

The Disclaimer

Referring to Velázquez's most famous artwork, Michel Foucault states that "the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation" and that "it is in vain that we say what we see; [for] what we see never resides in what we say."

If you feel no connection to the present exhibition, we suggest you read no further.

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Branca de Neve

At the very beginning, right in the entrance hall of ZDB in Bairro Alto, across from the bookshop,

stands an image that demands our *attention*: the opening act of the exhibition. It is a 20 x 24 inch large-format photograph developed by the artist himself in the dark room through intricate, alchemical processes. It is a preamble to the preamble and also the poster image of the show. It is an *advertisement*, from the Latin *advertere*, meaning "to direct one's attention to", to direct one's attention to it and to the rest. It is the harbinger, heralding and hastening the emergence of the various conundrums that unfold throughout the remainder of the display. It is the print known as *Branca de Neve* (Snow White) (2024). In essence, the photograph advises any lost sightseers coming from the gaudy, tipsy revelry of Lisbon's Bairro Alto that perhaps this is not their destination, for they have arrived in the land of self-referentiality, a tauto-tautological haven laden with redundancies and self-absorption – traits unfortunately long abandoned by any self-respecting publicist.

What we see in and within the composition is the top of a bag of flour – in red, white and blue – set against a blue backdrop, the very same sky blue as the bag itself. Emblazoned in scarlet letters upon the bag, enclosed curiously within brackets, is the mirrored name of the Portuguese flour brand, "EVEN ED ACNARB", or, when viewed in the correct direction, "BRANCA DE NEVE", which in English translates as "SNOW WHITE" (an eerie inversion which occurs optically due to the direct camera indexation of the light sensitive photographic paper). Beneath the title, the brand's emblem portrays a stylized sketch of a snow-capped mountain peak, the epitome of an ideal mountain top. Yet, this is not a mountain. Perched atop the superficial layer of the bag is another dimension beyond and within representation: a mound of the self-same glowing white "super fine self-raising flour for baking", in the very same tone of white as the bag itself. The "mountain" is a mound of the contents of the bag of flour depicted on the bag of flour, i.e. it is flour. In short, what we see in the picture is a mountain of flour on a bag of flour; a mimicking of a mountain sketch on a bag of flour; that is, a mountain sketch on a bag of flour in

a picture; a mimicking of a flour mountain on a bag of flour in a picture. Each element thus reflects and refracts the other in a perpetual dance of depiction and depicted, representation and re-representation. It is a spicy spin on Droste's famous vintage cacao packaging.

However, there is yet another layer upon layered layers, hidden perhaps within the reference to the fairy tale *Branca de Neve* (Snow White) in the exhibition titled, like Orwell's novel, *Animal Farm*. The latter, intriguingly, was subtitled *A Fairy Story* by George rather than a *fairy tale*, fable, allegory or satire, etc. And maybe this distinction, this taxonomic nuance, is an adequate scaffold for thinking about the exhibition and, subsequently, its title. And, subsequently, for thinking about João Maria Gusmão's (JMG) work. And possibly it lies in both the book and the show's engagement with the *real* through analogous means.



In

the case of JMG, it is analogue analogous or analogous analogue means – both in noun and adjective form, originating from the Greek word *analogos*, signifying "proportionate" or "bearing some resemblance or similar proportion."

Like Orwell's subtitle, both *Animal Farm* (the book) and *Animal Farm* (the show) dwell in a fertile liminal zone nestled between the notion of *fairy* – from the Old French term *faerie*, used to describe enchantment and the land of enchanted beings – and *story* – from the Ancient Greek *īstōpīa* ("history", "record", "narrative"), which means learning or discovering by inquiry. Both stand as representations that oscillate between the mythical and the historical. They navigate a delicate balance between the descriptive and the fantastical, between the record and the *faux-raccord*, in a "proportionate" place "bearing some resemblance" to another. Just like *Branca de Neve*, where this is echoed, warned and announced. The illustration of a mountain on the bag of BRANCA DE NEVE flour and the mountain of flour are both pictures within pictures, analogies bearing some resemblance to one another, like layers of an infinite mirror.

In other words:

In the frame where wonders pass, is it flour or the mountain's mass? Does the mirrored peak on the bag displayed copy flour once weighed? Or does this image, purely spun, reflect the flour as it's done? In depths of pictures laid so prime, do we spy an endless climb? "Looking glass upon the wall, who is the fairest of us all?"

Rooster at dawn

In the first room of the exhibition, *Rooster at dawn* awaits us. Here we are treated to a 16 mm *overture* where a rooster, silhouetted against the break of day, cackles in utter silence – typical of all JMG's (and JMG + Pedro Paiva's) mute films. But don't be fooled: while its silent serenade might suggest the crack of dawn, the *Rooster* heralds not the beginning of a new day, but of an electric day – conjured up by cones of light, electric luminance, smoke and mirrors. This is a day that only begins as the actual day ends, turning night into day and silence into song, the electrical illusion of the cinematic image.

And, like the black rooster that marched ahead of Napoleon – the dictatorial swine in *Animal*

Farm: A Fairy Story – crowing before the pig could squeak, the silent crow in *Rooster at dawn* acts like a trumpet, sounding off before the pieces speak to rouse us and point us backwards. Back to where? Back to the primordial medium of film – light itself. Like the cocky chronobiological *Zeitgeber* (where *Zeit* means "time" and *Geber* "giver")

that he is, instead of acting as the cue that synchronizes our biological clocks to the earth's 24-hour light/dark cycle, *Rooster at dawn* throws us off-kilter. And we are thus led back to the dichotomies between artificial and natural light that flood the exhibition.

But also towards a new taxonomy of beasts – a bestiary that is both descriptive and fantastic, luminous and dark.

We are taken back through the annals of cinema to one of the climactic scenes from *Nosferatu*, *Eine Symphonie des Grauens*, the 1922 German film by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, in which, much like here, a rooster's crow heralds the first ray of light (artificial, of course) which catches Count Orlok, the vampire, due to his own gluttony, and causes him to die, vanishing into nothingness. This scene cycles us back, yet again, to reinventions, that is, to inventions. It reveals Murnau's deviations from Bram Stoker's novel, making, for instance, sunlight lethal to the vampire (whereas in *Dracula* it merely weakens him), whilst artificial light – the light cone from every projector projecting Orlok – brings him eerily to life. Cock-a-doodle-doo, as Murnau wrote in *Nosferatu*: "They caught the cock", the beast is dead, light reigns supreme, the beast rises up and travels without moving in a sequence of still images.

Ghost tape

Like a phantom, *Ghost tape*, glimpsed in a room adjacent to *Rooster at dawn*, is an absence from the past persisting in the present. As we observe, and as befits any ghost worth its salt, it is unnervingly haunting due to the twistedness of the temporal dilemma that precipitates its *absent presence*.

What we see in the film is a tape which appears to float, moving, as a tape would, as if by some enchantment, spell or magic. As the title cautions,

this is a phantom cassette, a *Ghost tape*. What we see is not a moving cassette. Or, rather, yes, what we see is a moving cassette, but the cassette that is actually there does not move, twice over. Or, rather, what we see is not a moving cassette but a film of a moving cassette that is not moving. Let me describe the concoction. What was filmed was a static, blank, white cassette onto which, akin to a second skin, was projected a cassette in motion through the use of an episcope or opaque projector. Onto one of these wizard devices, JMG placed a transparent tape recorder with a moving cassette inside, which then projected the image, via mirrors, onto a white, static cassette set against a black table – an image of one tape precisely covering another. JMG captured this on film, thereby revealing the trick in a sort of behind-the-scenes exposé of the film itself. The footage starts by showcasing the projecting episcope, setting the stage for the visual trickery that unfolds.

But what is spooky here is not so much the why or the how but the conceptual constitution.

On the one hand, it references the origins of cinema as a medium of deception and illusion – using “medium” both in the sense of the material environment in which something exists and in the sense of a conduit purported to communicate with the spirit world. Like a *phantasmagoria*, this reference lies in the act of projecting, filming and projecting again, which transforms an inanimate, static object into something with a semblance of life. That is, the possession by an animate object of an inanimate one, a zombie cassette. On the other hand, the piece delves into its functional dimension through an extreme form of tautology, which simultaneously is and is not a redundancy. If projecting one tape onto another seems straightforward, it is no longer the case when it is the function which is being projected onto a dysfunctional tape.

There is a schizophrenic visual dance at play here which could be described using Heidegger’s tool-analysis, contrasting presence-at-hand (*Vorhanden*) – an object of explicit attention not involved in our practical engagement (i.e. the static tape that does not fulfil its function) – and readiness-at-hand (*Zuhanden*) – an object seamlessly integrated into our activities (i.e. the illusion of the moving tape). But there is more, since, once again, presence-at-hand seems to exist when we do not hear the sound its function should trigger; and yet again, it seems when we take the very sound of the film medium, the 16 mm projectors running, to be the soundtrack of the tape we see, a confusion is created by sound *pareidolia*. This cycle can perpetuate endlessly, as the illusory movement of the cassette itself becomes a perfect analogy for the real movement of the looping projector and traditional film reels. This is the function of a meaningless cassette – a *Ghost tape*: a cassette for playing and seeing ghosts in the machine.

So, we ponder, what might the sound of a phantom cassette be? Could it be the sound of the rooster crowing at the break of dawn? Or maybe it reverberates like a silent 16 mm film exalted by pastoral solace, animist minstrelsy and metaphysical riddles – ghosts, ghouls and goblins? Could it be the sound of one hand clapping while the other caresses a light cone? I have no clue.

Solar farm

Towards the end of the first floor, we catch a glimpse of the grand yet humble *Solar farm*: an estate devoted to the domestication of sunlight. What we witness in it is light captured, tamed, classified and framed; light that has been shot and ensnared (a camera is after all a contraption to trap refraction). Rays of sunlight are scattered, flared within a lens system, forced by the shutter onto the negative that detains them, released by the optical printer onto the positive that imprisons them, emancipated by the projector onto the screen that encloses them and then unlocked by the gaze onto the visual cortex. Despite these brief moments, light remains perpetually shackled, transferred from one form of bondage to another through its photochemical transfers.

Furthermore, there is something else apart from the sun trapped in this film, something else tamed and classified: the estate within the picture. Framed by the boundary of the image seen in the camera’s viewfinder, but also in each film photograph, is the farm in *Solar farm*. This is the singular vista of a meadow, neatly contoured by a road and a manor, as viewed from the balcony of the highest tower of an Austrian Renaissance fortress. This Central European landscape domesticated by human activity has all the semblance of a maquette, so small does it appear from the lofty perspective and angle. The landscape is thus tamed by the camera so that it echoes the model railways assembled by those navigating the vicissitudes of mid-life regression in their dimly lit basements.

This manner of *framing* inevitably compels us to contemplate another facet of *domestication*: the *domain* of the medium – a pair of terms born from the Latin *domus*, signifying “house”. It is this craftsmanship that forms the groundwork of JMG’s particular *technē*, which, as the Greeks stated, “is a form of [...] bringing forth” that belongs to *poiēsis* and which, «for the Greeks [, is] the coming into the “present” out of the “not present”».¹

Yet JMG’s approach of *technē* within *poiēsis* ushers us into contemplation of another elusive notion – “enframing” (*Gestell*), which, defined as the quintessence of modern technology, somehow diverges from *poiēsis*. It represents a contemporary mode of unveiling, one that positions nature and all its constituents as a “standing-reserve” (*Bestand*) through the prism of their utility – as a resource to be quantified, organised and harnessed, much as sunlight is corralled in *Solar Farm*. Reading this for and against Heidegger, our thoughts are drawn towards cinema, on the one hand, as a potentially detrimental manifestation of the technological “enframing” of the world,² which – just maybe – JMG and *Animal Farm* suggest, containing within it “the growth of the saving power.”³ This notion hints at a latent potential for redemption within the confines of technological dominion and, on the other hand (against Martin), regards cinema as the technological *enframing* that forges pathways to new modalities of world revelation. What then marks out JMG’s distinctive use of the film medium, a kind of poetry within the grammar of the technical –

the use of anamorphic lenses, high-speed cameras, multiple exposures, meticulous framing, all elements contributing to a distortion-focused manipulation of both the recording and reproduction media – may pertain to a means of unveiling the world.⁴

In *Solar farm*, a beam of light is observed oscillating from side to side like a lighthouse beacon. This was achieved by reflecting the sun at the camera lens with a mirror, thus creating a blind spot in the film – perhaps a playful nod to ancient lore, somewhat dubiously attributed to the Greeks who purportedly used mirrors to ignite enemy ships with sunlight.

Once the mirror was aligned with the optical centre of the camera lens, reflected sunbeams were aimed at the camera which shot back (captured) what we now see at a breathtaking 500 frames per second, generating a particular kind of lens flare that creates near-perfect concentric circles. This high-speed footage, when played back at the standard cinematic 24 frames per second, unfolds in slow motion – a detail only evident when looking at the full sequence of the film, in which a car drives along a road behind the meadow, establishing the only component of temporal indexation in the otherwise strangely chill pace of lightspeed.

Thus does the art of harvesting solar halos unfold, allowing the sun’s quantum scintillation to be exploited. A full-blown chain of production is set in place: from the light capture, or recollection of the raw materials – sunlight, solar halos and lens flares – to distribution lines, feedback loops and supply chain management. When the lens flares are finally projected, something else beams into view.

To project a 4:3 ratio image vertically, the artist must use a pair of mirrors to invert the image. In this way, an infinite dialogue unfolds between reality and fiction, the figurative and the literal, medium and message. This conversation emerges in the space between the projector and the image, creating an analogue analogous or analogous analogue chat.

A ray of sunlight, reflected by a mirror at the centre of the image – a ray re-presented, fictitious, and figurative, yet composed of natural light – directly points at the projector, engaging it and us in conversation, whilst another ray responds: the cone of light produced by the projector, reflected by a pair of mirrors – a ray present, real, literal, yet composed of artificial light – in turn forms the image that once again responds, infinitely and beyond, once more like two mirrors facing each other in an endless corridor.

This dialogue is reproduced, re-reproduced, emphasised and multiplied by the very subject of the piece: lens flares. Lens flares are optical artefacts – once taboo in cinema, a phenomenon that could cost photography directors their jobs when it inadvertently crept into a shot – that underscore that what we see, the fiction we are meant to identify with and believe in, is just that: mere fiction, a mirage. It is a cinematic suspension that reminds us that the lush green meadow we see is not on our plane;

¹ Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1977, p. xxiv.

² Sinnerbrink, Robert. ‘*Technē* and *Poiesis*: On Heidegger and Film Theory’. In *Technē/Technology*, edited by Annie van den Oever, 65–80. Researching Cinema and Media Technologies, Their Development, Use and Impact. Amsterdam University Press, 2014, p. 68. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jjj3177140.8>.

³ Heidegger, p. xxxv.

⁴ Sinnerbrink, p. 72.

that between us and that distant farmhouse lies a wall, a glass – the lens, the camera, the screen – that separates us from the scene. It corresponds to Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, the direct addressing of the reader, the collapse of the fourth wall, like an assault on the suspension of disbelief, a counter-catharsis revolution. Despite initial resistance, it is a resource that became ubiquitous in the post-sixties and paradoxically made films more believable, especially in science fiction, a genre now unimaginable without them. Like *Solar farm*, and *Animal Farm*, it is a mechanism that appropriates reality from fiction and expands it as analogy.

Fermented foam

Moving on, and in endless motion, we come to *Fermented foam*. Shown in the third room on the first floor illuminated by three 16 mm projectors, the piece, true to its *abstract* nature – derived from the Latin *abstractus*, meaning “drawn away” or “detached” – is the most removed from the other visual *tales* in the exhibition. Yet, it also represents the foundational backdrop, the *additive* soil from which all the other works in *Animal Farm* emerge or are *composed* – from the Latin *compositio*, from *componere* (meaning “to put together”).

This nature, fraught with duality, is further unravelled in its description as an ever-morphing form, a sphere that continually fractures into a myriad of shapes and colours yet retains its integrity; a substantial, hovering orb, apparently defying gravity against an even more abstract and out-of-focus canvas; a bubble that is chrono-multivalent and protean, textured with a rough surface brimming with informal, time-bending and shape-shifting contours. Like a multicellular organism indulging in quantum quackery or a kind of quantum goo, it is both the illustration of a celestial body and a composite particle, evidence of a fractal cosmology, spanning the microcosm of an atom to the macrocosm of a celestial body, a star, a gaseous nebula. It is the emblem of cosmic and quantum parallels, “a World in a Grain of Sand.”⁵

Yet, the original film material for *Fermented foam* comes from a deceptively simple scene – the pinnacle of a modest fountain seized at the very moment when gravity weaves its spell, revealing that what ascends inevitably descends. Filmed from a zenithal view at 500 frames per second, the footage unfolds in languid slowmotion. Perhaps this clarifies why we dub it protean, ever-fluid and adaptable. Echoing Heraclitus' wisdom, *Panta Rhei*: everything flows!

However, this scarcely explains why it is dubbed chrono-multivalent, valid across different times or simultaneously anachronistic and timely. This syncopation is discernible only because each projector emits the same nonsynchronous footage through a sole component of the RGB colour triad – red, green and blue – that together concoct a full-colour image. This arrangement paints the film's past and future moments in a kaleidoscope of hues, as the fountain's confined splashes break free in a spectrum of colours. In essence, it is chrono-multivalent, for what we witness are the past and future snapshots of the film itself escaping in varied shades from the fountain's embrace

while simultaneously shaping it. A never-ending, never-repeating, self-productive, reproductive film. It is this multiplicity that is unveiled, where the images diverge – a splash of another time in a different hue of another realm.

Is this a quantum superposition? Schrödinger's foam? A metabolic reaction that sparks chemical transformations in organic substrates through the wizardry of enzymes? An enigmatic mush reminiscent of dairy production – *dairy*, originating from the Latin *de intus*, meaning “from within”? A formal yet formless, temporal yet atemporal conundrum from its very core, from within, *de intus*, dairy? Yogurt, cheese, double cream? Or, perhaps, embodying Derrida's notion of *hauntology*, a contemporary micro-cosmic event haunted by past elements that refuse to fully vanish, like cinema itself?

Half a horse

In the very same room where *Fermented foam* floats, another piece perches precariously, playing with paradigms even more perplexing – those of evolution, animal anatomy and proto-cinema. The piece in question is *Half a horse*, a film that few can describe better than the title itself tidily does. Here we witness a sequence of still shots of bizarre bipedal horses, each appearing one after another, cleanly cloven in two. *Half a horse* repeated. But this title does not merely describe; it dances as an alliteration, a verbal volley – an auditory alliteration, which is also visual. Or rather, a verbal alliteration taken visually – a sequence that suggests the repetition of forms (half horses) – and, nevertheless, an alliteration taken literally visually.

We behold half horses, grazing gently, gradually blending into the background – into the air, a meadow, a fence. To disclose this dazzling duality to the world, JMG employed a cinematic contrivance: he filmed the subjects with half the lens covered, rewound the film in the camera – camera steadfast – waited for the animals to depart the scene and then filmed anew with the other half of the lens, revealing the landscape on the same strip of film: a

double exposure in which half a lens equals half a horse. And so, to paraphrase Karl Marx in a mirthful manner, for without him neither the exhibition *Animal Farm* nor the novel by the same name would exist, “All That Is [horse] Melts Into Air”.

This filmic finesse, though a frequent feature in cinema's fledgling frames, furnishes us with subtle hints – or semi-hints – about *Animal Farm* as an exhibition, about JMG's work and about the notion of *meio* – a Portuguese term that not only denotes “half” and “the middle” but also the artistic medium. Whilst it is true that, as far as special effects are concerned, this film seems quite straightforward, it beckons us to ponder the meaning once more of *technē* as a form of [...] bringing forth, the emergence into the “present” out of the “not present”. Bringing forth what is absent (half a horse) by concealing what is present (half a horse). Furthermore, we resist Heidegger, as the technological *enframing* that ensnares and reduces the domesticated “world-poor” horse to a mere production resource is no longer at work. Instead, the animal has been quantified by

half, ceasing to be productive and thus no longer bearing burdens or careering across racecourses for our gambling pleasure.

Yet, if that were not semi-harrowing enough, *Half a horse* is also suggestive of how JMG's work straddles – as already announced by *Branca de Neve* – the descriptive and the fantastical; the record and the *faux-raccord* (in a liminal space akin to, resembling, or proportionally similar to, yes, half); story and tale, fable, allegory, satire, and so forth; the purveyors of prestidigitation like Georges Méliès – populariser of techniques such as substitution splices, multiple exposures – and the descriptive pioneers, the brothers of light, who once refused to sell the latter their cameras.

It straddles all of this, therefore, for and against. Against Muybridge and his *Animal Locomotion*, for *Half a horse* cannot gallop as Muybridge's four-legged subjects did; for Derrida, because if *Half a horse* beheld us bare, naked in front of them, we would feel as much shame as Derrida felt when naked before his cat – or perhaps half as much shame, or half that half, given it is only a projection, but shame nonetheless.

Anthropomorphism as weirding critical zoopoetics! The mood is the same here as in Orwell's fairy story, when the animal comrades declare “Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy, FOUR LEGS GOOD, TWO LEGS BAD,” condemning bipedalism as a representation of evil authority over other animals, which is then appropriated by the Pig class (the ruthless superintendents of *Animal Farm* overtime) which adopts along with bipedalism other human-like features, e.g. managing privileges instead of distributing wealth, and replaces the original dictum with “Four legs good, two legs better! Four legs good, two legs better!”

Fast feet favored, twin toes triumph! Fast feet favored, twin toes triumph! Furry friends fine, bipedal beings best! Furry friends fine, bipedal beings best! Four-footed fellows fair, two-footed talents tops! Four-footed fellows fair, two-footed talents tops!

Landscape with boat and river

Facing off against *Fermented foam* and nestled near *Half a horse* is a cinematic *trompe-l'oeil* titled *Landscape with boat and river*: a still life painting masquerading as a film. In it, a riverbank scene boasts a crystal-clear watercourse that reflects foliage from above, thus doubling the lush canopy with uncanny symmetry and making us wonder if nature is as self-aware and absorbed as *Narcissus* (possibly linked to the word *narke*, meaning “numbness” or “stupor”, in reference to the narcotic effects of the plant). Here, then, is nature: bucolic, picturesque and quaint, yet caught in a numb reverie of self-admiration. Meanwhile, a solitary wooden canoe at the water's edge introduces a human touch to this otherwise isolated idyll.

Sporting a title that smacks of 19th century nostalgia, “Landscape” is not just a name but a nod to the Dutch word *landschap*. Coined back in the 16th century, it denoted a terrestrial unit of human-made space, particularly when immortalised in paint, a fact stressed in real time by the image addressing us.

Hence, this river does not take us on *A Voyage on the North Sea*, where movement, where narrative,

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Blake, William. *The Pickering Manuscript*. New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1972.

is pulled out of the everlasting motionlessness of painting, but, on the contrary, it tears stillness out of an ever-changing place by means of moving images. This river might as well have died by shooting it at 500 fps, by landscaping it; it has been tamed to a stillness so profound that it contradicts the aforementioned maxim *Panta Rhei* – for here, nothing flows.

Yet, “Quack! Quack!” The illusion of stillness, the impression of a landscape, is abruptly interrupted by a squadron of ducks waltzing through the still life in super slow motion, killing two birds with one stone, with one shot: that of the still life and that of life still. Moving on and via history, from still images to moving images, we are once again under the spell of *Animal Locomotion* where proto-cinema and naturalism anchor the fabrication of cinema.

Bedrooms

In Gilles Deleuze’s writings on cinema, the oft-cited philosopher refashions the concept of “any-space-whatever” (*espace quelconque*) – a term originally coined by French anthropologist Marc Augé to describe mundane urban spaces like metro stops and waiting rooms, perceived by Augé as homogenising and depersonalising – and elevates these transient locales, highlighting their potential as unique spaces that, having shed their conventional homogeneity and spatial metrics, facilitate the creation of endless new connections.⁶

Such transient yet distinctive, void yet fertile spaces – *any-spaces-whatever-wherever-whenever* – abound in and within *Bedrooms*, a small film projection hanging in the room adjacent to the larger chamber where *Fermented foam*, *Landscape with boat and river* and *Half a horse* are displayed. It is the last alcove on the first floor where *Solar farm* unveils the controlled cultivation of sunlight in Central Europe’s tamed meadows.

While all these pieces neighbouring *Bedrooms* expand on *Animal Farm*’s grand buffet of domestication – subduing everything under the sun, from the sun itself to landscapes, creatures and even ghosts – this film takes a deeper dive. It nudges us to contemplate the domestication of a rather unusual beast, an *anthropobeast*, i.e. *us*. We are domesticated through an eerie domesticity – for domestication, as we have seen, sprouts from the Latin *domus*, meaning “house”. Again, this is about framing and *enframing*, about seeing the spaces we inhabit as personal pens and ourselves as commodified resources or production beasts. The places where we, peculiar animals at best, are bred, with the precision of a home décor catalogue.

In *Bedrooms*, we are thus treated to a curious collection of 20-second shots of disconnected or emptied dominions. *Any-spaces-whatever-wherever-whenever* because we have no clue where these bedrooms are, when they are from or what on earth they are supposed to be. And yet, we might venture a guess without straying from the truth: we are peeping into a kind of purgatory – from the Latin *purgatorium*, from *purgō*, meaning “to clean, to cleanse”, a place forever inhabited by *The Animal That Therefore I Am, I Was and Will Be*. But this is no *purgatorium* and these bedrooms are not really rooms. This is a functioning dysfunctional

furniture shop, like IKEA, but from the 1970s and in the Portuguese countryside.

It is through its arranged sets, the *mise-en-scène* of property devoid of propriety and kitsch so profound that it achieves a universally unique character, that we can gain an insight into two of the many facets of *Bedrooms*.

One facet is a spectral aspect that always prevails. Contrary to what the title might suggest, these are not actual bedrooms but rather props, sets, stagings meticulously crafted for the consumer’s delight and the camera’s unblinking eye. They only represent an ideal *domus*; they illustrate how the dwelling space would look if one acquired such furniture. And this prompts the dilemma of what a dwelling space becomes when nobody lives in it (or if the workforce inhabiting it is alienated). The answer is that they become haunted. Haunted rooms in an idea of a house. And to access such places, a metaphysics of *presence*, an ontology – derived from the Greek *ontos* (“being”) and *logia* (“study of”) – does not suffice. Echoing Derrida’s *hauntology*, our exploration requires us to delve into the interstitial realm between *absence* and *presence*, where the phantom resides, the *absence presented* in a void; it requires an inquiry into the “always-already absent present”.

The other facet (as heralded initially by the ghostly prelude of the spectral recording device in *Ghost tape*), concerns the very being of the bedrooms, their *presence-at-hand* essence. As surely as the dormitory serves as the forge for slumber – and bearing in mind that *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*; and given that not a soul sleeps here, thereby leaving reason

unattended; and inasmuch as the slumber of presence conjures voids, that is, spectres – and since not even a brief doze is sanctioned within the sterile confines of furniture emporia, these bedrooms abandon their roles

as places of repose, are stripped

bare, bereft of purpose, and evolve into

mere bedrooms in their own right. Thus, the title sheds its cloak of paradox. Yet, what emerges now as truly paradoxical, as we peer beyond *Bedrooms* into bedrooms, is the curious placement of the screen, suspended within the confines of an indiscreet window that opens onto the outside – beyond the *presence* of ready-made living spaces; they are bedrooms unto themselves, for they are devoid of dwellers.

From the window, one can glimpse, in a voyeuristic survey of tangible and occupied domains, where the transient souls, the tourists, who traverse Bairro Alto slumber in their nomadic retreats, engaged solely in the singular pursuit of resting post-revelry, breaking the fourth edict of *Animal Farm* (the novel) in the manner of the swine: “No animal shall sleep in a bed” and, subsequently, “No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets.”

The wondrous pumpkin farm

From seed to fruit, to harvest, to distribution, to table, a pumpkin embarks on an epic journey through the convolutions of production and the supply and demand chain, resting along the way in an *any-space-whatever-wherever-whenever*. One such unfettered landscape is depicted in *The wondrous*

pumpkin farm, the one film in the exhibition closest to the documentary genre, a curious blend of a perplexing pilgrimage to an outlandish land and a sociological study into the quaint customs of locals.

Displayed in front of *Solar farm* on a small screen, the viewer is treated to endless shots of *cucurbitaceae*, vibrant in every conceivable hue and shape. Amidst this carnival of squash, one encounters sculptures of straw, macabre adornments from All Hallows’ Eve, vintage automobiles and farm trucks, a relic of military aviation, and rare human specimens, an animal only captured here and in one other film in *Animal Farm*. What we see before us is an Austrian pumpkin patch, showing us both the end of the harvest and sale of *Cucurbita pepo* – one of the oldest known domesticated plants.

The vision conjured by these eccentric images speaks of a place that is both singularly bizarre yet transcontinentally banal. Perhaps the reason for such geographical fuzziness lies in the presence of American paraphernalia, makeshift rural architecture and an overwhelming amount of Halloween decorations – peculiar to many, familiar to all – echoes of an ancient Celtic and European lineage reshaped by the diasporic currents of the 19th century.

In fact, the syncretism showcased in *The wondrous pumpkin farm* might just be the reason our skins prickle. Here, the old pagan Celtic celebration of Samhain – held at the end of the harvest season and the beginning of winter, a time that was also considered a period when the boundary between the living and the dead was blurred, allowing spirits to cross over into the world of the living – melds with Christian All Saints’ Day, the perfect backdrop for a film that captures the essence of spirited business, with the humble pumpkin playing a starring role in the festivity’s commercial exploitation.

But the filmed populace makes it abundantly clear that what is truly on the auction block are not the gourds but the spectacle itself. Once more, a *mise-en-scène* is hawked, becoming the perfect backdrop for a selfie, engendering a meta-slippage: phantasmagorical recordings of event attendees engulfed in an aura of commonplace otherness, in turn obsessively capturing their own images. This recursive loop of snapshottery is punctuated by bursts of portraits of pumpkins – the most anthropomorphic of fruit – traded for the essential trait of the human beasts attending the festival: vegetativeness.

Day for night

In the first chamber of the second storey, a curious pause unfolds, inviting thoughts that were first inspired by the rooster’s silent shout at dawn – a play of light, the bestial night, the beast of light, the beastly night, a pray of day, the bestial light, the beast of night, the beastly light, a night for day, a *Day for night*.

Day for night is a time-bending maze, lost in a circadian show, deconstructing the age-old battle of day versus night. As if it were not blatantly obvious, this film portrays a farmhouse (a *domus*) standing in a phantom twilight. In the upper half of the screen we see that it is daytime – the sky is blue, the birds are singing, the clouds are rising – while the lower half shows the gloom of night – shadows creeping across the *façade*.

⁶ Donato Totaro, “Gilles Deleuze’s Bergsonian Film Project: Part 1”, Offscreen, Volume 3, Issue 3 / March 1999. <https://offscreen.com/view/bergson3>. (accessed 15 May 2024).

The piece is a moving rehash of the motif from René Magritte's series *L'Empire des lumières* (1940s to 1960s), a title that some translate as *The Empire of Light* and others as *The Dominion of Light*. It is the latter that tickles our fancy here, for what is truly at stake – and as echoed in pieces past – is dominion (sovereignty or control) over the medium, resources, nature, domicile and the like. In short, dominion through the domestication of fire, i.e. light, which makes visible, brings forth – as in the allegory of the cave – the analogy through the analogue: the shadows, the picture, the representational image.

Through the alluded to daring daredevil Mr. Magritte, we may revisit the scene, describing it with his trademark flair as “a night-time landscape and a sky such as we see during the day. The landscape evokes night and the sky evokes day.” René proceeds: “I call this power: poetry.”

And, in fact, this is nothing more than a double *exposure* – from the Latin word *exponere* (“to set out”, “put forth”, “publish”, “display”, “bring forth”). Means (in Portuguese *meios, media*) were already used to produce *Half a horse* (in Portuguese *Meio cavalo*). The means of production. Means for and in an exhibition – from the Latin *exhibere*, meaning “to hold out”, “deliver”, “present” – exposing and exhibiting creatures of tangible nights and electric days, of electric nights and tangible days.

Thus, we arrive at the title, *Day for night*, which brings us to both the meta-fiction, François Truffaut's film about making a film, and to the cinematographic technique used to shoot night scenes during the day, consisting of using filters and underexposing the film to create the illusion of night (in French: *la nuit américaine*; in Spanish: *noche Americana*; in Portuguese: *noite americana*). Which brings us to the work, because that is indeed what JMG did, creating the illusion that it is night during the day and the illusion that it is day during the night. Which brings us to the *absent presence*, the phantom *presence* of the artist himself, in and within his work, half glimpsed entering the *domus* that is the house of *Day for night* to turn on the day for night and night for day, the artificial electric lights one by one, revealing the artifice, like a projectionist projecting his own image on a starlit day and a sunlit night while everything in turn is projected. Perhaps the lightbulb blows, exposing no more.

My uncle's castle

And now, behold, *My uncle's castle*, that is, the title of the film in the second room on the second floor: a film portraying a billboard wherein an image is portrayed – an image of an image of an image, or rather, an image within an image within an image – a visual *Matryoshka*. The billboard, an image itself, features a fortress perched upon a verdant knoll encircled by a copse of trees, a mediaeval stronghold of stone and stout defensive walls.

The sky-blue sky in the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls,

borders the darker blue forest in the backdrop of the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, which borders the blue roof of the fortress in the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, which borders the sand yellow defensive walls of the fortress in the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, and borders two big dark green trees on a balcony on the fortress in the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls.

The darker blue forest in the backdrop of the fortress in the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls also borders a darker green forest in the forefront of the fortress in the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls and the sand yellow defensive walls of the fortress in the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, and the towers of the fortress in the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls.

We see a fortress in the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, because on the lower part of the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, there is a map, on a darker green forest, at the forefront of the fortress in the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, and some lettering in the upper part of the sky-blue sky in the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls.

And all of a sudden, but in slow motion, a man comes into scene from the right-hand side and covers the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, in the film and halts like a *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* in front of the image of a billboard with an image of a

a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, and looks at and perhaps beyond the lower part of the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, where a map on the darker green forest at the forefront of the fortress in the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, is imprinted.

This man is the curator of *Animal Farm*, peering at an image that itself resides in *Animal Farm*, in the form of a film, gazing upon the image within the billboard within the film, creating layers upon layers of perception, with scribes now chronicling a tale where we glimpse the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, and suddenly, a man coming into scene, from the right-hand side of the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, in the film, halts like a *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* in front of the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, and looks at the lower part of the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, where the map on a darker green forest at the forefront of the fortress in the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, is, in the exhibition *Animal Farm*, where the curator is gazing at the image of a billboard with an image of a fortress atop a lush hill surrounded by trees, a mediaeval castle with stone structures and defensive walls, in *My uncle's castle*, that is, the title of the film in the second room on the second floor.

Furthermore, as the title *My uncle's castle* suggests, it seems the man coming into scene from the right-hand side of the image of a billboard, and so on, is the nephew of a man who in turn has dominion over the castle in the image in a billboard, and so forth. Yet, considering this is merely an image of a billboard showcasing an image of a fortress within a film, i.e. a film of an image in an image, the representation of a *castle* in *My uncle's castle*, we might justly surmise that private property, through its multiplication in forms of imagery, through its reproduction, has the effect of morphing a common good, a shared asset. Thereby, yours truly is not gazing with nostalgia at *My uncle's castle*, once my grandfather's and now my cousin's cottage, immersed in a *mise en abyme* of resentful inheritance and birthright; for it exists merely as an image, in an image, in an image, in a fairy story, in a show, as a fantasy, picturing that the accumulation of wealth, feudal or not, should be redistributed in recognition of everyone's true worth in society and not kept by any uncle or inherited exclusively by cousins of mine.

"I wanted to give the person an infinite number of identities, from photographer to subject, from being looked at to being an onlooker," wrote Luigi Ghirri, continuing: "I get the impression that behind what I see there is another landscape, one which is the true landscape, but I can't say what it is, nor can I imagine it."⁸

Flat cows make nice yoghurt

Upon the three-metre expanse of screen, we first encounter a visual opening that whisks us away to a foreign place through landscapes of deviance. Deviant, for they overtly diverge from the norms or expectations rooted in their inherent *milieu*. They diverge because they showcase vistas of transverse mountains, crowned with forests themselves aberrant. Transverse, for they seem to have surged upward diagonally shaped, akin to their arboreal counterparts. Sloped like the Leaning Tower of Pisa: *Montagnes of Pisa* and *Arbres of Pisa*. The verticality of these forms, as with all that is bent or bowed, becomes more pronounced, paramount and pervasive. All this without forsaking their inherent, natural visage. They are disconcerting visuals to behold. They appear as utterly real as otherness, yet as distorted as reality; as very real as alterity, yet as altered as real. *Natura Devians*.

Secondly, through these canvases, where landscapes are layered upon landscapes – meadows, sheep, mountains, all awry – we emerge into verdant meadows where, within the frame, raised cattle materialise: Austrian cows such as the rare *Ennstaler Bergscheck*, the *Murboden*, a highland breed esteemed both for its beef and milk, some *Österreichisches Braunvieh* and little else. Yet, these breeds have undergone a kind of genetic tampering, or else something is amiss. They are stretched both in length and breadth, like bovine dachshunds without the puniness in size. They are titanic cows resembling limousines (the automobile not the cattle species, which does exist but is far less exotic).

To shoot these woodland behemoths, JMG lugged an anamorphic lens along with his *Bolex* camera, both of which were used for the alpine and forest scenes as well as the cows. These lenses are crafted for cinematography to capture an expanded image by skewing it horizontally during the shoot and subsequently stretching it in projection – they are engineered for projection in CinemaScope, a format birthed in the early '50s. Yet, the artist used this optical device to fabricate a specific deviation, a deliberate distortion. His intention was to portray *vacas flacas* or "skinny cows", a saying used for times of economic tribulation or scarcity, in a thriving Central European country. This expression is rooted in biblical lore, coming specifically from the tale of Joseph in the Book of Genesis, where Pharaoh's dreams of seven lean cows eating seven fat cows is interpreted by Joseph to mean seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. However, the shooting either backfired, or the Central European nation did not wish its affluence, dominions or bovine assets to be questioned.

JMG misappropriated the artifice of an anamorphic lens by initially squeezing vertically

root. "Luigi Ghirri, the Italian Master of Color Photography, Charts Another Way of Looking". Friends of Friends / Freunde von Freunden (FvF), 2 July 2018. <https://www.friendsoffriends.com/art/featuresluigi-ghirri-folkwang-essen/>.

during capture and then expanding horizontally during projection, a rather unorthodox use of the gimmick. This sequence engenders substantial distortion, as the vertical compression followed by horizontal expansion does not reinstate the original proportions but rather stretches the image horizontally fourfold. Thus, *Flat cows* were optically born – colossal creatures of abundance, beastly beasts of beef, lunatic lactators in slow motion producing extra creamy full-fat milk by decaliters. Yet, they still retain something of their natural appearance. As utterly real as otherness, yet as distorted as reality; as very real as alterity, yet as altered as real.

As the title, *Flat cows make nice yoghurt*, intimates, these bovines have transcended mere animal status; they have become monsters of super-production. Amplified, as is inevitable when the urban sprawl ascends vertically, they reach outward to the horizon to sustain our growing brunch.

The portrayal of the beast we behold, the gargantuan dachshund cow, exemplifies a deliberate photographic unlearning; the deviation – akin to nature – of technicity. Thus, and only thus, does *technē* propel us towards *poiēsis*. Whether it be a horse, donkey or cow, the act of framing these domesticated beings – alongside mountains and trees – reiterates the concept of *enframing* anew. *Natura devians* does not serve to divert our gaze nor render the natural extraneous; rather, it emphasises the alien within our natural usage, aiming to amplify, broaden, flatten and liberate, thereby illuminating the subject at hand – a cow in this instance – as a resource to be quantified, organised and exploited to yield four times its volume, four times its lovely milk. "The growth of the saving power" thus becomes a conduit to new ways of revealing the world, a journey towards an eco-friendly estrangement from the extractivist rural landscape.

Mustard piece

A film, somewhat hidden from the main display, that greets us with scatological undertones – or, rather, overtones – is *Mustard piece*. The title itself forewarns us of its essence. We might think that the artist aimed to create a masterpiece, but due to lack of mastery (as material), he resorted to mustard, and the result is a *Mustard piece*. Of course, if a masterpiece is the epitome of the sublime, then a mustard piece is nothing short of faecal.

To truly engage with this film, we are granted access solely from the front, navigating around and beyond the corpulent contours of the sausage-like *Flat cows*, famed for their yummy yoghurt. And while that work suggests an eco-friendly estrangement from the extractivist rural landscape, *Mustard piece* is no less revealing; it too must unmask the estranged nature of extractivism.

Here is an artistic gesture made with Austrian mustard-coloured paste in either amorphous or tubular forms set against a vivid light blue surface. The lavishness of daily Austrian mustard use and its waste is starkly and stingily refuted herein.

This paste is drawn in, vacuumed up and imbued in an astonishing act of self-love. In mesmerising slow motion, the content retreats back to its origin, into the tube of Mautner Markhof Estragon Senf. One of Austria's most celebrated brands and a staple accompaniment of renowned Austrian sausages, it reclaims all of its essence, slurping up every bit of its interior back to its core, its bowels, its innards.

Watching this in reverse motion – the thorough eradication of the chaotic mess that any thick paste on a surface entails, with the filth whisked away leaving no trace with remarkable ease – is fascinating. At times, it even conjures up the imagery of a cowboy's lasso catching a cow and reining it in. And this unprecedented suction captivates. It can only be described as pleasurable, reminiscent of the sensations evoked by the now ubiquitous ASMR videos found across the internet. ASMR, or *autonomous sensory meridian response*, is a phenomenon that elicits a pleasant and relaxing sensation, often accompanied by a tingling that typically initiates at the head and cascades down the spine, triggered by specific visual or auditory stimuli.

Indeed, the satisfaction derived from viewing this distinctly scatological piece conjures thoughts of Julio Cortázar, who once remarked "that

Cortázar, Julio. *Hopscotch*. Pantheon Paperback Edition. New York City: Pantheon, 1987, p. 11.

people who make dates are the same kind who need lines on their writing paper, or who always squeeze up from the bottom on a tube of toothpaste".⁹ This reflection inevitably leads us to those individuals

in contemporary discourse labelled as "anal," a term colloquially employed to describe someone overly meticulous, organised or detail-oriented, to the point of being perceived as rigid or controlling. This term originates from Freudian psychology, as part of his theory on psychosexual development, specifically referencing the "anal stage," which focuses on a young child's control, dominance and mastery over his sphincter. Freud posited that a child's experience during this phase could influence their personality in later life, potentially leading to traits that are either obsessively orderly (an anal-retentive personality) or notably disorderly (an anal-expulsive personality).

As a matter of fact, meticulousness is paramount if one wishes to emulate the artist's technique of creating a film like *Mustard piece*, which was shot in reverse without post-production edits, that is, in-camera. This involves loading the film backwards (with the emulsion side facing the incorrect direction) and turning the camera upside down to capture the desired scene – a notably complex and generally discouraged technique due to the high risk of exposing the film to light, which could potentially damage it. A coprophilic masterpiece.

Mozart's piss stone

From the realm of scatology to the field of urology; from number two to number one – from three to four in Freudian jargon; from coprophilia to uropelia; from poo to pee, the journey is teensy, since both events are usually performed within the same revered sanctuary: the water closet, the bathroom. Yet, sometimes, these acts transpire outside these conventional confines, which brings us to the peculiar subject of the film *Mozart's piss stone*.

In it, we are presented with an elongated rock projected on a vertical screen. Attached to the rock is a plaque bearing an inscription. It reads: "ANNO DOMINI MDCCLXXXVII LIESS WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART AUF SEINER REISE NACH PRAG JUST AN DIESE STELLE SEINE KUTSCHE ANHALTEN SEITHER HEISST IM VOLKSMUND DIESE STEIN PINKELSTEIN 29.2.1976", which translates to: ANNO DOMINI MDCCLXXXVII WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART STOPPED HIS CARRIAGE AT THIS VERY SPOT ON HIS JOURNEY TO PRAGUE. SINCE THEN THIS STONE HAS BEEN POPULARLY KNOWN AS THE PISS-STONE 29/2/1976.

The message is unambiguously clear. It seems Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart marked – like the domesticated *Animal That Therefore [He Was]* – his territory, relieved himself with a great roar, went to the loo for a number one, released his bladder. In essence, he urinated on this stone in 1788 while *en route* to Prague.

In the film, two crucial elements – one visible and one invisible – play pivotal roles in the unfolding piece. The visible component is a stream of liquid that emanates from the top right of the frame, cascading in slow motion onto the very stone where Mozart is said to have relieved himself. This visual image suggests a contemporary re-enactment of the historical event, hinting that someone is freeing himself, in like manner, on the said monument. The artist pissing onto the pissed monument, perhaps. An irreverent gesture towards history, possibly. JMG marking his territory on the symbol of the composer, maybe.

The invisible yet perceptible component of the film is the underlying reason for the stone's exaggerated phallic appearance. Originally, the rock was neither so elongated or vertical. Once again, an anamorphic lens is employed to stretch the image, but this time vertically – a Lacanian twist, for it is analogous to what Lacan does with the third stage of Freudian psychosexual development: he elongates it. This cinematographic manipulation transforms the ordinary piss stone (if such a thing indeed exists) into a menhir of phallic proportions, mirroring the larger-than-life persona historically attributed to the composer – one, by the way, also known for certain idiosyncratic and somewhat disturbing fetishes.

We need not recall any of his numerous letters – such as the one from Augsburg in 1777 in which Mozart labelled the aristocrats attending a concerto as "the Duchess Smackarse, the Countess Pleasurepisser, the Princess Stinkmess, and the two Princes Potbelly von Piggick".¹⁰ Nor is it necessary to delve into some of his famous compositions – such as *Leck mich im Arsch*, a canon in B flat major written in 1782 with the original German lyrics translating as *lick my arse*.¹¹ And neither is it pertinent to recite any of his poems:

"Well, I wish you good night, but first,
Shit in your bed and make it burst.
Sleep soundly, my love
Into your mouth your arse you'll shove."¹²

¹⁰ Schroeder, David P. *Mozart in Revolt: Strategies of Resistance, Mischief, and Deception*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 135.

¹¹ Dundes, Alan. *Life is like a Chicken Coop Ladder: Studies of German National Character through Folklore*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984, pp. 42-48.

¹² Ibid. p. 66.

Sunflower at dusk

"Hereunder lies the above who up below
So hourly died that he lived on till now."¹³

If *Rooster at dawn* (2023) served as the 16 mm *overture* to *Animal Farm*, heralding not the beginning of a new day but an electric day, we can affirm that *Sunflower at dusk* serves as the *finale*, an ending that paves the way for another. It is perhaps the last chapter of this fairy story, since it culminates not just in a conclusion but an epilogue.

Standing before its small screen, we witness a cinematic portrayal of a sunflower within a field, both of which are grotesquely altered, transformed into what resembles a battlefield rather than a natural scene. The flower itself is lifeless. As those familiar with sunflowers might attest, the sunflower fields just before they are harvested adopt an eschatological visage, taking on the appearance of a post-apocalyptic landscape.

Young sunflowers, known for their heliotropic behaviour, trace the sun's path from east to west throughout the day, optimising their energy absorption, a process guided by the plant's internal circadian rhythms. In contrast, mature sunflowers halt this pursuit and steadfastly face east, benefiting from the early warmth to attract more pollinators. Those that are dead, poised for harvest, follow neither the sun nor the moon. This is precisely what the film captures: a deceased sunflower head with the sun setting behind it, signalling not just the onset of a new night but an electric one, marking the final scene.

In a twist of fate, due to the hastened and erroneous loading of the film into the camera, the sunflower in the field appears to shiver. It seems to be dissipating in the midst of what resembles a solar, nuclear and ultimate storm. The sunflower is desiccated, deceased, vanishing like Murnau's *Nosferatu*, succumbing to the ravages of excessive light exposure – the very light that revealed this and all films. Once more, artificial light – the light cone from every projector projecting – brings the sunflower eerily to life. And again, the beast is dead, the light reigns supreme, and the beast rises up and travels without moving in a sequence of still images.

"Ah Sun-flower! weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the Sun:
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the travellers journey is done.

Where the Youth pined away with desire,
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow:
Arise from their graves and aspire,
Where my Sun-flower wishes to go."¹⁴

All them swines

Beyond the final flick in the showcase lies another, a beacon at the terminus of

¹³ Beckett, Samuel. *First Love and Other Shorts*. New York City: Grove Press, 1994, p. 12.

¹⁴ Blake, William. *The complete poetry and prose of William Blake*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

this zoopoetic tunnel, our domestic *idiossey*. This film is *All them swines* and it claims a singular place. It serves both as the first and the last film. It is simultaneously the most divergent from the remaining reels in the exhibition and the one which most intimately reflects its title.

It is the first because the images we behold stem from a cunningly crafted appropriation of *Animal Farm* from 1954 – the inaugural film adaptation of Orwell's book bearing the same title – an animated creation by János Halász, Joy Batchelor and, clandestinely, the CIA.

It is the last because JMG completed it most recently, after securing a 16 mm print from South Africa and also because it graces the final chamber of *Animal Farm* (the exhibition) on the second storey beyond *Sunflower at dusk*, the curtain-closer. It is the most distinct within the display, for it stands alone as the sole appropriated film – a unique specimen in JMG's repertoire (and that of JMG + PP) – and the sole harbinger of sound – another premiere in JMG's catalogue (and that of JMG + PP). Lastly, it is the most like *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* because it animates the text and is not, like the Orwellian novel and our beastly exhibition, a dialogue with reality through figurative fauna, with the *real* evident through analogous means.

What unfolds in this final, final room, presented in a manner undeniably more cinematic than its predecessors, thus accentuating its distinctiveness, is an unending film. Each of three projectors casts a third of Halász and Batchelor's animation, which, as mentioned, is a cartoon rendition of Orwell's tome (and not devoid of considerable divergences). The film serves as an analogy for the October Revolution and the ensuing ascendancy of Stalinism in the Soviet Union: through the domestication of history and the story of domesticated animals; via the livestock igniting a rebellion against their human proprietors and in turn finding themselves subjugated anew by the pigs who have taken over – who proclaim at the end that "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

It seems that the narrative behind Halász and Batchelor's film (here artfully modified) involves Sonia Orwell (Orwell's widow) transferring the rights of the book to covert operatives from the CIA's Office of Political Coordination, who were engaged in the crafting of anti-communist art. They spearheaded production via Louis de Rochemont and his enterprise, which acted as a façade for the development of psychological warfare tactics. Unbeknownst to the filmmakers, the CIA's covert involvement dictated significant alterations, such as urging the portrayal of a triumphant animal insurrection against their tyrannical rulers, tweaks that underscored certain political doctrines and modified characterizations that echoed anti-communist views.

A notable example is the depiction of Snowball the pig and the human farmers, which were tailored to strike a chord with American audiences and to sidestep estranging agricultural communities.

Nevertheless, JMG's appropriation surpasses what the Central Intelligence Agency might have envisaged. By projecting the three segments asynchronously, it conjures a ceaseless, infinite opus that

ANIMAL

perpetuates without repetition. At intervals, the serene whispers of the soundtrack blend with the most ferocious imagery, with the most savage scenes intertwining like three threads. JMG's re-edit of Halas and Bachelor's presents us with the fairest version of our own fairy story, not of humans or domesticated animals, but a general history of violence and a never ending brutality: visions like criminal crimson hog eyes superimposed on a human lashing out against a cerulean sky; white pigeons soaring above the pig *nomenklatura* as a throng of incensed humans seeks to reclaim the farm; a nocturnal bonfire on top of famine and a snowstorm; the vicious, bloodthirsty onslaught by Napoleon's cynical henchmen, a horse's anguished shriek, its tongue a slashing blade; the ruthless slaughter of dissenting breeds, fire with blazing stares and trumpets blaring a mournful dirge; the fierce carnage of the Battle of the Windmill; a porker glancing up, Jones with his gun, sheep bleating, two legs bad; a harsh winter's harvest, the pigs milking the cows fast, the dogs snapping at the comrades amassed. Metanarratives assembled to the millisecond from the vestiges of a tale in a non-narrative twist: a history devoid of story as glimpses of poetic disarray, bringing forth far beyond what history could ever unravel, for "fact is simply fiction endorsed with state power".¹⁵ And so, science is fiction, say thee!

The projection thus unfolds into a cacophonous symphony of paradoxical-audiovisuals. It stands as an endless engine of happenstance, a catalyst of infinite coincidence, for as we know "A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance." It is the revolution! The analogue rebellion! An uprising against the tamed tales showcased elsewhere and beyond! The counter-domestic counter-insurrection through and against the cinematic form! A *coup d'état* against the propaganda machinery, against cultural skirmishes, wielding the very tools and strategies they themselves employed! Feral! War from within! I.e. *de intus*! I.e. dairy! Once upon a time! Once upon a night! Once upon a day! Cock-a-doodle-doo, sang the ghost, and nothing was ever the same!

It's fortunate that the CIA doesn't peruse exhibition texts, for they'd scarcely appreciate our words for them swine:

Beasts of England, beasts of Ireland
Beasts of every land and clime
Hearken to my joyful tidings
Of the golden future time

Soon or late the day is coming
Tyrant Man shall be overthrown
And the fruitful fields of England
Shall be trod by beasts alone

Rings shall vanish from our noses
And the harness from our back
Bit and spur shall rust forever
Cruel whips no more shall crack

Riches more than mind can picture
Wheat and barley, oats and hay
Clover, beans, and mangel-wurzels
Shall be ours upon that day

PRODUCTION

Bright will shine the fields of England
Purer shall its waters be
Sweeter yet shall blow its breezes
On the day that sets us free

For that day we all must labour
Though we die before it break
Cows and horses, geese and turkeys
All must toil for freedom's sake

Beasts of England, beasts of Ireland
Beasts of every land and clime
Hearken well and spread my tidings
Of the golden future time

From *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* by George Orwell

Marco Bene, May 2024

Alexis Okeowo. 'How Saidiya Hartman Retells the History of Black Life.' *The New Yorker*, 19 October 2020. www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/10/26/how-saidiya-hartman-retells-the-history-of-black-life (accessed 17 May 2024).

AND

An epilogue & Acknowledgments

What you have just perused – be it diagonally or linearly, by chapter or snippet, in full or just this sentence – is real. *Animal Farm*, an exhibition by João Maria Gusmão, exists (or existed). It thrived (or thrives) thanks to numerous individuals and institutions. Should any have been inadvertently overlooked here, please accept our sincere apologies and this earnest expression of gratitude in place of another, equally heartfelt, one: *thank you*. They differ not in spirit, but in form.



Nearly all of the 16 mm films displayed in the exhibition were shot in October 2023 deep in the heart of Austria. Natxo Checa, João Maria Gusmão and I ventured into this affluent Central European land on an artistic *idiossey*, Checa-style, making a castle nestled in the village of Maissau in Upper Austria our humble abode. We extend our gratitude to those who enabled this journey in various ways and capacities, thereby making the exhibition a reality:

Onkel Georg, Natascha & Ernst Abensperg und Traun, Benedikt Abensperg und Traun, Nadejda, Georg & Ernst Ferdinand Starhemberg, Kalina & Gabriel Piatti, Petra & Markus Hoyos, Anna Jankovich-Troubetzkoi, Meli, Nina Bene, Laszlo Bene, and countless others, along with sunlight and sunflowers, nights and evenings, beds and bedrooms, roosters, hens and common chickens, pumpkins, carrots, cucumbers and cucurbits, ducks and geese, spacecraft of all kind, mustardine, struthioquines, spectres, ghosts, ghouls and goblins, animalists, animavists, antispeciesists, zoalists, neo-Majorists, Jonesists, therocrates, zoopoets and normal poets, zootechnocrats and bureaucrats, my uncle and your cousin, yeast and even bestialist farms and farmers of all forms who graciously entertained, sheltered, received, fed and believed in us.



The inaugural iteration of *Animal Farm* debuted last winter, from February 2nd to March 10th, 2024, at 99 Canal, New York. This edition was brought to life through the collaborative efforts of the aforementioned venue and Galeria Zé dos Bois, notably spearheaded by Ruspoli and Checa. We express our heartfelt appreciation to all those who contributed to this endeavour in diverse capacities, thereby bringing the exhibition to fruition:

Andrew Kreps Gallery (USA) & team, Alice Conconi, Filipa Nunes, Edwin Cohen, Jimmy Traboulsi, Minjung Kim, Eugenia Lai, Julien Bismuth, Alexander Meurice, Alice Centamore, Jacob Ott, Katherine Pickard, Miguel Abreu, and countless others, alongside every visitor – whether returning or not, lingering or brief – Dimes and their delectable breakfast sandwiches, Balthazar, the establishment, and even Melchior and Gaspar, the wise kings, denizens of Chinatown, beer and brutalist buildings, night owls, eagles and city dwellers of all forms who graciously entertained, sheltered, received, fed and believed in us.

I dedicate this text, through this epitaph, to the living memory of my Onkel Georg, whose kindness knew no reason, and whose reason knew no limits; so much so that some thought him mad when he was only being kind, and others thought him kind when he was only being mad; so much so that some thought him mad when he was only being reasonable, and others thought him reasonable when he was only being mad; so much so that some thought his madness reasonable, and others thought him reasonably mad.

Animal Farm voyaged across the ocean, much like Noah's Ark and its funky fauna, and is presently (or previously) on display at the premises of Galeria Zé dos Bois in Bairro Alto, open to the public from May 20th to September 7th, 2024, welcoming all local chums, beastly fiends and foreign folk alike! We extend our gratitude to those who facilitated this journey in various capacities, thereby bringing the exhibition to life:

The two projectionists Fernando Urritia and Henrique Varnada, Marta Furtado, Marcos Silva and all the team at ZDB, Aleksander Smirnov, Sergiy Ivanov, Vitaliy Tkachuk, Cristina Guerra, the gallery and the person, all the aforementioned, Inês Henriques, Ana, Lira, Luna, & Carmen, Francisca Bagulho, Catarina Rebelo, Nuno Crespo, Alexandre Estrela, Joana Carro, George Orwell, of course, all visitors future and past, the Duchess Smackarse, the Countess Pleasurepisser, the Princess Stinkmess and the two Princes Potbelly von Pigdick and alfacinhas and other leafy plants of all forms who graciously entertained, sheltered, received, fed and believed in us.

THE ARTIST
WOULD LIKE TO DEDICATE
THIS EXHIBITION
TO
ANA MARGARIDA MONTEIRO
AND ALL HER DESCENDANTS.

Colophon

This journal is published on the occasion of the exhibition *Animal Farm* by João Maria Gusmão at Galeria Zé dos Bois, Lisbon, from May 20th to September 7th, 2024.

Exhibition

Curator

Marco Bene

Exhibition produced by

Natxo Checa

Galeria Zé dos Bois (ZDB), Lisbon

Opening reception

May 20th, 2024 | 18:00 to midnight

Opening hours

Monday–Saturday | 18:00–22:00

ARCOLisboa Opening Hours

May 21th to 26th | 12:00–22:00

Press

Catarina Rebelo

16 mm film equipment expertise by
Pato em Pequim

Film prints and lab work

ANDEC Cinegrell Filmtechnik GmbH

Artworks by

João Maria Gusmão

Animal Farm is an exhibition produced & presented by ZDB as part of *Travelling without Motion*, a project by João Maria Gusmão supported by *Artistic Creation Program, República Portuguesa – Cultura | DGARTES – Direção-Geral das Artes*.

Special film location

Schloss Maissau, Upper Austria

Publication

Title

A SUPPLEMENT TO JOÃO MARIA
GUSMÃO'S EXHIBITION ANIMAL
FARM BY MARCO BENE – A ZOOPOETIC
IDIOSSEY, AN INQUIRY INTO ANALOGUE
ANALOGOUS MEANS AND ANALOGOUS
ANALOGUE CONCEPTS, ANIMAL
PRODUCTION AND REPRODUCTION,
MULTIPLICATION AND REPLICATION

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João Maria Gusmão is represented by the following galleries:

*Cristina Guerra Contemporary Art (Portugal);
Andrew Kreps Gallery (USA);
Sies + Höke Galerie (Germany);
Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel (Brazil);
ZERO... (Italy).*

This project was generously supported by
*República Portuguesa – Cultura | DGARTES
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Luso-Americana para o Desenvolvimento, Escola
das Artes – Universidade Católica, Escola
das Artes, CITAR Centro de Investigação em
Ciência e Tecnologia das Artes, Porto.*



1
Branca de Neve (Snow White), 2024
 Fuji Crystal Archive DPII paper, RA4
 Reversal Process Print, 20'×24' (50.8x61cm)

Animal Farm artist edition of 10 for Galeria Zé dos Bois

2
Rooster at dawn, 2023
 16mm film, colour, no sound, 2'44"

 3
Ghost tape, 2021
 16mm film, colour, no sound, 3'22"
 Produced by Fundação de Serralve

 4
Landscape with boat and river, 2023
 16mm film, colour, no sound, 2'44"

 5
Fermented foam, 2023
 16mm film installation, 3 overlaid channel projection, colour, no sound, 3 × 2'45" (loop)

 6
Half a horse, 2023
 16mm film, colour, no sound, 2'44"

 7
Bedrooms, 2023
 16mm film, colour, no sound, 7'00"

 8
The wondrous pumpkin farm (Kürbishof Wunderlich), 2023
 16mm film, colour, no sound, 12'10"

 9
Solar farm, 2023
 Vertical 16mm film projection, colour, no sound, 2'45"

10
Day for night, 2023
 16mm film, colour, no sound, 2'44"

 11
Mustard piece, 2023
 16mm film, colour, no sound, 2'20"

 12
Flat cows make nice yogurt, 2023
 16mm film, anamorphic projection, colour, no sound, 8'04"

 13
My uncle's castle, 2023
 16mm film, colour, no sound, 2'44"

 14
Mozart's piss stone, 2023
 16mm film, anamorphic projection, colour, no sound, 2'34"

 15
Sunflower at dusk, 2023
 Vertical 16mm film projection, colour, no sound, 2'45"

 16
All them swines, 2024
 16mm film installation, 3 overlaid channel projection, colour, 3x mono sound, 3 × 24' (loop)

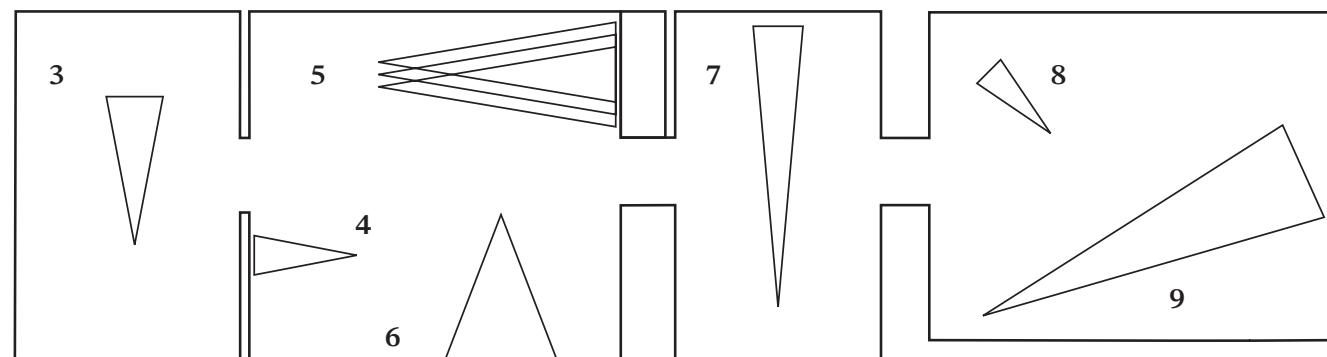
Re-edit of the animation feature film *Animal Farm*, from 1954, directed by Joy Batchelor, John Halas. Based on George Orwell's *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*, 1945.

Entrance hall

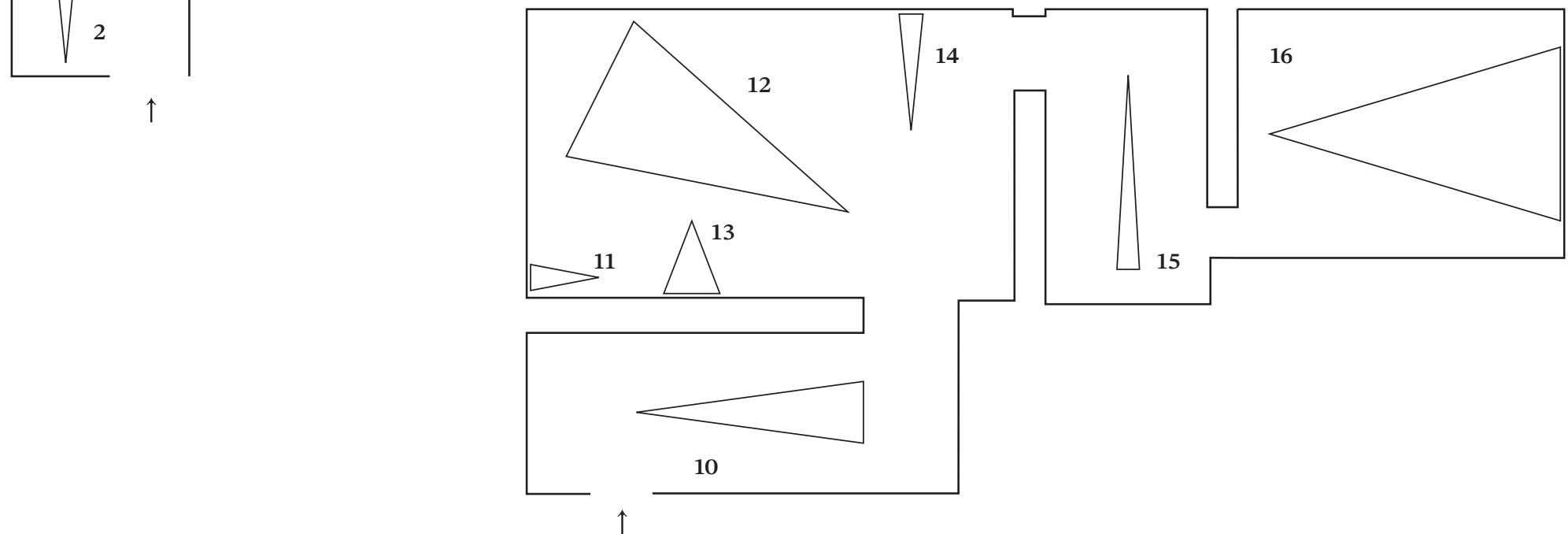
1



First floor



Second floor





PLAY & LEARNING