

THE CRUSHED CITY

Bottle to the sea for the god of architecture

PUBLISHED IN

Babelia. ETSAM 2005-2006. Ed. Mairea. Madrid, 2006

Pensar con las manos. Ed. Nobuko. Buenos Aires. 2009

THE CRUSHED CITY

Bottle to the sea for the god of architecture

The City is the title of a little book by Hermann Hesse that begins, "The fields burned silently in the yellow sunlight and the high forest-filled mountains stood in the hazy blue of the horizon. "

The sound of the first garlopa squeaked stridently in the frightened earth, the first shotgun blast thundered and boomed in the mountains, the first anvil emitted its sharp sound under the rapid blows of the hammer. A tin house sprang up, and the next day a wooden one, and others, new ones every day, and soon there were stone ones too.

This is how well Hesse describes the beginning of a city, and ends, after the many vicissitudes that are narrated there, with the destruction of the city itself by nature that ends up invading it. It ends with the song of a bird that looks with satisfaction at the growth of the forest and the splendid and green progress on Earth.

I read this text, or rather, I saw it, in an edition with illustrations by Walter Schmögner and calligraphy by Stella Wittenberg where the passage from virgin nature to the city and the return to the whole of nature is made clear through the beautiful drawings.

And if we talk about SUSTAINABILITY, about the house, the city and the territory, we must talk about architecture. Because isn't architecture something different from nature, which imposes itself on it?

What then should an architect understand by SUSTAINABILITY, perhaps a greater accord with nature? All of you have spoken these days here with wiser words than mine on a subject that is in the limelight today. Because we try to do things better. Because we are trying to right the wrongs of the past. Because we want a better land for our children. Because we do not want that, as in Hesse's story, although it is such a beautiful piece of literature, our cities disappear because they are an achievement of man for man.

I understand SUSTAINABILITY to mean something as simple as trying to do things LOGICALLY, with COMMON SENSE and in the spirit of SUSTAINABILITY.

THINKING instead of NOT THINKING

SAVING instead of SHRINKING

FIXING instead of CHANGING EVERYTHING

And it is in this context where it scares me, amazes me and surprises me that such a large number of "sustainability experts" and companies full of these "experts" have proliferated like mushrooms in such a short period of time. And the song of Los Sabandeños came to my mind, where they used to repeat "it is the intermediaries in the fruit business", the "experts in intermediation", as we would say today. And at the same time I remembered an old friend of mine from my university days, a nice guy and a

raconteur who, besides filling his surnames with DE and LAS, finished off with "two great European expresses". And the fact is that one continues to have a certain aversion to stories and storytellers.

But I am going to defend here the sustainability provided by LOGIC, COMMON SENSE and SOBRIETY that can be read in the key of ECONOMY OF MEANS, which is the best way to be sustainable.

Personally I have no car, no cell phone, no TV, no video, no watch. And I live happily. When I go by Metro every morning to teach my classes at the School of Architecture in Madrid, not only do I save a lot of time and hot flashes with the traffic jams in Madrid, but I also get a great walk through the Parque del Oeste which is a good prelude to better teach architecture...sustainable.

A good Minister of Housing proposed seven very clear points in relation to what should be a logical and sustainable CITY, and that I subscribe to one hundred percent. So logical they are.

COMPACTNESS, the City must be compact.

MIX, the City must mix many different uses.

EFFECTIVE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

good EQUIPMENT of all types

affordable HOUSING

suitable OFFICES and MANUFACTURERS

accessible GREEN SPACES

And I publicly propose here today, as if it were a UTOPIA, to make the dream that underlies those 7 points a reality, to effectively implement those points that she proposes and to which I subscribe, to do something that would only be left undone if that CONSERVATIVE TERQUEDAD of which Ortega so rightly spoke prevailed! Ortega.

1 SOCIALIZING THE SOIL

2 CLOSING CAR FACTORIES

3 BUILDING A NEW CITY

More than one will immediately think that things as impossible to think about as socializing the land or closing factories or building a utopia have little to do with the common sense, logic or economy of means that I defend. Well, I will try to convince them.

SOCIALIZE THE SOIL OR DIE

I know that as a proposal it may sound outrageous to you. I recently wrote an article with the meaningful title "SOCIALIZE THE LAND OR DIE". I had been asked to publish it by a magazine with a huge circulation in the real estate world, which seems to be trying to compete with HOLA, due to the number of photos of social events it publishes in full color and with smiles on their faces. Believe it or not, it was published there. Like saying the noose in the house of the hanged man.

Because land is the key to the housing problem. How can it be that housing, the most basic good, continues to be the main and greatest problem of our society? How can it be that housing, the most necessary good, continues to be the main source of enrichment for the rich?

Where is the crux of this very tricky question? In the cost of construction? NO, IT IS NOT. Any honest builder, of which there are some, doing things well and with good materials, on time and with good quality, can build a house today, in 2006, for 600 euros per square meter. And earning it well, why then should we buy it for a much higher price?

Could it be a question of the soil? Yes, it is. It's the damn soil. The land, the "good land" of that beautiful novel by Pearl S. Buck has become the crux of the matter. A land that is worth "nothing" one day, the next day, because of an "urban land declaration" can be worth a thousand times more. A THOUSAND times more! Of course, it is usually bought for "nothing" by the same person who then obtains the declaration of "urban land". Well, he never buys it directly. Always a company where his wife is usually, what a coincidence! Of course, I am not inventing anything. And then he sells it, for a thousand times more to the Banks. Well, to the poor through the Banks. Because the Banks take in with their mortgages of all colors the poor people who will scrupulously spend the rest of their lives paying, yes, cup by cup, as Carmen Maura taught us all in that old advertisement of Monky coffees.

All this must be because the poor will "inherit the earth". I believe that the poor will inherit something else. But not the land. But not the land. And even less if it is "developable" land.

If I provoke you with this SOCIALIZE THE GROUND OR DIE, it is because I believe that at this point it is the only possible solution to put an end to this cancer of the society in which we live. Put your imagination to work.

SHUTTING DOWN CAR FACTORIES

Can you imagine a person with three or four digestive tracts? Imagine a person who, instead of eating two meals, would eat six. And since he would not be able to resist, but has the "right" to eat whatever he wants, he would have three or four digestive tubes

transplanted or implanted. To be able to eat more. Monstrous. It would be easier to eat less. Just enough.

Well, that is what they are doing, or we are doing, in our cities. As we all have the right to have "our car" and more cars if we want (many of you will have them: for the wife, the children, the babysitter...), then, throw in ring roads! throw in M30s! throw in speed belts! In order to jam us more. So they can attack us more. Isn't it ridiculous to waste a couple of hours in the car every day? It would be easier to drive less, just enough, and live better.

We really are crazy. We do not think. I can assure you, as I have told you before, that in Madrid you can function perfectly well with public transportation. Even to get to Barajas T4 as I do so many times.

Don't you think we're crazy at this point?

There will be someone who will immediately talk to me about freedom. Of the freedom of movement that the car-mobile gives, as its name suggests. Of the freedom of being able to manufacture whatever you want. Of the problem that the jobs in those factories would mean. Then put your imagination to work.

BUILDING THE NEW CITY

I know the idea is not too original. But I think it could still be very effective. And instead of calling famous architects to do their little things here, call the youngest, the best, to build the dreams.

After stuffing Madrid with an unbearable, unbearable and disgusting environment, they also want to wash their faces. Of course, what is not the face, covered and well covered, very dirty they must have it.

Every time I land or take off from Madrid, I contemplate with indignation the horror "in crescendo" with which the collective crime of that group of true terrorists, those savage capitalists who eat us by the feet, materializes. Thousands and thousands of square meters built with a disgusting, abominable, and also old, ancient architecture. All housing and nothing but housing.

And although my first two proposals may seem unrealistic to you, as I have already warned you of "conservative stubbornness", let me at least dream of the possibility of making the dream of utopia come true from the official authorities. And I propose once again something not very original but which has always been very effective throughout history: to call upon the best young architects to build the houses of their generation and of those to come. Call them to build the New City. And give them all the ingredients to make them sustainable, and above all, give them FREEDOM. As if it were the princess's pea, at least a pea, annoying but capable of making her remember. To remind our society that utopia is still possible. That a New City is possible for a New Society, a fairer one. Even if we still have to call it! UTOPIA.

I thought I would end this speech by quoting André Gide when he recalled that "he learned from his father to serve himself only as much bread as he was going to use for the meal and not to get up from the table without draining all the wine that had been poured into the glass" because these words reflected well what I wanted to tell you.

But I cannot resist finishing with the expressive words with which García Márquez begins his "Cataclismo de Damocles", which is a strong but beautiful warning in case we are not capable of creating a "sustainable" world.

"One minute after the last explosion, more than half of the human beings will have died, and the dust and smoke of the burning continents will defeat the sunlight; and absolute darkness will again reign over the world; a winter of orange rains and icy hurricanes will reverse the time of the oceans and turn the course of the rivers, whose fish will have died of thirst in the burning waters, and whose birds will not find the sky; perpetual snows will cover the Sahara desert; the Amazon vista will disappear from the face of the planet destroyed by hail, and the age of rock and transplanted hearts will be back to its glacial infancy; the few human beings who survive the first fright, and those who would have had the privilege of a safe shelter at three o'clock in the afternoon of the fateful Monday of the great catastrophe, will only have saved their lives to die later for the horror of their memories."

CREATION WILL BE OVER

Or better yet, to be more positive, with the words with which García Márquez himself ends this text:

"Here life existed. In it suffering prevailed and injustice predominated. But we also knew love and were even able to imagine happiness."