

the architecture of Josep M.^a Jujol

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EXPLORATION OF THE FRINGES. The interest aroused still today by the work of the Tarragona architect Josep M.^a Jujol (1879-1949) lies in his position on the fringe of what we might call hegemonic postures in the architecture of this century. Committed to a personal way of creating architecture and working in conditions that were abnormal for a professional of our time, Jujol incessantly researched in areas that modern concepts of architecture have established as limits that cannot be gone beyond.

Every culture is built up around its own system of conventions: hence the classical architectural culture that lies between imitation and rules, and the architectural culture of the Modern Movement that lies between the expression of new technology and the inner order that each individual object pre-establishes. However, every culture also has its own system of censorship: the setting of limits that must be respected in order not to place the aesthetic and cultural appropriateness of a work of architecture in a position of crisis.

Systematisation and order, tectonics, objectivity and the expression of an ideal of present time, of a *zeitgeist* pointing towards a global future of perfection and progress, are some of the stereotypes that form an apparent boundary around most of the works of this century.

Jujol's work does not respond clearly to any of these parameters, and it is for this reason that its survival has greater value as a criticism of the limits rather than as a verification of the conceptual space they determine.

If it is possible for us to speak about Jujol's work as a task of

exploration, this is because as a whole his work is not only heterodox compared to what is commonly accepted as being modern architecture, but also because it is an exploration that, going beyond limits, in the *hybris* of its excesses, places itself outside established modernity and also outside the sphere of his own frontal criticism.

The fact that Jujol's work remained on the fringe is not because most of his buildings are of no great magnitude, for rural clients and always with meagre material resources. Neither does its interest lie in the fact that he made a virtue of necessity, in the sense that despite highly precarious conditions, he managed to produce a highly dignified and acceptable body of work. What confers an almost unique interest on this limited series of drawings, objects and buildings that still stand, albeit in a somewhat poor state of repair, is its significance as work at the limits. The exploration of fringes that apparently did not exist for the freedom of the modern experimental tradition, but which nevertheless are true frontiers by which tastes, schools and the cultural apparatus as a whole are measured and within which the processes of communicative entropy unavoidably function.

JUJOL AND GAUDI. It was Carlos Flores who posed the question, in a polemical way, of the relation between the master and the disciple. Much to the disgust of the Gaudinian old guard, Flores' texts published at the beginning of the seventies claimed that Jujol had been a protagonist in Gaudí's works as from his collaboration with the maestro from Reus during the years when the Casa Batlló (1906) was being built. This is also the opinion of Jujol's painstaking and observant biographer, his son Josep M.^a who, through first-hand information and by virtue of his natural admira-

tion for his father, has pointed out on different occasions Jujol's authorship in Gaudí's Casa Milà, Park Güell, the Choir of Tarragona Cathedral and certain aspects of the Sagrada Família project. This controversy, with reason, served to add arguments to a complete reading of the Gaudinian phenomenon and had as its background the concern of historians of Catalan architecture of the period to show connections between Gaudí and his circle of followers, on the one hand, and in a more generic way between Gaudí and his contemporaries.

However, another point of view must be given here; that of a more unusual relationship in which Jujol did not necessarily carry on after Gaudí in a certain direction, given the multiple openings Gaudí's work contains and which the architect was able to inculcate in his disciples, but rather that the relationship between master and disciple was a genuine case of companionship: the hierarchy between author and collaborator becomes a multiform work—the Gaudinian—which acts as host to another work—the Jujolian—which cohabits independently in the façades, in monumental works, in the ironwork or ceramic details.

Jujol's principle is a tactile one; Gaudí's is tectonic. When it is said that the architecture is Gaudinian while the decoration is Jujolian—in the examples mentioned—what is being referred to is a concept of architecture based on tectonics, on form achieved through constructive research. This is true, but it is also the limit of a convention, though a highly modern convention, according to which good forms emerge from good construction. This is the Vitruvian, Aristotelian tradition that can be detected as a current through the European tradition and which, on the threshold of the modern era, culminated in the great technical

work of Eugène Viollet-le-Duc.

However, need it be said that there is nothing of either the thought or the methods of the French essayist in the whole of Jujol's work? Jujol's departure point is a pair of hands and an unbridled imagination capable of establishing associations and displacements that have nothing to do with the codes, formal and figurative, of historical architectures.

In Gaudí, a constructive analysis and an inquisitive, fragmentary rationality find support in the great repertoires of history in order to transform it and project it towards the future. In the case of Jujol history is a secondary reference which in many cases is practically non-existent, or in any case the forms of historical architectures never have more value than that of a plate, a sickle, a piece of wire, the glass of a bottle or the wings of a butterfly. It is on the basis of a tangible perception of the universe of objects surrounding him that the architect develops his formal processes, and it is these forms that overlap, interpenetrate and move around each other to create the bulk of his designs and buildings.

THE HOUSE AND THE TEMPLE. It would be too schematic, however, just to emphasise the reference if I did not explain on what Jujol's discourse is built.

What in Jujol continues to lie inside the Gaudinian project, rather than the language or the sensitivity, is the sphere in which this discourse develops.

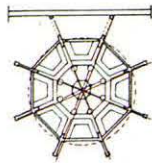
The distance from the Modern Movement or, in the words of Eduard Valentí, the antimodernism of Gaudí, is also present in Jujol's work. It is neither the metropolis nor the unlimited production of architectural objects that frames the work of the architect, but rather the essential place of the first shelter.

The house of men and the house of God are the two great poles between which Jujol's work developed. In the pre-industrial tradition, the house is the origin and the foundation of architecture. The temple is a house to an excellent degree, the perfection of a set of problems that in their sacred version form the challenge to the architectural synthesis, while on the domestic level it provides the sphere for experimentation, fantasy and polysemy. It is useful to establish this polarity because we shall see how, in the first case, the realisations are the fertile soil of free experimentation and of the most unexpected associations. On the other hand, in the case of Jujol's temples we shall see how the strength of his works is the balance between the demands of a certain totality and the disintegrating forces that break out, here and there, like autonomous desires.

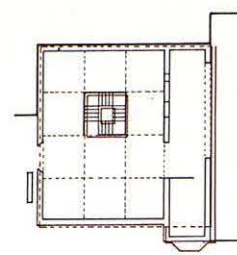
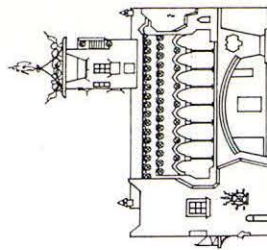
Jujol's domestic work is quite extensive. In the first place, however, we shall examine his two most important houses which, in his work as a whole, can be taken as paradigms. The Casa Bofarull in Els Pallaresos and the Masia Negra in Sant Joan Despí are two works that are practically parallel. Both took many years to build and both represent a transformation. Using today's vocabulary we would call them *architecture of intervention*, except that this term is too feeble to express what Jujol really achieved here. They were already existing buildings, rural houses with a strong typological structure well defined by the tradition of Catalan farmhouses. The metamorphosis the architect achieved in both cases is characteristic of his way of acting upon existing architecture.

There was no respect, of course. This generation had yet to appreciate rural architecture as a deep reality, essential and without style. No global construction here, but

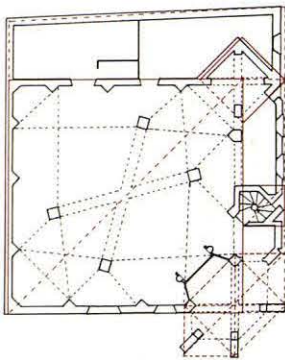
The floor plans for Jujol's religious buildings were based on basic geometrical shapes (squares, rectangles, curves or circles) from which displaced secondary geometrical figures emerge: turned-round squares, centrifugal lines, triangles, etc.



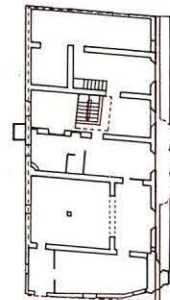
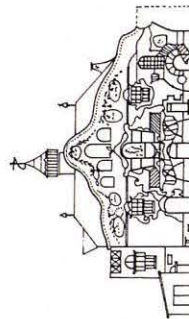
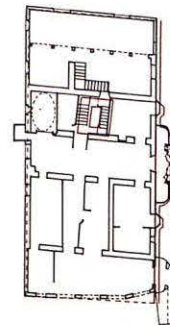
El Carmen Chapel.



Casa Bofarull.

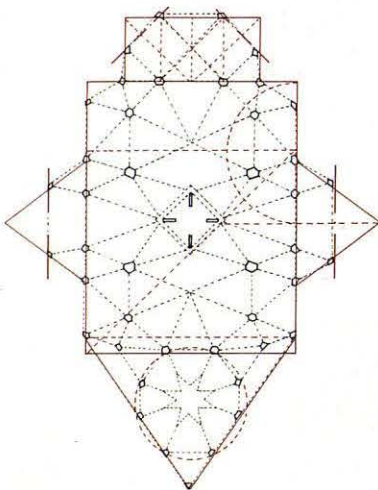


Church of Vistabella.

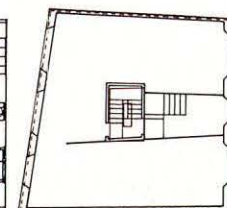
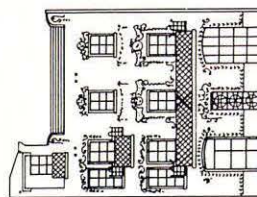


Casa Negre.

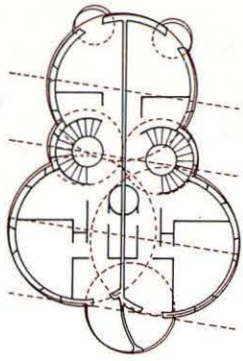
Casa Ximenis.



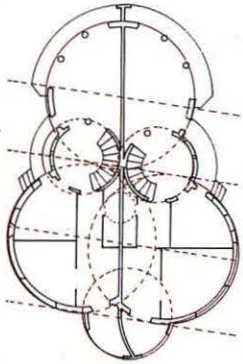
Church Sanctuary of Montferri.



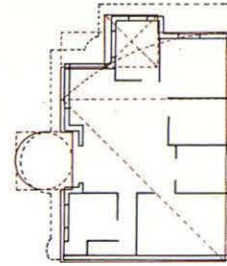
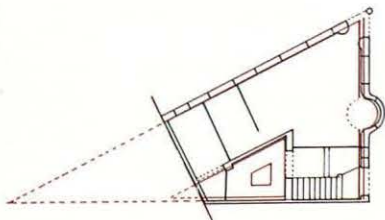
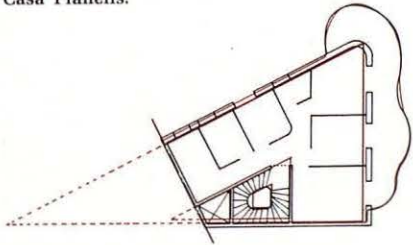
Jujol's remodelling works, are characterised by small modifications to the floor plan and predominance of the staircase, the focal point, and a radical treatment of the façades (more superficial in the case of Casa Ximenis, deeper in that of Casa Negre and Masia Bofarull), converted into an epidermis with its own form.



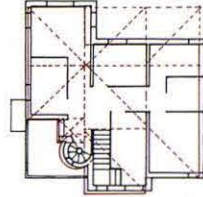
Casa de la Creu.



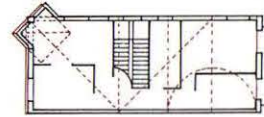
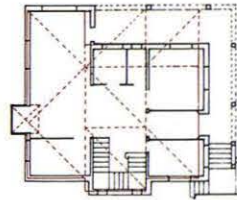
Casa Planells.



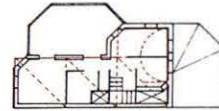
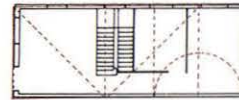
Casa Villa.



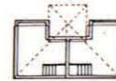
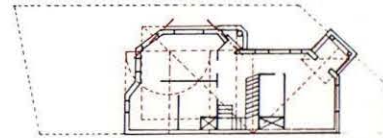
Torre Camprubí.



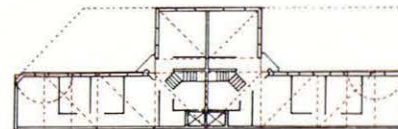
Casa Casas.



Casa Serra-Xaus.



Casa Jujol.



The small houses in Sant Joan Despí are based on a less radical repetition of the displaced geometrical figures. If in the case of the Torre de la Creu the concept is more striking, using as its motif the intersection of circles, in other, more modest works the projects consist of groups of squares or golden rectangles intersected with turned-around or dislocated secondary geometrical figures. Graphic interpretation, reworking of plans and commentaries: Manuel Gausa. In order to follow a comparative process, all the plans and elevations have been redrawn to the same scale (1:20 to the original)

something starting partly from scratch yet taking advantage of the materials of the existing. Here we have confrontation; a strategic penetration of certain nerve centres is the strategy he followed in the case of both buildings. Instead of a global intervention, the house was conceived as a system of explosions. With a tower, a gallery, a staircase, a chapel, a façade, Jujol's imagination created an often violent architectural episode, vaguely reminiscent of an identifiable type: a Medieval tower, a classical gallery, a baroque staircase, a rococo dressing room, a traditional façade. Not only is there no will to produce a determined style, but also no precision in the quotations that act at each point of intervention as simple complementary references.

In the operation as a whole, each episode has its own, continuous, organic and normally open and infinite logic. The energy of each of these episodes collides with the inert fabric of the already existing building, producing effects of violence that contribute even more to the energetic and temporary effect of the intervention as a series of actions. The geometries in which Jujol finds support are also open. Both in these houses and the ones he built from scratch, there is the repeated motif of the intersection of regular geometrical forms. Squares with squares, circles with circles, spirals and displacements are recurrent procedures in works in which the temporality of the act of construction completely displaces any ambition towards permanence or globality.

It is true that these principles are found also in the new houses he built and that the distinction between new works and works of renovation is relatively insignificant. In the Casa de la Creu or the Serra Xaus, the Jujol or Cebrià Camprubí houses in Sant Joan

Despí, or the Sansalvador or Planells houses in Barcelona, we find the same system fully active and peppered with architectural events. It is a narrative principle, an unravelling of architectural pieces that must be considered in relation to a kind of support which is finally seen to be the building. However, the word "building" cannot denote an object. One only has to see how ineffectual plans, drawings and photographs are when it comes to reproducing this architecture.

On the other hand, each episode, considered by itself, is a universe that, on another scale, reproduces the logic of juxtaposition, tension and event. In the Masia Negre, is it possible to harmonise the outline of the staircase and the form of the ceiling above? The same is true of the case of the exuberantly spiral staircases of the Casa de la Creu and the obsessive situation of a composition in which steps, bannisters and ceiling each have their own dynamics.

However, this eccentric system of interrelation, in which each and every one of the parts seems to be moved by an energy that unfolds without limits, in the case of churches is in an inverted position. I shall not now refer to specific interventions in already existing churches, since here Jujol acted in the same way as in other operations.

In the Constantí or Els Pallaresos churches, in the Chapel for the Carmelite nuns in Tarragona, in the Lloret hermitage in Renau and the sumptuous decoration for the Roser hermitage in Vallmoll, we find an exciting array of epidermic resources and unusual effects based always on highly economical solutions. The magic of calligraphies and signs combine with re-designs by hand of forms of vernacular baroque, following lines of geometrical composition that now have nothing to do with traditional repertoires.

Diagonal bands, irregular quartering and splatterings of points made from simple mosaic or ceramic pieces give, on another architectural level, the measure of a method in which freedom and memory play equal roles in the organising task assigned to them by the architect.

However, I should also like to comment on the churches of Vistabella and Montferri. Within the Gaudinian tradition the temple is the synthesis of all architectural problems. Construction, function and form must come together to define an object that provides the perfect solution for all the problems that converge in this House (with a capital “H”). Typologically, Vistabella is the theme of the central floor based on two concentric squares turned at an angle of 45° one from the other. Montferri is the basilical floor, with a wide transept that seeks to provide a concentrated space despite its essentially longitudinal layout.

It could be said that in this case the architect Jujol did not wish to evade as his departure point the reference to a model through which the order of the liturgical space inside and the order of the composition outside come together in a good construction where supporting and supported elements are unified by means of parabolic arches and brick or block vaults forming revolving surfaces with second degree curves.

Nevertheless, in these two churches, even though one was only begun, we discover that the Jujolian impulse is not disciplined by the typological or limited by the constructive system on which it is based.

The architecture of these two churches is like an unravelling, like a story of Russian dolls in which each scale of treatment offers us a new face that emerges from inside its immediate container.

In the case of the Vistabella church, which was completed, the string of events is not only the result of personal dedication the part of Jujol to the final decoration and paintings — some of which, alas, have been so crudely restored!— that cover the inside walls.

Outside, the intersection between the geometry of the entrance door, the regular ground plan of the temple, the service wing, the stairs and the way up to the belfry give anything but the impression of order, regularity and finished work. Everything looks inevitably towards the corkscrew-like belfry which, like a sharpened needle, spirals upwards in an attempt to reach the heavens. Inside, the presbitery, the side altars, and above all the disturbing surfaces of the choir, all establish the necessary imbalance so that the interior becomes an explosion of formal initiatives, each of which obeys its own laws in blatant conflict with what normally would act as a limiting force.

If in the case of remodelling interventions and of new houses it was episodes that began the formal processes, monopolising the structure of the already existing building, in the case of the new churches a parallel process seems to emerge: a canonical structure with a central or longitudinal ground plan is nothing more than the initial support for a series of operations of inclusion, displacement, juxtaposition and unfolding that at all times compete to vanquish, with their very energy, any presence of a globalising or synthesising structure.

SUMMARY: A DECALOGUE. At the beginning of this article I spoke about Jujol’s work as an example of exploration of limits. Some of the limits that the architect went beyond have possibly already appeared in the comments I have made so far. Now, however, I should like to finish with ten brief notes through

which to illustrate not only the intrinsic interest of his work but also the extent to which it is still very up-to-date. I wish to avoid the temptation of making parallels and analogies with certain recent works and simply offer these ten notes as commentaries.

1. The first exploration we recognise in Jujol's work as a whole is that of the boundaries between painting and architecture. If it were a question of writing a new Laocoon, nothing could be better than concentrating on his work in order to find an abundance of frontier situations. Those who attended Jujol's drawing classes always tell us of his ability to create form from smudges, pieces of cut out paper or a trickle of paint. Using a brush or even his fingers he would make these accidents grow, move and acquire form on the clumsy student's drawing pad. It was through this way of making forms grow on flat surfaces that he would also allow forms to grow in space, with recurrences, *ritornellos*, derivations and explosions at specific points.

2. For this reason, Jujol's architecture was always a personal work; not autobiographical in the sense that through it he attempted to solve his own problems, but in the sense that the architect ignored any division of labour and appeared present in all the phases and on every level of production of the building. Needless to say the abstract mediation of plans, calculations and documents lost importance. What was important was his drawings, and often not even these bore witness to the process in which the author was involved at all times. The manual nature of Jujol's architecture speaks not only of the tactile quality to which I referred earlier, but also of the presence of Jujol's personal touches, fruit of the close contact between the architect and his work.

3. Craftsmanship was all-important also, in the sense that it transformed the architect as director into a manual worker. The craftsmanship-industry debate so characteristic at the end of the XIX century became prominent in architecture at the turn of the century. There can be no doubt that the great architectural figures of the moment, Sullivan, Berlague, Domènech i Montaner, each provided his own reply to the debate. Jujol's reply to the problem was radical and critical, and his anti-modernism—in the philosophical rather than the stylistic, sense—was absolute.

4. The Catholic circles to which Jujol belonged in turn-of-the-century culture represented, from the standpoint of a millennial concept inspired in the idealisation of the middle ages, one of the first currents that criticised modern culture. Emerging from the fertile soil of the Franciscan movement, criticism of the modern world was the expression of inadequacy.

The option for manual methods, for agrarianism, for the exaltation of the smallest works, and an almost malignant opposition to convention, all established links with the other two critical currents that were Dada and Surrealism. However, it would be mistaken to refer to Jujol as a Surrealist, although we can perceive a critical attitude and certain linguistic techniques characteristic of modern fragmentation that have parallels in some aspects of Surrealism. The ambiguousness between critical attitude and reaction we find in Jujol is of the same order as that which we find, for example, in Miró or Max Ernst.

5. If it is possible to speak about weak architecture, in the sense of a way of working that reflects the insecurity of contemporary culture, we find this weakness in Jujol. It is not a question of speaking about the personal convictions of the architect, but rather of the

provisional character that always seems to be inherent in his work.

Jujol's architecture does not aim for the Vitruvian *firmitas*; it does not centre its discourse on the tectonics of the work as a challenge to the passage of time. Rather than an immobile presence and a permanent structure, this architecture rests temporarily on other buildings or lies in fragile, weakly constructed urban structures in order to last for a time.

6. Jujol's architecture rejects the *esprit de système*, the will to organise beginning at the most general and arriving at the most particular. On the contrary, it is erratic and self-constructing, growing from unforeseen movements caused by accidental displacements of energy.

7. The linguistic technique of this architecture is that of action by points. Points of poetic reaction we could say, paraphrasing Le Corbusier's famous expression. In the formation of the modern conscience, only too often the importance of the picturesque psychology tradition is scorned. However, its effectiveness when it comes to reflecting one of the traits of modern sensibility—temporality of the aesthetic experience—is also clear in the case of Jujol. That Jujol's works take us from one thing to another, from one place to another, from one visual impact to another, is simply the reflection, in the most symptomatic sense of the word, of the modernness of his sensitivity.

8. If in modern art each work carries with it its own code of interpretation, we can say that in Jujol's case such a code is lacking. What his architecture does contain is a mechanism of permanent decodification as a means of expression. Jujol's work always recasts a diversity of things. It functions as a metalanguage of previously familiar codes

—stylistic, of everyday images, of great architecture—that take part in a process of linguistic collision. More than the formation of a code by means of which to interpret the work, this is the result of the interrelation of many codes in a process of juxtaposition and conflict characteristic of all critical currents.

9. The introduction of time into a work is a typically modern operation that can be carried out in two ways: through spatial diversity or through the imprint of the process itself. I have already mentioned spatial diversity as a polycentric and uncoordinated technique of intervention. However, signs of the work in progress are equally important. All Jujol's buildings seem unfinished not only because none of them has an end: the work is a process that reveals itself as such and is always open to new interventions. It preserves the work signs that have brought it to its present state.

10. Jujol is often spoken of as a great architect who never had the right clients. In other words, as an architect who had to supplement with his ingenuity what the economic conditions of his work forbade him. This, I feel, is deceiving. His is a rich, sumptuous, sensual and exuberant architecture, despite the evident poverty of his materials and resources. The fascination of Jujol's architecture lies precisely in this paradox: he created an unlimited, rich, fascinating universe without having to fall back on such commonplaces as richness and abundance in works of architecture.