

Far Beyond the Quixotic Gaze

Paloma Checa-Gismero & Javier Fresneda

Every encounter has a start. This one is rooted in the two participants' original intentions. It is from them that communication emerges. Javier's aim is to ignore the physical limitations of the tool, and that all initial drives serve as energy to foster us both further than expected. He acknowledges the presence of non-human systems in our surroundings, with which we engage in reciprocal feedback, and believes in his responsibility to assume their existence as inevitable. He wants to write so as to escape his body. He understands that sharing this process is approaching non-human places together.

Paloma's aim is to explore the tension built in the interview. She wonders if it's at all feasible to reach a shared knowledge or if, on the contrary, is it just enough to recognize how the other arrives to his own separate conclusions. She is curious to see how much of a trace of the other one can turn into once engaged in dialogue, as well as how each of the parts feels with the distance established in the conversation.

Above all these hidden intentions there is an explicit will to discuss how we believe is possible to be involved with images today. Hence, they start by talking about Javier's work.

Let's discuss your work *Stamina*.

In *Stamina* (2011) I decided to explore Berlin's outskirts, with special attention to a series of architectural remains that have been used as geographical accidents. Berlin has no mountains, its orography and its glacial past turn it into a plane place where climbers have behaved like cartographers. Reusing post-war ruins, or even by setting the first artificial climbing structures in the 70's, Berlin acquired a fictional relief of its own. It was designed by a dynasty of climbers who fostered an other nature to relate to. My first aim was to find those seven sites and participate physically in them: to climb them. I carried with me a photography set to record my movements and help me improve them or, how it's said in climbers' jargon, to "automatize" them. The timer allowed me with a twenty seconds margin before every capture, so each picture would end up describing the place where I was at after that time had passed. Later I decided to optimize that preset margin, and to try to climb the more distance possible in those twenty seconds. Hence, every time I encountered one of these buildings, I would start climbing, then descend and reset the camera's timer again for a new twenty seconds margin. I would keep going this way until it got impossible to get better at my moves or to reach a longer distance.

On a side I would register my moves on a notebook, using a simple positional system I invented: triangles to mark the hands, squares for the feet, semicircles for the dynamic moves. This way I generated a graphic method to describe my displacements I made it in twenty seconds at each of the seven spaces. Each and every of the seven graphic forms (transcribed to 3D), were over-imposed with their corresponding photograph. This all has resulted in images where a site's photographic description co-exists with the 3D render of my movements.

How do you go from there to using sculpture to describe a cartographic residue shared by those seven sites, a priori unrelated?

Inspired by Inuit tactile maps (where cartographic and psycho-geographic data are both thought as tactile) I decided to combine all the graphic forms in one object. I condensed the most procesual information of my experience (my moves), and related them to each other through a chronological sequence. I obtained a ring-shaped object, a map without names that works as a resolution for assembling a space; or maybe a meeting point.

What role does the accumulation of your intents to engage your body with geography play at *Stamina*?

All through the development of the project I found myself at seven places whose narrative had not been activated. Forgotten or isolated areas that didn't seem to tell anything at all. Once I got some insight on them, I realized I wasn't interested in talking about the possible micro-history of each location. In a way that operative silence I had found brought me back to a very basic level of relations. I had to add my body to the buildings. It was through climbing that I was able to get a very basic sense of the place, first, and a way to fight it, later.

Let's say then that due to a lack of accumulation of stories that would mark the places, you decided to activate them through a tactile approach (following the Inuits maps you mentioned before), instead of baring a narrative paradigm in mind.

The nature of the project relied on productive and process-related decisions (times, places, registers, formats) that breed naturally from the work. I couldn't anticipate any conclusions. There was no prospective method to secure a future for those times, places, registers, or formats. To get to the next setting was to investigate it and to start from scratch. I had a great time accepting the challenge of continuing to work with *Stamina* from the contingency of its development, as well as from my creative response, resisting the temptation of projecting History in the places.

The drive to get closer to the object (or the subject) of desire -to get to know it- places the artist's body in a particular, almost unavoidable, attitude. How do you see this?

I don't see it! It's not a matter of visibility any more. At least not in the way we used to think this term. Knowledge comprised an opposition between truths and beliefs, almost between the inner world of affections and the external consensual constructions. The two worlds of men and phenomena. A world colonized by the notion of humanity. An anthropic whole where images were just supports, mediums-for-things. We can't engage with that idea of knowledge anymore. The word is not an attitude. We can't teach the world how to *be*.

So?

By renouncing to our anthropic world we become mediators, we're no longer managers. Our inquiry on the world and its images is therefore based in the body. And if images belong to the body we must bring our affections back to stage so as to flow with those world-images that we can't quite understand, since they're not entirely ours, and they will never be it again.

From your emphasis to stop understanding images as ends in themselves, and also from claiming a corporal bond with them as documents, there seems to emerge an attitude of absolute honesty between the artist and the world.

First I want to clarify that my interest is in images as processes and not as ends-in-themselves. An image is a trajectory, a *corpus* of events and decisions that fosters the seek for readings and experiences.

Agreed. Then I must say that I perceive an absolute honesty with the image-as-process instead.

What is particular to the image, on the other hand, is only found in territories unknown to us. It is hidden in areas where our action is limited to that of a mediator or a collaborator involved in their constitution (or in just some parts of the process). There are images that are asleep, waiting for us to be able to talk about them. But, how can we talk about them and not make them ours? I believe this is our next challenge, to get closer to images acknowledging their alien nature. To negotiate with images involves reconsidering the extent of our humanity.

Then how do the meanings of contexts and residues relate to each other?

Not that long ago I first got the hint that there is no clear bond between visible forms and their context -understood here as as the "place" and meaning they adopt. I am suspicious about the validity of "the ultimate form of ideas", since it pertains to paradigms in extinction. We are getting detached from a way of understanding this idea (the visible) and the forms in which it first appeared to us (narrations). If an image is no longer immutable or static, as a document alluding a reality that is not either such... how can we get involved in descriptions of the world?

Then everything would be as simple as not considering images static and perceivable anymore; not as the ultimate products of accumulated labor, as conclusions. We should therefore see them as the contrary: as forces in permanent activity whose perception -and control- are outside our reach. What would this recognition imply?

It seemed to me that the idea of time invested in images was pretty useful. If that conception allowed us to link specific times and spaces through images, it would also provide us with a context, a sort of aura that would point to us the presence of life in images, the existence of a tiny bit of reality in them. However, we now trespass that comfortable equation, where the specific of time and space used to forge a context. We inhabit worlds where we're only partially engaged in the constitution of their representations, where them and their spaces are generated by non-human processes too, and where life's very infiltration in them questions our already outdated perception of it too much based in biology.

Everything indicates that with the "visual residue" of each image one requires the tracing of an archaeological or stratigraphical prospection... A particular optic adjusted to each image-as-trajectory, without which it wouldn't be able to signify.

The exploration of cosmos is kind of quixotic. It implies a certain perceptual modulation of the surroundings pursuing aims and ideals that already corresponded beforehand with the same imagined phenomena. If we agree that space is an uncountable array of lights in delay, digitally colored and named after things we already knew (let's think of how the spots in Mars or the Moon are named!), its analysis is nothing but the translation of representations that, despite familiar, belong to "another world".

There seems to be in you a manifest will to the exploration of routes leading to an understanding of the desired object -or subject. This places your artist body in a conflictual position, that of someone who's after the unconquerable. How do you read Barthes' words on the quixotic? Do you also suffer from it?

Exploring routes implies a permanent negotiation of our role in the process. It implies considering how both contiguity and separation emerge in the move, considering also what is partial in our reach. The oldest Greek accounts of routes and travels, namely, took the sea as a reference, since they would study land's perimeter from the coast. From that relation with the border a seaman would know his location and guide his sail. In the Roman Empire, the *itineraria picta* presented the information of roads and tours related to the notion of a stable surface, a key idea for the tracing of maps and sketches that would offer a description of the world based in the bonds between abstract elements. If the cartographic surface is steady, the idea of the world as set of routes vanishes. It disappears also our relation with the environment as if it were an hodographic space, where scale is not as important as displacement. So *spatium* determines the space where wandering happens and where an anatomic void exists between identifiable and recognizable body parts.

Our space of relations is again detached from the map, it incorporates vectors and directions that make it more hodographic. The world is distorted after presences and absences of cities, rivers, opinions and travels. We no longer confer to the world it being an isotropic map. We extract the particulars from the map to form routes that reference and privilege brief elements (such as "they serve an awesome breakfast here", or "this is a new record store", ...)

In this light, the artist's body only encounters problems if the freedom that comes along with the exploration of routes is questioned. If we avoid the particularity of the detour, and with it the existence of any problems or specific surprises, we would be obviously seeking for shelter in the act of "looking down to things", thus unifying the environment so as to stop it and turn it into a map.

Maps can't describe processes, basically because they privilege the idea of surface (static surface) over the idea of movement that would in fact be present in ancient descriptions. Our current representation of the world goes back to that keen on displacement, on itineraries, and on the small landmarks that we come across with and share. Apparently everything is displaced and changed. How can we even talk about culture, about any foundations at all in such an environment?

The operations we underwent to explain the world to ourselves have followed the opposite direction. We have created "supra" contexts that can be turned into particularities, but which are always inserted in static frames of reference. My share from art proposes "sense-modules", premises, experiences, and objects that preserve a narrative autonomy while still drifting to relationships with other beings and objects. The contents I input are always dependent on their relational potential; they are processes that need to be seen and intervened by others.

When exploring, the object of desire can never be acknowledged, it may not even be at the end of the detour. In this relies the difference with the idea of conquest, where the ultimate terms and objectives meet (and desire) each other -despite knowing they are inabarcable. To explore is to give a meaning to a time turned into space in movement, and desire here is not at all rooted in the achievement of a reference, of any sort of truth that describes the world; it has more to do with spending a time wandering the world, with exposing oneself to experiencing it.

How is that Quixotic gaze from which you want to distance yourself?

Barthes reminds us that "(...) in analysis, (...) method and language must coincide". And it is through this expectation set a priori that we are comfortable with the development of the exploration. We picture cosmic space as if it were a plane, and we want all semantic and aesthetic reductions to correspond to the communicable results. While astronauts reach their descriptive summit up in the void, us the terrestrials wait for their descriptions of cosmic phenomena as one waits for a bestiary on sea animals.

Hence, over-idealism does not presuppose a rupture with the norm as it does with a belief in its perpetuation. The Quixotic gaze knows how to get advantages from its own particular optics. The world where it operates keeps sending phenomena that "fit" into its gaze. It belongs to a perfectly operative world shaped after its expectations. If science is ideological, it must privilege the format over the results, so as to turn them visible and knowledgeable from the method. Teleology has basically been transposed from the method to "informative" technologies. All these expectations on what is there yet to be known have conditioned tools and texts' potentials to confirm we have been following the right path.

So what you suggest, then, is the opposite of what Oppenheim did in *Identity Stretch*: to get so close to the concrete experience that it becomes impossible to speak about abstraction as an universal utterance. You seek an abstraction that has to do more with that part of processes which can't be named, abstractions rooted in the microscopic, to give them a name, than to those built from generalization.

Maybe because we are jailed in our excess of humanity. The pattern we've used to relate to images until today has required a basic structural consensus that presupposes that images can be reduced to their narration. And those which aren't can in turn be agenciated to the world of symbolic translations by a specific kind of unconscious that, in spite of having an interpellative potential close to infinite, keeps referring these operations to narration. Maybe in a subjective -or even hermetic- way, but still dependent on a supra-structural linguistic context, on their specific interpellation.

However, it seems to me that it is only through the agreement of a shared linguistic community that we can think images as true alterities. It looks like a dead-end lane to me.

Of course there are debates and disagreements, even in different languages at the same time. But this "alterity" you mention is based in a cultural distance of the kind "us-and-them". Images and humans. From this point emerges the communitarian idea of a "temporal agreement" to protect us from outer threats -which on the other hand are never entirely enunciable. But if sometimes this community is forcibly contingent and consensual, some others this agreement does not exist and we can't even think of a linguistic contract.

I like that you bring up dead-end lanes; they are settings for the possible un-imaginables. Commercial movies from the 80's and 90's put a thorough catalog together with all the weird stuff that can happen in them: fog clouds that hide people and things, destinations to be tele-transported to in which to die or resuscitate. Homeless people who witness awesome mutations, births or overcomings. Walls that explode, floating sewers ... In a way the dead-end lane is a space to place ourselves as affective researchers -or if you may, as cultural beggars. We would be exposed to images that are present, uncertain and shared, but that can't be reduced to our administration.

Returning to the Quixotic, I see how you turn it into a sort of optic deformation. A particular kind of gaze that produces, in consequence, a particular kind of representation. But I go back to the same dead-end lane: despite our keen on reclaiming the extreme specific, the acknowledgment of images as alterities can only happen with the corresponding recognition of a shared linguistic -even if we think them as processes. Is there a way to get out of this aporia?

I am not talking here of a desired "chromatic aberration", neither of a gaze forced *ex-profeso*, but of a pre-configuration of devices (the devices we would use to look through), and of the contexts that would make whatever is seen permeable through the device and the context. To acknowledge is not just to induce a mental representation to the world, but this encounter must have been set beforehand. The device and the context forge are already determining what will be seen -and how. Let's say that in this race all bids are set before playing.

The intentions that inaugurate every process seem to be determinant for you; you already mentioned them at the beginning of our dialogue. How is that primal drive materialized in the real world, once the process is started?

Our world is in the way of redefining itself, so it currently features plenty of inaugural intentions -basically dictated by consumer society. We can get involved in new hobbies, enroll on a workshop on Japanese cuisine, or change our sex so as to -maybe- abandon our initial ideas and define new ones. Us humans migrate from the ideas bond to exponential -or lineal- personal growth, to cycles of waves. What may be interesting here is not what we start, but all that is left behind; all those brief endings.

I get the idea that our bond to images is the reverse of the narrations with which we can affect them. In this case opening narrative voids would allow for these images to be receptive while still maintaining their autonomy. Obviously there is a shared environment, but when we escape our ontological farm and approach new worlds and their images, our recognition of them is not based in a shared linguistics, but in the very abandonment of it. Trying to grasp the images that escape from our management -our narrative management and the de facto management- implies an immediate crash with their autonomy. Let's go back to our beggar, Ernie -yeah, this is his name. He witnesses awesome phenomena, extraordinary events hard to describe -but they're still believable. His lane is a center of paranormal activity but, who's gonna believe what Ernie says?

The beggar is a translator of the non-agenciabile, not because he talks -or raves; but because *he is there*. The artist -or cultural beggar- can accept that commission and enter the lands of uncertainty; he can get closer to the Bermudas Triangle, where not everything is human, and once placed there extend us an invitation to party. Meanwhile, Ernie understands his own entanglement with other worlds as a shared and non-hierarchical context that is already there. That is the attitude that allows him to get into a negotiated navigation. However, let's see what happens once he returns from his travels.

In opposition to the classic topic of margins, how would you describe this dead-end lane you keep referring to? It seems to convict everyone to the eternal identification with the affective and an impossible participation in the institution. The beggar develops a certain Stockholm Syndrome with the streets; he gets addicted to it. Because in the end, going back to what we talked about before, all it remains is a Quixotic attitude: I live in the streets and I take my world for real, since it only has meaning to me and because of me (along with those who inhabit it too).

There is something classic -and terribly iterable- in our affinity to the margins of human worlds. Be it due to a cultural preservation instinct, be it due to the longing of whatever remains half-buried, our margins need the idea of the *outsider*. We are not in a comfortable position here; the border we get closer to is not structural (cultural or historic). It is the limit of our own interference with images that may be witnessing their own emancipation. Exploring these realms makes us ponder on the degree of mediation we invest in every act of recognition or adjudication. Assuming the "outer" (everything that exists outside the border) is addressing us, or we are addressing it, then the context is re-escalated, we go from integrating a "society" to integrating a "species".

Almost all extraterrestrial threats in movies are a good example. When facing the unknown nations go for armistices and alliances. I am very attracted to how by exploring these new worlds will sit new guests at the dinner table. In opposition to what happens in a social world -that which has no sense for anyone but me-, in the exploration of today's limits -in carrying out an affective inquiry- we can suddenly find shared nonsenses, and maybe reconsider the idea of a communal meaning. It may be too early to talk about institutions here.

I was referring to the institutional as a linguistic frame of reference. Community's shared forms.

You talk about community, and here is where the problem lies. Do we even dare to think of living in community with non-human fellows? Will that lead us to limiting the horizon of the speakable so as to make room for images that we can't even name? May be the artist's honesty does no longer lie in

a partial political recognition, but in acknowledging the partiality-of-the-partial. We don't control completely the pulpit from where we talk. Our tools no longer depend from us... this will all push us to rethink our contingency in the world we've helped to build a world for which we lack most of the words.

We can currently produce two-way methodological and narrative adaptations (from deconstruction to archeology, from archives to sculpture, from quantum physics to philosophy), and this all guarantees that whatever we face be reduced by the very structure that defines and explains it. But, what will happen to all the rebel images? They are simply irreducible, because "they don't belong to this world". If there's any rest area at all, it must be the Scouts', or Ernie's. They may exist, but in alien land; they can only exist where a negotiation with mutant environments can happen. We will be able to meet, but it will just be a stop on our ways.

Do you think we can talk in the same terms about our relations with texts?

Texts have a nice bond with images, almost like a subterranean love affair. They displace images while inserting new ones in our subjectivity. Texts are syntactically recursive but the images they denote are not, not even to the same reader. The official idea of community was shaped after texts, but not from the images they suggested. From my proposal of renegotiating our engagement with images and their worlds, it may be possible to invite texts to this crazy party, but only if we prioritize those images generated before the reading of the text. While the reading of a text remains a lineal activity and we give priority just to the logic function over the affective, the idea of community will be normalized according to the text's "inorganic content", to that sequence of information that can only be read or written according to that same sequence. I believe that being able to identify where is the present time placed at will be fundamental for advancing in these questions, since it is time what builds the text.

How do you understand this dialogue we're having, for instance?

Our conversation takes place in different times and spaces. We only have the text to fill up for a huge sum of absences. We write, we arrange information and encrypt images in the text so as to exchange them later. Everything is thrown to the void network made up of processes we're not very much aware of, in silent collaboration with us. This exchange circulates with the text as a priority, not entirely acknowledging the images that emerge from it -images that still color and shape our emotions and thoughts while we write and read each other. Maybe it is by talking about the images we withdraw from the text that we also bring time back to the present. Maybe putting images in words makes them and the text converge into an only body.

I see. Will this dialogue be betrayed, then, as soon as it is witnessed by somebody else?

Perceiving a text doesn't exhaust it; nor it cancels its images. If the text coexists with a narrative void then the reader lives in it. We are already able to produce texts biased to the images they generate; as long as we accept we can turn the text into a 3D, 4D, or 5D environment...

texts by
Paloma Checa-Gismero & Javier Fresneda
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lapalo@gmail.com
info@javierfresneda.com

Structural incompatibility makes some encounters hopeless. In them, each part is conditioned by contingencies that cannot be conciliated with those of the other. Hence, in order to believe in the illusion of the meeting a certain kind of gaze is required. It shall emerge from the recognition of that impossibility. It must project the scene in such a way that it places the actors in an initial disposition to trusting -temporarily- they step on common ground. Like in linear perspective, some things in this scene seem to fit inside our visual angle, some others are projected beyond the horizon, and the rest happen behind the viewer's eye.