

## ***Atrapafilms: The Film Catcher: Images Flying the Birdcage***

I am going to start at the end, which in this case means at a time before writing, transcribing and editing what follows. About a year ago I was asked to conduct an interview with Benet Rossell that was to be recorded on video to accompany a collection of his audiovisual works. After a few preliminary meetings I drew up a list of questions I thought would fill out a line of conversation. But what happened was that on the day of the recording Benet surprised us with a script for a silent interview. More than a script, it was a collection of doodles and scribbled notes on a piece of paper. A silent interview where my questions were to be left unanswered, but where we were to maintain an exchange of rehearsed movements on either side of a film rewriter. This was loaded with a roll of found film that could be described as a frame counter – with hand-scrawled numbers and frames separating each one. It was to represent the thousand and one possible questions and answers in the sequence of our conversation. Benet, with strips of film wrapped around his head, was to reply silently to my questions, which is why this action, this video, was given the rather emphatic title *No Comment* (2009). However, he agreed to do a repeat interview in a different format, which is what we are working on now. We've started by putting words to images that didn't have any (except on the title cards). Or, as Benet put it, we have gone from silent cinema to the talkies.

I remember Benet, towards the end of the 1970s, describing his films as the fruit of a succession of friendships and associations. He said he had made a film with each of his friends. The first, *La Seine* (1969), was made with Carles Andreu, and has been lost in the course of Rossell's migrations. Jaume Xifra, Antoni Miralda and Joan Rabascall together with Benet and the Catalanophile Dorothée Selz – the 'Catalans in Paris' to use a phrase coined by Alexandre Cirici i Pellicer in his writings – made others, the titles of which follow below. And with Jean-Pierre Béranger, a close friend of all of them, he made *Le cœur est un plaisir* (1975). Benet made another film that brought almost all of them together: *Cerimonials* (Ceremonials, 1973), a document of the fiestas and rituals put on by Miralda, Xifra, Selz, Rabascall and Beni himself (as he was then known). Yet another, which he directed alone although plenty of other people were involved in its making, was titled *Atrás etíope* (Away, Ethiopian, 1977). About this time he started using video to make documentaries about various artists commissioned by the Hara Foundation in Tokyo and the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

This collaborative streak to his audiovisual work continued with other 'two-headed' or 'four-handed' productions. With Lluís Maristany he made a piece for the collective film *En la ciudad* (In the City, 1976–77). He worked most often with Miralda, on projects such as the installations *Dreamlike* (1979) and *Monument a Colom* (Monument to Columbus, 1982), to mention only two. With Muntadas he made the installation *Rambla 24 h* (1981, recently revised and updated). With Jordi Torrent he made *El dau* (The Die, 1990). And with *No Comment*, mentioned above, I can add my own name to this list of collaborators. To keep this introduction to a reasonable length, the long list of collaborations with other talented musicians and technicians from the professional audiovisual

world will have to be cut short. Likewise, in the stream of videos he has done over the years, Benet has shown himself to be a multifaceted artist who thinks, writes, creates images (drawn, painted, animated, photographed, recycled, digitally produced, in 3D, et cetera) which he processes or manipulates, and puts to his own music, as well as acting, reciting, singing and dancing. If we add that he puts at well over fifty the number of audiovisual pieces that he has lost, thrown away or simply never edited, the conversation that follows might well, time and space permitting, range over subjects we have so far overlooked. And as he finds and revises material and projects that have been abandoned, some of them could take on new forms; rather as he has done recently with pieces such as *A priori* and *Chantier-masques* (Quarry-Masks), using material from the seventies and even earlier. It is, then, a body of work that is expanding, both backwards and forwards, as a result of Benet Rossell's hugely multifaceted activity.

**Around 1824, Dr John Ayrton Paris invented the thaumatrope, a philosophical toy used to demonstrate the principle of persistence of vision. The sparrow went into the cage and the cinema was thus founded. Benet, what for you is the cinema?**

For me, cinema is an extraordinary place for experimentation, for subverting the visual language *par excellence*, which is the moving image.

Cinema consists of the dreams of the filmmaker being received by the viewer so that both can go beyond the mirror, each on their own side.

But let me put off answering this question fully until the end of our conversation.

**In 1964 you arrive in Paris: you study theatre and cinema and later begin to exhibit. What took you to Paris? And which came first, the chicken or the egg?**

I first went to Paris to attend a congress as a representative of economics students in Madrid. In fact, I offered to take the real student representative's place; he couldn't make it, and the thing I wanted above all else was to go to Paris. A year later I went back to live there and enrolled to do a doctorate in law, which allowed me to officialise my situation. Needless to say, I didn't go to a single law class, but straightaway signed up for cinema courses run by Jean Rouch, as well as some theatre courses.

I went to Paris because I wanted to see and live life, because the situation here was too restricted and grey, and I ended up staying there for over fifteen years. So I can say that the chicken came first; that is the chicken-filmmaker<sup>1</sup> who was the boss around here for forty years!

**Was the kaleidoscope, in 1968, your first optical device? A way of approaching the moving image?**

Not really. The first optical device operated by me that I remember was the Cine Nic,<sup>2</sup> a toy projector my parents gave me when I was a kid. It gave me the opportunity

to build up a huge collection of short films on vegetable paper.

For me, as a village boy, the cinema was vital. I remember the film sessions in Àger and Tremp. In Àger they were held at the Café Pepito, which doubled up as a soda-siphon filling factory and meeting point for all the smugglers in the valley, and where they also put on plays and concerts. In Tremp there was a real cinema; La Lira. The person who recommended which films be shown was the town cobbler, and his shoe shop was a kind of film club *avant la lettre*. When they played a Ronald Colman film the place was packed out and you had to be quick off the mark to get tickets, largely because people claimed Colman had been born in the nearby market town of Talarn, making him the undisputed heartthrob of the whole area. Another formative experience was the variety shows that they put on at the Café Salàs de Pallars during the county fair. The flashing of fine Catalan thighs was sheer image in movement, and the optical device used was the steamed-up windows behind which we hid and were initiated into the exhilarating inactivity of the voyeur.

Later, when I went to Barcelona to study the pre-university course, I became a regular at all the theatres, mainly as a *claqueur*, as well as all the film clubs I could find: the Claret, the Monterols and the one at the School of Engineers, amongst others. This is how I came to discover Italian Neo-Realism, Free Cinema, the *Nouvelle Vague*, Dreyer, Bergman, Stroheim and Welles, as well as Busby Berkeley – not a million miles from the shows back at the Café Salàs! I had by that time met Francesc Betriu and we frequented the film clubs together.

When I arrived in Paris I immediately enrolled at the Comité du Film Ethnographique, where the idea for *Chronique d'un été* was hatched. It was there where I first got my hands on a 16 mm camera and came into contact with *cinéma vérité*.

But to get back to optical devices: they went from the Cine Nic to the projector at Àger, and from there to the zoetrope that so fascinated me in the foyer of the Cinémathèque Française. Just as kaleidoscopes fascinated me.

The kaleidoscope interested me for two reasons: it is a fairly simple device that is cheap to construct, something very important in those times of economic hardship. Apart from this practical consideration the kaleidoscope is a marvellous device into which all kinds of things fit: objects (old shoes, musical instruments, ice cubes, erotic drawings, etc.), substances (smoke, incense, dust, fingernails, hair, pigments, etc.), and even living things (flies and frogs, which were later released). Its radial and fragmentary symmetries enable reality to be observed differently to the way we humans normally see it; it's imaginative, random, unrepeatable and animal, less appropriated by humans.

*Man with a Movie Camera* was one-eyed. So too was *Man with a Kaleidoscope!* And looking through a hole is a way of catching sight of something we can't normally see. Neighbours, spies, voyeurs, children – and of course naturalists, biologists, astronomers and mariners – have always looked through a hole, it is something that both saved them and condemned them, because you look with two eyes, but with one you really see! Super-wide angle lenses, fisheyes, gun sights, kaleidoscopes, telescopes and microscopes are all tools for perceiving other realities – diminutive or large-scale. The paradox of micro and macro is another one of my recurrent themes. And out of all these devices, I have a soft spot for the dandy's monocle and the kaleidoscope – the precursor of 'very' special effects.

**Turning to your micrographs, micro-cinema, micro-theatre and your whole micro-cosmos: what is your philosophy, aesthetic or poetic, on reduced dimensions?**

The term 'reduced dimensions' suggests a reduction owing to a lack or shortage of something, but what I do is always of the appropriate size. My work often focuses on the relationship, the paradox, or the counterpoint that is established between the micro and the macro. For me art is life, and when it isn't we are getting into the realm of mannerism, virtuosity and reproduction instead of creation, and this is a dead end. In art, as in life, the most important thing is not that which is big, impactful, spectacular or so easy to perceive that we don't even have to really look at it.

In my case, my interest in the micro-universe has several origins. One has to do with my congenital shyness. Another definitely comes from habits learned in childhood. Being a village boy from a poor family, born during the war, my childhood games revolved around two crucial elements: unlimited nature with its macro-elements, bounded only by the horizon; and all the tiny treasures to be found in it: stones, fossils from the quarry in Rúbies, pieces of shrapnel, shot and empty cartridges that we picked up on the mountain of Sant Corneli in Conca de Tremp. And our pets, as children who lived in close contact with nature, were the insects, lizards and frogs that we caught in the country. This means that this duality between the micro and the macro is something I have had with me since the cradle, as well as a fascination for small hidden objects, mysterious and de-contextualised, as well as for ephemeral and fleeting existences.

A third origin undoubtedly had to do with the opportunities that I had to hand when I first lived in Paris, in a *chambre de bonne* whose dimensions exactly doubled those of my trunk (and which I luckily could fit under the bed, thus affording myself a slightly less *bijou* living space). My time of residence in diminutive spaces lasted many years, and has probably left its

mark on my work. But, since I was used to small things, I never regarded it as a restriction. What is more, I have never had any problems in doing larger format works.

'Stop and take a look': this is another theme I have cultivated throughout my work, whether in the almost microscopic *dibuixos de cec* (blind drawings), like the ones I exhibited at the Galerie Bazarine in 1970 that had to be looked at through a magnifying glass, or in *L'ametlla com balla* (The Dancing Almond),<sup>3</sup> which I conceived for my exhibition at the Virreina gallery in 1996. The latter involved an almost six-metre-high egg/fountain, on top of which a real almond danced on a jet of water; viewers could observe its almost imperceptibly small jumps on a monitor positioned below.

The inattention that is such an integral part of the spectacular culture in which we are immersed is something that disgusts me. The 'lowest common denominator' is indiscriminate, while artistic practice, despite all appearances, is curiously selective. Paul Klee said, 'drawing and writing are the same thing,' and my language is a kind of writing without grammar or syntax. And in the case of writing, it's obvious that the bigger the print, the closer you get to the headline, the slogan or the party line. The real content, however, is always lower down: the essence has a tendency to conceal itself!

Regarding the macro element: it's a crucial counterpoint, and relates to the concept of micro the same way as a word relates to silence, as light relates to darkness, as movement to stasis, as you to me, as the beginning to the end, and even the same way as Hardy relates to Laurel.

Stop, take a good look and a good breath: that's my philosophy. Or I should say, my micro-philosophy.

**You have often created cinema without any of the usual equipment, projectors, screens, et cetera. For example, you have done projections of holes or drops of water. Georges Maciunas, the leader of Fluxus, would have positioned your work in what he called 'poor-man's cinema'.**

Maciunas was always spot-on! I mentioned before my rather precarious existence in Paris. It was a time in which I self-produced, something that I continue to do since it guarantees me the liberty of expression needed for immediacy, although it is to the detriment of more sophisticated means of production. I said that I self-produced; well, this meant that when I was involved in some other type of filming I always made it my business to bag the unused reels of film. Sometimes these reels were even my payment. The cameras were lent to me by the audiovisual centre at the Sorbonne, successor of the Comité du Film Ethnographique, with which I stayed in close contact for many years.

*Holes* is from 1969. I took a thirty-metre roll of virgin colour reversible film, which I then partially exposed and took to be developed; a process which resulted in a combination of flashes and bluish dark patches. With

a perforator, which was in fact an olive-stoner, I made holes in the film, and the work was ready.

*Film blanc* (White Film) was, more than a film, an event. In *Fête en blanc* (White Party), organised by Miralda, Rabascall, Selz and Xifra in Verderonne in 1970, I projected onto the walls of the Hans Müller dome a clear film loop of 16 mm film, on to which I sprinkled drops of water that the heat of the projector instantly evaporated. The result was a wealth of translucent shapes that animated the ceiling of the cupola.

Fifteen years later I made, on video, *Micro-òpera 2* (1984), a video installation which I exhibited at the Miró Foundation in Barcelona. The video showed how I made a photogram, 24 x 36 mm, the first in a series of 160, using Chinese ink, saliva, hairs, a piece of fingernail... In this sense, working with resources provided by my own body, we can definitely say that I am the poorest filmmaker in the history of cinema.

But a dearth of means can be a source of inspiration for me. Right now a 'micro-performance' comes to mind that I did for the Festival de Arte Viva in Almada in 1982, where I went around the attendees with my hand out asking 'a film frame for charity!' Along the same lines I have a work called *Atrapafilms* (Film Catcher); it's a mobile that looks like flypaper, one of those strips of sticky paper that were hung from the ceiling near a light source to catch flies. I always have it hanging up in my studio, to catch all the imaginary film stills flying about in my mind.

I have always used frames and pieces of film in my object poems. *Cultius cinematogràfics* (Film Crops) is from 1968 and consists of a bed of earth with pieces of film, film-reel cans and other cinematographic odds and ends planted in it. In 1970 I presented an installation in Paris, *Chaussure* (Shoe), consisting of a giant papier mâché shoe from the inside of which protruded strips of 16 and 35 mm film, which were also arranged around the wall it was hung on. The ice cubes I made from polyester resin are also from the early seventies. Many of them contain film stills drawn or manipulated by me. Other objects, such as *Brotxes-films* (Paintbrush-Films) and *Triturafilms* (Film Crusher), are from the late seventies, as well as several compositions on paper that evoke an imaginary film through the use of drawings, glued-on film frames and handwritten notes.

**There is often an idea sequence in your micrographs. Are they not also a type of cinema on paper? Or like story boards for imaginary films?**

In 1973 I had an exhibition in Madrid at the Galeria Seiquer where I hung a series of micrographs done in Chinese ink on paper, one linked to another, forming a continual line that wasn't interrupted even by obstacles such as the main door, which had a strip of characters running across it. It was in fact a take, a sequence, a loop

on paper. My micrographs have a strong narrative content; they tell stories that emerge spontaneously from association. Joaquim Sala-Sanahuja spoke about 'feelers', and these feelers or tags have the virtue of bringing together unconnected individuals who, under certain circumstances, are connected by the intrinsic character of the feeler. And this allows one to establish, in a relatively short time, connections that would be inconceivable in other contexts, chance relationships that bring about a whole range of stories: love affairs, murders, robberies, conspiracies, sexual abuses, unexpected meetings and so on.

In 1981, in the catalogue for an exhibition entitled *Filmarte* held in the gallery of the Navarra Savings Bank in Pamplona, I included the plans for a project called *A priori*. They were a type of storyboard with notes for animation that I'd drawn up in preparation for a film I wanted to make in 16 mm. The project was relegated to the bottom of a drawer and forgotten until last year, when I shot it on video, using the drawings I had done in 1981 and animating some of the sequences.

In 1986, while I was recording the video *Carob Way* in New York, I did a series of drawings called *Carob Bean, an American Dream*, which were very similar to a comic strip. It again had the character of a take or sequence, and it captured the multicultural identity of the metropolis. I presented it at the Anthology Film Archives for the retrospective of my work they held in 1990.

In Barcelona I recently exhibited an art book I'd just finished, *1.000 a Miró* (1,000 to Miró), which consists of a thousand screen captures from a video of the same title dating back to 1993. These screen captures are presented as index cards, with captions for each one forming a poetic script for the video. Text and image become a storyboard, made after the fact, in a journey from the original video shot with digital technology to a support such as paper. This idea of a journey, of going from one medium to another, provided the concept for this work which I call *Story Abroad*.

The idea of sequence is present in a lot of my work, for instance *Microfàcies* (*Microfaces*, 1978), which I showed at the Galerie Shandar in Paris. This work is a series of rubbings of fossils trapped in different geological strata in the Àger Valley, *objets trouvés* that illustrate the series of 'sequences' that shaped the land I trod as a child.

It's also there in a later work made in 2001 for the Canyelles metro station in Barcelona. This is the first element of the diptych *Tir al món amb mar de fons* (*Shooting at the World with the Sea behind*, 2001), and consists of a series of four Olympic-sized targets with the satellite picture of a different continent superimposed on each one. The series is then repeated four times to create a 'firing range' that engages the interaction of the metro passengers.

**You were 'the man with a movie camera' of the so-called Catalans in Paris, as well as of other artists of your acquaintance. Was film a bond of friendship among you all?**  
Of course! The so-called Catalans in Paris never existed as a group, if we are to understand a group as a voluntary association with the aim of doing something together. We never declared ourselves to be a group either verbally or in writing. Each one of us had very different and divergent artistic affiliations, interests, work and careers. Our collaborations were more the fruit of enjoying time and experiences together. The undeniable individuality of each of us is almost definitely what has kept our friendship going over the years without conflicts or clashes. Of the four, I was the only one immediately connected with film, which was enough for me to become 'the man with a movie camera', as you say. I was also 'the Moviola man', since I had a 16 mm Moviola in my studio that I used to prepare the editing that was later finished in the annex of the Musée Guimet. We were good friends and often shared our equipment.

**Your audiovisual work is quite diverse compared with that which typifies you as a visual artist. Is this a consequence of collaborating with other artists, or was it deliberate on your part?**

I don't think my audiovisual work is any more varied than my other visual work, which is pretty varied as well. What has always interested me is the process, because therein lies the real road to knowledge, a road that I find captivating and completely involving. The finished work, in fact, is simply an outcome of the process. The thing is, my work is so multifaceted that it is not easily accessible. I'm a kind of quick-change artist who is sometimes a painter, other times ventures into the purely poetic and literary, and at others tries to approach the world as it is – something I've represented unceasingly in my micrographs. Other times I partake of the possibilities offered by public, monumental sculpture – the possibilities of playing with scale, material and concepts – in order to pack content into a space without distorting it.

Whenever I've collaborated on films with friends I've never felt the need to impose any kind of iconography that would identify me. This cannot be seen as a method, but I believe my signature is always present: in the way I film or insert a sequence, capture a space or light, or pull in on a detail. Rightly or wrongly, I have never thought to make use of a signature image that would identify me straight away. This has resulted in my work being characteristically multifaceted.

**How did you get into filmmaking on a more professional basis, such as the organisational side and working in crews? Was there ever a moment when you thought you had a future in the film industry?**

If I had ever seen myself working in the film industry, I would have chucked my camera off the Canal de

l'Embut<sup>41</sup>! Precisely what horrifies me about professional cinema is the industry and all its crude methods that I can't relate to. Although contact with professional filmmakers has been very beneficial for me, in the sense that I have picked up some invaluable knowledge.

I could mention Jean Rouch; his practice of filmmaking – so minimalist – is what got me hooked on this language. Because at one level it allowed me to create my own with the resources I had at my disposal at any given moment, and at another his way of making films, devoid of any artificiality, is something I deeply appreciate. Years after having finished my studies at the Comité du Film Ethnographique I accompanied Rouch in a seminar, and he flattered me with the following comment: 'There are only two people capable of capturing movement well, Néstor Almendros and Benet Rossell!' I owe it to Rouch and his collaborators that my urge to make films has come out the way it has.

I have always been great friends with Betriu and I have collaborated on his films as artistic director, scriptwriter and even actor. Paco is a man who knows professional filmmaking inside out and I have a lot to thank him for. I also took part in the experience that was the In-Scram production company that Betriu started in Madrid – a breeding ground for a lot of important filmmakers such as Antonio Drove, José Luis García Sánchez and Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, among others. Being around them provided me with plenty of food for thought, which has definitely influenced my work.

Carles Andreu and I are authors of the plot and script of *Despertaferro* (Iron Awakener, 1990), an animated film directed by Jordi Amorós. Learning about the world of animation was a great experience.

With Antoni Verdaguier we are getting back to the realm of friendship and proximity, since he lives next door to us. He had a project for a film about the Raval, the area of Barcelona where we live, and he asked Cristina and me to participate with a section about us. It was a very enjoyable experience and I think that the film *Raval*, *Raval* (2006) offers an honest and committed view of our neighbourhood.

**You once told me that you had invented the 'video-print', a combined print and video, and I see that a lot of your recent pieces are 'video-drawings', extensions of or complimentary creations to your artwork.**

The 'video-print' that you're talking about was quite a few years ago, and I'd almost forgotten about it. It was a project that consisted of encrusting a VHS cassette that had been crushed in a printing press onto a series of eight monochrome grounds of resin that correspond to the eight bars of colour that head a video tape. The rudimentary content of each video was a loop of the same colour as the printed ground colour. Once again a paradox can be inferred: the stasis of the colour bar code versus

the dynamism of the videographic colour. For years I had a mock-up hanging around in my studio, but in the end it fell apart and got lost, as so often happens with my pieces.

What you refer to as 'video-drawings' is something that has always been present in my work, although they aren't video-drawings in the strictest sense; more like ways of dreaming up dynamic spaces of expression. When I did *Pound* (1985) I used for the first time a graphic palette – very rudimentary, pure archaeology, in fact – and I used it to evoke an individual, the poet Ezra Pound, employing three modes of expression that are part of me: video, drawing and poetry. If we take *Nocturnal U* (2009), my graphisms, calligrams and *benigrams* retain their schematic quality but are written in space; they become corporeal, they move, and in the end they respond to us. I've always been fond of migrating from one support to another, from one technique to another, from one mode of expression to another. Perhaps this is why I invented an open-ended alphabet that approaches the utopia of infinite expression, an alphabet as rich and full of nuance as a painter's palette. In 1996 I did *Arbre paer* ('Paer' Tree), my first public sculpture. It is a tree of lights which originated from one of my micrographs, becoming three-dimensional. Its top branch is more than twelve metres high. I have always engaged in these types of transpositions and combinations in an attempt to explore the deeper nature of my morphemes.

**There is a very musical element to your audiovisual creations, especially the ones you've done with Miralda. Could it be said, then, that the music (or the musical soundtrack) takes the place of the storyline?**

The music doesn't so much take the place of the storyline as supplant the narrator, who, when we are talking about fiction, never drives the story along but is more like the oil that binds the mayonnaise. In the films I've made with Miralda the music is always very 'Miraldaesque', despite the fact that in some he made the greater contribution (*París, la Cumparsita, Miserere*), while in others the selection was more up to me. For *París, la Cumparsita* (1973) it was a case of presenting Miralda's sculptural expression (the soldiers, the postcards, the parades) from the point of view of a filmmaker, namely me. The way in which space, light and movement are calligraphed is my great contribution to these films. Without Miralda I would never have made them, because they correspond more to his mythic universe than mine, but without me they would never have come into existence in their present form. I contributed my way of seeing since I was the cameraman, the one who looked through the eyepiece, who decided on the framing, the light, the length of the takes, the movement of the camera, the filmic rhythm and so on.

The case of *Boum! Boum! En avant la musique!* (Boom! Boom! Forward Music, 1974) is different. This project

began when I came across a book at the Paris flea market in Montreuil called *En écoutant le maréchal Foch*, a collection of quotes by Field Marshal Foch compiled by a certain Commandant Charles Bugnet who had been his secretary. At first *Boum! Boum!* was going to be a sound film. Since I was the scriptwriter I had written the dialogue, based in great part on Foch's pithy phrases. Because we didn't have direct sound equipment, the dialogues were to be recorded afterwards in the studio, something we never got round to doing. So when finally we re-edited the material in digital format in 2007, we put together a soundtrack evoking the period in which the action takes place, complete with the outrageous statements made by those blimps (we included original speeches from the First World War), the bombast and frivolity of these people, all set against the humour running through the whole tape. In this case the choice of music was more my concern. Although Miralda chose the Cumbia – which is priceless!

Let's look at *Biodop* (1973), which I did with Joan Rabascall. I filmed the works in his studio while I was preparing a film project, *Rabascall, horoscope personnel* (Rabascall, Personal Horoscope), on the Joan's work. By the way, I just recently came across the images, which I had never edited. One day, at the Clignancourt flea market, I found some short advertising films for Biodop and tubes of that brilliantine, which was still being sold on the market. With this material, plus some takes that I filmed of my parents' TV in Barcelona and which I thought fitted in well with Rabascall's universe, I finished the film. The soundtrack is a collage of the soundtrack of those short films and the sound of the projector; advertising, motor and collage seemed to me the ideal elements with which to construct a Rabascall-like micro-symphony.

As you well know, kaleidoscopes were one of my recurrent motifs for quite a while. I had photographed images from my kaleidoscopes before, but Jaume Xifra came up with a way we could make a film; in his studio on the Passage des Grands Augustins he fixed to the end of a three-mirror kaleidoscope a kind of transparent box, driven by a small motor that made it revolve. I put drawings of mine in the box, and we filmed them from the other end using a 16 mm Beaulieu.

I wrote a letter to Carles Santos explaining what sound I wanted for the soundtrack to this film, called *Calidoscopi* (Kaleidoscope, 1971). We met in Barcelona and went over to Anna Ricci's house; she was the only person we knew at the time who had a reel-to-reel tape recorder. Santos stuck the mike in his mouth and repeated the word *calidoscopi* over and over again. Then he cut the tape into ribbons and we stuck it back together at random. I took this material to a studio in Barcelona to transfer it onto magnetic tape. With the help of García Sánchez, we finished editing it a few months later in Madrid, at the

production company In-Scram, of which I was a member. It was then copied as optic sound and transferred to 35 mm.

The soundtracks for my solo productions are different to those I did for the collaborations with Miralda and Rabascall; I would say they are more like the one for *Calidoscopi*. I did the soundtrack for the video *Micro-òpera 2* by becoming a kind of one-man band at the studio of the composer Eduardo Polonio, who recorded it and later did the mixing. This is a way of working that I have used again for several videos over the last few years. I did it for *Micro-òpera 2* because the piece corresponded to a concept I called 'micro-autoethnography', so it needed a soundtrack done by oneself. When I did the same thing recently it was for a different reason: I, who am a Jack of all trades – and therefore master of none – can't resist experimenting with sound as well.

*Atrás etíope* (1977) belongs to a genre that I would call *film-hazard*. A group of young friends suggested that I should accompany them on a trip to Afghanistan to film the journey, but one of the cars was involved in a minor accident in Turkey and so the trip stopped there. I made the most of it by filming what I could: the shots of camels we used in *París, la Cumparsita*, the vaginal-looking tree we can see at the beginning of *Biodop*, a short about the Galata Bridge which I still haven't put together; and I still had plenty of stuff left over. When I got back to Barcelona I wanted to keep it, and Betriu offered to store the reels in his mother's fridge. This was a good solution until the day Betriu's mother wanted the full run of her fridge back, almost a year after my encroachment. I had to look sharp to avoid the film being ruined. In those days Betriu, Gustau Hernández and I used to hang out with film people, and Paco persuaded me to make a short with some friends of his, one of whom was José María Cañete, a professional actor. In no time at all everything was ready to start; we only needed a script. Then I found a copy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Spanish that was kicking around Betriu's place. I opened it and found a passage that said something like, 'O me! what news, my love! / Am not I Hermia? are not you Lysander? / I am as fair now as I was erewhile. / Since night you loved me; yet since night you left / me: / Why, then you left me – O, the gods forbid! – / In earnest, shall I say? And this is how I got the script ready in less than a minute. As a backing track to the actors' voices I incorporated a passage from the *Carmina Burana*, which I found quite Shakespearean; I also used the text as the lyrics for a song, which I wrote with the help of the pianist from the dance hall in Calella de la Costa where we used to go during filming.

*Carob Way*, the video I made in New York, has direct sound. It is a kind of 'sonic map', free of any sophistication. To paraphrase José Maria Carrascal, he of the ties,<sup>5</sup> who lived in the same boarding house as me when I came from

Tremp to Barcelona to study pre-university, 'This is how New York sounds, and this is how we have shown it!'

*1.000 a Miró*, the video I made in 1993 to mark the Year of Miró in Barcelona and which now in the digital era is also a museum piece, has a musical suite by Jaume Aiats as its soundtrack. He is a good friend of mine and we used to see a lot of each other in those days. I filled him in on the project and he composed the suite, which in this case is an example of one of those collaborations I enjoy so much with a creative artist on the same wavelength.

**From 2007 you've produced a string of works using digital equipment where you yourself are the motor for the action in a very corporeal way. And where the language of action has become the expressive base of your plastic, poetic, micro-theatrical and meta-cinematographic universe, and of a residual diary consisting of swiftly resolved thoughts. What can you tell us about this most recent period?**

Many of the concepts you use are as equally valid for my most recent videographic work as they are for what I've always done. These reflections are applicable to the whole body of my work. We have spoken extensively about the presence of movement in my drawings. My poetry often evokes the 'micro-performances' that we all engage in every day. My sculptures, often born of the immediacy of a micrograph, evade all symmetry, and change depending on how they are viewed. In this sense they seem to move. Likewise, all the calligraphic and gestural elements of my work live and breathe this immediacy that you refer to. But it has to be remembered that to perform a gesture or action, you have to have interiorised it first. And that is a process that can take a lifetime.

It is true that my performative interventions are more frequent, but we shouldn't forget that *Carob Way* and *Micro-òpera 2* already pointed to this approach in the mid-eighties. But I think, in the end, this is only a coincidental aspect. Especially if we consider the work I am doing at the moment concerning the *Molino* music-hall, where a more documentary approach is being used.

Now, let's go back to your first question, which I left unanswered. Film is a means of expression, of communication, which has the special quality of being able to reproduce the moving image. The first films were silent, but they were films nevertheless because the moving image is the essence of cinematographic expression. This image, apparently real, articulates a story just as a dream does. In this way, reality and fiction are fused together in an eternal and shared present. This always happens, especially in the most direct cinema.

Now the time has come to turn the mirror around. I exit the scene, your image appears on the other side, and a voice off-camera asks, 'Eugeni, what for you is the cinema?'

**My turn to be silent and stay in the birdcage? Now's not the time for this... No comment!**

**1** *Pollastre-cineasta* (chicken-filmmaker). In colloquial Catalan the term *pollastre* or 'chicken' is used to talk about a disreputable person.

In this case the expression 'chicken-filmmaker' refers to the dictator Franco who fancied himself as a filmmaker to such an extent that, under the pseudonym Jaime de Andrade, he wrote the script for the film *Raza* (Race), directed by José Luis Sáenz de Heredia in 1942.

**2** Cine Nic is a toy film projector, patented in Barcelona in 1932, which was very popular in Spain up until the sixties. Production was recently resumed. Strips of translucent paper are used with two lines of drawings, which, through a simple shutter mechanism, produce basic animation.

**3** *L'ametlla com balla* is a reinterpretation of the Catalan tradition of *L'ou com balla* (The Dancing Egg), which stretches back to the sixteenth century and celebrates the Feast of Corpus Christi. It consists of making an empty egg shell 'dance' on the water jet of the fountains in cloisters, courtyards and gardens, which are festooned with flowers and fruit.

**4** *La Canal de l'Embut* (The Funnel Gully) is the local name for the highest escarpment of the Montsec mountain range, which looks like a funnel.

**5** José María Carrascal is a journalist who, with the liberalisation of television in Spain, presented the first news broadcast on a commercial television channel. He became famous for, amongst other things, the loud ties he wore.