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The Afterwake: Anaïs Horn & Pedro Zylbersztajn

The title of this exhibition, curated by Gabriela Rangel, presents a project by Anaïs Horn (Graz, Austria; based in Paris, France) and recent works by Pedro Zylbersztajn (São Paulo, Brazil - 1993); it alludes to the idea of time as a movement similar to the furrows that a boat produces when navigating a river, leaving the trace of its movement imprinted on the water with reverberating undulations until it dissolves. The title pays tribute to a feminist homonym poem by Adrienne Rich, where she narrates the care a woman dedicates to a patient from day to night, portraying her journey to assume the autonomy of her feminine identity as a series of waits, sacrifices, and losses.

Horn and Zylbersztajn poetically elaborate a sort of necropsy of the visual apparatus of modernity through the presence of phantasmatic figures, a *Nietzschean Dracula*, which animates objects and impregnates spaces with items emptied of content and, therefore, of meaning, listening to time in an endless wait. The registration of this elusive temporality also manifests in the conceptual exercise of cinematic ekphrasis or the anonymous archive of the *cocktail* party at the exhibition's opening, captured on napkins. Although distinct, the works of Horn and Zylbersztajn converge in showing the experience of photography or cinema emptied of meaning and provided with other functions and uses in a time dominated by affective entertainment techniques.

Longing Ghosts in Deep Blue Paranoia (2022) by Anaïs Horn is an installation composed of mirrored images of the interior of the Miramare castle with rare period frames loaded with the past, drawings, and a video projection of the palace on curtains that the wind from a fan moves to abstractly recompose the scene of the delirium of Empress Charlotte of Belgium, wife of Maximilian of Habsburg. After Maximilian's execution in Mexico in 1867, Charlotte moved around Europe until her confinement of almost 50 years in a castle in Belgium, where she wrote several hundred letters to an officer and died in 1927, accompanied only by her caregivers. Horn, however, has chosen to place the site of the widowed ex-empress's delirium in the Miramare Castle in Trieste, Italy, where she and her husband began their marital cohabitation before departing for Mexico. The photographic images, which show views of Miramare's objects and architectural elements printed on mirrors, take the form of the daguerreotype, a photographic imaging technique at its height in the 19th century when the declining hegemony of the Habsburgs sought to reach America. These blurred images also seem to imply the disappearing photo-mechanical gaze, whose trace today is materialized in the camera phone, producing a narcissistic chain of individual delusions of grandeur: *everyone wants to be a queen*.¹ Likewise, Horn has recorded small interventions in hidden spots in Miramare using a system of surveillance cameras. To complement all these elements, a penetrating and hypnotic fragrance developed by the specialist Pauline Rochas in collaboration with the artist, spreads in the exhibition room together with a soundscape by Eilert Asmervik featuring a text by Estelle Hoy.

¹ This quote refers to the title of the essay written by Giulio Polita and Francesca Lazzarini about Horn's installation. G. Polita and F. Lazzarini. *Everybody wants to be a Queen*. In: Anaïs Horn. *Longing Ghosts in Deep Blue Paranoia*, Drama Books, Paris, 2022. Unpaginated.

It has been argued that Horn's project underpins a contemporary version of kitsch as a system of affective consumption constructed by the viewer's devotion to this type of sensibility born in the 19th century. The ghostly images, sounds, and scent created by Horn depict the delirium of the dethroned empress and how many of the inventions of industrial capitalism, particularly photography, and cinema, are in the process of change or rapid extinction in the face of the emergence of a dematerialization logic. Moreover, his approach to photography critically examines the notion of the medium as a historical archive that is impossible to disassociate from the imperialist project.

Two recent works by Pedro Zylbersztajn chosen for this exhibition, the performance *Sentimental Journey* (2019) and the wall-mounted text *Écfrase de um filme (pausado)* (2020), elaborate different models of complex narratives constructed for a viewer who lacks any attention or whose form of attention is short and fragmentary. The piece *Sentimental Journey* consists of a performance executed by four "delegated performers" who place themselves in geographical points near the RGR gallery to whistle passages of the same melody synchronized and transmitted openly from their cell phones. The four performers will gather at a point in the gallery so that the melody will be one, despite the different intonations and temporalities. *Écfrase de um filme (pausado)*, on the other hand, describes in detail the architecture of a room as it appears in a film. The assembling of the story transforms the writing into an abstract work as complex as telling a movie to someone who has not seen it.

Two other works have been specially conceived and produced for the show: *Three Digestions* (three-channel video), and *We Serve Well to Serve Always* (performance and framed napkins); both invert the gallery administrators' space and enhance the public's active role. The first, *Three Digestions*, consists of a three-channel video placed in the upper window that links the architectural axes of the exhibition hall with the panoramic window in the private office that functions as a panopticon by placing the projection at the point of view from where one observes to become observed, inverting the passive and inert gaze of the one who "consumes" to show the entrails of the latter's activity obliquely. The video proposes to divert the gaze from the bottom to the top with three images edited in different loops of a walk of the Central Library of Zurich, an endoscopy, and views of the storage of the ethnographic collection of the Rietberg Museum in Zurich. This work, presented as distinct phases of the digestive process, inevitably refers to the anti-colonial drive of the anthropophagic program of Brazilian modernism (to eat the enemy productively). However, it also shows how the discursive economy and colonial memory link like the vertebrae of a powerful column located inside a devouring machinery that becomes sick.

We serve well to serve always is the motto used in Brazil in ready-to-eat food establishments. Zylbersztajn ironically appropriates this slogan to show the socioeconomic architecture of art as reflected in the stains on disposable napkins used at the exhibition's opening *cocktail* party. Some guest-used napkins will be kept and framed as art objects instead of being thrown away. In a Duchampian gesture, the artist reinterprets the docile Brazilian motto to bring it into the social sphere of contemporary art consumption.

Gabriela Rangel