

## Socius

### I

Inevitably the work programme on an island will eventually lead to insularity. This attitude does not have the same root as the one that obsesses a mainlander desirous of isolating a fraction of experimental territory. Rather it is based on an obvious vulnerability, an apparent malleability that places the island in a state of constant contradiction, which must continuously be negotiated by the islanders. An island is, therefore, always being tested, always at the trial stage. Each exploration or movement aimed at delving into or unravelling something will underline the main feature of any research carried out on an island as a mere prototype.

It is, then, easy to understand Sloterdijk's desire to tauten the relationship between what he calls firm land culture and island existence in order to establish that same dichotomy in relation to the island itself: "isolate it to see it benefiting the experiment. Not as a prototype of the world but as a prototype of an island".<sup>1</sup> This effect is unnecessary while the island produces variations of itself and not toned down models of the world. With a breakdown in the correspondence that relates both worlds as rule and exception, version and perversion, the island surfaces as a succession of possibilities incapable of functioning as the prototype of anything else.

The failed premisses of modernity in the shape of island Utopianisms confirm this intuition because, before furnishing evidence that "societies" are possible in general, they introduce the cynical suspicion of their impossibility without "correctors", whether on an island or inshore. This naive polarization between the isolated and the continuous contributes to the emergence of interesting nuances of what happens on islands.

The key to the essential redundancy of the island was argued by Deleuze on the subject of a second beginning implicit in the abandoned island. He writes: "First, it is true that from the deserted island it is not creation but re-creation, not a beginning but a re-beginning that takes place. The deserted island is the origin, but a second origin. From it everything begins anew".<sup>2</sup> Deleuze establishes the guideline when he indicates that the second moment does not succeed the first, but is its reappearance: "The second origin is thus more essential than the first, since it gives us the law of repetition, the law of the series whose first origin gave us only

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, "Insulamientos. Para una teoría de las cápsulas, islas e invernaderos", *Esfemas III* (Spheres), Siruela, Madrid, 2006, p. 239

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Causas y razones de las islas desiertas" in *La isla desierta y otros textos. Textos y entrevistas (1953-1974)* (Desert Islands and Other Texts). Spanish translation by José Luís Pardo. Ed. Pre-textos Valencia 2005, p. 19

moments”.<sup>3</sup> So then repetition is a new origin, a beginning that explains origin itself and that, by establishing a sequence, enables the delivery of meaning.

Dispensing with the restrictions stemming from functioning in a similar way on an island, attempting to constitute models in relation to terra firma, compels taking action on the island itself, while trapped in a baroque modulation machine set in continuous modulation.

But this functional tautology does not absolve the island, at least formally, of its condition as a social laboratory, which is the main reason for declaring it an experimental zone. European modernity has based the island metaphor on the puritan experience of the *administered island* and its “idealized insular, mean gospel of private property”.<sup>4</sup> However, on any *oceanic island* a different experience is perceived, which qualifies the *administered island* without being rid of it. Echoes still of early American baroque that was accompanied by an inaugural meaning and was rather more than the mere *mise en scène* for the evangelization of the continent. The organization was transferred to a new ideal order transformed into ideological baroque by the actions of the Jesuits: “... work in groups, *the evangelical dream of collectivity*, cellular organization of an ideal order: architectural projects, community studies and plans, rational and accurate cities, paradigm of the Phalanstère”.<sup>5</sup> Aesthetic metonymy become rules and regulations, transformed into assistance for the *new system*, absolved from its game and now re-invented to establish an administration and a hierarchy. History does not fail to repeat this phagocytosis during which order uses and deforms the staging of a foundational art.

Such resonances shake the metaphorical bottom of the island that then becomes an antithetical well: radical Calvinism and apologetic Catholicism make up the virulent strata on which the foundations of the inaugural fiction of the *oceanic island* are laid.

The main motivation on the island would therefore not be a desire to found new models for general application, since the conditions of isolation are insufficient and are either determined from within or are the same as always. But the conditions as a potential laboratory persist: the seductive sensation of malleability, the opportunity to exert control, the fascination and illusion of ruling over an enclosed territory, therefore implying absolute rule, and the promise of guaranteeing suitable conditions for positive results, bear witness to the vulnerability of islands exposed to all manner of whims or fantasies.

The paradox is that it is precisely this propensity to start from scratch and the visibility of being a laboratory that results in a system of prevention. It then produces variations of itself, since it is contained and constrained, thereby

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.20

<sup>4</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, on the novel by Daniel Defoe *Robinson Crusoe*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 237

<sup>5</sup> Severo Sarduy. “Barroco furioso”, *La simulación*, Monte Ávila Editores, Caracas. 1982, p 77-82. Speaking of a singular correspondence between metropolitan culture, the reality of the colony and Jesuit action, which accelerated a baroque of Latin American “origin”.

generating an apparently autonomous and intrinsic own entity. And it is this form that is conducive to the functioning of the modulation machine. A kind of metonymic displacement in which it is possible to gloss over signifiers that at intervals are incomplete, but from which a full meaning emerges thanks to the variation continuum. A paradox of proximity in which nothing is guaranteed and everything becomes a positive uncertainty. An opportunity on the island to decompose, fortunately, the perpetually variable pattern.

The experience of mysticism through landscape and the sublime, which has engendered modern identity and has eventually broken down into the bourgeois experience of tourism, just here on the frontier, at the epiphanic conjunction of sky-sea and subtropical land, has spawned a harmful species, an animal of idealizing exaltation of the island. Deleuze insists: "Dreaming of islands—whether with joy, or in fear, it doesn't matter—is dreaming of pulling away, of being already separate, [...] of being lost and alone, or is it dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew".<sup>6</sup> Both movements contain tenuous tinges of fatality perceived from the *oceanic island* precisely because it is supported on illusory and deceitful variations of the island. We stand before the tiny remote island, out of sight and forgotten, the germ of primary experiment.

The desire to return to a radical and absolute origin unleashes the potential dangers that lie in wait within, in particular intolerant Utopianism in the guise of political island dreams. A Utopianism of theological shades, which establishes an origin, invents an awareness of legitimacy and then produces automatic or affected distributions or regulations. Critical stimulation is also severed or dissolves before the veil of a mythical refoundation.

The impulse towards separation and being alone on the island is accompanied by a subtle atmosphere of a garrison town, which imposes a deep-seated conduct that has matured over time. A kind of internalization of disciplinary methods and control exerted over a population destined to live in remote places, somewhat similar to the methodical harshness of life in a top position. Militarization, civil servants at their posting.

Under the appearance of a fortress, a system of removal and inclusion is imposed. On the island, the population is prone to subjugation because of the nature of its exclusion. The opposite movement, the reflux, is a consequence of such subjugation, which continues under the collective hypnosis of the identitary.

It seems inevitable to derive meaning from the insular. Moreover, the geographical singularity of an island exacerbates a psychological feeling of having a distinct character and own identity, sliding it towards social metaphor, which, in its continuous proliferation then becomes a system of exploration. The production of metaphors about islands is an observation machine.

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<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Op. Cit.*, p. 16

## II

If every island metaphor is a reinvention of the observation machine, we should not be surprised if some day we see the observer, burdened by metaphor, sit on a rock and watch the sea, trying to escape the island and such saturation. We have to clear the gaze masked by traces of reification of the landscape. Hardened territory, over-objectified by the overlapping of alluring images and industrial topics that distribute the exotic along with large doses of clichés and interchangeable material. There is nothing so similar, so indistinct as the fantasy of tourism.

The oceanic island is perceived as an *extreme island*, its “original” references have been exponentially signalled, expanded and overcoded. The tourist clichés of freedom, leisure, adventure, nature and landscape, and access to high consumption and sophisticated hotel retreats give rise to a kind of demented island experience. Thus the island is perceived as an agglomeration of superimposed representations in a kind of *magnified reality*. The direct or indirect view of a real physical setting combines with a series of features and experiences that add information by overprinting details onto the real world.

Seeing is not a neutral action; in any case, it is a complex, culturally and politically constructed act, but on the *extreme island* what is involved is the production of *consumption gazes*, standard gazes or a production of entertainment gazes for the tourist industry.

Looking entails doing so over gazes that linger over the territory, composing a textual layer that with time has adapted to the terrain, forming a skin that is difficult to peel away. The *extreme island* is the result of superimposing all possibilities, not as an exercise in speculation, but as the alienation of the “island experience”, which is the residual product of an industrialized context, symbolic overproduction adhered to the territory. Looking beyond in order to de-territorialize the island, to see it detachedly, as in a mirror, is another way of seeing it whole.

Looking towards the interior is to look at the island, and looking beyond is also to look at the island because there is a yonder in relation to it. Sitting down to look beyond and at the sea, that outside desert that, through its closeness, distances and brings otherness closer, is also to look at a shining wall that returns our own image—the mirror. Once again it is the story of narcissistic fantasy: the desire to observe one’s own image, which is transformed into the desire to be observed, but with the brilliance that this idea acquires when Lacan describes the founding process of the individual in the mirror phase, describing it as *pulsion escopique* or scopic drive and pinpointing the social implication of such speculation. Lacan explains: “What is involved in the drive is making oneself seen.

The activity of the drive is concentrated in this making oneself.<sup>7</sup> It consists of incorporating the gaze and the voice in early recognition. The mother is already involved in the perception the child has of itself, she is present to sustain it. The inaugural symbolic operation that decides the advent of the individual through language occurs under the imaginary gaze of the other. The outcome is the location of the individual in the field of the other, the social. From then on, scopical drive associated with the gaze essentially involves the constitution of the individual in relation to others.<sup>8</sup>

Projecting a trope beyond the island, which then, like a mirror, reflects the referent off camera, to investigate from that point, covering the entire distance and with no other blind spot than the observer. Perhaps the meeting of a single gaze, which loses all reference to origin in its specular transit, slackens the perceptive machine at the point where abstract machine slips in. It is the temptation of the maritime face—de-territorialization.

The details of a face are gradually revealed, achieving a harmonious mixture of critical drawing, observation, metaphor and uncertainty. It is then that expressive identification emerges, revitalizing the place.

There is nothing to explain, nothing to interpret, just the machine sliding over the complementary relationship of *face-landscape*, a crossroads of semiotics that momentarily re-invents landscape as face.

This process of over-encoding appears to be related to the imaginary gaze of the other in Lacan's mirror phase, although there it refers to a form of subjectivity and no attempt is made for it to seem like a face or an ideal face.

The question is to point out that the circumstances that trigger the formation of face are situated on the side of power, though it is not a question of ideology but of economy and organization of power. A spontaneous displacement over the meeting of specular gazes that entangle territory and social body: "certain social formations need face and also landscape".<sup>9</sup> Thus we discover that the social formation of the island is a prototype (and its variant: experimentation zone) compared with non-island territories. Their demand for a face, a demand that leads to its invention.

As we have already said, a distinguishing perception in relation to the island's isolating geographical singularity is accentuated and so face furtively slips

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<sup>7</sup> Jacques Lacan, "La esquizia del ojo y de la mirada", in *Seminario 11, Los cuatro conceptos fundamentales del psicoanálisis*, (The Four Fundamental Concepts), editorial Paidós, Buenos Aires, 1987, p. 202.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. Rosa Aksenjuk, "Esquizia de la mirada y pulsión escópica en Lacan", in *Revista de Observaciones filosóficas*, no. 5, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Año cero-Rostridad" (Year-Zero: Faciality) In *Mil mesetas. Capitalismo y esquizofrenia* (1980) (A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia), Ed. Pre-Textos, Valencia, 1994. p. 185.

into place as a correlate of the landscape. The gaze held over the glass-like sea, now become a despotic gaze in its reflection, setting in motion an *inscription machine*, in a social production of face, this time *maritime subjective authoritarian face*,<sup>10</sup> in any case a redundant face.

The face is therefore a policy and its correlate becomes landscape exercises or compositions of place or as Foucault said: “Horizon is a pictorial but also a strategic notion”.<sup>11</sup> If we define power, as indeed Foucault did, as the implantation of a principle and of frontiers over free subjects, the modified and re-invented horizon and landscape are sources of power; they are strategies to demarcate the individual, lines that warn, stipulate, fence in or distort a territory or a horizon. This strategy culminates in a premeditated landscape where unwarned observers ignore the demarcations and signals because they have already incorporated them and coexist with them. In this way territory can be understood as an ideal place for invisible captivity, and escaping from it would be like escaping from oneself. The observer must travel a long path to unlearn the gaze in order to understand and let go of that captivity.

There is nothing interesting, but the zero point prior to any escape is commonplace: “Find your black holes and white walls, know them, know your faces; it is the only way you will be able to dismantle them and draw your lines of flight”.<sup>12</sup>

### III

As soon as it is revealed, the dismantling of face vanishes. Experience begins to produce *landscapity traits* freed of the landscape. Fragments that can even be found off camera, or forming part of simultaneous temporal, though diverging, strata. These are decentred features of new, though exogenous, splinters within a face in decomposition.

Confronting space and time, instead of simply being in them is what determines the experience considered here. Photography is the medium that has helped encode our apprehension of space and time. It has also shown itself to be an efficient means by which to establish correspondences between the visual and other aspects of thought.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189. Deleuze and Guattari in this research about *our semiotic of modern white men*, and, it should be added, still deeply Christian, Deleuze and Guattari describe a singular *dispositif* resulting from crossing mixed semiotics, *limit-face*; the despotic *terrestrial face*—*black holes-white walls*, multiplication of eyes—despots or their representatives are everywhere. And the *maritime* face or landscape-subjective, passional, reflective destiny, the white wall has been sharpened, horizon-silver thread, the authoritarian face is in profile and moving towards the black hole.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, “Preguntas sobre geografía” (Questions on Geography) in *Poder/Conocimiento: Entrevistas Seleccionadas y Otros Escritos 1972-1977* (Power/knowledge, selected interviews and other writings). Colin Gordon Ed., Panteón Books, New York, 1980, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Op. Cit.*, p. 192.

The way to proceed in constructing photographic panoramas, here an illusory space of unlimited immersion, that aim to become *samples* rather than a format, is similar to the future of observers who inevitably, at the exact moment of looking, invade by association the field covered by their gaze, continuously intermingling and exchanging fragments of words and images, and organizing a space of inter-reading.

The nature of the observed is always, and at the same time, metaphor and an image reconstructed or bathed by that metaphor.

It is this capacity of the image to “accommodate text” that makes it a complete tool, and I am not referring to a photo caption, though this is a significant fact, but to the complex culturally and politically constructed act of *seeing*. Far from being a purely phenomenological act it has been influenced by the weight of the concepts and categories that converge on it. This is an entire process of *abridgement* in which experiences provoked by the outside world overlap and are subverted—barely a direct replica of it and the complex linguistic space in which they interact.

In the words of Burgin: “inescapably the *sense* of the things we see is constructed across a complex of exchanges between these various registers of representation. (...); so photographs predominantly tend to prompt a complex of exchanges between the visual and verbal registers. (...) the greater part of photographic practice is *de facto* “scripto-visual””.<sup>13</sup>

It cannot be any other way if we intend to encapsulate the planes of meaning that precede, follow, underlie and surround photography. The image that carries or conceals a textual investigation reveals a different penetration because it was also created from the word and expands within it.

The suspicion that what the eye perceives is ultimately meaning, concept, thought, raises the possibility of *manipulating* the gaze itself and by extension the image. In the words of Brea: “What you know is what you see”. In other words: “that which can be known in that which can be seen”.<sup>14</sup>

This is no longer about the process of disclosure that constituted the abstract structure of most art in the 20th century, inherent in the Benjaminian optical unconscious. Our experience differs insofar as it is not about the manifestation of something that is only revealed by the mechanical eye, through the photographic camera; it is not only about perceptions that escape us and yet are perceived by the lens. We are talking about a fully conscious visibilization process. A slow process of discernment and a gradual *revelation* that make use of the reconstructive and relational potential of photographic practice.

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<sup>13</sup> Victor Burgin, “Ver el sentido” in *Efecto Real. Debates posmodernos sobre fotografía*, editorial Gustavo Pili, Barcelona, 2004, p. 170.

<sup>14</sup> José Luís Brea, “Cambio de régimen escópico: del inconsciente óptico a la e-imagen, in *Estudios Visuales* no. 4 ¿Un diferendo “arte”?, Ed. CENDEAC, Murcia, 2007,

Memory *dispositifs*, concepts and situations that even off camera are arranged in order to construct images. This can only happen in *delay* or *retardation*. Through a kind of *proffered duration*, affixed to the future as a bonus. This kind of defaulting wait, of prowling around, is an added piece, a new layer of symbols laid over the previous diagram. Time expanded way beyond the shutter and the moment, a duration that plunges into an enormous web made up of inter-reading, in the cogs of relations. Just like the time of the camera shutter, that *delay* will be inscribed on the image. And if these images that, by definition and the simple fact of their photographic condition, were already temporal *dispositifs* they would then become *something else*.

Attempting to explain that *something else* would be very difficult without alluding to Deleuze and his fundamental idea of the crystal-image. That figure in which the time-image seems to culminate undoubtedly concentrates a whole host of valuable intuitions. Over and above the kinetic, the sensory-motor and movement, over and above the shutter speed, the *crystalline regime* of the image emanates from *the chronic* to reveal a much more direct and also much more profound *time-image*.

The image is chained to its present but is observed as the past: its function is to coexist between two presents. We waver between these two realities, in a reciprocal, indivisible movement. The image is at least two images: that which stops the past and that which harbours a fleeing present.

It is within this duality that the image is composed and textualized. Being what it was and being now, in order to be in future, to recompose.

The past coexists with the present that it once was. This is the formula behind the Deleuzian *crystal-image*, based on Bergson's theory about duration. This project attempts to move towards this plane of coexistence. Time constantly splits into present and past. In the field of image, the past condition would be immanent to the present and absolutely essential for the present to occur. And therefore necessary for the future to exist and to flow and not *curdle*.

Deleuze writes: "The present has to pass on for the new present to arrive, at the moment that it is the present. Thus the image has to be present and past, still present and already past, at once and at the same time".<sup>15</sup> We need this simultaneity, this coexistence of times within the image. The past does not succeed the present that it no longer is; it lives with the present that it has been. The present is the actual image, and its contemporary past is the virtual image, the mirror-image.

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<sup>15</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *La imagen-tiempo. Estudios sobre cine 2* (Cinema 2. The Time-Image), Paidós Comunicación, Barcelona, 1986, p.110

In this sense, the phenomenon of paramnesia, *déjà vu*, the illusion of the “already seen”, the “already lived” is merely vertigo, a fluctuation within this splitting of time.

The crystal-image is found on the edge of the mirror, a point of indiscernibility between the current image and its contemporary past.

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