

Sarah Morris

Bye

Bye

Brazil

Shift to Liquid

I experience and see the paintings in this same manner: visceral, after-images, interfaces sometimes representing something that is repulsive, overwhelming; a system that is larger than you, with moments of inherent complicitness, and yet distance or failure built in.

• SARAH MORRIS

Sarah Morris is well aware of the impossibility of somehow placing oneself 'outside', for critical or artistic reasons. It can't be achieved through abstraction, reflection, alienation, or some other logic or technique. Perhaps it has become structurally impossible. Searching for ways to proceed nonetheless, seeking reasons or even excuses to make work, Morris began throwing herself into the middle of things. You could call this an excuse to engage with the hyper-intensity of our time. Practically speaking, as observers of Morris's work have often noted, that means exploring late capitalism and all the ways it has implemented modernism in architecture and urban planning, disciplines that could be described as the planning of the inside and the outside all at once. Manhattan, Miami, Washington, Los Angeles, Beijing, and, most recently, Rio de Janeiro: these metropolitan sites have been the subjects of her films and paintings, which since 1998 she has produced in parallel series.

Morris's films are shaped by a technique of investigatory observation. Always there is the feeling of drifting, drifting as a device; the cool, disembodied camera-eye. With the exception of two that feature conversations, all Morris's films have had their diegetic sound customarily stripped, which, as Warren Beatty pointed out to the artist, is the ultimate empowerment for a director. This allows fiction to enter the work. Always, there is rhythm: the music, the pace of the editing, the pulsating movements of people and cars through urban spaces. The soundtrack generally supports but at times disrupts the dreamy and hypnotic state induced by these long-form meditations. Morris's colleague Liam Gillick has always contributed to crafting these soundtracks. His observation of the work process, along with minimal but specific direction, is sufficient for him to compose what Morris calls "sound modules" without seeing a single frame. The collaborative process is purposefully disjointed; ultimately Gillick cedes control, passing the modules on for consideration by Morris, who then splices and repeats them as part of an editing process in which they are treated like colours or moods, to be used atmospherically.

'Midtown' (1998), Morris's first film, is an urban flânerie. Shot, like all her films, with the flattening effect of a zoom lens, it may be seen in light of Walter Benjamin's 'Arcades Project' (1927-40) and the idea of the dialectical image: the fetishism of commodities employed to break the spell of things that capitalism

had put upon them, bringing out what is ancient in them to make the historical traces of what surrounds us more sensible and thus releasing their significance by way of a new spell, that of art. The film contemplates the magic columns of these palace-like arcades, the reflections on glass-and-steel facades, the advertisements composed of light, whirling fashion, high heels, a woman coming to rest for lunch at a fountain. Every object, every space, must become public. Like 'Midtown's' musings, Benjamin's dialectical image describes a dreaming of the epoch that will follow this one; it is imbued with a double sense of both the dust and ruins all these things will become, as well as the dust and ruins they carry within from prior times.

This early film sets the stage for a concern with public space, but increasingly Morris has sought not simply the excuse to deploy a camera-eye, but a logistical challenge, a provocation of planning, an unknown journey, a set of practical impossibilities. She wants to be both author and protagonist, and to her that means using compromised personalities and places as portals into entanglements of power, generating a sense of dizzying simultaneity that she translates into motives and resources for her paintings and a flow of images for her films, all of which add up to topologies of a moment in the life of power and style.

The film 'Capital' (2000), for instance, posed a typical problem of access: how to film President Clinton in highly controlled areas in and around the White House? You must manipulate a system in order to penetrate it for your own ends, and Morris thrives on the phone calls and emails, letters and packages, the ongoing dialogue with other modes of production. Preparations for 'Beijing' (2008) involved asking both Chinese and Swiss bureaucracies for rights to film onstage and backstage during the Olympic Games. Morris was interested in doing so partly because of the way in which the Olympics acted as a corporate entity connecting an apparently stubbornly nationalistic China to the larger world in complex and uncontrollable ways. Although primarily Swiss and headquartered in Lausanne, the Olympic Committee, according to Morris, "occupies a country and a state and takes over and does a choreographed parade." The Committee's contract goes so far as to stipulate that any host city must hand over the rule of law for the duration of the event. Morris is simultaneously drawn to and suspicious of the gatekeepers, the sites and structures of social control, all of that desire, conspiracy, danger, power. She enacts a kind of negotiated trespass, in which the terms of those in power are not always honoured. Rather than pursue something along lines of critical distance, artistic ambiguity or female reserve, Morris wishes to encounter her quarry head-on, to master it and make it her own.

Like Morris's other films, 'Rio' (2012) has no need for the creation of cinematic space, of fictional space. There is no need for a script; there is no need for actors. It's all already there; it's all true. We immediately get the adrenaline rush of the city with the fast-cut opening shots: the bustle of a coffee shop, every countertop stocked with Brazil's artificial sweetener Assugrin, packaged

like medicine in a clear-plastic bottle. The mirror reflection of an espresso cup emblazoned with 'Capital'. Heads severed by close-ups, a nervous twitch of fingers, pedestrians in various directions somehow never touching, a zoom on flip-flops and sneakers, a city on the move.

Next, a bay vista on a grey day, boats on the water, hills in low clouds, diffuse light and an overcast sky. A small fishing craft sits in the right-hand corner of the frame and, as the musical accompaniment darkens, is joined by a vast freighter entering from the left and then another from background right, slowly usurping the frame, dwarfing the fisherman. The scene pays homage to 'It's All True', Orson Welles' unrealised 1941-42 film about Rio. Funded by Nelson Rockefeller, the project was never intended to be a commercial success. It was, instead, a product of cultural exchange in an early Cold War era in which the Brazilian government still sheltered Nazi sympathizers. Welles apparently got lost in Rio, shooting more and more footage but never nearing completion. In the end the production company took all the shot material, and for the rest of his life the director fought unsuccessfully to regain the rights to it. One particular episode from the film, called 'Four Men on a Raft', may have contributed to the project's demise. It tells the true story of impoverished fishermen who set sail for Rio from the town of Fortaleza on simple sailing crafts with no navigational instruments, their aim a revolutionary one. After a 61-day voyage they arrived in the city to much fanfare, delivering to the President their demands for union protections, which were eventually granted. Welles re-enacted the story with the original fishermen, and while it would become the heart of 'It's All True', this restaging claimed the life of the lead fisherman, who drowned at sea. This is just one of the many back-stories of aspiration and dependency that form the undercurrent of Sarah Morris's 'Rio'. From its first moment, the film refuses to step back and allow us to see the city as a whole, stretched along the ocean and winding into the hills. More precisely, this 88-minute-long film proposes that we can't step outside to get a clear picture, we are always within, always connected, via hidden channels, terrains, spheres, correspondences.

There was always an investigative sense in Morris's previous films. The drifting images were bound through power or celebrity. But what do you get with 'Rio'? What does the place mean to the artist? This is not a city taken over, either metonymically, as with Hollywood's LA and the White House's DC, or more literally, as with the Olympics. The film marks a step away from sharp focus, a shift in style to something more dispersed.

Liquidity, flow and transience have always been key elements of Morris's films, what she has called drifting as a device, but without a focus on power, it may be that these tonal narratives — how things look and feel, how we move through designed space, the investigation of surfaces and reflections — pose the question: what remains? Morris may have stopped trying to shoot that desk from where all is controlled, because it simply doesn't exist. The desk cannot be stormed, or filmed. What do you do then?

It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist. [...] Art must turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept, and thus become uncertain of itself right into its innermost fibre.

This premise from Theodor Adorno's 'Aesthetic Theory' (1961–69) emerges from his support for an autonomous artistic avant-garde, one which since the 1940s was unified by the critique of modern consumerism and what Adorno called the "culture industry". Today we might consider instead a culture of digital liquidity, in which the emphasis on art's autonomy has changed. In the culture at large, flexibility with uncertainty has replaced a belief in progress. As Zygmunt Baumann claims in 'Liquid Modernity' (2000):

If in its "solid" phase the heart of modernity was about controlling and fixing the future, in the "liquid" phase the prime concern moved to ensuring the future was not mortgaged. [...] To put it bluntly, under conditions of liquidity anything could happen yet nothing can be done with confidence and certainty.

Morris's 'Rio' feels different from her earlier films because she has allowed herself to tap this uncertainty. The film moves a step away from media spectacle and cliché towards vernacular, everyday culture, and presents the tension between history and the present as embodied in an architecture, design and advertising culture that is entirely merged with both commercial and political interests and localised struggles. The images are here one step ahead of the abstract electronic soundscape. Liquidity is more of an oracle than a symptom; it is a leap, a risky embrace of distraction and drift.

Although quite different in intent from 'Rio', another recent film shares this sensibility. Harmony Korine has repeatedly called his own drifting, dispersed, music-based film 'Spring Breakers' (2013) a "liquid narrative", going on to say:

I wanted the movie to work like electronic music, or sample-based music. I wanted this immersive quality with the sound, with the image hitting full-on throughout the entire film. [...] It's more like a feeling, or a drug experience, some kind of transcendence like a peak moment that dissolves into blackness.

It may be that this narrative sensibility has something to do with computational space and the digital technologies that shape our daily life: a shift from culture industry to digital liquidity. A hundred years ago, to be "modern" meant progress, the pursuit of some final state of perfection. Now it means infinite minor changes, no final state in sight, and none desired.

Even if Rio cannot be subsumed in one spectacular event of capitalism, sports and entertainment, there is an iconic figure who epitomises the city and perhaps even the country: architect Oscar Niemeyer. Working with landscape architect and urban planner Lúcio Costa, landscape designer and botanist Burle Marx (who harvested and cultivated rainforest plants), and artist Athos Bulcão, Niemeyer emphasised flexibility, publicness and the inter-penetration of inside and outside, nature and culture, light and shadow. A life-long and vocal communist, Niemeyer saw his career slow under the right-wing military dictatorships that ruled Brazil in the 1960s and '70s. The architect appears in Morris's film, just months from his death at 104. This coup is the most prominent trace of the artist's more typical ways of securing access to power. In Rio, however, such methods must be tempered because of the city's particular relationship to power, which stems from Brazil's anti-authoritarian period in the 1960s and subsequent military dictatorship, the deep influence of Catholicism, and a current taste for control that might be understood as a reaction to the extreme poverty and crime of the favelas.

Niemeyer is probably the single most powerful influence on the paintings Morris made parallel to the film's production, which makes sense, as he so deeply influenced all visual and spatial culture in Rio over the last century, from architecture and urban space to product design, graphics and signage. Morris's new paintings are imposing, like forms of new propaganda, but while cerebral and tough as always, their opaque, glossy surface keeping you at arm's length, they have never before been this beautiful. The digitally-generated compositions, based on the tension between the rigidity and restlessness of algorithmic diagrams, are full of botanical and lunar motifs: the curve that is not a circle but a circle turned botanical, the circle turned leaf, or perhaps Niemeyer's curve that is always female.

Sometimes we may also see references to the *brise-soleil*. It was Niemeyer who reinvented Le Corbusier's famous sun-shading façades by making them adjustable. What looks as if it had always been part of the Brazilian architecture, however, is an ideological artifact: the shades were largely manufactured and added to existing buildings only after the military regime ended in 1985, and crime surged in the wealthier parts of the city. Here they were intended to keep out not only the sun but the people. Complex symbols — both barriers and portals — the *brise-soleils* have deeply informed Morris's new works.

The titles of the paintings are literal, referring to Rio-based sites, structures and corporations, and suggest the myriad ways that Niemeyer's visual forms have influenced the country's public visual vocabulary. Morris's explicit titling of nominally decorative, abstract geometric paintings is a provocation that has occasionally caused trouble (the Mayor of London, for example, was discomfited by the title of a work commissioned for the city's Tube system in 2012: 'Petrobras', the name of Brazil's largest public oil company.) The pieces may be seen as charged with Brazil's current moment and all the contrasts and contradictions that city stands for: left and right, rich and poor, black and

white, and above all the recent and continuing transition from Third World to First World. This is all a carefully considered aspect of the work, and the exhibition's title 'Bye Bye Brazil' is taken from a 1979 film depicting travelling performers moving through jungle villages where factories and televisions are moving in, people are beginning to be displaced, and an old way of life is about to be turned over by the modern world. If Morris's film does indeed show a metropolis overtaken by some external force, it is no entertainment industry or political caste but the sudden embrace of global capital itself, a flood of liquidity that is working changes on Rio in especially savage and visible ways.

In the titles of her paintings Morris tells you specifically and literally what a visual abstraction refers to, and it becomes the work of a critic or viewer to draw out connections. In a sense the early films were similar: abstracted scenes are framed by an explanatory title. The 'Rio' film, however, reverses this logic. The specificity of people, sites and scenes are offered without language or back-story, remaining inscrutable to those without local knowledge. What if the critic didn't fill in all the background stories? Would it matter?

• BETTINA FUNCKE

A brief, speculative tour of Rio via Morris's painting titles:

01. Academia Militar [Rio] (2012): pointing to Brazil's colonial history. Still in operation today, the military academy was founded in 1792 by Queen Mary I to train the artillery and engineering officers of the Portuguese army based in Brazil. It is also the location from which Morris filmed the famous Sugarloaf cable cars and oil tankers in the bay.
05. Itaú [Rio] (2012): a modernist high-rise façade, this one for Itaú Unibanco, the largest financial conglomerate in the Southern hemisphere.
09. Parque Guinle — Nova Cintra [Rio] (2013): a building with brise-soleil structures, which is located beside a park designed by Lúcio Costa.
19. Apple [Rio] (2012): possibly referencing South America's first Apple store, recently opened in Rio.
20. Jockey Club Brasileiro [Rio] (2012): the headquarters of Brazil's Jockey Club, which is based in Rio, and pictured in the film.
25. Sambódromo da Marquês de Sapucaí [Rio] (2012): the Niemeyer-designed, mile-long street where the city's famous Carnival parade takes place.
36. Banco Safra [Rio] (2012): a modernist high-rise building that houses one of Brazil's largest banks.
37. Globo [Rio] (2013): the Brazilian TV channel Globo, which is the second-largest commercial TV network worldwide (measured in terms of annual revenue), as well as the owner of Rio's main newspaper. The network produces 'Insensato Coração' (Irritated Heart), the soap opera that is featured in Morris's 'Rio'.
43. Burle Marx [Rio] (2013): the man who introduced modernist landscape architecture to Brazil and created the most famous Copacabana boardwalk design.
49. Marquês de Herval [Rio] (2013): a 1953 modernist Marques de Herval building, originally designed with a complex brise-soleil system that was removed in the 1960s.
50. Posto 8 [Rio] (2013): a famous section of Ipanema beach where surfers hang out.
65. João Goulart [Rio] (2013): ousted in the 1964 military coup d'état, Goulart was the 24th President of Brazil, and the last left-winger to fulfil the role until 2003.
67. ABI [Rio] (2013): an early-1939 building for ABI, the Brazilian Press Association. Soon to be auctioned off due to the company's financial troubles.
77. Vale [Rio] (2013): the country's main mining company, which owns the world's largest ore carrier, used for transporting iron from Brazil to Asia.
88. Praça da Apoteose [Rio] (2012): the final destination point of the Sambódromo da Marquês de Sapucaí, where samba-school parade members gather to complete their competitive runway procession.

Paintings

01. Academia Militar [Rio]
2012
Household gloss on canvas
84 ¼ × 84 ¼ in. (214 × 214 cm)
05. Itaú [Rio]
2012
Household gloss on canvas
84 ¼ × 84 ¼ in. (214 × 214 cm)
06. Annual Solar Eclipse [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
60 × 60 in. (152.5 × 152.5 cm)
09. Parque Guinle — Nova Cintra [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
113 ¾ × 113 ¾ in. (289 × 289 cm)
15. Penumbrial Lunar Eclipse [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
48 × 48 in. (122 × 122 cm)
19. Apple [Rio]
2012
Household gloss on canvas
84 ¼ × 84 ¼ in. (214 × 214 cm)
20. Jockey Club Brasileiro [Rio]
2012
Household gloss on canvas
84 ¼ × 84 ¼ in. (214 × 214 cm)
25. Sambódromo da Marquês de Sapucaí [Rio]
2012
Household gloss on canvas
84 ¼ × 84 ¼ in. (214 × 214 cm)
30. Março 2011 [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
48 × 48 in. (122 × 122 cm)
36. Banco Safra [Rio]
2012
Household gloss on canvas
84 ¼ × 84 ¼ in. (214 × 214 cm)
37. Globo [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
84 ¼ × 84 ¼ in. (214 × 214 cm)
42. July 2013 [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
113 ¾ × 113 ¾ in. (289 × 289 cm)
43. Burle Marx [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
60 × 60 in. (152.5 × 152.5 cm)
49. Marquês de Herval [Rio]
2012
Household gloss on canvas
84 ¼ × 84 ¼ in. (214 × 214 cm)
50. Posto 8 [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
48 × 48 in. (122 × 122 cm)
59. Telebrás [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
84 ¼ × 84 ¼ in. (214 × 214 cm)
65. João Goulart [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
60 × 60 in. (152.5 × 152.5 cm)
67. ABI [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
84 ¼ × 84 ¼ in. (214 × 214 cm)
70. Cat's Tongue [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
60 × 60 in. (152.5 × 152.5 cm)
77. Vale [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
84 ¼ × 84 ¼ in. (214 × 214 cm)
81. Jardim Botânico [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
48 × 48 in. (122 × 122 cm)
86. Bovespa [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
48 ¼ × 48 ¼ in. (122.5 × 122.5 cm)
88. Praça da Apoteose [Rio]
2012
Household gloss on canvas
113 ¾ × 113 ¾ in. (289 × 289 cm)
94. Banco Alliança [Rio]
2013
Household gloss on canvas
60 × 60 in. (152.5 × 152.5 cm)

Works on Paper

Rio, 2012
 Red One MX
 Duration: 88 mins 33 secs
 Edition of 5

Rio Production Stills

08. El Ultimo Testigo [The Parallax View]	02. 00:06:06	14. Production still
2013	03. 00:07:44	16. Production still
Ink and gouache on paper	04. 00:07:42	23. Production still
39 ³ / ₈ × 27 ⁹ / ₁₆ in. (100 × 70 cm)	07. 00:08:42	24. Production still
	10. 00:59:00	26. Production still
18. F for Fake	11. 00:10:48	28. Production still
2013	12. 01:00:07	39. Production still
Ink and gouache on paper	13. 01:00:03	40. Production still
41 ³ / ₄ × 27 ¹³ / ₁₆ in. (106 × 70.7 cm)	17. 00:25:12	51. Production still
	21. 01:11:40	60. Production still
29. Orfeu Negro	22. 01:11:47	61. Production still
2013	27. 00:13:46	64. Production still
Ink and gouache on paper	31. 00:19:59	68. Production still
62 ¹ / ₁₆ × 46 ¹ / ₁₆ in. (157.6 × 117 cm)	32. 00:20:50	75. Production still
	33. 00:20:10	78. Production still
53. Chinatown	34. 00:54:18	93. Production still
2013	35. 00:53:36	
Ink and gouache on paper	38. 00:23:54	
32 ¹ / ₁₆ × 22 ⁵ / ₈ in. (81.5 × 57.5 cm)	41. 01:28:09	
	44. 00:27:22	
66. Pulp Fiction	45. 00:27:06	
2013	46. 00:26:41	
Ink and gouache on paper	47. 00:28:02	
62 × 45 ¹ / ₂ in. (157.5 × 115.5 cm)	48. 00:27:50	
	52. 00:36:14	
76. Black Tie	54. 00:13:02	
2013	55. 01:13:34	
Ink and gouache on paper	56. 00:17:24	
41 × 27 in. (104.2 × 68.6 cm)	57. 00:17:36	
	58. 00:16:55	
87. The Shining	62. 00:19:13	
2013	63. 00:09:01	
Ink and gouache on paper	69. 00:08:20	
61 ¹³ / ₁₆ × 46 in. (157 × 116.8 cm)	71. 00:18:24	
	72. 00:19:13	
	73. 00:11:24	
	74. 00:00:31	
	79. 00:29:00	
	80. 00:29:07	
	82. 00:21:02	
	83. 00:21:00	
	84. 01:18:18	
	85. 00:33:09	
	89. 00:44:19	
	90. 00:46:01	
	91. 00:03:10	
	92. 00:00:55	
	95. 01:15:57	
	96. 01:16:13	
	97. 00:04:19	

Sarah Morris was born in 1967 in the United Kingdom. She studied at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island (1985–89); Jesus College, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom (1987–88); Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program (1989–90) and received the American Academy Philip Morris Award, Berlin Prize Fellow (1999–2000) and Joan Mitchell Painting Award (2001–02).

Morris has participated in numerous international solo exhibitions including Museum of Modern Art, Oxford (1999); Kunsthalle Zürich (2000); Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2001); Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen (2004); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2005); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2005); Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover (2005); Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2006); Fondation Beyeler, Riehen, Switzerland (2008); Lenbachhaus, Munich (2008); Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (2009); Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main (2009); Wexner Centre for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2012); Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York (2012) and Musée National Fernand Léger, Biot, France (2012).

She has also exhibited in many group exhibitions including Saatchi Collection, London (1998); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (1999); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands (2000); Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany (2000); Sammlung Goetz, Munich (2001); MoMA, New York (2002); Tate Britain, London (2003); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2003); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2004); MoMA, New York (2005); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2005); MoMA, New York (2006); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2007); Kumho Museum of Art, Seoul (2007); Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich (2008); Garage Centre for Contemporary Art, Moscow (2008); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2009); Witte de With, Rotterdam (2009); Guggenheim, New York (2010); MAK, Vienna (2011); Kunsthalle Zürich (2012) and Casa de Vidro Lina Bo Bardi, São Paulo (2013).

Morris has executed site specific works at Kunsthalle Basel (2002); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2005); Lever House, New York (2006); Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2010); London Underground Gloucester Road Station, London (2012); Federal Courthouse of Bergen, Norway (2012) as well as many other sites.

Morris currently lives and works in New York and London.

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Sarah Morris

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Roger Avary is a director, producer and screenwriter who together with Quentin Tarantino wrote 'Reservoir Dogs' (1992) and 'Pulp Fiction' (1994), which won the Academy Award for best original screenplay. He directed 'Killing Joe' (1994) and 'The Rules of Attraction' (2002), and his most recent screenplays were 'Silent Hill' (2006) and 'Beowulf' (2007), co-written with Christophe Gans.

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