

Gabriel Villota / All-too-Real Fictions

(Two Notes on Politics and Work in the Audiovisual Production of Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto)

"In mornings like this anger crackles in our bodies. What to do with it? Anger is ire divided by our wages. What to do with it? What to do with our wagers' reticence?"

All that we hush up, where is it going?

What we hush up, to dreams. What we hush up, to fantasy. What we hush up, to the they-will-see, to the one-of-these-days, to the at-the-end-of-the-day. What we hush up, to the secret, the quiet life.

We hush up more and more things every day, and we still don't know how much pressure does matter need to break down and disintegrate."

(Belén Gopegui, *Lo Real*)

"The intellect, the sheer faculty of thought, the simple fact of having-a-language: this is, we insist, the "score" forever interpreted by the virtuous postfordists"

(Paolo Virno, *The Grammar of the Multitude*)

First Note: an Appeal beyond "Form" or "Content"

Some works appeal to us in a very direct manner, as if they were aimed at the heart of our (un)certainties: and that is their highest virtue. Not all works of art need to operate in that register, and in fact there are many that even while appearing overwhelmingly detached to us, can still provoke emotions in us or make us, somehow, enjoy or learn. But the ones in the first group, the ones aimed with precision at the very sense(lessness) of our everyday life, have a special capacity to adhere to our skin, and to our entire sensibility; and that's what makes us feel that bittersweet after-taste as residue in our souls even after having a good time in the cinema or the museum, or after finishing a book.

Without doubt, the production of Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto belongs to that group, and I'd say that's not only true to the writer of these lines; I'd even venture to say that there is a certain, unavoidable, component of a generational portrait in their work. Of course, there can be many different spectators and many different audiences in front of a work of art, and this identification doesn't have to take place every time: but still, within the much more reduced range of spectators who would normally go to an exhibition in a Western context, the chances are that this feeling of collective identification might take place. And, in my opinion, that is so because these videos draw up, with a remarkable precision, the map of emotions, reflections, desires and wills in which the lives of many of us at the beginning of the 21st Century develop around issues so elementary and therefore so crucial such

as the couple, friendship, work, language, or memory, and the multiple intertwinings among all of them.

But, how is this map drawn up? It is in this sense that the choice of the above-mentioned formal elements¹ acquires a vital importance, since it in turn will determine the very content of the narration. It is in this kind of choices that Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto appear as most capable of articulating a firm and impeccable audiovisual narrative mechanism, by which they can efficiently manage their characteristic resources: the sense of time, milimetrically-precise as much in the paused duration of the scenes in *W: La Force du Bio-travail* as in the most accelerated moments in the editing of the images ripped from news broadcasts in *The Morning Changes Names. The Morning Changes the World*; the precise framing and mise-en-scene, particularly poignant in *W: La Force du Bio-travail* and in *European Friendship and Telecommunications*; the sober balance between the voices of the narrators and the uncanny silence which normally surrounds them (when it doesn't flood them completely, displacing them in the form of text in the subtitles, as in *W: La Force du Bio-travail*); and, in short, the different means of presenting the video pieces, where, despite the fact that all of them have an exhibitivistic characteristic as installation pieces (since it is the context of contemporary art where their work is most directly situated), doesn't jeopardise their adaptation for their distribution as single-channel pieces.

Beyond (or within, or next to) the more or less explicit political intentions underlying the subject matter approached in these videos, what appears clear is the Godardian rooting (in the sense that the choice of a dolly shot was, according to that author's famous declaration, necessarily a political decision) of the aesthetic decisions they have taken.

Second Note: Between the "Day-after-Tomorrow" and "A Certain (Brechtian) Realism"

I've been recently interested² in the reading of certain science-fiction texts which situate their plot in a diffuse area of time, which English-speaking criticism has defined with the term *Day-after-Tomorrow SF*, that is, something like "the science-fiction of the day-after-tomorrow". The interest in tracing out this zone of time lies in the fact that it allows to project in it, as if in a future, the issues which are already urgently affecting us; thus we have access to a certain distance, produced by this slight projection in time, from which to critically approach the reality we inhabit. In reference to a similar effect perceived in a number of literary and cinematographic texts in recent times, based on what we could reciprocally define as the gaze of "the day before yesterday", Fredric Jameson used to talk about the time of Postmodernity as a time of a certain "*nostalgia for the present*"³.

While viewing these works one has a similar feeling, probably derived from this level of abstraction and decontextualisation undergone by their narrative prime matter: we recognise the space of a middle-class apartment, but it appears strangely empty; we witness the relationship between a child and a woman, with their long telephone conversation, but they appear isolated, as if their were alone on this planet; there is an analysis of the negative effect of the implication of

different forms of power and the hierarchies and systems of representation, but these images represent an ethereal offside in relation to the urban landscape visible from the window of the narrator/protagonist, whose voice is also relegated to a voice-over. All this brings along the possibility that these images and sounds might be reaching us from a close future, a distance from which, as we already mentioned, we can adopt a certain perspective on the living conditions in our immediate present: the here and now.

The criss-crossing of both strategies (a "nostalgia for the present" in the frequent flashbacks, which allows the projection of the locus of enunciation towards a certain "day after tomorrow") could also be seen as the place from which the narrative structure of one of the most important Spanish novels in recent years, i.e., Belén Gopegui's "*Lo real*", emerges. Aside from other considerations, it is interesting to observe there the latent and to a certain degree unresolved tension between the relatively Naturalistic tone of most of the text and the tragic tone of the extradiegetic choir which occasionally intervenes in the plot precisely to interrupt, in a rather Brechtian manner, this apparent narrative continuity of the novel.

The same tension is present in the videos of Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto, though in their case the balance is never tilted towards Naturalism, but rather in the opposite sense: there are, nevertheless, certain characteristics, particularly in the dialogues, that never cease to refer us to that area of everyday life with Naturalism normally feeds on. But in their case, as much as in the case of Gopegui, it would be more appropriate to talk about simply realism, or, as Pasolini was fond of saying of his own cinema, of "*a certain realism*"⁴, which is to say that kind of realism which, without abandoning reality (or, in a wider sense, without giving up the problem of reality), is aware of the impossibility of an innocent representation of reality; or, to put it differently: the kind of realism which, rather than an unproblematic vision of reality, chooses to show us its disagreement with it.

Because, at the end of the day, these video works point, from the vantage point of this disagreement, at the political character of artistic production; even more so in a society in which, as Paolo Virno⁵ has sharply pointed out, art, as well as the totality of linguistic and communicational practices, has become a paradigm of the new forms of work, exploitation and submission. Thus, the only thing we can do against the bio-production which penetrates us and conditions all our relationships with the others and with the world, is to learn to live in freedom inasmuch as we are capable of what Virno terms a virtuous disinterest; inasmuch as we choose, like Tristan, to stay close; inasmuch as we choose to love (each other) freely.

Notes:

1. In those formal elements one keeps hearing a variety of resonances, like those that proceed from the voice-over texts by Marguerite Duras - in her own films as much as in Alain Resnais' classic *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* -, the precision of framing in Bresson or Straub and Huillet, the accurate timing of the shot in any of the above, or also in Chantal Akerman: but we wouldn't like to bore the reader with a list of referents to which one could anyway add many more. But let this concise comment remain here as a brief guide to those who haven't had access to these works

before, as well as a record of a context in which to place their conscious use of the language of cinema.

2. And I should refer here to the recommendations of a connoisseur (of science-fiction as of so many other things) such as Bob Curwen, as much as to those tireless searchers of connections (jonctions), Laurence Russell and Nicolas Maleve (see their recent project *Stitch and Split* for the Tàpies Foundation, in <http://www.stitch-and-split.org>).

3. Jameson, F., *Postmoderism, of the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durhman 1991. There's a partial Spanish translation of this book entitled *Teoría de la posmodernidad*, Trotta, Madrid 1996, but, unfortunately, the referred chapter doesn't appear there...

4. Viano, M., *A Certain Realism*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993.

5. Virno, P., *The Grammar of the Multitude*, Traficantes de sueños, Madrid, 2003.