

TRANSFORMATION OF LANDSCAPES

Spain on Spain Symposium

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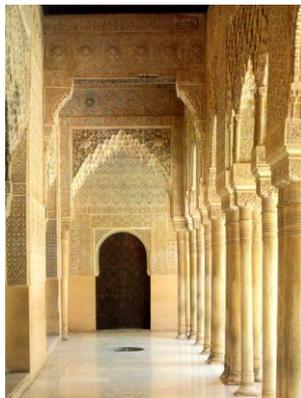
Juan Domingo Santos

During the past few years, my work studies have been dedicated to proposing solutions to landscapes in transformation. The idea of landscape is large and effects issues of different character. In this way, I have chosen the Alhambra like a representative example because it is an architecture that is built from the land. An architecture that is very vital and related to man in which the landscape appears in different ways. Sometimes it is abstract, and other times it is figurative, and also it can be very literal.

Overcoming the age of machines that was such a fascination of the 20th century, today the notion of landscape is a point of interest for everyone. From this point of view, the Alhambra is a very modern construction because it is built from multiple interpretations of landscape. There is something utopic behind this as in Venice where the utopia of water has made a sacred place, a myth. Venice is constructed with water, similarly the Alhambra is constructed with a utopic idea of nature; let us say that it is an architecture loaded with relationships between the natural and the artificial and in this sense it is a very up to date idea of landscape.

The Alhambra is made from an interior landscape, through a series of patios with a pronounced set-design of different types. These landscapes are constructed from different relationships, like the physical and epidermic aspects of material, the multiple use of scale and the idea of one fluid and continuous space. The landscape appears behind all of this like an open relationship; we have the sensation of assisting a meeting of very different issues, an this implies a very modern landscape, and indeed a contemporary one. It is surprising that a construction built in the 15th and 14th centuries can be so contemporary. When we walk in the Alhambra, we don't have the sensation of being inside an architectural monument that is more than 700 years old. We can say that her beauty lies in her being timeless.

The Alhambra is made up of nature, where life manifests itself everywhere through the merger of natural and artificial processes. The relationship between the natural and the artificial are produced through the material, valuing its qualities. The treatment of the walls are decorated skins with poems, words and colours that imitate the forms of nature, and are also with abstract forms. In addition, the way that material is used transcends its constructive capacities. For example, the effects of the water are truly beautiful, not only for the esthetic aspect and its capacity to transform space temporarily, but it addresses some concepts about solidity equalling opaqueness or lightness equalling transparency. By which way the same material can be opaque and provoke lightness at the same time. The water can be a mirror that reflects reality, or be used as a metaphor as the rivers in paradise, or flow with sensuality.



Alhambra, Granada (Spain)

There is a similar effect with light and its capacity to transform space. It is architecture without exterior windows and the interior lights play an important part. The floor is used like carpets that prolong the light from the patio to the inside of the rooms. In other cases the sequence of light and shadows create a special atmosphere. There is always a different treatment of light related to the space and activity. In the Alhambra the notion of landscape figures at different levels of interpretation: on occasions it is imitative of nature, at other times it emphasises the analogous side, and at certain moments it appears in a more symbolic form. What I mean is that it moves around freely, it can be rhetorical in its attempt to incorporate the organic and in other circumstances it is able to distance itself from its natural sources to become more abstract, constructing in this way the reality which we perceive sometimes figuratively, sometimes by reduction and this makes it diverse and also very attractive, very interesting.

With this landscape idea, I have situated two glasses in a garden of the Reales Alcázares de Sevilla (Spain), which change depending on light during the day. The two pieces of glass have similar qualities to those of water in its crystalline state and they raise questions related to the perception of an object introduced into nature, the way in which an object transforms or subverts the garden, the way in which people see it or experience it; it is all an entity which reveals the relationships between the people, the panes of glass and the garden with a view to temporarily transforming the significance of the scene. Two sheets of glass measuring 6,00m long and 2,52m high, set into the ground, changed their tonality depending on the natural light falling upon their surface and the movement of the observer on approaching, passing between or moving away from them. They could be translucent, casting a veil over nature; when opaque they were walls of white light; in the morning they were reflecting mirrors. And at nightfall, nocturnal scenes of projected images. The work was designed to be a technical study of the material and its propensity for change according to different types of light, using models which were made and treated in a factory and then transported to the garden on different days over the course of a year.



Two Glasses. Reales Alcázares (Sevilla)

I have also built a house in the historic center of Granada based in light used to regulate the interior landscape. What we get from the light is “clearness”, a kind of brilliance or clarity that changes over the day through an internal patio which is built onto a shared wall. It is exciting to feel time via the changes in this wall produced by this light, which in turn creates different spatial qualities depending on the time of day. In one video that I shot during a full moon you can see how the house changes in tone and colour throughout the day and night, like the changes brought on by the seasons. I try to think of light in this way, associating it with the changes it experiences through materials and their properties. On one occasion, someone said after watching the video that it had reminded them of the artist James Turrell’s installations due to his method of working with light and its effects. When I heard this I was surprised because it would seem that I had constructed an “artistic

idea”, when in fact the house is made with a different intention. People live in this space and the illuminated wall is a daily backdrop to their lives.



House in San Matías, Granada

With time I have come to realise that all the experiences I have collected in the Alhambra over the years appear as recurrent themes. They are not like images in books or magazines, but rather they form part of my personal experiences in live. There is therefore an exploration of materials which springs from memory, as well as a concept of landscape which is not merely contemplative, it is implicit in the materials, but it has to be discovered.

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I’m working on two houses at the same time that both have a common intention to build the landscape, in each case different, and investigate the domestic activities in each one of them. The “house in a cherry orchard” is built in relation to the landscape, which is proportioned by the seasonal changes of the trees in the orchard. The domestic activities relate to the trees and the notion of the time is determined by the orchard’s transformations. The intention is to construct a combined landscape between some elements from the city and some elements from the agricultural country, therefore creating a landscape with a new terminology. The house is built like a window that permits us to see the landscape through it. The “house on a hillside’s landscape”, however, is produced from the interior by means of interconnected enclosed areas that are like independent interlaced landscapes. The house is like an infrastructure deposited in the territory that doesn’t offer clues of what is happening in its interior. It’s a closed house allowing for privacy with just one window 6,00m wide to lookout on to the wonderful landscape of the mountain.

The two houses use nature as an origin of the project. The “house in a cherry orchard” starting from the agricultural transformation, and the “house on a hillside” starting from the manipulation of the earth’s topography.

In the “house in a cherry orchard” I have manipulated the orchard using urban criteria, whilst using agricultural norms to determine how the house is occupied. The shape of a patio carved from an orchard, or a house’s dimensions being calculated from the distances between rows of cherry trees, are each a contamination caused by the displacement of different traditions. Within the house there are references to the ventilated architecture of the tobacco drying houses of the valley plains, and to the chain-link fences which divide the fields, which appear in the innovative way of suspending them over a platform that rises above the agricultural land. The pattern of the holes in the farm buildings have been used as the template for the light and ventilation of the house. The possibility of repeating, multiplying and alternating these holes has allowed a degree of expression which makes for a strange decoration on concrete walls. The final result is one in which the building is perforated in a different way, one which takes into account the views of the surrounding countryside. The house gains character through its relationship with the orchard and the repetition of the holes. The cherry tree was chosen for its marked seasonal changes in appearance, which propagates the idea of the

passage of time in the house as being related to the productive cycles of the trees. In spring they are white, in summer green and loaded with fruit, in autumn their leaves fall onto the fields laying down a new red organic carpet in which they are naked structures. The orchard is treated as a colourful landscape that is placed between people and the architecture of the house.



Proposal for inhabiting in an agricultural environment

The landscape idea of the “house on a hillside” is considered to be related to certain positions of the house on the land and the relationship with two materials: earth and water. The house is placed into the slope on purpose and the domestic activities are produced at different levels. The project is an investigation of people’s movements inside, a way to measure time and space, and the use of unconventional spaces for the main activities of the house. Through the freedom with which they are generated, the interior circulations of the house are reminiscent of the natural movements of termite nests and other insects which live underground.

The entrance to the house is from the earthen garden viewpoint above the living-room, which enables the domestic and work activities to be moved outside. A curve metal mesh shelters this space from the gaze of nearby neighbours. The house is developed into two interconnected parts. The living-room and the kitchen are situated below an earthen garden viewpoint and the bedrooms are situated below a water tank with a patio. The water tank above the bedrooms permits the reflected views of the mountains to be prolonged into the house, while at the same time also acting as a heat regulator in the summer.



The interior spaces are scenes of activity with the entrance of light from the ceiling, creating different atmospheres. The house is constructed in concrete and has been covered with white panels on some points depending on the relationship with light. We can have a plan of interior light that changes throughout the day (in the living-room), or a suspended light in the entrance, or an indirect light associated with the movement of the staircase. To reinforce this idea of continuity of space and light the house has no doors. The possible divisions are temporarily obtained with dividing coloured mobile textiles.

I like the possibility in which the inhabitants could use different ways inside the house, whichever way they wanted, depending on their mood at that moment. I remember my grandmother's house constructed from a continuous gallery that surrounded the house. Although the house was small it could also become big depending on our never ending capacity to run around it. The possibility to construct the house like a crossroads of movement allows the inhabitant to take decisions about their destination.



The idea of different time associated with freedom of movement can cultivate differences on the domestic stage. We might think of the act of movement between linked rooms with different rhythms, shortening or stretching the time of the physical act of moving depending on the chosen itinerary. So we might use different times to connect the same rooms or, to put in different words, use the choice of the path to accelerate or slow down the physics of movement to reach the same destination. The movements we call slow and fast represented extreme state of this movement. They are intentional lines that use "architectural events" to intensify the idea of temporality in the itinerary. As an alternative, combined movement enables movement times to be superimposed at the wish of the user.