

# Organicismo y ortogonalidad: modelos contrapuestos de organización del espacio arquitectónico y urbano. ¿Podría ser el organicismo el paradigma estético de la nueva arquitectura sostenible?

## Organicism and orthogonality: opposing models for organising architectural and urban space. Could organicism be the aesthetic paradigm of the new sustainable architecture?

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### Resumen

Para cierta historiografía moderna se ha vinculado el organicismo arquitectónico a integración con la naturaleza, en una dicotomía lógica donde su némesis sería la ortogonalidad como exaltación de lo artificial y racional.

Siguiendo esa misma línea argumental de analogías, en la actualidad hay quienes postulan por una identificación de lo sostenible con arquitectura orgánica.

En este artículo se plantea que dicha asociación conceptual es algo bastante reciente, fruto de los movimientos contraculturales que nacen en los EE.UU. desde mediados de los años sesenta y principios de los setenta, donde el ecologismo y el naturalismo eran parte de las señas de identidad de estas corrientes inconformistas. Y asimismo se expone que, históricamente y hasta el inicio de la edad contemporánea, ortogonalidad y simetría han simbolizado intrínsecamente el orden terrestre emanado directamente de la divinidad, mientras que el organicismo representaba todo lo contrario.

Se concluye que organicismo y ortogonalidad son supracategorías, que para la arquitectura sostenible hay diferentes planteamientos o enfoques teóricos, y que el organicismo edilicio solo encajaría plenamente con determinadas sensibilidades "alternativas" de lo sostenible, por lo que consecuentemente no puede establecerse de forma genérica que lo orgánico constituya la imagen de la arquitectura sostenible.

### Palabras clave:

*Simbolismo, iconología, orgánico, cuadrulado, orden.*

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### ESP La noción de arquitectura sostenible <sup>1</sup>.

Por metáfora, sostenible sería un cierto equilibrio que se sustenta, sostiene o soporta a lo largo del tiempo. Según la RAE, el adjetivo "sostenible" es "especialmente en ecología y economía, que se puede mantener durante largo tiempo sin agotar los recursos o causar grave daño al medio ambiente"; y "sostenibilidad" resulta la "cualidad de sostenible". Para el escritor Uwe Poerksen con el término de "sostenibilidad" (y su análoga de "sustentabilidad", empleada en el mundo latinoamericano) estaríamos ante una palabra "plástica", que se usa por sus connotaciones en lugar de por sus valores descriptivos, más genéricos e indefinidos <sup>2</sup>. En cualquier caso "desarrollo sostenible" (sustainable development) estaría relacionado con la gestión de los recursos naturales.

El término de "sostenibilidad" se refiere a la relación entre el hombre y el medio ambiente, y consecuentemente "arquitectura sostenible" hace referencia a la relación entre la arquitectura y el medio ambiente. Conforme al Diccionario Panhispánico de dudas, "medioambiente" es el "conjunto de circunstancias o condiciones exteriores a un ser vivo que influyen en su desarrollo y en sus actividades".

Según el informe Brundtland se considera como "desarrollo sostenible" aquel que puede cubrir las necesidades de esta generación sin comprometer a las generaciones futuras: "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable -to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"<sup>3</sup>. Todo ello constituye un léxico bastante "plástico", empleando la terminología de Poerksen<sup>4</sup>.

Para el marco referencial de la edificación y el urbanismo, se propone que arquitectura sostenible sería de manera genérica aquella "arquitectura que conscientemente<sup>5</sup> reduce su impacto ambiental negativo"<sup>6</sup>. Nos encontramos así con un concepto algo indeterminado<sup>7</sup> y, por tanto, incuantificable, pero con distintos atributos variables o parámetros, unos perfectamente cuantificables<sup>8</sup> y otros menos, que en la concepción tecnologista y pasiva de la sostenibilidad arquitectónica afectan básicamente<sup>9</sup> a la gestión de los recursos naturales, a alargar la vida útil de lo construido, y a una adaptación particularizada al clima y al entorno:

#### 1. Gestión de recursos naturales<sup>10</sup>:

1.1.-Gestión de recursos energéticos. Pasividad energética donde se reduzca notablemente su futuro consumo energético de fuentes no renovables<sup>11</sup>. Limitación severa de las emisiones contaminantes del edificio, tanto al exterior como de productos potencialmente tóxicos a su interior. Reducción de la huella de carbono producida en la construcción. De forma activa durante la vida útil de urbanización y edificios, generar sumideros de carbono y neutralización de contaminantes: capacidad de una urbanización verde con parques y jardines e incluso de los

propios edificios para captar tanto carbono como diversos contaminantes.

1.2.-Gestión de recursos hídricos. Mejor empleo de los recursos hídricos mediante un menor consumo de agua y su reducida contaminación incluyendo redes separativas de saneamiento para su óptimo aprovechamiento y depuración, y potenciación de la capacidad de filtración al terreno urbanizado del agua de lluvia para recarga de acuíferos<sup>12</sup>.

1.3.-Gestión de recursos materiales y reciclaje<sup>13</sup>. Materiales sostenibles en la construcción, como madera procedente de explotaciones forestales controladas, pinturas sin disolventes tóxicos, distintos productos de construcción y acabado antialérgicos, cubiertas verdes y jardines verticales que ofrecen aislamiento y captan carbono, etc. Evitar materiales de potencial toxicidad en su producción y uso. Prioridad al empleo de materiales locales que no conlleven grandes gastos energéticos en transporte. Empleo de materiales reciclados o reutilizados para la construcción, con la incorporación de materiales procedentes de valorización de residuos. Reciclaje de materiales tras la vida útil del edificio, con el uso de materiales que faciliten su segregación y futuro reciclaje al término de su ciclo útil. Minimizar los residuos producidos por sus usuarios durante la vida útil del edificio, y segregar los residuos urbanos para posibilitar su retirada selectiva y así su reciclaje.

#### 2.-Durabilidad/vida útil de la construcción<sup>14</sup>:

2.1.-Una menor obsolescencia, que prolongue la duración útil en el tiempo de edificios y urbanización, y por ende de los recursos empleados<sup>15</sup>. Adaptabilidad del edificio a futuros cambios de programa. Minimización del mantenimiento necesario durante la vida útil de la construcción. Mejor capacidad de permanencia frente a desastres naturales: parece obvio que dentro de la sostenibilidad se incluiría mejorar la resistencia/estabilidad de la construcción frente a los desastres naturales más previsibles según su ubicación, como sismos, maremotos, riadas/inundaciones, tornados, incendios, etc.

#### 3.-Adaptación e integración particularizadas:

3.1.-Exposición climática. Estudiada orientación solar, tanto para un buen aprovechamiento directo del soleamiento como para captar de forma óptima la radiación de energía solar renovable. Consideración de los vientos dominantes, bien para su aprovechamiento biodinámico o bien para proteger al edificio de su efecto. Adaptación de la envolvente al régimen de temperaturas y de pluviosidad, mejorando tanto el confort como su eficiencia energética, incluso con elementos semienterrados para aumentar inercia térmica.

3.2.-Integración con el lugar y el terreno<sup>16</sup>, sea aprovechando las formas naturales para su emplazamiento y geometría, y/o con materiales locales que al mimetizar el edificio con el entorno minimicen su impacto visual y

a su vez reduzcan el consumo energético en transportes, habitualmente con el empleo de técnicas constructivas tradicionales en la región que puedan ser ejecutadas por personal local<sup>17</sup>.

La idea de arquitectura sostenible es una respuesta sobrevenida tanto a la degradación ambiental desencadenada por el crecimiento desordenado del medio urbano durante las últimas décadas como al cambio climático causado por el consumo de combustibles fósiles, desencadenados por el intenso desarrollo asociado a la fuerte expansión demográfica junto con un aumento generalizado<sup>18</sup> del nivel de vida. De ahí que en la definición antes propuesta se manifieste una “intencionalidad consciente” de reducir el impacto ambiental edilicio.

En las arquitecturas históricas ese propósito medioambiental nunca ha existido<sup>19</sup>, aunque lógicamente se aplicase una economía de medios que posibilitaba un mejor aprovechamiento de los recursos<sup>20</sup>, por lo que resultaría engañoso y sin rigor el tratar la sostenibilidad en la arquitectura del pasado.

#### La imagen de la arquitectura sostenible.

La imagen ofrece siempre una lectura semántica, siendo el estilo la materialización perceptiva del lenguaje formal empleado en un determinado momento cultural. De una forma más amplia, podemos agrupar los distintos estilos históricos en subcategorías y categorías, donde en arquitectura y urbanismo llegamos finalmente a las supracategorías contrapuestas de organicismo y ortogonalidad, cuyo ámbito conceptual trataremos de desarrollar.

Mucho se ha hablado sobre la imagen propia que ha de ofrecer la arquitectura sostenible<sup>21</sup>. En cualquier caso se trata de una arquitectura con una fuerte carga ideológica, que con pensamiento militante quiere mostrar a través de las formas su compromiso medioambiental. En estos últimos tiempos la asociación de ecologismo con organicismo<sup>22</sup> se ha retomado desde el concepto de sostenibilidad para defender que el organicismo podría representar el nuevo paradigma estético de la arquitectura sostenible<sup>23</sup>.

Hemos perdido parte de la lectura simbólica<sup>24</sup> de tiempos pretéritos (interpretaciones que para nuestros antecesores eran evidentes), llegando a una cierta indefinición en la que se halla sumida la modernidad desde su ruptura con la larga tradición continuista del pasado. Para poder comprender semánticamente los símbolos de un presente en constante cambio, es necesario conocer lo que simbolizaban anteriormente y cómo ha evolucionado su significado.

#### Características formales de organicismo y ortogonalidad.

Aunque en la época moderna la arquitectura orgánica se ha definido como un desarrollo ramificado de la arquitectura racionalista o movimiento moderno que aboga por una mejor integración de la arquitectura con el lugar<sup>25</sup> (y en cierto modo pero no necesariamente inspirada en las formas curvas de la naturaleza), en este escrito vamos a argumentar razonadamente la significación iconológica<sup>26</sup> a lo largo de la historia arquitectónica de la dualidad de opuestos<sup>27</sup> orgánico-ortogonal<sup>28</sup>, cuyas lecturas simbólicas son precisamente antitéticas. Por ello, para comprender el organicismo, necesitamos antes comprender la ortogonalidad.

En aras de desarrollar su interpretación iconológica, empezaremos diferenciando ambos conceptos por sus características meramente formales<sup>29</sup>, supracategorías que no se restringen a una época sino que se repiten de forma diacrónica en toda la historia de la arquitectura:

Arquitectura orgánica como aquella donde formalmente encontramos curvas con plantas más o menos circulares/ ovaladas, e incluso plantas poligonales irregulares de formas asimétricas, todas ellas en cierto modo aleatorias, adaptadas e integradas con la orografía del terreno<sup>30</sup>. Ejemplos paradigmáticos pretéritos serían los poblados fortificados de la cultura castreña desde el final del Bronce, o bien las Motillas del Bronce en La Mancha. Como ejemplo del siglo XX mencionar la “Bloomhouse” en Austin (Texas), refugio de inspiración hippie construido en los años setenta y con todo tipo de formas curvas onírico-psicodélicas, que sería restaurado en 2017.

Arquitectura ortogonal como aquella donde formalmente sus plantas y alzados muestran figuras geométricas basadas en el cuadrado y el rectángulo (y el triángulo en cubiertas, y las cúpulas como cuerpos o figuras de revolución), comúnmente mediante paralelepípedos rectangulares o composiciones de los mismos, formas marcadamente simétricas, moduladas y sistematizadas, perfectamente ordenadas en torno a ejes ortonormales. Ejemplos paradigmáticos del Mundo Antiguo serían los templos egipcios y los templos griegos.

En el presente artículo se propone hacer una reflexión sobre el significado iconológico de estos dos ideales históricos, organicismo y ortogonalidad<sup>31</sup>, siendo supracategorías opuestas y recurrentes empleadas históricamente<sup>32</sup> por la humanidad para organizar el espacio habitable<sup>33</sup> a escalas tanto edilicia como urbana<sup>34</sup>, postulándose que en las distintas fases históricas ambas ofrecían un marcado contenido simbólico pero diferente al que actualmente se viene considerando, y consecuentemente analizar si el modelo organicista sería compatible con la arquitectura sostenible.

#### El origen de los asentamientos humanos con carácter permanente/sedentario.

Estos primeros emplazamientos con vocación de continuidad aparecerán hace unos 14.000 años, en el periodo preneolítico o mesolítico de Oriente Próximo (cultura kebariense-natufiense, zona sirio-palestina). A lo largo de esta fase inicial, las edificaciones serán de planta circular/ovalada (como en Göbekli Tepe, hace unos 11.000 años).

Igualmente, las primeras ciudades de mayor tamaño (como Jericó en Palestina, con estratos inferiores de hace unos 10.400 años, primeras fases del periodo “Neolítico Pre-Cerámico A” [PPNA]<sup>35</sup> con agricultura predoméstica), presentan un urbanismo de casas circulares semiexcavadas en el suelo con zócalos de piedra y muros de adobe, ciudades de baja densidad rodeadas de muro defensivo y terraplén<sup>36</sup>. Se corresponden con cosmovisiones regionales, sin propósito de universalidad, respondiendo a incipientes estructuras organizativas locales y poco centralizadas.

Sin embargo, en el Neolítico Pre-Cerámico B [PPNB]<sup>37</sup> en Oriente Próximo aparecerá un cambio urbano muy significativo<sup>38</sup>, generado al aumentar exponencialmente la densidad de población que a su vez se compacta por las necesidades defensivas<sup>40</sup>, para lo que se agrupan y se aprietan las casas, cuadrículándose<sup>41</sup>. Se origina de este modo una nueva geometría constructiva, de la que se tanteearán empíricamente distintos esquemas:

a) Un “urbanismo aglutinante”, como el de la población neolítica de Çatalhöyük en Anatolia (con los estratos más antiguos de hace unos 9.500 años [PPNB]) donde las viviendas eran construcciones de adobe rectangulares o sensiblemente cuadradas pero adosadas entre sí y dejando solo algunos patios entre ellas; sin calles, se circulaba y se entraba por los tejados planos. El mismo esquema se repite en el nivel PPNB de Çayönü Tepesi. Esta organización urbana carente de calles se quedará en mera tentativa, desaparecerá sin dejar más huella que la arqueológica.

b) Un urbanismo de calles y construcciones adosadas. En los niveles superiores de las grandes ciudades sirio-palestinas (como sucederá en Jericó) hace unos 9.200 años [PPNB], con unas agricultura y ganadería ya más desarrolladas, las edificaciones circulares han desaparecido siendo sustituidas por un modelo urbano nuevo y diferente: casas de planta rectangular/ cuadrada con patio central en torno al que se agrupan habitaciones, donde igualmente nace el concepto de alineación de construcciones a calle que perdura hasta nuestros días. Como consecuencia lógica de esa rápida densificación habitacional, en el PPNB surgen también las construcciones de dos plantas<sup>42</sup>.

Lo que aparentemente se muestra como un simple cambio de geometría en los edificios y calles, pasando las casas redondas/ovaladas a ser cuadradas/rectangulares y alineadas en torno a calles rectas<sup>43</sup>, constituye un importante avance conceptual: aparece de forma sistemática la pared plana y la esquina recta<sup>44</sup>, algo antes inexistente. Vertical y horizontal son conceptos consustanciales con la gravedad, pero no así los muros planos y la esquina de noventa grados, que suponen una proyección en planta de algo que anteriormente solo se encontraba en vertical. Pared recta y esquina son invención puramente humana, mostrando un incipiente dominio sobre lo salvaje, sobre la naturaleza, sobre las plantas y los animales<sup>45</sup>.

Ha nacido la ortogonalización del espacio, una forma muy diferente de entender el espacio construido. Este cambio se produce al aumentar y concentrarse la población de las grandes ciudades (como Jericó en Cisjordania hace 9.200 años, y como la ciudad fenicia portuaria de Biblos en el Líbano desde hace unos 8.900 años<sup>46</sup>), crecimiento demográfico que igualmente originaría las primeras centralizaciones del poder religioso-político-económico-militar en un grupo reducido de personas sobre un gran número de personas<sup>47</sup> originándose los primeros pasos hacia un incipiente sistema monárquico, sistema que posteriormente cristalizaría en las dinastías arcaicas que gobernaron las primeras Ciudades-Estado (como Uruk en el sur de Irak, como Ur desde hace 5.800 años, o como la ciudad portuaria de Ugarit en Siria). Las élites gobernantes se afanarán en mostrar ese dominio, un nuevo orden que deviene directamente de lo divino<sup>48</sup> y que a su vez constituye la legitimación del poder jerárquico humano<sup>49</sup>. Y esto se simbolizará precisamente a través de la simetría en las composiciones arquitectónicas, las repeticiones<sup>50</sup>, y las geometrías de plantas tanto puramente cuadradas como rectangulares con proporciones matemáticas singulares. Todo ello supondrá expresión de orden<sup>51</sup>, reflejo de un orden superior<sup>52</sup> que por designio divino legitima y justifica al soberano gobernante.

A partir de esta primera simbolización, la historia del urbanismo/arquitectura va a resultar de la interacción entre estos dos modelos opuestos: el ortogonal (reticulado/cuadrículado, simétrico, ordenado, geométrico, rígido, repetitivo), y el orgánico (adaptativo, asimétrico, desordenado, fluido, oportunista).

#### Desarrollo del modelo ortogonal.

Las construcciones monumentales de Egipto y Mesopotamia se fundamentarán en el eje y la simetría<sup>53</sup>; posteriormente se regularizará esa ortogonalidad en la globalidad unificadora que trajo a la Antigüedad el mundo romano<sup>54</sup> donde el modelo paradigmático de los campamentos militares perfectamente cuadrículados partiendo de los ejes cardo y decumano se ejemplifica en

la ciudad militar de Timgad, fundada por Trajano hacia el año 100<sup>55</sup>. En la península ibérica encontramos una buena muestra en León, nacida como campamento legionario romano y donde la muralla formaba un rectángulo perfectamente definido<sup>56</sup>. La muralla de Ávila, del siglo XII pero con tramos sobre la antigua muralla romana<sup>57</sup> manifiesta clara vocación de recinto rectangular.

A una escala más doméstica, el diseño tradicional de la villa romana, articulada ordenadamente en torno a un patio central interior cuadrado/rectangular (peristilo porticado), se deberá a esta misma tradición ortogonal, transmitiendo en el ámbito rural el orden (jurídico, social, jerárquico, imperial, cultural, espiritual) que emanaba de Roma.

Las plantas centrales de geometrías básicas regulares se asocian simbólicamente con el orden perfecto. No obstante, las ciudades existentes están ancladas a la realidad matérica, condicionadas por su historia, y a su vez tensionadas y sometidas a desarrollo y evolución cambiantes. Por ello, es en las ciudades imaginadas donde mejor se plasma el simbolismo del orden. De hecho, en el ideario medieval, la Nueva Jerusalén o Jerusalén Celestial (ciudad evocada como idealización simbólica, combinando lo humano/terrestre con lo divino/celestial) era representada con sus murallas formando un cuadrado<sup>58</sup>, un círculo<sup>59</sup>, un hexágono<sup>60</sup> o una mandorla<sup>61</sup> (como intersección de los círculos de lo humano con lo divino)<sup>62</sup>.

En el Renacimiento, al igual que en el Barroco y luego con el Neoclasicismo, la incorporación de los órdenes arquitectónicos clásicos a la nueva arquitectura supone una clara muestra de orden, que emanaba del poder absoluto del príncipe/rey/soberano/emperador por designio divino.

Mostrar ese orden no solo urbanístico sino conceptual (“orden divino”, sustentador del poder terrenal) que ya exhibían las obras monumentales<sup>63</sup> no solo del imperio egipcio y de Mesopotamia, sino de todas las grandes culturas del Mundo Antiguo (orden que ya traspasa de lo religioso a lo laico en el urbanismo militar romano), es a lo que se aspirará por los nuevos imperios de la edad moderna. Las “Ordenanzas de descubrimientos, nueva población y pacificación de las Indias” (promulgadas por Felipe II)<sup>64</sup> regulan el urbanismo de las nuevas colonizaciones: establecen dimensiones de ciudades en cuadrícula o damero, manzanas y plazas, posicionamiento de la iglesia en la plaza mayor o central, de la que parten dos ejes organizando la cuadrícula, con soportales tanto en la plaza mayor como en las cuatro calles principales que ahí nacían. Más que innovadora, dicha normativa urbanística recogía de forma ordenada los usos y costumbres de aquel entonces, expresando así el ideal urbano de su época<sup>65</sup>.

Este modelo simbólico se mantendrá durante el Antiguo Régimen, mientras que en la edad contemporánea con el cambio al Nuevo Régimen y la separación entre Iglesia-

Estado el esquema ortogonal se conservará pero ahora asociado con “el orden del progreso”. De esta manera lo encontramos tanto en las ciudades americanas de nueva planta<sup>66</sup>, como en los ensanches planificados de las ciudades europeas<sup>67</sup> en época decimonónica.

En la arquitectura institucional de los regímenes autoritarios del siglo XX, además del gigantismo de escala y el empleo de lenguajes imperiales pretéritos con los que identificarse, se recurre inefablemente a la ortogonalidad.

### Coexistencia de ambos modelos.

Las ciudades y poblaciones medievales desarrollarán un urbanismo abigarrado y apegado a la orografía del terreno<sup>68</sup>, feudalismo heredero de la tradición orgánica, con parcelas poligonales pero muy irregulares y calles tortuosas<sup>69</sup> que se juntan en sus plazas (centros neurálgicos de actividad comercial y social)<sup>70</sup>, donde sin embargo convivirán con elementos singulares de marcado carácter ortogonal: los principales edificios cuadrículados serán los eclesiásticos (arquitectura de iglesias, catedrales, conventos, monasterios, mezquitas y sinagogas)<sup>71</sup> reflejando el orden divino, seguidos por gran parte de construcciones defensivas y cortesanas/nobiliarias (torres, castillos/fortalezas, palacios) mostrando el poder terrenal.

Olvidada la visión de la Roma imperial de un universo global ordenado, será ahora la iglesia quien proporcione una referencia clara de orden y estabilidad (tanto material como espiritual)<sup>72</sup> en medio del desorden humano, de ahí esa integración medieval donde se maclan o entrelazan los modelos orgánico y ortogonal.

### El organicismo en la arquitectura del movimiento moderno. Antecedentes y situación actual.

Ya veámos que el significado simbólico de la ortogonalidad cambiará al transicionar desde el Antiguo Régimen al Nuevo Régimen<sup>73</sup>, y lo mismo sucederá con el organicismo, en este caso simbolizando un rechazo reaccionario contra la industrialización y la producción en serie, que partiendo del movimiento Arts & Crafts de William Morris a mediados de época victoriana desembocará poco antes del cambio de siglo en el modernismo con sus curvas<sup>74</sup>, el cual terminará convirtiéndose en un estilo elitista e incluso será asociado a degeneración<sup>75</sup>, tildándolo las vanguardias de decadente.

Ya en el siglo XX se reactivará una determinada corriente organicista con Wright y Aalto buscando formalizar la integración del artefacto edilicio con el entorno, organicismo que sin embargo madurará con la contracultura<sup>76</sup> intimista y antitecnológica de los años sesenta y setenta, influenciada por una miríada de movimientos e idearios artísticos como el *Land Art*, el Arte Povera teorizado por Germano Celant, o bien la ‘efemeralización’<sup>77</sup> de Richard Buckminster Fuller y sus

casas-domo o cúpulas geodésicas<sup>78</sup>. Efectivamente, el rupturismo antisistema que caracterizará al inconformismo del movimiento hippie de los sesenta<sup>79</sup> tendrá un efecto disruptivo e influirá de forma contundente en el pensamiento alternativo tanto de su época como posterior<sup>80</sup>, ideología de cariz *underground* especialmente convergente con otros movimientos sociales reivindicativos. Como corriente contestataria con el orden establecido, esta contracultura adoptó esquemas espontáneos de asentamientos<sup>81</sup> y constructivos plenamente organicistas, fomentando la experimentación y la autoconstrucción (véase el edificio de la “Bloomhouse”, véase el manual *The Last Whole Earth Catalog*<sup>82</sup>), avivando una búsqueda idealizada de los orígenes y en marcada oposición al “orden del progreso” y al “orden institucional” que representaba la construcción ortogonal. Hasta ahí, todo coherente con los significados simbólicos que hemos visto; pero desde entonces, el tiempo ha pasado muy rápido y los cambios se han sucedido vertiginosamente, y al ser también la corriente hippie de alma arcadiana y precursora del ecologismo frente al desarrollismo del sistema, actualmente se ha terminado asociando ecologismo con organicismo en el imaginario popular (simplificación ciertamente rudimentaria).

Finalmente el organicismo adoptará su lectura actual (es decir, desarrollando la postulada por los maestros del movimiento moderno) siendo recurso compositivo buscando la integración/referenciación con el lugar particular de implantación, lo que podría interpretarse como reacción a la rigidez plástica del racionalismo internacional imperante (y no como muestra de oposición al orden establecido)<sup>83</sup>; pero a su vez, de alguna manera referido al ecologismo emblemático que promovió el movimiento hippie (asociación más subconsciente que teóricamente formalizada, pero no por ello menos real).

Así, el binomio “organicismo-ortogonalidad” pasará entonces de haber representado los conceptos opuestos de “desorden anárquico-orden divino” a expresar una contraposición de conceptos antagónicos mucho más amplios y subjetivos<sup>84</sup> como serían lo “natural<sup>85</sup>/sensual/expresivo/intuitivo/biológico/adaptativo/ecológico/mimético con el entorno” frente a lo “artificial/conceptual/formalista/racional/rígido/planificado/tecnológico/mecanicista”.

Curiosamente, e integrando ambos opuestos, desde 1959 y en el otro extremo del mundo se desarrolló el “metabolismo” de Kenzo Tange<sup>86</sup>, entendiendo la construcción como algo bio-orgánico pero más en el aspecto funcional y tecnológico que en el estético, proponiendo por consiguiente un enfoque bio-tecnológico<sup>87</sup>.

Actualmente, cuando el tecnoecologismo ha devenido en micro-utopía fomentada por el pensamiento socialdemócrata<sup>88</sup>, está buscando en el organicismo una

cierta materialización estética, heredera del relativismo en el pensamiento posmoderno<sup>89</sup> de la *French theory* de Foucault, Deleuze y Derrida<sup>90</sup>, e incluso bebiendo de las depuradas poéticas integradoras de arquitectura-lugar<sup>91</sup>, inconscientemente buscando identificarse con esa imagen orgánica popularmente asociada a los orígenes del ecologismo.

Donde parece que el “organicismo ecologista” ha tenido un éxito merecido sería en el urbanismo “ambientalista” relacionado con la infraestructura verde urbana, alcanzando el paisaje vegetal una dimensión estratégica (es decir, los sistemas públicos de parques y jardines, espacios verdes, anillos verdes, cuñas y corredores verdes, todos ellos elementos medioambientales que pasan a vertebrar la nueva ciudad que se reinventa sobre la antigua). Al aplicarse criterios restrictivos de selección de especies endémicas, autóctonas y alóctonas adaptadas (proscribiendo las especies exóticas invasoras) limitando el uso del agua potable para el riego, empleando preferiblemente agua reutilizada procedente de tanques de tormenta, se definirían como intervenciones urbanísticas sostenibles.

Sobre la arquitectura sostenible de los últimos años y debido a la multiplicidad de enfoques existentes, podemos encontrar ejemplos tanto de una arquitectura plenamente orgánica<sup>92</sup> (véanse las construcciones levantadas mediante los sistemas *earthbag* y *earthtube*<sup>93</sup>; o desde un planteamiento tecnologista mostrar el ejemplo del Zentrum Paul Klee de Renzo Piano construido en Berna, que forma tres colinas artificiales semienterradas unidas por vistosas ondas de acero), como de una arquitectura típicamente ortogonal (así serían la mayoría de edificaciones con certificación *Passivhaus* de planta rectangular o incluso cuadrada, buscando conseguir un máximo volumen ofreciendo la menor superficie envolvente y por tanto minimizando pérdidas; otro ejemplo muy diferente de arquitectura ortogonal sería la Biblioteca Pública de Bishan, proyectada por LOOK Architects y construida en Singapur, de imagen moderna con grandes acristalamientos, consiguiendo un cálido empleo de la luz natural).

### Conclusiones. ¿Podría ser el organicismo el paradigma estético de la nueva arquitectura sostenible?

Volvemos con el tema del inicio, cerrando el círculo tras el análisis crítico realizado desarrollando las concepciones históricas de organicismo y ortogonalidad, que serían las dos supracategorías de construcción del espacio habitable humano (donde los estilos arquitectónicos propios de las distintas culturas y épocas constituirían categorías<sup>94</sup> integradas en las anteriores). La arquitectura sostenible es una nueva categoría conceptual (específica de los tiempos actuales), donde se solapan varios enfoques diferentes y que posiblemente siga en fase de definición, y por esa multiplicidad de rumbos carece de un estilo característico global o imagen identificativa (percibiendo únicamente





**FIG 01.** Significados simbólicos de organicismo y ortogonalidad, cuadro acorde con los esquemas sincrónicos-diacrónicos desarrollados por Claude Lévi-Strauss. Elaboración del autor / *The symbolic meanings of organicism and orthogonality, in line with the synchronic-diachronic frameworks developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss. By the author.*

ARQUITECTURA (ÉPOCAS)	SIMBOLISMO SEMÁNTICO		
	ORGANICISMO	ORTOGONALIDAD	
MUNDO ANTIGUO	Desorden anárquico	El orden divino que legitima al gobernante	DIACRÓNICO
ÉPOCA MEDIEVAL			
ÉPOCA MODERNA			
ÉPOCA CONTEMPORÁNEA	Reaccionario, rechazo a la industrialización y tecnología	El orden del progreso, el orden institucional	
ACTUALIDAD	Natural/sensual/expresivo/intuitivo/biológico/adaptativo/ecológico/mimético con el entorno	Artificial/conceptual/formalista/racional/rígido/planificado/tecnológico/mecanicista	
SINCRÓNICO			

ARCHITECTURE (PERIODS)	SEMANTIC SYMBOLISM		
	ORGANICISM	ORTHOGONALITY	
ANCIENT WORLD	Anarchic disorder	The divine order that legitimizes the ruler.	DIACHRONIC
MEDIEVAL ERA			
MODERN ERA			
CONTEMPORARY ERA	Reactionary, rejection of industrialization and technology	The order of progress, the institutional order	
PRESENT DAY	Natural/sensual/expressive/intuitive/biological/adaptive/ecological/	Artificial/conceptual/formalist/rational/rigid/planned/technological/mechanistic	
SYNCHRONIC			

## Abstract

The architectural organicism has been linked to integration with nature by certain modern historiography, in a logical dichotomy where its opposite would be orthogonality as an exaltation of the artificial and rational.

Following that same line of analogies, there are currently those who advocate for an identification of sustainability with organic architecture.

This article suggests that this conceptual association is quite recent, stemming from countercultural movements that emerged in the USA from the mid/late 1960s and early 1970s, where environmentalism and naturalism were part of the defining characteristics of these nonconformist currents. And likewise, it is stated that, historically and until the beginning of the contemporary age, orthogonality and symmetry have inherently symbolized the earthly order emanating directly from divinity, while organicism represented the opposite.

It is concluded that organicism and orthogonality are supra-categories, that for sustainable architecture there are different theoretical approaches, and that architectural organicism would only fully align with certain "alternative" sensibilities of sustainability, therefore it cannot be generally established that the organic constitutes the image of sustainable architecture.

## Keywords:

*Symbolism, iconology, organic, gridded, order.*

## ENG The notion of sustainable architecture<sup>1</sup>

By metaphor, sustainable would be a certain balance that is sustained or supported over time. According to the Real Academia Española (RAE), the adjective "sustainable" is "especially in ecology and economics, which can be maintained over a long period of time without exhausting resources or causing serious damage to the environment"; and "sustainability" is the "quality of being sustainable". For the writer Uwe Poerksen, the term "sustainability" is a "plastic" word, used for its connotations rather than for its more generic and undefined descriptive values<sup>2</sup>. In any case, "sustainable development" would be related to the management of natural resources.

The term "sustainability" refers to the relationship between humans and the environment, and consequently, "sustainable architecture" refers to the relationship between architecture and the environment. According to the Diccionario Panhispánico de dudas (Pan-Hispanic Dictionary of Doubts), "environment" is the "set of circumstances or external conditions to a living being that influence its development and activities".

According to the Brundtland report, "sustainable development" is considered to be that which can meet the needs of this generation without compromising future generations: "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable -to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"<sup>3</sup>. All of this constitutes a rather "plastic" language, using Poerksen's terminology<sup>4</sup>.

For the reference framework of construction and urban planning, it is proposed that sustainable architecture would be, in a general sense, "that architecture which consciously<sup>5</sup> reduces its negative environmental impact"<sup>6</sup>. We thus encounter a somewhat indeterminate concept<sup>7</sup> and therefore unquantifiable, but with different variable attributes or parameters, some perfectly quantifiable<sup>8</sup> and others less so, which in the technologist and passive conception of architectural sustainability mainly affect<sup>9</sup> the management of natural resources, the extension of the lifespan of built structures, and a particularized adaptation to climate and environment.

1.-Natural resource management<sup>10</sup>:

1.1.-Management of energy resources. Energy passivity where future consumption of non-renewable sources is significantly reduced<sup>11</sup>. Severe limitation of pollutant emissions from the building, both externally and of potentially toxic products within. Reduction of the carbon footprint produced during construction. Actively, throughout the lifespan of urbanization and buildings, creating carbon sinks and neutralizing contaminants: the capacity of a green urbanization with parks and gardens,

and even of the buildings themselves, to capture both carbon and various pollutants.

1.2.-Water resource management. Improved use of water resources through reduced water consumption and contamination, including separate sewer systems for optimal utilization and purification, and enhancement of rainwater filtration capacity in urbanized areas for groundwater recharge<sup>12</sup>.

1.3.-Material resource management and recycling<sup>13</sup>. Sustainable materials in construction, such as wood from controlled forests, paints without toxic solvents, different anti-allergenic construction and finishing products, green roofs and green walls that offer insulation and capture carbon, etc. Avoid potentially toxic materials in their production and use. Priority to the use of local materials that do not entail large energy costs in transport. Use of recycled or reused materials for construction, with the incorporation of materials from waste recovery. Recycling of materials after the useful life of the building, with the use of materials that facilitate their segregation and future recycling at the end of their useful cycle. Minimise the waste produced by its users during the useful life of the building, and segregate urban waste to enable its selective removal and thus recycling.

2.-Durability/construction life<sup>14</sup>:

2.1.-Less obsolescence, which prolongs the useful life or lifespan over time of buildings and urbanization, and therefore of the resources used<sup>15</sup>. Adaptability of the building to future changes in the programme. Minimization of maintenance needed over the life of the construction. Better capacity to stay in the face of natural disasters: it seems obvious that sustainability would include improving the building's resistance/stability to the most foreseeable natural disasters according to its location, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, tornadoes, fires, and so on.

3.-Customised adaptation and integration:

3.1.-Climate exposure. Solar orientation needs to be studied, both for a good direct use of sunlight and to optimally capture the radiation of renewable solar energy. Consideration of the prevailing winds, either for their biodynamic use or to protect the building from their effect. Adaptation of the envelope to the temperature and rainfall regime, improving both comfort and energy efficiency, even with semi-buried elements to increase thermal inertia.

3.2.-Integration with the place and the terrain<sup>16</sup>, either by taking advantage of the natural forms for its location and geometry, and/or with local materials that, by blending the building with the environment, minimise its visual impact and in turn reduce energy consumption in transport, usually with the use of traditional construction techniques in the region that can be carried out by local staff<sup>17</sup>.

The idea of sustainable architecture is a response to both the environmental degradation triggered by the disorderly growth of the urban environment in recent decades and to climate change caused by the consumption of fossil fuels, triggered by the intense development associated with the strong demographic expansion together with a generalized<sup>18</sup> increase in the standard of living. Hence, the definition proposed above manifests a “conscious intention” to reduce the environmental impact of buildings.

In historic architecture, this environmental purpose has never existed<sup>19</sup>, although logically an economy of means was applied, which allowed for a better utilization of resources<sup>20</sup>, it would be misleading and lacking rigor to address sustainability in past architecture.

### **The image of sustainable architecture.**

The image always provides a semantic reading, with style being the perceptual materialization of the formal language used in a specific cultural moment. In a broader sense, we can group different historical styles into subcategories and categories, where in architecture and urban planning, we ultimately arrive at the contrasting supra-categories of organicism and orthogonality, which we will try to develop conceptually.

Much has been said about the self-image that sustainable architecture should present<sup>21</sup>. In any case, it is an architecture with a strong ideological foundation, which, with militant thought, aims to demonstrate its environmental commitment through its forms. In recent times, the association of environmentalism with organicism<sup>22</sup> has been revisited from the concept of sustainability, arguing that organicism could represent the new aesthetic paradigm of sustainable architecture<sup>23</sup>.

We have lost part of the symbolic reading<sup>24</sup> of past times (interpretations that were evident to our ancestors), leading to a certain indefiniteness in which modernity finds itself since its break with the long continuous tradition of the past. In order to semantically understand the symbols of a constantly changing present, it is necessary to know what they symbolized in the past and how their meaning has evolved.

### **Formal characteristics of organicism and orthogonality.**

Although in the modern era organic architecture has been defined as a branched development of rationalist architecture or modern movement that advocates a better integration of architecture with the place<sup>25</sup> (and in a certain way but not necessarily inspired by the curved forms of nature), in this paper we are going to argue in a reasoned way the iconological significance<sup>26</sup> throughout architectural history of the duality of organic-orthogonal<sup>27</sup> opposites<sup>28</sup>, whose symbolic readings are precisely antithetical.

Therefore, in order to understand organicism, we first need to understand orthogonality.

In order to develop its iconological interpretation, we will begin by distinguishing both concepts based on their purely formal characteristics<sup>29</sup>, supra-categories that are not limited to a specific time period but recur diachronically throughout the history of architecture:

Organic architecture is one in which we formally find curves with more or less circular/oval plants, and even irregular polygonal plants with asymmetrical shapes, all of them in a certain random way, adapted and integrated with the topography of the land<sup>30</sup>. Paradigmatic examples from the past would be the fortified settlements from the culture of the “Castros” since the end of the Bronze Age, or the Bronze Age “Motillas” in La Mancha. As an example from the 20th century, mention the “Bloomhouse” in Austin (Texas), a refuge of hippie inspiration built in the seventies with all kinds of dreamlike and psychedelic curved forms, which was restored in 2017.

Orthogonal architecture is one in which formally its plans and elevations display geometric figures based on the square and rectangle (and triangles in roofs, and domes as solids of revolution), commonly through rectangular parallelepipeds or compositions of the same, markedly symmetrical, modulated, and systematized forms, perfectly ordered around orthogonal axes. Paradigmatic examples from the Ancient World would be Egyptian temples and Greek temples.

In this article, a reflection is proposed on the iconological meaning of these two historical ideals, organicism and orthogonality<sup>31</sup>, which are opposing supra-categories and have historically been recurrently employed<sup>32</sup> by humanity to organize habitable space<sup>33</sup> at both architectural and urban scales<sup>34</sup>, assuming that in different historical phases both offered a marked symbolic content, but different from what is currently being considered, and consequently analyzing whether the organicist model would be compatible with sustainable architecture.

### **The origin of permanent/sedentary human settlements.**

These first settlements with a vocation for continuity appeared about 14,000 years ago, in the pre-Neolithic or Mesolithic period of the Near East (Kebari-Natufian culture, Syrian-Palestinian area). Throughout this initial phase, the buildings will be circular/oval in plan (as in Göbekli Tepe, about 11,000 years ago).

Likewise, the first larger cities (such as Jericho in Palestine, with lower strata from about 10,400 years ago, early phases of the “Pre-Pottery Neolithic A” period [PPNA]<sup>35</sup> with pre-domestic agriculture), they exhibit an urbanism of semi-excavated circular houses with stone bases and adobe

walls, low-density cities surrounded by defensive walls and embankments<sup>36</sup>. They correspond to regional worldviews, without aiming for universality, responding to incipient local and loosely centralized organizational structures.

However, in the “Pre-Pottery Neolithic B” period [PPNB]<sup>37</sup> in the Near East, a very significant urban change will appear<sup>38</sup>, due to the exponential increase in population density<sup>39</sup> which in turn is compacted by defensive needs<sup>40</sup>, resulting in houses being grouped together and tightly arranged in a grid pattern<sup>41</sup>. A new constructive geometry originates in this way, from which various schemes will be empirically explored:

a) A “clustered urbanism”, such as that of the Neolithic population of Çatalhöyük in Anatolia (with the oldest strata dating back about 9,500 years [PPNB]) where the dwellings were rectangular or sensibly square mud constructions but attached to each other and leaving only a few courtyards between them; without streets, circulation and entry was made through flat roofs. The same pattern is repeated at the PPNB level of Çayönü Tepesi. This urban organization devoid of streets will remain a mere attempt, it will disappear without leaving any trace other than the archaeological one.

b) An urbanism of streets and terraced buildings. In the upper levels of the large Syrian-Palestinian cities (as will happen in Jericho) about 9,200 years ago [PPNB], with agriculture and livestock farming already more developed, circular buildings have disappeared and have been replaced by a new and different urban model: rectangular/square houses with a central courtyard around which rooms are grouped, where the concept of alignment of buildings to the street that endures to this day is also born. As a logical consequence of this rapid housing densification, two-storey buildings also arise in the PPNB<sup>42</sup>.

What apparently appears as a simple change in the geometry of buildings and streets, transitioning from round/oval houses to square/rectangular ones aligned around straight streets<sup>43</sup>, constitutes a significant conceptual advancement: the flat wall and right angle systematically emerge<sup>44</sup>, something that was previously nonexistent. Vertical and horizontal are concepts inherent to gravity, but not so for flat walls and ninety-degree corners, which represent a projection in plan of something that previously only existed vertically. Straight walls and corners are purely human inventions, demonstrating an incipient mastery over the wild, over nature, over plants and animals<sup>45</sup>.

The orthogonalization of space has been born, a very different way of understanding constructed space. This change occurs as the population of large cities increases and concentrates (such as Jericho in the West Bank 9,200 years ago, and the Phoenician port city of Byblos in Lebanon for about 8,900 years<sup>46</sup>), a demographic growth that would also give rise to the first centralizations of religious,

political, economic, and military power in a small group of individuals over a large number of people<sup>47</sup>. The first steps towards an incipient monarchical system originated, a system that would later crystallize into the archaic dynasties that ruled the first City-States (such as Uruk in southern Iraq, Ur for the past 5,800 years, or the port city of Ugarit in Syria). The ruling elites will strive to demonstrate this dominion, a new order that directly stems from the divine<sup>48</sup> and, in turn, constitutes the legitimization of human hierarchical power<sup>49</sup>. And this will be symbolized precisely through symmetry in architectural compositions, the repetitions<sup>50</sup>, and the geometries of floor plans, both square and rectangular with unique mathematical proportions, will all represent an expression of order<sup>51</sup>, reflection of a higher order<sup>52</sup> which by divine design legitimizes and justifies the ruling sovereign.

From this first symbolization, the history of urbanism/architecture will result from the interaction between these two opposing models: the orthogonal (gridded, symmetrical, ordered, geometric, rigid, repetitive), and the organic (adaptive, asymmetrical, disordered, fluid, opportunistic).

#### Development of the orthogonal model.

The monumental constructions of Egypt and Mesopotamia will be based on axis and symmetry<sup>53</sup>; later this orthogonality will be regularized in the unifying globality that brought the Roman world to Antiquity<sup>54</sup>, where the paradigmatic model of the perfectly gridded military camps starting from the axes cardo and decumanus is exemplified in the military city of Timgad, founded by Trajan around the year 100<sup>55</sup>. In the Iberian Peninsula we find a good example in León, born as a Roman legionary camp and where the wall formed a perfectly defined rectangle<sup>56</sup>. The wall of Ávila, from the twelfth century but with sections on the old Roman wall<sup>57</sup>, clearly shows the vocation of a rectangular enclosure.

On a more domestic scale, the traditional design of the Roman villa (farmhouse or country house), articulated in an orderly manner around a square/rectangular central interior courtyard (porticoed peristyle), is due to this same orthogonal tradition, transmitting in the rural environment the order (legal, social, hierarchical, imperial, cultural, spiritual) that emanated from Rome.

The central plans of regular basic geometries are symbolically associated with perfect order. However, existing cities are anchored to material reality, conditioned by their history, and in turn stressed and subject to changing development and evolution. For this reason, it is in the imagined cities where the symbolism of order is best captured. In fact, in medieval ideology, the New Jerusalem or Celestial Jerusalem (a city evoked as a symbolic idealization, combining the human/terrestrial with the divine/heavenly) was represented with its walls forming

a square<sup>58</sup>, a circle<sup>59</sup>, an hexagon<sup>60</sup> or a mandorla<sup>61</sup> (as an intersection of the circles of the human with the divine)<sup>62</sup>.

In the Renaissance, as in the Baroque and later with Neoclassicism, the incorporation of classical architectural orders into the new architecture is a clear example of order, which emanated from the absolute power of the prince/king/sovereign/emperor by divine design.

To show that order not only urban but conceptual (“divine order”, sustaining earthly power) that was already exhibited in the monumental buildings<sup>63</sup> not only of the Egyptian empire and Mesopotamia, but of all the great cultures of the Ancient World (an order that already transcends from the religious to the secular in Roman military urbanism), is what the new empires of the modern age aspired to. The “Ordinances of Discoveries, New Population and Pacification of the Indies” (promulgated by Philip II)<sup>64</sup> regulate the urban planning of the new colonisations: they establish the dimensions of cities in grid or checkerboard, blocks and squares, positioning of the church in the main or central square, from which two axes start, organising the grid, with arcades both in the main square and in the four main streets that were born there. More than innovative, these urban planning regulations collected in an orderly way the uses and customs of the time, thus expressing the urban ideal of its time<sup>65</sup>.

This symbolic model would be maintained during the Ancien Régime, while in the contemporary age with the change to the New Régime and the separation between Church and State the orthogonal scheme would be preserved but now associated with “the order of progress”. Thus during the nineteenth century we find it both in the new American cities<sup>66</sup> and in the planned expansions of European cities<sup>67</sup>.

Through the institutional architecture of authoritarian regimes during the 20th century, besides the monumental scale and the use of archaic imperial languages for identification, there is invariably a reliance on orthogonality.

#### Coexistence of both models.

Medieval towns and villages will develop a tight variegated, terrain-oriented urbanism<sup>68</sup>, feudalism heir to organic tradition, with polygonal but very irregular plots and tortuous streets<sup>69</sup> that converge in its squares (nerve centres of commercial and social activity)<sup>70</sup>, where they will nevertheless coexist with unique elements of a markedly orthogonal character: the main squared buildings will be the ecclesiastical ones (architecture of churches, cathedrals, convents, monasteries, mosques and synagogues)<sup>71</sup> reflecting the divine order, followed by a large part of defensive and courtly/noble constructions (towers, castles, fortresses, palaces) showing earthly power.

Having forgotten the vision of the imperial Rome of a globally ordered universe, it will now be the church that provides a clear reference of order and stability (both material and spiritual)<sup>72</sup> amidst human disorder. Hence, that medieval integration where organic and orthogonal models blend or intertwine.

#### Organicism in modern architecture. Background and current situation.

We already saw that the symbolic meaning of orthogonality will change as we transition from the Old Regime to the New Regime<sup>73</sup>, and the same will happen with organicism, in this case symbolizing a reactionary rejection against industrialization and mass production. Starting from the Arts & Crafts movement by William Morris in the mid-Victorian era, it will culminate shortly before the turn of the century in Art Nouveau with its curves<sup>74</sup>. This last style will end up becoming elitist and even be associated with degeneration<sup>75</sup>, as labeled by the avant-gardes.

In the 20th century, a certain organicist current will be reactivated with Wright and Aalto seeking to formalize the integration of architectural artifacts with the environment. However, this organicism will mature during the introspective and antitechnological counterculture<sup>76</sup> of the 1960s and 1970s, influenced by a myriad of artistic movements and ideologies, such as the Land Art, the Arte Povera theorized by Germano Celant, and Richard Buckminster Fuller’s ‘ephemeralization’<sup>77</sup> with geodesic dome houses<sup>78</sup>. Indeed, the anti-system rupturism that would characterize the non-conformism of the hippie movement of the sixties<sup>79</sup> will have a disruptive effect and will strongly influence alternative thinking both during its time and afterwards<sup>80</sup>, being an ideology with an underground nature, particularly convergent with other assertive social movements. As a dissenting current against the established order, this counterculture embraced fully organic and spontaneous patterns of settlements and constructions<sup>81</sup>, promoting experimentation and self-building (see the “Bloomhouse” building, see the manual *The Last Whole Earth Catalog*<sup>82</sup>). It fueled an idealized search for origins, sharply opposing the “order of progress” and the “institutional order” represented by orthogonal construction. Up to that point, it aligns with the symbolic meanings we have observed; however, since then, time has passed swiftly and changes have occurred rapidly. As the hippie movement also embodies an Arcadian spirit and serves as a precursor to environmentalism in contrast to the system’s developmentalism, nowadays, ecologism has become associated with organicism in popular imagination (a certainly simplistic view).

Finally, organicism will adopt its current interpretation (that is, by developing the one proposed by the masters of the modern movement) as a compositional resource, seeking integration/referencing with the specific location of implementation. This could be explained as a reaction to

the plastic rigidity of the prevailing international rationalism (and not as a display of opposition to the established order)<sup>83</sup>; but at the same time, in some way, it refers to the emblematic environmentalism promoted by the hippie movement (an association that is more subconscious than formally theoretical, but no less real).

Thus, the binomial “organicism-orthogonality” will then go from having represented the opposing concepts of “anarchic disorder-divine order” to expressing a contrast of much broader and more subjective antagonistic concepts<sup>84</sup> such as the “natural<sup>85</sup>/sensual/expressive/intuitive/biological/adaptive/ecological/mimetic with the environment” versus the “artificial/conceptual/formalist/rational/rigid/planned/technological/mechanistic”.

Curiously, and integrating both opposites, since 1959 and at the other end of the world, Kenzō Tange’s “metabolism” was developed<sup>86</sup>, understanding construction as something bio-organic but more focused on the functional and technological aspects rather than the aesthetic, thus proposing a bio-technological approach<sup>87</sup>.

Currently, when techno-environmentalism has become a micro-utopia fostered by social democratic thought<sup>88</sup>, it is seeking a certain aesthetic materialization in organicism, inherited from the relativism in postmodern thought<sup>89</sup> of the “French theory” by Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida<sup>90</sup>, and even drawing from the refined integrative poetics of architecture-place<sup>91</sup>, unconsciously aiming to identify with that organic image commonly associated with the origins of environmentalism.

Where it seems that “ecological organicism” has deservedly succeeded is in the “environmentalist” urbanism related to urban green infrastructure, with the vegetal landscape reaching a strategic dimension (that is, the public park and garden system, with green spaces, green belts, green wedges, and green corridors, all of which become environmental elements that structure the new city reinvented over the old one). By applying restrictive criteria for the selection of endemic, native, and adapted non-native species (prohibiting invasive exotic species) and limiting the use of potable water for irrigation, preferably reusing water from storm tanks, these can be defined as sustainable urban interventions.

Regarding the sustainable architecture of recent years and due to the multiplicity of existing approaches, we can find examples of both fully organic architecture<sup>92</sup> (such as constructions built using “earthbag” and “earthtube” systems<sup>93</sup>; or from a technological perspective, the Zentrum Paul Klee by Renzo Piano in Bern, which consists of three semi-buried artificial hills connected by striking steel waves) and typically orthogonal architecture (such as most Passivhaus-certified rectangular or even square buildings, aiming to maximize volume while minimizing envelope surface area and therefore reducing losses; another very



different example of orthogonal architecture would be the Bishan Public Library, designed by LOOK Architects and built in Singapore, with a modern appearance and large windows that make good use of natural light).

### Conclusions. Could organicism be the aesthetic paradigm of the new sustainable architecture?.

We return to the topic of the beginning, closing the circle after the critical analysis carried out in developing the historical conceptions of organicism and orthogonality, which would be the two supra-categories for the construction of human habitable space (where architectural styles specific to different cultures and eras would constitute categories<sup>94</sup> integrated into the previous ones). The sustainable architecture is a new conceptual category (specific to the present times), where various different approaches overlap and which possibly continues to be in a phase of definition, and due to that multiplicity of directions, it lacks a global characteristic style or identifying image (with users perceiving only vague references of “green” and “solar” appearance)<sup>95</sup>. From the theoretical-semantic point of view, it does not seem possible for a recent conceptual category (sustainability) to absorb an entire supra-category (organicism) with a long historical and symbolic trajectory.

Analysing historic architectures from the perspective of sustainability would be nonsense; They can be studied from the search for the use and optimization of resources (which cultural materialism already theorizes as an anthropological research strategy), but the concept of sustainability is very recent and is linked to the awareness of the environmental imbalance that has caused consumerist urban growth in recent decades (which did not exist in the different historical architectures).

We find that the association of environmentalism/naturalism with organicist architecture emerged during the rebellious counterculture of the hippie movement<sup>96</sup> has unconsciously influenced proposals that link the formalization of new green sustainability with an organic image. However, there have been examples of sustainable architecture that are both organic and orthogonal. Similarly, in this article, it has been discussed that historically, the opposing meanings underlying “organicism-orthogonality” (see table no. 1) had little to do with the broader dichotomy of “natural-artificial” that is now commonly associated<sup>97</sup>, and it has been concluded that organic and orthogonal form two conceptual supra-categories. Beyond certain suggestive approaches (some limited, such as biomimetic architecture, New Age, or Eco-aesthetic<sup>98</sup>, which is one of the many branches stemming from the awareness of “sustainability,” in this case inheriting hippie ideals and championing alternative perspectives<sup>99</sup>; and some other cases more commonplace in our cities, such as environmental urban planning but restricted to green areas and excluding large buildings), it would be highly questionable<sup>100</sup> the future symbolic fit that

generically identifies organicism with the conceptualization of a sustainability that has not yet been fully defined and that still needs to resolve its own contradictions<sup>101</sup>. Sustainability is basically an awareness, but it opens up in different paths (different sensitivities that may or may not be intertwined), and as long as they are divergent, it does not seem possible to find a single symbolic style that defines sustainability globally<sup>102</sup>.

In any case, we have seen how the study of images from their symbolic-semantic meaning (iconology) provides us with many keys to understanding the underlying thought in different eras.

Looking at it from a broader perspective, we find that the chronicle of humanity has always represented a recurring advancement towards technology and globalization, interspersed with some dark periods of regression during shifts in dominant cultural paradigms (due to human causes, climate changes, or a combination of both).

The dilemma between the paths of sustainability and consumerism is a faithful reflection of today’s society and its contradictions. On the part of a very significant sector of society, there is a genuine awareness regarding climate change, which in our professional sphere is giving rise to an enriching debate on how to address it within architecture, with multiple approaches and without arriving at a single answer. However, while in old Europe the bureaucratic legislation of the prevailing social democracy has not respected the diversity of sensitivities and has chosen to impose, in a paternalistic manner, its own idea of technological-consumerist sustainability through mandatory norms<sup>103</sup>, in the USA the recent Republican government directly advocates climate change denial and therefore minimal intervention in a problem they claim doesn’t exist. In short, we are in for “interesting” years.

And where are we now? As always, current architecture must try to find the path that leads to its essence<sup>104</sup>, but for that, architects must first be able to understand this changing world.

1. In the English-speaking world, it is also known as “green architecture” and “eco-friendly architecture”, thus showing a direct relationship with ecology.
2. Uwe Poerksen, *Plastic Words: The Tyranny of a Modular Language*, trans. Jutta Mason and David Cayley (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).
3. Brundtland Commission, *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 24, para. 27.
4. Dealing with this definition of the Brundtland report, other authors also consider this description of sustainability to be very vague: “In seeking to engage with social and economic as well as environmental realms, this definition can be interpreted across a spectrum of practice, and is almost incomprehensible in its breadth. Andrew Blowers, for instance, refers to sustainability as a «concept whose strength lies in its vagueness” in Andrew Brennan, “Qualitative and Quantitative Traditions in Sustainable Design.” Sustainability: Science, Practice, and Policy 7, no. 1 (2011): 81.
5. There are authors who emphasize the moral aspect as something necessary for sustainable architecture: “A sustainable architecture on the other hand will be a cohesive and creative adaptation to the context based on a private morality to perform a beautiful act” in Terry Williamson, Antony Radford, and Helen Bennetts, *Understanding Sustainable Architecture* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 126.
6. Definition proposed by the author.
7. Indeed, Simon Guy and Graham Farmer analyze up to six different approaches (which they refer to as “eco logics”) to the concept of architectural sustainability: “Debates about sustainable architecture are shaped by different social interests, based on different interpretations of the problem, and characterized by quite different pathways towards a range of sustainable futures” in Simon Guy and Graham Farmer, “Reinterpreting Sustainable Architecture: The Place of Technology,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 54, no. 3 (2011): 146.
8. Certain energy parameters such as heat loss, energy consumption and carbon footprint have been developed through meticulous calculations, which are even incorporated into regulations and certifications, while others such as obsolescence still remain in the subjective realm.
9. Actually, the sustainability that we know in a more commercial way through the available seals and certifications in the market is technologist sustainability, focused mainly on energy resources and controlling carbon footprint through new technologies, with some consideration for recycling. However, it barely evaluates different factors (such as obsolescence, which goes against consumer technologism). Other authors also consider very different aspects within the concept of sustainability, including sociological and psychological factors that impact the well-being of its inhabitants in Charles Montgomery, *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), ), or approaches from autonomy and self-sufficiency for small rural communities in Bill Mollison, *Introduction to Permaculture* (Tyalgum, NSW: Tagari Publications, 1981) and even from organic agriculture in Masanobu Fukuoka, *The One-Straw Revolution: An Introduction to Natural Farming*, trans. Chris Pearce, Tsune Kurosawa, and Larry Korn (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 1978).
10. “The indiscriminate extraction of natural resources has various negative consequences on the economy and the environment. Non-renewable resource reserves, such as mining and energy resources, are not infinite, and inadequate management of renewable resources, such as wood, leads to undesirable effects on the natural environment, such as the depletion of water resources” in José Acosta, “Arquitectura y construcción sostenibles,” *Revista de Arquitectura y Urbanismo* 15 (2009): 15. “Ecological design should therefore involve a total an holistic approach to the energy and material resources management of built elements. In order to do so, it is useful to consider every built system conceptually as a designed system that has his own life-cycle pattern” Ken Yeang, *Designing with Nature: The Natural World as a Model for Architecture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995), 17.
11. The term “renewable energies” constitutes a concept that is not only “plastic” or malleable, but decidedly “elastic”. Currently, aerothermal energy (which is not truly renewable, but serves as a regulatory alternative to other impossibilities) and nuclear energy (which is a debatable issue due to the environmental impact of its radioactive waste and radiation released from accidental leaks) are considered renewable. Even the ecological, visual, and acoustic impact of onshore wind energy, until recently a paradigm of renewability, is now being questioned.
12. What has been incorporated into Madrid’s municipal regulations through the recent modification in 2023 of the NN.UU. of the PGOU M97.
13. On waste and recycling: “The concept of “zero waste” implies an attitude on the part of the innovator that leads them to try to avoid at all costs designing buildings that, during and at the end of their lifecycle, require disposing of waste and debris into the environment” (Acosta, “Arquitectura y construcción sostenibles”, 2009, 22). This (rather utopian) approach of not reducing but completely eliminating the term “garbage” from the equation was popularized in the book by Michael Braungart and William McDonough, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* (New York: North Point Press, 2003).
14. Kenneth Frampton precisely addresses these aspects when he writes that: “Sustainable buildings should be generically adaptable rather than utilitarian or encumbered with gratuitous formal gestures that soon become dated. Above all, they should be made of low-energy materials that weather and age, rather than high-energy synthetic substances that are often unable to withstand long-term exposure to natural conditions without continual maintenance” Kenneth Frampton, “Urbanization and Its Discontents,” *Harvard Design Magazine* 34 (2011): 107. In the same vein, Domingo Acosta emphasizes the need for “Build well from the beginning. Design and construct for a long lifespan; build with quality at a lower cost; avoid the pressure for quantity leading to “disposable” constructions, which are typical of our social housing; design with maintenance criteria; design with flexibility criteria” (Acosta, “Arquitectura y construcción sostenibles”, 2009, 21).
15. A substantial point to debate regarding urban architecture is that it may be more sustainable to promote the rehabilitation of the existing than to demolish a still solid construction to erect a new building. On the other hand, is it sustainable to build an ETICS finish using PVC drip edges, which we know will last only a few years on the outside? The market follows its own rules, so it is important for technicians to become really aware of what sustainability means, where I personally believe that it is more important to design responsibly and build well than to make elaborate theoretical calculations on the carbon footprint. How many times have I seen indoor insulating shells used in outdoor air conditioning equipment,

which after a few years falls apart causing significant losses of refrigerators? “It’s all in the detail. And attention to detail is key to successful design and delivery of quality homes. Lack of attention to detail leads to critical errors that affect the performance of new homes” (Dollard, *Designed to Perform*, 2018, 3).

16. “Radical terraforming is not only expensive but devastating to the site’s microclimate” en Ahmet Çelebi, “Environmental Discourse and Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Architecture,” *Building and Environment* 38, no. 2 (2003): 213.
17. “A strategy to investigate and develop involves combining constructive elements of advanced technology with locally rooted and small-scale usage techniques. Cilentó has coined this approach as technological syncretism” (Acosta, “Arquitectura y construcción sostenibles”, 2009, 22). Sobre el citado “sincretismo tecnológico”, Refer to the aforementioned “technological syncretism”: Cilentó-Sarri (“Sincretismo e innovación tecnológica en la construcción”, 1996, 15-19).
18. Overall and since the mid-20th century, there has been a widespread increase in the standard of living. However, this does not necessarily mean that this increase has been equitable, with Western countries benefiting the most.
19. Attempting to extrapolate it to historical architectures would imply a clear presentist bias. It will be from the works of Victor Olgyay (*Design with Climate*, 1962) that the question of architecture-energy-climate will begin to be seriously addressed through a bioclimatic approach, a perspective that will remain in the realm of alternatives and will not be academically revisited until the oil crisis of the seventies.
20. It is not necessary to reach the climatic determinism/materialism of Philippe Rahm (“Form follows climate”), as it overlooks cultural and social factors.
21. “The aesthetic dilemma of sustainable architecture can have no simple resolution” (Hill, “The Aesthetics of Architectural Consumption”, 2011, 40). There are those who, in a general sense, advocate for great simplicity: “Less really has to be more – variety and beauty have to be found in what is simple” (Sauerbruch & Hutton, “What Does Sustainability Look Like?”, 2011, 49). Depending on how the term “sustainable architecture” is understood, a different approach will be given to the resulting image: “We would observe that the production of architecture has much in common with the way in which we view sustainability” (Brennan, “Qualitative and Quantitative Traditions in Sustainable Design”, 2011, 81). For example, Ralph L. Knowles proposes a “solar” aesthetic (mono-pitched roof or multiple-pitched roof) with ideal solar orientation to optimize the performance of solar panels (Knowles, “Solar Aesthetic”, 2011, 50-65). And for example, Keith Bothwell, for whom passive architecture is the paradigm of sustainability, posits that: “If a humanistic and rational approach based on passive design is rigorously and logically pursued, the resulting aesthetic should perhaps be allowed to emerge as a natural outcome of the process” (Keith, “The Architecture of the Passively Tempered Environment”, 2011, 79).
22. The term “organic” is an adjective which, according to the RAE, means: “Said of a body: That is disposed or apt to live (synonyms: organized, alive, living)”, or “Constituted by parts that form a coherent whole (synonyms: organized, systematic, structured).”
23. According to eco-aesthetics logic: “A move back towards organicism, expressionism, the chaotic, and the non linear is the aesthetic growing out of this new world view” (Guy & Farmer, “Reinterpreting sustainable architecture”, 2001, 144).
24. Ernst Gombrich distinguishes between two interpretations of the symbol (Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 1983, 24). In the present paper, the symbol will be considered in its “Aristotelian” sense (as metaphor) as opposed to its “Neoplatonic” sense (mystical or Jungian). Therefore, the symbolism will be understood purely semantically (the symbol as a visual representation of an abstract concept through a metaphor), and not with a hermeneutic reading.
25. Focusing particularly on the relationship/integration of architecture with the place. According to Frank Lloyd Wright, organic architecture does not imitate nature, but rather engages with it and utilizes natural building materials (Wright, *In the Cause of Architecture*, 1975). Wright’s “Fallingwater” house, from the mid-1930s, directly rests on the rock over which the waterfall flows. Conceptually, it is a vertical stone chimney around which the program unfolds, with concrete terraces or balconies projecting over the waterfall, emphasizing horizontal planes above the vertical descent of water. These cantilevered platforms visually appear to be anchored at their other end by the solidity of the vertical chimney element. The design of the construction is fully rationalist, with balanced rectangular elements seeking formal equilibrium, where the project plays with the vertical axis and horizontal trays, incorporating the special relationship with the place (its formal design replicates, in an inverted or specular manner, the rocky horizontal platform and the vertical water descent), and with the natural materials used in the stonier part that refer to the rock platform itself.
26. In contrast to the traditional iconographic interpretation of art, it is proposed to complete it with an iconological reading (Panofsky, *Studies on Iconology*, 1972). In 1953 Cesare Ripa published *Iconology*, but it would be the German of Jewish descent Edwin Panofsky who developed the theoretical method that differentiates between iconography (formal analysis of images) and iconology (analysis of the symbolic or underlying meaning of images).
27. In this case it would be a duality of opposites of binary opposition, and not a complementary duality of opposites that have to interact and integrate as can be the yin-yang of Taoism.
28. “One way to effect a radical reduction of complexity is to devise a dualistic system, positing two containers in which to place any new phenomenon or experience” (Burkert, *Creation of the sacred*, 1996, 27). This duality of exclusive opposites, dichotomy or binary opposition, will constitute a recurring theme in the development of Structuralism, either from the structuralist linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, or from the structuralist anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss.
29. These would be the characteristics or formal properties of these two major supra-categories defined after the study corresponding to the classification of the data of the qualitative analysis carried out.
30. To state it through a thermodynamic analogy, organic architecture would be an architecture of high entropy.
31. Not everyone would agree on its application to architecture; speaking of the opposing terms “organic and rational”, Aldo Rossi wrote that: “Thus, even though this terminology undoubtedly possesses a certain poetic expressiveness, and as such might be of interest to us, it has nothing to do with a theory of urban artifacts. It is really a vehicle of confusion, and it would be useful to drop it altogether” (Rossi, *The architecture of the city*, 1984, 56).



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