

The “Making of” as Working Material

(Concerning production, distribution and dissemination)

The author gives an account of the experiences from the *Art and Electricity* and *Tester* projects which the Fundación Rodríguez has worked on during the last few years. In the text he reflects on the working process and the dissemination of these projects, and raises questions that are applicable to the creation of contemporary culture in general.

Writing about the subject that I want to address here involves observing, checking and comparing the issues that have structured our work in recent years. These are practices in which craft and industry, technology and rudiment, digital and analogue meld together to form a slippery, wriggling cultural product which we sometimes fail to embrace openly; it slips from our grasp, lost to our artlessness and our vertigo.

Writing about these issues is like walking across quicksand, with nothing but the clothes on your back, to get a better view of the completed projects from a certain distance. Understanding this crossing as an extension of the project itself is the only way of starting to sketch out new plans.

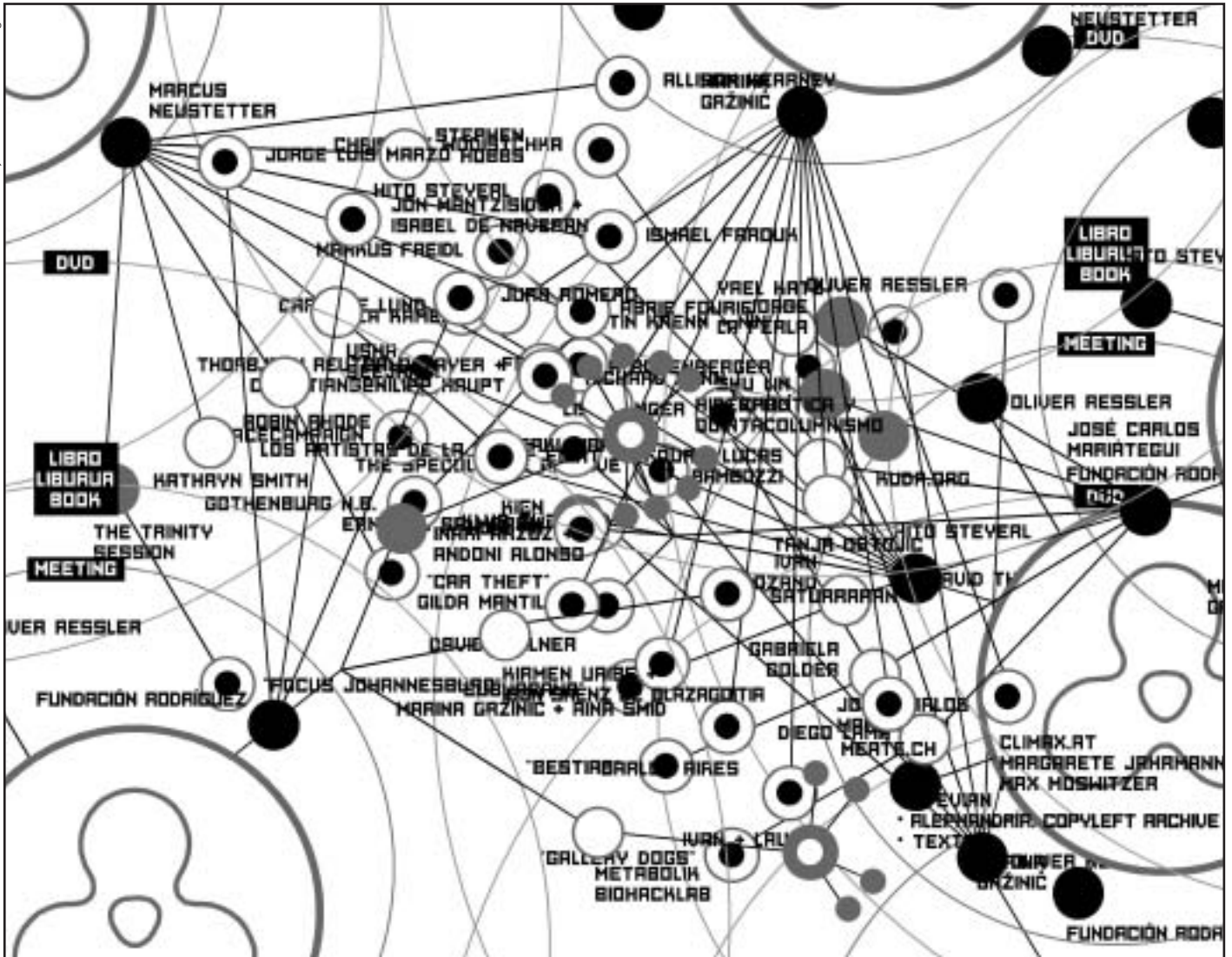
Three things

Looking at today’s art, we clearly see that ideas such as production, distribution and dissemination now form part of the contemporary project, and it is precisely the interrelations and interferences between these three concepts that determine their true projection in society, the art world and in the very thing that unites them.

If this projection pivots to a great extent on the three axes we have identified, which are in turn supported on foundations that are favoured by the sociological, ideological and political context, then we appear to be bound to accept that contamination and contagion are central features of the discourses that art generates.

This is a complex situation and it serves to remind us of the need to work at very different levels — obliquely, sometimes from an overwhelming sense of responsibility and with a necessary understanding of the relations between the forces this whole horizon has to offer.

Courtesy of the Fundación Rodríguez



Fundación Rodríguez *Tester*

Sequence

While this engineering does not in any way lessen the intensity required by any creative initiative, we need to see production, distribution and dissemination as a logical sequence, unwrapping as in a game of pass-the-parcel.

Thus we see that the idea of production is tied in with the paradigm shift, with an entirely new critical atmosphere which is debating the meaning of work in this post-Ford era, and which has shown that three types of action that previously seemed unconnected —work, politics and art— now coincide in one single attitude, and are essential to any production process.

We can then see distribution as being associated with the idea of “visibility”, the ability to “arrive” and the long-awaited conquest of the gaze. In many cases, the artistic proposal ends precisely here, in distribution, since it is this visibility which tends to take centre stage, hogging the limelight.

Another issue is the conquest of attention. This is related to seductive capacity and, if successful, in close association with “dissemination”, makes it possible to take a further step, leading to opinions and evaluations — in short, to debate.... Distribution makes the parcel arrive; it connects the product to the potential consumer.

If we try to complete the sequence, we could see dissemination as a sort of “emission”, an “outreach” of the message. It is at this point that this message —which was inscribed in the production process and that travelled on whatever medium bore it— now emerges and gets unwrapped and projected.

Dissemination might thus be said to correspond to the higher state of this sequence, since it means gaining access to certain channels, frequencies, circuits, tracks and programmes, but it also means using them to make the contents of the project progress beyond the minds that shaped it. Being disseminated or issued means “arriving” with a mes-



Isa Rosenberger *Sarajevo Guided Tours* 2002 NODO: Oliver Ressler

sage (if indeed there was ever anything to be said). This means successfully culminating a process which sought to bridge the complexity that has built up in the old “transmitter-receiver” arrangement.

Dissemination is the moment when the parcel is unwrapped, the gift is revealed and its value is understood.

Discontinuity

Just as the sequence we have described seeks to organise the times of a project, its discontinuity can reveal its incompetence or shortfalls, but it could also provide different and unsuspected scenarios for action: spaces, forums and targets that have appeared circumstantially on branch routes not taken in account when the route was first mapped out.

Discontinuity as a working material can prove useful as an end in itself. From the stance of the project, infiltration, camouflage, and a range of strategies and tactics could work to question this concept of series or frequency by subverting the order of the factors or by integrating them as a unitary proposal.

Underlying some of the proposals that have arisen from the sphere of art, there is a therefore a logical reluctance to become trapped in mechanical operations that lead to mar-

keting, or even an irresistible fascination in this type of relation, which end up handing the project over to a merely business-oriented activity.

This is the slippery ground some of us have found ourselves skating over on several occasions, however much warning we may have had. We have gone around needing to get our work known, but making it clear that it is not “just another product”; wanting to maintain the cultural or artistic seal on our work but keeping our eyes open for any chance of commercial distribution. We have been driven by our desire to get as far as possible without knowing what vehicle to use. We have been pushed along by the urgency to emit (i.e. broadcast) but without knowing how to get there in the first place.

And frequently we don't know who we want to reach nor how to transmit.

Anti-slip

Producing also means explaining yourself, making yourself understood through the word. Here, in the production of thought, the idea of the network has required a phenomenon capable of unifying production, distribution and dissemination. This is where the “network” comes in, working in certain situations as an evolved stage of the new production processes. Either because of its simplicity or the stability its mere mention invokes, its pregnancy—in other words its capacity to catch attention—seems to act like a trusted brand, perhaps because of the contemporary nature of the concept. But the net is not as tight as we might like when there is a product that requires physical support. Even if it is only a question of time before everything can be distributed and broadcast over the Net, there is already a new creative anxiety which has arisen precisely out of this circumstance, and which is forcing cultural producers to find mixed, upgradable solutions.

The result is that, just when we thought we had got past the object, we find our attention swinging right back to it. True, it is a new type of object, stripped of its auras (though not exempt from rules), but it is still an object, which, from its reproductive characteristic, requires us right from the start of the production process to think about its journey, its arrival, its transmitting ejection...

How can we embed our object in that other complex network which is not “ours”—a hard, reinforced, inexorable distribution network? How can we use our network to allow cultural products to be circulated?

Experience forces us to think of a “tight” network that takes over the sequence of production, distribution and dissemination.

Experience forces us to think about the target audience of each new project, about people and citizens (an instant before they become consumers); it forces us to think about

possible audiences or perhaps about the creation of a new audience. With every new project we will think about influential areas and areas that can be influenced where we can conduct our work. Many other assessments will be required to try to progress beyond the old formula of production (which obliges us to evaluate the working conditions constantly), and which will keep open the possibilities of updating the relations between distribution and dissemination. And it will also be necessary to believe in new formulas of irradiation, linking sensitivities and producing new growth in our network of aspirations.

Alexis Vaillant, talking about the work of Matthieu Laurette, says:

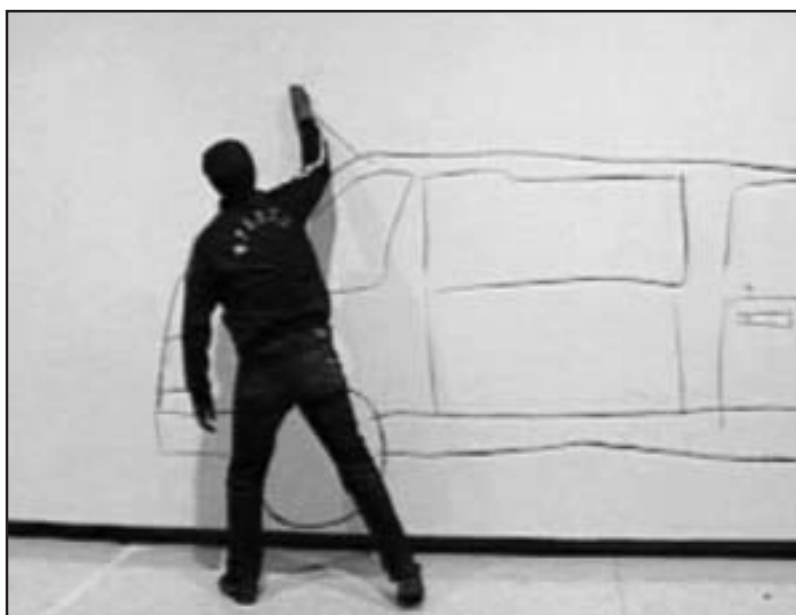
“Artists prove that what is at stake is, above all, the very nature of the dissemination space”.

This (perhaps utopian) emanation, in which the emancipating message becomes confused with the medium used, and which mixes creative quality and the effectiveness of reception until they become identified with each other, will to a large extent compensate the artistic project for the resulting lag vis-à-vis the mass media.

Where we need to work, undoubtedly, is in the very essence of the area of dissemination. As Franco “Bifo” Berardi says, “communication is not an instrument of political action, but political action itself”. However, we must not forget that we have to make the parcel arrive and unwrap it. Somewhere, there is a gift waiting for you. ❧

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This text is based on real events: the experience with the projects *Art and Electricity* (www.artyelectricidad.net) and *Tester* (www.e-tester.net), both by Fundación Rodríguez and produced by Arteleku.



Robin Rhode *Car Theft1* South Africa 2003 NODO: Marcus Neustetter