

The Three Little Pigs

Albert Serra

19.11.22-12.2.23

Fabra i Coats:
Centre d'Art
Contemporani

Ajuntament de
Barcelona



On the invitation of dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel, in 2012 Albert Serra created *The Three Little Pigs*, a work that is based on three books of conversations, with Goethe, Hitler and Fassbinder, respectively.¹ It was filmed, edited and projected in situ over the course of the 100 days the event lasted.

Every day, a selection from each of the three books was filmed in a different location in Kassel: Auepark for the sections on Goethe; the meeting room at the Salzmannfabrik for the Hitler part; and Ekstase Bar for the sections with Fassbinder. The Heinrich-Schütz-Schule dance hall was used for all three. As many of the performers (all Kassel-based workers) were not available each day, it was necessary to have more than one actor for each character, just as the film editing and sound editing would be carried out by an alternating team of six to eight people. This constituted a full-fledged factory producing two hours of film a day, which after a lapse of three days (the time needed to develop and edit the material) was shown at the Gloria-Kino cinema, with the corresponding text selections available on paper. The final piece, which maintained the described structure and, as Serra determined, would be shown without credits, was projected in full at the same cinema a few days after dOCUMENTA ended.

In the catalogue text, written in 2011, Serra explains his aim to do “a literal, complete adaptation”, in what would be an ongoing flow of discourse, with non-professional actors reciting the published texts, word by word, page by page: “As no kind of dramatization of either of the first two texts exists, their structure as diaries, their chronologies and all dialogues will be meticulously staged. In the case of Goethe, the descriptions of the situations will serve as a help for the mise-en-scène, which will be precise and true to the text; some dialogues in third person will have to be re-written in first person. In case of *The Private Conversations of Hitler*, the dialogues will remain unaltered; the mise-en-scène will be developed directly from the text and completed with an investigation of historic studies. The character Fassbinder and some of his opinions ... will be inserted at random and in its own freedom as well as mine to use it the way I like to. It will serve as a counterpoint to the conceptual and expressive stringency of the first two parts.”²

With this project, what Serra does is shake the foundations of at least three of the core tenets of dOCUMENTA: the production of art, its reception and its dissemination. The resultant instability unites form and content. Despite the solemnity drawn from the sum of textual citation, the dates, the three characters, the scenarios and the detailed historical recreations, this transcendence is swiftly countered by the ambiguity of the

images —and not only those of Fassbinder or Serra. Every film is the documentary of its own shoot, and that is clear in this case; but it is equally evident that “this is not a pipe”, as Magritte would say, so that this is not Hitler. In the performative nature of the medium, the performance and staging of the film reveal the suspicion of representation, and with it of whoever says “I”, of whoever writes history.

The pressure of daily shooting, the rushed editing and the fragmentary presentation had as an additional factor the fragility of the image, understood as a visual translation of the reality taking place in front of the camera. This fragility runs through the textual translation as well: the written text, be it autobiographical or transcribed (translation into the words of what we feel or say); a spoken or performed text (the translation of the reader or the actor reciting it); and the text as a historical document (the translation of the memory that history gives rise to). As he had previously done with Don Quixote, Dracula and Casanova, and as he would later do with Louis XIV, Serra plays with the medium’s ambivalence so as to question the construction of the self in literature (fictitious or not) and the symbolic construction of history (in this case, of European cultural identity).

“‘Between dreams and history’: that is how I live”, the filmmaker wrote from Kassel, in the first of fifteen chronicles he wrote for the *Cultura/s* supplement of *La Vanguardia*, here reproduced in part. This interstice is where we also find the three main characters, fully aware of the image they have of themselves and the discursive legacy they left for posterity, whether via Romanticism’s cult of the self, Nazi authoritarian narcissism or the queer dissidence of (post)modern intertext. Or, just as well, in the words of Pere Gimferrer: “Those of us who write a diary know that it is as risky and ambiguous, as seductive and lax, as all of literature. Or all of life.”³ Indeed, however much the dates and the first-person voice would have us view these daily dissertations as if they were autobiographical, the fact is that none of them were written by any of the three individuals referred to. Despite the supposed veracity of the textual register, they are discourses that have been arranged by other hands: “Identities that had never been stated as such are staged verbatim as they never occurred, forming a commentary on conceptions of history that can never be realized in that way.”⁴ Perceived in this way, maybe they are the three little pigs.

Serra’s appropriation encounters the Pierre Menard of Borges and Sherrie Levine’s Walker Evans, yet in cinema time works its way into ev-

everything; re-creation re-signifies, literacy is ineluctably diluted. Between the gravity of the texts of three men who, with greater or lesser impact, have left their mark on history, and the dreamlike levity with which their voices come to us in the present, here we are, silent listeners, although this does not make us innocent. Or perhaps the problem is that there is no true antagonism, as what is political leaves its mark on the personal—dreams are able to illustrate an *intimate seismography* of political history—⁵ and what is personal is political. Perhaps, as the title proclaims, it is a question of seeing irresolvable difference as a trio, an allegorical triangle that includes us while enabling us to rethink the relationship between past, present and future.

The original tale of *The Three Little Pigs* is focused on another character altogether, kept on the outside while being altogether decisive for the tale: the wolf. Against him, the three main characters discuss the situation and act together, constructing a common front that gradually gains in solidity. In Serra's *The Three Little Pigs*, the potential evil is an acritical, complacent, amnesiac present that reduces and simplifies the past, ignoring or banalizing the crimes committed. We are the ones, as contemporary readers of history, who can (mis)treat this evil as if it were built of straw, sticks or brick.

Albert Serra revives the path where tradition illuminates the present, as Hannah Arendt would say. This explains these one-hundred hours of film, a length that obliges us to become aware of what is, or should be, the untiring struggle of our relationship to the past. This is not only because any attempt at a quick and easy reading of what has gone before us is challenged to the core, but also because the past, as it looks out at us, poses new interrogatives about the world we live in. This is the gaze that today, ten years gone and after the refugee crisis, Brexit and the rise of the extreme right in various European governments, takes on new meanings.

Nowadays, *The Three Little Pigs* is a film that lasts 101 hours; it is also shown as a multi-screen installation. It continues to be a colossal work, and this is precisely what renders it inaccessible. The reason is not just that it is “absurdly long”,⁶ going well beyond the limits of its own exhibition, but because along with the difficulty of seeing it whole there is the difficulty of understanding it (it has only been screened in full on three occasions,⁷ and always in the original German).

Bringing *The Three Little Pigs* to Fabra i Coats means dealing with both of these obstacles directly. For this reason, for one, and thanks to the support of the Generalitat de Catalunya and the Goethe-Institut, we

have commissioned and guided the colossal task of translating and subtitling the film, a process which has taken nine months. In turn, paradoxically, this adds a new layer to it, a new coating of reality and poetry at once. On the other hand, we have designed a mechanism whereby the formal fragmentation and conceptual complexity of the project are readied for the exhibition gallery. This display leaves the work in suspense (with the images, pigs and voices floating beyond the gallery itself) while the public on the ground (the situated readings, the present), and simultaneously obstructing any attempt at a unitary vision, avoiding frontality with a triangular screen that makes it impossible to see the three projections at the same time.

Quite apart from the pigs and its length, everything in this work is a provocation, a quandary with no solution. From its final or initial uncertainty, which is what separates desire from the result, experimenting without knowing what the result would be; and up to the present, to our time, set at a distance from Kassel and even from Serra, in the imprecision of words and of the understanding of history, in the diffuse limits of authorship (exponentially multiplied with the omission of credits and the Catalan translation), in the impossibility for the public to see it in full, along with the institutional challenge of embracing all these contradictions.

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- 1 *Conversations with Goethe* by Johann Peter Eckermann, featuring the Romantic writer's thoughts in the final years of his life, which in the film are shifted from third person to first person; *Hitler's Table Talk 1941–1944: His Private Conversations*, monologues of the Führer as delivered and transcribed by his inner circle from 1941 to 1944 (and published ten years later); and a collection of interviews with and articles by the filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder, edited by Robert Fischer (*Fassbinder über Fassbinder: Die ungekürzten Interviews* [Fassbinder on Fassbinder: The Unabridged Interviews]).
 - 2 *dOCUMENTA (13). Das Begleitbuch/The Guidebook. Katalog/Catalog 3/3*, dOCUMENTA and Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Kassel, 2012.
 - 3 Pere Gimferrer, *Dietari (1979–1980)*, Edicions 62, Barcelona, 1981.
 - 4 Bettina Steinbrügge, in *Albert Serra — The Three Little Pigs*, Kunstverein in Hamburg, 19/6/21–15/8/21.
 - 5 This is how Raimond Koselleck describes the effects of Nazi totalitarianism on the collective unconscious, as studied by Charlotte Beradt, who compiled and analysed the dreams of 300 Germans after the rise of Hitler, before the war, in *The Third Reich of Dreams* (Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1968).
 - 6 See “Beginning and End”, *Chronicles from Kassel*.
 - 7 In the 2012 film version, shown at the Gloria-Kino cinema in Kassel, and in 2018 at Volksbühne, Berlin; and in the first exhibition version as a multi-channel installation, at the Kunstverein in Hamburg, in 2021.

BETWEEN THE DREAM AND THE HISTORICAL

‘Between the dream and the historical’, that’s how I live, not that that has to do, as those of bad faith might have it, with my participation in Kassel’s DOCUMENTA, to which I attach no importance, I never do to such things, but refers rather to the aesthetic experience connected to the film I am working on there.

After the first few difficult days (various technical problems) the lines of text are now circulating smoothly, with a lively rhythm, even; of the two texts, the Hitler one is easier, with short, sententious sentences, and the Goethe one is more complex in the German original, and gives rise to more errors.

But both texts are moving forward. One of the German collaborators, who is playing Goethe, says ingenuously that the text sounds as if it didn’t come from anywhere in particular, as if it were floating, as if it were a dream (perhaps an accumulative effect). But at the same time, the texts are journals, documents of a specific moment in time, indications of a historical truth, culturally important in the one instance, and of purely technical interest in the other. The presentation of the film makes this abundantly clear, given that each extract is preceded by a black screen with a date, which shifts at random from the 19th to the 20th centuries (and within the next few days, to the 21st, when the contemporary section begins, in which the historical and the intimate will become one). On the first day the film had credit titles but at a suggestion from the editor I decided to get rid of them, which was a great improvement (only the final version will have credits). It looks great without credits, especially on the huge, relaxing screen of a Kassel cinema, where the screening is not announced anywhere at all within the auditorium (this would seem to be simply a DOCUMENTA tradition, but always works well on an aesthetic level). Without the credits, the historical dimension grows solemn, dry, even if the images give the lie to that very soon; yet at the same time, without us barely realising it, the truth of the text —or the truth of its literal reproduction— once again recuperates that dimension ... when the manner of explaining it has already let it be lost yet again.

It's a curious effect, and all the different elements come together to create this instability (which is the strength of visual works): because the settings of the different spaces are suggestive, phantasmagorical and appropriate, but the actors are always subtly inappropriate, lost in absurd details, almost always brought on by the breakneck workload (twenty pages a day which will eventually become forty). And for the same reason the set-up is imperfect ... and impotent. And yet even so, the narrative is believable and probable.

This is the problem described by Àngel Quintana in his latest book: 'The black and white images of a successful old Hollywood film like Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca*, lend credibility to a story set in Morocco during the years of the German occupation and filmed in a studio, but they also remind us that the expressions of Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman are phantasmagorical expressions, which function as a documentary certification of the gestures made by the two actors when they were working on the film'. I've always said to Àngel that I am only interested in films in which these two levels, which in principle tend to be tautological, given that they are contained within the same image, are contradictory or, at least, confront each other dialectically.

In *The Three Little Pigs*, which is the title of my Kassel film, a new element has been added to this conflict in a more explicit fashion; it was already present in all my previous work, and formed part of their attractiveness, but here they come to the fore: what makes *Casablanca's* ridiculous narrative believable is that its actors (and everything else involved in the shooting of the film) at least managed to create their own reality, inasmuch as they acted as *documentary certifications* and it was this conviction that gave us the strength to believe in their fable. But what happens when the *documentary certification* doesn't believe in anything, not even in its own existence?

REPRESENTING HITLER

Until today, three weeks after arriving in Kassel and starting the shoot, the most complex problem I have come across so far is how to present a figure such as Adolf Hitler. I feel a certain dissatisfaction every time I look at the actor playing him, and I can't find a way to sort this out. No matter what I say to him, and as usual I hardly say anything at all, and given that he does as he pleases in the way he pleases, nothing I say is of much use. If he becomes more aggressive (an unbalanced Hitler with fits of rage) it's a cliché. If he becomes more human (a Hitler who likes chil-

dren and dogs, an intimate Hitler who makes small talk with Eva Braun) there you have another cliché. If he becomes more sarcastic (anticlerical, misogynistic, etc.) that also comes off as commonplace. And if he becomes more introverted, he is simply denying himself and at the same time the film, which is based on a text that demonstrates the man's incorrigible verbal incontinence. He also cannot be more intelligent than the text suggests (but neither can he be stupider, another cliché: the fact that he was an evil criminal and a lunatic doesn't stop him from being interesting). I can't even pass judgement on him as a last resort, given that the images cannot be used for a moral discourse: on the contrary, they are dangerous and ambiguous; look at the example of Visconti, whose images of Nazism implicitly exalted that which the film claimed to condemn ... Anything that I propose to the actor is a cliché, and I am in thrall to a certain irritation. The case of Goethe is exactly the opposite: I find anything, no matter how improvised, is highly satisfactory.

When it comes down to it, the problem is simple enough: there are characters, like Hitler, Dalí or Warhol who are caricatures of themselves. They've done the work for us, before anybody else could do it, and when they presented themselves to the world, to the great wide world, they did so having incorporated their own readings of themselves in the most pitiless way imaginable, the one that would hurt them the most, that is to say, the most caricatural; and every appearance they made, every public image (in fact, they had no privacy in order to avoid the possibility that anyone could spy on their secret lives; which is why they were forever exposing themselves, which is the same thing as having no personality at all) is a simultaneous staging of their egos and of their critical exegeses of them. They do not offer any self-representation, because their lives, their vital syntheses, already contain all such possible representations. Which is why all the works which have attempted to recreate their lives have turned out to be easily recognisable failures (and here I would include, in Hitler's case, Syberberg and Sokurov): you cannot represent what is already represented, unless you play at post-modernist games, just as you cannot imagine what has already been imagined. These are unresolvable contradictions.

The final consequence of this aesthetic impenetrability is obvious: dogmatism. But true images, by their very nature, cannot be dogmatic. And they suffer when they are unable to be faithful to that which they are portraying. Such visible suffering is what makes all the fictitious images of Hitler, for example, so grotesque; we have never been made to feel that we have known the real Hitler, or at least one with an acceptable level of realism, simply because such a thing never existed in reality, we

only know caricatures of it and you cannot make a caricature of a caricature ... Paradoxically, a character who is hyper-exposed, dogmatic and repetitive becomes unique, because he cannot be represented. Without a doubt, this is the key to the fascination that such characters exercise over us, their extreme authenticity, even though this is achieved by taking the unlikely path of pure artifice.

I would never have dared to make a film about Hitler, if I didn't have a credible textual starting point, which is also a historical document. And if I can't represent Hitler just as he was, I can certainly dream him up. My Hitler is deliberately fantastic, but has been created exclusively on the basis of historical data.

FASSBINDER

After a few weeks in Kassel, even I don't really know what Fassbinder's name is doing mixed up with the film I'm working on. Without a doubt this is the most delicate section, and perhaps the weakest one, of the entire project; it's completely unnecessary, it doesn't interest me, and will probably end up badly. Tomorrow, in theory, is the day I should start work on this section and I don't have a clear idea of how to go about it. I don't want to have one. I simply don't respect Fassbinder, he doesn't appeal to me, I don't regard him as important. To a large extent, I don't know his filmography as a director (he is a mediocre one, although he's a brilliant actor) nor do I know about his life (I can barely recall the more off-colour details of it) or about his opinions; I don't even feel any affinity with his baroque, decorativist and circumstantial aesthetic. I'm also not so sure that one can portray a contemporary personage without falling into a fetishistic deviation (which always ends up as pastiche). So tomorrow it looks like everything is going to lead to the creation of worthless images, whose worthlessness, however, will be pure, given that they cannot contain any type of resentment, merely indifference. And I love that. It's an attitude which popped up quite by chance, and seems to be to be, frankly, a very fine one for an artist. It is clear that the objective has no clear motivation, that it would like to be opportunistic but simply comes out as dry. And the rendition would like to be decadent, but simply comes out as perfect. In the end it turns out that from this very undramatic desperation, some form may emerge. Perhaps this absolute absence of desire is, today, the only possible prerequisite for avoiding the evils of fetishism (the evils of being derivative), the evils of filming with desire and not with form (and, of course, everything ends up as *cinema filmé*, to use Jean Claude Biette's

pithy expression: the surest way of achieving a style ... another option to be used by creators of bourgeois 'good taste'). But this absence of desire must be determined. I've realised that, coincidentally, these are two features of my personality and that when combined they give way to a most powerful and unusual energy in all fields, including that of aesthetics: determination free of content.

It's a waste of time to talk about Fassbinder, let alone to be inspired by him. Yet even so, perhaps tomorrow, thanks to him and despite him, a new form will appear in my work. But I don't owe him a thing; it's got nothing to do with him, or with anybody else. It doesn't have an origin, or a value (and for that reason cannot have any aesthetic value judgements applied to it) it simply has an outline, marked with a strong, almost decisive brushstroke.

I can assure you that the starting point has nothing to do with this triumphant ending. Fassbinder will be played by a young art student from Kassel, a lesbian, who works as a language assistant, and who volunteered herself for the part ('I'll do it really well', she assured me, and that surprised me because I'm not used to actors choosing me ...). As I find it difficult to say no, I agreed, though she wasn't listening to me by then. The role will also be played by a playwright who was meant to give us the German adaptation in direct speech of Eckermann's *Conversations With Goethe*. In the beginning he kept his word, but we haven't heard from him in over a week (apparently he is incommunicado in Serbia —or Kosovo?) and every day, before starting the shoot, I've had to do the adaptation myself, with the help of the art student and the English and Catalan translations of the text; a tough but extremely interesting task, it should be said. My friend Lluís Serrat has travelled to Kassel just to play the same role, and right now he's on the set, watching and taking in everything. The entire section dedicated to Fassbinder will be shot in the Ekstase Bar, an old switch club, the prettiest place in Kassel. Doesn't this ambience remind you of something? And all of this, yet again, without wanting it ...

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A friend, after having seen some of the daily rushes, asked me on what basis the order of the different episodes is determined (each one corresponds to an extract from the diaries of Goethe, Hitler, or, in the case of Fassbinder, an interview). I replied that for the time being there was no basis whatsoever, given that the rushes are merely a demonstration of the day to day work, which is fairly chaotic in nature, and that the true

structure will be contained within the definitive version of the final projection, and will be based on a chronological order. “So it’s going to be like a performance piece? It could be something more ...”. The concept of performance art has something pejorative about it for him, which I immediately understood, and which he identified, precisely, as an unstructured work, a work in which everything is there. I realised that, probably due to mental laziness, I had settled for a solution of the structural issue using a rather simplistic conceptualism, something very common today in the world of image, which consists of solving a problem simply by proposing a question, stressing it heavily to give the impression that it’s laden with connotations. It’s what I call a fake mystery. A conceptual solution to a complex problem which demands a great deal of reflection, is not fascinating (in the sense that we intuitively feel that it could say something, but doesn’t) but disappointing because it is us, the spectators, who have this intuition, not the work itself). A purely chronological structure for a work which blends three different books which have very different themes, doesn’t say anything in itself, and, what is more, shuts the door on any kind of formal search.

Another theoretical problem which has appeared over the last few days, upon seeing the images I have filmed, is the dichotomy between the subjective and the objective as regards the point of view. In the beginning, the Goethe and Hitler sections were meant to be filmed on two different sets, one for each character. Each in his natural setting, Hitler in a huge office and Goethe in the gardens of a rococo castle; and in a theatre where someone — Fassbinder, myself, or myself playing Fassbinder— would stage different parts of the above-mentioned books. In this way, I wished to achieve a subjective-lyrical point of view, with the images in natural settings, and another point of view of an objective-critical nature, in the theatre. In the theatre sections, I even had the idea of introducing improvised dialogues in Catalan, to accentuate the distancing effect; but in the end I chose not to, because it broke with the overall German feel of the work. However, there are moments in which a theatre director directs the work. And the effect is just the opposite of what could be expected. It turned out that the theatre images are now the lyrical ones, the ones with which the spectator identifies completely. And, by contrast, the untrammelled fantastic aspect, the verbal continuity that comes out of a given mind, has ended up being the last bastion of pure objectivity. This was something impossible to predict, but it appeared obvious to several members of the crew when they saw the images for the first time.

In my opinion, this is an effect of psychological evolution as regards our methods of communication in recent decades, and which has in-

creased in the last few years. Today a fact can no longer exist without a commentary, and so only the explosive self is capable of achieving objectivity, although not in a romantic fashion, but rather in an odd way which is both utopian and scientific. The aesthetic consequences of this are complex and still somewhat muddled. In fact, it seems to me that this is something of a central theme in the most recent contemporary art and at DOCUMENTA I've seen some (flawed) works by artists who have become aware of this. My proposal is as follows: a megalomaniac work but without a physical object (120 hours) but rather a gesture made in the air, an ingenuous affirmation ... a wonderful answer. To what? The question is missing.

MY SYSTEM

For the theatre in which some of the extracts of the books by Hitler and Goethe had to be filmed, or directed on the stage by Fassbinder or by me (at the same time as I directed the filming) I ordered two sets. The Goethe one was meant to have an antique or even a slightly archaic feel to it, and consisted of a background of three panels, the side ones being four by six metres in height, and the central one, eight by six; it was designed to look like an early 19th century parlour, and had two real openings, a door and a window, and another, figurative door. Hitler's set, on the other hand, consisted of an S from the SS emblem, with the original colours and typography, surrounded by fragments that represented chunks that had fallen off the second S. The whole S, a block of wood, was seven metres tall. As I wanted to film the three stories on different sets on the same day, in as far as that was possible, so that the audience which went to the various rushes could see different images that were representative of the final film, the two sets had to be 'easily interchangeable', as I warned the artistic director. It goes without saying that I knew the measurements on the day the sets arrived and yet we were all astonished by them, including the artistic director, which was even more surprising. It took seven operatives an entire day to install one of the sets; seven people were needed just to move the S. And that was the 'easiest' set to move. The Goethe one was fixed to the floor and was, and still is, completely unmoveable. After a few days, given this disaster, I decided to install the second set in the open air, in the middle of a field that we rented, some fifteen kilometres from Kassel, close to the castle where we are filming the exterior shots for the Goethe section. I thought that the rain and the damp would give an interesting finish to the wood, which would contrast with the furniture and the

attractive mouldings, and so that in this way, maybe, we could film something worthwhile on this set. I pointed out the exact spot to the artistic director and the operatives started to install the set. At the end of the day, when I was heading back, I turned and realised that we were in the middle of ... a wind farm. Some passers-by warned us that the wind would blow the set down, and assured us that was 'no chance' that it could remain upright. 'Now it really will be just like *The Three Little Pigs*' (which is the title of the film we are making) said the artistic director, and burst out laughing. Despite everything, I found the idea amusing, and liked it. I dismissed the operatives, who were incompetent, and went off with my crew to buy some turnbuckles. We secured the set, working practically without tools, and hammering iron posts a metre and a half into the ground: two months later, the set was still standing. Then our ingenious artistic director had another brilliant idea, and decided to paint everything with plastic paint. Logically enough, the wood hasn't developed any kind of interesting texture and as background for the images, it's completely flat; for the time being, it's of no use to us whatsoever. In the end we had no choice but to strip the paint with acid ... And, although the turnbuckles prevent the set from falling over, they also prevent us from filming in it, because they limit our space so much that they have left us with hardly any clean shots; what's more, the ones we bought were brightly coloured, some of them were a fluorescent orange and yellow, and they're really ugly. But we're not sure that we can remove them (on a windless day) without everything falling down ... By the by, the sets were extremely expensive and the project has had serious economic problems right from the start.

But now another idea is brewing in my head: as it stands right now, the set is catastrophic and useless for the film, but once removed from that context, on its own, it's a dry, violent piece, a strange, beautiful work of art, worthy of the DOCUMENTA, I would even dare to say one of the best works in this year's edition.

LONELINESS

It's odd: after living in Kassel for over two months, and having talked with people involved on a daily basis with art as it is being created today—all of them with different points of view—hardly anyone has come out in my presence with an aesthetic value judgement about an individual artist. It's an interesting attitude, because it clashes with what we see daily in the art market and would appear to be a reaction against the consumerist logic which is predominant within it. But at the same time, it is some-

times taken to such extremes, that it looks like a grotesque appendage of the political correctness to be found in the Anglo-Saxon world, in which any opinion concerning the value of something or the abilities of someone is automatically considered offensive. Even to simply talk of an artist, of 'singularity', in the double meaning of the word (just one person or something odd) has become increasingly uncommon. I find this attitude intriguing and after analysing it a little on the basis of what is on display at this dOCUMENTA, I am beginning to think that a possible reason for it, is that it is an unconscious symbol of a reaction against the proliferation of value in art.

In Kassel, in this edition, art is certainly returning to form, and is recouping its destiny (even though for my taste, it's doing so in a way which is a little too technical, too calculated: I realise it must be difficult to shake off old habits ...).

In recent years, value has taken over all art, aesthetic value, market value, symbolic value etc., and we all know that value is something which can be interchanged, negotiated, commercialised. But not forms: 'forms as such cannot be exchanged for anything else, they can only be interchanged amongst themselves, and that is the price of aesthetic illusion' (Baudrillard). And this dOCUMENTA does indeed represent a modest nod in the direction of form. Discourse has been avoided and the works have been left to themselves, so that they can talk to each other and not to the world (of all the important theoretical texts that dOCUMENTA has published in its catalogues, hardly any refer to the guest artists). Talking to the world is what created discourse and discourse always ends up making another value appear, the interpretative value, and this can end up being argued about, and if it's argued about, then it's arguable, and probably negotiable ... dOCUMENTA (13)'s utopia is as follows: the works are on their own, they are not underpinned by any discourse, an approved, accumulative discourse which covers up the works so completely that it creates an artificial aura around them; the same discourse which tries to artificially propagate the works in terms of communication; the same discourse which ends up creating an 'agreed aesthetic disillusion', by underpinning, albeit brilliantly, works which have lost all their intensity (possibly, and what a terminal paradox, due to discourse itself). This time the works are there, but they're not available, they are pure objects, and the most isolated works are the strongest. The least discussed, the least expected, the least known, the ones nobody talks about, are the most singular ones. At first, this surprised me, because I myself felt I was on my own, nobody was defending me theoretically, nobody was 'communicating' with me; I thought it was an organisational problem ... But I got used

to it at once, and I have to confess that as an artist, I've never felt happier. This has always been my own attitude, but I never imagined it could also be that of those who love me, who love my work. And now I understand it: only in this way can works of art retrieve their destiny.

This, to some extent, is what has happened in Kassel. Art has retrieved its destiny but has it also retrieved the force of illusion (in both senses of the term, as a hopeful looking forward to something, and as a distortion of feelings and imagination which makes us perceive an image or appearance as real)?

THE THEME

Throughout these articles I have dealt, albeit tangentially, and concerning several different matters, with the problem of 'materiality' in a filmic work of art. I referred to it when talking about staging and about the actors. But I haven't yet dealt with the problem of the materiality of the theme of a film. Unlike pure visual art forms, in which the theme is always treated in an abstract fashion and remains permanently concealed beneath plastic outlines, and is for that reason irrelevant (precisely because it has no materiality, that is to say, visibility) in filmic art the theme is linked to two indispensable elements, time and text, which provide us respectively with the narrative and with the film's psychology. And these two elements have a material basis: the vestiges of History, that is to say, the traces left by past events, including those which do not form part of the science of history when they are examined and their credibility is analysed, be they fictitious or real, it really doesn't matter.

Most filmmakers, mediocre as they are, have never considered the possibility that a theme has materiality, an organic objectification, and that it is because of that that their efforts give rise to a profound feeling of superficiality, if we compare them with literature, something which increasingly leads to ridicule, and more so when the theme to be dealt with is of a transcendent nature.

Syberberg put this matter under a completely different light, with a highly controversial theme, that of the figure of Hitler, which made the mechanism more descriptive. For him, the traces of the past (quotes, speeches, archive footage, opposing historical interpretations, buildings, etc.) do not reveal the past, but are simply its 'material' and their impact lies in their opacity, not in their transparency. With mediocre filmmakers, also in works of fiction, these signals are always treated as if they were transparent, as excuses to show us something more and keep on going,

to reveal to us something of which we are ignorant (even though it's irrelevant) in order to be organised (formatted) but always without believing in them, in their reality.

For Syberberg these signals are opaque and there is nothing to see beyond them. They are history. He can only concentrate on them, but not go through them, and all the energy of his vision and the driving force behind his interest clashes with the physical resistance of these objects ... the deafening sound of blows are his images, the sparks lend them shine, but what is left, swollen, is always the same: without a script, without a hero, Syberberg's film 'is not a disaster movie, it is a disaster made into a film ... the end of the world, the flood, the dying cosmos'. His great lesson, which I have profited from, is to have accepted the 'dark matter' on its own terms, and to have converted it into a single, repetitive objective, like a boxing ball, which gets hit all the time yet remains in place, albeit slightly worn; Syberberg focuses on the external, the social, in what is left of representation and his film is baroque and moribund; I in the internal, the leftovers of intimacy, and my film is fantastic, sluggish, undulating and endless. The obsession with the material nature of the theme, is the same. Without a doubt, they are the two most excessive and intense films about Hitler, and also the most equanimous, because they are physical. Despite his retrograde personal and somewhat muddled approach, Syberberg's *Hitler* has given rise to the admiration of people who hardly be suspected of being conservative, such as Susan Sontag, Gilles Deleuze, Serge Daney and Douglas Sirk. And the fact is that the material is noble, simple, cannot be manipulated, allows no nuances, or fine, elegant reflections: for Syberberg, as far as spectacular representation is concerned, Nazi totalitarianism and Hollywood's imperialism are one and the same, there is no difference between them, just as there is none between, say, the type of repression suffered by good or bad consciences.

BEGINNING AND END

The final screening, more than a hundred successive hours, day and night, has been going on for over two days and I'm told that it's quite an experience. In the early morning, for hours at a time, on a Tuesday or a Wednesday, the auditorium is completely empty and the projectionist alone ensures that everything stays on course, even though he too disappears for a little while, from time to time. It could be the illustration of the end of an era, that of images as collective experience, but it's quite the opposite, it's an image of rebirth, of a new era in which works of art

are made and take their time, a time which they mean to share and to that end they offer themselves seductively, clandestinely, by night and in darkness. They are autonomous, nobody controls them, nobody tries to sell them, and very few people enjoy them. But they exist, they are made with joy, paid off with pleasure. And then they vanish. There are no documents to confirm their existence, nor photos to keep a record of them, because they only exist as experience. They don't bother anyone. They live their lives, immoral for some, given that they are nothing but a luxury, they serve no purpose and are expensive ... They're independent.

The possibility of this final, uninterrupted screening is what decided me to take part in DOCUMENTA. This was the gift they were offering me. Yesterday it was generously returned to them.

In this atmosphere of camaraderie, Goethe was generous to me, too. Sometimes unbearable because of his extreme egocentricity, with boundless energy despite his age, he showed me the picturesque memoirs of a unique personage, Beaumarchais, as well as another, less adventurous but more instructive memoir, that of Dumont, Mirabeau's secretary. Like me, and like many other readers of Saint-Simon (such as the poet Pere Gimferrer), when the Sun King died, he too stopped reading the book, but he announced this to me in a memorable fashion: 'reading (Saint-Simon) no longer gives me pleasure. In its place I have been overwhelmed by dissatisfaction, so I abandoned the book just at the time when the *tyrant* abandoned me'.

Hitler, on the other hand, proved to be condescending and affable in private. He was obsessed and was dangerous, but oddly enough, he was a seducer and I'm not surprised that he bewitched millions of people. Two moral worlds opened and closed within me, every time he took off his moustache and changed his costume. He was a monster. But was delightful and roguish when gossiping about the secrets of other rulers, including the Spanish ones, whom he despised for their stupidity (even though he considered the Spanish to be the bravest people in Europe ...); he had a field day with the vileness and egotism of Europe's corrupt royal families, who he delighted in instructing harshly and at length on matters of practical politics, whenever he could. And as an overt antiliberal, when he heard about the awful political reality of our times, of the absence of public governance and the extortion of the banks, with his obsession that no one working for the state should have the slightest dealings with the private sector (those civil servants who wanted to save could only buy ... government bonds!), his words were comforting.

But Fassbinder had to warn us where this obsession led, how it infiltrated the collective unconscious and how totalitarianism forms part

of the genetic make-up of every state. He described the mental logic of groups fairly and squarely, even though he bored me; I didn't need any lessons from anyone on this subject, given that I've filmed my own epitaph concerning the dying days of the group and the impossibility of spiritual self-realisation (although I still hanker after the utopia of Sparta): it's called *El Senyor ha fet en mi meravelles*.

The image is one and continuous but has been built up from three very different minds, mental logics, ways of feeling and divergent forms of action. And it's long, extremely long: 'Absurdly long, the movie is a new alliance between seeing and the equivocal. Serra's non-stop film screening is a conflation of uncompromising passion for the image, the voice, the "then" of history and the "now", the actors, the time in Kassel, and the making of the movie itself, which presides over and witnesses the last days of dOCUMENTA (13).'

Opening times

Tuesdays to Saturdays, 12.00 to 20.00

Sundays and Holidays, 11.00 to 15.00

Guided tours. More information at:
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