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## POST-POST

PENNY COUSINEAU

excerpt

(...)

Raymonde April's photographic presentations of the last four years constitute a conscious working out of the notions we are discussing here. A show of works held in 1991 at René Blouin Gallery brought together April images from various time periods, formats, processes, and tonalities that "quoted" nineteenth-century photography like that of Daguerre and Bayard, 1950s French cinema, American Purist portraiture and nature morte, the romantic, surrealist street photography of Kertész, and the snapshot of the contemporary amateur. This was the quintessential Barthesian, "multidimensional space" in which "a variety of [works], none of them original, blend and clash,"<sup>16</sup> to form a "tissue" of intertextuality. A subsequent exhibit, held two years later at Galerie Rochefort, was even more "woven ... with citations, references, echoes ... which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony"<sup>17</sup> — much so that it threatened to push photographic narrative to what Barthes has called the "limits of enunciation." The closure one has come to expect from the photographic sequence (cf. Minor White, Ralph Gibson, Duane Michals) was imploded in on itself in April's hanging together of stylistically disparate photographic works with no discernible connecting thread. Her abandonment of a unifying narrative was all the more glaring given that she had first established herself as a photographer with the use of highly readable linear sequences of image and text.

In both of these exhibits the viewer was forced, in order to locate any meaning in their assemblage at all, to "Participate," in the postmodern sense, in their "creation," but in the Rochefort exhibit this "co-authorship" proved to be a daunting task. In the earlier installation one was still provided with hooks that had been evident in April's work since the 1970s — images of the photographer's lover, friends, and the domestic surroundings with which she constructed a kind of autobiographical fiction that could be likened, in its transmutation of everyday occurrence into an iconic version of the self, to the diaristic writings of Anaïs Nin. With the Rochefort exhibit, even these markers had disappeared, and neither exhibit included a self-portrait, the element that had characterized April's work for over twenty years. The Rochefort show appeared

to signal, for April, a photographic point of no return, an abandonment of photographic narrative as a possible form of knowledge.

Yet, from this extreme position, April's work displays a new energy and a renewed faith in the viability of photographic representation. A fold-out produced for the Winter 1994 edition of *CVphoto* included photographs made in 1973 and 1974 in April's hometown of Rivière-du-Loup (*Les Pèlerins de la Croix lumineuse*) ; among the seven images comprising the work were those of a group of men laughing and smoking as they congregated around cars parked in the street, a (recent) panoramic image of a river running through the town, adolescents hanging out with their bicycles, and a young woman who could be a stand-in for the photographer. These exuberant images convey a strong sense of time and place, and, following on the heels of the Blouin and Rochefort exhibitions, the youthful innocence to which they allude seemed to indicate a reclaiming of photographic "innocence" on the part of the photographer as well.

In *La Fortune*, a suite of four large-scale photographs of varying tonalities shown this spring at Dazibao Gallery, April combined an image she made recently with one made in the 1980s and two found photographs. As the pictures were read from left to right, the first was of a woman who holds a plastic "crown" of felt pens around her head. This was followed by images that could be seen to be emanating from the woman's consciousness — a tree, a man who looks as if he could be from the 1950s feeding a deer at the edge of a river, a woman in a snapshot holding a baby. Although this work shared with the Rochefort and Blouin installations a heterogeneity of photographic genres, the crucial difference was that, like the sequence produced for *CVphoto*, the photographer was "quoting" not from the great postmodern supermarket of photographic history, but from a personal bank of images, where memory may, perhaps only incidentally, be housed in the form of snapshot, landscape, or portrait.

During a lecture he gave in the fall of 1993 in Montreal, Ian Wallace referred to a photographic construction in which he had included a straightforward image of a crowd at a protest rally as "post-postmodern," and spoke of his confidence in photography's ability to tell the viewer something real about the world. Historians are still debating the distinctions between "late" and "post" modernism. Nevertheless, in the work of a number of Canadian photographers, one senses that something akin to "post-post" has arrived.

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<sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 160.

<sup>17</sup> Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 146.