



Logline

Gaudí, the iconic and unclassifiable Spanish architect, spearhead of modernism, prolific and contradictory, escapes any attempt at a hasty explanation.

Even the obvious is complex for him. Through that of his link to Nature, often cited, rarely questioned, we will take an exploratory journey through his living and organic work, in search of signs and symbols to try to explain **«Gaudi's Nature»**.

Taking as our starting point Casa Batlló, the work of artistic maturity for Gaudí, which crystallizes all his creative inspirations, we will in turn summon an era and a territory, an artistic imagination, but also the life of a man and the way in which he transcended all these elements to invent a unique work.

A story with several voices that will tell us how this fragile child, who was said to be condemned to save his energy in order to survive, has instead worked tirelessly to build a work that is all about life.

Going beyond the Gaudi Myth

The Catalan architect Antonio Gaudí belongs to the pantheon of Spanish artists of the twentieth century, alongside Picasso, Dali and Lorca.

Today, Barcelona cannot be dissociated from Gaudí: he has become its identity. To the point of having been converted into a tourist attraction that attracts hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world every year.

There is a **Gaudí myth**, consciously re-staged and simplified, with its main character, its legend and its setting.

About the man, the brilliant and ascetic aspect is often emphasized, dedicated body and soul to his greatest work, **The Basílica de la Sagrada Família**. A man who was half saint, half hermit, living in his workplace, away from society, solitary, single, vegetarian, and close to mysticism.

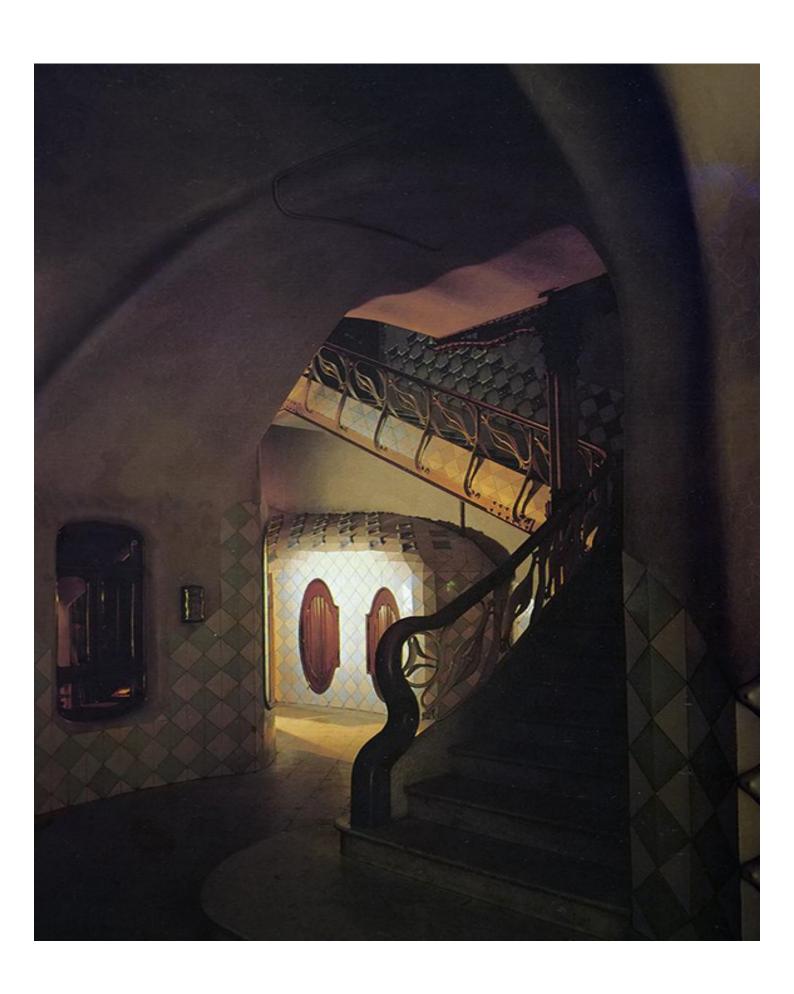
About his life, the same anecdotes are told that have become legends. Like the one about his death, when, reduced to the appearance of a beggar, he was hit by a streetcar in the heart of Barcelona.

Of his work, we value the fantastic, fairy-like, colorful aspect. We admire the fruits that adorn its towers, the animals that emerge from its portals. The predominance of nature in its architecture is rightly emphasized, as is its profound mineral, vegetable or animal aspect.

Surprisingly, Gaudi's relationship to nature is taken for granted. But it is not just a «taste» for nature, «a style». It is the result of the creative process of a man who was part of the turn of the 20th century, when the relationship with the environment was radically redefined, while the large cities disrupted by industrialization offered a new creative power to architects.

The complexity of Gaudí, in his intimate relationship with nature, is also explained by the ebullient imagination, at the same time scientific, artistic and social, which imprinted the time of this genius who is wrongly described as cut off from the world.

Gaudí was not outside the world: on the contrary, he «digested» that world in each of his works. And in particular in Casa Batlló, a key building that marks the peak of his fame and condenses all his work, from which we will dive «into the belly of the architect».



Director's Note of Intent

Casa Batlló is the mature work of an architect who has reached full mastery of his means. Until then, as innovative as his buildings were, Gaudí had always referred to pre-existing styles. For the first time, this place cannot be compared to anything known in modern architecture.

At first glance, the building can be disconcerting for those who do not know Gaudí: a shimmering, undulating façade, balconies in the shape of masks, slender columns reminiscent of bones, and to top it all off, a spectacular roof composed of large scales reminiscent of a dragon's back.

Once inside, some say that those who walk through its meanders, built without any right angles, find themselves like Jonah in the belly of the whale. From the terrace, aligned with the horizon of the city and the sea, plunging into the long corridor/throat of the animal, through the innovative ventilation system/gills, our human scale is lost.

It is an entire work of art, where the artist has intervened in everything: design, color, form, space and light. It is the ideal combination between art and functionality, between architecture and design, it is a key building to understand what Catalan modernism was... and to understand Gaudí.

The building will have here a significant function, because the intention is to dive into the «living» side of Gaudí's architecture, and to understand, by feeling, what he has to tell us. To do this, we will use an **immersive filming mode**, in motion. The complete freedom we have in Casa Batlló will allow us to be daring in our filming, and this will be a major asset.

We will also resort to the extreme close-up, to look at the architecture as we look at a painting, in which the eye can wander in search of the meaning of a detail. Because from the tiniest to the largest of details, Gaudí is behind it.

The natural origin of the **forms and structures** used will be made to be felt: helicoidal, hyperboloid, conoidal by putting them in scene, for example in association with the representations of nature from which they come, shell, tree, etc... The sound will also emphasize this organic immersion.

The story will progress through the discovery of this «world house», each part of the building allowing us to weave a bridge, tangible or allegorical, towards a chapter of our **story.** Through it, we will establish a **dynamic principle of exploration** which will be our basic structure, on which the other comprehension tools below will be articulated:

The **narration** will be handled by a **female voice**. **Gaudí's voice** will also be present, but in short quotes. There are very few of his writings, most of his archives having been burned when his studio was sacked during the civil war. No romantic correspondence or personal outpourings, the available material does not allow us to create a true incarnation. On the other hand, the available quotations are often clear and definitive, like unshakeable convictions. They shed light on the way he conceived his work and its place in the world.

Speakers will come to put things into perspective in a more committed and complex way than the voice of the narrator could do. Also, if we have to evoke another building of Gaudí, it is through them that we will do it. Artist, architect, art historian and science historian, they will be filmed in Casa Batlló or in a place where a visual bridge with it could be created.

The filmed nature will be present in the film, to play with the visual correspondences mentioned above but also to show what Gaudí saw and especially how he saw it. Trying to restore **Gaudi's subjective view** of nature, here's an exciting challenge. Close-up images of flora or fauna, whose geometry, intense color or movement under the effect of wind or light will be noticed. «Impressions» of nature, «organic memories». On these images, one can naturally place Gaudí's quotations.

Other images will be used. **Photographs or** animated **archive images**. They will testify to the «reality». The difficulty of the social and urban context, the broken link with nature, poverty, the burning of churches during Tragic Week.

In the same way, when it comes to evoking biographical elements of Gaudí's life that contain a strong dramatic intensity, we will resort to **documentary or fictional black and white** archive images. Like his distressing baptism when his life was hanging by a thread, the failure of his love declaration to Pepeta who would reject him, or the successive deaths of the members of his family, until the one of his friend and patron (of arts) Guëll, which will definitively separate him from the society of men.



Introduction

The façade: The Gaudi shocker

Confronting **the façade of Casa Batlló** for the first time, a true explosion of color, strewn with water lily ceramics, resting on stone shins and topped with a reptile skin, is to find oneself facing an obviousness and a mystery.

What is obvious is its **profoundly natural appearance**. A unique work, without comparison, Casa Batlló, located on the Passeig de Gràcia in the heart of Barcelona, was carried by the wind of artistic freedom that blew across Europe at the turn of the century. It is called Art Nouveau in France, Jungenstill in Germany, Liberty in Italy. In Catalonia, it is called Modernism and finds its leading figure in the person of the architect Antonio Gaudí. But Casa Batlló cannot be reduced to a legacy, so much so that its lively, organic aspect strikes at first sight.

Its mystery is precisely hidden behind this obviousness. Why is Casa Batlló, a true summary of all of Gaudí's work, so natural? What is the deep connection between Gaudí and nature?

To question this mystery is to initiate a quest within the Casa Batlló organization itself, an exploration of an unknown territory, with its tracks, its clues and its hidden areas.



1/Gaudi in context - Terrace and upper part : a mediterranean work

Wave-shaped terraces, wooden railings undulating like the ropes of a boat, deep blue ceramics, sunlight difracted by thick distorting glass: the entire upper part of Casa Batlló is strewn with references that powerfully invoke the marine world, and in particular the Mediterranean.

Gaudí, obsessed with the idea of returning to the origins, created here a building that recalls his own origins. For this Mediterranean cradle is his very first influence. The one that imprinted the body and the senses of a child who was thought to be destined to an early death. A Mediterranean that would never leave Gaudí and which he had a deep love for that is reflected in his writings.

He found it in Barcelona when he arrived there to study architecture. He discovered a city that was a real «gateway» to the Mediterranean, because Barcelona was a port before it was a city.

The newly rich industrialists drew part of their fortune from the city thanks to its strategic location, linked to Europe and the world, allowing the transport of goods created by the industries, or imports from the last colonies that were claiming their independence.

It was an economic gateway, but above all a cultural one, at the heart of the thousand-year-old Mediterranean influences. In particular the ancient ones and especially the Greek ones. The thought and especially the architecture of which strongly impressed the young student Gaudí, who saw in it a pure Mediterranean art, which would not have been polluted by thousands of years of decadent architectures.

But with Casa Batlló, the impression of returning to the origin is pushed to its paroxysm. The volumes of the upper part of the building are more reminiscent of a luminous underwater cave than of a house. We are transported to a time before architecture, before the presence of man, in direct contact with the primordial element: **water**.

Many of his student projects, which were never carried out, were based on this aquatic element. But also many of his very first works, such as the fountain in the Parc de la Cuitadella, destined for the World's Fair and thanks to which he passed smoothly into the professional world, while the director of the Barcelona Higher School of Architecture declared: «I don't know if we are granting this diploma to a genius or to a madman, only the future will tell.»



Behind the «G» door: exploring new worlds

Like on the deck of a ship, each floor has doors topped with a letter. **On the third floor, one door in particular attracts our attention, on which the letter G is inscribed in gold. G?** Is this the artist's signature as at the bottom of a painting? Is it the swirling symbol of the cosmos in which nature is inscribed?

To pass through this door is to discover behind it a world that goes far beyond the Mediterranean. As if aboard an underwater vessel, the world that is offered evokes an aquatic world of great depths.

Gaudí happened to live in an era during which natural worlds were being rediscovered thanks to the advances in science and the dissemination of knowledge, which in turn influenced artists.

In the library of the Barcelona Higher School of Architecture, he was able to read Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas, which Jules Verne had just published, or the naturalist drawings of Ernst Haeckel, who was upsetting his contemporaries with his meticulous representations of organisms. It is disturbing to note how much some of the fossilized forms in the walls of Casa Batlló resemble the marine animals listed on these drawings. Equally disturbing is the feeling that here we find ourselves physically projected into the imagination of Jules Verne, who had pushed the fantasy of the marine world to a level of poetry and mystery never before achieved. As Laura Bossi, neurologist and art historian, particularly interested

in the relationship between man and nature in the nineteenth century, summarizes: «It is hard to imagine to what extent the discovery of these worlds was imbued with the idea of beauty, we can even speak of beauty as a new understanding of the world. All nature, including the simplest beings, is perceived as endowed with an impulse towards beauty which leads it to create an astonishing variety of forms, even geometries. Artists value and sublimate the idea of beauty in Nature.»

While Europe was losing its colonies one by one, and thus its physical territories, it compensated by putting in the spotlight idealized exotic territories, a return to an original nature so dear to Gaudí. In the World's Fairs in particular, the theme of exoticism was reasserted everywhere, creating a new European imaginary which Gaudí then imbibed.

On the other hand, science, through the technological advances of the telescope and especially the microscope, destabilized the role of humans. The new territory of the infinitely small revealed an unexplored territory, which confronted man with the fascinating hidden geometry of nature. A veil was lifted on what was until now invisible, and man accessed another scale than his own.



2/ Gaudi: the uniqueness of a creator

Labyrinth of organic corridors: A natural Architecture in its principles

Gaudí did not limit himself to the external form of the natural repertoire, he tried to **assimilate the logic of nature itself.** Not one of his corridors is straight. Not an angle, not a stop, only curves, which sometimes end up in a spiral movement, as if the whole house was subjected to an immense marine current, which drew us by its whirlpool towards the depths.

While his whole life was marked by the **omnipresence of physical death**, in particular that of his brother and then his mother, all his work tends towards a knowledge, a reproduction and an enhancement of the living world, of which he reproduced the organic patterns of setting in motion.

In this great body of Casa Batlló, each organ has its function. If the attic serves as a breathing system and the hearth as a heart that warms the whole, the corridors are the circulatory system that connects the whole. A capillary labyrinth that seems to be subjected to a permanent liquid influx.

Cones, sinusoids, spirals, Gaudí used a whole repertoire of forms and volumes that brings back to a geometric vision of nature.

The most fascinating thing is that this natural world in which he immerses us here, is a world created from an ordinary apartment building. What is considered one of Gaudí's greatest «creations» is the remodeling of a pre-existing building, so transformed that he received complaints of destruction.

Throughout his career, Gaudí developed and perfected an astonishing ability to «make do». On the one hand, he adapted with great flexibility to the terrain, on the other, he constantly readapted his buildings along the way.

Joan Olona, an architect who is a great connoisseur of Gaudí, having led the restoration of the Casa Batlló, explains: «Sometimes it seems that Gaudí's works «grow». In fact, the tree model is a key to understanding Gaudí, because the tree is one of the natural structures that he most observed, commented on and reproduced, and the Church of Colònia Güell is a perfect example of this with its imposing pillars: all unique and never completely straight, like the trees. More profoundly, I would say that Gaudí's works reproduce in architecture a natural process of adaptation. **They don't destroy to build, they absorb what exists.**»

Roof/Dragon's Back: resurrecting the bestiary of the catalan land

Gaudí is not only the creator of a whole flora whose variety he inscribed in the marble, wood and stone of his monuments. He is also the father of a whole mythological bestiary, whose most famous incarnation covers **the roof of the Casa Batlló: the dragon.**

Its reptilian «back» reminds the city that it owes its protection to the knight who defeated the monster by sticking his sword between its scales. Gaudí thus updated the story of San Jordi, patron of Barcelona, and embodied his bestiary, which drew on **regional medieval references**.

With this act, he inscribed his work in the great movement of the Catalan Renaissance, which sought to culturally revive his native region, a land from which he never strayed far and to which his principal patrons were intimately linked. Whether their name was Vicens, for the Casa Vicens, Batlló for Casa Batlló or Güell for the Palau Güell, Gaudí's wealthy patrons all

had in common the desire to highlight this Catalan land, each in their own way.

By using animals as **allegories of regional values**, Gaudí not only paid tribute to natural fauna, but also to figures already reinterpreted by man. If on the one hand he wanted to return to an original nature, on the other hand he told in stone and ceramics, **the story of the founding myths**, and inscribed the history of men in both modernity and the city.

The backyard: bringing nature into the city

With his flora, minerals and real or mythological fauna, Gaudí thus inscribed nature in the city. He went even further, since with Casa Batlló Gaudí literally brought the sea, with its waves and mollusks, to the most famous avenue in Barcelona, located in the heart of a city that draws its strength from the sea. The backyard is at this level essential, as a zone of dialogue between the inside and the outside, where the outside invites itself into the interior of the house.

As Juan José Lahuerta, an art historian who has dedicated his career to the Catalan genius, develops: «At the same time as Casa Batlló, Gaudí was progressing on another project of unprecedented scope on which he would work for fifteen years: Parc Güell. Although with Casa Batlló, Gaudi symbolically inscribed nature in the city, with Parc Güell he proposed another powerful act: to extract the habitat from the city center and bring nature to the gates of the city. In both cases, it is a matter of offering the individual a haven of peace.»

Because in this city/nature fusion, we must not forget that individual comfort is essential.

Central light shaft: the reign of functionality

Casa Batlló is the result of a reflection on the place of the individual in the new large industrial city which, while exploiting the resources of nature, seemed to turn its back on it.

Gaudí fought this new «dead and mechanized world». But he did so without opposing it, by questioning one of the preoccupying themes of the time: **the polluted air.** In an era that began to identify viruses, and in a city that suffered from the blanket of smoke that covered it, **Gaudí became obsessed with healthy ventilation.**

He used the central light shaft as a ventilation column and created gill-like louvers so that each floor could choose how much air it wanted to have. The airflow management in Casa



Batlló was particularly innovative. But if the air can rise through the central column, the light can also descend, diffused to the depths.

In this way, he contrasted a Barcelona marked by promiscuity and dark narrow streets with a «healthy» building that took advantage of techniques never before seen.

Céramics from the depths of the lower part: the diverted power of the industry

At the turn of the century, industry was accused of impoverishing creativity by proposing standardized products. Gaudí turned this constraint into an asset, as with the lower part of Casa Batlló, which is entirely covered with ceramics.

To him, any monument must be in accordance with the means of production of its time.

He therefore used the new ability to produce the same ceramic tile by the hundreds, to create absolutely unique shapes once the tiles were laid side by side.

This is the case for the depths of the light shaft. It's all about illusion and the proper use of shapes and colors.

As the plastic artist, painter and sculptor Miquel Barcelo explains: «Gaudí has this ability to

use raw or common materials, to give them the appearance of luxury or splendor. He manages to create complex color compositions, reproducing the moving impression of the sea floor, from very simple basic elements, such as ceramic tiles of three different colors.»

Gaudí created the extra-ordinary with the ordinary to give the families who lived there a unique experience. Immersed in an autonomous organism that protects them from the clatter of the world, the inhabitants live in an environment that is as healthy as it is unique.



The noble floor: the triumph of competition

A unique owner needs a unique house and therefore a unique architecture. With Casa Batlló, Gaudí had to live up to Señor Batlló's high self-esteem. At a time when the new industrial bourgeoisie sought to distinguish themselves on the fashionable Passeig de Gràcia avenue, which had become their showcase, **the house became the embodiment in stone of the originality and power of the person who lived there.**

Here Gaudí played with the idea of the showcase: he built a living room that reproduces the structure of the aquariums that were all the rage at the time during the great world exhibitions. **Who is looking at whom?** The bourgeois overlooking the people strolling below, or the passer-by who, thanks to the unprecedented overhang of the living room balcony that

literally eats up the street, can observe, as in a theater, the life of these astonishing new rich people that Gaudí has staged to perfection? Even to the point of drawing the smallest chair on which they sit or the mirror in which they can contemplate the face of their success....

It was through a real showcase, created to display the gloves of the Comella brand, that Gaudí met Eusebi Güell who became his main patron, friend and supporter. For him Gaudí would go so far as to build the Palau Güell.

Whether on a European scale, during the World's Fairs, or on a Barcelona scale, we were entering a new era of competition, particularly visible on the Passeig de Gràcia, where everyone exhibited their magnifiscence.



From the moment it was built, Casa Batlló became the flagship monument of the so-called «Mansana de la Discòrdia», the Block of Discord: the height of competition between wealthy industrialists that became competition between architects. This mythical competition between four adjoining buildings, four architects, four unique styles, initiates our contemporary era: that of the artist architect, the architect with a NAME, as famous as the industrialist he worked for.

This is certainly why the multicolored façade, sometimes compared to Monet's Water Lilies, is so essential. It is the one we see first, juxtaposed with the other façades of the buildings that we will have to choose by a price, as we award a painting during the painting shows.

In fact, he created it like a painting. From the top of a scaffolding built on the opposite sidewalk, Gaudí indicated to the workers where to place each piece of colored faience. **Thus, he «painted» the façade directly, in order to adapt to the reality of the material and the color subjected to natural light, like an impressionist.**

But if he built homes for illustrious families, he did not build his own house, nor his own home. The love of his life, Pepeta Moreu, whom he courted for four years, a free woman, divorced, who dared to swim without a cap, enventually rejected him and married another man. This is the great humiliation, the great disappointment of Gaudí's life. Never again would he attempt the adventure of love with a woman. This rejection was an explosion for him and **he devoted himself exclusively to his work and to God.**



3/ The big change

Skeleton balconies & Bone pillars: Facing the heat of citicism

Thus exposed, overexposed, Gaudi's work became the target of extremely virulent criticism. The natural aspect of Casa Batlló was mocked, as well as that of the Casa Milà located up the avenue. They are criticized for being soft, melted, asymmetrical. They are caricatured as a rat's nest, a cod's guts stall, a bone graveyard or a runny cake.

Gaudí shocked deeply. He displayed for all to see, a world that we refuse to see. Too organic, too wild, too unexpected, this show also fascinated, until several decades after its creation. Picasso hated it and yet some of his erotic drawings, published at the time of the completion of Casa Batlló, reproduce the exact copy of the skeleton pillars of the façade.

The Gaudí shockwave continued long after the turn of the century. When he died, many wanted to wipe him off the map. Some because he represented bad Baroque taste, others because he was associated with the modernist movement, which was already out of fashion. But much more important is the effort of Francoism to bury the immense fame of a man who, although Catholic like Francoism, was a fervent Catalan, symbol of a rebellious regionalism.

Dali, while calling Gaudí's art «tapas art», was one of the first to rehabilitate it, going so far as to declare Gaudí the father of surrealism. The nature of the criticism, as well as the equally strong praise, proves one major thing: **Gaudí proposed a world open to all interpretations, where everyone projected their nightmares and dreams.**



Hearth: the embers of social anger

If Gaudi's work is aquatic, it is therefore equally incandescent. Although Gaudi sought to protect the individual from the aggressive aspect of the city, to refocus them on their home, of which the central point is the warm hearth, hidden in the center of the house like a little secret, this great conflicting city kept knocking on the door.

Like that Tuesday in July 1909 when Gaudí discovered his city burning. Following an explosion of violence, tinged with anti-clericalism, the fires turned dozens of churches into ash: it was smoke from the flames of anger that covered the city. The spark that ignited the revolt of

this Tragic Week was the sending of reservists, mainly from the working classes, to fight and be killed in Morocco, while Spain was trying to conquer new territories following the humiliation of its lost colonies.

To the warm, controlled fire of the central chimney thought of as a protected zone, was opposed a wild fire that undermined traditional values.

Paradoxically, these destructions exerted a fascination. Even the «bourgeois», like the Batlló family, exchanged postcards representing these places of worship destroyed by fire.

When his niece, for whom he was responsible, died, followed by his great friend and patron Eusebi Güell, Gaudí definitively detached himself from the world of men. As he said: «My good friends are dead; I have no family and no clients, no fortune nor anything. Now I can dedicate myself entirely to the Church.»

Vertebral stairs: is creating a natural world perjury?

Casa Batlló, like every building, park, house, cathedral, palace, crypt, created by Gaudí, can be seen as **a monumental tribute to Nature**. Every detail, every curve breathes the admiration of the man in front of it.



The vertebral column that seems to support the skeleton of the house from within pushes to the extreme the play of scale by which Gaudí brings man back to his status as a guest in this world of which he is one of the components, **like a cell in a body.**

As the priest and architect Gabriel Cordoba, a great admirer and specialist of Gaudí, says: «Gaudí manages to eliminate the distinction between the building of men and nature. Looking at his works, one would almost forget that a man was behind them. Gaudí has gradually faded from the world of men to get closer to the natural and divine world.»

With the Sagrada Família, he would extend this idea of a world that no longer needs men, that would continue to grow on its own, even though its architect would no longer be in the world of the living.

Without friends or any other project than honoring God, Gaudí dedicated himself entirely to this monumental religious work, **becoming himself a sacrificial figure of humility**. Some say that the Sagrada Família is faith rising from the ashes after the trauma. Others wonder about the shape of the towers of this basilica, **which borrows from the aesthetics of the ruin, the burnt stone, and why not the column of smoke.**

Yet is it possible to create with such a devouring passion while being humble? Because the one who breathed life into Casa Batlló, the one who modeled the very material, even leaving the mark of his fingers on the door handles, the one who chose to imprint the shape of the bodies eternally molded on the chairs as if in clay, the one who shaped its walls, who made water and air flow through it, was indeed Gaudí.

Is this presence that we feel there that of Nature, honored by Gaudí, or is it that of Gaudí himself? By recreating a perfect natural world through his works, did Gaudí defy God? In the end, by abolishing the frontier between the creator and the creation, is it not that which shocked so much and which continues to question?

His death itself would reflect this ambivalence between humility and pride.

He died on the way to his «holy place», the Sagrada Família, after being hit by a streetcar. Although no one helped him, mistaking him for a beggar, he had the funeral of a celebrity. Even before his death he was seen as a kind of saint, whose last years of life were marked by a slow ascent to the Divine.



Conclusion/ Aerial chimneys: desincarnation of Gaudí

The chimneys of Casa Batlló, which propel themselves towards Heaven, dialogue with it through water that has become steam and fire that has become smoke. The materiality of the world is condemned to disintegrate, like Gaudi's body, which gradually became dust in the crypt of the Sagrada Família that he himself helped to build. **Physically, he has returned** to nature which in turn digests him, for everything is destined to die, or rather everything is destined to live differently, for nothing is lost in nature.

And one might ask how afraid Gaudí was of the death that awaited him? To what extent is the very act of building, which has animated men since they knew how to stack two stones on top of each other, not a challenge to the smallness of their physical and temporal scale?

If with the Sagrada Família, Gaudí rose with our gaze to Heaven, with Casa Batlló he literally dissolved, returning to the element before birth, before humanity, becoming water again himself. This is why it is so difficult to confine Gaudí to a single mold, because his work is as **fluid as the ocean**: we can analyze this ocean with a microscope, classify its species, theorize about the flow of water or the taste of its salt. But all these analyses can never replace the feeling, untranslatable by words, of our body in direct contact with water. For the work of Gaudí is a work that is lived, physically, as we cross a natural landscape.



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