

Counter-conduct and aesthetic experience

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This paper is a part of an ongoing research regarding the “deviated use of space”, developed within the framework of a Masters degree thesis. Its main goal is to investigate the agents and factors that guide social behavior and how it affects the aesthetic experience of people who use the physical structures of public spaces. The term “deviated” is a translation of the French word “détournement”, used by the participants of the Situationist International, one of the theoretical references that inspired this discussion. The term is the reduction of the expression “détournement [deviation] of preexisting aesthetic elements”, which states a new way of appropriation of artistic elements in everyday life through the construction of situations. Thus the “deviated use of space” drafts the aesthetic experience of Architecture as an element that could allow people to perceive and to criticize the city beyond the spectacular contemplation of its elements. The research problem refers to the way how the public space, more specifically bus stops and stations, are appropriated by its users, considering that these places are conceived in a way that privileges its function as a component of a rationalized transport system, instead of taking into account the part it plays as a place for social encounter and dialogue. The investigation concerns bus stops as part of the city’s public spaces, considering that they have a vocation to be, simultaneously, a place where people stay while they are waiting for transportation and also a place of transit, bearing in mind that it has to respond to a functional demand for the urban mobility system as part of a rationalized integrated network. Spatial programming is capable of limiting the ways its structure is used; therefore it has a direct influence on its users liberty for spatial action. The study of “deviated uses” concentrates on practices that are not limited by the programmed and regulated use of space as a consequence of social empowerment in contemporary urban everyday life.

This paper aims to critically analyze theories concerning strategies of social behavior conformation to the disciplinary order that operate in the urban space. Sociological concepts will be presented regarding the use of public spaces in order to reveal the possible consequences that disciplinary and cultural factors have on individual and collective behavior. From this perspective, the “deviated use of space” is seen as a mean of personal and collective empowerment in the everyday life of contemporary cities. Some political, social and economic trends shown by various authors such as Norbert Elias, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault will be addressed in order to support the theoretical argument concerning the contemporary urban condition. These sociological theories address the evolution of behavioral manners, and also how these behaviors may vary according to culture and collective habits, how the social mechanisms that program and watch the social behavior of different groups work and how they can act in favor of maintaining the power structure - or rebel against it. The critical analysis of these references will start from the mobilization of theoretical concepts covered in the case of public transport stations in the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte.

The discussion is structured on the argument that refers to the opening of physical structures to unforeseen possibilities for body appropriation. As from provocative actions held on bus stops, the goal is to come up with a way to express how urban space could encourage freedom with regard to the individual and collective empowerment and to the expansion of possibilities of use. The aesthetic experiences of counter-conduct are artistic procedures of subversive nature that, in this paper, aim to elucidate the discussion of freedom of appropriation of public space structures. The use of the term "counter-conduct" was introduced by Michel Foucault with the intention of expressing the way the subject takes a stand against the behavior program stipulated by others (government, religion, etc.). The counter-conduct, from this prospect, is a political attitude as it relates to the action to be opposed to something, and not just be apathetic and ignore something to what you do not agree. Therefore, the research aims to discuss some urban provocations proposed by artists and activists who practice counter-conduct, for example the Dutch Provos, the Temporary

Autonomous Zones (TAZ) of the anarchist Hakim Bey and the Bloco Poleamor that happened during carnival in Belo Horizonte.

The research discusses the freedom as an autonomy exercise opposed to behavioral programming in urban areas by presenting a case study of an experiment performed in Belo Horizonte, where three pole dancers used a bus stop sign pole to perform. The different reactions and points of view – the dancers, the people waiting for their bus, the bus drivers and passengers, etc. - are interesting to be analyzed from the perspective of qualitative social research, where the goal is not the accumulation and processing of statistical and quantitative data, but rather discuss what arises from a critical-interpretative approach of the results of the methodological evaluation. Therefore, the participatory observation technique will be applied, in which the narrator is not neutral in the actions developed in the practical cycles. Thus the investigator is physically and socially present on site during the event. The participation of the researcher is critical to the production of knowledge regarding qualitative research because the information gathered on site comes from practical experience - through talking, listening and recorded observations – and can present new approaches to people living the situation on an everyday level, which is often not in the formal literature about that spatial context. Thus, this paper also has an investigative and experimental character that is developed at the same time it is made the critical analysis of the theoretical references of sociological origin, from the application of the action research method.