

ARCHITECTURE, KNOWLEDGE, AND UTOPIA

The first paradox of this prologue has to do with the audacity that I am showing as I write this. I could credit myself with some service to the area of knowledge of “Literature Theory” but I am quite lacking in any qualification in the “exclusive” field of architecture. Well, it is almost a must to question what a prologue writer like myself is doing in a book like this, which one can suppose with reason, is about architecture. Let’s go piece by piece.

One cannot deny that the book talks, and very well I might add, about architecture. But it is not any bit less correct to consider that it also tells a story, and that now falls within my jurisdiction. The story of that “little great history”, as the author refers to it, has a very particular architectural topic, “the space of knowledge” and as an unarguable theme “the utopia” (I want to draw special attention to the definite article used: “the” and not “a” utopia). The book, on the other hand, boasts a remarkable style in which it is not difficult to notice the mark of a striking personality, in agreement with the romantic interpretation of the sentence of the Count of Buffon “style is the man himself”.

I do not feel alien to any of the concepts that I have highlighted, and consider inextricably united. With respect to the last one, my identifying the two people over whom | weigh the story could not be greater. How could you not sympathize with the narrated protagonist, a man such as Lopez Otero who writes: “I believe...that architecture...can only save itself with a tendency towards the lyrical”? My devotion to the protagonist of the narration, in other words the author of the book, will shine through a bit later.

But, indiscreetly, is it possible for me, or anyone really, to feel alien to architecture? Paul Valéry drew attention with his dialogue *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte* about the profound affinity between architecture and music, which distinguishes it from the rest of the arts. It is about its embracing character, because only those two provide us with “une sorte de grandeur complete dans laquelle nous vivons... Nous sommes, nous mouvons, nous vivons alors dans l'oeuvre de l'homme!”, we live in it, we breath in it, and we belong to it. The other trait that sticks out is the genuine creator, of the pure invention, compared to the mimetic arts. Therefore “la Musique et l'Architecture nous font penser a tout autre chose qu'elles-mêmes; elles sont au milieu de ce monde, comme les monuments d'un autre monde”. It is common to both, to imitate natural objects the least amount possible, “produire, au contraire, des objets essentiellement humains”.

One must note the contrast between “natural objects” (including man) and “essentially human-like objects” that architecture and music produce. That contrast that overlaps between type/specie and quality, between humans and human like. But is it possible to conceive of man without architecture? I think it is only possible in terms of hominid or in other words, the savage state, like an animal in the elements, but not with respect to

being human or civilized. Architecture could be seen in this way as the dawn of civilization or the border between two faces, light and shade, of the unbearably ambiguous concept of “humanity”.

And music? Its distinctive character is not as clear. Surely for what it has in originality and metaphysics it is capable of transcending the limits of the civilized through two extremes, by situating itself below or on top of what is human. George Steiner referred to it in a superb manner in chapter six of *Errata*, “From an organic point of view, the human song situates us closer to what is animal than any other manifestation. Messiaen inhabits this proximity.” To the other extreme, for example in the *Winterreise* by Schubert, or in the song that surges from the night in the Third Symphony by Mahler, the song “goes deeper into the frontier of the other, in the land of terra incognita of a humanity beyond itself more than any other experience.” Vico and Rousseau consider music as something that preceded language and “Schopenhauer affirms that even if the universe were to disappear, music would endure.”

Well then, the background music of this book, the history that underlies what it tells us out loud, history of a journey to take, perhaps interminable, in which we continue on, could be perceived with more clarity bringing to the table the argument of another story (in reality, it’s the same), of which a few notes barely fit here. It is about a secret brotherhood, meager in numbers, but infinite in ambition and demand, that the survival of the humanity of man has been assigned, just like sex to the specie. The parallels are intensely disturbing. It is not any less profound, the mysterious and transcendent encounter between two lovers filled with love or desire, but perhaps even more meticulous and selfless, is what is produced between master and disciple possessed by the lust of knowledge. (It is scary, by the way, to imagine the future of a society like our own, which depreciates, with a certain suicide-like thoughtlessness, education, the *paideia*, natural and sacred place of that absolutely necessary rite, which ‘arms’ its officiates with the most genuinely human dignity that I am capable of imagining. I emphasize this because I know how far it is from being true; public opinion is quite clear.)

Always outside the walls of power, the “guild of knowledge” besieged and harassed without a truce by mediocrity, by the persistent rancor toward excellence, tempted from within by the untamed beauty of failure, the elegance of abstention, the exquisite sweetness of disdain, of the ironic distance of the onanism of intelligence, this guild is bleeding. It is bending over backwards literally, in the heroic task of maintaining lit the flame of the utopia. And it is doing it, which is intolerable in its most precise and hurtful sense, “with its eyes open”, meaning in an almost desperate way (especially after the atrocious lessons of inhumanity that the history of the last century has ferociously and abundantly provided us with).

I hope to have belonged to that guild, and to have participated in one or two dozens of those limpid rites throughout the years- now too many- of teaching. Always in the subordinate position of witness attending the miracle fascinated - almost instantaneous-

with the flowering of a truly human intelligence, sensibility, and consciousness. I will never be able to forget, no matter how illusory it was, the twinkle of those eyes as they opened, with a new, ubiquitous look that reflected or invented the harmonious figure, that cannot be waived now, of truth, good, and beauty.

Those of Pablo Campos Calvo-Sotelo, the author of this book, are one of the most brilliant that I can recall in the initiation trance. Although I can't deny having been there present, while I entrenched that seed in him, knowing how much pain it engenders I wouldn't want to have had anything to do with that inclement sowing; but without renouncing feeling proud of the splendid fruits that have come of it, starting with the growth, with impeccable rectitude, the base —of the exceptional person— that sustains it. I can testify not only his belonging to the dedicated sect of the utopia but also that he professes in it with the most serious level of responsibility and commitment: that of master or apostle of humanizing knowledge. Extraordinarily endowed for it, with the strength and integrity that is necessary for tolerating the formidable onslaughts of the vulgarity, not even we who love and admire him could forgive him for ever abandoning or even wavering slightly.

I hope to have touched upon, with these words, some of the threads of this profound book, which reveals itself- and its one of its charms- so polished and brilliant on the surface, but ends up putting us, smoothly and courteously before a not so pleasing mirror. The protagonists of this great “example”, from its promoter, King Alfonso XIII, to those members of the expedition in search of “the City of Knowledge”, Lopez Otero, Casares, Simonena, and Palacios without forgetting the chronicler, Pablo Campos, all embarked on this episode of the journey, that never ends, of utopia. They deserve that active and responsible form of gratitude that consists in following their example, in converting us into travel companions on their trip towards a better world and humanity, in other words, more humane.

José Luis Garcia Barrientos
Philologist