



Hector Castells
A Stag Beetle in Canal Bridge

25 January - 24 March 2011

The camera follows a beetle on the damp pavements of London. We are on Canal Bridge, it's midnight and here red is the colour of black, of anxiety, of the sound of sirens and backwash of cars, to which is added, in counterpoint, a guitar improvisation dedicated to the whale of the Thames, the 7 ton young female which appeared in the river in January 2006 - and where she died a few days later. Visually, it is a long sequence shot, hand-held camera, concentrated on the movements of the insect. Forsaken, it goes around and around, attracted as it was by some rubbish bins. It turns back, looks for an exit and falls! On the back, the beetle panics because death is here, it knows this much. The artist records this wreck as the cameras of the whole world had recorded, all at once half-terrified and half-fascinated, the rescue, and then the agony of the whale in the Thames' waters. The mammal, according to the scientists, would have made a mistake whilst coming down from Scotland. Having got into the river's estuary, guided by its instinct, which, however, urged it to get to the Atlantic Ocean, it died after three days from dehydration and hunger – just like Gregor Samsa will starve in the *Metamorphosis* and as Kafka himself starved.

Death is long and the last breath doesn't come like that, not in a snap, not by magic. If we die it's much rather in fear and open-mouthed. The insect's, filmed in close-up, is very spectacular, at the same time old man and infant, the light on its mandibles of steel in the dark revealing a physiology of the missed-out-on and of asphyxia. The method chosen to film this world doesn't differ from the one applied by the pioneers of scientific film, but here, the restitution by the film of the essential characteristics of the studied object, the magic of the animal world and the urban microcosm, is borne by a gesture. Castells films this display of nature under the red lights of the urban city, activating through the documentary the poetic and political dimensions of life, which he records. The frame is not fixed, the focus gets lost, the image gets misty, the film-maker is curved-up, the animal is on its back, one looking almost with cruelty if the other, opened-mouthed, will be able to get out of it. Almost inadvertently the encounter tips towards the social and zoological study. And if the hand trembles, if the breath is lacking, if after the fall and the miraculous recovery the cockroach is dazed, and if the film-maker, just as dizzy, also waddles when setting off, it is because there has been here a kind of empathy in the double performance. The insect is here an inhabitant of the world filmed for its anthropological qualities. Wildlife film and little parable about the human condition, *A Stag Beetle in Canal Bridge* is a gesture, a plastic investigation, a fall or the image of an abyss which made the other one say: "However tiny creatures are, we cannot represent ourselves without violence the involvement of the being in them " (G. Bataille). Dialectic of life against death, the video is the means of recording a zoological reality become backwards ethnological and urban.

Hector Castells was born in Barcelona in 1978. He lives and works in London.

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2010, 27', video, col., son.

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