Michael Part

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new jörg wien

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New Jörg

View from the Window at Le Gras is the oldest (known) surviving camera photograph. Created by Nicéphore Niépce in 1826 or 1827 at Saint-Loup-de-Varennes, it shows parts of the buildings and surrounding countryside of his estate, Le Gras, seen from a high window, made using a camera obscura. It was the result of an 8-hour exposure.

A photographic image contains moments of *objective* as well as *lived time/duration*[1]: we often know in which year it was taken and in some cases how many hours it needed until an image appeared at all. The duration within the image, the lived time, can be recognized by what is shown and by what we can imagine from the depiction.

M.’s message inviting me to write a text for his exhibition reaches me as I stand on my father’s terrace in 31-degree weather, putting away box after box of books from left to right and from top to bottom. A mixture of dust, sunscreen and sweat stings my eyes. At this moment, nothing seems further from my mind than the thought of sitting at my desk and finding the concentration to write. Confronted with books that were stored here sixteen years ago, stacked and not touched since; that never found their way to a bookshelf that remained unfinished. I’m confronted with a whole life, with illness, with the possibility of death. The fact that the unfinished, incomplete, never-to-be-finished is a constant part of our lives is revealed to me here more inescapably than ever before. Repression of repression. *So aware of loss that it's the one thing we can't lose*, my friend A. once wrote to me.

Despite everything, I say yes to M., and to myself: *don't think so much about it now.*

M. writes me an email, describing the processes of his work. The human capability to fall into someone else’s thinking surprises me again and again. I find myself standing in front of my bookshelf, pulling out possible textual references; on the way to the studio, my mind is already here, with the text, in writing. So it *does work*.

M.’s work process combines directed precision and unpredictable coincidences (a tautology) – not to say accidents. Situations are created and appropriated within tender, blurred boundaries, provoking moments of surprise.

[1] Henri Bergson, Time And Free Will, London, 1950, p. xi.

In M.'s approach, I recognize a childlike curiosity that challenges authorship and the role of being an artist. *To commit to making art is to maintain a somewhat clunky and unverifiable labour form: counter to the dominant logics of proficient margins and executable gains, working without knowing is perhaps a more constitutive factor*[2], writes Ghislaine Leung.

I think of Vernon Lee who writes: *But is anything worth attaining ever attained, whether knowledge or love, without some brief and hushed moments of expectant childishness?*[3] *The viewer [of the photograph] feels an irresistible compulsion to seek the tiny spark of chance, the here and now*[4], writes Walter Benjamin. The here and now of chance or accident becomes M.'s collaborator. One might call this conceptual, or perhaps performative. The starting point for the works brought together here was a situation on his balcony: all kinds of plants sprouted from a humus–freshly composted soil–that was free to be taken from the Botanical Garden of the University of Vienna. Every morning, the view of his balcony offered a new sight. An ongoing process, controlled by light, water and soil, which took place independently of M.'s influence and which has the potential to go unnoticed. *Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity*[5], writes Simone Weil in Gravity and Grace.

Moyra Davey describes the interplay between *drift, but also purpose as flânerie of a certain kind of photographing:*[6] *[…] they become enterprises of absorption and collecting.*[7] In M.'s work, limit and limitlessness are repeatedly placed in relation to one another.

I recognize a form of restraint, perhaps refusal, perhaps modesty in the grain of the grey, large-format projected prints. Light as initiator. An invitation to pay attention; to find generosity within modesty.

L. has planted a tomato plant in front of my studio, next to the Bärenbrunnen. Our neighbors and L. pick the ripe fruit from time to time, even though the six-lane road is only a few meters away. It's a foreign body there in the raised patch of green; a bit like us here, with our art. I usually only think about the tomato plant when I'm near it, sitting at my desk. But it is always there, wether I am or not, mostly unnoticed, and offers its crop to whoever notices it.

Inga Charlotte Thiele

[2] Ghislaine Leung, Bosses, Brussels, 2023, p.9.
[3] Vernon Lee, introduction to Clementia Anstruther-Thomson, Art & Man. Essays and Fragments, London, 1924, p.33.
[4] Walter Benjamin, Short History of Photography, 1931, p.7.
[5] Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, quote found on tumblr.com.
[6] Moyra Davey, Index Cards, New York: New Directions Publishing, 2020, p.27.
[7] ibd.