

MINUCODEs.

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In 1968, the Center for Inter-American Relations was a very uptight place, so my idea was to use the Center as a way to produce a subversive work. I'd noticed that cocktail parties were very important in New York-a way of social climbing. I decided to have a series of these parties, inviting the people who were the most fanatical about their jobs: politicians who only talked about politics, economists who only read about economics and who decorated their offices with portraits of other economists, people from the fashion world who only thought about clothes and how to be beautiful, and artists who really lived to create art.

Minucode was an extension of my interest in media-I was crazy about media. In Buenos Aires in the mid-1960s, I used to go to Oscar Masotta's lectures and reading groups. Masotta produced a lunch called "The Raw and the Cooked", after Claude Lévi-Strauss and also Ferdinand de Saussure, and Marshall McLuhan, whose book *Understanding Media* was very important to us. So in Buenos Aires in 1966, I did *Simultaneidad en simultaneidad (Simultaneity in Simultaneity)*, which was originally supposed to be a three-part project, with Allan Kaprow and Wolf Vostell organizing simultaneous happenings in New York and Berlin. I'd persuaded sixty famous people to participate -the biggest celebrities in Argentina, based on how many times their faces had been reproduced in mass media. It was a very complex work involving simultaneous radio and television broadcasts, which the celebrities watched together in a theater at the Di Tella Institute, while also looking at projections of themselves. On the radio, you could hear Vostell's and Kaprow's voices through static. On TV, we showed a video: shots of the celebrities in the theater; shots of me talking about McLuhan's ideas-lots of things. The public could tune in to the broadcasts, and 500 preselected people received phone calls and telegrams while this was going on, so that they would be totally invaded by the media.

Then, the next year, I was invited with other Happenings artists to Montreal for Expo 67, and I did two works, *Superheterodyne* and *Circuit*. I didn't have any money, but I wanted to use computers - a technological filter- to select and evaluate the participants. So I showed up at Sir George Williams University and asked the dean, Please, will you give me all the computers you have? And somehow I got access to this gigantic mainframe that filled a whole room. I persuaded the newspapers to publish surveys asking people to list their physical characteristics and sexual preferences and to say whether they thought they looked like celebrities-Frank Sinatra, Marilyn Monroe. And then, I don't know how I did it, but I got Montreal's most famous boxer, most famous

tennis player, most famous actress, most famous theater actor, and most famous writer...I think I was one of the first *artistas de gestión*, management artists.

So for *Circuit*, all of the celebrities sat around, talking about nothing; the conversation was broadcast and shown on televisions in the studio, so that the celebrities were watching themselves, as if in a mirror. Meanwhile, for *Superheterodyne*, we'd coded the survey responses and used the computer to sort the respondents by similarities into the three groups. The groups met in separate spaces in the Montreal Youth Pavilion, watching one another, watching images of themselves – projected Polaroids, several different media.

During these years I'd been spending some time New York, and I'd become well known there, especially after I did *Minuphone*, a multimedia environment in a phone booth. That got written about in *Time* and *Newsweek*, which may have been why Stanton Catlin, the original director of the CIAR art gallery, invited me to do a show there. I told him my exhibition would involve producing four cocktail parties, with people selected by computers and filmed, but I don't know whether he really understood what I was planning. I published questionnaires in *The New York Times*, *The Village Voice*, *Women's Wear Daily*, and so on. A thousand responses came back, and I used computers again – these were at New York University- to sort through the answers. We had senators, famous economists...I don't know why some of them applied. There was a curiosity factor, I'm sure, and maybe people also responded to the fact that the Center was funded by the Rockefeller foundation-maybe it was prestigious to show up and have a cocktail with a crazy artist from South America. That was something I was trying to play on -being a South American artist in New York. At the time, I was creating *Cha Cha Cha*, a cofounded magazine created with Juan Downey and Julian Cairol to point out how Latin American art was not being included in the global discussion. So at a couple of the center parties, I think the last two, I decided to dress like a stereotypical Puerto Rican as they were depicted in those days-a tiger-print shirt, a big hairdo. Like the title of the magazine, my outfit at the parties was a joke. The concept was *traslación de clases*, or translation of social classes –I was staging a passage from high to low.

Wednesday was the fashion party -Diana Vreeland, Veruschka- and Thursday was the art party: Viva, John Perreault, Al Hansen...Charlotte Moorman came and played her cello. A lot of people crashed, because by that night word of the events had circulated. Free cocktails! At each party the cameras would be on, six 16-mm cameras filming simultaneously, but the guests would forget about them pretty quickly. During each party, we also had eight people -the most "fanatical" members of each group, the biggest workaholics, the most obsessive ones, selected by computer- in a separate room. We were looking to expand their sensibilities. So we had Tony Martin, who at

that time was working at the Electric Circus, bring all the materials that he would normally bring for a light show, gels and so on. And the eight politicians or the eight economists would sit there picking colors, listening to Jimi Hendrix.

We edited the film over the weekend, and for the actual exhibition, which opened the following Monday, we put projectors in the same place where the footage had been recorded. The public was invited in to drink cocktails, completely surrounded by the film. So you could see what each group did, how they behaved, how the people moved, and you could see the differences among the groups. When the people who'd been filmed showed up, they would look for themselves in the projections: They could see the differences, but they could also see the similarities. I wanted the party guests to see themselves "backwards"-to observe their own behaviors, to watch their own social interactions. And possibly to change some of their attitudes.

I believe that *Minucode* is still avant-garde. Although today, everything is mixed together: politics is mixed with business, business with art, art with fashion, fashion with Hollywood. So I suppose if I were to do it again, I'd only need to have one big party.

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