



*Voz Alta*, *Relational Architecture* 15, 2008  
Memorial for the Tlatelolco student massacre, Mexico City  
Photo: Antimodular Research

## RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer has commented that he works with technology not because it is “new” but because it is inevitable, as it is a language that we cannot perceive as optional. He explains: “what you can do is pervert technology, to misuse it to create connective, critical or poetic experiences, to make evident its presence and the way it limits, expands or constructs our identities.”<sup>1</sup> Lozano-Hemmer’s work always involves the active and creative participation of the spectator, strategically avoiding the traditional role of critical distance, voyeurism and objectivity of the public. He explores issues of memory, subjectivity, digital technology and the internet, and of surveillance technology, to subvert their classificatory and controlling power. He gives an empowering performative role to the spectator, who can voice his/her critical thoughts, and immerse herself/himself in a personal, expansive, subjective experience while sharing that experience of and with others.

*Voz Alta (Loud Voice)*, 2008 was conceived as a memorial commissioned for the 40th anniversary of the student Massacre in Tlatelolco on October 2nd, 1968. For the piece, the public was invited to speak into a megaphone located at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, in the historic center of Mexico City, where the massacre took place. When the megaphone amplified the voice a 10kW searchlight beamed the voice in a sequence of flashes pointing to emblematic buildings or areas of the city. The voice of the participants could be ‘seen’ through the light

<sup>1</sup> Rafael Lozano Hemmer in Jacinta Laurent. ‘Interview: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’: *Recorders*, Manchester Art Gallery, UK, September 2010. p.13

of the beams, and could be heard live and uncensored by tuning into 96.1 FM Radio from UNAM. Thousands of people participated with memories and statements from survivors, calls for protest, marriage proposals, etc. At MOLAA we will exhibit the video documentation of people's participation in the 2008 event, and the same megaphone will be displayed so that when participants speak into it, their voices will be converted into xenon light flashes inside the gallery.

## EXCERPTS

### Why do you want to displease?

I want to displease those who have condescending and paternalistic attitudes towards the general public. Some museums, artists, curators and critics secretly (and sometimes openly) assert that most visitors are morons, that their contribution should be limited to the gift shop. In my experience, giving responsibilities to the public is always rewarding, it is great to be surprised by what they come up with. I am ready for *Recorders* to be panned by art critics who will see the show as a set of pavlovian tests, as a science museum, or as a populist exercise, lacking sophistication. When you see the video portraits in the new installation "People on People" sure enough you will not get the masterful aesthetisation that Bill Viola, Gary Hill or Pipilotti Rist achieve, but what you gain is a sense of improvisation, of event, of projected absence, of art as process, with the process including the contemplation of –and therefore the participation in– the work itself. Even though the art of participation has been around for centuries, many critics can't get over the idea that a small elite should be able to dictate what is a worthwhile exploration.

### So in the realm of interactive art there is little room for the role of the artist, the curator, the critic?

There is a lot of room! The artist derives a personal language from his or her nightmares, experiences, failures, influences, and then uses this to construct a platform, to improvise some constraints, to connect disparate realities, to materialize rich ambiguities. The curator becomes the host, creating a context for the work but also for the people, no longer so concerned with the preservation of the art object but with the perpetration of the cultural act. The critic becomes an empiricist, participating in the works and potentially embedding his or her own views so they become part of the artwork; also the critic can observe and relate the participation of others, a kind of comparative social anthropology upon which to base his or her apology, deconstruction, praise or dismissal.

*Excerpt from: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Recorders. Jacinta Laurent, "Interview: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer", Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester UK, 2011, pp. 12-13.*

There are times in these commissions where the relationship of the participants or the public can be a political memory. A good example is *Voz Alta*, the memorial for the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre in Mexico City. In those cases I try to



*Voz Alta*, *Relational Architecture* 15, 2008  
Memorial for the Tlatelolco student massacre, Mexico City  
Photo: Antimodular Research

approach the work in an anti-monumental way. The challenge of *Voz Alta* was to remember what happened, but not in a necrophiliac way, where we assume that memory can be recalled independently. So I try to think about a language that evokes this tragedy and activates the memories without being exhaustive about that representation. Instead, I turn the emphasis onto a living public that may create new memories and relationships, including connections to contemporary massacres that are taking place today.

I had a simplistic view of the radical movements of 68: I assumed that they were monolithic, utopian and idealistic. Yet when I studied the material, I realized that they were really sophisticated, creative and tactical in the way they used protest. So the idea for me was to reveal that and make it current. The question of making this event beautiful is one of creating an entitlement and a relationship to your surroundings. I don't have a problem saying that my work is a special effect. There is this intention of amplification to an urban scale. Yet although it's there, it's very frail, ephemeral, and has a tendency to disappear. Strategically the pieces are platforms for participation where the relationship to the political history of the site is as important as the microrelational event between two people who meet in the space and pass a microphone from one to the other.

*Excerpt from: Alien Media, An Interview with Rafael Lozano-Hemmer by  
Marie-Pier Boucher and Patrick Harrop.  
INFLExions No. 5 – Milieus, Techniques, Aesthetics (Mar. 2012)*