

Gustavo Romano: La tarde de un escritor (The Afternoon of a Writer)

by Susan Jane Douglas

Gustavo Romano shares with other second generation conceptual artists the need to relate human culture to theories of the sign and sign use by means of technological devices such as video, projects for the Internet and, more recently, the satellite photo. Today, Conceptual Art is a kind of degree zero of art, a common art language with Marcel Duchamp as its symbolic parent. During its heyday in the 1960s, Conceptual Art re-contextualized the idealizations of past tradition regarding objects; frequently it abandoned the object completely. Artists increasingly used analytic processes to "deconstruct" the idea of the artwork. Their work took several forms. Some conceptual work (in the U.S. Lawrence Weiner's for example), followed an aesthetic of amateurish denial in the spirit of radical unoriginality and anti-intellectualism associated with Dada. Other work drew on investigations of language and science; for instance in Britain, where Art & Language extracted the idea of art from its material and discursive determinations. During the same period, Fluxus associates (in Canada the N.E. Thing Company) worked on time based performances, video, film, and installation art as well as publications in various forms. Yoko Ono, who wanted to deal philosophically and aesthetically with the end of painting as a concept, created pieces that stated that the artwork is a movement in time and space.

Today's conceptualism is less tautological and more tactical. Whether it's made in Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, or Argentina, second generation Conceptual Art is the outcome of a process of abstraction. In its new guise it can be stylishly cool, intellectual, or exist as a critical window into a global virtual multimedia world. It can clearly adhere to codes for what Paul Virilio has called the electro-optical economy.* Alternately, it can lay bare a satisfying debate regarding what art is to become. Either way, it keeps reminding us that curiosity and scepticism are important values to the culture. The Argentine Gustavo Romano contributes to the debate by relating these values (in the levels macro and micro) to the visual aspects of the world.

Romano can be described as a researcher. In his studies he pursues the investigation of a construction of reality based on an intellectual understanding of a connection between the scale of intranscendent data, optical devices, visual perception, and reflection. The idea of relative space and time leads to this particular set of ontological conjunctions by way of the concept of the artwork as inspired by the informational field. In *La tarde de un escritor/The Afternoon of a Writer*, Gustavo Romano explores our human compulsion to put our life into words, to find the narrative thread which gives meaning to our lives. His work gives us a heightened sense of what is a normal part of our conscious life and our existence, and while pointing at the futility of such gestures in the larger scheme of things. The x-ray image records the impossibility of achieving transcendence by drawing on our desire to make clear, conscious statements.

* See Paul Virilio, *Ground Zero*, trans. Chris Turner (London & New York: Verso, 2002), p. 60.