

*The bewitched image. The cinematographic influences in the work of Georgina Starr.*

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Upon entering the room, our eyes travel with a certain speed to a number of lights injected in different technical supports. Machines that seem to undergo a neuronal center that, out of a whim, dominates everything—like a big brain to your nervous system. At the operational core we find a strange object. This is a pinkish mass, soft and delicate. It has a series of light tubes crowning its upper part. It waits for us. ‘The Sphere’ - that’s what the experts call it. Looking at her closely, her shape looks like a giant brain. In its lower part the wiring connects it to a series of devices: cameras, screens, sensors and recorders that control its action, as well as the activity that can occur inside. Imagine if ‘The Sphere’ can be penetrated. We are inside an experimental laboratory. Monitors, blackboards, paperwork, it gives the form of the record of a scientific study. But what is this study about? The brief statements that accompany the formulas and parables indicate that it is an investigation about time, about how the past was lived and how to revive it in the present. The Sphere is a memory machine and she is waiting for us: *Monument Memory Moment*.

Under the title *Moment Memory Monument* (2017) Georgina Starr presents one of her latest works on the occasion of her exhibition *Hello. Come here. I want you* at the Frac Franche-Comte de Besançon. This is the most important exhibition of the British artist in France and that, without being a retrospective, shows some of the most distinctive works of her career.

Georgina Starr (Leeds, 1968) is considered one of the most important artists of the last decades. Belonging to the second wave of the YBAs (Young British Artists), their works contrast the provocative vision of everyday life - the usual brand of the group led by Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, the Chapman brothers or Sarah Lucas, among others - with ideas closer to autobiography, identity analysis, story, representation and certain investigations into the unknown. Certainly, a large part of her work is aimed at offering us different approaches on how the hidden is revealed to us through small accidents or magical events that transform our lives. In this sense, Starr is inspired by science fiction, fantastic stories, the cinema of the Nouvelle Vague, the memory of an actress or the reading of the tarot during the visit to a spiritualist medium. The relationships between the symbolic and the real, the representation, the supernatural facts of everyday life seem to have a fundamental resonance in her works, be these performances, installations or sound recordings. However, we should return to that strange image of the laboratory. *Moment Memory Monument* is an installation and performance by Georgina Starr that to date has been shown twice with some variations, but in its essence is built with the same main elements. The first time she presented it in the collective exhibition *Fantasy Access Code* in the Appartamento del Principe in the Palazzo Reale in Milan and the second in her solo exhibition *Hello. Come here. I want you* at the Frac Franche-Comte de Besançon. In both exhibitions the main element is the same: a large brain that operates as a switchboard in an experiment on time and memory. In fact, that giant brain seems to honor the idea of memory. And if we reflect carefully on this image we find the direct inspiration of Georgina Starr when she chose this central element in her piece. Let us ask ourselves: who else has made their work a monument to memory and all its vicissitudes? The answer is prompt and sure: Alain Resnais. And it is true that if we stop to think about the filmography of the French

author, films such as *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961), *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* (1963) or the short film *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1956). However, if we need something else, we will find the direct answer in a lesser known film and that today we can understand it as a full evocation for *Moment Memory Monument*. I mean *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (1968).

Although *Je t'aime, je t'aime* appears in the filmography of the investigations of cinematographic critics of the time and of the present time on Alain Resnais, it is also true that there are few who have really stopped to delve into this film. At the time the social circumstances did not make it shine at all. And this was completely buried by the socio-political currents that prevailed in the revolts of the French "may." This climate caused that even being present at the Cannes festival that year disappeared from the cartel and did not appear. Consequently, we can say that the reception of *Je t'aime, je t'aime* occurred out of place and at the moment. And that perhaps today I have not yet achieved this task among the public. Despite this, let's analyze why this Alain Resnais film did not go to posterity and was forgotten when the author had previously achieved certain successes among critics.

Alain Resnais (1922-2014) belonged to the movement of the avant-garde film or new French cinema and was coined by the critic François Giroud in L'Express of 1953 with the name of Nouvelle Vague. Giroud used this term to refer to the cinema that was beginning to be filmed in the 50s of the last century. This was characterized because its filmmakers were a series of young people who were able to give birth to a new way of making movies. Among them, Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette, Agnès Varda, Jean Rouch, Éric Rohmer and Alain Resnais himself stood out.

The movement emerged as an anti-academic response. And under a cultural policy of protection and aid to the cinema and the arts had a prolific manifestation. So far, French cinema had submitted, as in most countries, to the dictatorship of the public and the box office, its investors and the money raised. Therefore, the initiative sponsored by the mandate of the culture minister André Malraux granted the new filmmakers the freedom needed to undertake with the right company: a renewed France after the wars. The combination of the economic impulse (the revolution du petit budget, as the film critic René Prédal called it) and a certain protectionism to the creation that was granted from the state were key to its success. La Nouvelle Vague became the mark of the V<sup>a</sup> République. These cultural budgets helped the production of a cinema that dreamed of the films of Roberto Rossellini, Alfred Hitchcock or Howard Hawks and with which he did not spare himself to achieve the intended results. However, the directors had their own ideology that was far from Hollywood. In fact, the filmmakers of the Nouvelle Vague were defined as being anti-warmongering, anti-imperialist leftist intellectuals, even some headed towards communist tendencies (mainly, Maoists). Most of them had cultivated their gaze by watching movies, analyzing it and learning from it. And finally, they ended up writing about him in the well-known Cahiers du cinéma. This group of filmmakers linked to the magazine also represented the rive gauche. That is, a bohemian, artistic and intellectual way of life on the left side of the Seine. Then we could say that they formed a certain stupid movement (bourgeois-bohème) although their position would be about to be transformed by the political and social events of the 60s. Therefore, although they possessed a high Hollywood reference level, their ways were closer to neorealism “La nouvelle vague marks an important intrusion of the French film français dont toute l'histoire est d'ailleurs celle d'une impossible quête du réalisme (“réalisme poétique”, “nouvelle vague”, “nouveau naturel”...).” And this impossibility of

the real was announced as the contradictions of a cinema in constant transformation where the reversal of the roles began to stand out as a consequence.

According to the studies of French film specialist René Prédal, when the republic changed the cinema as a result, it did so with it. However, it was mainly because of the eyes of its filmmakers that it had already changed. This was already another. The new generation, the new wave had its own point of view on reality. Therefore, following Prédal's thesis it would not be so much a change of style, but a visual conception of how to see the world. And that meant that the representation of this look had to be created. Therefore, the study was abandoned and began to roll in the street. A clear, simple and realistic way in which to film reality was sought. A look that came from the author. "Les auteurs pensent davantage à s'exprimer qu'à gagner le public et la création personnelle replace les règles éprouvées de la dramaturgie". From this specific moment, the origins of the concept of "author's cinema" come. A term that today is associated with the idiosyncrasy of the artist. That is, freedom of creation, thought and action. The directors had been able to privilege making the cinema they wanted before a commercial cinema, since they did not have to worry about the box office thanks to the budgets of the Ministry of Culture. This meant that a movie was not produced to please the public but to show that look built by the director.

Faced with this idea of building the gaze, the idea of a great creator who innovated according to his temperament and sensations on the scene has been cultivated. It has been tried to see in the cinema of the Nouvelle Vague an improvisation cinema that is not as it has been observed. There is evidence on how the shootings were, on how the story was built from the work with the actors, all to give more naturalness and more realism to the scenes. In fact, Jacques Rivette put the denomination *metteur en scène*

(stage director) before the author. And it is that in some way some came closer to a reformulation of the acting work than to the reconstruction of the scenery itself, the care of the photography or the innovation of the script. However, what we cannot forget is that their gaze was shaped through a completely literary language. In this way, we could say that this cinema was built using a language of writers. Because they were writers themselves.

If we pay attention to the cultural complexity of the time we could talk about a certain flowering in all aspects of the artistic life of the 50s. From the fashionable maisons of the French capital, through the recognition of the artists who had survived the World War II, until reaching the great importance of the transformations that occurred in the field of literature and thought. A new writing appears in mid-century France with the intention of questioning the heritage of the classic novel, as well as under the attempt to cease the experience of impoverishment that led to the two great wars. In this way, the new way of narrating present in the nouveau roman influenced the structural approach of the 50's cinema in France. The transformations subject to the new writing (changes in the plot, the scenarios, the context, the characters and the action) were evidenced in the cinematography. In such a way that some directors counted as scriptwriters with the writers who had pierced the canons of the classic novel. Such was the case of Alain Resnais who invited Marguerite Duras (*Hiroshima mon amour*), Alain Robbe-Grillet (*L'année dernière à Marienbad*), Jean Cayrol (*Toute la mémoire du monde*), Jorge Semprún (*Nuit*) to work on his scripts et brouillard) and Jacques Sternberg (*Je t'aime, je t'aime*).

Another of the points in contact of the authors of the Nouvelle Vague was in their political situation. Heirs of the malaise and torment of the two wars, their positioning

went to the left. One of the projects that united a great part of the intellectuals and filmmakers of that moment was *Loin de Vietnam*. A documentary and choral film directed by Chris Marker that featured the works of Agnès Varda, Jean-Luc Godard, Alain Resnais, Claude Lelouch or Jacques Sternberg, to name a few. This premiered at the Montreal festival in 1967. However, although the positioning of these directors was vindictive, their weight as "authors" made them move to another place in the cultural events of the country. If we continue thinking about the case of Alain Resnais, we can observe this split with the political approaches that would imminently occur in France. After the premiere of *Loin de Vietnam*, a few months later, Alain Resnais began filming *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (1968). This film was placed in an equidistant plane to the brightness of May 68 as well as other films of the Nouvelle Vague that at this time tended to science fiction. They would certainly highlight the films *La Jetée* by Chris Marker (1963), *Alphaville* (1964) by Jean-Luc Godard or *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) by François Truffaut. This perseverance in the literature seemed disconnected from the radical action of the 1968 demonstrations.

May 68 was the consequent development of a series of protests shackled. These started in the universities. The students initiated the demonstrations against the consumer society and the status quo in which a capitalization of the media reigned against the workers, the working class or the migrants. The student leadership was joined by the industrial workers revolt, the workers unions and the French Communist Party becoming the largest general strike in the history of France. This rejection of a class society was constituted under a common working formula that was manifested in the cinema through a directly political relationship and a collective practice of its use.

The revolutionary character of '68 with its own cultural manifestations, some influenced by the hippy character, countercultural currents and the situationist movement, revealed a departure from the cinematographic approach of the Nouvelle Vague. This had been confined to that denomination, nothing pleasing at this precise moment, of silly cinema and that in the new decade and before the new proposals of militant cinema it would end up relegated to fiction. Under this approach the aspect that some authors had taken as Resnais seemed completely removed from the foundations of a new cinema policy. Meanwhile, the revolution was intended to develop a cinema of collective experience, Resnais maintained a maximum desire that his films would “make a kind of dramatic development that was extremely clear and sensitive for the spectators but that, however, did not cut the roots that I hope I have preserved surrealism and automatic writing.” The novelesque character, in the sense of the nouveau roman, with which *Je t'aime* was pregnant, *je t'aime* evidently did not help its reception, although as Esteve Rimbaud indicates the film “speaks only of overcoming the frustration everyday through a double alternative”. The lack of understanding about this film made Resnais, as Jordi Costa assures, return to a more conventional and conspicuous political thematic story with the help of Semprún in writing the script for *Stavisky* (1973).

Then we wonder what sense, almost forty years after its premiere, bring to light this movie. *Je t'aime, je t'aime* is a strange film. Today it still is. The genius of the script, the construction of the completely fragmented visual narrative and the unusual present tense of memory mean that its appeal is not lost a bit. And so we contemplate it in *Moment Memory Monument* by Georgina Starr. It is also true that, as happened in the decade of the 50s of the last century, currently a new critical literature is gaining an important force. Based on literary fiction, on the roots of the Roman nouveau and

cyberpunk of the 80s, fiction theory engages the reader towards a deconstruction of reality through the forms of fiction. Therefore, it is increasingly common that among artists, literary and cinematographic forms of a fictional nature become more important. And it is in this line the artistic activity of Georgina Starr could be understood. While it is true that for her work in the field of fiction is not a novelty. Starr could be taken as one of the examples to be studied in which fiction theory is developed in the visual arts. In fact, her artistic production begins in the 90s and evolves to the present with projects in which cinema, literature, writing and performance are key to the continuity of fiction. As in the case of the authors of the Nouvelle Vague it has persisted in a way of doing that can sometimes be cryptic and misunderstood by its strong consistency in the field of fiction.

To understand all this, let's better analyze *Moment Memory Monument* and the weight of Alain Resnais and Jacques Rivette in this piece. As we described at the beginning *Moment Memory Monument* is an installation that evokes the scientific laboratory in which it is experimented with a time machine. The experiment is told in the script by Jacques Sternberg: "The first Time Travel. A short trip, a short round trip: to be projected for a minute in the past. The experiment was tried hundreds of times with mice, never with a man". And this chosen man will be Claude Ridder. A man who has survived the suicide attempt: "It is rare to see that it will come back from itself. C'est précisément ce nous cherchons ". But in the course of the experiment something breaks down and Ridder falls in time, going from one second to another, from year to year, without a specific order. His memories, the experiences that are revived in the present no longer continue with the space-time logic. Now he has been imprisoned in the time of a past lived in the present from which he cannot escape. And he only seems to find in that first memory that is accessed through the sphere, its emergence from the sea off

the coast of Azur on September 15, 1967, a moment of peace. But emerge or submerge? The lack of control of the machine indicates that the movements change and Ridder no longer seems to be reborn at that moment but to dive deeper into the past and the intrigue of the story.

However, *Je t'aime, je t'aime* is a love story. Or rather, the obsession of a love. Claude Ridder falls in love with Catrine who dies in strange circumstances that will take different explanations along the memory fragments and the jumps in time that occur in the machine. In fact, this story could be understood as a search for memories about Catrine. Since it is Ridder's memories that create Catrine. She exists as an appearance or as a mental construct. Beyond that, Catrine does not exist and has not existed. The obsession from the first moment causes Ridder to focus on a relationship that is dead before birth. This character is a faint-hearted, gray guy, with a general discontent impossible to satisfy. She is lost by a disease that makes it impossible for her to live in reality. That depression he seems to have may not be with him. Or at least, it is what makes us think. Normally in the official critics and comments on this film never talk about it. In fact, the interpretations to date have spoken that she has some kind of imbalance that leads her to melancholy. His lack of appetite for life or love is considered an impossibility, a tare of the young woman in front of Ridder. And yet, it does not fall back on the obsessive, manipulative and selfish way of it. What if she was just a fantasy?

Like the fantasy of any man to dominate a woman. Or maybe the memory of someone who never possessed. And yet she reveals herself as a broken dream, she is broken. It doesn't work for love, that's why Ridder should look for other female companies.

Knowing this, Catrine does not want to assume the other relationships and the distance grows more between them. He cannot live with her, but also without her. In an

interview with Alain Resnais during the cycle held on his career at the Cinemateca Portuguesa in 1992, we found some comments on this about the deceptive figure of Ridder. In fact, if we look at the evolution - if we can call it that - of Ridder's character throughout the course of the film, he loses credibility in each scene. Who is Ridder? It's so similar to that guy we all know! Meanwhile, this becomes an object of uncontrolled study for researchers. Perhaps because the mismatched machine makes visible the mechanisms of our mind and our memory: a fragile mixture between desire and reality, between fantasy and disappointment, between fear and oblivion. "While *Je t'aime, je t'aime* is situated at the confluence of two forms of imagination: retroactive and prospective, so Ridder dreams are existence upstream, that is to say, in the present, another dimension of his life".

In the Georgina Starr installation, the laboratory and the time machine are recreated. In such a way that we could consider that it is done with the same intention that is granted to Alain Resnais. " The theme of the time machine is just a convenient way to materialize memory, and the fantastic is already well enough in our daily lives ".

Therefore, Starr invites us to enter this great brain. The experience, as in the experiment that Ridder undergoes in the film, must be personal and lonely. Thus, the audience is arranged in isolation to surrender to the machine. Inside, identical to that of the film, one frees themselves from the circumstances of the outside and puts themselves in a situation to move to another level of consciousness: memory. A voice induces us to this mental movement. The voice transports us to a labyrinth, a mental space, which moves away from the physical of our bodies. The text that interprets the female voice reminds us of the one that Giorgio Albertazzi once made famous; that hypnotizing text, under the script of Alain Robbe-Grillet, with which the film *L'année dernière à Marienbad* opens.

Beyond the readjustment of the time machine of *Je t'aime, je t'aime* for *Moment Memory Monument*, there is a special interest in Georgina Starr's trajectory for the mechanisms of the mind and for its representation as a brain. In fact, it is very significant that on her website the image of a drawn brain offers us a situational plan of the different works of the artist. In the same way, it is not accidental that one of his most recent works, *Before Le Cerveau Affamé* (2013), has as its protagonist in the performance a huge brain that is transported by a group of young women who place it in the center of the room next to other brains of different sizes. Images of the brain that are repeated in the drawings of a special tarot deck, since it tells the matriarchal history of the spheres, bubbles and bubblegum with which a group of women experience.

However, as we said before and without losing sight of the analysis that we are interested in highlighting in Georgina Starr's work, *Moment Memory Monument* is an installation but also a performance that is activated, not only through the public that travels in the labyrinths of your mind, but for a series of characters. The main characters are under the duality of two cosmic beings: Daughters of the Sun and the Moon. These are accompanied by humans who are hypnotized under their powers and who in turn study The Sphere's behaviors like the scientists in the Alain Resnais movie. A closer study of the Daughters of the Sun and the Moon make us turn, again, towards the cinema of the Nouvelle Vague. Or rather the films that were made after the time of hatching of the Nouvelle Vague. As we have pointed out above, the paths of the authors of this movement took different directions. One of the most divergent cases was that of Jacques Rivette, head of Cahiers du cinema for a long time, which produced an elaborate experimental cinematography.

The cinema of Jacques Rivette (1928-2016) is characterized by an improvisation in the work of the actors that are conducted through that *metteur en scène*. The direction of a good acting interpretation, as well as the lack of the time limit (his films could last between two and thirteen hours) made the figure of Rivette an extravagant filmmaker, closer to theatrical action than to the canonical cinema. But it was not only his way of making films, but the themes and the mix of genres that led to this production that marked his career. Among his best-known films include *Paris nous appartient* (1960), *La Religieuse* (1966), *L'Amour fou* (1969), the exception of thirteen hours of *Out 1* (1971) or *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* (1974). The latter would serve as an introduction to some of the inflection points that would be developed in *Duelle* (1976) and *Noroît* (1976). If we focus on these last two, it is because they belong to an unfinished cycle of four films that the French director called *Les filles du feu* (The Daughters of Fire). Plagued with magic, wraiths and double lives, Jacques Rivette's fictions deepened the limits of the phantasmagoric by leaning across the mirror. In fact, the multiplication of personalities, the unfolding of the self and the dualities seem the habits of this filmmaker. And it is in *Duelle* where they seem to come alive intensely.

As in *Je t'aime, je t'aime* there is a split in the title. While in the first the word is repeated as the protagonist's memories, in *Duelle* it unfolds in its meaning. On the one hand, it means dual and, on the other, duel. In addition, *Duelle* is split into female. The original French word is *duel* that displays the "l" repeating it to turn the duel and duality into a struggle of women for power. Since *Duelle* is the story of a struggle for mastery of the cosmos. A fight embodied by the powers of the Daughter of the Moon (Leni, played by Juliet Berto) and the Daughter of the Sun (Viva, played by Bulle Ogier). As antagonists they represent night and day, light and darkness. In their transformation during the moments when they fight against each other they abandon their *prêt à porter* costumes

for a silver and gold dress respectively. Both intend to reach the conquest by possessing a powerful stone that would lead to victory over the other. To do this they will use at will the humans they find in their path. The film conjures different genres based on the detective film noir in which the protagonists seek the stone through research. In addition, both the Daughter of the Moon and the Daughter of the Sun play different roles throughout the film by unfolding their personalities in the conquest of power. Roles that could have been taken from a classic movie manual; those of the MRI (Mode of Institutional Representation), but that in the hands of Rivette are confused in their unfolding. Mortals in turn duplicate their desires and instincts by passing from one another's hands like puppets in a wink. Despite this, a human will stand out among them: Lucie, played by Hermine Karagheuz, who holds the power of the diamond to end the earthly presence of both goddesses.

Georgina Starr takes up the characters of the Daughter of the Sun and the Daughter of the Moon, dresses them with retro-futuristic clothes in gold and silver as in Rivette's film and places them controlling the future of the machine. They invite the public to enter, they fight on stage under the same text of *Duelle*, they dance as in the dancing club, Le Rhumba, of the film and, finally, they possess the wills of the humans that perform around them. But something stands out among the performances performed in Milan and Besançon, in addition to Starr involving for the latter a greater number of performers who dance and act around the sphere by singing the recurring melody in the Resnais film. For the Frac Franche-Comte includes a very special character. La Lucie de *Duelle* returns to the scene forty-one years later. "Two and two don't make four. All the walls can be defeated. Seven, eight, nine, ... four, five, three. " (...) "The thirteen, at that time they will be salamanders." Starr invites Hermine Karagheuz to perform in France giving the performance scene more magic and spectral atmosphere. Thus, the British

artist brings to life two of the strangest films of the filmography of Resnais and Rivette in order to build a bold work in which fiction and real experience are mixed with the hidden and the extraordinary in a new work that would register these films in history. Perhaps Starr through *Moment Memory Monument* has exorcised *Je t'aime, je t'aime* and *Duelle* to restore the place they never got. Perhaps *Moment Memory Monument* is really a spell that goes beyond a parallel life.