



Research «A» Head, Pierre Restany, Milan, 1999

Miguel Chevalier's art intrigues, in the same way that Jean-François Lyotard's famous exhibition, "Les Immatériaux", at the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 1985, intrigued. Chevalier unsettles us because the fundamental dimension of his basic postulate transcends and overwhelms the essential identity of our being, our consciousness of our relationship to the world. This is indeed a basic sensation, one that the artist translates into images. A tradition that goes back many millenia to the cave dwellers has consolidated the status of the image, which seemed eternal and was based on the material immanence of its frontality. Very different is the status of the image that Miguel Chevalier offers us. It's nature is digital and telematic and its ultimate purpose is interactive. Its support - no longer paper or canvas but the electronic screen - renders it ephemeral and transient. Miguel Chevalier's image is the trace of a surge of energy in real time - the immaterial energy that is the basis of all communication (Yves Klein, whose genius intuited its cosmic scope and universal relevance, did not hesitate to "cut it up" into zones of immaterial pictorial sensibility, to make an unlimited multiple art object out of it). Equally sensitive to the poetic energy of the immaterial, Miguel Chevalier appropriates its communicative force by using computers and telematic tools. His digital images, which appear in real time on computer screens or monitors, are interactive, and, depending on the program, can be produced by the viewer on a keyboard or on analogical controls.

Such a representation of the sensation of contemporary nature, within the virtual reality of an expanded universe, produces a radical change in our mode of being present in the world. In Miguel Chevalier's "Périphérie" installation at the Espace Cardin in Paris, the visitor's physical presence, detected by sensors on the floor, determined his or her projection in two simultaneous fields: that of two-way urban traffic and that of a panorama of virtual architectures. The circular nature of the screen panels accentuated the sensation of a total immersion in an expanded space - a fascinating sensation of entering, in real, organic time, a world of accelerated and alternating circular flows, of dizzying perspectives of formal hybridizations, with the exciting awareness that this new world was being revealed by a new technology, one specially suited to communicating it.

To say technology is to say reason. This glimpse of a new world, one having a more complex and deeper nature, which the artist communicates to us by resorting rationally to a technology possessing a more advanced visual poetics, is infinitely exciting. It gives us the impression that we are seeing the boundaries of transcendence being pushed back under our very eyes; that we have attained the ineffable moment when we are obliged to acknowledge our incapacity to reduce our perception of the manifestations of deep nature to the terms of pure reason, that ineffable moment which Kant would call "the sublime". (Miguel Chevalier might well retort, "But isn't there something sublime about the fact that we are glimpsing its limits being pushed back?")

And, in fact, by creating further installations and mises-en-scènes designed to convey this feeling of technological sublimeness, Miguel Chevalier jubilantly gives himself a licence to do just that. To stress the interactive purpose of these works, he calls them "Performances". With Transit and "Interconnexions", he expands the image. His giant screens, his Tableaux de bord (Instrument Panels), his "Fenêtres mémoires" (Memory Windows), have taken over an extraordinary variety of territories: the gardens of the Casa Velasquez in Madrid, the fortifications of Port-Louis, Montreal's Mirabel airport, a water reservoir at Kremlin-Bicêtre near Paris, different Olympic Games sites, the Fabrika at Beyrouth. The artist's most gigantic work to date was his installation in the port of Fukuoka in southern Japan, with its 10,000 square metre inflatable screen. With the creation of the Espace Landowski in Boulogne-Billancourt - a synchronized virtual interactive panorama tracing the socio-economic activities that have marked the town's history - Miguel Chevalier reached a peak of didactic refinement.

The titles of Miguel Chevalier's works - from "Marée binaire" (Binary Tide) to "Combat des images" (Battle of Images) - underline their passionate lyricism. The artist's classical training (The Ecole nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs in Paris, followed by the School of Visual Arts in New York), his existential background (his childhood in Mexico, his sojourns in Japan) give his technological commitment extra value. Eschewing all the approximate, routine preliminaries of classical expressive means, Miguel Chevalier intuited from the outset the immense possibilities that telematics offers in the field of visual language. He had the right vision at the right time, and he knows it. He is one of the few explorers of the world of computer communication to reveal the new profile of our global culture's image and the direction it is destined to take. Drawing conclusions from the aesthetics of communication dear to Fred Forest, he has managed to infuse the operational strategies derived from them with the cosmic breath of Yves Klein's sensibility. That is why the explosion of these new images projects them to the threshold of the technological sublime. While they remain connected to the memory, they harmonise perfectly with the syncopated rhythms of electronic music and the self-repeating perspectives of fractal urbanism. In its globalness our urban culture is expanding, and Miguel Chevalier's images are the ideal expression of this irresistible thrust of the present. This inspired poet of visual language of "Megacité" expresses the gratifying joy of clear sight. Chevalier's work now spans almost two decades, and this book presents its most spectacular achievements. To characterise an œuvre of such contemporary presence and such an effervescent mood, the expression that comes to mind - I borrow from one of Miguel's titles - is "C'est la recherche en tête", it's research (a)head.