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**graphic designer:**  
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**layout:**  
Aitana Montero

Publicacions de la Universitat Rovira i Virgili: Av. Catalunya, 35 - 43002 Tarragona  
Tel. 977 558 474 - Fax 977 558 393  
[www.urv.cat/publicacions](http://www.urv.cat/publicacions)  
[publicacions@urv.cat](mailto:publicacions@urv.cat)

ear, escola tècnica superior d'arquitectura de reus  
Campus Bellissens  
Av. de la Universitat, 1-43204 Reus  
Tel.: 977 759 880 - Fax: 977 759 888

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# THREE OUTINGS ON THE OUTSKIRTS

Carlos Martí Arís

Introduction  
**Gillermo Zuaznabar**

## CARLOS MARTÍ ARÍS

There are publications which reward researchers by inviting them to write for them and there are researchers who reward publications simply by their presence. The latter is true of number 1 of the new journal from the ear's History of Art and Architecture Theory Area.

It is no coincidence that the inaugural edition (number 1) is signed by the architect Carlos Martí (Barcelona, 1948). As the Jews reminded us, there are no coincidences, just causes, and three causes have led Carlos to be with us.

### 1st Cause

He is generous and keeps his word. Being aware that recently his work has been abundant and not always easy and in a blatant act of self interest we asked him to take part in the collection. He promised to let us publish some unpublished research which he read to the ear on 12 February 2008. As he keeps his word and is generous, we now have number 1 already printed.

### 2nd Cause

We respect his work and admire his dedication.

He is an architect, doctor and tenured lecturer in the project department at the Escola d'Arquitectura de Barcelona (Barcelona School of Architecture). He has had various responsibilities, he was sub-editor of the journal 2C CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA CIUDAD (between 1971-1985), he is currently member of the editorial staff at the journal DPA (with more than fifteen editions published) and, since 2006 he has worked, along with Joan Llecha, on the section, "Lectures" (Readings) in the Quaderns de arquitectura i urbanisme (Booklets on Architecture and Urbanism). We should also mention that he is the editor of the ARQUITHESES collection of Fundación Caja de Arquitectos (Architects' Foundation). His brief, but convincing, CV shows without a doubt that everything Carlos does, he does with perseverance, dedication and quality.

### 3rd Cause

To those of us who are his students, Carlos has shown that he can do two things which are absolutely transgressive and unprecedented among the architects of today: Carlos can read and write. These two revolutionary habits can be amply seen each time we reread the following: *Las Variaciones de la identidad: ensayo sobre el tipo en arquitectura*, (*Variations in identity: an essay on appearance in architecture*) doctoral thesis (1987) first published in Italian

(1990) and later in Spanish (1993), *Las formas de la residencia en la ciudad moderna*, (*Forms of residence at the modern city*) (1997), *Silencios elocuentes* (*Eloquent silences*) (1999), *La cimbra y el arco* (*The intrados and the arch*) (2006). His texts are the fruit of his reading and show that this is a sophisticated exercise which is not at all automatic but rather reflexive and creative at the same and which demands silence. He who reads better is capable of seeing and learning more and Carlos shares what he has read through his writing which is at once clear, sophisticated, precise and humble, and which uses language as an instrument of transmission. With exquisite tone and manner, the reading, writing and the lesson are carried out with neither raucousness nor grandiloquence but rather with a convincing and insistent firmness, teaching us to read the city, the public space, and the silence which is to be found in them, or which should be found in them, for coexistence. The silence to which he refers is a silence of freedom, not the silence of coercion. Thus he has led us by the hand, with subtlety and calmness, to Rothko, Mies, Borges, Yasujiro Ozu, Oteiza, Rossi, César Portela, Vacchini, Dreyer or Juan Rulfo, drawing and inaugurating through the specific the analysis of that which we might call an "aesthetic for silence".

Carlos is, in the first place, a teacher, a man who makes pleasant and habitable the place in which he finds himself. Not only is he a good reader and good writer, but he is also described by students and teachers in a way still more extraordinary and unprecedented in our schools and cities, that is, "he is a man you can talk to". This is a new cause and, because it is unexpected and surprising, we will add it to the list.

### The unexpected and surprising 4th Cause

Carlos knows how to read, write and furthermore he is a man you can talk to. Speak means listening first. To be able to speak with coherence and understanding means listening to the other speaker and Carlos knows how to speak because before he does it he is quiet and listens. It is perhaps because of this that for many he is a good and indispensable teacher.

How different and better all our schools would be if the teachers who work there knew how to do what Carlos Martí knows how to do: read, write and speak.

Gillermo Zuaznabar, ear  
19 February 2012

## KEYWORDS

Architecture, Urbanism, Literature, Journey, Reading.

## ABSTRACT

Based on three brief texts, Carlos Martí proposes a deep and concise reflection on the relationship between architecture and man. The first text is a fragment from Juan Belmonte, *matador de toros* by Manuel Chaves Nogales. The description of the Ancha de la Feria street in Seville, where Juan Belmonte's early childhood is set, becomes a reflection on the street as a synthesis of the world and the environment which favours the development of character. Architecture is the physical permanence of this constantly evolving space of exchange.

The second reading is an excerpt from the book *Contemplación cariñosa de la angustia*, "El campo, memoria de las artes", written by Agustina Bessa-Luis. Carlos Martí proposes a reflection on the current objectification and commercialization of mankind's creative ability. He speaks about the country-city dichotomy. The growth of urban centres homogenizes customs, and is therefore detrimental to literary and artistic creation. On the one hand we have a creation based on imagination, required by the life in the city, which is at odds with a creation based on memory and linked to the countryside. If memory produces the greatest of the arts, the imagination is limited to respect them.

The third outing is based on a book by John Berger entitled *And our faces, my heart, brief as photos*. Carlos Martí proposes a reflection on the conditions of uprooting based on the term Home. The recovery of its original meaning has to do with the notion of belonging to a place, a problem that architecture cannot elude. Apart from the specific conditions of emigration, uprooting also appears as a destruction of the meaning of the world itself and a dismantling of the centre.

As Carlos Martí himself points out, the architect must be capable of nurturing all kinds of experiences. In this sense, literary sources are an essential sustenance for the omnivorous animal which defines the true architect. *Three Outings on the Outskirts* is also a tribute to reading.

## THREE OUTINGS ON THE OUTSKIRTS

MANUEL CHAVES NOGALES, *Juan Belmonte matador de toros*, 1970  
AGUSTINA BESSA-LUIS, *Contemplación cariñosa de la angustia*, 2004  
JOHN BERGER, *And our faces, my heart, brief as photos*, 1984

## PREAMBLE

According to the statistics, reading is an activity which is experiencing a marked decline. Those of us who write are reaching fewer and fewer readers. A friend of mine once gave me one of his books with the following dedication: "To one of my twenty-five readers". Although he was saying it in an ironic and caustic tone, I thought that twenty-five readers wasn't that bad, as long as they were good readers. After all, Marguerite Yourcenar puts it very well when she says that you write your books for a handful of people and the only important thing is that the book gets into the hands of the reduced number of readers to whom it is really addressed, even if you do not know all of them.

However, these digressions aside, what is certain is that the good reader is species which is dying out. More and more is published and less and less is read. What does this paradox mean? This phenomenon is possibly the expression of some kind of explosion of knowledge, of some extreme atomization which makes real confrontation and coordinated progress difficult. A landscape has been opened up which is so vast and so easy to travel in all its levels and dimensions that it is more and more common to see individual capsules following capricious trajectories, lacking orientation, with confused movements which express a dominant feeling, that of perplexity.

One of the few tools which can in a way alleviate the disintegrated and convulsive condition of the world we live in is, without doubt, the good use of language. Language brings an inflexible discipline and tension to the transmissibility of meanings, making it a true antidote to the relativism and irrationalism which at times seem take over contemporary thought. Language cannot be invented according to the taste of each individual. But it can, it is true, transform, develop, stylize or turn itself into an expression of multiple points of view which can relate and interact with each other. To get language to fulfil these objectives revitalizing the practice of reading is a basic requirement. For this reason this talk could also be called "in praise of reading".

We will use a choice of texts from which we will make three outings or journeys through the outlying areas of architecture, which for this reason we have called suburbs. The journey is an act which contains an inevitable degree of indeterminacy: we can plan it with precision or set the itinerary, the stages, the times, but we cannot predict with any precision what experiences may befall us. A straightforward journey can lead us to loss, while one which is hazardous and improvised can help us to uncover certain mysteries. Reading a book is

also, in a way, a kind of journey; that is, an intellectual journey which we usually undertake in search of some uncertainty, of some unexpected encounter which we sense could be decisive. And if the reader is an architect, this literary stroll will have an unusual emphasis; it will be guided by a gaze which is fixed on certain aspects of reality with the architect is better trained than anybody to perceive.

This is the reason why I still believe there is no substitute for the value of reading, not because it helps redefine our syntax or improve our spelling, although neither of these are bad things, but because it sometimes places us in unexpected territory, it opens up news perspectives and allows us to discover the invisible threads that bind situations together, as well as phenomena which up to that moment we believed to be independent and unconnected. For this reason the pleasure of either reading or making a journey is always accompanied by an expectant attitude, one of questioning or listening to the world so as we can better decipher and understand it.

For this session I have chosen three brief texts which allow us to put to the test the intentions set out here. They are extracts taken from three writers who have frequented various literary genres and whose careers have been very diverse, but who possess a common denominator: their work always has an important self-reflective ingredient, an attempt to examine their own work from the outside. The extracts we are going to read come from the following authors: the Spaniard Manuel Chaves Nogales (born Seville 1897 and died London 1944), the Portuguese Agustina Bessa-Luis (born Porto, 1922), and the Englishman John Berger (born London 1926).

However, first it is necessary to make a little detour. In my time as a student, at the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies, the University was going through one of its periodical crises which, in one way or another, has come to be the natural state of affairs at the institution. They were years of crisis for culture in general. In the climate of the time we tended to relativize the importance of learning different trades or subjects, a task which in our opinion was necessary to face the urgent question of building a strategy directed at the conquest of social justice and political liberties. Only when the solution to these problems had been outlined, we said, would we be able to dedicate ourselves seriously to studying and training in architecture.

In those days, the bases of the traditional disciplines were being strongly questioned both by shrewd and authoritative critics and by simple adventurers, and this attack on the foundations of the wisdom we had inherited unsettled any attempt at the stable construction of knowledge. Furthermore, philosophical thought had gone into freefall. Post-structuralism painted a picture of an atomized and disjointed landscape where everybody fought against everybody

else and in which names such as Barthes, Foucault, Althusser, Deleuze, Lacan, Derrida and many others were perceived more as the visible faces of esoteric sects rather than the multiple profile of a cultural alternative. Be that as it may, let us leave all this to one side because to talk about it further would require a deeper and more qualified analysis.

In any case, it is easy to understand how in those days the University came to be a hotbed of all manner of experimentalisms, and the more successful these were, the more multi-disciplinary they were. The reaction to the relativist climate which this fostered took a while to surface, but surface it did. One of the principle banners flown by the group I belonged to in those days was the vindication of the specific value of architecture as an autonomous discipline. Seen in the context of the time, where everything seemed mixed up and confused, I still believe that the position adopted by Aldo Rossi and Giorgio Grassi in Italy in defence of the autonomy of the discipline was not mistaken, although nowadays I would no longer make a banner out of it given that I now believe that the only flags which deserve respect are those flown at half mast. Meanwhile, we have come to understand that architecture is governed by its own set of rules and knowledges and that, therefore, the project of architectural autonomy cannot emerge from an indiscriminate mix of disparate disciplines. It is nevertheless true that the "lateral" knowledge provided to us by philosophy or anthropology, mathematics or aesthetics, if we know how to keep them within their field of relevance, does not hinder the project, and furthermore can contain the stimulus which, in some circumstances, leads us straight to the heart of architecture.

From where did this project emerge? What are the necessary ingredients for generating something that has not existed before, this virtual reality, as we call the project? From where do we get the energy that will give consistency to a few drawings so that we can start to speak in terms of a project, that is, of something which contains a promise of architecture? These were the questions which we asked and continue to ask ourselves. The only thing is that the answer can be more complex and nuanced. I believe that the impulse which led to the creation of a project comes from seeing architecture as a continuous flow forming a repository of ideas and resources that are available to us and which are useful to us insofar as we can use them in the right way. However, the project also comes from many other experiences which leave a mark on us and which end up being manifested in our voluntary acts and, with even greater force than we imagine, in those which are growing in our subconsciouses. We could say that architecture can only be conceived and constructed using its own rules, but for it to reach the complexity which we demand of it, it must take its nourishment from different sources. For this rea-

son true architecture is always omnivorous (that is, it will eat anything). This is a necessary, although insufficient, condition for ensuring the quality of its work. On the one hand, much remains to be discovered regarding the process of metabolization through which the architect transmutes this heterogeneous array of nutrients into architectural material. On the other hand, however, it seems evident that the image of the architect as a naïve savage who bases his decisions on a calculated lack of culture, exhibited with pride as if it was a positive attribute, is, in addition to being an insult to the intelligence, an argument which is nowadays simple unsustainable.

Therefore, supposing that we have learnt this lesson and are acting with due caution, we can once again frequent interdisciplinary territories and move across them transversally (as we say nowadays) as long as we do not forget that our ultimate objective is architecture and how it relates to life, and that the language of architecture is basically visual and sensory. This does not prevent us from inclining the project towards the sphere of thought to give it a greater link with reality, given that there is no incompatibility between the conceptual and the visual. Instead, both aspects can mutually reinforce each other, as can be seen in the great architectures throughout history.

What we cannot accept is the ridiculous pretension that the scientific or philosophical categories which we might run into on any corner or in any Sunday supplement should automatically give the world of architecture a new order which is more in keeping with the contemporary complexity. Architecture is a very old art and it is among its mysteries where the keys can perhaps be found which will open the door to a present that, in part, remains closed and invisible to us.

After this long preamble, I believe that we can now set off on the promised journey. We will then see if it has only served to put fresh air into our lungs, or if it has also given us some of the keys we can use in our work.

### 1st TEXT

Translated from MANUEL CHAVES NOGALES, *Juan Belmonte, matador de toros*, (1970), Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1995, pp., 7-9.

In 1935, Manuel Chaves Nogales decided to put into autobiographical form the memories dictated by the bullfighter Juan Belmonte, who at that time was very near to his definitive retirement from the bullring. The result is a singular book: *Juan Belmonte, matador de toros* (Juan Belmonte, bullfighter). We will

look only at the first page, which is titled “Un niño en una calle de Sevilla” (A boy in a street in Seville).

Chaves had written some years before in 1921 the beautiful book “La ciudad” (The City), in which he subtly penetrated the essences of Seville, above all through the sentimental atmosphere which is generated in its patios and courtyards. But he had never reached such heights as in this description of Ancha de la Feria street in Seville, the street where Belmonte passed his earliest childhood. It is as follows:

### A BOY IN A STREET IN SEVILLE

The boy Juan is amazed when he pokes his head out of the doorway of his house in the afternoon, with his clean and mended bib and with the ounce of chocolate and the lump of brown bread they have given him for his afternoon snack in his little hands and contemplates the colourful aspect of the street from the semi-darkness of the hallway. He feels scared by the spectacle the world presents and he remains there for a moment, startled, unable to decide if he should jump into the road. When, in the end, he launches himself into the adventure that is the street, he does so timidly, moving along the wall, head bowed, eyes averted, quiet, hesitant, amazed.

Juan is only a little thing, but the street, on the other hand, is too big, tumultuous and varied. The street is a big and as varied as the whole world. Juan is not aware of it, but the truth is that he would like to freely roam the streets. However, being the king of the streets is as difficult as being the king of the world.

Those children who are not frightened in such a street and who by a feat of heroism dominate it, can one day dominate the world. For Juan, all day and every day, the street is everything, there is nothing else; no other confusion, no other worst enemies, no other certain dangers.

Juan lives in a house in Ancha de la Feria street, number 72, where he was born. To be born in Ancha de la Feria street and to face its bustling humanity when he has barely finished crawling and raised his fists to boldly take life on is a heroic undertaking, which imparts character and will be extraordinarily important for the rest of his life, because suddenly the street has given the new boy a perfect synthesis of the Universe. The Sevillians, who are very vain, warn of the importance of having been born in Ancha de la Feria street and they exalt it. It is as decisive as being born in Attica or amongst the barbarians must be. What the Sevillians do not know, and if they were told they would not believe it, is that it is just as important to have been born in any of the fifteen or twenty

similar streets (and there are no more) around the world. There are such streets in Paris, around Les Halles, in four or five cities in Italy, above all in Naples, and even in Moscow, round the Smolensk market. Up to fifteen or twenty in the whole wide world, although the Sevillians will not want to believe it.

These privileged streets provide an environment which favours character building, the right climate for producing men how men should be produced. It is these streets which miraculously contain several centuries of intense life, without being aged by the weight of the past; they are old but they do not seem it; although they have not forgotten anything, they live a feverish and authentic life, vibrating restlessly at all hours; with each generation they are invisibly and naturally renewed: the walls of the convent succeed those of the factory, the leatherworker leaves his mark on the stockbrokers from Ford or Citroën, in the yards of the old inns stand film projectors while taxi cabs now zig-zag along the road where carts once bounced along. This constant evolution gives them a chaotic appearance because of the continuing collision with anachronism and contradiction. The grand edifice of the English draper has already risen into the sky, yet there is still a second hand clothes shop next door; the memorialist is still there but a public telephone box is now there urging it to die; next to the Brotherhood of the Most Holy Wounds of Christ is the local Marxist union; the landowner has still not been completely ruined and now they want to buy his house to build a bank; the ironmongers with their mobile stalls fight for the road with the tram tracks; the market porters and their carts move slowly, obstructing the automobiles which pursue them, honking their horns uselessly; the bird sellers close the streets off with their walls of cages; the pavements are lined with old sellers of illustrations and books; bar owners get out their marble pedestal tables and their folding seats; on the corners there are groups of jobless peasants and bricklayers who desperately bathe in the sun, and lazy, cocky youths who drink coffee and eau-de-vie; hordes of boys hit each other and throw stones at each other; old women grumble, young girls show off, village women argue, dogs prowl at the doors of the butchers and the dirty, smelly water runs in little streams to the gutter. Everything there is alive, palpating, simultaneously being born and dying. And thus, as it is in Seville, so it is in Paris, Naples and Moscow.

The street is a good synthesis of the world. That which is learnt intuitively by a child brought up in its tumultuous atmosphere, would take a long time to be learnt by those children who wait until they are adults in the desolation of newly made slums or in the depths of the old solitary parks.

As you can see, in these paragraphs Chaves Nogales does not speak about architecture at any moment, only the activity in the street, of the inventory of the uses, the interchanges, the dynamism and the variability of what happens there.

We can recognize in this description the idea of the market as the origin of the city and the permanence of this space of exchange which has belonged to the streets of the market-city throughout history. We identify this physical permanence with architecture, understanding it as the stage on which life unfolds. Therefore, architecture is not predetermined by any image, nor does it need to refer to an image in order to be described. What happens instead is that the vivid description of Chaves sets the wheels of our imagination in motion, and thus each one of us can create a distinct image of what Ancha de la Feria street used to look like; a set of images which, despite their diversity, possess certain common features.

The same thing occurs in the descriptions of objects. Behind the agitation of the multiple pieces which make up the scene painted by Chaves, a profound sense of unity is perceived, so that the complexity of the situation culminates in order rather than confusion. As architects, we should take good note of this lesson: our task is to provide a stage which receives life and allows it to develop; to allow diverse elements to exist, all of them linked to each other by an aspiration to unity.

Architecture aspires to "order", which should not be confused with "uniformity". The tree has an order despite being made up of differing parts. Here, "order" means the unity which controls the disparate, the system of rules which brings together different elements and parts, giving the whole a new balance.

## 2ND TEXT

Translated from the original: AGUSTINA BESSA-LUÍS, *Contemplación cariñosa de la angustia*, "El campo, memoria de las artes" (Trad: María Bolaños Atienza, José Dias Sousa), cuatro ediciones, Valladolid 2004, pp.37-42

Agustina Bessa-Luís (Porto, 1922) is an extraordinary Portuguese writer who, as often seems to be the case between geographical neighbours, is almost unknown in Spain. Her texts are lucid, provocative, steely. They do not correspond at all to the stereotype of the mildness and softness of the Portuguese character and language. On the other hand, her forcefulness is pervaded with irony, a malicious and seductive humour which makes it difficult not to agree with her diagnoses regarding art and contemporary artists. We will discuss her ideas using her book *Contemplación cariñosa de la angustia* (An Affectionate Contemplation of Anguish) a collection of her essays and conference

papers. Specifically, we will look at the text "El campo, memoria de las artes" (The country, memory of the arts), which I think is exemplary. It goes like this:

David Hume, the English philosopher who enjoyed the rare peculiarity of being loved by the French, tells how one day he decided to leave the country and move to the city because the spirit progresses more when in contact with an urban environment. In life, the competitive spirit is stimulated by a kind of exigency which, as we know, is found in the city. Everything reaches the city, as Balzac says; and, as he also says, it is in the provinces where everything happens.

Anyone who has not had a profound relationship with the country is, in a way, lacking in memory. He has to create everything with the aid of his imagination, and the imagination is always more precarious and more fragile.

We may be sure that, as urban centres grow, as customs and traditions become standardized, the genes of literary and artistic creation increasingly waste away. Nature is associated with rites of creation; the imagination can never equal it.

When we see the cave paintings bequeathed by prehistoric men, we can confirm the prodigious way in which their memory worked. The habit of lying in wait for their prey for long periods allowed them to internalize the animal's movement and shape. Not a single detail escaped them and, when they made stone figures of the animals which were regarded as sacred because they were dangerous, they bequeathed a story of nature to younger hunters, thus transmitting a visual experience which would favour the further capture of animals. The reality of things acted upon the memory as if it was a kind of instinct. Today we call this art.

Europe left the creation of its art in the hands of the imagination. Even Plato, who thought that the main arts should be founded on studying and meditating on nature. Hasta Platón, que consideraba que las principales artes deben fundarse en el estudio y la meditación sobre la naturaleza, las cosas fueron bien. But nature ceded its space (and, with it, its spirit) to the pact made by men to congregate in places which are more and more blind to the nature's majesty. And this was substituted by the imagination, which is born of the exaltation of thought and not of practical knowledge.

When men meet to talk about their ideas, their works of art become vulgar or simply extravagant. All of them end up imitating each other, and their rivalry is more a power game rather than the mystery which the earth reveals to those who fear her for the solitary being that she is.

The true artist (I do not know if there are true artists left today) does all his work from the memory. From childhood, he stores the pleasure and terrors, the

form and the lines that he has frequented. And with this, one day, he creates a work of art.

I often say that the greatest poets in our language are to be found in Brazil. The greater part of the language pours from the repository of the memory which nature fills with its exemplary properties. Those who know Brazil, the roads of Paraíba with their scent of sugar, with the cane growing abundantly in fields stretching to the horizon, feel immediately a poetic call; they feel alone in the middle of nature and that she is showing them the secrets of the highest art. She shows them how to paint and compose music, she shows them how to write verse and to love every thread of the memory, which is poetry before it is turned into verse.

David Hume, who doubtless learnt so much in his strolls through the fields around Edinburgh, believed that a gentleman's place was in the city. And he turned the country into a kind of training ground, useful for his external life. Memory produces the best art of all: the imagination merely respects it, if it does not distort it. When Leonardo da Vinci painted his first canvases, he had the shady woods of his native Florence in front of him, which he used as the background for the Mona Lisa and his famous Virgin of the Rocks, that old virgin whose son had grown so much that she could no longer hold him in her arms.

Without his native lands, an artist would be nothing more than a copyist of things imagined. He would be no more than a citizen, as was Da Vinci in the castle of Amboise. When his memory of Florence faded, so in a way did his genius; what remains is intelligence, the skill and the thirst for power associated with disappointment. Given that, in all of us, the thirst for power is the first commandment, if the earth's breath which enlightens man before he acquires knowledge did not exist, the thirst for power, I repeat, would not lead him to art, to politics, to war or to love. Nature is the first to tell the child that he is destined to grow up and then to die. The idea of death makes man try to find the most triumphant qualities in his work. This idea emerges from contact with the flower, the bee, desire, the observation of nature.

The mediocre man loves the city, believing that this preference makes him the equal of a man of talent. He cannot stand the solitude of the common man, because it reveals to him the difficulties of competition; on the other hand, when among the victors, he feels like them and forgets his inability.

However, there is another way in which the city is stimulating: it feeds the imagination when the creative spirit reveals itself to be sterile. The fact that it is sterile does not mean that it does not aspire to power. Mental eunuchism, as with physical eunuchism, often finds itself attracted to grand ambitions.

The writer increasingly wants to achieve success and dedicate less of his life

to his work. The greater part of this time he wastes on camaraderie and on the priesthood of ideas, or on pious diversions, such as the defence of a good cause. All this harms creative power, although it may satisfy the exercising of power.

Do not think that the just man launches himself into a vertiginous race simply to obtain justice. With justice he tries to get power, and with power he tries to achieve harmony with others. If he achieves this harmony, either through bad luck or through necessity, the moment of corruption will not be long in coming. All original work is created anonymously. Up to the end of the century, artists lived strictly separately; although they might live in the same city, such as Paris, and see each other regularly, they maintain an obsessive secrecy regarding their work. They defend their originality as someone would defend a castle. The only news that passes between them concerns their debts and lovers. They do not speak about their work and try to create it from their feeling of confidence in the order of things, in their rejection of their love.

Our era is given over to the success rather than the eternity of man. It is true that man gets excited about making permanent and prolonging his youth, but this has nothing to do sacred confines of the ephemeral which we frequent and in which we can discern eternity.

Has poetry disappeared then? I wouldn't say that much. The city is inevitable, we cannot avoid its seduction. A gentleman's place is in the city as David Hulme declared. While it is true that men are equal in their thirst for power, it is no less true that they tend to make equal the conditions which best allow them to compete with each other. They try to have the same culture and the same virtues to be able to challenge each other under the best conditions.

Is the writer prepared to win with ideas and intellectual works? I have no doubt. However, the invisible nature of the creative act should be taken into account. This act is in no way like a manual task, which is visible at any given moment throughout its process and remains visible thereafter. The work of the thinker and artist possesses an invisible nature which is transmitted to whoever enjoys the work. It is transmitted through happiness, which is a form of hope.

There are no ideal conditions for creating a great piece of art or a handful of beautiful works. Vain will be the projects of those who try to limit themselves to ethics, rhetoric and topics of the day, because if there was a shortage in the restless ideas which the Muse grants to mortals, the work as a whole would continue to be unstable and precarious.

The restless thoughts, the children of doubt, are the best thing for turning the apprentice into a maestro. And once mastery has been achieved, there will continue to be deliberately anguished thoughts so the spirit does not die from a lack of uncertainty and despair.

Times have become false for the creator, vulgar for those who wish for hope, a legitimate desire for he who despairs. Today there is no despair, but rather grievances, and these are no longer raised to Heaven and neither does anyone malign the gods. People just ask for explanations from ministers and trust in the words of their leaders. The books bequeathed to us by the ancients were books which gave us hope because they were forged from despair. Despite this, some things remain as they always were and it is here where we should begin. There is, for example, the kindness of the earth and her vigour, the painful experience in her and her severity. The country has come to an end and with it the magnificent gods. The era of the metropolis has commenced and, where in days gone by the angels once flew, now agile aircraft cross the skies. Do we have to discover new myths, or is the welcoming shade of the ancients enough? As has been said: "harmony detests intolerable fatality". And let the world be created again.

There will be few, in my opinion, who will not be concerned by this brilliant diatribe. Art has ceased to be something genuine, something intensely linked to life, and has become a manufactured product, objectified and commercialized.

We humans tend to concentrate in spaces which are "increasingly blind to the majesty of nature". And the consequence of this is our alienation, the disconnection which affects everything that links us with the earth and ultimately, the loss of our genetic memory, and this is equal to losing our experience of natural phenomena and the capacity to interact with them.

"Our era is given over to the success rather than the eternity of man." "All original work is created anonymously". These are, among others, Agustina Bessa-Luis' arguments. The final diagnosis is that our imagination is increasingly prone to fantasizing and further and further from reality, as a consequence of our increasingly stunted memory.

Are there any genuine artists left today? asks Bessa-Luis. I think there are, although the majority of us do not have the pleasure of knowing them. They are, as they have always been, isolated, working intensely in multiple corners of the planet. When the time arrives, they will become visible and their insight will change our understanding of the world. Meanwhile, we continue to hope that they do exist. Sometimes we get the impression we have crossed paths with some of them. They can be recognized by their restless eyes, their laconic manner, their obstinacy in their work, their distrust of crowds for fear of contracting that sickness of spirit which regular dealings with them bring about: gregariousness is a real scourge. The artist is an ungregarious being and he does not usually attend great social acts. For this reason he is hardly known.

**3RD TEXT**

JOHN BERGER, *And our faces, my heart, brief as photos*, Pantheon Books, New York 1984, pp.54-57.

The name of John Berger<sup>3</sup> (London, 1926) will probably be more familiar to you than those of the other authors. He is a writer who has worked in all genres, from poetry to criticism, and he has managed to mix them without creating confusion or disorder, but rather a greater richness. He is also a prestigious analyst of contemporary painting. His book *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos* is a palpable demonstration of his capacity for changing register without losing the thread of the discourse. The book has an alternating structure which allows him to simultaneously use methodical reflection and poetic intuition to make a two pronged approach towards the great themes of contemporary culture.

I have chosen a passage to read from the second part of the book which, according to the author, deals with space. It goes like this:

“Philosophy is really homesickness, it is the urge to be at home everywhere”  
Novalis

The transition from a nomadic life to a settled one is said to mark the beginning of what was later called civilization. Soon all those who survived outside the city began to be considered uncivilized. But that is another story, to be told in the hills near the wolves.

Perhaps during the last century and a half an equally important transformation has taken place. Never before our time have so many people been uprooted. Emigration, forced or chosen, across national frontiers or from village to metropolis, is the quintessential experience of our time. That industrialization and capitalism would require such a transport of men on an unprecedented scale and with a new kind of violence was already prophesized by the opening of the slave trade in the sixteenth century. The Western Front in the First World War with its conscripted massed armies was a later confirmation of the same practice of tearing up, assembling, transporting and concentrating in a “no-man’s-land.” Later, concentration camps, across the world, followed the logic of the same continuous practice.

All the modern historians from Marx to Spengler have identified the contemporary phenomenon of emigration. Why add more words? To whisper for that

which has been lost. Not out of nostalgia, but because it is on the site of loss that hopes are born.

The term home (Old Norse Heimr, High German heim, Greek komi, meaning “village”) has, since a long time, been taken over by two kinds of moralists, both dear to those who wield power. The notion of home became the keystone for a code of domestic morality, safeguarding the property (which included the women) of the family. Simultaneously the notion of homeland supplied the first article of faith for patriotism, persuading men to die in wars which often served no other interest except that of a minority of their ruling class. Both usages have hidden the original meaning.

Originally home meant the centre of the world, not in a geographical, but in an ontological sense. Mircea Eliade has demonstrated how home was the place from which the world could be founded. A home was established, as he says, “at the heart of the real.” In traditional societies, everything that made sense of the world was real; the surrounding chaos existed and was threatening, but it was threatening because it was unreal. Without a home at the centre of the real, one was not only shelterless, but also lost in non-being, in unreality. Without a home everything was fragmentation.

Home was the centre of the world because it was the place where a vertical line crossed with a horizontal one. The vertical line was a path leading upwards to the sky and downwards to the underworld. The horizontal line represented the traffic of the world, all the possible roads leading across the earth to other places. Thus, at home, one was nearest to the gods in the sky and to the dead in the underworld. This nearness promised access to both. And at the same time, one was at the starting point and, hopefully, the returning point of all terrestrial journeys.

The crossing of the two lines, the reassurance their intersection promises, was probably already there, in embryo, in the thinking and beliefs of nomadic people, but they carried the vertical line with them, as they might carry a tent pole. Perhaps at the end of this century of unprecedented transportation, vestiges of the reassurance still remain in the unarticulated feelings of many millions of displaced people.

Emigration does not only involve leaving behind, crossing water, living amongst strangers, but, also, undoing the very meaning of the world and, at its most extreme, abandoning oneself to the unreal which is the absurd.

Emigration, when it is not enforced at gunpoint, may of course be prompted by hope as well as desperation. For example, to the peasant son the father’s traditional authority may seem more oppressively absurd than any chaos. The poverty of the village may appear more absurd than the crimes of the metropolis. To live and die amongst foreigners may

seem less absurd than to live persecuted or tortured by one's fellow countrymen. All this can be true. But to emigrate is always to dismantle the centre of the world, and so to move into a lost, disoriented one of fragments.

The key word in this text is, without doubt "uprooted". A person who has lost his roots has lost his home. Home, heim, komi; all these words presuppose the notion of belonging to a place. Precariousness, disorientation, anxiety, on the other hand, are synonyms describing a lack of roots. Architecture that really wants to be architecture cannot avoid confronting this problem: not necessarily to find a solution to it but so it is at least taken into account.

Nowadays, much is said about fast society and the new nomadism. However, is it possible to propose an architecture for nomads? Probably yes, from the moment that the ephemeral condition is accepted as one of the possible attributes of architecture. The dwelling of the new nomad then tends to become a vehicle and from this we arrive at the absolute dominance of the automobile in contemporary culture and mythology. The Lost Centre: This was the title of an important book by Hans Sedlmayr published in 1948. The title was, without doubt, the diagnosis which the Austrian intellectual applied to modern art as a whole; a diagnosis which today can be extended easily to other sectors until it defines characteristic features of the contemporary universe.

Architecture no longer tries, apart from occasionally, only to construct places (which means defining a centre and establishing order) but also to provide images. Its principal objective is no longer to make the world habitable, but rather, to turn certain objects into emblems which can compete in the global market. Constructing and preserving places becomes an act of resistance, an act of regression, practiced by outsiders with an obsolete vision of the world which cannot but express the decadence of some values and the end of some ways of living which are irremissibly becoming extinct.

## CONCLUSION

However, I did not want to conclude this journey in such a melancholy way. Therefore, I am going to offer three quotations to act as antidotes which allow us to comment ironically on the themes we have dealt with. (When all is said and done, irony and silence are among the few weapons which we have left). The first quote is from the Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu who, speaking of gregariousness in the cultural sphere, offers us the following motto: "For those things that are not worth the bother, follow the latest fashion; for the important

things, follow morality; for art, follow only yourself". This is exactly the opposite of what mediocre architects do: they follow fashion for the important things, they apply morality to the things that do not deserve it and, on top of it all, in art they follow the critics.

The second quotation is taken from the "Journal" of Jules Renard who speaks of the contradiction between success and rigor in artistic work, a discussion theme par excellence among the Parisian artistic circles he frequented during the final years of the 19th century. He adopts the role of spokesman for the majority of the people who moved in those circles and writes, with cynicism, the following phrase: "Yes, I know, all great men were ignored at first; but I am not a great man, therefore I would prefer to be famous immediately."

The third and last quote has a more solemn and philosophical character, that is, it provides a more appropriate conclusion to this discourse. It is an extraordinary exert taken from the book, *The Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino about the role of art and its relationship with reality. I am going to read it first in Italian and then I will translate it:

"L'inferno dei viventi non è qualcosa che sarà; se ce n'è uno, è quello che è già qui, l'inferno che abitiamo tutti i giorni, che formiamo stando insieme. Due modi ci sono per non soffrire più. Il primo risulta facile a molti: accettare l'inferno e diventarne parte fino al punto di non vederlo più. Il secondo è rischioso e richiede attenzione e apprendimento continui: cercare e saper riconoscere chi e cosa, in mezzo all'inferno, non è inferno, e farlo durare, e dargli spazio".

("Living hell is not something that is yet to happen, it exists now and is here among us: it is the hell that we inhabit every day and which we form by being together. There are two ways to stop suffering because of it. The first is easy for many: it consists of accepting hell and becoming part of it, to the point that you no longer see it or perceive it. The second is risky and requires continual caution and learning: it consists of looking for and knowing how to recognize what and who, in the middle of this hell, is not hell, and of making it last and giving it space").

This paragraph sums up a programme for life that is difficult to express in fewer words. There is nothing else to add to it and so with that we conclude.

Carlos Martí Arís,  
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