

Exhibition Cinema: A Crossroads between the Cinema and  
the Museum in Contemporary Spanish Film-Making

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Some of the most interesting films in Spanish cinema in recent years have had their origins in the intersection between the spaces of the movie theatre<sup>1</sup> and the museum — two territories that are being transformed. As a cultural institution, the museum is not only a place for audiovisual exhibition but also for film production, a relational space with the potential to participate actively in the development of new cinematic styles.

Drawing on the notion of the ‘cultural symptom’ formulated by Ernst Cassirer, this paper explores the work of various film-makers who have contributed to the definition of the space of exhibition cinema in contemporary Spanish film-making. Based on the common connection that links works as diverse as those of Jacques Aumont and Slavoj Žižek to studies of cinema and popular contemporary culture, the methodological core of the research detailed here is a desire to interrogate images, to ask what meaning is conveyed in the images arising from the intersection between the space of the movie theatre and the space of the museum in the Spanish case.

As a case study, the aim of the research outlined in this paper is to establish the phenomenology of the field of tension existing between the cinema and the museum and to identify the particular features of the contemporary Spanish context.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase ‘movie theatre’ is employed in this article to reveal the connection between the screening space and the traditional exhibition display. In a broader sense, ‘cinema’ and ‘the cinema’ are ways to refer generically to cinema as an art form.

Comparisons with film-makers from other countries and other eras are intended, above all, to illuminate the central concept that underpins this discussion and that constitutes one of the main contributions of the research: exhibition cinema. Our starting point is not so much a hypothesis as an affirmation: the central nature of the cinema in the contemporary cultural and artistic system. Our first task is thus to map out the contours of this encounter between the spaces of the cinema movie theatre and the museum through the hypothesis of the creation of a new field of possibilities in which the two dimensions become mutually necessary to one another. This dialectic dimension of exhibition cinema should not, however, be seen through an exclusively teleological prism, but as a space of convergence and synergy which, in the Spanish case, has had some very specific focal points.

This interest of the museum in film-making may have a number of explanations, but there is one that is probably a key factor: the fact that the cinema has a consolidated tradition in its relationship with the spectator, an active, individualized, inclusive relationship that is obviously of interest to the system of contemporary art as well. It would be fair to say that in the context of the 'global screen' theorized by Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy (2007), the cinema in the twenty-first century has kept its central role in image creation, although it may now be fulfilling that role by spreading out to other screens, influencing them all and, as Mary Ann Doane (2002) and Laura Mulvey (2006) have suggested, conditioning their temporality. At the same time, the range of its forms is opening up more and more, largely due to the evolution of the technology (which has allowed for a greater autonomy and agility), and to the debate over new forms of viewer consumption, both inside and outside the movie theatre. This dual mutation explains some of the shifts occurring in the work of some

of Spain's most original film-makers who have taken an interest in this creative intersection.

The originality of the films and film-makers analysed here consists in the fact that, although they are created as an interaction between cinema and the museum, they never lose their nature as films. All of these film-makers conceive their works for the museum without giving up the hypnotic nature and narrative form characteristic of the cinema (Bellour, 2012: 54-58). It is perhaps for this reason that this interaction has captured the interest of some of the most influential directors in Spanish and international film, because they are aware that this openness to different public spaces is also opening up new spaces for creative freedom. All of the film-making practices examined here are thus based on the principle that it is not the film-makers who adapt to the museum, but the museum that must be adapted to, and reinterpreted by, the cinema. We will therefore be leaving aside the different traditional forms of audiovisual installations, and the *expanded cinema* — so well defined by Youngblood (1969) as the set of unknown heterotopias into which it is presumed that cinema is being transformed — to focus on some singular works, short films or feature films, which in no way give up their place in the cinematic tradition, or the central nature of that tradition. All of these works are narrative in a traditional way and at the same time experimental, because they open up new perspectives for film-making practice in the twenty-first century.

The film-makers focused on below (Pere Portabella, Víctor Erice, José Luis Guerín, Albert Serra and Isaki Lacuesta) are indisputably the figures who have made the greatest contributions to the definition of exhibition cinema. In their different generations, their works, practices and activities over the course of the recent history of Spanish cinema have constructed an expressive fabric, the boundaries of which

have the particular feature of being in perpetual growth. Their versatile capacity to develop the different facets of film-making and expand its possibilities establishes a fertile dialogue with many other film-makers and creates not just a network for exhibition or creation but a constellation of expressive potentialities that constitute the foundations of exhibition cinema and that require, first and foremost, an unbiased perspective to interrogate their images.

#### Portabella and Disappearance

In the relationship between the cinema and the museum, the role played by the work of Pere Portabella is decisive for the originality of his films and their repercussion in the museum world, which has long been a space for freedom conquered for the wider distribution of his films. This was evident in the historic screening at the MoMa of *Vampir-Cuadecuc*, in January 1972, a few days after the film was presented at the Cannes Film Festival (Hernández, 2008: 45-46). Portabella's absence from the screening due to the cancellation of his passport added a political dimension to the event, which established a close relationship between his subsequent films and museum institutions. This relationship had a greater impact after his retrospective at the MACBA (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona) in 2001, his subsequent participation in the Documenta 11 in Kassel, Germany, and his tours of different museum spaces for presentations of films that have always retained their cinematic quality, so that it was the museum space that was adapted to his work, in which the protagonist has been his own artistry.

*Vampir-Cuadecuc* was conceived in parallel with Jess Franco's film *Count Dracula* (1970), as a singular and atypical 'making-of' documentary.

Portabella's achievement lies in having created an analytical device for

simultaneously exploring both a representative universe (the Dracula archetype) and the hiatus between the official images of Francoist Spain and the images of Spanish films of the period aimed at a foreign market. However, the most revealing example of how the relationship with the museum space may be inscribed into the style of a film is that of *Mudanza* (2008), a medium-length film commissioned by the Federico García Lorca House-Museum at Huerta de San Vicente in Granada, as part of a cycle curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist for which various artists were asked to propose projects related to the memory and spaces of the murdered poet. Portabella responded to this challenge with a radical proposal: to film the house-museum being emptied out, with the removal of all the furniture and paintings, the piano and other objects that form part of the poet's memory, to a warehouse near Granada, and then to film the empty space, in a principled declaration on the evocative nature of absence. Viewers unaware of the nature of the project might well believe that the film was shot on the occasion of the removal of the furniture for some kind of renovation and that the filmmaker had taken advantage of this moment to capture the expressive power of emptiness on film. But the particular force of the film arises from the recognition of Portabella's artistry in proposing the removal for no other reason than to film it, thereby demonstrating the central nature of the cinema in relation to other forms of contemporary art. This highlights the central theory that underpins the idea of exhibition cinema and its character as a trigger for a diverse range of actions and historical forms.

It is the film that gives rise to the need for artistic action, for which *Mudanza* is both the instigator and the record, as the event of the removal would not have occurred if not for the film that documented it. This primacy of the cinema is, moreover, one of the constants of Portabella's filmography; years earlier, when

filming Joan Miró at work on the outside of the College of Architects in Barcelona, the film-maker agreed with the painter that, after leaving the paintings on the windows of the building for a few days, Miró would proceed to destroy them, and from this emerged the film to which Portabella gave the title *Miró, l'altre* (1969). In both this film, now so highly acclaimed, and *Mudanza*, it is the film itself that is the only witness to a disappearance which that same film brought about. The significance of the theme of disappearance in Portabella's films could also be extended to other works, even beyond the expectations of the film-maker himself, as the filming of another work by Miró, *Miró, tapís* (1973), on the removal of a tapestry that would end up in the collection at the Twin Towers in New York, is now the sole testimony to the artwork, which was buried and destroyed in the 9-11 attacks.

#### Víctor Erice's Correspondence

After several years of film silence following the painful thwarted experience of *La promesa de Shanghai*, the film that Víctor Erice was to shoot in 1998 but which was ultimately taken away from him by virtue of a decision of his producer, the film-maker accepted the proposal of an exhibition project together with Abbas Kiarostami sponsored by several institutions (the CCCB Museum in Barcelona, La Casa Encendida in Madrid, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris). The exhibition was organized symmetrically, separating the work of the two film-makers with the aim that the effect of comparison of their works would inspire reflection in visitors as they moved from one presentation to the other. But at the point where the two presentations intersected, a format needed to be established that would place the two film-makers in direct relation to each other. Out of this museographic need arose the idea of film correspondence in 2004, a new film format that would be hard to

understand without a museum institution to support it, as it involved finding a way of creating a tangible relationship in the museum environment between the two directors, whose work until that moment was exhibited separately. This need for convergence was resolved by correspondence: the two film-makers would send each other filmed letters of different lengths, alternating between them and identified with the place and date where they were made. The series of letters represented a major revelation of this new format, in Barcelona, in Madrid, and especially when it was presented at the Centre Pompidou and subsequently at the ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image) in Melbourne.

Although there had been two earlier experiences of such cinematic correspondence, both rather circumstantial (the seven letters exchanged between Robert Kramer and Stephen Dwoskin in 1991 and the personal correspondence between Naomi Kawase and Hirokazu Koreeda), it could be argued that the format was crystallized in the encounter between Erice and Kiarostami. For the first time, it was the museum that sponsored the correspondence and recognized that it needed to contain a dual personal/exhibition dimension, i.e., that it had to be conceived in both terms in order to give rise to the circulation of the images. The correspondence was ultimately completed with nine letters, five by Erice and four by Kiarostami, exchanged between 2005 and 2007. The succession of these alternate missives posits a new film style, whereby the letter itself is as important as the awareness that each one is linked to the previous one, allowing the viewer to determine the extent to which there is a real dialogue, or whether it is merely a series of reflections without an interlocutor. Erice's first letter, *The Painter's Garden* (2005), is exemplary, because it constructs a genuine film narration through the evocation of his film *Dream of Light* (*El sol del membrillo*, 1992) with the presence of the

grandchildren of the painter Antonio López who had appeared in that film.

Kiarostami's reply, *Mashhad* (2005), a journey over the skin of a cow, seems almost an abstract image, closer to an installation or certain experimental styles of Michael Snow or Stan Brakhage than to a narration, which appears to disconcert even Erice himself. But it is from Kiarostami's second letter, *The Quince* (2006), that a dialogue is established through shared themes and concerns: the isolated life of two shepherds, one Iranian and the other Spanish, the intertextual nature of films such as *Where Is the Friend's Home?* (*Khane-ye dost Kodjast*, 1987) and, once again, *Dream of Light*.

It is in this respect that the final part of the correspondence is decisive; in *Sea-Mail* (2006), Erice films a letter sent in a bottle (a fictional detail agreed to by the two film-makers), which he himself then films as it drifts away and he anxiously awaits a reply in *Adrift* (2006), which arrives in the form of Kiarostami's last filmed letter, *Treasure Map* (2007). In Kiarostami's reply, two Iranian fishermen find the bottle and the message inside it, which is returned to the sea by an unexpected and poetic gust of wind, so familiar to Kiarostami's poetics and its association with the lyrical style of Farsi poets like Forug Farrojjad. A final filmed letter, *Written on the Water* (*Escrito en el agua*, 2007), concludes the correspondence and very clearly constitutes the establishment of a format, as well as a milestone in the shaping of exhibition cinema itself, which here appears far from any abstraction, crystallized in the concrete form of filmed correspondence, arising from the crossroads between the museum and the film-making act.

This series of correspondence had a huge critical impact because of its revelation of a new style of film-making for the two directors, who set their letters in the here and now, in an exchange that is intimate but not private because from the first

moment it has the spectator in mind. It is a reflection on everyday things, a connection with them similar to the pedagogy of the Czech thinker Comenius, the *pansophia* advocated in Rossellini's pedagogical project. Moreover, because the two interlocutors are film directors, their correspondence raises questions related to the craft of film-making, such as the need to provide specific visual motifs when dealing with the genre of the *filmed letter*. In this genre there is also a need for the film-maker writing the letter to insert himself, through a written phrase, a reflection, his own voice, and the constant reference to the interlocutor. This correspondence, and others that would follow in its footsteps immediately thereafter, is posited as a way of creating new forms of community among film-makers, who no longer seem to be limited, in the twenty-first century, to the scope of their own nation's cinema. Its success and its value as a model makes it clear that the most original film-makers, even while they work alone, can strike a chord with other film-makers around the world whom they perhaps do not know personally, but whose work can enter into a fruitful dialogue with theirs.

Film correspondence is also a form of expression that alludes to the agility of the film shoot, with what is almost a disappearance of the camera that hearkens back to the earliest days of cinema (Gunning, 2006), but above all to the need for a mediating institution capable of guaranteeing the circulation of the letters, which, by being exhibited firstly in a museum, foster in the spectator the awareness that a different cinematic space is the context for this new form of film. It is obvious that this kind of correspondence also represents a decisive change of register in the work of Erice himself and in the message that such an influential director sends to new generations of film-makers. The fact that such a prestigious director should agree to experiment with a new form of film-making, which is initially made public in the

context of exhibitions but which also aspires to be a feature film, represents a precedent of considerable impact in light of the need to seek new outlets for independent productions.

This experience convinced Erice that this experimental agility was a line to be pursued in the following years, as was made clear in his film *La morte rouge* (2006), a soliloquy also produced for the exhibition with Kiarostami, but subsequently released independently on DVD with other short films by the director. This film, although it shares certain features with the works of Godard, is also aligned with evocations of memory as powerful as Bergman's *Karins Ansikte* (1984) and Sokurov's *Soviet Elegy* (1990). Erice continues to use the inner voice to evoke his first experience as a film viewer, when he was a child, together with his sister in a casino that was also a cinema in San Sebastián, in an eerie memory bringing together his discovery of the conventions of fiction, his childish terror, and the hardships of life in post-war Spain. Both the letters to Kiarostami and *La morte rouge* represent a key development in the career of this vitally important film-maker, who uses soliloquy as a tool for exploration of his own cinematographic memory.

#### Guerín and the Reaction to Life

Recognizing that these series of correspondence constituted a new style of film-making, another exhibition project, also at the CCCB, La Casa Encendida and the Centre Pompidou, expanded the format to other pairs of film-makers, thereby demonstrating the serial and generalizable nature of the concept. This concept of duos between film-makers was consolidated in exchanges of correspondence between José Luis Guerín and Jonas Mekas, Albert Serra and Lisandro Alonso, Jaime Rosales and Wang Bing, Isaki Lacuesta and Naomi Kawase, and Fernando Eimbcke and So Yong

Kim. The case of the correspondence between Mekas and Guerín also represented a clear change in direction in the film work of the latter, who accepted the invitation to participate in this collective project from the outset. Mekas's decision to take part constitutes a particular stance taken by this film-maker, as it led to a relationship with a key director on the underground scene who, in the words of Guerín himself 'is a beacon not only as a film-maker [...] as if André Bazin, Henri Langlois and Jean-Luc Godard had all been fused in this new American cinema that is his' (Brenez, 2011: 96).

Following the format proposed by Erice, Guerín articulates the correspondence through brief letters that draw out his reflections on cinema, on film sets, on his travel experiences and on the influence that Mekas's work was having on him at that moment, particularly his way of understanding film as 'a reaction to life', as explicitly stated in his 'letter No. 1 to Jonas Mekas'. Guerín establishes a parallel between what he has learned from Mekas and the project of his feature film *Guest* (2010), which was being shot in different locations around the world. It is as if the lesson taken from the filmed letters, and the message from Mekas himself, had influenced Guerín in making this travelling feature film, which also contains the scene of the first physical meeting between the two film-makers. But perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of Guerín's letters is his willingness to listen to his interlocutor and react to his suggestions, without this undermining his ability to create forms, points of view and representations of great depth.

As is also the case in Erice's letters, in all of Guerín's letters there is some slight reference to his interlocutor's previous letter, something that gives the alternating nature of the missives a character of its own. Of all of these letters, of particular note is the third, in which Guerín invokes the pain of disappearance, in this

case of the young Slovenian film critic Nika Bohinc, of whom Guerín has kept a few images taken during a festival in Lisbon, shortly before she was murdered in Manila. At the time that this correspondence (and that of the other film-makers) began its tour of the co-producing museums, it was evident that the force of the ‘film factor’ remained, regardless of the different exhibition format used by each institution to display them. In Barcelona, at the CCCB, all of the letters were presented in exhibition rooms; in Madrid, at La Casa Encendida, they were screened according to a weekly film schedule, and at the Centre Pompidou in Paris it was decided that each of the series of correspondence, displayed at different times, would serve to propose a new way of presenting films, taking advantage of the encounter between each pair of film-makers to offer a joint retrospective of both.

Such was the case in 2012 with Guerín and Mekas, whose complete works were presented together, thereby responding to the cultural challenge of the relationship between the two film-makers as a way of conceiving of the artistic community; in other words, extending the idea that a director who lives far away can become the privileged interlocutor with another, in addition to demonstrating the contemporary value of the friendship produced within the film world itself, something that Mekas acknowledges by considering Guerín, in his third letter, ‘my friend in cinema.’ At the same time that Guerín was establishing this epistolary relationship, he also proposed the model of the filmed letter to make *Dos cartas a Ana* (2011), created for the installation *La Rosa de Corinto* at the Museo Esteban Vicente in Segovia, an exploration of the origins of painting and the evocative force of absence that takes its cue from the essay *Short History of the Shadow* (1997) by theorist Víctor Stoichita. Although in this case there is no interlocutor, Guerín’s use this format allows him to explore soliloquy as a reflection spoken aloud

on the mysteries of creation over the course of history, as well as to link the history of painting to that of the cinema, in a veritable museum of shadows.

Albert Serra, *the Art of the Shipwreck*

‘No excursion: chaise longue. No conversation, silence. No reading, lethargy. Insofar as is possible, not a movement, not a thought!’ This recommendation, in the voice of a physician, prescribed by the philosopher Eugeni d’Ors in his book *Oceanography of Tedium* (1994: 5) after spending a few days at a spa, runs through all of Albert Serra’s works: the recovery of time, the discreet charm of doing nothing. This is why, when responding to the model established by the letters of Erice and Kiarostami, Mekas and Guerin, Serra creates *El senyor ha fet en mi meravelles* (2011), he views the museum simultaneously as an expanded mechanism for searching, for getting lost among its images, and for finding a refuge in which to recover time. To the concepts of *augmented space* and *temps exposé* employed respectively by Lev Manovich (2008) and Dominique Païni (2002) to define the museum as a space of expansion and display, it would be worth adding the development of a notion that the studies of Renaissance painting by Aby Warburg were able to apply in his way of addressing the *life of images*: the ‘iconography of the interval’, an expression that alludes to the singular art of the montage used in the picture series *Mnemosyne* (2000), where the images converse on the basis of the tension established in the distances between them, in short through the exposure of the impurity that the marks of time and history inscribe on their configurations.

Among the wide range of possibilities that the museum is able to offer the film-maker and the spectator should be included the notion of an ‘expanded interval’,

a period won for tedium which can be recognized as an iconographic formula. It may perhaps be possible to view *El senyor ha fet en mi meravelles* as a false letter, a missive that Serra addresses not to this correspondent, Lisandro Alonso, but to himself, or rather to his film crew, resulting in a road movie around La Mancha, in the course of a supposed adaptation of *Don Quijote*. If, as d'Ors wrote, 'repose makes us wise' (d'Ors, 1994:39), Serra creates the circumstances for mutual listening between characters capable of twisting their conversation in a thousand directions, not merely in the hiatuses that would separate the scenes of a hypothetical movie, but rather in another interval corresponding to the need to reinvent a new code of interaction between bodies, space and time, in accordance with a change to the emotional structure (Smith, 2007) of perception.

The deliberate compositional beauty of the shots in *El cant dels ocells* (2008) gives way in this case to sequences calculated to show the artifice and the fingerprint in the very process of incarnation of the image. A vague conversation about Ceaucescu's Romania during a meal, the repeated shots of Lluís Serrat and Lluís Carbó in their room or at the end of a long hallway, or a lengthy casual chat in a depth of field shot next to a mill with the director himself in the foreground but off the soundtrack, are merely the thresholds that Serra sets up to produce the revelation. As in the case of Apitchapong Weerasethakul's *Mekong Hotel* (2012), Serra shows the other side of a shot, and even leaves ghosts trapped between the film and its reverse transparency, in the same way as the Thai film-maker does, although what really makes his films unique is a particular construction of humour.

The museum is also another incarnation of theatrical space, where words and gestures confront one another in what Peter Brook (1968) has called the empty

space, and it is not hard to see in the incoherent conversations of Serra's characters an alignment with the Pirandellian project and at the same time with popular culture: more than anything, the bizarre adventures of Carbó and Serrat in *Honor de Cavalleria* (2006), *El cant dels ocells* and *El senyor ha fet en mi meravelles* recall comic sagas like Georges Herriman's *Krazy Kat* (1913-1943). Like the movable landscape of Coconino County, Albert Serra's *Ampurdán* and *La Mancha* offer a space of perpetual transformation. As in *Krazy Kat*, the fact that one of Serra's characters should try to lie down or scratch his rear end can take on, in the context of the expectation it establishes, an almost epic dimension.

'Well, you're finally a little upset,' blurts out Montse Triola to Lluís Serra in *Els noms de Crist*, a series made in this case for the MACBA with an intention similar to that of *El senyor ha fet en mi meravelles*, but which adheres to an even more parodic style and combines the drawing out of interminably long sequence shots with other shots resulting from a more synthetic editing approach. Around a vacated centre, an empty room, countless discussions about the budget filmed in anodyne spaces, Hedy Lamarr's *Ecstasy* (1933), 'sword-and-sandle' films, the final scene in King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946) and Biblically inspired texts are put together, making Serra appear more a critic than a narrator. If criticism, as Giorgio Agamben has suggested, 'neither represents nor knows, but knows the representation' (2006: 11), this is the place where Serra's films are located, in the awareness of approaching the image only where the footprint begins. Like the thought of d'Ors and the couch philosophy of Oblomov, the basic mechanism of Serra's staging consists in raising the story to the level of a philosophical category, dedicated to a mathematics of singular solutions.

For d'Ors, who was, like Serra, a polemical and histrionic character, the

disguise was as important as the word. If, as he used to argue, everybody wants to talk like Demosthenes and to write like Boccaccio but definitely to be Goethe, this also seems to be the aim that has led Serra to evoke the German writer in *The Three Little Pigs* (2012), a film over 100 hours long that was shot, mounted and exhibited in the context of dOCUMENTA(13) in Kassel, also focusing on the diaries of Hitler and an interview with Fassbinder. At this festival, where Straub's characters can recite static fragments of Pavese and Dante in films that are models of austerity, such as *Quei loro incontri* (2006) and *O somma luce* (2010), *The Three Little Pigs* opts for a marathon of the word incarnate. As Serra wrote in the newspaper *La Vanguardia* about the screening of *The Three Little Pigs* in Kassel:

In the early morning, for hours, on a Tuesday or a Wednesday, the room is completely empty and only the projectionist ensures that everything continues on course, although sometimes even he leaves for a while. It could be the illustration of the end of an era, the era of images as a collective experience, but it is quite the opposite; it is the image of a rebirth, of a new era in which works are made and have their moment, a moment that they seek to share and to this end they are offered, seductive, clandestine, at night and in the dark. (2012: 28)

Appealing to the autonomous life of images, Serra attempts to empty the image of tradition, to leave, like Herriman, the empty white background, the ruins or debris of a story open to interpretation.

In the first contacts between the cinema and the museum, Duchamp and Kubelka, Bruce Conner and Len Lye all sought to focus the fetish-experience of the

museum on the perception of a cinematic time, and here where the mechanism of the contemporary museum attempts to colonize the last bastion of exhibition dynamics through a model of quasi-mystic participation, what Serra tries to do is turn the gaze back on the spectator, who is thus left bewildered. Between history and dream, observing a character arguing with another over whether or not to put on a cap, a tie or some socks ends up becoming a political issue, understood as an attitude towards images in the Warholian sense. According to d'Ors, it is enough to ponder something in depth to reconstruct the whole, as it is not necessary to search for systems or absolute concepts, and it is in this idea that Serra's proposition is encoded: it is not the image but its remains, not the character but the interval prior to his incarnation; it is not the distance between the cinema and the museum, but the point where they meet.

Isaki Lacuesta, *Travelling through Invisible Places*

While Serra's images take as their premise the need to film at home, or to take the home itself onto the film set (with the same actors, the same gestures, the same historical and religious references), Lacuesta's films have the opposite aim: to travel. His feature films, short films and installations, produced for the most part together with Isa Campo, attempt to create the forms of a ritual to conjure up disappearance and death. Perhaps for this reason, since the seminal work *Cravan vs. Cravan* (2002), made for a film distribution circuit, Lacuesta has sought to create films capable of defending one of the needs that the exhibiting institution should continue to offer the visitor: the story, and specifically a construction of the story linked to the recollection of the object.

Indeed, Lacuesta's films and installations as a whole constitute a firm affirmation of the traditional film story that could have fit well within the tradition of

the *Wunderkammer*, i.e., the cabinet of curiosities or wonders. The desire to penetrate tiny surfaces of pigment and film to associate them with memory in his work *Microscopías* (2003) is based, as in the case of *Las variaciones* Marker (2007), on the use of montage in order to explore the border regions between wonder and science. Not only Chris Marker but also the long list of explorers of time ranging from Orson Welles in *F for Fake* (1973) to Resnais and Kiarostami in *Close Up* (1990) serve as a mirror to reveal the difficulties of ‘getting to know’ that Lacuesta also turns into the focus of his reflection on exhibition cinema.

In the first scene of *F for Fake*, there is a certainty that can also be extended to those first two reflections on the condition of the spectator that are Buster Keaton’s *The Cameraman* and *Sherlock Junior*: the certainty that both the parading of images in the exhibition hall and the primitive situation of the museum visitor is a return to the condition of the child and the possibility of exposing the machinery behind the trick, the illusion, without this undermining the story. The first frustration that the child has with the world, according to Walter Benjamin, is not that adults are stronger, but that he is unable to perform magic, from which arises the propensity towards melancholy that sometimes overshadows childhood. That which we can be obtained through our own effort and hard work cannot make us completely happy, a fact that is well described in a letter written by Mozart to Bullinger: ‘To live well and to live happily are two different things, and the second without doubt will not happen to me without a little magic’ (Agamben, 2005: 19).

And magic, all of Lacuesta’s films seem to tell us, is not an act of creation but of exhortation, of knowing the secret name with which each thing can be invoked. This is why, when in the first of the *Correspondencias* between Lacuesta and

Kawase the film-maker turns his eyes towards his house and towards the woman he loves, he is confronting the spectator with an enigma, with the secret name of something unexpressed and with the transgression of the norm that forbids the filming of the most intimate details. It is no longer a model-installation like that used by Lacuesta in *Traços/Traces* (2007), but closer to the works of artists like Iranian Shirin Nesat or even Kiarostami's *Sleepers* (2001), *Looking at Tazieh* (2004) and *Forest without Leaves* (2005). The commission in this case is placed at the service of a development in cinema involving the convergence of a meditation on the rule of hospitality, the journey and the mystery of the female characters that runs through all his films. If the purpose of a letter is, above all, to establish a correspondence, Lacuesta offers Kawase not only a mystery and a voyage but also the corollary of all his searches, embodied in a young woman sleeping.

Again as can be seen in Welles, in this case in *The Inmortal Story* (1968), it is the circulation of a fable that seeks to determine the mood of the voyage. 'If we get to know each other, I will explain more to you', assures Lacuesta, who, after a beautiful reply from Kawase focusing on religious ritual and the image of his son Mitsuki, begins a third missive titled *Los ojos artificiales*. In the world of magic there is a luminous tradition that the secret name does not enforce the submission of the thing to the word of the magician, but is rather the key that allows his liberation from language; similarly, Lacuesta reveals how the correspondence allows him to enrich the dimensions of his film-making by showing the process, the constant possibility of a shift in cinematic form.

The images of the Lake of Banyoles captured in 1912 by Segundo de Chomón in *Gérone, la Venise espagnole*, along with the teratologies of the Museu Darder and its dissected figures of human beings of different races, allow the film-

maker to move from the adventure genre into the subgenre of 'body-horror' created by the films of David Cronenberg, which supports the theory of expanded cinema as another broadening of the narrative possibilities of film. But perhaps the heart of the correspondence between Lacuesta and Kawase is that which, in the fifth letter, allows them to come face to face with the emptiness of an unexpected twist. The images filmed with four hands of the Lake of Banyoles, the mythical landscape of Lacuesta's childhood, are elusive and eerie. The 16-mm footage, blurry due to poor exposure, becomes the leitmotif for the rest of the correspondence. As in the case of the different pieces that converge around Apitchapong Weerasethakul's multi-platform project *Primitive*, it is an endeavour to fence in an empty space. The dialogue between the bodies and the ghosts of the Mekong and the city of Nabua in Thailand, which Weerasethakul develops in *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* (2009), *Phantoms of Nabua* (2009), *Primitive Installation* (2009) and *Uncle Boonmee who can Recall his Past Lives* (2010), finds its reflection in the gap left by the absence of film in this correspondence.

## Conclusions

One of the landmark works of exhibition cinema, Aleksandr Sokurov's *Elegy of a Voyage* (2001), employs a surprising economy of resources to show the journey from a Russian winter to a museum in Rotterdam where the director finds a canvas of Pieter Saenredam, which holds inside it a voyage woven with voices, monologues, echoes and pulsations wherein space and time vanish — as opposed to the spatial density of his *Russian Ark* (2002) — into the word, in a mixture between dream and historical evocation. The presence of the word and history occupies a very different place in Lacuesta's case, crystallized in works like the short film

Herencia, which forms part of the collective work *Senses of Home* (2011) together with pieces by Jia Zhang-ke, Kawase, Erice, Mekas and Weerasethakul himself. *Herencia* shows an attention to the continuity of the shot and the invocation of the processes of memory closer to the work of the Thai director than to Sokurov, based on an autobiographical story: the last words or final confession made by the film-maker's grandfather to his father before he died.

The nomadic impulse, the great beyond in both space and time that constitutes the thematic core of Lacuesta's films, is thus rooted both in the adventure genre and in one of the potential advantages offered by the museum, as well as in an unbridled admiration for the ethnographic films of Jean Rouch. These elements are used to confront the contemporary migration of images. His exhibition project *Llocs que no existeixen (Google Earth 1.0)* (2009) reveals, like the feature films *El cuaderno de barro* (2011) and *Los pasos dobles* (2011), a willingness to travel to unseen places, to trace lines on a map that can invoke the primitive capacity of the cinema to bring back remote locations. The different experiences of exhibition cinema examined from a phenomenological perspective are thus an exercise in expansion without losing their quality as endeavours to penetrate into the very identity of cinema. The cinema and the museum are mutually enhanced without compromising the identities of either, in an experience which (although this is not its main purpose) dissolves boundaries: boundaries between spectator and film; and geographical boundaries as well, because what is particularly notable about exhibition cinema is its international orientation and circulation. The identity of the film-maker is thus defined by virtue of his or her relationship with a broader network of film-makers. Could it be that exhibition cinema, the aforementioned works of Guerin, Erice, Serra, Lacuesta and their

contemporaries Weerasethakul, Kawase, Kiarostami and many others, constitutes a secret plot in film circulation, the map for a different kind of possible cinema that can only expand and complement existing circuits for film creation and exhibition? In this respect, we need to hail the success and responsibility of this other screen provided by exhibition cinema precisely to allow an endless voyage to places unseen.

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