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and new artistic strategies. Idealizing and realizing artistic-oriented projects that intervene in relations between bodies and cities is her main concern since the mid-nineties; where she preferably works in transdisciplinary groups, as in “Lisbon Capital of Nothing: create, debate and intervene in public space, Marvila 2001”. Daniela currently runs the project “Baustelle M10 > gallery for contemporary experiments” within a collective of artists and students in Weimar.

SENSUAL IS POLITICAL

In this paper I wish to put at stake the contemporary compulsive obsession with appearance and therewith politicize the discussion of sense and sensuality. The sensual will be understood as what is appealing to the senses and what is experienced by the senses. On one hand it will be seen as what seduces and creates desire, and on the other hand, as a sensory experience that sensitizes the body, questioning the visual hypertrophy of postmodern society.

The dictatorship of iconic images (star-system architecture, celebrities, or cities' marketing and branding) commands the spectacularization of public spaces. It not only directs peoples' desires, but also shapes them, creating standardized life-styles for the benefit of capitalist power. Marketing strategies tantalize urban life, bombarding it with sexy places and sexy people, where the lived-ordinary-bodies end up being commodified, excluded and/or anesthetized. Citizens are rendered into passive audiences, "product-bodies"¹ that happily promenade in city-sceneries. Countering these "modern technologies for desensitizing the human body"³, in the second part of this paper we will look at sensorial and participatory experiences as an alternative to sensitize and empower people and how these can generate awareness of the roles our gestures, attitudes and life choices play in the construction of the city.

1 She argues that the increasing pace of individualism and consumerism is reflected by fashion and life-style industries. These industries are constantly "emitting" new values and identities, embodied in the commodities that finally shape bodies into products.

2 Torres Ribeiro, Ana Clara: "Corpo e imagem: alguns enredamentos urbanos." In: Torres Ribeiro, A.C. and Bernstein Jacques, P.: *Resistências em espaços opacos. Caderno PPG-AU*. Ano 5 – número especial. Universidade Federal da Bahia/CAPES, 2007. pp. 105–117.

3 Sennett, Richard: *Flesh and Stone: the body and the city in western civilization*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1996.

The Abuse of Seduction: Marketing Strategies to Transform Cities Into Sceneries and Bodies Into Products

First of all, it has to be underlined that sensuality is primarily cultural. Sensory perception is not only cognitive, nor merely a physical sensation shaped by personal subjectivities. The tendencies and the intensities of selective perception, i.e. what is perceived and how it is perceived are also variable according to the values and practices of different cultures and societies. “Every domain of sensory experience is also an arena for structuring social roles and interactions. We learn social divisions, distinctions of gender, class and race through our senses. Sensual relations are also social relations”⁴. His critique on Marx builds on the fact that he “never challenged the sensory status quo, whereas without sensory transformation there can be no social transformation. (...) By analyzing commodities exclusively in terms of their use- and exchange-value, Marx elided what could be called their sign-value—namely the sensuous contrasts that set one commodity off from another and give expression to cultural categories as well as express differences in social location”⁵.

However it seems that Empire has already understood what Marx didn’t predict: “postmodernist thinking—with its emphasis on concepts such as difference and multiplicity, its celebration of fetishism and simulacra, its continual fascination with the new and with fashion—is an excellent description of the ideal capitalist schemes of commodity consumption and thus provides an opportunity to perfect marketing strategies. (...) Postmodern marketing recognizes the difference of each commodity and each segment of the population, fashioning its strategies accordingly. Every difference is an opportunity.”⁶ Empire has not only captured symbolic value and cultural differences, but it has already developed the most variable set of marketing strategies to commodify perceptions and desires everywhere: in the city and in the body. In the fight of places and concentration of wealth, city marketing campaigns sell images and life-styles in a highly competitive international setting. “City marketing” and “revitalization strategies”—done with celebrities and iconic architecture—consolidate cities’ corporate identities to guarantee their position in the new geopolitics of international networks. To be multi-cultural is a trend and every metropolis wants to be sexier than the other.

4 Howes, David: *Sensual Relations Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory*, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2006, p. 1.

5 Ibid., p. 204.

6 Hardt, Michael, Negri, Antonio: *Empire*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000, p. 270.

The big stars have their set of slogans, T-shirts and other wearable souvenirs, attracting tourists and engaged citizens who madly drive through gift-shops and become the cities free-mobile-propaganda tools.

After public demonstrations of feelings as in the old and well known “I love NY”, now you should not only love and dress your city, but also embody it. “I Amsterdam” or “Be Berlin” are examples of cities’ campaigns that are investing hard on capturing people as if in a fan club, so that they can better advertise the diversity and of their engaged citizens. Directing people’s desires through fashion definitely makes citizens and tourists happy and money go round. These citizens and tourists—seduced by the on-going spectacularization of the cities and of themselves—must belong to certain social classes who have a minimum economic right to pursue the pleasures offered by the marketing campaigns. Cities need, in Milton Santos words, the “more-than-perfect-consumers”⁷. Please note that we will exclude of this analysis the people who are already excluded from the system, a system which does not allow access to many, but which equally bombs them with the same or even higher amounts of symbolic violence. The “more-than-perfect-consumers” are constantly seduced to do a certain amount of tourism per year, to consume fashionable objects, as much as fashionable clothes and fashionable architecture, according to the more or less privilege position they have to access credit. Pleasure is dislocated to the actual action of buying: “I buy, therefore I am”. The body is instrumentalized, becoming a product itself: wellness, beauty and fashion are the main industries able to decompose the product-body in images created through technological and marketing techniques. The anesthetized body loses all its dimensions, its subjectivities are compacted, and it ends up flattened in a car-window or in a home-theater screen. The product-body itself becomes a sexy object: it is rendered into a seductive form to be offered as an image, to be an image.

As Sennett argues, the body that Torres Ribeiro defines as a product-body, is historically constructed through technologies of desensitization that actually precede capitalism. In “Flesh and Stone” he analyses the relations of bodies and cities in Western civilization, pointing out that throughout the trajectory of systems of social control, pain and fear, we have arrived at a historical moment “where order means lack of contact”, and the “modern technologies for desensitizing the body” lead us to passivity. Even when conducted through over-stimulation of media sensationalism, it accomplishes to anesthetize us. Passivity and anesthesia are induced from all sides: the technologies of information, the use of mass-spectacles, wild consumerism, and also contemporary design. “Design turned to the

7 Torres Ribeiro, Ana Clara: *Corpo e imagem: alguns enredamentos urbanos*, p. 108.

shaping of pleasure, in the form of comfort, originally to compensate for fatigue, to lighten the burden of work. But these powers of design, which rested the body, came as well to lighten its sensory weight, suspending the body in an even more passive relation to its environment. The trajectory of designed pleasure led the human body to an ever more solitary rest.”⁸

Which are the flight-lines that can allow the product-body to become a sensing-body? How can people be capacitated to rescue consciousness of their roles as citizens, as active producers—and not only products—of their societies and of their cities? This is a question that is difficult to answer; flight-lines may be captured as they are produced. But we shall give it a try.

Emergency Exits

Flight-lines should be ephemeral, transitional, situational. Preferably contagious, viral: with micropolitical contaminations, mentalities also change. It is not casually that Lefebvre, Debord and the Situationists have been revisited in recent years. “The Right to the City”, “The Society of Spectacle” and the idea of “Unitarian Urbanism” are now the order of the day. The idea of “transient micro-ambiences” that transform the city in a site for appropriation and play is an alternative to spectacularization. The creation of unusual situations and changeable atmospheres that rupture with the logic of a given urban setting can be stimulation for questioning sedative consumption of life-styles and embalmed city sceneries.

Blurring the frontiers between political and poetical, alternative urban practices—such as the *dérive* (purposeless but sensorial walks in the city), or *détournement* (re-appropriation or re-contextualization of a given object/space) interfere in the relations between body and environment, opening up spaces for sensible experiences. They can point out exits: sensorial awareness, moments of liberation, and intensities in the pursuit of pleasure in everyday life. Shifting from small gestures to globally articulated activist campaigns, these practices have the potential to foster social change. Through a variety of labels—such as public art, socially-engaged practices, direct democracy processes, connective and relational aesthetics, guerilla art, everyday, sensorial, instant and do-it-yourself urbanism—new strategies of re-enabling active participation within urban life, as well as more sensitive modes of being are spreading out of the last decade. Artists, performers, architects, geographers, as well as social scientists, ecologists, psychologists and philosophers have deliberately blown the frontiers of classical disciplines and work in playful and ephemeral mixed practices. These practices tend

⁸ See note 3, p. 375.

to be highly specific, reacting to the given cultural, social, economical and political contexts. They try to disassemble systems of perception, thought and action, deconstruct forms of power. Providing tools for active participation they enable to react to the tantalizing seductions of capitalist consumption, and contribute to a more democratic construction of the city.

Empowering the Body: Sensitizing Experiences

These actions interfere in the micropolitical level, by offering sensible experiences they can challenge established or anesthetized patterns of perception. They can create a rupture in the flattening process engendered by the hegemony of the spectacle, or allow a consciousness to emerge that is liberating in itself. A sensorial experience can affect participators' sensorium. I mean affect in Deleuze and Guattari's sense,⁹ i.e. not of a personal feeling, but an alteration of the affected body's capacity to act, either potentializing or diminishing it. Either in the passive, product-bodies, or in the active and sensing-bodies, the intensity of affection is central. Change is in affection, and in intensity.

The intensity of a "sensorial-corporal participation" can lead participators to become conscious of their own bodies, their everyday gestures and attitudes. I would like to call attention to the word "participator"- instead of participant, as introduced by Hélio Oiticica in his artistic writing of the late sixties. This term can be interpreted in direct relation to the word "spectator"—the participator is part of the artwork as much as the spectator is part of the spectacle. To be the "participator" implies an action—the participant as an actor, and not merely as audience or passive member of a group. (...) The artist position himself as an "instigator for creation", generating a "process (that) completes itself through the dynamic participation of the 'spectator', now considered as 'participator'."¹⁰

To apply this terminology further, I would now like to discuss a particular experiment done in this field. It took place in Lisbon, Portugal, between the years of 2003 and 2005, in a collaborative and complex process that involved various institutions and groups of society. It was a participatory project that directly altered/restricted participants' senses, evolving to a process of mapping the found barriers in public space. It culminated in the implementation of a walking bus line, where the found barriers were removed by the City Hall.

9 Cf.: Deleuze, Giles and Guattari, Felix: *A thousand Plateaux: capitalism and schizophrenia*. London: Continuum, 2004.

10 Dervon, Chris, Figueiredo, Luciano, Sentis, Catherine (org.): *Hélio Oiticica*. Rio de Janeiro: Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, 1996, p. 100.

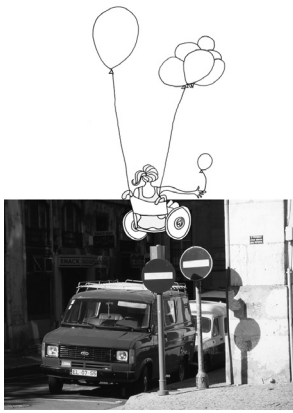


fig1: photomontages from “A book for ballerinas, tightrope walkers, trapezists and all the children.”, distributed to workshop participants. The obstacles were addressed as generated by public administration and individual behaviour.

Opposite page:
fig 2: inclusive design workshop

Metropolitan Lisbon, 2003-5

“Em trânsito: mobility and urban life” was a transdisciplinary festival initiated by a team of artists and architects in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut and the Monumental Art Gallery.¹¹ To create a platform of action and question towards the mobility and accessibility problems of Lisbon, the team worked in collaboration with, geographers, designers, engineers, sociologists, musicians, school children and teachers, university students, urban planners from the city hall, transport operators, politicians. The program consisted of various activities: documentation centers, artistic interventions, debates, round tables, games, workshops, concerts and parties. This variety aimed to bring a wide range of guests together: crossing the publics was a key strategy. The intention was to allow people not only to acknowledge each other, but also to become aware of their different choices and daily roles as citizens.

For the discussion in this paper, I will highlight three workshops: “Inclusive design” (1), “The yellow mark”(2) and “Pedibus”(3). They were intended to make school children and teenagers sensitive to the problematic of traffic in Lisbon by critically observing certain structures and behaviors in the city and therefore questioning established habits. Participators were invited to: (1) Experience the problems of mobility and accessibility in Lisbon’s metropolitan region; (2) Mark and map the problems in an explored area; (3) Create a pilot-project (as one possible solution to one of the acknowledged problems). We first invited them to experience the city as people with mobility constraints, which was done with the support of the Association for the Blind and Weak-sighted and the National Cooperative for the Aid of Disabled People. Having their eyes covered, their ears blocked, or having to circulate in a wheelchair, participators had the chance to discover new levels of sensory urban experiences. Addressing the problematic

11 Cf.: Brasil, Daniela and Galvão Lucas, Marta (eds.): *Em trânsito: mobilidade e vida urbana*. Lisbon: Goethe-Institut Lissabon, 2005.



of individual behaviors and city administration, we pointed out the concepts of “physical, communicative and cultural barriers”. Using the technical information given by the workshop monitors and a printed booklet, plus the sensorial experience of the space itself, they were invited to mark the obstacles found (fig. 1).

Within these workshops, some simple questions were asked: how is the city designed, how can it be used, who can use it, which mode of transportation do I use? If I drive my car, how do I drive it, where do I park it? In Lisbon it is still common to find cars parked over all sidewalks, and if they do not find a place on the sidewalk, cars are left on the street, disregarding the tram tracks, with emergency-flashers on. The tram might be blocked, but the owner thinks it is fine—it is just for a few minutes. So he/she disappears quickly—just to pay a bill at the bank or to deliver a package to the aunt on the 3rd floor somewhere. Meanwhile dozens of passengers get stuck in the tram, plus a traffic jam is formed; the street flux is stopped. Half an hour later the driver arrives, excuses himself as if it were nothing and drives away. Parents also tend to drive their children to school and due to the narrow sloppy streets of the city center, this habit normally generates traffic jams during school’s entrance and exit hours. In order to attenuate that, the *Em trânsito* Team invited several institutions and partners to implement a “pedibus”¹² pilot-project in *Escola Básica n°1 da Pena*, the elementary school of the neighborhood that “*em trânsito*” chose as the epicenter of its activities. The participatory-mapping of school-routes that came out of the workshop “yellow-mark” was applied to the area, resulting in an official document, inducing City Hall to remove the physical barriers found in one proposed route. They also agreed to produce traffic signage that was designed after the children’s mind maps and drawings. These signs were installed to mark the “bus stops” throughout the neighborhood (fig 2–4).

¹² Pedibus is a walking bus, first invented in Australia in 1992, which has been disseminated worldwide as an environment-friendly activity, fostering children’s physical activity and community involvement.



*fig 3: yellow mark
workshop*

Through a collaborative process and political associations a pedestrian bus line was implemented in 2005. School monitors became “bus walkers”: they picked-up children at the designated “Pedibus-stops” and walked them to school. This project wanted to foster the choice of walking, not driving, of going to school together, not one parent driving one child. But within an individualistic society, where the transport system is not yet well integrated and riding a bike is seen as a sport activity for the weekends, a proposal like “walking bus” is not so easy to initiate. It requires a change in mentalities, and that requires a change in sensual perception. As we have discussed before, to interfere in patterns of perception that are constructed culturally and socially throughout history is not an easy task. However, if those children were affected by those experiences, their patterns of perception and action will become another. Inviting them to experiment with the territory differently—where invisible barriers become visible, mapped, and changed—new cities might be created in their heads. By being “participants”, acknowledging actual mobility and accessibility problems through a shift in sensual experience, a step towards active citizenship is made. Not only, by involving various sectors of society (i.e. the primary school, the City Hall, the Traffic and Planning departments, the Association for the Blind, National Cooperative for the Aid of Disabled People, the Portuguese Road Prevention Foundation and the Center of Urban and Regional Systems), the political range of the project is expanded. The project becomes a space of agency; collaborations spread the initiative in micro and macro-political levels. “Activist and artistic actions have in common the fact of constituting two manners of confronting the tensions of social life at the points where its dynamics of transformation are blocked. Both aim at the liberation of life’s mobility, which makes them essential activities for the health of a society – that is to say, the affirmation of its inventive potential for change, when it becomes necessary”¹³.

13 Rolnik, Suely: “The Body’s Contagious Memory: Lygia Clark’s Return to the Museum.” In: *Extradisciplinaire, Transversal* / EIPCP multilingual webjournal: 05/2007. <<http://www.eipcp.org>>

fig 4: pedibus route and sign



The experiments of “Em Trânsito” were published in a catalogue that reached other urban-planners of the City Hall. Parallel, international policies were increasing their support for sustainable mobility practices. In 2007, Lisbon City Hall implemented the Pedibus in another two neighborhoods, co-financed by European funds. In the City Hall records, only these three attempts were implemented in Lisbon, but they were discontinued, due to the lack of engagement from parents and teachers. The infrastructure of traffic signs and lowered pavements remain, but the practice lost its power after the initiators stopped following the initiative. The discontinuity of the project triggers further questions. In any case impulses were given, and a process of bringing people and institutions together was initiated. The debates, engagements and experiences accomplished there might be part of the slow process of constructing new mentalities.

It is not expected that the deeply rooted acceptance for things as they are, parallel to the individualist “smartness” of Portuguese society—cultivated throughout the years of dictatorship and not yet properly dissolved by democracy¹⁴—will all of the sudden change. But a short flight out of the usual may bring new perspectives; not only to the ones primarily involved in the experience, but also to the ones around it. If these school children were affected by the workshops described here, for instance of experiencing the city in a wheelchair or blindfolded, they might become less tolerant towards negligent car parking on the sidewalk. If they were affected by the experience, their bodies will gain potential to act and to question. If city-campaigns instigate citizens to embody their cities through mediatic approaches, hopefully these projects might sensitize them to act in an active construction of citizenship. Processes of people’s empowerment are slow and encompass a complex constellation of factors. However, the alteration of patterns of behavior requires an alteration of the sensual patterns of perception. Particularly in Portugal, to perceive the public space as a common and collective

net/transversal/0507/rolnik/en> (accessed December 2009).

14 Gil, José: *Portugal, hoje. O medo de existir*. Lisboa: Relógio d’água editores, 2004.

space, moreover as a space that is constructed by each one of us in the everyday - was, and still is, a challenge.

The aim of these workshops was to deconstruct rooted habits and therefore to contest existing sociopolitical structures. By inviting people to become active participators, the project hoped to foster a type of consciousness that is learned not only by the mind but also by the body. Through sensual experience, what is experienced by the senses remains in the body. Body memory learns and incorporates new gestures and attitudes. And perhaps other modes of perceiving and being in the world can emerge.