



LA CULTURA Y LA CIUDAD

JUAN CALATRAVA
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(eds.)

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Y
LA CIUDAD

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CITY OVERLAYS. ON THE *MERCAT DE SANTA CATERINA* BY EMBT

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Apart from merely illustrating the city in its well understood form, on occasion urban representation can also construct new ways of perceiving the urban environment. Such drawings may in fact take an active role in the design method. This article asks how Enric Miralles and his studio EMBT used a historical overlay plan¹ to investigate the growth of Barcelona's Ribera district, and developed this into a successful counter-proposal to the Municipal masterplan for the regeneration of the neighbourhood. This innovative urban representation is discussed both as a piece of analysis and also as a design method capable of fusing a transformative urban regeneration project with the existing city, its local community and its ancient sense of place². This article considers how the precise means of representation managed to develop a new method of constructing an understanding of the city.

A decade after the re-opening of the Santa Caterina market, both the architectural project and its overall urban masterplan has proved successful in many respects, particularly in its swift appropriation by a wide variety of groups. This is particularly noteworthy considering the complexity of the project, the conflicting views of the many parties concerned and the fact that the masterplan was proposed as an alternative to the approved municipal plan, confronting the major scheme of demolition and reconstruction which this envisaged³.

In the early 1990s, the district of La Ribera in the historic centre of Barcelona was in urgent need of urban regeneration. Over crowding and serious deterioration of large parts of the building fabric made living conditions very poor and which was made worse by the lack of open public space⁴.

The municipal masterplan drawn up to resolve this situation involved applying a strategy often referred to as «esponjament» —literally *sponging*⁵. This involved the total demolition of large areas of the centre of the neighbourhood in order to open up new public

1. EMBT Arq. Ass, *Plano de superposición histórica*, Barcelona, 1996.

2. Urban plan, PERI 1995-6. *Santa Caterina Refurbishment project*, 1997-2005.

3. Municipal plan, *Pla especial de reforma interior del sector oriental del centre historic de Barcelona*, Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1985.

4. Manuel da Solà-Morales, *Ten Lessons on Barcelona*, Barcelona, COAC, 2008.

5. Enric Miralles, «Esponjament», *El País*, 9/11/1995.

spaces, and the construction of large new housing blocks in the new sites made available. This *tabla rasa* strategy, with its complete disregard for the surrounding urban fabric and the cultural memory of the inhabitants, aroused considerable complaint amongst the local community. In reaction to this, the alternative masterplan developed by Enric Miralles and his studio EMBT concentrated on how the existing city had grown. In order to understand the processes behind urban change, EMBT drew an overlay plan made up of a series of layers each showing the urban plan at a different chronological period.

The article is organised according to three principle ideas, each of which develops out of the last. The first considers the physical structure of the drawing comprising separate layers. The second considers the effect that the transparency of the layers had on the design process that developed out of the initial urban analysis. The third section considers how this design process evolved in the final stage of the Santa Caterina Market.

1. HISTORICAL LAYERS

The layered structure of the drawing makes visible a new way of understanding the growth of the city through precisely comparing critical moments of urban change at different historical periods.

Each layer of the plan has been drawn on tracing paper with one single line-weight and no hatching. The earliest layer shows the late Medieval plan of the Ribera district. The logic of its urban growth can be seen to have followed a relatively consistent pattern for centuries. The plan shows monasteries and churches in detail, positioning them as the major generating elements of this part of the medieval city. Small interventions, such as the widenings at either end of Montcada street helped to resolve specific and isolated points of congestion albeit in a piecemeal fashion⁶. The Medieval city grew and densified in an organic fashion resolving particular urban problems gradually as they arose.

The site of the current market and its surroundings were developed from the 11th century onwards around a church which was rebuilt and expanded on a number of occasions to become one of the city's main Gothic monasteries, finally known as Santa Caterina. The late gothic church was equivalent in scale to Santa Maria del Mar, with several cloisters and associated buildings forming an enclosed monastic complex. The city gradually grew up around the monastery until it reached the point of suffocation in the early 19th century when the monastery and its surrounding fields were repossessed, the church destroyed and the site transformed into the first covered market in Barcelona. This new use maintained the site as a focal point in the life of the neighbourhood.

Given the generating role played by the churches, monastery and market on the development of the surrounding district, EMBT concentrated on maintaining the site as a focal point in the new urban plan capable of regenerating the surrounding city culturally, socially and economically. Miralles used the method of designing with historical overlays for the architectural refurbishment of the market in the same way as for the urban plan.

6. Antonio Mora and Julián Galindo, «Construyendo con la mirada. Las capilaridades de la Ciutat Vella de Barcelona», in Estanislao Roca (ed.), *Walking the City*, Barcelona, Ediciones UB, 2015.

The structure of the drawing has been crucial to understanding the process of urban growth in the district. Separating the urban plan into historical layers allows different points in the cities development to be directly compared and contrasted showing a sequence of steps of cause and effect. Each new layer resolves the problems of the layer beneath whilst in turn generating new problems to be resolved by the layers above. This separates the evolution of the city into a series of frames, as in film, which when seen in sequence show a dynamic representation of the city growing and changing over the course of time. The degree of change between each stage shows the contemporary impact which specific interventions had on the cityscape in terms of the architectural and patrimonial consequences as well as the effect on the health of the city. The form of representation illustrates the *process* of urban growth rather than just concentrating on the final results of each urban phase.

This method of analysing urban growth was then developed by extending the logic of the existing urban pattern across the new urban proposal, particularly through its fragmentation, scale, critical distances and permeability. The newly planned spaces retain a scale similar to those elsewhere in the neighbourhood. The fragmented street pattern has been reinterpreted to avoid regularity and monotony. Whilst a certain amount of the more decrepit constructions have been demolished, many old parts have been maintained either in their physical materials or in the volumes or alignments of the original buildings. At the same time, new uses have been inserted into the neighbourhood, with new types of housing and new facilities intended to strengthen the existing life and commerce of the neighbourhood rather than hoping to generate new activity from scratch⁷.

2. TRANSPARENT OVERLAYS

The overlapping of consecutive transparent layers shows that the distribution of buildings on the Santa Caterina site followed a clear pattern over the course of several centuries. This pattern was incorporated once again into the design of the new market. The initial scheme positioned the new higher social housing towers at the rear of the site in the location once occupied by the volume of the church of equivalent height, whilst the lower elevation of the market and previous monastic buildings remain at approximately two storeys tall. The open space of the original cloister has also been reused as the central patio behind the new market building. A number of elements from previous buildings have been quoted in the new project. For example, the vaulting pattern of the main gothic church and cloister were drawn onto the paving design for the external spaces, as if tracing the ceiling pattern from one previous plan directly onto the paving pattern of the new plan. A similar approach has been taken to many other building components salvaged from the previous market⁸.

The fact that the layers are transparent means that the history of urban interventions can be seen in direct relation to the urban problems they were intended to resolve. The transparencies allow all layers to be compared simultaneously thus illustrating the consequences of the city's major interventions. The opening of the Via Laitana demonstrates

7. Ibid.

8. Josep Rovira (ed.), *Enric Miralles 1972-2000*, Barcelona, Arquia, 2011.

a particularly extreme urban intervention where the scale of demolition required to make way for the Via Laietana becomes particularly evident in the drawing as well as the removal (and subsequent reconstruction) of the entire medieval monastery of La Concepció⁹.

The transparency of the layers and the equality of the line-weights mean that each historical level interacts with the others on equal terms¹⁰. Rather than covering up the previous or lower level, each new layer always adds to the complexity of the urban fabric. This allows new relationships to appear between the components of the different layers, irrespective of whether they are older or more recent. This characteristic of the drawing has influenced the design process by helping to fuse together components from different periods into the new design.

EMBT's overlay plan contrasts the *continuity* of medieval urban growth with the disruptive changes of certain more recent interventions. The old has been treated with exactly the same importance as the new creating a sense of continuity between past, present and future. This was a significant aim for the project as it intended to maintain and strengthen the social and cultural momentum of place without total disruption.

3. CHRONOLOGICAL AMBIGUITY

During the design of the market the method of combining elements from different time periods evolved significantly from the literal exhibition of selected historical components to fusing them into a continuum from which it is no longer possible to distinguish a clear chronological order. As a result of this ambiguous mixture of the existing, the pre-existing and the new, the building presents time as a continuous process, whilst the chronological narrative of place involves the subjective interpretation of each participant.

During the process of excavation, substantial archeological investigations were undertaken. These revealed a far greater complexity to the history of the site and its buildings than was previously known covering over 3000 years of inhabitation. Following these discoveries, using the same method of overlaying, the traces of many more prior settlements and inhabitations were incorporated into the scheme. A clear example is the romanesque apse of the first chapel on the site from the 11th century which has carved an extra public space out of the ground floor of one of the housing towers. The reference to the original chapel is made clear by the stone semicircle in the pavement tracing the position of the apse, but furthermore the single storey undercroft, enclosing curved wall and the monolithic quality of the in-situ concrete all add references of scale, space and material recalling more subtle characteristics of a romanesque chapel.

Certain ruins were exhibited as in a museum. The apse foundations and crypt of the last church were uncovered and light wells and glazed facades were intended to allow the remains to be viewed from the public space without entering the building.

However the comparison of the paving in the two projects shows that although the same method of transparent collage has been used, the components of each layer have been combined in a different manner. In the first project, elements from past buildings

9. Oriol Bohigas, *Talk at the Atheneu*, organised by AxA, Barcelona, 2013.

10. *Talk by Raphael Moneo*, Fundació Miralles, Barcelona, 2014.

were traced directly onto the design plan the new pavement for example reproduced the exact layout of the gothic vaulting from the overlay plan treating proportion, number and measurement with precision, and allowing a clear, definitive and objective reading of the new project in relation to its predecessors.

However, in the second project this process became far more subtle. Although the archeological excavations did not significantly alter the understanding of the late gothic vault, the paving pattern was stretched and redrawn. The lines of the ribs are distorted into irregular triangles, which serve as an abstracted reference to a previous vault but not as a direct representation of it. This illustrates a more general change in how the project relates different points in time together. Many other components throughout the scheme are now no longer treated as literally as before. The original timber trusses are rehung but with no structural purpose, as is made evident by their slight inclination. The blank wall at the rear of the site is faced in materials re-used from the market but positioned in new ways, both recalling the past building but also introducing new ideas.

The abstract way in which references to the past are combined in the second project makes it hard, if not impossible, to distinguish between actual remains, reinterpreted references, re-used materials and totally new aspects of the design. Likewise the chronological order of the reasons behind each part becomes impossible to deduce objectively. Has the new, irregular layout of the market stalls been modified to reflect the alignment of the very first individual huts around the romanesque chapel, or have they been modified to change the lines of sight through the market, or to divert the flow of people more evenly around the market space?

The result of this ambiguity towards the past means that the building does not explain itself and its relationship to its predecessors in clear chronological order, the way that a history museum might. Instead, the built project fuses aspects from the past, both architectural references and physical materials, with the life and use of the new building. The boundary between the past and the present is dissolved, presenting time as a continuous mixture of elements.

This approach breaks down the distance between the venerated relics of the past and the everyday user of the market. In an equivalent way, Marcel Duchamp and others «de-objectivised» their artworks by requiring the observer to provide parts of the meaning of the work by bringing their own ideas, knowledge and interpretations¹¹. The motionless bicycle wheel mounted on a stool becomes interesting when the observer considers their prior knowledge of a wheel designed to spin in contrast to stool designed to remain motionless. Similarly, the users of the market, be they inhabitants of the social housing, employees in the market stalls, daily or occasional shoppers, or one-off visitors, can each choose to read as much into the market as they wish. The boundary between how much of the design refers to the past and how much to the future is never fixed. It depends on the creative and subjective interpretation of the user. In this way each individual has to connect with the building through bringing their own ideas, thoughts and imagination in order to unravel the role of the building in the present past and future.

11. Pontus Hulten (ed.), *Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life*, Cambridge (Mass), The MIT Press, 1993.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The form of representation has been crucial to understanding city as a process of growth. The layered structure and transparent nature of the drawing reveal how the underlying structure of urban growth has since the early middle ages, developed gradually being generated by the principal monasteries. In contrast, the large scale destructive interventions such as the Via Laietana were shown to have dramatic consequences on the city which would need the greater justification at a city-wide scale. Contrasting the Medieval process of gradual urban growth with the drastic intervention opening the Via Laietana clearly illustrated the severity of the Municipal proposal for regenerating the district and the social and cultural disruption that this sudden urban transformation could cause.

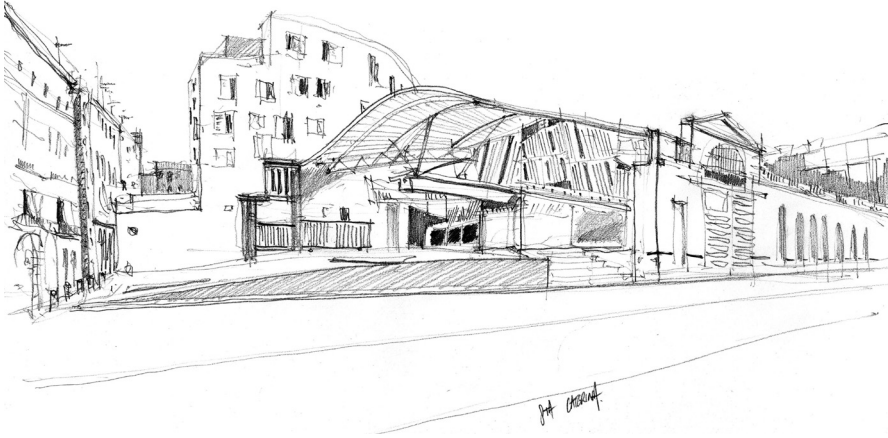
As a result of this method of representing the city and its history, the project for the Santa Caterina market extended the design strategy behind the urban proposal to a more detailed scale. The design developed remained consistent with past forms of urban growth whilst allowing new uses to be inserted and encouraging new life in the district through developing the existing. The project approaches its context not only in terms of solving contemporary problems, but through developing a subtle and intelligent approach to context and the process of urban change over time. One which involves the user as a participant and interpreter, taking part in a place which is constantly evolving but which is formed as much through its relationship with the past and its future as with the present day.

The form of representation has been crucial to combining analysis with the design process. The level of complexity which it has helped to develop has brought new insight into how architecture might connect people to place through connecting their sense of the past, present and future. This has allowed both the architectural project and the urban plan to merge new interventions into a highly complex existing context, strengthening the sense of place through its heritage, culture and commerce. This case therefore provides an example of a form of representation which has been developed to its full potential, influencing all stages of the analysis and design process, and helping to transform and improve the city's sense of place.

The major contribution of this article is to explain the impact of a particular kind of representation and the process of developing this into a design method for transforming the city in context and incorporating people. This is therefore a method to be used more widely for helping to connect analysis and design and fuse projects people and place together.



Sketch of Santa Caterina Market and new housing seen from a side street, 2014.
(Source: Author's drawing)



Sketch of Santa Caterina Market and the public space covering the convent ruins, 2014.
(Source: Author's drawing)



Sketch of demolitions for a new square under in La Ribera district, 2014.
(Source: Author's drawing)