

## ***WHITE PRINT ON WHITE GROUND: WRITING AND ENTROPY***

Francisco Javier San Martín

*He had bought a large map representing the sea,*

*Without the least vestige of land:*

*And the crew were much pleased when they found it to be*

*A map they could all understand.*

LEWIS CARROLL, *The Hunting of the Snark*, 1876

### *Stains on the White Cube*

Toxic democracy, dodgy money, invisible wars, displaced populations, public spaces like rubbish tips... It is quite clear that Jesús Palomino is talking about the present day. His art, which is involved in socio-political reality, refers to us at this precise place and moment in time. A reality that now, more than ever, is charged with negativity, in which war is just a peak of concentrated violence that stands out in the encephalogram of a society stuffed with media junk and tranquilizers and in which the major conflicts, Iraq and Afghanistan, are screens that conceal the proliferation of regional wars and where parliament, that veritable theatre in which neither the right nor the left hesitate to share costumes and roles, is governed by the law of electoral benefit, in which economic power has definitively taken the wheel, in which the difference of per capita income between rich and poor within each country or between rich and poor countries continues to grow ceaselessly, in which the destruction of the planet is a matter that has been sidelined in the political agenda in favour of industry and the extraction of fossil fuels, in which corruption is a global practice, as are security cameras and

the control of individuals, in which the battles for capital ceaselessly increase the reserve troops of the unemployed and oblige millions of people to move from one place to another, and in which scientific and technological innovation coexist with the spread of hunger and the presence of old and new diseases... Jesús Palomino has slimmed down the formal presence of his art to the same degree that he has increased his commitment to reality: the pared-down installation *MIGRANT ITEMS* in the present exhibition, in which the artist presents on the gallery floor a group of food products from different countries although all bought in shops in Málaga and Seville, is a symptom of this aesthetic climate in which he moves.

The objects assembled in this parody of an installation constitute a collection of remains from a lost place, opaque glints of the potential for identification with a lost realm that only lives on in the immigrant's mind as his body has been forced to move and thus to lose physical contact with its place of origin. For the Western consumer these banal objects – the *Brillo Boxes* or *Campbell's Soup Cans* of immigration, if you will – represent a form of near-at-hand exoticism, while for the communities at which they are aimed, they aspire but fail to function as fetishes of a longed-for place. Set in a white cube they once again emphasize the problem of the distinction between works of art and records (relics or remains) of life. Marc Augé proposed three characteristics of the anthropological space: it is *identificatory* as it defines the relationship between the individual and a spatial and cultural entity; it is *relational* as connections and accounts flow within it and it defines the boundary of the different in relation to the exterior; and finally, it is *historic*, as its cultural vitality is based on strata of people and past events, both real or mythical, that constitute the community's present. <sup>1</sup> This is precisely everything that these foodstuffs cannot offer outside their own context.

*MIGRANT ITEMS* is a work that is profoundly rooted in Jesús Palomino's work. Like his precarious (and also migrant) constructions of the late 1990s, here he denounces the ceaseless flow of individuals obliged to move from the countryside to the city or from one

country to another, compelled by a declaration of war made universal by power. Like those fragile constructions created in an interior, for example *Alejandro Sales House*, in which the unstable structure and fragile materials formed a powerful contrast with the solidity, cleanliness and permanence of the institutional space, these food products also stand out, abandoned on the floor, for their poorness and limited aesthetic aura, like a stain on the immaculate aesthetic space. They also imply an ironic comment due to the fact that they are essential products, here located in a museum context in which nothing seems to be truly necessary and in which the only food that can be hoped for is the spiritual.

### Broyeuse de papier

*MOUNTAIN* is a pile of shredded printed paper, a form of speeded-up textual geology. Precipitating the resolute and unificatory power of entropy and the definitive fusion of the real through the procedure of shredding, *MOUNTAIN* does not offer itself as a monument from a sculptural viewpoint but rather as an antagonistic account: a monument dedicated to the decline of all monuments. In its alternation of black and white it repeats with rare exactitude one of the examples that Robert Smithson offered as a way of visualising entropy: “Picture in your mind’s eye the sand box divided in half with black sand on one side and white sand on the other. We take a child and have him run hundreds of times clockwise in the box until the sand gets mixed and begins to turn grey; after that we have him run anti-clockwise but the result will not be a restoration of the original division but a greater degree of greyness and an increase of entropy.”<sup>2</sup> From this viewpoint, *MOUNTAIN* represents the final (ruinous) state of the precarious architectural structures that were constructed in the years around the end of the last century. Architectural structures that already look like coloured ruins, opaque mirrors of the lowness of power, permanently shredded and about to be absorbed by the earth. In his celebrated text on the new monuments, Smithson described their temporal fragility: “Instead

of being made of natural materials, such as marble, granite or other kinds of rock, the new monuments are made of artificial materials, plastic, chrome, and electric light. They are not built for the ages, but rather against the ages. They are involved in a systematic reduction of time down to fractions of seconds, rather than in representing the long spaces of centuries.” **3**

In this sense, *MOUNTAIN* is also a sculpture of short temporal range, made up of remains of a text that is a solemn discourse, namely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Paper has been shredded, but above all defense of and aspiration to equality. The shredding machine is a digestive mechanism that cannot assimilate – it destroys everything but it learns nothing – and it culminates in a faecal device. Looking at the mass of shredded paper that falls down due to its own weight, it is easy to think of Robert Smithson’s *Asphalt Rundown* as a neo-monumental model, or even of some of the versions of Wim Delvoye’s *Cloaca* as an ironic use of garbage and the counterpart to bulimic opulence. Even so, Jesús Palomino is not proposing an art of catastrophe with ruins as the evidence for the event but in fact rather the opposite; as a way of *optimising* knowledge, which, in the face of the systematic destruction of language, a curious, participative viewer seeks out even more eagerly. Marcel Duchamp called for a “viewer-artist” capable of finishing the job, just as Nietzsche called for a philosopher-reader able to wield the hammer of criticism. In this sense, it is when the text has been shredded and when the typography has lost the geometry of its meaning, when everything tends to empty itself and become distant or absent, that Palomino seems to wish (through the exchange of complicity) to summon up a viewer capable of once again filling the museum space, of raising the temperature in the exhibition gallery and of producing a murmur within its silent walls. As Michel Onfray has written: “Works of art have ceased to exist as proofs of existence of the Beautiful, and are rather encrypted messages that require intelligence, culture, education, documentation and the initiation of the spectator who makes contact with them. The inertia of the faithful before the truths of the aesthetic priesthood having come to an end, this radical

upheaval assigns a central role to the viewer; he becomes the *developer*, in a photographic sense, of the image established by the artist.” 4

In addition to detritus, *MOUNTAIN* is also, however, landscape. A mountain landscape and also a landscape after a battle. Located at the antipodes of the natural sublime, it exists in the sphere of performative sculpture and is close to what Virilio termed the *paysage d'événements*, which is “not just a place but also the sum of all events that have taken place in it.” 5 Leaves on a tree stirred by the wind, moving clouds, avalanches, quicksand... events that make a landscape not just a natural space but also a place in history. An interesting aspect of Palomino’s work lies in the fact that without being strictly performances all his works, whether constructions or posters, stencils or collections of photographs, have a clearly performative base. *MOUNTAIN* is a good example of this: as a sculpture it tends to the shapeless; as material, it derives from shredding. This performative aspect of his sculpture locates it between an *incident* and an *accident*: while the former refers to the unexpected that occurs during a process, the second refers to the unexpected as definition. While there is action (paper shredding) the accident will come about sooner or later, as Virilio has explained, through “the wearing away of the possibilities that it will not happen.” 6

### Collective jewels

Two small gold rings are placed at the disposal of the visiting public: jewels for sharing, for touching and feeling, for activating the role of the viewer in the exhibition space. “Art is something that takes place when the public does something,” Lawrence Weiner has said on more than one occasion, “when you find it completely finished it’s not art”, a declaration of a seemingly (although actually not) paradoxical nature by an artist who has made his art almost entirely from wall texts. In fact, *GOLD ONE TO ONE*, which consists of the above-mentioned two gold rings measuring 8 cm diameter that the public can handle, is rather an anti-jewel, or

strictly speaking, a *diminished* jewel, to use Beuys's concept when discussing his typical red with its blood-like, ochre colour. A jewel is a luxury object that combines the nobility of the material with its economic value, to which is added – in order to *saturate* its value – the decorative component of jewellery, which is what constitutes its crime. In *GOLD ONE TO ONE* Palomino has taken the concept of a jewel to its most orthodox expression, in line with Adolf Loos's ideas: pure gold, pure surface, pure geometry: the grade zero of something we can barely continue to call a jewel. <sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, gold, with its symbolic stream, is (paradoxically) still more present after the superfluous has been removed. A jewel is a concentration of beauty that demands distance and expectation; Palomino makes it pass from hand to hand as if relayed from one person to the next, a symbolic device that implies participation and a metaphor of the construction of a collective subjectivity. He invites the viewer to touch the art object – *prière de toucher* – but unlike Duchamp's rubber female breast, guarded by onanistic desire, *GOLD ONE TO ONE* refers to collective experience, to creating a prototype of an alliance, given that it can be read as a ring that has a social dimension which can create a sense of community through a tactile experience.

### Polysemy and disappearance

In contrast to art, which has a field of action as broad as it is diffuse, advertising acts in a direct and incisive way on reality with the aim of modifying the receiver's desires and decisions through the mobilisation of latent feelings. By its very nature the poster is functional, repetitive and ubiquitous as it has to win out, through "publicity science," <sup>8</sup> over the saturation of its countless equals in the tangled visual web of consumer civilisation. Despite the fact that its formal structure is similar to that of a painting, a poster is radically different to a painting, which inevitably requires prolonged contemplation. Gestalt *pregnanz*,

that golden rule of the advertising poster, is irrelevant in painting and in the diffused temporality of art.

A brief informational text solely consisting of the words *FREE MONEY* nonetheless becomes markedly connotative in the manner of a broad “field of dispersion” as Roland Barthes liked to say. Various parasitical significations, feeding off the ambivalence of the statement, raise the level of confusion in order to achieve more direct impact on the awareness of the person receiving the message. It is this ambiguity that makes the advertising text more penetrating. In the case of Jesús Palomino’s posters, *confusion* brings together the mechanisms of *agit-prop* in these two words. In its imperative version i.e. as an instruction to liberate money, agitation or the *proximity* of a concrete aim to be achieved win out, but in the more enunciative versions, i.e., free money in the sense of money as a gift, the mechanisms of advertising, which have a strategic aim or long-term mission, start to prevail. The same text, *FREE MONEY*, entirely occupies the surface of four connected posters, *shading* from solid black to total white, with the result that the message literally disappears before the viewer’s eye. “White space after white space; in other words, that infinitesimal state known as entropy.”<sup>9</sup> White on white: an albino poster from the viewpoint of the pathology of pigmentation, or a camouflaged poster in which the hint of war, like the soldier’s khaki uniform (the name of which derives from the Urdu word for dust, *kahki*) implies the idea of making the soldier disappear in the landscape of the war zone.<sup>10</sup> Whatever the case, it is an *anomalous* poster with a pale, sickly text. It is interesting to note how the effectiveness of the communicatory density of this emphatic statement is based on the use of a structural meaning of colour. The “fade into white” of film technique or the “*degradé*” used in colour design offer a new and distinctly unflattering use of the concept of nuancing, located between pictorial and ideological, given that it no longer refers to a slight visual change or to something imperceptible, nor to a slight divergence but rather, in a succinct and brutal manner, to its

own disappearance: the phantom of the white whale. As a vocal register it alludes to imposed silence, the disappearance of the voice which is gagged. In the visual field it makes reference to the desert of the monochrome, albeit at the opposite extreme to its formalist versions. Among the two extremes of clarity and disappearance there are two *greys*: intermediary colours or phases of a fading out into the mist,<sup>11</sup> possibly gradations of an *attenuated* language but still capable of achieving scraps of meaning. In his remarkable book on colour Johannes Itten expressed his appreciation of the intrinsic diversity of the colour grey, which is so often associated with monotony, dirt and old age: “There is only a maximum degree of black and a maximum of white, but there are an extraordinary number of grey tones, dark and light; grey is not on the side of the extremes, but on that of quantity and variation.”<sup>12</sup> In marked contrast to the chromatic definition of his precarious architectural structures that are filled with colour (that weapon of the poor, as Palomino has on occasions described it), the entire exhibition at the CAC Málaga seems to be discoloured, with a tendency to slim down the objects and to make them disappear in the whiteness of the wall like an intensely profound swan-song on a frozen lake. Looking at the final white poster, what is the *stimulus* that the viewer receives? Should he read this text in the way that some blind people are capable of perceiving the colour of a flower from its scent? Would this scent, or rather this *stink* of money,<sup>13</sup> its presence in and pressure on daily life, be what stimulates the synaesthetic mechanisms of the viewer, who would thus become capable of reading the unreadable? We cannot know exactly, but it does seem to be the case that this white text is invisible but not *useless*, as in Thomas the Quincey’s moving observation at his sister’s funeral: “There is exposed once again, and for the last time, the coffin. All eyes survey the record of name, of sex, of age, and the day of departure from earth – records how shadowy! and dropped into darkness as if messages addressed to worms.”<sup>14</sup>



As in other works by Palomino, the visitors who help themselves to the free posters in the exhibition gradually erode the compact block that initially referred to Minimalism and extend it into a physical dimension that is unimaginable with the sculpture-statue. As Felix Gonzalez-Torres declared on one occasion, "I want to be a virus infiltrated into the system". However, we know about the dialectic of extension and its opposite: Mario Merz used a phrase by the North Vietnamese military strategist Vo Nguyen Giap to create a textual map on his *Giap Igloo: Se il nemico si concentra perde terreno, se si dispersa perde forza*; this a military strategy based on the behaviour of gases, in which space and energy are inversely proportional. When the work of art, such as the present one by Palomino, is dispersed, it becomes incapable of forming a monument but it spreads out with a faint but persistent smell. Despite this, in *FREE MONEY* the work not only dissolves into the urban atmosphere but, in order to emphasise the difficult nature of the act of communication, the artist has used the visual metaphor of invisibility, with the motif and background coming increasingly closer until they mutually cancel each other out. What we have is a *pantone* that dissolves into nothingness, into the imperceptible and into silence. Like an inverted chain reaction, as it expands in the social sphere the mobilizing energy of the phrase *FREE MONEY* also becomes weaker; a sound that dies out and a text that fades away, creating an equally concise and eloquent metaphor of the difficulty of independent communication within the media system. Like Duchamp's *Ready-made malheureux*, these posters, which are exposed to the atmosphere (even if indoors) start to deteriorate physically and thus communicate with increasing difficulty: victims of illness on the wall, about to lose their strength to attract our attention but nonetheless still active. When we "read between the lines", not just in the sense of interpreting something but also in a period of censorship when the discourse only reveals a written part that conceals another part which the reader must complete through his or her knowledge and imagination, we are reading the white space of the paper, in other words, we

are giving a speech with words that have been silenced. In 2009 Ignasi Aballí, another artist who uses whites, produced *Llegir entre línies* consisting of blownup photographs of the white spaces in a text. Javier Peñafiel noted with startling precision that “he does this in order to reveal that all visibility incorporates a lie, but that the final meaning also lies, and that the false is not the opposite of the true, but rather of what has no meaning.” **15**

In other words, and referring to this particular work by Palomino, white is not a silent ending but a terrain of uncertainty in which the text becomes capable of affirming itself in the viewer’s mind. The viewer is able to *read the white* when, before or after, at the top or at the bottom, but next to the text there is some sort of mark, a trace of the text that allows us to take the initiative and exercise our freedom. *FREE MONEY* ends up as a white poster that no longer refers to the heroism of monochrome but to the entropic levelling out that has done away with the differentiation of colour, with the relevance of the syntax and with the life of the motifs. If we automatically adhere to the sequence of the four posters, we will undoubtedly interpret *FREE MONEY* as a form of affirmation of the discourse through disappearance, but if we try to go still further into its semantic complexity we will possibly discover that – in an opposite sense – this project involves the disappearance of the discourse through affirmation. Whatever the case, in the light of the text’s apocalypse, it is perhaps preferable to relativise visibility and legibility: the content of a work can be of an equally tangible or intangible nature. As in crime novels, the absence of a significant object acquires the same level of importance as the presence of another, insignificant one. A poster that shows nothing and says nothing is possibly the hidden sign of a text of high symbolic density. Or, as Mario Merz wrote in an “enlightening” text, in the dual sense of the term: *Se la forma scompare la sua radice è eterna.*

## Critical fetish

The stencil as used in printing is both a key tool and a marginal one. While it is the stencil that allows the image to appear on the wall and to be repeated in different places, once the image has become a reality the stencil is no longer essential, or perhaps it is, but now as an archival element, a documentary fetish or an object of desire. *STOP WAR ON PEOPLE / STOP WAR ON WORKERS* takes the form of an aluminium diptych resting against the gallery wall and perforated with these summary phrases. The clarity and precision of its design and its placement between the floor and the wall look back to classic Minimalism but the message on the two pieces is more specifically related to the critical trend which, starting in the 1990s, set out to deconstruct Minimalism in semantic terms, inscribing onto the original aphasia of Judd and Morris's sculptures elements that could locate them in another plane of meaning and within the critical discourses on feminism, postcolonialism, etc. In the present case, the problem in defining this pair of objects is increased by the profoundly ambiguous nature of its presentation: its immaculate appearance and its reflective surface seem to contradict the evidence of its functionality; the very metallic solidity of the objects locates them in a cross-over space between tool and sculpture, a utensil that has been liberated of its function in order to constitute itself as an object. The fetish not only has negative connotations, but with its power to provoke desire it is a witness to the impulse that originated it, maintaining the flame (concealed, but alive) of its original purpose. It can certainly be perfectly located within that category of objects that the curatorial group *El Espectro Rojo* describes as "critical fetishes." **16**

With regard to the typography and language of *STOP WAR ON PEOPLE / STOP WAR ON WORKERS*, two concepts should be singled out: anaesthetics and conciseness. Focused on the plane, its typography aspires to disappear as a signifier, as an element of seduction that accompanies the textual content. In a way it is a "ready-made" typography derived from the

stencil vocabulary of merchandise and from impermanent or provisional signage. Furthermore, it is has been chosen by the artist to suggest that it should not be taken into account and that it does not constitute an additional element in the message. In this regard, the extreme conciseness of its message leaves the play of words to one side, the irony, rhetoric, humour, paradox or sarcasm of so many post-modernist signs that arose from the heat of the famous metaphors of 1968 (*Under the paving stones, the beach*) in order to return to the sobriety and precision of the old slogans (*Workers of the world unite!*). It is a return to literal messages after literary ones. Brian O'Doherty has identified the key point: "It is easy to laugh at the slogans of a period after it has ended. We tend to avert our gazes from the great ideas once they have failed." **17**

As we well know, one of the problems of modern advertising communication lies in the problem of ensuring that the consumer remembers the brand name being advertised. This is due to the fact that within cognitive capitalism, advertising is essentially self-referential and its communicative intent is relegated in favour of its supposed visual and aesthetic power. This paradoxical situation of a message that fails to communicate itself due to aesthetic hypertrophy was already identified in 1951 by MacLuhan in *The Mechanical Bride*, while it was also predicted in a provocative manner by someone as above suspicion as Gertrude Stein: "In the beginning was the word. Then they put two words together, then they made a sentence, then they made a paragraph and they forgot the word." **18** It is also well known that the greatest degree of communication is not necessarily the best one, but that nonetheless, the messages that surround us become visible due to the redundant nature of their presence: an excess of information which, transformed into noise, no longer informs us but rather increases lack of knowledge. "The greater the flow of information" Paul Virilio wrote, "the more awareness we generally have of its fragmentary and incomplete nature ." **19** The communicatory impact of these messages by Palomino largely lies in the radically pared-

down nature of their expression and their presentation as well as in their appearance as a concentration of desire, something like a return to the origins of language, which implies moving against the tide of rhetorical seduction; in other words, an alternative discourse that also looks for alternatives in the discursive proposal.

*CREATIVE INQUIRY PREPARING AN EDUCATED ELECTORATE WITH THE WILL OF SOCIAL JUSTICE RATHER THAN SIMPLY SELF-INTEREST* is the text of another graffiti in the gallery and the one that provides the title for the exhibition. There is a marked contrast between the phrase's argument, pronounced in the context of a lecture when it was combined with numerous other arguments, and the emphatic nature that it acquires when installed in the exhibition space. In the latter it has a particularly strong format and a mural location that concentrate the discourse, in this case the slogan, into a *display* appropriate to eternal truths, unforgettable phrases and pressing utopias. In a process that is the opposite to the shredding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which we saw in *MOUNTAIN*, here an isolated phrase, a specific discourse, becomes monumental and acquires sculptural value.

## Invisible wars

*The real war will never get in the books.*

WALT WHITMAN, *Specimen Days*, 1885

“Invisible war” is a dreadful and terrifying expression: in addition to the real power of the enemy it adds the ungraspable power of the incorporeal. The key question might be whether this type of war solely relates to the field of military conflict and would thus distinguish between the armed conflicts that appear in the media and which are hence visible, and those others which are often referred to as “forgotten”, although in reality they are simply relegated by official information; or whether, in a broader sense, it refers to the war of

extermination on which capitalism has embarked against humanity, the war of exclusion and precariousness, the war of control and total surveillance, the war that science and technology wage against bodies, the war against all individuals and all peoples? Whichever it is, and to paraphrase the Prussian soldier and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, the first of the two types of war is none other than a continuation of the other by other means. Honoré de Balzac, a celebrated contemporary of Von Clausewitz's, drew attention to the dangers of invisibility in words that were true and terrifying in the mid-19th century but which seem even more so in the early 21st century: "All power will be concealed in shadow or it will not exist, as power that makes itself visible is threatened." Whatever the case, patriotic rejoicings, massive pro-war demonstrations and the informational deeds of war correspondents have passed into history and now belong to the dubious patrimony of the 20th century. All wars are now invisible as otherwise they might "wound the viewer's sensibilities": the so-called "forgotten" ones because they do not even appear in the media, and those that appear on the front pages because they only show the non-military aspect of war or, in an exercise of supreme cynicism, only its facet of "cooperation" or "humanitarian aid."

### A residual aesthetic

*I remain interested in a work that has a content  
outside of itself, in staying close to the public,  
but not in the theatre. 20*

BARRY LE VA, 1974

A person walks through the city without a particular route or destination in mind. Although he or she is not going anywhere specific, a precise term exists for this very imprecise activity: *wandering*. Someone doing so might come across a mattress thrown onto the

pavement and further on a large plank leaning against the back wall of a building, or a thrown away slice of pizza, giving rise to the thought that the variety of objects to be found makes the street seem something like a supermarket of broken down things. Having perhaps read Baudrillard, this person might reflect on the life of objects, which, for that French philosopher, “takes place between the shop and the attic.” Given the lack of an attic for relegating objects privately, the street takes on that role. Whatever the case, the succession of cast off items to be found on the way awakens the wanderer’s sense of intuition (very acutely defined by Bernstein as “intelligence committing a speeding offence”) and discovers that it is not a question of isolated objects or uncoordinated abandoning but rather that there is a diffused order that brings them together within their abandonment (something like a grouping mechanism of biological species that have been unable to adapt to their environment) and which he considers turning into series or *families* of objects that have been thrown out of the house and excluded from the normal functioning of society (at this point we should say that the wanderer is Jesús Palomino and the city is Brussels, Europe’s political capital, in the autumn of 2012). We need to insist on this idea of intuition, which is the ability to understand things without the need for reasoning, as Palomino is not a scientist in the laboratory but an artist wandering around. From the outset of his career he has been a committed wanderer and one with a particular sensibility for the abandoned, for objects and spaces that are only constituted in the past, locating his interventions in unused locations, railway depots, factories and, in general, spaces that are marginal to the production of wealth.

The Surrealist *objet trouvé* focused on the terrain of the fantastical, the discovery of a passport that allowed one to move from flat reality to the ethereal space of the imagination. However, there is a serious problem in this negotiation between reality and imagination: the encounter-rescue by the artist gives him or her a value within the aesthetic taxonomy. The *objet trouvé* places most emphasis on the encounter and thus on the supremacy of the artist

over the object itself: what has been found matters less than who has found it, their name and position within the administrative system of beauty. This state of things was radically inverted in the context of the Situationist trend, within which this work by Palomino can best be located. The Situationist urban wanderers were more attentive to the physical and psychological experience of the city and to the creation of documents that record it or chart it, as they liked to say, than to the pure rescue of abandoned objects. This is because the document of an abandoned object no longer refers so much to the sensibility of the artist who found it as to the object itself and to the specific *act* of abandonment by its owner who at a particular moment ejected it from his or her life and cast it out into the world. It is artists, with their interest in the marginal and their scant documentation, who make it possible to reactivate a circuit of interest. In addition, the Surrealist object sailed in the waters of the *unusual* and embellished the encounter with the aura of the one-off and unrepeatability, while the objects that waylay Jesús Palomino seem to be cancelled out by the logic of the commonplace and the repetitive. The term commonplace is not used here because the objects are ordinary ones that have been abandoned as they are no longer usable, but because their proliferation in the consumer city makes them ubiquitous. In addition, Palomino's approach has a specific orientation: these homeless objects that he photographed in Brussels are literally urban remains but they are also knowing formal and contextual references to Duchamp's ready-mades, to John McCracken's Minimalism, to Eva Hesse's *Eccentric Abstraction* and to the *Scatter* pieces by Barry Le Va, the most radical sculptor of entropy in the early 1970s. In their range of relationships and their spatial disposition, objects form a signifying system.<sup>21</sup>

When they encounter their ordering in the discourse of home, office or the urban space, they form comprehensible phrases known as functionality in economic terms. Isolated from the phrase, expelled from their habitual location that gave them sense, they became



dysfunctional errata. In consumer civilization the city is itself a digestive organism that expels certain substances, either because they are indigestible or because it has extracted all possible nourishment from them. It is also a linguistic city, an urban text, in which these cast-off objects appear as crossings-out or errors of the discourse in an urban situation regulated by *logos*. Hence Palomino's use of the term *Atlas*, which implies the desire to systemize and encompass, is clearly ironic. An atlas indicates points of geographical, economic or political interest through a taxonomy of value and in this sense *ATLAS OF ABANDONED OBJECTS* is an overtly cartographic aberration, an outpouring of economically inert and socially irrelevant points. It is an atlas that denies the difference between the essential and the inessential, given that in this context the inessential does not really exist but rather the pressure of the power that wishes to make it seem as such. A slice of pizza on the ground is not comparable to a traffic light, or a thrown-out mattress to a monument but in the geography of reality everything that is dissociated from cartographic representation may in fact be more signifiatory. I believe that it is from this viewpoint that Jesús Palomino pursues the idea of Edward Said's *return to philology* in which "words" (or in this case abandoned objects) "are not merely passive figures but vital agents in historical and political change." 22

What's more, these abandoned objects only aspire to acquire a *provisional* logic within the urban space as their unavoidable destiny within the economy of the throw-away is the rubbish dump while the classificatory authority of *ATLAS* fixes them for posterity, like geographical features of an economic terrain that power can no longer erode. Objects abandoned on the street are a visual anomaly in the context of the society of spectacle and form a type of antithesis to collectable objects, the value of which invokes time in order to make them permanent and thus symbolically immortal to the collector. Only two options thus remain for explaining this unusual *ATLAS*: the *aesthetic* one, with the abovementioned implication of the found object, and the *political* one, in the sense of a critical counter-map.

The first seems to be associated with the fact that the artist describes his activity as a “fortuitous encounter” in the urban space which recalls Lautréamont’s celebrated “rencontre fortuite” in *Les Chants de Maldoror*. However, it is undoubtedly the second that seems to correspond to this photographic collection of cast-offs, given that the “fantastic” is no longer exclusively subject to the poetic but also and above all to the perverse system of circulation of objects within the capitalist system, to irrational consumption, pre-programmed obsolescence and, ultimately, to the systematic impossibility of satisfying desire, which leads to the abandoning in the public space of an object as intimate and as associated with the body as a mattress. Or a hubcap, which literally passes from private property to impropriety.

In the 19th century the dandy was an expression of what Baudelaire conceptualized as the “cult of the ego” or the absolute superiority of individuality. The *flâneur* on the streets of Paris or the dandy in the Salons embodied the sensibility characteristic of art. Dandyism was the last glint of aesthetic heroism in the transfer of powers from a decadent aristocratic system to an emerging democracy. A century later, with the urban space threatened by corporate and institutional privatization, the carefree *flâneur* with his distracted gaze has been replaced by the urban wanderer, the homeless or displaced person whose furtive gaze explores a dispossessed space. In this landscape of disorder the abandoned objects documented by Jesús Palomino constitute a type of decoration of the precarious, furnishings of homelessness and poverty, *bibelots* of the harsh outdoors that would only be collected by outcasts.

The mattress, the object that best summarizes domestic intimacy, is now exposed to the elements, cast out as the sign of a dead language. Refugee objects. The convention of consumer value has created a *disaffection* towards desired objects. The programmed obsolescence that evolved in the last century now reveals itself as a conflict of a psychological type: faded love for what was an irrepressible desire, passion that consumes itself in its cold

flame and announces the separation between subject and object. It is for this reason that the mattresses on which passion glowed are now a spent memory. Jesús Palomino acts as a “health guard”, recreating in these photographs the moist gleam of a broken relationship, love that has broken at its weakest link, the tragedy of intimacy exposed in public. Planks, bed bases, hubcaps, packaging, mattresses: a life that reveals its failure on the street.

Francisco Javier San Martín

March 2013

---

1 Marc Augé, *Los no lugares. Espacios del anonimato*, Gedisa, Barcelona, 2008, p. 83.

2 Robert Smithson: *The Collected Writings*, ed. J. Flam, University of California Press, 1996, p. 74.

3 “Entropy and the new Monuments”, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. J. Flam, University of California Press, 1996, p. 11.

4 Michel Onfray, *Archéologie du présent. Manifeste pour une esthétique cynique*, Grasset, Paris, 2003, p. 23.

5 Paul Virilio, *Un paisaje de acontecimientos*, Paidós, Buenos Aires, 1997.

6 Paul Virilio, *Ce qui arrive*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, November 2002-March 2003.

7 Adolf Loos, *Ornamento y delito y otros escritos*, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona 1972.

8 The phrase coined by Abraham Moles; see Prologue to Françoise Enel, *L’Affiche: fonctions, langage, rhétorique*, Maison Mame, Tours, 1971, p. 13.

9 Robert Smithson, “Entropy and the new Monuments”, op. cit.

10 See Rosa Gallego and Juan Carlos Sanz, *Diccionario Akal del color*, Akal, Madrid, 2001, p. 209.

11 Gilbert Lascault, “Elementos para un dossier sobre el gris”, in *Revue d’Esthétique. La práctica de la pintura*, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 1976, p. 125.

- 12 Johannes Itten, *Art de la couleur. Édition abrégée*, Dessain et Tolra / Larousse, Paris, 2004, p. 31.
- 13 Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, *Non olet*, Destino, Barcelona, 2003. "It does not smell" was apparently the phrase used with regard to money by the Emperor Vespasian in response to his son Titus who criticised him for imposing a tax on the use of public urinals in Rome.
- 14 Thomas de Quincey, *Autobiographic Sketches*, 1853, p. 28. Available at [www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/tdquincey/autobiographic-sketches.pdf](http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/tdquincey/autobiographic-sketches.pdf)
- 15 "Una conversación entre Javier Peñafiel y Glòria Picazo", in *Veu entre línies. Un projecte de Javier Peñafiel amb la complicitat de Glòria Picazo, catalogue of the exhibition in La Panera, Lleida, 2010*, p. 17.
- 16 El Espectro Rojo, *Fetiches críticos. Residuos de la economía general*, catalogue of the exhibition at the CA2M, Móstoles, May-August 2010.
- 17 Brian O'Doherty, *White Cube. L'espace de la Galerie et son idéologie*, JRP/Ringier, Zurich, 2008, p. 112.
- 18 Gertrude Stein, quoted in Morton Feldman, *Give my Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B.H. Friedman, Exact Change, 2000.
- 19 Paul Virilio, *Estética de la desaparición*, Anagrama, Barcelona, 1988, p. 50.
- 20 Quoted in Robert Pincus-Witten, "Barry Le Va. La invisibilidad del contenido", in Richard Armstrong and Richard Marshall, *Entre la geometría y el gesto. Escultura norteamericana. 1965-1975*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Palacio de Velázquez, Madrid, May-June 1986, Ministerio de Cultura, Madrid, 1986, p. 180.
- 21 Published nearly fifty years ago, Jean Baudrillard's *The System of Objects* continues to be an invaluable contribution to the issue of the discursive nature of objects.
- 22 Edward Said, *Humanism and critical Democracy*, Columbia University Press, 2004, quoted by Jesús Palomino in *Moving Around (sobre nomadismo y nuevas prácticas de arte contemporáneo)*, Los Sentidos Ediciones, 2010.