

The Strain of the Imaginary in Photography

Víctor del Río

Like rays of light shimmering out of a high beam, the work of Juanli Carrión turns on the ambiguous and mysterious fact of mere representation, especially when such representation is photographic. Perhaps in all the ambitious efforts to lay-out theories of photography too much has been made of the phenomenon of the lost reference point and the melancholy that has sprung up as a result, when, in fact, it is certain that photography's true essence lies in its imaginary and phantasmal quality. That is to say, the image would be, according to that condition, the rest of an occurrence, the fruit of an appearance whose nucleus is irradiant and projected. As an eco and residual apparition of the occurrence, the entire photographic image contains another projected image within it, and it thereby initiates a context of reception that removes all certainty as to what it is "in reality" that we are seeing. Or, as it has been said in a more squarely phenomenological spirit, a nagging suspicion persists in all the images one glimpses. Juanli Carrión frames his work in a complex game that turns on the projective nature of every image, with the duplicity brought on by the daily fact of looking at a photograph and seeing, with it, the supplementary condition it inherently implies. We supplement images not only with the textual apparatus with which we try to annotate them, but also with the background noise that accompanies them, along with the memories evoked by each recorded experience.

This projection, which is both literal (in terms of the light) and psychological (in terms of reception), affects our considerations of the natural, from the standpoint of our assimilated cultural sensibility, as well as the naturalization of culture as a newly overlaid environment abounding in meanings. In this regard, as authors like Jonathan T.D. Neil have pointed out, the work of Carrión could be linked to the American tradition of photo-conceptual landscape, where the inheritance of Anglo-Saxon painting turns ironic and reanimates otherwise dead landscapes. The replacement of the landscape as a meaningful natural concept by the disembodied plateau gives rise to a reanimation that we might call, in effect, zombie landscapes. It is no coincidence that this comes from the air photography was once able to convey, supplemented by a cluster of

sonorous and objective evocations, because with them we remember that the birth of photography is associated with the romantic landscape. The vedute, or fragments of nature salvaged within the frame, a simple act of signage, salutes us before an origin that enjoins the early byzantine discussions of aesthetic philosophy, close to the virtue of gardening, and the irreparable transformation wrought by heavy industry on the contemporary landscape.

In a series like *Kei Seki* (2010) or *On Stage* (2010-2011), we find these superimpositions on the first layer of the exercise of symbolic projection by way of the transfiguration of the space with artificial light. In this same sense, the inscriptions of text on these public spaces would be messages that, like captions to a photo, serve to modify our consciousness about the symbolic dimension of place. The work of Juanli Carrión offers, in that way, a reading of spaces, and then a second reading that transcends and complements the literalness of the first, while becoming something of an allegorical strategy.