Catalan Identity as Expressed Through Architecture

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Catalonia (*Catalunya*) is an autonomous community in Spain with a unique culture and language developed over hundreds of years. This unique culture and language led to Catalans developing a concept of Catalan identity which encapsulates Catalonia's history, cuisine, architecture, culture, and language. Catalan architects have developed distinctly Catalan styles of architecture to display Catalan identity in a public and physical setting; the resulting buildings serve as a physical embodiment of Catalan identity and signify spaces within Catalan cities as distinctly Catalonian. The major architectural movements that accomplish this are *Modernisme, Noucentisme,* and Postmodernism. These architectural movements have produced unique and beautiful buildings in Catalonia that serve as symbols for Catalan national unity.

Catalonia's long history, which spans thousands of years, contributes heavily to the development of Catalan identity and nationalism. Various Celtiberian tribes initially inhabited the region of Iberia that later became Catalonia.[1] During the Second Punic War (218-201 BC), Rome began its conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, which was occupied by the Carthaginians and Celtiberians, and established significant colonies around the Pyrennees mountain range that eventually become Barcelona and Tarragona; it was during Roman rule that Christianity began to spread throughout Catalonia, which is an important facet of Catalan identity.[2] Throughout the centuries following Roman rule, the Visigoths, Frankish, and Moorish peoples ruled Catalonia, with Moorish rule beginning to flounder in the tenth-century.[3] Approximately the year 1060 marked the beginning of Catalan independence; throughout this period of independence, Catalonia was very prosperous and contributed heavily to the Reconquista.[4] This period of independence did not last long, though, with Catalonia and Aragon's union beginning in

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[1] Thomas N. Bisson, *Medieval Crown of Aragon: a Short History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000) 5-6.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.,* 9-12.
[4] *Ibid.,* 25-28.

approximately 1150 with the marriage of Ramon Berenguer IV, Count of Barcelona, and heiress Petronilla of Aragon.[5]

Under the Crown of Aragon, Catalonia in the Middle-Ages was generally very successful both economically and militarily. The eighteenth-century, though, was the beginning of the end of the Crown of Aragon, under which Catalonia had managed to maintain its culture and a semblance of regional autonomy. This regional autonomy and self-governance which Catalonia had retained under the Crown of Aragon, though, slowly degraded over many years in favor of Castilian power; an example of this degradation is the written portion of the Catalan language disappearing in favor of written Castilian that lasted until Catalan's revival in the late nineteenth-century.[6] The final hurrah of the Crown of Aragon took place during the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714), where the Crown of Aragon supported the Austrians and lost the war to the French Bourbons in 1714.[7] The loss of the War of Spanish Succession and the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht (1714) led to the absorption of Catalonia by the new Spanish Bourbon monarchy and the implementation of the *Nueva Planta* by King Phillip V.[8] The *Nueva Planta* led to the dominance of a Castillian government in Catalonia, and the abolishment of ancient privileges which Catalonia enjoyed, such as the *fueros*, as well as the implementation of Castilian as the official language of Spain.[9] The rule of the Bourbons in the 1700s marked the loss of most of the region's autonomous powers and is seen by many nationalists as the end of Catalan autonomy.[10]

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[5] Bisson*, Medieval Crown of Aragon,* 2-3.
[6] Robert W. Kern, *The Regions of Spain; A Reference Guide to History and Culture* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 143-142.
[7] Bisson, *Medieval Crown of Aragon,* 189.
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] *Ibid.,* 189-190.
[10] Jon Cowans, ed. *Modern Spain: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press: 2003), 54-55.

Throughout the following centuries, Catalonia experienced waves of autonomy and suppression. In the twentieth century, Catalonia underwent *La Renaixença,* which was a cultural revival of Catalan identity and language following a period of advanced industrialization during the 1840s.[11] *La Renaixença* marked the return of Catalonia's desire for self-determination and self-governance. The Glorious September Revolution of 1868 and the expulsion of Queen Isabella II marked a chance for Catalonians to express this desire for autonomy in the newly elected Spanish parliament.[12] Catalan deputies in the new parliament advocated for Catalonian self-governance within a Spanish federation, but this proposal was met with discontent by many of their contemporaries.[13] In 1913, following the overthrow of King Alfonso XIII and the establishment of the Second Republic, the Spanish government created the Generalitat, which was Catalonia's autonomous regional government; this regional government lasted from 1932-1939.[14]

In 1939 General Francisco Franco won the Spanish Civil War and instituted fascism in Spain. Under Franco, the Spanish government fiercely suppressed Catalan culture as Franco attempted to unify Spanish culture; the Spanish government outlawed the Catalan language during this period.[15] Following Franco's death in 1975, the new Spanish government once again supported Catalan autonomy, and the Catalan autonomy measure went into effect in 1980, reestablishing Catalan autonomy within the seventeen Spanish autonomous communities.[16] Suppression of Catalan culture has led to the rise of Catalan nationalist movements, whose goals

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[11] Anna Calvera, "The Influence of English Design Reform in Catalonia: An Attempt at Comparative History," *Journal of Design History* 15, no. 2 (2002): 84. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3527200
[12] Cowans, *Modern Spain,* 54.
[13] *Ibid., 55-56.*
[14] Kern, *The Regions of Spain*, 144.
[15] Viviana Narotzky, "Selling the Nation: Identity and Design in 1980s Catalonia," *Design Issues* 25, no. 3 (2009): 84-85. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20627817.
[16] Kern, *The Regions of Spain,* 144.

range from cultural revival and autonomy to total independence.[17] These independence

movements continue into the twenty-first century. The Spanish government has responded

harshly to any attempts at independence and in the 2010s declared some aspects of the Catalan

Statute of Autonomy unconstitutional; the Spanish government also declared independence

referendums an illegal act and have suppressed independence protests and movements.[18]

       Modernisme, Noucentisme, and later Postmodernism, which are all unique Catalan styles

of architecture, are physical embodiments of Catalan identity that define spaces in Catalonia as

distinctly Catalan.[19] These movements are rooted in the revival of Catalan culture and Catalan

nationalism. Catalan nationalists aim to glorify Catalonia's past and create its future; the idea of

glorifying the past and future of Catalonia is, therefore, present in Catalan architecture.[20] Catalan

architects aimed to glorify Catalonia's past while also glorifying its future, which means that

Catalan architects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries founded much of their architectural

styles in Catalonia's past, specifically the Medieval era.[21] Much of Catalonia began as a series of

Roman colonies, but not much remains of this period; there are remnants of Roman architecture

dotted around Catalonia, such as Barcelona's Roman walls and various mosaics, but nothing

entirely significant or influential to the *Modernisme* or Postmodern movements.[22] Some of the

earliest examples of Catalan architecture are Romanesque buildings; monasteries proved very

important to the development of Catholicism as a central facet to Catalan identity, and

monasteries such as the monastery of Poblet and the monastery of Ripoll proved very influential,

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[17] Cowans, *Modern Spain*, 87.

[18] Suriñach Jordi, and Dentinho Tomás Ponce, "Catalonia," *Regional Science Policy & Practice* 11, no. 5 (2019): 760-761. https://doi.org/10.1111/rsp3.12250.

[19] Mark F. Hau, "Nation Space, and Identity in the City: Marking Space and Making Place in Barcelona," *Etnofoor* 28, no. 2 (2016): 78-79. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44013447.

[20] Marilyn McCully, *Homage to Barcelona; The City and its Art 1888-1936* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986) 115.

[21]Hughes, *Barcelona* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1992), ix.

[22] *Ibid.,* 65-67.

especially to the *Noucentisme* movement.[23] While classical and Roman architecture became influential during the *Noucentisme* movement in the twentieth century, Catalan nationalists and architects in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were far more concerned with reviving Gothic and Medieval architecture.

Gothic architecture heavily influenced Catalan architects; some of the best examples of Catalan Gothic and Medieval architecture are Catalan Cathedrals, which are unique in their construction. High-Catalan Gothic, which characterizes architecture in fourteenth-century Catalonia, is a distinct adaptation of Gothic architecture that contrasts greatly with English or French Gothic.[24] High-Catalan Gothic architecture's characteristics are plain exterior and interior decoration, a rejection of organic ornamentation, and blocky fortress-like design elements.[25] Catalan architects built cathedrals with no aisles and a single nave with a polygonal apse at one end and a choir at the other end; this style of cathedral layout is "wide Gothic style."[26] "Wide Gothic" cathedrals have "external grandeur and internal drama," and feature massive interiors; Catalan architects developed unique structural elements which allowed for massive interiors unparalleled in size by other Gothic and Medieval architects.[27] Examples of "wide Gothic" cathedrals in the High-Catalan Gothic period are the *Santa Maria del Pi* (1322-1486) and the *Santa Maria del Mar*. [28] Neither of these cathedrals adhere to commonly accepted tenets of Gothic architecture; they are not organic, highly ornamented, lack spires, and are overall very

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[23] Josep-Maria Garcia-Fuentes, "A Nation of Monasteries: The Legacy of Víctor Balaguer in the Spanish Conception of National Monuments," *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism* 10, No. 1 (2013): 46-47. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/futuante.10.1.0041
[24] Hughes, *Barcelona*, 144
[25] *Ibid.,* 144-145.
[26] *Ibid.,* 145-146.
[27] *Ibid.,* 145-147.
[28] *Ibid.*

fortress-like. Nonetheless, Catalan High-Gothic architecture served as one of the foundations for Catalan architecture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[29]

The Cathedral of Barcelona is another example of the importance of Gothic architecture as it serves as an example of Catalonia's nationalist movement attempting to glorify Catalonia's past and create a Catalan identity.[30] Initially, the Cathedral of Barcelona, as is the case for much of the *Barri Gotic* district of Barcelona, was built in the traditional style of Catalan Gothic architecture. Builders began construction on the cathedral in 1298.[31] Construction continued into the late nineteenth-century; originally, the cathedral featured a plain facade and minimal ornamentation, as was common with Catalan High-Gothic architecture, but architects in the nineteenth century built a new highly ornamented facade in a Northern Gothic style.[32] In the nineteenth-century, following Catalonia's rapid industrialization and acclamation of wealth, Catalans invested in Barcelona and redeveloped much of their city, attempting to glorify Catalonia's past in the process; construction of the *Barri Gotic,* or Gothic Quarter, whose design was heavily influenced by Catalan nationalists, began in the early 1900s.[33] In the 1860s, restoration and urbanization began in the areas surrounding the Cathedral of Barcelona.[34] The *Barri Gotic,* is the Gothic old-town of Barcelona surrounding the Cathedral of Barcelona; Catalan nationalists used the restoration of Barcelona's old-town as an opportunity to glorify Catalonia's Medieval era, and Gothic architecture in the *Barri Gotic* is largely a construction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[35] The construction of the *Barri Gotic* and the

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[29] Hughes, *Barcelona*, 147-150.
[30] Joan Ganau, "Invention and Authenticity in Barcelona's 'Barri Gótic'," *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism* 3. No. 2 (2006): 11. : https://www.jstor.org/stable/41201264.
[31] Hughes, *Barcelona*, 152-154.
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] Ganau, "Invention and Authenticity," 11-12.
[34] Hughes, *Barcelona*, 394-395.
[35] *Ibid.,* 14-16.

addition of a new facade to the Cathedral of Barcelona represented Catalan nationalist's desires to build a city and identity that glorified Catalonia's middle ages.

Not all Catalan nationalists and architects believed that a revival of Catalonia's past would determine its future, and the *Modernisme* movement challenged Catalan nationalists to look forwards and create a new Catalonia instead of reveling in and copying its past.[36] The *Modernisme* movement is the Catalan variant of Art Nouveau that lasted between the 1870s through 1911; major architects include Josep Vilaseca, Lluís Domènech i Montaner, Pere Falqués, Joan Martorell, Camil Oliveres, and Antoni Gaudi.[37] As was the case with the transformation of the Cathedral of Barcelona and the construction of the *Barri Gotic*, *Modernista* architecture pulled heavily on Gothic and Arabic architecture, but with the added twist of being adventurous and open to new concepts while still employing age-old Catalan building techniques, such as Catalan vaulting and the Catalan Medieval arch.[38] This resulted in an eclectic form of architecture, which, as Gaudi stated, was "radically old" and aimed to glorify Catalonia's past while also bringing something new and original to the architectural scene of Catalonia.[39]

Historians divide *Modernisme* into three periods, with the first being Early *Modernisme* (1870-1893), the second being the most recognizable style of High *Modernisme* (1893-1910), and the final being late-stage *Modernisme* (1911), which coincided with the arrival of the new *Noucentisme* movement.[40] *Modernista* architecture began as a response to the rapid industrialization of Catalonia in the 1840s and served as a popular form of architecture for new institutions and ruling classes; *Modernisme* was often organic and ornamental in its design.[41] Antoni Gaudi is the central figure of the *Modernisme* movements, and his work, such as *La*

[36] Calvera, "The Influence of English Design," 84.
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] Hughes, *Barcelona*, 394.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] Calvera, "The Influence of English Design," 84.
[41] McCully, *Homage to Barcelona,* 115.

Sagrada Familia, serve as iconic symbols of Catalan culture.[42] Construction began on *La Sagrada Familia* in 1882 and continues into 2020; *La Sagrada Familia* is a massive cathedral that serves as a "palace of Christian memory" featuring ornate decoration and Catholic iconography on almost every surface.[43] The cathedral's organic construction stands in stark contrast to the grid pattern of Barcelona and is a distinctly Catalan facet of the city, displaying Catalan identity across the city. Other major examples of *Modernista* architecture include the *Hospital de Sant Pau,* the *Palau de la Música Catalana, Casa Garí, El Frare Blanc,* and many others.[44] These buildings all serve as symbols of Catalan identity in Catalonia and mark spaces within Barcelona and other Catalan cities as distinctly Catalan.[45]

In 1911, near the end of the *Modernisme* movement, the *Noucentisme* movement, characterized by Mediterranean and classical elements, began to overtake *Modernisme*. *Noucentisme* lasted from 1911 to 1929 and is the response to the decadence and elitism of *Modernisme*; Proponents of the *Noucentisme* movement aimed to create a Catalonia fit for the twentieth-century, thus the name *Noucentisme* (nine-hundred-ism).[46] Along with the revival of Mediterranean influence, *Noucentisme* marked the revival of the influence of Graeco-Roman heritage in Catalonia, an aspect of Catalonian history neglected by *Modernista* architecture[47] Sculptors Pau Gargallo, Josep Clara, Manolo Hugue, and Enric Casanovas, along with painters Joaquin Torres Garcia and Joaquim Sunyer, make up the core of artists who spearheaded *Noucentisme*.[48] *Noucentista* architecture was initially uncommon, but eventually, Roman based classical-style buildings appeared.[49] Examples of *Noucentista* architecture, such as the *Casa*

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[42] Hughes, *Barcelona*, 530-531.
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] *Ibid.,* 115-127.
[45] Hau, "Nation Space, and Identity," 78.
[46] Calvera, "The Influence of English Design," 84.
[47] Hughes, *Barcelona*, 534.
[48] *Ibid.*
[49] *Ibid.*

Francesc Coll and the *Torres Venecianas*, are found around the *Placa De Catalunya* and down the *Via Laietana*.[50] The *Noucentisme* movement would eventually come to an end upon the rise of dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera, who despised Catalan regionalism, suppressed Catalonia's culture, and limited the power of the Mamncomunitat; the rise of the Primo de Rivera, who believed in a unified Spain, marked the introduction of national Spanish architecture to Catalonia and the end of major Catalonian architectural movements until the collapse of the Franco regime in 1975.[51]

The fascist dictator Fransisco Franco, who ruled Spain from 1939 to 1975, heavily suppressed Catalan culture, outlawed the Catalan language, and suspended any semblance of autonomy, which led to the rise of the Postmodern movement in the 1980s.[52] Fierce suppression led to the rise of nationalist movements throughout Catalonia, which flared up more and more as the rule of the Franco regime came slowly to an end.[53] After the collapse of fascist Spain and the transition to a democratic government, the Spanish government restored the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, and Catalans once again began to develop a distinct style of design and architecture to represent itself, known as Postmodernism.[54] Postmodernism, while also a nationalist movement, had different intentions than its predecessors *Modernisme* and *Noucentisme*; Postmodernism did not aim to "validate historical lineage" or create "localized iconography," rather it was a modernizing movement that aimed to polish Catalonia's international and domestic image.[55] The specific characteristics of the Postmodern movement in Catalonia are challenging to pinpoint, and the movement went through many phases. However, the overall goal of modernizing and representing Catalonia internationally remained constant, and designers and

[50] Hughes, *Barcelona*, 535.
[51] *Ibid.,* 537.
[52] Narotzky, "Selling the Nation," 62-64.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.,* 66,
[55] *Ibid.*

architects throughout the 1980s created a unique movement that represented Catalonia throughout the late twentieth century.[56]

These architectural movements all aimed to distinctly mark spaces within Catalonia as distinctly Catalan, as cities in Catalonia are a mix of Spanish and Catalan architecture.[57] There are many ways Catalans mark spaces within their cities as distinctly Catalan, and the process of marking spaces as Catalan is still ongoing in the twenty-first century, with the recovery of the formerly banned Catalan language still ongoing.[58] Since the death of Franco, Catalans began renaming street signs, road names, and buildings in Catalan after being renamed in Castilian Spanish by Franco, and schools are once more teaching Catalan.[59] Spanish dictators destroyed Catalan structures in favor of Spanish buildings, such as four columns in front of the National Art Museum of Catalonia which served as symbols of Catalonia's golden age that were torn down by dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera and replaced with a "Spanish Town" for the 1929 Exhibition. Catalans have rebuilt many of these lost structures, reclaiming spaces in Catalonia as Catalan.[60] Similar to the reconstruction of lost spaces, the architectural movements of *Modernisme, Noucentisme*, and Postmodernism are a visual testament to Catalanism, and buildings such as *La Sagrada Familia* serve as icons of Catalonia in the twenty-first century.[61] Catalans identify more with areas of Barcelona and other Catalan cities where Catalan forms of architecture are more prevalent, and when combined with other methods of claiming space, such as the presence of the Catalan flag and language, make a space a Catalan space as opposed to a Spanish space.

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[56] Narotzky, "Selling the Nation," *68.*
[57] Hau, "Nation Space, and Identity," 77.
[58] *Ibid.,* 77-78.
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] *Ibid.,* 81-82.
[61] *Ibid.,* 82-84.

      Overall, Catalan architecture is a means by which Catalans represent their culture in a physical and visual means. The major architectural movements that accomplish this are *Modernisme, Noucentisme,* and Postmodernism, which are all founded in Catalan nationalism. Catalan nationalists aim to bring autonomy to Catalonia and to revive their language and culture. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, rather than in the mid-to-late twentieth century, Catalan nationalism was founded in a desire to glorify Catalonia's middle ages, legitimize Catalonia's history, and to create localized iconography; this form of Catalan nationalism is represented in *Modernisme* and *Noucentisme*.[62] Postmodernism was also a nationalist movement, but rather than creating Catalan identity, Postmodernism aimed to polish Catalonia's international and domestic image and legitimize Catalonia following the oppressive rule of Fransisco Franco. Catalan architecture is a visual testament to Catalonia and a physical embodiment of Catalan identity, representing Catalonia domestically and abroad.

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[62] Narotzky, "Selling the Nation," 66.

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