
“Enric Miralles’ Santa Rosa’s Park in Mollet del Vallés: Redefining public space in contemporary city”.

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ABSTRACT: This article attempts to show the influence of Enric Miralles’ project in Santa Rosa’s park in Mollet del Vallés (North-West of Barcelona). How in the middle of an empty, degraded, and useless field, the contemporary architect assumes the responsibility of intervene to give live to this wasteland generating an ideal landscape, amending the breach previously existing in the surroundings. This project proves that there are still some models and practices that enlighten the future of public space in contemporary city. The park shows that the local authorities chose the right man for the job. Nowadays, the people of the districts of Santa Rosa, Plana Lledó and Can Borrell walk freely and enjoy collectively of the environment.

KEYWORDS: site, landscape, public space, contemporary city, natural, artificial

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1. The proposal

Since 1983, the emplacement of the park was already registered in the local urban development plan of Mollet. This plan was National Award of town planning the same year.

The first encounters of Enric Miralles with the customer can be traced back to spring 1993, when Miralles showed to Concha Bohigas, *Service Director of the Area town planning of Mollet del Vallés* his work at the Icaria Avenue, in the Olympic town in Barcelona. The facilities for the archery shooting range olympic competition of *Valle de Hebrón* and the civic center of *Hostalets de Balenyá*.

On December 16, 1993, the Mollet`s town council adjudicates the park design and development to Enric Miralles Architectural Office.

For the economical viability the project was developed in continuous steps following this general description:

-On May 1997 the second phase of the project is delivered to the town hall.

-On November 1999, third phase of the project is delivered at town hall.

-On June 2000 fourth and last phase of the project is delivered.

The construction is officially finished July 13, 2001, and the same day the park is inaugurated by the theatre group *La Fura dels Baus*.

The first phase contemplated the construction of the park. Perimetral walls, topography, design of pavement, playgrounds, skating rink, benches, petancas areas, etc...

The second phase expected to build a civic center inside the park. The building would stend along a series of walls sustained by pillars, that would define the limits of the park. This building was never built, but Miralles would recycle the designs to project the *Palafolls Public Library*.

The construction development was complex, as we can see in the first certification of the construction signed by Enric Miralles and by a fax sent by the Mayor of Mollet where requests collaboration of Enric Miralles to understanding with the demands by the contractor to speed up the construction work schedule. [1]

Miralles was able to supervise most of the construction even if he sadly died in July 2000, before he could see his work finished, inaugurated one year later.

2. Miralles at the time of the project

By the time he received the confirmation of the project, in 1993 Enric Miralles live an independent period intensely creative, in proposals everywhere and projects characterized by a strong poetic charge. This moment is good captured in a photograph which he poses in his architectural studio in *Avinyó Street* of Barcelona [2]. There he came with the model of his proposal for the new *Faculty of Valencia University*. In 1989 he divorced his first professional partner Carme Pinós. Even if Benedetta Tagliabue started collaborating with him in 1990, their professional official union did not arrive until January 1998.

At the time his proposal was adjudicated, other projects like the *Igualada`s Cemetery* and the *Huesca Sports Hall* are still ongoing and he has monograph exhibitions of his work at the *GSD of Harvard University* and the *AEDES Gallery in*

Berlin. At the moment of the proposal, he teaches as Director of the Master Class at the *Stadelschule in Frankfurt* and the *Kenzo Tange Chair at Harvard University*.

3. The site

The park is located in an industrial town in Barcelona`s periphery and extends in an area of thirty thousand square meters. This land, was an unurbanized and marginal area, located between the neighborhoods of *Plana Lledò*, *Santa Rosa*, and the *Nou Eixample Nord*. In the following picture [Fig 1] we can appreciate the land that Miralles faced during his visit in 1993.



[Fig. 1]

"...When we are not trying to have a fresh start imposing a project and we try to develop a sensibility towards reality, architecture has no other choice but to criticize itself about the location and program. The solar, as the other projects, such Besòs park, La Mina building, the Valle de Hebron shooting range, the cemetery of Igualada, are far from become an ideal and coherent place... In this project are, in fact, certain critic causality: there are doubts about the belonging of the location, doubts about the quality of the surroundings. However, there is only the possibility of solving them in a positive way. Paradoxically, the critic answer about the place has a positive answer..." Enric Miralles. [3]

"...The reality of the place... it is a place that could be defined as a social topography... where the topography mixes with the social desire of the project of transforming a marginal emplacement into a public construction...We still did not have the chance of fixing recent time in this place... Almost nothing physical has left its print here... The building that has to appear here claims for a topography, so this must be our first priority for construction". Enric Miralles [4]

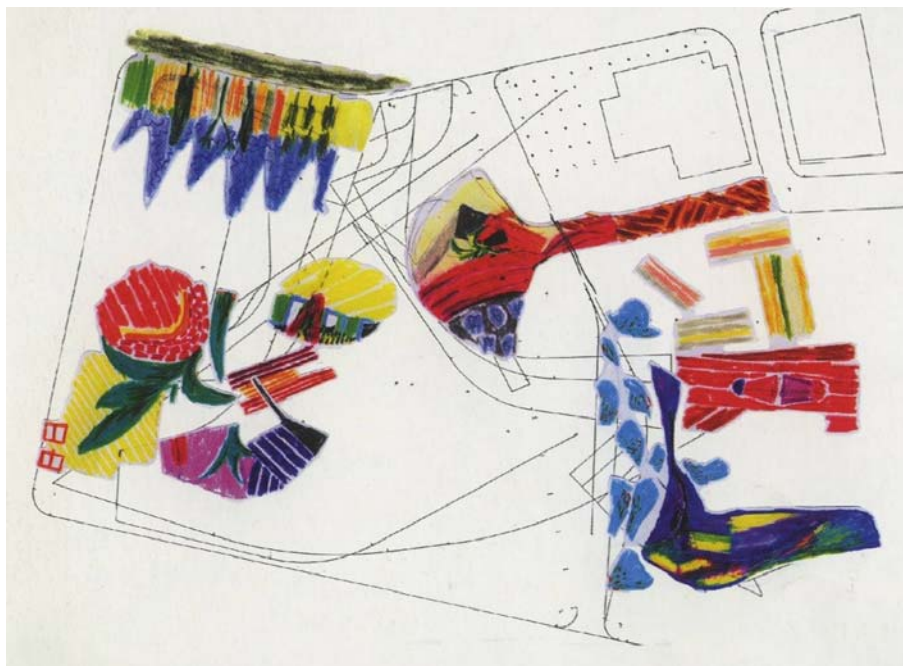
4. Abstraction as a Project strategy

The particular conditions of the site imposed to Miralles the need for new tools to create the project. The first drawings on which Miralles faces the problematic of the project show a set of lines that floods the entire park. He begins from a solar corner and continues to the extremes. The lines evolve among themselves to continue

afterwards an independent path defining places that will later welcome different functions. [Fig. 2]

"...The same way as Land Art´s works are not a representation of the landscape on which they are inserted, but rather redefine it. Miralles´ work acts equally redefining its place of emplacement: its topography, its shape, its dimension... redefining this way the qualities of the area." Juan Antonio Cortes [7]

"...my projects depend on much more than just the eye.... I like how real the project seems when you are there.... The best example of this might be our Park at Mollet. One is a drawing in which you see the park and the classical relationship between it and the housing. You don´t distinguish between the density of this area and the density of the city, because it is a rather poor neighborhood... we liked that because the city and its shadows are completely mixed with nature. There is a lot of neighborhood reality and the geometries extend into the project. ...we don´t want to ignore these kinds of things in the neighborhood." Enric Miralles. [8]



[Fig. 2]

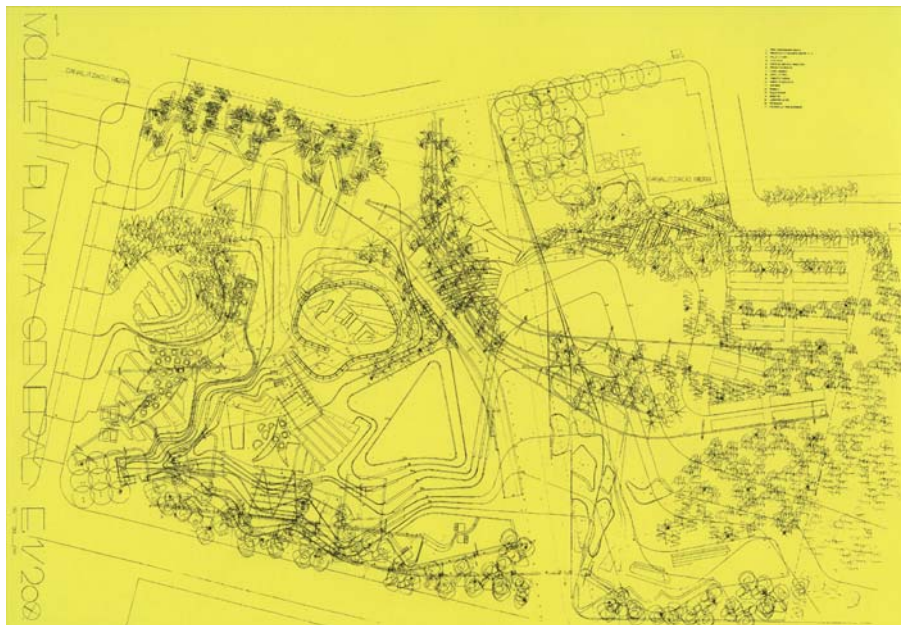
The line is constituted as an abstract initial element to begin the project. Abstract lines with strong meanings, lines that Miralles extracted from the vanguard period and its artists: Alexander Rodchenko and Paul Klee.

The line is conceived as an initial guide, as an instrument to know the place and learning to behave in it. This lineal reality, which Miralles refers when he talks

about the flux of people movement give the necessary clues to properly understand the place.

Miralles, with this project, faces a new operating method as he expresses:

"...The project of this park and civic centre originates from a different point to previous projects. It is not a formal origin directly related to the specific topographical situation...The project exists in the desire for the construction more than in the place... The activities that take place already exist, but today they take place in different streets and spaces... I started to work trying to think of a building that would imply a landscape that did not exist there... an ideal landscape... This project is a narrative from its beginning, anecdotal... to fix a very concrete moment: when the neighbors of Plana Lledó and Santa Rosa agree to the construction..."
Enric Miralles[10]



[Fig. 3]

In the architecture that Miralles did until the time (Igalada, Hostalets, Huesca, Alicante...) the colour was not protagonist. However, already in the first sketches of this project we would use colour as a differentiating agent for surroundings, functions and paths. [Fig. 2]

Miralles started the project from a corner where the topographic lines start. Some concrete suspended walls also start in this point with influences from "le corbusier", with two types of bricks bonds. The suspended walls constitute the materialization of the message of the lines. Lines which Miralles started the project, containing energies that would later become constructed elements.

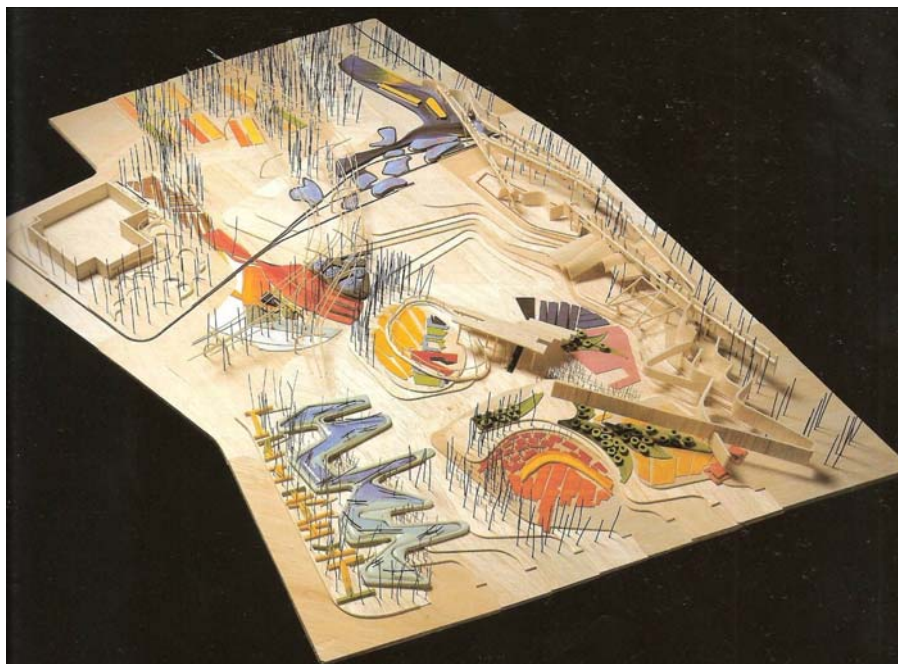
The procession of porchs (procession that Miralles had already done in *Icaria Avenue*) head for towards the center of the park where is build the theatre in to the air. This construction focalizes the looks and absorbs the lateral walls of the park. There are not only porchs that go, but the specific time in history in which the park was designed as well as the future of the whole area. This procession in the mind of Miralles opens with time of the tradition and the time of immediate present: Modernism architecture and industrial architecture of the periphery.

The bonds that put on end the bricks remind the facade of the industrial buildings of the nearby industrial suburbs. The other bond of bricks reproduces a lattice more usual in the times of the Catalan Modernism [11].

With this intromission in time, Miralles wants to show that his project park is part of a continuous become.

The three suspended walls with letters that Miralles projects, impose a break with time, imposing his own. Letters as graffiti that materialize in the park as prefabricated concrete and steel sunshades, are referring to the graffiti painted by the younger neighbours in the facades of the surrounding buildings. This suspended walls with letters, have a message trough three large signs in them. "PARC MOLLET / LUDOTECA AVIS / SANTA ROSA" and represent a physical limit for the park, since they marc the gate to cross in order to enter the park and being able to reed correctly the meaning of the letters painted on them facing the interior of the park.

The masts at the *Icaria Avenue* reappear here as a reminder to the neighbours Miralles' authorship of the project. Authorship is signs again in one of the fountains from with his own handwriting.



[Fig. 4]

In the park as in his work, we can see the thought of Georges Bataille and the indifference of a lineal progression as a way of defining his projects. The space conception from which all of this comes from is that of a social landscape where institutions, context, and nature fuse together in an interactive relationship. His method of intervention feeds of what is already there and the common sediments of the daily culture.

It is important not to forget in his architecture the importance of nature and the Mediterranean climate, as well as his local influences that includes artists such as Gaudi, Jujol or Coderch.

"...The main interest of this project is, maybe, not directly in it, but in the "themes" in it contained (as the ones of suspension of the building, of graffiti becoming architecture of the colour of a painting becoming, of the suspended spirit of the users, of unexpected connections ...We like to think that this project could be a project for the "near future" being a more subtle conception of architecture."
Benedetta Tagliabue. [12]

5. The park

The peripheral nature of the place and the line of plane trees next to the boulevard that crosses the park constitute the only information that the place offers to the architect. Against this lack of identity, the first objective is to redefine the place conditions before start building. This is a recognition of the reality of the area, in which the topography combines itself with a social desire for the project, a desire to turn this marginal area into a shared public construction that everyone can enjoy. Here is where the concept of social topography referred by the locals about the change from a wasteland into a place where the community could gather and do common activities. It is here where the conversations that Miralles had with the neighbours have special meaning. Thanks to this contact with the people to whom the park is built, made him focus on the social aspect of the design. Any local deficiency is compensated by their surprise and festive spirit of an invented place. This park was born in Miralles' mind as a series of relationships between the artificial elements substituting the data that the topography traditionally offers. [5]

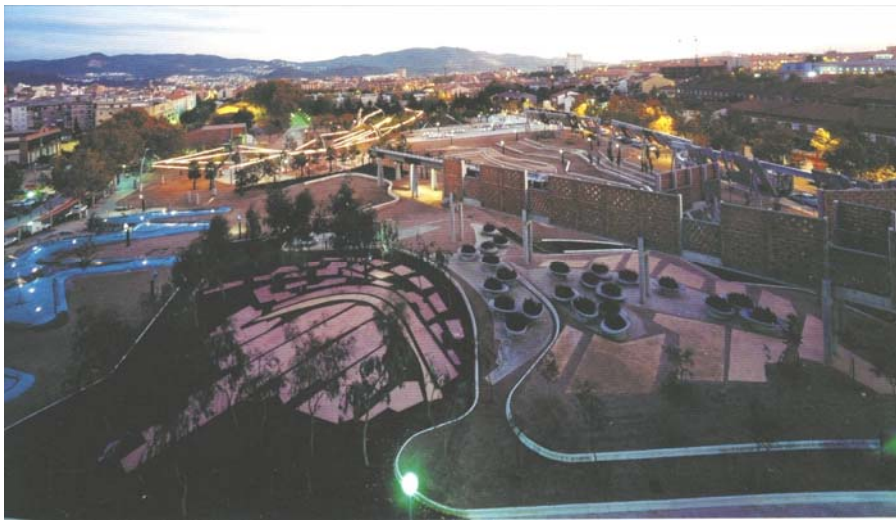
To obtain this, Miralles generated a code of signs (on which the pieces of pavement or walls that configurate signs) that refers metaphorically to the diversity and multiplicity of images accumulated in the identity of consolidated town established through time. This fragmented vocabulary generate a fictitious topography will fuse in time with the vegetation and new constructions. Then, it creates by itself an artificial landscape across perimetral walls that delimit the intervention. Every detail in the park is meticulously designed to delimitate this invented landscape.

The different pavement colours indicate the different activities' areas in the park. The topography is punctually altered, giving a hollow in the center of the park for an open air spectacles theatre.

Vegetation, in forms of compact masses, affirming this division with small forests that envelope the benches and the more calmed areas in the park. Gathered by species, the trees also contribute to characterize the different functional areas. The willows surround the fountains, the mulberry trees delimitate the playgrounds and the eucalyptus are planted around the entire park's perimeter. The existing trees are complemented with others from the same families. The lampposts bend as if they were long willow branches accompanying the itinerary around the park. Among other things, the freshness from the disperse fountains lead the path, with water appearing and disappearing along the day, as puddles after copious rain.

The park, in which there was planned a new phase on which a Civic Center would be built (this was never built here, but the use of the designed can be traced in the *Parafolls Public Library*) had to serve as a meeting point, an open air theater where every common activity could take place. The result is a park that symbolizes a fusion between the natural components with the artificial elements, such street lights, benches and other urban elements.

Working in the combination of colours and different materials (painted concrete, bricks, ceramics, steel and wood) combined with the changing lights and shadows as the day progresses, the park appear changeable and unforeseeable.



[Fig. 5]

The *Santa Rosa park* establishes a communication with neighbours, that may seem distant at first, but after, same as familiar, functional and perfectly integrated landscape that is able to interpret on its own the conflicts and complexity that periphery generates.

In the border of the city, the park awaits as an oasis, with the surprise of an invented landscape.

CONCLUSION:

This article hopes to have demonstrated how brave the bet that the local authorities, the responsible of public space in contemporary city, realized for a compromised and quality architecture represented in the intervention of Enric Miralles, an architect accustomed to work on difficult places, who following his own style and way to operate, with a strong ethical vocation, serving the society being aware of the responsibility for the construction of a better society trough architecture.

Miralles demonstrates with this example of intervention in *Santa Rosa Park*, that even in the worse scene, the architect should have a positive attitude, never

surrender to dejection and pessimism. Opposed to that, Miralles shows us with his example how optimism, hard work, passion, perseverance, desire to serve society, ethics, imagination, creativity and other positive qualities that showed through his legacy are present in the project of the park of *Santa Rosa Park in Mollet*.

Good architecture, compromised with society, proves how necessary is for contemporary cities. Remember what the wasteland where the park was built looked like before the intervention of all the people involved in the making of the park. Then contrast this effort with the feelings evoked by a simple walk around this park. The happiness with which the neighbours enjoy the park, how the work of an architect can emotionally move the neighbours showing the still important role of architects in today's society.

Notes

The author of this article has contacted with the editors of publications to ask for permission to publish the images that appear in this article.

[1] To check it, is enough to consult the fax sent by the mayor of Mollet to Miralles. View the book *Enric Miralles Benedetta Tagliabue / Work in Progress*. COAC-ACTAR. 2006, pag. 65.

[2] The picture taken in 1993 constitutes the jacket of the book of Josep M. ROVIRA, *Enric Miralles, 1972-2000*. Fundación Caja de Arquitectos. 2012.

[3] This quote is taken from the book of Juan José Lahuerta, *Enric Miralles: obra completa*. Electa. 1996, pag. 208.

[4] This quotation is from the magazine *El Croquis*, 50+72, pag. 366.

[5] For more information consult the article *Parque público, Mollet del Vallés (Barcelona) en AV Monografías*, 81-82. 2000, pag. 116.

[6] This quotation is from the film directed by Bigas Luna that appears in the DVD 90 min. of *Fundación Caja de Arquitectos*. 2010.

[7] This quotation is from the magazine *El Croquis 2000-2009. El croquis editorial 144. 2009*. pag 28.

[8] This quotation is from the interview to Miralles by *Focus on architect. GA Interview*. GA INTERNATIONAL 60. 1999. Pages: 100-129.

[9] This quotation is from the book *"Paul Klee, his work and thought"*, University of Chicago Press, 1991, pag. 197

[10] This quotation is from the magazine *El Croquis* 1983-2000.

[11] For more information consult the article *PARQUE DELS COLORS, Mollet del Vallés Barcelona, 1992-2001* from Josep Maria Rovira y Carolina B. Garcia, that appears in the book Josep M. ROVIRA: *Enric Miralles, 1972-2000*. Fundación Caja de Arquitectos. 2012.

[12] This quotation is from the magazine *GA DOCUMENT 71*, pages: 74-95.

Legends

[Fig. 1] Photomontage of the picture that was taken in the landscape that Miralles found in 1993. This picture appears in the book *Enric Miralles Benedetta Tagliabue / Work in Progress*. COAC-ACTAR. 2006, pag. 51.

[Fig. 2] Drawing of Enric Miralles that appears in the magazine *GA 71*.

[Fig. 3] Final drawing of the park with all the functional areas. The picture appears in the magazine *GA 71*

[Fig. 4] The model of the project as it appears in the book of Juan José Lahuerta, *Enric Miralles: obra completa*. Electa. 1996, pag. 208.

[Fig. 5] Night picture of the park as it appears in the book *Enric Miralles Benedetta Tagliabue / Work in Progress*.COAC-ACTAR. 2006.

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Biography

José Manuel Mateo Vega is an architect and M Phil. graduated from the Higher Technical School of Architecture of Madrid (ETSAM). Polytechnic University of Madrid (UPM). He has collaborated with several architects with national prestige as Carmen Espegel, Ginés Garrido Colmenero, Ricardo Sánchez-Lampreave...and has participated in large scale architectural projects as a part of the engineering firm TYPESA: Financial City of the "Santander Bank Foundation" in Madrid, New Terminal of Barcelona Airport... Currently he runs his own professional firm MATEO VEGA ARQUITECTOS activity that coordinates with his labour of researcher in Madrid. In the academics he has collaborated in several research projects among which should be mentioned "Study of Average Physicist and Environmental of the city of Toledo" as Researcher Fellowship of Juan de Herrera Institute at ETSAM. He is also a PhD candidate in the Architectural Projects Department at ETSAM, being Director of Doctoral Thesis: Federico Soriano. Title of Doctoral Thesis: "Settlement strategies in Landscape in Contemporary Spanish Architecture: Enric Miralles"