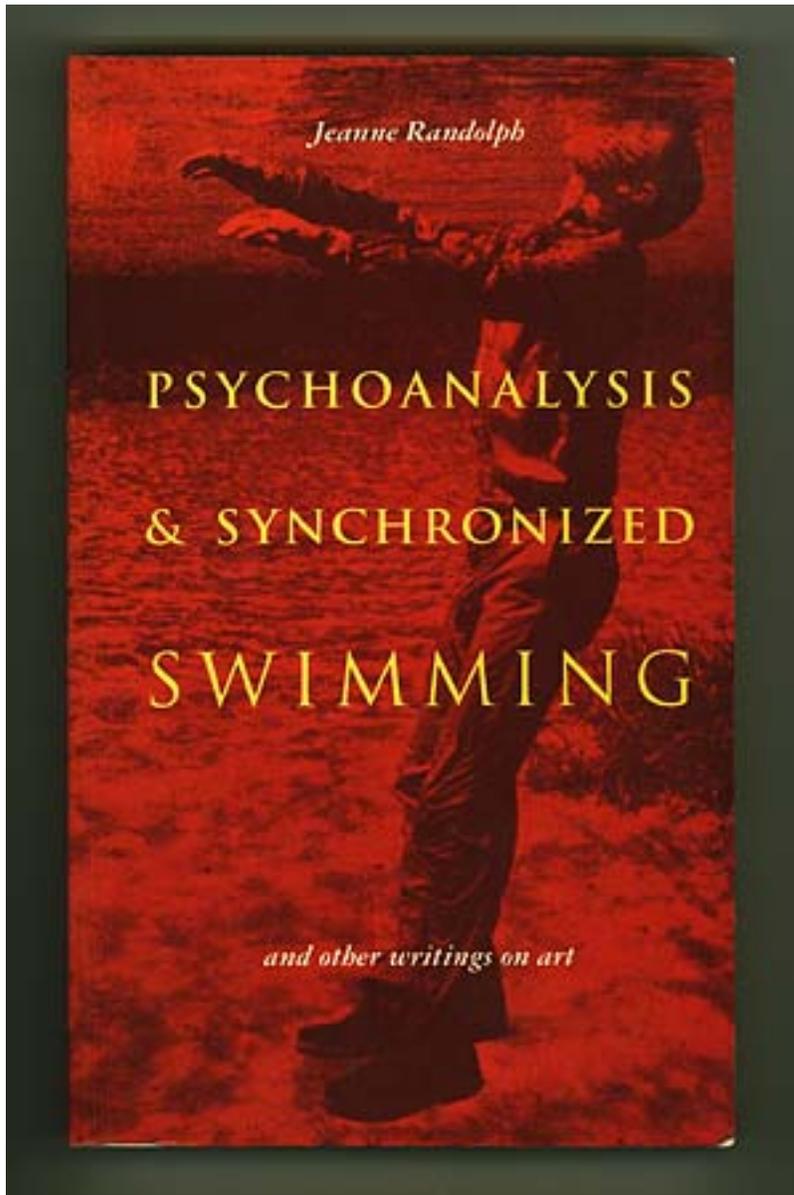


Randolph, Jeanne. — «Raymonde April». — *Parachute*. — N° 30 (mars/avril/mai 1983). — Repris sous le titre «Raymonde April» dans *Psychoanalysis + synchronized swimming and other writings on art*, Toronto: YYZ Books, 1991, p.164-168. — P. 52-53

PSYCHOANALYSIS & SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING

JEANNE RANDOLPH



Groombridge's 1986 Lethbridge catalogue, and the review of Robin Collyer's 1987 show at Carmen Lamanna's, of the briny breezes and sunlight that vitaminize December mornings spent typing on my father's old Smith-Corona. Then, in January, the first night back in Toronto, I dreamed Raymonde's review was a lizard.

RAYMONDE APRIL

Most people dream in black and white. The substance of the dream dissolves into light or into lightless void. Ambiguities promise revelation. Insight is enclosed in paradox. Illusion may be wiser than fact. Anyone, from Joseph among the Egyptians to Freud in the clutches of Helmholtzian mechanistics, will be prized if they do a good job interpreting dreams. Freudian theory, however, is not exactly based on the proposition that illusion is wiser than fact. In Freudian theory, illusion is the opposite of fact. The real object of desire stands in physical defiance of the fantastical symbol that is invented to represent it.

The *Personnages au Lac bleu* photographs at their best present images so deeply eroded by light and shadow that they seem as incorporeal as dream. Seemingly as dimensionless as light and lightlessness, these images of fabrics, walls, slips of paper, even faces, can only be perceived as illusory, as fabrications made from shadows. Yet the nature of illusion which is emphasized, indeed treasured, in these photographs and which is in some sense intrinsic to artmaking, is not, as Freud proposed, how illusion is distinct from what is real, but how illusion is an extension of something real.

The romantic sensibility that Raymonde April presents is familiar, almost conventional. Yet in a delicate, solitary way she reveals mysterious qualities of ordinary things. She reveals how an illusion can be formed from an unassuming object when it is perceived as an ambiguous one. There is one photograph in the series *Moi-Meme, Portrait de Paysage* which is sweet and introspective, an illustration of April's fascination with illusion: the head of a woman is turned facing a dingy wall. The side of her face gleams like a pearl. The shadow she casts is so intensely dark it is a silhouette cut through the wall. Fine shadows from peeling paint like fragile veins give the wall the membranous vulnerability of skin. A nameless garment hangs near a corner. On the dingy wall, beside the silhouette, is the object of the woman's gaze, a tiny smudge of a shadow. The shadow is essentially a toy: it takes the shape of a tiny dog. We know the shadow has been

cast by bits of paper or mundane objects, but the silly little shadow dog is so pert and magical that all it would take is a wish and it would scamper or wag its tail.

If, as in a psychoanalytically interpreted dream, the daffy little dog were taken as a symbol of something needed or longed for, whatever is unique in April's perceptiveness could be missed. This image, like several others, especially in the series *Miniatures*, has a certain casual authenticity that is like ordinary dreaming. What seems so valid is not that the petite pooch might be a fake animal that stands for something else, but that the artist is so at home with real shadows. The metaphorical potential of the experience this image symbolizes is evocative: "She is at home with shadows." This use of an illusion to symbolize that experience, not the use of a symbol as an ersatz (thing), is the source of the authenticity of these photographic works.

However, none of the photographs taken individually are a brilliant embodiment of this, and April's playfulness results in a range of images whose only relation to each other at times is their characteristically humble romanticism. The comfort with venerable objects and subjects of romanticism — antiques, the Orient, sensual surfaces — is the central problem of the work because it can be taken as a refuge in the past, a timidity, a withdrawal, as if the present offered no metaphors with which to work. But even in this there is an aspect of April's work that is unique, though cluttered and understated — she transforms rather sordid little details into exotic scenarios. She does so not by hiding the wrinkles, cracks and mustiness, but by illuminating them.

For example, in the series *Miniatures*, there is a photograph of a person in a heavy overcoat, back toward the camera, facing the shadow he or she casts on an empty wall. On the other wall, an electrical fixture sags. The details of each of these subjects — the person, the shadow, the fixture — have not been glamourized into sentimental flawlessness. The overcoat is frayed, hanging clumsily from the shoulders. The shadow does not presume to cover the crumbling surface of the wall. The fixture is delapidated. But the light in the room calls illusion into being — the person's head is so darkly a shadow, it loses its dimensions and looks like a hole in the wall. The shadow unfolds on the wall as if it might be a cape more comfy than the overcoat. The light, which becomes a metaphor of April's imagination, deliberately seeks illusions in the most prosaic situations.

This delight in illusion implies a defiance of its own – that materials, objects, conditions are always fluid, mutable when the imagination gets hold of them. Although April is inconsistent in her romanticism, this aspect of it is quite unambivalent – that no object, form, situation or method is intrinsically ugly or beautiful, lowly or magical, common or exotic until imagination creates the illusion of what it can become.

This review first appeared in *Parachute*, no. 30
(March–May 1983): 52–53.