



PSJM

2003 • **A CRITICAL DECADE** • 2013

SAN MARTÍN CENTRO DE CULTURA CONTEMPORÁNEA

PSJM: A CRITICAL DECADE 2003-2013

San Martín Centro de Cultura Contemporánea

8 de agosto-13 de octubre de 2013

Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

Sala de Arte Contemporáneo

17 de enero - 29 de marzo de 2014

Santa Cruz de Tenerife

Organiza



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At present Corazón is a Prometeo researcher (SENESCYT) at Universidad de Cuenca (Ecuador). He is co-director of the curatorial group Commission, co-editor of the journal *Sublime* and editor for Spain and Latin America of *Cura Magazine*. Corazón works as exhibition curator and as an art critic for several Spanish and Latin American media. At the moment he has a scholarship at Academia de España in Rome. His publications include *La escalera da a la nada. Estética de Juan Eduardo Cirlot* (CENDEAC, 2007).

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A theorist and researcher, Durán has a PhD in Art History, and lectures in History of European Culture at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler, Berlin. He is a regular contributor at international conferences, including Rethinking Marxism, Cultural Studies Association and Actuel Marx. Durán is author of the book *Hacia una crítica de la economía política del arte* (Plaza y Valdés, 2008) and *Iconoclasia, historia del arte y lucha de clases* (Trama, 2009).

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An art critic and curator, Muñoz has a degree in Art History from Universidad de La Laguna, Tenerife (1991), and a degree in Contemporary History from Universidad Complutense, Madrid (1981). Much of her research focuses on the art and architecture of the Canary Islands in recent decades. She is a contributor to various art and architecture magazines. Director of the exhibition hall at Gabinete Literario, Las Palmas, from 2003 to 2012, Muñoz also coordinated the first two editions of the Architecture, Art and Landscape Biennial of the Canary Islands.

FRANCESCO SPAMPINATO

A contemporary art historian, writer and artist interested in abstraction, performative practices, collectivism, appropriation and printed matter. He holds two degrees from the University of Bologna, in Preservation and Art History, and an MA in Modern Art: Critical Studies Track from Columbia University, New York. He is currently Adjunct Professor at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Providence, RI, where he teaches a contemporary art history and theory survey course and a course on performance art and its relationships with mass media. He has also taught at NABA, Milan, and Parsons School of Design, The New School, New York. His articles have been published on *Kaleidoscope*, *Flash Art*, *Apartamento*, *L'Uomo Vogue*, *Casa Vogue* and *Waxpoetics*. Lives and works in New York.

BLANCA DE LA TORRE

With a degree in Art History and a Master (MDE) from Centro Superior de Arquitectura, de la Torre is currently curator at Museo Artium, Vitoria, where she has curated exhibitions including *Of More Than One Voice. Katarina Zdjelar, Montaje de atracciones; Tiempos de Urgencias; Piel de gallina. Regina José Galindo; Video(S)torias*, and managed countless projects. She has also conceived exhibition programmes, including *Praxis*, a successful project with more than three years to its credit which has involved around a dozen artists, and of projects outside the museum, like *Grey Flag* or *Mutatis Mutandis*.

THROUGH THE FISSURE: A CRITICAL DECADE OF PSJM

A brief prologue

once again for Clara

The work of the artistic duo PSJM—who have been together for a decade as an artistic team on multiple and multidisciplinary collaborations—consisting of Pablo San José and Cynthia Viera, is included among, or affiliated with (perhaps it would be better to say “affiliated” by virtue of its political vocation) the neo-conceptual strategies of an “an-institutional style” of art. Some critics, as well as specialists of contemporary art, dub this style art in the method of “Institutional Critique,” for PSJM justifies its work through an acidic critical demand upon the textbook standards of the system of Art itself.

In an incestuous condition of dubious uncertainty, the place from which the limits of Art, Design, and Cultural Administration emerge, the authorial duo employs an artistic production that upsets the standard ways of thinking about the traditional concept of Art; the traditional concept of Design; and the traditional or academic concept of cultural administrator, embodied in the figure of the organizer-curator—suddenly combining the functions and operating plans of the three into a single one.

What PSJM—a differential case, an exception—does is bring into the critical debate the question of what would happen if an artist (or authorial collective, in its case), were his own designer, curator, and creator. Assuming all of these roles when faced with the despoticisms of the “System of Art” itself, and with its members’ interference in the creation and circulation of art and visual culture.

Even when the duo undeniably connects with the biopolitical conceptual strategies of a master, such as the German Hans Hacker, or with the brazenness of market-accented neo-pop’s (extremely) commercializing offerings, such as those put forth by someone like Jeff Koons, where merchandizing of an “expositive act” completes the fetishist demand of his exhibition in itself—even then, the discursive combination and the duo’s enchanting staging are nearer to the desacralizing radicalism with which Spanish artists of PSJM’s generation approach the artistic institutional system. This nearness signals that PSJM is settling into a new post-national



artistic nomenclature, which accents the critical influence exercised by firms such as the collective Democracia (previously El Perro, with whom PSJM has exhibited on many occasions), or by the irreverent and always polemical Santiago Sierra, the sarcastic and constantly questioning Javier Núñez Gasco, or Karmelo Bermejo with all his cynicism.

All artists who, along with PSJM, show that “something’s wrong” in this overvalued scheme of supra-economic influences, deteriorations, abuses of power, conceits or falsehoods—an arrangement ever more remote from the “real world” of our social context that Art is becoming these days.

Something against which PSJM issues a challenging boast in its “proximity to the real.” With its blunt realist mannerism taken with the elegance of a good poison. Our present-day real as seen from a point of view that gives us a critical constructed outline, frontal and direct, but with the coarse manner of presenting itself like a faithful reflection of what we are experiencing, in its true intricacy, in its miserable, cruel transparency.

A presentation that the artists seem to insist upon approaching in that defiant manner with which reality repeatedly slaps us in the face when it says to us, “This is what there is; take it or leave it.” As if PSJM were doing its work by consciously slipping through the fissures of the system itself in order to plant here, within this system, the seed of discord. Or rather, the seed of dissidence.

Omar-Pascual Castillo

Director, CAAM

Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain

Summer, 2013



A CRITICAL DECADE

Over the last ten years PSJM has worked alongside curators, gallery owners, theorists, art critics, artists, activists and cultural agents of all kinds. Having said that, its very functioning as a mixed creation-management team has often led PSJM to implement and run a number of curatorial or editorial projects independently. For that reason, on an occasion as special as this tenth anniversary, it would only seem appropriate that the team also take on the task of the curator.

In our practice, theory acquires particular relevance given that PSJM is also a collective that writes and publishes. That is why the utmost care has been paid to the selection of essays compiled in the first half of this book. This theoretical part includes a text expressly written for the occasion by Francesco Spampinato, a New York-based Italian theorist and artist who is currently preparing the book *Come Together: The Rise of Cooperative Art and Design*, forthcoming from Princeton Architectural Press, New York, and which features our work. Spampinato's conscientious and articulate approach encouraged us to invite him to contribute the essay that opens this section. Having said that, given that this publication mirrors a survey show featuring a selection of works made over a whole decade, we also thought it expedient to include other texts and extracts of interviews already published by some of the writers with whom we have maintained a close relationship during these last ten years: Miguel Cereceda, Clara Muñoz, José Luis Corazón Ardura, José María Durán, Sonia Mauricio, Blanca de la Torre and Régine Debatty. It was impossible to include everyone, but everyone included has a reason to be here. The free-flowing debate held throughout the years with the above-mentioned and other writers has greatly benefited our work. We will always be indebted to their contributions, their friendship and their kindness for allowing us to publish their words.

We felt equally honoured when we discovered that our work is being featured in several PhD dissertations in Spain and abroad. We would like to single out one made in Germany by José María Durán, and another one written in Italy by the young historian Gioia Iannilli, who in this book makes her voice heard through a text we ourselves wrote in response to questions posed by Iannilli that throw light on our most recent visual and philosophical concerns.

By pure chance, this year of 2013 we celebrate the centenary of two milestones which are instrumental in any proper understanding of the path taken by modern and contemporary art: *Bicycle Wheel*, Marcel Duchamp's first readymade, and *Black Square* by Kazimir Malevich, both from 1913. And we say pure chance



because the spirit of those radical pieces has imbued the practice PSJM has been developing over ten years. Concept, industrial object and formal reduction cut through the exhibition spaces of the San Martín Centro de Arte Contemporáneo as a tribute in admiration of those masters.

PSJM: A Critical Decade 2003-2013 is structured around three broad themes. On one hand, we bring together some of the works that have to do with our working method as a company, a labour strategy that questions the structures of the art world. It will therefore be the practice of *institutional critique* and, in direct connection with it, the *institutional theory of art* advanced by philosophers like Dickie and sociologists like Becker or Bourdieu, that shall provide the theoretical backbone of that section. These visually expressed critical strategies are materialised in corporate performances, industrially manufactured objects, displays, merchandising, surveys, animated graphics and consumer auratic goods; a line we have called “experimental marketing.” This group of works explicitly informs the PSJM brand, although the construction of the brand is updated with every work made, every text written and every public action. The handling of the symbolic-political world of the brands may have been one of our trademarks under the unwritten slogan of “PSJM: creation and destruction of brands.” Subsequently, we wanted to group the direct critique of brands in another set of works that bring to the fore the lack of ethics or comment on the disproportionate power which, under the demands of Neo-Liberal hegemony, corporations exert on citizens, turning individuals into mere consumers of image-products, of shallow political options, of equally insubstantial experiences. A dystopian view counteracted by the utopian desire exemplified in the project titled *The Hydrogen Island*. Finally, the decade comes to an end with a group of pieces belonging to a body of work we call “social geometry” which uses statistical data as a source to determine painterly, mural, sculptural, industrial or video compositions. This line of work will undoubtedly guide our upcoming works, which are more concerned with the existing relation between pure forms, knowledge, and behaviour.

This occasion has given us an opportunity to look backwards and at the same time to project future theoretical or visual actions, always focused on an uncertain tomorrow, as could not be otherwise, for, when talking about the future, we of course lack all certainty.

PSJM, Berlin, 2013.



PSJM: THE AESTHETIC OF THE TRADE SHOW

Francesco Spampinato



THE FORM OF PROPAGANDA

A recurring feature in the works of contemporary art is their interest in the forms of reflection not only on the reality in which we live but also on themselves. Who determines the intended use of a work of art? What properties define a work of art as such? What responsibilities is supposed to have the artist about the meanings of which the work is the carrier? Each of these points is further complicated when the author decides to sacrifice his ego in the name of a collective and anonymous production as Pablo San José and Cynthia Viera do, being active as a couple as PSJM since 2003.

PSJM celebrate today a decade of production of works/non-works structured around social, economic and political themes, in relation both to society and the history of art. In this text I will try to explore the correspondences between art and product, between artist and brand, and between the post-studio activities of the Spanish duo and the post-Fordist phase of global economy in this first part of the new millennium. I will refer to issues related to globalization, the commodification of culture, ecology, and explain how the production of PSJM is symptomatic of a significant change of the role of the artist in our society and in art history.

As we know, though, history is cyclical and we shouldn't be surprised that the origins of the practices in which PSJM are involved date back to about a century ago, to avant-garde movements such as Futurism and Dadaism, but especially Russian Constructivism. It is around the time of the October Revolution of 1917 that artists such as Alexander Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova and Vladimir Tatlin, involved up to that point in conceptual researches on the material properties of the work of art, with an abstract declination, decide to serve Marxist ideology.

Initially on their own and then working at the Vkhutemas, the State art school founded in Moscow in 1920, these artists leave their studios to draw billboards, sports uniforms for parades celebratory of the Revolution, and public monuments. From a deeply intellectual production, accessible only to an elite, they embrace a form of state propaganda in which art has a public dimension to enact values and symbols of a new way of understanding society.

Now, what interests us here is not a comparison between the ideology promoted by Vkhutemas and that of PSJM, although the two have many points in common, but the manner in which they both propose a change in the intended use of art. Like the artists at the service of the Revolution, indeed, the PSJM are looking for a wider audience than that of art, an audience they seek to conquer not only through contents but the forms that art takes, the modes of expression and the places of reception of the artwork.

Whether he is looking for deep intellectual values or mere entertainment, the average viewer gets stuck in the contemplative mechanism he expects the art put up for him, but it is compared to unexpected messages of social and political nature. In the hands of PSJM art becomes a replica of reality, as familiar as interrogative. Leveraging forms and languages borrowed from the realm of marketing and advertising, it functions as a mirror of a reality represented by slogans, statistics and ratings and regulated by occult mechanisms of brainwashing that produce consensus.



Varvara Stepanova, *Design for Sports Clothing*, 1923.

MARKETING AS A CRITICAL TOOL

One of the first theorists to talk about the work of art as a mirror of reality was Arthur Danto in reference to Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964). In what has become a fundamental text to understand Pop Art, Danto calls into question Hamlet who "recognized a remarkable feature of reflecting surfaces, namely that they show us what we could not otherwise perceive [...] Brillo Boxes may reveal us to ourselves as well as anything might: as a mirror held up to nature, they might serve the conscience of our kings."¹

Danto's text revolves around the question: what is the difference between a box of detergent Brillo on the shelves of a supermarket and its replica produced by Warhol? It is the theory of art, Danto suggests, and therefore the context, that justifies the reading of the latter as intellectual operation. Similarly, many of PSJM's works could circulate in the market as products or elements responsible for their promotion:

1 Arthur Danto, "The Artworld", *The Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 61, Issue 19, 1964, pp. 571-584.

lightboxes, stickers, graphics, gifs and animations, billboards and advertising gadgets, signage, furnishing and clothing. But it is their circulation as art objects that provides us with a critical reflection on the signs and symbols they replicate.

Particularly significant is the project *Marx*® (2008), which consists of a fashion collection (jeans, sandals, shirts and dresses), a multimedia advertising campaign and an installation worthy of a mall, or even better of a trade fair. Here, the word “Marx” becomes a logo that shines from colored lightboxes, while a pattern with the face of the German philosopher stands out on wallpapers and fabrics. The project, presented at CAAM in Las Palmas and the Laboral Art Centre in Gijón, invites us to reflect on the forms of homologation proposed by fashion, through the inversion of Marxist ideology, reflected in the motto “Do Like Us, Be Different,” which echoes the slogan of popular brands such as Nike and Diesel.

An effective key to understand a large part of PSJM production, is the concept of “over-identification,” coined by Slavoj Žižek about the artrock collective Laibach, which emerged in Yugoslavia in the Eighties. Laibach’s strategy to identify with an imaginary totalitarian government (a mix between Nazism and Stalinism), “frustrates the system (the ruling ideology),” suggests the Slovenian philosopher, “... precisely insofar as it is not its ironic imitation but over-identification with it —by bringing to light the obscene superego underside of the system, over-identification suspends its efficiency.”²

A similar result is achieved by *Corporate Armies* (2008), another of PSJM’s projects that uses the language of the trade show, whose main element is the trailer for an animated film set in a dystopian future in which the world is ruled by corporations. Even in this case, the over-identification with the spectacle (a sci-fi animation) and the marketing tied to it (the trailer, but also the context in which it is presented) doesn’t aim to entertain, nor to sell a product, but to make visible the risks we run when the market uses forms of entertainment as marketing strategies. From being an instrument of coercion, as they themselves often say, in PSJM’s hands marketing becomes “a critical tool.”

FREE THE SLAVES!

The context within which PSJM’s production takes shape between the end of the Nineties (when Pablo alone begins to use the acronym PSJM to sign his productions) and the early 2000s, goes beyond the art world and is part of the much more complex system of visual resistance enacted by the anti-globalization movement. It is during these years that many artists join forces in a semiotic guerrillas against corporations such as Nike, McDonald’s, Walmart, Ikea and Starbucks, accused mainly of homologation and exploitation of the labor force in developing countries. Some of these are the ones we see fighting each other in *Corporate Armies*, strong of the most advanced forms of military technology as well as masters of the more subtle strategies of mental manipulation.

2 Slavoj Žižek, *Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascists?*, M’ARS, Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana 1993.

The one in which PSJM are involved, instead, is not a war but a guerrilla known as culture jamming, often carried out on the roads, anonymously, by activists and street artist, and arrayed against the public symbols of corporations, that is their billboards, stores, mascots and especially their logos. As Naomi Klein wrote in 2000 in *No Logo*, which has become the reference text for understanding the forms of creative resistance to corporations: “Culture jamming badly rejects the idea that marketing — because it buys its way into our public spaces — must be passively accepted as a one-way information flow.”³

One of the first PSJM’s works against the power of the brand is *Asia Project* (2005), a series of circular lightboxes with logos of sportswear brands — Nike, Adidas, Reebok and Puma— accompanied by the slogan “Made by slaves for free people” as a way to “pointing out the irony in the values that they really represent,” write PSJM.



Project Asia, Riflemaker Gallery at A Foundation, London, 2008.

No wonder that the project, designed for the Plaza Mayor of Gijón, was removed shortly after his installation as a result of pressing threats from Adidas.

However, its remained highly subversive even within the walls of the museum. As we said earlier, in fact, it is precisely here that, in search of intellectual values, our defenses are lowered and a social, political or economic critical operation reaches the greatest effects. Once again, it is the over-identification of an art object with elements taken from the market (in this case the lightbox as advertising support and the logo as a symbol of business) that works, as Danto says, “as a mirror held up to nature, they might serve the conscience of our kings”⁴.

Made by Kids for Kids (2007), amplifies the message of *Project Asia*. It is a series of lightboxes depicting the iconic silhouette of the face of Mickey Mouse, but instead of the Walt Disney logo we read the message “made by kids for kids,” which denounces the exploitation of children in developing countries by many corporations to save on production costs. A denunciation that is even more frustrating and uncomfortable to accept, because it reveals the perverse logic on which the entertainment industry aimed at children is based.

3 Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, Picador, New York 2000, pp. 281.

4 *Ibid.* 1.

FROM THE CULTURE OF BRANDING TO THE BRANDING OF CULTURE

PSJM have incorporated symbols of globalization and of the fight against it in several other works, which not only act against the consumer world, but warn us that even the protest is subjected to commodification. For example, the difference between the restless demonstrators illustrated in *Consumer Demonstration* (2007) and the *New Consumer* (2008), laden with shopping bags but with a closed fist proudly pointed upward, becomes more and more confused. Do not forget that a major corporation today plundered its slogan from the 1968 youth revolts, of which represents the capitalist incarnation: “Think Different.”⁵

The same happened to the No Global generation. The logic of *No Logo* has been appropriated by different brands (i.e. Absolut Vodka, Starbucks, Muji) and many



Zizek talking at Zuccotti Park, New York, during Occupy Wall Street.

Black Blocs instead of breaking windows, today direct music videos in which someone breaks windows, or publish stories of young people who break windows. Street art has lent his tools to sportswear companies that produce expensive limited edition sneakers or launch advertising campaigns based on “pseudo-illegal” stencils. Even a flash mob is not surprising

anymore: it may have been organized by T-Mobile to launch its latest smartphone rate or by an un-shamed boyfriend to ask for the hand of his future bride.

Even the last major social movement, Occupy Wall Street, has been a victim of this ambivalence, divided from the beginning between opposition and its representation, between a radical and physical spatial practice and its formulation through visual and literary documents: pamphlets, posters and blogs concurrently with essays, articles and photo books. Once again Žižek is relevant for us. Invited to speak at New York’s Zuccotti Park during the hot days of the occupation, he warned: “There is a danger. Don’t fall in love with yourselves. We have a nice time here. But remember, carnivals come cheap. What matters is the day after, when we will have to return to normal lives. Will there be any changes then?”⁶

⁵ “Think Different” is an advertising slogan created for Apple computer in 1997.

⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Don’t Fall in Love with Yourselves: Remarks at Zuccotti Park*, October 9 in Astra Taylor, Keith Gessen and editors from n+1, *Occupy: Scenes from Occupied America*, Verso, New York 2011, pp. 68.

There is another danger, however, that the name of Zizek itself becomes a logo, as it happens in *Great Brands* (2006), a series of PSJM's lightboxes in which the names of famous philosophers (including the already mentioned Marx and Danto), artists (i.e. Pollock, Warhol) and architects (i.e. Le Corbusier, Gehry) turns into logo. Not that PSJM want to delegitimize these names of their associated intellectual value, but denounce as they are not immune to a process of commodification that besides regulating the market, inevitably affects human relationships and how culture is transmitted and received.

They themselves, as artists, aren't immune to this mechanism. In everything they do, they try to over-identify with a brand. Their name alone (composed of the initials of the name of Pablo) sounds like the name of a corporation, but also the fact that they operate as a couple, they produce "objects" and manage commercial activities, says a lot about the intentions of PSJM to present themselves as a company. However, unlike artists who act like real brands on the market today (i.e. Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst and Takashi Murakami), PSJM use the form of the brand both as a medium and a message, that is as a form and as a way to reflect on it.

THE ARTWORK AS COMMODITY

PSJM are not against art, but against a unique perspective, majoritarian and dependent on the market, which sees the work of art as a luxury object, more and more often at the center of financial speculations rather than intellectual discussions. A number of their works, for example, attack modernist abstraction, not only as an obsolete form to interpret today reality, but also as symptomatic of a process of commodification that devalues art of its avant-garde scope.

Rationalistic Landscapes (1999) is a series reminiscent of Bauhaus and De Stijl, but these landscapes could easily be backdrops for a car racing videogame. The *Cool Dripping* (2002-2003) series, instead, attacks Abstract Expressionism: the stroke of the rebel genius—from Van Gogh to Pollock—becomes the element of a potential screensaver or a wall sticker to match the new Ikea sofa. In *New!! Painting with sofa* (2002), on to the wall over a sofa couch is applied the replica of the same: if what we want from art is to match our interior decor, then let it become itself decor.

Much more complex is the project *American Colors* (2009-2010), a series of flat abstract images based on five colors, reminiscent of Sixties minimalist *colorfield* painting of Barnett Newman and Kenneth Noland. Here, however, it is not mere over-identification, the image is not supposed to be only watched but read as a graph. The field on which each of the colors extends, in fact, corresponds to demographic statistics on American population, in relation to its prison system and the index of poverty by ethnicity. Here, iconic elements of American abstraction such as *colorfield*, become the percentages of an equation between inequalities, of which even art, according to PSJM, should feel responsible.

A number of their works are constructed or presented as statistics in a process of dematerialization of art, that consists in the passage from an artwork to an object, from object to product, from product to statistical information on the network

that comprehends it. The intellectual value of their production doesn't only rely in what we see, but in the mechanism of production itself, shared by two members of the group and in some cases delegated to external agents, "employees" of the two artists. Many of their operations, in fact, are presented as events in which hostesses interact with the public using forms of dialogue of statistical nature —short questionnaires, either verbally or by filling —aimed at gathering data for the improvement of marketing strategies.



Fries Museum, Berlin, 2010.

Critical Situation (2001, in collaboration with El Perro, Aitor Méndez and Martín Sampedro), for example, is a temporary employment agency for artists, developed at MoMA PS1, New York, which, as previously seen in other works, becomes an operation of institutional critique: it uses art, within an artistic context, to think about how art is also subjected to the market rules. *Marketing Research* (2003-2013), instead, is a performance-survey that collects data on the rating of popularity of art and images in general, and how we relate to them in public and in private.

THE ECOLOGICAL TURN

The role of the hostess is symbolic of the capitalist phase in which we live, a phase that some have defined "Post-Fordist." The concept of Post-Fordism has been developed by Italian philosophers such as Christian Marazzi, Antonio Negri and Maurizio Lazzarato in opposition and overcoming the major capitalist model of the last century, focused on the assembly line invented by Ford. The main feature of Post-Fordism is the replacement of the object as a final product with a type of widespread and dispersed production, so specialized as decentralized, so delegated as immaterial: as money is.

In this sense, the activities of PSJM become symptomatic of a new model of artistic production. As we said, the object of their research is not the product but the mechanism of production. Crucial to understand their research, therefore, are the collateral activities such as their talks and articles that deal with the same content of their artworks (globalization, economics, politics), but from different positions, presented as academic interventions or through the reviews of exhibitions of artists congenial to them.

Their latest ambitious project, *The Hydrogen Island* (2010-2012), says a lot about the possible developments of this logic. Born as a revolutionary proposal for the

development of sustainable forms of energy, the project has been developed together with the Institute of Technology of the Canary Islands. As it happened before, the activities of PSJM spread out to a larger group, but even more interesting is that the exchange now takes place between art and science, two areas as distant as eager to enter into communication. *The Hydrogen Island* is both a project of artistic nature (with a symbolic value) and an applicable form of alternative energy.

The boundary between art and real life is getting so thin. One is reminded of similar projects developed by other art collectives, such as Superflex's *Supergas* (1996), a biogas unit aimed at making self-sufficient small human settlements, and the Del Aire Park, in the heart of Los Angeles, that thanks to Fallen Fruit will be destined to the production and distribution of free fruit. These, like the PSJM's project, arise from ecological concerns that are being challenged with artistic tools, belonging, as PSJM say, "to both the functional and representational sphere"⁷.

The practice of PSJM, like many other performative practices emerged at the turn of the Millennium and aimed at involving the spectator, has been read initially through the lens of the Relational Aesthetics theorized by Nicolas Bourriaud. However, more and more artists from that generation felt the need, at some point, to make their aesthetics functional, answering the call of one of the most witty critics of Bourriaud, Claire Bishop, who famously led: "what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?"⁸.

PSJM's activities are born out of a vast movement of thought that believes that art and culture play a crucial role regarding social, economic and political issues. That's why they are symptomatic of a significant change in the role of the artist in our society: more active and involved in matters to which it was supposed to be stranger. But PSJM are also responsible for the intended use of their works, they do not depend on market rules nor theoretical dogmas, and this is why they represent a new model of artist, that produces culture on the one hand and on the other the instruments through which art is proposed, read and spread, paving the way for a more ambitious but also purer concept of art and art making.

⁷ PSJM, *The Hydrogen Island: A Project by PSJM and ITC*, 2010.

⁸ Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", *October*, No. 110, Fall 2004, pp. 51-79.

PSJM*

Miguel Cereceda



hen PSJM became a working team after Cynthia Viera joined the collective in 2003, it presented a video work at Galería Blanca Soto which, with hindsight, I believe to be highly programmatic of what their later practice would hold. A very short piece, it consisted of a cartoon image of two stacks of coins. One of these twin towers of coins representing capitalism collapses, yet far from being destroyed by foreign terrorists

or unidentified attackers, it is capitalism itself that crumbles and collapses.

In a way, PSJM's whole practice as an art team is closely bound to this idea of the internal destruction of capitalism and of the elements of critique from inside, as a team, as an artwork. In this regard, one of the pieces from their earliest period that struck a deep chord with me was called *Cuadro con Sofá* (Painting With Sofa), a work conceived expressly to finish off painting once and for all. How come painting is still alive? Painting has never died because of something PSJM discovered and coldly diagnosed: painting is alive because the sofa still exists. The very existence of the sofa, a domestic contraption, an artefact that, once installed in the bourgeois sitting-room, creates an unsettling blank, empty space on the wall behind it which cries out to be filled with a picture. So, painting survives thanks to the sofa. This meant that the only way to finish off painting for good was to create a type of work that already had a painting built into it: a piece of furniture that could be distributed as a commodity and which, as an instrument for art critique, tried to destroy painting from within. It failed, but not for want of trying.

However, these attempts to develop a brand of art critical with capitalism from within capitalism have been put into practice in many of the team's art projects, which have taken on various forms that prefigure the novel we are now presenting.

In *Promesas*, from 2004, PSJM put forward a reflection on the difference between art and advertising. In it, they started to devote some thinking to the working strategy of capitalism from the viewpoint of self-propaganda and self-promotion. First of all, an ad was placed in a journal, self-advertising the piece as an artwork—

* Transcript of lecture by Miguel Cereceda at the Instituto Cervantes in Berlin in November 2011.

"This advertisement is an artwork." Likewise, as part of the overall *Promesas* project, an art intervention was undertaken in the exhibition *El barco del arte*, consisting, on one hand, in sticking up posters all around the city advertising fantastic gifts of free holidays, cars and designer clothes, and, on the other, in the presentation of those very same posters in the exhibition space where the attendance of an audience was requested, where those same posters were displayed as artworks, as conventional pictures. In other words, it was a crystal clear allusion to the self-referential problem of contemporary art and to the problem of the publicity of capitalism, attempting yet again to rebuild from within that market work. Thus, the meaning of advertising was subverted, incorporating in fact the presentation of an artwork.

From there, as an artists' team, little by little PSJM began to venture along a path of political engagement that ended up by being more provocative and challenging than would have been initially thought. As a matter of fact, a critique of capitalism entails no problem whatsoever—it is even positively regarded except, that is, when it affects the pocket of the capital market. And, even though it might be seem obvious, we ought to remind ourselves that markets are not abstract entities. The downturn is not, as Adam Smith would have it, the making of some invisible hand which would drive us to bankruptcy. It has proper names. And PSJM has located them in a very simple manner, because they are the names of big commercial brands. And so they began a strategy—at first sight, apparently naive—of submitting big commercial brands to a distinctly curious deconstructive critique. On one hand, *Project Asia*, presented in 2005, was the first time one of its projects was censored, probably because it was also the first time that they addressed the issue of the private property of big brands which, in point of fact, felt directly attacked by the group's intervention. Here is where they found the true enemy, in other words capital. Yet not capital in a general, abstract manner, but embodied by large corporations. *Project Asia* had come about as a proposal for the public space. More specifically, it was located in Gijón's Plaza Mayor, from where it was removed following pressure exerted by the ADIDAS brand in response to what it perceived to be a frontal attack. This evidence that they had seriously got to the throbbing heart



New consumer, 2008.

of capitalism made them realise the existence of something really crucial concerning contemporary culture: the problem that the product which is actually sold is not really an object and not really content but, as they soon understood, it was specifically a big commercial brand. Then, that strategy of deconstructed commercial brands led them to advertise those things advertisers never want to publicise: to show who takes the money to the bank or who takes the dough home, as PSJM made explicit in large advertising posters as part of the *Hidden Brands* project. Not the names of the large corporations or their brands, but the names of the big owners of big corporations. And that is why they are *Hidden Brands*: because it is what the company owners are most interested in concealing. There, the names of George Soros or other



Berlin, 2008.

major shareholders of big multinational corporations were displayed, made explicitly known. In this way, *Hidden Brands* leveraged the same mechanisms of suggestion as used by the powers-that-be, but in this case to bring to the fore the dangers of globalised capitalism. It was about publicising precisely those people who did not want to be publicised.

But that project of critical deconstruction of commercial brands led the group to the discovery of something that the cultural world is not really fully aware of, or that is not too evident, which is to say, of the fact that large brands are also in operation when it comes to selling cultural contents, art contents, ideological contents. And that is what made them highlight something, in the context of the *Great Brands*

project, which is particularly evident in contemporary art: the brand is what sells. Look for example at the Museo Picasso in Málaga—the perfect container without any content. Its collection possesses exactly seven paintings by Pablo Ruiz Picasso and obtains seven million euros from the State for its annual budget, working out at one million per painting. How is that possible? The reason is because it is the museum in Andalusia with the highest number of visitors. It claims to be the second most frequented contemporary art museum in Spain, only after the Museo Reina Sofia. How come? By art of magic. What is it selling? A commercial brand called Picasso. And what is Picasso? As everybody knows, it is a car, a well advertised commercial brand and therefore people flock in droves to see what is actually there. The fact that there is nothing to be seen does not matter. You can say “I’ve been at the Picasso Museum!” And what was there? “Nothing! But it was beautiful!” This is becoming a customary process in the world of culture. PSJM predicted as much when they analysed how big names very often also operate as big brands. In that same sense they established a strategy, sometimes wounding for those of us who identify with a certain philosophical tradition, by which they used the names of great philosophers—for instance, Marx—as a brand to create t-shirts, jeans and a whole line of design; or used the names of great philosophers like Adorno or Benjamin as commercial brands. Indeed, very often we realise that this is how cultural contents often operate. Names like Nietzsche are frequently mere tags people drop in conversation as if to say: yes, I give myself a certain cultural sheen, a certain cultural content, even though I have never read anything of the kind.

Following this line, and in their critique of capitalism, I believe that PSJM have been hitting out both left and right. That is to say, they have also shown that capitalism is not alone in having a commercial structure, that contemporary culture and even the leftwing are also tied to that same commercial dynamics. In this regard, particularly interesting are, for instance, their deconstructive criticism of consumer demonstrations, showing people angrily protesting in the street, displaying their banners with slogans, yet at once sporting commercial brands or designer handbags, raising their clenched fists while carrying shopping bags from luxury stores. This criticism opens up a process which PSJM followed up immediately, influenced somewhat by Naomi Klein but also by a critique of the system itself. This step can perhaps be seen more clearly in *Corporate Armies*, a project in which PSJM engaged in a critique of the capitalist system that was not merely focused on those companies selling and distributing their products to us, but also in how they consolidate their position in power as corporate armies.

PSJM cast a spotlight on an article published in *The Guardian* in July 2007, talking about how the Russian parliament had passed a law giving large energy giants like Gazprom and Transneft a freehand to avail of state troops, going beyond conventional security employees; that is, they have established corporate armies. Those armies have helped PSJM to develop a working project through which they enter a little bit into the idea of the Apocalypse, playing with the idea of destruction, of a world facing open confrontation, with something that bears a connection with comics, with science fiction, and that has to do with the play of counter-utopias. A notion that would reappear in their work *Struggle*, perhaps the first counter-utopia—told

nearly in comic format—of protesters confronting the power of brands. In *Struggle*, the demonstrators are seen destroying or knocking down commercial brands and things of the sort. The latest instance of this work could perhaps be a piece from 2007 titled *Capitalismo Descanse en Paz* (Capitalism Rest in Peace), once again, a death notice on one of those billboards we see at bus stops where, with its customary black edge and its little cross, a large death notice says: *Capitalismo Descanse en Paz. 1712-2010* (Capitalism Rest in Peace. 1712-2010). To some extent, it was a prophetic piece of work given that in 2007, even though we could intuit the imminence of a downturn, no one was able to predict the extent of the crisis we are now going through and that has led many people to talk about post-capitalism, or, in a different sense, about the urgency or the need for a rethinking of the whole economic system. I have no idea whether capitalism has collapsed or not, but in 2007 PSJM announced its definitive demise.

The truth of the matter is that, in recent years, PSJM's practice has subsequently clearly shifted towards what could be defined as a social critique project with a utopian-critical bent. And, there can be no question about it, that is the content of *The Hydrogen Island*, the novel we are now presenting. A novel that is partially science fiction, albeit science fiction presenting, like any utopia, a critique of the established social order.

PARALLEL REFLECTIONS*

Clara Muñoz



SJM, an artistic team that includes Pablo San José (Mieres, 1969) and Cynthia Viera (Gran Canaria, 1973), prefer to work in Madrid. The inclusion of Cynthia Viera in the team has brought them closer to the insular plastic arts while her presence is continuously becoming more active, especially as they are represented by the Gallery Saro León. PSJM inhabit those spaces where art, design and publicity converge. In fact the team's very name functions as a trademark. The majority of PSJM's work raises question regarding the market, regarding communication with consumers, or regarding function as an artistic quality. PSJM refuses to stress the frontiers that could exist between art, design and publicity. To a certain degree their work does not cease to be the correct commentary of a anxious team that has constructed a personal language favoured by the reading and knowledge of the heroic vanguards (Dadaism, Bauhaus) and the post-vanguards (pop, conceptual and minimalism). The presence of PSJM on the artistic circuits is accentuated by their being selected for the exhibit "The Real Royal Trip ... by the Arts", PS1-MOMA, a proposal they put together with the collaboration of El Perro, Aitor Méndez and Martín Sampedro. This project also included works by Carmela García and Nestor Torrens.

PSJM's works shape proposals of incredible visual effectiveness close to their own images of the media environment. This group's approach to graphic design and publicity is evident in *Marcas Ocultas* [Hidden Frames]. This is a work that demonstrates the suggestive mechanisms that tend to use power in order to give visibility to the dangers of globalized capitalism. "It attempts to create publicity for those who do not want it", the team assures us.

We inhabit a codified territory where the consumption of symbols even reaches the point of creating our own identity. The world of thought or of creation is not exempt from this phenomenon. *Grandes Marcas* [Large Frames] addresses the signatures' cultural environment, the very names of the authors that have left a profound mark on us throughout the twentieth century. It is a list of personalities that we contiguously recall or cite. A world without them is unimaginable. In fact, PSJM assures

* Publicado en *Sublime* n° 19. *Ultraperiferia*, 01/02/2007.

us “they function as referential elements full of intellectual values that the expert, the enthusiast and everyone who participates in this field brings out to shine without qualm in order to support their cultural positioning”. They all form the saints’ lives of the culture. PSJM invoke Benjamin, Adorno, Duchamp, Beuys, Serra, Mies or Le Corbusier as though they were commercial trademarks identifiable by everyone. It is an ironic work that reverberates with the irreverent humour that characterizes this team.



Organization chart, 2003-2013.

MARX® , THE IDEOLOGICAL BOUTIQUE*

José María Durán



In the face of it, *MARX*® is a boutique for the sale of clothing by the *MARX*® brand on display in a museum. Registering the brand *MARX*®, the garments themselves, as well as the advertising campaign organized to tie in with the exhibition, were all conceived by PSJM as core elements of the artwork. As a result, the artwork is the whole mesh of relations, of which buying and selling is critical in the interaction with the audience. *MARX*® avails of commercial strategies that are standard practice for a boutique of its kind; and so, PSJM convincingly exhibit in the museum the apparent superficiality of the commodity form, which only means that what is on exhibit is the way in which the commodity appears socially. And, as is customary in capitalism, the surface is wiped clean of the relations of production, that is, they are not evident on the surface of what is there, meaning that what we are confronted with at the museum are fetishes. Therefore, the *MARX*® installation is predicated on a twofold reality. On one hand, we experience the actuality of the commodity form, though disguised under the appearance of the artwork; on the other, art is exhibited as a totally ordinary commodity. PSJM view this collision of art and commodity as the production of *simulacra*, which is to say, trick images: “What defines our team’s line of work” PSJM write in the exhibition catalogue, “and to a certain extent distinguishes us from the other artists of our generation is not so much the fact that we keep an eye on the socio-economic-political events around us and represent them, as the fact that we use the mechanisms characteristic of the culture industry, especially in its facet of commercial seduction, to create, within the framework of contemporary art, a sort of simulacra which easily crosses the line between fiction and reality. In other words, if many current creators interested in mass culture and its creative industries strive to produce parodies, at PSJM we

* Extract from the PhD dissertation “Der Wert im Inneren der künstlerischen Produktivität” at the Institute of Philosophy of Freie Universität Berlin. An earlier version of this text was published in 2009 under the title “PSJM: Sobre los procesos de trabajo y arte en el capitalismo” in the blog *contraindicaciones*. I would like to thank Pablo and Cynthia, from PSJM, for allowing me access to all the necessary material to carry out my research, and to Pablo España from *contraindicaciones* for making the publication possible.

strive to generate simulacra, not parodies. Many of our pieces could pass as parts of reality; a reality which we well know is difficult to separate nowadays from the fiction produced by the media”¹ In *MARX*® it is all about producing clothing as *simulacra* of the real.

It is widely accepted that the simulacrum is always at the core of any theory of representation worthy of the name. Plato, whose intention was to pigeonhole the Sophists as imitators and sorcerers of reality, asks himself in that regard what type of imitator a sophist actually is. In order to expose the sophist as an imitator, Plato examined the duality of image production, which is the imitator’s activity par excellence. Plato alludes first of all to the production of *portraits* (*mimesis eikastike*) which, to his way of thinking, consists of the creation of a copy adapted to the proportions of the original, not just from a three-dimensional viewpoint, but also when applying

the appropriate colours to each part.² Secondly, Plato talks about art practitioners who deal with a kind of representation in which, rather than real proportions, the question is that the work would *appear* beautiful. Their depictions may not be deemed as *portraits*, that is, as likenesses, but rather as *appearances*, which is to say semblances.³ Thus, the producers of those semblances are producers of *simulacra*,



Marx®, Label, 2008.

and the production of simulacra requires an obligatory displacement of the reality to be represented in order to cause a *reality effect* in the artwork. What is represented is not the real, no matter how similar it may be. And as it is not seen from an appropriate viewpoint, Plato warns, the image resembles the reality which is the object of representation. However, if it were possible to see the image from a better perspective, we would immediately realise that, for instance, the garments that are part of the *MARX*® installation, rather than a portrait of reality, are a *simulacrum* of it. Consequently, PSJM would have behaved as true sophists. We ought to bear in mind that, as a truthful portrait or likeness of reality, representation must guarantee an interval between reality and representation, between model and copy, so as to make

1 PSJM, “Theoretical Framework”, in *MARX*®, CAAM and LABoral, Las Palmas and Gijon, 2008, p. 52.

2 Plato, Sophist, in *Plato. The Collected Dialogues*, edited by Hamilton & Cairns, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2005, p. 978.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 979.

it possible “to examine the law by which *mimesis* is controlled and mastered.”⁴ And that is the situation we are faced with in the Baroque, the period of simulacra par excellence. A representation where truth is not the starting point, but only a sought-after effect, has succumbed to simulacrum, to an excess of mimesis as pointed out by Marin, turning the copy into the perfect double of the real. That *reality effect* or excess of mimesis is at the heart of PSJM’s practice. Here, the crucial issue is that, unlike similar works, for instance the installation Guillaume Bijl made of a branch of the British supermarket Tesco at Tate Liverpool in 2002, which attempted to set up a real supermarket in the museum, in *MARX*® what PSJM undertake is the production of reality. The outcome is not an exact copy of the real, as a portrait would be, but reality produced anew. When, in the case of Bijl, the museum offered the interval required to distinguish the model from the representation, its reality is so obvious that it can only be the representation or illustration of a reality that transcends the installation. The clothes produced by PSJM appear in the museum as an updated Baroque *trompe l’oeil* which “exposes the body-eye to the fascination of its double, its simulacrum.”⁵ The representation of the commodity form has been deployed to the utmost perfection, but not because the commodity has been convincingly *portrayed* in the museum (Bijl’s case), but because the commodity has been perfectly *produced*. The artists are then transformed from imitators of the real to producers of the real. And as this new production tries to reproduce the real, it could be said that the reality produced anew is really operating as a substitution of the old reality. And that, for Baudrillard, is the effect of the simulacrum.

Subsequently, a form of understanding the simulacrum in contemporary interventions would be to follow Baudrillard’s recommendation to view the simulacrum as a substitution of the real: “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double.”⁶ That way of overlapping reality through its double is better understood through the analysis Baudrillard makes of Disneyland. Disneyland appears as something imaginary to make us believe that the world beyond Disneyland is real, when the reality is that Disneyland is the real, and the outer reality now belongs to hyperreality and to the world of simulacra: “The imaginary of Disneyland is neither true nor false, it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp.”⁷ In that regard, Baudrillard maintains that it is no longer about a *reversed* image of reality, as in the classic analysis of ideology inasmuch as a camera *obscura* taken from *The German Ideology* by Marx and Engels and developed by the Frankfurt-inspired critical theory, but about “concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving

4 Louis Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1995, p. 100.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

6 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, The University of Michigan Press, 1994, p 2.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

the reality principle.”⁸ The truth of the matter is that to assume the existence of a *reversed* image of reality, which would amount to an ideological image that is seen as false, that is, a false representation of the real, is at once tantamount to stating the existence of a *true* reality behind the reversed image, and that it is possible for truth to be revealed by merely restoring the image that has been reversed to its original position. Therefore, a critique of ideology would be about unmasking the sophist. However, what Baudrillard defends is that that truth awaiting its revelation through the critique of ideology is *really* a fiction. Baudrillard observes it in the Marxian analysis of the double reality of commodities, that is, of commodities as use-value and exchange-value. For Marx, the use-value would correspond to the true essence of the being (Marx’s anthropological formulation as seen by Baudrillard) that has been taken away from the worker, in other words, alienated by the capitalist system of production of goods. Needs would have been turned into money, and that is an analysis that, influenced by Feuerbach, Marx certainly sets out in an anthropological-idealistic way in the famous *Manuscripts of 1844*. In his critique of Marx, Baudrillard attempts to overcome that analysis made by Marx which would obviously lead to the notion of ideology as a *camera obscura* and replace the concept of ideology by that of simulacrum: “Ideology only corresponds to a corruption of reality through signs; simulation corresponds to a short circuit of reality and to its duplication through signs. It is always the goal of the ideological analysis to restore the objective process, it is always a false problem to wish to restore the truth beneath the simulacrum.”⁹ That reduplication of reality through signs is the strategy that PSJM attempts to materialise in *MARX®*. In fact, the *MARX®* boutique is shored up by signs of the real that are re-appropriated and reduplicated by PSJM. Also the museum (which in PSJM’s work should always be construed as a *sign*) becomes the scenario of the real very much in tune with Baudrillard: “It is no longer a question of the ideology of work” but “the scenario of work is there to conceal that the real of work, the real of production, has disappeared.”¹⁰ Baudrillard’s thesis is grounded on a shift or a break with the classic paradigm of capitalist production whose importance is crucial in PSJM’s practice: from the production of material wealth we would have moved to the production of signs. The commodity form characteristic of 19th century capitalism, that is, of Marx’s capitalism according to Baudrillard, would now be displaced by the *form-sign*: consumed signs in lieu of use-values. In other words, today’s consumption would reveal the acquisition of signs, or rather, the systematic manipulation of signs rather than the connection of the objects to any particular need. Hence, Baudrillard concludes, the study of social objects, of their function and meaning, should go beyond a focus on objects as needs, in consonance with the priority of their use-values. For Baudrillard, consumption is equivalent to a logic of signs and difference: “this object does not assume meaning either in a symbolic relation with the subject... or in an operational relation to the world...:

8 Ibid., p. 13.

9 Ibid., p. 27.

10 Ibid., pp. 26-27.



Marx®, Video, 2008.

it finds meaning with other objects, in difference, according to a hierarchical code of significations.”¹¹ PSJM clearly reference Baudrillard’s analysis when, for instance, they allude to the construction of individuality through the form-sign (as in their work *Great Brands*) which is consubstantial to the registered trademark: “The brand slogan “Do like us, be different” reproduces the paradoxical message we can easily see in the media. Achieve your individuality, be yourself, always, of course, by consuming mass produced goods. This tension between the individual and mass production, exclusivity and mass industrial production, between the subjectivity industries and what is technologically objective takes material form in *MARX*® products which are unique because of their visible and differentiating series number.”¹² And that involves PSJM’s use of strategies of commercialisation currently in vogue which they take very seriously indeed. Baudrillard’s praise of Thorstein Veblen is highly germane in this context given that in Baudrillard’s eyes Veblen’s achievement is to have demonstrated that the whole of society is ruled according to the production of distinctive material.¹³ And from a financial viewpoint, art tends to be considered as a “Veblen good” of sorts. If the use-value of the commodity is nowadays channelled, totally simulated through (brand-)signs, no other commodity would be able to express it in a better way than art, whose use-value only exists inasmuch as a material medium through which the sign circulates. The consumption of artworks is transformed into a lifestyle and the most ordinary goods mimic that way of appearing, thus becoming aesthetic products. Subsequently, we may state that today’s commodities are little more than simulacra of artworks.

11 Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, translated by Charles Levin, The Telos Press, St. Louis, Mo., 1981, p. 64.

12 PSJM, “Theoretical Framework”, op. cit., p. 52.

13 Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, op. cit., p. 77-79.

Therefore, what are we really facing when coming across the *MARX*® boutique at the museum? The commercial logic of sign production remitting us to a reality made of simulacra? There is a sought-for interaction between the social reality of a product inasmuch as commodity and inasmuch as art, or in relation to its materialisation as art in the museum. In the museum, the goal of PSJM is not to sell



Marx®, Light box, 2008.

clothes. In other words, it is not about *masking* clothes as art, but about displaying them under the guise of art with a view to materialising their exchange-value. The business rationale works differently. BMW does not exhibit its motorcycle in a museum disguising them as artworks to sell them more efficiently, it is the Guggenheim who organises an exhibition titled “The Art of the Motorcycle” (1999/2000) *generously* sponsored by BMW. Although the realisation of the exchange value is an intrinsic element of the logic of the work conceived by PSJM, what this work is really about is the production of reality, and, we would venture to say, taken to its ultimate consequences.¹⁴ But that does not mean that PSJM has sought to strategically place their clothes at the museum as fashion designers. There is no question that what PSJM have produced is art, and under no circumstances goods that are subject to exchange value. Is that true? Well, only relatively, for the *MARX*® garments are an interface of clashing social relations. PSJM has produced those clothes, those totally ordinary consumer goods as signs. But they are ideological signs aimed at refracting the reality of the world of goods—thus, nothing to do with the metaphor of the *camera obscura*. For what a refraction of the real implies is not its imitation,

¹⁴ In this regard, PSJM allude to the classic cynicism of Diogenes, which “consists of taking the laws ruling the established to their ultimate consequences as a means of bringing to the fore the absurdity of their premises.” PSJM interviewed by Clara Muñoz for the magazine *Atlántica*, no. 46, (2008), pp.128-143.

but its (re)production, and inasmuch as a displacement, or change of direction, of the real, that reproduction is an ideological mechanism that does not attempt to disclose a reality concealed from sight, but to produce a specific relation with the real. And that relation is an experience, which is to say, something actually experienced. And in order to refract reality, artists need a medium (or, if you will, an apparatus as Althusser would say) that might make it possible to change the direction of the meaning. And that medium is the contemporary art museum. We therefore observe a process of de-contextualising and re-contextualising the clothes at the museum so as to generate a paradox. At the museum, the garments are re-contextualised as art, and only then does it become possible for them to fulfil their commercial logic, that is, the realisation of the exchange-value because they are then ready to be sold in all their glorious epiphany.¹⁵ Subsequently, PSJM transform the museum into a market, and thus their stance that defends that the artwork has succumbed to the logic of goods production is immediately confirmed. However, inside the museum, the use-value of the clothes as consumer goods is obviously absurd and the same applies to their realisation as exchange-value, for the simple reason that one does not go to a museum to buy clothes, but to look at art. The comfortable position of the consumers of goods and art is thus questioned. Indeed, although they are forced to look at those garments as if they were artworks, they at once find themselves seduced by their signic presentation and therefore surrender themselves to the wish to buy clothes, at least to try them on. The dialectic PSJM confront us with is evident: from passive onlookers of artworks we are turned into active consumers of goods. In other words, from sentient intuition we move to sentient activity in the best sense of the fifth of Marx's well known *Theses on Feuerbach*. The outcome of that transformation is, in any case, an abyss. The praxis we are faced with is one we would like to overlook. But if we overlook it, we immediately restore the typically auratic-contemplative nature of art production in the bourgeois world which PSJM constantly underscores in many of its works and also here by labelling their clothes with that typical edition number so cherished by collectors. What then is the choice? Looking or consuming? But thanks to that contradiction we can advance in the direction that PSJM are pointing at: what they are saying is that if we accept mass-production mechanisms, we will eventually be able to reach an authentically democratic art form: an art for all. What on the surface of simulated representation emerged as a comment about the production of goods in capitalism, is now, thanks to the refraction of the apparent reality, turned into a forceful critique of art production, paradoxically enough, through the production of goods. Just like Diogenes, that cynic who, although he was not interested in theatre, tried to get in at the end, when everybody was leaving, elbowing his way *against the stream* into an already empty theatre, PSJM are not interested in commodities although they deal with them and thus bring them into the museum *against the stream*, not to make us reject them or laugh at them but to enthrall us with their appearance and thus throw art in our face.

15 Carlos García Gual, *La secta del perro*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1987, p. 56.

PSJM: ONE MUST BE ABSOLUTELY MODERN

Sonia Mauricio



nce aesthetic subjectivity, inasmuch as a constructive principle of totality, was smashed to smithereens in the wake of Nietzsche, we are located in postmodernism, or its aftermath following the dissolution of the aesthetic discourse, with a particular focus on deconstruction, decentralization, dissemination, discontinuity and dispersal. PSJM (Pablo & Cynthia) handle all these loose threads with consummate ease and use them to build their own world, or plurality of aesthetic worlds, based on political discourse and on the dichotomy of a critique of the system by one who knows its structures from the inside, thus invariably straddling inside and outside through various idioms that connect with art via advertising, fashion, music, literature or video.

PSJM is keenly aware that, after the destruction of the modern utopia, aesthetically and politically speaking, we find ourselves caught up in a deployment of a heterotopy in which we acknowledge the existence of spaces and models describing multiple, changing and contradictory realities. In turn, if we fall back on the Kantian antinomy, by which two apparently conflicting propositions are in fact not so and can indeed coexist, PSJM continues being absolutely modern without relinquishing aesthetic utopia and political critique.

The current dispersion of aesthetic discourses produces a cartography where a yearning for classicism—with a prefigured platonic order—coexists with the modern cult of the fragment and with aesthetic postmodernism. For all those reasons, I am fully in agreement with Habermas's¹ point of view which defends that, instead of giving up modernity and its project as a lost cause, we should learn from the mistakes of those extravagant programs which have tried to negate it and have led us to the present-day financial, political, social and cultural crisis. The different types of reception of art might perhaps be able to offer an example that could at least point towards a way out. This is where PSJM place

1 See Habermas, J. "La modernidad, un proyecto incompleto" in Various Authors. *La posmodernidad*, Kairos, 7th ed. 2008.

themselves alongside groups like *Crear es Resistir*, *Resistir es Crear*. And they do so with works like *Hidden Brands* or with actions like *Out of Context, Inside the Market* (2005), which engage with the mechanisms of suggestion used by power structures, with the purpose of unmasking them.

When I met Pablo San José in Madrid in the 1990s, I was taken by his vast artistic intuition in making a highly suggestive and eclectic synthesis of art using different languages. With the passing of time, and once the team with Cynthia Viera had already been established, PSJM has further explored these postulates. Their insatiable passion has taken them deeper into the theoretical analysis that runs in parallel to their art practice, and they use the aesthetic device of advertising to make a lucid analysis of how the commodity—the very embodiment of contemporary desire—is permanently emptied by the incessant de-multiplication of its products in a logic of never-ending neo-capitalism that, according to Lipovetsky or to Bataille, leads to emptiness and to saturation.

In point of fact, in the project *Great Brands* (2007), the design of a range of t-shirts featuring the brands Le Corbusier, Derrida and Foucault engaged in a critical reflection to explain how aesthetic or artistic thinking is automatically devoured by the market. And in the installation *Marx*® (2008), the trade mark



Wall games, 1998-2004.



Total Experience, 2010.

MARX® and its corresponding patent acquired by PSJM disclose, through a clever marketing operation, how traditionally sacrosanct substrata are inserted into the unlimited consumerist society of our days. Following Crimp, anything that plays a role in the secular processes of increasing the producible is, to begin with, *exhibitable*, and that applies both to mobile and to immobile goods. It is what he calls “on the museum’s ruins,” which is to say, how the exhibition is no longer limited to displaying the immediate products of the ability to create works, but also accepts raw materials, auxiliary products, prototypes, intermediate developments, waste.

Worth underscoring in this same train of thought is *Consumer Demonstration* (2006), a work which, with cutting irony, mines the current feeling of impotence of protest, in which immaculate whiteness brings to mind a dishwasher ad.

Later, the publication of the book *Wagner/Estética* (2010), and the title of their work “Total Experience. Wagner’s Legacy in Global Culture Industry,” explain another of the structural concepts behind their practice: “From the beginning we understood that what underpinned all our practice but also the work of many other contemporary artists, as well as the working rationale of the globalised mass culture, was *Das Gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art.” A total work of art that encourages them to research diverging fields, although connected with the same thread, as in the case of their novel *The Hydrogen Island*, which builds an aesthetic and political utopia mixing science fiction and cinema in the manner of Nolan

with Schiller's philosophy, beneath which lies a social critique of an increasingly liquid society as described by Bauman.

The ongoing quest that encourages PSJM to experiment with new forms and styles, that does not renounce transformation in the wider sense of the word, connects with Rimbaud's "one must be absolutely modern" and with his poem "Departure":

Enough seen. The vision was encountered under all skies.

Enough had. Sounds of cities, evening, and in the light, as always.

Enough known. The decisions of life. - O Sounds and Visions!

Departure into new affection and noise!

Departures and quests that produce a thunder clap of scarlet stars around PSJM that ends up unveiling riches beyond belief. Long life, health and fortune to Pablo and Cynthia!

PSJM: THE HYDROGEN ISLAND AND THE ARCHIPELAGO NOVEL*

José Luis Corazón Ardura



resenting a book is an odd task, for when it comes to fashioning an artefact such as the one bringing us all together here today, it leaps right (back) off the page. In PSJM's *The Hydrogen Island*, we are dealing with a novel that is isolated in the proper sense of the word. Indeed, it is not the typical offshoot of a professional writer dedicated to this kind of literature, but the work of a team of artists bold enough to devote their time and space to building a literary artefact, an art product that contains, rather than a mere text, a space for self-referential reading.

One could say that, if there is no writing without a writer, then there would probably be no writer without writing. As such, it comes as a surprise that PSJM's style also touches on spaces of writing and communication. And then, the fact that a couple of artists involved in a shared project should engage with the professionalisation of writing could also mean something: Is it possible not to write between two? In consequence, what we have here is an island-novel, or an archipelago-book; and one that is presented as an entropic utopia, as a literary artefact.

That said, it might be more of a dystopia, a place strangely underpinned by topics and tropics that leads us to a weird monument that could well be viewed as a device for reading not only images, words and things, but also for the timely re-enactment of the space we inhabit at present, one deeply critical of capitalism. But, what history of critical democracy is there in this island? As one can read, Past is Future, which, in triumphing over capitalist anarchy, calls up the thought of a lost history.

Notwithstanding its proximity to science fiction, in this novel the islands and ships belong to a space not only indebted to the optimism of the Arts & Crafts movement, but also—as exemplified by PSJM's whole practice—one that rereads certain strands of the avant-gardes leaning towards Futurism, Minimalism and Constructivism, not forgetting the knowing nod to utopian novels by William Morris or Samuel Butler. As the subtitle to Morris' *News from Nowhere* makes explicit, it is about fa-

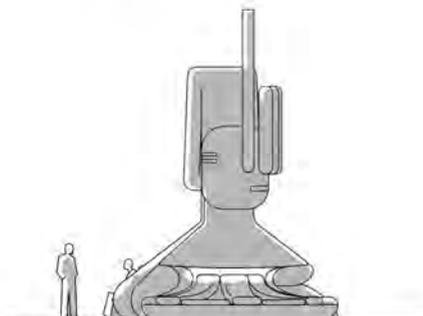
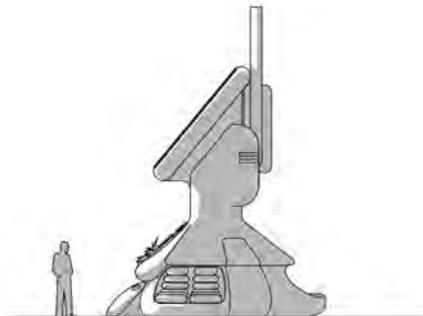
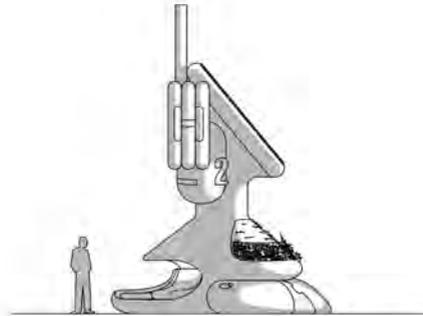
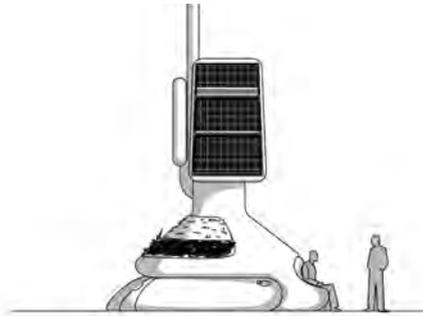
* Conference hosted by José Luis Corazón Ardura in the Museum Reina Sofia Art Center in April 2011.

vouring an epoch of rest from where to return to an activity of the present-day. A truly effective promise in the islands making up this idealised Macaronesia, a kind of new Atlantis.

But we all know that, to some extent, ships and islands invented Western literature. There is no need here to go into the possible connections between the lost ship in *The Odyssey* or in *Planet of the Apes* or that *stultifera navis* or ship of insanity that is the Millennium Falcon. Or indeed the balloon used to take a Soviet communist to Mars in the novel by Bogdanov, the return to the island in *The Invention of Morel* or the shipwreck of a portable Europe on the coast of the island where the Criticon (Faultfinder) begins and ends. In any case, wherever there is literature with islands we may be sure that we will also find ourselves face to face with a critical questioning of the present.

Could *The Hydrogen Island* be seen as a reanimation of steampunk, as coined by KW Jeter in the late 1970s? This type of literature fuelled a reaction against the society of the spectacle, one that emerged as a retro-futuristic literary movement grounded in an idealised vision of the Victorian era. The idea is to find utopian premises to present a story which, after some technological apocalypse that happened in a distant past, tries to preserve a society facing problems like consumerism, the power of corporations and unbridled capitalism, tasks which, on the other hand, have always sustained PSJM's practice.

This writing artefact has its own peculiar features, including hygiene and cleanliness, clarity and emotion. In consequence, it creates a somewhat eudaemonic or happy utopia which



shall soon taste the tragic blend of love and death, in a smooth, liquid space led by desire and a thanatic drive. Without disclosing too much of what happens on this Morelian island, beneath this metaphor lies a sinuous critique of the current situation of our societies. Of course, here we are not dealing with a naive defence of anti-civilization, but with a quest for an origin on a mythical island. This

post-human realm, with a youthful and clearly lyrical façade, also conceals the contradiction and dualism proper to a state divested of belligerency, competitiveness or rampant ambition. It probably contains some portion of Kantian ethics, addressing the island of the noumenon, an idealised space of distant perfection in a future new age suffused with pseudo-mystical pretences where, as stated, instead of seeing the other as a means to an end, the focus is on the empathic ability of coexistence between what we are and what informs us in relation to social idealisation.

All in all, by presenting this utopia today, PSJM once again alerts us to art and literature. It is all about forging bonds from writing and from the monumentality of an island that is so close to us that we never actually think of going there. After all, could there really be any new space in litera-



The Hydrogen Island, Website, 2011.

ture? Is modern ambition not the very space of the present? But if *The Hydrogen Island* conjures up spaces both real and imaginary, it also contains a markedly political quality. It describes the construction of imaginary cities and islands; it talks about political organisation through technical advances that also surmount all the parasitical elements of voracious capitalism.

The Hydrogen Island also conveys the notion that literature maintains a place within society. It is a split novel that talks about duality. There are two stories, two realities, two complementary tales containing what one reasonably expects in relation to utopian tragedy and literature. Two elements handled by an artist's team set up as an empathic enterprise that now offers, in the form of a literal product, art objects at the price of a book. Because this novel we are presenting here is actually a work of art within everyone's reach, calling into question all those ideas which led to the consideration of art as the only product of genius.

Yet on the other hand, the split shows that not everyone is so perfect on the island in this novel. There are issues concerning art entropy and a disconnect with an aesthetics of the simulacrum.

This reading device gives rise, as we said before, through an audiovisual mechanism, to a book or a monument, two key concepts. It strives to describe an entropic utopia in an unusual way. We would insist that we are unaware whether or not this object-book is the island itself. On the other hand, the announcement of a transient energy seemingly springing from an un-present island, here becomes a technological advance coming from a literary source, thus acknowledging the condition of this split project in an announcement of what has happened, reaching towards an optimistic, blue future. Two stories that turn this island into a promise of knowledge that can come into being only with access to a centre of projective energy that lends future time its modern semblance.

On another note, the constitution of modern technology feasible only as literature leads this PSJM project to cite reasons supporting a delicate and sensitive positivism. They are descriptions of devices that are useful in knowing the past—a positive introjection that will define some characters who, even though they do not exactly work, invest part of their lives in the creation of a city in the inland of a salvational archipelago. A serious serialised novel.

In addition, what projection is there in this island book? The presence of a monument whose main feature is its ability to educationally interact in a sentient manner. A place with extraordinary plants calling to mind the vegetal. And also an energy machine providing us a glimpse of what is expected. All in all, a calm place to discover a new reading of the present. In other words, a promise to come.

For this fate has included the island as a book, an artefact capable of discovering how the literary becomes artistic and the artistic becomes literary. Indeed, it is not about looking at a novel only for its clean blue colour, sometimes not even for what its writing narrates. Just as present day literature and art do not consist of the mere reproduction of clichés as if in an uncultured worldly-wise grammar, constructing a text is much more than stringing together certain words in an orderly fashion.

Consequently, in the case of this archipelago-cum-project, we must try to understand the possible connection between a book and an environmental work which speaks both to a publishing enterprise and an art project, as well as to teamwork: an infectious case of empathy vis-à-vis the possibility of seeing this island novel as a feasible albeit impossible project, the minimum positive thing we could demand from something predicated on a certain suspense: escaping boredom.

The world of the past related as an apocalypse leads to a possible reading of our reality from here. A projection of reality in a novel that transmits its own present time. Furthermore, announcing that not everything is perfect, that in the suspension lurks a serial killer, a Freudian-style knowledge device called AutoPsycho, puns and dream cubes. The hero responds to that ironic invitation to the public: female or young, university student or city slicker. A fate of writing which this art book points to, conscious that we are all part of a present-day utopian novel that returns to the literary mix of suspense, death and desire.

OFF STREET / INTERVIEW WITH PSJM*

Blanca de la Torre



How do urban spaces affect your work?

We always work with urban space, regarding it as public space that includes mass media too, such as advertising, TV, Internet and the like. Actually our work is inspired by socio-commercial behaviors which wholly belong to society. We are focused on the industrialised cartography, in the sense that we play with the signs that mark the city and produce meaning. For us urban cartography is a point of departure and a destination at the same time. The public realm wholly affects our work.

Rethinking the street as a magical scenario, looking for the unexpected, the uncanny in the everyday, that tangential outlook; how do you find magical possibilities in the street, does the artist use a poetic, political or social perspective?

We prefer 'reason' to 'magic', though we are interested in unplanned events and systematic paradoxes. Max Weber regarded the "disenchantment of the world" as an important distinguishing aspect of Western culture, the freedom from magic. This process begins with the rise of the great religions and finds its fulfillment in industrialisation. Now, in postmodern culture, brands can be rendered as myths, they work not through reasons but emotions. To deconstruct the magical realm, in order to reach a critical rationalism, is not to pursue a more standardized world but to think freely. Instincts are definitely dangerous. Adorno, who was a fervent critic of the reason of the Enlightenment, noted too that the Nazi communication worked more through the unconscious than consciousness. Philosophies like vitalism or irrationalism could be a useful counterpart of 'instrumental reason' but, in fact, currently these are modes exploited by late capitalism.

* Extract from the interview with the curator Blanca de la Torre for its inclusion in the catalog of *Off Street* exhibition held at the A Foundation in London, 2009.

In what sense has art a social power?

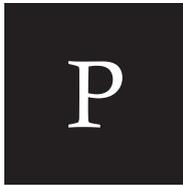
The artworld has limited audiences, therefore critical activists are like an ant in front of the ideology spread by mass media. But there are gaps, narrow ways to act. An example: our project *Corporate Armies* was based on an article we read in *The Guardian*, in July 2007. Russia's parliament voted to allow the country's biggest energy monopolies, Gazprom and the state oil pipeline company Transneft, to employ and arm private security units in order to 'protect themselves from terrorist attack.' Russia's interior ministry said they would supply Gazprom with guns from its own armoury. This was the starting point of *Corporate Armies*, a project of 'political fiction' in which we pushed to the extreme the possible sequels of the Russian proposal. Of course, our project has exclusively been shown in art spaces, like ARCO'09 Madrid where thousands watched the video, but, it was mediaworthy, reviews picked up our work and published it as news. Otherwise only the lefty *The Guardian* would have exposed this issue.

How do you feel about the transposition of making art on the streets and reconstructing it in the gallery space?

Art that mixes itself with reality, with life, is subjected to a structural contradiction. That is the bind of Dissolution-distinction. These facets entail two stages. Firstly the art event needs to dissolve itself into reality to gain effectiveness, afterwards it must be distinguished as art, according with George Dickie's institutional theory of art, to legitimate its value. The challenge here is to make a work equally effective as art and as life experience. The intervention in the public space has the advantage of being direct. We had an experience related to this, during our *Asia Project* in which we presented in a public space four light boxes with the Puma, Nike, Adidas and Reebok logos sharing the same slogan: Made by slaves for free people. The work was censured by Adidas. We later exhibited this work in galleries, art fairs and museums, and the company did nothing. Public spaces and openwhereas the art space is closed, but this closure allows a protected space for freedom to speech. Copyright, registered trademark and intellectual property make more money than material values. We are involved in a symbolic struggle.

WMMNA/ INTERVIEW WITH PSJM*

Régine Debatty



SJM is made of artist Pablo San José and management graduate Cynthia Viera. Excuse the banality of my prejudice but how can people with such a different background manage to dialog? What brought you together? Did Cynthia's mindset and knowledge influence Pablo's artistic practice and view of the contemporary art landscape? And vice-versa, have Cynthia's management skills been "affected" by her collaboration with an artist?

In fact we do not have such different backgrounds. At some point during his artistic career, Pablo worked for some years as a creative for a big corporation of the advertisement sector, creating campaigns and brand images for international companies. In 1998, and in parallel to his work in publicity, Pablo decided that his artistic signature would become a brand. He was interested by the promotion processes of artistic brands and its parallelism with other commercial brands. He then started a work that continues today, a project that builds itself with each work realized. "The artist is the brand, the work is the product" became the slogan of the PSJM brand. In 2003, Cynthia, a graduate in Direction of International Commerce and Marketing, and until then working as the Head of Marketing Services for a major telecommunication company, joined the project. With her arrival, the theoretical objectives to work under the same structures as a company and to legally establish the team as a commercial brand became reality. We work as a team in which the point of view of each of us affects without a doubt the work of the other one. However, we both use the same language. Pablo doesn't correspond to the typical romantic idea of the artist more than Cynthia fits the usual profile of an executive who puts the quest for maximum benefits above social or aesthetic commitments.

One of the striking element of the MARX® brand is the price. All the garments, be they jeans or dress, carry the same price tag (220,40 euros), while the one and

* Extract from the interview with Régine Debatty published in *We Make Money Not Art*, July 2008.

only shoe available costs way more than most people could afford. What were the motivations behind the price tags?

While the main objective of marketing is to satisfy the client in exchange of economic benefits, we use marketing as a critical tool that enables us to provide consumers with an aesthetic or intellectual gratification. We use the “4 Ps” of the Marketing Mix (Product, Price, Promotion and Placement) to interweave a strategy of meaning where each of these “Ps” is regarded as a creative opportunity, as a poetic license. This way, the product constitute the artwork, the price constitutes the artwork the promotion is in itself an artwork and the distribution (placement) is also part and parcel of the artwork. We like to call ‘Marketing experimental’ this process of experimentation of a representational kind.

With MARX® we have used once again the price as a poetic license and vehicle of meaning. The fact that garments exhibited have a high price tag creates some kind of reflective impotence in the mind of the visitor who has finally the opportunity to act as a consumer in the museum space but is inhibited by the aspect of the aspect of exclusivity of the goods. In any case and in order to keep the work alive and continue creating meanings and mixing reality and fiction, and because the next exhibition of the garments will be at the CAAM in July, they will be on sale. Let’s see what happens.

The MARX® project was accompanied with a promotional campaign in the streets of Gijon. The promo posters looked like any other posters designed by mainstream fashion brand. The general public, whether they wanted it or not, was thus in direct contact with your project. How much do you value their look and reaction to your work? Do you give it more credit and importance than you would give to an art critic or to anyone familiar with artistic discourses?

For us it is crucial that our proposals should not remain exclusively at the reach of the cultural elite. The commitment to open up our discourse to a broader public is at the basis of our work, we strive to create pieces which have two levels of lectures and try to unite experimentation and communication. We call this difficult operation “ the dilemma of Mayakovsky”, as it was a theme that kept the Russian poet awake at night. To achieve this we use the media and the strategies of mass culture. The broad public understands perfectly its language and this provides us with a space for experimenting while generating various meanings. However, we also have the objective of placing our proposals inside the theoretical discourse of contemporary art, all our projects involve a text which we write ourselves and which constitutes and additional element of the art piece. Our work can be situated between reality and the art institution, both spheres are important to us.

A NOTE ON SYMBOLS, WORLDS AND EXPERIENCE *

PSJM for Gioia Iannilli



The philosophical debate between realists, who confer an ontological existence on general concepts (essences, universals), and nominalists, of whom Goodman is an outstanding exponent in the 20th century, who do not recognise the existence of universals, but only of concepts created in the mind, is age old. Geometry has been defended as a universal truth by a legion of philosophers throughout history, like Husserl's phenomenology and his *Origin of Geometry*. However, the universality of geometric knowledge exclusively pertains to its theorems and definitions, because if a circle is endowed with other kinds of meanings (for instance, that of "perfection" and therefore of its being One, eternal and indivisible, as Parmenides had it), then the geometric solid and its meaning move from the condition of being universal to being cultural and particular. And even if other cultures also see perfection in the circle, there could be at least as many others that do not view it that way. However, what is beyond argument is its geometric definition. The same goes for arithmetical truths: two plus two is four, both here and in China.

Our interest in geometry lies precisely in the tension produced when using pure and apparently universal forms, and assigning them a meaning. In other words, once those forms act as signifiers in an arbitrary sign. When the purity of geometry, so highly cherished by idealist and platonic systems alike, is build from statistical data (mathematical reflections of reality) culled from the empirical world, and those data reveal a truth which is by no means idyllic, but instead unfair and cruel, then that is the moment when the language of art, contrast and poetry come into play. So, to some extent, in works like *Class Geometry*, *American Colors* and *Statistic Sculpture*, the truth of science and the truth of art are placed face to face.

For the hermeneutic camp, any discourse, including the scientific one, is a narrative. That said, according to Nietzsche, the art discourse is aware of its own rhetoricalness and, therefore, it lacks the audacity to advocate itself as the guarantor of objective truth, as is the case with science. Heidegger's critique of technology takes a similar

* Response to questions posed by Gioia Iannilli for her PhD dissertation *Planimetrie (per)formative: tra John Dewey e Nelson Goodman*, 2013.

tack when he says that it is truth that “is at work” in the work of art. Nonetheless, his ill-fated albeit elegant *The Origin of the Work of Art* includes an awkward exercise in interpretation, as Meyer Schapiro argued when talking about Van Gogh’s boots. That notwithstanding, Heidegger’s disciple and friend, Gadamer, discussed in greater length the theory that truth in art is truer than the truth science provides us with.

It is at this juncture that the big question arises: Has art a truth? Is the truth of science, demonstrated truth, the only truth? A scientific theory may be true or false, may be refuted or proven, but does the same apply to an artwork? It does not seem to be the case. A work of art is neither true nor false, but has to do with *aletheia*, an unconcealment of the truth. A work of art that adds something invariably conforms an alternative vision of reality, a perspective that may have been overlooked by ordinary citizens but which is all too evident to the artist’s eye. In our case, all our work involves an unconcealment, a demythologisation, a critical inquiry or *skepsis*. A legacy of classical cynicism and scepticism combined with the Marxian passion to unmask phantasmagorias. The message we wish to convey in each work, often consisting of an obviousness so concealed or so visible that no one puts it into words, is like scientific truth, in other words, the truth of the facts, the function of the concordance of the sign with the referent, of history with the event. Therefore, it is not a different truth, it is simply the truth. What is different is the “way” that truth chooses to let itself be known. In science, the exposition of truth comes through demonstration—it is about publicising a discourse that is as objective as it may be, as neutral as could be a theory framed within what Kuhn calls “scientific paradigms” and that we could readily connect to the concept of ideology, the ideology underlying scientific research. However, in science there is an endeavour to suppress all rhetorical apparatus, even though, as we contend, that can never be entirely achieved.¹ On the contrary, art has at its service a whole series of poetic and rhetorical licenses which, over and above the mere transmission of information, enable emotion. And that feeling, that awareness of being beyond words and concepts, is what we could call the truth of art, which is nothing but a way of doing. Or, as Goodman put it, “a way of worldmaking.” A way of symbolising the material quality of experience: the mix of information and emotion deployed by an artist or group of artists in an aesthetic experience and the reading the receiver of the work makes of it.

Clifford Geertz’s symbolic and cognitive anthropology understands reality as a symbolic structure while Nelson Goodman’s irrealism sees reality as symbolically

1 The use of rhetoric in scientific discourse is often expressed in a highly evident manner. Good proof can be seen in the spectacular demonstrations of experimental physics in 18th century British coffee-houses and Parisian salons (M. Sellés, *Historia de la Ciencia*, Espasa, Madrid, 2009, p. 605). Persuasion, rhetoric and propaganda were invoked by the philosopher of science Feyerabend, whose philosophical anarchism would deal a heavy blow to the scientific myth of the method. Feyerabend focuses his attention on the psychological strategies of Galileo, whose rhetorical skills would have placed him in a position to impose his ideas upon the burgeoning scientific community in the 17th century. A good example would be *The Starry Messenger*, the treatise published by Galileo in which the Italian genius disseminated his spectacular astronomic discoveries, accompanied by illustrations he had made himself. (D. Sánchez Meca, *Teoría del conocimiento*, Dykinson, Madrid, 2012, p. 473).

constructed “realities” and his relativism leads him to defend the existence of as many worlds as ways of (symbolically) creating them. This stance might be viewed as the antithesis of Marxian thought, which proclaims the material determination of consciousness, that is to say, that superstructure is a reflection of infrastructure. On the other hand, American, empiricist and positivist pragmatism is related to historical materialism and both currents, however remote in many aspects, spring from a common source. What we are interested in here is the fact that, in both cases, the focus is placed on the practice, on the processes, on the praxis, an aspect that in the case of Goodman-Dewey is inherited from Pierce’s pragmatic maxim to focus on experience, and, in Marx, in the activity of the human being in response to his/her environment, always mediated by the work.

The work *Statistic sculpture* presents our working autobiography, our historical experience with our environs and our résumé in the form of a bar graph: geometry turned into information (infographics) and the minimalist volume in its phenomenological dimension. A mental map of the relations of the production of meaning.

Experience, as a closed process, and aesthetic experience as the appreciation of that process, which Dewey analysed in *Art and Experience*, is given utmost importance in our project *The Hydrogen Island* which includes a relational monument conceived as a “design of experience,” video, sculpture, drawing and utopian novel describing a society where there are no longer artists (or labour, only activities), who have been replaced by “designers of experiences” like Celia More, the hero of the story.

That notion of experience as something pierced by meanings (practice and symbol) is also the starting point for our work *Synaesthesia*. In that work, devoted to the perception of colour, geometry is chromatically rendered and the word, the ongoing protagonist of our practice, is inscribed on the walls: “reading a colour is an experience of the senses.”