In 1964, still without the necessary historical perspective, the German author Sibyl Moholy-Nagy already explained in the first book published on the work of Villanueva, how his career drew a continuous line from the Renaissance traditions up to modernity. Following this hypothesis, it is possible to trace up to his last works—posterior to the book—that line that comes from the baggage assimilated by the Ecole de Beau-Arts from the classical world, and which ends by updating its own humanism under the impact of the sociological, technological and aesthetic changes of the 20th century. His discourse was marked by this preponderance of what is human, leaving what is formal—an unavoidable aspect of modernity, mitigated by the urgency and severity of the enormous task he assumed from his position as public architect. However, his verbalization does not prevent one from verifying in its modern work the synthetic action of the architect, his own artistry. Little given to theorization, he always explained his work from principles. For Villanueva, the most succinct way of expressing the architectural fact, from Vitruvius and throughout history, was still the classic triad: Utilitas, Firmitas, Venustas. Modernizing the terms in a language appropriate with contemporary thought he would talk of the function or programme rather than the convenience or usefulness, of the structure or the means of construction instead of the robustness; and of the form or space in substitution of the aesthetics. Going deeper into this theory, he explained: “(...) It is a duty on behalf of the architect, in that trilogy, to achieve a rational balance between the three components that by no means or reason can and should divorce and become independent; but on the contrary, must remain indissoluble. (...) Composing is creating a series of harmony () between values that have dimensions and that do not cover absolute conditions, since none of them is worthy on their own, but in function with others of another value; initially nothing is absolute. Architecture becomes architecture when it achieves in its accomplishments a relation, a balance, a harmony between these three values."

Nevertheless Villanueva felt it necessary to add the principles of economy and prefabrication. The second is a precision of the Firmitas and the first, being transversal, is intrinsically linked to functionality. The economy, by definition, has to do with the effectiveness (performance), rationally (reflection) and containment (control) in the use of resources. Principles, as stated above, linked to his practice from his public position, and that would end up defining his modern work: functional economy in the versatility of the spaces, structural economy in the paucity and constructive rigor and formal economy in the basic volumes. The strength, the meaning and even the contemporary justification to rescue and update the Vitruvian formula resided in the fact that Roman architects placed "Comfort" in the top vertex. Ensuring the functionality of the building, and using it as a generator of form, architecture will inevitably reach Vitruvian harmony. A balance only orchestrated by the architect and his mastery of the form.

Thus, any study on Villanueva's architecture cannot be based on a strictly formal approach, that is, analyzing the project only from aesthetic values, because he constantly exchanged them, in its internal legality, the corrective criterion of the look—the sensitive action—for that of reason. The "processus de pensée" of the Ecole, in which Villanueva was formed in the 20's, strong reasoning while remaining flexible, would enable his disciples to continuous adaptation. A rationality of a classical origin and an eclectic spirit, that— as Diderot said— allows one to establish a new philosophy on the basis of all the ones studied, reviewing the general principles to examine and discuss them based on experience and reason. We must also assume the proper tempo of Villanueva's work, and understand his evolution as on a border place, between a centre clearly defined by the European and North American modernity, with cohesive criteria allowing to recognize it as such, and a half-cast and fertile periphery, where his project has to still be able to synthetise universal and local values. Venezuela, as part of a Latin America historically considered periphery, is the geographical, cultural and political context in which Villanueva developed his career: A country to which he came to when he was only 28 years old and that after studying and assimilating the national historical legacy—to define his own tradition—he will end up leading the Venezuelan modernity and an outstanding chapter in that of the Latin American one. In August 1970, Villanueva was—along with Juan Pedro Pissani—responsible for the inaugural seminar of the third Faculty of Architecture of the country at the University of The Andes, Merida. After having seen the architecture of the twentieth century evolve, at the end of his career, he summoned teachers and pupils to overcome the former architectural composition in the education of future architects, facing the challenges of his time and in the framework of respect for the physical environment. We cannot say whether he was referring to the academic teaching of the French school or that derived from the Bauhaus methods and all the modern architectural culture that followed. His challenge is surely released from the certainty of the basic principles: Utilitas, Firmitas y Venustas, with the name given to them by every period of time, will remain the same, and the balance among them cannot produce anything other than Architecture.

José Javier Alayón (Guanare, Venezuela, 1974), Architect by the University of the Andes (Venezuela) and Dr. Of Architectural Design by the Polytechnic University of Catalonia. He is an independent researcher and designer.