



Public Address Systems collects a series of projects created and coordinated by artist and researcher Lois Weaver. Each of these projects engages the public, with Weaver's extensive practice bringing together multiple and interrelated strands. In a period when the nature of 'the public' is increasingly contested, these Public Address Systems create spaces that are hospitable and open, where alternatives can be modeled and critical questions staged. What do we share and what do we owe each other? How are 'we' counted and who is included? From broad questions about material resources to intimate studies of bodies and identity, Public Address Systems extend the terms by which it is possible to think, and feel, publicly.

Public Address Systems draws on three modes of inquiry to address shifts in the contemporary political, cultural and technological landscapes that constitute what we might call 'public'. Performance, place and the everyday – each is a lens for focusing in detail on a range of topics and contexts. Perhaps best known as a performance artist, Weaver here uses her practice to directly address political issues, to explore persona and identity, and as a methodology for working with the public collaboratively and in dialogue. Weaver also draws on place, and in particular, the appropriation of institutional places, to coordinate complex interventions around gender, sexuality, human rights and other crucial flash points for public activism. The library, the museum and the form of the manifesto are all radically reconfigured to create new public spaces for political action, and to question ingrained institutional boundaries. Finally, Weaver proposes that everyday practices – often associated with the private, the domestic and the marginal – can be used to create new forms of public sociality. The space between the kitchen table and the porch swing becomes politically charged and of public consequence – indeed, Public Address Systems insists that it already is.



THE LONG TABLE

Background

The Long Table [1] is a means of generating open discussion about a specified topic, using a stylised environment and participation protocol to turn ordinary conversation into a performance.

The approach is inspired by the film *Antonia's Line* by Maureen Gorris [2]. In this film a woman returns to the Dutch countryside to raise her young daughter and founds a communal house where the residents defy convention and live life as they please. The central image of the film is a dinner table that grows longer and longer as this family of friends, outsiders and eccentrics gets bigger and bigger. Eventually, the table becomes so long it has to be brought outside into the yard.

The Long Table experiments with participation and public engagement by combining re-appropriating a dinner table atmosphere as a public forum and encouraging informal conversation on serious topics.

Format

The Long Table is created through the use of devices such as focused lighting, a tablecloth for writing upon and the positioning of chairs both at and at a distance from the table. People are at once made aware of and drawn into the performance space.



Figure 1: The Long Table

The event has a beginning and an end and, although no host is necessary, usually has an owner who can begin and end it and ensure that the etiquette is followed. The etiquette (following page) is placed on all the chairs around the table.

Practicalities

To run this event, we need at minimum a performance space, a large table (approx two banquet sized table in length), 12 chairs at the table and up to 40 at a distance from the table, microphones and a recording device. table cloth and fabric marking pens.

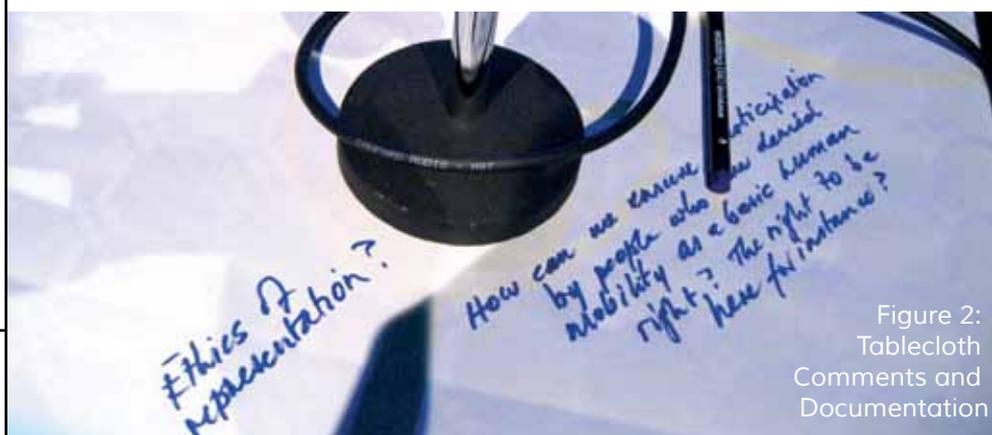


Figure 2:
Tablecloth
Comments and
Documentation

EVERYDAY

The Long Table Etiquette



This is a performance of a dinner party conversation



Anyone seated at the table is a guest performer



Anything is on the menu



Talk is the only course



No hostess will assist you



It is a democracy



To participate simply take an empty seat at the table



If the table is full you can request a seat



If you leave the table you can come back again and again



Feel free to write your comments on the tablecloth



There can be silence



There might be awkwardness



There could always be laughter



There is an end but no conclusion

