

2018

Catarina Bothelo: Tercer Paisaje

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SILVESTRE

Premio PhotoEspaña OFF 2018. Galería Silvestre. 26/05 - 28/07/2018
Dialogue between Catarina Botelho and Oriol Fontdevila

The prominence of the surface in Catarina Botelho's photography is not determined by formalism or documentalism features. There is no trace of objectivity –Nuno Crespo pointed it out previously- and likewise self-absorption is avoided.

The photography of Catarina Botelho is a surface that comes up against the surface of a wall. The impact between both of them is physical and literal: come up against is akin to crash, and that's what is happening here when the image comes up against the wall, with all its material density, and therefore, being barely able to describe one of them as the externality of the other. In effect, the crash involves a connection through which both surfaces will remain inseparable, because when you come up against something, you are coming up to that simultaneously. Meaning that it interacts and establishes itself. Consequently, the crash becomes a contractual basis: with and against the wall at the same time. That is the point where we are led to by Botelho's work.

The first wall I photographed was the one located in the staircase of my house in Lisbon, which is a building from the XVIII century. Until then, I took pictures of people, mainly. When I moved there, the whole wall was quite degraded, it looked as if it had been through a war. All paint layers that the wall had accumulated over the last decades, they could be seen. Thereby, a whole handmade construction system was revealed. Additionally, the map of an imaginary archipelago seemed to be generated through the dampness stains caused by the onset of winter.

I was fascinated by all of this. As well as it annoyed me. At one point, the neighbours from the property, we agreed to renovate the building. But then, when I became conscious that I would never see that wall again, I began photographing it repeatedly, every day before leaving home. I did it for six months, the time it took to make the decision and to carry out the renovation. The result where I presented this work is a book, O outro nome das coisas (2009-2010). On each page there is an image in which the wall appears at different times of the day and different times of the year. But on turning the page, you're never completely sure that the time has passed, that the wall has changed, or even that the matter is still alive

It catches my attention a previous series to *Tercer Paisaje* where Botelho interpellates matter and she wonders about its longevity. It is the series where different dogs are lying *À sombra do sol* on the floor, created by the artist during her residence in Cape Verde in 2015. It is a collection of individual portraits of lying dogs as if they wished to camouflage their presence, *dogs-chameleons* – as the artist called them –. Although at first sight those dogs are dead, actually, they are just exhausted due to the heat and, this time, they rest next to the walls protected from the sun.

Botelho explains that through her photography she seeks to capture the lifespan of the matter, the temporary continuum which is typical of the existence beyond human perception –the *durée*, in the more bergsonian sense of the word–. But, in both cases, the wall-photobook from her house in Lisbon and those *dogs-chameleons*, the possibility of life is under suspicion, running the risk of being just a presumption. Therefore, the way Botelho approaches material world, although it has a speculative nature, it has a particular eschatological touch.

My photography might refer to certain morbid aspects. But, actually, it arises from a vital impulse: what I am trying to capture is a entre estares (being between).

Regarding her new exhibition at Galería silvestre, *Tercer paisaje*, it is interesting to observe how Botelho deals with the homonymous concept defended by the botanist Gilles Clément in 2004. According to Clément, the Third Landscape comprises a large amount of vague spaces, devoid of function, of residual spaces, which, being on the margins of any form of human planning and being in the interstices of the planned city, they generate an unheard-of biological diversity.

What attracts me to these spaces probably responds to my need to get out of productive times and also of an excessively planned city. And break out from the action, from the action-production. On the one hand, there is a desire of leaving the downtown area, getting away from the noise of the shops and also fleeing from their visual noise. On the other hand, as I walk, I try to meet this silence and other ways of being.

Then I look at the spaces that seem to be waiting for something; maybe because they were factories and were abandoned due to the end of an era, or maybe they've been subjected to urban speculation. These spaces appear between what has been built and the nature. I am interested in the silence that lies there, in spaces that are not part of the modes of production which are generating profit nowadays.

In these spaces I see a potentiality, a possibility of invention. From there could emerge something else. But it is true that the city will probably take and absorb them, finding the fate of these spaces more in current models of production than in potential alternatives.

In this respect, if according to Clément the third landscape is indisputably a space of potentiality, in Botelho's work a shadow

of doubt is glimpsed. Actually, in terms of photographic record, the artist does not orient her gaze towards the mixture that would be sprouting in these untamed parts of the urban scene, but she ends up bumping into the walls which usually differentiate those spaces from the planned city. She is attracted by the walls that surround those spaces. Therefore, in *Tercer Paisaje*, what is finally emphasized is, mainly, the virulence that accompanies them as a product of the urban exclusion – while the lively dimension of the spaces seems to be suspended in time –.

The third landscape is formed by the excluded spaces. This exclusion may be the embryo of other possibilities that we do not imagine now. But it can also be a "nothing happens". It is because of the freezing of time that I am also interested in working with the images.

In the attraction I feel towards these spaces there is something that I find very attractive, but at the same time there is something that annoys me: how the city encloses the bodies. The city is made of enclosed spaces. Maybe I find there something biographical, as a foreign newcomer in Barcelona, which is where I have taken these photographs, in the district of Poblenou. Being in a new city for me, I find walls everywhere, visible and invisible.

With this series I look for the hardness that the city exerts against the body. The hardness of its materials, the difficulties to inhabit the cities.

Je parle aux murs. In his lecture at the Chapel of Saint-Anne, Jacques Lacan played with words when he spoke of l'amour and of l'(a)mur. For the psychoanalyst talking to the walls has to do with talking about love. Then, his dissertation found a point of support in a poem by Antoine Tudal (although the male and heteronormative perspective of the composition is now clearly outdated, the idea developed by Lacan from it, still seems suggestive):

*Between the man and the woman,
there is love.
Between the man and love,
there is a world.
Between man and the world,
there is a wall.*

The wall is interposition and also castration for Lacan, but at the same time the wall is constituent of any form of relationship: that wall is everywhere, he tells us. Hence that bump into the wall is also a bump into somebody: the lack of communication is part of the communication, the word is a presence made of absence, the rubbing between subjects is also the friction between abysses that ultimately remain unfathomable. Thus, the wall is also a wall in language, a certain manifestation of the space of the signifier which never lets itself be captured by the meaning. This also leads the subject to experience beyond his subjectivity and the constructions of meaning.

Through my photography I confront the wall. But at the same time, I cannot deny that I find in the walls something that is very comforting for me. Perhaps it is the mere effect of its solidity, of its robust presence, which is very brutal. Or the idea of limit.

In intersubjectivity, the subject not only experiences love: to bump into the wall that constitutes him/her, his/her meaningless side, the subject is also going to need the other. So, in psychoanalysis, the subject appears divided, splitted between an ego (discourse's subject) and a it (the unsaid that lies in the holes of the discourse).

Regarding *Tercer paisaje*, this subject turned into it is present in the second series of pictures, and the artist interprets it, likewise, as a hole in the meaning. In this case, a hole relative to systems that are not strictly linguistic or even concerning subjectivity. Through a small collection of remains, Botelho seeks the holes of the economic and social system.

They are remains facing neon light. The lighting is important in these photographs, as it cuts the spoils resulting from informal trade practices as they were still lifes. In any case it is not an added light, but it comes from the lighting system that has been installed in Glòries Square, in Barcelona.

Indeed, it is the light of gentrification which is thrown on the spoils of a very precarious activity of people who are on the margins, on their spaces of nonproductivity and non-profit. Some holes in the system of formal trade emerge there, because they are things that possess some value in use but they have no value within the trading system.

Particularly these photographs refer me to the series *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974-1975) by Martha Rosler. But instead of the question of language and the systems of representation that was made there by the American artist, in this case I find that predominates an eschatological nature question about life. Thus, the series also reminds me of the images of those dogs that appeared before lying in the shade produced by the walls in Cape Verde. Again, facing the spillover of remains, we ask ourselves: is there life in there?

Yes, there is. Once again it is a entre estares (being between), absent presences. They are traces that tell you that there were people, that someone went through and left all that. In those remains I find the presence of people, of their bodies.

Through the photography I look for an access to the reverse of the productive time, the abstract time, the regulated time. A time without time, which moves away from the act of doing. These lasting that happens when you're with someone, just sharing time, when you don't even need to be talking.