

**CONVERSATION: THE AFFECTION OF A BLANK PAGE.**

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This conversation both has already been held and is about to occur. Somehow, it has not taken place yet. It anticipates that one which is always waited for. We have not found the chance to see ourselves, and the body that has been brought into play has been that one that makes us look in directions that we can share. We have breathed a common air. Words have caused other words. In short, talking is not exchanging; it is being affected, so much so that you can neither be nor make as you used to. We have seen our texts and works, and not only these. On receiving a text, it worked what was called 'the propulsion steering wheel' and corresponding to what was being said was enough. Such an experience is similar to that of any creation, no matter how modest it results. The secret of that correspondence is that of the letter which is actually an empty envelope. There is always something in it, even if it is only what was expected to come. We are affected by different possibilities. This emptiness has brought about our talking. And such a procedure requires the others' words, their expressions, their exposition. What is actually looked for is this company, which is wished, which is needed. Far from just an explanatory comment or from a representation of what is offered, this prelude of conversation already shares a game of sly glances, it refers to what has no remission and it is a way of wandering and roving about showrooms, it is taking a long time that could offer different sedimentation. On accompanying us, works appear in a different way, they are not just reproduced. What could happen is their becoming evident.

**J.C.M.** – *As you have seen, I am constantly worried about some questions such as: what appears in some texts as 'the impossibility of an epic'; creating, by means of the work, a territory of emptying, not of suspense but of a moment of a certain carelessness, of a certain impossibility; the idea itself of impossibility as a motive, as a working method; the failure itself or the reiteration over the same as a way of approaching work, being neither contemplative moments nor brief moments, typical of a culture of show business; the self-spying of the subject as a way of knowledge for which art is a useful tool,...*

**A.G.** – Then, let's talk, for instance, about 'the impossible', which is not just what cannot be, but also that which makes possible. Let's talk about obsession, which works as a concept. Let's talk about intensity, which is not mere insistence. Resisting, persisting in reiteration, in reiteration. Thinking about what 'time', 'each time', 'time and time again', never 'once and for all' mean. It is the impossible what turns the time into a vicissitude.

**J.C.M.** – *The strength of ideas together with the desire to carry them out is a very valuable tool. When time goes by and they come back time and time again, they become an obsession. It is then when desire turns into need and you think about carrying them out, materialising them, shaping them. The artist is usually a highly obsessive person and it is in that obsession where things acquire intensity, they become a continuous pressure. In some cases this pressure is not very nice but it helps you keep awake; let's say that it keeps us on guard with respect to what is going on around.*

*Calvino tells us about his proposals for the next millennium, for this that is already catching us, about speed as a value to take into account. My nature does not seem to feel comfortable in the vertigo that this speed brings about, that is why I try to provide myself with other weapons suitable for me such as repetition, persisting in things, reiterating myself or what you rightly call 'reiteration'. For me, that reiteration is the case of artists whom I admire: Cezanne, Brancusi, Morandi... Everything comes back time and time again until it gets a precise shape, either material or ideal. This reiteration is that one which leaves the track of the time in the work, the testimony of a life which is registered in different ways in the piece that you are making; it is the one that, at the same time that brings the work nearer the idea, shows the imperfection of life, of the vital as a parallel testimony or sometimes opposed to the ideal. I am not interested in the ideas that are far from the vital; I am interested in the projects that are capable of assuming modifications, surprises, mistakes when being materialised.*

*Resistance comes in the same way, persisting in the ideal without forgetting that we live.*

*The impossible establishes itself as a challenge, it can not be understood without the possible as you note it so well, but maybe the extremes are not so interesting. I am interested in constantly playing with dualities, contrasts, because it puts new energy into senses and crossed glances, from that I often play with dualities in the titles: Ruinas y proyectos (Ruins and projects), Sospecha y conspiración (Suspicion and*

conspiracy), Líder o cobarde (Leader or coward)... *Thus, there arise possibilities for the work. It must also be said that, in my work, this impossibility is not free from a certain degree of melancholy or, even in some works, free from certain nihilism, but I am interested in these aspects as a zero degree from which I can plan new projections. Certainly, possibilities are not many but I am not attracted by the rhetoric of the spectacular at all.*

**A.G.** – ‘Having to do’ with something that rings us a bell and can not be apprehended. That *having to do* with something or with somebody, and only with it, him or her, is so disconcerting as the fact that something *rings us a bell*. That sound that is in tune with a particular sense looks like the concretion of an unceasing whisper that keeps in certain insomnia, with no rest at all. It seems to call, to say ‘come’, and it does not let any other approach except the caress, the peeping, some smell. It seems to pursue so much that, in the end, you get pursued by it. Time and time again, its carrying out is an eloquent failure; its efficiency does not authorise self-indulgence, maybe the happiness of desire, the pleasure of non-possession. Then, obsession is not a mere mood, it is a way of being of the making that is not reduced to the already done. The same arises on each occasion, never alike, always different. The work is, in each case, the return of an impossibility that is not infertile. Such a deviation of the making produces the effect of something incomplete, although finished, like faintness, decrease by vanishing. The waiting is without hope. The awaited obsession is left. That *come* comes back. And it is necessary to answer. Materials acquire their shape in a unity that is fulfilled. It is necessary to resume on each occasion. But words, like shapes do, begin with coming back. And they finish endlessly, as if they were always about to be born.

It could happen tomorrow. The spreading of time would ridicule all hurry. The tempo of the making demands persisting, which means delaying, remaining in something. You neither can always know in advance, nor you can everything. We have to learn the *making come* from something, with somebody. This conflict – not contradiction – is that of a constant fight, without solution, but it demands a solution. This decision is not either the mere fulfilment of a previous plan, or the staging of a presumed idea. The decision cuts with the scissors of the lightning.

**J.C.M.** – *When you speak, you point out things that are close to what the works try to do. I can't help seeing Narcissus in your words. I have just given a lecture about the*

*look in the mirror starting from the myth, and as you have already noticed, it has been a permanent idea for some years. And the case is that there are many clues in the scene when Narcissus drowns. You talk to me about having to do with something, and recognising it, knowing that it is what you are looking for, watching out in order to recognise it and seeing that it is what looks at you. In the end, you are looked at by the works, by the images; they are there, casting glances at us, waiting for us to recognise ourselves in them. It is then when the adjustment takes place, the dialogue adjusts to the image. But we also have to know that the work is beyond, that we can approach it from seduction. That is the moment of Narcissus' embrace, a moment of maximum tension in the myth, the young boy touching the image. It is curious that we normally retain the tragedy of the myth, the death in the depth of the water. But, afterwards, there comes the birth of the flower, of the new seducing element. Narcissus strokes the image in the same way that the artist limits the space of his problems in his workshop, it is about a whisper. That is why Narcissus is accompanied by Echo in the myth.*

*But we can not drown permanently, we are obliged to look for or create ways out and, on making, you look for the transformation, and, at this point, let me use ideas of some authors to whom I find closer. In his works, Peter Handke makes continuous references to the transformation that the writer undergoes in their working process. This transformation implies that things remain unfinished, that the complete is a stage of precarious rest, a repose that is being on the watch rather than a surrender. From that, that starting anew which also appears in Handke. It seems there is never a stage of total security, of full satisfaction. Maybe this would cancel any possibility of desire.*

*In this transforming from and with the work, time plays an important role. Time which is transitory, time very close to the images of the Baroque vanitas still-lives with which I am familiar. It is an obsessive time but of a great transitory nature. They are instants of the material that have the power of influencing our transformation. They propose the reality and the material nature of the instant in an obsessive manner but, at the same time, they have a transitory nature that touches the ephemeral. It is then that you realise that plans and strategies have little to do with art, that what must prevail is the attitude of rehearsal, building in order to doubt everything at any time and, however, as Handke points out, having had the experience of transformation.*

**A.G.** – Sometimes, transformation is transmutation or trans-valuation. Turning into another. And not only a modification of attitudes, dispositions or behaviour, but an effective incorporation as well. The carnal and material nature of this word is full of suggestions. Winning body implies that the shaping of the work sometimes takes a certain amount of health, on other occasions it is its only source. However, that same material nature is the one that prevents the absolute appropriation. There is no possession, nor even remission to something absolute, just allusion, evocation of what, strictly, does not exist at all. Its only and effective being is that of evocation and allusion. It consists of never completely being, of always being as if it was not. Therefore, there is neither shelter nor comfort in failure. Even failing has become difficult. We will never have each other.

Therefore, far from any language of desolation, the joy and happiness of the ephemeral (beings of a day) shine with the irruption of the spark of what is caused *suddenly*. For that, it is absolutely vital to create conditions, to delay, to cultivate. And to wait, open, without expectations that represent what is going to happen. A work tries that waiting, it makes say again, it lets talk. One of the reasons to do this is that it does not want to say everything. However, it says everything that is possible to say. In this sense, it is complete and pregnant. Such is its art. But it demands intervention; it needs it. The only way to make it work is by means of corresponding to its way of procedure, enrolling in the stream of that which made it appear, co-belonging to that which made and makes it say, listening. Such a will to say is not reduced to what somebody wishes to be said. But it is necessary to wish, it is not just to want something. It is vital to wish *to wish*. And if that happened, everything becomes another, without being but the same. That is the difference, the one that creates movement. And that is thinking. The work belongs to the thought.

**J.C.M.** – ‘We will never have each other’. *What a statement! But, what to do then? It is true that we have to wish to wish. In this sense, we have to cover the space that tends towards the utopia with desire. If we are not able to imagine and dream, if we are not wishing subjects, we are lost. That is how we become fertile beings; even if we never catch it, we have to look for what makes us complete in the other. This is the contradiction with which we have to live, but it is there where everything moves, it is where thought, as you say, gets activated. It is then where I regard art as knowledge, as self-knowledge. This happens in the individual and I think that, in the same sense, it*

*also happens in the collective, that is, as a community, as a society. It is there where I think that art must fulfil its role in the social, showing the less visible sides of reality and, at the same time, raising certain 'eroticism'. And here, we can join this and what we said before, when eroticism does not know anything about time, it slows down, it is the time of those who are in love, a time that, although it is brief, gets captivated by the instants or sparks. It is a time that seems to have stopped and, however, it knows that it is ephemeral; but the interesting thing is that it is a continuous process, we always think that we can go on wishing.*

*Maybe this is the genuine responsibility of art, and of thought in general, that of raising new capacities of answering in the context where it is practised, getting involved in order to talk, in order to try, from responsibility, new spaces of freedom. And it is also in this sense that I find the ethics of art.*

*It occurs to me to think what role the virtual image and all its artistic product fulfil in this, because all this virtual character seems to escape from the incorporeal nature that you mention. Maybe we do not appreciate its extent yet or we are in the first step of those who are in love and we lack perspective to understand the process by means of which it joins us.*

**A.G.** – The creation of possibilities, of spaces – no matter how minimum they are – where we can breathe, wish, expect; the creation of lifestyles imposes itself as a challenging task that goes beyond the individual capacity. In that case, we must talk about networks of friendships, which are not a sect of followers. The question of friendship, that one which does not elude solitude, is decisive. Thus, possibility is potency, which is another way of potentiality. Making potential works – complete potentially – is as much as obtaining some possibilities that are given without our possessing them. It is as if, in any case, they were about to come. It is always disconcerting that about which the stoics talked: *the material nature of the incorporeal*.

**J.C.M.** – *The virtual then regarded as potency provides us with some spaces of creation, some spaces of thought from which we can develop a different vision of things. If we do not associate the virtual with the spectacular, it becomes a valid tool to continuously initiate the 'reiteration' that you pointed out at the beginning. The interesting things are the ways and options that are not created.*

*It is in this sense that we can relate all this to topics which are en vogue such as that of identity. That is, identity regarded as what is left to come, that which transforms us or that we incorporate, and not identity regarded as a fortress, as a territory that must be defended at any price. Identity has in mind the future, not the past. I think that the title I have given to the exhibition poses this problem: getting rid of burdens that paralyse us, that prevent us from incorporating possibilities.*

**A.G.** – We are that towards which we go. Identity oozes in that ‘towards’. The arrow also hits its target here. It is the target that we propose the one that goes too far. So, in the title ‘*Lo que hay que hacer, lo que hay que dejar*’ (‘What must be done, what must be lent’) there sparkles a co-belonging of the made and of the lent, co-belonging in ‘what must’. *Lent* does not show a passive nature, it means ‘donate’. Thus, the relation between the making and the giving is enigmatic. It is as if you had to hit (the target) without possessing what must be given. As if we only possessed it as far as we lend it without retaining it. And, then, we are possessed subjects rather and possessors. The top is not a summit, but the capacity for bearing a permanent going into pieces. The rooms are not mere places, they are passages, like those of a wandering text, that tries new left-overs and emptying. The tiredness that is produced by feeling folded in the impossibility of an unfolded identity empties the space from itself. There is only room for the wakefulness and for the permanent conflict, the rehearsal of new lifestyles, the possibility of a blank page (*pango*: peace agreement, village). This page-bed, floor of a room, bears the differences, receives them. On that page, words and elements are used with such intensity and density that they are practically established among remains without closing in a close proposal. That is why the staging is ‘intriguing’, a network, a way of myth whose *mimesis* is not a copy, but a recreation of possibilities. This interweaving – which the one of the ideas among themselves – avoids the reduction to a single image. *Speculating* is also *spying*. And seeing oneself when looking gives another public dimension to what can be seen. It is not a shelter, it is the need for retirement in the public; not a withdrawal, but an escape, in the manner of arrows run away towards their target.

**J.C.M.** – *In fact that is what the experience of exhibiting, of exposing to the others consists of. I do not regard works as authoritarian, as images to be imposed, but rather as dispositions to propose; the aim is not to communicate anything in particular but to*

*look for the dialogue with the other, the activation of the parts. Stages are created where the looks, the routes, the crosses between images activate all the means of estrangement, of the conflict with what we do not control, of the mysterious, without this mystery having to do with the sacred or with the religious, but with everything that must be unveiled by means of unconsciousness.*

*The image of the ‘zulo’ (hole) that I use somehow condenses this space for the waiting. It is a new element that appears in the work in this exhibition and that is suggesting me new ideas. A tiny space where the victim lives, that victim who is only allowed to have a few things, a mirror among them. We constantly need an image of ourselves. It is as cruel as necessary. This mirror reflects the passage of time; it questions us at the same time that it comforts us. The space of the ‘zulo’ is the place of the emptiness and of the waiting in its crude material nature: it is ‘the blind waiting’.*

**A.G.** – The ‘zulo’ is not predisposed as such. It is nothing but an empty cavity. It is the captive the one who tries emptying it. Emptiness is not the lack of contents. In the myth of the cave, the one who returns is expelled because of their extravagance, because their look sees a lot and too little. The image is rejected, it does not liberate. The mirror gives us back emptiness. The midwife does not give birth. Emptying, trying and taking care of emptiness is an activity in itself, a task that also belongs to the word. What is it necessary to put so that emptiness gets more effective? What words to say in order to give silence? What exhibition is this, *without place*, without ostentation? Leaving the room bare is not the same as clearing it. Filling it in with mechanisms and procedures to leave it bare is an art, that of not being in safekeeping, that of being out in the open without epidermis. We lack words. Their lacking makes say. And, then, delaying in this non-place of the rooms gives an unexpected way of freedom. It is the recreation.

**J.C.M.** – *Of course, the ‘zulo’ is not interesting as far as an architectonic space is concerned. However it is interesting in the sense that it is a place where a extreme experience of leaving the room bare takes place. Somehow, almost all the elements and objects that I put in my work have undergone this process of bareness, of loss of reference and sense, in order to enter a process of being in the work limiting empty spaces, spaces of absences. In this sense, poetry has helped me see and sharpen these senses. J. A. Valente is an example in this sense and I think that Hugo Mújica – an*



*author that I have recently discovered – is radical concerning this search for bareness when, for instance, he says:*

*We have to dare the open and the fall:*

*the desert of the thirst*

*not the thirst for the desert.*

*The mirror does not give us back valid images; it is a tool to think about that idea of emptiness. I think this idea is clear when I turn the mirrors face down; we deny their capacity for producing an image of the world but we need their presence as a testimony of the impossibility.*

*Always mirrors resting; never put as if they were solemn objects to face or to find self-affirmations; seldom put opposite our eyes; sometimes displayed horizontally, as if they were the remains of a look.*

**A.G.** – The experience of the limits of the mirror is the experience of the limits of the language. Not only because of the impenetrable nature of that which wraps us, the mirror ‘zulo’, but because it frees butterflies that can not be found, since they lack space. When the maximum transparency is given, what is revealed is the insurmountable nature of the obstacle. And, here, oblivion is also constitutive. Mirrors bring about new oblivion. This is the gift of what is made, the liberation of other possibilities. The monument pays tribute, as memento, as memory, to what can only be oblivion. And that is writing, copy of a copy, bastard son, dying parricide, pretence. Mirrors vanish and they already give more than images, they go to pieces towards the exterior.

**J.C.M.** – *When we search for what we want to be memory, we come across oblivion. This seems to be the game of possibilities, always having paradoxes in mind. And this also follows to what I think when I work with the flag. The poles, the white canvas, the flags are not symbols of surrender, but rather a space of waiting that we have been limiting all along this conversation. Symbols that join us are no longer possible. Let’s remember those images of genre or rather minor genre, of the leaders as exalted subjects by the symbol of the flag. Both, character and flag, exalt each other and they are an example. But there are too many flags to believe in them; either we become cynical and ironical to play games such as those by Jasper Johns or we must empty and silence the image to raise new possibilities.*

**A.G.** – Obsessions are repeated, the conversation that only hits the target and that only gives the blank.

\* This conversation took place in June and July 2001 due to the preparation of the exhibition.