

The intervention of Víctor Eusa in the 2nd Ensanche of Pamplona: The artistic transformation of a technical model

Andrés Caballero Lobera

Departamento de Arquitectura. Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura, Donostia-San Sebastian. Universidad del País Vasco UPV/EHU. Spain
E-mail: ander.caballero@ehu.eus

Abstract. *It is inevitable to be disappointed when we consciously compare today's city with yesterday's. Territorial occupancy was an arduous task which confronted man and nature. It was a collective act, the cultural manifestation of a society that aspired to artistically represent itself in the cities it built, both in buildings and public spaces. The city of the past, so conceived, successfully raised through time, and even today we can appreciate, in the human affection it brings about, the plastic value of its buildings and the ambient quality of its public spaces. Currently the contemporary city is just incapable of meeting a profound spiritual demand if it does not pursue a practical goal. In the Ensanche, one of its most renowned examples, the idea of the city imposes a restriction to the artistic or monumental value of the historic city in favour of a technical efficiency that facilitates the economic and administrative management of the new city. The unidentified reticular mesh so characteristic of the urban morphology of the Ensanche evinces the distortion of the hippodamian model which in past ages and also throughout time probed its validity to provide magnificent examples of cities thought and built also from artistic principles. In the late example of the 2nd Ensanche of Pamplona, we attend to the solitary labour of an architect such as Victor Eusa Razquin, who knew how to transform with his buildings the "technical" uniformity of the Ensanche by transforming, qualifying and enriching it with the incrustation of architectural episodes of elevated artistic value.*

Keywords: Eusa, Pamplona, Ensanche, Orden, Variedad.

Introduction

The construction of Pamplona's 2nd Ensanche represented the application of a city model that, based on efficiency, aspired to occupy the territory without restrictions. This fast-growing and technically efficient city, with no exact limits, had limited its only possibilities of formal inspiration to the block residential unit. Of the hippodamian model offered by the classical Greek city, only the residential mesh offered it the guarantee of a rational support to develop this new modern city, considered now as just a technical problem.

The intervention of Víctor Eusa Razquin in

the construction of this Ensanche, represented a correction of that technical model, incorporating the artistic principle of his architectonic work. The rigidity of the Ensanche is transformed, in Eusa's work, into plastic flexibility, showing an artistic intent that is able to produce surprise, admiration and an architectonic reality in a setting where architecture had been limited to satisfying the practical needs of the constituent and of the regulating ordinance.

This positivism, assumed as a sign of efficiency, has ferociously limited the artistic capacity in the construction of the city. In contrast, the historical experience, both of our recent past and that of the other more distant

past, offers us the example of cities where the delicate balance reached between science and art still causes admiration, converting those exemplary cities into something to be imitated. The spirit of pragmatism, the willingness to search for a practical purpose, is an in-depth concern of human nature, and as it is something we cannot relinquish, the cultures of the past knew how to share the utilitarian desire with a representational value, consolidating it as a superior asset to the value of utility. This representational will was firstly expressed in the foundational act of the city which trusted in the invocation of the myth – bearer of the symbol – and continued with a sophisticated ritual which, in its liturgical development, made evident the important meaning of that inaugural act.

The old city: symbol and representation

In the historical experience that has preceded us, architecture and city, as a singular expression of the same, satisfied utilitarian needs, but reflected in it we were also able to find those other aspirations of a spiritual nature that affected the social group and that needed to be expressed artistically. On these occasions, art is offered to us as a natural medium where we can find the tool that will enable us to involve the spiritual and transcendent desire of a community in its everyday.

In the past, constructing the city meant the renewal of a new beginning, a premeditated and rigorous act that, directed by elite, engaged the entire group. In its origins, the foundation of the historical city as a collective act had a high symbolic value, which was entrusted to the execution of an elaborate ritual. The exclusive predictive secret of the augur, the mysterious secrecy of his knowledge, was totally rational and coherent at a time of thought when myth shared with science the ability to give a rational explanation to the eventful world of nature. If science investigated into the cause, the myth, with its highly symbolic nature, clarified the purpose of the phenomena.

The ritual act provided the myth with an organised and coherent structure, which, in its symbolic undertaking, aspired to rationally

explain the world: “if we imaginatively accept the premises of the ancients, we would be surprised to discover the extent to which their consideration of the myth and of the ritual is complete and rational, even in such a complex issue, from the ceremonial viewpoint, as the foundation of a city” (Rykwert, 2002).

As a collective architectonic ensemble, the symbolic aspect contained in predictive and ritual practices gradually gave way, with the passing of time, to a representational value that ended up being consolidated as a mark of character of the traditional city. The city constructed the necessary physical framework for the relationships among its inhabitants, and also, in the high plane of the symbolic, it provided them with a stage for daily living that had to be designed based on artistic principles that took into account the requirements of the artistic will – *kunstwollen* – to which the culture of every historical time aspired.

This characteristic of the traditional city as an artistic work, can be verified from historical experience, and despite the fact that during each era the city has been constructed in a different manner, with its own and specific character, in all cases it can be acknowledged “as a perfectly undertakable, homogeneous and closed event, as a delimited and autonomous place that contains the public and private elements that guarantee its equilibrium” (Martí, 1991).

The hippodamian mesh: a timeless model

On the grid, the Ensanche supported the idea of a city based on technical efficiency that would facilitate the economic and administrative management of the new town. This practical approach of the urban reality, closely linked to an idea of positivist disposition, represented a restriction of the artistic and monumental value that was so present in the old city.

The limitless reticular mesh, typical of the morphology of the ensanche, shows the denaturalisation of the hippodamian model, which, in past eras and throughout time, had proved its validity to offer superb examples of cities designed and constructed from artistic principles: Mileto; Priene; Timgad; Zamosch; Manheim or La Carolina, de Pablo de Olavide

in the province of Jaén, are some of the many examples where the grid, as support for urban planning, was complemented with the artistic principle that each culture aspired to. In all these examples, the technical uniformity of the hippodamian grid that supports them, is offset, qualified and enriched with the incrustation of episodes of an architectonic nature, whether they are buildings or public spaces, with a high artistic value. The spiritual desire of art as a genuine expression of human behaviour, in its creative desire to overcome the historical contingency, permits cultural vicissitudes, making the city, as an architectonic reality, feel at the same time like an aesthetic reality.

The demand for utility and the need for representation were, in the past, aspirations that ran parallel and where the stimulus was reciprocal. Scientific thinking and artistic aspiration walked hand in hand at a time when the technique fell within the limits of the artisan. The alterations and modifications that the hippodamian grid suffered in the evolutionary process of the historical city were always carried out under the intuitive control of spatial meaning, of a harmonious and sensitive relationship, adapted to the specificity and destination of each space; as well as to its degree of representativeness.

Order and Contrast as an artistic principle

When one observes the work constructed by Eusa in the Ensanche, we can see more fully how the characteristic image of that Pamplona of the start of the 20th century, eager to enter modernity, has been constructed with the fragments that Eusa deposited in it throughout the years. The unhurried decantation of his singular work has been enriched with variety and contrast, with order and uniformity inherent to the hippodamian model on which inspires the Ensanche is supported.

Order and Variety as an implicit artistic principle, appealed to the judgement of reason, and Marc-Antoine Langueri made it explicit in the 18th century as a way of introducing order, and perhaps calm, faced with the overwhelming presence of a rococo decoration that, behind

the pomp and glitz, concealed the truth of an art that been left hidden and suffocated by an invasive and ecstatic ornament. Thus, the oppressive order of a regular city, submitted to the uniformity of the building ordinance, makes the sensual stimulus aroused by the enjoyment of the artistic work, in this case, of the urban environment where we live, disappear. J. Starobinski correctly expresses the limitation of an art given over exclusively to order, when he says that “perfect harmony permits the coexistence of order, aimed at satisfying the spirit, and a variety of details and nuances, able to stimulate the happy surprise of the senses. Order and variety, these two principles of the classic aesthetics, are interpreted as qualities that will simultaneously claim the activity of understanding and the activity of sensitivity” (Starobinski, 1964).

The varied work of Victor Eusa in the Ensanche of Pamplona, offers, in its static and uniform landscape, an intense corridor of buildings and styles that appear before the observer as witnesses of the architect’s sensitivity; but also as evidence of the artistic spirit from an era that still kept the memory of history alive.

The eclectic spirit in which Eusa had trained, enabled the architect to exploit his natural disposition to use any contemporary artistic manifestation as an expression of architectonic form; from the eclecticism of the first works, to motifs inspired by Secession and Art Déco, his unmistakable figurative expressionism of red brick or exposed concrete, or the compulsory regionalism and the least inspired “national style” that was enforced after the war.

The emotional vicissitudes with which Eusa has expressed the art of his profession can be found peppered throughout a city which, in the longer term, has assumed the architect’s characteristic work as its own identity. The variety and wealth of all of this work is offered as a guarantee of visual pleasure, in the face of the edifying spectacle of finding buildings, in the heart of the technical and efficient city of the ensanche, which understand their location in that modern city from a personal and artistic viewpoint.

Eusa’s buildings overcome the programmatic demands of the project and engage in the

construction of a city that is about to take on full significance within the urban context in which they have been designed, and only there. The actual city would be visually flatter and both its structure and its visual identity reduced, if we were to deprive it of the visual image constructed by Eusa's buildings. Understanding the Ensanche as a sensorial experience would also be limited.

The disconcerting uniformity of the Ensanche is limited with Eusa's personal work, which manages, in the urban settings where he operates, to define "a characteristic and legible environment [that] does not only offer safety but also enhances the potential depth and intensity of human experience, (...) potentially, the city is, per se, the symbol of a complex society. If it is visually well planned, it can also have an intense expressive significance" (Lynch, 1998). The quality of Victor Eusa as an architect emancipates his work over and above the rest, making it possible to showcase the perspectives that his buildings offer in a featureless city.

His building form vanishing points, visual focal points for the passer-by that stand out over the rest of the setting that is more neutral. Immersed in this inexpressive coral accompaniment, V. Eusa reveals, full of formal power, some extremely personal architecture with great determination, to influence the immediate urban setting, until transformed into visual references of the city they occupy.

The repairing work of V. Eusa

The city of the ensanche was supported on a geometric outline that lacked limits, and therefore, there was no need to define either its profile, or its singular points where that urbanised interior comes into contact with the diaphanous and ruralised exterior. The formal idea that dwells in that grid of the ensanche is deprived of that physical and precise limit, typical and obvious of the historical city.

This situation will be corrected by Eusa,

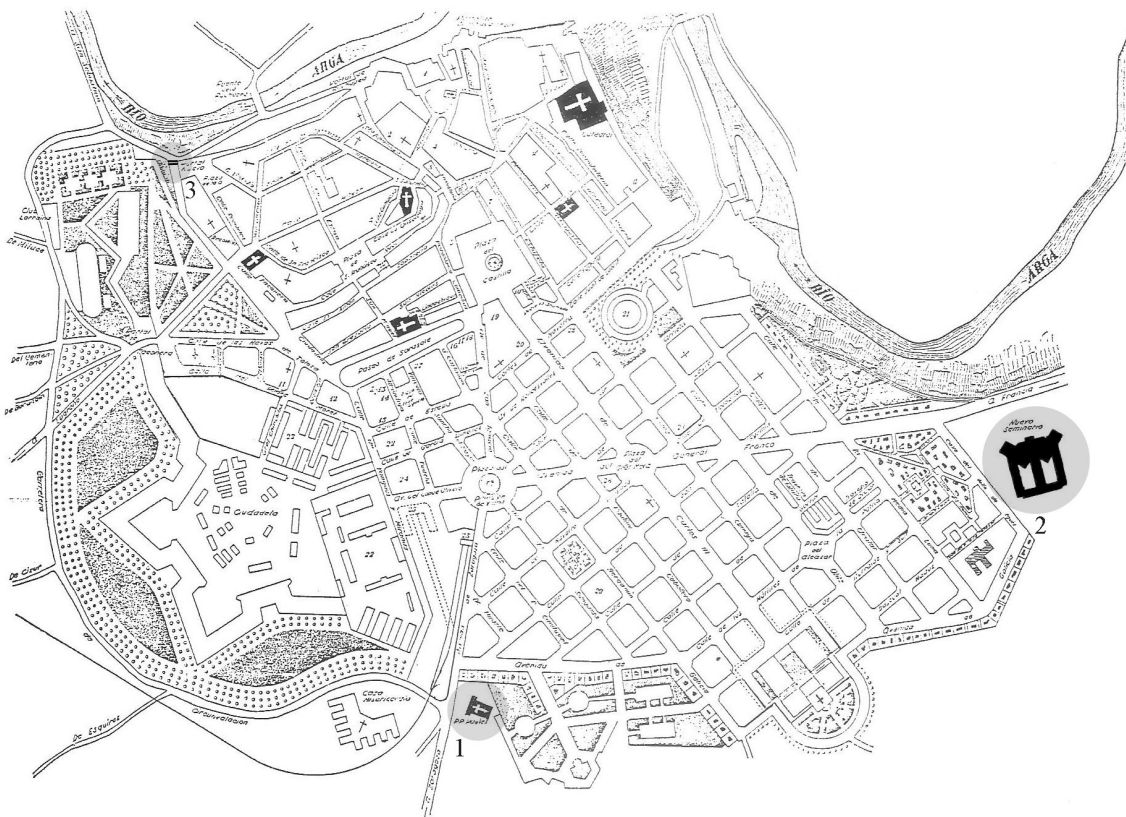


Figure 1. The 2nd Ensanche of Pamplona: 1. "La Milagrosa" School; 2. "San Miguel" Seminar; 3. Portal Nuevo.

who, through his projects, will carry out a series of buildings in the new perimeter of the city, thus managing to characterise the entry points into Pamplona and for the urban perimeter of the new Ensanche to be architectonically signified and physically delimited (Figure 1). The strategic position of these buildings, which are located at the natural accesses to Pamplona from Zaragoza (south), France (east) and Guipuzcoa (north), allowed the architect to correct the absence of that recognisable element, that allegory of the gateway that announces the passage from an organically laid out setting to a rationally structured urban setting. Gateways that symbolically show the city as a visible expression of a mark of identity, and that the city of the Ensanche was not even able to suggest. The connection points between the inside and outside of the city were, thanks to Eusa's intervention, going to be qualified, and the ends of the ring road – now as a new boundary in the south of the urban area – architectonically resolved.

In 1928, when the design of the Ensanche began and the image of the new city was barely visible, Eusa constructed the School and Residence for the P.P. Paules in the southern access. This was a compact building, whose unit volume was supposed to show the religious community around the church as a symbol of the joint communion between teachers and students, congregation and parishioners. In 1931, on the eastern side of the city, at the opposite end of the ring road, Eusa constructed the “San Miguel” Seminary, a monumental work of modern Spanish architecture, both due to its size, and its formal and symbolic pretensions.

With these interventions on the edge of the city, Eusa managed to transfer an evident and legible image to a model with a uniform nature that was being formally being developed but lacked in identity, thus making Pamplona once again an imaginable city. These buildings have the ability to elicit the vigorous image “that facilitates the elaboration of mental images, which are vividly identified, powerfully structured and of great utility” (Lynch, 1998). The last of three interventions on the perimeter of the city, was the Portal Nuevo, and of the three, it is the one that can assume the name of

gateway with more propriety, as it reconstructs the demolished canvas of the Baroque wall. The project was carried out by Victor Eusa in 1939, but it was not constructed until 1950, modifying a previous intervention from the year 1906 by Julian Arteaga. Eusa, as municipal architect, drafted a gateway project that would dignify the city's image at that point, offsetting the deficiencies of the previous intervention, with a castle-like building that had a vigorous image, in the style of E.-L. Boullée's *Portes de ville*, where the architect's artistic intent placed his work on a par with the walled monument (Figure 2).

The evocative and always powerful image of Boullée's work, finds a place in this monumental work by Eusa where he relinquishes the elaborated language of the old figurative form, in favour of the play of bare masses where abstract volumes transform this Gateway into the worthiest access that the city of Pamplona has today. However, the evocation of the remote past is subtly controlled in the severe treatment of the crown of battlements that finish off the walls, and in the corbels that separate the lower body from the upper towers. All of this is treated with great austerity as corresponds to a building whose aim is, from the expression of architectonic form, to fit in with the defensive system of the walls. The actual bare surfaces of the walls act as a support to show, as if it were an ornamental collage, the archaeological remains of the Portal de la Rochapea situated nearby and more to the east of the wall, and which had been dismantled in 1914. This fortress-like work provides it with a defensive aspect that is characteristic of the walled ensemble, and the sobriety of its forms grant it a severe aspect that is suitable for a defensive element. Eusa's project completed the ensemble with some Baroque-style stairs, with no recharging and that fit in well with the austere style of the ensemble, connecting the upper level of the ring road to the lower level of the Guipuzcoa road.

Of all the fragments of the Ensanche where an ambience constituted by the work of Victor Eusa can be recognised, the one configured by Garcia Castañon Street is the area that contains the largest amount of architecture constructed by the architect. This small street

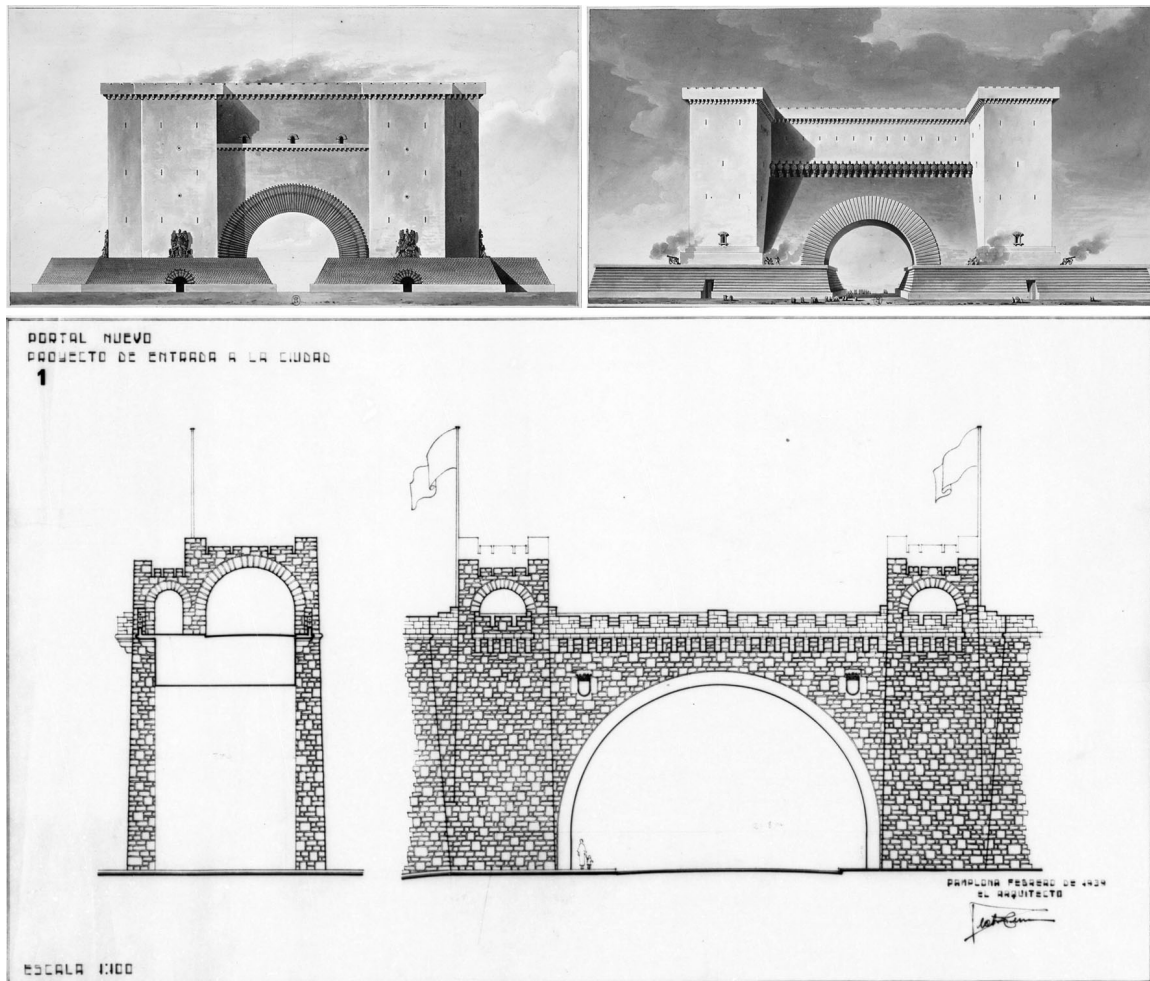


Figure 2. E.-L. Boullée. Portes des villes; V. Eusa. Section and Elevation of the Portal Nuevo.

of the Ensanche is thus transformed into the metaphor of a living museum where some of the author's most important works can be found. Although it is not a definite collection, it comprises an important and very significant sample of the architect's personal and artistic journey over three decades.

His earlier work was carried out in the twenties, and outstanding examples of this era are the Uranga House (1922) and the Goicoechea house (1924), both of which represent an eclectic spirit that was expressed in the local terms of regionalism. In 1924, Eusa planned a residential and office building for the insurance company, La Vasco-Navarra (Figure 3). This building, in addition to the eclectic experience of the previous work, afforded a new language which, in the eastern forms, encountered a natural continuity with the

regionalist northern language, as well as a note of character with which to signify the building in that urban area where García Castañón, Bergamín, Avda. Roncesvalles and Avda. San Ignacio streets converge.

Victor Eusa showed non-dissimulated devotion towards O. Wagner, and in this La Vasco – Navarra building, we find the reflection of some of the typical elements of Wagner's work. Architecture was, at that time, still a mainly artistic product, bringing together all the other noble arts: sculpture and painting. In a building like the Postsparkasse (1906) that O. Wagner offered to the international architectonic context as a mark of identity for a modern architecture that had managed to incorporate the technique of the architectonic form into the figurative world, kept alive that artistic spirit which naturally understood the

advisability of crowning that Viennese postal bank with Othmar Schimkowitz's sculptures. Víctor Eusa, with the same enthusiasm, imitated his master and crowned his with an Athenea.

Six years later, in 1930, Eusa constructed a small block of flats on the corner of García Castañón and Fdez. Arenas streets, which would end up becoming the emblem of an



Figure 3. V. Eusa. Vasco-Navarra building.



Figure 4. V. Eusa. Residential building in García Castañón street.

extremely inspiring period of the architect. The plastic capacity of the artistic genius of Víctor Eusa is concentrated in this project, completing a stage of personal maturity when the architect had detached himself from the diffuse but encoded language of an eclecticism that although late, was still governed by the historical form (Figure 4).

The transformation that the architect experiences with this change in language does not entail a rejection of the previous stage, but

rather, in an evolving process of continuity, this new phase allows us to recognise, in the multiplicity of lines that comprise the ornament, an endless articulation, typical of Moorish ornamental calligraphy that Eusa does not apply to the surfaces of the building; but rather he involves the actual architectonic form in the construction of that arabesque. The architect's spiritual affiliation with some artistic forms that had literally and expressly been used in his previous work is thus denounced.

In 1938, Eusa planned one of his most complete and admirable buildings in Olite Street near the Bullring. This was the San Miguel and Escuelas Pias School. The academic composition floor had a highly hierarchised axial layout where the formal emphasis applied to the corners stands out. In the beginning, these appeared to be outside the field of action of the static central symmetrical axis; but the tension introduced in the diagonals gives forewarning of the prominence that the architect will grant to them in the volumetric configuration of the ensemble. The equilibrium and accumulated tension on the floor will end up disappearing into the exterior volumetric accumulation that will afford the building its characteristic image (Figure 5). The stimulus of buildings such as H.P. Berlage's Amsterdam Stock Exchange, becomes obvious in this project. And, as in the Dutch case, the formal resources used by the architect seek to recreate, with the expression of a new spirit, the artistic keys with which the old mediaeval city was constructed.

The use of the tower as a visual lure in the uniform and aseptic context of the Ensanche, is particularly vital and emotionally suggestive. The slimness of the form and its figurative treatment, both of which are related to the building they belong to, recall the monumental square-tower-palace ensemble, as an architectonic grouping whose compositive complexity and plasticity make it a first rate urban type and aesthetic reference.

This exemplary work contains a silent statement about the idea of a city that Eusa imagined for Pamplona. The typical picturesque qualities of San Miguel and Escuelas Pias School, with the multiple forms that coexist in this architectonic object, demand an organising composition that will lead the rich formal



Figure 5. V. Eusa. San Miguel and Escuelas Pías School.



Figure 6. View of the tower of San Miguel and Escuelas Pías school from the bull ring.

variety inspired by that mediaeval-based urban model, and whose idea of form was not subject to any previous outline, to a harmonious and unitary whole.

The symbolic content of this project can be interpreted as a recomposition of the myth-rite duality in the anthropological plane, representing the symbolic meeting of the bullring and its Sanctuary, the latter embodied in the figure of the tower as a religious emblem (Figure 6). Recalling that atavistic moment is consciously expressed by Eusa through the appearance of the tower over the bullring, managing, both from the urban contingency plane and from the meaningfulness of the archaic, to express his will to construct “mankind’s environment as a social and artistically sensitive being” (Collins and Collins, 1980).

Conclusion

Víctor Eusa incorporates an artistic value into the Ensanche through the different building he constructs on it. His buildings, clearly identifiable due to their singularity, afford the formal quality of his artistic expression that transforms them, compared with the other buildings that surround them, into urban elements with a high added value in terms of their ability to qualify and signify the urban setting where they are located.

Eusa attempted to recuperate the artistic profile that existed in the historical city from the aesthetic standards of architectonic expressionism, seeking the sources for his inspiration in those artistic movements that value the artist’s non-abstract expression within models that could be understood as a renewed continuity of architectonic tradition. Therefore, his work lacks references to the examples that extol the machine as a model, making the denial of History the purpose of a new art. An art that expressed the spirit of modern man and of his future, thanks to technical progress, represented the consummation of a positivist materialism that threatened to destroy that other mankind that was still represented in the humanistic spirit that found, in history, the real model of art.

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