

Lundi de Phantom Numéro trente-deux: Alex Reynolds (26.02.18)

Interview with Anna Manubens for a publication on the occasion of Lundi de Phantom at Khiasma, Paris, February 2018

Seeing as the idea of this invitation is to talk about your work, of how we work together, where we're at and where we're going, I will try to ask questions that might lead us to talk about both your films and about how they are made.

I'll begin with rhythm. In the feature you're preparing, *Eiqui Chegan Os Meus Amores*, rhythm is a fundamental question. On the one hand at a conceptual level, rhythm is one of the angles from which you observe the idea of hospitality or coexistence in the sense of the collision and negotiation of different rhythms. On the other, or as a consequence of it, there is a whole series of fictional content and decisions of filming and editing that translate the conceptual preoccupation for rhythm into cinematic language.

Firstly, I would like you to talk about rhythm in general and how you have dealt with it in films like *By Day* (*De día*) and *This Door, This Window* (*Esta puerta, esta ventana*), and to what extent they anticipate what will happen in *Eiqui Chegan Os Meus Amores*.

For me rhythm is something that brings things together, that opens up the chance to come together or to drift off, to run through one another; it's our way of ordering chaos, of transforming noise into rhythm or melody... It's the state of being in the present that all music requires; but it also needs memory in order to exist... Without the memory of the first notes or beats that come before the one we're listening to, we would have neither rhythm nor song.

I also think about film editing in these terms. It opens up unexpected possibilities and relations, synesthesiae, between one image and the next... It's very similar to narrative, where in order to be recognisable or familiar, stories need certain rhythms or a specific order. In order to explode these sorts of narrative inertias, in my recent works, I have used rhythm as my starting point for storytelling or editing.



Film still: *Esta puerta, esta ventana* © Alex Reynolds (2017)

In *By Day* I worked with images from my personal archive, low resolution videos that I would shoot during my travels, or that I would use as sketches for other works. I've never been interested in working with the autobiographical, so I never thought of using these images for a film. Within that collection of images there was a recording shot by my ex-partner, while I was in between wakefulness and sleep (*duermevela*). We discovered that, in this state, I was still capable of maintaining a conversation, and he recorded some of them. The desire to work with that material which was so intimate, that lay somewhere between tenderness, invasion, and comedy, without knowing how, was the drive for *By Day*.

I attempted a first edit and quickly abandoned it. A year later I returned to the material; and in the end the piece, both in terms of form and content, has something to do with all of this. With someone who invades you while you are unawares, like a song in the background, but also with the feeling that the time I didn't find narrative patterns useful to understand the material... I would return to the same spot, once and again, to try to find a way of ordering, a form of understanding that ran through the skin and the ear... Ultimately, the film is a search for a rhythmical structuring principle. There is a drumming lesson, and sometimes there are singing and breathing exercises. Bodies follow and imitate each other and clumsily try to align with one another through sound, through image and sound... And this extends not only to the bodies we see and hear, but also to the images themselves, who, with a life of their own, cross over into each other, so that we can still hear their rhythm even when they are silent.



Set photo: *Esta puerta, esta ventana* – Alex Reynolds (2017) – © Anna Manubens

This Door, This Window has some points in common with *By Day* in that it continues to explore the possibility of a rhythmical connection/invasion between bodies. It is also a double portrait of two people I feel close to and who share my obsession with music and rhythm, Alma Söderberg and Nilo Gallego, whose work and way of being in the world I admire. The film is shot in a single space on two different days. I asked Alma and Nilo to improvise to a series of soundscapes I had prepared for them. These included interviews with them on the idea of home, of living together, and the rhythms each of them made during the recording sessions. So they were filmed on separate days; in fact, they never appear together onscreen, but they are listening and reacting to each other, interrupting each other, through sound.

In a way *This Door, This Window* was also an experiment for something I want to do in the feature film I am preparing. It isolates this rhythmical connecting element that will be present in a more narrative way in the feature. Editing *This Door, This Window* was quite a trip; it required a state of very attentive listening that I wasn't sure would translate to the viewer.



Set photo: *Esta puerta, esta ventana* – Alex Reynolds (2017) – © Anna Manubens

I'm asking about rhythm because I would like to relocate the idea of negotiation/invasion/(de)synchronicity to our work together. There is a question that Nilo Gallego asks in *This Door, This Window* that I could have asked you (or you me) throughout the years we have been working together: "Will you wait for me when there are problems, of the kind that take over, that you end up getting stuck in for years?" When we decided to work together, we set off on a long-term commitment; we knew when it began, but it was impossible to predict when it would end—and no one

has their schedules set for 3 years from now. The fitting of rhythms becomes crucial then. The working pact survives because there is attention given to and care directed to the demands of the accelerating or stopping of one or the other.

Every film tells the story it tells, but it's also a document of the people who make it. In our case I think the very subject of the feature we have embarked upon has provoked, and is somehow a reflection of, the difficulties, happiness, and readjustments we have gone through in our relationship. To combine friendship and work is not an easy task and most people with some common sense would advise to separate them as much as possible. In our case, we decided not to from the start, almost as a political stance, perhaps as a result of an intuition that making a film, or this film in particular, also had something to do with this risk and this learning experience, with an exercise in listening.



Set photo: *Esta puerta, esta ventana* – Alex Reynolds (2017) – © Anna Manubens

I also wanted to ask you about the idea of storytelling as a dialogue that runs through a lot of what you do. Even if for different reasons, I think we have both been obsessed with the idea of the tale, and in particular with the role fiction plays as a means of survival. We have recently given some thought to how that fiction is built through two voices. In *To See Snow (Ver Nieve)*, there is clearly a dialogued writing. Just like in the former question, I would like you to speak about writing with four hands in general, and how working together has something to do with this as well. I have sometimes written about your work in hindsight, like with *This Door, This Window*, but sometimes we write up projects that are yet to come and then a speculation in duo takes place, which is typical of the accompaniment of a production. I'm thinking about some anecdotes from the last shoot where the locals would ask: What's the film about? And we would take turns and reply to that question in different ways.

In almost all my narrative works the speaking subject, who narrates, is not alone; they almost always need the voice, eye, ear, or body of another to materialise their tale. This happens in all my sound works, but also in videos such as *Juana* and *To See Snow*. For me, the tale is a living subject; it is never a stable object. Which is why in works such as *To See Snow* I go as far as personifying the film itself as a woman who asks questions about herself, that is to say, about the film—because she doesn't know it yet; it's in the making. This way of working stems from the idea that we discover ourselves with and through others... In other photographic works of mine, such as *When Smoke Becomes Fire...*, or *By Day*, the other sees things about us that we don't have access to.

I learned to work with a team thanks to the fact I played in a band for years. Before then, I always worked alone. I was very controlling... Playing music with others opened me up to collaboration. I now know how much my work will mutate as soon as I put it in contact with the DoP, the actors, and so on... But if I choose my collaborators well, I know that those mutations, together with the circumstances we find ourselves in, will only enrich the work. I also know that I will learn from them, that they are my harshest critics. As even without meaning to, their work will unveil all the mistakes in mine, and I have to remain open to that during the shoot.



Image of research materials for *Ver Nieve* – Alex Reynolds (2016) © Anna Manubens

I like to think about *To See Snow* as a film that also speaks about desire. Starting with the title: It's a film that sees—and even fantasises with—the snow of the next film. You know that I took that title as a way of saying: "There's no way I'm giving up on the snow I imagine for the feature." Snow has greatly influenced the preparation of the shoot and its economy; but it's an element that, if we're strict, is not indispensable. And I actually think that's fantastic because it escapes the criteria of justification that is so crushing when, for example, you're fundraising. I'm currently writing about the libido, the phantasm and the whim as drives for working. Barthes defends the phantasm as a legitimate reason for research and as a place of resistance and pleasure, against the discipline of method and discursive coherence. Yesterday I was reading a text that Jacques-Alain Miller wrote, where he said: "Ce qui est beau dans le caprice c'est que le sujet assume comme sa volonté *la volonté qui l'agit* (...) je veux ce qui me pulsionne." You don't usually speak in terms of desire, but could you do so now?

I don't think work is possible without the drive of desire, at least not for me. No one asks you to get up in the morning and make a film. For me, the biggest difficulty in making a feature is keeping that desire, that whim, alive during years of preparation, rewrites, fundraising, postponed shoots, snowstorms... And no, I couldn't give up on the snow, for the whole film relies on the premise of the snow, and on the desire to shoot that image; it's almost like a blank page that we will write the film on. If we were to solely adhere to logic, coherence, and economics I think films would be pretty dead... That said, during the shoot in the snow, with all the struggles it entailed, I reached a point where I questioned everything. I thought that I was keeping you all prisoners of my delirium; I felt very responsible.



Set photo: *Eiqui Chegan Os Meus Amores* – Alex Reynolds (in production) – © Anna Manubens