

The structures and mechanisms of power haunt Marine Hugonnier's film *Ariana*. Set in the Pandjshêr Valley in Afghanistan, a fertile, verdant place walled in by the high peaks of the Hindu Kush, what begins as a document of a film being made becomes an allegory for the process of representation itself, and its attendant implications in terms of power and control: representation via the act of looking, of image-making. *CASTING* a glance, *CATCHING* a glimpse, *FIXING* with a stare: traps to ensnare, assets to be stolen.

*Ariana* opens with doubt and attent, its unseen cast – in a reflexive turn, a film crew attempting to capture the scene – waiting for a vantage point from which to survey the valley floor. They are, to use the narrator's own loaded term, "disoriented." They must be let in, for space to reveal itself, and so they wait to be shown. This is redolent of Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*, and indeed René Daumal's unfinished novel *Mount Analogue*, both of which posited space which must 'allow' or 'show' those who navigated their way through them, and that the goal of their journeys was to access – after a period of waiting – an obscured or forbidden place via a threshold, a border, a littoral pregnant with meaning; a limit which demarcates the quotidian and the preternatural, knowing and not knowing, the profane and sacred. In both instances it carries, to varying degrees, overtones of the spiritual quest, but one which is analogic, not specifically theologic.

The group of characters – a geographer, an anthropologist, a sound engineer, a cameraman and a local guide – not only resonates with Daumal's baroque assembly but is surely similarly symbolic, in particular of the Western notion of the explorer or discoverer. The characters' vocations are all unequivocal, empirical: to examine, measure, gather and objectify and, by generating data, arguably to neutralise that which they measure via a process of homogenisation. In this sense the character of the explorer in the Western mode is inevitably also that of the conqueror, vanquisher – and where not explicitly of a people, then of their space; the map envisioning and fixing space, creating the *only possible instance* of that space where before its meaning may have been shifting, precarious, slippery, plural.

The film crew's wait is mirrored by the history, we are told by the narrator, of a battle for vantage points in the valley. "Planes had to be destroyed", such is the primacy of the bird's-eye view, a conceit which plays on sci-fi tropes in its telling, and the lyrical documentary in form: the work of Patrick Keiller, Chris Marker and Peter Greenaway covers similar ground. The spectre of war raises, of course, the very real and debilitating conflicts, over decades, which have troubled Afghanistan; and the notion of the control of or militarisation of landscape, particularly the skies above it, suggests not only the aerial bombardments associated with the West's 'clean' warfare but the unmanned drones which have become both instrumental to, and symbolic of, the conflict in the area.

Beyond this, though, lies the map and its will to survey and command, which, historically, moved from vantages observed to imagined, with the birds-eye view, and beyond to what amounted to its actualisation with the advent of aerial surveys.<sup>1</sup> From on high, the viewer can command all. In her book *Atlas of Emotion*, Giuliana Bruno notes that "The art of viewing followed the older touristic drive to survey and embrace a particular terrain: the compulsion to map a territory and position oneself within it that led to the climbing of church towers, mountains, and buildings to take in the panorama."<sup>2</sup> But this sight-seeing, or, as Bruno has it, *site-seeing*, is but a benign manifestation of the will to control. "From the air," the geographer Denis Cosgrove writes, "the imposition of political authority over space can be readily appreciated: the die-straight linearity of Roman military roads, the geometry of baroque urban plans, the gridded fields of reclaimed polder-lands, the sweeping masonry curves of China's Great Wall. [...] The dream of flight, offering an Apollonian perspective of the wide earth, encouraged visions of rational spatial order to be written across the land, free from the hindrance of local contingency and variation."<sup>3</sup>

The namelessness of the mountains in this valley invokes the map, too, and in particular the *terrae incognitae* of early maps which set up the binary of 'discovered' and 'undiscovered', mapped and not, civilised and savage; and which signified places *other*, that is, places alien to the Western explorer and Western imagination.<sup>4</sup> By reaching back and reactivating this landscape as *Ariana*, the ancient name for the swathe of Central Asia from Iran to the Indus River, Hugonnier performs a process of 'othering', removing the signification 'Afghanistan' and in a sense freeing it. Where maps objectify, fix, territorialise, and speak of power and agency with what Cosgrove identifies as their "normalizing and often ideological authority," this effects a defocusing, a loosening.<sup>5</sup>

This is that unknown land, then, neither truly Ariana nor Afghanistan, sequestered as it is by multi-national occupying forces and their private contractors; yet for all the borders, flags, and allied and enemy fronts, the mountains remain nameless – and this confers upon them an advantage of their own. Unscripted, the landscape remains free. Place-names speak of discovery and ownership, and therefore also relativity

# A P P A R E N T P O S I T I O N S

and position: of relative power. And this process of defining and positioning – representing – within this particular geography, is part of a system which applies such relativity on a grand scale, specifically that of the West's vision of the Orient.

Waiting to ascend Mount Analogue, the narrator writes that "We had to make use of this delay. First, we rethought the necessity of our material goods. All kinds of observational and measuring instruments, which had seemed to us more precious than anything, now seemed laughable – especially after our unfortunate photographic experiments – and several proved utterly useless."<sup>6</sup> It seems as though the place itself shrugs off representation.

In *Ariana*, the film crew search for a vantage point, to seek *advantage*, but are prevented from doing so by a landslide. The landscape *acts*. In being prevented from scaling its hills, they are, as in *Mount Analogue*, prevented from owning the place in some way, even if in view alone. While the colonial project continues its sacking of Afghanistan, the will to power of empire wrecking and razing, the landscape itself remains active, partisan. The Pandjshêr Valley becomes an "untouched zone", a "state within a state", as the narrator imparts, due to properties of *its own*. It is untouchable because it is measureless. This sense of the agency of space that *Ariana* unpicks, and the language it employs, once again circles *Stalker*, its "zone" echoing Tarkovsky's *zona*, both suggesting a particularity, an enclave, a *temenos*.

And from here, the quest in *Ariana* is also perhaps a corollary for the process of image-making itself; for representation as a means of control. Prevented from finding a vantage point, the narrator remarks drily that "an image would be missing," provoking a reflexive relationship between the facts of the ostensible narrative, the process of making the film and, arguably, the viewer themselves. The process of *taking* pictures by the film crew in this place diminishes that which they are taken from by virtue of the fact that they are *exterior* representations. In his highly influential work *Orientalism*, Edward Said shows this sense of exteriority to be central to his definition of Orientalism, or the Western view of the Orient: "Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West."<sup>7</sup> The crew realise that the image is implicated, not least because it establishes a (artificial) panoptic vision: "we realised that this panoramic shot was itself a means of control", the narrator says.

To *hold* something in one's gaze is to assert control over it. Space becomes image; the unbounded is bound, establishing a uniformity: the panorama of the city, in particular, "erases fragments", the narrator finds, making "the cityscape homogeneous, as opposed to this urban reality, as if the idea of discontinuity, or of a revolution, was impossible." Where the image of the city helps to enforce the notion that it is a regular whole, that of the mountains is disrupted, kept heterogeneous by the specific qualities of the space itself. And it is not a great leap to move from this point to the idea of the *civis*, the city, as site of control, or at least the *representation* of the city. As Cosgrove and others have shown, there was an ideological imperative in moving populations from disparate, dispersed rural communities to cities which were uniform, easy to control. The city becomes its represented self: panoptic, seamless, rendering resistance improbable. Where all is visible, and importantly, made visible in the service of power, there is no free or ambiguous space left.<sup>8</sup> In the compromised, embattled, appropriated landscape of *Ariana* as it stands today, it is the crew's failure to scale the nameless mountain which offers some hope.

Adam Pugh

1. This reached a zenith of sorts, and provoked the shock of the without, with the view of earth from space.

2. Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p.176

3. Denis Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision*, p.88

4. The colours chosen to shade these *terrae incognitae* were ideologically charged, too, to designate the dangerous, dark, untrustworthy or savage 'other'; and language followed suit, with 'darkest Africa' but one example.

5. Denis Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision*, p.155

6. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, pp.20-21

7. René Daumal, *Mount Analogue*, p.88

8. The process of Hausmannisation expressed this physically in the creation of the boulevards in Paris, designed to prevent, or at least control, protest. See Michael Sayeau's article *Beyond the Barricades*, in *Frieze* #142 (October 2011).

Apparent Positions runs from 20 October 2012 to 10 February 2013, with work by Aglaia Konrad, Beatrice Gibson, Cyprien Gaillard and Marine Hugonnier. An overview of the series is available separately.

Curated by Adam Pugh

Exhibition design and build: Rob Filby, Paul Kuzemczak and Thomas Salt  
Part of the 'Changing Landscapes' programme at the Sainsbury Centre.

Changing Landscapes project curator: Veronica Sekules

Thanks to Anna Mustonen and Rebecca Gremmo, Max Wigram Gallery; Silvia Batschun and Erika Neufeld, Sprüth Magers Berlin; Marie Logie, Auguste Orts; Gil Leung and Ben Cook, LUX; David Leister and Bella Parry, Kinoclub; Ludwig Draser, Andec Film; Andy Crouch; and all artists.

“The territory in question must be able to exist in any region on the surface of the globe; therefore we must study under what conditions it remains inaccessible, not only to ships, airplanes or other vehicles, but even to the eye. I mean that it might be possible, theoretically, for it to exist in the middle of this table without our having the slightest inkling.”

—René Daumal, *Mount Analogue*

Though by diverse means, the four artists whose work is part of the series *Apparent Positions* explore the notion of transfigured space. Complicating and subverting, variously, the construct of landscape and the Romantic tradition; the institution of the map; and the relationship of the built to the unbuilt, their films summon the notion of the plurality of place, of a meta-landscape; and beyond that, of the active site, loaded, both defining and defined by interaction with its occupants and would-be occupiers.

The title of the series invokes the phenomenon of parallax, wherein objects assume differing positions relative to that of the eye. Though a problem for astronomers and mathematicians, travellers and photographers alike, a parallax error could perhaps present, as the French writer René Daumal demonstrates in *Mount Analogue*, a margin of freedom; a zone of uncertainty in which change can be effected and co-ordinates altered unseen.

A number of artists and writers have stalked this territory. The Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges’ fictions revolve around worlds imagined, particularly those that exist as a synthesis of concept and object, that are conjured entirely by thought or word, or in time rather than space. In *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, the planet Tlön, a literary invention which is discussed by the author himself both inside and outside of the fiction in a dizzying *mise-en-abîme*, takes the place, gradually, of the real world; in *The Garden of Forking Paths*, an apocryphal labyrinth exists in time, rather than space, and the characters’ journeys crosses terrain both literal and literary.

Borges’ sometime collaborator and friend Adolfo Bioy Casares explores simultaneity, memory and memorialisation, and the notion of a terrain which encompasses both the physical and metaphysical in a similar way in the novella *The Invention of Morel*. The two suns, withered vegetation and rehearsed, repetitious behaviour of the inhabitants of Morel’s remote island speak not only of the troubled relationship between object and subject, observer and observed, but of the image itself — and though a digression from the theme here, the premise of the triumph of the copy pre-dates Jean Baudrillard’s treatise *Simulacra and Simulation*, which explores similar territory, by some forty years.

Beyond the image, this invokes representation, particularly that of space; and the disquieting sense of parallax which haunts not only the works of Borges, Bioy Casares and Daumal but the works in *Apparent Positions* is that of the disjuncture between map and mapped — geographic, linguistic or political. Borges’ *On Exactitude in Science* proposes a 1:1 map, an absurdity which exposes the ambition of the cartographic to influence, if not conquer, that which it represents: if the map becomes all, there are no longer any apparent positions, only absolute ones. The process of objectivisation or empiricisation needed to force the world to conform to the geometry of the map arguably alters the terrain itself (in the Occupied Territories, literally so, with a drawn line become a concrete wall), yet space is mutable, slippery, layered, and, as *Mount Analogue*, and famously Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* suggest, able to evade even the objective, vanquishing command of Man.

#### Ariana

Marine Hugonnier, UK, 2003, 18’36  
*Super 16mm film transferred to DVD, colour, sound*

*Ariana* tells the story of a film crew that sets out to visit the Pandjshêr Valley in Northern Afghanistan. Described in classic Persian poetry as a ‘paradise garden’, the impenetrable nature of the valley and its lush, fertile landscape have set it apart from the rest of the country and encouraged a history of independence and resistance. Hugonnier’s film considers how the specificities of a landscape help to determine its history.

After the crew is unable to film the valley from a vantage point in the surrounding Hindu Kush mountains, *Ariana* becomes the story of a failed project that prompts a process of reflection about the ‘panorama’ as a form of strategic overview, as a cinematic camera move, and its origins as pre-cinematic mass entertainment.

#### Marine Hugonnier

Marine Hugonnier (b. Paris, 1969) lives and works in London. Her practice, which centres on film and photography, demonstrates an interest in the anthropology of images and how the imagery of a culture develops. Hugonnier has exhibited widely, with solo presentations at Konsthall Malmö, Sweden; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Chisenhale Gallery, London; and Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland. Her work has also featured in group exhibitions at MACBA, Barcelona; MOMA, New York; the 52nd Venice Biennale, and the touring exhibition British Art Show 6. She is represented by Max Wigram Gallery, London.

*Ariana* was commissioned by MW Projects and Film and Video Umbrella in association with Chisenhale Gallery. Supported by the National Touring Programme of Arts Council England and sponsored by Marion and Guy Nagger and Alan Djanogly.

#### Resource and event space

The resource and event space is a cumulative archive, expanding with each exhibition in the *Apparent Positions* series. It includes publications relating to each artist, and doubles as an event space for talks and performances.

#### Publications

##### *Carrara*

Aglaia Konrad (text by Angelika Stepken)  
ROMA Publications, 2011, 136pp.  
287 x 216mm  
ISBN 978-907745966-9

##### *Desert Cities*

Aglaia Konrad (ed. Christoph Keller; texts by Brigitte Franzen, Miles Glendinning)  
JRP Ringier, 2008, 236pp.  
310 x 230mm  
ISBN 978-390582959-4

##### *Elasticity*

Aglaia Konrad (texts by Daniel Kurjakovic, Antonio Guzman, Eran Schaerf)  
NAI010 Publishers, 2003, 248pp.  
269 x 200mm  
ISBN 978-905662273-2

##### *Iconicity*

Aglaia Konrad (text by Willem Oorebeek)  
Walther König, 2005, 224pp.  
258 x 166mm  
ISBN 978-386560004-2

##### *Common Ground*

ed. Adam Pugh, with contributions by Beatrice Gibson, Alex Waterman, Will Holder, Luke Fowler et al.  
AURORA, 2009, 188pp.  
200 x 130mm  
ISBN 978-0-9553822-3-9

##### *The Tiger’s Mind*

Beatrice Gibson  
Sternberg Press, 2012, 144pp.  
ISBN 978-3-943365-50-4

##### *The Wire*

November 2012, 106pp.  
ISSN 977-095206809-01-1

##### *Cyprien Gaillard:*

*The Recovery of Discovery*  
Walther König, 2012, 84pp.  
ISBN 978-3863352-05-9

##### *Marine Hugonnier*

Michael Newman, Jeremy Millar, Lynne Cooke et al.  
Film and Video Umbrella & Dundee Contemporary Arts, 2004, 80pp.  
ISBN 978-1-904270-12-6

