

# Undergraduate Campus Architecture, Building A. Adolfo Ibáñez University, Peñalolén, Santiago, Chile

By José Cruz Ovalle - Architect

I.

The location of this university above the city of Santiago, at the foot of the Andes Mountains, constitutes the first architectural affirmation of this architecture, as it situates it within a unique dimension of our America: that of being placed decisively before the vastness of nature.

This statement posits that this location is a place, not simply a plot of land, as it represents a magnitude unique to both Chile and the continent: A huge expanse.

This location, positioned before this expanse, and un-besieged by the urban grid, places us before the freedom of the project's boundaries. This, together with the decision to abandon any preconceived mental image of it as a building, means we can begin from an origin and generate the campus without following any model.

This origin can grant the project the status of an original, insofar as it proposes the creation of a new order, not a new version of one already conceived or realized.

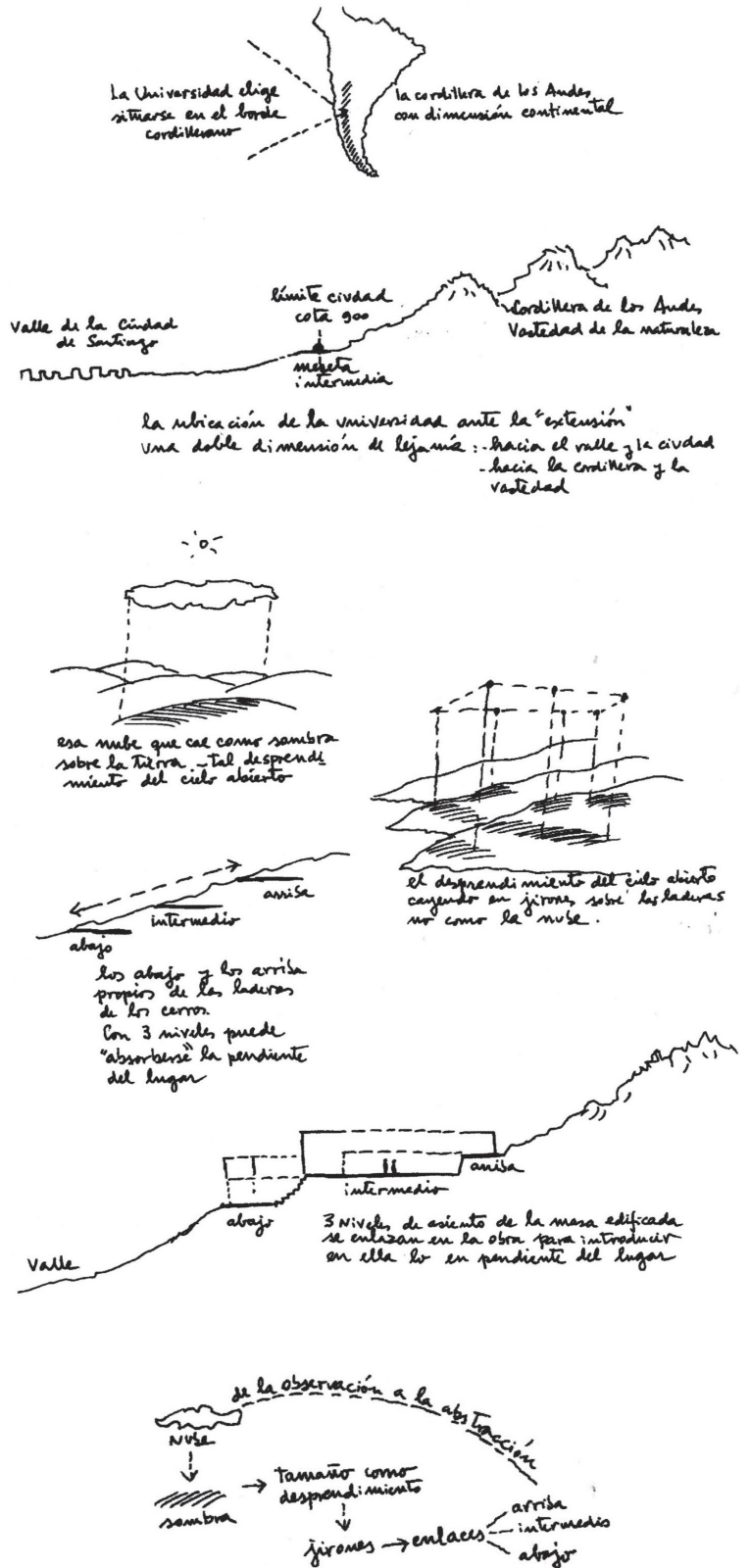
II.

The vision of professors and students occupying this place—with the freedom to gather and disperse under the open sky, was the first step in conceiving the habitable size of the site, within its boundaries, as a spaced totality emerging from the vast expanse.

In a second step, this totality was conceived as a detachment from the open sky, as if its projection onto the earth touched the ground at certain points and at others it was suspended at a certain height to cast its shadow.

In this way, on the hillside, some built volumes anchor below, others above, and others even higher, threading through the air with suspended spans that traverse horizontal or sloping areas - patios and amphitheatres - to build their depth and graduate their remoteness.

The aim is to deploy the power of a continuity capable of linking space, tying together above and below, earth and sky—elements that are inherent to this sloping terrain. The suspended segments, like a portico, will measure and trace the open sky, projecting it onto the ground.



III.

This spatiality, which brings extension into architecture, proposes that in the real act of inhabiting the university, being takes place while circulating, which, with its pauses and stops, constitutes the relationship between study and contemplation.

Circulation is defined by a continuous spatial system of rings that connect horizontal and vertical planes through ramps, enabling multiple paths. This allows students and professors to move freely, inventing their own routes.

This continuity is not homogeneous as it introduces pauses and stops within the movement, through variations in space and natural light. Light penetrates the interiors in diverse ways and from different angles—creating simultaneous depths that unfold in different directions offering different views at each step, giving meaning to movement.

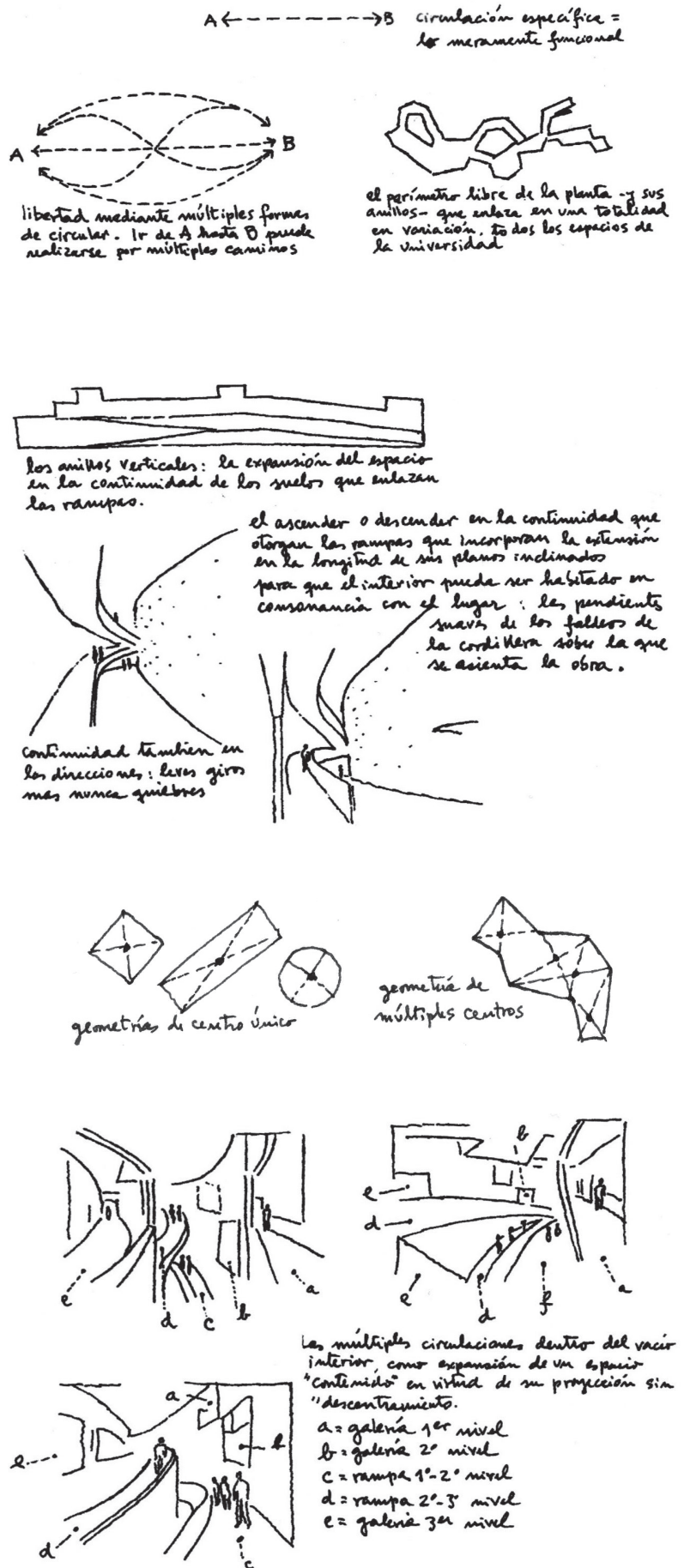
The expansion of space through these rings—which articulate its containment to accommodate pauses—relates, in this project, to the invention of a depth detached from the vanishing points.

This depth arises from a conception of architectural space as a tension between centering and decentering, from the construction of that relationship, which, in this case, leads to proposing spaces with multiple centers. This is based on the understanding that while a single center tends to restrict space, multiple centers tend to open movement.

Of course, not only the geometric configuration plays a role in this tension, but also other coordinates that shape architectural space, such as material and light, which define its gravitas—that is, the weight or lightness our body acquires in space, its degree of slenderness.

Movement is thus welcomed by this free form of circulation that unfolds by linking galleries, ramps, patios, terraces, and amphitheaters. It shapes a spatiality that transitions gradually between indoors and outdoors, inside the buildings and within the patios and loops. In this way, the body is welcomed in all its postures, from contraction to relaxation, so that you can stay at the university throughout the day without becoming fatigued.

White responds to this unfolded spatiality, without front or back; from enclosed interiors to open interiors and exteriors, in this non-homogeneous continuity, expressing its total scale as a detachment from the open sky.



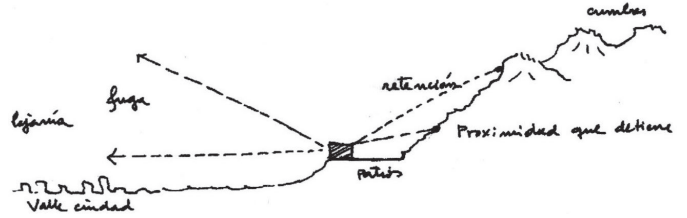
IV.

The building proposes crossing courtyards—not cloisters with enclosed perimeters—allowing nature to come through. Elevated built masses, like a mild form of shaping the relationship between ground and hillside, and between ground and building. Buildings that surround their voids: suspended patios with an equivalence between the void of sky and the void of ground. Free continuity of the facades that expand their edges - not toward a cube, nor a tower.



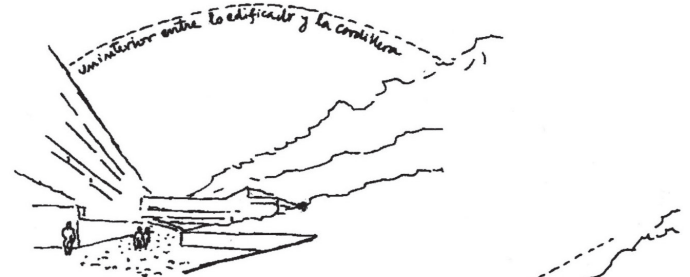
V.

From the altitude at which the project is situated, on the Andean foothills, the difference between the horizons of the valley and of the mountains is starkly contrasted: towards the valley, space escapes into the distance, whereas towards the mountains, the vertical mass retains it.

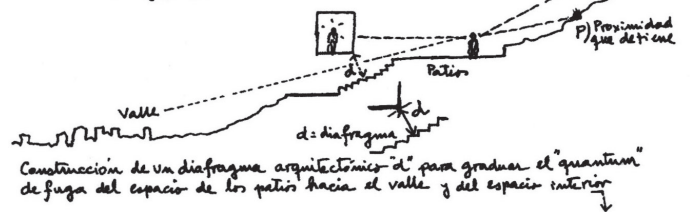


This observation of the site dictated how the exteriors were to be conceived.

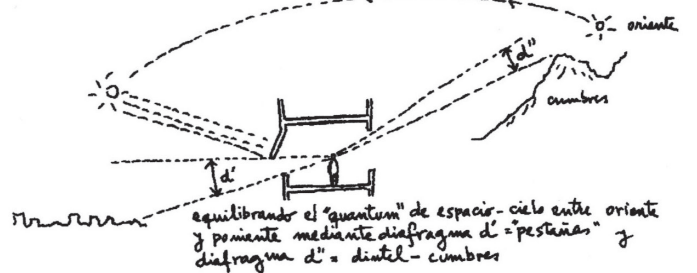
The courtyards unfold within the larger order sought between the built mass and the mountain mass: a kind of great interior, measured and modulated by those suspended volumes that take on the role of porticos.



In the openings of the patios toward the valley, space is governed by the crossing of these suspended volumes, aligned with the level of the patios, above the amphitheataters and terraces that descend toward the valley, allowing the eye to measure the distance and control the vanishing point.



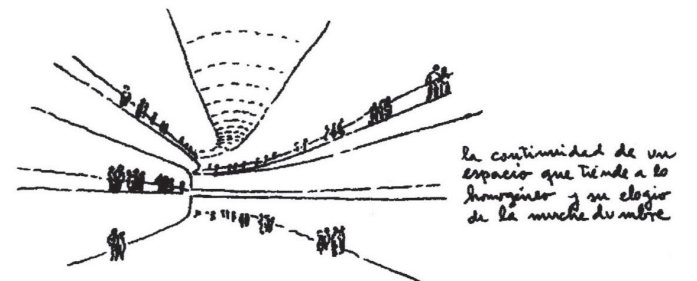
In the interior spaces, windows facing the valley are shielded by a kind of eyelid, like folds that drop from the wall itself, preserving the interior atmosphere and softening the intensity of the setting sun's rays in spring and summer.



The interior is inhabited in harmony with the place, in such a way that ascending or descending takes place on the continuity of gentle slopes, as it does on the hills of this landscape, using ramps that incorporate their extension.

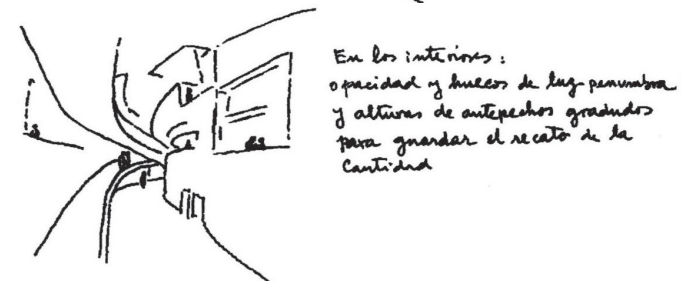
VI.

To prevent the number of students from becoming a multitude, space in the university is discretely conceived so as not to seek the praise of the crowd, as happens in certain public spaces where transparency glorifies the throng in motion.



For this reason, the opaque parapets of the galleries and their variable heights also preserve this restraint of quantity, so there is never a crowd.

This project is about one-on-one encounters, for which the continuously unfolding space, is rhythmically varied to form unique locations, not homogeneous repetitions of a space that can extend to reach its size.



This is because the architecture—as suggested at the beginning—was conceived as visions of space before any consideration of buildings.