

example, would whips be left here and not in the room in which other riding tackle—the stirrup, saddle etc.—would be stored? It is not that we should assume that these whips would have been used for any other purposes, such as self-flagellation or the like. Indeed, we need not assume that items left left on display need to have a direct utilitarian significance. The average house, for example, is full of items that are never used as such, but are kept on display for a purely symbolic reason. Rather we might question whether such items might have a certain suggestive potential to open up particular corporeally embedded ideas. They become objects of the crucifix. They become objects of contemplation that allow us to image the possibility of pain. By extension, they also allow us to imagine the possibility of pleasure.

Could these whips, then, not hold a clue to Barragan's whole Outlook on aesthetics? Are we able to glimpse within the orchid like beauty of Barragan's interiors a certain erotics of pain, but so too an erotic of pleasure? And could these erotics not be understood within religious terms as part of the operations of the ecstatic? Might this give us an insight not only into the nature of Barragan's own aesthetic vision, but also into the nature of the very discipline of architecture? Is Barragan's work, in other words, not a perfect example of the operations of *jouissance*, of a *religio-erotic* aesthetics that lies at the heart of all good architecture?

#### **POLITICS FOR PUBLIC ART?**

**Lorena Wolffer**

To speak of politics concerning art in public spaces "I prefer to use this expression rather than more problematic -public art" – in the current context of Mexico City inevitably involves a whole series of complications. Those of us who have undertaken – or have attempted to undertake—art projects in this city's public sphere know that, in doing so, we are forced to act as negotiators between

political powers, inadequate and limiting laws, and bureaucrats or government officials with conflicting interests. Talking about any project of this nature would be like narrating a long, farcical soap. Opera about useless meetings, arbitrary decision-making and simply baffling scenes, worth turning into a comic strip. I am referring to projects that do not exactly fit the patterns of the recent sculpture show on *Reforma* Boulevard, but are rather pieces that are made based on the connects in which they are shown and that aim to establish a dialogue with this specific space.

It seems appropriate, to mention but one example, to refer to the reasons why Cesar Martinez changed the color of his piece *Piedad entubada* (Piety in a Pipe) – an intervention he did last year on a section of the *Viaducto* expressway as part of the *Agua/Wasser* exhibition. Using blue paint, Martínez wanted to outline what had once been the course of the *La Piedad River*.<sup>41</sup> However, after over a year of negotiations, Mexico City government officials "invited" him to change the color he had proposed to use, arguing that it made reference to a particular political party.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the intervention that can be seen today on the *Viaducto* is aqua green, –a color that instead recalls the one in high schools kindergarten handrails, or public restrooms, –to quote the artist. And this is just one of countless stories of how government officials and/or bylaws have transformed (sometimes willfully, sometimes unintentionally) art projects in public spaces.

Yet, to discuss the role that art plays in public spaces in this city we must first, in my mind, deal with the complex organization of, –our public space *per se*. As has surely been discussed in this symposium's precious panel, our public space consists of a series of territories that are not necessarily clearly set, outlined or regulated, and there are no standards to determine the "quality" of one public space *vis-à-vis* another. Certain city planners and sociologists have

argued that they in fact may never have been public domain, but rather parochial spaces. As Martin Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp state in their book *In search of the New Public Domain*: "... what most people experiences as a pleasant public space is actually often dominated by a relatively homogeneous group. (...) Public domains because one belongs to that specific dominant group."

In Mexico City, considering everything from the unbridled proliferation of outdoor advertising to the building of private homes in public parks or forest preserves, the border between what we call public space and private space is redrawn every day and changes from one moment to another. The historic absence of law regulating outdoors advertising, of the general legal void in this field. Public spaces in Mexico City are highly problematic areas of interactions- almost always defined by business and consumer interest—fulfilling a wide range of private functions, confirming Hajer and Peijndorp's theories. But how could it be otherwise if it is precisely in a city's organization that a society's lingering inequities are clearly represented? If we contemplate public space as a medium through which notions about citizenship and one's belonging to a city can be constructed – as Lynn A. Staehelin and Albert Thompson state in their article "Citizenship, Community and Struggles for Public space" – then shape of Mexico City is nothing but a map of its residents' social, economic and political realities.

Taking this intrinsic into account, i think we should begin by discussing the shape of our city, including an analysis on the possible place of art, to the purpose the necessary politics.

It is a fact that Mexico City has no adequate policies for dealing with art in public spaces and, hence, developing projects in that context can almost be considered a heroic feat impose policies on art, but rather consider it as a fundamental, necessary

factor within the re-conceptualization of public space. I am not proposing to create organizations like the Toronto Public Space Committee – devoted to the "democratizations of public space", mainly by means of ad campaigns – but rather to understand art as a way of interpreting – and not decorating –our city in the context of much broader discussions about the policies that the city needs to implement.

For over a year, Saul Villa – my collaborator in the projects *La belleza esta en la calle* (Beauty is in the Streets) – and I have discussed the problems of public space and the place that contemporary art can or should occupy within it. The countless meetings we have held with government officials, artists, curators, city planners, architects, businesspeople and even members of parliament regarding these issues – and the fact that subject of art in public spaces must necessarily be pursued within the context of discussions about the shaping of our city, In an attempt to delve deeper into the issue, Villa and I organized a colloquium entitled public – that took place at the *Sala de Arte Publico* Siqueiros in July 2002 and that was also coordinated by architect Arturo Ortiz – involving a wide range of professionals, from artist to businesspeople.

Based on my experiences and the many questions that were posed during public am convinced that insisting on introducing policies designed specifically and exclusively for art in public spaces would not only be useless but also requires that we take into account other kinds of apparently basic considerations: what do we mean when we talk about art in public spaces? What kind of art practices are we talking about? Made by which artists? Sanctioned by whom? Addressed at which audiences? If some of the most interesting projects developed in the public arena were presented in that specific space precisely in order to escape the art world's processes of legitimization and to address audiences that are more

heterogeneous than those that usually attend openings (among other reasons), would the creation a commission or institution devoted to art in public to art spaces not perpetuate the patterns characteristic of established art venues? And most importantly: in developing policies for art in public spaces, how can we guarantee that they will include a heterogeneous range of practice?

I do not have slightest doubt about the relevance and need for conceiving certain projects for art in public spaces that act as catalytic and incentive resources, promoting people to reflect in the city in which we live and its complexities. However, taking into account the aforesaid problems and being reliant to enter into limited discussions about specific policies concerning art in public spaces. I have decided to simply discuss a few projects. These Works have managed to establish a refreshing dialogue with the context in which they were presented and consequently with the communities residing in or traveling through this context. Faced with the reality that spaces devoted to contemporary art (whether governmental or private) need the proposals try to revert this tendency by showing art to diverse audiences and communities, incorporating the latter into the process of artistic reflection.

I become more convinced everyday that projects in and for public spaces must be independent and self-managed – without government endorsement, local permits or the certification of the art institution – and that this might be one of the most effective ways of transforming certain public spaces into public domain.

In this sense, I would like to mention the work of certain graffiti artists such as Humo, Skape or Krater. As dissident art dealing with urban intervention, graffiti is an as – yet-untamed expressive tool that generates various narrative and aesthetics. Stephen Powers, a self-titled “public artist” and the author of *The art of Getting Over: Graffiti at*

the Millennium, states -what I sell aren't really products but rather “vapors” which hip-hop lingo, refers to public presentation of certain often invisible sectors of society. I am not only attracted by the truly great work of graffiti artists such as Humo –a member of the DNC crew (Designing New Culture) who understands and uses graffiti as a contemporary tool to reinterpret and reclaim history – but also by the fact that graffiti artists appropriate and christen public space- and often private space of -presentation. It is true that graffiti is an imposition, but so is official public art and the so-called -branding of the city. Unlike the latter, however, graffiti –As Powers says – is not about selling products. Those of us who travel around in the city have noticed local, national and multinational companies' increasingly obvious commercialization of public space: many walls and fences are covered by billboards nowadays, street signs in the Miguel Hidalgo District have been privatized, sporting Coca Cola logos and the policemen on Insurgentes Avenue stands inside blue Pepsi booths. Faced with this phenomenon, the takeover of spaces by graffiti artists and so – called “billboard liberators” – who either work with or intervene upon outdoor ads – is not only refreshing but, in my opinion, necessary.

For my part, in addition to sometimes presenting performances in public spaces. I have carried out two projects involving billboards in Mexico City. The first was *Soy totalmente de hierro* (I Am Totally of Iron), a Project I did in collaboration with photographer Martin Vargas and graphic designer Monica Martinez in 200. Using ten billboards scattered around the city, this “counter-campaign” sought to question and respond to the stereotyped representation of women in the ad campaign *Soy Totalmente Palacio*<sup>43</sup> as well as a few others that have popped up in the cityscape.

My intention was to create an alternate “advertising” space in the exact same sites where ads are “exhibited” in Mexico City and

thus prompt an analysis of the intricate ways in which society – through one of its most conniving and revealing media – constructs and manipulates our notions of femininity. With the final Works (five in total), I was not trying to find instant solutions to age-old problems; yet, I attempted to articulate some of the issues that I perceive as fundamental in order to counteract the way women are represented in contemporary Mexican advertising. The five pieces were shown in the following locations:

1. This is My Palace and It's Entirely Made of Iron – Tlalpan and Eje 6 Sur; Periférico Canal de Garay and Eje 6 Sur.
2. Who Teaches You How to Be a Women? – Insurgentes and Avenida del Iman; Plaza Santa Cruz, San Antonio Abad.
3. The Problem Is that You Think My Body Belongs to You – Insurgentes and Copilco; Insurgentes and Quintana Roo.
4. The Curious Thing Is that You Think You Can Control my Image – Camino a Santa Teresa; Rio Churubusco and Calle 17.
5. No ad Campaign Can Silence my Voice – Periférico Sur and Zacatepetl; Viaducto and Tránsito.

During the two month that the billboards were up, there were numerous and often astonishing reactions to them. I gave over fifty interviews to newspaper, magazines and television programs, in addition to hosting a press conference, I received up to thirty e-mails a day was asked to taken part in several internet chat sessions where I received some comments in favor of the work and many against it. I was even invited to a well know talk show whose producer insisted on matching me against the director of the Palacio de Hierro's add campaign. Though I was briefly temped by this thoughtful offer, I obvious turned it down.

The second project -which I mentioned earlier– was Beauty Is in the Streets, done in collaboration with Saul Villa. At the outset, this projects was conceived as a series of thirty billboards that hoped to depict some of

the everyday tensions existing in the city. However, given that several institutions that had agreed to supports us withdrew they're funding, fearing hypothetical. Political reprisals, we ended up presenting only four pieces (a much scaled down version of our original plan), three of which can currently be seen on some of the city's streets, and one which we hung from the facade of the *Sala de arte Publico Siqueiros* during the public colloquium. As a response to the difficulties we faced in bringing off the original Project, the billboards offer simple reflections about the complex shaping of public space in Mexico City, expressed in the four following phrases:

1. This Is Not an Ad, It's a public Space – Revolucion and Mixcoac
2. Where does a public Space Begin? – Circuito Interior, Colonia Cuauhtemoc
3. Who Controls What Is Public? – Avenida Cuauhtemoc and Eje 8 Sur
4. The Notion of Public Is Private – Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros

Perhaps because this Project did not imply a hypothetical confrontation whit a major national chain of department stores, the final scaled-down version of Beauty Is in the Streets did not generate the same kind of media buzz as *Soy Totalmente de Hierro* had, though that does not make it any less important in my eyes.

Employing different strategies and addressing more specific audiences, the work of certain performance artists tackles and articulates notions of performance art can function as a metaphor for the implicit contracts that are made every day in our society –as American writer Kathy O'Dell states in *Contract with the skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 70s*– then these Works seek to alter the kinds of contracts that are represented in public space and thus redefine the latter for a few hours. I am referring to the work performance artists live Emma Villanueva, whose work is Little

understood by the art world given both its subjects matter and formats and the fact commodity made by and for minority and that it often over steps the bounds of art's traditional domains to make use of public space.

In her performance entitled *Pasionaria*, Villanueva – wearing a black and red bikini colors – walked from of her body painted the same - walked from the Zapata subway station to the UNAM (National Autónoma University of Mexico) when its main campus was under police control. While Mexican society was bitterly divided into staunch supporters of the CGH (General Strike Council), a moderate faction and those who were definitely against the movement, Villanueva took to the streets to expose and defend her own point of view. Along her way, the performance artist asked people to manifest their opinions about the strike at the UNAM on their bodies. On this long, tiring journey, Villanueva uses her body – a meta-sexualized object of her own making – as a conveyor or receptacle for the conflict at the UNAM. In flyers that she handed out to her "audience", the performance artists state she was not a CGH member but that, as a student of the UNAM, she would refuse to attend classes until the six demands stipulated in the CGH's proclamation had been met. Villanueva even confronted the police directly – perhaps in a more effective manner than the CGH itself had – by trying to hand them flyers and, when they refused to take them, stuffing them into their pockets. Television cameras and reporters, looking for the latest scoop concerning the dispute, turned this performance into that day's top story.

Finally I would like to discuss two projects that were fundamental in establishing a dialogue between different communities, organized by the Mexico City Museum – under the direction of Conrado Tostado – with and in the directions in the Buenos Aires, Doctores Sur and Tepito neighborhoods. Besides exhibitions and

performances. These projects included conferences. Talks and, most notably guided tours to the aforesaid neighborhoods. The premise behind these exhibitions, entitled *Notoriety is to Blame: Buenos Aires and Doctores Sur* and *Tepito: The Unsellable Objects*, was to allow the neighborhoods to represent themselves through their communities' voice. Dealing with these neighborhoods' ill repute among our city's general population, the guided tours consisted of inviting people from others parts of town to converse with Tepito, Buenos Aires and Doctores Sur residents. Thus, visitor found out about the experiences and points of view of people living in these areas as well as about the activities that they organize, such as the parade featuring floats dedicated to our Lady of Guadalupe that takes place every August 15 in the Buenos Aires and Doctores Sur. Among these project's diverse aspects, we should also note a public exhibition of comic strips about the history of the Buenos Aires area painted by various artists on the metal screens of some of the local shops. Thus, the Buenos Aires neighborhood underwent a nightly transformation – when stores closed and pulled down their screens – and narrated its own history.

Though these kinds of projects may not be seen as dealing exclusively with art in public spaces, they do include a dialogue with among the residents of the zones in which they took place – something which seems not only desirable but also necessary, in the end, I believe that the most interesting and appropriate projects for art in public spaces are precisely the ones, like those undertaken by the Mexico City Museum, that resemble projects such as Code 33 by American artist Suzanne Lacy. Code 33 was a public art Project undertaken over a period of two years (1998-1999), in the streets of Oakland, California, and concluding with the presentation of a public performance. The Project included youth art workshops and video productions, workshops in which youth and police could confront each other,

press reports and community discussions. As in the case of the projects in the Tepito, Buenos Aires and the Doctores Sur neighborhoods, these activities facilitated and promoted a different kind of visibility for the spaces and communities involved; moreover, they dispelled or transformed common preconceptions about specific areas and communities.

Instead of wasting our time justifying artwork imposed on an avenue or square by the political regime of the "citizenization"<sup>44</sup> of culture or defending the ingenious "intervention" of some artist on a median in the *Condesa* neighborhood<sup>45</sup> I think that the projects that are worth undertaking are precisely those that make us more visible, that lend us a presence and a sense of belonging and where we live. And as for the question this panel was asked to discuss "policies for public art?" – my answer is no, thank you very much.

**ASYMPTOTE**  
**Hani Rashid**

Asymptote, as you heard, is a firm that I run with my partner Lisa Anne Couture in New York. We have been involved in many different kinds of projects over the years, since we started. I think what I would speak about here would be seven points of what, maybe from the Asymptote point of view, might be a way for architects to reconsider urban space as a place of deployment. This sort of blur between art, architecture and urbanism is something that we are extremely interested in. Although we do see ourselves predominantly as a really architects, and by that I mean that we sort of have to engage the public ground, there is a kind of social contract. We have to meet client and city needs but at the same time, try to maintain a certain level of critical Outlook and behavior that may sometimes seem subversive, but in fact we have to find a way to actually build.

So I'm going to concentrate on the way that our work has moved into the world of building- not away from the virtual reality work – but in many ways, the way that the virtual is trying to many ways, the way that the virtual is trying to inform our proposals in buildings. These are the seven points that I'll be referring to.

The first one and you'll notice behind the text that I've used images, some of which you might recognize from a certain period in the avant-garde, mainly of the 60's and early 70's with groups like Archigram, Arcasoom, Ufo, the Florentine Avant-Garde, Yona Friedman, Constant and many others that have been such powerful forces in the way that way the engage city space, in the way we engage politics, in the way we engage design: you'll see their influences though out our work in the urban field. A few years ago we were asked to look at a city in Scandinavia, Copenhagen, and asked to look at proposing new kinds of urban structures for the city. We started by taking the UT,UTM, or OTE photographs, military surveillance photographs and it sounds kind of strange but we actually found military surveillance photographs of Copenhagen and decided to use those as kind of a premise for urban filling r for urban design and architectural strategies for the city. This is one of the drawing that we produced, and the drawings were produced in a kind of automatic fashion. They were done really by sort of link down in a kind of digital graffiti maybe a sort of system of designs or operations and then filtering those operations spatially to in fact create a kind of urban structure.

This was over the Canals I'm just going to show a few of the images, not the whole Project but this is a kind of way to start to map on to the canal, onto the voids of the city and into the city. A kind of lacing tectonic graphic work, that could then reveal itself as, in this case, a propose for a new kind of urban park in Copenhagen. One that would in fact cover all the Canals with this kind rest