

LOCAL ANTHROPOGENIES – PHYLOGENESIS

A PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

19. ROBERT FRANK (Switzerland, 1924), MARC TRIVIER (Belgium, 1960)

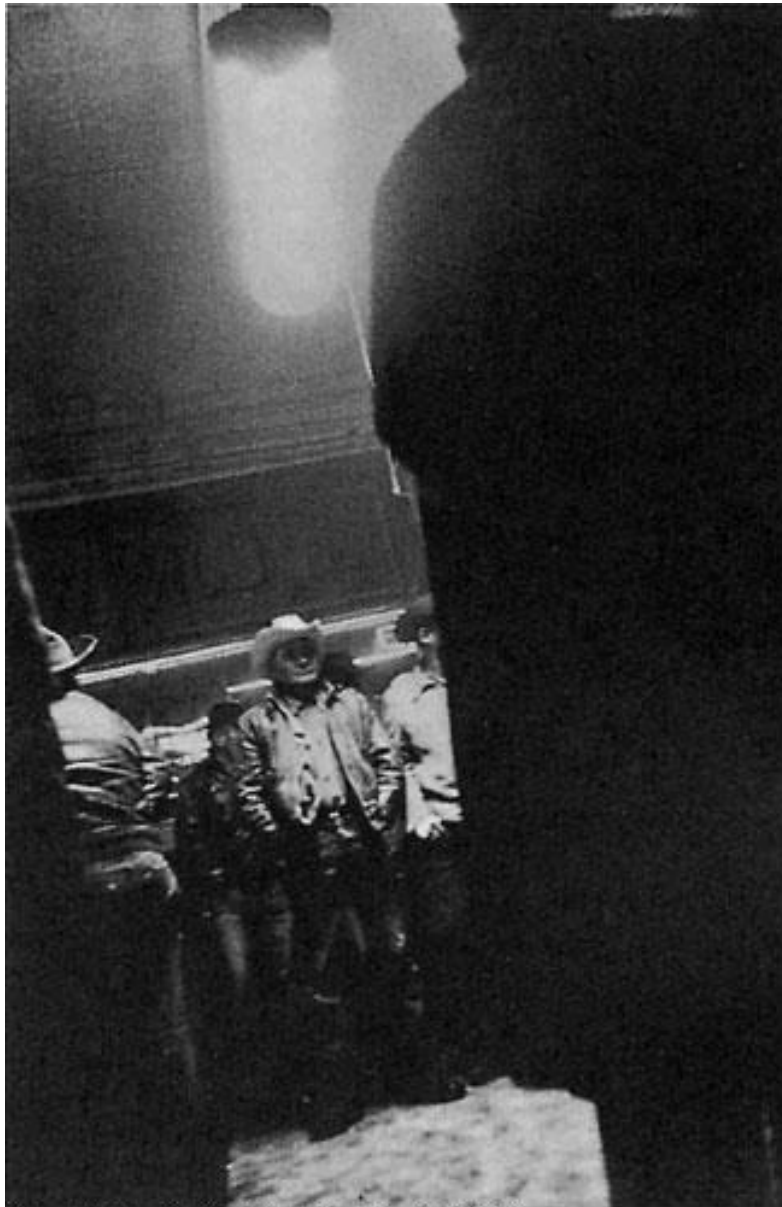
The photonic tone

19A. The reverberating timbre: Robert Frank

In every Robert Frank photo, there is a matte cymbal sound, already in the themes or the motifs. It can be a large American flag, half of which already covers a good half of the show, horizontally or vertically. It can be the hood of a car engrossing the night. Or still, in *Bar of Gallup New Mexico* (*CP, 32), the powerful contrast between the monumental back of a character standing on the right of the foreground and a gap where – in a now-distant background – we glimpse at other cowboys facing us. In this case, there is even a violent rolling of the ensemble in relation to the horizontal of the frame.

The texture of the photonic imprint is of the same type as the themes. We see no massive blacks like in the work of Alvarez-Bravo, Bill Brandt, Eugene Smith, but rather, shadows like we find with Peter Henry Emerson and Paul Strand, with the difference that this time, the shadows do not give way to an equal becoming towards the obscuring or towards lightening, but hit lights and resound, whilst the lights hit them and resound in turn. This double resonance does not engender continuous gradations, but timbre effects, i.e. luminous partials of variable intensity. Speaking of photonic cymbal strokes is hardly a metaphor.

Hence, the place, with its intro-reverberation – that Brassai had obtained through his spatial, logical, psychological chiasms, or that he had reached through balls and rolls until the large body of the night – is now produced by multi-dimensional impacts of energies of various orientation and sources, whose the night is the warm and vibrant matrix. In other words, the place depends on the ambiance, with its something vague, its manner of *ire ambo*, of going in different directions at once. Like the photographer himself in his divagation.



Robert Frank, *Bar de Gallup New Mexico, CP, 32*

A photograph taken in London in 1952 registers the nuances of the timbre that a back, black (or at least dark), opened car door inflicts to the rainy grays of the road, the facades, the evanescent passers-by (CP, 90-91). However, Robert Frank will not blossom in England, but in the United States, where he immigrates in 1947. There, things and being already and always have the forces of radiance that his photographic timbre calls for. Reading the famous book, *Les Américains* published in Paris in 1958, we could in a first while think about some sociology with the usual questions of richness and poverty, happiness and unhappiness, or the originality or insignificance of the individual. However, if there is sociology, it consists in recognizing that here, the individuals are above and foremost the places where they move (we are not saying: where they live).

Thereby, *Restaurant U.S.1 leaving Columbia* (**CP, 44-45) – even though we do not see anyone – is beforehand haunted. The chairs, the table, the fan are such that, not *on* them but *against* them, the photons that entered the room through the window bounce in every direction to give the crossed resonances and the timbres that set the ambiance. The only person visible appears on the screen of the television, which is turned on. Apart from that, the television is everywhere, because the day glows against the table and the Thonet chairs are of the same oval than the screen.



Robert Frank, *Restaurant U.S.1 leaving Columbia*, CP, 44-45

We should even press this symbol. To see a place as the result of crossed luminous timbres, it is essential that we should be able to move among the lights in the light emitted, hence the television light and not in the cinematographic, reflected light. For Walker Evans – before television – the light still reflected *on* things, which had the valorist density of ‘Heideggerian’ utensils. For televisual Robert Frank, it splatters to the point that it emanates, only retaining an ambiance that volatilizes the utensility. More precisely, we are in the fifties, and television is more often that not in black and white. As we see in *Bar, New York City* (CP, 10-11) with its reptilian forms, it is the entire *structure*, which, in Frank’s work, follows the black and white televisual *texture*, with its tentacular viscosities.

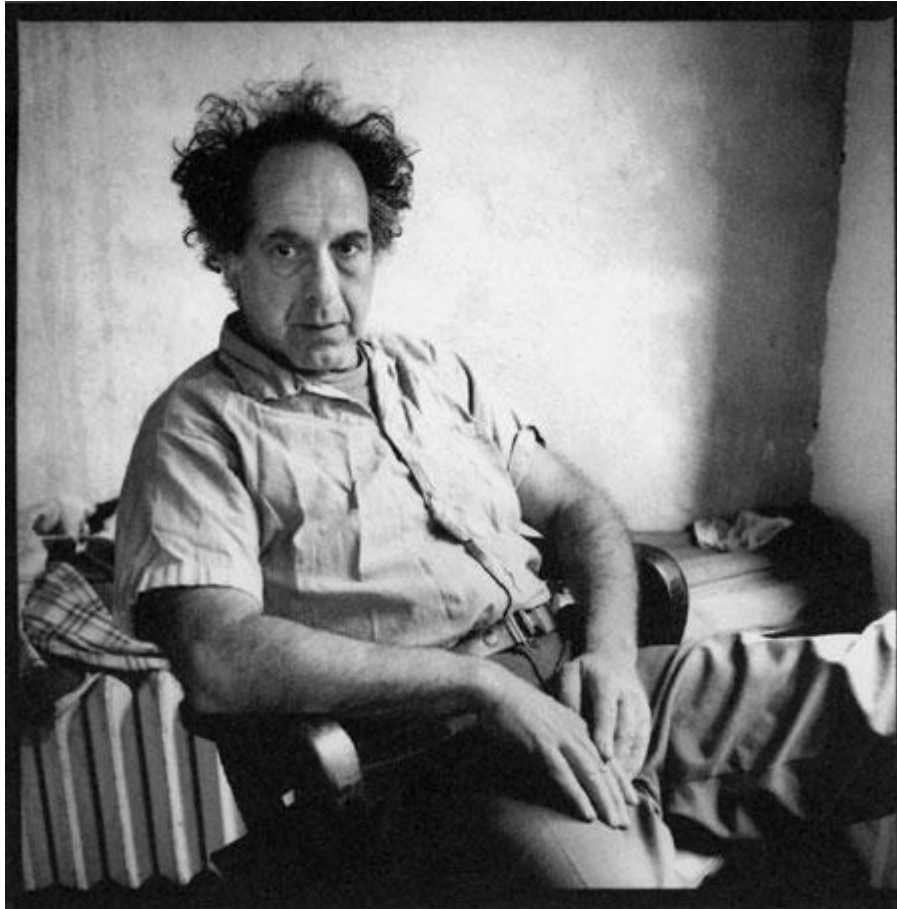
The pure ambiance, this mixture of presence and a lot of absence, from which Frank obtains the photographic equivalent is not a sophisticated experience, it is even the simplest of experiences, the one that anyone drinking coffee in their local bar or at home in their favourite armchair can live. Proust wanted to demonstrate the mechanism of that experience when, in his last book, he questions what ultimately gives the human being an urge to go forth. He responds,

according to his definition of homosexuality (being another same) that it is memorising superimpositions: the X beach on the Y church on the Z face, etc. To the same question, in another era, with an ethos of heterosexual compenetration and fecundity, in a light redefined by black and white television, Frank's uterine photos respond that one can live for the ambiance of photonic timbres that are so much more compenetrating that they are impure, filled with noise. Apart from that, they are also memorizing, according to a present that is already in the memory.

19B. The diffusive tone: Marc Trivier

The fact that Marc Trivier made a *Portrait of Robert Frank* (***) is not the only pretext for discussing him here. There is in both men, despite the great age difference, similar ways of settling in the photonic dust and subordinating the structure to the texture as in the work of Avedon, while taking from this party not an atomization, but timbre effects, and simultaneously mixtures of cosmologic fervour and desperation. Both oppose magmas and plasmas to the atoms of Avedon and to the cells of Arbus. However, whilst Robert Frank goes straight to the core of things, Trivier, like Avedon, likes going straight to the body, even to the face. But as an abandon, a flow. Until the supreme flow, the outlook.

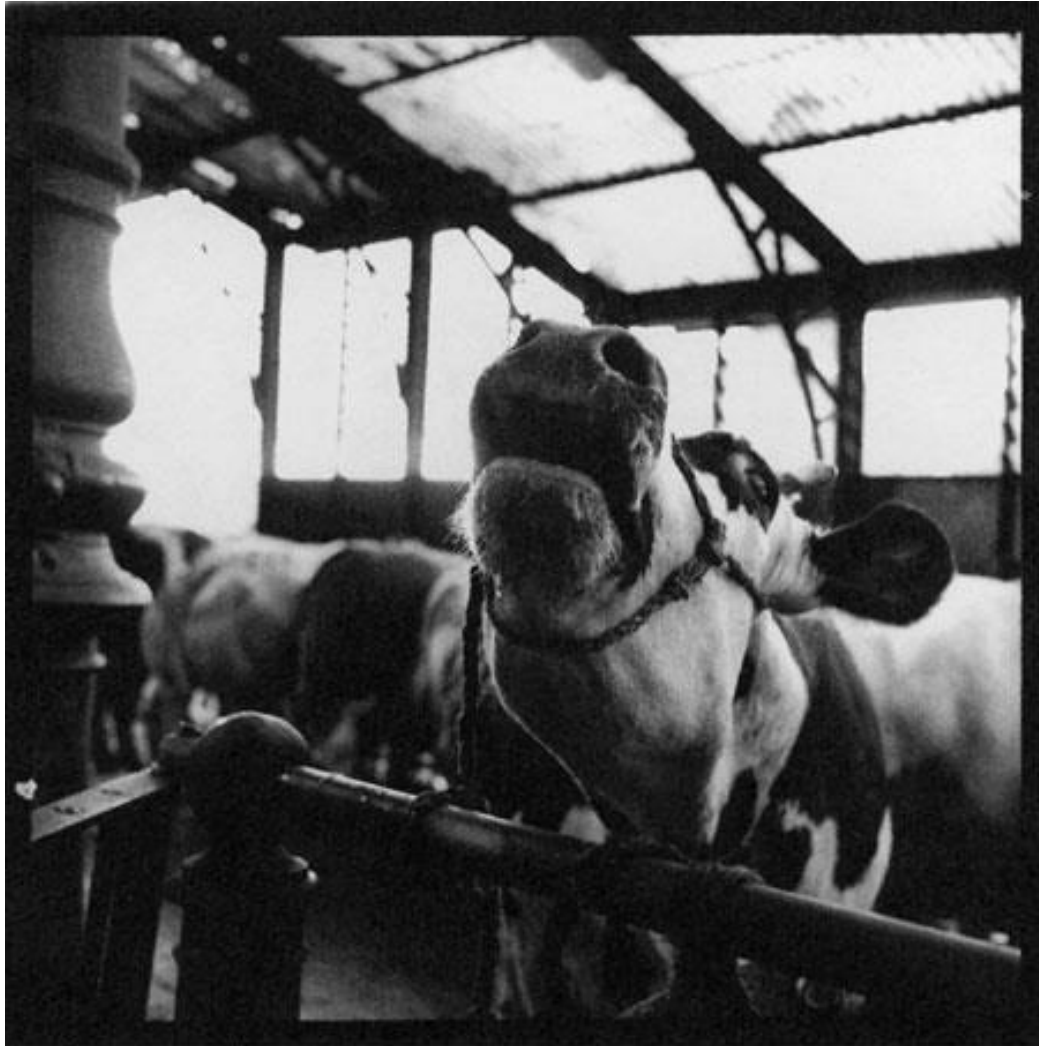
Introducing an individuated organism into this type of cosmological leeway supposes long tracks, friendly and tense cohabitations. To set ideas, let us evoke the protocol to which we were subjected in 1983, but we have to say that since, it has incurred a few variants. At the first contact, the press book played a propaedeutic (Webster) role. 'Here is Francis Bacon, Burroughs, etc. Here is (implied) the defeat, the de-doing, that is expected of you'. The camera was a Rolleyflex that was supposed to thwart the mastery of the photographer at the last moment. The abandonment to this third-included on its tripod was even more destabilizing that its state of disrepair was subject to comments (it will die for good after capturing Jean Genet). The self-timer was finishing placing the associates 'where there was no longer time', the prey having been warned that when the click sound was heard, it was not that 'it' had a place but that 'it' was going to occur a few seconds later – perhaps ten seconds – at a moment that would escape the protagonists. Considering this 'husteron proteron', the cosmos-world would lose its footing, opening the universe. During the timeless wait, some incantatory shakings communicated to the Rolleyflex would complete the levitation. In the end, the portrayed had the impression of being shot ten years after he had died. In any event, a long while after he had rejoined the indifference and beatitude of the stars.



Marc Trivier, *Portrait de Robert Frank*

The cows, which Marc Trivier regularly photographed at the Anderlecht abattoirs, show the same essence as the human faces (****). An essence that is no longer the turmoil encountered with Avedon, but more of a souvenir of Georges Bataille's 'continuous', occasionally invoked by the photographer, dissolving from every side the pretenses of emergence of the 'discontinuous' and whose here the matter is the light, the vaporized milk of the light. The fact that he was born on the Meuse at the epitome of the combats of both world wars, where his childhood encountered the mass graves through the semi-historical, semi-fictional tales of former generations probably intervenes in this grasp-construction where Fiction and Reality neutralize each other sufficiently to well up the Real.

Merging faraway and near historicities reminds us of post-modernism. And it is true that with Trivier, like with Suda, we have once again reached a very different attitude to the modernism of the 1950-1975, and that we will regularly encounter.



Marc Trivier, *Abattoir d'Anderlecht*

In the photonic timbre, photography, a very thin texture, has found one of its major virtualities. It is one of the aspects where it artistically overflows, because the strokes in painting are too wide to trigger a veritable visual timbre. Pointillism went down that road but was stopped in its tracks by the pictorial touch.

Henri Van Lier

A photographic history of photography

in Les Cahiers de la Photographie, 1992

List of abbreviations of common references:

CP: Special issue of "Cahiers de Photographie" dedicated to the relevant photographer.

The acronyms (), (**), (***) refer to the first, second, and third illustration of the chapters, respectively. Thus, the reference (***) AP, 417) must be interpreted as: "This refers to the third illustration of the chapter, and you will find a better reproduction, or a different one, with the necessary technical specifications, in The Art of Photography listed under number 417".*