

1. Kaunas, Lithuania

Roadmap to Arts Education

Number of participants: 16

Project Context: Waiting for Return /A Probable Day/

Project Duration: April 2009 until June 2010

Project Participants: 40+

Oh what can we expect from a dinner table where the menu is a report? More strangely, that while the mother tongue was predominately Lithuanian with a sprinkle of Dutch and Hibernia, the group was confined to the constraints of international English. So below is an inadequately drafted report from a conversation that took place in Kaunas, Lithuania. It focused on an art project called *Waiting for Return – A Probable Day* by Dutch artist Jeanne van Heeswijk and Marcel van der Meijs.

Dear reader, what all this has to do with the Roadmap and Education is for you to contest. All I can ask is for you to please excuse me (!) and not my fellow conversants who may feel liberty to also protest, the mistakes and omissions which are purely of my own making.

While planning we set out to foreground two questions that are, we think, embedded in the project: (1) can we speak about the project, *Waiting for Return* -as a process of education among citizens and the city and -as a process for art education among artists and producers?

So what is this thing called *Waiting for Return – A Probable Day*? It is an art commission by Kaunas Biennial devised and programmed by Vita Geluniene and Ed Carroll. The project was located in Kaunas Castle old Bus Station adjacent to the Old Town. It is a rundown space, still used as a bus station, built in Soviet times, for certain routes into and out of the city with small kebab take-a-way, newsagent kiosk, toilets and beer bar. On November 11th 2009 at moment of departure of the first bus (No. 120) until the last one, a sequence of small interventions happened, every hour, based upon the timetable of the bus. Each performance was also filmed and only recently after editing ended up as a 30-minute film. Each sequence was developed by the artists through listening and reflecting upon ideas that people shared with them. Their ideas, hopes and fantasies became the raw material for re-enactment.

So please find presented the fragments of our conversation not fully ordered in sequence:
Vėjūnė Sudarytė: This kind of art gets closer to people and shows them how art works and why it is useful, because today's society and artists' community is so far apart and there has to be done some work to get them together. This film is kind of an education on how to become civil society. Lithuanian society needs to (re)learn what being citizen and part of community/society/state means and that they have to raise their voice if they want to change something. But it is not used to do this so the art project and film gives them an opportunity, in a very subtle way, to (re)learn this lesson. So a project about education but not in the formal sense that UNESCO speaks even though it says it wants to encompass non formal education.

Jeanne van Heeswijk: If you think about education as a place we share or where we try and collectively learn. If you think about education in the sense of trying to bring forward the energies, the emotions and the knowledge that exists in certain places and try to learn from that by sharing it which can be through dialogue or confrontation. If you talk about the project in that way you talk about an education process. But we all know that education institutes don't work like that. They are not communal learning. Neither do they emphasise the fact that you might learn through disagreeing or through subverting knowledge. It is a whole new concept of education you bring on the table. The guy who gave us the story about taking the bus to Neverland was actually the encounter we had that started the thinking about the project. I could never have shown that because a) the camera was

not running and b) I think it would not have been interesting to ask him to play his completely drunken self. But the story he gave us at that particular moment in time was truly a very important which was the centre of the project because when we came into that bar (for the first time) he was sitting in that bar and shouted something at Marcel in Spanish because he thought Marcel was Spanish. And it turned out that he was the first encounter we had with someone other than the people we met before because our Lithuanian language does not work so well.
Marcel van der Miejs: So we had a conversation.

Jeanne van Heeswijk: And it turned out in the conversation we had that he was in a hurry because he said, "I have to take the bus to Neverland"! And then he pointed out that this was exactly the day that the funeral of Michael Jackson happened. So he was joking to us because we asked him what he thought about the bus station. He said, "I am in a hurry because you can never go far away if you want to come close back home". So that was not a sentence we imagined but it was literally a sentence he gave to us. And then he told a whole story about how sentiment of space, how sentiment of locality, how sentiment works. And that was a beautiful story. So even if the camera was running there I don't know if you could even have edited that. So the only action that he felt he could do is to shout out loud that going nowhere was the only place to come back home or the only way to get back home. And I think these projects are about the place and they are partly real life situations. And sometimes the best ways to show what is happening is to extrapolate and to make it bigger. It is not just about any person on the street. But it is about, as I said at the beginning, about a lot of different experts on location: from the bar woman to the architects, to the local artists, to the couple in love, to the bus drivers that are all for me experts for that location. And it is this connection of experts that show the essence or the possible meaning of a place. So for me it is important that it is a mixture of people you know and people you don't know. Because otherwise you would always make the mistake by putting the camera on the local and showing it as it is if you are not a documentary maker but you are an artists and we are talking about artistic practice. You might run the risk to only just represent their stories and not penetrate or re-learn from their stories. And that re-learning is something that I have to learn and you have to do and you have to learn.

Gediminas Urbonas: It is transformative learning

Jeanne van Heeswijk: It is transformative. And that is very important and that makes it art and not documentary or not tv.

Gediminas Urbonas: Or not an illustration.

Jeanne van Heeswijk: Or not an illustration. And of that is what you ask in terms of where does it sit? And you can of course ask is it good art or is it bad art.

Gediminas Urbonas: But for me what was really surprising in your work is that you managed to open up the mundane. Mundane life, something that is happening every day and something that is not representative but something that is essential because it is everyday of the people and everyday for the people who are not political. The project is about ordinary people, who are in service, who are not in the pages of the magazines and who are not in the media. They are doing very important work. And also the bus station is a meeting place for all these different people; a meeting place of all these different nodes that are very important for life. But not for this representative life but precisely for something that is the essence of life without, which maybe the life would not be sustained in the people. And thanks also to your extremely skilful, I would call it, artistic strategy of two modes. First what you described as a re-enactment and the second which is the daily reality, the everyday life reality. When you look at these two things it is very interesting because you no longer see the difference between these two. And this is something I could only ever experience in the quality of the films of Peter Watkins and particularly in his film War Games.

Vita Geluniene: I would like to develop you idea of the collaborative in what you said. Just a couple of weeks ago we were sitting in this same space with some other people and Gintare who is developing this art movement called Art Hole which is a very active art centre of young people

promoting art. And she had an argument with an art professor of history and we were discussing the idea of a new art space in Kaunas and what it could be and what activities there could be in it. And there was a talk about education and some special activity dedicated to art education. And there was an opposition between Gintare and the professor. And the professor said that education is not our field, that education in art was not the field of an art centre. That art has to speak on its behalf about what it is. We don't need mediators. So I would be very interested to hear what Gintare has to say about this approach in the context of education and what is your personal opinion. Being a student, and now I am addressing not only Gintare but also the other students present with us. You are students in this field and I wonder do you feel it is a different approach to presenting art. Or did you ever experience something like that in Kaunas? Do you see projects that are engaging people? What do you think about that?

Gintarė – <http://menoduobe.com> - I like the fact that art is not simply about this or that thing or object but is kind of like a social movement. And even after the last Biennial I had a question for myself: what is this art? Is it a social movement because everyone can do this not only an artist? I can do it. It is interesting and very important because people can feel close and you can enter it: young people, children, teenagers, everyone. So you can find a way not only in galleries or museums where only twenty people come to one artist or one space to see what art is. So it is a way not only for people with a special education but also available for ordinary people

Ed Carroll: If we speak about education, another thing that is very important in this project is to ask how an arts project will engage with this public space. In an article written about the art project Protest Labs there is an interesting phrase I picked up namely 'artists missing in action'. To me this is an idea to be explored because in Lithuania it is as if there is a whole body of artists and arts institutions that are *missing in action* when it comes to presenting a face to issues that are important to the public.

Gediminas Urbonas: Just to speak also about the relevance of certain concepts. In the Nineties when Nomedas and myself started to work in these self organising platforms for us it was the political question to organise something for ourselves: to build self-organising platforms. And I see that this question is still very relevant today. How to organise self organising platforms? Otherwise you end up in opposition to authority, in opposition to the institution. But you may work with them, you may collaborate with them, you may be part of them but at the same time you are self organising and self educating. So what is interesting is that you are no longer talking about artists and platforms but what we are talking about is people. For me, it was very interesting to see this self organising and self education of the people in the bus station. And here I see the huge potential for the artists. You know for us also to reflect on what we are doing and how we are organising ourselves. And that is where the game brought us. You know in Italy this is something that is now being discussed. It is about Negrian thinking versus authoritarian thinking. These are very important paradigms that are worth considering.

You also touch upon a very interesting question: what do you mean by performative? Performative, performance and to be performing. And another thing is about art work, art project like what you said is this project, in terms of what was conceived the film project. Were all the interventions and performative actions, interactions into the every day for the sake of the film? So again I will be repeating myself, repeating what I was saying about Peter Watkins. What you see is not only the film. The film was made to build a logic movement that could be concerned not only about the historical event of the Nineteenth century living in Paris. But it was precisely to look at the ideals we had been living. And the point which should be supported after looking at this today. So art should fulfil the projection of the film – the filming of the film was conceived as an ongoing workshop. And after the film, the people who made this workshop – and they were not professional actors. They were not professional actors they were just people from the street. Something that was in this work, these people are real people. And after that they are continuing the filming something that they can perform in the film. So this is a very important point. In this sense we can come back to your question about the performance. The performance in the sense for me it is a performative gesture in the sense that it tries to create a space for an individual projection versus something that is involved i.e. a projection

that is conceived by developers. Projections of those who are informed – of the perfect idea. Trying each time to abstract space and colonise space. And in this sense you try to decolonise space. It is a project of decolonisation. So this is how I understand the performative in this.

Jeanne van Heeswijk: It is also always very tricky the documentation of art projects which involve performative actions because how does that work? Is it just documentation or does it end up in a product which is shown separately and then does it have the meaning and is that document transferred into something else that tells a specific story that is unconnected from the place. And for me for instance what for the day for the platform was very important was that at every hour something would happen in the station. Something that would intensify or scratch the surface or intensify the moment of the energy. I don't know if you would call that a performance because some of them looked more like a performance like the red carpet was a very performative gesture. But the milkman, people would just think it was the milkman. Nobody would have thought that the milkman was asked to come on that day rather than on Saturday when he normally comes and goes to the front side instead of to the back side of the station. To intensify, to scratch the surfaces during a whole day like a repetitive, we would say acupuncture, a repetitive pressing on certain issues that are different in kind to me. That is a way to me to create performative action, to create certain activities in a particular place that might intensify its dailyness, that might intensify a lot of things that may happen there in more condensed form. And that is in order to create a different kind of visibility. In that sense it is performative but not in the sense of performances. They are not performances as such otherwise I have a lot of very bad performers/performances.

Gediminas Urbonas: There is a quote of a Lithuanian art historian and critic Alfonsas

Andriuškevičius, which says that every performative has elements of performances but not every performance has a performative quality.