José de Hermosilla y Sandoval
and the origin of the Spanish Academy

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"*The richness of the classical tradition is due to the variety of antique sources available and to the interpretations and re-interpretations of them from age to age." (Michael Greenhalgh)*

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Since the mid-sixteenth century, when Serlio and Palladio declared Bramante "the first who brought good, and beautiful architecture to light, which from the time of the ancients had been hid," the appeal to ancient authority has been one of the most potent and critical tools for confronting the current state of building.[1] The idea, however, can be traced back to the Augustan author Vitruvius, whose treatise *De architectura* put forth the idea that architecture of the ancient Greeks was the exemplary model for building.[2] Unfortunately though for Vitruvius, Italy would have to wait another 1500 years before his ideas on architectural practice could find fertile ground to flourish. In the capable hands of Bramante, Peruzzi, Raphael, Palladio, and many others, the style *all'antica*, what is commonly referred to as the manner of the ancients, emerged as the most cogent expression of Roman grandeur.[3]

Though the style *all'antica* relied for the most part on the fidelity and allegiance to the canon of antique models, the term referred to something much more expressive than the simplistic citation of ancient motifs and themes. In virtually every case of *all'antica* building, one finds a complex combination of historical references, ideal visions and ingenious inventions. Indeed, by the late-sixteenth century, when the Roman Accademia di San Luca officially

opened with the aim of cultivating the fine arts, the study of Vitruvius, antiquity, and in particular the orders of architecture, had become the touchstone of architectural education.[4] But how could such a program take hold outside the Italian peninsula? How could it be possible to provide a proven way to teach the art of building, based on the study of Vitruvius and *all'antica* architecture, in academies that were far removed from Rome? Who would be capable of formulating such a program as well as carry out its teaching? These challenges emerged simultaneously in Spain in the 1740s, when the new Bourbon monarchs sought to establish a coordinated program of architectural education founded, not surprisingly, on ancient authority, and *al romano* architecture.[5]

During the first four decades of the eighteenth century, artistic patronage in Spain had focused principally on foreign artists of French and Italian descent.[6] Such well-known figures as Filippo Juvarra René Carlier, and Louis Michel van Loo, were among those involved in the early projects and palace designs of the Spanish Bourbons. More significant than these were the enterprising efforts of a notable group of painters, sculptors, architects, and craftsmen - mainly Italian - who traveled to Spain, or were brought over by the Bourbon court, to work on the new Royal Palace in Madrid.[7] The atelier of the palace served as the educational center of this legacy, further fostering the nation's fascination with the enduring myth of Rome's cultural and artistic supremacy. Yet the presence of foreign artists in Madrid only made evident the desperate need for a bona fide academy of fine arts. Thus in 1739, Philip V set up a Junta *preparatoria* (provisional academy) with the aim of promoting the fine arts in Spain. From this initiative a group of young Spaniards emerged to form a new generation of professional architects and educators. José de Hermosilla y Sandoval stands out as a unique figure from this period, as one who sought a critical balance between academic research, writing, and architectural practice.

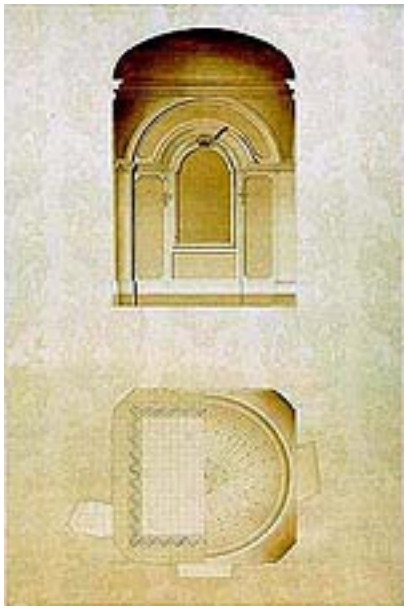
Educated first in theology and mathematics, Hermosilla later received his architectural training in the atelier of the new Royal Palace.[8] In May of 1747, he was awarded a royal pension to study architecture in Rome, making him the first Spanish architect to receive such an award. Hermosilla spent four years in Rome, working first as a draftsman to the papal architect and Cavaliere, Ferdinando Fuga, then as the architect in charge of the completion of the church and monastery of Ss. Trinità degli Spagnoli, and finally as an independent scholar, archaeologist and writer on architecture. His time in Rome was marked by the typical, academic study of iconic works from Antiquity and the Renaissance, in addition to extensive research on architectural matters, both ancient and modern. Beyond continuing his studies in architecture, though, Hermosilla used his time in Rome to prepare a course of study for the proposed academy in Madrid. Indeed, Hermosilla proved the perfect candidate to carry out such a task, as the Junta believed that only an individual well versed in the currents of contemporary architectural practice and theory, combined with a familiarity of the great monuments of the past, would be capable of preparing such a program. Hermosilla, therefore, concluded his studies in Rome in 1750 with the preparation of his treatise,

Architectura civil; a work that sought to reestablish the Vitruvian triad of strength, beauty, and utility as the basis of perfection in architecture.

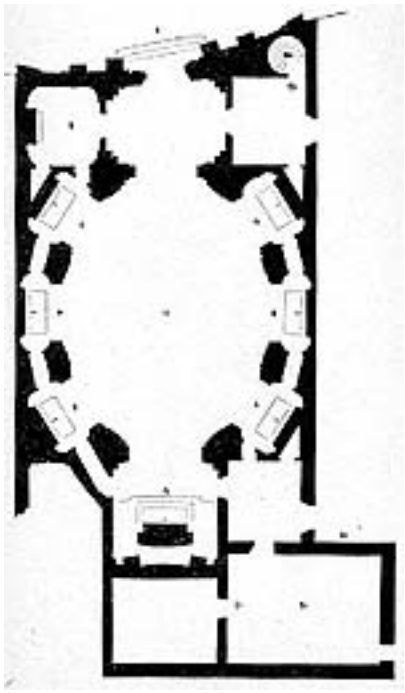
Upon his return to Spain in 1751, Hermosilla was appointed Director of Architecture at the newly founded Academia de San Fernando in Madrid. Placed under the protection of the monarch's namesake, the academy was modeled upon the highly esteemed Accademia di San Luca in Rome, at that time the seat of artistic education in Europe. The basic purpose of the academy was to provide a course of architecture (and the other fine arts) that could easily be taught. The Academia sought to promote infallible rules. They feared the cultivation of subjective judgment and the diversity of taste as the basis of artistic education. They turned instead to the standards of the past that had stood the test of time. This way even individuals who lacked genius, or who were of ordinary talent could follow the academic discipline and achieve a high degree of competence. And it was there that Hermosilla would fulfill his ambition of combining architectural practice, education, research and writing; a commitment that would occupy him until his death in 1776. Throughout his later years, however, it remained clear that Hermosilla's time in Italy was the critical ingredient to his formation as a practicing architect and academician. Moreover, it was his participation in the completion of the church and convent of Ss. Trinità (*above, the interior dome*), and the preparation of his treatise, *Architectura civil*, that would distinguish him from his peers, placing him at the forefront of architectural debate in mid-eighteenth century Spain.

The story of Ss. Trinità, (*right, facade*) though fraught with bitter controversy, extends well beyond the confines of the architecture and papal politics of eighteenth-century Rome.[9] Originally designed by the Portuguese architect Emanuel Rodriguez Dos Santos between 1732-35, the church was built in the following decade under the direction of the Italian builder Giuseppe Sardi. Midway through construction of the complex, a group of workers encountered evidence of several design errors and structural problems. In the wake of their findings, the Spanish Trinitarians conducted an inquiry into the state of the existing structure.[10] Several papal architects and professors from the Accademia di San Luca, including Fuga, Carlo Marchionni, and Gabriele Valvassori, were asked to examine the condition of the church and present reports on their findings. Hermosilla was the only foreign architect asked to participate in this investigation; a responsibility that resulted in his subsequent commission to complete the structure.

As the architect in charge of the completion of the church, Hermosilla carried out several design additions and modifications to Dos Santos' original scheme. The additions included: the decoration of all interior chapels (altars, retables, prayer rails, etc.); the decoration of the main sanctuary with its monumental retable and high altar; the design of the choir balcony and support structure; the design of all windows, doors, and decorative tablets; the decoration of the wall and ceiling surfaces that were not intended to be frescoed over; and the design of the*bussolotto*, or timber entry portal within the soto-choir narthex. Several alterations were made to the existing structure following the investigation's suggestions: four lanterns in the dome were removed and the oval panel in the center was increased in size, so that the major painting could occupy a more prominent position; the interior surface of the dome was rendered with a combination of decorative ribs and basket weave coffers (*a canestro*); lateral pilasters were removed from the *capella maggiore*, and the arched opening dividing the soto-choir narthex from the main body of the church was modified. Though modest in their scope, all of these designs and alterations provided Hermosilla with the perfect opportunity to fulfill many of his architectural ambitions.



The case of Ss. Trinità (*right, measured drawing of the soto-choir narthex by R. Pilla*) also reveals a number of compelling design issues and cultural problems that affected the methodology of eighteenth-century Roman building. The monastic complex, for instance, though originally designed as a composite whole by Rodriguez Dos Santos was subsequently altered and completed by Hermosilla. Moreover, both men came from the Iberian Peninsula and their contribution to the face of Ss. Trinità highlights the issue of displacement and questions regarding the importance of foreign building typologies and decorative vocabularies in settecento Rome. The legal case surrounding the completion of the church, too, throws into high relief the importance of design committees and the authority they wielded in managing matters of procedure, finance, and taste. Finally, the case reaffirmed the Accademia di San Luca's role as intellectual guardian of the Roman grand manner of building.



José de Hermosilla was undoubtedly aware of the delicate predicament he was facing when he accepted the commission to complete the church of Ss. Trinità (*right, plan*). The chance to work on a new church for Rome, alongside some of the most distinguished architects in the city, was an exceptional opportunity that no Spaniard before him had ever encountered. As a devoted pupil of Fuga, though, he felt compelled to agree with the investigation's findings on the design and structural deficiencies of the original scheme. Yet at the same time, he was very similar to his Portuguese predecessor, in that he too was a stranger in Rome having arrived there in the hope of establishing himself as a critically independent architect. His reaction towards the treatment of Rodriguez Dos Santos was likely one of sympathy, for the power being wielded by the various architects and *giudici* was enough to damage one's personal reputation - if not career - permanently. And therefore, when the time came for Hermosilla to produce his designs for the completion of Ss. Trinità, it is not surprising to find that they were conceived with the greatest discretion and attention to Roman precedent.

As the church and convent of the Trinitarians (*above, in a contemporary view by Vasi*) was approaching its last stages of completion in early 1750, Hermosilla began to organize and write a treatise which was intended to have been his greatest achievement, *La Architectura Civil de D.n Joseph de Hermosilla y de Sandovàl.*[11] The work appeared in two manuscript forms, but unfortunately never achieved the success one might have expected given its timely appearance in Rome at the middle of the century. It was never published afterwards even though it received significant praise from such distinguished figures as Fuga, Ruggiero Giuseppe Boscovich, and P. Alonso Cano, the superior of the Trinitarians in Rome. That an unpublished manuscript on architecture should draw the attention of some of the most noted figures in mid eighteenth-century Rome is not only a reflection of Hermosilla's experience and breadth of intelligence, but more importantly an indication of the widespread need for a new kind of architectural treatise. This called for a work on architecture that addressed in a much more cogent manner the emerging problems of beauty in building, the appropriateness of certain building typologies, and the image of the city as a whole.

Arquitectura civil is structured around three books on civil architecture situated between a preliminary compendium on practical geometry, and a final survey of architectural machinery. The three central books appropriately follow the Vitruvian triad of firmness (*fortaleza*), commodity (*commodidad*), and delight (*hermosura*), with the latter category occupying a middle position between the two more practical ends. The first book, *fortaleza*, deals mainly with materials and methods of construction, foundations, walls, paving, roofs, vaults and timber trusses. The second book, *hermosura*, occupies a central position for it addresses the essential problem of beauty in building, namely in the disposition of the orders

of architecture and the types (*generos*) of buildings according to Vitruvius' description of temple plans.[12] Book three, *commodidad*, deals with the larger context of urban planning, civic spaces, and public and private buildings. It is important to note that at the time of Hermosilla's writing there were very few architectural treatises or pattern books being published in Rome, or elsewhere in Europe.[13] The great Baroque treatises of Lobkowitz, Guarini, Desgodetz and Daviler had been published more than half a century earlier and in many cases reprinted several times. The critique of baroque and rococo architecture, in the form of a rigorist approach to composition, the orders and planning - mainly through the treatises of Laugier, and Lodoli (via Algarotti) - would begin to appear in the years immediately following Hermosilla's manuscript. With the exception, perhaps, of Giuseppe Vasi, Piranesi, the Galli Bibiena, and others whose theatrical stage sets and *vedute* of ancient and modern Rome would add a new dimension of drama and scenographic fantasy to architectural representation, the dearth of theoretical treatises on architecture around 1750 was noticeable. Hermosilla's treatise, therefore, stands at a critical moment in the history of architectural theory, for not only was it intended to be a synthesis of all previous works of architecture, but also posited the challenges that he and others would have to face if architecture was going to play a critical role in the future development of Spain. Yet in this respect Hermosilla's ideas were clearly split: that is, while he believed that the canonical Roman exemplars served as the central doctrine for the education and practice of architecture, he understood from experience that every structure has its own temperament and unique character.

Architectura civil proved to be of tremendous importance to Spain, for the King's Minister of Foreign Affairs, D. Josef de Carvajal y Lancaster, who also happened to be the academy's Protector, had instructed Hermosilla to consider a future course of architecture for the new academy. To that end, Hermosilla firmly believed that a comprehensive work on architecture would serve as an invaluable resource for both beginning students and respected practitioners. His plan for a course of architectural education at the new academy followed closely the plan of his treatise, and contained a "Grand Tour" as well.[14] The course was to have lasted six years, studying in Rome and its environs, and travelling throughout Europe. The students were required to study geometry, statics, hydrostatics, perspective and stereotomy, among other things. They were required to familiarize themselves with Vitruvius' treatise and its modern commentaries by Daniele Barbaro, Guillaume Philandre, Alberti, Perrault and others, as well as the treatises of Serlio, Palladio, Scamozzi, Vignola, Arfe y Villafañe, Fray Lorenzo de San Nicolás, Caramuel and Tosca. Additionally, the pensioners were required to undertake a number of activities while in Rome, including: making copies of well-known works of art; carefully examining the monuments and ruins of Antiquity, and engaging in the design, assistance and construction of buildings and projects. His treatise, as well as his subsequent proposals for the academic program of study at the Academia, set the intellectual framework for architectural discourse and practice in Spain in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and contributed to the formation of several generations of Spanish architects.

José de Hermosilla was a remarkable figure in the cultural life of mid-eighteenth century Spain and Italy, whose contribution to the history of Spanish architecture merits closer study. He lived through a period that not only witnessed a growing uneasiness about both the recent and distant past, but also brought to light a desire for a new architectural order. Yet in his efforts to negotiate a critical path between these two seemingly incompatible views, he neither solved the complex historical, philosophical and cultural uncertainties of the past, nor provided a clean slate, a *tabula rasa* for the future. Aware of the peculiar contingencies that characterized his own period, Hermosilla sought to reveal how the architectural debates that took shape in Spain around 1750 were neither historicist nor positivist, but rather centered on notions of continuity and the struggle that each generation has in defining itself in relation to an increasingly distant past and an indeterminate future.

If authenticity in architecture is to have any importance in the future fabric of our cities, then architects will have to reintegrate themselves with the world of ideas and artefacts in a way not too dissimilar from that of José de Hermosilla in the mid-eighteenth century. Like many before him struggling with the practice and theory of classical architecture, Hermosilla grasped how infinitely capable *all'antica* forms were in embodying metaphorically the variety of human conditions and natural phenomena that existed. But even more so, Hermosilla understood that authenticity in architecture meant authority, and as such it guided the character and conduct of the architect, and the development patterns of urban life. His efforts in redirecting the attitude of Spaniards towards a more critical and genuine approach to architectural practice and academic instruction were truly exceptional. The lessons drawn from the Spanish artistic campaigns of the eighteenth century could very well provide a useful analogy in confronting the current crisis of meaning in architecture, and the fear of establishing an authoritative way forward.

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Footnotes

1 *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture,* (translated from the Italian with an introduction and commentary by Vaughan Hart and Peter Hicks), New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996, Bk. IV, ch. 6, p. 281; and Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture,* New York: Dover, 1965, p. 97.

2 Vitruvius suggested more than once that his aim was to publish the rules of architecture, which since the time of the ancients had remained unavailable. See Vitruvius, *De Architectura,* (edited and translated by Frank Granger), Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, Bk. III, preface, p. 153, ff.

3 E. Gombrich, "The Style *all'antica*: Imitation and Assimilation," in *Gombrich on the Renaissance*(London: Phaidon, 1993), 1:122-8; E. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 21-24; and M.F. Hansen, "Representing the Past: The

Concept and Study of Antique Architecture in 15th-century Italy," *A.R.I.D.* XXIII (Rome, 1996), 83-116.

4 On the history of the academic teaching of art in general, see the classic work by N. Pevsner,*Academies of Art, Past and Present* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973). On the Roman Academy of St. Luke's, see in particular, M. Missirini, *Memorie per servire alla storia della Romana Accademia di S. Luca fino alla morte di Antonio Canova* (Rome: De Romanis, 1823).

5 On the foundation of the Madrid Academy, see: J. Caveda y Nava, *Memorias para la historia de la Real Academia de San Fernando y de las bellas artes en España* (Madrid: Imprenta de Manuel Tello, 1867), 1-30; C. Bédat, La real academia de bellas artes de San Fernando (1744-1808) (Madrid: R.A.B.A.S.F., 1989), 27 ff.; and F.J. Sánchez Cantón, "Los antecedentes, la fundación y la historia de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes," Academia I, no. 3 (1952), 291-320.

6 On eighteenth-century Spanish architecture, see in particular: V. Lampérez y Romea, *Arquitectura civil española de los siglos I al XVIII*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1922); O. Schubert, *Historia del barroco en España* (Madrid, 1924); Y. Bottineau, *L'Art de cour dans l'Espagne de Philippe V, 1700-1746*(Bordeaux, 1962; reprint, *El arte cortesano en la España de Felipe V (1700-1746)* Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1986); W. Rincón García and F. Chueca Goitía, *Arquitectura barocca de los siglos XVII y XVIII, arquitectura de los Borbones y neoclásica* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1986); G. Kubler, *Arquitectura de los siglos XVII y XVIII* (Madrid: Editorial Plus Ultra, 1957); G. Kubler and M. Soria, *Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and Their American Dominions 1500-180*0 (Baltimore and Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969); and C. Sambricio, *La arquitectura española de la ilustración* (Madrid, 1986).

7 The period between the incendiary destruction of the old Alcazar in Madrid in 1734 and the death of Philip V in 1746 marked a critical moment in the history of eighteenth-century Spanish architecture, for the new Royal Palace became the principal residence of artistic patronage in Spain. This work influenced a generation of young Spanish architects who were instrumental in diffusing a new architectural spirit throughout Spain. On the long and complex history of the palace, see: F.J. de la Plaza Santiago, *Investigaciones sobre el Palacio Real nuevo de Madrid* (Valladolid, 1975); Bottineau, *El arte cortesano*, 531-601; and Kubler, *Arquitectura de los siglos XVII y XVIII*, 206-15.

8 For a survey of Hermosilla's life, see: V. Deupi, *Architectural Temperance: Spaniards and Rome 1700-1758* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1999), p. 320 ff; D. Rodríguez Ruiz, "De la Utopía a la Academia: El tratado de arquitectura civil de José de Hermosilla," *Fragmentos*, no. 3 (1984), 57-80; *idem*, *La memoria fragil. José de Hermosilla y Las Antigüedades Arabes en España* (Madrid: COAM, 1992); and Sambricio, *La arquitectura española de la ilustración*, 109-27.

9 See: Deupi*, Architectural Temperance*, p. 350 ff.; P.C. Blanco, *La Ss.ma Trinità dei Domenicani Spagnoli* (Rome: Danesi Editore, n.d.); and M. Tafuri, "Un <<fuoco>> urbano della Roma barocca,"*Quaderni* XI, no. 61 (1964), 1-20.

[10] On the complicated legal case surrounding the construction of the church, see P. Ferraris, "Il contenzioso legale tra architetti e committenti," *In urbe architectus: Modelli, disegni, misure: la professione dell'architetto, Roma, 1680-1750*, B. Contardi, and G. Curcio, eds. (Rome: Argos, 1991), 239 ff.

[11] The treatise remains in manuscript form in the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, Sign.: Ms 7573. See, Deupi, *Architectural Temperance*, p. 415 ff. I have not had the opportunity of consulting Delfin Rodríguez Ruiz' critical edition of the *Architectura civil* which is presently in preparation. See also by the same author, "De la utopia a la Academia," *passim*. A copy of Hermosilla's original manuscript may be found in the Academia de Buenas Letras de Sevilla, Sign.: M/4071. (*Idem*, *La memoria fragil,* 33, n. 39).

[12] Instead of the more commonly used word *belleza*, Hermosilla employed the more expressive term*hermosura*. Francisco Lozano coined the expression in his translation of Alberti's treatise (1582). It is a departure from the Vitruvian notion of *venustas* insofar as it proceeds from Alberti's three principles of number, measure and arrangement (*numerus*, *finitio* and *collocatio*), and their ultimate integration (*concinnitas*). See F. Marías, "El Escorial de Felipe II y la sabiduría divina*," Annali di architettura, Rivista del Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio*, no. 1 (1989), p. 63.

[13] A brief glance through Dora Wiebenson's *Architectural Theory from Alberti to Ledoux* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), reveals how very few architectural treatises came out in 1750. With the exeption of Wren's *Parentalia*, and reprints of previously written pattern books on the orders, the absence of theoretical speculation prior to Laugier is considerable. For a more comprehensive list, see C.V. Meeks, "List of Publications 1700-1800," in *Italian Architecture 1750-1914* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), 463 ff.

[14] On this in particular, see A. López de Menesés, "Las pensiones que en 1758 concedio la Academia de San Fernando para ampliación de estudios en Roma," *Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Excursiones* XLI (1933), 253-300; XLII (1934), 26-69.