

The Evolution of Intervention Criteria in Modern Movement Restoration: Essential Problems and Circumstantial Problems

GATCPAC'S CONSERVATION PROJECTS AS A CASE STUDY

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GATCPAC heritage is usually considered in relation to its historical context of the Second Republic and the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). We propose to also review the reconstruction and preservation of the group's work in light of the international revaluation of Modern Movement projects.

THE REPRESSION OF THE GATCPAC ARCHITECTS AND ARCHITECTURE

The Group of Catalan Architects and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture, which was headed by Sert and Torres Clavé, broke up towards the end of the Civil War. Some members died on the battlefield and some were forced into exile, whereas others joined the 'Nationalists' side. During the Franco dictatorship, repression fell not only on these militant architects, who were expelled from the Architectural Association and had their professional licences revoked, but also on their works and projects, especially those which most directly represented the political platform of the Second Republic. One example is the *Casa Bloc* complex, a worker's housing prototype; another is the *Dispensari Central Antituberculòs* of Barcelona, a clinic which served as a model of the democratization of health care; and a third is the *Pavilion of the Republic*, a political and cultural manifesto.

The *Casa Bloc* had been conceived as a social housing prototype based on the 'minimum dwelling' concept, and it was located in the then highly-politicized working-class neighbourhood of Sant Andreu. At the end of the Civil War, the complex was seized by the new regime, leaving it in a state of deterioration due to alterations and lack of maintenance. The southern block was converted into a Residence for War Widows and Orphans. The vertical circulation tower, which connected that block to the adjacent block, was sealed off from the rest of the complex. The elevators in the remaining towers were disassembled and transferred to other buildings under construction at the time. The common areas on the ground floor were compartmentalized and privatized. A Police Unit occupied a large part of the south patio for stables and other purposes, sealing it off from the street. The ground floors in the north side blocks were converted into a school, occupying and sealing off most of the north patio. The construction between 1940 and 1945 of a sixth block to house police officers' families completed the take-over of the complex.

The Central Anti-Tuberculosis *Dispensari* of Barcelona was intended to address the unsanitary conditions found in the Raval neighbourhood, which at the time was the most degraded in the city and the most densely populated in Europe. The building also represented beliefs regarding hygiene that were held by the Group, which resulted in a proposal to improve the sanitary conditions of the urban fabric. However, at the end of the war, the neighbourhood continued to deteriorate and the building itself suffered from continual modifications and a lack of maintenance for more than fifty years.



Figure 1. Casa Bloc (1934-38), Barcelona. Sert, Torres Clavé and Subirana. In the 1930's.
Arxiu Mas.

In February 1937, with the Civil War raging but with hopes of suppressing General Franco's military insurrection still alive, the government of the Republic decided to participate in the Paris World Fair. A pavilion, whose main objective was to exhibit the values and aspirations of the Second Republic, was erected to showcase a country in full process of modernization and innovation, despite the difficulties imposed by the circumstances of war. This was fully expressed in the contrast between the austerity of the materials used for its construction, such as the *Uralita* fibro-cement panels and the quality and abundance of the artwork exhibited inside. Once the event had finished, the building was demolished and forgotten while the artworks it housed were dispersed, due to the war. Pablo Picasso's 'Guernica' would not return to Spain until 1981.

THE VINDICATION OF THE GATCPAC AS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE AGAINST THE FRANCO REGIME

A little less than twenty years after the end of the Spanish Civil War, Joan Prats arranged a meeting with a group of young architects and students to view the documents and material which he himself had rescued from the GATCPAC premises after Franco's troops entered Barcelona. This event, among others, could be considered a first step towards vindicating a type of architecture strongly dedicated to the social and political principles of the Second Republic. Such interest grew in the sixties, with the first classification of material from the archive, and the publication of several articles about this issue, especially those regarding Sert, who had become an international figure.

1971 marked the high point of this period of vindication with the staging of the first exhibition on GATCPAC at the headquarters of the Architectural Association of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands in Barcelona, even though it was 'camouflaged' behind *Uralita* panels. The documents were placed in the Association's historical archives and issues 90 and 94 of the architectural journal *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*, which were published in 1972 and 1973 respectively, were devoted to the first historical research concerning this subject.

GATCPAC'S VINDICATION THROUGH RECONSTRUCTION AND PRESERVATION OF ITS WORK UPON REINSTATEMENT OF THE GENERALITAT

The Generalitat of Catalonia – an autonomous government body dissolved in 1939 upon Franco's victory – was restored in 1977 within the framework of the democratic transition. This new context was especially favourable towards furthering the initial vindications of the 1960's and 1970's, the first positive steps taken towards recovering the constructed masterpieces.

A series of interventions illustrate the period covering the early 1980's through to the late 1990's. In 1982, work began on recovering the structure and on the reconstruction of the *Dispensari* roof. In 1986 a pilot project was begun in one of the blocks of the *Casa Bloc*, coinciding with the reconstruction period of the Barcelona Pavilion by Mies van der Rohe (1981-1986). This was followed by the reconstruction, in Barcelona, of the *Pavilion of the Republic* in 1992, taking advantage of the city's staging of the Olympic Games, and a thorough intervention in the *Dispensari*. Then, in the late 1990's, work began on the second intervention phase in the *Casa Bloc*.

This period coincided with a growing number of intervention projects to recover and conserve Modern architecture in various other countries. Specific problems common to the restoration of this type of architecture started to become evident during this period. So, despite having overcome the problems related to the political and social value of the GATCPAC work, such intervention projects have to be understood within a context in which the discipline specific to Modern Movement architectural restoration was just beginning to be developed. This is why it is currently relevant to analyze the intervention criteria applied, and to distinguish between essential problems – those that are intrinsic to the conception and materialization of these works – and *circumstantial problems* – those that are characteristic of a historically and politically determined conjuncture, in order to understand the consequences they have on long-term preservation.



Figure 2. *Casa Bloc* with the sixth block added.
Arxiu Històric de la Diputació de Barcelona.



Figure 3. *Dispensari Central Antituberculos* (1933-37), Barcelona. Sert, Torres Clavé and Subirana. In the 1940's.
Arxiu Mas.

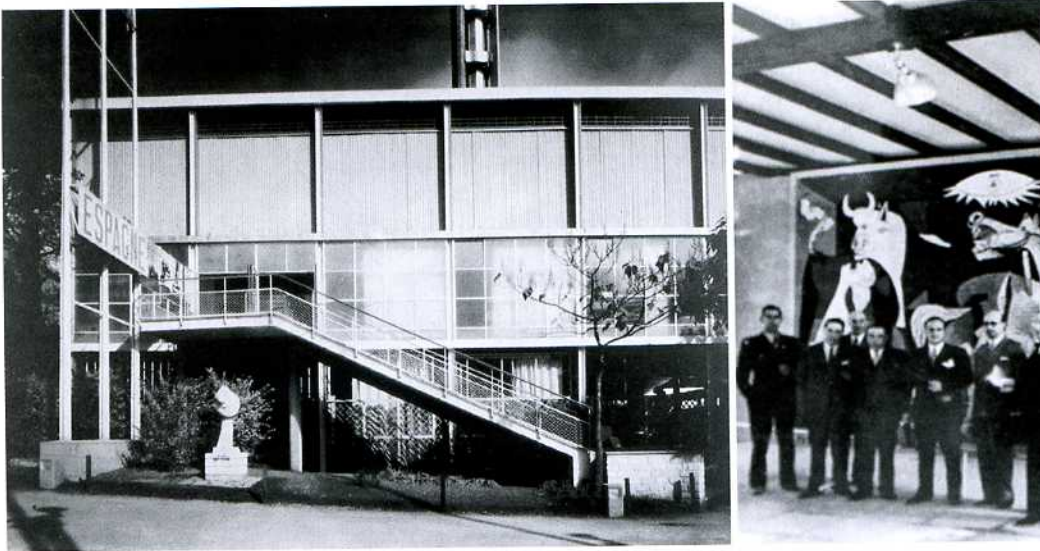


Figure 4. *Pavilion of the Republic (1934-37). Paris World Fair, 1937. Sert and Lacasa. Kollar/Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.*

INTERVENTIONS CARRIED OUT ON GATCPAC PROJECTS AS A REFLECTION OF THE ESSENTIAL PROBLEMS AND CIRCUMSTANTIAL PROBLEMS OF RESTORING THE MODERN MOVEMENT

The intervention projects carried out in the *Casa Bloc* largely consisted of pragmatic repair work, the main objective being the preservation of its original social composition and function. In the complex's common areas, it was decided to reverse the imposed modifications, although a part of the South Patio remains privatized for the exclusive use of the former Residence for War Widows and Orphans. Despite the fact that during the first phase of the refurbishment the demolition of the sixth block was taken into consideration, it remained standing until July, 2008, when demolition work was begun. In the apartments themselves it was decided to consolidate the changes they had undergone over time. The 'minimum dwelling' standard set in the 1930's, was no longer considered applicable to the standards of comfort in the 1980's and 1990's, so the enclosing of the apartment terraces, which all the residents had taken upon themselves to do over a number of years, was not reversed. Nevertheless, all of this entailed alterations to both the morphology and the original materiality of the complex.

The works carried out in the *Dispensari* also involved a high degree of reconstruction, including the rooftops, part of the structure, part of the South facade and the plasterwork. Furthermore, original materials representing a health hazard, such as the fibrocement panels, had to be replaced. With regard to the conservation of the original relationship between form and function, the conversion of the *Dispensari Antituberculòs* into a Primary Care Centre did not result in significant spatial or volumetric alterations in adapting it to the new programme – with one important exception: it proved to be impossible to maintain the original function of the roof-terrace, which had been used for heliotherapy treatment and was a space central to the concept of the building. It became a service area.

As for the *Pavilion of the Republic*, the initial objective for its reconstruction was to remain as faithful as possible to the original design, not only by reconstructing the building exactly as the original, but also by returning the art works that were once part of its cultural content and

propaganda. However, the complexity of the equipment required by a contemporary exhibition hall was not compatible with the characteristics of the original building. As it was a new building, functional changes were imposed and new building codes were applied which gave rise to considerable formal, constructive and spatial modifications, such as the addition of an originally nonexistent basement (approximately 300 m²) to house the offices of the company sponsoring the new project. This modification to the original morphology was justified by the fact that the new location had a pronounced slope, unlike the original plot. In spite of the modifications in the execution of the details and the application of contemporary standards, the reconstructed Pavilion has had to undergo various repairs in little more than 15 years.

Upon analyzing these early cases of intervention, it can be seen that the fundamental principles of preservation – minimum intervention, maximum retention of original fabric, conserving as found, reversibility of new interventions, or ruling out of any reconstruction work – were all radically questioned. In fact, many of the points, which the Venice Charter determined as exceptions, were recurrent in these interventions. Furthermore, the profound difficulties in retaining the original materiality of these buildings helped to allow a certain amount of freedom in terms of the introduction of major alterations and the application of irreversible intervention methods, or the application of intervention methods without sufficient knowledge of their mid- or long-term performance. In some cases this resulted in the distortion of the material design of the original work.

This distortion was directly related to the main essential problems regarding the restoration of these works: the fragility of the original materiality – due to either the use of new materials without sufficient knowledge of their performance or durability, or the use of traditional materials in new ways or in a combination with new materials, to attain a new architectural expression –; the rapid development of new materials and also their rapid supersession; the life expectancy and rapid expiration of the buildings' functional programmes caused by the close relationship between form and function, and the projects' experimental condition.

However, the circumstantial problems posed specific difficulties for the success of these interventions. Problems related to the evolution of socio-cultural appreciation of the works include cultural and technological proximity, making it difficult to identify the works as being part of the architectural heritage; changes in building codes; changes in accepted standards of comfort; or changes in the buildings' surroundings. Problems related to developments in the specific discipline of Modern architectural restoration include lack of experience, lack of points of reference for restoration of Modern Movement works as well as lack of research into *Modern materials* and their long-term repair. Ultimately, the most serious problem was the lack of conceptual clarity between the practice of renovating a contemporary building and that of restoring a heritage building. Thus these interventions were characterized as having as their primary objective the recovery of the original artistic value along with functional and formal aspects, whilst the authenticity of the original materials was undervalued.

UNDERSTANDING CONSERVATION AS AN ONGOING PROCESS

Despite the aforementioned difficulties and dilemmas, in a relatively short period of time it has proven possible to restore or reproduce Modern materials; to find functions which are compatible with the original spatial concept of these buildings; to gain the appreciation of the non-professional public, and so on – all issues which at other times seemed unresolvable. Even though this evolution has taken place and there are a number of cases today where intervention work stands out for its quality and is considered exemplary, only 20 years have passed since the sea change in attitudes, represented among other things by the creation of DOCOMOMO. This is why we must be aware that in comparison to traditional restoration practice, the restoration of the Modern Movement is still in its early stage of development.

Faced with the present state of affairs, and if Modern restoration does in fact present inherent characteristics and specific problems, it is important to identify which of these are essential problems and which respond to circumstantial situations that have now begun to be resolved. It is therefore fundamental to understand conservation as an ongoing process, not as a complete action in and of itself, and take the experience acquired through restorations carried out on works from preceding periods as a conceptual reference. In this sense, it is necessary to prioritize the use of non-destructive, tried-and-tested and reversible methods of intervention as a way to the conservation of both the originality of the materials as well as the original architectural concept.

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