

A name out of place

Jordi Colomer

Every sacred thing must be in its place.

(Statement by a Pawnee Indian gathered by Fletcher)

One of the last projects by the architect Rem Koolhaas is about dismantling a typically American enormous grain silo to be rebuilt piece by piece on European soil. Once the silo would be finished, its characteristics and performance on the Old Continent would be analysed.

Although there is no known relationship between the two projects, perhaps with the aim of restoring the balance between both sides of the Atlantic, Martin Kippenberger has thought of erecting one of the characteristic *Art Nouveau* Paris tube station entrances somewhere in the middle of the monotonous frozen plain on the Alaska Peninsula. So far, just like the former one, the project remains an utopian comment to be reviewed.

In 1992, in Atlantic waters, a private underwater expedition found the 1800 objects which had been sailing for four days, and had later sunk together with the crew and the passengers on the Titanic. After imagining them at the bottom of the sea for 80 years, the inheritors had the opportunity to get their damp family belongings back. But before that, they had to pay a modest sum of money to the supplier. This company was able to later dive again and rescue the 47 vessels of the British crown. The ships were coming from Egypt, loaded with sarcophagi and mummies, and they were resting on the bottom of the Mediterranean long before ending up in one of the halls of the British Museum, or finding a harbour at the crypt on 13, Lincoln's Inn Fields, Sir John Soane's residence. On the other hand, what did disembark in London were the Parthenon friezes, claimed by the Greek authorities in an only half-convinced demand that the friezes should embark on a return journey back across the sea to Greece. Further south, north of Lisbon, beside a gigantic rock there is a sign reading: "Since 1851 this rock decorates the Sintra gardens, at the summer residence of the Portuguese monarchs. This 14-ton rock travelled a long way from far away China to this place".

Grain silos, tube station entrances, watches, jewellery and scrap from the Titanic, sarcophagi, mummies, Parthenon friezes and a 14 ton rock, centuries apart, have moved from one place to another. The so-called western civilisation has illustrated the Encyclopaedia by bringing the world into our homes, and checking its measurements. The natural route –we know that– goes from the "Far East" to the West. In the case we just mentioned, Koolhaas prefers to stick to the broad scenario of the Western world in order to stage the story of the prodigal son (the US) returning home to Europe. It may be an ironical odyssey,

just like Kippenberger's action of placing the Paris underground station entrance in the middle of the ice desert. By this action, the artist multiplies its cultural content, abolishes all functional nature and points to a journey towards the non-place. Robert Smithson warned about some of the dangers which could be encountered in this process:

"Between the site and the Non-site one may lapse into places of little organisation and no direction". Strictly speaking, in both of the projects, the act of finding or moving a site, although it is an important issue, is not the core one. Rather, it is the actual displacement of the object that plays the main role in the action.

Another German artist, Wim Wenders, pays tribute to the Japanese master Ozu in *Tokyo-Ga*. The film was made with a small portable camera and it tells the story of another journey which is almost identical: In a scene shot at the centre of Tokyo, we see a skilfully-built 300 m. high structure of riveted girders which are an exact replica of the Eiffel Tower, a clone-like copy standing right in the middle of the Japanese metropolis, like a colossal mirror facing Paris.

A thing out of place, like this speculative image, becomes reality in Slumberland, Little Nemo's dream land, thus founding a logic system as true as any other logic. In one of the dreams, the dictator of planet Mars establishes a regime of omnipotent control of words, where citizens have to pay some kind of tax for everything they want to say. Each word has a price, and the use of adjectives or sentimental words becomes something unaffordable. In Tokyo, the price to be paid for the name of the famous tower made them change it: The Eiffel Tower in Tokyo is logically called the Tokyo Tower, which makes it substantially different. A change of site, but also a change of name: Two things which make things change. We approve of the long way which has brought us here.

Sculpture today suffers from a name out of place, a name which shows less than what it really comprises, making us trap it between "quotation marks" maybe more than we should. Nowadays the site is a multiple one, and each space (still) enclosed in a discipline, is condemned to consume all the oxygen. If the place of sculpture today is the personal site of amalgams and displacements, a place of intense convergence, then its name, displaced from itself, doesn't correspond with it. It must urgently come closer to what it is supposed to define, and definitely broaden out in a more ambitious and open sense. In other words, the name should be put in its place. If, on the contrary, it becomes a burden, we may have to drop the name of the sculpture down into the abyss, lock it up and let it stay down there; and then find another one.

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