

Alice's big bed

(brief and punctuated note about the work of Mónica Alonso)

Marti Peran, 2003

Among Eugene Atget's photographic reports, one of the most singular is made up of his images of "Intérieurs parisiens"; an authentic collection of private rooms in which the express desire of the owners to articulate the famous house-case that Walter Benjamin spoke about stands out. Indeed, these domestic spaces are, above all, a kind of camouflaged shelter of friendliness; raised more by the need to build a controlled space against the anomalies of exteriority than by fulfilling an optimistic dream of habitability. They are spaces in which the opulent and orderly presence of the decorative arts subtly denotes its appearance as an alternative and frightened space in the face of external disorder.

Since then the idea of the house has not been able to shake off this radical ambivalence. Just as it refers us to the ideal of having a place where we can anchor ourselves - join the world of things - and from where we can frame the vision of everything unknown, it also constitutes a kind of hiding place from which we try to alleviate, precisely, the absence of a habitable world and the folly of being its own shows. It is a double game, after all, similar to the one that characterizes the myth of the cave: being part of it implies being forced to leave to store the necessary provisions.

Mónica Alonso's rooms are not at all alien to this paradoxical nature. On the one hand, they are offered as the possibility to model a space as we please, with the necessary accessories and services to guarantee its effectiveness; but this promise of comfort requires a suspension of time, it is expressed almost in the manner of prescribing a mental experience, as if implying that it is, above all, about freeing ourselves from any pain, that which would entrust us to an absolute present.

In effect, pain is something like factuality itself; the instant of the pure present, without the capacity for evocation or projects. This is the double nature of these mental rooms: they are pantones to build us the enclosure of supposed happiness that is nothing more than the bubble to exclude pain even at the cost of also eliminating time.

The "Bubbles" are truly a paraphrase of monads: that purely intransitive instance, without doors or windows, which from Leibniz to Lévinas has been used to define the very possibility of defining a strict identity: "It is to be that I am monad" . Inside this bubble –hospital cell- a praise of privacy is constituted, far from the equivocal defense of transparency according to which the public sphere

and one's own should remain in permanent contact. Nothing is further from reality. The idea of comfort points precisely towards the pleasure of withdrawal. Comfort is nothing more than another paraphrase of the ivory tower, only now this happiness of isolation is not based on the construction of a unique world but on the particularization of a general offer. From the interiors photographed by Atget to the services offered by the company ComfortWorld, the tactics to set up a refuge are different, but in both extremes they cannot avoid the double aspect that betrays any promise of improvement: the need to repair a previous state of affairs. .

The rooms represent a good part of the private interiors photographed by Atget. To the extent that they are testimonial spaces of a frightened bourgeoisie that urgently needs to demonstrate its notoriety, the beds in these rooms appear impeccable, like precious objects in a still life. It will not be until much later when the sheets wrinkled by the absent bodies are shown to us from the private rooms. A couple of good examples are Lourdes Castro's "Shadows on Lençol" (1969) or Nan Goldin's "Empty Beds" (1979). Under these new models, in effect, the notion of the house has been reduced to the essence of the room, where it is foreseeable that the absolute specificity of what is proper must triumph; likewise, the will to emphasize personal identity, makes all the attention fall on the used beds. The difference between the beds documented by Atget and the sheets folded by the weight of bodies seems strident; however, its neighborhood is full. In both cases it is about executing personal portraits, either through an iconographic setting or through a poeticization of the traces.

In Mónica Alonso's rooms, the beds do not yet have an owner or are marked by any body. On this occasion the beds are no longer the document of anything but an instrument. As in the rooms of Atget, Castro or Goldin, the beds portend the radical privacy of the space in question – hence, they have nothing to do with the bed shared by Sophie Calle in "The sleepers" (1979) or the pillows exposed in the public road by Félix González Torres - but more as an enclosure that the user will have to build to measure to cultivate their dreams than as a historical room loaded with memory. Under the guise of a business registry, Mónica Alonso's work adopts the role of an explicit production of services that, on this occasion, are specialized in the construction of particular worlds. The bed is therefore something like the platform for sleep; the guarantee that the space to be materialized will not only be an inviolable enclosure but, even more important, that the experience that has to be fertilized in this space will have a practically dreamlike nature. It is therefore not surprising that the appearance of these spaces is sometimes very close to psicodelia.

In 1991 Vito Acconci occupied the entire exhibition area made available to him with some "Multi-Beds" that turned the room into a tangle of extravagant beds that should facilitate new forms of

sleep. However, the analogy of this work with the proposals by Mónica Alonso that we want to underline now does not stop at the use of the same type of furniture or at the appeal to mental experience. What interests us now is to highlight how the beds built by Vito Acconci are arranged in such a way that the entire exhibition space becomes an “axiomatic space”, that is, a space attached to the sort of sculptural composition of the set of beds. Indeed, in the context in which the work of Mónica Alonso has been placed, there is a double formal possibility: either the offer is embodied in a model format – as the sale of real estate comfort has traditionally done – or the actual construction of the space requires to overlap completely on the exhibition space until they cannot be distinguished. It is from this perspective that Mónica Alonso's invitation is similar to the big bed that Alicia stumbles upon in her regressive dreams, dreams in which, just as her body becomes gigantic, they can immediately make her smaller again.