

A relentless desire to embrace the kind of “de-personalization” that the filmmaker and theorist Maya Deren describes as a function of ritual and film-ritual:

“A ritual is characterized by the de-personalization of the individual. In some cases it is even marked by the use of masks and voluminous garments, so that the performer is virtually anonymous; and it is marked also by the participation of the community [...] as a homogeneous entity in which the inner patterns of relationship between the elements together create a larger movement of the body as a whole. The intent of such a de-personalization is not the destruction of the individual; on the contrary, it enlarges him beyond the personal dimension.”<sup>2</sup>

The West rejects this desire, and sees in the de-personalization at the origins of ritual practices and anti-slavery movements from the nineteenth century a serious illness. Such a vision arises from the West’s fear of abandoning itself “without” its concept of the individual and all that has been attributed to it as history, memory, narrative forms, perception of reality, and all that accompanies it, and must not be relinquished.

Enter such a trance-like momentum, merge with the experience of a collective dance and abandon the role of filmmaker, artist, etc.; let oneself be possessed, rather than possess; become “passionate about”; lose oneself among things and among others with whom we share these moments. Begin by abandoning oneself in this way.<sup>3</sup> Return to *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*.<sup>4</sup> Take up our tools again. Imagine “a primitive film, of friction, erosion, reflection and agitation.” A camera made of water and the friction of a grindstone against a stone from a river.

Propose a reading made of autonomous images and captions: the images have become the footnotes of a text which remains to be written, while the captions emerge as suppositions. Allow ourselves what had been forbidden “on and in the interior” of the image of the colonial archive; redirect the light “against such a cinema.” Alter the images and, henceforth, their transmission. Through the art of magic, see to it that, without erasing or eliminating, the purported subjects “in” and “of” the colonial photograph – of which we know so little – can forgo and abandon their “overexposure.” Retouch them with care. Thus, without their “exhibited subjects,” the colonial images become silent images... Rumor has it that what these images had to say will no longer be said.

Attempt to bring out the invisible.

The spirits of the place: hear them speak of healing.

An experience, in order to be imparted, requires finding the place that can reveal it and bring it to life. It is then necessary, in the middle of summer, when gazes become distracted and doors remain open from the intense heat, to begin by finding the cracks. Such breaks in reasoning fuel doubts of a coherent, solid and homogenous whole. In the corner of a white wall in an old hospital converted into a museum: find an opening. Descend the stairs and search through the vaults, for the lack of a more collective arrangement – which has yet to be established – to burrow even deeper underground,

in the very foundations of the building and its surroundings, forever inhabited by the ghosts and spirits of the Civil War, which no display of images can replace. Once down there, find a trapdoor. Open it. Remove the metal bars that have remained firmly in place for centuries. Then search for where the trapdoor of the ancient kiln leads.

Discover not in a history book, but rather in a few scattered passages from a thesis on the “successive transformations of an unfinished hospital”<sup>5</sup> the story of a delirious, military and religious building plan, which then became civil, military, and civil again... and has not ceased since it began in 1758 – except during the Civil War when the hospital became Clínica Militar N° 4: construction begun in 1930 collapsed, additions to the building were suspended, and civilian patients were evacuated. Discover that the underground, brick dome enclosed a whole “Ward for Insane Women,” a room surprisingly named “Maternity and Female Prisoners,” a shop and a pharmaceutical laboratory. Learn, while reading minor documents from work done in 1859, 1886 and 1918, of the “hydrotherapy wards,” and the existence of “lunatic wards,” which are only mentioned much later, in 1963, under the name “Lunatic Observation Ward.” Learn the otherwise forgotten names of foremen, various personnel, architects and doctors, those whose vocation it is to heal, who appealed to the government to build wards “so far down” for “the demented and the incurable,” and a “maternity wing,” while others, “the artistic creators” of the building, signed and organized spaces that they will never inhabit. Read of the “cages” where the bodies of badly treated patients were crammed in almost total darkness, humidity and minimal ventilation, in documents from 1821 detailing the numerous demands for funding never allocated. Read newspapers, slow to react, complaining, in 1882, of the conditions in the “squalid and miserable underground cells” and describing “the most violent patients who turn against their own comrades,” all nonetheless lodged in “beds with iron bars that resemble children’s cots,” but with straps to “attach the raving mad.”

Or, in 1928, read of the numerous locks and the excessively thick walls

and doors that prevent any sound or voice from filtering through to the upper levels of the building; or again, in 1932, the crisis and the increase of incarcerated patients. And the installation, in 1944, in the vaults of a chamber where the patients’ clothes, brought in from the streets, were disinfected with cyanuric acid and where patients were forced to wear the clothes provided by the establishment. Read elsewhere that the industrial and electromechanical services of the provincial council of Madrid had the project, in 1954, “of installing a small coal burner in the lunatic ward.”

Read nowhere of the number of deaths due to neglect. Keep in mind that the history of the caves had been mentioned for the first time at the museum in 2002, in a play by Fernando Arrabal, *Carta de amor (como un suplicio chino)* [Love Letters (Like Chinese Torture)]: the story of a

father who refused to join the military uprising brought on by the Civil War. Condemned to death, then imprisoned, he escaped from a psychiatric hospital in the middle of winter. Homeless and stripped of his papers, he disappeared never to be found again. And the story of a mother who, having raised the child, denounced the father’s refusal to sign up, which led to his imprisonment... A history among many others that leaves individual destinies to carry the burden of responsibility, as opposed to the collective responsibility that it occasions.

Keep in mind that the caves were then opened to the public for the first time in 2007, during an intervention by Isidoro Valcárcel Medina who alluded to the short story *Casa Tomada* [House Taken Over] by Julio Cortázar.

Regain composure.

Take a sledgehammer and knock down part of the white wall; remove the old bricks that cover the trap door. Make a hole big enough for bodies to pass through. Discover that the opening does not lead directly to the street, but rather to the ground floor surrounded by the guards’ room, where it has been located for years. Take a deep breath of fresh air... Realize that despite being under surveillance, a circulation of air and light, from a skylight, is possible between the basement and the ground floor. Reconnect with the past. Thus free the passage for what remains unseen while passing unnoticed in front of one of the building’s open, yet well-guarded doors: the staff entrance. Open to the outside that which has been trapped in an enforced obscurity. Sense the difficulty of the passage. Rather than returning to an otherwise isolated, romantic gesture, agree to not recoil before the door which is now open; perform a sleight of hand “as if we were not there”; go through it without hesitation. Once on the outside, walk at a chosen pace as far as the palm trees, replanted who knows when and originating from who knows where.

If everything cannot be said or known, learn to see what remains closed in the darkness of the present. To go blind is a phenomenon that affects all of us. It is therefore necessary to rediscover that which moves us.

AR, August 2013 notes on *opératiques (de l'inachèvement poétique) of imitation* [poetic(s) of imitation]

1. The last sentence of Guy Debord’s film *Inguru inus nocte noscimus igni*, which initially existed as a text, did not find its place in cinema, and more recently in a national archive, without resistance. As he wrote, “in opposing traditional marks of closure, ‘The End,’ ‘To be continued,’ etc., the sentence should be understood in every sense of the word ‘reprendre’ [to resume; to return to; to go back to; to continue].” Firstly, it means that the film whose title is a palindrome, would benefit from being immediately seen again in order to experience more fully its effect of desperation: it is only when the end is known that it becomes possible to understand how the beginning was to be understood. It also means that it is necessary to begin again both the action evoked and the commentary. And finally it means that it is necessary to reconsider everything from the beginning, to correct or perhaps rebuke, in order to today reach more admirable results.

2. Maya Deren, “Notes on Ritual and Oraeal,” *Maya Deren: Notes, Essays, Letters*, *film Culture* 39 (Winter 1965): 1-86.

3. That which the filmmaker Maya Deren confirmed in 1951 when she declared that she felt obliged to abandon her role as an artist and forgo any manipulation – aimed at creating an artwork – of the footage that she had nevertheless gathered during several trips to Haiti in 1947, 1949 and 1954. The footage included voodoo dances and rituals for a film project, which she intended to enlarge beyond the context of Haiti, and which ultimately remained unfinished. Having felt constrained, as she admitted, to film most humbly and faithfully “a reality whose integrity imposed itself on her, she preferred, instead, to finish writing a study on voodoo cosmology, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (London & New York: Thames & Hudson, 1953). She nevertheless did not entirely discard the footage and continued to work on it until her death; she henceforth abandoned use of the footage and of cinema. Deren stored the rushes she had filmed in Haiti in coffeetins and covered them with readhesive tape. As she wrote, she put them aside and no longer knew where she had placed her initial plan for editing the film. She let go and refused to possess, without, however, refusing to give up. In letting go in this way, she has offered us a gift. She had written: “My films are for everyone.” And the most striking aspect of that gift is perhaps the fact that this unnamed “cinematographic collage,” potentially combining footage shot in Haiti, sequences of children at play, which she intended to film in Haiti and New York, Balinese rituals, filmed by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, and Navajo dances remained dormant in her frayed originality, and in her errors. It is perhaps even beyond the projection of the message that the obliquity of such a collage can be found.

Outside of a collective endeavour, where individual preconceptions can be set aside, even if the seventeen reels of bare footage (approximately five hours of black and white silent film) shot by Maya Deren and preserved since 1972, at Anthology Film Archives, were restored they would not be legible. What needs to be restored, along with the rushes themselves, is the difficulty of transcribing an experience into film – without justifying or fetishizing it...

4. Maya Deren, *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film* (Yonkers, NY: Alicat Bookshop, 1946).

5. Dolores Muñoz Alonso, *De hospital a museo, las sucesivas transformaciones de un hospital inacabado, el hospital General de Madrid*, tesis de doctorado, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid, 2010, p. 97, p. 1 ap.II, p. 34, 86, 380, 400, 412, 413, 414, 417, 422, 423-425, 431, 467, 480, 481, 500, 506.

#### Reference Material:

Film documentation of the opening of a hole and the aperture of a trapdoor allowing natural light to enter the vaults of Sabatini building, Friday, July 5, 2013.

Reemploy *Contre le cinéma* (Aarhus, Denmark: Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie/Scandinavian Institute of Comparative Vandalism, 1964). Edition published in the collection directed by Asger Jorn, Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie, the same year as the original edition. Reflective cover of the book receiving natural light from the staff entrance of the museum, redirected towards the vaults.

Film comprising various extracts from research undertaken by Marine Lahaix since 2008 of alternatives to breaking in horses; research based on experiments with her mare.

*After photographs from the Collection of Prince Roland Bonaparte* (formally in the collection of the photographic library at the Musée de l'homme, Paris; currently in the collection of the iconographic library at the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris), a series of seven colonial archival photographs, retouched by Sybil Coovi Handemagnon.

Camera-grindstone-river-stone: a tool using water and the friction of a grindstone and a stone from a river, conceived and built by Alexandre Chanoine.

<... - histoire(s) du présent - ...>, film-document, 1h 50min., AR with UEINZZ (São Paulo, Brazil). Documentation of a collective experiment in poetic invention begun in September 2009 with the theater collective UEINZZ.

## poétique(s) de l'inachèvement [poetic(s) of incompleteness]

September 25, 2013 – January 6, 2014.  
Edificio Sabatini, Sala de Bóvedas.

Initiated by Alejandra Riera

With:

UEINZZ, Marine Boulay, atelier Lucioles, Alexandre Chanoine, Miriam Martín, Dean Inkster, Eleni Tranouli, Sybil Coovi Handemagnon and Marine Lahaix, students from the École nationale supérieure d'art de Bourges. With additional assistance from Lore Gablier and Tamara Díaz.

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Sala de Bóvedas, night of August 4th, 2013

There is that which exposes itself and that which, in the turmoil of overexposure, remains buried and repressed. There is that which cannot be seen by the naked eye, but is nevertheless there and was already there before we arrived.

“poetic(s) of incompleteness”: a possible title for the means that allow us to dwell on certain experiences at a greater depth than cinema, even if cinema’s role is to accompany them.

A poetic(s) of gestures that helps “do away with” whatever oppresses us – whatever shapes or governs our perception. Incompleteness would be the opposite of the time worn “work-in-progress.” Rather than never stopping – such as the path of ruthless progress – it would entail giving space to that which has been discarded. *To be taken up again from the beginning* might be understood to mean “to make or leave space for...” Re-employ, with the same fervor, a method already undertaken by and with others, in the *place at which* she had arrived with all her complexity. Begin, in this way, by dwelling on the editing, countless times imagined and abandoned, of an unfinished film, which got lost in the complexities of real experience: that of *living with* and *among* and in this *precise place where* intuition and desire arise, beyond that to which the images and captions, her texts and informers can, *from afar* testify.