

Magnitude. The art of orbiting the public

Mireia c. Saladrígues has developed her work by probing experiences in relation to the reception of art and gathering findings based on the interaction between art and its public. She believes that subjection to the context is, by nature, fundamental to the conception of each project. Starting from her own personal state of alertness, she applies strategies of intuition-understanding onto art itself, making her practice revolve around the relationship with the end user, 'accompanying' the work through its constant changes and its return to the social sphere from which it emerged.

This scenario entails the alternation of empirical observation and theoretical sources, between experimentation with formats and content analysis, in order to create a path based on feedback between trial and error, narrative and process, which gives shape to transitory situations of dialectics involving author, artwork, receiver and environment.

Influenced by documentary and archival practices, performance, relational aesthetics and institutional critique, Saladrígues channels her collector's passion into a reconstruction that is mnemonically similar to that of any other researcher, formalised through schemes that are not very orthodox for artwork-product clichés, removed from the demands of the market and the ways of the art system.

Otherness in regard to cultural translation, the social imaginary and prejudices; the distance between contemporary art and the bulk of the population; respect towards artistic work as a social and professional category, and the relational systems that the artwork sets up in regard to the public in accordance with the specific institutional mechanism that they are framed within, are her recurring concerns.

Human contact is at the origin of her projects, which always require an interlocutor-accomplice who is willing to engage with the situation that is brought about, with her proposed hiatus for reflection in the midst of artistic circulation, through which she aspires to introduce controversy around the actual meaning of artistic practice and its genuine experiential significance to the user.

The broadening of the scope of the study by means of the various scenarios she has developed and the models of action that she has implemented for each of them have charted a heuristic roadmap of what we could now see as an open, ever-changing rhizomatic framework of formulas in which the boundaries between artistic work and the relationship to the public are rather blurred.

Saladrígues' experience as a resident artist in Finland and her contact with Pia Lindman were probably the triggers for her early actions. These were influenced by the idea of cultural alterity and rootedness, which she responds to with an empirical search for spaces of direct social contact.

"Piparkakku Project" (2002) was a culinary exchange of traditional recipes that had been handed down orally through the generations by women in families and communities. Using her own family's confectionary making tradition as a point of departure, Saladrígues organised

for a Finnish grandmother, mother and daughter to prepare a traditional sweet called piparkakku together for the first time in two years, and to help her cook a hybrid between their recipe and the Catalan recipes that she herself had inherited. The 'new piparkakku' hung from ryöstökoukku, traditional trick bait that have been used in this fishing area but which were no longer familiar to younger generations. This meant that they were forced to interact with a vanishing tradition in order to reach the new delicacy.

This project already showed signs of the artist's interest in language, which, in "Cacao-tabs Project" (2003) took the form of a patient information leaflet that went along with the chocolate "pills" that Saladrigues distributed free of charge, dressed as a nurse and dragging a portable table with hospital equipment on it through the streets. In a subtle allusion to mental health and to the medical institution as a regulator of social order, the artist talked to members of the public who were then urged to take a break and experience the pleasure of taste, to escape through the senses.

"Projecte Taulell" (2003-2005) was based on the artist's concern at the commercial privatisation of public space, and took the form of a table similar to those that stores sometimes use for selling their goods on the street outside. There, passers-by were invited to chat and to taste chocolate free of charge, using their fingers to take it from a bowl. This brief moment of sharing that avoided the 'rub a little bit in' was an opportunity for the artist to explore her concerns about people's inability to recognise themselves in contemporary art.

Once she was back in the context of emergent contemporary artists in Barcelona, Saladrigues once again drew on her family background in confectionery making to produce 'fortunetes', her own version of Chinese fortune cookies containing snippets of advice and thoughts targeted at her own generation of artists in the arts community. "Els bons consells per a ser un bon artista" (2006-2007) was an ephemeral, edible textual epicentre of strategies, uncertainties, conceits and insecurities common to artists who are starting out on their careers. It was also a poetic exercise in thinking about the contradictions and mirages against which the struggle between inner commitment and the desire for professional advancement takes place.

In this same framework touching on institutional critique, the artist created "Projecte E/F" (2007-2008), in which a group of young artists took part in a friendly and apparently spontaneous domestic discussion about the importance of becoming known abroad as legitimising factor at the local level. The script, which was the result of thirty interviews held with artists, curators, thinkers and a series of institutional agents, is a homogenous polyphony that functions as an intersubjective account of the clichés of the Catalan art scene: emigration as indispensable for future prospects, the exclusive attention to particular formats of art or career models, and the recurring endogamy as *horror vacui*. This project, which was her first foray into video, gave way to the activation of systems of narrative fiction rooted in real documentation that governed subsequent projects.

The feeling of art's inability to develop personal habits of appropriation, reading and use in its audience was crystallised in "El poder de la convocatòria" (2008-2009). A group of people were chosen randomly from the telephone book and sent a vacuum-sealed letter cut out of bread,

along with a letter asking them to take it to an exhibition space in their city within a specified period of time. The letters formed a sentence with a message to the effect of “what you are looking at is the potential of the call for participation for this project.” The action was rounded off with a series of interviews with the people who the call for participation had been addressed to – whether or not they had fulfilled the request –, about their reasons and resistances. The almost exegetical desire to take the process apart ended up being expressed in a publication that navigates between statistics and subjectivity, through the users’ levels of involvement in art. This was also the first of her now regular publishing projects, which allow her to pour her passion for books into them and which intersected with her concern at the gap between art and society in her work in progress “Els significats de l’art” . This collection, which started off with books that have the word ‘art’ in their title, takes stock of the word’s amorphous, heterogeneous and expansive semantic boundaries, the unfathomable usufruct of the term on the margins of a system that insists on withdrawing into itself.

Similarly, in “Inventari d’art” (2009-2010) Saladrigues collected things that local residents had in their houses and considered to be art or described as artistic. The everyday, subjective presence of art in their lives was a subject that participants reflected on, and that negotiated the parallel narrative: a debate on social versions of art, its validation systems and the ideas linked to legitimacy as a criteria or status.

At this point, the subject of study in Saladrigues’ work shifts towards the plausible user of artistic appreciation. Once again using gradual, exhaustive, individual interviews, the people attending the one-day event “0912 10” (2010) were – after a long wait – asked a series of questions about their potential involvement in an art project, with emphasis on the codes of behaviour that the action itself entailed. Entering fully into the analysis of the institution as a space of social production, and motivated by what Foucault theorised as societies of control and the way they are reflected in the artistic framework, she then focused on the social fixation of the roles of the public, and on the surveillance systems of art centres and museums.

This gave way to “Radically Emancipated” (2011), a documentary work in progress, the initial results of which became the basis for her intervention in “Cardinal Audiences” in the form of video capsules, objects and documents. Somewhere between the prohibited and the sublime, Saladrigues looks at the experience of thefts of fragments of artworks that have been carried out in Barcelona by perpetrators who see their actions as exercises in profound and respectful communion with the work. In this vision of the desire to transcend the ephemeral experience of contemplation – through appropriation – Mireia touches on fetishist materialisation and possible impertinence in the face of security codes and regulations, but also comments on the poetry and politicisation required by the inner time of use of the artwork, beyond throwaway consumption and its domains of safeguarding.

In “Her Museum” (2011), an unusual security guard, in her own special way, watches over a book that she herself wrote, and Saladrigues edited, in which she recounts her experiences looking after works of art in a museum. This paraphrase of self-citation, performatic sculpturisation of the inner workings of the project allows Saladrigues to reposition, through irony, the discourses of institutions’ imposition of behaviour.

For her most recent work, "Akron" (2011), Saladrigues restored a hundred-year-old film projector and used it to project fragments of films that had been censored on their release, in a room in which the screen is framed by a conceptual map of the project. Historical revisionism and a homage to cinema converge in a project that emphasises the condition of power that lies beneath the construction of any audience through its control mechanisms.

How can the essence of art approach the subjectivity of the individual? As she moves towards authorial specialisation, Mireia c. Saladrigues' immersion in the social structures of art is not limited to the appreciable appearance of things, but is committed to recreating experience through correlation with the consciousness of its users. Both enthusiastic and sceptical, between the optimism of the possible and the angst of the attainable, Saladrigues defends the post-productive capacity of art – that which can endow it with the proficiency it requires to develop autonomously in its relationship to the spectator in spite of the regulated procedures that surround its contact with the public. And isn't that the meta-narrative that supposedly underlies the base of art and, as such, its purpose?