

pere portabella

lorenza pignatti

Lorenza Pignatti: In the text *Historias sin argumento*, Santos Zunzunegui talks about a particular aspect of your film work—that of extraterritoriality. Do you agree with this reading?

Pere Portabella: Sure, I can perfectly see that. It concerns the opposition between realism/non-realism. I saw it as an excellent linguistic indication, which explains the position that I always put myself in: at the margins of situations, which doesn't mean being marginal. From the sidelines I was able to situate myself in a place where the artistic avant-garde, film practice, and political activity came together in an indissociable way. Pilar Parcerisas as well—writing about the synergies between my work as a cineaste with the poetry of Joan Brossa and the music of Carles Santos, both of whom I've worked with on numerous films—points out how important it is for different disciplines to

collide and meet, where the chance aspect of the encounters creates the desire to invent a new glance at reality.

LP: Your second-to-last film, *Pont de Varsavia/Pinte de Varsavia* (1989), is a reflection upon cinema and literature. The film is divided into two parts: in the first, a writer, after having won a literary award, writes the film version of his story. Only after about 20 minutes and after the credits have rolled, it seems that what one supposes to be the film of the story actually begins. How do you explain this shift between cinematic and literary dimensions, which seem almost to "vampirize" one another?

PP: Literature operates in the terrain of signs whereas the image is located much closer to statements. In one case, the discourse is monophonic, and in the other, polyphonic. Consequently, there are two absolutely different levels, since cinema requires a synthesis that is extraneous to literature. In cinema we have editing, movements, the camera's motion, dialogue, off-screen voices—which can generate an afilmic discourse—music, which can be subsidiary to the action or develop in an independent manner to the images that

incorporate it. In the same way, the sound does not have to comment solely on what's happening in the frame; instead, it must also suggest the off-screen space.

In *Puente de Varsavia*, I didn't want to create a sterile theoretical reflection. I tried to use all the narrative possibilities of association, evocation, and deconstruction to show an aspect of cinema that is very important to me. That of being able to reach a perceptive level that involves both the emotional sphere as well as the rational one. An emotional and conceptual striving that is the result of an aesthetic experience that comes from the visualization of the images. The diegetic development in *Puente de Varsavia* isn't based on a narrative dimension, but on the capacity of cinema itself to cover different metonymic and metaphorical levels, with actions parallel and tangential to those of the universe of poetry.

LP: *Cuadecuc-Vampir(91Q)* is probably your most known film. It's a sort of "making of" movie about the film *El conde Drácula*, which Jesús Franco was shooting at that time. The film has no dialogue; it's accompanied only by music composed by Carles Santos and is characterized by a strong tension between the filmic space and the "real" space, between fiction and the construction of fiction

PP: That's absolutely right. What happens off-screen is always intervening with the filmed image. The fact that each of these elements—whether the dialogue, music, or sound—can be eliminated to allow for a greater presence of the other doesn't impede the reading of the film. Rather, it constitutes its meaningful essence that we could call "negative realization." If the protagonists in a film are





speaking but you can't hear what they're saying, it's not correct to say that the film is lacking dialogue because it nonetheless maintains the meaningful essence. A bi-temporal aspect exists in cinema, a dislocation between the multiplicity attributable to real facts, when and if they happen, and cinema temporality.

LP: Although the film was made without funding from the Spanish State under Franco, it was able to circulate clandestinely in Spain and was screened at Cannes and then at MoMA in New York in 1972. And it is precisely MoMA that's preparing a retrospective on your work for next year. How do you explain this new attention on the part of art institutions towards your cinema?

PP: Let's say that after the exhibition at MACBA in Barcelona in 2001 there was a succession of invitations. First to Documental 1 in Kassel, then to the Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville, New York, the Philadelphia Museum, and the Pompidou in Paris.

-although my first films were made in the '70,

it was only in the '90 that a new generation of intellectuals rediscovered my work. I've always looked for a different form of expression, based more on ellipses and deconstruction rather than on classic Aristotelian narrative, founded on cause-and-effect relationships, which is typical of commercial cinema. Perhaps my multidisciplinary and polyphonic approach is much more contemporary now than 10 or 20 years ago. I restate the fact that I am a filmmaker, and not a video artist. Sure, I have worked with a lot of artists, with Joan Miró, with the Catalan Grup de Treball, a group of conceptual artists that has, for a long time now, questioned the role of art institutions and the art system. What I make is cinema, even if it's interesting to note this shifting of expressive arenas, the fact, that is, that it's not only cinema festivals that show my work—from Buenos Aires to Pesaro and the Festival du

cinéma du Réel in Paris—but also museums and exhibition spaces.

Pere Portabella was born in 1929 in Figueres. Some of his most famous films are *Nocturn 29* (1968), which is part of the collection of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, *Cuadecuc-Vampiri* (1970), and *Pont de Varsovia/Puente de Varsovia* (1989), both of which have been purchased by MoMA in New York.

▲ Pere Portabella on the / sul set di *No conteis con las dedos*, 1967.

▲ Pere Portabella *Pont de Varsovia/Puente de Varsovia*, 1989.