

RE: QUESTIONS... AND ANSWERS.

Jorge Casanova and Jesús Palomino

I have shared a table with Jesús Palomino in more than one occasion and in more than one context. Those tables have been full or empty depending on the situation; with food and drink, or without anything; in a public place or at home; with more people or just the two of us. In all those moments, there has been always a common denominator in the conversations we have maintained: we have always spoken a lot about everything linked to his artistic production which was not strictly artistic. In certain way, was my advantage, being a philologist, to be able to take the conversation to area in which I felt, not only more comfortable, but more motivated to consider the position of artist with respect to many questions that worried me. Nevertheless, there were always questions that could have been asked and they were not; something that I think everybody does; I dare say fortunately. It is those questions, the ones who you are about to read in the following pages, the only ones produced outside the usual context for our conversations: at the table or in a café. These questions have been collected from my electronic correspondence with Jesús. They are for me urgent questions which receive answer from different geographic points; they are questions for an artistic practice which produces an urgent agenda for its viewers.

Q: In your work, you usually incorporate very diverse material, generally from recognizable origin. Nevertheless, those materials appear estranged from the processes by they were devised, in order to become part of other new processes; sometimes these associations occur in an unexpected way, or they have made the essential vehicle for an inevitable reflection. What value do you give to this complicity/challenge dynamics of within your work?

Well, that relationship with the materials that you mention could have several readings. At a very pragmatic level, there exists one important reason. I can find these very common and inexpensive materials for very little money at any “1 Euro-store” or equivalent anywhere in the world.

There is also another reason, and it has more to do with the construction of the message I hope to transmit from the experience of the work: the precariousness of the materials, the inventiveness to look for solutions, the sense of game of an ethical reading of the reality.

This is the way in which installations can be carried out, with an intention to confront difficult conflicts from a clear lack of means. The installations transmit to us a glance of bewilderment around what I call the paradox of political awareness: How could we transmit what we consider politically correct and pertinent? Which tools can we use to confront some highly conflicting social and historical situations? Could we contribute with solutions form a close reading of these situations?

These artefacts of low technology recreate the figure of an individual who approaches social and historical conflicts from willingness for repair.

This repairer “I” finally hits reality and realizes that there no possible actions or changes, because the means and forces to start up these processes are absent. More simply put:

this conflict could be solved in this way, but: who, how, which forces are available to do it.

Q: One of the most obvious perceptions when reviewing your production is that each work displays something that had to be assembled, and each assembly contains a cohesive message. In most cases, this sequence is linked to a specific place. So that material, process and place, appear united under a message whose departure point is a motto indicating the origin of the work displayed, of the intervention. This is the usual scheme but it requires a permeable position and an active receptivity. Do you have an initial approach when identifying the areas to take shape in your intervention?

No. I do not have beforehand a fixed scheme regarding the topics I am going to approach in each situation. Obviously, when I am invited to work and to propose a project for a specific place, I use my imagination and my interest to understand the place, its history and its social landscape. It is very stimulating mental game: to mix in your head different information levels and finally confront them with human reality, the one you find when you move to the place itself.

Sometimes prejudices, previous images or objective information about the place do not help you to get any specific idea. The most interesting ideas come from the glance, from looking around and experimenting in each of the places.

Q: It is clear that one of your worries is to establish a dialogue with the place you are working in but, then, it is also obvious that space is not your only worry. Your activities possess a geographic specificity while they offer and, therefore, also demand a temporary frame. In most cases, that connection looks into a re-evaluation of events which have customarily received a biased interpretation within the conventional grounds of history and conflicts. In your opinion, how high an aspiration can one have for a work of art to create a valid intersection between events and facts those who see your work recognize, and the possible interpretations of those events preceding your intervention?

This question goes right into the center of the whole issue here. I could re-formulate it to myself in a more concise way: am I able to change anything with my installations? And if I could do that: what kind of change would that be?

Obviously my installations are not going to solve any real problem. Let's say that they are placed more clearly in a stage prior to any action: acknowledged there is a problem, identify from a close reading what kind of problem it is and offer a solution.

I do not know to what extent what I propose in each place is shared or understood by spectators who, generally, coexist everyday with that problem I try to thematize. I try to take the subject to a point in which a consensus reading can happen.

I am not interested in a unanimous opinions, but in general agreement about priorities. If I find a contaminated river in Serbia because military action, I propose to purify it. If I find a deeply divided and violent society in Venezuela, my goes to identify what is absent and prevents the normal function of society: civil rights. If I propose to purify the memory related to the dictatorship of Franco it is because, to some degree, I can still detect situations or attitudes which prevent democratic life from being carried out normally. (Sometimes the problem is so painful and infuriating, as in the case of Venezuela and Spain, that it would be difficult to speak about consensus.)

In this sense and following the previous ideas, it is very simple to understand the actions I propose: READING and REPAIR. Sometimes, in order to repair, it is necessary to introduce new readings, new sources of information which can justify, legitimize and make the act valuable, as well as making possible to recover what was lost. In this confrontation, vigor or weakness of social dialogue is really put to test. Supposedly, it is in that dialogue I try to take part whenever I propose my installations.

Q: For some people, to talk about social dialogue in a place which is not one's own may seem a bit of a disproportion. Nevertheless, and far from being so, I believe that it opens an avenue of artistic communication which, in fact, gives a measure to the work, links it to the space it occupies. In this sense, and in order to be what they are, your machines reject contemplation to demand intervention. Do you think that the recognition/intervention of those who see your machines redefines the trio artist-work-spectator? Do you think that if such redefinition were true it would be possible to speak of a certain kind of aesthetics? Could we then say that intervention impairment in the aesthetics of your work takes place?

To try to understand and to present my artistic reflection in a certain place does not have to be something out of place. Somebody travels to another place to say something. That is what I try to do with my travels: to say something that makes sense for me and the people who can see my work. It could be said that the sense of proposal resides in the interest about it. The installations are placed between my proposal and the potential audience. I try with the installations to create new reflections, unexpected perspectives, imaginative links, etc. The way and the spheres in which I display my works are still conventionally codified cultural places. I do not believe that there is a difference between the way a spectator confronts my work or any other work. After all, what I do is just art. It happens to be a type of art which thematizes readings about society, ecology, mass-media, history, etc. It is here, from the work that the spectator can find a common ground from which to establish connections, elaborate reflections, and enjoy imaginative impressions.

Q: The making of your machines creates a process similar to the construction of prototypes. Although sometimes you have amplified the size of some elements in new versions, you have reproduced essentially works already shown. Do you think that when one of your machines is reproduced somewhere else its scope also changes with the new place and public? Does it become a new piece, a new filter, a new shack...?

Each new installation entails a new and differentiated situation: different date, new physical and social space, new people around the project, new possibilities, new means of production, etc. Everything is newness, and it is for that reason that the project can take a new impulse. For me, it would be artistically and humanly impossible to carry out anything without feeling the inspiring presence of newness. I have presented different projects in which the references were always linked to the informal architecture of survival (shacks) or the machines laboratories (filters). This does not point in any manner to reproduction, but to repetition of an imaginative impulse and experience: it means insistence and interest in the use of those references. The process consists of constructing again the reference in a different place, under different light, with different people who, perhaps, speak a language strange to me; people who are sometimes immersed in uncertain conditions of production and experiment new impressions with

respect to the social, human and historical environment. The idea is, then, to repeat from the difference, to negotiate each action with contingency in order to be able to, perhaps, offer something the opening day to the public, something which has to do with them as much as with me. It goes without saying that, sometime, the objective is nor completely attained.

Q: This takes me to one of the questions I'm more interested about artistic communication: the reproducibility. Although your work is born and exhibited with a high degree of spatial-temporal specificity, you maintain an open margin for reproducibility. In that sense, how do you think filters, shacks, projectors, articulate themselves as units capable of reproducing meaning outside a specific context? Or. Perhaps, more importantly how are those units aesthetically conceived? Is there aesthetics of the filter or of the shack? How does the filter as aesthetic object interact with the filter as a propeller of the social dialogue?

I begin with your last question. The interaction takes place by means of the only possible agent: the spectator, everybody who confronts the work and accepts the invitation to live and experiment with what any work of art is supposed to provide. As far as the reproduction of my works, I do not believe that Benjamin's ideas are applicable to my creations, because he talked about the capacity of modern mechanical means of creation and distribution of images, and how that new possibility would redefine the role of the artist and its production. In my work, I do not believe that there are any mechanisms that reproduce anything, though there is constant repetition in the difference. Perhaps the way I approach the work is more like the experience the musicians on tour can have: they have a good repertoire well known and specified; then, they play as sensitively as possible in each one of the performances. As we all know, the audience's response is for the musicians conclusive.

The presence of text is a common denominator of your interventions. Sometimes, it is the written word the one physically articulates the nexus between the materials, the one that unifies the work beyond mottos or titles. There is an offer of questioning the use of certain materials as well as of certain words. Your works inscribe themselves in a time and in space, they are contextualized. At the same time, those materials and words are forced outside its natural context, boxes like machines, words like ice, etc. in order to give them more possibilities of impact, like through radio for example. Do you see, within the general plan for an installation/intervention a radio transmission as an extension of your work, a reproduction or simply like a part which completes the creative process?

The radio transmissions are also the piece. They are not less important than the physical object built which, generally, accompanies the transmission. Once again, I thought that the orientation and the spirit of some of my interventions, at the museum or the gallery could be better understood if, simultaneously, people could express explicit opinions and reflections. The idea was to accompany the objects with words, that is, to bring the projects closer, make them more eloquent and participative by means of the explanation and the shared experience in the radio; to create a radio dialogue around the artistic experience to expand it beyond its usual limits. This was the idea in the three radio transmissions I have propitiated to date: Cameroon 2002, it was a workshop for young people in a very poor district of the city of Douala; Valladolid 2005, we tried to

approach different social questions; Foundation Montenmedio 2006, we wanted to approach the common cultural roots between Spanish Andalusians and Andalusies Morrocans. Radio can generate a very interesting group dynamics. The possibility of transmitting information created and compiled from the experience of the participants in the project, while they move forward investigating with curiosity, creating a playful dialogue and interested in the generosity of knowledge, these are all ingredients that fascinate me. Moreover, the best of everything is that radio works very well as facilitator of human contact. So, as soon as I can, if the conditions are there, I will again propose radio.

Q: I agree with you. An ideal, or idealized radio must, without a doubt, reflect that ground between playing and the flow of knowledge without restrictions. However radio essentially channels information, be it in the form of words, music, announcements, etc. information to be processed where it is listened. Although radio transmissions are, as you say, part of the work, they take place after the artist; once you're gone. Your intervention, as I understand it, the wireless production, so important for you, seems to aspire to surpass the work it is part of. Do you think that, in general, the presence of artist and works should have a limit, so that the action of both could nurture a wider aesthetic experience? Without those limits, don't you think that artist and work are in danger of dilution in a mixed bag of memories and other people's experiences, and finally disappear as referents?

Well, all the projects I propose have a very specific duration. The work disappears at the end of the exhibition. Sometimes, the project has a reality without my presence (as it is the case of the radio transmissions). Later on, photographs and texts can transmit in the form of information-memory what the works was like.

I always like to think that any interested spectator, or any collaborator of my projects, will take himself/ herself images, impressions, memories, which will continue to complete the experience of the work autonomously. What I mean is that the memory of the spectator continues generating results long after the artistic object is directly experienced. Perhaps this is what you call expanded aesthetics. I firmly believe in the deposit of experiences a work can generate. I also believe in the process of reading-re-reading that starts up when an artistic object draws our attention. Each spectator becomes a potential container of aesthetics experiences. He/she will continuously carries that baggage where he/she goes. It is like a folder which can be used if the occasion requires it. This individualized relation with the memory has always interested me. In addition, it facilitates the existence of a spectator capable of active and participative readings.

Photos and texts remain, after the physical disappearance of works, work as a file-, information around my activities. They are quite useful to understand my process and its practical reality. It does not worry me too much to disappear like "author". It worries me more that the memory of my works disappears, without leaving the slightest trace, in the memory of the spectators.

Q: Since your work is composed of diversity of materials, of references to diverse places, and very different experiences, since it can take so many shapes, the uniqueness of the work creates minimal geographies whose access becomes difficult one is not in-situ.

In addition, it is necessary to keep in mind that some of your installations or interventions are ephemeral, from what perspective do you conceive the dissemination of your work? Do you think that the aesthetic experience you talk about are transferable to a series of photos, for example, which in turn endow the work with permanence and the possibility of distribution? If you tackle a piece to be exhibited permanently what changes in your plan?

I conceive of the dissemination of my work first like a direct of an artistic project which spectators of a specific local sphere can appreciate. Generally, the places in which works appear are related to the conventional artistic world: galleries, museums, private foundations, etc. These interventions are collected in visual and textual documents that give information about the installations. It is this information-material what gets a wider distribution under the form of press articles, catalogues, internet, gallery networks, professional critics, etc. My work has more media readers than watchers. For me, both experiences make sense in their obvious difference. I do not consider the possibility of anchoring the experience of my projects into a series of photographs, which could easily be circulated and distributed. I believe that, as information, the most effective and interesting way continues being the graphic document and the critical text.

In order to create a work that is imperishable, one has to resort to completely different planning. This means producing a lasting object, something collectable, materially storable, etc. The planning is different not only physically but also conceptually. It is very interesting for me to see how sense, actions and their acceleration and impulse are freed during the process of the installations. This is probably so because I do not have to produce from restrictive conditionings and I can give priority to the statements over any other circumstances. Perhaps this is the most interesting and rewarding experience for me. I believe it is there that all the value events are concentrated which, in turn, can later be extracted from reading my pieces.

Q: The creation of a scene in which there's continuity between material, object and viewers comes into being at the end of the installation/intervention. This is achieved by the creation of atmospheres conducive to a certain experience. Without going too deep into a past or present theoretical line, could we say that the installation/intervention as aesthetic manifestation nurtures the binomial temporality/theatricality? Do you think that, in some cases, within the present panorama of the artistic installation a stage tendency can end up in a mere aesthetic pose? How do you position yourself as an artist in front of the already difficult balance between staging and aesthetic-critical experience? Where would you like to recognize yourself within the present panorama?

I think it would be better to talk about TIME-SPACE-PARTICIPATION. For me, at least, it is more stimulating like that. Theatre and the installation come from clearly differentiated traditions. It is true that installations use elements common in theatre but I do not consider that they are the link they seem to be. The form "INSTALLATION" creates an emergency which obeys to a series of historical conditionings, very specific to the post war European and American artistic scene. Perhaps the right question would be: why there arises a necessity to expand the experience of space and sculpture? How are these experiences extended specifically in the visual arts? Which forces, actions and desires emerge to lay the field of what we call today installation?

Well, that an object of artistic action ends up being no more than a pose will depend, to a great extent, on the author and the circumstances. There could be successful and failed

installations. Having experience in the field does not guarantee optimal results *per se*. Consequently; I believe that it will depend to a great extent on what the artist achieves by setting off the project. The two last questions are difficult to answer and I don't know very well what to say. I position myself doing what I do. I would like to be recognized as a promoter of imaginative artistic situations, of interesting human events and hopeful ethical readings. This is the way I would like to be considered.

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