

Batman among the Butterflies. The Art of the Collector or the Risk of Transgressing Order

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The common etymology of the concepts *legere* and *colligere* suggests it: like it or not, an artist is also a collector. The writer reads works from a vast pre-existing corpus, absorbs them and moulds them into a new body; the artist reads the material world of objects, deciphers previous artworks, which he fuses, filters and rearranges in his own, different way, unearthing fresh relations and transfiguring this raw material by lending it new meaning. The talented collector has an unquestionable creative force. Art and collecting appear to have a symbiotic relationship, not only at the obvious, receptive level (Marcel Duchamp described the collector as a painter 'squared'), but also at the productive level, as evidenced by the existence of innumerable artist-collectors of the stature of Rembrandt, Goethe, d'Annunzio, Picasso or Nabokov.

An essential part of Carlos Pazos' work consists of sifting through endless matter, picking out the pieces he wants and storing – hoarding – them in the storage spaces of his homes, perhaps not with the systematic pedantry of the average collector, but rather in an accumulative way, of eccentric chaos.

The broad range of objects includes everything from his own personalities, in the staging of his manifold double personas and semblances (extravagant self-collection), to works of art (also his own) and knick-knacks. Like Andy Warhol or Kurt Schwitters, he plays the role of storer, searcher and gatherer of *artificialia*; trivial nonsense of everyday, second hand life. Armed with a keen, poetic eye, he is able to foresee and capture the eloquence of the objects, the hidden constellations, which after arranging together the raw material or 'data bank', reveal all the potential of subversive intervention.

When he died, Warhol had 10,000 objects stockpiled away (the number is known from a posthumous auction). Collection obsession. He just couldn't throw anything out, like Picasso, who had, among other things, 15,000 photos and col-

lected knick-knacks (toothpicks, empty cigarette boxes, etc.), African art and works by other painters. He was convinced that all painters appropriate other painter's works and adapt them to their own purposes. He copied, mainly classic paintings, and would come up with as many as fifteen variations on a single Delacroix, Degas or Grünewald.

The poetics of verbal collecting

Before examining closely Carlos Pazos' art of assemblages, collages and installations, I would like to touch on what concerns me as a literary critic by focusing on the analogous para-textual procedure of titles and legends in his works. Pazos collects, equally, verbal cast-offs, well-worn idiomatic fragments, hoary commonplaces and stock phrases, and through their associations with the aforementioned assemblage fills them with surprising – often intriguing, niggling, provocative – semantics, which lends them a second artistic dimension. This ready-made language the archaeologist-collector-artist sifts through, attracted by its inspirational potential, picking out what will serve his purposes. *Ya nada es como antes, No quiero ni pensarlo, ¡Se te va a caer el pelo!, Ni se compra ni se vende, Quién te ha visto y quién te ve*, are a just few examples of such prosaic expressions, phrases from the attic.¹ The new combination sets off a powerful reaction through, among other things, metaphorisation.

One of the thematic devices he employs is a combination of the religious reminiscences with childhood motifs, the origin of which likely goes back to an autobiographic resentment against a 'bad education'. Carlos Pazos fashions, on the one hand, a collection of reproductions of the Sacred Heart, while on the other he puts together hackneyed Biblical expressions, giving them a striking interpretative twist by means of assemblages with objects from his childhood, in this case dolls.

1. 'Nothing is as it was,' 'I don't even want to think about it,' 'You're going to lose your hair' (meaning: you're in for it), 'Can't be bought or sold,' 'Who has seen you, who sees you' (If they could only see you now), respectively. (Translator's note.)

As a young child Carlos received from his father an entire collection of red rubber figures, perhaps thus inspiring the passion for collecting things his son would show in his adult life. In the series *Diez estampas de mártires y pecadores* (1999-2000), the invitation to Lazarus to 'rise and walk' provides the title to the assemblage of a baby doll with an outsized artificial leg. The legless torso of another doll, with a large black protuberance on its back which might connote the head, a pair of wings of natural black feathers sprouting from its behind, is under attack from a monster figure with simian proportions and a huge, gaping red mouth. High above this scene, titled *Ángel caído*, flies another object from his toy collection, an aeroplane.

The associations with sexual repression are even greater in *Virgen y mártir*, featuring another beastly sinner, a stuffed albino mouse (analogous to the monster and natural black wings from the previous work), pleading desperately before the object of its desire: a doll's head with maiden's plaits atop a spring which serves as a body, inside which (about where the private parts would be) is enclosed a bit of cheese, beyond the creature's grasp. From these assemblages to Charlemagne Palestine's assemblages of stuffed animals or Arman's *Le Massacre des innocents* (1961), which features a collection of mutilated dolls, there is but one Pazos...

The iconography of the Sacred Heart prints is embodied in the natural organ in flames and a sacrificial knife; the title of this piece from the series engages in word play with the Spanish *Dios* and the English 'boss': *iEn Boss confío!*. In other words, the artist's interventions – which are always there – also occur at the verbal level; he subverts stock phrases by means of poetic figures. Instead of a letter or syllable, he may change an entire word; thus the grilled *Burger Queen* or the title *Bonjour*

Melancolía, instead of the original 'Tristesse' of the Françoise Sagan novel.

Another sort of word play is seen in examples such as *Siestas, si estás*, *Ser STAR* or *Sucu lento*. There is also the inner – consonant or assonant – rhyme: *Pánico en el acuario*, *L'amour c'est comme un jour* and *Qué tiempos aquellos (¿para nosotros o para ellos?)*.² Nor is he short on alliterations, even in triadic English names: *Poetry, Pottery or Poultry* or *Blood, Grit and Glitter*. Besides the phonic figures, there are the semantic, like the double entendre of the Italian *diavolo*³ in reference to the toy and the devil. Another deconstructive device cultivated by Pazos is to highlight common, established metaphors by means of an ironic visualisation with ready-made objects: *Con llanto de cocodrilo*, for example, is seen in a crocodile skin, a velvet heart, chains and a knife. His keen abstraction transposes substances such as saliva (with clear plastic wrap) or the effect of cyanide (with a bit of mink pelt). The mix of artificial and natural objects is a constant in the assemblages made from his arsenal of collected materials. In *En conexión directa* he connects an earpiece and a seashell with telephone wire, playing with the analogy of a soundbox held to one's ear.

His ready wit applied to the titling of works, lending them 'verbal colour' (Pazos himself cites this idea of Duchamp's), has been captured in the book *Garabatos y zarpazos*, a chronologically-ordered compilation of thoughts, notes, miniatures and aphorisms also based on conjurings and linguistic acrobatics drawn from an inventory of stock phrases.

His two most prominent rhetorical devices – altering the original semantic function and emphasising ambiguity – are both the product of slight changes in the order of the letters of a word, with substantial effect. Abundant puns (there are rel-

2. *Siestas, si estás*: *siestas*, if you're there. *Ser STAR*: literally, to be a star, but a play on the two Spanish forms of to be. *Sucu lento*: succulent rendered as 'succu slow'. *Qué tiempos aquellos (¿para nosotros o para ellos?)*: Those were the good old days (for us or for them?). (Translator's note.)

3. In English: *diabolo*.

atively few anagrams: *sílaba* [syllable] becomes *saliva*) underscore the sensibility of an artist who knows how to manipulate – mould – the insignificant mass of a locution into a relevant, even colourful entity. The common, average *artesano* metamorphoses and emerges as the *más sano* (healthiest) sector of ‘Art’, or as a question and answer ‘Art, ¿a? No’; *artilugios* (gadgets) as ‘arte y lujo’ (art and luxury), the abstract *fundamental* as a *funda mental* (mental cover); he associates *traseo* (buttocks) with that which follows *tras* (after) Eros; he dissects the name of a glue from his childhood, *Syndetikon*, into several particles – morphemes – in order to connect them all with the mother who gave the little boy support in his early works: *Sin, de, ti, con, Mamá* (without, of, you, with, Mother). *Sindetikon* was the name of an exhibition at the Museo de Bellas Artes de Álava in 2000-2001. In all these phonic-semantic games, the ‘cut-and-paste’ device several times evoked by Pazos himself is applied to language. More abundant still is his collection of plays of words relating to art and philosophy: he condenses the metaphysical dimension of art into the formula *crear es ‘creer’* (creating is believing); and he establishes opposition between the concepts of platonic and the more physical platonic love; the *anonymous* love of *inanimate* objects sets out in search of its *soul* (*anónimo, inanimado, alma*). Nor does Pazos shy from taking the leap over to other languages in his word games: where he reveals his taste for rock music and the transmutations of alter ego roles; the Italian cake *panetone* becomes *pan étonne*, etc. (*clochard/clocher, calés/calaix*). The alliterative, phonetic proximity between *silencio* and its putative opposite *sonido* gives rise to a haptic, synaesthetic marriage of opposites, as the insomniac self ‘digs’ into the sounds of nocturnal silence. The phonological sphere also encompasses the use of inner rhyme: ‘A life with a knife’ – which, like so many of Pazos’ works, refers to the surname of his wife Montserrat Cuchillo.

His book *Garabatos y zarpazos*, the very title of which (assonance, play on his surname) advertises the witty attitude towards language that we have just described (and collected...), reveals keys to his rhetorical procedures, to better grasp, by inter-artistic paths, Pazos’ visual work. It also confirms the relation between the elements of poetry in his work and the objects he brings together – the more ‘improbable’ the better – with which he needs to surround himself, to which he feels a special attachment and whose evocative – suggestive, symbolic – capacity he ‘questions’, without concerning himself with issues of good or bad taste; and he subjects them to a constant personification, imagining them as being, for example, ‘loyal’ or ‘erotic’. Pazos synthesises his snoopers-among-the-ruins *coleccionismo* in a sentence, which includes the change in energy through a disruptive operation, expressed in the verb *violato*: ‘Store, classify and violate to fix the slime of our path.’ The consistency of the slimy trail corroborates the distance the artist has progressed toward the redemptive function of the objects related to the biography of an individual, his ‘taxidermised souvenirs’ salted away, hoarded by a collector of keepsakes ‘anchored’ in the present.

An object is a trail, an indelible sign. I use objects, I collect them, I group them. I try to construct a discourse that relates to my life... Any object is a potential member of the ‘chosen ones’, but I have a weakness for the poorest and those which have aristocratic pretensions. They are usually the ones that show the most ingenuity.⁴

Nevertheless, the artist calls into question his commitment to vice as an ‘inveterate accumulator’: perhaps the artistic labour in the gestation of his works is a mere pretext for stockpiling knick-knacks, for concealing his addiction to things?

4. Carlos Pazos, in Montserrat Cuchillo (ed.): *Garabatos y zarpazos*. Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2004, p. 83.

Collections at work

A retrospective is based inevitably on a procedure tantamount to collecting. And collecting (or hoarding) is the foundation of Carlos Pazos' artistic production. In addition to its character as a meta-collection, the MACBA exhibition highlights the basic, unpolished tool that the artist wields in his work: his large and varied collections. This library of curiosities, this 'sentimental museum', of which he allows us a peek, as if he had invited us into his studio, suggests the artistic category or potential, and is, in his own words, the 'womb' of all his work. Carlos Pazos allows us to look back over the collections pertaining both to his oeuvre of nearly four decades and to his archives, which entails a certain amount of protective nostalgia toward the past, a celebration of patina – 'caresses of time', as Santiago Rusiñol, another Catalan artist-collector, said. And Pablo Neruda's expresses in verse, *Ode to Things*, the lyrical self and his special idolatry of objects, mute witnesses to human existence.

I have a crazy/crazy love of things/... little/for-gotten treasures /fans upon/whose feathers love has scattered its blossoms /... the trace/of someone's fingers/of a distant hand lost/in the depths of forgetfulness.⁵

Carlos Pazos calls his collections (in deliberate pleonasm) *memorabilia*, a 'useless bazaar of souvenirs of the memory'. He has repeatedly used the metaphor of 'photo album' and called the objects in his collection 'family', thus not only anthropomorphising them but also the making them the *mise-en-scène* and grounding of his childhood. The object as biography in disguise. Walter Benjamin spoke of collecting as 'practical memory'.

With active memory, he absorbs what came before and restores and decontextualises it. What is it that distinguishes him from the mere collector? He destroys the hierarchy of his found objects, amalgamating the cheap and trivial (plastic, cos-

tume jewellery, empty bottles) with others more noble (jewels, precious stones, pistols, animal skins). In the subsequent process of elaboration he brings in the semiotic plurality or polyphony, in which predominates his whimsical and ironic attitude, his carnivalesque ambiguity, simulation and subversive ingenuity.

The artist exploits his collections in different ways:

– For private amusement and pleasure, with little or no direct relationship to his trade, and for pure delight in contemplation, independent of art-making. The satisfaction of tracking down a given object, the desire to complete a series and the desire to own things can motivate this sort of disinterested collecting, removed from professional aspirations. Nabokov and his butterflies is perhaps the best-known example of this; before dedicating himself to literature, he earned his living as an entomologist and, in the form of highly detailed descriptions, this soon becomes apparent in his writing.

– As an explicit source of inspiration and formation, under the pretext of documentation, as a standard or model: a painter may cite or copy an acquired work or object, the writer may describe it in meticulous detail. Rembrandt, Goethe and Degas all collected objects that may or may not have pertained to their sphere of work for purposes of copying.

– The collected materials, *artificialia* and *naturalia*, are integrated directly into the work, a collage, for example, made either of elements from nature (Richard Long's land art) or from recycled and congealed refuse taken off the city street (Schwitters). The combination of artificial and natural objects (stuffed hares) is a constant in Pazos' assemblages.

By chance, and with great pleasure, I have discovered today that, in the early eighties Pazos' pseudo-archaeological New York works coincided with those of an Italian artist, Sara Spinelli, who,

5. Pablo Neruda: *Navegaciones y regresos*. Buenos Aires: Losada, 1979, p. 41-44.

in 1982, exhibited at the Basel Kunsthalle a piece called *Archaeology of the Eighties*, made out of squashed drinks cans found on the streets of New York mounted above their corresponding coloured labels, also made out of tins. A squashed tin also appears in a collage by Pazos from 1999 called *Calcomanías*, and seven intact 7-UP cans hold seven plastic penises in *7 machos (basic, classic and gold)*, (1991-96).

– Work and collection are the same. In the case of the French artist Annette Messager, who exhibits photo albums, the work is a constructed, fictitious meta-collection.

Often, the objects are taken, with irony, from traditional natural science museums. In *Huevos no puestos* (Unlaid Eggs) Hubbard & Birchler present the plaster imitation of an ornithological collection of eggs of different species of birds. Eggs, natural and artificial, are also a Pazos collectable, in *Cocinamos con el corazón* (1996) or *iVaya huevos, Supermán!* (1991).

Bowties and butterflies

In this context, one is reminded of two collection/works of winged – artificial and natural – objects. Due to their semblance to wings, in Spanish bowties receive the metaphorical name of *pajarita*. Pazos presents, in a symmetrically arranged assemblage, nine specimens of these cloth butterflies, as if they formed an entomological collection, mounting pins stuck through their thoraxes included, in the sort of showcase used for dried insect displays. Instead of a tenth *pajarita*, there is a Polaroid of his ex-wife contemptuously labelled ‘Piraña H₂O₂KT’ (the H₂O₂KT being a rebus for *aguacate* [avocado], slang for a native of the Canary Islands), with the additional insult *pájara* (slut) and a print of a viper; her underwear (which leaves her pubis exposed) reflects the symmetric form of the wings of the bowties. Associations with voodoo rites arise here, and not only because of

the pins. *Pájara* and *pajaritas* appear in the series *El miedo es libre* from 1990. The strong irony is highlighted by the tacky wallpaper, which serves as a backdrop for simulated imitations.

Eight years on, Pazos presented a genuine butterfly collection in a professional showcase, just as he had acquired it, including the original handwritten cards identifying the species. The simple decontextualisation of this collection of insects hunted and dissected by an entomologist did not provide enough irony for the artist. In his ready-made he must intervene, here introducing into this naturalistic world an artificial figure from the world of comics, the wing-caped superhero, Batman. This extraordinary, alien body invades the space like an elephant (one of Carlos Pazos’ favourite animals) in a china shop, violently disturbing the peace, a rupture analogous to the human *pájara* among the *pajaritas*. *Batman mariposeando*⁶ (1998) alludes to the incredibly gifted man with his cape who engages in a game of mimicry, the failure of which is due only to the disproportion of bodies. And there is the evidence of his intrusion on the lepidopteron paradise: the broken glass of the once hermetic case.

Batman does not have superhuman powers; in other words he cannot, as other superheroes do, go through walls or glass, not without leaving a trail of destruction. However, Bruce Wayne decides on the bat outfit when, in a key, dreamlike, meditative scene, a bat crashes through the window into his library. Moreover the Caped Crusader prepares himself especially for his secret life. Now, the plastic figure, taken from one of Carlos Pazos’ collections, becomes the object of ridicule: with his size and the material of which he is wrought his exercise in mimicry becomes futile, a silly carnival disguise. Failed metamorphosis. And the genuine collection has been reincarnated in a work of art.

As suggested above, this work encompasses the artist’s entire range of poetics as applied in the making of his assemblages, which show how

6. *Mariposeando*: gerund of *mariposear* (from *mariposa*, butterfly): to flutter; to flirt. (Translator’s note.)

he maintains a clear, ironic distance from collecting as it is usually understood. He does not trust the autonomy of artistic expression of his collections transported to his work; mere disassemblage, cut-and-paste, is not enough for him. Rather, he needs to manipulate and, in a more or less drastic act, disturb the idyllic order, the harmonic coherence of the once complete and ordered set. Surely it is his lack of instinct, or need, for order that separates him from a genuine collector. Rather, his interests lie in bringing chaos into any overly coherent set, *épatant* the middle-class attitude to conventional collecting. Where a collector will always try to save, he does not mind destroying. He admits, of course, the dialectic of order and chaos (the sensation of apparent chaos in a collage hides certain order), describing himself as being 'fairly organised', although obsessively accumulative, and that he finds himself in a permanent – reassuring – quest for the 'ideal order'.

Of course he collects things: books, battery-powered electric guitars, Vallauris pottery, reflective postcards (over 2,000), stereos. Then there are the memories, mainly from his childhood: Sacred Hearts, for example, or the innocent icons of a child's fancy, the entire cast of Disney, monsters and heroes, black virgin and albino gorilla included. But according to Pazos, his collecting is as non-vocational as his art. In spite of his symbiotic relation with objects, he knows how to let go of a collection, one reason why the lack of space in his homes in Collioure and Barcelona does not seem to affect him as much as it would a true collector. Nonetheless, he has told me that he tends to fill any space he occupies.

In his adventures as a *flâneur* through the flea markets of this world, Pazos the amateur cultivates his inveterate collecting, with neither scientific nor utilitarian aims, searching, sometimes compulsively, for curiosities or memories, not necessarily real and autobiographical, but constructed. The gatherer of refuse naturally perceives the symbolic and conceptual content in knives, pistols, African busts, costume jewellery, vinyl records...

Each collector to his own.

There is, here, a sliding scale of intensity, and quantity, from hobby to fixation to fetishist obsession to cases of genuine collectomania. I certainly do not aspire to place Carlos Pazos on this scale. He defends himself tooth-and-nail against those who would label him, something he cannot stand. Collector? No. Kitsch? Not at all. Camp? Not that either. For the sake of a better understanding of the Pazos oeuvre, however, we might examine these concepts.

Although collectors' inclinations very rarely lead them to see a psychiatrist, I will do as the publishers of this catalogue have asked me to and provide a 'diagnosis of the collector's pathology'. Most of what has been said of interest on this subject, including the conclusions of the classical psychoanalysts, we should not take very seriously today. To begin with, the leading members of that brotherhood were all inveterate collectors themselves: Freud, Jung, Lacan, Clérambault, who had a pathological fetish for fabric. Sigmund Freud had a collection of 3,000 archaeological objects and maintained that there was an analogy between his obsessive collecting and his professional excavations in the prehistory – the subconscious mind – of his patients. Although the two main Freudian theories regarding passionate, compulsive collecting, considered at the time to be a substitute for libidinal impulses and a regression to the anal stage, seem old-fashioned today, the fact remains that ninety per cent of children collect things until they reach puberty and that the elderly, in a sexually less active stage, often go back to doing the same. An extreme example of this tendency, seen mainly in elderly recluses, is a compulsive accumulation in dirty, unkempt homes of all sorts of refuse (luxury objects too, but without any awareness of their true value), which in the seventies was dubbed Diogenes syndrome. Psychoanalysis now rejects anal retentiveness and erotic substitute as an explanation for the collector's passion and, at most, interprets it as a sublimation of some loss, as a compensation for some traumatic deprivation,

separation (from a family member) or loss of identity. And we should certainly bear in mind the possibility of narcissistic regression to childhood.

The classic Freudian texts always have their bit of literary construction and, vice versa, much literary fiction owes a great deal to Freud's descriptions of his cases. As the Argentine critic Beatriz Sarlo points out, great literature is founded on monomania; all great people are fanatical, obsessive. Thus Braque and Picasso (1912) and their collecting of bits of paper, *papiers collés*, also has its counterpart in the realms of literature and psychoanalysis.

There is a story of a psychiatrist from Basel who has a patient suffering from exhaustive depression. The patient has the habit of picking up any piece of paper he finds in the streets of the city, marking each one with the date and the place of his discovery. Suffering from Diogenes syndrome, he keeps the slips of paper in large bags, first in the cellar of his house and then in his living quarters, until the collection grows so large that he no longer has any space to live in; the collection devours the collector, or hoarder, as the case may be. A similar case, fictional this time, has fatal consequences in a book by Anatole France, *Penguin Island* (1908), in which a singularly thorough scholar of art is literally smothered under an avalanche of filing cards.

In the realm of twentieth-century art (don't worry, Carlos, I've never heard of any fatalities here) works based on the collecting of printed paper first appeared with the cellulose collages by Schwitters, Braque, Picasso or Man Ray (*Collage/ L'Âge de la colle*, 1935), and abound in contemporary installations with the Arte Povera of Boltanski or Mario Merz. The Swiss Dieter Roth exhibited in a museum in Zurich a monumental collection of all the paper – tons of waste – that, over a year, had passed through his hands. Annette Messager's autobiographical photo albums are ordered in detailed taxonomy, for example, 'the wrappers from the oranges I ate'. Anna Oppermann was a collector of the intimate (papers from her daily life, odd bits and objects, the remains of

an autobiographical memory) which she fitted onto a three-dimensional assemblage in the corner of her studio. The common place transfigures toward a sublime, unexpected aesthetic dimension. There hardly exists a work by Carlos Pazos in which at least a bit of printed paper does not appear.

Neither collector nor camp?

Paper is only one of many collectables in Arte Povera. Charlemagne Palestine, the aforementioned sculptor from Brooklyn, for years has deified stuffed animals abandoned by children and impregnated with the memory of emotions and past caresses. From these sacred toys, idols, 'fetishes', the artist-collector creates sculpture by putting them in a new context. Despite their commonness and kitsch, worn and stained by use they become icons of lost childhood with a significant subjective value of emotional, sensual, historical or nostalgic associations. The art that gathers and recycles such objects – experiments with them, disassembles them – also ironises them and is based on the principal of the collage or montage and deconstruction, and thus relates to a kitsch or camp aesthetic. Camp, which came out of Pop art, ignores the old negative view of kitsch which placed it clearly outside the realm of art. This dichotomy was eliminated and kitsch art appeared in the eighties and nineties in the US. Criteria of good and bad taste – fake, cheaply imitative, out of proportion, overloaded, mediocre, low brow, patriotic, naïve, idealising, trivial, frivolous, pretentious, melodramatic, sentimental, sensationalist, stylistically heterogeneous and stereotypifyingly reductionist – as pejorative attributes that an elitist culture assigns to products destined for the masses, became obsolete.

It is not surprising that Carlos Pazos, whose assemblages relate to the procedure described above, should pose a pithy, rhetorical question: Why must a taste for bad taste be in 'bad taste'? A camp sensibility obviously informs his work, for he exalts artificiality, stylisation, theatrical aestheticism,

excess and sex (gender transgressions included). His ambivalent attitude, at once iconoclast and reverential, toward the pop – mass – visual arts culture parodies and satirises collected kitsch materials, but it also rehabilitates and pays tribute to them. His predilection for Catholic iconography (relics), for example, for the child's realm, or his fascination for the golden age of Hollywood with its star system and glamour is shared by all artists with a camp sensibility, including Andy Warhol, Pedro Almodóvar, Manuel Puig or Pierre et Gilles.

That the art of Carlos Pazos has a certain affinity with camp seems to me undeniable. But he is neither wholly camp nor wholly a collector, insofar as he does not conserve his treasure, but rather brings it into play, puts it at risk. He does not open spaces of identicalness, seeking to complete sets and create enclaves of meaning in a contingent world, but rather engenders meanings by breaking up sets and therefore fomenting artistic productivity. A collage is not collection. It provides

the objects with a realm of their own and a second *raison d'être*, by placing them in alien surroundings, so as to lend them new and different dimensions of whimsy.

The voluptuous pleasure that he experiences in accumulating things has never led him to renounce the pronounced sensual cult to objects in large numbers; I imagine his house as a hall of wonders, at the opposite pole from Diogenes' barrel. Always and with discretion, he has practised the hoarding of his materials, inveterately, without ever arriving at saturation and with the same astonishing persistence that he applies to his trade. If Carlos Pazos occasionally starts a collection, he soon loses control over it and returns to his gatherer state, without any structuring rationale or principle, nor debt to any sort of classification system, but with a sense of order and harmony of his own. If there is any order in his objects, it will lurk within, imperceptible to other people, until they see it as part of a finished and titled work of art.

I have never felt that my dedication to art was written into my genes. I am neither an artist by vocation nor am I gifted. I am an artist by sheer will, I am an artist by decision, by the stubborn resolve to turn myself into someone with a certain idea of risk, someone radically useless, convinced that one must not avoid making a fool of oneself: to be prepared to die with one's boots on. I am talking about my role in society.

I wanted to be nothing. In fact, I did not want to be. Yet there I was, in some way prescient of the Thomas Bernhard who many years later would become such a part of me, and at an early age I chose to take the opposite tack. 'Whoever wins, just as long as it's the opposition,' as my mother would pragmatically sum it up.

If we're going to be something, let it be nothing. If we're going to be somewhere, let it be with the stars. To be a star.

My melancholic character, a sclerotic sponge soaked in sorrow and alienation, wandered, perplexed, between an unhealthy attraction to solitude and a crass zest for danger, for that 'Who said fear, men?' which my maternal grandfather bequeathed me.

For family reasons, I often visited a couple of easel painting studios. It was all so seductive. The leaded windows filtering the light (particularly impressive when the sun was high), the heavy velvet curtains, somewhat faded, which added character to that light and the finishing touch to the rococo caissoned ceilings, the throb of colour, the absence of the models I knew had been there and the vaporous dizziness in which I became lost, perhaps 'high' on oils, varnishes and solvents. The atelier aesthetics were, without doubt, the ideal setting for my future solitude.

I had barely turned seven. In a vain attempt to follow the ghosts that inhabited the dark, I surrendered to the reality of daily awakening without being able to turn myself into my shadow and set out to cultivate other hopes and illusions. Since life seemed inevitable, I decided to live not one but several lives. In an attractive and mute cat-

like transhumance, I would move through manifold scenarios assuming the gestures of the role most suitable, at every turn, to my idle state of being. Romantic as much as individualist, eccentric as much as over-the-top, dandy as much as impertinent.

I learned to see and I forgot to imagine. Out of fear rather than daring, I chose the appropriate disguise best to perform the role demanded by each situation. With my face barely recognisable, like a transfer, squashed in the gutter, I 'performed' with one half of the mask.

Ardent opponent of life, indefatigable and persevering in the task of trying to understand the world, though not to share in it, I decided to take the risk and devote myself to something useless, to disguise life as a pastime. Having been instilled with the idea of a future in the besuited pursuit of transcendence, the only way out was to not understand existence as a road to a goal. I would dare to escape the tedium and monotony, the comfortable boredom of a promising future. It would be enough for me to 'bide my time', entertaining myself in fixing on small details and sharpening differences, longing to cheat, foot in mouth, the irremediable scam of life.

To elude the perfection for which they strove to prepare me. To escape through art; defying my elders. To be an artist as an alibi, as an excuse for overcoming my shyness, for doing the wrong thing, for saying the outrageous and acting irresponsibly. To make a fool of myself openly, without needing to cover up my helplessness, my anxieties, my fears, my ignorance, with the ceremonious rictus of imperturbability. I longed for celebrity as a means of destroying the cloak of false modesty, mean nature and overwhelming mediocrity of the rancid environment that surrounded me. An environment that, impregnated with the smell of priests, the military, functionaries, shopkeepers and a middle class in cahoots with the dictator, offended any form of sensitivity.

I tried, shamelessly, to portray the autobiographical fantasies of the entire world. To confront

with humour life's dirty tricks and to anticipate haughtily the irremediable. Beyond that improbable *star* being, humans provided me with little in the way of inspiring material. They excited neither my fantasies nor my eyes. They seemed to me irremediably obtuse and opaque. Objects, as well as animals, seemed friendlier, more conversational, in short, much more 'people-like'. But even animals were, frequently, too human. I focused on objects. Initially I fixed my attention on the most ingenious, most attractive, most surprising, most useless objects. And in that imbalance, I managed to become a seer of the mute histories festering in those objects.

I constructed myself as an artist. Artist and acrobat, on the tightrope, preserving my independence from a 'fan base' and a market that, on the other hand, has paid little attention to me; they don't consider me a professional. And, truth be told, they are not mistaken, because I have always resisted seeing my dedication to art as my profession. My dedication to art arises from an attempt at social and emotional survival. Because, as a deliberate artist, I am convinced that art is dispensable, that it is good for nothing or, at best, for keeping us company in our desolation. Just

as we can find similar company, of a humble sort, in that manner of collecting without cataloguing, which does not entail the ticking-off of boxes, but rather accumulating, with obsessive greed, bits of the past, with or without *pedigree*, to 'appease' nostalgic anxieties.

My work is that of an amateur with the soul of a boxer, but with his feet poorly planted and a punch far short of devastating. An artist with a tendency to go off-register, who has preferred to take aim before shooting and who has looked for the cry in the most unexpected onomatopoeia, rather than in the most shrill. An intimist artist, but not parapolitical. A light, rather than non-volatile or insubstantial, artist. Autistic?

It's just that I notice the present only when it has passed, that is, when it is past. My retarded development has permitted me to age with delayed disappointment. As a romantic besieged by absolute unbelief, art is in the end, above all, my space of resistance. The space of the authenticity of the artifice, the deceit, the *faux pas*, the illusory, the simulation, the interstitial, the latent and the rooted in the interstitial. That space, open or closed, in which, since I cannot not be, I can almost be nothing.

Perhaps at heart, I didn't even want to be an artist

Carlos Pazos

Paris, January 2006