



The Urbanite

With postmodern attempts exhausted and with the failure of the attempt to prolong the dogmatism of avant-gardes through the sterile substitution of art by ideological processes, art has somehow come back to itself in the first decade of the 21st century. Aesthetic ideas have come back, emotion has come back and they have done so by way of an experience: urban malaise. A persistent malaise, apparently skin-deep, but the bearer of sustained unease. The artist subject and the urban subject have come together in one point: the urbanite. The inhabitant who has already made of the city his landscape, suffering the pressure of the city and at once celebrating its apotheosis, who lives, in herself, in his face, in her dress, in his body, the tension of permanent change and is its lead player. It might be said that this urbanite is the individual of postindividualism, of the moment in which the subject sets out to shed the exigencies of ideological individualism. This is the moment of doubts, of solitudes, of fears that disturb the construction of a new kind of social meshes and networks that will perhaps be the socialising factor that marks the coming decade. A system of communitarian relations without communitarianism, if one might put it thus.

If the 20th century has been the one of crimes of logic, of genocides, of systematic liquidation of peoples and communities, the 21st is shaping up as that of intermittent violence, of wars of going in and coming out, or of going in and not knowing how to get out. The terrorist attack on the United States on 11 September 2001 somehow marks the beginning of the century just as the closing off and asphyxiation of Gaza – whose inhabitants are immured between the Israeli army and Hamas – are constant reminders of conflicts inherited from last century, and these have shaped the way of being of some cities to such an extent that the fracture has turned, irreversibly, into a wall. The suicide terrorist, in opting to die with his or her victims, breaks the last protocol of communication between human beings: the belief that there is always a minimum common element, the will to survive. The theatrical militarism used by states in response helps terrorists to consolidate the primary aim of terror: fear. And fear means the dissolution of democratic sensibility. Any trimming back of freedoms is justified by fear. To put it another way, it is the climate of fear generated by the strategy and counterstrategy of terror and this translates into the fact that submission and indifference are irreparably thriving in the most advanced societies. A state of the spirit that contrasts with the technological acceleration that has man running out of control to the beat of new prostheses without knowing if he can save, in this race, his own human condition.

Art of this decade speaks of the city of fear, of the masses, of individuals, or of the urban landscape in which actor and set seem to be seeking a certain reencounter. And, through art, we discover something that postmodern fragmentation seems to be denying: a shared universal pathos. The confirmation that there are manifestations of unease that are appearing in very similar ways in the most diverse cities of the planet. Like a sort of common thread that makes it possible to recover the idea of shared aesthetic experience. And to lay the foundations for a shared culture in the cities that are attempting to weave their coexistence starting out from the experience of heterogeneity.

Art and the city come together in the first half of the 21st century so that the inhabitant can recognise himself or herself within the framework of his or her usual landscape. A landscape constructed span after span by the human hand. What is the promise? None. It is simply that the



Prologues by Josep Ramoneda to the CCCB's catalogues

confirmation and the stylisation of the experience of atopian malaise is an interpellation of ourselves. A coming out of the viewless room in which it often seems we are trapped and looking fearlessly to the future.