

Reflexions on Arte Útil (Useful Art)

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The natural impulse of artists is to try to understand the things surrounding them and to share the questions they ask themselves and the answers they find with others.

The idea of Arte Útil is to imagine, create, develop, and implement something that, produced in artistic practice, offers people a clearly beneficial result. It is art because it is the elaboration of a proposal that does not yet exist in the real world and because it is made with the hope and belief that something could be done better, even when the conditions for it to happen might not yet be there. Art is the space in which you behave as if conditions existed for making things you want to happen, happen; and as if everyone agreed with what we suggested, though this might not yet be the case—art is living the future in the present. Art is also to make people believe, though we know we might not have much more than belief itself. Art is to start practicing the future.

Arte Útil has to do with understanding that art, only as a proposal, is not enough. Arte Útil goes from the state of proposal to that of real application. It has to do with understanding that proposals coming from art must reveal the next step and be applied, must leave the sphere of what is unattainable, of desired impossibility, to be part of what exists, of the real and functional sphere: to be a feasible utopia. Although Arte

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Útil may be like a 'pilot' or 'beta' programme, where participants can experience how it feels to live in the world that is being proposed, it must be launched as something real. It should be shown to and shared with those who may make it work in the long term, that is, for people who derive benefits from the proposal and might enable it to have a more permanent state or existence. Art made as Arte Útil does not have a planned obsolescence; on the contrary, it is a proposal others may 'retake' and continue without any further intervention by the artist. Artists suggest its potential life: some projects are imagined as short and specific; in others there is a desire for the work to have repercussions on people and for society to appropriate it. Arte Útil has nothing to do with consumption, but with making something happen.

Arte Útil is transforming affection into effectiveness.

For Arte Útil, failure is not a possibility. If the project fails, it is not Arte Útil. Artists have the challenge of finding forms in which their proposal might actually work; this is not impossible to achieve. So, the means through which art is made do not depend on a capricious

ideal of the artist, but on the limits imposed by what can really be achieved and up to what point the reality of what has been dreamed can be pushed. Therefore, the limits of an Arte Útil project are determined by the relationship with the people for whom it is made and the transformations in the conditions within which the work is made. The perfect moment appears when the project is already in movement, when the people for whom it is made understand it, when they expropriate it from the artist and make it theirs. Arte Útil is involved in the life of people and it is to be expected that it becomes part of it.

Arte Útil has no relationship with a view that falsely sees the good in everything; it rather believes in people's possibility to grow. Artists doing social art are not shamans, magicians, healers, saints, or mommies. They are nearer to teachers, negotiators, behaviour builders, or social structures. Arte Útil functions directly with/in reality. Arte Útil has a different society in mind.

Arte Útil is a form of practicing social art. It is a socially consistent (artistic) material which functions as an entrypoint for the audience. With excessive frequency we hear about the barrier existing between the work of art and the non-informed audience for which access to the work is impossible. The usefulness of the work for the audience is, from my point of view, the key to solving this

barrier of communication and interest by the non-informed/non-initiated audience in contemporary art. It is a displacement of the use of resources as metaphors, allegories, and others; it is an entry into understanding the idea of the work by using usefulness as a system to interpret and appreciate the work.

If you work in Arte Útil, what can be more gratifying than to see your idea incorporated into the daily life of people? Or to the social programme of a city? Or to nuances in the vocabulary of the individuals? I believe this is the natural place for Arte Útil works which reach the higher level of popularity and effectiveness. Just as images based on visual art at times have lives similar to parts of shower curtains, tea cups, or T-shirts, for socially committed art, popular distribution should be society itself, civic institutions, civic behaviour—the daily life of people. Arte Útil should be part of everyday life; it should be a daily exercise in creativity.

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