

End Thoughts,
by Jonathan Miles

Modernity can be understood as a form of persistence, enduring despite the fact that many of its abstractions have disintegrated. We might circulate within the orbit of these photographs with a sense that we are afforded an image of a continuous universe in the form of the deep reserve of nature, the possibility of contemplative remove, heights, depths and extents, within a world that nonetheless shrinks. A modernist would of course bring a measure of caution against the desire for such release, but then might still offer the possibility anyway as part of a folded moment or passage of perception. Modernism placed the thought of freedom in the space in which conflicting feeling arose. To negotiate the contrary required the formation of distance. In this respect freedom derives conceptually from the opposition of idea to nature. What, I wonder in this work, are we witness to? Is it the continuity of the power of modernity, or a form of melancholic vestige which understands it's own movement as a passing over, or descent, a hymn to the reflection of a project that is no longer possible but an acknowledgement of the incapacity to be otherwise?

A breath circulating inside the space of the photograph, followed next by a feeling, and with it, the withdrawal of thought.

I would like to be able to make some more mediated or analytical claims about the work but I find that such an enterprise is quickly exhausted which is neither a way of saying that the works lack substance or equally that there is nothing that can be said of analytical value. Through memory I dwell within the images and attempt to record the play of sensibility, understanding or imagination. I am never certain as to whether this is a way of adjusting to the work or letting the work cohere with me.

A momentary release from gravity as light touches all things but the trace of shadows contained within the reserve of visibility - in the wake of this momentum, fading also occurs, but only in gradual proportion.

We live within a naked universe into which shapes and forms are whispered. Language occurs within the spaces that the rhythm of nature does not occupy, spaces left for naming.

At times this essay appears to have assumed a stance of wishing to question the extent to which the Trilogy is Romantic, modernist, post-modernist, or a remainder issuing from those forms. I feel that it is possible to make a case in regard to such categories. The challenge though, for any form of art is whether it can hold the demands made against it in formulating such an argument. In giving an exposition of various scenarios of aesthetic theory I am only attempting to evoke the speculative measure that works of art within the modern period have either had to face or even form radical retreat from. What is centrally important about our present period though is the question of art's relationship to aesthetics and whether or not it is possible for art to go beyond its absorption into this aesthetic concerns. If such a condition were possible then this would also call into question the autonomy of art alongside art containing its own speculation. The condition of the present can be seen as dismal in light of this. What we have is a form of institutionally driven aesthetic discourse, which is governed by a nihilistic closure around the capacity of the work of art. On the most simple level this empire of judgement is sketched out around a post-Duchampian remainder, in which all things of the world might qualify as works of art given institutional naming as such. All subjectivities hereby become viable as aesthetic expression (linked to Beuys' notion that all people are artists). Educational imperatives should regulate the final conduct of the sphere of art in ways that ensure the interchangeability of democracy, freedom and economic exchange. Art is simply destined to be either product or instruction within this order – denying itself the opportunity for a program of resistance by artists to this situation. The question that can be asked within this essay is related to the extent to which a form of Neo-Romanticism would be capable of such resistance? What is fully at stake is what Giorgio Agamben saw in his book 'The Man without Content', as the alignment of modernist art with nihilism.

“The greatest accusation against Romanticism has still not been made: that it plays out the inner truth of human nature. Its excesses, its absurdities and its ability to seduce and move hearts all come from its being the outer representation of what's deepest in the soul – a concrete, visible representation that would even be possible, if human possibility depended on something besides Fate.” (Giorgio Agamben)

Is photography a form of grief issuing from the passage of time? Appearances slipping away, a curse of emptying that defies the momentary grasping which photography offers; we wish to join things together in order to say “world” but equally we are inclined to slump back into an opaque depth.

Different photographs in pursuit of the same realm. Landscape is the façade for this pursuit of an original source of the image which equally doubles as a final image. To figure the trilogy is to figure a circling motion. This traces the impossibility of the equivalence of direct speech. Something fails to move forward even though this or that photograph might achieve orders of difference or marks of distinction. We are neither witnessing a gradual process of construction nor a form of deconstruction. Ultimately we are being probed about the possibility of standing still.

The Trilogy must be aiming to be a body of sorts and in becoming a body, lay claim to something, even if that thing stutters toward being the appropriation of its unique journey and its assembly of affects. Does it mean that this body of work will become a completed project? If this is indeed a possibility it will require that a form of discourse within the work will become self conscious and be able to reflect this operation within its own limit. Yet at this point we will of course object and ask how such self knowing could be possible, that the work will in fact be the converse of this scenario gradually losing itself as an unconscious power asserts itself within the work. Lacan would say that the unconscious is “knowledge that can't tolerate one's knowing that one knows.” Are we talking of fissures, gaps, blind spots, wounds within the fabric

of knowledge or the possibility that non-knowledge accrues in equal measure to knowledge? Whatever the condition, the project of the Trilogy is fated, as both the “adventure of insight” and the dark night of dissolution stand as an equal possibility.

Is the photograph a form of scission between expression and the thing?

The first sign of a universalising instance was the flashing blade of the guillotine that delivered the equality of death to all citizens. Democracy and terror formed an intimate bond with this technological apparatus. Death was simplified, uniform and mechanical. The speed of the blade secured a form of invisible interval, life and death divided by an instance. The second sign of this universalising instance is delivered by photography which carries within it the promise of equalising representation.

In the last instance I introduce yet another turn. This is the desire lodged within every artwork that, before the spectator exits, there might be a contrary rhythm of thought that takes hold, and then lingers within the space of persistence that is found in the promise of the work.

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