

Publication: Dossier VideoBrasil #12
Author: André Brasil

Almost nothing: affection

8762 “– To see is a motion too. – To see presumes a paced, measurable separation; to see is always to see at a distance, but also to allow distance to give back to us all that it takes away from us. [...] – To see is to perceive immediately far away.” (Blanchot)

0964 A man walks. Steady steps, from far away. He comes closer, as the fixed camera follows him. An overflow forms a sort of river that crosses the street he walks on. The camera’s digital zoom renders the scene impressionist, trembling, tenuous, breaking up the field depth. In a natural way, without hesitation, the man starts crossing the river, sinking slowly until his body is almost fully covered. He steps out of the water, continues to walk the streets and passes by the camera without acknowledging it. The video ends when the man steps out of the scene. No soundtrack, no credits, no acknowledgements, no sponsors.

9564 A highway. Dilated landscape: the cars speeding by contribute to highlight the alienation of the man who walks. The camera follows as he moves slowly. The duration of the scene increases, little by little, our anguish. Immersed, distracted from the vertigo of the cars, he walks along the highway shoulder. The traffic is not as interesting to him as the waste that he meticulously collects from the asphalt. The video is abruptly interrupted by a black screen: the traveler goes on his way.

7692 Here we find the same man, enraptured by his own alienation. He is now standing in a hectic downtown scenery, among cars, motorcycles, and trucks. There is smoke all around, and the air is dilated by the asphalt heat. A bus cuts through the scene, and then the man is no longer there.

7439 It is night. The streets are empty, silent. In a single take we see a horse standing on the asphalt and, a little above him, behind the glass wall of a brightly lit gym, a lonely man walks on a gym mat. There is the motionless horse, the darkened street, the excessive transparency of the gym. The man walks fast over the mat, without leaving the place where he stands.

3476 Sea of white. The saturated image – produced by means of an excessive opening of the camera diaphragm – renders the landscape and the people rarefied. The people are fishing, throwing a net and then pulling it back. An ordinary scene, though slightly displaced: standing at an interstice where this world, as well as a whole other world, have been simultaneously produced.

8879 Shadows on the outside wall of a house. They slide around, modulated by the car lights. Images in motion, shocks, juxtapositions, interruptions: the world is making cinema.

0793 Between one black screen and another, something passes by, crosses the image and goes on beyond, way past it. This something – life (alien, ordinary, undetermined) – moves on, leaks out, escapes away from all sides of the image. Thus are the “rhizomes”, which is how Marcellvs names his videos: image sections, interrupted worlds, cut off, extracted, excavated, ripped away, and then sent back to life.

2418 In order to produce his images, Marcellvs seems to be in an ambiguous zone, combining attention, belief, and detachment. The contingency of capturing these events (or near-events) is fundamental to the production of the videos. Nevertheless, there is no belief in the illusion that just looking at the world would be enough for it to reveal itself to our eyes: pure, naive, transparent. This sort of "distracted attention" enables a meeting – affection (in the literal meaning of affecting and being affected) – of the eye and the world: a meeting which is distended by time, mediated by the camera, transfigured by digital editing (economical, in most cases).

2376 Nothing here is pure and natural. Despite their apparent crudeness, these are electronic landscapes, mediatized happenings, worlds that can only emerge in between: the event and its dissolution into pixels and electrons.

2998 The camera (eye, brain, spirit) awaits. However, this is not "bad hope", the one which waits for the Same (as we had comfortably foreseen). This is about hope that is open to the "unexpected in every hope." As Blanchot suggests, "hope is only true hope when it aspires to give us, in the future of a promise, that which it is".

3470 "That which it is, is presence." The event in its eventuality.

0687 If we are to believe in Bergson, then the world is a group of images that clash with each other, sliding over one another. Given this continuous and chaotic motion, we can intervene in two ways: either by blocking the motion, obstructing it, coaching it, turning the images of the world into mere repetitions of the images of the world that we are used to; or just by opening up passages, fissures, breaches through which images (other images, different, weird) can leak out, affect us, and then continue with their mundane motion. The first option yields a comforting thought, offering us that which is known and recognizable; after all, it always leads us to the Same. Quite different is the (drifting) thought produced by the power of image in motion: precarious, hesitating, rough, "almost" done and then, soon thereafter, undone, it is a sort of "thought which does not think yet" (Blanchot). Or, as Rancière put it, "a thought that has become strange to itself: a product that is identical to the non-product, knowledge transformed into nonknowledge, "logos" that is identical to "pathos", an intention of the unintentional". Aesthetic thought, if we may call it that.

0378 During one of our conversations (we both wish they were more frequent), Marcellvs recalls a scene from Tarkovsky ("The mirror"): someone walks on a green, wide, motionless field. The fixed camera follows him, giving time the time it needs. It does not crave, does not interrupt, or accelerate motion. The scene lasts long and almost nothing happens: except for the fact that someone walks. Then, intense and subtle at the same time, the wind cuts through the image, shaking up the whole field. A light thought, a trembling goes through us like a shiver.

3354 After exhibiting one of his pieces, upon reflecting on the audience's receptiveness, the artist utters a precise diagnosis: "time is political". He was referring to the extended duration of his videos, to the idle, slow timing in them. Yes, in many cases, time is political. Especially in the case of these "videorhizomes", since duration is what allows us to detect, in the mundane, the regular, the ordinary, its extraordinary

power, routinely suffocated by haste: that which journalists miss out, in their hurried listening; that which the editor, under the pressure of his deadline, leaves out; that which the documentarist, who is concerned with the pertinence of his story, refuses to perceive; that which we, as spectators, thirsty for more and more new images, cannot wait for: the happening (or a near-happening). If these happenings are rare – contrary to what the TV news try to make us believe –, it is because they are associated with time, they need duration in order to happen (so they can be perceived, and so they can affect us). Time is political because it is time that enables us, through images, to catch a glimpse, or better yet, to invent happenings and the unstable “worlds” that emerge around it. Therefore, time and duration elicit new partitions of the sensible (Rancière): new forms of perception and visibility, new configurations of what is possible and thinkable. That is why time is political and, for that same reason, compulsorily aesthetic.

9643 The man walks. But the way in which he appears and walks through the image is quite different from what we see in reality shows, TV newscasts, and certain documentary films – all of which approach ordinary, regular life, but are unable to escape from the comfort of stereotypes: they reduce the other’s difference to the Same, to that which has already been recognized, and is already expected. He who walks through Marcellvs’ videos seem more like a “man without qualities” (Musil), with no name and no possessions. That man is kept there in his weird singularity, he cannot be captured by clichés, he is impervious to predefined categories that we use in order to protect ourselves (profession, gender, class, nationality...). The ordinary is thus maintained in its “ordinariness”, in its raw power: “the being plus the power of being”, as Blanchot would put it.

7854 “The being is the common being” (Agamben). A singular being who is always to come, who is not reduced to a stereotype, neither, on the other hand, vanishes anonymously into the crowd. It is a regular being, but not an indifferent one: the man who walks the street and does not hesitate to cross the river; or he who walks along the highway shoulder, alien to the cars, attentive to the waste. “Quodlibet ens”: a common being, Agamben tells us, “contains something that has to do with will (“libet”), as the common being establishes an original relationship with desire”.

8642 The happening – this precarious moment in which, circumstantially though it may be, a “truth” is outlined – cannot be captured merely by technical dexterity, neither by formal virtuosity: more than just a technique, inseparable from aesthetic, first of all, this is about image ethics. Much more than a technological tool, even more than a language tool, the camera becomes part of a way of seeing, being, and acting in the world.

6798 In a world that has been transformed into image, extracting images from the cliché in which we have transformed the world is a difficult task, although a necessary one. This is what these “videorhizomes” suggest to us, standing in that undistinguishable border between ethics, politics, and aesthetics.

5558 To see, to perceive, to listen, to participate in the time flow – a policy; to shape, or better yet, to modulate time (and extracting other worlds from it) – an aesthetic; to allow time to pass through us, to shape us, and to recreate us – an ethic.

9875 In successive dice rolls, Marcellvs usually attributes random numbers to his videos: 0314, 7077,

5040, 8011, 2004, 3172, 0667. Then he sends them, one by one, to randomly chosen addresses in the phone book. Who receives the videos, how do they receive them, to what end? It doesn't matter. That which is fundamental is the random, fragile meeting of the happening with the not-happening: the ordinary man who produced the images; the ordinary men who sometimes inhabit the images; the ordinary man who receives the videotapes by mail. The community that is thus fleetingly invented, which is connected by fragile wires.

0873 This is the result of these rhizomes, after all: delicate wires, nearly imperceptible. Almost nothing: affection.