

# History in the making. Built and Thought: with regard to the Historiography of Architecture

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Overwhelmed by the proliferation of an increasing number of formats through which the themes that occupy historians of architecture and urban planning are also subject to constant scrutiny at the service of creating content controlled by parameters of production and performance — a form of knowledge that cancels thought, with its symptoms most prevalent in universities — one cannot help but feel a certain relief when coming across a book, published on the occasion of a research meeting on the historiography of architecture, that is not only capable of questioning this rescission objectively but also does so, inquiring what is the way in which this story has been and is being thought. It is a unique format that works as an analogue tool for action and that establishes a relationship between authors and readers (non-consumers). Or in other words, not by judging the past, but by interrogating it, as seems to be the aim of architecture historians every time their work has achieved a level of autonomy that is justified by the establishment of its own epistemological foundations.

How is architecture written? How is the history of architecture written? What are the connections between buildings and the ideological assumptions that support them? How to link the universal condition of the grand historical narratives and the specific condition of microhistory? How does so-called historical science relate to architecture? How have different generations conditioned the renewal of the different historiographic traditions when building their own context? For example, from the universalist historicism of the German school to the absolute historicism of Croce, via positivist objectivity; from Marx's historical materialism to the Annales School? How has the discipline itself used those postmodern intellectual contributions that transformed historiographic discursive models to redefine itself? What has more weight, the work of architecture or its narrative potential, in other words, its ability to fit in according to which historical narrative? How do those histories based on the idea of the canon coexist with the most revisionist positions of a certain cultural history or with the cultural studies themselves? What has been and is currently the relationship of history with the project? Who has used who? Is the history

of architecture an autonomous discipline? Where is the interest in intellectually directing today's architecture from historical assumptions? How does architecture and its historicization contribute to defining — and deconstructing — national identities? What has been the role of post-colonial and non-Eurocentric theories? How have alterity, the presence of the other and the other, for example, as well as other paradigms or currents of thought that are no longer so recent (cultural, gender, global, environmental, digital studies) influenced the historiography of architecture? How have some survived (namely those related to language, first, and communication second)? What are the new paradigms and the new possible histories?

These are the questions that together with other more specific ones in relation to certain works, texts, contexts and authors journey from beginning to end of the book *Built and Thought. European and Transatlantic correspondence in the Historiography of Architecture [Lo construido y lo pensado. Correspondencias europeas y transatlánticas en la historiografía de la arquitectura]*<sup>1</sup>. The references include the palaces and villas of the Italian Renaissance to the church of St. Engelbert in Cologne by Dominikus Böhm, via Monticello by Thomas Jefferson; from Giorgio Vasari's *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* to *Teorie e storia dell'architettura* by Manfredo Tafuri, via *Art and Architecture in France 1500-1700* by Anthony Blunt; from Italy to Australia via Latin America; from Johann Joachim Winckelmann to Joseph Rykwert via Bruno Zevi, among many others on the cover flaps of the book.

Published in June 2022, the book compiles the research papers presented at the homonymous international conference held in Madrid — Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura (ETSAM) of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM) and Residencia de Estudiantes — from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, 2022. It was published by the Asociación de historiadores de la Arquitectura y el Urbanismo (AhAU; Association of Historians of Architecture and Urbanism), founded in 2017 thanks to the impulse, among others, of the historian Carlos Sambricio, who was professor of history of architecture and urban planning at ETSAM and a reference for several generations, including the youngest, several of whom now teach where he was chair, having the ambition to recover certain attitudes towards history apparently buried by style guides and storytelling.

This conference, led by the architects and professors Salvador Guerrero (ETSAM, UPM) and Joaquín Medina Warmburg (Karlsruher Institut Für Technologie; KIT), who also edited the book, was the third of the conferences organised by AhAU over the last six years. As demonstrated by the choice of topics (especially the last two) and the careful edition of the books that compile the research, these conferences were organised not with the spirit of being simply platforms that, under certain umbrellas — history,

theory or criticism or whatever the gender distinctions or the branches of knowledge or other typifications they might refer to — accept the need for teaching bodies to quantify and approve their work based on criteria that has little or nothing to do with the value of the research (despite the fact that some of their parameters intend to ensure it), and to reward, above all things, quantity over quality.

*Built and Thought* intentionally distances itself from those tedious and so often unusable conference book of papers with which it is customary to reflect the academic production of conferences. Furthermore, it does it through a book that stands up for itself and demands attention and time, starting from its colourful red covers. And it couldn't be otherwise in a meeting on historiography, dedicated to “sketch a profile of how the construction of the history of architecture has been addressed”<sup>2</sup>. The book, designed by Montse Lago (tipos móviles), recovers a certain avant-garde graphic style on the cover through the use of typography and, by extension, text as a communication tool. Therefore, and revealing again how much the medium is the message, the challenge of the book was triple (allow me the pun): how to tell how researchers tell how history has been (and is being) told (and, also, thought)?

The first two conferences of the AhAU, held in Madrid in the autumns of 2017 and 2019, were focused on the symbiotic relationship between Spain and two important milestones of contemporary architectural culture raised in the first third of the last century — specifically in the interwar period — without which the historical and social context of the avant-garde and modern architecture could not be explained. One is the International Conferences of Modern Architecture (CIAM) inaugurated in 1928 and, the other, Bauhaus, founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar (Germany) in 1919<sup>3</sup>. However, those first two conferences had a common denominator that does not appear in the third of them: Spain and the particularity of its own most recent history in relation to the rest of the western countries or, at least, the European ones — interestingly rejected today from some openly reactionary positions.

This issue, together with the careful selection of the nine topics used to address, as stated by Guerrero and Medina Warmburg, a reflection on “the historiographical construction of architecture from within and from outside at the same time, that is, (...) about the discipline itself, but within the currents of thought and the challenges that characterise the cultural world in order to build another history”<sup>4</sup>, made the list of participants diverse, especially in terms of age and origin, including the variable presentations that opened each of the nine thematic roundtables mainly presented by the members of the Scientific Committee of the Conference formed by Juan Calatrava, Julio Garnica, Jorge Fernández Liernur, Joaquim Moreno, María Teresa Muñoz, Carlos Plaza, Eduardo Prieto, Delfín Rodríguez, Josep M<sup>a</sup>. Rovira and André Tavares.

The themes were the following: the genres of the history of architecture (from grand narratives to microhistory); the generational question (masters and disciples); the materials, techniques and tools of the historian (the archaeologies of knowledge and the historian as *bricoleur*); the western canon and its questioning; the operational issue (the relationship between history and the project); the issue of identity (construction of national identities and international networks); post-colonial and post-Eurocentric historical approaches; the relationship between the history of architecture and Mass Media (from the travel guide to the World Wide Web); and, finally, the irruption of new paradigms and the renewal of historiographic traditions (through the debates about globalisation, the environment and the digital, among others). Each thematic block was thus characterised by four texts with images (communications), preceded by the previously mentioned introductory presentations without images. This enabled each thematic block to be read independently, despite the fact that, in many cases, when reading the book as a whole, inevitable links between them are perceived. There are a total of 44 contributions – including the presentations except for the first one – from Germany (2), Argentina (4), Australia (1), China (1), Spain (17), United States (3), France (1), Greece (1), Italy (10), Mexico (2), Portugal (1) and Switzerland (1).

Woven into each of the nine themes, the different contributions clearly reflect the approaches of the conference. Each of the themes is dealt with from its own specificity and in a kaleidoscopic way, inevitably subjected to the space created by the contextual and temporal margins marked by the call for research itself (European and transatlantic correspondences). Each demonstrates how the study of the principles of the different historiographic constructions used by the history of architecture is, at least, as necessary if not more so as the historization of the buildings themselves.

1. Salvador Guerrero and Medina Warmburg (eds.), *Lo construido y lo pensado. Correspondencias europeas y transatlántica en la historiografía de la arquitectura*, (Madrid: Asociación de historiadores de la Arquitectura y el Urbanismo (AhAU), Madrid, June 2022).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

3. The first of them, under the title of *Los años CIAM en España: la otra modernidad*, led by Sambricio himself with Ricardo Sánchez Lampreave (Universidade da Coruña, UDC), proposed a debate of opposites: the apparent orthodoxy of the approaches of the CIAM in comparison with the heterodox response from Spain as a result of the development of its political events. All this was around thematic lines that went from, among others, traditional architecture or the existence of Francoist architecture to developmentalism or the relationship between engineering and architecture. (See: Sánchez Lampreave, Ricardo (ed.), *Los años CIAM en España: la otra modernidad*, Asociación de historiadores de la Arquitectura y el Urbanismo (AhAU), Madrid, 2017). The second conference, with the title of “Bauhaus In and Out: Perspectives from Spain”, directed by Laura Martínez de Guereñu (IE University) and Carolina B. García-Estévez (Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya), based on several themes (including the connections between art and architecture, the issue around

technique and the generational issue between masters and disciples) had an ambition similar to the first conference: to refute or, at least, to question from omission, the contradiction and, also, from revelation, the European artistic and architectural avant-garde of the beginning of the last century and its links with Spain through the Bauhaus. (See: Martínez de Guereñu, Laura and García Estévez, Carolina Beatriz (eds.), *Bauhaus In and Out: Perspectives from Spain*, Asociación de historiadores de la Arquitectura y el Urbanismo (AhAU), Madrid, 2019).

4. Salvador Guerrero and Medina Warmburg (eds.), *Op. cit.*, p. 10.