



Nationalism and Architecture in the Catalan Modernisme

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The movement we know in Catalonia as *Modernisme* is not merely the Catalan version of the movement internationally identified as Art Nouveau. It is true that Catalan *Modernisme* and *Art Nouveau* share an internationalist desire and a cosmopolitan spirit. Undoubtedly, the principal characteristic of *Art Nouveau* is the desire to create an international architectural style reflecting the cosmopolitan culture that dominated fin-de-siècle mentalities. But the Catalan movement presents a clear paradox: holding on to its roots yet defending the most radical modernity. In Catalonia, the new forms, the sinuous line and the stylisation that leaves historic styles behind, preserves its own roots and traditions and are superimposed on historical forms, mainly of Gothic origin. Iconographic forms (St. George, patron saint of Catalonia, the continuous presence of Montserrat mountain, etc) are also closely linked to national traditions. The cosmopolitan mentality is translated in Catalonia as a general idea of modernity, but a modernity that wants to project the country towards the future by absorbing its deepest roots.

Of course, it was important to defend Catalonia's own architectonic styles, iconographic elements and building techniques, but a sense of modernity was always sought in European models of the day. Certainly, French influence was the most important – travelling to Paris was essential at this time for architects, artists and craftsmen - but ideas also arrived from other countries. The fact is that we can find in Barcelona a combination of all the European movements: from France came French Symbolism, the taste for the sinuous line of Art Nouveau and Japanese fashion; from Germany, Wagner and his new concept of Total Art; and from Britain, the aesthetics of the Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin and Morris's philosophy and, of course, the models inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement.

1880-1888. Travelling through Europe

In 1902, a young architect, Josep Puig i Cadafalch, described the period 1880-1888 in a homage to his old master, Domènech i Montaner. He compared the archaeological architecture of Elies Rogent, who built University of Barcelona, and that of Joan Martorell, a Romantic medievalist not far removed from the British Victorian spirit, with the more modern work of Domènech i Montaner. His work summarized the modernisation of Catalan architecture because of its contribution to the combination of structural concepts, form and function, i.e. because of its ability to overcome a concept of eclecticism based on “stylistic models” in order to define a renewed eclecticism that integrated the container and the contents, form and function, structure and ornament.

The key point for understanding the “triumph of eclecticism” was the discovery by Domènech i Montaner - who in this moment worked with another architect, Josep Vilaseca - of the great architecture of Central Europe. The contributions made by Gartner and von Klenze in Munich, Friedrich Schinkel in Berlin and especially Gottfried Semper in Dresden and Vienna are characterized by the search for a blend of technique and form, based on the prior option of a stylistic type and its incorporation in the urban context. Vilaseca and Domènech i Montaner travelled through Germany and Switzerland, in 1880, when they were working on a very important project, a Provincial Teaching Institutions Building that was never built. But Vilaseca also visited Vienna after finishing his studies and, in his own house (now destroyed), he wrote on the cornice the names of Schinkel, von Klenze and Semper next to those of Villanueva, Michelangelo, Wren or Mansart, without making any reference to the neo-medievalist architects. Finally, the library of Domènech technical, now being studied, allows us to see that German books (most of them technical, although there are some travel guides among them) occupied a prominent place. The result was a renewed conception of Eclecticism as stylistic alternative, with a wise use of ornamentation as the basic component of architecture and always according to the building's construction conditions. That is really important because the integration between architecture and ornamentation is the prime principle of Catalan Art Nouveau architecture.

Nationalism and Architecture in the Nineties

The first part of this talk will focus on the special features, which can be found in some constructions that we define as the *Primer període modernista* (First Modernista Period), the clearest example of the connections between Nationalism and Architecture. The *Casa Amatller*, built in the later 1890s by Josep Puig i Cadafalch, is probably the most representative sample of this mentality. It shows the architect's interest in Catalanist ideas and medieval history. This is quite (I stress the word quite) a strange, bizarre, archaic, original and creative neo-medieval style. It was a recreation of Gothic forms founded on a free interpretation of the style, which led to the acceptance of elements from other periods in history and other cultures, while making wide use of new possibilities provided by modern construction techniques or new materials such as cast iron. You can see the difference with Casa Batlló, next door that is influenced by international *Art Nouveau*.

Why were Catalan architects involved in such a strange form of architecture that was so out of context at that time? We must remember that in the rest of Europe a new international style was developing. Victor Horta was building the *Hôtel Tassel* (1893) in Brussels, and in Glasgow, Charles Rennie Mackintosh was involved in the construction of the *Glasgow School of Art* (1897-1899). However, the Catalan architects were still involved in late recreations of historic models. We can affirm that it was a late permanence en la idea de of romantic feelings deeply justified by the conviction that a new national conscience was in the process of being born.

I must insist that it is possible to define this period, which, to a certain extent, encompasses the era from the Universal Exhibition of 1888 to the first years of the 20th Century, as the *Primer període modernista*. During this period, the idea of modernity associated with tradition could be found in the field of architecture or the decorative and applied arts, as well as in other cultural fields. A magazine called *L'Avenç*, which means "progress", made the first attempt to firmly establish the grammar of the Catalan language. Important figures in the field of prose and poetry were consolidated; the most representative of these is probably the great poet Joan Maragall. In the plastic arts, finally, the Realist tradition was abandoned and all eyes turned towards the new European Avant-garde. All the European Avant-garde movements --- Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Symbolism --- were absorbed and redefined in Catalonia in the 1890s.

The highlight of the architecture of this era is an impressive construction, the *Café-Restaurant* – now Museu de Zoologia (Zoological Museum) - that Domènech i Montaner built for the International Exhibition. The building is very interesting from the point of view of its construction, but equally for its general aspect, and the attention to detail and the quality regarding the applied arts. Undoubtedly, this magnificent and picturesque castle is an example of the archaic taste of the period. The *Café-Restaurant* was only the first step, other architects following the same route. Puig i Cadafalch, who had obtained his degree in 1891, is probably the one who best explains the architecture of the period. Take, for example, the *Casa Martí* (1875), on the ground floor of which was situated the famous café *Els Quatre Gats*. The Gothic arches that look on to the main street and the side street lend it an elegant and, at the same time, nostalgic air that is continued in the interior decoration: old Catalan ceramics, rustic furniture, as well as modern paintings by the cafe's regulars, presided over by the famous *La bicicleta o La fi del segle XIX*, also known as the *Tandem*, by Ramon Casas.

All Puig i Cadafalch's works follow this trend, as do those of Antoni Gaudí. At about this time, Gaudí abandoned his style based on the recreation of different styles - especially the Mudéjar style that dominated his earlier creations - and he concentrated on an experimental search, taking Gothic as a starting point in the *Palau Güell* (1883-1889) and in the *Col·legi de les Teresianes* (1889). Other architects followed suit. Lluís Muncunill, in Terrassa, was interested in these models in his first years of production. Examples are the *Casa Joaquina Pujals Vda. d'Alegre* (1897) and *Casa Gorina* (1902).

This period, the *Primer modernisme*, was explained in 1961 by the architect Joan Bergós, who spoke of "developed Gothic". However, the most complete work concerning this is Judy Rohrer's doctoral thesis, *Artistic Regionalism and Architectural Politics in Barcelona, c. 1880.c. 1906*. Rohrer talks about "regionalist architects" but she includes those who I think are openly Art Nouveau. Yet in the first years of the 20th Century, some critics started to talk of the "*nova arquitectura catalana*" (new Catalan architecture). Jeroni Martorell, an architect of Gaudí's circle said for example, in a very clever expression, that: "*lo gòtic de la terra ha sigut modernitzat amb èxit*" (our traditional Gothic style has been successfully modernised).

Architecture and Political background

However, the national character of architecture is rooted in the Catalan bourgeois' political background, shared of course by the more important architects – architecture was a new, prestigious and wealthy profession and many architects had an important position in Catalan society. Domènech i Montaner, Puig i Cadafalch, Joan Rubió i Bellver, Josep Ma Pericas and Rafael Masó supported and held high positions in the nationalist parties. One can recall, for example, Domènech i Montaner's leading role in the first Catalan assembly, in the city of Manresa (1892) and also as President of the *Jocs Florals* (a Catalan poetic competition) in 1895, and again as President of the most important cultural association of the time, the *Ateneu Barcelonès*. Puig i Cadafalch was also an important politician. He was councillor for the city of Barcelona (1907-1909) for Solidaritat Catalana, deputy for Barcelona (1913-1917) and, most importantly, president of the Mancomunitat de Catalunya, the first regional government (1917-1924). Nevertheless, we must remember that the huge differences between the two architects lay in their difference of attitude in understanding Catalan politics: Puig i Cadafalch supported the more conservative Lliga Nacionalista, whereas Domènech i Montaner's political leanings were more in line with the more progressive views of the newspaper *El Poble Català*. One should remember that the relationship between the two architects was, until the beginnings of the 20th Century, very close, as master and pupil. The studies of Josep Termes, Jordi Casassas, Agustí Colominas as well as Enric Jardí concerning Catalan politics, and also those of Angels Solà regarding the bourgeois mentality, analyse this subject more intensely.

The Art Industry Debate and the Arts and Crafts as a model

On the other hand, we must insist also on the connections with the Art & Crafts Movement, whose persistence in the use of the archaic also led their exponents to re-explore historical styles. To find the basis of their changing attitudes we must go back some years, to the middle of the 19th century, when the Art/Industry Debate began.

This debate had been particularly heated in Catalonia. It was the only part of the Peninsula that, although lagging somewhat behind, joined the process of industrialisation. Industrial Exhibitions were held in Barcelona throughout the 19th century between 1826 and the Universal Exhibition of 1888. In order to find out what was being done to promote the application of art in industry and to meet the people who were producing this work in the new decorative museums (the V&A, in particular) and in the art schools of England, the Barcelona Provincial Corporation sent Salvador Sanpere i Miquel to London in 1870. Sanpere was a typical romantic, a politician and a poet, and one of the first historians of Catalan medieval art. He soon became a great defender of the arts as applied to industry and can be considered the Catalan Henry Cole. This was the first official move of any importance in favour of the application of art in industry.

But the person with the first-hand knowledge of the Pre-Raphaelite School as well as the Arts and Crafts Movement was Alexandre de Riquer (1856-1920). In 1988, Eliseu Trenc Ballester and Alan Yates published the definitive study on this subject, *Alexandre de Riquer (1856-1920): The British Connection in Catalan Modernisme* (published by the Anglo-Catalan Society). Riquer was a central figure in the Modernisme movement - he was a poet, painter, draftsman, art collector and art critic. His elegant work embraced a wide variety of fields, including bibliophile (cover design, vignettes, and illustrations), posters as an artistic vehicle for advertising, decorative mural painting, and the ex-libris or bookplate, the field in which his own creativity took flight.

Between May and June 1894, Alexandre de Riquer travelled to Britain. It was not his first visit, but it was the one that was to be most important in establishing the connection between the two cultures. He encountered a highly innovative artistic atmosphere at that time. On the one hand, the Pre-Raphaelites - and Burne Jones in particular - provided him with examples of renewed medievalism. On the other, William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement provided him with a doctrine that could justify his hitherto disparaged efforts as a decorative artist. He took out a subscription to *The Studio* and *The Yellow Book* journals and collected a number of very important American and English books now housed in the Biblioteca dels Museus d'Art de Barcelona (Barcelona Art Museums Library): these include the works of Walter Crane, Morris and Ruskin, a biography of Rossetti by H.C. Marillier (1899), many books of poetry and an important collection of book-plates, in total, a library of almost two hundred items (according to Yates and Trenc's study). Riquer left some interior designs, like *El Cercle del Liceu* in Barcelona and the hall of the *Institut Industrial* in Terrassa, that lay between the Arts and Crafts model and the taste of Puig i Cadafalch's work.

After 1900. Vernacular Taste and International Exchanges

The great contribution to Modernista architecture and Applied Arts in this period (1900-c.1910) is the introduction of the sinuous line, the shot in the arts of international Art Nouveau, which was added to the taste for the indigenous that we have already seen in the architecture that defined the 1890s. We should not lose sight of the fact that, at that time, Catalan Modernisme drew heavily on French *Art Nouveau* – particularly in its use of the sinuous forms of the whiplash (*coup de fouet*), which was introduced into Catalonia after the 1900 International Exhibition in Paris.

In Gaudí's Casa Calvet (1898-1900), the interior design, as a result of Art Nouveau influence, tends toward abstraction, although some detail can always be seen, such as the function of a piece of furniture, the materials used or the iconography that refers us to the vernacular traditions. Shortly afterwards, Gaudí designed the two apartment buildings in Passeig de Gràcia: Casa Batlló where, as already mentioned, tremendous freedom of form coexists with the illustration of the legend of St. George; and Casa Milà or "La Pedrera (the stone quarry)", which exalts the theme of the Virgin Mary, a very popular theme in the Mediterranean, while recreating basic telluric elements - stone (which appears in the facade material), the sea (in the forms of the lower part of the building) and the plant kingdom (in the wrought-iron work in the balconies and entrance doors).

After this watershed, Puig i Cadafalch and Domènech i Montaner continued to work as architects but the former devoted himself increasingly to politics – he was President of the new Mancomunitat de Catalunya between 1917 and 1923 - and carried out important urbanism and urban arrangement projects. Domènech i Montaner left behind the criteria that he had formulated years before and the work done at this time is of great interest. He worked on two important private houses, *Casa Navàs* (1901) in Reus (in this town, Domènech i Montaner left behind some major works) and *Casa Lleó Morera* (1905) in Barcelona's Passeig de Gràcia, as well as three ambitious public projects. The latter comprised two medical institutions, the *Institut Pere Mata* in Reus (1897-1919) and the *Hospital de Sant Pau* (1903-1930) in Barcelona, and a concert hall, the *Palau de la Música Catalana* (1905-1908). In these works, Domènech i Montaner maintained his principle of combining the most advanced techniques with vernacular tradition and, as always, a wise and sensitive use of ornamentation as the basic component of architecture.

The study of Romanesque heritage

Both Domènech i Montaner and Puig i Cadafalch were at this time deeply interested in Catalonia's own art as part of their own national ideology. Domènech i Montaner started a real "pilgrimage" throughout Catalonia at the beginning of the 1900s looking for the history of Catalan Romanesque architecture. He started to compose technical files with notes and drawings about the different churches, convents and small hermitages; these can now be found in Archives in the Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya (The Architects Association). The final objective was to publish a complete study on Romanesque Art. He even gave a lecture in 1905 at the Ateneu Barcelonès (of which he was then president) called "*Introducció a la Història de l'Art Romànic a Catalunya*" ("Introduction to the History of Romanesque Art in Catalonia"). But only a year later, his beloved disciple, Puig i Cadafalch was named chair of Història de l'Art Català (Catalan Art History) in the recently created Estudis Universitaris Catalans (a private institution that was determined to offer modern and more complete knowledge than what was usual at the university at that time). Evidently Puig i Cadafalch was chosen for the chairmanship instead of Domènech i Montaner for political reasons.

From this moment, Puig i Cadafalch was the main promoter of studies of Catalan Medieval Art. This process culminated in the publication of the first volume of *L'Arquitectura romànica a Catalunya (Romanesque Architecture in Catalonia)* in 1909, with the collaboration of Antoni de Falguera and Josep Goday i Goday. It was promoted by the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, a Catalan Language and Scientific Academy founded in 1907. Also, in 1907 Puig i Cadafalch led the first scientific mission to the "border of Aragon" in the Pyrenees with the aim of preserving the mural Romanesque paintings from the Vall de Boí, now in the Museum Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. But in this instance, it was another institution (the Institut d'Estudis Catalans), other teams and, of course, another artistic era, *Noucentisme*. *Noucentisme* was a complex movement. It preserved the same Catalan nationalist objectives but in a more practical, institutional sense. At this time, the Lliga Nacionalista de Catalunya was hegemonic as a political party in Catalan politics. It had very strongly conservative views. Puig i Cadafalch

and other architects such as Joan Rubió i Bellver were members of this party and had very distinct positions. It is commonly accepted that the movement started in 1906, when Eugeni d'Ors began a column, "El Glosari", in the regionalist journal, *La Veu de Catalunya* (The Voice of Catalonia), but the philosophy of these new ideas was rooted in the first years of the century.