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RAYMONDE APRIL : THE HIDDEN REALITY OF THINGS

JEAN DUMONT

When the invention of photography was first announced, a German catholic newspaper castigated Daguerre's research with the criticism that "God created man in his image, and consequently no human machine could seize God's images..." Let us forget these old concepts of a vengeful God, and return to a related question which is just as vast and has also been haunting photography since the beginning. What is the real status of the images that the photographic process gives us? Although some of them are admittedly, from their very inception, considered by their authors as fiction, how many others, left without specific definitions, are seen at first view as objective representations of reality by a public which never questions the well-foundedness of such a certitude?

Raymonde April's rich and diverse photographic production obviously does not furnish any particular answer to this question. No artistic effort worthy of the name, that is to say devoted to refusing immobility, can constitute a definitive answer to such a question. On the other hand, when there is an apparent familiarity between the artist and the everyday subjects and places she treats, the viewer is incited to think seriously about the question This interrogation is primordial because it calls into question point of view, space, time and consequently must drift irremediably toward an existential concern with regard to the actual stuff which surrounds us and which, in order to appease our spirits, we call reality. Unfortunately, what is real is not the reality we dream about. It is only a facet, always changing, ever mutable according to the criteria of our perception. And this is just as true for the artist who must choose the image as it is for the viewer contemplating it. Indeed, we never see the world objectively; we recount it with each gaze. We immediately and instinctively find the relationships between things that solicit the latter. And these relationships, like all narratives, put into play not only time and space, but also elements from our own stories and experiences. To see the images in their raw state, we would have to exist without history, or be deprived of all forms of memory. Plunged into a kind of fiction whose denouement can only escape us, we can only fall back on being interested in the multitude of elements which constitute it.

Paradoxically, Raymonde April helps us to become conscious of this complexity which is both limiting and enriching. She succeeds by using images that seem so limpid and clear that we naturally become accomplices. But let us make no mistake: this apparent simplicity is often the fruit of an enormous amount of work: choosing, editing, lab work and putting into place all the refined techniques of contemporary photography. Because the artist does not make these techniques the rationale nor the goal of her activities, we do not feel estranged from her procedure. Similarly, we do not feel estranged from her many autobiographical images. There are always, in her group scenes, her portraits, or self-portraits, curious details, turned backs, incomplete faces, unexpected frames which induce in the viewer the idea that the image he looks at is not a finality from which he is excluded, but rather the sign of time passing and a future in which anything is possible.

Those who have a passion for photography know that you never swim twice in the same river. They constantly confront with the phenomenon of time passing. This bulimic time which turns each photographed subject into an immediate absence, but also the time of the opening and closing of the shutter whose movement steals from reality an instant which it will never fully disclose. No doubt this explains why, as a renowned artist working in a discipline whose tradition involves fixing images, Raymonde April is fascinated by movement above all else. Many of her images display a potential mobility. In some of them we almost feel a light breeze moving the hairs which hide a face, or scramble the water drops falling on a windowpane. Other images reveal her attachment to roads and trails which, straight in front of her lens, run up hill and dale toward a distant horizon.

Even if she deplores that this possibility of escape is canceled by the verticality of her photographic presentation.

Her most recent exhibition, entitled *Tout embrasser*, is a further step in this search for meaning using the methods of displacement which are so common in today's art. By digging in her stock of hundreds of unpublished photographs, she has assembled a video program. You see the pictures piled on a table, in front of the camera. An anonymous hand picks them up one by one to present to fill the screen for several seconds before disappearing to make room for the next. These memories of something real that no longer exists could only have made sense in this succession of barely asserted moments. Since reality escapes us, we can at least, in the presence of Raymonde April, accompany the real in its transformations...