



COLECTIVO CAMBALACHE  
Museo de la Calle, 1999.

# *carolina* **caycedo**

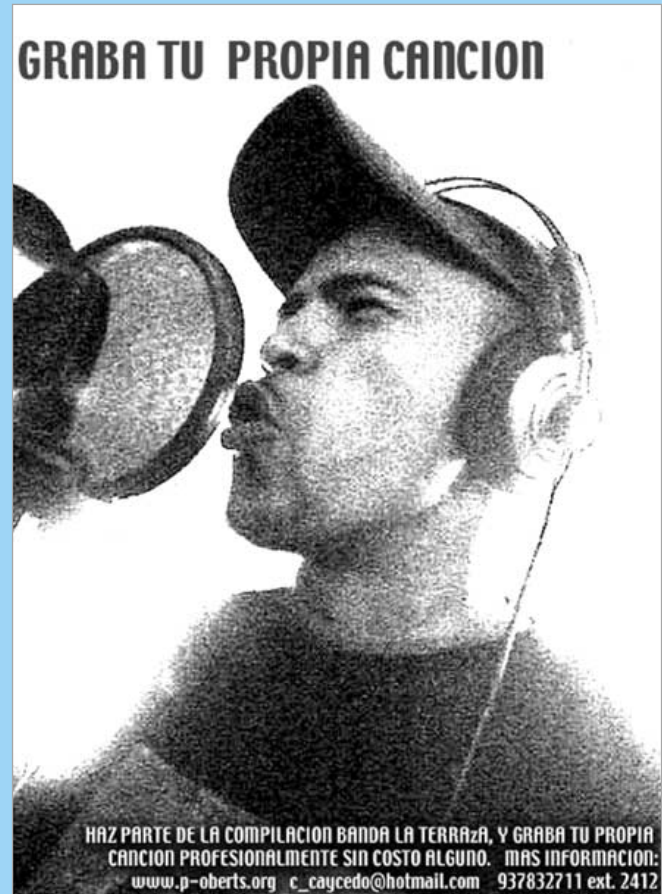
## Experiencie as an Art Form

NATALIA MAYA SANTACRUZ

Born in London and both professionally and sentimentally educated in Colombia, Carolina Caycedo has managed to consolidate an integral career which, in spite of the great quantity and variety of projects, is thus far a remarkably coherent one. The projects reviewed in this essay are the most significant among Caycedo`s works, and they deserve to be lingered over, since they constitute moments in which the artist is defining the ideas that will undergird her future projects.

In 1999, Carolina Caycedo joined the *Colectivo Cambalache* in order to carry out a project called *Museo de la calle (Street's Museum)*, an itinerant and portable work whose means of transport was a little wooden cart named *El Veloz (Speedy)*, a kind of vehicle commonly used by garbage collectors and recyclers who dwell in and ambulate all around the city of Bogotá. According to the collective, such an artefact was intended to promote a flowing of objects and communication by means of exchanging and bartering practises. All those objects gathered in the streets and loaded on board *El Veloz* were supposed to be bartered at different places around the world. The starting point was El Cartucho, a street formerly located downtown, in a zone that has recently undergone a forced evacuation because it served as a hub for informal trading among those who comprised the lowest rank of Colombian society. Bartering in this place, the members of *Colectivo Cambalache* did in fact gather all kinds of material: knives, hair curlers, mirrors, drugs, books, doll heads, pots, among many other things. The bartering, as it had been planned, kept going both in different sectors of Bogotá and at many cities around the world, such as San Juan, Ljubljana, Seville and Barcelona.

As a result of this "trading" of objects, which are consequently transformed into a universal subject matter –a doll head from Bogotá, for instance, could be bartered in Ljubljana– *Cambalache* proposed the notion of a constantly travelling museum. After a series of travels, *El Veloz*`s first phase ended in an exhibition room where the collected items were not only exhibited but also available for bartering, giving the visitor a chance to get involved in the project as an active contributor rather than a passive onlooker. By



### CAROLINA CAYCEDO

Banda la Terraza, 2004  
Flyer for Banda la Terraza CD.

disregarding money, the members of *Cambalache* shift the terms of human relationships –aware as they are that the latter have been strongly conditioned by money transactions– and abolish the market value of the merchandise, in the sense that it is the subject who assigns the object its value, one unrestrained by the standards imposed by economical powers.

The projects individually carried out by Caycedo are in some measure an extension of the experience of bartering performed in *Museo de la calle*. Caycedo presented the project *Day to Day* during the annual activities organized by Secession, the visual artists

association of Vienna. Taking up again the idea of disregarding money as the only mediator in human relationships and aiming to demonstrate how daily life needs can be fulfilled without using money and through an alternative way, Caycedo decided to live for three weeks in Vienna without spending a single euro; a van and gasoline coupons were the only requisites she asked for. In that house-van, where she barely had a small mattress, Caycedo did provide a series of "services" such as teaching how to dance salsa, hairdressing, telling her secrets, running errands, kissing, teaching English and reading books aloud, among others, in exchange for other favours such as clothes washing, Internet access, a meal or a place for cooking; to be brief, the artist was meeting her needs with those of the locals, an attitude properly expressed in a motto written by Caycedo on both sides of her van: "I give, I need. You give, you need".

The artist tried her own limits and communication skills in this project, and, as it finally happened, she found more receptiveness than she had expected; people truly did participate: "I never had to pry any locks, people always opened the door for me."

Encouraged by her reading of Hakim Bey<sup>1</sup> –nom de plume of a contemporary anarchist thinker who divulgates his work on the Internet for free and is the creator of a model called TAZ, developed as a means of alternative work intended to facilitate a total freedom from the pressuring infrastructures which so often grab hold of any form of resistance– Carolina Caycedo has proposed *invisibility* as a strategy for dodging the siege by the machinery of power. TAZ, initials for "Temporary Autonomous Zone," is depicted as an area that can denote as much a determined fraction of time as a real or fictitious place. This area tends to self-dissolve before being detected by a regulating force. TAZ's strength resides in its invisibility and capacity to incite entropy within controlling systems: in Bey's theory the State is regarded as a simulating entity whose elements play a determined and fixed role, hence whenever any of these elements play an atypical role they become disturbing factors.

In this sense –and in order to circumvent another imposition, namely, that of image as a coercive power– we could say that Caycedo has deviated toward new technical resources while still maintaining an ideological line. Carlos Basualdo, one of the curators partaking in the 50<sup>th</sup> Biennial of Venice with a collective exhibition called "The Structure of Survival," asked Caycedo to talk about the problem of social disparity in the world from her artistic point of view.

Downplaying the worn-out images from the Third World, saturated with shantytowns and children in search of a compassionate glimpse –images that in the long run have encouraged apathy because of their exhibitionistic and commercial exploitation– Caycedo refused to work with the imagery of hunger and misery and decided to release *Shanty Sounds*, a double-CD that seems to merely offer a sound testimony of social segregation.

Nevertheless, there is a background: Caycedo moved to the outskirts of Bogotá, and she spent four months there recording the most intense sounds of the city. As Caycedo said in one occasion, "if we could use a sound wave for drawing, defining, comparing, sensing and/or depicting a Latin-American city, I think the slums would provide both the highest and the lowest tone; the wave would vibrate more intensely at those places, given their lack of routines, unexpected situations, informality, precariousness, lack of security and unsteadiness. The shantytowns are time-bombs."

This double-CD includes records where the songs by *Makube* and *Perpetuo* –two hip-hop groups from Bogotá's shantytowns– appear intermingled with daily life sounds and conversations that the artist had with the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods. Provided that rap is one of the simplest forms of making music since it doesn't require any technology, and in view of the fact that rap constitutes a real form of resistance against the unsteadiness shantytown residents have to confront on a daily basis, it's no wonder that this musical form is a very common practise among these circles. Their lyrics are indeed despairing and loaded with urban poetry and harsh reality, they talk about

their missing friends, the uprooted families or the deceitful face of society. In a single track we can hear background music, dog barks and voices sometimes brazen and other times whispering telling us how hard it is to live in a radically unfavourable environment. The record is a completely joint effort by Caycedo and the rappers. She also disclosed a series of pieces of Colombian conflict synthesized in prosaic shantytown narrations; I`m referring to testimonies that make the necessities of those who speak even more evident, since these narratives have come out of a strictly marginalized environment and also because every single story makes us aware of the magnitude of the problem, while we keep noticing a social fissure, as obvious as it is paradoxically unutterable. Somehow coinciding with Caycedo`s ideas on the strengthening of communication are the sounds produced through "perifoneo," a communal communication system consisting of megaphones strung up on electric poles or a car in order to broadcast the inhabitants` needs, services and urgencies. It is also a self-financed communal service and Caycedo regards this as a meaningful element: "The echo, produced in the mountains that surround these zones, makes the sound more effective, sometimes excessively effective, bursting into and merging with the "perifoneo" from adjoining neighbourhoods, generating beautiful urban cacophonies."

Thanks to DJ Bala –one of the pseudonyms used by Carolina Caycedo– the boys of *Makube* and *Perpetuo* had the chance to become skilled in music production processes. In some measure, she acted as a patron for them, diverting funds from artistic infrastructure –in short, those of the Biennial– in an attempt to extend, share and collectivise those means within a different kind of social group, and at the same time, expand the artistic production range.



**COLECTIVO CAMBALACHE**

*Museo de la Calle, 1999.*  
El Veloz, Museo de la Calle's vehicle.



Once the collective work formulas, the public space handling and the diversion of resources had been experienced and set in motion, Caycedo`s proposals were welcomed in *Process Oberts (Open Processes)*, a platform created by the artistic production centre of Barcelona, Hangar. The activities of *Process Oberts* have been taking place since the beginning of 2004 in the city of Terrassa (Catalonia),

where 12 invited artists must contextualize their works, using their relationship with this community as the starting point and core of their projects.

The CD included free of charge in the current issue of ARTECONTEXTO as a means to support this creative work includes Caycedo's project named *Banda La Terraza*, a pun alluding both to the name of the Catalonian city and a renowned gang from Medellín. This CD was recorded after the artist summoned all those inhabitants of Terrassa who wanted to participate in an independent musical production and never had the chance to record their own music, regardless if they were professional or amateurs. The outcome is a mixture of styles and assorted genres such as flamenco, reggae, pop, jazz, hard-core, techno, hip-hop, bolero, romantic ballads, among others.

While *Banda La Terraza* is intended to serve as a social communication tool –thanks to the public concept that originated it, the reaction of the people and given that it allows for an approach to the current trends in popular culture from an specific point of view– we must also mention that this project encourages a reflection on small-scale strategies developed as feasible utopias and against the homogenizing industrial production.

It might be said that Caycedo's work has been affected essentially by two notions: *reality* and *daily life*. Both notions constitute her primary context as she never schemes or designs her projects in order to apply them in simulation-based societies. And that's why the results become reflections and questionings about our behavior regarding consumerism, communication and perception.

Instead of keeping her works enclosed, permanently paralyzed and objectified, Caycedo prefers gathering, integrating and dissolving those works (actions) within the very street dynamics.

In spite of their CD format, neither *Shanty Sounds* nor *Banda La Terraza* records can arrive at the gallery status of stand-still pieces, since these records don't ultimately constitute the artistic object itself. In that sense, it would be preferable to talk of experience as an art form, which means that the work undergoes

dissemination both across time and space, and all that's left for the spectator to see are the subsequent tracks. As a consequence, these records are just a document recounting/evoking a former experience. Such a dematerialization impedes any populist or demagogical approach to the people whom she works with. She doesn't exploit people or their extreme situations because she never brandishes the banner of the radical and isolated political denunciation that winds up becoming trite and having no consequences on reality; nor does she craft discourses to bring down the establishment, as used to be the case with artists back in the 60's, but rather she re-introduces a number of political art concepts from the aforementioned decade, as she approaches daily life aiming to generate changes without hoping for grand nor massive revolutions. She hasn't presented herself as a redeeming subject who offers solutions, and she has shirked the idea of an approach that restricts itself to gathering sociological material. Hers is an approach under the influence of vital rhythms. We must mention that her personality goes along with the flow of the streets she works in. When people told her about their precarious situation and self-financed communication system for the neighborhood in *Shanty Sounds*, they were narrating themselves, which makes clear that people not only contributed but also configured the entire work; moreover, the project always depended on their receptiveness and disposition during the process. Caycedo is used to employing a natural approach and has never had the intention to change people's customs. In a very subtle way, the artist gets involved in the daily reality of these persons, among whom she goes on to play a role more in keeping with mediation than authorship, catalyzing more than interpreting the internal forces that move these groups.

#### NOTE

1. We don't know for sure if the pseudonym Hakim Bey is a cover for a particular individual or the actual name of a social anarchist group.



**PERPETUO** Banda de hip-hop. Barrios de Soacha, Bogotá.



**MAKUBE** Banda de hip-hop. Soacha, Bogotá.