

Durand, Régis — «[Sans titre]». —Raymonde April : Tout embrasser. — Montréal : Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery, 2001. — Texte français / English text. — N.p.

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The Self is distinct from every created thing. It withdraws from negation to negation. What we call "the Universe" might be defined as everything in which the Self declines to recognize itself.
— Paul Valéry¹

Photographs (many photographs), a film made from these photographs and an exhibition that attempts to show all of this. The following few words then, are a matter of seeing clearly and reflecting the artist's work process, which is straightforward, never consciously playing with confusion or fascination. Raymonde April's clear process produces photographs of clarity - they are radiant, suspended moments, even when weighed down by gloom or melancholy. They radiate as a result of the work's condensation and not from the stance or intention they display. These photographs then are both clear and compact objects without this seeming paradoxical. Like crystal, then? Gilles Deleuze wrote in the text where he first presented this notion that it is a matter of "contracting the image instead of dilating it." And that it is advisable to "search for the smallest circuit that functions as internal limit for all the others and that puts the actual image

beside a kind of immediate symmetrical, consecutive or even simultaneous double.”² Each image in the film *Tout embrasser* is then this “immediate double” of the photographic image that it records, creating the film circuit — hardly a very large circuit in fact, because it is almost this, a reduplication. Almost, because it is not that simple. By presenting the images one at a time, every three seconds or so, and by letting the hand appear that displays and withdraws them, the film creates its own time and structure. An attempt must be made to define this. There are many parameters to be considered: the projection, its speed and rhythm; the linking of the images and the connections that are established between them; the thematic effects whether they are conscious or chance narratives. Also, the images are re-framed and there is the presence of sound (the noise of the camera, but also recorded or composed sounds) and so on. These are basic cinematic facts (a film specifically made from a fixed image, the fixed image as the material) and not, for example, the problems that one often sees today in many exhibitions concerning film or a film “installation”.³ The issue here is rather: Why film fixed images today? What is the purpose? What does this seem to signify the end of? Photography? Film? Raymonde April is not looking for a new form of narrative like Chris Marker in *La Jetée*, for example, nor a way to make stillness become movement, producing pseudo-movement by editing fixed images like Thomas Demand does in his short films. And neither is it about deconstructing film’s mobility through immobility like certain “artists’ films” such as Thomas Struth’s filmed portraits.⁴ On this point, it might be worth asking what occurs in *Tout embrasser* regarding the passage from one photograph to another, the physical and temporal spacing created. Because it actually is, in fact, a time-based procedure that mimes and repeats “the most fundamental operation of time.” In his analysis of “the crystal-image”, Deleuze makes an observation at one point that is central to his thinking about the film image. “What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or, what amounts to the same thing, it has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future and the other falls into the past.”⁵ Raymonde April’s film materialises such a change. Of course, this change is already present in each of the photographs, it has simply been condensed: this is what gives them their strength. To film the photographs then is to “unfold” them while making the gesture of separation visible.



In a text I wrote earlier on Raymonde April's photographs, I emphasised this kind of oscillation between fixedness and mobility. Those images, I wrote, could be called "cinematic" : "that is both perfectly autonomous and perfectly available for various combinations and associations."⁶ Their fragmented nature and internal dislocation was also the source of their narrative and symbolic potential.

In the series titled *L'Arrivée des figurants* (1997), the theatrical metaphor is immediately called to mind by the "Chekhovian" character of this grouping, a mixture of nostalgia, waiting and openness to what will happen. But the presentation of the photographs, their organisation in the same series, was of course already cinematic in nature. Their time was not that of the stage but of a hypothetical film, combining "events and people of unequal magnitude and importance, various stories inserted and integrated into an immense scene of intertwining motifs." "Images without a past and that do not evoke happiness," wrote Raymonde April. "In their fragmentation, they are not contemplative: they are renewable."⁷

Tout embrasser does not eliminate this; it does not attempt to create an artificial continuity between the images in the sequence. On the contrary, in the film the camera contemplates the images, watches them being leafed through. But by leafing through the photographs and imposing a steady rhythm, the film changes them. The projection, in a way, mimes the urgency of making choices, the changes and diversions which continually confront us : it is always this or that, and quickly because it is already too late to choose. Here, however, the choice does not exclude us because there is no ending. The hand presenting the photographs does not wait, but generously carries out its proposition. In reality, we have neither the choice nor the time: a choice is made for us "by default." Ramifications and pile-ups build up by default, giving us the feeling that they are offered to us and we can appropriate them. *Tout embrasser* is a film about desire, our desire,

which is held up like a mirror, and we easily recognize traces of certain dreams and fleeting sensations in these images. But we can not stop here; the images are already about the past, about memory. We find some of them on the walls in the exhibition and we become engrossed, studying the puzzling aspect of each image on its own, “célibataire.”

The film keeps its linear aspect with precision and coolness. But its regularity does not conceal the intensity at work: *Tout embrasser* means to recapture a whole life (a history, a body of work): with this intention, there is both photography’s celebration (everything is there) and its denial (only fragments are produced). The film produces a series of short-circuits, while the exhibition invites one to move back and forth between the images. The film plays with speed although its rhythm is rather slow and even, and its unfolding is inevitable. The images on the wall play with a form of slowness: the gaze explores particular configurations, this or that detail, this or that theme or narrative sequence. The photographs now appear to be photogramme excerpts from the film, which nevertheless came after them. Everything happens as if the film has created something irreversible, and has made returning to the initial material difficult, as if it was now necessary, says Raymonde April, “to go against already existing movement and form.” It is a strange paradox, a translation of the fundamental operation of time that Deleuze talks about. Each image has been duplicated as soon as it appears. One image has taken its place in the past as an archive ; the other, remaining a long time as a virtual image, has been launched towards the future where it will become the film.

Translation by Janet Logan

NOTES

¹ Paul Valéry, *Analects*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, vol. 14 of the *Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, Princeton N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1970. “*Analecta XVI*” p. 280.

² Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: the time image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, London: The Athlone Press, 1989. ch. 4: “The crystals of time:” *passim*, and p. 68 for the passage cited.

³ For a very interesting discussion about “mobile images” by contemporary artists and their forms of exhibition, see Raymond Bellour in particular, “D’un autre cinema,” *Trafic* 34, (summer 2000), p. 5-21, and “La querelle des dispositifs,” *Art Press* 262, (November 2000), p. 48-52. And for a more controversial point of view, Dominique Païni, “Le retour du flâneur,” *Art Press* 255, (March 2000), p. 33-41.

⁴ On this point, see Jean-Christophe Royoux, “Cinéma d’exposition : l’espace de la durée:” *Art Press* 262, p. 36-41.

⁵ *op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁶ “Des routes, des parcours d’images” *CV Photo* 29 (winter 1994), p. 16-33.

⁷ Quoted from a letter Raymonde April wrote to the author in January 1997. The primacy of the cinematographic metaphor obviously does not exclude the pertinence of the theatrical reference, and in particular the “Chekhovian” character to which I make allusion. On the immanentism of Chekhov, for example, see the introduction by Claude Frioux in the first volume of the works by Chekhov in the *Pléiade* collection.