

(ENG)

SITESIZE SERPS D'AIGUA. LES RIERES OCULTES I LA CONSTRUCCIÓ SIMBÒLICA DE BARCELONA

OFF-SITE PROJECT

It could have been a pond.

An encyclopaedia-like tank project, where everything settles and finds its place. Or like the water cycle, in phases that complement one another as the liquid, evaporated or buried part moves ahead. Or a project where the flow imposes itself and any possibility of order is overwhelmed by the force of the current. *Water Snakes* has chosen the latter, that of getting close to the jet without stopping, hiding, confining or containing it. Being a confluence, a flood. Allowing oneself to be swept away by the seasonal water that, while all too often scarce, can occasionally be excessive and overflowing. Getting wet with stories and pasts, because what is at stake here comes from afar, being dragged by and dragging a muddy density, freed from the tyranny of the now, that "love water and the parts of us that are water" ¹ in the words of the London-based writer Iain Sinclair, who is possibly the most prominent living exponent of this obsession.

From the Collserola chain of mountains down to the sea or the River Besòs, Barcelona was criss-crossed by numerous watercourses. Torrents,

gullies, springs and ravines shaped the urban landscape and were useful to us. The transformation of the city gradually channelled and manipulated them until sealing over their visible presence, and all we have now is traces of them surviving in the names of streets in every neighbourhood. However, psycho-geography, contemporary water diviners or artist collectives like Sitesize work hard to find them in order to understand why we do things, why things happen to us and why we feel a certain way in certain parts of the metropolis.

Water Snakes seeks to reread the city of Barcelona by relating the pre-existing nature of the water current to various accounts of the city's meaning and social, historic, symbolic and cultural construction in order to better understand the urban settings where we co-exist. With that aim, it takes the form of actions with walking routes, and of observation with the naked eye, in line with the idea that a city is a library and that you need to walk around it to read it. That is why, when asked who the author of *Donde la ciudad cambia su nombre* was, the waiter in Barcelona's

Zona Franca area replied "Candel? He's out there somewhere, he must be out there..." Rooted to the earth, what this project activates is a process of *de-concealing*. Be it in images, words or signs of the unsaid. That is why the title evokes both the winding shape of the gully and the above- and below-ground force of the snake. A source of lethal venom and poison that can cure, an ungovernable power. And it combines everything that springs from the visionary poets, the cultural mix of La Rambla, popular Catalan Modernisme, cheap housing, the Saint John's Eve bonfires, the revolts in cultural associations, the picnics in Montjuïc, the debates in bars, the squatted plots of land, the neighbourhood parties or the course of spontaneous manifestations.

Through the routes and actions that Sitesize will invite us to do over these months, which will be listed on a website ² and in a publication, we will realise that, by following the course and the history of water, there are places on the seemingly neutral



surface of our city that have meanings beyond what we might imagine them to have. We will summarise other reasons for some of the junctions or squares that citizens use, or those for the locations of certain historical milestones and institutions; we will follow bus lines that trace the course of old gullies; we will rediscover the disappeared Creu de Vallcarca hermitage, whose surrounding area was occupied by the last hermits of Barcelona, who lived from the nearby springs and streams, as well as the story of the old woman from Sant Genís dels Agudells, who would come down from the hills to the Sant Pere neighbourhood to sell wood; or we will talk about why, regardless of ideology, we feel so good in the Montjuïc cemetery next to the graves of Durruti, Ascaso and Ferrer i Guàrdia, lined up in rows facing the sea horizon.

Some routes will make us follow and imagine the gullies that used to fill the Raval lagoon; will make us wonder why there are places in the city that are nodes in constant transformation – Lesseps, Glòries, Cerdà; and will make us discover the purity of the torrents and springs at the sources, or the rapid energy that is shifted at the point where gullies flow into the sea. Some walks will be damper than others, but hopefully we will end up muddy, it being understood that everything has a meaning, even though we may not know what it is, in order to begin to draw out what we have forgotten and let go of the city that we live in and that lives within us. Back home, full of the poetry of observation, we might whisper a few verses by Verdaguier: “Les fonts ja són rieres, i les rieres, mar... [The springs are now gullies and the gullies sea...]”,³ or fragments of Sinclair’s invisible writing: “an ignorant man, clinging to the earth, with shady motives, runs back along the inward path”.⁴

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¹ Sinclair, Iain, *Swimming to Heaven: The Lost Rivers of London*. London: The Swedenborg Society, 2013.

² <http://rieresocultes.stream/>

³ From the poem “La mort de l’escolà”.

⁴ Lecture by Iain Sinclair at CCCB (12/12/2016).

SITE SIZE

Formed by Elvira Pujol Masip and Joan Vila Puig, Sitesize is a platform dedicated to creating and conducting research into the metropolis. We develop art projects, investigate forms of autonomous cultural production and take part in community learning processes. From our extensive portfolio of projects and creations in different contexts, we would highlight the following:

1. The Community Learning Laboratory (2017-2018), in collaboration with La Virreina Centre de la Imatge in Barcelona.
2. The touring project Popular Tourism Agency (2016-2019), which entailed building an alternative narrative to mass tourism in the city of Barcelona.
3. The touring exhibition and publishing project *Catalonia ends here! Here Murcia begins!* (2011-2014), a documentary research work on urban spaces and popular learning.
4. *MAD#sub. Notes from the sub-suburb of Madrid* (2010-2011), a visual essay about the metropolitan periphery south of Madrid.
5. Valparaíso Permanent Classroom (2010), creation of a learning community about the city of Valparaíso (Chile).
6. The project *Metropolitan stories – Permanent classroom* for the exhibition *The Unavowable Community* (2009) in the Catalan pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2009.
7. The project SIT Manresa, Territorial Interpretation Service (2005-2008), a public audit of the transformation of the city based on creative practices in relation to geography, landscape design, pedagogy and cultural management.

<http://www.sitesize.net/>