



E X T R A C T I O N : T H E R A F T O F T H E M E D U S A

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T H E  
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M E D U S A

Salomé Lamas

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INTER  
SECCIÓN









EXTRACTION: THE RAFT OF THE MEDUSA is a meditation on humanity's massive redesign of the planet and a dystopic pamphlet on the anthropocene.

EXTRACTION: THE RAFT OF THE MEDUSA portrays a brief moment of euphoria as the drifting occupants on the raft, hoping and praying to be rescued, appear to glimpse a possibility of salvation. We can almost hear the hoarse cries through which they attempt to draw attention to their desperate plight, mustering a final ounce of strength before the void. This is their last chance of survival.

EXTRACTION: THE RAFT OF THE MEDUSA refers to the colonial paradigm, worldview, and technologies that mark out regions of high biodiversity in order to reduce life to its conversion into a resource through capitalism, with an enormous environmental and social impact.

It is an allegory for states of emergency in environmental policy, climate and migration, with an ethical-political purpose.

EXTRACTION: THE RAFT OF THE MEDUSA is a multidisciplinary project in which sequential satellite products are layered around the exploration of a composed allegoric image.











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*The Mask of Disaster*  
*"Extraction: The Raft of the Medusa" (2019-2020)*  
 by Salomé Lamas

By Lars Henrik Gass

The scholar Klaus Heinrich – whose entire, unfortunately much too little noticed work (his legendary lectures in Berlin especially), is dedicated to nothing else than to enlighten man about himself and his psychological entanglements with the help of mythological studies, and thus to give him a bit more presence of mind – also devoted himself to the question of what it is about the Medusa in Gericault's painting, in which at first glance one cannot recognize anything of a Medusa figure at all.

Not much is known about the prehistory of the painting. It is known that it was a political issue, an *interventionist* act, an affront by Gericault, which was probably intended to prevent the almost unbelievable from being covered up by state structures: in 1816, following the wrecking of the frigate "Medusa", just one tenth of its original 150 sailors were left on a raft as survivors, after the most serious social and psychological disruption, physical suffering and cannibalism. Gericault decided to paint the thing that would otherwise have long been forgotten, but which could thus remain in collective consciousness forever as a metaphor. It is known that Gericault hired extras, built a raft, made numerous preliminary studies, even painted over parts of the already almost completed painting until it reached a final form. For it was not a matter of a realistic replica, but of uncovering a substrate, an *extraction*, one may say for now; so that genre could be exceeded by proportion.

The ship that went under probably didn't owe its name to the mythological horror figure. But through the *Faszinationsgeschichte* (history of fascination) provoked by the painting, as Klaus Heinrich writes, the "puzzle figure" remains a piece of thought, i.e. related to myth, to narrative, history, language. In another place, in the text "Zur Geistlosigkeit der Universität heute" ("On the Spiritlessness of the University Today"), Heinrich gave a hint as to what is possibly of such lasting concern to us – *fascination of catastrophe*: "catastrophic events that wave in image and writing from the display boards that, like election posters, are set up on public roads. The fascination of catastrophes in comics and specially invented cinema series has put the pornographic genre in second place unless it asserts itself with catastrophic fascination". I will come back to this in the end.

But what has prompted filmmaker Salomé Lamas to turn to an installation, not for the first time, in other words to *spatialize* a film? Is "Extraction: The Raft of the Medusa" (2019-2020) a concession to the art world that lets the film become *sculptural* in order to contain it, to take away its genuine *compulsion to perception*, which makes it suspicious of the freedom of the gaze?

In the art world, which above all controls access (i.e. to art, but also to how to view it in spaces) everything is geared towards taking

duration away from film – or more precisely: to take away that which only duration can produce – in order that film be made sculptural and thus usable through installation or loop. A film that requires a regulated entrance, a completely darkened room with rising rows of seats, is a constant problem in this system; it can hardly be displayed. Duration is the "imposition" of cinema, writes Juliane Rebentisch. The art business has therefore developed conventions and quite considerable restrictions for films that it approves to be thought of as art, which are now recognizably reflected as a design principle in films that want to be exploited by the art business. This is precisely the moment in which the cinema returns spatialized as sculpture, as cultic object – i.e. re-auratized. The uniqueness of cinema in terms of media history, however, consisted in the passivity of the viewer, in the compulsion to perceive. Cinema did not become social through participation. The "free", "individual" gaze that is propagated for art today and is allegedly opposed by the cinema is perfectly suited to neoliberal individualization. Cinema is social not because it is overly socially organized or provokes social processes independently of films themselves, but because it regulates, even if only for a certain duration, access to social reality, how reality becomes technically visible.

And what does "Extraction" mean? What does it add to the painting we know and to which Lamas' work refers? What does it consist of? Why should or must Gericault's painting be "extracted"? Extraction (Latin "extrahere": pull out, take out), Wikipedia teaches me, names any separation process in which one or more components are extracted from a mixture of substances (individually solid, liquid or gaseous) – the extraction material – with the aid of an extraction agent (solid, liquid or gaseous). The extracted substance, even if it is still in solution, is referred to as an extract, or rarely as an infusion. This leads to the centre of the work, which remains a film even when it presents itself sculpturally in a double sense: as an ensemble of bodies in a room and as a moving image for a room – i.e. an object that can be walked around.

But what, to finally speak of it, does one see in Lamas' work, which I would like to continue to call a "film" because it is the temporality of the image that points to the center of the work, rather than straight to the art world. One first sees a tendingly endless frame that holds an endless space of the universe and time, the film itself embodying duration. Then Gericault's tableau and, as we approach the extraction, two intertwined triangles called "Despair" and "Hope", angles and edges opposite the earth, the globe, the curved line, the form without angles in the background. Two voices accompany the forms: initially a male one, speaking a cascade of terms that evoke doom ("extinguish", "destroy", "contaminate", "disintegrate" etc), then a female one that forms a thought, slowly and steadily: "The body of the other is not the body. It's a thing. The other is nothing more than myself". One sees a heap of bodies, bodies that devour each other, that are dependent on each other and on the limited surface of the space that remains for them, even if at the same time they threaten each other (as the speech "the boat is full" suggests), which thus,

one could say, turns the raft into a Noah's Ark; a place of salvation for the last, the rest of civilization, that remains on Mount Ararat.

We begin to understand that we are dealing here with an experimental arrangement (of Gericault's material and/or the situation) which is historically re-contextualized, *faszinationsgeschichtlich* (fascination-historically) sharpened to the question of why we want to view the horror, the head of Medusa, at all: *aesthetically*, in that Lamas places the gaze of terror (the "catastrophe fascination") in the picture; *media historically*, in that Lamas returns the film to its place in society, by asking the world to look at the person who goes to the cinema; and finally *sociogenetically*, in that Lamas makes clear that the Medusa's role is not merely as a representation of horror (we are not only looking at terrible events) but also that of horror looking back at us, so to speak, as Medusa's gaze. Medusa is a projection figure, a female figure above all, a mask that should be lifted. This may be seen as the meaning of the statement of the female voice in the film: "Which is the place on the raft for the other that I am?".

At the end of the film, Lamas graphically illustrates this peculiar, artificial situation, through the forms that stand against each other in the picture: the upright pyramid, floating on coal and milk, representing fire and air; the inverted pyramid, above all, representing water and earth; and the hourglass in between and formed by these shapes, the clock that ticks, our clock ("time is running out"). The inverted pyramid has been given an internationally sensational interpretation by the architect I.M. Pei in his work at the Louvre. The inverted glass pyramidal form that drops into the building's interior was perceived as a chalice, a female symbol, while the upright stone pyramid placed beneath it was interpreted as a blade, a male symbol: the whole structure could thus express the union of the sexes. So here we are not talking about an all-seeing eye, an eye of God, but a new kind of fascination-historical, analytical Trinity, a Trinity of the gaze: the gaze of horror, the gaze of the world looking back at us through the film, and the gaze of time seen from the possible end of civilization on life, so to speak from a creaturely perspective.

Slavoj Žižek recently referred to our peculiar, powerless, perverse fascination with horror: "Observing the suffering of others is the obscure reason why we can feel joy (bliss in heaven) at all. If we remove it, our bliss appears in all its sterile stupidity. The same applies to wars, famines and violence, all the horror scenarios from the Third World that we see on our screens every day. We need this horror in order to bear the happiness in our consumer heaven at all". For Klaus Heinrich, the figure of Medusa is basically a misogynist reversal: "What makes us freeze is attributed to it as *what it does to us*". The woman is ascribed the terror that her gaze merely reflects: the terror of a humanity that fails to be enlightened, the fear of destruction, as well as the fascination of the survivors. That, roughly speaking, makes us think "Extraction: The Raft of the Medusa".

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The following texts were written in dialogue with (in order of appearance): J.B. Henry Savigny and Alexandre Corréard; Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Achille Mbembe, Macarena Gómez-Barris, Deleuze and Guattari, Manabe and Wetherald, Dipesh Chakrabarty; Slavoj Žižek, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ray Kurzweil, Deleuze and Guattari, Catherine Malabou, Michel Foucault; Giorgio Agamben, Franz Kafka, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Oswald de Andrade; Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Plato, Aristotle, Carl Schmitt; Peter Frase; Reg Morrison, James Lovelock, Karl Kraus, Emil Cioran, John Grey; BBC Science; Donna Haraway.