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A Resonance Chamber

There are no limited objects, but rather matter and energy entwined into complex knots, extensions of some of whose threads reach our bodies through our senses. They form part of flows of events, and the effects of these flows involve us. Our environment and our presence within it are interdependent, and they flow together to form an integrated whole, engaged in an interactive dynamic. When we consider an object or some part of our environment, we must realize at once that we are actually integral to the process of apprehension, that relationships exist without which its existence would pass undetected.

Not all of the infinite number of possible effects exerted by the outside world are physically detected; some are detectable only when amplified, emphatically pointed out, or transfigured. Only then do they appear and become obvious, while others pass unnoticed. An external environment touches and transforms another internal, intracorporeal one and the signals that reach us via our senses are interiorized within our mental space. Emotion is a response to effects induced during a complex informational process.

Architecture, which can be construed as an interposition along this continuum between the two spheres, external and internal, acts as a chamber to enlarge or filter the threads of its uninterrupted, encompassing basic fabric. An image that I always find seductive is that of the room or built space as a resonance chamber, a transformer of foreign signals that translates and adapts them into receivable terms, as imposed by organic nature and culture. In other words, this is a way to understand architecture as part of nature, an abstract landscape inferred from the natural world and, what is more, directed at establishing an indissolubly powerful alliance with the body as a whole. Its effects are backed up by the memory of countless experiences. Constructed space mobilizes and triggers memories of spontaneous habitation, of the links between space and the body, and of what every culture has made of this relation. Architecture is a mirror in which we can see an awareness of our physical, organic presence in the world, and this awakens echoes that thrill and stir the emotions. Architecture can be seen as landscape, but also as body art.

We do not, therefore, inhabit a specific piece of architecture so much as a house that is both within and beyond it. A single work of architecture is a concentric, selective interposition, occupying a gap between the all-embracing and the intimate. It stands in both spheres and reverts to each.

In music, an initial vibration, a wave on the air, is collected and treated, filtered, channeled, and amplified through a sound box, a resonance chamber, so that its effects reach our ears as a distinct and differentiated sensation. A sound caused by the wind, when amplified by a bell or metal tube, we hear as a tinkle; the vibration of a string, when qualified by a wooden box, we hear as timbre. What we perceive as sound after sound arranged in time is, in essence, collaboratively produced by the original source of the vibration, the translating instrument, and our hearing.

If we say that music is not the instrument, then neither is architecture the box. It is not enough to concentrate our efforts on making the box beautiful. This way of understanding architecture postulates something more specific: building on the conceptual axis that incorporates source and sink, physical origin and sensory destination, and, to extend the metaphor, making a box that, when it resonates, creates harmony between both extremes. A piece of architecture imagined as a vehicle, a transitive entity, is conceptually transparent and its mission is to be invisible.

It is my opinion that this interpretation of the ends and means of architecture places a new slant on how architectonic culture should be oriented, its sense of purpose and its role. It calls for a broader focus and a more generous and disinterested approach. I believe that such an approach would immediately contribute to a freer, more agile understanding of how we relate to the made and built environment.

Excerpted from Juan Navarro Baldeweg, introduction to *Juan Navarro Baldeweg* (Madrid: Tanais Ediciones, 2000; English ed. Corte Madera, Calif.: Ginko Press, 2000; German ed. Hamburg: Ginko Press, 2000). Photograph by Alexander Levi, model by Juan de Dios Hernández and Jesús Rey.

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