

REDEFINING A BUILDING. METAMORPHOSIS OF A HOUSE IN ROTA

RESIGNIFICAR LO CONSTRUIDO. METAMORFOSIS
DE UNA CASA EN ROTA

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ABSTRACT

The architectural work designed by Antonio Jiménez Torrecilla and analyzed in this paper shows an innovative way of facing what is built, by converting, through a spatial reversal, a small anonymous and conventional isolated house located in a peripheral urbanization in Rota Cadiz municipality, into the starting point of a singular work of contemporary architecture through a spatial inversion. A pre-existence, the found, is preserved, but altering its spatial conception, and is added to the new so that inextricably together they make up a new way of living, resignifying what was found in a manner equivalent to those carried out by the artistic avant-garde of the 20th century. Authors such as Picasso or Duchamp opened the way for appropriations and alterations of everyday objects to subvert the principles of sculpture. A hermeneutic method is used to get a deep comprehension of the house that deconstructs the previous place to resignify the current one.

KEYWORDS

Conservation, Jiménez Torrecilla, ready-made, ruin

RESUMEN

La obra de arquitectura proyectada por Antonio Jiménez Torrecillas y analizada en este artículo muestra una manera innovadora de enfrentarse a lo construido, al convertir mediante una inversión espacial una pequeña vivienda aislada, anónima y convencional de una urbanización periférica del municipio gaditano de Rota (España) en el punto de partida de una obra singular de arquitectura contemporánea. La preexistencia, lo encontrado se conserva, pero alterando su concepción espacial, y se suma a lo nuevo de manera que indisolublemente juntos conforman otra forma de habitar, resignificando lo encontrado de manera equivalente a obras realizadas por las vanguardias artísticas del siglo XX. Autores como Picasso o Duchamp abrieron el camino a apropiaciones y alteraciones de objetos cotidianos para subvertir los principios de la escultura. Se utiliza una metodología interpretativa que permite una comprensión profunda del modo de hacer que plantea la intervención y que deconstruye el lugar anterior para resignificar el actual.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Conservación, Jiménez Torrecilla, ready-made, ruina

INTRODUCTION

The starting point of an investigation often determines the intentionality of its development. In this sense, the starting point of this one predates the content of the article. It is born of the desire to understand contemporary architecture in depth, searching for the ways of making that unfold through its study, and which to a large extent respond to problems that go beyond the concreteness of each work.

From this perspective, the research covers a significant number of case studies, with the aim of finding the keys to understanding the current architectural production. An in-depth analysis of each of the cases allows us to unveil the problems posed by the work under study¹.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The study of the work is based on this general interest, focusing on the theme of housing. This specific interest is determined by the experimentation detected in this field in recent decades. The changes in living habits, forms of production, and relationship with the urban or territorial context make it necessary to review housing models that reflect sufficient diversity to evaluate the directions in which these changes are materializing. The selection of cases ranges from collective housing (both social and luxury) to single-family dwellings, which incorporate spatially significant experimentation, whether new or refurbished. This is an ongoing research work that is being complemented by new case studies.

¹ We thus understand that this text should not be support for the explanation of the general research work, focusing ourselves on the specific approach of the case study: the house in Rota by architect Antonio Jiménez Torrecillas.

The single family house in Rota (Spain), designed by architect Antonio Jiménez Torrecillas, is selected because it incorporates a significant point of view regarding the rehabilitation of architectural remains that lack heritage value, as well as for its peculiar approach both to the spatial organization and to its relationship with the context and building materiality. This project, moreover, is especially revealing in that it addresses the problem of place from a critical and deconstructive perspective. Critical, because it distances itself from the environment questioning the keys that underlie the action; and deconstructive because it dismantles the conditions that the original building had; it revises them and returns them reformulated, in a spatial and material resignification of the place. Observations which we have not found contrasted in the bibliography produced about this work. The ways of making, verified in his analysis, seem to us representative of current architecture and suitable for discussion and dissemination in this medium. The objective in this case is to reveal how a work is produced, and what kind of architectural resources it brings into play to develop its specific spatial response.

This study employs the methodology of architectural interpretation, which implies the quest for a reasoned and open knowledge that allows us to expand architectural matter and space to other knowledge that comes from the social, artistic, legal, or historical. We have relied on a process of interpretation based on Gadamerian hermeneutics, adapted for the interpretation of architectural works by the authors of the article (Guerra de Hoyos 2023; Guerra de Hoyos et al., 2024) which is developed through a descriptive approach that, in the first place, aims to delve as deeply as possible into the work, to then inscribe it in a network of genealogical references by analogy and by contrast; and which is subsequently subjected to a process of synthesis and selection in search of a comprehensive meaning of the work that can be recognized in the text, even though it might not be made explicit as such.

In the article, we develop a more narrative than methodological approach to facilitate the understanding of the research. Nevertheless, the interpretation methodology described underlies the narrative and can be recognized.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The contemporary ruin and its resignification

In 1917, Marcel Duchamp submits a porcelain urinal, model Bedfordshire, purchased from J. L. Mott Iron Works at 118 Fifth Avenue, to the Society of Independent Artists Exhibition in New York. His intervention consisted of naming it *Fountain*, placing it upside down, and signing it with the pseudonym R. Mutt. The piece

sparked disputes on the part of the directors of the exhibition, who rejected it as they could not frame it as a work of art (Méndez Llopis & Mínguez García, 2021). Nevertheless, this work represents an aesthetic revolution by questioning the consideration of what an artistic object is by incorporating everyday industrial elements into the sphere of art. Something attempted by Duchamp in 1913 when he fixed a bicycle wheel to a stool, inaugurating the dissolution “between works of art and mere things, between fabrication and appropriation” (Méndez Llopis & Mínguez García, 2021, p. 6). The question posed then by those who rejected it must have been: what else could a white porcelain urinal by Mott be but a urinal? Evidently, Duchamp sought provocation and irony, but also a change in the way we look at everyday objects, by seeing beyond the purely descriptive, posing an alteration of meanings that repositions the object and opens it up to subjective interpretation.

In architecture, the current state of a building is the given. Measuring an old house that has reached the end of its useful life provides the opportunity to describe its construction with a technical language, obsolete qualities, installations seen and imposed at a later time, spillings, dampness that gives a special smell and the preconceived ideas of residue. This document could be called an autopsy report. It certifies that it has thus come to ruin, although all or part of it is still standing. The house seems destined to be demolished, to the disappearance of the place of lives and conversations that were extinguished within its walls. What else could be done with an old house but to demolish it?

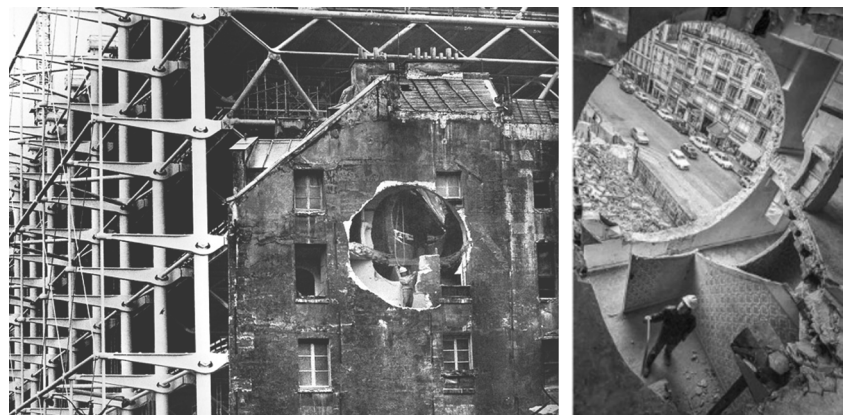
The meaning of a ruin is concretized in something to be demolished. This situation is described by Georges Perec (2008) in his returns to the Rue Vilin, in Paris, during the process of urban renovation of the street where he was born. The demolition, close in time, drives him to revisit the memory of his childhood. In the text that initiates the series of visits, he makes a description-inspection with brief memories, to make the subsequent walks an exercise of notary-inspection, in a record of the minimal changes produced in the process. This autopsy report, lacking the criteria of the technical tradition, places value on what exists as a container of personal memories.

This phenomenological and passive significance invites us to reflect on the state of the building prior to the end of its life. From the project, as proposed by Albert Speer (Amado Lorenzo et al., 2022; Montiel Alvarez, 2014), it is possible to think about that ruin and give a character to the structure for being the last thing that will remain standing. A solution close to those used in the interventions of the Aires Mateus brothers in two houses, Alenquer (1999) and

Brejos de Azeitao (2003), and in the Colegio da Trindade in Coimbra (2016), where they designed thinking that their work would disappear, and that the ruins on which they intervened will remain again (Blázquez Jesús, 2019), keeping the poetics of reintegration of the building in the landscape.

Or one can design an artistic state prior to the ruin as Matta-Clark did, performing operations in that instant prior to demolition, which recreate a new space with the introduction of light (Alliez, 2017): a section plane, the opening of a void, or the penetration of an empty volume provide an artistic sense of last gasp to that which can no longer be (Figure 1). The light of these transformed spaces cannot be grasped, only photographed. This very action introduces a poetic of memory. To advance in this resignification poses ways of being incorporated into a new architectural structure in a conversation of different languages with a single purpose, to connect the given or found architecture with the present architecture.

FIGURE 1
Demolition of the work
Conical Intersect by Gordon
Matta-Clark in Paris (1975)



Source. Salas Lamamié,
2023, p. 21.

WHEN THE HOUSE BECOMES A COURTYARD

In 2012, Jiménez Torrecillas receives a commission from two outstanding characters from the literary world, poet Luis García Montero and writer Almudena Grandes, to build their vacation home. They had acquired a building in the municipality of Rota in Cadiz, in an urbanization built during the 1950s by the U.S. military at the naval base, born under the agreements between Franco and Eisenhower (Calatrava, 2016), and occupied some land distant from the urban center, near the beach of Los Corrales and the old Almadraba de Arroyo Hondo, which today gives its name to the urbanization (Perona Cáliz, 2022). It was intended for the high command of the base, and its semi-enclosed shape, defined by a ring street surrounded by plots with single-family houses, provided a certain degree of privacy. On the other hand, the complex assumed several aspects typical of North American

housing developments, with houses built in the center of the plot, limited by a fence “more symbolic than effective” (Calatrava, 2016, p. 66) that allowed to appreciate wide outdoor spaces meandered by pine forests.

The choice of architects on the part of the owners was not fortuitous: client and architect knew each other since their youth, when they coincided in Granada in the late 1980s, where they shared the same world of concerns and interests “about the need to challenge the absolutist perspective of the avant-gardes to attempt a modernizing reading of tradition” (García Montero, 2019, p. 10). Thoughts that have later accompanied them throughout their professional careers, as shown by the fact that Jiménez Torrecillas developed his doctoral thesis entitled *El viaje de vuelta. El encuentro de la contemporaneidad a través de lo vernáculo* (2006), on these architectures, present in the villages of Andalusia, that filled his eyes with contemporaneity (Fernández Morillas, 2017).

Once the commission was accepted, the architect skillfully asked his clients to write a page about their expectations for the new house. Almudena wrote some notes entitled “My beach house.” In them, she indicates two fundamental conditions for the project: on the one hand, privacy; and, on the other, that instead of the usual house with a garden, she wanted a garden with a house. Luis, on the other hand, did not write anything (Guerrera y Rispoli, 2015), although it can be inferred from his subsequent comments that he did convey some of his concerns verbally, such as the introduction of the sound of water or the existence of courtyards, both elements with a long tradition in Granada architecture.

In the beginning was the word. All important things. Even houses must begin to be built with words. Long conversations about memory, time, and life followed long conversations about light, trees, and water. (García Montero, 2019, p. 11)

The acquired plot is located on a corner with frontage on two streets and two dividing boundaries with other equivalent plots, and retained its original house, separated from the perimeter and of great simplicity —with a basic program of three bedrooms, bathroom, living room and kitchen distributed on one floor— and a simple construction of brick load-bearing walls and roofs formed by slightly inclined thin slabs on which stood out a chimney stack and a unique finish of plaster over stone masonry. There was also a covered garage adjacent to the northwest boundary at the rear of the plot; a low brick fence

with a couple of courses of lattice and six large pine trees that were planted in the development during its construction to provide shade and integrate it with the adjoining pine forest (Perona Cáliz, 2022), and which grew twisted by the strong winds of the area. 'Difficult winds' would be the word used by Almudena Grandes to title one of her novels, in reference to the importance of the winds on the coast of Cadiz and how they condition the lives of its inhabitants.

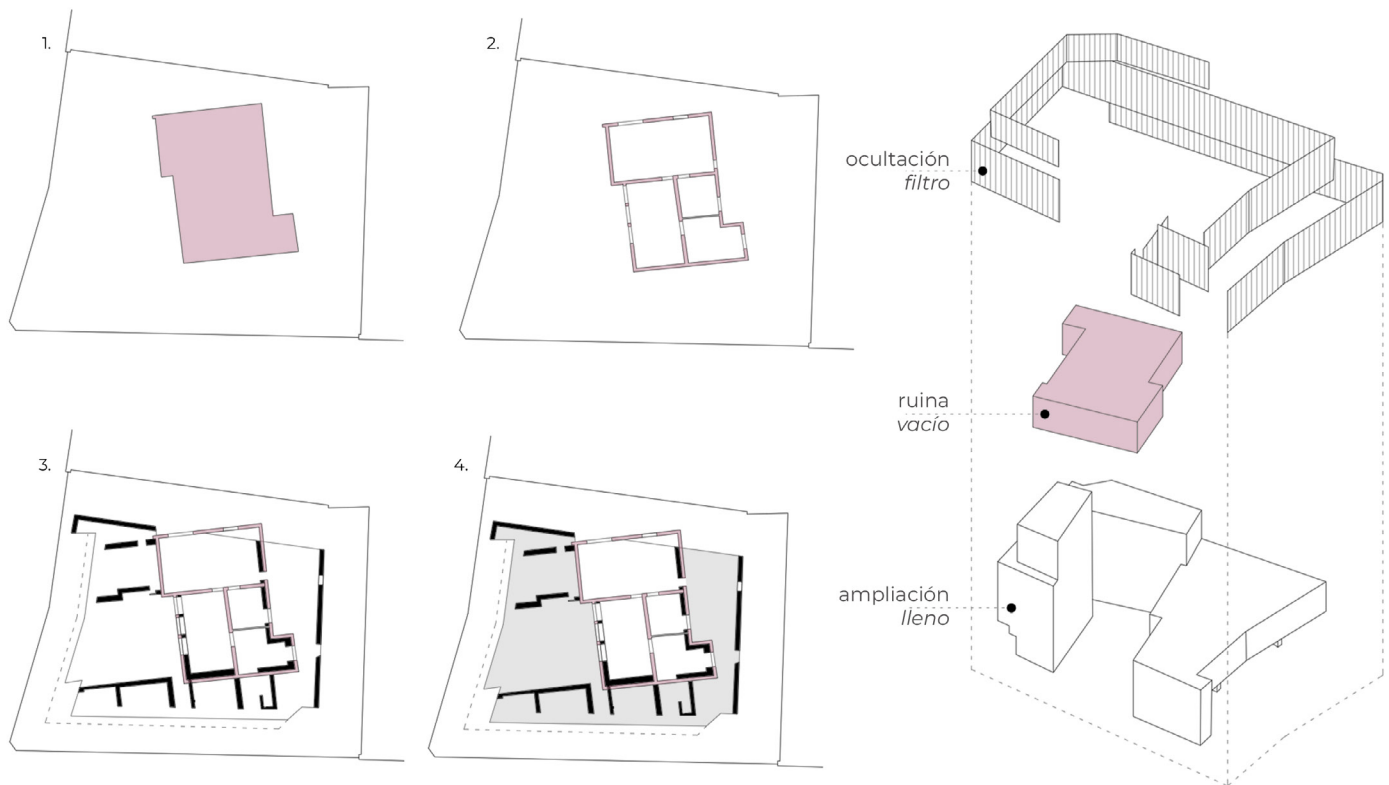
Over the years, the development underwent significant transformations, with the initial owners leaving, while the local population began to acquire the houses as second homes. The houses were enlarged, some doubling or tripling their height, and the fences were raised, so that their character became more enclosed and similar to any Spanish urbanization of the urban outskirts, a condition that did not encourage the new owners to maintain the initial conditions of the housing.

An extensive reconnaissance and study of the site including issues such as orientation, prevailing winds, morphology of trees, light, materiality of the surrounding elements, or the study of urban planning regulations; the initial guidelines given by the owners and the incorporation of their ideas led the architect to a novel approach, since, faced with the more immediate option of total demolition of the existing building, he decided to maintain the pre-existence. But rather than renovating and expand it, moving away from conventional solutions, he proposes "to incorporate in the new house, the values of the old one" (Calatrava, 2016, p. 74); turn it into a fragmented inner courtyard around which the new construction is accommodated between the pre-existing and the alignment that marks the urban planning regulations². The party walls are respected, leaving free corridors to the volume of the garage, which remains in the same location as prior to the work. From the two spaces, two entrances to the house are proposed (Figure 2).

The subversion proposed is absolute. The initial house is present and absent at the same time; it keeps its walls and holes, even the chimney is preserved, although it remains outside, in memory of what it was and its function as typical pivot of the American home. But they are all roofless, the covered part becomes open, they are exterior rooms that allow an intimate, private living, protected from the strong winds of Cádiz and suitable for self-absorption. An inner courtyard that in turn serves as a generator of the new house, which now occupies much of the old garden with an enveloping movement that seems to seek its total appropriation (Figure 3).

² According to the urban planning regulations set out in the city's General Urban Development Plan, new buildings must be separated by at least two meters from the boundaries and preserve the existing vegetation.

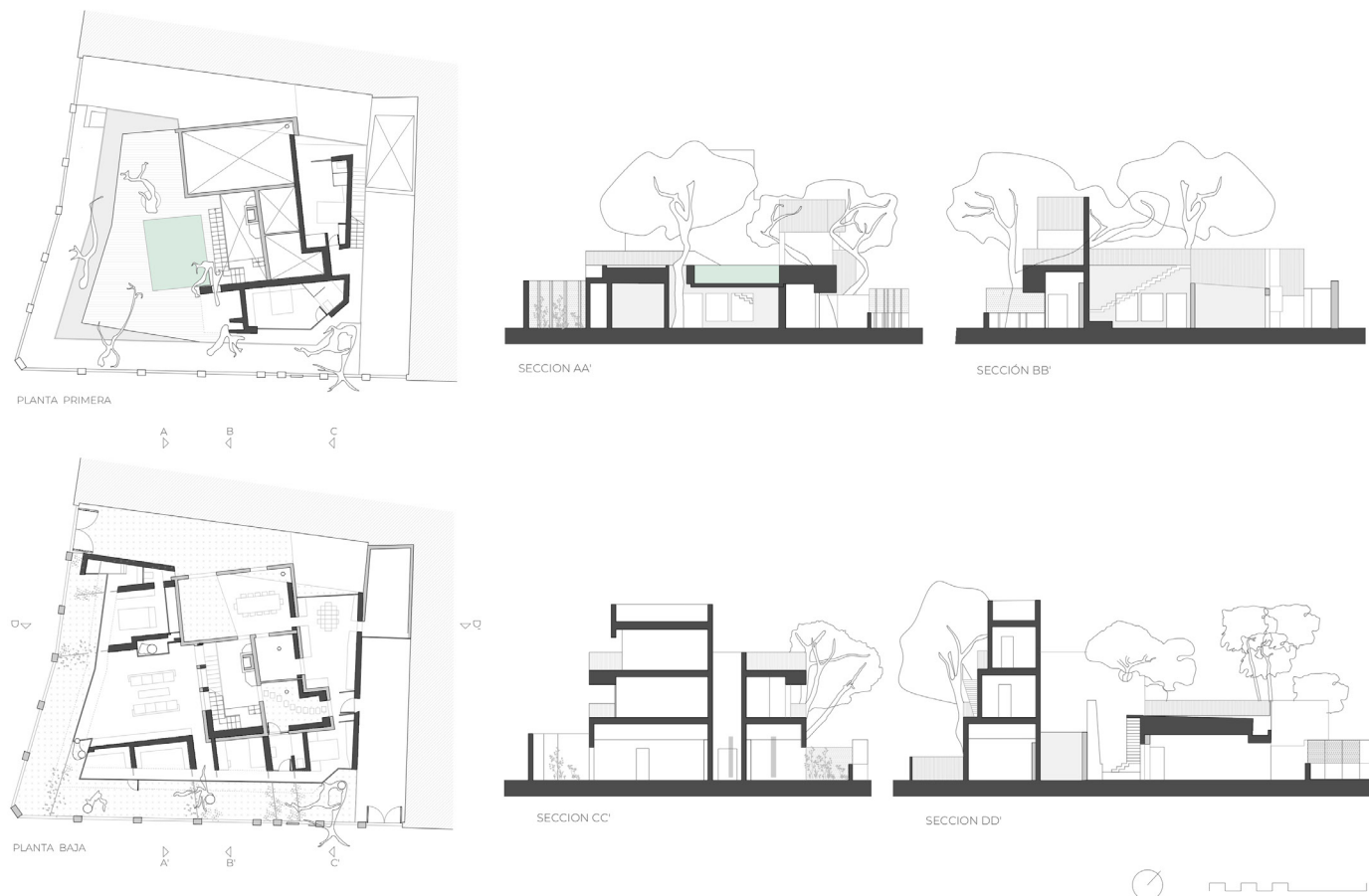
FIGURE 2
*Floor plan of the house,
 present state and
 compositional scheme of the
 intervention*



Source. The authors.

This design decision might seem to compromise the preservation of the large pine trees, one of the initial conditions, but here too actions are taken in a transgressive way. Taking advantage of a distinctive trait of these trees, which develop their crown upwards without generating new branches at the bottom, some of them are incorporated into the interior of the house. For this purpose, a thorough study was carried out, with a three-dimensional survey and the construction of models, of the interaction between the pines and the building, leaving the most central ones inserted in the new house with their robust trunks visible on the first floor, and their crowns and branches, twisted by the winds, emerging on the upper floor. This generates a garden in height that recovers the surface occupied on the lower level by the new house. This garden-terrace accommodates the swimming pool and the access to the first and second floor rooms. A 'novel' artificial garden in the style of some Japanese houses (Figure 4).

FIGURE 3
Project drawings



Source. García Montero, 2019, p. 24 (floor plans) and pp. 28-31 (sections), both redrawn by the authors.

There is a clear intention of making people that enter this space feel as if they were in the nearby pine forest, which is reaffirmed by the choice of materials. The wooden floor is placed as a reference to the existing ones on the paths over the pine forest sands, and the railings are covered with heather as a support for future vegetation, without losing now its condition of natural element, thus assimilating to a garden containing a house, the desire of the writer reflected in her initial letter. On the other hand, its elevated condition visually approaches the pine forest, eventually allowing a view to the Atlantic from the privacy of home, in the words of Luis García Montero in the video *Mi casa en la playa*:

You are in the courtyard, and you see the trees in the distance as your own, even though they belong to the pine forest or other houses. In this sense, the fusion of the interior and exterior is very noticeable. Perhaps it is an attempt to escape from all that is sharply divided. It is a beautiful way of bringing immodesty into beauty and art. (Guerrera & Rispoli, 2015, 14m30s)

FIGURE 4

Study of the existing trees and their relationship to the house



Note. The introduction of the trees between the walls of the intervention is highlighted, acting as a pre-existence and enhancement.

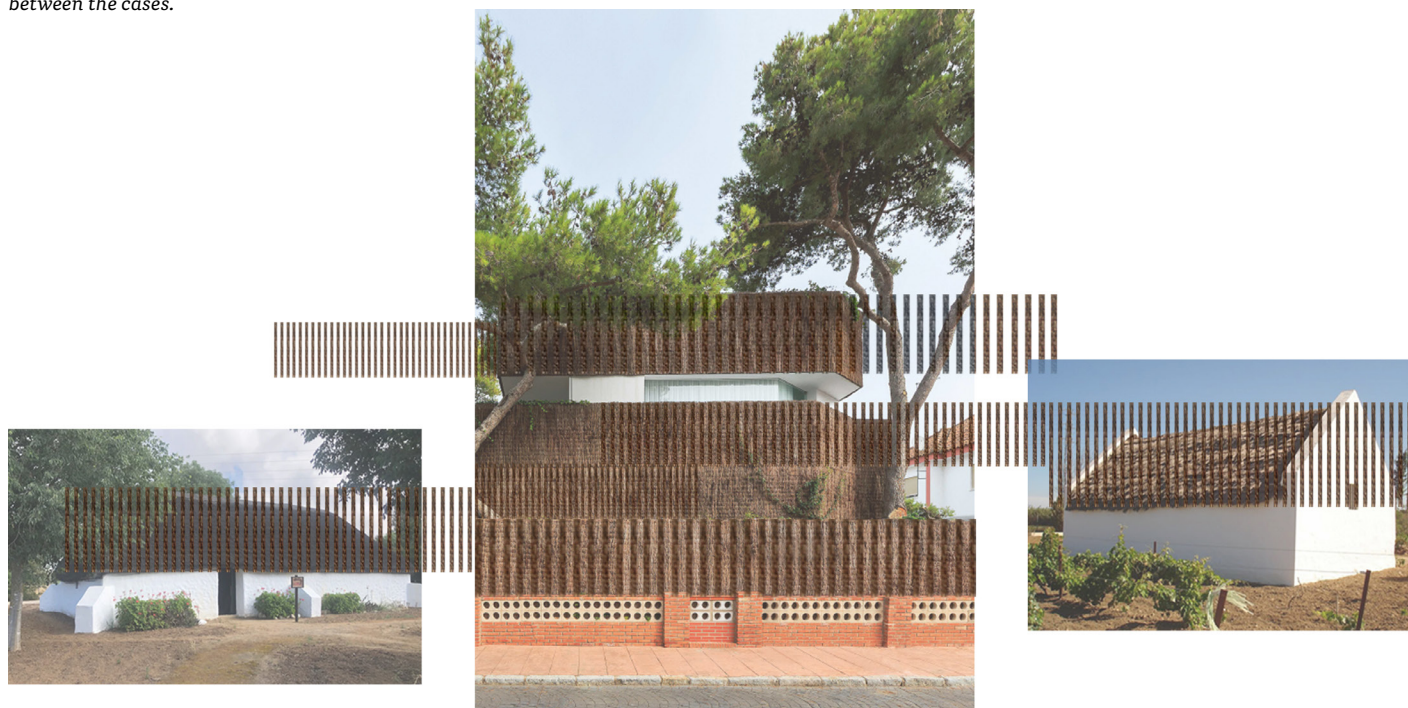
Source. Photographs by Antonio Luis Martínez Cano (Calatrava, 2016, pp. 77, 78 y 81). Models: Estudio Jiménez Torrecillas. Image manipulation and montage by the authors.

³ The primitive huts of the mayetos (name given to the traditional farmers of Rota) were built entirely of reeds (heather) gathered from the mouth of the Guadalquivir River, which were completely waterproof.

The decision to preserve the existing structure as the basis for the project is reinforced by keeping the garage, perimeter fencing, and access points. The first one blends naturally into the new surrounding structure, while the second is elevated wrapped in heather. The operation gives the house a distinctive appearance, with a dematerialization akin to the traditional huts of the area³ (*Centro de Recuperación de la Mayetería. Sobre el arte tradicional para extraer los frutos de la tierra*, 2024), to transform it in the future into a vegetation element that contains a house inside. A camouflage operation that blends it into the environment (Fernández & de Fontcuberta, 2015) (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5

Exterior view of the house in the center and its material relationship with the Mayetas huts in Rota on the left and right. Framework overlay showing the material correlation between the cases.



Source. Photographs: left and right extracted from *Centro de Recuperación de la Mayetería. Sobre el arte tradicional para extraer los frutos de la tierra*, 2024. Center: photographs by Antonio Luis Martínez Cano (Calatrava, 2016, p. 69).

Once inside the fence, access is through one of the narrowest points of the new enclosure, making the added section almost invisible, creating the illusion that it is a brief passage from the exterior to the new interior courtyards. So, from the small hallway, one can glimpse that the heart of the house is empty but fragmented, moving away from the traditional courtyard house and closer to a labyrinth of enclosed gardens, a result of the respect for the previous building, of which all the walls and openings have been preserved, save for the entrance to the kitchen and the secondary partitions. The action maintains the domestic scale of the old interior spaces, only without the roof. During the work, the architect wrote to his client: “I think we were right to keep the wall of the courtyard with the bay tree. Tell Almudena we can always knock it down, but also tell her that I like that labyrinth of intimacy” (García Montero, 2019, p. 10).

The final result is four roofless volumes that can be traversed sequentially: the first one, which contained the old kitchen and entrance hall, becomes the access courtyard behind the hallway; opposite this, the old living room now accommodates the staircase leading to the upper floors and the access to the new living room; the third is made up of two of the former bedrooms and the bathroom, becoming a spacious open-air dining room connected to the kitchen and the perimeter garden, constituting the second entrance to the house from the outside. Finally, through this third courtyard, we access another one that is the footprint of a former bedroom that is now linked to the new kitchen, but without connection to the other elements of the house. This last courtyard is adjacent to the entrance courtyard, although isolated and disconnected from it. This layout creates a spiral route; we enter and, as we reach one room, the other spaces unfold around the perimeter. A structure that is reinforced by the materials used in the flooring: initially earth with ceramic tiles, then a courtyard with concrete flooring, which leads to a third partially paved courtyard, and then back to the fourth, again with earth flooring (Figure 6).

The new attached section is also structured with sequential spiral routes. On the ground floor, we could start from the garage and move on to the kitchen, the hall, the guest room, a bathroom, the owners' offices, the living room, and the master bedroom and bathroom, in an exterior perimetral circulation that finds other alternatives in the form of interior bypasses that allow for the private use of the rooms without losing the sequential character of the spaces. This strategy is also maintained on the upper floors, although here most of the circulation areas are open, and each room, with its own bathroom, constitutes an independent volume, enveloping the house on the northeast and southeast façades in a counterclockwise direction. This achieves a setback of the building from the façade line that breaks up the sections and dematerializes the volume towards the exterior, a fact that is reinforced by the lightness and ambiguity of the heather.

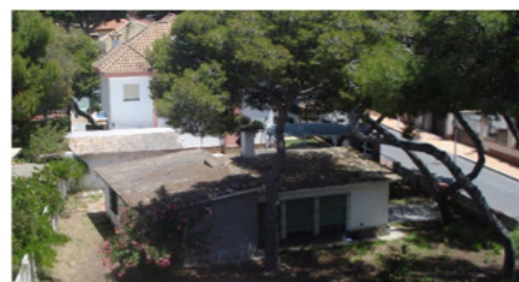
With this sequential description, we might think that the house has a very open interior and even exterior structure, but in the complex interplay established by the architect with this continuous spiral movement, a radial fragmentation is superimposed that not only compartmentalizes the empty heart of the house, but also divides the new surrounding corridor to create the different private spaces requested by the owners, which open onto the narrow perimetral space, with their backs to each other, so that each room has its own small garden, as the walls that subdivide the interior of the building are extended with the light materiality of heather towards the exterior fencing, creating

private enclosures that merge with the rooms with which they connect. This strategy means that even when you are inside, you have the feeling of being in a landscaped outdoor space, once again creating the illusion of living in a garden (Figure 7). The house is filled with intermediate spaces such as those defined by Kapstein Lomboy, structured to suit its occupants:

Where they can be as free as in a controlled interior, but incorporating natural elements (sun, wind, rain, and landscape) from a small world that can be organized, transformed, and domesticated. Its scale and character allow for personalization and appropriation, with the identification-projection relation coexisting between inhabitant-habitat and inhabiting. (Fernández-Nieto et al., 2021, p. 79)

FIGURE 6

Aerial view of the four new interior courtyards built on the base of the pre-existing dwelling, whose deconstruction process is reflected on the left



Source. Photographs: left, photograph by Antonio Luis Martínez (Calatrava, 2016, pp. 70-71); right, extracted from Guerrero & Rispoli (2015). Montage by the authors.

FIGURE 7

Side and aerial views of the relationship between the house and the new side garden.



Source. Photographs by Antonio Luis Martínez Cano (Perona, 2022, p. 78). Montage by the authors.

PARALLEL READINGS OF APPROPRIATIONS IN ARCHITECTURE

This mature work by Jiménez Torrecillas reflects much of his research, both from his formative years and his professional and teaching career. While the owners' choice was based on a friendship forged in the 1980s, these were also the years when he trained at the Seville School of Architecture (Hernández Soriano, 2015, p. 17). This was a period that saw a significant rapprochement with and appreciation of built heritage. The

influence of Aldo Rossi became most evident in the academic sphere from the mid-1970s onwards, particularly through professors such as Antonio Barrionuevo Ferrer, Francisco Torres Martínez, the brothers Manuel and Juan Luis Trillo, and Guillermo Vázquez Consuegra, who defined Rossi's influence in an interview as:

teaching students to understand the city as a formal expression of history and, therefore, as a fundamental reference for architectural design. This theoretical contribution led to the desire to build architecture that is more suited to our cities, deeply connected to the reality of the place (Sainz Gutiérrez, 2015, p. 12)

Jiménez Torrecillas's own professional career is marked by this type of commission, in which he offers some very different proposals in relation to existing structures, exploring possibilities that he will refine over time. This text does not seek to analyze that evolution, but rather to relate the attitude he proposes in this work to other approaches that, over a broad time span, resonate and dialogue with the house in Rota.

Finding a pre-existing structure of the kind we are studying, very far from being a heritage site, and not demolishing it entirely requires an initial decision that determines the starting point: we can approach it from the outside, that is, insert the pre-existing structure into the heart of the work; or, as a second possibility, use the pre-existing structure as a container for the intervention. In the first case, the limits are determined by the plot, and the form of growth is established from these geometric constraints. A previous example of this approach can be found in Frank Gehry's house in Santa Monica (1978). In this case, the original building is surrounded by a structure that reaches the limits of the plot on two of its sides. The width of the two added bays is marked by these limits, so that the circulation in the house follows a perimeter route. The interior is partially manipulated, closing a longitudinal section of the ground floor but maintaining access to the upper floor.

Gehry takes an equally ambiguous approach to the interior space, retaining part of the previous house but drilling holes and creating transparencies between the larger rooms and drastically changing their materiality. The new façade is almost completely closed off from the street, and the surrounding space is folded into different volumes that punctuate the route through the property with a multiplicity of situations in terms of lighting and height.

Something very different happens when an outward expansion of existing structures is not constrained by restrictive plot boundaries. A good example of this is the work carried out in different phases by Alison and Peter Smithson on the Hexenhaus in Hessen between 1986 and 2002.

On a huge plot, with a large wooded area and an access far off from the original cabin, the Smithsons proposed a double growth. On the one hand, the creation of an enveloping space, like a covered porch, which is first attached to one side and then extended around the house, reaching almost all of its freestanding façades. This extension is almost a folding outward of the house's openings, which expand into outdoor living spaces, protected and at the same time exposed to the desired northern European sun.

However, the second type of extension is the one that allows for a broader exploration of the house's territory, as it is achieved by adding pavilions at different points on the plot. These have a heterogeneous or even ambiguous functionality, as can be understood by the name given to a meditation pavilion, *Hexenbessenraum*, meaning witch's broom room. The route between the house and almost all the pavilions is consolidated by the construction of very light walkways that unify and connect the different additions to the original core.

Here, the Smithsons take the same liberty as Gehry in Santa Monica, feeling free to remove partitions and drill through floors, creating transparency between the attached spaces and the existing ones, but also between the ground and the sky (Figure 8).

In Rota, the decision to expand outward, leaving the previous house as an empty shell, can be understood as a lesson learned from both projects, since in neither case does the envelope reach the façades, among other reasons due to its adaptation to current urban planning regulations. It does, however, fold around it, shaping both the interior and exterior spaces with its geometry. It is dematerialized, but the constrained dimensions of the plot limit the freedom the Smithsons had. On the façades, Jiménez Torrecillas extends the building to the line marked by the existing pine trees around the perimeter of the plot, with shifts between floors and reduced perimeter open spaces on the ground floor, protected by the upper floor, which cantilevers out until almost touching the trees.

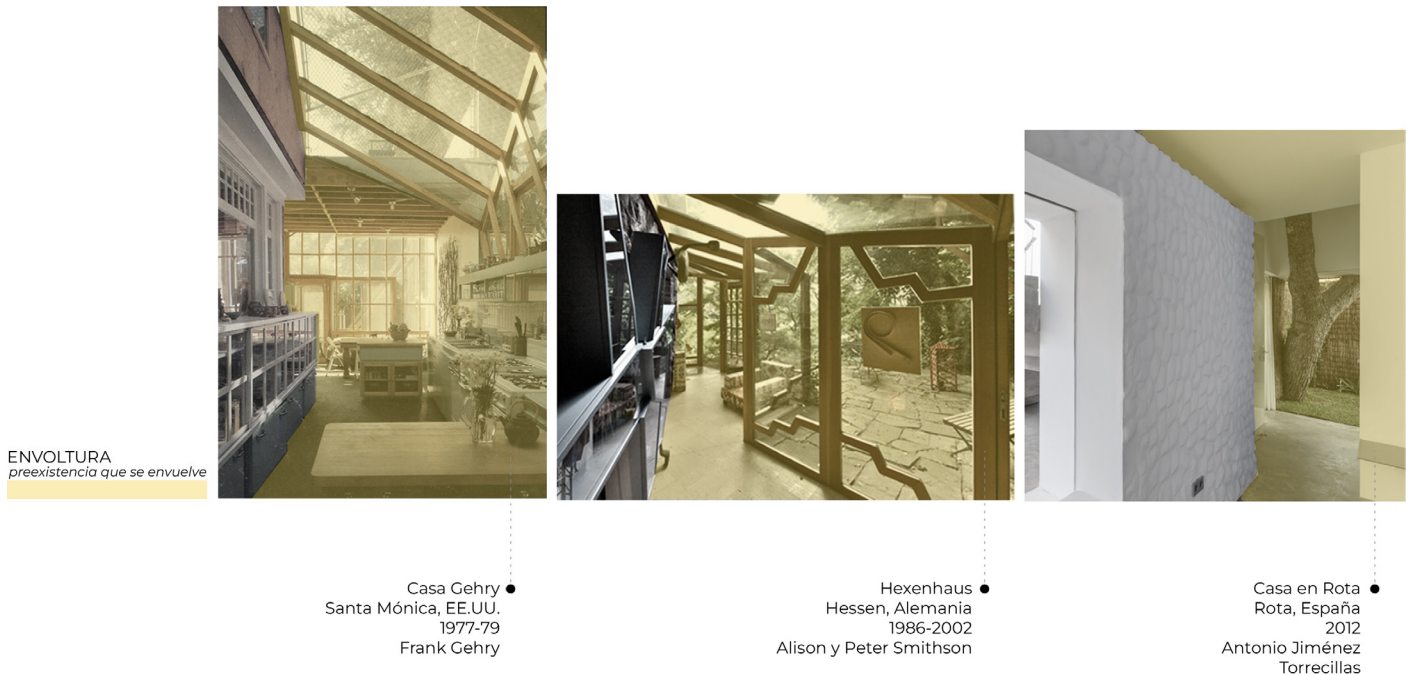
The operation of corrosion of the pre-existing structure in Rota is radical, as the previous building had been completely gutted, leaving only the walls. The interior space becomes exterior, in a reversal of its role and meaning, with the living room fireplace

preserved in the second courtyard, a silent witness to a bygone way of life. As if seeking to establish a relationship of distance with the pre-existing structure despite integrating it, something that Jiménez Torrecillas had also explored in two previous projects, the intervention in the Nasrid wall in Granada (2006) and the house in the 'Las Hermanillas' farmstead (2009).

The Nasrid wall, dating from the early 16th century, closes a gap that has existed since the 19th century with a construction that restores the lost volume but is slightly offset, without touching the historical remains, from which it is also distinguished by its materiality, as it is built with stacked granite slabs in contrast to the Nasrid rammed earth. It also differs structurally, as it does not require the massiveness of the ground wall, and the slabs form two walls that leave an empty interior, a passageway that allows us to walk inside the wall with two additional uses: connecting two historically separate areas of the urban fabric, and looking out over the city through small random gaps in the stacking.

FIGURE 8

Correlation between the cases presented and the house in Rota, where the existing structure is enveloped in a new architectural design highlighted in yellow



Source. Photographs (from left to right): Liao Yusheng, 2010 (<https://www.archdaily.com/67321/gehry-residence-frank-gehry> 2010), Axel Bruchhäuser (Fernández-Villalobos, 2024, p. 27) and Antonio Luis Martínez Cano (Calatrava, 2016, p. 81). Image processing and composition by the authors.

A contemporary, fragmented, and changing view that recreates the view from the latticework of the Alhambra. A natural and respectful placement of the new architecture alongside the old, which guarantees, in a way, that cities can continue to actively enrich and build on their architectural tradition (Vial, 2024).

In the unbuilt project for the Las Hermanillas farmhouse, Jiménez Torrecillas once again distances himself from the existing structure, which he preserves as it is, with its ruinous appearance. In this case, he envelops it with a new building that contains the dwelling, whose central courtyard shelters the pre-existing structure, which can be seen from any room in the house.

In both cases, a physical and conceptual distance is established with the past: it is embraced, it is admired, but not merged or 'touched', as if this gesture were the appropriate way to show respect for its preservation. An operation of estrangement from the ruin that in the Rota house is compensated by focusing on the powerful materiality of the plastered stone masonry of the pre-existing walls and its contrast with the new structure and the pine trunks (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9

Correlation of quoted works by Antonio Jiménez Torrecillas where there is a close relationship between the new elements, highlighted in pink, and the pre-existing elements



TANGENCIA
preexistencia que se roza

Muralla Nazarí ●
Granada, España
2002-06
Antonio Jiménez
Torrecillas



Cortijo "Las Hermanillas" ●
Granada, España
2009
Antonio Jiménez
Torrecillas



Casa en Rota ●
Rota, España
2012
Antonio Jiménez
Torrecillas

Source. Photographs (from left to right): Arredondo et al., 2006 (<https://www.archdaily.cl/cl/762203/muralla-nazari-en-el-alto-albaicin-antonio-jimenez-torrecillas>); Jiménez Torrecilla (2010, p. 196) and Antonio Luis Martínez Cano, 2015 (<https://antonioluismartinez.com/fotografia/casa-con-patio-en-rota-cadiz/>). Image processing and montage by the authors.

It is paradoxical to see in other examples how the possibility of contact with the pre-existing structure is accentuated when the remains have less spatiality and all that is left to work with is a wall or a few isolated remains. In such cases, some architects choose to 'preserve' them almost entirely, while others 'make use' of them incorporating them directly into the project. These attitudes are exemplified in the Folly Solar Pavilion or Upper Lawn by the Smithsons (Whiltshire, 1959), or in the 1413 house by

Harquitectes (Ullastret, 2016), where the old walls remain fully recognizable and the new is attached to the old, using it as an enclosure or structural support, but recognizing it as something different from what is added.

But what happens when we consider the alternative possibility of 'growing inside' the pre-existing structure? If we analyze the career of the Aires Mateus brothers through their three works mentioned above in Alenquer, Brejos de Azeitao, and Coimbra, we can see how the pre-existing structure takes on a very different role. In all three projects, the elements with the greatest timelessness are evaluated, and it is concluded that it is the stone walls, the thick walls that work under compression, that should remain, with the other elements being restored more freely (Blazquez Jesús, 2019). The formal impact of the past is much more evident, conditioning the work, especially when the space to be occupied is not very large (Figure 10).

FIGURE 10

Correlación de las obras de los hermanos Aires Mateus y la casa en Rota donde la alteración de lo construido se produce mediante la introducción de elementos en el interior, sin alterar la envolvente



Note. Pre-existences are highlighted in blue.

Source. Photographs (from left to right): Daniel Malhão (left: Miranda, 2024, p. 76 and right: www.archdaily.cl, 2003), Antonio Luís Martínez Cano (Calatrava, 2016, p. 81) and Nelson Garrido (TC: Tribuna de la construcción, 2020, p. 157). Image processing and montage by the authors.

Like Jiménez Torrecillas, Aires Mateus feels free to reformulate the previous building without demolishing it, altering meanings and modifying openings in the existing walls. However, the Portuguese architects only carry out the spatial inversion inside, with the clash between the old skin and the new volumes leaving a multiplicity of interstitial spaces with clear plastic potential.

CONCLUSIONS

When starting a renovation or intervention project, the first step is to assess the site. The survey of an existing building is the result of data collection in the field. Triangulation remains the basis for this work. At a minimum, each room is broken down into two triangles and the hands run through every corner with a tape measure to take five measurements. It is physical contact with the building and a time to recognize the light, the environment, and the possible horizons.

At that moment, the project begins to take shape based on what already exists. The architect sees the hidden possibilities of this small, anonymous house built by the American military in the physical work of measuring, wondering about its material value and how its new owners might inhabit it. The answer is a courtyard made from old rooms, now open to the sky, walls that have their own geography and topography representing the territory of memory. A resignified fireplace in an outdoor courtyard, a window read from the back, or a wall of haphazard stones plastered to the scale of the dune landscape outside, the murmur of water springing from a wall reminiscent of Granada. The character of the house is captured through timeless elements that are redefined and incorporated. On the beach, the passage of time is relaxed, like the walls of the nearby beach of Corrales that have been standing for three thousand years. It is time that transcends in the renewed light of the domestic space, time scaled to the dimensions of the rooms, with the sound of water flowing from a fountain and the intimacy sought by those who inhabit it (Figure 11).

We are all links in a single chain. Time, legacy, continuity... We stand on the shoulders of our predecessors. We use their discoveries as a springboard, incorporating new mistakes, which are a source of new riches. Where does true value lie? In what we have generously inherited, or in what we must generously contribute? (Jiménez Torrecillas, 2012, p. 133)

The new dwelling embraces the potential offered by the existing structures, despite their everyday nature and lack of architectural value. In a centripetal and ascending manner, the new structure envelops the previous construction, which is transformed into a series of connected voids. By modifying its initial spatial conception and altering its meaning, it becomes the heart of this building, endowing it with values of its own that would never have existed without its humble presence and the transformative vision of the architect, who was able to capture hidden qualities, perhaps equivalent to those that Picasso saw in the rickety handlebars and saddle of the bicycle that now form the head of his bull.

FIGURE 11

Evolution of the house in Rota from its initial state as contemporary ruin to its final state and principles that shape the work



Note. Above, from left to right, evolution of the Rota house from its initial state as contemporary ruin to its final state. Below, the three principles that shape the house with the different states of the work.

Source. Photographs by Antonio Luís Martínez Cano, 2015 (<https://antonioluismartinez.com/fotografia/casa-con-patio-en-rota-cadiz/>). Image processing and montage by the authors.

These operations reflect a series of approaches that are intrinsically contemporary. The first is working with the empty space as generative core of the home, not only playing an organizing role in the spaces, but also acquiring a strong symbolic charge by identifying with memory. Another tool used is the wrapping process, based on understanding architecture as an addition of layers that generate habitable spaces between them, so that the transparency and permeability of these wrappings produce spatial conditions that can be particularized in each space created. Finally, there is a way of working in which the remains 'almost touch' the new, or the natural, endowing the project with tactile sense, as occurs in the Eastern techniques of ceramic restoration with noble materials (kintsugi), where the delicate union between the added and the pre-existing achieves an extra value for the ensemble that was not there before it was broken.

To re-signify a fragment of architecture that has been given is to incorporate it coherently into a project. The new meaning will prevail as long as it is an interpretation of all the conditions of the work. After the autopsy, the architect was able to find what still had another life and give birth to a ruin in the center of the house,

underpinned by the new house that was designed. The trees, the enclosure of the plot, and the walls of that old house will remain standing for another generation. The house tells a story made into a courtyard. The material of architecture is architecture itself.

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