

GERARD MUSY

Elements

LUSTRE MUSEE DE L'ELYSEE 1991

PhotographWords I wrote for the opening of this art exhibition. A true manifest, present throughout my photography.

The title, Lustre, illustrates the four meanings of the word: In French, 1. The radiance of a shiny object. 2. A coating to polish fabrics, skins. 3. A glass pendant on a chandelier. In English, 4. Lust.

Thus, the photographs illustrate worldliness, the brilliance of clothing, artificial light, and desire.

*The project is a dream-voyage through international scenes of nightlife. One travels from one photography to another through visual links. The repetition of formal elements brings a sense of continuity, an uninterrupted sequence. A world of appearances, of women in ceremonial attire, an exhibition. It is neither a documentary with anecdotes and messages, nor a personal confession, but just **a game of figurative rhythms**. The collision of flamboyant visual elements (already cliché) produces a burst of fireworks, as would a kaleidoscope (Kalos: good; eidos: aspect; skopein; to observe). Photography is an attractive formal composition of fragments captured through rapid and changing visual successions.*

*Random snapshots of reality, bursts of women and light, the chosen photos lead to a fragile and brilliant composition, like a piece of bravery, where poetic tension arises from a **precarious equilibrium between order and disorder**.*

*A baroque profusion confuses the linear perspective (mastery of the monocular lens) and embeds the canvas (scene/studio). Intermingled shapes, which unfold within the photo frame, seem suspended above an invisible ground. **Lost limits**. But bodies, restless in a place of sound and fury, come to life in the complexity of visual depths... and the spectacular penetrates the photographic space, traversing it throughout – desire.*

LUST FOR LIFE

Photograph(...) *to exclaim like Maupassant "(...) When the sun sets, a confused joy, a joy of my entire body invades me. I awaken and come alive". (Antoine de Baecque, Les nuits parisiennes XVIIIe siècle-XXIe siècle, Edited by Seuil, Paris 2015, p. 96). This energy so well captured by Max Ophüls' camera in the first part of the film House of Pleasure: Le Masque.*

Energy of life is my photographic quest: **Lust for Life**, title of Minelli's film on Van Gogh. The attraction of a **truly physical body**. A physical relationship with "**true**" **life** is the basis of my photography. Portraits have never interested me; bodies in abstract form are the elements of my photography. To be attracted by, and to portray, **views of life**.

*(...) animation is permanent and the **energy to see a fluid of vital desire** (...). A nocturnal and worldly parade, where we put ourselves on display, where we parade, and especially where we look, **scopic drive** which in itself shapes the main performance (Ibid, p. 70).*

The final image sought is one of equilibrium of visual energy: it becomes an organic, living body, expanding and retracting: **a living entity**. As in physics, photography is a space where we observe the **collision of elements**.

REAL/DREAM

PhotographThe magic lantern, with its painted images, exists well before photography and cinema: this famous light projection cone, so dear to film maker Godard. The lens of the photographic camera captures light, and the projector reflects it – the same apparatus as in the early days of cinema. My projections are neither slideshows nor films, but something else, more like a modern magic lantern.

Phantasmagoria is a popular process at the end of the 18th century, consisting in a transparent screen, on which diabolical luminous figures are projected using hidden projection devices (more advanced magic lanterns). Figuratively speaking: an imaginary representation, visions of fantasy. Dream phantasmagorias. Spiritual images.

Photographed reality becomes unreal, sight becomes vision; image becomes imagination. The power of imagination – repetitive phrase in Daniel Schmid's film *La Paloma* – and **the power of dreams** are liberated, like from Pandora's box, by the photographic image. The primary attractiveness of the subject (at the moment of the shooting) becomes phantasm at the moment of the final projection. The shooting of reality (*res: thing*) finally becomes dreamlike. Genuine **sublimation** (chemistry: transformation from solid to gaseous form) of the image captured in reality, which becomes imagination as a result of its projection. Thus we find an abstraction inherent to this process: a piece of soap or a pack of cigarettes become a circle or a square.

From a real past, the projected image opens onto the imaginary. *Through the Looking Glass*, we reach the **Wonderful**. *Phantasmagoria* is precisely the title of one of Lewis Carroll's poems.

From a real transgression (the night and *fetish S&M*) the image must achieve a certain level of transcendence.

AT PLAY

PhotographThe eighties bring back **the game** after the dreary post-1968 years. We re-discover the body (and its different parts), and games to play with it through fashion, dance, and, at the end of the decade, S&M games.

*The Palace (...) carries during its culminating years a **festive spirit** which, exactly ten years after May 1968, is simultaneously its libertarian accomplishment and political death warrant. The spirit of the place says yes to what is transgressive, joyful, playful, sometimes frankly provoking, but no to the serious spirit of the activist (...). (Ibid, p. 235).*

A game of **chance**: to photograph at night (seeing only vaguely the subject) and never with the eye on the lens. Combinations captured by the camera will only be seen later. The photography is fetishist and fortuitous by nature, since it only chooses in the lapse of time the varied elements that enter by chance into its visual field. Chance and S&M fetishism are precisely part of the vocabulary of surrealists like Man Ray.

The kaleidoscope, with its random visual combinations, is the metaphor of the photographic game. The last images of *Kaleidoscope* (The Feria of Córdoba) are the climax of this non-mastery. To photograph is to play with characters (visual elements), who they themselves are playing – particularly in *fetish* S&M scenes: a double game.

The intentionality and causality (dear to Aristotle) are disclaimed, to the benefit of Lucretius' philosophy of randomness. In *De natura rerum* (II, 218-220), the *clinamen* is understood as the offshoot of atoms, a minimal movement which they must undergo, without which they would fall vertically into the void, as a result of which no world could be born. This movement, totally **random**, provokes an interesting series of **chain reactions**.

IN-VOLVERE

Photograph**Involved - in-volvere** - also with the notion of rotation, as if caught in a whirlpool.

I have the feeling many things are lacking to this chronicle, things present here in New York, this "snake pit" aspect of the city (...) Raymond Depardon, *Correspondance New-Yorkaise*. To do exactly the opposite of photographer Depardon: to be inside the lion's cage. Not only in direct contact with reality, but to actually take part in the photographed world.

To be inside an empathetic world; to let (oneself) go (be transported), to transfigure oneself. To capture movement, as close as possible to the surrounding life; an impetuous thrust into the world which itself becomes fusional. To lose one's self. To let go in a time and space which become suspended. Leaves: to depart, to leave. *Beyond*: to be caught in the S&M game. **A crossing.** Excess: joys of the night owls (*Lamées*), amorous ecstasy (*Lustres*), euphoria of the wanderer (*Leaves*), the traveller's floatation (*Lontano*), the hypnotic dimension (*Kaleidoscope*), literal suspension (*Beyond*).

*Alain Pacadis (...) reviews with his engaged acuity: "We must have a blast, dance to disco rhythms, wear flashy but sophisticated clothes and **blend** into the partying crowds to **become an integral part of the celebrations** until the end of the night". (Ibid, p. 238).*

Similarly, photography is a living entity into which the spectator progressively penetrates. William A. Ewing always told me that looking at my pictures was like **entering** a half-lit room and progressively getting accustomed to the darkness to seize the meaning of the scene. They do not deliver their message immediately.

IN-SIMIL

Photograph**To-gether from the Latin *In-simil*.**

*"For me celebration is first of all an ardent apotheosis of the present moment... there is always a taste of mortality in living drunkenness, but death, during a searing moment, is reduced to nothing... the detail of these nights is of little importance: suffice we **be together** (...). We became a sort of **fraternity**, unleashing its secret rites, hidden from the world." (Simone de Beauvoir, *La force des choses*). (Ibid, pp 171-172).*

*Ceremonies and communions where dance appears as a physical medium of **intercommunion**... where the body evolves according to a rite of exaltation relieved of contingency... (Ibid, p.219).*

To photograph: to be together and to unite. Not only is photography a fusion of one's-self and the world, but also of time and space. To be united with the subject, and to simultaneously withdraw to become one. Total empathy.

The photographed subject is of little importance since the quest for this symbiosis is similar in a night of celebration, a fetishist/erotic night, a crossing into nature, travel in time, the swirl of merry-go-rounds or a sensorial S&M exploration.

To abolish space and time is the ultimate utopia sought by photography: as with Proust, who initially based his concept of *In Search for Lost Time* on photography itself. A temporality where dreams and memories intermingle beyond the time-space barrier; a sensual exploration and spatial-temporal widening. To be together and elsewhere.

*Roland Barthes is a great admirer of such places, fascinated by baroque nights observed from the balcony, this "architecture where everyone rejoices in seeing each other". Barthes oscillates between **the desire to celebrate**, "this extraordinary call for pleasure", and the "**feeling of semi-absence**" secreted by the night club, especially when it is immense: "**this space is not without bodies**, they are even very close, this is what is important. But these anonymous bodies, animated by delicate movements, leave me in a **state of idleness, irresponsibility and indecision**: everyone is here, nobody asks me for anything.", he wrote in Barthes by him-self. (He) ended up associating this nocturnal well being to one of his favourite readings: "Leaning over the balcony overlooking the Palace, livened by coloured rays and dancing silhouettes, guessing around me the coming and going of young bodies busy with who knows what circuits, **I seemed to find, transposed to modernity, something I could have read in Proust**". (Ibid, p. 237)*

SENSUAL

PhotographTo photograph is a **sensual celebration and an organic approach** to the world: a **sensitive and sensorial** opening onto the **fullness of the senses**.

*The new night. After the very last one, the spirit of the night changes. (...) it carries an adornment more artistic, intellectual, literary. Unexpected encounters, chances, provoked, pedestrian vagrancies, strangeness of alcohols and substances, **sensual and erotic experiences**, exhaustion and **body regeneration**, sought visions and hypnoses, this capital of Aragon, (...) of Breton (...) of Soupault (...) of Desnos (...) seems a **possible passage to another world, that of a true poetic and artistic life**. (Ibid, pp. 144-147).*

*The nights of Montparnasse appear as a **space-time continuum of transgression, of seduction, of erotic poetry, of festive experimentation** (...). These years we call "golden" because they follow the deprivations and sufferings of the Great War. (...) All these dances bring a new body language to Parisian nights, where desires are expressed more crudely, senses assert and exalt themselves, where night owls become the actors of the **sensual conquest** of the other. (Ibid, pp. 148-160)*

The personification surrealists' eroticism (prototype of the *fetish S&M* figure) is *precisely* Musidora en Irma Vep wearing a black hooded ensemble in Feuillade's cinematographic series *Les Vampires* (1915). The term "vamp" comes from this title.

*The existentialist night is playful, musical, rhythmic, alcoholic, drugged: it refuses, by contrast, the rationing of desires. The **confining of desires**, associated with the occupation, which it succeeds and challenges" (Ibid, p174).*

Just like after the two World Wars, the post 1968 years relive this experimentation of celebration and body. It is not a coincidence that S&M images appeared also just after these two global conflicts.

*Alain Pacadis (...) in Libération: "Last night (March 5th 1978) was the opening of the Palace, and we danced. Music and lasers. People who touch without seeing each other. Adagietto. Ones beating heart. **To reach the sublime**". (Ibid, p. 234)*

Passion of the senses: vibration of the night, dance, alcohol, drugs, sex, sensorial experimentations, the touch of latex but also **the touch of the air** – bare-chested for long walks in the nature... Sublime. Endorphins are precisely produced by arousal, orgasm, pain, physical exercise. Just like opiates, and particularly morphine (hence its name), which have an analgesic capacity and procure a **feeling of wellbeing** or even **euphoria**.

Finally, my photography is the pleasure of capturing pleasure in pictures. An exploration of exteriority, which beckons to an exploration of interiority, and vice-versa.