

Juan Castillo's Minimal Baroque

Investigation into the cities Auckland, Stockholm, Fuerteventura and Santiago, interrogated by art. Catalogue of videos in which inhabitants of marginal neighborhoods in the city responded to the question *What is art for you?* Projection of those videos, in a gallery, on panels which feature scarcely-visible drawings of the interviewees, with tea.

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Minimal

In the most minimal sense, to coexist means to create imaginary ties and common places. In the most minimal sense, to live means to allow oneself to be implicated in the passions, the bad reasons and the obsessions which are the artifacts of coexistence.

The most minimal thing of all is the link.

In the ambiguous closeness of an encounter, the insignificant brush against another body pulls us out of our anesthetized torpor and if we are lucky it allows us to discover a face, an idea, a feeling. The minimal thing is the other who visits us and changes us. The stranger who we receive and who welcomes us for an instant or forever. Someone who is open to the experience of a resonance or a tremor that jerks us from our lethargy, changing us subtly or torn apart, without thinking, forever.

Both in the most minimal things, as in their folds, there are values and pains of which the economy knows nothing.

Public Transportation

A truck traverses the city from dusk until the very end of the day. Its itinerary occurs for those who are late, at the hour of the automatic gazes, between those who doze off and those who stay awake, between those who are going home and those who will not see the light of day.

Something strange stimulates our vision when we see a truck with a huge screen on top, upon which a face makes the gesture of talking. What takes place is the sparkle of an encounter. The work serves as a means of transportation for imaginary, rational, and sensational transferences, for experiences suspended in the memory, worked over. The work is a vehicle for stories that flow back and forth, with a direction no more precise than that of the disquieting energy of all the things in those images that seek refuge in the gaze.

The work is made of light cables suspended to overcome the amorphous, solitary space.

Faces Traveling, Exposed to the Elements

Those faces trotted around in all their glory and majesty are the antithesis of public transportation. Oscillating somewhere in between art and the city, they are like Benjamin's angel, who moves forward by moving back, sucked in by an implacable force as he stares, forlorn and frightened, at the ruins of his progress that lay before his eyes.

Angels are mute and eloquent presences, bearers of the mandate of the law. They have always participated in the social contract in their role as messengers of the highest authority. In the same way, the beggar participates in the social fiction of a limited reciprocity that exchanges charity for acceptance and passivity. The illuminated faces that Juan Castillo sends us, on the other hand, offer themselves up to the gaze but guarantee nothing, they enter into no contracts but they expose themselves to all possible encounters and their inaudible voices, without another word, speak only to reveal the impulses that move their faces.

Our visitors seem less like divinities and more like middle-class tourists, moved by the vision of being seen and forced by the interrogation of the city that studies them. Those faces are the repositories of a gaze that knows it is being watched, and they are at once innocent and loquacious, tempered by modesty, possessed of a mission that is controlled and persistent but every time expressive of a singular character.

Voices that strike against the cement

Even if nobody were to see them, and they were to pass before the public without eliciting a single gaze, those faces in transit, those faces that recite an inaudible response, a secret or hushed sonority, those mouths that scarcely move between the lights would nonetheless be a radiant suggestion of the life that inhabits the city streets.

They are images without message.

While they flaunt their incomprehensible language and their yearning gaze there is no way to create a happy ending for the tale of the city. There is no way to close the deal. Their offering, their job in art is that of keeping language and chance encounters open to the possibility of the unpredictable proliferation of all that is alive and the affirmation that it cannot be forced to yield to the discipline of the bodies that the interchangeable jargon of the techniques of authority attempts to impose.

Spoken portraits in the city

A truck traverses the city from dusk until the very end of the day.

In transporting its imaginary cargo, a transference of flow is produced between art and the city. What happens is a perfect rendezvous of accounting and excess.

The city, on the side of technocratic excess. In the elaboration of a transportation plan, the emotion of the numerical figure comes to move huge masses of people according to the determinations of economy and engineering. Efficiency is determined by the ability of countless body-containers to travel smoothly and without unpleasant surprises, in an

incident-free and yet infernal labyrinth of stops and starts. In its movement, the circulatory system digests the idiosyncrasies of the travelers as functional indices and testimonies for the decoration of an incredibly powerful, incompetent and ethically vulgar statistic.

On the side of art, we have the luxurious calculation of the work in terms of its use of time; it is astute in its occupation of light and meticulous in the decomposition of space and in the planning of its route –a trick of the truck driver’s trade. To transport a luminous, weightless body goes directly against the fundamental gesture of public transportation and its use as a tool to create mass, to put the travelers to sleep and consume their fits of singularity. In these illuminated trucks, a single face clogs the mechanism of homogenization and shows its deference to the transportation system by sending an out-of-place image to wander through the city.

A Journey Through Hell

The fact that buses are jails is belied in the clamor of boarding, but revealed in the impatience of the descent, in people’s fear of meeting the gaze of another, in the mediocrity of the pressures, in all the defensive strategies, and in the desire to escape sleeping. The system has been perfected to such a degree that alienation is actually desired, prized and paid in cash.

In the technocratic paradoxes of the builders of our city, massive quantities of sedentary people must be forced into becoming nomads who must be evacuated on a daily basis from their homes, and delivered back drained of their vital energy.

Masses of people crammed together on the city streets wander around with nobody to explain the circular, everyday and eternal meaning of their exile. When they go home, they seek shelter in the ersatz show business world that seems to hang on to some old memory of liveliness.

Suddenly, the visible offers nothing

On those trips, the gaze becomes increasingly distracted, indifferent and elusive. Bodies close in on themselves, protecting themselves as if in a battle, eyes staring at knees. On occasion they will just barely open to surrender to the solidarity of shared misfortune. For these passengers, it is less important to know who they are and more important to know where they are standing, who is at their side and which are the authorities to whom they may recount their troubles.

Perhaps they do not even realize it, but neither the driver nor his copilot respond to anything; above them there is nobody and between them there is nothing.

Exiles

Among the exiles of language lies the future of art. Expelled and condemned to wander among strangers in unfamiliar lands, they reveal their incompetence and their open ruins in the need to occupy themselves with new images, new visions, new ties and languages that

have yet to be invented. The exile wanders through the remains of his discourse in an anguish-filled, expressive despair that dissolves his science, his knowledge and his time in a dark literary passion.

Three options present themselves: the exile can either withdraw into the indulgence of self-pity, he can pretend to be a convert, like a most orthodox neophyte or a technological innovator protected by the principal vein of the prevailing ideology. Or he can throw himself forward in a creative, vertiginous and obsessive plunge into the abyss of the lost potentialities and surrender to the marginal arguments of a shared solitude. It is only in that narrow madness that the exile can find art, and that art can find life.

There are many urgencies in life

There are those that clamor for food, and those that call for decorum. There are those that ask for instantaneity and those that ask for deference. Then there are the academic demands, the economic struggles, and the absences that offer themselves, open and vulnerable to whomever wishes to take them and inhabit them.

There are visits that are bodies with unrestrained urgencies, and which invariably repeat their pressing needs for expression and their need to be embraced. There are accelerated velocities and bodies captured in spaces that are increasingly meager and segregated. What the work does is fracture the legality of institutional time by responding to the presence of the foreigner and embracing him in his own cadence. The ethical urgency that marks the era stems from the overabundance of encounters in spaces that have grown smaller and smaller.

To circulate these portraits constitutes an abuse of the trust of the system, a manner of cheating in the game, an act of corruption of the institutional spaces of art and the city; it is a glimpse of the future in which creativity and art are fused in a passion for living well.

Time, garbage, recycling and details

In the paradox of the miser, the shortage of time has come to lead the generation of waste. Time is money, as they say, but the more time that is turned into money the less time that is available which leads to less value circulating in the economy. The economy generates its own shortage for the benefit of its authoritarian discourse. On the other hand, less time is the luck of the literary people; it is the increased numbers of castoffs of facts, stories and lives that are the materials that art reclaims.

Reality makes its presence felt with violence. Irrefutably it imposes itself in the places where ignoring it brought traumatic consequences. Reality is patient and it is astute and art only imitates its gesture in the recycling and the circulation of leftovers and castoffs.

The only reality is wretched, is contaminating and hides in things forgotten, in details. The current economic importance of the detail is the result of the massive simplification of the world through quantification and measurement, the defense of the hundredth. We should thank excesses in the order of things for the massive onslaught of garbage, blind spots,

irrelevant noise, insignificant quantities, accidents, uncertainties and unforeseen occurrences that function like scarecrows at the forefront of contemporary life.

In the flourish of art, a sparkle on a light, a rusty machine, a biblical traffic jam on the road, a polar current or a flash of indignation, any circumstance at all, a face in front of your eyes, a truck taking an angel for a ride, an unexpected encounter at the intersection of two streets, or a delicacy found at the bottom of a trash can; it is in these details that life escapes us and the appetite is whetted.

Transports and transfers

For what does the returning person return if not to correct himself and pull his pieces together?

It is no longer the home to which he returns. The public bus is the common place of intimacy, the intimidating border traveled daily to test our disposition between life and dreams. It is here that masks are formed and where some people, unable to tolerate the gaze of the other, hide their faces and lose them entirely.

Strange things emerge subtly in these motorized apparitions that JC offers us. A sparkle appears for no reason and goes away with no message.

Te devuelvo tu imagen (I give you back your image) is the breath that gives our body back its soul.

Traces

Faces, figures and images are expressions that belong to the professional argot of aesthetics, of religiosity, of the police or of psychoanalysis, and together they compete in the race to keep the body under control and at a prudent distance from other bodies. The goal is to keep the observer distant and impenetrable, for that is the common and necessary model for those who administer knowledge and ride buses.

Nevertheless. In the gaze that turns to look at the spark, in the eyelid that vacillates and the neck that twists around, in the tiny irritation of not knowing what that voice is railing against, in that nanometric vertigo in which the body falls apart and the mind accepts perplexed, in that repeated and repeatedly oppressed moment, there, in the complicit experience of the bus stop, it is possible to be certain that you have been living.

What is art?

(Four open insinuations and a question for the public)

1.

Juan Castillo's question is aimed at distinguishing the impulse, the vocation and the life breath of art from the institution that protects, circulates and sterilizes it.

2.

Presently, the conceptual gesture needed in art is that of entering, hacking away, and reassembling. No more and no less than everything, all at once, beneath the pickaxe of a gaze that embraces, criticizes, disrupts and negotiates.

3.

In its revolutionary tradition, the word 'art' still seems to hold on to the strength of our loves and the work necessary to build a life of one's own.

4.

In its technological present, art is what opposes the voracity of obsolescence, the atemporal urgency of what returns to find his home destroyed.

Does it still make any sense to invoke art?

What is art? Urbanity!

Here there is no embellishment possible, and the question regarding art is brought back to the city, and from the city to art, dividing it up in the countless cities that it projects, insinuates and effectively builds. Cities among three, solitary cities, cities to listen to, cities unswept, cities with their backs to the mountains, rivers of sweat, cities renewed by grass and cities of God. Cities in search of redemption and cities in search of warmth. Cities subjected, seduced, stained and whitened. Cities elevated to their maximum strength. Cities that cry out in secret, buried beneath cities without voice. Cities that are centered, cities of neighborhoods.

Art is a matter of practice (and practical reason)

The urgency of the response to the demands of the other is not exclusively an ethical matter, it is functional and it is economic. And when confronting the demands of functionality, when the elastic has reached its breaking point, when inertia is not enough, when elusion no longer works, that is when the work of art begins to find its way through the path of feint and simulation or through the alternative road of provocation and a reconfiguration of possible feelings. This reorganization of hierarchies, of intimacies, of the placement and of the worthiness of things and between them, that diagram of relocation and scattering of the subject in its surroundings; in the incorporation of the surroundings and of the other, there is an act of opening, of enterprise and of daring that continues to be recognized in the name of art.

What gets shaken up in the light of these faces that pass by is an internal wind that filters through the work, the artist, and the witnesses. What happens in the process of visiting and receiving these faces is art as a multimedia of life. And as all artists know, the most that one can hope for in this legend is to be a co-animator of the spectacle.

Art is measured by the social movements that traverse it

In art, the spoken word is always split. It speaks of what happens on the skin exposed to brushes with other, and of what the tongue needs to remain active. There is an expression

that is immersed in the intensity of the feeling and a speech that searches for its tribe. There is one that is confused by pleasure and another that is attenuated by pain. There is a choral, harmonic speech and there are dissonances. There are repulsive invasions and desires to embrace.

There is an unmistakable speech that comes from multitudes of more than two and which manifests itself through a murmur, an ambient sonority that is the product of the rebounding echoes and the resonance that envelops the bodies, in a rhythm that those who belong to the place internalize. On occasion a word may filter out, absurd and crystal-clear for some.

Art refuses to allow itself indifference. Its commitment is deployed with a dark point that is just barely perceptible in the strident gleam of the city. With the sad gait of a face chosen by chance, with the laborious intersection of the technified everyday, and the tiny occurrence of a mouth modulating in mid-air, this work obstructs uniformity and rises up like an exhortation to those who are listening and who have a face to give a face to.

Mestizo baroque

In the jumbled unity of the truck and the street, incongruence is produced by the difference in temporalities. Both coexist but they are not contemporaries. The work flies above the idle traffic of these streets.

These trucks must park and discharge their energy in a consecrated space; this is necessary. There, in front of their faithful, they will find their faces, and their languages will reveal themselves in their essence, as exhalations, insinuations that will be received like hopeful news from some corner of the earth.

(Babel is not the end of anything. It is the acknowledgment of the absence of communication and of the limitations of the authority of technical jargon. Babel is the name of the beginning of the return to elective communities and emotional neighborhoods).

The stopping points for these trucks are also galleries of the detained, they are sound-filled spaces and painful passages, centers for of baggage transfer, institutions of closure, spaces of liturgy and –only sometimes– points of contact between animated faces.

To breathe in your mouth

In the gallery, the images that have been paraded around the city in their discreet triumph are projected upon curtains and their faces sketched with tea. A faint, fixed image will support the entire weight of the light in movement. For an instant, both images will come together and blend perfectly, in a convergence of technological valences, in a passing embrace that affirms the will of taking sides in the gaze.

In these places, shared aspirations become the basis for future solidarities. The rapport shared by those fiery figures and the ties that they establish with the ardent public, is the matter that informs the complicities of mood that make a difference to their history.

In this work, the gallery is on the level of the barricade

In the gallery where the travelers stop –in a rationally arbitrary manner- there is nothing more than a minimal geometry and undulating bodies, there is no reproduction nor is there representation, reflection, presence. There are no discourses and only intense appearances, excisions and complicities. There are encounters and in the intersections there are diverging feelings, appropriations, noises and rhythms, there are conversations and reverberations, gazes that confront one another and then go on their way. Faces that remain illuminated, reciting though having escaped from the text, and impassioned in their insistence, their fact of being there, with their own people as if at home.