

## *Devon Loch, or How To Entertain A Desire For Reality*

Devon Loch, a famous race horse belonging to Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, made a memorable fall during the final stretch of the horse jumping race at the Grand National in 1956, only 45 metres before the finishing line. The real reasons for this sudden spectacular fall have never been established ; it was presumed to be due to a cramp or a shadow on the barrier that could have unsettled him. Nowadays, “to do a Devon Loch” is a metaphor used in the English language to describe a sudden and unexpected failure, particularly in the sports sector.<sup>1</sup>

What characterises the scopic drive is an inextinguishable desire based on stealing an image or accessing it by an unauthorised route. If the voyeur hides, it isn't to avoid the shame of being caught, but to avoid any reciprocity, any interaction with the person under scrutiny, since that is exactly where their pleasure resides. Indeed, images which are stolen by the voyeur, even when embodied in the form of photographs and films, are not intended to be shared. Scopophilia renders images, in the sense that it occurs through personal symbolisation while building upon the two other elements in the conceptual tripod defined by Hans Belting<sup>2</sup>: apparatus (translated here as the ritual established by the voyeur) and content (the subject under scrutiny). It is moreover obvious that the obsessive nature of voyeurism finds a translation in repetition, the ambivalent expression of a disposition to maintain a paroxysmal state of desire or the failure to fully access the state of *jouissance*. Clément Rosset underlines that “[...] an important component of this perversion is the feeling of persistent anxiety, based on the fact that the voyeur is sure that they will never see anything, either because they will never have anything to observe (the scrutinised woman closing her shutters at the precise moment when the spectacle finally begins), or because what would indeed be worthy of observation will always coincide, in the voyeur's mind, with the moment when they abandon their watch for an instant [...]”<sup>3</sup> The voyeur simultaneously withholds and transforms through the internalisation of the impossible access to the object of their desire.

In different projects inspired by Devon Loch<sup>4</sup>, Emilie Pitoiset confronts us with this experience, not to voyeurism *per se*, but rather to the inextinguishable aspiration and vacuity of a quest for truth that demonstrates the illusory nature of *really* grasping reality. The archives of the race, films and photographs, fail to pierce the enigma of the horse's fall. If this allegation, understood beyond the subject of Devon Loch, is considered a commonplace in the space of art – which entertains a distance with reality induced by the notion representation – it still appears foreign to the space of media where any reflexion on reality seems subsumed in the presumption of an indexicality of certain images. Emilie Pitoiset invites us as “emancipated spectators” to create our own route to representation, since personal meanders then win over the objective to resolve the Devon Loch enigma. In the introduction to his lectures at the Collège de France, Barthes spoke of his defiance towards *method* which “implies the notion of a right path, that is to say aiming for one goal. Or paradoxically the right path designates the places where the subject does not want to go. Following a method, in the strict sense of the word, is to risk to fetishise the goal as a place, and, as such, risk to pass by other places. Whereas *paideia*, that is to say culture, opposed to method, returns the image of a sort of

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<sup>1</sup> Aude Launay, Extract of the press release for the eponymous Emilie Pitoiset exhibition, 10 June to 16 July 2011, Zoo Galerie, Nantes.

<sup>2</sup> *Pour une anthropologie des images*, Paris, Gallimard, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *Fantasmagories*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 2006, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Exhibition *Devon Loch*, 10 June to 16 July 2011, Zoo Galerie, Nantes ; continuation of the *Devon Loch* project, the artist's documentation.

dispersion, dispatching, a sort of eccentric tracing. This consists in staggering between snippets, as landmarks of knowledge and taste [...].”<sup>5</sup> By ellipse, Emilie Pitoiset’s proposition takes the shape of a body of work, objects and related clues. The cult of the fetish is removed from being the main subject since it is physically absent – the fall of the horse in *Devon Loch* or the ceremonial event in *Vous arrivez trop tard, Cérémonie* [You come too late, Ceremony]<sup>6</sup> – and is dispersed between indexical fragments that create the apparatus of the exhibition. Derived from processes of investigation, her works are subtle entry points towards making our own personal agency with our systems of representation.

Devon Loch’s fall is the metaphorical motif by which Emilie Pitoiset organises access to another metaphor, that of art, as Clouzot meant it in *The Mystery of Picasso*<sup>7</sup>. The fixed shots of Picasso painting, despite unity of time and place presuppose a real restitution of the filmed moment, are incapable of revealing the mystery of creation (or of what it is to be a genius, but that is another story...). The trauma of the 20<sup>th</sup> century wars with their processions of inhumanities has inspired major artworks about the impossibility to reconstitute that experience and the refusal of the image : “You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing.”, “I saw everything. Everything...”<sup>8</sup> ; or more recently, in *I Want To See* by Joanna Hadjithomas et Khalid Joreige<sup>9</sup>, reaffirming desire by working with an icon (Catherine Deneuve), as an escape from the *possibility/impossibility* duet. Obviously sharing this obsession with representation, Emilie Pitoiset contributes to the artwork by introducing a part of fiction into the debate on what is real. The anecdote of Devon Loch’s jockey, Dick Francis, who later developed a career writing detective novels based on the racing industry, allows for the following hypothesis : if one always scrutinises reality, rather than accessing its ectoplasm of truth or univocality, one arrives at a fictional, fanciful, fantasised form... Rumour has it in fact that his wife, Mary, was the true pen behind his novels.

Devon Loch is the anti Nana. In his eponymous novel<sup>10</sup>, Zola chose to give the name of his heroine (a prostitute) to a racing horse who, against all expectations (Nana herself calls her a deuce) wins the Paris Grand Prix. The osmosis that links the horse and his jockey, Price, at the peak of the race, concludes by a victory (which the author pushes to the limits of erotic equivocality) : “Then a splendid sight was witnessed. Price, rising in his stirrups and brandishing his whip, flogged Nana with an arm of iron. The old shrivelled-up child with his long, hard, dead face seemed to breath flame. And in a fit of furious audacity and triumphant will he put his heart into the filly, held her up, lifted her forward, drenched in foam, with eyes of blood. The whole rush of horses passed with a roar of thunder: it took away people’s breaths; it swept the air with it while the judge sat frigidly waiting, his eye adjusted to its task. Then there was an immense re-echoing burst of acclamation. With a supreme effort Price had just flung Nana past the post, thus beating Spirit by a head.” The osmosis between Devon Loch and Dick Francis was, on the other hand, brutally interrupted. The brutality marking the end of a story which is nevertheless written in advance is characteristic of the formation of myths.

The principal hypothesis of the elucidation of Devon Loch’s fall is in the same register of signs that Clément Rosset called “proximity doubles”<sup>11</sup>. It appears that the *echo* of the crowd, the *shadow* of a barrier or a *reflection* could have perturbed the horse. They are

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<sup>5</sup> “Comment vivre ensemble”, lecture 12 January 1977, Collège de France, CD, Paris, Edition du Seuil.

<sup>6</sup> Title of the exhibition presented at the art centre in Chelles, Les Eglises, 1 April to 20 May 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Documentary, 78 min., 1955.

<sup>8</sup> *Hiroshima mon amour*, film by Alain Resnais based on a scenario by Marguerite Duras, 90 min., 1959.

<sup>9</sup> Fictionalised documentary, 75 min., France-Lebanon, 2008

<sup>10</sup> *Nana*, 1880

<sup>11</sup> *Impressions fugitives*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 2004.

all emanations of reality; they incarnate imperfect forms of repetition, disrupted and altered forms. Far from being content to adhere to reality, they impact on each other. The principal of repetition and its corollaries (double, symmetry) is a lynch pin in Emilie Pitoiset's work. The artist reactivates the subject of Devon Loch, in the form of a challenge, in order to exhaust its mysterious charge, drawing from its fictional reserve, devitalising its emotional component, by an act of objectivisation inherent in repetition. If Devon Loch perceived or thought he perceived something, one can postulate that this cause existed, therefore no matter that the horse's reaction appeared inappropriate or inexplicable by outside witnesses. Devon Loch exited the world he had been assigned to, the space-time of the race track, to enter into an alternative dimension, living a form of reality which is impossible to share. The animal world and the human world adjust themselves without merging since "we comfort ourselves all too easily with the illusion that the relations of another kind of subject to the things of its environment play out in the same space and time as the relations that link us to the things of our human environment. This illusion is fed by the belief in the existence of one and only one world, in which all living beings are encased."<sup>12</sup> The plurality of modes of perception, and by causal extension the coexistence of perceived worlds, point to the equivocal nature of the idea of a common reality.

A, B and C watch together ~~and~~ for the first time the video of the famous Grand National race in 1956.

A : an honorary horsewoman  
B : a young man  
C : the instigator of the discussion

A : At least, it's not raining.  
B : But the terrain is muddy.  
A : No, it's not muddy.  
A : Ooh ! Look, that is how horses fall.  
C : On their backs with legs in the air ?  
A : Ah yes, it is quite muddy.  
C : Well, this race is such a panic !  
A : You know, many of them are euthanised on the field afterwards.  
B : You can't really hear the noise from the crowd, it is like a background sound over the journalist's commentaries.  
A : Ah there we are !  
The sports' commentator: "**Devon Loch can't loose !**"  
B : Devon Loch was trying to jump.  
A : No, no, he didn't jump.  
B : He just slipped.  
C : Go back, go back !  
C : "Devon Loch can't loose", that's what he said, right ?  
B : He slipped, I think. Look.  
A : Nooo.  
B : Look, he does do a small jump, hop.  
C : What do you think ? Go back, put the fall back on.  
B : What's that ?  
C : What's this madness ?  
A : That's bizarre...

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<sup>12</sup> Jacob von Uexküll, *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, (translated by Joseph D. O'Neil), University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

C : It's as if he is illustrating what the commentator said :  
"Devon Loch can't loose !". And then, I crash to the ground, a  
small figure on the belly !  
B : Wait, we can watch it image by image, wait...  
A : Stop... Stop !  
B : Did you see, he jumps !  
A : No he doesn't jump. Go back to the image.  
C : And what would the shadow be, if there was a shadow ?  
A : Look, he starts off with his ears backwards then his ears  
come forward.  
C : Ah, that's right ! Go back. You are right : all of a  
sudden, his ears pricked up.  
B : He saw something in the distance.  
A : He saw something since his ears pricked up. Show us the  
ears again.  
B : All his face changes, doesn't it ?  
A : Just a tiny bit before...  
B : Wait... Wait, normally we should be able to slow it down.  
The sports' commentator again : "**Devon loch can't loose !**"  
B : He missed a stride, basically...  
B : Did you see that ? He jumps. He is pulling back, no ?  
A : No. He found himself stuck in the earth. I don't know... The  
hooves stay stuck.  
C : The front or back hooves ?  
A : From behind ...  
A : Look ! He is not looking at the ground as if there was  
something down there, in fact, he is looking up. Clearly. He  
is not looking at the ground.  
C : So, there was no shadow on the ground.  
A : No, he is looking further away.  
B : Maybe someone wanted to cheat... positioned themselves in  
his field of vision to perturb him, show him something...  
C : You are trying to help me with my story, aren't you, with  
such a fanciful story ?  
B : No, I always think this way.  
C : OK... So what happens to Devon Loch after the fall ?  
C : Ah! See ! He didn't have a heart attack because he was  
too...  
A : Yes in that case, it would be more like asphyxia.  
B : Or otherwise... he had been given drugs. The way he  
stopped... he was really messed up.  
C : Already then ?  
B : He was given a potion that worked until that moment when  
he no longer assimilated it.  
C : Aah ! He's better ! Is he better ?  
B : Yes, the jockey is continuing !  
A : He, thingy whatsit, he is walking normally... Ah, no ! Look,  
he is staggering.  
C : He has hurt himself in the fall after all...  
A : Oh no, but look ! No, no...  
C : What ? He hurt his hindquarters or he had a heart attack ?  
A : I know ! It's as if he saw a *fence* \* in front of him.  
B : Really ?  
C : What's a *fence* \* ?  
A : A barrier, an obstacle.  
C : Yes but really. That's what you say, but, we have no idea  
here, after all. »

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