

Alicia Herrero interviewed by Pablo Helguera*

Published in the books *Pedagogía en el campo expandido*, 8th Mercosur Biennale and *Consideraciones sobre lo Público, un Simposio en Tres Actos* (*Public Considerations, a Symposium in Three Acts*).

PH: In many of your projects the dialogue, the conversation, or to be more precise what you've termed the 'conversational scenarios', play a central role. What motivates you to use conversation at the centre of your practise?

AH: One of the things that motivates me most is the potential event contained in the creation of these 'conversational scenarios'; the possible ways to relate resources from performance, theatre, symposia, popular gatherings, round tables or talk TV, and from this the ability to situate them with ubiquity in relation to the strategies of art itself, its genres and its mechanisms of visibility.

PH: In your project *Public Considerations* you employed a whole spectrum of dialogue and presentation devices from theatre to talk show. In this particular case, what was it that motivated you to search for that multiplicity of formats? What was, in your opinion, the potential of these formats and what kind of discoveries - if any - did you make in realizing this experiment?

AH: *Public Considerations, a Symposium in Three Acts* (2010-11), takes place in the paradoxical frame of the present day in which, curiously, while various South American states commemorate 200 years of colonial independence at the same time the biggest systematic crisis of global capitalism is taking place, making evident once again the dependence on the financial state. It's the banks that appear to write the script of history... It's also applicable to the power that the logic of capital amasses in the system of art itself, which in this field produces a clear imbalance. *Public Considerations* questions the naturalization of this market logic at the same time as re-interrogating the rhetoric of freedom used in the field of art.

The project proposes entering into a debate on and an experience of 'the public', situated in the territorial frontiers of (artistic, academic and political) discourse. It's about a performative talk in three auditoria of notable and iconic public institutions of the city of Buenos Aires: a university, a bank and the parliament. These were: Act 1 in the auditorium of Buenos Aires University's Ricardo Rojas Cultural Centre, which challenged re-localizations of art and knowledge; Act 2 in the central office of the Argentine National Bank in Plaza de Mayo, to present re-mappings of art and economy and Act 3 in the auditorium of the National Congress, from which to present new cartographies and questions on the processes of emancipation. We add to these dislocations the unusual integration of diverse participants who introduce or activate different perspectives:

political analysts; artists; activists; investigators in the field of philosophy, art and sociology; economists; musicians; journalists; town planners; actors; video makers.

The project promotes three key matters. The first is that it 'stages' the public, revising the concepts of liberty forged by the vanguards of history. This is possible in *Public Considerations*, because whilst it exists on the limits of the scenarios of visibility and the subjects of the field of art (the question of the public is rarely dealt with in discussions in this field) it also questions its politics and conditions of production, what Walter Benjamin termed the *production apparatus*. The second is concerned with the scenarios, the 'representational space of discussion and debate'. In *Public Considerations* the public auditoria (of the university, bank and parliament) offer a wide variety of mechanisms for debate on the public and also bring the enormous potential to investigate the limits of these emblematic mechanisms: how they create observation and participation. The auditoria are also considered for their representational dimension.

The third matter is that which makes the previous two possible: the performative-talk. It's concerned with a conversational form that interrupts the classic scheme of symposia and presents a redistribution of the artistic processes at the same time as standing in the way of their classification. It brings the idea of theatre to the symposium and that of symposia to talk TV, including the construction itself: a *regisseur*, round tables, performers officiating as introductory guides to the proposed institutions, theatrical illumination, signs, live incidental music, the participation of a moderator, a panel of experts on the proposed subjects. The act of debate is staged through 'participative ranks' of particular abilities, and an in-situ script is created that enhances the flow of the public's active participation. Its complexity favours situating the experience as part of a heuristic strategy and multiplicity of perception, proposed as a process of continuous dislocation. In this sense, it's interesting to add to the project *Chat* to the precedents for *Public Considerations*. *Chat* was commenced in 2000 and was presented in the Boijmans Museum, Rotterdam, in 2001. It inaugurated the series *Conversations*, whose slogan announced "the political explosion of a body, a field, an institution...", it was a *mise-en-scène* of objects in dialogue. Also, since 2004, *Magazine in Situ* has generated diverse conversational situations in specific situations, one edition navigated the Beagle Canal for example. *Public Considerations* is also a video of each act and a publication.

PH: In these discursive experiments, what type of discoveries, revelations or experiences have you had that demonstrate something new about the way in which we use this type of communication or something new about the way in which we relate to art?

AH: There are some revelations, for example, the plottings resulting from the use of certain mapping techniques to create situations. Whilst I've employed inventories, re-cataloguing, market indicators or hydrographic tables in other projects, in *Public Considerations, a Symposium in*

Three Acts, what is mapped and de-mapped is the 'territory of debate', the mechanisms and equipment that we have at our disposal for the activation of 'democracy'. One of these threads was to dis-cover not only the auditoria-parliaments offered by a city, but also their particular spatial organization, their use and how our bodies and behaviours are trained for this. For many participants it was the first time that they entered those scenarios and had direct contact with their theatricality, conventions and historical-political context.

The three acts between them presented a dramaturgy expressed in the progressive inclusion of formal changes to the point of complete alteration of the organizational type. Each act sketched out its own strategy for the mutation of the use of the auditorium space and the concept of symposia. Standard equipment was employed which with it drew in particular actors and their roles; spoken words acquired another dimension through the introduction of placards, live acoustics, changing in lighting or secret briefings in the form of rehearsals. It was a process that created small crises (those that intermediate states tend to generate, the dislocation of the spaces to which we belong: the fields, genres or roles), the appearance of less self-regulation of speech, the surmounting of a certain institutionalized lexicon and the realization of new collective mappings of discourse. It fostered an event that went beyond artistic genres and the division of knowledge into fields, clearly adding the complexity of the public exercise of debate and of the use of critical instruments and rhetoric employed by the field of art.

Interview conducted during the 8th Mercosur Biennale (September 2011) and published in *Pedagogía en el campo expandido, 8th Mercosur Biennale*, edited by Pablo Helguera and Monica Hoff, Porto Alegre 2011.

Pablo Helguera is the Curator of the 8th Mercosur Biennale teaching project and director of the *Adult and Academic Program*, MoMA, New York since 2007.