to obtain a positive synergy. For many years Rogers writes about it and Italian architects seem to take the same way. In April 1959 Reyner Bahnam (Banham 1959), from the pages of *Architectural Review*, criticizes the Italian Postwar architecture and Rogers (1959) answers explicating that Bahnam does not understand the true spirit of evolution and not regression of Italy.

The year 1959 is also the year of the Ciam of Otterlo. In that occasion the Italian delegation showed an aversion with the formal conservatism of the Rationalism.

Topics of a New Architectural Attitude

Postwar Italian and Spanish architecture seem to be the synthesis of three components: Rationalism, Vernacular architecture and Scandinavian architecture. In the fifties Casabella-Continuità publishes articles about these topics in the majority of its numbers. Even if the models are the same, every architect elaborates its own style. Models are common but principles are personal and various. One of the archetypical models is the Mediterranean house.

Vernacular Architecture

While Rationalism has revolutionized the semantic and the syntax of the architectural language, considering only the official history, Italian and Spanish architects in the Postwar have decided to follow the poor, vernacular tradition. They do not contradict the Rationalist innovations but just want to take new directions, by researching a new architectural attitude. They do a synthesis of the architectural history and they do not censure anything of the past (differently by the battle of Rationalism against the Academy) and so they are able to use a wide cultural wage. They research an architecture adequate for its time.

For the first time in the history of European architecture, poor materials, vernacular semantic and syntax are widely employed and find an official utilization. The not-official architecture, as called by Bernard Rudofsky, permeates the “noble” history, and combined with modern rules, gives life to a new architectural current.

Theory and Practice

Architects are not guided by important texts, as it happened in the previous period (one can think to the essays of Le Corbusier in Europe, of Persico and Pagano in Italy) or in the following one (marked by essays of Robert Venturi, Aldo Rossi, Vittorio Gregotti). Authority is not given to theorization. This becomes a phase of deep experimentation and research, with a sentiment of modesty. Coderch demonstrates it with his article titled “*No son genios lo que necesitamos ahora*” published by Domus in 1961 (Coderch 1961). For Coderch, theory does not come before Practice but it is the result of observation and experimentation.

At the same time, Italian architects as Ignazio Gardella (Gardella 2013) or Mario Ridolfi do not theorize the principles of architecture but just experiment new way through the project (De Carlo 1953). Mario Ridolfi uses an inductive method to write the first *Manuale dell'architetto* (Ridolfi 1946).

Eco-architecture

Italian and Spanish architects discover a culture in which the building is conceived to be ecological and energy-safe, due to the poverty of resources: buildings are made of local materials and labour forces, volumes are defined to exploit local climatic vantages and resist to adverse conditions, buildings

integrate traditional technologies to take advantage of local conditions, projects respect the environment and get inspired from it. The importance of this attitude is that buildings do not have to produce energy but just save it; in this way the architect considers with modesty the ecological problem from the first phases of the project. Usually this attitude it is not expressed but it is left implicit because until the 1970s ecology is not considered an emergency. The most important innovation is cultural: in the postwar Italian and Spanish architects define a style for an architecture very connected with its place and that takes advantage of the local climatic and ecological features.

Aspect of the Building

It is possible to introduce a new concept: the “Aspect of the building” as the impressions that a construction give to the people (architect or not) for the symbolic significance of its elements. For example a white one storey building with small windows composed by various pure volumes reminds the archetypical Mediterranean house.

Often Italian and Spanish architects want to evoke that “Aspect”, in order to establish a relationship with the place and the local culture. If one analyses the project of *Viviendas en Sitges* by J.A. Coderch and M. Valls, one discovers a strong contradiction between plans and façades. While the plan follows an orthogonal and well proportioned order, with separation between passages and served rooms (as common under the Rationalist architectures), the aggregation of volumes perceived from outside seems casual and built in different time phases (as it happens in the traditional architecture). The Time loses its significance of necessary condition to generate a complex aggregation. But that project demonstrates that it is possible to study the traditional vocabulary and re-apply it in modern conditions by reaching an interesting synergy.

The Elements

By learning from the Vernacular, Italian and Spanish architects extend their vocabulary and employ many elements of the tradition that were not used during the Rationalist epoch.

The five points theorized by Le Corbusier are no longer a starting point for architecture but just a possibility offered to the architectural language.

As affirmed by Francesco Venezia, every building establishes a relationship with three elements: gravity, light and horizon. In the Postwar these three topics are at the core of the architectural issue.

Gravity

The relationship with gravity, also studied by Kenneth Frampton (2008) and Alberto Campo Baeza, is a fundamental topic of architecture. Classical architecture establishes a sequence of elements that goes from the weightier to the lightest. This centuries-old rule of order is changed under Rationalism. The

new materials allow an empty space under the building known as Pilotis. Le Corbusier buildings are lifted from the terrain and it creates a new spatiality.

Postwar Italian and Spanish architects define a new relationship with gravity. For architects like Gardella and Albini the building is a volume or a combination of volumes that can enter in the terrain at the same way as it is done in the upper levels. The building is an extrusion of a plane figure.

On the other hand Luigi Moretti, following baroque ideas, creates a strain between the volume and the terrain. His buildings always have a empty space (real or figurative) of certain proportions that suggests the impression of a building flowing in the air. In his idea different volumes and materials always have to be separated and so the volume does not have to touch the terrain.

It is important to analyse two different typologies: apartment blocks and villas.

As evident in Rome or Barcelona, the first typology has a façade formal structure that depends on the use. Generally the ground floor is open to let people enter and introduce to the building. There is a particular relationship between open and close spaces that creates an interesting transition area. It is possible to observe it in the buildings of Moretti, Monaco and Luccichenti but also in Catalan blocks of Coderch, of Bofill. In the urban context, the apartment block respects the classical tripartite façade but usually the ground floor is empty. The apartment levels are in evidence and often they are expanded toward the road.

Villas follow another idea. In the Fifties rich people used to build a villa nearby the sea and so it follows the archetypical Mediterranean principles. Materials are always locally sourced and usually using bricks or stones. Four examples are emblematic: La Saracena of Moretti, the summer house in Ibiza of Ricardo Bofill, the project for a Village in Sitges of Coderch y Valls, the project for a villa in Tangier of De la Sota. All these projects evidence the strong relationship between the natural and the artificial. In fact the artificial building is made with local materials and respects its features: the stone and the brick wall are solid with few little windows. Sometimes the solid material constitutes a basement as happens for the house in Sardinia project by Cini Boeri. The villas respect the archetype of the cave as closed spaces with few light where people can refuge.

Light

In the Sixties Gregotti (1965) notices a similar feature between Italian and Spanish architecture. He considers that architects resist to the temptation of brilliant glass buildings. In fact, while in the central Europe, the concrete technology permits to make big opening in the façades of the buildings, the Mediterranean countries prefer to maintain small windows that do not let enter too much light in the interiors. This attitude is also the reason of the rediscovering of the jealousy windows. At the same time it is a way to control the light and the temperature but also a way to define new façades. Coderch is the first one who utilizes that traditional technology and he exposes a jealousy

window at the Triennale of 1951 in Milan. He also uses it in many buildings like in the Barceloneta Apartment or in the Casa Catusus of Sitges.

Horizon

The villas are characterized by a sense of horizontal. Since the roofs are flat, the angles and the edges of the volume are more evidenced. All this evidences the volume in contrast with the environment and the sky. For this reason the volume is usually compact and not fragmented in many portions. All these compact, horizontal and white volumes establish a relationship with the horizon, generally defined by the sea. They evidence the well defined line of the horizon but at the same time they receive from it the visual power as the only exceptional volume. When possible these houses are not in the seaside but they are positioned some meters higher. In this way the architect permits a better view and perception of the sea from the interior of the house.

Time

The time is the condition in which architecture evolves. The vernacular building is constituted by aggregation of simple cells. The dimension of the cell depends on the technology used to cover the closed space. Sometimes spaces are covered with wood beams, sometimes with stone domes and so one needs to aggregate small cells to obtain big construction. The aggregation needs many steeps and so vernacular architecture never has a definitive shape. Volumes are added, destroyed, modified and this process lasts for the whole cycle life of a building. So the continuous growth and transformation always propose different images. A building that always changes cannot permit one to identify and define a model. So the Time is the necessary condition to understand vernacular architecture. In the Postwar the architects that try to propose this kind of transformation (one can think to the village of Coderch and Valls in Sitges) make an artificial and historically false operation but the quality of the result demonstrates a strong control of complexity.

A Metaphor of Reinterpretation: Roof

In the Postwar the pitched roof reappears. There are three models: the first one is the Casa Borsalino of Gardella, the second one the Torri Ina of Mario Ridolfi (Censi 2014) and the third one the apartment block of Clotet y Tuquets in Barcelona. In the first one the roof assumes new features respect to the tradition. It is nearly flat and seems to be symbolic. This attitude is the same of Coderch in Barceloneta Block. In the second case Ridolfi uses a roof that does not cover anything. In fact it covers a flat roof behind it and its scope is just to hide the floor behind. In this case the roof has a figurative feature. A similar case is the Casa Girasole of Moretti. Clotet y Tusquets re-propose the Catalan roof with chimneys, by reinterpreting the local tradition. Here the aim is to take the tradition in the modernity without denying its true spirit: chimneys are compositive elements but also useful for their function. Ricardo Bofill uses the same idea for some of his buildings.

Details and Building Technologies

The lack of industrialization, joint with policies to tackle widespread unemployment, is determinant for the emphasis of labour intensive technologies. This makes possible a non-standardized architecture and favours the professional specialization of the workers. The consequences are very important for two reasons: the first one is that the labour force is very cheap affording widespread developments and experimentation (even if in the other hand materials are expensive), the second reason is that the high specialization of the workers opens many possibilities to the projects. This generation of workers plays a protagonist role at the realization of the building, not only materially but also throughout the strategic thinking level. The work of Mario Ridolfi highlights this possibility: carefully planning all the singles parts of the building, sure that the very specialized labour forces permits to realize every part of the construction, coherently with the project.

Materials

Italians and Spanish architects rediscover the building technologies of the tradition. They use it because of the know-how of the labour forces and to develop an architecture with a historical memory of the place. The building technologies are evidenced by materials, different from place to place. The brick reappears, the jealous windows too. Coderch is one of the most important architects because he revalues many elements of the tradition. It is important to underline the philosophical and social value of this reinterpretation of elements.

Conclusions

The analysis of the architectural linguistic evolution occurred in Spain and Italy in their Postwar periods is very important because it can open many possibilities for the contemporary architectural debate.

On the one hand it allows an understanding of an attitude that values the historical heritage, both noble and unofficial, learning from it in facing architectural problems. On the other hand, in that attitude, one can find the way to evolve a modern architecture without denying the relevance of Rationalism.

Furthermore the Postwar Italian and Spanish architects demonstrate how it was possible to satisfy a huge demand of urbanization, guaranteeing architectural quality level despite the poor economic conditions (the results of the economic boom will be visible only in the following decades).

This research is also important for historiographical reasons: it analyzes an epoch in which the Italian architects were able to find the key to face the difficulties of a complex geographical and historical context with brilliant results. The abandon of this attitude during the Seventies coincided with the beginning of a long crisis for the Italian architecture. At the same time, the Spanish architects that follow on that way, open an extraordinary season for national architecture.

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