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Architectural Constants from Toni Gironès

Habitability and Poetic Reverberations

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The presence of Mankind on Earth is marked by the continuous conquest of space. The ground we walk on has long witnessed our passage or permanence in certain places. Hence it is on that ground that we encounter the traces of those who preceded us and where, at the same time, we build contemporary projects. Caring for the place we inhabit implies acknowledging these time frames. Architecture mediates them in the present, providing them with a renewed condition of habitability. This can be perceived in the work of Catalan architect Toni Gironès, particularly in the context of archaeological remains. Using his lesson of the constants as a starting point, potentially in parallel with

Fernando Távora, this paper uses these as mechanisms for triggering sensorial experience, also drawing on Peter Zumthor and Luis Barragán. Then, through the memory(ies) of the ruins of Vilassar de Dalt and Seró, the place is considered here as a means of enabling individual perception and collective, perhaps even global, identity. Finally, some questions are put forward to problematise Toni Gironès's habitability over the porosity of time, associating past memories, present experience and the unknown future.

- 1 “Current World Population,” accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>
- 2 Let us recall that the United Nations (UN) resolution “Transforming our world: 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda” was unanimously approved by 193 Member States on 25 September 2015, at a historic summit held at headquarters in New York. It came into force on January 1, 2016. “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 (A/RES/70/1): Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” United Nations, accessed November 4, 2020, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Fernando Távora, “Arquitectura e Urbanismo – a lição das constantes,” *Lusitana*, November 1952, 151. Original quote in Portuguese: “fenómeno necessário, inerente à própria natureza do homem, prolongamento indispensável da sua vida, manifestação da sua existência.”

1 Architecture's Role in the 2030 Agenda

The stamp left by human presence on Earth is one of continuous conquest of space. Territories favourable to human settlement have been populated and others, despite having no guarantee at the outset, have been domesticated. We have appropriated the planet's natural resources and subjugated other species to our needs. Exponential population growth has brought about challenges that we are only now starting to face, and human survival is at stake. At the date of writing of this article – November 4, 2020, at 4 pm – the population is estimated at approximately 7 823 170 500, with births certainly outnumbering deaths.¹ The population is spreading at dizzying speed into territories which are already overcrowded, resulting in serious economic and social problems; which the most recent effects of the SARS-COV-2 coronavirus pandemic have manifested on a global scale. There are few areas of the planet that we do not ‘inhabit’, directly or indirectly. There are also few species, humans in particular, that live free from the repercussions of globalisation. Following the industrial and digital revolutions, there is now a call for the planet Earth to be *sustainable* in the 21st century, notwithstanding the resistance of the political and economic-financial powers in some countries of the so-called *first world*.

The famous seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are broken down into 169 targets, are a clear indication that the paramount purpose of the United Nations agenda for the 2030s is to “transform our world” into a place with new *habitable* conditions for all.² As noted in the first paragraph of the preamble to the extensive UN resolution, dated September 25, 2015: “This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. We recognize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.”³ It is via objectives such as these that we can face the precarious times that we are living in and that are we are approaching, aggravated as they are now by the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that, among other purposes, we must “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” and “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.”⁴

The ground on which we walk has long been witness to our passage or persistence in certain places. It is on the earth, therefore, that the vestiges of those who preceded us can be found and also that we build our current-day projects. Under the teachings of *The Lesson of the Constants* by Fernando Távora, *architecture* and *urbanism* are “a necessary phenomenon, inherent to the very nature of man, an indispensable extension of his life, a manifestation of his existence.”⁵ In order to care for “universality – the variety and infinity of aspects, the multiplicity of

- 6 Ibid. Original quote in Portuguese: “universalidade – a variedade, a infinidade dos aspectos, a pluralidade das realizações.”
- 7 Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos'è il contemporaneo?* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2008).
- 8 The word “modern” is used by Fernando Távora, “Arquitetura e Urbanismo.”
- 9 “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 (A/RES/70/1).”
- 10 Toni Gironès, “Conditions for Habitability. A conversation with Toni Gironès,” interview by Inmaculada Maluenda and Enrique Encabo, *El Croquis*, No. 189, 2017, 203.
- 11 Idem., “Topographies in Time: The Experience of Architecture,” *El Croquis*, No. 189, 2017, 211.

achievements” – of the space we inhabit, we need to know what has gone before and to try to anticipate the future.⁶ That is, *to be contemporary*, according to Giorgio Agamben’s proposition.⁷ Architecture (and urbanism) serves to mediate both times in the present, wishing to offer *modern* conditions of *habitability*.⁸ And so it goes, from ancient shelters to the present day. In each era, the places of tomorrow were built, preserving what previous civilizations took the trouble to safeguard, whether due to its function or, from the 18th to 19th centuries, due to its cultural and heritage value. The lands we occupy are therefore in a state of permanent development; via the corporeal condition of architecture, we express the collective awareness of the moment, understood today as being on the local, regional and – particularly – global scale.

In view of the above-mentioned SDGs on the UN 2030 Agenda, inquiry into the role of architecture in the next decade and how it will respond to the multiple and varied challenges that we face holds a certain interest. In some cases, certainly, *rescue architecture* is to be expected and in others, a formal manifestation of the ordained political and financial powers. We know that the sheerest skyscraper is yet to be erected in Abu Dhabi or Shanghai and that innumerable refugee shelters are yet to be set up in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, for example. But, it is not only these delicate problems, most of which have their roots in society, that will be addressed in the post-COVID-19 years. Indeed, aiming “to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment” holds us to a comprehensive and accurate perception of what surrounds us.⁹ On observing the current situation, Toni Gironès elects “habitability” as “the primary task of architecture.” His prediction for 2025 or 2030 is that “80% of the world’s population will be concentrated in cities, the only habitable environment according to a particular idea of progress.”¹⁰

Working out of Badalona, Barcelona, Toni Gironès has accomplished a significant body of work, especially in Catalonia; it is of recognised importance in Spain and also further abroad. The ‘local’ and ‘global’ nature of his interventions reveals his way of closely examining the state of architecture in the 21st century. Abiding by the guidelines of the 2030 Agenda, Toni Gironès has understood daily life as a form of knowledge from the beginning of the 1990s. His process for a project is focused on the experience of places, yet his understanding of it is not limited to the area of intervention: “I think its range of action spreads beyond the city, from its direct relationship with habitability out to the entire planet Earth, regarded as a truly shared heritage,” says Toni Gironès.¹¹ The pre-existing condition offers a new *topography in time*, which is able to identify with the daily lives of local communities, but, concomitantly, with the most far-flung. Although there is no place for *a priori* criteria, Toni Gironès has identified a set of *constants*, eight in total, which are closely related to the idea of *habitability* which he pursues in his

- 12 Idem., “*Spontaneous architectures, reflections and constants in architecture: The Cape Creus peninsula, a topography in time*” (PhD diss., Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Departament de Projectes Arquitectònics, 2016).
- 13 Idem., “Topographies in Time: The Experience of Architecture,” 209.
- 14 Idem., “A conversation with Toni Gironès, under the postgraduate international and interdisciplinary 2-yrs Erasmus Joint Master Program in *Architecture, Landscape and Archaeology (ALA)*, developed by a consortium of 4 institutions (University of Rome Sapienza, University of Coimbra, National Technical University of Athens and University of Naples Federico II),” interview by Paulo Providência, May 26, 2020, audio, 52:52.
- 15 T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” *The Egoist*, vol. VI, no. 4 (September 1919): 54-55; Idem, no.5 (December 1919): 72-73.

professional and academic practice at the Reus School of Architecture, in Spain, and as a researcher.¹² They are “[c]onstants that run crosswise through my projects and sketch out a degree of continuity between them,” acknowledges Toni Gironès, recalling that the memory of past experiences plays a unique role in his life as an architect. In short, his conclusion is that architecture is *emotion* and *thought*.¹³

We live in a time of uncertainty; what once seemed safe dissolved instantly upon the arrival of a virus of planetary span. The speed at which it propagates rivals that of the information that reaches us daily. The architecture of Toni Gironès requires slow time; it forces us to live within it and to bear witness to the *constants* that give it meaning. It is the resumption of the idea of an architecture of place, one which thinks on the territory and redraws the landscape. This is *porous* architecture, with no boundaries; it is architecture of individual and collective belonging, in which the truth of the materials and means of construction adopted lend it a unique sensory experience. Following the lessons of Fernando Távora, we would anticipate Toni Gironès’s work to be *modern* and *contemporary*, in accordance with Giorgio Agamben. It is a response to a world that is transforming by the second, of rapid time and instant consumption. Thus, the *lesson of the constants* and Toni Gironès’s interventions are of special interest for research. In this article, we will examine them in two parts. In *Reasoning the “topographies in time”*, we will study the *constants* underlying Toni Gironès’s lesson and seek to establish a direct dialogue with that of Fernando Távora, mentioned earlier. In *Experiencing the memory(ies) of the Sharon Stones*, we will take them as effective artifices with which to trigger the desired architectural experience. These poetic reverberations will be assessed in the memory(ies) of the Seró Megalithic Tomb and the Roman Kiln Discovery Space in Vilassar de Dalt, not forgetting other projects, such as the Archaeological Park for Roman Iesso Settlement or the adaptation of Can Tacó Roman Site. An intermediate section, mediating these two, will frame the *lesson of the constants* and the work of Toni Gironès in *The coming age of emotional architecture*. Peter Zumthor and Luis Barragán will be our company on this journey. Finally, we will show how the place that has been reconstructed simultaneously institutes *thought* and *emotion* of individual perception and collective identity, perhaps with global roots. Our itinerary will unfold through the lands of Catalonia, inevitably accompanied by the words of Toni Gironès, as in his recent interview with Paulo Providência.¹⁴

Lastly, it should be emphasised that we will dare to “pair” the lesson and certain works of Toni Gironès with those of Fernando Távora, Luis Barragán and Peter Zumthor. In the light of T.S. Eliot’s well-known critical essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, even living in more or less distant times, only those who are faced with similar dilemmas are contemporary.¹⁵ Thus, we will try to explore the lesson of Toni Gironès and those of the renowned Fernando Távora, Luis Barragán and Peter Zumthor

- 16 Ibid., 55.
17 Idem., interview with Paulo Providência.
18 Ibid.
19 Idem., “Conditions for Habitability.
A conversation with Toni Gironès,” 207.

from a perspective of space and time. After all, as T.S. Eliot states in the text from over a century ago: “the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.”¹⁶

2 Reasoning the “Topography in Time”

Habitability, as the basis for his architectural discourse, is perceived by Toni Gironès as “the essential element that is important” and the architect as “an expert in habitability, like the doctor is in health.”¹⁷ The broadness of this concept can be interpreted throughout his practice, in his approach to the inhabitants’ experience in space, the congregation of past and present time frames, or local and global contexts; because occupation, and life at large, constructs a hypertext with all of these layers and architecture can congregate them all, acting for *continuity*, as testified by Toni Gironès: “Work the limit in between the different parts, the different scales, etc., [...] I think that is the final objective. [...] I would dissolve the limits between the parts I think, the objective of all work, no? Just to base this continuity.”¹⁸

Sensorial experience acts as an enabler of *habitability*, as a motivation for design and a final purpose, providing substance to a poetic design, as well as to the individual and collective functional occupation or haptic fruition of each work. In his own words: “I’m interested in defending and encouraging the poetic gaze in each one of us.”¹⁹ This is overall embedded in his works, by an attentive choice of materiality, such as the tectonic stonework in the adaptation of Can Tacó Roman Site, or the light and evocative metal structure on Tarragona’s Roman Theatre; or by a thorough use of light, like the one that floods the interior space of the Roman Kiln Discovery Space in Vilassar de Dalt (figure 1).

fig. 1 Roman Kiln Discovery Space, Vilassar de Dalt, Barcelona, Spain (2002-2004). Courtesy of Toni Gironès.



- 20 Idem., interview with Paulo Providência.
- 21 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996). First edition 1927.
- 22 Gironès, interview with Paulo Providência.
- 23 Idem., “*Arquitectures espontànies, reflexions sobre constants en arquitectura: la península del Cap de Creus, una topografia en el temps*,” abstract.
- 24 Idem., interview with Paulo Providência.
- 25 Távora, “Arquitectura e Urbanismo,” 155. Original quote in Portuguese: “Porque a lição das constantes não pode ser esquecida a Arquitectura e o Urbanismo contemporâneos deverão manifestar a sua modernidade, traduzir uma colaboração total e não esquecer a importância que desempenham como elementos condicionantes da vida do homem.” The expression “lesson of constants” is from Távora, “Arquitectura e Urbanismo.” For Távora’s writings on space organization see his *Da Organização do Espaço* (Porto: FAUP Publicações, 2006), first published 1962.

But *habitability* is also present in a comprehensive possibility of uses, the gathering of programmes where the present meets the past and standing ruins meet busy urban life, as largely represented by the coexistence of spaces with diverse positionings, uses and scales in Seró Megalithic Tomb/Dolmen Transmitter Space: “[...] the experience of the people rebuilt the site. It’s not possible to explain in one slice, in one photo, in one publication, you need to have the experience to understand the proposal. Like a cinema, but you are into the film. In the end we work with the experience of the people. But you don’t offer a film, you offer the conditions for people, every person, every subject to interpret his or her film.”²⁰

Habitability as a mental and bodily dwelling in the present also evokes Martin Heidegger’s *Dasein* and, hence, his temporal approach to *being*, with a past that brings us to a present.²¹ In fact, Toni Gironès’s archaeological parks are a paradigmatic resonance between time, materials and ambiances. They are both a means for rescuing a lifelong and inherited way of living, but also for disclosing contemporary possibilities for inhabiting them, considering that “the archaeological parks are quotidian parks, that the people use day to day,” and *activating* them for the people: “activating the stones or the ancient ruins, but in the end activating this new public space with local people, with the region.”²²

These compose his *topographies in time*, echoing the past into the present, “refined by decanting in time” and moulded by “the natural dynamics and human interventions” and “always with hope and future option.”²³ This can be observed on the Cap de Creus peninsula as an object of Toni Gironès’s more academic research, but also in his research by design, in his archaeological parks, in his approach to the territory and to pre-existences.

The passing of time also introduces the *constants* that linger in architecture, either in the *topographies in time*, or in the new design proposals, despite the contextual specificities of each design, place or programme. These are construed with past and present experiences from the architect – “the architecture is here, in your interior, from the experience of habitability of this first childhood and during your whole life” – along with his formative path. Because, as Toni Gironès said: “you need theories, you need references” that prevail on the design.²⁴

A *lesson of the constants* that endure in architecture had already been introduced in 1952, by the Portuguese architect and pedagogue Fernando Távora, from whom we have learnt that history is an invaluable design content and that *organising space* is the paramount task of the architect: “Because the lesson of the constants cannot be overlooked, contemporary architecture and urbanism must manifest their modernity, translate a total collaboration and not forget the importance that they play as conditioning elements of men’s life.”²⁵

- 26 Idem., *Da Organização do Espaço*, 75. Original quote in Portuguese: “Que a par de um intenso e necessário especialismo ele coloque um profundo e indispensável humanismo.”
- 27 Alexandre Alves Costa, note to *Teoria Geral da Organização do Espaço*, by Fernando Távora (Porto: FAUP Publicações, 1993), vii. Original quote in Portuguese: “A sua lição fundamental decorre simplesmente da sua capacidade única para distinguir o essencial do supérfluo ou circunstancial e enquanto nos dividíamos pela circunstância com ele nos uníamos no reforço e consideração dos valores estruturais mais perenes.” Ibid., viii. Original quote in Portuguese: “ativamente vigilante na construção da felicidade de todos os homens.”
- 28 Gironès, “Conditions for Habitability. A conversation with Toni Gironès,” 201.
- 29 Idem., “Topographies in Time: The Experience of Architecture,” 209.
- 30 Ibid., 209 and 211.
- 31 Távora, “Arquitectura e Urbanismo,” 155. Original quote in Portuguese: “Está, em grande parte, nas mãos da Arquitectura e do Urbanismo a organização do meio em que o homem vive, dos edifícios em que habita ou trabalha, das cidades, das regiões ou dos países em que se encontra integrado.”
- 32 Gironès, “Conditions for Habitability. A conversation with Toni Gironès,” 203.
- 33 Ibid., 205.
- 34 Idem., “Topographies in Time: The Experience of Architecture,” 209.
- 35 Távora, “Arquitectura e Urbanismo,” 154-155. Original quote in Portuguese: “A colaboração toma aqui os mais variados aspectos e atinge as mais diferentes camadas sociais. [...] E esta colaboração vai desde a colaboração efectiva que se manifesta na concepção ou construção das obras de Arquitectura e de Urbanismo até à própria fruição dessas obras.”

Fernando Távora has taught us how to perceive architecture, how both to respect our traditional ways of living and building, and also how to be contemporary and global. He has taught us to cooperate amongst ourselves, to value spatial quality, to simultaneously hold an “intense and necessary specialism” along with a “deep and indispensable humanism,” assisting in society’s well-being.²⁶ Hence, a parallel is proposed here on the use of the lessons that outline Fernando Távora’s architecture, the “more perennial structural values” that he stood for and that regard him as “actively vigilant in edifying the happiness of all men,” with Toni Gironès’s *constants*.²⁷ When asked whether these might change according to each site, he assertively stresses that “they’re always the same.”²⁸

More than a half a century after Fernando Távora’s lessons, Toni Gironès wrote *Topographies in Time: The Experience of Architecture*, where he displayed his own “series of constants linked to habitability that were consolidated over time in my [his] architectural practice,” demonstrating a constant resilience of architectural understanding.²⁹ As follows: “1. The stability of the horizontal plane”; “2. Buffer space and boundary management”; “3. Material condition and the passage of time”; “4. ‘Objet trouvé’ and conceptual recycling”; “5. Managing remnants as generators of places”; “6. The thermal inertia of the earth and the optimization of natural resources”; “7. Trees and vegetation as architectural material”; “8. Recognition and activation of pre-existing.”³⁰

At first glance, we can argue that the significance of architecture towards “the organisation of the environment in which man lives, the buildings in which he lives or works, the cities, the regions or the countries in which he is integrated” can be transferred onto Toni Gironès’s concept of *habitability* and the similar relevance he bestows on it for his practice.³¹ Additionally, this can be perceived in his rapport with experience and occupation: “Our profession consists of generating not so much outlines as conditions: material elements with their geometries, their scales and their arrangements in space and time. The fact that they are conditions means that they can be interpreted by their occupants, and that they will ultimately be materialized through their habitability.”³²

Furthermore, this is profoundly correlated with the spatial experience of his works: “In my opinion, architecture is a mediator, an intermediary between our body and the environment that we inhabit.”³³ But it is also associated with his third constant “material condition and the passage of time,” which claims that: “The different types of material are not chosen and laid out on the basis of substantive criteria, but rather by their ability to adjectivise and verbalize the architecture.”³⁴ Ultimately, this also conveys another *constant* assumed by Fernando Távora, which “goes from the effective collaboration that is manifested in the conception or construction of the works of architecture and urbanism to the very fruition of those works.”³⁵



fig. 2 Adaptation of Can Tacó Roman Site, Montmeló, Montornès del Vallès, Barcelona, Spain (2008-2012). Courtesy of Toni Gironès.

- 36 Ibid., 153. Original quote in Portuguese:
 “A modernidade de um acontecimento mede-se pela relação que ele mantém com as condições dentro das quais se realiza.”
- 37 Ibid. Original quote in Portuguese:
 “A modernidade manifesta-se na qualidade, na exactidão das relações entre a obra e a vida.”
- 38 Ibid., 155. Original quote in Portuguese:
 “O conhecimento do passado vale na medida do presente.”
- 39 Constantinos Doxiadis, *Architectural space in ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985).
- 40 Gironès, interview with Paulo Providência.

Another potential analogy between these *constants* is related to time, an urge for the present and a respect for the past. Fernando Távora’s definition of modernity is “measured by the relationship it has with the conditions within which it takes place.”³⁶ Acknowledging its contemporaneity, it draws from the “accuracy of the relationship between the work and life.”³⁷ But it also assumes that “the knowledge of the past is worth in its contribution to the present,” which is embodied in historical examples presented to the reader, such as: Stonehenge, the pyramids of Giza, St. Mark’s Square or the Parthenon.³⁸ Similarly, the adaptation of Can Tacó Roman Site can resemble the visual articulations of the Acropolis and the site implementation of the Greek ruins, as Constantinos Doxiadis has comprehensively examined.³⁹ At the Roman site of Can Tacó, the platforms for both the pre-existent ruins and the new proposal, as well as the diagonal visual perception can be an intuitive and latent reminiscence of Toni Gironès’s references in a well-established and structural concept from the Parthenon (figure 2). And even if this is clear in the architects’ works, as the earlier archaeological parks addressed, its present condition it is also evident in his discourse: “At the end all these frames are to be linked in time, in these 2,000 years, right? That you, in all interventions, you never rebuild – ever – because this is not a Roman theatre, not a Roman oven, not a Roman city in Guissona, not a dolmen in Seró, not a domus or a *praesidium* or Can Tacó, I don’t know at the end what it is, because they have three, four or five different points, but it is the archaeological rest of this ancient reality, and you put the archaeological site in value, not the theatre, or the domus, or the dolmen, the archaeological site is another question.”⁴⁰

Time also echoes throughout his works, as a melodic chant of continuity – rather than a mimesis of an ancient Greek hymn – or an interpolative jazz that awakes and *activates* our senses to the ambiance of where we are, as Toni Gironès explains: “first to understand that time is part of the process, and you need to dance with time when you are working in different scales.”⁴¹

As a cyclical event for the community since 1996, the installation Passanelles (figure 3) comprehends both the temporal *continuity* through a collective memory, and the uniqueness of each moment, according to the natural conditions of the sea and the weather. Additionally, the fact that it is completed by the people in space also accomplishes Toni Gironès’s *habitability*. Finally, with the standing position of the floating elements and the moving stones thrown by the people in a rhythmic sound, it stands as a truly sensorial space and time of poetic action, that systematises the constants in time, collaboration and life.

Finally, Toni Gironès’s *topographies in time*, which etymologically recall the Greek *topos* –the site, over the passing of time and its collective memory, are also blended with the individual echoes of his childhood for a subjective approach to design and fruition: “I remember terraces full of olive trees behind a hut [...] I remember a fantastic sense of white calm

fig. 3 Action / installation “Passanelles, a temporary space,” Cadaqués, Girona, Spain (1995-2009). Courtesy of Toni Gironès.



- 42 Idem., "Topographies in Time: The Experience of Architecture," 209.
- 43 Peter Zumthor, "A way of looking at things," in *Thinking Architecture*, ed. Zumthor (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006), 9-25, 10. Originally published in 1988.
- 44 Zumthor, "The hard core of beauty," in *Thinking Architecture*, ed. Zumthor (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006), 27-34. Originally published in 1991. For Martin Heidegger see his "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, ed. Heidegger, translation and introduction by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 145-161. Originally published in 1954.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Idem., "The body of architecture," in *Thinking Architecture*, ed. Zumthor (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006), 48-56. Originally published in 1996.
- 49 Idem., "From passion for things to the things themselves," in *Thinking Architecture*, ed. Zumthor (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006), 35-45. Originally published in 1994.
- 50 Luis Barragán, "Luis Barragán, extract from conversations with Emilio Ambasz," in *The architecture of Luis Barragán*, ed. E. Ambasz (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1976), 8-9.

before I turned ten. [...] These and other experiences come to my mind in the form of intense vital records."⁴²

This is also embedded in Peter Zumthor's words when he is *thinking architecture*, assuming that his memories convey a poetic design and project sensorial artefacts with similar emphasis on *habitability* and life at large: "Memories like these contain the deepest architectural experience that I know. They are reservoirs of the architectural atmospheres and images that I explore in my work as an architect."⁴³

3 The Coming Age of Emotional Architecture

As a supporter of the principles of Martin Heidegger, in the essay "The hard core of beauty," written in 1991, Peter Zumthor reminds us that, surely, "we are never in an abstract world but always in a world of things, even when we think."⁴⁴ By this condition, he understands that the concept of *habitability*, his pursuit, can be found in "Heidegger's wide sense of living and thinking in places and spaces": "The reality of architecture is the concrete body in which forms, volumes, and spaces come into being."⁴⁵ Thus, he believes that ideas can be revealed in the materials and physics of construction. Peter Zumthor refuses "the reality of theories detached from things," and expresses "[his] powers of imagination" using the properties of stone, wood, iron, glass, etc.⁴⁶ *The hard core of beauty*, he assures us, is found in the meaning and *sensitivity* offered them: "a building that can serve as a home for man."⁴⁷ "The body of architecture" by Peter Zumthor is, therefore, tangible.⁴⁸ But, as mentioned earlier, in the places of one's imagination, one can also envisage: "From passion for things to the things themselves."⁴⁹

We know the characteristics of the materials and how they withstand time, how they resonate or how they shimmer in light. Similarly, we can anticipate how they react with each other. Technologies are not unknown, like ancient knowledge. The matter and physics of construction are, with a few exceptions, measurable. The design of a 'detail' is sought in the material and technologies prescribed. Architecture finds the solution to its technical problems and others in science. Today, knowledge of the physical and human geography of any given location is never lacking. The data is publicly available at a click. Despite the value of meteorological, socioeconomic and cultural records, the *leitmotiv* of the discipline is upstream of these aspects, as Luis Barragán taught. Let us then turn to his testimony.

As noted by Emilio Ambasz, author of *The Architecture of Luis Barragán*, in the 1970s, "It is very important for humankind that architecture should move by its beauty; if there are many equally valid technical solutions to a problem, the one which offers the user a message of beauty and emotion, that one is architecture."⁵⁰ Luis Barragán, convinced as he is that architecture cannot be the "cold piece of convenience," argues that any work that "does not express serenity is a

- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid., 9.
- 53 Idem., "Luis Barragán, 1980 Laureate, Acceptance Speech," The Pritzker Architecture Prize, accessed December 5, 2020, https://www.pritzkerprize.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/1980_Acceptance_Speech.pdf
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 On this matter, see, among others, the article: Ignacio San Martín, "Luis Barragán: The Process of Discovery," *Landscape Journal* 15, no. 2 (1996): 99-112. Accessed December 5, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43323394>
- 56 Barragán, "Luis Barragán, 1980 Laureate, Acceptance Speech."
- 57 Ibid.

mistake."⁵¹ Architecture is emotional, he says; like Fernando Távora, Peter Zumthor and Toni Gironès, he recognises that the *lesson of its constants* arises from history and past experiences. Its memories are a reservoir of architectural experiences which are closely linked to the *atmosphere* of the place. An 'image' that understands the meaning of territory as well as the expression of land and materials: "My earliest childhood memories are from a ranch my family owned near the village of Mazamitla. It was a pueblo with hills, formed by houses with tile roofs and immense eaves to shield passers-by [sic] from the heavy rains which fall in that area. Even the earth's color [sic] was interesting because it was red earth."⁵² When the Pritzker Prize was awarded to him in Washington in June 1980, the Mexican architect and engineer admitted that his work is consciously autobiographical, because there are memories in it of his childhood and adolescence on his father's ranch. But, he explained, although *nostalgia* leads us to the past, it is there that the possibilities of the present emerge: "the architect must listen and heed his nostalgic revelations."⁵³ For Luis Barragán, only if one is imbued with this principle will it be possible to truly occupy space and architectural emptiness with *beauty* and consequently combat dehumanisation and vulgarity. His architecture embodies 'resistance', while remaining *contemporary*. He wants to retrieve the physical and timeless values of the place, associating "beauty" with "silence," "solitude" with "serenity" or "joy" with "death." "In [his] work [he] [has] always strived to adapt to the needs of modern living the magic of those remote nostalgic years": "the whitewashed walls; the peace to be found in patios and orchards; the colorful streets; the humble majesty of the village squares surrounded by shady open corridors." "As a sublime act of poetic imagination," as Jay Pritzker said when on awarding the eponymous prize to the illustrious Mexican from Guadalajara.⁵⁴

Like Toni Gironès and Peter Zumthor, Luis Barragán's work reflects his life and thought; perhaps he also identifies with certain of Martin Heidegger's ideas.⁵⁵ Their *houses* demand to belong to another 'time'; they cannot be evaluated by advanced technological precepts. And thus, they are not quantifiable in the light of any mathematical order. Their existence and experience summon up the past, the present and the future at once and in a non-linear way. The lessons of history and memory lend meaning to places and materialise in the physics of construction and in *emptiness*. To build is to think on and care for the space we inhabit, in harmony with our surroundings. Building, therefore, is an extension of Being. In this sense, in the 'return' to roots, Luis Barragán foresaw the possibility of authentic, emotional architecture, worthy of the human condition: a sense of habitability and continuity that did not negate "The Art of Seeing."⁵⁶ "It is essential to an architect to know how to see: I mean, to see in such a way that the vision is not overpowered by rational analysis," was Luis Barragán's expression of his cherished concept in the North American capital.⁵⁷ In an appropriation of Juhani Pallasmaa's

- 58 Juhani Pallasmaa, "Space, place and atmosphere. Emotion and peripheral perception in architectural experience," *Lebenswelt*, no. 4.1 (2014): 230-245.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Zumthor, *Atmospheres* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006); Pallasmaa, "Space, place and atmosphere," 230.
- 61 Alexander Ćetković. 2015. "The coming age of calm architecture." Paper presented at *Mediacity 5, Plymouth, UK, April 2015*. Accessed December 5, 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298353154_The_coming_age_of_calm_architecture
- 62 Zumthor, *Atmospheres*, 11.
- 63 Ibid., 21, 23, 29, 33, 35, 41, 45, 49, 57, 63, 67 and 71.
- 64 Pallasmaa, "Space, place and atmosphere," 244. The expression "Magic of the Real" is by Peter Zumthor, *Atmospheres*, 19.
- 65 Ibid.

words in *Space, place and atmosphere*, we can observe that for Luis Barragán, "The quality of a space or place is not merely a visual perceptual quality as it is usually assumed."⁵⁸ Indeed, Luis Barragán's thought and work can be revealed in the axiom which this Finnish architect proposed, namely: *Emotion and peripheral perception in architectural experience*.⁵⁹ In his investigation of the work *Atmospheres* by Peter Zumthor – which, it should be noted, was published three decades after Emilio Ambasz spoke with Luis Barragán – Juhani Pallasmaa comes to the conclusion that "The judgement of environmental character is a complex multi-sensory fusion of countless factors which are immediately and synthetically grasped as an overall atmosphere, ambience, feeling or mood."⁶⁰ In short, Luis Barragán and Peter Zumthor, as did Fernando Távora and Toni Gironès, dreamed (and dream) of what Alexander Ćetković calls *The coming age of calm architecture*, or, as argued here, *The coming age of [emotional] architecture*.⁶¹ This architecture cannot be quantified, but instead finds meaning only in what we feel. It is in the experience of the place that *architectural quality* is discovered. "Quality architecture to me," Peter Zumthor explains, "is when a building manages to move me," and certainly, "one word for it is atmosphere." "We perceive atmosphere through our emotional sensibility – a form of perception that works incredibly quickly, and which we humans evidently need to help us survive," he stresses.⁶² As Luis Barragán explained in the *lesson of the constants* offered at the Pritzker Prize award ceremony, Peter Zumthor also names his twelve constants: 1. "The Body of Architecture"; 2. "Material Compatibility"; 3. "The Sound of a Space"; 4. "The Temperature of a Space"; 5. "Surrounding Objects"; 6. "Between Composure and Seduction"; 7. "Tension between Interior and Exterior"; 8. "Levels of Intimacy"; 9. "The Light on Things"; 10. "Architecture as Surroundings"; 11. "Coherence"; 12. "The Beautiful Form."⁶³ Out of these means of creating *emotion and peripheral perception*, Peter Zumthor glimpses achieving the "Magic of the Real": "the secret power of architecture and how it can influence entire societies, but, at the same time, enable us to define our own individual existential foothold," Juhani Pallasmaa emphasises, in turn.⁶⁴ Recalling the recommendations adopted at the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015, "[we] suggest that [like Juhani Pallasmaa,] we may well become more interested in atmosphere than in individually expressive forms."⁶⁵

We are therefore left in no doubt as to the relevance of Toni Gironès's work. We see it as being in natural continuation of that of Luis Barragán, Peter Zumthor and also Fernando Távora. While they live(d) in different lands and are from different generations, their architecture is considered to be from the same 'slow time' and the 'calm' of Stonehenge, the pyramids of Giza, St. Mark's Square and the Parthenon. In view of the seventeen objectives on the 2030 Agenda, the interventions in Vilassar de Dalt, Guissona, Montmeló and Seró (Artesa de Segre), among others, can be seen as an example of "a non-autonomous, fragile, and collaborative

- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Iñaki Ábalos, *A boa-vida* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2003), 95. Original quote in Portuguese: “passado eminente e individual”; “dupla ação do segredo e da descoberta.”
- 68 Ibid., 105.
- 69 Ibid., 94. Original quote in Portuguese: “fundamento [deste] conhecimento.”
- 70 See: <http://www.tonigirones.com/es/>
- 71 Gironès, “Topographies in Time: The Experience of Architecture,” 211; Idem., “Conditions for Habitability. A conversation with Toni Gironès,” 203.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Ibid., 201.

architecture adapted to the precise conditions of topography, soil, climate, vegetation, as well as other conditions of the region and site,”⁶⁶ to quote Juhani Pallasmaa again. Next, we will walk through some of these projects in the body of a character whose link with space comes from the *nostalgia* of ‘childhood’ memories and remembrances, an “eminent and individual past” that Iñaki Ábalos combines with the “double action of secret and discovery.”⁶⁷ On the other hand, we should not forget the sensorial and intellectual phenomenon that desirably qualifies the architectural experience, the *magic of the real*, mentioned above and characterised by Peter Zumthor. In parallel with *The good life* suggested by Iñaki Ábalos, we will ‘invade’ the intimacy of existentialist shelters of Vilassar de Dalt and Seró with the watchful eye of a “bricoleur” architect.⁶⁸ After all, the ambitious poetic *reverberations* are sought “according to the principle that ‘they can always be useful’” tomorrow. *Intention* and *intuition* constitute the “foundation [of] this knowledge.”⁶⁹

4 Experiencing the Memory(ies) of the Sharon Stones

When one studies Toni Gironès’s professional path, the need arises to discuss why the interventions in Vilassar de Dalt and Seró were chosen as case studies, and not equally significant ones, such as those with recognition in Spain and abroad: the delicate Archaeological Park for Roman Iesso Settlement in Guissona, Lleida, the inspiring adaptation of Can Tacó Roman Site in Montmeló, Montornès del Vallès, Barcelona, the topographic Climate Museum in Lleida, the restrained adaptation of the Archaeological Remains of the Ancient Roman Theater of Tàrraco in Tarragona, or even the entry for the tender for ideas for the Museum of the Archaeological Park of Puig de Sa Morisca en Calvià in Mallorca.⁷⁰ With the exception of the Museo del Clima, the other works, including those in Vilassar de Dalt and Seró, share the fact that they *think on/care for/build* those places with the architecture discovered on the floor as the starting point. Indeed for Toni Gironès, the archaeological remains represented, and continue to represent, an opportunity for “Recognition and activation of pre-existing,” but never “as a hermetic object or work of art that is only created to be exhibited in a museum room.”⁷¹ Regardless of the historical or architectural value of the pre-existences found in the space for intervention, they must be understood as part of a more encompassing strategy, “as something that you leave for other people to interpret, with certain conditions,” notes Toni Gironès in the interview with Inmaculada Maluenda and Enrique Encabo.⁷² As architects, we know that any transformation implies the design of ‘new’ conditions, some of a physical nature and others that will result from “climatic variations, interpretations by the users or appropriation of the place.”⁷³ Toni Gironès believes that the initial *intuition* requires “objective conditions from the ones that people who are going to experience those spaces will use.”⁷⁴ Hence were the *constants* of his work born: a *lesson* that deals with *intention* and *intuition* as one.

75 Ibid., 207.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.

Archaeological spaces are territories of memory(ies) in expectation, per se. Time has severed them from everyday life and their boundaries are often inaccurate and difficult to interpret at first glance. It is impossible to be indifferent to them, even when they are unreadable. Whether because of the value of the antiquity they testify to, the exclusive position they occupy in the landscape or the *nostalgia* we experience in the shade of the walls that still persist, such places invariably transmit an *atmosphere* that immediately communicates with us. The unknown leads us to discovery. We look for a reason for what we feel; we are, unconsciously, *bricoleur architects*. Also, according to Toni Gironès, “[we] think an archaeological site is a magnet, an element that triggers a question.”⁷⁵ In the projects for conserving and highlighting the value of the Roman remains in Seró, Guissona, Can Tacó and Vilassar de Dalt, one of the main issues had to do with the relationship established between the sites themselves and the region in which they are set. Toni Gironès shows that they all “lead to the mental construction of a narrative, a cross-section of Catalonia as a territory that reflects four different climates, four situations and four populations.”⁷⁶ Likewise, he emphasises that the integration into the surrounding context is distinct: “from the Pyrenees foothill landscape in Seró to the agricultural and industrial context of Guissona, or from a completely metropolitan one in Can Tacó to a different one on the Mediterranean in Vilassar de Dalt.”⁷⁷ Despite the obvious differences, there is a common principle underlying these four projects. Therefore, it should be considered that it is more what unites them than what separates them. “Points of knowledge, recreation and connection related to these environments have been generated in all of them with very few resources,” the Catalan architect himself acknowledges.⁷⁸ He points out, under the pretext of protecting archaeological remains, that he designed a new public space for the village in Seró and an outdoor platform in Can Tacó, as if it were “a huge building between three small hills in the midst of contemporary metropolitan complexity.”⁷⁹ In Vilassar de Dalt, the wall/platform which was built wishes to belong to the existing park, while in Guissona, the structures and form of the land, excavated in the meantime, yearn to return what remains of the ancient Roman city of Iesso to the spontaneity of urban life. *Memory* sees itself as time in suspension, but with a ‘functional’ value, and thus contemporary. In any of these works, the past is not only seen as a *document* to be consulted; it wants to be more than that. It wants to be of the order of the present, to be part of the daily life of the place. It demands to be collective, local and global. It does not neglect individual perception, but encourages it. *Memory* is also physical, recyclable material. So, Toni Gironès, wonders: “What does highlighting something mean in the 21st century society?” In anticipation of the UN SDGs referred to earlier, he suggests: “Allowing people to interpret long-term periods.” “I’m talking about how the place has changed and above all, how successive layers coexist in time until they stabilize in the current layer with

- 80 Ibid.
 81 Ibid.
 82 Ibid., 201.

a high degree of complexity, not only material,” Toni Gironès concludes.⁸⁰ The interventions in Vilassar de Dalt, Guissona, Can Tacó and Seró can answer this major challenge. In the end, “it’s a question of suggesting that reality can be much broader.”⁸¹ Toni Gironès’s work vindicates this, particularly in the interventions which resuscitate ‘forgotten’ architectures.

In Vilassar de Dalt, Guissona, Can Tacó and Seró, the prime objective was the recovery of Roman and prehistoric findings, although the underlying programme for each project was different. Indeed, while in Guissona and Can Tacó, the archaeological structures were mostly in the open, in Vilassar de Dalt and Seró, a place for protecting the three Roman industrial kilns and the megalithic tomb/dolmen were erected, respectively. Nevertheless, an identical approach to place is evident in all four interventions. The materialisation of *memory(ies)* takes place according to a set of mechanisms, and is above all recognisable in the physics of construction. The context and, of course, the projects determine the limits of each action. Adopting these *constants* stems from a desire to relate “a public, outdoor landscape to an interior one,” as Toni Gironès explained in the interview published in the journal *El Croquis*.⁸² Thus, the aim of the organisation of space is to enable the architectural experience to be lived and felt, both inside and outside. In fact, architecture, Toni

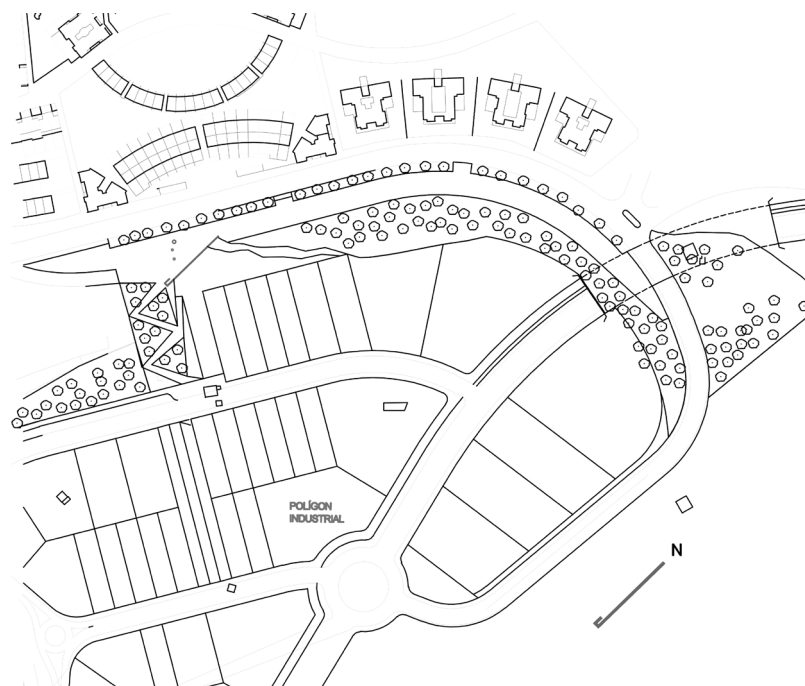


fig. 4 Site plan. Roman Kiln Discovery Space, Vilassar de Dalt, Barcelona, Spain (2002-2004). Courtesy of Toni Gironès.

83 Ibid., 205.

84 A concept developed by Le Corbusier. It emerges for the first time in the description of Villa Savoye, built in Poissy in 1928. On this topic, see Flora Manuel, *Le Corbusier and the Architectural Promenade* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010), among various other works.

85 Gironès, "Conditions for Habitability. A conversation with Toni Gironès," 205.

Gironès guarantees, "explains what the place is like, it serves to understand it, or to make you participate or live better with it."⁸³ Through the design of the constants, the boundaries are controlled, the intermediate spaces are coordinated and the movements of the people are calculated, as a *promenade architecturale*.⁸⁴ Our body is related to the body of architecture. The relationship with the interior and exterior *atmosphere* that surrounds us, be it direct or intuitive, takes place at different speeds. 'Slow' and 'fast' spaces alternate. "Whatever the case, it is not intended to be a behavioural experience, but rather one that leaves each person free to generate their own itinerary," Toni Gironès assures us.⁸⁵ This principle, which

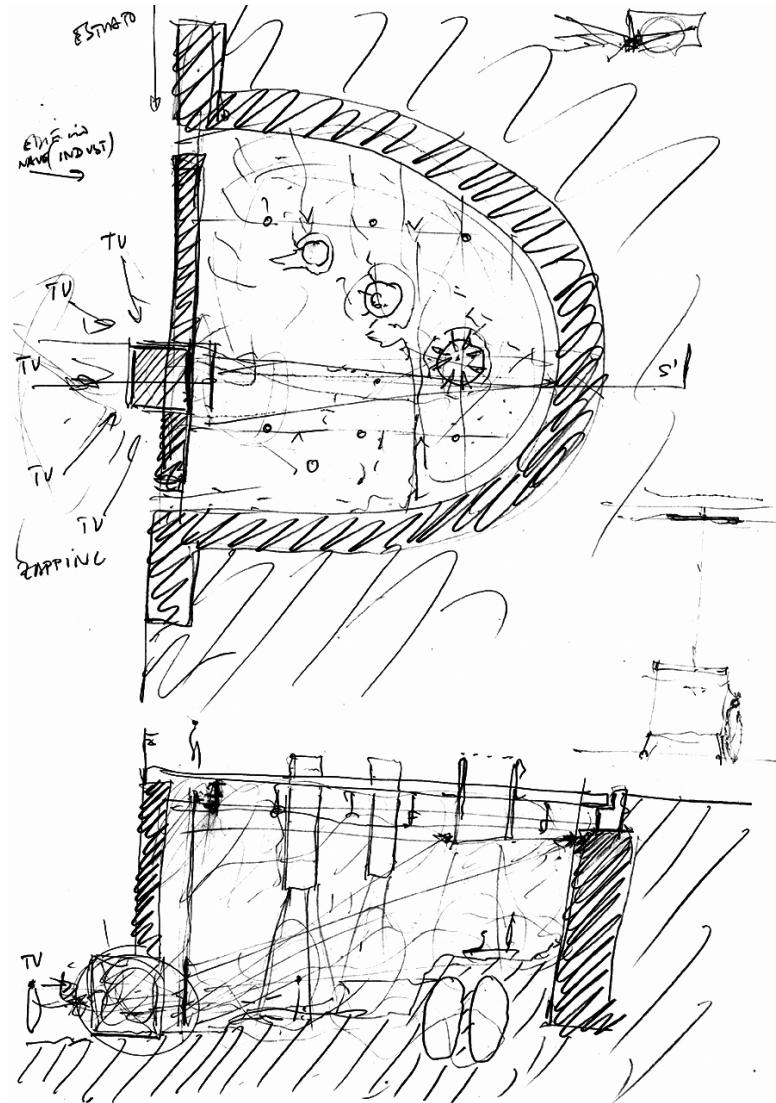
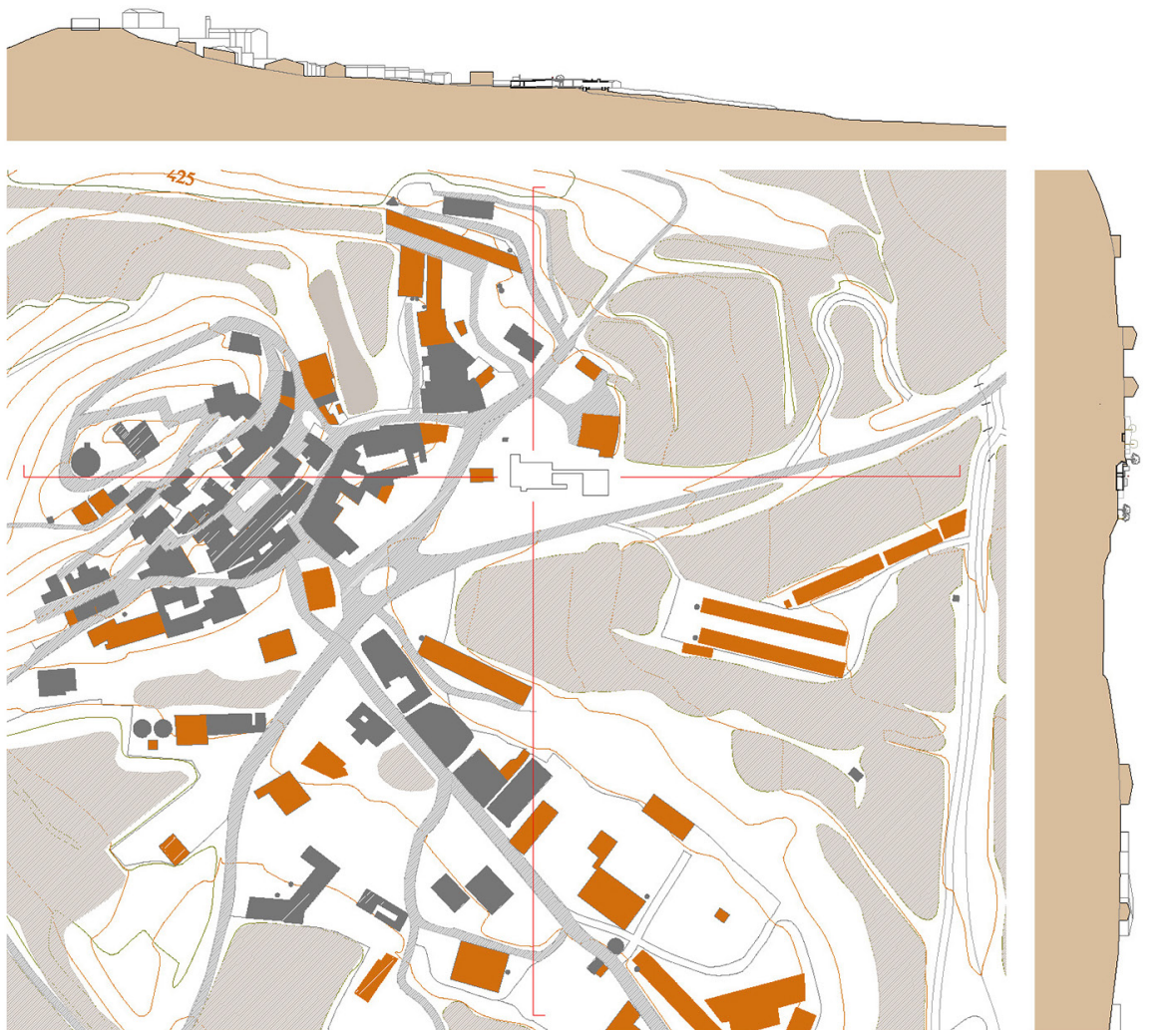


fig. 5 Roman Kiln Discovery space, Vilassar de Dalt, Barcelona, Spain (2002-2004). Sketch courtesy of Toni Gironès.

Peter Zumthor also argues, is intentionally explored in most projects, especially in the four under analysis here. However, from the reading of the works in Vilassar de Dalt, Guissona, Can Tacó and Seró, it is clear that this is not entirely the case. Bearing in mind that the recognition and activation of pre-existences imply creating new conditions, the project will inevitably establish criteria for occupation and will direct how the space is experienced. Toni Gironès does this, albeit subtly. Orientation rather than obligation. In other words, experience is offered to us under certain *conditions*. It is a kind of conditioned freedom. As an example, in the structure housing the three Roman kilns in Vilassar de Dalt, there

fig. 6 Site plan and sections. Seró Megalithic Tomb/
Dolmen Transmitter Space, Lleida, Spain
(2007-2012). Courtesy of Toni Gironès.



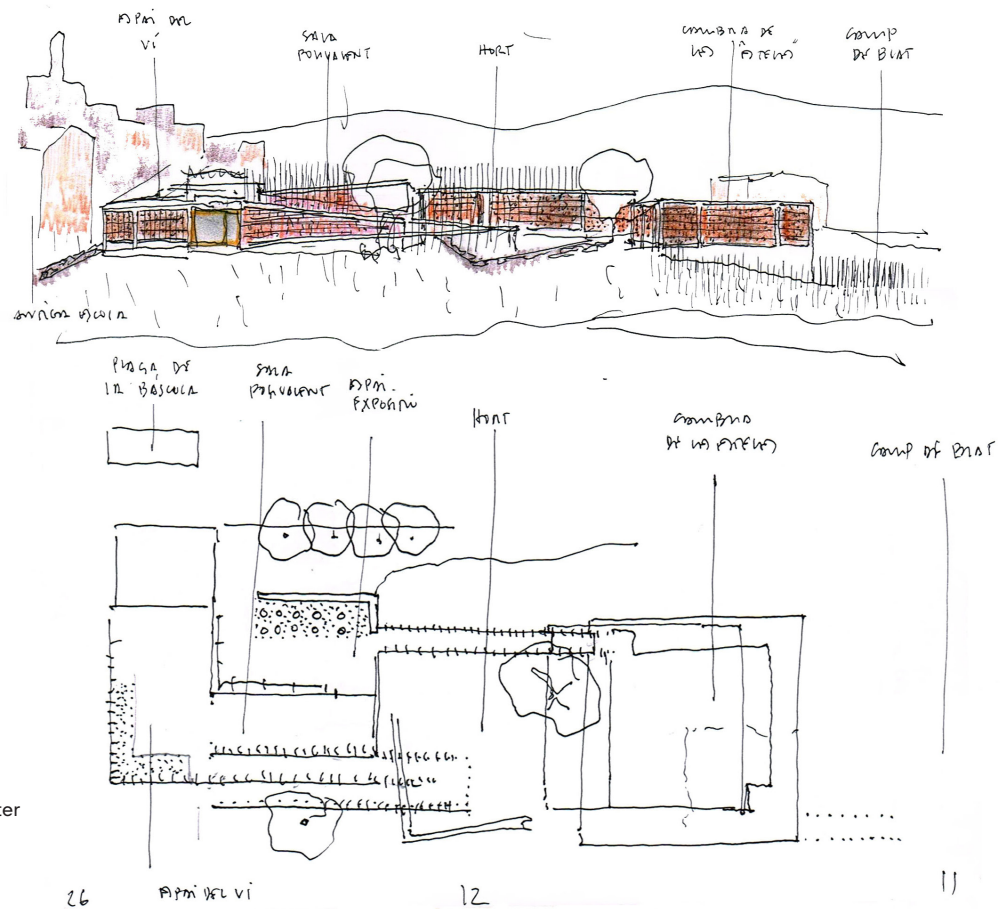


fig. 7 Seró Megalithic Tomb/Dolmen Transmitter Space, Lleida, Spain (2007-2012). Sketch courtesy of Toni Gironès.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

88 Idem., "Topographies in Time: The Experience of Architecture," 209.

89 Idem., "Conditions for Habitability. A conversation with Toni Gironès," 205.

90 Idem., "Topographies in Time: The Experience of Architecture," 209 and 211.

is "a stopping point – the transitional chamber between the outsider and the inside – that sits between a compressed time and a slower time, where visitors can discover its elasticity."⁸⁶ In Can Tacó, "this decompression space is the pre-existing forest."⁸⁷ The *double spiral* ensures "the passage of time" in Seró, while in Guissona it is the delicate coverings and newly formed topography that mark the day-to-day compasses, "the stability of the horizontal plane."⁸⁸ Toni Gironès's architecture indisputably "has to do with the interpretation of time," even when witnessed from a material point of view.⁸⁹ By understanding time as the raw material of architecture, Toni Gironès, as shown earlier, gives it greater meaning in these and other projects. The concepts of "boundary" and "buffer space" are associated with it, as are the four *constants*: "objet trouvé" and conceptual recycling"; "managing remnants as generators of places"; "the thermal inertia of the earth and the optimization of natural resources"; "trees and vegetation as architectural material."⁹⁰ The aim is for low-tech materials

- 91 Idem., "Conditions for Habitability. A conversation with Toni Gironès," 205.
 92 Ibid.
 93 Idem., "Roman Kiln Discovery Space in Vilassar de Dalt," *El Croquis*, No. 189, 2017, 225.
 94 Ibid., 226.

and construction processes to have an amicable coexistence with the environment, "to help people understand this commitment to a slower time as an alternative value that can coexist with complexity of a networked system."⁹¹ There is a conscious return to artisanal thinking, in which there is a link to 'slow time' and *emotional* architecture. The concept of *porosity* presides over our interaction with space and consequently with time. That is why it is also physical. "It's true that in my case, the design process is also related to this idea of porosity," admits Toni Gironès, explaining that the *intention* goes far beyond the material properties and construction physics used: "I certainly do regard intermediate spaces as relational environments that are useful for the human being to change scale or programmes [,] and in turn, this idea connects up with the concept of the boundary."⁹² In the shelter-spaces of the three industrial kilns in Vilassar de Dalt (figures 4 & 5) and in the tomb/dolmen in Seró (figures 6, 7, 8 & 9) these principles of action are clearly apparent. Our earlier choices follow here.

The aforementioned space-shelter for the three industrial kilns in Vilassar de Dalt is in the archaeological area of *La Fornaca* park. The project requested by the local authority was simple. The intention was only to conserve and protect the remains of these 1st century AD kilns, which still had their original combustion chambers, and to install a museum centre there. Part of the commission was to have the future 'museum' coordinate with the park and the surrounding industrial fabric. Toni Gironès assumes that "diversified programs are now expected to coexist and interact," in which case the flow of two types of visitors would have to be 'controlled': "walkers who enjoy the park [...] and guide tours with access to the interior."⁹³ The answer comes down to a clear gesture. A platform wall was designed to preserve the Roman remains, just as they have been for almost twenty centuries, and to dominate the topography. Toni Gironès understands the wall and platform as two *facades*. The platform is thus seen as the park's main façade, while the wall expresses the cut of the land, and is the facade of the small museum. With this gesture, the autonomy of the flows referred to is also maintained. The entrance to the museum centre is 'disconnected' from the day-to-day life of the park. However, the presence of the excavated interior can be sensed on the platform with the use of three skylights. From this horizontal plane there is a superb view over the Mediterranean Sea. The platform, stabilised and based on an iron structure, can be said to have a public character, and the wall, built with recyclable material, to contain "a new zone where spatial and temporal references are minimised and the remains are seen in their essence."⁹⁴ But the wall is not just a vertical plane; it simultaneously covers the excavated perimeter. It is built of granite and a mesh of steel rods. The truth of materials and construction processes is exhibited inside and out. The architectural experience forged for the discovery space of the three Roman industrial kilns feeds on them – their colour, texture, smell, temperature,



fig. 8 Seró Megalithic Tomb/Dolmen Transmitter Space, Lleida, Spain (2007-2012).
Courtesy of Toni Gironès.

fig. 9 Seró Megalithic Tomb/Dolmen Transmitter Space, Lleida, Spain (2007-2012).
Courtesy of Toni Gironès.

porosity and other attributes. The *porous boundary* allows the interior to be ventilated; in general, it is cooler in summer and warmer in winter. The *boundary* is not intended to be watertight. In a way, it is expected that life outside will be perceived from the inside, and vice versa. Two slashes in the wall demonstrate this. The box built into the wall transitions from 'bright light' to 'dark light' and from bustle to silence. It mediates the experience; it is a mirrored and *porous intermediate space*. Within the museum nucleus, the three kilns have the leading role. The skylights illuminate them. In turn, the rays of light from the two openings on the facade guide visitors. The topographic ground we walk on is historical and we feel how valuable

this Roman antiquity is. A rail protects the remains and leads visitors on the tour. The park facade, the platform, rests on the *porous boundary* and on six black iron pillars, which reinforce the centrality of the space. For a brief moment, we *nostalgically* remember the silence, the light, the temperature and the *porosity* of the shelter of the Roman ruins in Chur (1986), Switzerland, designed by Peter Zumthor.

In 2004, three years after the end of the work at Vilassar de Dalt, Toni Gironés took on the project for conserving and highlighting the value of recently discovered remains of an important prehistoric construction, almost forty-eight centuries old. The discovery of the tomb/dolmen, now on display in Seró, occurred during works to install a secondary water distribution pipe in of the Segarra-Garrigues network. In his view: "The most outstanding features of this discovery were the megalithic sandstone slabs and their numerous geometric decorations, carved in bas-relief."⁹⁵ The slabs which were found are fragments of old statues, reused from a previous sculptural monument, Toni Gironès recounts. As in Vilassar de Dalt, a rescue of the archaeology, or the little of it that remained, was necessary. As indicated by the municipality of Seró, the resting place of the tomb/dolmen would be at the foot of the hill in the small town. Thus, a 'modest' cultural space was projected on the grounds of two abandoned orchards, adjacent to a square. The need to protect the tomb/dolmen appeared to be a rare opportunity to conjure a project with a different scope, namely of a social nature. As we saw in the intervention in Vilassar de Dalt, in Seró, Toni Gironès had to cater for the use of the building by two different types of visitors: those who are there on a daily basis and those who are there to see the ancient remains. Both groups were offered something extra. Those from outside are introduced to the life and culture of the land. Those from that land, in addition to the expected economic benefits, have the possibility of 'inhabiting' the global world opened up for them. Thus, it was decided that the programme of the Seró Megalithic Tomb/Dolmen Transmitter Space should encompass an area dedicated to wines from the local cooperatives; it would take on the functions of a bar, with another multipurpose area. The latter would have daily use of it as a social centre and an introduction to the museum space, where it was proposed to document this discovery and present the pieces of the megalithic tomb. The slabs recovered during the water distribution works would be displayed in a reserved place. Continuing with the work developed in Vilassar de Dalt, Toni Gironès embodies a structure that connects different levels and embraces the project with *porous boundaries*. Once again, the horizontal planes are stabilised. A singular view can be enjoyed from here. Its aim is to be part of the place and the landscape. On the upper level, the new platform joins the existing square to the west. We can perhaps designate it as a public elevation of the *museum-social centre*. On the other hand, the lower level is associated with the modesty of ancestral agricultural gardens. There is a patio here that brings the

96 Ibid., 264.

97 Ibid., 268.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

social/cultural areas closer to the museum centre. An existing wall is integrated into the patio, giving it shape. The entrance places us in front of the territory, with a succession of ramps to overcome the topography. It is a lengthy *promenade* that traverses the multiple (re)created *atmospheres*. In the singular testimony of Toni Gironès: “The clay soil platform connects the square to the pre-Pyrenees horizon; the plane of cliff, a viewing point for the chamber containing the steles – the archaeological site; a sheltered west-facing corner space that enjoys sun in winter and plant cover in summer; places to sit, with stones recycled from the one of the gardens walls, porous drainage paving that provides thermal inertia for the roof and views of the landscape in each season; the shadows of two rebuilt mounds and the memory of the ancient site, with spontaneous silverbeet regrowth.”⁹⁶ Inside the structure, another *porous promenade* leads us. The intention to link the cultural and social programme with the outside life is clear. The opposite is also true. It can be seen that the *boundaries* are no longer *porous* when the function of the respective space ‘requires’ it. The space for wines, located next to the entrance, is immediately visible from the platform at the lower level. The multipurpose room, in turn, faces the courtyard. The light is frank but intimate. The introduction area to the museum nucleus is closed. The light is provided by ten slender skylights. We can guess at this from the upper platform. The mechanisms already tested in Vilassar de Dalt are reapplied. The experience is *sensory* and *intuitive*. Again, the ‘poor’ materials and ‘imperfect’ physics of construction used play a key role. The *poetic reverberations* arise from it. There is benefit to be drawn from the reaction of materials to light, rain, wind and other elements. The colour, texture, aroma and temperature of brick, concrete, iron and glass constitute the body of this architecture, which finds obvious references in the materiality of the town and the surrounding landscape. The wish is that the *museum-social centre* be part of this place, although it should be given a *sui generis* reading. Occasionally, it retreats into its interior. We saw this happen in the area prior to the tomb/dolmen exposure. It is an intermediate space that, according to Toni Gironès, transitions to “a quadrangular spiral route on a negligible slope [,] surrounded by ceramic material, permeable to filtered light, air, fog and smell of the earth.”⁹⁷ At the end of the *brick promenade*, the engraved surface of each of the seven slabs is revealed, under a solemn light from more skylights. The *boundaries* are *porous* and translucent. The *body of architecture* brings us the *magic of the real*: “times pause in silence, focused contemplation, a horizontal plane of clay dust captures the footprints left by each visitor.”⁹⁸ The exit is in the opposite direction. No paths cross; however, an opposite movement can be sensed. The project calculates detailed, *long promenade* times. We experience the *intention*. The increasing intensity of light and sound guides us until “the wheatfield horizon comes to greet us, returning us to the district’s agricultural landscape.”⁹⁹ We remember nothing in particular, but we know that the atmosphere has long

100 Gironès, interview by Paulo Providência.

101 Câmara Municipal do Porto [Távora], *Estudo de Renovação Urbana do Barredo* [Barredo Urban Renewal Study] (Porto: Câmara Municipal do Porto, Direcção dos Serviços de Habitação, 1969), 32. Original quote in Portuguese: “os homens valem infinitamente mais do que as [pedras].”

102 Panayiota Pyla, “Constantinos A. Doxiadis and his Entopia: Promises of a moderate utopia and a humanized modernism,” *FAM Magazine* [invited essay for special issue on ‘Forgotten and Unknown Architects’], (2019): 104. Accessed February 3, 2021. <https://www.famagazine.it/index.php/famagazine/article/view/234/1009>. The term “entopia” was “coined by C.A. Doxiadis from the Greek words en and topos, ‘in’ and ‘place,’ to mean place that is practicable — that can exist.” Constantinos A. Doxiadis, *Glossary*. Accessed February 3, 2021. <https://www.doxiadis.org/Downloads/GLOSSARY-ad.pdf>

been familiar to us. No time is wasted thinking about whether we liked it or not. Seró’s *museum-social centre* established immediate communication with us. We look forward to returning and not just to revisit *the Sharon Stones*...

Finally, we cannot resist going back to the interview that Toni Gironès recently did with Paulo Providência. Asked about the process of Seró, Toni Gironès confirms that in fact the seven precious stones of the tomb/dolmen gave rise to a public, cultural and social space which was capable of providing us with a daily new experience: “In the beginning you are like a director of cinema. You don’t know the history. You only have Sharon Stone. We had the stones, and then the promoters asked: ‘Do you do the film with the stones?’ With Sharon Stone and nothing more. And then we begin to find the site...”¹⁰⁰ We already know the rest of the story. What we can be sure of is that, in the light of what Fernando Távora asserted in the late 1960s, “people are worth infinitely more than [stones].”¹⁰¹

5 Quid Tum?

Over these pages we have focused on the work of Toni Gironès through the lenses of *habitability*, which underlies the conceptualisation of his proposals, the outlines of his designs and the tectonic materialisation of his projects. Toni Gironès masters this conviviality between Mankind and place very sensitively, acknowledging the memories that overlay the traces of previous times and that compose the ground occupied in their midst.

The archaeological parks, exemplified earlier, are the leading figures of his *topographies in time*. They are the main actors that embody the collective heritage of what *has been* – as an architecture that rescues – and, simultaneously, that enflames a contemporary experience and a haptic earthly perception of the place *that is*.

This connection with the place that Toni Gironès advocates is developed from its history but looking forward towards the present and future circumstances. In this sense, the current situation where his designs are constructed is enhanced by its former conditions, either through its materiality – when he uses the slabs recovered in the archaeological ruins in Seró; or from the possibilities these have laid for a contemporary space, as the Roman furnaces kept underground in Vilassar de Dalt. These act as whole, porous and inhabited spaces, balancing what they have surpassed with what they can signify today and what they can foster onwards, resembling the concept of “entopia” devised by Constantinos A. Doxiadis: “In light of environmental problems, entopia promised to restore the ‘balance of the human environment,’ and to reclaim the physical qualities of past settlements.”¹⁰²

This upholds the proposed analogy with Fernando Távora, on his contemporaneity, on the absolute need for collaboration between disciplines and between people, and inherently, on the deep and absolute

- 103 Gironès, “Architecture and Intuition,” interview by Emma López-Bahut and Luz Paz-Agras, *BAC, Boletín Académico, Revista de investigación y arquitectura contemporánea*, Escola Técnica Superior de Arquitectura, Universidade da Coruña, no. 7 (2017): 9, 10. <https://doi.org/10.17979/bac.2017.7.0.3083>
- 104 Idem., “Conditions for Habitability. A conversation with Toni Gironès,” 203.

humanism of his works, which reverberate in Toni Gironès’s projects as the long-learned lessons of the indisputable values of architecture.

Undeniably, *habitability* takes on an enriched sense here, conceptually feeding the design, but also as a physical input and purpose to the forthcoming men and women that will step on that ground. It is, hence, a profound and absolute constant in his work that resonates with passionate poetic reverberations from the inhabited space, echoing Luis Barragán’s *beauty* or Peter Zumthor’s *atmospheres* from an emotional perception of space.

Quid tum? is placed on the medal which bears the portrait of Leon Battista Alberti by Matteo de’ Pasti. Headed by his emblem of the winged eye that sees it all, it questions what can be translated as *So what?* or *What next?* Arriving at the final stage of this text, where Toni Gironès’s work has been problematised, from its conceptual core to its sensorial fruition, this can be a challenging query into what can be expected from this architect’s future elaborations. How can his *habitability* engage with the fluidity of time, draining the past memories onto the present experience and the unknown future? More specifically, how can his architecture continue to *activate* the place in a near future? How can it project the lasting memory on the porosity of its materiality? How can architecture act as both a *topography in time* and also a present bodily experience? How can *habitability* continue to be pursued, conceived and constructed? What is architecture’s role in the 2030 agenda? What does each place require and by what means will people inhabit them?

Perhaps this will reside in the timeless lesson of “minimal construction/maximum intervention,” as stated by Toni Gironès in the interview given to Emma López-Bahut and Luz Paz-Agras in 2017, and which is an underlying principle of all his works, as perceived in Seró, Guissona, Can Tacó and Vilassar de Dalt: “I think there’s a very simple formula in this case that leads towards a particular attitude in the way of looking and interpreting, and finally in the way of activating certain process. But I think that maximum intervention based on a minimum construction shouldn’t be seen so closely in relation to the architectural element understood as an object itself but instead should take into account what we consider as our place of work, which at the end of the day is the planet Earth.”¹⁰³

In an imminent fragile era, economically deprived by the pandemic crisis and in much need for functional, social and emotional nurturing, *habitability* – as the “the primary task of architecture” – as Toni Gironès puts it – can mean answering with few existing resources to overwhelming urges, enabling contemporary life and providing for Mankind, while coping with the pace of time, as taught by these great masters.¹⁰⁴

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