

author(s)



Sara Coscarelli Comas  
EINA, Centre Universitari de Disseny i Art de  
Barcelona. Adscrit a la UAB.

abstract

The study of Barcelona's architectural context, that adopts its *modus operandi* from the Milanese's architectural imaginary<sup>1</sup>, between 1949 and 1964, is substantially characterized by the desire to recover the lost history - lost with the Franco's dictatorship -, the connection of the individual with its innermost *self* and the consciousness of belonging to the Mediterranean context, without forgetting, however, the progressive and emancipative tenets of the Modern Movement.

The vicissitudes of adaptation carried out by Catalan architects, especially Group R, while admiring their Milanese counterparts Ernesto Nathan Rogers, Ignazio Gardella and Franco Albini, among others, always around the contents of the magazine *Casabella-Continuità*, leads to the expression of a genre that

is specific to this region: *Mediterranean Critical Regionalism*, as an assimilation from the Kenneth Frampton's Critical Regionalism.

keywords

design, architecture, context, memory, identity.

## Mediterranean Critical Regionalism

On the Barcelona's adaptation from the Milanese architectural imaginary, 1949-1964.



Figure 1. Ugalde House (1951) by Coderch. Caldes d'Estrac, Barcelona.



Figure 2. Comparison between Torre Atalaia (1966-1971) by Federico Correa & Alfons Milà (left) and Torre Velasca (1951-1958) by BBPR studio (right).



Figure 3. Comparison between Tokyo Building (1953-1957) by Francesc Mitjans (left) and Tognella Building (1946-1948) by Ignazio Gardella (right).



Figure 4. Comparison between Residential Building at Pellars street (1958-1959) by Oriol Bohigas (left) and Residential Building at IACP Mangiagalli II neighbourhood (1950-1952) by Ignazio Gardella and Franco Albini (right).



Figure 5. Comparison between Residential Building "Casa dels Braus" (1960-1962) by Antoni De Moragas (left) and Residential Building "Ca Granda Nord" (1956-1957), by Vittorio Gandolfi (right).

The *Mediterranean Critical Regionalism*, belonging to a physical, concrete, specific and unique place, can be considered a gender. It comes from the Kenneth Frampton's Critical Regionalism<sup>2</sup>, a critical category which aims to supplement the lack of identity of the Modern Movement using the topographical context of the building and recreating a humanist architecture linked to regional and decentralized contexts in any gap in the world.

This gender is based on the “preesistenza ambientale” (Rogers 1955: 3-6), the adaptation of new construction in the environmental context, but also tectonic of the work, leads the architects towards the intervention on the specific fragment of the city, under proposed by Rogers’ “caso per caso” (Rogers 1945: 74-75) theory, which acts on the small scale of the city.

Both Barcelona and Milan have very important precedents who already incorporated a very strong vernacular architecture: the Gruppo 7 and the GATCPAC. Both groups were in touch during the thirties, under the influence of Le Corbusier, captured a Mediterranean influence into their Modernist projects that will be recovered after the Second World War.

Consequently, some Milanese architects carry out some projects of symbolic value and far removed from the real estate market and the INA-Casa regulatory plan. Grup R architects – Josep Maria Sostres, José Antonio Coderch, Antoni De Moragas, Oriol Bohigas, and later Federico Correa and Alfonso Milan, too, among others like Francesc Mitjans –, also undertake the task of reviewing modern architecture, searching for a specific figurative identity, focused in small realistic projects, with the intention to contact with the human being; the references to the territory's various archetypes, and the recovered incorporation of forms and values of the memory associated with the historical and architectural past of the place.

See below the defining factors of this new *Mediterranean Critical Regionalism*:

1. *Dialectic between tradition and modernity*: The recovery of the dialogue with history in contemporary architectural projection, allows both the society and

the Catalan architects the identity revival and the resumption of nationalist positions toward the territory, going hand in hand, with the architectural progress and emancipation that the Modern Movement allowed.

2. *Geo-environmental context*: The knowledge its own physical territory, around the Mediterranean, is preminent. Beyond of what a political map may indicate, physical maps, topography and even the geology of the place for the building are analyzed, and several studies of light, heat and noise, which become essential to ensure that the building meets the requirements for habitation, all with the aim of integrating the tectonics of the specific site in the architectural space.

3. *Link between individual and place*: The architectural space will be formed based on the actual and specific needs of the individual, which go far beyond the usual dependencies of a conventional home, then identified from the study of their social strata, daily habits, their schedules, the number of members who live there, the link between them all and the uses that they make of each space.

4. *References, interregional links*: The *Mediterranean Critical Regionalism* takes as a model Milan's cultural and architectural imagery, because of its regional, environmental, cultural and, social similarities and, of course, architectural. Thus, the Lombard capital acts as a mirror where Barcelona views itself reflected initially out of the darkness of war, and then taking its own way.

5. *Methodological expression*: Rogers points in his early writings that the great error occurs when considering the Modern Movement style from the figurative appearances instead as the expressions of a method trying to establish new and clearer relationships between form and content, in the context of a phenomenology of a historical-pragmatic process<sup>3</sup>. The habitation understood as the fate of human existence directly leads to reflection on the vital importance of its contents, which goes beyond the typological form or materials used in its construction. That's why it intends to constitute an indicative and methodological value.

Coderch's works in the beginning of this period, such as the *Urbanization project “Les Forques”* (1946), the *ISM apartment block* (1951) and especially the *Ugalde House* (1951), serve as the first examples to understand which are the basic methodologies of a *Mediterranean Critical Regionalism*. But he is not the only one to apply this method in his works. Most of the members of Group R of the time, and others outside of the Association, followed its tenets.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. TORRES, J., *Italia y Catalunya. Relaciones e influencias en la arquitectura, 1945-1968*. València: ETSAV 1991 [Tesi doctoral].

<sup>2</sup> FRAMPTON, K., (1980) *Modern Architecture: A Critical History (World of Art)*. London: Thames & Hudson 2007 (4a ed.) pàgs. 314-319.

<sup>3</sup> ROGERS, E. N., “Continuità o crisi?”. *A Casabella-Continuità*, no 215, Milà: abril-maig 1957, pàg. 3.

#### References

TORRES, J., *Italia y Catalunya. Relaciones e influencias en la arquitectura, 1945-1968*. Valencia: ETSAV 1991.

FRAMPTON, K., (1980) *Modern Architecture: A Critical History (World of Art)*. London: Thames & Hudson 2007 (4a ed.).

ROGERS, E. N., “Le preesistenza ambientali e i temi pratici contemporanei”. In *Casabella-Continuità*, 204, Milan: February 1955.

ROGERS, E. N., “Una casa a ciascuno”. *A Il Politecnico. Settimanale di cultura contemporanea*, 420, Milan: October 1945.

ROGERS, E. N., “Continuità o crisi?”. In *Casabella-Continuità*, 215, Milan: April 1957.