

fragment from a diary of memoirs

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I have written and spoken enough about Josep M. Jujol not to have to repeat here that I consider him one of the most interesting of XX-century architects, one of the few who kept in his work a link that is always mentioned in theoretical references but hardly ever based on concrete facts: from Art Nouveau to the avant-gardes. It is my belief that along these lines there is no other example of higher quality. He never lost his faithful *Gaudinisme*, self-denying and bomb proof, but he always added to it a new artistic ferment that carried it away towards an expressionism that took its own flight and which took its position in the avant-garde hierarchy. The church of Vistabella, the Casa dels Ous in Sant Joan Despí, the Casa Planells in Diagonal Avenue, Barcelona, and the bench in the Park Güell have often been seen as Gaudinian or post-Gaudinian formulae. However, they also anticipate a kind of architecture, sculpture and painting that was developing at the same time all over the world, and do so brilliantly since Jujol was unaware of these parallel experiences and the cultural motivations and social conditions that gave rise to them. It is difficult to imagine this, but it is true. When Jujol made his ceramic incrustations in the Park Güell, he knew nothing of the initial ruptures of the avant-garde that would lead to the experiences of the *objet trouvé* or the cubist recompositions of ruptures. When he adopted the vocabulary of Gaudinian lines and geometricised them for the Torre dels Ous or the Casa Planelles, when he converted the skylights of the Manyach factory into sculptures, this was not provincial mimicry —which in any case would have

been splendidly early and original— of the evolution of German expressionism or the purist derivations of Wagnerian Vienna. For Jujol, everything was still a devoted continuity of Art Nouveau, an ingenuous belief in the universal category of originality, and for this reason everything of his took on that so personal, and therefore genuine, air that was fundamental and international, qualities found in the work of no other architect from this country.

A couple of years ago I accompanied Beth Galí, Maria del Mar Arnús and Xavier Nieto on a visit to Jujol's works because they were preparing an exhibition on Gaudí and his contemporaries for the Hewitt Cooper Gallery in New York.

Jujol should have had a leading role in this exhibition, but they were not entirely successful in achieving this because in New York Judith Rohrer, following the advice of George Collins, orientated it more towards Gaudí and because Jujol's immediate heirs for some unknown reason are extremely reluctant to cede original material, either through meanness, lack of culture or purely Oedipean sentiments. Certainly one of the reasons why Jujol is not internationally recognised is the fact that his archive is inaccessible and no one has ever produced a serious catalogue of his work. Among the surprises that endowed the visit with cultural dignity was the discovery, in Vistabella, of a lamp, on an entresol crammed with junk, made entirely out of pieces of wood and wire which were undoubtedly left over from the chapel works. It is a surprising piece, unclassifiable for the time when it was made, but which now the radicals of *arte povera* and other reductionists would not hesitate in considering a brilliant antecedent. This shows, on the other hand, that it is too simple to attribute to Jujol the invention of so

many avant-gardes, from Dada and Cubism to *arte povera*. As I have said before, all that can be attributed to him is that will towards invention and artistic creativity that for him had a categorical value.

At the School he was an anarchical, disordered teacher who was difficult to understand and who peppered his classes with unusual cultural ideas. His pedagogical weight lay more in the exercises he set rather than in his direct presence, since he was often absent and in class he tended to be a trifle scornful. He made us copy Gothic tombstones which we then had to reproduce, actual size, in watercolour, imitating the shadows, the scratches and the romantic character of their decay. When he came to class he devoted himself above all to reading and translating the Latin texts of the stones, and making historical and iconographical comments on them. When a student could not follow him very well and did not understand his utterances in Latin, he would adopt an expression of transcendental amazement and say, «But you don't know Latin and want to be an architect?»

We would all remain open-mouthed when he picked up his pencil to illustrate with precise, explanatory drawings a detail that the stones suggested to him or to tidy up a sumptuous, rhetorical and thoroughly overwhelming inscription that had to complete every sheet. He was the most skilful, precise draughtsman I have ever known. From the pocket of his black jacket —adorned with successive incrustations of centennial dandruff— or of his yellow waistcoat— that stood out so vividly under his jacket that we would often say that he was dressed as a Barcelona taxi —he would pull out a pencil only seven or eight centimetres long and he would let it run over the paper without ever taking it off. When he had completed the immensely long con-

tinuous line we could read —with the difficulty entailed in a somewhat baroque Gothic-modernist aesthetic— the title of the object represented, the name of the student, the date and occasionally an adjective of his own. From then on all we had to do was follow his instructions and paint the inscription alternating red and blue gouache and, above all, with great areas of golden metallic paint.

These inscriptions were often the real protagonists of the drawings. I remember that one of the exercises I had to do, after the series of stone tablets, was an actual-size drawing of one of the pillars of Barcelona Cathedral. Once I had completed taking measurements and had finished the geometrical drawing, I turned up in class with a piece of wrapping paper which must have measured fifteen or twenty square metres, on which there was only a fine, continuous line around the edge, reproducing the series of the pillar mouldings, while in the centre there was a discouraging emptiness as the only protagonist. I showed it to him very reluctantly since it seemed to me to be of an absurd poverty beside the watercolours of the tiles of the Casa de la Convalescència, of the frontispieces or door knockers of Santa Maria del Mar, or of the stained glass of the now disappeared rose window of the church in the Plaça del Pi, which my fellow students produced. He told me, «Don't worry; we'll decorate it.» He took out a tiny pencil and, kneeling on the ground, he filled up the whole empty space with an immense Latin inscription that explained everything. The downpour of gouache and metallic paint was a grandiose spectacle. We had to do it from buckets. Finally the meticulous section of the pillar had practically disappeared beneath an amazing abstract design of reds and blues on a golden background.

We would often complain about his absent-mindedness, possibly exacerbated by the fact that he was soon to retire and he had lost the pedagogical enthusiasm that he must have had in previous years. More than absent-mindedness it was isolation from the whole structure of the School. He was an anomalous, uncontaminated soul, and this sometimes produced painful situations. I remember that one day he came into class and discreetly approached one of the students, whispering, «Do you know if I'll get my salary from the Secretary's Office today?» On another occasion, when talking to him about the fountain in the Plaça d'Espanya and commenting on a number of stylistic aspects that surprised me, he said to me with a hint of anxiety, «Do you know anyone at the City Hall? Could you do me a favour? Ask them to pay me the remaining fees for that project that they still owe me.»

I have thought often about the efficiency of Jujol's strange way of teaching. I understand it better now than then. It is possible that the accurate reproduction of elements of the best historical architecture that we have around us initiated us into an understanding of those permanent values that outlive styles and functions. Perhaps his chaotic methodology was the only way he could transmit the essence of cultural search.

1. This text is part of a book of memoirs that has yet to be published.