



Ignasi de Solà-Morales

ARCHITECTURE AND CRITICISM

The work of Ignasi de Solà-Morales (1942-2001) exemplifies some of the most significant attributes of a certain architectural tradition closely connected with Barcelona, notable for encompassing thinking about culture, heritage and the city within a single body of theory. This exhibition presents—for the first time in a museum—an extensive selection of material from the architect's personal archive.

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In the academic sphere, through the history and theory of architecture, or as a catalyst of diverse generations and practices, Solà-Morales was for almost 30 years a model of the difficult balance between professional exercise, critical production and influence in the public sphere.

This exhibition presents—for the first time in a museum context—an extensive selection of material from the architect's personal archive, consisting of working documents, notes and lectures, dialogues and projects, most of them never seen by the public before. This material not only tells us of Solà-Morales' own intellectual life but also gives an account of the development of architecture in Catalonia during the closing 30 years of the 20th century, of the fabric of cultural institutions constructed at that time, and of the links with international movements.

Solà-Morales lived at a time when people were looking to overcome ideological exhaustion and the more simplistic or black-and-white speculations. Today, we can see in his career a use—not without friction—of the transversality between disciplines such as philosophy and artistic languages or semiotics and architecture, as well as a consideration of the urban experience that invites us to draw parallels with the present.

Thus, the displacement of the strictly architectural discourse to the shifting realm of contemporary cultural grammar constitutes perhaps one of the most characteristic traits of Solà-Morales' work, the place where we recognise the validity of his ideas and through which we can trace the continuities and antagonisms posited by this exhibition.

ARCHITECTURE — CITY — METROPOLIS

The exhibition presents a number of key episodes in Ignasi de Solà-Morales extensive activity as an architect and as a lecturer, historian and theorist of architecture, crucial moments that demonstrate the confluence between his philosophical and aesthetic discourse and the issues that affect architecture and the city.

His life's work is viewed here as a continuous recontextualization of architectural phenomena: a path that leads from the history of local architecture to his consideration of more complex matters of global reach. This ambit reconstructs the formation of his thought, which took the critique of modernity as its starting point to seek explanations—in all instances fragmentary and off-centre—to the specific problems of the contemporary world.

Barcelona: The architecture of the bourgeois city

One of the initial lines of Solà-Morales's studies was aimed at reviewing the history of bourgeois Barcelona from eclecticism, historicism and Modernisme to the local avant-garde. His doctoral thesis, on the work of his grandfather on his mother's side, the architect Joan Rubió Bellver, enabled him to define the radius of action of *Gaudinisme* and to rethink the place occupied by some of the leading figures of *fin-de-siècle* architecture, with Gaudí himself and Josep Maria Jujol at the center. As a consequence, he went to considerable effort to raise a new appreciation of Gaudí, freeing him from the isolation to which the preceding historiography had condemned him, and from his own genius or superficial interpretations. As a logical continuation of this path, Solà-Morales was one of the first to recognise the work of Jujol as a clear example of avant-gardism.

The capital city as a political project

The work of Walter Benjamin was a central referent in the formulation and development of Solà-Morales' thinking. Solà-Morales was attracted by the German philosopher's

ability to cast aside the great theoretical apparatuses and by the intuitive force of his ideas, an interest that can be seen in the foreword—written in 1970—to the Spanish edition of *Angelus Novus* and which continued with his analysis of the project for the Great Barcelona of the early 20th century, led by the architect, politician and historian Josep Puig i Cadafalch.

Solà-Morales' studies on the International Exhibition of 1929 as an “instrument of urban policy” and as a “pretext” for setting in motion a “city expansion policy” are fundamental if we are to understand the meaning of contemporary Barcelona in his work. In clear keeping with the critical historiography of the 1970s, the architect studied the World's Fair on the basis of its “production and usage” conditions, paying particular attention to “contaminated architectures” as a counterpoint to the idealised vision of the local avant-garde. This approach culminated in 1980 with the publication of one of his most influential works, *Eclecticismo y vanguardia. El caso de la arquitectura moderna en Catalunya*.

His endeavour to strip away the element of myth from the history of architecture in order to create new lines of interpretation and debate proved successful thanks to his work as the director of the Historical Archive of the COACB (Association of Architects of Catalonia and the Balearics) between October 1970 and January 1973. In 1971, when the COACB received the archives of the GATCPAC (Group of Catalan Architects and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture), an exhibition on the group was organised but was eventually shut down by the political censors. Five years later, the critical consideration of the achievements and failures of the avant-garde took shape with the first facsimile (1975) reprint of *AC. Documentos de Actividad Contemporánea* magazine (1931-1935).

Rereadings of architecture

Clearly loath to accept historical labels, Solà-Morales posited a series of ‘rereadings’ of 19th and 20th century architecture through the COACB Archive. Together with Salvador

Tarragó and José Emilio Hernández-Cros, he established the basic lines of the Archive, consisting of the review of Catalan architecture, the defense of heritage, the creation of a documentation centre and the consolidation of the COACB as a centre of social and cultural agitation. One highlight in this context is the lecture given by the Italian critic and historian Manfredo Tafuri at the COACB at the invitation of Solà-Morales in 1971.

His rereadings of architecture project continued in the early years following the restoration of democracy with the reinterpretation of the period of autarchy, the launch of a new critical approach to the second phase of the Franco era. Fundamental to this was his article “Arquitectura española contemporánea: balbuceos y silencios”, part of the talks given by the Spanish delegation at the 37th Venice Biennale (1976), and his curation of a major exhibition on Spanish architecture, *Contemporary Spanish Architecture. An Eclectic Panorama*, held at the Architectural League in New York in July 1986.

Arquitectura y Crítica

A crucial factor during Solà-Morales’ formative years was his decision to combine his studies in philosophy with studies in architecture. At that time, he was interested in semiotics and structuralism, thanks to his approach to Italian architects and historians and to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Thereafter, one of his main concerns was connected with language and particularly the definition of a terminology that would enable him to *ponder* on and above all to *talk* about architecture, while distancing himself from professional jargon and forging links with the most notable lines of thinking of the time.

To understand Solà-Morales’ work as a theorist, we need to look at his collaboration with the Gustavo Gili publishing house, for which he was the advisor and director of the “Arquitectura y Crítica” (Architecture and Criticism) collection. In the piece he wrote to present the collection, Solà-Morales

put forward a “declaration of intent” that was clearly in keeping with his personal project to revisit the history and theory of architecture: “our goals are to stir up debate, to improve its standard, to broaden the bases of our architectural culture”. Thanks to this effort, some of the works that proved fundamental to the training of Hispanic American architects of the second half of the 20th century were translated and published.

Solà-Morales’ reflections on the meaning and function of criticism are here intertwined with his appraisal of the famous Semiotics and Architecture Symposium held in Castelldefels (1972) and his assessment of the critical essays of Aldo Rossi and Robert Venturi, two contributions that are crucial to our understanding of the development of contemporary architectural thinking.

A change in scale: time spent in the United States

Following years of experience as a teacher and critic in Spain, Solà-Morales moved to the United States with the intention of studying the connections between the academic architecture and the modern architecture there. While in the States, he began to collaborate with the IAUS (Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies), directed by the architect Peter Eisenman, which led to a significant change in scale in his thinking: coming into contact with Anglo-American authors and experiencing at close hand the impact of Italian and French criticism on the North American scene prompted the architect to lay the foundations of a theoretical framework of greater scope and complexity.

Solà-Morales’ American phase coincided with the formulation of bolder theoretical concepts and with a period of intellectual maturity during which he was a guest lecturer at the universities of Columbia and Princeton. Years later, he participated in the genesis of the *ANY* international conferences (1991-2000), which were intended to widen the international debate “on the status of architecture at the end of the millennium”. Based on these chapters in his career, he

constructed a new discursive fabric in which certain concepts crucial to his work emerged, such as ‘liquid architecture’, ‘weak architecture’ and ‘*terrain vague*’.

Differences, topographies

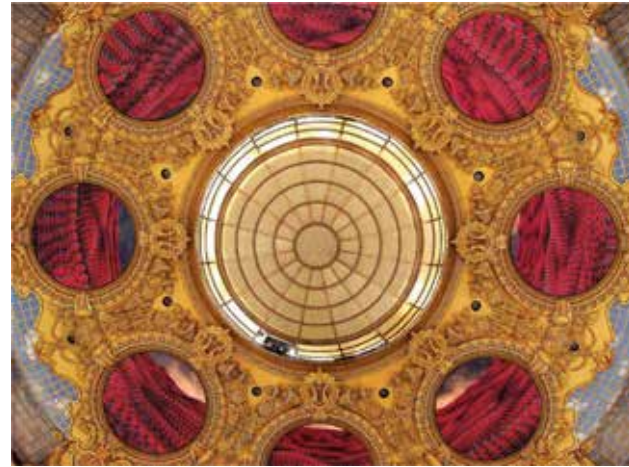
During the final stage of his life, Solà-Morales became interested in the problem of creation in crisis situations and specifically in the analysis of differences, which he defined as “the most characteristic trait of architecture in today’s world”. Taking as his referent the works of Gilles Deleuze (*Différence et Répétition*, 1968) and Jean-François Lyotard, (*Le Différend*, 1983), the architect considered the notion of differences in architecture in order to address “the diversity, tension, contrast and dynamics of the present”. At a time when the discipline of architecture was showing clear signs of exhaustion and given the impossibility of using “a single adjective or of privileging a single trend”, Solà-Morales mapped a remarkable topography that still today helps us to “make the territory of the architecture of our time intelligible”.

In complete keeping with the style of French poststructuralism, Solà-Morales suggested in his articles written in his mature years that we should read contemporaneity in the interstitial spaces of architectural and urban production, using concepts and references of greater complexity. He uses the term ‘weak architecture’ to mean an architecture that is neither important nor arrogant on the grounds that it is the only architecture capable of eschewing the banality and self-referentiality of postmodernity. In the ambit of the metropolis, exhausted by its own growth and frenetic activity, termed “nervous life” by Georg Simmel, Solà-Morales proposed a new, distracted and photographic look at the ‘other spaces’, the places of absence, that lacked a boundary or activity (*terrain vague*), which give us, as we contemplate them, a brief breath of freedom or, perhaps, the only hope of a better city.



Francesc Català-Roca. Exhibition *Marcel Duchamp*. Fundació Joan Miró. Barcelona, November 1984 - January 1985
Archive ISM

Manfredo Tafuri *et al.* *De la vanguardia a la metrópoli. Crítica radical a la arquitectura*
Collection «Arquitectura y crítica»
Ed. Gustavo Gili. Barcelona, 1972
Library ISM



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 Ignasi de Solà-Morales. Lecture given at
 Harvard University on October the 20th, 1993
 Published in *Anywhere*. Rizzoli International
 Publications Inc., New York, 1993
 Archive ISM

Conferences series "La cultura de la Metròpolis.
 Des de les diferències". CCCB. Barcelona 1994
 Archive ISM

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 Perejaume. «La platea abrupta». Project of
 intervention for the Gran Teatre del Liceu, c. 1998
 Collection Gran Teatre del Liceu

ANY conferences participants. 1991-2000
 Archive ISM



intervention on heritage or the recreation of an original that no longer exists, his professional career was inextricably linked with the set of problems inherent in the issue of the replica.

Through the presentation of some of his seminal critical texts and of his most important architectural works, this section invites visitors to reflect on the complexity of the process surrounding the act of reproducing a work and the cultural consequences associated with this.

Marcel Duchamp exhibition (1984)

Fundació Joan Miró (Barcelona) – Fundación
Juan March (Madrid)

With the first monographic exhibition on Marcel Duchamp in Spain, the curator Gloria Moure and the designers Eulàlia Serra and Solà-Morales embraced the challenge of displaying a self-contained oeuvre that was difficult for the public to grasp. Here, we focus on the creation of an exhibition narrative, the purpose of which was to place the emphasis on the critical analysis of Duchamp's work. By taking the issue of reproducibility as an essential aspect of Duchamp's work, the exhibition posited the dissolution of the boundaries between "originals and replicas, between unique pieces and multiples", illustrated by the 'making' of copies of two of the artist's chief works, *Le Grand Verre* and *Étant donnés*.

G.T. Rietveld exhibition (1971)

History Archive of the COACB

Solà-Morales was director of the COACB History Archive at the same time that a number of initiatives were set in motion to revive appreciation of major figures in the history of design. One of these ventures was the exhibition on Gerrit Thomas Rietveld (1971), organised by Santiago Roqueta, an architect promoter of the shop-workshop-study *Snark Bazaar* (1969) and the furniture editor *Snark Design* (1975) which produced the replicas for this exhibition. The display of replicas of pieces

of furniture by the Dutch designer prompted Solà-Morales to reflect on the reproduction of a work, which he interpreted as going beyond mimesis and as an opportunity to engage in an "exercise in research, the recomposition of a design process and the possibility of intimately understanding a method". Grasping the development of this idea in the architect's thinking is fundamental, as it enables us to reconstruct a path that he would follow in future interventions, tracing the process followed by the maker or designer of the original and, above all, to get close "to the innermost aspect of the work once its deep structure has been stripped away".

Reconstruction of the Barcelona Pavilion (1983-1986)

Following a long period of negotiation, which began back in the 1950s with the initial contact between Oriol Bohigas and Mies van der Rohe, Solà-Morales, Fernando Ramos and Cristian Cirici were commissioned to replicate one of the most influential architectural works of the 20th century, the German Pavilion designed by Mies for the Barcelona International Exhibition of 1929. This section reconstructs the complex, lengthy process that culminated in the reproduction of the original, starting from the centre of a debate from which the architects did not escape scot-free. Solà-Morales used the same arguments presented in relation to his Duchamp experience, with the idea that "every replica is, without question, a reinterpretation". However, neither the repeated theoretical arguments nor the numerous interventions of the institutions involved (from the MoMA to Barcelona Council) were able to prevent the project from stirring up extremely heated discussion between the proponents and critics of the reconstruction. Still today, more than 30 years on, the replica of the German Pavilion continues to generate new debates that question the validity of its existence.

Reconstruction of the Gran Teatre del Liceu de Barcelona (1994-1999)

When he took on the reconstruction of the Gran Teatre del Liceu opera house, with Lluís Dilme and Xavier Fabrè, Solà-Morales had to rethink some of his ideas concerning heritage and the social and cultural values of the architectural replica. The circumstances in this instance were unlike those of the previous cases, since the controversy surrounding the reproduction of the main auditorium was influenced by the social trauma caused by the blaze and by the wave of reactions opposed to any option other than the faithful 'restoration' of the original. The response to this situation was based on a two-fold strategy: firstly, a detailed analysis of the conditions of the main theatre and opera auditoria around the world to adapt the new Liceu to the latest requirements in comfort, security, visibility and technology; and secondly, the use of the tools offered by theory and the acceptance of the 19th century maxim of Camillo Boito: "where it was and as it was". This "cultural decision of continuity and of memory", as Solà-Morales put it, was the response to the public demand to restore the opera house's original look and ambience.

Theories on architectural intervention: the problem of heritage

The formulation of Solà-Morales's theories on intervention, restoration and reconstruction is essential to our understanding of the advance of thinking concerning heritage in the late 20th century. This theme is illustrated with a selection of his most influential articles and with the project to refurbish the Pati Llimona and Correu Vell buildings (1983-1991), an exercise that enabled him to put into practice his discourse on intervention as a form of interpretation of architecture. This section also looks at the shift in his thinking towards the problem of the metamorphosis of historical heritage into a theme park; a critical consideration of cultural

commodification that goes beyond the realm of architecture, becoming part of a deeper analysis of social changes, the 'museumification' of cultural objects and the 'spectacular' transformation of historical places.

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THE PUBLIC SPHERE

From very early on, Solà-Morales participated actively in the debate on the renewal of academia and in other cultural initiatives and established himself as a significant public presence in Barcelona. Sometimes centre stage and on other occasions in the wings, he had a career that was always connected with collaboration in public and private institutions, in which he played a key role, driving projects forward and acting as a catalyst for new ventures that are today essential to our understanding of the cultural evolution of Barcelona in the late 20th century.

The renewal of the academic context

In the years immediately prior to the death of Franco and during the early days of the restoration of democracy, Solà-Morales participated in the academic debate in his capacity as a professor at the Barcelona School of Architecture. Some of the initiatives that he was behind should be seen as bids to reform pedagogy, among them the Exhibition of the Centenary of the School of Architecture (Palau Nacional, 1977) and the exhibition, display on the 1929 International Exhibition (Fundació Joan Miró, 1979), examples of his extensive teaching career here complemented by a selection of his academic programmes and the research projects he directed.

Commitment to the public space

Ignasi de Solà-Morales always upheld the architect's commitment to society: "Thinking, designing the public space

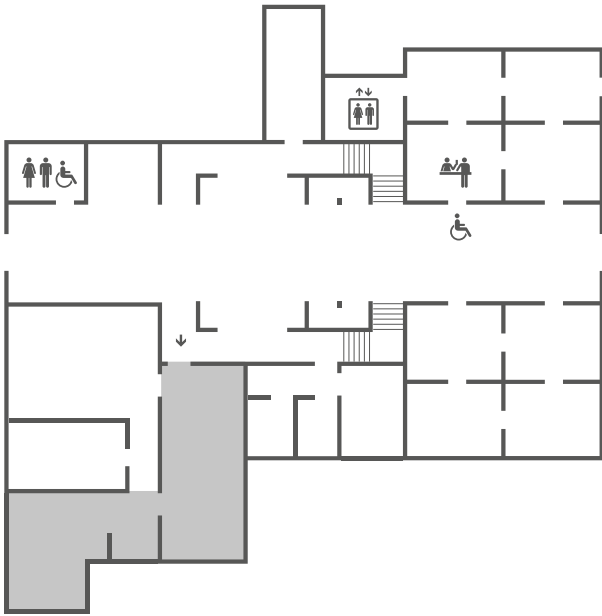
[presupposes] the existence of a collective that shares an identity and dignity in its rights and duties.” His concept of the thinking and activity of the profession was closely connected with this commitment to the public sphere and to a reality that was increasingly complex and in need of answers. A conviction that explains his determination to open up channels for interdisciplinary debate and to encourage forums of cultural exchange, which led him to participate in the creation of projects such as the Institut d’Humanitats (1987), where he took over the running of the Architecture and Urbanism Division. Directed by Professor Jordi Llovet, the Institut d’Humanitats is a remarkable space for learning and reflection. It was also the seed for the CCCB (Barcelona Centre of Contemporary Culture), which opened in 1994, another of the cultural projects that Solà-Morales contributed to.

Barcelona: action and reaction

The criticism of Barcelona as it was during the time of Porcioles published in the *Tele/eXpres* newspaper, no longer in circulation, is a reminder of one of Solà-Morales’ least known facets: his contribution to public debate on the city prior to the restoration of democracy. Together with José Emilio Hernández-Cros, Gabriel Mora and Albert Puigdomènech, the architect began to write regularly for the paper (1970-1972), enabling him to address the range of problems facing the capital and the metropolitan area in articles about the periphery, housing, the implementation of master plans, the Ronda ring roads, transportation, the destruction of heritage and many other issues. Special mention must be made of his individual contributions in newspapers and magazines in which he countered the expectations concerning Barcelona of the Olympic Games, such as “Desfer el miratge” (Dispelling the Mirage) and “Barcelona ’92: conclusions provisionals” (Barcelona ’92: Provisional Conclusions), both written in 1992, through his robust criticism of political and public self-complacency

and of the recurrent vision of major events in Barcelona as the driving forces of the contemporary city. From the late Franco era to the Olympic euphoria, in this section we discover the critical conscience and awareness of someone who worked to bring down the boundaries dividing social, pedagogical and cultural action.

Curators: Carmen Rodríguez
and Pau de Solà-Morales



La Virreina Centre de la Imatge
Palau de la Virreina
La Rambla, 99. 08002 Barcelona

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