

OF JAMBS, LINTELS AND SILLS

When the facades were the walls themselves

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Any architecture that does not express serenity is wrong and does not fulfill its spiritual mission. This is why it has been a mistake to substitute the shelter of the walls for the openness of the windows.

Luis Barragan

When the walls were load-bearing walls, when the walls were thick, when the facades were the walls themselves, the openings in those walls, the windows and doors, were formed by the jambs, the lintel and the sill.

Now that many facades are thin, extremely thin, like skins, especially when many are made of glass, the holes are torn instead of embouchures, they are like scratches. There are no more jambs or lintel or sill to put in the mouth. And spatially the exterior landscape is framed in a very different way.

Jorn Utzon made for himself in Mallorca a beautiful house, Can Lis. There the Danish master embosses the holes in the walls in such a way that he achieves very special, very precise spatial effects. And he does it with jambs and lintel and sill, added to make the holes even deeper. I wrote a text I called Más Mar (More Sea) in which I described how Utzon tilted those lintels inwards so that, seeing less sky, more sea would appear there.

And if we continue with this type of nuances we would have to distinguish when an opening reaches the ground, when a window becomes a window, when the sill becomes a threshold, and whether or not there is continuity in the ground plane to allow the exit to the outside. Or if, on the contrary, the operation stops at the height of a table, and this plane of the table materializes, a table-sill, and the exterior landscape is framed and at the same time underlined by this plane. And if, on the outside, we make this plane in continuity with the interior, as if we were extending the table to the outside, the spatial effect will be much stronger, more radical. It will seem that the landscape rests on that plane at the height of the table.

So I am doing in my latest project of house in Gaucín. And the framed landscape, the mountains of Africa, the Mediterranean Sea and the Rock of Gibraltar, take on a protagonism as if it were Roberts' own engraving. Because the well-known landscape of Gaucín engraved by Roberts is made from exactly the same place. And maybe even the beauty wants to come there. In short, we are working once again with light and shadow well measured, framing the light of the landscape with the shadow of the interior.

WINDOW

Because what is a window? A window is an opening through which sunlight penetrates into the interior space illuminating it and, at the same time, from the interior it allows to see the exterior landscape framed, put in value. It is this double condition that makes the window a particularly interesting spatial mechanism of architecture. It has always been

so in the history of architecture: from the Serlian window or the fenêtre en longueur, to Utzon's window.

When a window opens on a façade, light and air and clouds and birds enter through it. And through there, from the inside, the landscape is framed and is thus enhanced.

If the facade is very thin, the window appears as a tear, as a slit. And the window sometimes disappears, taking the entire size of the opening, flush with the facade, and all the light passes through it and all the vision comes out. Sometimes too much light, sometimes too much vision. That is what Barragán complained about with the words with which I introduce this text. And that way of framing almost nothing, from inside to outside the landscape, is like when we put a passe partout on an engraving to enhance its value. And when that happens, when too much light passes through, then we need to veil that window.

To excavate versus to watch, those are the two positions of the architect in front of a facade. To excavate the wall so that light and air can pass through the excavated openings into the interior space. To veil the façade more open to control the entrance of light and air.

HOLE IN THE WALL

"Architecture is born, just like the wall, from the encounter between the idea and the matter" proposes Jesús Aparicio in his book *El Muro*, thus underlining the central importance of the wall in architecture. In this recommendable book, Professor Aparicio unfolds all the topics related to the wall with great pedagogical clarity.

Because throughout history, facades have almost always been structural walls, thick load-bearing walls. And the openings, the windows, have usually been deep excavated holes, with jambs, lintel and sill, three precious words almost forgotten. Utzon, the old druid, knew it well and understood it well in his house in Mallorca, where with absolute freedom and knowledge he fitted those windows with jambs, lintel and sill conveniently placed.

And now, it would seem that many architects see lightness as the only possibility. The famous: How much does your building weigh Mr. Foster? with which Fuller asked the English master, seems to rule out more stereotomic solutions, thicker, heavier.

It is evident that there is not, and cannot be, a single architecture, stereotomic? or thetonic?

In my first work, the Turégano house, I tried to make the big windows like slits in the white façade. The windows were flush, as if flattened with the facade. It was a more tectonic architecture, more of veiling than of excavating, more of addition than of subtraction.

CALA

And in the last one, the Cala house, with many points coinciding spatially with the Turégano, the large windows appear as hollows excavated in the facade. Especially in those that open on the roofs that connect air with air, and let themselves be crossed by the light, by the wind, by the birds and even by the clouds. It is a more stereotomic architecture, more of excavation than of veiling, more of subtraction than of addition.

It is exciting to rediscover the effectiveness of such old and simple mechanisms. And so, in these openings, to accentuate these spatial effects even more, I have given more depth to the sill, which not only appears as a table but, accompanied by the lintel and the jambs with the same depth, frame the landscape with an unthinkable force. The result is, at this point! surprising. Both from the outside, as they give the volume an unusual rotundity, and from the inside where the landscape of the western cornice of Madrid, from the Royal Palace to the four towers thus framed, is impressive. I think of one day sitting on that rooftop at that table in front of that wonderful landscape of Madrid, reading the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius to the sound of birdsong.

GAUCIN

And in the project that is now on my desk, a house in Gaucín, the issue at hand is radicalized to the maximum. This house is in a very privileged situation. In front of it, with pure south orientation, appear in the distant but clear horizon, the mountains of Africa, and the Mediterranean Sea and the Rock of Gibraltar as protagonist. The view is so beautiful that Roberts immortalized it in an engraving of his series of travels through southern Spain, and Pérez Villamil painted it. And the central theme of this house, turned to the garden, is the space of the room that besides being very vertical, 7 meters, is presided over by a 3x3 meter hole focused exactly on the described view that we want to catch. To accentuate its value, we will place the opening with a deep lintel and jambs, 3 meters, which will also protect us from the sun. Perhaps the novelty will be to create a large table that will cross the hole one and a half meters inward and six meters outward. The mechanism that we explained at the beginning of this writing. More than just a table, it is to establish a horizontal plane with table height, which puts in tension all that space. As a counterpoint, a hole at the top of the vertical space of the room, a skylight in the corner, which by reason of the geometry will be triangular, which will make the sun's rays move through the space throughout the day, giving reason for the time.

ALMERÍA AND ZAMORA

The mechanisms of embouchure or sajar with radicality have been habitual in many of my works. In two works built in stone, one in Almería and the other in Zamora, the theme of the façade, of fenestration, became the central theme.

In the Almería project, offices for the Junta de Andalucía in 2002, the shutters were made of stone, the same stone as the facade, lumaquela. Flush shutters so that when all the shutters were closed, the building appeared as a single closed stone prism. And as those

shutters were opened or closed, inwards, the façade was changing, as if it had a thousand eyes that opened and closed. A façade in movement.

In Zamora's work, on the other hand, the generous openings in the thick stone wall that surrounds the work, whose purpose is to make visible from the street the interior of the great stone box open to the sky, make the wall seem even more closed, more powerful. Large stone jambs, sills and lintels make this power evident. And they make the dialogue between our building and the Cathedral, opposite, immediate. The façade to the city is the thick stone wall that evokes the idea of the walls of the convent that once stood there.

CONCLUSION

Windows? sockets? mortises? scratches? gouges? cracks? digging? glazing? All of them are mechanisms to translate more general spatial ideas in which this subtraction or that addition, collaborate to set up, through the façade, an idea of Architecture, a constructed idea.