

Geographical Turn by Antonio García Rico and his Ephemeral Museum

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The Geographical Turn

Taking as a starting point the definition of geography as a specific feature of territories defined in the description of their natural, bordering, or social forms, determined in their geophysical formulation, would distance us from the new approaches to what geography means as a place of symbolic transformation; a place that can be accessed from other ways of thinking about the territory in the alteration of established schemes.

The reason is that

Today’s geography has nothing to do with the one from yesterday: the way to spell has changed as much as *gê* (The Earth). [...], as from now, the geography of contemporary artists explores the ways to inhabit, the different networks in which we evolve, the circuits in which we move around, and especially, the economic, social and political formations that enclose human territories.¹

Territories that, due to their significant impact, are accessed in the artist’s visualization process as spaces of understanding, in which new cartographies of use are elaborated in the essence of the experimentations that present us with the entrance of the ‘other’; as well as the obsession of finding oneself in another place as foreign, distant, different, full of forms and symbolic management worthy of being narrated using a profound process of relationships. These transcend the individual perspective of an artist who turns on himself to become a cartographer of spaces. Spaces with territories and communities that are transformed into a field of action where we can see a temporary playfulness with an “offshore zone”: neither fully integrated into the society - **to which he has access to** - nor limited to the role of a neutral observer. He defines himself above all by maintaining his distances, alternating the committed expedition to the heart of reality and the retreat to the comfort provided by extrateritoriality”.²

The entries and exits of the geographical areas indicate within themselves new and complex cosmogonies of the territory. Other visualizations capable of relating diverse perspectives -disrupter of maps- to load them with new scenes and presences amid relationships that revolve in the artist’s image through oth-

er descriptions and uses of the territory. From it, he can extract, generate, fragment, or cut a diversity of elements and non-obvious meanings, to make them work differently while he interferes in the other space. The moment he puts into action other layout codes, another elaboration of cartographies arises, which start from a different visual grammar with which to understand the territory from the outside, to explore, and intervene in the surfaces of natural and social landscapes already established.

Explorations that geographically organize territories of an emotional nature. They are identified, modified, and used within the empathy of what is found to lead to a geographic and turned concept in which “a different way of organizing knowledge is established according to how the natural, the social and the cultural concepts are related to each other”.³ These relationships apply another field of ideas on the cartographies that are presented to us. They are crossed by a diversity of socio-cultural and natural agents that are enabled to evidence the inwardness of micro-territorial configurations that transit from the local aspect, the private one, the modes of use of the territory, and the ways of identification with it.



1.a

1.b



Antonio García Rico and His Ephemeral Museum

Territoriality, extra-territoriality, place, natural and human paths condition and emerge in the creation of geography not explored in the ways of regulated measurement, but in the use of new mappings that speak from other uses of territories, born from empathy to the space that is accessed from a non-neutral obser-



vation contemplated from a cultural production of space. This is where the new cartography will be developed, through the staging of other unexpected places, marked by a territorial tour in which the artist performs a play by programming other forms of behavior through the alteration of what is already given or established in the place, his way of understanding it and representing himself in it.



In this way, the geography created by an artist will generate another space that links what is real to what is imaginary, and “that refers this to a broader concept of spatiality, «spatiality» understood as a «socially produced space» [...] as a part of a «second nature», a key aspect in human existence and a description of the world”.⁴ Such description is necessary to comprehend other systems of representation and how to decompose, through them, individual and external situations within the configuration of a





relational narrative. This narrative is run by the space-artist figure, understood as the possibility to generate modifying works of the places where he is situated, in the middle of his curious individuality, which is committed to the later closing and distancing of those who he will create a unique topography.

Thereby, the location places will be conceived from the composition of other spaces in which diverse “visual, sound or tactile behaviors of the individual, **-or of the collectivity-** will

be expressed in a way foreseen by the artist **-and this one as programmer and cartographer of another place-** [...] with an aesthetic purpose, of a series of events that affect sensorially **-and socially-** by being perceptive, positively or negatively, by the pleasure or by the displeasure in a spatial-temporal development”.⁵ All of this is defined by the unexpected nature of the intrusion, built from the viewpoint of the one who explores to access the place to propose other territorial and, at the same time, significant routes.

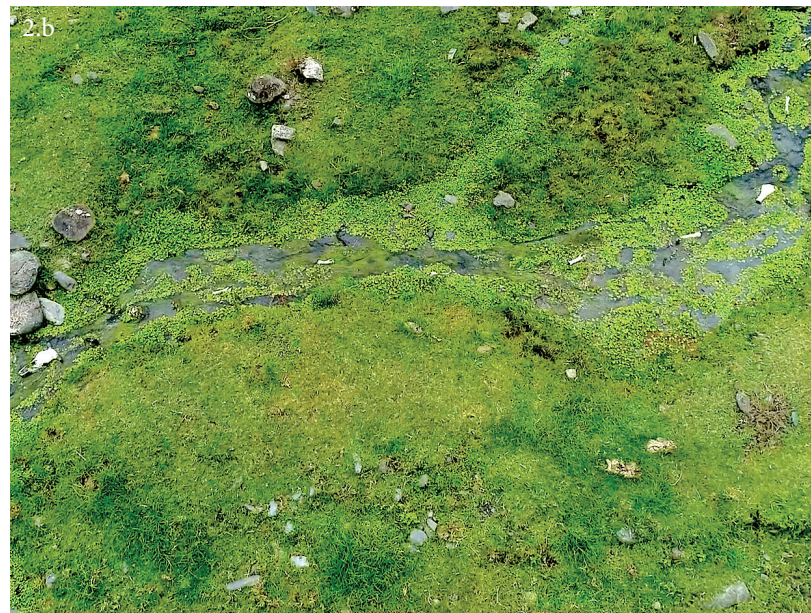
It is about a geographical experimentation that leads to the transition of the artist Antonio García Rico (Caracas, 1970-). Obsessed by the spatial fabrics and how they are manifested within a certain society such as that of El Molino (The Windmill in English), located in the Venezuelan Andes, within a territory known by rurality and its isolation from the urban-city, with particular rituals and different times, the artist accesses it from an individual, exploratory vision, with which he researches this geography from the affections and the transformation that it can produce in it, amid an intrusion thought by the possibility of creating other spaces of great significance.

Spaces determined in the placement of a triggered simultaneity in the extraction, fragmentation and cutting of what was found in that specific geography of the State of Merida in the West of Venezuela, with which he conceives a new

[...] «lived space» [...] «directly lived», the space of the inhabitants and users, while simultaneously containing the other spaces, both real and imaginary. This «lived» space is superimposed on the physical space, making a symbolic use of its objects, and tends to be expressed in systems of symbols and non-verbal signs.⁶

Signs and symbols of the place with which the artist intervenes in the territory of El Molino, to place the accent on that simultaneous, lived-in space, and for this, it was necessary to compulsorily locate the offshore zone defined in the extraterritoriality that determines not neutral but relational glances that are transferred to a new socially constructed space that García Rico appropriates and redirects to new fields of meaning.

This is the reason the artist works amid permanent conversation and negotiation with the area, in all its dimensions, during the years 2017-2018. Time in which he will move to El Molino to know the territory, its identity, its rituals and customs determined by the world of the harvest, its ways of execution, the use of materials with which they draw the lands in sinuous borders.



As well as the presence of others, outside the community, who are today involved in a game of determining if they are from there due to time spent, but at the same time of not belonging there, or its playfulness with the religious power of the community and the permissiveness of the same one.

His geography and spatial measurement of the population of El Molino speaks to us of a social, subjective cartography set in the symbolic elements of its extraterritoriality, in a permanent game with the territory it accesses. Thus, there is a new way of functioning, at the moment in which non-obvious elements of this particular society and the environment in which it is located stand out. Here the artist's actions, conceived in interventions of different kinds, whether in the physical or emotional territory of the community, are supposed to mobilize it in another way with interventions that represent this different mapping that will carry the name of 'Ephemeral Museum'.

An ephemeral exhibitable space, in which the entire community of El Molino will emerge in a new measure of the representable, mobilized among that which is worthy of the collection in its

impermanence since it is only evident in the experience and in the residues that the actions proposed by García Rico leave on the delimited terrain. In it, the artist will place his intentional and planned interventions from his exploration and where the territory, in its lived space, becomes support with which to invent "a new world of topography based on the notion of entropy"⁷, hence generating a new order of the territory.

In this way, García Rico's 'Ephemeral Museum' outlines a new territorial space experienced through the creation of geographical metaphors that allow the culture of El Molino to be read from a variety of significant substrates in which a series of possible identifications are operated from the artist's point of view, within the acts of relationship hence creating temporary correspondences. Such correspondences will be registered within the territorial reorganization given by the artist in the game of the world-surface of Land Art willing to be altered and in the presence of the "planet-set" **-in which El Molino emerges in-** a succession of scenes, of sets, to be inhabited"⁸, with which space directly lived as experience is expressed.

In this ambivalence of world-surface and planet-set, El Molino emerges and accesses the planned cartography in this geographical turn through seven interventions defined and planned in the ambiguity of the exhibitable as collectible and the ephemeral as evanescent. Each intervention has its time of duration and degradation, since its purpose of marking, of the manifestation of tracing the territory through a heterogeneity of devices that transit from the subtlety, the laceration of the space or the evidence of the rituals crossed by research scripted by the artist in the field of the symbolic and the social.

Research that worked at a knowledge and selection center of what was found in interventions such as "White Stones" (Img.1.a-g) or "A Tribute to Cows" (Img.2.a-f). In them, materials imperceptible in the area, white stones known as pebbles and the skull of a cow, worked as defining elements, not traditional, in the territorial space field of El Molino. The purpose was to show the movements, the delimitations, the flow, and the impermanence visualized in the world-surface that shows the wandering of the artist in his geographical turn.



Other interventions that are part of the lived space in García Rico's Ephemeral Museum express a twisted definition of the geometric abstract as a trace in the world of experiences, which differs from the spontaneity found and re-functionalized in "White Stones" and "A Tribute to Cows". Made with rational schemes, both recycle and change the forms of the traditional plow of El Molino to create new tracks on the delimitation of the territory.



The first, called "Drawing on an Onion" (Img.3.a-b), where a yoke of oxen works as the instrument of realization of a free and subtle expression in the built, harvested landscape, in which the linear furrows left by this ancient way of sowing and marking the territory are transformed, also, carried out by the artist. The result is the implementation of a system designed to create radial shapes and thus alter the traditional topography, along with the possible innovation that breaks with the previous schemes



of the harvest.

In this physical transformation of the land, the artist plays with his knowledge as an industrial designer to set a new space of experience, in which we can find the representation in the action that uses the land to give it a new sense of usefulness and the team of oxen as the means with which to leave their mark. With it, he generates a new functionality that alters the previous

3.a



linearity and, at the same time, the topography of the landscape.

“Ode to Persephone” (Img.4.a-b) is the second topographic intervention made by the artist on the grounds of El Molino. Although this also expresses its geometric abstract character, it does not possess the subtlety of “Drawing on an Onion.” The ground has been torn with a tractor, a wound caused on the territory, by the great ground movement brought by its conception,

the magnitude of the space that it occupied, besides the game between the natural and the constructed, between the established and the imaginary, and in which the opposition between matter and meaning is manifested as a wound of the world-surface in its materiality.

The geographic aspect becomes, then, in human cartography at the time of marking the territory from emotional rationality,

away from any kind of functionality for the harvest. In “Ode to Persephone”, the artist expresses the ritual of leaving one’s footprint, of having been there. A precarious footprint that presents in its conceptual treatment of impermanence the need to become a monument and memory amid an ephemeral temporality.

The four interventions: “White stones”, “A Tribute to Cows”, “Drawing on an Onion”, and “Ode to Persephone” map and

3.b



4.a



4.b





5.a

mark the territory from a different physical aspect and significant materiality where another order of the territory emerges in the absence of a society that participates only in the negotiation of spaces and their later contemplation. The interventions evidence the word-surface built in its usefulness and not in its social aspect. However, to make a complete and complex cartography, the artist will add three further interventions along with the active participation of the community. With this, he generates a new entropy that topographies the community from other socially constructed spaces of understanding.

These interventions began with “The first public spittoon of El Molino” (Img.5.a-b), a collective action in which García Rico appropriates and re-dimensions a collective custom of the population, that of chewing chimó, a mixture of tobacco sewn with Urao salt that is chewed and then spat out by the person who consumes it. This old custom in the Venezuelan Andean communities used to fight hunger has become a sign of identity of certain populations, as well as the product of the same one: the spit that goes directly to the ground. In addition, chimó also works as a pigment with it, some artists have created known works from the Andean region such as paintings made of chimó.



5.b



The artist maps this custom and its expression within the territory of El Molino. With it, he activates a collective pictorial work in which he places a canvas and the spitters perform their work of spitting the residues on it, during a sort of unexpected, spontaneous dripping, which results in an abstract expressionist chimó painting placed in the public areas of the canvas.

Although “The First Public Spittoon in El Molino” highlights

diverse representational substrates in which García Rico establishes his extra-territorial discourse within diverse layers of meaning, in a later intervention it will lead the collectivity of El Molino to a new resignification of the identity of its inhabitants. This time, he will take as an excuse social geography which he will use to map the population from his intervention “Tomb for the Living” in which he shows, sarcastically, the presence of the ‘other’ as an agent foreign to the community.

“Tomb for the living” (Img.6.a) consisted in the realization of a Catholic funeral altar used by the locals, in which they asked and prayed for the living, for those ‘others’ who enter the territories of El Molino in the form of an invasion; ‘others’ who unexpectedly enter the territory and who, from the popular ritual, must be chased away. This cartography shows one of the contemporary complexities: the migration, the relocation, the crossing of simultaneities that emerge in the presence of that apparent stranger, with which one has a partial connection and a different relationship between the ‘other and the place.’ Thus, in this particular tomb that relationship is re-dimensioned by those who break into a part of the territory that belongs to the El Molino Documentary Center. This Center was created by a journalist and an architect. A couple who have dedicated themselves to documenting and divulging the customs of the place and its inhabitants, and who, despite their stay in the territory and the benefits brought to El Molino, continue to be ‘others’ today.

The last intervention completely alters the symbolic spaces of El Molino. Through the artist’s influence, which marks the geography of the lived space, the church turns its primary function, that of the Catholic tradition, to become a Cinema, through the use of its furniture. This action of altering and transforming the physical space was called “The Cinema” (Img.7.a-b), where the main nave of the humble church transfigures its function of worship in the main altar, the apse, to lead it to a place of provisional projection, in the intentional placement of a fragile screen in the place.

‘The Cinema’ is an intervention agreed upon with the parish priest of the community This completely changes the definition of the liturgical space and leads it to the paths of different functionality and meaning capable of generating a new emotional locality, expectant of change, of a ephemerality that mutates in the ways of contemplation and understanding of the space and themselves. (Img. 7.a-b).



The Ephemeral Museum: A Geographical Topocritical Review.

Antonio García Rico, through his Ephemeral Museum, leads us from his presence to his non-presence in that journey of the world-surface interpreted by a particular way of Land Art in the interventions that begin with “White Stones” or “A Tribute to Cows.” In them, the spontaneity of what has been found shows the way of this artist who is obsessed with the experiential space of what has been lived, and who will later decide on the exercise of rationalizing his action on the world-surface, while

intervening with traditional and modern systems of plowing the territory, marking it, tracing it or giving a new meaning to it. This is performed from the extra-territorial position of the geographer-space artist, who approaches what is necessary and moves distantly enough in an individual decision to map the space he accesses.

This particular decision leads the artist through the paths of a topocritical geography that he uses to explore different social and natural built substrates, which were used to gather the



information that led him to the analysis and knowledge of the lived space of El Molino, as well as the physical reality of human places, both his own and those of others. This aspect is evident in the abstract-geometric rationality of “Drawing on an Onion” and “Ode to Persephone”, or in the realities that show the present from different substrates of extra-territoriality in “The First Public Spittoon at El Molino” and “Tomb for the Living.” He closes the cycle of this new and complex geography with “The Cinema” as the ultimate alteration of the social.

¹Bourriaud, Nicolas: “1. Topocritical review. Contemporary Art and Geographical Research”, in: “*Heterochronies. Time, art, and archeology of the Present*”, Miguel Ángel Navarro (Comp.) Murcia, CENDEAC, PAC”, 2008, pp. 17-18.

²Idem, p. 18. **(Emphasis added)**

³Guasch, Anna Maria: “*Art in the Global Era.*” 1989/2015, Madrid, Alianza Forma, 2016, p. 161.

⁴Idem, p. 162.

⁵Torrijos, Fernando: “About the Aesthetic Use of Space”, in: *Ephemeral Art and Aesthetic Space*, José Fernando Arenas (Coord.), Barcelona, Anthropos, 1988, p.24 **(Emphasis added)**.

⁶Soja, Edward: *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Spaces*, Boston, WileyBlackwell, 1996, pp. 130-131, cited by: Guasch, Ana María: Op. cit: p. 163.

⁷Bourriaud, Nicolas: Op. cit, p.26.

⁸Idem, p.29. **(Emphasis added)**.