

Joan Fontcuberta

Xavier Ribas' Sundays

Text published in *BLINK*, Phaidon Press, London 2002, p. 313

The contemporary metropolis orients its transformations on the basis of organic and functionalist models: a historic centre where the city is museified, residential areas where people live, commercial centres for shopping in, industrial states where goods are manufactured, traffic interchanges, and so on. Nowadays the experience of the big city can be explained in terms of movements between compartments exclusively devoted to perfectly planned activities. But despite the best efforts of politicians and urbanists to weave the complex fabric of the urban landscape, in the midst of the network of interests and objectives that constitutes every city there are pockets that escape their control. These are the *terrains vagues*: the wastelands, interstitial zones left vacant by industry, railway lines or docklands; residual spaces of the riverbanks, rubbish dumps, quarries, unused patches of land hemmed in by expressways, awaiting the speculators and developers... This is the panorama we find in any big city such as Barcelona –in spite of the plastic surgery carried out by architects and planners for the 1992 Olympic Games- and this is the territory Xavier Ribas has chosen to work in.

Xavier Ribas dissects the phenomenon of entertainment, of leisure, of what people do in their 'free' time, showing the extent to which such activities take place in the city's residual spaces. Quite spontaneously, people preserve, manage and recycle these spaces, effectively keeping them out of the efficient, productive order of the city: places for walking, sunbathing, picnicking, sport and exercise...It seems paradoxical that these spaces –not yet codified, as yet without regulation- are where people still have a chance to take the initiative. As Ribas concludes: 'Freedom can only flourish in a residual space that might, as a result, have a desolate appearance'. Although his documentary approach is guided primarily by an interest in anthropology and urbanism that leads to narrative images laden with little anecdotes, the photography –at once incisive and indulgent- sets out to imbue that desolation with a touch of Mediterranean irony.

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