

nos rotos de un tejido urbano, rotos que, por acostumbrados a tenerlos, ya siquiera notábamos. Fragmentos aislados de huertos, de campos y de restos que se resistían a cambiar de uso han desaparecido. Todo ha ocurrido demasiado rápido, lo que se echaba en falta y lo que no tanto. Sin apenas tiempo para las dudas se da hoy por acabado lo que está bien y aquello que el tiempo confirmará que tendría que rectificarse.

Los árboles, con su lento crecer, me permiten hacer una aplicación de este fenómeno desde un punto de vista arquitectónico. Cabe asignar a la especie vegetal un crecimiento mucho más pausado. En los árboles, por ejemplo, el tronco, las ramas y la copa se van desarrollando proporcionalmente, según un ritmo natural, en tanto que las raíces discurren paralelamente. Como elemento de estructura, de soporte y de nutrición del árbol, bajo el suelo y en la misma medida que el resto, se van afincando, toman medidas y validan el crecimiento y sus límites.

Desde un punto de vista formal, las raíces no tienen importancia, ya que no se ven, van bajo tierra, están fuera del alcance de la vista. Pero, para la naturaleza del árbol, es evidente que son primordiales.

A las raíces les pasa algo parecido a muchos ejemplos de arquitectura, tales como:

Matorral: Edificación aislada (perdida) en páramos urbanos.

La arquitectura vive y se descubre a salto de mata.

Arrozales: Absurdas casas interminables en hilera sobre campos de secano promovidas por Incasol.

Barbecho: Campos sin raíces que racionalizan los cultivos intensivos, o sea, la Villa Olímpica.

Hortalizas: Parcelas de huertos y emparados sobre suelo urbano para alimentar el estómago (diseño urbano de la Anilla Olímpica).

Tubérculos: Construcciones semienterradas con abundancia de abonos.

Las instalaciones olímpicas de la Vall d'Hebron son tubérculos. O sea, digna y honrada comida en tiempos de hambre. Por el contrario, la arquitectura, como los árboles, tiene un crecimiento demasiado lento para sacarle tajada en poco tiempo, a corto plazo. Como casi siempre, sólo nos queda esperar para poder confirmarlo.

MOISÉS GALLEGO

PROJECT FOR THE RENOVATION OF THE PICORNELL BATHS IN BARCELONA.

Reflections on a difficult assignment

SCENERY AND ARCHITECTURE IN THE OLYMPIC DEVELOPMENT

PREMISES

The site and layout of the Anella Olímpica (Olympic Ring or Complex) starts from the existence of a half-ruined stadium that needed remodelling in depth and of an area with buildings and swimming baths that had to be preserved: these were conditions imposed by the organizers which were adopted in the initial proposals.

The arrangement of the Olympic complex takes care of the most substantial part of the matter. A longitudinal course organizes enormous open spaces and culminates in the stadium; on both sides, in alternation, buildings appear that struggle to avoid being simple supernumeraries of a monumental scheme. Their architecture takes pains to emphasize their presence, to give significance. The redesigning of the Picornell baths, always outside this game, was left until a gap was found which would not interfere with priority objectives.

The plan to renovate the Picornell baths seemed to us to appear at a moment when there was hardly anything to say or when it might have been better to keep silent and try to pass unnoticed. It was a question of resisting the temptation of falling into a trap that was obviously unequal and to draw back and keep quiet in the face of such ostentatious neighbours.

The baths, for one of those reasons of time, were there before the Olympic Ring itself. This explains their magnificent situation in relation to the new arrangement. Nevertheless, little was expected of them and, just in case, the development plan included a densely wooded area on the periphery of the old building, with the intention of hiding it. A green protective mass was waiting, ready to be planted, to participate in the well-known laws of camouflage in the form of scenery.

The promoter's technical team, observing the logic of minimum intervention, decided to retain and take advantage of the existing installations. The remodelling, leaving aside the meagre architectural quality shown by the area already constructed, had to ensure, first and foremost, that it was functionally satisfactory and fulfilled the new requirements arrived at in a well studied and difficult programme. What was needed was an urgent project of a realistic nature which would conserve as much as possible —a work of general medicine.

The expectations of the assignment were not very encouraging. What was needed was to reconstruct two of the vessels of the pools, maintaining their former position and endowing them with an impeccable level of technical equipment and installations. For the rest of the renovation a tight budget allowed little more than tidying up and repairing and taking the maximum advantage of what already existed. Moreover, we also had to include the covering over of one of the two remodelled pools.

FIRST SKETCHES

Having received such cautions and fearful of favouring any danger of contamination, we chose to continue the same game. It was not difficult to make the cushion act in both directions. Under cover of the trees, protected by the camouflage offered to us, we took good note of the relief provided by the neighbouring buildings. In this way the project took its first steps.

We soon became aware of the paucity of the means available for a project on the scale and level of the adjacent buildings. The most sensible thing to do was to retract. We worked on the outside, on a narrow fringe, on the whole periphery, and in this way there rose up a barrier of white brick which unified the whole.

Now that the project was freed from the premises of a complicated plan of integration, which moreover would need its corresponding justification to acquire its right to a place, the architectural participation adopted the form of its former logic, although now it was unrecognizable. What before were dispersed, badly connected pavilions around three open air pools had been transformed into one single building. Inside the complex, within the space converted into a walled site, there are three latticed metallic girders of the gantry type which preserve and shelter the existing buildings, while at the same time creating the cover required for one of the pools. The new structure is arranged above the level of the roof, outside, like all the rest; to place it inside would have been an act of folly. When we took this decision we were consoled by the thought that the neighbouring structures of the olympic buildings were even more ferocious.

The contentious aspect of the proposal centres on the basic language of almost blind walls. The division of the brickwork serves to express the great dimensions of the box built to be its best quality. The definition of the perimeter marks the limits of the project and prevents the space from being extended and prolonged to the outside, that is, from being sheltered by the elements of the building development. Basically it avoids confrontation: at heart we knew that this was the most suitable thing to do. Later the construction of the new telephone tower has confirmed this.

In addition, if this is allowed, the remodelling does not renounce its right to be included in the whole group of buildings which form the Olympic Ring even though this might suppose a profound reprimand from those who, because of variable circumstances, become censors of architecture. A prestigious jury created in Barcelona to award the annual prizes for building restoration rejected the Picornell baths project as being a new work: a decision which, dis-

counting its motivation, we consider to be the highest praise that can be given to the work carried out.

THE PROPOSAL

Essentially the proposed remodelling has the functional aim of serving the practice of the sport for which it is conceived. Nevertheless, the project directly refuses to seek refuge in the specific aspects of this type of installation. The high degree of technical qualification achieved in the work, necessarily obtained with the help of genuine specialists, does not diminish or attempt to hide the architectural problem which lies at the basis of the operation.

The former installations were hidden behind a dense wood. This vegetal mass lightened their presence, as did the meagreness and deficiencies of their form, in such a way that the fragments that were visible through the green offered no help in recognizing the constructed whole. In the proposal, the exterior surroundings are hardly modified, in the same way that the field of influence remains unchanged.

There will remain considerable traces of the former timidity but from these will arise the powerful new structure of the bridge crane which supports the spatial mesh of the roof and at the same time new façades which the precinct formerly lacked. The consciousness and memory of the place is thus guaranteed.

The complete plan is a sum of partial projects. The work involved comprises operations of earth removal, demolition, pathology and repair, renovation, enlargement and addition. Each one of the parts of the precinct becomes an individual case, but without forgetting that guiding lines obey and must be subject to the lines of the total project. The same occurs when the project is described. The complete dimension of the work, once the general outlines have been revealed, needs a detailed runthrough of its component parts.

To say that hardly anything of the former Bernat Picornell baths has remained is a way of evaluating the final result. All the built sections already existed and the project works with them to leave room for a complex programme. The buildings were cut, enlarged, lengthened and restored as thought fit. The vessels of two of the pools are new, bigger and technically better equipped. The training pool is covered. The changing rooms are bigger and have been resited, new complementary programmes appear, as do others with independent, alternative uses which need new locations.

The spectator tiers, retained integrally after a difficult process of repair, are the most visible witness to what were the former Picornell baths. On Montjuïc, with the complex restoration which has been achieved, there arises a new building in which to practice swimming.

The unification of criteria for the adoption of materials was of enormous help in the final result. One dominant colour was agreed, ivory white, and in approximation to this the different materials appear with which the whole is built. The siliceous-calcareous brick, the pieces and blocks of white prefabricated concrete, the ceramic work, the coating materials, the carpentry and the glazed areas all contribute to the serene uniformity of the whole.

The Mediterranean light of Montjuïc falls onto the deco-

ration and its reflections add to the sheet of water, contrasting with the chiaroscuro of the porticoes, in a feast of brilliant light evoked by the marvellous proximity of the sea. In the evenings the Garbí wind brings with it the scent of the waves to make it still more evident.

CONSTRUCTION PROCESS

As with most other similar examples, the work of remodelling carried out has not only passed through a varied range of partial projects but also experienced the need to resort to different building techniques. This continuous jump in objectives, or rather this continuous need to break the project down into other partial projects, creates a constant obligation to change scale and thus run the risk of losing the overall vision of the whole operation.

In round figures we could summarize and say that half of the present construction has been remodelled while the remaining half is either extension or new building. Of the half of the remodelled work, part has been preserved by using techniques of pathology while the rest has been achieved by means of the usual practices of remodelling, guided by fitness for use. The same can be said of that part of the building which is in the open.

The competitiveness achieved in the swimming pools, from the point of view of sporting performance, has been attained by the use of an excellent technical team. This requirement was one of the most important aims of the assignment.

In the different solutions employed, not only as regards the design of the pools themselves, systems for renewing the water, type of overflow, building systems, lining materials, etc., special recognition must be given to the valuable contributions made not only by the technicians who have taken a direct part in the project but also by the team of the owners who collaborated so efficiently when it came to taking decisions.

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SCENERY AND ARCHITECTURE IN THE OLYMPIC DEVELOPMENT

Many of the Olympic installations have much in common with wild mushrooms, not because of any formal relationship but because of the variety and speed with which they have grown and proliferated. These constructions have appeared in the twinkling of an eye, like mushrooms, in uncultivated fields, on no man's land, all across the country. The sowing, for distribution reasons, has not been uniform and Barcelona is full of them.

The last great holes in the city sponge have been filled and with these the eternal darning of holes in the urban fabric has come to an end, holes which we were so accustomed to see-

ing that we did not even notice them. Isolated fragments of orchards, of fields and remnants that resisted a change of use have disappeared. Everything has happened too fast—things that were lacking and also things we did not lack so much. With hardly a moment for doubt, what is acceptable is considered to be finished and time alone will confirm what has to be rectified.

Trees, with their slow growth, permit me to apply this phenomenon from an architectural point of view. Vegetal species have to be allowed a less hurried growth. In trees, for example, the trunk, the branches and the crown develop proportionally, following a natural rhythm, while the roots spread out correspondingly. As a structural element, an element of support and nutrition for the tree, beneath the soil and to the same degree as the rest, they establish themselves, take measurements and regulate the growth and its limits.

From a formal point of view, the roots are of no importance as they are not seen, they go under the ground, they are out of sight. But it is clear that for the very nature of the tree they are of fundamental importance.

The same thing happens to the roots as to many examples of architecture, such as:

Brushwood: Isolated (lost) building in urban wildernesses. Architecture lives and reveals itself haphazardly.

Rice fields: Absurd interminable rows of houses on dry farm land, promoted by Incasol.

Fallow land: Fields without roots which rationalize intensive cultivation, that is, the Olympic Village.

Vegetables: Allotments and vines on urban land to feed the stomach (urban design of the Olympic Ring).

Tubers: Half-buried constructions with abundant fertilizers in the form of credit.

The Olympic installations of the Vall d'Hebron are tubers; that is to say, good honest food in times of hunger. On the contrary, architecture, like trees, has a growth that is too slow to take advantage of in a limited period of time, in the short term. As is almost always the case, all that remains for us to do is wait to be able to confirm it.

MOISÉS GALLEGO