

## JESÚS PALOMINO: THE PHYSICITY OF INTELLECTUAL WORK

"For the intellectual toilet, a little bar of soap, well handled, is enough."

Francis Ponge

Since his early works, Jesús Palomino's work has been articulated on two axes: the drawing and the use of simple everyday materials. If his first drawings were dense compositions of obsessive and methodical strokes of graphite, stroke and line were soon substituted by small fragments of paper or plastic of bright colours, collages springing parallel to the sculptures which, made with humble and fragile materials --pieces of cloth or fabric, paper, soap, light wood from fruit boxes, flasks, cheap plastics...- - sprouted from the bare observation of daily experience and turned into emotional comments on domestic furniture.

But his works have also been related, from the outset, to architectural spaces. Thus, for instance, those made in abandoned railway buildings: the great drawing of grease on the walls of some immense ruined outbuildings in Cuenca (1992) or the huge but light curtains translucent in blue paper --its opacity lost after having been soaked in oil-- which, hanging from the ceiling, reproduced by means of a small shifting the monumental walls of the San Jerónimo workshops in Seville (1995). As well as his exhibitions in Madrid in 1995 and 1997, where his sculptures referred, in a subtle but effective way, to the arrangement of the rooms of a house. As the artist said, "Each one of the works concretely referred to one space and one function (...) in such a way that I had already defined my first house, not by building its walls but by suggesting the important or essential aspects they should contain. Let us say that I had my house without having built it."

The three above-mentioned axes will converge --starting from "Hungry Market Town" (1998), the first in a series now approaching fifteen- - in the "Houses" built by Palomino, in which the chromatic collages made with humble building elements are turned into cabins where one may find the evidence of their dwellers: small objects, fruits, buckets, clothes... "I cover the walls with words that make them invulnerable," Jacques Dupin wrote. Palomino seems to protect, to shelter, the walls of his hovels with

colours, as if the intense chromatism conferred solidity to fragile materials, as if the coloured light of the interiors bestowed conditions of habitability on the precarious.

Luis Francisco Pérez has written, with his usual clarity, that Palomino makes use of fragility "to set up a species of landing stage from which we are invited to a shipwreck: to oppose and reach crisis point with several contending binomials. Matter fragility/violence of thought, physical delicacy/creative force, ocular weakness/perceptive force, conceptual resistance/formal laxity, narrative prostration/abstract intensity, figurative asthenia/strength in the use of colour... Yes, it is true, it is a fragile work which tells us about the fragility of our systems of appreciation and judgement, but that fragility, in its turn, does not exist as an autonomous rhetorical element --that would mean poorness of action and thought-- but as a fuse which sets up the critical device of the above-mentioned opposing valences."

Jesús Palomino's houses also make other binomials related to the architectural and the artistic reach a crisis point, such as it was exemplified in the words written by Adolf Loos in 1910: " Nowadays only two people enjoy most houses: the owner and the architect. Everyone has to like a house. Unlike the work of art, which one does not need to like. The work of art is a private matter of the artist. The house is not. The work of art is introduced in the world without there being any need for it. The house fulfils a need. The work of art does not have to account to anyone, the house does account to everyone. The work of art wants to wrench people from their comfort. The house has comfort as its purpose. The work of art is revolutionary, the house is conservative. The work of art teaches new ways to humankind and thinks of the future. The house thinks of the present. People love everything that assures them some comfort. They hate everything that wants to wrench them from their usual safe position and overwhelms them. And that is why people love houses and hate art".

Evidently, Palomino's humble but complex architectural collages do not correspond with Loos's notion of a house. They do not correspond with ours, either, the house of our comforts and our properties. They are not a private house in the same way that the work of art is no longer a private matter of the artist. Those artistic constructions arising within preexisting architectures, making use of their walls, floors or ceilings in order to stand firm, refer us to an ancestral economy: the economy of need. And they

open, thus, to the realm of politics in its most strict sense of critical analysis of reality: they do not tell about the symptoms but about the conditions that make them appear. "House" and "need" in belligerent opposition to "architecture-institution" and "real estate profit". His houses are always the Other's House, that other that only inhabits the place in our absence, since our presence demands his/her invisibility insofar as our well-being goes together with his/her precariousness.

In the last months Palomino has introduced an element: luminous hoardings. Occasionally, the hovels are leaned against them searching for support. In some other cases, they are on their own, a rambling construction typical of the urban landscape. If the houses contain, the hoardings expose, externalize. If the house belongs to the realm of the intimate, of the silent autobiography, the hoarding belongs to that of the public, of the message that narrates the surpluses of desire.

Jesús Palomino is not interested in the house as a symbol, --"as an autonomous rhetorical element", as proclaimed above by Luis Francisco Pérez-- but as a place which is inhabited, which is used every day. The things are not the real important issue, but the relation one establishes with them. Perhaps what Wittgenstein says in his *Tractatus*: "The world is the totality of facts, not of things". And, as it was already explicit in his sculptures related to domestic furniture, use generates affects.

Here another horizon of paramount importance for Palomino's creative activity opens. His work springs from an ethics of the intellectual work that conforms with André Malraux's words: "To be a man consists in transforming experience into conscience". His work springs not from "for something" ("for later, in another place"), but from "here". From the conscience of the experience of "here" as a place inhabited by thought. The "here and now" --our only true house-- not only as a place of refuge, but as a place of culture. A culture which is made with the hands, but where the hands make with the force of conscience.

In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche writes: "Thoughts are the shadows of our sensations --ever darker, emptier, more simple than these". Palomino's works make up sensation and thought from a full conscience of the everyday and create, by means of an ever more precise architecture of affects --is the house the shadow of the man?--, a radically contemporary reflection on the physics of intellectual work.

In a recent conversation with the artist, held before an audience in Madrid, I quoted the words with which John Cage tells how, when trying to compose a suitable piece of music for the *Bachanna* that Sybilla Fort had asked him, he reached the innovation nowadays known as "prepared piano". Cage writes: "Having chosen to change the sound of the piano, I went to the kitchen, took one dish, carried it to the sitting room and placed it among the piano strings". Then I asked Jesús if he recognised himself in that scene --the artist arising and going along the corridor of his house towards the kitchen, later returning to the sitting room with the dish in his hand-- that links, as I think it happens in his work, creativity and everydayness. His answer was an anecdote that, no matter how unappealable, ended that talk in the same way it ends the present text: "I worked in my grandmother's home, and when I had been working for six hours and it seemed that it started to take shape, my grandmother used to come and say: Jesús, go and buy me a kilo of pears. And I had to understand that letting everything aside and going to the shop was also a part of the work".

Armando Montesinos.

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