
Paul Ramírez Jonas

An statement about my research program and future plans.

I create as I speak

From the beginning of my career in 1989 I have always considered myself merely a reader of texts. The pre-existing text could have been any cultural artifact that I could interpret as a score: a diary, a plan, an old photo, a footpath, sheet music, etc. The reading could take the form of a performance, a sculpture, a photo, or a video. Thus, a musical score sometimes resulted in a sculpture, and a travelogue in a video, and the plans for a flying machine in a photo.

During the period from 1989 to about 2004, in my practice what looked like invention was but re-enactment; and what seemed to be exploration was but walking in someone else's footsteps. From the late nineties up to the mid 2000s this method of working became more covert. While the original historical sources became increasingly less visible, the modus operandi of score to performance remained central to my work. While it may seem otherwise from this description, my work was never dry or removed. On the contrary, not unlike a musician playing from a score, or an actor performing from a play – the pre-existence of the text did not preclude passion, enthusiasm, humor and new meanings to arise. Reading remains for me a creative and freeing activity.

By 2004-2005 I began to ask myself, being a reader, don't I have more in common with the public than with the author? And isn't that commonality or collective feeling what I find inspiring in working with pre-existing texts? Isn't this feeling of being part of a collective what it might mean to work within a tradition? Duchamp said that "art is a game between all people of all periods", and I have faith in this game.

In general terms, these were the basis of most of my work throughout the nineties and early 2000s. These heartfelt premises are still at the foundation of my work. However, now I see my role extending beyond that of being a private reader, and into someone who invites viewers to join in and become participants. I now read 'in public'. The result of this shift is the reassertion of a contract between the artwork and its public. This implicit contract stipulates that works of art are for them/you/me to read; and that readers cannot be passive –to receive involves action on our part. The artwork needs you: even if it is just the giving of a penny, the making of a wish, the whispering of a magic spell, the silent reading of an oath, or the consent to having one of your keys copied.

Given these views, it may come as no surprise that I think of my artworks and projects as a kind of monument. I say this because monuments are created with the awareness that they are being made for a public (not for their own sake). Likewise, as in most monuments, as an author I am not interested in conveying my interior life, biography or to put forward a private and unique sense of aesthetics -rather I am interested in articulating shared stories and collective histories. For this reason I have been increasingly focused in different forms of public art, public symbols and public institutions. One of my chief intents is to find ways to merge the intimacy enabled by the one-on-one relationship fostered by traditional art objects, with one-to-many public nature of monuments. With this in mind I have made sculptures that use the form of the key to the city, the heroic equestrian monument, and the grassy commons of a city; but I have crafted these forms using my experience as a maker of exhibition-based work.

I am increasingly interested in how the public itself has a form: in the way it sits for a performance, or gathers around a painting, or congregates for a speech, sermon or sports event. This investigation is reflected in the drawings I have been making for the past few years that examine the history and evolution of a sitting public. In turn, these drawings are feeding into a future projects.

Publics have a form and any form can become an artwork. Furthermore, any *public form* is capable to becoming a public artwork. Thus, I am have been thinking along the lines of how could something like *public transportation* become and artwork. Once I open myself to these possibilities, the repertoire of public art expands greatly. Any of these forms could be potential artworks:

<i>notary public</i>	<i>public notary</i>
<i>public access</i>	<i>public offering</i>
<i>public act</i>	<i>public office</i>
<i>public bank</i>	<i>public opinion</i>
<i>public bar</i>	<i>public orator</i>
<i>public bath</i>	<i>public ownership</i>
<i>public bench</i>	<i>public park</i>
<i>public bill</i>	<i>public policy</i>
<i>public broadcaster</i>	<i>public prosecutor</i>
<i>public broadcasting</i>	<i>public radio</i>
<i>public building</i>	<i>public reader</i>
<i>public company</i>	<i>public reason</i>
<i>public corporation</i>	<i>public record</i>
<i>public defender</i>	<i>public record office</i>
<i>public diplomacy</i>	<i>public school</i>
<i>public education</i>	<i>public scribe</i>
<i>public employment</i>	<i>public servant</i>
<i>public enemy</i>	<i>public speaker</i>
<i>public enemy number one</i>	<i>public statute</i>
<i>public figure</i>	<i>public telephone</i>
<i>public good</i>	<i>public television</i>
<i>public holiday</i>	<i>public transportation</i>
<i>public housing</i>	<i>public trust</i>
<i>public image</i>	<i>public utility</i>
<i>public intellectual</i>	<i>public voice</i>
<i>public interest</i>	<i>public walk</i>
<i>public language</i>	<i>public woman</i>
<i>public lavatory</i>	<i>public works</i>
<i>public lecture</i>	<i>public works</i>
<i>public library</i>	<i>public-heartedness</i>
<i>public life</i>	<i>public-mindedness</i>
<i>public man</i>	<i>publication</i>
<i>public monument</i>	<i>republic</i>
<i>public noise</i>	<i>to go in public</i>

Every public has a form.