

THE MIDDLE SPACE ON ROLAND FISCHER'S NEW ARCHITECTURES

Sergio Rubira

Western thinking is based on opposite pairs, on paired terms that confront one another in a duel, on words with positive associations and their antonyms with negative connotations, on what is and what is not because it is just the opposite. It is an antithetical way of thinking with no apparent middle space for what lies "between", for what, in the final instance, is neither one thing nor the other but which instead inhabits a strange territory preferably seen as paradoxical. It is a way of trying to understand—and take on board—the world, an approach from which the obsession for classification, taxonomy and systematization stems. A mania that has prevailed in the West since that 18th century known as the Age of Enlightenment, which was later found to have generated many shadows, perhaps too many. They are lights and shadows found in the origins of all starting points when we think. They formed part of the way in which the Greeks regarded the universe as being ordered; an uncreated eternal irreducible original—and final—chaos, lacking in any trait, on which limits had to be imposed, limits forged through a gory battle between opposite characteristics which would determine the nature of matter, depending on which of the two was victorious: hot and cold, wet and dry, water and fire etc. This two-sided vision of the cosmos that Anaximander of Miletus is said to have inspired was adopted by the Pythagoreans and it has been handed down through to today. They managed to differentiate up to ten pairs of opposites: limited-unlimited, odd-even, unity-plurality, right-left, male-female, resting-moving, straight-crooked, light-darkness, good-evil and square-oblong. In turn, these pairs became interlinked and, with the incorporation of a pair known as good-evil (which would come to determine all of them—and others—in the course of time), they acquired a moralistic quality and worth.

However, the Pythagoreans forgot—like us today—what separated them: that hyphen between one word and the other, that line that allowed one word to be distinguished from its opposite. It is very probably that gap that has characterized Roland Fischer's work over the years. It is

work that is situated and situates him in that "middle" space that eludes, shuns and flees classification. For some, his work is photographic in the strictest sense of the word, because this is the medium—or technique—that defines it, and also due to photography's ties with the reality that it reproduces. For others, however, his work has more to do with painting, since it takes advantage of many of this discipline's resources, or even with sculpture, given his interest in volumes and his images' affinity with objects when hung. It is a debate soon found to be unsolvable because his work is all this and much more.

Almost from the very outset of his career, his work concentrated on that fine dividing film. This is the case of all his series of portraits, from *Nuns and Monks* (1986) to the Los Angeles or Beijing photographs taken in swimming pools or the photos of the group or groups that he took in China and Spain, where the conflict between individual and collective identities is clear, between the subject and the crowd, between the public and private, between mine and ours, transforming the surface of all the photographs into a place where these contradictions seemed to be resolved.

And this is also true of his photographs of architecture. In *Façades*, a project still in progress, he concentrates precisely on those limits of buildings that mark the difference between what is inside and what is outside, between the interior and exterior, between the public and private once again. Nonetheless, here, he takes that "middle space" and somehow also that "as opposed to" even further and he does away with another pair of terms that have served to interpret photographs: the *studium* and *punctum* that Roland Barthes [...] connotations, *Camera Lucida* (1980). With his façades, the *studium*—what the image tells us, what is associated with the reality that it reflects—is outside the image (displaced to the title written on the accompanying sign). There is just *punctum*; what punctures, pricks or wounds the spectator, and this fills the whole image, repeated again and again ad finitum.

In *Cathedrals*, however, his research into thresholds leads him to reverse the process and what prevails in the images is the *studium*, so much so that it is hard to fix upon a single punctum because it might well be the

whole image. The photographs contain all the details of what they portray. What is inside and out has all been recorded: the façade and naves of those gothic cathedrals that he photographed for years. Fischer has managed to look—and let us look— “through” and not just “at”. The photos have been transformed into a retina onto which views are simultaneously projected, taken at different times. Our perception is altered and we find ourselves in a nebulous zone, lacking in certainties; a midway point like architecture's party wall, with its demarcating role and uncertain ownership.

Something similar also occurs in the *New Architectures* series.. In these images, different views of buildings overlap. Buildings that constitute landmarks in the history of architecture, they represent the continuance of an avant-garde tradition in search of dimensions (one

being time) that surpassed the height, width and depth that govern space and its portrayal, here, before and now. Once again it is impossible to distinguish the outside from the inside, what is on one side from what is in front, what is on the right from what is on the left, what is secondary to what is primary. This is the case with Le Corbusier's Ville Savoye, not easily habitable given the way it seems to contain itself, or Luis Barragán's houses, with their unlikely colours that become simply impossible in conjunction. The image that perhaps best explains the crumbling conventions to which we have become accustomed is the Barcelona Pavilion by Mies van der Rohe: a window whose closed curtain prevents us from looking in and yet reveals all because, as I was saying, what is important is not what something is or is not but what lies in the middle space.