

RADICAL IMAGINATION

Ruptures and Continuities

I desire to share the experience of a group to which I belonged during the 60s. The process of this group may be useful, I understand, to consider certain problems related to this conference and to reflect on various activist practices today.

This presentation also allows me the opportunity to talk about some preoccupations of my work related to the archive I have been constructing since those years, and my actual experience at El Levante and the Red de Conceptualismos del Sur.

The Group of Avant Garde Artists from Rosario (Argentina), was born from certain critical positions related to art and the searching out of new languages and materials, with the idea that traditional resources were obsolete and useless in the society we were living in.

I am referring to an experience that took place more than 40 years ago, to the process of radicalization and political compromise of a collective of artists that found themselves in contradiction with their own practices and tried to discover other definitions of art and other roles for the artist.

The relation between subject and context, between imagination and creative process in hostile backgrounds raises questions, provokes actions that oppose the status quo. Along the process of these searches and investigations our productions transformed themselves, and at the same time we were transformed.

This reconstruction of ourselves from art practice took place in a group and made us realize that artists can get rid of museums and art institutions and can assume the organization and production of the conditions of the perception of their work in order to install it in other social contexts conceiving artistic practice as political practice.

Tucuman Arde's aim was to question the politics of a totalitarian government by means of images, texts and reports that denounced the fallacies of its perversions. The possibilities afforded by thinking about the potential of image and word drove us to propose an action of counter-information, developed in different moments and spaces, on the social crisis that was taking place in the region.

Tucuman Arde has been analyzed from different points of view, from different angles and perspectives. We can erect many stories regarding what T.A. was, of its different stages, of the exhibition, of the efficacy or otherwise of its denunciation. But what is seldom mentioned is what T.A. meant to us, the participants. I would like to focus on this.

T.A. was an experience that modified us structurally, a group project that while taking place modified us, politicizing us. T.A. constituted us as subjects.

Artistic practice not only produces modifications inside the art field, expanding borders, but also within the human being itself and thus within the social group where it works.

It is here I find the potential of these actions and of this period, in the liberating energy that they have and the possibilities they offer – in thinking it is possible to step outside imposed canons, to conceive other spaces for art apart from galleries and museums, of creating other publics, of artists speaking about their work and their ideas, of writing about their interests and worries, of theorizing about problems with which they deal and

being able to produce and distribute their production by creating new mechanisms of visibility. That it is possible to create autonomous spaces to exercise transversal practices. To conceive production from field investigation and denounce a social reality through a documented registration which involves the public in an aesthetic experience appealing to all its senses, exploring the use of new languages in the search of new associations in the political field.

We strove not only to inform, we did not appeal exclusively to the brain, we wanted to provoke a sensory experience that could produce knowledge, and for that we needed to break free from institutionalized forms, from legitimized places, imposed canons, and to risk some new paths on which to embark.

The time of the group was short but intense.

Soon after the group was dissolved. We could not find the way toward a continuous alternative practice. Different political and ideological points of view arose. Rooting in the most radical labor unions was no longer possible. The group broke. For a long time afterward we, the members of the group, stopped our artistic production to commit ourselves to different political activities.

After many years some came back to art, but in doing so they had to reinvent it in a different context. One companion died in political struggle. Others went into exile, and some never returned to the artistic field.

During the following years teaching was for me a space in which to develop a compromised action. This displacement was, without a doubt, only possible by understanding teaching as a creative and militant practice conceived as a space where critical thought could be exercised.

Today the battle seems to revolve around the production of new subjectivities, around the production of new ways of life. At present the above experience may be useful as a reference in thinking about autonomous practices or subjectivities and thus finding a new continuity for projects understood as tools with which to transform reality.

We need other types of knowledge and art production to minimize the products of cultural industries. New artistic practices that unite aesthetics, art and activism in order to broaden the social capacity of producing autonomous interventions that are not held in the territory of hegemonic discourses.

We feel it necessary to regain the freedom to think on radical transformations, trying to step away from the politically correct, even within the activist field. To be able to implement languages intimately linked to new ways of collective experiences. To break free of colonialist and colonizer's concepts in culture, to think about forms, languages and materials articulated toward new concepts of art.

There is a need to develop a critical autonomous thought that gets into conflict with dominant discourse, to develop a knowledge produced collectively, taking distance from universalistic concepts that assume a state of instability as a condition.

Today I find myself walking through moments where uncertainty tries to find sense in doing. Straying far from the status quo of hegemonic artistic practices that involves us deeply and collides with an art concept related to market that only serves to feed the capitalist machine. A concept of art that transcends the established limits and that invades yet again all the manifestations of the subject. Ruptures that manifests itself not

only within institutions and hegemonic thinking in art and politics but also with our own old practices and ways of production, with our own radical actions which in contexts in a process of ongoing or permanent change (over)turn conservative positions and actions that in their first moment displayed a strong disruptive sense. References that force us to constantly revise what we think and how we act.

Visibility and invisibility, in a sort of guerrilla army tactic of moving in and out of institutions in a permanent negotiation, maintaining clearly in mind what is not negotiable.

Silence as an affirmative proposition.

Exodus sustained as an active practice.

We insist on a collective way of acting as the possibility of another dimension of production in a reality that is opaque, and that makes it difficult to think in a utopian way while success and visibility transform themselves into absolute values of the system.

How to rid ourselves of these pressures? How to exercise, rescue, radicalness from anonymity?

We intend to put pre-established models into crisis, taking debate as a tool to produce knowledge. We understand creation as a combination of investigation, production, documentation, exhibition and formation, with the goal of penetrating reality. We conceive art as a critical doing that tends to invent ways of life more human and just.

Ruptures and fugues are components the system appropriates and incorporates as its own, neutralizing their critical and disruptive potential.

Laws have turned social struggles into the norm.

Education at the museum has also been turned into a manipulative instance.

How can we get out of the system? What can we do in order that what is made visible is not transformed into myth?

How to produce moments of vibrant energies that can rewrite sensible experiences over our bodies?

We conceive art not defined beforehand but constructed in situation, not defined by occupying a consecrated place but by its social effects, by the readings and questions effected by it.

Mauro Machado (El Levante) offers that today ruptures ought not consist in confronting and breaking, but in creating minimal basic structures from where we could produce and resist reality. It would consist in beginning to build a certain type of structure that could contain us in this changing reality, or build nets that could hold us. We thought just the opposite some time ago when we tried to look for holes and cracks through which to escape from the net that dragged us in.

Today to resist would be to construct us, to articulate places of self organization.

Last October Julio Lira, a Brazilian artist in residence at El levante referred to an experience related to his project "Mediating knowledge":

"Luis arrived early. He is from a garbage collector community that we would visit. Before the rest had arrived he asked me with sincere curiosity: "What does the Biennial have to do with my community? I understand this tour has to do with culture, but with art? How can this tour be art?" I sighed and talked about things like the crisis of representation, the use of objects as signals, of artists that use relations as substances, of

others who model situations. I didn't know if I had answered his question properly, if he was satisfied.

Later we walked through Parque Armonia and went to the slum area where he lives and works. He told me they were going to be commuted to a different area. But they had planned a strategy for their change, so as not to take the problems of their current area to the new one. First they would develop several projects in their "favela" to then change houses. After walking for a long time and being greeted by the members of the community he offered a farewell speech, where he spoke about our visit, and outlined his idea of art: "... with art you go a little way's ahead or far more ahead of what you are looking at, of what is there. Looking at things this way our community is art. Look closely and thoroughly, you are not going to see any violence here. [These] people could erect a university on how to live well with little money, that nobody is evil with life, without most everything; one only has human warmth. In this sense I believe this is art, how people get to live with so little, with what society thinks is so important, and transform that into good things. I have lived here for two-and-half years. I don't have what I then had, but what I have now I did not have before. That is art, isn't it?"

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