

PHILOCTETES PROJECT

An URBAN INTERVENTION by Emilio García Wehbi with the collaboration of Maricel Alvarez, Norberto Laino and Julieta María Potenze.

*I shit
Upon the order of the world
I am
Lost.*

Heiner Müller.

PROJECT'S GROUNDS

1. Dribble's Bubbles

These present times find us artists more and more confused.

Some suggest us to look for a new place in the world since we are no longer – or ever will be again – vanguard.

We are also proposed to transform our projects into *products* now that we are finally a part in the economic society, we pay our taxes as independent workers, we are traders representing our own interests, etc. So, we must *integrate*.

And we must be absolutely post modern, that means globalized, since so is reality and that's ok, otherwise what else do we have left?

Some slap our back, give us awards, the media praise us. We are proposed to choose the Darwinian variation. To coexist with natural selection..., to accept the law of the strongest..., the idea that we are only a machinery part in the mercantile society..., that the market rules..., etc.

That is: we are proposed to accept our own defeat. And not only that. We are asked, as artists, to coldly laugh at the world that surrounds us and to get fascinated with our own dribble's bubbles, or to be modern watching the fuzz in our navel grow.

To be cynical. To ignore reflection. Therefore, we are asked to ignore reality, since reality is quite complex and doesn't exist as such anymore but it is fragmented into millions of particularities, and that these particularities at the same time...blah blah...

We are demanded to be furious watchmen of the winners, soldiers of ourselves, guardians of cynicism...

This is what we are asked to do.

We are lost.

2. Quiz game

Q: Is it truly impossible to unbutton the postmodern palter without falling into the ridiculous and seem to be Marxist dinosaurs?

A: Yes, it is. At least for the moment.

Q: Then shall we satisfy ourselves with the contemplation of our own navel?

A: Not necessarily. We can start looking for a new path.

Q: Wouldn't that be the old trap of idealize our own little private worlds?

A: Perhaps. But we better try something.

Q: Where to begin, then?

A: Starting questioning reality metaphorically, not with a cold glance but through a warm tide.

Q: ...?

A: Pulling down the walls of our theatres, opening the windows of the art galleries. Reality is outside.

Q: That means that old artistic forms are over?

A: Yes and no. Lets take from the old forms the capacity of amazement and its interrogation spirit; and find one new form that will contain the old ones according to the present times.

Q: How?

A: Lets go out in the streets, for instance, to intervene in the daily life of individuals. To interrogate their social miseries. To be voyeurs of their reactions. Lets us be the public and them the actors.

Q: And is this a new art form?

A: Not at all. We are going 40 years backwards to take impulse and jump high. Because the post modern wall is quite tall. But what really must be new is the way of looking at things.

Q: And why would we necessary be no longer post moderns?

A: We don't know. It is an attempt.

Q: That sounds quite naïve...

A: Yes, precisely. We should try to be naïve again.

Q: Wouldn't that be only the expression of an unhappy conscience?

A: May be. But you must comprehend that we are desperate people. The fuzz in our navel has grown so much...

PHILOCTETES PROJECT

1. Prologue

There are two kinds of people in the streets of our cities: passers-by, people who cross the city from one point to the other, that enjoy the benefits of the city's services and its comforts; and those who really inhabit the streets: homeless people, abandoned children, beggars, immigrants that came with the hope of achieving a better future.

As artists we wish to interrogate the link between these two different groups: to explore beyond the obvious indifference from one group towards the other and the also obvious dependency for subsistence from one group to the other.

And we are primarily interested in the reactions of the group of fortunate, privileged ones (we, among them) in the moment when they are confronted with the presence of death and misery as part of their everyday life.

We would like to investigate and analyze the reactions and responses in the frame of that confrontation.

The daily presence of a devastated body and the apparent apathy of the people passing near that body (being that body a beggar, a poor immigrant or perhaps a corpse) in the streets of big urban territories, creates a kind of suspicious normality among their inhabitants.

Is it the cynical indifference of present times working? Or is it the explicit denial of a terrible reality in order to survive our unhappy conscience?

Is it so easy for us to integrate in our urban landscape those bodies, future social corpses, under the pretext of the Darwinian sheet that is covering us today? Or is it a psychic self defense mechanism to avoid blowing our brains up?

Whatever it is, we behave as if everything was normal.
We want to interrogate and go deeper into that suspicious normality.

2. The project

The name of the project is related to the story of Philoctetes, the one with the rotten and stinking feet who is confined to inhabit the isle of Lemnos since his terrible smell makes him dreadful and unbearable to Greek society. All big urban territories are the contemporary Lemnos.

This project of Urban Intervention can be produced in any city in the world. Its starting point was the city of Vienna (May 2002). The following edition of the project was held in Buenos Aires (November 2002).

A series of 25 hyper realistic anthropomorphic bodies (produced and designed by the artist and his team) made out of several different kinds of materials (latex, silicone, clothes, hair, etc.) are placed in 25 specific locations in the area of the chosen city.

The criteria in the election of the different places where these bodies are located is related to a very specific analysis of its geographical meanings, historical and symbolical relevance, as well as its importance in terms of the number of people passing-by. So, the result of this search of locations can be as follows: the main entrance of a public building, a public square, an historical monument, a street at the financial district, a train station, a seat at the parliament, a shopping mall, etc.

The bodies are placed so as to be discovered by an unexpected audience - simply lying on the street - perhaps along a blood or vomit stain - , sitting as sleeping at the entrance of a museum, etc.

The idea is to locate these 25 bodies during the early morning in order to be noticed by the people at the beginning of their working journey.

Each one of these bodies is supervised by a working team composed by three people (hidden to the public eye): **one technical responsible** for the placement of the body and its maintenance and care (in case the body is removed or damaged by strange people or the police), **one responsible for the visual and audio documentation** (video, photographs, audio recordings of the reactions, public opinion, police intervention, etc.) during the whole time the body is placed in a same spot, and **one responsible for the logistic** (communication with the other 25 teams, communication with the responsible for the project as well as with the authorities in case of any incident, etc.).

The participants of this experience are students recruited from arts schools (in the field of the performing arts, visual arts, filmmaking, photography, etc.) in town.

Between 70 and 80 people are involved in the making of this project that includes a workshop with the artist and the active participation during the day of the intervention.

All information (photographs, video and audio recordings, interviews, etc.) recollected by all teams the day of the intervention are analyzed by the artist and the students within the

frame of the workshop and with the support of intellectuals invited to participate in the discussions during the project.

The result of that analysis together with all graphic material and the recorded images edited in video format are presented in a public exhibition. A public debate with the attending audience is also arranged.

No press release is made before the event takes place.

by Emilio García Wehbi