

Ismael Monticelli: Ping eye drops

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The metalinguistic sophistication of Ismael Monticelli infiltrates perversity in the art system to eat away at the cynicism in the cultural field. Everything in the economy of symbolic exchanges in art[1] is subject to destabilization by Monticellian action: spectacularization of the image, the good soul, the patrons of the arts looking after their own pockets, the shopping mall curator, the prophets of industrial culture, the heroes of the form, the slyness of the white cube, the museum souvenir shops, corporative logic, the fetichization of art, artists and critics *phynanciers* of the *Avida dollars*. Nothing emerges through moralism, but rather through the demand for transparency that forms the basis of his ethics.

Monticelli notes that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology suggested theoretical bases that sustained the most extreme movement of Brazilian art; with neo-concretism, art attains the real condition of an autonomous language in the country[2]. The philosopher's ideas fed Ferreira Gullar's *Neoconcrete Manifesto* and *Theory of the Non-Object*; his reflections on the five senses wedge the presence of the subject into the objective structure of geometric art. Monticelli's *Merleau-Ponty's Eye Drops* (Colirio Merleau-Ponty) serves "to separate things from their manner of appearing."

A flashing *ping* image of Beckett appears, disappears and reappears seventy times[3] on glass slides. Blick. Languid single slow second. Ping, icy and monotone *pizzicato*, singsong in stunning, exhaustive, opaque, moribund white[4]. So many whites, the incessant switch from *Ping* to *Pong* – "Nude white body fixed white on invisible white" (*Ping* freely translated). What is reheard white? *Ut nihil non iisdem verbis redderetur auditum* – is in Plinio's *Naturalis historia* cited by Funes, in fact, Borges, for nothing that has been said can be said by the same words. This is what Monticelli and Adriano and Fernando Guimaraes' *Flash* (*Lampejo*) is like. If light is a metaphor for life (Lucretius, *De rerum natura*), in the intermezzo between living and dying, Beckett asks us to meander through murky passages, skotomic fields to the exhaustive limit of speech and of meaning[5].

The text-work is linguistic pleasure in Monticelli and his *Eye Drops* instructions leaflets and *Instructions manual for building landscapes at home* [*Manual de instruções para construir paisagens em casa*]. His arch encompasses art as *cosa mentale* developed with the *hostinato rigore* of Leonardo to the *Marcel Duchamp Eye Drops*, an optical solution “to make visible the dance of matter that hides itself from sight,” according to the leaflet. Monticelli is a Leonardesque Duchamp, in an art of acts of speech, which tackle the contemporary optical regime. The fiction *Pointers about how far a landscape can enter an eye* [*Apontamentos sobre o quanto de uma paisagem pode entrar em um olho*] reports on the experience of someone who gets home and recognises nothing there. He is missing the *Instruction Manual for building landscapes at home* by Monticelli, the anti-Xavier de Maistre of *A Journey Around my Room*, the ironic piece about eighteenth century travels. *Look the Eye Looking* [*Olhar o olho olhando*] is more than Narcissus in the mirror because it is not reflex, but reflexive action of the subject of the gaze.

The extensive debate of the hegemony of vision ranges from Plato to the century of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Derrida, Habermas and others (Martin Jay)[6]. In Monticelli’s ophthalmology, the crux of ocularcentrism lies in the disturbance of opaque vision, thus his philosophical *Eye Drops*. The etymology of *colírio* (eye drops, in Portuguese) underlines Monticelli’s nosology, which, not being neural, does not act on the eyeball, but rather on the *perceptio and the episteme*. The *Luis Borges Eye Drops* are recommended “to develop categories for all things” and the *Carlos Asp Eye Drops* “to presentify the absent.” Their instruction leaflets follow the pharmacological standard of *Vomistop* [7], an alert for empty criticism and the symptoms of anthropoemia, the vomit of differences in Levi-Strauss’ *Sad Tropics*[8].

The first Brazilian constructive generation[9] establishes concepts (concrete and neoconcrete concepts in *Penetrable Structures for Wild Mice [tiny obsession]* [*Estruturas penetráveis para ratos selvagens [obsessão miúda]*]); the second expands the field (Ascanio MMM, Sergio Camargo, Anna Maria Maiolino, Cildo Meireles); the third merges with conceptualism (Jac Leirner); the fourth is porous to social crisis with the urbanistic entropy of Joana Cseko, the politics of historicity of Monticelli, the cartography of Marina Camargo, the geometry of violence of Igor Vidor[10]. Monticelli appropriates nothing through formalism nor does he gratuitously cite any artist, but he opens ethical-aesthetic problems handed down from them, just as Clark and Oiticica did with Mondrian and

Malevich. What was distressing for Clark[11] is pleasurable for Monticelli, who deplores it when experience falls asleep. His antidote: reactivate the neoconcrete theoretical nucleus, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, the modulation and notion of structure. Monticelli's *opus* (see Instruction Leaflets) clashes with the mechanized perception of Pavlovian spectators conditioned like dogs. One remedy: *Luis Borges Eye Drops*, recommended "to develop categories for all things." By the logic of the dogs, in the Focus Award, the *Penetrable Structures for Wild Mice [tiny obsession]* are arranged in the style of Oiticica's *Hunting Dogs Project*.

The library and bookstore mice have evolved into mice of the fairs and galleries market. It is something of a genesis of the *Penetrable Structures for Wild Mice* which reinterpret the concrete artists (like one of Waldemar Cordeiro's *Popcretos*) and the exemplary selection of neoconcrete artists from the planar adventure of Helio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Aluisio Carvao, Franz Weissmann, Amilcar de Castro and Osmar Dillon[12]. Monticelli skillfully guides the passage from the biplanar of neoconcrete objects to the three-dimensional condition and then into the environmental model of Oiticica's *Penetrables*. The *Penetrable Structures* retrieve the neoconcrete poetics of the plane and colour, in reverting to the planar dimension[13] with Clark (*Cocoon and Creature*), Oiticica (*Spatial Reliefs*) and Castro (cut and fold sculpture), worldwide pioneers in this matter. Penetrability in Monticelli is spatial until taking on the condition of conceptual and political place, hence the model is *Invention of Colour, Penetrable Magic Square #5* of the phenomenological Oiticica in his singing colours. Monticelli engages the architectural unconscious, which is an extract of the "general constructive will" of Brazil, which implies the desire of solidity and poetic logic, says Oiticica[14]. This Monticelli for wild mice is a better historian than an a-phenomenological Lorenzo Mammi, whose opaque eye feels entitled, through its Sao Paulo-centric perspective, to disappear with the so delicate and significant differences between the concretists and neoconcretists, which he homogenized in the show *A raiz da forma*.

The metacritical model of *Penetrable Structures for Wild Mice* is an allegory of the gaze. What place do mice have in contemporary art? Erosion, relegation, repugnance? Not for Monticelli. The virulent invasion of network sanitization, principle of the space of modernity; might this be contamination of the sublime by scatology? And why not a hare, wolves, or dogs?

In John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, the big farmworker Lennie watched a dead mouse. In *Penetrable Structures*, mice, by way of representation (without the humanized bias of Mickey), invade the open work. Monticelli's rodents are hybrids of wolf and hare. In the *Jungle Book*, by Rudyard Kipling, the boy Mowgli is adopted by wolves and must readapt to his human condition. If Josef Beuys explained art to a dead hare (*Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt*), Monticelli, author of *Instruction manual for the capture of wild mice and their introduction into color experiences*, proposes a sensorial model for perceiving art in which, by conceptual phylogenesis, compares the biobehavioural traits of the rodents to those of visitors to the museum. Mice are "restless animals that get bored easily"[15], have dual vision; each eye moves in a different direction. After all, the *Structures* deals with visual illiteracy and limitations of the human species. The bright colour of the *Structures*, like Oiticica's *Magic Square*, is correlated to the sharp colour vision of mice, whose visual range reaches ultraviolet, invisible to man. The National Human Genome Research Institute compared the samples of human genes to the DNA of twelve animals (from monkeys to fish) and concluded that man is closer to rodents than to carnivores, as asserted by Eric Green: "In the gene sequences, we can find changes that occurred in the genome of humans and of rodents, but not other animals." In *Of rats and men*, Simon Twigger treats the rat as a genomic model in the study of man[16]. The humanity of rats or mice, like the tiny obsession, comes out of *Os ratos* by Dyonelio Machado, the gaucho novelist who discusses poverty[17]. One suspect's inversion has occurred in the *Penetrable structures for wild mice*, as if men were the guinea pigs for the mice.

[1] BOURDIEU, Pierre. *A economia das trocas simbólicas*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2003.

[2] HERKENHOFF, Paulo. *Poética da percepção*. Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, 2008.

[3] I paraphrase Louise Bourgeois from *I do, I undo, I redo*.

[4] KOPPSCHITZ, Maria Helena. "Sobre Ping de Samuel Beckett". In: MUTRAN, Munira (Org.). *Guirlanda de histórias: uma antologia do conto irlandês*. São Paulo: Olavobras/ABEI, 1996. p. 175. Apud Monticelli.

[5] See HERKENHOFF, Paulo. "Miroslaw Bałka, the illuminating darkness of *How It Is*". In: SAINSBURY, Helen (Org.). *Miroslaw Bałka, How It Is*. London: Tate Gallery, 2009. p. 50-105.

- [6] JAY, Martin. "Derrida and the closure of vision". In: LEVIN, David Michael (Org.). *Modernity and the hegemony of vision*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- [7] The box uses the logo of Moura Brasil eye drops.
- [8] LEVI-STRAUSS, Claude. *Tristes trópicos*. Trans. Wilson Martins. Sao Paulo: Anhembi, 1957. p. 414-415.
- [9] AMARAL, Aracy (Coord.). *Projeto construtivo brasileiro na arte (1950-1962)*. Rio de Janeiro: MEC/Funarte/Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 1977.
- [10] Apropos this periodization, see HERKENHOFF, Paulo. *Ascânio MMM: poética da razão*. São Paulo: BEI, 2012.
- [11] Lygia Clark, Carta a Mondrian (1959): "Voce ja sabe que eu continuo o seu problema, que e penoso."
- [12] Only Decio Vieira is missing from the cast.
- [13] ROWELL, Margit. "The planar dimension 1912-1932: from surfasse to space". In: *The Planar Dimension, Europe 1912-1932*. New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1979. p. 9.
- [14] OITICICA, Helio. "Esquema geral da nova objetividade". In: *Nova objetividade brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 1967.
- [15] Ismael Monticelli in email to the author on 27 April 2018, including the Eric Green quotes. Monticelli had prepared these reflections for Bernardo Mosqueira, the curator who introduced the artist's work to me.
- [16] TWIGGER, Simon. "Of rats and men". *Genome Biology*, v. 5, n. 3, 2004. Available at: <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC395761/>>.
- [17] PASSOS, Cleusa Pinheiro. "A obsessao miuda em Os ratos de Dyonelio Machado". *Língua e Literatura*, v. 17, 1989. Available at: <<https://www.revistas.usp.br/linguaeliteratura/article/view/114008>>.

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