

## LIFE IN THE PLAYGROUND

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A forty-second video shows some feet walking along the edge of a dune, no more than that. This is the work of Juan Aizpitarte, and its simplicity represents the conscience of a renewed contract with image, to keep it close to experience and feeling. To ensure that images do not only refer to other images.

Revolutions often start where they are least expected, and this means *from below*, in the art world too. In particular, in the world of the moving image, the revolutionary breath of fresh air has often come from those who have the least artistic ambition and prejudice. The strategies devised and used by documentary makers, industrial filmmakers, amateurs, advertising agents and journalists have regularly been adopted by artists, who have found their aesthetics and resources to give them new ways to revivify a look. In a famous quote by Francis Ford Coppola, he said that the future of film was in the hands of a kid with a skateboard in one hand and a home movie camera in the other. Regardless of whether the skater aesthetic rules the big screen or not, the fact is that we see and recognise its features all around us, and it has invaded a large part of the contemporary audiovisual world. You have to look no further than *Inland Empire* (David Lynch, 2006), *Honor de Cavallería* (Albert Serra, 2006), *Finisterrae* (Sergi Caballero, 2010), the video-clips by Vincent Moon, Nicolás Méndez or Blu's animation. What do these works all have in common? And what do they have to do with so-called skate film?

Let's be clear about this, it's not about this audiovisual concept dazzling out other fields with its creativity. It's simply that, in this field, the available technology and some important features of the propitious zeitgeist have mutually strengthened each other, from the DIY culture to the echoes of the X Generation. In other words, the determination to work NOW, without prejudices and using available tools. Not only that, but to do so to have fun, not against the world, but using that world as a theatre in which to play out our fantasies, although this entails the need to *interpret* it in a new way.

That's why skate film does not represent things, it *looks* at them. It does not talk about things, it shows actions.

Hence the city, or reality itself, becomes a playground; adolescence is turned into a chronic condition; and accidents become a celebration of life. Nothing better than a good fall, said Preston Sturges, and this was even better explained by the guys at *Boing Boing* in their manifesto about the coming of the *Happy Mutants*: you don't have to clash with authority; you have to laugh at it.

In the early nineties, those videos that were recorded to show twirls on a board, with no decoration other than their music, were based on something else, on small non-stories that were held together by an ingenious idea, hardly a gag, not even a video-clip.

But these pieces gave off a lot more than that: they showed an alternative way to read architecture and public spaces, of inhabiting non-places, of ignoring authority, distracting the narration, freezing time, dancing with danger and living the performance. They used any means that reflected their removal from reality: pranks, dressing up, masks, costumes, role play, staged accidents...

In short, what popular culture sowed throughout the 20th century, coming to fruition towards the end of that century, was the chance for some to live in the third place, in a world of fantasy, fiction and virtual experiences.

The third place concept was coined by the philosopher Henri Lefebvre, referring to that which does not correspond to all things devised, planned or even experimented, all

things real. The third place is, therefore, a mental space in which subjective experience makes it possible to interweave all that has gone before.

Other thinkers have developed, adapted or made the idea their own, such as Edward W Soja, who has found the perfect third place in Los Angeles: the dream factory where you can build your life to meet your fantasies, in which nothing is false if it is in the name of desire or the sacred right of the *pursuit of happiness*...It is there in the film star clones in *L.A. Confidential* (Hanson, 97), *The Truman Show* (Weir, 98) or the thousand and one nights or European-inspired frenzied architecture that we see in *Mulholland Drive*.

Lynch's L.A. trilogy (*Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Inland Empire*) perfectly represents this condition: a city in which it is hard to distinguish the facts from the dreams and desires. A city in which the mind can break away, create parallel realities or psychogenic fugues. It's hardly surprising that this city has been the stage for so many films of chaotic tales (*Pulp Fiction*, *Memento*), and it also comes as no surprise that Lynch was commissioned the Playstation 2 campaign, presented as '*The Third Place*'. Videogames are, in effect, an ideal third place.

Douglas Coupland drew our attention to this phenomenon when he assumed the expression *X Generation* to refer to a generation that felt that coming of age did not mean you had to sacrifice the myths and fetishes of your childhood or adolescence. A generation who made film, TV and music their school of life. A path of subjectification in which almost all of us in the West walk, but which is particularly well represented by some urban tribes, such as skateboarders, clubbers, or the otaku... all examples of immersion, obsession, or indeed, customisation of reality. *Jackass* (2000) is a manifesto, more than an example, and *Moulin Rouge* (Luhmann, 2001), is a warning: nothing happens now without pop reverberations, without a soundtrack, without the puréed quotes and common references that the screens and songs throw up, like a new type of Esperanto, and which, in this third place, fulfils a seminal function.

What the above films have in common is that they are all made with absolute freedom. They have been able to adapt their production to make possible what the others believed was not possible, without sticking to genres or pre-established formats, and with a narrative of suspended rules.

At this point, often what is a trial, an artwork, experiment or consumer product is not set by the work as much as the author, who opts for one circuit or another as his or her starting point, or the viewers themselves. These are also films that raise our awareness as observers, because they have managed to unlearn, to improvise, ignore or detach themselves from a century of visual conventions, and they have seen with new eyes, exploring with all the curiosity of an amateur and all the sophistication of the learned. Could Coppola's prophecy refer, perhaps, to Harmony Korine? Maybe there's no need to look that far.

Aizpitarte's videos have the same vision: exploring, accidents and reports are all used to take on reality, surprise it, copy it, violate logic and bury the argument under a wave of sensations.

Even Benidorm, *Benidorm* (2005), an early work and an apparently documentary way of approaching the coastal population, wasn't able to give us access to a reality other than that which is mediated by nostalgia, the press, stereotypes and anecdotes.

In his work, you can see how the very dynamics of the digital world and videogames are applied to reality, for example, using *loops* and 360 degree *travellings* (Pli.pipe, ), in the same way as you can enter into a videogame and suffer as if it were a kind of kidnapped reality (*Overgame*, 2007).

Skateboarding plays a central role in many works, sometimes in very short works and other times as the objective of documentary pieces or of stage and videographic creations. In all cases, the camera shies away from merely recording jumps or accidents, and instead focuses on the magical mix of sensations that a board can bring, adapting the viewpoint so as to understand that the board is always a stranger gatecrashing places to which it wasn't invited. This is particularly noticeable in the sensual *Ticzag* (2005), in which we travel with a skateboarder for 25 minutes, but we can also appreciate the importance of the viewpoint in the short videos, *Acciones* (1998-2002), which use clips of barely a minute, not to immerse us hypnotically in that world, but to reveal the most intense and fun aspect of skateboarding, extended here *Jackass-style* to different risk practices (that can never resist a good slope).

In this world-resistant world, there is obviously a space for appropriations, fakes and recontextualisations, strategies that Aizpitarte uses not only as a parody or revenge of the means themselves (*Revolta*, 2006), but as an exhibition device.

Hemen Bai (2009) showed the image of an obsolete talking head embedded in a mirror, offering a narrated guide of the exhibition in which he was taking part. Fortunately for the rest of the artists, the work was located at the end of the exhibition.

In *Surface* (2010), two people covered in a sheet go through various emotional states, the intensity of which we can barely appreciate in the way in which the material reflects their shivers and sighs. Once again, everything is shown, and everything is hidden.

*A lie that tells the truth*. That's the third place, and, in fact, the power of the artistic experience: a place where you can feel things without having to experience reality.