

Sight

My gaze pierces

The crystal ball, and the transparent bottom

Grows clear; my hand, by stirring, makes it,

Unintentionally, fleeting and wobbly;

It depicts an entire beach of sand

Now busy, brilliant; the weather is beautiful;

Odd and trifling flashes of light streak the water, Rounding off at the whim of the swell.

Raymond Roussel, *La Vue* ^[1]

The tone is set right from the very moment one sets foot in the Chapel where Marcel Dinahet's *À Château-Gontier* has been installed: the view has been blocked off, and it is not going to be easy to see, the viewer's gaze being forced to skirt the obstacle. For in effect, the doorway to the Genétiel Chapel has been visually obstructed by a grey drywall partition that one must sidestep to get into the building. The partition is in fact the back wall of a paralleloidal space, reminiscent of a large shipping container, occupying a good third of the chapel's depth, right in the middle; one gets inside through a vertical opening of the same width as between two of the studs of the drywall panel - 60 centimetres - opposite the partition standing in front of the entrance. Except for this doorway, the space is entirely closed in. Inside, facing this narrow entranceway, a video with sound is projected against the partition's entire surface; the beam of light from the video projector placed on the ground is thus pointed toward the building's exit, toward natural light. If one looks at the installation from a distance - say, from the far end of the nave - the portion of the electronic image cut off by both the vertical opening and a window thus takes the place of a natural view of the space which extends toward the outside, in front of the chapel.

These rather fastidious details are required in order to grasp to just what extent the question of visibility is at the very core of Marcel Dinahet's installation, and to what extent this question has been calculated with care; the installation is a vision machine, a modified *camera obscura*, a "view" enshrined in an installation, like the one in Raymond Roussel's pen holder. But what does one see, or more exactly, what does one catch sight of in these screened images?

In-between

Depending on when the viewer actually enters the chapel, he or she may hear either a very loud noise running through the container or merely silence. These two sound phases correspond to the two parts of the video which follow one upon the other in a loop. The town of Château-Gontier is the common site of the two sequences: a first part represents images of the town itself taken from the Mayenne River that runs through it, whereas the second shows images of calves mooing in the livestock hall, where its well-known market is held. The two sequences form a very striking contrast both in terms of sound and in terms of the motifs that have been filmed, the setup for the shots, and the playing times (5 minutes 30 for the first, 2 minutes 30 for the second). Do the images thus show two aspects of the town? Before we go any further, let's correct that error in terminology: nothing is shown here, because in order to show, a gaze, a point of view, an intention or a tension in the act of seeing is required. And these images seem to correspond to an entirely different logic: those showing the livestock hall are filmed with a handheld camera, with no particular attention to framing: metal fencing, bits of animal hides, ears and tails, human legs and so on flash by - details that show the camera's proximity to the situation. This vision - more haptic than optic - expresses the anguish and panic of the calves, whose terrible racket evokes the smell of death. "Until then, man was born of the mind, and I alone was the first to see things through his animal orifices,"^[2] writes Valère Novarina. This remark could be attributed to Marcel Dinahet, given how he adopts not merely the viewpoint of the "beast," but its perceptive and instinctive system as a whole.

Between the animal and the river, there is no transition, but rather a brutal cut, which allows the infernal sound to rush in and out, making way for the somewhat relative silence of the images of the in-between. Between water and air, Marcel Dinahet has habituated us to this strange place, where the gaze abandons itself to drifting, floating along the water line of his *Flottaisons* - bobbing between the above and the

below, between breathing and drowning, between the too-far-away and the too-close-up. And it's easy to see why: the camera's eye is actually in the water, protected by a diving chamber that the artist lets float about at the whim of the currents of the liquid mass. This distraction affecting the visible makes the image the locus of a variety of entirely singular optical events.

Going with the flow

Afloat in the water like a lurking hippopotamus, eyes peeled, the chamber bobs along at the float line. The latter is materialized at the image's surface, at its horizontal midpoint, by a narrow strip of electronic matter that separates the deep, viscous-looking water from the landscape and the sky behind it, which are pushed far into the background. Following the chamber's slight movements, the horizontal strip - the mark of genuine surface thickness - alternately pushes the image upward, then pulls it downward. The image dribbles, leaving a trail across the glass-screen. In this zone of turbulence, the image takes shape and consistency, stretches and contracts; like the world reflected in a droplet of water, it undergoes anamorphosis, and becomes so deformed that seeing distinctly becomes an exceptional event. Beneath the uneventful landscape of the town above, with its slate-roofed houses all in a row, its pruned trees and smoothly flowing traffic - that could be easily named inasmuch as its mode of representation is both known and recognized - there is a different, disfigured landscape, eaten away from underneath, by this opaque mass, sewer or cesspit, unnamable because unknown, the underside of things (their subconscious, their memory perhaps), that no event can further perturb. There is something of a calm before the storm, an appeal for turbulence, a desire to see what is concealed, what crouches and pulls back in this apparent anesthesia of things. Then the ruckus erupts, in all the sound and fury of animality: the business of living things, the economy of the region, the violence of the flesh.

Far from fitting into an aesthetics of the image taken as an autonomous whole, Marcel Dinahet's work is situated in the spacing of the images, in the entre-images as Raymond Bellour described those artistic practices in the 1980s which questioned the shifts between different image supports - photography, cinema, video - in an era where everything takes place on television. Avoiding the manifold formal temptations suggested by the medium - the famous video effect - Marcel Dinahet abstains from tampering with his images; it is the choice of the filming mechanism and its optical consequences which make it possible to renew the approach to the age-old but forever renewed question of visibility. Making use of the modern surveillance practices or of taking shots sight unseen - inherited from Michael Snow and Michael Klier - the artist stalks in the cracks and suspended points of the visible, that open again and forever onto the gaping spaces of seeing. The real shimmers and sometimes, between its slightly spread edges, allows a small territory to appear, where the body can be thought of in different terms.

Marcel Dinahet *transports* us (as the shipping container already suggested) toward an experience of seeing as a divestiture of the visible, and he does so by means of an image which seeks visibility; this he accomplishes by withdrawing his own gaze, eliminating any intentionality from his gaze, through a sort of regression. The camera, detached from the eye, touches the real *without knowing it*; it is the artist's installation - extending from the shot itself to the scenography of the exhibition, and including the shot lengths - which reorganises this chaos of the intention-free image, and which enables us to catch sight of visibility, thereby gaining an awareness of things and of their movement. The labour of art.

Françoise Parfait, 2002, Translated from the French by Stephen Wright.

[1] Extract. Éditions Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1963, p. 10. *La Vue* is a long poem by Raymond Roussel inspired by a small photograph inlaid into the case of the pen with which the author writes.

[2] *Le discours aux animaux*, P.O.L., 1987, p. 37.