

Reflections

Jiří Hanke: Standpoint

Points have zero dimensions. A good way to imagine them is to consider dust particles in a light beam. Still, there are acrobats who succeed to step on such a particle, transform it into a standpoint and to persist on that precarious place for four long years. Such an acrobatic feat is admirable and the ^{ph}otos Jiří Hanke's show it. The present reflection is an articulation of the admiration for such an acrobatic achievement.

Points are characterized by their sworling. This insight is older than the one we owe to nuclear physics with their particle swarms. Thus we know that each object of the world is surrounded by a swarm of viewpoints. Recently we have even invented a tool for jumping from viewpoint to viewpoint. On each of those points it fixes the corresponding aspect and it then collects them. The tool is called a ^{ph}otocamera', the fixed aspect a 'photo' and the collection 'photo-retrospective'. That retrospective serves as an overview of all objective aspects.

But look: Here comes a ^{ph}otocamera acrobat called Jiří Hanke. And he obliges the camera to insist upon one single standpoint. Before asking him and asking oneself why he thus reverses this photographic gesture, a preliminary remark is in order: The original cameras were static. Heavy, massive, clumsy gadgets which perched on mostly threelegged tripods like shortsighted lynxes. They defended insistently their own point of view as do shortsighted politicians. In front of such staring gadgets equally static scenes were set: for instance just married couples. Immovable cameras and unmoving persons about to become immortalized thus stared at each other to become a photo. And this was so, not because it is essential to photography, but on the contrary because paleophotography although aiming at mobility was technically incapable to achieve it.

Hanke's acrobatics should not be confused with such an archaic rigidity. He does not revert into mutual rigid staring but he climbs upon a loft to hover on top of all points of view, and it is there that he installs his apparatus. He does so in order to photograph therefrom a stream of appearances as it flows by.

Were one to describe such acrobatics as a climbing into transcendency one would be poking fun at it. Because this specific transcendency is the window of a not very lofty apartment. And the stream^{of} appearance is in this case the traffic on a not very impressive Prague street. If one considers the context, however, laughter is stopped short: The photos were taken during the years between 82 and 86 which is an uncomfortable period within the history of Prague. What Hanke did was not to emerge from an indifferent swarm of standpoints but from that drift of standpoints which the ominous words normalisation, contensation, repression and hypocrisy denote imprecisely. And the transcendency whereto Hanke does climb is not any indifferent noble objectivity but it is that lofty viewpoint from which an observer tries to see history for himself and inspite of the drift of viewpoints.

Hanke shows how one may climb into decency and observe events as they flow by, inspite of the swarming, colliding and diverging drifts of viewpoints that characterize totalitarian oppression. Such an achievement of artistry merits admiration even after the lifting of the pressure to which the streets of Prague were subject for so long.