



FERNANDO PRATS *catch on the fly*



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Thinking the Outside
[Notes on the nomad cartography
of Fernando Prats]

Fernando Castro Flórez

"I can now say it: the starting point of an artist is the great feeling of an enormous gap in nature that he sometimes has, a gap that he may later fill, using the gap itself as an impulse, with some pieces, but which – the sign that he is an artist! – will come back, time and time again, in the form of a great vacuum, a vacuum that gives pleasure: a vacuum in turmoil".

PETER HANDKE

[Beyond] morbid (aesthetic) symptoms

Some creators manage to keep their balance on the dangerous ridge that separates (or brings into contact) the wonderful and the banal. It is precisely there and not in any empty transcendentalism that the exceptional must emerge, delving into an etymologically idiotic reality in order to attain other intensities, works that I dare to call magnificent, in which the brightness of pleasure and the vibration of concept are not forced to collide. When a fossilizing strategy has imposed what Baudrillard called the trans-aesthetic of banality and when works are, literally, objects of superstition¹ and creative process resemble the giddy choice of memory (souvenir), the meaning of art should be revised, like a journey in search of itself, which ultimately becomes a line of resistance against the diffuse aestheticization of hegemonic spectacularization. Undoubtedly, our post-historic sensitivity is an heir to the dismantling of the avant-garde poetics that occurred with pop –a true cataclysm for the traditional concept of art². Guidieri pointed out that the aestheticization of the world, radicalized by pop art, is shadowed by a discreet humor verging on affectation which shows a deficiency vis-à-vis any kind of depth, as well as a hypnotic dependence on the social aura it attaches to things: a kind of mystery that today plays a profound role, although everything may be a mystery without any trace of greatness.

"It is very difficult to speak of painting today because it is very difficult to see it. Because generally it no longer wants exactly to be looked at, but to be absorbed visually without leaving any traces. In some way modern painting could be characterized as the simplified aesthetic form of the impossible Exchange. So that the best discourse about painting would be the equivalent of a painting where there is nothing to see. The equivalent

of an object, the object of art, that isn't an object any more"³. Paradoxical logic, which is what defines the contemporary prostheses of vision, although it is also found disseminated in the fractured tradition of painting, will impose the oblique and coded rhetoric, the estrangement that simultaneously means the acceptance of the veil's function. We must be clear: painting does not start from scratch, but from an imperfect erasure or, perhaps, from the resistance of signs converted into clichés⁴.

Today banality is made sacred, in that hang-time that is consumed in what we –to parody Barthes– might call the Xerox-degree of culture. Baudrillard spoke of this in relation to art of our time, which can lead to the strictest kind of indifference. Art is cast upon a pseudo-rituality of suicide, a simulation of sometimes embarrassing proportions where banality gets larger in scale⁵. After the heroic sublime and the orthodoxy of trauma⁶, there would be ecstasy among those who dug its grave or, in other words, a simulation of the third degree⁷. Fortunately, artists keep on appearing who, despite the "Biennialism" (exhausted, tired or shamelessly cynical) and the crisis which is not –to begin with– financial but rather the failure of an entire project (in every sense: political, social, philosophical, etc.), manage to generate works and activate processes that go beyond bogged-down literalism. Fernando Prats is a worthy example of a creator who has known how to forge a plastic space of his own, unafraid of being unique. He has stayed far away from the mainstream and resisted the urge to copy the dominant rhetoric (whether it be the rhetoric of the traumatic/abject, of the identity/deconstructed or of juvenile/relational), thereby accepting a harsh solitude. This distancing may be what has made him so strong. At any rate, one thing is certain: when we look at his works, they convey a tremendous intensity, conviction without alibis and above all, an ability to present, without any metalinguistic knots, a reflection on the expansion and redefinition of painting that gives us food for thought. For Prats has established a hybrid domain in which performance is the foundation of pictorial sedimentation but where cartography is also essential to the final configuration of his "installations." Going beyond contemporary morbidity and nihilistic complaisance, he has displayed a fascinating sedimentation of the world upon smoke, as if the combustion or

calcination of images opened up the possibility of other marks, new routes, another "geometry"⁸.

Something more concrete than the flat

Among the antagonisms that characterize our epoch, perhaps a key place belongs to the one that is established between abstraction –which increasingly determines our lives– and the deluge of pseudo-concrete images. If we understand abstraction as the progressive self-discovery of the material bases of art, within a process of unique depicturalization⁹, we would also have to understand that in such a process, there is a hard core of the modern. Without doubt there is a considerable breach between epic modernism (exemplified in the case of painting through American abstract expressionism) and nihilist existential gesturalism (in which some moments of emerging after conceptual dematerialization, the phenomenological givenness of the minimal and thus the crisis of Major Reports taking place within the post-modern condition.

A long time has gone by since theoreticians such as Michael Fried contemplated, almost with a panic, the arrival of a plastic behavior that rejected modern purity in order to embrace the theatricality of objectuality, a kind literalism came to be identified with the end of art or its very negation¹⁰. We are well-aware of the effectiveness of dripping as an expression of energy that must be controlled¹¹. A rarefied expansion of painting takes place based on the certainty that there is nothing else behind the canvas and of course, that there is no model of the vision that is anything like Nature¹². Fernando Prats manages to overcome the strict "Modernist" code by producing paintings which, even though they are "flat", do not for that reason correspond to the ideology of flatness. In his case, the natural (soil, birds, insects, water, geysers, etc.) is precisely what "executes" the painting. It is not, therefore, an abstraction, but the pinnacle of concreteness, a process of sedimentation of events in which the subject's action is offset by the confidence in chance, by the conviction that what is occurring is what deserves to be received; the traces show us the way.

The deconstruction of gesture and the drive of the trace

We must not forget that, contrary to the Freudian view that the unconscious, as shown by dreams, was a cache of images obtained from repressed

memories, Clement Greenberg argued that, with painters, unconscious scribbling produced, at most, forms and colors with a "schematic" likeness; that is, they were flat and abstract, rather than "realistic" representations tied to real phenomena. At first glance, Prats' works may make us think of gestural abstraction, of the surrendering to the "mental daydream," letting the hand or arm wander, uncontrolled, at will, but what is actually captured there, on that smoky surface, is something that generally has nothing to do with the focalization of the self.

"When we look at a painting, we see an accumulation of gestures, the superposition and organization of the materials, the yearning for the inanimate to come to life, but we do not see the hand itself. The image is an immense poem without words, on that surface are the events at the mercy of gravity: in a certain way, each painting is born of a conflict between opposing forces"¹³. There is no other point, in this world of shadows and solitude, other than the painting itself. The viewer has to penetrate its interior, see himself at the mercy of displacements, feel the attraction and dissonance¹⁴. Modernity is about gestures, not images. Many have been lost, others have become totally pathetic. "The being in language," writes Giorgio Agamben, "is like a huge gap in memory, like an incurable lack of words"¹⁵. Gesture is merely a means, something that can be understood as the power of exhibition. Specifically, the gesture of painting is a motion loaded with meaning, a free motion that contains something of an enigma, arrow, path, indication or route that coincides with the destination of a glance. Flusser said that the gesture of painting is a moment of self-analysis (auto-analyse) –that is to say, of self-awareness, in which giving and having meaning become intertwined, where the possibility of changing the world and of being there for the other come together: "the picture to be painted is anticipated in the gesture, and once painted, the painting becomes gesture solidified and set in place"¹⁶.

We must bear in mind that the gesture is the imaginary signifier of modern art: "Modern painting –in particular, abstract expressionism– precisely underlines production of what is significant, but it would not therefore be legitimate to suppose that this practice involves a deconstruction, a violation or a transgression of the pictorial space"¹⁷. Fernando Prats re-examines this fetishism of the gesture in order to show us another world, so-

mething that forces us to surrender to alterity, to let other traces make themselves visible. "The trait is attracted and retrac(t)ed there by itself, attracts and dispenses with itself there. It is situated. It situates between the visible edging and the phantom in the center, from which we fascinate"¹⁸. To a certain extent, Prats' poetics can be understood as post-performative, as the recovery of the body that is not fixed in an (impositive) metaphysics of presence. For Jacques Derrida, for example, the body is not a presence, "it is –how to put it– and experience of context, of dissociation, of dislocations"¹⁹. However, the artist is the one who always leaves traces and materials that sometimes make up something resembling a crime scene²⁰. The trace is something that indicates and is not erased, but also something that is not present in a definite way. At a time in which we have accepted, perhaps all too calmly, destinerance versus the ideology of the "virtualization of the world", a number of veiled situations appear, traces of difference, events that have something paradoxical about them, indications that set us adrift creatively: "we leave traces everywhere –viruses, lapses, germs and catastrophes– signs of imperfection which are, so to speak, man's signature in the heart of the artificial world."²¹. All these traces –almost magical– are the decisive element of Fernando Prats' work, which gives us back the furious energy of the real; that is, the imposing indication that there is indeed an outside. His works are a catastrophe²², a final act which does not, however, bring anything to a close: the curtain has not fallen. Through the black –just as the merveilleux quotidien shines through the cracks of Malevitch's icon – shines the recollection of trips, the desiring drive, the traces of the world, and in the end, the happening of the things that happen to us.

The unveiling and incarnation of painting

Fernando Prats is the perfect example of a contemporary artist who is capable of keeping the marvelous paths of painting open, without clinging to established dogmas or following the current trend of an ultimately decorative hybridization. With incredible lucidity, he has resumed the notion of painting as event²³ without returning, in a Mannerist way, to the passion of dripping. What is certain is that the horizontal territory around which Pollock did his "choreography", as

the photographs of Hans Namuth made overly clear, was simultaneously a physical support and an imaginary territory for projections of an unconscious nature. From the archetypes/expressionism of that epic generation, so close in every sense, to the trauma of the global establishment of Nihilism (that idea that writing poetry after Auschwitz was barbaric), to the age of devastating terrorism and Manichean politics (unfortunately, our world has become a reality show), changed radically in the sense of chance. We put our faith in these encounters, apparently unafraid, far from the sublime that Newman defined as the pleasure that something is happening instead of nothing. Surely, the proliferation of commentary, that culture of epilogue we have created, makes it extremely hard to find real presences. It makes everything tediously familiar and dumps –and I do not exaggerate – magic onto the rubbish heap of the past. But in spite of all this, I insist, there are some artists, such as Fernando Prats, who have the courage to revolt, without any strident gestures or pseudo-radical rhetoric. They are brave enough to get to the bottom of things, literally, returning to the cave or the crypt to show that what we are bewitched by is merely simulacra.²⁴ That un-veiling –if you'll excuse the play on words – insists upon the function of the veil; in other words, an intensely poetic exploration of that thin surface that attracts desire like a magnet. Precisely because painting is that aesthetic experience around which constant funeral rights are celebrated, it is equipped to show what – to borrow Hal Foster's terms – we shall refer to as the posthumous condition of art. The phantom quality of the work refers to the beloved shadow on the wall, that sad experience which silently cries out to be brought back from the dead. In the meantime, though, it constructs another form of corporality so that it can find consolation, however precarious, or better yet, so that it can give memory something to hold onto. Fernando Prats works almost like an alchemist, blackening the old surface of representation so that things can be produced now, which are not in the least bit insignificant. His work is, at once, a different display of subjectivity and a strange withdrawal that makes me think that the hand (that appendage that has made us who we are) is going extinct. In effect, Fernando Prats throws stones at his paintings, he lets branches lash at them and pigeons mark them with the flapping of their wings; photographs of the work

process reveal that he licks the blackened surface to leave enigmatic traces, and that worms even "draw" fascinating labyrinthine lines on the fertile territory of this other incarnation of painting. Fernando Prats wants to overcome the "instruments of painting" so that the work of art is produced in the gap between world and earth; it is, really, in the hermeneutical space of friction, between that which is within reach and that which is set aside as a treasure (in a deliberate simplification of Heidegger's ideas about the origins of the work of art) where truth –a kind of atmospheric time– is put into play. When Prats takes all the way to the Arctic glaciers the sheets of plastic he used to cover (I insist: veil) Ignatius of Loyola's mystical cave of illumination in Manresa, he is making, in an extraordinary way, a new aesthetic geography. What this singular artist recovers is the sacred dimension, without succumbing to the confessional in the process. His rituals essentially have to do with the desire to give art the aesthetic commotion which, since the time of Aristotle, has been referred to as catharsis. When catastrophe is imminent, at the moment when the story of life (represented, yes) becomes unbearable, a purification occurs that undoubtedly teaches us something. The curtain falls or the *deus ex machina* noisily bursts onto the scene so that logical thought assumes, when the moment of illusion is over, the tensions of what is left for us. What remains is exactly what obsesses Fernando Prats; that which we cannot tell if it is superfluous or lacking. Fortunately, instead of reiterating an aesthetization of the eschatological (something clearly mandatory in the contemporary world), what this creator raises up like a dark map is the plural face of a nomadic art. Fernando Prats travels towards the unknown but also towards the beginning. When he reduces the pictorial surface to smoke, he does not settle for Malevitch's desert, nor does he yearn for things past (the gold of Byzantium). Instead, he activates chance; he takes action so that the magic can appear.²⁵

That which remains is established by poets

The path of poetry is, etymologically, a method that requires a stimulus to get going. This fervor –a combination of the calmness and the restlessness that crosses the river– is what makes Fernando Prats stick his head in his materials let his fingernails fall across rough surfaces²⁶. These enormous

sewn hosts may end up as pillows for bodies that haven't arrived yet. Dream or epiphany, darkening of the world and glimmers of what we do not even need to "identify". As Amador Vega so delicately said of Fernando Prats, "the artist roams blindly around space, scratching the veils of smoke of propitiatory fire." The invocation of blindness may have something to do with mythical clairvoyance, with the poet's ability to fuse times and impose *aletheia* (non-oblivion). The sacred undoubtedly runs through all of Prats' work, an inopportune artist in every sense.

The sacred manifests itself all of a sudden: it is hierophany. When the sacred appears, any old object becomes something else, without ceasing to be itself, as it continues to share the circulating cosmic medium. For those that have a religious experience, all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality. To access this real existence, a spiritual birth is required. This takes the form of a "second birth" that makes the religious experience an experience of initiation. Sacred knowledge and by extension, wisdom, are conceived as the fruit of an initiation that implied the death of profane existence followed by a rebirth. This rebirth occurs in a world that does not exist, but which must be constructed and founded according to a scheme: the ritual that repeats the cosmogony. The goal is to find an absolute pillar of support, the center of the world that organizes things and beings around it. To locate this central, omnipotent place, we need a sign that tells us the place is sacred. When the sign does not appear, its appearance is provoked. Then a kind of evocation is generally practiced, in which animals play a key role (particularly a lamb, like the one that Fernando Prats, in a 1996 action, presses or hugs against a post): they are the ones that indicate the appropriate place to house the sanctuary or the people. The sacred therefore configures the real and is, at once, the real *par excellence*; it is also power, efficiency, source of life, fertility and sociability. The religious man's desire to inhabit the sacred matches his desire to inhabit an objective reality, scaring away the tortuous, dangerous, deformed...in short, the chaotic.

In Fernando Prats' extraordinary works, the sacred – this must be stressed– does not lead us to any "religion." Rather, it evokes or, to be more precise, reveals the power of that reality. Friedhelm Mennekes noted that this artist comes close to the inner eye of Jose

ph Beuys, certainly immersed in the totemic, and to Kounellis' idea that it is necessary to show the non-visible or at least, to try and ascertain "what the image originally represented."²⁷ Fernando Prats' retablos, full of that body of Christ given to us at communion (the host multiplied until it becomes a thing) do not demand any prayers, nor do they impose the fear of the numinous. On the contrary: they reach out to us, even though the hand cannot be seen. At risk of sounding too romantic, I'd say that with Prats, there is a night journey. In total darkness, when the separation from the maternal is more painful, we grope for a hand in the night and sometimes, a miracle occurs. Another hand may fall upon ours, fulfilling our wish, but even if that does not happen, it does not mean failure. Lezama Lima wrote, based on that experience which is really that of the symbolic (the broken password that always yearns for the other to arrive so that it can be completed) that inhalation and exhalation are a universal rhythm: "The hidden is that which completes us; it is the plenitude in the wavelength. The knowledge that it does not belong to us and not knowing that it belongs to us constitutes, for me, true knowledge". The deep wisdom of Fernando Prats's painting brings us to Gaston Bachelard's domain of material imagination: fire, smoke, water, steam. We have something here that reminds us of ashes²⁸, those remains that, for Celan, were the possible beginnings of poem. The erratic impressions of the earth that Prats lays down "as painting" generate a territory of profound poetry and enigmatic beauty.

Aquatic dreams and specular reflections

"One dreams before contemplating. Before being a spectacle, every landscape is an oneiric experience. One only observes with an aesthetic passion those landscapes one has seen before in one's dreams"²⁹. Freud pointed out that, after complete interpretation, all dreams reveal themselves to be the fulfillment of a desire; that is, dreams are the hallucinatory realization of an unconscious desire.³⁰ "The creation of symbols is a partial comprehension owing to the refusal to satisfy, under the pressure of the principle of reality, all of the organism's desires and drives. In the form of a compromise, it is a partial liberation vis-à-vis reality, a return to the paradise of infancy with its "everything goes" and its hallucinatory realization of desires. The biological state of the organism while sleeping is, in

itself, a partial resumption of the fetus's position inside the uterus. Unconsciously, of course, we restage that state; a return to the womb. We are naked, we raise our knees, lower our head, curl up under the sheets; we recreate the fetal position; our organism shuts itself off to all external stimuli and influences and finally, as we have seen, our dreams partially restore the realm of the principle of pleasure"³¹. Sleep traps us and leads us to the abyss of the sublime/immense, of tenderness, of the tattered memory of the womb. Therein lies a deep truth; Plato himself came to the defense of the dream experience³² against the prejudice that we must "free ourselves from appearances". Surely, there is a knot or maze-like structure that keeps us from seeing our dreams clearly. As Freud himself said, the navel of dreams is the unknown, something that is off the grid of the intellectual world³³. I think that Fernando Prats' work has, with all its power, that dimension of dreaming as the journey towards what we do not yet know. The fog of vision, the confusion of night, the frayed nature of memories are synchronized with that which is set upon the black surface, on that layer of smoke. Beyond any kind of facile dramatism or negation of images, Prats brings us closer to the fleeting nature, to the fragility of our desires, which are as vertiginous as water and as inapprehensible as smoke. The sensual dimension of dreaming³⁴ is tied to seminal water; that is, to that wetness that comes from the nymphs, something that lies deep inside our unconscious.³⁵ Waters recall maternity, and also the void of being³⁶; they summon Narcissus, they naturalize our likeness³⁷, making us teeter between identity and alterity³⁸. Water has the virtue of mellowing pain, even though it can reflect our despair. "Credulous boy," writes Ovid in his *Metamorphosis*, "why do you try in vain to grasp fleeting images? What you are seeking is nowhere. If you turn away, you shall lose what you love. That which you perceive is the shadow of a reflected form: it has no substance of its own. It both comes with you and stays with you; it will depart with you – if you can depart." The reflection can lead to a process of interiorization as well as to an expansion of the idea of infinity. The specular image seems to be the threshold of the visible world, that identification or, better put, transformation that takes place in the subject (function of self) when it accepts an image that constitutes the symbolic womb, before language returns it to the universe

and puts it in complex social situations. Apuleius, accused of using magic because he had a looking glass, praised it very effectively, saying that due to its ability to capture images, the mirror is better than clay, which lacks energy; marble, which lacks color; painting, which has no body or volume, and also that it can capture the movement of images on its small surface better than anything else: "By trapping the motion of the objects and people that pass before it, the mirror manages to express in fragments the passing of the years of a man's life and the changes that occur during it"³⁹. But in reality, the mirror retains nothing; its mercury background rejects all memory. All that remains is the yearning of the one who contemplates his reflection in it. Fernando Prats projects or "reflects" himself in his works; he's always involved corporally, devoted to an extreme nomadism, seeking the tremor that rouses us from our sleep and snaps us out of our polar inertia. His dark surfaces may recall mercury, precisely the substance that allows the mirror to function. It is really thanks to total blackness that our identity appears, albeit inverted. The mirror is a threshold phenomenon that names the concrete object that is in front of it, although it can also be extensive or intensive and make the eye see places that it usually cannot decipher. Glass acts as a metaphor for water, as well as an element that causes us to reveal the invisible; the mirror is not only a duplicating object, it can also show the hidden part of the real: the difference of the identical, which is apparent in the reflection, entails the emergence of a dissymmetry, anchored both in desire and the logic of the gaze: "From the beginning, in the dialectic between the eye and the gaze, we see that there is no match at all, but rather a true decoy effect. When in love, I yearn for a look, it is something intrinsically unsatisfactory that always fails because you never look at me from where I see. Conversely, what I look at is never what I want to see. And, whatever people say, the relationship between painter and aficionado [...] is a game, a game of *trompe-l'oeil*: a game to deceive in some way"⁴⁰. Perhaps life is but the story of a mirror that gets warped, "leading, like a punishment, to solitude and to forest of night, where we are a memory of ourselves, trembling in the hand"⁴¹, and thus, the artist has to bear witness to the indeterminate; the possibility that nothing will happen is often as

sociated with the feeling of anguish, “but suspense can also be accompanied by pleasure, for instance pleasure in welcoming the unknown, and even by joy, to speak like Baruch Spinoza, the joy obtained by the intensification of being that the event brings with it”⁴². Prats’ artistic experience is nothing but a surrendering to the events, a speculation that leaves traces, whether they be of water –as in the impressive intervention he did at Los Hervideros in Lanzarote for the II Canary Islands Biennial– or of steam, like that “cinematographic” steam emanating from the asphalt of Manhattan. “Pre-Socratic” elements totally belong in the fertile imagination of an artist who does not seek so much his silhouette in the mirror as the subtle, poetic contact with a world that is in a trance of disappearance.

(Altered) still lifes

It has been pointed out that the still life genre tries to produce an idea of zero time or a lasting instant, with motion being blocked. Alberti argued in *De Pictura* (“On Painting”) that bodies move in many different ways, growing larger and smaller, stopping, shifting positions, “but we painters, who wish to depict the movement of the spirit with the movement of the limbs, show movement only by changing place.”⁴³. Still-life paintings meant a shift from interest in action, – given that nothing happens in these works– to matters of composition, although in an allegorical substratum a desire may be expressed to represent that which is, strictly speaking, beyond any kind of expression: death itself. If what is immobile is the instant (the time of representation in the painting), the exemplary case of this paradox would be the still life, which takes evolution back to zero, successfully presenting the inexorable sense of time and the vanity of worldly pleasures. This constitutes a new paradox: “in order to depict the passing of time (time represented) it is necessary to block the time of the representation”⁴⁴. The value of an empty space is, above all, the absence of any possible contents, whereas a still life is defined by the presence and composition of objects that are wrapped in or become transformed into their own continent: “the still life is time, because everything that changes is in time, but time itself does not change, it could only change itself into another time, until infinity.”. Certainly time is the visual reserve of what happens or, in other terms, the horizon of events, an

occurrence of moments which, in the still life, has been frozen.

Historically, the *vanitas* conveys the moral message of the futility of human endeavors⁴⁶, the awareness of time that must elapse and the premonition of death⁴⁷. To some extent all still lifes include the *vanitas* motif⁴⁸; that allegorical depiction of the brevity of life was easily rooted in the Spanish religious feeling of the 17th century⁴⁹. Melancholy sees things from the viewpoint of loss; contempt of the world causes the consciousness to affirm the vanity of all things. That obsession, faced with the fleeting nature of time and the disillusionment that comes over us at the very moment that we attain the object of our desires “is precisely expressed in the aspiration to the most perfect solitude and paradoxically is shown in the most idyllically serene landscape”⁵⁰. Fernando Prats’ works can also be interpreted as “still lifes” or even “landscapes”. In effect, that which constitutes aesthetic experience is alive and does not lead so much to an abysmal sadness, although the color of mourning (the black of smoke) may be dominant, but to a strange manifestation of euphoria. Here too, the problem is how to pin down time, but this does not lead to either scenification or to a reduction to an ordered table. On the contrary, the chaotic and the unexpected, the Earth’s inexhaustibility, open up or –better put– alter the reductive sense of the pictorial genre.

Return to the sublime

Bachelard stressed that the poetic experience must be governed by the dream experience. “What is poetry? Fortunately,” argues Adam Zagajewski, “we don’t know for sure and we don’t need to know in an analytical way; no definition (and there are so many!) can formalize this element of nature. Nor do I have any intention of defining it. Nevertheless, it is appealing to contemplate the image of poetry in its “between” movement – poetry as one of the most important vehicles that takes us upward– and to find that fervor precedes irony: fervor, that arduous birdcall that we answer with our own imperfect song. We need poetry just as we need beauty (although they say there are countries in Europe where the word beauty is absolutely forbidden). Beauty is not for aesthetes, but for all those who seek a serious path; it is a call, a promise, perhaps not of happiness –as Stendhal would have it– but indeed of a great eternal pil-

grimage”⁵¹. Beauty arises, almost accidentally, in a pictorial touch or an indescribably light trace of drawing. Consider the famous Friedrich painting, *The Monk by the Sea*, one of the most oft-cited examples of sublimity; the manifestation of a territory we are barely able to penetrate. The sublime is not just the terror or failure of the concept, it is also the spark or glimmer that signals the advent of poetry. That metaphysical shudder⁵² of sublime feeling leaves us speechless in every way: it is the dark, luxurious, silent presence that invites us to halt. The writer Vladimir Nabokov was once asked if he was surprised by anything in life. He replied: “The marvel of consciousness – that sudden window swinging open on a sunlit landscape amid the night of non-being”. Though his works, Fernando Prats opens up that window of the marvelous. Against the perverse pleasure taken in the repugnant⁵³ he imposes “his” compositions of beautiful, erratic symmetries; he outlines spaces where the encounter encounters us; he marks, allegorically, paths that make us penetrate poetry. We keep our eye on the beautiful⁵⁴ while dreams keep on coming, as we try to decipher in the water or in the smoke what is happening to us.

We must keep our minds open to everything so we can make, in Freudian terms, a constant “free association”; that is, we must work towards a radical stimulation of dreams⁵⁵. That beauty that gives the impression that, like water, there is not enough of it or it is about to vanish,⁵⁶ can impose itself once again as a sublime feeling. Let us remember that Kant associated sublime feeling precisely with water’s impetuous display of physical power: “the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty waterfall of a mighty river, and such alike; these exhibit our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might. But the sight of them is more attractive, the more fearful it is, provided that we are in security. And we willingly call these objects sublime, because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height, and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind”. The immensity of Nature also reveals an immense power in the subject. Perhaps when we are at a loss for them, due to the magnitude of emotion, words are where the imaginary starts to weave its fabulous constructions; it is the void that allows desire to be articulated⁵⁷; that is, shadows, the partial objects, impose a distorted gaze, an approximation,

shall we say, a trembling, excited gesture, that tries to rhyme with the (ever-fleeing) intensity of dreaming.

“... out of joint”

We should bear in mind that when the subject comes too close to fantasy, self-erasure occurs. Painting is left in the room as aphanisis⁵⁸, but also as a secret treasure (agalma: a jewel that glitters in the darkness and giddily seduces us) that guarantees a minimum amount of fantasmatic consistency as it belongs to the subject; let us remember that the objet a as object of fantasy is something more than myself, it is “that thing” thanks to which I perceive myself as “worthy of the Other’s desire”. The original question of desire is not that which really wants to know what it is you want to say, but that which hopes to find out what the others want from me: what do they see in me? What am I to the others? In more topological terms: the division of the subject is not the division between and I and the other, between two contents, but the division between something and nothing, between the characteristic of identification and the void. “Decentrement thus first designates the ambiguity, the oscillation between symbolic and imaginary identification –the undecidability as to where my true point is, in my ‘real’ self or in my external mask, with the possible implication that my symbolic mask can be ‘truer’ than what it conceals; than the ‘true face’ behind it”⁵⁹. Decentrement (as opposed to the Cartesian theater of central consciousness that is the focus of subjectivity) is, in a way, a means of identifying the void. Even though it is localized, painting is dislocated. “The time is out of joint. The world is going badly. It is worn but its wear no longer counts. Old age or youth – one no longer counts in that way. The world has more than one age. We lack the measure of the measure. [...] Contre-temps. The time is out of joint. Theatrical speech, Hamlet’s speech, Hamlet’s speech before the theater of the world, of history, and of politics. The age is off its hinges. Everything, beginning with time, seems out of kilter, unjust, disadjusted. The world is going very badly, it wears as it grows, as the Painter also says at the beginning of *Timon of Athens* (which is a Marx play, is it not). For, this time, it is a painter’s speech, as if he were speaking of a spectacle or before a tableau: ‘How goes the world? It wears, sir, as it grows’⁶⁰. The curtain is a black painting. Fernando Prats knows

a lot about this and, in spite of it all, his images do not repeat the “apocalyptic” tone, nor do they aim to erase anything. Rather, he lets all the traces take on the most fascinating centrality. His “painting” is, in every sense, a place, an energy zone where the event vibrates and trembles.

On the aporetic

We know that desire can be opened up based on indeterminacy, on unsayability or even disinterrance. “Thus,” writes Derrida, “I think that, just like death, unsayability, what I also call disinterrance, the possibility a gesture has of never reaching its destination, is the condition of the movement of desire which would otherwise die beforehand”⁶¹. Derrida argues that only because there is no full presence is it possible to experience, among other things, the work of art⁶². Without the possibility of difference, the desire of presence as such, there is no way it would find any room to breath, which means that it is headed towards dissatisfaction: the difference, in the end, comes from what it prohibits, paradoxically allowing the exact same thing that it disallows.

Perhaps air is the place of images, and dust can become the pigment of the aura⁶³. Detritus, unnameable things fallen on the floor or, to be precise, on the Large Glass, are fixed (fate preserved) on a surface of transparencies that are deceiving, full of cracks and today still provocatively enigmatic. This *Elevage de poussière* (photographed by Man Ray in 1920) is the zero degree of the contemporary eschatological-catastrophic imaginary. The poetics of Fernando Prats makes the most out, in an extraordinary way, of the glass where Duchampian breeds dust without getting trapped by the “disease of the ready-made”. Sensations and visions can be deposited on the canvas in many ways, but the hand can also let itself be guided by impulses that have nothing to do with the concept or the structure of representations. The painter, as Valery said, contributes his body, “immersed in the visible by his body, itself visible, the seer does not appropriate what he sees: he merely approaches it by looking, he opens himself up to the world”⁶⁴.

The opportune moment

The act of painting can lead us up to that edge of the abyss where we erase ourselves without losing, as a result, the intensity of the experience⁶⁵ in a moment of true ecstasy. Fernando Prats lets

himself be influenced by *kairós*, aware that what we call improvisation is always –the paradox is worth considering – studied down to the very last detail⁶⁶. We must learn from how things grow in nature and eventually decide on the right moment. Perhaps chronological time, meteorological time, talk about nothing but a mixture; that is, about *kairos*, that which is opportune⁶⁷. The light that makes things visible in the ball of the bounce imposes the time of nature: there the cut and continuity, the static and the fluid come together⁶⁸. Fernando Prats’ powerful intervention at La Gallera in Valencia traps flight; it shows the marks of the flapping of the pigeons’ wings. If, on the one hand, it reminds us of the old function of space, it also refers to a VAST field of symbols ranging from the mystical to the alchemical, from the idea of reclusion to the hackneyed image of peace, from purity to the dark or “contaminated surface”. Without sublimation but with an aerial impulse, Prats leaves spaces so that the viewers will apply their own imagination; that is, so that instead of receiving a closed message or slogan, they can leave their own trace on the work with their gaze. The works of Fernando Prats incarnate the immense, that strange intermediate place in which the sublime can manifest itself⁶⁹, that feeling of terror that gives reason a chance to avoid the failure of concept; it is a finality without end, a threshold of the uncertain. From aionic time to the suction of shadow, from the soul to simultaneities, he gradually opens up a gap from which extremely fertile symbolic processes emerge, although these psychic condensations are also, literally, precipices. “Of all the arts,” Deleuze writes, “painting is the only one that necessarily, ‘hysterically’ includes its own catastrophe, and is constituted therefore as a flight forward”⁷⁰.

Encountering the voyage

The adventure of death can also be conveyed as an aesthetic adventure. There is a deep correlation between the adventurer, the traveler and the artist, in their mixture of fate and fragments, their peculiar attitude towards life: “It is because the work of art and the adventure stand juxtaposed to life... the one and the other are analogous to the totality of life itself, even as it is presented in the brief outline and the condensation of a dream experience”⁷¹. The ambiguity of the journey causes the adventurer to be

both someone who is projected in the future, who is radically non-historical, and thus a creature of the present. From an aesthetic point of view as well, adventure and travel are something contemplated after the fact, they are something that is offered to be narrated. In this time-dense experience of adventure, the tragic (in the mortal adventure) and the novelesque (in the aesthetic adventure) manifest themselves no less than the enclave of the erotic adventure. In all of these forms, distance plays an essential role: not only the physical distance of place, but the emotional distance of death, irony with regard to what is narrated or the passion that stands in the way of the romantic encounter. It seems that, during the journey, man attends the spectacle of his imagination; he contemplates how the tragic certainty of the absence (or distance) from his native country can create a space for the display of magical places. Adventure sets forth a flexible time that acquires the form of an inhabitable beauty. In a profound sense, all adventurers are erotic, they all postulate the encounter, the moment when passion is unleashed, even though they know how precarious and tragic it can be: "an amorous relationship clearly brings together the two elements of adventure: the conquest of power and the impossible acceptance of imposition, the sense achievement due to one's own faculties and the reliance on fate, which graces us with an unpredictable element external to ourselves"⁷². Baudelaire pointed out how this freedom of adventure or travel is unrelated to serene complaisance, at times becoming serious and tedious when we are asked what we saw. On the journey, guided by the compass of desire, the dark pleasure of becoming a foreigner may arise, although we could also talk about a passage from dehumanization to anonymity.

We know, in the midst of general mobilization, that travelling can be a form of stopping completely. Hence the concept of the trip to nowhere, as opposed to the tourist's obsession with "destinations"⁷³. There is a singular pleasure in fleeing and trying and be others, though we are bound to end up extremely exhausted⁷⁴. This is what Baudelaire experienced, the secret pleasure of the flânerie, that "botanizing on the asphalt" where junkmen appeared like poets of modernity. Foreignness inhabits us. This does not necessarily mean being torn all the time; it can also lead to the joy of perpetual transience⁷⁵. The artistic forms of travel act as

a line of resistance against the divinity of tourism, but they also show its impossibility⁷⁶ or –better put – its heterotopic character. Perhaps contemporary art tries, in some cases, to incite us to learn to travel again⁷⁷, even though this entails getting lost or knowing that there is no return⁷⁸. Fernando Prats, like one who goes on an expedition to frozen regions, demands individuals who are willing to take risks; all of his work is a journey, an aesthetic adventure and of course, a life adventure that takes him all the way to the Arctic or the desert to paint, as I have already said, with a geyser or the steam coming out of a plastic tube in the Big Apple.

Route maps are, as Freud noted, essential to psychic activity. Through them the identity of the itinerary of the experience that runs through it is expressed. In the end, the libido is not formed by metamorphosis, but by routes. Deleuze noted how Australia's aborigines connect nomad itineraries with journeys in dreams that together make up a network of routes, located in a huge slit in space and time that ought to be read like a map. We should keep in mind that a cartographic conception of subconscious processes is very different from the archaeological perspective; the latter deeply links the unconscious and memory, tending towards the monumental or commemorative; this is a domain of objects and individuals that can identify themselves or legitimize their situation based on the notion of "authenticity." The process is, in this case, vertical and downward, while conversely, maps propose a game of touch-ups that goes beyond the notion of truth as tracking down origins: "from one map to another, we are not dealing with a search for the origin, but rather an evaluation of the movements. Each map is a distribution of dead-end streets, gaps, thresholds and enclosures that go from the bottom to the top. It is not just an inversion of the direction, but rather a difference in nature: the unconscious no longer has to do with persons or objects, but rather with pathways and occurrences; it is no longer an unconscious commemoration but a mobilization, whose objects, rather than staying buried under ground, take flight⁷⁹. All works of art entail a number of different routes, which are only legible when they exist together on the map. The painting, as Fernando Prats shows perfectly, is no longer a window onto the world or a montage on a surface. "To an archaeology-art, which penetrates the millennia in order to reach the immemorial, is

opposed a cartography-art built on 'things of forgetting and places of passing'⁸⁰

In order (not) to reveal the secret

Painting, as Giorgio de Chirico warned, unloads its material, artisanal cargo on us, as well as the enigmatic, disturbing aspects of the world and of life⁸¹. Fernando Prats does not, to recall the Handke quote that serves as an introduction to this essay, cease to invigorate the void. In the friction of the world (like that which is subjected to the onto-technological) and earth (the inexhaustible deposit of meaning) he composes a prodigious cartography or a diagram in which the chaos that is germ, order and rhythm is never absent⁸². The act of painting is not a mere masking of space or an exorcism of trauma⁸³; Prats' fascinating work makes me think that the work of art materializes or sediments the process of *demeurer* –something that is connected, in its multiplicity of meanings, with the demand for a singular intensity in life⁸⁴. Gestures are not differed; rather, they have been executed by another, they are the traces of life in its "unrepresentability". Fernando Prats does not cease to listen, in his fabulous aesthetic dream, to the imperative of travel, spurred on by a radical alterity. His dynamic cartography drives the gaze⁸⁵ to free itself from the monotony of that narcotic banality that is now taking on imperial proportions. The thinking the outside (to use one of Michel Foucault's titles) that Fernando Prats puts into play simultaneously defends that intimacy he shows and veils the mystery of beauty. "I think that you look at paintings with the hope of discovering a secret. Not a secret about art, but about life. And if you finally discover it, it will be still a secret, because, after all, you cannot put it into words. With words the only thing you can do is draw, with your own hand, a rough map to reach the secret."⁸⁶

¹ See Jean Baudrillard: *La ilusión y la desilusión estéticas* ("Aesthetic Illusion and Disillusion"), Ed. Monte Ávila, Caracas, 1998, p. 27.

² "We must really try to think about Pop –or at least I think we must think of Pop– in a more philosophical way. I subscribe to a narrative of the history of modern art in which Pop plays a central role, philosophically speaking. In my narrative, Pop marked the end of the great narrative of Western art, by giving us the self-awareness of the philosophical truth of art. That it was a most unlikely messenger of philosophical depth is something that I willingly confess" [Arthur C. Danto: *Después del fin del arte. El arte contemporáneo y el linde de la historia* ("After the End of Art"), Ed. Paidós, Barcelona, 1999, p. 136].

³ Jean Baudrillard: "Ilusión y desilusión estética", in *Letra internacional*, n° 39, Madrid, 1995, p. 17.

⁴ "[...] modern painting is invaded and besieged before the painter even begins to work. In fact, it would be a mistake to think that the painter works on a white and virgin surface. The entire surface is already invested virtually with all kinds of clichés, which the painter will have to break with" (Gilles Deleuze: *Francis Bacon. Lógica de la sensación*), Ed. Arena, Madrid, 2002, p. 21).

⁵ "There is a very enlightening moment for art, the moment of its own loss (modern art, of course). There is an enlightening moment of simulation, the moment of its sacrifice, that moment when art is submerged in banality (Heidegger says that this submersion in banality is the second fall of man, his modern destiny). However, there is, for want of a better expression, an unenlightened, disillusioned moment, when one learns to live with such banality, to recycle its own waste, and that seems a little like a failed suicide attempt" (Jean Baudrillard: "La simulación en el arte" in *La ilusión y la desilusión estéticas*, Ed. Monte Ávila, Caracas, 1998, p. 51).

⁶ See Hal Foster: *The Return of the Real*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996, pp. 127-168 and Rosalind Krauss: "Le destin de l'informe" in Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois: *L'informe (mode d'emploi)*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1996, pp. 223-242.

⁷ "I have said that the sublime of modern art lied in the magic of its disappearance. But the capital danger for modern art is repeating its own disappearance. All of the forms of this heroic vanishing, this heroic abnegation of form and color, of the very substance of art, have completely unfolded. Even the utopia of the disappearance of art has been accomplished. As for us, we have reached a second generation simulation, or a simulation of the third kind" (Jean Baudrillard: "Towards the vanishing point of art" in *Kunstmachen?*, Munich, 1991, p. 207).

⁸ "[...] the aesthetic work is a privileged domain for displacing us from the geometrical point, for encouraging us to see in ways not dictated in advance by the dominant fiction. The conscious and unconscious faculties "lose their mutual exclusiveness" during the act of artistic creation." (Kaja Silverman: *El umbral del mundo visible*, Ed. Akal, Madrid, 2009, p. 193).

⁹ "Sometimes I feel like you can read the history of modern painting like history of traditional painting upside down, like a movie screened from the end to the beginning: a regressive and systematic dismantling of the invented mechanisms throughout many centuries to make convincing the pictorial representations of the painful triumph of Christendom and stories of national glory. Therefore, transparent surfaces became full of clots of paint, spaces became flat, perspective became arbitrary, drawings didn't worry about the correspondence with real patterns of figures, shading was cancelled in favor of areas with saturated colors which didn't care about edges of shapes, and these very shapes were no more representative of what the eye captures from perceptive reality. The monochrome canvas is the final stage of this collective proceeding of 'dispictorialization'

until someone comes up with the idea of assaulting this very same canvas with a knife in his hands" (Arthur C. Danto: "Abstracción" in *La Madonna del futuro. Ensayos en un mundo del arte plural*, Ed. Paidós, Barcelona, 2003, p. 235).

¹⁰ See Michel Fried: "Arte y objetualidad" in *Minimal Art*, Sala Koldo Mitxelena, San Sebastián, 1996, p. 66.

¹¹ "Drips are generally a kind of incontinence, a mark of control betrayed by the treacheries of fluid [...]. The drips affirmed that paint had an expressive life of its own, that it is not a passive paste to be moved where the artist wants it to be moved, but possesses a fluid energy over which the artist endeavors to exercise control" (Arthur C. Danto: "Pollock y el drip" in *La Madonna del futuro. Ensayos en un mundo del arte plural*, Ed. Paidós, Barcelona, 2003, p. 391).

¹² "In [Pollock's] paintings, the visible is not overly large or open, but rather it denotes that something has been deliberately abandoned. The drama stems from the fact that something that was once before the canvas, where the painter divulged its natural condition, is reduced to nothing. A visual equivalent of the most absolute silence. [...] With all his brilliance he painted, trying to show that behind the canvas, there was nothing else. That terrible, rebellious impulse, born of a frenetic individualism, was his contribution to the suicide of art" (John Berger: "Una manera de compartir" in *Siempre bienvenidos*, Ed. Hueriga & Fierro, Madrid, 2004, pp. 148-149).

¹³ Paul Auster: "Negro sobre blanco" en *El arte del hambre*, Ed. Edhasa, Barcelona, 1992, p. 52.

¹⁴ For Yve-Alain Boi, the experience of gravity (movement towards the horizontal) present in the works of Cézanne to Serra and Morris, is decisive in contemporary art. See "The Pandora's Box of Gravity" in *Gravity. Axis of Contemporary Art*, The National Museum of Art, Osaka, 1997, pp. 194-199.

¹⁵ Giorgio Agamben: "Teoría del gesto" in *La modernidad como estética*, Ed. Instituto de Estética y Teoría de las Artes, Madrid, 1993, p. 106.

¹⁶ Vilém Flusser: *Los gestos. Fenomenología y comunicación*, Ed. Herder, Barcelona, 1994, p. 96.

¹⁷ Mary Kelly: "Contribuciones a una re-visión de la crítica moderna" in *Arte después de la modernidad. Nuevos planteamientos en torno a la representación*, Ed. Akal, Madrid, 2001, p. 90.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida: "Passe-partout" in *La verdad en pintura*, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2001, p. 25.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida: "Dispersión de voces" in *No escribo sin luz artificial*, Ed. Cuatro, Valladolid, 1999, p. 159.

²⁰ See Ralf Rugoff: "More than Metes the Eye" in *Scene of the Crime*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1997, p. 62.

²¹ Jean Baudrillard: "La escritura automática del mundo" in *La ilusión y la desilusión estéticas*, Ed. Monte Ávila, Caracas, 1997, p. 85.

²² "It is as if, in the midst of the figurative and probabilistic givens, a catastrophe overcame the canvas. It is like the emergence of another world. For these marks, these traits, are irrational, involuntary, accidental, free, random" (Gilles Deleuze: *Francis Bacon. Lógica de la sensación*, Ed. Arena, Madrid, 2002, pp. 102-103).

²³ "The goal of the voyage I decided to embark on was not painting per se, but rather to see if painting contained sound enough arguments to warrant the rejection of everything that is not self-representation and to be able to understand the plastic behaviors associated with the subjects that interested me: the

sacred, its representation, and behaviors, the relationship to mysticism and the spiritual plane, ritual and its binding actions, the symbolic dimension of Christ, Christianity and orthodox faiths." (Fernando Prats, cited in Pilar Parcerisas: "Substancia y potencia en el hombre contemporáneo" en Fernando Prats. *Deambulatoris*, Ed. Polígrafa, Barcelona, 2000, p. 36).

²⁴ There is a sublime intensity in Fernando Prats's work that renounces the figurative anecdote without in any way losing, as a result, the poetics of the traces: "Undoubtedly, all of it entails an experience of abandoning oneself to the void, more like paralysis than warm mysticism. The contact with the Void that Fernando Prats shows us generates debris, falls, tears, sudden deaths and collapses. His experience of the sublime is chilled and it stings" (Teresa Blanch: "Desahogo" in Fernando Prats. *Desahogo*, Galería Joan Prats, Barcelona, 2002, p. 7).

²⁵ "His art lies in knowing how to see, hear, taste, touch, smell and shout, to give voice to the horror hidden behind the smoky panels of his oven and to the gold of his paint on the canvas" (Amador Vega, in Fernando Prats. *Affatus*, Galería Joan Prats, Barcelona, 2005, p. 5).

²⁶ "In some paintings, the trace of air from his lungs, the marks of his tongue, suggest initial efforts to give birth to the inner concept" (Amador Vega, in Fernando Prats. *Affatus*, Galería Joan Prats, Barcelona, 2005, p. 7).

²⁷ See Friedhelm Mennekes: "Synaesthesia Substantiae. (Concepción de la sustancia). Acerca de un aspecto de la obra de Fernando Prats" in Fernando Prats. *Substancias*, Galería Joan Prats, Barcelona, 1999.

²⁸ "Slime is the dust of water, as ash is the dust of fire. Ash, slime, dust and smoke offer images whose form changes over and over. The materials are connected through these reduced forms. They are like four dusts of the four elements. Lime is one of the most valued materials. It would seem that water, in this form, has given the Earth the very principle of calm, slow, sure fertility" (Gaston Bachelard: *El agua y los sueños*, Ed. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico, 1978, p. 168).

²⁹ Gaston Bachelard: *El agua y los sueños*, Ed. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico, 1978, p. 12.

³⁰ "Very early on, Freud gets the idea, which is reformulated in 1900, that dreams are the hallucinatory realization of unconscious desire, and right away it appears to him as the model for the mode of primary functioning characterized by the meaning of representation sliding into representation, through processes such as displacement, the condensation whose importance will be detected in the elaboration of the dream" (Catherine Desprats-Péquignot: *El psicoanálisis*, Ed. Alianza, Madrid, 1997, p. 47).

³¹ Valentin N. Voloshinov: *Freudismo. Un bosquejo crítico*, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 1999, p. 111.

³² "In Theaetetus (157E ff.) [Plato] would argue that even errors of the senses, the images of dreams and hallucinations caused by illness of some sort, can not just be written off: you can't deny that the dreamer or the sick person has had the experience he has had." (F. M. Cornford: *Platón y Parménides*, Ed. Visor, Madrid, 1989, p. 340).

³³ "In the best interpreted dreams we often have to leave one passage in obscurity because we observe during the interpretation that we have here a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled, and which furnishes no fresh contribution to the dream-content. This, then, is the keystone of the dream, the point at which it ascends into the unknown. For the dream-thoughts

which we encounter during the interpretation commonly have no termination, but run in all directions into the net-like entanglement of our intellectual world. It is from some denser part of this fabric that the dream-wish then arises" (Sigmund Freud: *La interpretación de los sueños*, vol. 3, Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, 1988, p. 152).

³⁴ "Imagination sometimes amasses images in our sensuality. First it feeds off of remote images; it sounds out before a vast panorama; then it extracts a secret place where it gathers images that are more human. Finally, at the climax of the dream of seduction, visions become sexual intentions, suggesting acts" (Gaston Bachelard: *El agua y los sueños*, Ed. Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 1978, p. 62). See Patricia Magli: "Duplicidad del agua" en *Revista de Occidente*, n° 306, Madrid, November 2006, p. 127.

³⁵ In his text *The Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey*, Porfirio presents water and dampness as the origin of both physical and psychic reality.

³⁶ "The return to water imagery shows that self-awareness is no longer the preferred instrument for understanding the world, but the awareness of ourselves or, better put, the feeling of ourselves through which each of us curl up in the 'hole' of being" (Michel Maffesoli: "El agua matricial" in *Revista de Occidente*, n° 306, Madrid, November 2006, p. 117).

³⁷ "First, we must understand the psychological utility of the mirror of waters: water naturalizes our image, lending a certain innocence and naturalness to the pride of our intimate contemplation" (Gaston Bachelard: *El agua y los sueños*, Ed. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico, 1978, pp. 39-40).

³⁸ "Matriarchal waters and sapiential waters, waters of corruption and waters of regeneration, waters of death and waters of rebirth; murky, stagnant, dirty waters and clean, clear, calm running waters; surface waters and deep waters... water still plays a central role in another avatar no less striking than those we have already mentioned. It is an avatar in which water will reflect truth, like a mirror, but only to generate illusion and deception; it will make cold come from heat, the alterity of identity from the identity of alterity, the passion for the other from the ignorance of oneself, and along with all this, the death of life, but not the life of death. I'm talking about the myth of Narcissus, the son of the beautiful Liriope and the river god Cephissus. One day, as Ovid tells us, while leaning over an extremely clear pool of water that had never been clouded by mud or the snouts of livestock, he saw such a lovely, bewitching image that he fell totally in love with it, believing this seductive image to be the Nymph of the fountain." (Ignacio Gómez de Liaño: "Metamorfosis simbólicas del agua" in *Revista de Occidente*, n° 306, Madrid, November 2006, p. 83).

³⁹ Manlio Brusatin: "Imágenes que aparecen y desaparecen" in *Historia de las imágenes*, Ed. Julio Ollero, Madrid, 1992, p. 45.

⁴⁰ Jacques Lacan: "La línea y la luz" in *Los Cuatro Conceptos Fundamentales del Psicoanálisis*. El Seminario 11, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 1995, p. 109.

⁴¹ Leopoldo María Panero: *Y la luz no es nuestra*, Ed. Libertarias/Prodhufi, Madrid, 1993, pp. 161-162.

⁴² Jean-Francois Lyotard: "Lo sublime y la vanguardia" in *Lo inhumano*. Charlas sobre el tiempo, Ed. Manantial, Buenos Aires, 1998, p. 97.

⁴³ L.B. Alberti: *De Pictura*, cited in Omar Calabrese: "Naturaleza muerta" in *Cómo se lee una obra de arte*, Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, 1993, p. 21.

⁴⁴ Omar Calabrese: "Naturaleza muerta" in *Cómo se lee una obra de arte*, Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, 1993, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Gilles Deleuze: *La imagen-tiempo*. Estudios sobre cine, vol. 2, Ed. Paidós, Barcelona, 1987, p. 31.

⁴⁶ "The most extreme form of moral message delivered by still life is to be found in the vanitas picture, named after the opening lines of Ecclesiastes: "Vanitas vanitatis, et omnia vanitas" ["Vanity of vanities, all is vanity"]. The typical giveaway detail of a vanitas arrangement is a human skull, though other symbols of the transience of life and the insignificance of human endeavor abound: guttering candles, wilting flowers, spoiled fruits and stale breads, hourglasses, soap bubbles, oil lamps, coins and globes terrestrial and celestial... Many vanitas do not feature food at all. They group together symbols of human effort –books, scientific instruments- and human pleasures – pipes, playing cards and musical instruments. These objects in combination with signs of mortality put the viewer in mind of the futility in human endeavor in the sweep of time" (Carolyn Korsmeyer: *El sentido del gusto*. Comida, estética y filosofía, Ed. Paidós, Barcelona, 2002, pp. 221-222).

⁴⁷ "A large group of still lifes whose general sense could with difficulty not be noticed is that of vanitas, with objects associated with expiry and death, such as a skull, an hourglass with the hands pointing to eleven o'clock or almost twelve, a nearly-melted candle, and a tablet of soap" (Sam Segal: "Sobre la naturaleza muerta en los Países Bajos" in *El Bodegón*, Ed. Galaxia Gutenberg, Círculo de Lectores, Barcelona, 2000, pp. 199-199).

⁴⁸ "It is not surprising that this power of art to perpetuate sensitive enjoyment should give rise, in religious souls, to the need to prevent such sinful inclinations. The motif of vanitas, as Sterling saw it, would make the banquet harmless: 'The Puritan spirit hovered over all that, calling for sobriety: thus the watch that we find so often, symbolizing temperance, which otherwise would seem to be out of place among the piles of food and the beautiful objects of the Dutch still life.' But however useful those alibis might be, they are not really necessary. Since all still lifes have the vanitas motif "incorporated" in them – as the saying goes, for those who wish to see it." (Ernst H. Gombrich: "Tradición y expresión en la naturaleza muerta occidental" in *Meditaciones sobre un caballo de juguete*. Y otros ensayos sobre la teoría del arte, Ed. Destino, Barcelona, 1998, p. 104).

⁴⁹ "One of the striking themes in the still life genre is that of the vanitas – that is, the still life with a moral content, which began to be developed independently around the first half of the 17th century. The main objective was to spark a reflection about the inexorable passing of time, the fleeting nature of earthly goods, the coming to an end of pleasures, in short, the brevity of life – an idea that was deeply rooted in the religious feeling of Spain at that time" (Fernando Checa: "El bodegón en el Museo del Prado" in *El Bodegón*, Ed. Galaxia Gutenberg, Círculo de Lectores, Barcelona, 2000, p. 12).

⁵⁰ Remo Bodei: *Una geometría de las pasiones*, Ed. Muchnik, Barcelona, 1995, p. 166.

⁵¹ Adam Zagajewski: "En defensa del fervor" in *En defensa del fervor*, Ed. El Acantilado, Barcelona, 2005, pp. 26-27.

⁵² "We can say that today the sublime must be understood in a different way; we must shed this notion of its neoclassic compositivity, of its alpine bump, of its theatrical exaggeration; today the sublime is, first of all, an experience of the world's mystery, a metaphysical shiver, a big surprise, a dazzling and a feeling of being close to the ineffable (obviously, all these shivers have to find an artistic form)" (Adam Zagajewski: "Observaciones acerca del estilo sublime" in *En defensa del fervor*, Ed. El Acantilado, Barcelona, 2005, pp. 43-44).

⁵³ "An absolutely repugnant world would not be a world where we would want to be conscious for a long time. Nor, to be sure, would we want to live a life that would have no meaning without sunlight. If I point to a painting and call it sublime, someone

might correct me and say I'm confusing the beautiful and the sublime. I would cite Nabokov and reply that the beautiful is sublime 'amid the night of non-being'. Kant brings these considerations into play in the formulation we noted above: 'The sublime is that, the mere ability to think which shows a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense'. I might add, and not without malice: it is sublime because it is in the viewer's mind. Beauty is an option for art and not a necessary condition. But it is not an option for life. It is a necessary condition for life as would want to live it. That is why beauty, unlike the other aesthetic qualities, including the sublime, is a value" (Arthur C. Danto: *El abuso de la belleza*. La estética y el concepto del arte, Ed. Paidós, Barcelona, 2005, p. 223).

⁵⁴ "As the heirs of the Greeks that we are, we still have our "gaze fixed on the beautiful," as Plotinus said. And this raised question gave rise to the nude: if we have not stopped paying attention to it or putting it on a pedestal, it is because we have not ceased to seek in it, through it, studying its variations over and over, relentlessly exploring its possibilities, the answer to the question which, once raised, we can't seem to forget. The nude concentrates –and made concrete- that abstract pursuit of Beauty" (Francois Jullien: *De la esencia o del desnudo*, Ed. Alpha Decay, Barcelona, 2004, p. 168).

⁵⁵ "Freud proposed [in order to probe latent thoughts and interpret dreams] the method of "spontaneous thoughts" (freie Einfälle) or "free association" (freie Assoziation) of the images that appeared in the dream being analyzed. It is necessary to leave the way open for the psyche and to ease all the restrictive, critical faculties of the conscious; everything must be allowed to access the mind, even the most outrageous thoughts and images that are apparently irrelevant to the dream being analyzed; one must be totally passive and allow a free access to everything that enters the consciousness, even though it may not make any sense or have any significance, and may be totally unrelated to the question at hand; you only have to strive to pay attention to what arises involuntarily in the psyche" (Valentin N. Voloshinov: *Freudismo*. Un bosquejo crítico, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 1999, p. 109).

⁵⁶ "Beauty [Schiller notes] does not consist of excluding certain realities, but of including absolutely all of them." Water, in effect, participates inside of all realities, announcing them and preceding them, reflecting and multiplying them... [...] We could also argue, then, that the degradation of water until it becomes generally opaque is the first step in a world whose beauty is being stamped out with great speed and tremendous conclusiveness" (Joaquín Araujo: "Las fuentes de la sed" in *Revista de Occidente*, n° 306, Madrid, November 2006, p. 159).

⁵⁷ "The void filled by creative symbolic fiction is the objet petit a, the object-cause of desire, the empty frame that provides the space for the articulation of desire. When this void is saturated, the distance separating a from reality is lost: a falls into reality. However, reality itself is constituted by means of the withdrawal of objet a: we can relate to the 'normal' reality only in so far as jouissance is evacuated from it, in so far as the object-cause of desire is missing from it" (Slavoj Zizek: *Las metástasis del goce*. Seis ensayos sobre la mujer y la causalidad, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2003, p. 124).

⁵⁸ "There is a gap which forever separates the fantasmatic kernel of the subject's being from the more superficial modes of his or her symbolic or imaginary identifications. It is never possible for me to fully assume (in the sense of symbolic integration) the fantasmatic kernel of my being: when I approach it too much, when I come too close to it, what occurs is what Lacan calls aphanisis (the self-obliteration) of the subject: the subject loses his/her symbolic consistency, it disintegrates. And, perhaps, the forced actualization in social reality itself of the fantasmatic kernel of my being is

the worst, most humiliating kind of violence, a violence which undermines the very basis of my identity (of my self-image)" (Slavoj Zizek: *El acoso de las fantasías*, Ed. Siglo XXI, México, 1999, p. 197).

⁵⁹ Slavoj Zizek: *El acoso de las fantasías*, Ed. Siglo XXI, México, 1999, p. 161.

⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida: "Desgastes. (Pintura de un mundo sin edad)" in *Espectros de Marx. El estado de la deuda, el trabajo del duelo y la nueva internacional*, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 1995, p. 91.

⁶¹ Jacques Derrida: ¡Palabra! Instantáneas filosóficas, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 2001, p. 42.

⁶² "Presence would mean death. If presence were possible, in the full sense of a being that is wherever he is, that fully appears wherever he is, then neither Van Gogh nor his work would exist, nor would the experience we have of this work" (Jacques Derrida interviewed by Peter Brunette and David Wallis: "Las artes espaciales" in *Acción Paralela*, n° 1, Madrid, Mayo, 1995, p. 19).

⁶³ "Si l'air devient le lieu des images –leur "porte-empreinte", leur "médium", leur subjectile par excelenc-, alors le pigment sera "pollen" ou poussière, et la touche sera soufflé ou aura" (Georges Didi-Huberman: *Gene du non-lieu. Air, poussière, empreinte, hantise*, Ed. Minuit, Paris, 2001, p. 81).

⁶⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *El ojo y el espíritu*, Ed. Paidós, Barcelona, 1986, p. 16.

⁶⁵ Mark Tobey followed Tanizaki's instruction "to let nature dominate your work" which led to the idea of "Erase yourself". "Without that self-erasure, which creates, first of all, the void or nothingness, no creation is possible. [...] For the same reason, the void plays an essential role in Chinese art. As Rudolf Otto recalls in his seminal book on *The Sacred*, in certain Chinese paintings there is "almost nothing"; the style consists of producing the maximum effect with minimal brushstrokes and the fewest possible resources" (José Ángel Valente: "Mark Tobey o el enigma del límite" in *Elogio del calígrafo. Ensayos sobre arte*, Ed. Galaxia Gutenberg, Barcelona, 2002, p. 51).

⁶⁶ Deleuze talks about improvisation as a kind of experienced feeling of the composition of relationships: "In the example of jazz, it's the moment when the trumpet comes in. I think that is exactly what is expressed by the English word *timing*. French does not have such words. The Greeks also had a very interesting word that meant exactly the same thing as the American word *timing*: *kairós*. The Greeks use this word all the time. *Kairós* means exactly the right moment; to not let the right moment go by. French doesn't have such a powerful word. The Greeks had a God, a kind of divine power of the *kairós*. The favourable, opportune occasion, the trick...this is the moment when the trumpet can take over" (Gilles Deleuze: *Pintura. El concepto de diagrama*, Ed. Cactus, Buenos Aires, 2007, pp. 287-288).

⁶⁷ Marramao resumes a theory formulated by Benveniste in 1940, to suggest that the term *tempus* derives from the abstraction of terms such as *tempestus*, *tempestar*, *temperare* and also *temperatura*, *temperatio*, etc. "It is as if the uniqueness of the term represented our awareness of the fact that what we call 'time' is no more than a meeting point between different elements, which originates an evolving reality, a mixture (does not to cut also mean, in a way, "to mix"?) that makes the *tempus* something very similar to what the Greeks called *kairós*, opportune time, propitious time" (Giacomo Marramao: *Kairós. Apología del tiempo oportuno*, Ed. Gedisa, Barcelona, 2008, p. 129).

⁶⁸ "The word time comes from one of two Greek verbs with

contradictory meanings. One of them, *temno* means to cut, from which we no doubt derive our measurements and dates, while the other, *teino*, means to stretch out, which expresses very well the continuous, uninterrupted flow" (Michel Serres: *Los orígenes de la geometría*, Ed. Siglo XXI, México, 1996, p. 35).

⁶⁹ "The right place, the ideal topos ideal for the experience of the sublime, for the inadequation of presentation to the unrepresentable, will be a median place, an average place of the body which would provide an aesthetic maximum without losing itself in the mathematical infinite. Things must come to a relationship of body to body: the 'sublime' body (the one that provokes the feeling of the sublime) must be far enough away for the maximum size to appear and remain sensible, but close enough to be seen and 'comprehended', not to lose itself in the mathematical indefinite. Regulated, measured distance [e-loignment] between a too-close and a too-far" (Jacques Derrida: *La verdad en pintura*, Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2001, p. 149).

⁷⁰ Gilles Deleuze: Francis Bacon *Lógica de la sensación*, Ed. Arena, Madrid, 2002, p. 104.

⁷¹ Georg Simmel: *Sobre la aventura*, Ed. Península, Barcelona, Barcelona, 1988, p. 13.

⁷² Georg Simmel: *Sobre la aventura*, Ed. Península, Barcelona, 1988, p. 13.

⁷³ "Tourists.- They clamber up the mountain like animals, silent and sweaty: someone forgot to tell them there were fine views along the way" (Friedrich Nietzsche: *El viajero y su sombra*, Ed. EDAF, Madrid, 1985, p. 231).

⁷⁴ "Some say that we stay away from ourselves out of neglect or because we are tempted to lose what we had in the pleasure of flight; that we sought a way out without even knowing what that meant, unless it was that hurry to be somewhere else or to be in a dream, to be like succubi, like the bewitched or like those individuals that live by proxy, like subjects of a power whose name nobody knows, but which is ubiquitous. A name should be found for it, but no one has found one yet" (Remo Bodei: "Trapero fin de siglo" in *Creación*, n° 12, Instituto de Estética y Teoría de las Artes, Madrid, Octubre, 1994, p. 97).

⁷⁵ "The strange happiness of the foreigner consists in maintaining that fleeting eternity or that perpetual transience" (Julia Kristeva: *Extranjeros para nosotros mismos*, Ed. Plaza & Janés, Barcelona, 1991, p. 13).

⁷⁶ "The impossible voyage is one that we will no longer make, one that could have made us discover new landscapes and other peoples" (Marc Augé: *El viaje imposible. El turismo y sus imágenes*, Ed. Gedisa, Barcelona, 1998, p. 15).

⁷⁷ "The world still exists in its diversity. But this diversity has little to do with the illusionary kaleidoscope of tourism. Perhaps one of the most pressing tasks is to learn how to travel again, to the regions closest to us in any case, in order to learn how to see again" (Marc Augé: *El viaje imposible. El turismo y sus imágenes*, Ed. Gedisa, Barcelona, 1998, p. 16).

⁷⁸ "The modern adventure is a way out with no return" (Vladimir Jankélévitch: *La aventura, el aburrimiento, lo serio*, Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 1989, p. 26).

⁷⁹ Gilles Deleuze: *Crítica y clínica*, Ed. Anagrama, Barcelona, 1996, p. 92.

⁸⁰ Gilles Deleuze: *Crítica y clínica*, Ed. Anagrama, Barcelona, 1996, p. 96.

⁸¹ See Giorgio de Chirico: "Estatuas, muebles y generales" in *Sobre el arte metafísico y otros escritos*, Ed. Yerba, Murcia, 1990, p. 123.

⁸² "There is no painter who has not had this experience of the chaos-germ, where he or she no longer sees anything and risks foundering: the collapse of visual coordinates" (Gilles Deleuze: Francis Bacon. *Lógica de la sensación*, Ed. Arena, Madrid, 2002, p. 104).

⁸³ "And what is art (the act of painting) but the attempt to dépose 'lay down' in the painting this traumatic dimension, to exorcise it by externalizing it in the work of art" (Slavoj Zizek: *El acoso de las fantasías*, Ed. Siglo XXI, México, 1999, p. 33).

⁸⁴ "Demeure is a French verb that has an extreme multiplicity, *demeurer* means 'to postpone for the future', it means what has been differed, the determined delay, and has the same meaning in law terms. The question of delay has always concerned me and I will not oppose surviving to death. I have even come to define surviving as a different possibility or one that is far away from both death and life, like an original concept. (...) I could never think of the thought of death or the awareness of death itself, or even the wait or anguish of death as something different from the affirmation of life. They are two movements that are inseparable for me: an awareness at all times of the imminence of death is not necessarily sad, negative or lethal, but on the contrary, it is for me life itself, the greatest intensity of life." (Jacques Derrida: ¡Palabra! Instantáneas filosóficas, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 2001, p. 41).

⁸⁵ "The potentially productive uses to which the remembering look can be put reside not in the imperative to return, but, on the contrary, in the interlocking imperative to displace. Because the backward path ostensibly leading to gratification is blocked, as Freud puts it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, we have no choice but to move forward; repression dictates that the desired object can only be recovered or 'remembered' in the guise of a substitute. Thus there can be no return or recollection which is not at the same time a displacement and which, consequently, does not introduce alterity" (Kaja Silverman: *El umbral del mundo visible*, Ed. Akal, Madrid, 2009, p. 190).

⁸⁶ John Berger: "¿Cómo aparecen las cosas?, o Carta abierta a Marisa" in *El Bodegón*, Ed. Galaxia Gutenberg, Círculo de Lectores, Barcelona, 2000, p. 59.