

## Urban Simulacrum of the Panorama By Valeria de los Ríos

Carola Redondo's photographs attract the observer's attention by its dimension and format. The sizes of her panoramas-which go from 7.8x31.5 to 23.5x94.5-in addition to her insistence on a wide, oblong format, suggest a simulacrum of the panoramic format. Instead of using specialized cameras for this kind of shots, Redondo proceeds by composing images-sometimes manually, but usually digitally-merging sets of individual photographs. The use of the panoramic format is related, on one hand, to tradition, as to the imitation of this 18th and 19th century media technology. On the other hand, its use is inserted into the actual discussion on visual arts (especially photography), which seems to be shocked by the emergence of new digital technologies.

In 1792 the Scottish painter Robert Barker coined the term panorama, a Greek expression for "total vision", to name his representation of Edinburgh, which was mounted over a cylindrical surface. A year later, a semicircular building, specially designed for the exhibition of Barker's paintings, was lifted on the Leicester Square of London. Then, during the 19th century, the use of panoramas proliferated over Europe, United States and South America, appearing for instance in Cuba at 1846.

Panoramic paintings manipulated perspective: illuminated in particular ways, they produced unseen experiences and, most essentially, configured and responded to a new kind of observer. The 19th century panorama spectators possessed a temporal and mobile perception, a multiple and selective vision that diverged from the concentrated and imperturbable contemplation associated to the valuation of traditional visual arts. This new kind of observer, able to walk at discretion around the painting in order to appreciate the novelty and its illusion, emerges from deep perceptual changes due to the introduction of new technologies on the telecommunication, transport and entertainment fields. In this way, panoramas quickly became one of the first mass media, and the experiences it provided were always nearer to those of the amusement parks (also a 19th century innovation) than to those of the museum. First, these paintings usually represented natural or exotic landscapes as well as battlefields; these were later joined by urban panoramas, thus configuring the history of a medium that does not focus on details or individuals, but rather on a long-distance perspective.

Redondo's adoption of the panoramic format recycles this previously mentioned kind of observer, although with certain new consequences. This format is an invitation to a literal walk-not just through the gaze-through the work's physical space, and it provokes a diversification of perspectives. The transformation of urban space, produced by perceptual and temporal dislocations introduced by this 19th century technology, is taken to extremes in Redondo's works, whose vision coincides with the 21st century telecommunication's fragmentation, speed and circulation.

In "Valdivieso" and "Vista CTC", for example, these features are peripherally manifested, where she integrates two icons of Santiago's Modernity and Postmodernity imageries respectively in different moments, separately, and duplicated. Dislocation is not only considered part of the spectator's perceptive capacities; it is also included into the work itself. Mobility, fluidness, interchange, and distortion are integrated as crucial elements of the art work in "Vista Vega", "Pasillo", "¿Quieres bailar", "¿Con quién hablas?", "Moviéndome", "V Panel" and "21:45". As in every photograph, spatio-temporal coordinates are frozen, even though movement is not rationalized and mechanized as in Edwards Muybridge's experimentations: it is rather suggested by the overlapping of photographic moments into one single photograph (for example, the own artist's duplication in two different moments in "Moviéndome", or a male character's duplication in "GP", a female duplication in "Tarde en Los Vilos" and the

duplication of a male character observing a female one in "¿Con quien hablas?"). A visual approach, configured by light reflections and individual character duplications, which appear simultaneously as real and spectral, poses a serious challenge to the auto sufficiency of the single image; instead, it celebrates duplication, illusionism and the artificial character of photographic construction. The incorporation of diverse spatio-temporal stages allows the emergence of a mute narrative, inherent feature of the photographic medium made explicit on Redondo's works.

"En el baño", "Daniela y Maida", "Madrid" and "Pasillo" indicate an alteration of the panoramic tradition, as they stray from the landscape representations towards the private sphere. This indicates the fulfillment of the Barthesian dictum: in the age of photograph, that what is private becomes public, and it is consumed publicly. The spectacular (spectaculum), long distanced perspective taken by the panoramic format becomes in these photographs a voyeuristic-and sometimes even panoptical-vision, the outcome of a society that implements new surveillance and control mechanisms in order to register the increasing mobility of its own population. The sequences in "Quieres bailar?", "Con quien hablas?" and "Cocinando" are examples of this disciplinary stance, which spies and transforms the act of watching without being observed into a show or exhibition. The limits of this espionage act reveal themselves through the glass/window/mirror intermediation, which duplicates the images and, at the same time, acts as the single and relative container of the photographic penetration.

If, on one hand, digital technologies make the manipulation of information possible, as well as the fast and simple generation of falsifications, they are also able to shed light over their own forms of production. In works such as "Tarde de domingo", the Photoshop software allows the creation of an impossible perspective through the indiscernible suture of two different images. The observer's reaction when facing this vision tends to oddness, sensation that guides towards the deciphering of the artist's procedures. Although Redondo does not employ Photoshop to create her images-overlapping and duplication in the image are pre-digital outcomes, based on the exploitation of reflections, and not a consequence of work through digital layers-Redondo does use it to merge different photographs, generating the panorama's simulacrum. This simulacrum is constrained to the removal of the composition's traces, but not to the creation of those mobile or spectral individuals that inhabit her photographs.

"Madrid" and "La última puerta" are clear examples of the facilitation provided by digital procedures in order to create spatio-temporal labyrinths. These works embody what Victor Burgin meant-employing psychoanalytic terminology-when he spoke of the kaleidoscopic image of the contemporary media ecology, persistently visual and abundant of condensations and displacements that resemble inner spaces of fantasy and hallucinations. As in "Tarde de domingo" and its improbable perspective, these panoramas are simulacra-seen under Baudrillard's terminology as "copies without original"-that paradoxically sign spatial disorientation in certain territories not susceptible to be mapped.

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This is the case of "Madrid", "Tarde en Los Vilos" and "La última puerta", of 1998. Authors such as Vanesa Schwartz, Stephen Oetermann or Jonathan Crary have claimed this idea.

Translated by Leonardo Salinas