

Patrick Rimond's encounters

Patrick Rimond is an observer. One may say that his photographic research takes the form of “a set out” for an encounter with the world. Curiosity, openness to all sorts of impulses coming to the artist from the outside world (noted and recognized rationally but also, or maybe above all, absorbed subconsciously), as well as trust to one’s visual intuition and finally taking the risk to “simply” release the camera’s shutter are the indispensable conditions for being the observer. Whether the photographs are portraits, where Patrick goes out to meet a stranger, the “other” (with all the consequences to this, including the fact that he himself is a stranger towards the person in front of the camera) and embraces the essence of the encounter and the presence and “being” of the other human before us in a portrait’s strong form, or whether they are landscapes, especially urban, where seemingly nothing is going on and yet they hypnotise us by the form and intrigue by the unspoken but perceptible strangeness – his photographs will always be a registration of the longing for the encounter. Coming forward and ceaseless readiness to accept everything that occurs in the field of one’s perception and experience are with no doubt the conditions of a good encounter. Modern environment of our lives is a very dense, sophisticated space, where the proliferation of images, sounds, happenings, moves and transfers might be even oppressive. Seemingly ordinary impulses (not only visual) coming from the reality are what teases senses and mind and encourages an automatic reaction, in this case an urge for photographic registration. Patrick Rimond’s newest series of photographs are registrations of a sort of hypnagogic vision, an unconscious set of impulses, which enclosed in a form of an image might give an idea of the source for the fascination with the place, its form, life and atmosphere. Photography might be, as a registration of that encounter, a kind of an image transcription which reveals the moment, a glimpse of a thought, some inscrutable reason for activating the artist’s subconscious in front of the reality.

Such an attitude of an artist endlessly interested in an encounter with the world is what Charles Baudelaire described in his essay “The Painter of Modern Life”. To the poet-critic an artist capable of finding their way in the modernity is a *flâneur*. *Flâneur*, who is a leisurely passer-by, a selfless observer whose “curiosity may be considered the starting point of his genius” and it is his “irresistible passion”.¹ The artist praised by Baudelaire is like a convalescent who is twice as happy to be alive and to embrace the world and its life. “It is an ego athirst for the non-ego”.² What is more, an attitude of such a convalescent is alike to the delight of a child that has a unique “faculty of taking a lively interest in things, even the most trivial in appearance” and for whom everything is a novelty with which “the child is always ‘drunk’”.³ A childish way of perceiving is sharper and “magical”. And art is a sort of magic, is “a magical operation”.⁴ Baudelaire created his own “philosophy of art” and as a critic and journalist he presented it in his “Salons”, reviews of the great exhibitions of the art of his time. Amongst many important categories present in Baudelaire’s writing I would like to have a closer look at those which, in addition to the ones mentioned above, might shed light on Patrick Rimond’s photographs and perhaps allow us to see them from a different perspective. The particular Baudelaire’s philosophy is based on many dichotomies reflecting an inner drama which haunted the poet: a fight between two contradictory feelings, “l’horreur de la vie

¹ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, in: *Selected writings on Art and Literature*, London, England; New York, N.Y., USA : Penguin Books , 1992, p. 397.

² *Ibidem*, p. 400.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 398.

⁴ Charles Baudelaire, *The Universal Exhibition of 1855*, in: *Selected writings...*, p. 120.

et l'extase de la vie" when he experienced the real world and felt excitement for the surreal.⁵ As David Carrier writes, the artist does not perceive these two worlds as different ones, but as one world experienced in many, various ways. The difference lies in *quality and kind*, and the transition between the everyday world and the supernatural happens magically, with the help of art as well as prayer or drugs. We see this world by means of *correspondences* between the spiritual and the natural and the role of a true artist is to bring these *correspondences* forth. Imagination is crucial in this process. For Baudelaire imagination is the superior category, the indispensable quality of an artist. Imagination is "the queen of the faculties" which influences other skills, "it stimulates them, sends them forth to do battle".⁶ Imagination allows an artist not to *imitate* the world but to create a new, different one from the fragments of this world, from the mysteries observed. Wrongly understood realism, thoughtless reproduction in art is hideous to the poet (this very aspect of photography kept Baudelaire from treating photography as a tool for artistic creation. He perceived it only as a scientific, fact seeking instrument. Baudelaire was unable to recognize the artist standing behind the camera. He neglected genius's intervention to the picture taken, the creative role of the one who lent his personality, concept, imagination to the gaze of the lens). Baudelaire dares even to state that imagination, as the "cardinal" skill, is related to the infinity. Imagination is a nearly metaphysical category, it is a kind of a vehicle enabling one to see more, clearer, sharper. Its influence, its effect is almost that of a drug on the senses that "is to endow the whole of nature with a supernatural interest that gives every object a deeper, a more deliberate, a more despotic meaning"⁷. Associated with all that is also a notion of strangeness which we find in Baudelaire's writings (what is strange is also wonderful) – strangeness, that is naïve and unconscious, is what defines beauty in art. Baudelaire cites Poe whom he admired so much: "It is a happiness to wonder, but also it is a happiness to dream".⁸ Ability to wonder coupled with curiosity are the qualities which shape the artist – the *flâneur*. They shape the artist who follows the subconsciously absorbed impulses and places his camera *in between*. Between the real world and the strange world, the uncanny – to refer to a Freudian notion describing something that had been hidden and was made visible. An experience on the edge of a lucid dream: on the borderline between something recognizable (rational) and unrecognizable. A hypnagogic vision.

Baudelaire as a protosurrealist? Maybe, the surrealists were keen on referring to the romantic symbolic tradition of "poets maudits" with Baudelaire amongst them. The category of unrestraint imagination which renders visible what we "naturally" cannot see, as well as the hypnotic way of perceiving the world and telling about it, are common for both surreal and symbolic kind of thinking. Patrick Rimond's photographs from the newest series are registrations of reality perceived and transformed by imagination, subconsciousness and intuition. Seemingly ordinary impulses (not only visual) coming from the reality tease senses and mind. In the beginning of the 20th century artists from the dada-surrealist circles (and not only, to mention Futurists at least) found inspiration in the modern world and its "non-artistic" everyday life. The living matter of the city, movement, technique, colours, lights were fertile ground for their creation. Duchamp's "Act descending the stairs" would be the most famous example here. At the same time this "ordinary" aspect of modern life was being

⁵ David Carrier wrote about the Cartesian mind/body problem when discussing this contradiction in Baudelaire's experience. How does it happen that the mind, a not extended substance, influences the spatially extended matter – the body – and the other way around? David Carrier, *High Art. Charles Baudelaire and the origin of Modernist Paintings*, University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press 1996, p. 3.

⁶ Charles Baudelaire, *The Salon of 1859*, in: *Selected writings...*, p.299.

⁷ Baudelaire refers here to Edgar Allan Poe's opinion in this matter. At the same time he agrees that even "without recourse to opium" one can still experience those "true festivals of brain". Charles Baudelaire, *The Universal Exhibition...*, p. 138.

⁸ Charles Baudelaire, *The Salon of 1859...*, p. 294.

made unreal by the artistic processes, it became different to the reality – sometimes dangerous, sometimes funny, sometimes absurd. The other well-known example would be “Sculptures Involontaires” by Brassai – photographs in which an ordinary object like a bus ticket starts living its own life in our imagination.

Susan Sontag argued that “there is a kind of surrealist sensibility in photography”⁹ and that this is a living visual-perceptual tradition, not only associated with the photographers-Surrealists. The fact that an ordinary, homely object or even a corner of something, neglected in the mass of others in our everyday experience, may reveal its “beauty” when photographed, is a thesis undertaken by many artists, not interested in the surrealist movement as such (Edward Weston would be an obvious example). In the context of modern art we can talk about a certain tradition of surrealist *sensitive vision* that, as Sontag proposes, is “promoted” by photography. This tradition is resonant to a great extent in the newest work of Patrick Rimond: both in his own defining the very method of work as *visions hypnagogiques* (the idea “promoted” artistically by the Surrealists) and in the idea of transcription of reality and registering its “traces” (“imprints”) in order to find out what comes out of this, what one might get to know from these trace registrations. Photography as a medium is endowed in this special connection to reality and, as Rosalind Krauss argues, it fell to Surrealists to draw out this specific relation where a photography is a transfer of the real. It is a photochemically registered trace of the thing in the world, to which it refers as rings of water left of the table refer to a cold glass which left them.¹⁰

Max Ernst is an important personage to Patrick in this matter (also personally as a fascination that introduced the artist to the world opened up by art in the beginning of his artistic carrier). His technological “inventions” are an excellent embodiment of the idea of transcription, registration of a trace, of a fragment taken out from an “ordinary” reality that results in discovering something fantastic. And it doesn’t matter that Ernst’s frottages or collages were not employed directly in photography. In the context of what I called unconscious fascination and inscrutable reason for activating the artist’s subconscious, Max Ernst’s account of how a childhood memory led him to inventing the frottage technique seems to be interesting. When he was a child a veneer surface imitating mahogany next to his bed used to optically incite lucid dream visions. After many years a view of an old floor marked with rifts and grooves, put him in a state of *obsessive irritation*. In order to get to the core of this obsession, he referred to his meditation and hallucinate skills and made a series of frottage drawings by putting a piece of paper on the floor and rubbing it with graphite. Ernst was convinced that those drawings, taking up a character different to a mere “reproduction” or “image” of the floor, would explain to him the reason of his obsession and show him its reflection in an image.¹¹ Krauss calls it ceaseless automatism of the writing of nature, its *presentation* (as opposed to representation, a picture).¹² Surrealists, and especially poets of this milieu, would call the techniques made up by Ernst or Man Ray “magical operations”. The parallel to the idea of “magic” which we encounter in Baudelaire’s writings is not accidental. Magical transformation performed on reality is the privilege of art, it comes out of operations of a sensitive artist. And a camera, that eye of a different kind than the human one, that eye which sees more, at stranger angles, that registers with a different speed and scrutiny, is a sort of a prosthesis extending the physical abilities of human body.¹³

⁹ Susan Sontag, *Photography within the humanities*, in: *Thinking Photography*, ed. Liz Wells, London and New York 2003, p. 65.

¹⁰ Rosalind Krauss, *The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism*, „October” vol. 19 (Winter 1981), p. 26.

¹¹ The story is mentioned by Krystyna Janicka in her book „Surrealism”, Warszawa 1975, p. 99.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 31.

¹³ The idea of a „camera vision” (one must remember that “sight” as a physical skill is different to the vision which above all is a process) as a special way of seeing was spread among others by Moholy-Nagy in the 1920s and 1930s. Rosalind Krauss, *op. cit.*, s. 31 – 32.

For Patrick the technology, the technological device enabling the registration of those traces and imprints mentioned, is the camera and its possibilities. What is important as well – it is not computer manipulation. The photographs were all taken in a space which the artist passes by everyday. So on the one hand in a well known place, well recognised, on the other hand – by the fact of the everyday passing-by – an unimportant, inappreciable place. Patrick photographed in a limited space of about 60x60m which subconsciously influenced his mind in a way inexplicable to him. The photographs are as it were a transcription of the experience which remains a mystery. Visualising it is an attempt to familiarise, to seize what induces a man in spite of their rational thinking. Referring to Ernst – it is like making a frottage to find out something about the obsession and to capture its materialised reflection. From the aesthetical point of view, to which Ernst was not indifferent, the operations done on an everyday material, in a common place, might give an intriguing result. It is enough to see how attractive and visually seductive this photography is.

Patrick's works are frames chosen and composed perfectly. They provide the viewer with the mystery of experience, yet they are not simple "representations" of a place or a situation. The photographs should rather be experienced intuitively, emotionally, as a whole. Lack of precise description and the insinuation present in the pictures might be irritating, but at the same time it opens up new possibilities for imagination, for associations and fantastic closures. It might be a good idea to let the imagination work and let oneself immerse in the photographs' space. The angle of the camera vision, different to that of a biped, upright creature, forces changes to our perceptual references which are always conditioned by our vertical posture and physical habits of finding orientation in space. Rhythm of the grid, seriality and repetition of the shapes occurring on the surface are incredibly musical, they introduce a lot of dynamics to these seemingly "dead" or "cold" visions. I think we might speak here of a sort of a poetic synesthesia (and Baudelaire comes up again), where the visual impulses influence other senses, colours seem haptic, forms and shapes vibrate musically. Light and shade, glimmering, sharpness and evanescence, lack of focus and impossibility to recognize forms irritate and at the same time fascinate in a hypnotic way. One is forced to look intensively, to presume and to add up to what is not in the text, in the registered *presentation*. And such a need is always there in the viewer's mind. We want to see and know for sure and there the photographed place is fluctuant, beguiling, and eludes us.

In these photographs space is the special *quality*, shaped by light and colour, it fluctuates and pulls one in, but at the same time it is fractured with sharp divisions of lines. Simultaneously, it is bound to the surface with the very same lines. This ambivalence lends an interesting graphical quality to these works. Colour is just as important. The limited, subtle and delicate palette enhances the impression of something rendered unreal, immaterial, of an ephemeral presence of something experienced in a glimpse, as a glance caught only thanks to a camera. Blues, a dash of greens, blacks, silvery greys. Colour is anyway what distinguishes Patrick Rimond's photographs in all, especially his urban landscapes. Patrick does not look for vivid, flashy and strong colour disposition. Compositions of slightly dim, perhaps not interesting yet contrasting colours are a sufficiently strong form in his work, as they often define the shape which might elude rational definition. And this is what is intriguing because it stimulates the appetite, increases curiosity, feeds imagination. Everything is righteous, everything is allowed because the viewer also "sets out" for an encounter with photography and further, through photography, for and encounter with the world, or the worlds. For in this still mysterious medium worlds multiply, pervade, cancel out and create anew.

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