

TRANSFORMING MACHINES, CONSCIOUSNESS AND GESTALT.

A text by Rosa Palomino

“ Impulse is born out of the connection of art to life, to the reality in which we are immersed, to a new beginning, to break which makes clear a clean start.”

(Angela Largo)*

For several years now, Jesús Palomino has presented his peculiar machine-laboratories in different cities of the world. Generally, the action of the artist is a response to identifiable social and human contexts in the places where he is invited to show his work. Each of those fictional machines is designed to provide a solution for the most pressing conflicts in need of solution in those places. In most of the cases, the artist confronts unfinished or interrupted collective situations which require a solution in order to facilitate a freer, a more balanced social process. His installations emerge as a creative action in the face of current situations, or as responses to historical events of the past which still linger in the present and demand resolution or completion.

A GESTALT EXERCISE

What would it happen if, for a moment, I let fly my imagination and identified myself with one of the recent installations by Jesús Palomino? What would a gestalt approach purport for machines whose main function is a cleaning and purification aimed at transformation?

I close my eyes and make the most of the opportunity for identification. I imagine my organism as if it were one of these machines produces by the artist: which one would I identify with? Which would I avoid it if I was given the opportunity to embody one of them? What feelings do these machines provoke in me?

As I think, I try to identify myself with one of the machines. As I become aware, I try to imagine the consequences of such identification. I establish a dialogue with myself about what I have felt, and I wonder: What would happen if the human organism works like one of these transforming machines?

THIS IS GESTALT

Friedrich Salomon Perls (1893-1970), German psychoanalyst of Jewish origin, dissident, better known as Fritz Perls, elaborated a coherent synthesis from different philosophical currents in his time, psychoanalysis, psychodrama, and Eastern philosophy. He integrated and experimented with all of them and managed to turn his psychotherapeutic approach into an existential method., a “philosophy of life” so enriching that Perls considered it was not only useful for his patients. He named his therapy GESTALT, which German means form, totality and configuration.

Perls postulated a particular vision of neurosis by considering it not only as disease, but also as a way to be in this world, a mode of contact with our closest surroundings.

In his position, health criteria prevailed over pathological criteria. Therefore, according to gestalt therapy, neurosis supposes a darkening of consciousness, a deterioration of “awareness”, a defense against the external threats. Neurosis appears as symptom for an incomplete or interrupted maturity.

THE EGO IS A CONGLOMERATE OF INTROJECTS

Jesús Palomino constructs machines which, like our organism, act before a detected necessity. Necessity and search for satisfaction are basic processes of human existence and, indeed, the main focus of Gestalt therapy.

Always according to Perls, the needs we worry about emerge from diffuse contexts. If these needs are satisfied, they will disappear and others will emerge to draw our attention again. This is a free-flowing and endless cycle of satisfaction. To interrupt it or not to complete it it would favour the appearance of neurosis and its subsequent organic unbalance.

Fritz Perls had the bright idea to establish a certain parallelism between physical metabolism of the organism and mental processes. That is to say, he considered our psychological experiences not very different from our physiological experience of assimilating food. In his book “Ego, unger and aggression” (1960), he writes: “*In the same way organic assimilation is essential for growth, intellectual or social assimilation by the personality is a central process for development and self-regulation.*”

The organism tends by nature to continuously update what is not complete in order to restore balance. Perls called this capacity of the human being “organismic self-regulation”**. An interruption of this natural tendency could bring about an accumulation of unfinished situations which would hamper the life process.

The massive flow of introjects*** the ego absorbs throughout its existence must be properly processed and filtered in order to provide balance for the personality of the individual.

In some of his installations, Jesús Palomino proposes a process similar to Gestalt theories. The different installations embody a creative action in a very specific context. It all takes place before a necessity in search of resolution. The result would be a better creative adjustment of the social and individual organism within his/her immediate context.

In his particular vision of the artistic practice, Jesús Palomino has proposed among other type of action:

- purification of contaminated waters in the Tamis River after the conflicts in the Balkans;
- a machine to produce “civil rights” to confront the loss of balance in the democratic dialogue;
- the purification of the political and historical negativity of Franco Regime;
- a great compass which could guide us through the enormous amount of information generated daily by the media.

AGAINST APATHY AND FOUNTAIN OF COURAGE

I would like deal with the work “AGAINST APATHY.” (Great green light torch and a proposal for fasting.) , Gallery Helga de Alvear, Madrid, January 2006. In my opinion, it reflects very clearly a gestalt idea of assimilation.

Palomino invites us, with his proposal of food and media fasting, to stop consuming radio, press, TV or internet, at least for one day. At the same time, he is also inviting us not to eat, to take a break aimed at the cleansing and regulation of our organism.

Moreover, the Gestalt approach invites us “to stop and chew”, to select any introjected material, assimilating what is our own and giving the organism and the individual the right to reject whatever is inadequate, not one’s own, toxic or a disadvantage.

This “Great torch of green light” invites us to recover our awareness in the face of our social present restoring, thus, our consciousness against apathy and the avoidance.

The neurotic symptom is a signal that the biological being needs attention. From his position, Palomino proposes a new poetic encounter with nature, still the basis, at least physical basis, of all human capacities.

The decision to stop and clean our psychological space or our closest social context entails going deep into the mentally ill areas of our being, or reflecting upon the darkest spaces of our social life. Such a confrontation can generate painful, frustrating or phobic situations. And yet the artist presents this confrontation like inescapable.

FEAR TRANSFORMER / FOUNTAIN OF COURAGE was presented at the Clark Gallery in Montréal and proposed another experience based on fantasy. The idea is to deal with the possibility of establishing a reflective and conscious dialogue with our most polarized emotions: fear and courage in social and individual spheres.

To drink a glass of water, imagining that the liquid has been previously purified from toxic elements, can be highly healing. This act of identification produces an amplification of our consciousness. Water represents emotion, and it is through it and a series of exchange processes that Palomino transforms fear into “courage to participate”.

Whit his machines and laboratories, Jesús Palomino invites us to something as simple and complex as the reappropriation of our own beign through conscious and critical assimilation. He proposes to gain awareness, to render the account of our interruptions to ourselves, to identify what is good for us and what is not, to attentively Listen to our present experience, and to reinforce our personal responsibility in this process of maturation and transformation which the human existence can be.

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* Angela Largo: Dramatic and performance artist from Seville. Quotation from the text “Desatando amarras” by Laura Fajardo.

** Organismic self-regulation: natural tendency of an organism to restore physical and psychological balance.

*** Introject: any experience, situation norm or attitude incorporated to our psychological process without any previous filter or critical questioning.