EDITORIAL

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The city may no longer be the place of refuge (geography), market (economy) and stage (culture) on which the struggle for life (history) takes place, but it is still the place, or at least this is my understanding of it, in which to feel the "proximity" and the presence of others; and that is something that can never be dispensed with or forgotten.

Rafael Moneo[1]

Regardless of its cultural characterisations or its place in a space and time that also shape it, the city is the paradigm of innovation and improved living conditions for all those who form societies across the world; a gradual story of success, despite the difficulties it has faced since its evolution began almost six thousand years ago. The acceleration of city growth has been especially dramatic in the last hundred and fifty years: in 2014, 54% of the world's population were living in cities, a figure that is forecast to reach 70% by the middle of this century. There are now 500 cities with more than half a million inhabitants, five times those of thirty years ago. And this trend is set to continue. For the moment we have no imaginable alternative to the city that is capable of giving citizens satisfactory opportunities for housing, employment, services, education, health and leisure in a harmonious, sustainable social and environmental context.

Our attention in this edition of kult-ur turns to public space which, despite the diversity of characteristics and meanings it embodies, is common to all cities: not defined as closed spaces; publicly or commonly owned spaces there to be used, not appropriated, even though they may be spaces by default, tucked among the institutionalised spaces of production, commerce, worship and so on. Needless to say, we are referring to both physical spaces and the dynamics of use that occur within them. Spaces that citizens take over and purposely make into places for interaction —conversation— with each other, nothing more, nothing less, without qualifiers, without the trappings of their institutional belongings; a specific environment for recognising the condition of the citizen as the other, of their humanity; a place for multiple belonging and stepping beyond the minor allegiances of family, tribe, sect, class or other group; a place for change and instability brimming with alternatives; where strangers pass by, making their presence felt to one another only to then disappear; where the heterogeneity of culture, ethnicity and identity nourishes learning, coexistence and tolerance; where each individual constructs their own personal history; where decisions and choices are made, and negotiated agreements —solutions— are reached; political space, in other words.

But what can best define public space is the activity of play as a functional, impartial pleasure, based on pleasure for its own sake, without achievement or reward beyond (or different from) enjoyment itself. The non-combative play characterised by Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio as meaningless and the opposite of sport, which has been ruined by competition, antagonistic parties, the passion for struggle and ambition for power and pure commerce, sport that is eventually consumed by the satisfaction of winning, and that pushes out the joy of the game itself. The spontaneous, unregulated occupation of streets, squares and parks where neighbours chat unpretentiously, seeking the cool of summer evenings. Playing cards, chess, dominoes or some other board game; or boules or tai-chi in the park; or persistently attempting to perfect skateboard or rollerblade skills on the concrete plaza in front of the museum; in the placebo conversations of the health centre waiting room; in the cathartic dramatisations of local festivities… All these are exercises of belonging and welcoming: building citizens. And crowning them all, dancing in the square, the supreme example of meaningless play.

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1.   Moneo, R (2003): "Seis apuntes discontinuos sobre la ciudad". *Sileno,* 14-15, p. 51.

The development of communication technologies has opened up a diversity of spaces for virtual relations among citizens. The internet was heralded as an extraordinary development of public space that would increase and enhance information, diversity, innovation and fusion. Idyllic promises stymied by data management companies bent on appropriating, processing via artificial intelligence techniques and selling information extracted from all manner of online behaviour, offered explicitly or implicitly by citizens going about their business on internet. We have ended up more visible than ever, all the time, down to the most intimate details of our private lives: life on internet has become a life of social control, uniformity and the reaffirmation of the unsurprising, the same old thing, typical of a small hamlet in a remote valley —precisely what the city allows us to escape from. Public and private institutions have gradually taken over and eroded what were traditionally considered as public spaces, with panoptic aspirations under the pretext of security: the web imitates the reality that the web replicates.

We need to develop the open, dynamic, changing and cosmopolitan nature of public space —both in the real world and on the web— where play, dance and politics can thrive, because that is what makes citizens.

Castelló, June, 2017.