

Off Street / interview with PSJM

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1. We are not trying to create an urban art project but instead to work with the specificities of the Area and explore the space between the gallery and the 'Street' as an urban cartography. Have you worked in this way before, how does the urban space affect your work?

We always work with urban space, regarding it as public space that includes mass media too, such as advertising, TV, Internet and the like. Actually our work is inspired by socio-commercial behaviors which wholly belong to society. We are focused on the industrialised cartography, in the sense that we play with the signs that mark the city and produce meaning. For us urban cartography is a point of departure and a destination at the same time. The public realm wholly affects our work.

2. Would you describe your practice as bringing together complementary styles into a no man's land between performance, street, art, installation, public art, social art, intervention...?

Absolutely. Our practice inhabits these boundaries in order to blur the limit between art and reality. We usually make simulacra at the edge of art,

aiming to provoke a reflection on brand politics, art markets, the aesthetics of socioeconomics. Our simulacra are real but they are also fictional, allowing us to explore two fields simultaneously. With the transposition of codes and frames from separate realms we are able to find paths for poetry.

3. Working in the streets and urban surroundings implies working with a live entity. In this kind of project is the street more like a sort of tool or purely a context?

For us the context always reveals a tool with which to construct meanings. Indeed this tradition was started when Duchamp's ready-made appeared on stage. We thrive on the person-to-person, person-to-thing or thing-to-person relationship, in the street outcomes are unforeseeable, non-linear, rizomatic. The *spatial practice*, suggested by Lefebvre, is made through symmetries and asymmetries, like the spider production of webs. Human bodies and social bodies secrete paths, places, nodes and boundaries, yielding space while they take over it. This theory sees the city not like a *text* but like a *texture*. Although it is a valuable point of view, we should rather rethink the city like a place in which sings and lives, semiotic and immanence, coexist.

4. Rethinking the street as a magical scenario, looking for the unexpected, the uncanny in the everyday, that tangential outlook; how do you find that

magical possibility in the street, does the artist use a poetic, political or social perspective?

We prefer 'reason' rather than 'magic', though we are really interested in unplanned events and systematic paradoxes. Max Weber regarded the "disenchantment of the world" as an important distinguishing aspect of Western culture, the freedom from magic. This process begins with the rise of the great religions and finds its fulfillment in the modernization. Now, in the postmodern culture, brands can be rendered as myths, they work not through reasons but emotions. To deconstruct the magical realm, in order to reach a critical rationalism, is not to pursue a more standardized world but to think freely. Instincts are definitely dangerous. Adorno, who was a fervent critic with the reason of the Enlightenment, noted too that the nazi communication worked more through the unconscious rather than consciousness. Philosophies like vitalism or irrationalism could be a useful counterpart of 'instrumental reason' but, in fact, currently these are modes exploited by late capitalism.

5. Urban space as a canvas also implies a certain relationship to materials. No rules, a street bricolage or do you set strict limits to define the use of materials within your work?

The material is the relationship between the artwork and the audience, between the citizens and the institution, between the people and the social meanings of the things. Here the art produce a relationship, to use the term coined by Craig Saper, a *sociopoetic* work of art. We could

say that the material here is an immaterial one. This tendency in contemporary art matches well the new satge of commodities. Using Inna Blom words: “Just as the standard interpretation of the commodity informational or immaterial economy would seem to be affects, feelings, sensitivities, and communications—in short, social relations—the artwork or art event could equally be understood as a social space rather than an object—a producer of social relations.” The production of an artwork as relationship needs a corporate structure where the tasks are separated and most of the raw stuff is information, dialogue, communication. In PSJM: the management-marketing and the creativity-theory duties are distributed among Cynthia and Pablo. The production work is shared. All decisions and statements are taken in consensus. The PSJM brand is a company based on empathy.

6. In an area with such social and cultural specificities. I would like you to interact as archeologists, like reactivating agents of the energy of a past that has been reinterpreted very organically. In what sense is interaction with the inhabitants of an area important with your work?

In 'Citizen Identity' the interaction with the inhabitants is essential. They are the main character in this movie. People is seriously considered in all our work, it is important for us that our artwoks are democratic. We strive to obtain two reading levels, one for the individuals unfamiliar with art codes and one for those immersed in the art world. We solve the first through exploriting the language tropes of the global culture industry, and the second through our contribution to the currently aesthetic debate. Our

projects become alive when they begin to interact with the audience. The reactions of the people, the media and the social body form the artwork's biography.

7. How do you think a project like this can affect the people and its surroundings?

Creating experiences, working to achieve the people realize that they are the main part of the culture, letting them to participate in the event, not as passive audience but as users of a device made for/by them.

8. In what sense has art a social power?

The artworld has limited audiences, therefore critical activist are an ant in front of the ideology spread by mass media. But there are gaps, narrow ways to act. An example: our project 'Corporate Armies' was based on an article we read in 'The Guardian', in July 2007. Russia's parliament voted to allow the country's biggest energy monopolies, Gazprom and the state oil pipeline company Transneft, to employ and arm private security units in order to 'protect themselves from terrorist attack.' Russia's interior ministry said they would supply Gazprom with guns from its own armoury. This was the starting point of 'Corporate Armies', a project of 'political fiction' in which we pushed to the extreme the possible sequels of the Russian proposal. Of course, our project has exclusively shown in art spaces, like ARCO'09 Madrid where thousands watched the video, but, it was mediaworthy, reviews picked up our work and published it as news.

Otherwise only the lefty 'The Guardian' have exposed this issue.

9. We are trying to remap the aesthetics of the social. How is it possible to remap any aesthetic today and how would you introduce it within the social realm?

Our work is about the individual's identity in consumerist, informational, semiotic society. The new 'generic city', as Koolhaas likes to call it, is a zone of flux and flow, no-identity areas which grow between the contradiction of planned urbanism and randomness. As Scoth Lash has pointed out, the urban space is a mess, a chaos that can be only organized by the commercial signs, the brands. The brands mark these territories imposing their semiotic rules, making noise and making meaning at the same time. Those are signs imposed from above, but another ubiquitous marks exists all over our streets, and they come from below, those are the graffiti tags, the signatures that remark the territory, adding noise and meaning to the city. The individual stays amidst that branded field, receiving signals from all sides, trying to built an identity by themselves. With the 'Citizen Identity' project we want to throw some light on this situation by acknowledging the primal individual's brand, his/her signature. Converting this into a new sign between global culture industry and global subculture expressions.

10. How do you feel about the transposition of making art on the streets and reconstructing it in the gallery space?

Art that mixes itself with reality, with life, is subjected to a structural contradiction hardly to solve. That is the bind of *Dissolution-distinction*. These facets entail two stages. Firstly the art event needs to dissolve itself into reality to gain effectiveness, afterwards it must be distinguished as art, according with George Dickie's institutional theory of art, to legitimate its value. The challenge here is to make a work equally effective as art and as life experience. The intervention in the public space has the advantage of being direct, opened, at-hand. The art space is closed, but this closeness is an advantage as well because entails a protected space, freedom of speech. We had an experience related to this, our 'Asia Project' in which we presented, in a public space, 4 light boxes with the Puma, Nike, Adidas and Reebok logos sharing the same slogan: Made by slaves for free people. The work was censored by Adidas. We later exhibited this work in galleries, art fairs and museums, and the company did nothing. Public spaces are delimited by signs of a new kind of private proprietorship, not on objects but on immaterial things. Copyright, registered trademark and intellectual property make move more money than material values. We are involved in a symbolic struggle.

11. Should we pursue these kind of interventions as something permanent or is its own ephemeral quality critical in this sense?

We must keep ongoing, it's the only means we have at hand and we should take advantage of it.

12. How do you think the street art scene is evolving?

We think there are two types of street art, the one that is made by contemporary artists inside the circle of art and on the other hand we have street art made by graffiti artists, usually very linked to the hip-hop culture. Often these two currents meet each other, when the artists borrow the subcultural aesthetics, and when the street artists attain conventional gallery support and enter the art market and the artworld institution. We have seen very interesting works in both fields.