

## Speculations

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Reflections, still images, but paradoxically submitted to an impulse, or a drift. From the sculpture to the photograph or the films, one can see a calculated process, a general rhetoric where an increase in intensity is gradually obtained. José Noguero puts forward his work as a structuring of fictions, without merely sticking to the forcefulness of his sculptures or to the theatricality of the great photographs, but on the contrary, bringing about an imaginary movement between both fields. Narrations which have arisen in the artist's studio, like games which the works take part in or, better still, stagings, preserving a fragment of the plot which does not need to be completed. There is a strange silent theatricality, an explicit evaluation of the empty spaces, to which facts or forgotten presences suddenly return. An exponential representation where what has been built is a temporary place in order to continue the aesthetic journey, the stratification of experiences.

Since his work with shields this sculptor appears to have a peculiar fascination for motifs of the history of the ornament. Peripheral, lateral or distracted, the ornament reminds one of something which is considered to be improbable, the margin which one wished to get rid of. The two main historical-critical figures of the theory of the ornament, the one which understands it as organic expressiveness or the other one which considers it as asemantic abstraction, are supportive, they are located in the precarious terrain where secularization and symbolic-religious art are in conflict. Basically, the hierarchy where the ornament is located is typical of the metaphysical differentiation between substance and accident. Face with Gombrich's idea that there is one art which one can look at and pay attention to and another art, the decorative one, which would only be the object of a glance, one can formulate the hypothesis that a great number of determining expressions of contemporary art consist precisely in making what generally remains on the margins move into the centre, into

the focal point of the perception. That idea, formulated by Loos, that the ornament is an offence, is based on an alleged lack of continuity with respect to man's animal or wild nature, a repression of his body and his passions, of the luxury' which is offered to the gaze. Noguero rescues the power of the emblems, that summoning of the noble, that which has an origin, but he inverts their sign, they are now shields of nakedness. The sculpture which has lost the pedestal, entering into what Rosalind Krauss calls the "expanded field," finds a rewriting in this case, in a framing process. Firstly gestures are concentrated, of a naked body which points towards a smaller reclining figure: a corpse or a sculpture, lifeless, mutilated remains.

The centre may be empty, the figure may be seated on the edge of the shield, typically showing the lack of history to be commemorated, Noguero combines the motley of some compositions where the background is a multiplication of classical architecture with ironic stripping of that "nihilist heraldry." In this work the folding is, again, a type of Baroque, a modulation of the materials and the concepts crossed by astuteness. Noguero uses elements which apparently establish the continuity with tradition, but his diction is essentially untimely, he swims against the tide, he converts his works into polytonal developments. The history of the forms does not hang over him intoning the "memento mori," nor does it take refuge in a melancholy mood. A crude view of finiteness appears in Noguero's works, concentrated especially in a metal boat which intervenes at different times, like a symbol of transit, the impossible journey, also adopting the presence of the coffin. One may consider that the apparent unfinished of certain sculptures, the scenes which are developed and repeated elements such as that boat, which presents precarious reflections, complete an everyday but a missed world, that is, sinister. In some photographs one can see Noguero's beings half made, fallen or moving near to the wall. A broken material comes out of them, modelling paste which takes on a dramatic symbolic dimension. It is as if the corpses, those human extremely white figures, have broken up and their blood or innards are coming out of them.

An obsessive plot where the room is a scale which does not stand aside. A place where things happen, an area without, apparently, many nuances, but which gradually offers many details as the process unfolds: intensification by insistence. The glass door which may be part of a balcony or terrace, the light which delimits everything, the tiled floor like "fractales." A chipped, white wall like something torn from memory, scars which speak of the passing of time, faced with the scheming of the mirror. Miguel Fernández-Cid has indicated the

importance of time and the silences in this artist's sculptures, "silences which arise due to the importance granted to the large fragments of empty wall, generally increased by the intervention of a clean, intense light which hardens the motifs. Silences which have something to do with the choice of the places where those motifs are located, giving an idea of flight, of movement."<sup>1</sup> A repetition in abyss where the same is disseminated, the differences structure the itinerary. Ritornello of images (marks and presences) which trap with the strength of a Medusa: hypnotism arisen from the specular effect.

In his *Small history of photography* Walter Benjamin points out that the technique, in its preciseness, can provide its products with a magical value, the observer feels drawn before the photograph in search of "the minute spark of chance, of here and now, with which, one might say, reality has scorched his character of image."<sup>2</sup> The end of the time of the consonance is also the time when the images teach man to look at himself, they lead him to live the present time and create a drifting phase of the optical unconscious. That desire to do things nearer and nearer finds limits in the distance imposed by the image of his ego. Photography can be understood as the advent of the self as another, a process of dissociation of the awareness of identity. If on the one hand it is the tireless testimony of reality, it is also obvious that it produces a disorder of the objects: a break in the course of the phenomena. Photography is the area of the contingency, that territory where the gaze becomes adventurous, as if it should only pursue surprises: the odd, the numen, the feat, the contorsions of the technique or the finding. Barthes understands all those confusions as an obedience to a principle of challenge: the photographer must challenge the laws of the probable and even the possible and, above all, overcome the merely interesting. Transforming the image into subversive does not require dealing with something strange or capturing cruelty, but adopting masks, testing the contingency, that is, becoming a part of the thinking. Noguero has underlined that his use of photography forces the observer to take his gaze as a series of hierarchised strata, "which show that superimposition of objects—realities—scenarios and typical iconologies."<sup>3</sup> He photographs the relections, he accentuates the character of illusive space, he integrates the elements in a room which is the support of fictions.

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1. Miguel Fernández-Cid: *José Noguero, an evasive look* in *Catalogue of the 15th Show of the 16*, Old MEAC, Madrid, 1995, p. 137.

2. Walter Benjamin: *Pequeña historia de la fotografía* in *Discursos interrumpidos I*, Taurus, Madrid, 1973, p. 67.

3. Text by José Noguero in the catalogue of his individual exhibition in the Joan Prats Gallery, Sept-Oct 1993.

The aesthetics of sketchiness meet the rhetoric of multiplication, admirably managing to unify the discourse, to introduce vectors as much of the sense as of the internal memory of the relations between the works. Lucien Dällenbach's notions of a "specular tale" or the application made by Craig Owens in his essay "Photography en abyme"<sup>4</sup> are relevant in order to try to establish an interpretative model close to Noguero's work: let us recall the importance of heraldry in Gide, the coats of arms which embrace others (sur le tout – sur le tout du tout) or the pictorial examples of Van Eyck, Memling and Velázquez. A work within the work, the use of the mirror to disarrange the topology, but above all, the inscription of the individual in the area of his creation thanks to the oblique position of the reflecting material. The *mise en abyme* becomes evident as a mode of reflection, it is an enclave which has a connection of similarity with the work it contains.<sup>5</sup> Noguero puts forward, more than a mutual preparation by the author and of the work, movements among the forms of the image, overcoming the Narcissist splitting which Lacan distinguished with the name of "mirror phase," that corruption of the symbolical which represents a relapse in the imaginary.<sup>6</sup> What becomes obvious is the *lack of continuity*, a process where the strength of the similarity breaks down. It is not an infinite regression but a simple reduplication regression; Noguero *states otherwise*, he splits what has been created, he pays attention to the non-contradictory strange. If similarity is the same as thinking, resemblance questions the stability of the representation, the repetition crosses that area of the sham. Sculptures which, when, projected onto the flat surface of the photographs, achieve that extra dimension, the excess which Baudrillard considers typical of the "simulation effect." A subversion of the rule, the standard or the law is put into work, until a ludic erotization is reached, an arrangement of mechanisms which generate a strong seduction: a consequence of that sham which engenders the neutralisation of the perspective. "Seduction – sustains Jean Baudrillard – is never about nature, but about the artifice -never about the energy, but the sign and ritual."<sup>7</sup> Noguero pursues *sculptural events*, sudden removals of the rituals which he prepares with his works.

4. Included in Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition Representation, Power, and Culture*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992, pp. 16-30.

5. In heraldry treaties abyme is defined as the heart of a shield, it is said that a figure is abyssed when it is found with others in the centre of the shield, but without contact with any of them. Dällenbach underlines that what fascinates Andre Gide is the "image of a shield which has a miniature replica of itself in the centre" (Lucien Dällenbach, *El relato especular*, Visor, Madrid, 1991, p. 16).

6. One of the works where that structure of "placed in abyme" is intensified mots is the cibachrome which he presented in the exhibition "A film of skin" (Marisa Marimón Gallery, Orense, 1995): Noguero is sitting on a chair in the studio with his back to the light contemplating how the plaster dog is looking back at him. In another photograph, which forms part of the Coca-Cola Collection, the scene is the same although the man has disappeared, perhaps because this image has been taken in the mirror.

7. Jean Baudrillard: *De la seducción*, Cátedra, Madrid, 1987, p. 9.

The sculptures take on life in aesthetics of perversity. Mallarmé understood perversity as doing that which need not be done, receiving in exchange the only advantage of the discomfort which one feels when faced with products which, by nature, are strange to one, whilst we feign a perspective or assume untimely principles. Works like those of Noguero, which move and remove the sense, clearly impose their complexity. The presence of the double, represents an allusion to the other, a figure of the sinister in the Freudian sense or, better still, of the contemptible, which does not necessarily have anything to do with dirt or health, but which is mainly a question of disruption of the identity, system or order. Some of Noguero's sculptures present, without tabus, the sexual act or the erection of a figure on one his metal boats; they are not so much provocations as interferences in the generalised anaesthesia of taste, an expression of a time of exception. "The contemptible is related to perversion, the feeling of being contemptible which I experience is anchored in the superego. The contemptible is perverse as it does not abandon or assume an interdiction, a rule or a law, but it diverts it, it puts it on wrong track, it corrupts it."<sup>8</sup> The forms are repeated until they wear out; perhaps the greatest object of art is to make all the repetitions work at the same time, with their difference in nature and rhythm, movement and deceitfulness; sham and disguise. The "small difference" is taken out of the stereotype. Noguero pays attention to the "inner impulses," the empty places are gradually filled with presences and variations: images which are mutually reflected in a strategy of hybridization. The body in the first instance, a human figure or captivated dog, but with the background of the photographic mark. The reality of what has been seen in the reproduction would exceed the ability to narrate it, whilst the paradoxical presence of the "photographic" would legitimise the events. There is no doubt that the fracture of the classical epistemology, that tidy table which guaranteed a stable relationship between words and things, has represented a redefinition of the truth of the representation or, to be more precise, the realization that we can only guide ourselves by means of interpretations. The closure of the representation is established based on nihilism, that suspension of the correlation between the forms of the world and system of language; Noguero becomes aware of the moment of mutation of sense between nature and the artifice. His perverse sculptural scheming forces us, as he himself states, to put ourselves in the place of his gaze, but this, as in Baroque compositions, is a line of flight: interrogations, reflections, gestures, figures of desire. Passions which go through mirrors.

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8. Julia Kristeva: *Poderes de la perversión*, Siglo XXI, México, 1988, p. 25.