

João Lopes, 2004

FAR FROM THE CROWD



“When can one image be placed next to another? Or rather: what *montage* effect occurs whenever we bring two images together?

We know how, in most cases, televised information answers these questions. It does so in the name of supposed *naturalness*, and more than that, in the name of the illusory *neutrality* of its narrative processes - on television, two images almost always bind to one another *just because*.

But (and this is the huge *but...*): what if two images are fitted together, not because they illustrate a univocal and universal meaning, but precisely the opposite? In other words: any link between these images is referred to an (albeit unidentified) gaze, to an (albeit unknowable) subjectivity, and a point of view (albeit of an indefinite subject). Knowing the world would perhaps be sharing in this splendid instability.

It was this that Ana Vieira’s exhibition *Casa Desabitada* addressed, recently presented by the *Artistas Unidos* (in an empty building on Rua Ivens, in Lisbon). Exhibition? A more accurate word would probably be *installation*. But, even then, it would be insufficient. Because it is not every day that someone takes a risk by doing away with the commotion and the rapture of the most common figure of media rhetoric - the crowd - by opting to show an inescapable solitude. Whose solitude? Well, probably the solitude of the visitor himself to this unusual *exhibition-installation uninhabited-house*.

In practice, the house was almost shut off to our intrusive eyes. And this is almost far from being indifferent. This is because we could approach several doors left ajar, to glimpse inside, where various images were always reflected in mirrors: a television screen (with a ballroom dancing competition), a woman getting dressed, a man laying out plates and silverware on a table, someone cooking... However, the sound installation created the “environments” for us, and above all provided us with the dialogue of a violent domestic argument - it was something that we could not see, that is, *something for which we had no image*.

Herein lays the dual and fascinating imbalance that the *Casa Desabitada* pulls us toward: on the one hand, image and sound exists in a perverse complementarity in which neither of these elements ever cancelled out the other in mere illustrative redundancy;

on the other hand, everything takes place before us as if we, the spectators, were *superfluous*. Or even: feeling that by visiting those rooms, by looking and listening, we are violating the complexity of the real, albeit inadvertently, transfiguring it. Although invisible, the huge shadow of Alfred Hitchcock could be sensed walking through the corridors of Ana Vieira's house. Was it not this filmmaker who taught us that an image is always a mask of objectivity? From *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, to *Psycho*, to *Rebecca*, *Rear Window* or *Vertigo*, it was with him that we had access to a mystery that television, in its persistent "naturalist" fury, made unpopular: that any image tends to be subjective - a great political question, alas!

Hence you are asked for some tolerance to the modest boldness of this page, for connecting the poster of *Casa Desabitada* to Anny Ondra's image in Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (1929). I would say that, amid the noises from the deserted rooms of the house on the Rua Ivens, perhaps it was she who roamed through it. And perhaps in her fear it is possible to interpret the freeing of our gaze. In any case, mind the knife."

DN, 12-06-2004, p. 51

Catalogue Ana Vieira: Muros de Abrigo / Shelter Walls; Ponta Delgada [Azores], Museu Carlos Machado, Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2010, p. 226 (org. Paulo Pires do Vale)
