Strategies to keep the 'double' alive

Nuria-Gurina 24/10/2016

About Erick Beltrán's exhibition *El doble no existe / El doble de las mil caras*
[The double does not exist / The one-thousand-face double]

Why cannot we control our dreams? Who is talking during altered states of consciousness? What's behind a *lapsus*? Are there a Dr. Jekyll and a Mr. Hyde inside our bodies? Are the extra-corporal journeys possible? Why the beyond world shows up in the shape of ghosts, devils and hells? Can we communicate with dead people? If a zombie is a dead without soul, where is its soul? Is it, by any chance, a phantom or does he inhabits within another body? Who rules the subject? Is it a neuronal effect or is it a symbolical construction? Is there an alter ego of each human being somewhere in the universe? May it be an avatar that dwells inside the social network? These are some of the endless questions that are proposed in "***El doble no existe***" [The double does not exist] and "***El doble de las mil caras***" [The one-thousand-face double], a two-sided work that the Mexican artist, Erick Beltrán, presents at **Galeria Joan Prats**.

Beginning from some questions that concern the collective imagery, by creating a visual essay Beltrán analyses the relationship between human beings and all the things that are out of human control. Or in other words, he brings up the forms that western way of thinking uses to understand the figure of "the ego" –the conscious individual- in relation to the unknown and what cannot be explained –personified by the figure of the double-. To explain himself, Beltrán presents his theories through examples that cover all sort of fields, as psychoanalysis, mythology, religion, philosophy, neuroscience and popular tradition.

The topic is presented in the shape of groups of diagrams, conceptual maps and sculptures-text. From the brain area where the functions of perception are identified, to the world view where the planet-subject and the planet-double are moving in concentric orbits inside a same system. The art pieces exhibited at Galeria Joan Prats are the initial notes of these ideas. These have a double function: to show their analytical methods and to elaborate a theoretical hypothesis that is showed in the *"**Manifiesto**"* [Manifest].

The "***Manifiesto***" is the engine that articulates Beltran's project. It is presented through low tech imagery (which reminds the fanzine as well as some graphic resources with propagandistic goals), Beltrán wallpapers the space with his theoretical notes that take form of an ideological manifest. It takes the same name than the exhibition, "***Manifiesto. El doble no existe***" [Manifest. The double does not exist], and is a multilayer installation in which are explored many interpretations and representations of the double's figure throughout the history in a narrative way. The last goal: to decode the mechanisms that organize the systems of thinking and knowledge, especially in the discourse construction, in order to offer a critical reinterpretation of our understanding of the world. Either concepts as control, order, power, consciousness, soul, centre, unity, horizon, true and politics are attributed to "the ego" , whereas the double seems to be set aside, as a mere antithesis, being related to the figure of the monster, the nightmare, the heterogeneity, the abyss, the periphery, the ghosts, etc.

But what predominates in this overambitious work is the premise that "the ego" is an invention, a construction that has been done by men in its own image and convenience with purely ideological purposes; a self-protection tool used by the individual in order to control his power in the world where he operates. In other words, the typical limitations of the subject to perceive, understand

and control the universe as a whole have lead him to identify all those facts that escape to his consciousness with the figure of an *alter ego*: the double (from the Greek myth to the homunculus, werewolf, aliens or ghosts). And this principal of the ego as a fixed and indivisible straitjacket to interpret the universe has been present in all the discourses of the occidental society until the current days.

In the critique of the unity of "the ego", Beltrán introduces a fundamental concept that is constantly present in his work: the **multiplicity**. The double, as the universe, doesn't respond to the concept of unity because it is multiple and heterogeneous. That's when the implicit trick in the title of the exhibition is revealed: the double does not exist because he has thousand faces. For Beltrán, multiplicity is an expansive concept that includes everything: historical readings, cultural stories, the meaning of objects, knowledge construction process… The undeniable influence of Deleuze, along with Beltrán's way of investigation through archives and his obsession for creating classification systems that allow to relate elements that apparently are unconnected, allows the artist to build narratives that bring into question some hegemonic narratives.

Therefore, if "***El doble no existe***" [The double does not exist] makes up the most conceptual part of the investigation, in "***El doble de las mil caras***" [The one-thousand-face double] -exhibited at **Joan Prats Warehouse**- the text disappears to lead on to images. This black and white visual atlas formed by numerous pictures gives a visual translation from some theoretical speculations to the background of the imagery. Through photographs of twins, medieval engravings, baroque paintings, photograms and Greco-Roman sculptures, amongst others, Beltrán exemplifies thousands faces in which the double has been represented in the visual culture. As a kind of Atlas Mnemosyne, the layout of images in the space and the short printed texts that completes them, invite the visitor to establish connections of ideas that debate between them and create new interpretations.

Beltrán doesn't take anything for granted and only points out. The exhibition opens more questions than answers are solved: Is the ego a metaphor of the power and the institutions? If the ego represents the average citizen that lives under the law and order, is the double an outsider or a dissident of the system? Is it maybe that the institution doesn't feel threatened by all those voices it cannot control or those who want to overthrow it? Perhaps is under this interpretation that we should reclaim, more than ever, the multiplicity of the double as an anti-establishment tool. As Beltrán points out in the text of the exhibition: *'The double is the most trenchant critic to the self-proclaimed integrity of the ego'.*

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Erick Beltrán. El doble no existe (Galeria Joan Prats) / El doble de las mil caras (Joan Prats Warehouse)

30 September – 10 December;

Galeria Joan Prats: Balmes, 54 – Tuesday – Saturday 11 a.m to 2p.m. and 4 to 8 p.m.;

Joan Prats Warehouse: Passatge Saladrigas, 5 – by appointment