



Fragment from the book "En una fracción" edited by Distrito 4 Gallery. Madrid. 2004

## Overexposure

*"You Press the Button , We Do the Rest"*

George Eastman 1888 (Eastman- Kodak company)

1

We could say that a spectator is one who looks with close attention at something that he experiences, and an observer is one who experiments, who is concerned about the act of experiencing.

We think it is common sense to know how to distinguish a painting from a photo . But for hundreds of years there was no distinction because the latter did not exist. A painting could only be compared with what was understood as visual reality.

When photography was invented, people, who thought only of the question of representation, assumed that this would be the end of painting. The normalisation of a code for representing, the presumed immediacy of it and its capacity for repetition, made it seem certain to be the official model for negotiating and exchanging a subject with its visual equivalent.

The invention of photography, in 1839, was in practice a question of chemistry. It is the one medium used in art where we know exactly when it was born and presented into society:

*M.Daguerre has discovered a way of fixing images which appear at the base of the camera obscura, in such a way that they are not temporary reflections but fixed and lasting ones which can be removed from the objects themselves, just like an engraving or a painting.*

It is very useful to observe how things are looked at in exhibitions and to examine how the spectator physically places himself, if he adopts several points of view, what makes him stand at a certain distance, if and how he touches things, if he stands still or moves while looking. Include if possible a question about what he thinks he is doing.

I have stated on various occasions that my works are objects which include the distance between them and the spectator. The best thing that could happen to any of my images is that they activate the space between them and the observer. When that happens, the reality of the spectator includes what they are seeing.

This placing of the spectator I have used in works like "En una (microverso 11) fracción" of 1997, "insider next" of 2000, "El vientre del observador (umbral de atención) and "El vientre del observador (afterimages" of 2001 or in "The cuckoo's egg and "into the frame" of 2003. They do not require total apprehension from one ideal or static point of view. They are pieces which ask the observer to go round them and to approach them to see something close up, maybe a detail invisible at a distance, and by coming close to lose what has been seen from further back, and so to construct a new image. For example, take "In a (microverso 11) fraction" of the 1997, the first thing we notice are the five pieces it comprises, together as a wide screen. They remain separated from the wall by means of a special anchorage and they give us the sensation of floating. Simultaneously the parts at the sides, where the eyes appear, comes to our attention *iconographically*, like meeting someone and making eye contact by string at each other. Then something else happens that causes us to draw closer. We will have an oblique memory of this later. So what is this image, and what is the work that we see iconographically from a distance and then close to? If it is represented as a negative does it then require us to invert the image mentally to the positive? If you look

Paris, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1839

Photography consisted, in fact, in making a trace of objects exposed to light stick on to a piece of paper. In as much as the appearance was "real", an accurate representation, what they were doing was to fix in time, and automatically, a code of representation like that procured by a camera obscura used in the past by Vermeer, among others. Looked at in this way, a means of codifying representation had long been known.

In 1888 an institution known as The National Geographic Society was founded. The biggest scientific and educational non-profit-making institution in the world had as its founding aim "to increase the spread of geographical knowledge." For more than a hundred years it has been the great chronicler and documentarist of the most important explorations of our planet. Nearly a century after its founding, in the early 1980s, the National Geographic Magazine began to use computers and software of the Scitex company – creator of the first high-quality CCD scanner- to digitally manipulate the cover of the magazine and to change the arrangement of the Egyptian pyramids.

2

In English, the word "lens" is used, for the gadget which makes the light beams converge in a camera. It is noteworthy that in Spanish the word for "lens" is "objetivo", the objective.

With the appearance of photography, it became firmly established that the image was defined as an "object". For most people photography is the static image of greatest verisimilitude to the real. Abstracting all the qualities which may not be purely visual, the image has a more or less "real" analogue.

Any image "not mediated" through a machine includes a large "subjective" element, and again, the presence of something which is the interpretation of a subject. But the visual universe does not have in itself objective qualities just waiting for somebody to capture them.

We are culturally so used to photographic images, they are so firmly entrenched, that every time we see a photo, even one which may appear

at "El Vientre del Observador (Umbral de Atencion,)" that is the negative paintings, without looking at "El Vientre del Observador (Afterimages) it is as if the images are waiting to be developed. Giving them this subsequent positive image can be imagined or processed by computer. The latter images, that is the positive paintings, are intended to multiply the observer's perspectives; the degree of photographic realism is more intense than in the image from which they come. Furthermore, because the images are digitally printed between two sheets of glass, this translucence gives them a varying sensation from night to day, from an atmosphere of landscape to a religious one. The work in the end, is mentally reconstructed from all the varying points of view, not just the physical standpoint but what the spectator brings to the experience from within.

There is no part of the brain which stores a memory of an event photographically. The brain does not work in that way. Fragments, data, impressions which are not just visual are stored in the brain in different places but suddenly when something is strongly recorded it can stimulate what has been stored so that a new and spontaneous experience can come to life.

We have often seen natural phenomena like the growth of a plant, the evolution of a cell, the decay of an animal corpse where the recordings alter the film speed. They show something which takes hours and days, happen within minutes.

"into the frame" was partly about showing the passing of time with documentary evidence. The installation was fixed in real time, but fictitious as a document and with infinite potential. In the studio, my first task was to pour glutinous pigments on the remains of some old brushstrokes which had been painted on a piece of glass, which itself had been used as a palette in the past. The action was photographed seven times at half hourly intervals, documenting each stage of the process. Then the seven images were later made into a video making a continuous sequence of movement, introducing an animated transition of the metamorphosis from one image to the next. So the seven initial stills were increased to the 6000 stills necessary for the four-minute looped sequence.

The temporal dimension here is the important thing, separating the seven initial stills. It replaces the time that it all took in the studio. Looking at the sequence on screen we see it moving forward to the point where it goes back to the beginning. This coming and going is perpetual because the DVD disc is commanded to continuously rewind the scene.

The material seems to transform itself on its own so slowly that even a spectator might think he is dealing with a static image on the monitor. If we look closely some movement is noticeable and

formally abstract, immediately and automatically the brain makes something recognisable of it.

3

It is an oversimplification for people to think that painting lies and photography and video tell the truth. Or that photography and video represent the real world more faithfully. I believe they are confusing truth, reality, realism and verisimilitude. If you think that is misleading, keep in mind for reference a C19 model or think of those hyper-realistic paintings of the 1970s which made us wonder if they were photos. But let us not forget that only the most authentic of those works, in their surface simulation of reality, were proposing a radical "linguistic" upheaval. It is not a question of realism but of meaning, of the way in which things are shown.

The concept of "realism" is not only used meaning linked to "reality" but as a term the opposite of "abstract". But the "abstract" does not mean that it may not be "real". Science uses abstract models, like molecules which have very concrete links into reality.../...

the more often we see the sequence the more noticeable is the speed. It all seems to be about spontaneous events captured naturally, without human intervention. But for this to be true, something would have to appear occasionally: my hands pouring the liquid, for example. There is a hint of that in the first image, in the detail of the brushstrokes, a suggestion of human activity.

Once these pieces are installed they await a witness who will contrast what appears on the screen with his memory of the procession of the seven photographic images hanging on the wall. What we understand by optical reality at each passing moment requires an abstraction and reconstruction of what we are used to seeing. An observer is not placed outside time. I make an object and it is up to you to complete it as a work of art.../...

Darío Urzay , february, 2004