



Urban bricolage: art of temporary and immaterial appropriation of the urban space in Viçosa, MG. Luciana Bosco e Silva, Liz Fagundes Oliveira Valente, Victor Brandão Motta and Alice Zarantonelli Ildefonso

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“The meanings of urban art unfold into the multiple roles exercised by it, whose values are woven in its relationship with the public, in the modes of collective appropriation. There is a temporal construction of its meaning, asserting or annulling itself. Thus, such artistic practices can contribute to the understanding of changes that occur in urban space as well as it can also review its own roles before such transformations: what spaces and representations shape or help shape, which beacons are in use in this social construction process.” (PALLAMIN, 2000, p.19).

Engaging people in urban development is a growing challenge. Municipal norms and structures present, in a general note, a language which is distant from the citizen's everyday lives. Therefore, based on the principles of education and research, the cultural and artistic movement called Urban *Bricolage* emerged occupying this position in which the discourse is converted into palpable actions. The concepts of accessibility and community in favor of the urban development are thus evident.

For Lefebvre "to occupy space means the expression of the relationships upon which all social organization is founded." (LEFEBVRE, 1992 p.22). In this sense, it can be said that space is organic, it happens relations between groups, between group members, between 'society' and nature. In space life reproduces itself. Without space there is no life or identity. Varnelis adds that "places are full of individual identities, language, references and non-formulated rules" (VARNELIS, 2006) which are the fundamental identity elements necessary for the construction of each one's "self". Direct relations with space, uses and daily events are manifestations of space appropriation.

It is noticed that the spatial identity can boost a care-active relationship with the place. Therefore facts such as traces of a football field designed on the street or a mini-library hanging from a tree in a residential neighbourhood are noted works of active citizens who make out of their own urban environment what they need or want. The abandonment of the 'user' posture which consumes the cities is the essence of a rising "Do It Yourself" (DIY) culture. The DIY culture says 'no' to the idea that there is an established response, and 'yes' to individual empowerment in favor of the development progress.

"The Do It Yourself [DIY] ethic seeks to overthrow the idea that we will be provided for. We will provide for ourselves, through educating each other, through collective decision making. It fits into this larger concept of an ideal society." (CARLSON, 2008, p.46)

Consequently, if the actions of citizens are properly promoted and managed, communities can channel the energy of the people who want to make a difference towards strengthening the identity ties with space through a proactive caring culture.

Within this present and energetic context, lies the artistic movement, quote above, Urban *Bricolage* (UB), object of study proposed by ARQMnese in 2013 in the Department of Architecture and Urbanism of UFV. The BU is proposed to instigate disinterested citizens, those who only use the urban space, to actively interact with the place where they live. Through temporary actions it aims to awaken the engaged citizen posture.

However, it is correct to say that this engagement of individuals will not only result in material improvements, such as the construction and maintenance of urban infrastructure, but a affectionate relationship with the space in which people live also interferes with the strength of the local identity and the quality of life.

The present spread of a global culture discourages a geographical symbolic identification, replacing the physical place with the virtual place. However in Urban *Bricolage* art interventions there is an inverse stimulation, the art proposes a redefinition of the spaces and an immaterial reconstitution of symbols. According to Cassirer, symbols are key elements to the human nature (CASSIRER, 2001 p.77). One of the objectives of the Urban *Bricolage* works is the incitement of symbolic spaces, and it is in this symbolic space or abstract space that differs mankind from any other life form. Cassirer claims that in the abstract space "we are not dealing

with the truth of things , but the truth of propositions and judgments." (CASSIRER, 2001). The place beyond space. The abstract space is where the *Bricolage* occurs, its spatial events refer to human judgments. The propositions and judgments form the key concept of the art in question, it configures the exchanging substance between the artform and the users of urban space.

The ARQMnese group within the research and extension project on Urban *Bricolage* which has been developing some work since 2013, work that seeks to promote the urban Do It Yourself concept, in Viçosa, Minas Gerais State . The first proposal of the group was based on the following issues in question: Brazil is essentially an urban Country, approximately 85 % of Brazilians now live in urban areas. In Viçosa only 6.7 % of the population lives in rural areas, in other words Viçosa is fundamentally an urban city, therefore, to be concerned with the city is to care for the great majority of the population both in Viçosa and in Brazil (IBGE, 2010).

The Urban *Bricolage* artistic movement proposes artworks and happenings that stimulate public space appropriation through affection and care rather than vandalism or disturbance. Examples are works such as *Le Pass Quand Je Veux*, Paris, 2011 Elise Texier and Aurore Laulanet, or *Projet nid de poule*, also in Paris, Juliana Santacruz Herrera 2009 . The first case was a performance where the artists built a portable fabric crosswalk which was unrolled before crossing the street in places of their choice. In the second the artist wove small flaps of tapestry to cover the cracks in the sidewalk in an act which simultaneously highlighted the infrastructure failures and beautified the urban space. What can be perceived in these temporary actions is an attempt to awaken the citizens from their apathy towards the hardness of the city through gentleness; ie propose the appropriation of public spaces through sensibility and sense of community. However these actions require planning, coordination and conceptual study to corroborate them. With these issues in mind arose the idea of *#VemPraFeira* (*#ComeToTheFair*) happening. Using the slogan "I love the Fair", the action proposed a set of kind actions that would reinforce the importance of the fair. Viçosa's fair was endangered. It began in 1967 in the square of the Mother Church. It went to be held in Santa Rita Avenue, a main route located in the downtown area where it became a weekly symbolic event of the city, much frequented by citizens, students and residents of the surrounding areas. However, in 2010 it was relocated to a less arterial place, and today it happens in a parking lot next to the Municipal Forum . This change in location was controversial and disliked by most merchants. Because it is a representative event of urban relationships, the fair was chosen by ARQMnese as appropriate event to receive a *Bricolage*.

The *#VemPraFeira* action began research on street markets in small and medium-sized cities, made by graduate students in Architecture and Urbanism at UFV, Dafhini Aline Pereira Greek (ProCultura fellow in 2013) and Sarah Alves Toledo. Then an awareness talk of voluntary and participants about the history of Viçosa's fair and proposal plan of action that consisted of three teams of simultaneous interventions at the fair was coordinated, also participated in this action students Caio Magalhaes Castriotto and Gelsner Penha da Silva (PIBIC fellow 2013-14). Three groups worked concurrently: "safe crossings", "let me take your purchase" and "listening to whom fair".

When the fair was relocated to a pocket in the urban mesh, the traffic in the Santa Rita Avenue was improved. The cars gained even more power and crosswalks were dimmer. The team "safe crossing" pursued the brave and caring function of reminding drivers to stop and allow pedestrians who came from the fair to cross the street carrying their heavy bags. Also reminding them that nearby was something valuable, the fair. Although drivers do not have to change their course due to the

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current off-traffic location of the fair , they can choose to drive more carefully on Saturdays leaving the marketers to cross safely. The team used "stop" and "I love the fair" signs and distributed stickers "I love the Fair" and a pamphlet with the brief history of Viçosa's street fair.

Meanwhile, another group provided with fabric bags kindly offered to merchants to deposit their shopping in the bag and are accompanied by a friendly charger. Learning the route of a marketer and their relationships enhances the integrity of the fair. To carry purchases of a complete stranger tightens the urban ties. The bags were donated to the fairground after the end of their purchases to reuso. A last team consisted of the simple act of listening.

The last team consisted of the simple act of listening. Viçosa's fair has approximately 170 merchants that sell different goods. They make the fair alive. Listening to them was an act of wisdom, an experience of sensitivity. All the vendors received a kit with "I love the Fair" stickers and a agroecology brochure developed by the Alternative Technologies Center of Zona da Mata.

Overall, the event was well accepted by the community, and also well accepted by the participants. For some volunteers it was the first contact with the fair and the event favorably marked their relationship with it. The event helped to build a positive identity of the fair and strengthen its historical and cultural values.



Uma iniciativa dos adolescentes da Rebusca e da Igreja Presbiteriana de Viçosa e do grupo ARQMnese - UFV

Fig. 1: Stickers distributed during the action to everyone who walked through the fair. Source: Authors.

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“Feiras livres são mosaicos.
São espaços em que as
multiplicidades se manifestam
e se completam”.

- As feiras livres são importantes acontecimentos das relações urbanas, são abertas à cidade e levam vida às ruas. Elas ocupam o espaço público, facilitando a convivência entre pessoas de realidades diferentes, o que proporciona a vivência da cidade.
- A feira de Viçosa começou em 1967.
- Aconteceu primeiro na Praça da Igreja Matriz, e depois na Avenida Santa Rita, e, em 2010 foi transferida para a Rua Nossa Senhora das Graças, ao lado do Fórum.
- São aproximadamente 170 feirantes, que comercializam diferentes mercadorias.
- Os itens vendidos são produzidos por famílias ou pequenos agricultores que, trabalhando em pequena escala, fornecem alimentos saudáveis e frescos.

#VemPraFeira

Uma iniciativa dos adolescentes da Rebusca e da Igreja Presbiteriana de Viçosa e do ARQMnese - UFV

ArqMnese



Igreja
Presbiteriana
de Viçosa



Fig. 2: Translated flyer distributed throughout the action. Source: authors

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Fig. 3: #VemPraFeira happening. Source: Toledo, S. A.



Fig. 4: #VemPraFeira happening. Source: Toledo, S. A.

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Fig. 5: #VemPraFeira happening. Source: Toledo, S. A.



Fig. 6: #VemPraFeira happening. Source: Toledo, S. A.

Another work carried out by ARQMnese, related to DIY and Urban *Bricolage*, was the "Tea Table", in 2014. This work was part of the exhibition "The symbolic and time in form design conception" proposed by the discipline of Plastic II part of the Architecture and Urbanism major. In total the exposition had seven works, however, "Tea Table" was the one to propose an action related to urban kindness, since the students that performed the it were involved in the Urban *Bricolage* research branch of ARQMnese (Victor Brandão Motta, Alice Zarantonelli Ildefonso, Júlia Marim Mitre, Luisa Couto Chaves Santos, Vinicius Pereira Corrêa e Marcela Figueiredo Fonseca).

In the case of tea table, the focus was on constant movement in public spacs which can alienate the individual from himself, from his surrounding and from the perception of the space around it with its appropriation of possibilities. Taking the rush as a theme, students adopted the emblematic figure of the Rabbit from Lewis Carrol's "Alice in Wonderland". Speeding, factor constantly present in contemporary life, especially in urban networks, is extremely present in the place chosen for installation. The "straight" as it is known, the main access to the UFV campus is a place to rush. Just like the rabbit in Alice in Wonderland who pass by "straight" also tend to be late and concerned about time - evidence schedules, assignments, presentations, internships, etc.

Students then proposed to create a pause space of contemplation, a gentle space amid the rush of the "reta". Using the work of Lewis Carroll, the group proposed a rereading of the *unbirthday* scene which occurs at a tea table when Alice is interrupted of her chase for the Rabbit to celebrate the previously *noncelebratory*. According to Arnheim (2005), society credits symbolic meaning to concrete event. Thus, the table emerged as the formalization of an idea that would only be completed as the individuals experienced it, when they appointed a meaning to the object. Dislocated from its common place the table provokes in people an initial strangeness, generates a pause, an interruption from reality that afterward turns into reflection on space and time.

The materials used for the execution of work were extremely simple and easy to obtain in accordance with the principles Do It Yourself. Bins were used as recycled as banks and the table itself. On the table the students put breads, cookies and juices, which were replaced a few times during the installation. Along the way, the "reta" near the *Tea Table*, students put small posters that read: "Counts the time", "Against time", "Setback" and "Find the time". Such phrases functioned as an invitation to the table and, above all, a stimulus for a possible reflection on the pace of life of those who go by there.

On the table was a presence notebook with the phrase "Did you spend time here ...?" Emblazoned on its cover. The purpose was to verify and register those who passed by and enjoyed the interaction with the intervention not needed with the creators of the work. This distance between performer and spectator-asset was pre-set to avoid any embarrassment or induction of the use of space and its elements.

The result surprised the group and surpassed the existing expectations for interaction and awareness of those who participated in work. The book of records that began with simple signatures and dates unfolded in testimonials, poems and drawings. Various expressions of understanding and gratitude made the group prolong the duration of work for two more days. Some of the poetic inscriptions that stood out were: "There is love in everyyhinh, open up for him." And "find the time / who is against time / There are setbacks / There are setbacks / For whoever counts the time / tic, tac ... / tock, tick ...".

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Ernest Fischer seeks to decipher the causes that make essential art for humanity. It bills of *complete man* who longs to break individuality in order to reach a fullness, reaching a world more understandable and meaningful. The way the "Tea table" currently provided a human sublimation was due to increased hunger and curiosity that the individual had to break the individuality and joining its self to a social community, that even though it is not left outside consisting of its essence. Thus, through art, kindness and poetry, installation provided a new experience and a different possibility of interaction and exchange.

Fig. 7 à 9: Mesa de Chá. Fonte: Motta, V.



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Therefore, one can see in these two works, that the Urban *Bricolage* arises aggregating two important aspects of contemporary culture: the active of citizens not only spectator on urban problems in cities; and the strengthening of local identity confronting the challenges of a global reality where aesthetic values and lifestyle are submerged in globalization.

This project is still under development by ARQMnese and seeks an interface with the investigation of the temporary manifestations of appropriation of public space. As the daily life of cities is a product of a plurality of voices and discourses that coexist and overlap forming an extremely complex mesh, the result of many appropriations and expropriations of speeches/ spaces, often art appears as a rare and legitimate expression of the zeitgeist. Urban *Bricolage* art is purposely and intentionally questioning art of the relationship of the users in / with the space, it aims to rethink who the city, who have or have no right of action and expression, based on the concept that the possibility of expression of individual in the environment in which it operates this creates an identification / relationship that can strengthen the sense of place.

Maintenance challenges of urban infrastructure, peaceful gatherings, production and disposal of waste, among other growing problems, are shown rampant and traditional solutions by government pathways and political systems are failing. As contemporary art is recognized for its strong defense of conceiving and questioning of reality, it found in this gap of urban issues vast possibilities of action mainly in the relations between individuals and their cities. The dynamics of the city are pertinent to all those living with the consequences of their transformations. It is expected that these evaluations and work contribute in the search for effective ways to address further the problems of contemporary cities, investing to positively



influence citizens' relationship with the spatial reality of the urban network through a relationship of care and identification.

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