

SIGURDUR GUDJÓNSSON: SUSPENDED PRESENCES

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A dark and desolate garage, water dripping, a turntable that plays an inexistent track. Is *Sleep* the fragment of a dream? A wakeful trance? A state of induced hypnosis? A lapidary declaration of intent? Is it a work of art that reflects on its own absence of voice or that reflects on the absence of voice in all art and in all works of art?

Sigurdur Gudjónsson's visions have always been tinged with dark and surreal nuances, but the aspect of tension and suspension typical of his poetics is expressed here at its apex. The absence of plot and characters, the absence of voices and familiar sounds, the absence of apparent meaning: all presences that are lacking, or better, *suspended presences* which envelop the spectator in the spirals of a subtle dizziness.

The pathos is tight: it doesn't fall and doesn't collapse, neither implodes nor explodes. The anxiety-inducing and hallucinated atmosphere instils a sense of anguished expectation and almost leads us to think that something dramatic or sinister might happen from one moment to the next. Actually everything remains there as it is, and apparently nothing happens... There's no narration and there aren't even evident relationships between the elements that figure in the video: the garage, the turntable, the dripping. Each lives its own life: the bonds and consequentiality of time and space are also suspended.

The video that shows and repeats itself without respite, the drop that goes on falling rhythmically and tirelessly, the turntable that plays a mute track: everything would appear to converge in the definition of a total absence of meaning or towards the impossibility of grasping one. The loop of the video (the loop of the artist's eye) pursues and is hard on the heels of our loop as spectators, involved or perhaps abandoned in the headstrong search for a meaning but frustrated by the outcome of an apparently vain undertaking: the search for meaning/absence of meaning, absence of meaning/search for meaning...

If he were a romantic artist Gudjónsson would film a certain scene to recount the accents and vibrations of his mood. But in his work it is exactly the opposite that happens: it isn't the mood that finds form and expression in the landscape out there but the landscape (or the non-landscape, as in *Sleep* and in *Glasshouse*) that defines itself in accordance with the denotative and connotative characters of that interior world which observes it. In Gudjónsson external landscape is the direct emanation of an interior landscape. The atmospheres and settings of his videos stage a private vision, faithfully taking on its features. Thus the camera eye is an introspective lens which, while it frames

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itself, frames an external reality that will conform with the subjective dimension from which it issues.

Strangled emotions... Yet the use of the video medium succeeds in fluidifying the artist's emotional visions and even our own, though they are mingled with a deep unease that does not cease to question us. With the video medium this unease is free to run and flow, not crystallised by the "cage" of margins and frame as in a painting by Edvard Munch or Francis Bacon. Gudjónsson's stylistic cipher probably lies wholly in shifting tension, also through the use of melody and even non-melody (industrial noises, amplified environmental noises, distant and not better identified rhythms...). The artist himself feels his oeuvre to be "sound work" set in the medium of video. In *Sleep* the old turntable emits no sound except that of its needle ploughing the grooves of a trackless disc, together with the dull background noise of an anonymous garage that accommodates only the patter of the dripping. So the tension runs along the edge of sounds or non-sounds and the amplification of noises, like silence (which is never really silence), contributing to shaping this complex scenario of a metaphysical and spectral flavour. So it comes about that what did not seem to be bound by a narrative thread, by a causal nexus, appears instead to be gathered and condensed to express itself in a unique composite acoustic plot. The soundtrack is/becomes the connecting thread that runs through the video and "unwinds" it to the point of transcending it.

In the midst of a dream that has no explanation, a projection of itself beyond its own boundaries towards a transfiguration of its own interior landscape, it carries a reflection, dramatic and self-possessed, on the contemplation of emptiness, on the amplification of "silence" as suspension of presence. Temporary or permanent?

***Sleep*, 4 minutes 48 seconds HDV. By Sigurdur Gudjónsson, 2010.**