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Communication

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About my work

I have to speak about my work -which is something i barely understand myself- using a language i'm not good at. A lot of difficulties.

When I was a young student, from 16 to 18 years, i studied Physics and Mathematics. And even if i was not very good at this, I liked it very much. Except in Physics, the chapter which was about optic. I understood nothing, it was so confusing to me. And when it came about describing space with Mathematics, i was totally lost. Actually i still don't understand them today.

After medicine studies for one year I finally landed in an art school, which was a kind of secret dream, and finally I was good at something : painting, I enjoyed it very very much, playing with colors and forms and figures. It was a very nice time. Maybe two or three years.

At the art school, we had to document our work and make beautiful files with photographs we arranged on nice paper sheets with spray glue, to show what we were capable of. At that time we used film in analog cameras. So we had to be very careful to have the good light, that would represent our work as close as possible from the original one, in reality. The students had tricks that were supposed to get the best result as possible to make a good photo.

I'm not a great technician at all, especially in photography, which is a very precise technology : you have to understand and know a lot of things about chemical and optic... So i tried my best to get a picture which was acceptable as representing a painting or an installation i made.

I tried a lot, and for a long time. After some months, i was absolutely desperate and had the feeling there must have been something i missed in the process. Something that had to do with magic.

Obviously, a lot of people knew how to deal with that terrible medium and got photographs that i considered as acceptable enough (actually it was just because i didn't pay real attention to them, it was not about my work, so my view was superficial, otherwise i would have noticed the problem was the same, but nobody seemed to care, it seemed OK for most of the people).

I tried so long -at least one year- and spent so much money -it was so much more expensive to buy a film and make it develop and then get prints, that at some point, i stoped trying and a lot of questions appeared to me, like :

- how can it be possible that this medium, which seems to produce images so close to the appearance of what we see -at least that was the reputation of photography to me, i was just a young naive student, not even practicing photography-, why is it actually a real failure to catch time, space and all the objects in them ?
- Why can't I get the " good " picture, the " right " one ? And actually, what is the " right " one ?
- Does it have something to do with " ressemblance " ? If yes what do we exactly call ressemblance ? And of course, the next question would be : " ressemblance " to what ?
- Why when i see a photograph of something, i first see the fact i saw, and the way I saw, I can see I was there, at that precise moment (it's a kind of a prouve of my own existence, I don't have to be in the picture, just i was there because I pressed the button. I'm out of frame but i'm here in the same space, at the same time), I see my view before seeing the thing that is on the picture. I remember the moment I took the photo, why i pressed the button, what I had in mind at that precise moment.
- The result is that it just shows me, points to me the impossibility of catching the world i live in ? So why, if it's impossible, do we think photography is a good way to document the world ? I'm very suspicious with documentary photography ... We are very naive in front of a photographic image. The painters at the Renaissance were much less naive with the perspective théorie. They knew it was a game, a way to play (what they did a lot).
- So finally : what is photography ? What happens when we transform a piece of that reality into a photograph ?

Slowly, month after month, all my mental work, my concerns, were about photography. It became a kind of an obsession. At some point, it appeared to me that these questions about the impossible photograph, were the center of my mind and i started to photograph other objects than just my own paintings ...

Actually, I wasn't very interested in these objects themselves, i was interested in the gap between an object and its picture. What is happening in that gap ? How does it work, what are the terms and conditions of the metamorphosis of an object into an image ? What is gained, what is lost ? What's left from the object ? What does a photograph teach me about my own way to see and think ?

At some point, i became a photographer that way. But a photographer who was looking for what photography was.

In the end, the question was about how we perceive the world and how we form a representation of it that is livable and more or less coherent (at least we try), at the cost of many distortions.

It's these distortions that interest me. Because it worries me.

And all the joy i had with painting disappeared.

So i began to make experiments. My work was very conceptual at that time.

The next problematic question was : I want to photograph things from here (our reality) to see how they arrive there (the picture). But WHAT shall i photograph ??? Why this more than that ? Why a person, more than a landscape, or a lamp more than a flower ?

I finally solved the problem, creating a loop : i could just photograph the process itself and its accessories . That is how i began the series of the self-portraits. In a way I became an accessory. It was not a portrait of me as a person, with a life, a mind, social, cultural and psychological particularities (who cares ? What's the point ?). Not even a portrait (i don't think self-portraits are portraits, most of them are the portrait of what is happening here and now).

The presence of my body as an operator, as a piece of that great image-making machine . My body, especially my hand : the index of the photographic moment is a simple gesture : my hand pressing the shutter release. That's the moment, that is time. OK. But what about space ?

Some years ago I started building spaces in my studio for a series called 7 Metamorphoses (7 Metamorphosis).

The project came from a residency i made in Finland. After that, i was invited by the VB photographic center in Kuopio : it's in the house of Victor Barsokevitsch, a finish photographer from the 19 century. There were paintings of landscape, backdrops for the setting, rolled into a closet. I had the opportunity to see them.

At the end the people there offered me a print of a photo i liked very much. The photo showed the photographer's wife and son, with a dog, in his studio. And behind them there was a painted landscape. A very bad painting actually. You could see without any doubts it was a painting. It was saying : "let's pretend it's a landscape". But, at the same time, you had the very strong sensation that the space extended far beyond the studio, into the depths of a forest. So why do I feel something despite I perfectly know it's fake ? I could see both at the same time : truth and illusion.

Because of that i started the **7 Metamorphoses**. I have been using other photographs as backdrops instead of paintings. But the project was the same. Creating a depth that did not exist. Creating a mental space.

It allowed me to repeat the model, to repeat the space, the objects, to double the distance between the front and the farthest point, and finally, to multiply moments of time. Like in the pictures of the earliest Renaissance, my model and I could appear several times in the photo.

That's a bit of a paradox when it comes to photography. Which is supposed to stop time or at least describe a very short moment of it.

First it had something to do with theater, the staging, with models, light, positions. I was looking for the photograph of a situation in space. It was about the

artist and the model, which is a very classical subject and also the logical continuity of the self portraits.

The spaces I build were ideas of spaces we live in : rooms, doors, windows, corridors. But you could see in an obvious way, that there were not real places, just concepts of places, like : let's pretend it's a corridor, let's pretend it's a door, etc. There were very abstract. In reality -i mean in my studio-, they were totally twisted, like baroque architectures. They were not what the photograph of them pretended they were.

I was playing with perspective, mirrors, and other photos that were printed on tarpaulins and installed in the sets. The ceiling was going down, the walls were twisted, the doors and the windows had strange shapes.

That was the moment i started to draw before a project and using perspective for my drawings. And of course i started to play with the perspective in my sets.

After the Metamorphosis, I spent a few months in New York shooting images for a project, called Portrait of a man, whose ambition was to describe the inside of a head and the big mix we all have in mind, consciousness, unconsciousness, imaginary, morality, experiences, history, fantasies, and all that at the same time together : it was a special head : Raskolnikov's head, the hero of Dostoevsky's novel, Crime and Punishment.

The novel is the story of a psychic and geographic trajectory, since the central character is constantly moving, changing point of view, focal distance, both psychically and physically. And so do we. It's the story of a mental journey, embodied in part by a journey through urban spaces. The distortions are metaphors of his sick mind. Dostoyevsky's novel proceeds by conjunctions and disjunctions, continuities and ruptures, dilations and contractions, accelerations and slowing down.

It is built on alternating interior and exterior scenes. Sometimes the hero is lost outside because the outside space is too wide.

Then he is in his room, in his bed, wrapped in his coat, and in his mind, worrying about very little details. All these variations (too wide, too focused) can be perfectly translated with focal lengths.

I worked in two very different ways to capture the two contradictory states that haunt the main character. For the first period, I worked mainly outdoor, in sometimes difficult conditions : working in natural light (that i never ever do !), winter, rain, in the street, in the middle of a lot of people (it was mainly in Manhattan) without a tripod, in a very free and light way, accumulating shots. Finding myself as lost and uncertain as Dostoevsky's character.

For the second period, I returned to my usual way of working : in the studio, on stage, in artificial light, in sets reduced to simple signification (a wall, a door, a window, a corridor, a chair, etc.), in which are included, as trompe l'œil, other preliminary views, printed on canvas, a principle I had already used in the series 7 Métamorphoses.

My interest was more and more about space, so the next series is all about it : Apories (les perspectives dépravées) - Aporias (depraved perspectives) : it's a tribute to Baltrusaitis, who's an art historian from the 20th century) I was very focused on the "sets" which became more and more sculptures, not only sets to be photographed. At some point I ended up showing the sculptures in exhibitions in the same way as the photos.

I'm still working on it today.

So, in a way, i started to build photos.

And the spaces I built became more and more twisted.

I always wonder how far I can move the volume away from the image I will later make, before the bond of resemblance breaks.

I first make a drawing, that i print on transparent paper and put on the glass of my camera and I follow it. I build the sculptures from the camera.

But I can make choices, I have a lot of possibilities. Like, i can trick the angles, or the distance, or turn something that is moving forward in the image into something that is actually moving backwards in reality. Or making something going up, actually going down. And so on.

I'm always very curious about what the sculpture will look like, when i approximatively know what the photo will look like.

I trick the camera. It's not always easy. Because it's a clever machine ...

I slowly realize (i'm a very slow artist) that the model is not the sculpture, even if i photograph the sculpture to get the photo. No, the model is the photo that does not exist yet, because according to that picture, i built the space. There is a kind of an inversion i'm very interested in right now.

My studio is like a laboratory. Like when a biologist or a physician wants to experiment an idea, or an hypothesis : they build the conditions of the experiment according to the idea they want to test.

In the Aporias photos, when you see the pictures, something is wrong, even if you can't detect what it is, but at the same time, you have the feeling it is real and that what you see is what it was in the studio. It's very uncomfortable and delicious at the same time (at least for me : i'm always very happy when i get the photo because it's like in this Henry James's novel : The Figure in the Carpet : it's just right before your eyes, you know it, you can even feel it, but you don't see it, so the real Aporia is in our mind).

That is why it's called Aporias : it holds together two things, two consciousness that can't stay together because they do not agree together. It's actually worse : they repel each other like magnets of the same pole, they should destroy each other. But they don't. They do stay together. In the photo. That is what the photographic picture is able to do : holding together "yes" and "no".

That is why I work with films. It's not about nostalgia, about vintage technics - I'm not interested in vintage process. I don't want to work like hundred years ago.

It is because i need the direct, physical, material connection between the picture and reality which has been photographed. In a way the film is the witness of the process, a relic. It's a recording of an experiment. It's a material proof of what happened.

Camera is a black box.

To me, black -the inside of a camera- is saturation of events, and not the contrary. It's not an absence, it's a "too much" presence.

To be able to see that, I once installed a camera in a sleeping room, to record a complete week looking at the bed. Very nice picture but almost black, and of course you see nothing interesting in the bed.

Exactly like the black box in the plane (as a child, i was really fascinated when after a plane crash, the investigators were looking for the black box in the rubble of the

disaster to understand what happened). To me it was like a box who contained the truth of everything, and I was desperate when it was too much damaged. Because something was lost for even.

To resume the whole thing, photography transforms the world in order to get it pictured, so that when you look at a photograph, you're never really sure what it's the image of.