

## **Fabricantes Unidos**

### **An Invocation in Once, by Inés Katzenstein**

During the meetings I held with Eduardo as he was building up Fabricantes Unidos, we tried -albeit in vain- to define the nature of this piece; what it is, what it is not, and what does an artwork like this accomplish. It is a work that (even if clearly situated between installation, sculpture, political art, site-specific and relational art) is best expressed in an equivocal fashion, otherwise too difficult to accommodate precisely to any of those genres or trends. Like on many other occasions, Eduardo's work poses more questions than it gives answers. If not to define what this work is, I would like, at the very least, to try to enumerate what it is not.

For Eduardo, who thinks day in and day out about his new undertaking, finding the words to describe what he is doing is visibly an important step of the constructive process. What follows is a crucial element to understanding this piece; it is not a consequence of a sort of previously projected plan. By no means the equivalent of "installing a little pudding store in the middle of Once," it is instead the result of an extended process of architectural and ethnographical observation. Neither is it a logical consequence of this observation of context. Navarro's logic is equally relentless and unfathomable. He is guided by a method which aims to attain objectivity, or some point of realism, within the context of a constructed neutrality developed from a completely eccentric mind.

His first decisive insight arose from curiosity about the neighborhood of Once. It is a curiosity shared by many artists living in Buenos Aires who take a special interest in this area of the city. Once, can be observed to be a territory where the mercantile and consumerist culture that defines our age intensifies to become that, "self made kingdom of consolation through the trinket," as the writer Marcelo Cohen wittingly put it. With few exceptions - -as that memorable picture of the corner of Pueyrredón and Corrientes taken with ferocious realism by Alberto Goldenstein managed to capture-- the transformation, either aesthetical or conceptual, of the trinket into a jewel, has been the predominant operation made by artists in Once when facing this universe of infinite surprises. Recall those luxurious lamps, salad and washing bowls, made with plastic which became monuments to the sensibility of an age. Recall those little packets filled with little things

bought at wholesale shops which Daniel Joglar installed on his tables, also featured in many images from the installations and pictures of Diego Bianchi and Leopoldo Estol. These are just some of the artists from different generations who have seen and continue to see Once as an infinite quarry for objectual reality, and thus process it with different grades of intervention; from bricolage to ready-made. Eduardo's interest for the place developed in a markedly unique direction, and not only because his project puts us -- the art audience -- in the situation of having to climb up to the mezzanine of a cheap commercial gallery on Rivadavia Avenue. Granted, this too is one important and intentional facet, but there is much more. Unlike the artists mentioned above, Eduardo doesn't conceive the art-work as a transmutation of the object through its displacement beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood -- into the art gallery or the collector's home. Instead he is interested in a socio- economic situation, a diffused condition of production uniquely present in Once that delimitates esthetic, architectural and social situations which are "experimental" in their precariousness. His focus is "dissolving" into a working logic conditioned by a very clear limitation; the capital instead of the result obtained by that the work. In this case the commodity is "pudding". Yet in the process of identifying with a gray and anonymous work-place, neither discovery nor epiphany has arisen.

After some time wandering around Once I realized I was perceiving only 30% of it, while the other 70% was hidden in store rooms, basements, corridors, mezzanines, secret restaurants, garage ramps and romp halls... So I found myself trying to find some very strange places. In some, for example, after asking for permission to enter, I opened a door and found 5 women sewing in a room of only ten square meters, and then I opened another door and found a tiny hair- shop with just two customers. I found lots of unexpected situations like this that slowly settled some lines for the work, but that at the same time made me feel all the more curious and intrigued and further drove me to continue exploring. Now I realize that what I've done in "Pudding Store" works in a very similar way to places like the ones I mentioned; it is about going upstairs and finding something unexpected. I want the visitors to encounter the pudding store just as I discovered the five seamstresses or the tiny hair-shop. To me, it is not the goal to denounce or delineate, but rather to be part of what is Once.

The work consists of renting a space in Once with the purpose of creating a small enterprise. This finds its formal resolution at the sculptural level (the construction of the facilities: foyer, kneading room, kitchen, exhibition and storage room). But the work goes far beyond its material existence and design. Despite the eloquence of the final result, what really distinguishes this work is the reason why it became what it finally became. That is to say, despite being the fake productive project of an artist (with the result of a hundred impossible to eat puddings, all hard as rock) it is a paradoxically authentic work. Because the enterprise is not a replica, nor a copy or appropriation based on a model, but the result of an open observational process, through which Eduardo tried to learn about a context and a circumstance, and tried as well to stay loyal to the knowledge he gained, it is seeking to produce a piece as natural as possible.

He put it like this:

“Imagine that you wanted to draw a lung, but you have never seen one. Instead of opening the anatomy book to the breathing system and copying the lungs, what I propose is to leaf very quickly through the whole book, have an overview-like understanding of the human body, then close the book and finally draw the lung.”

Even if Navarro's realism is always marked by artifice, the main sensation one gets is that he wanted to do something true.

He continues:

“I want to work in some operational but also aesthetic way, taking immediateness or practicality as a starting point. I think every space in Once is shaped naturally from practicality. I feel the #1 rule of Once is "everything as practical and economical as possible". Peculiarly in the case of restricted-access spaces, no one has a reason, or even time, to ask himself about where a rack, a box or a bucket should be. I feel I am setting up the work as if my piece was a character intended to be a part of Once as realistically as possible. I wouldn't be satisfied if the work ends as a mere conclusion I arrived at and everybody reads what I think about Once just because I want them to read it that way. I want this piece to be an invocation; an atmosphere. I would like the place to generate uncertainty and for each person to act as a detective inside the work, just as I did when I was looking for a space.

All of Navarro's works that I have witnessed produced an uncertainty

of the following kind: his arduous will for realism reaches into the absurd, which leaves us, the spectators, a little stunned and without a clear indication for how to proceed with evaluation. It is increasingly complicated to discern the aesthetical choices made around an idea of fiction versus, in comparison to, or in conjunction with, those made with regards to the load of ethnographical documentation. Still more importantly, one doesn't grasp why these works fail in the attempt to be what they want to be. Doubtlessly, what we see in *La Dulce* could be, but is not, just a pudding store.

The clearest sign of this elusive condition was the incredible anti-smoking marathon organized by Eduardo one morning in 2005. A group of friends and others less familiar could all be found running around a park in Palermo, with its big anti-cigarette podium, a medical tent, and even an informative talk delivered by a health professional about smoking habits and how to quit. The marathon was such an absolute failure in its public, and even symbolic, effectiveness that it was hard not to think Eduardo had conceived it that way, even if it wasn't the case (Guillermo Kuitca says the thing he liked most from the pictures documenting the event was to see an artist running with shoes among the marathon runners, as if that absurd detail made the (failed) exhaustive efforts of Eduardo more semantically and artistically comprehensive.) This work reminiscences the feeling of emptiness transmitted by Navarro's office-space for the "Jardines de Mayo" exhibit, or the stylistic folly of the building that was half mountain-cottage and half pagoda which he made at the Kuitca Program's backyard to accommodate evangelization groups (in which the sun entering through the cracks of the wood, reminded of the pictures of the little house where Jackson Pollock made his famous action painting sessions). The scheme of the mentioned works seems to a large extent relational according to the openness of the works and their connection to a real and concrete, albeit exotic, community. In fact, they are pieces that can be understood only when expectations of stylistic success, and the political and conceptual accuracy of contemporary art, are left behind. Only after their performances fail do we become acutely aware that the artist's intentions are in fact distant from the scenario's effect, the realism or the social sympathy. We would probably like to have a more clear finish or more assertive actions, but Eduardo always manages to put the emphasis in unexpected places.

During a walk we took with Eduardo around Once one particularly hot

day, we talked about the political dimension of Fabricantes Unidos. This is something which concerned me specifically because it is difficult to ignore the small distance between people in Once, all breathing as hard as they are working to survive in the middle of an incredible mass of energy, contrasted to the young artist, slowly trying to merge himself with that situation and to objectively represent an architecture of precariousness. It's impossible not to recall the recent experiences of other artists who became involved with industrial production, but from a more committed or idealistic point of view, as for example those who worked with occupied factories.

Insistently Eduardo points out that this is not about denouncing anything. He especially does not want his work to be confused with other works whose aim was to make visible some social experiences, to denounce oppressive situations or exploitation. However clear this may be, as it would be hard to think of Navarro as a committed person or moralist, rejecting this possibility in no way excludes other forms of politics. This work in fact is close to those which deliberately assume a perverse form of denouncement by themselves enacting the role of the oppressor. There is clearly some abuse of genuineness involved in pretending to act like a modest and solitary entrepreneur, and to settle into such a context, just to make a special situation visible for the art audience. There's a clear inequality of resources between the artist and the little salesman who would set up this kind of factory. And this is something that doesn't truly dissolve itself; it is well marked, despite Eduardo's attraction to the "as if". Perhaps Navarro's ingenuity is but the reflection of cruelty.