

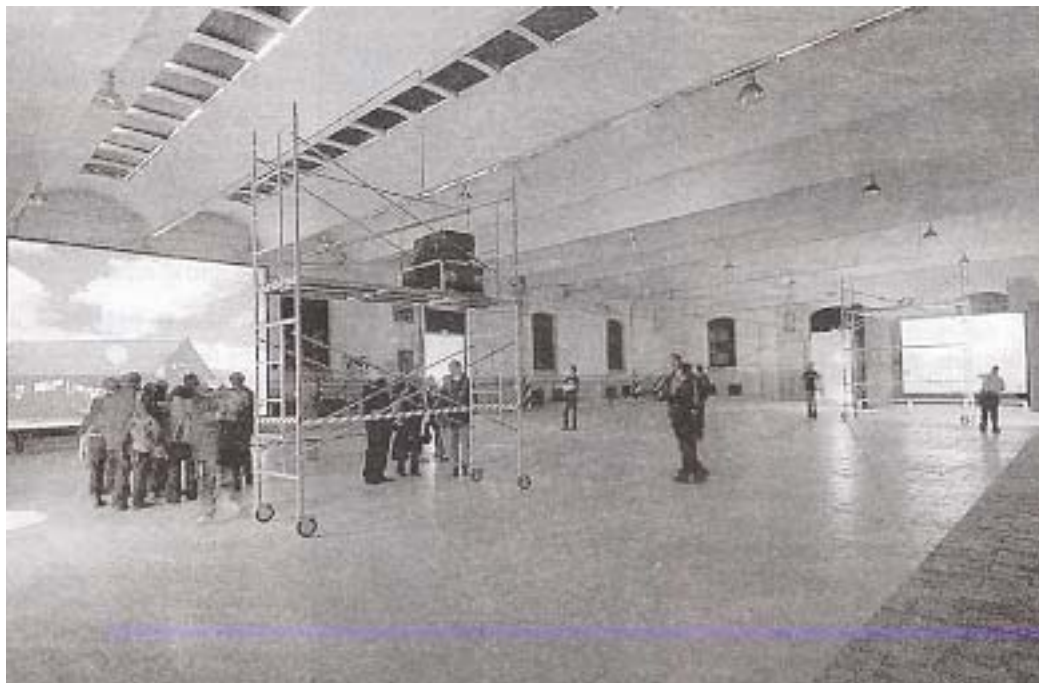
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# SEDUCTIONS AND BREAKS

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Increasingly, today's hegemonic cultural policies appear to be becoming fascinated with and seduced by models of cultural production that are based largely on the spectacularisation of subjective production; on the trivialisation and subsequent mercantilization of the discourses.

In this sense, the proliferation of museums, centres of contemporary culture and artistic events—biennials, fairs, etc.—should be seen as being part of a utilitarian vision of culture, where it primarily operates as a showcase for passive consumption (or active consumption, for those with enough money), a “feature” for tourist promotion, urban reform or open political propaganda, rather than a real means of social construction. We don't have to look too far to see specific examples that will serve as a paradigm of these strategies. San Sebastian hosts a photography fair, organised by a private collector, which is becoming one of the main reference points for filling the future International Centre of Contemporary Culture which it is planned to create in the old tobacco factory, in the geographical heart of the city, with a floor space of over thirty thousand square metres. A video show was organised (*La actualidad revisada* [A Review of the Present]) was organised to coincide with this fair in the vast areas of the Tabacalera building. The exhibition reproduces all the clichés of the most conventional artistic internationalism, down to the very last degree; the monumentalization of the aesthetic experience, with an excessive use of reproduction techniques; the construction of “fascinating” spaces which develop strategies that seduce and alienate the spectator; the annulment of any possibility of interaction apart from simple contemplation; the neutralisation of criticism and of course the concealment and negation of any type of information and documentation that might allow any mutation in the public's behaviour and its relationship with the works on display. Under these conditions, spectators rarely stand watching a video from beginning to end and their attention is seldom intense and uninterrupted.



A Review of the Present. Tabacalera 2005

A few months ago, coinciding with the San Sebastian Film Festival, a “cultural event” (a euphemism for “party” used by the organisers) was held in the city to mark the conclusion of the Manifesta Biennial. This event was also held in Tabacalera.

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During the party, which was attended by several hundred guests, one of the best works seen in Manifesta was screened: *Route 181*, a documentary on the Palestinian conflict, made by Eyal Sivan and Michel Khleifi. The film was screened in Arteleku to coincide with the seminar *Contemporary Arab Representations. Critical Discourses and Political Thought* (1) coordinated by Gema Martín Muñoz. The organisers of the “cultural event” were quite happy to screen the film out of context at the party, producing an effect of alienation and aestheticisation, with the result that the film became little more than a decorative backdrop, while the guests tucked into sophisticated “tapas” and ice-cream.



Manifesta Party.Tabacalera 2004.

For our part, we screened the documentary within the framework of a seminar that sought to examine the socio-political contradictions in which the subjective experience occurs in the Arab world, trying to target specific audiences. The project formed part of a wider network of international collaboration which enabled a continuous and uninterrupted reflection through a participative process of all those involved. We have also reached an agreement with the production company to include the film in the publication containing the papers given by the participants and the discussions at the seminar. All this material is available on our website and was broadcast live on the Internet.



Contemporary Arab Representations. Eyal Sivan in Arteleku.

For some years now, a large number of cultural agents and producers have been trying to redevelop the conditions for the production and reception of the time/image in order to guarantee some minimum visibility for the works. We try to develop formulas that will allow for greater and better matching between the receiver and the space / time conditions needed for the interaction to occur under the best conditions. Naturally, the result is a reduced media impact and less spectacular production processes—since they are primarily based on achieving the maximum commitment between the author, an analysis of the context in which the works have been made and the receiver, who becomes an active subject.



Disagreements. Mutations of Feminism. Exhibition. Workshop by Diane Torr. Arteleku

In a recent interview for the “Disagreements”(2) project, Catherine David, director of Documenta X, said that in the 1990s there was a worsening of the spectacle, media-centred, culture, with an abandonment of any type of cultural policy related to the production and transmission of social complexity or to the critical construction of an awareness of the faults and shortfalls in that society. The result was a mass “resignation” by all kinds of cultural commitment (always a political commitment). After the 1990s, it became clear that if on the one hand there is an entire sector of the art world which has chosen to align itself with that “spectacle culture”, that homogeneity and evanescence of the dominant culture, there are also other practices, which have more of a future—the ones that are related to long-lasting processes and very heterogeneous spaces. Martha Rosler, from whom I have borrowed the title of this text, also stresses that artistic work must centre not only on production, exhibition and dissemination, but also on the social and political context that determines it.

The intended “neutrality” of art and culture with regard to political matters and the socialisation of the public space can consciously or unconsciously give rise to a shameful partiality which lends support to strategies for the privatisation of all types of experience. In our own times, the irrevocable place of art and culture in social commitment is being obstructed by the objective conditions of certain dominant policies and the consequent hegemony of certain artistic and cultural practices, which insist on legitimating certain indulgent attitudes and a system that hinders the visibility of other emerging forms of cultural production— and as Marius Babias rightly said in a text published in the latest edition of ZEHAR, on perpetuating a system that reinforces the function of art and culture as a socio-political mechanism of integration, instead of (as the

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avant-gardes would have it) as a medium for freeing up the possibilities of emancipation.

We need to ask how and to what extent it is possible to think and act in any other way. a decidedly sacrificial—even agonic—character appears to be being imposed on certain cultural practices, in open antipathy to the consensus of public opinion and the predominant political discourse. The limit can of course be transgressed, but it is immediately rebuilt. It is in this continuous displacement that we can open up spaces for re-establishing the relations of subject, words and things, creating new forms, new types of state and essence and other ways of thinking. In that antagonism between assimilation and resistance we also need to think of structures of social and collective production that highlight the political perspectives of cultural practice. Within this framework, where the public space takes on its maximum significance, we need to send out a warning about cultural strategies of liquidation which will prevent the maintenance and development of spaces for experimentation and projects of innovation. Despite certain political strategies that promote growing marginalisation, a form of artistic practice survives and continues to evolve which points to new possibilities of cultural resistance and the construction of critical networks in which “specific intellectuals”, in the Foucaultian sense, come together to form a genuine intellectual group which can direct its thoughts, actions and breaks independently.

In this sense, “Tester”(3) is a project which seeks to be consequent with these political premises, counterposing organisational models and systems of renewable production to the rhetoric of a critique which is often devised from a simple spirit of destruction: this is what is known as constructive criticism or preaching by example.

Our commitment is oriented in this direction. It is not a question of negating the existence of different ways of understanding cultural action, but of enabling the emergence of new ones and preventing the disappearance of others, so that diversity and heterogeneity can continue to hold a place in the complex cultural map occupied by Arteleku and keep supplying the added value it has incorporated into the social fabric over the years.

1.- *Contemporary Arab Representations* is a project directed by Catherine David and organised by Witte de With, Rotterdam and the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona, in collaboration with the International University of Andalusia (UNIA arteypensamiento) and Arteleku (Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa).

2.- *Disagreements. On Art, Politics and the Public Sphere in Spain* is a coproduction by Arteleku-Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa, Museu d'Art Contemporani, Barcelona-MACBA and the International University of Andalusia-UNIA arteypensamiento. [www.desacuerdos.org](http://www.desacuerdos.org)

3.- *TESTER* centres on the production and dissemination of contemporary artistic proposals, especially those related to new technological possibilities. Technology is used as a tool for production, as a medium of communication between the participants and as a vehicle for disseminating the project. *TESTER* seeks to give attention to local (international) spheres of creation, which do not have a presence or a visibility on the international circuits or which are not known through the hegemonic panorama of the visual arts. It is a system for detecting creative activity, conceived as a project in process, a network and a structure of production.

It is backed by participation from different production nodes (Marina Grzinic -Slovenia, Oliver Ressler –Vienna, Marcus Neustetter – Johannesburg, José Carlos Mariategui – Lima-) and artists Tanja Ostojic, Masaki Hirano, Ralo Mayer, Philipp Haupt, Sejla Kameric, David Thorne, Usha Seejarim, Robin Rode, Kathryn Smith, Stephen Hobbs, Diego Lama, Gabriela Golder, Iván Lozano, Lucas Bambozzi, Yael Katz, Kirmen Uribe, Ibon Saenz de Olazagoitia, Hacklab Leioa, Zoran Pantelic, Kristian Lukic, Trinity Session, Iñaki Arzo, Andoi Alonso, Kien Nghi Ha, Shulin Zhao and Jorge La Ferla.