Urban Sonographies:  
A Feminist Art Work and the Transformation of Architectural Culture in the Infosphere

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Applying the concepts of “infosphere” coined by Franco Berardi and “pharmacopornographic regime” proposed by Paul B. Preciado, this paper will revisit two experimental works created in late 1970s Spain that use the spoken word as a tool to explore urban and architectural space. Occitània i Països Catalans, the feminist sonic artwork conceived by Eulàlia Grau in 1978 and the spoken “o.o” issue of the magazine Arquitectura launched three years before by the Architects Association of Madrid (COAM) coincided with the emergence of new imaging techniques and telecommunication technologies. I claim, in a moment of political transition in Spain from the Franco regime to a modern democracy, these works demonstrate the conceptual changes brought about by the use of new technologies in everyday life, in the process redefining the domestic and urban sphere.
In 1978, Catalanian artist Eulàlia Grau exhibited her work *Occitània iPaïsos Catalans* (Occitània and Catalan-speaking Regions) as part of *A Spoken Space* — a two-year-long show at Galérie Gaëtan in Geneva, Switzerland. Eulàlia’s work set in motion a dialogue concerning the telephone network and the symbolic space of the gallery. The piece was exhibited night and day for eight days by the gallery’s answering machine while the gallery space itself remained closed. During that week, Eulàlia used the telephone line to build a spoken territory. Each phone call to the show was answered by the voice of a woman artist singing traditional songs or reading extracts from the local history and literature of the Catalan-speaking regions. As callers listened, each track would bring to life the virtual space inhabited by said voices.

The native voice of a woman speaking her mother tongue stood for each region, which were thus portrayed in a kind of spoken landmark differentiating a verbal geography in a constructed territory. These local languages had been suppressed for years: censored in the public sphere under the Franco regime and barely surviving in the intimacy of certain domestic spaces. Eulàlia’s piece provided a sonography that made present those spoken territories.

In 1977 two technological breakthroughs emerged with the capacity to influence our way of conceiving space: cellular telephones became publicly available, and sonography emerged as a new technique for monitoring the first weeks of gestation. This latter imaging technique opened up new modes of visualizing bodies and new ways of perceiving space.

Galérie Gaëtan’s exploration of spoken spaces was not an isolated experience. Two years before, *Arquitectura* (the professional journal of COAM, the Madrid Architects Association) had launched a “spoken issue.”

### A spoken space, spoken geographies

The exhibition *A Spoken Space* “set in motion a dialogue between a telephone network, a gallery and an artist whose piece was specially conceived for this show. Each [...] installation was broadcast night and day for eight days by an automatic answering device.” During two years audio exhibitions changed weekly while the physical space of the gallery remained closed. Instead, what the public was able to access was a fictive, immaterial space that transformed into an actual verbal representation. The only form of contact with the gallery was by way of dialing a number on the telephone network (see Figures 1, 2, and 3).

Young international artists such as Muntadas, Eulàlia and the Fluxus artist Robert Filliou were among the show’s headline acts. Each track generated during the show unfolded a sonic space inhabited by voices. Through the act of listening, previously unexplored forms of representation,
became accessible. The exhibition catalogue was available in vinyl format, emphasizing the importance of sound. The title read: Un espace parlé. 47 propositions. Messageries associés. Galerie Gaëtan.

Eulàlia's piece is the focus of this article, mainly because of its capacity to use a virtual space for actualizing a political claim. It is a work linked to the author’s biography. As a Catalonian, she had experienced the repression of her own language under the Franco dictatorship. Only months after the exhibition, in December 1978, the new Spanish Constitution recognized the wide variety of languages spoken in Spain that were censored under the Franco regime. The success of this work lies in its use of technological tools available in our everyday life, specifically the telephone and the answering machine. Eulàlia's piece demonstrates how our conception of space and our notion of territory have changed through different technologies of representation. This notion can no longer be explained merely through geographical location, geopolitical boundaries or historical identity. Instead, the piece reveals the psychological and physiological “mutations” suffered by inhabitants of specific territories, in Franco Berardi’s terms. In a world based on semiotics and technology, concepts such as space, inhabitant, identity and reproduction must be reconsidered. So, how exactly does Eulàlia's work explore the possibility of inhabiting this new, immaterial terrain?

By discussing Eulàlia's work as a paradigmatic case through a current philosophical and theoretical lens, I present the political transformation in the early post-Franco Spain in relation to new telecommunication and medical technologies. I draw on the work of the Italian philosopher and activist Franco Berardi, who has identified and analysed psychological mutations linked to political and technological changes as opening a cognitive dimension in the everyday life of a middle class. Berardi refers to this dimension as the “infosphere”, and he coins the term “post alpha generation” to highlight the existence of a psychologically mutated population that has lived since childhood at the intersection between westernized cities and the deterritorialized new, virtual world.4

Another underlying aspect of Grau’s piece can be best described through concepts developed by philosopher and architectural theorist Paul B. Preciado. In his book Testo Junkie, he proposes the concept of the “pharmacopornographic regime” to depict the new mechanisms used to govern subjectivity since the mid-1970s.5 These mechanisms, in Preciado’s terms, are characterized by the remote provision of information capsules which are then incorporated into our bodies, producing transformations concerning our subjectivity and physical composition.

In the context of this debate, Occitània i Països Catalans applies the theories proposed by Berardi and Preciado to urban studies, opening a promising line of research concerning the intersection of art, technology

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and politics. By proposing new forms of urban architectonic space from the new epistemological paradigm through the use of new technologies, Eulàlia’s piece prompts important discussions. The “0.0” issue of the journal Arquitectura, which I will discuss in detail, also emphasizes the importance of the sonic, the virtual and the semiotic in the urban. Another association in respect to both examples is Beatriz Colomina’s thesis on the correlation between the improvements in medical imaging technologies and the evolution of architectural representation methods, which supports Berardi’s line of argumentation.

Occitània i Països Catalans was a sound collage specifically conceived in 1978 for the A Spoken Space exhibition. The piece presents a collection of poems, songs, literary readings and historical documents representatives of the regions of Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands and southern France. An oral piece performed by a local artist in her native language stood for each region. The Occitan singer Josiana, the Catalan actress Rosa María Sardà, Teresa Rebull, a Catalanian singer who had immigrated to Languedoc after the Spanish Civil War, María del Mar Bonet, a singer and writer from Mallorca, and Al Tall, a folk music band from Valencia, were the artists whose voices contributed to creating the work (see Figure 4).
The reading started off as a geographic and historical review of each of the different territories, offering physical and demographic data, and slowly transformed into an epic legend presented through songs and narratives, thereby creating the imaginary terrain of Occitània i Països Catalans.

An oral techno-performative device to integrate diverse geographies in a virtual space

A virtual territory popped up on the telephone line. A series of calls helped to weave a spoken network between homes and the art gallery. People calling the gallery could listen to the recording that Eulàlia had prepared on the answering machine. This act of sonic weaving materialized a virtual region overlaid onto the geopolitical map.

Each phone connected the calling party to a new location where the regional languages were claiming their belonging. These new regions were thus, temporarily inserted into the internationally legitimized reality. The instruments of choice for this insertion were both the spoken word and the telephone. The telephone became popular in Spanish homes in the mid-1960s. The spoken word ensured the continuity of the persecuted idiom on the streets. Through the art installation, a virtual space emerged to host it. The delocalization strategy became a valuable asset for dispersion and camouflage.

Out of the answering machine, artists and songwriters performed their songs. As Catalan, Valencian, Balearic and Occitan languages reached their highest expansion in the Middle Ages, due in part to the literature of the courts and to the lyric poetry of the troubadours, some of these contemporary techno-troubadours acted to reclaim the existence of their language by repeating songs from those traditions.

The installation joined together two private spaces in the process of reproducing the regional languages: the caller’s house and the inside of the gallery. Confining the possibility of coming into contact with Eulàlia’s sound art to an inner, private space, Eulàlia’s device recreated the circulation grid for the regional languages in Spain. Eulàlia’s strategy also allowed for those languages to creep into Swiss homes.

The mother tongues sounding through the artists’ voices shifted to become an oral landmark of sorts, bringing forth a spoken geography. Catalan, Valencian and Balearic languages had been domesticated – censored for decades in the public space but surviving in intimate contexts. Because the home was where language was taught and transmitted, Eulàlia’s work insists on the interaction between such spaces. Eulàlia’s device provided a kind of sonography that visualized the vitality and development of the languages. The image in the catalogue showing the artists during the

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sound recording for the answering machine (see Figure 4) reinforces this idea by reproducing the visual appearance of an ultrasound scan. The composition of the picture uses a triangular layout, with the women located at the base and the telephone at the top. Also, the black and white colours, the definition and the contrast in the image are characteristics of medical imaging.

Fig. 4 Rosa Maria Sardà, Maria del Mar Bonet, Josiana and Eulàlia Grau recording Occitània i Països Catalans, 1978, by courtesy of Eulàlia Grau. Photographer: Colita (Isabel Steva Hernández)
Occitània, somewhere in the infosphere

Occitània i Països Catalans not only meets the linguistic decolonizing goal that drives Eulàlia to create this multilingual oral soundscape but also provides a model to analyse the new mechanisms for the production of both space and the notion of identity regarding it. Using Deleuzian terminology, it is easy to say that Eulàlia’s work is a reterritorializing device.

Firstly, it builds a physical space using sound as the primary construction material; then in addition it brings about an emotional landscape with the capacity to enrol a community of listeners wishing to inhabit a shared space, at least for a few minutes.

From a Foucauldian perspective, Occitània i Països Catalans escapes the biopolitical mechanisms of control operating in western societies by the use of new technologies through subverting them. It emerges from inside the gallery, away from street surveillance, and it spreads by the telephone line. Humans cannot directly consume (listen, speak, or inhabit) “the spoken space”; it is only accessible by the use of machines (the telephone and the answering device).

The exhibition A Spoken Space opened in 1977, the same year that cellular phones became available, Apple was registered as a trademark, and the internet took its first steps towards the development of modems. 1977 was also the year that free radio channels conquered the air space in Italy and France. It thus becomes clear that what Eulàlia developed was a territory to explore – one with no handbook or history of behaviours setting guidelines. It was a territory designed for intervention through the use of domestic tools.

Occitània i Països Catalans emerges from the infosphere through an exploratory semiotic device. It fits the characteristics that Franco Berardi attributes to the cognitive territories of the infosphere. Quoting the terms employed by Berardi to define the construction process in the digital network, Occitània i Països Catalans is composed of a mosaic of “microfragments of recombinant semiosis” provided in each call: the sound clips recorded on the answering machine. In addition to that, the mindscape of Occitània i Països Catalans is constructed through the logic of mythology. Each call provides a shot of disjointed information that cannot be isolated or analysed rationally. The territory constructed by Eulàlia is not created appealing to reason but appealing to feelings. The singing voices of the techno troubadours call out to our deepest emotions. Its inhabitants (citizens in the act of communication through the telephone call) are members of the post-alphabetic generation which, according to Berardi, have learned more words from a machine than from...
their biological parents. The “post-alpha generation” described by Berardi has discovered the world by experiencing space and time correlations in a brand new way, unknown to their ancestors. He observes that “The concept of ‘generation’ no longer identifies a biological phenomenon but a technological and cognitive one,” identifying a generation as a human group sharing a technological training that creates a cognitive system and consequently an imaginary world. “The transformation of the cognitive techno environment continually redefines the forms of identity.”

It becomes imperative to explore how the technological transformations in the mid-1970s (and therefore contemporaneous to *A Spoken Space*) redefined the notion of identity. This panorama seems to permeate into the architectural sector in Spain – one found in the intersection between new technological tools, the end of the dictatorship, and the beginning of the democratic transition.

**Post alphabetical humans, urban sonographies**

*A Spoken Space* was contemporaneous with the boom in telecommunication technologies, yet it also coincided with the development of the sonography for monitoring early weeks of conception and gestation. This technique opens up new modes of visualizing bodies and new ways of representing space. Body and space are viewed as one, and what is more, the body itself becomes a typology of space. The architecture historian Beatriz Colomina claims that the evolution of architectural space correlates with the development of medical procedures to explore bodies. The way the human body is approached from a medical standpoint is also valid for the representation of architectural space. Sonography is a technique to explore both the new cognitive territory and its inhabitants. The exhibition format established for *A Spoken Space* made the works conceived for this show behave like a sort of ultrasound exploration of an enclosed space through the use of sound. The exhibition scanned the cognitive scene where the post alphabetical individual develops. It provided the verbalization expressing the mental representation of the virtual space constructed by the artist and inhabited by the listener. In the meantime, the exhibition exposed the technological tools used to construct the spoken spaces: images of the phone and the answering machine are featured on the catalogue cover in a calculated way (see Figures 2 and 3).

In 1975, coinciding with the end of the dictatorship, the Architects Association of Madrid put out the “0.0” issue of the professional journal *Arquitectura*. The editorial team launched the issue to mark a starting point for the renewal of the institution that would lead to a serious revision of Spain’s architecture culture. It was a sort of map guide with characters and spaces. A tour through the COAM building was outlined to discover the real institution behind the building’s façade. The magazine displayed a sequence of floor plans, photographs and inventories of

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10 Ibid., 76.
11 Ibid.
objects showing the innermost places of the building, accompanied by a series of interviews, testimonies, biographical data, drawings and pictures introducing the people working at COAM.

To illustrate the birth of a new and improved organization, graphic resources referring to human reproduction were used throughout the publication (see Figure 7). This brings us back to the paradigm outlined by Preciado and dubbed by him the *pharmacopornographic regime*, a term that “refers to the processes of a biomolecular (pharmaco) and semiotic-technical (porno-graphic) government of sexual subjectivity.” According to Preciado, the pharmacopornographic regime acts as hormones do, producing remote reactions that transform our bodies and shape our subjectivities. This argument is based on the fact that our societal structures and identities are controlled by the information we receive, incorporate and assimilate, an action which starts a mutation with an endocrine disruption.

To show the internal transformation of the institution and to expand on its revolutionary spirit, the magazine carried out a series of performative strategies. Dozens of human silhouettes printed on tracing paper appeared interspersed between regular pages. As the pages were turned, their hollow bodies were filled with the words written on the page after and the page before (see Figure 8). In this way they were made to incorporate every plan, scheme, and text describing the COAM renewal. The voice of the transformed institution permeated and thus transformed the humanoids, and vice versa. The renovation of the Madrid Architects Association also began with a metabolic change of the institutional organism that would alter the way architecture was conceived and then built in (physical or virtual) space. The issue was prefaced by an evaluation of the current state of Spanish architecture, taking into consideration the rules governing the practice that needed to be changed. Throughout the magazine the mechanisms that controlled production in the architectural practice were exposed and adjustments were proposed for changing them. This was sketched out as a model of the human reproductive system (see Figure 7). The semi-transparent bodies of the humanoids conquering the magazine became a metaphor for the assimilation process of the proposed changes.

Issue “0.0” was also available in a (tape) recorded format entitled “La Voz del Colegio” (Voice of the Academy). At the end of the printed publication was an advertisement publicizing this alternative format and the extra audio information it contained. The ad showed a floating tape cassette hovering above the COAM building and absorbing it (see Figure 6). The sound recording was an equivalent of the “spoken space” of COAM; a virtual and expanded version of the building arose from the ultrasound exploration undertaken by the editorial team. The credits of this issue were housed (in the printed version) in a vinyl sleeve (see Figure 5). The format and the visual imagery were quite similar to the ones employed in the *A Spoken Space* catalogue.
The two experiences provide a path to explore the newly opened landscape of the public realm since the mid-1970s. They attempt to conquer the urban space by conquering the air, which appears as a virtual *terrain vague* that can be inhabited through the construction of oral architectures. While the experience of *A Spoken Space* represents a speculative spatial proposal, the *Arquitectura* magazine example definitely brings the explorations of the virtual space created by the new telecommunication techniques and the new epistemological paradigms out of the art context and into the architectural and urban debate. *Arquitectura* magazine places these experimentations at the centre of professional discussions, bringing them to the most relevant architectural institutions in Spain. With its launch of the “0.0” issue, COAM acknowledged such spatial phenomena and explored the possibility of inhabiting them. If we consider the political context of this COAM publication – 1975, the last year of the dictatorship in Spain – the cognitive space emerges as an uncharted land of opportunities out of biopolitical control.

Fig. 5 *Arquitectura*, no. “0.0”, summary printed in a vinyl sleeve containing the credits of this issue. Colegio de Arquitectos de Madrid COAM, 1975. Photo: Amelia Vilaplana

Fig. 6 *Arquitectura*, no. “0.0”, advertisement for “*La Voz del Colegio*”. Colegio de Arquitectos de Madrid COAM, 1975. Photo: Amelia Vilaplana
The virtual spaces constructed by Eulàlia’s artwork and by the publication are tangible because they obey the new epistemological paradigms which conceive, represent and validate (what is considered as the) truth in the mid-1970s. What was previously repressed and denied is legitimized by the use of the new technologies.

**Becoming a feminist architect**

Analysed from a feminist and postcolonial perspective, Eulàlia’s piece and the “0.0” issue of *Arquitectura* magazine can make a contribution to exploring the new representation methods for a more inclusive architectural and urban practice. Those works opened new ways to conceptualize architectural space by integrating the behavioural changes brought by the use of the new technologies, and encourage us to consider the dynamic beyond the static, the liquid beyond the solid, and the
Both examples propose experimental sonic maps to integrate the different sensibilities coexisting in the same space. In those representations, the static physical sphere (buildings, urban fabric, and territorial organization) is always considered together with a dynamic virtual sphere where memories and desires keep constantly recombining. As a consequence, both works propose a liquid concept of space and of spatial identity. They even open a path to imagine a post-human concept of “inhabitant” and claim that we can virtually inhabit space. Finally, they dismiss the status of demiurge associated with the traditional role of the architect – in Eulàlia’s piece, by showing that space can be modified with domestic technological tools, from home and by anyone; and in the “0.0” issue, by making transparent the institution of the Architects Association of Madrid as a first step towards a renewed architectural culture post-dictatorship.

References
