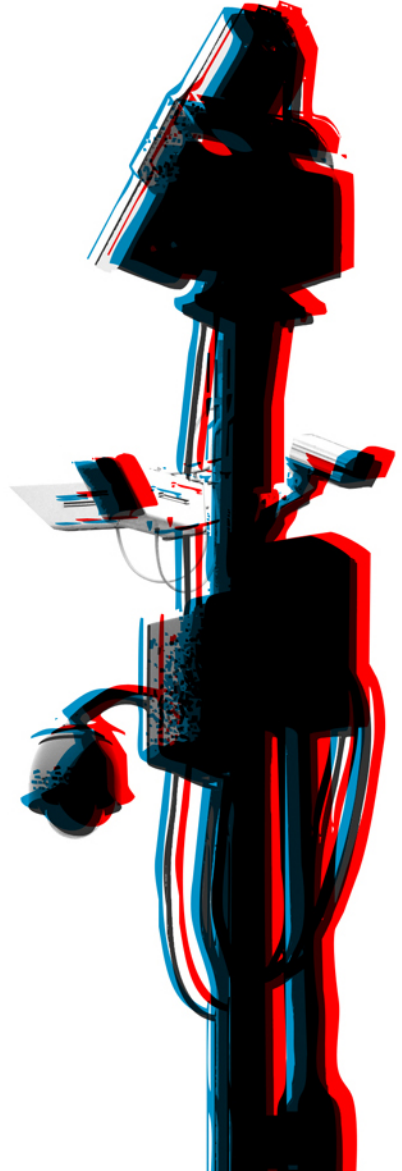


UN PROYECTO DE FUNDACIÓN RODRÍGUEZ + ZEMOS98

PANEL DE CONTROL

INTERRUPTORES CRÍTICOS

PARA UNA SOCIEDAD VIGILADA



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CIVIC DEMOCRACY: A NEW FORM OF CONTROL

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Abstract

The *Civic behaviour by-laws* (*Ordenanza del civismo* in Spanish), short for the *By-laws of measures to promote and ensure the peaceful coexistence of citizens in Barcelona's public spaces*, have a particular history, given that their enactment is inseparable from the failure of what has been called the "Barcelona model".

keywords

Public space, law and surveillance devices, cognitariat, power and surveillance, democracy, struggle, local context, micro-politics, micro-resistances.

What follows is not a complete and finished text, just some notes that have to be collectively developed in greater depth.

The Bylaws of measures to promote and ensure the peaceful coexistence of citizens in Barcelona's public spaces, known as the *Civic behaviour by-laws*, have a specific history behind them, given that their enactment is inseparable from the failure of what has been called the "Barcelona model". The "Barcelona model" could be defined as a combination of tourism and culture, services and real estate business, all seasoned with the staging of major events. This model was introduced with full force during the 1992 Olympic Games, and was later exported all over the world as an example of new urbanism and citizen participation. In reality, the "Barcelona model" has been, above all, a power mechanism based on the production of consensus, in which the main objective has always been to turn Barcelona into a brand, that is, to place Barcelona in a favourable position in the global market of metropolises. This model has failed for many reasons. Abstention in recent local government elections - Barcelona had the lowest participation rate in Spain at 49.58% - are proof of it. It is curious and thought-provoking to note that the collapse of the "Barcelona model" has coincided with the new civic by-laws. Without entering into an analysis that would be a digression here, we want to emphasise that with these by-laws, Barcelona closes a cycle that has to do with ways of exercising social control, while also becoming a pioneer of a tendency that is expanding to other cities. Valladolid, San Sebastián, Toledo, Cáceres and Pamplona have also drafted their own civic by-laws.

Faced with this, we ask ourselves: What is the point of talking about civic behaviour today? Why has the discourse on civic behaviour come to play such an important role in the management of many cities? The immediate response we can put forward - the one given in politicised environments - is that the new by-laws are a smoke screen. The new by-laws talk about incivic behaviour (a category that becomes a dumping ground for anything), and about regulating the problems of dirtiness... but in reality its purpose is to criminalise and persecute any activity that doesn't fit into the model it aims to construct, that of the city-company. That's why the by-laws are ultimately nothing more than regulations for cleaning the city (cleaning it of poor people, prostitutes, dissidents...). There's a reason behind the claim that "it's not about civic behaviour, it's about cynicism). Let's explain what we mean when we say it's a clean-up operation:

- Today, the whole of society is productive, today the whole city has become an articulation of capital. That's why we talk about a city-company. For example: leisure time is often reduced to simply consuming; strolling is a productive activity when it confers economic value on the streets that people wander along. And we could go on.

- But also, given the current state of globalisation, all cities must know how to sell themselves in order to attract international capital and insert themselves into the world economic network. It happens, however, that neoliberal globalisation - that extreme and rampant capitalism - produces elements of ungovernability: uncontrolled immigration, cesspits of misery, precarity as a way of life. Neoliberalism is fundamentally unjust because it produces a majority of losers.

In order to confront this nameless ungovernability, this chaos that emerges from this globalised capitalism, and still remain competitive, civic by-laws become necessary. So civic by-laws appear as regulation, or codification, that extends to those aspects that legislation doesn't reach, aimed at (re)constructing the social order. The official texts that justify civic by-laws say that the city has become "more complex", that it is a "space for opportunities and freedom", but above all, they stress that the true challenge is "knowing how manage this complexity". Now we know what lies behind these nice words. The term "(new)complexity" is used to conceal the effects of a rampant capitalism that is producing increasing inequality and injustices.

So far we've had a first look at the role of the by-laws. This denunciation is good, and it's important to express it, but it doesn't resolve the issue. In order to rise to the needs of its time, critical thought must go beyond denunciations, which doesn't in any way imply that it has to be constructive.

Let's try to go one step further - Why was the discourse of civic behaviour chosen? And once we've answered this - How does the civic behaviour discourse operate and what mechanisms does it use?

Let's put forward some of the characteristics of the civic behaviour discourse:

- The discourse on civic behaviour is an obvious one. Obvious means that it imposes itself on its own. Who's going to oppose collective peaceful co-existence? The obviousness of the civic behaviour discourse likens it to common sense. The rhetoric goes "it's common sense that...", "..... is civic behaviour". And so it becomes absurd to oppose common sense or civic behaviour, as the person opposing it is immediately discredited. However, we know that common sense is an ally of power, which always defends what is natural and established. Just as civic behaviour is natural. Which doesn't mean it is free of repressive elements.

- The discourse on civic behaviour is a de-politicising discourse: it neutralises the political because it deals with infringements through administrative processes. To the civic by-laws, putting up an anti-precarity poster is the same as selling bootleg copies of DVDs, or urinating on the street. Those who transgress the

rules are reduced to the empty, homogenous role of an "offender", to whom different kinds of fines or penalties are applied. As well as de-politicising criticism, the by-laws establish democracy and its parliament as the exclusive framework of the political.

- The discourse on civic behaviour clearly assumes the idea I have defended elsewhere: "today, life is the main form of control" (1) and intervenes in this field by managing behaviour, but with unappealable conventions of the law. To be more precise: the by-laws are an infra-law that extends to areas where legislation didn't.

- In short, discourse on civic behaviour creates a simulacrum of sociality through so-called "community mediators", and a simulacrum of public space (getting rid of conflicts, constructing a set of private worlds, etc.)

Ultimately, the discourse on civic behaviour channelled through the by-laws is much more than a simple standardising discourse. Clearly, it standardises: it separates good citizens from bad. Bad citizens are those that urinate on the street and those that put up a political banner. To the by-laws, as we mentioned earlier, the two cases are the same. But it doesn't stop there. What we're saying is that the discourse on civic behaviour is more than just a standardising discourse, and that this is so because it fuses with the defence of democracy. In other words, the civic behaviour discourse is a discourse on the defence of democracy because it's specifically aimed at producing citizens. As it stands, citizens are not in any sense critical agents. Rather, they are the essential piece in that general mobilisation of life that moves through all of us, and produces a reality that is one with capitalism. Now it's easier to identify the elements that make up the civic behaviour discourse and the mechanisms it uses, because they are the same elements and mechanisms that are behind democracy.

The discourse on civic behaviour implies and requires:

- The **war-state**, which is a capitalist mechanism that produces order based on war. Politics as war means a permanent individuation of the enemy. In practice: to go from the war against poverty to the war against the poor, to the political management of fear, etc.

- **Postmodern fascism**. Acknowledgement of differences so that they can be used to unify order. The defence of personal autonomy as a form of control. Freedom of choice so that nothing really changes.

Democracy, and its concrete expression through the civic behaviour discourse, is the articulation of the war-state and postmodern fascism (2). Marxist critique of bourgeoisie democracy stressed the fact that a minority

dominated a majority. This perspective should not be abandoned, although it needs to be brought up to date. Democracy as it “really exists” is an articulation of the war-state and postmodern fascism. Each democracy is a specific articulation. Thus, there is no single model. We use the word “articulation” because it suggests the process as well as its result. Democracy is the unit for government re-nationalisation of state de-governmentalisation. But this unit has to be constructed case by case. The war-state and postmodern fascism aren’t the pre-existing elements of a duality, they are constructed through the actual process of articulation.

Conclusions:

- There is an urgent need to dismantle the discourse on civic behaviour, because it’s not insignificant - it is a central piece of the way the social is managed, of the de-politisation of the social malaise.

- Also, it should be noted that this critique of civic behaviour opens up a possibility of attacking democracy. The civic by-laws are no more than a specific expression of what democracy is today. We have to target the figure of “the citizen”, which is really the key element of civic democracy.

Notes

(1) See, for example, my text *Más allá de la crítica de la vida cotidiana* published in the journal *Espai en blanc* nº1/2 (2007)

(2) To further explore what I have mentioned here so briefly, see, for example: LÓPEZ PETIT, SANTIAGO (2003) *El Estado-guerra*, Hiru, Hondarribia, Guipúzcoa