Three urban experiences: Gas Natural´s building, Santa Caterina market and Diagonal-Mar park.

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One of the architects who has demonstrated great sensitivity in the establishing of relationships with a site´s surroundings, in his dealing of existing trails, urban tracks, the successful inclusion of contextual data and footprints of a place, would be Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue. His plans are likened to tourist guides: they reflect and highlight landmarks, buildings, squares and existent trails. In this text, we will examine the procedures of three interventions to reorganize three emblematic quarters of Barcelona and see how those transformed the city, in order to find out their implicit concept of the city.
Respecting footprints, guidelines, cultural, social, physical and historical preexistences.
The context is perceived as an accumulation of diverse and complex elements, all of them important and revealing.
Superposition of historical tracks is fundamental to understand the dynamics of the present day city.
The proposal, by contrast, devises an attentive subtraction of buildings’ pieces that results in an opening that winds its way through the neighborhood sinuously, in the manner of the old streets and in organic understanding. It respects, as well, the site’s grain of construction and reveals, as it trails, old architectures which shall be restored and completed in the new intervention.
The weight of the project lies on the footprints of historical heritage, culture and the intricate design of the old winding streets.

“It is considered that superposition of historical tracks are fundamental to understand the dynamics and configuration of the present day city, so an essential and preliminary document taking form, which is necessary for the project evolution as well.”
The old walls of the market’s perimeter accept the continuative act by which the new structure incorporates and extends them, just as the market shares its space with the ruins of an old convent. This answers to ideas of inclusion of elements both present and past, in favor of cultural awareness and the possibility of re-evaluation and dialogue - a concept known as “present continuous”.
Santa Caterina market
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We can see Miralles’ use of allegorical imagery where material items take the place of ideas. In Santa Caterina this concept shines in the colorful ceramics roofing the market, echoing the colors of the fruit and the vegetables which are sold there within in the diverse stalls.
Santa Caterina market
Miralles-Tagliabue, authors of the master-plan, coordinated with the three groups of architects (Arañó/Ensenyat/Tarrida, Bravo/Contepomi and Fuses/Viader) who had won the contests for the housing projects, venues and public spaces included in the plan to re-design the same area. This union went to turn into an exhaustive revision of the initial plan, which, in its process, revealed keys for major improvements of the area, surpassing the expectations that had been expressed at the PERI (the former Master Plan).
Santa Caterina market
In Diagonal Mar Park, 1997-2002, a difficult project set for the residual space between private blocks, the design will emerge out of the patterns of existent road networks and older railroad tracks. In addition, it proposes to connect itself to the nearby beach area, in a move to attain union with that close and accessible open space, the beach, which—besides—happens to be the only one big enough for the scale of the vast metropolitan area of Barcelona.
It's design favours an interaction with the city. It is organised by following a series of paths, which similar to the branches of a tree, spread out in all directions.
The park rises in the beach and bifurcates in two axis as the main branches of a tree, each one forming more branches. The first is a rambla where the people flow; the other one is the life of the man. These two axis generate seven spaces:
Diagonal-Mar Park

a.- Branch of the plaza: a walking lane where park visitors from the central area flow to the sea and Paseo Marítimo.

b.- Branch of the man childhood and playground: life of man begins here at his childhood, a playground.

c.- Taulat street: the park comes to pause at this street, wherefrom astonishing views of the new Diagonal Mar neighborhood can be seen.

d.- A meandering walkway above the lake, and the lake underneath in surprising forms.

e.- The Magic Mountain: man goes on forward in evolution to his pre-adolescence. Playground with sinuous toboggans in a big green mountain.

f.- The Lake: a wide water basin with steel meandering sculptures, spitting steamed water all around.

g.- The Plaza: a place where neighbors meet and the intersection of the park and Diagonal Avenue.
Miralles creates his own repertoire of artificial nature. Elements such as pergolas, benches, metal and vibrant structures that, with the ever changing play of light and shadow, serve to enrich and enliven the spaces of the park. Elements that the architect calls “lunghi mare”, for their sinuous forms.
In Diagonal Mar Park, though the idea of connecting new gardens to the biggest green area of the town – the seashore – could not be realized, an original green space resulted which deserves a visit. It serves both the nearby neighborhood and the city as it is - as the other examples we have mentioned above - a landmark in itself.
In 1999, Gas Natural convoked the contest for the construction of its new building. Miralles and Tagliabue’s project, the one that was chosen, was the single one not to propose a conventional tower but a complex volumetric design. One which, as a result of study, succeeded to be, at once, in touch with the company’s desired corporate image, in dialogue with its immediate surroundings and with the larger significance of the city.
Gas Natural’s Building
Gas Natural’s Building
The large cantilevered body is set in parallel with the apartment blocks also facing the lane; however, unlike these, it affords the possibility to completely walk through and forges visual links with the landscape it inhabits.
The deliberately imperfect surface of glass on the face of the building instructs the vibration of light into a particularly rich and allusive reflection, which can be seen all the way from the pier of Barcelona, most remarkably when it’s seemingly set ablaze during sunset.
The offices inside have equally been built with the user’s relationship to the seaside and pier area in mind: transparency extends from the pavement to the ceiling of all interior spaces and the façade skin, keeping users in close touch with external views.
Gas Natural’s Building
The case of the Market, Diagonal Mar Park, Port Vell and the prolongation of Cambó Avenue are all examples of successful interventions in historical areas of the city. These are areas which maintain and increase the city’s greatest touristic attraction.

A transformation must most importantly recognize and prioritize to maintain the elements contributing to the location’s vitality and flux of activity. It is only caring for those that will grant the survival of its charismatic strength, life and touristic attractiveness and not close in on the possibility of its cultural and social progress.
Thanks you


