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**ARTEFACTOS.
ARTISTIC PRACTICES FOR
RETHINKING EMANCIPATION IN
THE GLOBAL CITY***

Due to the reality deficit that has led to the establishment of global cities,¹ and the consequent crisis of emancipation and subjectivity in the contemporary citizen,² innovative forms of urban movements are currently being developed. These intervene from the point of view of artistic practice within the public space through a series of tactical antagonist devices, revealing the work of the 'craftsmen', a new type of artist.³

Social creativity as a source and application of critical thinking has been influential for the construction of collective actions, for the formation of alternative methodologies, and even for the identity of new social movements

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¹ As Saskia Sassen indicates, the development of the Delocalized Capitalism has brought the settlement of a new model of city: The Global City. The Global City does not correspond with the singularity of his territory, with the memory and with the culture of his citizens. The Global City is that Marc Augé would be called a *non-place*. The Global City does not form a part of the network of a national power, but it is constituted as pedestal of the big financial companies. These financial companies manage his global dominion across a network of economic interests, across a few processes of homogenization, which develop using biopolitics strategies. Sassen, Saskia (1991). *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. New York: Princeton University Press.

² Baudrillard, Jean (1981). *Simulacres et Simulation*. Paris: Galilée.

³ Sennet, Richard (2008). *The Craftsman*. London: Yale University Press.

which are reflected by the many social groups that champion social art as their leitmotif. The potential of art lies in its ability to overcome the internal limits that power implements for the social control of subjects and the social production of hegemonic reality and ideal spaces. While the *global city* is presented as an ideal social and territorial representation for the conditions of hegemonic globalization, social transformation 'artefactos' are constituted as antagonist artistic tactics that transgress these limits through different responses that contradict the logic of the monument, urban design, and the spectacle: on the one hand what Giovanni La Varra would define as the *post-it city*,⁴ mobile devices that are able to generate a form of informal urbanism (*Recetas urbanas*, Santiago Cirugeda, 2008-2012); on the other contra-mapping practices aimed to make visible what has been negated in the city map as tools provided to the public for their self-representation (creative archives, para-documentary practices, web platforms), allowing an empowerment of society (*Megafone*, Antoni Abad, 2003-2012); as well as finding alternative spaces, heterotopias of the city⁵ help create other models of living (*Guía de descampados de la Ría de Bilbao*, Almarcegui Lara, 2008). In this sense, public space is postulated as the real scenario where these critical artistic processes take place, allowing the construction of a reflexive, dialogical and dialectical text which stimulates thinking about, and creating, another city. Small narratives and micro-politics lead to the emergence of micro-utopias to maintain a new subaltern cosmopolitanism in the plural possibility of alternatives. Artistic practices are more than isolated subjective expressions, they are frames of reference which converse with other practices, and in their critical eagerness are key actions for the social emancipation of the postmodern city.

Michel Foucault has reflected on the mechanisms of biopolitics through two key concepts: the *panopticon* and the *closure systems*. As a prisoner in a prison, a patient in a hospital or a child in a school, the contemporary citizen is immersed in a panoptic structure, where you cannot see, but you are seen, where you are deprived of your imagination to be prepared for production and where your political autonomy is relegated to the decision of an articulated system of

⁴ La Varra, Giovanni (2001). "POST IT CITY: The Other European Public Spaces". In *Mutations*. Barcelona: Actar.

⁵ Foucault, Michel (1984). « Des espaces autres ». *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, n°5, October, 46-49.

representation. If we remember the structure of the architectural typology of the panopticon, we can easily imagine how this representational system works by placing the financial power in the central control tower, from which it watches each of the representative institutions: the Media, as selection mechanism of the news; History, as instrument for the narrowing of memory; the Democratic System, as a form of government to which the political autonomy of individuals is delegated; Language, through which communication is encrypted; Science, as a hegemonic form of truth; and the Arts, as representation of a collective subjectivity.

The difficulty of the citizen to choose and imagine determines the consolidation of the citizen as a controlled subject, alienated, and disciplined, a spectator of his own life, as denounced by Guy Debord in *Société du Spectacle*. As spectators of the global financial circus, the citizens of the global city do not have full awareness of the reality in which they live; the contemporary citizen has no reality. The reality deficit, which had been anticipated by Walter Benjamin since the beginning of the century, makes the city a great simulation, a simulation as Jean Baudrillard understands it, where there is no citizen's experience. That impossibility of experience translates into an inability to imagine and, therefore, a lack of expectations to build one future; this is required to make emancipatory and critical judgments. The possibility is silenced, as is any form of dissidence.

What are we talking about when we talk about art as an instrument for emancipation in the public space? Obviously, we are not talking about all of contemporary art, we are talking about certain artistic practices from the second half of the twentieth century that began to break with the tradition of modern art, originating a new artistic paradigm. In the fifty years of the last century, there were two key publications in this regard: first, the *Guide Psicogéographie* by Guy Debord, which collected the work developed by the Situationists, and *La Poétique de l'espace*, by Gaston Bachelard. Both contributions reclaim the need to relive the city under the logic of experience and announce an art than it is capable of restoring autonomy to citizens. In the seventies, the confluence of the French post-structuralist theories, and the work of post-minimalist artists around the *October* journal, brought on a change in the art paradigm. Widely debated by theorists such as Craig Owens, Hal Foster or Rosalind Krauss, this paradigm shift

prompted a new kind of art. A new kind of art which develops research methods and processes under a critical and political form. A new kind of art which rejects the logic of the monument, the spectacle and consumption in artistic production. As Rosalind Krauss developed in her article *The Sculpture in the Expanded Field* (1979), these new artistic processes reject conventional art formats in favor of extended post-disciplinarity in space. This inclination for spatial practice leads to a progressive strengthening of the public subject. This explains the growing interest in contemporary art for the public space.

Within the wide range of artistic practices in the public space that are working under the logic of this new paradigm in art, we can identify three different processes: exploration and research, visualization, and intervention. The artworks in this line are *artefactos*, devices for reality production than impulse the political imagination of the citizens. So, the art projects that explore and research the public space try to find alternative lifestyles to the official ones, try to discover a peripheral reality and heterogeneous subjectivities. For these, various methodologies are used, as in the case of mapping. One tactic of exploration in the mapping practice is the drift. The drift was developed by the Situationists to observe the city under psychogeographical viewpoint. Several contemporary artists have developed works that are based on this idea, and so multiply the critical points of view of public space. This is the case of the work of Richard Long, Hamish Fulton or, as we see in this presentation, the numerous projects that the collective Rotor has developed in Barcelona.

Furthermore, the way to view the city from a contemporary art stance is by obviating the traditional geo-scientific representational categories, avoiding a homogenizing vision of the territory and returning the place to its particularity. Within this perspective we find a proliferation of new documentarisms as video, photography and image archives. These works could be described as *para-documentary practices*, given their deliberate break from the institutional point of view in the documentary. This is the case of artists like Francesco Jodice, Ursula Biemann, Armin Linke, Bruno Serralogue or Jordi Colomer. Another proposal to display reality through contemporary art is to provide mechanisms for self-representation. In this work we can include, the Antoni Abad's *Megafone* project, that has been developing since 2003. In this work, Antoni Abad provided

instruments for self-representational groups at risk of social exclusion, as in the case of taxi drivers in Mexico, people with reduced mobility in Barcelona or sex workers in Madrid. These materials constitute other cartographies, new cartographies of subjectivity that are in conflict with the homogeneous and consensual impact of globalization.

Finally, interventional processes that contemporary art developed in public spaces constitute what Giovanni La Varra calls the *post-it city*, a series of devices that contain the dynamics of the collective life of the city outside the conventional channels, everyday life machines that work as a form of informal urbanism versus the planning strategies of the Global City. Within this category, we include the work of reactivation spaces that have remained outside the urban design of the city, such as wastelands, which the artist Almarcegui Lara has been working on in cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Lund, Bilbao or Sao Paulo. In this sense we can also consider the *Urban Recipes* of architect Santiago Cirugeda as forms of political intervention of space, and the workshops organized by the group *All x the Praxis*, which offers citizen handmade dissident-making mobile devices, a do-it-yourself through *artefactos*, with which to be able to reappropriate the public space. Performances and actions in the public space can be considered a post-it city too, because while they provide the dynamic of the everyday life of the city, they also allow citizens to be empowered by identifying and promoting the reappropriation of public space through the body. These artworks may be called *artivism*, a form of art that incorporates the aesthetic, social criticism, activism and dissidence. In relation to these, we could include the Nuria Güell's project, *Epistolary. Humanitarian Aid*, which gives the opportunity to young Cubans to migrate to Spain by a love game that ends in marriage; the critical interventions by Anibal Parada in the Rambla de Barcelona; the occupations in The *Mercadona* chain supermarkets as a result of the investigation conducted by Rogelio López Cuenca; or the lived space reappropriation by the Turkish minority in Copenhagen through sound devices distributed by Jens Hanning around the city. These actions have also contaminated social movements that have been gradually integrating through these forms of protest. Since the first World Summit on the Environment meeting in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, many antagonist actions incorporating artistic sense have appeared in response to capitalist globalization.

As stated above, certain forms of art share the aim of generating new realities that allow citizen empowerment and social tactics for solving the reality deficit in the global city, and for rethinking emancipation today. The city is a physical and political space that must be conquered by the citizens, and this must be done by wielding an emancipatory capacity through imagination. The artistic practices that we have presented allow for that form of political imagination.

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