

English summary

Editorial

Felipe Leal

It is advisable for us to be optimists, if by this we understand not an inner complacency or the silly confidence on a beneficent destiny. Optimism is the decision to do something. Optimism is believing we can alter the circumstances. It is believing in historical time, it is accepting the dimension set forth by the future.

Alejandro Rossi

Every tradition is based on the variety and multitude of voices and ideas that mould it, and shape it while conveying it. The underlying wish that moves this *Bitácora* (Logbook) is precisely to make room for the different languages on which architectonic tradition is seated on, a tradition that looks into the past and does not cease moving towards the future. The content of this second issue undoubtedly is proof of such intention.

The alarming and chaotic proliferation of great scale publicity and its consequences on the urban and natural landscape are tackled this time, from several perspectives, by Héctor García Olivera. A central subject of our *Bitácora*, the essay, which moves between an analysis of the aesthetic deviation these ads might represent and the way these billboard ads affect not only their physical surroundings but the ways in which we the inhabitants of big cities relate to it, forces us to give thought to the disorderly manner in which our cities have grown during the last decades and to consider, facing the new millenium, less aggressive urban and architectonic development processes.

One can consider Luis Ortiz Macedo's text under that light, a writing which offers us an intelligent panorama of our country's building tradition, from ancient Mexico to the present, not to mention our architecture's contributions to the world. In an effort to give that rich Mexican architectonic tradition its fair value and encourage its vitality, Peter Krieger's text, which closes our Essay section, proposes the establishment of "architecture's day" in our country.

It is precisely the perfect mixture between richness and tradition seen in popular architecture which is presented in our Patrimony section, where Valeria Prieto and Luis Fernando Guerrero relate to us, respectively, the importance of the preservation of the vernacular legacy and the universality of the city of Tlaxcala, a consummate example of this art, recently designated by the UNESCO as World Cultural Heritage.

In this issue, Ramón Vargas Salguero offers us an approximation of the text that makes up book II, volume III of the *History of Mexican Architecture*

and *Urbanism (HAYUM)*, the important project undertaken by the UNAM's (National University) faculty of architecture together with the Fondo de Cultura Económica, a publishing house. This volume's subject is the architecture under Porfirio Díaz's regime, a period of our national history which practically defined the first architectonic decades of the Mexican twentieth century.

During 1999 Mario Schjetnan taught the faculty of architecture's Cátedra Extraordinaria Federico Mariscal (Federico Mariscal Lecture). In our Testimony section, the landscape architect converses with Alejandro Cabeza about his vast experience in this discipline as well as the future challenges those who work in this profession will face. And speaking of challenges, Students gives us an account of a century that came to an end brimming with international contests from which our students were not absent, as the results of the Millenium Dome contest show: students from our faculty obtained the first prize and an honorable mention.

Bitácora's literature section Letras congratulates itself for the recent designation of Alejandro Rossi as the Linguistics and Literature National Award recipient, and on this occasion celebrates his intelligent humor and his deep reflection with *Calles y casas* (Streets and Houses) a text taken from his *Manual del distraído* (The Absent-minded's Handbook) in which, like any one of us, he endures and enjoys the modern city, that complex "triumph" of civilizations. Two exhibitions that visited Mexico City last year showed proof of other more ancient, perhaps happier, civilizations: The Mayans and The Etruscans, brought to mind by our Review section, as well as the conference dealing with Herzog and De Meuron's architecture that Swiss architect Jacques Herzog gave at the *Palacio de Bellas Artes*.

This is the course that defines the second issue of *Bitácora*. Our task will continue to be to foster and divulge an architectonic culture that suits the times and the present day needs. ☺

Felipe Leal
winter 2000



Mexico, builder country. From prehispanic constructions to the present day

Luis Ortiz Macedo

Geographies possess symbols: physical spaces resolve themselves in geometrical archetypes which are forms that convey symbols. Each land is a society: a world in itself and a vision of the world and universe. Each history is a geography and each geography a geometry of symbols. Thus architecture, that geography traced by man, stems from and is a conveyor too of these symbols. Built on this perspective, the article presents a historical revision of the fundamental traits which in different periods dominated the architecture of what today is Mexico.

The prehispanic period was dominated by the pyramid. It is the outstanding form in Mesoamerican architecture. This volume, inspired on the ascending will of religious spirit, served mostly as base for a temple. All pyramids were built facing great open spaces, ideal for assembling the people.

If prehispanic civilizations ended, this was not only due to the conqueror himself but mainly to the modernity he brought with him: steel, gunpowder, horses, the wheel, monetary economy and, above all, construction technology. At the very beginning of the colonial period, the *Colegio de San José de los Naturales* and the *Colegio de Santiago Tlatelolco* constituted the first construction school in the entire American continent, and in them Indians taught by monks began to learn the techniques, the theory, how to calculate the resistance of materials and to consult the treaties written by Renaissance constructors. In the beginning, syncretism and crossbreeding of styles were most evident in the works that were built.

The 16th was the century of evangelization and edification. A building, bricklayer century. The art and science of building cities are political matters; a civilization is above all a city planning; that is, more than a vision of the world and of men, a civilization is a vision of men in the world and of men as a world: an order, a social architecture. If that which is built by men is the best expression of a society's character and tendencies, New Spain was a vast square in which the palace, the city hall and the cathedral faced and confronted each other. Outside the square, three other constructions: the convent, the university and the fortress. The fortress defended the nation from the outside world; the convent and the university defended it from time.

Following the first decades of turmoil of independent life, Porfirio Díaz's regime (1876-1911) established a period of peace and economic growth. Offi-

cial buildings and monuments were conceived in the likeness of the great capital cities of the world. Then came the revolution which meant, during its first years, a change in the political structure of the republic as well as a jolt in the sensibility directed towards creation. Artists dedicated themselves to exploring the roots of what was Mexican buried by the foreign attitudes prevalent during the former regime.

At the beginning of modern times, architect José Villagrán's theses, stated since 1925, conceptually ordered Mexican architecture. He believed one had to subject the project to the program's analysis; one didn't have to preconceive forms, and one had to give the building and its materials a tone of authenticity. Design depended then on the utility and productivity of the work, on the new construction techniques and the strict budgets. Formal simplicity resulted from this. A reaction against the unexpressiveness of these buildings was, among others, the group of buildings in Ciudad Universitaria (the National University's campus), an example of pictorial integration. The best Mexican architecture is the one that has managed to combine what is functional and the creative.

The first expansion of cities was fostered by the railroad system, because of the activities that were created or flourished in its wake. Later on industrial development in the country's central states and the great investments made on irrigation systems and physical infrastructure were the ones to foster urban development. In the future one can see the development that construction will have in the 21st century.

Last but not least, the article considers the contributions Mexican engineers and architects have made in other countries. Mexican engineering applied to construction of big works has received international recognition. Panama's Convention Center and Colombia's aqueduct are the most remarkable examples. The list of Mexican architects which have worked abroad is long: Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, Carlos Mijares, Pascual Broid, Abraham Zabludovsky, Eduardo Terrazas, José Luis Esquerri, Manuel Parra, Carlos Flores Marini, Jorge L. Medellín, Félix Candela, Luis Ortiz Macedo, Ricardo Legorreta and Teodoro González de León. ☺

Tag der
Architektur
1999

Architecture's day - a proposal that seeks to promote architectural debates in Mexico City
Peter Krieger

I. Scientific debates, even in the context of architectural education, seem to become more and more self-referential, closed to the public and the needs of everyday life. Since architecture is a discipline of considerable social responsibility it may seem appropriate to rethink the concepts of aesthetic and political education via architecture and urban planning. Architectural reviews are not the only ones in charge of "educating" the visual and social expectations of city inhabitants, but so are the more popular media like films, television, soap operas and comic strips. Architectural researchers should analyze such type of visual communication. Unfortunately, a large number of architectural publications only seek to strengthen the star system and its related myths.

II. As an example of a program that seeks to inspire the desire for a deeper knowledge on architecture among a city's inhabitants, this article offers readers a German model of popular architectural education (Architektenkammer). The Hamburg example shows how certain subjects of interest - from innovative technological and aesthetical solutions in

architecture to current problems of urban planning - were chosen by a board of advisers, and then brought together to a day's programme with various alternative routes. The tours' participants be it by bus, boat, bicycle or simply by foot, receive information from the guides. In this way, many city inhabitants are able to express directly what they think about their urban and architectural ambience.

III. This model of architectural education could probably be transferred to Mexico City, and of course, the National University's (UNAM) faculty of architecture could be the center of such project. Given that spatial identification and participation in urban planning is a very difficult task in Mexico City, establishing a day devoted to architecture may inspire new forms of collaboration between architects and their clients; of course, all inhabitants of the megacities are clients of architects and urban planners, because they have to live in the public and private spaces designed for them. The Cuicuilco design or the remodelation of the Zócalo are only two striking examples which reveal the importance of open public debates on architecture. Yet, an increasing number of memorial days may undermine the presence of "architecture's day"; but the collaboration of mass media like newspapers and television can help the project succeed in truly arousing the interest of Mexico City's inhabitants. ☺



HAYUM.

Affirmation of Nationalism and Modernity
Ramón Vargas Salguero

"What blossoms on the tree feeds on what lies buried" Anonymous

In November 1998, book II, volume III of the *History of Mexican Architecture and Urbanism (Historia de la Arquitectura y el Urbanismo Mexicanos, HAYUM)* was presented to the university community. This book covers the time period of Porfirio Díaz's regime. What follows are some of its guiding hypotheses, conceptual frameworks and conclusions.

Reality is a whole continuous entity where all components mutually interact and which has had to be sliced, sectioned, fragmented into events, phases, moments, historical stages or social formations in order to deepen its understanding. Historiographical reconstruction seeks to reestablish that integrity once again in a task that makes every historical moment indispensable. Each moment stems from a former one and fathers the next.

It is in the past of any event where one will find the ideals, the toils, the objectives and goals that prepared the means and the wills that would later on give them substance and form. The present is always a materialization of the past, and for this to be so one has to previously accept that there are several pasts, as well as several presents. The past of a specific reality is in turn a concrete past, one that is specific to this or that moment one is researching.

It was not until enough doubts regarding the arguments that sought to explain the appearance of the so called architecture of the Mexican revolution accumulated, that the need to familiarize ourselves with the architects of Díaz's regime imposed itself. Until then it was thought that nothing could be learned from their submission to l'École de Beaux Arts' formalism, or from their disconnection from the social situation, or their participation in "exotic anachronism" or the emphasis they placed on the decorative. How could one believe there was any

sort of link between the architects of Díaz's regime and our teachers, the architects of the revolutionary period -spanning from the Constitution of 1917 up to the fifties approximately-, when the divergences and disparities between the two seemed so notorious. History had to be revised under a fresh light.

Because Díaz's regime is on the dividing line between two centuries and in the meeting point of two historical stages it has been the most disreputed moment in Mexico's history. Although time and space have transpired, the dwelling places and those who participated in their design and construction continue carrying the stigma with which formal and informal historiography have branded the period as a whole. Efforts to change this have not been enough. The architecture of this period seems to suffer from a condemnation that has more to do with the political regime as a whole.

On the other hand, one may ask: What should Díaz's regime be redressed for in the architectural-urbanistic field? One thing: architects of the period and their work are exhibited as mere replicas of l'École de Beaux Arts, considered by traditional historiography as a prototype of the most neglectful affixation of unharmonious forms.

Another aspect that has been neglected when viewing architecture in Díaz's regime is the one referring to the construction of dwelling spaces done by other professional architects, ones without a degree and society as a whole. The back was turned on common architecture and it was derogatorily catalogued as "popular", "refunctionalized", "self-built", "precarious" or as merely "habilitated". Historiography could not take such work into account: it lacked a certain aesthetic value and artistry. Another neglected issue was the one that concerned how this very same architects viewed and judged their task, what criteria guided them, what ethical norms, what objectives did they pursue.

In contrast, the architecture of the revolutionary period was seen as the threshold of modernity, rationalism and functionalism the good-bye of styles and eclectic functionalism. This book seeks to present how the most consistent tendencies of our later architecture and urban development were surmised, stimulated and transmitted by the architects of Díaz's regime. It was them who sought to retrieve our Mesoamerican and Hispanic traditions and root in this a "modern" and "national" architecture. It was them who strove to build an architect that was "philosopher, artist and civilian" at the same time. The transition between an oligarquic architecture and a democratic-liberal one was well underway. The book seeks to reestablish the fundamental link which this time represents in the history of our architectonic evolution. ☺



Interview with Mario Schjetnan Garduño
Alejandro Cabeza

The present and future opportunities, challenges and defiances for landscape architects are englobed in eight subjects: Water, specifically in works and projects relative to the recovery of rivers and basins, and its integration to urban design; recycling, as it concerns the reincorporation and redesigning of obsolete and abandoned infrastructure; archeological sites, historical and mythical, where adequate landscape design is required; works of major infrastructure, for example public transport, ports or dams; tourism, regarding touristic developments; urban development

and design that coordinates architecture, urban design and landscape architecture; the preservation and use of natural areas under an ecological sustainable perspective. Finally, the subject of landscape and art, where landscape itself is object of art.

Significant works throughout your evolution as a designer

The development of Bahías de Huatulco in Oaxaca, as a project regarding environmental planning, where we came up with a master plan. It was the first time an environmental type methodology was used to define the use of land and the preservation of the natural areas within the development. Architectonic and urban image criterion was set forth. The Medical Center in Mexico City, where the design of the group of buildings as a whole was coordinated with the participation of five architectural firms contributing to the design of squares, paths and elements that integrate the unit; heights were defined, materials and detailed design of exterior spaces.

A different project is constituted by the Mexiquense Cultural Center, in the city of Toluca, State of Mexico, which considers urban design and landscape, introducing museology within a colonial hacienda casque. Three museums were conceived: Charrería, Popular Arts and Modern Arts.

The museum of the Cultures of the North in the archeological zone of Paquimé, represents, in our evolution as designers, the strongest synthesis we have achieved between architecture and landscape, where limits cannot be established. The designed building is practically underground.

In an urban context, the Tezozomoc park, in Mexico City, encompasses three important concepts: the artificiality of landscape, the technology implied in the construction of what is artificial and the recycling of soil and water. It is also significant for its historical narrative content. The Xochimilco Ecological Park is inserted as well within the great works of territorial recovery. It is a contribution in the conception of the park.

Interest for landscape architecture

Since childhood I developed a special identification with landscape and nature. I was influenced by my father who enjoyed golf, outdoor sports and hunting.

During my third year at college I met teachers like Guillermo Shelley, Julio García Coll, Carlos Contreras and Carlos Bernal who encouraged my interest for urbanism and landscape.

Moreover I received the influence of four great personages: Luis Barragán, Lawrence Halprin, Californian landscape designer, Isamo Noguchi and Roberto Burle Marx, Brazilian landscape designer; all this complemented by the work of Donald Appleyard, Kevin Lynch and Ian McHarg. This last landscape designer has the idea of integrating natural systems to environmental regional planning.

Concerns.

The lack of a country perspective in the manner of Ian McHarg to approach great systems like regional ones in Washington, Virginia or Maryland, where development is combined with preservation.

On a national level there are no projects regarding public systems of green natural areas or natural parks, which are either common lands or subject to exploitation.

Another concern of mine is the abandonment of the historical tradition in the valley of Mexico regarding its surrounding humid zones like Texcoco, Chalco and Tlahuac.

Finally, the landscape design profession in Mexico has developed slowly, not having consolidated its place yet. I hope that in the next twenty years it succeeds in being structured as a leading profession regarding natural areas, the open space and the city. ⊗



"Space, image, urban landscape and billboard ads"

by Héctor García Olvera

Billboard ads have invaded Mexico City's urban landscape in an astute and anarchic fashion. Héctor García Olvera offers us the following notes on the concept of architectonic and urban spatialness, urban inhabitability and the way these issues are viewed within our academic circle.

These notes must be seen, within the academic world, mere reflections stemming from some old concerns on the problem of spatialness and the urban image, which I am now able to share with some fellow teachers of academic disputes. They have convinced me that if one is to attend to these issues, it is necessary to re-sensitize oneself before the very order that spatialness has assumed. To do this, we must consider the coming about of the city's nature itself, and finally understand that today, this nature has been seriously altered and damaged with the presence of billboard ads.

I am strictly referring to the problem constituted by the presence of commercial advertising and billboard ads in the spatialness of our city; to the evident collective perception of the matter, and to a sense of dispossession and invasion in relation to their urban space which is already growing in the citizens' consciences; things which ultimately affect the process itself by which the city's quality is generated, its inhabitability, and the possibility of enjoying and conserving it.

Given our city's production circumstances, we now fear we might be generating a sick city. The gradual appearance of exterior advertising and billboard ads is one of the causes most often pinpointed. Their presence goes too far and subtly but intensely alters the psycho-perceptiveness of urban life. The problem refers not only to the simple installation of imposing visual barriers in the urban landscape, but to the presence of their persuasive content and mode of expression, to the fact that they are a vehicle for mental pillage, and most particularly, to the attitude implied in this action, one of inexorable visual imposition against which the will or desire of the citizens is worth nothing, leaving them as mere spectators, unable to participate, intervene or control such instrument of commercial communication.

In the case of exterior advertising and billboard ads present in urban spatialness, the recipient is more and more an unconscious captive spectator, a subject inevitably linked to whatever takes place on the streets, an alienated citizen, a motorized passer-by irremisibly tied to it visually. We must be aware, that as far as the commercial publicist is concerned, this fact constitutes the wonderful and productive quality of our urban space.

These environmental conditions have led the city's inhabitants to develop collective feelings of latent and passive discontent, somewhat unconscious and slowly but permanently expressed. We must understand that in principle this is a serious urban problem, difficult to discern, and relatively new in our world. In first world countries of central Europe this problem has been studied rationally for some time now, and they suggest the possibility of posing it in its exact relation to what environmental psycho-anthropo-physiology expresses as "learned perceptual despair".

In this confusing situation and faced with the impossibility of intervening in the way space is arranged, citizens' "capacity of urban reactivity" is

affected the most. Thus, any possibility of developing a collective attitude of "altruism or civic reciprocity" is diminished and consistently altered, and what is identified as the capacity of developing "a disposition for solidarity" faced with possible emergency or catastrophic situations, is neutralized. Emotional and physiological health are altered indifferently; a pathetic apathy similar to learnt despair is produced, a syndrome of large cities where an image of spectacular simplicity has been imposed together with a high density of adverse stimuli. A passive repugnance and a subtle alteration in citizens' heartbeat, blood pressure, hormone secretion and even in their limbic structure, their urban behavior and mood, are generated indiscriminately.

These are the signs that allow us to think we are in the presence of the particular traits of a severe "urban catatonia" which results in the loss of civic identity and a gradual dwindling of reactivity and defense against the environmental stress system. These are the typical traits of collective melancholy through which the uninhabitability of our urban space already manifests itself.

Of course the traits of this present urban pathology show interesting variations depending on the different circumstances of spatialness the afflicted collectivity or victim find themselves in. The conditions are different for a motorized passer-by than for an urban inhabitant whose house is at the foot of these ads. In this case, the victim is subjected to permanent stress coming from his immediate surroundings, whose presence is simultaneously imposing, persistent, repetitive and constantly threatening. Here the effects are deeper and they affect an individual's emotional structure in a seriously chronic manner.

We now know that this produces the "learned despair" effect together with the traits of an exceptional form of madness represented by a sort of latent and permanent insecurity, a subtle fear without knowledge of its cause, a fear that generates a vague but incise anguish with regard to the unstable vicinity of such new, colossal and unscaled an object. This fear also refers to, not the real possibility of these objects catastrophically collapsing on their houses - which has actually happened, an event both incredible and shocking-, but to the permanent impression or sensation of the possibility of this happening.

The sensations produced by the strange vicinity, the colossal size foreign to the perceptive pattern of human scale, the intensely persuasive content, the seductive graphic expression and the high degree of sublimation and commercial abstraction; the substitutive role of transitory urban landmark, repetitive and ever changing in response to mercantile whim; and the weakening of urban identity effect, are some of the factors that generate those exceptional traits that constitute the effect on the citizens' emotional health and the collective behavior of the people who live close to these new and consistent urban objects.

It must also be said that this phenomenon is not an isolated event, something only a couple of inhabitants suffer from, but an occurrence of considerable proportions, due to the fact that the majority of these billboard ads have been installed over basically residential areas or properties. We could register as of today approximately 45 000 families living in these conditions. Remember that under the present regulations, this type of installation in these areas is clearly forbidden. As a whole, the phenomenon of urban spatialness and billboard ads must be understood as part of the general process of contemporary transformation undergone by large cities. A process in which clearly the spatial relationship between public and private places is being redefined; in which the dialectic relationship between the choice of public exposure and the achievement of personal intimacy is being rediscovered; in which fresh knowledge concerning urban spatialness is being produced; and in which the image of today's city is being redesigned.

If one considers the sense conveyed by the traits of its message, this image is not precisely disproportionate. Its dimensional relationship is subtly well calculated, its spectacular scale holding an excellent proportion in relation to what is big. It is a titanic image, powerful and highly desirable which unfailingly drives one to buy.

This represents the already mentioned seductive manner by which citizens are dispossessed of an elemental choice, civic and collective, their right to participate in the production and visual enjoyment of the urban landscape, how they are deprived of the right to perceive the natural spatialness of the city and shape the image of its identity or metaphorical reference on the original artifice which is hers. And thanks to this dispossession, we find it more difficult today to identify the natural profile of urban constructions, to decide as to their beauty or ugliness, to adequately interpret their boundaries, their connections or edges without having to blend the urban signs, or to, say, bask in the greenness of the trees, in the gracious outline of the mountains, in the more and more uncommon sight of the volcanoes, in the occasional blue of the sky or a quiet urban sundown.

Thus, the urban image as such becomes less and less comprehensible and appropriate for the citizen. It is less and less the base for urban identity since a strange and simple flat geometry, not spatial, prevails in form along the entire image, a geometry of illusory windows whose content unfolds and communicates exclusively in the direction posed by the typical traits of commercial abstraction.

Faced with this difficult problem whereby the quality of spatialness and the urban image are altered and damaged by the invasive presence of commercial advertising, we must also confront the vicious circle pattern in which all this occurs. And thus consider that in the production of the quality of this spatialness and urban image, the mercantile sector of urban publicity is not the only one that should intervene, but that the very same citizens that live in and experience such situation could be allowed to participate and share the basic responsibility, taking into account of course that this civic collectivity is immersed, to begin with, in a state of extremely altered spatial behavior and whose capacity to understand the problem appears to be pathetically deteriorated.

As part of the whole picture it must be recorded that exterior publicity is now an important and substantial urban business, developed by a couple of firms and a couple of persons. It feeds on free competition, on the free and necessary commercial advertising of economic production which has generated an ambitious business advertising organization, monopolistic, of extensive lucrative interests and with an enormous capacity to speculate. An organization which even assigns it her right to decide on the ugliness or beauty of the city's natural image and outline.

This business has proliferated due to a strange situation of disorder and inconsistency in the normativity and management that establish the way the urban image is regulated. We know that the existing regulation has promoted an atmosphere of complex discretionality and corruption in which permits are issued; that these permits, actually, are hardly issued; that the city's treasury accumulates losses of up to 24 million pesos a year on this account, the government thus self-nullifying its capacity to confront the matter. Nevertheless, billboard ads are installed by the handful, and to understand the magnitude of the problem let it be said that the percentage of illegal installations sometimes amounts to 97 per cent.

We now know, inferring from the official ads inventory, that there are approximately 7 500 billboard ads installed in our city, which amount to approximately 290 hectares of images of dubious commercial promotion scattered linearly at an average height of 30 to 40 meters, in the area where urban space is best perceived,

and preferably located around the city's public web of streets and roads. A great majority of them are located over residential areas, where they have been placed without the slightest consideration for the urban environmental impact they unquestionably provoke, or of the evident alteration the urban image has undergone and which thereby affects the identity and the effective choice of civic use of this very image.

It is very important to remember that these billboard ads are normally installed during the night because their unlawful character seeks those hours to ensure there will be no vigilance or inspection. The ads impose themselves suddenly and grow upon their own structure like metallic trees, multiplying brackets and thus profits. They exploit the devaluated income-yield capacity of the land where they stand and geometrically reproduce, for their own profit, the income-yield capacity itself of the space they occupy. They set and move as they please the monetary exchange value of urban space itself, and even determine, in a perverse game, the increased value of the rent of this very same space.

Under these circumstances, space and urban image undoubtedly turn into objects that produce a high income-yield capacity, and which become an easy choice for private appropriation, as well as objects that produce perentory effects on the behavior and health of the city's inhabitants. Regulation on this matter continues to be ambiguous and inconsistent. In the present democratic government's perspective one does not glimpse any possibility that use of space permits will be established, simply because they do not know what this means. And this is how the volumetric presence of buildings, their devotedly designed facades, their finials and terraced roofs, their sides and adjoining walls, the empty space of unoccupied lots, the surface of fences, the islands of grass that divide a road in two, parks, and other urban objects capable of supporting the commercial advertising image and which are located in the wide range of vision of the citizen's captive gaze, will be easy prey for the voracious capacity of exploitation of the private business organization in charge of commercial advertising.

We must then concern ourselves with finding out which is the role, under the given circumstance, that professional architects and urbanists, the designers of urban space, will have to play. How involved will the academic or teaching community need to be; what will be the attitude of the trade as a whole and of professors or apprentices individually while developing their design process for buildings or architectural and urban objects.

That the city's inhabitability is becoming more fragile is something that professional designers will have to understand thoroughly, specially as it refers to the behavior of the people who inhabit and use the urban space, who now share it physically with these billboard ads. With this experience in mind, urbanists and city planners, while doing their job and intervening in this problem, will have to stop being so "coward" so "ostrich like", and will have to raise their eyes from that solely bidimensional surface at their feet and interpret the problem, taking into account not only the use, the rent or transference of potential of "urban land" that this horizontal surface constitutes; they will have to discover and accept the existence of space, the tri or quadridimensionality that unfolds above this land, and thus thoroughly understand the real problems of urban spatialness and image.

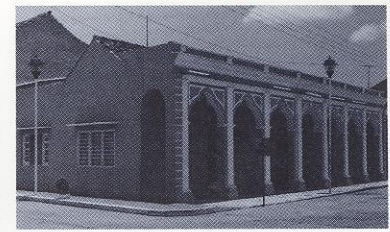
In this resensitizing ourselves to the order this spatialness has assumed and the coming about of the nature of what is urban, we acknowledge the existence of a curious collective memory regarding the presence in the city of these billboard ads. In the beginning, they emerged silently and discretely in the form of gentle landmarks or slight stationary references in the urban ambit. Due to their special dimension, proportion and large format they appeared, first, in the city's fragile and disordered gateways, and later on, affixed and

integrated to the appearance of some buildings with a singular perspective. They were all billboard ads, with neon light, and one identified them as panoramic even harmonious because of their moderate and sporadic presence.

In some developed countries with a consistent urban culture, like Catalonia, Spain, it is not difficult to find superb and actually imitable examples of good use of publicity and image, due to the fact that urban space and the streets are held in high esteem and are viewed as depositories of collective identity. People here even resort to covering the external appearance of buildings under construction with a cloth that bears the image of the future building, or it may happen that commercial advertisements are set and their income-yield capacity is absorbed by the public treasury and then strictly directed to cover urban infrastructure expenses.

Indeed, the development of publicity and the urban image in our city has not been this way. It has very quickly extended itself, grown unrestrainedly, overflowed, imposed itself and reproduced without order, without respect for image and under a vague, ambiguous, and obsolete regulation. In the present condition of our urban spatialness, the presence of billboard ads, strictly speaking, has shown no regularity or an attitude of perceptual discreteness. It has expressed itself openly as a result of a great mercantile voracity.

Let these notes serve to encourage within our own faculty the study, the essential reflexion and the basic revision on the concept itself of space. ☉



Tlacotalpan, World Cultural Heritage
Luis Fernando Guerrero

At the end of 1998, the city of Tlacotalpan, Veracruz was selected by UNESCO to become part of the "World Heritage List". Nevertheless, few people really understand what this means. On November 16, 1972, UNESCO approved the Convention concerning the protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, considering that deterioration of the heritage of one nation impoverishes all the nations of the world, and recommended necessary international cooperation to alleviate this problem. But several conceptual problems appear when defining the value of heritage. One of them stems from the fact that each country should determine the assets that are to be considered "unique and significant" on account of their "exceptional universal value" for the international collectivity.

Although it has been accepted that the World Heritage "monuments", "groups of buildings" and "sites" have an outstanding universal value from a historical, artistic or scientific point of view, it is not easy to define the criteria that allow the characterization of these items.

When Tlacotalpan was postulated it was known to have some disadvantages when compared with the other seven historical cities that were already part of the list. It was necessary for national authorities and government representatives from the World Heritage Committee to understand that the importance of a site depends mostly on its singularity, harmony and authenticity.

From this point on Tlacotalpan's peculiarity as a fluvial harbor was emphasized. The series of distinctive characteristics were detailed, for instance, its extremely preserved condition, its urban form and

structure, the typological unity of its legitimate properties and the harmony between its architectural components. The originality of the city's "portales" distinct from the facades showed up clearly, the architectural colouring, its public and private garden areas, the balance between its architectural design and the environment, and the authenticity of its relation between popular tradition and constructed areas. Furthermore, a report of all legitimate properties considered by law as historical monuments was completed, amounting to a total of 547 buildings.

Accepting Tlacotalpan as a World Cultural Heritage is acknowledging the "exceptional universal" value of anonymous architecture, of plain and uncostly constructions, of vernacular XIXth and XXth century city planning, of traditional buildings, of common culture and the character of its populations.

Nevertheless, it is evident that it is not enough to identify these urban values to secure its conservation. It is also necessary, as happens in many other historical Mexican cities, to achieve an equilibrium between development and preservation. It is necessary that citizens consider the value of their city as a heritage that they are proud of and bequeath to future generations in better conditions than when they inherited it. ☉



Tlacotalpan Forum

Valeria Prieto & Nelson Melero

The Vernacular Architecture and Heritage Association promoted and organized the Tlacotalpan Forum on the Preservation of the Built Heritage, whose fundamental purpose was to assemble a group of prominent specialists on this matter in order to analyze the causes that explain why monumental as well as vernacular architectural heritage is destroyed in our country, and reveal the existing possibilities for its recovery, preservation and appropriate use.

Teachers and researchers from the faculty of architecture of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), University of Veracruz, the Mexican fraction of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (Icomos), Universidad Autónoma de México (UAM), Trusteeship of the Historical Center of Mexico City, Popular Cultures' Museum, College of Architects, State of Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), Urban Development Office and Cultural Institute of the State of Veracruz, participated as rapporteurs and commentators in this forum, along with inhabitants of Tlacotalpan and special guests, like master in architecture Nelson Melero, researcher from the Restoration, Conservation and Museology Center of Cuba.

The result of the forum was the Declaration of Tlacotalpan, presented by the President of Vernacular Architecture and Patrimony, Valeria Prieto, at the closing session, which states nineteen points establishing the commitment of those present towards the preservation, protection and rescue of the built historical and vernacular patrimony. ☉



Students

In November of 1998 the third biennial FabStruct competition "International membrane structure student design challenge" took place at the Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science, School of Architecture and Design, with the sponsorship of Birdair, Chemfab, Ferrari S.A., Seaman Corporation and Taiyo Kogyo Corp.

The theme was the International Student Center as part of the Millennium Dome complex in Greenwich England. The site was about 45 meters square and it is located beside the new Underground Railway Station constructed by Sir Norman Foster and associates, and the "Baby Dome", although the most important presence is the "Millennium Dome" by Sir Richard Rogers. The dome itself is 360m. diameter overall with an external wall at 320m. The roof rises to nearly 50m. The Millennium Experience is scheduled to open doors at the eve of the new millennium. Design premises. The projects should be resolved with membrane structures, including tents, air or tensile structures, hybrids of these existing applications or something entirely new. The structure must serve several functions and include a significant entryway that could serve as a landmark for visitors. An area for International Student Association members to check in, including a members' lounge and restrooms and changing facilities should be provided. A larger social gathering space for occasional exhibits and a separate auditorium to seat 500 people. Appropriately sized restroom facilities, support and storage spaces should accompany these areas.

Ground conditions. The site was previously occupied by the Greenwich Gas Works, which used to be the largest in Europe known as Bugby's Marsh. The plaza oversees a large number of 6m. high inverted umbrellas arranged on a 9m. grid which provide shade and protection from rain. The estimated number of visitors expected to be at the millennium experience is 30 000 to 40 000 at peak times. Fifty percent of the visitors will arrive via the London Underground Railway station, 40% will arrive by car or bus and 10% by river.

Results. The jury was integrated by Denis Hector, architect, associate professor and director of graduate studies in the School of Architecture, University of Miami, Florida; the structural engineer Ian Liddell, founding partner of the Bath, England-based Buro Happold; and Tiang-Fang Jing, structural engineer and partner with Weidinger Associates in New York City.

Editor of Fabric Architecture, Bruce N. Wright said: "The quality of the presentations was very high. Liddell noted that they had a great deal of difficulty deciding between the first and second place admissions. The issue of constructibility weighted heavily with the judges". Said Hector: "It is worth noting that all the Honorable Mentions were chosen for the evocative characteristics of fabric architecture. The reason that they weren't top winners is because they fell short of figuring out how to realize them as structures".

The faculty of architecture of the National University, UNAM, participated with three projects developed at the Structural Geometry course imparted by doctor Juan Gerardo Oliva Salinas. Two of these entries were awarded.

Victor Hugo Roldán González, student of the "José Villagrán" studio obtained the first place of the competition, and Cynthia Echave and Mauricio Cortés Sierra from the "Jorge González Reyna" studio together with Manuel Del Río Francos from the "Max Cetto" studio received an honorable mention.

Description of the projects. First place: Victor Hugo Roldán González. In the author's voice: "Pyramids have always been a transcendental element in the history of mankind- as a symbol of wisdom, an architectonic purity, and as a monument and an icon in ancient cultures.

I built on this concept to achieve an attractive, interesting and innovative space. The project is intended as a minimalist structure, as the membrane is the most important element of the design over the metal structure. I tried to avoid the use of big steel arches.

The membrane is a translucent PVC-coated polyester. The metal structure is made of narrow stainless steel (mostly traction-working members), making the building aesthetically and structurally neat.

The inner part of each pyramid face (an equilateral triangle) holds a tensegrity system (cables and posts) which pulls the membrane from three points to the interior trough steel circular plates.

In the four vertex of the pyramid face, the membrane is tractioned to the exterior at three points by cables; another point is pulled to the top of the pyramid where vertexes join.

The membrane is pulled to the exterior by three cables in the center of each triangle".

The jury pointed out that the pyramid seems an unlikely form for fabric, even though this project proved that it is possible. It was very interesting to see the strong relationship between the computer model and the physical model which shows the knowledge and understanding of tensile structures, which made a really constructive proposal. Although the interior design wasn't figured out (for example the auditorium could be moved to any part of the plan), they said it was one of the most technically clever pieces of fabric structure in the competition with an adequate context integration, complexity and sophisticated technique.

Honorable Mention: Cynthia Echave Martínez, Mauricio Cortés Sierra and Miguel del Río Francos.

The authors explain their project:

"On our first consideration of the site, we realized that the best integrated proposal should contrast with the geometry of the Dome and the Baby Dome, while a dome shape isolates interior from exterior, we looked for spatial relationship and visual communication between the interior activities and the plaza, in this way the access would be more evident. The proposal consists essentially of two elements, the first is the auditorium composed by a transparent object with ellipsoid shape structured with steel nerves and rings that obtain their rigidity by four sinclastic curved walls aligned to let the dominant winds pass through, the second element is a tent which surrounds the auditorium and at the same time fitting to the limits of the site. The tent starts with its first module almost on the ground, and then it grows reaching its highest point at 20m. It provides different heights that respond to different functions of the Center such as restrooms, exhibition areas etcetera.

The intention was to make the auditorium the most hierarchical element to become a landmark because of its shape and transparency that allows it to be perceived as an illuminated object specially at nights.

The high points of the tent are raised by posts, and the low points are anchored to the ground creating the hyperbolic paraboloid surfaces. The tent's material is white PVC-coated fabric tractioned by stainless steel cables".

The jury commented that even though the constructive feasibility of the auditorium was not entirely clear, and wasn't a tent structure at all, it was a clever composition. The project fits nicely on the limits of the square site. The ellipsoid contrasts well with the given background achieving a great and elegant image.

Cynthia Echave Martínez, Victor Hugo Roldán and Mauricio Cortés Sierra collaborate with doctor Oliva Salinas at the Laboratory of Lightweight Structures of the Architecture and Urbanism Research Center of the faculty of architecture at the UNAM. Miguel del Río Francos participates in the academic interchange program between the faculty of architecture, UNAM and the University of Columbia. ☉