

AFFAIRS OF THE SELF

Based on Antony Vidler's text "Agoraphobia Psychopathologies of Urban Space", 2000

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"The pursuit of natural knowledge, the investigation of the world - mental and material - in which we live, is not a dull and spiritless affair: rather is it a voyage of adventure of the human mind, a holiday for reckless and imaginative souls" - Archibald Hill.

We all have a very peculiar and personal way of walking, exploring, and experiencing the city. These daily experiences in which we inhabit the city brings with it many challenges that we might have to face on countless occasions, so as not to remain physically and mentally immobilized in the middle of the street. The city is constantly changing and every single transformation that takes place in it creates different political and social conditions that we are forced to internalize, in order to understand the social effects that come with the incessant reconfiguration of the public space. Spaces that a certain point becomes normalized by the recurrent activity that we exercise in them.

Many times, a rupture or a disruptive event is necessary since allows us to rethink and reflect on the structures that support these spaces on daily basis, and that almost always remain invisible. For example, artists like Oreet Ashery or John Jordan, among others, have turned their practices toward these problems. They starting to understand their own artistic practice as a disruptive element that questions the very inner fabric of our everyday life. Precisely these ruptures help us to have a better cultural understanding of a place, allowing us to understand the unknown. Many times the unknown and the unfamiliar are being represented by other people which with whom we share those spaces.

These structures are the sum of symbolism, social codes, gestures, traditions, and ideologies - among other things- that give shape and are in itself the essence of a specific site. As inhabitants of these spaces we cannot escape (can we?) from the encounter with the Other, nor from the proximity that on certain occasions becomes a necessity to facilitate social interaction between individuals. However, the modern world has prioritized progress, money, individualism and anti-social practices. Instead of helping to create symbolic structures that generate and facilitate connections and encounters between citizens based on the potential for empathy (or equivalent) to support those structures. Anthrophobia, the fear of social contact, is one of the diseases that has grown the most since this new way of living has been implemented. It responds mainly to a fear of the unknown, fear of the Other.

It is normal to be afraid about what we cannot entirely understand, especially because it makes us feel vulnerable. That vulnerability is reflected in moments when we lose control over the conditions that create a situation, in which we have to encounter a large number of people or for instance encounter, a totally empty space govern by *void*. The anxiety produced by the lack of control we experience in these situations is just one of the symptoms that show that we might be still far from learning to live away from an absolute rational understanding of the presence of the Other in the public realm.

This pure rationality driven by our urge to dominate a logical thought –reason- is one of the biggest barriers that prevent us to activate the full capacity of our senses in public. Widening the gap and putting ourselves further from extending our comprehension about the importance of being spontaneous in public. By spontaneous I mean that is important to allow ourselves to meet the unpredictability character of the public realm, being prepared to response creatively thus with a certain degree of sensibility to the most truthful human challenges that these daily encounters presupposed.