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FOR ILLUSION ISN'T THE OPPOSITE OF REALITY...

Photography is our exorcism. Primitive society had its masks, bourgeois society its mirrors. We have our images. We believe we can overpower the world with technology. But through technology, the world has imposed itself on us and the surprise effect generated by that reversal has been considerable.

You think you photograph a particular scene for the pleasure it gives. In fact it's the scene that wants to be photographed. You're merely an extra in the production. The photographing subject is just the agent of the ironic appearance of things. The image is the prime medium for this gigantic advertising campaign which the world lays on for itself, which objects lay on for themselves – overwhelming our imaginations, forcing our passions out into the world, breaking the mirror we held up – hypocritically as it happens – to capture them.

The miracle today is that appearances, which were long reduced to voluntary servitude but have now gained their independence, are turning around on us, turning against us, through the very technology we use to drive them out. They now come from somewhere else, from their own place, from the heart of their banality; they are bursting in on us from everywhere, joyously multiplying on their own. The joy of taking photographs is an objective delight. Whoever has not experienced the objective rapture of the image one morning in town or desert will never in any way understand the pataphysical refinement of the world.

If something wants to be photographed, that is precisely because it does not want to yield up its meaning; it does not want to be reflected upon. It wants to be seized directly, violated on the spot, illuminated in its detail. If something wants to become an image, this is not so as to last, but in order to disappear more effectively. And the photographing subject is a good medium only if s/he joins in the game, exorcizes his/her own gaze and judgement, revels in his/her own absence.

It falls to the very grain of the details of the object, the play of lines and light, to signify this interruption of the subject – and hence the irruption of the world – which gives the photograph its quality of suspense. Through the image the world asserts its discontinuity, its fragmentation, its artificial instantaneousness. In this sense, the photographic image is the purest, because it does not simulate time or movement and keeps to the most rigorous unrealism. All other forms of image (cinema, video, computer-generated etc.) are merely attenuated forms of the pure image and of its break with reality.

The degree of intensity of the image matches the degree of its denial of the real, its invention of another scene. To make an image of an object is to strip the object of all its dimensions one by one: weight, relief, smell, depth, time, continuity and, of course, meaning. This disembodiment is the price to be paid for that power of fascination which the image acquires, the price for its becoming a medium of pure objectality, becoming transparent to a subtler form of seduction.

To add back all these dimensions one by one – relief, movement, emotion, ideas, meaning and desire – in order to produce something better, more real – in other words, something more effectively simulated – is, where images are concerned, utter nonsense. And technology itself is hoist here with its own petard.

The desire to take photographs may perhaps arise from the following observation: looked at in general, from the angle of meaning, the world is distinctly disappointing. In detail, taken unawares, it is always perfectly self-evident.

The dizzying impact of the perpetual detail. The magical eccentricity of the detail. In photographs, things are conjoined by a technical operation which matches the way they interconnect in their commonplace reality. An image for another image and a photograph for another photograph are simply this: a contiguity of fragments. There is no „view of the world“ here, no „approach“ to things:

merely the refraction of the world, in its detail, on equal terms.

The absence of the world in each detail, like the absence of the subject which shows in every feature of a face. You can achieve such an illumination of detail by mental gymnastics or by a subtle use of the senses too. But, here, technology brings it about as smoothly as can be. Perhaps it is a trap.

Objects are such that, in themselves, their disappearance changes them. It is in this sense that they deceive us, that they generate illusion. But it is in this sense too that they are faithful to themselves, and we must be faithful to them: in their minute detail, in their exact figuration, in the sensuous illusion of their appearance and connectedness. For illusion is not the opposite of reality, but another more subtle reality which enwraps the former kind in the sign of its disappearance.

Every photographed object is merely the trace left behind by the disappearance of all the rest. It is an almost perfect crime, an almost total resolution of the world, which merely leaves the illusion of a particular object shining forth, the image of which then becomes an impenetrable enigma. Starting out from this radical exception, you have an unimpeded view on the world.

It isn't a question of producing; it's all in the art of disappearing. Only what comes into being in the mode of disappearance is truly other. And yet that disappearance has to leave traces, has to be the place where the Other, the world or the object appears. This is indeed the only way for the Other to exist: on the basis of your own disappearance.

„We shall be your favorite disappearing act!“

The only profound desire is object desire (including desire for the sexual object). Not, in other words, desire for

what one lacks, nor even for that which (or the person who) lacks me (which is more subtle), but for the person who does not lack me, for that which can quite happily exist without me. It's the one who doesn't lack me who is the Other. That is radical otherness.

Desire is always the desire for that alien perfection at the same time as the desire to wreck or destroy it. You only get excited about those things whose perfection and impunity you want both to share and to destroy.

To take photographs is not to take the world for an object, but to make it an object, to exhume its otherness buried beneath its alleged reality, to bring it forth as a strange attractor, and pin down that strange attraction in an image.

It is, basically, to become again „a thing among things“ – all foreign to each other, but collusive, all opaque, but familiar. To become this rather than a universe of subjects who are opposed, and transparent, to each other.

It is photographs which bring us closest to a universe without images, or in other words to pure appearance.

The dramatic quality of the photographic image comes from the struggle between the subject's resolve to impose itself in its discontinuity and immediacy. In the best case, the object wins and the photographic image is an image of a fractal world which has no summation, which is contained in no equation. In this way it differs from art and cinema, which, by way of ideas, vision or movement, always tend towards a totalizing pattern.

Against the philosophy of the subject and the contemplating gaze – of stepping back from the world in order to grasp it – the anti-philosophy of the object, of the disconnectedness of objects, of the random succession of part-objects and details. Like musical syncopation or the movement of particles.

Photographs are what bring us closest to flies, to their compound eyes and their jerky flight.

In order for the object to be grasped, the subject has to relinquish his hold. But this turns out to be the subject's last adventure, his last chance – the chance of a dispossession of self in the reverberation of a world in which he henceforth occupies the unseen site of representation. The object, for its part, has much greater scope for play, since, not having passed through the mirror stage, it is not dealing with its image, identity or likeness – since, stripped of desire and having nothing to say, it eludes commentary and interpretation.

If you manage to capture something of this dissimilarity and this singularity, something changes insofar as the „real“ world and, indeed, the reality principle itself, are concerned.

Rather than having the presence and representation of the subject foisted upon the object, the point is to have the object become the site of the absence and disappearance of the subject. And the object here can be a situation, a quality of light or a living creature. The key thing is that there should be a fracture in this excessively well-crafted machinery of representation (and the moral and philosophical dialectic attaching to it) and that, through a pure coming-to-pass of the image, the world should burst forth as insoluble self-evidence.

It is a mirror reversal. Up to now the subject was the mirror of representation. The object was merely the content. In this case it is the object which says: „I shall be your mirror.“

Photography is obsessive, temperamental, ecstatic and narcissistic in character. It is a solitary activity. The photographic image is discontinuous, selective, unpredictable and irreparable, like the state of things at any given moment. Any touching-up, second thoughts or staging assumes an abominably aesthetic character. The solitude of the photographic subject in space and time is correlative of the solitude of the object and its temperamental silence.

The object must be fixed with an intense, immobilizing gaze. It is not the object of the photograph who must pose, but the photographer who must hold his breath in order to create a blank region in time and in his body. But who must also refrain mentally from breathing, and empty his mind, so that the mental surface is as virgin as the film. Who must not see himself as a representative being, but as an object working in its own cycle, without any concern for *mise-en-scène*, in a kind of frenzied circumscribing of self and object. There is in this an enchantment which one can also find in playing – the enchantment of passing beyond your own image and being delivered up to a kind of happy fatality. It is you and it isn't you who are playing. In this way you create a void within and around yourself, by a kind of initiatory confinement. You no longer project yourself into an image – you produce the world as a singular event, without commentary.

The photograph isn't an image in real time. It retains something of the negative, something of the suspense of the negative. It is this slight time-lag which allows the image to exist as such, as an illusion different from the real world. It is this slight time-lag which affords it the discreet charm of a previous life, which digital or video images do not have, occurring as they do in „real time.“ In computer-generated images the real has already disappeared. And for that reason they are not, strictly speaking, images.

Photography produces a kind of thunderstruck effect, a form of suspense and phenomenal immobility which interrupts the precipitation of events. The „freeze-frame“ is a freezing of the world. However, that suspense is never definitive, since photographs refer on one to another and the image's only destiny is to be an image. And yet each is distinct from all the others.

It is through this kind of distinction and secret complicity that photography has recovered the aura it had lost with the coming of cinema. But cinema too can recover this

specific quality of the image – which is both complicit with, and apparently foreign to, narration – having its own static intensity, though fired with all the energy of movement, crystallizing a whole course of events in a still image by a principle of condensation which runs counter to the principle of high dilution and dispersion of all our current images. In Godard, for example.

It is rare for a piece of writing to present itself with the same brute self-evidence, instantaneity or magic as a shadow, a quality of light or the grain of some material. And yet, in Nabokov or Gombrowicz, for example, writing sometime recovers something of the material, objectal autonomy of things without qualities, something of the erotic potency and supernatural disorder of a meaningless world.

Genuine stillness is not the immobility of a static body, but the stillness of a weight on the end of a pendulum that has barely stopped swinging and is still vibrating imperceptibly. It is the stillness of time in the instant (the instant of photographic „instantaneity“, behind which there is always the idea of movement, but only the idea), the image being there to keep movement at a respectful distance, without ever showing it, which destroys the illusion. It is this stillness things dream of, it is this stillness we dream of. It is this the cinema lingers over increasingly today, in its nostalgia for slow-motion and the freeze-frame, as the highest point of drama.

The same goes for silence. And the paradox of television will no doubt have been that it has restored all the charm of the silence of the image.

The silence of the photograph. One of its most precious qualities, unlike cinema and television, which always have to have silence imposed on them – though no-one ever succeeds in this. The silence of the image, which requires (or should require!) no commentary. But the silence, too, of the object, which it wrests from the deafening



hurly-burly of the real world. Whatever the noise and the violence around them, photographs return objects to a state of stillness and silence. In the midst of urban hustle and bustle, they recreate the equivalent of the desert, a phenomenal isolation. They are the only way of passing through cities in silence, of moving through the world in silence.

Photography conveys the state of the world in our absence. The lens explores that absence. Even in emotionally charged faces and bodies, it is still this absence it explores. The best photographs, then, are of those people and things for whom the other does not exist, or no longer exists – primitive peoples, down-and-outs, objects. Only the inhuman is photogenic. That is the price to be paid for reciprocal stupefaction to come into play, and hence for there to be collusion with the world – and of the world with us.

Human beings are too sentimental. Even animals and plants are too sentimental. Only objects have no sexual or sentimental aura. So you don't have to violate them in cold blood to photograph them. Having no problems of resemblance, they are marvellously self-identical. By using technology, you can only add to the magical self-evidence of their indifference and the innocence of their *mise-en-scène*, and hence can only bring out what they personify: the objective illusion, and the subjective disillusionment, of the world.

It is very difficult to photograph individuals or faces. It is impossible to bring someone into focus photographically when you are so little able to get them into focus psychologically. Human beings are sites of such *mise-en-scène*, such complex (de)construction, that the lens strips them of their character in spite of themselves. They are so laden with meaning that it is almost impossible to separate them from that meaning to discover the secret form of their absence.

They say there is always a moment when the most commonplace – or the most masked – person reveals their secret identity. But what is interesting is their secret alterity. And rather than seeking out the identity beneath the mask, one should seek out the mask beneath the identity – the face which haunts us and deflects us from our identity – the masked divinity which in fact haunts each one of us for a moment, at some time or other.

For objects, savages, beasts and primitives, otherness is sure, singularity is sure. A beast has no identity, but for all that it is not alienated – it is foreign to itself and to its own ends. As a result it has that charm of beings foreign to their image, but consequently enjoying an organic familiarity with their bodies and with all others. If you find both this connivance and this foreign-ness, then you are approaching a poetic quality of otherness – the quality of dreams and „paradoxical“ (REM) sleep, identity merging here with deep sleep.

Objects, like primitive peoples, are a length ahead of us in the photogenic stakes. Being free, from the outset, of psychology and introspection, they retain the whole of their seduction in the face of the camera. Being free of representation, they retain their entire presence. So far as the subject is concerned, matters are much less certain, as the subject most often succeeds – is this the price he pays for his intelligence or the mark of his stupidity? – in denying his otherness, even though it costs him enormous efforts, and in existing only within the limits of his identity. What is needed, then, is to make him a little more enigmatic to himself and to make human beings in general a little stranger (or more alien) to each other. It is a question not of treating them as subjects, but of turning them into objects, into something different – that is to say treating them as what they are.

„People have to be grasped in their relation to themselves, that is to say, in their silence.“ (Henri Cartier-Bresson).

We base our lives, in large part, on the machinery of will and representation, but the real story goes on elsewhere. This is not to deny that everyone is there with their wills and desires, but their decisions and thoughts secretly come from elsewhere and it is in this very strange interference that their originality lies. It does not lie in the mirrors in which they recognize themselves nor in the lens which wants to recognize them. Traps are always based on resemblance and the greatness of an image lies in its ability to defy all resemblance, to seek elsewhere that which comes from elsewhere.

There was a time when the confrontation with the lens was dramatic, when the image itself was still a thing of risk, a magical and dangerous reality. Everything expressed an absence of complaisance towards the image (whether through fear, defiance or pride) and this gave any early-century bourgeois or peasant, surrounded by his family, the same wild, deathly seriousness as a primitive. Their being is immobilized, their eyes dilate before the image; they spontaneously take on the stature of dead men. As a result, the lens itself becomes a savage thing. Promiscuity between the photographer and his object is entirely excluded (the opposite of present practice). The distance between the two cannot be bridged and the photograph produced is the technical equivalent of the radical exoticism Segalen wrote of. This lends the photographic event genuine nobility, like a distant echo of the primal clash of cultures.

In the heroic period, the photographic relationship is a duel. And it really is a matter of life and death. The corpse-like immobility of the object, the lack of expression (though not of character) is as powerful as the mobility of the lens, which it counterbalances. The destiny they have in their heads, their mental universes imprint themselves directly onto the film – an effect as tangible today as it was a century ago when the photograph was taken. It is we who capture the savage or primitive in our lens, but it is s/he who imagines us.

This death or disappearance, which in the heroic age was the virtual death of the object, is always present, according to Barthes, at the anthropological heart of the image. The „punctum“: that figure of nothingness, absence and unreality which stands opposed to the „studium“, the whole context of meaning and references. It is the nothingness at the heart of the image which lends it its magic and its power and which is most often driven out by significations. In the festivals, galleries, museums and exhibitions the images teem with messages, testimony, aesthetic sentimentality, and stereotypes. This is a prostitution of the image to what it signifies, to what it seeks to communicate – the image taken hostage, either by media operators or news managers. In the profusion of our images death and violence are everywhere, but as things of pathos, ideology and spectacle. There is nothing of the „punctum“ here, that fateful trait or mechanism internal to the image which has now been driven out of it.

Instead of the image symbolically enfolding death, death enfolds the image (in the outward form of the exhibition, the museum or the cultural necropolises which glorify photographic art).

The image is off-camera, off-stage. Photographic mise-en-scène, whether it be a staging internal to the image or a staging by the institution is a nonsense. Once the hallucination which should properly inhabit the image is buried beneath commentary, walled up in aesthetic celebration and condemned to the plastic surgery of the museum, it is finished. This is no longer even a question of „punctum“ versus „studium“. What we have here is quite simply the medium in circulation. And the fundamentally dangerous form of the image gives way to the mere cultural circulation of masterpieces.

What I bemoan is the aestheticization of photography, its having become one of the Fine Arts, culture having taken it to its bosom. The photographic image, by its technical essence, came from somewhere beyond, or

before, aesthetics, and by that token constitutes a substantial revolution in our mode of representation. The irruption of photography throws art itself into question in its aesthetic monopoly of the image. Now, today, things have turned around: it is art which is swallowing up photography and not the other way about.

Photography belongs very much to another dimension, which is not, strictly speaking, aesthetic. It is something like the dimension of *trompe-l'œil*, which runs through the history of art but remains virtually indifferent to its twists and turns. *Trompe-l'œil* is only apparently realistic. It is in fact linked to the self-evidence of the world, with such meticulous likeness that it becomes magical. *Trompe-l'œil*, like photography, preserves something of the magical status of the image and hence something of the radical illusion of the world. It is an instinctive, irreducible form, closer to the origin of representation, the throes of representation – linked to the appearance and the self-evidence of the world, but to a deceptive self-evidence – and hence opposed to any realist vision, and, even today, valid not so much in terms of judgement and taste as for its sheer fascination.

By dint of the non-realist play with technique, and by its absolute stillness, its silence, its excision of objects from the world, its phenomenological reduction of movement and, in some cases, of colour, the photograph is the purest and most artificial image. It isn't beautiful, it's worse. And it's as such that it assumes the force of an object in a world in which the aesthetic principle is in fact petering out.

It's technics which gives the photograph its originality. It's through technicity that our world reveals itself to be radically non-objective. It is, paradoxically, the so-called objective lens of the camera which reveals the unobjectivity of the world, that little something which will not be resolved by analysis or resemblance.

It is technics which takes us beyond resemblance, to the heart of the trompe-l'œil of reality. In so doing, it also transforms the vision we have of technics. This becomes now the site of a double game, the magnifying mirror of illusion and forms. There is a collusion between technical equipment and the world, a convergence between an objective technics and the very potency of the object. Photography might be said to be the art of slipping into this collusion, not to control the process but to play on it and to show that the die is not cast irrevocably.

The world in itself resembles nothing. As concept and discourse it relates to many other things – as pure object, it is unidentifiable.

The photographic operation is a kind of reflex or automatic writing of the self-evidence of the world, which is not self-evident at all.

In the generic illusion of the image, the problem of the real no longer arises. It is effaced by its very movement, which passes immediately and spontaneously beyond true and false, beyond real and unreal, beyond good and evil.

The image is not a medium for which we have to find the proper use. It is what it is and it is beyond all our moral considerations. It is by its essence immoral, and the world's becoming-image is an immoral process. It is up to us to escape our representation and to become ourselves the immoral vehicle of the image. Up to us to become objects again, and to become once again other in a seductive relation to the world.

To make way for the silent complicity between object and objective lens, between appearances and technology, between the physical quality of light and the metaphysical complexity of the technical apparatus, without bringing in either vision or meaning.

For it is the object which sees us, the object which dreams us. It is the world which reflects us, it is the world which thinks us. This is the basic rule.

The magic of photography is that it is the object which does all the work. Photographers will never admit this and will argue that all the originality lies in their inspiration and their photographic interpretation of the world. As a result they take photographs which are either bad or too good, confusing their subjective vision with the reflex miracle of the photographic act.