

Dwelling or anti-dwelling?

Sumer Ereğ's Newspaper House

The Newspaper House is a participatory project, consisting of an installation, a house made of newspapers. Sumer Ereğ created an outer shell, a mould or cast, with the shape of the most elementary icon of a house, its inside a 'bare minimal space'. This shell will be laboriously covered and filled up with sticks of paper, until it reaches the final accomplished volume of a house.

As a multi-disciplinary artist, experienced in large-scale interactive public art installation, Ereğ sets out to convey more than the straightforward ecological statement of the project. Within the participatory feature of the project, the public has the chance to collect and bring as many old newspapers as possible (the piece requires an estimate amount of 120.000 newspapers), and also to write a personal message on a paper sheet. This material will be rolled into sticks using one of the several Stixx machines available.

Inversion of logic

In the plastic and poetic contents of his work, Ereğ usually explores paradoxes and oppositions in order to reach an integrative sense for the several layers of meaning. Concerning the three basic topics of the Newspaper House Project - news, paper and house - Ereğ explains the intent of creatively confronting the private and the public, addressing an ethics that is experimentally tried out on an exchange between the immaterial non physicality and the material physical concreteness of both information and space.

Ereğ refers the contrasting nature of the newspaper information and the personal messages the public is invited to write, and points out the paradox that, in the Newspaper House, information of every kind assumes a detailed minute materiality to build up a hollow predefined shape and likely occupy its inner space. There is an underlying idea of entropy, of overloading of data and of inversely proportional amount of time for apprehending it, which results in the destitution of its significance. In a way, this is suggested by the dramatic change

of the original graphic (visual or verbal) content, which arises from the creative process of turning tangible that which was seemingly flat, shapeless, immaterial. In this, the manual process by which this transformation is rendered, the rolling of the sticks in a hand worked machine, proves more than a clever way to enrol volunteer participation. Its rudimentary technological nature is set against the stately detached technology of printed mass media, to bring about the concrete experience of acting upon transitory expired graphic contents in order to renovate them into a raw material, pristine and direct in its even reed-like shape, utterly objective and unambiguously functional.

An inversion of logic, enabling the aphoristic presentation of issues and conveying, by itself, a practical demonstration of intent, of sense, of meaning, is an established device in Sumer EreK's work. What might be wrongly assumed as a conceptual approach to the process of art has, in fact, an important differential in a defining performative feature. As we shall see, however literal or symbolical the inversion on display, such as it occurs respectively on 'Upside Down House' (2001) and on 'Resuscitation' (2003), or integrating both aspects, such as on the 'Raw Earth Project' (2005/2007), all of EreK's works imply the deployment of one's own body, in order to perceive and, through that experience, acknowledge the piece and directly access its core. To perceive scale, distance, depth, different qualities of space, and also temperature, or the passage of time...

'Upside Down House' is a completely set, detailed and literally upside down house: as you enter the space a video system captures your image and an upside down TV set on the living room shows you on the space in real time, but on an upside down image.

The perplexity caused by this discontinuity in perception, by the collision of perceptual expectations with the impediment of understanding one's own image shown upside down, conveys in an experimental way the difficulty of building up a coherent self image that matches with the space around.

EreK's biography is marked by the early event of expatriation within the

territory of Cyprus, divided as a result of the 70's Greek/Turkish dispute. From this founding experience would emanate Ereka's main interrogations and deepest insights: ontology and ethics, identity and belonging, the body as the ultimate area of belonging, the creative sensitive vehicle that enacts meaning and through which the latter may be shared. Fulfilling such intuitions, the artwork is envisaged as the syncretic ground that enables the accomplishment of meaningful processes of life and of living experience. As a recurrent icon on Ereka's artwork, the house merges these different layers of meaning.

Dwellings

'Resuscitation' is a symbolical enactment of the sense of belonging, and a universal representation of 'dwelling'. It allows us to further understand the dynamics of imagination by which one's own standing point is, in fact, the ultimate area of belonging, a 'centre of the world, an 'axis mundi'.

At the centre of a circle of wood on fire, a tall vertical column made of twenty burned logs of lemon-tree; each log is jointed to the next by a transparent plastic pillow with one lemon inside; drops of water fall from above, and water flows through the wrinkles of the logs, making up a circular mirror of water contained by the barrier of fire.

The morphological clarity of the piece brings to mind the archetypal image of the Central Pillar, or the Tree of the World, that the shaman uses to direct the shamanic trance down to the underworld or up to heaven, his travel marked by the successive stages that divide the pole. This generic image of accomplishment of the aspiration to transcendency corresponds to a pattern of images of 'the centre of the world', a complex of meanings that resumes men's desire of placing himself naturally and permanently in a sacred place, at the core of reality and, through a short cut, of transcending human condition. In this, the idea of dwelling is attached to the notion of a site for the change of the mode of being, for a qualified dynamics of consciousness. Furthermore, with the circle of wood on fire, the iconography of 'Resuscitation' also includes the idea of enclosure, the most ancient form of distinguishing a place, or the partition

between two areas of a different kind, which has the function of outlining a "supremely 'creational' place, because the source of all reality and consequently of energy and life is to be found there" (Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, p. 370, 382-383). Finally, the presence of opposing natural elements, water and fire, in a dynamic, simultaneous process, reveals the archetypical image of the 'conjunction of opposites', while the presence of at least three different kinds of water (the rain, the running water and the pool) opens to a complex of meanings that bring the sense of fertility and creation, rebirth and cleansing.

The 'Raw Earth Project' addresses both in literal and symbolical ways the idea of dwelling, and its main icon is, yet again, a house. In a derelict country house in Cyprus, Erek installed a bathing pool, crossed by a wooden bridge. The iconographic complexity of the project, still in progress, included a series of museological procedures, such as the labelling and recording of the material that resulted from the participation of the public. Invited to stand at the centre of the house, over the pool, using it as a 'centre of the world', the participant was given a small bag of clay to hold in the hand (a 'proof of the real') while engaged on the experience of being a conductor of telluric energy, available to sense the body/mind/environment continuum. The ideas of cleansing and rebirth, and of a site conceived for the change of the mode of being, which Erek recurrently try out on previous pieces, gain on the 'Raw Earth Project' their full archaic meaning and potency, while the introduction of museological procedures states the autonomy of a dwelling-like artwork vis-à-vis the art establishment.

An anti-dwelling?

The Newspaper House Project is a work-in-progress carried out until the house is loaded with sticks, its space notoriously taken by the converted content of mass media information and the personal messages of the participants. Taken to its extreme, the process may lead to the impossibility of getting inside the house, thus cancelling the space for dwelling, a living experience that implies the

presence of the body within the consecrated area.

Are we then before an anti-dwelling?

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