

UNDERLINING VS. FRAMING

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Many times, facing the sea, we have a distant horizon. And the higher our position is, the clearer is that perception of the horizon's remoteness. This situation of a spectator in front of a landscape with a distant horizon is something we have many times in our lives. As when we are on the top of a mountain or a hill, in front of the landscape whose horizon we see far away, and we recognize it.

Faced with a distant horizon landscape, architecture can adopt two attitudes. Or, rather, architecture can use two different mechanisms: to emphasize that landscape, subjectifying it, or to frame the same landscape, objectifying it.

UNDERLINE THE LANDSCAPE

When, through a high horizontal plane, the viewer contemplates the distant horizon landscape, the underlined landscape resembles the sea. This landscape, underlined by the horizontal plane, by the straight line of its edge, is subjectivized. The viewer seems to enter this landscape or, better still, the landscape seems to come towards him. I have sometimes used the image of Aladdin's flying carpet. In the situation described it seems that we are on that flying carpet and that the landscape is coming towards us.

This situation is that of the upper plane of the podiums. Perhaps the clearest, the most architectural, is that of the Acropolis of Athens. What the Greeks called *temenos*, the place where men met the gods. Or better still the high Mayan and Aztec platforms that dominate the natural landscape in Mexico and of which Jorn Utzon speaks to us masterfully in his well-known text "Plateaus, platforms".

I have worked with these mechanisms many times in my projects. Facing the Atlantic Ocean in Cadiz I have acted in both ways. When I did the Drago Public School in 1992, I made a large, deep window in the main lobby, which framed the sea. Almost 20 years later, in Entre Catedrales, very close to the previous building, I have emphasized that same sea through a very white platform in such a way that it seems that the whole sea is coming to us.

And in the Casa de Blas in Sevilla la Nueva and in the Olnick Spanu in New York and in the Casa Rufo in Toledo, the main theme is the high plane of their platforms facing the landscape, all of them with a distant horizon. All these platforms were presided over by a lighter, temple-like construction. And, even more radical, it was proposed in the House of Infinity in Tarifa and in the Landscape Interpretation Center in Lanzarote, where there was nothing but the bare horizontal plane, with nothing on top. And in my last project in El Tecuán in Mexico.

FRAMING THE LANDSCAPE

If in front of the same landscape we open a gap, a window, we will be framing with the inner shadow that landscape of distant horizon. And it will seem that, framed, the landscape becomes more important, it becomes objective. And it seems that it moves away from us, that by objectifying it, it becomes more important. We are putting a frame to something that did not have one before. Ortega y Gasset, in a precious essay on the frame, talks about all this with more wisdom than we can. And being aware of this architectural mechanism, we will be very careful about how we place the windows, looking from the inside to the outside.

This is the most common situation of people experiencing the landscape through the windows of buildings. Of course, the architect can work on the shape and position of these windows, of these openings, to enhance the value of this framed landscape. In my last work under construction, we have varied the position of the windows with respect to the original project, to better define the piece of real landscape that we had in front of us and that we wanted to frame.

When through a window, the viewer sees the distant horizon landscape from the inside, the framed landscape resembles a painting. This painting, framed by the inner shadow, objectifies that landscape that seems to be moving away from the viewer.