

Moral art

A doll, the inanimated double of the human body, is one of the objects capable of making the look hesitate. If one of the abilities inherent to the act of looking is the capability of acknowledging the line that separates the human from the non-human, the doll or the double, tends to suspend that ability, inviting to sharpen the act of looking to the point of turning it into a moral exercise: we decide, through a series of quick and unapprehensible decisions, that we are standing in front of an inanimated figure, and in front of it we call out to all every distance it takes to distinguish it from the human image. That distance is precisely what announces an artistic matter, better said, of a certain void that can only be fulfilled with an artistic announcement.

This is not to say that art always needs to place itself on that shady borderline between representation of the human being and the hesitation that helps us to tell the first from the Human and its living body form. But the lack of definition that the look detects, detonates an automatic search for a certainty that could confirm us the fact of being in presence of an actual body –our ultimate mechanical certainty of inhabiting the living world- or introduces in us the horrid hesitation of that that seeming to be alive might be not. What is nothing but mere double of the human enters a confused perception that, for a split instant, attributes human life to it .

I believe that the most riskful artistic experiences are the ones that start off with an invitation to decide on what is the thing that we are looking at. Not forgetting, of course, the fact that what is seen here is an “Un-cognizable”. But not on grounds of a representation founded on some sort of pre-agreement –a certain attitude towards the work of art-, but precisely, when this agreement is not there. In this case, it is the very first look what is looked at, the ordinary urban look. With all its complexity –as it is a look that accumulates an infinite amount of experiences-; but at the same time, with all its naivety, since to be put through a crucial experience, is what it is about.

Looked at it from this angle, this is the experience subject of discussion here. It is about an experience of a moral kind that implies the frustration of expectation. The “Philoctetes Project” scatters around in the city several non-human bodies –dolls, as the participants of the experience called them- in too-human situations. This is to say, in attitudes in which the excess of human quality reads as *abandonment, fall, faint, privation*, and every other item inside the broad menu of possible pass outs that contemporary cities provide. Specially in the crisis-beaten-Buenos Aires City, where shelterless and grieving human bodies are spread all around. They are not dead; they stand deeply scarred, exposing themselves to the silent and panicked observation of the passers-by. They are dropped bodies, in the verge of transforming into things, defying the moral order of collective perception.

In the Philoctetes project, the inanimated bodies of the dolls operated as theatrical bodies. The theatrical origin of this experience allows us to infer on the way the dolls disturb the fate of the actor and of the human constitution. Doubtless, the presence of dolls in any theatrical expression, immediately glimpses an ungrateful threat to the *I* of the actor. But what could render as a limitation to the actors conscience when confronting the inanimated double of his own living presence, radically increases the powers of acting, reminding them their own origin. And the origin of this probably took place in the will of representation itself, inquiring on the division between body and soul. Hence the shivering place the puppet occupies, with a borrowed soul and a body of its own, but with

movements that concentrate the essence of the fundamental exercises of the living body at the cost of looking lifeless.

The theatrical scattering of these inanimated bodies in the city of Buenos Aires rendered as an enactment of strange and provocative resounding. First of all, in the context of a crisis that echoed in the lifestyle and life-making of thousands of people, the image of dismantled bodies in the city, displayed in improvised shacks or recipients, has become regular. For the day-to-day life of the dispossessed and the shelterless, the city itself is source of surviving resources; this generates and somehow requires alternative garment, alternative sleeping postures, alternative feeding habits. The crouch-positioned body, busy in precarious occupations, is now part of the urban reality; also the improvised imagery in which the thrown away instruments and utensils are seized again contributing to forge a citizenship out of despair, dressed up in their martyred outfit.

The Philoctetes Project, aimed to create an aesthetic experience based on the present matter of the fallen bodies, possessed a drastic ambiguity in its premises. Firstly, the dolls could be taken for real exanimated bodies, but none of them lacked of some feature that could abruptly return the scene to its theatrical origin. It was an essay on perception in which diverse reactions took place; diverse according to the way the complex perceptive machinery of each and every eventual spectator, set in motion its evaluation and appreciation capabilities. Secondly, each person that stepped into the spectator condition of an ambiguous theatrical project –as it was founded on a realistic evocation of the actual lying bodies in the city- didn't know and didn't recognize him/herself holder of that condition; this was origin for several degrees of frustrated expectations: when someone tried to aid the dolls, a fainted person turned itself into a "moral theatre" test dummy.

This morally undefined scenario demanded the extension of the -what was, after all- the theatrical motivation of the experience: the moral look and the documented observation. Everything that occurred in Buenos Aires' streets according to Philoctetes, fell into a classification of looks: from the casual spectator –the passer by that looks around with an acute practical selectivity, to the groups of participants in the experience, taking photo and video registration of what was happening and, finally, a third level of watchers that included guests invited to observe the observing ones, in an itinerant way, moving around in a motor vehicle taken for this purpose. The media broadcasting of the events, could be considered as a *coup de grace* of the "meta-observations"; their attitude couldn't be anything but very critical towards the experience: it was about a "moral-aesthetical" scrutiny that, in some way, radicalized what the media do on a day to day basis under "journalistic research" purposes. Finally, as the participants and organizers of the project would join afterwards to analyze the events occurred and the obtained documents, the possibility of building a final look over the experience could be preserved. The project built its own final statement, forever linked to the crisis of its self-interpretation.

So, it was about some sort of anthropological theatre of the moral look. A look set under an extraordinary and complicated dynamic that would unleash an infinite amount of, perhaps unsolvable, debates. Evidently, the project's motivation could be neither to reflect on the existing levels of solidarity towards the neighbor, nor to check the level of preparation the city's medical emergency aid equipment had (since the S.A.M.E –city's emergency service, and the police had been warned beforehand). Also, when someone approached with aiding intention, a fast re-conversion in the perception of scene would take place. I personally witnessed somebody guiding a group of people that approached

the doll ready to take its pulse hastingly; as soon as the scenic character of the situation re-organized their moral feelings, in this case -and surely in many-, ended with a disturbing disappointment because of frustrated expectations.

An experience that was beginning from the art of making dolls (human substitute) was ending in the art of observing the urban moral life (mechanical substitute). Surprisingly, those who from the very first moment perceived the theatrical nature of the lying body –the case of the fireman with the box of wine, was evidently an amusing narrative elaboration because of the funny paradox that implied-, reacted as audience of a comic scene. Fact is that the dolls –helplessly-, displayed signs of their mimetic origin, that could be easily detected. Those who by the end of the observation didn't notice this, absorbed in their decision to aid, felt naturally frustrated, caught in an expression of a profound feeling that showed roots of plain solidarity.

Perhaps they are the ones to whom the Philoctetes Project was aimed to. In their initial act of self devotion to solidarity, and in their later disappointment (either having accepted the experience in good terms or not), represented the fate of the art in the city. A fate that, as soon as it reveals it's condition of being art separated from real life, originates a reflection on the ways it affects us, the ways it becomes necessary or prescindible. This is why it can be said that this difficult and questionable experience –in the sense that its language is also receptive to incorporate the hard objections received- reveals also, in some way, the ambiguous origins of the artistic experience. We cannot be certain of how much it steals from real life, or what is the degree of revision, or moral tragedy, produced in our consciousness. We cannot even be certain on whether our consciousness and our life would be better or worse by accepting it.

Horacio González – sociologist
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