

Transformance.

An answer to "Transformance" in "Ceskoslovenska Fotografie", page 497.

The article I am referring to is a discussion of A. Mueller-Pohle's picture book "Transformance". The author of that book handed the article over to me for me to translate it into German. I am of Czech origin, (as my first name will suggest to any Czech reader), and should this paper be published in "Ceskoslovenska Fotografie", (as I ardently hope), this will be my first contribution to the Czech dialogue, ever since I left Prague in 1939. This will explain my emotion in writing these reflexions. I should also add that I wrote the preface to the book under consideration.

"DM", the writer of the article I am answering to, suggests a very interesting point: A. Mueller-Pohle has chosen the published images from among thousands of negatives, more or less with the same criteria which are used by one who collects pebbles on a sea shore. Now such a comparison seems to me to be very important, but for reasons which are exactly opposite to the one's "DM" is advancing. The pebbles, as "DM" correctly says, have been "informed", (opracovane), by nature, (prirodnimi vlivy). They are examples of how nature may, by chance, result in unexpected forms, in information. He who collects such pebbles, is giving a meaning to those chance formations. Mueller-Pohle's negatives, on the contrary, are the results of what I call an "apparatus program", namely of the rules which the producers of the camera have fed into the apparatus. They are examples of apparatus automation. Mueller-Pohle selects among them in order to give them a meaning not contained within the apparatus program. And this is, I believe, what the book "Transformance" is about: namely transformance of apparatus programs.

The comparison suggested by "DM" permits me to show the problem involved here, (and I am sorry that this comparison did not occur to me while writing my introduction). We are determined by two sets of conditions, by "nature" and by "culture", but the two sets are different one from the other. "Nature" is a set of "accidental" conditions, and "culture" one of "deliberate" conditions. Nature, taken as a closed system, a "universe", tends toward entropy, towards loss of information, and the informed structures within nature which condition us, (structures like the pebbles on the sea shore, or like wild beasts, or like meteorological conditions), have come about by a complex series of coincidences, by pure and mindless chance. Culture, on the contrary, is the result of human intention to give a more or less permanent form to nature, and the informed structures within culture, (like Mueller-Pohle's negatives, or like the administrative or educational apparatus), determine us, because this is their purpose. Freedom, of course, is that curious human capacity for changing our conditions. It follows from what I have just said that freedom must apply a different strategy against nature and against culture. In nature it must struggle against mindless chance, in culture against human intentions.

An important change has occurred in culture lately, however. The human intentions which are responsible for the cultural structures which determine us, no longer act directly, but through automated apparatus. Mueller-Pohle's negatives,

or instance, have not been produced directly by some human agent whose purpose is to determine the lives of those who look at the pictures. They ^{were} produced by an automatic apparatus. The same goes for many other cultural structures, like the social, economic and political conditions under which we are living. They have all been produced by some more or less automatic apparatus, (governments, trade unions, political parties and so forth). Now this change in culture is important for the strategies of freedom. We can no longer fight human intentions directly, because they have receded to the horizon of culture, and it is difficult or impossible to localize them. What we must fight now is the programs fed into the apparatus. It should be added that those programs tend to become autonomous of the human intentions which have originally fed them into the apparatus. Because this is the meaning of "automation": a function autonomous of human intervention. What we must fight now are programs which tend to escape from human intentions. An example: the programs of the various thermonuclear apparatus. The true enemy is no longer a malevolent human intention, but the automatic inertia of apparatus.

Now I believe that this is precisely what Mueller-Pohle is attempting to do in his book "Transformance". He first permits his camera to function automatically, by not looking while pressing on the releaser. The result are automatically produced images which show the camera program. And he then selects among those images to show us those which, according to his criteria, show us best some of the results of a program become autonomous of the original intention of the programmers. As if somebody were to select, from the results of an automated economic apparatus, those examples which show how the original intention of the programmers was transformed by the apparatus. (This is, by the way, one of the meanings of the term "Transformance" which has been coined by Mueller-Pohle).

This is why I believe "DM" is wrong when saying that Mueller-Pohle's pictures are "true reproductions of reality and at the same time a transformation of that reality", (vernym obrazem skutečnosti a soucasne jejim poprenim). They are, in my opinion, a first attempt at a true reproduction of automation, by rendering visible the danger lurking within that automation. I shall not quarrel here with Mueller-Pohle whether this should be called "visualism". In view of the enormous importance of his pictures, (as weapons in the struggle against apparatus oppression), such a quarrel is unimportant. "DM" is right in saying that those pictures have an "undeniable attraction", (nepopiratelna pritazlivost). It is the attraction of the fight for freedom.