

Jukka Male – CHINO.

When I first came to Barcelona I did not encounter Catalonia or any of the nationalist passions I had anticipated. After roaming around for a while, I found an open space in the center of the city, created by the demolition of a whole quarter of buildings.

Stone pillars joined the sides of this packed dirt square to the rest of the city. It was like a small town plaza in the middle of a metropolis. It provided a good space for hanging out and for all kinds of encounters.

All the frequenters of the square were more interested in themselves, in their own livelihoods, than in the independence or coexistence of diverse cultures. The population of this part of town had been brought here by drugs, prostitution, and the most severe of crimes: poverty. I had entered Chino, the basement of society.

On the short stretch of Calle Sant Ramón that was one of the square's boundaries there were four bars: Las Marinas, Porto Pi, La Barra, and El Disco. They shared the street with a barber and a condom shop. Around the corner there was a restaurant, and in the vicinity there were a few small hotels or rooms for rent for brief encounters involving the spending or earning of what little money there was in circulation. The bars had a motley clientele. It did not take me long to join it.

Later on, the sandy scab became the site of two new ugly apartment buildings, so minimalist that one could think of them as their own freight crates.

The buildings have cut down the space, it is less inviting, but it still is an anteroom to lust. Most of the street action consists of the sale of human bodies. Different styles dominate their own sectors. This is a female sector, aimed at males.

In this part of Chino, dozens of women are selling their bodies in the street. This is not love for sale, not even brief joy; the joys are left to your own imagination. What's for sale here is coition, "fucky-fucky".

Business is most brisk while the evening's warmth lingers, slowing down as night falls. Then the prostitutes leave to mingle with the tourist stream in the hope of greater rewards. Almost anything looks prettier at night.

It took me a while to understand, among other things, this mode of prostitution and its great extent. According to one estimate, Barcelona has more than 50 000 active prostitutes. My personal knowledge of the phenomenon is minimal, since my radius was limited to the thirty yards between Las Marinas and La Barra. To this day, I hardly know the rest of the city.

Every environment creates its own ethics. The people of Sant Ramón do not know much about each other. It is not necessary to know names, or addresses, or even genders. When proximity gets to be too close, it changes into danger. The only necessity is to exist, and you can't exist without being somewhere.

*Chino is part of a larger project involving humanity in diverse conditions and communities. I have paid eight visits to Barcelona's Chino, the last seven within the last eighteen months.*

Translated from the Finnish by Anselm Hollo