

## SCATTERED MUSIC

### Manel Clot

An evident aesthetic and terminological confusion, together with all the borrowings and inheritances that characterized so much of Catalan art for the theatre in the seventies, gave rise to a sort of categorical uncertainty which meant that practically everything anyone did was labelled conceptual, a kind of indiscriminate universal title that was used to designate almost all the non-pictorial trends of the day. Time, of course, has gradually sifted and distinguished the many different propositions on a basis of more essential defining features. Fifteen long years after that situation, the work of Jordi Benito can be seen in a very different, more specific way, and his present work regarded as a logical evolutionary stage —can be aligned with other contemporary attitudes, distancing it from the idea of a hypothetical isolation though maintaining its forceful independence and singularity. An untiring practitioner of action painting and body art (with a vast collection of references ranging from Malevich to Nietzsche), and more influenced by the thing than the concept, his works have always had a dual component, both theoretical and residual: cause and effect and, as materialization of his discourse, origin and consequence - i.e. action and installation. Thanks to the close symbiosis of these two elements, his works have become very personal stage sets permitting the development of a narrative aspect basically assisted by a complex objectualism, in an attempt to make it as complete a discourse as possible by synthesizing effects: the visual effect with the sound, and both of them with the psychic and emotive.

**MANEL CLOT:** The evolution of your work has led you to an increased involvement with installations, to the

detriment of your action art. Has the object, as a symbolic and connotative element, been the main nucleus of this?

**JORDI BENITO:** To a certain extent it has, because it has always been my aim to create scenery for musicians. Hence my collaboration with Carles Santos. My present idea is to build scenery of a Wagnerian kind, but in terms of our own age, recovered as it were. This scenographic idea links up with a sort of theory of the support, or of the base: a support is produced in which there is a series of things, and this support can be just a photograph, for instance, or a painted canvas, or a lead flooring, though this does not necessarily mean that it is exactly the same as a décor or performs its function. The rest is a repetitive story, the usual personal, subjective stories; it is like telling the story of your life in each work, and telling it in stages.

**M.C:** In this respect, do you opt for the thing as a catalyst for reflection or as a subject of metaphorical manipulation?

**J.B:** As the latter. It is a question of using literary objects, highly charged with connotations. Basically, we are back to the former question, for they act as autobiographical elements and in that we find their value and their presence.

**M.C:** In view of the present intentionality of your work, can one speak of parallels with the objectual and neosculptural trends now in vogue, or do you consider yourself absolutely separate from them?

**J.B:** Perhaps you might find some similarity, of a purely formalistic kind, at a very generic level. But it is a general tone and no more. I don't think you could find anything else. In my work there are many more remains of land art or arte povera than of any other movement.

**M.C:** After fifteen years of continuous work, with the evolution that implies, what differences have you established between the body vehicle and the object vehicle?

**J.B:** I don't know if there is really any difference, because the intention has always been the same. In my earlier work the two elements converged, because those works were defined as actions within installations; that is to say, it was a question of integrating two equally important things, differentiated but complementary. My ideas for future pieces would include actors too, in a way that would have nothing to do with the world of the theatre or with any contemporary works of a paratheatrical type.

**M.C:** Would it be proper to speak of a theory of still life or landscape in your works?

**J.B:** Oh, they are both there, but at different periods. My earlier works were really still lifes of a sort, both in the composition of space and in the choice of objects. But in what I've done more recently there's much more

sense of landscape, like a contemplation of some complex thing, more total and less punctual or anecdotal. At bottom it's a question of something similar to "landscapes after the battle", basically when before there has been some little action; we return to the previous sense, of little actions within installations which take them in and are their later result, like their remains of the solid waste, the detritus.

**M.C:** Centring our attention, then, on the theme of the object, do you consider yourself more a landscapist than a handyman?

**J.B:** To begin with it might be considered a question of cultural crossbreeding, a thing that has always been rather a characteristic of mine. Just as I am interested in the whole Germanic world, at the same time I am fascinated by what we might somewhat metonymically call "the Guadalquivir", perhaps because of the years I spent in Cordova and Seville. Thus, this crossbreeding would be a sort of North/South conjunction. If I have to choose, at all events, the landscape attitude is much clearer in respect of a pure interest in scenography. The basic interest at first was music, and now that has become more complex, tending towards an interest in scenography, as a sum total of factors of all kinds, like juxtaposed fragments. A series of scattered images as a beginning, and the inspirations in musical motifs — almost always based on motifs taken from Wagner — are references from which the work of the piece begins; the final result is usually the sum of all these, the whole.

**M.C:** After so many years of works done in quest of a total work of art or of something very much like it, do you still think of achieving this sort of Gesamtkunstwerk as a central element in your artistic activity?

**J.B:** Well, yes, you might say that in that respect nothing has changed, but I still lack that primordial, decisive element, a total symbiosis with a musician, a really close artistic bond, so that the final effect may be complete and total. I still base my work on the idea of opera, because of all it represents as a sum of ideas, of brief images, of snapshots as it were, of many things; it is like a division of the story into smaller parts. The sequence that strings all the parts, all these fragments, together, on a basis of snapshots and images, is the one that succeeds in converting the whole into a work very similar to the notion one has of opera.

**M.C:** Are there any possible affinities with works by other artists, either by reason of their discourse of feeling or in your own results?

**J.B:** I am not very sure exactly why it should be, but there is one artist with whom I feel a profound affinity, and that is Arnulf Rainer. It is something really very inexplicit, but I am convinced that there is a very important influence. I suppose that this can also be

included within that more generic concept we spoke of before, that of my influences from, and interest in, the Germanic world.

**M.C:** An appreciable sentimental projection and an uncertain scattered music, synthesized in the final residues ●

