

I think your more recent installations tend to be more aesthetic, "cleaner", and there is no doubt a decision on your part in this. To what extent do you direct the people who participate in your projects?

Generally, I hardly direct the action at all, I propose the idea, I invite people to take action, I draw possible lines of operations. I have a lot of respect for other people's proposals. I find it hard to 'manipulate' the other for the sake of an idea. The projects end up coming together, becoming through the others, and when working with other people I never propose closed ideas, I always pose departure points, and I observe, I listen, I imagine on the premise of what the others propose to me. To resignify this sometimes involves a lot of work, and always involves investing a lot of energy. Nevertheless, I am always interested in creating spaces, easing this asking to speak, opening up. Guaranteeing that things are said in order not to be forgotten, that things are written down in order not to be erased. "Asking to be heard, raising hell, calling for attention, saying no" is present in all my production, especially when I work with others, as is the case of "Reocupación" (2006), for example.

M.M.: Where in your work do you identify humour?

G.G.: I don't see a lot of humour in my work, and, in fact, I think I have a terrible sense of humour. Images, or fragments, might appear in my work which can make someone smile, but, generally, this is not part of my intentions. For example, in "Vacío" (2005), there is a moment in the video where there is an extreme close-up shot of a cow which seems to look back at us, this often causes chuckles, but there is no humour there, there is, at most, an appeal to the gaze, the question of who is looking at who (and people get nervous with this, and they laugh). In "Daytime Concert" (2006), or in "Doméstico" (2007), some of the gestures of the women smashing dishes could cause a laugh, but, above all, there is a challenge, or violence, not humour.

M.M.: How do you feel, in the context of a project which engages humour in socially-informed works of art? What is your work's place in this context?

G.G.: I like it, I like it. It honours some of the women taking part in the project, those that challenge, those that challenge themselves, those that had as much fun as if they were being mischievous.

YOSHUA OKON

Oríllesen a la orilla

In the series of video screenings "Oríllesen a la Orilla" ("Shore Up to the Shore"), Yoshua Okón documents the police officers in Mexico City in situations which, depending on the video, vary in their degree and mode of manipulation on behalf of the artist. In the case of "Poli I" ("Cop I"), he faces the police officer with the camera, which leads to an absurd argument. In "Poli II" ("Cop II"), with the help of a walkie-talkie, he intercepts a radio conversation between two officers who, sitting

in their patrol cars, discuss their intentions of hitting on women in order to have sex with them. In "Poli III", Okón enters a policeman's shed and starts up a bizarre conversation. In "Poli IV", he simply asks a police officer to prove his truncheon skills. On his own initiative, the policeman executes an amazing performance, mixing agile movements with brief moments in which he gropes his crotch. In the case of "Poli V", he pays a police officer to dance to a fashionable song. In "Poli VI", he hires a policeman to act as if he was being assaulted by three civilians. Without understanding what is going on, the neighbours call the police, and the artist keeps holding the camera while he is being arrested - and finally pays a bribe in order to secure his release.

Interview with Yoshua Okon

Olga Fernández: Your participation in this show is framed within the curators' intention of revealing how humour is a tool which allows artists to effect a comment on different economic, social and political realities, beyond the traditional notion of protest art. Also, one of your pieces was included in a recent exhibition, *Laughing in a Foreign Landscape*, (London, Hayward Gallery), in which a lot of emphasis was given to the idea of inter/national identities in a global world. In both cases, it was a question of stressing this vision of double transgression (of reality, and of the art and theory status quo) by artists who have been working mainly in the last decade, in a necessarily international field. Do new realities require new forms? Do you believe that there is something 'generational' about this outlook on the world? What differential value does humour provide, here and now?

Yoshua Okon: Yes, I have always believed that art is neither self-sufficient nor self-contained, and this necessarily responds to, and is (partially) defined by circumstances and contexts: therefore, it is plain obvious that, since our circumstances are in a state of constant flux, art must also be in such a state. In reference to whether I believe that there is something generational in this incorporation of humour in the art work, I rather believe that in the last decade a certain kind of sensibility has ceased to be marginal and becomes much more accepted, both on a critical and official, and on a mass level. My generation was preceded by the troubled paradigm, a result of Modernist culture, which, by taking itself too seriously, loses any self-critical capacity, and, therefore, loses its sense of humour. Very rigid and solemn categories are created, in which the only two possibilities art has is to either be political or to be apolitical (an absurd contradiction): "political art", superficially taken for activism, and apolitical art, (mis)understood as "formalist art", with no social dimension whatsoever. In order to be taken seriously, both possibilities need to be solemn. In this context, humour is ridiculed, since it is considered something necessarily frivolous and lacking any political or formalist relevance. But, of course, this doesn't mean

that before my generation there had never been any humour in art – humour has existed all the way through the history of art –, and it doesn't mean that humour is automatically critical and subversive, either. Rather, the critical potential of satire and humour were left out of the official discourse, and, although some artists who have historically worked outside of this paradigm were highly recognised (as is the case of the Dada artists, where humour and satire play a fundamental role), in the dominant and official discourses the elements of humour were generally omitted, and the work was described and historically interpreted in a solemn and authoritarian way. Thus, I think that, for my generation, art is no longer understood only as a solemn practise, and humour has started to be taken seriously as a serious tool which can be used critically, with no need for a political agenda, or of sacrificing any formal aspects of the work.

O.F.: In order to expand on the specific shapes that humour adopts in your work, I would point out caricature and parody, beyond the ironic and satirical intentions which traverse it. It occurs to me to term your works as "performative caricatures", where there is that tension between the character (the stereotype in which this identity/representation debate is embodied), and the person (the subject who exceeds that representation and ends up liberating this creative potential). It is as if it were made explicit that any similarity of the subject with themselves is pure coincidence. In this sense, "fantasy" seems an important term in order to understand the dialectic between reality and fiction which is established in your production. How do you pin-point yourself as an artist, and how do you think you are being pin-pointed by the participants in this relationship between fantasy and performance?

Y.O.: Normally, we tend to create categories of "reality" and "fiction" as opposed and autonomous entities, and as if the filter of our individual perception was non-existent. Fantasy ignores this dichotomy: it is, at the same time, reality and fiction. And performance operates above all within the space of fantasy. This is how I understand it, and this is how the persons/characters which participate with me in the performances understand it.

O.F.: Parody was defined in Greek literature as a type of poem which imitated the style of another poem. In your work, you generate a parody premised on the vocation of a "documentary register" which is inevitably implied in the use of a video camera. In this sense, in your work, you have parodied the conventions generated, on the basis of diverse formats, such as the historical documentary drama, amateur soap-operas, nature or ethnographic documentaries, and even amateur video (very close to the "YouTube aesthetic"). An expression you use a lot is that of "mockumentary", and wordplay on the notion of mocking and of documentary, which subverts not only the content of the latter, but also its so-called transparency of form and of aims, its capturing of reality

and of the truly real. Artists are sensitive and capable when deconstructing reality as fiction. Do you believe it is necessary and/or possible to go beyond the simulacrum/spetacle?

Y.O.: There is no such thing as transparency... There is only an illusion of transparency... This is why, what I find it very interesting about the use of humour as satire is the fact that certain contents and conventions are deconstructed does not guarantee the absence of a new meaning – and in this new content, satire is very self-conscious when deconstructing: it reveals the structures of the illusion of transparency. And, in satire, through the references to established genres and clichés, what is constructed is a new discourse.

O.F.: Finally, I would like us to comment a little bit on the role of the spectator in your works. That suspicion which is projected on representation in your videos, the impossibility of deciding whether what is seen is real or, as you say, an "orchestrated situation", I think this is a case of going beyond political art understood as mere protest. Let me explain: at the end of the day, what matters is not so much whether what one sees is real or not, what matters is to adopt a position, unawares. And this option alludes directly and inevitably to the beholder, who cannot continue to simply watch. How do you understand this dialectic between the ethical and the political?

Y.O.: I am interested in parody because it turns the spectator in an active agent. In this sense, my art does not only attempt to go beyond protest, but I would add that it operates in a very different manner, since protest implies a specific agenda, and it assumes that the spectator is a passive consumer who simply accepts or refuses what is being protested. Parody positions the spectator in an active role, where they are prompted to formulate ideas, thus turning us into creative agents. This is why my work really does operate within a political and ethical dimension (if we understand politics as a constant definition of our position regarding our circumstances and if we understand ethics as part of this same process, and inseparable from politics). As you say, it doesn't matter whether what we see is real, but, rather, what matters is the manner in which we position ourselves regarding what we are seeing.