FESTINA LENTE!

Make haste slowly!

REWRITING

3

Alberto Campo Baeza

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To Maria Perbellini

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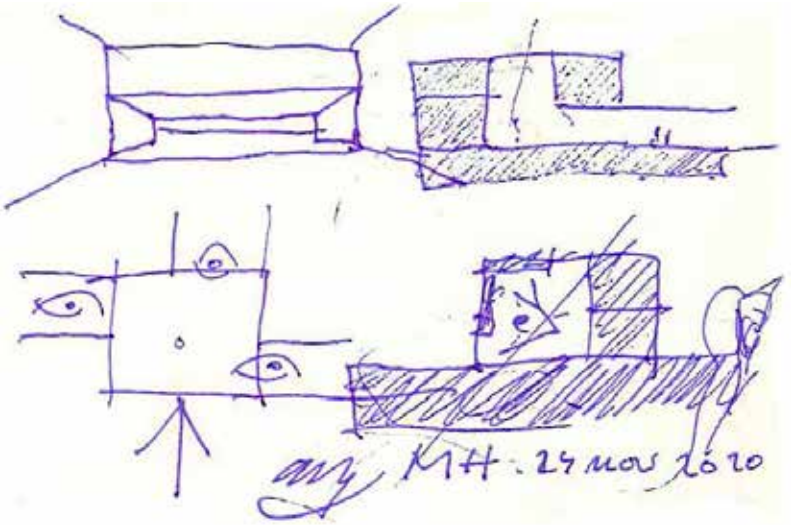
PREFACE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FESTINA LENTE!

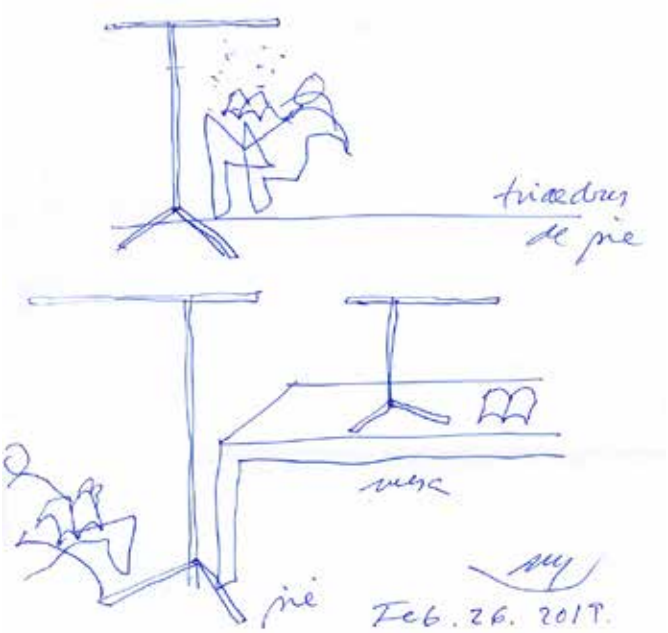
Make haste slowly!

The phrase *festina lente* [make haste slowly] is attributed to the Emperor Augustus when calling on one of his commanders to act with a proper balance of urgency and deliberation.

And I would urge my readers to employ that deliberation when reading this collection of texts that I have had the patience to rewrite, clean and refine, and to seek that same clarity that Ortega demanded as a courtesy to philosophers.

It is my fervent hope that this work will be useful, especially for students of Architecture and for all who read these redrafted texts.

The adage *festina lente* is the sixth of the seven emblems of the University of Salamanca inscribed on a stone panel with a very expressive, symmetrically engraved image of an anchor (slowness) and a coiled dolphin (speed), which already appeared on certain coins minted for the Roman emperors.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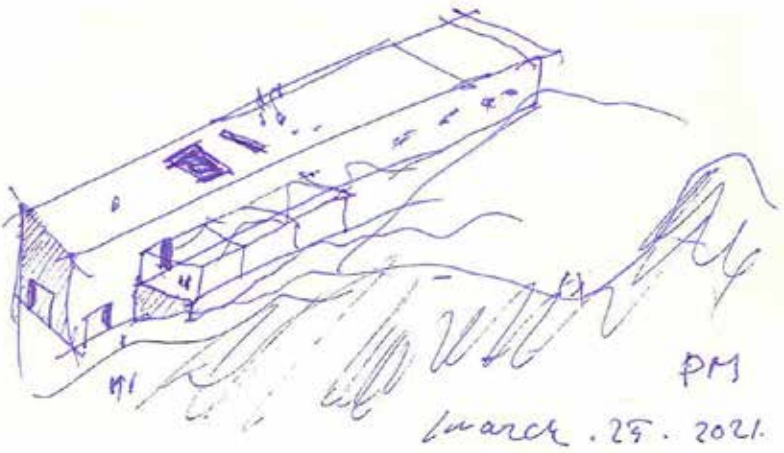
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THE HORIZON-TAL PLAN

The Foundation of Architecture

The ability of man to control his surroundings, in effect to dominate the Earth, is found in his constant reference of the existence of all things through his own being. Taking the argument further is to say Man is able to understand the Limits of the World, the boundary between the grounded Earth and ephemeral Heavens, as a simple line, the line of the Horizon. As an investigation of the position of Man within the world one can understand his security when supported by a firm, stable ground from which to ponder the ends of this grounded state. By clearing and leveling a space on the ground Man is defining for himself and those around him a bounded region over which he has control. In this argument, by defining a region one is creating limits to the extent of the space and in a sense has created a *close horizon* at the boundary between the space that is controlled and that which is foreign. The Acropolis is an example of an elevated horizontal plane, which affords Man the ability to control his surroundings through the reference of the Horizon as a boundary, while providing him with a stable ground on which to sit.

Mies van der Rohe is an example of and individual who had a very clear and precise vision of these limits and went to great lengths in his investigation of the creation of such limits. For Mies, ever element of the building was integrated into his thinking within this framework. When the building is one which is grounded on the earth, a clearing of the land, Mies makes efforts to articulate the procession into the building by carving the steps into the platform. Conversely, when the building is a floating plane, he creates steps which hover, never touching, a series of floating planes for ascension into the building.

This discussion about the horizontal plan is a fundamental one, as it is the key to the establishment of a space. It is the origin of Architecture. When the primitive man erected the sacred stones of Stonehenge, to create this

monument, he first had to clear a level plane, and to establish a horizontal plan that would order their arrangement. Additionally, the Acropolis in Athens, more than the sublime beauty of its individual temples, is a proposal of an elevated horizontal plan, at the highest point of that divine mountain. The clarity of its organization shows very obviously in the way the masters drew it when they went to visit. Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn, and Karl Friedrich Schinkel, instead of focusing on the individual temples, or the details ornamenting the various structures, all viewed the Acropolis from a distance, allowing their drawings of it to encompass the entire complex, to take in the general view, underlining the basic operation of the creation of the horizontal plan at the highest point of the city. Additionally, Villa Rotunda, more than its brilliant composition, is clear in its establishment of a horizontal plan, the *piano nobile*, to which a series of grand staircases ascend, emphasizing the idea of the podium.

The beautiful *Breakfast on the Grass*, painting by Manet, is a portrait of a group seated on a tablecloth, establishing a special link with nature. This simple decision of defining a space on the ground with the use of a tablecloth, or a towel when at the beach, is the creation of a horizontal plan, indicating the limits of the space over which one has control. Once the space has been defined, and the limits clearly articulated, we recognize that we need protection from the weather, and from other natural elements. We need to be covered by an upper level, by something more than an umbrella, by a roof. And, because it is material, and as it must be elevated to resist gravity, we must support it in some manner with a structure that allows for the enclosure of the space with walls. To cover, and to enclose: two basic architectonic operations, to decide the limits of the space in both the horizontal and vertical directions. The limits of the heavens and the earth. Is the horizon not the boundary between the heavens and the Earth?

RAFT, BOAT, DOCK

“Is the Farnsworth House not a well tempered space between two horizontal floating planes?” By elevating the principle plane of the house to the precise height of the eye, Mies van der Rohe, in a sense, creates the

effect of equating the horizontal plan of the house with the Horizon, that indefinable boundary between the earth and the heavens. The ascension to the primary level is slowed by another intermediate plane, while the steps themselves are in effect a series of floating planes. The progression to the enclosed Horizon is essentially the same as the end result. On the primary plane of the house one feels as though one is on a raft floating lightly on the water with nature quietly passing by. The serenity of the space can be understood to be the result of the elevation of the horizontal plan to the precise height of the eye, and the maintenance of a perfect horizontality. Ever concerned with the perfect horizontality of the boundary line of the Horizon, Mies invented a series of inverted pyramids in an effort to eliminate even the slightest inclination of the floor under foot. The Master, obsessed with the notion of achieving the perfect horizontality would not allow for even the slightest inclination under foot.

“Is the Villa Savoie not a spatial artifact on an elevated horizontal plan?” By elevating the main level to such a height and by framing the views out of the house in a particular manner, Le Corbusier creates the effect of standing on the deck of a boat when one is standing in his house with its open views to the sky. Accessed by the circuitous route of the ramp the house controls the pace of ascension as well as the views to nature until one reaches its ultimate height and the box opens itself to the sky. By creating, in a sense, an unbroken vista to the heavens, Le Corbusier ultimately recognizes the necessity to contextualize the view through the creation of the panoramic window which provides a framed view of the connection between the sky and the earth, the boundary, the Horizon. The interest inside, however, is clearly to provide the most direct access to the sky above, in a like manner to the space of the deck of a boat.

“And what is the Utzon House in Porto Petro, Mallorca, but a horizontal platform carved into a cliff overlooking the sea?” Engaging the marine analogy further, as Mies created a house as a raft, and Le Corbusier created a house as a boat, Utzon effectively created a house as a dock, by clearing a platform at the edge of the sea, and placing a collection of built elements on the platform. The focus of the entire act of the house is the

transition between the earth and the sea. Once inside the house, views to the sea are framed in such a way to raise the horizon to the upper third of the opening, in an attempt to focus the eye to the sea. Where Le Corbusier was interested in the presentation of *More Sky*, Utzon, by manipulating the boundary between the sea and the sky, has as his interest the presentation of *More Sea*.

GRAVITY: WHY THE HORIZONTAL PLAN

Without attempting to make a medical analysis on the sense of equilibrium and the Eustachian tube of our inner ear, it is clearly known that there is a physical relationship between our bodies and the condition of horizontality. In order to remain seated in a comfortable, stable manner, we demand a horizontal floor. In fact, as a means of disturbing the stability and equilibrium of prison inmates, prisons will often create inclined floors in the cells. Additionally, while working we require an horizontal plane, or table. Older architects will remember how easily the instruments would fall from the table when using inclined tables for drafting. Finally, in order for a restful, fulfilling night's sleep we require a comfortable, horizontal plane.

When the primitive man was still dwelling in the cave, he sought various planes that he could clear in order to create surfaces for his various, necessary functions of living. The primary horizontal plane became a general public space for the fire and other fundamental activities. From there he would look for smaller, elevated planes for seating, and additional, more enclosed horizontal planes for sleeping. It is easy to imaging the multitude of activities and situations, which require a horizontal plane having the capacity to control gravity in the life of the man, who is a vertical being. It is the point at which primitive man leaves the cave and imagines building a room of his own in nature from the ground up that he discovers the freedom to control his environment. The primitive man now simply has to identify a horizontal plane, to clear it, and to mark it in some manner, as his own. Similar to the act of animals, although with the key difference of the default geometry of the space as a square, or possibly circle. Finally, in order to create shelter, he creates a roof and holds it up with vertical

elements, which also allow for the vertical enclosure, and is left with a creation similar to the *Caribbean Hut*, which Semper identified, in his *The Four Elements of Architecture.*

THE STEREOTOMIC PODIUM

We could imagine the horizontal plan created through the act of slicing the top of the rock, to ground the architecture in nature. This theory of continuity in constructions creates a podium that is linked to the earth, as though it is born from it. The stereotomic podium is always massive, heavy, and connected materially to the stones of the earth. The podiums by Mies van der Rohe, at the Barcelona Pavilion and the Tugendhat house are very clearly grounded, stereotomic podiums, which he reinforces by carving the steps leading to the house out of the podium. It is interesting to note that when Mies decides to create the horizontal plan on a podium he always carves the steps into the side of the podium. Conversely when elevates the horizontal plan to create a floating platform, he also uses floating planes for the steps and locates them in a frontal position. He will do this in his final masterpiece in Berlin, similar to Palladio in the Villa Rotunda and La Malcontenta.

THE TECTONIC PLATFORM

The main plan, the *piano nobile* appears like a flying rug, or like a table, when the primary horizontal plane is elevated. The platforms of the Farnsworth house (which we referred to as a raft) or the Villa Savoie (which we referred to as a boat) are clear examples of elevated planes floating, an effect which has been made possible with the use of steel and reinforced concrete. The clear idea of the horizontal plan is not a question of old or new, nor of classical or avant-garde, it is a fundamental question relating to the most basic physical condition of man and his attempt to control gravity, and to use it to serve his means. The question of the *horizon-tal* plan is a universal one, one that is fundamental to our existence.

MIES UP!

The elevated horizontal plan was a key component in Mies van der Rohe's plan for his proposal of the human domain of the world. Every project by Mies started with a very clear establishment of a horizontal plane, and he would create this using two very clear and efficient methods. The first way is by creating the primary plan as the upper level of a podium, or rock, similar to Semper's notion of the stereotomic podium. The second way is achieved by floating an isolated plane, creating in a sense a tectonic platform. In both cases, Mies will, very carefully, place this plan at the precise height of our eyes, marking from the very beginning the clear position of the horizon, the point at which the horizontal plane, becomes, like the horizon, a simple line. The procession onto this primary plan was equally important for Mies as he created an ascension always using steps, never a ramp, in a very precise spatial operation. When using the operation of the stereotomic podium he always carves the steps into the side of the podium. In the Tugendhat House and the Barcelona Pavilion the steps are on the side and restrained by a wall, which emphasizes the condition of the excavation of the steps from the earth, of the podium. On the other hand, when using the operation of the tectonic platform, Mies always creates the procession onto the primary plane in a frontal manner. The steps leading to the Farnsworth House or to Crown Hall are both frontal, isolated planes, appearing as though they are floating in the air. It is also interesting to note that in the stereotomic condition, when Mies would carve the steps into the podium, he would always do so without an extended break, or with only a small landing. It is a question of arriving as soon as possible. Conversely, in the tectonic condition, with the floating steps in the frontal position, Mies always created an intermediate platform which allowed him to control the pace of ascension and to allow us to contemplate the transparency and continuity of his architectonic temple, which he is offering. The Master very precisely, places the primary level of his buildings, at the elevation of our eyes, and very carefully controls our ascension into his elevated world of Architecture.

AN IDEA FITS IN THE PALM OF A HAND

On small-scale models as a synthesis of the projected space

Jewish laws prescribed that when a first-born son was presented in the temple shortly after birth, the offering consisted of two turtle doves or pigeons. And if the family were very poor, a handful of wheat would suffice: the wheat that would fit in the palm of one's hand.

That wonderful Jewish custom, which I learnt about when writing this text, moved me deeply on account of what it shares with this proposal of making models capable of fitting into the palm of one's hand.

At the Master Classes for Advanced Projects in Architecture, or MPAA, which I taught at the Madrid School of Architecture, ETSAM, during an academic year I gave my students for the first time a rather curious exercise: that of constructing a model so small that it fits into the palm of one's hand. Because I thought at the time, as I think now, the idea of a project should be able to be materialized, synthesized in such a small model that it fits in the palm of one's hand. Because an idea has no size; it fits in the palm of one's hand.

In order to achieve this, the model had to be done in a size and scale that demanded the elimination of everything superfluous, synthesizing to the maximum the idea generated by the chosen project; rather like materializing the architectural idea in its purest state.

I have repeated a thousand times to my students William Blake's poem in which, in order to express what we should dream, he tells us: "to see a world in a grain of sand", to which he immediately adds: "hold infinity in the palm of your hand". In the same vein, the idea of holding something —in this case, architectural form— in the palm of one's hand, was my intention with this exercise.

I will never tire of repeating that in Architecture, as in any creative work, it is indispensable to have a clear idea of what one wants to do: “Architectura sine idea vana architectura est”.

The more than positive experience of my strategy on that Masters Course prompted me to again request these little models from my regular students for the current academic year, right at the outset, as they embarked on their own projects, while they were still germinating ideas. And once again the strategy proved to be extraordinarily worthwhile. I must confess here that it is something I have been doing with my own projects for some time, and what I have also continued to do with all my latest projects.

But, what is the purpose of such a reduced model? Indeed what is the purpose of making a model at all at a time when computers can generate 3D virtual models that can move in all directions? Well, although this is true, what is also true is that one can never achieve on the flat screen what only can be produced with a real model: the simultaneity of understanding three-dimensional space and its relationship with humans and light. The understanding of its relationship with sunlight, when the model is placed under the real sun, is something ineffable and infallible. I have never seen anyone placing their computer screen in the sunlight to see what happens. Because nothing would happen. And furthermore, if this scale-model is small, very small, devoid of any unnecessary additions, it must be capable of representing the idea which one wants to develop in the project with maximum precision. That is the ultimate goal of all these operations.

So the approach with these little scale-models is not the same as someone making a miniature. Far from it, what I am looking for here is the precision of the idea through form.

That little scale model, that idea that fits in the palm of a hand, prompts serious reflection on the project itself, the kind of reflection that is characterized by research and at times can prove difficult for non-architects to understand. This was what a good friend of mine, a marvellous industrial engineer, said to me. He couldn’t understand why I make these models

when I could use the very advanced computer programs available today. I still think that this little model is an instrument that is not only efficient but indispensable for project research.

There is nothing more satisfying for an educator than to verify the validity of new teaching strategies applied over time with the hand of experience. And in this particular instance it is that same hand that makes it possible to capture ideas, ideas materialized in small models. Because for a true architect, an idea fits nicely in the palm of one's hand.


ROTONDA

THE ARCHITECT WHO WANTED TO CAPTURE THE CUBE

Dimensions in Architecture in Relation to the Dimensions of Man

The architect saw it clearly. He wanted to master space and with it architecture. And he thought that this would be possible if he could only control the form and dimensions of the architectural space. And then he wanted to understand what this space was and what it was like.

So, he placed himself outside of the cubic form, in front of a cube that was somewhat larger than he was. The great squared vertical plane seemed to overpower him. He walked to the corner and the two, vertical orthogonal planes impressed him with their force. But he wanted to be the one controlling them. He imagined that he moved away into the distance. He knew that the cube was formed by six planes and he only saw two. And while he knew that there was a plane up there above him, on the roof, that formed a trihedral with the two planes that arose before him, he had no way of seeing it. He climbed up onto a tree in front and from there he could finally make out the three planes.

Surely, it's just a matter of dimensions, he said to himself and he looked for a cubic figure that was somewhat smaller than himself in an attempt, or so he hoped, to be able to control the entire space. Proudly, he discovered that in a single glance, he could take in the three faces that formed the trihedral. One side more than at first. But as he walked around the cube trying to capture a fourth side, one of the others disappeared. After multiple turns around the cube that ended up making him dizzy, he figured that he would never succeed in seeing more than three sides of the cube at a single glance. And it was not easy for him to calm down.

Surely, it's just a simple matter of dimensions, he said to himself once again, just like the first time. And he looked for an even smaller cubic figure. He held it in his hands and said to himself that now he had dominated it, since all of it fit into the palm of one hand. And he continued his game. He

raised it, lowered it, turned it around, but no matter how many times he turned that form, he couldn't capture it. He never managed to see more than three sides at one time. And he knew that it had six.

Thus, in front of the three cubic figures, the large, the medium and the small, he sat down, desperate, and reflected on his impotence. He would never be able to control space!

And he thought, and he thought and he thought when, exhausted, he fell asleep. And suddenly, he saw Alice by his side. She took his hand and led him up to the large cubic figure and, through a small hole, she knew it well, and they entered inside. There, the architect saw that at last he could take in up to four planes at the same time and even five, if he stood with his back against one of the vertical planes. But never the six planes, the complete space.

Suddenly, the light that was bathing the inner space, which he hadn't paid any attention to and hadn't noticed where it came from, disappeared and everything remained in the dark. That powerful sense of dominating the space disappeared. And he was disconcerted. Alice smiled at his side. Once the eclipse passed, the light returned. And with it, his senses awakened once again, and the architect recovered his domination of the space.

He looked up to see where that light had come from and he woke up under the rays of a powerful sun, without Alice, who had stayed behind in his dream. And now, back in reality, he found himself again in front of those cubes that had given him so much trouble.

The architect concluded, once fully awake, that Architecture, the domination of space, is a simple matter of measurements, of controllable dimensions, to be put into relation to the dimensions of man. He also concluded that it was a matter of light, without which architecture was nothing.

THE ORDER OF THE WORLD

> Ma troisième maxime était de tâcher toujours plutôt à me vaincre que la fortune et à changer mes désirs que l'ordre du monde.
>
> Descartes*, Discourse on the method.* Third part. 1637

Descartes wisely advises that it is better to master ourselves rather than fortune and to change our desires rather than the order of the world. But now there are too many architects who put their own desires before the order of the world, creating disorder with their capricious architecture. And they prefer fame and fortune rather than mastering themselves. In short, Descartes defends reason as the tool for life. And how could I not be in agreement with Descartes when it is my firm belief that reason is the primary and principal tool of an architect?

The work of the architect is to bring order to the world. To physically organize the world, organize territory, organize cities, organize every building, organize rooms and organize services. Organizing means bringing order and to bring order to space, to establish the order of space is the work of the architect: bringing order to the world, order to territory, order to cities, order to every building, order to rooms, order to services.

What Palladio wished to do with his Villa Rotonda, was it not to organize, to bring order to the whole world? More than a house, it was a temple and more than a temple what the architect was trying to do was to make it the center of the world.

When Palladio designed the Villa Capra, Villa Rotonda, in 1566 on a hill on the outskirts of Vicenza, he wanted to build something there that was more, much more than just a villa. He builds a villa where the axes that traverse and articulate it are made visible. And with these axes that reach infinity he

intends to bring order to the whole world. And he does. The two cardinal axes permit the Villa to become the centre of the world. Palladio brings order to the world.

Was it not to organize, to bring order to the emerging world that Michelangelo sought for with the Campidoglio square, the very epicenter of Imperial and Papal Rome, when he brought about the emergence of the world not just to be contemplated but also to hold in his hands?

When Michelangelo designs this sublime space, he creates something more than just a square. The two converging palaces and the position of the Dioscuris Castor and Pollux, apart from constituting an exemplary exercise in perspective, are no more than an excuse to make the world emerge there, at that very spot. And God knows he does it. Michelangelo brings order to the world.

What did the architects of Manhattan, Paris, Barcelona or Madrid do but bring order to these cities?

When G. Morris, J. Rutherford and S. de Witt brought order to Manhattan, they had no idea that the order imposed there in 1811 was to continue to be valid, and more than valid, two centuries later. The perfect grid plan of its avenues 150 feet wide and its streets 60 feet wide, is to this day extraordinarily efficient in its layout. When I go out walking in New York I am reminded how right these measurements are. One feels at home on these avenues. Their dimensions are just right, not too large, not too small.

When in 1865 Baron Haussmann decrees his modernization program for Paris, in spite of considerable opposition, he knows that he is imposing an order that will turn Paris into the capital of the world. As clear as daylight. And in the same vein, Cerdá in Barcelona and Castro in Madrid. And Bogotá and Lima and Buenos Aires. And so many other cities in the world. Something as logical as establishing the order of space, clearly the work of an architect. An architect who knows that reason is his primary and principal work tool.

Is it not to organize, to bring order to nature what man does when he plants thousands of olives and vine on a grid plan drawn up with string like a fishnet? Is it not to establish a very definite order? Is it not favoring nature? There are those who appeal for freedom, or who argue about the lack of freedom of the olives and the vines when it comes to choosing their position in nature. This brings us back to Rousseau and the age-old discussion of the noble savage.

And within this organization of the world and of nature, man uses, or rather he should use reason as his principal tool. And architects most of all. Because reason is the principal tool of the architect, of the creator. Cervantes in his short but marvelous prologue to Don Quijote writes: “I would this book, as a *child of my intellect*, were the fairest, gayest and cleverest that could be imagined…”. He clearly states that reason is the principal tool of every creator. Because literary creation is also the result of reason, of the intellect.

What is it if not to bring order to the world what I strive to achieve with each and every one of my projects? I have a project on my desk for a white tower in Dubai, and all that I have done is to bring order, create order, put in order. I have done nothing more than create order, guided by reason. The tower brings order to the territory which becomes its principal point of reference.

To create order is to organize. I have had to organize the territory with my building: once the legal norms in relation to the other towers around it have been scrupulously adhered to, my tower brings order to the space there. The first operation with this new piece consisted in bringing order to the pieces in closest proximity. With my tower bringing order to all the other surrounding towers. Next I had to vertically order the functions, dimensions and character that I wished to include on every floor of my tower. Then in each apartment I had to put in order the programs stipulated for 1, 2 and 3-bedded apartments. Then within each apartment I had to put in order each and every one of the pieces, including bathrooms. Then within each bathroom I had to put in order every single element, including the door. In short, bringing order, creating order, putting in order.

And the facade of translucent white glass, is nothing more than another exercise that demands rigorous order, bringing a facade to order. Bringing order, creating order, putting in order.

It is my intention to bring order to the space with the establishment of cardinal points, rather like the threads of a spider's web. That is what I wish to achieve with my white tower in Dubai. Because there is not another tower in the world so square, so smooth, so white. Square, which by marking the cardinal points, seeks to be the center of the world. Smooth with the minimum envelope. White with the pure whiteness of an arab minaret.

In poetic terms, I wanted to combine Beauty and vertigo in designing this tower in purest white, slender and tall, ever so tall, as if it were the minaret of a great mosque. Striving to achieve the most beautiful tower in the world. Knowing that Beauty belongs to the world of order, or better still, the dream of an order tempered by reason. Because creating order means bringing silence and calm to what is in order. Which is exactly what I propose to bring about with my architecture: silence, calm, order. That serenity, that silent music, that order that I believe architecture, in all its forms, should always provide us.

Because as Descartes goes on to say in his *Discourse on the Method*:

> There is nothing that is completely within our power except our thoughts, so that after we have done our best regarding things external to us, everything where we fail to succeed is, from our point of view, absolutely impossible. And this alone seemed to me sufficient to prevent me from desiring for the future anything but what I was to acquire, and thus render me contented.

Or as Le Corbusier put it in more simple terms: "Space, light and order. Those are the things that men need just as much as they need bread or a place to sleep."

MY HOUSE IN SUMMER IS SHADE

On the Gaspar House in Cádiz

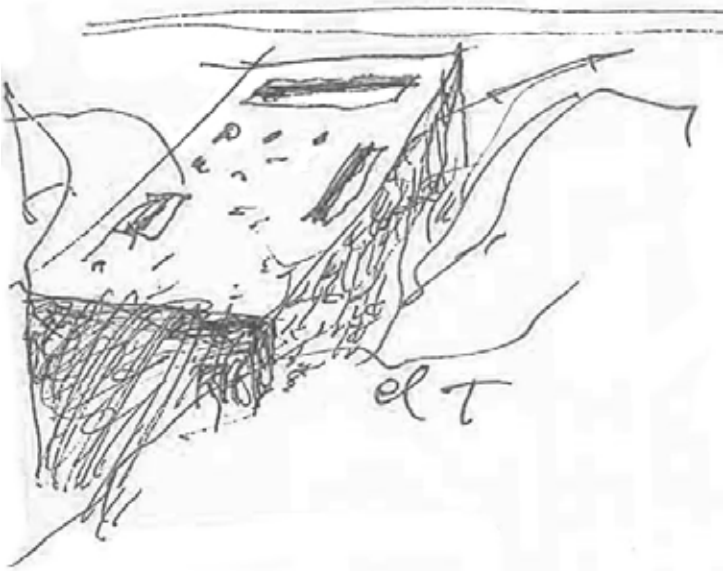
My house in the summer is shade raised between four walls. Shade which as darkness is transparent from all the light that battles there.

My house in the summer is tranquility, a place where calm has settled, a heaven of peace to which one returns.

My house in the summer is a raft where my shipwrecked friends come to find the word that comforts, to rescue such lost time. Poems of nothingness, perhaps the most beautiful thing in life, are born there.

But, in the final analysis, what is the house and what is it like? It is a simple architecture. Four high walls, white and well designed, arranged with frugal wisdom. With an interior in carefully measured shade that persists, always, against the bold light. A solid floor of stone, as found, as if the earth had emerged to support our bare feet. And there in the background, in the center, a serene pond has been dug, containing an almost still water in silence. A lost seagull bathes there, hardly touching or marking it. And so it is that the water in this shade is a mirror, an infinite periscope of the skies. And at its four clear cardinal points, piercing the stone to its core, lemon trees blossom, opening their white flowers each morning.

It is my house in summer architecture, in the fullest sense of the word. Enclosed garden, arcadia, paradise. Four walls and a tree and a pond. And light and darkness, in time. And the fresh stone floor that gives joy. Heaven on earth, after all, what else is architecture if not that?



WINKING MY EYES

On the Diagram in Architecture

> To see a World in a grain of sand,
> And a Heaven in a wild flower,
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And Eternity in an hour.

How many times have I repeated this beautiful poem by William Blake to my students, trying to inculcate them with how much of the ineffable the best Architecture has. “To see a World in a grain of sand” has quite a bit to do with what a diagram is in relation to the project that it explains to us. While the dictionary says that *diagram* is “a graphic figure that explains a specific phenomenon”, knowing how complex constructed architecture is, we are surprised by the diagram’s capacity, as a small and simple drawing, to express so much. Like the grain of sand does in regard to the world.

I have written time and time again that “Architecture is built idea”. And to build these ideas, one needs design plans that can express what and how this reality is. These drawings are like *anatomical cross-sections* of the new architectural body. They are the development of other, simpler drawings that defined the project in a more general manner before. And if we keep pulling the thread, we reach a key moment: the beginning. There, the very schematic drawings appear which are the diagrams. The diagram is the key drawing that contains within it the seed for the entire project. It would be like the fetus in which the heart already beats, in which the being that is going to be born, further developed, already appears wholly complete. That is the diagram in a work of architecture.

In my architecture, diagrams have played an important role. And whenever I am asked for documentation to publish a project, I include some diagram to explain my intentions clearly.

The diagram expresses the idea precisely. It is the first concretion from thought to reality. When I draw a diagram, it seems as though I wink my eyes in the attitude that Shakespeare describes so well at the beginning of his beautiful “Sonnet 43”:

> When most I wink, then do my eyes best see,
> For all the day they view things unrespected.

LETTER TO A YOUNG ARCHITECT

LETTER TO A YOUNG ARCHITECT

My dear and young friend:

Do you know the *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* [Letters to a Young Poet] by Rainer Maria Rilke? You should know them!

He wrote from February 17 1903 until December 16 1908 a collection of letters capable to remove your hearth and mine!

However, my letter, this letter is dedicated to you because you are thinking in studying architecture, Architecture!

GOING UP AND DOWN STAIRS

Have you ever gone upstairs two steps at a time? I'm sure you have. I also still go up two steps at a time even on the *Metro* escalators. Have you ever come downstairs two steps at a time? Of course not. Not only is it impossible, but also very, very dangerous. I never even dreamt of doing it, not even for fun.

Architecture is like going up and down stairs. You can climb the stairs two by two. You can study diligently and learn many things in much less time. You can't go down the stairs two steps at a time, nor do you have to. You don't have to make plans or build projects with undue haste. You have to work at least twice as hard and spend twice the time to design and build something that is for life. Just like honey being poured from a jar, it has to be done calmly and at just the right speed. Slowly and carefully, as an old Spanish saying goes, doing things well is more important than actually doing them.

WHAT'S AN ARCHITECT

Being an architect requires strength of character. It's rather like *being a doctor*: either you are or you are not. Maybe that's why these two degrees, Medicine and Architecture, have so much in common, because they are vocational. Maybe that's also why the two degrees are longer and need greater maturity. Something that those who make our education laws seem to be unable to understand.

An architect is a creator. An architect is a thinker, someone who creates buildings in his/her imagination. An architect is a builder, someone who builds ideas. Someone who creates.

Someone who thinks up things that can be built. Someone who builds something that is well thought out. A dreamer. An artist. A technichian. Not a composer of forms. Not a simple builder of materials. Not someone frivolous and haphazard. *To be an architect* means being capable of transforming a house into a dream and at the same time being capable of transforming a dream into a house.

Like a doctor, who diagnoses wisely and without haste.
Like a chef, who combines ingredients in an informed way.
Like a poet, who places words in such a way that they can thrill us.

With the same words one can create a beautiful poem or a load of rubbish. This is also true in architecture: with the same materials one can build an uninteresting piece of architecture, or, a stunning building that can really stop us in our tracks.

And to be a good architect you don't need to have a kind of neurotic obsession with seeing buildings everywhere —of which there are a limited number of very good examples, and rather bad ones in abundance— but all you need to grasp and hold onto are the concepts of space and light.

“The building awoke every morning to the call of the sunlight that came to visit it every single day”. American writer Henry James wrote about the Pantheon in Rome.

SOME ADVICE

Draw. Draw everything. Keep a pocket notebook and a pencil or a fine ball-point to draw everything you think can help you as an architect. From buildings or squares you like to everything on your desk. Or passers-by, or your other hand, the one you don’t draw with. Someone suggested drawing with your left hand. And try to make your drawings analytic and expressive. See, observe, draw. And if you like painting, paint.

Take photography. Photography of everything. And be analytical too, just like with your drawings. Play around with a camera and enjoy the results. You will start to understand the importance of light in the perception of space. See, look, photograph.

Think. Analyse everything. Think over everything you see that you think is related to architecture, space and light. Try to work out the reasons why such and such a building does or doesn’t appeal to you, not just whether you like or dislike it. You will surprise yourself. Architecture is amazingly logical.

Write. Jot down everything. Write down what goes through your mind. It’s the best way to complete the process of drawing, taking photographs and thinking. And try also to relate your reasoning to what you have learnt in history of art classes, or philosophy or literature. Writing forces you to reason and to organise your reasons. I advise you to keep another notebook, not your drawing-book, for writing all this down. And if you manage to get something published that you have written, even if it’s only in the school magazine, this will encourage you and boost your morale. Try to be very analytical and clear in what you write. Try to keep your writing orderly and clearly understandable. Write poetry too, it will help you to fine-tune your ideas.

And read. Read lots and enjoy what you read. Not only about Architecture but about everything you like and that interests you. Especially poetry. And understand how close it is to architecture, translating ideas with words placed in such a way that they make us dream. And analyse what is the internal order of these words. Cry with Ulysses when you read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. And laugh with *Don Quijote of La Mancha*. From the most recent novels you have read select passages in which architectural themes are described in one way or another. Read them again with a fresh pair of eyes.

There is a marvellous writer and philosopher, George Steiner, whose autobiography *Errata* I recommend. In it he tells how when he was small his father gave him lots of books to read, one by one. When he was reading, if there was a passage that he didn't quite understand, he had to read it aloud. If after that he still didn't understand, he had to write it down. In the end there wasn't a text that he didn't understand. A delightfully simple, straightforward and educational exercise: try using it in architecture and in life.

I hope this letter will be useful for you for becoming more free in your election and happy. Architecture is the most beautiful labour all over the world!

7 JOYAS IMPRESCINDIBLES A TU ALCANCE

7 libros que deben estar en tu biblioteca y en tu corazón

Algunos de mis estudiantes de Arquitectura del NYIT de New York me pidieron una lista de libros imprescindibles para su carrera y para su vida, ¡con tantos libros debí llenarles la cabeza! Debo reconocer que mis clases en NYIT New York, en el primer semestre de 2021, fueron maravillosas. Yo disfruté tanto o más que ellos. Con María Perbellini como Dean estupenda. Y ahora, darles esta lista de libros imprescindibles, es una bonita manera de coronar ese curso.

Ya había hecho otra lista parecida para los futuros estudiantes de arquitectura que incluí en un libro que escribí hace años para los niños: *Quiero ser arquitecto*. El libro, primorosamente editado por AMAG en el 2000, en inglés, fue luego editado en inglés-español por Nancy Olnick y Giorgio Spanu, con dibujos preciosos de Aya Waterhouse.

“Algunos libros son para probarlos, otros para devorarlos y unos pocos para masticarlos y digerirlos”. Así de claro se expresa Francis Bacon en su texto *De los Estudios*. Pues esta lista que ahora propongo a los arquitectos y a los que no lo son todavía, se compone de libros del último grupo, de los que, sigue Bacon, “son para leerlos totalmente, con diligencia y atención”.

Los libros que aquí os propongo son textos breves que dicen tanto, que son no sólo para leerlos una vez sino para releerlos y seguir sacando provecho de ellos toda la vida. Yo así lo hago. Os recomiendo reservar en vuestras estanterías un apartado pequeño con estos libros imprescindibles, con estas joyas. Me lo agradeceréis.

Ayer hablaba con uno de mis libreros habituales, Jesús de la Librería Pérez Galdós de Madrid, sobre *Mendel el de los libros*, el personaje inolvidable creado por Stefan Zweig. Nada más volver a casa releí ese cuento y volví a disfrutar como un niño. Zweig nunca defrauda, por eso es imprescindible.

1
WHAT IS A CLASSIC?
T.S. Eliot

Yo estaba muy orgulloso porque, aficionado a T.S. Eliot como poeta, había comprado en New York, en una mesa de libros en la calle, en Broadway, un ejemplar casi de anticuario de la primera edición en 1944 de Faber & Faber de *What is a classic?* Con la portada dura, de cartón, y un papel verjurado con barbas que da gloria verlo y tocarlo.

Y al poco tiempo, en mayo de 2017, recibo el regalo de mi amigo César Caicoya de una estupenda traducción de ese libro al castellano de Juan Carlos Rodríguez, editado por la UNAM de México. Una joya.

"En nuestro tiempo, cuando los hombres parecen más inclinados que nunca a confundir sabiduría con conocimiento, y conocimiento con información, y tratar de resolver los problemas de la vida en términos de ingeniería, está apareciendo una nueva clase de provincianismo que quizás merece un nuevo nombre. Provincianismo, no de espacio sino de tiempo."

Emplea Eliot en inglés el término "provincial" que en castellano es "provinciano", todavía más peyorativo.

Eliot desgrana aquí el concepto de clásico de una manera tan clara y convincente que, aunque él se refiere lógicamente a la literatura, puede aplicarse con toda propiedad a la arquitectura, ¡tan universal es su razonamiento!

Una vez más, la brevedad del texto hace que esta edición en castellano se acompañe de otro texto de Eliot. En el libro de la UNAM, con el título "Lo clásico y el talento individual" se incluyen dos textos: el primero es ¿QUÉ ES UN CLÄSICO?, que es la traducción al castellano del libro citado al principio, que es el discurso que T.S. Eliot pronunció como primer presidente de la Sociedad Virgiliana de Londres el 16 de octubre de 1944.

El segundo, LA TRADICIÓN Y EL TALENTO INDIVIDUAL es también un texto precioso, imprescindible.

2
EL MISTERIO DE LA CREACIÓN ARTÍSTICA
Stefan Zweig

Un día de 2008, recibí un pequeño libro regalado por el último becario que había estado en mi Estudio, Raúl Martínez, con una dedicatoria muy generosa. El libro, pequeñito, contenía cuatro textos de Zweig, encabezados por el que da título al libro: *El misterio de la creación artística*. Luego supe que era la conferencia que había dado, en castellano, en 1940 en Rosario, Argentina, donde este año me han hecho Doctor Honoris Causa.

Empezaba con un: "De todos los misterios del universo, ninguno más profundo que el de la creación". Y terminaba con un rotundo: "No tengo yo noticias de deleite y satisfacción más grandes que reconocer que también le es dado al hombre crear valores imperecederos, y que eternamente quedamos unidos al Eterno mediante nuestro esfuerzo supremo en la tierra: mediante el arte".

No tiene desperdicio. Aquí comenzó mi descubrimiento de Zweig, del que he leído, disfrutado, todo. Incluido su *Mendel el de los libros* que aprovecho para también recomendar aquí.

3
EL MITO DEL HOMBRE ALLENDE LA TÉCNICA
Ortega y Gasset

El estupendo texto de Ortega suele editarse acompañando a su *Meditación de la Técnica*, aunque yo prefiero éste, que es más corto y luminoso, donde Ortega nos dice: "El hombre gasta y desgasta los instrumentos técnicos". "Pero frente a los objetos artísticos, el hacer del hombre no resulta tan simple. No los gasta, ni mucho menos los desgasta. Se queda ante ellos". Y siempre, su "La claridad es la cortesía del filósofo."

Este *El mito del hombre allende la técnica* se suele acompañar del *En torno al Coloquio de Darmstadt,* de 1951, que tampoco tiene desperdicio y donde, además, Ortega se atreve a hablar de arquitectura.

4
PROTREPTICO
Aristóteles 384-322 a de C.

Sigue siendo inexplicable que, a estas alturas, entrados ya en el tercer milenio, no haya sido encontrado este sin par texto aristotélico.

Ante mí la edición de Carlos Megino de 2006 editado por Abada. Parece ser que existe una edición de 1981 del argentino Alberto Buela pero que no aparece ni citado por sus congéneres. Y el argentino, con razón, se enfada. Se dice que Cicerón se inspiró en este *Protrépticus* para su *Hortensius*. Y que también Marco Aurelio (121-180 d de C) para sus *Meditaciones*, tan aforísticas como el texto de Aristóteles. Marco Aurelio lo confiesa sin rubor.

Fragmento CX 74

“Pues el entendimiento es en nosotros el Dios” (haya sido Hermótimo o Anaxágoras el que lo dijo) y “porque la vida mortal participa de un Dios” es necesario filosofar, o bien, dejar este mundo y decir adiós al vivir, pues todo el resto no es sino frivolidad y estupidez.

5
HORTENSIUS
Cicerón

Sobre mi mesa, un *Ortensio* en italiano, que es el *Hortensius*, que es lo único que, tras larguísimas indagaciones, he podido conseguir. Cicerón es siempre claro y concreto. Como con el *Protréptico* de Aristóteles, sigue siendo increíble que no podamos disponer de un original.

Debo reconocer que, a mí, que soy adicto a San Agustín, éste es el libro por el que el de Hipona dice haberse convertido, tiene un interés máximo. Desde entonces yo lo busco debajo de las piedras para ver si produce en mí tamaño cambio.

6
CONFESIONES
San Agustín

“Nos hiciste Señor para Ti y está inquieto mi corazón hasta que en Ti repose”. Así de rotundo se expresa Agustín de Hipona al principio de este texto. Leer *las Confesiones* de San Agustín es una verdadera delicia desde todos los puntos de vista. La fluidez de su prosa hace que, ya sea de un tirón, ya sea a trocitos, el disfrute sea siempre máximo.

Su “¡Tarde te amé, belleza tan antigua y tan nueva, ¡qué tarde te amé!” fue un plato fuerte en mi discurso de ingreso como académico en la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando en Madrid en 2014. Más de uno después me ha preguntado de dónde había sacado ese texto tan hermoso. Merece la pena transcribir aquí completo el apartado 27 del libro X:

“¡Tarde te amé, belleza tan antigua y tan nueva, ¡qué tarde te amé! Tú estabas dentro de mí, y yo estaba fuera, y por fuera te buscaba, y deforme como era, me lanzaba sobre las cosas hermosas creadas por Ti. Tú estabas conmigo, pero yo no estaba contigo. Me retenían lejos de Ti todas las cosas que, si no existieran en Ti, nada serian. Pero Tú me llamaste y clamaste, y rompiste mi sordera. Brillaste y resplandeciste, y pusiste en fuga mi ceguera. Exhalaste tu perfume, y respiré, y suspiro por Ti. Gusté de Ti, y siento hambre y sed. Me tocaste, y ardo en deseos de tu paz”.

7
MEDITACIONES
Marco Aurelio

En este septiembre de 2021, he conseguido hasta 80 versiones de las *Meditaciones* de Marco Aurelio. 31 en castellano, 23 en inglés, 8 en italiano, 6 en francés, 1 en alemán, 1 en portugués, 1 en croata y hasta 1 última en chino. Y algunas más. Una de las versiones en italiano tiene también el texto original en griego, porque es bien sabido que el emperador Marco Aurelio escribió este texto en este idioma. Esta versión se puede consultar en la Biblioteca Vaticana. La ultimísima versión que me ha llegado está en sueco.

Cualquiera podría pensar que soy un lingüista o un filósofo, o una rata de biblioteca o alguien con una cultura superlativa. Nada de eso. Soy un simple arquitecto que ama la extraordinaria belleza que el ser humano es capaz de crear. Y que reconoce que este texto escrito en griego por Marco Aurelio es de una gran belleza.

Y en mi habitual visita al Museo del Prado, hoy he visto una cabeza de Marco Aurelio en la sala 71 de Escultura clásica, como escondida en la planta baja. Hasta hace poco, había otra, mejor, en la Galería principal, junto a la de Adriano.

FINALE

Hoy, cuando termino de escribir estas líneas sobre estas 7 joyas más que recomendables, imprescindibles, tengo delante todos los libros citados, menos el *Hortensius* de Cicerón (sólo tengo el *Ortensio* en italiano). Casi todos ellos están muy gastados. Y es que los libros, los libros de papel, además de leerlos, algunos los acariciamos y, de vez en cuando, alguna lágrima derramamos sobre ellos, lágrimas que se nos escapan en los momentos de mayor emoción.

Además, en los últimos años he adquirido la mala costumbre de subrayar mis libros en rojo, con un Pilot 4 rojo. A mí me ayuda mucho no sólo para fijar más aún si cabe mi atención sino, para recordar (pasar el corazón) al releerlos dónde entonces puse mi atención. Debo reconocer que es una mala costumbre. Pero funciona.

Pero, eso sí, hagan como yo, tengan estos libros en esa estantería especial como joyas que son. Valen muchísimo más de lo que cuestan.

Tanto el *Protréptico* de Aristóteles como el *Hortensius* de Cicerón, son textos perdidos que, siendo fundamentales, siguen apareciendo en versiones meritorias pero entrecortadas y no fáciles de asimilar.

Tengo la secreta esperanza de que no tardarán mucho en aparecer los originales de ambos libros, o llegar a una síntesis-traducción que sea capaz de darnos unos frutos parecidos a los que produjeron tanto en Marco Aurelio como en San Agustín.

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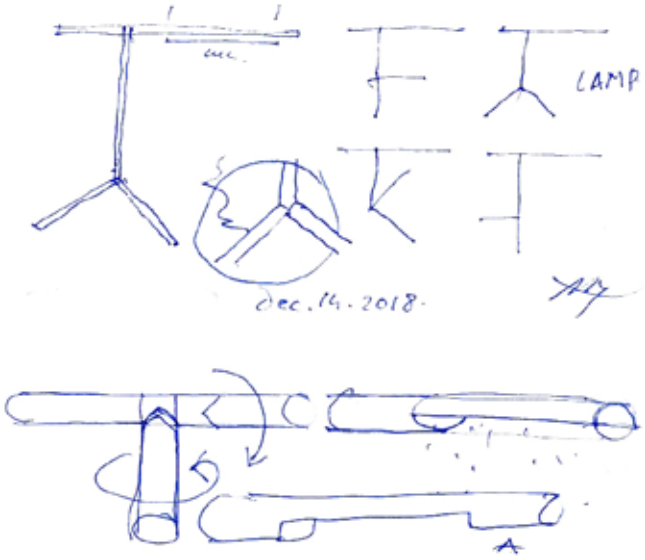

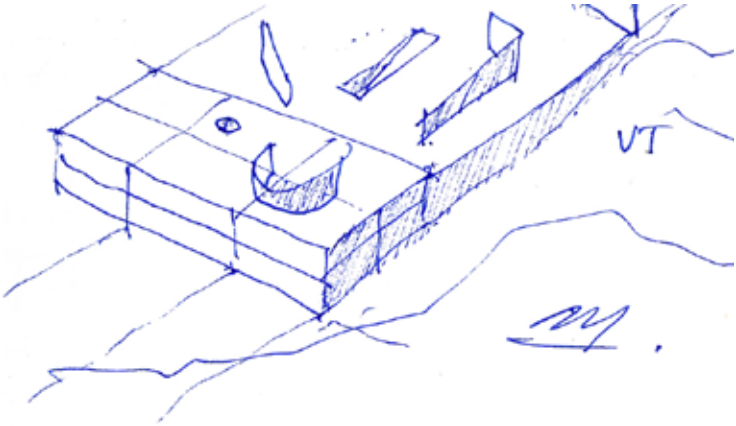
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7 JOYAS IMPRESCINDIBLES A TU ALCANCE

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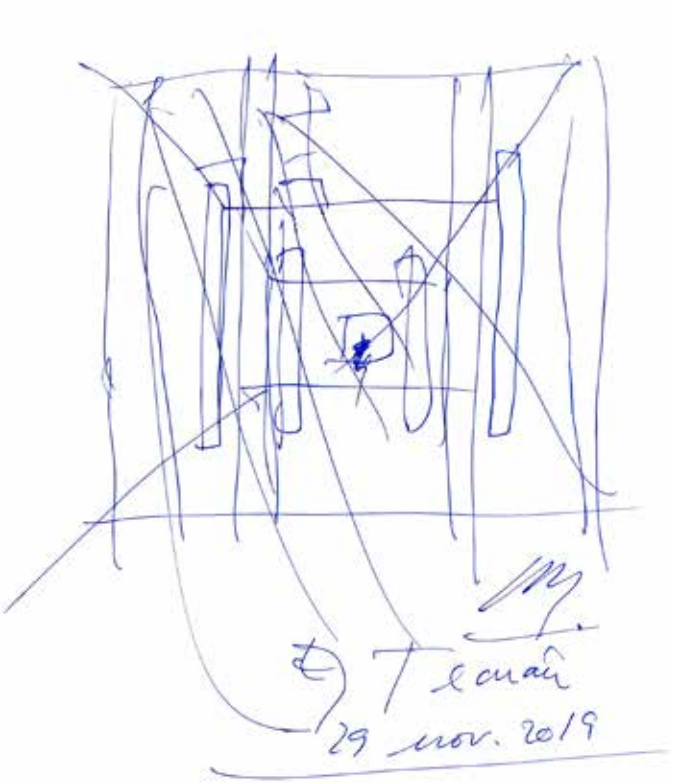
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