

RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co)

*invest & drawwipe*

Fernando Balcells

Invited by Ingrid Wildi to participate in *Dislocación*, Marie Antoinete Chiarenza and Daniel Hauser from the artists' group RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co) visited Chile twice: first to do research in February 2010 and then in August–September 2010 to produce the show that they presented at the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende in Santiago.

Walking into the exhibition resulting from their exploration can be stressful. On a wall to the left is an asocial speech by Margaret Thatcher; straight in front of the entrance is a panel with a clipping from the *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung FAZ* dated September 1973 announcing a business opportunity: “Chile: Invest now!” Behind the panel, a leaning bed faces a screen showing a video. Under the bed a second video shows a neurotic gesture repeated again and again. Further to the back of the exhibition space, a wheel of fortune gives out incongruent predictions related to what I am and what I have.

For the Chilean viewer, the small newspaper announcement about investments is both disturbing and rich in commemorative power. In September of 1973, thousands of Chileans were arrested, tortured, sent into exile, disappeared, and subjected to summary executions. Taken from an archive somewhere and exhibited in Santiago by RELAX, the announcement effects an immediate inversion of the values it solicits. Displayed in an art exhibition, the clipping is rendered an opportunity to reflect on indifference and on the autistic sovereignty demanded by the logic of economics.

By means of RELAX's work, the old piece of printed paper has been dislocated; it has been removed from its normal junctures and gone mad. It affirms the very opposite of what it announces. Its values have been upset, its payday suspended, and its value deferred endlessly. Due to this twist, two elements run through the exhibition; the omnipresence of business discourse, on the one hand, and the humor with which that discourse is staged, on the other. Mrs. Thatcher, complete with hairdo and disdain for society, stands the test of time and place. The distant and hygienic nature of her presentation in no way diminishes the drama associated with her figure, but rather heightens it by eliciting intimate complicity with the viewer's experience.

The bed behind the panel appears to be an invitation to rest, but its leaning position expulses you and draws you immediately towards the television set. There is no relaxation. Our lives ensue in a state of compulsive movement and the inability to rest. Our lives ensue between exaggeration and depression because there is no exact measure of justice. The economy that overpowers us is but an accelerated and satirical version of the longstanding search for the fair value of acts and things.

The wheel of fortune located behind the panel with the newspaper clipping suggests, among other things, the same thing as the German announcement: another way to hastily increase wealth. The only thing that differentiates the capitalist's wager from the gambler's wager is the belief that—through Pinochet—chance can be held at bay. The risk is similar but the meaning is different. While the reasonable investor hopes to win, the reasonable gambler is satisfied just to play.

But in this wheel of fortune there is nothing to be won. It tells neither the future nor the past, but rather plays randomly with the fictions of identity that besiege us.

A consolidated character in the mythology of Chilean identity is the figure of the *roto*, the cunning gambler who feigns humility and perseverance, awaiting the opportunity offered by

luck, celebration, and expense, refusing to delay satisfaction or to accumulate a surplus that, in any case, would be snatched away.

The video *paradise you can trust* shows without comment an apartment for sale and the conversation between the salesperson and the possible buyers. What RELAX adds is drawings, calculations, and questions the impertinence of which, when superimposed on the generous offer, serves to reveal the elusive quality and authoritarian resonance of such asymmetrical dialogues.

RELAX disassembles confining practices and discourses by merely bringing them to bear on the experience of any pedestrian. The situation that the duo constructs reveals, in a manner both chilling and comic, the fact that what is presented as obvious is in fact imposture.

Like discursive corpses, we are confronted with a restrained, exact, economic, and cold humor. RELAX does not make economics into a theme, but rather gives it the word and then makes it pay.

In economics, rate of return is what matters; everything else is organized around that irrational mandate. In that excess lies the invention of disproportionate reason—reason lacking a logical basis—which, through the imperative of maximum gain, turns facts into linear fables of means and ends to deploy a binary logic in the irrefutable language of costs and benefits.

According to RELAX, though, in the economies of life, the senses depend on the rhythm of the body and values are measured by their singularity, according to the intensity of the encounters and affects they produce. If in economics value is measured in terms of the expenditure of energy, in art it is measured by just the opposite gauge, in terms of the creation of energy. Chiarenza and Hauser's artwork simply exposes the paradoxes, inconsistencies, and mismatches between technical discourse and life.

RELAX's installation is a gift that credits a form of reason aware of arbitrary controls and requirements. The work gives the word. It gives what it does not have. It is given to the word like a gift is given, expecting nothing in return because it is given, ultimately, to itself insofar as it is openness to encounters. The work summons the word as opening, as the traveling companion of a creative association that is the possible support of an "us" in the making.