

reviews



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Reviews

|| A Theory of Linguistic Sustainability

Joan Melià

Albert Bastardas, 2005, *Cap a una sostenibilitat lingüística* (Towards Linguistic Sustainability), Barcelona, Centre d'Estudis de Temes Contemporanis and Angle Editorial, 71 pp.

Linguistic diversity is not a thing of the past but something used on a daily basis by millions of human beings who want to keep living linguistically as they have done in the past, without this becoming an obstacle to being able to understand and communicate with members of other groups. (pp. 60-61)

Constructing the title of this work around the term “sustainability”, which is usually associated with ecology and economy, is a clear sign of how the author approaches the study of sociolinguistics, and this is also demonstrated in the bibliographical references he uses. In this brief essay, Albert Bastardas, as he has done in previous works¹, besides rejecting any dichotomic standpoint and upholding the paradigm of complexity, avails himself of concepts and procedures from other scientific disciplines in order to go deeper in his reflections on the contact of languages. And there is no doubt that, in this regard, his contributions are among the most outstanding in Catalan sociolinguistics, so that he has become one of the leading lights in the rise of eco-linguistic thought over the last few years. Without its relative brevity constituting any obstacle, *Cap a una sostenibilitat lingüística* (ex aequo 2004 IDEES Prize), offers original and innovative thoughts both on the characteristics of the processes of linguistic substitution and standardisation, and about the standpoint that should be adopted in order to study them. The themes the book covers range from the need for a wide-ranging interdisciplinary approach in sociolinguistic research through to the possibility of making use of the concept of “sustainability” in linguistic policy-making and planning, all of which it complements with proposals for linguistic regulation with the aim of ordering multilingualism in such a way as not to lead to linguistic substitution, in other words, in favour of sustainable multilingualism. In this regard, we might mention the author’s proposal, a bold one in our circles, of questioning the idea that social bilingualism leads necessarily to linguistic substitution, an idea that is both recurring and undisputed in our most accessible sociolinguistic literature. According to the author, in most processes of massive bilingualisation of which we are aware, the outcome has been substitution because

■ ²² Along these lines, apart from numerous articles in specialised reviews, we might mention his *Ecologia de les llengües: Medi, contacte i dinàmica sociolingüística* (Ecology of Languages: Milieu, Contact and Sociolinguistics) and the articles of different authors that, as co-editor, he brought together in *Diversitats. Llengües, espècies i ecologies* (Diversities: Languages, Species and Ecologies, 2004).

this was the aim of the exercise but, in the framework of sustainable multilingualism, bilingualism need not necessarily lead to substitution. The sustainability theory is precisely concerned to combine and harmonise the aspects and alternatives that seem to cause exclusion. For Bastardas, “linguistic sustainability would be a gradual process of transformation of the present model of human linguistic organisation, which would aim at ensuring that collective movement by human beings towards bilingual or polyglot models does not necessarily mean abandoning the languages belonging to the different cultural groups” (p. 17).

In order to make the application of this proposal of multilingualism possible, appropriate instruments would be needed so as to measure the socio-linguistic impact of changes occurring in the economic, political, educational, migratory, technological, etc. domains. “We must achieve without delay clear and functional models of socio-linguistic ecosystems, discover the interactions between the different elements, quantify them and, to the extent that it is possible, make some predictions about their evolution and, consequently, propose some measures [...] that are appropriate from the standpoint of sustainable management of plurilingualism” (p. 23).

The author distinguishes three kinds of situation in which policies for maintaining multilingualism should be applied: a) When a community becomes bilingual because of incorporation into a more extensive politico-economic structure in which it becomes a minority; b) In horizontal contacts, basically caused by migratory flows; c) When migratory flows occur in host societies that are not independent and are already lop-sided from a linguistic point of view because of previous events. Determining what model to apply in each case is not a simple process. Evidently a lot of other factors intervene, for example the degree of industrial development, the characteristics of the migratory movements, the phase the process of linguistic substitution has reached, etc..

In speaking of ordering the functions of languages, the author, as he has done in previous works, turns to the concept of “subsidiarity”, which has also been borrowed, in this case from political science. In the linguistic sphere, this principle might be summed up as “anything that a local language can do should not be done by a more global language” (p. 24); in other words, by default, the preferential language should always be that of the linguistic community.

To the author’s denunciation, as a falsehood, of the assertion that the members of subordinate communities must abandon their languages in order to go ahead and leave poverty behind them (pp. 61-62), we could add that following such recommendations, rather than aiming to lift the people out of their poverty, has frequently meant opening up the way to domination by the very groups that make the recommendation.

With regard to integrating the immigrant population, Bastardas proposes, in his framework of conserving linguistic diversity, that what he calls “agreed principles of coexistence” should be accepted: 1. The principle of linguistic stability, development, and normality of the host group; 2. The principle of adaptation (inter-group and social) of the displaced group; 3. The principle of personal freedom of displaced people with regard to the continuity of their cultural elements within the group (pp. 52-53).

In the final part of this book, Bastardas mentions the priorities that he considers should be given to activities in favour of linguistic sustainability, these going from discouraging



abusive use of the great interlanguages and dignifying the self-image of subordinated linguistic groups, through to control by these groups of their own communicative space, reserving exclusive functions for languages that are presently subordinated, and the commitment of governments and companies to establishing sustainable linguistic models.

The author's standpoint is particularly ideal for analysing the dynamics of linguistic change in present-day societies, especially our own. If we consider, as Bastardas does, that throughout history there have been two great causes that explain the rupture of linguistic ecosystems (migratory irruptions and political and economic absorption), we will need to agree that, in our own part of the world these two factors have come together in a particularly intense way. In such circumstances, Bastardas maintains that, despite the problems that the great changes occurring in today's societies mean for the continuity of the great majority of linguistic communities, with an appropriate model it must be possible to strike a balance between progress and maintenance of linguistic diversity ||

|| A more dangerous world

Gustau Muñoz

Antoni Segura, 2004, *Senyors i vassalls del segle XXI. Una explicació fonamental i clara dels conflictes internacionals* (Lords and Vassals of the 21st Century. A Clear and Basic Explanation of International Conflicts), Barcelona, La Campana, 366 pp.

In the world that has emerged from the Cold War there is nothing that remotely approaches any paradigm of stability and peaceful resolution of conflicts, or of peace and harmonious progression towards a multilateral overcoming of the social, ecological and economic problems that make life difficult for millions of people. Far from that, conflicts are proliferating with a great potential for destabilisation and one can glimpse on the horizon an accumulation of tensions that could well have devastating effects. Alex Callinicos has written in a recent book that, "it is difficult not to think that this world is heading for catastrophe". Some people believed that the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar conflict that had structured international relations for almost half a century would open up the way to some kind of "perpetual peace". Having to wake up from this dream has been very hard.

Events have unfolded rapidly and one war follows hot on the heels of another, shaping a complex panorama in which a modicum of conceptual order is needed before one can try to understand it. Again, increasing attention to the international sphere has generated a veritable avalanche of extremely different kinds of books. This is why this particular contribution (in the La Campana collection "Obertures", which one should always keep in mind) is very useful. It is essentially an instructive, easy-to-understand book that follows the evolution of international relations from the collapse of the Soviet Union through to the invasion of Iraq or, in other words, through to the present day, while pausing to reflect upon the core factors of the new constellation of conflicts.

It is a useful book because it synthesises a range of different contributions while never losing sight of what is essential. It gives due consideration to the great upheaval of 11 September, which drastically changed the scene but also, in fact, legitimised the high-risk options that had already been adopted by the powers-that-be in the United States. Segura offers a clear account of the thinking of the so-called neoconservatives, the imperial intent underlying it, and describes the consequences. The context is the struggle for world hegemony, for strategic resources, for a presence in Central Asia and the appearance of a new kind of conflict, the “asymmetrical conflict” in which non-territorial terrorist networks have unprecedented possibilities for making their moves.

The end of the Cold War left the United States as the only world power, with a military capacity that is infinitely superior to that of any possible rival. Meanwhile, a strategy for occupying power vacuums has been taking shape, its main concern being to guarantee geostrategic interests. The American Republic, going against deep traditions, has now nourished, thanks to the neoconservatives (presently in power), a determined imperial vocation. But this raises problems in everything, as the author stresses. First, there is the inappropriateness of the conventional military approach with regard to the new kinds of terrorist-based conflicts. Meanwhile, this imperial vocation also has to confront the same dilemmas that confront any kind of imperialism, these deriving from the scope and costs of a very large-scale military presence and, in particular, from the economic and financial situation of the dominant power on the world scale. This aspect, which is not given much space in the book, is fundamental. In the end, military and political power is based on economic capacity. Even though the United States has a great technological advantage, its economic power is waning and the financial outlook is progressively darkening. Its demographic clout is also on the decline and the struggle over resources—especially oil—has only made things worse. The desire to prevent the emergence of any possible rival power will have profoundly destabilising effects in a world that is changing at great speed. Improvised imperial rhetoric (around the values of civilisation, democracy and human rights), with its huge encumbrance of systematic incoherence that denies it credibility and that is extensively described in these pages, will be less and less convincing. Here, the drama is announced ||

|| Experimental metaphysics

Jesús Navarro

Ramon Lapiedra, 2004, *Els dèficits de la realitat i la creació del món* (The Deficits of Reality and the Creation of the World), Valencia, Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 248 pp.

Many of the classical themes of philosophical reflection cannot be approached at present without taking into account the findings of the natural sciences, especially physics and biology. After the advent of the theory of relativity, ideas on space and time were profoundly modified and were widely discussed during the first third of the twentieth century. Contrary to a legend that still persists in the popular imagination, the basic

concepts of relativist physics can be understood with some rudimentary knowledge of mathematics, which does not remotely mean that they are intuitive. Once one accepts the hypothesis, hitherto verified by experiments, that the velocity of light in a vacuum is independent of the observer who is measuring it, it is not difficult to understand and accept that two observers can have different results in their measurements of spatial and temporal intervals. Neither does one have to be an expert in what are known in mathematics as matrices and tensors to understand that space and time are entities that cannot exist without matter.

The situation is more complicated when it comes to quantum mechanics. This is based on an inevitable formal and not easily simplifiable framework and leads to results that escape the most imaginative intuition, where reality is mixed with its representations and interpretations. It seems clear that the use of a not very evident and still less intuitive formalism makes interpretation absolutely necessary. The issue in the case of quantum mechanics is, however, that interpretation is not merely a translation of mathematical terms but somehow forms an essential part of the theory. Even today this interpretation is the subject of debate, a continuation of that initiated in the 1920s by such notable figures as Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein. There is no doubt that Ramon Lapiedra's book contributes interesting elements for understanding the terms of the debate. More than half is devoted to problems related with interpreting quantum mechanics, how it approaches knowledge of objective reality, and what the implications are. With these elements, the author begins his consideration of two classical epistemological questions: determinism and realism. Is everything previously determined by antecedents? Is there a reality that is prior to experience and independent of it?

Quantum mechanics is the theoretical framework that has enabled understanding of a great number of new phenomena, while opening up the way for the appearance of new techniques and inventions. Moreover, it is associated with the greatest power of prediction ever achieved in science: in some cases, agreement between theoretical predictions and experimental measurements coincide to eleven significant figures. Yet this highly successful intellectual construction has conceptual consequences that might offend our view of reality. Let the reader imagine that a coin has been put in a box. After shaking it a little, the reader has a 50% chance of guessing what "state" (to use quantum terminology) the coin will be in: heads or tails. But he or she will certainly never doubt that the coin will be in one of these two possible states (on condition, naturally, that the box has been shaken enough to ensure that the coin is not stuck) and will assert that the fact of opening the box will be sufficient to know if the guess is correct or not. Things would not be so simple if the coin were a quantum object: quantum mechanics would say that the heads or tails state of the coin is not defined, and it is the process of measuring (opening the box) that determines it. In technical terms, the situation of the coin is characterised by a mathematical function that contains both possibilities (heads and tails), and the act of measuring, which somehow implies an interaction between the quantum object and a macroscopic system, determines what is known, technically speaking, as the "collapse of the wave function" into one of the two possibilities. This counterintuitive situation led Schrödinger to imagine a mental experiment where, instead of a coin, there is a cat and, through an appropriate mechanism, one comes to a superimposition of a live cat and a dead cat, which is an aberration for our intuition. Lapiedra devotes an entire

chapter to analysing this sadistic experiment and to showing that even though it contains the conceptual difficulties of quantum physics, the so-called paradox of Schrödinger's cat is, in fact, no such thing¹.

The idea of the cat was to demonstrate a paradoxical situation in a macroscopic world, but the question can be approached in terms of quantum objects, as Lapiedra does with experiments involving electron spin. Spin is a characteristic of quantum objects that is manifested in the presence of a magnetic field, orienting the former as if they were microscopic compasses. It should be made clear that spin is not the only quantum property that defies our intuition about reality, but it is the one that makes it possible to design relatively simple experiments even while maintaining the conceptual complexity of which we speak. In the case of the electron, the value of spin is $\frac{1}{2}$ and there are only two possibilities of orientation, indicated as + or - (one could have said north or south, but these signs are associated with mathematical operations that generalise this particular case). Then, if we ask ourselves in what state of + or - the orientation of electron spin is, the answer of quantum mechanics is that the question makes no sense. Until the measurement is made to determine this, the electron spin has no orientation and it is the process of measuring that will create it. This means, in Lapiedra's words, that behind any observation there is not always a reality that functions as an exhaustive antecedent of the observation because the observation itself can produce part of the reality that is observed. Reality is in part determined (the spin value) and in part non-existent before measurement (the projection of spin). With a suggestive image, the author speaks of a "reality with holes", for quantum reality contains ontological deficits.

In the long debate between Einstein and Bohr, the former imagined another mental experiment. In 1935, along with Podolski and Rosen, he published an article entitled "Can the Quantum-Mechanical Description of Physical Reality be Considered Complete?", which led to the EPR experiments, thus named because of the authors' initials. This article analysed the case of two particles with a spin correlation such that, if the projection of one is +, that of the other is -. The aim was to show that quantum mechanics is incomplete in the sense that it lacks some information for describing the system and this incompleteness of the theory would avoid the paradoxical dilemma that the wave function seems to entail. But Bohr demonstrated that the quantum correlations mean that the state of a particle could not always disregard its origins, so the debate was not closed. It is worth saying that questions like this, even though they are fundamental from a conceptual point of view, do not occupy or concern most physicists in their everyday work. In general, scientists are interested in matters that might lead to predictions, which need to be verified or are proved wrong through experience or the internal consistency of the theory itself. If this is not the case, the questions go beyond the realm of physics: they are literally metaphysical matters. In some sense it is what Newton meant with his words "Hypotheses non fingo", when he confessed that he had no explanation for the origin of gravity.

However, in 1964, thanks to the work of J. S. Bell, these problems were approached in terms that can be verified by experiments and hence it is possible to undertake an experimental study of metaphysics. Bell imagined a series of measurements of projections, according to three different directions, of the spin of two particles. If there is a reality of these projections prior to the measurement, which is what a strictly realist standpoint would tell us, then the sets of measurements would have to satisfy

an inequality, which Lapiedra demonstrates in an appendix. But this assumption of inequality would be breached if the entanglement² of a wave function makes the spin of the particles continue to be in correlation even though they may be a long way apart. Lapiedra offers an adequate discussion of inequality and its consequences in a separate chapter. After 1984, the experiments begun by A. Aspect have shown that Bell's inequality was not satisfied, which discredits the realism hypothesis and confirms the existence of the "quantum reality with holes of ontological deficits": the experiment does create part of the reality. As the reader may imagine, even though Lapiedra does not mention it because of space limitations and in order not to distract from his elucidation, the debate on these issues continues today. Some physicists think that perhaps a theory at a more profound level than quantum mechanics might reconcile our intuitions about reality and theories of physics but, for the moment, things go on as they are.

Once he has discussed the basic problem of realism and the collapse of the wave function, Lapiedra devotes a chapter to discussing the possibility that quantum effects could be amplified by the human brain and have consequences for determinism and free will. This is the most original and speculative part of the book with personal reflections and suggestions that, while they are not inevitably deduced from quantum mechanics, are inspired in the analyses that have been done on it. Is it possible that behind the functioning of our brain there is quantum indeterminacy? Would this indeterminacy have anything to do with free will? In an attempt to raise questions in the terms of physics, the author speaks of an inequality that resembles Bell's, with the aid of which one could measure the degree of determinism in humans. Unfortunately, he does not provide information about what these experiments with mental acts are, or what the inequality is. Is he thinking, perchance, of telepathic experiments? We do not know and the author leaves us wanting to know the details. The last chapter of the book has a good informative summary of the origin of the universe according to present-day cosmological theories. Nowadays one has quite a clear framework on the basis of time to the order of 10^{-43} seconds (Planck's time, in technical language) after the great crack or the initial big bang. And what was there before that? And before the before? Quantum indeterminacy prevents talk of absolute nothingness, and quantum fluctuations enable energy to be constantly created and destroyed in intervals of time given by the uncertainty relations. Present-day theories cannot go beyond Planck's time because this would require a quantum theory of gravitation. The reader will doubtless have heard of "string theories" or the "everything theory", which are today's attempts to accomplish Einstein's old dream of unifying, in a single corpus of theory, the four basic interactions of nature. For some, this unification, which would represent a quantum theory of gravity, would resolve all the conceptual problems. All of this is possible, but the theory is yet to be constructed.

■ ¹ The figure that accompanies the analysis of the cat paradox contains a trivial error: as it is represented, there is no reflected ray but rather two transmitted rays. It would suffice to make the incident ray come from the left, as is conventionally done, to make everything correct. Alternatively, the mirror can be turned by 90° . This error does not affect the discussion of the paradox but could complicate things for a reader who is not familiar with the usual schemas of physics.

² Lapiedra felicitously translates the English word "entanglement" into the Catalan embolic. With this term he indicates certain kinds of quantum correlations that make a system more than the sum of its parts: it is not possible to assign a definite quantum state to each part separately. Quantum computation and cryptography benefit from this entanglement.

This book is written for philosophers, professionals or amateurs and, in general, at people who are interested in these old questions. The author therefore avoids writing a lot of mathematical expressions at the price of a style that is very prolix at times. He has also borne in mind physicists who are interested in conceptual questions, between physics and philosophy. But in this list of potential readers of the book, physics students should have a prominent place. Since these issues of meta-physics are not usually dealt with in degree courses, they will find here a simple, suggestive introduction to the study of the basic principles of quantum mechanics II

II The craft of being and knowing

Enric Balaguer

Enric Sòria, 2005, *La lentitud del mar. Dietari, 1989 -1997*
(The Slow Pace of the Sea. Diary 1989 -1997), Barcelona, Proa, 358 pp.

With *Mentre parlem. Fragments d'un diari iniciàtic* (While We Speak. Fragments of a Diary of Initiation-1991), Enric Sòria brings together his diary notes from 1979 to 1984. Now, with *La lentitud del mar*, he has made a new selection with texts running from 1989 to 1997. If the first volume received unanimous praise from the critics, one must say that this new volume goes still further in being of even greater interest. It goes further in its density, the richness of its worlds and ideas, and in its writing.

A good diary is a book of books —Sòria calls it a “repertoire of maps”— where we can find “sketched out” the profile of the author and his or her times. In keeping with his tastes and vocations, Sòria’s diary is a reflection of his reading, his favourite writers, his thoughts, everyday life, films, travels... As we meander through the byways of his notes and comments we can discern his favourite “map” or “maps”. In the broad sense, this is his poetics. But in *La lentitud del mar* there is also an essayistic bent that brings the author to dig up theses and to raise for discussion (and digression) different issues, whether they are philosophical, sociological, or political...

Enric Sòria is a “Germanophile” (I use the word with the greatest reluctance because of what it evokes): he loves German literature, travels there quite frequently and knows about all sorts of its social and cultural aspects. While he was writing these notes the Berlin Wall fell, with all that came to mean in western history. He lives with his partner Heike with whom he has translated a number of works from the German.

With regard to the literature of Germany and *Mitteleuropa*, we find some very interesting comments on Elias Canetti, Mann (the son), Jünger, Magris *inter alia*. If Canetti is a passion, Jünger —the Nazi officer who describes the experience of war in his diaries— is a debility. Jünger gives off, *malgré tout*, a kind of essential mysticism with which he, as author, is daubed in many aspects: in his portrayals of landscapes, his moral observation

of actions and judgements in exceptional situations (an existentialist would say “limit situations”). In *Radiations* —writes Sòria— Jünger “moves, informs and incites”. Yet, Claudio Magris’s deliberations in his monumental work on the Danube attract ambivalent comments. The Valencian writer rebels against “the deliberate collection of anecdotes” that Magris uses because, at some points, “without a prior literature he doesn’t know how to look”. This, despite the great acuteness and the brilliance of many of the theses of the writer from Trieste.

Sòria’s literary map extends over different writers and works. It would be tiring to produce an exhaustive list. Comments on Espriu, Pla, Fuster, Estellés... parade through his pages. His notes on the latter two, written on the occasion of their funerals, are first-rate. With writing that is somewhere between a portrait, a chronicle of the ceremony of death and literary digression, Sòria introduces —with a naturalness that has not prevented him from capturing the essential— his experience as a reader and that of his human contact. The four pages on Estellés are a spectacularly evocative (“provocative”, as Sòria himself would say) approximation.

Here we find another element to highlight: his extraordinary handling of the portrait. Sòria is a good writer of ideas but he is also a great portraitist —as a meticulous and profound observer. One only needs to look at his notes on writer friends such as Vicent Alonso, Vicent Sanchis, Josep Piera... His gaze combines steely observation and delicacy. It is both deep and respectful. His “portraiture” is not unrelated with the evocative sketch he produces of any journey. Sòria is a very good landscape artist.

The poet —and let us not overlook Enric Sòria’s poetic work, with such outstanding landmark works as *Compàs d’espera* (On Hold-1993) or *L’instant etern* (The Eternal Instant-1999)— can be glimpsed from time to time. It happens with his capacity for synthesis, for choosing the significant image, for balancing brain and emotion or integrating them both.

The reflections of the cultural world of Valencia that the author offers in his discussions with passionate poets or indescribable sages like L.V. Aracil are important. The presence of his literary comments, however, does not eclipse a multitude of observations and thoughts about our world today (universalism, nationalism, currents of thought or views on historic events like the First Gulf War or the Balkans War).

Sòria’s world is fuelled by a vast curiosity. “To live is to ask questions and to want to answer them”, he writes at one point. This vast curiosity extends to the individual behind it. Sòria dives into the “chemistry of the ego”, as they now say. He engages in introspection and shows us an unsatisfied subject who turns to writing as a vital need to “get things clear” and to “hear himself”. In probing his intimate world, the author confesses (and if all introspection contains the pleasure of contemplating oneself, every confession contains the desire to be absolved, as Michael Leiris says). This is the most singular part of the writing of the ego. Deriving it from a first-person usage, the subject of the writing accepts responsibility (acts, thoughts, emotions, feelings). And being responsible does not mean letting out a *mea culpa* but recognising one’s own diversity. The path of the writer from Oliva is well marked in this sense and the diary testifies to this. For Sòria, creative activity and the process of learning are one and the same thing. Maestro and disciple are the same person. This adventure the author designates, with a statement worthy of Pavese, the “craft of being and knowing” ||

|| **I'm the one who
doesn't speak**

Maria Josep Escrivà

Feliu Formosa, 2004,
Darrere el vidre. Poesia 1972-2002
(Behind the Glass. Poetry 1972-2002), Barcelona, Ed. 62-Empúries, 336 pp.

When a poet and his or her work have left their mark in shaping our reading or creative life it is because there has been an exact point of wonderment or upset in which two instants of life have affected one another. After this interference, the person who has grasped it ceases to be himself or herself in a more or less considerable part of his or her literary experience; and yet this force that has acted first —poet, book, line or word— also undergoes transformations depending on what the consequences of the episode have been.

With Feliu Formosa, I can recall when, how and what precise poem alerted me that some strange element had crept though the limit of differences: “I mean that at times the afternoons say there is no solitude”. It was in 1992, six years after the publication of his *Semblança* (Portrait) from which the shock of those words came, and twenty years after the date that Formosa has fixed in his volume of collected works, *Darrere el vidre* (Behind the Glass), as the departure point of his long poetic journey. For some reason innocent of wishes, the glass was then pure transparency, a way of communication and not a barrier.

Semblança (1986) is the first book of poems published outside of what was the first volume of Formosa’s collected work under the title of *Si tot és dintre* (If it is All in Here-1980). For me, one of the high points of his production as a whole is this book, which is indebted to Pedro Salinas and, now that I consider his work in general, it appears as a prodigious master beam to either side of which he has erected a rationally organised poetic edifice over thirty years.

Until that year of 1986, there were five published titles: *Albes breus a les mans* (Brief Dawns in my Hands-1973), *Llibre de les meditacions* (Book of Meditations-1973), *Raval* (1975), *Cançoners* (Song Book-1976) and *Llibre dels viatges* (Book of Travels-1978), besides his translations of Villon, Trakl, Brecht, the writing of his first *Diari* (1973-1978) (Diary (1973-1978), which was published in 1979) and, on the personal level, the tragic and all-encompassing experience of the death of his wife, Maria Plans. Five more books of poetry have appeared since 1986: *Per Puck* (By Puck-1992), *Impasse* (Impasse-1992), *Al llarg de tota una impaciència* (Through an Entire Impatience-1994), *Immediacions* (Surroundings-2000) and *Cap claredat no dorm* (No Clarity Sleeps-2001).

When Joaquim Marco and Jaume Pont published *La nova poesia catalana* (New Catalan Poetry-1980), a study and anthology of the phenomenon of the poetic generation of the 1970s, Feliu Formosa appeared in it under the heading of “outsider”, which the two Catalan critics had used as a way of personalising the bridge they had traced from “critical realism to inner experience”. Although he was born about ten years before the generation that is regarded as that of the seventies, it is also true that 1973, the year in which Formosa published his first two books, was also that of the creation in Barcelona

of the collection entitled “Llibres del Mall” while, in Valencia, it was the year that Amadeu Fabregat had completed an anthology called *Carn fresca* (Fresh Meat, which was published the following year) with new names such as Josep Piera, Salvador Jàfer and Joan Navarro, who was also the winner of the first Vicent Andrés Estellés Award in the newly-inaugurated October Prizes.

With more or fewer coincidences, this “outsider” who, perhaps because of the dates and the events he had lived through, did not fit in with the new generation—even while doing so through aesthetic affinities—was, more than anything else, a poet who was voluntarily *marginal* vis-à-vis himself. Because of his professional (Formosa is above all a man of the theatre) and personal circumstances, we should not be surprised that his surviving should be mediated by the need to draw a barrier between himself and his poetic creation; by dividing himself between the man who lives, who suffers, who remembers through pain and who creates, who imagines possible worlds, who invents fictional characters, or who takes refuge in words when he writes. The image of the poet voluntarily stationed behind the glass is perfect for attaining this twofold effect of protection and distancing. In his *Diaris*, in a section that is undated but one we can situate between 1974—the year of the death of Maria Plans—and 1976, Feliu Formosa writes, “Miguel Hernández says, ‘Yo nada más soy yo cuando estoy solo’ [I am only me when I am alone]. I could say ‘I am only me when I am not me’; expressing thus the fact that theatre is the only thing that can save me”. So, this “not being me”, this artistic elaboration of dispossession, of splitting or of farce, is a constant that will never be far from Feliu Formosa’s poetic work. In *Cançoners*, for example—without a doubt his book of most powerful emotional intensity—the beloved has gone to occupy a dimension that is alien to the poet and therefore “everything is outside me”. The communication between the two sides of the gap is memory, dialogue (as in theatre), writing, the poem, which is at once, in *Cançoners* too, the unhappy proof of the absence of his wife. Overcoming this abyss is his only solace. The last lines of the book are breathtaking and I feel I must reproduce them here: “and it will all end in an embrace / that will be the first. There will not be / any past or future. It will all be logic. / And this poem will never have existed”.

In the subsequent book, *Llibre dels viatges*, the title itself might appear as a key for understanding this will to leave oneself behind, given that with oneself there only remains the void, the I that has been vacated by the you. In a physical, highly graphic way, the extirpation of one by oneself is expressed thus: “I am, simply, the one who is leaving”.

Between the aforementioned title and the following extremely beautiful *Semblança*, there is a distance of eight years. It is a distance that is not merely chronological. It is no coincidence that the poet’s voice should have rediscovered the world’s harmony in a long love poem structured into fifteen fragments that are a song to hope and against pain and fear. At the two great moments of Feliu Formosa’s poetic career, the lines flow without subterfuge and are engendered from poignant emotion. And both correspond to love poems, one in the absence of the beloved woman as a burning lament of loss; the other a song of welcome, celebrating his new good fortune.

Then there comes the book *Per Puck* in which Formosa seems to settle a great, vital debt to theatre, bringing together authors, texts and personalities of the history of theatre throughout time, and where the limits between poetry, drama, reality and literary

reflections about all three are blurred. It is a dedication, or a toast to the depersonalised world in the imp of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where, as Jordi Coca says in his Prologue to the first edition, "the world is manifested as being both terrible and trivial".

From *Impasse* to *Cap claredat no dorm*, the latter book collected and published within *Darrere el vidre*, Formosa's poetic voice goes through a process of distillation based on some of the core points of his artistic thinking. The poems of *Al llarg de tota una impaciència* reflect on the poetic fact from a standpoint of extreme restraint. For their essentiality they acquire the tone of what was once called "pure poetry" and more recently "poetry of silence", while still manifesting the desire to push at the limits between the indispensable word and the void, the mystery according to which everything speaks or everything remains silent.

Within the same minimalist exercise, *Immediacions* proposes reducing to the minimum the most profound and most extensive thought. Expressed in the form of a single alexandrine or decasyllable per poem, they appeal to me to imagine everything that would have preceded their rotund, aphoristic conclusions. There is no need to make too many suppositions because the poet himself puts it like this: "From what I have struck out these poems remain". For the rest, there is life, and there are trials, attempts and what is forgotten. The resulting verse is on the page what a theatrical performance is on the stage: the final selection from a wide range of possibilities. An option, a risk, the writer or the actor and his solitude confronted with silence, committed in opposition to silence. But, by the same reasoning, if a few lines ago I have noted Feliu Formosa's decision to opt for this theatrical duality, where exactly is this "I" that clings to life? What is the true subject, the one who looks through to the other side of the glass or the one who is looked at? The resulting verse or the raw material where the verse has had its gestation? Is it not what Formosa expresses in a disturbing, magnificent poem in *Al llarg de tota una impaciència*? "I'm the one who doesn't speak. / From my / condition of marble, I observe so many / transparencies". It is the infinite circle, the pure instant at which everything begins anew: "I'm the one who doesn't speak": The first step towards reconstruction. After all, the poet also writes: "is it not good the silence / that contains / all the questions?" ||