

Farewell to the Rhombus

Nicolas Malevé

These words are above all an echo of a dialogue that grew up between Teresa and me. Sitting at a table, over a cup of coffee, at a restaurant, at the school where she teaches, at my house, when I still lived in Barcelona, or currently on-line. Nuria Enguita Mayo and Salim Bayri also joined in. And, by extension, so did the former students which Teresa invited to take part in the exhibition.

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On the periphery of any exhibition there are places, people, connections. Teresa looks for a way to incorporate all these elements into the exhibition. Her chosen way is a form of hospitality, an invitation. Alongside her textile pieces, those of the Moroccan women who inspire her (although this relationship is much more than that), those of the students she has taught (although this relationship is much more than that) and those of Salim, who is also much more than a guest artist or a former student of hers. Why so much more than that? Because Teresa does not relinquish anything. When exhibiting their work, we expect artists to refine it, to leave behind their “influences”, their multiple roles (as teacher, as friend). Teresa doesn’t do that. She invites. She invites artists, artisans, students, words, objects and techniques to show up.

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Teresa tells me that she takes photos of the Ebro Valley from the train. She tells me about its political history, about the war. All the while, I am wondering which of the two is the instrument she uses to take the photos. The camera or the train? Or a combination of both? She brings the two together. The movement of the train, the camera’s staccato and the uncovering of history.

[. . .]

The intuition of geometry. Who had the intuition that this could be something more than shapes, that this formal regularity could have an influence on the world?

[. . .]

As the conversations flows, a dream of a map takes shape. No sooner have I written this down than I begin to doubt my choice of words. An inevitably retrospective reconstruction. Especially the “taking shape”. Not really, or perhaps only in the way that dreams have shapes. To link the parts of a conversation. Our doubts about what geography means. In different ways, Salim, Teresa and I all wonder what a country’s name means. How can you name the parts which are linked as this exhibition is being set up? Morocco, Spain, Catalonia, the Basque Country. A list of names, a list of deceptions.¹ What is worse than a map that merely preserves a series of . . .? Of what exactly? Administrative entities? Is there a word to describe the place of something as the context in which people, women, create rugs and weave patterns, geometries? It is unthinkable not to know where these objects come from, who these women are. We find it crucial to say that what they do comes from elsewhere, an elsewhere which is suddenly viewed very differently when you see that these women live in it, that they work in it. Yet no sooner have we set off in that direction than we have to slow down, press the brakes, to prevent ourselves from orientalising, from falling into exoticism, into the admiration of the other, or even into a kind of fascination with preserved authenticity. Teresa often revisits her meeting with a woman who created fabulous carpets, but whose ambition was to study chemistry or biology (I can’t remember which now) so she could leave her village. There is no fixed point. Everything is evasive. Farewell to the rhombus. Hence, a cartography of these places, which are merely passwords to open up other places. Hidden doors, like those found in dreams and haunted castles.

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Adrian MacKenzie wonders if we can conceive a social ontology that doesn’t act as a border control.

[. . .]

¹ Teresa asks me to add Belgium. That gives me the opportunity to add my first footnote.

Make a map, not a tracing. These words by Gilles Deleuze have stayed with me ever since I have been making maps, always with the feeling of ultimately succumbing to tracing. Tracings are different categorical entities that overlay the geographical framework. They are detachable elements confirming outlines and borders, making them permanent. A static cut-out. To make a map, not a tracing, is an invitation to consider the content of the map as it is made, not to see it as a given, as hard data. How it takes shape and how that shape shifts. A map that doesn't deal with a feature just because it is there, but asks how this feature might be shown if it wasn't there or when it is no longer there. Or, indeed, to see how this feature suddenly stands out, how it acquires "mappable" status, how it might lose that which makes it stand out, how it disappears into another entity which itself becomes "mappable".

[. . .]

The story of the Spanish army cartographers who travelled to Morocco to map the desert. The outlines which they had previously drawn had no value, since the sand had shifted the dunes. No sooner had the map been drawn than it was outdated. A new expedition. After several days, their measuring equipment succumbed to sand damage. The desert light made the mere act of looking unbearable. The power of devices and eyes failed. All that remained were their guides, who knew the movement of the sand, who got their bearings. The cartographers and guides set off walking at the same pace. And counted their steps. From one undetectable point to another. A map made by their own feet. A map whose outlines are traced by those whom are colonised. An unseeing walk accompanied by the inner murmurings of step counting. An incremental cohort blindly drawing a space that is vanishing beneath its feet.

[. . .]

The threads of a tapestry, wrinkles on a face, lines on a hand. Continuous. In dotted lines.

[. . .]

Teresa talks of the women she has met and their rough skin, as though scoured by the wind and the sand. She says to me, "Maybe they don't like our milky skin".

[. . .]

A map that is like a sewing machine that traces lines with coloured threads on the shifting terrain of a conversation.