

Lecture given to the Academy of Architecture of France, on July 19th in 1954, on the occasion of his appointment as a corresponding member.

1

The architect has an extremely complex and contradictory personality. The artistic value of his or her work cannot be doubted. Hundreds of fundamental architectural works in the history of human culture prove it.

Contemporary criticism has highlighted that an architectural work can achieve absolutely similar expressive levels to the levels attained by the best works of literature, painting or music. But in the case of architecture, the degree of dependence of external circumstances (of the client, of the economy, of the level of the means of production, of the society as a whole) is immensely higher and coercive. It is obviously not a question of the problem of creative freedom.

All artistic expressions are performed within structures that have conditions imposed on them, which establish the opportunities and the premises for its manifestation. Moreover, the artistic realization "precisely" comes to life under its coherence with the structure that serves it as a natural, necessary, unflinching support. The level of expression is directly related to its penetration in the content of the historical situation. For the Architect this postulation is even more rigorous and true. The recognition of the social world where the Architect is obliged to move is the precondition for the Architect's very existence.

2

The architect lives in a sometimes very dramatic disequilibrium, caused by the instability and by the contradictions of the society that surrounds and influences him/her.

The architect, due to the historical development of his/her personality, to the accumulation of traditions and experiences, has reached, as a social figure, a very high level of consciousness that prevents him/her from accepting a passive role in the cycle of the construction of space for man.

The architect has today a historical conscious-

ness of his/her role. For this reason he/she will constantly strive so that his/her catalytic faculties, anticipatory perceptions and attributions of natural creator are recognized.

The architect cannot resign himself/herself to being a mere translator, mechanical and passive.

The architect must be critical and accusatory. In this way he/she will increase in his/her work the value of rescue and provision.

Briefly, I could give the following definition:

The architect is an intellectual, by means of education and function. He/she must be a technical expert, to carry out his/her intellectual dreams. If these dreams are particularly rich, vivid and poetic, this means that he/she at times can also be an artist.

3

More than outlining a philosophy or architectural theory, which I would say are the principles that guide me in my work. I consider that the specific expressive means of architecture is the internal space, the fluid space, used and enjoyed by mankind.

From the essential invention of space as the privileged place of the composition, as the secret key of the entire project, it articulates the volumetric box. The supporting structure is specified. It vibrates with colour and the texture. It comes alive with the pulsations of energy installations, with the movements of the mechanical services.

I believe in the Cartesian virtues of logic and of coherence. Its application to the project is a law of survival. I am not attracted to closed systems. I am interested in all the contributions. All the new shapes and all the new contents that they express. All the new construction advances, from wherever they come from, they constitute a stimulus for me. I deny the value of doctrinal dogmatism, concerned to set boundaries, to separate essences, to punctiliously discriminate. I believe in an architecture that departs from reality, which develops a critical interpretation of it and returns to reality, modifying it with an incessant dialectic. For this reason, architecture seems to me to be an instrument of human perfection. As a cathartic element.

Society entrusts the architect with a role of urban redemption. We must not waste the opportunity or avoid the responsibility and the burden of the task. The dramatic aspect of the conflict between the purifying desire of the architectural will and the strict requirements

imposed by current human alienation does not exempt one from participating in the struggle for a new urbanism. I think the architect must be a humanist. His/Her vision should be global, universal and therefore local.

In effect, No one will be able to understand the accidental without before having discovered the great features of the essential.

I deduce, consequently, the reversibility of the urban value of architecture and the architectural value of urbanism. They both represent opposite aspects of a single entity.

4

I consider the architect as the maximum responsible and sole director of the architectural process. In his/her hands should lay the responsibilities and the privileges of the coordination of all the components.

With tact, sensitivity and firmness he/she must distribute the tasks and regulate the overall homogeneity of the work. He/She will not replace any of the specialists in their specific job. But he/she will be able to lead them and he/she will be able to take out of their teamwork a higher harmonic conformation qualitatively to the sum of all the partial values put in their work. I am concerned about the problem of a new synthesis of the different expressive means. It is an aspiration for me to redirect architecture, painting, and sculpture, to that of intimate, inextricable and significant cohesion. Perhaps the times are not yet mature for this purpose. It doesn't matter. I hope that our works will serve as a base for the integrated man of the 21st century. At least they will remind them of our anguish and they will make them understand the value of the progress.

5

I like the materials which because of their poorness, their plebeian sincerity, allow me to challenge the foolish conceit of exhibitionism. Among them I am particularly attracted to reinforced concrete, symbol of the constructive progress of an entire century, rough, docile and strong like an elephant, monumental like the stone, poor like the brick.

6

The changes that take place in the field of industrialization. Architecture will stop being handmade. Everything will be done by machine. This is the only valid response to the extension of the social meaning of architecture. The construction process carried out in the factory, universalized transport of the parts, mechanized mounting onsite, will revolutionize

the methods of design. Identify the order of values of the basic parts, not too small in order not to keep the advantages of prefabrication, and not too big in order not to compromise the freedom of creation, it will be the most useful and widespread research. The advent of the total industrialization of architecture will raise the search of creative fantasy to the level of urban and regional composition. Therefore a vast new chapter of the history of architecture will open up.

7 questions to Juan Pedro Posani

José Javier Alayón González

Juan Pedro Posani (Rome, 1931), emigrated to Venezuela when he was 17 years old and since then, began collaborating with Villanueva, 31 years older than him. His close relation made him participant in the architectural achievements of Villanueva and later on one of his best specialists. In his 80s, his critical vision has been collected in numerous writings, so these questions are addressed to inquire into the working and personal relationship that they maintained in the architectural and educational field.

1. In some published lists of works and projects of Villanueva, you appear as collaborator in the Church La Asunción (1957), the National Building of Maracaibo (1960), the Faculty of Economics (1963-67) and the Fina Gomez Foundation in Paris (1969). What other projects and what other collaborators shared the same stage?

My work with Master Villanueva was always performed in the field of the offices responsible for the projects for the University City of Caracas. Although tasks related to other projects of the Master were not infrequent. The ones you mention are examples. I should also note that for the strange inertias of life, I have never graduated as an architect, but I have been awarded a national prize (1992) and an honorary doctorate (UCV, 2000), both in architecture, which I owe to the colleagues of the Faculty in which I have taught for decades. I am, to put it in a way, one of the last specimens of that endangered species, that of the self-taught architects. The other collaborators that I can mention briefly (as in every work of architecture, there is always a team of collaborators, from specialist engineers to craftsmen) are the notable German engineer Rudolf Kaltenstadler and in particular the architect Gorka Dorransoro, who has even personally designed some excellent buildings of the University City.

2. Could you explain to me what it was like to work alongside Villanueva?

How did he combine his teaching and profes-

sional work?

With time and intellectual proximity, I was becoming a translator of the ideas of Master Villanueva. I translated into specific terms, into documents drawn for construction, his beautiful sketches -pure energy of synthesis- so that they could be converted into works. The daily professional practice over years and years, created the possibility of a fruitful dialogue for both, which also added for me the most pleasant commission, certainly from his essential approach, of writing his ideas in the theoretical and critical. The work of the University City was the site of design work but it was also one of study and teaching.

3. In your book, Architectures of Villanueva, you briefly explain how he, from an academic base axis, began to "break the geometry." Studying the sketches that reconstruct the design process of some of his works this becomes evident, but I would like to know if he justified this new order in any way, or it was simply a formal search, that is to say, plastic and not reasoned.

The discovery of the theoretical and historical contributions of Bruno Zevi, who would also become my teacher later on, and his insistence on the need for a dynamic breakage with the families of shapes and with the stereotyped conceptions of the rationalist movement, gradually led Villanueva to what you recall as "breaking the geometry". There never was in his later work at the end of the 40s an exclusively plastic orientated search. The visual sequences programmed in dynamic sequence, almost like a film, were the reason for the distortions and the accommodations, volumes, courtyards, light and dark shadows, which apparently disarticulate the sets. In summary, Villanueva's architecture of that time is subject to an eye that moves slowly and awakens chained perspectives.

4. I would like to know your opinion on the scarce artistic production of Villanueva, his "assemblies". Those small manual buildings, framed within the informal art that emerged in the 60's after the exhaustion of the abstract research, based on inalterable elements such as colour, line, rhythm, harmony, etc., which seem to question the immutable aspects of art and architecture that Villanueva constantly claimed. This was the field that he kept most private (perhaps his only evasion