



Analyse - The Right Distance

LA DISTANCIÀ ADEQUADA - THE RIGHT DISTANCE

Par Alexandra Laudo



There is a saying in Catalan: *Feta la llei, feta la trampa*, which roughly translates to: "Every law has its loophole". It refers to people's inventiveness in seeking out grey areas and finding ways around the law. In the popular imagination, the figure of the "cheat" has negative connotations: supposedly, he is someone who breaks the social contract and the established order for his own benefit, and to the direct or indirect detriment of the rest of society. However, in today's sociopolitical climate, when it is often the authorities themselves (whether political, religious, financial, etc.) that break the social contract through abuses of power and illegal practices, there may be scope for reexamining the practice of "cheating" and placing it within the concept of civil disobedience. This is an idea that has been discussed by thinkers such as Hanna Arendt, Jürgen Habermas and Norberto Bobbio. "Cheating" implies the subversion of the law in a non-explicit way: defying the authorities and attempting to evade the corresponding penalty, or finding the right distance that allows you to stay within the law yet be outside it at the same time. When such an attitude arises from a mistrust of those who govern us and other authority figures, the acts of the "cheat" could be interpreted as a means of questioning the legitimacy of those in power; a form of political resistance and a strategic manifestation of dissent that is an alternative to simple confrontation. The videos that comprise *The Right Distance* explore the concepts of rules, prohibition and law and their potential room for interpretation. They examine the political value of actions that challenge the established regulations while simultaneously attempting to maintain an appearance of legality. The videos are the work of Spanish and Latin American artists who are reflecting on the critical potential of "cheating" as a disguised form of subversion, as a response to existing regulatory structures and a manifestation of the rejection of normative order.

Defying the values and conventions of religion is a central theme of the video by Marta Burugorri, in which the artist takes a humorous approach to exploring the relationship between religious belief and prohibition. During the short period of time in which a siren announces the start of the Shabbat in the city of Jerusalem, Burugorri attempts to perform all the activities that will be forbidden once the Shabbat begins. What is the nature of this "fringe area" of time? Is it a temporal space that lies outside religious jurisdiction? Does the Shabbat begin precisely when the siren ends, or does it also begin when the siren begins? Burugorri's exercise presents a good-humoured challenge to religious law, protected by the scope for flexibility in the interpretation of the rules.

The video by Luz Broto documents an act in which a group of people are brought together by the artist in order to break a municipal regulation; specifically, the regulation that establishes the maximum capacity for a given public space. Although it is an act of civil disobedience, the group does it gradually and very peacefully, in accordance with the artist's instructions, so that the act of breaking the law - which is the essence of this piece - is achieved quietly, without drawing attention to itself. It is a poetic challenge to the law and to convention that is articulated from the standpoint of humour.

The work by Adrian Melis represents a reflection on the grey areas surrounding labour laws in Cuba, where absenteeism is commonplace. His video presents the excuses that Cuban workers from various different professions have made up in order to avoid going to work. This is a common tactic that allows employees to free themselves of work-related obligations without having to suffer the potential consequences of an unjustified absence. Therefore, although it is a strategy that defies the rules, it does not do so explicitly; rather, it employs a rationale that the employer is forced to accept because it is formulated within the framework of cordiality and on the basis of an assumed honesty.

The work of the artist Levi Orta continues this theme of exploring the challenging of rules within the context of the Cuban political regime. His video shows a series of children's drawings that reflect the ways in which the many rules and prohibitions established by the government are defied by Cuban society on a daily basis. The State knows of and even tolerates this widespread rule-breaking, although it cannot officially recognise the existence of such acts of disobedience. They are legal transgressions that are nonetheless protected by the margins of permission established by the government. At the same time, the artist himself breaks the rules in managing to get his drawings broadcast on television, by pretending to be a teacher and asserting that they are the work of students from a special-education class.

As well as serving as an introduction to the above works, *The Permit* by León Siminiani reflects on the concept of a "permit" and the interrelationships between human beings. The result is a fantastical, poetic, global tale that tells the story of humanity's evolution in relation to the dynamics of obedience and transgression.

To watch the video of *The Right Distance* page

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