

Garage Talk 1

August 28, 2005

In conversation with:

Omar Foglio/Bulbo, Måns Wrangé, Paul Ramirez Jonas, Mark Bradford, Judi Werthein, Ruth Auerbach, Beverly Adams, and Javier Téllez

Moderated by: Joshua Decter



Joshua Decter *Interlocutor*/ Today, the artists will talk about the working processes that they employed in developing their projects for **inSite_05**, specifically within the framework of **Interventions**. On theoretical and pragmatic terms, questions of intervening in the public domain (however we define the public domain), and the conditions of process itself, have been central for the artists' working methods and project development. I would like to give each of them an opportunity to articulate a narrative based upon their respective processes of conceptualization: for instance, discussing how their projects changed during the course of the residencies, particularly as they transected through, and began to intervene within, the San Diego-Tijuana area. I would also like us to focus upon the processes of discussion and negotiation (even between the artists themselves) that took place over the past three years. In particular, how dynamics of exchange during this period might have contributed to the evolution of specific practices, and to consider the interrelationship between the complexities of the public domain and the dynamics of various types of process. It seems that **inSite_05** has been a transformative experience in terms of the meaning of process for artists, and from speaking with a number of the artists over the past few days, it appears that this context has required them to test the boundaries of their own artistic methodologies.

Omar Foglio/Bulbo *Interventions artist*/ *The Clothes Shop* is a project that doesn't just involve Bulbo. The people working in the workshop are really the ones making the decisions. Our role is really more that of a facilitator. So the process of what is going to happen is very open. It's up to the workshop participants. We're waiting for them to decide what's going to transpire. We are going to facilitate the creation of a mobile clothes shop that will be set up in four different places: two swap meets (one in San Diego and one in Tijuana), a clothes boutique here in San Diego, and a shopping mall in Tijuana.

Joshua Decter/ Aren't you using the media—radio and TV—to encourage people to come to the workshops? There's an attempt to make the workshops transparent to the public.

Omar Foglio/ The workshops are private, but you can follow the process through the webcast, which goes on each Saturday between 10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m. Documentation of the workshops will also be available at the mobile shop. We are going to do a lot of promotion for the mobile shop and provide a lot of information about the process.

Joshua Decter/ The **Interventions** artists have in some way re-defined their function as agents of encounters and agents of negotiation. This is particularly evident in the case of Bulbo, where you have completely different individuals working together, who are coming from very different positions and class bases. I imagine that this generated some very unique situations.

Omar Foglio/ Working in Tijuana, I think that this process is something that is very natural for us. That said, *The Clothes Shop* is completely

different from anything we have done before. The experience has been very rewarding for us—there's been a lot of reciprocity in terms of our relationship with the participants. One of the participants is a woman in her fifties who is a designer. Her daughter called us and said that her mother has changed with this project and now she seems much more positive and happy. For us to hear things like that is really great. I can say that we have achieved the goal of the project. We were able to bring people together who did not know each other and who were very different, and we were able to create the conditions for them to work together. That is much more important than the actual "work" that was produced.

Måns Wrangé *Interventions artist*/ When I was invited to participate in **inSite**, I was interested in the relationship between Tijuana and San Diego. I heard a lot of rumors about Tijuana in San Diego, and I wanted to see if there was some way to create a project about rumors. Most of the time, rumors attribute negative characteristics to people who are deemed "other." I was interested in the idea of replicating this by constructing and spreading a rumor, but also in inverting it. I worked with a team of people from Stockholm, San Diego, and Tijuana, and together we formed a strategy to spread the rumor. We targeted people with large social networks in San Diego and Tijuana to help us to spread the rumor. These people, who were termed "nodes," have been spreading the rumor and have also been given the task of recruiting three additional nodes to participate in the project. The nodes are largely people suggested by **inSite** so they have a personal relationship to the project. There is an element of trust. It wouldn't work if we tried to recruit people off the street; there has to be some sort of personal relationship.

Joshua Decter/ Can you tell us the rumor please Måns?

Måns Wrangé/ If I told you it wouldn't be a rumor!

Paul Ramirez Jonas *Interventions artist*/ Måns is denying the audience. Måns is basically saying: "I will not tell you my piece." I've been thinking about this, replaying the infinite series of denials. The curatorial framework of **inSite** has forced us to consider that our "piece" is finally an audience; the exhibition has become an audience. I don't think I honestly want to be an artist today because you are not

the audience of my work. There is an audience out there for my work. I think the problematics of **inSite** is how to frame the projects. Are we going to frame it with the traditional frame of the exhibition?

Joshua Decter/ In some way you are suggesting that each of the projects in its own way constructs a particular audience.

Paul Ramírez Jonas/ Yes, there is a real distance between the audiences the projects are addressing and a traditional art-driven audience.

Joshua Decter/ Måns talked about trust. Your project is also dedicated to the creation of trust. Can you talk about trust in terms of how to not only reach an audience, but also different co-participants and collaborators (bearing in mind that collaborators are really an audience in and of themselves)?

Paul Ramírez Jonas/ I think if you set up a situation where you are successful within the white cube, then you are being successful in “making” the white cube. It was very interesting to see the *Farsites* exhibition opening during the opening weekend. It kind of didn’t make sense. I don’t know if that was the right approach. If we are going to have a project where you can’t really see the pieces we have to reassess how we’re going to frame it. I went to see Bulbo’s project and I was thinking about how many people were at the opening at the museum compared to how many people there were at *The Clothes Shop*. It was sort of like the project managed to escape, but audiences still found it easier to access the museum. We still haven’t found a way to get that audience away from the museum, not from the museum to Bulbo, but to Bulbo, away from the museum. If only ten people saw the project, what does that mean?

Joshua Decter/ Yesterday I went to visit Mark Bradford’s project *Maleteros*. By the time I got there all the carts had been redistributed in Tijuana, but the kind of interaction that Mark was having was quite phenomenal—I had never seen anything like it.

Mark Bradford Interventions artist/ I was trying to be faithful to what I considered the main component of the project: visibility and invisibility. I was interested in power in relation to **inSite**. Actually, for me, **inSite** is a kind of “government” organization in the same way as the US government and the Mexican government. For me the project was the opposite of government power, government projects. I am interested in things that negotiate through and around power. It is really in relation to power that the informal economy of the *maleteros* developed. For the past forty years, the *maleteros* have had to negotiate power. The project had to change because of conditions set either by the Mexican government, the US government, or **inSite**. So there had to be a lot of negotiations along the way, but the project survived nonetheless. From the beginning, I told the *maleteros* that **inSite** was the government with government money. That made sense to them. We had to work with that. I didn’t necessarily have all the answers. I just tried to make the whole process as transparent as I could.

I formalized the sites where people always operated informally. So I was “officializing” the site. This could have been a problem because sometimes they wanted to be visible, and sometimes they wanted to be invisible and get on with doing their job under the radar of police and border patrol surveillance.

Judi Wertheim Interventions artist/ My project is called *Brinco*. First of all, I am very happy to have had the opportunity to be part of this, and to have the chance to rethink my positions about many things. I decided to develop a project that would intervene on both sides of the border—Tijuana and San Diego. One of the first things that caught my attention was the issue of migration on the Tijuana side and the issue of consumerism and objects of desire on the San Diego side. I created a fictional company, which designed a sneaker specifically designed for undocumented migrants to cross the border. It has all the things that a migrant would need to cross. I did a lot of research with migrants. I spent a lot of time with them, talking to them about their experiences. I also followed a route out into the desert that undocumented migrants use to cross into the US. It was a very intense experience to be in contact with them and to be in the actual physical space where they cross. Through this process, all the ideas for the sneaker came together and I designed it. **inSite** then produced the sneaker in the same way that an American company like Nike or Reebok would. We used a maquiladora in China, mirroring the way that American companies exploit cheap labor over there. We’re going to launch the product at 6:30 p.m. tonight and you will be able to purchase the sneaker as a utilitarian “piece” you can wear. The money made from the sales will go back to the migrants. So I invite you all to come later today to Blends—a sneaker store on 10th and Market.

Paul Ramírez Jonas/ I think that it is interesting to think of a certain generation of artists like myself, from the late eighties, early nineties, that really love the work of the seventies that tries to escape from the frame. They were trying to reconcile the exhibition format with works that are immaterial or echoes. In this sense I think that artists are way ahead of the institutions. From Chris Burden on you can see the multitude of solutions artists are trying out. None of them is perfect. In this type of work where you are relinquishing the frame of the institution it is almost more problematic. I think that if you look at different artists and their practices, then you can see the possibility for a solution.

Mark Bradford/ It’s almost like there is a desperation that fetishises the solution; I think that the process gets overwhelmed. When I started the project there were a lot of questions. I don’t know the solution, I don’t know the solution where I end up, but the process in which I am engaged, this is the only thing I belong to. I really don’t know what the solution will be, but I know the way of working where engagements are sort of contradictions of the problems. And their awkwardness is true because it sort of has a manifesto of engagement. At the same time you know the project will have a life beyond you. It’s going to be in books. It’s going to have this other solo life, which will go on and become this sort of symbol of your work. And I don’t know how comfortable I am with that but at the same time I want the project to have a life.

Paul Ramírez Jonas/ If you look historically, the artists’ process has kind of been opened up. In our studios we had the power not to be transparent. We were geniuses with masterpieces that come out of our studios. How did that happen? I don’t know but I think it was quite successful and, if I may suggest, maybe the next thing that needs to be opened up and made transparent is curatorial practice.