

AT THE BACK, BEHIND THE PARADE

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In this project entitled AT THE BACK. BEHIND THE PARADE, Itziar Barrio explores the iconographic apparatus of popular festivities and parties and examines the particular features of their social registers, taking this as her starting point for embarking on an attempt to reconstruct the codes of our milieu based on the idea of the fiesta. In doing so, she will adopt certain signs associated with the imaginary of fiestas, which she will then take apart in order to generate her own fictions and to shape new mythologies. In this manner, she will convey to us the way in which, in this coded terrain, the consumption of certain signs gradually lays the foundations for the construction of our identity. The artist presents an analysis of humankind's habits, customs and needs and speaks to us of the space that we own and of the space that is occupied temporarily. At the same time, she helps us to rethink the collective behaviours that spring from these particular characteristics. In the centre of the room, we are astonished at the sight of a *txosna* (a shack with a bar typical of the popular fiestas in the Basque Country) growing from one of the walls.

The *txosna*, regardless of its regional specificity, also suggests to us the house, at both a formal and conceptual level, as well as the temporary nature of the shack-bar, a code that is presented as an icon of the project and which the collective spectator easily recognises. This house-cum-bar connects with the anthropological aspect of Barrio's work, which here focuses on the importance of the collective, on the social act of festive celebration, the survival of ritual and the need to adopt certain systematic ceremonies as a sign of group membership.

Barrio's work experiments with behavioural processes to talk about the collective, the need to create groups, as an intrinsic element of life. In tribal societies, punishment consisted of exclusion, ostracism by the group that was identified with death itself.

Barrio plays continuously with the fiction/non-fiction binomial and with that intermediate space dominated by the ambiguities it generates. The narrative is presented as constant, a territory that draws these ambiguities together and thus, at the beginning of the project, the most intensive phase of research into the popular fiestas in the various neighbourhoods, the artist moves in a non-fictional territory. During the stage when the artist is absent, the space is kept alive by the writing of a fable that gradually unfolds, ending in a culmination in which fiction/non-fiction are once again fused and which coincides with the local saint's day festivities. This aesthetic territory, marked out by the reclaiming of the festivity, is situated in a space of social conflict that uses the collective codes underlying popular fiestas. Barrio thus brings about a transfer of information, which goes from a series of festive ritual acts to the adoption

of a particular form, the effect of which is the construction of new meanings that correspond to the contextual reality and reflect the inhabitant's cultural identity. The public identifies with it immediately and introduces into the cultural repertoire recoded information that reformulates the everyday. Consequently, a personal identity is established that turns the recipient into a collaborator. This brings us to the age-old concept of the symbolic: the symbol as that in which something is recognised.

Re-cognition of something as being that which is already known. Hans-Georg Gadamer speaks to us in *The Actuality of the Beautiful* of how more is always known in re-cognition than was possible during the momentary uncertainty of the first encounter.

Re-cognition grasps the permanence in the fleeting. Taking this process to its culmination is in essence the function of the symbol and of the symbolic in all artistic languages (Gadamer, 1991: 114). Later on, the author draws a connection between time and the things typical of art with the time of festivities and points to a characteristic that unifies art and the fiesta: in both, the typical is only characteristic for the person taking part. In turn, art taken to the dimension of the rite and celebration suffers a kind of hierophantic disintegration, which deactivates the sacred element implicit in ritual.

Barrio's installation inevitably points us to the role of the spectator and the "aesthetic distance" that Jacques Rancière speaks of in *The Emancipated Spectator*. Rancière raises that which constitutes the source of this distance and its efficacy: "the suspension of any determinable relationship between an artist's intention, a perceivable form presented in a place of art, the gaze of a spectator and a state of community" (Rancière, 2010:

Moreover, "aesthetic efficacy", according to the French critic, signifies the "efficacy of the suspension of any direct relationship between the production of the forms of art and the production of a particular effect on a particular audience". Barrio's installation does not address a particular audience but an indeterminate, anonymous audience.

However, in this instance, the work is by no means cut off from the way of life that gave rise to its production. The artist defines a dual separation, a device that she uses to examine the limits of her own practice, which refuses to anticipate its effect and takes into account the aesthetic separation whereby this effect is created. It is, in short, a piece that has no wish to suppress the spectator's passivity but instead re-examines his activity.

The result is a kind of hybrid with clear references to the relational, in which the spectator is used in an almost bipolar manner. Firstly, the sociological component, a constant presence in the artist's work, is focused on the gestation of identities, the need for the group for the development of an identity and the

Above and beyond the relational character intrinsic in the work of art, the figures of reference of the sphere of human relations have since then [the 1990s] become full artistic forms: thus, the meetings, gatherings, demonstrations, various types of collaboration between two people, games, fiestas, places, in short, the entire array of ways of meeting others

and forging relationships today represents aesthetic objects to be studied as such. (Bourriaud [1998], 2006: 23)

importance of the collective. This last aspect is directly related with another of the artist's objects of study in this project: the rite. It also constitutes an aesthetic proposal that stems from the acceptance of the symbolic values and communicative faculties of this series of festive rituals.

This relational character brings us inevitably to Nicolas Bourriaud, since we are talking about that kind of practice that posits a direct dialogue with the present and social relations through a series of strategies suited to the social sphere and their transfer to a context characteristic of art:

At the far end of the room, there is a disconcerting element that creates a sense of unease that forces you to come closer. As in every horror film, the protagonist opens the door, drawn by a predictable noise. This element is a wall, a small spot created in a corner at the back that alludes to that place where things happen. It is that corner, spotless during the daytime, that is transformed by the power of the night into the hideaway of all things forbidden and covert, urine, sex, drugs, etc. With a violent charge from which the night, like so many other connotations, cannot free itself. In this way, Barrio manages, with the simplicity of a corner, to cover an entire repertoire of attributes of the night, the fiesta, that space in which social codes change and conventions become lax, that redoubt granted the power of unthinkable permissiveness by the lack of light. Here once again we find the ritual component, which is also related as a return to the darkness, to that which conceals the hideaway.

The temporary nature of the txosna is also present in the elements gradually developed in the project. Among them, Barrio will produce an installation in the manner of a banner, in an allusion to the traditional banner or poster for fiestas which in itself constitutes an ephemeral artistic language whose short life is usually restricted to one or two weeks.

The creation of this banner is also closely in keeping with the culture of DIY, since its creation and the materials employed to make it are usually basic, involving a limited infrastructure and budget. The versatility of the poster makes it suitable for every context and they are to be found plastered over every landscape and all street furniture. They are put up on the spur of the moment with the intention that the public will come across them unexpectedly and, unavoidably, assimilate the information they give. Passers-by cannot escape their presence or evade their influence—like parties themselves. It is a ritual in which people become inevitably caught up and so the poster here serves its advertising function.

As a result, the poster is linked to consumerism and capitalist society and at this point links up once again with the artist's earlier works, such as *Welcome to the New Paradise*, in which Barrio took over an advertising billboard on top of a building in the Bed-Stuy neighbourhood of Brooklyn, New York. Against an abstract composition of a typical tropical landscape, it reads *Welcome to the New Paradise. You, a lonely Wild Cat*, which the artist uses to speak to us of the various concepts that exist of the idea of paradise and the seductive strategies of the language of advertising. Finally, these poster elements are reflected in the mirror of a society, of a present—clinging to a past and in some cases reinterpreted tradition—a culture and customs, rites and social codes.

Converging in this place of encounter between contemporary art and anthropology are elements in seeming opposition: contemporary society

and traditional societies. The possible confluences and divergences are presented in a series of symbol-images that go from the apparent to the concealed.

BOURRIAUD, Nicolas ([1998], 2006): Estética relacional, Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo.
GADAMER, Hans-Georg (1991): La actualidad de lo bello, Barcelona: Paidós.
RANCIÈRE, Jacques (2010): El espectador emancipado, Castellón: Ellago Ediciones.

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