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RICE UNIVERSITY

WHEN FORM RESISTS FUNCTION

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

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ABSTRACT

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Architecture is a bridge field between Science and Art, between the objective and subjective. It is up to the individual to define and locate Architecture between these two opposites. For me, the beauty of the field is its subjectiveness and that is precisely what makes Architecture.

The main goal of the project, a seminary in Barcelona, is to design a permeable architecture despite contextual density and programmatic opacity. The design will challenge the existing "closed" architecture of the site by creating an architecture that is "open" to the city.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a research, trying to determine and define what Architecture is. Obviously the goal is not to give a universal definition but to try to define a personal approach to Architecture.

The starting point of my discussion was to emphasize the quality of "in-between" in Architecture has. Architecture is a bridge-field between Science and Art, between the objective and the subjective.

From this statement, the research focused on defending a very subjective approach to Architecture over a more objective one.

However a subjective position could be considered and as a matter of fact has been considered as decadent, and therefore an important part of my research was devoted to analyzing decadence, and defending a decadent approach to Architecture.

As a method of developing my thesis, analyzing the creative process, and staying true to the decadent approach to Architecture, I realized that the most important thing is the experience, and not the final product. Because of this the rest of the thesis focused on the process of design, hence the
documentation of the architectural creation and the analysis of this
documentation are the main part of this document.
1. ARCHITECTURE

1.1. DEFINITION

According to the "Historia de la Arquitectura" encyclopedia published by Salvat, the most elementary definition of Architecture says that it is the art of designing and building buildings. All these terms in the definition are essential.

1. Architecture is something that overcomes the simple need of shelter, in order to get lost in the mysterious terrain of art.

2. The architectural art consists not only in building buildings but in designing and imagining them.

3. In the last part of the definition, we talk about the object of architecture: the building.

Though this is the simplest, most commonly accepted definition of architecture it has been proposed that we should broaden the architectural object to include in it all of the human environment (cities, roads, everyday objects, furniture, ...). Hence a more accurate and more inclusive definition will
be that architecture is total immersion of human experience into the decadent domain of art.

Architecture moves humanity from the world of nature to own of its own creation. This cult of artificiality and the artifact, will be one of the main traits of the decadent character, as we will see later on when we analyze the concept of decadence. A maxim for this attitude, will be the following Oscar Wilde’s statement:

_The first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible, what the second duty is no one has yet discovered._

The conceptual framework is wide and complex: geometry, mathematics and physics as main sciences come together with less precise fields such as psychology, history, philosophy and aesthetics.

### 1.2. IN BETWEEN CONDITION

The term architecture is therefore a confrontational one by nature, since in its definition and in its practice, it tries to combine two opposites. This paradox is crucial to architecture and its definition, as many architects and
critics have realized and stated in their writings. Perhaps the most conscious writing bearing on this statement is Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, where in its introduction he says:

> Louis Kahn has referred to what a thing wants to be, but implicit in this statement is the opposite: what the architect wants the thing to be. In the tension and balance between these two lie many of the architect’s decisions.

Some people may argue that architecture is not a dichotomy between science and art, and they may mention the vitruvian triad; that architecture is the union of firmness, commodity and delight, or in other words as Trachtenberg and Hyman will say in the introduction to their *Architecture: from prehistory to post-modernism*:

> Architecture should be at once a structural, practical and visual art. Without solidity, it is dangerous, without usefulness, it is merely large-scale sculpture, and without beauty (as Ruskin, Le Corbusier, and Pevsner emphasize) it is no more than an utilitarian construction.

I agree with Vitruvius that we should take sociological concerns as key elements of architecture, but I disagree with his assumption that this aspect is opposed to science and art, and it is independent to these two concepts, I think

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sociology (or commodity as Vitruvius will say) as architecture, is a combination of objectivity and subjectivity. Therefore as we will say in mathematical terms commodity is not "linearly independent" from science and art but a combination of these "variables". After eliminating this variable from the equation, we could then say architecture is that indefinable field between science (technology, construction, structure, ...) and art (aesthetics, composition, ...), in other words, between the objective and the subjective.

Technology .......................................................... Architecture .......................................................... Art
Objective .......................... Subjective

1.3 ZONE OF CONFLICT

The zone of conflict appears when we try to define and locate architecture between these two opposites. Certainly, the only truth in this dilemma is that for something to be considered architecture has to have both components, the rest is purely rhetoric and any position could be argued. Nevertheless I defend the subjective approach to Architecture arguing that the beauty of the field is its subjectiveness and is precisely what really gives

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architecture a total value. Le Corbusier's definition of architecture from his Vers une Architecture comes to mind:

You employ stone, wood and concrete, and with these materials you build houses and palaces; that is construction. But suddenly you touch my heart, you do me good, I am happy and I say: "this is beautiful"; that is architecture, art enters in. My house is practical. I thank you, as I might thank railway engineers or the telephone service. You have not touch my heart. But suppose that walls rise towards heaven in such a way that I am moved. I perceived your intentions. Your mood has been gentle, brutal, charming or noble. The stones you have erected tell me so. You fix me to the place and my eyes regard it. They behold something which expresses a thought. A thought which reveals itself without word or sound, but solely by means of shapes which stand in a certain relationship to one another. These shapes are such they are clearly revealed in light. The relationships between them have not necessarily any reference to what is practical or descriptive. They are a mathematical creation of your mind. They are the language of architecture. By the use of inert materials and starting from conditions more or less utilitarian, you have established certain relationships which have aroused my emotions. This is architecture.³

1.4. ARCHITECTURE AS AN ART

This emphasis on the subjective will lead us to consider architecture as an art, at which point we should ask ourselves for the definition and essence of art; a difficult question that many have asked themselves without finding an answer. Robert Venturi tries to explain the essence of art, and he seems to find it again in the tension produced by juxtaposition, as he explains in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture:

While the second classification of complexity and contradiction in architecture relates to form and content as manifestation of program and structure, the first concerns the medium and refers to a paradox inherent in perception and the very process of meaning in art: the complexity and that results from contradiction the juxtaposition of what an image is what it seems. Joseph Albers call "the discrepancy between physical fact and psychic effect" a contradiction which is "the origin of art".4

Art is a wide concept, quite indefinable, with ambiguous scope and a fascinating character. Maybe we could define it precisely from that ethereal character: art as that which exceeds the need. Architecture will then be considered art as for that part of it not devoted to cover the basic need of shelter for human activities. We could find also extreme opinions, like John Ruskin who defines architecture as:

The art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man, that the sight of them contributes to his mental health, power and pleasure.

1.5. HEDONISM AND THE HUMAN CONDITION

We do not have to be as extreme as Ruskin for whom architecture is just passionate surfaces, but we have to acknowledge that architecture fulfills and exceeds the need of shelter for human activities, making the human environment an infinite fountain of pleasure, filled with beauty and with symbols and references describing the human soul. As Oscar Wilde said in The Picture of Dorian Gray:

No civilized man ever regrets a pleasure, and no uncivilized man ever knows what a pleasure is.⁵

This hedonistic attitude was preached by the great critic Walter Pater in the late XIX century. Pater, especially in his conclusion to his book The Renaissance, encouraged his followers to pursue what the French call a frisson. A frisson, as Thomas Reed Whissen defines in his book The Devil's Advocates: Decadence in Modern Literature:

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⁵ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, (New York, Printed for members of the Limited Editions Club, 1957)
A “frisson” is a thrill, a shudder of delight, a pulse of ecstasy, a jolt of pure joy, and it was the ambition of the aesthetes of Oscar Wilde’s day to measure the quality of experience by the frequency and intensity with which they experienced such sensations.⁶

As we will see later, this focus on the human experience, as the only important thing in life, and the only thing worth considering in life will also be one of the most significant aspects of the decadent spirit.

This human experience that we have been talking about will be in what we normally consider the realm of feeling, and as S. Giedion says in *Space, Time and Architecture*, it is the opening of this realm the artist’s chief mission.

*The artist reveals ordinary things as “objets a reaction poetiques”, to borrow Le Corbusier’s phrase. Or, to put it somewhat differently, new parts of the world are made accessible to feeling.*⁷

1.6. ANALYSIS OF AN ARCHITECTURAL WORK

Everytime we are in front of an architectural work, and we ask ourselves to what degree the work fulfills the function for which it was created, and to what

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level it exceeds the function that was assigned to the work, we will understand, that deep inside, the work is devoted to a different function, less concrete, belonging to the realm of art. For example, Michelangelo's staircase in the Laurentian library, is not simply a staircase connecting two different levels, but also a sculpture and an artwork, and that is why it took him so long to design it, and why it is considered one of the architectural masterpieces of all times. Maybe his idea of art is different from ours, but what Michelangelo was after is the same that many modern architects look for: something that lives in the realm of art. I would like to finish this section with the following quote from Giedion's book *Space, Time and Architecture*:

The artist, in fact, functions a great deal like an inventor or a scientific discoverer: all three seek new relations between man and his world. In the artist's case these relations are emotional instead of practical or cognitive. The creative artist does not want to copy his surroundings, on the one hand, or to make us see them through his eyes on the other. He is a specialist who shows us in his work as if in a mirror something we have not realized for ourselves: the state of our own souls. He finds the outer symbols for the feelings which really possess us but which for us are only chaotic and -therefore- disquieting, obsessive stirrings. This is why we still need artists however difficult it may be for them to hold their place in the modern life.\(^7\)

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2. DECADENCE

2.1. DEFINITION

After looking for a clear definition of decadence, the only thing in common with every source that I researched was the acknowledgment of the difficulty to define such a term. As Thomas Reed Whissen said in The Devil's Advocates:

Decadence shares with existentialism a stubborn resistance to text book definition. Just as any attempt at a precise definition of existentialism would destroy existentialism’s very meaning, so would a precise definition of decadence drain the vitality from that term; and as he mentions previously in the introduction, any definition that pleases some is bound to offend others.⁹

Even the philosopher Cyrill E.M. Joad mentions in his monograph on decadence, how difficult is to define the word decadence, because of the great variety of senses in which the word is used, pointing out how the essential meaning of the word, if there is any, is buried underneath a multitude of attributes.

According to some sources, and especially according to the most extended meaning of the word, the following five will be the most common definitions:

1. Form without content.
2. Failure to maintain a level in a realized form.
3. Identification of decadence with immorality.
4. Political definitions:
   - Military weakness.
   - Declining population.
5. Declining status of health or being.

The most common conception of decadence is the third one, the one that links it with morals, or rather, with their lack. A clear example of this position is the writer Virginia Wolf, due to her preoccupation with the minutiae of experience and the trivialities of personal relationships, also because of her emphasis upon the human as the only source of interest and standard of value, and because of her persistent refusal to grade, to give moral marks or assign values.

Perhaps one might say that two of the marks of decadent ages, or of what are commonly regarded as decadent periods, are that humanity should no longer desire anything with sufficient intensity to think it worth while to inkect
misery upon itself in order to obtain it, and no longer hold any belief with sufficient conviction to be willing to turn the world into shambles for the sake of "the truth".

2.2. WALTER PATER'S STATEMENT

As a reminder I would quote Walter Pater in what I think sums up his ideas: “Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end.”

This section is basically a summary on Cyrill E.M. Joad’s first part of his monograph on decadence. Though I do not agree completely with all his discourse, I found value in his deconstruction of Walter Pater's statement and analysis of its meaning. Therefore, the following section will be highly quoted, due to the summary nature of it.

If everything is changing, it follows that there is no absolute truth, in fact, nothing other than the flux of our experience; or, if there is, experience alone is the end.

If experience is an end in itself, and if, all experience is significant, it is difficult to see how any obligation can be laid upon us to seek one kind of experience rather than another.
2.3. CONSEQUENCES OF CONSIDERING EXPERIENCE AS AN END.

After this analysis of what Walter Pater's statement implies, Joad goes into analyzing what the consequences of it are, and talks about certain attitudes that tend to be associated with the view that experience is an end.

SKEPTICISM IN BELIEF

Let us suppose that the universe is without meaning or purpose, that the natural order of spatio-temporal events which we participate as the possessors of our bodies is the only order of reality, and finally, let us suppose that our minds are neither byproducts, of bodily and cerebral processes or that, they may be other than the bodies which they animate, they are, nevertheless, permanently tied to and cannot exist without those bodies. Then it will follow that there can be no meaning in life such as belongs to and derives from the order of reality which our bodies inhabit. It will also follow that there can be no ideals save such as the human mind has itself invented.

According to the above suppositions, we should have succeeded in life in proportion as we have contrived to invest our experience with the qualities and characteristics to which we give names of "significant" or "intense" or "beautiful" or "valuable".

The success of our lives will, then, be judged not by the degree to which they realize an end and achieve a goal, fulfill a purpose or
conform to a standard which we have recognized as authoritative, but by
the extent to which they contrive to embody a series of significant
experiences. The impolite way of putting this is to say as Bruno Rotini did
in “Time must have a stop” that such a life consists merely of “one
damned thing after another until at last there is a final damned thing,
after which there is not anything”. In this way it may be seen how the
belief in experience for its own sake both reflects and supports a
metaphysical skepticism.

EPICUREANISM AND HEDONISM IN CONDUCT

It is no accident that ages which value experience for its own sake
because their of beliefs (or, rather, lack of belief) have denied to the
universe anything else to value, these periods are pleasure-seeking
ages which accept as the object of living the quest of pleasurable
sensations without taking into account the sources from which they
derive, the end for the sake of which they are pursued or any property
which they may possess beyond the one property of pleasurableness. It
is also to be expected that they should seek to develop, refine and
enlarge the capacity for enjoying pleasurable sensations, that, in short,
they should make a cult of pleasure. The hedonist asserts that pleasure
is the only element or factor of value in our experience.

SUBJECTIVISM IN THOUGHT, ART AND MORALS

When analyzing the theory of judgment, we can distinguish
between three different components: person judging, judgment passed
and object on which we judge.
There is an important difference between abstract object and concrete, physical ones. The difference is that in the case of a judgment about a physical object, I can sometimes check or verify the judgment, whether in the case of an abstract one I could never do this. Because of this inability to verify the judgment, the judgment itself becomes a completely subjective one.

Regarding the analysis of aesthetic and moral judgment we can agree that:

1. When we pass moral and aesthetic judgments we do not succeed in saying anything about the moral or aesthetic qualities of the “object” to which the judgments refer.

2. No two aesthetic or moral judgments can disagree, since they are not, in fact two differing judgments about the same “object”, one asserting that the “object” has, the other that it has not a particular quality or attribute; they are judgments about different “objects”, since one of them reports the feelings or opinions of one judging subject, the other of another one.

3. From this it is a short step to the assertion that “objects” do not possess moral attributes and qualities in their own right.

As a consequence of this subjectivistic analysis of judgments we find the above mentioned attitudes of Skepticism and Hedonism, that imply the non-existence or, at least, the not knowability of “objects” other than our mental states. Hence, this theory’s tend to belittle “the object” and to concentrate upon the fact of human experience. This leaving out of “the object” is an essential part in the definition of decadence.
CONCLUSION

After all this analysis, the argument returns to its starting point. The "dropping of the object" entails that the worth or validity of experience cannot be assessed by reference to the "objects" that evoke it. Experience, then, must be assessed, in so far as it can be assessed at all, by reference to its intrinsic qualities, since it cannot be assessed in reference to anything else. Three results follow:

1. Experience must be for its own sake.

2. In so far as we attempt to estimate the worth of experience, we should do so by reference to a single standard, the degree of its pleasurableness.

3. Valuing experience for its own sake, we shall tend to hold that the more intense and the more various the experience the better.

2.4. DECADENT SPIRIT: ANALYSIS OF “A REBOURS”

We can consider Des Esseintes, main character of Huysmans' novel "A Rebours", the epitome of the decadent spirit. Des Esseintes, fights against the mediocrity of the world and decides to live in opposition to the norms of society, trying to build his own life as a refined and exquisite art work. He will try to treat his life a continuous emotional and spiritual exaltation. There is a permanent search for the aesthetic-emotional intensity and the dreamt ideal.
The world view of Des Esseintes is uncompromising. As in Baudelaire's sonnet "Correspondences", he tries to discover the secret unity that reigns in the apparent dispersion of the world and life. He will try, for example, to match the perfumes, the colors and the sounds, in order to feel the expansion of the infinite things, believing that they would allow us to somehow come closer to the mystery of life.

2.4.1. SUBLIMATION OF THE ART AND THE ARTIFICE

The artistic sensibility and the aesthetic emotion lead and rule all of Des Esseintes' activities. According to him, man truly liberates himself through the creative power of the art and the artifice (art is a form of artifice, and the ingenious and creative artifice a form of art), because the art and the artifice show the victory of the human spirit over nature, and both come from the human creative genius.

Nature would therefore be the realm of what is necessary and impersonal, meanwhile, the imaginative art and artifice show the transformational power of the spirit, introducing the free dimension of what is aesthetic, that is to say, a way to freely organize and associate certain elements in order to produce something new and evocative.
Des Esseintes is for an art that above all is evocative and suggestive. For him, the artistic work is an exceptional stimulus to dive into subliminal sensations and mysterious ecstasies.

He argues for an active and creative reading of the art work, for attractive work because of the magic of its style and its ability to open to different interpretative possibilities, allowing the reader to discover various meanings in the piece.

Des Esseintes looks for the poetics of music, and the music of poetics; the poetics of paintings and the painting of poetics. Art (any kind of art) possesses a poetic musical language in which the deep and mysterious rhythm of life and the universe are vibrating.

Artifice constituted for Des Esseintes the decisive sign of human genius. As he sustains that, nature has already spent its time, since it has finally extinguish the patience of the refined and sensitive spirits because of the repugnant uniformity of its landscapes and skies. Its banality is like that of a specialist who just works in his own field; what a monotonous storage of trees and fields, what a banal show of mountains and seas!
This exaltation of the artifice as the most important sign of the creative human genius and as the main element of the aesthetic configuration, superior to nature, is related to Baudelaire's "Praise of the Make-up". The goal is not to make nature more beautiful, but to create according to the aesthetic of the artifice another kind of beauty that establishes a new dimension opposed to the natural one.

2.4.2. DANDISM

Des Esseintes could be described as a dandy. Dandism was a phenomenon of individual behavior many artists and aesthetes from the nineteenth century practiced. The dandy rebels against mediocrity, vulgarity and the conformism of the social atmosphere of his age, and he wants to nourish his personal originality acting with cynicism, with refinement and with flamboyance in the way he dresses, thinks and lives. Deep inside the dandy is a lonely aesthete fighting against the norm (a rebours), and as Baudelaire used to say, dandism is the last heroic act in decadent societies.
“En este mundo traidor,

In this traitor world,

nada es verdad ni mentira,

nothing is truth nor false,

todo es segun del color

it all depends on the color

del cristal con que se mira.”

of the glass through which we look.

Calderon de la Barca
3. PREFACE TO A DESIGN DIARY

3.1. THE DROPPING OF THE CONCEPT

He tried and tried to come up with an explanation, with a rationalization of his work, but he could not. How could you summarize seven months of work with a few words? It would be like describing a person with one or two adjectives. Sure you could do it!, but this will probably sound simplistic.

He got caught up in this metaphor and soon he was trying to find out who he was and how was he? He thought forever until he finally realized he was his own actions, he was not a concept, and most of all he was not a law; no matter what he thought about himself, he kept on surprising and challenging his intellect with unpredictable actions. He concluded: like his work, he could not be rationalized with concepts, and the only thing he could do was to explain his actions and experiences while doing his work.

He realized in a way he was himself a conceptual product, a simple logic machine. He was so rational and logical he could not act, since he would expend his life deconstructing every argument or situation that came across, people will call it overanalyzing or critical spirit, but he knew that was nothing more than fear, stage fright, fear to act.
3.2. THE RELIGIOUS CHANGE

There was just one way out, act. Action became his god, and opposed to it there was logic and rationalism, those fake deities that for a lifetime he had adored and worship. He knew they were not really opposed, but he desperately needed to escape from his paralysis and in order to do so, he
should adopt some values and create a value system as the only way out of the eternal limbo of rationalization.

3.3. THE CONTROL FALLACY

His first reaction was to get rid of all intellectual research for a concept and the analysis of everything. How could he do that? He was clearly a control freak, obviously a trait he had inherit from his dad.

How could he control something he did not know about yet and had not observed. He had known and contemplated many things in his life, actually that was the only thing he had done in his life since he was never able to relate to these things. When he felt confident enough to interact with them, they were already gone. He realized the only control he had and ever had was over himself and his actions.

3.4. CARPE DIEM

This Latin maxim became his new credo in life. He had identified the control fallacy, now he just needed to loose the fear.
3.5. THE WORLD'S SUBJECTIVITY

The first step was taken, and the first decision made, it might have been a good one or a bad one, but it really did not matter since the definition of good or bad is subjective, at this point he remembered Calderon de la Barca's famous poem:

\[
\begin{align*}
En \ este \ mundo \ traidor \\
nada \ es \ verdad \ ni \ mentira \\
todo \ es \ segun \ el \ color \\
del \ c\text{i}rstal \ con \ que \ se \ mira
\end{align*}
\]

In this traitor world
nothing is true nor false
it all depends on the color
of the glass through which we look

3.6. ACCEPTANCE OF DECISIONS TO PREVENT PARALYSIS

The important thing now was to accept this decision as a given and to keep on going. Obviously he would not go too far if he was to keep on questioning his decisions. The following is a true story.
4. A DESIGN STORY

4.1. FORMAT

Based on the acknowledgment of the difficult task of explaining with concepts the design thesis, especially because of their quantity, and the non obvious relations between them; this section is a diary in the design of a seminary, in the city of Barcelona. The goal is to make the project and the design process as comprehensible as possible by documenting the work and explaining the evolution of the project.

The format is based on the documented work as the main element, and where needed, explanations of the work and decisions will be given.

5.2. SITE/CONTEXT

The chosen site for the project is located in Barcelona's old city, what is known by the locals as "El Barri Gotic".
Fig. 2. Aerial view of Barcelona's old city

He used to take the metro from his house to Liceo, in the heart of the Ramblas, and then he would meander through the narrow streets to Via Laietana, where his friends had a studio. He liked variety, and though this was provided by the different people who were on the street every day, he used to try different paths even if they were longer. One day he came across a secluded street, Palla street, where he discovered a door built in 1462. He then researched until he found out that that door was the remains of an old hospital that had been remodeled into an apartment building at the end of last century.
Fig. 3 View of the street from Plaza de la Catedral to Plaza del Pi
4.2.1. HISTORIC CHARGE

This area is where the Roman settlement of Barcino was created around two thousand years ago, and the place from which Barcelona evolved.

Barcelona was a walled city until last century, when the central government decided to tear down the medieval wall and allow Barcelona to grow according to the designs of Ildefons Cerda. Because of these spatial constrictions we can clearly identify the evolution of Barcelona as it passed from the Roman extension, to the Medieval one and finally to the Modern one.

Regardless this clear distinction from a bird's eye point of view, the different eras and architectural styles are superimposed, especially in the old city, where in just a couple of hundred yards we encounter buildings ranging from the remains of Barcino to buildings that have just been built.

The chosen site is a small version of this eclectic condition and within the length of Palla Street, a street that used to run around the North-east side of the original Roman wall, we realize the strong historic charge as we come through recently finish buildings, XVIIIth and XIXth century constructions, Medieval churches and palaces, and remains of the Roman wall.
4.2.2. DENSE URBAN FABRIC

Because of the impossibility of Barcelona to grow outside the city walls the only solution in order to absorb the growth of industrialization was to maintain and to even densify more its already crowded urban fabric.

This dense urban fabric could be experienced by just walking around the old city, were "major" streets are no more than twenty feet wide and most of them are around ten feet wide. This density is further emphasized with the five or six story average height of the buildings in the area.

4.2.3. CLOSED PROGRAMS

The other main density encountered on the site is the condition of closeness of the programs and functions that take place along Palla street. This closeness is both programmatic and physical.
The East side of the street was originally running along the first city wall, and because of this, regardless of the later constructions, it has kept this wall condition since the placed buildings were designed to be accessed from inside the city, and the facades facing Palla street were considered backdoors of these buildings and were rarely used.

Fig. 4. Back of a Church.

Even a modern intervention on that side of the street resulted on a closed program. The project was the demolition of a lot, in order to create a public space and be able to reveal the remains of the Roman wall. Because of the low transit of the street the piazza became a drug hole and the city hall decided to gate the space.
The main features of the west side are a gated empty lot, due to the demolition of the previous buildings, a XVth century hospital that was remodeled into an apartment complex at the end of last century and that is not presently occupied, and the rest are apartment buildings with some antique shops on the ground floors.
Fig. 7. Gated empty lot
4.3. PROGRAM

After the analysis of the context he thought that there was a challenge in the site to design a permeable architecture despite contextual density and programmatic opacity. He had always loved challenges, the more difficult something looked the more he was attracted to it.

The challenge was to design an "open" architecture though the program will be "closed". By "open" architecture, he meant one that was permeable to the city with public gestures via its form. And for a "closed" program he meant a program that was opaque to the city and forbidden to penetration by outsiders to the program.

As for the program, he decided the designing of a seminary was very appropriate for the problem the design was facing. As we all know, a seminary is one of the more "closed" or "opaque" programs towards the city we can find. As for specifics the program consisted of:
1. Academic-Event facilities:
   1. Auditorium
   2. Classes
   3. Offices
   4. Lobby-Cafe area
   5. Restrooms

2. Religious facilities
   1. Chapel
   2. Sacristy

3. Library

4. Living facilities
   1. Parlor
   2. Meeting areas
   3. Kitchen
   4. Refectory
   5. Cells
   6. Bathrooms
4.4. REGULATING LINES

After trying to come up with a geometric system for the development of the seminary, that will be both contextual and functional, he realized, he did not have to invent any, the geometry was already there, figured out along centuries and totally in accordance with the physical context.

Fig. 8. Geometry of the site.

This geometry, was derived from the lines from the previous buildings that are or were on the site. From these existing lines the whole project evolved, ending up having four different kind of lines:
1. Existing lines that are not used.

2. Existing lines that are used.

3. Lines based on geometric transformations of the existing ones.
   3.1. Extension.
   3.2. Rotation.
   3.3. Parallel.
   3.4. Perpendicular.

4. New lines not based on the previous ones.

As mentioned before this geometry, a geometry that evolves from the site itself will be totally contextual and it will fit right in with the surrounding buildings. But what about the convenience of this geometry for the functions of a seminary?. He personally thought this geometry was perfect for the design of a seminary, both because of the geometry itself, and because of how this geometry was created.

The geometry of the area evolved from movement, from the paths that were used to get to the Roman city, we can notice all the streets around the Roman wall converge toward the old doors of the city. Later on, these paths became streets, and buildings grew along their sides. On the way he saw the seminary as a place for meditation and contemplation, where there is not really a goal but it is all about the experience of an encounter with God, and the functions were to evolve from a meandering destinationless circulation.
4.5. DESIGNING THE MASSING

Once he had the regulating lines from which the building was to evolve, both in plan and in section, the next step was to design the shell of the building, or what in architectural terms will be call the massing.

Fig. 9. General view of the complex
The starting point in order to design the seminary was the concern with circulation, and how people where to move along the site. A major decision was to create a passage that will connect Pi street with Palla street physically penetrating the complex and that could be used by the pedestrians.

Fig. 10.. Entry to the passage at Palla Street
More than a passage this area is also a destination, a place the public can occupy, and consists of a courtyard, a small patio to allow lighting into the passage and the passage itself.

Fig .11. Second level plan. Where we can see the passage and courtyard.

The courtyard is elevated 3.8 meters over the street level in order to allow independent circulation for the seminary at all levels. The courtyard is located where the interior patio of the old hospital was placed, so the regulating lines
served not just for geometric purposes, but also for functional purposes, since where there were interior patios, in most of the cases there still are.

Fig. 12. Aerial view of the seminary, where we can see the different patios.

From this point on, the main concern of the design was to create a fluid circulation between the different parts of the building both in plan and in section, but at the same time creating a clear distinction between public and private realm. Once the circulation was created, the different programmatic element evolved from this scheme, as buildings evolved from the paths leading to the Roman city.
At the same time he was considering all those concerns, there was also the formal aspect of the building, how will the building be perceived from the street? As mentioned before, a main challenge was to create a building permeated by the city, he decided the best way to do it was to eliminate the property line, and not to make the building depend on that line, but it should pass and recede that line, so a sense of fluidity will be created, and the pedestrian will penetrate the building (physically: through the passage, visually: through openings in the facades via fenestration and conceptually: through the articulation of the facade).
Fig. 14. Articulation of the facade
4.6. GETTING INTO THE BUILDING

Once the shell of the building and the main distribution of the spaces and circulation was done, the next step was to get into the building and start solving and shaping the different spaces.

The way of carrying out this task, was as the previous phase via model, but he needed a jump in scale since the 1:100 (metric) had been fine for the designing of the massing, but was not at all appropriate for this new part of the design process, so he jumped to a 1:50 model in order to be able to deal and design the interiors of the seminary.

Fig. 15. Detail of the living facilities 1:50 model
4.7. "MASSAGING" THE SPACES

The basic shaping of the different spaces was solved with the new model, but in order to define them better and start getting into general details and a more accurate distribution of the seminary, he also started documenting the model with drawings.

Fig. 16. Plan 1 of the seminary

We could say this was the phase where the programmatic elements and their dimensions started to be solved and fixed, though since every element was interrelated and depended on other ones, the process became a
come and go between different solutions and measures. Even if the project was constantly morphing, the changes were increasingly smaller.

Fig 17. 1:50 study model.
5.8. UNDERSTANDING THE PROJECT

At this stage the project was already in his mind, he could see it and experience it, the drawings had certainly helped him do that, a new problem arose now, how could he show what was in his mind?. How could he make the project comprehensible?. He remembered what Andrew Zago once told him, a project is as good as you can present it or show it, is just as good as your drawings, models, ...

He decided to stop designing, the building and the details were clearly unfinished, but he decided that it was more important to produce a comprehensible presentation of what he had done and of what he already had in his mind, than keep on designing and not having anything but mere pieces of an unresolved jigsaw puzzle.

In order to explain the building he thought the best way will be a run through the building.
5.8.1. PASSAGE AREA

He loved the life of the streets, but he also enjoyed getting lost in the city, and finding timeless secluded places where he would stop and meditate, and he was attracted like a magnet to the music emanating from these places.

Fig. 18. Gypsy at Plaza del Pi
The places in general where small human-scale plazas or cul-de-sac, where some musician will perform for a smile and for trying to keep on living from what he most loved on earth.

He decided that he had to create one of those places in his building, a transitional place where people could go and get lost. This is how he came across the idea of a passage connecting the two different streets that his building faced.

The entries to the passage should be ambiguously inviting, they will tell you; “come in, come in!”, but something inside of you will stop you and an uncertainty will grow on you.

The Palla entry will be like the entrance to an Egyptian temple, a huge staircase will lead you up to some unknown place from which you could see some light coming and finally you will discover the secluded elevated courtyard from which you could access the library or hopefully just listen to the music of a nonmaterialistic human
Fig. 19. Entry from Palla Street.
The access from Pi street is quite different and even if there is a big opening and the facade turns into it as an inviting gesture to the pedestrian, once you arrive to the opening, you realize that you are entering some unknown
space, a ramp leads to a place from where some light is filtering, is a small light shaft that also serves as a structural element for the building.

Fig. 22. Entry to the passage from Pi street.
Fig. 23. Detail of the entrance.
Once you arrive there you are grateful that you have discovered this little place, but you cannot still see the end of the tunnel, though again some light will make you wonder what is at the end, the end of course is the secluded courtyard.
4.8.2. THE CHAPEL AND SACRISTY

The designing of the chapel provoked a weird feeling on him. He had seen many churches, after all, he was raised up Catholic in a very Catholic country at that time, Franco's Spain.

Fig. 24. First plan of the chapel.
Since almost ten years ago he was what Americans will call a fallen Catholic, and though he had decided he could not base his life in something or someone, he was not sure existed, he had always loved visiting religious buildings because they irradiated some kind of energy and calmness to them.

Fig. 25. View from the altar
The chapel was a small church located on the ground level pretty much in the middle of the building, and was access from the seminary facilities for the seminarians or via a lobby for the outside visitors.

The space was very simple and the only ornamentation came from the lighting devises: a screen wall opposed to the altar, skylights washing the north wall, a crack in the facade letting northern light into the altar, and an opening on the ceiling simulating some kind of cupola.

Fig. 26. Detail of the opening over the altar
Fig. 27. Section Through the chapel
4.8.3. ACADEMIC AREA

Fig. 28. View of the Auditorium

He wondered about the appropriate space for studying theology, it had to have areas for discussion with other seminarions, a lecture hall, but most of all it should have a lot of indeterminate spaces where a person could get lost and meditate. The spaces should be naked of ornaments, to help the people detach themselves from the material world, and the animation of the spaces will come through light, mostly zenithal light in order to connect the person with the metaphysical world.
Fig. 29. View of the Lobby

Fig. 30. Section through the Entry and Lobby
4.8.4. THE LIBRARY

The designing of the seminary had been like the designing of a city for him, the complex was a city within the old city of Barcelona, that itself was another city within Barcelona. It was like a Russian doll, if you keep on opening it you will always find another doll inside.

He decided the library, a city of books, should also be like a small city within the complex.
4.8.5. THE LIVING FACILITIES

This part of the building was the more traditional and standard one, since the functions to be develop there, were more fixed and determinate than the other ones.

Fig. 31. Interior view of the living facilities
5. DOCUMENTATION OF THE FINAL PRESENTATION
Fig. 32. Final Presentation display. Jury room at Anderson Hall. April 27, 1996.
Fig. 33. Aerial photograph of the site.
Fig. 34. Site model.
Fig. 35. Geometry of the project.
Fig. 36. Aerial view of the massing model.
Fig. 37. Massing model.
Fig. 38. Massing model. Several views.
Fig. 39. Massing model. Palla Street elevation.
Fig. 40. First level plan.
Fig. 41. Second level plan.
Fig. 42. Third level plan.
Fig. 43. Fourth level plan.
Fig. 44. Fifth level plan.
Fig. 45. Longitudinal section through the passage.

Fig. 46. Section through the lobby.
Fig. 47. Section through the chapel.

Fig. 48. Elevation from Pi Street.
Fig. 49. Elevation from Palla Street.
Fig. 50. Entry to the passage from Palla Street.
Fig. 51. Interior piazza coming from Palla Street.
Fig. 52. Interior piazza coming from Pi Street.
Fig. 53. Entry to the passage from Pl Street.
Fig. 54. View of the seminary from Pi Street.
Fig. 55. View of the auditorium from the stage.
Fig. 56. View of the lobby area on the second floor.
Fig. 57. View of the chapel from the altar.
Fig. 58. View of the main living-room.
Fig. 59. View of the circulation area leading to the cells.
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