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Women's Action of Urban Guerrilla

Methodological Path for an Urban Analysis from a Gender Perspective

Cândida ZIGONI¹

Abstract. The perception of women in the city as a strategy for acknowledging the urban space enabled the development of design practices and experiences such as the Women's urban Guerrilla in Rio de Janeiro, an ephemeral action to broaden the spectrum of experiences and connect the ambiances felt during a path into physical interventions in the city. In order to develop a methodological path that understands subjectivity as an instrument to bring the collective closer, concepts such as tactical urbanism and its guidelines contributed to the apprehension of space by a body scale and its experiences, as well as to the re-sensitization of design practices and normative urban analysis.

Keywords. *Ambiances, Gender, Re-Sensitization, Subjectivity, Urban Guerrilla*

Introduction

This work aims to subvert the structural invisibility of women in public life, which is naturalized and to think about collaborative ways to go into the field and contribute to the development of an urban analysis from a gender perspective. The research focused on the relationship of women in the city and their dynamics, and for this reason it is necessary to understand that the homogeneous vision of men and women, without cuttings of class and race, allows nuances and specificities to be implicit, and as a consequence there is a superficiality of making public policies.

The commitment is to unite theory, analysis and design practices that are concerned with elucidating gender issues in the city and understanding women in their displacements. According to Merleau Ponty (1999) the perception is to experience the body in space, where movement and feeling are key elements of perception. Therefore, the research cross concepts to understand the different experiences of women in the city and to apprehend the dynamics of their daily paths.

Working with different spectrums through a collective activity makes possible to perceive the power of this approach once the perceptions of women can be extracted. It's also necessary to assume here that this path recognizes the incompleteness of the researcher in his individual point of view and for that reason the views of others are explored. Therefore, the Women's action of urban Guerrilla emerges as a strategical intervention in the city that aims to contribute to the processes of re-sensitization and experimentation of the body in space, an urban analysis instrument that points to a collaborative/participative methodological path.

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Subjectivity in the Gender Issue

According to Butler (1998), the bodies follow a performative dynamic where they are engaged by collective situations, although these acts are inherent to their own repertoire. Thus, the issue of subjectivity from a gender perspective causes a discussion in this research, which indicates performative acts as a clue to subvert the naturalized concept of “becoming a woman.” Simone de Beauvoir (1949) in “The second sex” says: one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.

This reflection leads us to the understanding that woman’s body is historical, engaged by memories from a collective sense and is in constantly construction. Therefore, it becomes possible to develop a work that encourages interventions in the city made by women’s bodies, which would allow to expand the spectrum of the observer and to apprehend the different “cities” experienced by women.

Acknowledging space from a gender perspective is a strategy that brings concerns about the intersectionality of the different subjectivities. However, it’s possible to go through the research and find the common into the collective. The author Heleith Saffioti (2004) during the article “Gender violence: the place of praxis in the construction of subjectivity” says that the identity construction is connected to the subjectivity of the subject, which is considered as a gap. The gap is understood here as a transversal vector that recognizes the cuttings in the Brazil’s context and contributes to a feminist research that intends to apprehend diversity without losing itself in fragmentation or in a universalist discourse.

The contributions of the researchers Elisabeth Souza-Lobo and Mary Garcia Castro (1991), allowed us to understand the term woman as a generic one, although not universal, and presents the possibility of incorporating the singular, in praxis, to defend the interests of its category. This line of reasoning allows to understand that women’s actions will indicate a collective sense of movement.

In addition to the concerns of women in the city, gender violence is a rising issue in the public and private context, and it’s necessary to emphasize that although women assume a role of victim, they cannot be considered passive (Saffioti, 2004).

This research is committed to investigate strategies to subvert the normative and hegemonic praxis of constructing the identity of women in the city and also to performs acts of resistance in public spaces.

Re-Sensitize Paths

Is necessary to discuss the role of women into the constructions of the cities and also review the hegemonic standards of urban planning, since the women’s experience in the city enable to adapt the environment and make visible the needs of those who are not considered by the dominant thought.

The inclusion of an invisible perspective points to sensitive processes, which enhance the city’s experience as an instrument for urban analysis. The closer relation of the body scale in the processes of design cities may suggest a collaborative/participative methodology in the development of this work.

The crosscutting issue at the gender perspective in urban analyzes in order to detect the functioning and efficiency of a space, make it possible to systematize real demands and think about an application in this review of urban planning and political concepts.

Therefore, the resilience of women's urban mobility searches for inputs to analyze the subject and its sensations. Resilient displacements could be a clue to the application of perception and improvisation. The adaptability of women according to the situation exemplifies how the body makes the ambiances and that in order to the perception the action is performed.

The ambiances treated here has the power to unite the sensations experienced by women during an activity, which points to a concept that recognizes the collectivity, despite representing itself in individuality² (Duarte, 2013). The great challenge dealing with the gender issue is the apprehension of singularities. The ambiances in this study is an instrument that adds to the connections between the subject, his historical body and his memory.

Strategies of Interventions in the City

The debate about the invisibility of women in different contexts arouses interest to elucidate these issues, and activism became naturally a reference of interventions. Subversively, we take as examples the *Slam das Minas*, which is a battle of poetry that discuss about the body and space during an event and brings with it experiences of cities. Other example is The *Feminicidade*³, which is a feminist collective that materializes posters with narratives of women on the urban walls.

These are some examples that guided the research to broaden the view of the city. Thus, given the urgency to understand this sensitive dimension of the women's body in movement, the tactical urbanism concept is a part of this methodological path, where the body scale is part of the production of space in occasional events.

The concept consists of quick, low-cost actions that demonstrate the possibility of changes. In this present work, tactical urbanism defined some guidelines about the time scale of interventions in the city. According to Lydon and Garcia (2015), the strategy aims to integrate knowledge about the city from their own users, so that the approximation of the body scale can instigate changes and offer local ideas for the challenges of urban planning.

In order to recognize the resilient walk of women, the urban guerrilla is related to the studies of tactical urbanism and the idea of instigating women in guerrilla actions arises as an experimental strategy that seeks to re-sensitize women's daily paths.

Here it's necessary to define the chronological guidelines of this strategy: the ephemeral (hours/days) as a manifest intervention, the temporary as a prototype project developed with the support of the public authorities and the participation of civil society and at last the permanent phase as the implementation of the previous layers.

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The autonomy of women in their displacements is connected to the feelings of insecurity in public spaces. The guerrilla action, as a manifesto, seeks to bring to light the demands of women in the city during a re-sensitized path by interventions and the bodies in movement performing spaces.

2. In the present work, the concept from Duarte is used in a more specific gender cutting.

3. *Feminicidade* is a juxtaposition of two words in portuguese. *Femini* stands for feminine and *Cidade* for city, and together means *Feminine City*.

4. Video online about the action of urban guerrilla: <https://youtu.be/jw6o1nuQo7k>

The Women's action of urban Guerrilla took place on August 31, 2019, in Rio de Janeiro, and it was part of a Final Undergraduate Studio at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism - UFRJ about the construction of a methodological path for an urban analysis from a gender perspective. The event had 21 participants and it lasted about 4 hours.

As a minimally instructed action, each participant received a device common to the women's body, a bag, equipped with materials that could leave marks in the public spaces, so as to bring their perspective to the design process. Despite being ephemeral in its physical character, the guerrilla reverberated in the memory of the participants and in the people, who were interested about the activity and even wanted to contribute locally.

The device also represents the autonomy of walking and enhances it when the woman has the power to register her feelings through marks in the city. It is necessary to remember that the ambiances allow the transition from the sensitive dimension to the cognitive dimension (Amphoux, 2004). Nevertheless, the guerrilla action potentialize this movement when it allows the transposition of the ambiances felt by women into a physical intervention.

Therefore, after the activity, the records (photos and videos) were an important instrument for analyze the path, as well as the conversations with the guerrilla's participants, who had the chance to remember the path and to comprehend their movements around the city. The exchange of perceptions and experiences while intervening on the path made it possible a sensitive analysis about the public spaces, such as to extract ideas for design actions, for example: extending sidewalks, visualizing and enlarging corners, subverting barriers, crossing safely, prioritizing and informing paths, connecting spaces, limiting parking areas and integrating empty spaces.

Clearly its understood that any environment would be inert if it didn't interact with the physical, sensory, sensitive and psychological dimensions of those who use it. (Duarte, 2013)

Partial Considerations

Subjectivity as a device to bring together the collective sense with the design research processes, enables the development of solutions to the real demands of the city. In addition, it also expands the spectrum of the observer and contribute to a re-sensitization of design practices.

Figure 1. Intervention at the Women's action of urban Guerrilla with a poster asking: "How many times did you changed your path today?," Keila Aorea, 2019





Figure 2. Illustration of the bag and the materials uses in the action of urban guerrilla, Cândida Zigoni, 2019

Tactical urbanism is a strategical concept not only to acknowledging space through a body scale and its experiments, but also to indicate chronological guidelines in studies on urban analysis and design proposals. The action of guerrilla apprehends subjectivity in a collective sense. It is performed as a meeting-point of body and space that brings the opportunities for women to experience themselves in the public spaces.

There is a power in the autonomy represented with the proposed bag in its urban mobility, which enables the development of a network study in the city, where the individual recognizes himself in the collective sense and acts in a more active way. This can result in a construction of a network of actions around the city and contribute to a new approach for urban analysis and design practices.

The research is qualitative, experimental and the fact of being in a constant state of construction, indicates a certain urgency in thinking about new manners of exploring spaces of ambiances and developing methodological paths that could connect the sensitive and dynamics aspects of spaces and their users.

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