

IDEAS THAT ARE FORMS, FORMS THAT ARE IDEAS

Regarding the General Savings Bank of Granada by the architect Alberto Campo Baeza.

An architect, not a writer or critic or historian, writing about an architectural work is taking on something that is not his own. Spaces, not words, are his field. Still, that may prove to be interesting, because while he cannot and should not make poetry or indulge in rhetoric and erudition, and though his writings be artless, unstructured, and uncontrolled, he can nonetheless provide a view from within, from within the difficulty of generating spaces, projecting them and constructing them. For this reason, I would like to emphasize that this is only my personal vision. That is to say, absolutely partial and incomplete.

Writing about the new General Savings Bank of Granada by the architect Alberto Campo Baeza entails another problem. And that is: the intensity of this work takes one's breath away. Once again, this architect reveals his capacity to construct ideas that are forms and forms that are ideas. And shows again his courage in the bid, even at the price of not following suit, and his wisdom of the intensity of the embrace as opposed to words.

One. Regarding the dialogue between full and empty spaces.

The issue of architectural space is always complicated. How does one speak of something that cannot be seen? By means of its complimentary material? Or its geometric body? Or by its structure? Or by the light? Or perhaps by the intention or the idea? Doubtless, one should do so by means of all of these, everything else, and above all, by the suitability of its relations.

One of these relations is to start from a massive mass and to perforate it with intersecting spaces. But another is also the opposite; that is to say, to start from a single space and place material in it capable of compartmentalizing it and stressing it. They are two forms of dialogue between the full and the empty, the occupied and the unoccupied, what becomes present and what is made absent.

In the project's first spatial approaches, these two situations appear separately: the full space that is emptied diagonally and the empty space that is filled with various differentiated volumes. But the interesting thing about this work is that it ends up concentrating the two approaches into one in a consecutive and complementary

manner. First, the exterior volume appears as a sharp and prismatic fullness within the empty space of the city. Second, this full space is hollowed out into a central space that is the heart of the building. And third, this empty space is occupied by four very large columns. Filling in order to empty, emptying in order to fill, inhaling in order to exhale.

Two. Regarding the contrast of scales.

Another of the great issues in architectural space is that of scale or the size relations between man and the object and its parts. It is this relationship that makes man's physical presence in spaces unavoidable and irreplaceable in order to feel them and apprehend them.

Here, a multiple and deliberate play of scales occurs. Multiple, because they are constantly being opposed and contrasted, and deliberate because it is controlled in order to produce a space where imagination and dreams are the protagonists. Thus, imagination is engaged in the contrast between what is expected and what appears, what is intuited and what is found. For example, from the outside, constructed with shade holes measuring 2.70 x 2.70 m. nothing gives us any indication of the large space that it hides and surprises. As for the dreams, this space is both large and small at the same time. It belongs to the city and also to man.

It could be because the columns suggest an enormous scale, but at the same time compartmentalize the space into smaller scales where the visitor recognizes himself. Or it could be because the skin enveloping the space on the one hand recovers the scale with the piling up of wrought material and on the other, dissolves it with a continuous skin of alabaster on two sides. Whatever the reason, in this work the human scale is contrasted against a larger scale that simultaneously invites recollection and dispersion, concentration and expansion. One confronts a reality that transcends one.

Three. Regarding materials and structural light.

I defend the concept of "structural light" as the coexistence and cooperation of natural light with the structural layout, as opposed to those works where each one unfolds independently. In this way, the effort of presence coincides with the benefit of absence. The space generated by the structure is transformed into a space pierced and crossed by light. And thus, the material is dependent on the structure. The former is arranged in a manner so as to construct the latter. It is placed in order to be able not to place; it is filled in order to be able to empty.

The General Savings Bank of Granada constructs this relation naturally and with great simplicity. As in all great works, with an insulting simplicity. Thus, it begins from a box of perforated concrete, the material concentrating where it is necessary, on the south façades and on the flat plane of the roof. As this plane also needs supports in its center, the central columns are placed. And as these need to be made resistant to warping, because of their height, they are constructed as circular rings measuring 3.30 m. in diameter and 0.33 m. thick. The structure in concrete is like this: a construction that is simultaneously box and table, container and contents, that which comprehends and that which is comprehended.

The presence of the concrete represents the physicality of an opaque and categorical material. Other translucent and transparent materials appear that contrast and

increase its power. One thus feels simultaneously the massive, the fluid, and the airy. All in relation to the light.

Four. About natural light and its angulation.

We often forget that the light within a building is a slanted halo and that it turns. Nevertheless, in this work, all of the issues discussed above, full and empty spaces, scale, structure and material are organized around the angulation and rotation of the light. It is not that the space is distinct and that the light crosses it diagonally, as is usually the case. But rather the space becomes diagonal in order to receive the light. It is as if to say the space becomes light. Thus, although based on a central cubic space, the space is oriented diagonally. The floor plan is configured out of two "L's" of different thickness, one measuring 3 modules and the other 6. The first is north, the second south. It is center and it is diagonal, it is static and it is dynamic. From the central space, a built area comes out and the other is sighted continuing the slant while the other façade remains tense and translucent prepared as closing.

And the columns that were centered in the main volume are displaced in the main space towards the thickest bay. It is as if they advanced in order to anticipate or collect the light, instead of waiting for it passively. And the skylights in turn are also displaced from the central space in order to obtain the greatest path of light possible. And the light turns in the space in the opposite direction from that the visitor follows upon entering. In this way, a face-to-face meeting is produced in the space, the sun and man, that from there and that from here, where one can feel that the world, our world, is the one that moves. As in a dawn.

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