

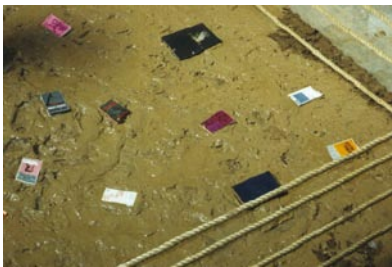
## JOSÉ SPANIOL. COME BACK TOMORROW OR WAIT IN THE MIRROR.

'Come back tomorrow' Mariano José de Larra called one of those well known articles of manners that so well reflect the attitude and types of an age. In it the author begins by reflecting on laziness to then continue with an anecdote, supposedly co-protagonized by Larra himself. The other protagonist of the story is Monsieur Sans-dé-lai, a Frenchman who comes to Spain for a fortnight to reclaim some property. Larra tells him he will need fifteen months and the Frenchman's intentions are immediately thwarted by the civil servants' curt reply of: 'come back tomorrow'

I think this concept of time, of insistence, of anecdote, of lack of response and irresolvable or more concretely illegible conflicts, palpitates in José Spaniol's world of resonances and digressions. We are always moving within (or without) an undefined space in his work, with signs that, before we can locate ourselves, become drowned in an absence of limitations. Because his work seeks a spectator capable of experiencing dislocations and energies; one that is definitively capable of valuing the 'between' over the 'before' or 'after'. In this sense, Spaniol works like a sculptor of 'lost forms' that allow themselves to be knocked over by a time that may fold itself before our very eyes, like the ghostly property of the memory that Bachelard refers to.

I imagine then that Spaniol is attracted by the world of shadow, by the apparent gaze, by the crossing of gestures. This is why he often uses the idea of the mirror as a duplicator of forms or interval to imagine the infinite more than as a limitation or flat representation that becomes invisible when it reflects the life before it.

*Ringe*, 1998, [detalle]  
[ 90 x 500 x 500 cm, libros, arcilla, cuerdas ].  
Bienal Barro de América, Maracaibo, Venezuela



José Spaniol resolves the expansion of the moment, the vice-versa of the object by means of poetic tension that implies the generic. The event is understood to be occurring, as time in which apparently nothing occurs. This is where he locates his position as an inventor of narrative possibilities. Basically it is a strategy of intensification of the real like that demonstrated by Mark Boyle in *Street* (1964), when he improvised a theatre and sat a number of people in front of a curtain. When the curtain opened, the audience saw nothing more than what was happening in the street through a window. This kind of experiment in real time or confrontation permits the amplification of the most insignificant event. Like in Berger's stories, the initial event, that which attracts our attention, is more obvious than those that follow and it is all about submerging oneself in the experience, in a narrative time that can evaluate this expectation. This is probably why he gives us the right to rest in the exhibition room. Because the scene is interminable and truth and fiction combine to form an irresolvable Moebius strip. So I interpret his chairs, walls and all those kind of virtual reflections as an exhausting long shot, like those that can create a psychological climate by using dead moments, an unstable balance.

But we should define this concept of the virtual, because the virtual is that which exists only as potential and not as action and often in Spaniol, that which seems virtual is precisely the contrary. Virtual comes from the Latin *virtualis*, which is derived from *virtus*, strength, or potential. In a dictionary, virtual would be that which has the power to produce an effect even though it doesn't, in other words, that which has an apparent but not a real existence. We are talking then about something that only exists as potential and yet we link it with inappropriate synonyms such as eventual, which means something casual or subject

to contingency, something possible, which might be or happen. But the possible is equivalent to the static, to that which is already constituted, to a sort of dissimulated reality, given that, like the virtual – a fortunate recycling of the possible – does not exist far from its condition of response or sum of knowledge of the real. The virtual imagines and builds possibilities from point zero, from the minimum crack, from an interstitial space mediating contraries. And José Spaniol is in this conflict zone, configuring different points of balance between opposites, or not?

Let's consider his piece *Mirante* (*Observation point*) Four walls dominate and configure a square floor in the vacuum of a flat landscape. The walls do not support anything, as if they were a precarious ready-made of architecture itself. Open at the corners, they only permit shadow or the measuring of time, like a sundial. The oldest sundials date from the era of the pharaohs and they have continued to be built until now, perhaps more for decorative than practical reasons, like the ironic, nihilistic perspective that is so characteristic of José Spaniol. But why the title *Observation point*? Probably because Spaniol sees the world as a sort of fold, as a dysfunction that allows ironic unfolding. Spaniol practices an introverted kind of contemplation, misanthropy as penetration, contamination or expansion, as a breaking of the mirror as a frontier between the real and the virtual. Which is the true image? Why must we limit ourselves to look at the sky? Because this mirror is a dream, a utopia, a respite into which we project our fantasies before returning tomorrow.

Let's talk about intersections, conflicts that take us toward Derridian writing, interpreting each pause as a doubt or dynamic moment that makes reading difficult while at the same time nourishing an infinity of

interpretations and meanings. With this syntax it is understood that everything remains open, without concluding or closing, making the result difficult. Because as Tassinari states in his text, Spaniol's work hardly ever offers answers. Perhaps because the letters have fled from their rightful place, because the discourse is packaging and the packaging discourse.

Let's consider the words of Jacques Derrida in *La dissémination* (1972): "A text is not a text if it does not hide the laws of its composition and the rules of its game from the first glance. A text moreover is always imperceptible. The law and the rule do not cover themselves with the inaccessibility of a secret, they simply never discover themselves, in the present, to anything that might rigorously be called a perception [...] In any case the dissolution of the fabric hiding the texture might take centuries. The fabric the covers the fabric. Centuries to dissolve. Reconstructing it also as an organism. Indefinitely regenerating its own fabric behind the imprint that cuts, the decision of each reading. Always reserving a surprise for the anatomy or physiology of a criticism that believes that it dominates its game, guarding all the threads at once, also deceiving itself by wanting to see the text without touching it, without touching the 'object', without risking addition, the only possibility of entering the game trapping the fingers, a new thread. To add here is to give to read. One must attempt to think that it is not a question of embroidering, unless one thinks that knowing how to embroider is also following the given thread. That is to say to make it follow us, hidden. If there is a unity of reading and writing, as may easily be felt today, if reading is writing, this unity does not designate either undifferentiated confusion or tranquil identity: it is that what unites reading with writing has to be partly unpicked. It would be necessary to read and write in a single but unfolded gesture

then. And whoever believed themselves, precisely for this reason, to be authorized to add, that is to say add anything, would not have understood the game at all. They would add nothing; the stitching would not be maintained".

Fabric and text share an etymological meaning: Both refer to crosses, knots that historically come to function as language. Much of Spaniol's work consists in untying this knot. We may possibly emerge on the other side, arriving at that evening utopia tinged sky that can reveal the exegesis of our history. This is why the sky was called the veil as was the Gods' clothing, according to Porfirio.

In this kind of illusion and distortion we might rescue a fragment from a text by Sigfried Giedion in *Space, Time and Architecture*, about Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace for the first world exhibition (1851): "We can glimpse a delicate network of lines without possessing any key as to how to judge its distance by eye or its several different dimensions. The side walls are too far away for us to be able to take them in with a single gaze. Instead of running from one end wall to the other, one's gaze is lost in an endless perspective that disappears over the horizon. We cannot state whether this building rises up a hundred or a thousand feet above us, or whether the roof is flat or made up of a succession of nerves, as there is no game of shadows to put our optic means into the position of appreciating its measurements [...] all natural elements are scattered into the atmosphere". In José Spaniol's work we need time to locate ourselves, to specify exactly where we are in this sort of game of scale.

But we are talking about signs, about writing. In Spaniol books drown in the mud of a boxing ring, letters escape from the walls

as if Lewis Carroll's Alice herself had decided to go once again through the looking glass, and previously everything was cryptic in those bags that held rolls of drawings in his first works of the mid-eighties. We will never see what all this is hiding; like Manzoni's shit, the value will depend on time that will configure the level of aesthetic value given to these hidden values.

Spaniol's ready-mades could never be monuments. Or at least according to what we understand as the notion of a traditional monument. Lewis Mumford's words are still the most significant in this respect: "If it is a monument, it is not modern; and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument". I think of *Mirante* and its uselessness, of his *Balão*, his *Ringues*, in his walls that are falling down, in his folding chairs; Spaniol's sculpture is more than ever, gesture, attitude, impossibility. This gesture is normally reduced to a simple extrapolation of the autonomy of art as opposed to life, but way beyond this, gestures such as Manzoni's – in 1959 he created his pneumatic sculptures realized with white balloons that he inflated himself – embodies the problematic of the fleeting present, which is what Mumford was concerned with respect to the concept of the monument. The vital presence, the lethal time and irony shaped as ready-mades transform his work into something alive. Duchamp's ready-mades are objects that before being appropriated by the artist, were useful objects and not typical products of contemporary consumer culture. Warhol's ready-mades were absolutely contemporary, but also useful. Koons' ready-mades are contemporary, but completely useless: they are luxury trash objects, i.e. kitsch". Spaniol works with ideas, aware that the ready-made struck a direct blow to sculpture, or at least to that which is traditionally understood as sculpture until, if we attempt to resume the most recent contemporary history of sculpture, it might be plausible

to understand sculpture's particular history as a universe of non-encounters or perhaps as a repeated betrayal of itself, like a collage of revolutions. The ready-made is a metalinguistic commentary, a direct criticism that, as stated previously, might have commenced with Manet, but would never be as effective as in this operation by Duchamp. But besides being an object sublimated by art, the bottle rack ceases to be a bottle rack announcing a second criticism implicit in this and later ready-mades such as *Air de Paris*: the bottle rack ceases to function as such at the moment when all design has a utility, because the world of design is that which dominates and this is Duchamp's second iconoclastic operation. Duchamp attacked pictorial, sculptural and objective dictatorships by means of a performance not far from the habitual act of destroying a statue whenever there is a change of power; a seemingly inevitable exercise of collective iconoclasm. Spaniol inherits this ironic attitude, whether to hide the function of objects or to discuss problems derived from the support and the surface of painting, like in his wooden beams that reveal their very texture.

Spaniol plays with the known, although we do not completely identify it. We see it in his pure coloured ceramic objects, like in Brazilian interior architecture. It is all a question of making a turn, like in Cortazar's *Rayuela*, where a character strolls in Paris and turns a corner into London. This is why far from being simple commercial texts, the posters he hangs in the street are lyrically structured personal stories. All is commonplace and yet strange. And always with space as the protagonist, as evolution.

We might say Spaniol's works are sculptures in time. Consider the excellent exhibition that opened the Oeste gallery entitled

*O descanso da sala - The rest of the room.* The exhibits unfold as if obeying the impression of a room. Agnaldo Farias in his text speaks of delirium and how Spaniol is not the first to perceive that objects rest. Farias compared Spaniol's Babelic temerity with the texts of Clarice Lispector and his name/palindrome character Ana. Which leads me to think of Alice again and in *Why do Things Get in a Muddle [Come on Petunia]*, a work by Gary Hill where he inverts the direction of time using a text by Gregory Bateson, concerning the relation between a man and his daughter whose conversation becomes confused and chaotic; Hill plays with the reversibility of language, building an alluring metalogue. Thus like Spaniol, it questions the order of things. What is really happening is the characters recite their dialogue and action in reverse, but the tape again inverts the discourse and the movements, so that everything seems to be going in the right direction, just a bit distorted. Gary Hill, concerned about the function of language from a poetic or evocative position, has also created other works such as *URA ARU*, an authentic exercise in linguistic reversibility, in this case using phonetically transcribed acoustic Japanese palindromes – words that may be read backwards – to explore the acoustic nature of words and also the birth or creation of new words.

And the objects touched by Spaniol also seem to chime. From an ironic scale challenging ready-made, they no longer relate to our size; although spectral introjection may still be possible. Spaniol, with a measure of humour, invites us to exit our world in order to enter another alien, but alluring one, once we have stepped through the virtual mirror. A world of perceptive fissures. Spaniol works on the indecipherable, as in poetry. But the relation of the artist with the poetry is not because he gives importance to words, to language; but because the image does not illustrate, the hinge ef-

fect dominates until we stumble on the absence of our own image. Hölderlin insists that 'we are a dialogue and we can hear one another' and Spaniol's predominantly sculptural perception is above all event, a making possible. As in poetry, which does not take language to be an existing material, but what makes language possible, as Heidegger affirms. All reality is unreal, dream. 'This is not a chair', Magritte would say.

Spaniol makes us stumble over the words, crash into the virtual 'virtual reflection' of our stage; he does it now, precisely when the physical relation with almost everything has been lost, when everything is reproduction, the biggest library's in Google music is wrapped in a sexy iPod. What is interesting in Spaniol's work is that it is never a surrealist dream and the viewer may constantly come back to the world, as when we read a book. This may be why Borges imagined paradise in the form of a library, probably because it is a two-way paradise, with vice versa, of the kind that allow one to wait in the mirror, or perhaps in the green room: 'Come back tomorrow', some would say to us.