

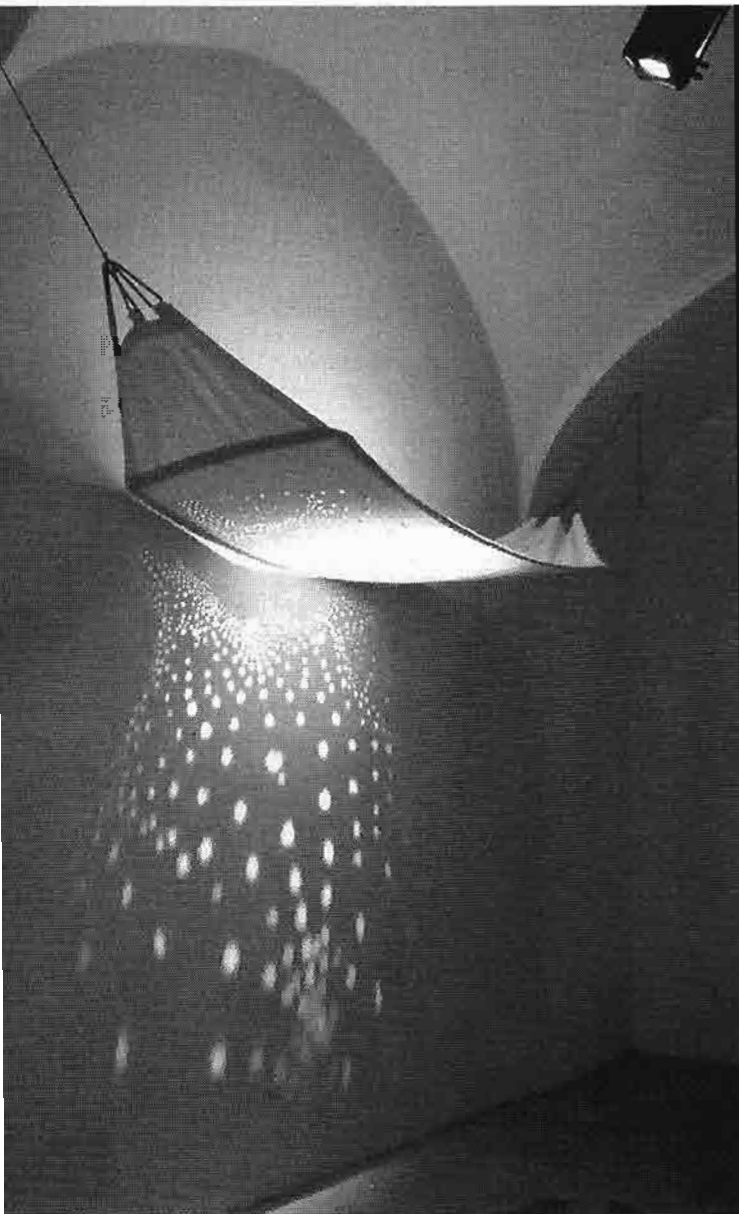
When Walter Benjamin, in his "Thesis on the Philosophy of History", used the image of a chess-playing doll activated invisibly from within by an ugly and hunchbacked dwarf, as a kind of parable for contemporary philosophy, he was doubtlessly making use of an extremely subtle form of irony to refer to himself, which in reality suited him down to the ground in that he wished to destroy the idea of "truth" and

his own situation as an author. The dwarf, in his or her theological role, requires a prosthesis which represents him or her, given the absolute incommunicability of theology should it have to present itself on its own. Therefore the dwarf uses philosophy -the doll that looks like an automaton- as a scaffolding or façade in order to channel his or her thoughts outward. In other words, Benjamin suggests the image of ventriloquy itself, as a model for the building of contemporary communication.

If this dwarf, crippled and ghastly, were to show his true face nobody would be capable of believing him -he would not be credible- so that he has decided to transfer his social identity to the figure of a doll which is credible and which we may address as interlocutors. But why is the story the doll tells us credible, whereas we would not believe the dwarf if talking to him directly? Why did Benjamin use this image in order to mock his own situation as an author? Perhaps the German thinker knew that he would not be believed either unless he used an allegory which could genuinely interest us? Benjamin, like the dwarf, "throws his voice" onto the allegorical figure, aware of his impotence as the individual originator of the message, but also of the need to communicate, be it though it may at the cost of an important loss of identity, of a certain prostitution.

And is it not the case -we ask ourselves- that contemporary artists use the mechanisms of ventriloquy in order to make themselves heard? To what extent does it make sense -we would appear to repeatedly tell ourselves- to transmit a message which is "literally" sincere? We therefore build up a series of prostheses by means of which we are able to talk, albeit through the mediation of a social artifact. Who would listen to Eulàlia Valldosera -or to myself- if we hadn't built strategic facades which, like dolls, would speak on our behalf, if we hadn't interfered in some way in the space between our need to talk and the hearing of those who we wish to listen to us? All of us have our own discourses, and now that any kind of moral norm -such as may have existed in the past- has gone, all of these discourses have the advantage of being valid by definition. For what reason then should we listen more attentively to one than to the other? In fact, it would seem that we are getting close to a question of some value, "interesting", we would say, after the manner of Schlegel or Vattimo: Why do we use the concept of "art" as if it were a doll in our hands in order to explain things which otherwise could only be considered attractive with difficulty?

If the discipline or institution of "art" -noted at the time by Peter Burger and Marcuse- has nothing to do with certain values, such as friendship, solidarity or beauty, then why are we playing about with this



1. Teràpies, incidents, fuites  
(fragment: l'hamaca)  
/Therapies, incidents escapes  
(fragment: the hamac)/  
1991/instal·lació lumínica  
dos focus, hamaca, llitera, orinal masculí  
d'hospital

Galeria Antonio de Barnola, Barcelona, 1991  
/1991/Installation with two light spots  
hamac, stretcher, masculine hospital's urinar,  
smoke tube/

**The world's navel:  
The earth's belly &  
Breasts**

1990-91 / work in progress

- installations on the floor:  
cigarette-butts on canvas 400 x 400 cm
- text: The world's navel
- performance SWEEPING recorded on  
videotape 4 min.
- photographic series  
• gardener's broom

The central piece of this installation in progress is a floor covered with cigarette-butts and ashes forming a feminine torso.

The photographic works show several points of view and different stages in the construction and the disturbance (SWEEPINGS) of this ephemeral work. These new visions hanging on the wall must be seen as complementary to the image on the floor, like several pictures inside another picture. The process culminates in the floor being swept with a broom like a brush drawing the prints of absent cigarettes, constructing the feminine body again with the ashes. The performance is recorded on video.

The last step consists in fixing the residues of this cleaning operation on the cloth on the floor.

Finally through this process, the core of the work has disappeared.



3. The earth's belly, vertical fragment  
[The world's navel]

1990 / colour photograph 90 x 133 cm

prosthesis in order to legitimate or justify a discourse? Is it possible that Valldosera, like a hunchbacked dwarf but this time without theological rules, uses the mask called art to tell us stories that would otherwise bore us, given that they would not be ours? Take an act as simple and yet as incommunicable as smoking; would it really interest us to hear about somebody's relationship -let's call it psycho-social- with this act, by simply using words? With difficulty. On the other hand, dramatisation, the stage-setting of this relationship in the way that Valldosera does it -in *The Navel of the World*- awakens our interest and our wish to know. In other words: is not art simply a method, an architectural practice which is used as an instrument which by now has no relationship with truths as such and which is useful to us simply as a necessary trick in order to catalyse the spectator?

On the other hand, we should ask ourselves for what reason we pay such fascinated and interested attention to the discourse of the doll, given that we know beforehand it is the artist who is speaking to us. Just as jesters in earlier times (many of whom were ventriloquists of considerable importance), or drunks, or children, elderly and sick people are watched and listened to indulgently, while we accept the contingent nature of their situations as open-mindedly as possible, taking on and assimilating our own feelings, inspired by them, in a way which we would not do with "levelled", "consensual" people, the ventriloquist's doll is receptively pampered, and what it says is taken to be true to a certain extent, thanks to its credibility. And if these anomic people within our society move us, and we attend to their "meaning" as we would not do with that of others, it is because we interpret them as dramatisations of concepts -the "human", the "certain", etc.- which cannot be explained in abstract terms: we need to create spatial, optical, anamorphic corrections. The contemporary artist is also one of these anamorphic elements, who we enjoy scrutinising precisely because of his or her deformity, and his or her supposed capacity for moving and explaining through masks which always hide one, also supposed, true face. And of course there is never a face, fortunately; only strategies of hallucinatory placement, blissfully deceitful. I believe that Eulàlia Valldosera is aware of all this when she submerges herself into the self-evident with the wish to transform that which we believe is certain within that self-evidence.

Ventriloquy deals basically with verisimilitudes and transparencies, parables and unmaskings. John Hills Miller, when talking of three of Conrad's stories -an invaluable example of the intelligent practice of ventriloquy- has pointed out the close relationships between verisimilitude, parable and the unfolding of the narrative discourse. According to him, the meaning of a parable appears in the spectral "apparentness" of the story which explains it. This meaning would remain permanently hidden without this external mechanism which brings it out into the open. This openness -the doll, as we would express it- takes over the contents and disseminates them on the outside, at the cost of cutting itself off from them, converting the signified into something verisimilar but not real. The verisimilar is the appearance of that which could be real, but which cannot be demonstrated by means of any legal, normative, scientific or moral judgement; in other words, the verisimilar is that which we are able to theatrically objectivise, a situation in which universally valued rules have no function. I do not believe that Valldosera is so very far from this when she places her own transparent image in the defunctionalised corners of a house. A house which only she knows, a body which belongs only to her and the decision pertaining to this positioning, which she alone controls. But we are dealing here with an objective image, which tries to talk to us out of a spectral light which we can indeed recognise.

Verisimilitude, in fact, is an element which belongs to a reality which does not wish to be systematised. Not in vain did the first modern definitions of the term appear in the Baroque period, through ideas -which were not as moral as we might think- such as that of decorum and spatial

"...With our lit cigarette we watch the primal fire turned into metaphor of consumption. Cigarettes are also those small rosary beads, or the small knots used long ago to stimulate memory: words were uttered as they were picked up from the rope...

How one can fulfil one's mouth's anxiety while trying to give up smoking? To eat, to suck... After 28 days I interrupt my abstinence, and, in starting over, I decide to pick up day by day the leftovers of this vice.

(...) Knitting means creating out of one's own substance, just as the spider spins its web out of itself. So I knit on the floor my own residual garden, reconstructing my body, my sex, weaving my destiny."

*The world's navel* E.V.1991

### **Burns series**

1990/91 photo series

Photographs taken by obtaining a series of exposures on the same photographic negative. Light projections have been used which partially touch the body, until the whole of the space where the body was positioned for the pose is lit. Each exposure is picked up on the same photo, so that the final result is an eye-witness account of the disappearance of those areas untouched by light.

correctness. When sculptures were placed in churches, on higher spatial levels, a series of optical -anamorphic- corrections were carried out, so that the pieces could be appreciated with a certain visual logic by the onlooker. In other words, the artist was aware of the lack of truth in the sculpture, for which reason it was necessary to dramatise it with a view to obtaining a virtual relationship with the public. But he did not dramatise it for the sake of doing so, simply because he felt like it, but rather because he was limited by certain inherent physical conditions which obliged him to make certain formal decisions. As with the theory of relativity, space is not merely a setting in which the drama takes place, but is a player in its own right. The capacity to decide on one or another option depended on the situation -which formed an integral part of the conception of the work- of the positioning of the piece. This circumstance meant that the artist gradually came to see the relativity of any notion of truth. The artist becomes aware of the fact that the idea which he or she wishes to reproduce depends physically on the place and form in which it is presented.

Eulàlia Valldosera's work, it seems to me, is stricken constantly by this disjunctive paradox. In her works with lights, mirrors, slides, films etc., the signified elements are constantly being questioned thanks to the non-existence of any central point of reference. Everything tends to turn around everything else, but never in concentric fashion, but rather elliptically, aware of the plurality of interests projected by a work. And it is not only a question here of physical, verifiable "truth"; sympotomatically, she herself has commented on her absolute lack of common points of reference with regard to a cultural past such as the Spanish one, plagued with "truths" which are broadcast constantly by unrepresentable male sexists whose only aim is to "make their mark".

The transparency of the trick, of the farce, of the drama, is that which pertains to the relationship between the ventriloquist and his dummy. A ventriloquist cannot act in obscurity; he or she needs to openly show the trick of the mechanism being used. Our sight and hearing will be focussed on the doll no matter how well we may be aware of who is really doing the talking. But while knowing the intricacies of the performance, we are perfectly capable of uncovering this hidden meaning which the artist wishes to transmit by means of our relationship with the lie which is being shown to us in such a barefaced manner. The uncovering of the ventriloquist does not respond to a wish to reveal some unknown truth. Derrida has already remarked that the truth behind the Christian concept of revelation does not lie in the end of the world but in the very fact of its being announced. And somewhat earlier, Wittgenstein -one of the inventors of modern ventriloquy- said that the function of language is first to show rather than to tell, that the significance of any proposition resides in the way in which it is described. Revelation reveals its own resources, the machinery, the utensils by means of which we will be able to pull back the curtain; we already know what lies beyond; it is our own archaeology of means which is what is really beyond us.

The ventriloquist shows all his or her utensils without hesitation; his or her voice, the movement of the mouth (growing less and less sophisticated by the day, as it were), the hand which moves the arms and mouth of the doll, the ineffable stool, the stage lights etc. He or she is pornographic in his or her way of going about things and in this crystal clear deployment of his or her effects lies his or her strength. The meaning of his or her work lies in a peculiar combination of all these means; that which is inscribed in the why and the wherefore, and vice-versa. There are no secrets to this communicative deployment, despite the fact that there well might be in the interior of the author's will, but this secret is lost, it converts itself voluntarily if disposed to project itself socially.

Eulàlia's mechanisms are also presented in pornographic fashion. Everything is on show. In *Vendajes* -a sensational performance piece- the brutal transparency of all the elements, including the "literal"

*"The screams and gestures, the mechanical movements that are caused by physical pain are often indistinguishable from those caused by erotic pleasure"*

E.V.

### 6 and 7. Bandages

1992 / performance / technical realization Kees Schaap / produced by Fundació "la Caixa", Barcelona

- 16 mm. film, 18 min.
- hospital bed on rails
- 2 mirrors
- variable space around 18 x 5 m.

### Bandages

A film projector lies on a hospital bed with wheels. The artist pushes the bed along the room on rails, projecting the film all along the wall.

The film is conceived as if it were a searching light spot that follows the artist's body lying on the bed, showing it slowly and fragmentarily from left to right and viceversa. There is a script for the movements and timing of the bed-projector and another one for the film itself. The intense dialogue between both creates an illusionary space concerning the difference of the timing and reality of the point of view.

At the end of these rounds, the artist intercepts between the projector and the projection on the wall, unfolding herself on a shadow, interacting with her virtual being.

physical transparency of the artist, led to a complete disappearance of the probable original meaning which the artist was aiming at in order to deliver it so that it had a total and thoroughly shattering effect on the spectator. The original secret got lost, certainly, but a configuration of other meanings was gained, in this case ones which were more important for the creator; the social ones. The mental and social prostitution of "Vendajes" allows the public to appreciate a story which, told without a "doll", would have been impossible to communicate; a merely visual relationship would have been established, and never a social one.

In the exercise of a verisimilar practice in the face of a mass of demonstrated and unitarian truths, irony has a vital role to play; irony itself, faced with the absurdity of the artist's "poetic illusion", with the latter being understood as the possibility of once more creating another "grand récit", another grand



narrative. "Irony is a way of saying the truth, of revealing, but at the same time is a defence against truth. This duplicity leads to another form of meaninglessness: the meaninglessness of a fundamental unsayability (...) an unsayability which cannot be dominated or used as an instrument of domination." as J.H. Miller wrote, referring to Conrad. However, this inability to say can be dramatised precisely by means of certain prostheses shown to us by those mechanisms concerning which, ironically enough, we can say that we cannot say. "Whoever tries to say something when it clearly signifies something else ends up by also saying the first thing too, despite him or herself.; despite a more or less substantial loss of initial willpower. Inasmuch as the doll speaks, it ends up by finally saying that which the ventriloquist originally wanted to say, despite the fact that the ventriloquist may be unaware of this. Because it is in the projection of how a thing is said that the what of being said is inscribed. However, does not an advertisement do the same? Yes, but a parity between the how and the what does not seem to interest us in the same way; we only want to see the doll, it doesn't matter which one, nor do the strings of the puppets matter, or the selection.

Irony is consubstantial with the idea of transparency. In Validosera's latest works (*Appearances*), a series of sets consisting of day-to-day objects - "transparent" ones, thanks to our closeness to them - are organised in such a way that the simplicity of their mechanisms is so obvious that in reality it makes us

*realise to what extent we have taken for granted the most supposedly natural events in the name of functionality for things. In these pieces - "cheap and dirty", thanks to their pornographic presentation- we are obliged, I repeat, obliged, to face up not so much to the result but rather the sum of the movements which have brought about this result. And simply because they are before us, clear and pristine, like the tricks of a ventriloquist. Ends and means are ethically related thanks to the irony of an equation formulated on the basis of the Foucaultian spool of analysis of the evidence. How can the obvious be investigated? Well, perhaps by making the obvious, obvious; or to put it another way; by stage-setting the stage set. In these works -which curiously Eulàlia, shortly before the writing of this text, wanted to entitle "about love"- the baroque processes of ellipsis, anamorphosis and continuum are presented by means of total verisimilitude: nothing is certain regarding the way in which the pieces have been constituted, but on the other hand everything is very real, extremely real.*

*And us? Do we also see these works from the point of view of the supposed truth of onlookers or are we able at the same time to anamorphise that which we see, to relativise it from our own positions?*

*There are some people who do not know how to express themselves because they never find themselves in the same place at any one time. Valldosera appears to have put communication before expression, at the risk of there being a misunderstanding, a healthy and necessary deformation, at the risk of theatricalisation -while knowing the "unsayability" of that which she was aiming at- at the risk of it being converted into an allegory, into a parable of itself. But whoever tries to say something when clearly meaning something else, ends up by saying the first thing too.*

