



Exhibition «The City of Difference»

16/09/1996 - 06/01/1997

Difference and freedom

The theoretician of Nazi totalitarianism, Carl Schmitt, defined politics as the fight between the friend and enemy. The other, the different, could only be the enemy. Among his own kind, uniformity, unanimity and homogeneity needed to reign, justifying the mass gatherings organised by Nazism. Fear of difference is one of the characteristics of human societies. Nevertheless, the progress of humanity is the process of accepting differences. From the tribal society to the nation-state there is a major leap in the acceptance of the other. And the next great change is right in front of our eyes: the passage of the nation-state as a framework for political articulation, to a process of universalisation in which the city, the characteristic place of difference, is destined to play an important role. If, along the way, ethnic discourses, racist predicaments, the retrograde fantasies of a white Europe with a closed mind reappear cyclically, this does not break the general evolution of history. Political power seeks out homogeneity because it is easier to govern because it is difference which favours the process of adaptive selection in which culture has proved to be much more efficient than nature.

Indeed, the possibility of accepting difference is closely linked to the birth of thought and philosophy. It was in the Greek cities that the *logos* was introduced as a scalpel which cut through the oblivious harmony of the mythical world, and where difference began to be conceivable. Since then, expanding the ways of introducing difference inside the homogenising monotony of religions, ideologies and organic social orders, has been the fight for liberty. Equality of rights and radicality of differences are the dream of free society, in contrast with the totalitarian or fascist society, which preaches negation (in the case of the former) or inequality of rights (in the latter), and makes the *different*, the excluded one, an enemy.

The metaphor of the piano which Wagensberg uses in the exhibition says it all. The closed society which some people dream of is as absurd as a piano with keys that all play the same note. Music only emanates from places where there is diversity. In spite of everything, it is still hard for politicians to understand this (the single-note piano has become increasingly the ideal of political parties), for doctrines to accept it—because religions and ideologies do not escape the logic of the faithful and unfaithful—and for the social sectors fearful of the changes in the world not to let themselves be caught up in the paranoia which can only see an enemy in the other.

The city was born, through the *logos*, as a place of differentiation and autonomy, as a space which escapes the rigid laws of rural order, permanently trapped between the natural and the sacred. Since Sodom and Gomorrah, power (with God at the fore) has tried to destroy cities cyclically. By destroying the city it seeks to destroy freedom and memory. The two factors of difference as a foundation of the community, which is exactly the opposite of what is wanted by those who claim to found the community on homogeneity and make the different into the enemy.