

## Thinking/Drawing from Peripheral Vision: Techniques + Approaches Learned from Miralles

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"We would like to suggest that the first step to understanding the drawings would be to look at them out of focus. Half close your eyes. Or, if you wear glasses, take them off... looking at things without forming a firm opinion... without the intrusion of questions as to "what is this", how does it work,... opening it up to resemblances and associations..."<sup>1</sup>

"...as soon as the frame is withdrawn, the object is found to exist as part of a mobile continuum that cannot be cut anywhere... (and it, the object) cannot be said to occupy a *single* location, since its locus is always the universal field of transformations".<sup>2</sup>

To fully understand the thinking behind the drawings of Enric Miralles, I have always thought that there might be some clue in the title of his (Miralles') Doctoral Thesis, "Things seen to left and right". I have attempted here to tie together various dots which might give insight to the drawings as both artifact and process. I am interested in the drawings in relation to the invention and imagination of the associated architectural space with the aim of identifying what architects might glean and bring to their own work from visits to these drawings.

My preparations for teaching a course on "representation and spatial reasoning", has focused my attention in recent years on the history and evolution of spatial ideas in relation to the primary modes of architectural representation – the three projective methods

(orthography, paraline, + perspective) and the peripheral practices of *stereotomy*, its associated *traits* and *trompes*, mapping and notation, collage, photo montage, and animation.

Looking for experimental approaches to orthographic projection to share with students inspired me to re-examine Miralles' drawings. Although the manner in which the drawings are made is not a new form of representation, the interconnection of projective views puts a number of conventions in question. More importantly, the interconnections between drawings, and between them and the page's (lack of) edges, are extra-ordinary in the linking of drawing to speculation, sensory perception, embodiment, to geometry, and spatial thinking.

Let's begin by examining a drawing or two - Bremerhaven Port (fig. 1) and the Ines Table (fig. 2). Horizontal and vertical slices occupy the same page; often, as in complex problems of descriptive geometry, views are associated to facilitate the author's resolution of specific circumstances. At times views float freely or have been slid, laterally related to the section cut. Scales shift, as though the author's thoughts became fascinated momentarily with one particular detail. They are not necessarily arranged to facilitate reading of the drawings. The manner in which orthographic views or section cuts relate to each other also challenges what has become the conventional relationship between the diverse drawings and studies and the page itself. Obedience to the normative Cartesian organization of views from one (reader's) vantage point is completely

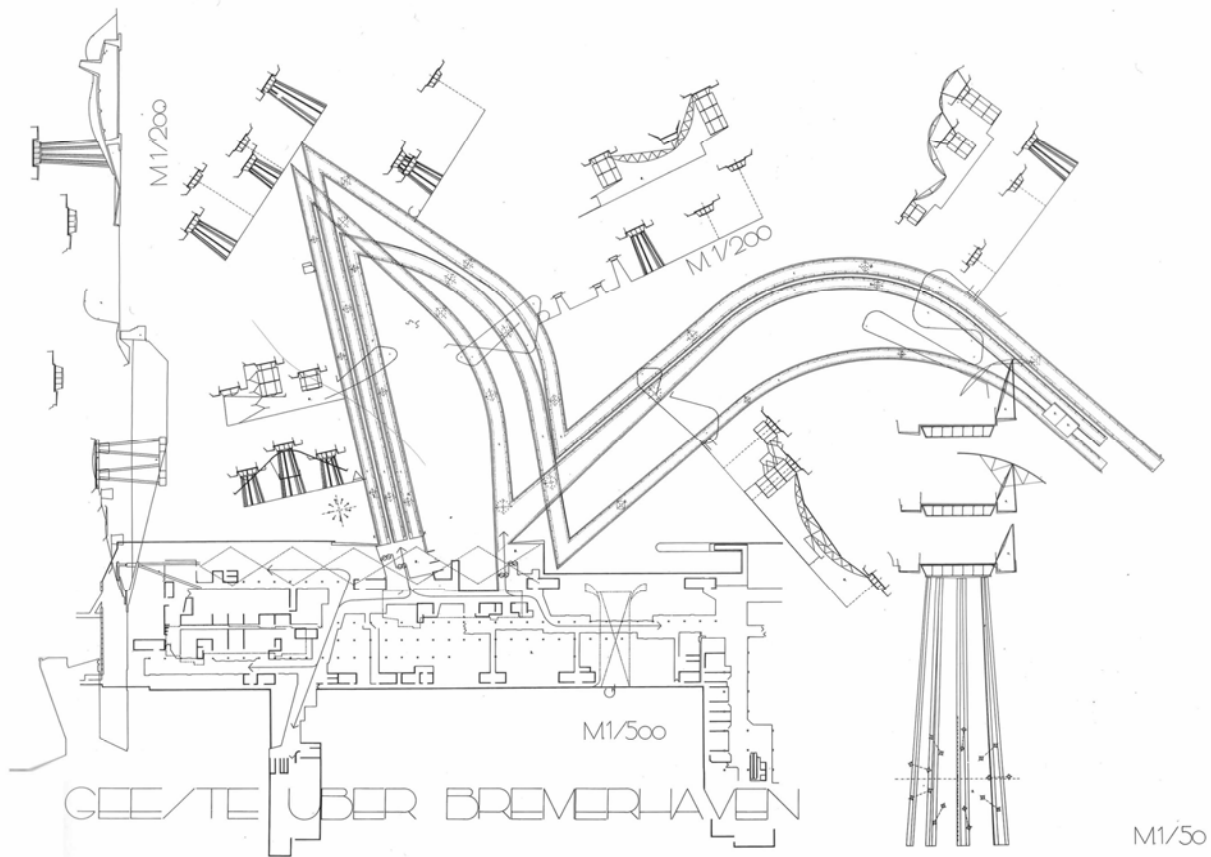


Fig. 1. New Center in Bremerhaven Port. 1993

abandoned. Projective planes intersect + overlap, on the spot, following the often undulating, landscape-like geometries. Views multiply as they make their way around the investigated space.

"If *place* is one of those moments when thought is woven with reality... In this sense, the drawing, even the paper itself, is *place* for an instant... The rules that let us advance also appear in it. Blank paper never exists. It is only an invisible backing... if we accept the rules of the page, it is to forget it. Shifts and turns make the paper lose its sheet nature... On these planes... it is a task of multiplying a single intuition: in seeing it appear in all its possible forms".<sup>3</sup>

Nearly any of Miralles' drawings will lead one to conclude that the drawing was rotated repeatedly during the process of its construction or that the drawing's author moved around the drawing table, re-establishing at each turn a new *cardo-decumanus*. Who/what shifts/turns? Is it the

geometry of the architecture in the mind of the author that lead to this manner of drawing or did a manner of drawing, and moving around the space of the page (the space of a terrain) lead to this particular kind of geometry + thus architecture?

Miralles is by no means the first to shake up the orientation on the page. As previously mentioned, this *is* the convention for solving problems of intersection through descriptive geometry. This rotated viewpoint is also found within historical representations of both architectural space and depictions of landscapes, especially in Japan. Maps are "typically rotated through a full 360 degrees in order for its written and pictorial information to be absorbed. The information faces in all directions".<sup>4</sup> Unlike western maps, no attempt whatsoever is made to maintain or even establish a primary orientation.

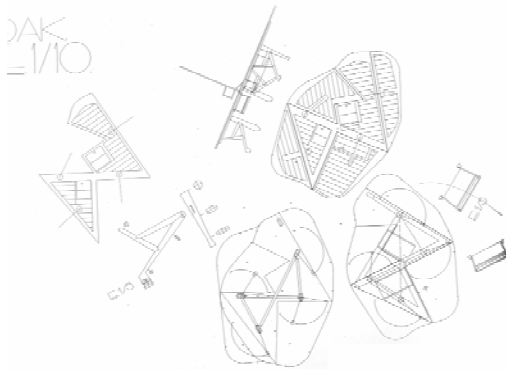


Fig. 2. Ines Table. 1993

Returning to the question of motive behind the technique, maybe Tagliabue's suggestion to remove one's glasses or squint is a hint. In looking at a page of drawings, eyes half closed or squinting, the edges of the page become completely lost. Miralles blatantly states, vis-à-vis the rules of the page, "forget it". Erase the edge. This is an excellent technique for perceiving the architecture depicted and described on the page as existing in a larger expanse, extending infinitely 360°, in all directions.

The edge now gone also frees the body of the architect from his/her conventional frontal and static relationship to the drawing, and creates a new way of thinking of the body as mobile, around the drawing, as well as projected into the space under construction within the drawing. Both author and reader move around the page, mentally and physically. But no *body* is represented (illustrated) within the space of the drawing. In this way the *embodiment* of the space of representation differs radically from that identified with Carlo Scarpa and his Veneto colleague, Valeriano Pastor. Their drawings are literally inhabited by weighty, fleshy, tactile, viewing illustrated beings. The Miralles body-in-drawing is not a Scarpa-esque representation of body parts or wholes within sections and perspectives. Rather, this body, like that in *Las Meninas*, is the presence of both the author and the observer, simultaneously both in and around the drawing. One literally moves one's body or imagined body around the drawing, mentally projecting oneself into the space and into the traces of the body of the author in the way one appropriates footprints left in the snow by some prior traveler.

Let us focus for a moment, not on the projected body within the space of the drawing

or the body of the drawing-author, but rather step back and question the frame, the page itself, and ask some larger questions about vision and the limiting and framing devices of vision and drawing.

Norman Bryson, in his essay "The Gaze in the Expanded Field", discusses the gaze (*regard*), and the relation between frame, subject and object, in three conceptual, cultural and visual models: that presented by Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Lacan, and Keiji Nishitani. Bryson postulates that the model put forth by Nishitani successfully and finally undoes the Cartesian frame and resulting oppositional / dialectic / dualistic and anthropocentric structure of vision. Nishitani presents an alternative to the "paranoid" or "nihilistic" attempts at dismantling the centralized structure of vision through the introduction of *sunyata*, or emptiness, blankness.<sup>5</sup> Essentially Nishitani reconfigures the structure of vision, viewer, and viewed not as the central, privileged view from a particular static place, but rather one instant in a continuum of possible instances. This mobilizes vision, locates it along a path - the antithesis to the static vision of Italian renaissance painting. This also negates the conceptually static relationship between viewer and universe that has been the foundation of visualized representation in architectural practice (central projection) since Alberti laid the groundwork of *perspectiva artificialis*.

What is Nishitani really suggesting? "What is not thought through (by Sartre, Lacan, et al.) is the question of vision's wider frame".<sup>6</sup> One point is the shifting of focus from within the limited framing device, such as view finder, canvas of the painting, or edge of the paper for the architect at the drawing board, to the extension of the space of perception beyond the frame, 360° spherically around the perceiving organs in the head of the observer. Or if we look at the tradition of scroll and screen painting in China and Japan, the page of representation is explicitly set up as an expansive landscape, which engages the viewer in time. Regarding narrative screens and scrolls, "it could only be convincing as art and suggestive of coming incident when the composition matched the fluidity of the narrative. In such a long form (often 15" by up to 30') the *absence of bounding lines* on the sides made it possible for the artists to arouse interest, to shift the setting, and to unite the whole in a continuous design".<sup>7</sup>

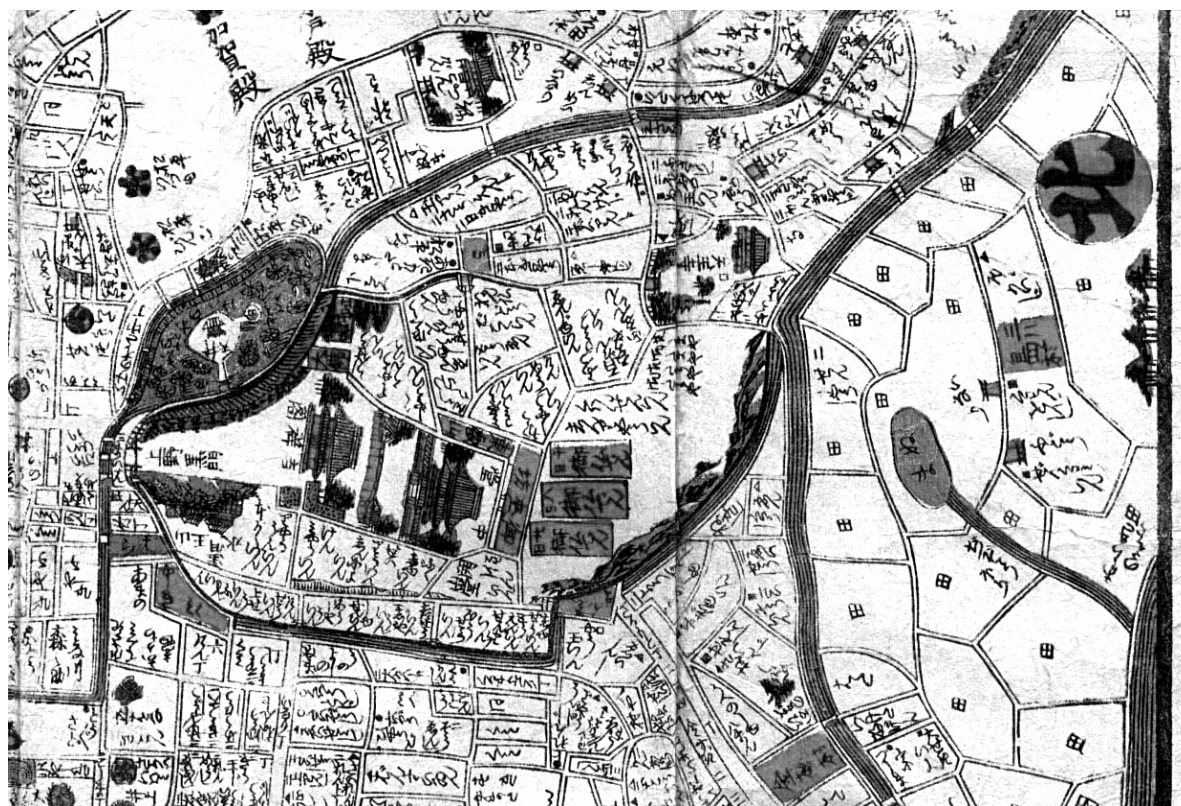


Fig. 3 – Fragment of Edo (Tokyo) Map , with East facing down, text and images all directions, c. 1844-48.



Fig. 4 - Izumo Shrine

I remain within the representational confines of the page for this discussion as the drawings to which I am referring from Miralles' studio were constructed by hand on paper, and not in the infinite space of digital drawing and modeling. I would speculate that Miralles worked, thought space / drew space, within the mental context of 360° perception, (not a limited page) out of which one particular view, at one instant in time is selected. And adjacent to that, another view / instant is laid down, until, by walking around the architecture, mentally through projection of the body into the space of the page, one has fully investigated the terrain, instant by instant.

### Caminar/Walking

"Tracks as writing on the surface we move or ponder on. That trace which corresponds to the movement we believe we discover in the place.... Fragments of these movements describe a geometry linked to a reality: they envelope real shapes".<sup>8</sup>

Thus drawing may be considered as a process for the meditation upon and investigation of

specific local instances; the drawing, in its construction and rethinking of conventions can support a spatial thinking which is more *local* than global. Instead of revealing or investigating the full picture all at once, the drawing investigates, step by step, each instant, in its specific place. Again, there are historical, but marginalized, models for this kind of thinking/drawing: these ancestors are the unfolded elevations which inhabit plans and maps and the multiple and conflicting paraline views such as those I found in the Izumo Shrine Treasury's collection. (fig. 4)

Information is revealed, spatial element by element, turning each so as to reveal the most important face that one encounters along one's path. These drawings/maps, like Miralles', embrace the body of the author/viewer as moving in time through the space as it unfolds experientially before the senses. Things perceived, not just frontally, but to left and right, sometimes in focus, sometimes in peripheral vision.

Returning to the main story, why is it that Enric Miralles speaks about things seen to left + right (as in one's peripheral vision) or seen with one's glasses removed? Benedetta Tagliabue reveals that one benefit of this technique is to delay judgment. To create a gap or expanse in the creative process which can be occupied by a multitude of associated thoughts. The direct link between what is drawn (lines, dots, shapes, areas, tonalities...) and what it "is" is momentarily disconnected. As opposed to the direct implication and the assumption that something is X, the Duchampian door is left to flap in the breeze,

slamming against a multitude of hypothetically associated jambs. The technique of squinting, of dropping one's lids half way over the eyes, denies one the ability to look directly AT the object of study; it instead forces one to sense all of the twinkling space around the object and its "full radiation of light emitted omnidirectionally", as Bryson refers to it, which intersects with the author's/viewer's 360° sensing and probing.<sup>9</sup>

If the vision is blurred, or it is all rendered peripheral, the edge of the page disappears; the larger context becomes boundless. Similarly, the identifying details are eliminated; the larger gesture is perceived in all its ambiguity, allowing an open-ended musing on the possible interpretations. The perceived incompleteness of the drawing or image places the fragment within the realm of an open-ended work.

Given the invention Miralles brings to the relation of drawing to drawing, drawings to the page, to the work itself, it would only be in keeping that there would be a *practical* drawing technique, beyond squinting or removing one's glasses, that would place the mind appropriately to see and conceive of the work within this open-ended, free association process.

Photographs taken of constructed works, or those under construction, models, reference images, are cropped, cut up and reconfigured, willfully rendering the seemingly static and complete as continuing, unfinished, open-ended and just another moment within the

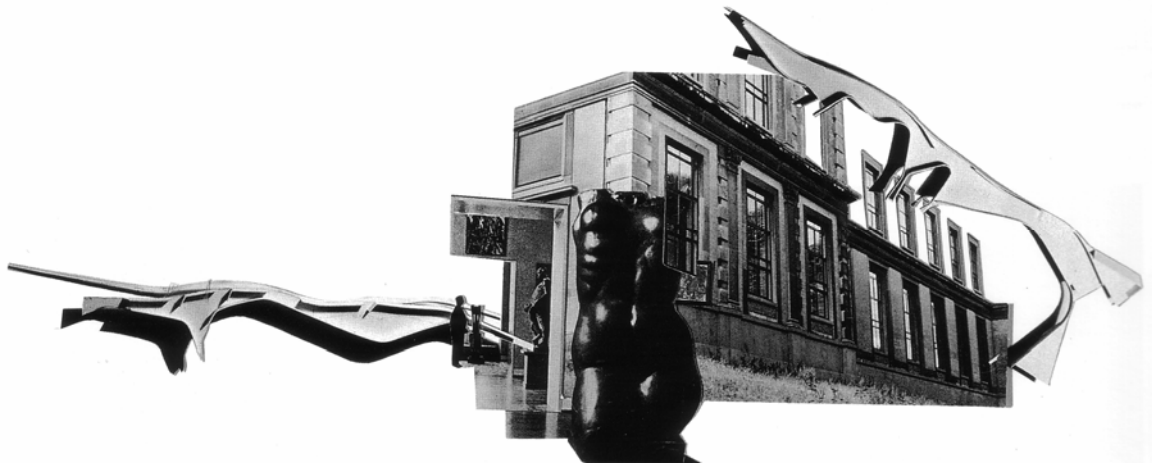


Fig. 5. Cropped photographs Royal Museum Copenhagen, 1992

continuum of design. The photographic filaments linger on the tabletops, the pages, with other works in progress. This technique enables seeing completed projects, better referred to as things made/things drawn, as an instant in a continuous process as opposed to a series of discrete objects.

Why would these techniques – to link specific works into a larger process, a larger site, unfolding slowly, in time – be important or useful? In particular for students at the beginning of their education, it is all too easy to think of and see the work in the opposing fashion – as a series of discreet projects or objects with precise beginnings and endings. These methods that Miralles worked with and developed allow for readings of the work in a physically continuing space as well as within a temporal continuum. The drawings are also useful models for differentiating drawn lines as abstract geometries to lines describing an inhabited path, limits of flows or perception, and the development of an embodied space discovered, manipulated and invented as one moves along, step by step. In studio and representation class, when trying to unstick a student, stuck on a singular interpretation of their own drawings, I refer, time and again, to Miralles' work. Cropping and remixing in space and time, examining what is seen with peripheral vision, unfolding the drawn views slowly, locally, and placing the body within each local condition, and eliminating the edge – these are all means towards thinking/drawing architecture as an open-ended experimental process.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Tagliabue, Benedetta. "Don Quixote's Itineraries or material in the clouds", *AD Architectural Monographs #40. Enric Miralles Mixed Talks*. . Academy Group: London, 1995. p 118.

<sup>2</sup> Bryson, Norman. "The Gaze in the Expanded Field", *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, no. 2, DIA Art Foundation, Hal Foster, editor. Bay Press: Seattle, 1988. p 97.

<sup>3</sup> Miralles, Enric. "Lugar / Place", *Miralles/Pinos, Miralles, El Croquis nos. 30+49-50+72*. Richard C. Levene + Fernando Marquez, editors. El Croquis Editorial: El Escorial / Madrid, 1999. p 28-9.

<sup>4</sup> Shelton, Barrie. *Learning from the Japanese City: Wets meets East in Urban Design*. E & FN Spon: London. 1999. p. 53

<sup>5</sup> In Bryson's article, in reference to the attempts to dismantle the Cartesian structure of vision, self + other, Sartre's reading of the gaze is tinged with a sense of menace (p 95-6) and Lacan's, paranoid. Nishitani presents his alternative in *Religion and Nothingness*, Univ. of California Press: Berkeley, 1982.

<sup>6</sup> Bryson, p 96.

<sup>7</sup> Paine, Robert Treat + Soper, Alexander, *The Art + Architecture of Japan*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 1955. p 137

<sup>8</sup> Miralles, Enric. "Caminar / Walking", *Miralles/Pinos, Miralles, El Croquis nos. 30+49-50+72*, Richard C. Levene + Fernando Marquez editors. El Croquis Editorial: El Escorial / Madrid, 1999. p 40-1.

<sup>9</sup> Bryson, p 101-2.

## Figures

Fig 1. Area 4: Crystal Palace, Ground floor plan + sections. New Center in Bremerhaven Port, 1993. Enric Miralles, associate architect: Benedetta Tagliabue. *Miralles/Pinos, Miralles, El Croquis nos. 30+49-50+72*, Richard C. Levene + Fernando Marquez editors. El Croquis Editorial: El Escorial / Madrid, 1999. p 354.

Fig 2. "Ines-Table", for "Le Magazine" exhibition, Grenoble, France, 1993. *AD Architectural Monographs #40. Enric Miralles Mixed Talks*. . Academy Group: London, 1995. p 56.

fig 3. Fragment of Edo (Tokyo) Map, with East facing down, text and images all directions; Koka Era. c. 1844-48. Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, Univ. of Texas at Austin. <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/edo.html>

fig 4. Painting of the Izumo Shrine, Izumo Shrine Treasury, Izumo Taisha, Shimane, Japan. photo © by the author, 2006. The image has two opposing paraline logics at work, in order to reveal the facades and oblique views experienced during a pilgrimage to the shrine.

Fig 5. Enlargement of the Royal Museum in Copenhagen, 1992. Enric Miralles, associate architect: Benedetta Tagliabue. *Miralles/Pinos, Miralles, El Croquis nos. 30+49-50+72*, Richard C. Levene + Fernando Marquez editors. El Croquis Editorial: El Escorial / Madrid, 1999. p 296.