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Xavier Rubert de Ventós



Rubert de Ventós, Multifaceted Thinker

Mariona Sanfeliu Salvà

Xavier Rubert de Ventós divides his time between philosophical reflection and his commitment to active politics. He is a professor of aesthetics at the Barcelona School of Architecture. He has also been Visiting professor at Berkeley and Santayana Fellow at Harvard, in addition to being a founding member of the New York Institute for the Humanities. As a politician, he has been a member of the Spanish Parliament and of the European Parliament. His prolific and multiform philosophical creation is critical and heterodox.

Francesc Xavier Rubert de Ventós was born in Barcelona in 1939, the final year of the Civil War. Philosopher, politician and university teacher, he finished his Law degree in 1961, after which he obtained a doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Barcelona in 1965, having written a thesis on aesthetics entitled *La estética de la abstracción* (The Aesthetics of Abstraction). He was greatly influenced by his teachers José Luis Aranguren at the Complutense University of Madrid (who, in turn, was a follower of [Eugeni d'Ors](#)), and José María Valverde and Manuel Sacristán at the University of Barcelona. He has been Visiting Professor at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio (1964), Santayana Fellow in the Faculty of Philosophy at Harvard University (1972) and Visiting Scholar at the Faculty of Architecture in the University of California, Berkeley (1973). He has taught at both Barcelona's universities and in the School of Architecture at the Technical University of Catalonia (Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya), where he has been professor of Aesthetics and Composition since 1973. He has also taught courses at the universities of Caracas and Mexico.

Author of an extensive body of work with essays and, philosophical writings on culture theory, practical philosophy (ethics and political philosophy) and philosophy in general, his writing has taken a number of forms: the essay, collections of aphorisms, personal diaries and historical analysis. In the words of Pere Lluís Font, Rubert de Ventós set out, in the 1960s, on "a brilliant career as an aesthetics theorist and culture critic" (*Les idees i els dies* (Ideas and Days)), publishing a number of books on aesthetics and related themes. *El arte ensimismado* (The Engrossed Art - 1963, winner of the City of Barcelona Prize), was an analysis of vanguard art, a critique of what he called the "fanaticism" of novelty and, more recently "avant-garde euphoria". In *Teoría de la sensibilidad* (Theory of Sensibility, 1968), winner of the [Lletra d'Or Prize](#) for Catalan Literature) he notes the break from the consequences of Renaissance art, which are still patent in conventional avant-garde works, in the attempt to arrive at an amplified concept of art through what he calls "scientific design", a synthesis of art, science and technology. In the domain of aesthetics, he has also published *Utopías de la sensualidad y métodos del sentido* (Utopias of Sensuality and Methods of Meaning, 1973), and *La estética y sus herejías* (Aesthetics and its Heresies, 1974), which received the Anagrama Essay Prize).

It might be considered that his major work is *De la Modernidad. Ensayos de filosofía crítica* (From Modernity. Essays in Critical Philosophy, 1980), for it is here that Rubert elucidates his philosophical

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standpoint. In the domain of moral philosophy, he has published *Moral y nueva cultura* (Morals and New Culture, 1971), where he comes out in favour of a new appreciation of ethics based on permanent revision of one's own values and experimentalism; *Ética sin atributos* (Ethics without Attributes, 1996), a moral manifesto in which he undertakes the task of defining virtue by purging it of its attributes, and *Dios, entre otros inconvenientes* (God, among Other Stumbling Blocks, 2000), where Rubert adopts, in the face of belief in God and in other commonplace deities such as Nature, History and Culture (the "means by which we have tried to evacuate the enigma of our existence"), an intellectual stance that characterises the greater part of his work: a distancing both from "*liquid opinion*" that is shaped by all the means and times that are its vehicle, and the *solid stupidity* that is never, ever caught off balance", in the words of his Introduction. His aim is to denounce the excesses that hide behind excessively unanimous opinions.

Some of his work has been translated into Italian, English and German: *La scienza e l'arte* (1972); *Self-Defeated man. Personal Identity and Beyond* (1975); *Heresies of Modern Art* (1980); *The Hispanic Labyrinth: Tradition and Modernity in the Colonization of the Americas* (1991); *Medien - Welten, Wirklichkeiten* (1998) and *Philosophie ohne Eigenschaften* (1999). The Prologue of the last-mentioned book has been translated into Catalan and published in the book *Pensament i Filosofia a Catalunya III 1940-1975* (Thought and Philosophy in Catalonia III 1940-1975), Barcelona, INEHC - Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2004.

Apart from his writings and work as a university teacher, Rubert de Ventós has been, and is an eminent personality in the worlds of culture and politics in Catalonia as a member of prestigious cultural and political institutions. In 1976, he was a founding member of the Barcelona College of Philosophy, which was formed by a group of university-teacher philosophers who offered lectures on philosophy that were open to the public. Its distant predecessor, even in name was George Bataille's Collège de Sociologie in France in the 1930s. In the words of Pere Lluís Font, "(...) [the College] engaged in the practice of public philosophy in different venues of the city for about twelve years until it was absorbed *de facto* by the Humanities Institute" (*Les idees i els dies*). Among its members were Eugenio Trias, Jordi Llovet, Antoni Vicens and Josep Ramoneda. With a view to bringing together the ideas conveyed in these public lectures, Rubert de Ventós, along with other members of the Col·legi, worked together to produce several books that are a miscellany of the subjects they discussed: *Col·legi de Filosofia. Maneras de hacer filosofía* (College of Philosophy. Ways of Going about Philosophy, 1978), *Col·legi de Filosofia. Frontera i perill* (College of Philosophy. Frontier and Danger, 1987).

He is the creator of the Càtedra Barcelona - Nova York de llengua i cultura catalanes (Barcelona - New York Chair of Catalan Culture and Language, 1979-1982), a founder-member of the New York Institute for Humanities and of the Institut d'Humanitats de Barcelona (successor of the Col·legi de Filosofia), of which he is president and a frequent contributor to the courses it offers. In February 2006, Rubert de Ventós was named full member of the Philosophy and Social Sciences Section of the Institute of Catalan Studies. His inaugural speech was entitled *La Taca Cultural* (The Cultural Blot) and in it Rubert outlines a study of the intercultural reality of our times and describes variations in the content of ethical codes. The superimposition of *Boolean cultural areas* defined by activities *regulated* by the cultural code make it possible to see how often there is a superimposition in one and the same person of different cultural codes. Rubert has stated that he is very pleased with his incorporation into the country's institutional life because -as he puts it- it enables him to connect with the urban-based, early-twentieth-century "tradition of Noucentism" and to participate in the institutions in the context of a certain "formality".

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Xavier Rubert de Ventós has actively participated in the country's politics as a member of parliament for the Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (Socialist Party of Catalonia) from 1982 to 1986, and was also a European parliamentarian for nine years (1985-1994). He has published his reflections on his experiences in the world of politics in *El cortesà i el seu fantasma* (The Courtier and his Ghost, 1991), which received the Josep Pla Prize. Another book of critical reflections on political matters had previously received the 1987 Espejo de España Prize. This was *El Laberinto de la Hispanidad* (The Hispanic Labyrinth), which sketched a new framework for relations between the different peoples of the Iberian Peninsula. A more general book is *Nacionalismos* (Nationalisms). In his *El laberinto de la identidad* (The Labyrinth of Identity, 1994), he offers an original view on the explosion of the phenomenon of nationalism at the end of the twentieth century. *Teoria de la sensibilitat nacionalista. Fonamentalismes, minories, migracions* (A Theory of Nationalist Sensibility. Fundamentalisms, Minorities and Migrations, 2006), his most recent book on the matter, "analyses with the head what frequently comes from the gut", thereby making a major contribution on the concept of identity and belonging.

In the last 20 years, he has been a member of the Comissió per la Dignitat (Commission for Dignity), an entity that calls for the return to their rightful owners of documents that were confiscated at the end of the Civil War and subsequently housed in the General Civil War Archive in Salamanca.

In recognition of his career and his contributions as a well-known figure in Catalonia's cultural circles, Rubert de Ventós was awarded the Creu de Sant Jordi (Saint George Cross) by the Generalitat (Government) of Catalonia in July 1999.

It is said of Rubert de Ventós that he is an iconoclast who writes with asperity, but it is an asperity that is not exempt of humour. The lucidity and irony of his writings do not lack musicality. He says, speaking of the philosophers' (or "philosophants", as he says in some of his texts) trade, "It is understandable, then, that the academic existence of the trade does not guarantee that of genius" (*Filosofia d'estar per casa*). Rubert de Ventós' prose is forceful but it has a light touch. Rich in metaphors, wordplays and suggestive images, it also reveals one of his frequent stylistic devices -the great descriptive power of metaphorical comparisons, similes and surprising juxtapositions that are very illuminating in whatever it is they wish to convey. The reader frequently finds fine-tuned ironic details in his work, intelligent joking, along with a playful and unabashed use of synonymy. "[?] the alternative to a good education is ideological indoctrination, just as that to sport is military marches" (*Filosofia d'estar per casa*). In some cases, it may be said that he employs clichés, set phrases and commonplaces but he gives them curiously suggestive twists. To offer one example of this, he says: "How is it that physical phenomena -the fall of a stone or the orbits of the sky- seem to be governed by reason, while human matters -the history of the stock exchange, war or love- seem to be governed by irrational or random forces?" (*Manies i afrodismes* (Manias and Aphrodisms)).

Rubert uses his texts on morality, ethics, philosophy, politics, and also those dealing with more general matters -where he engages in philosophy of small things, reeling off his musings and thoughts- as vehicles for denouncing things and stirring up consciences. He rails against the hypocrisy of a world that is "morally unacceptable while politically stable", a world in which "there is a growing abyss between those who line up for high-protein UN biscuits and those who consume skimmed milk and Low-Cal drinks in order to keep slim" (*Filosofia d'estar per casa*).

One notes in Rubert de Ventós's work a vast knowledge of the world in the huge array of examples he offers and in his acute observations of past and present and past politics. His analysis is discerning, precise, sharp and backed by facts; his arguments are frequently accompanied by

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examples and contrastable data; in sum, his is an erudition that is shaped by quotes from the classics, historical references, philosophical, mythological and ethnological knowledge and a long etcetera of references that, far from intellectual posturing bordering on narcissism, help the reader to understand the text and to engage in a profound and careful reading of it.

As for his contribution to philosophy, one should note the influence of José Luis Aranguren and the mark on his work left by his readings of Kant, Schopenhauer and Hegel, not to mention Kierkegaard (his aesthetic period) and Simmel (his attraction for fashion, his culturalist and sociological perspectives). Unless we take these writers into account, Rubert de Ventós is incomprehensible.

The intellectual stance that is manifest in his work might be summed up with two metaphors related with birds, both of which appear in his writings. Rubert de Ventós tries to do as the crow did in Aesop's fable, "The Crow and the Pitcher". In this story, the crow, unable to reach the water in the pitcher, filled it with pebbles until the water level rose enough for him to drink and quench his thirst. Faced with a problem, or a question, Rubert always tries to go beyond any given coordinates so as to locate himself *à l'autre bout de la chaîne* and to recognise the ambiguity of things by considering them in reverse, seeking the hidden nuances. In his treatment of the matters he writes or speaks about, Rubert de Ventós tries to respect the distance that things themselves claim, to apply the pressure they require (because the optimum is not always equivalent to the *maximum*) in an equilibrium of strength and pressure, like that required for the bird in his hand after it has fallen from the nest. Too much pressure would squash it, while too little would let it escape to try and fly away, badly hurt or dying. Similarly, Rubert de Ventós is always seeking the other side of things (a trait he celebrates in the Catalan philosopher Joan Crexells, whom he so admires), preferring hybrid things to those that are all of a piece. He speaks of "the importance of seeing things as unclear". He values the fact of being able to, "Find the strength, the security, the maturity of *not* having set ideas on each and every thing" (*Manies i afrodismes*). To put it otherwise, still in his own words, "I believe that frequently dispensing of an old prejudice is equally or more important than being right in a new judgement" (*Filosofia d'estar per casa*); "Understanding something is nothing more than the degree to which one can be surprised by the next thing" (*Manies i afrodismes*). This is a quintessentially philosophical point of view.

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A selection of texts

Text



WEB: Rubert de Ventós a EPdLP

Nota biogràfica en castellà i un fragment de *Per què filosofia* a El Poder de La Palabra.
<http://www.epdlp.com/escritor.php?id=2241>



WEB: Xavier Rubert de Ventós

Biografia, informacions i dos fragments de la seva obra.
http://www.arrakis.es/~afr1992/horizonte2001/rubert_de_ventos.htm



WEB: Catalunya i Espanya

Article publicat a l'ABC (11/10/2000).

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< <http://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/xavier-rubert-de-ventos> >

<http://personal1.iddeo.es/lbouza/rubert.htm>



PDF: "Ergonomía para la mente"

Selecció i traducció de textos de Xavier Rubert de Ventós. Inclou fotografies i il·lustracions.

<http://www.m-grup.com/revistas/pdf/boletin-2/ergonomia.pdf>



WEB: El concepte d'Art

Argumentació de Rubert de Ventós apareguda al *Diccionario Crítico de Ciencias Sociales*, dirigit per Román Reyes.

<http://www.ucm.es/info/eurotheo/diccionario/A/arte.htm>



WEB: "Maragall: camino a la soberanía mínima"

Article d'opinió de Rubert de Ventós publicat a *El País* (01/10/2003).

<http://www.noucycle.org/arxiu4/rdeventos.html>



WEB: Xavier Rubert de Ventós

Biography, information and two fragments of his writing.

http://www.arrakis.es/~afr1992/horizonte2001/rubert_de_ventos.htm



WEB: Catalonia and Spain

Article published in *ABC* (11/10/2000).

<http://personal1.iddeo.es/lbouza/rubert.htm>



WEB: The Concept of Art

Discussion by Rubert de Ventós published in *Diccionario Crítico de Ciencias Sociales*, Román Reyes (ed.).

<http://www.ucm.es/info/eurotheo/diccionario/A/arte.htm>

Bio-bibliography

Biography



WEB: A la Hiperenciclopèdia

http://www.enciclopedia.cat/fitxa_v2.jsp?NDCHEC=0057204



WEB: Fitxa al "Qui és qui a les lletres catalanes"

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/qeq/FitxaAutors.asp?nom1=rub&nom2=&cerca=Cerca&quinform=form1&NRegistre=1&idregistre=3046>



WEB: The author in the Catalan Encyclopaedia

<http://www.grec.cat/cgibin/hecangcl2.pgm?&USUARI=&SESSIO=&NDCHEC=0057204&PGMORI=E>



WEB: Membre de l'IEC

Xavier Rubert de Ventós, membre numerari de l'Institut d'Estudis Catalans.

<http://apmembres2.iec.cat/detall.aspx?pkMembrePLE=450>

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WEB: Xavier Rubert de Ventós a l'Institut Ramon Llull

Nota biobibliogràfica dins l'espai dedicat a la Fira Internacional del Llibre de Guadalajara 2004.
http://fil04.llull.cat/cat/02protagonistes/rubert_de_ventos_xavier.shtm



WEB: The author in the Who's Who of Catalan Literature

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/qeq/fitxaAutorsuk.asp?nom1=rubert&cercauk2=Search&quinform=form1&NRegistre=&idregistre=3046>



VIDEO: Rubert de Ventós a Veus literàries

Documental sobre la vida i l'obra de l'escriptor, realitzat per l'AELC.
http://www.edu3.cat/Edu3tv/Fitxa?p_id=43213



WEB: Member of the IEC

Xavier Rubert de Ventós, a permanent member of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (Institute of Catalan Studies).

<http://apmembres2.iec.cat/detall.aspx?pkMembrePLE=450>



WEB: Xavier Rubert de Ventós in the Ramon Llull Institute

Biobibliographical note on this author on a page devoted to the Guadalajara International Book Fair.
http://fil04.llull.cat/eng/02protagonistes/rubert_de_ventos_xavier.shtm



VIDEO: Rubert de Ventós in Veus literàries [Literary Voices]

Documentary on Rubert de Ventós's life and work made by AELC (Association of Catalan Language Writers).

http://www.edu3.cat/Edu3tv/Fitxa?p_id=43213

Bibliography



WEB: Què hi ha a la Biblioteca de Catalunya

http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*cat/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Rubert+de+Vent%C3%B3s+Xavier&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D



WEB: Què hi ha a les biblioteques universitàries catalanes (CCUC)

http://ccuc.cbuc.cat/search*cat/a?SEARCH=Rubert+de+Vent%C3%B3s+Xavier&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=23



WEB: Què hi ha a les biblioteques públiques

<http://argus.biblioteques.gencat.cat/iii/encore/search/C|SRubert+de+Vent%C3%B3s+Xavier|Orightresult|U1?lang=cat&suite=pearl>



WEB: Per comprar-ne llibres

<http://www.llibres.cat/ca/detall-autor/rubert-i-de-ventos-xavier>

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WEB: Articles de l'autor (Traces)

<http://traces.uab.cat/search?f=author&p=Rubert%20de%20Vent%C3%B3s%20Xavier&sc=1&ln=ca>



WEB: Articles sobre l'autor (Traces)

http://traces.uab.cat/search?ln=ca&as=1&m1=a&p1=Rubert+de+Vent%C3%B3s%2C+Xavier&f1=keyword&op1=a&m2=a&p2=&f2=&op2=a&m3=a&p3=&f3=&action_search=Cerca&c=Traces+%3A+base+de+dades+de+llengua+i+literatura+catalanes&sf=&so=a&rm=&rg=10&sc=1&of=hb



WEB: Works in the Biblioteca de Catalunya

http://catalag.bnc.cat/search*eng/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Rubert+de+Vent%C3%B3s+Xavier&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D



WEB: The author in The European Library

<http://search.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/en/search/%28creator+all+%22rubert+de+vent%C3%B3s+xavier%22%29.query>



WEB: The author in the Congress Library (US)

<http://catalog.loc.gov/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First>



WEB: The author in the COPAC Catalogue (UK)

<http://copac.ac.uk/search?&au=Xavier+Rubert+de+Vent%C3%B3s>

Comments on the author

Comments



WEB: Entrevista a Xavier Rubert de Ventós

Montse Frisach parla amb l'autor arran de la reedició catalana del seu llibre *Teoria de la sensibilitat*. A l'*Avui* (22/10/2007).

<http://paper.avui.cat/article/cultura/103197/som/primitius/altre/mon/comenca.html>



PDF: "Teoria del desconeixement"

Xavier Filella ressenya el llibre de Rubert de Ventós *Filosofia d'estar per casa* a l'*Avui* (17/06/2004).

<http://www.traces.uab.es/tracesbd/avui/av02610.pdf>



PDF: "Teoria del desconeixement" (Theory of Ignorance)

Xavier Filella reviews Rubert de Ventós's book *Filosofia d'estar per casa* (Stay-at-Home Philosophy) in *Avui* (17/6/2004).

<http://www.traces.uab.es/tracesbd/avui/av02610.pdf>

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Comments



PDF: Conversation with Rubert de Ventós by Mercè Rius and Daniel Gamper

Conversation with Rubert de Ventós by Mercè Rius and Daniel Gamper, in *Transfer*, iss. 3 (2008).

http://www.llull.cat/rec_transfer/webt3/transfer03_dia01.pdf
