

The Added Value

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto
[eds]

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Fundació Espais d'Art Contemporani
March 2005

“That's why we love literature, for what it begets. That is the final reason. All other reasons may be complex, broad and personal, but they are not the ultimate, the necessary, the indispensable one. [...]

Life is not just life, Mr. Director - it's life plus the added value.”

Belén Gopegui. *El lado frío de la almohada*.

Anagrama, Barcelona. 2004.

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Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

This publication is released on the occasion of the exhibition of a series of projects we have felt the need to develop in the past few years. The exhibition will be at the *Espais* Contemporary Art Foundation in Girona for a certain period of time, and it will be visited by a few dozen people. For this exhibition, we could have published a catalogue with the exhibited works, with their technical details, and their accompanying texts. We could have tried to produce a publication which would attempt to translate the pieces into a graphical format, to translate their direct reception as much as possible, as we have already done in the past. But this time we're looking for something different.

Let's call “a debate” the communication of two or more people who produce something more. That “something more” is the possibility, a “something else”. It seems like we have been granted a socio-historical moment in which that other possible something is a very clear necessity. But we're afraid of it. What to do with all that malaise, then? Are we going to remain silent? For how long? Will we be able to define the final objective of this simulacrum?

The malaise rooted in our fractured lives feeds on loneliness. Workers of symbolic capital, of the attempt to create cultural contributions, we try to be competitive, to think things out better than others do, to be worthier of our pay than others. Nothing is spoken about, no information is shared with your competitor. We are afraid of speaking and of adopting a position with regards to art projects, texts and theories. These are no times for being unwary.

We have exhibited works and published catalogues in the past. They have allowed us to think, but they have seldom generated the debate necessary for us to think together with someone else. It's not that we are against art catalogues or exhibitions, we have come across infinite amounts of food for thought in both. But at this moment we need to think rather than to catalogue, to think in order to give food for thought. To listen to what others are thinking. To disseminate what others are thinking. We have invited a variety of people related to the art world to summarise, in a brief text, prompted by a question we have formulated, some issues about art we have sometimes spoken about, inviting them to ask us a question in turn. In short: an invitation to create possibilities out of doubts, to provoke thought and to think in a cultural context which is diametrically opposed to that attitude. To enquire with the hope of finding new questions further down the line.

1

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

Your career as an enthusiastic History of Art lecturer is a guarantee of your interest in the subject. But what are we to expect nowadays of poetry, of artistic poetics as a cultural contribution? What faith is it possible to have in art nowadays? Is it a question of belief or a question of thought? What would you like to find, in this sense, when you visit exhibitions or take part in art events?

1+1

Aurora Fernández Polanco:

You have allotted me a very comfortable niche, since I don't have to think about the art institution, or which might be the desirable cultural politics. I don't have to worry about democratic access to culture, either, or whether privileged spaces dedicated solely to the production, exhibition and conservation of art make any sense nowadays. Therefore, I take it for granted that what I'm talking about "exists".

Since you address me as an educator, I can start with an account of a questionnaire we handed out a few days ago in my Aesthetics class. We were talking precisely about the aesthetic experience, and I invited my students to comment on any aesthetic experience they had had. There wasn't a single answer in which "art" had anything to do with it, they all spoke about everyday facts. I was joking and asking them whether that had anything to do with them being "children" of teachers from the 1960's-1970's generation, who had taught them to "pay attention" to aspects of what was then called vital praxis.

But art is not life, however much we might have learned to see and believe that we can all be artists. I don't think that in this new life we are living, this media life, art coincides with everything included in the notion of "the visual", either. It is true that, as an art historian,

I can't help being interested in the debate between this discipline and visual culture, and since it is as important to expand the limits of the former as to think about the implications of both. Without taking things to the extreme of renaming the term "history" to "culture", and "art" to "visual". If there is, in the wide framework of visual culture, an autonomous sphere, that's because some of us think that certain artifacts carry the implication of a certain life experience which we still call aesthetic experience. And that if art has any meaning, it is within the media landscape, playing a significant, or "signifying" role in this context, with all its intellectual and critical implications.

It is true that things cannot be collapsed into the same, let's derivatively call them 19th Century (including a large part of the 20th Century), terms, and that many of the works on show in museums, biennials, galleries or "alternative spaces" focus more on epistemological aspects - for example: art practise as a true inter-disciplinary research, akin to textual analysis, to documentation - which are reclaimed from the semantic field of the archive and therefore demand a more theoretical experience.

Even after recognising all the exceptions - as valid within the art discourse, of course - you mention poetry, and I know that underneath all this there is this kind of experience, so important to you, provided by a certain kind of poetics, or "formalisation", and which we call aesthetics. The kind designation you dedicate to me by calling me an "enthusiastic" educator, presupposes a conversation or two we have had together, where we understood that enthusiasm is nothing else but a product of the need to share the experiences one has had when enjoying a work of art, that old pretence to universality from the Enlightenment, or, in a similar way, from a restricted notion of "enthusiasts", like those obsessed with seeing "the secret relationships between things". And why not?

Therefore, we could try to follow an imaginary stroll. It doesn't matter if the place where we would go to participate in a work of art were an "orthodox" space, within a relative autonomy, or whether the work was produced within the realm of alternative practises. Simply speaking, one turns up at a particular place where one has been called in order to take over the role of spectator, with all the implications this has been carrying for the last few decades. We look, we contemplate, we analyse, we stroll, we interact; we are in the presence of the work trying to keep in tension the critical moment of the aesthetic experience.

We wanted to eliminate pleasure and beauty (in the updated sense of those terms), so that works of art

could preserve their negative character with regards to the false and phantasmagoric reality offered by the culture industry, its “yes, I do”, its constant affirmation of the conditions in which its own exploitative character is premised. We wanted to eliminate the spectacle and we ceased to value whatever there was that could be positive in something spectacular. With pleasure and beauty, all the impact and the surprise were also flushed down the drain, with all the positive character they could have. We forgot that the aesthetic experience is (also) a sensory experience. The miracle takes place in the intertwining of the sensory experience (a mixture of pleasure and displeasure, and why not, Publio), and the critical moment.

That art should recover emotions doesn't mean that it should compete with the “spectacle”. We're not talking about stealing power from theme parks and fairs. Why is Viola being so successful with his *Passions*? Maybe because he has gone back to emotions. He studies them and works with them. But he also intensifies them.

We have spoken so much, we have theorised so much about the works (truly, it was necessary, we had to do it at a certain point) that maybe it's time to ask ourselves the question of whether the current (more repetitive, less sincere) discourses are drowning them out by simultaneously silencing not only the ineffability of experience, but those words that try to take a roundabout around the concept, layer after layer, in order to explain something not very far removed from the 18th-Century “je ne sais quoi”, but less sensual, more conceptual, if you will. Should we go back to this pre-reflexive aesthetic experience? It is definitely nothing else but biding our time, taking our time to look. To look a lot and to compare, something similar to “seeing is having seen”. An activity which only intensifies the imaginative power of the aesthetic experience.

This is what we can expect nowadays from art and from artistic poetics: the active preservation of imagination as a creative, poetic and political faculty. Against the uniformity of meaning imposed by power, the old imagination recognises itself as a liberating, revealing faculty; a faculty which allows us to separate ourselves from “this” empirical world and which, by doing that, points out that it ought to be different. The faith one can have in art nowadays is that of assigning it the defence of imagination in the sense I have just pointed out. You yourselves have written: “let us not allow ourselves to be conquered by the symbolic space of language!”.

I don't understand you well when you ask me whether the latter is a question of belief or a question of thought. It's a question of will. In the academic realm, in the educational politics. Wherever the practical is imposed and the speculative, the creative, is cornered, wherever certain subjects are eliminated from school curricula. In the everyday surveillance of the manipulative use of language. Wherever there is a uniform meaning of language - a dominant discourse, whatever that may be - what is failing is imagination. It's a question of will: wishing things were different and defending a truly “artistic” realm, an aesthetic experience which would not be afraid to recuperate its traditional sense (in the positive “sense” of the word): discovering more, getting to know more, to think more, to live in different times, to be a fissure in everyday time, “ways of making world”, of making other worlds; to enter this world transversally, to deactivate it, to “alter” it, blowing up in pieces the mechanism of automatic understanding.

Finally, the easiest part, since you allow me to be imaginative: what would I like to come across when I visit an exhibition or take part in an artistic event?

I would like to arrive and stay still, slightly overwhelmed, just enough to get closer (I wouldn't mind losing the correct distance for a while), and to smile, just enough to prove myself that something was happening, something that already happened, or something that I had always wished had happened. To recuperate distance. To have a lot of questions to ask myself, a lot of things to tell someone about, things that were there in the work itself, in the event itself; to transverse it with comments in this sense. Or, quite the opposite, to have “so many insinuations”, so many questions wedged in there to make it difficult for me to enunciate the experience in words. Still... I wouldn't mind getting a little bit angry because “that could have been an Armani window display”, and then think why it couldn't be that

anymore, why was I so unfair in the first place. I would like the work to make me return to it again before leaving.

What is increasingly important for me is that the artists manage to formalise things properly (you yourselves talk about a “poetic form”, and that's not by chance). That they be aware that (I borrow this from Muntadas) they must “activate the artifact”, since works of art also have a sell-by date which shouldn't be feared.

I am also one of those people who think that it is important to be acquainted with previous works by an artist in order to better enjoy their new proposals. The “visitor”, or “participant” experiences a higher level of enjoyment if they have been well informed. There is no such thing as a uninformed dilettante in any field of human activity... I'm sceptical towards the miracles that suddenly bring art closer to “the masses”.

1+1+1

Aurora Fernández Polanco:

There is a constant in your writings and conversations: the aesthetic experience: how can it be defined nowadays? How to do it? What relationship is there for you between artistic production and aesthetic experience?

1+1+1+1

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

Quite a few years ago Félix Guisasaola recommended us Christoph Menke's book *The Sovereignty of Art*, to whose rereading of Adorno and Derrida we owe the definition of aesthetic experience as a fracture in the automatic comprehension of signs generated from a work of art, which implies an acceptance of the autonomy of art, not as an autonomous space, but as an autonomous discourse, which is nevertheless capable of subverting other discourses. The fracture in the automatic comprehension of signs takes place in the subject of an aesthetic attitude, with which to critically face the rest of their active reality.

To defend the autonomy of art from this point of view is equivalent to defending that the development of its own discourses, and through the generation of other representational strategies, art (in its widest sense) still holds the capacity to be useful for us and to inspire us not survival, since our nature itself tends towards it even in extreme situations, but resistance and transformation.

This aesthetic attitude is necessary today more than ever, because our environment seems to inevitably absorb us into a passive, sceptical, cynical and submissive attitude - which doesn't develop us as human beings, nor does it give us the possibility of any change in what is left to us to inhabit with our existence. To have been the subject of an aesthetic experience can imply this attitude, which can end up being even disturbing, because it's hard to be demanding with oneself and with everybody else. Nevertheless this attitude is also an addiction, because in the opacity of our surroundings we see and think with more density and our curiosity grows, allowing us to feel other possibilities. This is the added value which makes life more of a life.

One cannot be a producer of aesthetic experiences if one hasn't been the subject of one. Even after having been one, it is a really difficult task, for which there are no formulae, the challenge of conceiving and configuring this experience which you would like to make possible, which you would like to encounter. The desire of a certain awareness in the production of writing, images, the desire to “inform”, to “find the form” so that an object or situation can become capable of providing an aesthetic experience can only stem from being submerged in these processes of questions and answers, of uncertainty.

2

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

What does it mean to accept the defeat of the avant-garde? The avant-garde utopia of social change through autonomous art vs. ...what? What is artistic specificity nowadays if it has nothing to do with a formal research? Where are its autonomy and sovereignty? And, on the other hand, if we are to consider the moment in which works were efficient and were happy to exhibit the malaise, the symptoms, that is,

to make them perceptible, as a thing of the past, how can we expect that the works of art would not lead to resignation and cynicism, but to something more?

2+1

Víctor del Río:

In summary, maybe the first condition of rupture which the avant-garde art projects required was precisely to overcome their autonomy. So “the avant-garde utopia of social change” could not be achieved through an autonomous art. In the productivist programme, for example, this was fairly well explained. As it was in the over-referenced text by Benjamin, *The Author as Producer*. But even then it was possible to infer that the artist's production was going to be dissolved in other social practises, and that it was going to lose its specificity. In a sense, in the realm of Russian productivism, it is interesting to see how the artistic phenomenon could even achieve an educational dimension. This positions art in a paradoxical function from which it was exiled by Platonism, in the sense that art and poetry were the carriers (as oral and visual culture) of the basic information with which people were educated, something which Plato pretended to substitute with a different educational model. In theories of reception, we can also find a claim which suggests the constructive dimension of art in the attempt to overcome the aesthetics of negativity, specifically in Jauss, of whom you are avid readers...

The problem, nowadays, is that artistic practise hasn't ceased to be autonomous, while at the same time it continues to feed the fiction of a political or social efficiency which can only be interpreted, in most cases, as cynicism or ingenuity. The difficulty lies in the fact that only a few residual contexts of the historical avant-garde would provide a programme of critical awareness involved in the problems we're referring to today. Maybe some episodes of *Dada*, and, no doubt, Constructivism, could be considered as representative of that critical avant-garde which contemporary artistic practises have attempted to recuperate. Thus, there is a kind of haziness regarding the avant-garde, which sometimes makes us forget that, strictly speaking, most of the artistic production associated with this concept was responding to formalist aims, that it was the effective culmination of Modernity. In that sense, the famous failure of the avant-garde, sustained by authors such as Bürger, is a failure in terms of a reductionist project through which there was an attempt to explain a much more complex phenomenon, one which exceeds the expectations launched by those who have felt disappointed by it. In my opinion, this failure only exists under the guise of a retroactive interpretation of the avant-garde phenomenon.

One of the common forgotten facts regarding this problem is the role of the discipline known as “History of Art”, understood as an institution. History of Art, as a contemporary factor of delimitation of the artistic phenomenon, is responsible for many of the unanswered questions, which are rooted in the very notion of “art” as a category derived from a historical awareness. The problem is even more poignant in Spain, where the educational bodies and historiography itself shamelessly flaunt a general absence of the contemporary in History of Art Faculties, with the fortunate exception of a few well-known departments and teaching nuclei.

Maybe the historical escape from this time loop was a false one, and happened under the relative category of the “neo-avant-garde”, which inevitably leads to a frustrated “postmodernity”.

Hal Foster, in *Return of the Real*, is more concerned with developing the notion of a “return” than of that of “the real”, so it is not very clear what is it that actually returns. And he ends up, despite his intentions, subsumed into a new discursive loop. His definition of the real, as that which is inscribed in trauma, seems rather lacking given the great variety of implications present in practise, and his resorting to the concept of the artist as ethnographer couldn't be more predictable and disappointing. In the analysis of contemporary artistic discourse we have inherited from the generation of American critics and historians a false disjunction between formalism and structuralism, from which we extract consequences that generate this strange political bad faith. We should ask ourselves whether art nowadays really has “nothing to do with a formal research”, something which art practises systematically contradict.

The hypothesis that is due to the new inflation of the art object as commodity after the conceptual asceticism of the 1970's seems to me to be an all too easy analysis, and, therefore, an all too ideological

one. I rather think that, as suggested by Thomas Crow, the economy of contemporary art looks suspiciously similar to that of the culture industry, and that it is premised on the huge installation and exhibition budgets at fairs, biennials and other macro-events, far removed from the modality of a commodity fetish of the auction houses...

These issues are where most of the problems of legitimising the art discourse nowadays reside, because all of us dedicated to this activity (trying to see beyond the institutional structure of the circuit) are no longer surprised to discover that there is a relationship of hiding between the art apparatus and the aesthetic experience. The circuit conceals the art, or, rather, art is precisely what is lacking in this discourse, not because of its ineffability, but because of an endemic distortion. The circuit, the professional and institutional infrastructure, misrepresents the art object in its sheer aesthetic phenomenology.

The works of art condemn us to cynicism and resignation to the extent that they assume a rhetorically political role, and reproduce perfectly codified gestures in which discourse doesn't develop criticism, but merely resembles it through a curious mechanism of mimesis. These cases are probably the ones that inflict the most damage to the truly overwhelming capacity of the aesthetic experience as a locus of distancing from the functional structures of interest and power management.

Maybe the common-sense question of "What to do?" with this blockage would be inadequate. From an ethical viewpoint it would be much more effective to ask "What not to do?". Art is something else altogether, and, no doubt, its relationship to praxis is yet to be developed.

2+1+1

Víctor del Río:

Well, regarding all this, the first question I'd like to ask you is whether you agree with the above (rather urgent) diagnose, or what it is that you disagree about?

On the other hand, in your production I often come across a totally un-accommodating reflection with the spectator on the relationship between power and exploitation; in a sense, I'd like to ask you the same question back... although, assuming everything I have said, I'd like to ask you what is it that you wouldn't do in your production as artists, that is, what is it that you consciously try to avoid...

In a number of conversations we have commented on the need for a distancing from the figure of the artist as a social role, as a character. Would that imply a denial of the professionalisation in the field of art and cultural agents? Or, rather, would it become an exercise in ambiguity and camouflage, whether under the disguise of the ethnographer or the private detective? How would you answer that famous question which we share as accomplices: Do you want to be artists? Are you artists? What does that mean to everyone else?

2+1+1+1

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

In relation to the debate surrounding the autonomy and specificity of art practise, and being aware that we are adopting the opposite view of that of most of our invites in this publication, we are going to defend both.

In order not to create confusion, let us say that defending the autonomy of art, defending its specificity, that of generating aesthetic experiences, resides in the otherness of its form of discourse. In this sense, said specificity would lie in how to generate a discourse which is artistic not only in terms of what it communicates, but also in how it does it; thus, formal research is a great part of it, not in the sense of style, but in terms of strategies of production, distribution, representation and communication. These strategies are inevitably bound to be superseded and to be assimilated, but that shouldn't bother us, as long as they have succeeded in being effective, even though only temporarily.

According to these principles, many of the contemporary practises which don't publicise themselves as art shouldn't be considered art (in the most conservative realms, as much as in those that are presumably less so), and, at the same time, many practises that do provide us with aesthetic experiences, and should therefore be artistic, do not exist in the eyes of the system, or, as you point out, they are even ignored

and misrepresented (here, no doubt, the real challenge would be to establish clear borderlines, but that might not be necessary or convenient). One could say that there is an ideological search for whatever it is that hinders the aesthetic experience in post-fordist capitalism. Within this status quo, no one is interested in individuals developing an aesthetic attitude. On the contrary, we think that a desired education, in terms of teaching human beings, not slave workers, should provide aesthetic experiences which can inform this aesthetic attitude. To create human beings who might not be much freer, no less submerged in the same reality and its contradictions, but at least doubtful, at least aware of what is at stake on a more general level, more ambitious with regards to justice, more fed up with the free market, more open to risk.

We presume, therefore, that in art there is a potential to promote critical subjectivities, non-affirmative subjectivities, something that, no doubt, has a political dimension, and maybe even a social one (art is a comment on art, whether it wants to or not, and is political, whether it wants to or not). The problem is that reception, the aesthetic experience, is an individual process, which we cannot live through someone else. We don't believe that a collective aesthetic experience is possible; therefore, the so-called political efficiency cannot be anything else but to generate in the subjects those doubts we were referring to regarding that which is offered us as reality. Another, different problem, is that as contemporary subjects, we have enormous difficulties in articulating ourselves collectively in order to reclaim social and political change.

This is related to one of our questions which was unfortunately left unanswered [10], in which we were referring to the growing incorporation of communication and artistic representation strategies connected to political action groups, to the generation of collective representations and identities and the debate on whether aesthetic experience is inevitably elitist and ineffective. We perceive a paradox in the positions defended by the need to undertake representations which can effectively communicate current situations, but which pretend to provide an easy answer to the task. The aesthetic experience is by definition a demanding one, since by breaking free from the mechanisms of automatic comprehension it should also break free from ourselves, should make us face our own abyss, and might not be to our liking. In that sense, nothing can be easy. On the other hand, it is highly desirable that collectives should represent themselves, but in order for these representations to be capable of generating an aesthetic experience and to be somehow politically effective, they must count with the necessary knowledge of the language with which to inform that representation (whether it be graphic, audiovisual, etc.) and with that other nameless element which is talent, something to develop in order to provide effective solutions, whatever the task you're working on, not only in art.

Here, it would be convenient to link with another point in your text, which is in turn related to another of our unanswered questions [6], on the subject of who are the artists, and the desire to be one. It seems that cultural producers are more interested in wearing the artist's badge (as writer, director, etc.), rather than really understanding what is it that their job consists in, and doing it. The conditions of the institutional framework and the artistic education facilitate this running on empty. There is a simple explanation for this: the system awards these simulators because they serve it in its purpose of concealing the aesthetic experience and they provide it with the necessary contents with which to trade and organise lucrative or somehow profitable events. Only those that manage to provoke aesthetic experiences in others will be artists; that's what's important and difficult.

We try to avoid taking for granted a mere field reception for our works, that the gaze of a certain spectator should weight too much in our considerations, or starting from the premise that people are stupid. Choosing a subject matter for its "zeitgeist" relevance. Producing insincere, theatrical, or con works, that repeat a formula simply because it has been successful, or that ambiguously resolve an incapacity, or do it through formal mechanisation, whether that's done for the sake of comfort or because of personal repetition (style), or whether it's caused by the repetition of recognisable and effective forms, i.e., those that "work". Being content with complaints, or with cynicism. Producing works that allow an obliging reception. Ignoring the conditions and contexts of reception. Using people, and reproducing

within our work the conditions of exploitation of capitalism. Soiling our work with tabloid comments on art producers. Thinking that any one of our pieces is okay considering it's the product of two Spanish artists between the age of 33 and 31, that it lacks intellectual ambition, that it iterates on the same emptiness. Thinking that it's our time, that we should receive our due share of power. We try not to escape our responsibilities.

3

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

If we are to understand that art has meaning in the sense that it is capable of generating significant cultural contributions, which in turn are capable of generating in its receiving subjects an aesthetic experience that can provide them with an aesthetic attitude with which to face the construction of reality, a non-affirmative attitude, what would this attitude that art can generate consist in nowadays? What are we to think of what there is to remain of contemporary art practises?

3+1

Gabriel Villota:

I. In a world increasingly dominated by the presence and the ideology of the image, art or aesthetic education should be a fundamental part of life education, especially as a protective shell with which to provide oneself with a critical-sensitive distance from all the visual (and audio) stimuli. I think this should not be just (or not only) compulsory for artists, but also for teachers and educators in general; which obviously implies that the educational models for art, or for an aesthetic awareness-raising, should really be different, in primary as much as in secondary education. The latter, therefore, should already include within their priorities the raising of an awareness of the world of the visual in children and youngsters, an awareness specially focused on the audiovisual sphere, since that is the place that the citizens of the future will inevitably inhabit. Therefore, art nowadays should be able to generate in the spectator a gaze capable of discerning and evaluating amid the huge everyday flow we're immersed in.

But it is difficult to sustain that gaze on our surrounding reality while at the same time being immersed in it: for that would imply an Apollonian distancing which is more impossible nowadays than ever before, taking into account that we're living within a global framework characterised by the so-called crisis of representation, the corollary of which is the vanishing of the distance needed in order for an object to be produced in the eyes of the subject (i.e., reality). He who looks nowadays is aware, should be aware, of the position he occupies, and that his gaze is formed as a trace, as a difference. There is, therefore, no watchtower from which to contemplate "the sound and the fury" of the world; we are, whether we like it or not, active participants.

A gaze, therefore, with which to look at reality, but which can also understand, as part of that hitherto called "outside" reality, that other element hitherto called the "inside" of oneself: the very root of subjectivity. So the most significant aesthetic experiences nowadays would be, in my opinion, those that can provide us with an attitude whereby the "outside" and the "inside" would become indistinguishable, and would allow us to plug into those sensations, ideas, feelings and thoughts which we hold in our hearts, brains and guts with the roots we tread on on the ground and the branches we scrape the sky with; thus linking together guts, clouds and streets in a single image.

II. I'm resisting the thought that "contemporary art practises" are limited to the so-called "art world", or, to use a different wording, "the visible side" of that "reality"; in this sense, it would be very hard to evaluate a discourse about the importance or future persistence of "contemporary art practises", since this category would be informed by all those activities in which human creativity is nowadays focused on, and, more specifically, a creativity of a visual nature: which would transcend by far what we call "the art world". This world is staked out by the border separating the "professional" from the "amateur", and it is within this second group that we find visual and creative manifestations that belong to our time, and which look like they could characterise it in a certain future; I'm thinking of graffiti, comic strips, manga, fanzines, graphic design, videoclips...

But, beyond that, I'm finding it hard to think about styles, trends, professional careers or proper names

which could be foreseen as noteworthy; on the contrary, what is not so difficult to imagine is the silent disappearance of the great majority of professional activities which nowadays fill front pages and focus the attention of the press, inaudible and invisible within the growing noise and fury of this strange world we are living in: “it's all like this, it all happens like this, it's all forgotten, it's all left behind” (Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina*).

3+1+1

Gabriel Villota:

How do you face up to your production as artists while having to combine that with other, paid occupations? I mean, is it possible to keep on developing an art practise without going through the so-called “professionalisation” implied in “giving it all up” for the sake of art? And, in this sense, could an “amateur” approach, in the sense of a “non-professional” one, be taken as seriously as those that are understood to be professional?

3+1+1+1

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

We start off from the notion that it is impossible, at least in the context of the Spanish State, and for someone from our generation, to make a living from their art. This living on art frequently resides in having most of one's basic necessities previously taken care of, i.e., it's a social class issue, and/or it is inscribed in our generation's dynamics of economic dependency to the family; in fact, it's a dissimulated poverty, or an inherited wealth.

We make our living, our food, shelter, heating, books, and projects, by educating young people. Some days we'd like to do nothing but stay home and read, or work at home. To combine our projects with other paid occupations is compulsory for us, since we're not rich, and our artistic projects are not paid for (we have hardly sold anything after all these years, grants produce projects, but don't feed you, even when you don't have to advance the money, and the payments for showing or leasing works are so irregular and so unpredictable that they can only be taken as extra earnings). Sometimes we also think that this is an ethical imperative, not because work dignifies, but because it puts you in a position to understand what other people's lives are like.

The thing is, we also *like* teaching, it keeps you in touch with what is happening in the street, with the first symptoms of certain politics, of certain migrations. We learn from it and we think that it is one of the areas to transform, to improve, an area worth investing dedication into, worth reflecting about and developing micro-politics in. We have a fairly stable labour situation, with a reasonable pay. We are aware of being privileged under the current conditions, since once our working day is over we have some time, money and energy left. We insist that it is possible to develop projects which attempt to become art while at the same time working as teachers, buying a 52m² flat in Madrid, with two young kids, with family and friends. Sometimes, as is the case with this publication, doing what we want to do implies typing away with one hand while the other is holding our younger son's body while he's being breast-fed. We could do with some more time and some more calm, although we are the ones that don't allow it to ourselves, we are the ones obsessed with exploiting ourselves in whatever time we have got left (there's a contradiction for you), maybe we'd do it even more if we were working full-time.

Having one's basic necessities covered in our society makes you less fragile, less afraid, and freer to develop projects. It also provides some security and strength when controlling the conditions of exhibition of your projects, and claiming your rights as a worker who produces an added value, as well as the possibility of saying “no”, something we value very highly. The same scenario is also possible if your income comes from your art practise, but that would put you in a precarious situation which, like many others, would hinder sanity and economic capacity when undertaking the autonomous production of art and vital projects.

We experience education like we experience art or life, for us it is all integrated in the same attitude. Artistic production is neither amateur nor professional in the usual terms, it's a struggle between one's will and one's capacity, one decides, “I want to do this”, and one struggles to do it day after day, alone in

front of a blank sheet of paper, although our loneliness is shared and easier to live with. This work represents a certain attitude towards life, and it is permanent and inescapable.

4

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

If we can start off from the basic notion that art projects, as you once said, must be irrefutable, we should presume that they have to be that on a human level, and also as a contribution to art, and, taking into account that the aesthetic experience situates us between a rock and a hard place, it implies a difficulty which makes us face up to our own abyss, within a society which condones the idea of zero effort, who is the possible receiver of the irrefutable art projects? Who will be prepared to be their producer, and why? On the other hand, is there such a thing as an artist community? Is there a possibility to be generous, to share the thoughts that one has already had?

4+1

Isidoro Valcárcel Medina:

Irrefutable, yes, but on the level of argument, which is what you, if you wish, can call the human level... But absolutely debatable on purely artistic grounds.

More power to redundancy! That's not that far removed from our surroundings, either; but there are some nuances: works of art which are both irrefutable and redundant only appear that way to minds predisposed to see them that way...; The redundant cultural environment, on the other hand, would be irrefutable, if the minds beholding it would decide, as a supreme act of good will, not to refute it.

So, rather: More power to conformism!, as a slogan for what used to be called "the peace of graveyards". The only problem is that in those end-of-journey places there are hardly any noises - only the wind in the cypress trees - and that generalised conformism manifests itself by shouting out loud, but only as a disguise... And those of us involved in this art thing can't conform to being the ones blowing in the tree branches, we should rather discover whether it's not these very shouts that make the air move. Such a thing can be achieved by the usual obviousness: in this case, the naked truth, which, as a sign of modesty, I tend to call reality. So the obviousness of reality should be enough.

Furthermore, this irrefutable nature must have a couple of tasks, and one of them is directed inwards, towards art itself. Let's be clear to ourselves about what is the intention and what makes the art world, in its different fields, so unclear.

This is true to such an extent that I'd rather support obviousness to the premises of art than the premises of art to social prejudice.

The fight is first and foremost against ourselves. The most debatable element is the art we're suffering; the most irrefutable element would be the art we wish.

Our works are of the kind that someone might call bad, but never false. (You know, ethics before aesthetics).

As far as the addressees are concerned, they are, of course, those that want to catch us out but can't... In summary, those that take cover in the mess of culture. In other words, false addressees. Those ideal irrefutable works of art are not produced for nothing - what use would there be for that? - but for something.

The problem is that when us human beings start talking, we do it from certain presumptions, redundancies and consensus. Against that, the tangible evidence takes over the scene.

If I say "left hand and right hand", I already defeat those that say "two hands". It's a case of objectual evidence against conceptual hypothesis.

The unwary receivers of sponsored art melt away, and thrive on the "two hands", which provide grounds for an analysis...; but they get scalded and jump back at the "left hand and right hand" concept, despite the fact that both are very human forms.

No doubt, irrefutable products are intrinsically opposed to the artistic community, if that's how you choose to call it. I would almost say that their aim is to defeat it... but, still, despite their simplicity, they are favourable to thought. A clear and deep, even though brief, thought. Now, said community is rather

inclined towards a prolonged, superficial and overloaded thought.

What I'm trying to say is the following: maybe it is not necessary to think so much about truth (Didn't you study that quote that went "The supreme criterion for truth is evidence"?)... Maybe it would be preferable to simply stand by its side.

Pero Grullo was quietly transcendental and disturbingly obvious (he used to call a closed hand a fist). An artist of reality - in the most noble and vulgar sense of the word - would have nothing to show, nothing but reality. Can we call that teaching? Can the beautiful aporias collapse under simple material facts? I believe that there are people who have the obligation of revealing the obtuse clarities as such, leaving everybody else to choose whether they want to get infatuated with them... After all, they will always draw different kinds of profit. How really insignificant we are!

4+1+1

I would like to conclude with a statement which seems to be leaning slightly towards the past (all that is already discredited by culture). It's the pride in the redundant and the convenience of common sense. I present it, perversely, as my required question: Is it true that "the proof of speed is in the walking"? That is, does the art of walking transcend space and consecrate time?

4+1+1+1

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

Whether it's speed or movement or both - since movement implies some kind of speed - is not important, but it's true that their proof is in the walking, a truth compatible with other truths. Let's take as an example, without walking, the position of the sun as a reference. After a while, we'll be able to confirm the rotation of the Earth, proving that, even though we might not be walking, we are moving. Art is no doubt defined through a double movement: production and reception. A given activity is art if it is successful as an act of communication, thus our question about the possible receivers of irrefutable works of art. It's not that if there was nobody out there, producers would cease in their activity, they have their own reasons or lack thereof [cf. *II+1+1+1*]. We try to walk, and that consecrates our time, making us risk wasting it if our project doesn't achieve what we're looking for. But the real danger, underneath it all, is not wasting our time, but being incapable of transcending space, stupidly duplicating the world, there is enough trash out there anyway.

By the way, our work consists in doing what we say we want to do. We say this to make clear that what we feel as our work is producing works, offering them for reception, not writing about what we'd like to do. The text all sixteen participants in this publication are offering would appear even more valuable to us if apart from provoking reflection through disseminating their ideas, that reflection would also make other works of art possible. Maybe we're too optimistic. But even if there was nobody out there, could the works make someone out there appear?

We hope this constitutes an answer.

5

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

You have produced a number of projects on post-fordist production, in which you have presented a reflection on how intellectual and art production not only fail to escape the common conditions of self-exploitation suffered by our contemporaries in other areas of production, but multiply them. If we are to accept that reality, how to sustain and ideologically develop the added value generated by art and intellectual production without turning it into a market surplus? That is, how to take self-exploitation and precariousness as chosen factors on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to avoid the reduction of their product, whether objective or not, to a commodity? And finally, do you think that the precariousness of "young" artists or curators implies a search for approval? Whose approval?

5+1

María Ruido:

Dear Marta and Publio: we have had so many conversations about the conditions of production of our works over the last few years, and this has been (and remains) such an important factor in our latest

projects, that it's hard to summarise our words in a few lines. On the other hand, let us not forget that precariousness (whether personal or professional) has been taken in by institutional political agendas and is being themed by them, including the art ones, without, by the way, being confronted with any real consequences within art practise.

We must take into account the fact that art practise is part of the economical dynamics of post-fordist capitalism (and that it has been part of it since previous capitalist and pre-capitalist management systems), unless we want to risk being dangerously naive.

It is not necessary to work with a gallery or to exhibit one's work in a more or less commodified context in order for these dynamics to operate. As an institution, art “values” our productions and turns them into products, whether they are objectual or not. Its conversion capacity is very high, although, obviously, there are projects and production strategies which are easier to assimilate than others, as we have spoken about on a number of occasions.

It would be a question of, citing Pierre Bourdieu, not only being aware of the extent to which our processes and objects are not beyond the market and the generation of economic surplus, even when manufacturing products of a “more complex profitability”, but of which is our role in the production of symbolic value, and to what extent our projects have the capacity to resist assimilation or, worse, distortion and spurious harnessing. I'm referring to things like acting like a *quota*, as a politically-correct faction, or even as a necessary opposition to the single thought, to hierarchising thought - all these positions can hardly be seen as uncomfortable nowadays.

I think we live in times where there is no “outside of the system”, no “other systems”, but, yes, I'd like to think that a certain capacity of resistance, premised on permanent movement, on changing strategies in order to hinder its capture, of infiltration mechanisms which work towards small-scale changes, or the use of open and/or polisemic languages as the poetic or the ironic (if they don't degenerate into vacuous metaphor and pure cynicism, of course) is possible.

Nevertheless, I don't believe that being aware of and feeling responsible for the socio-political framework we produce in, of its capacity for assimilation, or the ease of political fetishising of the art institutions, is paralysing; rather, it's simply something to bear in mind. Maybe breaking out of this framework and establishing paths to concrete action (I insist, on a micro-political, always contextual, close, local, and even personal level) and doing this consciously and with all the risks involved, could constitute, in itself, an answer. Another possible answer would be to move, paradoxically, into “invisibility”, or, rather, into the lack of visibility involved in shifting the conventional mechanisms of legitimation or making them clearly obvious (I think the consequences would be similar in both cases).

Your second question refers to a fundamental issue in the art world - self-exploitation - to which I would add the “vocational” fallacy and the false feeling of social interaction, all working to complete one of the most “sinister” frameworks in the contemporary scenario.

Artists' self-exploitation is almost always premised on the schizophrenic triple work day (survival work, housekeeping work, artistic work) and reaches its extreme in the horrible feeling of paying to work and working in order to be able to work.

Furthermore, the everyday life experience of this kind of work as non-work, as an occupation which activates your desires and your “personal development” is, in my opinion, really touching the very roots of the various dislocations of our precarious subjectivities, and has a lot to do with forms of (self)control typical of bio-politics.

As a woman and as an artist, I feel deeply hurt by the presumption of these schemes, which turn many of us women, paradoxically, into socially inactive beings. I mean our double condition as breeders (there is still not enough thought given to reproduction and care as work, mainly caused by the traditional economic mechanism) and as generators of representation, which is only considered an active product if it acquires legitimation through certain bodies.

Let us not forget that having a social identity is still premised, in our scenario, on having an identity as a worker, i.e., practising an activity recognised as work. And, although feminism and other critical

theories have overcome limitations and have established other parameters which grow beyond the limitations of object production, care production, bodily production, sexual production, and also work as a locus of representation outside the framework of certified professionalism are still considered non-work. It is still very humiliating that while post-industrial capitalism uses these new assets (affection, corporeity, the idea of process and project) in order to increase its profits, there should be people who are “illegal” because they haven't got a job in the traditional sense, or that a prostitute should be subject to being expelled from a state because there are no bylaws for her non-worker situation.

While our situation might not be similar (please, don't get me wrong; there isn't, and there couldn't possibly be any parallel between the above situations and the social status of an artist), it is also conflictive. Worse: it is assumed as a necessary sacrifice, especially by the young people trying to gain access to the art world, mainly seeking that “professional realisation”, which would presumably imply the acceptance of professional and personal conditions which take things close to the limit of the pathological.

Excuse my harsh tone, but as I already outlined in a recent text (“¡Mamá, quiero ser artista!”, in the book *A la deriva, por los circuitos de la precariedad femenina*, edited by the “Precarias a la Deriva” collective this year), the world of art and media, in its diverse variations, is not only one of the areas where sexism, class judgement, homophobia and racism, which inform our relational framework, are most subtle and disguised, but only one of the spaces where they are best registered and fed-back.

This is not the place for an analysis of the close relationship (active and passive) between the political realm and the representational one. I won't bear my time on describing the veiled collusions and complicities which you, as people who generate representational discourses, know all too well.

In my attempt to provide a response to your call, I would like to insist on the precariousness in the world of cultural production at large, on the lack of honoraries in the production of projects, on the endless timetables, on the lack of visibility of so many projects which are considered “minor” but which are absolutely necessary (produced, almost always, by women), on the lack of a legal framework for our relations with the institutions, things we often feel impotent about, in the unspoken blackmails we accept, especially when we're very young (work for free, endless internships, infinite fellowships), in the clique generated by critics, curators, gallerists and artists... overall, in a scenario of deceit, where discrepancy, differences and tensions are disguised and even drowned out, sometimes incorporating the potentially conflicting subjects as one more link into the same chain of transmission, or, as outlined above, by assimilating/decontextualising certain productions through effective tactics of sabotage and/or de-activation.

It is hard to gain visibility and recognition (in the media, profitable sense of the word, and, to be honest, in many others) if one doesn't pass through certain filters, so, in learning from past experiences, and as I have outlined above, the key question would be not so much in the production of the work, or in its form, but in the devices and platforms of administration and distribution, as well as in the very concepts of visibility and recognition.

I think your last question has been, in a sense, already answered. But, if you will, I would like to underline that.

Young artists (and us, who have been that at some point) not only accept precariousness, but also censorship (and, worse, self-censorship), and the social masquerade which they/we believe to be associated to the art institution (the perverse and oftentimes unconscious sexual ambiguity, for example). This is not to be reproached, if we consider that those mechanisms of legitimation we spoke about earlier manifest themselves as unique and logical, and are thus naturalised. This way, they make us feel that if things were any different, we'd never get recognition, no-one would see our works and, of course, we'd never make a living from them.

Maybe, as outlined above, a slight chance for change might lie in the responsible self-evaluation of our work, in a firmer position regarding the institutions, but also in self-organisation, in proposing new platforms, circuits and devices, and, of course, in inventing new, “contaminated” forms of being artists

(circumstantial, extended, partial, even openly un-professional), which can turn us all into possible articulators of discourse and representation, and in workers of the visual.

It is here that some of the questions I'd like to ask you lie.

5+1+1

Do you think that one can act from a (to borrow your words) “responsible aesthetic experience” within the framework of the traditional art system? To what extent do you (being both teachers and parents) think that education is responsible for our assuming the working models and social position of representation? Which is/are in your opinion the axis/es of the problem of changing our position as generators of images here and now? Maybe, like someone pointed out towards the end of *Tiempo Real*, in assuming our position in the various places and moments of production?

Please, excuse me... As usual, I have asked more questions than I have answered. I don't know whether my answers will be of any use for you in continuing your reflection. What I'm sure about is that you will do it with the highest possible care and awareness.

I hope to have an opportunity to follow up on your endless conversations on this and other subjects very soon. In the meanwhile, lots of energy and love, and kisses to you, Tristán, and Romeo.

5+1+1+1

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

The key issue here would not be in either one of the points you make (form, distribution, the concept of visibility used, etc.), but in not losing sight (or awareness) of any of them. Having said that, we understand that when you refer to the framework of the traditional art system, you're really asking us about whether one can act responsibly as an artist exhibiting works and even collaborating in projects with art institutions. We like showing our work in contexts which don't belong to this framework, we think that a responsible work of art operates as such without any need of a receiver who has been previously pre-disposed to receive it as art, i.e., without it having to be legitimised for him/her from a space reserved for it. We are very interested in showing our work to autonomous collectives, groups of teachers, our high school students, etc. Even more so if this reception could imply a further process, i.e., a debate, a workshop, etc. Nevertheless, we have decided that we don't want to deprive ourselves of the traditional exhibition frameworks, especially the public ones. We belong to the old school, and believe that the public sphere should exist, and that it belongs to us, to all of us. We have had aesthetic experiences in places like that and we know that it is still possible for them to happen there. We believe that these opportunities for communication, which are not at all humiliating, should be taken advantage of.

This is related to your next question on education. Museums educate, culture educates, its representations educate... in what? The answer depends on the use we make of these entities, of the level of awareness we might have of the reality of the situation, and, finally, on an ethical level, on the commitment and work we are able to invest in the matter. It is true that nothing changes if nothing gets done. There will always be someone submissive and predisposed to not working so that everything can remain the same. Right now, education is a fundamental focal point of interest and practise for us. We think it is a clear and interesting field of long-term political action, and this is why it is indispensable to provide young people with conditions for accessing aesthetic experiences, so that they can have some possibility of developing an aesthetic attitude which can allow them to choose their own crises and to avoid the malaise which they have been pre-destined to [cf. 7+1+1+1].

Current educational systems are lacking, in this and in other senses, we need a precise diagnose of the educational lacks regarding the situations in which aesthetic experiences can be beheld, and the capacity to read and interpret the audiovisual culture we live in. The existence and the characteristics of the school subjects of artistic education, visual education and expression and audio-visual communication shouldn't be understood from the standpoint of their inclusion into the curricula for secondary education as a means of democratisation of the access to high culture, which previously was the privilege of the few, but as a basic necessity for critical survival in a social structure which

privileges images for the broadcasting of mass, dominant and hegemonic messages. The project we're currently working on is about education, about audio-visual literacy, about forms of generating conditions of access to aesthetic experiences and significant production practises; and it attempts to speak mainly to the social groups involved in education (mothers, fathers, teachers, students).

Regarding your last question, we are unable to give an answer beyond our own personal standpoint. It has been quite some time since we faced the dilemma of self-exploitation or ceasing to produce. We understood that giving up our projects would be to censor ourselves, to give in. Art is our form of thinking the world, it is our password to it. We exploit ourselves with all the contradictions this implies. On the other hand, everybody should develop their own ethical, aesthetic and political framework, within which to operate, produce, adopt a stance, present oneself, and which to obey. The worst thing that can happen as a consequence of this, is that the phone might stop ringing any day now, and invitations to exhibit our works in certain

contexts might cease to arrive. But, as you know, contexts can also be created.

6

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

As someone well-versed in the field of artistic education in this country, would you also point out that most of the Fine Arts students nowadays want to be “artists”, i.e., to adopt this role socially? What consequences does this error of enunciation imply for contemporary art practise? Can the production of many contemporary “artists” be seen as self-publicising their character? And how would you explain that many of the art works presented to us are barely distinguishable from publicity?

6+0

No answer.

7

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

In the last few decades, the incorporation of “other” discourses in contemporary art practise via the theories of Postmodernity which establish a reference to the multiplicity of operating discourses and the critique of hegemonic discourses have given rise to a progressive acceptance of said practises within the framework of art institutions. Nevertheless, sometimes it seems that in this incorporation of marginal and minority discourses what is really fulfilled is the Leopard's prophecy: “everything must change so that everything can remain the same”. In your opinion, hasn't the acceptance of these discourses on behalf of the art institutions implied the establishment of a kind of set of rules, an academicism or mannerism in said practises which has, in fact, relegated them to reduced spaces, to minor areas, to a de facto elitism? What has this got to do with the automatism with which the same formal solutions are reproduced in works supposedly conceived from different stances and subjectivities?

7+1

Virginia Villaplana Ruiz:

On reflecting on your question and writing these lines, one of the nodes of criticism I wanted to address was how we're witnessing the de-politicisation of the re-politicisation of sex with regards to the politics of gender representation. Somehow, what institutions have taken in is not the risk of the presence and operation of art practises which understand gender as an axis in knowledge production, but the “spectacularity” of a certain visualising or over-exposing the sexualisation of politics. In this sense, we need to develop other strategies of representation which can have a precise effect on the queer re-politicisation of gender and sex. This is a focus which, in the case of the consensus on “gender violence”, for example, leads us to bear in mind the naturalisation of the relationship between violence and masculinity effected by institutions, as well as the need to expand this problematic to include the notion of “structural violence” in post-contemporary societies. From this point of view, we can trace out the dove-tailing of the contributions from the latter part of the decade of the 1980's with Gayatri Spivak's classic text, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, post-colonial theory, cultural difference, micro-identitary stances and hierarchical class politics as posited by Nancy Fraser.

The approach I propose requires understanding gender from a bifocal point of view, by looking at it through two different lenses. Seen through one lens, gender has an affinity with class; seen through the other one, it is closer to a political stance. Each lens focuses on an important aspect of women's subordination, but none of them is self-sufficient. A full understanding only appears when we superimpose both lenses. At that point, gender appears as an axial category which opens up in two dimensions of social order, the dimension of distribution and the dimension of recognition. From the point of view of recognition, by contrast, gender appears as a social position differentiation, rooted in society's status order. Gender codes affect the cultural patterns of interpretation and evaluation. From the standpoint of the critique of representation in Spain, it wasn't until the mid-90's that a new generation of artists took up the challenge of analysing the relationship between the conditions of production of knowledge, the *body* of visual culture narratives, its articulation through modes of production in art practise and the critique of representation. In particular, the generation of women who recuperated some of the critical stances of feminism, discovered that our position in the realm of art and teaching is completely compromised. We opened up - and continue to open up - a current of interpretation which maintains that, because of the coexistence of the social field with power relations and forms of knowledge, these are transformed into a kind of network which simultaneously involves material and symbolic structures. In a similar manner, we revised the questioning of social identities as nomadic (as posited by Rossi Braidotti), and performative (as posited by Judith Butler) constructs. A current which reveals the different layers of representational knowledge via the feminist contributions formulated by Teresa de Laurentis, Cherry Moraga, Donna Harraway, Chela Sandoval, Saskia Sassen, Giulia Colaizzi, Joan Walach Scout or the feminist current involved with the issues of class and race, like Angela Y. Davis, who pointed out the relevance of class and race in the constitution of subjectivity. As Rey Chow taught us in "The Resistance of Theory; or, The Worth of Agony" in *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2003), those open and polisemic notions of the concept of culture, gender and representation span multiple variables which would allow a better understanding of the resistance stances derived from class, sex, race and age, all of them fundamental key factors in differentiation. This is the set of ideas I have recently developed in the *Double Stage* documentary: to define gender as an intersection of language and the social, proposing a reinterpretation of this notion as a crossroads between the symbolic and the material, between theory and practise.

"What - for now - constitutes the ideal formula for me has been described by Ernst Larsen in a recent essay on cinevideo: 'To transform the process of ideological identification in political criticism without overlooking of the question of identity' ('For an Impure Cinevideo', *The Independent*, May 1990). For me, political criticism is not only a criticism of oppressive social forces, but of the dominant forms of representation of these forces. I remember Godard's old saying about not just making political films, but making them politically. Which allows me to take care of many of the dominant cinematographic conventions. The splitting of identities, the optical degradation of images, the character whose visibility for the other is never explained, acting with an inadequate voice-over and synchronisation, the printed attributions of cited monologues, etc. All these tricks enter and exit stage following a narrative planning. I'm learning to play more and more according to the rules, in order to better break them... in order to break them better."

Ivonne Rainer. *Narrative at the (dis)service of identity*

An essay for a documentary film. Double stage

Marco, answers to the camera:

Sequence 1.

My name was very ambiguous. There was no real need to change it, but...

Because you don't want it, you relate it to your past life and no, you don't like it.

My name was Reyes. Some men are called like that. Many men in Spain are called like that.

Question: You didn't like it?

Of course not, it reminded me of my life as a woman. I didn't like it at all.

It saved me all the paperwork and all that, but it wasn't worth it.

I want a masculine name.

I liked a name like Marco.

Some girlfriends of mine chose the name for me, and I liked it; it went like this: one day in class, my friends said to me, c'mon, this name sounds good for you, it suits you. You see, I like this name. It's an Italian name. When I was 16, I changed my name, and I've been Marco to everybody ever since. Everybody calls me that.

I've lived 15 years as a woman, and the rest of my life I'm going to live like a man. Soon, I'll also do it psychologically and physically.

Sequence 2.

First comes the hormone treatment, you take hormones with endocrine... and at the same time, you see a psychologist... who helps you out with seeing the changes you go through.

Because it all has to be very gradual. You can't just go to bed one way and wake up the other... it all has to be very progressive... he helps you out, he explains things to you, he talks to you, and then after a while we gives you permission to have the operation

There are three operations. The first one is vasectomy. They remove your breasts, and, well, you can have that operation done even without the hormone treatment.

It depends on the person, on what the doctor says. And then there's the hysterectomy. They empty you out, they take out your ovaries and they take out everything and they, like, make a special conduit so you can urinate.

And then there's the very last operation, it's the least urgent one because it's not as important, they do it to you when you are done with all the other operations, and then they tell you "From now on you can start working on your penis reconstruction anytime you like, it doesn't have to be right now, it can be anytime, whenever you have enough money, whenever you can, you can have it done."

It takes about 2 years, depending on the person, about 2 years. In our case the whole process took about 2 years to complete. In fact, I've already started, I haven't started taking anything yet, I haven't done anything, but when I get back to Seville in September I will.

I've been doing it since April, I started in April and I've been seeing the psychologist and the endocrinologist.

They had been examining me and eventually accepted me, and I've already started with the hormone treatment.

I suppose I'll go see the psychologists a couple more times, and see the endocrinologist again, and then in a couple of months I'll get started with the whole thing.

Really, the greatest change are the hormones. The operations are for giving it the final touch and polishing things up a little bit, but the real change is the hormones, because that's when you can see yourself change. Everything changes...

Question: Does your stubble grow?

Of course, stubble grows, muscles, bones, everything grows: your voice changes, your face changes completely, too, it's like you but with a more masculine face.

Question: Did you always feel like a man, or like a boy?

Yes, always. Maybe I don't know. This is what I remember. I don't know because I don't know what's happening there, and why it's happening, but it's always been like that. I'd like to know why, but I don't. I'd like someone to tell me... all I remember is that I always wanted to be a boy. I never decided to do it, because of fear, because of my family, of what people might say... I still don't know how they're going to take it.

But then a time comes when you just can't take it anymore and you have to do something. Because your life's at stake, and you've got to live your life your way. You can't keep thinking about what the others are going to say, everybody has their own life to live, everybody has their own life and you're living

someone else's, not yours. And a time comes when you tell yourself: Look, enough of this! I've got to live my life, whatever it takes.

Sequence 3.

Nobody should have any suspicions. I didn't want anyone to know about it. Never ever.

And, of course, you've got your inner world, and it's like acting out a role. Oh, so this is my role, okay then. I'll just do what people expect me to, right? But, of course, it was... it was horrible.

I don't feel like myself. I do now, a little bit. But I didn't feel like myself previously. Because...

I didn't feel a woman. I didn't look at myself in mirrors, I never took off my clothes, you know? With clothes, back then, I would always go around looking at how to wear them so I could fake it better, so I could look like a man, it's horrible when you're always checking to make sure everything's perfect, so that no-one could suspect, so that everybody can see you as a man.

Always checking even the smallest detail.

Sequence 4.

When I decided to talk about it it was because I saw a show on TV and a guy just like me came up. And I was in my sitting room watching TV, channel-hopping, and I stopped at one of those talk shows where people go to tell their story.

And it just happened to be that one. I was very young, and I didn't know a lot, I didn't know this was called trans-sexuality, I knew nothing. I didn't know there were other people like me, I was clueless, I only knew what was happening to me, and watching that show I realised that that kid was telling my story. He was telling the story of my life since I was born. All my life.

In Seville there's an association of transsexuals and lesbians, which has closed down now. I went to talk to that association. I met a girl, Caridad, who was the exact opposite case.

Getting to know her helped me a lot. She helped me to get into the "Carlos Haya" hospital. They treated me very well there.

Then there's Kim Pérez from Granada, she's older, she's fifty-something, and she has suffered a lot in her life because of this, but she's made it. So she had her operation when she was 55, and those were different times, really. Kim Pérez is like our mother, like our second mother. Because she's always there for us, and she talks to us. She guides us through the whole process.

It was Kim Pérez that spoke with my parents. They knew about it, but it was kind of difficult for them, so they went to talk to Kim.

She told them how the whole process went. There was a bit of a taboo between me and my parents, but Kim broke it.

She broke that taboo. We went for dinner one night, all four of us: my father, my mother, Kim and me, and we talked about it, we talked about everything and from that day on everything changed, it was great. It's always great when a person like this appears that steps out and says who she is, because it's always best to talk to someone who's going through the same situation. Now, when I go to Seville, I'm going to talk to a boy who's going through the same process. Kim told me to talk to this boy, and help him out a bit. This way, we help each other out.

Sequence 5.

When something starts happening, there's always this thing of having to talk about it.

You have to talk, somehow. Whenever I've had a relationship, whenever I've been with a girl, it was because they had known me before, right? Or maybe it was because they already knew. They had somehow heard about and knew about it. I still haven't met a girl that has said no just because of that, you know? So far. I've had a girlfriend for a couple of years. I had another girlfriend for a year, too. And then it was all girls, maybe for short stretches of time, I don't know, a week, a few months, but there's never been a problem of that kind. We would talk about it, they would ask me about it, and I would explain everything to them.

Sequence 6.

And to experience everything I've been unable to experience on my terms. To do... I don't know,

everything. First of all, to go to the beach and swim, for example, that's the first thing I'm going to do, because I haven't been to the beach for many years. Many years.

I haven't gone to swimming pools, either. This, for example, this is something I value a lot now. And other men don't value it at all. They go to the beach and swim every day, and me, since I can't, the day I go to the beach I'm going to be the happiest man in the world. Just going there, taking off my t-shirt and getting in the water.

Sequence 7.

I've got to tell my boss. Because he has to pay my social security. He has to look at my ID and pay my social security, otherwise, I wouldn't tell him. I've been here since first thing in the morning, and well. Everybody thought I was a boy. Some people don't know, or maybe they don't tell me about it. They treat me like a normal boy, and there's no problem. I can't tell the difference, you know? Between how a friend who knows me well treats me, and how they do it. They treat me well. Of course, you feel ashamed, and you think Shit! Why is it me that always has to give explanations, why is it me that has to be so afraid, that has to go to work and then show them my ID card, you know?

Because some people are kind of shocked when they find out. I've been lucky here, and there's been no problem. They respect me, and that's it. We don't even talk about it, because there's no need to talk about that here. I've told them who I am, what I am, and for what reason, and that's it, there's nothing else to talk about, period. But, of course, if I had to find another job, for example, I'd have to start from scratch again, and I'd have to say, listen, I want to work here, okay? and I want you to treat me like this, because that's how I feel, but you have to pay my social security under the name that appears here on this ID card. This is my ID card, and this is the name you've got to use. Some people refuse to, because they're shocked, or they fail to understand it. Whereas, if things were different, you'd be able to walk into an office and say, I'd like to work here, my name is Marco. Like any other person, without having to give those explanations.

Sequence 8.

Now that I'm 21, I'm going to become an teenager. I'm like a 13, or 14 year old kid, and now, I'm going to start developing at the age of 21, oh well...

THE END.

7+1+1

Virginia Villaplana Ruiz:

Regarding the narrative devices you have presented in your recent works, how do you focus on the process of work between everyday politics and art practise?

7+1+1+1

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto

Everything is part of the same situation, we are experience, everyday life experience. We are not great scholars, we aren't too learned. Most of the reflections our projects stem from are an effort of analysing our everyday lives, of the contradictions which we see ourselves immersed in, of our direct experiences and of the need of thinking through them in order to elaborate a personal politics from which to be able to continue living our lives.

In the exhibition we had at MediaLabMadrid, entitled *Relatos de una crisis elegida*, we were supporting the thesis that in a context of a construction of identity through fear, in the malaise as symptom of that permanent fear, human psychology is hungry for certainties. In that moment of longing, a dilemma manifests itself: either to embrace the imposed certainty, the certainty somebody has designed for us and that, in our opinion, is equivalent to buying our ticket for a larger long-term crisis, since sooner or later people find themselves overcome by their contradictions, bound to a lifestyle collapse; or to choose the crisis. That chosen crisis is premised on the definitions of an aesthetic experience we have outlined above, and is based on the notion of a subject who lives in a state of permanent critical attitude; not in relativism, since s/he considers that certainties are partial, momentous, but that capacity for mutation

strengthens him/her.

We want to talk about this malaise in complex, not very accommodating narratives, but narratives which shouldn't deny the very necessity for stories, for certain stories as an empathetic lab for identity. Or haven't we all been brought up on tales, on stories?

8

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

Terms such as “public art” or “political art” are often used to designate art projects which somehow address social problems or that insert their reception in public spaces presumably far removed from the art institution. Aside from the ambiguity of terminology provoked by this notion by spanning highly diverse practises, in your opinion, who are the final or privileged receivers of this public-political art? Are these projects produced for their reception by the general public, or are they only addressing those that somehow already belong to the art institution?

8+1

Kamen Nedev:

Nothing *a priori* distinguishes “public” or “political” art from any other kind of art. Art - true art - cannot help being both political and public. We can neither have art if there hasn't been an act of communication (if art hasn't found an audience), nor can we have an art which magically transcends the power structure of the society in which it is created. It would make more sense to talk about what public dimension does a given art practise have, and how does it address its political environment.

To designate a certain way of producing art as “political” or “public” could be rooted in the desire to emphasise that dimension of art practise: its willingness to address facts and contents which are politically relevant to society; to rethink the space and mode of operation of said society; to insert itself, regardless of the notion of aesthetic pleasure, in the political processes of construction of subjectivity.

The latter factor - aesthetic experience as construction of subjectivity - is, to my mind, the most relevant one for the question we're addressing here. Art practise always - whether consciously or not - constructs a final receiver, it prefigures an element which closes the act of aesthetic communication. Art practise also (again, consciously or no) configures the identity of the artist. It is the *how*, not the *what* of this process of subjectivity construction that determines the reception of this form of art.

This process which can be affirmative or non-affirmative. Maybe the artist is simply looking for a re-affirmation of his/her social identity as a politically-aware artist, as a producer of “political” art. The media channels for this kind of identity process have been set in place for more than a century now, and, *a priori* there is nothing, except the artist's incapacity to take advantage of these channels, that would hinder the success of the operation. In such cases, we normally say that what we have is an example of an art which is “easy to assimilate” by the institutions. What I say is that we should stop holding the institutions responsible for everything. The final receiver of this kind of art is not part of “those who somehow already belong to the art institution”, s/he is not even the art institution - the final receiver of such art is the artist himself. It is not the institution that “assimilates” this kind of art practise, it receives it in an already assimilated state, “productivised” and ready for consumption, as we can see in the astonishing popularity of the “public art” trend in the last five years.

On the other hand, there is always the possibility of an art that can activate a process of construction of subjectivity which can go beyond the gesture of self-affirmation. An in which both the subjectivity of the receiver and that of the producer can remain in a state of permanent reconfiguration. An art which can relate the public with the private in a non-affirmative manner, a truly political art. These art practises would not have, *a priori*, an end receiver - because part of their task would be creating him/her. Personally, I haven't got any answers regarding this kind of art. I just like the sound of its question. It's always different.

8+1+1

Should political art know beforehand the answers to the questions it poses to its audience?

8+1+1+1

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

In the understanding of art practise we have reached, the process of producing artistic projects is an organ of personal structuring of sensible data, of trying to understand the world. Our attitude is, in the first place, to share with others, through acts of communication that themselves pose questions, without knowing the answers. Sometimes, as is the case of a recent project on friendship, the accumulation of successive questions causes the presentation of a thesis, a temporary answer we have reached which open up for discussion without knowing what answers it might provoke.

Works of art which appear to ask us a question but which have been designed to impose their own answer, are cheating, they do not make aesthetic experiences possible, they're like watching adverts. A thin emotional veil disguises a predefined answer.

Just a comment: art which calls itself political and which uses (in the worst sense of the word) people or their image is immoral. This kind of artists should only use themselves, much like many architects should be made to live forever in the buildings they envisage and build.

9

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

Recently, there have been a series of theories about what should politically-aware art practise generate. Many of these theories have been abetted, even if indirectly, by the thought of people like Toni Negri or Paolo Virno. Nevertheless, we find that the projects developed from these premises don't seem to achieve the results pretended. What happens when a theory doesn't find a practise to make it justice? And, conversely, there are also contemporary art practises which stand outside the established theoretical framework, and lack the visibility and the capacity to generate a debate. What happens when art practises fail to generate a theory? Finally, and in relation to the above, if we consider aesthetic experience as an individual process, and bearing in mind that the deep individualisation of subjects is one of the tools which the capitalist system has equipped itself with in order to impress self control in subjects, can the individual aesthetic experience be a process likely to generate in subjects the capacity of insurrection, or is there a possibility to think that there is a kind of aesthetic experience likely to be processed collectively?

9+1

Montse Romaní:

There is no doubt that the central position achieved by cultural processes, the production of knowledge and media representation in the so-called information economy has informed, among other things, a state of affairs in which the qualities associated with the relational, the creative, the cognitive and the symbolic, which belong to the environment we inhabit, should be directly productive.

Now that art is definitely deprived of the space of autonomy it had during Modernity, any material practise nowadays reclaims spaces capable of articulating new interactions with the social, political and economic present.

In this sense, lately we have witnessed that certain politically-aware practises, influenced by contemporary critical thought, and committed to social struggle, have gained an important visibility.

In relation to your questions "What happens when a theory doesn't find practises to do it justice?", and its possible reversal, "What happens when practises fail to generate a theory?", in my opinion both art theory and art practise are factors which inform a discourse. To accept the existence of one of them without the other, or the lack of either of them, would imply assuming a schism between both realms of thought.

We could argue that the first question finds its expression in certain art practises that involve socio-political interaction, which have sometimes been debated for their tendency to aestheticise theory in some cases, or to over-simplify it in others. Paradoxically, we are witnessing practises which, even though they posit a working methodology as an interface between production of meaning and political action, have results which end up reducing theory to a quote and practise to a mere illustration.

Among the possible examples, we find documentary forms, and performative practises related to social

movements or community structures, which, in their attempt to create other, non-hegemonic forms of representation, follow strategies which, far from articulating a full cartography of their purposes, resign themselves to celebrate the *mise-en-scene* of their struggles without questioning certain authoritarian attitudes and power complexes which they themselves reproduce.

Therefore, the renewed interest in these issues that has established itself in the art sphere, has increased the institutional demand which, on one hand, has ended up theming the object of representation of said issues, and, on the other hand, has (re)legitimated them as true forms of production. Independent curatorial practise has developed an important contribution in this sense, and has found in said practises a fertile ground to establish its position within the institutions.

It seems obvious, therefore, that a certain left-wing cultural rhetoric, that champions a reconciliation of research, production of subjectivity and action, should continue in its search for new models of mediation or possible production and participation structures in social sciences and political theory, art practises and the real.

In relation to the above, I turn to your next questions: “Can the individual aesthetic experience be susceptible of generating in subjects a potential for insurrection, or is there a possibility for an aesthetic experience likely to be processed collectively?”.

And I continue with other questions: what do we mean when we speak about an aesthetic experience? In a world full of collective aesthetic experiences, mediated by certain consensual codes, what quality/qualities of experience should we reclaim as possibilities for the emancipation of the subject?

Emotional experience, as a subjective experience, intensifies our perception of the work of art as an everyday experience, and, consequently, it increases our interest in it, it becomes likely to create a response which could destabilise the received codes. But the potential of this emotional character is stressed in a manner directly proportional to the degree of spectacularity, which ends up imposing a subordination on the receiving subject which separates him/her from an understanding of the discourse.

In detriment to this notion of emotional experience, lately the relational quality has gained relevance in the creation of aesthetic experiences. The relational aesthetic experience has been defined as a mode of production which “researches new forms of interacting with the social, with the purpose of contributing to a multiplication of the public spheres, defining itself from the premise of the relations between diverse subjects, forms and spaces”. In chat culture, this kind of interaction is the basis for a communicative action which transcends the limits of space and time, and transform our way of relating to each other, locating experience in the centre of productive action, that is, becoming an experience of consumption.

In my opinion, a relational counter-experience likely to be lived as a critical discourse on reality, whether it takes place outside or inside the formal apparatus which dynamises it, would be an experience of becoming through the tools whose source code is likely to be re-appropriated by the receiving subjects, to thus allow them to configure their own networks, their own strategies and their own forms of production. In this way, the central position pretended by experience is shifted and multiplied to so many other places, dissolving, on the one hand, any attempt at hierarchy, and placing the receiver as a subject capable of deciding on their own position. Thus, the possibilities for insurrection, whether individual or collective, provided by an aesthetic experience, shouldn't be measured in terms of great transformations, but rather as micro-actions that affect our everyday practise.

Finally, I think that aesthetic experiences, as interventions, should be accompanied by a self-critical attitude on behalf of the agents that make them possible, questioning the space, time and gaze involved in the intervention, on its economy, its production and execution process, and its circulation.

9+1+1

Against the crisis of political expression, art's only option is to stand in uncertainty, that liminal space which, neither nostalgic nor isolated, allows it to stay in motion. Or do you believe that art can maintain a position of autonomy?

9+1+1+1

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

In previous questions [cf. 1+1+1+1, 2+1+1+1, 5+1+1+1], we have already explained that we don't believe in an autonomous space, but in an autonomy as consequence of an artistic specificity. While we believe that art practise can articulate new interactions with the social, political and economic present, it will only reach this potential in the precise degree to which it is capable of promoting aesthetic attitudes as a consequence of the experiences which it produces (in your words "...tools, the source code of which is open to re-appropriation by its receiving subjects, to thus allow them to configure their own networks, their own strategies and their own forms of production" we recognise that aesthetic attitude). No doubt, to understand the specificity of art in this way, as sovereignty, implies presuming that art practise is discursive and cannot be at the service of another type of discourse (thus its specificity).

One of the important ideas within the theories of relational art is that they reiterate the importance of the experiential nature of artistic reception (and also production). Nevertheless we feel that championing a relational aesthetic experience should not imply or confuse the issues at stake. On one hand, every subject perceives through their own previous experiences, and, even though it is true that we live in a global, homogenised society, luckily there are still differences. Thus, there can be no such thing as a "world populated by collective aesthetic experiences, mediated through certain consensual codes" for two reasons: they are neither collective, nor can the aesthetic experiences in the terms in which we understand them take place as an affirmation of codes of consensus. The personal nature of reception irrevocably makes us limit the expectations one can invest in an aesthetic experience to, as you put it very well, a critical attitude which can result in a politicisation of our everyday practise. If that causes, or fails to do so, some collective micro-agreements, which would be of course a positive outcome, is an altogether different matter. In the past few years of diverse collective projects we have learned that these are only truly collective when there has been a previous process of personal commitment (to oneself) of consciously politicising every action.

In your text you touch upon two issues which, while not being questions, we'd like to comment on. The first one refers to how you evaluate emotional experience. We understand that you are referring to how certain works of art seem to strive for and favour a more emotional reception than other works do.

We think that relating the capacity to elicit an emotional response to spectacularity unnecessarily limits practise. Spectacle operates through emotions, but it only looks for the same emotional response and promotes it through identical and easily identifiable strategies. This is true to such an extent that the superficial emotions of the spectacle have been conceived and produced for immediate oblivion, totally unlike the emotions produced by aesthetic experience, which, since they are derived from an attitude, leave a long-term residue and imply a high degree of reflection on said emotions.

The second issue has to do with the necessity posed by relational aesthetic theory of researching new means of interacting with the social, multiplying the public spheres of relations between diverse subjects, forms and spaces. Here, our doubt lies in the same realm we have already pointed out: how to mobilise diverse subjects for the occupation of public spaces which can allow them to interact politically with the social based on an aesthetic (critical, creative and proactive) attitude. To our minds, what is at stake here is more than the aesthetic experience and the conditions of precariousness and fear which we subjects are exposed to in contemporary societies. If this attitude is not backed up with a true will of commitment to change, all this would be reduced to gestures, bourgeois gestures in a double sense: they would trivialise and re-affirm the status quo.

10

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

In the realms of political reclamation and action there has been evidence for some time of the need to endow the new problems with new representations which can render them transmittable and thinkable to a wider social collective. In this sense, there has been a great number of artists who have collaborated with social collectives. Nevertheless, there is an open debate surrounding these representations. Could we say that in the political left there is a persistent patronising attitude which understands that

representations are practical when they promote an easy reception, those that are somehow proselytising? Don't you think that underneath some practises of political representation there is a prejudice that rules that politically-aware art is equivalent to elitism? We are ashamed of the media superficiality, but isn't the party-riot in many ways a true continuation of the same superficiality? Do you think that endowing social collectives with means to represent themselves would automatically guarantee the efficiency of this representation before third parties? Do you think that artists' experience in the generation and reception of images, of formal discourses, can be of any use to political action?

10+0

No answer.

11

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

Los Torreznos are an example of collective production. Where does the need to work with others arise from? We have seen many fall out along the way, giving up art production. Do you think that it is easier to resist precariousness and pressure inside a group? Does responsibility get diluted in a collective? We belong to an infantile society. Do we unite because we decide to do so? Does the fact that a project is the result of a collective process allow certain levels of complexity, or does it trivialise things? Are the tendencies towards leadership in collective projects inevitable?

11+1

Los Torreznos:

Where does the need to work with others arise from?

There is a context of friendship, of complicity, of pleasure taken in other people's ideas. Then there is a layer of complementarity and capacity to work together.

We believe that one could speak of the existence of a certain genetic factor: a shared search for pleasure, a need to be guided into unknown territories, a desire too intense to be taken by oneself...

There is also a cultural factor: working with an other (with the missed encounter, with the challenge, with the non-sense, with the admiration, the surprise, the passion), a certain social group culture, the idea of a lab.

Chance also helps: mutual understanding is always a mystery.

One has to love the other.

Where does the need to love others arise from?

Is it easier to resist precariousness and pressure?

Although we haven't got anything, we don't feel precarious. We simply take some time to think in how to pay the rent. We don't experience this as resistance, but rather as an obligation. We remind each other of what there is to be done. Sometimes we do it, sometimes we don't. But, in general, we carry on. This is the kind of pressure we feel, the inner pressure. By having nothing, we don't have to answer to anyone but ourselves, and that's sometimes bad enough.

If one could interpret life in terms of resistance, obviously the more we are the better we'd be able to resist. Nevertheless, the paradox is that here we're talking of a group of two, not even a group of three. Two can't take too much, just a little bit more than one, and at best they can take turns hurtling rocks at the front line, but finally our muscles get exhausted, anyway.

If one could interpret life in terms of happiness, two are infinitely happier than one.

Does responsibility get diluted in a collective?

The image of responsibility diluting is a pretty one, its like the rape of Europa, but in an 18th Century French *salón*. In our society, responsibility has vanished, or maybe it has simply passed out. Creative responsibility is reinforced in our experience. Who hammers in the nails and who designs the postcard is a different question altogether...

The collective aspect could become a synonym of lack of responsibility. Increasingly, democratic societies have been diluting the little responsibility left out there. The challenge: to achieve an irresponsible Government, one that doesn't have to answer to anyone.

In the meanwhile, we're poised on strengthening the collective creation, obsessed with not developing the individual creativity so well established by Western culture, which has left so many models of reference.

It remain unclear, but maybe the truly important thing is responsible creation, whether collective or individual, everything else will come in its own time.

But can there be such a thing as responsible creation? Where is the borderline between responsible and irresponsible creation? Can lack of responsibility be creative?

Isn't the bohemian artist a paradigm of social irresponsibility? Isn't bohemia one of the sources of resistance?

An infantile society...

We can't go it alone. That's obvious. We can't do it alone. Alone, we can only pee and shit. Alone, we can only do our basic necessities. Alone, we can sell ourselves. We can't really do much alone. Two can't do that much, either... I think that there is a strange relationship between art and sociology.

How many things can we do alone? It would be a good idea to make a list of the things one can do alone, and compare them, see if this or that person can do more things alone than oneself, look him in the eyes and ask him: "How are you? How do you feel? How does it feel?"

Do two minds think more than one?

Not always, one only has to leaf through the newspaper. This is a bet, and a bet can be won or lost by one person, as much as by two or more. Group phenomena provide an element of surprise and complexity, depending on your focus on them, how you organise them and the kind of minds grouped together.

We tend to coincide, but not always. Nevertheless, two minds can help a lot in understanding how the brain works, which is wrinkled and not smooth for a good reason. The twists and turns of our brain surface could well be a valid image of how this duo works: sometimes two minds think much less than one, but this thought is much more valuable than what one could think up on his own; two people thinking together doesn't mean thinking twice as much, it means thinking with another person.

Nevertheless, we are aware that here, as much as in other realms, nothing is guaranteed.

We're not so sure this is a bet. Wouldn't it rather be a need to build a reality? Wouldn't it rather be the will to share modes of seeing, modes of feeling?

In what sense can this bet be lost?

Leadership?

Our experience is more like that of a solo musician. Sometimes one of us plays a solo, and sometimes the other one, depending on the kind of day one has had, whether one has thought something up previously...

Nevertheless, this is not a rock band; by contrast, in our case, either everybody sings, or everybody plays bass, or nobody does; it's all or nothing.

So far, some answers to your questions. Based on those, some questions arise that we'd like to ask ourselves and that we take the opportunity, since we have enough space left for it, to answer:

What's so interesting about the twisted mirrors at a country fair?

To see double is a symptom of the intake of some perception-altering product, and, in this sense, a duo is a facilitator of altered perception. In a larger group, the metaphor of a symphonic orchestra would be more appropriate. The duo is the inebriated presence: an always slightly altered monotony. The shot-countershot which is the most economical way to prompt some depth of field. The creative duo is what allows the most economical social-artistic projection. In a minimum of space you have all you need, at the lowest cost.

Without technology, you achieve projection, the inebriated individuality with the least possible effort. The basic sociological underlining: you-me, me-you, no matter how much the me-me would impose itself.

Occasional jesters? The jesters of art?

Since we're talking about art, we defend the role of the jester. Humour as a survival strategy. Survival as

a strategy for research and communication. So many conventions are needed in order to have the feeling of leaving one's own particular hole, that some of us prefer to play at finding our step on the small screeching steps. The position from which we can make ape faces at the great power and all the small powers which everybody avails himself to in order to make his stay on the planet easier to digest.

The double jester has the advantage of guaranteeing the laugh in front of the mirror when checking the state of that chronological evolution we're condemned to.

The problem of languages, and what is contributed by each one of them.

Two of us can scream twice as loud, and in large rooms we don't need a microphone. But, who do we want to call? And what do we want to tell them? Obviously, we're not certain about this, but we have a certain hypothesis: insistence causes consistence, and consistence makes an echo, like banging on a frying-pan. The echo doesn't mean anything by itself, so we need another hypothesis: humour reaches further than erudition. Humour is more sincere, because it doesn't imply a dogma. Some might say that humour is not serious, that it is comfortable, slippery, and that it doesn't consolidate anything... Against these, and other similar considerations, we can say that when dealing with culture, the idea of construction is highly misleading, and that reality adapts itself better to the idea of cultivation; cultivation, depending on the season, requires different tools and ingredients, and in this dry season we're living, we think it necessary to use humour, not as laughter, but as the mirrors at the country fair...

What does climbing to the top of art consist in?

In a tireless, obsessive, crunching public tender.

As time passes by, maybe one starts thinking that the important things are somewhere else and hangs his vanity on the coat-hanger, while others pass him by, climbing fast, very fast.

11+1+1

Los Torreznos:

Why carry on?

Why think at all?

11+1+1+1

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

And why not? Often, we have the feeling that everything in our surroundings wishes that nobody would think, that nobody would make others think. Sometimes, some times we have shared with you, it seems like people really want things to happen, something different to happen. It's a pity that even in these cases, what people normally want is someone else to show up and do it, the possibility of acting out oneself is not even contemplated. In the end, one does what one can't help doing and what one doesn't want to stop doing. And one does it, if one tries hard, as best as one can. We think because we're one of those species (the human one), and we can't help doing it. We feel, we ask ourselves questions, we desire, we try to verbalise and represent, maybe because it's what we do best, maybe because we don't know what to do with all these thoughts and feelings, maybe because it's what we do best, or maybe because we think it's what we do best. Maybe it's just cultivating a small area of freedom we still have. Certainly, we do it because we enjoy doing it and because we learn.

12

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

What would you say are the desirable cultural politics? Is it indispensable that these politics should structure, or be part of, a long-term project, instead of fragmentary and disconnected programs? Do you think there are any differences between what is required by the status quo as necessary art and what art producers and administrators deem to be the necessary art nowadays?

12+0

No answer.

13

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

In certain quarters there is an attempt to convince us that there is a democratic access to culture and to

cultural production, which we know to be absolutely untrue. In your opinion, is it enough to provide access to means of production, or is it also indispensable to back this access up with another access, that of cultural materials which have been deliberately hidden? Wouldn't producers be condemned to reinventing the wheel over and over again without this access to certain inconvenient cultural materials? Who should provide this access? Is it necessary to establish associations of citizens and cultural producers who should cooperate in rescuing other cultural artifacts, in order to see films which are not being shown, or to translate texts which will never be published? Is this viable?

13+1

Manuel Oliveira:

THE FALLACY OF CULTURAL HAPPINESS. PUBLICITY AND THE MICRO-SPHERES OF THE PUBLIC

I start, in turn, with questions. Is there an inside and an outside? Is there anything more important than “other” somethings? Who, and how, determines hierarchy? Is there anything within or beyond publicity and homogenised culture?

I realise that I'm saying “something” over and over again, because it's so hard to define and categorise what I'm trying to say. Or because I don't want to define it. I believe I know what I'm alluding to, but I can't find a simplifying and adequate pigeon-hole. The “somethings” are “moving targets”, and this state of affairs is good, because this makes it difficult to locate them with a telescoping aim and open fire on them.

The difference between high art and mass culture has been eliminated, the borderline between centre and periphery has ceased to be, because the hegemony of the centres of research, production and propagation typical of Modernity have ceased to make sense. Digital communication technology, the circulation of commodities and ideas, the flows of migration, planetary-scale connectivity and the interesting activity generated through some “peripheral” places have drawn up a new map.

There are no international artists, as some biennials inconsistently preach, because nowadays they're all international. They all travel and get to know more different cultural spaces than those in past cultural hegemonies. There are no more centres and peripheries, but a series of interesting cultural production networks, highly independent from the limelight of the metropolis and the high-flown museums who preach from their white citadels a spectacular and banal culture. The most active projects, those that can be established as a point of reference in the Spanish state nowadays are in Bilbao (*Sala Rekalde*), San Sebastián (*Consonni* or *Arteleku*), Olot (*Espai Zero1* or *Panorama*), Terrassa (*P_O_*), in Girona (*Espais* and *Papers d'Art*) or Pontevedra (*Inter-medios*), to name a few. All these organisations constitute “somethings”, “moving targets”, an international lattice which is beyond the institution and still not as far out as the redemptive utopia of a uniform and universal education exemplified by the museum, the art school, and the institutional publicity. These places, these organisations and what is produced in them is beyond publicity, but that doesn't mean that their existence and their activities are outside the Spectacle of culture.

But this breakdown of borders and differences shouldn't make us act in a celebratory manner, nor should it be an excuse for giving in to the fallacy of cultural happiness, because nowadays we're witnessing a different kind of exclusions, sometimes more obscenely pornographic, and sometimes more facetiously sophisticated. What's the access to TV and the pluralism of channels good for, if they always simultaneously show the same football match, or the same show? What are museums and art centres good for if their programming is insubstantially homogeneous? What are documentation centres good for if that they document has been ruled out in a manner which excludes certain textual production? What does standing outside the Spectacle imply?

We will only be in a position to state that a certain project is useful, that it is operational and profitable

if it is capable, precisely, of generating its own structure beyond the so-called *mainstream* or the audience polls. This will only be possible if the access is not determined by a logo, if the material accessed is not determined by publicity. It will only be possible if we generate micro-structures of the public which can re-establish some borderline between the public and publicity, between centre and periphery, between the circuit of power and the underground, between internationalism and cosmopolitanism, or between the Spectacle and serious production. Yes, borderlines, in order to be able to enunciate a definition and not have to resort to the “somethings” in order to protect spaces reserved for the homogenising action. Yes, frontiers, but with bridges and aqueducts free from a hegemonic verticality, free from hijacking.

Borderlines to generate a kind of collaboration and activity within a shared space, or a space to be shared, basically, through a series of activities. The relationship between experience and activity produces a series of bridges, or links with the audience, or with the public sphere, and excludes the hijacking by institutional publicity. In this manner, what is being sought for is the creation of public micro-spheres, seen as autonomous and cohesive organisations and structures around a set of interests or sensibilities which need to be endowed with an adequate working infrastructure, production offices, elaboration agencies, platforms of visibility, a sense of purpose within their city or community, and, above all, an adequate organisational physiognomy and structural model.

Since the cultural normality in the Spanish state has been built on so many paranoid fallacies, we reclaim the state of exception, the proliferation of exceptional micro-structures. Access is inexistent nowadays beyond its mere theoretical enunciation, but it wouldn't be effective even if it existed, since there are forms of governmental hijacking, of de-activation, of legitimation and of institutionalisation which de-activate the access through a logo, through the privatisation of experience or through the homogenisation hidden behind the collapse of the borderlines. We might as well forget about normality, and choose exceptionality.

13+1+1

How can we make it possible for a “moving target” to gain visibility without being shot at? How can we gain access to “something” in permanent movement and mutation without slowing it down? How can we generate exceptional workspaces, spaces of representation and experience, without falling into the trap of institutionalisation? Can we/you answer, even through in a temporary and fragile way, to these questions?

13+1+1+1

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

We've got the feeling that these moving targets are hardly shot at at all: all it takes is to deny them all visibility. Of course, this slows them down, but maybe in these cases we should assume that there are different beats, slower ones, indeed, but more precise, in the double sense of the term. What is a shame is impact, sometimes the impact is minimal when compared to the effort. We remember when one of the people contributing to this publication, Isidoro Valcárcel, presented a work of measuring, in three dimensions, the space of one of these moving targets, the *Zona de Acción Temporal*, which existed in Madrid thanks to a small group of five committed people, among whom were also Rafael Lamata and Jaime Vallauré (*Los Torreznos*). We spent a whole afternoon watching the results of that research, and, when leaving, we felt sad about the fact that such a project would only be seen by a very reduced group of people for a city of the size of Madrid. Resigning oneself to minimal impact seems to be one of the preconditions for those moving targets, but this doesn't make it less of a pity. It's not that we believe in magical massive success, but we'd like to have an impact that could transcend a small group of supporters, one that can grow by itself.

Many tasks are highly gratifying on a personal level, and very committed, but very difficult to sustain over time. How many are prepared to pay (not only with their time and their money, but also with the emotional loss this can involve) in order to exhibit, translate, speak, write or create projects which are deliberately marginalised? How many can afford that? For how long? Reality is stubborn, and long-term

work is hard, slow, and despairing. To imagine an other reality and to attempt to build it against the grain of what already exists, with other methodologies, other resources, would inevitably have to resort to voluntary labour, and this kind of labour needs to be regenerated in order to persist, in terms of motivation and in terms of people. It is well worthwhile that difficulty shouldn't make us give up the effort from the very beginning, that fear shouldn't defeat us before we even get started, this is all good and much better than nothing, but, at the same time, it's not enough. Because this enormous effort doesn't necessarily generate good projects. It is not enough to verbalise things in order to conjure them up, as it isn't enough to come back from the dead in order to find essence, and it isn't enough to want in order to be able to.

We have had the opportunity to get involved in the maintenance of a project of this kind for some time, and right now we can't, we lack the strength. Maybe we'll recover it at a later stage.

For the time being, we have decided to carry on as a duo, and since we don't feel that giving up certain institutional visibility is a guarantee for anything, we accepted the possibility of occupying certain voids in exhibitions and events which we find honourable, since we believe that this presence can show "other" modes of production and self-management. Some might say: they're young. Others might say: they're building up their career. Our stance is to not give up those spaces which, as we have already said, we consider public, our production process takes place in solitude, or in the small lab, but our question must be voiced in public.

Our answer is truly fragile. The idea that there is an enemy out there is motivating, it clearly polarises things, there are the goodies and the baddies, the sell-outs and the incorruptibles. But we, *Espais*, *Hangar*, all of us writing here, we're an institution, and therefore we make an institution. The weak possibility of change is based on us being permanently aware of our role in the game, on us giving maximum priority to the long-term critical evaluation of our projects, while being aware that it is hard to believe that this can go any further than some kind of personal micro-politics, with some small potential impact. Can many small impacts create a great commotion? We're swinging between a certain sub-tone of resignation and occasional sparkles of light, of partial belief amid a moment of incredulity. We believe, and we don't believe. And then we believe.

14

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

What is the function, nowadays, of the art critic, and what is the function of the cultural administrator or the curator? In terms of how you answer the question, do any of these exist in Spain? How to avoid the distortion by which people understand as art criticism what is little more than publicity for galleries and institutions? In this sense, do you think that there is a censorship, or a self-censorship, among critics and curators? We'd like you to talk about your experience with large cultural bodies and what you have learned from it.

14+1

Juan Antonio Álvarez Reyes:

To begin with, I'd like to say that I will answer, much like your recent video work, as a friend. That is, with the tone we use when we speak in private, with full confidence, without being defensive, and with nothing to hide. I will not enter an entangled discussion of what should be the function of the critic, the curator or the administrator in contemporary society. I'll leave that for another occasion. I won't discuss whether that has anything to do with the separation between these two occupations. The fact is that I, for different biographical reasons, have done all three of them.

Let's look at everything in turn. The occupation I've dedicated the longest period of time has been that of an art critic, and it's probably the one I feel most passionate about. In my opinion there are art critics in Spain who feel passionate about their job, and do it with honesty. Although there are also others who understand art criticism as a means to an end, and use it in this manner. There is a generalised misunderstanding among the contemporary art readership about the art criticism produced in the Spanish state, which consists in believing that it only exists and is produced in the newspapers. This

sector is therefore over-rated and is given an importance it doesn't justify. We can find a good comparison in TV ads: the fact that something is advertised (and therefore well known, or, in our case, read) doesn't make it worthwhile. In this field there is clearly a beyond. This is where the confusion regarding what is criticism and what is publicity for galleries and institutions resides. We're talking about a total confusion. It's also true that there are very few people who are likely to take criticism lightly, maybe because we've all lost the habit of it.

Nowadays, as before, the art critic's job is to be someone with specific training and with some kind of experience, who researches, selects, analyses, and voices an opinion. Nothing else. Their credibility will depend on the honesty and independence from power and from what they're writing about. Although credibility is often confused with visibility. A greater effort is required to build this credibility based on honesty and independence. In this sense, a Council of Visual Art Critics has been established (and which I am a member of) with the purpose of dignifying this occupation, and one of the first in achieving this aim is the formulation of a deontological code, something I consider absolutely essential.

We should support, above all, the critique of endogamy, of trying to twist the reader's arm, of assuming that people know nothing, and that, therefore, any fortuitous or vested-interest statement can go unnoticed. After all, we should ask ourselves about the responsibility of the critic. He should be required to work with some rationale, aside from some awareness of being-here (which is not that of poetry, or that of philosophy, not even that of journalism, even though that was where art criticism was born). I've always thought that the shakers and movers of contemporary art in Spain suffer from a desire of being something else. The experts in aesthetics want to be critics and curators; critics and curators want to be experts in aesthetics; I could go on. In the end, the result is that within this total masquerade no-one gets their job done. Furthermore, there is a common problem with cultural producers - the total precariousness of labour. Or, to define it more clearly, it is difficult to make a living out of one's writing. What is normally paid for a critical article or text is inadequate. One should bear in mind that precariousness is always sought for and that it always benefits someone.

As far as curating is concerned, many critics consider it a side job in either direction. I don't dissociate one occupation from the other. In the end, they both have the same objective, although with a different priority of factors, which don't affect the sum of the parts. If the critic, as I noted previously, researches, selects, looks, analyses and draws up an opinion, the curator (according to my sequence) also sees, analyses, researches, draws up an opinion and selects. What does vary is the extension and form of work. They are both very different. In any case, one should recognise that the exhibition format is clearly in crisis, despite its popularity, and, therefore, so are curatorship and exhibition criticism.

On the other hand, the most interesting aspect of this job (criticism and curatorship) is the knowledge, both personal and intellectual, that one acquires, and that ends up operating as a form of producing meaning. And this is what makes it worthwhile for me.

I have left the issue of what you term "cultural administration" for last, because it's an altogether different field, very close to the political, economical, and social power structures, and sometimes in open conflict with them. Obviously, there is some common ground with the other two occupations, but because of the above-mentioned proximity and to the difficult autonomy from these powers, an adequate, honest, and independent cultural administration is highly unlikely, but absolutely necessary. What is very noteworthy is how easy it is, once one has occupied an administrative position with a clear will of providing a public service (something which is certainly often forgotten), to do many of the things which it is necessary to do, and, at the same time, the enormous resistance one encounters, which rules that these things don't even get formulated. In that last case, the weapon of choice is the environmental noise which creates confusion and dispersion of efforts, which can easily end up diluted or simply cut down or even erased. I personally choose the very real possibility for change which can be provided from the field of cultural administration, with that possibility, with that almost-getting-there, despite the opposing forces... Sometimes I tend to think that everything is easier than it seems, that it all comes down to wanting to do something and working towards it. There are examples of achievements which this is not

the place to enumerate. The job of the cultural administrator really has its troubles and difficulties, but also many moments of satisfaction when some of these public service objectives are met. I'm not defending a naive option, I'm not being blind to the fact that cultural administration positions are sought as steps on the ladder of power, or the belonging to a particular clique (the great peril of this country): it's just that I think that that honesty and independence which should be demanded from criticism should also be demanded from cultural administration.

Regarding censorship and self-censorship in these three professions, it's a bit like Galician *meigas*, that, despite everything, exist...

Finally, I'd like to point out that, despite my anarchist tendency (quoting the Minister of Culture referring to her professional field), a union that creates force is needed among the different workers of contemporary art. What I have learned from that contact you mention is that one should keep working in order to achieve the desired transformations. As Camus wrote, "hope cannot be avoided forever, and it can assault even those that thought they had gotten rid of her."

14+1+1

Juan Antonio Álvarez Reyes:

What do you, as artists, expect from art criticism and curatorship? And, from your standpoint, what should guide cultural administration?

14+1+1+1

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

What we expect from everyone is to work from the position of a "not knowing", to understand their labour as part of a wider definition of culture, communication, and contribution to what makes us human.

What we expect from criticism is to learn from other gazes on the specificity of the artistic, on what we do and what others do, to debate the strategies put to work in projects, to debate the projects themselves, more awareness and consistency of debate, more intellectual ambition, more personal disclosure, more autonomy and a more disinterested micro-politics.

What we expect from curators is to elaborate interesting projects for reception, that they be coherent and responsible with their tasks and their commitment to their audience, the artists, and other participating parties. That they should make exhibitions more than just a display of one thing or the other, that they be committed to research and risk-taking, that they don't simply shift the packages required by institutions. That they be ready to work collectively and in a non-hierarchical manner with artists. And, if possible, that they be clear and sincere, that they don't mysteriously vanish halfway through a project, that they don't lie, or exploit precariousness and illusion, that they don't use people.

What we expect from cultural administrators is an open mind, a demanding ethical and political stance, with a mind for commons; adequate training and knowledge of what is being administrated, to look always for the long-term results, and to work based on an elaborated project, in which social collectives and agents can have a voice.

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Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

In your experience from the *Papers d'Art* publication and the administration of *Espais*, how would you differentiate what is generated from the art works themselves and what is generated from what is written about them? What do they produce, and at what level? Are both dimensions of cultural production indispensable and part of a whole? On the other hand, what are the responsibilities of the cultural agent nowadays?

15+1

Jordi Font Agulló:

I'm finding it really hard to come up with a monolithic answer to your question. That is, a clear and simple answer, since I think that your focus, at least as far as formulating the issue goes, is rather generalising. What I mean is that when discussing what do works of art generate, we should specify

which works of art we're talking about, since it is obvious that current art production is very diverse. I'd even say, due to this heterogeneity, that we need, above all, to specify our political and aesthetic preferences and be aware of what position we're in in relation to such an divergent amount of works circulating in the field of art. What is more, I think we should reject this uncritical acceptance, so fashionable nowadays, of diversity as a synonym of a "right on" attitude, tolerance and, finally, as proof of the good democratic operation of society. Normally, we shouldn't trust these sermons, because under the lattice of pluralism - plagued by stereotypical gestures and clichés related to everything considered "correct" - there are, concealed, on the one hand, the mechanisms that articulate the exploitation which our endearing *Democratic National Plays* stand on, and, on the other hand, and related to the previous case, we have to take in as part of normality the distortion caused by the tools for manipulation of messages; that is, publicity and media.

Consequently, from my point of view, art production becomes interesting when it sustains and generates a discourse which runs against the grain of what is conventionally understood as normal and reglamentary. In other words, it would imply that the work of art in question opens the possibility for a generation of counter-narratives which can provoke a crisis in the status quo. To reach this point is anything but easy, even more so if we bear in mind that the dominant - subtly imposed from above - social understanding is that everything has already been decided beforehand. They want to make us believe that change, illusions, surprises, and transformations are impossible in our lives. Indeed, it often seems like this, and Fredric Jameson (*Interview with Fredric Jameson, El Archipiélago*, N° 63/2004), for example, rightly points out that, when set against this scenario, it would seem that art and culture have little to offer as far as unmasking and revealing these paralysing circumstances goes. But, nevertheless, F. Jameson himself wonders why we don't offer any resistance to this disaster. Maybe, when looking for the causes that make resistance so difficult, one might find the kernel of resistance. Therefore, we need to work hard in this direction. We are already aware that those conditions which seemed to make revolution possible during Modernity are not around the corner, and, also, that art alone cannot transform the social scene. In fact, such a proposition has never been taken seriously by anyone with half a brain. By the way, it's true that some artists from the historical avant-garde fervently believed in the socialist revolution. But that belief was based on their certainty of being part of a wider notion, of a social and political movement of great transcendence and public presence, beyond the reduced art sphere. At the end of the day, I always hear one of the simple variations on the theme of the well-known and supposed political uselessness of art from people who - perversely - attempt to discredit the political and historical qualities of artistic productions. As one would expect, they always resort to the problematic autonomy of art defensively, and, at the end of the day, politically - even though they might deny it - because they're aware that the potential in art and culture, despite their being so sectarian, partial and fragmented, can acquire a determining role in the collective imaginary and in the production of symbolic capital. How else are we to understand the rise of American Abstract Expressionism amidst the Cold War?

Therefore, it is irrefutably obvious that art (in this case, the novel), as the writer Belén Gopegui recently stated (*Babelia*, 13/9/04), always maintains a capacity for significant social intervention, especially in an affirmative sense, or in the sense of legitimising the dominant system. The thing is, when this happens, it seems natural. In this sense, Pierre Bourdieu uses the term *doxa* in order to pinpoint the kind of ideological body which ends up governing a social order in which it becomes impossible to even start thinking about the possibility of undertaking some kind of alteration, because domination has become natural in an unquestionable manner. It is an altogether different achievement to generate an antagonistic stance, capable of debating this apparent normality and, furthermore, to simultaneously originate the tools with which to face the environmental pressure with a critical advantage.

I have been running the *Fundació Espais* with Magdala Perpinyà for over a decade now, and I have been working together with Carme Ortiz on the *Papers d'Art* publication for quite a few years. In both cases, I'd like to think that we have managed, even though only occasionally, to provide a shelter for art

projects and critics, writers, etc., who have been able to develop this antagonistic interventionist discourse. Although we shouldn't lose sight of complexity, the various kinds of precariousness and the contradictions which weight on and condition work in the artistic and cultural realm. What I mean by this is that we shouldn't give in to the self-censorship which the institutional framework all too often imposes on us. It is clearly obvious that to adopt a dissident attitude implies entering a universe of paradoxes. But it is also unquestionable that there are no pure spaces, places unaffected by some kind of institutional pollution or that are not exposed to the pressures of the powers that be. Therefore, acting from the "margins" is legitimate anywhere. The next step is to make this viable - to have enough ability, and even luck - in that fragile line that separates negotiation and confrontation.

To answer your question more specifically, I think that there shouldn't be too many differences between what is generated by the kind of works of art I am interested in, and what is generated by the writing which surrounds them. On the contrary, an important condition is to maintain a coherence and balance between both. In my experience, not as an administrator, but as a producer of texts, I think that the written word shouldn't sidestep the artist's work, as it shouldn't fall into the trap of over-interpreting and in the juggling exercises of an empty rhetoric. I am not happy with those writings that tend to veil the social or political aesthetics of artistic production through the use of a jargon which separates the object from the subject-spectator (the audience), either.

In short, texts, whether they are produced for catalogues, specialised magazines, or other documents, have, no doubt, a primary importance. The text can describe, suggest, establish connections with structures of knowledge not directly related to art, and even, why not, it can make possible a wider diffusion which can involve the achievement of a political significance of the work outside the field of art. In any case, as one more creative act, writing aids in the enlargement of the field of vision and diffusion of the work of art. I think that an antagonistic art is indissociable from a critique and a resilient structure, which shouldn't shy away from combat and confrontation with mainstream thought and art. The challenge we have on our hands is still that of the eternal problem of communication and reception. We provide coverage and support for unconventional art productions and texts which generate discourses, narratives and perceptions of reality which should reach the majority and which, nevertheless, we rarely manage to take beyond the interest of a reduced minority.

We are, therefore, facing the challenge which us the agents of so-called Postmodernity should face up without hesitation: the contribution to the creation of a truly alternative culture, with an eye on its social integration. I think that until this objective is reached, both what is generated by dissident artistic production, and what is generated by its complementary texts, have a lot of work left to do.

15+1+1

Magdala Perpinyà Gombau:

It is certainly not a simple task to enumerate and define the responsibilities of the cultural agent in the current context. To my mind, and in my professional experience, there are paradigms and perspectives which can even become divergent. To a large extent, I think that this responsibility is premised on the vested interests of certain cultural politics. In this sense, I think that the paradigm adopted by a professional working in an institution with an administration that is deeply involved in a purely utilitarian understanding of culture, and with the purpose of producing massive public events, will be altogether different from that of the secondary space, located on the periphery of the dominant cultural sphere - and by "periphery" I don't only mean the physical location, but rather a notion which would include the areas of power and influence of the large cultural infrastructures - and which pretends to separate itself from the dynamics of standardising of symbolic production. By the way, the positions of those who understand that working in the circulation and the knowledge of visual arts consists in pigeon-holing them in the great factory of the culture industry would be irreconcilable with the positions of those that think that there is a need to develop projects that, more than becoming populist events evaluated in terms of the number of visitors, should aid reflection and the development of a critical awareness in citizens. Despite the fact that apparently it would be over-simplifying and misleading to

generalise and polarise the focus of the cultural administrator's work between these two positions, it is also true that they inform the better part of our cultural scene, and that nowadays both constitute clear examples of opposing modes of approaching the art phenomenon in the same territory.

In order to be able to better locate the problem that affects creators, critics, technicians, etc., I'd like to stress the importance acquired by the harnessing character of cultural politics, which is being imposed on a global level and which - as argued by George Yúdice - is based on the transformation of culture into one of the key resources or neo-liberalist politics. In this sense, we are witnessing the re-orientation of the "utility" of symbolic production; the major appeal of which, in the context of late-capitalist society, would lie in its capacity to generate wealth. But, beyond this harnessing, its profitability can also be assigned to its attribution of the capacity to solve problems, the resolution of which would be an exclusive responsibility of the public institutions. In fact, it would not be too difficult to find examples of the extreme to which political power and large corporations; not to mention the W.B. and the I.M.F., have used culture as a disguise for the justification of certain economical and ideological interests, or, in an even more perverse manner, to disengage themselves from their public responsibilities and obligations; in this case, the commitment of the State with regards to civil society.

On the other hand, despite the fact that the penetration of culture in the social field is an irrefutable fact and can have its positive aspects in specific contexts, we shouldn't forget that the short-term use of this fact can backfire and have a negative influence on the social sphere. In this respect, I'd like to quote a very eloquent example, mentioned by Yúdice. Specifically, the author of *El recurso de la cultura. Usos de la cultura en la era global* (2002) refers to Peekskill, an American post-industrial city in which, in order to re-activate the economy, local authorities promoted the establishment of studios for artists from New York, offering them cheap lofts. The result set off a typical case of gentrification, displacing the original inhabitants and increasing the real estate prices. One doesn't need to look much further in our country for examples of "cultural theme-parking" of historical city centres with the pretended aims of regeneration, or the building of large museums in cities depressed by industrial recession. No doubt, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is not only a prototype of a museum aimed at cultural tourism, with the purpose of generating financial profit and solving the problem of unemployment caused by the closing down of the shipyards, but also a highly-elaborated manoeuvre, aimed at cleansing the image of a Basque Country tainted by terrorism. Therefore, culture, as a resource, is located in the centre of these processes (Yúdice). No doubt, it is a shame that some of the most complex issues that affect the citizen should be reducible to economic transactions, that is, to mere commodities.

In short, as pointed out by Jeremy Rifkin, culture has ended up playing an essential role in the renewal of productive forces, the consequences of which project it towards the promotion of certain ideologies and towards the social control of the population. Nevertheless, we should be aware the total subordination and submission - not only of the technicians, but also of the creators - to the administrators who base their management practise on a model which is governed by parameters of strictly economicist development and growth, implies an expropriation of the value of culture and of intellectual labour and a pauperising of their potential as a container of knowledge, of generators of a space for debate and for the formation of public opinion. In fact, the subsidiary role assigned to art not only adulterates it until it becomes a servant of the imperatives of the new cultural commerce, but it despoils it of all its capacity to transmit historical memory and the collective imaginary and collective symbolic.

To my mind, and taking into account the state we're in, we should reject any disposition which might imply a misunderstanding or a hedonistic conceit, or which justifies the stance according to which any medium or tactic is valid in a historical period dominated by cognitive relativism, in which, according to the most reactionary reading of Postmodernism, the grand narratives of Modernism are no longer possible, which commands the advocacy of resignation. Against this, I think it is necessary to adopt an attitude of dissent and struggle, in order to avoid falling into the trap of initiatives that simply re-affirm the legitimation of hegemonic power, or that incite an uncritical cultural consumption. Therefore, as

argued by my colleague Jordi Font Agulló, it would be a matter of articulating interventionist discourses of an antagonistic nature, that can sustain an independence from the system and are capable of generating spaces of reflection through the cracks in the social body. Of course, we shouldn't be naive, the utopian thought of transforming the world through art defended by the historical avant-garde is not possible anymore, but what is possible is affecting the real, struggling against intellectual misery and banality, and approaching the project of Modernity as an unfinished process, which can be recuperated. This is the challenge that we the workers of symbolic production need to face if we want our labour to have an effect in the social sphere. Of course, as Jordi Font Agulló rightly points out, paradoxes and contradictions are common, and are difficult to solve; nevertheless we must understand that these conflictive situations are also part of the challenge.

Fortunately, beyond the “culture of complaint”, so typical of those who'd rather remain in their armchair feeling sorry for themselves, we are witnessing a change taking place in certain sectors of citizenry, a change which a good deal of the contemporary art strategies are very receptive to. Certainly, after a period of sleepiness and lethargy, we are witnessing how civil society is re-organising itself and facing power, avoiding the rancid authoritarianism which has ended up imposing globalisation at all levels. Maybe, as pointed out by Toni Negri, civil disobedience and the new notion of community and of “forms of subjectivation” which are being developed could be evidence of this crack which is opening up within society as a consequence of the crisis of the capitalist system. Thus, resistant cultural initiatives are emerging in this context, which pretend to create spaces of dissent that can raise their voice beyond the directives of any order. In this manner, a plurality of directions and multiple dynamics exist within visual creation, which answer this need to overcome the institutional framework and reject the requirements which the new cultural market attempts to impose, in order to breathe new meaning into the creative act. There are examples of this on many levels, with interventions which enlarge the field of representation and creativity within the spaces of capitalist production, and don't give in to the spectacularisation and trivialisation which art practise is being lead into.

In the wake of the new transformations affecting symbolic production, the responsibility of the cultural agent will probably reside in being capable of adopting a position and searching for new means of mediation in order to operate within these new social, economical and political mechanics, searching for an agency of tools which can allow us to complete a task which can involve the dimension of a public service.

15+1+1+1

Jordi Font and Magdala Perpinyà Gombau:

Since we're talking about the possible social impact of an art with a pretence of antagonism, how do you perceive the public reception of your work?

15+1+1+1+1

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto:

The public repercussion of what we do, in the terms in which this is usually understood, i.e., media or debate and/or criticism in specialised media, has hardly gone beyond the mere appearance of our names in lists of artists participating in certain events. There was a critical review of our last exhibition in the *MediaLabMadrid*, which praised our conceptual background, while at the same time it accused us of an insufficient formal development, without providing arguments for any of these two statements. This worries us, it is predictable, if we bear in mind the kind of works we produce. In fact, we don't crave protagonism, what we want is debate. Sometimes, we have missed some comment, some opposition to our proposals (in our solo projects as much as in our work in the *Circo Interior Bruto*, or in *Ecosofías*). There's a lot of talk of who's exhibiting where, and other secondary issues, but there is little talk about the practise, there is not enough criticism and not enough willingness to accept criticism in this sense. This simultaneously soils and distorts the picture.

There is another kind of repercussion, one that can't be measured in terms of articles or critical reviews, and this kind of repercussion is translated into invitations to participate in projects, exhibitions,

workshops, etc. In this sense, we've been lucky, since quite a few people in different places have shown interest in our work, providing the conditions so that we can keep developing and showing it, providing space, visibility, and trust in our proposals even when they're unconventional, as is your case with the exhibition at *Espais* and this publication. We appreciate and value very highly the fact that the origin of most of these opportunities is in the reception of the works themselves, in the life of the work itself. But some people say that certain attitudes have to be answered for sooner or later, we'll see what happens now that we're no longer young.

We also have something which is very important for us, the feedback from friends and unknown people who sometimes come up and talk to us or leave their comments in our physical or electronic guest-books. They have lead us to think that we have managed to produce works which can be accessed at different levels by old-age people, by adults, by teenagers, whether they have been initiated or not - the works do not, *a priori*, reject them. We have produced works which demand more than a meta-artistic reception, and this satisfies us a lot. Sometimes we're deeply touched by people who approach us to thank us for a work, and sometimes we're dazzled by people who demand that we cease to think and cease to produce because they don't like what we do and where we come from politically. But what we're really thankful for is that someone would be ready to talk and discuss our work with us, people who demand more communication with us than simple adulation, gratitude or insult. Someone who would share with us their doubts and their temporary truths. This doesn't happen very often, but it does happen occasionally.

As far as the social impact of our works in terms of whether they have or haven't provoked an aesthetic experience and a critical attitude - how does one measure that? We know that certain works have achieved such an effect in certain people (not necessarily the same works, or the same people). We know this because some have written us, some have used fragments from them, and we have seen some of them crying... Can these "some" be considered "many"?

Biographies

Juan Antonio Álvarez Reyes

Art critic and curator. I have been the director of *El Periódico del Arte* (1997-2002) and director of the Centro de Arte Párraga in Murcia (2002-2004). As an art critic, I have contributed to *Diario 16* (1995-1997), and *El Mundo*, as well as collaborating with magazines such as *Papers d'Art*, *Artecontexto*, *Exit Express* and *Exit Book*, *Lápiz*, *Historia y Vida*, *Descubrir el Arte*, *Flash Art*, *Le Journal del Arts*, or *The Art Newspaper*. As a curator, I have organised, for the Madrid Autonomous Community, the exhibitions *La casa, su idea*, *Ciudades sin nombre* and *Paredes y suelos*, and, for the INJUVE, *Escenarios*. I was the curator for the Sala Montcada of the *La Caixa* Foundation between 1998, under the title *El ojo divers*, and I also curated *Monocanal* (Reina Sofía National Museum and another six art centres). Recently, I curated *Esfuerzo in Koldo Mitxelena*. I have also curated individual exhibitions and projects by Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto, Lara Almarcegui and El Perro. Currently, I am preparing the *Sesiones Animadas* project for the CAAM and MNCARS.

Aurora Fernández Polanco

Is a lecturer in Theory and History of Contemporary Art at the Complutense University, Madrid. She has worked on the perceptual and epistemological changes in the appreciation of contemporary art through articles, conferences, and the organisation of courses and seminars. Among her publications are: *Arte Povera*, Madrid, Nerea, 1999; *La Distancia y la Huella: para una antropología de la mirada* (edited by Aurora Fernández Polanco and Josu Larrañaga. Catalogue and exhibition), Cuenca, UIMP and Provincial Board, 2001; "Sobre algunas metáforas psicoanalíticas en la estética contemporánea", in *Psicoanálisis sin diván (Ensayos postmodernos en el siglo XXI)*, Madrid, Biblioteca nueva, 2004. Her latest book is *Formas de mirar en el arte actual*, Madrid, Edilupa, 2004.

Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto

(Madrid, 1971 / Mérida, Badajoz, 1973). They live and work in Madrid since 1996, after meeting at the G. Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. They have exhibited at the MediaLabMadrid (2004), and in the MEIAC, Badajoz (2002); and also collectively in *Ahalegina / Esfuerzo*, Koldo Mitxelena Kulturunea, San Sebastián (2004); *Banquete*.

Metabolismo y Comunicación, Conde Duque Cultural Centre, Madrid; *Corpos de Producción*, Santiago de Compostela (2003); *Dé[s]règlements*. Galerie Art & Essai, Rennes (2002); *Ecosofías*, Sala Amadís, Instituto de la Juventud, Madrid (2001). Their audiovisual works have been shown at *Zinebi 46*. Fine Arts Museum, Bilbao; *O lugar do corpo*, Centro ON, A Coruña (2004); *El cine de afuera: el espíritu del retrato*, Sala Kutxa y Arteleku, San Sebastián; *Just do it. Gènere, performativitat i narratives del treball*. 11 Mostra Internacional de Film de Dones, Barcelona, and *Monocanal*, MNCARS [travelling exhibition], (2003). Currently, they are working on a long-term project on education and audiovisual literacy with the collaboration of the Department of Education of the Patio Herreriano Museum and MediaLabMadrid.
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Kamen Nedev

(Sofia, 1972). Keywords: abjection, acoustic space, action, audio, body without organs, circo interior bruto, copyleft, desiring machines, dérive, el afilador, em:t, espacio tangente, flexible, fluxus, immaterial production, immaterial, inter-media, media, migration, multiple names, multiplicity, n-1, nettime, nomadism, panopticism, performative subjectivity, plunderphonics, psychogeography, public space, schizophrenia, surveillance, walk, webartery, wryting. k_men@gmx.net
Manuel Oliveira

(Porto do Son, A Coruña 1964) Graduated in Fine Arts by the Universidad Central de Barcelona (1994), and in History of Art (1988). Between 1998 and 2001 he directed the Pedagogical Service at the CGAC, where he also programmed a series of audio-visual projects such as *Plataforma de video* (Compostela, 1997), which he has also done on other occasions such as *El cuerpo en un mundo polisensorial* (Burgos, 2002), *Scan Around* (Warsaw Video Festival, WEF, 2003), and *Hangar a Loop* (Loop, Barcelona, 2003), *Transplant Heart* (Santiago de Compostela and Helsinki, 2000), *Lost in Sound* (CGAC, Santiago, 1999), *Nuevos Caminos: amenazas y promesas del arte electrónico* (Casa das Artes, Vigo, 1998), *Outra Mirada* (CGAC, Santiago, 1998), *We must be over the rainbow!* (CGAC, 1998). He has published in newspapers (*El Temps d'Art*, *ABC Cultural*, *O Correo Galego*), in specialised magazines (*Arte Iberica*, *Arte y Parte*, *Camera Austria*, *Papers d'Art*, etc.), and in various catalogues (Pontevedra Biennial, Elisa Sighicelli, *Excentricidades*); he has taught courses ("Miradas arredor da arte", CGAC, 1998 and "De interés público", Junta Castilla-León, 2002), read conferences (UIMP, TransKULTUR, MUA, UEM, the Fine Arts Faculty in Bilbao, Espai s'Arts Visuals d'Amposta, etc.) with the aim of critically revising the various manifestations of contemporary culture and its vectors of transformation. Currently, he directs Hangar, a production centre for visual arts in Barcelona (www.hangar.org), and also directs the production and research project *Procesos abiertos* (www.p-oberts.org).

Magdala Perpinyà Gombau

is a Fine Arts graduate.

Jordi Font Agulló

is a historian.

Since 1992, they have both been in charge of the art direction of the *Espais d'Art Contemporani* Foundation in Girona, a centre dedicated to the production and dissemination of visual art. They are also part of the editing committee of the contemporary art magazine *Papers d'Art*, and they collaborate with their texts in various specialised publications and magazines. Jordi Font Agulló has also curated a number of exhibitions outside of the *Espais* Foundation.

Víctor del Río

Graduated in Philosophy and Fine Arts by the Salamanca University. He has published art criticism in the magazine *Lápiz* and in other media and collective works. Associate lecturer in History of Contemporary Art at the Salamanca University, he combines his teaching position with that of Research and Education Coordinator of the Patio Herreriano Museum, specialised in contemporary Spanish art. In this institution, he has developed a number of projects on education and contemporary art practise, as well as the *exploradorArte* project, which consists in a art and education research and resources web portal as part of the museum's website.

Montse Romaní

(Lloret de Mar, 1968). She lives in Barcelona. Since 1992 she has been working in the field of cultural administration. In the last few years she has worked as an independent curator focusing her research on the articulations between art practise, urban transformations and critical theory.

Among her projects are: *Non Place Urban Realm*, South London Gallery, London (1999); *Imaginando Identidades*, Espai 22a, Barcelona (2000); *Memòria Urbana i Espectacle*, Espais Foundation, Girona (2002); *Benvingut a Banyoles*, Sala Municipal *El Tint*, Banyoles (2002); *Total Work*, Sala Montcada, Barcelona (2003), *Tour-ismos. La derrota de la disensió*

(in collaboration with Nuria Enguita and Jorge Luis Marzo), Antoni Tàpies Foundation (2004).

Since 2001, together with María Ruido and Virginia Villaplana, she has been part of the *Sueño colectivo* group, which develops a research on the current conditions of post-fordist labour through audiovisual production.
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María Ruido

(Ourense, 1967). Artist, critic and cultural producer, since 1995 she has been developing interdisciplinary projects on the social construction of the body and identity(ies), on women's imaginary regarding work and on the forms of construction of collective and personal memory, chiefly through video, photography and writing.

Recently, she has curated, together with Uqui Permui, *Corpos de producció: miradas críticas e relatos feministas en torno aos suxeitos sexados nos espacios públicos* (Santiago de Compostela, Concello de Santiago/USC/CGAC, from March 2002 - March 2003), and is currently a researcher in the Feminisms part of the *Desacuerdos* project, developed by MACBA-Arteleku-UNIA.

Since 2001, together with Virginia Villaplana and Montse Romaní, she has been part of the *El sueño colectivo* work group.

She currently lives in Barcelona, where she is a lecturer in the Department of Design and Visual Arts at the Barcelona University.

Los Torreznos

Los Torreznos are a duo dedicated to a conceptual exploration in the social and political terrain, as well as that of our most deeply rooted customs. Their point of departure is the most direct reality, including the family. Los Torreznos are Los Torreznos. Los Torreznos are currently, or have been in the past, part of independent artistic creation collectives. Los Torreznos, as such, were created in 2000. J. Vallauré and Rafael Lamata have been working together for over twelve years in different creative projects, both their own, and other projects dedicated to the generation of art spaces and groups, as was the case with the *Zona de Acción Temporal*, and currently the *Circo Interior Bruto. La noche electoral. Séquence. Arts Visuels et Médiatiques. Chicoutimi. Canada. / 35 minutos. Galerie Rouge. Québec. Canada; Reencontré internationale d'art performance de Québec; and Doméstico 2004. Madrid. / Investigaciones lingüísticas. E.P.I. Zentrum. Essen. Alemania (2004). De perejil a Ninwanija. Circo Interior Bruto. / ¿Mis maletas, dónde están mis maletas?. Coslart 2003. XI Encuentro de arte experimental de Coslada. Madrid; and Centro Che Guevara. Rivas Vaciamadrid. Madrid. / Confiando en Shakespeare (with Los Superagradecidos). Circo Interior Bruto. Madrid (2003). 35 minutos. Vacío 9. Madrid. / La Pasión según los Torreznos (Un vodevil de Los Torreznos). Circo Interior Bruto. Madrid; and Doméstico'02. Madrid. / La noche electoral. Fundació Espais d'art Contemporani. Gerona (2002). La noche electoral. Valencia University. Fine Arts Faculty; and Circo Interior Bruto. / Energía Española Normal. Ciclo de performances Territorios nómadas. Galería Theredoom. Barcelona; and La Fábrica, Fotogalería. Madrid (2001). Energía Española Normal. Le lieu. Quebec. Canadá; and Doméstico'00. Madrid. / Colocar 50 pajaritos de papel en una autopista, darles alpiste y esperar a que canten. (A participative action). L'ilot d'florieu. Quebec. Canadá. / Puzzle canadiense para hacer con canadienses (A participative action). L'ilot d'florieu. Quebec. Canadá (2000).*

Isidoro Valcárcel Medina

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Virginia Villaplana

Mass media producer and critical writer. Lecturer in audiovisual communication, Faculty of Social and Juridical Sciences, UCH (Valencia). She works on projects in the field of cinema, video, installation and critical writing. Her research on culture, gender and representation examines the challenge of technology regarding traditional notions of memory, space, communication and identity. In the realm of audiovisual production, she has produced the following documentaries, among others: *Daydream Mechanics*, *Tras las fronteras del sueño de la inmigración*, *Stop Transit*, *Anonymous Film Portrait*, *NUIT, NOT EVEN SO*, and *Double Stage*. Film and video programmes: *Pasarse de la Raya*, Arte&Idea, Mexico D.F, Mexico and New York, USA. *Fronteras/No-Lugar*, *Metrópolis*, TVE2. *Arquitecturas del discurso*,

Antoni Tàpies Foundation, Barcelona. *Cine y casi cine*, MNCARS.

Le détournement des technologies. Media and culture conflicting spaces. Constant, Brussels. INIVA, *El sueño colectivo*, London. *Corpos de producción*, CGAC, Santiago. *Monocanal*, MNCARS, Madrid.

Los ojos cercanos, cartografías, relatos y ficciones en torno a las imágenes como documento, La Casa Encendida, Madrid (2003). *Transacciones/fadaia*, UNIA, arte y pensamiento (2004).

Gabriel Villota Toyos

(Bilbao, 1964), is a writer and lecturer of Audiovisual Communication in the University of the Basque Country. He has worked as artist and organiser of a variety of activities in relation to visual arts, and has published in a large number of specialised magazines, art catalogues and other written media. His most recent works are the *Bodybuilding* video (1999) and the book *Sujeto e imagen-cuerpo: entre la imagen del cuerpo y el cuerpo del espectador* (2004). Currently, he is preparing his contribution to the *Desacuerdos* project, under the title *Devenir vídeo*, which will be presented in the MACBA, Barcelona, in March 2004.