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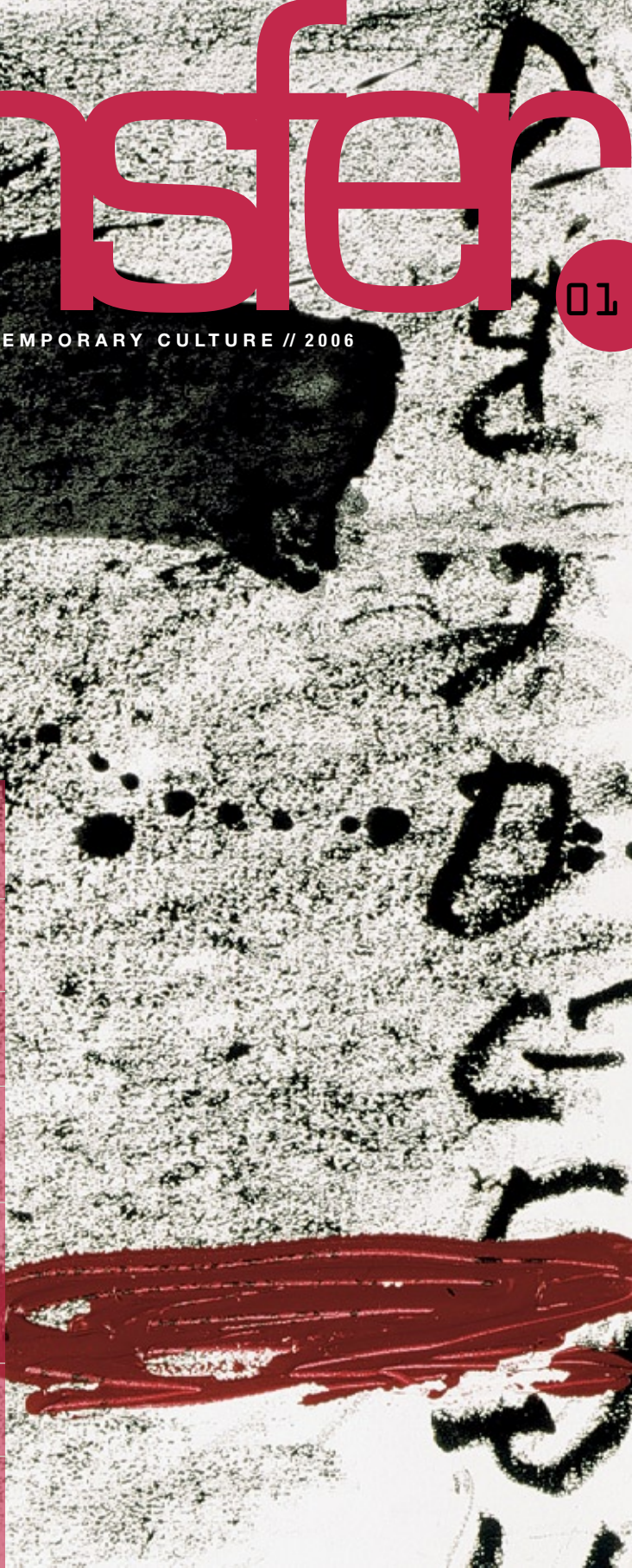
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Carles Torner

# Culture in Catalan: from Ramon Llull to the present

“...[B]ut there are several different Catalonias: Ramon Llull’s Majorca, Ausiàs March’s Valencia, Salvador Espriu’s Barcelona, and places I regret I will never be, now that I am old, including Alacant and Andorra.”

With these words, the critic Harold Bloom concluded a lecture he gave on 11 February 2006 at Poets House, New York, adding,

“Few peoples are as devoted to the best of their imaginative literature as are the Catalans. Barcelona is a city-of-cities, like New York, Rome, and Paris, and resembles them most in being a city of imagination. Again, I regret that probably I never will have the energy to voyage for a final visit. Instead, I will try to immerse myself more deeply in the study of Catalan and of its literature.”

In his New York lecture, the author of *The Western Canon* linked Llull with Cervantes, Goethe, Dante and Chaucer because all of them were initiators of a literary language and founders of a tradition. Llull founded a diverse language that was adaptable to all registers because he alternated poetry, narrative, philosophical reflection and theological essay, thereby ushering in a literature that would unfold in all the facets of poetry, narrative writing, drama and thought. Eight hundred years later, at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and after its tragic struggle for survival during the Franco dictatorship, Catalan literature is flourishing, with renewed vitality in all genres and registers of the language. The essay, works of thinkers, and academic research in Catalan constitute a vehicle for engaging with writers from everywhere in Europe and all around the world, and this dialogue has found an ideal space of expression in a multiplicity of journals of culture and contemporary thought, which, from Valencia to Barcelona, and from Lleida to Palma de Mallorca, engage in the debates of contemporary thinkers.

However, this dialogue with writers in other countries is unidirectional. Translations are produced, debates are carried out with thinkers from everywhere but the voices of Catalan thinkers and essayists rarely manage to cross the linguistic borders so that they can be heard and be part of the discussion with their colleagues elsewhere. The journal **Transfer**, with this, its first issue, aims from the outset to be a vehicle for communication. In each issue we shall offer, translated into English, recent articles written in Catalan by our thinkers or published in our cultural journals. An editorial board, autonomous in its decision-making powers but in close collaboration with the network of cultural publications, will make a selection of articles, offering variety and substance. **Transfer** will consist of four sections: Essays (on a range

## *editorial address* **transfer** // SPRING 2006

of contemporary matters), Focus (a monographic section bringing together articles that have been published in different journals on a particular challenge we face today), Notes & Comments (briefer articles on different aspects of Catalan culture) and Reviews (a selection of reviews of recently published books of essays and contemporary thought or literature that have been written in Catalan). This collection of articles will be addressed to essayists, thinkers and readers around the world who are interested in the topics **Transfer** deals with but, in particular, it is hoped they will attract the attention of other journals of culture and contemporary thought in all languages that might be interested in translating the writers and articles that appear in **Transfer**, not to mention publishers, literary agents and translators who specialise in the domains of research and contemporary thought.

Our translating these works into English is partly due to the fact that there is a renewed interest in Catalan literature and thought in the Anglo-Saxon world. The first four months of 2006 have seen a symposium on Catalonia and European national identities in the Remarque Institute of New York University; a conference on the linguistic policies of Catalonia and the universality of linguistic rights at Georgetown University; the creation of a new Joan Coromines Chair at the University of Chicago, and another Chair at the Research Centre for Catalan Studies at the Queen Mary University of London. This wide-ranging interest fits very well with the promotion of contemporary Catalan thought now being carried out by the Humanities and Science Department at the Ramon Llull Institute.

**Transfer** will not be a publication that is concerned with Catalan nationalist issues but rather will publish articles pertaining to international debates in the fields of contemporary thought and culture, as may be seen in this first issue.

However, the choice of English as **Transfer**'s language of expression also responds to the cry of warning, "Mind the gap!" Be careful with the increasing distance being created by a form of globalisation that is conveyed by the English language, which perceives itself as global but is, in fact, one of the languages that is least concerned with translation of other languages. **Transfer** aims to steer clear of this "covering-law universalism" (to use Michael Walzer's expression), which is being imposed everywhere along with its demand that the richness of thought expressed in its own language should be renounced. **Transfer** opts instead for the "universalism of translation", to use Enric Sòria's words in a book that is reviewed in these pages. From a literary tradition of eight hundred years that is full of life today in all its genres, from the wish to foster exchanges between essayists and researchers who write in Catalan and their colleagues around the world, and from the standpoint of a radical political option in favour of the universalism of translation, the Ramon Llull Institute has decided to publish **Transfer**.

Finally, the Ramon Llull Institute wishes to express its gratitude to Publicacions de la Universitat de València (University of València Press) for its valuable assistance, to the leading Catalan-language journals of culture and contemporary thought, and to Antoni Tàpies for being the first Catalan artist to offer us recent original work to accompany the articles that appear in this issue of **Transfer** II

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**The Ramon Llull Institute** is a consortium formed by the Government of Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya) and the Institute of Catalan Studies which aims to promote Catalan language and culture abroad. The Institute's programmes are carried out by three departments: Language; Creative Arts; and Humanities and Science.

### Language

The Language Department promotes the use and study of the Catalan language in universities and other educational institutions around the world, providing the linguistic and teaching resources that are necessary for the study of the language, promoting the training of teachers of Catalan as a Second Language, and organising and administering examinations outside the Catalan-language territories.

### Creative Arts

The Creative Arts Department promotes Catalan artistic and creative work by encouraging its inclusion in international programmes, providing facilities for the circulation of both works of art and artists, and raising awareness of contemporary Catalan artistic creation and the Catalan cultural heritage. It works in the fields of music, performing arts, visual arts, cinema, architecture and design. The Creative Arts Department organises cultural exhibitions abroad, fosters strategic actions for the dissemination of the arts and provides financial assistance for a range of cultural agents whose work advances the internationalisation of Catalan artistic creation.

### Humanities and Science

The Humanities and Science Department is responsible for the international promotion of Catalan literature and thought through the following programmes:

#### **Translation of works of literature and contemporary thought**

With a view to encouraging the publication in other languages of works of literature, essays and scientific research originally written in Catalan, there is a fund available for publishers in other countries who wish to publish translations of books and articles from the Catalan. In order to promote wider circulation and awareness of Catalan authors and works of literature or contemporary thought, grants are also given for publishing authors and their works as well as for travelling expenses.

#### **Literary and academic programmes**

Continuous contact is maintained with writers and university researchers working in the Catalan linguistic field to enable them to participate in the department's activities, mainly through literary and academic programmes that are organised each year in different parts of the world (under the auspices of Catalan Culture weeks, book fairs and other cultural events).

#### **Journals of Catalan thought and culture**

Support is also given for increasing the international presence of Catalan-language journals concerned with contemporary thought in the spheres of the humanities and science, thereby contributing towards the consolidation of these publications. The department fosters bilateral relations between Catalan and foreign journals while also organising meetings of specialists in specific areas so as to further the circulation of ideas, authors and Catalan-language works in general.

#### **Cultural and linguistic diversity**

In a number of countries around the world interest has been expressed in the knowledge that has been gained by Catalan linguists, jurists and researchers from the political and social sciences who work, inter alia, in the field of linguistic and cultural rights, in legislation designed to protect and consolidate that is appropriate for protecting and consolidating minority languages, and in their experience of different ways of working to achieve political autonomy and self-government. The aim of the department is to present this accumulated knowledge at international events in which Catalan culture is represented, and to favour exchanges of information about the Catalan situation and comparable situations of other countries.

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# essays

transfer

JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURE // 2006

01

**Joan F. Mira**

# A history of Europe

## *Cultures, languages, nations*

**The history of Europe can, like that of anywhere else, be examined from all the angles that the professionals in the field have considered relevant: kings and wars, treaties and frontiers, society and economy, people's lives and culture or so many other approaches that are equally fruitful and illustrative, either alone or in combination.**

And if, as in the present case, we are talking about identities and memory, of past constructions and possible present processes, the subject of language may prove as relevant and significant as the others. In any event, the past is an unavoidable reference because hardly anything of what is happening now, and of the things that might happen, in this subject of languages as in so many others, can be understood if we do not at least grasp the contemporary evolution of ideas and facts. For example, if we do not understand that a hundred or a hundred and fifty years ago Catalan was one of the many more or less important languages in Europe that seemed on one hand sentenced to final extinction and on the other was already being vindicated as the language of a nation aspiring to some effective form of political existence. If historical comparison is as significant as it is detestable, this is because right now, at the start of this twenty-first century, most of those tongues (many of them with less demography and "less history" than Catalan) are now effectively national and state languages, with nobody arguing over their category and official status in this commercial and ritual invention known as the European Union, while Catalan is still denied the basic necessities and rights in this field and certain others. It would not matter perhaps, if it were all a matter of trade and rituals and treaties, but it could matter a lot because languages in Europe have never been dissociable from peoples or nations, and nations and peoples have never easily been dissociable from languages, either two hundred or one hundred years ago, or now even. This is the deeper substance of the matter, which is a subject that I already tried to explain or clear up many years ago, and which I will now put forward with ideas that I



think still retain the same value as when I developed them for the first time. In order to go straight into the matter with no further introductions, I will resort to an emblematic quote like the following to present the terms of the question: “A people without its own language is only half a nation. A nation should hang on to its language more than to its territory: it is a safer barrier, a more important frontier than a mountain or a river”. These are the words of an Irish patriot, quoted by Carl D. Buck in a classic article on language and sentiment of nationality, published in 1916 in the *American Political Science Review*. Observe the date and the place: 1916, Ireland, a country where a genuine war of independence could not bring a language already almost extinguished back to life. Later in the same article Buck also quotes a professor Mahaffy, not a great sympathiser of the cause, who states: “It seems a great mistake that differentiated nationality can only be sustained by differentiated language”. Curiously, a few years later, the first president of the republic of Ireland, Eamon de Valera, assured that if they had given him the choice between language and independence, he would have preferred language: it is not hard to guess why. In any case, the affirmations of the patriot and the professor could express, with no further qualifications, the terms of a long-standing debate. If weightier authorities need to be quoted, and from distant times, I cannot help remembering on one hand the allegation of the English prelates at the Council of Constance, in 1414, at times of schism, of confusion and pre-national affirmations, when they demanded their own separate representation, invoking the “*diversitatem linguarum, quae maximam et uerissimam probant nationem et ipsius essentiam, iure diuino pariter et humano*”. And at the other end of the scale, the affirmation of Antoine Meillet, one of the fathers of social linguistics:



**Ocell i cama (Bird and Leg)**  
Antoni Tàpies (2005)  
paint on paper  
50 x 64 cm

“Une nation n’est pas liée à tel ou tel soutien matériel, et pas même à la langue. Appartenir à une nation est affaire de sentiment et de volonté”. Meillet, as a linguist, was a disciple of Saussure, but in these statements one can see a much greater influence of Ernest Renan’s teaching, and the faithful following of French national ideology, which at that time —these are words published in 1918— was being applied to proving that Alsace and Lorraine were France, precisely without seeing any obstacle in the past or present *diuersitas linguarum*.

To help clear up the terms and concepts used in these texts, we should remember that we do not need to have any faith in the immutable essence of nations, nor that any such essence has any *iure diuino* or even any *human* foundation. But neither is it a matter of faith that the nation should be a question only of sentiment and will —that is, of psychology— without any material basis in political history, in culture and in language. The issue now is not one of looking into the real foundation of the concepts and thus involving knowing if the 15<sup>th</sup> century bishops, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century linguists or the Irish patriots were actually *right*. Amongst other reasons because, at least in modern and contemporary European history, which is what is now in question, everyone has acted as a persuaded patriot in this subject of language and national identity. When I say “everyone”, I mean politicians and governors, practical or theoretical nationalists, soldiers, teachers and university professors, journalists and the general public. This means that it is not actually a matter of knowing whether the language *is or is not*, in itself a defining trait of national identity, of knowing whether there is any *essential* correspondence between this criterion and others when delimiting the space of the nation. What can be done is to observe whether, and in what sense, language has functioned and functions in this way: to thus examine the workings of “the intimate relationship between language and nationality, which indeed in Europe prevails in both the naive approach of the common man and the thought-out projects of politicians”, as Carl Buck wrote ninety years ago now. That is the question, and it is one whose contents and effects evidently affect us right now.

**I shall not be revealing any great secret** if I say that the debate that has been occupying the press, civic bodies and the government and opposition parties over the last few months (the debate on the official nature of Catalan in the European Union Institutions, and on the old “dispute” about Valencian-Catalan) is not only a debate on language but about something more than that: everyone believes, whether they say so or not, that “recognising” this language also means recognising that there is a people, country or nation, or set of countries, which have this language as their own national tongue. This is a relationship believed in similarly by statesmen and common people, *ingénues* or ideologists: they believe it because, either openly or not, they think that *speaking is being*. They might think so in a tolerant and polite way, or as forthrightly as that slogan or exhortation that used to be found around here not so long ago, and which depending on how, often seems to still circulate: “If you’re Spanish, speak Spanish!”. This slogan implies that someone who *is* has to *speak*, and that someone who does not speak is not; or at least “is” not in such a genuine and full way as those who “speak”. Just the same today as always, when it comes down to the truths of the heart —which has its own reasons— Castilian-speaking Spaniards do not believe that the Catalans, who do not speak like the rest, are Spanish *like the rest*. Alfred de Musset, a romantic poet, put this categorically

and perfectly: “Only someone who knows, speaks and reads the French language is really French”. The terrible question is, if they did not know nor speak nor read the Spanish language, would Catalans be considered Spanish in body and soul, from head to foot? And Alsatians, in an equivalent situation?

**This is not only a question of poets:** soon after Alsace had been annexed to the dominions of Louis XIV, Colbert was already sending letters with instructions to teach French to everyone, above all in the schools, “so that they forget German” and become proper Frenchmen. It makes no difference whether these are subjects of the monarchy or citizens of the republic: just over a century after Colbert, the Revolution would justify *linguistic terror* (real terror, with prison sentences, destitutions from posts and deportations) for the sake of efficiency, democracy and people’s participation. The problem of understanding the laws and decrees of Paris —for almost half the population of France who did not speak French— could be solved in a very simple way: by translating. An elementary solution, which was however violently rejected. Why? Because it was not a matter of making citizens, but of making *French* citizens. When Barère affirmed in 1794, at the Public Health Committee: “Chez un peuple libre, la langue doit être une et la même pour tous”, it means that he did not think for a moment that there could be more than one *people* within the Republic, because it is totally evident that in France there could only be Frenchmen. And recognising that peoples who do not speak French have the right to speak something else would be tantamount to admitting that they were entitled to *be* something else. “Il est certain que c’est la langue qui fait la patrie”, in the words of a M. Vaublanc, Moselle prefect at the time. And hence there could not be *diverse* languages in *one* country. *Liberty* obviously had nothing to do with it, and for the following two centuries, the dogma of the Trinity, “France, the French people, French”, three concepts and a single substance, would be an immutable doctrine of faith... although faith continued to be laic. In 1925, the minister of education, Anatole de Monzie, penned this precious idea in a circular in which he banned the teaching of any *regional language*: “The lay ideal... would not be capable of harmonising rival tongues with the French language, the jealous cult for which will never have enough altars”. A *lay* ideal, with all its cults and altars to an implacable jealous divinity not tolerating any rivals! And so things go on eighty years later in our lovely France, fatherland of human rights and liberties. It is therefore not in the least surprising that any French government should look with little sympathy on the formal presence of Catalan, not only in its own territory, but in the European Union institutions: who knows if the example of an official language without a state (and according to them, also without a nation) might arouse intolerable comparisons among the Britons or the Alsatians, for example? It was indeed that same ministerial circular which quotes as supreme argument Musset’s words according to which the language and essence of the French are one and the same thing: a metaphysical and poetical idea which —if expressed by a French (or Spanish, or Italian, Hungarian, Swedish or Portuguese) poet or minister— proves unquestionable and beautiful, but if expressed by a Catalan intellectual or politician will mean they are immediately accused of displaying essentialist nationalism, or something worse.

Concepts and metaphors like this are not just the product of the most extreme political or romantic nationalism, far from it. They already circulated among the enlightened, and are a very old and well-accredited resource: “With language the heart of a people

has been created”, said Herder. And it is very well known that a people has a normally exclusive, more or less pure and powerful, more or less great or indestructible *spirit*; a fact or phenomenon not subject to empirical verification, but not detracting from any of its weight or effectiveness for that reason: a good deal of European —and not just European— national and nationalist ideologies, of the last century and a half have been founded on faith in the existence of a certain spirit (with that very successful word *Volksggeist*, as it used to be called by the German enlightened and romantics). There is only a very short distance to go from this to thinking that for each people “its language is its spirit and its spirit is its language”, as Humboldt wrote. All in all, the belief expressed by Humboldt does not have any more empirical basis than the very existence of spirits, but this does not matter: the important thing is that ideologists, politicians, writers, professors and educated people in general firmly believe in national spirits (when they deny this faith, they merely believe it under another denomination) and in their association with respective languages. This is heightened if such a belief does not come forward as stemming from metaphysics, but supposedly as something observable. This is part of general culture and in very serious books things like this can be read: “the soul and qualities of a people react on the language which is its organ and that this adapts to its own image: flexible and orientated towards analysis such as Greek, synthetic and strictly ordered such as Latin, impressive and rough like German, precise and logical like French, energetic and concentrated like Spanish, musical and clear like Italian, brief like English...” (Albert Dauzat, *L'Europe linguistique*). Let us forget the usual clichés, which were bound to include the elegant precision of French, the musicality of Italian or the forcefulness of Spanish. Let us also ignore that idea that different languages could be more or less appropriate for certain intellectual or aesthetic operations. There is a central idea, that peoples have a spirit, and that language is the organ that displays and expresses this. When you stop to consider it, the things that we manage to believe prove really surprising. But it is this faith which to a large extent leads to the conviction, power and emotion with which large or small states manage to demand (and even consider natural, and thus unrelinquishable) the formal presence of their language in international bodies such as those of the European Union today; if Slovakian or Lithuanian were not *recognised* there, this would mean that Slovakia or Lithuania would not get any recognition for all that is most intimate and consubstantial for them.



**The truth is that those supposed virtues of language** as a manifestation of the collective spirit are precisely the ones that can be used to *oppose* —that is, distinguish— one “spirit” from another one, one people from another people: who does not know that the French spirit is logical and precise, and that the French *therefore* speak with logical and precise language? And who could be unaware that the Catalans are straightforward people, that go in for hard work, and their language is thus efficient with short words, saying things with a much lower consumption of syllables than Castilian Spanish? This was explained as long ago as by Saint Vicent Ferrer: “The Castilians are very talkative: Ferran Ferrandec of the Arcos de los Mayores...”. Our apologists of language in the 18<sup>th</sup> century already set to work making statements of this kind.

What matters above all is that the belief in these correlations between language and the hypothetical spirit, whatever their aim or reality may be, has a very effective function as regards the group consciousness: the function of contrast, opposition: we speak this way *because* we are that and the others speak differently *because* they are different, something else. Without this identity or identifying vision, it would be hard

to understand the insistence of European states (the large ones, but also and above all the small ones) on having their own national language accepted as international, or the reticence or resistance of the same states when recognising an equivalent status for the languages of the “minorities” said or considered to be regional: in this field, as in certain others, politics stems from faith.

We ought to remember that *speaking is being* for this so commonly found faith, and we referred to French national ideology as a perfect expression of the deliberate imposition of this identity principle. This is however a principle that can be seen from a different perspective: that of the historical processes in which *speaking* has for a long time been the only or the main way to preserve *being*. I am referring, of course, to the societies which have set themselves up in modern times as political communities —national communities, and possibly states— above all from their survival as linguistic communities... and of the awareness of unity and distinction retrieved on the basis of that survival. We could mention cases such as those of Slovakia or Slovenia, Romania, Macedonia, Estonia or Latvia, of the peoples who have been said to be “peoples without history” (without any autonomous political history over recent centuries), but who were nevertheless peoples *with a language*. What about Lithuania, with a glorious historical and territorial history under this denomination, but where the historical name covered regions that are mostly Ukrainian or Byelorussian, and with Russian and Polish, successively, as educated and public language? In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, Lithuanian was only the language of the peasants in a few Baltic counties, but thanks to this language the Lithuanian nationality survived when these counties, in the Russians’ or Prussians’ power were the sole testimony of the former sway and ancient glory of the Lithuanians. In Estonia, not to leave the Baltic, the (scanty) urban population spoke German, Yiddish

“There is a central idea, that peoples have a spirit, and that language is the organ that displays and expresses this”

or Russian, and only started to think of itself as a possible nation when the “intellectuals” discovered that the strange tongue spoken by the peasants was a real language, a sister or cousin of Finnish. An observation of this aspect and dimension of the history of Europe leads to a coincidence almost without any exceptions: it is difficult for there to be a “national question” without there also being a “linguistic question”. And vice versa, seldom is there a conflict of languages which is not or does not become or express a conflict of a national nature: of societies in all cases wishing to assert themselves (often *against* another society) as culture communities: societies in most cases also wishing to assert themselves as political communities. In this field, languages are not “innocent” nor neutral. And governments’ decisions are even less neutral and innocent.

We should remember that national ideologies always look inwards, but they also look outwards, and include a universal perspective. If consistent they include the project of assuring a “place in the sun” for the people, guaranteeing them their right to take “a place amongst the peoples of the world”. It thus implies conceiving the world —humanity— as consisting of, and spread or spreadable among a number of societies, peoples, nations, of the same or equivalent status. And it thus presupposes the definition of the people or nation itself as an equal member, *de facto* or *de iure*, of this universal status. External acknowledgement of this existence, in theory political, has to go along, when this is the case, with recognition of the historical, ethno-cultural and if possible linguistic distinction; that is, of the projection of those traits which make the nation what it is and not something else, the traits that constitute its “distinction”. When the nation (generally meaning the state, but not always) cannot affirm its own distinction with its own distinctive language (because this is shared: Austrian German) they obviously do not insist on language as a factor of singularity. When they have more than one, and none is particular to them and exclusive, they will not insist on this either: in a case like that of Belgium, because it is not even certain if both linguistic communities form the same nation, either cultural or political: in the case of Switzerland, because the political nation (a very real cohesion) has not been formed on the cultural or linguistic basis, and because none of the languages was seen as *the* national language. But these are very exceptional cases. The “rule” is that all nationalisms (ideologies, social movements, projects or political actions from power or towards power ) have placed language in first and eminent place among the combination of particular and distinctive traits which need to be consolidated inwardly and ensured recognition outwardly.

Amongst other reasons, this has been done that way because there is no European national ideology able to conceive its own people as a recent creation, subjective and arbitrary, the mere effect of accidents of history. Outside Europe, where the states more or less self-defined as nations are often precisely the product of accidents of history, national ideologies make strange adaptations and connections to inquire into what way, and since when, for example, a Mexican or Paraguayan or Senegalese people has existed. But within Europe, and practically in all cases, national ideologies firmly maintain that the modern nation is the result and the continuation of the real existence of an ancient people (even in cases such as Belgium and Switzerland; were there not peoples known as the *Belgae* and the *Helvetii* in Julius Caesar’s time?). In that case there is no more effective and visible argument than language (obviously when this is one’s own and distinctive, that is, in almost all cases) to ground this continuing and ancient reality: if five or seven or ten

centuries ago, *there was already* a different language, this means that *there was already* a different people existing there. And if in this 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century the language *still* exists, this means that there is still a people: continuity has not dissolved, we are the same as we were; perhaps not identical to those before, but the same people. The moderate part of fantasy that this belief presupposes does not detract one whit from its effectiveness or mobilising power, quite the opposite. Neither does it detract any “moral” power from the argument that says: we exist and we have a language, we are a “country with a language”, and since we want to be known and recognised as a people or country, we also want our language to be known and recognised. Because if our language is not recognised, it means that we are not recognised as a country. Presenting oneself towards the outside *with* one’s own language (*idiom* in Greek means just that: ‘one’s own thing’) is the other side of the correlation between nation and language, because before or at the same time, one has to make oneself or remake oneself within and through language.

**It is precisely when the danger of a break** in continuity with the past, the danger of ceasing to be what one was or imagined one was, is perceived that nationalist groups, whether these are just starting to emerge or already developed, link the project of national preservation with a linguistic project. *Authenticity* and *unity*, aims of any nationalism, will also be the objectives of any programme which attempts to affirm, or recover, the status of *national* for its own language. In such a programme “national” means a relationship between language and society in which the latter considers and esteems the former as the only one effectively identified as its own. All the national societies of contemporary Europe—all the peoples-with-a-language—with a state or aspirations to some form of state, have had a “programme” of this sort, at least since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and even more so during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In its most elaborate form, the objectives are always the same: a *unified* language, more or less with the features that we would now call a basic common and accepted standard, against the dangers of disintegration; a language *purified* of everything that is not authentic, of foreign bodies, everything which is seen as contaminating, alien, adhered and so on; and an effectively *national and particular* language, which occupies or reoccupies all the spaces that the language not of one’s own, that of another nation, has succeeded in occupying. One should point out that as a general rule this project is not a “peaceful” project, meaning that it does not work without external or internal resistance. Resistance of the language that has to be displaced, resistance of German in Bohemia, failing and with complete final displacement; resistance of Spanish in the Catalan Countries, with very considerable success up to now; resistance of English in Ireland with almost perfect success... Or endogenous resistance to a unifying standard: the secular conflict between *Landsmal* and *Riksmal* and its derivatives in Norway or between *katharevousa* and *demotiki* in Greece, the regional ill feeling against *euskera batua*, the up to now impossible reunification of Galician with Portuguese, the fuss with more or less substance about *català* and *valencià*...

This accepted codification or standard is not only, when this has not been attained, a first rank strategic objective for a society’s affirmation of national culture. Its very existence and influence also make it a decisive influence in the formation of that society. When Slovakian Catholic clergy, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, spread religious literature in the country’s language, they were laying the foundations that would turn a Czech dialect into an independent literary language, so that later on the resistance to Magyarisation

(when Slovakia was included in the kingdom of Hungary) did not give rise to a Panbohemian nationalism, as they forecast in Prague, but to an autonomous affirmation of the Slovak nation. In Holland the autonomous historical course, the independent political affirmation of the urban bourgeoisie (the United Provinces are the only territory to remain outside the bounds of the Empire from the 16<sup>th</sup> century), meant that just

“...people perceive that they have their own language when they know and accept that there is a model of *language* for their *speech*”

another variety of Low German became a formal, literary language and autonomous standard: the opposition between standard Low German and dominant high German became conscious and nationally effective only in Holland, as far as becoming opposition between *Dutch* and *German*. The opposition of peoples and languages had only previously been seen between “Latin” and Germanic countries:

“Kerstenheit es gedeelt in twee:/ die Walsche tonge die es een,/ d’andere die Dietsche al geheel” (“Christendom is split into two: the Romance language is one part, and the other Germany as a whole”), wrote Dutch poet Jan van Boendale in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. For centuries Serbo-Croatian, a language with a composite name, has, as is well known, used a dual script: Cyrillic in orthodox Serbia and Roman in Catholic Croatia, and during the supposedly happy times of a Yugoslavia made up of more or less reconciled people—the times of Josip Broz, Tito—the duality of writing was no hindrance for growing rapprochement, as a result of which everyone considered that this was ultimately a single language, and eventually the Serbs increasingly used Roman script (I observed this in the eighties in Belgrade). The disintegration of the federation, the bloody conflict, the renewal of ancient hatred, have made Serbs and Croats (and their governments, schools, books and newspapers) now claim that they speak different languages, without realising that the common name could hardly work in Bosnia as it used to work before. To make an awful comparison: if Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia join the European Union one day (it will take time but they *will* join), will they come in with three languages and two alphabets?

The examples could go on and on without leaving Europe and will all have a common denominator, which is the close relationship between language and politics, between language and power, between the existence of an “educated” language and its institutional status (as a reality or as a project), and between this status and its interior and exterior affirmation. The social and political “status” of language —“higher” than the lower one of dialect, as everyone knows— is not something that depends on the distinctions of philological science, but on the existence and effective dissemination of an autonomous codification: people perceive that they have their own language when they know and accept that there is a model of *language* for their *speech*. This is not exactly a matter of *parole* and *langue*, but of the existence of a model seen as correct, literary, formal and if possible institutional, considered one’s own and corresponding to one’s own language. Then this reference attains a highly efficient symbolic value, becomes proof and representation of the autonomy and individuality of the language and (in the case



of a language that is or is considered to be exclusive) a mechanism for affirmation and reinforcement of the different identity of the people, citizens or country speaking this. Hence languages, very particularly in Europe, do not have only a functional-rational value as an instrument or vehicle for communication, as some affirm, furthermore very much in their own interests (going by this value, the “smaller” languages would easily be relinquishable, in favour of the bigger ones... and that is really what they mean). I am not talking about language in general, but of *that* particular language, which, when seen as codified and educated, and above all when seen as being acknowledged from outside, becomes to some extent a symbol of itself: *educated* and recognised language —rules, literature, institutionalisation and so on— *represents* a different language, a “higher category” of language, with value and dignity equal to other languages. Indeed, the perception of this recognised “equal dignity” is essential for effective perception of the “particular dignity” of the group, society or country which speaks this, and essential for the cohesion and adhesion mechanisms to work: it is not easy to adhere to or be faithful to something —a language or human group— which is seen as inferior and lower in value. And “value” and dignity are not only results of knowledge, but of acknowledgement: being a language or culture invited to international book fairs (in Turin, Guadalajara or Frankfurt), being translated into many other languages, being taught in foreign universities... or being recognised as a language of the European Union. Because the nation itself and its own people, the basic identity group of which people form part, cannot be seen as unworthy of being known and acknowledged as equals... without entailing the danger of one of the many forms of collective schizophrenia or alienation, or any of the multiple symptoms of disappearance through dissolution. Neither can one’s own language be seen as inferior, clumsy, unworthy of acknowledgement... without a risk of general depression or being abandoned at the first opportunity or coercion. As Meillet himself affirmed, “une langue ne subsiste que misérablement là où elle n’est pas soutenue par un sentiment national”. And this is also the modern history of Europe, from Estonia to Portugal and from Sweden to Greece. For this reason comparisons are so detestable, and for this reason, if speaking a language involves much more than speaking, acknowledging one also means much more than acknowledging a language II

**Josep Fontana**

# Europe, history and identity

**The concept of Europe beyond a mere geographical name, as the collective term used to identify a group of men and women as Europeans, initially emerged for the purpose of defining the members of societies that had supposedly reached the height of progress and civilisation, something distinguishing them from the “others”.**

This was at first—and even today still is in many senses—a racist concept, which has often been identified with “white”, in contrast with darker-skinned men and women. This option involves the added advantage of being able to extend the term to the peoples descending from Europeans settled in other continents. This was how Kipling used the term in his poem “The White Man’s Burden”, written in 1899 to celebrate the United States’ conquest of the Philippines, encouraging them to carry out the white man’s civilising labours there. This meant that the Spaniards who had been on the islands for three centuries were not deemed white and, one might suppose, not even European. The idea might well tie in with a famous one of Mr. Fraga, who, when he was Minister for Propaganda and Tourism, took pains to inform any Europeans who wished to visit this country that Spain was “different”.

Until recently there were almost no attempts to write histories of Europe because what sense could there be in writing the history of a part of humanity living in a poorly-defined space and with no common past? What had usually been done was to Europeanise the history of the world, putting forward the Europeans and their own North-American relatives as the spearhead of human progress and placing all the others on a scale of greater or lesser backwardness in relation to them: historical progress was thus roughly identified with the others’ efforts to imitate European societies.

The other way this sort of history has been used, stemming from the one I have just mentioned, was to seek a justification of the wealth acquired by the Europeans, in

**Dibuix negre II (Black Drawing II),**

Antoni Tàpies (2005)

paint and pencil on paper

23,8 x 16,5 cm



Tàpies

opposition to the idea so widespread among colonised countries that this enrichment came from plundering them<sup>1</sup>. Hence, such histories were used in the search for some reasonable form of explaining what has been called “European exceptionalism”. It would be practically impossible to cover the great number of hypotheses that have been put forward to explain the causes of this economic superiority, which would only seem to have started from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Some of them are based on natural advantages (on biological, ecological or geographical reasons),<sup>3</sup> on certain moral and cultural “virtues” (such as late marriages, giving rise to a less expansive demography, and consequently leaving more resources available for investment),<sup>4</sup> diverse reasons of economic efficiency or technology of sails and guns,<sup>5</sup> amongst many others. One of the latest ones, for example, explains European superiority through the use of glass, which “transformed humanity’s relations with the natural world” and “changed the meaning of reality, favouring vision over memory and suggesting new concepts of proof and evidence”, all of which is supposed to have given the West an unquestionable advantage over the short-sighted societies of the East.<sup>6</sup>

Another wide variety of explanations associates western superiority with its progress in the field of forming the modern state, initially exposing us to a number of misleading elements, through both the difficulty involved in defining exactly what the “modern state” consists in, as well as the fact that a comparative approach to the history of the states of Europe and Asia reveals more parallelisms than divergences in this field.<sup>7</sup> The thing is that we Europeans have decided that the others are incapable of attaining modernity on their own account—in the same way as we have decided that they are “societies without any history” through the simple expedient of ignoring this—and disqualify any attempt to take the same road towards the “modern state” on the other hand. In our setting nationalism is a sign of modernity, but doctor John Warnock, an Englishman who held an important post in Egypt for over twenty-five years, diagnosed Egyptian nationalism as “an infectious mental disorder”.<sup>8</sup>

■ <sup>1</sup> For example, in Walter Rodney’s book, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*, London, Bogle-L’Ouverture, 1972.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Bairoch (ed.), *Disparities in economic development since the industrial revolution*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1981; by the same Bairoch, *Victoires et déboires. Histoire économique et sociale du monde du xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997, especially volume III.

Contradicting Bairoch, Angus Maddison claims that the European advantage started long before, possibly even in late medieval times, but his speculations on the figures of GNP per inhabitant from 1000 to 1820 are fanciful and the historical arguments that he seeks to use to support these end up being unworthy through their coarseness (Angus Maddison, “Western Economy and that of the rest of the world in the last millennium”, in *Revista de historia económica*, xxii [2004], n<sup>o</sup>. 2, pp. 259-336).

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz, *The great divergence. China, Europe and the making of the modern world economy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, for example, gives basic importance to the availability of mineral coal.

<sup>4</sup> To restrict myself to the most recent examples: J. R. McNeill “The reserve army of the unmarried in world economic history: flexible fertility regimes and the wealth of nations”, in D. H. Aldcroft and R. E. Catterall (eds.), *Rich nations-poor nations. The long-run perspective*,

Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 1996, pp. 23-38; John P.

Powelson, *Centuries of economic endeavor. Parallel paths in Japan and Europe and their contrast with the Third World*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> An idea of Carlo M. Cipolla (*Guns and sails*) which Alfred W. Crosby later pursued in *Throwing fire. Projectile technology through history* (Cambridge, 2002). Crosby had previously written about ecological imperialism (Cambridge 1986) and about the advantages stemming from the diffusion of quantification (*The measure of reality: quantification and western society, 1250-1600*, Cambridge, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Alan Macfarlane and Gerry Martin, *The glass bathyscaphe. How glass changed the world*, London, Profile Books, 2002, p. 18; also Chiara Frugoni, *Medioevo sul naso*, Rome, Laterza, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Victor Lieberman, “Transcending east-west dichotomies: state and culture formation in six ostensibly disparate areas”, in Victor Lieberman (ed.), *Beyond binary histories. Re-imagining Eurasia to c. 1830*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1999, pp. 19-102.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Porter, “Strew the path with flowers”, in *London Review of Books*, 4th March 2004, p. 33, in a review of James Mills’ book, *Cannabis Britannica*.

**Still, the search for a European identity** has for some time now left legitimization of exceptionalism in the background —since now that the Far East has the greatest rates of economic growth this has lost interest as an explanatory element— to concentrate instead on seeking historical background for the present European Union. This is not an easy task at all, as the most distant precedent that one can find dates back to 1648, with the peace of Westphalia, which is the first time that a group of governors talks in civil terms and not as members of Christendom, and which more strictly begins with the Vienna congress of 1814-1815, which was the first international meeting held on behalf of the European powers, and which gave rise to the appearance of the first hymn of Europe, now surprisingly forgotten —a cantata which Beethoven composed with the title of “The glorious moment”, which exalted the coalition of powers. This was first performed on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1814, at the same time as the “Battle of Vitoria”, and when it came to the point where the choir sings, in the city of Vienna’s voice, “everything lofty and sublime of the Earth has come together within my walls”, met with public acclamation, in a reaction which to me does not seem to be particularly Europeanising.

The subject of a permanent alliance of European powers was dropped much before, with the failure of the system of congresses. And the very idea of a possible union had almost no success until the nazis recovered this with their programme of “new European order”; but this would have to be considered rather more as the history of empires than that of unions. Outside this, there is little more than count Coudenhove-Kalergi and his Pan-European Movement’s lucubrations without much practical content in the nineteen twenties, or those of Aristide Briand in 1929. The most forward-looking step was taken in 1944 by the governments in exile of Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg, who decided that, after the war was over, they would form a customs union with the name of Benelux. After the end of the Second World War some great projects for unity were put forward, with a lot of festivals and lofty speeches, given at events like the 1948 celebration of a European congress which was attended by 750 politicians, from veterans like Churchill or Adenauer to the young Mitterrand, and which started a movement which led in 1949 to the creation of a Council of Europe made up of a Commission of Ministers and a Consultative Assembly that actually did little more than produce and disseminate rhetoric.

The origins of the European Union have nothing to do with the background mentioned above, but, as is well known, stemmed from very modest economic initiatives starting with the European Coal and Steel Community, the result of the Schuman plan in 1950, which was got under way in 1952 and followed in 1957 by signing the Treaty of Rome, which created the European Economic Community. Though significant in the field of the economy, and if you wish even in that of international relations, these did not go very far at all as regards political bonds. This would be seen in De Gaulle’s attitude opposing Great Britain’s joining because —as one French minister said to a British politician— at that time, the six members of the community were five chickens and a cock, understood to be France, while if Great Britain were allowed to join with the countries that were associated with it, there would be more chickens, but also two cocks, and that would not bode well for life in the farmyard.

The endeavour to give some kind of political content to this community explains why the attempts to construct a history of Europe legitimating this have proliferated, just as the

supposedly national histories sponsored by states since the 19<sup>th</sup> century were used to legitimate modern nation states, inventing genealogies going back to prehistoric times. But to the same extent as this European Union is a union of states to which their histories attribute an immemorial origin, the results tend to be little more than the more or less compared sum of the individual histories that form these. This statist fallacy forces historians to work from the modern political frameworks, artificially projected backwards, deliberately ignoring the fact that today's "ethnic" frontiers have nothing "natural" about them, but are the result of centuries of wars, of forced migrations, expulsions and cleansing and cultural genocide operations. One could for example think of the case of a Yugoslavia bonded and broken up again in seventy-five years; twenty-five years ago we would have considered it quite sound to speak of medieval Yugoslavia, and now that has become meaningless. If this is the case, why should it be any more meaningful to talk of the medieval history of other similar "national-state" entities? And what is the worth of a Europe made up of comparisons between a non-existent medieval France, Germany or Italy?

**This all stems from the dire confusion** between a cultural and awareness phenomenon, like that of the nation, and the political fact of the state, the foundation which we should look for in the social contract, and not in a common history. The way that nation states have sought to unite, or —perhaps more accurately— *compact*, the diverse cultural traditions in their sphere, absorbing these into a dominant one, succeeded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>, linked with the compulsory teaching of "national history", like the sort we had to suffer as recently as under Franco's regime. But insofar as the last few decades have witnessed the fragmentations of old state structures, as occurred with the Soviet empire, and we have seen new states rushing to make up their own national historical traditions, the validity of this form of understanding the past has started to be questioned. As opposed to a view exalting frontiers which did not exist until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and which ignores the fact that the limits defined by treaties were easily crossed or that currencies flowed around internationally, with no guarantee other than their cash value,<sup>9</sup> we have learned to value the zones of contact on both sides of frontiers, which were the setting for many economic, cultural and ecological exchanges at times when persons, goods and ideas moved around them freely.<sup>10</sup>

Getting rid of the mythology confusing the state with the nation is necessary not only to understand history better, but to live in the present. After having to face conflicts like the ones in Nagorno-Karabakh or Chechnia, Evgeni Primakov, who was the prime minister of Russia not so long ago, gives us this reflection on the reality of the current world in his memoirs: "If we take into account that there are two thousand nations and ethnic groups coexisting in 150 states, we should come to the universal conclusion that the best solution is to guarantee the rights of national minorities within multinational states".<sup>11</sup>

■ <sup>9</sup> Eric Helleiner, *The making of national money: territorial currencies in historical perspective*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2003.

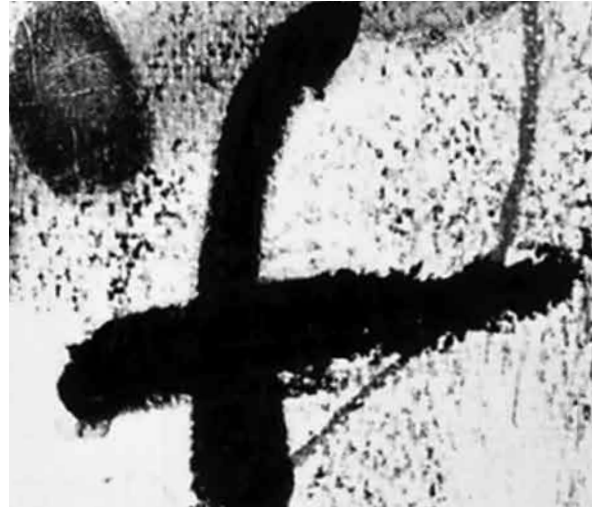
<sup>10</sup> Mark von Hagen, "Empires, borderlands, and diasporas: Eurasia as anti-paradigm for the post-soviet era", a text appearing in *Ab Imperio*, a magazine published in Kazan, which I know of thanks to professor Sergey Glebov's paper.

<sup>11</sup> Evgeni Primakov, *Russian crossroads*, chapter IX.

<sup>12</sup> Barry W. Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean. The Atlantic world and its peoples, 8000 BC-AD 1500*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The corrupting sea. A study of Mediterranean history*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000; see also John Wansbrough, *Lingua franca in the Mediterranean*, Richmond, Curzon Press, 1996.

“Getting rid of the mythology confusing the state with the nation is necessary not only to understand history better, but to live in the present”



The truth is that the immense majority of states are multinational in one way or another, which means that they ought to abandon their claim to justification established on a patriotism based in turn on founding myths, often built on an identitarian racism, to assume that the new legitimacy is based on the social contract that their subjects renew in general elections, in exchange for requiring the social services that the state is supposed to have to provide.

A legitimate history of Europe cannot thus be that of the present states projected backwards, but one which tackles how the relations between the inhabitants of the diverse areas of the continent were established over time. Barry Cunliffe has published an ambitious review of ancient and medieval history which sustains that there is an Atlantic Europe going from Iceland to Gibraltar, through Galicia, where thousands of years facing the ocean have meant that “Celts, Bretons and Galicians have closer relations with their maritime neighbours than with their English, French or Spanish compatriots”<sup>12</sup>. Something similar, even more complex, can be said of the Mediterranean, in respect of which Horden and Purcell have published the first volume of what intends to be the history of three thousand years of common life of Europeans, Asians and Africans around the sea<sup>13</sup>.

Against so many studies on non-existent European states in medieval or modern times, there are just a few which talk of the migrations, of the trade routes which connected the Baltic with the Black Sea, of the coexistence of shepherds and flocks over and above the political borders, of the routes taken by travelling traders over all the continent’s roads, of the communities of seamen, of the paths that would be taken by religious dissidents (which explain why the persecuted English Lollards took refuge in Bohemia with the Czech Hussites); cultural phenomena such as the ones stemming from the scattering of the Sephardim expelled from the Iberian Peninsula (who found in Holland the freedom allowing the development of thought like Spinoza’s, which could have led to burning at the stake here in Spain), the diffusion of the rationalist ideas of the Enlightenment, passed on in books that no state censorship could manage to curb (from 1751 to 1782

25,000 copies of the *Encyclopédie*, which meant 900,000 volumes, were circulating around Europe), and of so many other activities and group relations that established bonds of attachment and facilitated cultural rapprochements many centuries before governments thought up European unity from the higher spheres.

What particular characteristics, defining a possible European identity, can be found in the culture that emerged from such exchanges? The academic convention tends to repeat that its defining signs are the traditions of classical culture and Christianity. But if we look into the most fertile points in the formation of European reality in medieval times we will discover that there is a lot more to it than that. There is a borderland region, permeable to the circulation of goods, men and ideas, where the classical and Christian substrates, but also those of the old local cultures, were blended in with the contributions of the science and techniques of Asia, arriving above all through the Moslem world, with such essential items as the Indian numbering system, with new crops and new farming techniques and such important technical imports as those of gunpowder and paper, which enabled

“... European values are today threatened by a dangerous involution”

the multiplication of written texts. We will also see how this crossbreeding could be more fruitfully developed, creating a genuinely European culture from it, thanks to a large extent to the political failure of the attempts to reconstruct the framework of the empire and to the Church's powerlessness in its attempt to impose strict patterns of thought.

The main characteristics that have enabled this culture to form and identifying traits to be wrought from it are on one hand the tradition of struggles against the despotism of empires—all imperial ventures have been either largely ineffective, like the Holy Roman German Empire, or short-lived, like those of Napoleon or Hitler—which would lead to the development of representative government systems; and on the other the growth of a rational and critical culture which has its remote origins in the medieval blossoming of heresies and takes form in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries with that final heresy which we know as the Enlightenment, through the work of Spinoza, Locke, Bayle, Hume, Montesquieu or Diderot, among so many others.

This dual tradition would inspire amongst us a sustained struggle for individual freedoms and human rights (from the French revolution, which was not a revolution of landowners like the North-American one, but, as Michelet saw it, was characterised by an active popular participation) and later on, those of the First International, a parallel struggle for social rights (for such substantial things as public education, public health or the pensions system) won over one hundred and fifty years of group struggle. Right up to the present day these would continue to be the distinctive traits of a European society which would in 1939 associate the struggle against fascism with the establishment of the welfare state.

These European values are today threatened by a dangerous involution, born in the United States in the nineteen seventies, from the memorandum in which Lewis Powell denounced that the enemies of “free enterprise” were above all “university students, teachers, the world of the communication media, intellectuals and literary journals, artists and scientists”<sup>14</sup>.



The result of this campaign has been the ideological counter-revolution that we are living through, financed by the great private foundations controlling television stations, sponsoring the publication of hundreds of books and paying university chairs<sup>15</sup>, in association with the Christian fundamentalist groups with visions such as those of evangelical leader Tim LaHaye, one of the founders of the Moral Majority movement, which has spread its prophetic message in a series of utopian novels which have sold fifty-five million copies in the United States. This message consists in an interpretation of the biblical texts, particularly Revelation, which sustains that when the biblical lands have been occupied by Israel —and these groups help to speed up the process by financing the Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory— the legions of the Antichrist —who, according to LaHaye, turns out to be a secretary general of the UN who will promote a general disarmament policy, the reinforcement of the United Nations and a universal currency— will attack Israel and there will be a decisive battle in the valley of Armageddon. It also includes the “rapture”: according to what is said in the first epistle to the Thessalonians, the righteous, the real believers, will be caught up by God in the air “in the clouds” and seated at his right hand to see how their political and ideological enemies remaining on the planet, the people *left behind*, undergo plagues and harm in the years of tribulation elapsing prior to the second coming of the Messiah, who will establish a thousand-year reign on the Earth.

I am not talking about a couple of isolated lunatics. This fundamentalist Christian right owns 1,600 radio stations and 250 TV stations, through which they have a powerful influence on how their listeners perceive what is happening in the world, and can exert vital pressure on presidential elections: a recent article in *The Economist* claims that the “traditionalist Christians” have provided over 40 per cent of Bush’s total votes<sup>16</sup>. This 40 per cent coincides with the proportion of North-Americans who think that the Bible has to be understood as fully and literally true, which explains the inertia attained by the large-scale pseudo-science campaigns against evolutionism (in some places creationism or the theory of intelligent design now have to be explained as valid alternatives) going as far as groups whose literal faith in the Bible leads them to sustain that it is actually the sun that turns around the earth! Taking the same approach, there are all the campaigns which question global warming and which refuse to accept the measures for controlling gas emissions. Because it is indeed hardly worth getting very upset about the state of the environment if one is sure that the world will very soon be ending: a *Time/CNN* survey showed that 36 per cent of those replying thought that Revelation was a true prophecy.<sup>17</sup>

All this has a global facet which we should not lose sight of. Andreas Huygen wrote that the battle of ideas of the Cold War was between two sides sharing a common ground, who both claimed to be heirs of the Enlightenment. What they were arguing over was how progress and modernisation, equality and freedom should be understood, without considering denying these. He adds that the Western liberalism which won

■ <sup>14</sup> John Micklethwait and Adrian Woolridge, *The right nation. Conservative power in America*, New York, Penguin, 2004, pp. 77-78.

<sup>15</sup> Sefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America alone. The neo-conservatives and the global order*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> “Social conservatives. Following their own path”, in *The Economist*, 2nd April 2005, pp. 39-40.

<sup>17</sup> Esther Kaplan, *With God on their side*, New York, The New Press, 2004, pp. 30-31; Bill Moyers, “Welcome to Doomsday”, in *The New York Review of Books*, 24th March, 2005, pp. 8-10, Micklethwait and Woolridge, *The right nation*, pp. 155-160.

this battle against the Soviet Union “is now challenged by an anti-liberal wave opposing international cooperation, constitutional guarantees of habeas corpus, the separation of Church and State and the secular rationalism of modernity”.

To show just to what extent these concepts differ from ours, i.e., European ones, in such basic aspects as the need to guarantee collective rights, two examples might perhaps suffice: the Concerned Women for America group is fighting the United Nations Convention for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, alleging that this means that they are being denied the right to decide about what refers to the family or children’s education and prohibited from acknowledging that “men and women are fundamentally different”; another group, the Eagle Forum, claims that the United Nations Convention on children’s rights forbids parents to force children to do housework and creates the possibility of parents who want to educate their children at home, instead of taking them to school, being accused of negligence.<sup>18</sup>

As well as this attitude, opposing any guarantee of human rights, I could mention the one referring to social rights, systematically opposed for many years now. One example gives a clear idea of the present situation: as unfavourable comments were heard about the news that a major North-American chain store, Wal-Mart, was threatening to close any shop where there was an attempt to set up a trade union, the chain published on 7<sup>th</sup> April this year a two-page advertisement in the *New York Review of Books*, with the title of “Wal-Mart’s impact on society: a decisive time for North-American capitalism”, decorated with a colour picture of a happy family with children and a dog playing in front of a detached house, where it justifies its low salaries and the lack of health care for its workers and sustains that it is not only businesses —nor those like Wal-Mart which prove to have made a 10,000 million dollar profit last year— which have to settle social problems but that in the next decade there has to be a serious debate, and I quote this literally, about the way “business, government and individuals have to share the burden of financing a decent society”.

A history of Europe able to present the traits that have gradually fashioned European identity, which does justice to what its tradition of the defence of human rights and social rights has meant, and which properly values all it has contributed to creating a critical culture, should help us today to defend ourselves, at very difficult times, from the assault of a counter-revolution which attempts to deny these ideals, the legacy of the struggles of the Enlightenment, of the French Revolution or the First International, which are essential milestones in our history and bear witness to a long-standing effort, which we should not relinquish, to build a society where there can be the greatest equality possible within the greatest freedom possible II

■ <sup>18</sup> Kaplan, *With God on their side*, p. 31 and *passim*.

Josep M. Lloró

# The palisade of Auschwitz

## *An image*

**A paradox of the concept of history: when it refers to the human construction of reality over time, history becomes a great cry, an expression, unattainable through knowledge, of the multiplicity of human experience; as a form of narration of this experience, however, history selects its silences: it ignores some voices, gags others and definitively buries some experiences so as to make space for only a certain few.**

Yet, *history* as knowledge is secularly expected to be the highest instance of truth. The ruling of posterity is transferred to history as knowledge. Of no other discipline is so much demanded. Certainly not of literature and its peripheries —literary criticism, literary theory, cultural studies— or of philosophy or art. Only historians are summoned to appear in the courts that judge silences, omissions and distortions. And this is the case, no doubt, because the historian is telling the history of barbarism when he or she wants to talk about the history of culture. Because any story is susceptible to being inquired into, questioned or, as Walter Benjamin wished, to being brushed against the grain.

Brushing against the grain means re-inverting the order, altering the sign of the variable: to oblige addition when the desire is for subtraction and vice versa. The metaphor of the historian as detective is pertinent. It is also the metaphor of *Crime and Punishment*, which can be read as a judgment on history as narration. Let's take a brief look. Raskolnikov is caught in the delirium of being another. Of being Napoleon, of being a new Napoleon. Of paying the price of first being a criminal so as to be absolved subsequently by history to the extent that it has been able to convert the first criminal act into something that is beneficial for society because he is able to turn himself into a benefactor of humanity. But Raskolnikov is at once assailed by astonishment: the murder of the old woman does not give him the initial energy he needs for his personal redemption and that of humanity.



**Dibuix negre I (Black Drawing I).**

Antoni Tàpies (2005)

paint and pencil on paper

23,8 x 16,5 cm

Tàpies

On the contrary, the delirium is accentuated and the malaise threatens his life. Expiation in this crisis will be offered him by the judge in charge of investigating the old woman's murder, Porfiry Petrovitch. At the price, however, of his confession, his being condemned, his imprisonment and his return to Christianity, which sanctions the uselessness of any human action in being able to make a better world. The end of Kant's imperative autonomy, the return to religious ways of giving sense to the world and the implicit refutation of any history that is other than that of salvation.

What does Porfiry Petrovitch offer Raskolnikov to make him shed his delirium and agree to confession? A counter-story, a history of the silences hidden in Raskolnikov's explanation. These silences are precisely the lacunae in the protagonist's argument, what he premeditatedly leaves out so as not to alter the logic of his account. The detective Petrovitch deactivates the story that justifies the violence. At the price of denying any force that justifies autonomous human action.

**Logic, precisely, is what breaks through silences.** It is their creator, strictly speaking. Historical narrative, insofar as it is a credible and hence "logical" explanation, has to conceal violence, which is precisely the midwife of history. It is frequently claimed that there were three stages in the development of history as an academic discipline: the first—until practically 1848—is characterised by politico-diplomacy and the State is its object of study. The second, economic and social, identifies class conflict in the struggle for power as its driving force, and its crisis begins in the 1970s. Finally, the anthropological and cultural phase, which in its latest post-modern and relativist version is still operative, would place its emphasis on defining social groups and individuals by selecting specific cultural features that condition them or mark their actions in response to external events.

In the first phase, violence is part of the early and necessary manifestations of the construction of state powers. States are violent because they are able to monopolise the use of violence and make it legitimate and then to restructure this violence into war, which is the natural means of resolving conflicts of hegemony. In the second phase, violence is the product that derives from the clash between the classes that are struggling for power. The legitimacy of this violence is justified by a logic of enemy against enemy that obliges one to think of the other as belonging to a class that must be subjugated or destroyed. Its necessity is analysed as an effect of the project of social collectives that are faced with the impossibility of modifying the structures within which human lives develop. Here, violence would be the result of the struggle for power, but not a constituent of power, as in the first case. The third phase sees violence as a dysfunction, as a disturbance in the cultural narration of a group, as the effect of an irruption by the other, or the appearance of an element that interrupts the normal reproduction of the group's identity. In all three cases, however, violence is derived and fortuitous. The greatest silence of history as narration is precisely this. The cry that results from this violence is silenced in historical narratives.

Yet, those explanations of history that refuse to set out both "the past as it has been" and an "explanation of the past as credible re-creation" or, in other words, explanations that come not from the mere application of methods but from the attempt to find answers to the different ways of formulating the question of why the past represents itself in

the way that it does, are confronted with the obligation of identifying the forms of violence that have been exercised to obtain the silences necessary for offering some image of this past. An image, yes. A diorama. Reconstructing the violence that has enabled the characters that people the dioramas to be transformed into figures of wax and identifying the processes of selection of these characters, revealing the dynamics of its logic, its variability and adaptation to changing circumstances, observing its *hic et nunc*, which is to say its past condition as present, how it was therefore eventually submitted to resistance, threats, confrontations, and inquiring into the process of its consolidation in the past of the present that will then become future and, for future generations, a description of that past as it was: destroying these silences is a task of knowledge. In their representation the diorama and the image abolish dynamics, a process, a conflict, and a contradictory interplay of hopes, some of which are broken so as to permit the emergence of new realities. History as human experience is not moral. The historian can be moral when he or she asks about the causes and effects of these kinds of violence.

**The question about violence is the historical question** *par excellence*, the answers to which make it possible to formulate other silences: the exclusion and oppression of women, genocide, extermination, colonialism, feudalism, resistance to these processes of destruction, isolation and alienation. But one must avoid turning this violence into an omni-comprehensible metaphysical instance. Into a kind of *deus ex machina* that is open to universal explanation. The historian has the obligation to return to the historic moment its gravity, the set of possibilities that are taking shape at any given point, that give it form. Only thus can one make the violence intelligible. Violence, too, has its *hic et nunc*, its domesticity and its singularity. Let us consider an example.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum houses a collection of photographs of these two death camps amongst which four stand out. They are four images taken by a *Sonderkommando*, one of the members of the special Jewish work details that were given the task of collecting the corpses of their gassed fellow Jews, then removing the gold in their teeth, taking them to the crematoria ovens or the incineration pits, collecting their ashes, reducing to powder the bones that were not completely burned and getting rid of it all in the river. The four photographs were taken in the summer of 1944 in Crematorium v at Auschwitz, clandestinely removed from the camp, developed and sent to the Polish resistance on 4 September 1944. In three of them the images are recognisable. Two have been taken after the gassing: the dead bodies of the victims, left outside the chamber waiting to be thrown into an incineration pit. Another shows some naked women being hustled towards a shower house, which was in reality the gas chamber of Crematorium v. The last photograph, the one I find most interesting, cannot show anything. It is taken into the sun— probably at some other moment of the previous sequence —and does not enable identification of any specific object except some tree trunks. In its abstraction, the image is really shocking because of the violent transition of blacks and whites as a result of the over-exposure and the burning of the film. Reconstruction of what happens in this image refers to the work of the historian who wants to remove himself from the double violence of what the image represents but cannot because the condition of its production was marked by great danger —not of death but that it might have been impossible to capture any image— and by the silence imposed on this violence that creates the process of reality that this impossible image expresses. It is a good idea to place these

photographs, as Georges Didi-Huberman has done, next to another, this time taken by an anonymous German soldier or officer, of the camouflaging palisade of Crematorium v at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The photograph is taken from inside. One can see a wall of beech trees in which the gaps between the trees are filled by a palisade of branches and brushwood, which the prisoners of the special work units had to replace and repair every so often. The filling-in shown in the image is total. Nothing can be seen of the outside world and nothing of the interior is perceptible from outside the camp except for the smoke from the chimneys.

In his film *Shoah*, the director Claude Lanzmann interviews an ss officer from Treblinka. I reproduce below, (translated) from the Spanish version of the book of the film, the declaration of the latter about the desire of the Nazis to avoid any filtering of any information or image related with the secret that surrounded the death camps. “The ‘tube’ (the walkway that connected the unloading ramp of the trains with the gas chambers) was about a hundred metres long and four metres wide (...). They were surrounded by high palisades”. “Walls?” asks Lanzmann. “No, no, wire fencing very closely interwoven with branches, pine branches. Do you understand? It was called ‘camouflage’. There was a camouflage commando of twenty Jews who went to get branches every day (...) in the woods. And everything was covered. Everything, everything. They couldn’t see out (people going to the gas chambers through the ‘tube’), neither right nor left. Absolutely nothing. You couldn’t see through it (...) Impossible to see through it”.

“Absolutely nothing”. As Godard has said, “L’oubli de l’extermination fait partie de l’extermination”. In the era of radio and cinema, the Nazis wanted and almost managed to create such a thick wall of silence around the crime that they perpetrated that it was on the point of being simply ignored. Or banalised. The relevance of using the case of Auschwitz to talk about the silences of history is justified because Nazism represented a voluntary acceleration and a “making coherent” —in other words, creating a coherent combination— of processes of racism and structural violence that were regionally and temporarily disseminated in order to bring about a millennialist and genocidal calamity without leaving a trace. This was clearly perceived by the victims. Another of the main witnesses in *Shoah* describes an interview between himself and two outstanding leaders of the Warsaw ghetto. Jan Karski was then the courier for the underground with the Polish Government in exile. The aim of the interview was to get Karski to take a message to the allies that urgent action was needed to save the Jews from destruction. This action would have even implied a change in military strategy so that the Nazis would understand that some acts of war were clearly in reprisal for the extermination. Before inviting him to visit the ghetto clandestinely and in order to convince him, one of the ghetto leaders says, “We have contributed to Humanity, we have given wise men throughout the centuries. We are at the origin of the great religions. We are human beings”.

“The historian can be moral when he or she asks about the causes and effects of these kinds of violence”

“We are human beings”. The discourse runs out here because the ability to make the young Polish courier understand has limits. The final argument is overwhelming, not because of its forcefulness or sophistication but, on the contrary, its obviousness. The duty of saving the Jews from certain extermination arises because they are “human beings”. There can be no more moving idea: in all the processes of destroying communities, from slavery to colonial expansion, the poignant affirmation of the slaves, of the vanquished, of the victims that “we are human beings” has echoed for a long time, over slave traders, conquerors and executioners. It must be silenced. As when the 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish theologians argued about whether the American Indians were human beings or not and, therefore, whether they had souls and hence had to be “saved” and respected as human beings. These considerations certainly came too late for some Caribbean populations that were victims of the exploitation, violence and ailments that the Europeans brought with them. Such “estrangement” has nothing archaic or circumstantial about it. It is the first phase of any process of dehumanisation aimed at the destruction of the victims. When Jan Karski tells Lanzmann what it was that he saw in the ghetto, he says literally, “That wasn’t a world. That wasn’t Humanity”.

**All the silences of history have the same aim:** to wipe out all evidence of the violent process of dehumanisation that is to be hushed up.

The historian who wants to escape from the narrative, who understands that the “tradition of the oppressed” is always threatened by the successive victories of the oppressors, is faced with the dilemma of making his or her work harder, of having to hone it like a knife. Because this tradition of the oppressed is not another pole of paradise, a retrospective utopia, the world of nostalgia to be recovered. Within this tradition, too, distortion and the lie are operative, constructing stories. It is material that must be handled with the greatest of care. Strictly speaking, this tradition is what it is to the extent that it is postulated as such from the present standpoint, and to the extent that it is politically magnetised as a story to counter the dominant story. Nevertheless, the historian has to work with this material because in it, properly treated, purged, methodically worked, it is possible to find vestiges of the violence that have made it a thing of the past, to show the signs of resistance to that violence, to speak of the voices that were silenced and that bore, they too, a body of experience, a vision of an alternative world and, in short, were a harbinger of other possible worlds. And in this way one can dismantle the account of history as the necessary unfolding of the dominant forces, the triumph of which was both inevitable and to be desired. And to show how, in the diorama that backs this version, what is missing is precisely the power that it has created.

I have already said that all the subsequent silences are formulated on the basis of this hushing-up of violence. There is no process that is not a result of it: the establishment of patriarchal society, the social division of classes, colonial expansion, genocides. First, the struggle for resources, then the struggle for power and, finally, the struggle for hegemony: the material of which humanity is made creates these realities. But in the excavation of this material, in the creation of methodological tools —the working hypothesis, new systems of analysis and, in particular, the brush that is prepared to go against the grain— that make it possible to capture the voices that people these silences and refute them, it is verified that this humanity is diverse and protean and that, in its diversity, there is also a spark of hope that the end of history —when it comes— will not present a balance in favour of the evil that this humanity can do ||



## ■ References

This is not an exhaustive bibliography, but a list of the works I have referred to in writing these pages.

BENJAMIN, W. "Tesis sobre la filosofía de la història" (Thesis on the Philosophy of History), *Art i literatura*. Translated into Catalan by A. Pous. Vic: Eumo, 1984, pp. 133-142). Much discussed in the 1980s, this text of Walter Benjamin, from which I have taken concepts like "tradition of the oppressed" and the dichotomy between "documents of barbarism and documents of civilisation" continues to be the most pertinent reflection that I know of from the field of philosophy on the "state of emergency" that is all historic present with regard to the past and also the utopian magnetisation of the future. Certainly Benjamin's reflection challenges historical narrative as knowledge and proposes, eschatologically, revolutionary historical knowledge. Academia and historical reflection are, then, incompatible for Benjamin.

DIDI-HUBERMAN, G. *Images malgré tout*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2003, 235 pp. A penetrating analysis on respecting, and the importance of what is singular in the process of understanding complex phenomena. An argument aimed at deactivating any kind of metaphysics or theologising in understanding and explaining the extermination of the European Jews.

FONTANA, J. *La història dels homes* (The History of Man). Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2000, 368 pp. It is necessary to construct a method of historical analysis that makes an investigation more complex, making of it a polyphonic account that, following the main strand of the "State" because, like it or not, the role of power has to

be borne in mind", gathers into the story as many voices as possible to make it more meaningful.

GUHA, R. *Los voces de la Historia y otros estudios subalternos* (The Voices of History and Other Subaltern Studies). Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2002, 114 pp. A critique of "statist" ideology according to which "the life of the state is central for History", and a search for other voices that offer accounts that differ from that segregated by "statism".

HANSON V. D. *Why the West Has Won*. London: Faber and Faber, 2001, 492 pp. In the history of humanity there have never been such lethal and murderous societies as those of the West –Europe and the United States– but this deadliness has been accompanied by "constitutional government, capitalism, freedom of religious and political association, free speech and intellectual tolerance", while in the world that has opened up since 1991, the clear danger is the appearance of semi-western autocracies –China, Iran, North Korea– that can attain "Western notions of military discipline, technology, decisive battle, and capitalism without the accompanying womb of freedom, civic militarism, civilian audit and dissent". The argument is Spenglerian: there would exist a great paradox that the very same western values that had given "spiritual" superiority to the westerners –since Salamina, westerners have fought for their values and freedom while the enemy armies have been comprised by mercenaries of subjects of despotisms– have led us to lose our fighting spirit, have led

us into "decadence", which is to say, to more understanding and pacifist formulas of coexistence that threaten western hegemony and, what is most dangerous of all, the values of the West. The conclusion is evident: the intellectual and moral legacy of the West is the best thing humanity has produced, says Hanson and "it is a weighty and sometimes ominous heritage that we must neither deny nor feel ashamed about –but insist that our deadly manner of war serves, rather than buries, our civilisation". This is an example of how the pain caused by conflicts can be discounted from the final balance of History and of the scant importance of human lives when defending the "values of civilisation" or, in other words, "hegemony".

LANZMANN, C. *Shoah*. Madrid: Arena Libros, 2003, 210 pp. This book brings together the dialogues from interviews that were shown in the film, making it possible to restore the precision of the testimony which is sometimes somewhat lost in the film because of the power of the mise en scène.

MAYER, A. J. *The Furies. Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions*. Princeton, 2000, 716 pp. A comparative study on the nature of the violence and the role it played in the French and Russian Revolutions. For Mayer, "there is no revolution without violence and terror; without civil and foreign war; without iconoclasm and religious conflict; and without collision between city and country". Although he seems critical of the idea that collective violence is as unusual in history as revolution is, since he

emphasises the extraordinary aspect –which is to say revolutionary– of violence, he cannot analyse its role in its more diffuse forms in controlling and shaping societies in which there exist structural and structuring inequalities. Nonetheless, it is a study that brings to the foreground the role of ideological, political and religious violence in shaping realities.

THOMPSON, E. P. “La lógica de la historia” (The Logic of History) in *Obra esencial* (The Essential E. P. Thompson). Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2002, pp. 509 – 526. Indeed, one could cite other texts from this collection of essential –in fact, quite Benjaminesque– works by Thompson, for example “Marxism and History”, “Agenda or a Radical History” and the preface to his best-known work,

*The Making of the English Working Class*. However, I shall limit myself to (a paraphrase based on the Spanish translation of) the aforementioned text that reminds us that: only those of us who are still alive can give “sense” to the past. Yet the past has always been, among other things, the result of reasoning about values. In recovering this process, in showing how the causal sequence really occurred, we must, to the extent that the discipline permits, keep our own values in suspension. But once this history is recovered, we are then free to express our prejudices about it. This judgement must in turn be subject to historical checks (...). What we can do (...) is to identify ourselves with certain values upheld by actors from the past, and to reject others.

TRAVERSO, E. *La violencia nazi. Una genealogía europea*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003, 204 pp. From a standpoint in diametrical opposition to Hanson’s book, Traverso analyses the historical and European roots of Nazism and the structural nature of its violence. This is, then, a process, product of the development of a series of elements, mass murder in the name of “ideals”, scientific racism, colonialism, “nationalisation of the masses”, anti-enlightenment –which become central in the genesis of Nazism and fascism– the roots of which are not, however, German or Italian but western: “Nazism permitted the encounter and fusion of two paradigmatic figures: the *Jew*, the ‘other’ of the western world, and the ‘subhuman’, the ‘other’ of the colonised world”.

**Rosa Congost**

# Teaching “historical thinking” *Pierre Vilar’s legacy*

**I would like to begin by recalling July 1988. I believe it was the last time that the historian Pierre Vilar visited Catalonia and it was quite possibly the last time he addressed a university audience. The place was the University of Girona. Pierre Vilar was then 82 years old and taught ten hours of the Girona General Studies summer course.**

The organisers would have been happy enough if Vilar had merely repeated his best-known ideas but he provided a great deal more. The course gave young historians a wonderful opportunity to hear Vilar’s reflections (Girona’s gain here was Paris’ loss).

It was then that we first heard the expression “historical thinking”, which was a relatively new addition to Vilar’s ideas. I say “relatively” because it linked to one of the historian’s old arguments, namely, the need to use historical reasoning. It represented a shift from an appeal for historical justice to one of genuine historical thought in which it was important for the general public to grasp a broader concept of history. The expression “historical reasoning” stemmed from the practices and methodology adopted by a small group of people, namely historians. “Historical thinking”, by contrast, was something that all citizens ought to indulge in. It reflected a desire to reflect on the past in order to draw lessons for the present. Vilar said that “this approach should have an immediate impact on historians and their desire to clarify contemporary problems”.

Pierre Vilar’s interest in clarifying contemporary problems was not new. In a book compilation of some of classes at the Sorbonne in the 1970s, we read “What we expect of historical reasoning is to understand the past in order to understand the present”. This understanding, added Vilar, requires one to reflect on the way the media distort information. Pierre Vilar’s intellectual odyssey began in the 1920s and was inspired by this same desire to understand the present. It was during this decade that he discovered Catalonia —an event that I will refer to later.

However Vilar’s concern with the present did not extend to signing manifestos and newspaper articles like other intellectuals and indeed, he felt uncomfortable with the label “intellectual” itself. His notion of “historical thinking” went far beyond the intellectual’s role as intermediary between the world of ideas and the world in general. His concept involved historians assuming a more relevant role in society and shouldering a task that is well within their grasp, namely teaching history whether at universities or in schools.

What, though, does “historical thinking” really mean? For Pierre Vilar, it meant bearing in mind the diverse meanings that underlie certain words (for example the names of countries or abstractions) and placing them in historical and geographical context. The questions “Where?” and “When?” have to be answered if we are to date and contextualise events. This is a vital first step before examining the past and investigating how such events occurred.

Failure to think historically makes it all too easy to fall into the trap of seeing things *as if they were the same as in the distant past*. Use of formulations such as “Spain is one thing, France quite another” are symptomatic of this misperception. Those who look at events only in the light of what happened later also fail to think historically. As Vilar put it:

Thinking about an event only from the standpoint of what subsequently happened is fraught with perils. It is all too easy to come up with statements like “Germany was predisposed to Protestantism, and Spain to Catholicism”.

In this respect, Pierre Vilar did not claim to have stumbled upon the philosopher’s stone, for he added:

I do not believe that anyone would deny that the 16<sup>th</sup> Century was different from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, or that Italy is different from England. The problem, warned Vilar, is that such things are not properly taken into account.

When Vilar insisted on the need for “historical thinking”, he was not speaking of the works of historians but rather of what was said of the historian’s craft and, in particular, of the kind of statements that crop up in newspapers, books, and on the radio and television. The habit of “historical thinking” could only be acquired through suitable education. This reflection led Pierre Vilar to state that “Historical thinking simply involves giving everyone the general schooling in history they deserve”. He added “but such essential training of the human spirit may prove too dangerous for the powers that be and entrenched ideologies”.

“Historical thinking” thus encapsulates not only the thought and concerns of historians but also of a thinking men like Pierre Vilar. That is why we have taken his expression as the title for this inaugural lesson. Furthermore, the subject of history teaching has been very much in the news for some time now. The members of the present Spanish government believe, like Vilar, that teaching history is important. If they did not think so, they would not spend so much time talking about reforming it. However, the proposals currently being made by the central government in Madrid have nothing in common with the ideas defended by Vilar. Indeed, the kind of history teacher envisaged by Minister Pilar del Castillo is the antithesis of the one exemplified by Pierre Vilar.





**T retallada (Cut-out T)**, Antoni Tàpies (2005) paint, pencil and collage on paper 49 x 49,5 cm |

**Both concepts of history and historians have co-existed for years.** In fact, these two concepts are not only applicable to history's role but also to that of the humanities in society. In 1988, the Italian historian Marina Cendronio asked Pierre Vilar about this point in an interview. Her question was: "Do you think that historians have played an important role in the development of the modern world? Do you think that we can perform this role in contemporary society?"

In his reply, Vilar began by mentioning some 19<sup>th</sup> Century French historians. One of them —Michelet— had, according to Vilar: “condensed the memory of France by stating that the country was a person, and had thus taken part in constructing what is considered to be the French nation by stressing its unity and indivisibility”. The influence of such historians was undeniable but Vilar did not consider them to be *scientific historians*. With regard to the scientific approach to history (i.e. historical reasoning), Vilar stated that:

I believe that history could have a positive effect if the notion and vision of the discipline were properly conceived and commonly adopted. I do not believe in Valéry’s formulation of history as the worst of all possible worlds. But I have to say Valéry was right if we think of Germany at the end of Hitler’s Third Reich or France at the end of the Third Republic, and the perils those regimes represented. In other words, history has its dangers and has sometimes exercised a negative influence. The contrary idea is that historical reasoning might exercise a positive influence. For my part, I fear that history has never exercised any influence whatsoever.

Here, it is worth briefly noting what Valéry’s formulation was. Vilar was referring to the bitter words written by Valéry (a poet) on History at the beginning of the 1930s. Hence the allusion to Germany and France during the inter-war period. Paul Valéry wrote:

History is the worst poison ever dreamt up by the mind of Man. Consider its properties. It induces sleep, makes entire peoples drunk with its fumes, creates false memories, exaggerates one’s reactions, opens up old wounds, disturbs one’s peace of mind, drives the great mad with dreams of grandeur or fears of persecution, and generally embitters nations, making them vain, haughty and insufferable.

History, continued Valéry, justifies anything. It does not teach anything because it covers and provides examples of everything under the sun. How many books are published with titles on the lines of: “The Lessons of X” or “What Can Be Learnt from Y”. Nothing could be more absurd than reading about past events in these books, which make solemn predictions about the future. In the current state of the world, listening to History’s siren song is the greatest peril imaginable.

Valéry’s text, published in 1931, made a big impact on French intellectual circles, particularly on a generation of historians still aghast at the First World War and its aftermath. It is therefore hardly surprising that the young Pierre Vilar, then a secondary school teacher, spoke on this theme at his Prize Day speech at the Lycée de Sens, near Paris. The date was the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1937. The Spanish Civil War was raging and promised to be a lengthy affair. Vilar felt that a World War was imminent. Speaking before a hall full of students and their parents, he alluded to Valéry’s accusations. He asked whether Valéry had looked at the right sources for defining history. In any case, argued Vilar, Valéry was obviously not referring to the history written by Pirenne, another innovator in the historiographical field at the time. Most contemporaries had not read Pirenne and, moreover, “true historians were seldom admitted to the Académie Française”. However, Vilar said that he was optimistic on this score, given that “such historians are the ones who inspire our textbooks and our courses”. In other words, the future would bear the fruit of these new ideas.

It was also an allusion to the importance of textbooks. Some parents’ associations had demanded that “all history exams be reduced to reciting a list of dates learnt by rote”. At the end of his speech, Pierre Vilar proposed another kind of history that taught people

to think. He argued that *taught history* was the only way of combatting the kind of history hawked by the media:

... the Press, cinemas and political speeches are vulgar show. Our newspapers fight tooth and nail for historical novels and Hollywood spends millions to recreate the atmosphere of the Roman Empire.

In many cases, historians confined themselves to providing dates and details for news stories. But on other occasions, warned Vilar,

Historians may be called upon to prove the purity and wisdom of a Master Race or be used to argue for the restoration of an empire. Let us be in no doubt here, history has not fed this exorbitant pride. Rather, such arrogance has distorted history.

The young Pierre Vilar's recipe for counteracting such a baleful influence was clear:

This peril can only be averted by fostering true history, modestly and patiently researched and written in universities and carefully taught in schools, which so far have either failed to live up to this role or have been deliberately hindered from doing so.

Vilar's speech ended with a piece of advice for those students who saw History as just something to be learnt by rote: "The aim of History is to make you think about some of the gravest problems afflicting the world".

This leap back half a century to 1937 reveals several things. First, the present problems regarding the teaching of history are nothing new. Second, Pierre Vilar was concerned with this problem even as a young man and his interests in history and education were closely interwoven. From this point of view, the concept of "historical thinking" is the best antidote to what Valéry termed the "worst poison dreamt up by the mind of Man".

Let us now return to the late 1980s, when Pierre Vilar decided to use the concept of "historical thinking" to summarize some of his interests and concerns. It was in 1987 that journalists (i.e. non-historians) had lighted on the story of the trial of Klaus Barbie, an SS officer guilty of war crimes in occupied Lyons. *Le Monde* newspaper published a dossier titled "A Historic Trial". Barbie was then 75 and his crimes had been committed in 1942, when he was 30. He was to be tried by jury under French Civil Law. Barbie was a notorious Nazi torturer. Pierre Vilar did not protest against the trial but rather against the lurid headlines. After all, why was the trial so historic? Vilar was forthright—it was not trials that clarified history but rather history which would help clarify this particular trial. Stating that Barbie was a Nazi shed no new light on the nature of Nazism. History consisted in discovering why men like Barbie had wielded power or were grist to Hitler's war machine.

Vilar argued that comparing the Barbie trial to history simply made people think that "History is about establishing facts and judging individuals". In his view, it made the "man in the street take a sentimental, moralistic view of History". Pierre Vilar believed that historical knowledge was different in nature and consisted of "trying to understand social phenomena and how they affect the way events unfold".

**In making these reflections**, Vilar linked his proposals for historical reasoning, which he had developed in the 1970s during his courses at the Sorbonne. He urged his students

to spurn everyday phrases on the lines of “History teaches us that...” or “History will judge...”. Vilar argued that the first kind of formulation either invokes tradition or is based on the false premise that History is self-evident. Such bald statements, according to Vilar, confuse collective moral judgement with the prevailing historiographical discourse.

All of these reflections made Pierre Vilar a man of his times who pondered on the contemporary world. This was a hallmark of his intellectual development from the outset. His keen interest in geography was also evident. Indeed, in the 1920s, he said that geographical research was the best way of approaching the great contemporary problems regarding *economy, colonisation, and distant civilizations*. In 1927, Vilar began studying geography at the Barcelona Industrial school. In the process, Pierre Vilar became an observant historian of Catalonia. He recounted the story many times, notably when he received the Catalan Government’s Ramon Llull Prize:

It is said here, with fond exaggeration, that Catalonia owes me something. I would never be so presumptuous. For my part, I am fully aware of what I owe to Catalonia.

First, I owe my vocation as a historian. It is not that I have any disdain for my first career as a geographer —far from it. But Geography is either eternal or contemporary. I quickly realised that the 20<sup>th</sup> century could be explained by the events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and so on, right back to the Romans and pre-history. That is why I became a historian.

Second, I am indebted to Catalonia because it was she that first made me aware of a historical problem that has persisted over the centuries, namely the dialectic between territorial groups and social classes.

Vilar explained that when he arrived in Catalonia for the first time in 1927, like all young Frenchmen of his intellectual generation —Satre, Nizan, Lévi-Strauss— he was profoundly anti-militarist, anti-nationalist, and even a little unpatriotic. It was, he said, “a reaction against the patriotic hysteria of the 1914-18 war and the evident failure of the Treaty of Versailles. However, Catalan patriotism and nationalism during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship represented the defence of freedom and progressive thought and could thus be seen in a very different light”.

Many of Vilar’s fellow-countrymen from the same generation also left France. The most famous ones, Aron and Sartre, travelled to Germany, which was then in turmoil. That journey influenced their intellectual development in a way that was quite different from the impact Catalonia had on Vilar. The French historian confessed that his relationship with Catalonia was “a love affair”. The comment underlined how deeply Vilar was influenced by the country and the ties of friendship that Vilar and his wife established in Catalonia.

Even so, Vilar lived only a short time in Catalonia. His various stays in the country only added up to six years. Part of the reason for this was his expulsion from Spain in 1948. This evidently hampered his research on Catalonia and the reason Vilar persisted after 1948 was that Catalonia’s complex history raised new historiographical issues that he was eager to pursue in greater depth. In this respect, Catalonia’s history proved an attractive and absorbing subject for research.

That is why Vilar wrote so extensively on Catalonia, presenting many papers on it at international congresses. His contact with Catalonia had raised his historical awareness,



which led him to begin the first volume of his four-volume thesis with the following words:

(Because the historian forms part of history) it is important that he begins by revealing both his approach to research and the circumstances surrounding it.

It was thus that he began his work *Cataluny dins l'Espanya moderna* (Catalonia Within Modern Spain), which contains lengthy reflections on his own intellectual development. That reflection provides the key to the methodology employed in the book: "I know that this work would have been different had I not been interested in revealing the anatomy of societies and spurning facile theoretical approaches and the ideas in vogue".

His desire to reveal a society's anatomy is consistent with the notion of an all-embracing History. This was the concept advocated by many historians the 1930s. The so-called "Annals School" of thought admitted various approaches. For Vilar, above all it meant reflecting on the historical development of a society, the elements making it up, its social inequalities and contradictions, and avoiding unilateral explanations. His observation of Catalonia's complex society (in which class divisions combined with national rifts) only served to strengthen Vilar's historical orientation. It took him a long time to write his history, involving many hours of archive research and lonely meditation. That is why his work was incompatible with "facile theoretical approaches and the ideas in vogue". In Vilar's words, such ideas often conceal "the desire for a single, facile explanation" and "historians' frequently resort to unhistorical ways of thinking".

Pierre Vilar was strongly aware of the intellectual fashions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and saw them as a sign of the times. "All historiographical approaches make sense", he wrote. It is therefore not surprising that he successively argued the case against Malthusianism, Monetarism, the naive quantitative approaches taken by many Economic Historians, Althusser's pseudo-Marxism, and Political History à la Raymond Aron. As he himself admitted, this won him many foes.

Pierre Vilar's dogged perseverance in seeking dialogue was frustrated by the indifference or hostility of others. It was surprising for a Catalan historian to see Vilar's isolation at many academic congresses in France.

His voice could be likened to that of a prophet in the wilderness. The deafening silence that greeted his words was largely due to the increasing specialization of historical knowledge in academe, which thus tended to reject Vilar's aspiration for an all-embracing history. Vilar not only pursued this "dream" (a term he himself used on one occasion) to the end, he was also swift to acknowledge his debt to Marx. In Vilar's words, "Marx was the first scholar to propose a general theory of societies in motion". That is why he considered a Marxist approach as one that facilitated historical analysis and without which it was difficult to appreciate the weaknesses and anti-scientific foundations of many of the Social Science postulates considered "neutral" in academic circles.

**“For Vilar, Catalonia’s history proved an attractive and absorbing subject for research”**

Such an approach was anathema in French intellectual circles in the 80s and 90s. In 1989 (coinciding with the bicentenary of the French Revolution), Pierre Vilar sought to explain

why Ernest Labrousse’s contribution to the history of the French Revolution was being so studiously ignored. Vilar wrote: “This wall of silence is intended to misinform the public”. Faced by the rift with many of his disciples, Vilar wondered whether historians of his generation had really done such a bad job. He also asked himself whether the new academic establishment really believed that the work of the historians of his generation had been merely a fad.

This silence in French academe contrasts sharply with the recognition accorded Vilar in Catalonia and Spain. It is not as if the crises of Marxism and of the paradigm of an all-embracing vision of history had not affected intellectual and historiographical circles here. Yet it is precisely Vilar’s works and those of his disciples which make it difficult to write off the whole Marxist legacy. *Catalunya dins l’Espanya Moderna* is, forty years after its first publication, still the most cited book in History PhD theses at Catalan universities.

**In order to understand Pierre Vilar’s works**, we should not separate his books on theory and his teachings from his historical research. To do so would be to fail to capitalize on the body of his work. Vilar’s need to describe with passion and in detail how he came to write *Catalunya dins l’Espanya Moderna* reveals a historian whose methodology inextricably links empirical research and theoretical reflection. Quite simply, we cannot prize his empirical work without also setting great store by the theoretical effort underlying every line and statistic. The opposite is also true. For Pierre Vilar, “History constantly involves linking the case to the theory, and theory to the case”.

There is a path to follow: reasoned history. The distinction (so often made by Vilar) between a *conviction historian* and a *thinking historian* is a fascinating one. It is not a question of thinking in class or national terms but rather of thinking about such subjects. The reasoned history proposed by Vilar is a fruitful exchange between *observation* and *reasoning*.

This history has to be reconstructed through thought and conveyed through words. On countless occasions, Vilar noted the pitfalls posed by terminology. Few authors made such liberal use of inverted commas and italics. It was his way of avoiding the traps set by fixed ideas and the dominant ideology, or of having the wrong meanings read into one’s words, or of falling prey to fashion, routine, and intellectual laziness.

Once again, it was a trait he exhibited throughout his career. In 1937, during his speech at the Lycée de Sens, he warned:

Today we are at the mercy of words. Races, States, nations, countries, tyrannies, monarchies, democracies —in fact, a whole host of words ending in *-ions*, *-ies*, *-isms*, *-cracies*, and so on. We grow up using the words honestly enough, and later smiling at the mistakes made by others or frowning at their deliberate misuse by the powers that be for their own nefarious ends. However, it is only through History that these words acquire real meaning, which probably changes over time. Such changes introduce nuances and define things and words that go to the root of historical research.

Vilar never abandoned this kind of research. In 1991, he lost his sight. This prevented him from completing a book that was going to be published in five languages. The provocative working title he gave the work was: *País, poble, pàtria, nació, estat, imperi, potència... quin vocabulari per a una Europa?* (Country, People, Nation, State, Empire,

Power... What kind of terminology should we choose for Europe?). Vilar had mused on these words for decades. The title reveals both the scholar's research interest in Catalonia and his concern for Europe's present.

Insisting on the importance of terminology, Vilar argued the need for History without visions, without dogmas, and free of pitfalls. In other words, he advocated unremitting effort. But then such is the labour of the scientific historian. It cannot be otherwise given that *the historian forms part of History*. He strove through the same unremitting labour to understand daily life. His conversations, readings and reflections constantly nurtured his thinking as a historian. It was part of his vision, of which he said "We have not invented the concept of an all-embracing History, we experience it through our lives".

To understand Vilar, we need to understand his observational methods and his way of reasoning. His best disciples are not those who most cite his words or those who see his texts as easy-to-use recipes. What Vilar taught us above all is just how difficult it is to be a good historian, and the need to question documents constantly and discuss matters thoroughly.

We still have a great deal to learn from Vilar. Who today can possibly harbour any doubts regarding the important role he played in Catalan society? Recall Vilar's words in 1988, cited earlier: "I believe that history could have a positive effect if the notion and vision of the discipline were properly conceived and commonly adopted". After faulting Valéry's formulation, he added: "The contrary idea is that historical reasoning might exercise a positive influence. For my part, I fear that history has never exercised any influence whatsoever".

Despite his scepticism, Vilar himself offers a case worthy of analysis. His influence in Spain, and above all in Catalonia, was enormous. I have already said that he is the most cited author by historians here. In this context, one should recall that Vilar's work linked the historical tradition of Rafael Altamira with the printing press of Jaume Vicens Vives in the early days of the Franco dictatorship. But his work went far beyond the academic sphere. His book *Història d'Espanya* (The History of Spain) was the history book that became a best-seller. It is easy to recognize Vilar's influence in the majority of primary and secondary school textbooks. Traces can also be found in many works on local history, some of which fall into the hands of the general public in the most unlikely ways (for example, at village fêtes).

“Country, People, Nation, State, Empire, Power... What kind of terminology for Europe?”



The ease with which politicians cite his works is also remarkable. For many years, the former Mayor of Girona, the historian Joaquim Nadal, presented all four volumes of *Catalunya dins l’Espanya moderna* in Catalan to Felipe de Borbón during a visit made by the Prince to the city. The message on the flyleaf was “Read this if you want to get a better understanding of Catalonia”. Jordi Pujol, President of the Catalan Government, held Vilar in great esteem. This culminated in Vilar being awarded the Catalan Government Gold Medal in May 2000.

I particularly remember a homage to Vilar, held in Paris in 1992. Two of his most renowned disciples —Josep Fontana and Ernest Lluch— attended the event. The historian Josep Fontana remarked on the impact Pierre Vilar’s works had had in Catalonia, noting that their contribution to fostering the country’s national awareness. The publication of Vilar’s works, argued Fontana, soon meant that the slogan “Catalonia is a Nation” could be uttered without carrying racial connotations. Ernest Lluch noted that Catalans and Spaniards had learnt a great deal about Spain from reading Vilar’s *Historia d’Espanya*, which was banned by the regime. Lluch’s and Fontana’s speeches carried the same message: Vilar’s work showed that the scholarly rigour of a historian could exercise a positive, long-lasting influence on society as a whole.

It is also a tribute to Vilar’s influence that the University of Girona dedicated the inaugural lesson for the 2003-2004 academic year to him. In today’s intellectual context of what some have called “monolithic thought”, and of the so-called “crisis in the humanities” in the university world, historical thought runs the risk of being pushed to the sidelines. Such developments make Valéry’s indictment more relevant than ever. Hence the importance and validity of Pierre Vilar’s legacy and the struggle in which he was engaged ||

Ferran Sáez Mateu

# When identity becomes an alibi

## *Huntington seen from Catalonia*

**I. The first issue of the journal IDEES (January-March 1999) contained an article whose title I found particularly well chosen: “The archipelago of identity”. On the cover of that first issue was a black and white photograph by Toni Vidal: a square, rudimentary country house, lodged on a desolate hill of rugged stone, with scarce signs of vegetation.**

It is the image of the human being struggling against the harshness of nature, remaking the world, constructing it to fulfil his needs, fashioning it according to certain specific beliefs and values. That country house is, in the primitive sense of the word, culture. With a group of such buildings and a few common rules for those who inhabit them, the result would be, also in the primitive sense of the word, a civilization. The Latin *civitas*, the Greek *polis*, the city as it is understood in the Western World —as something more than an agglomeration of dwelling places— shapes the beginning of all our collective identities.

From our shared Western perspective, identity is both a delimitation and an opening: we feel we participate in certain specific collective traits, but this *delimitation* is not equivalent to a self imposed *limitation*, on the contrary, it necessarily implies a slow opening to other realities (if not, we would still be cave dwellers gazing at the sparks of a fire). Catalonia, for example, is simply a collection of cultural sediments which have led to a specific identity. The Catalan language, our main identity trait, is simply a dialect of a language which appeared in the middle of the Italic peninsula, Latin. The most visible geographical feature of the city of Barcelona, the mountain of Montjuïc, owes its name to the burial site of the medieval Hebrew community. La Suda de Tortosa, one of the most

emblematic monuments of the southern lands of the principality, is an impressive Arab fortress. This list could be continued up to present day. Nevertheless, these substrata are not incompatible with a specific identity which is not the result of a simple addition of its parts, a shapeless, chaotic conglomerate, but of a very long process which has produced a definite and shared identity. In general, this is how identity is understood in Europe: our own historical reality moves us prudently away from ingenuous essentialisms, although we must remember that these wreaked havoc in the thirties and that they unfortunately revive periodically.

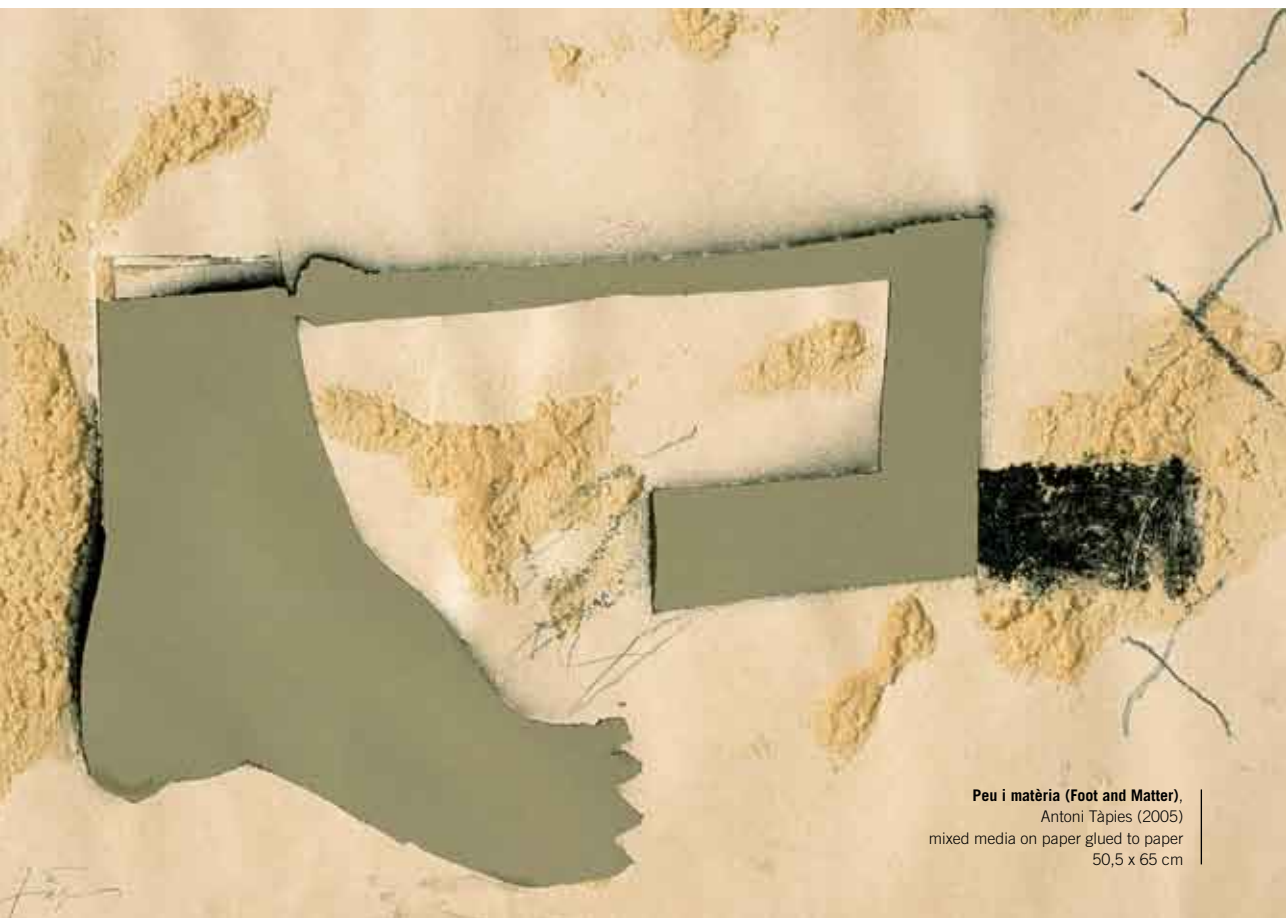
From other more recent cultural or national realities, however, identity can be lived in quite a different way, and often a more problematic one. The United States is a very recent national and cultural entity. Of course, it can be argued that Germany and Italy are even more recent as States, but this objection does not correspond to reality: Petrarch or Dante, Luther or Bach, lived long before the respective unifications of Italy and Germany, but it is obvious that Italians and Germans consider them inseparable from their culture and, in short, from their collective identity. None of this can be applied to the United States. Furthermore, the group of small kingdoms and principalities which gave place to these two national realities sink their territorial roots into remote, prehistoric ages. This cannot be said of the United States either. Thirdly and finally, the aim, the *telos*, which gave place to the majority of European cultures, is totally diffuse, vague and random: there is no point in looking for —shall we say— “a common foundational motive” which embraces the whole community. The United States, however, has a clear and defined founding motive, related mainly to the religious persecutions that took place in England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (it is worth mentioning that the sympathy and solidarity shown towards the state of Israel comes more from this conscience than from the disproportionate weight of the American Jewish lobby). The first colonies of the Eastern coast shared this common *telos*, chronologically very specific and marked and which is still present in the collective memory.

The three differences we have just pointed out form, inevitably, two opposed ways of understanding national and cultural identity. The United States and Europe have undoubtedly many things in common but, as far as national and cultural identity is concerned, they seem condemned to a mutual lack of understanding. A striking example is that in the United States it is totally acceptable for Catholic cathedrals, Protestant churches, synagogues, Masonic lodges etc. to display the American flag. In Europe, this combination of identity symbols generates disconcert or even intense distrust. This, of course, is only an anecdote, but a very meaningful one.

II. We believe this long introduction indispensable for an accurate contextualization of the latest work by the controversial American essayist Samuel P. Huntington. *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, is a book that from the collective way of thinking of the United States —not necessarily conservative, or affiliated to the increasingly radical ideas of the Republican Party— might seem almost harmless. Apart from certain heated references to the issue of Mexican immigration and also certain radical evaluations of the alleged social disintegration that took place in the sixties, the book adheres perfectly to the main standardised ideas of the average North American (but

evidently, not to all of them). However, in Europe, Huntington's latest book might cause astonishment and, on occasions, indignation. Returning to the example with which we closed the first section of the article, the ease with which religious feeling is juxtaposed to the national American identity takes the average European reader back to times he considered superseded. This could explain why the contents of the interviews granted by the author of the article "The Clash of Civilizations?" to the American media are perceptively different from those published in Europe. For example, the interview that appeared in the newspaper *El País* in June 2004 had very little to do —especially in its tone— with the real contents of his latest book.

According to Huntington, the United States is not the result of the juxtaposition of a collection of heterogeneous cultural sediments —the famous melting pot— but have just one identity root: the Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture introduced by the first settlers during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This culture is more than just the English language, the different Lutheran based confessions, the way law is understood, etc. In fact, according to Huntington, the American identity is a set of shared beliefs stemming from the confluence of the axes just mentioned above. It is about the American *creed*, the one that defends both individualism and equal rights; the one that backs the initiatives of civil society rather than basing the country on a state that runs the citizens' lives; the one that believes in work; the one that places religion —whichever it may be— in a very important place in people's lives and in their communities. In this sense the



**Peu i matèria (Foot and Matter),**  
Antoni Tàpies (2005)  
mixed media on paper glued to paper  
50,5 x 65 cm

United States is not only a country but a certain way of understanding the world. This is Americanism. Huntington states that this is a specific phenomenon: there is no other ideology which could seriously be named Frenchism, Italianism, etc. Huntington is mistaken on this point: A thing called “Catalonialism” exists, having many points in common with Americanism, but also with many insurmountable differences. This relationship will be examined more deeply further on. But before that, a question must be asked to be able to follow Huntington’s reasoning: why does he deny the —apparently obvious— existence of the American melting pot? The answer is simple: Huntington draws a specific dividing line between the first settlers (who founded the nation) and the immigrants (who *only* helped it to become what it is now: the most powerful country in the world). The Catholic Irish, the Chinese, the Jews from Central Europe, the Italians, the Mexicans, etc., did not arrive, according to Huntington, to a mere territory, but to an already existing nation, with a refined and recognizable cultural identity. This nation had specific political and administrative structures, with laws coming from the Anglo-Protestant tradition, with a language and its own set of images (the one reflected in John Ford’s westerns, for instance). In general these immigrants integrated —albeit at different speeds and in different historical contexts— in the founders’ culture. They added their little contribution to American culture, they *complemented* it, but they did not *create* it. This distinction between the first settlers and the immigrants is therefore decisive to be able to understand the rest. In a way, it is Huntington’s main argument —perhaps the only one— against the possible translations of multiculturalism.

**III.** In the labyrinth of national and cultural identities two different crises have occurred; as they were almost simultaneous there is a possibility of confusion. The first is a global crisis which was almost inevitable. The formidable advances in communication and information technology —from television in the sixties to the Internet in the nineties— have caused, according to Huntington, a redefinition, or even a fading out of the so-called “traditional” identities. This happens everywhere, even in remote corners of the world. There is, however, a second, more specific crisis, which has affected some places more than others. We are talking about, in the words of Francis Fukuyama, the “Great Disruption” of the sixties. Huntington claims that up until the sixties the American national and cultural identity was more or less that of the first settlers who founded the country. It was guided by patriotism together with strong religious feelings and an inflexible work ethic. Most Americans considered themselves firstly Americans and, secondly, in a subsidiary way, claimed their family origin, their gender, their aesthetic tastes and other such things. Everything changed meaning in the sixties. The Afro-American movements fighting for civil rights, for instance, fulfilled a most important task, but also consolidated an identity which, according to Huntington, up to that moment had only had a reactive and vicarious existence. The same can be said about the feminist movements, the gay liberation movements, etc. Which defining features did that forgotten identity contain?

I would say that from a Catalonian perspective and also a European one in general, Huntington’s views could disconcert. “Religion has been and still is a central, perhaps *the* central, element of American identity. America was founded in large part for religious reasons, and religious movements have shaped its evolution for almost four centuries. By



every indicator, Americans are far more religious than the people of other industrialized countries. Overwhelming majorities of white Americans, of black Americans, and of Hispanic Americans are Christian. In a world in which culture and particularly religion shape the allegiances, the alliances, and the antagonisms of people on every continent, Americans could again find their national identity and their national purposes in their culture and religion”<sup>1</sup>.

It seems obvious that in this fragment a great hyperbole and an omission converge. The former refers to the notion of “Christianism”, which Huntington uses in a biased and, above all, accommodating way: when it suits his purpose he makes a clear-cut distinction between Catholics and Protestants, but when not convenient he leaves it to one side as now. As far as the Americans of Jewish origin are concerned, they are fully “Western” when convenient —despite the fact that they do not belong, at least by name, to a Christian culture— and when not convenient, they are not. With respect to the omission mentioned above, Huntington’s bias is even more serious: the enormous racial tension perceptible in the United States is not mentioned anywhere. Huntington considers it overcome since the sixties (!?), which is quite untrue. For this reason there is a basis to be reasonably suspicious that the notion of identity proposed is a mere alibi to legitimize the *wasp* hegemony from a new perspective which does not refer to racial categories, but takes them for granted.

Seen from Catalonia, and with a Catalonian perspective, this discourse proves disquieting. With the exception of certain 19<sup>th</sup> century writers, a person’s religion is a private matter which does not make that person any more or less Catalonian. Neither does a person’s race condition the fact that he is or is not Catalonian. The principal sign of identity is the Catalonian language, to be more exact: the *public* use of the language, the positive attitude towards a language which, for political and historic reasons, is at a disadvantage with respect to Spanish. All this has led to a civic project shared by the immense majority of Catalonians, irrespective of their origins. In this sense Catalonianism and Americanism (in Huntington’s version at least) are ways of understanding identity with little or no connection at all ■

■ <sup>1</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Who are we? The challenges to America’s National Identity*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2004, p 20.

**Sebastià Serrano**

# Humanisation process and language

**One of the star themes over the last few years has been the construction of the mind as the long-term product of brain activity, and the role played by language in this process. If we go back six million years, our direct ancestors would not have been very different from modern-day chimpanzees with regard to communication skills and social organisation.**

Our distant ancestors set out on a path that was to involve irreversible biological changes linked to cognitive activity and behaviour. These changes involved incredible feedback processes, finally turning us into sapient beings —*Homo Sapiens*. We have termed this process humanisation and in order to reconstruct it we have often had to proceed blindly, given that there are so few traces remaining of the first three quarters of the story and the difficulty of interpreting what little we know.

The point of departure for this process was bipedal locomotion, driven by great changes in the ecosystems in which our ancestors lived. Our arboreal primate ancestors originally lived in densely wooded areas where they had access to abundant foliage and fruit. However, within several thousand generations, environmental changes forced them to live on the hostile savannah, where social relationships and ingenuity were to prove vital to their survival. By walking upright, our primate ancestors began biological changes that, combined with cognition and cultural changes, were to turn them into the only hominid species some thirty thousand years ago. It was the species to which we belong. Let us reflect on the possible consequences of these changes in the process of humanisation, in which language played a decisive role.

We know very little of the first third of hominids' six million years of evolution. What we do know is that they walked upright and that indications of changes —in comparison with chimpanzees— are to be found in fossilised jaw bones. Here, there are signs of a gradual reduction in the size of canine teeth, which would seem to indicate that ecological changes had an impact on the diet of the first *Ardipithecus* and later, *Australopithecus*.

However, we do not know what changes took place in their social organisation or their forms of communication. Nevertheless, there are many signs dating from 3-4 million years ago that *Australopithecus* had adapted very well to life on the savannah. We have almost complete skulls of *Australopithecus*, and while nothing of the soft tissues has been preserved, analysis of the endocranial slabs by Tobias and Holloway (among others) suggests a certain distinction between those areas of the brain that correspond to the Broca and Wernicke areas in *Homo Sapiens*. In our species, these areas are directly related to language and a certain degree of cerebral lateralisation.

What we can be certain about is that there was a continual reduction in the size of canine teeth, even though this was an unusual adaptation among primates. Most of the large primates have big multi-purpose canine teeth which serve to threaten and fight competitors and/or provide defence against predators. Thus, such teeth serve as both sword and shield yet much of the humanisation process involved shrinkage of a feature typifying the large primates. The explanation for this is long and involved but some of the details are relevant to this discourse. One can also conjecture on whether the reduction in the size of canine teeth was related to other changes in the social life of the group, such as a lessening of competition and strife among males seeking access to females. However, it seems more likely that our ancestors' increasing use of their hands to perform tasks and to shape tools played a key role in the humanisation process. Indeed, resort to fists or even the use of the first wooden weapons may have played a part and one can even speculate on the use of hands to seal agreements, which in turn would require some kind of symbolic communication. Competition between *Australopithecus* males would have been particularly strong, if we consider the pronounced sexual dimorphism found in this species.

This leads us to interpret the reduction in canine teeth in relation to changes in diet rather than to changes in forms of competition and ways of fighting. Such an interpretation would be consistent with the development of increasingly robust, enamelled teeth suitable for crushing food. This represents an adaptation for chewing fibres or tougher food that required thorough mastication before it could be swallowed. In other words, large incisors and large molars are contradictory since such a combination hampers jaw movement. In contrast, chewing teeth and molars confer greater jaw mobility and enable the development of faces, which in turn permit facial expression. Such ability to express emotions facilitated the first non-verbal communication, and later verbal communication. Increasingly multi-purpose teeth, and a more mobile mouth (which in turn helped reconfigure the face) provided necessary (though possibly still insufficient) elements for making communication more symbolic. To this we can add indications (although they are no more than that) of increases in brain mass and brain reconfiguration, which would allow the transition to the Stone Age.

In this context, I should like to remark on changes in the physical configuration of both males and females (particularly the latter) that were to affect the deployment of various communication skills, ways of attracting the opposite sex, and the social order. These changes played an important role in the emergence of *Homo Sapiens*. One of these was the regression of hair and was linked to the use of sweat glands to cool the body. This development resulted in a smoother, more tactile skin and a more expressive body. Another change was the disappearance of female "heats", along with external

signs of ovulation. This change would forever divide these females from those of other mammalian species (which to this day continue to make great display of their fertility as a sign of identity). Moreover, these female ancestors exhibited large pendulous breasts through most of their lives, regardless of their lactation periods. We believe these body changes were linked to biochemical changes facilitating communication and the emotions required by changes in the social order, which in turn required increasingly sophisticated communication systems.

**The process of humanisation not only involved** bipedal locomotion but also remodelling of the mandibular system and, to a certain extent, of the body in general. These changes facilitated an increase in the brain's size and complexity. In this last regard, no substantial changes are found before 2.5 m years B.C. Paleo-anthropological finds reveal brain casings exhibiting non-allometric growth—in other words, an increase in brain weight that is disproportional to changes in body weight. The increase in brain size was dramatic, rising by over 50% and producing brain sizes in the 600-800 cm<sup>3</sup> range. This should be compared with the brain of *Australopithecus*, which ranged between 400 cm<sup>3</sup> and 500 cm<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, the cave in which the later skulls and bones were found included well-crafted tools. This is why the new species was dubbed *Homo Habilis*. For the first time we can appreciate a technology—termed M1 or Olduvai by the experts—which involves a manufacturing process and uses requiring complex cognitive activity. The first finds were made at Olduvai Gorge and, a little later, at Hadar—almost next door to where the now famous “Lucy” lived almost a million years earlier. What happened in the aeons between Lucy and the appearance of the first specimens of *Homo Habilis*? How did this dramatic increase in brain size occur?

Perhaps part of the answer lies in the endocrine moulds taken from the skulls of *Homo Habilis*. It seems that the primary cerebral areas in the first *Homo* species remained the same with respect to *Australopithecus* and indeed chimpanzees, with possibly a very slight reduction in the primary visual area. By comparison, there was considerable growth in the pareto-frontal and pre-frontal lobes. This means that a kind of selection process operated on the neo-cortical expansion, particularly in those areas involving association, rather than simply an overall increase in brain size. We now know that associations underlie complex cognitive functions and the behaviour patterns to which they are related. Furthermore, the pre-frontal lobes are directly linked to memory of work—information retrieval depends on the context and the behaviour to be followed—and with executive functions such as planning, initiation or inhibition of communication activity, the ability to put things in sequence, mental flexibility, creativity and imagination. It is therefore hardly suprising that the pre-frontal lobes have been considered as the directing brain, the executive brain, indeed as the brain making civilisation possible.

At this juncture, the key question is what drove the rapid growth of the pre-frontal lobes and association areas of the brain that led to hominid evolution and the emergence of a new species—*Homo Habilis*. Our hypothesis links the development of the pre-frontal areas of the brain with the use of signs based on some kind of symbolic language. This would explain the dramatic non-allometric growth in those parts of the brain linked to planning, programming activities, attention, concentration, and learning. In this respect, it is highly likely that the expansion of the pre-frontal lobe was not the cause



Perfil i T (T and Profile),  
Antoni Tàpies (2005)  
paint on paper, 50 x 64 cm

of a proto-language but rather its consequence. This would have occurred in Lucy's kin or in the related *Australopithecus*, with cognitive abilities superior to those exhibited by modern chimpanzees. As a result, the species had passed a threshold into symbolism, thus beginning an incredible feedback process that led to growth in the pre-frontal lobe, which in turn facilitated better articulation, greater auditory discrimination, flexibility

**“The new social order would have required a symbolic repertoire, which should be considered as a proto-language”**

and sequencing. This would then have further driven growth of the pre-frontal lobe, the parieto-temporal areas and neighbouring limbic areas involved in making associations.

Earlier, we referred to the interaction of ecological, dietary, and social factors in producing the biological changes characterising the

humanisation process. In no case is this interaction so clear-cut as that concerning the brain's enlargement. We know that hominids adapted to life on the savannah and that meat formed part of *Australopithecus*' diet. In the beginning, meat was probably just another foodstuff but, once its advantages became apparent, it is likely that they sought it at every opportunity. Meat not only provides a rich source of proteins and scarce minerals—including phosphorus, which is so important for brain functions—it also supplies a lot of calories. For example, 100 grams of meat provides 200 calories, while the same quantity of fruit only provides a little over 60 calories. A 100 grams of grass only provides between 10 and 20 calories. A large brain requires a calory-rich diet.

Accordingly, these hominids needed to devise strategies for finding meat, hence the need for altruism and mutual help that would have required pacts and compromises between males and females. Thus giving females and children access to meat would have helped the males guarantee perpetuation of their family line. All in all, such considerations would have produced a social structure constituting one of the first hominid societies, and which differed greatly from chimpanzee society. The new social order would have required a symbolic repertoire, which should be considered as a proto-language. The repertoire would have been very limited in the beginning and would have taken a great effort to learn. The slow expansion of this repertoire and the natural selection fostering this process would have tilted the balance in favour of brain growth in general, and growth of those areas linking biology and the emerging culture in particular.

The first tools that have been found date back 2.5 m years. They are a good example of how those hominids, which we label *Homo*, had occupied the ecological niche of meat-eaters. This must have happened quite some time after social negotiation of reproductive activities allowed the first family planning, changing the social order order in the process. This revolution is evidence of synergy between biological and social changes, which in turn helped create a new brain architecture that was increasingly dedicated to language functions. As a result, language developed from a limited, fairly inflexible repertoire to an increasingly powerful mental tool capable of representing the individual, the environment, and the world in general. Between 1.8 and 1.5 m years ago, the brain

grew further, passing the 1,000 cm<sup>3</sup> barrier. This growth was entirely allometric, given that it accompanied a general increase in body size. The jawbone underwent considerable modification, and sexual dimorphism virtually disappeared. Man's tools became much more refined, making it reasonable to consider *Homo Ergaster*, who emerged 1.8 m years ago, as our real ancestor.

Around half a million years ago, there was a further increase in brain size, this time of a non-allometric nature. Once again, it affected the frontal lobes (i.e. the pre-frontal lobes and associated areas including neighboring limbic spaces). This development can be seen in *Homo Heidelbergensis*, of which the famous Skull 5 from Atapuerca (some 400,000 years old) is a good example. The brain is a modern one and what separates it from that of contemporary *Homo Sapiens* can probably be ascribed to culture. The pre-frontal brain had a plethora of connections and the synaptic area provided links to all the limbic zones. It is worth noting that the first increase in size of the pre-frontal lobes would have been linked to vocalisation and how this conveyed meaning. The process involved taming the voice —an essential prerequisite for weaving the rich tapestry of language. We believe that the vocalisations of primates (chimpanzees) are not controlled by the cerebral cortex but rather by older neural structures sited in the encephalic trunk and in the limbic system, and which are involved in expressing emotions.

This growth was also linked to a considerable increase in the limbic nuclei involved in creating pleasure sensations and friendly behaviour —amounting to an investment in sociability. The growth in the pre-frontal lobes was accompanied by increasing motivation, concentration, and learning. Meanwhile, the links between motor activity and memory became ever stronger. Throwing an object at a quarry required complex calculations to be made by the brain circuitry, which quite conceivably executed a common algorithm for this purpose and which permitted verbal communication. There are considerable parallels between the brain activity controlling the movements of hands, arms, the tongue and larynx. The last few years have seen hyoide bone finds at Atapuerca and Kebara. This anatomical element would have been necessary to fix the larynx in place and, together with the buccal cavity, satisfy all of the conditions needed to deploy language. Refinements in mental, social and emotional calculations facilitated the emergence of a syntax as a set of principles and procedures allowing organisation of lexical lists to form long chains of words that could be easily spoken and understood. It is even possible that this complete, elaborated language in use a quarter of a million years ago was a further selection factor in forging the final link in the chain —*Homo Sapiens* ■





# *focus*

“ Globalization and changing cultural identities ”

transfer

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01

**Manuel Castells**

# Globalisation and identity

## *A comparative perspective*

**Globalisation and the strengthening of various cultural identities (religious, national, ethnic, geographic, and gender, among others) have occurred over the last fifteen years. In my view, this is no coincidence but rather the product of a systemic relationship between the two phenomena.**

### 1. TWO SIMULTANEOUS PROCESSES

It is not immediately because the idea has taken root that globalisation requires a global, cosmopolitan culture. There are several variations on this theme. Some talk of unification and cultural homogenisation of the world and criticise the process. Others consider that globalisation will overcome local and historical identities, supercede some ideologies, and produce an undifferentiated universal human culture. I believe that both the quest for a new universal cultural to sweep away historical cultures is misguided, while fear that “Americanisation” will wipe out historically-based cultural identities is unfounded.

This vision of economic development and globalisation is really no more than an extension of the two great rationalist movements providing the cultural and ideological foundations of the contemporary world — Liberalism and Marxism. Both schools of thought are based on a negation of historical, religious, and ethnic construction of identity, and stress new ideals (the Citizen of the World or Soviet Man, respectively). Each of these models has its own traits but they both coincide in considering any other distinction as artificial. I emphasise this because at the moment this is the dominant ideology in our society and in Europe as a whole. It is the rationalist approach, in both its Liberal and Marxist guises. These ideologies consider identities as dangerous and, most likely, fundamentalist, whether they be religiously, nationally, or ethnically based. I believe this is an extremely important issue because it goes to the root of the problems of the modern world.

## 2. THE PERSISTENCE OF IDENTITIES

Let us now examine the reasons for the foregoing situation. It has been empirically demonstrated that culturally constructed identities are fundamental to the way people think about things. Evidence for this comes from various questionnaires administered in universities over a longish period of time. The main source of this data comes from the *World Values Survey*, the greatest impetus for which has come from Prof. Inglehart of the University of Michigan. For many years, he has demonstrated both the persistence and the transformation of these identities. In this respect, one should also take into account the data analysed by Prof. Norris of Harvard University. She used the data contained in the *World Values Survey* that compared identities at world, national, and regional levels, and with Mankind's cosmopolitan identities in general.

With regard to data taken from the beginning and the end of the 1990s, Prof. Norris calculated that for the world as a whole, 13% of respondents primarily considered themselves as "citizens of the world", 38% put their Nation-State first, and the remainder (i.e. the majority) put local or regional identities first. One should note that the Basque Country and Catalonia appear in this database as regional identities. Moreover, a breakdown of world geographical zones reveals that the area where local and regional identities are strongest is Southern Europe (61%).

This reveals the need to begin with observations regarding the persistence of these identities. Nevertheless, one has to begin with more than just the combination of globalisation (i.e. processes producing power, wealth, and information on a worldwide scale) and identities drawing on unique cultural and local traits. In recent times, these two processes have led to a crisis in the Nation-State, which was invented as an institutional tool for managing societies and their problems.

However, the world is facing problems that cannot be managed within the national sphere. This creates a crisis of political representation in which the State fails to enshrine multiple sources of identity (not least because we live in a multicultural world). It is worth briefly looking at the trends before dealing with this complex issue in greater depth.

“These two processes have led to a crisis in the Nation-State, which was invented as an institutional tool for managing societies”

## 3. GLOBALISATION AS A STRUCTURAL PROCESS

First, it is worth recalling that globalisation is not an ideology but rather an objective process of structuring economy, societies, institutions, cultures, etc. One should also remember that *globalisation* does not mean a set of undifferentiated processes. For example, we speak of globalisation to refer to the kind of economy capable of operating in real time at the everyday level. However, one should note here that not all economies can be considered global in scope. The world economy operates in accordance with its central

functions, which span capital and financial markets. These financial markets are globally interdependent regardless of whether they operate in true market economies or in Capitalist ones. In both cases, capital is global in nature.

### 3.1. Economy, Science, Technology and Communication

At root, economy is global in nature. It is interdependent and global when it comes to world trade, which increasingly plays a decisive role in economies worldwide. It is also global with regard to the production of goods and services. However, while the economy's core is global, the rest is not. For example, most of the labour force is not global. Multinational companies and their ancillary networks only provide work for some two hundred million workers. This may seem a great many but in fact it is only a drop in the ocean compared with a world workforce of three thousand million workers. However, these two hundred million workers, employed in some fifty three thousand multinationals, make up 40% of the world GDP and two thirds of world trade. Therefore, what happens in this system of production shapes economies as a whole.

Science and technology, the basis of wealth creation and military power, and of States and countries, are global in scope and are articulated on a worldwide scale. Science and technology networks operate globally and are based on local nodes of varying size.

Communication is also basically global in nature. Financial and technological control of communications also operates on a world scale. Here, one should note that 50% of the world's audiovisual material and news is controlled by just seven communication groups. However, this does not necessarily mean that the culture of these media is a globalised one. What can be seen is a process of globalisation with regard to business and information management but with content tailored to local tastes. For example, Murdoch produces classic American series for us audiences, while Sky Channel in the UK broadcasts British series. Sky Channel in India broadcasts in Hindi for Northern India, and in Tamil in Madras, using local characters. Broadcasts in Southern China are in Cantonese, and the series are locally-based. By contrast, broadcasts in Northern China are in Mandarin and series employ different storylines. In other words, communication strategies are global in business terms but are tailored to specific cultures and identities for marketing reasons.





**Collage Blau (Blue Collage)**, Antoni Tàpies (2005) paint, pencil and collage on cardboard 50,5 x 67 cm |

**3.2. Global public goods** The concept of globalisation has gone hand in hand with the development of a set of international institutions that are playing an increasingly important role in dealing with world problems. The notion of global public goods requiring worldwide management is one that continues to gain ground. The environment is a case in point, despite the Bush Administration's refusal to accept overwhelming expert consensus on global warming. Human rights are also considered to be universal and fall under the aegis of the International Criminal Court. Likewise, health also has a global

dimension, as shown by the AIDS epidemic and SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), which reveal that disease is catching and that the wealthy have a vested interest in the health of the poor. The policies and workings of the United Nations also indicate that interdependence goes far beyond bilateral relationships between countries.

“This globalisation is both inclusive and exclusive. It includes everything that has monetary value and excludes everything else”

**3.3. Infrastructure and causes** Globalisation rests on a technological infrastructure. However, this infrastructure is not the cause of globalisation, which is driven by economic strategies, cultural developments and markets. Even so, it would not have happened without the economic infrastructure. In other words, capital has always been global but now thousands of millions of Euros can be shifted from one investment to another in a matter of seconds. Today's globalisation is quite different from that of yesteryear because it is based on ICT (Information and Communication Technology), which renders distances between countries irrelevant.

Moreover, this globalisation is both inclusive and exclusive. It includes everything that has monetary value and excludes everything else. Thus economic globalisation is selective by nature. This is why national governments and companies try to position themselves in the global network because exclusion from it means no growth, no economic development, and no wealth creation. Failure to attract capital and technological investment can make economic outcasts of whole countries or sectors of the population. Accordingly, it is not so much a question of a “North-South” divide but rather of those within the network opposing those outside it. Evidently, a much larger proportion of people in the “North” belong to the network compared to those in the “South”. Even so, there are groups of population in the South that belong to the network yet remain isolated from their host societies.

This kind of exclusion has led to public opinion questioning the benefits of globalisation in recent years. Great swathes of society have been left on the fringes by globalisation, while its beneficiaries have reaped vast rewards. One cannot see globalisation in black and white terms as either “good” or “bad”. It depends on one's criteria, who is being considered and the subject under consideration (for example, globalisation may be beneficial in economic terms but harmful in environmental ones). In any case, Nation-States are pushing ahead with globalisation in order to shape and benefit from

the process. It is simply untrue to say that multinationals are the only parties driving globalisation. Nation-States have taken an active role by de-regulating and furnishing the technological infrastructure supporting globalisation. Put another way, globalisation of capital and international trade does not just depend on technology or on corporate strategy. It also depends on Nation-States de-regulating activities, privatising, and doing away with frontier controls —which is precisely what they have done.

**3.4. The crisis in political representation** Nation-States have been the main agents of liberalisation and globalisation. In carrying through these changes they have distanced themselves from their voters and lost political legitimacy. A prime example of this is the European Union, which has organised its affairs to have a greater say in the world. In this context, it is worth noting that not even the us is in a position to control world financial markets, investments, and corporate strategies. First, the EU has established what I would call a “Networked State”. Here, political management is exercised through institutions in which national governments work together, negotiating, and sharing sovereignty in order to preserve some autonomy vis-à-vis the aforementioned global networks. Second, a superstructure of international institutions (NATO, WHO) and treaties (Kyoto) has been established. Third, the issue of Nation-States’ waning political legitimacy has been addressed by decentralising powers to the regions and even to NGOs – a trend that is particularly marked in the EU. Thus the Nation-State no longer performs its traditional role but rather merely acts as a node within a super-national network. In such a network, political decisions are negotiated. Thus, while Nation-States have not vanished in the globalisation process, they have to cede sovereignty to survive. Moreover, in so doing they move one step further away from their electorates. Their citizens not only have to accept that the Nation-State is run on different lines from their own regions but also that the way the State is run has changed a great deal. This makes political representation much more distant. Here, it is worth recalling a slogan of what is wrongly-labelled the “anti-globalisation movement”. The slogan was “No globalisation without representation” and was heard for the first time at the WTO in Seattle. It echoed the one used in The American War of Independence (“No taxation without representation”). Although the slogan might be considered slightly inaccurate (the WTO does not represent multinationals but States, some of which have democratically-elected governments), the sentiment behind it is unambiguous.

This kind of reaction points to a loss in popular representation when it comes to political decisions regarding world economic policy. On the one hand, radical movements argue that ordinary citizens are powerless in this respect. Others argue that new political mechanisms are required to properly represent citizens. What it boils down to is that the emphasis on political management comes at the expense of legitimacy and popular representation.

#### 4. THE EMERGING OF IDENTITIES

In the context of globalisation, this reaction by States and the gap opening up between the State and its representatives is driving efforts by growing numbers of people to establish their collective identities. This is because they feel alienated from a State that no

longer represents them or helps them build meaning in their lives. They therefore tend to build these identities on historical foundations.

Identity is way of constructing meaning in people's lives at a time when the *raison d'être* of modern States seems to be vanishing. In this respect, people crave much more than just market economics. Indeed, the State can be said to be an agent of globalisation rather than of the people. The reaction to this is an alternative construction of meaning based on identity.

At this juncture, it is worth recalling what we mean by identity, given that it is a word that means different things to different people. In the Social Sciences, identity is the process whereby people draw on a cultural attribute to build meaning in their lives. People create a cultural construct in referring to something that lies beyond them as individuals but which also defines them as such. However, one should note that such a cultural construction may be purely individual, given that individuality is also a form of identity. For example, one could express identity in the following terms: "I am the be-all and end-all of existence", or "I and my family are the be-all and end-all of existence". This is a kind of identity, although we generally consider identities to be based on historical elements. Sociologists, social scientists, and anthropologists argue about whether identity is constructed or not. I consider that identities are constructs and that all cultural phenomena are the product of such construction.

What are such constructs built with? Evidently, I cannot awake one morning and suddenly decide to be a Hutu. Becoming a Hutu is a much more complex affair. One could draw on post-Modernist theories in which everything is possible and identities are mere inventions. According to this approach, being a Muslim or being a Catalan, being a woman or hailing from Manresa are simply part of the same process in which everything is constructed.

While there is an element of truth in this, identity is built upon personal experience, which in turn draws on a history, a culture, and has linguistic and geographic components. Even so, one can ask how an identity is constructed, who constructs it, and how it can be pinned down. The process of constructing identity is where the problems begin and thus where one needs to hone one's analysis.

**4.1. Legitimising identity** I distinguish three types of identities, which I have empirically observed in groups. I have termed the first *legitimising identity*, which is constructed by institutions in general and by the State in particular. Thus, taking French national identity (which happens to be one of the strongest in Europe), it is the French State that has constructed the French Nation, and not the reverse. At the time of the French Revolution, less than 13% of the territories now forming France spoke the language of the *Île de France*. Indeed, I would go further and say that France is the only example of a European national identity that was effectively forged by the State. This was mainly achieved through repression, as is the case of all State-constructed entities. However, repression was also used elsewhere but to much less effect. The schools inspired by Jules Ferry during the Third Republic were to prove decisive, constructing the *petit citoyen français* as a cultural model. Unlike the French case, another revolutionary nation —the United States— built a strong national identity without drawing on traditional components but instead, built one based on the State, the Constitution, and multicultural and multi-ethnic elements.



**4.2. Resistance-based identity** The second type is the *resistance-based identity*. In this case, groups who feel they are pushed to the fringes of society in cultural, political, or social terms react by constructing an identity that allows them to resist assimilation by the system that subordinates them. They do this by drawing on history and self-identification. For example, there is currently an extraordinary upsurge in Indian movement throughout Latin America. This identity has lain dormant and it is only recently that it has been strongly asserted. The reason for this lies in resistance to certain kinds of globalisation that have pushed Indians to the fringes of society. Not all kinds of globalisation provoke such resistance but some social groups take this path precisely because they cannot resist as citizens, or because they are in a minority and cannot exercise their political rights.

**4.3. Project-based identity** The third kind is *project-based identity*. This is based on self-identification, albeit drawing upon cultural, historical, and geographic components for this purpose. Such a project may be of a national or a generic nature. For example, the feminist or ecological movements reflects this kind of process.

These three kinds of identities differ greatly from one another and it would be a mistake to think that one can slip easily between them. For example, it is unlikely that one can jump from a resistance-based identity to a project-based one. If this were the case, these identities would simply become one and the same. Legitimising identities involve ideological manipulation. If the project for building a nation based on the State merely serves the interests of the latter, it means that anyone who disagrees with what the State does is automatically pushed to the fringes of society. Resistance-based identities may (but do not necessarily) lead to extremism in the absence of bridge-building and communication. If project-based identities are not fleshed out with historical materials, they become purely subjective and hence unlikely to be adopted by society as a whole.

## 5. RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

How can one empirically consider the developments seen over the last few years? Instead of considering all possible cases, we confine ourselves to religious identity and to national identity.

**5.1. Religious identity** Religious identity in Western Europe (and indeed Europe as a whole) is relatively unimportant nowadays. Our studies of Catalonia reveal that less than 5% of the country's population are regular church-goers. This does not mean that religion is unimportant in Catalan culture, merely that it does not represent an element of identity for the majority of Catalans. Many European intellectuals write off religious identity. However, this attitude stems from ignorance, given that religious identity is of great importance elsewhere in the world (not least in the us). This is also true of Arab countries along the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean.

Religion provides an identity that is very different from one based on State legitimacy. The former is based on the believer as a member of a community of faith. Talking specifically about the Muslim world, the project of building an Arab State runs counter

to the principle of *Uma*, which is a community of believers which is not expressed in the State. Indeed, the State is only legitimate insofar as it embraces Islam and represents the interests of God on Earth. From this point of departure, interpretations may be more or

“Such reconstruction is not the fruit of a project-based identity but rather represents the resistance of a community and thus tends towards fundamentalism”

less fundamentalist. However, nationalism is anathema to *Uma*. That is why when Saddam Hussein seized power (aided and abetted by the us and France), he gained support for defending Iraq as a key Islam country. When Hussein was toppled, together with the extreme nationalists who supported him, it was Islam —the bedrock of Iraqi society— that filled the vacuum. This particularly benefitted the Shiites but Sunni Moslems agree on broadly the same principles. Put baldly, Saddam Hussein was the mortal enemy not only of the Shiites but of Islam in general.

The construction of a religious identity in the Muslim world has arisen from: the

failure of Nation-States to manage globalisation; the failure of Arab nationalism in the long-running dispute over Israel and globalisation in general; the failures of Arab or other kinds of nationalism in other parts of the Muslim world; and religious reconstruction excluding the State. It is also possible that such reconstruction is not the fruit of a project-based identity but rather represents the resistance of a community and thus tends towards fundamentalism.

**5.2. National identity** National construction is the point of departure for the Nation-State, usually based on the State as expression of the nation. In most cases, it is the State that creates the nation rather than the other way round. There is currently a growing separation between State and nation. This can be observed when one speaks of values —national values differ from those of the State. The latter are instrumental and now go beyond the Nation-State, being used to manage globalisation and its accompanying networks. By contrast, national values are ones that affirm identity. Nations denied the opportunity of forming their own States —Catalonia, Scotland, and Quebec— but also strong States like France feel lost in an increasingly globalised world. They perceive a loss of autonomy in State terms and see the influx of immigrants as an invasion that is culturally alien. Last year, Europe experienced politics based on fear —whether of globalisation or of invasion by hordes of foreigners. This expressed the idea of the nation being betrayed by the State. As a result, there has been an upsurge in support for extremist political movements, of which the Dutch and French far-right parties are good examples.

The separation of nationalism and State takes various political forms. The idea of rebuilding the State as an expression of the nation raises the issue of what the national identity is. In the case of Spain, when President Aznar put forward the idea of the country as an important nation in the world, he explicitly rejected the idea of a multicultural

society. Aznar invoked the principle of Spain as a single culture and nation, despite the fact that it is currently neither and both concepts run counter to the letter and spirit of the Spanish Constitution. Such a project for reconstructing identity was made in the nation's name, even though it really served the State's interests. The project is effectively State-inspired nationalism rather than nationalism inspired by a nation. One should bear the distinction in mind, not only with regard to Spain but also as a general principle applicable elsewhere in the world.

Once the State loses its potency as a symbol of identity as a result of limited scope for manoeuvre in a globalising world, it attempts to re-establish its legitimacy by appealing to national sentiment. However, in many cases this nation has separated from the State and no longer feels that it is represented by the latter.

Latin America is a dramatic case in point but there are others, such as States built upon several nations (of which Spain is an example). Appealing to the Spanish nation as if it were a single identity raises grave questions regarding the principles enshrined in the Constitution – namely a State based on common consent and on its constituent nations. Approaches such as that adopted by Aznar attempt the impossible, trying to reconcile the State, national identity and globalisation.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The instrumental processes of power, global wealth, institutions, and the Nation-State no longer represent the nation and identities built on local autonomy. This lies at the root of the management crisis currently afflicting the world. Even the most powerful countries are affected by this crisis, of which the post 9/11 United States is an example. Under such circumstances, governments resort to the State's *raison d'être*, namely the ability to legitimise a monopoly of violence, as Weber put it. They resort to the threat of violence and force in a world which, over the last ten years, has seen any number of experiments in combinations of States, formulae for joint sovereignty and management, pluralist identities, and a positively Byzantine relationship between global public goods and the institutions of Nation-States. This complexity however vanishes when panic assails a country's leaders and resort is made to military might.

This is the politics of fear on a worldwide scale, not just a national one. In structural terms, we are moving towards a more complex, plural, interdependent world. But powerful forces are at work to impose their own will on the planet and wreak profound changes. Here it is instructive to recall the relationship between structure and agency, in which the first creates the framework within which problems arise but where agency finally prevails.



The agent does not understand the structure. Bush has decided that despite globalisation and cultural pluralism, he will take his own decisions regardless of the overall context in which he operates. What Bush and other powerful leaders do is to create a different trajectory. On the one hand, there is the Internet, globalisation, interdependence, and cultural pluralism. On the other hand, there is censorship, military power and technology, the unilateral use of which is capable of plunging the world into chaos as economic, cultural and institutional structures are undermined by the misuse of political instruments.

The summit meeting in the Azores brought together the four great Western Christian empires —or remains thereof— and conveyed a message of a much more dangerous, complicated world. The leaders at that summit chose to simplify things and present a model of civilisation that is so obviously superior to all others – their own. Given that they have the power to impose this model, that is just what they decided to do. The basic idea is that we can make the world more controllable by imposing our will on it. The corollary is that the world will be made a better place because our civilisation is superior to all others. Such is the logic of Empire and oil will be part of the spoils of conquest. This should come as no great surprise —all imperial ventures need to be funded somehow. Imperial thinking means considering our civilisation is right and justified in using might to drag others out of their misery.

Current US political science is that of the “Bankrupt State”, in which governments that are incapable of relating to citizens, of managing the planet, and of husbanding the Earth’s natural resources. Recently, a small coterie of American Political Science experts went so far as to propose a Commission run by Western countries to manage the world’s dwindling natural resources for the benefit of all. The unpleasant truth is that this civilising zeal is merely a mask for State *realpolitik*.

This legitimising identity is increasingly facing the resistance-based identities springing up around the world. Even so, such resistance does not necessarily aspire to something better since its *raison d’être* lies in opposition. Project-based identities need to supplant resistance-based identities (and in particular, national identities). Only thus can we hope to chart a course between powerful establishments and fundamentalist commons II

**Yolanda Aixelà**

# Islam and women; Europe and Islam

## *Mirror play*

**Throughout their history, Moslem societies have created a widespread popular belief as to what men and women should be like. The Koran, the holy scripture, has provided the foundations for these identities involving a supposedly sexual complementariness based on biologicist differentiation criteria that are clearly materialised in a sexual compartmentalisation of space.**

### INTRODUCTION

But the veracity of the Koran as a text revealed by archangel Gabriel to the prophet Mahomet would enable legitimating a gender construction based on an idea of authenticity that is extremely useful for stressing their differences with other non-Moslem societies. This fact was displayed in Maghrebi societies throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in countries where the affirmation and recovery of their own cultural specificity, after bloody colonisation periods, required adopting symbols to act as bastions of the “Moslem way”. Among these symbols there are women and, inseparably connected to these, the veil –*hijab*.

Now we should also point out the need to analyse the social construction of Moslem women that has been created in Europe, as this is often a perception close to their victimisation, illustrated with certain particularly clear cases as regards female subordination (though this could hardly be generally defended in all Moslem societies). In this respect one should point out how, for example, in Maghrebi societies women have had powers, sometimes peripheral, which enable them to transform their daily reality. In spite of this, the lack of knowledge about these countries and the socio-political and media interpretation of some cultural practices ended up forming a pejorative discourse based on Moslem traditionalism and its cultural backwardness. Europe clearly set itself

up as spokesperson for denouncing female subordination in Moslem lands from the criterion of its “superiority” and “social modernity” as regards the equality of individuals within society.

### WOMEN IN ISLAM: from the Koran to legal practices

There are diverse studies defending the possibility of interpreting Moslem women’s everyday life from a rereading of the Koran which enables female duties and obligations to be specified from an almost essentialist angle (for example, Motahari, 2000).

However, in spite of the Book providing a social construction of the sexes based on sexual complementarity, it is true that this Moslem social ideology built on the Koran as regards sexual categorization has often later collided with the social practices of each setting.<sup>1</sup> In fact, this stance was developed in my doctoral thesis (Aixelà, 2000), where the aim was not to find a singular and ahistorical description of Moslem women, but to analyse the influence of the Koranic gender construction in legal practices of the Moroccan Family Code, *Mudawwana*.

One should point out that there are major differences in the legal practice of each country which depend on its particular interests. We hence find that although the Koran may give many proposals it is each government that has the power to develop the one coming closest to its social policies.<sup>2</sup> On this matter, we now give two examples on the polemical rereading of the Book: one shows the importance of legal selection when drawing up family codes in each country and the other stresses the contradictions themselves contained in Islamic societies.

As regards the first example, Tunisia needs to be specified as a special case in the North-African sphere in certain legal matters connected with women (Aixelà, 1998). For example, polygyny was banned there. This was possible because the legislators who drew up their Family Code, *Madjala*, inspired like all the others in Arab Moslem countries by the Koran, chose the suras that backed up their own proposals. They were able to defend and legitimate monogamy in the following way: First they took the sura that regulates marriage, which consists of two parts with very different contents: the first says “marry such women as seem good to you, two and three and four...” [sura iv “Women”, verse 3]; a second affirms: “but if you fear that you will not do justice between them, then (marry) only one... This is more suitable so as not to be inequitable...” [sura iv “Women”, verse 3]. Then Tunisian legislators chose the part of the text that proved most appropriate for them within their scheme of government: instead of taking the first part, which allowed polygyny, they took the second, which censured this due to the difficulty in being completely fair with all four wives. The result was that Tunisia was able to approve monogamy with the backing of the Koran, enjoying the Moslem legitimacy necessary to defend this in its society.

■ <sup>1</sup> A good collection of legal practice in the Moslem world is given by J. Nasir (1994).

<sup>2</sup> To find out about how the legal system works in the Moslem world A. Wahhâb Khallâf can be consulted.

**Collage sobre fons gravat**  
**(Collage on an Engraved Background).**  
Antoni Tàpies (2005)  
paint and collage on paper with  
an engraved background, 56 x 63 m





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The second example comes from Saudi Arabia. This country has a great influence on the whole Moslem world and produced a very interesting controversy in the nineteen-eighties to do with women's obligations (Hijab, 1994: 47). On one hand, some highly conservative interpretations of religious institutions, represented by sheikh Abdel-Aziz Bin Abdullah Bin Baz, defended that the Koran ordered women to stay at home, wear veils and obey men's orders. This was defended on the basis of a verse referring to the wives of the Prophet, who considered that these ought to be differentiated from other women through their purity and faith. However, other sectors of the country's Moslem fabric did not agree. In their opinion, the very fact of not being the Prophet's wives released them from these Koranic obligations.

These two cases, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia, are of great use when demonstrating the major Moslem legal contradictions existing in diverse Moslem countries. In fact, they vouch for the difficulty of establishing a totalising uniformity in social and legal practices in respect of women's everyday lives in the Moslem world.

## MOSLEM WOMEN AND COLONISATION

The European colonial structures established in different countries in the Mediterranean Moslem sphere criticised the situation undergone by women. Criticism has not always implied any change in their social situation—in fact, hardly any changes were actually generated (Aixelà, 2000). For example, schooling, which was one of the factors considered to be able to facilitate the end of their subordination to men, would spread extremely slowly in a good many of these societies, and no real progress in the different countries would be made until after independence.

In spite of this, and the fact that most of the colonisers did not include any social or legal improvements in women's condition in the whole colonial occupation, the female group came into European's focus. One very clear case was that of Algeria, skilfully explained by Fanon (1966: 22), who tells how, in an attempt to reduce the social influence of Islam during the war of independence, the French themselves chose women as the group that needed to be subverted in order to bring about profound changes in the occupied society: "First all they went for destitute women. With each kilo of corn they added a dose of indignation against the veil and confinement. After the indignation came the practical advice. Algerian women were called to play a 'fundamental, capital role' in the transformation of their destiny... Colonial administration invested major sums in this fight. After affirming that women represented the core of Algerian society, every effort was made to control them... In the colonialist programme, women were entrusted with the historical mission of sidetracking Algerian men. Women were intended to be converted, won for foreign values...". However, Fanon (1966: 31) also narrates the failure of the self-seeking French policies: "the occupier's tenacity to unveil women, to convert them into allies in the task of cultural destruction, reinforced traditional habits". And he added: "the colonialist offensive against the veil was opposed by the colonised people's cult for the veil... the Algerians' attitude to the veil was interpreted as an overall stance against foreign occupation".

“A strange bond was established between nationalism and feminism from terms such as authenticity and complementarity”

Something very similar took place in Egypt, where the colonial structures strongly criticised certain matters connected with women such as spatial exclusion, the veil and female circumcision<sup>3</sup> (Hijab, 1994). It was assumed that Egyptians should give up these social practices which revealed their cultural backwardness. In spite of this the colonial pressure only helped to make certain structures consider that these changes were non-negotiable as

such through representing a part of their cultural specificity in respect of the occupants. In fact, as happened in other countries, neither did colonisers develop specific policies to condition their social decline.

#### IDENTITY AFFIRMATION THROUGH WOMEN: nationalisms and feminisms

At the same time as colonial structures were considering the need to transform women's status, there were many conservative and nationalist parties using women as social assets whose role was to facilitate Moslem identity affirmation as cultural reproducers: it was understood that the changes arising in their status could be understood as symptoms of the transformations which could appear in contemporary Moslem states, as a threat of sociocultural change, and as a way to establish where these countries were attempting to go from a cultural perspective. In fact, a strange bond was established between nationalism and feminism from terms such as authenticity and complementarity, which would later be contested by some left-wing political parties who would defend a transformation of female status from concepts such as “equality” and “human rights”<sup>4</sup>.

One clear example of the nationalist standpoint was Moroccan Allal el-Fassi, who links “women” with “moral rebirth” since he felt that they had managed to remain unaffected by the temptations of the West. A good deal of el-Fassi's proposals for women would appear in one of his best-known works, published in 1952, *Self-criticism*, where he would tackle the need to get rid of polygyny and limit repudiation. In spite of this, el-Fassi would never consider the equality of sexes as he defended the complementarity of men and women.

One should point out that behind the nationalist or left-wing political claims there was a vindication of women as leading actors in society. The most significant difference lay in the end to be obtained: on one hand, this would consolidate a discourse which would connect the need for women, after reaching national independence, to be the perpetrators of Islam's cultural specificity by strictly following the gender proposals filtered from the Koran, and on the other, there would be a discourse which would defend the necessary transformation of female status seen in their acquisition of new rights and duties which would make them equivalent to men in the different political and economic spheres.

We should in any case stress the close relationship established between nationalism and feminism, fostered by many politicians through diverse publications: the objective was to

display the excellencies of Islam towards women by being the first to denounce custom as a great corruptor of laws that were originally egalitarian.

### MOSLEM WOMEN. From the late nineteen-sixties to the present day: new social visibilities

Women have gradually joined the working world and political life in many Moslem countries since the nineteen-sixties. Indeed, in some cases, such as Egypt, this participation goes back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through it has been a slow incorporation process that has taken place in different periods depending on the context, this is a wholly reversible process in spite of the rejection of some Moslem structures. This acquisition by women of new responsibilities now implies the restructuring of a gender construction, which was traditionally based on sexual complementarity, and which is still now defended by those who look to the Koranic text to establish men's obligations towards women and vice versa; nowadays women and men work in the formal and informal economy and are militant and participate in all kinds of politic parties and associations.

These factors, which have gradually been developing in the societies of origin, also visible among European Moslem women, have indeed transformed the view that used to be had of Islam as an eminently masculine religion; a feminisation of Islam has been generated, fostered and conditioned by female public perception (Amiriaux, 2003) and by their social participation, which has in Europe been closely associated with the historical victimisation of this group (Aixelà, 2000).

However, it should be pointed out that Islamism has contributed a lot to female visibility as a large part of its discourse has been developed around this. As Imache and Nour (1994: 15) pointed out, for many Islamists "the *hijab* distinguishes the Moslem woman from the non-Moslem woman". As Kasriel affirms, the veil enables an image of traditionalism to be given to a society that has changed now. What is more, some of these Islamist groups, such as the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, proposed a whole series of prohibitions to be respected by women in their publication *Mounquid*, such as: 1) no women can be state politicians; 2) no women can be judges; 3) women cannot practice a wage-earning activity (a matter on which they constantly contradict themselves); 4) women have to wear the *hijab*; 5) women have to refuse to share space with men; 6) women have to avoid practicing sports.<sup>5</sup> In fact, this same publication stressed women's rights: 1) the right to learning; 2) the right to respect; 3) the right to inherit; 4) the right to give their opinion; 5) the right to vote; 6) the right to fight in God's name; 6) the right to carry out a wage-earning activity (the one most qualified).<sup>6</sup>

■ <sup>3</sup> One should point out that Egypt is the only country in the African Mediterranean where clitoridectomy is practiced. We could also mention a book from the nineteen-sixties covering the colonial view of Egyptian society. This is published by El Masry, *Drama sexual de la mujer árabe*.

<sup>4</sup> The specialists classify these in different ways, but the political objectives and social contents were very similar. To go further into the debate one can consult Aixelà (2000).

<sup>5</sup> Imache and Nour (1994: 46).

<sup>6</sup> Imache and Nour (1994: 45).

All these questions connected with women's rights and duties have taken root in a conception of women which clearly established their priority activities: maternity and education of children. These groups considered that they were responsible for future generations.

These very explicit Algerian proposals have not been very visible in the Moroccan case, partly perhaps because the top member of the Justice and Charity group (al-'Adl wa-l-Ihsan) in recent times has been a woman, Nadia Yassin, daughter of the historic moderate Islamist Abdassalam Yassin. It proves highly interesting to analyse Yassin's discourse since she advocates women's socio-political participation in Morocco, through proposals close to the affirmation of the Moslem woman as mother and wife and criteria of spatial separation and Moslem authenticity.

### THE SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF MOSLEM WOMEN IN EUROPE

The controversy about the way Moslem women are thought of in their societies of origin is also found in Europe, though it must be said that less is known about the way they have acquired new social responsibilities throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In European contexts, the female sector has often been connected with "patriarchy": the woman has been imagined as confined to the home, subordinate to the men in her family group. In fact, the discourse on supposed "European superiority" in respect of these societies, that authors such as E. Said denounced long ago, is still alive and has been corroborated by Islamists' strict attitude to women. The result has been an enormous misunderstanding, difficult to deal with on both shores of the Mediterranean, as the information exchanged is basically the fruit of social stereotypes.

Part of the distorted image of Moslem women in Europe involves the controversial use of the veil, the *hijab*. One sector of European people construes this as a symbol of female confinement, of their subordination to men and of Islam's cultural backwardness, an

**“Religions form an intrinsic part of national identities in many European countries”**

analysis that has been fostered in Europe by its political, media (Coman, 2003) and in some cases even scientific (Amiriaux, 2003) treatment, conditioned by certain structures eager to extend interpretations coming close to connecting Islam with barbarity (Said, 1991; Bartra, 1996; Martín, 2002).

However, certain statements made by different Moslem structures, both in their societies of origin and Europe, often fail to facilitate any reconsideration of these distortions, as they contain inflexible discourses about the use of the veil affirming that the *hijab* proves the value and dignity of women as well as making patent the continuity, value and dignity of Islam. Hence Motahari (2000: 13) gave the reason, essential in his opinion, justifying the female veil: "For a woman to cover herself in the presence of an unknown man is one of the major Moslem questions, and is specified in the noble Koran itself".

In any case, as has been seen by diverse authors such as Kilani (2000, 2002, 2003) or Amiraux (2003), the female veil is interpreted in Europe as the symbol of anti-modernity, as an archaism of which Moslem women are *victims*. This is important because it is one of the foundations on which the irreducible incompatibility between Islam and the democratic values of “modernity” has been constructed. A clear example of the controversy is wearing the veil at schools, an issue that has led to a debate on this matter in different European countries such as France and Spain.

On this question, Kilani (2000) took a clear stance as regards the attitude of certain European countries towards their subjects practising the Moslem religion: the political discourses only served to encourage one particular aspect of the differences used to build the essential difference, the difference which would generate all the others and which would explain them at the same time. Islam would be the cultural difference distinguishing the immigrants coming from Moslem countries from the others, whether or not these had citizenship, and had been born in Europe or not: they were the so-called second, third and fourth generations.

## CONCLUSIONS

As has been observed in this article, the outlooks on Moslem women of both European and Moslem societies have been crossing for a long time now. This has given them an unfair responsibility which did not pertain to them: the perpetuation or not of Moslem society. Access to their opinions on the social role that they should play—or have played—in the legitimation and consolidation of Moslem identity has however been wholly impossible.

The situation becomes even more difficult to analyse clearly when these Moslem women are in Europe (or are European) and want to make use of a hijab, which is also connected in our popular thinking with the traditionalism of Islam, with female subordination and, what is worse, with a religious identity of supranational nature.

Behind all these questions, and beyond the gender perspective, something becomes increasingly evident: Europe, apart from being Catholic, Protestant and Jewish, amongst other things, is Moslem. This 21<sup>st</sup> century cultural and religious reality, resulting from migration processes, ought to involve a review of how the construction of the *other* is being handled, above all because that Moslem other will increasingly be closer to us and end up being European—as was recently affirmed by Roy (2003). However, there can be no doubt that this will involve conflicts, and not only through the utterly negative image that the Moslem group has in European societies, but also because religions form an intrinsic part of national identities in many European countries. One should nevertheless point out that many of the Moslem women who wear the veil in Europe do so through a chosen religious practice and for the sake of a vindicating political practice. But again, this will entail conflicts since, as different official bodies are wondering: how can this *other* form part of our population if apparently it seems so different from the rest and does not accept the rules of the game? II

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# Globalisation and linguistic rights

## *Towards a universal framework of linguistic sustainability*<sup>1</sup>

**Like many others, Mexican society and Catalan society, both of them engaged in the task of conserving their linguistic diversity in today's changing world, are united in their concerns about the evolution and future prospects of linguistic diversity in the world.**

**Their agreement on** this was already evident throughout the process of preparing the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, which was proclaimed in Barcelona in 1996<sup>2</sup>. Of great importance, too, was the Mexican participation in the World Congress on Language Policies<sup>3</sup> organised by Linguapax<sup>4</sup> in Barcelona in April 2002, and in the recent Dialogue on Language Diversity, Sustainability and Peace<sup>5</sup>, which took place as the 10<sup>th</sup> Linguapax Congress under the auspices of the Universal Forum of Cultures, held in Barcelona in May 2004.

■ <sup>1</sup> Inaugural lecture at the *XIV Seminario de la Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras, 'La diversidad lingüística en el contexto de la globalización'* (14<sup>th</sup> Seminar on Foreign Language Teaching, "Linguistic Diversity in the Context of Globalisation"), an academic function held in parallel to the XVIII Feria Internacional del Libro de Guadalajara (28<sup>th</sup> Guadalajara International Book Fair-Jalisco, Mexico) on 1-2 December 2004.

<sup>2</sup> It is possible to consult the text (also available in English) of the Declaration, the process of its preparation and its subsequent international diffusion at the website <http://www.linguistic-declaration.org> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.linguapax.org/congres/indexcast.html> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.linguapax.org/> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.linguapax.org/congreso4/indexcast.html> (accessed in 2004).

This latter Congress confirmed, in lectures given by the world's leading experts, the immense importance of the present if we are to act to conserve the planet's linguistic diversity, while also confirming international recognition of the reference-point roles that Barcelona and Catalonia have come to play in this world-wide debate.

In his inaugural lecture<sup>6</sup>, Professor David Crystal emphasised the timeliness of such a Congress, devoted as it was to the sustainability of linguistic diversity, precisely a decade after the crisis of the linguistic heritage of our planet had come to have universal resonance. Since the early 1990s, in fact, numerous well-qualified voices have been raised to warn of the threat of extinction that hovers over a considerable part of humanity's languages. The 15<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Linguists in Quebec in 1992 alerted UNESCO to the threat; the following year (1993), the UNESCO General Assembly initiated a project<sup>7</sup> and produced the *Red Book on Endangered Languages*<sup>8</sup>; in 1995 the International Clearing House for Endangered Languages was created in the University of Tokyo<sup>9</sup>; in the United States, the Endangered Language Fund<sup>10</sup> was created; and in the United Kingdom a Foundation for Endangered Languages was established<sup>11</sup>. At least among academic specialists, the evidence was spreading that, unless there were radical changes in the present model of globalisation, perhaps 90% of the world's spoken languages would disappear in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the tremendous paradox that it is precisely now that humanity has more means than ever to assure the future of all languages!

The 66 NGOs, the 44 PEN Centres and 61 experts from some ninety countries around the World who took part in producing the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights in Barcelona (1996) trusted that growing sensibility around the world to this enormous crisis of linguistic diversity and having the support of the UNESCO Director-General, Federico Mayor Zaragoza would enable them to achieve United Nations backing for an initiative of this kind. This hope was bolstered by numerous declarations of support from well-known personalities around the world. I believe that today it is appropriate to recall that among them were Homero Aridjis, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Octavio Paz and Rigoberta Menchú.

However, the UNESCO General Conference of 1997 did not take the Declaration into account, and neither did the UNESCO Executive Council deem it appropriate in the spring of 1998 to adopt as a starting point a second version of the Declaration that was briefer and more focused on individual rights, although we had drafted this version according to suggestions made by Federico Mayor Zaragoza himself. The impressions gleaned by the Declaration Follow-up Committee in a long series of contacts with numerous State representatives in UNESCO confirmed that a declaration of this kind —affirming equality among all languages without exception and both the individual and collective nature of linguistic rights— was disturbing for State powers-that-be, which, after all, would have to agree to its processing and official proclamation.

Subsequent events did not contradict this interpretation. UNESCO dissolved its Languages Division and focused on a generic defence of cultural diversity. In 2000 its World Culture Report was devoted to the subject of *Cultural Diversity, Conflict and Pluralism*<sup>12</sup>, while, in November 2001, it adopted a Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity<sup>13</sup>, with references that were not very relevant to the linguistic dimension of diversity.

One of the most significant new features of this Declaration appears in Article 8, which states that “cultural goods and services [...], as vectors of identity, values and meaning, must not be treated as mere commodities or consumer goods”.



With this, UNESCO picked up the debate concerning cultural diversity in the world market, a question that had already been analysed in the World Culture Report of 1998, which was concerned with the theme of “Culture, Creativity and Markets” (Paris, 1999)<sup>14</sup>.

Deregulation and liberalisation of the world market and the consequences of this for cultural diversity are, it would seem, the main concern of the States and of UNESCO itself. As will be recalled, at the end of the negotiations of the Uruguay Round in 1993 that would give rise the following year to the World Trade Organisation (WTO)<sup>15</sup>, the concept of cultural *exception* emerged, according to which the liberalisation of world trade must not be applied indiscriminately to cultural products and exchanges. Advocates of this principle today have adopted the term *cultural diversity*, which is doubtless more appropriate because the previous version seemed to establish the “normality” of total deregulation, and give the idea that it was exceptional to determine specific treatment for cultural products in international trade.

**Defending the specificity of cultural products** and services on the World market was a cause initially promoted by France and the Francophone countries which, by 1998, had created a working group to promote an international legal instrument that would guarantee to States the power to regulate quotas of diffusion in the linguistic domain or for internal cultural production, and to establish compensatory systems of financing or public subsidies for their cultural products and services.

There is no doubt that the adoption by UNESCO of these principles in Article 8 of the 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity represented influential support for these initiatives and, not long afterwards, the States of other linguistic and cultural spaces have come out in defence of cultural diversity in the market. In 2003, a joint organisation called Three Linguistic Spaces was formed of Francophone, Hispanophone and Lusophone countries<sup>16</sup>, and contacts with Arabic-, Russian-, Chinese- and Japanese-speaking countries are gradually being made.

According to present information, the UNESCO General Conference is soon to examine a *Draft Convention on the protection of the diversity of cultural content and artistic expression*<sup>17</sup> which is now in an advanced phase of preparation and negotiation. This international treaty could represent a major breakthrough in the development and application of the principle of cultural diversity in the market, which had only been enunciated in the 2001 UNESCO Declaration.

■ <sup>6</sup> See <http://www.linguapax.org/congreso4/pdf/crystal.pdf> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>7</sup> See [http://portal.unesco.org/culture/es/ev.php-URL\\_ID=8270&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/es/ev.php-URL_ID=8270&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html) (accessed in 2004).

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.tooyoo.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/Redbook/index.html> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.tooyoo.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/ichel/ichel.html> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>10</sup> See <http://sapisr.ling.yale.edu/~elf/> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.ogmios.org/home.htm> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>12</sup> See [http://www.unesco.org/culture/worldreport/html\\_index\\_sp.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/culture/worldreport/html_index_sp.shtml) (accessed in 2004).

<sup>13</sup> This may be consulted at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.crim.unam.mx/cultura/informe/default.htm> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.wto.org/indexsp.htm> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.3el.org/> (accessed in 2004). Its second Congress was held in Mexico in April and the minutes may be consulted at [http://www.3el.org/IMG/pdf/Actes\\_mexico\\_es.pdf](http://www.3el.org/IMG/pdf/Actes_mexico_es.pdf) (accessed in 2004).

<sup>17</sup> This may be consulted at: [http://portal.unesco.org/culture/es/file\\_download.php6232bc25499910544b1855bfaa523186Spa-AnteproyectoConv-conf201-2.pdf](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/es/file_download.php6232bc25499910544b1855bfaa523186Spa-AnteproyectoConv-conf201-2.pdf) (accessed in 2004).

Nonetheless, I think it is very clear why this approximation to a defence of cultural diversity —markedly economist and focused at State level— has merited growing interest from the international organisms while linguistic diversity has remained in the background or, at best, in a very secondary position in this period. The exceptional

“Equal treatment for all cultural communities would require that the Convention establishes official hearing mechanisms through which public institutions or organisations of civil society could bring their demands for protection”

significance of commercial transactions in the cultural and media markets and the extraordinary predominance on the global market of some twenty huge corporations, mainly based in the United States, have given rise to a clear strategic confluence of the cultural industries of many countries with their respective States, since it is the latter that are able to defend their interests on the world market. State powers, in turn, seeing their sovereignty shrinking in economic and military terms, tend to tighten their control over their own symbolic and cultural space.

Market interests and the national interests of States have been mobilised for a common objective. But who cares about protecting languages and cultures at the sub-State level when they do not represent a significant proportion of the culture trade or enjoy support on any egalitarian basis within their own States?

It is still revealing that the *Draft Convention* that is to be presented to the UNESCO General Conference only refers to language on one single occasion (in Article 6.2.a), when it proposes State measures “which in an appropriate manner reserve a certain space for domestic cultural goods and services among all those available within the national territory, in order to ensure opportunities for their production, distribution, dissemination and consumption, and include, where appropriate, provisions relating to the language used for the above-mentioned goods”. It is surprising that such a relevant dimension of cultural diversity as the languages of cultural expression should merit just this one reference in the entire text of the Draft.

Much more revealing —and worrying from our point of view— is that the political objections that are envisaged with regard to some articles of this Draft are going to focus precisely on the points where the signatory States would have taken on the commitment of actively protecting their internal cultural diversity. Such is the case of point 1 of Article 6, to which I have just referred, establishing in its present form that, “each State Party will adopt measures, especially regulatory and financial measures, aimed at protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions within its territory, particularly in cases where such expressions are threatened or in a situation of vulnerability”. This formulation, it seems, has given rise to numerous reserves because it implies excessive obligations for States, and it is possible that the first sentence will be modified so that the

original formulation of “each State Party **will adopt** measures” will be reduced to the mere possibility of adopting them with “each State Party **may adopt** measures...”<sup>18</sup>.

Such a decision would confirm that, in fact, the main aim of this Convention is not to protect cultural diversity —and, in particular, what is in most need of protection— but simply to protect the national cultural industries on the world market.

Again, if we bear in mind that the main objection to our proposal of a Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights was its consideration of the collective —and not merely individual— nature of linguistic rights, there is a contradiction in the fact that the present Draft Convention is based on the right —unquestionably collective— of States to regulate the cultural market, as the Preamble acknowledges in the following formulation: “Recognizing the fundamental right of social groups and societies, in particular of members of minorities and indigenous peoples, to create, disseminate and distribute their cultural goods and services ...”. It also includes among its principles the equal dignity of all cultures (Principle 4) and constantly invokes the twofold individual and collective dimension of the cultural expressions it wishes to protect.

If this is really the aim of the Convention and of UNESCO, they should, I believe, reinforce and not reduce the commitments of each State to protect its internal diversity. One of the positive points of the Draft is that it envisages that States with limited resources can turn to international systems of support for producing appropriate policies in order to protect their cultures (Article 8). We understand, then, that equal treatment for all cultural communities would require that the Convention establish official hearing mechanisms through which public institutions or organisations of civil society in an endangered cultural community could bring their demands for protection before the Convention’s Intergovernmental Committee (envisaged in Article 21), or at least before the Advisory Group as defined in Article 22 so that these organisms work towards positive measures being taken in favour of these cultures by the States concerned.

In brief, we cannot deny the potential interest of these international measures as a guarantee of State cultures, but what is not evident is their applicability to the numerous cultural communities that are neglected or pushed into the background, when not actively undermined by the cultural policies of many States that do not promote internal equality among the cultures within their boundaries.

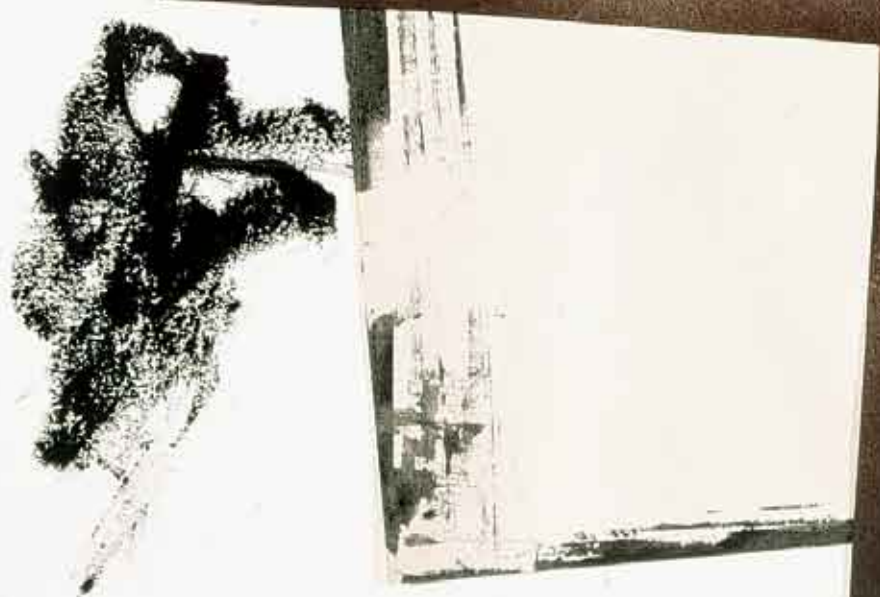
With regard to our specific interest in protecting linguistic diversity and linguistic rights, the present provisions of these international legal instruments are, by any reckoning, inadequate.

In this context, which is not very encouraging for any progress in international recognition of the importance of linguistic diversity, it has been gratifying to confirm that the United Nations Human Development Report 2004, entitled “Cultural Liberty in Today’s Diverse World”<sup>19</sup>, clearly tackles the linguistic dimension of world diversity and

■ <sup>18</sup> This was the impression given by the document of Professor Ivan Bernier, *Avant-projet de convention sur la protection de la diversité des contenus culturels et des expressions artistiques. Analyse et commentaire*. This may be consulted at [http://agence.francophonie.org/diversiteculturelle/fichiers/aif\\_bernier\\_aout2004.pdf](http://agence.francophonie.org/diversiteculturelle/fichiers/aif_bernier_aout2004.pdf) (accessed in 2004). Indeed, the change has now come about as can be seen in the Spanish version cited in footnote 17 and the English version, which

may be found at: [http://66.102.9.104/search?q=cache:Vo4MS26gSuwJ:www.folklife.si.edu/resources/center/cultural\\_policy/pdf/UNESCO\\_Draft.pdf+UNESCO+CLT/CPD/2004/CONF.201/2&hl=en](http://66.102.9.104/search?q=cache:Vo4MS26gSuwJ:www.folklife.si.edu/resources/center/cultural_policy/pdf/UNESCO_Draft.pdf+UNESCO+CLT/CPD/2004/CONF.201/2&hl=en)

<sup>19</sup> Published by the United Nations Development (UNDP) in its Spanish version by Ediciones Mundi-Prensa 2004. See <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/espanol/> (accessed in 2004).





**Creu marró (Brown Cross)**, Antoni Tàpies (2005)  
paint and collage on paper  
50 x 64 cm

*Tàpies*

repeatedly suggests that States need to adopt multicultural and multilingual policies that respect their internal diversity. The worldwide scope of this need is immense, as the Report states, since there are thousands of linguistic, cultural and ethnic communities that come under some two hundred States. Almost all the world's States, then, contain multilingual and multicultural societies.

It is also reassuring that this United Nations Report should affirm the specific nature of linguistic diversity and hence the specific treatment this requires from the State powers-that-be, thereby clearly contradicting the attempted application of the liberal rule of benign neglect or non-intervention by the State with regard to linguistic diversity: "While it is possible and even desirable for a State to remain 'neutral' on ethnicity and religion, this is impractical for language" (p.59).

One should also recognise, as the Report does, that for multilingual States, "While the ability to use one's mother tongue in public as well as private life is important, this does not make the use of multiple languages in government, the courts and education easy or practical" (p. 33). Policies are therefore suggested in order to accommodate —and not to put in opposition— "the twin objectives of unity and diversity by adopting two or three languages, recognizing a unifying national language as well as local languages" (p.9). UNESCO itself, the Report recalls, has recommended a three-language formula, bringing together— in both individual linguistic spheres and social usage —an international language, a lingua franca or "local link language" and the mother tongue of each group (p. 60).

However, with respect to specifically linguistic rights, the Report's position is not very receptive, asserting, "There is no universal 'right to language'. But there are human rights with an implicit linguistic content that multilingual States must acknowledge in order to comply with their international obligations under such instruments as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Especially important are the rights to freedom of expression and equality" (p. 60).

**I confess that we are not satisfied with** such a reluctant position when it comes to recognising specifically linguistic rights, but still less satisfactory, I feel, is the fact that, having noted the worldwide importance of the linguistic dimension of human rights, the United Nations organisms should be so lacking in diligence in that they do not offer explicit formulation of these issues by means of adequate legal instruments and developing international protection mechanisms.

We still understand and maintain that, as stated in the Barcelona Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (1996), "All languages are collectively constituted and are made available within a community for individual use as tools of cohesion, identification, communication and creative expression" (Article 7.2). The linguistic freedom and equality of each person depend on and are inseparable from the linguistic options offered by the society in which he or she lives, and it is precisely within one's own linguistic community and one's own territorial space where every person must enjoy the full range of linguistic rights. This is expressed in Article 1.2. of the Barcelona Declaration, which states that, "[it] takes as its point of departure the principle that linguistic rights are individual and collective at one and the same time. In defining the full range of linguistic rights, it adopts as its referent the case of a historical language community within its own territorial space, this space being understood, not only as the geographical area where the community lives, but also as the social and functional space vital to the full development of the language".

Hence the task that began in 1996 with the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights in Barcelona still requires our renewed and intensified efforts. Yet, as Professor Crystal asked at the Barcelona Conference in the Universal Form of Cultures (May 2004), can researchers and academics all around the world really modify the present trends of globalisation? The answer is obvious: not by themselves, not without consciousness raising and a wider mobilisation of society as a whole.

As David Crystal proposed, in order to achieve this general mobilisation, we should take our inspiration from the process the ecologist movement went through until it achieved a considerable degree of awareness all around the world about preserving the natural environment. It is necessary to reach the mass media, schools and inside every home. This does not only mean using strategies analogous to those used by ecologist movements. Indeed, we can and should act together given that biodiversity and linguistic and cultural diversity are closely interconnected in reality, as shown in studies done by the organisation Terralingua<sup>20</sup>. The planet's biological diversity and linguistic diversity are concentrated in the same spaces, in a number of specific States, and their preservation should be approached together as a joint endeavour in which the whole of humanity is involved and to which it is committed.

**Again, we must not overlook the fact** that globalisation also represents, along with far-reaching transformations that affect linguistic, cultural and biological diversity, new possibilities for coordinating and acting on a planetary scale. Constructing worldwide networks to cooperate in this huge task of preserving diversity is one of our best hopes. We must not let this chance slip through our fingers.

One of the first and foremost tasks of worldwide mobilisation for linguistic diversity must be disseminating a correct interpretation or representation of the linguistic consequences of globalisation. All too often, simplistic and stereotyped conceptions of the world's linguistic diversity and its supposedly inexorable evolution towards monolingualism constitute the fictitious basis for a massive abandonment of options and demands for linguistic equality.

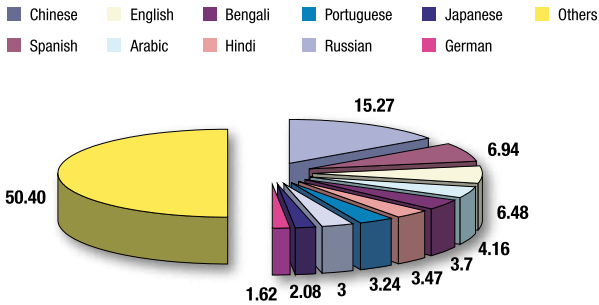
It is true, as Abram de Swaan<sup>21</sup> has said, that among the 6,000 languages of the world's linguistic system those that carry out lingua franca functions in their regional settings are few. Some of these languages —like Arabic, Malay, Hindi, Russian or Chinese— are not expanding in their use at present. Others, however, continue to enjoy considerable transcontinental diffusion and these, significantly, are the languages of the old European colonial powers: Portuguese, French, Spanish and, in particular, English, which occupies the central place in the world's linguistic system as the lingua franca *par excellence*.

Nonetheless, we must not overvalue this relative ascendancy. We cannot ignore the fact that the native populations of the ten most spoken languages of the world taken together only represent half of the world's population. If we add up all the people with Chinese, Spanish, English, Arabic, Bengali, Hindi, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese or German as their first language, they do not constitute a majority in humanity taken as a whole (See Graph 1).

■ <sup>20</sup> See <http://www.terralingua.org> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>21</sup> *Words of the World: The Global Language System*.  
Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001.

GRAPH 1:  
Percentage of the 10 most spoken languages in the total of languages spoken



\* The list of most-spoken languages is (moving clockwise from the 12 o'clock position) Chinese (15.27%), Spanish (6.94%), English (6.48%), Arabic (4.16%), Bengali (3.7%), Hindi (3.47%), Portuguese (3.24%), Russian (3%), Japanese (2.08%), German (1.62%), Others (50.04%).

In other words, all the world's languages are minority languages although some aim to be regarded—and frequently are regarded—as hegemonic or majority languages on the world scale. If we could all learn to see ourselves as we really are, as members of bigger or smaller linguistic minorities, perhaps understanding among the languages of the world would be less difficult.

The distinguished sociolinguist Joshua Fishman alerts us also to other characteristics of the world's new linguistic

order that should not be overlooked either<sup>22</sup>: along with the process of the spread of a worldwide *interlingua*, globalisation is accompanied by other processes of consolidation of regional and local languages. Fishman notes there were never as many standardised languages as there are today, these amounting to some 1,200. Local languages, in many cases, maintain a great vitality and functional utility because they are so deep-rooted in their immediate natural and social surroundings. Many regional languages constitute more effective international vehicles of communication than English in numerous forms of interaction that are important for both individuals and organisations. Globalisation, regionalisation and localisation are simultaneously spreading and are processes that can complement each other in a balanced fashion, fostering a gradual multilingualism or polyglotism among groups of people, in keeping with the new settings in which we must interrelate.

As for the set of principles upon which a new worldwide linguistic order could be founded, I think particular attention should be paid to the approach of the Catalan sociolinguist Albert Bastardas<sup>23</sup>.

Bastardas considers that the spread of multilingual contacts and the demand in a globalised world for personal multilingual skills in an increasing number of linguistic communities that have hitherto been monolingual have created an increasingly favourable context for fostering a generalised awareness among the peoples of the world concerning the linguistic minorisation that many communities, including our own, have historically undergone to a greater or lesser degree. It is foreseeable, then, that there could be greater comprehension of situations of minorisation by more extensive and minorising linguistic groups. New possibilities open up, in this situation, for a profound rethinking of the principles of humanity's linguistic organisation and it is also a chance for attaining a more just and equitable politico-linguistic order.

Though these predictions of Bastardas may seem somewhat optimistic, I do not believe that we can completely rule them out. For the moment, it does not seem that there is



any detectable large-scale process in humanity as a whole of growing empathy with the situation of minority languages, even in the cases of those that are most endangered. However, in my view, it is probable that gradual verification of the tragic disappearance of linguistic and cultural groups will reach such a point of worldwide consternation that it will oblige reconsideration of the linguistic and cultural —and ecological in general— consequences of today's prevailing economicist model of globalisation. Again, as Bastardas also notes, the global dimensions of massive human migrations also entail the pressing need for almost all the societies in the world to establish equitable principles of intercultural coexistence that would give linguistic precision to the concept of reasonable accommodation to diversity in the most immediate and local contexts of social relations.

**The authorities can no longer disregard** this pressing demand without defining some principles of coexistence in linguistic diversity on all scales and levels, from the most local, to the State and through to the worldwide dimensions.

Bastardas has therefore been working on the idea of complementary —instead of contradictory— compatibility between two simultaneous demands: the continuity of linguistic diversity and essential, functional intercommunication at all levels. We should firmly and definitively reject the conflicting and dichotomic view that has prevailed until today in most linguistic policies that are designed to impose a single language on all the collectives in a particular political space and, at the opposite end of the scale, the claim to monolingual self-sufficiency that sometimes appears in the statements of hegemonic linguistic communities and even in demands for recognition by some minority linguistic communities.

Moreover, at this point, linguistic diversity offers particular differences and opportunities that do not appear in other spheres of diversity: indeed, any person can adopt and use a number of languages in a compatible and complementary fashion, which cannot be said of his or her gender condition, race or even religious choice. The coexistence of several languages in one person or society is not just a possibility, but it is also backed by numerous valid —though there is room for improvement— historical experiences. The approach, then, should not be that there is a *disjunction* in the form of an opposition between linguistic diversity **or** intercomprehension on a world scale, but to see that there is a *conjunction* between the two terms: linguistic diversity **and** intercomprehension on a world scale.

Neither can we ignore the risk that a situation of social bilingualism on the broad scale can evolve towards the displacement and general substitution of one language by another. This threat of linguistic substitution that hovers over minorised communities must be removed because their fears are frequently very well founded in the political frameworks of subordination and dependency in which they find themselves. However, it is also a good idea to examine situations of relatively stable diglossia that have appeared at different times and in different contexts —like the cases analysed by Charles Ferguson<sup>24</sup>— and understand that complementary, equitable and stable distribution is

■ <sup>22</sup> *El nou ordre lingüístic*. In Digit-HVM (digital review of Humanities), N<sup>o</sup>. 3 (2001): <http://www.uoc.edu/humfil/articles/esp/fishman/fishman.html> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>23</sup> Although Bastardas has produced several texts dealing with these issues, I shall mainly refer to his plenary lecture (also available in English) at the World Congress

on Language Policies, Barcelona 2002: <http://www.linguapax.org/congres/plenaries/bastardas.html> (accessed in 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Ferguson, Charles, "Diglossia", in *Word* 15, N<sup>o</sup> 2 (August 1959), pp. 325-337.

possible between the languages that are in contact, if a political framework of equality rather than subordination is established, dissipating thus socio-cognitive interpretations of inferiority and self-denigration that constitute the basic motivation for abandoning one's own language and paving the way for the advance of linguistic substitution.

We are not unaware of the political problems raised by Bastardas' proposal which posits, as a condition for the viability of an equitable distribution of functions between languages in contact, equal political recognition of minorised individuals and linguistic communities in a clear and sincere process of developing their power or empowerment.

However, these considerations coincide at this point with a change in paradigm that is essential in many other fields for humanity: the need to abandon the coercive idea of power – according to which the attaining of powers of self-organisation by subordinate groups necessarily removes power from the dominant groups. In the linguistic field, as in many others, we should all understand power in a collaborative and additive sense: the empowerment of subordinated groups can contribute skills and new values of superior efficacy to society in general so that the whole is empowered.

As Bastardas suggests, basing himself on Edgar Morin's paradigm of complexity, our actions should be carried out in parallel on different levels: the political, that of representations or discourse on linguistic diversity, and that of the functions of intercommunication. In order to do so, it will be necessary to combine the traditional principles of the *territoriality*<sup>25</sup> and the *personality*<sup>26</sup> of linguistic rights —that can no longer have as their references strictly monolingual spaces or subjects— with new principles that are appropriate to the new sociolinguistic context that globalisation represents

First, application of the principle of *subsidiarity* —which is already widely known in the domain of structuring political and administrative powers— to the linguistic sphere should be studied. In the formula proposed by Bastardas, the principle would read as follows:

Any communicative function that can be carried out by a local language should not be conveyed by a language of regional or global reach.

This evidently means assuring the functional pre-eminence of each language within its own historically-constituted linguistic community, which is very much along the lines of the Barcelona Declaration. Extra-group languages would be used, as is logical, for increasingly frequent contacts with other collectives.

Yet this reserving of functions for local languages cannot overlook the increasingly present fact of interpenetration of linguistic groups and the existence of functional spheres that, in a local setting, entail the use of languages of regional or worldwide scope. Not only does the population become more and more bilingual, incorporating multilingual forms of communication, but each person also progressively acquires multilingual linguistic skills.

■ <sup>25</sup> In other words, the predominance and official nature of each language in the geographic zone in which the society that speaks the language is historically settled.

<sup>26</sup> I refer to recognition of the official nature and of a pattern of individual linguistic rights independently of the zone in which each language is spoken.

Thus, in keeping with Bastardas' views, if we do not want multilingualism to shift towards linguistic substitution, we should introduce, along with the principle of subsidiarity, a new principle, that of the *functional sufficiency* of local languages.

In order to ensure that a language does not become functionally unnecessary or redundant and hence dispensable for its own speakers, it is necessary to guarantee its use in a solid and significant nucleus of social functions that all the members of a local society should perform in the local language. These functions reserved for the local language cannot be hierarchically secondary —limited, for example, to informal oral communication in societies where written and technologically mediated communication already has a considerable presence. On the contrary, it must involve, to the maximum possible extent, prestigious and innovative functions so that the psychosocial assessments associated with them favour and justify the maintenance of the local language, its transmission to new generations and its acquisition by new members joining the local society.

**It will not be easy, of course, to persuade** the powers-that-be that promote the functional expansion of the dominant languages to accept these principles or to get the speakers of the more widespread languages to accept with good grace the functional pre-eminence of local languages and the resulting need to learn them. Neither can we even be sure —as we very well know in the Catalan context— that the speakers of a local language will clearly decide to maintain it in certain functions when they have already learned more widely-spoken languages and have found that adopting them for these functions is not only easy but it can also involve a certain sense of superiority or identification with some kind of fashionable behaviour.

Such a wide-ranging change of mentality and behaviour requires vast, concerted, worldwide action that would be capable of achieving the support of the international organisations and their active commitment in preserving the linguistic communities that are most critically endangered, a combined action on the international scale that would make it possible to reach agreement on a number of principles of linguistic pluralism that would be appropriate for all the peoples of the planet: a universal framework of linguistic sustainability.

In his brilliant lecture at the Barcelona Congress in May 2004, David Crystal proposed ten specific measures for achieving this essential involvement of society as a whole. I feel it is worth repeating them to close my lecture today:

- 1 **Use Internet** and the information and communication technologies to promote linguistic diversity.
- 2 **Involve young people** in movements in favour of linguistic diversity, taking their interests into account and respecting their non-academic cultural and linguistic forms because the future of our languages is in their hands.
- 3 **Make sure that linguistic diversity** is visible on every screen and in all kinds of multimedia communication.
- 4 **Promote all kinds of artistic creation** on the theme of linguistic diversity because the communicative, emotional and symbolic effectiveness of works of art is extraordinary.

- 5 **Establish an annual prize** for the best artistic creation on linguistic diversity (to be awarded, perhaps, on 26 September, European Day of Languages) as a way to promote consciousness-raising on these matters.
- 6 **Place within the reach of every home** the visible and attractive presence of a whole range of objects that represent linguistic diversity in order to introduce them into all the aspects of personal, everyday life.
- 7 **Include teaching about** and love of linguistic diversity in all educational curricula, from the earliest stages.
- 8 **Foster Centres of Information and Documentation** on linguistic diversity, where any interested person might easily obtain all sorts of information about this subject.
- 9 **In addition to all of this, establish a House of Languages**, a major international institution that people can visit and find detailed information about the world of language and the world's languages.
- 10 **Mobilise whatever resources are necessary** to make these goals a reality. This is not such a great effort as it may appear, compared with the efforts that go into much more dubious enterprises. And let us not forget that the costs of war are always greater than those of peace.

I am pleased to recall that Professor David Crystal's suggestions were not only very well received by the participants in the last Linguapax Congress in Barcelona, but that his request to establish a House of Languages in order to symbolise and bring together all the elements of this project of universal linguistic diversity immediately received the support of the President of the Generalitat (Government) of Catalonia, Pasqual Maragall, and of the representative of the City of Barcelona, both of whom attended the lecture. I am informed that the House of Languages project is under serious consideration in Catalonia<sup>27</sup> and I should be happy if everyone who is interested in all these issues could be sure from now on that this House of Languages will be their house in Barcelona, just as the project of universal linguistic sustainability will be our project.

It is true, as I said at the closing session of the Barcelona Congress that this project might seem utopian to some, but it is indubitably one of the *realistic utopias* that the great theoretician of liberalism John Rawls<sup>28</sup> considered to be essential for the future of humanity. It is a utopia worth striving for. And the most unreal utopia is, of course, to aspire to a world without diversity. This would be a world that would not be worth anything, even for those who get to dominate it ||

■ <sup>27</sup> During the Guadalajara International Book Fair, on 30 November 2004 to be precise, the Government of Catalonia adopted an agreement to initiate the project of the House of Languages.

<sup>28</sup> In his book *The Law of Peoples* (1999).

**Gil-Manuel Hernández i Martí**

# The deterritorialization of cultural heritage in a globalized modernity

## INTRODUCTION

**The aim of the following essay is to deal synthetically with the deterritorialized quality acquired by cultural heritage in the transition from first modernity to globalized modernity. In order to do so, we will start by defining the concept of deterritorialization, which in our opinion describes the essence of the cultural condition of globalization.**

Following this, a brief description of the main transformations undergone by cultural heritage in its evolution towards advanced modernity will be given. From there on, the body of the article will analyze the different signs which characterize the deterritorialization of culture, with special emphasis on the paradox of the reactive and compensatory processes of reterritorialization not being able, after all, to escape the context itself and the characteristic means of deterritorialization. This is why the three central manifestations of cultural deterritorialization are mentioned. These manifestations are homogenization, differentiation and, most especially, hybridization, as the concept of cultural heritage itself is historically constructed as a hybrid social product.

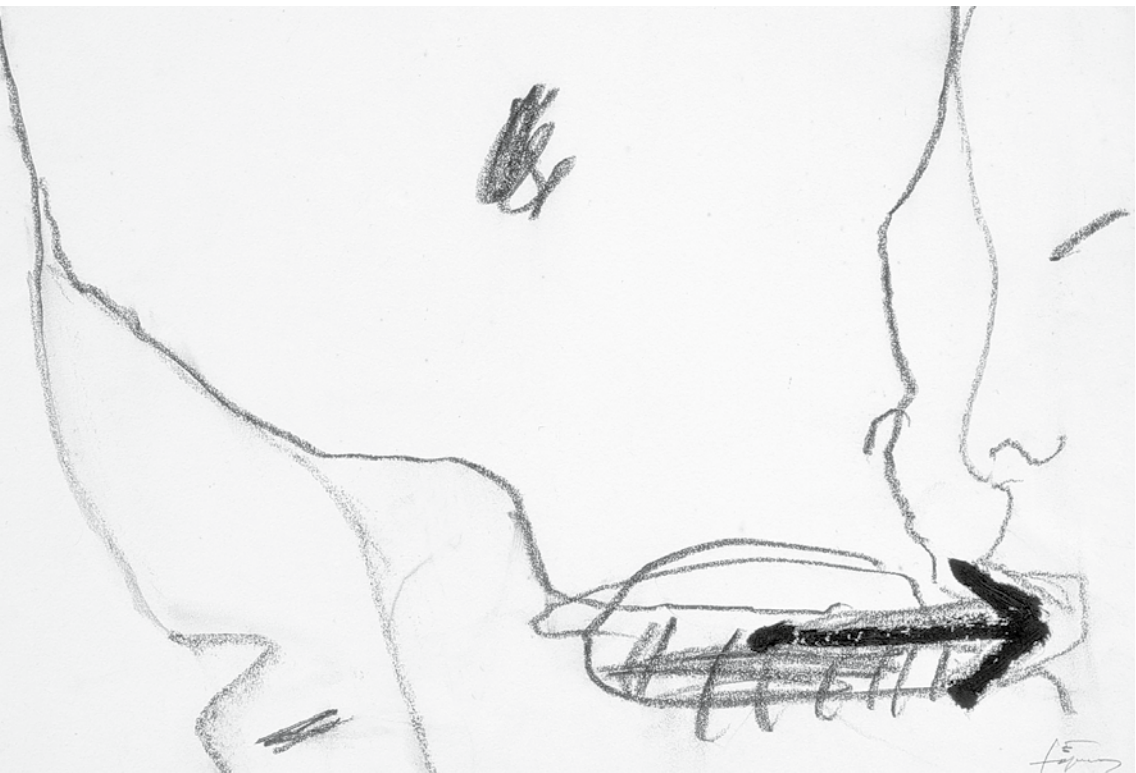
## DETERRITORIALIZATION AS A CULTURAL CONDITION OF GLOBALIZATION

The development and extension of the processes of mediatization, migration and commodification which characterise globalized modernity produce a considerable intensification of deterritorialization, understood as a proliferation of translocalized cultural experiences (Hernández 2002). Deterritorialization, considered a central feature of globalization, implies the growing presence of social forms of contact and involvement

which go beyond the limits of a specific territory, a kind of “weighing of anchors” of social relations (Giddens 1990), which takes us to a closer involvement with the external, which generates closeness in distance, and to a relative distancing from what is close. The mediatic and communicative nets work as obvious vehicles of deterritorialization; therefore, the extension of the forms of deterritorialized social relation tends to generalize with the intensification of globalization, causing a profound transformation in the status of local environments, ever more conditioned by global dynamics.

Mediatization works as a preferential source of deterritorialization, while it becomes a catalyser of other sources of deterritorialization (migrations, tourism, vast shopping centres, and economical transformations). As Tomlinson points out (1999), mediatization is absolutely omnipresent in everyday contemporary cultural experiences, it therefore appears as clearly decisive in deterritorialized cultural experience.

The aforementioned experience implies opening up to the world and amplifying cultural horizons through the globalized mass media. This means that globalization transforms the relation between the places where we live and our cultural activities, experiences and identities. Paradoxically, deterritorialization also includes reterritorialized manifestations, which García Canclini (1990, p. 288) defines as “certain relative, partial territorial relocalizations of old and new symbolic productions”. According to the concept of glocalization proposed by Robertson (1992), deterritorialization and reterritorialization



constitute both sides of the same coin of cultural globalization. Deterritorialization speaks of the loss of the “natural” relation between culture and the social and geographic territories (García Canclini 1990), and describes a deep transformation of the link between our everyday cultural experiences and our configuration as preferably local beings (Tomlinson 1999). As Giddens (1990, p. 142) argues, “the very tissue of spatial experience alters, conjoining proximity and distance in ways that have few close parallels in prior ages”. Nevertheless, it is very important not to interpret the deterritorialization of localized cultural experiences as an impoverishment of cultural interaction, but as a transformation produced by the impact the growing cultural transnational connections have on the local realm, which means that deterritorialization generates a relativization and a transformation of local cultural experiences, whether it is from the local event itself or by the projection of symbolical shapes from the local event.

“Globalization transforms the relation between the places where we live and our cultural activities, experiences and identities”

**In an intensely deterritorialized context**, the globalization of everyday experiences makes it ever more difficult to maintain a stable sense of local cultural identity, including national identity, as our daily life entwines itself more and more with influences and experiences of remote origin. As especially Appadurai (1997), García Canclini (1999), Ianni (1998), Ribeiro (2003) and Tomlinson (1999) have pointed out, to understand the essence of deterritorialization intensified by the process of mediatization we must grant special importance to the alterations experienced by the work of imagination. This indeed constitutes one of the basic factors to understand the cultural distancing from the locality, which is implicit in deterritorialization. Through the process of a mediatic expansion of imagination, from their own local situation individuals can imagine other lives, become familiar with landscapes and cultural products alien to their locality, create new materials for the reelaboration of the local experience, develop transnational cultural links, take cultural diversity to the locality, reinterpret standardized cultural products or set the conditions for hybridization to take place. The work of imagination implies the combination of image, imaginary and imagined community. It also assumes a space of symbolical disputes and negotiations through which individuals and groups try to annex things global to their practices of modernity, especially through the junction of mediatization with the movement of people (Appadurai 1997).

Nevertheless, deterritorialization is neither totally new, nor totally uniform. Firstly, because before contemporary deterritorialization, local cultures were never pure or isolated cultures, alien to exogenous cultural influences. Secondly, because globalization and, therefore, also deterritorialization are asymmetrical and unequal, as the cultural experience created by globalization is complex and varied. There are, therefore, several ways (more or less intense, active or agreeable) to experiment cultural deterritorialization. All the world inhabitants and all social classes experiment deterritorialization, but they do it from differentiated or unequal conditions and contexts.

Deterritorialization becomes, therefore, a general cultural condition which derives from the dissemination of global modernity, whose existential implication affects more people than ever, deeply transforming their everyday lives. As we have already outlined, deterritorialization is inserted in the dialectic character of globalization, as, far from being a linear or univocal process, it causes contrary and reflexive mechanisms of reterritorialization. This is expressed in the anxious search for cultural diversity, for particularism, for the reinforcement of the local, which even resorts to deterritorialized media. The ambiguous or ambivalent character of deterritorialization must not be forgotten, as, while it generates benefits, it also produces evident costs such as feelings of existential vulnerability or of cultural rootlessness, especially if you consider that individuals have ties to a locality, and this locality remains important for them. As a consequence, deterritorialization does not mean the end of the locality at all, but its transformation into a more complex cultural space, characterized by varied manifestations, tendencies or cultural effects.

The manifestations of cultural deterritorialization are basically two: cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization, which are but the cultural expressions of what Robertson (2000) calls the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism. This means that the particular can be universalized or projected to a global level and that the universal can be particularized and rooted with the local. Furthermore, both manifestations are dialectically related, in accordance with the glocalizing (and reflexive) dynamics of globalization, which advises against holding a conception of globalization as a mere uniformization or homogeneization of the world. We must, therefore, go beyond the debate which opposes homogenization to heterogenization in order to show that both tendencies imply each another. For this reason, we should emphasize the simultaneity, the reflexivity and the interpenetration of the global and the local, of the universal and the particular, of the homogeneous and the heterogeneous. From here on we can speak, firstly, of cultural homogenization, and, secondly, of the two manifestations of cultural heterogeneization, cultural differentiation and hybridization. From the mutual relation between homogenization, differentiation and hybridization derives a continuous flow of dialectical connections which delimit the glocalizing phenomenology of cultural deterritorialized experience.

**“The manifestations of cultural deterritorialization are basically two: cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization”**

Cultural homogenization presents both an apocalyptic face (homogenization understood as an Americanization, Westernization or absolute marketization of world culture) and an integrated face (homogenization can also have a “beneficial” manifestation, and, after all, its limit is always the active reception of cultural

asset). As far as heterogenization is concerned, the differentiation appears as much in the different reception of standardized cultural products as in the assertion of one’s own cultural identity through diverse mechanisms (cultural patrimonialization, indigenisms, cultural nationalisms, fundamentalisms, formation of new transnational ethical



communities or of new virtual communities which are also transnational). Finally, hybridization implies fusion, racial mixing, creolization, synthesis or symbiosis of diverse cultural plans which are not only affected by the global/local opposition, but that also by pairs such as traditional/modern, real/virtual or urban/rural. Notwithstanding, although there have been diverse manifestations of cultural homogenization and heterogenization in other periods of globalization, the increase of intensity, extension, speed, impact, infrastructures and of the institutional framework (Held *et al* 1999) of contemporary cultural globalization defines its differential character, which is especially visible in the mechanisms of deterritorialization. That is to say, these three manifestations of cultural deterritorialization are different from those that took place at other stages of globalization, due precisely to their extensive degree of deterritorialization, paradoxically visible in the fact, which we have already outlined, that reactive or compensatory mechanisms of reterritorialization have themselves to use deterritorialized media, an aspect which will be exemplarily expressed in the case of cultural heritage.

### CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE TRANSITION TOWARDS ADVANCED MODERNITY

Before dealing with the topic of deterritorialization of cultural heritage, the concept of cultural heritage must be defined. It could be described as a social construction, understood as a symbolic, subjective, processual and reflexive selection of cultural elements (from the past) which are recycled, adapted, refunctionalized, revitalized, reconstructed or reinvented in a context of modernity by means of mechanisms of mediation, conflict, dialogue and negotiation in which social agents participate. These cultural elements transform themselves into a selective representation which articulates itself through a discourse on heritage values, which is specified or fixed in the form of a valuable cultural asset which expresses the historical-cultural identity of a community, can be used for the legitimization of power structures and allows the reproduction of market mechanisms.

A concise account of the fundamental transformations undergone by cultural heritage in the last decades, emphasizing the progressive globalization and expansion will now be given. 1) From a heritage strictly identified with educated culture to a heritage which includes culture in the broadest sense of the word, moving from the concept of classical monument of the Western educated culture to the concept of cultural asset with all its social and geographical magnitude. 2) From a traditional, rural and pre-industrial heritage (typical of the conception of “national” heritage of the first modernity) to a heritage which includes modern, mediatic and urban forms derived from cultural dynamics of advanced modernity. 3) From movable and immovable cultural asset of a tangible character to immaterial and intangible cultural asset institutionally recognised at world level of late. 4) From a national heritage to a local and global heritage. This implies the expansion of heritage activating agents on behalf of diverse systems of belonging. If during a good part of modernity states and nationalist movements were the basic agents of patrimonialization, taking the nation as a referent of imagined community, they have later been joined by scholars and experts who, in the name of the scientific community, defend the preservation of cultural heritage for its documentary or informative value. In the last forty years they have been joined by the UNESCO, a supranational agent which

represents the generic community of humankind (World Heritage Sites), as well as by the civil society who independently from the state and by means of associations for the defence of heritage demand the activation of local heritages (local identities). Maybe we should add yet another agent: the companies who pursue an activation of cultural heritage for commercial interests (tourism, publicity), profit perspectives and consumer activities. 5) From a cultural heritage to a natural-cultural heritage, this includes the historico-artistic, archaeological, palaeontological, technico-scientific, ethnological and natural heritage and implies the assumption of the risks that threaten the environment (natural heritage) as well as of those that threaten past culture (cultural heritage).

It must be added that the changes in the intensity of cultural heritage are parallel to the changes in its extension, which are condensed in the literal globalization of patrimonialization of culture (Ariño 2002), especially if we consider that globalization, an irreversible process which appears in all aspects of social life, becomes one of the main agents of the transformations that affect the very substance of heritage, which extends its territories and has an influence on its national and local contexts, which in the end amplifies its social impact, as happens with ecological problems, which are transferred to social, political and economical realms. We are therefore witnessing a historical process of a dialectical nature, which transports heritage from origins which are local or related to the nation state towards clearly global dimensions, from which the local dimensions are reconfigured.

### **THE DETERRITORIALIZATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE: a paradox of globalized modernity**

As has already been pointed out, contemporary culture is a highly mediatized culture, to the point that mediatization is the basis of cultural globalization. To the extent that cultural heritage, both national and global, is transmitted through diverse media to heterogeneous audiences who are located in very different places, the aforementioned media manage to create an emotional, moral or touristic identification between the exposed heritage asset and a complex mediatic community, which generates new opportunities for remote action over heritage.

In the last thirty years, with the creation of a worldwide heritage, the mass media (radio, television, magazines, newspapers and the Internet) have diffused it massively. This has had two main consequences: on the one hand, the launching of a local heritage asset (an example would be el *Misteri d'Elx* —The Mystery Play of Elx—, which expresses an *Elxana*, Valencian and Spanish identity at the same time) to a potentially universal expansion for consumer cultural demand, an actual consequence of the so-called cultural tourism. This way a local heritage asset reaches a global realm, and thus is transformed into global heritage. On the other hand, the local community where the promoted asset is located is superimposed by a globalizing community as big as the human community. This global community is institutionally represented by the UNESCO. As a consequence, the diffusion of a heritage asset through the mass media allows it to enter the conscience of uncountable individuals who live in distant contexts, and they will therefore be able to incorporate it into their own phenomenal world. Paradoxically, in order to allow identification between the members of the universal neighbourhood

and the local asset, through world heritage, a neutralization or expurgation of the asset's original functionality and interpretation will be required; this way it acquires a clearly deterritorialized status as far as the structure of its meaning and its range of values are concerned. Therefore, the Buddhas of Bamiyan will not be considered just "pagan" idols, nor the Mystery Play of Elx conceived as just the representation of a Catholic dogma, nor the square of Djemma-El-Fnaa in Marrakesh, Morocco, considered only as an important local market.



Besides, with the fundamental participation of the mass media, the local communities that own a certain cultural asset will be interested in seeking the recognition of international institutions, and especially if they achieve this recognition, the locality, represented by the asset, will acquire a transnational status, projecting the originally local asset as an asset for “everyone”, as a fully global asset. In this highly mediatic process local cultural heritage will inevitably experiment a process of deterritorialization or uprooting, in the sense of loss of local control; nevertheless, its direct ownership will always be local. By emphasizing its cultural value, uncountable distant eyes (alien and far from local) will be invited to take this heritage as their own and to consume it. Therefore, this heritage will become, at least potentially, an object for touristic and mediatic consumption and with time, besides this, it will be necessarily spectacularized for external consumption. This will accelerate its transformation, with the unfolding of a mass of infrastructures, publicity media, marketing resources, management, dispersion and popularization institutions, or diversified museums. Let us look at several examples to illustrate this:

**1 The case of the Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afganistan.** Their destruction by the Taliban regime generated a worldwide mobilization in which the UNESCO, the UN, the Islamic Conference, diverse governments and embassies, museums and cultural institutions were involved, and a mediatic stirring which generated, at a local level, a sensitisation towards the protection of external and geographically isolated asset, although not officially World Heritage Sites.

**2 The subject of “the black man of Banyoles”.** Initially a local problem, but with colonial resonances, in which a Haitian doctor who lived in Banyoles complained about the presence of a Bushman warrior whose mummified body had been displayed at the town museum since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, became an international debate, in which several African countries, the OAU, the UNESCO and the UN were involved and which only abated when the body of the Bushman was finally withdrawn from the museum of Banyoles and buried in Botswana with great pomp and circumstance.

**3 Most of the properties declared World Heritage Sites** have several web pages on the Internet where they can be studied in certain depth. Similarly, other local heritage properties also try to project themselves through the Internet towards the global space to be internationally known and recognized, as is, for example, the case of the diverse carnival celebrations, the festival of San Fermín in Pamplona, the Valencian *Fallas*, the Sevillian Holy Week and even the “traditional” patron saint festivals which have been recovered of late in order to promote rural tourism. There is, in consequence, a growing relation between the appreciation of cultural heritage and the possibilities of the cyberspatial environment.

**4 The relation between tourism and heritage.** With the arrival and intensification of the tourist industry, local heritage properties become known world wide. Tourism implies an activity of cultural consumption clearly deterritorialized and highly mediaticized in which heritages are commercialized and spectacularized, while giving place to a new source of risk which threatens the touristically exploited heritage, creating the need of implementing a series of reflexive responses aimed at alleviating the risks. Thus, as local heritages are reappropriated by visiting

cultures, they are necessarily also reappropriated by the receiving local cultures, as their heritage asset has been irremissibly incorporated into the global touristic imaginary.

**5 The link between publicity and cultural heritage.** As publicity spreads homogeneous and global products, it also resorts to local, traditional and heritage elements, which helps it both to enter certain market spaces (from the perspective of a great transnational company) and to publicize the cultural idiosyncrasy of a region (from the perspective of their interest in promoting local tourism). In fact, “tradition”, i.e. cultural heritage, has become one of the main appeals of present day publicity. There are multiple examples of this in publicity for certain foods, which evoke for their promotion heritage elements of the past, such as rural tradition, noble culture, natural landscape, popular festivals or classical artistic heritage.

### **DETERRITORIALIZED HERITAGE: homogeneity and difference**

As we have already pointed out, the deterritorialization of cultural heritage constitutes a remarkable paradox of advanced modernity: indeed, in spite of the fact that the patrimonialization of culture is an important aspect of cultural reterritorialization, it cannot avoid a deterritorialized context or deterritorialized media in order to take place. That is why, after observing the three basic manifestations of cultural deterritorialization in general terms (homogenization, differentiation and hybridization), we must now assess them within the deterritorialization of cultural heritage itself.

As far as homogenization is concerned, this can be seen in a series of lines which we will now refer to. Firstly, the World Heritage List must be mentioned, an official list started in 1978 by UNESCO, to which the places that are declared World Heritage Sites are added year after year. At present, there are more than seven hundred declared sites; however, in spite of including sites from all over the world, what clearly stands out is that Western cultural heritage or heritage linked with the Christian civilization is visibly predominant. Secondly, moreover, the concept of cultural heritage is itself a product of modern Western culture and, like the nationalist ideology to which it is closely linked, it has not stopped globalizing since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which has generated a mimesis in the colonial territories that gained independence in the processes of decolonization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is a profound example of the westernizing project which hides behind the cosmopolitan ideology of enlightened origin (Sebastià 2004), an ideology which underlies to a great extent the heritage projects of UNESCO. On the other hand, and in the third place, the asset included in the world list has formed a kind of common global culture, according to the definition proposed by Ortiz (1997), a culture of localized origins, assumed as universal due to its deterritorialization, despite consisting of the cultural diversity which stems from its components. In addition, and in the fourth place, since 1972, the year in which the Convention concerning the Preservation of Cultural and Natural Heritage adopted by the general conference of UNESCO decided to activate the concept of world heritage, a standardized category of what has to be understood as world heritage (both natural and cultural) has started to be diffused worldwide, with criteria approved by the countries who signed the Convention and with uniform categories into

which cultural heritage can be classified. That is so because international conventions and recommendations have a global scope and imply universalist homologated definitions of what is to be understood as heritage, to the point that in the last fifteen years UNESCO has also decided institutionally what is to be understood as popular and traditional culture, or as oral and immaterial culture. In the fifth place, there is a series of institutions and knowledgeable experts (techno-scientists) who, in addition to UNESCO, spread a homogeneous conception of what should be understood as heritage, and of

“We must add the sense of the relation between memory, territory and the quality of a meaningful life which underlies the associative heritage work”

how this heritage has to be studied and preserved. This is the case of institutions or institutional networks such as the European Council, the European Union, ICOM, ICCROM, ICOMOS, IUCN or the Forum UNESCO University and Heritage). In relation with this, in the sixth place, there is a series of standardized patrimonialized formulas and categories which have spread all over the world: cultural asset, museum, eco-museum, theme park, biosphere reserve, natural park, national park, cultural space,

cultural landscape, palaeontological park, fauna and biosphere reserve, architectonic complex, archaeological park, historical urban centre, historical town or cultural park; to sum up, a set of formulas and instrumental categories which homogenise the definition, classification and management of cultural heritage throughout the world, as happens with the devices for management, conservation, protection, definition, evaluation, commercial exploitation and categorization of cultural heritage (v. A. 2001).

With respect to differentiation, it must be said that cultural patrimonialization is, currently, one of the main expressions of cultural differentiation and of the assertion of local cultures and identities. This is, to a great extent, the result of a reterritorializing effort against the reflexive perception of deterritorialization seen as a risk, even though, paradoxically, this reaction is expressed and asserted through the mass media. One of the most evident expressions of this differentiation is the revitalization of traditions, a phenomenon which is widely documented in the world (Boissevain 1999; Berger and Huntington 2002) and implies the re-adaptation of a series of cultural materials of traditional origin such as folk music, festivities, customs, trades, crafts, markets and fairs, among other expressions of traditional popular culture, to the cultural demands of advanced modernity.

Secondly, taking into account the empirical evidence of studies carried out in France, Canada and the Valencian Community, the work for the defence of heritage by civic organizations should be mentioned. It is a phenomenon which is related to a great associative effervescence of the last two decades, with the proliferation of local associations in defence of cultural heritage, working for the defence of cultural asset which is scarcely promoted by official policies, and for the sensitization, recovery and defence (by means of criticism, denunciation and demands) of specific cultural values.

These groups for the defence of heritage are extremely aware of the magnitude of economical development and growth, and of the uncontrolled and irreversible risks they can generate over cultural asset, such as degradation, abandonment, depersonalization of the way of living or speculative urban and industrial aggression. These associations therefore try to sensitize, create awareness, make demands, denounce, intervene, research and inform about local heritages. They also defend a global conception of heritage and culture (which implies restoring dignity to popular forms). To this we must add the sense of the relation between memory, territory and the quality of a meaningful life which underlies the associative heritage work which also insists on the practice of an active citizenship and a civic commitment, as they work for the common cultural good. Therefore, the associations for the defence of heritage work to present cultural heritage as an instrument in the struggle for quality of life, by means of a selection of valuable elements to build the identity and dignity of a community, following the line proposed by the so called post-modernizing values (Inglehart 1997). The aim, therefore, is the reinforcement of collective identity and its projection towards the future, providing the community with a historical sense.

### **CULTURAL HERITAGE: a zombie of modernity**

Finally, hybridization as an expression of cultural deterritorialization which affects heritage must be dealt with more extensively. To begin with, it must be noted that the modern idea of cultural heritage already implies, to a great extent, a hybridization phenomenon: it is clear that several actors and cultural approaches intervene in its social construction and there is a merging of the cultured, the popular, the mass, the economic, the political, the identifying and the scientific. The very fact that heritage is being forged by re-adapting materials coming from cultural tradition (past) for diverse uses in modern society (present) implies a process of mixture, fusion and symbiosis which generates a cultural asset which is neither traditional in the narrowest sense (as this quality disappears in the processes of detraditionalization) nor a mere expression of present culture, even if it is the product of the anxieties and cultural programmes of society in advanced modernity. Patrimonializing culture implies, therefore, hybridization culture, mixing elements which have been rescued from the past with elements generated in the present, for its future endurance, so that cultural heritage can be transmitted from generation to generation. This particular mixture of past, present and future forms the hybrid and impure essence of heritage, where dead and living forms of culture, tradition and modernity, amnesia and anamnesis, enchantment and disenchantment, order and criticism are fused.

The concept of cultural heritage is paradoxical because, while it expresses the tragic and nostalgic awareness of the fracture implied in the longing for the past (Lowenthal 1993), it tries to overcome it, sublimate it and compensate it with the construction of a concept which, at the end of the day, becomes an imaginary representation socially constructed from the needs of the present. In some ways, and allowing the use of this image, cultural heritage appears before us as a zombie or a living dead. As we all know, zombies are hybrids of the dead and the living, beings who died but not completely, who remain in the ambiguous territory of catatonic life, of half-death. Cultural heritage behaves like a



**Crani dibuixat (Drawn Skull)**  
Antoni Tàpies (2005)  
paint and pencil on paper  
64 x 50 cm

*Tàpies*



zombie, which may enjoy better or worse health, but whose energy is the product of a life injected by present agents who are, for diverse reasons, interested in rescuing fragments from the past. The heritage zombie, a hybrid which is as much the son of modernity as the Promethean monster of Frankenstein, enjoys, therefore, an artificial life. It is a life connected to the machine of present urges, a modern machine which, by means of diverse administrative, economic and technical devices, extracts rich fluids from the heritage zombie in the form of political-identity legitimization and potentially exploitable merchandising, but to which, on the other hand, it must regularly inject vital liquids, administered in a bureaucratic and rational way in order to keep it alive. Significantly, this strange hybridization of dead culture and cultural politics (cultural vivification) is what makes cultural heritage more attractive, and what grants it better health. In the same way as extinct beings or species can be cloned through technological means, ancient pieces of history can be recreated, cloned or resurrected through the patrimonialization of culture, conveniently filtered through the cultural needs of contemporaneity.

The hybridization at the core of cultural heritage produces the introduction of artificial memories, as happened to the anguished replicants in the film *Blade Runner*. They are not personal memories, but memories that have been implanted and incorporated through the institutional process of patrimonialization. Truly speaking, heritage does not correspond exactly to our memories, it is an artificially assembled historical memory which is inserted through the socializing mechanisms of culture, allowing the memories, the fragments of historical past, the possibility of being felt as personal experiences, so personal and social memory merge into a concentration where the denser fluids come basically from the work of the identities' imagination.

In its hybrid condition, heritage synthesizes modernity and tradition. It is true that the patrimonialization of culture is inseparable from modernism, understood as a discourse, an ideology and an identity at the service of the creative destruction of the present, and at the same time linked to the images of evolutionism and the great developist tales. Heritage is established as a product of the reflexive conscience of modernism and, as it succeeds and legitimizes the achievements of modernity, it generates a modernized vision, i.e. homologated and normalized, of past traditional culture, one of the reasons being that heritage can testify and reinforce the appropriateness of the project of modernity. This is the reason why cultural heritage is not only a modern creation but also a modernist one, embedded in the modern myth of the civilization process. Ironically, modernity also becomes a breeding place for new traditions, since, as its historicity increases, due to its dynamics of intensified change, the threshold of obsolescence diminishes and the area of what can potentially be patrimonialized increases dramatically.

In present times characterized by the increase of past territory and decrease of present territory, we find, nevertheless, the paradox that the hunger for anamnesis (of memory and recollections) can lead, in mercantiled, spectacularized and consumerist conditions, to a kind of assembling or hybridization of pasts which could result in the production of a kind of amnesia or amnesic memory. In other words, the inflation and saturation itself of cultural heritage can deactivate the initial pretence of anamnesis and find an amnesia which has the appearance of memory culture. This coexistence or fusion of amnesic and anamnesic memory leads to the combination of the late modern practices of *zapping* and *surfing* through the past with what could be called the speleology of memory. This

*zapping* presents an atomized treatment of the past, allowing us to pass from one to the other with hedonistic idleness, enjoying the television programmes on channels such as History Channel or Discovery Channel. On these channels, as well as in theme parks, shopping centres and tourist circuits we practise *surfing*, understood as the superficial approach to the past, a practice which allows us to slide over the smooth homologated board of the heritage fair through the most famous waves of history, without having to study their origins or the effects they generated.

This speleology of memory, an illusion of a deep knowledge of the past, is actually a task patiently undertaken by historical science, which still believes in great all-comprehensive chronicles, daily and frivolously undone by the mass media or the entertainment industry. This happens because the acceleration of historical change ultimately creates simultaneity of available pasts in a notoriously capitalist context. Therefore the past becomes a bazaar of consumable pasts in a continuous present, where the reenchantment inherent in the triumphant instrumental rationality merges with the expressive need of reenchantment by compensation, a need that can actually only be satisfied, as Ritzer would say (1999), through genuinely disenchanting mechanisms.

To complete the hybrid character of cultural heritage, the hotchpotch created between the legitimization of the established order and its critical potential must be referred to. A conception of heritage which pretends to be neutral and positive is imposed by institutions. The merchandized heritage is emphasized in the name of identity, wellbeing and tourism, and an uncritical vision of the past is generated, subject to the *status quo* and opposed to visions of heritage that insist on approaches that are critical or challenge past or present rule. In general, these critical approaches dissolve in the jungle of decontextualized culturalisms, and are systematically obliterated by the avalanche of strategies of identity exaltation or by well-intentioned developist discourses.

To this matrix of hybridizations (past and present, tradition and modernity, amnesia and anamnesis, real memory and artificial memory, enchantment and disenchantment, order and criticism) must be added the main hybridization of cultural deterritorialization: the one that takes place between heritages of diverse origin, or between local and global heritages, all this in the context of the same transnational reorganization of the local. Think, for example, of the proliferation of theme parks, where heritage elements coming from diverse cultures and civilizations, either metaphorically (reproductions) or metonymically (with real elements), are incorporated in a new space —generally a non-place following Augé's definition (1993)— and mixed to obtain a new cultural product aimed at touristic or leisure consumism, such as Port Aventura or Terra Mítica. Prats (1997), actually calls these cultural activations “hybrid activations”, as they play with the mixture of heritages for diverse identitary, social and touristic ends.

But heritage hybridization with a clear deterritorialized character does not end here; in fact, it can be found in other realms. That is the case of hybrid heritages of origin or in process (festivities, crafts, music, languages, fairs or clothing), subject to spectacularization or equalization processes or the so-called “cultural spaces”, recognised by UNESCO as an example of master pieces of oral or immaterial heritage and, precisely as a result of their declaration as such, they are inserted in modern tourist circuits; and therefore change their appearance and become a melting-pot of typical traditions (this is the case, for

example, of the peculiar cultural universe of the Djemma-el-Fnna square in Marrakech). The patrimonialization of cultural hybrids also derives from the impact of tourism and the mass media, as in the creation of external or global heritages which are subsequently reincorporated in other localities and inserted in their local culture, as happened with the exportation and local adaptation of the model of the Brazilian carnival, the Anglo-Saxon models of Christmas and Halloween or the Alcoian model of the Moors and Christians festivities which have spread throughout the Southeast of Spain.

Advanced modernity emphasizes the hybridization of heritages in other realms: in publicity, where commercial strategies and avant-garde designs merge with the evocation of traditional topics; as happens with a lot of the food publicity; in citizen vindication, where associations of “save the...” do not hesitate to introduce modern art exhibitions in traditional heritages in order to enhance the cultural value with the added value of contemporary and committed works of art; in the modern uses of heritage, which consist in celebrating festivals or creative events in heritage surroundings (a rock opera in a Roman theatre or an intercultural music festival in a heritage architectural surrounding); in the modern cybernetic creations based on heritage resources; or in the generation of museums and spaces where the real and the virtual, the strictly museum material and the commercial spectacular are mixed in an implosive way (as in the Old Harbour in Barcelona or in the City of Arts and Sciences in Valencia).

In conclusion, it may be suggested that at the core of the acute cultural deterritorialization which characterizes cultural globalization of advanced modernity, cultural heritage is fully affected by the characteristic expressions of deterritorialization (homogenization, differentiation and hybridization), and it is precisely this profound hybrid character that provides it with a greater complexity and introduces it into the conflicts derived from growing multiculturalism

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**M. Carme Junyent**

# The volatilization of literature

**Humankind is immersed in an unprecedented process of linguistic homogenization: according to predictions, if things do not change, in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century only 10% of the present linguistic heritage will be left. We are not certain of how this will affect life on our planet, but the destruction of resources, the loss of knowledge which has been accumulated for centuries, the different ways of seeing the world and, in short, all that languages are and represent, will probably have disastrous consequences for all.**

All the consequences it has entailed so far must be considered: marginalization, uprooting, poverty, violence and a very long etcetera, which can be summed up in all the possible forms of suffering. There is an aspect, however, that, as it precedes the process and is intimately linked to it, at least allows us to understand what is at stake in this story. I am referring to literary creation.

Needless to say language is the raw material of literature, but creation cannot be separated from cultural tradition, and from the literary tradition and the referential world which nourishes the author. In addition, the recipient of this creation, the relationship authors establish with their readers and the message they transmit can also be added. Although the act of writing is individual, this does not imply it is dissociated from a context, and contexts have a history. The individuality of the act of writing allows the choice of language, and history is full of authors who have chosen a language which is not their own or who have written in two languages. Conrad, Nabokov, Beckett, Ionesco or Celan are some of the names always mentioned whenever a change of language has to be justified. However, does anybody consider Conrad a representative of Polish literature or *Lolita* a work of Russian literature? It would be odd to do so, as the choice of language also implies the choice of a referential world in which to insert oneself and, especially, of a recipient.

As the mercantilization of literature has turned the recipients into consumers, the creation has also adapted itself to the consumers taste, and market laws have required the product to be addressed to the maximum number of potential readers; so authors choose majority languages to obtain readers. The choice clearly implies the renunciation of history or, at least, the insertion in an alien history, a history which has created its own stereotypes of the other and which will not allow them to be changed. This, therefore, transforms the writer into a reproducer of stereotypes and a transmitter of official history, dissociated from the context which, in theory, nourishes him, who creates and recreates a product for consumption. Literature, however, has volatilized.

### THE “CHOICE” OF LANGUAGE

For isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? And what can that really mean? The language of the criminal can explain and express the deed only from the criminal's point of view.

JAMAICA KINCAID, *A small place* (1988)

In the history of the processes of linguistic substitution of a large percentage of the languages which have disappeared during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a common element can be found which initiates the process: the adoption of the dominant language by a cultured elite. This fact, which could be nothing more than a “social indicator”, usually has immediate implications which often explain the subsequent developments: language becomes an instrument of power which allows the people holding it to control those who do not. This is naturally a good ploy to achieve dissemination, and this explains, for example, the rejection of the use of subordinate languages by the speakers themselves. This rejection can be restricted to certain realms, education for example, or even reach the most intimate realms of communication, but whatever scope it has, we will always find the feeling that the subordinate language reduces or hampers the possibilities of social mobility. The fact that the possibility of thriving by means of the subordinate language is not even considered is quite incomprehensible unless we take into account that the dissemination of the dominant language goes hand in hand with an ideology which is, in the end, the most destructive factor for linguistic diversity.

The colonial enterprise, as any form of imperialism, is characterised by an absolute disdain towards people, their cultures and their languages and, when faced with self-destruction, it is easier to change a language than to change skin colour, for example. However, giving up one's own language is a painful enough process for a very powerful ideological apparatus not to be needed, and this apparatus is provided by disdain, humiliation, punishment and marginalization; if this is not enough, genocide, deportation, the kidnapping of children and other similar practices can always be resorted to, therefore leaving the victims defenceless and with no possibility of choice. Nevertheless, the process of persuasion is more “civilized”, making believe that the language that has been transmitted is useless. This method is more civilized and more effective, because in the end, what is left is mental colonization, as destructive as colonization itself and much longer lasting. It is actually so civilized and efficient that

it even manages to make its victims believe that they have chosen the new language freely, and, in consequence, any attempt at recovering linguistic heritage is branded as imperialistic and antidemocratic.

When dealing with literature, the social fracture implied by dominant language versus subordinated language is reproduced in the authors who “choose” and those who probably do not even think about choosing, that is, those who write in the dominant language, and those who write in the language they have been allotted. The former are in theory addressing the world, the latter are simply creating; the former set themselves up as representatives of their people, the latter write for them; the former are recognized, the latter are hidden by the former. Worst of all is the fact that the former are those who, with products manufactured for the market, have impeded the flotation of literary creation. This result is clearly linked to language.

If there is a representative figure of what mental colonization can imply for a writer, it is the Senegalese Leopold Sédar Senghor, the instigator of what was supposed to be a back-to-roots movement, the *négritude*, and the author of some of the most servile texts towards the language of the master which can be found: “Why do we write in French? Because we are cultural hybrids, because although we feel in black, we express ourselves in French, because French is a language with a universal vocation, so that our language also addresses French people from France and other men, because French is a language of kindness and honesty. [...] I know its resources for having tasted it, chewed it, taught it and it is the language of gods. So listen to Corneille, La Fontaine, Rimbaud, Péguy and Claudel. Listen to the great Hugo. French, great organs that are suitable for every tone, every effect, the gentlest and most dazzling sweetness of tempest. It is, alternatively and at the same time, flute, oboe, trumpet, tam-tam and even cannon”<sup>1</sup>.

Senghor’s poetry is so alien to Africa that he can hardly be considered an African poet. A similar fate seems to have befallen the work of another member of the *négritude*, the Martinican writer Aimé Césaire, of whom his fellow countryman Patrick Chamoiseau makes the following assessment: “And, for example, the relationship Césaire has with the French language, his adherence to this language, comes from this dynamics; a dynamics and a relationship with the language which is almost a relationship of idolatry. And the problem with Antillean writers is that, when they wrote in French, they became French. They were so concerned with universality, so concerned with obliterating any trace of Creole, of presence in the country and in the place where they found themselves —a mean little country of black people— so greatly concerned with universality that they used a language in which they disappeared completely”<sup>2</sup>.

The *négritude* inspired a similar movement, called *Vamos descobrir Angola*, led by Agostinho Neto, Portuguese being its vehicular language. Neto, as president of his country —and in a similar way to Senghor— did very little for the revitalization of African languages, in spite of his well-intentioned discourses about returning to roots. Writers such as Wole Soyinka, who wrote in English, or Tchicaya U’Tamsi, who wrote in French

■ <sup>1</sup> L. S. SENGHOR, *Poèmes*, Paris: Seuil, 1973, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> P. CHAMOISEAU, “Un rapport problématique”, in L. GAUVING (ed.), *L’écrivain francophone à la croisée des langues. Entretien*, Paris: Karthala, 1997, p. 37.

were in opposition to the *négritude*, in spite of the fact that their linguistic behaviour was identical to that of those they condemn. The processes that led the country to independence initiated a debate about the language of literature, in which Wole Soyinka showed special virulence: “There is an inherent element of irrationality, the unwillingness to accept the socio-political reality of which those affected form part, an attempt to leave them out of the national structures —out of the judicial and legislative structure, traffic signs and shops, all of which use this language— an attempt to make them operate outside history, outside the reality of their country”<sup>3</sup>.

Tchicaya U’Tamsi discharges an enraged argument which writers who have “chosen” the dominant language have used in all its possible variants: “So you want to know if it bothers me to write in French? Or why in French and not in Congolese? Well, I ask myself and my reply is: It certainly does bother me, but what can I do? What do we do with an impairment which is consequence of an accident? We drag it along until our death hoping it is not the genesis of an atavism for those who follow on”<sup>4</sup>.

We will speak about this “atavism” further on. Let us, however, first go back to Soyinka’s argument about “the country’s reality”, because when this reality has been faced with honesty, the answer has been very different.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o is probably the author who is best known for having abandoned the dominant language in favour of his own language, in this case Kikuiu. The return to roots is actually caused by a clash with the “reality” of his country: wanting to write a play for a theatre group in his village, he realises that he cannot do it in a language,

**“This choice [of an alien language] also implies the choice of a kind of reader, and this is where the alienation of the work with respect to its context condemns it to volatilization”**

English, which they do not know; this prompts a reflection which makes him abandon English as a language for creation and to write subsequent works in Kikuyu. The case of Ngugi also illustrates quite a revealing fact: although his works in English are a fierce criticism of colonization, of neocolonization, of

the corruption in his country, Ngugi had never had any problems with censorship; it is evident that they were not too concerned about a work that, in any case, could not reach the great majority of Kenyans as they did not understand the language in which it was written. On the other hand, a play in Kikuyu results in his imprisonment and later his exile. Ngugi’s experience is similar to that of Ismaïla Traoré. This Malian author also reaches the conclusion that “literature in national languages can be a weapon to participate in the awakening of consciences”<sup>5</sup> and, as a result of the premiere of one of his plays (where the author was not mentioned), the director of l’École Normale Supérieure where it was staged was sanctioned and removed from his post. The person who was at the time in charge of the Organization of Malian Students was arrested and tortured, but he assumed all responsibilities and refused to name the author. The reflection that made Ngugi and Traoré write in their own languages is shared by other authors such as



Sembène Ousmane, from Senegal, who, having written many plays in French, started directing cinema in Wolof and publishing a magazine in this language; or Gassou Diawara, who wrote his first works in French but who in the end reached the conclusion that “we have written in the great languages of Western communication; for the moment we are strangers in our own home, because our people do not identify themselves with us”<sup>6</sup>. As André Salifou says: “I have absolutely nothing against ‘francophony’ not even against ‘Frenchness’, but no one is fooled: when they say that a country like Niger, for example, is francophone, everybody knows it is a way of saying what the country is not. The Nigerians who are capable of reading a book —or even the merest texts— written in French [...] are no more than a handful of privileged people”<sup>7</sup>.

Taking into account the percentages of population who know the dominant language in many parts of the world, it is obvious that the unwillingness to accept the reality described by Soyinka is mostly typical of those who “chose” an alien language. The question is that, inevitably, this choice also implies the choice of a kind of reader, and this is where the alienation of the work with respect to its context condemns it to volatilization.

## THE CHOICE OF READER

In Africa, Paris is still the privileged place of recognition. It is in Paris where African books are published and sold.

HAMIDOU DIA

When the question of the language of literature is raised, one of the arguments most often put forward by writers who have chosen to write in the dominant language is that of the potential public. But although this comes down to the possible number of readers, this choice implies a specific kind of public. What public is in the mind of a writer who says things like this: “Even when kidnapping is advised by the girl’s parents or they mutually agree on the matter, in no case has this not been considered an infringement of our ancestors’ good principles”<sup>8</sup>.

Or like this: “Her deepening despair found expression in the names she gave her children. One of them was a pathetic cry, Onwumbiko, ‘Death I implore you’. But death took no notice. Onwumbiko died in his fifteenth month. The next child was a girl, Ozoemena, ‘May it not happen again’. She died in her eleventh month, and two others after her. Ekwefi then became defiant and called her next child Onwuma, ‘Death may please himself’. And he did”<sup>9</sup>.

What makes novels become anthropology textbooks in which even the translation of proper names becomes a part of the novel? Evidently, the author is thinking of a reader

■ <sup>3</sup> W. SOYINKA, “Ethics, Ideology and the Critic”, in K. HOLST PETERSEN (ed.), *Criticism and Ideology*, Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> TCHICAYA U’ TAMSİ, “Le socialisme c’est la révolution à parfaire”, in M. ROMBAUT, *Nouvelle poésie négro-africaine*, Paris: Saint-Germain-des Prés, 1976, p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> A-B. ISCHINGER, *Kulturidentität und Frankographie*. Afrikanistische Monographien 5, Universität zu Köln, 1995, p. 88.

<sup>6</sup> Id., p. 92

<sup>7</sup> A. SALIFOU, *Tamimoune*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1973, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> X. UANHENGA, *Maka na sanzala*, Lisboa: Eds. 70, 1979, p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> CH. ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart*, New York: Fawcett Crest, 1959.

**Dibuix negre III (Black Drawing III)**, Antoni Tàpies (2005)  
paint and pencil on paper 23,8 x 16,5 cm



*Tàpies*

who ignores the context of his work and, therefore, needs to be put in the picture. For some, as for the Congolese writer Sony Labou Tansi, for example, this seems to be the main objective, given that, as François Lumwamu says: “The identity of the Sonyan man coincides with the promotion of ethnical culture. In this sense, at several levels, Sony’s novels are marked by this ideal of defence and illustration of Kongo culture. The many *excursus* in these texts do not seem to have any reason other than offering, through fiction, an insight into this culture, whether it is dealing with the structuring of space in well identified clans or with time”<sup>10</sup>.

But the choice of reader does not only imply the anthropologization of literature but it all too often implies the creation of characters, worlds and situations which fit the stereotype the chosen reader has of the other. This corresponds clearly with what Edward Said calls “Orientalism”, a discourse, according to the author himself: “by which European culture was able to manage —and even produce— the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period”<sup>11</sup>.

And as he says in a later article: “Orientalism is a style of thought based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between ‘Orient’ and (almost always) ‘Occident’. Thus, a great number of writers, among which there are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as a starting point for the creation of theories, epic, novels, social descriptions and political explanations about Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind’, fate, etc.”<sup>12</sup>.

Although orientalism develops in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the model of relationship established by it expands and ramifies during the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a pattern of relationships between Occident and the rest of the world, and it is the one adopted by authors who, with the choice of language, choose also the reader. The difference resides in the fact that in the former case the stereotype is created by Occident, and in the latter case, when the writers who have chosen the dominant language are the ones who come into play, they are actually adding fuel to these stereotypes and in doing so, in spite of their self-appointed role of intermediaries —or interpreters, as they are known— become screens which stand in the way of true knowledge of the other. Naturally, Western publishing industry has also played its part, as in the case of Heinemann and its African Writers Series: “A cursory history of the Series suggests that Heinemann, for all its well-intentioned activities, may have contributed to the continuing exoticization of Africa it has promoted by way of its talented literary protégés and has been subjected to a self-empowering, implicitly neocolonialist ‘anthropological gaze’”<sup>13</sup>.

By simply looking through the catalogue of this collection, it is noticeable that, as far as language is concerned, the majority of the titles are originally written in English, and regarding the translations, they can be found translated from French, Portuguese and Arabic, while very few works are originally written in African languages. It is therefore obvious that the market lays down its own conditions and that the “interpreters” do nothing to change them. On the whole, this leads to an isolation and an alienation

■ <sup>10</sup> A-P. BOKIBA, *Écriture et identité dans la littérature africaine*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998, p. 129.

<sup>11</sup> E. SAID, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage, 1978, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> E. SAID, “From Orientalism”, in P. MONGIA, (ed.),

*Contemporary Postcolonial Theory. A Reader*, Arnold: p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> G. HUGGAN, *The Post-Colonial Exotic. Marketing the Margins*, London & New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 50.

which critics have not refrained from denouncing. Anthony Appiah, for example, defines “postcoloniality” as “the condition of what could be called, without the merest generosity, *comprador intelligentsia*: a relatively small group of writers and thinkers in the Western style and formed the Western way, who are intermediaries in the trade of cultural products from the capitalist world to the periphery”<sup>14</sup>. Or Grahan Huggan: Indo-Anglian writing is the product of a roving band of privileged diasporics; that it has become the happy hunting ground of a fairly small group of clubbable cosmopolitans, who are producing a self-consciously globalized literature “written by elites, and defined and canonized by elites”<sup>15</sup>.

The elite is, therefore, the one who establishes the characteristics that the product must have, the one who acts as a censor or promoter of ideological, aesthetic, thematic trends etc. Huggan remembers, for example, the first meeting of Commonwealth

“The elite is the one who establishes the characteristics that the product must have, the one who acts as a censor or promoter of ideological, aesthetic, thematic trends etc.”

writers in Leeds, where they required the writer to be an “internationalist”, who must be comprehensible to readers in Heckmondville or Helmsby, and asks himself “how the writer in London or New York would react to the demand that s/he must also be comprehensible to readers in Murrurundi or Kumasi”<sup>16</sup>.

The choice of reader, apart from alienation, also has other effects that have contributed to the volatilization of literature. A significant one is the isolating of the recipients, both the “chosen ones” and those that have been “left out”.

As the majority of writers who have “chosen” the language come from the university world, it could at least be expected that their “natural” public would also be found at university. The metropolis have already made an effort to organize their territory, in case an Eliot were mistaken for a Zulfikar Ghose, or a Proust for an Oulougem; there is, therefore, English literature and Commonwealth literature, or French literature and Francophone literature, or Portuguese literature and Overseas literature, or Spanish literature and South American literature. Therefore universities act accordingly: the programmes in which both are represented are very rare. If we look at it from another perspective, that is, from overseas, or from the colonies, or from the provinces, or from the Orient, the pattern is reproduced. It is sufficient to analyse the recommended reading in African literature courses to realize that those canonized by Heinemann are always on the list and that they are rarely renewed; in India, Narayan or Desai are ever-present, while younger writers have very few possibilities. Of course this is a usual source of complaint amongst marginalized writers, but if they were asked about their referents, would they not say they were Pound, Faulkner, Flaubert, Hugo and, in short, all those considered universal classics? So what can they say in their favour, if they themselves have shown what the path to success was? What need is there to read intermediaries if we can access the sources directly? And when we look at the metropolis, the reply is not too different. The writer Zulfikar Ghose

—Pakistani, though born in Bombay— tormented by his own identity, complains: “As you yourselves know better than I do, some of the best new writing in English has come from the Commonwealth. Much of it goes unread in America and Britain. And much of European and South American literature goes unread too”<sup>17</sup>.

But beyond the public that is chosen, there is a despised public, the one they claim to represent and the one that nurtures them, and the one upon which one day responsibilities could be claimed, since as Pius Ngandu Nkashama says: “The debate [about language] is exclusively oriented towards the ‘foreign school’, ignoring the majority of unschooled children, or those who have left school after primary or secondary education. How can you think of building the ‘future of the continent’ based only on the ten per cent of the whole country’s population who are high school graduates or the half per cent who are university students? The loss of school children should make the ‘creators of great linguistic theories’ reflect and take into consideration the problem of African languages, mainly taking into account the millions of youngsters who have not been formed at school or received any technical formation from technical schools, semi-illiterate, but who also have their place in society. It must be considered that they are the group from which the ‘death squads’ are regularly recruited, cynically used by the ‘combatants’ who appear in the countryside and in the hinterland: in Liberia or Uganda, in Chad or Sudan, in the former Belgian Congo or in Angola; everywhere where senseless and fratricide fighting keeps destroying contemporary societies”<sup>18</sup>.

This despised public can also appear in the works themselves. The Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer, author of a quartet whose protagonist is the prototype of intellectual who opposes colonization although he is not in touch with his own culture, lets this public speak through the character’s mother: “And you, what do you care about the Dutch? You are still not an authentic Javanese. You do not pay enough attention to your Javanese ancestors. People say that you have become a learned man but, where are the poems that I can read at night, when you are not by my side?”

“I cannot write in Javanese, mother”.

“See? If you were a proper Javanese you would be able to write in Javanese. You write in Dutch, Gus, because you do not want to feel Javanese any more. You write for the Dutch”<sup>19</sup>.

This contempt can result in the author’s alienation from his place of reference, but what is worse is that it deprives the immediate public of the referents they could provide, as Rigoberta Menchú says: “The Ladine ethnic group is often foreign in its own country. The same happens with the majority of the scholars. They have not felt confident with their volcanoes, their rivers; they have not felt confident with their villages, with this beautiful cultural continent, with the valuable things there are here. They have always looked for a source of reference outside. Many of them have moved to find inspiration. On many

■ <sup>14</sup> K. A. APPIAH, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?”, in P. MONGIA, (ed.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory. A Reader*, Arnold: 1996, p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> G. HUGGAN, *The Post-Colonial Exotic...*, p. 79.

<sup>16</sup> Id., p. 233.

<sup>17</sup> F. JUSSAWALLA, R. W. DASENBROCK, (eds.) *Interviews*

*with Writers of the Post-Colonial World*, University Press of Mississippi, 1992, p. 188.

<sup>18</sup> P. NGANDU NKASHAMA, *Littératures et écritures en langues africaines*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992, p. 112-113.

<sup>19</sup> P. ANATA TOER, *Tierra Humana*, Tafalla: Ed. Txalaparta, 1995, (or. 1975), p.331.

occasions they were with one foot in America and another in Paris. This has also affected and has caused a delay in the cultural development of our people”<sup>20</sup>.

The fact is that sometimes it seems these authors need a static referent as a source of inspiration and that the interaction of the referent with their work could leave them without a setting or without actors, as this could distance them from the stereotype they need to reproduce. This way, the author becomes the spectator of a world that he has abandoned. He will regret illiteracy, but will not ask himself if he has contributed to its eradication, and will complain about the lack cultural development, but will not have to justify his performance. It is then when dissociation from context will be complete.

### DISSOCIATION FROM CONTEXT

... So all our best work... appears first to an audience which either regards us like some glass-enclosed specimen... or like some exotic weed to be sampled and made a conversation piece... or else we become some international organization's pet.

ATUKWEI OKAI

Choosing a language may entail choosing the reader, but when the language is alien then nearly all the ingredients are present for the creation of a volatile product. As was mentioned at the beginning, literature is a creation associated with a tradition and with a referential realm and it cannot be conceived without taking the reader into account either. The choosing of an alien language causes dissociation between the referential realm and the reader, and so the text becomes a marginal product, for some because it does not belong to their cultural environment and for the others because it is, simply, incomprehensible. It is questionable whether this type of literature could create a new tradition, but a glance at the development of 20<sup>th</sup> century literature does not exactly show this tendency.

As has already been mentioned, Tchicaya U'Tamsi expressed his wish that the “impairment” of writing in a foreign language did not create an atavism for those who followed on. It cannot be said, for the moment, that his wish has been fulfilled, but quite the opposite. Alain Ricard's synthesis of the generational sequence in Nigerian poetry —generally applicable to other literatures and other genres— clearly shows that the choice of language made by the first generation, Tchicaya U'Tamsi included, led the next generation into a cul-de-sac: “These poets are scholars and university people. They no longer apologise for writing in the language they teach. They are the third generation of Nigerian poets writing in English: the first generation adopted Victorian rhetoric; poetry was a discourse aimed to manifest clearly the mastery of English by scholars, politicians, journalists and educated Africans; the second generation is a brilliant university group who have tried to equal Eliot and Pound, with the risk of sounding pedantic and ostentatious, but proving they took poetry seriously. For the Latinist Okigobo, poetry is a separate language, destined for the *happy few*: in this same sense the problem of poetic consciousness is only a mastering of the particular codes of this language. For Wole Soyinka, poetry is also a separate language: poetry is not the place to show the Yoruba

inspiration present in his drama works. The poetic text is closed within itself and does not converse with the mother language. The third generation of poets has appropriated English, but has not been able to spare the reflection on the relation between poetical consciousness and linguistic consciousness. These writers must have no complexes: English is the language of the Nigerian elite and they adopt Wole Soyinka's pragmatic approach regarding linguistic practice. But, on the other hand, they do not wish their poetry to be classified as an intellectual exercise, and wish to abandon its university image; they cannot continue avoiding the reflection on the peoples' languages and the relation of their poetry with popular culture"<sup>21</sup>.

The truth is that, no matter how necessary that reflection is, the third generation continues to be as detached from its context as the first. It is surprising to verify that forty years of independence has done very little to decolonize the mind of the elite and the arguments they use to justify their choice are more typical of colonial civil servants than of previous generations of authors. In fact if the first generation were able to use Caliban type arguments (you had to appropriate the oppressor's language in order to fight against him), the younger generation argue that their language "is not written", or is not taught at school, or that it has not enough words, or that "what matters is what you write, not which language it is written in". The author who now jumps on the bandwagon of exoticism as a representative of his people is more a subject of the market than an intermediary, and, does probably not even consider the language an issue, since, as Boehmer states, the post colonial writer of the 90s is: "possibly more a cultural traveller, or an 'extra-territorial', than a national. Ex-colonial by birth, 'Third World' in cultural interest, cosmopolitan in almost every other way, he or she works within the precincts of the Western metropolis while at the same time retaining thematic and/or political connections with a national background"<sup>22</sup>.

The Pakistani authoress writes about the effects of this: "Those who are writing from outside their countries do tend to be more critical. It almost appears sometimes that they are pandering to the Western world, reinforcing the stereotype the Western world would like to see reinforced and perhaps feel they can't do it themselves and would prefer somebody else to do it for them.[...] Then, of course, there's this whole new body of writers who live in England, let's say, or perhaps in France, who write about their countries, be it Africa, be it Subcontinent, and their way of presenting things, their whole slant on the world and their part of the world, because they are living in a foreign country and they've adopted another country, does change. There's less compassion. There's less realism, and they start seeing their own backgrounds the way the West has been seeing them"<sup>23</sup>.

What the market will rarely receive is the perception of the matter held by "the others", those who, having cultivated a work linked to their context, integrated in a tradition and not having "chosen" any language, remain concealed from those self-appointed representatives of their people.

■ <sup>19</sup> R. MENCHÚ, *Rigoberta: La nieta de los mayas*, Madrid: El País-Aguilar, 1998, p. 160.

<sup>21</sup> A. RICARD, *Littératures d'Afrique noire. Des langues aux livres*, Paris: CNRS & Karthala, 1995, p. 187-188.

<sup>22</sup> E. BOEHMER, *Colonial and Post-Colonial Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 78.

<sup>23</sup> E. JUSSAWALLA, R. W. DASENBROCK (eds.), *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World*, P. 212.

In the year 1997, Salman Rushdie co-published an anthology of Indian literature, *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997*, for which he only chose English-writing authors. He could have added the prefix *Anglo* to the title, as, according to Rushdie, English is one of the languages in India, but in fact he wanted an anthology which represented the whole country. The author justifies his choice and the arguments could not be more cynical, because, if, some 400 languages are spoken in India, many of them

“A language is not only an instrument of communication. Hidden in that language is the knowledge accumulated by the speakers for centuries”

with a long tradition of written literature, who can have sufficient knowledge to choose? As he says, the texts included are the most important works produced in the 15 official languages of India, and they represent the most valuable contribution made by India to the book

world. It is not difficult to imagine the reaction of the excluded ones. Shyamala Narayan, who wrote a review of the anthology, accuses him of being excluded from the debate on the languages in India and of wanting to represent the speakers without knowing the languages. U.R. Ananthamurthy, a writer in Kannada, quite rightly states that “No Indian writer in any of the languages can presume to know what is happening in the other Indian languages. Rushdie does not even live in India. How can he make such an enormous assumption?”<sup>24</sup> Nabaneeta Deb Sen compares him to Macaulay, a colonial British civil servant, the author of a project for the teaching of the local languages which included the creation of a class of “interpreters”, who would be intermediaries between the colonizers and colonized, who, naturally would have to speak English. It is clear that Rushdie is considered an interpreter by the West, but he is not the most suitable for the job.

Macaulay’s project was an utter failure, especially in the creation of this class of interpreters, who finally became acultured individuals and once in the metropolis, look at their place of origin with borrowed eyes. If the way of looking is changed, it is easier to despise, as Buchi Emecheta does: “In Nigeria, as people do not leave the country, they think that real English is the English spoken by the colonizers twenty years ago. That is how you will find English spoken by people who have not left Nigeria. But English is a language that grows, like any other language. The African writer who stays in Nigeria and writes in English is left to one side. This writer uses old-fashioned English to write. He thinks that people still speak that way. So that when he comes to the West people laugh at him without him realizing”<sup>25</sup>.

The most regrettable of all is that, once dissociated from the context and not being able to integrate in any tradition, the fight for a place in the market intensifies, and within this fight behaviours can range from Emecheta’s disrespect to the subtlety of oblivion. Alain Ricard remarks that: “Nadine Gordimer does not spare praise in an essay on black African literature: for her, Senghor would be the greatest poet, Soyinka the best playwright and Achebe the only novelist of ‘international class’. Her opinions, still seem appropriate, twenty years later. She had only omitted South Africans among the African writers”<sup>26</sup>.



## THE VOLATILIZATION OF LITERATURE

The students sang without pausing in a language which was neither French nor their own language. It was a strange mixture which the village people took for French and the French for the indigenous language. They all applauded. FERDINAND OYONO, *Une vie de boy*

The adoption of an alien language as a creative instrument, as long as it is an individual phenomenon, is only as important as the individual's skill to use it. This is obviously not what is being questioned. Neither is the question the choice of the language of the environment regardless of whether it is the mother tongue. What is being questioned is the borrowing of an alien instrument to re-create one's own world. The reasoning being that this choice may be innocent, but never innocuous. This choice entails an ideological component justifying the subordination of some languages to others, of some cultures to others and of some people to others. This choice implies the incorporation of the others' point of view of one's own reality. That is where creation becomes deception.

A language is not only an instrument of communication. Hidden in that language is the knowledge accumulated by the speakers for centuries. It is a unique way of explaining the world, and an instrument of adaptation to the environment. When a writer chooses an alien language, he also chooses a vision of the world, and this vision may be incomprehensible for someone not familiar with the referential world of the language. "Visite", one of Senghor's poems, begins like this:

*Je songe dans la pénombre étroite d'un après-midi  
Me visitent les fatigues de la journée  
Les défunts de l'année, les souvenirs de la décade*

In other poems by the same author it is possible to find images like these:

*Et voilà qu'au Coeur de l'Été et de Midi, je te découvre.  
Bleue par les prés frais de Septembre.  
Quel mois ? Quelle année ?  
Que viendra la moisson après l'hivernage pénible  
Est-ce le Printemps – partir!  
Cette vacance de trois mois comme ce sombre couloir de trois semestres captifs*

The list is endless and there is no need to continue, but the conclusion is immediate: Seghor, the poet of *négritude*, the one who claims to vindicate his cultural legacy, follows a European measuring of time. What can "au Coeur de l'Été" mean to an African? And "l'hivernage pénible" mean to someone from Senegal? Such cases as Senghor's can be found everywhere. Emmanuel Dongala, in an allegedly magical realism novel entitled *Le feu des origines*, tells how Makunku discovers the annual cycles—the Georgian Calendar, to be exact—which as the languages show, have no connection with the measuring of time in the cultures of that zone. Donato Ndongo, in *Los poderes de la Tempestad*, paints

■ S. NARAYAN, review of S. RUSHDIE & E. WEST (eds.), *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997*, 1997, in *Ariel*, 29, 1, 1998, p. 264.

<sup>25</sup> F. JUSSAWALLA, R. W. DASENBROCK (eds.), *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World*, p. 88.

<sup>26</sup> A. RICARD, *Littératures d'Afrique noire...*, p. 238.

a picture of Macías's Guinea where the good characters use a Christian rhetoric and the villains use a Marxist-Leninist one, where the description of the native culture seems taken from a colonial civil servant's diary. Tutuola was acclaimed by Western critics and public for his *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* because he allegedly dared to challenge English syntax, in a story reproducing supposedly African narrative. We could continue to give examples of the farce the "chosen" language literature has become.

Tutuola's case is paradigmatic, and above all, a premonition of what is now called postcolonial, or emerging, or ethnic, or new literature, which is only a product for consumption by the West. Tutuola first appeared with a disconcerting book and, rather than admitting that the king was naked, everyone applauded. He tried the same move again but without success, his later works went practically unnoticed. This confusion appears both in publishing policies (even in the aforementioned *African Writers Series*, there are texts which can be directly included in this group) and among the critics who have acclaimed texts which hardly merited the category of melodramas, like Cyprian Ekwensi's, to mention just another historical writer. Due to the lack of criteria, they resort to trends to solve the question: nobody remembers the Haitian authors who enjoyed the public favour of the French in the 50s; the West Indian writers who also had their golden age in the 60s (v. s. Naipaul, Sam Selvon, George Lamming, Wilson Harris) are now complaining about lack of continuity; in the 80s it was the Indian authors turn... But all considered, what has it to do with literature?

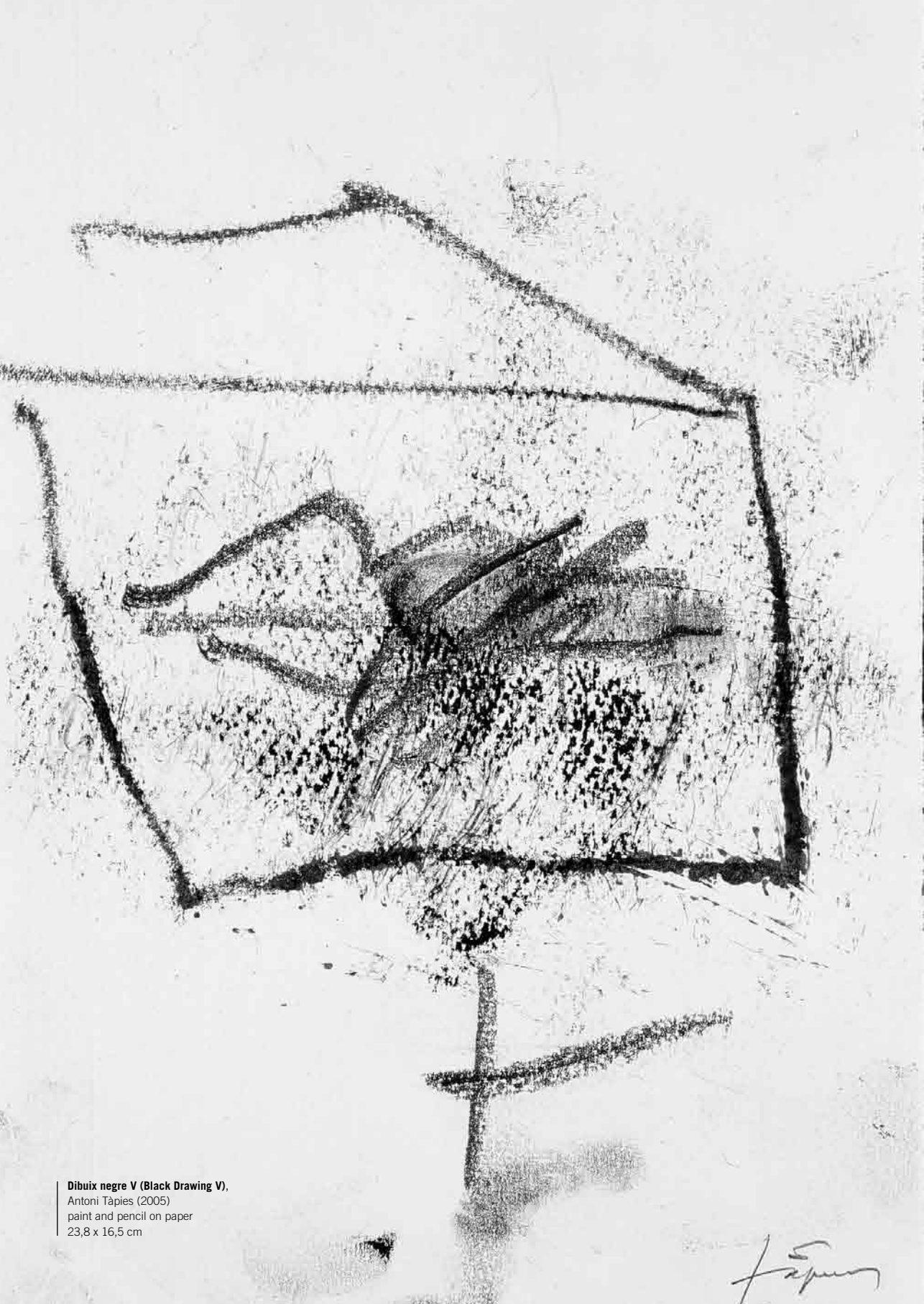
The fact that these authors themselves miss continuity in creative work is already a sign that, despite having chosen a dominant language, they do not consider themselves a part of the literary tradition in these languages; and even though they appeal to Joyce or Kafka to justify their option, it is obvious that they are different cases. The difference lies in the self-imposed role of intermediary. This role alone places them in no man's land even if they explain it as a will of universalism, but their main deception is rethinking a world that lives in a different language. A world that neither understands them nor is interested in them, and a world, presumably, they do not understand and that only interests them as a stage. They have played the exotic card to present themselves but have entered through the wrong door. If the elements they use are a borrowed language, an alien tradition, a referential world from which they have dissociated themselves and a recipient who has fed on stereotypes, what kind of message are they trying to convey?

Globalization has only emphasised the contradictions of those who turn their backs on their natural public to address the market. Dazzled by the West, they cannot conceive success without the Empire's recognition. The Empire, in turn, is pleased when tame subjects return the values they had been transmitted even when they are covered in a coat of rebelliousness to enhance those democratic values it boasts. As Charles de Gaulle put it: "France has done a lot for Guinea. There is clear evidence of this in the fact that the previous speaker (Sekou Turé) spoke very good French..."

Literature can be many things, but without honesty, without authenticity, there is no literature. If false raw material is used in the first place, the result cannot be expected to be authentic. Therefore, those who have thwarted the access to other literatures, have also given us, in exchange, a consumer product. Literature has volatilized ||

*notes  
&  
comments*

transfer



**Dibuix negre V (Black Drawing V),**  
Antoni Tàpies (2005)  
paint and pencil on paper  
23,8 x 16,5 cm

Tàpies

**Enric Pujol**

# Controversial Dalí

## *The politico-ideological controversy with the Catalan intelligentsia*

SEX, MADNESS AND POLITICS

As is self-evident, the statement that Salvador Dalí was one of the most controversial figures (in Catalonia and the world) of the 20<sup>th</sup> century does not need too much explanation. However, the great public controversy has focused, basically, upon two points: one about whether Dalí was mad or not (a debate especially acute during the artist's lifetime) and the other about his "atypical" sex life (a controversy especially intense after his death).

Neither of these aspects will be dealt with here, as there are a host of books on both subjects. As a mere indication, we ought to mention, with regard to the supposed madness, the book by Àngel Carmona *Dalí no és cap boig* (Dalí is no Madman), published in the 1960s, which, just by its very title, resolves the polemic in a quite categorical and well-reasoned way<sup>1</sup>. As to the artist's sex life, lately there have appeared different publications that

analyse the question in detail and that have been supplemented by declarations by people close to Dalí, like for example his ex-secretary Enric Sabater<sup>2</sup>. Above all we must point out two books: the one by Clifford Thurlow *Sex, Surrealism, Dalí and Me* (which includes the confessions of the gallery owner Carlos Lozano) and the biography by Ian Gibson *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí* (in which, in a psycho-analytical way, great importance

■ <sup>1</sup> The original version in Castilian was published by Plaza & Janés (Barcelona: 1963) and now a Catalan version is being prepared by Llibres del Segle.

<sup>2</sup> In an interview in *Avui* (31-5-1998, pp. 51-52), E. Sabater denied all trace of homosexuality in Dalí: "He wasn't. What Dalí had were other things. He practiced masturbation from a distance".

is given to a supposed —and very arguable— repressed homosexuality as the key to interpreting the life and work of Dalí<sup>3</sup>.

I wish here to deal with an aspect less studied but no less crucial when it comes to explaining the controversy that the figure and work of Dalí stirred up in the society of his day: I am referring to ideological and political reasons. Although these were widely known about during the process of Francoist liquidation, they have gradually become more and more neglected and may quite soon be reduced merely to the field of specialists if the centenary of the artist's birth ends up as a mere apology and does not serve to make a critical assessment (and naturally balanced and unbiased) of the man<sup>4</sup>. The different politico-ideological standpoints that Dalí championed throughout his life won him passionate support and criticism from outstanding intellectual figures of the time, both Catalan and from elsewhere<sup>5</sup>. Especially controversial was his figure and work in the bosom of the Catalan intelligentsia of his day, as it was the “closest” and where Dalí had lain what we might call his basic ideological foundations.

It is worth saying, as a prior question, that Dalí, despite the many politico-ideological twists and turns that he made, never renounced being Catalan (even though he made it compatible with being a “Spanish” and cosmopolitan man par excellence): he always explicitly defended the existence of a Catalan culture with its own personality and

an unequivocal universal dimension, a culture especially strong, according to Dalí, in the philosophical and artistic spheres (two of his favourite fields). Therefore one of the “mature” Dalí's basic trios of great intellectual reference points was that made up by the philosopher Francesc Pujols, the architect Antoni Gaudí and the painter Marià Fortuny (names “of reference” to which one could even add others, from quite different periods, like the painter Modest Urgell, the draughtsman Joan Junceda, the inventor Narcís Monturiol, the writer and painter Santiago Rusiñol or the mediaeval philosopher Ramon Llull). Dalí, therefore, was never a rootless man who abjured his own culture (as were, at a given moment, Eugeni d'Ors or Ferran Valls-Taberner). To review, even briefly, the total of the love and hatred that Dalí aroused in the bosom of the Catalan intelligentsia would go far beyond the limits of an article such as this (and ten more, for sure); for this reason four significant stages in Dalí's career have been chosen in order to see the game of adherences and rejections that his politico-ideological (and aesthetic) standpoint aroused among the Catalan intellectuals of the day.

### **Yellow is the colour of the avant-garde**

A first stage, corresponding to the period of his youth, is the appearance of the ‘Yellow Manifesto’ (1928), signed by Dalí, Lluís Montanyà and Sebastià Gasch. It is a very significant moment because it puts Dalí in the most daring groups of the Catalan avant-garde attitudes of the day. What sort of avant-garde was it? Daring,

■ <sup>3</sup> Published, respectively, by Planeta, 2000, and Empúries, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> The need to carry out this critical exercise has already been noted by N. Selles: “Al voltant de Dalí. D'usos, lectures i valoracions”, *Diari de Girona* (21-9-2003).

<sup>5</sup> A first approach to Dalí's relations with important figures of his time is the catalogue *Salvador Dalí. Àlbum de família*, by Montse Aguer and Fèlix Fanés, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí/Fundació “La Caixa”, Barcelona: 1998.

provocative, breaking with tradition, critical of the situation of the moment. We have enough examples of it in the large number of denunciations made of it. Thus, among other things denounced are “the sentimental influence of the racial common ground of Guimerà”, the “mawkish sentimentality served up by the ‘Orfeó català’”, “the complete lack of youth of our young people”, “the young people trying to repeat the old painting and the old literature”, “the absolute lack of background knowledge of the critics with respect to the art of today and the art of yesterday”, “the painters of crooked trees”, “current Catalan poetry made of the most tired Maragallian clichés”, the “psychology of the boys and girls that sing *Rosó, Rosó*”... At the end of the text, on the positive side of things, there is a list made of the “great artists of today”, among whom are mentioned Picasso, De Chirico, Brancusi, Breton, Aragon, Cocteau, Garcia Lorca... and Joan Miró<sup>6</sup>. The appearance of the manifesto made the young Dalí’s name, at the age of 24, as one of the principal points of reference of the plastic and aesthetic avant-garde of the day. Naturally, this was possible because, then already, Dalí was a solid “young hopeful” who had achieved putting on his first individual exhibition, in 1925, at the Dalmau Gallery in Barcelona (a great success with the intellectuals of the Ateneu Barcelonès), who had already published texts in such an emblematic avant-garde magazine as *L’Amic de les Arts* and who had already made personal contact with famous

painters like Picasso or Miró and with young poets like García Lorca<sup>7</sup>.

The radical nature of the young Dalí’s plastic and aesthetic proposals went hand in hand with radical ideas in the political arena. We have precise knowledge of his youthful ideas thanks to some diaries that he wrote at the beginning of the 1920s (*A Diary: 1919-1920. My Private Impressions and Memories*), but which was not published until 1994<sup>8</sup>. In these writings he shows himself to be unequivocally on the side of the Russian revolution and the struggle of the Catalan anarcho-syndicalist trade unions against the owners and against all bourgeois order. It should be said that this attitude coincided fully with that held by certain radical sectors of Catalanist republicanism in L’Empordà, then all-powerful in Figueres and the county. This mixture of political radicalism and aesthetic daring made contact with the Parisian surrealists easy, through the affinity he had with the programmatic foundations of the movement. However, the key figure that made the incorporation of Dalí into the surrealist movement possible was Joan Miró, who advised him very well and made the right introductions for him to be able to make his very own “conquest” of Paris<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, then, in this early period of his professional career, Dalí had the support of very important names in the avant-garde intelligentsia. As well as Miró, he was backed by the entire team of the magazine *L’Amic de les Arts*: Josep Carbonell i Gener (the chief driving force

■ <sup>6</sup> Reproduced in the catalogue D. GIRALT-MIRACLE (ed.): *Avantguardes a Catalunya, 1906-1939*, Fundació Caixa de Catalunya, Barcelona: 1992, p.309.

<sup>7</sup> One of the pioneering voices when it came to pointing out the high level of appreciation that certain intellectual circles showed the young Dalí was his

sister Anna Maria. See *Noves imatges de Salvador Dalí*, Columna, Barcelona: 1988.

<sup>8</sup> Ed. 62, Barcelona: 1994

<sup>9</sup> See the letter by Miró reproduced in the catalogue *Dalí: els anys joves (1918-1930)*, Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona: 1995.

behind the publication), the poet Josep Vicenç Foix, and Gasch and Montanyà, with whom he had signed the “Yellow Manifesto”. The counterpoint to this support was the opposition of Eugeni d’Ors, who in 1929, in an article in *La Gazeta Literaria*, criticised the fact that Dalí had hung, in an exhibition at the Goemans Gallery in Paris, a painting with a sacred heart where it said (with an eagerness to provoke that went down really well with the surrealists) that “I sometimes spit out of pleasure on the portrait of my mother”. D’Ors’ article revealed quite sufficiently the aesthetic chasm that separated him from Dalí, but it had repercussions that went much further than the sphere of aesthetic philosophical discussion. Dalí’s father read the article and this led to the two of them breaking off relations.

### **Change of course and exile**

A second key moment in Dalí’s career took place in the mid 1930s. The great upheavals of the period (the Events of October 1934 and then the Civil War of 1936-1939) were the cause for a radical change in his political outlook, which became more and more right wing and conservative. He himself explains, in the imagined autobiography *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*<sup>10</sup>, this mutation due to the panic that the “real” revolutionary movement produced in him, which first manifested itself in a big way after the so-called Events of October 1934, when President Companys proclaimed the independent Catalan state after an extreme right-wing government had been set up in Madrid that seemed to be

endangering the republican regime itself. In the autobiography, Dalí tells of his flight from Barcelona to Paris before the military repression against the Catalan capital and explains that once he had arrived in the French capital he made, under the impact of that experience, the painting *Premonition of Civil War*. His distant attitude towards the Generalitat and the republican government during the civil war, his expatriation during this time and his relationship with some Francoist intellectuals (among them D’Ors himself), contributed to the cooling off of relations with the surrealists (especially with the chief inspirer of the movement, André Breton, with whom he broke off for good at the beginning of 1939) and naturally to his distancing from numerous left-wing and democratic Catalan intellectuals. However, he was still looked upon with a great deal of reticence by the Francoist intellectuals (like P. Laín Entralgo, who at the height of the war severely criticised the artist)<sup>11</sup> and it cannot be said that then, despite some declarations of a racist nature and of a fascination for Hitler, Dalí was a Nazi-sympathizer. The proof is that, after the Nazi occupation of France, the Dalís moved to the United States, where they lived a sort of “golden exile” until 1948, when they decided to return to spend long periods in Catalonia.

During this exile *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* was published, which made a great impact in the artistic and intellectual world of the time; an impact that was felt among the Catalan intelligentsia, both those who had supported Francoism and those who had

■ <sup>10</sup> Recently reissued and included in the first volume of his *Obra completa*, Destino/Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Barcelona: 2003.

<sup>11</sup> This is how F. MIRALLES reports it: *L’època de les avantguardes, 1917-1970*, vol. VIII of *Història de l’art català*, Ed. 62, Barcelona: 1989, 3rd ed., pp. 216-217.



had to go into exile. Thus, Josep Pla (from the ranks of those initially addicted to the regime) spoke well of it; also speaking enthusiastically of it were some of the most important intellectuals in exile, like Joan Sales or Lluís Ferran de Pol, who devoted enthusiastic articles to him in the *Quaderns de l'exili*, published in Mexico<sup>12</sup>.

Sales (under the pseudonym of Masades de Segura) called Dalí the “prophet from Portlligat” and Ferran de Pol ended his article calling for a definitive edition to be made, in Catalan, of all Dalí’s writings<sup>13</sup>.

The appearance of the book and the success the artist had in the USA was even mentioned among the centres of the internal cultural resistance opposing the dictatorship, as was the case with the promoters of the semi-clandestine journal *Ariel*<sup>14</sup>; of course, there was a deep division of opinions. In issue 3-4 of *Ariel*, corresponding to the months of July and August 1946, there appeared four notes referring to Dalí, signed by Josep M. de Sucre, Alexandre Cirici i Pellicer, Joan Perucho and Daedalus (pseudonym), where you could see the different appraisal each one made of the artist, although there was an overriding tone of general reticence. The most enthusiastic was A. Cirici, who valued very positively that in the personal diary that Dalí kept in New York, called *Dalí News*, he should have included the coat of arms of Catalonia on the masthead. In another issue of the magazine, from June 1947, Salvador Espriu was extremely critical of *Secret Life*, a work he dismissed as a “llibre autocoprobiofàgic” (shit-eating autobiography) (and of course, this was no compliment).

### Return and the ostentatious acceptance of Francoism

The moment of clearest rupture between Dalí and the main body of the Catalan anti-Francoist intelligentsia took place, however, when the artist returned, with Gala, to live in his native Empordà; that is, from 1948. And this is the third moment that I shall consider. After the end of the Second World War it was thought that the victorious allies would put an end to the Franco dictatorship, as they had done with other dictatorial and Nazi-sympathizing regimes. But these expectations were not met due to the new political demands resulting from the Cold War, which broke out straight afterwards and which saw Franco considered a “lesser evil” by the self-named Western Bloc, headed by the USA. In this context of the international consolidation of Francoism, Dalí decided to return and make a determined approach to the regime, going as far as becoming one of its “official” artists.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Dalí, in part due to his convictions and partly through the wish to be recognised as a great artist, should then direct his actions and his work towards parameters that would make him more acceptable to the regime. 1951 was a decisive year in this sense. It was the year of his lecture “Picasso and Me”, given at the María Guerrero Theatre in Madrid (where he said “Picasso is a communist, neither am I”); and the year of the *Mystic Manifesto* and the work *Christ of Saint John of the Cross*, which gave an unequivocally religious, Catholic, feel to his work (no matter that it was a religious

■ <sup>12</sup> There is a facsimile edition of it produced by Estudis Nacionalistes, Barcelona: 1982.

<sup>13</sup> Published, respectively, in issues 17 (December

1945) and 18 (January-March 1946).

<sup>14</sup> There is also a facsimile edition of it, Proa, Barcelona: 1978.

assumption very *sui generis*, eccentric and not too credible) and placed his artistic output in forms closer to a figurativism of classicist aspiration. Thus, anti-communism, religiousness and the new forms close to “Renaissance mannerism” (as F. Miralles has called them)<sup>15</sup> were the three basic pillars that allowed him to be accepted by Francoism. Naturally, the acceptance of Dalí by the regime (or vice versa) brought down upon him the disavowal of the main body of the Anti-Franco intelligentsia. In this respect, the adverse standpoint of three key figures in the formulation of what we might call the anti-Francoist aesthetic was decisive: Joan Miró, Antoni Tàpies and Joan Brossa, who both in private and in public criticised his political stance and invalidated his aesthetic option, which they considered out of date, old fashioned, due to the new reality that had emerged in the post-war years.

During the dictatorship, the figure and work of Dalí was anathematised, then, by a very significant part of the anti-Francoist cultural front, although within this bloc there were voices who knew perfectly well how to separate the value of Dalí’s artistic contribution from the criticism of a certain political option as is the case of Àngel Carmona or Manuel Costa-Pau. Even some anti Francoist figures received Dalí’s help, as was the case with the president of the Generalitat in exile, Josep Tarradellas, whom the painter presented with a work when the politician was in dire financial straits<sup>16</sup>.

However, it must be underlined that the anti-Dalí opposition of the day did not come exclusively from the anti-Franco movement, as he was heavily criticised by Catholic sectors who did not look kindly upon his religious “conversion” and who found him irreverent (not to say blasphemous). This was the case, for example, of the journalist and writer Manuel Brunet, who, from the pages of *Destino*, considered Dalí a pornographic author and threw in his face his past as a communist-sympathizer, anti-religious and anti-Spanish. Brunet’s standpoint brought him into long arguments with the poet Carles Fages de Climent, a fervent Dalí supporter; both of them lived in Castelló d’Empúries and saw each other very often<sup>17</sup>. Not for nothing, Fages de Climent was one of the most outstanding members of the “hardcore” of Dalí’s stalwarts, made up basically by people from L’Empordà who knew the artist and his work well and who therefore, whatever their political opinions, agreed to champion Dalí’s option<sup>18</sup>. As well as Fages (who initially had supported Francoism, but later moved away), there were the historian and pharmacist Alexandre Deulofeu (who was the Republican mayor of Figueres during the war, exiled and hostile to the regime) and Jaume Miravittles (head of the famous propaganda commissariat during the war, an outstanding collaborator of the Republican government in exile, a self-confessed anti-Francoist, but also very anti-communist

■ <sup>15</sup> F. MIRALLES: *L’època de les avantguardes...*, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>16</sup> As stated by Enric Sabater in the quoted interview.

<sup>17</sup> As explained by J. Pla: “Carles Fages de Climent. L’epigramista, el poeta, l’home. Una vaga aproximació” in *Escrits empordanesos*, vol. 38, *Obra completa*, Destino, Barcelona: 1989, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p. 353.

<sup>18</sup> I have already taken a first look at this group, in E. Pujol: “Alexandre Deulofeu i Salvador Dalí, dos genis heterodoxos”, *Revista de Girona*, 221 (Nov-Dec 2003), pp. 32-37. As for the relationship Fages-Dalí, see also the book-catalogue *Carles Fages de Climent (1902-1968). Poètica i mítica de l’Empordà*, Ajuntament de Figueres, Figueres: 2002.

and pro-Atlantic). In this same group of Dalí stalwarts, we should include Claudi Díaz Pérez, from Figueres, an architect and “one of the most intelligent men I have ever met in my life”, according to the historian Pierre Vilar. It turns out that Díaz explained to Vilar the keys to Dalí’s world and this opened up a whole new world to the historian; a fact that Vilar still remembered nostalgically and affectionately in his memoirs *Pensar històricament*, written in the closing stages of his life<sup>19</sup>.

It is impossible to list the Dalí supporters of the day without mentioning two more names: Francesc Pujols and Josep Pla. In the case of Pujols, it was Dalí who declared himself to be an admirer of his, even though Pujols (who died in 1962) distanced himself from some of the main Dalí-esque formulations (especially those most deeply rooted in the avant-garde and provocation). Pla became, above all after Dalí broke with the surrealists, one of the firmest champions of Dalí’s aesthetic ideas especially insofar as it was a return to “realist” figuration<sup>20</sup>.

### Civic discredit and official rehabilitation

At the closing stages of Francoism, after the dictator’s death, the figure of Dalí was once again at the centre of a huge controversy, due to his exclusion, in 1976, from a tribute exhibition to Carles Rahola (a Girona intellectual from the Empordà shot by Franco) organised in Cadaqués by the Democratic Assembly of Artists of Girona and which later moved to the Fundació Miró in Barcelona. This episode has been studied in detail by

Narcís Selles in the book *Art, política i societat en la derogació del franquisme* (Art, Politics and Society in the Abolition of Francoism) where it is made clear that Dalí was seen by the politically engaged artists of the time as the official artist of the regime<sup>21</sup>.

And thus we come to a fourth key moment in Dalí’s career, that of the transition from dictatorship to democracy, which began still under the sign of the dispute. Three years after the controversy caused by the tribute to Carles Rahola, in summer 1979, a great controversy emerged again when the new democratic Figueres council decided to change the names of the city streets (to restore the traditional names removed during the dictatorship) and it replaced the name of the square in front of the Teatre-Museu Dalí, dedicated to the artist and Gala, with that of Plaça del Teatre (which was what it was commonly known as). The event was reported internationally and was perceived by many sectors as an unfair snub to Dalí. However, I think that the incident served to initiate a very profound rethink of the artist, especially among the sectors who had fought for democracy and Catalan autonomy, which culminated, a few years later, in an “official rehabilitation” of Dalí’s contribution, promoted by the re-established Generalitat, which decided to award him, in 1982, the Generalitat’s gold medal. Since then, there has been a growing interest in and recognition of Dalí’s contribution by Catalan society as a whole, whatever people’s ideological or political standpoint.

■ <sup>19</sup> Tres i Quatre, Valencia: 1995.

<sup>20</sup> This is the central thesis of the biography that Pla wrote of Dalí in *Obres de Museu*. There is a popular

edition of it by Dasa Edicions, Figueres: 1981.

<sup>21</sup> Llibres del Segle, Gaiques: 1999.

Still, however, there were some controversial flare-ups, like an article by Antoni Tàpies on July 10<sup>th</sup> 1983 in which he made appreciating Dalí's work and being left-wing incompatible<sup>22</sup>. However, in the long run, there was imposed a very generalised appreciation of Dalí's work, which did not in any way exclude criticism but did not deny his work all validity. An example of this more equable critical position was the lecture by Carles Muñoz Espinalt, "Pujols, an Archetype of Dalí", given in 1982 in the Teatre-Museu Dalí in Figueres, in which he distinguished perfectly between the appreciation of Dalí "the artist" and the (heavy) criticism of "the citizen", with many interesting forays into the complex personality of the genius from Figueres<sup>23</sup>. Even an intellectual "of reference" in left-wing circles like Manuel Vázquez Montalbán did not hesitate to write the libretto for Dalí's opera-poem *Être Dieu*, published in 1985.

Thus, towards the end of his life, the figure of Dalí began to shed the controversial side that it had dragged behind it until then. His death, however, saw it flare up again. The controversial will he left unleashed veritable rivers of ink and provoked a behind-the-scenes institutional confrontation between Figueres-Barcelona and Madrid which was only resolved (very unfavourably for Catalan interests and especially those of Figueres) thanks to a high-level political agreement. This, however, would need another article entirely. Controversy, then, was a constant feature throughout the life and artistic career of Dalí that did not abandon him even after his death. It was most certainly something he wished for to begin with, but in the end it took on the feel of an authentic condemnation ||

■ <sup>22</sup> "El reencuentro oficial con Dalí", *El País* (10-7-1983), p. 11

<sup>23</sup> Included in *Obra escrita*, El Llamp, Barcelona: 1987. I believe that the psychological analysis that Muñoz Espinalt makes of Dalí is very correct and opens up many avenues that have not been exploited by specialist scholars of Dalí's work.

**Imma Merino**

# From the *Xino* to the *Raval*

## *Cinema and the construction of a new reality*

Whether in the north or the south, all cities have their ugly district. A district with narrow streets where the sunlight barely reaches; a district of wretched dwellings, with just enough air so as not to suffocate, inhabited by humble folk forced to exist side by side with crime and immorality

(From *Sin la sonrisa de Dios*, a film directed by Juli Salvador in 1957)

During 1998, a group of students on the Creative Documentary Master's course at Pompeu Fabra University began a cinematographic experience in the district now called the Raval. They did it together with a filmmaker born in Barcelona who, up to then, had made films in Castile, in the Ireland discovered with John Ford and in Normandy where he glimpsed trains in shadows.

For the first time he was preparing to film in his hometown, but not on his own patch, because the *Xino* (as he prefers to call the district, though he is aware that the name refers to a lost reality) is a long way from his middle-class origins. It so happened that, while he was preparing for a shoot that was long and patient, the filmmaker stayed in several hotels in the district. Like a traveller who wants to make contact with a reality unknown to him. With a gaze that wishes to become

a quest for something, he's not quite sure what. Because José Luis Guerin, the filmmaker in question, tries to experience the making of a film (in short, the cinema) as a learning process.

### **The Transformation of a District**

So it was that, without a definite screenplay written in advance, he began shooting a film that three years later was presented at the San Sebastián film

festival with the title *En construcción* (Under Construction). In fact, together with the crucial intervention of the editing that synthesised a hundred hours of footage into 127 minutes, the film was constructed from the filming of (or taking as its reference) the construction of a new apartment block in front of the church of Sant Pau del Camp. At the beginning of the film, after some documentary footage relative to the atmosphere in the district at the end of the 1950s, there appears a wall with some eyes painted on (we later see it demolished) whilst, overprinted, some letters define the idea: “Things seen and heard during the construction of a new building in El Chino, a working-class district of Barcelona that was born and died with the century” —the 20<sup>th</sup> century, obviously, at the end of which the film was made. It continues with the image of a poster that, with a design for the Rambla del Raval, announces: “landscaping work for the new public space of the Raval Central Plan (July 1998-December 1998)”. Straight away an old ex-seaman (one of the characters in the film) starts, or perhaps resumes, talking to himself, saying that, having travelled the world and seen a city like London with such large squares and streets, he now walks narrow, old-fashioned, outmoded streets. The verbal diarrhoea of the seaman (on land and homeless) ends as some graffiti appears: “No to demolition, yes to renovation”.

In just over five minutes, then, *En construcción* places the audience in the context of an urban space affected by a process of transformation that, designed in the offices of the local authorities in connivance with the real estate investors (if not speculators), was to put an end to a working-class district, as seen in the documentary images by

the photographer Joan Colom, filmed in 8 mm in 1959, and in *El alegre Paralelo* (1960), by Enric Ripoll Freixes. These fragments, which end with a sailor in the 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet staggering drunkenly towards the Columbus monument, also reflect an atmosphere of prostitution that has had something to do with the degradation of the *Xino*, many of its inhabitants succumbing to a marginalization and a precarious existence that cried out for social intervention. But, pointed to by the graffiti “No to demolition, yes to renovation”, what is evident in *En construcción* is the questioning of an urban redevelopment plan that, rather than improving the living conditions of the population of a district that should have been renovated, brought about the demolition of buildings that led to the inhabitants being moved out to other areas.

Thus, in relation to the transformation of the place, the building site foreman tells his son that, upon arriving in Barcelona, migrants like him bought a watch and paid a visit to the *Xino* (“what with all the life there was”) whereas now “we’ve decided to create a new district... the mayor of Barcelona wants it done and we have to achieve it”. At the same time Abdul Aziz El Mountassir (builder, poet and communist) maintains a significant dialogue with another Moroccan who is starting to learn the job of building houses: the latter says that although the new buildings are not for the people of the district, those moved out are given a flat in another district, while his workmate replies that they only give them 800,000 pesetas to be going on with... At the end of the film, the potential new occupants arrive, who, when visiting the flats, assess the quality, ask about security and make comments, often

derogatory, with regard to the human (children and old people staring from the balconies) and physical views: "Let's hope that in years to come everything is new and the views are prettier..." or "What I don't want is people hanging washing out on the balcony...".

Despite these specific references within dialogues that José Luis Guerin claims to have recorded without dictating or manipulating them, although the presence of the camera always determines what people say and the possible induction of situations and comments forms part of the "chef's secrets" of the film, *En construcció*n does not contribute an explicit message as do militant films or those trying to make a point. Explicitness goes against the grain of Guerin's subtle and suggestive cinema; influenced by Rossellini, he prefers to show why the audience should be free to reflect on the matter. The filmmaker provides a portrait of a series of characters (a possible criticism of the film is that all of them are Spanish speaking, as it gives a biased view of the social make-up of the place and, contrasted with the fact that many of the hypothetical new occupants speak Catalan, creates the reductionist impression that a working-class immigrant district is being occupied by the Catalan middle class) while, with a lot of brief shots, he sketches other portraits: children playing in the street, women hanging out the washing, old men looking from a balcony or, homeless, taking refuge in a building site on New Year's Eve. Through these snippets, a human landscape is seen.

Guerin, however, has not avoided criticism from those who consider that his denunciation is not incisive enough or that, generally speaking, he softens the harshness of the reality shown and

thus hidden. The filmmaker claims that the cinema (unlike the television or other media, which, in the specific case of the Raval, have tended merely to present the district and its inhabitants in relation to criminal acts, the situation of marginalization or the conflicts resulting from the recent immigration, as well as the pederasty case dealt with by the other great film made there in the last few years: *De nens*) is a medium capable of reflecting the complexity of life and highlighting sides of people reduced to a single dimension: the lives of immigrants, then, are not just about problems with the law or racism, they can talk about poetry, the class struggle and the sadness of loneliness; the young girl who becomes a prostitute can find true love and, at times, play football; the old tramps can fantasize about their lives. Moreover, the filmmaker's idea is that reality, in all its harshness and crudity, is there and it's not necessary to emphasize it: it's enough that old men sleep in the street or girls become prostitutes and that, evicted, they wander from house to house, whether being built or torn down. By the way, despite its title, the film contains more images of destruction than construction: houses demolished, walls knocked down, rubble piling up. And, in this landscape that looks like a disaster area or the aftermath of a catastrophe, aggressive mechanical diggers, impassive cranes and haughty scaffolding. Only inside the chosen building is the work humanised and the dignity of the job seen as the builders talk, putting up walls, mixing the cement, looking at the plans or using the spirit level.

The machine that builds and destroys, however, is halted by an unexpected discovery announced by the change from a trowel to a spatula in successive

shots: skeletons appear and a Roman burial ground emerges. The past thus bursts in on the present and reminds us that human life, and human works, are subject to the devastating passage of time and therefore to expiry: they come back as remains. In a splendid choral sequence, the neighbours talk about the inevitable destiny common to all (death, which makes us all equal) and the futility of so much worrying; they comment perplexedly that they have been living on top of the dead; they claim that a cemetery is a sacred place and that they ought to stop building; they speculate on the language of the dead people (“did they speak Catalan?” “No, they all spoke Latin then”) and about their identity (“were they Romans? So, they weren’t Spanish then?”), and when they lived. It is as if they were calling on the dead of all ages: the Roman period (as is the case), the 6<sup>th</sup> century, “the time of the Moors”, even the Spanish Civil War. Thus, a man maintains: “They’re from the civil war. The ones they killed, they buried and you wouldn’t have known, it was as if nothing had happened”.

These remains were found in front of the church of Sant Pau del Camp, which, dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, is the oldest conserved building in a district that for a long time was an area mostly occupied by monastery gardens. The fact that this church is still standing must have something to do with what we glean from a conversation concerning *Land of the Pharaohs*, the film by Howard Hawks about the construction of the pyramids: in the end the buildings that last the longest are those that are designed to be the expression of power.

### Crime fiction in the *Xino*

The church of Sant Pau del Camp appears fleetingly in a film that Juli Coll made in 1957, an adaptation of *És perillós fer-se esperar*, by Josep Maria Espinàs, entitled *Distrito v*, in a decade when part of the Barcelona film industry opted for the crime or detective genre, under the influence of the so-called American film noir. With production companies like Emisora Films, Iquino’s and Este Films, and the participation of, among others, the afore-mentioned Juli Coll, Juli Salvador, Antonio Isasi, Joan Bosch, Francisco Pérez Dolz, Alfonso Balcázar, Juan Fortuny, Josep Maria Forn and, obviously, Ignasi F. Iquino, there developed during the 1950s and part of the 60s a genre that caught the public’s imagination with films of inevitably varying quality based on original works of literature or at times on true events, although they could be so transformed as to turn (as the Francoist press did) the armed actions of the anarchist resistance fighters Facérias or Quico Sabaté (without mentioning them by name, obviously) into common criminal acts. Examples of this are *El cerco*, *Los atracadores* and the notable *A tiro limpio*, by Pérez Dolz.

In the well-researched book *Ficción criminal a Barcelona 1950-1963*, to which I refer readers who may be interested in the subject, Ramon Espelt claims that, made in 1950, the two films introducing the police genre to Barcelona (and indeed Spain) are *Apartado de Correos 1001*, directed by Juli Salvador, and *Brigada criminal*, directed by Ignasi F. Iquino. In the two films, but especially in Iquino’s, there is a moralistic aspect (not always associated with the turmoil and the ambiguities of the noir genre) and an exaltation of the police, but, as Ramon Espelt points out, they brought a realist



dimension that, with regard to filming in urban settings, marks a difference with respect to the historical, folkloric, rural cinema that predominated in Spanish films of the 1940s. This realist dimension even led to the consideration that they introduced certain neo-realist criteria.

This was also said (although, certain critics of the day added, with a much more positive moral outlook than Italian neo-realism, accused of Marxist influence and therefore of being negative with respect to the possibilities of human redemption) about a film not within the police genre, but which was also shot partly on location in Barcelona: *Sin la sonrisa de Dios*, which, directed in 1957 by Juli Salvador, also features in the credits of *En construcción* for having had footage taken from it. The church of Sant Pau del Camp is also in it, near to which are the Felip II schools where a teacher (Conrado San Martín) tries to prevent the kids of the district ending up as “yobs —old, bored and disappointed kids whose only aim in life was to become more mindless”. This is stated by a narrator’s voice, which adds: “They are the first victims of the district, with nothing nice about their lives, as if they didn’t even have the consolation of a smile from God”. This district, as seen in the film, is none other than the Barrio Chino which, without actually being mentioned by name, is presented at the beginning of the film with the quote that heads this text: “Whether in the north or the south, all cities have their ugly district...”

*Sin la sonrisa de Dios* (based on a novel by José Antonio de la Loma, who, over the years, was to turn “El Vaquilla”, “El Torete” and other “street punks” into short-lived film stars), exemplifies a kind of approach to marginalisation where (with the children, always the love for the

children, as a paradigm of human frailty) social sensitivity, conformist moralising and melodramatic, even theatrical, exploitation of a certain reality are mixed up. Not much to do with the profound spirit of neo-realism, which some years later Pier Paolo Pasolini would take to extremes. The film also points to the uncertain frontier between the reality of the Xino district and an imaginary one that links it with a scene of crime and ruin.

This lack of definition is also present in the afore-mentioned *Distrito V*, a title that, at the time of the film’s release, brought forth this consideration from J. Ruiz, the critic of *El Correo Catalán*: “Couldn’t they have found another title that sounds less like a dramatic story from the inter-war years?” However, despite the title’s explicitness, the physical geography is barely noticed (and, in fact, neither is the human). There is only the above-mentioned fleeting image of Sant Pau del Camp, some brief shots of Carrer Nou de la Rambla (then Conde del Asalto) filmed from a window or a roof, from where we can also see other roofs in the surrounding area with the bell tower of Sant Agustí Vell visible. This is because, based on the play by Espinàs, *Distrito V* is a film of interiors (of a single interior) and not exteriors.

As the title of the adapted play says, the character played by Alberto Closas (a delinquent suspected of having committed a crime) will find out for sure that “it’s dangerous to keep others waiting”. The film begins with a group of men going up the stairs of a building to the top floor, where on the door a notice says “Dance School”, but which is also a run-down hostel. They have just committed a robbery and are waiting for the last man (Closas), who has the money they have stolen from a factory.

The wait drags on and the suspicions about the character who does not arrive (after all, a stranger to the group) mark the beginning of a narration in flash-back that, from different points of view, reconstructs how they spent the days leading up to the robbery in this same hostel/dance school. A combination of moralising (guilt, repentance, punishment) and pseudo-existentialist fatalism (all the characters have a frustration and have stolen impelled by a personal dream that will not come true) leads to a denouement where, without them actually appearing, the arrival of the police is announced.

As I have said, Juli Coll's film makes an abstraction of the physical space of *Distrito V* to project on it the idea of a place of corruption or, in the words of another critic of the time (A. Martínez Tomàs, of *La Vanguardia*), "the legend of being a dissolute and dangerous area" with regard to a "district whose reputation is still ambiguous". This "still" has to do with this previous claim: "the old district, now in the process of transformation and disappearance". So it is that, almost forty years before the carrying out of the redevelopment plan in the fifth district, it is claimed that the old district is in the process of transformation and disappearance. At the height of Francoism, then, the need to cleanse the district (of prostitutes, poor people and criminals, I suppose, after eliminating the anarchists) must also have spread, in keeping with an ideal of order, hygiene, safety and morality. Filmed in the same period, at the end of the 1950s, the images reproduced at the beginning of *En construcció*n contradict this, showing a bustling life based around prostitution. Even the above-mentioned fictional films of the period denounce

(with all the limitations you can imagine) the wretched living conditions in the district.

Nowadays, despite the "cleansing" operation of recent years, the Raval still does not conform to the ideal conceived in the town hall. "They wanted to cleanse the place of poor people and turn it into a kind of intellectuals' district. But while they were emptying the district of one sort, Moroccans and Pakistanis were sneaking in under the door", says Joaquim Jordà, a local resident and director of the film *De nens*, about the trial of those accused in the pederasty case that shook the Raval in 1997. In the film, the anthropologist Manuel Delgado insists that one thing is a (hypothetically) ideal city, designed in the council offices, and another thing is the real city, alive, contradictory and full of conflicts.

### Against defencelessness

In the summer of 1997, the Barcelona police announced that a pederasty ring in the Raval had been broken up. A large part of the media spread the police's version of events. After some months, the supposed pederasty ring had been reduced to five men charged: two with abusing minors and three with having "sold" their children for sexual purposes. Some people initially involved in the case (and later freed without charge) were members of groups that, against the judgement of the Raval Residents' Association, had questioned the urban redevelopment, denouncing the real estate speculation and the re-housing of people without resources.

It was also in summer 1997 that Jordà, after living for some years in Madrid, returned to Barcelona, where in the 1960s (along with José Maria Nunes, Pere

Portabella, Jacinto Esteve, Carles Duran, Ricard Bofill) he had been part of the so-called Film School of Barcelona, which, with its formalist concerns, showed little interest in the social reality of the *Xino* district. As the result of a stroke, Jordà had become disoriented in Madrid and chose to regain his bearings in the Raval district. Then, he took part in Pompeu Fabra University's first venture in the creative documentary master's course: *Mones com la Becky*, where he talks to patients in a psychiatric hospital and, based on his own experience as a result of the stroke, questions the boundaries between health and illness, normality and abnormality. *Mones com la Becky* launched an initiative with a freedom that seems to have inspired that of much of the subsequent productions created within the master's: *En construcció*, *Cravan vs. Cravan*, *El cielo gira*, *Tierra negra* and, among others, *De nens* itself.

Living in Carrer de la Cera and becoming interested in the libertarian groups that are trying to relive the district's anarchist past, Jordà monitored the pederasty case as a resident of the Raval. He met people affected for having been arrested without proof and was made aware (since the stroke he has had difficulty reading) of the book by the journalist Arcadi Espada (*Raval. Del amor a los niños*) who develops the theory of a police set-up with the media's complicity. A theory shared by Jordà, who is convinced that there was a desire to discredit certain groups opposed to the criteria of the council's policy in the Raval.

Unlike Guerin, Jordà began shooting with an idea about the reality he wanted to show: the Raval and its transformations, based on a certain and significant diverse fact, so that the cinema once again became interested in the "dark history"

of the district, although with a critical spirit and cinematographic criteria very different from the crime fiction of the 1950s. However, despite basing himself on a previous idea, Joaquim Jordà (who also explores the uncertain territory between documentary and fiction) does not work with a closed screenplay that would make the film immune to the unforeseen events that may take place during filming. Thus, he was clear that the film would be constructed with the images filmed at the trial. After all, a trial has a strong dramatic structure, but at the same time a real trial cannot be controlled by the director. For this reason the attitudes of judges and lawyers (arrogant gestures, class-based attitudes, details of incompetence and some nodding off during the sessions) could not have been staged, but were caught in an unforeseen way, though deliberately chosen and edited.

*De nens* (with a free, but at the same time firm, structure that incorporates interviews, representations of the events and songs with which Albert Pla acts as a reporter) is a film that takes aim at certain forms of power that tyrannise reality or make it their own at the service of a certain order of things: the judicial system, the police, the media, town planning. All this, while Jordà tries to protect the accused from the prying eyes of the cameras. Guilty or not, they are examples of the defencelessness of the poor and excluded. In the end, of a certain population of the Raval ■



**Dibuix negre IV**  
**(Black Drawing IV),**  
Antoni Tàpies (2005)  
paint and pencil on paper  
23,8 x 16,5 cm

Tàpies

**Margarida Casacuberta**

# Alone in the city

## *From Aloma to Mirall trencat*

All the characters that describe themselves in the novels of Mercè Rodoreda, published between 1938 and 1974, are women: *Aloma*, *La plaça del Diamant* (Time of the Doves), *El carrer de les Camèlies* (Camellia Street), *Jardí vora el mar* (Garden by the Sea) and *Mirall trencat* (Broken Mirror). That describe themselves or that are described:

in *Jardí vora el mar*, the novel that, according to Rodoreda, imposed itself on her “after years of not writing anything —apart from a few stories— because it requires effort and I had more important things to do, like for example surviving”, the person talking is an old gardener waiting to die among the plants that he has looked after all his life and which hide the secrets of those who, at some time or other, have passed through the garden. Like Armanda, the maid in *Mirall trencat*, he is the repository of the secrets of the families that, one after another, have left their footsteps there; also like Armanda, he is interested in other people’s stories, not as a mere matter of gossip, but as an act of love. Thus, from the old gardener’s narration there eventually emerges the outline of a female character who, despite the lack of clarity, becomes the centre of the picture. She is, to use the title of one of Francesc Trabal’s novels, “a woman

just like the others”, whom the gazes of the other women shroud in an aura of mystery that makes her special, a sort of heroine of a romantic novel or film like the ones the gardener likes to see at the cinema, and yet who does not cease to be a woman alone, like any of the other women that inhabit the universe created by Rodoreda, in the heart of the city. The city is Barcelona and Rosamaria, the “young lady” who spends the summers, after getting married, with her husband and a few friends in a summer residence with a garden next to the sea, a girl from Sant Gervasi who was going to be a dressmaker, but who marries the heir to a well-off family in the district, and begins a typical process of social climbing. Typical, because the social climbing of the main characters is a generally recurring motif in the novels of Rodoreda: from the marriage of convenience of Teresa Godoy, “a beauty who helped her mother on the fish stall but was ready inside to go up a

step or two with that ease that a person often has, especially a woman, wrenched from her surroundings by fate”, to the peculiar form of social climbing that the ending of *Aloma* allows us to glimpse, passing through the descent into hell and the later rebirth of two female characters apparently so different as Cecília Ce, in *El carrer de les Camèlies*, and Natàlia, in *La plaça del Diamant*.

All these women find themselves in the situation of having to break, at a specific moment of their respective existences, with the dreams or ideals of a youth more or less marked by “bovarism”, in order to survive in the city at a time of change, transformation and liquidation of an entire world, the one erased at a stroke with the outcome of the Spanish Civil War and the harsh post-war period that inevitably followed. This liquidation, to which Rodoreda’s characters are witness and mould themselves, survivors rather than heroines, is played out symbolically via the loss —of a house, a garden, a district, or a dovecot, that functions as an objective correlate of the existence of these characters, who react by making a new start with their small lives, borne along by the “destiny” that Rodoreda alludes to and, above all, “without dreams”.

Thus, *Aloma* has to leave the house and garden in Sant Gervasi that holds the memories, the secrets and the experiences of her childhood and adolescence and seal it like a tomb in order to be able to carry on living; Rosamaria swaps, for a suitor with potential, the life-long friend she has shared her childhood, garden and gossip with, apart from hopes and one night of love; Cecília loses the scene of her childhood as a “baby taken in” while she scours the city in search of an ideal father, an image she herself has

been forging from the comments and gossip of the neighbours that gather each afternoon around the dining room table in the house with a small tower and garden in Carrer de les Camèlies; Teresa Goday, on the basis of the rejection of the love child resulting from a fling “on the slopes of Tibidabo” with a married lamplighter who seems like an “angel in rags and tatters”, builds a new life as Senyora Rovira in Carrer de Trafalgar that will catapult her towards the top of the social scale, a place represented symbolically by a house “in the top part of Sant Gervasi, in a half-built street, next to a field, surrounded by a huge garden that, at the back, beyond an esplanade, becomes woodland”.

The romantic “garden of all gardens” turns out to be, literally and figuratively, the typically *Modernista* abandoned garden and, ultimately, the place of death and destruction that symbolises the liquidation of the bourgeois dream that precedes the sudden awakening to the terrifying absurdity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Natàlia, in *La plaça del Diamant*, is the character that embodies this absurdity. With the “cry from hell” with which, in the middle of the square, she expels the anguish and the pain of the war and the post-war years, inseparable, moreover, from the character of Colometa that she has unconsciously been assuming, and which issues from her mouth in the form of the narrative that forms the entire novel, Natàlia leaves her youth locked in the apartment with a roof and dovecot, which she bars symbolically by deeply marking the name of Colometa with a knife on the closed door of the entrance staircase: another tomb.

### The city in the feminine

The characters in the novels of Mercè Rodoreda wander like souls in torment around the streets of the city, before or after making the decision that will lead them to live life “without dreams” which roots them to the ground like the bronze women, planted and upright, that Giacometti sculpts in this same period.

The place that Rodoreda’s women wander around alone is a real, specific city, filtered, none the less, through the gaze and the monologizing voices of the characters (when the narrator’s voice corresponds directly with the “I” that is describing herself, as in the case of Natàlia or Cecília), by the gaze where the all-knowing narrative voice in third person is situated, as occurs in *Aloma* and *Mirall trencat*, or also (and this is the case with *Jardí vora el mar*) by the gaze of an “I” whose innocence and good nature place sideways the different points of view that focus on the character in the vanishing point where all these gazes converge.

This means that the city, despite being perfectly recognisable in all cases, is interiorised and acquires, though the pathetic fallacy, anthropomorphic comparisons and the systematic use of synaesthesia, the human attributes that make it one more character in Rodoreda’s universe, common to all the novels and, therefore, also feminine.

And feminine equals decentralised, marginal, interior, intuitive, emotional and synthetic. Rodoreda’s narrative option —perfectly established already in the last of the novels published in the nineteen thirties, the only one she was to recognise as being by her later— does not turn out to be too far removed from the one used by Joyce

in the process of constructing the rich and hitherto unheard of gaze of the character of Leopold Bloom. The modern Ulysses is an antihero, a nobody who, as has been said, has the greatness of a god despite his greyness, his non-deliberate marginality and his prosaic personal crises, apparently ahistorical but inseparable, if we think about it, from the complexity of the social, political and cultural framework that forms the pattern of the lives of the people after the First World War.

The female characters described in the novels of Rodoreda are also nobodies: tiny insects that get stuck in the spider’s web that so often appears in these books or mere fleeting images reflected in the pieces of a broken mirror. Their gazes become, like those of Bloom, representative of naivety, innocence and impotence in the face of the decisive course of history, which passes implacably and impassively over them; but it also shows up the difficulties that women have, in general, when it comes to gaining access to intellectual and practical training, still a male preserve, that puts obstacles in the way of a pressing need for personal independence that is not easy to achieve and which, when it is obtained, is not always seen as a triumph. But these modern Penelopes, who live in a city and a society in transformation, also ask themselves what is their place in this world and make important decisions with respect to it.

As important as they are everyday and domestic. This is the great challenge that Mercè Rodoreda sets herself in her novels, not only for the fact itself of turning these decisions into material for a novel —she has before her such solid referents as *Solitud* by Víctor Català— but to turn them into the subject

par excellence of her novels. Rodoreda knows what to do and also what she has from the moment she decides to write professionally. She explains it in 1933 in the “polemic” she maintains with the editor of the magazine *Clarisme*, Delfi Dalmau, over the publication of her first novel, later disowned, *Sóc una dona honrada?* (Am I an Honest Woman?). The way to becoming a professional writer passes via the novel, and Rodoreda wants to write modern novels, something that leads her to psychologism, without falling into the sentimentality trap that novels based on the exploration of a specific personality or case run the risk of falling into. The debate about the novel has been in the pages of the Catalan newspapers for years and, although behind this debate there is an argument about the concept of culture and its concretion in political terms, one cannot neglect the strict reflection about the genre, literally speaking, that it throws up.

Mercè Rodoreda, therefore, knows how to employ some useful narrative models, from both Catalan literature —the novels of Miquel Llor, Carles Soldevila, C.A. Jordana, Francesc Trabal, M. Teresa Vernet— and contemporary foreign literature, especially English-language, as in the case of the experiments by Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and many others. All of them, in the interwar years, are looking for the way of reflecting, through literature and from within the realist genre par excellence, the crisis of bourgeois civilisation, the foundations and the values of the West, which, moreover, at the time Rodoreda wrote the main body of her work, have already been placed in quarantine.

### Penelope on the streets of the city

The foundations of Western civilisation are combined, in Rodoreda’s fiction as a whole, in the figure of Penelope: the woman submissive and subjected to man, patient, sacrificing, a guarantee of the continuity of the species and a direct transmitter of the values —family, work, tradition— on which this civilisation is built. Her natural place is in the enclosure of the family, keeping house and bringing up the children. Molly Bloom, to use the female correlate of the modern Ulysses, completely contravenes this model, she is the figure of Penelope in negative: she works outside the home, she looks to satisfy her sexuality, if necessary outside matrimony, and turns the great novel with which, literally speaking, the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe begins into an affirmation of the importance of the little things in human existence.

Also contravening it, from a point of view subtler and certainly closer to Rodoreda’s sensibilities, is *Mrs. Dalloway*, the character who becomes the point of convergence and tension of the different ideological and moral discourses that form part of the construction of the character of the people in Europe after the First World War, although at the end of the novel the main character continues to appear before the eyes of those whose observe her as the clearest representation of the established values. It is clear that Clarissa Dalloway represents a social class from which all of Rodoreda’s heroines are far removed, with the exception perhaps of Teresa Valldaura when she reaches the high point of her ascent, but she shares with all of them the symbolic category that she is given by the construction of the novel based on the crossing of different lives and parallel stories in the same place and in shared time.



Aloma is a good-for-nothing girl from Sant Gervasi, an orphan, who depends on the goodwill of her brother, the heir to the family, to continue living under the family roof and who becomes, due to her innate curiosity and the ability to look at the reality surrounding her, a mirror that reproduces ad infinitum a story that belongs to everyone because, in the course of the story, they all repeat it, from the cats to the apparently well-matched couples. So-called amorous relationships are relationships of power in which on only a very few occasions does the woman have a chance of winning; and this only occurs when the woman is able to leave her feelings to one side, one of the most solid and most effective cultural constructs, in the modern age, of guaranteeing the social order.

Thus, although the very name Aloma may signify a burden of submission, domesticity and fidelity as heavy as Penelope, the main character in the novel manages to neutralise its influence after experiencing in person the inequality on which any "love" affair understood in conventional terms is based. The triangle that functions in the home between her brother Joan, her sister-in-law Anna and Coral, a friend of both of them, is not so different from the one she herself is part of with Robert, Anna's brother who returns from America, and Violeta, the femme fatale who, as they say, has clouded his judgement; but, beside these more or less stereotyped triangles, there are other subtler ones, more closely linked to jealousy: the husband who goes right off the wife he seemed to be hopelessly in love with when she has a baby; the young husband who cannot stand the idea of being a father and leaves his wife, a teenager, even before she has the baby; the husband who exerts control over a

financially and socially defenceless wife based on physical and psychological mistreatment.

The contrast to all this lies in the ability of women to approach love affairs in terms of interest, just as Aloma's neighbour does, who, while showing off the linen to her friends, is thinking of the freedom that she is about to achieve and which as a girl she doesn't have; or as Coral does, the vamp who lives from sucking the blood and the money of the men she seduces without the slightest sense of involvement, either emotional or moral. Therefore when Aloma makes the decision to go it alone with the pregnancy with which, in accordance with the stereotypes of romantic sentimental literature, her relationship with her brother-in-law ends, this decision is a bold departure, but, above all, it takes place in a historical context that doubtlessly makes it possible: during the Republic, in an age of the modernisation of customs, of greater freedom of movement and, most importantly, of thinking.

Aloma's decision is that of so many other Alomas who roam the city streets and find themselves in the situation of having to leave their childhood home, not to automatically form another family group destined also to guarantee the solidity and the continuity of the established social structure, but to begin a new way of life, beyond all the clichés. All of them: that of the femme fatale, the kept woman, the dancer in a theatre on the Paral·lel, or that of the "intellectual".

Aloma is a simple, homely and not very naughty character, different from other Penelopes due to the discomfort produced in her by gossip as a form of domestic sociability and by the almost subconscious need to get away from it

all, to breathe. This discomfort results in a form of constant journeys to Barcelona that enable her to become aware of the sound and the movement of the modern city and pave the way for her last definitive journey to the adult world, the real world, represented by “the city lit up in a great quivering of little lights” that Aloma sees, before going, from the attic of the house in Sant Gervasi, a place full of symbolic content, as it is the scene of the suicide of another brother of hers, which is where she leaves, perhaps as an offering, the novel she is carrying in her hands, before sealing the tomb of her own youth. The decision is made: life must go on. And this means assuming the loneliness and the imminent motherhood in a way that clashes with conventional morality and with the socially accepted image of woman. Alone, but aware of the existence of other cases like hers, Aloma does not hesitate to blend in with the lights and shadows of the city: “The streets were still. From a wall hung a rose bush with no roses. In the distance, there was the dull sound of the city; girls who were facing up to life, without dreams. (...) And Aloma got lost down there below, like a shadow, in the night that accompanied her”.

### Life goes on in the streets

It was to be another twenty-five years before the first Penelope that Rodoreda brings out of the domestic enclosure to leave her alone, with all the virtualities open, in the middle of the city, was joined by another novel. In 1962, from exile in Geneva, Mercè Rodoreda once more addressed the readers she had left from the thirties and a new generation of readers born in the post-war years through the voice of another Penelope,

named Natàlia, born in Gràcia, not too far from Aloma’s Sant Gervasi.

The small problems of Natàlia, an only child, who has lost her mother, with an absent remarried father, who works behind the counter in a cake shop and has a fiancé, begin in the Plaça del Diamant, on Midsummer’s Night, when she meets Quimet, the man who, in less than a year, she will marry. A carpenter with his own business, Natàlia marries him despite —or perhaps because of— the moral harassment he subjects her to from the very moment he sets eyes on her: he changes her name —Natàlia stops being Natàlia and becomes Colometa— and he becomes jealous of her, he spies on her while she is serving in the shop, he makes her give up her job, he tells her she does nothing right, he invents illnesses so that she will pay him more attention, especially after she gets pregnant, and he turns the home into a dovecot and life into that sort of martyrdom which, out of ignorance or through the fear of ending up destitute, so many women have resigned themselves to confusing with married life. As one of the many set phrases that appear in the novel says, “you enter matrimony on a path of roses and you leave it on a path full of thorns”. Therefore it can be said that the first part of Natàlia’s story is also one like many others, made of the self-sacrifices that any girl had to make before the war, brought up to become a housewife, a good wife and mother, just as her mother-in-law and husband remind her, as well as the proverbs, set phrases and *double entendres* of colloquial language, which is, as has been said, the great protagonist of *La plaça del Diamant*.

But if the process of turning a young girl into a resigned Penelope is painful, the opposite process is too, which begins,

gradually but unstoppably, after the proclamation of the Republic: "it was with April and closed flowers that my little headaches started becoming big headaches". The big headaches are those associated with the course of history, although it is the course of this history that, paradoxically, the ability to explain naively and lucidly her existence as Colometa shut up in a dovecot that the need to work outside the home forces her to leave, because "business was down a little in the shop" and "Quimet said (...) the rich were messing around with the republic".

From that moment onwards, the streets become the protagonists of Natàlia's story, together with the references, ever more obsessive, to doves. Natàlia's revolution against the doves began with a visit from Mateu, who makes her think "about things that I thought I understood and which I didn't really understand... or I was learning things that I was just beginning to know...", a sort of "epiphany", which becomes the turning point of the novel, with the decision to do away with the "village of doves" and the assertion that "everything Quimet said to me went in one ear and out the other as if, between my ears, a hole had just appeared", and which coincides with the other revolution, the important and, for that reason, unnamed one.

During the war, it is Quimet who goes round the streets, becoming a militiaman. He and his companions go off to war because, says Mateu, "if we lose they'll wipe us off the map". When the bombings start, in the streets "all the lights were blue. It looked like the land of the wizards and was pretty". But it starts to be hard for Natàlia to cross the High Street. Her anguish intensifies when she is laid off and she finds herself forced to leave her son in a children's camp.

Meanwhile, the news arrives of Quimet's death and it was the turn of the young boys to be called up: "Old and young, all off to the war, and the war sucked them up and brought death to them. (...) And all of them were becoming like the rats in the rat trap". And finally, the Diaspora.

Natàlia now only leaves the house to look for work, and just crossing the High Street is too much for her. The old bosses tell her that they don't want any dealings with reds, and when she tries to cross again, she falls to the ground "lying like a sack". From this moment on, with nothing to eat and with two children to maintain, Natàlia reaches the end of the journey to hell with the idea of killing the children and committing suicide with hydrochloric acid solution. While she is gathering the strength to do it, "I went out, what to do I don't know. Just to go out. The trams were running not with glass in the windows, with mosquito grille. The people were badly dressed. All was very tired, still, from the great illness". As in dreams, and dressed in mourning, she who had had "a white dress to put on and could walk on the streets..." automatically follows another woman in mourning who leads her to a church full of people where Natàlia feels like the repository of everyone's pain and from where she escapes pursued by the vision of blood: "and I ran home and everyone was dead. Dead those who had been killed and those who had been left alive, who seemed also to be dead, living as if they had been killed".

From this journey, the Penelope in Natàlia emerges with her soul torn apart. She has reached the very edge of the abyss pushed by the force with which history acts on the individual, and this leaves an indelible mark that nothing or nobody will be able to erase. Therefore, from

the moment that Natàlia marries the grocer —another victim of the war and the *deus ex machina* that prevents the final tragedy, because modern Penelopes cannot even allow themselves tragedy—and goes to live on the other side of the High Street, she is paralysed every time she tries to step off the kerb and return to her previous world. The modern Penelope has had to become tough, with a heart of ice, to be able to survive and is reduced to the condition of living death, suffering from an agoraphobia that Natàlia explains with the recurring image of the worms in the wood, becoming for the others, when she begins to go out, the “lady of the doves”, who explains to everyone who wishes to listen, when she spends the afternoons in the parks, that she had had a beautiful dovecot with eighty doves destroyed by a bombing raid. This Natàlia who hides her true story and eventually idealises her dead husband, does not find the voice with which she narrates, like a confession, her whole existence as Colometa until, after many years, she is able to face up to the past and bury it. For the last word of this novel to be the adjective *contents* (content), instead of *feliços* (happy) that Quimet had used at another time in the story, referring to the doves that Natàlia sees soaking themselves in the puddles of water, is only possible after once more walking the streets that had become her own private hell amid the collective hell. Most significantly, the exact scene of the catharsis, the hole in the funnel where Natàlia lets out the “cry from hell” with which she expels “a beetle of saliva”, her very “youth that fled with a cry that I didn’t know exactly what it was”, is the Plaça del Diamant, where the character of Colometa was born and where Natàlia restores it in order to recover her own identity and voice.

### Penelope in search of a lost world

Cecília, the girl in *El carrer de les Camèlies*, is, during the war, a teenager who “cheers up seeing the old people scared” and who likes to “go down the middle of the street when the sirens sound”. Abandoned in front of the entrance to a house in Sant Gervasi when she was just a baby, picked up by a security guard and adopted by a couple already old and childless, Cecília is certainly the most emblematic literary representation of the solitude of the individual in the modern world, characterised by violence and absurdity, by precariousness and the lack of points of reference.

In this respect, the woman who walks, who roams the streets of a city she finds hostile because she has an indomitable spirit, rootless and, in a certain sense, dangerously free, represents the depersonalised individual, lacking identity, that moreover is not content with surviving in abject poverty. It is precisely for this reason that Cecília becomes such a disconcerting character because her rebellion is not due to her will but to her instinct, and her particular journey to hell goes no further than the edges of the city, of what is known, apparently controlled and civilized. The peculiar heart of darkness that Cecília finds herself having to explore is in the very core of the bourgeois city, the right-hand side of the Barcelona Eixample, the scene of inexcusable evil, a mechanism perfectly calibrated to destroy the person with no particular aim, at random, for the pure and simple pleasure of exerting a certain power.

Nor does Rodoreda use important-sounding words, when it comes to exploring this other major theme of contemporary literature. Through a

character essentially “innocent”, brought up outside the great ideological constructs and who seems completely indifferent to history, in a microcosm condemned to immediate extinction, but which still rests on the pillars of a petty-bourgeois society symbolised by the house with a garden in Sant Gervasi, the writer constructs the negative of the stereotyped image of the bourgeois city. To do it, she uses the point of view of Cecília, a female type that does not correspond at all to the Penelopes of the previous novels, shut up at home, subjected to the authority of the husband, but to Maria-Cinta, the “kept woman” who lives, like Coral in *Aloma*, in an apartment in Passeig de Gràcia furnished by a friend who takes her to the Liceu “like a queen”.

Before getting there though, fully mature, and after finding, at the end of a long and painful journey, the same loneliness as Aloma and Natàlia, Cecília, without thinking about it too much, changes the scenes of a more or less “happy” childhood for a marginal life in the shanty towns, first with Eusebi—who eventually disappears in the innards of the Francoist city—and then with Andrés, a plasterer who dies of tuberculosis; nor will she hesitate to change the exploitation involved in the work of sewing blouses at piece rate for another type of prostitution, not as dignified and perhaps more profitable, on the Rambla. Now away from the world of the shanty towns, she will eventually change the Kafka-esque relationship with Cosme, the innkeeper from Gràcia, for the no less claustrophobic, degrading and destructive relationship in the apartment in Carrer Mallorca, which changes her black dress for a pink doll’s dress that everybody feels like fondling. Even the idealised “nice gentleman” from the café with the fern leaves, another *deus ex*

*machina* that saves Cecília in extremis from alienation and death, and who, moreover, gives her the material means and the sufficient presence of mind to begin a life alone, mirrored in the image of Maria-Cinta, yes, but with the necessary corrections to avoid “dying in hospital” and end up “badly buried”. Above all one, eliminating sentimentality. Seeing as she has to live, and “she had to live until she died”, Cecília rids herself of everything that may tie her sentimentally—which means subjecting herself—to the world of conventions, hypocrisy, emotional blackmail. Therefore she escapes, time and again, in search of the ideal love of a father unknown and also idealised that she will not find until the end of a winding road that will take her back right to the start of her story as a child taken in: the only true love is that of the security guard who found her, who left “that little kitten of a girl” in front of the doorway of the “most suitable” family, and who gave her a name. It is the disinterested love that she does not find even in the promises of marriage of the Majorcan sailor who keeps her locked for three days in a hotel room, nor in the “good intentions”, also related with marriage, of the innkeeper who locks her in a prison of jealousy and authoritarianism, just as—and the only difference are the “intentions”—the lover in Carrer Mallorca does. Without forgetting the emotional blackmail of the old general in the café on the Rambla de Catalunya, or the disgust produced in Cecília by the submission of Paulina, her confidant and go-between, to the man from Tarragona, going so far as to make her betray the trust of a woman friend and confuse her role as lover with that of submissive wife.

Cecília feels nauseous or is sick in the light of these last episodes, in the same way that she resolves her first “amorous” relationships with abortions and miscarriages. It is not until after the last and definitive abortion, that will take her to death’s doorway, and until after the nausea brought on by the mere sight of the “nice gentleman” in the café with the fern leaves, her “last love”, that Cecília is able to recognise the true father in the three people that intervened directly in her adoption. Where does that leave, then, the images of the father that make the society as represented by the Liceu, a symbol, Cecília’s childhood and teenage obsession? When finally a Maria-Cinta risen from the dead can enter there “like a queen”, she realises that “inside there was nothing that was mine, and outside there were the streets and the air”.

Cecília’s streets are not those of Aloma, nor are they those of Natàlia, despite the fact that very often they coincide and that all three characters, at one time or another, could perfectly and anonymously cross paths in them. Cecília’s streets are those of the district of Gràcia and El Guinardó; those that take her to El Tibidabo and the mountain of El Carmel; they are those of the Eixample, Carrer Mallorca, Passeig de Gràcia and, above all, the Rambla de Catalunya, with the lime trees; they are also the winding streets of the district of Sant Pere and La Ribera, with Carrer Vermell as a point of reference, next to the railings of the Ciutadella Park or the narrow streets of La Barceloneta. Cecília, however, will eventually find her refuge in La Bonanova, in an abandoned *Modernista* house that, little by little, becomes her lonely woman’s world, a hybrid between the lost world of the Carrer de les Camèlies and her new world.

### A dead rat in the abandoned garden

Of the stock of the Corals, Cecília nevertheless shares some important traits with Aloma and Natàlia: the dignity recovered with the second birth of all three characters and the will to lay the foundations of a new existence “without dreams” from the awareness that the painful experience of loss awakens in them.

Above all, however, she shares with Teresa, from *Mirall trencat*, the space of the house, one of the main *leitmotiven* in Rodoreda’s fiction around which all the other Penelopes also revolve: Aloma passes by “the house of all houses” on her journeys between Barcelona and Sant Gervasi, and Natàlia knows of its existence from the story that Julieta tells of her night of love during the war in “a requisitioned house”. The totalising nature of *Mirall trencat* —which makes it possible to read this novel, as Maria Campillo and Marina Gustà explain, as a commentary on literature itself— affects all the novels published up to then by Rodoreda, which find a reflection —at times direct, but more often distorted— in her first mature work that, significantly, Rodoreda heads with a theoretical text. Therefore it does not seem rash to see the Valldaura family house as the macrocosm that integrates the different microcosms that make up Rodoreda’s fiction, which, for their part, are mutually mirrored and weave a web of spatial, temporal, human, thematic and symbolic relationships that allow the author to transcend all anecdote.

Thus, Teresa Goday who, like Aloma, is a single mother (although the former is a product of the nineteenth-century novelette and the latter corresponds to the psychologism of the interwar novel), shares with Cecília the construction

of a new life centring on the house understood as a place of life and at the same time of death, in accordance with the fin de siècle symbol of the abandoned garden, so prominent in the literary and pictorial tradition of the turn of the century.

The “garden of all gardens” represents, therefore, a synthesis of opposites: life/death, peace/war, beauty/decomposition, a place not of this world, a sort of limbo. Both Teresa and Cecília take possession of it immediately after the house has been witness to the collapse of a world, the aristocratic, when Teresa goes to live there, and the bourgeois, when Cecília moves in; and, in both cases, it becomes the tomb of the love affairs of the main characters, and symbolises the space of the memory.

Unlike Mercè Rodoreda’s other novels, in *Mirall trencat* almost all the action takes place in the grounds of the house and the garden, and it is reality which inevitably bursts in on the life of a family and a house that keep up a peculiar struggle with the passage of time. The characters arrive there with all their stories and all their memories in tow, secrets included, closely related to certain objects that become, in the novel’s tangle of relationships, symbols that take on their own narrative life: the black-lacquered Japanese wardrobe linked to Teresa’s first husband; the brooch in the form of a bunch of green gems that represents the character’s social elevation, the cut-glass cup, green and pink, that brings Salvador Valldaura’s Viennese history into the world of the house; the lilac dominoes, the black mask and the fan with an apple painted on that Teresa is holding the night she seduces the man who is to be her second husband; the tie clip with the grey pearl that Teresa sees the jeweller

Begú wearing, which she presents to Valldaura and he doesn’t wear, and which her lover the notary Riera ends up wearing, among so many other objects that enter the world of the house.

Moreover, reality filters into this closed world through outside characters that give it gestures, ways of speaking, diverse personal circumstances and social extractions. This is the case with Jesús Masdeu, the unacknowledged son of Teresa, a shy boy who would like to be an artist and will get no further than being a picture card painter and who, during the war, is the head of the militia charged with confiscating the house; his presence in the house is the echo of Teresa’s popular roots. The boy Masdeu looks at the red fishes that Teresa has put in the fountain of the house’s vestibule, just as he notices the lion’s head from where the bell chain hangs and which is reminiscent of the bell in Cecília’s house.

The red fishes are a badge of the new rich in Rodoreda’s work: Senyor Bellom, in *Jardí vora el mar*, and one of Cecília’s clients, has them installed on the bed head, and the owners of the house where Natàlia works also have them in the garden fountain. Furthermore, with Eulàlia, the character who makes the marriage of Teresa to Valldaura possible, the notes of society enter the house —weddings, funerals and various liaisons— and the news of social unrest. Eulàlia will end up in Paris, like Sofia Valldaura, her step-daughter and the only member of the family who constantly goes out of the enclosure of the house: first the games of tennis with friends, then shopping, journeys and burials, and finally exile.

After news of the death of the jeweller of the bunch of gems, “Teresa felt that time had just taken a leap”. Time gets

the better of the occupants of the house, who are not immune to outside reality: roadworks are done in the district, new streets are laid and offices and modern shops are built, the car replaces the horse and carriage, and Teresa Valldaura, a fat, ill grandmother, goes back to speaking like she did as a young woman, typical of the more working-class Barcelona, whose roofs Jesús Masdeu never tires of painting and to which Ramon will return, one of Sofia's sons, married to a dressmaker when he returns from South American exile to the grey, sad, starving and wretched Barcelona of the post-war years, the same city reflected by the shacks of *El carrer de les Camèlies* or the streets teeming with the poor and war-wounded in *La plaça del Diamant*.

This is where the fast-moving, indifferent Barcelona will end up, passing before the eyes of the old notary Riera, when he goes to visit Teresa for the last time; a city that already seems strange to Eulàlia on a quick visit before the war: "She had come to Barcelona on a kind of sentimental journey and had the impression that she would leave it devastated if she didn't find the way to react in time. The Passeig de Gràcia was not her Passeig de Gràcia. Her friends had all disappeared. Everything had changed without really changing at all. On days like this she clung to memories as if her life depended on it: what was left of her life..."

After the war, everything really does change. The house is demolished and the garden flattened, in order to build apartment blocks that leave no trace of it. With the destruction of the house, carried out on Sofia's orders, a world still indebted to romantic values is wiped out. And Sofia is the only character in Rodoreda's universe that can make this decision, because she is the only

one capable of distancing herself sentimentally from the past. She is the great survivor of this story, because she has learnt to control her own emotions and those of others, because she has not hesitated to smash the last testimonies of her hopes as a young woman—to which she has never yielded—once she takes control of her life and of the fortune inherited.

Like the vague Rosamaria in *Jardí vora el mar*, Sofia rejects, discreetly but without hesitation, the embrace that Armanda, the repository of this whole world, wants to give her; at the end of the novel, she is reduced to nothing, like the empty shell of the hazelnut that Eladi Farriols crushes, like the pearl that breaks off the old notary Riera's tie clip, like the head of the master of the doll's house that Ramon takes from the house, like the marble gravestone with the name of Maria that ends up on the floor of the washhouse of one of the removal men, or like the rosebush cuttings that Armanda goes to look for and which in the end are dry: a world that is symbolised by the dead rat, with its head covered in green flies, that the demolition men discover inside the hollowed-out trunk of a chestnut tree. Without turning round, Penelope "gets lost down the streets" ||



# reviews



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01

# Reviews

## || A Theory of Linguistic Sustainability

Joan Melià

Albert Bastardas, 2005, *Cap a una sostenibilitat lingüística* (Towards Linguistic Sustainability), Barcelona, Centre d'Estudis de Temes Contemporanis and Angle Editorial, 71 pp.

Linguistic diversity is not a thing of the past but something used on a daily basis by millions of human beings who want to keep living linguistically as they have done in the past, without this becoming an obstacle to being able to understand and communicate with members of other groups. (pp. 60-61)

Constructing the title of this work around the term “sustainability”, which is usually associated with ecology and economy, is a clear sign of how the author approaches the study of sociolinguistics, and this is also demonstrated in the bibliographical references he uses. In this brief essay, Albert Bastardas, as he has done in previous works<sup>1</sup>, besides rejecting any dichotomic standpoint and upholding the paradigm of complexity, avails himself of concepts and procedures from other scientific disciplines in order to go deeper in his reflections on the contact of languages. And there is no doubt that, in this regard, his contributions are among the most outstanding in Catalan sociolinguistics, so that he has become one of the leading lights in the rise of eco-linguistic thought over the last few years. Without its relative brevity constituting any obstacle, *Cap a una sostenibilitat lingüística* (ex aequo 2004 IDEES Prize), offers original and innovative thoughts both on the characteristics of the processes of linguistic substitution and standardisation, and about the standpoint that should be adopted in order to study them. The themes the book covers range from the need for a wide-ranging interdisciplinary approach in sociolinguistic research through to the possibility of making use of the concept of “sustainability” in linguistic policy-making and planning, all of which it complements with proposals for linguistic regulation with the aim of ordering multilingualism in such a way as not to lead to linguistic substitution, in other words, in favour of sustainable multilingualism. In this regard, we might mention the author’s proposal, a bold one in our circles, of questioning the idea that social bilingualism leads necessarily to linguistic substitution, an idea that is both recurring and undisputed in our most accessible sociolinguistic literature. According to the author, in most processes of massive bilingualisation of which we are aware, the outcome has been substitution because

■ <sup>22</sup> Along these lines, apart from numerous articles in specialised reviews, we might mention his *Ecologia de les llengües: Medi, contacte i dinàmica sociolingüística* (Ecology of Languages: Milieu, Contact and Sociolinguistics) and the articles of different authors that, as co-editor, he brought together in *Diversitats. Llengües, espècies i ecologies* (Diversities: Languages, Species and Ecologies, 2004).

this was the aim of the exercise but, in the framework of sustainable multilingualism, bilingualism need not necessarily lead to substitution. The sustainability theory is precisely concerned to combine and harmonise the aspects and alternatives that seem to cause exclusion. For Bastardas, “linguistic sustainability would be a gradual process of transformation of the present model of human linguistic organisation, which would aim at ensuring that collective movement by human beings towards bilingual or polyglot models does not necessarily mean abandoning the languages belonging to the different cultural groups” (p. 17).

In order to make the application of this proposal of multilingualism possible, appropriate instruments would be needed so as to measure the socio-linguistic impact of changes occurring in the economic, political, educational, migratory, technological, etc. domains. “We must achieve without delay clear and functional models of socio-linguistic ecosystems, discover the interactions between the different elements, quantify them and, to the extent that it is possible, make some predictions about their evolution and, consequently, propose some measures [...] that are appropriate from the standpoint of sustainable management of plurilingualism” (p. 23).

The author distinguishes three kinds of situation in which policies for maintaining multilingualism should be applied: a) When a community becomes bilingual because of incorporation into a more extensive politico-economic structure in which it becomes a minority; b) In horizontal contacts, basically caused by migratory flows; c) When migratory flows occur in host societies that are not independent and are already lop-sided from a linguistic point of view because of previous events. Determining what model to apply in each case is not a simple process. Evidently a lot of other factors intervene, for example the degree of industrial development, the characteristics of the migratory movements, the phase the process of linguistic substitution has reached, etc..

In speaking of ordering the functions of languages, the author, as he has done in previous works, turns to the concept of “subsidiarity”, which has also been borrowed, in this case from political science. In the linguistic sphere, this principle might be summed up as “anything that a local language can do should not be done by a more global language” (p. 24); in other words, by default, the preferential language should always be that of the linguistic community.

To the author’s denunciation, as a falsehood, of the assertion that the members of subordinate communities must abandon their languages in order to go ahead and leave poverty behind them (pp. 61-62), we could add that following such recommendations, rather than aiming to lift the people out of their poverty, has frequently meant opening up the way to domination by the very groups that make the recommendation.

With regard to integrating the immigrant population, Bastardas proposes, in his framework of conserving linguistic diversity, that what he calls “agreed principles of coexistence” should be accepted: 1. The principle of linguistic stability, development, and normality of the host group; 2. The principle of adaptation (inter-group and social) of the displaced group; 3. The principle of personal freedom of displaced people with regard to the continuity of their cultural elements within the group (pp. 52-53).

In the final part of this book, Bastardas mentions the priorities that he considers should be given to activities in favour of linguistic sustainability, these going from discouraging



abusive use of the great interlanguages and dignifying the self-image of subordinated linguistic groups, through to control by these groups of their own communicative space, reserving exclusive functions for languages that are presently subordinated, and the commitment of governments and companies to establishing sustainable linguistic models.

The author's standpoint is particularly ideal for analysing the dynamics of linguistic change in present-day societies, especially our own. If we consider, as Bastardas does, that throughout history there have been two great causes that explain the rupture of linguistic ecosystems (migratory irruptions and political and economic absorption), we will need to agree that, in our own part of the world these two factors have come together in a particularly intense way. In such circumstances, Bastardas maintains that, despite the problems that the great changes occurring in today's societies mean for the continuity of the great majority of linguistic communities, with an appropriate model it must be possible to strike a balance between progress and maintenance of linguistic diversity ||

## || A more dangerous world

**Gustau Muñoz**

Antoni Segura, 2004, *Senyors i vassalls del segle XXI. Una explicació fonamental i clara dels conflictes internacionals* (Lords and Vassals of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A Clear and Basic Explanation of International Conflicts), Barcelona, La Campana, 366 pp.

In the world that has emerged from the Cold War there is nothing that remotely approaches any paradigm of stability and peaceful resolution of conflicts, or of peace and harmonious progression towards a multilateral overcoming of the social, ecological and economic problems that make life difficult for millions of people. Far from that, conflicts are proliferating with a great potential for destabilisation and one can glimpse on the horizon an accumulation of tensions that could well have devastating effects. Alex Callinicos has written in a recent book that, "it is difficult not to think that this world is heading for catastrophe". Some people believed that the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar conflict that had structured international relations for almost half a century would open up the way to some kind of "perpetual peace". Having to wake up from this dream has been very hard.

Events have unfolded rapidly and one war follows hot on the heels of another, shaping a complex panorama in which a modicum of conceptual order is needed before one can try to understand it. Again, increasing attention to the international sphere has generated a veritable avalanche of extremely different kinds of books. This is why this particular contribution (in the La Campana collection "Obertures", which one should always keep in mind) is very useful. It is essentially an instructive, easy-to-understand book that follows the evolution of international relations from the collapse of the Soviet Union through to the invasion of Iraq or, in other words, through to the present day, while pausing to reflect upon the core factors of the new constellation of conflicts.

It is a useful book because it synthesises a range of different contributions while never losing sight of what is essential. It gives due consideration to the great upheaval of 11 September, which drastically changed the scene but also, in fact, legitimised the high-risk options that had already been adopted by the powers-that-be in the United States. Segura offers a clear account of the thinking of the so-called neoconservatives, the imperial intent underlying it, and describes the consequences. The context is the struggle for world hegemony, for strategic resources, for a presence in Central Asia and the appearance of a new kind of conflict, the “asymmetrical conflict” in which non-territorial terrorist networks have unprecedented possibilities for making their moves.

The end of the Cold War left the United States as the only world power, with a military capacity that is infinitely superior to that of any possible rival. Meanwhile, a strategy for occupying power vacuums has been taking shape, its main concern being to guarantee geostrategic interests. The American Republic, going against deep traditions, has now nourished, thanks to the neoconservatives (presently in power), a determined imperial vocation. But this raises problems in everything, as the author stresses. First, there is the inappropriateness of the conventional military approach with regard to the new kinds of terrorist-based conflicts. Meanwhile, this imperial vocation also has to confront the same dilemmas that confront any kind of imperialism, these deriving from the scope and costs of a very large-scale military presence and, in particular, from the economic and financial situation of the dominant power on the world scale. This aspect, which is not given much space in the book, is fundamental. In the end, military and political power is based on economic capacity. Even though the United States has a great technological advantage, its economic power is waning and the financial outlook is progressively darkening. Its demographic clout is also on the decline and the struggle over resources—especially oil—has only made things worse. The desire to prevent the emergence of any possible rival power will have profoundly destabilising effects in a world that is changing at great speed. Improvised imperial rhetoric (around the values of civilisation, democracy and human rights), with its huge encumbrance of systematic incoherence that denies it credibility and that is extensively described in these pages, will be less and less convincing. Here, the drama is announced ||

## || Experimental metaphysics

Jesús Navarro

Ramon Lapiedra, 2004, *Els dèficits de la realitat i la creació del món* (The Deficits of Reality and the Creation of the World), Valencia, Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 248 pp.

Many of the classical themes of philosophical reflection cannot be approached at present without taking into account the findings of the natural sciences, especially physics and biology. After the advent of the theory of relativity, ideas on space and time were profoundly modified and were widely discussed during the first third of the twentieth century. Contrary to a legend that still persists in the popular imagination, the basic

concepts of relativist physics can be understood with some rudimentary knowledge of mathematics, which does not remotely mean that they are intuitive. Once one accepts the hypothesis, hitherto verified by experiments, that the velocity of light in a vacuum is independent of the observer who is measuring it, it is not difficult to understand and accept that two observers can have different results in their measurements of spatial and temporal intervals. Neither does one have to be an expert in what are known in mathematics as matrices and tensors to understand that space and time are entities that cannot exist without matter.

The situation is more complicated when it comes to quantum mechanics. This is based on an inevitable formal and not easily simplifiable framework and leads to results that escape the most imaginative intuition, where reality is mixed with its representations and interpretations. It seems clear that the use of a not very evident and still less intuitive formalism makes interpretation absolutely necessary. The issue in the case of quantum mechanics is, however, that interpretation is not merely a translation of mathematical terms but somehow forms an essential part of the theory. Even today this interpretation is the subject of debate, a continuation of that initiated in the 1920s by such notable figures as Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein. There is no doubt that Ramon Lapiedra's book contributes interesting elements for understanding the terms of the debate. More than half is devoted to problems related with interpreting quantum mechanics, how it approaches knowledge of objective reality, and what the implications are. With these elements, the author begins his consideration of two classical epistemological questions: determinism and realism. Is everything previously determined by antecedents? Is there a reality that is prior to experience and independent of it?

Quantum mechanics is the theoretical framework that has enabled understanding of a great number of new phenomena, while opening up the way for the appearance of new techniques and inventions. Moreover, it is associated with the greatest power of prediction ever achieved in science: in some cases, agreement between theoretical predictions and experimental measurements coincide to eleven significant figures. Yet this highly successful intellectual construction has conceptual consequences that might offend our view of reality. Let the reader imagine that a coin has been put in a box. After shaking it a little, the reader has a 50% chance of guessing what "state" (to use quantum terminology) the coin will be in: heads or tails. But he or she will certainly never doubt that the coin will be in one of these two possible states (on condition, naturally, that the box has been shaken enough to ensure that the coin is not stuck) and will assert that the fact of opening the box will be sufficient to know if the guess is correct or not. Things would not be so simple if the coin were a quantum object: quantum mechanics would say that the heads or tails state of the coin is not defined, and it is the process of measuring (opening the box) that determines it. In technical terms, the situation of the coin is characterised by a mathematical function that contains both possibilities (heads and tails), and the act of measuring, which somehow implies an interaction between the quantum object and a macroscopic system, determines what is known, technically speaking, as the "collapse of the wave function" into one of the two possibilities. This counterintuitive situation led Schrödinger to imagine a mental experiment where, instead of a coin, there is a cat and, through an appropriate mechanism, one comes to a superimposition of a live cat and a dead cat, which is an aberration for our intuition. Lapiedra devotes an entire

chapter to analysing this sadistic experiment and to showing that even though it contains the conceptual difficulties of quantum physics, the so-called paradox of Schrödinger's cat is, in fact, no such thing<sup>1</sup>.

The idea of the cat was to demonstrate a paradoxical situation in a macroscopic world, but the question can be approached in terms of quantum objects, as Lapedra does with experiments involving electron spin. Spin is a characteristic of quantum objects that is manifested in the presence of a magnetic field, orienting the former as if they were microscopic compasses. It should be made clear that spin is not the only quantum property that defies our intuition about reality, but it is the one that makes it possible to design relatively simple experiments even while maintaining the conceptual complexity of which we speak. In the case of the electron, the value of spin is  $\frac{1}{2}$  and there are only two possibilities of orientation, indicated as + or - (one could have said north or south, but these signs are associated with mathematical operations that generalise this particular case). Then, if we ask ourselves in what state of + or - the orientation of electron spin is, the answer of quantum mechanics is that the question makes no sense. Until the measurement is made to determine this, the electron spin has no orientation and it is the process of measuring that will create it. This means, in Lapedra's words, that behind any observation there is not always a reality that functions as an exhaustive antecedent of the observation because the observation itself can produce part of the reality that is observed. Reality is in part determined (the spin value) and in part non-existent before measurement (the projection of spin). With a suggestive image, the author speaks of a "reality with holes", for quantum reality contains ontological deficits.

In the long debate between Einstein and Bohr, the former imagined another mental experiment. In 1935, along with Podolski and Rosen, he published an article entitled "Can the Quantum-Mechanical Description of Physical Reality be Considered Complete?", which led to the EPR experiments, thus named because of the authors' initials. This article analysed the case of two particles with a spin correlation such that, if the projection of one is +, that of the other is -. The aim was to show that quantum mechanics is incomplete in the sense that it lacks some information for describing the system and this incompleteness of the theory would avoid the paradoxical dilemma that the wave function seems to entail. But Bohr demonstrated that the quantum correlations mean that the state of a particle could not always disregard its origins, so the debate was not closed. It is worth saying that questions like this, even though they are fundamental from a conceptual point of view, do not occupy or concern most physicists in their everyday work. In general, scientists are interested in matters that might lead to predictions, which need to be verified or are proved wrong through experience or the internal consistency of the theory itself. If this is not the case, the questions go beyond the realm of physics: they are literally metaphysical matters. In some sense it is what Newton meant with his words "Hypotheses non fingo", when he confessed that he had no explanation for the origin of gravity.

However, in 1964, thanks to the work of J. S. Bell, these problems were approached in terms that can be verified by experiments and hence it is possible to undertake an experimental study of metaphysics. Bell imagined a series of measurements of projections, according to three different directions, of the spin of two particles. If there is a reality of these projections prior to the measurement, which is what a strictly realist standpoint would tell us, then the sets of measurements would have to satisfy

an inequality, which Lapiedra demonstrates in an appendix. But this assumption of inequality would be breached if the entanglement<sup>2</sup> of a wave function makes the spin of the particles continue to be in correlation even though they may be a long way apart. Lapiedra offers an adequate discussion of inequality and its consequences in a separate chapter. After 1984, the experiments begun by A. Aspect have shown that Bell's inequality was not satisfied, which discredits the realism hypothesis and confirms the existence of the "quantum reality with holes of ontological deficits": the experiment does create part of the reality. As the reader may imagine, even though Lapiedra does not mention it because of space limitations and in order not to distract from his elucidation, the debate on these issues continues today. Some physicists think that perhaps a theory at a more profound level than quantum mechanics might reconcile our intuitions about reality and theories of physics but, for the moment, things go on as they are.

Once he has discussed the basic problem of realism and the collapse of the wave function, Lapiedra devotes a chapter to discussing the possibility that quantum effects could be amplified by the human brain and have consequences for determinism and free will. This is the most original and speculative part of the book with personal reflections and suggestions that, while they are not inevitably deduced from quantum mechanics, are inspired in the analyses that have been done on it. Is it possible that behind the functioning of our brain there is quantum indeterminacy? Would this indeterminacy have anything to do with free will? In an attempt to raise questions in the terms of physics, the author speaks of an inequality that resembles Bell's, with the aid of which one could measure the degree of determinism in humans. Unfortunately, he does not provide information about what these experiments with mental acts are, or what the inequality is. Is he thinking, perchance, of telepathic experiments? We do not know and the author leaves us wanting to know the details. The last chapter of the book has a good informative summary of the origin of the universe according to present-day cosmological theories. Nowadays one has quite a clear framework on the basis of time to the order of  $10^{-43}$  seconds (Planck's time, in technical language) after the great crack or the initial big bang. And what was there before that? And before the before? Quantum indeterminacy prevents talk of absolute nothingness, and quantum fluctuations enable energy to be constantly created and destroyed in intervals of time given by the uncertainty relations. Present-day theories cannot go beyond Planck's time because this would require a quantum theory of gravitation. The reader will doubtless have heard of "string theories" or the "everything theory", which are today's attempts to accomplish Einstein's old dream of unifying, in a single corpus of theory, the four basic interactions of nature. For some, this unification, which would represent a quantum theory of gravity, would resolve all the conceptual problems. All of this is possible, but the theory is yet to be constructed.

■ <sup>1</sup> The figure that accompanies the analysis of the cat paradox contains a trivial error: as it is represented, there is no reflected ray but rather two transmitted rays. It would suffice to make the incident ray come from the left, as is conventionally done, to make everything correct. Alternatively, the mirror can be turned by  $90^\circ$ . This error does not affect the discussion of the paradox but could complicate things for a reader who is not familiar with the usual schemas of physics.

<sup>2</sup> Lapiedra felicitously translates the English word "entanglement" into the Catalan embolic. With this term he indicates certain kinds of quantum correlations that make a system more than the sum of its parts: it is not possible to assign a definite quantum state to each part separately. Quantum computation and cryptography benefit from this entanglement.



This book is written for philosophers, professionals or amateurs and, in general, at people who are interested in these old questions. The author therefore avoids writing a lot of mathematical expressions at the price of a style that is very prolix at times. He has also borne in mind physicists who are interested in conceptual questions, between physics and philosophy. But in this list of potential readers of the book, physics students should have a prominent place. Since these issues of meta-physics are not usually dealt with in degree courses, they will find here a simple, suggestive introduction to the study of the basic principles of quantum mechanics II

## II The craft of being and knowing

Enric Balaguer

Enric Sòria, 2005, *La lentitud del mar. Dietari, 1989 -1997*  
(The Slow Pace of the Sea. Diary 1989 -1997), Barcelona, Proa, 358 pp.

With *Mentre parlem. Fragments d'un diari iniciàtic* (While We Speak. Fragments of a Diary of Initiation-1991), Enric Sòria brings together his diary notes from 1979 to 1984. Now, with *La lentitud del mar*, he has made a new selection with texts running from 1989 to 1997. If the first volume received unanimous praise from the critics, one must say that this new volume goes still further in being of even greater interest. It goes further in its density, the richness of its worlds and ideas, and in its writing.

A good diary is a book of books —Sòria calls it a “repertoire of maps”— where we can find “sketched out” the profile of the author and his or her times. In keeping with his tastes and vocations, Sòria’s diary is a reflection of his reading, his favourite writers, his thoughts, everyday life, films, travels... As we meander through the byways of his notes and comments we can discern his favourite “map” or “maps”. In the broad sense, this is his poetics. But in *La lentitud del mar* there is also an essayistic bent that brings the author to dig up theses and to raise for discussion (and digression) different issues, whether they are philosophical, sociological, or political...

Enric Sòria is a “Germanophile” (I use the word with the greatest reluctance because of what it evokes): he loves German literature, travels there quite frequently and knows about all sorts of its social and cultural aspects. While he was writing these notes the Berlin Wall fell, with all that came to mean in western history. He lives with his partner Heike with whom he has translated a number of works from the German.

With regard to the literature of Germany and *Mitteleuropa*, we find some very interesting comments on Elias Canetti, Mann (the son), Jünger, Magris *inter alia*. If Canetti is a passion, Jünger —the Nazi officer who describes the experience of war in his diaries— is a debility. Jünger gives off, *malgré tout*, a kind of essential mysticism with which he, as author, is daubed in many aspects: in his portrayals of landscapes, his moral observation

of actions and judgements in exceptional situations (an existentialist would say “limit situations”). In *Radiations* —writes Sòria— Jünger “moves, informs and incites”. Yet, Claudio Magris’s deliberations in his monumental work on the Danube attract ambivalent comments. The Valencian writer rebels against “the deliberate collection of anecdotes” that Magris uses because, at some points, “without a prior literature he doesn’t know how to look”. This, despite the great acuteness and the brilliance of many of the theses of the writer from Trieste.

Sòria’s literary map extends over different writers and works. It would be tiring to produce an exhaustive list. Comments on Espriu, Pla, Fuster, Estellés... parade through his pages. His notes on the latter two, written on the occasion of their funerals, are first-rate. With writing that is somewhere between a portrait, a chronicle of the ceremony of death and literary digression, Sòria introduces —with a naturalness that has not prevented him from capturing the essential— his experience as a reader and that of his human contact. The four pages on Estellés are a spectacularly evocative (“provocative”, as Sòria himself would say) approximation.

Here we find another element to highlight: his extraordinary handling of the portrait. Sòria is a good writer of ideas but he is also a great portraitist —as a meticulous and profound observer. One only needs to look at his notes on writer friends such as Vicent Alonso, Vicent Sanchis, Josep Piera... His gaze combines steely observation and delicacy. It is both deep and respectful. His “portraiture” is not unrelated with the evocative sketch he produces of any journey. Sòria is a very good landscape artist.

The poet —and let us not overlook Enric Sòria’s poetic work, with such outstanding landmark works as *Compàs d’espera* (On Hold-1993) or *L’instant etern* (The Eternal Instant-1999)— can be glimpsed from time to time. It happens with his capacity for synthesis, for choosing the significant image, for balancing brain and emotion or integrating them both.

The reflections of the cultural world of Valencia that the author offers in his discussions with passionate poets or indescribable sages like L.V. Aracil are important. The presence of his literary comments, however, does not eclipse a multitude of observations and thoughts about our world today (universalism, nationalism, currents of thought or views on historic events like the First Gulf War or the Balkans War).

Sòria’s world is fuelled by a vast curiosity. “To live is to ask questions and to want to answer them”, he writes at one point. This vast curiosity extends to the individual behind it. Sòria dives into the “chemistry of the ego”, as they now say. He engages in introspection and shows us an unsatisfied subject who turns to writing as a vital need to “get things clear” and to “hear himself”. In probing his intimate world, the author confesses (and if all introspection contains the pleasure of contemplating oneself, every confession contains the desire to be absolved, as Michael Leiris says). This is the most singular part of the writing of the ego. Deriving it from a first-person usage, the subject of the writing accepts responsibility (acts, thoughts, emotions, feelings). And being responsible does not mean letting out a *mea culpa* but recognising one’s own diversity. The path of the writer from Oliva is well marked in this sense and the diary testifies to this. For Sòria, creative activity and the process of learning are one and the same thing. Maestro and disciple are the same person. This adventure the author designates, with a statement worthy of Pavese, the “craft of being and knowing” ||

|| **I'm the one who  
doesn't speak**

**Maria Josep Escrivà**

Feliu Formosa, 2004,  
*Darrere el vidre. Poesia 1972-2002*  
(Behind the Glass. Poetry 1972-2002), Barcelona, Ed. 62-Empúries, 336 pp.

When a poet and his or her work have left their mark in shaping our reading or creative life it is because there has been an exact point of wonderment or upset in which two instants of life have affected one another. After this interference, the person who has grasped it ceases to be himself or herself in a more or less considerable part of his or her literary experience; and yet this force that has acted first —poet, book, line or word— also undergoes transformations depending on what the consequences of the episode have been.

With Feliu Formosa, I can recall when, how and what precise poem alerted me that some strange element had crept though the limit of differences: “I mean that at times the afternoons say there is no solitude”. It was in 1992, six years after the publication of his *Semblança* (Portrait) from which the shock of those words came, and twenty years after the date that Formosa has fixed in his volume of collected works, *Darrere el vidre* (Behind the Glass), as the departure point of his long poetic journey. For some reason innocent of wishes, the glass was then pure transparency, a way of communication and not a barrier.

*Semblança* (1986) is the first book of poems published outside of what was the first volume of Formosa’s collected work under the title of *Si tot és dintre* (If it is All in Here-1980). For me, one of the high points of his production as a whole is this book, which is indebted to Pedro Salinas and, now that I consider his work in general, it appears as a prodigious master beam to either side of which he has erected a rationally organised poetic edifice over thirty years.

Until that year of 1986, there were five published titles: *Albes breus a les mans* (Brief Dawns in my Hands-1973), *Llibre de les meditacions* (Book of Meditations-1973), *Raval* (1975), *Cançoners* (Song Book-1976) and *Llibre dels viatges* (Book of Travels-1978), besides his translations of Villon, Trakl, Brecht, the writing of his first *Diari* (1973-1978) (Diary (1973-1978), which was published in 1979) and, on the personal level, the tragic and all-encompassing experience of the death of his wife, Maria Plans. Five more books of poetry have appeared since 1986: *Per Puck* (By Puck-1992), *Impasse* (Impasse-1992), *Al llarg de tota una impaciència* (Through an Entire Impatience-1994), *Immediacions* (Surroundings-2000) and *Cap claredat no dorm* (No Clarity Sleeps-2001).

When Joaquim Marco and Jaume Pont published *La nova poesia catalana* (New Catalan Poetry-1980), a study and anthology of the phenomenon of the poetic generation of the 1970s, Feliu Formosa appeared in it under the heading of “outsider”, which the two Catalan critics had used as a way of personalising the bridge they had traced from “critical realism to inner experience”. Although he was born about ten years before the generation that is regarded as that of the seventies, it is also true that 1973, the year in which Formosa published his first two books, was also that of the creation in Barcelona

of the collection entitled “Llibres del Mall” while, in Valencia, it was the year that Amadeu Fabregat had completed an anthology called *Carn fresca* (Fresh Meat, which was published the following year) with new names such as Josep Piera, Salvador Jàfer and Joan Navarro, who was also the winner of the first Vicent Andrés Estellés Award in the newly-inaugurated October Prizes.

With more or fewer coincidences, this “outsider” who, perhaps because of the dates and the events he had lived through, did not fit in with the new generation—even while doing so through aesthetic affinities—was, more than anything else, a poet who was voluntarily *marginal* vis-à-vis himself. Because of his professional (Formosa is above all a man of the theatre) and personal circumstances, we should not be surprised that his surviving should be mediated by the need to draw a barrier between himself and his poetic creation; by dividing himself between the man who lives, who suffers, who remembers through pain and who creates, who imagines possible worlds, who invents fictional characters, or who takes refuge in words when he writes. The image of the poet voluntarily stationed behind the glass is perfect for attaining this twofold effect of protection and distancing. In his *Diaris*, in a section that is undated but one we can situate between 1974—the year of the death of Maria Plans—and 1976, Feliu Formosa writes, “Miguel Hernández says, ‘Yo nada más soy yo cuando estoy solo’ [I am only me when I am alone]. I could say ‘I am only me when I am not me’; expressing thus the fact that theatre is the only thing that can save me”. So, this “not being me”, this artistic elaboration of dispossession, of splitting or of farce, is a constant that will never be far from Feliu Formosa’s poetic work. In *Cançoners*, for example—without a doubt his book of most powerful emotional intensity—the beloved has gone to occupy a dimension that is alien to the poet and therefore “everything is outside me”. The communication between the two sides of the gap is memory, dialogue (as in theatre), writing, the poem, which is at once, in *Cançoners* too, the unhappy proof of the absence of his wife. Overcoming this abyss is his only solace. The last lines of the book are breathtaking and I feel I must reproduce them here: “and it will all end in an embrace / that will be the first. There will not be / any past or future. It will all be logic. / And this poem will never have existed”.

In the subsequent book, *Llibre dels viatges*, the title itself might appear as a key for understanding this will to leave oneself behind, given that with oneself there only remains the void, the I that has been vacated by the you. In a physical, highly graphic way, the extirpation of one by oneself is expressed thus: “I am, simply, the one who is leaving”.

Between the aforementioned title and the following extremely beautiful *Semblança*, there is a distance of eight years. It is a distance that is not merely chronological. It is no coincidence that the poet’s voice should have rediscovered the world’s harmony in a long love poem structured into fifteen fragments that are a song to hope and against pain and fear. At the two great moments of Feliu Formosa’s poetic career, the lines flow without subterfuge and are engendered from poignant emotion. And both correspond to love poems, one in the absence of the beloved woman as a burning lament of loss; the other a song of welcome, celebrating his new good fortune.

Then there comes the book *Per Puck* in which Formosa seems to settle a great, vital debt to theatre, bringing together authors, texts and personalities of the history of theatre throughout time, and where the limits between poetry, drama, reality and literary

reflections about all three are blurred. It is a dedication, or a toast to the depersonalised world in the imp of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where, as Jordi Coca says in his Prologue to the first edition, "the world is manifested as being both terrible and trivial".

From *Impasse* to *Cap claredat no dorm*, the latter book collected and published within *Darrere el vidre*, Formosa's poetic voice goes through a process of distillation based on some of the core points of his artistic thinking. The poems of *Al llarg de tota una impaciència* reflect on the poetic fact from a standpoint of extreme restraint. For their essentiality they acquire the tone of what was once called "pure poetry" and more recently "poetry of silence", while still manifesting the desire to push at the limits between the indispensable word and the void, the mystery according to which everything speaks or everything remains silent.

Within the same minimalist exercise, *Immediacions* proposes reducing to the minimum the most profound and most extensive thought. Expressed in the form of a single alexandrine or decasyllable per poem, they appeal to me to imagine everything that would have preceded their rotund, aphoristic conclusions. There is no need to make too many suppositions because the poet himself puts it like this: "From what I have struck out these poems remain". For the rest, there is life, and there are trials, attempts and what is forgotten. The resulting verse is on the page what a theatrical performance is on the stage: the final selection from a wide range of possibilities. An option, a risk, the writer or the actor and his solitude confronted with silence, committed in opposition to silence. But, by the same reasoning, if a few lines ago I have noted Feliu Formosa's decision to opt for this theatrical duality, where exactly is this "I" that clings to life? What is the true subject, the one who looks through to the other side of the glass or the one who is looked at? The resulting verse or the raw material where the verse has had its gestation? Is it not what Formosa expresses in a disturbing, magnificent poem in *Al llarg de tota una impaciència*? "I'm the one who doesn't speak. / From my / condition of marble, I observe so many / transparencies". It is the infinite circle, the pure instant at which everything begins anew: "I'm the one who doesn't speak": The first step towards reconstruction. After all, the poet also writes: "is it not good the silence / that contains / all the questions?" ||



## Fragments of the world, fragments of the body

Antoni Tàpies' "Black Drawing 1-V"

Manuel Guerrero

At the origins of all the work of Antoni Tàpies (Barcelona, 1923) is the drawing. His first known works, from 1943 onwards, are drawings on paper in pencil, charcoal and Indian ink. Tàpies has been drawing ever since. "Even in the latter half of the 1950s and the early 1960s when my attention was apparently taken up with what have been called my 'matter paintings', I never stopped drawing or working with paper", Tàpies has stated in a conversation with Manuel J. Borja-Villel, which is included in the catalogue of his exhibition *El tatuatge i el cos. Papers, cartons i collages (The Tattoo and the Body. Paper, Cardboard and Collages, 1998)*. Tàpies' drawing knows no material frontiers or techniques. "I have always worked in the conviction that there is a total interconnection between the drawing, the collage, the painting, etcetera, and have constantly endeavoured to 'traverse' previously established frontiers and categories, especially when academics or the cultural industry are involved", he confirms.

The drawing, the line, the imprint becomes the singular and unmistakable writing of Antoni Tàpies, moving through all his work as an enigmatic sign. "Every work of art is writing, and not only that which is presented as such; it is hieroglyphic writing whose code will have been lost and whose content is partially determined by that loss. Works of art are language only as writing",

wrote Theodor W. Adorno in his book *Aesthetic Theory*, as Xavier Antich notes in his essay "*L'èsser i l'escriptura. Una aproximació a l'obra sobre paper d'Antoni Tàpies*" (Being and Writing. An Approximation to Antoni Tàpies' Work on Paper)

In Tàpies' work, however, everything is within reach, *Tocant a mà* (At Hand), as the poet J. V. Foix says. Everything is pure presence and evidence. A hand is a hand, a cross is a cross, a wineglass is a wineglass. Of course every hand is different, every cross is different, every wineglass is different. It is perfectly true to say that, in Tàpies' work, no sign is repeated, no sign is the same as any other. His entire work is pure becoming, change, mutation, transformation. And it is precisely the repetition of themes and motifs that enables us to verify this movement, this energy and quiet, subtle vibration that Tàpies' work transmits.

Perhaps it is in drawing that Tàpies reveals in a more radical way his awareness of the fragmentation of the world, the fragmentation of the body, which characterises our society today. It is from this awareness of fragility and fragmentation that the unfinished becomes possible. The artist himself has unambiguously said as much. "For me, the fragment is related with the fact of leaving things insinuated, unfinished... In the East they are masters at this as well. The fragment, in

this sense, presupposes, more than anything else, a denial of idealist logocentrism. It is a view of the world that is close to Chinese cosmology and Heracleitean philosophy, where the essence of the being is becoming, and where things are part of a continuous flux, which means that they are not complete in themselves.

My interest in the fragment is part of a single desire to apprehend and express the cosmos, and even to “cosmosize” humble and insignificant things. They are both part of the same phenomenon. The whole cosmos is found in a small fragment, though not necessarily as a totality”.

The new series *Dibuix negre* (Black Drawing, 2005) consisting of five small (23.8 x 16.5 cm) drawings, in paint and ink on paper, includes some of the signs of multiple and open readings that frequently appear in Tàpies’ work: the imprint of the open hand on a black-painted corner of the paper, recalling the mourning armbands of bygone times (I); a form that resembles a human head whose outstanding features are a number of curved lines, like thick hair, two lines that might be eyes, a profile that looks like a nose and a mouth formed by a horizontal line crossed by five smaller vertical lines, in a sign that Tàpies has at times used to represent a skull (II); a finger-marked wineglass, a cross and other lines (III); some haphazard-looking, interlinked signs in the shape of an S that are finished with a black mass in the form of a heart (IV); and, finally, some crossed-out lips within a square that might be a box or an envelope, with a cross below (V).

The title “Black Drawing” is a simple description of the colour used, but it can also denote a certain state of spiritual gloom, of mourning, of pain. Are they independent drawings or do they have a narrative thread? They testify, no doubt, to some moments of life, some fragments of the world, some fragments of the body. Is the palm of the hand, the artist’s own? Probably.

Are the finger marks on the glass made by the same hand? It is possible. It could be the artist’s hand or it might be that of any human being. The individual gesture can be a universal gesture. Yet, throbbing in these apparently anonymous signs that are easily recognisable as Tàpies’ writing are uneasiness and solitude. It is the uneasiness and solitude of the human being, with his passions and his everyday life. A fragment of the world, a fragment of the body can tell us more about the enigma of existence than any prosaic story.

Throughout 2005, Tàpies produced other splendid drawings that have not yet been published. Some are reproduced for the first time in this review. I shall refer to just two works that have had a particular impact on me: “*Perfil i T*” (Profile and T, page XX) and “*Crani dibuixat*” (Cranium Drawn, page XX). These are startling drawings of very unusual composition. A long profile with a black head occupying almost the entire oblong sheet of paper shows us a mouth that is open in the act of crying out or in pain. There is a small black cross in the mouth and a big letter T, also black, inside the head. Behind the head, going from the top to the bottom of the sheet, are other letters in alphabetical order, from A to H. The T and the cross might suggest that this is the profile of the artist himself but, since we are given no other clue, it could also be the profile of any man showing his pain. With a remarkable economy of means, Tàpies achieves a powerful expressive density. In “Cranium Drawn”, a simple black line in pencil draws a cranium that has, directly in front of it, the profile of a young figure. From the mouth of the cranium flies an arrow aimed at the nascent mouth. Is it death that feeds life? Is it the thought of death that gives us life? It is difficult to say so many things with so few elements. Many are the anonymous voices that, like those in Beckett’s theatre, speak to us in Tàpies’ work. In the writing of Tàpies echoes our world II

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