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Years of Stone

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The documentary focuses, in an intertwined way, the spatial form and the social mechanics of the camelódromo [1] from Praça XV [2], in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, and its modus operandi. It faces the daily metamorphosis suffered by the square, which mutates, along the day, taken by this living organism, the camelódromo, which grows, occupying spaces and reacting to the wind, the sun or the rain. The film shows a spatial structure of large size, collectively created, which continuously adapts to the climatic conditions. If, on the one hand, the spatial mechanic of the camelódromo behaves admirably, on the other hand, the socioeconomical and cultural mechanics are not left behind. The atmosphere is bustling.

The film explores, in an articulate manner, two situations: the first is the top view of the camelódromo, in plan, as something observed through a microscope, seen from the buildings which surround it, modifying along the day, under different climatic conditions. The association between the aesthetics and the pragmatics of this transformation is evidenced. The second situation is the camelódromo as seen from the ground, through the eyes of the moving observer. There, are seen people, the routes, and the architectural promenade. Plan descriptions help in the understanding of the photographic sequences. And again, now from the inside, the camelódromo appears to be changing throughout the day, under different climatic conditions.

Throughout the film, the constructivist notion of the social condenser emerges naturally on the screen. The underlying premise is that architecture and, specially, the urban environment, have a natural potential of creating social behaviors and, in parallel, the premise that the design of public space has the potential to dissolve social hierarchies by enabling spatial situations that are socially shared.

Another concern of the documentary refers to the dynamics of the self-produced systems.

The shown dimension of self-organization naturally conducts to an analogy with the behavior of living organisms and with the concept of autopoiesis by highlighting a fundamental dialectic between structure and function. The film also shows the role of the ephemeral in contemporary culture and in the proposal of an architecture and an urbanism essentially committed with an ideal of mobility and lighter technology. In this sense, the documentary recovers, in the plain language of the materials from tupiniquim (an amerindian tribe) informality, the ideas of the Archigram: a huge, light spatial structure, consisting of inaccurate modular systems, necessarily created from an ideal of mobility, and which makes part of a popular repertoire developed in the culture of informality. The film also has the pretension of recovering the urban role of environmental art, along the lines suggested by Hélio Oiticica, where the spatiality generated by the camelódromo proposes a contemporary visualization of the Penetráveis (penetrables) and the Parangolés.

The film is structured throughout the following scenarios:

- a. It is six o'clock in the morning: People are already moving. Amidst the sparse pedestrians there happens a larger drive in the north side of the square, where Marechal Floriano street widens itself until meeting the Parobé square. In this stretch, dozens of carts, trailers, mini-containers, all wrapped in orange canvases, begin to be unloaded, dismantled and transformed into stands, shelves and much more. The apparently random distribution demonstrates, after careful observation, preferably through air, an ambition of order: alignments and passages gradually emerge. From the carts yellow umbrellas sprout, and then, very quickly, the scene begins to undergo total transformation.
- b. Now it is two o'clock in the afternoon: the sun shines, there is heat. The square is now fully covered by umbrellas, like a fabric, but with topography, as a continuous surface of yellow domes. They settle occupying all the interstices possible to be occupied. In this arrangement, passages are carefully preserved, there emerging a subtle network of paths.
- c. Now it is five o'clock and the late afternoon announces rain: the yellow canvases, those that by the morning were covering the carts, go back to star in the show. Quickly, these canvases get stretched above the umbrellas and artfully sustained by metal rods anchored in automobile wheel rims, which acts as foundation. Within minutes, a network of hundreds of cord tensioners are tied to poles, trees and porches, setting dozens and dozens of orange canvases over the area covered by umbrellas. The rain arrives. The discontinuous surface of canvas cleverly directs the fate of the water. Below, the camelódromo works cheerfully.

The camelódromo from Praça XV no longer exists and the camelôs [3], are no longer camelôs, as they were relocated in an edification specially built by the Town Hall, the Popular Shopping Mall!

Notes:

[1] Translator's note: an open air, large gathering of street vendors. [[back to text](#)]

[2] Translator's note: name of a town square. [[back to text](#)]

[3] Translator's note: each individual vendor. [[back to text](#)]