

João Maria Gusmão and Pedro Paiva

(Lisbon, Portugal, 1979, and Lisbon, Portugal, 1977)

Meteoritic, 2008, is one of a group of films entitled *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air*, which were shown at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009. The two artists filmed these works using the typical code of early twentieth-century clinical documentaries, with an immobile movie camera shooting the slow development of an experiment, presented from a supposedly objective viewpoint, without sound or commentary.

The hypnotizing power of natural phenomena and simple handcrafted gestures is such that this language, created to be neutral, unleashes an aura of magical occurrence, of cosmic analogy between the small event shown and the laws of nature that reproduce on a cosmic level what appears, secretly, in everyday life. In front of the opening of a glowing furnace, an orange sphere of scorching dough slowly turns on a stick, moving to a regular rhythm. The material of the sphere is really unprocessed glass, but it is also the cosmos, an incandescent piece of stellar matter, rotating in the void. What at first glance seems to be the slowed-down motion applied by the hands of an invisible glassworker evokes, through analogy, the accelerated movement of a meteorite, so that between the deceleration and acceleration of natural time, a bubble of eternal time takes shape, where magic, a natural philosophy of poetics, momentarily manifests itself.

With regard to this scientific-philosophical research Gusmão has stated: "Like a meteorite—which comes from the infinite and acquires a finite existence when it strikes the earth's crust—*Meteoritic* has to do with exploding from the void into existence."

In the work of these two artists, the representation of the impenetrability of the mystery of the universe takes on different accents. Thus, alongside the cosmic poetry of the scorching glass, one finds other "science experiments" conducted with the visual superimposition of fried eggs or gravitational dances of coconuts around wooden poles. The science experiment becomes a game and seems to evoke the amused seriousness of Terry Fox's *Children's Tapes*. It is the enchanted observation of every smallest and most insignificant fact in the world that leads to a continuous variation of enchanted and ironic inflections. In the continuous mirroring between the apparently insignificant and the universal there exists an awareness that everything is a play of references typical of theatrical fictions. "Without evading the thingness of things, we see the puppeteer setting up the show," Gusmão and Paiva have written, persuaded that a fascination with the magical quality of everything and an awareness of the theatrical construction within which this magic is explicated cannot help but coexist in man's eyes. (EV)