

In the middle by Jaime Conde Salazar

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Let us start with the idea that theater is a performative structure. It is, to quote Beatriz Preciado, a sort of architecture "that produces the subjectivity it pretends to host" (Testo yonki, 2008, p.134). Although an oversimplification, we can say that the subjectivity that theatre produces and hosts functions along a very simple system of dichotomies. This system establishes a point of view separate from the object of vision. Additionally this point of view is invisible and incorporeal. On one side we have the subject and on the other the object, dark on one side and light on the other, on one side invisibility and total visibility on the other, paralysis on one side and movement in the other, etc. (. . .) This structure portrays department characteristic of modern bourgeois Western culture and any deviation from it entails a transformation of subjectivity. (. . .)

In her previous works, María Jerez has repeatedly uncloaked the subject that looks from and remains protected by the darkness cast on the audience of the conventional theatre. In "The Case of the Spectator" (2004) the image and its standard visual coherence was fragmented through different games and visual artifacts. Only if the viewers took charge of their own presence and put together the pieces could they access the narration. (. . .) "The Movie" film (2008) displayed on the screen a dazzling collection of filmic signs which established the spectators in an almost unconscious complicity. This complicity revealed how, once seated in the cinema, we cease to see things "as they are." Instead we see everything through the narrative conventions developed throughout cinematic history. These works betrayed the presence of the spectator and its imposed economy. And in doing so, theatre, as a structural representation, ceased to be the perfect machine whose performance can go unnoticed. Its engines and gears make too much noise.

This was just the first step- it was not enough to simply reveal how theater works and subtly let the subjectivity that it imposes disintegrate- next María Jerez presents other structures of representation in order to see what they produce. María Jerez had already explored the implications of architecture in her work "This Side Up" (2006). In this piece, with the help of a team of "builders," she constructed a cardboard theatre. In this case the action of building was understood literally: creating a spatial structure whose typology and functionality is conventional. (. . .) In her latest work "The Perfect Alibi (The Film)" (2011), the architecture is taken as something much more complex which has the power to dictate conditions of existence for those entering the space. The structure is very simple: a screen, the spectators and behind the audience, the projector. It might look like cinema but it is not. The projection on the screen is a computer desk that will generate several Word documents: someone writes while we look.... This spatial artifact is so simple because it repeats the structure of writing in front of a computer: our eyes, our typing fingers and the screen where our thoughts become an image (writing). It has nothing to do with cinema, which promises a place and a time different from the one we actually occupy.

In this new spatial arrangement proposed by María Jerez, the spectators are in the middle: between the screen and the eyes of the person who writes, ... we are inside the body/head of the author-actress and we witness how she "exists" during the duration of the piece. There is no distance, no space out of the process of being. The immediate consequence caused by

the removal of that distance is that the body stops being an image: it ceases to be a volume that we recognize as an object separate from ourselves and offered to our gaze. Strangely, the body of the author-actress becomes something that is substantially the same as us. This body has nothing to do with the packages of meat usually placed onstage which we are accustomed to consume as images. Presence becomes something elusive that resembles the body that Lepecki imagines reflecting on the work of Schilder: "a body that always goes behind your arrival and always ahead of his departure, a body that is never entirely there, in the context of his appearance" ("Exhausting Dance, 2008, 96) (...) The body ceases to be a solid and stable image and, inevitably, presence becomes something else. And perhaps this is the pinnacle of the piece: through reading, the performative power is revealed, i.e. the power of awareness through a tool so ordinary as the text word processor.

When reading, an immediate and almost unconscious process of identification takes place and we start to think with the structure of Word: fonts that are attitudes, font sizes which set tone, wallpaper that creates places, effects which become events, overlapping scenes, layers of thought breaking down subjectivity, levels of awareness crossed without interruption. (. . .) (inevitably, here the question arises "Does Word repeat the structure of human thought? Or rather, do we end thinking through the structure of Word?"). (...) In the theater María Jerez built there is no depth, there is no vanishing point reducing space to a mere promise of distance. Here you can just stay (a form of being). This adventure redefines presence not in terms of its visibility but instead as partaking in an experience of subjectivity. It is an awareness that makes us understand reality through the form that the author-actress proposes. We are inside her home, physically and symbolically. I can't think of a riskier exercise of exposure.

Jaime Conde-Salazar, 2011

Translated by Quim Pujol