

The Translation of Souls

Craigie Horsfield



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- 1 In this event there is a little bit of improvisation in terms of its unfamiliarity to many of us. Arnd was talking about the *genius loci* that is not any longer being useful, but, as we will see during the discussion about rituals, I profoundly disagree. The concept of « nomadism » is a very popular and widely used term. I spend whole my life travelling, but, I would disincline to see my self as a nomad. Then, mention was made of the exhibition « Magiciens de la terre » in the Georges Pompidou It raised complex and sometimes troubling issues, which I suppose will also be rehearsed here.
- 2 There is no reason why you should know either me or my work and I will give a little background, as it relates to the talk here: I had begun working with performance, to some extent to performance art, in the late sixties and with « social projects » two or three years later. I make the distinction because it is one which lies unresolved in the proposals of this colloquium and it reflects larger disconnects between the subjects of anthropology and those of contemporary art. But there are also within contemporary art very different notions of performance and the performative. It is overly simplifying in dividing it that way, but the experience that I have is that anthropology, performance and I have bumped up against each other over the last 40 years. This is has been twofold. The first is what has now become known as social projects, usually large collaborative projects with people from several disciplines working together often with sociological, political connections in communities: urbanists, economists, sociologists and frequently anthropologists. This may seem quite a step from the discussion on performance, art, ritual and anthropology.
- 3 However, if you stay with me you will see that it is not necessary the case. The development in social projects of recognizably performance elements, things that look like art or that are presented as being art, were often fraud. What the social project is actually doing? Here there is a short step into asking about similarly complex relationship between anthropology and the performance that is traditionally documented. The jump we are asked to make is how the clear or the apparently clear continuities of ritual within so-called traditional societies are in any way replicated in contemporary art - which works evidently in a very different context. My own concern

between these two areas of the debate, the one of social project and the order of performance, is the « relation » in the sense of « telling », in the formation of relation. We used the example of conversation and within conversation there is clearly the notion of negotiation. The second principle I have worked with concerns the so-called « slow time » and the « present ». « Slow time » is not only this sense of stepping outside but the idea that we experience the time with many differences. « Slow time » also carries with it implications about what we would call « deep present » or « profound present » in which the historical past and the future are predicated, where the past and the future take meaning and are given meaning.

- 4 One of my doubts about anthropology - and I know this is widely addressed amongst anthropologists - concerns the « taking place » of the observer. I mean the way in which the anthropologists place themselves outside of the circumstance, outside of the event. I was an observer that becomes invisible and is supposed not in any way to shape the event, or the relationship. That obviously has changed over my lifetime and there is much more sense today of the « reflexive », the « engagement » of the anthropologist in that work is up to or documented.
- 5 I referred earlier to social projects, having worked on nascent forms of these projects in various parts of Europe. The principal large-scale project was in Barcelona in 1993. It was in barrios outside in communities that were considered to be marginal, and often in conflict one with another. There were considerable divisions amongst those engaged who saw themselves as « benevolents ». They stepped into the community, self-conscious and aware of the very obvious difficulties. But there were very clear distinctions between those whose function was to work for the government. Of course this had very strong class elements attached to it. From these observations came again the development of notions of relation and the arguments that the individual within the community is both shaped and shaping that community. Being aware of that performative element is one step, only one step, not necessary to unlocking but to opening some of these rather difficult questions.
- 6 I would like to step aside and look at it a bit closer to a project that happened at El Hierro shortly after the work in Barcelona and which continued. El Hierro is the most westerly of the Canarian islands. It is a small volcanic rock, with a population officially between five and six thousand people. It was settled in the 16th century and it is familiar to emigration and immigration - immigration is from the mainland, subsistence farming constantly at the risk of hunger and starving and emigration to central and then South America, Cuba, Venezuela, Argentina. This process happened almost throughout its history of being settled by European. The small indigenous community did not survive and there is little trace of it beyond some small rock carvings. The center of the diurnal life of the community is a procession which takes place every four years. I spend time with it because it was both at very familiar ritual structure you would easily recognize and it had local specific differences. Many of the now distant communities returned for the procession - the procession itself dates to the 18th century (1741) - and the carrying around of an effigy of the Virgin, housed in a small and protective monastery at the far western end of the island beyond which for the Romans to world ended.
- 7 El Hierro was the last most westerly land before Bolivia and the void. Looking out over this distance is the glass incased fetish or effigy of the Virgin. The Virgin, in her immensely heavy wooden box and glass windows is carried all the length of the islands

about 40 kilometers to the church in only town of the island. The Virgin is then returned three months later. During the Bajada the population of the island swells to about 25,000 people and this is a transforming process and has the effect of tying the links. It has obviously also effects on the economy because of the money spend on the island during the procession. One is surprised by the intertwining of the ritual and its tradition which are not wholly archaic; they are actually relatively modern as many of these processions are.

- 8 However, I present this in order to outline some of the questions around cultural difference and the function of ritual. Nevertheless, I think that giving attention to existing ritual within our practices illustrates the sense of community, the possibility of our being within that community and a sense of material world. In the end, the potential of ritual lies within these two areas: the intense attention to a communal life and our relation to the material world.

Discussion

- 9 **Arnd Schneider:** When I saw your work, it seemed to me as an unaccustomed video or movie spectator like an « unending loop ». You almost filmed in real time over many hours the procession of El Hierro. Is that linked to the concept you mentioned of « slow time »? What relevance does this has for artistic representation, for ritual and for the ritual process?
- 10 **Craigie Horsfield:** There was an interesting point: the cheese making. The cheese making takes two hours and there is the actual rhythm and routine within it, which is about the physicality of work and it is not necessarily replicated in five minutes of how you make the cheese. You can't make a simulacrum of that, but you can work with the devices of representation, of installation as sense of performative element in which the audience themselves are performers. And I suspect many of those who will be speaking here will be describing their own ways through that. I mean how do you do that? How do we –as audience – engage both imaginatively and also physically?
- 11 **Arnd Schneider:** When I was looking again to your work at the catalogue of Ciutat de la Gent, it occurred to me that according to many anthropologists you are almost the counter model of what we sometimes hold as a stereotypical contemporary artist. This means moving in and out quickly of communities and becoming « nomads ». I mentioned the trope nomadism in my introduction; it is a very quick nomadism sometimes. Going back to « slow time », yours is a really sustained nomadism, it seems to me. What are beyond the visual lifetime of a project? What is your continuing engagement with these communities? What is your relation to Barcelona now, to bring it to the point?
- 12 **Craigie Horsfield:** There are two issues and I will announce them very briefly. The first one: in Paris about twenty five years ago, I had a conversation with Thomas Trout. He told me that he could not remain in a place more than two weeks. This is a familiar observation: when you are in a new place you are discovering it. Afterwards, you have a degree of prejudice, in the way you are insulated from the place by your expectation and by your experience. I don't feel that because I only even begin to understand a little bit after two years.
- 13 The two key questions I asked Thomas are

- 14 1) Are you not making a kind of tourism?
- 15 2) how can you pretend to be part of a community when you are so evidently an outsider? If you don't speak the language nor you don't know the culture, aren't you a kind of nomad - in the West sense of nomadism (without roots, without connections, nor conception of place)?
- 16 Both of my answers are probably forms of sophistry: to some extent I am a great deal closer to my friends who I work with in Barcelona, at El Hierro or presently in Naples, than I am to my next door neighbour in London. Indeed I see them a great deal more often. Just to carry that step further: to some extent we are strangers to each other and we are all outsiders.
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ABSTRACTS

This presentation concerns the context and the practice of so-called "social projects" By considering artist and anthropologist as protagonists, the focus is on separation, relationships, questions of telling, and the performative. Particular attention has been given to practical questions; examples include references to the Canary Island of El Hierro, and to Nola in Campania. The overview concludes with the outline of a proposal concerning ritual, and a summary of the actual and potential engagements of those making art, including the audience.

La discussion porte sur le contexte et la pratique de ce qu'on appelle, dans le champ artistique, « projet social ». Considérant l'artiste et l'anthropologue comme protagonistes, la communication concerne les notions de séparation, d'interactivité, de discoursivité et de performatif. Des questions pratiques sont mises en avant, avec des exemples concernant l'île el Hierro dans les Canaries et la ville de Nola en Campanie (Italie). Ce panorama conduira, d'une part, à une proposition concernant le rituel, et, d'autre part, à faire le point sur les engagements actuels et futurs des artistes et des spectateurs dans les projets sociaux.

AUTHOR

CRAIGIE HORSFIELD

À partir de 1988, date de sa première exposition, Craigie Horsfield devient un acteur essentiel de la scène artistique contemporaine en proposant une nouvelle approche de la photographie. Il a défendu pendant plus de trente ans l'introduction des œuvres sonores au musée, le potentiel des projections sur écrans multiples comme espace social, et le rôle central du public. Pour l'artiste, « la réalisation d'une œuvre, que ce soit son tirage, sa contemplation ou son effet émotionnel, s'effectue dans notre espace commun, se déroule dans un présent relationnel ». L'artiste utilise la photographie comme un moyen pour aborder la séparation entre le monde de la fiction et le monde de l'expérience. Il associe film, photographie, travail sur le son, gravures et dessins pour interroger à la fois l'art et la vie, le familier et l'extraordinaire, l'épique et le quotidien, le « temps lent » du présent qui garde trace du passé et amorce le temps à venir.