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Three iterations of Alejandro de la Sota's Domínguez House are analysed for their insights into the architect's ideas about dwelling, activity and repose, and public and private

## **The Domínguez House: Alejandro de la Sota's investigation of dwelling**

*Sandra Costa Santos*

The few discussions of Alejandro de la Sota's Domínguez House which currently exist cite a retrospective text, dated 1976, where he developed *activity* and *repose* as two distinct images within human dwelling. While the Domínguez House has previously been understood in relation to biological rhythms<sup>1</sup>, this paper presents a different reading of this remarkable project – as a deconstruction and reformulation of the contemporary dwelling, one which challenges the inward-looking understanding of human dwelling as shelter. I therefore propose that Alejandro De la Sota was as an architect with a theoretical agenda, far from the conventional view that his was an empirical approach to architecture.

### **Seeking a human place within earth and sky**

Before analysing the Domínguez House and the architectural intentions behind it, it is necessary to set the context of Alejandro De la Sota and his work. He began his career in Spain just a couple of years after the country emerged from the Civil War (1936-1939), a period when it was consequently isolated from significant architectural discourses. Pre-war attempts to engage with modernism had been interrupted, giving way to historicist styles and particular ideas of localism and regionalism. Having joined Franco's *Frente Nacional* during the war, and having worked on official commissions during the regime, De la Sota found it hard to position himself socially in line with functionalism. Modern architecture re-entered

Spain in the 1950s, shaped in terms of Italian rationalism (given the close relation between the Spanish and Italian Fascist regimes) or vernacular regionalism. De la Sota's early works, therefore, are in line with the architectural scene at the time, although they have a clear emphasis on abstraction.<sup>2</sup>

It was at this time that the architect started submitting articles to professional and academic journals, such as *Boletín de Información de la Dirección General de Arquitectura* and *Revista Nacional de Arquitectura*. His reflections illustrated a more open defence of modern architecture<sup>3</sup> and led him to his first self-imposed career break in 1955. An acute critical sense of the role of the architect, and his awareness that the cultural domain in Spain remained isolated, encouraged him to seek references beyond the national landscape. This period of self-reflection resulted in a move from what he called the 'chemical'<sup>4</sup> architecture of the regime and a return to what he imagined to be the spirit of the modern movement.

Two projects commissioned right after this career break consolidated him as one of the most important Spanish architects of the second half of the twentieth century: the Civil Governor's Office and Residence in Tarragona (1957-1964) and the Maravillas School Gymnasium in Madrid (1960-1962). The reversal of 'traditional typologies of civic representation'<sup>5</sup> present in the Tarragona building speak of an architect with modernist ambitions responding to the monumentalising conventions of the dictatorship, as his set of sketches deconstructing the public palace seem to suggest. It was at this time that he published a text titled 'The Great and Honourable Orphanhood', an obituary for Ludwig Mies van der Rohe published in August 1969 giving a clear defence of the legacy of modernism against emerging new architectural languages<sup>6</sup>. Moisés Puente had argued that it is an open opposition to the surging postmodernism that was entering the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid (ETSAM) at that time<sup>7</sup>. However, as De la Sota's career developed, he detached himself from the positivism of orthodox modernism with its belief in technology and inclination to elaborate a building's form as an expression of its function.

In the early 1970s De la Sota suffered two setbacks: he failed to obtain a professorship at ETSAM and his entry for the Bankunión headquarters competition – in which he proposed the use of avant-garde glass technologies – proved unsuccessful. These obstacles had a great impact on him and led to his second professional crisis which he famously described as his 'voluntary house arrest'<sup>8</sup>. Beyond the preoccupation with place and the local, he now sought to re-apply lessons from the modern masters to what he perceived to be the larger cultural dilemmas of the contemporary world. He became obsessed with the significance of dwelling for architecture as a means to address human inquiry into our place in the world. As dwelling involves belonging somewhere, he thought, it also involves developing meaningful explanations that allow us to reach a sense of attachment

that is implicit within the fundamental activities of dwelling. It is therefore our need to develop meaningful explanations, which may satisfy our inquiring human nature, that can make us feel at home. For De la Sota, this remained the reason why the house has been understood from antiquity as our first domain, a microcosm within which the basic structure of our worldly human environment (ground, sky and encircling horizon) is repeated by the floor, ceiling and walls<sup>9</sup>. However, the analysis of those qualities of the house which grounds our belonging and ultimately our place in the world is not a descriptive problem. Although floor, ceiling and walls represent the structure of our own cosmos, it is not a matter of describing their features but of reading the body of images inherent within them. Our existential image of the surrounding environment is related to this basic structure of ground, sky and horizon and structured around centres where fundamental actions take place and our known world resides. This body of metaphors, he felt, offer meaningful explanations (or at least an illusion of stability) connected to our consciousness of *centrality* and *verticality*<sup>10</sup>. The verticality of the dwelling image described by Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* first became accessible to Spanish readers in the late 1960s and it develops the idea of centre understood as a constituent of existential space. The centre is, therefore, experienced by man as 'a vertical axis mundi which unites earth and sky',<sup>11</sup> a line of tension between two cosmic realms that may conquer the gravity of the earth or submit to a base reality. While enabling the progress from one cosmic domain to the other, the vertical tension promises meaningful, aspirational explanations to rational beings. And so, as reasoning beings, humans seek purpose in their existence, inquire about the surrounding world and try to interpret its meanings in a process that begins with the inquiring gaze into the visible evidence of the sky. This human existential quest is then followed by a symbolic framework that deciphers the sky and transforms it into the 'starry firmament'<sup>12</sup> forming part of a journey of discovery that remains as important as any knowledge acquired. This symbolic assembly is fundamental to the inquiring gaze of the troubled individual who wishes to locate his place with reference to a complete totality. This enables, it might be argued, 'inquisitive humans to consider their own position within it'.<sup>13</sup> This totality, the primal oneness of the conditions that philosopher Martin Heidegger called the 'fourfold'<sup>14</sup> (earth, sky, divinities and man), has been perceived as vital to human dwelling: mortals belong to this fourfold by dwelling, by capturing a universe of things and by reading the meanings gathered by them. Simultaneously, humans dwell as long as these meanings are being uncovered and revealed to them. Heidegger's fourfold designates the structure of the world as a complex totality, in which things are relative and interrelated: human beings are what they are on account of their relationship to the earth-sky totality.

It is my contention that De la Sota consolidated his reflections on dwelling with the text dated 1976, as an aftermath of his second crisis, and as part of a broader attempt to surpass positivism and address larger contemporary dilemmas in architecture.

### **Part one – Theory: the vertically polarised house**

Alejandro De la Sota's retrospective text dated 1976 described the idea of the house in terms of a vertically polarised being, with the active human figure rising upwards to dominate the landscape, before being pulled back to rest by subterranean forces. He wrote that 'man's dwelling could be represented as a sphere cut through the middle by the earth'.<sup>15</sup> This conception drew on what he considered to be the fundamental human intellectual search: the inquiring gaze of the upright human being towards the sky and a sense that, the more elevated that this intellectual search is, the more man aims to the sky: 'As man's thinking is set free, the crystal hemisphere moves away from the earth, it is released, and it becomes a new and unattainable flying hemisphere'.<sup>16</sup>

De la Sota argued that, in the first instance, active man's inquiring gaze seeks a physical separation from the natural world, overlooking the landscape, as a biological urge<sup>17</sup>. The basic human instinct of climbing up the hill in order to look down into the world as far as the eye can see<sup>18</sup> seems to be rooted in our need to find our place in the world. A high place gives us the possibility to overlook the surrounding earth, offering a sense of being closer to the sky, promising a conspicuous totality of earth and sky. Activity and repose, however, are joined together in the same idea of dwelling. We have our resting times, when we must descend to a horizontal position, close to the earth, then long to overlook the entire horizon from a high place. The two images of *repose* and the *flight of being*<sup>19</sup> are unmistakable, intertwined, constituting one moment of dwelling: the more concentrated the repose, the greater the expansion of the being that emerges from it.<sup>20</sup>

De la Sota's image [1] shows these oppositional concepts as part of the same domain: activity and repose present the minimum tension. The following stages, however, show the initial sphere divided, as if under the influence of a virtual compressive force, into two independent realms that relate to activity and repose. His explanation continued: 'The more that man needs to repose, to rest, the deeper that the hemisphere buries itself'.<sup>21</sup> Not just death brings our intellectual search to an end, he implied, but it is also paused while we rest: 'Sleep is like a short death'.<sup>22</sup> The term chosen by De la Sota to refer to man's inactivity is *reposito*, or repose, allowing us to read two of its meanings: *descansar*, rest, and *estar enterrado*, to lay buried. Humans lay at the end of their life and during periods of inactivity, succumbing to the gravity of the earth. The vertical dimension established in De la Sota's imagined house is

affirmed by emphasising the polarity of the two realms of activity and repose. In the same way that Bachelard's daydream safeguards its verticality by the counterpoints of cellar and attic,<sup>23</sup> De la Sota's imagined house relies on the duality of a higher rational level – corresponding to activity – and a lower irrational level – corresponding to repose – increasingly stretching from earth to sky and becoming oneirically complete. The dynamism of these moments of dwelling is to be found in the dialectics of the manifest and the concealed, the balance between the rational and the irrational: the emerging figure whose enquiring gaze seeks the horizon will withdraw when in repose.

Alejandro De la Sota's conception of dwelling is thus underpinned by a theoretical framework that understands a centre which constitutes an idea of existential space, and is represented by the vertical tension between the two realms of activity and repose.

### **Part two – Praxis: The Domínguez House (1970-1975)**

De la Sota was engaged in the design and construction of the Domínguez house for at least ten years, during which time he drafted almost one hundred drawings for the first design and its subsequent revisions.<sup>24</sup> The project for the Domínguez house was a purposeful investigation into dwelling that can be dated back to De la Sota's second crisis. During this period, his theoretical concerns moved from the specific and local to larger cultural issues present in contemporary life, such as modern dwelling. The architect sought an opportunity to materialise his theoretical ideas about contemporary dwelling, trying his ideas out on a variety of clients: 'I drew this many years ago, and I was anxious about it, and it was left there, in the file. I wanted to sell it to someone'.<sup>25</sup>

The first version of the project was the Guzmán House, a precursor to the Domínguez house. In 1970, De la Sota showed his proposal for a single family house in Algete, Madrid, to Enrique Guzmán. This set of preliminary studies appears almost identical to the drawings filed by the architect as the first folio of the Domínguez House.<sup>26</sup> However, De la Sota developed the Guzmán House with respect to the client's requirements, who did not find the original concept appropriate for either Madrid's continental climate or for the particular site. Although De la Sota's proposals moved away from a scheme which was clearly polarised vertically towards a simpler one-storey house with a roof terrace, he nevertheless retained a glazed living area over a block of half-buried bedrooms. The project documentation recalled the image of the active man dominating the landscape, and seeking shelter in the ground when he rests, that he had written about: 'Repose is related to enclosure, to hiding under the ground and active life, on the opposite, to dominating it'.<sup>27</sup>

In 1973, De la Sota presented a set of drawings for a single family house to a new client.<sup>28</sup> The drawings were based on the initial concept of the polarised house and they provoked an extensive dialogue between the architect and the client, Mr. Domínguez. The discussion oscillated between the metaphorical aspirations of the architect and the pragmatic needs of the client, in the context of the specific character of the site. The single family house needed to provide a solution for the functional requirements of the Domínguez household, providing a home for the parents, their seven children and resident housekeeper. The brief, and the site's unique topography, views, orientation, area and history could not be ignored, and De la Sota agreed to synthesise these influences with the prevailing concept. The site was located within a residential area, A Caeira, near Pontevedra, Galicia, that took its name from a previous estate in the same location. In the nineteenth century, this estate belonged to the Marquis of Riestra who built a manor and small family chapel on the grounds. The estate remained largely unaltered until the 1960s when it was bought by a housing developer and divided into smaller plots. The Domínguez House was the first single family house to be built within A Caeira. When De la Sota first visited the place in 1973, it had privileged views over Pontevedra, the estuary, and a range of distant mountains.<sup>29</sup> Memories of the former estate remained at that time, to be preserved with the retention of the original stone boundary wall, an oak tree, chestnut tree and the greenery that later became the garden of the new single family house. The architect sought to maintain the original boundary wall as the dominant element rather than the limits of the new plot, marking the perimeter only with an unobtrusive hedge. When a rendering of the new project was finally submitted for approval, De la Sota's position was clearly expressed in his introduction to the project documentation: *'the project tries to introduce a deep conceptual change to the single family dwelling'*.<sup>30</sup> A common Spanish dwelling typology locates the public areas of the house at ground level, accessing the garden, with private rooms situated upstairs. Alternatively, private and the public realms are inverted, linking bedrooms and studies to the shelter of the ground. The Domínguez House established two poles articulated vertically in relation to the ground line: the elevated rational zone of the intellectualised project and the buried zone of domestic withdrawal. In this second version of the project, a glazed volume materialised the *active* realm of the imagined house as a floating container for open plan living, detached from the semi-buried sleeping areas that symbolised repose.

The reflections gathered in De la Sota's retrospective text dated 1976, focusing on the vertical tension between activity and repose discussed above, are informed by the first two iterations of the Domínguez House. However, the third iteration of the house marked a substantial development of the initial investigation into dwelling. I will pursue this here, questioning Buchanan's reading of the house as driven by

biological rhythms<sup>31</sup> which fails to address De la Sota's concerns about the house as an artefact that facilitates dwelling.

### **Part three: Theory - The Domínguez House and the public realm**

As I outlined previously, the project for the Domínguez House developed from De la Sota's reflections on the inquiring human gaze into a more substantial investigation into dwelling. Through dwelling, we become bonded with a place whose basic structure is defined by the ground under our feet, the sky above our heads and the surrounding horizon in our sight. Ground, sky and horizon are given and they have generalised as well as particular qualities: their conditions change through time, but the structure of the place that provides our reference in this process of identification is perceived as something permanent we can identify with. Together with identification, orientation is also considered essential to dwelling.<sup>32</sup> In order to develop meaningful explanations, we need to know where we are and how we are. In order to nurture our experience of dwelling, we need to level a site for our base, to establish a horizontal datum for our existence.<sup>33</sup> In this process, the topography of the site is purposefully demarcated in relation to its surroundings. Whether elevated or sunken, the demarcated site is ultimately determined by our intentions. The correct level for our existential datum should then be determined by the architectural intention behind a project<sup>34</sup>. The verticality of the dwelling image behind the Domínguez House originally relied on the clear polarity between a higher, supposedly rational, level and a lower, supposedly irrational, level. It can be argued that the polarity that is safeguarded in the original idea by the counterpoints of two volumes either side of the ground line would be compromised by the accommodation at ground level that is shown in the project filed for approval. When work started on site, De la Sota surprised the clients with an apparently contrary decision to alter the design, increasing the proportion of buried accommodation and modifying the elevated volume. His proposal moved away from the previous versions which included a garage and play room at ground floor level, making this an inhabited space.

This revised - and built - version of the project sought to preserve the ground running under the elevated volume and with the buried volume blending-in with the surrounding landscape, serving to emphasise the tension between the elevated and underground realms [2]. The brief was therefore accommodated in two different volumes: first, the buried mass containing all bedrooms, the garage and utility areas, with a play room and a cellar beneath the bedrooms [3] and; second, the elevated volume including a large living, dining, and kitchen space [4], with an external terrace and roof garden. A covered outdoor space runs under the elevated volume with no function other than extending the garden beneath. A volume constructed of translucent glass blocks here housed the access hall, stairs and lift, occupying part of



the ground and connecting the two realms [5]. By removing most of the programmed uses from the ground floor, de la Sota replicated the clarity of the initial concept through two realms either side of the ground. The buried massing increased the complexity of the architecture, providing more accommodation, more skylights and new levels under the garden. The empty space between the two volumes increased in size, interrupted only by the translucent vertical link. In contrast with Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, for example, De la Sota rejected the possibility of paved car access under the elevated house, stressing the importance of the natural landscape.<sup>35</sup> The house can be accessed at two points: through the private entrance, used by the family, which is three steps lower than the street level (and leads directly into the buried volume), or through the visitor entrance at ground level, six steps up from the street. There are no dramatic signifiers of this public entrance apart from a path linking the steps to the public pavement .

De la Sota's drive to revise the approved design illustrates his determination to pursue the original conceptual strategy in spite of the difficulties encountered in turning his conceptual diagram into reality. His mythical status as an architect in Spain had just been consolidated with the publication of an interview held with Mariano Bayón titled: 'Conversation with Alejandro De la Sota from his Voluntary House Arrest'.<sup>36</sup> In this interview, De la Sota denied any stylistic or formal distractions while defending a non-architectonic architecture, detached from either the current or any other disciplinary culture. Thus framed, the final version of the Domínguez House appears more radical in terms of strategy but less ambitious in terms of its formal materialisation: the initially fully-glazed elevated volume becomes a square plan box with metal cladding and openings of various dimensions. This supports Mostafavi's<sup>37</sup> view that De la Sota's use of new techniques is enabling rather than totalising, that techniques can be rapidly modified by the architect as the spatial relations demand. The new geometry of the elevated volume does not favour a particular orientation. It offers a platform for the inquiring gaze to observe the sky where form is not considered by Sota as a determining factor. 'And what shape is this glass box?', he reflected, 'It does not matter. Any. It is defined already. The minimum'.<sup>38</sup> Most importantly, the final revision of the project recovered the initial polarity of the idea of the dwelling that he had first theorised and intensified the character of each volume, as counterpoints either side of the ground line.

The two realms of the Domínguez house may seem clearly segregated by their different locations but they represent two paradigms that allowed particular patterns of relationships, fostered by separate entrances at two levels. The project submitted part of the site to the public realm beyond the site boundary and brought visitors in through the garden platforms under the elevated volume [6]. In doing so, it renounces part of its privacy in order to include properties of the public space, establishing a relationship to the larger urban grain. This gesture acknowledged the

importance of activities and values within the public realm of dwelling. These were imagined as the activities that allow man to establish order, orientation, community and stability, or in other words, to make a place in the world. De la Sota's man in action offers a formal simile to Vitruvian Man, identifying a being whose dwelling experience tries to balance the purposelessness of individual life.<sup>39</sup> Just as 'instinctual behaviour' is believed to guarantee the survival of humans, 'purposeful action' might create the conditions for history and recollection.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the idea of man in *repose* reflects humanity's needs to satisfy basic (biological or emotional, primal or hedonistic) urges in order to survive – sleep, play, love – while the man in *action* seeks, through the legitimising condition of plurality, and understanding and perpetuation of human accomplishments beyond transient existence as his cognitive and self-affirmative faculties demand. This duality of the human condition presents the architect with decisions that expose the conflict between survival needs and existential questioning.<sup>41</sup> The final iteration of the Domínguez House can be questioned as an exercise in practical living. Its segregated accommodation and the resulting circulation present a somewhat inefficient solution in satisfying domestic activities. However, as a metaphor of our inquiring nature, the house is more successful. It attempts to formalise the perpetual opposition between liberation and need through the activation of the public mode of dwelling. Place, then, as the realm where man dwells, and comes into being, also ascends to the symbolic through conscious political *significatio*,<sup>42</sup> legitimised through the deliberative assembly it houses and represents, irrespective of scale.

The architect's late decision shows that repose and withdrawal do not symbolise isolation but rather allude to a different kind of meeting. The life envisaged at the Domínguez House was a shared life on two levels: the intimate meeting of the private dwelling steps down into the ground; and public understanding and agreement overlook the landscape, ascending to the sky, stretching the earth-sky axis. The elevated platform houses those activities that correspond to the 'human condition of plurality'.<sup>43</sup> In De la Sota's terms, the active man, the man in action<sup>44</sup>, cannot be imagined as isolated from the society of men, and so he needs the presence of others to dwell. The ancient understanding of privacy indicates a state of being denied something.<sup>45</sup> Therefore a man who lives only a private life, and does not belong to the public realm, is not fully human. Modern individualism can be seen to have enriched the private domain, in opposition to both the collective and the public realms. Hence the ubiquitous characterisation of the private dwelling as refuge, foregrounding privacy in order to shelter the intimate and to allow the individual to prosper. In antiquity, the idea of the collective – gathering in order to exchange feelings, ideas or things – belongs to the household and is considered to have been closely and authentically related. Individualism and the emergence of the social into the public realm change the

meaning of the public – the political – and its significance for the individual. The Domínguez House thus challenges assumptions that the house or home are purely for shelter or private retreat, disengaged from the public realm. It questions the normative division between collective, public and private modes<sup>46</sup> of dwelling. The open plan public spaces of the house, related to the elevated level where active man is imagined to reflect on his existence, indicates the development of the public mode of dwelling. Reflection and agreement on common issues form the basis for society. However, agreement, deliberative assembly, is not implied in meeting as gathering. The two images of dwelling in the Domínguez House allow for the collective and the private to take place. Still, public character is represented by the elevated volume. The house offers man both a daily ascension to the public realm and a withdrawal into the private and collective, enabling a total experience of dwelling beyond the functional provision of shelter. In the Domínguez House, dwelling and assembly are closely bonded.

### **Three Modes of Dwelling**

I have examined Alejandro De la Sota's Domínguez House from the first iteration presented to Guzmán in 1970 to the completion of the built project for Domínguez in 1980, in the light of De la Sota's and other theories of dwelling. Over this time, the project's concrete realisation changed but the architect tried to maintain his initial ideas about its significance, aiming to achieve the clarity of the house he first imagined where the polarities of *activity* and *repose* were clearly represented. I have shown the Domínguez House to be a concrete manifestation of De la Sota's larger concerns regarding buildings as artefacts endowing orientation in the world and therefore facilitating a sense of dwelling. In doing so, I have exposed De la Sota's theoretical agenda, generally ignored by most of those studying his architecture, and I have challenged the understanding of his work as primarily empirical.

Secondly, I have reflected on the apparently contradictory turning point in the house's design and development that took place during construction, when De la Sota excluded the playroom and garage from the ground floor. My argument is that this decision does not seek to segregate *activity* and *repose* into different locations, presenting the idea that De la Sota's decision aimed at representing two human paradigms: instinctual behaviour and purposeful action. By reading De la Sota's idea about the man in action as a formal simile to Vitruvian Man, whose dwelling experience tries to counterbalance the purposelessness of individual life, this work challenges Buchanan's reading of the Domínguez House as a project based on biological rhythms.

Thirdly, and finally, this work supports the thesis that the Domínguez House questions the assumption that the house or home should be conceptualised purely as an instrument of shelter or a private retreat, disengaged from the public realm, thus

challenging the normative division between the collective, public and private modes of dwelling. It is in the elevated level where De la Sota's active man reflects on his existence, indicating the development of a public mode of dwelling that requires agreement. Agreement, as deliberative assembly, is however not implied in the idea of meeting as gathering. The two images of dwelling present in the Domínguez House allow for the collective and the private to take place while, still, public character is represented by the elevated volume. The house can be imagined as providing its inhabitants with a daily process of ascension and withdrawal, upwards to the public realm and downwards into the private and collective, conceived as an architecture offering a total experience of dwelling.

### **Image credits**

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Alejandro De la Sota: 1-6

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### **Author's biography**

Sandra Costa Santos is Senior Lecturer in Architecture at the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, University of Northumbria (Newcastle upon Tyne), after having taught and lectured at architecture schools in the UK, Spain and Ireland. She has a firm background in architectural practice both in UK and overseas.

Underpinned by the understanding of Architecture as a discipline that is receptive to cross-disciplinary scholarship, her work investigates architectural theory.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Buchanan, 'Alejandro De la Sota', *Architectural Review*, 5 (1986), 32.

<sup>2</sup> His first works showed influences from popular architectural styles and a coy approach to modernity. See Moisés Puente, 'Alejandro De la Sota, or the Construction of a Myth' in *Miguel Fisac and Alejandro De la Sota: Parallel Visions. Two Masters of Modern Spanish Architecture on their Centenary*, eds. C. Asensio-Wandosell, M. Puente (Madrid: La Fábrica, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> In his article entitled 'Pequeña polémica en torno a unas fotografías', originally published in 1952 in *Revista Nacional de Arquitectura* 124, he championed a new architecture of modernity.

<sup>4</sup> Alejandro De la Sota decided then to 'opt for a physical as opposed to a chemical architecture, in which no element is mixed with another to produce a third, but with the tweezers you can always come up with the whole personality of the element'.

Alejandro De la Sota in *Alejandro de la Sota: Escritos, conversaciones, conferencias*, ed. Moisés Puente (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2002), p.171.

<sup>5</sup> William J.R. Curtis, 'Harmonic, Hierarchical and Noble: De la Sota's Civil Government Building in Tarragona' in *Alejandro De la Sota: The Architecture of Imperfection*, ed. by M. Mostafavi (London: Architectural Association, 1997), p.20.

<sup>6</sup> 'La grande y honrosa orfandad' originally published in *Arquitectura* 129 (1969), republished in Puente (ed.), *Alejandro de la Sota*, p.51.

<sup>7</sup> Moisés Puente, "Alejandro De la Sota, or the Construction of a Myth" in Asensio-Wandosell and Puente (eds.), *Miguel Fisac and Alejandro De la Sota*, p.42.

<sup>8</sup> In 1974, Mariano Bayón entitled his interview with the architect 'Conversation with Alejandro De la Sota From his Voluntary House Arrest'. Alejandro De la Sota, interview by Mariano Bayón, 'Conversación con Alejandro De la Sota desde su propio arresto domiciliario', *Arquitecturas Bis* 1, (1974), 25-29.

<sup>9</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling: On the way to Figurative Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), p 91.

<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that a Spanish version of Bachelard's *La poétique de l'espace* was in the late 1960s translated by Ernestina de Champourcín (Mexico: FCE, 1965). In English as: Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How we Experience Intimate Places*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p 17.

<sup>11</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Concept of Dwelling*, p 20.

<sup>12</sup> Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. by Rowland, ed. by Th. N. Howe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> R. D. Dripps, *The First House: Myth, Paradigm, and the Task of Architecture* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1999), p.16.

<sup>14</sup> A first translation into Spanish of the German original (1954) was available in the late 1970s: 'Construir Habitar Pensar' in *Teoría* 5-6 (1975), trans Francisco Soler Grima. In English as Martin Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Perennial, 2001), p.148.

<sup>15</sup> 'El habitáculo del hombre puede ser representado por una esfera cortada ecuatorialmente por el plano de la tierra'. Cited in Alejandro De la Sota, 'Casa Dominguez en La Caeira', *Arquitectura* 228 (1981): 58-59. (Author's own translation).

<sup>16</sup> 'Cuanto más libere el hombre su pensamiento, más se separará de la tierra la cristalina semiesfera que, liberada, se convierte en nueva esfera volante, inalcanzable'. Cited in Sota, 'Casa Dominguez en La Caeira', 58-59. (Author's own translation).

<sup>17</sup> Alejandro De la Sota, 'Conferencia Modernitat i avantguarda' in Puente ed., *Alejandro de la Sota*, p.185.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Alexander et al., *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.316.

<sup>19</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p.65.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.

- <sup>21</sup> 'Cuanto más grande es la necesidad de reposo, del descanso, más profunda se enterrará la enterrada semiesfera'. Cited in Sota, 'Casa Dominguez en La Caeira', 58-59. (Author's own translation).
- <sup>22</sup> 'el sueño es como una pequeña muerte'. Cited in Miguel Angel Diaz Camacho, 'La Casa Dominguez: Alejandro de la Sota: Construir-Habitar', Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Universidad Politecnica de Madrid, 2012. Interview with Joaquin Basilio, Appendix 2. (Author's own translation).
- <sup>23</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p.17.
- <sup>24</sup> Diaz Camacho, 'Casa Dominguez', p.12.
- <sup>25</sup> 'Hace bastantes años que hice este dibujo, y que me preocupó, y ahí quedó, en el archivo. Yo quería vendérselo a alguien'. Cited in Sota, 'Modernitat i avantguarda', p.185 (Author's own translation).
- <sup>26</sup> Diaz Camacho, 'Casa Dominguez', p.41.
- <sup>27</sup> 'El reposo va unido al encerramiento, a la ocultación en el terreno y la vida activa, por el contrario, a su dominio'. Alejandro de la Sota, Casa Guzmán Project documentation, 1970. (Author's own translation).
- <sup>28</sup> Diaz Camacho, 'Casa Dominguez', p.49.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.34.
- <sup>30</sup> 'se intenta introducir un profundo cambio en la concepción del tipo de hotel unifamiliar'. Cited in Diaz Camacho, 'Casa Dominguez', Appendix A1(Author's own translation)
- <sup>31</sup> Buchanan, 'Alejandro De la Sota', 32.
- <sup>32</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Concept of dwelling*, p. 7
- <sup>33</sup> Dripps, *First House*, p.53.
- <sup>34</sup> De la Sota famously used the metaphor of an object dropped into the water to exemplify the relationship between architecture (object) and site (water): the 'specific weight' (architectural intention) of the object will determine if it sinks or not. Alejandro de la Sota, *Alejandro de la Sota: Arquitecto* (Madrid: Pronaos, 1989), p.135
- <sup>35</sup> When questioned by the clients, Sota supported his decision around the benefits of a bigger garden. See Diaz Camacho, 'Casa Dominguez', p.169.
- <sup>36</sup> Alejandro De la Sota, interview by Mariano Bayón, 'Conversación con Alejandro De la Sota desde su propio arresto domiciliario', *Arquitecturas Bis 1*, (1974), 25-29.
- <sup>37</sup> Mohsen Mostafavi, 'Demythologising the real' in Mostafavi, ed., *Alejandro De la Sota.*, p.7.
- <sup>38</sup> 'Y qué forma tiene esta estancia acristalada? Da igual. Una cualquiera. Ya está definida. La mínima'. Cited in: Alejandro De la Sota, interview by Mariano Bayón, 'Conversación con Alejandro de la Sota desde su propio arresto domiciliario', *Arquitecturas Bis 1*, (1974), 25-29. (Author's own translation).
- <sup>39</sup> Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*.
- <sup>40</sup> Vitruvius' *instinctual behaviour* corresponds to the two fundamental human activities (*labor* and *work*) that guarantee the survival of the human species as defined

by Hannah Arendt. Vitruvius's *purposeful action* relates to Arendt's *action*, the third fundamental human activity included in the term *vita activa*. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.7.

<sup>41</sup> The task of the architect is located at the interface between the infrastructural and superstructural realms of production. Kenneth Frampton, 'On Reading Heidegger' in *Oppositions Reader*, K. Michael Hays, ed. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), p.6.

<sup>42</sup> For the political and ontological aspects of the task of place making, see Frampton, 'Reading Heidegger', p.5.

<sup>43</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, p.7.

<sup>44</sup> With 'action' we refer to one of the three fundamental human activities included in the term 'vita activa'. See Arendt, *Human Condition*, p.7.

<sup>45</sup> Joseph Rykwert, 'Privacy in Antiquity', *Social Research* 68 (2001), 29-40.

<sup>46</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Concept of dwelling*, p. 7.

## CAPTIONS

1. Man's dwelling represented as a sphere.
2. The Domínguez House: section through the two volumes.
3. The Domínguez House: lower level, plan dated 1975.
4. The Domínguez House: upper level, plan dated 1975.
5. The Domínguez House: interior view of the stairwell
6. The entrance of the Domínguez House as an extension of the public pavement.

## WEB ABSTRACT

The few discussions of Alejandro de la Sota's Domínguez House which currently exist cite a retrospective text, dated 1976, where he developed *activity* and *repose* as two distinct images within human dwelling. While the Domínguez House has previously been understood in relation to biological rhythms, this paper presents a different reading of this remarkable project – as a deconstruction and reformulation of the contemporary dwelling, one which challenges the inward-looking understanding of human dwelling as shelter. I therefore propose that Alejandro De la Sota was as an architect with a theoretical agenda, far from the conventional view that his was an empirical approach to architecture.