



AN APPROACH TO THE IMAGE

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“I’ve begun to consider the idea that the surface of the music might contain a complexity, a diversity and multiplicity of trajectories, all while preserving a single formal idea as its base.”

(Sam Hayden)

Gestures –that is life– leave traces. Even in art. It might be either the Object –the proverbial painting, the sculpture, always pretending or aspiring to embody the event itself exclusively and by its own means– or be it the record of a performance, sometimes even more perversely, just residual signs that were part of the actual happening. These traces that are symbols, supposedly evocative, carriers of coded information, occasionally precise, frequently merely suggestive and vague.

The dominant issues underlying my work are mostly about the perdurability of signs, the *signifying*, beyond their content. Their life and validity by themselves, isolated once all relationships to the original *signified* have been severed. Which is to say that they are also about the process through which information –or more precisely the attempt to convey it– devours those links and becomes in the end no more than the symbol itself.

The idea is to observe the *effects* of the power of symbols that as said are standing on their own, their structural capacity to operate in the absence of any reference to a related object, devoid of any subjugation to a requirement of intuition. The base method employed to develop these pieces is, given a set of visual signs with a common generating root, to dissociate them from that root and to subject them to an intervention mostly manual of realignment or substitution. Consequently, through a process of accumulation, layering or parallelism these raw materials are combined into a new sign, different and independent. This invented symbol will again stand by its own power, and make possible a reversal of the process by engaging the viewer in a game of (artificial) reconstruction of a new signified. Or in a third round, to find out (ask) about the original root employed and consider the process subjacent to the piece.

Two requirements: the piece must engage the viewer a-priori, independently of all theoretical consideration just by its immediate visual power. And second: the procedure generating the structure of the piece must validate itself by showing in the final resulting symbol a balance, a consistency resulting –even if not exclusively– from the fact that

there is a common provenance to all of its components. The act of *vision* has to take place first creating a minimum amount of interest that will allow then further consideration, making *vision visible* and then moving into a critical phase, deconstruction that vision, the proverbial “Explanation”. It is possible then to reflect on the ambiguity of the act itself, the inherent disconnect between language (color, form, signs and the syntactic rules) and the information lost in the effort to communicate. The viewer is not asked to read the signs but to affirm their validity with vision, to think the visible itself. To see language, the coding of information as vision, and not vision as language.

THE PRESENCE OF TECHNOLOGY

Digital technology is employed in many of my works, but without being given a preferential role. Both photography as computer software and digital printing are used as regular tools on the same level of importance as more “traditional” resources.

Digital photography, for instance is used as a medium without making the resulting document the ultimate objective. Photography is taken only as a tool to propose a concept, a consideration of the same issues described above: photos are signs that are artificial artifacts never related to any specific signified event or thing, and be they original takes or acquired images, digitally re-processed or not, they are all treated equivalently, and mostly taken out of their initial context, present only as presumptive traces of an individual or collective “experience” that they are supposed to help the viewer reconstruct. In this sense the photograph is given no esthetic value in-themselves: the artistic event only takes place in the exercising on the part of the viewer of an evocative effort.

Take as an example Monument, consisting of 17 duratrans on light boxes including an appropriated (and re-processed) school photo, plus 16 images of houses in Buenos Aires. The object, a 50 year old image donated by a friend, has a clear effect, producing a gaze, in fact a number of parallel gazes, focused on the viewer. This feeling has in fact no support at all: factually the viewer is facing no more than a set of black and white pixels, a symbol describing people the viewer doesn’t know. But these “faces” are telling a multitude of stories. Stories of people the viewer never met and never will, but that refuse to be ignored. A modicum of research helped identify 16 of the houses where some of the real subjects used to live at the time the old picture was taken, and that were newly photographed. These ghostly characters present us across time with these fading symbols, today’s traces of their past environment. But the photographs, as objects in-themselves, have no intrinsic importance.

With regard to the digital processing of images, there is a (merely personal but) strong preference to preserve and give protagonist role to the artist’s manual gesture. In consequence no computer-generated images are ever used. Whenever digital manipulation is involved, it is always that of a manual painting or drawing, and the computer is used just to make a point with regards to that original human gesture.

Take for instance Deconstructed Plastic Man. It starts from two previous original large paintings. Since those pieces were manually produced, they are analog in nature, but they have been later digitized and fed to the computer, to be fragmented and digitally manipulated to reveal, in a new symbol, the way in which this other witness, the machine, is able to “see” what we do by hand. The point is that the viewer’s act of seeing is as artificial as that exemplified in the piece, and equally forever disconnected from the original. The large scale of the piece helps make the viewer focus on the individual components, making clear that the point is the *Process* rather than the resulting image.

IN LIEU OF BACKGROUND

The freedom of signs after Derrida:

In his First Investigation Husserl broke open the discussion on the value of signs on their own, and of their role as mediators in the communication process, a debate that has become one of the most visible and influential of our times. It is notable that while Husserl is the first to recognize that there is a role for signs to play, who identifies the structural capacity of signs to operate in the absence of its related object and proceeds to differentiate and assign important properties to them, he is at the same time uneasy with this independence and attempts to set strict limits on such role. The wandering signifier must be contained, and rules of grammar are established, rules governing the forms of meaning. Validation is measured only in terms of intuitability.

Husserl states that signs are useless by themselves because there is no need to indicate mental acts to oneself, there is no genuine, effective communication of anything to the self by the self. Therefore in soliloquy, signs would ultimately be without purpose, the instrumentality and mediation function of indicative signs becoming useless. In this view there can be no need to indicate mental acts to oneself, because “the acts in question are experienced by us at that very moment”. Yet he undermines his own position with his own on inner-time consciousness. From them derives the conclusion that *the present depends on the function of representation*. Representation makes presence possible; presence is the *effect* of representation, not a modification of it.

With the momentous discovery of (the semiotic) reduction, Husserl isolates an operation which is at once the fundamental gesture of philosophy and the undoing of the classical role of philosophy to provide foundations and assured presence; but he loses his nerve and the reductive impulse is cut short. Husserl carries out a reduction *of* phonetic signifiers, not a reduction *to them*. (JD Caputo)

But it is Derrida the one that unveils the real power of Husserl’s proposals. As he writes: “The whole originality of this conception lies in the fact that its ultimate subjection to intuitionism does not oppress what might be called the freedom of language, the candor of speech, even if it is false and contradictory. One can speak without knowing. And against the whole philosophical tradition Husserl shows that in that case speech is still genuinely speech, provided it obeys certain rules which do not immediately figure as rules of knowledge.”

It is through Derrida that we gain access to the freedom of signs, releasing them from any requirement of intuition. He warns against letting signs fall into subjugation by created things, contingent units of meaning. Derrida pushes forward. He argues that the sign stands, and holds the place for something, even when that something is not to be had even when it is present, for here too the signifier intervenes, producing the effect of presence as something constituted. The work of signs is to produce presence in the pregnant sense, where presence is impregnated with absence, presence in the supplemented sense, supplemented by signs, sustained by protention and retention. Presence is not fallen from the sky; it is generated by constitution, engendered by repetition. It is a work wrought by signs which produce the effect of things themselves.

The sign implies non-plenitude, the power to function without fulfillment, and this is structurally necessary to it as a sign. This is the essence of the sign as such. The signs have a role to play, that of *tenere*, tenancy, standing in and holding the place for something, just when what is present is not to be had. They are the remedy that will provide a supplement for memory. Signs make consciousness stronger, more tenacious. They make consciousness in the pregnant sense possible.

While Derrida said that a phenomenal system cannot be woven together without the work of signifiers, of *textere*, he also points out that *the thing* always steals away: "...contrary to what phenomenology – which is always phenomenology of perception – has tried to make us believe, contrary to what our desire cannot fail to be tempted into believing, the thing itself always steals away." Thus Derrida takes Husserl's series of reductions one step further, allowing the sign to survive as semiotic residuum, liberated from the oppressive regime of intuitions. He has isolated the pure form of the signifier, the repeatable code, making a reduction of a logico-grammatical form, still heavy with the matter of metaphysics, in order to make reduction to the pure power of signs to produce to generate their products, thus allowing for the interweaving of signifiers which produce an odd, obscure effect which tantalizes us, but an effect nonetheless.

ON MATHEMATICS:

Since as early as Isaac Newton, scientists have understood that scientific knowledge is acquired (and "reality is experienced") through the construction of structures of concepts, discursive systems, that are (at best) representational models of the given idea or observation.

This imaginary structure is in turn registered, for analysis, preservation and transmission purposes, through its codification using a set of symbols and pre-established definitions, and regulated by a set of syntactic rules also established a-priori. These symbols and its syntactic are conventional, therefore not unique and subject to substitution. In consequence, alternate symbolic representations are possible.

It is nevertheless frequent that in common discourse these symbolic representations are confused with the original imaginary structure itself. Blurring Lacan's boundary between the Imaginary and Symbolic layers, the symbol is taken for the concept.

A structure (a conceptual construct) is considered "*good*" if:

- a) It is internally consistent according to the accepted syntactic rules and offers a potential for further expansion
- b) If it proves to be consistent with previously adopted structures or of new bridge-structures can be developed (according to the same established set of rules) to link the new model to previous ones, or if a new construct can be developed that will encompass and substitutes both new and older structures and their implications.

A structure will be deemed to be "*useful*" if:

- a) It can be employed to resolve issues left open by a previously accepted construct or contributes to the expansion of one such previous construct.
- b) When a given structure (or conceptual construct) is related to an experimentally observable phenomenon allows predicting the occurrence of such events or others associated with the subject. In this case the construct is called an "explanation" of the observed events. *Explanation* is a highly dangerous word. If a construct related to an observable phenomenon is deemed to be an explanation of it, it must be understood that it is no more than an imaginary model heavily tinted by the cognitive mechanisms of the observer and thus terminally disconnected of the thing in-itself. Finally, given that symbols are conventional and not uniquely linked to a content, it is possible then to build symbolic systems not related to an independently observable event, that is, as said earlier, without any requirement of an intuitive link.

In the end, all works in this set are attempts to build (simpler) systems of signs, only justified by the consistency of the method employed in its construction.