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EDITORIAL

On neighbours and citizens

... trying to make a life and getting into trouble, that's why people come to the city, not just to sit back and watch.

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In the city and from the city we learn, through practice, to interact with people who are different from us, people we do not know—not family, colleagues or friends—people with whom we can weave communities for mutual support (or create insurmountable boundaries). This interaction takes the form of a conversation: actively understanding what the other person proposes, their motives and intentions, and evaluating them in light of our own proposals, motivations and intentions; transacting by creating converging synthesis; or dialectically moving to a response that renews the conversational process in a loop with pauses but no end, that by necessity modifies its participants: we do not come out of a conversation exactly how we entered it—unless the conversation is just a self-absorbed soliloquy.

We are free to learn one thing and its opposite, that is our choice, but the city must have the intention, the will and the design for us to learn something that is specific and defined—not the opposite or just any other thing. In other words, it must want to educate; to forge citizens who are active agents of their own citizenship, of themselves, and who share the values of being open to a minimum public morality, grounded on equal rights and duties, designed to mutually improve citizens' lives; a morality that makes possible structured, deliberate interpellation among citizens, to prevent self-destructive conflicts; and that guarantees the recognition of the other, of the different, as an equal citizen.

The educational function of the monochrome, strictly hierarchical, static city was clear, to say the least: to mould the city's inhabitants—still not citizens—precisely and unquestioningly to the spaces, times and functions established by the authoritarian imposition of the hegemonic power of the day, and put into practice concurrently by every authority designed to shape the subject, from family and school to urban planning and legislative output. But this kind of society now only exists in the chimeras of messianic fundamentalisms of all types: the absolute power of my kind over everyone else even for their salvation: their disappearance as a legitimate other. Different in every way, and in the way he or she wants to be, but equal in rights and duties.

Today's cities cannot be other than open, complex and dynamic, and as such we must redefine the now patently obsolete principles and practices for creating citizens. The jettisoning—in the Spanish system—of civic education from all levels of the school curriculum; the emphasis on identity narratives; the fading/disappearance of enlightened humanistic criticism; the cushioned overprotection against the principle of reality and the relativist ambiguity of the political correct—among other practices—have had a radical effect in preventing the genesis of any values on which to construct the public morality referred to above and bring about an open community and a sense of open community.

Furthermore, the locations of our homes, workplaces, schools and universities, and the commercial and leisure districts in our contemporary cities have increased our dependency on transport—public and private—and, therefore, more time is spent travelling between these places of private activity. Our personal exchanges and interrelationships have been transferred to the web, with the subsequent substantial modification to our ways of experiencing the city (being), reducing it to a place to pass through, to transit (crossing), with the consequent forsaking of the city's historical function of interaction and exchange: of conversation, of politics.

We need to identify those pockets of public activity which offer educational opportunities that can be oriented towards the public morality referred to above; to define the social responsibility of private activities (individual and corporate) that can also be used to educate citizens in their shared co-responsibility for managing their own lives; and redefine the role of institutions and civil society. We must bring back genuine political debate, removed from the



vacuous mantras that advertising and the reality-show view of the world have embedded ad nauseam in every aspect of our lives; and pull back from this descent into the hells of demagoguery, ignorance and lies into which our corrupt democracy is sinking, reaching the brink of fascism: the death of the citizen.

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