

Ideological Perspectives on Spanish Architecture in International Journals (1950-1986)

Spain, Image, Ideology, Architecture, Journals

/Abstract

At the end of the 1930s, Spain suffered a civil war. Its consequence is the establishment of a new political order: General Franco's dictatorship, that would keep its power for almost forty years.

Along this period, the image of the country for the foreigners was complex and changing. From the initial mistrust from international powers, the image of Spain went through a larger acceptance following its entry in the United Nations and its re-adjustment as occasional ally of Western countries against communism. However, the main feature of the government—the lack of public rights—marked the foreign view of Spain along these years.

In parallel, this image of the country had repercussion for the way architecture—a phenomenon relatively alien to the political realm—has been analysed and comprehended. This influence can be noticed on the way international journals approached the work of Spanish architects. On their pages we can find a view conditioned, in varying degrees, by ideology.

It is not until the death of the dictator, in 1975, and the coming of democracy, that a change in the architectural and political panorama took place. The production of Spanish architects got rid of ideological connotations, that along Franco's period had diverse manifestations—from the linkage with the regime to its consideration as a means of combating it.

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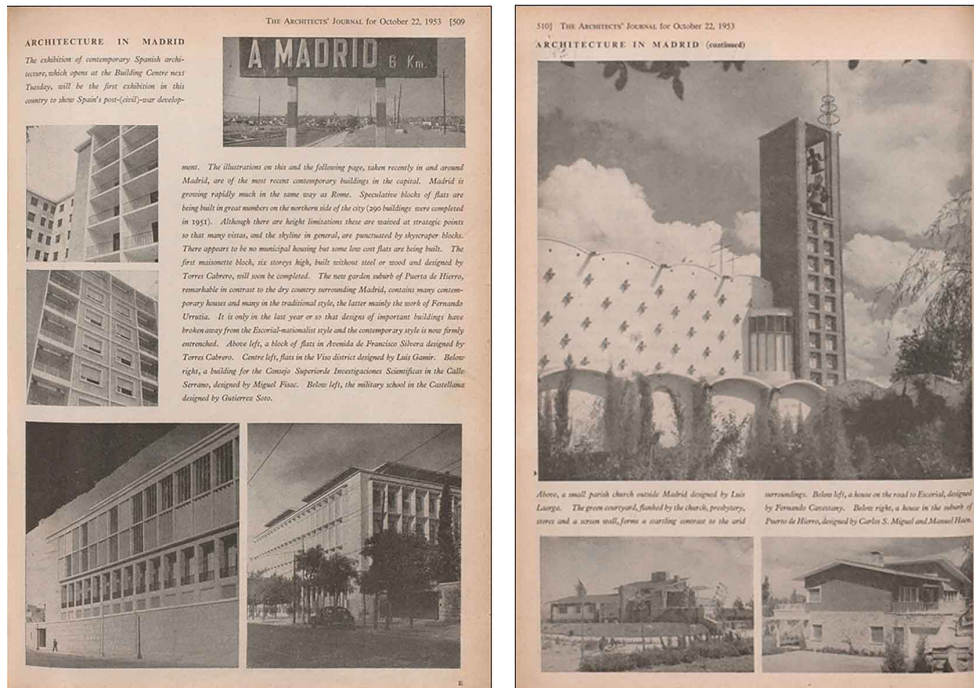
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Introduction¹

In the Autumn of 1953, the Building Centre in London hosted an exhibition on recent architecture in Madrid. In the show there were works of Miguel Fisac, Luis Gutiérrez Soto, Carlos de Miguel and Luis Laorga, among others. The exhibited works provoked diverse opinions that were published in some English journals:

The Architect and Building News presented a brief report in which the editor referred the Spanish architecture in these terms: 'I find the buildings disappointing (...) [they] have the harsh monumentality associated with the Works of Hitler and Mussolini'².



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The Architects' Journal, on its two-pages article illustrated with some photographs, assessed the show and pointed that 'it is only in the last year or so that designs of important buildings have broken away from the Escorial-nationalist style and the contemporary style is now firmly entrenched'³ [Fig. 1].

It can be noticed that these commentaries offer different perceptions of the work exhibited in London, however, it is not my intention to evaluate which one is more accurate. What I want to focus on is that the particular political situation of Spain in these years—a regime without liberties—was present, in a way or another, for the assessment of both journals.

On the one hand, *The Architect and Building News* perceived in Spain a monumentalism similar to the one promoted by German and Italian regimes.

1 Grant PID2022-138760NB-C22 funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and "ERDF/EU".

2 "Events and Comments. Contemporary Spanish Architecture," *The Architect and Building News* Nov. (1953): 555.

3 "Architecture in Madrid," *The Architects' Journal*, no. 3060 (1953): 509.

Fig. 1

Article from *The Architect's Journal* about the exhibition on Madrid architecture held at the Building Centre in London, 1953 (Figure from the Author).

This architecture was also present in authoritarian governments such as Stalinism. However, this appreciation was not present in the report. Thus, it seems that the journal was judging the exhibited work based on ideological criteria, identifying the country with right-wing dictatorships and applying these characteristics to the designs. On the other hand, *The Architects' Journal*, with the term 'Escorial-nationalist style', made reference to a supposed architectural style, official for the regime, inspired by the Escorial monastery.

These events put into consideration how the view of Spain from abroad, in that specific moment, had repercussions for the way a phenomenon such as architecture—to some degree outside of the political realm—has been analyzed and understood.

Therefore, with this text, it is my intention to show this relationship. The period that I will cover dates from 1950—once the immediate postwar period is passed—to 1986—year in which the young Spanish democracy enters the European Union; Franco died in 1975. However, it is also important to point out that, in the field of history Spanish architecture, this period is one of development and consolidation of the modern architecture in the country.

Spain seeing from abroad (1936-1986)

For a better comprehension of the repercussion of the foreign understanding of Spain between 1950 and 1986, firstly it is necessary to know what the elements that defined this understanding were. For reasons of extension, I will not develop here an in-depth study of the topic—which itself is very complex and has an abundant bibliography. Thus, I will only trace the general panorama, highlighting the main events that contributed to the construction of a specific view of the country.

Many times, the view of a nation is built on stereotypes or inevitable simplifications. Although not completely truthful, these views strongly influence the way the beholder perceives the different features of the country. On the top of it, many varied factors contribute to the construction of the image, however not all of the same importance. In the case of Spain, it is a fact that 'the political issue has conditioned and charged the foreign projection of the country'⁴, along this period.

Besides, the image of any period is influenced by the perceptions of the previous period. In this case, this means that the foreign understanding of the early years of Franco's regime is marked by the position taken during the Spanish Civil War. For the historian Javier Tusell, the Civil War got Spain closer to the World. 'Never before there was such an attention towards Spain in all the countries'⁵. The warfare put the whole world in one fighting group or the other.

4 Hipolito de la Torre Gómez, "La España de Franco desde el exterior: el inacabado camino hacia Occidente (1955-1975)," *Espacio Tiempo y Forma*, no. 25 (2013): 235.

5 Javier Noya, *La imagen de España en el exterior* (Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 2002), 61.

Once the war was ended, a new political order was settled: General Franco's dictatorship. The regime held the power for almost forty years. During this period, the image of the dictator is one of strength that 'inescapably was projected over the whole country'⁶. From the beginning of the war, everyone had an opinion about the insurgent army and, as it is logical, judged the whole nation from that perception.

Along Franco's regime, the image of the country was complex and changing. During the early years of the dictatorship, once the II World War was ended and fascism defeated, the survival of an authoritarian regime such as Franco's arose a feeling of mistrust from the democratic powers. As a consequence, between 1946 and 1950, Spain was under a tight isolation, fruit of economic and political sanctions from the UN.

With the dissolution of the sanctions in 1950, it seemed Spain was starting a favorable period for the external context. Within this new international realm—rarefied by the menace of communism and the inception of the Cold War—, in a brief period, Spain changed from being under suspicion of pro-nazi from the democratic powers to be sympathetic for the Americans and its re-adjustment as 'allied country', although in a secondary position⁷. General Franco became an anti-communist leader and, for some aspects, casual ally of the Western powers.

It is in this context in which, in 1953, Spain signed two important agreements: the Concordat with the Holy See and the Pact of Madrid with the USA. Two years later, Spain entered the UN. This new situation made the foreign view more favorable.

This way, at the end of the 1950s' decade, everything seems 'to contribute to clear the way for the re-encounter between Spain and its neighboring Western-Europe countries'⁸. In a World in state of change, Spain also showed its transformation. The country developed a process of social and economic modernization, international opening and an increasing presence in foreign affairs. However, the political ideology of the government did not evolve.

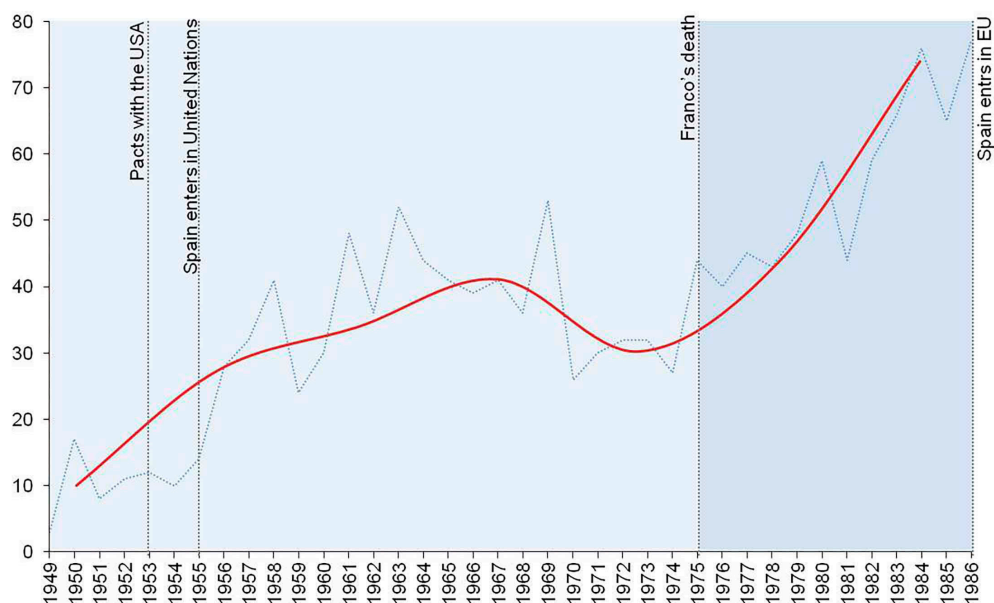
Within this panorama, in 1962 Spain applied for its entry in the European Economic Community. However, the shadow of a regime without liberties prevented the entry in the European organization. This burden supposed an obstacle impossible to avoid for as long as the dictatorship remained. Nevertheless—and despite the negative of the EEC—, Spain continued showing a progressive opening towards the exterior.

In the last years of the Regime, some political events contributed to disturb the foreign understanding of Spain, producing a rejection of the dictatorship.

6 Rafael Nuñez Florencio, "La percepción exterior de España durante el franquismo," *Historia Contemporánea*, no. 30 (2005): 26.

7 Nuñez Florencio, "La percepción," 40.

8 Raimundo Bassols Jacas, "España y Europa durante el franquismo," *Historia Contemporánea*, no. 30 (2005): 219.



The reason for this spurning was the legal processes that took place in the country. Between 1970 and 1975 several members of the terrorist group ETA were sentenced to death. Some of these sentences were executed. These events 'provoked a wave of repudiation in the rest of the world against Spain and Franco'⁹, with various demonstrations in front of Spanish embassies along Europe.

In 1975, with the death of General Franco, Spain moved over a long period in which the main feature of the political system—its lack of public rights—, disappeared. Despite the fears and an initial uncertainty, the foreign countries behold a pacific transition towards parliamentary democracy¹⁰. The process of international normalization culminated in 1986 with the entry of the country in the European Union.

The presence of Spanish architecture in international journals

As it was pointed out in the introduction, the complex image of Spain, produced by the political status of the country, seemed to be influential for the way the work of Spanish architects was approached in international publications' discourse. As we will see, along their pages, we can observe an understanding of Spanish architecture conditioned, in varying degrees, by the ideological position regarding Franco's regime.

If we look at the dissemination of Spanish architecture along the period we can observe how, along these years and in a parallel way to the improvement of the image of the country abroad, there was an increasing interest on the

Fig. 2

Graphical representation of the diffusion of Spanish architecture in international journals between 1949 and 1986. The blue line indicates the number of articles each year featuring Spanish architecture in international journals. In red, the trend curve is shown (Figure from the Author).

⁹ Bassols Jacas, "España," 231.

¹⁰ This process towards democracy eased the breaking of stereotypes inherited from past decades. The stereotypes produced the thinking of the end of the dictatorship, as it happened in the Civil War of 1936 with the end of the Republic, as "a time in which violence and passions would dictate the change" (Noya, *La imagen*, 63).

architectural production of the country that, with the advent of democracy, grew considerably [Fig. 2].

The 1950s' was not only a decade of economic and political opening towards the world; it was also the first time that the post-war Spanish architecture was rediscovered and valued in an international realm. Not without certain surprise, different foreign journals started to unearth some remarkable Spanish architects and to dedicate, in a progressive way, a larger number of pages of their works.

Certainly, in a large degree this was due to the good work of the Spanish professionals. However, it is worth considering the improvements in foreign affairs after a period of isolation, and how they contributed to the phenomenon. The opening of the relationships stimulated the introduction of new ideas and this promoted again a further openness. In this sense, in 1972, the journal *Architectural Design* reminded how 'the slight liberalization introduced after the American-Spanish military and economic pact in 1953 allowed the frontier to be opened and new ideas to fertilize'¹¹.

In the context of the 1950s', 1957 and 1958 were important years for the international projection of Spanish architecture. In these years, the pages of different publications made reference to two important works: the canteens for Seat by César Ortiz-Echagüe, Rafael de la Joya and Manuel Barbero Rebolledo; and the Spanish pavilion for the Expo in Brussels by José Antonio Corrales and Ramón Vázquez Molezún. With the former, in 1957, Ortiz Echagüe, de la Joya and Rebolledo won the prestigious Reynolds Memorial award of the The American Institute of Architects¹². With the pavilion in Brussels, Spain reached a notorious international prestige in 1958—the first expo after the Second World War. As J.M. Richards, editor of *Architectural Review*, many 'were introduced to modern Spanish architecture by the Spanish pavilion at the Brussels International Exhibition of 1958'¹³. Both works became the most published in the decade, as well as in the period between 1950 and 1986.

In the decade of 1960s', the Spanish architecture continued improving its presence in foreign periodicals. This way, in 1962, *Werk* journal commissioned César Ortiz Echagüe¹⁴ to develop the first monograph on recent Spanish architecture [Fig. 3]. The special issue came out in June of that year. In the introduction of the issue, the editor Lucius Burckhardt posed the interesting reflection of the situation of the country in which he argues for that publication:

Should we dedicate the editorial to the young generation of Spanish architects? Wouldn't it be misinterpreted in Switzerland—and in Spain? (...) Whoever thinks about a real change in the authoritarian instances is misguided. However,

11 Ángeles Sanjuanista, "Spanish students unrest," *Architectural Design*, no. 2 (1972): 123.

12 Regarding the canteens *Architectural Review*, no. 754 (1958): 345, noted: "a welcome sign of continuing progressive thought in Spain".

13 James Maude Richards, "The Spain of Carlos Flores," *Architectural Review*, no. 781 (1962): 187.

14 César Ortiz Echagüe's success with the design of the canteens for Seat allowed him to established different contacts in Germany and Switzerland. From those contacts he received the commission of the monographic issue.



there is also a misguidance of whoever, due to this reason, boycotts the cultural holders that have remained in the country¹⁵.

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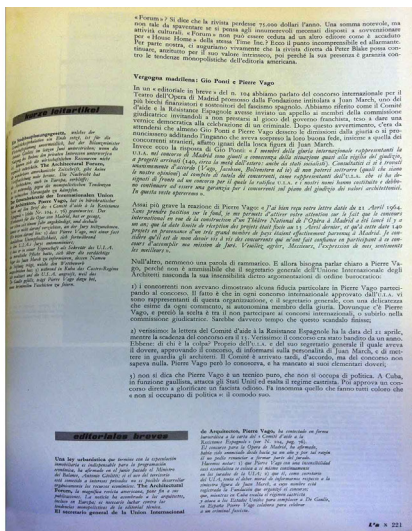
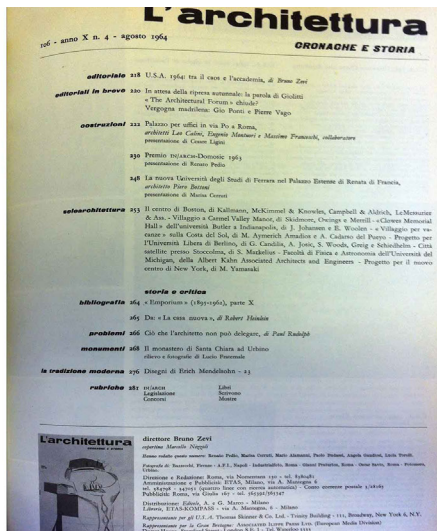
From these brief lines, two clear ideas can be extracted: First, Burckhardt's knowledge of the political situation is patent. When talking about the misguidance of the ones thinking in a 'real change' within the regime, it seems that, implicitly, he is closing the doors to any hope in those believing that the improvement of the foreign affairs and modernisation of the country in those years were to bring a change in the liberties. Second, despite that situation, he considered that there was no reason for blaming the whole country, neither its architecture, acknowledging the virtues of it—in this case, the young architects' production.

Three years later, in 1965, the Italian journal *Zodiac* published an extensive monograph dedicated to Spanish architecture [Fig. 3]. The edition was in charge of the Italian architect Vittorio Gregotti. In the editorial, Gregotti also mentioned the situation of the country, arguing that anything happening there, including architecture, seemed to be constructed as a subversion against the regime: 'when we curated this issue, about a year ago, we set a prime objective, further to our opposition to the regime, of trying to trespass the traditional figure, based on the struggle of regime-resistance with which the world understands life in Spain'¹⁶. What Gregotti did not narrate were the problems raised on trying to publish the prepared material. In those years, the Italian architect was editor of *Edilizia Moderna*, however, for political reasons that journal did not accept an

15 Lucius Burckhardt, "Spanische Architektur," *Werk*, no. 6 (1962):185.

16 Vittorio Gregotti, "Premisa," *Zodiac*, no. 15 (1965): 3.

Fig. 3
Front page of the monographic numbers dedicated to Spanish Architecture from the journals *Werk* (n 6, 1962) and *Zodiac* (n 15, 1965) (Figure from the Author).



issue on Spanish architecture. Facing that situation, Gregotti turned to *Zodiac*.

As we can see, for both Gregotti and Burckhardt the ideological question conditioned their approach to the Spanish architectural reality. In both cases, the political situation of the country is present; however, it seems to step back against the value of the architecture the young Spaniards were developing. At the end, both editors considered that talking about Spanish architecture was not a means of promoting the regime but a way of critique.

Along the pages of other foreign periodicals we can notice how the disagreement with Franco's dictatorship was a primary question when engaging with Spanish architecture. A clear example was the Italian publication *L'Architettura Cronache e Storia*. The journal was founded in 1955 by the architect and critic Bruno Zevi—who, since then until 2000, became its editor. Zevi, besides being one of the theoretical sources of the post-war Italian rationalism, was prominent for his opposition and struggle against fascism—in which he participated in the forties.

In 1958, in a chronicle published in the journal on the Expo in Brussels, Zevi clearly stated his position regarding the Spanish situation. When talking about the Spanish pavilion, the editor wondered, with some irony, the next questions: 'maybe the country is not fascist anymore? Or Franco is tired and allows an unusual freedom for the artist as Mussolini did in some periods of his dictatorship?'¹⁷ As can be noticed, this commentary shows how the journal believed that Franco controlled the architectural production of the country, when, in fact, the interest of the dictator for the discipline was very little¹⁸.

Later on, in an editorial for the issue of June 1964¹⁹, Bruno Zevi gathered the polemic around the competition for an Opera House in Madrid. The Spanish

17 Renato Pedio, "La crisi del linguaggio moderno dell'Esposizione Universale di Bruxelles 1958," *L'Architettura Cronache e Storia*, no. 36 (1958): 388.

18 Pedro Feduchi, in an article about the Pavilion in Brussels (*Pabellón de Bruselas '58. Corrales y Molezún*, (Madrid: Ministerio de Vivienda, 2004), 103-121) shows the little intervention of the government in that work.

19 *L'Architettura Cronache e Storia* presented a similar structure in all its issues. A first part, under the title of 'editoriale' and 'editoriali in breve', developed in four pages different topical questions for architecture. In these editorials, the author was, in most of them, the editor of the journal: Bruno Zevi.

Fig.4
Index and editorial from the journal *L'Architettura Cronache e Storia* (n 106, 1964). The editorial, titled, 'Shame in Madrid: Gio Ponti and Pierre Vago' refers to the controversy that emerged around the contest of the Opera of Madrid (Figure from the Author).

Ministry of Information and Tourism called for this competition, of international character, under the sponsorship of Juan March Foundation. The competition had a great reception among architects. Among the members of the jury were Gio Ponti and Pierre Vago. Up to this point nothing seemed strange. However, the polemic came with the sponsorship of the Foundation. The institution received the name from its founder, Juan March, to whom Zevi described as 'one of the founder members and promoters of Falange, one of the most wicked figures of Spanish fascism'²⁰. Zevi also suggested how 'Franco's regime wanted to glorify, through an international initiative, one of its infamous protagonists'²¹.

In the editorial he continued explaining how, after knowing this fact, various Italian intellectuals—among them Zevi himself—sent a telegram to all the embassies informing about the event, and requesting the architects not to present projects²². He also pointed out that the 'Comité d'aide a la Résistance Espagnole', presided by Jean Cassou, had sent a release to the members of the jury, asking for their resignation²³. Two months later, in the August issue of the journal, Zevi showed—in the 'editoriale in brevi' titled 'Shame in Madrid: Gio Ponti and Pierre Vago'²⁴—his indignation with the negative of Pierre Vago²⁵ and Gio Ponti to the resignation [Fig. 4].

Despite the polemic, the proposals for the competition were published in different international journals as *Bauwelt*, *Deutsche Bauzeitung*, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *Architectural Design* or *BUILDER* among others. Some, as it is the case of *Architectural Design*, in 1965, took advantage to show their hostility towards the dictatorship: 'The competition last year for the Madrid Opera House offered architects a challenge that was not only architectural but, equally, ideological -many preferred to have no part in the aggrandizement of the present Spanish regime'²⁶. From these words it can be inferred how, for some, every success of the country—also in the realm of architecture—was a triumph for the regime. Two years later, in July 1966, in a new editorial entitled 'Barcelona architects are fighting for freedom in Spain', Zevi published again in his journal a piece of news related to the political situation of the country. In this occasion, he informed about the detention and release of architects Antonio de Moragas, Oriol Bohigas, Luis Domenech and Josep Maria Martorell, noticing how 'once again, Franco's regime has shown oppressive and tyrannical'²⁷.

20 Certainly, March's economical support for the coup is clear, however, the politician and businessman also was characterised by his sponsorship of culture and science through his foundation, created in 1955.

21 Bruno Zevi, "Editoriali in Brevi. Más italianos nerviosos," *L'architettura Cronache e Storia*, no. 104 (1964): 77.

22 The text, apart from informing about the fact, is also the response to the accusation made by the newspaper ABC of attempted sabotage of the competition. The Spanish journal *Arquitectura* also mentioned the news and published a letter of response.

23 Bruno Zevi was among the signatories.

24 Bruno Zevi, "Editoriali in Brevi. Vergogna madrileña: Gio Ponti e Pierre Vago," *L'architettura Cronache e Storia*, no. 106 (1964): 221.

25 In these years, he was General Secretary of the UIA.

26 "Madrid Opera House," *Architectural Design*, no. 6 (1965): 312.

27 Bruno Zevi, "Editoriali in Brevi. Gli architetti di Barcellona lottano per la libertà della Spagna," *L'architettura Cronache e Storia*, no. 129 (1966): 144. The reason for the detentions belongs to the context of the revolts carried

On the other hand, it is also patent the journal's support to the Catalan architects that are characterised as 'the best architects in Barcelona, internationally recognised'. With them, Zevi shared a 'common desire of setting Spain free from the oppression'²⁸. This affinity was patent on the way Spanish architecture was approached. In the analysis of its pages there were more than forty articles about architectural production in Spain in our historical period. From them, three quarters are dedicated to Catalan architecture from which almost one forth is the work of Catalan architect Oriol Bohigas.

It is important to point out that this fact is not an isolated phenomenon but a possible feature of all the period: between 1950 and 1986, when talking about Spanish architecture, Barcelona had more presence in international journals—more than Madrid or any peripheral region²⁹.

Certainly, from the many factors that influenced this question, it seems logical to think about how one of these factors has been the view of Catalan architecture as a form of dissent from Franco.

In this sense, it is also important to bear in mind the effort made by some architects from within the country for promoting the Spanish architecture abroad. Among them, the role that Bohigas developed. His promotion in periodicals has been constant, evidencing the effort for promoting Spanish presence, and specially Catalan, in the international panorama. He has regularly collaborated in journals such as *Moebel interior Design*, *Lotus* or *Casabella*. Besides it, he also has collaborated in many monographs that, from the seventies, several periodicals—such as *Aujourd'hui Art et Architecture*, *Arquitectura* (Lisbon), *Werk*, *Der Architekt*, *Abitare* or *Zodiac*— has dedicated to the Spanish production.

From 1975, with Franco's death and the establishment of democracy, there was a new interest in Spanish architecture and its presence in international journals increased in a considerable way: there were many monographs³⁰ and articles along these years on the Spanish production. As it is logical, along their pages, the new situation of Spain did not pass unnoticed and the architectural reality was seen with optimism. In this new scenario, the production of Spanish architects was set free from the ideological burden that, as we have seen, had diverse manifestations—from the alignment with the regime to its consideration as a mean to combat it—that lost their meaning in the new times.

Bauen und Wohnen magazine dedicated its January 1978 issue to the architecture in Barcelona³¹. In that volume, it is pointed how the country 'had been liberated from fascist rule, peacefully, by a judicious government, at a

out by students in Spain in the 1960s'. In this case, there was a meeting of around 500 students and 35 intellectuals aiming to create a union, something illegal at the time.

28 Zevi, "Editoriali in Brevi," 144.

29 This data is inferred from the analysis of almost 180 international journals.

30 More than a half of the monographs dedicated to Spanish architecture between 1950 and 1986 were published in the period of 1975-1986.

31 It was the second monograph about Spanish architecture that was published since the death of the dictator in 1975. The first one was edited by A+U dedicated to the work of José Antonio Coderch, in December 1977.

crucial moment, combining two epochs, the past still having life in it and the future beginning to emerge³². From its part, the Italian journal *Controspazio* edited a monograph in 1979 on contemporary Spanish architecture. In that issue, the journal reminded the special issue published by *Zodiac* in 1965 and the obstacles Gregotti found for its publication. This way, they put into evidence how the political and architectural panoramas, after fifteen years, changed radically. Leaving Franco's regime behind, Spanish architecture, freed from ideological clichés, was analysed with deeper detail. 'Spain had left the myth behind'³³.

32 Ulrich Schäfer, "Architektur im Gespräch – Bericht aus Barcelona," *Bauen und Wohnen*, no. 33 (1978): 9.

33 Claudio D'Amato, "Presentazione," *Controspazio*, no. 4 (1979): 2.

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