

## **Presentation by Enric Miralles**

Style is something which derives from a particular way of operating. The gestures determining my work come from a specific set of interests, irrespective of the ensuing spatial results. I believe that systematic repetition and variation can provide coherence and a great deal of my work depends upon repetitive accumulation and repetition. I rework every sketch at least thirty times, and my colleagues do the same. My repetitive method is aimed at revealing the underlying structure of the site, its scale and its basic coordinates. Repetition is essential to the embodiment of an architectural idea. I work with constructive rather than visual criteria, and in this respect repetition assumes a static significance. Geometry is important as a basic tool, affording a means of articulating specific situations and leading towards forms that could not have been anticipated at the beginning.

One of the characteristics of my work is that I never have an apriori idea of the space that I am trying to evolve; I always establish a ground plan as a point of departure, rather than work from elevations or three dimensional configurations. Multi-level plans afford the coordinates from which the sections may be automatically derived. The three-dimensional form only arises at the end of the process, never prior to the generation of these plans and sections. This method of designing is more abstract and conceptual than working directly from sectional profiles. Sectional thinking has an archaic character, it is as if we were still working with the classical orders. I am much more attuned to the idea of a productive accumulation in plan rather than to working in section.

One only accepts the confines of a piece of paper in order to forget it, treating it as a kind of invisible backing. In the process of designing one shifts and turns the piece of paper in order to make it lose its sheet-like character. In part it is a matter of multiplying a single intuition: of seeing it appear in all

its possible forms, of aligning different elements acrobatically, as in a game. The aim is to represent all the aspects of a project within the confines of a single page. It is not a question of accumulating data in the most efficient way but of multiplying shapes, generating configurations that were not in mind at the outset. The project advances through a series of successive beginnings, as if each one were a definitive stage, while the assembly is constantly being dismantled and the scale changed. The best aspects of a sketch are its intermediate states, which reveal the kaleidoscopic potential of the project emerging in all its aspects and give rise to ideas and forms that might be applied to other jobs. The new situations that appear almost spontaneously are the means by which a work develops from its point of departure. The system of construction, however, causes us to reexamine this origin. As it comes to be enclosed, empty space expresses the absence of what once existed there. At the same time that which we would have thought to be impossible comes into existence.

The experience of walking may be seen as a kind of writing upon the surface of the ground. It is a trace of a bodily movement which we discover in a particular place. Fragments of various other hypothetical movement patterns generate a geometry that is woven into the reality in such a way as to be capable of engendering new shapes. These traces occupy the entire space.

The Igualada Cemetery (1985 - 1991) was a concept that derived from such a track in space or path. It was structured around a dialogical movement of entering and leaving that covered the entire terrain, while the terrain itself remained largely untouched. In developing this trajectory we did not entertain any kind of narrative dimension since narration is unbearable in a cemetery. Instead we tried to work with a number of hypothetical movements across the site so as to multiply the number of dividing paths. Into this trajectory we inserted intermediate spaces and escape routes. This

necropolis is built in a disused quarry on the outskirts of a rather nondescript industrial estate, not far from Barcelona. It is largely made up of different types of retaining walls, ranging from in-situ reinforced concrete construction to the *gablon* technique in which wire-mesh, sustained by steel rods is back-filled with mortarless rubble. This method is employed only in the low-rise walls at the end of cemetery, whereas the deeper cuttings, closer to the point of entry, are stabilized by a mixture of in-situ and pre-cast concrete construction. These retaining walls, inclining both inwards and outwards, provide the necessary depth for the columbarium. Here pre-cast niches set into the in-situ concrete frame accommodate the coffins. At the other end of the cemetery large family mausoleums are set into the gablon walls on two levels. Meanwhile the bottom of the cemetery is paved in disused railway sleepers, set in weak cement. There are also a number of spots reserved for individual burial. At the higher level, near the main entrance there is a charnel pit, a morgue, a sacristy and a chapel.

In our 1993 proposal for Bremerhaven, as in our other urban work, the specific figuration of the proposal was in large part a direct response to the brief. However in formal terms the design was initially derived from a series of gestural figures, from intuitive hieroglyphics that I have on occasion called “blots.” These helped us to reveal and represent the labyrinthine order of the old port. The project was broken down into a series of thematic zones that were given evocative names such as “labyrinth,” “promenade,” “crystal palace,” etc. Among other things, the “labyrinth” served to accommodate a small zoo at the northern end of the old port. The “promenade” was conceived as a series of terraces overlooking the harbor. The “crystal palace” was designed as an activity center capable of receiving the energy emanating from the surrounding urban fabric. Each of these elements created a new topography of which the earth mounds that formed part of the “labyrinth” were the most dramatic.

Our 1993 proposal for twin concert halls in Copenhagen also arose from the suggestion of a “blot.” This gestural form tried to evoke the way people spontaneously gather in order to listen to music. The concert halls, situated in the most sheltered part of the site, were stacked on top of one another to form a dense assembly; a microcosmic urban form. The surface was treated as a mnemonic device with the large window and the ramps recalling the ancient surroundings of the city.

Like the undulating metal entrance that we designed for the Takaoka Station, Japan (1993) the pavilion at Unazuki near Toyama (1991-1993) was conceived as redefining the topography of the site. The metal tubular frame echoed in its arabesque form the complex structure of the original pilgrimage routes leading to the site. A bridge, a small path and an old pilgrim route are brought together in this sculptural space-form. By attaching this tubular construction to the abutment of an existing bridge, the bridge becomes spatially linked to the landscape.

The Archery Range realized for the Barcelona Olympics of 1992 was our first attempt at an earthwork. Both the competition and the training buildings serve the open target range that is immediately in front of them. In each instance the sectional profile is integrated into an earthen embankment. The structural form of both edifices arises in part out of a need to contain the earth. They are *bunker* buildings. Where the training structure mimics the flight of the arrows across the site through its folded slab roofs, the competition building assumes a more undulating and articulate form. Both buildings are conceived as landforms; as a form of topography. Indeed the design emerged out of a conscious interplay between the building and the site; through a kind of automatic writing in which various calligraphic propositions interacted with the existing contours. This is evident in the competition building where propped concrete shells are loosely combined with a metal pergola. In the training building tiled-faced roofs slabs are propped

by a mixture of tubular metal pylons and cylindrical concrete columns. This last, bounded by screen walls in terra cotta blocks, weave in and out under the warped roof to generate a series of dressing rooms for the competitors.

The Morella boarding school was built outside the medieval hill town of Castellon between 1986, the date of the competition, and 1994, the date of completion. The school which faces out over spectacular, unspoiled countryside, was conceived in such a way as its triangular cellular form would echo the spiraling structure of the town. This rotatory movement of the plan suggested the staggered arrangement of the classrooms and dormitory spaces side by side. The dormitories are accessed by a serpentine corridor as they descend the hill. Different levels are linked by ramps, terraces and courts as they cascade down the slope. The larger common space establishes the boundary of the building on one side. As in the archery complex, the roof serves as a fourth facade when the building is seen from above.

Between 1990 and 1994 we built two sport facilities in Huesca and Alicante. Developed in succession these two stadiums were closely interrelated. In Huesca, the arena is formed from excavating the ground while expressive steel trusswork spans over the stadium in section. In Alicante, the stadium is raised off the ground. Where Huesca functions like an open air amphitheater, Alicante is an introverted structure grouped around an athletic activity. The main arena at Alicante is roofed by three long-span trusses. These trusses, composed of laminated steel angles and tubes, are resolved according to different statical models; those that are subject to a simple bending have a variable profile in section while others subject to torsion have an asymmetrical cross section designed to resist the twisting action. An undulating roof form is suspended from these trusses. An existing football stadium constitutes one end of the complex while the other is established by the classrooms, dining rooms and dressing facilities. The elevated

amphitheater is executed in reinforced concrete, while the tribune is supported on cylindrical props.

I am part of a tradition that accords value to making and manufacturing as an origin of thought. I feel much closer to this form of operating than to the tradition that pursues an abstract idea as a way of arriving at form. Consider Bruno Taut's own house built in Berlin-Dahlewitz in 1927. Because of its peculiar plan each room is virtually pentagonal in shape. This means it would be difficult to reconstitute the form of the house from its independent elements. Given the pieces alone you would hardly know how to set one room beside another. Each room has its own independent logic irrespective of the quasi-symmetrical form of the whole. I think that Taut is part of a tradition where one is more interested in surprise and variation, than in the general concept of the project. In this instance the house has a particularly sharp character due to its skillful detailing, the location of the rooms, and the furnishing of the space; the relationship between door, table, window, radiator etc. This tradition, rather than imposing a set of forms and ideas, teaches fresh modes of observation and discovery. This commitment to variation and surprise does not, however, necessarily imply geometric or material complexity.