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Amann, Cánovas, and Maruri's Eclectic Realism

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The studio led by Atxu Amann, Andrés Cánovas, and Nicolás Maruri (*Temperaturas extremas*) is a peculiar “office of architectural services” in its own way. Just compare the wooden shrine that makes up the Arab Wall Museum in Murcia, the perforated corten steel defining the complex volume of the visitor center in Monteagudo, and the intricate geometry of the roof of the Roman ruins in Cartagena, composed of a structure of steel, perforated metal sheet, and polycarbonate. Alternatively, consider the galvanized iron and expanded mesh structure of the footbridge thrown over archaeological remains in Murcia, the metal cage in the Roman Curia Museum, the exposed concrete enclosing the underground spaces, both in Cartagena, and, finally, the fabric covering of the pavilion of the Dubai 2020 Expo. Comparing these projects may suffice to realize the extraordinary versatility of this Madrilenian studio. But this is not just about technical expertise, something clearly has to do with the “genetics” of contemporary Spanish architecture: on this topic, «Spanish architects have always approached every architectural theme», as Fabio Garrera writes in his clear-eyed introductory essay, «with eclectic realism, turning specific opportunities into starting points of contemporary design». For A.C.M. studio, this means giving design responses – even with stylistic differences – to address the various issues posed by functions and sites without bias. As Fabio Garrera points out, this entangles being «independent from a preset stylistic idea». Leafing through the projects illustrated in these pages indeed suggests something elusive, refractory to our taxonomic mania of labeling authors according to their stylistic witticisms.

The works of the A.C.M. studio, Fabio Garrera’s essay, Emilio Tuñón’s introduction, and Maria Argenti’s beautiful afterword also suggested to me other things related to teaching architectural design today. Amann, Cánovas, and Maruri are professors at ETSAM in Madrid. Furthermore, all three were born in the early 1960s, with a firmly twentieth-century background. Yet, the academic world’s theoretical research does not imprison them in granitic certainties atrophying their design versatility, unlike it is often the case. On the contrary, their extraordinary openness to contemporary architectural experimentation seems surprising. Moreover, they work in a group: few things prevent pursuing stylistic consistency as much as working in a group.

<p>Presentation by Emilio Tuñón Presentazione di Emilio Tuñón</p> <p>In the wake of a renewed Madrielenian eclecticism Nel solco di un rinnovato eclettismo madrilenio</p> <p>Between memory and transgression Tra memoria e trasgressione</p> <p>Urban connections and collective spaces Connessioni urbane e spazi comunitari</p> <p>Collective housing and typological experimentation Alloggi collettivi e sperimentazione tipologica</p> <p>Plastic values and diaphanous density: the materials interface Valori plastici e diafane densità: le interfacce materiche</p> <p>Authorship versus anonymity: conclusions Autorialità plasma e tendenza all'anonimato: conclusioni</p> <p>Endnotes Note</p> <p>Stratigraphic palimpsests Palinsesti stratigrafici</p> <p>Augusteum in Cartagena Augusteum di Cartagena</p> <p>Museum of Arab walls in Murcia Museo delle mura arabe di Murcia</p> <p>Visitor center in Montevideo Centro Visitatori di Montevideo</p> <p>Roof structure and routes in the Roman complex of El Molinete Copertura e percorsi nel complesso romano del Molinete</p> <p>Public Health Center in Cartagena Centro di Salute pubblica di Cartagena</p> <p>Museum of the Roman Curia in Cartagena Museo della Curia Romana</p> <p>Residential building in the former Palace of the Germany Consulate in Cartagena Edificio per alloggi nell'ex Palazzo del Consolato Tedesco di Cartagena</p>	<p>11</p> <p>15</p> <p>35</p> <p>47</p> <p>57</p> <p>63</p> <p>69</p> <p>72</p> <p>80</p> <p>82</p> <p>86</p> <p>92</p> <p>102</p> <p>106</p> <p>116</p> <p>8</p>	<p>Small 'urban infrastructures' Piccole infrastrutture urbane</p> <p>Urban route near the Embarcadero del Hornillo Percorso urbano nei pressi dell'Embarcadero dell'Hornillo</p> <p>Elevator and urban routes in Cartagena Ascensore e percorsi a Cartagena</p> <p>Spain Pavilion at the Universal Expo 2020, Dubai Padiglione Spagnolo alla Esposizione Universale 2020 di Dubai</p> <p>Collective housing Alloggi collettivi</p> <p>82 social houses in Carabanchel 82 alloggi popolari a Carabanchel</p> <p>Corner building in Moncloa Edificio d'angolo a Moncloa</p> <p>Hybrid building Orosola Rambla Edificio ibrido a Orosola Rambla</p> <p>61 social houses in Coslada Puerto 61 alloggi popolari a Coslada Puerto</p> <p>Multi-story buildings in Merres Edifici in linea a Merres</p> <p>Tower buildings in Vallebebas Edifici a torre a Vallebebas</p> <p>Multi-story buildings in Luxembourg (1st batch) Edifici in linea a Lussemburgo</p> <p>Multi-story buildings in Luxembourg (2nd batch) Edifici in linea a Lussemburgo</p> <p>Essential bibliography Bibliografia essenziale</p> <p>ACM biographical profile Profilo biografico ACM</p> <p>List of collaborators Elenco dei collaboratori</p> <p>Photo credit Crediti fotografici</p> <p>Afterword by Maria Argenti Postfazione di Maria Argenti</p> <p>122</p> <p>128</p> <p>134</p> <p>142</p> <p>148</p> <p>152</p> <p>160</p> <p>164</p> <p>170</p> <p>174</p> <p>178</p> <p>182</p> <p>185</p> <p>186</p> <p>187</p> <p>189</p> <p>9</p>
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 <p>Fig. 1 - El Abrazo © Juan Genovés, 1976</p>	<p>In the wake of a renewed Madrielenian eclecticism</p> <p>The work of Atxu Amann, Andrés Cánovas, and Nicolás Maruri (ACM) can be better framed in contemporary Spanish architectural culture through two artistic works: a painting and a photograph. The first one, <i>El abrazo</i> by Juan Genovés (fig. 1), is often mentioned by Andrés Cánovas in his academic lectures and was realized in 1976, one year after general Franco's death. It portrays a group of men and women (a metaphor for the Spanish people) who are hugging as if to pursue a cultural and post-dictatorial unification, which has never been indeed achieved. The painting displays an 'eclectic balance' between tensioned bodies, describing a possible 'unity' through the juxtaposition of multiple subjects.</p> <p>The second work is a digital photographic elaboration by Daniel Canogar² from 2002, titled <i>Gravedad Cero</i> (fig. 2). Unlike the previous one, here, a group of people floats in a vast sidereal void until a condition of apparent balance is reached – through multiplicity, again. To understand the representativity of these two pictures for the condition of 'balance in the variety of multiplicity' achieved by Spanish contemporary design culture – and hence by ACM's architecture – it is necessary to take a small step behind to clarify the meaning of the noun 'eclecticism' as used in the title of this first chapter. Eclecticism derives from the Greek <i>eklektikos</i>, composed in turn of the root <i>ek</i>, meaning 'out', and the word <i>legein</i>, meaning 'choose'. An 'eclectic' is someone who 'chooses between multiple different things, systems, or directions'. By extension, an eclectic is also someone who chooses</p>
 <p>Fig. 2 - Gravedad Cero © Daniel Canogar, 2002</p>	<p>Nel solco di un rinnovato eclettismo madrilenio</p> <p>Due opere, una pittorica e l'altra fotografica, ci aiutano a inquadrare il lavoro di Atxu Amann, Andrés Cánovas e Nicolás Maruri (ACM) nel contesto della cultura architettonica spagnola contemporanea. La prima opera, <i>El abrazo</i> di Juan Genovés (fig. 1), spesso citata da Andrés Cánovas nell'ambito delle sue lezioni universitarie, è stata eseguita nel 1976, un anno dopo la morte del generale Franco. Essa rappresenta un gruppo di uomini e donne nell'intento di abbracciarsi, quasi a ricercare un'unificazione culturale e post-dittatoriale - metaforica allusione del popolo spagnolo - in realtà mai del tutto conquistata. Un 'equilibrio eclettico' tra corpi in tensione, quello rappresentato da Genovés, che può dirsi descrittivo di una possibile 'unità' ottenuta dall'accostamento di figure molteplici.</p> <p>La seconda opera è un'elaborazione fotografica digitale di Daniel Canogar², realizzata nel 2002 e intitolata <i>Gravedad Cero</i> (fig. 2). A differenza della precedente, un gruppo di persone flotta in questo caso all'interno di un grande vuoto siderale fino a raggiungere una condizione di equilibrio apparente, ancora una volta composto da unità molteplici.</p> <p>Per comprendere in che misura queste due immagini possano dirsi metaforicamente rappresentative della condizione di 'equilibrio nella varietà del molteplice' raggiunto dalla cultura progettuale spagnola contemporanea - e per implicito riferimento dall'architettura di ACM - è necessario fare un piccolo passo indietro per chiarire il senso del sostantivo 'eclettismo' usato nel titolo di questo primo capitolo. Eclettismo deriva dal greco <i>eklektikos</i> ed è composto dalla radice <i>ek</i>, che vuol dire 'fuori', e da <i>legein</i> che significa 'scegliere'. 'Eclettico' è dunque chi 'sceglie' fra più cose, sistemi o indirizzi differenti.</p>

Fig 1
Book index.

Fig 2
In the wake of a renewed Madrielenian eclecticism.

In conclusion, in light of these considerations – and especially in light of A.C.M.'s works, so broadly described in Guarrera's monographic essay – it almost seems evident that they would approve this sentence by Spain's leading twentieth-century philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset – and indeed, he is cited by the author as one of the most influent on the Madrielenian trio's design philosophy: «If an architect's project shows admirable personal style, he is not, strictly speaking, a good architect».