MATILDE UCELAY: WOMEN AND THE ARCHITECTURAL VOCATION¹

MATILDE UCELAY: MUJERES Y VOCACIÓN POR LA ARQUITECTURA²

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Abstract | This article looks at women's vocations in architecture through the personal experience of Matilde Ucelay, Spain's first female architect. To this aim, the first section provides a brief biographical note on the life and work of Matilde Ucelay: her initial vocation within her artistic and intellectual social milieu; the court martials and professional purges she underwent after the civil war in the 1940s; her full professional dedication to architecture during 40 years at a time when women did not have legal rights, as a solo professional who specialized in designing homes for the upper bourgeoisie in Madrid. The second section of the article looks at a number of relevant issues identified in the emerging literature on women in the architectural profession, and addresses them through Ucelay's personal experience, situated in space and time. A first question relates to the concentration of the activity of female architects in the residential sector, and whether this is the result of active decision or of structural factors setting limits on their professional action. Another issue addresses whether women architects contribute a different vision to the residential project, and the case being, what this different approach to design can be and in what it materializes. Finally, the article explores the material, spatial and temporal conditions under which such work is carried out: that is, how the vocation for architecture is made compatible with private life.

Keywords: Gender, Architecture, Domesticity, Pioneering women, Work-life balance, Architectural practice.

Resumen | Este artículo analiza las vocaciones de las mujeres en la arquitectura a través de la experiencia personal de Matilde Ucelay, la primera arquitecta española. Para ello, la primera sección ofrece una breve nota biográfica sobre la vida y obra de Matilde Ucelay: su vocación inicial dentro del medio social artístico e intelectual familiar; los consejos de guerra y las purgas profesionales a las que fue sometida después de la guerra civil en la década de 1940; su plena dedicación profesional a la arquitectura durante 40 años en una época en la que las mujeres no tenían derechos legales, como profesional en solitario especializada en el diseño de viviendas para la alta burguesía en Madrid. La segunda sección del artículo analiza una serie de cuestiones relevantes identificadas en la literatura emergente sobre las mujeres en la profesión de la arquitectura, que se abordan a través de la experiencia personal de Ucelay, situada en el espacio y el tiempo. Una primera cuestión se refiere a la concentración de la actividad de las arquitectas en el sector residencial, y plantea si esto es el resultado de una decisión activa o de factores estructurales que limitan la actuación profesional de las mujeres. Se plantea en segundo lugar en qué medida las arquitectas aportan una visión diferente al proyecto arquitectónico y en concreto al proyecto residencial, y en su caso, cuál puede ser este enfoque diferente del proceso de diseño y en qué se aspectos concretos se puede materializar. Finalmente, el artículo explora las

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condiciones materiales, espaciales y temporales en las que se desarrolla dicho trabajo arquitectónico: es decir, cómo la vocación por la arquitectura se compatibiliza con la vida privada.

Palabras clave: Género, Arquitectura, Domesticidad, Mujeres pioneras, Conciliación, Vivienda, Feminismo.

| Introduction |

Matilde Ucelay (Madrid, 1912-2007) was the first woman to become an architect in Spain. For over four decades, from before 1940 to 1979, she developed a long career as a solo professional, specializing in domestic architecture³. After a brief biographical note on her life and professional career, this article addresses a number of issues of general relevance to the professional work of women architects. These general issues are addressed through the concrete personal experience of Ucelay.

The concentration of the activity of female architects in the residential sector raises numerous questions that only recently are being addressed by the literature. Is it the result of active decisions sought by the architects themselves? Is it rather the result of specific circumstances, arising from the historical moment lived by each one of them and not so much of their desire or inclination? Or is it the result of more structural and permanent factors over time, which in each period and case acquire specific features, limiting their performance in the public sphere and in the large commission?

One second set of issues has to do with the way architecture is practiced. Do women architects contribute a different vision to the residential project? If that was the case, could this be related to their own personal lived experience as women in the home?

Finally, a third set of questions relate to the material, spatial and temporal conditions in which such work is carried out. How is an absorbing profession such as architecture compatible with private, family and personal life?

This article proposes to contribute to the incipient literature on women in architecture by providing some answers to these questions based on the specific case of Matilde Ucelay. The article builds on previous work published by the author both on women in architecture generally, and on Matilde Ucelay particularly. The original data used in this previous work involves original research from a variety of sources, including multiple

³ On Matilde Ucelay's life and work, see: Sánchez de Madariaga (2010a; 2012a). Sánchez de Madariaga (2012a) was published as a book commemorating the National Prize Award the Ministry of Public Works bestowed on Matilde Ucelay in 2006, the first woman ever to receive it. It draws on archival material from the Historical Archive of Defense, from the architect's own personal archive, and on information obtained through about a dozen interviews made by the author in 2009 and 2010 to relatives, friends and colleagues, many of whom are not alive today. Among them are particularly relevant for this article the interviews with her two sons Javier and José Enrique, who was also an architect; her nephew Enric Ucelay; and her childhood friend Angela Barnés. Enric Ucelay, a professional historian, has also provided some detailed historical data, particularly on the participation of Pura Maortua in the women's association *La Cívica*. Other persons interviewed were: Margarita Ucelay Maortua, sister; Carlos Boyer, building engineer; Aurelio Botella Clarella, friend and colleague; Carmen Ruiz-Castillo, niece; Juan Capdevilla, friend and colleague; Teresa Bermejo, friend.

archives, interviews, data from national level surveys, and government literature, as well as secondary sources.

This article is a first essay at crossing these two strands of previous work by the author. By looking at general issues that arise from the study of the current situation of women in architecture, from on the one hand the point of view of policy and the quantitative analysis of data, and, on the other hand, the concrete, biographical, and detailed account, historically and geographically situated, of the lived experience of our first woman architect.

The intersections between these two approaches to the study of women in architecture provides, I think, illuminating insights that can help us better understand the current situation and prospects of women in the architectural profession.

| A brief biographical note |

Matilde Ucelay graduated from the School of Architecture of Madrid in July of 1936, only a few days before the start of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). She was the first woman to obtain an architectural degree in Spain. After spending the war in Valencia, she returned to Madrid in 1939 and started working almost immediately.

The timespan of Ucelay's activity as an architect practically coincided with the years in which Madrid was the capital of the Franco political regime (1939-1975). The dictatorship denied basic legal and economic rights to women, and imposed explicit prohibitions on women regarding employment, which they could not access without their husbands' permission. Women were even forbidden the right to exercise activities essential for freelance work, such as signing legal contracts, and thus managing personal assets.

The unlikely trajectory of Ucelay was made possible by two favorable personal circumstances. In the first place, she had the advantage of her upper-middle class upbringing. She was born into a bourgeois milieu which was an extremely small section of the Spanish population in the early decades of the twentieth century. Furthermore, within this already reduced bourgeois environment, her family belonged to an even smaller milieu, given that her mother, father, uncles, and several other relatives were among the few with artistic, scientific, and intellectual inclinations.

A fledgling Spanish bourgeois feminism flourished in such circles through the Lyceum Club of Madrid, an association created in the footsteps of its earlier British counterpart (Baroja Nessi 1998, Marina & Rodríguez 2009). Matilde's mother, Pura, was a very active member of the Lyceum Club. This incipient bourgeois feminism would advance in parallel with the popular feminist movements of the 1920s and 1930s (Maillard 1990). But Pura was also a founder, with the writer María Lejárraga, of a new entity set up in 1932, known

as *La Cívica*, and close to the Socialist Party. Later on, the name of her daughter Matilde would be associated, perhaps erroneously, to *La Cívica*.

A second circumstance favorable to Ucelay and the development of her career was the personality of her husband. He was an affable and good-humored man, who, in such a demanding historical time and place, was capable of something still difficult for men today anywhere in the world: he was quite willing to support his wife's professional work; even more, he was able to be genuinely and honestly proud of his wife's career, and to set this above his own⁴. In retrospect, such personal positioning as a husband appears as a stunning feat for a man of his generation.

These two personal circumstances are, I believe, a basic, necessary substrate, without which a trajectory like Ucelay's, in her time and place, would have been even more unlikely. Without them, the course of Ucelay's professional life would seem utterly impossible.

While necessary, these two conditions are not sufficient to explain the calling and work of a pioneer like Ucelay. To properly understand her, it is necessary to look at her individual personality in addition to her family and social context. There is abundant testimony on Ucelay's character by many people who knew her, both in personal and professional circumstances. Her personality traits seem to have been a strong willpower, a great capacity for work, a high sense of order and discipline, and a temperament at once daring, persevering and tenacious. Personality traits like these were perhaps inherited or learned from her mother Pura, who, with absolute ladylike dignity, had sat daily at police headquarters during months in order to request the return of Federico García Lorca's play *Adventures of Don Perlimplín with Belisa in her garden*, which had been seized by the authorities on the grounds of alleged pornography. Pura persisted until she succeeded, and she staged the play as a première in the theater group of *La Cívica*.

Matilde was "like a soldier", according to her son José Enrique: when "something had to be done", she would do it, and she would invest all the necessary effort to achieve her goal. This is what José Enrique indicates when he refers to the way she worked during four decades, without missing a day, four hours in the mornings visiting a building site, and then four hours in the afternoon sitting at the drawing table, while, at the same time and like any of her female friends, she ran a home in which the bourgeois rules of propriety of her time were kept with absolute diligence.

According to the testimony gathered from friends, colleagues and family, other traits that seem to have also been qualities of Ucelay were an acute intelligence, and a sharp aesthetic sense. She had an extraordinary devotion for her profession, cultivated since

⁴ Ucelay's husband, José Ruiz-Castillo authored two books of memoirs which provide not just an account of his personal life, and of a number of relevant events in his wife's life, but also a very dense and rich description of historical facts and of the social milieu of the upper intellectual middle classes in Madrid during the 1920s, 1930s, and even during the first decades after the civil war (Ruiz-Castillo 1972; 1983).

early adolescence, in nothing different from the architectural vocations of men in any era: “love for architecture” in the words of her son Javier.

Matilde demonstrated these same qualities of intellect and tenacity many times over. She did so, when, together with her fellow student Fernando Chueca Goitia, she completed two academic terms in just one calendar year, a feat which allowed her to graduate from architecture school in July 1936, only a few days before the start of the Civil War. She had already done so, when, in 1934, she had convinced her father to authorize and finance a study trip, via Paris and Berlin, to probe the Soviet Union, together with a group of friends, including her then-boyfriend and future husband.

She would do so yet again after the war, when already in 1940 she began to practice her profession with everything against her, while still being investigated under the terms of a court martial, having suffered house arrest, a major economic penalty, a prohibition from signing private architectural projects for five years, with friends signing the projects for her, and, last but not least, subject to a ban for life of working in the public sector or exercising any managerial positions. In a lighter vein, she showed her understanding and determination when, in the 1960s, she surprised her family one day by appearing with a new car that she had secretly bought and learnt to drive, in order to be able to go to construction sites more comfortably, without using the tramway, as she had hitherto been doing for years.

| The court martials

Harsh penalties and prohibitions were inflicted on Matilde Ucelay in 1942, at the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)⁵. These punishments were imposed through two professional purges, carried out respectively by civilian authority under the government and the professional association of architects, in which some of her own fellow students at the school of architecture participated, and through three separate court martials by the military authorities, in a total of five processes. The so-called Occupation Army of the “National cause” applied court-martials to individuals and groups suspected of activities considered as “aiding and abetting rebellion” (Dueñas 1990; Núñez 2009). This concept paradoxically referred to any action related to the defense of the democratically-elected government of the Spanish Second Republic, a political system that had been established in 1931, and against which the military uprising had taken place on July 18, 1936.

The fact that triggered Ucelay’s military and civil trials was her participation as secretary of a new Governing Board of the College of Architects of Madrid, constituted in the first months of the Civil War in the summer of 1936. Under the presidency of Gabriel Pradal, an architect who also was a socialist member of parliament, this Board had taken over the professional association of architects in the chaos and confusion after the failed coup attempt: their objective was to better orient the activities of architects and their

⁵ The full detailed account of Ucelay’s trials can be found at Sánchez de Madariaga 2012a.

association in defense of the legally-elected government. She held this position from August to perhaps October 1936. By January 1937, given siege conditions in Madrid, she had already moved to Valencia with her parents, from where she returned at the end of the war in 1939, already married and with a son. The court martials proceedings against her were not completely closed until the mid-1950s.

Matilde Ucelay received exemplary punishment, when compared to her male colleagues, in the civil purge processes imposed on all Spanish civil servants by the new authorities established after the war (Cuesta 2009, del Cueto 1996; Chapapriá 2002), the status of Spanish architects at the time being assimilated to that of functionaries. The sanctions imposed on her were comparatively more severe than those suffered by her male counterparts. It should be understood that many fellow architects, as men, had taken part in military activities in the Republican army, in a variety of roles: some might have assumed tasks of a professional nature, such as building fortifications, others would have simply taken on missions of a more standard military scope. The charge against her was that she had been “secretary” of the Board of the College of Architects set up at the beginning of the war. But there was more sexism intended.

After a first publication of sanctions, in 1942 the authorities decided to alleviate the penalties, seeing that the severity that had been initially devised could deprive the country of the scarce qualified professionals necessary for the enormous task of reconstruction after the devastation. And this they did: they reduced proportionally the sanctions imposed on each and every one of the architects that previously had been condemned, except for one: Matilde Ucelay, the only woman.

The circumstances of her career, it can be seen, were not exactly easy. Anyone with slighter drive, a weaker sense of vocation, or less of what they now call resilience, no matter with how much support she might get from a husband, or how many facilities might be derived from a high social upbringing, would have abandoned in 1940, even before she had started. But regardless of how traumatic the pressure of the endless trials might have been, and despite the harsh sanctions imposed on her, and even if such episodes would not have happened, another way to look at the exceptionality of her trajectory is to consider her in the context of the more general situation of women in Spanish architecture throughout the central decades of the 20th century and up to present times.

| Context: women in architecture

Spanish women’s presence in the architectural profession is historically a relatively late phenomenon, when compared with other countries, such as the United States, where we can see professional women architects working since the late nineteenth century (Berkeley 1989), or Germany, where the Architecture School at the Bauhaus was full of women by the 1920s (Hervás 2015).

There is a growing literature on women in architecture. Of particular relevance is the Bloomsbury Global Encyclopaedia of Women in Architecture, an excellent work coordinated by Brown and Burns scheduled for publication in 2021, which for the first time offers an overview, at a global level, of the role of women in architecture in the second half of the 20th century. In this project, Inés Novella Abril has served as area editor responsible for coordinating the section on female architects from the countries of Western Europe, including Spain.

In an older work, written from Spain, Espegel (2006) reviews the lives and work of some of the famous women architects within the international modern movement. Similarly, Muxí (2018) has realized an extensive compilation of major figures, based on the secondary literature regarding the most relevant contributions of women architects during the 20th century and up to the present moment. This last book mixes historical accounts with contemporary appraisals of ongoing work, this resulting in some geographical imbalances.

The participation of women in architecture in Spain has not only been comparatively delayed, but also slow for a large part of the twentieth century, as a resulting of the loss of civil and legal rights undergone by women during Franco's dictatorship. While many western countries did not completely suppress a variety of legal prohibitions and restrictions still existing on female employment and education until the 1970s, particularly limitations affecting married women and certain areas of education, the prohibitions adopted by the Francoist regime in Spain upon the end of the Civil War in 1939 were probably among the most restrictive and discriminatory of any country in the Western world.

Following shortly after Ucelay's matriculation, three other women entered the Madrid School of Architecture, also during the 1930s: María Cristina Gonzalo Pintor and Rita Fernández Queimadelos, both of whom graduated after the War was over; and Lali Urcola, who dropped out of school to get married (Sánchez de Madariaga 2010b). Fernández Queimadelos and Gonzalo Pintor had both extensive careers, with relatively short periods of inactivity, both in the public sector, initially in the Directorate General of Devastated Regions, an agency created in 1938 by the nascent Franco régime to deal with the reconstruction of buildings and infrastructure that suffered war damage. Over the next two decades, those of 1940 and 1950, only other five women became architects, including Juana de Ontañón, who was a collaborator on the Plan Bidagor in Madrid, the new urban development plan for the capital adopted by the nascent Francoist régime in 1946.

During the 1960s and until democracy was reinstated in 1975, very few women studied in Spanish architectural schools (Sánchez de Madariaga 2008). Less than 10 women graduated per year during this period at either the School of Madrid or that of Barcelona. After 1975, however, many women of the generations born in the 1950s and 1960s began studying architecture. Nevertheless, these cohorts of female architects were still small: in the 1980s the percentage of women among students was around 15% at the

Madrid School. The women architects of this generation did groundbreaking work in almost every area of professional practice. Since 1990 the number of women studying architecture has increased steadily, and, in 2007, for the first time, half of first-year students enrolled in the field in Madrid were women⁶. In the academic course 2020-21 women enrolled in the first year at the School of Madrid represent as much as 65% of the total (Sánchez de Madariaga 2021).

But the presence of women among university students does not in and of itself imply a similar quantitative participation in the labor force, let alone a “vertical”, more qualitative integration, i.e., equal possibilities for professional development. Few women have achieved positions of responsibility and recognition in their various fields of activity. The vast majority of the small number of women who have managed to develop a stable and recognized activity as owners of their own independent office, have done so almost invariably in collaboration with a male partner, who in most cases is also their husband.

To this day, few Spanish women architects have achieved what Matilde Ucelay did: owning her own office and developing partnerless as a recognized independent professional. I make this point said without presupposing that independent professional work is in any way an inherently a more valuable professional option, albeit if it is a common aspiration of most architects.

| The (compulsory) option for private practice and domestic architecture

In Ucelay’s case, the option for private, independent professional activity, was made without choice; it was rather a necessity, and an imposition, being the only legal possibility for exercising her profession that was left open to her. The data available allows us to infer that Ucelay had a strong personal calling for public life, a vocation that was pulled out by the roots at the end of Spain’s internal conflict.

As Sánchez de Madariaga (2012a) has documented, Ucelay had a sense of mission for some kind of public service. This can be inferred from her active engagement during her student years in the moderate-left student organization the FUE (the Spanish initials of the School and University Federation), founded in 1926 in opposition to the existing Association of Catholic Students. It can also be inferred by her presence on the Board of Directors of the College of Architects of Madrid, a few weeks after graduation and with the war already on, in August 1936.

In the polarized political environment of the 1930s in Spain, with gunmen in the streets, she was easily signaled out as someone special. The involvement of a politically active woman at the School of Architecture in Madrid, a person who furthermore had visited the Soviet Union (even if she had gone merely as a tourist), was badly regarded by a

⁶ On the current situation of women in architecture, see Sánchez de Madariaga (2021) which provides a detailed statistical analysis of the Survey of the architectural profession realized by the Consejo Superior de los Colegios de Arquitectos de España, CSCAE, the umbrella organization that groups all the professional associations of architects which are organized on a regional and provincial level.

number of her fellow students who became members of the Falange, a political party in the style of Italian fascism created in late 1933. This negative evaluation became of course far worse after the bitterness of the Civil War. Members of the Falange took control over the three key institutions relevant for architectural work: the university, the professional association, and, at Government level, the Directorate General for Architecture.

The sanctions imposed on her at the end of the war included a lifetime ban on public and managerial or bureaucratic work of any kind, an exclusion that implied not only a proscription from working for the public administration at any level, but also from occupying positions of responsibility in any kind of organization in civil society.

Such a personal veto was monitored by the authorities, as is demonstrated by the fact that Ucelay was prevented, as late as the mid-1950s, from accepting a position on the Board of Directors of the Association of University Women. The overall sanctions and prohibitions imposed at the end of the war on Spanish architects, including Ucelay, were not legally nullified until 2004, during the eighth legislature of the two bodies of the Spanish parliament (three decades after democracy was reinstated).

Ucelay was forbidden any participation in public works of any kind. In an impoverished post-war Spain, with a non-existent private real estate sector, the prohibition to work for the administration meant that Ucelay could scarcely find work. It was a situation obviously made worse for a woman, who literally was an exception. She was prevented access to virtually any other type of architectural commission different from designing homes for private clients.

This option opened up for her over time through her family's networks of sociability. Such possibilities expanded with her husband's own web among intellectuals and well-regarded professionals: José (Pepe) Ruiz-Castillo and his siblings had inherited from their father the prestigious editorial Biblioteca Nueva, publisher of the some of the most important authors of the time, a situation in which personal and professional relationships overlapped (Ruiz-Castillo 1983).

Through hard work, perseverance, the quality of her efforts, her dedication to the client, and the overall thrust of her initiative, brought recognition. After a few years the doors of an upper bourgeoisie clientele opened to her. This clientele was at first mostly foreign and feminine, as foreigners and females with the desire of a quality home were the only ones who would trust a woman with an architectural commission.

Ucelay specialized in building homes for the wealthy bourgeoisie of Spain's capital. These were houses of the highest quality in both design and construction, carefully planned to be lived in at the specification of clients. Care was always taken to deal with even the smallest details. The respect for a job well done, the attention she paid to the real life of the future occupants, as well as to the needs expressed by the client, were all together translated into careful solutions that integrated architecture with interior design. The

approach perhaps revealed her feminine condition and her own living experience of the home, that space traditionally occupied by women.

While an almost exclusive dedication to residential architecture was in the case of Ucelay forced by very specific vital and historical circumstances, professional activity focused on domestic architecture is a situation that we find regularly in the professional trajectories of other pioneering and not-so-pioneering women architects.

| On women's vocations and domestic architecture |

The concentration of the professional activity of female architects in the residential sector raises several questions that begin to be addressed by the literature. In fact, the kind of commissions architects receive is one of the key indicators of the level of integration into the mainstream of the profession, and more specifically of professional advancement.

Some early research on women's careers in architecture include RIBA (1984), Durning (1999), Adams (2000), Kathryn (2001), Sánchez de Madariaga (2010b). These and other authors have analyzed the barriers women find in the practice of their profession in Spain, the UK and the US, as well as at the measures implemented and proposed to overcome such barriers. Sánchez de Madariaga (2013) presents an early experience of *avant-la-lettre* public policy to support gender equality in architecture developed by the Spanish Government during the period 2005-2007, even before gender mainstreaming policies became a principle of government policy in Spain through the Law on Equality between Men and Women of 2007.

The size, budget and kind of buildings architects get to design, and build, are very relevant indicators of professional development. Income level and type of job, including whether it is waged employment, or a directive/owner position at the office, are other key aspects to look at. Hence the observed over participation of women architects within the residential sector and the small scale of the projects they get to design, is a highly relevant issue to look at when considering the barriers women architects find in their careers. Most often, residential commissions are small-scale and low-budget projects by private clients.

Hence, a highly first relevant question addresses the measure in which the over representation of women in the residential sector is a voluntary decision or the result of other sorts of factors. Is this dedication to domestic architecture primarily the result of concrete circumstances, typical of the specific historical moment lived, and therefore above personal desire or inclination?

It would be necessary to consider whether the preferential dedication to domestic architecture of so many women is not the result of more structural and permanent

factors, which might be relatively more stable over time, which in each time, place, and case acquire specific traits, thereby limiting in deeper ways female performance in the field of important public commissions and, as a result, in architecture itself.

Another strand of the literature has looked at the interrelationships between gender, space, and building design, in particular with regard to domestic architecture. Among such authors, Heynen (2005), Rosner (2005), Betsky (1995), Roberts (1991) provide accounts of gendered dimension of the architectural product. Yet another strand that found a certain level of resonance in the 1990s in the US, proposes feminist practices in architecture, such as Hughes (1996), Agrest (1996), Rüedi (1996), Coleman (1996), and Rothschild (1999).

Following some of these authors, we should ask then in the second place, whether women architects do provide a vision to residential projects different from that of men. Such specificity of women architects could be related to an actively feminist intention of subverting meaning in space and/or influencing use, in an aspiration to transform structural gender relations through spatial design. But it can also, from what could be labeled as a “feminine” viewpoint that puts care aspects at the core of design, imply a way of professional intervention that would more appropriately be described as derived from their own life experience as women in a house. Such label of a feminine approach to architectural design can well be considered as a strand of that feminism grounded in the feminism of difference.

Thirdly, the interrelations of professional and private lives must be considered. Work-life balance measures are a very important aspect of contemporary policies in support of women’s employment. Pioneering women in the professions in the early 20th century were often single and childless, or wives or lovers of male colleagues with whom they worked. They were rarely, as Ucelay was, wives of husbands working in other sectors of activity, and mothers, as well as full-fledged architects. The fact is that personal life affects women very differently and it cannot be set aside from any study of women in architecture.

| Vocation and home design in Ucelay’s experience

A serious reply to these questions should be explored in sufficiently representative and specific case studies. Concretely, as regards Ucelay, we know that, from her adolescence onwards, her architectural vocation was linked to an acute awareness of what we now call gender roles, the relevance of these in the understanding of domestic space, and the user knowledge they provide. All of them issues which condition any architectural project.

Ángela Barnés, who was Matilde's childhood friend and classmate at the Instituto Escuela, bears witness to how in her very early teens Ucelay already expressed her desire to be an architect "because it is women who know how people live in houses". From that early age, this was the reason why she wished to become an architect: because as a woman

she would be more capable to exercise the profession of building houses than men, who lack that special expertise, that awareness of living out the daily needs of an intimate space, because it is not part of their usual life experience.

The awareness of women's competence on home arrangement related issues, including interior design, is undoubtedly also linked to her mother's work as a dress designer, scenographer, and decorator, in her amateur theater group Anfistora at La Cívica, with Federico García Lorca, and in her very loose connection with La Barraca (Lorca's travelling theatre company) during the 1930s and, later, after the Civil War was over, as a professional in *atrezzo* and *décor* in the movies.

It is rather striking that a young adolescent of her day might possess such an acute understanding of the importance of both what is commonly known today as gender roles, as well as the relevance of user (non-technical) knowledge, in design processes. I believe that this early grasp is a relevant element in providing answers to the first two questions raised above.

For the first question, if the priority dedication to domestic architecture is the result of external factors rather than the active will of the architect, the response would be positive for both factors: circumstances and personal inclination. Positive for both because, while her specific historical situation prevented her from working in other areas of architecture, under legal imposition, it is also true that her initial architectural calling, manifested in her professional practice in adult life, is clearly connected with a primary interest and an intentional consideration for domestic space, which results from an active personal inclination.

All of the above, it seems to me, also leads to a positive answer to the second question. Many women architects today deny the possibility that there could be any difference or specificity in their professional work that would derive from their feminine condition, while others make explicit that their explorations of specific forms of architectural expression are clearly linked to the fact that they are women, some of them even actively seeking a "feminist practice" of architecture.

I believe that Ucelay's life trajectory as a builder confirms that a specific vision can indeed be provided by women architects. In her case, her attitude could be described as more specific than most male professionals, with a precise attention to detail, a disposition more finely tuned to client demands, a greater awareness regarding all things derived from the organization and the daily tasks performed in the house. All these predispositions translate, for example, into ways of operating logistical spaces, as well as in the aesthetic and decorative aspects of detail. All these elements can in sum be described as derived from her own life experience as a woman in the domestic space.

It could be argued, from some current perspectives within gender studies, that such a different approach is in turn a social product, the result of differentiated forms of socialization of children from childhood and "gender norms", and not something

specifically derived from the fact of being a woman. The important matter in this debate, however, given the questions raised above, are the historical facts, situated in time and space, incarnate in the person of Ucelay and in her specific historical moment.

| A vocational call: the personal and the professional

In her work as an architect, Ucelay harmoniously integrated her lived experience as a woman and what she learned from the women of her family. But I would dare to say that her life as an architect was lived as a man. Ucelay did professionalize in the same way, one hundred percent equivalent, to the manner any of her most dedicated to the profession male colleagues did.

She did this without any concessions to her female condition, nor to work-life balance. When she spoke about architecture, her voice changed, says her son Javier, dropping the higher-pitched tone she used with her female friends. She never worked part-time, nor did she ever stopped working for any length of time in order to prioritize other personal or family matters. She worked forty years with the full dedication of those who are fortunate enough to work for a living on what is an authentic and serious vocation, artistic, scientific, or professional, whatever it may be.

This is a manner of work that is rarely granted to women, or that women rarely assume voluntarily, because it necessarily involves radically prioritizing work, which, more than a job, could be said to be a vocation that absorbs the whole person and is overwhelmingly imposed over all other aspects of life.

For many women, this kind of prioritization is not materially possible. For others, it is not materially possible without unacceptable sacrifices in their personal lives, that often, for those who accept such a kind of mission, translates into life as a single person, a circumstance either assumed or befallen. This takes place through more or less conscious and more or less voluntary processes, both internal and external. For others, it is not an option that they would want to choose, because even if they could have certain material facilities that would have somehow made their choice feasible, actively and in full use of their will, they would prefer a more balanced life, in which vocational dedication does not absorb the person to the point of subordinating the other aspects of her life.

Such a vocation involves the person as a whole and completely subsumes life under its influx. It is very different from a normal job, in the office, in the factory, the store, or the workshop, that, whether male or female, is physically, mentally, and emotionally set aside when returning home. This was her kind of vocation, which she lived without becoming a single, unmarried individual.

A professional vocation in architecture thus lived leaves little space and free time, which undoubtedly had a major impact on family life. Ucelay combined her professional activity with her family life together with her husband and two children. This was a conciliation

of work and family that she partially resolved with the help of maids, as they were then called, in the context of Franco's Spain in which it was normal for the bourgeoisie to have in-house service, however small the residence might be. I say she did it partially, because the responsibility of running and organizing the house, and responding to the multitude of issues of daily life with children and a husband, at that time and even today, cannot be delegated to service personnel. We can presume that this surely involved an inordinate degree of discipline and order. A pioneer's vocational call comes with a price.

According to testimony of her son Javier, rhythms in the Ucelay and Ruiz-Castillo household were very different from what he could see in his friends' homes. The two sons knew that their mother was the first Spanish female architect. They saw her at work every day at home, where she had her drawing board in the living room, and where she labored all her professional life, in what they perceived as "a serious operation". I suspect that it was not precisely easy for the children. I also venture that the work of the mother presided over family life, so to speak. It dominated the space of the house, the time and mind of its owner, and everything else was subordinate to this aim.

| As mode of conclusion: men and women, balanced lives and radical vocations |

The Ucelay Ruiz-Castillo couple had a very rich social life with many excellent friendships, in small and elitist professional and intellectual circles. This part of her social life was closely intertwined with the work of both: the husband in publishing, and the wife in architecture. In truth, a not inconsiderable part of her architectural commissions were derived from such relationships of sociability and friendship. Accordingly, just as there was no discontinuity in family life at home, there also seems not to have been a significant division between her social and her professional life; rather, there existed a continuum in which social activities and the demands of work were interwoven.

Finally, an answer to the question raised above remains to be provided: whether women's preferential dedication to domestic architecture is (or is not) the result of more structural and permanent factors, or at least relatively more stable over time. More structural, stable factors, taking at each time and case specific traits, could be limiting female performance in the field of the public and great architectural commission.

From the specific case of Ucelay's life, I believe that some provisional answer to this question can be advanced. I stress that a proper, more generally relevant and valid response requires an approach based on evidence provided by a wider range of detailed studies, both biographical and social, of a sufficient and sufficiently representative number of women architects.

In support of this assertion, I would say firstly that in Ucelay's case, an intervention of extraordinary institutional and political violence was necessary to prevent what, without such an intervention, could perhaps have been a career in the public domain, and therefore access to commissions from other types of larger buildings.

However, in the lives of other women architects in less convulsive periods, and to this day in Spain and other countries, we see that limitations for women's architectural work of this kind occur through a cluster of difficulties and barriers, more or less insurmountable or openly visible, more or less limiting, which are imbued in the functioning of the structures and processes that articulate the gears of the profession, which add to the difficulties of balancing the profession with personal life.

We can imagine that, in the absence of the civil war and its subsequent dictatorship and repression, should democracy not have been suppressed after 1939, and in the face of the emergence of the first, more numerous generations of women architects in Spain during the 1950s, mechanisms limiting access to architectural work of significant scale in the public domain would have developed.

Obviously, such mechanisms would have been compatible with democratic political systems, rather than the kind of violent interventions of court martials and professional purges carried out by the dictatorship's authorities against Ucelay in the early 1940s. This in fact occurred in time, as the régime evolved, slightly liberalized, and more women joined architectural schools by the late 1960 and the 1970s.

I suggest it is reasonable to hypothesize that women's preferential dedication to domestic architecture is significantly conditioned, at least until the present historical moment, by factors external to their will that at every time and place acquire specific formulations, compatible with cultural, political, and socio-economic circumstances of the moment.

I would also suggest that such external circumstances are combined to this day with what has been said above with regards to the need of a radical personal motivation and vocation, necessary for an absorbing professional dedication, usually a prerequisite for access to the great commission and a full fledged career. Unlike men, for many women actualizing such radical motivation and vocation it is not materially possible. For many others, the sacrifice of other aspects of life is not an option, or is an option assumed at high price. Others ultimately opt for a more balanced life.

Opting for a more balanced life is precisely what José Ruiz-Castillo, Matilde's husband, did. Just as Matilde is a pioneer among women architects, her husband is no less of a pioneer for those men who, in today's younger generations, begin to have, like him, enough courage to do such a thing. And, from that place of discretion, support and endure the career of an admired and revered wife.

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