

**Juan Betancurth and Daniel Neumann**

Conversations [modified]

Part 01

**DN:** It's so difficult now to find a starting point.

**JB:** Well, I think you just found it though.

And with that set, do you think about our collaboration in terms of a dynamic or in terms of meaning? If one is different to the other, I don't know.

**DN:** It's probably different. I think I'm more interested in the dynamic. The meaning to me is almost not that important, so it's more about this dynamic process of our two approaches, that are somewhat clashing, creating something new. I'm personally not looking for meaning. Or how would you answer that?

**JB:** I think that maybe the result is kind of the meaning, if we could call it that.

**DN:** The meaning, I think, gets assigned to the result. It's not necessarily inherent in the result.

**JB:** Right, and I don't think we are pursuing a meaning. Since the beginning, it has been more about exploring the unknown. So it is like we are playing the role of being creators and, how can I say that, observers.

**DN:** Yes, I think that's totally true. And to me that reflects immediately back on the title of the show, that process of joining our two forces and seeing what happens. That's what is always ONE CYCLE AHEAD. Giving it a meaning and trying to understand what it is as an object is secondary and always lacking behind. To me that is fascinating. That's I think also part of what I'm looking for in art. I'm always a little bit bored if the artwork is an execution of a pre-existing idea – the one liner. That to me has more to do with craft, or design.

**JB:** I think I would put it more in terms of design, because it's even more planned than the craft. In craft you have some kind of instinctual vision of what you're going to do, to make. But if in the process of building something a mistake happens, you embrace it and keep going. I think our process, since the beginning has been like that, like, how do you say, freedom..

**DN:** Freedom from meaning.

**JB:** Yeah, exactly, freedom from meaning and structure.

**DN:** And letting the dynamic of our interaction kind of guide the way towards a result. That's what I find very pronounced in our interaction. And to me it's also a valid point on almost like a political level, to create something that doesn't have to mean anything. And that's beauty in an artwork, when it has a certain openness, where you can assign meaning to it, but you don't have to feel that meaning is enforced. Enforcing to me is almost like a fascist way, where there's only one ideology, there's one understanding of the world, there's one way of thinking, one way of reading what you see.

**JB:** This sounds very modernist.

**DN:** Yeah, and I think it's important to move as far away from that as possible.

**JB:** My personal experience with all of what we've been doing is that it's kind of an abandonment, you know, it's like letting the things go.

**DN:** And so, do you have the feeling that the work is a compromise? Because that's always, or often a critique for collaborative works. That instead of having one subjective strong vision resulting from one place, in collaboration, by trying to combine multiple visions you always end up with a compromise that's somewhat weaker. How do you feel about that critique, or potential critique in relationship to what we are doing?

**JB:** I don't feel compromised. And I'm not feeling that my practice is been compromised, even though I'm involved in a collaboration, in a situation, in an exhibition, I would've never imagined myself to be involved with. I couldn't have planned it. It just organically and spontaneously happened and I just started to go with it. But I don't feel at any moment that I'm compromising myself. I feel that I can be myself. And I feel that I have a practice and you know my practice and you know what I'm doing and I know I can just put that practice on the table, to interact with yours. I feel that in our process the moment that we have to get to a middle point are things like: what is going to be the poster, what is going to be this.. you know, things that are about the space, the gallery, the logistics. We have to get to these decisions as compromises, but not within the nature of the – creating, or the collaboration. Or how do you feel?

**DN:** No, yeah, I feel similar. I also feel like I almost can be more honest with my output than in most other things. I don't really know why! (laughing)

Maybe one factor is that we are coming from very different angles. Me definitely coming from a sonic perspective, based on listening, on how sound fills space, how sound interacts in a space and what it does to the objects in its arena. And you coming from working with objects, often found objects, stripping their given meaning away, and putting them into this ambiguous, open ontological space basically creating a different object within a different world, that I then can approach, almost from – I wanted to say almost from the outside, but that's not really true – almost from the inside!

**JB:** (laughter) I would say from the inside!

**DN:** So, I'm approaching the objects from the inside, right. And then, articulate these objects with sound in a certain space and in a certain relationship to each other. We are developing multiple objects and they will be presented together in one room. For you, do you perceive the objects as individual objects, or as one installation with multiple parts? And how does that relate to your practice normally? How do you work with installations?

**JB:** I think that when I work with installations I recognize all the elements there as individuals sharing the same space at one point. So the installation becomes the dialog that happens between this individual object and this other one. I never feel like I'm trying to create a group, an installation as a group. One installation is more like a space where different entities coexist and meet. Because if I'd go for group, I think it'd be against my own self, since I don't believe that much in groups.

**DN:** Right. To me, I perceive it more as an energy field, as a field with individual voices interrelated. But sound has this nature of connecting. To me field is better than group, since group suggests an identity, a group identity, which creates a narrowing umbrella for the individual objects. In a field I feel like, it's just like the shared space, the shared plain on which those individuals can be what they are and interact.

**JB:** Yeah, and I think that that for me has been interesting working with you on this. Because we are also creating this field, and are coexisting and interacting in it. But if you say to me for instance, I want to lower this frequency, or put this effect,

or I want to do this or that in relationship to the sound – how can I say no? Because that's not my language even if we are in the same field – it's not mine. I need to wait and listen to what you were talking about, to feel it, to understand it and to let myself go with it. So the fact that we have those two different angles that you were mentioning before is interesting. The last concern that we have is to have a mutual agreement. This I think for a collaboration is really interesting.

**DN:** And it would be different if we were, let's say, both painters and we would collaborate on a painting, then there would have to be more compromise. But yeah, I've never been in a collaboration like ours, I don't think.

**JB:** Me neither. And it's hard to define. We were having quite a few moments where you said what you wanted to do, but I was like, I cannot really visualize sound in the way that he can. So, I hold my opinion, not because I don't feel free to say it, I feel that I can say whatever I want to say, but I'm just afraid of you losing the freedom, you know, your own expression, which is the thing that is really what I want to see, and want to enjoy. I don't want to say something that could stop you, make you think twice, for me that would be a lost!

(laughing)

**DN:** Oh, I like that, as a picture! To think twice is a lost! (more laughing)

**JB:** One of the things that excites me about all of this is that we have the chance to do the things that aren't as meaningful, embracing relationships between meaning/meaningless, found/lost, ambiguities, and contradictions.

**DN:** Our connection is on this more theoretical level I think. That's where we actually have a lot of things in common, I'm just realizing now. To me ambiguity is very important, and an open-endedness of meaning, and a kind of darkness of existence or something. I think on those levels that's where we actually have an overlap. But in the material, the first overlap happened when we decided to work together, otherwise there wouldn't be any overlap..

**JB:** Yeah.

**DN:** ..or barely.

**JB:** And, going even deeper than that, I think that we didn't even decide to work together. It just happened. (laughing) We didn't plan to do something together, everything started and took a direction that we never thought about.

**DN:** Right. And then the other more material based overlap came into play, because I had this collection of speaker objects, that were somewhat unusual. It then reminded me, when we started talking about it, of your approach with your objects. All of a sudden I was like, wait, these strange speaker cones or this old military speaker, I would be curious what Juan would do with that as an object, stripped of its function, to approach it as sculptural material. Since I'm too close to the technology and its function and I have a hard time seeing it removed from that. I feel like that's where the collaboration started, at these found objects that I gave to you, as a material. What was yours? You probably have a totally different starting point..

**JB:** For me it was out of curiosity. When you showed me those objects, I was just trapped and seduced by how they were looking. It was like, well is this an amplifier or a speaker? I cannot tell the difference. The first object was the double head speaker. We worked on it without even thinking that we'll be going to do that together. We followed that non-sense, without planning or designing an object. We were just like, let that live, speak loud.

**DN:** Yeah, we were like: this could actually hang from two leather belts. Then you had this metal frame and it just flew together. And then also became an amazing sound tool for me, because it's this strange in-phase-but-open sound-projecting machine, where when you move your head around the center, you're experiencing a phase shift in the sound. And from a certain distance when you get closer the sound comes from farther away, until you get really close and then it kind of comes back.

**DN:** So at some point you were saying that with this show you're moving into sound art territory.

**JB:** Yeah, and that is not my territory, which I find very interesting. It's like a new territory that I had no idea about before. And sometimes I ask myself, what am I doing here? It's almost like when I was hiking for the first time in an American forest. I saw trees that I've never seen before in my life, recognizing a totally new, different landscape. And I was like, whoa, this looks unreal, but it's real, I'm here!

**DN:** Is that how you define reality?

(laughing)

**JB:** Yeah. (more laughing)

And, it's to me about the question: how can I recognize myself? Everything is new to me. Almost like a science fiction! (laughing)

It removed myself from materiality, of being so attached to the object as an object. And seeing another vision, another field that I had no idea about before.

**DN:** Because sound is also like a non-material, or the material is just very different from an object.

**JB:** Yes. You mentioned something similar to that, when I asked you if we have enough objects, or not enough to bring to the gallery. You said: well, what is this about? It's about the sound. Which for me is so immaterial, and kind of scary. Me as a sculptor, as an installation artist recognizing something that is not physical that I can't touch, or carry, or transform in a physical way – I cannot take one of your sounds and just wrap it in leather!

**DN:** Oh, I would love to watch the attempt.

(loud laughing)