

**THERE IS
NO
BODY
WITHOUT
GLASSES**

DAYANA ZDEBSKY DE CORDOVA

RELÂCHE – CASA HOFFMANN e-MAGAZINE | 2004

THERE IS NO BODY WITHOUT GLASSES¹

Dayana Zdebsky de Cordova²

After the performatic events that took place at Casa Hoffman last year (In-side CWB, *Da Casa, Improviso*, and *Mostra Temática*),³ we used to hang out for a chat. Of course, there was coffee with cookies, and a smoke (for some of us).

Those performatic events, and consequently the chats, featured experienced artists and others who began working just a short time ago. Thanks to their artistic or even personal incompatibilities, very interesting discussions took place, which revealed some singularities and differences regarding creative processes, motivations, rhythms, ambitions, reasonings and concepts.

As we carried the conversation on, always sitting in a circle, some questions were raised and answered, while others were silenced. Very personal observations and points of view were discussed. The arguments were a bit passionate sometimes, an evidence that between the construction of a performance and its reception, there's a very convenient distance for the evaluation of the works, which generally do not follow rigorous scripts—that is to say they are very fleeting and, in a way, idiosyncratic.

The objective of this paper is to reflect upon issues regarding subjectivity and particular stances in the construction and the reception of the artistic actions that happened at Casa Hoffman. The chats have been considered as crucial venues for understanding how the audience and the performers have negotiated the meanings they produced and consumed.

If “taking one's clothes off in public requires courage to expose one's appearance in a intimate, unprotected way, exhibiting the fragility of his/her own body”,⁴ the courage that was necessary for the artists to express subjective thoughts during those chats seemed even greater. The outspoken were considered ‘savage’ by some, boring, or even essential by others. Just as nudity exposes the human body, the chats exposed different stances, different ways of thinking and acting upon the world.

Subjectivity exists in every human act, in the way one sees

things and in every single muscle one moves. It consists of personal experiences and group experiences. People construct culture at the same time they're constructed by it, in continuous dialects among individuals and society. People share webs of meaning⁵ (schemata, languages, specific codes). However, they are placed in different sites within those webs, thus standing out as singular persons with specific experiences and different from each other, with unique perspectives and world views, in spite of being part of the same culture. As a result, people constantly negotiate social meanings, which are always changing.

Looking simultaneously consists in interpreting, giving significance and selecting. Looking is socially constructed, and also constructs different realities—including virtual realities—not only in different physical spaces but also inside a single space. By sharing their perspectives people become more singular as well: “(...)There is no world ready to be seen, nor a world before vision or before the split between what can be seen (or thought about) and what is invisible (the assumed), which establishes the horizon of a thought” (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2002, p.123).⁶

The Seer is on the Seen.

One doesn't see things as they really are, but as they seem to be for him/her. The act of looking is to recognize, to select, to add value, to classify, and to place in hierarchies.

[1] The expression ‘body without glasses’ was used by Eleonora Fabião at a workshop she coordinated together with André Lepecki at Casa Hoffmann, in 2003.

[2] CNPq/ PIBIC fellow.

[3] These events were only made possible with the efforts of its curators and organizers, who created experimental space where artists from different areas of knowledge presented their works, truly exchanging experiences, creative processes, feelings of security and insecurity, certainties and uncertainties.

[4] According to Marlon de Azambuja and Pedro Innocente, on the program folder of *In-side CWB*, Nov 18, 2003.

[5] Web of meanings is a term used by Clifford Geertz (1973).

[6] In the original in Portuguese: “(...) não há mundo pronto para ser visto, um mundo antes da visão, ou antes da divisão entre o visível (ou

Looking is a relationship between the inner self and the exterior world. In a certain sense, the world is what each person is able to see and become aware of, despite knowing that there are millions of other matters that remain invisible. People's way of seeing things changes constantly. Thus, the ways of acting upon the world change, too. Such acting also changes one's way of looking. Therefore, looking is acting.⁷

The artist is positioned at the threshold of the self and the world. There a continuous interplay between the involvement and distancing of the person who is performer of himself/herself and of whatever surrounds him/her. In a way, this prompts him/her to such a level of awareness where he/she may monitor himself/herself in order to produce a work in which he/she is the "raw material" and the subject of his/her art at the same time. To act and to create performances is a personal action that depends on the relationship between the performer and the world, provided the fact that the self does not exist without the others:

There is a relationship with the inner time of the experience, a subjective time that is unique to each performance [and performer], which acquires inherent value and will grant the singularity of these artistic manifestations, making possible to tell them apart from other manifestations and from each other. (...) The performer is his/her own schedule, his/her own chronometer, and his/her own action pulse (...) Nevertheless, that being is plural, circumstantial, cultural and historical. (GLUSBERG, 2003, p. 67, 110 e 111)

Images imply polysemy. They truly are reception signs (SAMAIN, 2001). Performatic works are not motionless images, but consist in collections of sequential images and actions, onto which the creator may add sounds, scents, tastes, words, etc. The body of signs of a performance becomes a kind of 'script' that is not necessarily composed in a linear way,⁸ and may be an "open work" (ECO, 2001)⁹ to be interpreted in countless ways, depending, for instance, on each onlooker's subjective experiences and group experiences.

A lot of information was made available to the audience in all of the works and performances shown at Casa Hoffmann, especially at those events in which simultaneous works were presented. Certainly, each observer chose his/her focus, selecting images while looking at this actions. Performance is not only a relationship between

what is shown or not, but also between what one chooses to see or not to see. For each thing one chooses to see several others remain invisible. Therefore, each person in the audience has a unique perception and reading of the esthetic actions observed. There is a 'negotiation of meanings' concerning what is shown by the other and what is seen. Consequently, there are different interpretations of one single action. This 'negotiation' between the audience and the real time artist greatly increases indeterminacy, the uncertain aspects already inherent to performances.

One of the characteristics of the works shown at Casa Hoffmann, just as it generally seems to happen in contemporary art, is the belief that every and any subjectivity, every and any personal history is a source of symbols for producing art.

Performance artists, like other types of artists, generally draw on experiences and subjective issues as a basis for their actions. The use of subjective references was frequently declared during the chats. The observers also perceived the performances based on their own subjective experiences. These experiences seem to be the central point of both the creation process and the reception of the performances.¹⁰

pensável) e o invisível (o pressuposto) que institui o horizonte de um pensamento." (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2002, p.123)

^[7] After revising this paper, Prof. Selma Baptista suggested that the following note should be added here: 'On a city bus, I recently read a saying that was written with the clear purpose of making citizens more political': "we always hear that the heart doesn't feel what the eyes don't see; this is a strategy to avoid suffering or even to erase the 'other'. Yet the argument against this was right there: 'the eyes don't see what the heart doesn't feel'."

^[8] Just as performances, on the other hand, one of the recurrent features in these actions is a counter-narrative, which far from denying a narrative, corresponds to a kind of appropriation of the orthodox narratives, which is done by means of an unusual transformation (somehow different from everyday appropriations) of code (ECO, 2001).

^[9] Every work of art may be interpreted in several ways and thus, every work is "open." Because contemporary poetics feature extreme polysemy, provided its specific appropriations of codes, it would be even more open to various interpretations (ECO, 2001).

^[10] While subjective references were frequently used as semantic support in the works exhibited at Casa Hoffman, it is crucial to remark that his doesn't deny their connection to collective problems. And although

During the chats, the works were usually explained and defended. Reports on the personal motivations behind the performances were also frequent, and the audience normally questioned such motivations, which were always personal. On the other hand, there were many who stated something like “What matters is not what caused someone to make the action, but the action resulting from this motivation”. Apparently, there was a consensus that ‘what really matters’ in a performance are both how the action is made and what is shown to the audience, for the audience can only see what is shown: “It would be absurd to pretend to find any semantic content that is identical to itself in multiple forms and in the seemingly perceptual chaos of performance, where the most dissimulating and contrasting elements are combined in a harmonical way, which depends on the arrangement of signs and the composition of the significant” (GLUSBERG, 2003, p. 82).

Performance ‘scripts’ are not merely groups of significants, since those significants are manipulated, transformed and re-constructed by the performer. In fact, performance ‘scripts’ are groups of meanings that are ‘negotiated’ for their poetics, and for how the semantic content is both exposed and observed. Performance is not only action, but also looking at this action. Performance happens intersubjectively.

Glusberg (2003) and Eco (2001) mentioned that both performer and audience need some ‘training’ in order to face performance. Concerning the performer, this ‘training’ consists in a game in which he/she gets more involved or more distant. It also consists in finding his/her collective and subjective references, being aware (as mentioned before), and manipulating or somehow subverting these references. On the other hand, the audience faces a situation that is similar to an anthropologist’s who studies his/her own society: he/she faces difference, and also faces the other person. In this sense, what is being faced is the ‘unknown’.

The ‘unknown’ is not only the other person, but also himself/herself, their culture, their references. But these references are manipulated, boosted, inverted, and so on. One can identify oneself with something by denying, too. By denying certain representations and references, one recognizes what is exterior to them, or so to say the others. Also, one’s own references are identified, other representations are recognized, and a connection is established with something opposite to what is denied.

In those chats, clear attempts to understand the other person’s language and a constant negotiation between subjectivities could be observed. Through verbal manifestation of different perspectives, one tries to understand how the other person manipulates different languages and how the ones who observe give meaning to the action. Through the exposition of the artist’s motivation, one tries to comprehend (or to explain) the semantic support of the work. While expressing different perspectives and interpretations on some action, both the artist and the audience openly negotiate the several meanings of the performances, reviewing or reaffirming their opinions. People look at themselves through the eyes and the experience of the other person, through the lenses that are part of the other person’s looking.

When one looks at oneself, he/she is able to recognize and understand himself/herself and his/her art, identifying with other persons and seeing what the differences are. It’s also possible to recognize the artistic similarities and differences. In this game, in this negotiation of meanings lie the thoughtful possibilities of those chats. This thoughtfulness exists, in different levels, in every esthetic action (TURNER, 1982) and in every communicative action as well:

As soon as we see other seers, we no longer have before us only the look without a pupil, the plate glass of the things with that feeble reflection, that phantom of ourselves they evoke by designating a place among themselves whence we see them: henceforth, through other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible; that lacuna where our eyes, our back, lie is filled, filled still by the visible, of which we are not the titulars. To believe that, to bring a vision that is not our own into account, it is to be sure inevitably, it is always from the unique treasury of our own vision that we draw, and experience therefore can teach us nothing that would not be outlined in our own vision. But what is proper to the visible is (...) to be the surface of an inexhaustible depth: this is what makes it able to be open to visions other than our own (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1992, p.143).

I don’t address the issue in depth in this paper, it doesn’t mean that performance and contemporary art in general are restricted to personal semantic supports. For instance, I’ve been studying performances that take place at Curitiba’s public urban spaces, where I have verified that most of their contents draw on collective issue.

Explanations and questions concerning the works' semantic support were frequent, even when they regarded the work goals instead of motivations. There was a distance among the motivations (which were mostly personal), the goals (the possible results calculated by the performer), the information received by the audience, and how this information is interpreted. In those chats, this distance made possible to agree and to disagree, to negotiate meanings, and so on.

As much as there is a relation between the performer's actions and motivations, there are other relations suggested by the audience. Among these relations there may be much disagreeing. That's where it may or may not be possible to reflect upon both for the audience and the performers. These meaning negotiations open a venue for the development of an awareness regarding performance objectivity. Thoughtfulness is both becoming aware and dealing with the consequences of doing so.¹¹ ♦

References:

ECO, Umberto. *Obra Aberta: forma e indeterminação nas poéticas contemporâneas*. Coleção Debates. São Paulo: Ed. Perspectiva, 2001.

GEERTZ, Clifford. *A Interpretação das Culturas*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1973.

GLUSBERG, Jorge. *A Arte da Performance*. Coleção: debates. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 2003.

MERLEAU-PONTY, Maurice. "The Intertwining – The Chiasm". In: *The Visible and the Invisible*. Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy. Edited by Claude Lefort. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. 130–155. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

SAMAIN, Etienne. "Questões heurísticas em torno do uso das imagens nas ciências sociais". In: FELDMAN-BIANCO, Bela & LEITE, Míriam I. Moreira (orgs.), *Desafios da Imagem: fotografia, iconografia e vídeo nas ciências sociais*. Campinas: Ed. Papirus, 2001.

TURNER, Victor. "Acting in everyday life and everyday life in acting". In: *From Ritual to Theatre*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1982.

VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, Eduardo. "O nativo relativo". In: *Mana* (online), abr. 2002, vol. 8, n.º 1, p. 113-148. Disponível na World Wide Web: <http://www.scielo.br>, 2002.

Dayana Zdebsky de Cordova is an actress graduated from the Program of Acting at the Technical School of the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), where she currently is and undergraduate student of Social Sciences. She has a CNPq/PIBIC scholarship (Brazil's National Council of Research/ Program of Scientific Initiation) to develop the project "Performance, Urban Space and Politics," which is part of the project "Performance, Memory and Politics" of the Art, Ritual and Performance Center at the Anthropology Department of UFPR. Her advisors are Dr. Sandra Jacqueline Stoll and Dr. Selma Baptista.

^[11] This article received some very important (and welcome!) suggestions from Dr. Selma Baptista, one of my advisor's from the Núcleo de Artes, Rituais e Performance, da UFPR.



(untitled), Lucianne Figueiredo
Da Casa | Ciclo de Ações Performáticas 2003
Photography by Fernando Augusto

Relâche

Relâche – Casa Hoffmann e-Magazine
Curitiba/Brazil, 2004.

Publishing Council

Andrea Lerner
Beto Lanza
Cristiane Bouger
Edson Bueno
Rosane Chamecki

Interviews (by e-mail)

Cristiane Bouger

Interviews Revising

Rosane Chamecki
Andrea Lerner
Beto Lanza

Collaborators

Cristiane Bouger
Dayana Zdebsky de Cordova
Gladis Tripadalli
Michelle Moura
Olga Nenevê

Translation of the Interviews into English and Portuguese

Rita Rodrigues do Rosário
Lilian Esteigleder Cabral

Proofreading in Portuguese

Lydia Rocca

Proofreading in English

Margarida Gandara Rauen

Creation of Relâche Logo

Sebastian Bremer

Relâche e-magazine was made possible with funds by Fundação Cultural de Curitiba – FCC and Prefeitura Municipal de Curitiba.