

MECHANISMS VS. IDEAS

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Y todos cuantos vagan,
de ti me van mil gracias refiriendo.
Y todos más me llagan,
y déjame muriendo
un no sé **qué que quedan** balbuciendo.

[And all those who wander,
from you I get a thousand thanks for referring to you.
And everyone else gets to me,
and leave me dying
a I don't know what that are left stammering.]

This is how the wife expresses herself in the Spiritual Canticle of St. John of the Cross with such a tearfulness that makes us burst into tears. And for this the poet uses a literary device that in poetry is called alliteration. As if it were a cooking recipe, he puts three pinches of salt in the pot: "a I don't know what **that** are left babbling", a pronoun, an article and the beginning of a verb. The alliteration, so ingenious and so effective, is nothing more than a poetic mechanism that materializes well here the babbling that produces the tearing of love described in the poem.

Thus, the architectural mechanisms. Many times I have spoken to my students of these architectural mechanisms that are nothing more than spatial operations capable of helping to set up the ideas that we want to materialize. Ideas in architecture, in the end, always translate into forms. And forms in architecture have proportions and measures and concrete materials. And often working with form through simple architectural mechanisms allows us to materialize in a simple way ideas that at first glance seem complex.

These mechanisms in architecture are always related to the physical man, to the human body, like architecture itself. Because if poetry relates to the soul, to memory, to understanding, to reason, architecture also relates to the body. Hence the importance of measure, proportion and materials, and also of light. These mechanisms of architecture, like cooking recipes, if applied with precision, can be very effective.

In Spanish the term mechanism usually leads to think of technical elements. When I have searched in the dictionary of the Real Academia Española de la Lengua the term mechanism, I have not been able to find the meaning of this word in relation to architecture. Not even in the María Moliner. Nor in Google or similar. In English the term *tools* seems to fit well, better, to this of mechanisms. So I am encouraged to write now on this topic that I think is important for architects.

In some of my published texts I have developed at greater length and depth some of these mechanisms. Here it is a question of making a commented enumeration at the appropriate length of some of what I consider to be the most important and effective mechanisms with which an architect can work.

This collection of tricks, these thirteen architectural tricks, are like a recipe book of tricks, of tricks, as the classics say, to get out of architectural battles with flying colors.

CONSIDERATIONS

Architectural mechanisms are formal strategies to achieve spatial results. They are not ideas but simply operations to translate those ideas. A double height connected to another double height after a vertical displacement is not an architectural idea. It is simply a mechanism to translate and make visible the idea of a diagonal space.

If the structure serves, in addition to transmitting the weight of gravity to the earth, to establish the order of space, the mechanisms serve to tighten, to tune this ordered space, like someone who tunes a musical instrument to make it sound better.

Mechanisms have always been used in architecture.

We could assimilate them to metrics in poetry. The sonnet is a poetic mechanism that manifests itself with enormous efficacy in any past, present and future tense.

They relate to the physical man, to the human body.

Sometimes they are new inventions, as when Bernini proposes the luce *alla Bernina*, hiding the focus from where the light that illuminates the space comes from. To produce our astonishment.

Sometimes they are mathematical procedures. The 9 m diameter of the Pantheon in Rome and the 43 m diameter of its spherical dome are mathematically measured to control with absolute precision the entrance of the sun's rays and the angle of the viewer's vision.

Sometimes they are strategies of order, such as the mechanism of the hypostyle room, to order the space in an unequivocal and effective way. Other times a new order is proposed, such as Kazuyo Sejima's park space, to order the space in a different way.

Sometimes they are as simple as the translucent ceiling with which Terragni, in the Triennale house in Milan, gives a twist to Pierre Chareau's Maison de Verre in Paris where he creates a translucent space, a cloud.

Sometimes new mechanisms are created, such as drilling solid light into the translucent space. To tighten the space even more in a new and very effective way.

Sometimes they are as old as opening a high window to the west, which was already done by the Pompeian houses. To make visible the diagonal space with the solid light coming from above at sunset.

Sometimes, although clear, they are obvious. Such as the *alignment of the doors* following their two orthogonal axes in Villa Rotonda. To achieve immediate spatial continuity with the means available at the time.

Sometimes they are of such indisputable effectiveness as that of the transformation of a plane into a line, when placed at eye level. As Mies does in the Farnsworth House. To make visible the lightness, the lightness.

And so many others.