



↑ View of carrera séptima. Bogotá, Colombia. Jaime Iregui, 2006.



«Urbanism and information are complementary features of capitalist and anti-capitalist societies in that they are responsible for organising the silence. Ideal urbanism, in both the West and the East, is the projection of a society without conflicts».¹

At present, it can be said that in almost all large cities, the public space has changed from being the place of encounter and socialisation to one of mere transit from one place in the city to another; its design appears to focus more on optimising the flows of decidedly capitalist system production that expands without apparent resistance than on satisfying the citizens' desire for well-being and leisure.

However, if we view the city as spatial production and we ask ourselves about the authorities that are responsible for it, we initially think of the state and its regulatory function, which determines the stability and permanence of the city in its physical aspects and its feelings.

The design of standards, urban structure (streets, plazas, quarters, etc.) and short-, mid- and long-term fiscal policies are some of the activities with which the state regulates the production of public space. But this does not occur only from the state authorities and the logic of capital. It also occurs (and is transformed) when the space is inhabited, travelled through and critically appropriated.

From disciplines such as art, geography, sociology, urbanism, anthropology and political science, new approaches to the experience and conceptualisation of space² are being considered. They enable production, as well as the planning and practical side of spatial configurations different from those defined by hegemonic systems which have determined the way in which space is inhabited, represented and used throughout history.

As the French thinker Henri Lefebvre suggests, space is produced in the same way as goods and it is made from three different spheres:

The first is that in which its production is associated with the representations of power and capital: it is the space conceived by the state, the urbanists, the architects and the technocrats; the second is the space inhabited by its inhabitants through symbols, images and exchanges, where the image of the city is built collectively from experience and dialogue, from the observations of each citizen, from the way in which specific places are appropriated to be filled with sense and meaning (streets, parks, buildings, monuments, etc.); finally, we have the used space, in other words, the ways in which each citizen inhabits and travels through the space of the city. Accordingly, each sphere can be considered in the way in which people read and interpret the city on the basis of the text constructed by the state and the urbanists.



These three spheres are related with the philosopher Henri Lefebvre's suggestions³ (bound to situations by an epoch) in his work *The social production of space*, in which he proposes the defetishisation of space to no longer perceive it as an inert and predetermined dimension: space is alive and dynamic, something that is produced and instituted not only from state norms and the designs of urbanists and architects, but also from everyday experience (images, symbols) and the ways in which the citizen on the street can use it and observe it.

In this context, the public space is instituted as a space of representation in which images, ideologies, symbols and spectacles flow and are appropriated by citizens. It is in this space where the illusion of progress takes place, representing the concept of following a certain city model, the constant evolution of cultural expressions towards purer and purer states, the novelty as a spectacle in the examples of formal trade, the public space and its regulation as an exhibition of state power.

It is also where the critical consumption of these representations by the public takes place. In other words, contrary to pre-mid-20th century belief, consumption is also a place of production in that it generates appropriations and forms of views that are specific to a consumer who reinterprets, redefines and transforms the images and symbols that surround him.

In this way, the public space can be understood as a *scenario* on which each citizen produces space from his observations and journeys, where he also plays a role, where the city is represented in rules, symbols, images and, of course, in the observations and experiences with which each citizen reflects and travels through it.



↑ Carrera séptima, Bogotá, Colombia. Jaime Iregui, 2005.

¹ Vaneigem Raoul. *Comments Against Urbanism*, Internationale Situationniste #6 (August 1961). International Situationist On line. Revised on 23 January 2007 at:
 →www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/comments.htm

² In the context of contemporary geography, the Brazilian Milton Santos defines space «not so much as a thing or a system of things, but rather as a relation reality: things and relations together. It is important to consider the three ways in which space can be conceptualised. First of all, space can be seen from an absolute sense, as a thing in itself, with a specific, determined and unique existence. It is the space of the surveyor and cartographer. [...] Secondly, we have relative space, which highlights the relations between objects and exists because the objects exist and are related to each other. [...] Thirdly, we have relational space, where space is perceived as content and represents another type of relation that exists between objects in its own interior». Milton Santos, *Metamorphosis of the Inhabited Space*. Ed. Oikos-Tau, 1996.

³ According to Henri Lefebvre, space is produced in the same way as goods are produced: «Space is where the discourses of power and knowledge are transformed into real power relations». Lefebvre identifies three dimensions of space. One is the representation of space by engineering professionals, architecture, in terms of buildings, roads, for example, usually produced by the public or «official» space. The second is the representational space, in other words, the images that are produced by the space, which is more feeling than thought. The third dimension is what Lefebvre refers to as spatial practices, in other words, the routes and networks of everyday life.