

Identity makes you generic (Bernadette Corporation)

Witte de With, Rotterdam

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(translated from French by John Doherty)

Schweizer Fotografie hat man zugunsten vieler jüngerer oder weniger bekannter Namen nicht gewählt, also kein Robert Frank oder René Burri. Stattdessen eine breite Palette aus anerkannten berichtenden Positionen (Jean Mohr, Monique Jacot, Michel Bauer, Michael von Graffenried), von im Schweizer wie internationalen Kunstmarkt mittlerweile etablierten Namen (Balthus Burkhard, Urs Lüthi, Olaf Breuning, Beat Streuli, Katrin Freisager, Hans Danuser) sowie von etwas jüngeren Positionen (Gian Paolo Minelli, Olivier Christinat) und solchen, die sich etwa in Grenzbereichen zum Film (Alberto Venzago, Luciano Rigolini) oder zur Auftrags- und Werbefotografie (Christian Coigny) bewegen – ein bunter Mix diverser Themen, fotografischer Haltungen und Ästhetiken und eine eher konservative Auswahl mit wenigen Grenzüberschreitungen. Unumgänglich war offenbar die gleichfalls seit langem bekannte, mit ihren neueren Arbeiten aber kühl im Reich des digitalen Edelkitsches während Annelies Strba (vor nicht allzu langer Zeit kam so etwas von David Hamilton und galt als Soffporno).

Im Buch, das die so unterschiedlichen FotografInnen in zwei Hauptteilen nach unterschiedlichen Kriterien aneinander reiht, ergibt das zunächst wenig Sinn. Kurze, einseitige Einführungstexte stellen Werk und Person mit knappen Publikations- und Ausstellungsangaben vor, dann folgen je vier Doppelseiten mit Beispielen aus oft auch noch verschiedenen Arbeiten und Serien. Peter Pfander von der Fotostiftung Schweiz (Winterthur), die dem Projekt beratend zur Seite stand, versucht in seinem Essay behutsam, dem Ganzen mit wichtigen Etappen schweizerischer Fotokultur im 20. Jahrhundert eine historische Dimension zu geben und auf Jakob Tuggener, Hennette Grundat und Robert Frank als frühe Vorläufer heutiger AutorInnenfotografie zu verweisen. Die mittlerweile erreichte Vielfalt der Ansätze führt Pfander auf eine Revolution der Fotokunst seit den 1980er Jahren zurück, und er verweist auf mehrere nicht gezeigte Ansätze.

Ihre eigentliche Form erhält »photo suisse« erst im Zusammenhang mit den Filmen, denen das Buch fast mehr als Katalog dient – und mit den Ausstellungen. Die in Dramaturgie und Tiefgang sehr unterschiedlichen Filme, die den ProtagonistInnen breiten Raum für ihre Selbstdarstellung einräumen, erscheinen zunächst als zu einfach und zu beschreibend. Manche FotografInnen Namen (Balthus Burkhard, Urs Lüthi, Olaf Breuning, Beat Streuli, Katrin Freisager, Hans Danuser) sowie von etwas jüngeren Positionen (Gian Paolo Minelli, Olivier Christinat) und solchen, die sich etwa in Grenzbereichen zum Film (Alberto Venzago, Luciano Rigolini) oder zur Auftrags- und Werbefotografie (Christian Coigny) bewegen – ein bunter Mix diverser Themen, fotografischer Haltungen und Ästhetiken und eine eher konservative Auswahl mit wenigen Grenzüberschreitungen. Unumgänglich war offenbar die gleichfalls seit langem bekannte, mit ihren neueren Arbeiten aber kühl im Reich des digitalen Edelkitsches während Annelies Strba (vor nicht allzu langer Zeit kam so etwas von David Hamilton und galt als Soffporno).

Und doch ist es eigenartig zu beobachten, wie mit der zunehmenden Zahl nacheinander gesehener Filme ein plastisches Bild von der so völlig unterschiedlichen Weltlichkeit und dem jeweiligen künstlerischen Selbstverständnis entsteht. Man bekommt drastisch vorgeführt, wie hoch der Anteil derjenigen AutorInnen immer noch ist, die in der Tradition eines Edward Weston oder Minor White am schönen oder transzendenten Bild arbeiten. Die Wirklichkeit in Strukturen und pittoresker Melancholie wahrnehmen, mit prävalisierten Konzepten an das Sichtbare herangehen oder im Studio arrangieren – und wie überzeugend demgegenüber Positionen erscheinen, die sich den allzu griffigen Bildstrategien verweigern und das Erfahren, Aufzeigen, Vermitteln und Erkennen weiterhin als ein hohes Ziel ansehen.

Hier setzen auch die Ausstellungen in Rom an, die das Spektrum in die drei Kapitel »Matrix« (Die Untersuchung der Oberfläche), »Milieu« (Der soziale Raum) und »Media« (Die Beziehung zwischen den Bildern) unterteilen und damit einmal drei grundsätzlich unterschiedliche fotografische Interessen und Praxisfelder herausarbeiten konnten, was das Buch eben nicht leistet. Sucht einem vergleichsweise engen Raum und der dichten Hängung von zum Teil großformatigen Bildern kann diesen thematischen Fokussierungen entgegen, dass man sich nicht in die Auswahl im Buch hielt, sondern bewusst nur Beispiele jeweils einer Arbeit oder eines Themas zeigte und damit einen viel präziseren Eindruck von medialen Weltzugängen bieten konnte.

- 1 »photo suisse« war eine Initiative der SRG SSR Idee suisse in Zusammenarbeit mit der Fotostiftung Schweiz und unterstützt von Präsenz Schweiz. Die Ausstellung in Rom wurde von Andreas Hertach und Hilar Stadler kuratiert und von Pro Helvetia unterstützt.
- 2 Vgl. etwa: *The eye of the beholder. Seven contemporary Swiss photographers*, Kat. New York (The Swiss Institute 1996, Made in Switzerland. Aus den *Fotografien der Eidgenossenschaft*, Kat. Lausanne (Musée de l'Élysée) 1997. Und auch die *Fotogeschichte* widmete der »Fotografie in der Schweiz« vor nicht allzu langer Zeit ein Themenheft (23. Jg. 2003, Nr. 90).



PHOTO SUISSE.
Hrsg. von Christian Eggenberger und Lars Müller.
Mit Texten von Christian Eggenberger, Mikhail Shikhin, Peter Pfander u.a. (Dt./Frz./Ital./Engl.)
Lars Müller Publishers, Baden 2005. 432 Seiten, 16,5 cm x 24 cm, zahlreiche Schwarzweiß- und Farbbild.

2 DVDs (Dt./Frz./Ital./Engl.), 340 Minuten.
CHF 85.–
ISBN 3-03778-036-3

JOÃO PENALVA

Ludwig Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest, 4.11.2005 – 15.1.2006

Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin 14.6. – 27.8. 2006

by Denise Robinson

»The allegorical impulse is one that acknowledges explicitly the futility of trying to sort out the »mere« from the »pure«, an impulse to embrace [the heteronomous and heterological]!«
(Giorgio Agamben)

As in all of João Penalva's work this exhibition was redolent with a refusal to sort out the mere from the pure. This is the second of a chain of three exhibitions of Penalva's work. The first took place at the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, and the last will be at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin in June 2006. Largely selected by Penalva in collaboration with the curators, each becomes a form of assemblage, doing away with assumptions about the genesis or destination of his work by absorbing it into the possibilities inherent in the act of selection. The first space held »The Hair of Mr Ruskin«



NICOLAS FAURE, A3, Schinznach-Bad AG, novembre 2001. C-print auf Aluminium. 95 cm x 120 cm.



João Penalva, LM44/EB61, 1995. Installation: Ludwig Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest, 2005 / 2006. Photograph: József Rosta.

(1997), an elaborate focus on a seemingly fanciful object: a framed »real« splice of John Ruskin's hair, hidden amidst framed fakes. It's here we begin to enter into the ruses and ellipses that Penalva brings our way, for the fake throws light on the original, erasing its use value by removing the capacity to categorise. A wall of letters from the keeper of the public collection the hair belongs to, informs the artist of the theft of one of the fakes and, before the police find and return it, requests a new fake from him. I left this room with the feeling that this beginning had itself unwound.

The work in the next space »LM44/EB61« (1995) is a palimpsest of proof and coincidence, both forensic and artistic investigation, and like much of the work in the exhibition its effect is derived from its associative potential. It connects a portrait by Kurt Schwitters – by chance that of a person connected to a murder, and the other, the first composite police portrait in Britain. Penalva includes unedited media reports all of which accumulate to a portrait of 1960's Britain's xenophobic culture. The inclusion of the dispairing conditions for Schwitters as a migrant could also produce a portrait of the fragility of the emergence of the work of art.

In »Wallenda« (1997 / 1998), music is made visible through a spectral analyser – the edited version of Penalva's year long attempt to learn and to whistle the whole of the Stravinsky's »Rite of Spring« – an impossible task, and for some listeners, unbearable. Yet there is something to be had from the productive force of failure that Penalva manages to archive here. Simultaneously to this is a film projection of a tightrope walker, »The Great Wallenda« who, as in the dream, can retrospectively be »saved« from his deathly fall, figured here by the cinematic wipe.

Texts proliferate throughout the rooms, slowing down the beholder. They are in the works as information, dialogue, subtleties and evidence, or as translated wall texts. There's a meeting of dialogue and text in »Addressing the Weeds in Hirashima« (1998), a large gridded work of thirty one frames, containing embedded specimens of weeds, found on a site that survived the US nuclear blast – and whom Penalva »talks to«. Shown here is Penalva's, research, labeling each plant, providing histories, maps and records, as

well as the story of the storm that blew away the labels. Labels that held within them the culmination of that which would retrieve the plants' potential and significances. Then there is the saving of the labels from the storm. As do all stories of survival, it confounds any distinction of value between the mere and the pure.

I always seek out Penalva's temporary cinema in his exhibitions, for me the most perfect mimicry of a cinema space – in a gallery. Through the screening of his films in this cinema, it returns us to cinema as a »dream palace«. Two films were screened in this last space, one, »A Harangozó« [The Bell Ringer] (2005) is one of the most compelling meditations on translation, memory, the moving image and the voice I have encountered. It is as if Rauschenberg's assemblages of fifty years ago, rich in allegory, had been given voice. A voice that weaves us back through all the elements that make up the assemblage, that is this exhibition. A beautifully designed book by Penalva accompanies these exhibitions. Titled João Penalva, its only text is of João Fernandes in conversation alongside the artist's lengthy hand-written script.

Penalva has said on being asked why he does not »publish« his many, quite beautiful texts, simply as writing, that his interest is to change the support of writing itself, writing for a space that is not the space of the page. An eloquent gesture – to maintain the support of art as unsecured and to slow us down enough for reverie, or for what may happen as people move together.

- 1 Giorgio Agamben, quoted by Jennifer Bloomer, Architecture and the Text. The Scripts of Joyce and Proust. Yale University Press, 1993. p. 80.



JOÃO PENALVA.
With texts by the artist and a dialogue between the artist and João Fernandes (Engl./Hung). Fundacio de Serralves, Porto; Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin 2005.

264 pages (supplement: 49 pages), 17,5 x 22,5 cm, numerous b/w and colour ill. No price. ISBN 972-739-154-0

INDIVIDUALITY MAKES YOU GENERIC BERNADETTE CORPORATION: PEDESTRIAN CINEMA

Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, 19.11.2005 – 8.1.2006

by Yoann Van Parys

Thank heavens for that sublime mathematical invention known as the diagram. Reducing every kind of phenomenon to a conjunction of abscissas and ordinates, it allows one to comprehend the diversity of the world in a reassuring way. Nothing can resist this mode of comprehension, and useful comparisons can be made between many different parameters: the price of crude oil and household consumption, meteorology and suicide rates; ownership of pets and familiarity with supermarkets.

Even artists (with all due respect) can be embraced by such conjunctions, for example in the relationship between their geographical origins and their impact on the market (Warhol was in Zimbabwean), or between the success of their careers and their ability to produce a recognisable, simple, classifiable oeuvre (Matthew Barney isn't Joseph Kosuth). Contemporary artists, whether they admit it or not, are familiar with this problematic, and many of them go so far as to integrate it into their work, sometimes to the point where a paradox arises: that of being both judge and jury, in a somewhat touching kind of hypocrisy.

»Bernadette Corporation« is the pseudonym of a formidable group of artists who do not explicitly deal with the situation outlined above; but, conscious of that reality, they have decided to take the bull by the horns (the better to control it). They work anonymously, or at any rate under their collective identity rather than their personal identities. The standard flaps in the wind, and the warriors boldly state their claims. Intent on subverting the codes by which they are inevitably bound. Difficult to pin down (New York, Paris, etc.), though active for around a dozen years now, they work with brio in various types of medium. This winter, the Witte de With in Rotterdam put on an exhibition of their work. It was an enigmatic event, in part retrospective (though the members of the confraternity are opposed, in principle, to the idea of being portrayed as the heroes of an historical narrative). It featured their current project, »Pedestrian Cinema«, a temporary production unit for alternative films.

The first few rooms were in fact devoted to this year-old project which, as if to emphasize its pervasive Dadaist spirit, adopted Berlin as its epicentre. But the Dutch city in which the exhibition took place contributed something to one of the posters, i.e. the motif of another poster which was adorning the walls there at the same time. It showed a dazed-looking Charlie Chaplin, whose films were shown over the Christmas and New Year period. There was nothing accidental about this subject, insofar as it had to do with the cinema, and it was further reinterpreted in the other images, all of which were emblazoned with a publicity notice (a seal, conveying appropriation, or perhaps anxiety) which had a string of characters running across it: »PedestrianBC-Cinema2005Bernadette2006CorpBEG-madainTheBoscar...«

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«Bernadette Corporation» is the pseudonym of a formidable group of artists whose viewpoint is not really the one sketched out above. They have decided, rather, to take the bull by the horns. They work anonymously, or at any rate under their collective identity rather than their personal identities. The standard flaps in the wind, and the warriors boldly state their claims, the better to subvert the codes by which they



BERNADETTE CORPORATION, Still from: Get Rid of Yourself, 2003. Video.

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(Translation)

TRAVELLING TH SEVEN MOUNTA

Art Pavilion Zagreb,

by Sandra Križič Rob

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This was not easy to decipher, in that the patterns of readings and deletions were superimposed, although the theme remained. A photocopy of a page from a magazine published in London listed the leisure activities

Rumors of any impending crisis have been averted. There is only now a possibility of never having anything worthwhile to do. So steal yourself some time to think and time to kill. It's good to run with your gang, in the city or in the country. A rough assembly. When you are at the level of rat-survival, you begin organizing. Some illegality will be necessary. You and your friends are without a purpose and without a place to stay. Mock incorporation is quick and easy, simply choose a name: Booty Corporation, Bourgeois Corporation, Buns Corporation and then spend a lot of time together. Ideas will come later. Historically, creating space in the founding of your corporate headquarters is the next step. HQ should be convenient for visitors, should not be comfortable for freeloaders. In New York, commercial property rents for less than residential property. So get some, and though it's not allowed, live there like your immigrant fathers. Above all else, don't romanticize the communal life - dress for work everyday, keep regular business hours, and learn proper phone manners. Now take a moment and project yourselves into the far-flung future. You'll be churning out product because people will like your products and expect you to produce. Sure, you might be marketable icons like the cultural heroes of your youth, but like them, the best you can do is entertain and inform, which isn't enough. Look back to your roots and the gutter you crawled up from. The commodity culture you outsmarted still exists, excludes others, and makes their lives mis-

of the week; another page carried the West End cinema programme; yet another gave the number of stars awarded by the critics to the different masterpieces (though neither the titles nor the casts were given), along with a brief comment: One of the world's great directors? And then there was a simple representation of a brick wall waiting to have similar posters stuck to it, which gave rise to a certain specularisation. But the main message was in the videos, which were shown in four different locations - an avatar of the multiplex. They were really at the heart of the enterprise. Made with whatever resources came to hand, and in a limited time span, they were heterogeneous, but also characterised by a common stance. Fragmentary, they explored the formal limits of their conditions of existence.

The first comprised a succession of sequences that took some of its vocabulary from the graphic style of television: credits, digital effects in poor taste, optical games, matte shots. The eye might be drawn to a close-up of an apple and a tomato; or a human mouth might loom up, multiplied by overprinting. The transmission was occasionally blurred, but one thing remained constant - the group's logo, made up of the capital letters B and C, using typographies that one might associate with a given period or industry. It acted as a leitmotiv, mimicking marketing mannerisms.

The second was radically different. The screen was blank, the projector being switched off. On the floor there was a sprinkling of fine gold dust and a large



sheet of paper. A monastic homily could be heard. The third had a more developed narration. The camera followed a person as he moved around a city, solemnly walking along a canal with deliberate steps, wearing glasses so dark he might have been taken for a blind man. But his mind was alert, and reality was obviously his source material. It could be seen that any situation might generate a script. There he was, looking at a display of female mannequins in the window of a clothes shop. The reflection on the glass meant he could peer at himself and match his image to that of a plastic body, giving it his arms and head as though in a tribute to Hans Bellmer or Raoul Hausmann. The fourth showed teenage girls strolling around a rehearsal stage, expressionlessly reciting a text. This scenario of absurdism evoked the discomfort of a society in which the identities of the multiple and the individual are in mutual confrontation.

The final exhibition rooms documented the previous activities of the Corporation, which has constantly changed its configuration over the last decade, while retaining the ideology of the early days with an approach that is casual to the point of virtual anarchy, and yet closely argued. Between 1995 and 1997 the group ran an independent fashion label that promoted a hybrid line of haute couture, with shows that caught the imagination. It later became the editorial board of a fashion magazine, *Made in USA*, which was published between 1999 and 2001. It then morphed into an experimental literature collective – at one point,



several authors worked together to produce a novel about New York called Reena Spaulings - while continuing to make films. In Rotterdam, some of these films (and they would merit a article in themselves) were shown on monitors in loop mode.

Get rid of yourself is a must. It has the look of a documentary about it, as it plunges into the anti-globalisation demonstrations that took place at the G8 meeting in Genoa, in 2001. Intercut with fictional sequences, it brings out the ambiguity of this movement, whose protagonists sometimes get immersed in a discourse over which they have so little control that they end up bringing about serious destruction. This calls to mind Camus's postulate that revolt is legitimate as a way of defending liberty, but not revolution, if it involves riding roughshod over ideals. And the subtlety of Bernadette Corporation, throughout its work, lies in its ability to examine this question by circuitous means. Its members do not always express themselves overtly, but react in their own particular ways: «There is only now a possibility of never having anything worthwhile to do. So steal yourself some time to think and some time to kill. (...) Ideas will come later.»

