

LOCAL ANTHROPOGENIES – PHYLOGENESIS

A PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

20. GIACOMELLI (Italy, 1925), JORGE MOLDER (Portugal, 1947)

The catastrophes of development

Apart for Man Ray, the preceding photographers were sufficiently characterized by the shootings that we did not have to take into account the development of the negative, the printing of the positive, the printing process, although all were important conditions of their work.

This is quite different with Giacomelli and Jorge Molder. Both explored the various chemical catastrophes of photography to proceed upstream the forms to be neurally elaborated, by simultaneously unveiling a national genius, very Italian for the former, and most Portuguese with the latter.

20A. The upstream of perception, or Italy: Giacomelli

The Italian genius is structuration. Let us remember that *structura* is a specifically Latin word that is still very vivacious in today's modern Italian *struttura*, aiming at something common to all constructions – whether it is artificial or natural –, that is applicable to bones and stones, a sort of constructive essence, a general principle former to any particular realization, a sort of transcendental design – not transcendent, it is at the contrary very immanent – common to nature and culture, or rather, going from nature to culture, whilst the German Bauhaus design and specifically Hungarian design tends to absorb nature in the artifice, even in digitality. Leonardo da Vinci's (engineer-designer-painter-sculptor) *Whirlwinds* are the culmination of this grasping. Morandi's 'metaphysical' painting gave an example at the beginning of the century. And let us recall that the preoccupation of the Kantian transcendental supported the secular fraternity of Italian and German philosophy.

One generation after Morandi, Giacomelli made this structuration his photographic subject through the possibilities that add on to the first chemical catastrophe, i.e. the shooting,

meaning the steps of the development and the printing. The landscape that we reproduce, taken from the series *Paesaggio*, dated 1971 (*CI, 1), supposes furrows, paths, trees, but at a level of oversimplicity (in the Kantian sense) such as nature and culture mutually engender each other from one same transcendental structuration.



Giacomelli, *Paesaggio*, CI, n°1

Firstly, this supposed the appropriate landscape, such as the arid Italian landscape. Then, an erasing of the details and a thickening of the lines of force. But it was not enough. There was also a need for these accentuations and erasing be balanced in such a way that what was positive and negative in the shooting should reach a true positive/negative *beat*, fundamental resource of photography since Hill and Adamson's dress of Elisabeth Eastlake, but that takes here the decision of a photographic subject. Asking metaphysic questions à la Morandi. What is a background, what is a form? What is nature, what is culture? What do we call *indicium*, *index*, referential sign? Where does the analogy end and where does the digital

begin? Even when characters appear, such as these ladies in black and the little boy in the street of *Scanno* in 1963 (LP, 184), those are still transcended by the textural abstraction.

This time, photography goes from WORLD 2 to WORLD 3 not so much through the shakings of the form or by the triggering between heterogeneous forms, than in virtue of a move up towards the moments of the cerebral constitution of the form. *Vision*, by David Marr, published in 1982, three years after his death, helps us understand what it is.

In the purest spirit of the M.I.T., hence combining physiology, cybernetic, and theory of the information, this seminal book offered a certain suite of the samples (erasing, cleavages, constructions) that our visual nervous system *must* operate to perceive a tridimensionnel object. This system, very similar to that of other primates, serves at elaborating, from a retinal data that is not very differentiated and that is bi-dimensional, an object that can be handled, hence eventually nameable, that has three full dimensions (object centred). It is giving a *computational* basis (perhaps one day verified and localized physiologically) to the Kantian schemes, and to conclude to the transcendental of vision.

Giacomelli's photographs – particularly in their textural availability and in their powerful positive / negative beat – take us back to the non-final, pre-terminal stages of this suite. There would even be a sense in saying that they privilege the level that David Marr calls 2.5 dimensions (viewer centred). Then, our cerebral activations are not so much the trivial associations of ideas and emotions usually spoken off rather than the perceptive-motor upstream neural elaborations that are necessary to take into account if one wants to measure the extent of the photographic perceptive-motor field effects. Giacomelli would also enlighten the aptitude of any photograph to activate the sequence of the cerebral schemes of the watcher, particularly and more the grasping of a nameable show (denoted and connoted). The photographic 'beyond' are often 'behind'.

'Camera International' started its first issue in 1984 with an ensemble taken from the series *Paesaggio*. We could not find a better declaration of principles. Fotografia come cosa mentale.

20B. The upstream of memory, or Portugal: Jorge Molder

Although younger than Giacomelli by twenty-two years, Jorge Molder can be linked to his elder because he too uses the catastrophes of the development and the photographic prints to go up the grasping of the object upstream to the perception and constituted nomination. Similarly, he radicalizes the entire genius of a nation.

Because – in their shady valorism – these subtle prints are intimately consonant with the topology, cybernetic, and logico-semiotic of the Portuguese language. Of Portuguese, they marry the curving and re-curving of the nasals, the long and deaf swell, the tactile yet diffuse heat, the half-light, the rhythmic sliding, the imponderable curvature rates, the inflexions, the nearby faraway that results in the memory here, or rather over there, is remembrance, a cross

between the *alheação* and the *saudade*, of which Camões and Pessoa gave the language culminations. It is a question of texture rather than structure, like the fado, the Coïmbre guitar and the philosophical Sebastianism.

In the recapitulative catalogue that the Gulbenkian dedicated to Jorge Molder in 1986, we did not choose his white sailors sailing on a Vigo pavement at night, because we did not want to put forth that his oceanism is a question of theme. We did not use wide shots either, because we did not want to put forth the question of format. Nor his figures with the faded faces, to avoid any confusion with an easy pathos. We hope that the fourth of the *Inventions à deux voix de Bach* (**), vertical on a vertical piano shows that, right up to the verticality, this 'nasal' photographic subject, which is more textural than structural, maintains its distant horizontal tension through the fineness of the fold of the pages, the fugitive bending of the partition on its support, the ductility of the vanishing points, the rates of the consistency and the inconsistency of the anchoring of the black keys among the white keys. This time, the bistre is not a common printing process, but the very foundation of the soul.



Jorge Molder, *Inventions à deux voix*

Such photography is interrogative to the point of being narrative. From an intrinsic narration, non-extrinsic as it usually is. *The Secret Agent* also comprises eighty white, black, illustrated pages in a wordless tale sufficiently metaphysical that the introductory thanks should be addressed to painter Marcel Broodthaers. But the isolated photographs are filled with the same underlying narration. Among the *Trabajos Anteriores* (everything is ‘anterior’ for the upstream of the Portuguese memory), in an abandoned church in Beja, at the foot of an altar in Manueline swell, a frame bearing an unknown soldier floats indefinitely (PHPH, 6).

Jorge Molder is a philosopher photographer, or a photographer philosopher. His work is currently achieving a philosophy of photography in action. Could the true ‘Secret Agent’ be the writer Joseph Conrad, or the man and photographer Jorge Molder, or photography as such?

That, in both cases when a photographic subject explicates topology, cybernetic, logico-semiotic of a nation, the photographs privilege the chemical catastrophes that take the image upstream perception, and the accomplished denomination, would probably not have been much of a surprise to David Marr.

Henri Van Lier

A photographic history of photography

in *Les Cahiers de la Photographie*, 1992

List of abbreviations of common references:

LP: Szarkowski, Looking at Photographs, Museum of Modern Art.

CI: Caméra International, Paris.

PHPH: Philosophy of Photography.

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”.*