

Rosa Casado

Abstractions of Reality

Interview by Cynthia Troup

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Recognising that you're currently inside - or amid - the creative process, can you speak about the background to Some Things Happen All at Once, and especially the over-arching ethic that has helped to generate this work?

I had the first idea for this work in February 2007. For the 2008 Festival Escena Contemporánea in Madrid, it was called *Agua(cero)s - Some Things Happen All at Once*. The director of that festival, Roberto Cerdá, had suggested to me that I make a piece of work about water, and I was thinking a lot about how we use water at home. Then I started to think that even if in my previous works I've been looking at possible ways of being in the world - at what is happening in the world in terms of consumption and migration and all those things that are quite difficult to relate to without feeling powerless - I have never thought about trying to make a piece based on a logic that was not following the logic of capitalism, in a way. Until then I hadn't thought about a piece that could be *sustainable*.

So, I was thinking, "OK, what if I try to make that? What if I try to create the energy, the electricity that I need to make this piece of work?" I started this conversation with Mike Brookes, with whom I've collaborated before, on *Las Sin Tierra - 7 Attempted Crossings of the Straits of Gibraltar* directed by Jill Greenhalgh and *Paradise 2 - The Incessant Sound of a Falling Tree*. The new project began in this way. Through working on the piece, we have been realising that it is quite easy to find solutions that are really sustainable. It's not about being right or wrong. It's just about making or creating the possibility of thinking in a different way, with the things we have already, and things that everybody can work out at home. Two texts have also been a basis for developing this realisation, *Critical Mass: How One Thing Leads to Another* by Phillip Ball (2004), and *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* by Buckminster Fuller (first published in 1963).

In the broadest terms you're addressing the global issue of the

human footprint, and the demand that awareness of this issue makes upon us in our daily lives; you're making a specific study of this in a new work for theatre. Am I right in inferring, then, that the ethical practice in life comes first?

It's the same thing for me. Or I try at least to become aware, try to see how I can practice awareness in my daily life and therefore in my artistic practice. Now it's becoming more visible in my artistic work. I think that *Some Things Happen All at Once* represents a step forward from the ethic of *Paradise 2*.

There was a sense in Paradise 2 that your commitment to the ethic of the work was left quite implicit; that hopefully the cumulative effect of the performance would provoke people to reflection. By comparison, Some Things Happen All at Once sounds more committed to an explicit discourse about the individual's contribution to creating or supporting a sustainable planet. Can you describe some of the ideas that you've been working with in relation to 'making the thinking explicit'?

I mentioned that the first idea was to create the energy to run the performance in real time; literally to create the energy to make the performance happen. The other important idea was to make the audience aware that we all have the power of transformation. Of course maybe audiences won't agree, won't think the same. So, *Some Things Happen All at Once* is reliant on what each different audience decides to do; the audiences can intervene in the work. In fact, the work depends on what they do, it is what they do.

Are you referring to specific practical interventions?

Yes. I am proposing that an audience enters the performance space where there will be an illuminated forest made of ice - a minia-

ture forest of 150 ice trees - a cooling system, and thermometers. Of course the ice will be melting. I am proposing that the audience will make the cooling system work, to maintain the ice forest as long as possible. Bikes will be used to generate the energy for this: the effectiveness of the cooling system will depend on how many people ride, for how long and how fast. People will need to ride the bikes to light the space also; they will make things visible or not, it's up to them what is visible. For me this is a very explicit way of saying, "it's up to you what happens in the world".

It seems that the work needs to be based on some form of improvised, cooperative negotiation amongst members of the audience. Even though this is work in progress, have you imagined that people will speak aloud during the time of the performance to do such negotiating?

That's important. One member of the audience may have to speak with another close by, to share the bikes and the cycling. I was thinking that I would be riding a bike from the beginning of the performance, but I don't know if I will be able to ride for an hour; I will probably have to ask another person to ride in my place. That was the idea, to give the space over to negotiation, but to the possibility of resting as well.

It's also important for me in this work to deal with the impression that many people have - and I myself have had it and have it still - that to move towards a more sustainable way of living requires working more. It could be just about being together and cooperating to do simply what is needed.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that simplicity is not the opposite of progress. Even if making the performance becomes a group effort, or a social effort, I also want to create a space where people individually respond to the theme. The idea is to try to



Some Things Happen All at Once. Photo: Mike Brookes

make visible, first of all, that whatever you do has consequences. Secondly, that there are many of us here at the same time.

Here I would like to speak about social physics. That is, I thought of using the behaviour of water to structure the performance; the structure for the work is the phased transition of water. In a phased transition, changes don't have to be progressive, they can just happen at once. In a phased transition, molecules change individually, but all at the same time. I am very interested in trying to make such a process visible and possible in society. I think it opens many

possibilities and paradigms for human behaviour in favour of change that don't necessarily rely on talking, on convincing others, on verbal agreement.

If we consider politicians, for example, it's true that often talking about change stands in for practical measures that would bring about the desired change. Words can become a form of hiding from the action for change, action which could easily be silent, or at least wordless; it could be quite exemplary yet very quiet.

Yes, and your reference to action returns us

to the ethic of the performance, because, in principle, action is the main sign of performance. It's the action that can transform the space; that can transform everything. When I attended *The Articulate Practitioner* [the meeting of the Magdalena Project in Wales, July 2005], I spoke about that, because there we were talking a lot about words, and I was saying that for me words represent the potential for action. What is before the action? Words could be the fixed point for change but not the change itself.

Perhaps through your background training in physics, you have a greater interest and belief in numbers rather than whole words? That is, an interest in thinking through numbers and letters of the alphabet as these are used, for example, in the study of physics?

Oh, I love science and I love numbers. In scientific study, numbers are specific, and letters represent the generalisation of things. So, in science letters of the alphabet serve to help build theories, and make abstract structures for thinking. It's like... letters are the abstraction of reality.

When I was a student, I was studying linguistics - but it was algebra as well, because we had problems to solve about how words behave and the structure of this, the grammar and so on. We had to make a rule out of examples; to make the rule we used only letters, no words. Letters served as the abstraction of the reality of words. Letters are also the abstraction of the reality of numbers; science always concerns the real world, that's why I said earlier that letters are the abstraction of reality. For instance, we observe the large-scale reality of fresh water: rainfall, runoff, human water consumption, the effects of global warming, and letters are some of the signs we use to think through the relations between these phenomena.

Speaking statistically, I read recently that the average water footprint per capita in Australia is 1393 cubic metres - slightly higher than the global average. In Australia water is one of the most urgent topics and visible concerns relating to the larger issue of environmental sustainability. Australians are aware that the continent is drying, while in our major cities we live already on the extreme coastal areas. Hence, on a daily basis Australians are attempting to be skilful with domestic water resources. Is water the most visible issue for sustainability in Spain? And is there a topical discourse about water and the home in Spain?

Water has been an issue for many, many years now in Spain; Spain is becoming a desert also. My family comes from the south, Cordoba, a very dry area, so when I was a child growing up there we had water restrictions in the summers.

That was in the 1970s and 1980s, so it's been like that - I mean, I remember it like that - for ever. I want the audience to make the performance of *Some Things Happen All at Once* because it seems we don't think that we human beings have the power to intervene in this environmental reality.

As with *Paradise 2*, I would like this newer work to encourage awareness that even if the economic and political systems make us feel powerless, we have all of the power: we are making these systems. I don't believe in a conspiracy theory. We are making the systems therefore through our behaviour 'all at once' we can change them.

*There seems to be a great deal of idealism as the background to *Some Things Happen All at Once*, and more broadly informing your practice. Would you describe yourself as an idealistic person, or a pragmatist in your approach to life and work?*

I've been talking about that a lot with Margaret Cameron, the Australian writer/performer. I am a very hopeless person; I mean I can feel hopeless. Often I feel quite sad about the state of the world, overwhelmed. And because of this I need to create possibilities, even if for me these look impossible. Actually it's not a problem if they are impossible. With commitment I can make them possible.

In my lecture for *The Articulate Practitioner* I said that I think it's very important that we share our thoughts, and share what we see and what we don't see, because sometimes we can feel, privately, very lonely in our thinking. Then suddenly we speak to another person, and remember that we are the same you know, just the same. And again, we are many here at the same time, with the potential for action - to change our reality for the better.

ROSA CASADO (Spain) is a performance artist. Currently she lives in or between Madrid, Peroblasco (La Rioja), and Rome. Her artistic work centres on simple and everyday performative propositions that explore new ways of thinking and doing; that promote the development of interdisciplinary spaces for contemporary artistic practice.

CYNTHIA TROUP (Australia) is a Melbourne-based writer and a founding member of the arts company Aphids. She frequently writes on contemporary arts practice. Her piece on Rosa Casado's Melbourne performance of *Paradise 2* for *RealTime 74* (2006) can be found at <http://www.realttime-arts.net/article/74/8188>.