

## **Risk and Trust - Compressed one-day presence in a new social context**

“Then I began to understand “permission” in another way: curator’s can create an “empty” space for thinking and creating. All the other work we take on (writing grants etc.) is to preserve an open space for the making and viewing and reflecting on art. In that space we give artists permission to work well ...”an invitation to participate in the discussion”.

Mary Jane Jacob in an e-mail conversation with Ernesto Pujol and Paula Toppila for PR02 (En Ruta)

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I received the invitation from M&M Proyectos to participate in OPEN MARKS, one project of PR02 (En Ruta) as one of the seven curators in May 2002. With the invitation I received some documentation of three small towns around the capital city San Juan, namely Bayamón, Loiza and Naranjito. The routes to these desitinations and the places themselves where to be the context for these events to happen and art works to be located and experienced.

I immediately liked the idea of compressed one-day presence of the visiting artists and curator in a new social context. I was very much aware of the very big challenge and risk when I decides, that our aim would be to produce something that would have a meaning in this very context, something that would be available for anybody and that would directly communicate with local audience hopefully without problems of understanding the work despite the different cultural backgrounds of the artist and the audience. This would mean serious research on the context before arriving to Puerto Rico and during the visit, and an intensive working period on location to be able to present three new works on “our day”, Saturday October 12<sup>th</sup> 2002.

After some thinking time, processing the conditions and artists that could work with them, I sent this information with the documentation on the places to two Finnish artists and one group with a request to make a proposal of a project. They could freely choose which place they preferred to work with and to a big surprise they all independently from others chose the same place, Bayamón - the urban mayhem known for “Chicarron” the pork crackling and huge traffic jams! Even the one paragraph I could find on Bayamón in The Lonely Planet travel guide for Puerto Rico states that “ you have to be on a serious mission to go to Bayamón”. This is something we certainly would be!

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I met with Michelle Marxuach for the first time at ARCO art fair in February 2002 where M&M Proyectos participated at the Cutting Edge gallery department representing Caribbean region by invitation from Maria-Ines Rodriguez, Victor Zamudio-Taylor and Antonio Zaya. After the meeting at the fair I couldn’t stop thinking about one project I was introduced there and this was called *El Cerro* by Puerto Rican artist Chemi Rosado Seijo. He had initiated a wide community art

project by proposing to the people of El Cerro in Naranjito, in the mountains, to paint their houses different shades of green, the colour of the mountainside landscape. This project grew into a wider collaboration with artists, students of different disciplines, companies of various fields and the local people including in addition to the painting ie. restoration of the fasades of the houses to different kind of courses and other activities to take place in El Cerro. This process has been going on for couple of years and is still on going.

*El Cerro* is fantastic example of both environmental art and community art, it is as much aesthetic project as it is conceptual and social and it has shown such patience and consequence that it is admirable. To know about this project was very important for me and it encouraged me to invite Finnish artists who work a little bit in the same vein, with similar type of attitude, commitment and spirit as Chemi Rosado Seijo with his many collaborators in Naranjito. If we would succeed, our projects would be a gesture of support and appreciation to this type of projects.

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The artists that I invited - Jan-Erik Andersson, Laura Horelli and Casagrande & Rintala - all have an interest to work consciously in conversation with the society, reflect it and work in collaboration with different kind of communities, but each from very different angles. Jan-Erik Andersson has a long multi-faceted career as a sculptor, performance artist and a member in a group called Rosegarden, together with architect Erkki Pitkäranta realising long-term architectural and interior decoration projects. They have for example planned and constructed an ecological cow house *Cummin* in Teuva, *Gardener School Gerbera* in Kiipula, and redecorated two churches in Kirkkonummi and Espoo, all in Finland and many other intriguing visual projects involving narratives and close collaboration with the customers whether they were teachers, school kids, priests, parish church community or else.<sup>i</sup> Rosegarden's mission is to bring imagination, sensuality and joy to architecture<sup>ii</sup> and the same attitude can easily be found also in Andersson's solo projects. For several years his dream has been to realise a *World Wide Dinner Table* which would be of his design and made for the purpose of one huge dinner shared by one representative from each country of the world. Food has been important part of his work since 1991 when he realised his first eating performance together with artist Kari Juutilainen, who was later joined by artist and chef Pertti Toikkanen, too.

*World Wide Dinner Table* project is still a dream, but several other projects have been realised connecting people from different parts of the world and often in a situation involving food. During the last couple of years Andersson has delved into the world of new technologies and realised projects called *World Wide Chocolate Heart* linking Helsinki first with Brussels, Belgium and then with Malmö, Sweden.<sup>iii</sup> The project to be realised in Bayamón entitled *Culinary Link Between Bayamón and Helsinki (World Wide Paper Heart)* is continuation of ideas realised in these projects. The event took place at the shopping mall Plaza del Sol, close to the Science Park and looking (to my Scandinavian eyes) more like amusement park than a shopping centre with flashing lights and colourful logos and space-themed cafeteria area. The real-time connection is made between the shopping mall and the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma in Helsinki. The participation in the work is a ritual - first you take a

photograph of yourself with a webcam and write a message to accompany it, then you send it as an e-mail to the other end. After this you are invited to choose a picture of a person in Helsinki, printed on heart-shaped rice paper, to eat it with a glass of cranberry juice or a red wine. The work includes many religious references - Communion, pray-like immateriality of each message etc. - and not least because of the places where the event happens, a shopping mall and a museum are both sites that seem to have taken the place of the church in contemporary people's lives. Also things operated with computers and other technological equipment create "miracles" since we seldom really know how devices like phone, fax, computer etc. operate however everyday tools they might be and thus it seems as if there invisible mystical powers at work.

Laura Horelli has dealt in her work with social and political issues, most often through private investigations and research. She has realised projects to deal with social distances, the use of mobile phones and how does it change communication between people. She has realised a visual study of the world's current female presidents at Venice Biennial 2001 by examining websites of the countries - her native Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Panama, Sri Lanka and The Philippines . In these projects she studied and compared different kind of phenomena from the point of view of individual, nationality, ethnicity and media - always having as a starting point in her own background being a Finn and phenomena from the Finnish society. The first project where she collaborated with a particular community was called *Frankfurter Positionen* (2001) and it dealt with different kind of cultural groups and associations, run by people that have something other than German origin. She published a free publication introducing another Frankfurt by offering advertisement space for these associations.

For PR02 (En Ruta) Laura Horelli presented a project proposal studying the cruise ship as a sign. While doing research on Puerto Rico she found out that many cruise ships sailing in the Caribbean are built in Helsinki, Finland and decided to choose this link between the two remote countries as her topic and something to study further. During the process having many hours of video interviews on tape she realised that there are many topics to choose from when it comes to cruise ship industry: cruise ship as a working environment, as an environment for leisure, cause for environmental problems etc. In the end, for the edition to be shown at PR02 she decided to concentrate on interviewing people that get their living out of the industry - the builders, contractors, engineers, designers etc. in the shipyard in Helsinki and Turku and tourist guides, group leaders, pr people, travel agents, diamond sellers and other representatives of related businesses on ship and on shore in San Juan. Horelli's two monitor installation was in the end shown at Diner's restaurant in Old San Juan for two days. This restaurant is almost a hide-a-way in the city, known mainly by people working on the ships who come there to spend their private hours making phone-calls and checking e-mails. This work revealed another reality behind the cruise ship industry and business in two different parts of the world. The work shows the reverse side of the holiday feeling we know from Love Boats the 80's cruise ship tv series. It shows individuals in a big system, under pressure in front of increased demands, low pay and under threat of unemployment in the interviews made in Finland. The Puerto Rican interviews give more official perhaps more politically correct image, people seem to hesitate to give any criticism. This must also be due to

different kind of occupations people represent in each location but it might also be to some state a cultural difference – employees in Finland speak less but more frankly, employees in Puerto Rico speak more with official taught tone.

I contacted for the third proposal Sami Rintala and Marco Casagrande that are trained as architects, but have been working as artists both in Finnish and international art context since 1999. They have primarily executed projects situated in the environment outside regular exhibition space always initiating a process and collaboration with the local people. For example, their project for Yokohama Triennial 2001 was an installation called *Birdcage*. The installation was built from iron structure and hemp rope together with Japanese architecture students. Every day, during the whole exhibition, a helium balloon would escape (up to 10 kilometres) from the cage with a balsa bird carrying five different hyötykasvi seeds together with a message, which asks to contact Casagrande & Rintala for the landing point to be recorded.<sup>iv</sup> *Sixty Minute Man* was their project for Venice Architectural Biennial in 2000 where an archaic oak park was planted inside a cargo ship on top of 60 minutes worth of human waste from the city of Venice. This strong ecological comment was realised in collaboration with the landscape architecture students from Helsinki. In Puerto Rico they will again collaborate with architecture students, now from the New School of Architecture at San Juan Polytechnic, where possibility to arrange the essential workshop with the students took place in order to brainstorm real problems of city planning in Bayamón.

It was soon clear that the biggest problems have to do with defective or most of the time non-existent infrastructure for pedestrians and public transportation. Thus, in the beginning of the workshop the students walked all the way from San Juan to Bayamón (15km) along Route 2 the most hectic highway between the two destinations together with the architects to realise the position of a pedestrian, to find the motivation to look for solutions that could be realised in the circumstances (toteuttamiskelpoisia ratkaisuehdotuksia). The students spent long days in their office at the school during the 13 days the process lasted - studying maps, making models and drawings, trying to figure out possibilities for a commuter train line etc. Essential part of the workshop was also to plan the introduction of the project to the audience. They would arrange another public appearance, a procession, march or demonstration, a walk again by foot now from Bayamón to Israel in Hato Rey. During the procession the 11 students and Marco Casagrande would stop 12 times to make each time one zen garden, size of a parking space, out of soil, gravel and abandoned parts of cars. This could take place along the road but also in the middle of the street disturbing the traffic. The students were dressed in black navy trousers, black t-shirts, black caps and while walking they were carrying red umbrellas. Casagrande was dressed in white carrying white umbrella, playing the role of Hernando, character invented during the workshop and encountered many times during the first rehearse walk - the white man giving you permission to walk in the Puerto Rican traffic light.<sup>v</sup>

To the audience it seemed to be obvious that it was some kind demonstration or performance for more ethics in the cityplanning, for saving the nature or demontsration against cars and traffic pollution. But I realised that some people also took it as a somehow religiously charged happening, some people followed the performers long way in a state of religious trance. Antonio Zaya, curator, editor and

Santería guru himself , helped me to understand some of the signs and symbols which in exceptionally large scale seemed to match with the ones in Santería – colours of the clothes, number of participants, materials used in the zen garden compositions etc. Suddenly I realised too that my arms were on goose pumps and the atmosphere changed totally in my eyes. Incredible synchronicity took place and the work became much more than planned from it's primary earth bound practical ethical starting point and meaning to a more profound understanding and interpretation of life.

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The Finnish artists invited to this project chose to situate themselves in the urban landscape, the mayhem, Bayamón. Thus, the process would be about getting to know Bayamón beyond this stereotype and at the same time introducing it to be viewed through visitor's eyes. This is why we gave our project a working title *Introducing Bayamón, Mirroring Helsinki*. First person who commented the title in Puerto Rico laughed and said that it is so funny title, these two far-out places that no one has ever heard about! That was for sure very true, but for how long – since I strongly believe that after the week of PR02 something changed, at least a little bit. A process started and now we know more about each other, we have shared part of our everyday and work, our working habits, ethics, dreams and hopes. This is possible even in a short and intensive period of time when the institutional infrastructure is light, spontaneous, unofficial and enthusiastic as around M& M Proyectos during that week in October.

In experimental projects like this there is a great responsibility that you have to take if you want to take the task seriously, both for the artists and the curator. I thank the artists warmly for their commitment and persistence in realising these projects. But without the commitment and enthusiasm, patience and durance of the local community, local artists, volunteers at M&M Proyectos none of our projects would have happened and above mentioned experiences and other memories both to the audience and to us would not have born. Thus, I would like to express our warmest thanks to everyone involved in carrying out the production processes of the work by Jan-Erik Andersson, Laura Horelli and Casagrande&Rintala. Michy, Roos, Tito, Eva, Vanessa, Sandra, Carlos, Jorge Rigau and the students at the New School of Architecture, people at Movistar, Paradiso and Diner's, and everyone else - you were there too to make it possible to create above quoted "empty" space that Mary Jane Jacob brought up, for the artists to think and create, to work well.

Warm thanks also to my fellow-panelist Mary Jane Jacob and moderator Ernesto Pujol for their wise words and inspiring thoughts.

Paula Toppila  
Curator  
FRAME Finnish Fund for Art Exchange

The Finnish participation at PR 02 was completed with a soundtrack played in the bus compiled by Vilunki 3000 (in collaboration with DJ Didier, Dj Jorge and Radio Helsinki) and with a film & video screening programme curated by Tiina Erkintalo, director of Avanto - Helsinki Media Art Festival, entitled Helsinki Clipology, was shown at the Visual Arts Academy in San Juan, October 12<sup>th</sup> 2002.

Finnish participation was supported by FRAME Finnish Fund for Art Exchange, Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Av-Arkki and Radio Helsinki.

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<sup>i</sup> For more information [www.anderssonart.com](http://www.anderssonart.com) or [www.arkkitehtiryhma.com](http://www.arkkitehtiryhma.com)

<sup>ii</sup> Minna Tarkka, *Rosegarden promises: Sensuous, imaginative architecture*. Rosegarden productions Ky. 2001, Turku.

<sup>iii</sup> For more information [www.anderssonart.com](http://www.anderssonart.com)

<sup>iv</sup> For more information [www.casagrandeintala.com](http://www.casagrandeintala.com)

<sup>v</sup> There will be a 120-page book on *Anarchist Gardener* project entitled *cityZEN\_book*, published by New School of Architecture, San Juan Polytechnic, 2002. This book will document all the 12 zen gardenes made during the procession and the process more widel including the proposals for improvements in the cityplanning of Bayamón.