

Graduate Campus Architecture, Building C. Adolfo Ibáñez University, Peñalolén, Santiago, Chile

By José Cruz Ovalle - Architect

I.

The site - about a thousand meters away and 200 meters higher than the Graduate Campus completed in 2002 - stretches towards the slopes of the Andean foothills above Santiago: a curved ridge rising between two ravines filled with native vegetation. This urges us not to linger, but to engage the upward slope immediately. Not, as in the previous campus, to seek development along the horizontal contours.

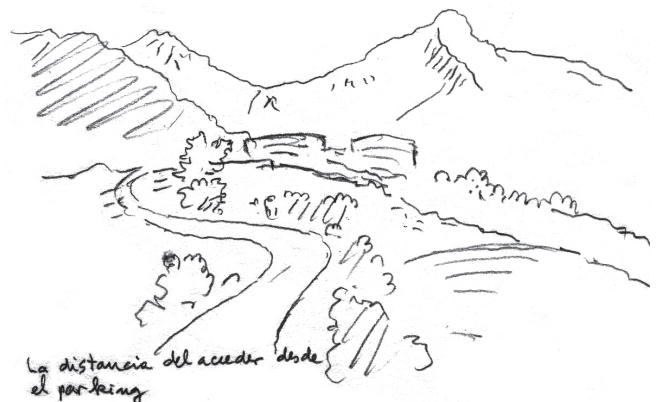
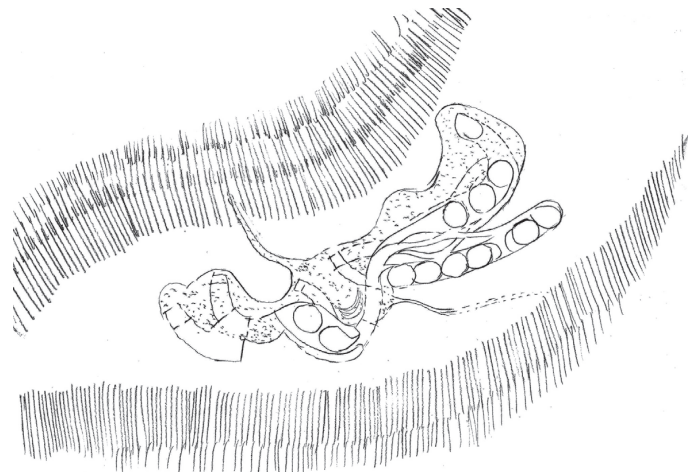
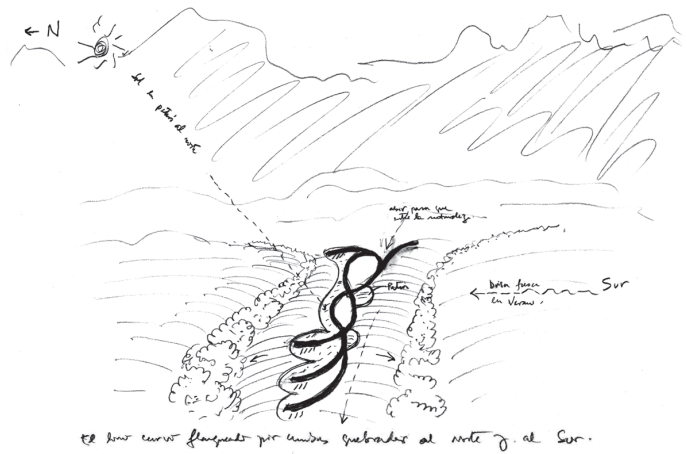
Indeed, this setting which - as previously mentioned - represents Chile's own, and the whole American continent's magnitude: A Huge Expanse. Approaching this immensity by abandoning any preconceived notion of the site as a building allows us to begin from the origin without following any particular model.

The discovery of this origin is not an attempt to break free from nature. An architecture that avoids a preconceived typology can turn what initially appears unfavorable into something beneficial. Thus, it freely embraces the slope, considering it an essential dimension of the site.

The space of the site seeks and finds its limits in a form that ascends and descends along this ridge. It unfolds following the course of the northern ravine, with sunlit courtyards at various levels-intersected by cantilevered volumes that offer shade. These courtyards, in turn, through hollowed-out volumes, open onto the southern slope, to receive the cool breeze that blows up here in spring and summer.

However, it does so gradually, step by step, from tree to tree. The ups and downs of the slopes are not the result of coming up with formulas to resolve habitability. No. We are not guided solely by mathematical abstraction, but by one founded on singularities: the twists and turns that shape the boundaries of the project, protecting an outcrop of rocks here, encircling foliage there, opening a hollow for the breeze here, casting shade over a courtyard there... Here, there, over there ... singularities that represent this location and which the project seeks to organize about our bodies to create a place.¹

An order that begins with the shape and size of the access-not with the immediacy of a car, as in urban settings, but with distance: A 250-meter footpath, where, step-by-step, the body ascends, entering the silence of this landscape.



II.

The architecture follows the original premise that, in the university, presence is experienced through movement. With its stops and pauses, this sustains the relationship between study and contemplation.

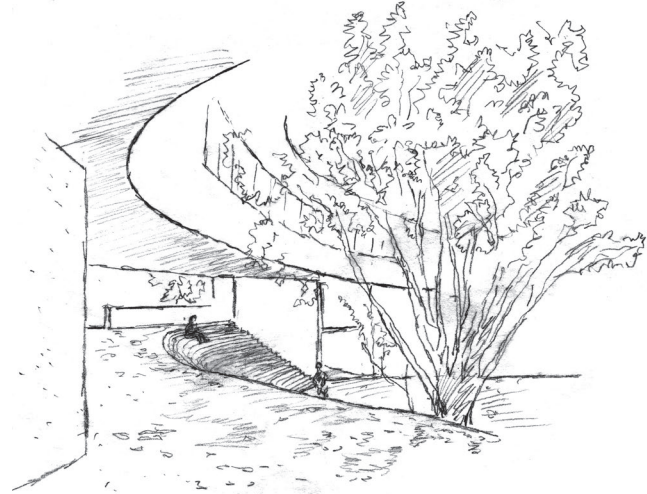
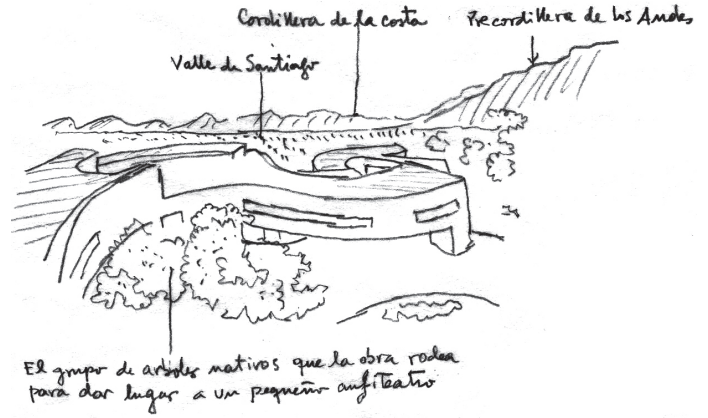
A spatiality that enables the possibility of using multiple paths. Each person may choose their own route, so that moving from one place to another gives the feeling of freedom that a stroll in the country can give: continuity of movement for the feet, so as not to lose one's pace; variation for the eyes, to sustain the interest of every walk.

Thus, a continuous space, but not a homogeneous one: its twists and turns, its changes in scale, the transitions from shadow to light, the varied nuances of its chiaroscuro... all build multiple continuities that build expectations through movement: With each step, new perspectives unfold. This "step by step", mentioned earlier, heralds its true construction.

Inside, movement up and down the slope of the terrain happens on multiple levels, connected by ramps and stairs, defying the conventional order of 'floors' and creating a sense of proximity-what José Cruz Ovalle calls 'the proximate'. This is the abstraction that arises from the order of the inhabiting body, not from one that might understand it, for example, as a principle of mathematical proportion.

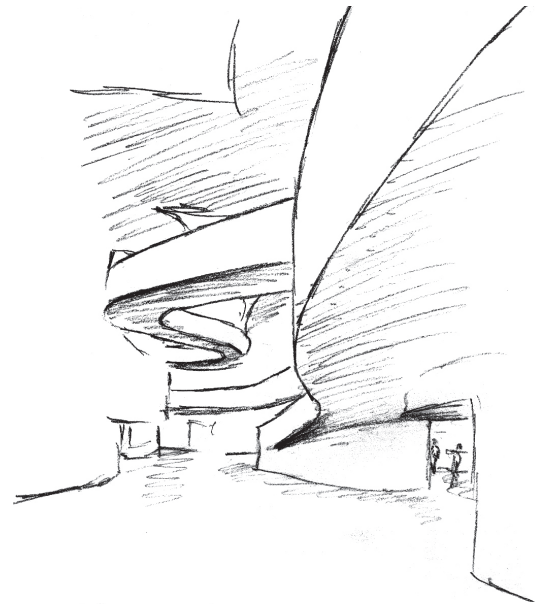
Thus, the site continues and seeks to advance the idea of an architecture conceived simultaneously as an internal void and spatial unfolding that accompanies nature to create a habitable outer perimeter.

An internal void where, unlike a Gothic cathedral, its vertical rise is not merely a spatial expansion to be contemplated from below, from the horizontal plane of a single floor, but one that can be traversed in length, width, and height-becoming simultaneously inhabited space and hovering spatial void filled with light.

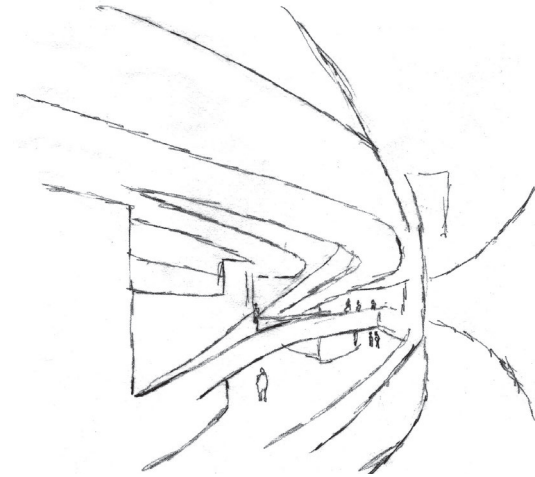


III.

The architecture introduces natural light in different forms and from various orientations, to reveal it in its constant transformation. But it does so in a non-literal way: skylights are not merely elements to capture light but are conceived as a whole to orchestrate a luminous plasticity. Thus, we distinguish between the mere capture of light and the true building of luminous space.



In this sense, white responds to this spatial unfolding—without front or back, from enclosed interiors to open exteriors - in that non-homogeneous continuity that receives the vibration of shadows from the foliage and marks the transition from shadow to light.

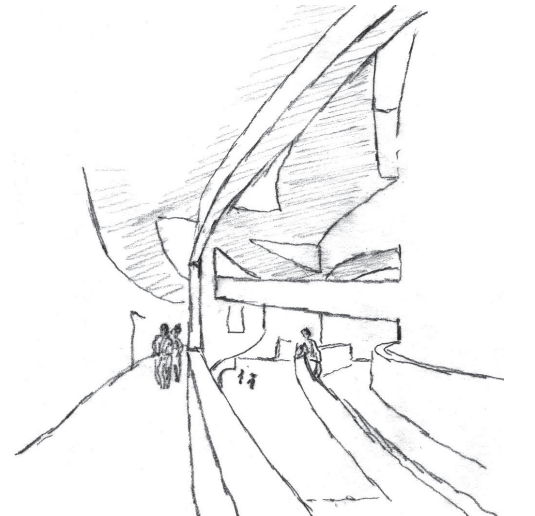


It is not a color, but an absence that allows the infinite tonalities of sunlight and the nuances of its shadows to be received and manifested in their constant variation, giving the built mass its lightness.

This plasticity of space and light is not an act of architectural power to impose presence, but rather to achieve the splendor of lightness that enables free inhabitation.

Plasticity awakens the senses and enlivens the spirit. Lightness withdraws the mass, making it present through its weightlessness. This is what a true space for study requires.

It is an architecture that sets us free—one that guides without directing. As once said, with the lightness of a “dove’s footsteps” ... like those rays of sun that reach our bodies on a winter morning.² That freedom which professors and students might truly experience by inhabiting these spaces.



Notes:

^{*1}. A site becomes present—as Alberto Cruz has said—when it is ordered according to the human body. In this sense, the place, as present on site, is work of architecture.

^{*2}. “Scope of the field of work around a new abstraction,” in the book José Cruz Ovalle. *Toward a New Abstraction*. ARQ Editorial, Santiago de Chile, 2004