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EDITORIAL

Without poetry, there is no city

Those of us who know

nothing matters more than absence

prowl the city's night streets .

Cristina Peri Rossi

It is more than fifty years since Roland Barthes first suggested that, rather than a plethora of surveys or functional studies, what is needed are more readings that make it possible to understand a city better. Literature provides numerous examples of visions that shape an urban space and time through writing. But music, mathematics, art, theatre or architecture also complement, through their own languages, other historical, sociological, geographical or political readings of the city. And that is just the view from within academic and formal parameters. A less disciplined gaze offers us a much more multifaceted, disordered vision, a perspective full of informal narratives that depict cities from the position of multiple individual and collective experiences.

All these possible readings take us to the myriad ways of writing the city, writings found in books, paintings or musical scores, but also on its skin, on its walls, its street furniture and pavements. And it is precisely this expression that sometimes becomes more significant, not because it is right or effective, but because it is dynamic, unpredictable and alive. Since 1996, when the Mexican poet Armando Alanís Pulido began speaking through walls and murals, street art has spread what is now known as poetic action across the globe. This movement asserted that without poetry, there is no city, from which we can gather that what urban means is determined by the type of communicative actions it promotes. In the case of poetic action, expressions of love are mixed up with struggle, irreverence and protest among graffiti and performances. Demonstrators' placards denouncing the Russian invasion of Ukraine can glide alongside protests of love on a zebra crossing; a rowdy bus full of supporters celebrating a football cup victory can pass by a silent group protesting male violence against women; and girls making a TikTok video in the street can be caught on a bank's CCTV, girls who are essentially invisible as far as the bank is concerned.

Communicative actions in the urban space are probably more chaotic now than ever before. The aesthetic experience of the city –the experience activated by the visual, but also by sound, smell and touch– provides multiple stimuli, which in turn create a breeding ground where the words and actions of its residents take on new meanings. In this issue, *kult-ur* reflects on the symbolic management that takes place in the city through ways of communication. As the coordinators of this monograph note, the bedlam of discourses on what to do with the city and what the city decides to be on its own, without consulting anyone, is what ends up defining it. The social, economic and political relationships at play in this communication tangle highlight the vital importance of paying attention to the ways power is expressed in the urban context, because it is here that the possibility for subversion and transformation become tangible. We talk about power in its material sense, power as reflected in administrative decisions, legal verdicts or market-driven actions. But we also refer to power in its broader sense, the power that alludes to citizens' perceptions of being in a city: ways of living and relating to each other.



Experiencing the city always alerts us to the tension between the singular and the shared, the private and the public. Yet it is in this very conflict that the wealth of possible readings of the city lies. Today's insistence by international organisations that we return to the common to ensure the effectiveness of the Sustainable Development Goals is nothing more than another push towards the urgent need to recover our battered social bond. Now that our streets are full of poetic proclamations and at the same time neighbourhood groups are demanding a revitalised politics shows that this bond cannot be upheld on the basis of orders or imperatives. On the contrary, it must be forged at the conjunction of these emerging expressions and the reshaping of the spaces of recognition and collective action.

Cristina Peri Rossi, recent recipient of the Cervantes Prize, eloquently expresses how awareness of subjectivity –and we might also say of citizenship– only touches its deepest meaning with the experience of exile. From the certainty of absence, cities seem as ephemeral as the actions and interactions that take place in them, yet they are anchors for us to return to. Political awareness of the urban should introduce this real, yet in equal measure contradictory, evidence. If we accept the challenge to construct the dynamics for cultural, social and economic regeneration by prowling among the multiple languages that write the city, we will probably find ourselves facing a new landscape of recognition and civic potential. Data and statistics inform but do not communicate, explain but do not bond, because communication and bonding can only be achieved if citizens have true poetic will.