

EXIT #13 SENSE OF HUMOR

Excerpt

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Teun Hocks or the melancholy of a master

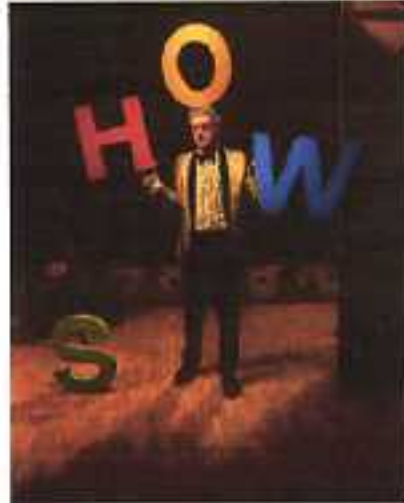
"Perhaps, the only authentic art would be that liberated from the very idea of authenticity, from being thus and no other way."
Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of the new music*

"Figures are called images and images could also be called figures, but they are not equal. And precisely because they belong to a world that is not ordered according to equality, but according to figurativeness, one can comprehend the strength of substitution, the imposing effect, of dark and poor imitations..."

Robert Musil, *Man without attributes*

It would not be exceedingly complicated to arrive at an acceptable conclusion regarding the "narrative will", so contemporaneous and optimized at present, of current artistic practices –and the intentional wording we have chosen to address this should certainly serve to bear witness to their descriptive ambition, their lively immersion in a ferocious narratology of facts and things. If indeed it would be more correct and opportune to speak in terms of need rather than will, as long as their reason to exist and develop might not be as united, as it may very well seem at first, to a lack of vocation, modal and stylistic profile, which is also contingently undeniable, as they are to the more than possible, we could say obligatory fact that that same will or need would be signified by the very epochal features stemming from the obsessive use of existential experience, almost always in its most intimate or domestic aspect, of the contemporary subject.

If we are willing to accept this premise, halfway between style and epoch, that narrative symbolism has become prevalent, thus confirming Benjamin's thoughts on the matter, whenever what the symbol reveals is "the transfiguration of nature in the light of redemption", and therefore the progressive shifting of all the individual, intimate or domestic hierarchies toward a "form of Truth" essentially characterized by being dispossessed of any essentialist attribute. The contemporary Truth, the "artistic truth", if you will, possesses the traits of a secular, fickle and manipulative nature, but at this point it is definitively the only Nature we can use as mirror for our own contemplation, albeit still with difficulty.



Teun Hocks, *Untitled*, 2000

Teun Hocks (Leiden, Holland, 1947) is an artist who uses the photographic medium to portray himself in hundreds of different acts and situations (he as a multiple other), after having painted (worked, maneuvered, altered, manipulated) the appropriate scenery, or the narrative setting necessary to create the right atmosphere to convey what he aims to relate, where Hocks plays the role of the sole actor of a comedy of manners. Here we have a character in search of an author, after Pirandelli, insofar as that sole character (Hocks who is not Hocks) really possesses nothing but the knowledge that he is author of himself. Or, in other words, Hocks creates, develops and stimulates an anonymous character who, in each and every one of his works, presents himself as if he were waiting, not for Godot, but for Hocks, waiting for Hocks.



Teun Hocks, *Untitled*, 1990

This is a work (admirable, brutal, magnificent; it is important, depending on which cases, to effect as soon as possible an affirmative statement of the intentions we are after) in which there is a quality consubstantial to a great deal of European literature, albeit more pronounced or highly defined in the Northern European literature, especially in Germany, where it is known as *Bildungsroman*, or formative novel, in which the protagonist of the tale, almost always a male adolescent, traces through his life adventure the existential structure of his own human journey as well as that of the society where that formation, or education, takes place, while also conveying its inherent forms and customs. The classic example of *Bildungsroman* is, of course, Goethe's marvelous tale *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, but closer to us, and certainly much more proximate to the cultural world of Teun Hocks, is another no less extraordinary example of *Bildungsroman*, the magnificent novel *The Sorrow of Belgium*, in the Dutch language, by the Belgian writer Hugo Claus, and considered a masterpiece by he who writes these words. To be sure, Teun Hocks' entire body of work is a marvelous example of another type of formative novel, a *Bildungsroman* that is sequenced by way of an admirable succession of photographs, or it would be more correct to call them images, each singled out as if it were an autonomous chapter, equipped or endowed with its own "adventure", with a greater

tale, and where the single protagonist of this solitary plot is the artist Teun Hocks himself. But it is not as simple as it may seem at first glance. In fact, nothing in Hocks work is what it seems.

Foremost is the problem of pure visibility, or the "dilemma of the visible", in other words, and getting to the gist of the matter, the limits of perception. These are some of the main questions posed by the (apparently) happy contemplation in Teun Hocks' work. But first it is necessary to sidetrack somewhat in order to reach the core of the photographic work of the Dutch artist. Among the many auto-immolations Modernity –more than that compulsive cry lacking time and memory which is the *Avant-garde*-, in its aesthetic aspect, has inflicted upon itself in an intelligent as well as cynical attempt to "disappear in Presence", that which circumscribes the reality of its artistic conquests to a continuous and circular testing of perceptive devices is not the least important; or to express the same thing in a different way: the eternal systematic renovation of what we could call "the natural rights of the gaze" at a perpetual enthusiasm and stimulation. A certain happiness of the gaze, yes, but in any case there should be no mistaking it for what we could very well define as "weariness of artistic factuality", or exhaustion of the aesthetic alternatives. The gaze demands an event reproducing territory, whether it be a desert or the jungle of a modern city, or at least a space whence the gaze itself can provoke the necessary devices that, afterwards, will confer its character for critical speculation. Therefore, what do we have? A pure visibility with no other honor than the magnificence of its noble attribute? No, that is not what we want or mean to say, but rather a pure visual quality without which not even sensual shuddering in the presence of beauty, or the offended rejection of horror would exist. A visual quality, in short, which, thanks to the virginity of its a priori, paves the way for Modernity to remain in force through its multiple survival strategies. One of those strategies, and certainly not the least trivial is the renovated capacity of the astonishment at what, while not "new" (because it cannot be so), appears before our eyes to be so.



Teun Hocks, *Untitled*, 1999

(...)

Translation by Dena Cowan

◀ [back]