

## Trivializing the idea of "good": the Forum of Cultures

### I

Walter Benjamin said that there was not any culture document that at the same time was not of barbarism. Few times a sentence has been so appropriate to define the forum of the cultures.

It is for sure that the grandmother of the seventh floor doesn't know anything about Benjamin, she has already had enough with trafficking for the life like to worry about a poor person unfortunate Jew and communist, for more emphasis that, caught in France in full Nazi invasion he finished dying in Portbou without more glory. Likewise when they tossed it of house - with bad manners that others ones don't know the real estate - since their floor had become a deluxe object queerly revalued by the fastuos of the forum - it had always been a floor more than humble for a family also more than humble -, some similar thing to the German Jew should happen to him for the head. Her granddaughter that now she will have lived in the revalued floor, ten or twenty times revaluated, and that with great difficulty she can pay, she would also think some similar thing if the possibility to get a ticket for the event "revaluated" had not blinded her. And it is that the progress, more when it is cultural progress, it already has this, according to one of the more "fun-loving" of the mayors that has had the city "to be an unique experience, every day there will pass different, exciting, deep things. It will be intense and amusing" (First reason of the "ten reasons to be added to the mayor's forum"). At least we cannot refuse that the dresses of the volunteers devised by Toni Miró are "SPARKLING". Made of alive colors and with a design that reminds to that of the "worker of the month" of any McDonald's, but with better taste. With better taste. Because if Barcelona has to put on pretty, what to say of these volunteers that showing off bellies (plane bellies, please very plane and sexy) they will allow us to see the best in the Barcelona's navel. It is our cultural contribution to the world.

### II

It is easy to begin to speak for the town-planning operations, as if the forum was not nothing else. It is true that, according to the mayor, behind the proposal there is "an effort of radical" architecture (seventh reason of the "ten reasons to be added to the forum"), and if the mayor is not convincing you can ask the grandmother of the "radical" effort, but things goes further on. It is necessary to look at it with constructive spirit "because it will be amusing" (sixth reason of the "ten reasons to be added to the forum"). Because with this spirit and the certainty announced by the mayor that it is a "privilege to see it to be born and to contribute with our presence, to invent it (tenth reason of the "ten reasons to be added to the forum") that want to approach to the cultural proposal of the Forum.

Difficult approach as citizens, from the difficulty of seeing in their content an articulate proposal. Their origin has probably finished determining its destination. Another mayor of the count city, today president, one day he woke up and announced, without being commended neither to God neither the devil that in the 2004 the city would organize an universal exhibition. "The dream didn't last neither one day" it titled the press the following day. The universal exhibition is that it was foreseen for the 2005 and also the period to present candidacies it was closed when the mayor-marvels, today president-marvels, decided it was necessary to make his glorious announcement. "If it is necessary we will invent ourselves an expo" announced the municipal responsible. As long as he didn't expand the depression among the troop, mainly among that of the brick, they took

out of the hat a Forum of the cultures. Depression there was not. What extended starting from that moment was the panic because of so substantial proposal. What the Forum of the cultures was? And in that issue we are.

Even more difficult approach as historians. And it is that the History and Memory don't go with the Forum. Modern and modernized proposal don't leave space for some voices of the past that can always be annoying for the divine of all condition, liberal, neoliberals, social democrat that in what "divine" it concerns there are not ideological differences. (See the fundamental laws of human stupidity of the Italian historian's Carlo M. Cipolla). Well, History doesn't have a space in the event it is not completely certain. Inside the confused web page of the Forum we can find the organization of a previous encounter that with the title of "the shared" memory wants to be a day of the Nobel prizes as they inform us, "the prizes Nobel contributes to the collective memory of nations" . Perhaps that of physics, or that of mathematics, contribute to the collective memory of the nations. We agree that a Nobel shines more than a historian or a testimony. In this point we agree, but we don't know how to appreciate the sensibility that can have for the historical memory sponsoring companies as Endesa or La Caixa . It is impossible that first one has a great experience in the forgetfulness , mainly in the forgetfulness of the Mapuche people, exterminated by that hydroelectric company. Neither the second one with an old president as Antoni Samaranch, a fascist pro- franco regime, it is totally alienates to the problems of the historical memory. But nothing else there is of History in this event. Or nothing else we have been able to find.

### III

We put on in the web page of Forum, smiling children greet us. Is it curious... in the world there are only smiling children? The page doesn't clarify it to us. Likewise we go to the search motor, we write the word "hunger", zero results. We prove with another word, "tortures", zero results. Let us tune more with "children work" zero results. It is curious if we put the word "peace" we have 668 results. Well, the world of the Forum is at least a world of peace. We breathe calmy not onlty because of the creatures are happy but because of the recommended reading of the book *The crash of civilizations* of Samuel Huntington. Book of peace, as all we know. Some of the advisers of Bush Administration has also read it and since then the White House makes an effort day by day to take the new messages of durable freedom to the world. The responsables of such a "deep" proposal, according to the mayor, as the Forum, should not ignore neither.

But we are historians and concerned as we are for the historical memory, we decide to continue investigating. "Franquism" zero results, but " Spanish transition" as model to follow, already has six. Well, we go cheering up, we continue. "Spanish Civil War", one result, "antifranquismo" zero results, "workers movement " zero results. The thing begins to be disturbing, let us make it more generic: "conflict", two results, mmmmmm... "managers" 33 results. It seems that the culture is built without memory neither history for the Forum. But then, if one loses the origins it loses identity following the Catalan singer Raimon which is the contribution from Barcelona to the world cultural debate that wants to have as main scenario the Forum. It seems sufficiently clear: "peace" 668 results. The web page of the Forum informs us on the historical memory, the objective of the seminar on the past it is "the construction of new paradigms for the humanity from a culture of peace and non violence way" that it includes the debate on "the proposal << another world is possible >>. For what seems the Forum it will transmute the Fire Rose just as it was known by the workers of the XIX century and principles of the XX one, in the Rose of the Peace.

Joan Clos, our mayor, attempted to explain us. Concerned as he was of what also occupies us - to what the Forum was - during the campaign against the war found the final objective of the Forum. If Porto Alegre was the world capital of the antiglobalization, and their mayor the mayor of the participating democracy and of all

those poor deprived of the earth, Barcelona would be the capital of the peace, and its "fun-loving" mayor would become a figure of first world relevance. It is the "model of Barcelona" that we have not been stopped of explaining during the marches anti-war, comparing the "public spirit" of the count city, with the Genoese entertainment. It was curious that soon after the same mayor suffered a setback in votes like no other socialist leader had known until that moment in the city. It seems that people were already tired of so much party and that below the imagined polis there was the city of people that rises every morning thinking like they will be able to go to sleep at night without the material headache problems (Marx, zero results, Xavier Sala Martin, confirmed lecturer of the Forum). But if there was some doubt, the same mayor it clarified it to us the same electoral night: I have understood the message, tomorrow we will inaugurate the Fair of the Construction... ". And because we understand it better, the Forum offers us a complete list of lecturers: Anthony Giddens, "one of the read and mentioned" writers, as they present us; Paulo Coelho, really representative of a "different" culture; Baltasar Garzón, specialist recognized in the thematic of tortures; or Xavier Sala Martin who considered that the economic growth under Chilean Pinochet was a model to export. In definitive, lecturers that will help us to reinforce the culture for the peace of the city and to build a Barcelona as world capital of the peace. Peace, peace, peace, peace, 668 results; multicultural, multicultural, multicultural, 29 results; mediation, mediation, mediation, 26 results. History? Past? Well, we already know that this it is conflicting (conflict, 2 results) the voices of the past can never be obliging with a built past on the ashes of their hopes; the Catalan oasis comes undone in the hands of the breed of Clio; the "pattern of Barcelona" is diluted in the Rose of Fire that has been one of the richest cities in experiences of social change during our contemporary history (more important politician of the XX century, according to Joan Saura: Lula). A suffering citizen already said it for the net: "I would like to request a monument in the Forum of the Cultures for those shot in the Field of the Boot. Not everything must be Disneyworld."

#### IV

In the place of the place where will take place the great cultural event there is a neighborhood, one of the petals of the Rose of forgotten Fire, the same neighborhood where before the grandmother lived of before the "cultural" revaluation of her floor. Recently, there has been settled a family of Indians, as Andalusians before, settled, murcians, Aragonese and Valencian, renovating the vitality of a nonexistent popular culture for the Forum. They are good people, nice, they look for the same as the other ones to cohabit in this small planet, breathing the same air that us and they want, also the same as all, a better future for their children. Her daughter, Jasmine, could be a good lecturer of the cultural dialogue. Blink like she is speaks Catalan and Spanish, English and some of the languages characteristic of India, knows her country and it doesn't give up the roots of their parents. To survive and to prosper, their progenitors have opened a little shop. The prices are low and this has brought them a lot of clientele, to reinforce it, or following the uses and customs of their country, they have not had problem in trusting their products to the neighbors. The looks of hate intersect to side and side of the street every morning when mounting the store. As the parents of Jasmine have progressed, in a material way, their schedules they have left making to the "customs" of the country (and it is that many of the cultural "differences are in fact class differences: labor movement, zero results). Anyway, if with this there is not enough, it is only a problem among merchants.

Likewise beside the store also have been settled a group of twenty Moroccans in one of the "revalued" floors. It could be that the grandsons can no longer live in that floors, but joining twenty immigrants in a living space of 60 meters, you can take out a good rent while they wait to revalue the property. Undoubtedly to the rest of proprietors has not made them any grace this new form of living the "multiculturalism". Their children

must escape from the neighborhood looking for lower rents, while they live every night the musical rumor of the new cultures. The immigrants of the floor neither are of very good humor when they dialogue culturally of the night musical diversity with their neighbors. Tired as they come from extenuated labor days, with some miserable wages and alone as they are far from their families, husbands, women, and children, don't want to refuse the pleasure to be able to enjoy the veiled of the twilight. If they could live in floors of lower rent they would play to less for property and the noctambulant dreams would lower in intensity. But this it is not the case. The administrations request them to work, for increase the rates of the security, but they have not foreseen anything for their location. Likewise they wear out big quantities of resources in campaigns of values so that we understand the great luck that we have had when living in a time of multiculturalism.

In fact, product of the new tendencies in radical "architecture impelled by the Forum, recently the neighborhood has been able to take a bath in the motto "diversity to cohabit" (there was another part of this motto in the nineties which the administrations have forgotten... mmmmm... some thing prayed as "diversity to cohabit, equality to live"). Five hundred relocated gypsies have settled in campaign stores in the neighborhood. The neighbors have not known how to value the good hope; of the cultural diversity they only perceive the noises, the scents, the competition with those recently arrived to compete for the scarce social resources that are not enlarged by the new necessities, and therefore they are more and more scarce. Beside where the Forum will take place recently there is bad omen. In fact the parents of the Jasmine have stopped to trust goods. Many neighbors, the poorest have enormous debts with the store and after the decision that good people with a daughter that all considered a treasure now are simply "pakis". Lately when in the morning those of the lifelong store open her looks full with rejection they are confirmed by the old clients of the store of Jasmine. She begins to also have, the concern in the face.

It is of waiting that if any spark finishes burning in the neighborhood, it already comes from the twenty Moroccans or of the five hundred "relocated" gypsies, a city like Barcelona with its Forum of the Cultures will offer new and innovators solutions. Cultural mediators will come to attempt to explain us how to cohabit in the diversity, they will be organized acts of celebration of the difference, not understood starting from the inequality but starting from the cultural wealth and, some, will still complain of how in a neighborhood with so much tradition of left the racism has been able to sprout again. As minimum the neighborhood will be near the cultural celebration of the century and they won't lack cultural resources. Paolo Coelho will be able to them to offer some courses of emotional self-help, it is already known that the bad vibrations are product of a bad understanding of ourselves, or Martin Sala will explain the benefits of the real estate economic growth, or Garzón he will explain to them he can take them out of this labyrinth of the juridical consequences of all this. Likewise, if all this has just worked, the politicians and the organic intellectuals will be able to take out of the sleeve the crash of civilizations of Huntington and to mobilize the population according to the new precepts. After all they recommend their reading to understand the world of nowadays inside the cultural event. And for some thing it should be.

## V

One of the worst things in the Forum is not only that it is a form of hiding and legitimating an operation of urban speculation, with cultural infrastructures yes, but accompanied by speculation after all, but the perversion of values that it behaves. When the values become excuse to celebrate a party, they are divine comedy, when non cynicism. It is for that reason that any approach to its proposal finds empty and banality. The values are embodied in realities and they must operate on them and for them and

not the other way around. You cannot seek, like it has been made recently, to go to Sarajevo and to mount shops of resolution of conflicts directed by citizens from Barcelona that anything knows about the suffering of a war, and to hope the population responds enthusiastically. Or to go to countries of the third world to teach to the creatures non competitive games, like constantly make the NGO's from Barcelona without getting tired. Is it their problem that they don't know how to cooperate? When we deal with the population as a idiots reality, when their problems are not listened, when they fade the voices of the past and of the present under the noise of the modernity, when they take place the values like a party that it will be "amusing", what it is making it is not a reflection exercise but a cynicism exercise. Then the culture act becomes act of barbarism as Benjamin said while he escaped from the Nazi.

We know that to be positioned against the Forum is difficult. Perhaps campaigns antiglobalization were easier: affected some leaders and some world organizations with those that anything have to be our political, social and cultural leaders. The Catalan administrations could take place and, even, to attempt to guide the expression of the uneasiness that was shown in those strikes and demonstrations. Now, those implied are "ours", "ours" are those that work, those that get paid, and those that live off the for the Forum. Anyway, the question continues effective. Expressed crudely: Is it that nobody has shame in this country? Somebody believes that in a time we meditate on what all this has been, beyond the ephemeral thing that it will be such an act in the collective memory, "we would like of here 20, 30 or 50 years to explain that we have been in the first Forum of the Cultures, this legacy that Barcelona leaves to the world". (tenth reason, of the "Ten reasons to be added the Forum"). We expect from all heart that such an exercise of superficial cynicism can be carried out, without the tempests that seem point of breaking presently they make it impossible in the future. Meanwhile we will continue as "desafectos", disaffected, those hostile to the régime.