

ANOMALY

Javier Rubio Nombrot

“...however much we may love general beauty, as expressed by classical poets and artists, it is no less wrong to neglect particular beauty, circumstantial beauty...”

Charles Baudelaire. *The painter of Modern Life*. 1863.

The artist and flâneur Charles Baudelaire sensed, as early as the mid nineteenth century, that modernity would bring with it Anxiety, together with crises of representation and of artistic practice. His discourse is already that of a creator who needs solutions to a problem, ways forward, new conceptual moulds for a new world. Baudelaire is already almost consciously avant-garde (initiating an unbroken succession of avant-garde movements), already contemporary, as well as being a visionary; the surrealists, over half a century later, replicated his walks in search of the marvellous, and following these same tracks, a hundred and fifty years later, in a world that is radically new to an almost inconceivable degree, we find Susan Nash, whom Mercedes Replinger describes as practicing “*the botany of the asphalt*, collecting abandoned objects, to which she usually adds colour, in a kind of aberrant restoration that seeks the narrow space between the *found geometry* and the new history”.

What is different this time round? Really, as Baudelaire foresaw – and for that reason made a study of its characters-, with industrialization at its zenith, the triumph of an urban society in need of new cosmologies (less closely linked to the earth, for example, and more so to the realm of *the social*). The constructivists and functionalists were subsequently to study the artificial geometry of the urban landscape, with its synthetic texture; the cubists and futurists, its rhythm –cinematographic-, Surrealism and *Arte Povera*, its waste and residues, *Pop Art* its most trivial products and its dynamism...In general, as has often been pointed out, modern art shows an obsession with the object which, in turn, has aroused reactions –or *resistance*- such as Land Art or other movements seeking to recover the natural or primary.

The *objet trouvé* allows us, as Replinger says, to study the new geometry resulting from the separation of the object from its function (or from its context) and to use it as a starting point from which to invent alternative histories: something that could be called fantastic or *creative archaeology*, aimed at undermining conventional narrative forms (even before the great narratives were finally closed down by *the postmodern condition*). In this sense, Nash has used the concept of *anomaly*: “The responsibility of the artist lies, to a large extent, in his or her irresponsibility. The normal tendency of our minds (also of our society, and of our biological reproduction) would seem to be towards filtering out any element that appears anomalous, that makes no sense within the existing framework, or that is simply of no more or less immediately practical use. I believe that the appearance of the concept of “art” has meant the creation of a space –one of great restriction and relatively great freedom- for irresponsibility, a space within which to contemplate, manipulate, play with the incorrect, the incompatible or incomplete, the anomalous” (Susan Nash. Exhibition catalogue. Espacio Bop, Madrid, 2010):

*

Globalization, resulting largely from the telecommunications revolution –the latter, in its turn, from the appearance of the *processors* made possible by *microelectronics*, the old *silicon revolution*-, has shown with total clarity that the massive and instant transfer of capital can radically transform the economy and the society of whole continents in the space of a few years. Whilst the formation of the great empires, from the Roman empire to that of Spain, and even that of the United States, took centuries, the unprecedented development of Asia, with the subsequent crisis of European and United States competitiveness, has occurred in just a decade: it is *history* itself – which has always been to a large extent the history of empires- that is accelerating and unfolding before our eyes with the speed of a *film*.

To concentrate the present in one single *film*, one single day, a *terrible day*, a kind of clearly *spectacular Day of Judgement* that, rather than being definitive (*the 11th of September* was something like a definitive film, created live and consumed instantly throughout the world), would be the start of an eternal, catastrophic *mise en abîme*: stated plainly, to portray the collapse of the world financial system –the long-awaited and repeatedly postponed crisis of capitalism- in order to discover why it inevitably collapses. In *Cosmopolis*, his latest film, David Cronenberg –a master of irreversible metamorphosis, expert at synthetic ghosts- portrays liberalism reaching its critical point in the only way possible: by assimilating the discoveries made in avant-garde painting, into an abstract-expressionist film (Pollock, whose *Chapel* is the object most desired by the main character, and Lasker introduce and close the story) with no narrative structure, and which dissects the mysterious and apparently benign internal laws that govern the working of the markets –in the same way that *intuition* guides the brush of the informalist painter- only to conclude, admirably, that these are no more than the reflection of our most trivial and anodyne imperfections.

Those very same synthetic ghosts, those mysterious *interferences*, slip their way into the *landscapes* –at the same time figurative and symbolic- of the *banknotes* analyzed under the microscope, processed, modified and deconstructed, which form Susan Nash’s latest graphic work. In fact, everyone seems to agree that the cycle ends when “money” ceases to represent a tangible value and becomes a value in itself, independent of anything it might represent and subject to its own dynamics and fluctuations. Which explains its presumable and growing *virtuality*, and even its *mythical* quality: “money has ceased to be a sign indicating the value of things, and which was of itself bound to the value things have; we have transformed it into something spiritual, into something detached from natural wealth, something which no longer represents the value of things but represents a phantasmagoric value, and that is how we started to create phantasmagoric money. In fact, we started to worship a substitute, a simulacrum of God”, the artist seems to suggest. But is this really so? Nash’s work –ultimately an analysis of money as a material entity- seems rather to suggest that banknotes are themselves crammed with symbols, that they no longer represent the merchandise but the Institution –or a metainstitution.

And if this is so, Nash’s intelligent approach –a combat on virtual territory, the territory of *simulacra*, in the sense that we are dealing with *synthetic images* and intangible values- to the material dimension of money, not using the weapons of abstract expressionism –as Cronenberg does-, but with her particular, minimalist form of expression, is, in this case also, the only possible answer to the attempt on the part of the financial system to achieve emancipation –dematerialization-, and is almost conceptualist: in the landscapes, in the monuments and buildings, the arches, bridges and façades on the Euro notes are the signs which reconnect “money” with reality –or a reality- and, what is more important, link the destiny of both. Indeed, the video *// mercato è mobile*, which Nash presented in this latest exhibition in Espacio Bop, seems to refer, not only to the extreme mobility –and volatility- of the markets, but also to the physical permanence of the seats of financial power. And it is in these that Nash once again situates her *interferences*.

*

In 1963 (four years before publishing *How Long is the Coast of Britain?*), Benoît Mandelbrot had developed his famous *theory of fractals* based, not on observation of the non-Euclidean geometry of Nature, but on the price of cotton over a few decades. Both Mandelbrot and the solipsistic broker in *Cosmopolis* try to find a relationship between the secret patterns of human activity and those of Nature or its mathematics, and this is in fact a convincing defence of ultraliberalism: attributing to the “Yuan graph”, for example, superhuman, even ecological, qualities. Taking things to their extreme, imagining a strictly solipsistic *master of the financial system*, the supposed perfection of the market *rhythm* disappears: even in the purest *art* –in the uncontaminated communion of the ascetic with the pulsating of the cosmos- there lies hidden the *defect*; if one is absolutely pure, if one strictly obeys *the will of God*, then it is the most benign and innocuous pathology, the most irrelevant and hidden imperfection, the most trivial detail, that causes the catastrophic failure, the ruin of the system, the hecatomb.

In the prologue for the exhibition *I Am an Artist and I Make a Lot of Money*, Nash wrote:” Money offers a wealth of paradoxes. This magnificent abstraction affects us at a very material level. It is a means of storing, and a means of creating flow. It liberates and enslaves. Gold and shit, associated with power and impurity, a meeting place we have created for desire, fear and repulsion, for a certain manifestation of the numinous. Our brainchild and our master”. These contradictions are too deep to be reconcilable: they are *paradoxes*; and the *anomaly*, as Nash –and, in his own way, Mandelbrot, for whom traditional statistics were not effective in predicting *crises*- foresaw, unbalances the system because it represents precisely that which does not fit in with its logic and is rejected. Nash, by situating herself, from conviction, on one hand “within the surrealist tradition of the found object, and, on the other, by adding the pictorial meaning given to it by Pop Art” (Hernando Carrasco), seeks to drive the knife to the very heart of the system by examining what does not fit into it.

Interminable collapse -constantly postponed, or repeated *ad infinitum* because that is the only dynamic possible in the natural world, itself subject to entropy- is portrayed in the installation *Spending Money Like Water*, which follows earlier beautiful installations such as *Migrations* (2010), o *Memories of Light* (2011) and occupied the *compluvium* in Espacio Bop: seventy-three five-litre bottles hanging in the form of a *tree* –that one being of which, paradoxically, each branch and each leaf struggles to receive more light and more water than the others, the great symbol of the West, according to Deleuze and Guattari, with their concept of the *rhizome*- awaiting, perhaps, a *shower of millions*. It is not so much a representation of the epic of the *winner* –inherent to the Anglo-Saxon protestant culture now clearly dominant- as an illustration of the real functioning of a system whose main characteristic is –again paradoxically- a flow of money on all sides and in quantities that are clearly excessive, exaggerated, expressionist. And abstract. Because, in the final analysis, art is right and the virtualization of the economy is simply a sign of the dematerialization of those institutions that are the very soul of the banknote. Which is just printed paper.