HISTORY/HISTORIES OF M

(THE NATURE OF IMAGES, INDICATIONS OF LANGUAGE,
PERFORMATIVE ARCHITECTURES, SONIC ARTEFACTS)

MANEL CLOT

The Negro inside me
Barry Adamson

Time is now a corporate asset. It belongs to the free market system.
The present is more difficult to find. It is sucked out of the world to
give room to the future of ungoverned markets and to enormous
investment potential. The future is becoming persistent in its demands.
Don DeLillo

On dirait qu'il n'y a que lui
Jean-Luc Godard

I think that what definitively obsesses me about photography is its
slight distancing from the act, something that makes me return more
violently to the act. Photographs are nothing more than points of reference.
The are often reactivators of ideas.
Francis Bacon

Let me tell you about her
Elvis Costello

What video and cinema (especially experimental video and film) have in
common is that they enquire about the relationship between the spectator
and the images, in order to de-condition their perception. They cut across
our visual habits, they disconnect our models of thought and of vision.
Gene Youngblood

1.

Although we again insist on starting from our firm conviction in the
fact the coherence of each artist who is fully aware of their dedication
and responsibility – and of their unavoidably resultant sense of
contemporaneity – is amplified and re-dimensioned both as the artist
continues to construct his or her own time and to map their remarkably
similar (or at least possessing quite parallel mechanisms) places of
being while they also slowly incorporate, articulate, modify and
synthesise the axes, guidelines, typologies and intentions that
configure their own work. Once again, and in Mabel Palacín's case
more than ever, we continue to talk about the artist's *work* and not
works –we will not however stop repeating how, apart from that,
some creators produce in what constitutes their work's same directional
flux – although not necessarily in an explicit or excessively evident
manner – a type of hyper textual arborescence in continuous growth
in which each and every element and process refers back to the
global being of the whole and which links up to the rest, unavoidably
mapping the peripheral extensions of a complex relational system in
which it becomes increasingly difficult to separate or isolate just one
of its many components or its many agents, as if each individual
work included de facto all of its predecessors, showing the intervention
of a peculiar *parallax effect* in which all of the works end up recognising,
re-encountering and reformulating each other.

2.

Overflowing, then from the point of view proposed along the lines
recently mentioned of interferences, exhumations, returns, encounters
and resonances, M.P.'s work has been conformed and articulated as
if it were a geared mechanism, a complex piece of operating machinery
in which any formalistic application or *technologised* excess (which
are so frequent and in fashion in the diversity of contemporary image
treatments that are visibly *evolutionary*) is evidently impractical – due
to this blindingly obvious lack of any meaning whatsoever –. Applications
such as the device/framework in which reference to a contextual
network are not only logical but also important, almost indispensable.
The persistence and vigilance of these updating devices will also be
instruments that enable the artist to both re-focus resistance upon
the looming danger of a decline in critical awareness and upon the
implication of experience as well as attempting to apply a brake to
the tendency to abandon oneself in the arms of this excessive, narcotic
technologised spectacularisation from whose powerful implantation
and visualisation are shamelessly feeding the numerous firework-like
displays and scarcely effective eye-catching effects that have recently
been overwhelming certain areas of the artistic scene.

3.

If from the start we propose that series of previous conditions, this
proposal is due fundamentally to the fact that many of the more
solid points of departure and the foundational processing frameworks
that continue to characterise – and that have been symptomatic of
– M.P.'s work throughout these recent years, create conditions in
her work that enable the viewer to recognise again and again the
repeated and indelible persistence of certain analytical and reflective

mechanisms concerning the function of images (and of nightmares, dreams, opposites, the imagined, reflection, shadows, doubles, separations, infradistances) and the processes by which a look and a(n) (un)certain relational diegesis between the character / spectator / memory / instrument / technology in contemporary societies is constructed – the language of perception, the viewpoint, the spatial construction, the indication of the story, the scopic impulse, the inventory of shadows – as well as a type of linkage with a recognisably *viral* – perhaps *metastatic*? - relationship that spreads ceaselessly and that expands definitively in a *network* that has already clearly become a systemic place by definition in which all and any eighth passenger has its lair and lies in wait.

4.

All of the instants in MP's work (unremittingly immersed in the continuing processes of fusion, linking, fading, symmetrical opposition, duplication, off field, tracking, inversion, soundtrack) mutate and transform in places of process from which the work continues to demand and require *readings* that are much more territorial than visual, more polyhedral than linear and more active than static, thus giving sustenance to the possibilities of visualising that which we could call *signalectics*, the signs of its properties and its *genealogical* expectations while also encouraging the following and unavoidable projection of the presence, fundamental effects and consequences of what we are going to regard as a singular, distinctive, process-linked *double helix,* uncompromisingly curled around an argument of the always beautifully arranged and always approachable as a form – *another* form – perhaps one more form although, obviously, it is the impulse with which to give a new vehicle to some of the outliers of reflexive thought whose peripheries are limited by the ability that objects show to fix, hold and magnify – and which form places of narrative and cinematographic memory – as well as the possible liquefaction of the situations created.

5.

Due to all of the above, this clear and *continued* flow of M.P.'s allows, practically in its totality, the same types of structural considerations, analytical repertoires and intentional formulations (including the previous and posterior reflections that the artist establishes and projects upon each of her works) that with such extreme precision *has punctuated* the sequential progress of the projects that have been so important and significant in her evolution over the last ten years — photographic or video projects, projects that remain as yet unfinished and others that are completely finished – such as *Name no one man, Para M, Sur l'autoroute, C'era una volta (Rojo), Attaché* and, of course, those works that are the first configurations of this latest work, *The right Distance.*

6.

The right Distance: let us now refer to this work not as *la historia de un hombre marcado por un recuerdo de infancia* [the story of a man marked by a memory from his infancy] but as the story of a man who is trapped in one place in the construction of a time of (only) images, stories and fragments, a man who must finally remove

himself at all costs from the implacable iconic and figurative pressure (a pressure bordering on the threshold of consciousness and perceptive limits of *psychoasthenia*) that is deployed so overwhelmingly around him; a man who must continuously protect himself from this *technologised* spectacularisation that ends up drifting into a perverse identification or (con)fusion between what the difference between existing or being present in a place and this place's simulated *surroundings*, in other words the imposture of a representation and its appearance; a man who must unavoidably mark in real time a provisional concatenation of the steps and an a priori configuration of the limits of the process of taking on, and the habitability of, this logistical space that he has been given in order for it to operate on and from him – and in which he himself will therefore take part in a visibly *performing* manner –, a man who, in function of everything, and in relation to the profusion of world-images that comprise his surroundings becomes decisively and unequivocally a powerful and enormous mechanism for producing feeling(s), a mechanism from whose intricate gearings he approaches the task of constructing a story – *one* possible story – that never becomes the definitive story, a mechanism with which to articulate essays to fix what is real, to organise the fictitious and to set a stamp on the narrative, and more concretely, everything concerning that which, sooner or later, will have to be constituted as the irreplaceable *reading* activity in the spectator, an immense space for expectations and vertigos.

7.

In some way, in *The right Distance* the cameras shows (us) how a story is built up with the aid of perception and the unconscious, bridging infradistances between fiction and reality, accentuating the growing complexity and pluridirectionality of the processes and sequences and construction of the gaze: actor / character / camera / perception / the imaginary / referent / spectator.

8.

Let us refer as well to a powerful neuralgic centre in the operative territory and the constructive devices that M.P. has put into circulation: an essential ideal (always germinal) of duplicity – splitting, duality, bifurcation, reflection, illumination / bedazzlement, an instant of blindness / a blinded moment, diegenetic meaning / implied meaning, a close up / a panoramic shot, frontal action / lateral occurrence, fusion / fission, speaking (action) / the spoken (fact), – in the narrative formalised (always in process) scene, based on certain visual and cinematographic resources, studiously reconfigured to construct in a concise manner the generic points of a story – as story that happens, in reality, in a situation built upon a story – created from concatenated images, images that advance and retreat, linked to each other by a strong dependency that is not only structural but also dialogic and at a certain moment, explicitly organised in function of their exterior nature, their externalisation, of their being in an *outside*. Of their actually being *the* outside.

9.

The images create physical spaces and spaces for thinking; from this perspective, the image definitively creates a space – setting the

scene, presenting the scene, interventions, performativity: what situations it presents what stories it proposes, what ending it foresees, what data it hides, what experiences, what aim, where it happens, when it happens, what to think about, to whom it alludes – that affects and therefore concerns equally both the materials that constitute the artist's (sole) foundational experience and those who construct the (plausible) reading expectations of the spectator.

10.

The extensive repertoire of visual notes arrayed by M.P. and based on images, constitutes and reflects, in the first instance, the width and singularity of what is essentially the very core of her ideas and concepts, of her stances concerning the world and its constructs and representations. Image upon image then, in a singular formula that refers to a tropical figure who is certainly (it is only fair to admit the fact) unusual: *an image-based alliteration* – a list of visual alliterations weaving images not only at the very heart of each of her works but also serving a similar function in the other relational space that links and articulates the totality of her works.

11.

In *The right Distance:* people — as in many of her previous works, or in those that can be considered as parallel – are always characters. The movements and camera tracking in the spaces are keen instants of choreographed precision, of mathematical accuracy, painstakingly calculated and with a performative action; the spectator's expectations and anxieties, direct appeals to their indispensable reading capacity, to their unavoidable executive responsibility and their definitive destructuring potential. And the passing of time, a frenetic search for links, returns, calls and links of all types arrayed throughout the past and the present, without shadows yet often in darkness. In the present, in *this* present to say here is to say then: where then should the spectator locate him or herself? Distanced *outside* and merely contemplative or perhaps completely immersed in the projection's narrative space?

12.

Yes. To say *here* is to say *then*: the eternal double, the ghostly presence, the definition by absence, the negative description, the screen as threshold, the McGuffin effect, the shadow as a dimensional doorway, the band of Moebius, the palindrome, the echo-free reverberation, the projection as lighting, the flash as a firework, darkness without shadow, light without flame, evocation as a description, the perceptual margin, light as a fixation, the mechanism as a pathway, the allusion in hypertext, *selves in the making,* the beginning/collage, aggregation by adherence, *A Woman Under The Influence,* the addition by contagion, *Im Lauf der Zeit.*

13.

Links returns, calls, fade-ins, nodes and crosses of all types are arrayed – now as a powerful operating methodology now as a formal recurrence endowed with an express will to give meaning, from some of its central episodes, really foundational, in the framework that could constitute the hint of a trace, the skeleton's profile, the

bases of the framework for a possible genealogical essay on M.P.'s work.

14.

Sleep does not become nightmare: it seems ghostly because it shows a double image and the story is encrusted on the plane of the real. The relationship of the characters with objects is not absurd, rather it is uncertain. The specific registers of filmic syntax are thought mechanisms transformed into complex image construction devices. Every time a story is told it is of necessity another one. Each image raises doubts about another: one image does not resolve another. The story is installed less in the lack of communication than in fragility and temporariness: the configuration of a space dealing with relationships and identity/ies whose narrative logic advances through altered segments of time and whose peripheral extremes are defined, uniting the operating activity of the different agents that to a greater or lesser extent participate in its construction of necessity, the artist and the spectator, the sound and image, narrative fiction and *cinematographic reality,* the boy and the characters, space and the screen, the passing of internal time and the projection, the actor's presence and the reflection of the only face – that of Monica Vitti.

15.

The two sides of a coin or, better, the two sides of the same possibility, two thresholds on one *construction*: we could divide the repertoires of her images between *virtual images* and *real images;* the images of shadows that appear on the screen (those accepted as *fictional*) and real, the images that produce the shadows and that appear after every scene (those desired to be *truthful*). The shadows are close to the category of fiction and what we see when crossing into the screen is a fiction mechanism (in a vertiginous spiral that winds around itself constituting a possible *making of* of a (or another) film parallel to this film inserting the notion of time, arousing the need of this much wanted *supplement* of meaning and dismantling all acts of perception at the moment they occur, each act fading as it does into another consecutive act. While fiction recounts one thing, the mechanism reveals another.

16.

How an image is constructed always holds revealing stories. With this idea, it might seem that what the mechanism reveals resolves the story that fiction proposes; that the images on the screen are resolved into real images and that those on one screen somehow follow those on the other. That however is not the case. Both sets of images affect each other and in turn both affect that which is projected from afar, something that can be seen in its structure where images form blocks that interrelate: each of the images on the screen have a reverse in those of the other block and is inseparable from it.

17.

Two type of images that occur in parallel: they tell a story that is the same yet also different, a story that takes place in different, deferred times – in a spectacular différance – a story is created from accretions

and recognitions in which a bipolarity has become now so classical as reality / representation – or what is real / what is fictitious appears here is superimposed and separated on three indispensable planes for all possible reading attempts: the screen (time of the story), the place where the story occurs (the character's life) and the reception ambit (spectator's task). Three planes – three areas of meaning –, for the rest, actively divided into two spaces of time and vision.

18.

A story within other stories, in dazzling travelling shots and long takes, and which must be regarded as one sole story: the changes of scale, the change of focus on objects, the transformations of things and the multi-layered structure both in its visual nature and how the symptoms of the scene of action place the protagonist's figure in a strange relationship of disorientation and imbalance with regard to the spectator's usual role. In this spectacular spiral descent into the search for explanatory mechanisms, this narrative that contains another narrative containing another and another and yet another, this Opening Night in a mirroring loop, this rotund and unstoppable mise en abîme at the nucleus of the story, then, decisively brings us face to face with the ultimate thickness of perceptual alterations and narrative interference.

19.

A look and an action are directly related to the subject that produces them and from the first moment this gives us cause to ponder the existence and the perception of a structure. The relationship of a look to the body that belongs to it, and the relationship between images of both categories, modified by the visual setting that holds them, originates a cross-referenced structure that establishes a joint complex of relationships in a necessary exponential growth. We are talking about fiction and fictional artifices. It is nothing more than the evidence of another representation of reality in the dramatic space: it blurs all perception of reality and of (a possible) neutral register of space. A raising of awareness then: sight and blindness, lighting and lightning, a look and saturation, profile and dazzlement, implication and comprehension, uncertainty and verification, activity and subject, to look and to see. Also to listen. And, finally, to read. To read.

20.

The character in *The right Distance,* one character only, inhabits a world that is only habitable in another place because it is in this other place where he relates with things, with images, visions, impressions and visualisations and through all of these elements he establishes the behavioural axes of many of his relationships: 1) the cellar, or only one image of the idea cellar as an evident conventional symptomology of a certain social space for relationships; 2) a past and some events that have been narrated in film and the establishment of a relational distance with these events advanced as an inseparable problem of the image; 3) these events recur a second time in playback almost as if it were a memory, a retelling and the story can be read as a structure of superimposed layers, a multi-layered, milfeuille

series of events; 4) sound as an instrument for amplifying the field of vision and of perception with regard to the situations and as a tool for describing the inhabited space. It continuously contributes to the demarcation and definition of distance and location of the elements that conform the story (actor / camera /screen / objects / scale / set / technology / spectator / fiction / superimposition / accretion / credibility); 5) the soundtrack displaces the action's fades.

21.

The character lives in a world of images and his uninterrupted action must of necessity locate him in an accumulative process of images that the world presents him with and with which he must deal in order to confront the meetings and separations (off-screen) with the overwhelming imagined world that accompanies him.

22.

With each of his movements, the character accompanies the movements of the projected images. The camera's travelling shots from which he is going to project and the evolutions of the soundtrack that underlines each one of the fade-outs that the action shows. And at the same time, his movements transform and re-create the rest, since his essential search consists of seeking an ideal position between the images and the camera, seeking to adapt to the events as they happen: however, the speed with which they occur oblige the character to adopt other postures, to perform other movements, to move to other places and to thus configure other situations and new settings.

23.

Today we again recognise M.P.'s singular resort to narrative mechanisms and (re)presentations situated – and without us now wanting to reiterate the extremes of a terminology that is now somewhat out of date, over-popularised and rendered banal, so reductionist is it in its apparent facility – in the multiple and scarcely explored interstices that can be opened between the sphere of reality and the ambits of fiction, the zonal interval that is so rich, oscillating around what is credible and what is possible, in whose nucleus desire is constantly being fed and some of all of the unfinished possible worlds: time, the spectator's act of commitment, the image and problems of performing, the story as a base and a structure of present time of artistic practises and the conviction of the creative feeling based on modifications and reformulation of the buttresses that bear up the present, end up confirming how the territory of contemporary speculation is not a mere reflection of the world (impossible) of the world without a (another) method to (be able to) see it and read it. One world among many possible worlds: the world as a text.

24.

Let us think about transitory states, states of de-identification and modification characteristic of *non-places:* places that are more identified with transit than with permanence. Places that, with means of transport acting together with architecture, are generators of

experiments in new social formats, and recently re-thought in terms originating in the very notion of psychoasthenia. These bring the individual in contact with images that are nothing more than (other) images of themselves and that tend to provoke anomalous identifications of the subject's interior projections with his own visual surroundings, in daring megalopolitan sceneries inhabited by images from all possible times.

25.

In order to achieve the correct degree of credibility, the image is situated between fiction and reality, on the edge, in the turbulent outliers of possibility. It is precisely this equidistance that makes it credible – legible – as well as the necessary previous recognition that we find ourselves in the territory of the representational image – not in the territory of reality –, endowed with its own codes that are sufficiently flexible in order to cross the entrance for the thousands of voices that have just submerged themselves – and us – in the powerful narcotic effect achieved by all of the story's multiplied process-based anfractuosities, under eternal construction.