Invoking the Productive Negative

By Betti-Sue Hertz

Yoshua Okón's video installations are built on improvisational narratives created by the artist and his collaborators, mostly delegated performers[1] willing to participate in a game of social chance that may easily spiral out of control. These works provoke viewers to consider questions of societal conduct within the context of the authoritative nation-state and personal behavior within those systems of social restraint. Okón places pressure on viewers to question their own attitudes towards power, ethics, and prejudice in regard to class, status, and marginality. Maintaining a belief that humanity holds within its grasp a complex web of fears and desires, psychological violence shares the stage with absurdity and humor. The rather serious antics that unfold yield to audience reactions of shock while providing a space to laugh at their own frailties. To achieve an immediacy of purpose, Okón, a Mexico-City based artist, often creates works in or near the locale where they are initially exhibited, setting up a direct correlation between the everyday world of particular sociological subsets and the siting of a project.

There is a long history of cultural production and a rich indigenous artistic tradition in Mexico. The city has also proven to be a cornucopia of source material, influences, and ideas for artists of Okón's generation (b. 1970), including Miguel Calderón (b. 1971), Eduardo Abaroa (b. 1968), and Pablo Vargas Lugo (b. 1968). Slightly older artists, including Gabriel Orozco (b. 1962) and Belgian-born artist Francis Alÿs (b. 1959), are recognized internationally as exemplary for their use of the city as a source of production. Street life and some of the denizens who circulate in central Mexico City's urban streets have inspired and fueled these individuals' practices. In some cases the casual relationships that develop between people and the objects, events, and commerce that the artists encounter in their daily lives has branched off into artistic strategies. For these artists, contact with residents of the city that cuts across extreme differences in class, education, and pedigree has come to be recognized as political acts that mildly resonate with the Mexican modernists on the Left, but stripped of that earlier generation's investment in myth and propaganda. These contemporary successors are not inventing a mythology around the convergence of European and indigenous culture. They are living in the mestizo world that they inherited and are reflecting the realities of everyday lives within the larger constructs of the nation-state and international global capital.

In Mexico the cultural resonance of ancient cultures; the deep and violent history with emblematic conflicts including "first contact" and the subsequent period of the conquistadors; the revolution that is now one hundred years old; and recent governments that follow neo-liberal models, all have created a strong national and cultural identity that many Mexican artists access and navigate as part of their artistic process. As in other large cities, the informality of the street culture and the spontaneity of interactions that take place there encompass a variety of behavior, including random acts of generosity and, conversely, acts that engender fear. With this comes a heightened awareness of unspoken rules and an instinctual sense of what is necessary for safety and survival. The city is an urbanized microcosm of the traces of this history, even at the level of everyday life.

In many ways, Mexico is an open society compared to other countries in the same economic tier. The urban scene is continuously reinvigorated by a constant flow of domestic migrations and immigration, forming a highly variegated cosmopolitan populace. While this condition has created a vibrant and dynamic quality in the cities, it has also created cultures of extremes. The high rates of drug trafficking have given the country a reputation for danger. However, to characterize the violence in terms of the outlaw is to miss the main point, which is that the government, with its long history of nepotistic social relations, corruption and failed policies has created excellent conditions for the production of brutality on domestic and intimate levels as well as in the civic sphere. The one aspect of violence missing from the culture is a strong military, which is not to say there is a lack of foot soldiers, but their role is quite distinct from the militaristic cultures that have dominated many other Latin American countries. Much of the sanctioned assault against the general populace is tolerated by corrupt local and national governments, creating ripe conditions for human devaluation. Okón's artistic project is in dialogue with this negative national condition, which marks his as a specifically Mexican endeavor, even though the types of collective exchange that he exposes cross over into social patterns that are recognizable elsewhere globally.

The peculiarities of Mexico City lend themselves to being the source for Okón's approach to image and space making, which emerges from a desire to expose bits of the complex web of social hierarchies that are negotiated every day. Commentaries on his early videos, featuring street cops performing various simple activities based on the artist's instructions, point out that these time-based images are exemplary of the kind of contradictory power dynamics that make up the chaotic social order.[2] What started out for Okón as a rather curious attempt at confronting his own anxiety about class and power became a bold reflection on the complexity of power games derived from ignorance and insecurity, where manipulation and financial reward are common bedfellows. Ultimately, in Okón's work, the psychological status of being caught between knowledge and fear earns an important position as an emotionally tumultuous interchange between individuals.

The power inversions and points of discomfort that populate Okón's video installations, while not exactly replicating the events that take place outside of the theatrical frame of his work, certainly allude, in a more abstract manner, to incidents of social confusion that often take place between people of different subcultures and classes. For example, in *Oríllese a la orilla* (1999-2000) the street cops, who are from the lower class, equipped with only a basic education, and who are the foot soldiers for local government, wield power over the artist—in one video the cop is waving his baton at the artist/cameraman and threatening him. Even taking into consideration that the performers are paid by the artist to perform according to his own instructions in his own studio, in this scenario who is more vulnerable? And who would be more defenseless if a miscommunication or glitch in the relationship were to arise? Whose power is more compelling? This work exposes a contest between the violence of brute power and the ability to manipulate, verbally and through nuance, thanks to education and privilege. Okón revisits this dynamic in subsequent video installations including *Bocanegra* (2007) and *White Russians* (2008).

Increasingly, his works have required yet another player, a third actor in the game of chance that breaks open social expectations. More and more, the viewer has become that third actor. While this is generally the case in installation art, Okón's approach to the phenomenological consequence of being "inside" a work of art, has triggered fundamental emotional consequences for the viewer, which operate aggressively on psychological, physiological, and political levels.

Art historian Claire Bishop has written extensively about installation art, especially its predominance in the 1990s and 2000s. In writing about several projects by artists based in Europe in the first half of the 2000s where the work is situated in conflicting local political contexts, she acknowledges the appropriation of the subject position of the performers by the artists as a source of meaning for the works. The physical bodies of these actor/participants play an especially important role in transmitting socio-political issues that have relevance and resonance for all of those involved in the project. Especially with these participant collaborations, the artists create works that expose the hardships or contradictions of particular economic, social, and political dynamics of place, often in relationship to labor and agency.

As an example, *Canned Laughter* (2009) focuses on a quintessential labor issue within the Mexican context. This project deconstructs the communicative codes of the corporate image, from the uniform to the logo to the interior architecture of the factory. Shot in a section of one of the many empty shells of the abandoned factories in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, a town in northern Mexico that shares a border with Texas, Okón created a mock maquiladora[3] where underpaid workers package cans of laughter, a fundamental multimedia product used by the television entertainment industry. Yoshua Okón hired workers from the area and "orchestrated" their individual laughter into a traditional chorus to recreate different effects: hysterical laughs, nervous ones, wicked ones, and so on. The audience of the installation is invited to reflect on the limits of spontaneity of this emotion within the discourse of labor and the serial logic of contemporary industrial practice. As the artist stated,

> The piece stems from my interest in the inexplicability of humor and its subtleties, and this project also has to do with the impossibility of translating "true" emotion and reproducing it through technological means. I am interested in translating laughter in particular because I very much see it as a 'social gesture' which also relates to my broader artistic process.[4]

Bishop writes that the "intersubjective relations weren't an end in themselves but rather served to unfold a more complex knot of concerns about pleasure, visibility, engagement, and the conventions of social interaction." She continues with a comment on the shifting relationship of concepts of authorship in this new configuration of artist/participant/audience. "The best collaborative practices of the past ten years address this contradictory pull between autonomy and social intervention, and reflect on this antinomy both in the structure of the work and in the conditions of its reception."[5] Yoshua Okón, like other artists of his generation, have been incorporating reception itself into works of art that are also social interventions framed within the parameters of installation art, especially in scenarios where the viewer becomes a participant, either by design or involuntarily. This conflation of roles is necessary to the success of many of Okón's works produced between 2007 and 2009.

Okón takes particularly perverse advantage of the conditions of production and reception in a manner similar to other artists that Bishop mentions including British artists Phil Collins and Jeremy Deller and Polish artist Artur Zmijewski, all of whom cross boundaries of polite acceptability by requiring their actor/collaborators to perform acts that are either extreme, embarrassing or nonsensical. Installation art has the advantage of instantly and seamlessly shifting the relationship between art object and viewer, giving audiences just enough distance from each other to implicate the viewer into constructed scenarios, which address harsh realities. This strategy works particularly well for Okón as he takes full advantage of these conditions to further the emotional drama within the work through the inclusion of the audience members as the third actor.

What happens is that performativity becomes, in part, the burden of viewers, and now that they are thrust into the role, oftentimes unknowingly, they then realize that they have also been thrust into taking on an unsought responsibility, shifting the role of viewer to that of actor. Most importantly, the contract one enters into as a spectator, even if involuntarily, is binding, at least theoretically. What I mean to say by this is that it is impossible to escape an emotional relationship with the work once you enter the installation. It is at this point that you need to take some kind of responsibility for what you see and what you know. This does not mean that you need to do something about it or that you need to take any specific action to justify your position as a responsible viewer. In fact, in many cases the viewer is irresponsible. It does not really matter, as this is not what the game is about. It becomes a dilemma of conscience in the face of the intimacy, sexuality, perversion, and inversion that unfolds within the works. While many of the installations take advantage of the mirroring effect on a primarily phenomenological level, this Lacanian mirror furthers dislocation and discontinuity in the liminal space in the cinematic sense, that hovers somewhere between the presentness of documentary and the escape mechanisms of dramatic fiction. The instability of viewers' ability to position themselves *vis-à-vis* the work of art is disconcerting because the confused positions of power on the screen(s) discourage, through guilt perhaps, psychological distance.

Danger as it presents itself in these works is dependent, in part, on the realist modes of transparency associated with video as a medium, which is one reason that television reality shows have been so addicting. For these commercial ventures, regular people, who are often not ready for the challenges that they face as members of a constructed cast, agree to participate in a game devised for the entertainment of the viewing public. While there are some similarities here to Okón's project, the scale and context of his works draw on the intimate spatial relation of the screen to the viewing public within the relatively rarefied sphere of the museum or gallery. In addition, Okón often creates his projects in response to an invitation to exhibit his work by a curator who has a relationship with a specific museum or gallery. In Mexico City, he proceeds to upend that society's social structures and iconic identities; in Germany, he addresses the role of distortion in the play of fantasy; and in California, he exposes a laissez-faire version of existentialism.[6] Certainly, there is a trend towards the sadistic in several of Okón's works, and this trend is the artist's own choice, or his fascination, or obsession. It is as if sadism is everywhere and just has to be unearthed and exposed in all of its ugliness, which forces us, the viewers, to confront our own eroded sense of ethics and justice. He opens up a strange window to various forms of depravity that are hidden from general view. He is fascinated by the unconscious mechanisms in negative or insulting acts.

Okón's work shares some attributes with the live endurance events conceived by Santiago Sierra (b. 1966), which are also shown as single-channel video or video/audio installations. Sierra, who is from Spain and has been based in Mexico since 1995, is known for his "social sculpture," a term coined by German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986). Curator Joan Rothfuss writes that the term "might broadly be defined as a conscious act of shaping, of bringing some aspect of the environment—whether the political system, the economy, or the classroom—from a chaotic state into a state of form or structure."[7] His work has certainly affected Okón's thinking, especially in relationship to sociology and labor. Sierra focuses on the corporeal bodies of those that he hires to participate in his art projects. These paid delegated performers are also actual protagonists for the failure of capitalist economic structures. His projects dramatize margins of human self-value for those with few options for meaningful employment, as well as the role of desperation for those forced to make undesirable employment choices. For instance, in 2000 Sierra created *The Wall of a Gallery Pulled Out, Inclined 60 Degrees From the Ground and Sustained by 5 People*, where the artist paid five men to hold up a temporary wall for four hours a day over five days. Okón's project approaches these themes in more resolutely psychological terms, and

the viewer's empathetic pain is less about the limits of burden on the body in relationship to human economics and more about empathy for the actor's part-real/part-fictional characters whose actions are perceived as embarrassing, nonsensical, and absurd. While Sierra almost always addresses issues of labor, this is only one of the social spheres in which Okón engages. Okón's fascination with deep social disconnects that exist between subgroups is laden with emotional and psychological intent and an insertion of the surreal within realist forms.

Initially, Okón's filmmaking was quite simple, comprised of a series of questions or directives that were then played out in front of the camera. While the earlier videos were structured as simple documents, with some verbal exchange between the artist and the actor, over the years the works have become more complex in both conception and execution. His most recent installations include multiple cameras, editing across more than one screen, and coordinated planning and components produced by others, such as the product promotion video in *Canned Laughter* (2009). For *White Russians* (2008), the process included meetings and rehearsals before the final shoot that took place as part of a larger event. Also, the editing is employed more actively to shape raw footage into a recognizable, quasi-narrative structure, allowing for a porous relationship between the actions on screen and those within the installation space.

For *Bocanegra* (2007), Okón collaborated with a group of Third Reich sympathizers and enthusiasts. He spent a significant amount of time with the group before convincing them to participate in his project. As a result, they felt comfortable enough to perform roles and fantasies in front of the camera, including their fascination with Third Reich philosophy and paraphernalia and obsession with the tenets of its horrific politics. Two of the videos—including *The Gathering*, a dinner conversation, and *A Walk in the Park*, a march through the city by men fully dressed in Third Reich uniforms, regalia, and banners—were developed for the video by the artists and the performers. These scenes are simultaneously abhorrent and comical in that absurdity and twisted logic mark the group's ineffectiveness and the ridiculousness of their endeavors. The viewer, nonetheless, is put in an uncomfortable position of negotiating how he or she feels about the group. Are they harmless or are they potentially dangerous? The viewer is faced with the group's rhetoric full of pathetic contradictions and illogical conclusions. *The Movie* component of the four-part installation was conceived and shot entirely by members of the group and then edited by Okón following the script written by them. This portion of the installation is a result of the group's ambivalence towards the artist and their doubts about whether he would give them a fair representation. What emerged from these feelings was a demand to regain control over how they were being represented. Ironically, their own efforts are the most damning component of the installation. It further exposes their depravity, and while ridiculous in and of itself, placed within the spatial configuration of the installation, sheds some light on the entire project.

Some of Okón's video installations, including *Coyotería* (2003) and *White Russians* address contradictions that beset the art world, of which he is a part, as a sphere that is not without its own deep contradictions and problematic relationship to ethics, bullying, typecasting, and elitism. Okón has often inserted himself into his videos through his presence in the frame or as an off-camera voice in his directorial role. In works that implicate the art world as narrow, short-sighted, unconscious, and at the same time in a position of influence to expose a corrupt society, Okón creates situations that expose hidden ethical conundrums. With *Coyotería*, Okón appropriates a 1974 work by Joseph Beuys titled *I Like America and America Likes Me* performed in New York at the Rene Block Gallery, where he lived with a *coyote* for a week. For Beuys, the *coyote* represents Native American spiritualism. In Mexico, *coyote* is a term used to describe those who are hired to take immigrants without documents across national borders, especially the U.S.-Mexico border. Okón's performance and video features a real *coyote* (person) in the gallery acting like a *coyote* (animal) that is taunted by the artist, who is wrapped in a blanket and wields a shamanic staff and the *Wall Street Journal*.

The power relations around issues of consciousness are particularly convoluted in many of the scenarios depicted in Okón's video installations. He means to make some important points about this dynamic that could be construed as perverse or manipulative on his part. Who is the person who holds the power and who is the one who is victimized? Or what are the layers of power and victimization at work simultaneously and how are they played out in this work within the dynamics of bullying? If one positions the state as a bully to the populace, then all who are citizens of the state share this victimized position. As cultural theorist Roddey Reid explains,

> In this regard it is commonly observed that bullies, when they are criticized or stymied, are nonetheless quick to portray themselves as innocent victims and that victims have often become bullies in their own right. […] Successful bullying intimidates in part because it makes violently clear that it is supremely indifferent to any type of social, psychological or ethical boundary. No holds are barred and nothing is sacred. It strives to impress upon both actual and potential victims its literally boundless character that exceeds all possible imaginings and logic.[8]

When Okón identifies individuals and communities of people with whom he would like to collaborate—Third Reich enthusiasts in Mexico City; a museum guard at the Städtische Kunsthalle München; residents of a small town in a desert in Southern California; beach lifers in Santa Monica, California; residents of the Mexican border city of Ciudad Juárez—he asks them to participate in a mise-en-scène that he constructs based on their normal lives and activities. While he is motivated by his desire to create a video installation that speaks to some core aspects of the lives of these "temporary workers," on a deeper level he is, like a novelist, using the lives of others to delve into his own vulnerability, which opens him up to feeling and living within the problematics of production. How does Okón use and

abuse his position of power? The actors, whose own life situations are mirrored in the work of art, are now complicit with the "boss" of the work in exposing the contradictions between their own lives and the fictions created by the artist. Through acting, everyday life is placed into precarious new positions when considering states of empowerment. Do the actors leave the project with a new awareness of themselves? Is this a question that should remain within the framework of the work itself? Can a meta-narrative of power dynamics be represented through these micro-plays? In a sense, Okón's project is a distortion or perhaps an exaggeration of normal practices in documentary filmmaking, where subjects are asked to sign release forms and then asked questions or filmed on site in a cinéma vérité style.

In some cases, they have some say in the outcome of the footage, but in other instances they are manipulated by the filmmaker's agenda. But the comparison ends there, since Okón is not interested in showing a piece of reality, but rather in creating a parallel scenario that is near fiction or fact, a composite and at the same time not a composite of both, within his works. He clearly is working towards something that disturbs the normal relations between director and actor. While the symbiotic relationships between director, actor, and viewer is a stable aspect of the work, the dynamics of how these relationships play out within the work is unique and determined by the central motivation of each of the projects: bullying, disassociation, complicity or exposure. This is coupled with an attention to negative emotions with the expressions of doubt, dismay, irritation, envy or confusion in the actor/subject.

More recently, with Okón's shift to audience reception as a central component of the work, these negative emotions figure both on the screen and within the gallery. However, both the actor and the audience may have had emotions triggered by earlier works, for example, when a cop is berating the artist, or even later, when paranoia becomes such a strong factor in the artist's relationship with the group of Third Reich enthusiasts that they doubt his ability to present them with objectivity. The paranoia escalates at one point in the process when the group learns that the artist is Jewish, which then creates more internal conflict about his motivations and even a debate among themselves about why they are participating in the project. Differing positions within society and issues of class also lead to envy and doubt. So while there are reasons that tensions arise within the process of creating the work, in many cases they are exposed as part of the content of the work.

White Russians features the Akien family and their friends who live in the remote community of Wonder Valley, in the high desert of southern California about two hours drive from Los Angeles, where they have developed a unique social microculture. The community consists of scattered houses with no running water on five-acre lots connected to each other by dirt roads. The title of the work refers to Diana Akien's alcoholic beverage of choice. Filmed during the 2008 edition of the High Desert Test Sites, an annual art festival of temporary works,[9] this video demonstrates Okón's desire, as a member of the

art world, for sociological reflexivity. The video features a "rehearsal" elaborated from a loose script developed collaboratively between the artist and the actors. The family and friends chose to create a "family drama," where the audience circulating the area for the art festival would be invited to "watch" the rehearsal on "set." The dramatic actions take place intermittently, in twenty-minute intervals. For the installation, the audience enters a structure that imitates elements of a simple house that references the structures in the community. Suspended video monitors show footage of the actors and audience within view of the three static cameras shooting simultaneously. Notable shots include the family members screaming and a dog peeing on the living room carpet. In one scene, one of the male actors, Roger, points to Yoshua, and says, "Get the shit out of here too. Bye. Adios. I quit. Vanish. I quit. Adios. Disappear. I'm serious, out of here." Although he is pointing to Yoshua he is also requesting that all visitors who have gathered in the house leave the premises.

This kind of revolt is an indication of the pressures that Okón places on his actors. Cross-gaze voyeurism between the two subsets—the residents of Wonder Valley and the members of the art world—is a display of the social pressures that have been placed on individuals in each of the groups that is caught on camera. By asking Yoshua and his art world "friends" to leave, Roger is acting on impulse and playing out his feelings and fears about his contract with the artist. It is at this moment that he both acts out and enacts a primitive power to banish. He locates the agency to direct or boss around, and with his command gives shape to the conflicting feelings and confusion that is floating throughout the house. It may appear that control and power extend beyond the dichotomy of the subgroups into a mutable and malleable state. Yet this illusion of control is subsumed by the agency of the artist, who has consciously constructed a situation that is open to a very wide range of behaviors, reactions, and demands. He achieves the best results from his actors by incorporating everyone into a role playing situation, with a regard for the social order, which is suspect.

Okón often chooses to collaborate with those who feel disenfranchised from the mainstream in one way or another and are therefore already either disillusioned or unable to fit in to some notion of societal norms. Artists have often associated with and depicted social marginality as a way of representing their own sense of difference. Okón finds ways to side-step predictability, often choosing to work with groups who are completely outside of his own social sphere, yet with whom he connects because of their Otherness.

In certain of Okón's videos, such as *New Décor* (2001) and *Hausmeister* (2008), they exhibit aggressive or embarrassing behaviors that trigger visceral responses in audiences. In her book *Ugly Feelings*, cultural theorist Sianne Ngai unpacks a range of non-cathartic feelings with a focus on both the "aesthetics of negative emotions" and "affective gaps and illegibilities, dysphoric feelings, and other sites of emotional negativity in literature, film, and theoretical writing, to explore similarly ambivalent situations of suspended agency."[10] What is illuminating about this book is the way that Ngai has found value in narrative

descriptions of emotions such as paranoia, envy, and "stuplimity," a term she coined to describe a combination of boredom and shock. She is highly sensitive to the way that capitalism shapes political agency and also suggests that these lesser emotions (rather than bolder ones such as anger, jealousy, and fear) chart a course of feeling that has been given less attention because it is either more difficult to identify or because of a murky ambivalence that surrounds the feeling. At the same time, since these feelings are associated with pain or displeasure, Ngai wants to "recuperate several of these negative effects for their critical productivity."[11]

Of interest here is that they appear in the narrative arts to reveal a disconnection between behaviors assumed to be normal and those that are considered to be discomforting. She discusses the depictions of irritating literary characters as well as the irritation felt by readers when confronted by characters who are behaving in ways that are out of line with the standard script, based on social mores, etc. For instance, in a long analysis of the 1928 novel *Quicksand*, by Nella Larson, her character Helga Crane, a mixed-race teacher reared by a white mother who lives in a black neighborhood, responds to racism in ways that will likely irritate the reader by sidestepping the more obvious emotion of anger or contempt for racial hatred for something more ambiguous like her annoyance over the smell of food and smoke in the form of a physical irritant in the "negro" car of a moving train. Ngai writes: "What is more, her irritation is likely to irritate the reader."[12] She explains, "Thus, if there are narrative lesions or ruptures in *Quicksand* that discomfort the reader, they are ruptures which function as 'felt' outbreak of contradiction, telling symptoms of race's overdetermined equation with the black body in American culture."[13]

I find these observances very useful when considering Okón's work. Even with video installations where these types of feelings are a bit less obvious, such as with *White Russians*, an emotion such as suplimity is repeated throughout. Within the artificiality of the staged but unscripted scenes, the sudden chorus of screams breaks the boredom of sitting around the living room just hanging out. The art world audience members seem a bit perplexed by their insertion into the film, and though not exactly bored, they are also rather lacking in expressions of inquisitiveness. Certainly, paranoia plays an important function in *Bocanegra* in dialogue such as:

> People in Oaxaca were Aryan. If you separate and produce a better race, you're Aryan. The Jews were Aryan? The majority… because they marry amongst themselves. No! Look, it says it clearly in one of the fuehrer's speeches. As long as you don't make the mistake of mixing your blood with inferior blood, you're Aryan.

At one point in the video one of the actors says, "I'm no longer acting."

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1 For more on the concept of the delegated performer see Julia Austin's interview with Claire Bishop, "Trauma, Antagonism and the Bodies of Others: a dialogue on delegated performance" in *Performance Paradigm 5.1: After Effects: Performing the ends of memory,* (May 2009). Available on http://www.performanceparadigm.net/category/journal/issue-5.1/.
2 See Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, "Yoshua Okón: *Orillese a la orilla*" in *Curator's Notes: Fishing in International Waters: New Acquisitions from the Latin American Collection,* brochure, Blanton Museum of Art, 2004 and Davila-Villa, Ursula, "*Yoshua Okón: The Psychology of Powe*r," in *Yoshua Okón-SUBTITLE* 1997-2007, exh. cat., Städtische Kunsthalle München, 2008.
3 Factory owned by an international corporation that imports materials and equipment on a duty-free and tariff-free basis for assembly or manufacturing and then re-exports the assembled product, usually back to the originating country.
4 See the announcement for the presentation of *Canned Laughter* at http://www.viafarini.org/english/shows/okon.html
5 Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents" in *Artforum*, February 2006, p. 182.
6 Examples include *Gaza Stripper* (2006), a performance at the Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, Israel and *White Russians* (2008), created for the California Biennial at the Orange County Museum of Art.
7 Joan Rothfuss, "Creativity" in *Beuys/Logos* hyperessay by Julio Luchenbach, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, http://www.walkerart.org/archive/1/A8433698FB2232A536167.htm
8 Roddey Reid, "The American Culture of Public Bullying," *Black Renaissance Noire*, vol. 9, nos. 2-3 (Fall-Winter 2009-10), p. 184.
9 High Desert Test Sites was founded and is organized by artist Andrea Zittel and inaugurated in 2002. Okón created *White Russians* in response to an invitation to participate in the 2008 California Biennial.
10 Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 2005, p. 1.
11 *Ibid.,* p. 3.
12 *Ibid.,* p.187.
13 *Ibid.,* p. 207.