

CULTURE CONTACTS AND THE MAKING OF CULTURES

Papers in Homage to
Itamar Even-Zohar



Edited by

Rakefet Sela-Sheffy and Gideon Toury

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URBANITY IN TRANSIT: CATALAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ARCHITECTURAL REPERTOIRE OF MODERN URUGUAY

Thomas S. Harrington

When most of us think of the formation of Latin American culture, we think of how two relatively impoverished and under-populated nations, Spain and Portugal, momentarily possessed by extraordinary levels of vital energy and marginal advantages in technology, conquered much of the American landmass between 1492 and 1550. As a result of this conquest, and the subsequent miscegenation with the native inhabitants, and the slaves brought from Africa to work the land, a new and vast cultural system was forged.

Insofar as it goes, this narrative of the Latin American *Genesis* is fairly accurate. However, when we begin to look more closely at this rendering of events, a number of interpretive problems emerge. The first, which has rightly been a concern of specialists in the area over the last several decades, is the way in which this narrative has tended to crudely attenuate the mid-bogglingly diverse cultural reality of the American indigenous populations and the imported African slaves who are, in numerical terms at least, the true protagonists of this terrible yet simultaneously regenerative cultural drama. Though there is still a very long way to go, this systematic underestimation of the region's non-European reality, is slowly but surely being remedied by dedicated scholars of the continent's indigenous and trans-African pasts.

A less immediately evident analytical issue revolves around the historiographical representation of the Iberians in this cultural clash. Just above, I spoke of the centrality of Spain and Portugal in the colonization process. To speak in this way is, again, to be factually accurate on one level. That is, as long as we assume the juridically-constituted state to be the fundamental building block in the creation of new collective identities, a supposition that has been widely assumed to be true during much of the past 150 years.

The reason for this conceptual predominance is clear: the institution of national history as we know it is part and parcel of the nineteenth

century drive by governmental elites and their attendant bureaucracies to homogenize, and submit to centralized rule, the ethnically and linguistically diverse populations under their control. In other words, the “socio-semiotic entrepreneurs” of the would-be European nation-states, aware of the implied desires of those in power, generated narratives that tended to elide past fissures within the body politic in the hope of consolidating a more coherent sense of the collective’s present and future mission.

In the case of the Portugal, one of the more long-established and ethnically homogenous states in Europe, this 19th-century rewrite of the past did not require a terribly large amounts of what Jo Labanyi refers to as “strategic forgetting” (Labanyi 1994: 132).

In regard to Spain, however, things were different and a good deal more complex. There, for the reasons mentioned above, official(ist) historians tended to gloss over the fact that it was not the new unified Spain they were inventing in their writings, but only one of its two co-equal royal entities, Castile, which had led the effort to impose European culture on indigenous Americans in the 16th and 17th centuries. Left largely unsaid was the fact that the other major pillar of the Spanish kingdom, Aragon, whose true engine was the prosperous and commercially advanced Catalan-speaking territories along the northern Mediterranean coast of the Peninsula, had virtually no stake in the colonial game during the foundational period.

This false assignation of Catalan colonial protagonism is, however, only one part of the story. Far more interesting and consequential, in my view, is a related, if seemingly paradoxical phenomenon: the generalized failure of the same Spanish historiographical establishment to register and examine the very real Aragonese, which is to say, Catalan contributions to the construction of Latin American life in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In 1778, the reform minded King Carlos III of Spain, lifted the nearly three-century ban on Catalan participation in the trans-Atlantic enterprise. The results of this decision would be immediate and dramatic. Over the next half-century, a relatively small cohort of Catalans, possessing generally superior educational and vocational skills (Nieto-Galán and Roca-Rosell 2006: 273-288) and a deeply-rooted proclivity for

preserving and expanding wealth through strategic intermarriage¹, insinuated themselves into the most influential sectors of colonial and postcolonial life in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay².

Greatly aiding their advance in the last three countries mentioned (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay) were two other important factors. The first was the relative absence of a Spanish colonial infrastructure in these places. The lands of the Southern Cone, so central to any notion we might have today of Latin American wealth and social development, were viewed by the Spanish as being largely peripheral to the colonial enterprise until the middle of the 18th century. This meant that when the Catalans finally did arrive in these places in search of markets in the years following 1778, their struggles with the “dead hand” of the imperial administration tended to be much less than it would have been in other parts of the realm. The second was the Catalans own ambivalence toward Spanish state prerogative and overt demonstrations of Spanish national identity. When the countries of the Southern Cone finally achieved independence from Spain during the 1820s, the creole elites sought, understandably, to avoid entanglements with their former colonial masters. Toward this end, they passed laws prohibiting

¹ Edward C. Hanson translates *pairalisme* as “allegiance to paternal house”. (Hansen 1969, 221). He then explains the full extent of its enormous importance within Catalan society. “Yet, its social meaning was not simple primogeniture. It was clearly understood that the first-born child should administer the fixed assets of the father to capitalize the business interests of his younger siblings...that is, to provide business or professional backing for his brothers, or to arrange an advantageous marriage for his sisters. Mobility was thus a familial, as opposed to individual matter...” (222) In a more recent study on national identity Josep Llobera (Llobera 2004, 50-63) underscores the absolute centrality of *pairalisme* to the creation of a recognizably Catalan concept of social identity.

² Key to the success of this system was placing family members (linked by blood and/or marriage) in “branch offices” in strategically chosen cities of the Atlantic basin. Often these networks would exist wholly within the framework of the Spanish overseas empire (e.g. Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Havana and, of course Barcelona). But as time progressed, Catalan merchant families sought to establish outposts in London, Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans as hedges against geopolitical instability and as places of personal refuge during turbulent times.

and/or curtailing commerce with the former mother country. At the same time however, they did not wish to give up their many affective and material connections to peninsular life.

Into the breach stepped numerous Catalan traders and mariners. Having spent the previous half-century establishing family-managed networks of commerce with branch offices in numerous European and Latin American countries, they were in an enviable position to blur the true origin of certain Spanish products, and in this way, facilitate their delivery to places where they were officially banned. Catalan mariners took a similarly pragmatic approach to the identification and licensure of their ships, regularly lowering the Spanish flag replacing it with a Uruguayan or an Argentine insignia when entering into the harbors of Montevideo or Buenos Aires.³

By the 1850s, this well-honed brand of pragmatism had delivered Catalans to positions of great influence within the fledgling nations of the Southern Cone. Nowhere was this more true than in Uruguay. When one reviews lists of “movers and shakers” from mid and late-nineteenth century Uruguayan life, compiled from almanacs, commemorative publications, lists of board members at prominent cultural and social institutions and more recent studies on Uruguay’s “Spaniards”, the incidence of Catalan surnames is simply staggering (Valls and Moragues 1918, *Uruguay-España* 1952: 2-67 and Reyes Abadie 2000: 151-234). We can gain some idea of their prominence when we consider that the country’s most important and enduring political dynasty (the Batlles), three of its Foreign Ministers between 1828 and 1843 (Giró, Llambi and Vidal), its first archbishop (Soler), its most important 19th-century financiers (Cibils and Reus), some of its more important

³ In 1835, Captain Joan Mirambell entered the port of Montevideo with a ship registered in Barcelona but flying Brazilian colors. When his subterfuge was discovered by Uruguayan officials, he was promptly jailed in preparation for a summary execution. But while in the brig, he told his captors that he and his fellow Catalans were in their country for purely peaceful commercial purposes. Convinced by his sincerity, the Uruguayan President Rivera not only freed him but provided him with a document which said that from this time onward Spanish ships would be allowed to trade freely in Uruguayan waters provided did so under a Uruguayan flag. The result was a strengthening of Barcelona’s already privileged pre-Independence position of the main point of Peninsular contact with Uruguay.

late 19th century artists and art educators (Jaume y Bosch, Blanes Viale), a number of its more important trading companies (Carrau, Buxareo), the co-founder of its wine industry (Vidiella), many of its more important 19th century doctors (Villardebó, Sunyer i Capdevila, Fiol de Perera), almost half of the 5-7 most important patriarchs of the country's absolutely essential meatpacking industry (Ferrés, Argentó, Sero, Illa, Cibils) and the country's most important turn of the century intellectual (Rodó) were all first or second generation Catalan immigrants to the country. And this does not even include the small army of elite Catalan educators (Català i Codina, Calabuig, Forteza, Giralt, Claramunt, Ferrer i Barceló, Pedralbes, Compte Riqué, Araujo and a very long etc.), that made their way to the country beginning in the early 1800s and were responsible for building core institutions⁴ and implementing key reforms in this country which, it could be strongly argued, places a higher premium on public instruction than any other in Latin America. Nor does include the still smaller numbers of Catalans that made their way to the country in the twentieth century and were absolutely fundamental influences in the plastic arts (Torres-Garcia), opera (Jose Soler, Juanita Capella), theater (Margarida Xirgu) and journalism (Torrendell, Fors, Torres Cladera, Fleches y Florit, Bernat, Vidal, Gillimón and Sabat Fargas, Roxlo) just to name a few.

After hearing all this, you are probably saying to yourself "Well, even if Spanish historians have trouble recognizing the contributions of these wayward sons of the Mediterranean to the construction of Spanish America in general, and the former "Switzerland of America" in particular, their Uruguayan counterparts must have surely examined this legacy with great care".

⁴ As anonymous Uruguayan put it in 1925: "En épocas pretéritas, catalán era símbolo de laboriosidad, honradez, arte, cultura, y, en una palabra, significaba acometividad creadora. La veracidad de este aserto se encuentra demostrada en la vida nacional uruguaya, donde hay miles ejemplos que colocan a la Colonia Catalana en un pedestal sólido. Catedráticos, profesores, medicos, abogados, ingenieros, arquitectos, maestros de escuela y de música han producido los mejores discípulos orientales. Pocos son los uruguayos de dos generaciones acá que tengan carreras o estudios superiores que no guarden en su alma un algo de la espiritualidad de Cataluña porque casi todos han recibido lecciones de algún catedratico, profesor o maestro de escuela catalana" (Los catalanes 1925, 434-435).

Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth. Some four years ago, a new book (Arocena and Aguiar 2007), was launched to great fanfare in Montevideo. Its avowed aim is to reverse the country's deeply ingrained tendency to suppress rather than highlight its rich multiethnic past. The text contains 11 chapters on groups such as Russians, Jews, Lebanese, Italians, Swiss, Armenians, Afro-uruguayans, Charrúas, Peruvians, and even the Basques. Nary a word, however, on the Catalans. This invisibility is mirrored in the otherwise abundant bibliography on contemporary Uruguayan immigration. As of today, not a single monograph has been produced which examines the extraordinary role of the Catalans in the construction of modern Uruguay. How can this be explained?

This invisibility would appear to have a number of sources. The first and most obvious is the issue of 19th and early 20th century historiography outlined briefly above. Owing to the fact that Uruguay was founded in the nineteenth century when culturally homogenizing, statist conceptions of the nation were at the height of their appeal, Uruguayan historians have, if anything, been even more subject than their Spanish colleagues to an implied need to obviate the existence of minority voices within their nation's narrative of upward progress. This need to speak in unitary terms about the raw human material of the nation was reinforced by the early Uruguayan elite's strong embrace enlightenment-style contractualism, with its marked indifference to the idea of cultural specificity as the foremost ideal of social cohesion.

Compounding the issue is a somewhat understandable aversion to acknowledging the considerable influence of the former colonial master's culture in the formation of the country's cultural matrix. Much like early 20th Galician nationalists, who seized upon fairly scant anthropological evidence to generate an all embracing mythology of cultural kinship between their country in Ireland, late 19th and early 20th century Uruguayan scholarship greatly exaggerated the influence of French immigrants to their fledgling republic, and in this way, generated the idea – which is still widely believed and repeated – that Paris (rather than Madrid, Barcelona, Palermo or Naples) was far and away the prime source for the Uruguay's most widely subscribed aesthetic and political ideals.⁵

⁵ I believe this exaggerated discourse of French influence also goes a long way

On the relatively few occasions when Uruguayan scholars have taken on the Iberian “elephant in the room”, they have done so in ways that not so much as respond to the complex contours of Spanish life and the highly variegated immigration it generated, but that reify their own culturally constructed idea of what a nation is, that is, a place where one can assume an extremely high degree of congruence between a citizen’s cultural and juridical identities. This has engendered a surprisingly high level of tone deafness when it comes to parsing very real cultural, linguistic and sociological differences between making the immigrant contributions of people raised in Barcelona, Santiago and Madrid. Emblematic of this one size fits all approach is the use of the term “gallego” – literally someone born in Galicia – to refer to any and all immigrants born in Spain. This would be roughly akin to having North Americans regularly and colloquially refer to all immigrants from Great Britain as Welshmen or Scottish Highlanders.

This leads us, in turn, to still yet another probable reason for the seeming Uruguayan blindness toward the considerable influence of Catalan culture on the development of their country: class.

As we have seen, anxiety about encroachments by the former mother country-which was, not coincidentally, also THE prime source of much needed “white” demographic reinforcements-was a constant element of early Uruguayan life. By using the “Gallego” to refer to all Spaniards, that is to say, employing the name of the Spanish subgroup

toward explaining the surprising (in the context of the Catalan absence) presence of the Basques in Arrocena and Aguiar’s recent study (above) on Uruguayan multiculturalism. When building the trope of French-Uruguayan cultural interpenetration, historians would often point to the statistical upsurge in French immigration between 1830 and 1850. The clear implication was that small but important numbers of Frenchmen exercised a decisive influence on the development of national culture during the country’s foundational period. Left unsaid at the time was the fact that these bearers of French passports were not, in the main, educated denizens of Paris, Lyon or even Marseille, but peasants from the upper altitudes of the Bearn and Pays Basque, regions where the language of Voltaire was still very sparsely spoken and read. But, rather than give up the privileged place in the national conversation originally awarded to them as result of their alleged Frenchness, these descendants of *Iparralde* have retooled their discourse of collective identity, placing an ever-increasing emphasis on the Basque part of the Basque-French binomial.

that was widely acknowledged to possess the very lowest level of cultural and economic wealth, Uruguayans were able to carry out a much-desired act of psychic one-upsmanship vis-à-vis their peninsular cousins. Though an obvious exaggeration, this labeling scheme possessed enough verisimilitude to be popularly credible. However, we can quickly see the preposterousness of trying to place the Catalans, who had for the most part emigrated to Uruguay with levels of culture and education that were superior to that of the existing Creole elites and who, for this reason, often quickly insinuated themselves into the very highest level of the new nation's leadership class, within this frame of reference. Faced with the choice of admitting this salient fact and the set of uncomfortable inquiries it would inevitably provoke about the national ontology or simply "disappearing" the issue of Catalan prerogative in Uruguay under the overly broad and "safely" disdainful label of "gallego", it appears that Uruguayan scholars have overwhelmingly opted for the latter.

Finally, there's the issue of identity "performance" among Catalans themselves. As heirs to what is in the modern Western European context, a uniquely "unstable", or if one prefers, "flexible" concept of linguistic and national identity, Catalans have long been accustomed – and here we see the vaunted tendency toward pragmatism alluded to earlier on – donning the identity mask deemed most likely to efficiently further their immediate career and family goals. In the Latin American context, this generally meant performing in public as "Spanish" or after, a generation or two, as generically Cuban, Argentinian or Uruguayan. What generally has not been seen, or recognized was the fact that many of these same people continued to speak Catalan at home and/or to adhere to long-established and identifiably Catalan patterns of inheritance, intermarriage and transnational cultural commerce, designed, more than anything else, to safeguard and expand concentrations of cultural and pecuniary wealth.

With these theoretical considerations in mind, I will now turn to the particular case history concerning the role Catalan architects within Uruguayan culture.

One of the more striking things for anyone who has observed both Catalan and Uruguayan society up close, it is their shared obsession with the aesthetics of the built environment. Or to frame the issue in

polysystemic terms, there are a few other places where urbanists, architects and the spaces they create occupy such a central place in the repertoire of cultural exemplarity. On a more anecdotal, but perhaps equally revealing, level, Barcelona and Montevideo are the only two major cities in the world where the unquestioned point of social-spatial focus is not a plaza or square but a promenade referred to as a “Rambla”, a term which is apparently linked to the Catalan language and the specific geo-climatic realities of Iberia’s northern Mediterranean coast. Finally, there is the fact that at least 800 Catalan names and/or surnames have been identified in the toponymy of Uruguay’s capital city (La vida catalana a l’uruguai 1992-1993: 192-196).

The question, as always, in studies of inter-systemic cultural commerce is whether these observed realities pertain to the province of mere coincidence or the realm structurally explainable phenomena.

Owing in all probability to the hispanophobia I spoke of earlier on, architectural historians from the Plata region, have produced surprisingly little work on the role played by Spaniards (understood here in the juridical/passport bearing sense) in designing and building the physical spaces inhabit.

In an effort to remedy a gaping hole in existing scholarship, Chebaratoff and Loustau, recently published an extensive study of the influence of the Iberian peninsula on the development of Uruguayan architecture and urbanism (Chebaratoff and Loustau 2003). In it, they delineate the many links between Spain and the built environment of their country over the last 250 years. They conclude their book with a set of profiles on “Outstanding ‘Peninsulars’ who worked in our country after 1830”. Of the six architects singled out, five were born in Catalonia. And the sixth was the Madrid-born son of one of the aforementioned group of five. More recently still, CEDODAL (*Centro de Documentación de Arquitectura Latinoamericana*), an architectural study center in Buenos Aires published what is, to my knowledge, the first attempt to comprehensively catalog the contributions of these Spanish architects to the physical patrimony of Argentina and Uruguay (Gutiérrez and Méndez 2006). Like the aforementioned Uruguayan scholars, they also conclude their study with a roster of outstanding Spanish architectural contributors to the Plata Region. Of the 75 creators profiled, 31 are listed straight away as having been born in the Catalan-speaking terri-

tories. However, there are a number of cases where the place of birth is not listed or figures simply as Spain. Faced with this gap of information, the survey was re-calibrated in terms of place of birth AND the presence of recognizably Catalan surnames. When this last factor is added to the mix, the number of Catalans among the register of esteemed Spanish architects in the Plata rises to 49 out of 75. Perhaps more remarkable still, neither Chebaratoff and Loustau nor Ramón Gutiérrez, the editor and prologue writer of the CEDODAL study, mention this extraordinary coincidence of geographical and cultural origin! When we collate the two studies for those “Spanish” architects (a term that for the authors of both studies includes not only Spanish-born professionals but those heavily influenced by time in Spain or very direct Spanish tutelage) that spent their professional life working often if not primarily in Uruguay, a roster of some 16 names emerges: Elezeario Boix, Emilio Boix, Antonio Bonet, Cayetano Buigas Antonio Casanova, José Claret, Antonio Fongibell, Juan Lladó, Vicente Mayol, Francisco Matosas i Amat, Manuel Milláns, Andres Millé, Ignacio Pedralbes Francisco Roca i Simó Jose Torres Argullol y Julio Villamajó.⁶ Of these creators, all are either Catalan born or (12) first-generation descendants of Catalans (4).

The contributions of all of these figures to Uruguayan society are significant. However, a limited number of them stand out for their highly visible contributions to the Uruguayan physical patrimony and/or the ways in which they forcefully transported the esthetic and social ideals on their homeland into the Uruguayan context. Let us now turn to the history of some of the more important and remarkable members of this cohort.

During the long siege of Montevideo (1843-1851), Oribe, the commander of the encroaching *Blanco* army, understood that the success of his battle plan hinged heavily on his ability to insure the efficient flow of goods from the interior to foreign markets. Doing so required not only the development of an alternative port, *El Buceo*, but also a full service city capable of attracting and retaining citizens loyal to his cause. At this moment in the late 1840s, a young Catalan architect

⁶ This list is by no means complete. Missing, for example, are architects such as Federico Purcalla Grau and Juan Saldías, both of whom enjoyed successful careers in Uruguay after emigrating from Catalonia.

named Antoni Fongivell (it also often appears as Fongibell) was working within the area of the city controlled the *Colorado* forces under the leadership of General Rivera. However, while there, he received word from a Catalan who had recently arrived from Oribe's encampment that the General of the *Blancos* wished to begin building a more permanent base for his troops and their families. Sensing an opportunity, Fongivell crossed territorial lines with his countryman and assistant, Vicente Mayol. Upon entering into the territory of the besieging army they were imprisoned under the suspicion of espionage. However, they were released after outlining for their captors the plans they had devised for the construction of the much-desired alternative city. In two years of feverish work that beginning 1847, the two Catalans largely made good on their promises, laying the groundwork for a new urban concentration called *La Restauración* (and after 1851, *La Unión*). As the scars of the long civil war started to heal, the structures designed by Fongivell under intense time pressure in this "new" city turned into important axes of the now reunited Montevideo. For example, the building he constructed as a school for the children of the besieging army (the *Colegio Oriental* run by the Valencian schoolmaster Cayetano Ribas), became the *Seminario Nacional* and later the *Universidad Menor de la República*. Today, it houses the *Hospital Pasteur*, one of the more important public health centers of the Uruguayan capital. Contemporary observers underscore Fongivell's unique technical skills, abilities rooted in a long-standing and widely recognized specialty (the ceiling vault) of the Catalan architectural tradition: "No tenía el constructor catalán ningún competidor en la construcción de bóvedas salvo Mayol Había levantado muchas iglesias en el país, y esto hizo que el directorio lo eligiera para la obra ciclópea (he is referring to the construction of Uruguay's first bull ring), que debía tener real mérito, precisamente por sus 36 bóvedas de calificadísima resistencia" (Chebataroff and Loustau 2003: 371).

During the last decades of the 19th century, the liberal intellectual elites of Spanish-speaking countries began to abandon the churches which had served them and their families – in greater or lesser degree – places of collective deliberation. This increasing disavowal of the role of the church in their lives did not, however, vitiate the need to try and transcend space and time in the company of others. It was in this con-

text that Atheneums, the new secular temples of intellectual life, sprung up all across the Hispanic world. In Uruguay, where the debates about the need to secularize public life had been especially intense, el *Ateneo* of the city took on an exceptional degree of social importance.⁷ When, after years of holding meeting in one temporary headquarters or another, the *Ateneo's* Board of Directors finally raised the funds to build a grand temple to rational inquiry, they turned to two Catalan architects, Emilio Boix and José Claret. The building, completed in 1900, became not only the physical embodiment of the country's prime socio-semiotic entrepreneurs at what is arguably the apogee of the country's intellectual arc, but also one of the cornerstones of the city's extremely frenetic turn-of-the-century downtown development.

In addition to his work on the *Ateneo*, Boix designed and oversaw the construction of the *Cementerio del Buceo*, analogous in the Uruguayan context to *La Recoleta* in Buenos Aires or *Montjuïc* in Barcelona in its function as a resting place for the city's more famous and influential residents. He also designed a very notable complement of some 20 monumental private homes in the city center, roughly half of which were built for clients with unmistakably Catalan surnames.

Today when the name Buigas is mentioned in the context of architectural design, most think of Carles Buigas, the creator of the famous lighted fountains of Montjuïc for the Barcelona World's Fair of 1929. But that Buigas was, in fact, the son of a very important Catalan architect, Gaità or Cayetano Buigas y Monrava (1853-1919), a man with a very solid architectural trajectory in Catalonia who, along with two architects working in Argentina, Julián García Nuñez Francisco Roca i Simó, translated the esthetics of Catalan architectural *modernisme* into the Latin American context. After studying under Elías Rogent (an essential pre-cursor to the era dominated by Gaudí Domènech and Puig i Cadafalch), Büigas worked as the municipal architect of several Catalan localities before winning (in all likelihood with some help from Rogent who was the chief architect of the 1888 World's Fair of which the commission was part) the privilege of building the monument to Christopher Columbus at the foot of the Ramblas. Thanks to the notoriety he

⁷ For example, the life and times of José Enrique Rodó, a son of catalans and the father of Uruguayan modernism and one of the earliest theorists of a Latin-American identity, is virtually inseparable from this institution.

gained through the execution of this iconic element of the international celebration, he obtained numerous important commissions. Among these are the Comellas Palace in Vic, the Public Market and the Municipal Slaughterhouse in Sitges and the Spa of Vichy Catalán in Caldes de Malavella.

In 1903, he emigrated to Argentina and then on to Uruguay in late 1905 or early 1906. His first project in that country was the *Banco Popular* of Montevideo. The building is described by Ramón Gutiérrez as an eclectic work marked nonetheless by a clear devotion to the canons of Catalan *modernisme*, in its use of surface ornamentation (Gutiérrez et al. 2005: 65). His second important Uruguayan project, the *Teatro Lavalleja*, located in the mountain city of Minas is similarly evocative of Catalonia, especially, as the Uruguayan architect María Luz Morosoli makes clear (Morosoli de Mazzoni, María Luz s.d.), in its evident imitation of the balcony system used at the famous *Liceu* opera house in Barcelona.

However, the most important contribution of Buigas to the Uruguayan architectural patrimony – both in terms of esthetics and its social centrality – is his design for Show Pavilions of Asociación Rural del Uruguay (ARU) in Montevideo (1912). At the beginning of the 20th century, the ARU was arguably the most important and powerful social institution of any type in the country. In submitting his proposal for the job, the most logical thing for Buigas to have done, it would seem, would have been to generate a plan that would, in some way be evocative of the then-important idiom of the Gauchesque with its *a posteriori* glorification of the free-herder's life on the pampas. But instead, after a South American trajectory that Francesc Fontbona has described as essentially eclectic (Fontbona 1992: 246), it is here – at an institution which lies at the very center of Uruguay's elite power structure – that Buigas decides to compose a no holds barred love letter to Catalan *modernisme*, with building after build replete with curvaceous forms covered in *trencadís* (broken glass shards) of the type made famous by Gaudí in contemporaneous works.

Francesc Matosas i Amat was born in Badalona near Barcelona in 1886 and moved to Premià de Dalt (known then as Saint Pere de Premià) in 1901 following the death of his father. He began working in the granite mines near the town. During the first months of 1909, Matosas, who like an increasing number working class Catalans of the

time, had become convinced of the merits of Anarchism, fled to América to escape conscription to the Moroccan Wars. He did so mere months before the Anarchist-led anti-war protests which would provoke the famous Tragic Week, an event of enormous importance in the history of both Catalanism and the evolution of modern Spanish authoritarianism. The Catalan quarryman and bricklayer worked for a few months in Buenos Aires, quite possibly on the building of the *Teatro Colón*,⁸ before heading north to Santiago de Estero. He stayed there until 1916 when the financial problems of national government (which had financed an ambitious public works program in the city) and the very favorable immigration laws promulgated by Batlle y Ordóñez, induced him to move to Mercedes, the capital of Soriano province in Uruguay.

There is very good reason to believe that the presence of fellow Catalans in the area had something to do with the choice of this destination.⁹ Once established there as a baker, bricklayer (he was famous for his work ethic) Matosas began building an extraordinary monument to creativity (some 28 houses, mostly for family members and friends) which reveal both a strong desire to express his own idiosyncratic view of the world and pay homage to the esthetic ideals and design techniques of his native Catalonia. Upon seeing these buildings which are, for the most part, densely concentrated in the center of the city, the observer is struck by their plastic exuberance and bright shining colors, traits which are immediately evocative of Catalan *modernisme*. Howev-

⁸ For a more exhaustive account of the life and works of Matosas, see Morales 2007.

⁹ Earlier on, I mentioned that Barcelona and Montevideo are the only *major* cities that have a *Rambla* as the major axis of socio-spatial orientation. There are, however two less populous cities that possess this same characteristic. One is Palma de Mallorca. Another is Mercedes, Uruguay. Indeed, as the dean of local historians in the city made clear to me (Harrington 2007), the *Rambla* there, which runs along the shores of the Rio Negro, was the brainchild of the first *intendente* of Mercedes, the Catalan immigrant Manuel Miláns. In my fieldwork, I also found an original sculpture by Josep Llimona, the most important plastic artist of Catalan *noucentisme*, in the gardens of the city's Chopitea orphanage! In short, it appears that as Matosas headed for Mercedes, he did so knowing that there was already a network of Catalans in the city who would be able to aid him in his adaptation should the need arise.

er, on closer inspection we see how Matosas has carefully adapted his Catalan vision to the Uruguayan reality. For example, we see that the surfaces that at first appear to be made of *trencadís* are in fact made of the area's abundant coarse gravel which, according to Matosas's long-time assistant, Humberto Nazabay, the Catalan designer and builder carefully hand-sorted and colored (in private and with techniques he would never divulge to anyone) to achieve the plastic effect being sought. Something similar occurs on the iconographic level. Upon visiting the complex of houses which includes his own residence on la Calle Castro y Carreaga, the eyes are immediately drawn to the Gaudi-like way in which the builder seeks to recreate the forms of nature. However, as the process of observation advances, it becomes clear any attempt to describe his work purely in terms of Gaudinian mimetism cannot be sustained. Beside the sculptured plants and animals, we find elements from the serene classicism of *modernisme's* successor esthetic, *noucentisme*, scenes from the old and new testament, motifs from Freemasonry and Rosacruzianism and, among other wholly *sui generis* items, an oversized relief of Luis Tuya, the Uruguayan aviator that died defending the Republic during the Spanish Civil War.

Catalan *modernisme* and *noucentisme* were both undeniably urban forms of expression. And for the most part, Matosas worked within the compact urban core of Mercedes. However, his largest and arguably most impressive work is the Estancia Carolina located on the rolling and largely treeless pampa some 20 kilometers outside the city. For the most part, the architecture of Uruguayan cattle ranches is fairly unremarkable, low utilitarian building with next to nothing in the way of ornamentation. One can thus imagine the effect of coming across a full-blown neo-Gaudinian palace, in the midst of this landscape. For the many Uruguayan I asked directions from in trying to find it, it was variously described as strange, odd and different. What none was able (even when I prompted them) to do, as they would undoubtedly be able to do with a similarly derivative work of an Italian or German immigrant designer, was to place it in the context of another very distinct national tradition. For them, Matosas was simply the Spaniard with an extravagantly lively sense of color and imagination.

In an article from 1953, Oriol Bohigas wrote "El profesor de la teoría del Arte de la Universidad de Montevideo empieza cada año su curso

recordando que la arquitectura moderna del Uruguay se debe precisamente a un catalán Anonio Bonet i Castellana. Ese catalán no sólo ha triunfado en América sino ha logrado imponer su ejemplo a toda una generación” (Bohigas 1999: 228). The esthetic and social vision of Bonet, which, according to Bohigas has had such a profound effect on the development of Uruguayan architecture, was forged in the Spanish Second Republic (1931-1939). While still a university student, he became friends with Josep Luis Sert and Josep Torres Clavé, the two most fervent interpreters of Le Corbusier in the Iberian Peninsula. For the three young men, the Swiss creator’s socially inclusive concept of urban design came to be seen as the perfect complement to their cosmopolitan and interclass version of Catalanism. Working in the context of the famous GATCPAC (Grup d’Arquitectes i Tècnics Catalans per el Progres de la Arquitectura Contemporànea) and the first International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM), they turned Barcelona into a key node of the self-named Modern architectural movement. In 1936, Sert invited Bonet to work with him in Paris on the Pavillion of the Spanish Republic for the Paris World’s Fair of 1937. While there, he also worked in Le Corbusier’s studio where he met two people who would become essential collaborators during his years in America: Jorge Ferrari Hardoy and Juan Kurchan. In 1938, Bonet leaves Paris for Buenos Aires where he and the two aforementioned Argentines form the *Grupo Austral*, an organizational concept that derived from the example of the GATCPAC. The firm, which is perhaps best known for its BFK chair, would wield great influence in the world of Latin American design and urbanism over the ensuing decades.

In 1945, Bonet wins a commission to develop a forested piece of land located in the lee of Punta Ballena (just east of Punta del Este) in Uruguay. From that moment until 1948, Bonet would live on the site, supervising the execution of the project that Bohigas would describe shortly thereafter as: “el conjunto urbanístico más importante del mundo” (228). According to Bohigas, Bonet’s project achieved several important goals. The first was to build an entire community without disturbing the fertile rolling terrain of the area. The second was to generate structures, the most notable of which was the *Casa Solana*, which seek to eliminate the idea of an inside space existing in opposition to an outside one, echoing in this way, Frank Lloyd Wright’s *Falling Water*

(1936-39) and anticipating, if only slightly, Philip Johnson's *Glass House* (1949). The third is his ability to integrate elements of traditional artisanry – such as the use of traditional “bovedas catalanas” in the Casa Berlinghieri – in a plan of otherwise wholly modern and cosmopolitan pretensions.

Since the late eighteenth century, small cadres of Catalans have played extremely important roles in the construction of a number of Latin American cultures. Nowhere is this Catalan cultural influence more palpable than in Uruguay. However, owing to the structure of institutionalized historiographical conventions in both Spain and the small republic of the Plata region, this reality has passed largely unnoticed. I have sought to provide some of the general reasons for this glaring case of omission while simultaneously examining the particular, and heretofore largely unreported case of Catalan contributions to architectural creation in Uruguay. I sincerely hope it will provide us with some reason for further discussion.

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