

**BOXES PIERCED BY LIGHT**

**Prologue to the book by Rogelio Ruiz Fernández**

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## BOXES PIERCED BY LIGHT

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The air becomes serene  
And dresses in beauty and unused light  
Salinas, when it sounds  
Extreme music  
By your wise hand governed

Although Salinas was a musician, divine, he could have been an architect. Fray Luis de León, in this admirable poem, seems to be talking about architecture, about the capacity of architecture to clothe the air of space with beauty and unused light. So many times we have compared the musical composition to the work of architecture. Or better yet, the musical building to the architectural composition. And that is what is done in this book by Rogelio Ruiz Fernández when he talks about architecture and light.

This book speaks to us of light, of architecture traversed by light. And we should celebrate the fact that Rogelio Ruiz Fernández has decided to distill the best of his doctoral thesis to create this precious text on light.

Boxes pierced by light, is how this book should be titled, which talks about architecture when it is pierced by light and sounds. I have written more than once that works of architecture are like musical instruments. Paul Valery, in his *Eupalinos*, spoke with great insight of mute buildings, buildings that speak and buildings that sing, that sound. Because that is the central theme of this book where the author makes us walk through those boxes that, when crossed by light, sound, sing and produce a wonderful architecture capable of stopping time.

When a musical instrument is pierced by air, either by vibrating its strings or by being blown in some way, the miracle of music arises. Because music is air.

When an architectural instrument, a work of architecture, is pierced by light, the prodigy of architecture capable of suspending time emerges. Because architecture is light.

And if the ultimate meaning of a musical instrument is that the air passes through it to produce the sublime music capable of moving the receiver, the same is true of architecture. Rogelio Ruiz, rightly, calls the receiver the one who receives that architecture, and considers him one of the three constituent parts of the architectural fact. And in a similar way he calls light "the physical phenomenon itself", because it is "physical", material, what light does when it passes through the architectural instrument. Far from being something mysterious and inexplicable, it is something physical, quantifiable, measurable, controllable, just as the receiver is man with all his senses.

Years ago I wrote, lying, that there were tables of light, invented by Bernini, lost and found by Le Corbusier. I wanted to express with it, that character of "physical phenomenon" of light that was quantifiable, measurable, controllable, as are the

phenomena of gravity, the structures. Many believed it, because it is credible. Someone, somewhere, will make them with computerized means, if they are not already made.

I must admit that as soon as I received the draft of the book and read its title I immediately thought of Bernini's Santa Teresa pierced, reverberated by the dart of divine light in the impressive Cornaro Chapel of the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome. Because it is there that one of the greatest prodigies of architecture takes place every day, of this architecture read through the prism of light that Rogelio Ruiz Fernández proposes to us. The light coming from a source that is hidden from us produces the ecstasy not only of the saint but also of the simple spectators who witness the miracle. This is the central theme of this book.

At a certain point in this book, for various reasons, the figure of Sir Christopher Wren, the great English architect, appears and takes on a special prominence. And, it could not be otherwise, Bernini and Wren came to meet. Bernini 1598-1680 and Wren 1632-1723 met. This is what Gilian Darley tells us in his book John Evelyn. Living for ingenuity where he tells us that this meeting, in Paris on the occasion of Bernini's project for the Louvre, was a very brief and frustrating encounter. We would like to know more.

It is interesting in some of the sections referring to light, the originality of considering the horizontal light crossing the buildings, for which he uses, as a good Asturian, the image of Santa María de Naranco.

The text has a certain complexity that I understand enriches the study of light under very different points of view. It is a text that provokes and awakens us by sometimes proposing uncommon points of view.

On my table, Complexity and contradiction in the architecture of Robert Venturi. It is a text that has had a great influence on contemporary architecture and has some concomitants with this text. We can remember here what Niels Bohr said: "the opposite of a profound truth may very well be another profound truth". And the fact is that there are no incontrovertible truths in architecture. There are no unique truths.

There are now some architects who believe themselves to be discoverers of light. Even I am sometimes awarded that certain more than inclination. But no one, no architect can arrogate to himself the ownership of light, which is, has been and will be a central theme of architecture itself. I have repeated actively and passively that two of the central themes of architecture are gravity and light. Gravity that constructs space and light that constructs time. And it is in these coordinates that this marvelous book by Rogelio Ruiz Fernández moves.

Among the many good points, he brings us a quote from Ortega, from his *La deshumanización del arte* where he points out that "a gothic cathedral is a trap set by fantasy to hunt the infinite". Well, it's all that good.

And if I began with a poem by Fray Luis de León, I can only end with another poem by the prince of Spanish poetry, Garcilaso de la Vega, because it also fits poetically to the works of architecture when we consider them as musical instruments.

If from my low lyre,  
So much could the sound that in a moment  
Appease your anger  
From the bracing wind,  
And the fury of the sea, and the movement.

N.B.

I encourage you to read this book with paper and 0.4 pilot in hand to jot down issues, and perhaps underline them. On which topics you agree and on which you disagree. I usually do it this way and it is very effective. I hope you enjoy this book as much as I do.