

INHERITED GAMES

The montage and the document: The (in)visible singularity

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In a text from 1995, Jean-Luc Godard asserted, in a radical and almost violent manner, that film had failed drastically as a means of expression. "Everything came to an end," said Godard, "from the moment when Concentration Camps were *not* registered on film." That assertion would be easily embraced if it had not been refuted by direct and empirical evidence: there are hundreds of feet of film shot during the German National-Socialism era by various filmmakers and even by the military forces themselves. We have all been confronted by the horrendous images of construction machines digging graves and dragging hundreds of bodies, shapeless and unrecognizable as such. Why is it then that Godard should accuse filmmakers of failing to record the Camps if he was aware of the diverse images of record that various camera operators had shot in different sites? His point lies, perhaps, in signaling that the fact that there were images of record for the extermination falls short of affirming that film has *shown* what transpired in the Camps. With his drastic condemnation, Godard demanded that the images be *edited* in such a way that they achieved the capacity to make visible, beyond the shape of a direct record, the singularity of what happened in the German Camps. The expressive capacity of film comes into action through the task of bringing two images together, of structuring a relation. If filmmaking did not record the Camps, that is because it had not known how to edit the existing images of record. This is then the central determination: A series of loose images does not become film; it does not compose an audiovisual *document* of the event. The power of film to show is rooted in its arrangement and its juxtapositions. The questions that are implicit in Godard's assertion would be: How is an artwork able to surpass the record of a particular event in order to become a document that makes a singularity visible? What type of editing/montage allows for the construction of a document? These questions, among many others, play a fundamental role in *Inherited Games*.

That piece draws its beginnings from an indeterminate material, from a series of images recorded in the Colombian regions of *Valle* and *Chocó*, during several days around July the 20th – date that marks the celebration of what is called there the “*fiesta del gallo*,” or Feast of the Rooster. Aside from the direct recording of that event, the work utilizes a series of recreations realized in the manner of *gestural* unfoldings, which allow it to emphasize the minute actions carried out during the *fiesta*: loading the shovel, digging a hole, fixing blindfolds, clutching a machete, burying the rooster. As we observe the final disposition of those images, their montage – interior as well as *installative*, we do not however come up with a narrative description of the event. Regardless of the method put in play for recording the images, many would doubt the usefulness of the term “documentary” to comment on this piece. It is plain to see that the work does not utilize any of the narrative or formal resources that we traditionally associate with the documentary. Interviews and testimonials, voices off camera, or any other explanatory resources, are replaced by the apparent quiescence of the image and the sound – the latter perceived as noise, even, at certain moments. The artist refuses to narrate the event, to expound a record of the *fiesta* in any effort to compose, to edit a document that may account for its singularity. She refuses to provide an exhaustive depiction of the *particularity* of the event, so as to address the possibility of drawing forth its *singularity*, of making visible what – although it may be part of that concrete act – cannot be reduced to the act itself.

We observe the occurrence, but “something else” becomes visible to us in that occurrence – something unnamable, something that is not reducible to a written description. We are dealing neither with a concept nor with an abstract idea, articulated as a metaphorical meaning. The spectators move between what seems to be a ritual and its permanent dislocation in the image. We sense the anticipation of death, the violence of the forthcoming act and, at the same time, the resisting endurance of life in the buried animal. It is not, however, only a matter *of* the rooster’s death, *of* the violence unleashed by those who perform the slaughter, and *of* the – conceivably futile – resistance *of* the concrete animal. Death, violence and resistance no longer pertain to any of the actors who take part in the particular event. We go beyond the executed victim and the

executioner without ceasing to perceive them. We are facing the singularity of the act beyond its particularity.

The visibility of that singularity comes about on the basis of a particular type of editing, of a way of articulating the images among themselves and making them relate in space. This piece is composed around twelve chapters that do not follow a linear descriptive order. Even as the work generates tension in the spectator, that tension is not the consequence of a narrative crescendo that would lead us from the preparation of the sacrifice all the way to its execution – with the respective causal explanations. The tension is generated, instead, by permanent repetitions and rhythmic ruptures, by fragmentation and detention, by the staging of a new account of the more minimal events. Hence, the fundamental operation seems to be the dislocation of chronological time.

Sound is, perhaps, the key element of that rupture. Here it is not a matter of a synchronic, “realistic” sound that may follow the image. Songs turn up amid the rain in an almost imperceptible way; the blows of shovels on the sand grow and get repeated to the point of losing any figurative intention; voices are made intelligible as murmurs. The sound is constantly interrupted; it is modulated in its intensities; it appears and disappears without any recognizable formula. It is a sound that does not register. It separates. And in that separation, it affords the possibility of an indicating designation, re-locates the gaze in its relation to the event in the image.

This permanent rupture allows for the discovery of instants that appeared to be lost in the linearity of the event. The actions – as they get expanded, repeated or multiplied in space, or as they become bursting silences or noises – are transformed into *gestures* that emerge through the interstices of image and sound. Visual gestures and sound gestures are now made perceptible in the simultaneity that the editing generates. Whatever was diluted in the linearity of the event gets a voice through the temporal and spatial dislocation. It is this, precisely, that allows us to go from the record to the document, from the narrative description to the revealing montage. The piece moves us between what appears to be a ritual and its permanent dislocation in the image. Unavoidably, a loss is made to stand out: those gestures, which originally

composed a ritual of Celtic origin, were inherited from Spain in the 1930's by the peoples of the Colombian Pacific; through that transference of contexts, the gestures are drained of any ritual connection and become a game of actions that are isolated, devoid of purpose beyond pure violence. That singularity becomes perceptible in the montage, not as information but rather as irruption. By way of the montage, the event – unique, transient – becomes habitable. The spectators can “circulate” in it. They do not “know,” are not “informed on” what it is that composes the event. Rather, they come face to face with its singularity, which is hidden amidst visual and resonant images.

Translated from the Spanish original by Juan Julián Caicedo