

ABSTRACT

Gender and space. Towards a critical recontextualization of feminist visual art practices

This research explores the existing relationship between feminist art practices and theories that question sexual difference, and the power of the visual emerging from the interdisciplinary thinking on space put forward by feminism. This means questioning gender divisions and spatial divisions to discover how these are mutually constituted.

The study aims to describe and characterize the construction process of the meaning of sexual differentiation, and to identify the roles played by art practices in this process. To do so, it analyzes the epistemological framework in which gender theory and the construction of sexual difference operate. At the same time, it sets out to characterize the contents of space within the social sciences and in processes of social construction. To do so, it analyzes how particular ways of thinking about space and place are linked, directly and indirectly, to particular constructions of gender relations; and how the construction of gender relations is also closely involved in debates about the conceptualization of space. Following on from this articulation of space, the study identifies and characterizes the production of subjectivities placed in urban space. One of the basic purposes of this work has been to deconstruct the view of the city as a neutral space – a-temporal and delocalized – which pretends to create universal categories of validation. From an interdisciplinary perspective of feminist theories about space, this considers the alternative politics of urban transformation that have allowed us to rethink hegemonic models of urban planning. Redefinitions of citizenship occupy a pertinent and privileged place in the city, through transnational circuits and through the connectivity of political networks enabled by new technologies. New forms of citizenship are taking shape within the framework of a global city. This has called for the consolidation of an analytic framework of the politics of difference in light of the effects of transculturalization through globalization.

The study's findings reveal how feminist studies have been a key to understanding how sexual difference is constructed socially alongside a social division of power based on notions of gender as an analytic category, as social and cultural construct. It is important to understand the enmeshing of relations between power, the forms of the construction of sexual difference, forms of social oppression and the gender relations established in specific spaces at certain times. This social division of power is reflected in spatial configuration; at the same time, the space and context in which people are socialized are crucial factors in conforming their identity.

Large numbers of women artists have contributed to the transformation of public space through practices and research which have confronted the production of sexual difference through art production in order to destabilize the hegemonic discourses of the public and private spheres. Feminist critiques of representation have made a central contribution to dismantling the notions of neutrality that constitute public space by pinpointing the asymmetrical positions occupied by men and women both in social life and in art disciplines.

This research stresses the need to revise the critical role played by certain art practices in propounding new ways of tying symbolic production to critical and/or antagonist politics. These are esthetic/political practices that attend to the order of biopolitical production, mainly from the standpoint of gender and sexual difference and propose alternatives to the existing model of society. Political issues in the production of subjectivity constitute one of the front lines in any critical project that seeks to reconstruct bridges between politics and art, in turn implementing new or revised models for the production, exhibition and dissemination of art.

Key words: visual representation, gender and space, urban space, feminist art practices, local/global.