

RadioActive

Several points regarding the (radioactive) project and the reactions it produced.

I read the intention of this piece in a very simple way, I read it through the knowledge of the people who made it and through the context of their expanded practice. I also think there needs to be an answer to some arbitrary assumptions on the part of some respondents.

There is an expression in Spanish "pelar el cobre" to "reveal your copper". This is what Renee Gabri and Ayreen Anastas's piece has done to some of their respondents. The tacit "Cultural Bureau" has made its appearance in righteous moral stances such as: "these artists will never get another show in New York". The real Cultural Bureau is unnecessary; it is clear that Tom Ridge can rest on that front and delegate in peace. Yes, go ahead and make political work as long as it doesn't disrupt anyone or anything, as long as it is neutralized and safe. The art world is full of "political work", everyone knows that nowadays it sells to have a revolutionary edge, even The Gap, even bankers. So there is a subliminal message being broadcast here: don't cross the line, don't try to raise a real problematic, uncomfortable, dislikeable, imprecise but bloody real discussion about the climate of censorship in this country. Stay with the work that looks dangerous and which is completely drained of all its power to alarm. Godard once wrote a review on a film called PRAVDA and said "we discover that what was made here was a political film and not a film politically". "Political work" has become in many cases a genre; an operation such as this fiction, silly as it may seem at a first glance, is acting politically, creating thought around very difficult issues, assuming a risk, putting itself on the line, breaking a discourse that pretends that we are active in resisting the steady way in which all civil liberties are disappearing in the name of national security, when many of us are not taking the urgent stance that it demands.

If you think about it, even if the operation is not particularly gracious or innovative, what else could have been as effective in producing a discussion, an urgent discussion about censorship, about the kind of highly sophisticated strategies that might need to be deployed in a situation such as the one that is silently and securely installing itself in this country? And about the passivity in which the whole of America is entering an era of surveillance, (and more specifically, of acute self-surveillance)? The responses that claim that this alienates the art world are completely wrong from my point of view. The moment of a shock is the moment of an activation of thought, it is precisely the moment of de alienation. And the piece was successful in doing so. Another position, the one of the individuals who saw this as a strategy for career advancement is just the bluntest and most naïve way for someone to reveal their own hidden agendas (also, so what if it were true?S let me rephrase: "it reveals their guilt regarding their own secret agendas"). As a direct response to both responses stand the actions of the two artists who have clearly not been playing the

game of easy art world credits.

Fortunately for this situation then, the work was been made by two people who have proved over several years their commitment to creating a platform of serious, focused discussion. Their actions speak for themselves, they have been steadily forming a community through reading groups on critical world issues and have taken an increasingly active role in promoting serious analysis on urgent matters. So they are not pranksters nor "shepherds crying wolf" as some have named them resorting to antique moralities, but people who consider the passivity of a community that doesn't fully realize that the wolf is already here. And that the wolf doesn't have the form of a wolf, and that the contingent truth of all these matters, of all political positions, is only visible in the short circuits that actions such as these create. Not in liberal positions that are repeatedly spoken. This is, again where their politics lie. This is what speaks for them, the commitment to trying to create a real discussion, where we, the enlightened art world are no longer safe, on the side of those who are in the know. It is revealed to what degree we need to include ourselves, and this abstract notion - the "art world"- in the equation (nobody complains when the hoax is not on the art world, that, precisely, seems to be the taboo). In a certain sense we are deeper in the problem because of our spontaneous arrogance and righteousness, which has been duly expressed during the last two days. Nothing is more dangerous than assuming a common ground that doesn't need to be discussed, or assuming that there are clear cut oppressions that are objectively there for us to protest against; or truthful unmediated information on urgent affairs of the world; or a benign government that will perform a self examination after a protest or a signed petition, and redress its wrongdoings. This work revealed more than anything the desire for censorship that the art world has (as Lucas Ospina said), that is, the desire for an external oppressive force to fight against. But the reality is that the question about who is censoring now is far more complicated, and perhaps much more a matter of introspection. The closing of a gallery in Chelsea, the spontaneous reaction of all artists protesting in front of the gallery would have been perfect for everyone to come together in disgust in front of a despicable action of the state. But things are not that simple, unfortunately we're not in Salem anymore. Martha Rosler said it clearly today in her email "The sad truth is that at present we don't need official censorship. Our cultural institutions have learned to do it very well all by themselves"

If anything this work was very successful in revealing the need for all of us who have entered the internet world in the candid way that we have, without a full knowledge of its mechanisms, sources and codes, that there is a simple way to know who owns what domain, or where we're getting our information from, and who owns that information. The few people that did a little research on the matter, the ones who searched the name of the director of the cultural Bureau for example, where able to determine that the search produced zero results. Others went all the way to finding out who the domain owner was and saw the whole picture. I see this as a very important byproduct of the action.

The piece doesn't want to be genial nor beautiful nor clever, it is not the broadcast of "the War of the worlds", which by the way I'm sure no one would condemn today even if it brought real panic to millions. It clearly wants to trigger a discussion, for an issue, an extremely urgent issue to be brought to light. The artists have used the oldest strategy of all, the creation of a fiction that is set forth to reveal a truth. In this case what is revealed is the urgency of a reality that is in front of everyone's eyes (which is why the absurdity became believable).

Many have condemned them with the argument that there are enough real issues to be concerned with and that this has caused unjustified anxiety. As much as I respect the voices that have taken this stance, I do think the agitation is not at all unjustified and I also think that this community has not fully awoken to its new reality (as Shelly Silver wrote today), and that there are not many mechanisms left that would have been so effective in activating an energized conversation such as this one.

It is understandable to become enraged when being fooled, but maybe what follows is to try to understand the motives of an action such as this one. To position it by becoming aware of the context of the executors and to go to next level which may be to recognize that something was indeed triggered, and that the conversation that is taking place around this piece is precisely what was intended, and moreover that it is particular to it. I think the high moral grounds from where some of the responses were spoken are too similar to the high moral grounds of the department of Homeland Security. And that is really an uncomfortable thing to watch.

I stand by the notion that this work is that of two artists whose intention is to trigger a real, truly engaged conversation. That it springs from an intuition that is actually common to many of us; an intuition that says it has all gone too far already. The last point is perhaps that we need to wake up to the fact that there will not be a clumsy Cultural Bureau to fight in an epic battle of liberals against repressors; that effective resistance to censorship now is far more complicated.

External Links

- [16beavergroup.org]