

Marcelo Cidade

The space between me and you

The public space has an order acquired through the uses and relationships that bodies establish with the city. Avenues, staircases, corridors, alleys, squares, bridges and streets are concepts that combine different spatial orders: below and above, inside and outside, light and dark, right bank and left bank.

These spaces, which the communication scientist Harry Pross (1923-2010) understands as “intermediaries”, are places for meeting, interchange, communication and exchange, since those who circulate through them are not constrained by the symbolic coercion represented by the order of the private space.

The works that make up Marcelo Cidade’s new solo exhibition, *O espaço entre eu e você* [The space between me and you], reflect the artist’s daily practice of perceiving the public space, in an operation of observation and appropriation of elements that are later displaced and reorganized. Cidade reflects on his own body in the city from his displacements through it. The title of the exhibition points to what exists between two bodies to meditate on public space in a city like São Paulo, where unilateral decisions that benefit private interests define the ways in which the city is used.

For Cidade, the public policies adopted by recent governments annihilated the principle of social welfare that should manage community life. Instead of aggregating, these policies divide. The logic of gentrification, the current neoliberal bet, invests in private space, in the steel door as the domestic frontier between inside and outside, between public and private. For Cidade, this social issue determines our relationships with the space and with the other. The space between me and you, these days, is a space of segregation. It’s a fence.

Like Pross, Cidade organizes the exhibition based on dichotomies, such as inside and outside, below and above.

On the gallery’s façade, the visitor is faced with a single, standardized image. The work *O grid e a grade* [The grid and the fence] (2020) is an appropriation of an image that circulated in all newspapers in Brazil on the date of the impeachment trial of Dilma Rousseff, in 2016, when the Esplanada dos Ministérios was divided by a railing, separating the people for and against the process. In this gigantic grid of repetitions, Cidade dissolves the problem embedded in the image, creating an optical dilution, a visual discomfort.

With that feeling, the visitor arrives at the reception where he finds two works that deal with the perception of time. In *Instante estante* [Instant shelf] (2022), Cidade lays out two metal shelves marked by use. In the work, the idea is to freeze the utilitarian function that these objects had at another time, creating a two-dimensional reorganization.

The grid (grade) as a logical way of organizing different objects is something that appears in all the works in the exhibition: the northern grid marked by Le Corbusier’s rationalist thought that seeks to organize, and the grade that controls the sensible body, in the south.

In Room 1, visitors are faced with the work *Ato Falho [Freudian Slip]* (2023), made up of aluminum panels in different sizes. "I chose the formats based on the dimensions of the steel doors that divide the public space. They are gates and windows on which we see a pattern composed of colored stickers that, when looked at carefully, are nothing more than advertisements for companies that maintain and repair steel doors."

"These stickers have a particular history, as I collected them. I would go through the steel doors of the city, peeling off these stickers and then doing graffiti over the surfaces. Then, I asked myself, why not make a work of composition that suggests a decomposition? What I do is decompose the work on the street, the work of someone who went there and pasted it; I start it almost like a cleaning action in the public space; I rearrange them so that they become visible, respecting a grid format. In this case, I don't use rulers, but compose based on the grid of my eye, a human grid, an anthropometric grid in which there are errors, dirt, fingerprints. The measurements are not exactly perfect and equals. The stickers themselves, having been removed from the public space, are old, torn and overlapping. None of them are new."

This procedure of pasting stickers is informal work. Normally, it is done by children who go out in the morning through the streets of downtown São Paulo, pasting stickers, in an idea that repeats the practice of graffiti. Those who walk around the city do not notice this action because it is swallowed by the architecture. In the work, not so. In it, the stickers appear in the foreground. Aluminum is a material that reflects light. Cidade chose a material that is very close to that used in metal doors, but which is the opposite. "The doors of establishments in the central city area are usually dirty, battered, and I wanted an untouched material that would reflect the observer." In the cube, these works will be facing each other, generating the illusion of an expanded space: "it is not a mirror, nor a glass, but there is a reflection of light that causes a certain dizziness, an urban rubbish that arises from displacement and appropriation."

Higienópolis (2022), a work that will be displayed on the first floor of the gallery, emanates, like the others, from displacements around the city. In the work, this operation works in reverse, in which the artist no longer appropriates the object itself. In this case, Cidade collected images of the dumpsters that occupy the sidewalks of the Higienópolis neighborhood, in São Paulo. The images were captured during the pandemic, on morning walks, the time of day when these bins are still empty. The images were taken with the back to the buildings. So, what you see is the street organized by the rubbish grid. Rectangular, these bins have shapes that establish a golden ratio relation with the human body. The images were mounted in sets of 30 photos in 6 wooden boxes similar to those used in condominiums as bulletin boards.

Alongside *Higienópolis*, Cidade presents *O eterno jogo dos opostos [The eternal game of opposites]* (2023), which follows the idea of appropriation and inversion. "During the pandemic, one of my practices when walking around the city was to collect pieces of rubble from plots of land and construction debris containers of buildings in the process of demolition. The pieces of rubble were mounted on aluminum plates currently used as a replacement for pink boarding in ongoing construction projects. I am interested in taking the opposite path, that is, bringing to the forefront of the work the ruined object that has suffered entropy: what was destroyed is worth more than what is new."

Returning to the external area of the gallery, Cidade set up *Uma churrasqueira muito triste [A very sad grill]* (2023) on the terrace, which also employs the idea of appropriating a pre-molded structure with a specific function. Cidade reorganizes and reassembles the parts in a way that alludes to a formalist public sculpture. Once again, the object sheds its social function.

The collapse of the Vale S.A. dam, in Brumadinho, in 2019, was one of the biggest mining environmental disasters in the country, and the second biggest industrial disaster of the century. Depois da sedimentação da mente [After the sedimentation of the mind] (2019-2020), a project that precedes the others included in the exhibition, was created after the dam rupture. To create it, Cidade invited three accomplices, who embarked on a car trip carrying 60 liters of water.

“I wanted to be an accomplice in that destruction and I created an accomplice of the accomplice. I understand this work and all the others in the exhibition as performances that have the displacement of my body as a factor in gestures of registering (trash bins), pulling out (stickers), transporting (earth), moving (ruins). The body is part of it.”

One of the accomplices, the curator Germano Dushá, signs the text – the trip’s logbook, which can be read in the exhibition space. Robert Smithson (1938-1973), and his concept of Non Site, emerges as a new accomplice suggesting ways of perceiving a place without being in it. This idea was incorporated in the formalization of the installation, which includes iron boxes in the shape of the Vale logo, where Cidade deposited the earth brought from Brumadinho, in addition to a photographic image.

Depois da sedimentação da mente is a work that creates an abstraction of the catastrophe through its residues.

*Excerpts from an interview by Marcos Gallon, conducted on April 5th, 2023, in São Paulo.

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