

LOCAL ANTHROPOGENIES – PHYLOGENESIS

A PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

29. COLETTE DUCK (Germany - Belgium, 1949)

Cosmological transformation

Since the 1970's, many have started to perceive themselves as being in an expanding Universe among a luxuriant geological and biological evolution, one that was irreversible. This somewhat enlightened the *cosmological voyage* through civilizations in the manner of Max Pam, and through moments of history in the manner of Scianna. This should also be our starting point to understand the perception of the *cosmological transformation* in the manner of Colette Duck.

Cosmological transformation is as old as the hills. Yet, the aggregative and instinctive elements of WORLD 1, which of close continuity, only kept the elementary case of aggregation: the procreation. The WORLD 2, which of distant continuity, almost fled aggregation, as the latter shattered its search to integral parts and wholes in their acme (their integration climax). Even the functioning elements of WORLD 3, that of discontinuity, were at first a lot more combinatory than transformational, as testified by Picasso or Bauhaus. In summary, we had to wait until the 1970's and the feeling of one-time-never-again that affected the Universe itself for the irreversible factor of time as such to become the heart of an artistic subject.

Music – through its temporal nature and sensitiveness to fluctuation – first testified of this new sensitivity, when Steve Reich, Phil Glass, and La Monte Young created musical mechanisms that invited grasping sound as a place of infinitesimal, fecund, ceaseless mutations. The shock was generalized. Exemplarily, since 1965, polish painter Opalka continues to write, each day, from painting to painting and from line to line, a suite (sequence) of positive complete numbers from one to the infinite in endlessly paler greys, which are destined to fade away with his own life. Most happenings, as their name indicate, centred on the patient grasping of unpredictability and the irreversibility of time going by. In all of these cases, the artist has become a cosmologist celebrant.

Photography played its role in this transformational vision. But its version in black and white was more suited to recording macroscopic transformations, like in the work of Denis Roche. The infinitesimal cosmologic transformations required colour photography. Colette Duck testifies this, even if in her work, along photography, this aim also called upon painting, sculpture, video, ready-made, and chemical alterations. We shall limit ourselves to her photos.

Browsing through the book-catalogue published by Espace Médecis in 1991 (CD), we are first struck by the archetypal role played by the coloured auto-thermogram. There, the theme is the own body visualised in a particularly fluctuating factor, its heat, and in the most proprioceptive as, in the tightest connection between the taker and the taken, the operator varies – on the monitor – the grasping of himself to select what he finds the most intimate and most moving. We measure the privilege of the female body, a place of cosmological effervescence that are ostensible in menstruation and particularly in the gestation and lactation, where two confounded and distinct organisms conduct an exchange.

However, the infinitesimal cosmologic transformation overlaps the own body and concerns the external world just as much. Another theme was hence required, one that was sufficiently universal, mutational, and where mutation would be fit to be shown in a way that was once again visual, tactile, kinaesthetic, proprioceptive. This theme is the mountain, which is changing, secularly and daily, which can be touched and grasped in a gravitational effort, visible by a great people for whom it is the God through its mass, through its anteriority and by its name. Colette Duck's mountain-transformation is the 3000 meters of the Austrian *Zugspitze Wetterstein* (*CD).

Only colour photographs could exalt this geological and meteorological transformation at point-blank and in the mid-distance, in the visible and in the infrared (close to the thermogram), in a touch-vision (as the thermogram, again) that coincided with the co-apted gravitations of the rock and the body of the alpinist in such a way that the projections could record not only simple surfaces, but depths and embraces. When the final editing gives way to series (*CD), these orchestrate amazements and efforts, sometimes eliding, but never inverting the states of the experience. If a photograph is isolated, and in this case does not possess a sequential orchestration, it requires, to become tactile, the pictorial or chemical touching up.

We then see that, photographically, it is not so much the colour photo that is transformational, but the suites of colour photographs. If, since 1900, the Scanachrome allows for an intervention in the dimension, the texture, or the colour of an isolated photograph, it cannot modify the contours and also requires, at the end of the day, the pictorial or chemical touching up to include the tactile aspect and the mutation (except assuredly in the auto-thermogram that would lose all sense if they were altered.



Colette Duck, *Zugspitze Wetterstein*, CD

We will draw a parallel between Colette Duck, whose mother was German, and Dieter Appelt, who is roughly the same age. On both side, we find the same specifically German grasping of the concomitant explosion and implosion. The same packaging of space and time, that means that there are never surfaces without depths. The same combination of softness and savagery, of caress and breaking-in, of vision and touching. We will say that Colette Duck also has an Italian side, more precisely Venetian, since the Brenner is the sole separator between Innsbruck and Venice. Dieter Appelt too, in 1981, photographed the depths of time-space in Venice, the transformational, entitled *Venedig* in his series *Ezra Pound*.

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List of abbreviations of common references:

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".*