

WHEN THE PLANE BECOMES A LINE

Mies, the old magician

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And the fact is that old Mies, in addition to his obsession with unbearable lightness, was of unfathomable depth. He wanted it all, he knew it all and in the Farnsworth House, which more than a house is a proclamation, he achieved almost everything.

Because of the steel, it creates a very light horizontal floor plane that seems to float. So thin it appears that, rather than floating raft as has been said so many times and rightly so, I would like to define it as a flying carpet. So thin seems the roof and so delicate seem the 16 pillars that support it.

And the floor is as light as the ceiling, which is painted white, making it even more ethereal. By painting everything white, he gives another turn of the screw in his divine obsession with lightness.

And then, the glass used in the maximum dimensions that the industry allowed at that time. Always at the limit. With total transparency as a goal.

And the house is arranged in such a way, with such wisdom, that there is only one double door that, being placed in the center of the headwall that is tucked under the porch, comes to pass almost unnoticed. And it is difficult to make a practicable carpentry disappear in a glass box. We architects who build when we materialize our ideas are well aware of this.

But, and this is well known, but less well known, one of the central issues of the Farnsworth House, if not the main issue, is the placement of the HORIZONTAL PLANE of its floor at the eye level of the viewer. It is at such a height that the horizontal plane becomes for the viewer a LINE.

What more could anyone who seeks maximum transparency and absolute lightness in architecture want? Mies Van der Rohe succeeded. And his masterly lesson has not yet been well learned.

FROM SEMPER TO FRAMPTON

When Gottfried Semper made that clear and distinct, quasi-Cartesian distinction between the tectonic and the stereotomic in Architecture, and after Kenneth Frampton's even more clarifying reading of these questions, I can only understand that the dividing line between these two worlds is the horizon line.

EURYTHMY, PROPORTION, DIRECTION. MEASUREMENTS, PROPORTIONS, SCALE.

The definition of the main HORIZONTAL PLANE as a central issue in any architectural organization is not only a question of its position with respect to the vertical. No less

important is the definition of its form and measurements. Architecture is not in vain a question of form and measurements.

We would never imagine a double-height Farnsworth House, nor would we imagine it being twice as large as in an iniquitous homothecia.

Man, with his measurements and his perception of gravity and his vision, is the center of architectural space.

The measurements, the proportions, the scale of this horizontal plane are as important as the first one, in the achievement of a space capable of moving people.

MATERIALITY AND MATERIALS

And, of course, the materials. And the fact is that although Architecture seems so sublime, and sometimes it is, it is always inescapably material.

The choice of a material, travertine in the Farnsworth House, with the ability to function inside and outside to translate well the continuity of this horizontal plane, is also an important decision. As is the fact that all the pieces are the same, rectangular, as if underlining even more the direction of this house. With the same measurements inside and outside. With the same horizontality inside and outside. That almost perfect CONTINUITY that Mies proposes that through that strong horizontal plane of the stone floor, makes, even more if possible, the transparency of the glass seem greater.

IN THE BEGINNING

The starting point of Architecture, as I have already written more than once, is the HORIZONTAL PLANE. As the HORIZON separates or unites the earth with the sky, so it seems that man when he establishes (table, mesa) his horizontal plane with Architecture is establishing the place where, rising above the earth, he is able to touch the sky with his hands. And so he takes refuge in the cave to rest, to sleep, and goes up to the hut to live, to dream closer to the sky and the stars.

An Architecture always at the service of the man who lives, who thinks, who dreams.