

NOTE ON THE AIRPORTS OF BARCELONA AND SEVILLE

However superficial our inspection of the new airports of Barcelona and Seville might be, we could only ever come to one conclusion: they have nothing, absolutely nothing, in common. Nevertheless, the idea of setting them side by side, of presenting them both at the same time, is a very great temptation. Why? Just because they «happen» to have been built at the same time, coinciding with celebrations that have a special significance for the Spanish state, and have been entrusted to the two Spanish architects with perhaps the greatest international reputation? But these are, of course, weighty reasons. It is worth trying, therefore, to explain these reasons, if only briefly, by means of the buildings themselves.

With Barcelona airport, Bofill has reduced the whole of its architecture to the use of two elements: on the one hand, the curtain wall, resolved by double walls of glass which reveal the metallic structure between them, and on the other hand, the cylindrical column, stone-like and of squat proportions, crowned with a grotesque pseudo-Doric capital. Both of these have been developed in a highly rhetorical key. The curtain wall which leaves inside it, visible but untouchable, an exaggerated structural mesh, is obviously an operation of *amplificatio*: it is not a question of high technology but it is a representation of what the public, supposedly, must understand by high technology. «Re-presentation», in fact, since everything has been literally doubled: the wall, the colouring of the glass —dark on one side and transparent on the other— the structure... The eyes of the traveller have to take in everything twice, as if things did not have enough with their simple appearance. But this is not all: the structure enclosed within the transparent box that is the wall, so close to and at the same time so removed from the hands of the traveller, separated from him not only by a sheet of glass but also by its infinite reflections, becomes the most coarse, most immediate representation of technology as a fetish: a kind of fetishism based, like that old market fetishism, on the principle of «look but don't touch». And next to this «shop window» curtain wall Bofill has arranged long rows of columns. These columns also represent. And not only, as is obvious, the «classical» element of architecture: with their exaggeratedly stone-like appearance, with their heavy proportions, with their, as it were, Doric order, they trivialize to the most extraordinary extremes one concrete interpretation of this supposedly «classical» element: its archaism, with all the connotations of ancestral «values» contained in this. The mechanism of *amplificatio* carried out in the columns is no different, then, from what has operated in the wall. It is not surprising that, apart from functional justifications, always contingent, the building develops lineally with a straight axis which is very explicitly displayed: on this axis walls and colonnades run in long parallel developments without touching each other but always together, following one

identical direction into the distance. Nor is it surprising that Bofill calls this axis the «interior street», but not because it is a question of a naïve —or, more aptly, cynical— space of relationships, but because, like any other street, it is the place of the most trivial display: «what is understood as the most novel» alongside «what is understood as the classical». It is the representation of the institutional building: no one could ask for a greater ideological plan or plainer simplicity. More than that of any other, the architecture of Bofill can be called populist.

With Seville airport we are faced with what seems to be a completely different case. Everything that in Barcelona was dichotomous and open display is in Seville concentration and a desire for unity. Moneo, in fact, has built a vast bay covered by a series of cupolas which display his model eloquently: John Soane's pendentive dome. No cupola explains as this does its own condition: there is no tambour or other element to separate it from the walls on which it unloads its weight and the pendentives and cap are seen as one sole entity without interruption. But on a model that is already abstract in itself —I am thinking especially of the Bank Stock Office— Moneo has carried out a further reduction: he has eliminated every aspect that is still contingent —medallions, mouldings...— and by painting the spherical surface in a strong continuous blue he has literally condensed its form. This also is *amplificatio*. This type of contraction responds to a way of thinking and acting that is characteristic of Moneo, who is telling us: «This is not a cupola of this building, but the Cupola.» The forms, the elements, the structures of architecture occupy for Moneo a «different place», no less true, however, than ours. Only in this way, «instituted» in its principles of pure forms, will architecture be worthy of the institution, deserving of its trust: because it will transmit to it the certain security of its principles essentials. It is not surprising, then, that this atmosphere, with its succession of metaphysical vaults, does not remind us of the check-in lobby of an airport but rather of the grand hall of a nineteenth century monumental station, that is to say, the place where architecture showed itself «massively», as opposed to the metallic bays which, «beyond» it, strictly covered the platforms. Moneo, unlike Bofill, aware that between those stations and his airport there intervened a long war, has eliminated everything which modern commonplace would consider to be decoration, but how can he prevent the disappearance of decoration being accompanied at the same time by the disappearance of *decorum*? Beside the impressive contraction of massiveness caused by the vaults, what is the meaning, for example, of those fan-shaped capitals —large in size but, in fact, fragile and insignificant as a piece of paper-folding— if not the paradoxical situation of architecture which, converted into a primordial world, has been dispossessed of its «concrete» articulation? In the world of ideas in Moneo's architecture this dispossession is a reason of State. Thus there exists no other type of architecture which, like this, can be called, with radical propriety, neoclassicist.

It is, therefore, not only «chance» that provokes the temptation to see these two works together: there are few works that show so clearly the institutional craving of present-day architecture and which at the same time reveal their means so summarily. Bofill, Moneo: they have nothing to do with each other. They are, it is true, two extremes, but they are extremes

of the same thing: the desire for representation of the transformist State. Populism, neoclassicism: official architecture is always architecture that is known beforehand, that is foreseen.