



Molecular Science

Catalogue essay by Gean Moreno

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John Espinosa's work has always been about the way that information can "disjoint" the object that transmits it. There is always an excess in his sculptures, but not in the sense that we can't pin down their meaning and have to capitulate to a logic of deferral or to symbolic indeterminacy. It's, rather, that the information used precedes the object and continues moving after it. Like the comic book cells of Pop art, it's material already circulating in the world when Espinosa sets his sights on it and it won't be depleted by "entering" his objects. But unlike Pop art, however, the translating machine here never manages to turn appropriated material into self-contained aesthetic object. In fact, it's the turbulence of translation--the transference of data and the way it perturbs the object--more than any completed conversion, that is important

to the work. Espinosa's claim that Dennis Oppenheim's *Two Stage Transfer Drawing* (*Advancing to a Future State*), 1971, was an important early encounter should generate little surprise. One imagines the conspiracy films of the 1970s no less significant an influence.



In Espinosa's work, the sculpture that one bumps into is merely a vector in the much longer trajectory of the information presented. Granted, it's an eccentric vector, a vector that as an art object, enmeshed in a history of self-aware and complexly-structured cultural artifacts, calls attention to itself, harbors various secondary motives, underscores and intensifies the very process it is engaged in, and often by its very nature alters the data it routes. But an agent used to deliver information from one context to another nonetheless, the Espinosa "vector" takes on a kind of supplementary character in relation to the massive networks--those invisible materialities that increasingly structure our everyday worlds--in which the data it mines is enmeshed.

This may be a way to think about Espinosa's sculptural practice: It's about rerouting information and waiting to see how this rerouting "re-molecularizes" the

object. Espinosa plugs into the massive networks in which data is moving and generates a detour in their flows by grafting an artificial vector (a sculpture) to them. But it's weirder than this, because the vector itself, in a significant even if not in a complete way, is made from the data it channels. The data becomes part of the "molecular" structure of the object and the actual molecules that make up the physical artifact have to accommodate this data as an essential and irreducible part of it--and not simply as a disconnected semiotic layer loosely pegged to matter. Consequently, the object is "molecularly" bound to the data it drew on. When we learn, for instance, that the hollow core of *An Infinite Collapse* (2005) is filled with fifty gallons of hermetically sealed saltwater harvested from the Bermuda Triangle we see a doubling, like an image splitting and "de-laminating" from itself, suddenly crystallized: the sculpture is there as a physical body, but the sculpture is also in the wild currents of information regarding the Bermuda Triangle that come rushing in. Neither side has priority over the other. And to obviate the second, immaterial (but very real) dimension of the work is to shortchange its complexity and to refuse to see the exercise in adjusting sculptural production to a world traversed by endless networks, overflowing with information, and shaped by invisible forces.



On the one hand, the object plugs and dissolves into the lore that has accrued around the Bermuda Triangle--the anomalous phenomena registered in aircraft gages spinning wildly, the disappearance of Flight 19, the leftover technology of Atlantis, etc.. It taps that entire network of perhaps spurious, but not because of this any less real, information and becomes an interface with it--a real endpoint of the network. It is now part of its contents. More than referencing or alluding to an object of myth, *An Infinite Collapse* fuses with the Bigness of the Bermuda Triangle.¹ Seamed to a massive virtual archive, forever submerged in its flows, what is this sculpture? Where does it end? Where do we locate it? Does it become, like the Bermuda Triangle, something that splits itself between a very specific location in physical space and a virtual collection of data? In a very real sense, *An Infinite Collapse* is somehow *not there*.

On the other hand, of course *An Infinite Collapse* is undeniably *there*. Its dimensions are precise; its weight can easily be determined; a soft kick when the gallery attendants aren't looking will confirm its materiality. It engages in that "calibrated relationship" between object, viewer and architecture that has busied American sculpture since it internalized the lessons of Barnett Newman. Even if coated with an image of deep space that takes us elsewhere, *An Infinite Collapse's* flirtation with a recurrent minimalist gestalt while bending it just so, as if it's been distorted by an alien force or by the gravitational pull of a black hole, claims it as yield from the gene pool of that "something else" beyond sculpture that Donald Judd staked out in the mid-60s. One thinks, in particular, of how this object relates to Charles Ray's adherence to and challenge of minimalist forms in works like *Ink Box* (1986) and *Ink Line* (1987). (But one also thinks of the intertwining of data and form that is central to Ray's *Unpainted Sculpture* [1997] and more recent projects.) Like Ray's objects in general, *An Infinite Collapse* addresses the problem of scale. In taking on particular proportions, in addressing and ironically challenging formal protocols, in sitting in space in such a way as to participate in the triangular relationship of viewer-object-architecture, *An Infinite Collapse* manifests not only its undeniable *thereness* but its affiliation to a lineage of objects deeply concerned with their literal presence and behavior in physical space.

So, then, *An Infinite Collapse* splits in two--ontologically. A fault line opens up in it. It's surely in front of us. But then, it's also not *merely* that squat object that gravity anchors to the gallery floor, because it is swirling around us, transacting in our memory banks, digging into our (pop) cultural archives, taking up cheap real estate in cyberspace, inserting itself into other heads that may care less for sculpture than for the paranormal. It's the data channeled and the channel the data flows through. It's dispersed and it's contained, refusing synthetical tidiness. To put a down a short and precise formulation, here where precision comes undone: *An Infinite Collapse* is *there* completely and it's *not there* at all. This is the theorem that diagrams it's double structure. The infinite collapse is that of the bridge that we incessantly (reflexively) try to place over the gap at the center of the object.

This impossible bridge that would re-link things, that would return us to the object that is self-contained and autonomous, is what Espinosa refuses to deliver or what he is perhaps proposing as out of tune with a world stitched together by networks and structured by disembodied forces. What he offers, instead, is the split-object. And more recently, we've gotten the absent-object or the object that is a little like Fritz Lang's Dr. Mabuse in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933)--a network that has swallowed its center; a series of "external" manifestations that retroactively postulate a cause or center they can't quite confirm. In the film, Dr. Mabuse is a mastermind criminal who, after years of silence in an asylum, begins to write obsessively and produces a massive manual (the testament) intended to bring about the Reign of Crime. Sitting up in his bed the few times he is shown in the film, Mabuse is an empty shell and a writing machine--a senselessly productive body bereft of interiority and intentionality. And although the mad doctor is confined and dies halfway through the movie, the perfect crimes he has laid the program for are executed to the letter by a disconnected network of criminals led by a voice that emanates from behind a curtain in a secret room. Everything points back to Mabuse, but Mabuse is nowhere to be located.

In the end we find out that the "voice" who is unleashing chaos on the city belongs to Dr. Baum, Mabuse's psychiatrist. But of course, Baum is no more than a decoy. He is

the voice behind the curtain that hides The Voice Behind the Curtain--the Absent Cause that generates concrete effects by putting out the urgent and implacable demand--as a manageable substitute to irresolvable social antagonisms--to be filled in. The Voice Behind the Curtain is the voice that is not there; the voice whose very absence we have to fill, whose missing message we are compelled to code. It's the voice that Mabuse's empty shell of a body and machine-like production serve as placeholders for.

Espinosa's most Mabusean project thus far is *Remote Viewing* (2010). He claims to have acquired a remote parcel of land somewhere in central Florida. It's exact location is secret. He constructed a sculpture on this property and left it there for people to bump into accidentally. There are no images of this artifact, except for a video that has been deposited somewhere on the Internet. It's exact location, like that of the sculpture, isn't being disclosed. There is the title, but it remains unclear whether this names the orphaned object or the process that the object's absence triggers--the need for those who hear about this "absent" sculpture to produce their own mental picture of it. It may be that the title names more than either of these.

We have to believe Espinosa regarding the existence of this abandoned artifact, I suppose, even in the absence of evidence, lest we risk this being only a hoax. (Though, in the end, it may not matter if it is a hoax, as the dam has already been opened and the effects generated demand we fill in the "absent cause" anyway.) So there is an object somewhere out there, its location is unknown, its morphology anyone's guess, its fate not only undetermined but unverifiable. And yet, even with this black hole at the center of the story, skepticism has no purchase here. Or rather, to doubt if any of this is true is to miss what is at stake: the entire economy of rumor has been activated. Calling up such a massive force, a tornado that moves only data while producing real physical effects, in order to consider its productive possibilities, to see where it takes us, renders any potential lack of veracity in Espinosa's claim of little consequence. All we need to do is hear the story and follow its movements, track the spirals spinning out of an empty eye.

“While still under the shadow of negativity, rumor nonetheless acts as an *enabler*...”¹ Although Avital Ronell is busy deciphering Heidegger in that line, what is of interest here is the question of enabling, of setting the conditions, if not the obligations, for production. Rumor is generative; it fires things up. In our case, it enables or “teleguides” the fantasy production of a potentially infinite array of images of a sculpture, each determined by the idiosyncratic mental modulations or limitations of the conjurer. And we can go further: this rumor *compels*, like a mad hypnotist, the emergence of this endless parade of morphological variants, of this insubstantial and dispersed field of delirious incongruity. It induces a kind of cognitive mobilization. Aren’t you, as you read this, already working on a mental picture of this object, already adding to the field of possible versions, even if, now that I’ve mentioned it, you fight against the impulse, refuse to be manipulated?

So, *where* do we locate the sculpture in this case? Is it the object abandoned in the woods? Is it the rumor that activates things? Is it in your head? Is it the endless flow of private images that form a kind of unbound archive? If we think that the latter is the case, then *Remote Viewing* will always be miscellaneous and unfinished. We’d be dealing with an “object” that has swelled beyond itself precisely by articulating itself as a flexible void, an open and unavoidable invitation, within the cognitive space of those whom the rumor catches up with. The sculpture can accommodate endless, heterogeneous iterations of “itself.”

But, of course, Espinosa’s understanding of the object as always double, always there and not there, always “de-laminated” from itself, paradoxically refuses to allow us to decouple things this easily and say that only these fantasy images constitute *Remote Viewing*. Whatever it is that triggered the production of these images, the “absent cause,” insofar as Espinosa has folded it into the work by elaborating a story about it, is just as much a part of the sculpture. It’s a structuring hole at the center of it. And if this is so, then the medium--rumor--that extends the process in time and space has to be incorporated as a fundamental aspect of the work as well. *Remote Viewing* may just be the entire network that is constructed between the missing causal agent or trigger (the

black hole we feel compelled to fill), the medium of transmission (rumor), and the dispersed array of images that result. And one has to take things further, since rumors have a way of refusing to stay once we put them down: *the work is also in all the future images that will emerge*. It's already in the non-existent locations that it will actualize by filling. The whole thing is like a flexible and expanding and multidimensional Mabusean web. The work is distributed and disconnected to the point where we can't see the end of it--its absent source is mirrored by its potential lack of finitude. We are not before a sculpture but *in* it somehow, in the field of all the incongruent versions that have been/will be imagined, even if we can't really survey this field. This is sculpture as exploded drawing, but with this difference: it's not exploded spatially, it's exploded in time. It's sculpture re-molecularized into a quasi-hyperobject,¹ a "machine" of effects that, like Dr. Mabuse, is nowhere and everywhere.

NOTES

1. One wonders if using the Bermuda Triangle, a shared/disqualified signifier of the paranormal, is not an exercise in putting the very idea that sculpture can sustain so much extraneous information to the test.
2. Ronell, Avital, "Street-Talk" in *Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium*, Bison Books (Nebraska: 1994), pp.88-9
3. Hyperobjects are, according to Timothy Morton, "entities massively distributed in spacetime. You can only see certain fragments at any moment, but you know it's there." Scale and multidimensional dispersal force us to conceptualize a special category for them. Evolution, global warming, capitalism, class, language, plutonium 239--all these have been proposed as hyperobjects. We can't see the end of any of these, since we are inside them and they are inside us, even if we are unaware of their existence. Global warming is out there surely; it's effects will be felt million of years into the future. But it is also here. Viscous, as Morton proposes, it stick to us. It burrows into the porous layers of our bodies and discourses and lives, through the

uncannily warm afternoons of February that we spend on the terrace, through the A/Cs that we crank on and the tailpipes of the cars we rev up, through the ubiquitous injunction to think green. Global warming is in these things, while of course not being in them at all. The hyperobject occupies a massive range of locations at the same time. It is here and it is not. See Morton, Tomothy, "Unprimed: The Emergence of Hyperobjects," lectured delivered at the symposium *The Unprimed Canvas: Burgeoning Fields in Practice*, held at the Architectural Association, London <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com/2011/02/unprimed-emergence-of-hyperobjects.html>