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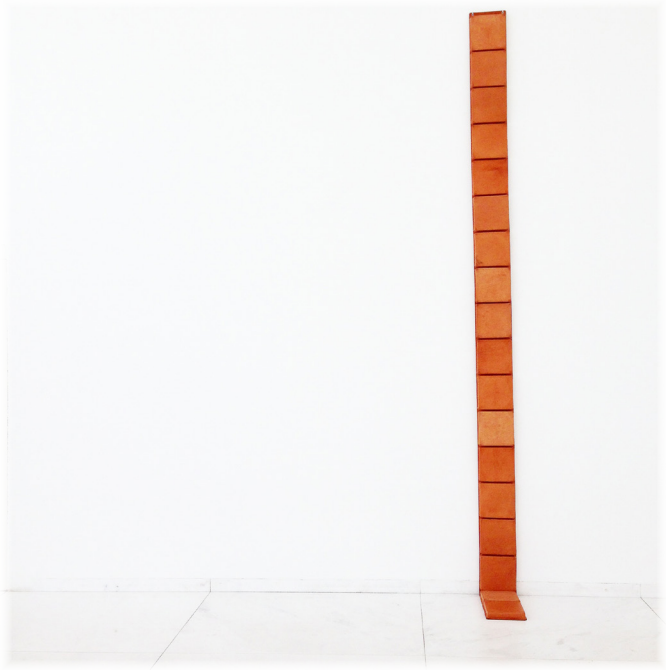

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Walking with Michel de Certeau.
Jesuit architecture and the city

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Abstract
"Bernard loved the valleys, Benedict the mountains; Francis the towns, Ignatius loved great cities". According to Thomas M. Lucas SJ this is an old Jesuit proverb which, I think, clearly expresses the strong bond between the Society of Jesus and urban settings. In fact, the establishment of most of its colleges followed a precise urban strategy. Thus, even though limited by numerous circumstances such as the patron and the inhabitants' wishes, the frequent reluctance of previously settled religious orders, and the urban layout, the Jesuits used to achieve significant locations inside the city walls. And this, along with the orientation, dimensions, configuration and iconographic elements of their façades, makes it evident that the Society carried out a quest for representativeness –or, from Evonne Levy's perspective, "propaganda"– that is paradigmatic of the *cultus externus* promoted by the Counter Reformation. In other words, they strove to show their peculiar white wall/black hole to as many people as possible. Therefore, to consider aspects like the urban layout and its unfolding, viewpoints, transit dynamics, current and past functions of space, or toponymy can be very useful to better understand Jesuit architecture. This paper aims to reflect on Jesuit urban strategy with a special focus on Galicia –in the Northwest of Spain– by using the wandering gaze of Michel de Certeau.

Keywords
Michel de Certeau; Jesuit architecture; Urban layout; Galicia.

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Location is the key

As Thomas M. Lucas SJ explains in his magnificent book *Landmarking. City, Church & Jesuit Urban Strategy*, location was of capital importance for the Society of Jesus' establishments. Whereas the previously settled mendicant orders used to prefer the countryside, Jesuits realised from the beginning that cities were the ideal place to implement their particular project[2]. This, along with the rapid expansion of the Society from short after its foundation in 1540, impelled Ignatius and his companions to quickly develop a precise strategy in order to get the best urban settlements all over the world. A strategy that, despite encountering constant obstacles[3] generally led them to excel in fulfilling most of their desired features for urban locations (Lucas 1997, passim). Jesuit urban locations ought preferably to be: in downtown and as central as possible[4]; close to the main political, religious and social centres[5]; large enough[6]; and salubrious[7] (Lucas 1997, 135-137, 140-141, 151).

The example of the *Gesù*, the Society's Mother Church, certainly worked as a model for other Jesuit establishments in many ways, also regarding the siting. Located in the core of Rome, the complex of church and 'headquarters' dominates a central area within the walls of the city, not far away from the *Campidoglio* and with its façade "oriented squarely onto the *piazza* that fronted the *Via Papalé*"[8] (Lucas 1997, 158). Similarly, Florence's college is just a few steps from the *duomo* and right next to its powerful patrons' palace, *Palazzo Medici*. And also the colleges of such distant and different places as Naples, Ferrara, Sienna, Palermo, Messina, Prague, Mi-

2. In Father Lucas' words, that of the Jesuits was "an aggressive, interactive urban ministry" quite different from the passivity of other orders (Lucas 1997, 36).

3. As Father Lucas summarizes, Jesuits "invariably collided with the interests of other orders and other urban religious institutions" (Lucas 1997, 157).

4. "Ignatius deliberately and strategically opted for downtown sitings of his most important works, both in Rome and elsewhere." (Lucas 1997, 135). "Finding a convenient, central location […], what Ignatius called the *commodo luogo*, was a major concern from the beginnings of the Society. For Ignatius, the idea of commodity […] denoted aptness and convenience for the needs of the ministry." (Lucas 1997, 136).

5. "The ministerial *proposito* for a residence or professed house required certain "commodities": […] a convenient location that was easily accessible to large numbers of citizens; and a residence for the Fathers. Proximity to the local court was a decided advantage." (Lucas 1997, 137).

6. "*Take special care that you obtain a good and sufficiently large site, or one that can be enlarged with time, large enough for house and church, and if possible, not too far removed from the conversation of the city*", Document *EpisIgn 3, 1899*, dated June 13, 1551 (quoted in Lucas 1997, 140).

7. "*it is expedient that attention should be given to having houses and colleges in healthy locations with pure air and not in those characterized by the opposite.*", *Constitutions*, final paragraph (quoted in Lucas 1997, 141).

8. It was an explicit desire of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, who promoted the works (Lucas 1997, 157-158).

lan, Vienna, Lisbon (Lucas 1997, 141, 150-151), or Porto, where the Jesuit college was built very close to the cathedral.

In Galicia, in the Northwest of Spain, the Jesuits settled four urban colleges. A central position was very much pursued for all of them, but not always possible. Pontevedra and Coruña colleges had to reluctantly accept sites on the edge of the wall, though in rather good locations inside it. Whilst Pontevedra's college was next to a wall gate widely used by wine traders and not too far away from a grocery market, Coruña's college was very close to the market and next to the only public fountain, exactly in the limit between the two main quarters of the city (Rivera Vázquez 1989, 372-377, 404-405). On the other hand, Santiago's college was settled in the place of a former Franciscan convent which was also next to the wall, but not too far from the cathedral and very close to some landmarks of the city such as a church which was key in its foundational legend or the place of a former Neolithic fortified settlement. Besides, an important weekly market was held at the square next to the college, so the site was a neuralgic point of city life (Rivera Vázquez 1989, 218-220). And finally, Ourense's college was established in the city's best location [Fig. 1], very close to the cathedral and in the former Jewish Quarter, whose synagogue may have been very close to or even in the same place where the Jesuit church was built and still stands nowadays (Rivera Vázquez 1989, 345).

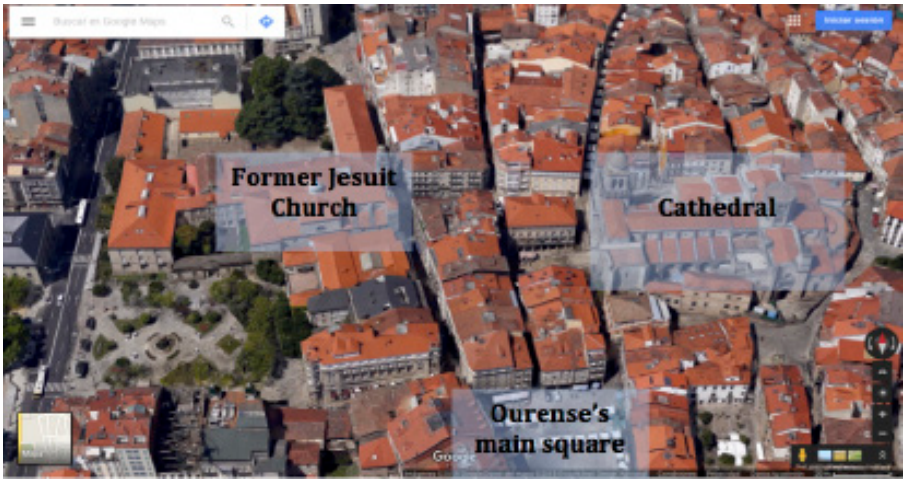

Fig. 1

Everyday life writing

In the essay "Walking in the City", written by the French Jesuit and philosopher Michel de Certeau, the *Wandersmänner* –unlike the idleness of Baudelaire's *flâneur* and Rousseau's *promeneur*[9]– are the busy inhabitants of the city, the ordinary people whose daily activities make them move constantly rewriting the urban layout. However, they are incapable of reading the whole writing because each of them is just a little part of it, a tiny piece that barely guesses the existence of other pieces (Certeau 1988, 93). And yet their walking discloses the city, it is to the urban system what the speech act is to a language. Walking is constructing the city as writing or speaking is materializing the language (Certeau 1988, 97-99); both actions have the power of turning something that belongs to an intellectual stratum into reality. Nevertheless, as Wittgenstein pointed out "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (Wittgenstein 1922, 74), and therefore the limits of my city mean the limits of my walking. In other words, the possibilities are not infinite, they just stay hidden until speaking/writing –or walking– make them become real, allow them to temporarily exist[10]. For Roland Barthes, "The user of a city picks out certain fragments of the statement in order to actualize them in secret." (quoted in Certeau 1988, 98). Or, as Francesco Careri observes, "It is as if Time and History were updated again and again by 'walking them'" (Careri 2004, 44-48).

At the same time, for de Certeau "To walk is to lack a place" (Certeau 1988, 103), so using a place just as a transit space transforms it into the "non-place" formulated by Marc Augé (Augé 1992). Moreover, as the French Jesuit clearly states, there is a rethoric of walking that, in my opinion, is always a Baroque one in everyday life. In de Certeau's words, everyday life "practices of space also correspond to manipulations of basic elements of a constructed order", "deviations relative to a sort of 'literal meaning' defined by the urbanistic system." (Certeau 1988, 100). Everyday walking selects and fragments the space, transforming it into a "spatial phrasing" "composed of juxtaposed citations" as well as of "gaps, lapses, and allusions" through rhetorical operations (Certeau 1988, 102)[11]. Unlike the stillness of architectural landmarks, the restlessness of everyday life is constantly forcing the adaptation of the space to new functions. As in Lamarck's theory, function creates space.

9. A text about the multiple works which reflected on the art of walking can be found in the Spanish edition of one of these works, *Die Spaziergänge* by Karl Gottlob Schelle (López Silvestre 2013, 165-182).

10. For the architect Francesco Careri, member of the *Stalker urban art workshop*, "walking has always generated architecture and landscape" (Careri 2004, 13), and "It's walking, too, which makes the internal frontiers of the city evident; which, by identifying it, reveals the *zone*" (Careri 2004, 15).

11. In a certain way, de Certeau's comparison between walking and speaking reminds me of Barthes' analysis of Ignatius of Loyola's *Ejercicios Espirituales* (Barthes 1997, 51-92).

Fig. 2

Baroque viewpoints

Furthermore, in Michel de Certeau's text the act of looking has a petrifying quality which connects with that of the camera capturing the decisive moment; it places a period or full stop in the walking that instantly transforms the city: "Its agitation is momentarily arrested by vision. The gigantic mass is immobilized before the eyes.", he says (Certeau 1988, 91). That superior, half mystical-half voyeuristic eye, which in the Jesuit's text looked down from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center (Certeau 1988, 91-92), operates not very differently from the one that Baroque urbanism and architecture generate through framing and surprising effects.

The surrounding streets of Santiago's Jesuit church give the walker a wide range of perspectives. The slightly crosswise façade appears gradually after crossing the only remaining city gate, just before the old marketplace; and its only tower is suddenly revealed around the corner of a house when arriving from a frontal narrow street[12] [Fig. 2]. In Ourense, since the current square in front of it was not opened until the 20th century, the façade was originally suffocated by the narrow street to which it is oriented, so its concavity was probably thought as an attraction tool. The whole façade, slightly crosswise like that of Santiago, shows up unexpectedly when coming

12. In fact, other authors have dealt with Santiago's Baroque viewpoints before (Martín González 1964).

from the city's main square and arises overwhelmingly when looking up closely and frontally [Fig. 3].

The Baroque eye, half mystical-half voyeuristic just like de Certeau's, operates upon the reality of the building making it become a kind of "still frame", a static image, from very specific viewpoints.

Fig. 3

White wall/black hole

But actually it is not a mere static image. The façades of these churches are a brand, a face, the presentation card of the college to the city, its particular "white wall" in Deleuze and Guattari's words (Ballantyne 2007, 64-79). Their orientation, dimensions, configuration and iconographic elements must therefore have been as wisely chosen as the location of the whole college[13].

In regard to the orientation, in both Santiago's and Coruña's cases a flow of people would pass by or clearly see the façades in their way to the marketplace. Similarly, in Pontevedra the façade is oriented onto the street that leads into the wall gate near Santa Clara's convent. And in Ourense the proximity of the cathedral surely determined the Jesuit church to be facing it, despite merely having an alley to connect both temples. In fact,

13. As Luce Giard emphasises, "Among the authorities there was a clear awareness of the importance of colleges to establish the public image of the Society of Jesus." (Giard 2008, 5).

the canonical orientation towards the east was hardly followed in all these examples. In Ourense and Coruña the church is orientated to the west, in Pontevedra to the north, and Santiago's building follows the normative orientation, probably because that was also the most suitable one for the Jesuits' purposes.

In their quest for representativeness –or "propaganda", in Evonne Levy's words (Levy 2004)–, the Society also managed to ensure a sort of alluring façade in every place of the world by cleverly combining Jesuit and local traits. Pontevedra's façade, for instance, was designed after the prestigious model of the *Gesù* –until then scarcely used in the region– but with two typical Galician bell towers [Fig. 4]. Santiago's and especially Ourense's churches present strong Italian reminiscences because of their respectively rectangular and curved fronts, which make them distinctive. And even Coruña's façade, closer to Galician architectural trends, seems to show a sort of structural connection with the Roman *Gesù*.

Finally, the presence of Jesuit emblems, its patrons' coats of arms and a few places for sculptures of Jesuit or titular saints complete a representativeness which is paradigmatic of the *cultus externus* promoted by the Counter Reformation in opposition to Protestant ideas (Repishti and Schofield 2004, 125-249). A carefully planned and captivating white wall that the Society strove to show to as many people as possible. That, no doubt, was the key of its success. The "still frame" of the white wall at which the inhabitants of the city stared when their restless everyday walking reached a period or full stop was, and is still, a powerful weapon.

Fig. 4

Toponymy as memory

But the meaning of such a powerful weapon can change in a moment, and after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 a *damnatio memoriae* process was carried out by removing or replacing all of the Jesuit emblems and sculptures from their façades.

For de Certeau, walking "is attracted and repelled by nominations whose meaning is not clear", because "proper names carve out pockets of hidden and familiar meanings." In other words, toponymy affects itineraries by giving them a meaning that –generally according to a historical background– works as the "impetus of movements" (Certeau 1988, 103-104). Thus, these names have the power to make a place *believable* –and therefore habitable– by associating it to a word, *memorable* by recalling its past, and *primitive* by creating a sort of nowhere due to its conflict with today's function of the place (Certeau 1988, 105). "The places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences" (Certeau 1988, 108) which toponymy barely evokes.

As many others, some Galician Jesuit buildings have left an evident trace in their surrounding toponymy. Thus, in Santiago an alley called "Tránsito dos Gramáticos" (Grammarians' Passage) leads into the former Jesuit complex, and several streets surrounding Pontevedra's college are named after two of its Jesuit inhabitants and one of its most outstanding students. However, the Society's expulsion in 1767 changed the names of many nearby streets and squares along with the functions of the former Jesuit colleges. In Santiago there is a "University" street and square; in Ourense, the narrow street to which the façade of the church is oriented was renamed "del Instituto" (Secondary School Street) in the 19th century because of the use of the building; and in Coruña, one of the nearest streets is nowadays called "San Agustín" (Saint Augustine), the order to which the building was given after the Jesuits' departure. Sadly enough, however, the original names and functions of these streets and buildings, as well as the meaning behind the Jesuit related names are today unreadable for most *Wandersmänner*.

As father Lucas states, "Jesuits understood the urban equation." (Lucas 1997, 163), but in de Certeau's words "Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state" (Certeau 1988, 108).

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