Alexandra do Carmo

'The Steam Shop (or the painter's studio)'
From the expansion of the studio into an anthropological approach to place

The studio as an expanded field

After some fundamental shifts in the 1960's and 1970's, namely Minimalism, *Conceptual Art*, *Performance*, *Body Art* and *Site- specific* - all of which were the basis on which some of the fundamental contemporary art movements were structured – the art institution can not be defined solely in spatial terms (studio, gallery, museum etc). As a symptom of a topological lethargy still present (or having reappeared) in the artistic practice, artistic residency emerges within this context, presenting itself as a potential alternative (1) discursive modality, nomadic and 'invasive' of institutional spaces, consisting of different approaches and research trends, as well as through new methods of placing it in context, at times establishing unexpected communication channels in terms of collaboration and participation in the public domain through local social events, which are part of the most recent critical, artistic and curatorial (2) discourses under a wide variety of designations.

Alexandra do Carmo's intervention and the inseparable curatorial project to which it belongs, held during the month of July 2006 at the *Fábrica da Pólvora de Barcarena* (in Oeiras), with the intriguing title The Steam Shop (or the painter's studio) – leads us into a frenetically disturbing brainstorming process, whatever pops into our heads. In other words, one can see it as a two-sided critical awareness: <1> the artistic conventions that make up the studio (*atelier*) as a private topos of creation through the relational critique of two different historical paradigms (the *"social" realism ideologically motivated by Courbet and the more recent state of the art world, dismissing universality, interventive and transformative power of the vanguards, and therefore, more fragmented by the structural micro-topia that traverses its discourses*); and <2> the institutional model that the Museu da Polvora Negra embodies as a conventional way of editing and presenting the *memory* of the places of industrial architecture.

Let us first think about the project as a discursive practice strictly focused on the *artist's studio*. What is it telling us? That the studio can not go back to what it was before, that this deliberate dislocation being promoted here – this transition or topological expansion – gives it a *political* dimension (3) when it clearly exacerbates the disintegration of the private dimension in the social sphere, with a clearly critical and reflexive purpose (4). One can say that, unlike Courbet's painting *The Artist's Studio*…(Musee D'Orsay, Paris) - which inspired the event and was at the same time a challenge proposed to both artist and *public* (5) – the creative space is literally being transferred to public social institutional spaces (framed as leisure and cultural spaces). Goal: to rethink its *topos* through an epistemological questionnaire, through a deconstruction of its essential determinations, in order to free it from a panoply of historically decisive dichotomies that remain residually linked: private vs. public; creation vs. presentation; pre- vs. post-production; means vs. ends; process vs. finished product etc …

Essentially, analyzing Alexandra do Carmo's curatorial project in itself, we should immediately mention that the initiative – as a collaborative social project - sets out to be more than a mere artistic residency/occupation of a certain place (with certain physical, historical or culturally specific characteristics, with the purpose of being thematically contextualized), and becomes instead an "exhibition" composed of a panoply of locally improvised, open studios, dedicated to problematizing the aesthetic process through the narrowing and/or dissolution of the existing protocol abyss between the space of creation and the space of the exhibition. Generally speaking it is a work strategically directed towards the creation of a social 'laboratory' (6), with the ultimate purpose of evaluating its critical and theoretical consequences. We are therefore faced with (and perceive) an experiment, not an exhibition.

The place was very well chosen. From the back of the studios/spaces, along the walking path that is situated in an elevation circumscribing the entire perimeter of the back of the building, we have a panoramic, bird's-eye view of each artist's space, thus promoting a 'small roman theater' situation, a voyeuristic vision of the *one seeing without being seen*. Allegorically, it is a hyperbolic amplification of the fish tank situation which was attempted to be avoided: because the walking path most used by the public is precisely the one closest to the facade of the building, the one that invites you to enter into each studio though the front door without asking permission. Invading them not only with our look but with the presence of our body to interact and question the artist while he/she interrupts (or not) his/her work to give us some of their time. (At this point, we begin to wonder, a certain feeling of discomfort is present, which is inconvenient without being disturbing, perhaps because it is also amusing, arising as it does from a complicity which we are not used to) (7).

In fact, what was exhibited couldn't have been the immaculate product, but rather the persistent production, the process in itself instead of the "work of art" as a self- centered and finished piece.(8) Therefore, anyone committing him/herself to visit (or inhabit) this "*exhibition-experiment*" was confronted with a manifestation that sees itself from the inside. Being there, following it was to accept each artist as a live element of this perpetual uncompleteable work.
Making the studio into the space, the look into the encounter and the encounter into the game.

Site-Specific vs. place " the artist as an anthropologist"

Focusing now on Alexandra do Carmo's specific artistic intervention, it extremely important to make it evident that the discursive and methodological path proposed by the artist is based on ethnographic processes recently used in certain artistic practices – such as the news coverage type *personal interview and documented field-work* – as the best-adjusted and incisive way to start studying daily life in the dismantled factory space. In other words, A reactivates the possibility of collective experience, as a gesture to capture the *memory* through the incorporation of usually non-artistic processes of socialization. Taking advantage of the situation, she simulates a journalistic documentary to involve and interpolate the ex-factory workers that are still alive. In conclusion; she gives us a sequence of multiple sounds of voices and testimonies, taking the opportunity to collaborate in an effective and innovative way with the local community, to unveil *non-official* stories in a Museum institution, where, as Alexandra mentions " the social and political analysis of that period is completely absent" (9).

In this regard, Alexandra do Carmo simultaneously creates a *spatial environment* (the artistic studio is converted into a journalistic one and/or vice versa) and an event (the interview), positioning herself as a *secondary actress* within an almost theatrical mechanism. The *topos* of the performance is deliberately invited. But not without a peculiar *but*, a fundamental aspect to read one of the semantic layers of her intervention. The interviewee actually turns into the central target, the artist being just the *initiator* (just like a psychologist who mostly listens, asking only occasional questions…) It is the interviewee that speaks. It is his/her statement that matters. It is the collection of memories and world living experiences that one must capture from the conversation… We can then affirm that, through a first person narrative, Alexandra resuscitates and articulates a *collective sharing of the individual experience* about the history of the *place* (distant echoes from the ancestral tradition handed down orally).

The anthropological drive that is framed here can be explained operationally: <1> in terms of object, by taking culture as its object and concern <2> in terms of method, because it is a research-study In the form of *field-work adapted* to a local live community through a series of programmed and documented questionnaires - interviews (10), <3> *in terms of goals*, for being essentially a *contextual* work, the research object of which is precisely the tension between the present and past of a *particular local* as the stage for social, historical and life-experience representations, assuming it's relational characterization with the different eras and scenarios and with the representations and institutionalized ideals (11).

Deep down, we believe that it is acceptable to say that Alexandra do Carmo contrasts the fossilized remains of the Museu da Polvora Negra with *immaterialness of the place* (12). Broken diffused pieces, placed haphazardly, a limbo that calls out to be decoded, documented, composed and edited…. It is thus less at home in the *site-specific*, as an intervention specifically conceived for the concrete physicality of the place – essentially understood as an architecturally *formal* space, *phenomenologically* circumscribed, born of minimalism, and more at home within the more recent notion of *place-specific* as an intervention aimed at thematization and its impact on a certain socio-cultural context of a *locale* (13).

When the institutional critique goes beyond the art museum

Here we will also have to talk about another recent genealogy, given the fact that Alexandra do Carmo's project clearly classifies itself (in a curious integrated way) as an *institutional critique that extends beyond the art museum* (14).

Mankind's experiences in spaces inhabited by them are definitely put away by the official history that is usually presented. The Museu da Polvora Negra, a building inside a dismantled industrial site, proclaims and simply "*eternalizes the memory of the work in the factory*" (15), through a "*documentation of the working systems*" preserving and presenting the factory as a museum through a small number of photo-documents of a period, a reproduction of the original architectural plans drawn up by the first engineers, and the presentation of static, polished and shiny fossilized objects (looking like they have never been used before) just like the glass-fronted cases that protect them from the dust and clumsy hands. The displays are formally positioned amongst the displaced furniture with identifying plaques containing taxonomical definitions with their typical abstract classification system.

Alexandra proposes something different. She carries out a mnemonic research, *another one* in order to dismiss the focus on the *actual space* – a "*preserved ruin*", the product of a frozen chain within a clutter of several historical moments in time, properly dated, and therefore out of a *temporal continuum* which defines the flux of *life*. This shows that the search for the *history of the place* can be extended to the fixation and/or construction of an individual *memory*.

The way of working being proposed here, formalized in terms of an entertaining pedagogical rebellion, without losing its corrosive effectiveness – certainly seems to challenge what is usually done inside a Museum Institution. We experienced it. We entered the *Museu da Pólvora Negra* and saw the *object* (the Museum piece), exhibited as a catalyst, evoking essentially generic, virtual and conjectural experiences. So, in order to understand the mnemonic dimension of the place, Alexandra does not satisfy herself with passively contemplating it. She transforms the common requirements of a passive apparatus for observing museum artifacts into an initiative of creative interaction involving the real *protagonists* (the former Fábrica da Pólvora workers that are still alive). In other words, Alexandra deconstructs the *auto-centrality of the object* in search of an *investigation of human activities*, of particular experiences, of *petit histoires*, of repeated formulae and daily dynamics, of recurrent behavior, of conduct and social codes, of normative rules guiding the working systems, its functional idiosyncratic paradigms.

In conclusion, Alexandra shows how private and experimental memory is negligibly erased by the state according to an installed hegemony and a prescribed system, truly impersonal and abstract (16). In other words, she contrasts (*material*) monumentalized history with (*immaterial*) precarious domestic history, which allows her to traverse several different temporalities – idiosyncratic and conjunctural, dissident and normative, private and collective...

The ambiguity of the Performance and of the Happening as anti-spectacle – The passive 'interaction' of the visitor as a symbolic value

As was mentioned before, Alexandra do Carmo works through a direct confrontation with the public and social space. For that she chose to work in a certain context within a *locale*, a spectacle consisting of an allegorical theater of mnemonic projections and historicized reflections.

Plus: what seems at first to be a strange paradox immediately takes place through the construction of an image and a scenario as props for the show (I can't reach the place of the interview, I pretend to be a movie spectator or in the comfort of my home couch as a TV-spectator of an *event* happening in a place that is strange to me…). When one appropriates protocol in this way, then one can focus on the dichotomy spectacle vs. anti-spectacle - the clear fragmentation between the stage and the audience (17)– in order to do a performance and/or a happening that, by definition, supposedly should integrate the visitors or turn them into the subject-protagonists of the event (18).

Finally, Alexandra is corrosive and extremely sharp. She shows the collapsing frontier between *performer* and audience by means of a wall that separates them, but which is *symbolically reversed*.

At first we are immediately tempted to attribute Alexandra's project to the recent *topos* of *relational aesthetics* (19) proposed by Nicolas Bourriaud, when the artist adopts one of the nuclear premises of such typification, presenting herself as sensitive to the *contingencies* of the environment/context and of the audience in the name of a supposedly *community intersubjective encounter*; therefore, no longer based on the modernist paradigm of the personal relation between the viewer and the work of art. But, as in the Thomas Hirschhorn *Bataille Monument* (2002) project conceived for *Documenta XI* (20), *here* the visitor's *direct participation* is not required. The visitor is asked only to be a thoughtful visitor acting as an *independent* subject *distant* enough to formulate a *point of view*, based on the fact that he/she has been asked to take a critical position regarding both questions raised: <1> the closeness of the *studio*, as a topos of creation, in the *private* sphere; and <2> the institutional and official *construction of the memory* of the place based on a de-personalized presentation of glassed in remains, as if nothing else exists beyond *the generic reality of abstract classifications(?)* .

In relation to this aspect, Alexandra separates herself from the Borriaud relational aesthetics paradigm – which, as we saw (see note 16), sponsored the literal and direct participation of the visitor as a *micro-topic* production of "*inter-subjective relations*" through the creation of *inte-ractive communicable experiments*, to instead become closer to Bishop's (21) alternative notion of "relational antagonism", in order to define some recently presented works – such as Thomas Hirchorn's and Santiago Serra's – where the literal and direct participation gives way to the alrea-dy mentioned *reflective* solicitation, this way opposing itself to a false *democratic participation* promoted by Bourriaud in critical studies and led by Tiravanija in the artistic practice field – both naively immersed in a blind belief in the harmonious and idyllic scenario of the *participatory community communication* united through *identification* based on *common interests and/or ex-periences* (22).

More than anything else, between the inside and the outside of the event, Alexandra prefers to create a deliberate tension between the *participant* (artist and interviewee) and the *non-parti-cipant* (spectator/visitor). In corroborating Bishop's paradigm (already negatively seen in Saltz), she takes to the last consequences the forever unavoidable *exclusiveness* (23) of any *micro-topos* in the contemporary art context, due to the inherent mental, political, social and economical barriers. A therefore operates in an ironically reverse way: she critically amplifies a reality built of barriers, both visible and invisible, existing endemically between insiders and outsiders...
We can risk defending that Alexandra's appropriation of the pre-existent wall - the obstruction - had an almost scenario-like intention, like in some of Santiago Serra's (24) works, Alexandra's performance turns into a hyperbolic expression of the existing frontiers in both the social and aes-thetic domain. Having said this, we are in the presence of a homology between the *non-access of the particular* to the '*official history*' - which Alexandra denounces - and the *non-participation* of the *visiting public* in the *watched 'event'* – which the artist uses as a metaphor for the former.

The phenomenological and perceptive approach of the spectator: the tension between mediation and pure presence

The final result in the photos at the entrance of the improvised studio, welcoming the visitor, brings the viewer into a contingent state because of his/her own action of arriving or leaving the place. They are a show mechanism (as if they were publicity tabloids), they also work as a repository for clues (or indicators) to the events to come: the chain of interviews in the presence of an audience.

In relation to this, one should mention that this kind of spectator involvement is also rarely used: only the most courageous (25), curious and persistent (or simply lucky) find a half-hidden cinema balcony on the small ramp descending to the interview space, circumscribed as it is by a wall that blocks physical access but not visual access.

Here Alexandra uses the *instantaneous* character of the media through a closed video circuit (camera-monitor simultaneous transmission). This produces a 'mirror effect' as a process of displacing the captured object into a virtual place, announcing its future image: an image-document of the event anticipates (affirms) its *obsolescence from the present* (a transient nausea typical of life's duration) and immediately turns it into a *registered/recorded* (26) past. Above all, it is a gesture that *objectifies* the statements captured by the artist *in loco* as well as in real time by showing live images of the real space, emphasizing the tension between the corporeal (physical) presence and technological mediation (27).

Basically, the artist literally transforms the visitor into a theater *spectator* (28). Through the act of seeing, the *relational vision* disputed (between the live event and it's panoply of instruments of mediation (29)) turns him/her into a *performative and thoughtful* spectator (What do I see? What is the difference between the event and its instant record?). At the same time, a spatial dislocation takes place (What should I look at, the image or the person?) to evoke the i*mpossibility* of pure presence. In other words, we can interpret this aspect as *a gesture to deconstruct a neutral, common and overcome regime of mediation*. Our perception challenges the immediate (and symbolic) presence of the past moment, the moment experienced, thus proposing (forging) a perceptual (or phenomenological) (30) conscience already contaminated by its own meaning and historical record as a probatory document of the Barthesian (31) "*Has been*". (We the spectators are like the interviewees, simultaneously present and past, presence and mediation).

The social role of the artist

The transformation of the artist's role (especially as project orchestrator), already present in some of the neo-vanguard proposals, with emphasis on *performance and happening*, is in this case updated with the recent *topos* of 'artist as curator'. In this particular case, the goal is to expand its field of action in relation to the socio-cultural reality, promoting a strong entertainment (and even pedagogical) aspect associated with the event.

Alexandra do Carmo seems to hereby dissolve the frontiers established between social intervention and artistic practice. As an artist acquires an effective and peculiar role in society: in this particular case, it operates as an interface between people (between themselves, the ex-factory workers and the visitors of the event) and temporalities (*present, past and different memories*). So, the memory of the place is treated as a group of personal narratives, brought to life by an agent, who, after moulding it (through the editing process) will turn them into a sparkling magma, a potentially historical document, perhaps even deserving a place in the institutional archives.

This questioning process is accompanied by obvious efforts to create areas of agreement and conviviality between people, leading to the end of loneliness, the death of the 'celibate' (whose controversial figure was based on the romanticized image of the misunderstood and anti-social artist), bringing to life certain issues stemming from the Fluxus and "happening" lineage practices.

The lineage of this paradigm, enabling the artist to become a *social-being*, erases the classical dialectic between the *lonely* time when the artist creates and the *social encounter* where he/she offers a new reality to others. If we pursue this line of interpretation to its last consequences, we may be able to detect some echoes of a utopic abolition of the exceptional artist disintegrating any kind of subjective experience (for example, the same situation of the *aesthetic operator* by Ernesto de Sousa in the seventies) and of the demolition of the artist as a cult figure when acting as connecting agent (32).

We are after all looking at an *anti-spectacle* as an apparatus within our personal adventure. What conclusions can we draw from this? <1> The explicit demonstration that the time of creation and the *time of perception/aesthetic reception* are not necessarily incompatible. <2> That the diagnosis of such a commonly accepted malevolence - that of the *incommunicability of contemporary art*- can see its own possible cure in an interrogatory attitude by opposition to an affirmative one, open and locative in relation to the limitation and closeness of the private creation.

Re-visiting the avant-garde of the sixties and seventies: blending art and life

It is as a helpful tool that we bring in the Fluxus movement, in order to enter into the panoply of questions and symbolical layers that Alexandra do Carmo's intervention contains and evokes. This is understandable, since the artist incorporates a series of procedures already very much present in the Fluxus movement and mostly practiced in certain post-conceptualist movements, which, in a succinct way are based on: <1> the interaction and participation of the viewer (33) and <2> a somewhat "institution critique" approach as a *practice of unveiling the functional mechanisms of the presentation and legitimation of art* (34).

But other languages and procedures are part of a revalidation exercise that we would like to do in relation to this: succinctly, and therefore oversimplified; *the dematerialization of the art object, the end of the artistic genre and it's media, the critique of originality, the relation between art and life* (again, exhaustively researched by the Fluxus movement), also mark Alexandra do Carmo's parameters of debate and experiment.

It is precisely this last aspect, which has to do with tightening the boundaries between art and life, which is behind the theme of the Studio portrayed by Alexandra do Carmo. It is not the cliché-representation of the painter's pathos within its creative act with a brush in one hand and the palette in the other, but the perfect excuse to start a process of rethinking a group of boundaries that classically still prevail today (or have reappeared) within the actions (procedures) and discourses of contemporary art: it is between the private and the public space still implied by the common notion of the <studio>; between the process of creation and its institutional presentation as a circumscribed expository mechanism; between the individual, self-promotional closed signature circle and the openness to a collective dimension; between the artistic creation and the curatorial; between presence (happening *in loco*) and document (its record); between the historical time (memory of the past) and actual present.

However, to limit the Steam Shop (or the painter's studio) event to a mere replica/consequence of the avant-garde of the sixties and seventies (or more precisely from the fluxus movement and its later subsidiaries) is to ultimately misunderstand it. This is because today, art paths of experimentation/experiment are continuously enlightened by the paths of rupture and history that precede them. New projects appropriate previous ones, revisiting them critically, far from their pretensions and vanguard context.

It is time to evaluate if Alexandra do Carmo's project is anachronistic (or even lethargic) within the context(s) of most innovative artistic practice paradigm(s) of our times. One has only to schematically enumerate the complex, interwoven actions involved to realise that what's at stake is definitely contemporary and requisite: <1> *the artistic residency* as an 'interactive' (35) platform of discussion, <2> the *ambiguity* of the artistic curatorial endeavor; between the artist-as-curator and the figure curator-as-artist (36); <3> the *place-specific* as a local socio-cultural approach; <4> the deconstruction of the private studio *topos* to promote the role of the artist as a *social agent, serving as a communication interface between the protagonists and the public*; <5> the dissolution of the segmented protocol relation between production and aesthetic reception; <6> the anthropological approach to memory as an *adapted field work* through documented interviews; <7>The creation of a memory of the place through a more human/personal articulation between the *private history* and it's physical, spatial *context*; <8> the new re-conceptualization of the *white cube* as a model to represent contemporary art, formalized as "s*tudio and/or experimental laboratory*; <9> The presentation of a practice strategically conceived to promote visitor's *reflective thinking* based on an *exterior dissociation* as a condition for an *independent and critica*l position as proposed by Bishop's "relational antagonism". All this makes her intervention "a new experiment" of extreme pertinence broadly positioned within an aesthetic trend already labelled by several authors as encompassing a new vanguard (37).

The forgotten documentary by the official history

Second paradox: Alexandra do Carmo uses technologies of recording and reproducing in order to preserve a *memory* kept in document form. However, this one will not be available to be seen by the general public. In a way, the documentary only exists in a virtual state. Thus another symbolism appears: it is deliberately impossible to convert this memory into an object that may be *possessed* (private and susceptible to being sold) by a museum or a collector.

Conceptualism is clearly evoked: Alexandra does not present the result of the protocol-based investigation done from the usual standpoint of edited documentaries (a monitor in some gallery corner, or at the exhibit hall of the Museu da Polvora Negra). She prefers to show and share the process of the making, which immediately throws us back to the topos of *process art* (38) premises (at the same time opening up the creation process to the viewer's participation, to allow him/her to follow it unfolding *in situ* and in real time).

In other words, it is *an ephemeral documentary*, a series of interviews in the same place for the period of a month, which only existed at a place in time and inside the memory of the ones that were present. After being edited, it will be given away to a local community center (a social centre frequented by some of the ex factory workers that were approached by the artist at the time of this initiative). The documentary therefore works as an *ephemeral gift*, *a precarious present*, with a somewhat micro-utopian dimension, somehow innocuous (excuse the paradox!) (39) and an *archival impulse* (already compromised by its very origin).

Ultimately we should ask ourselves which kind of symbolic value we can extract from here. We know that the 'living memory'will be retained by the fundamental and real project protagonists. We can therefore expect a proclaimed latent obsolescence, due to the inexorable physical degradation of the technological media used. This *documented memory* has already begun its natural disappearance, like a parchment carelessly exposed to sun or rain. One has to preserve it, in order to build *another time* (that we idyllically call 'eternity') within the one which rarely escapes voracity…

Bruno Marques
Independent curator and grant award investigator by FTC
(doctor degree in Contemporary Art History at FCSH, UNL)

[Graphic Design: Diana Oliveira]

(1) Although, as Cristiana Mazzucchelli mentions (in " Arte Como Projecto", June 2005; source: Fórum Permanente – Padrões aos Pedaços – First Paço das Artes International Simposium, available on-line in http//www.rizome.net/) " Today, at the beginning of the new millennium, such practices seem to be central within the mainstream of contemporary art, still they have been censored by some of the most important cultural institutions and critics all over the world. Some common characteristics to this kind of practices are the connection between artist and public (art through the social), The close relationship of the artist with a specific audience (art as an event), the formation of collectives and the use of non-artistic methods as a way of political resistance."

(2) See Cristiana Mazzucchelli mentions (in " Arte Como Projecto", June 2005; source: Fórum Permanente – Padrões aos Pedaços – First Paço das Artes International Simposium, available on-line in http//www.rizome.net/) " Within Theory, what emerges from the few attempts from curators and critics to systemize those practices is the variety of similar term that would serve this apparently new model;: situational art (Doherty), relational art (Borriaud), reciprocal ready made (Wright), Paradigm of the laboratory (Obrist), etc.
However, the fighting for the notion of 'new model to a net society' usually copy concepts and ideas present in the art world at least since the sixties"
More recently, also Claire Bishop (In the Social turn: Collaborations and its Discontents – Artforum, February 2006), mentions the variety and great extension of the terminology behind an innovative artistic practice, truly devoted to collaboration in the social sphere: "*This expanded field of relational practices currently goes by a variety of names: socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based, or collaborative art. These practices are less interested in a relational aesthetic than in the creative rewards of collaborative activity—whether in the form of working with preexisting communities or establishing one's own interdisciplinary network*"

(3) In this precise context, as we will later develop, Alexandra do Carmo normalized field of the studio definitely acquires a social form capable of producing human positive relations associated with the creation of memory giving the project a political and emancipatory side.

(4) It is a conscient and deliberate intention, "to examine the sustainability and strength of a contemporary practice of social engagement." (taken from the curatorial proposal".

(5) Besides Alexandra do Carmo the following artists participate in the event: Andrea Creutz (Dinamarca), David Lowe (EUA), Frederica Bastide Duarte (Portugal), Gabriela Albergaria (Portugal), John Hawke/Sancho Silva (EUA/Portugal), John Durmmett (Inglaterra), Judite dos Santos (EUA-Portugal), Sérgio Taborda (Portugal), Thierry Simões (Portugal).

(6) See Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relation Aesthetics", in *October*, n.º 110, 2004, p. 51 e note 1, where the author in relation to this recent paradigm, briefly evaluates, naming a series of European events, dated from 2000/1, which borrow the notion of "studio" or "*experimental laboratory*" as a starting point to "*re-conceptualize the white cube as a model to represent contemporary art*"
Among the curators that the author mentions (Maria Lind, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Barbara van der Linden, Hou Hanru), is Nicolas Bourriaud, who, in relation to Palays de Tokyo says that "We want a sort of a transdiciplinar Kunstverein – more laboratory than museum". (in "Publics Relations: Bennett Simpson Talks with Nicolas Bourriaud, *Artforum* [April 2001], p. 48).
Also some artists adopt this new curatorial and artistic orientations, extremely well explained by Liam Gillick, elaborating on his individual exhibition at Arnolfini, in Bristol, mentions that the event was "a laboratory or a workshop where it there was an opportunity to test some ideas all together, to exercise a critical comparative and relational process." (Gillick in *Liam Gillick: Renovation Filler: Recent Past and Near Future* [Bristol, Arnolfini, 2000], p. 16.).

(7) The spaces were permanently open to the public even when the artists were not there. There was some temporary occupations of the studios. During the day, for example, an intervention of an anonymous person was registered at Frederica Bastide Duarte. Someone rearranged Andrea Creutz's studio.. and deserving to be mentioned is the reaction occurred in relation the use of red carnations (Portuguese revolution flowers) inside Alexandra do Carmo studio; a communist party symbol drawing.

(8) Clearly an allusion to Harald Szeemann's paradigmatic premises which, in order to justify the exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*, em Berna, em 1969, releases the following manifesto: "*[…]it is perfectly understandable the desire of exploding the international art triangle: studio-gallery-museum.*" Continuing in the sense that "*In today's art, the main theme is not the realization, the space arrangement, it is rather the activity of the human being, the artist, which explains the title of the exhibition (phrase it is not a slogan). It is the first time that the intrinsic attitude of the artist is being shown, in such a precise way, like a work of art […] the artists of this exhibition are not object makers, on the contrary they search to avoid them, this way expanding it's levels of meaning in order to reach the essential beyond the object, to constitute the situation. Still they aim to turn the artistic process visible in the final*

product of the 'exhibition'. '(Harald Szeemann, "*Quand les Attitudes Deviennent Forme*", in *Écrire les Expositions*, La Lettre Volée, Bruxels, 1996, p. 24).

(9) phrase taken from the email correspondence with the artist in November 2006.

(10) Although with some distance, it is close to the topos of the descriptive cultural anthropology or ethnography, which is primarily based, among other procedures, in the collection of cultural elements in relation to a human group, it's life style, organization, technology, economy, etc.

(11) Basically, it is being operatively assumed as work upon *what men is as a social an active being*. One can sense an interpretative mode, inviting the visitor to analyse the situation by him/herself; unveiling the essence of a society or group, exposing it's conduct, it's way of living and acting and the basic relationships defining it's existence and it's particular characteristics.

(12) A (critical) dialectic presented through the *sublimation of the memory (still) alive* and the *de-sublimation of the physical artefacts* (inanimated forever) making us think about the temporal dimension of memory through a place that was mysteriously (not to say neglect) kept out of the institutional sphere, what we usually now as 'patrimony'.

(13) Alexandra do Carmo's work is more engaged with its context rather than the place (as specific physical space and topologically localized). Alexandra uses the specificities of the place/local only to evoqe its forgotten ghosts, living in those walls, in between spaces that were abandoned and left without roof with the 72 explosion, now desperately looking for an opportunity to speak up. The place (as concrete physical space), is the interface through which(throughout) is possible to bring apparently indiscoverable and thought as irrecoverable memories.

(14) See Hal foster, The Return of the real - The MIT Press (an OCTOBER book): Cambridge, Massachusetts / London, England, 1996 (cap. 6, "The Artist as Ethnographer", pp. 171-203); e Hal Foster, "1992", in *Art since 1900. Modernism, Anti-modernism, Postmodernism* - New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004, pp. 624-629, where the author elaborates on Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* presentation in Baltimore, paradigmatic moment where "*the institutional critique goes beyond the art museum*", and an "*anthropological model of the artistic project based in* ?" is adapted by artists such as Renée Green and Mark Dion.

(15) Phrases taken after seeing the film/documentary passing at Museu da Pólvora Negra.

(16) Basically, it frames the institution within an alternative discourse in order to denounce the endless repression of the particular in favor of the function of abstracting history. Hegemonic passification instituted as a prescribed blind *rule*. Instead Alexandra do Carmo, shows that the building (Fábrica da Pólvora) is not only an abstract space but it is also place filed with memories where the local and daily life can be relived through reenacting a panoply of singularities, stories and records of histories which would be completely lost if not rescued by her.

(17) The spectacularization of the event is affirmed through the physical division/segmentation/demarcation of the spaces, which is constituted by a low wall, part of another wall and part of the destroyed structures at the time of the 1972 Fábrica da Pólvora explosion.

(18) Here I mention the barrier that deliberately and intentionally felt apart according to the original definition, coming from Allan Kaprow and Fluxus movement of the beginning of the 60's of the XX century, which deliberately erased the stage and the ideal scenario as it was used in the conventional characterization.

(19) The term that we are here translating as " *estética relacional*" (in original/French '*Esthétique relationelle*'; English translation '*Relational Aesthetics*') is theorized by Bourriaud in Relation Aesthetics. – Dijon: Les Presses du Réal, 2002[1998]. Pretends to define and characterize a new generation of artists whose practices became relevant during the first years of the XX century 90's in Europe (having paradigmatically started with Rirkrit Tiravanija and Liam Gillick) because of the use as a theory base "*the kingdom of human interactions and of it's social contexts*" (p.17) in order to promote ' *inter-subjective encounters*' (literal or potencial) in which *sense is collectively elaborated* (p.18), in opposition to what usually happens in the privatized space of individual consumption according to the modernist vision of *autonomy of the work of art* (portable and discrete, therefore transcending it's presentation context). The ultimate goal intends to frame the observer within a social entity with the intention of creating a *community*, even a temporary or utopian one.

(20) See Bishop, "Antagonism and Relation Aesthetics", in *October*, n.º 110, 2004, p. 76.

(21) See Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", in *October*, n.º 110, 2004, p. 77.

(22) Bishop ("Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", in *October*, n.° 110, 2004, p. 65) mentions Rosalyn Deutsche (in *Evictions*, [without more bibliographic references]) to opposes Bourriaud's *democratic* optimism - *enclosed in a participatory community (harmonious and united), based in an identification via common experiences or interests*– exactly like Deutsche argues that the public sphere remains democratic " only insofar as its naturalized exclusions are taken into account and made open to contestation: " Conflict, division, and instability, then, do not ruin the democratic public sphere; they are conditions of its existence". According to Bishop, Deutsche is subsidiary of the book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* published in 1985 (London: Verso) off Lacan and Mouffe - one of the first published works to reconsider leftist political theory through the lens of post-structuralism. Using the Lacanian understanding of subjectivity as split and decentered, one of the first ideas to emerge of the book mentioned above is the concept of antagonism. One of the nuclear thesis is based on the assumption that a fully functioning democratic society is not one in which all antagonisms have disappeared, but one in which new political frontiers are constantly being drawn and brought into debate. In other words, taken from Lacan and Mouffe, Bishop says that " *a democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are sustained, not erased.*" Basically, concludes the author that *"Without antagonism there is only the imposed consensus of authoritarian order – a total suppression of debate and discussion, which is inimical to democracy."* A position also shared by Luiz Sérgio de Oliveira, in "Dialogic art practices in collaboration with the communities: the singularities of *community-based projects of* insite_05" (available on-line in http//www.rizoma.net; original source www.unifacs.br/anpap), in the sense that mentions that: *"the conventional models and common sense tend to designate the community as a group of people brought together by common interests, as ' the desire of beings that are truly honest to each other, mutual understanding relationships, and social comfort'* [according to Iris Marrion Young's social feminist theory, from Miwon Kwon's *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity.* - Cambridge, Mass: The Mit Press, 2002, p. 149 *invariably pointing to an approximation of identical and to the establishment of resemblance units, for the exclusion of difference,* seeming to unknow the fast process of deconstruction and re-construction of identities in post-modern times, where to frieze an individual identity or a community one will only be possible through a *violent process of exclusion which eliminates other possibilities; denser and complex forms of identity."*

(23) In relation to this question, see the way Saltz (in "A Short History of Rirkrit Tiravanija", p. 106, cit. p. Bishop, op. cit. , p. 68) questions the optimism and the vision of Tiravanija's project with the intervention of "Untitled (Tomorrow is a Another Day)" from 2004, which pretended to transform the exhibition space into an "a kind of 'asylum' for everyone", when mentioning that "Theoretically anyone can come in [to an art gallery]" although in practical terms, as Bishop's *"somehow the art world seems to secrete an envisible enzyme that repels outsiders".*

(24) Apropriating what is mentioned and the examples given by Bishop ("Antagonism and Relation Aesthetics", in *October*, n.° 110, 2004, p. 78, nota 66), the blockage or the non physical access to circumbscribed spaces is a recurrent motive in Santiago Sierra's work: see the paradigmatic cases of *68 People Paid to Block the Entrace to Pusan's Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea (2000)* ou *465 Paid to Satnd in a Room at the Museo Rufino Tamaya, Mexico City (1999).*

(25) Alexandra tests the visitors curiosity and pre-disposition, because only the most curious and persistent one finds the audience at the back of the improvised studio. Only the most naughty one seats among an audience without a direct invitation.

(26) The video has also an image arquival of the experience of history, an index of present past, a repositoty of documented information.

(27) We find ourselves placed simultaneously inside the mechanism of the interview and twice on the outside (both because of the video mediation and our place in the audience). We see on the same level the shared event of an unique moment (between the artist and the public), the documented image of a previous but similar interview (taking place) and the real time image on the tv monitor: in other words, <I see my presence being projected on the object of my sight captured from a different angle, and immediately I guess that I will be converted into a photo, in a disturbing inversion of places – the camera also captures my presence within the audience and the photoshop photo with exsuberant colors shows themanipulated/fabricated caracter of the image, and, this way the (?) abyss between experienced event in loco and its reproduced/documented image.

(28) However, to the visitor it is being ofered a fictional ambiguos role instead of a real activity or efective intervention: spectator of a non-spectacle.In other words, in this composed scenario there isn't a literal interaction, but a fictional/ virtual role that the spectator chooses to participate or not, and that is based on mere observation and audition in a passive position facing an event circumbscribed to an interview image.

(29) The removal of a mediatic specificity (by its complementary and tensional use) and the inclusion of all its perceptional 'realities' into the aesthetic sphere, provoques the inevitable tension between the event and its documentation.

Actions coming together, informing each other, a desire of globalization (through the cubist point of view, multi-pective or multi-dimensional) of the this phenomenon being reinforced and at the same time turning against itself. A tention between the different dimensions is being questioned...

(30) A less phenomenological (and/or corporeal) and more psicological experience happens – a tension and auto-reflexive activity: during the event the spectator become conscient of him/herself as spectator.

(31) See Roland Barthes, Câmara Lucida (A Câmara Clara. - Lisboa: Edições 70, 1998 (1980), "*Atestando que o objecto foi real, ela leva sub-repticiamente a pensar que ele está vivo, devido a essa armadilha que nos faz atribuir ao Real um valor absolutamente superior, como que eterno. Mas, deslocando esse real para o passado («isso foi»), ela sugere que ele está morto.*" (p. 112); "*A Fotografia não diz (forçosamente)* aquilo que já não é, *mas apenas e de certeza aquilo que foi.*" (p. 120)
that, in relation to photography, mentions: Testefying that the object was real, she...

(32) Alexandra do Carmo's intervention shape is close to a jornalistic documentary enterprise or factual narrative (both belonging to the vast panoply typical of the Fluxus movement processes). The artist presents herself like someone that does not detain a special skills or a talent, but an *examplar agent of a collective participation* when promoting an event (coincidental to its documented record) first as comunicative generator of personal memory testemonies, then, as a promoter of debate between artists and public. We detect here again subterranean ressonancies coming from the Fluxus movement, by the role given to the artist as an *exceptional specialist with cognitive and perceptive habilities*. At this point we should mention. In fact Alexandra postulates an alternative comunicational path, with no doubt based on the *activity of collaborating* with the invited artists (as a curator) and on the *partiucipatory intervention* with people of the place (as an artist), but without "*sacrificing authorship*", proclaimed by the recent fundamentalism of social engagement decisivly defending in first place ethics in favor of aesthetics. In a condensed way, we are referering here to curators and recent authors such as Grandt H. Kester and Maria Lind, and collective artistic projects as for example, Oda Projesi (working since 1997, in a turkish "*room project*" interactive), among others mentioned by Claire Bishop in her recent article *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontentes. - Artforum*, Fevereiro 2006. In this essay Bishop points to several recent alternative proposals – according to the author, critically more relevant than the ethical imperative paradigm mentioned above- where it is not the evangelical and well intentioned colective leveled (done through the disapearance of any kind of hierarquic role in terms of the aesthetic process and creative decision), but a place to problematize perceptivity, culture and society (and why not aesthetics!) like taking the participant to exaustion during the required task (Phil Collins), the excruciating mounted situations in order to amplify the complexity of comunicationive opacity (Artur Zmijewski), subjecting groups of people to the most painfull event of profound inaction, or "passive activism", and bordness (Carsten Holler), and its contact with the ambiguity of roles, the tension between representation and reality or historical re-enactment and aesthetic diversion (Jeremy Deller), as incisive ways of rethinking some of the most susceptible social themes being discussed today (such as globalization, andalienating repetition given by mass media and the critical adoption of squemes and formulas to build reality, imposed by invisible and omnipresent forces of contemporary society). Basically, all the artists mentioned above are seen as ethically less 'correct' (according to the severe and inflexible *respect for the 'other'*) but with no doubt semanticly sharper, and also in terms of the the critical impact of their experiences and definetly more capable within the rethinking of contemporary aesthetic squems informing them, this way alowing aesthetics and social/political to colapse instead of maintaining them under the *ethical imperative*, contrarily to those hiding under the untouchable 'politicaly correct', and the "socially well intended" (using Bishop's caricature; under the flag of the "christian" *self-sacrifice*), where invariably reigns a consensual collaboration regime, definitly more esterile in relation to debate and critical discussion.
Concluding, Bishop's position is based in Jaques Rancière's assumption that today's art regime, is predicated precisely on a confusion between art's *autonomy* (its position at one remove from instrumental rationality) and heteronomy (its blurring of art and life), witch also defines it; in other words, art is, quoting the French philosopher, the ability to think contradiction, is simultaneously *autonomous* and *inextricably* bound to the promise of a better world to come.

(33) One should convoke as well the openness to the public used by some of the neo-Dada neo-avant-garde; Happenings, Fluxus, performance in the 70's and Joseph Beuys's " everybody is an artist" .

(34) In a time when the institution is being gradually converted into the place for the <institutional critique> par excellence, this one presents itself as totally and peacefully absorbed, and even ironically legitimized within its own frame when taken as a irreducible and self-legitimized reference, Alexandra seems to be able open some fissures in the both invisible and elastic thread, where ambiguity reverses itself in order to reach a renewed purpose.

(35) The discursive mode and the space of socialization was twice fruitful: In terms of the conviviality between the invited artists (through one month residency) and openness to discussion artists/public, like a guided tour, finishing with a proposed challenge by Alexandra do Carmo inside her the audience space scenario; to build a platform for discussion

and interactive debate.

(36) The ambiguity is obvious and deliberate: Where does the artist finishes and the curator starts and vive-versa? Conceptually, Alexandra do Carmo's intervention and the curatorial proposal under the semantic point of view are inseparable. Which is to say, we can consider that producing an exhibition, within the paradigm where we are historically situated, can be the equivalent to the production of a *work of art*: not private anymore, but collective (and in collaboration) as conception and creation of an event to be appreciated in terms of its critical effect in all its more generic theoretically consequences/implications. One should emphasize here the existing narrow articulation between the artistic conception in terms of *projects* and projects done in terms of *localized discourses*.

(37) Luiz Sérgio de Oliveira, in "Dialogic art practices in collaboration with the communities: the singularities of *community-based projects of inSite05"* (available on-line in http//www.rizoma.net; original source www.unifacs.br/ anpap), quoting Nicolas Bourriaud's Relation Aesthetics. – Dijon:Les Presses du Réal, 2002 [1998], mentions, in relation to the event *inSite-05* (happened near the border between Mexico and the United States, from the cities of San Diego and Tijuana) that " The insistence of the inSite-05 curatorial in establishing connections with the communities would reveal the desire of creating a show according to collaboration and co-participation practices, which from some time now have been emphasized in public art production, *they are a product of 'what was called avant-guard' and that are reappearing in contemporary art production 'retired due to different philosophical, cultural and social assumptions, […] proposing new receptive, experimental, critical and participatory models'*, even when it is not being '*presented anymore as an event coming from an inevitable historical evolution.'*
More recently Claire Bishop (in *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontentes. - Artforum,* February 2006.) although with small differences, reiterates Bourriaud's statement mentioning that *"This mixed panorama of socially collaborative work arguably forms what avant-garde we have today: artists using social situations to produce dematerialized, antimarket, politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life."*

(38) One can predict a look into 'process art' formalized as such during the second half of the 60's of the XX century (by the hand of artists that rehabilitated Jackson Pollock, first with Robert Ryman in painting, then with Robert Morris, Robert Smithson and Richard Serra), as focusing in the creation process rather than the final result of the 'work', which deliberately and programmatically destabilizes the traditional dichotomies (and its lethargic hierarchy) between form and content and between means and ends.

(39) To Nicolas Bourriaud, there's a paradigmatic shift to a social mutation. In this respect, Bishop ("Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", in *October,* n.º 110, 2004, p.54) mentions, that, according to the author, "instead of a 'utopian ' agenda, today's artists seek only to find provisional solutions in the here and now; instead of trying to change their environment, artists are simply 'learning to inhabit the world in a better way '; instead of looking forward to a future utopia, this art sets up functioning 'microtopias ' in the present" (Bishop op. Quoting. P.54, quoting Nicolas Bourriaud, op. Quoting. P.13).