



**Artist Dora García and curator Marti Manen
in conversation with Pamela Prado**

Pamela Prado Dora, I would like to start with a question on the notion of 'institutional time'. What can you say about the links that might exist between this notion and the kind of time your work offers?

Dora García Institutional time has many factors that do not interest me as an artist. Each time I collaborate with an institution there must be a compromise between the things that I not only dislike, but also sometimes detest, and the things that interest me. The time that interests me is immediate, radical and uncompromised, anti-didactic. Obviously qualities not appreciated by the institution, but there are points where we connect and others that have to be negotiated.

PP What do you negotiate with the institution?

DG What I mainly negotiate is my approach towards the public or audience, in how to present the work mediated by the institution to the public. Very often the institution is not only unavoidable, but also desirable.

Marti Manen About the qualities not appreciated by the institution, it is interesting to see this attention paid to the radicality from the past, not inside the frame of the institution, because it is under control, you can put it in order.

PP What do you mean by the 'radicality from the past'? Do you think there could be a connection between the past and institutional time?

MM I mean the connection, the whole conception of contemporary art history with the avant-gardes as a sort of revolutionary movement with all their radicalism. Maybe I'm wrong, but the thing about present time is that it – in fact, contemporary art – is unstable.

PP Marti, I think the argument you presented in your article 'New institutionalism and contextual reality' is very interesting. here you explain, 'institutional time is not the same as real time'. Could you explain a bit more?

MM Institutions define their procedures within some time structures that are not the same ones as everyday reality. The time of the exhibition depends on some pre-defined coordinates. We have an opening date, hours when visitors can come to the institution, past exhibitions and future exhibitions. But the exhibition is usually out of time. As a visitor you want to see what you are supposed to see.

DG Yes I agree, except in the dichotomy between institution and reality.

MM It means that the whole idea depends on the concept of always offering everything. Well, institutions are of course part of reality, I was maybe more focused on the time inside the realm of institution.

DG Yes, but also reality is a very complex thing. If we accept the dichotomy it would have to be 'everything outside the institution'.

MM But also the reaction is that reality from the institutional context is not the same as real reality.

PP Given that Marti has called attention to this notion of 'real reality', what about real reality in relation to real time?

DG Well, yes, in that case it makes more sense. In the sense that it is a reality we had not had the time to frame yet. Except that reality is not related to time, but to fiction: space/time, reality/fiction.

MM At the same time the aim of the traditional institution is to answer reality, read it or build it.

DG Yes, that is the aim of art, too.

PP What about creating new realities instead of representations?

MM Exactly. I agree with Pamela, but representation is a difficult word.

DG Yes, in the idea of representation we can put together space/time, reality/fiction.

MM I don't want to represent anything. Maybe I'm wrong, but representation puts culture outside reality, or at least it takes some distance from it.

DG I don't know what to say to that. In terms of representation as 'presenting again', I think that is interesting, and related to this idea of the frame, but certainly opposite to the idea of real time. There is a notion of translation to representation, things are framed, chewed, modified and manipulated by meaning, and this is opposite to the idea of 'real time, real space', that is, unframed, un-mediated.

PP So, real time would be a chance to escape representation? In that sense, when we talk about representation, we then talk about that frame as well. It could be related to the relationship, perhaps of translation, that exists between the institution and the audience.

MM It is an intellectual position (needed, of course) but it is also a defensive system; with translation we understand that there is a subjective reading, accepting different points of view and different needs to communicate with each context. Right now, I would prefer this term.

DG The work I made for the Institute of Contemporary Arts show in London, *Instant Narrative* (2008), was related to the idea of breaking the safe position of the audience, to force them to enter the framed reality of the exhibition, and the response was a mix of fear and thrill. It was about breaking this safe membrane between representation and real time.

MM Dora, one question: Is it easy to break the rules of the exhibition space? And, who is afraid of doing it?

DG It is very easy and very funny, but it often backlashes, like in the opening of

Friends of the Divided Mind. What failed in my performance was the knowledge of the situation.

MM Does it mean that *we* know the rules inside the rules?

DG Let's say for a successful breaking of the rules one has to know the situation and from there you can break everything. It is very funny; the result is comic in the sense that it is related to truth, like comedy is related to truth. You unveil a convention and the result is laughter. It is sometimes impossible to predict and we are often blinded by our own wishes, what we want, and are unable to see the situation as it is. So, yes, breaking the rules is easy, but like in comedy, to break the rules one has to be an insider.

MM And I think that this is one of the things institutions have difficulty with.

DG The joke is not funny when it comes from an outsider.

PP And we don't know how the public will react.

MM Are we afraid of the public?

PP It depends.

MM Are we public?

DG Well, that's one thing that differs between the institution and me. I am not afraid of the public.

PP In this respect curators certainly have different constraints than artists.

DG I am not afraid in the sense that I have nothing to lose. And this is a position that an artist has to achieve, and work for.

MM I really need to think that the audience will be part of the project (whatever it is) or it means that we are working just for *us* and I can see this 'being afraid of the audience' in many institutional behaviours, pretending that the audience is a kind of stupid mass.

PP What I really like about ORTA was the fact of facing the public everyday, and so dealing directly with any possible fear, or internalising that fear within the exhibition.

DG The audience is part of the project, but one does not have to be afraid of the audience, this is linked to the idea of success, of knowing what the audience wants. But no one knows what the audience wants, the audience itself does not know at all what they want. Me, 'I am audience too', and what I want is to be challenged by the situation I am in. This is what I take into account when I, as an artist, produce a situation.

MM One of the good things about ORTA was the realisation of the exhibition, and it means that you were confronting the audience much more than within the usual frame.

PP Certainly, we were there all the time, working with artists and speaking with the public, outside the usual frame.

MM And then it means that you respect the audience, as you want them to be invested.

PP Yes, we want them to interact with us so that they could ask questions and talk to us.

MM Usually there is no one to answer questions; the curator is not in the show. We could say that, in general, it works like this: You plan everything. Go there, install the exhibition, opening, and go to the next project. And the exhibition is there, alone.

DG Well, if I am not mistaken there is a certain shift in the idea of exhibition, as there are more and more time-based projects.

PP Marti, how do you think your work as a curator relates to time? Do you think there is any connection between what you do and the use of time as a possible curatorial strategy?

MM For me it is very important to think the idea of time for the exhibition. It is not always possible (it all depends on the place-institution-context) where you work, but I try to work by mixing formats or opening the exhibition to other materials.

PP What kind of materials?

MM The exhibition space is, for me, a kind of platform offering several timelines. And it means that you work with several ideas of users, offering several *contents*. With material I'm thinking from artworks to interviews, from workshops to songs, from screenings to sofas... But, of course, this is not always a success. Failure is more than possible as you are taking some risks and leaving a lot of things out of your control.

DG Yes, but their failure is not higher than in *normal* exhibitions, the difference is that in this type of exhibition, when failure comes, you are there to see it.

PP I would like to finish with a question about our experimental institution, the Office of Real Time Activity. We tried to be model of a transparent office situated within an exhibition, which is not very typical of an institution. We also managed the time in a different format from conventional institutions, according to a level of rapid response typically uncharacteristic of centralized institutional hierarchies. What is your response to this format or initiative?

DG Well, of course I favour this structure. It is curiously very similar to an exhibition in Frankfurt, *Playing the City* (2009), a transparent office, a series of events looking for the audience's instant reaction, the un-labelling of the events as *art*.

MM I like the idea to link a concept like office and the exhibition as you were working and we work within the office space. Transparency is another issue as I'm not sure if it is always interesting to know about what is behind everything.

DG To me this is exactly why exhibitions are veering towards a time-based model, because, like in show business, this allows a real time relation with the audience!

MM And because we want this contact with the audience, with the visitors, with the users...

DG Yes of course, and the thing is, this allows for a feedback in real time between producers and users.

MM To give a say, to listen... and a platform like the Office of Real Time Activity helps.

DG As a well for a blurring of the condition of user and producer.

MM Then, it is necessary to see if the next step for institutions is to be flexible, to adapt the projects to this feedback you are talking about. I would love to see it more often.

Dora García is a Spanish artist who presented *Forever* (2004–ongoing) and *The Kingdom* (2003–ongoing) as well as a new performance, *The 60 Minute Zoom, Identification / Projection* (2009), based on a story by J.G. Ballard, at the Office of Real Time Activity.

Marti Manen is a freelance curator whose projects address the temporal boundaries of exhibitions. He lives and works in Stockholm.

Pamela Prado is a curator who graduated from the Royal College of Art in London. She curated the exhibition *Office of Real Time Activity*, RCA, March 2009.