

1

*The spectacle as a tendency to make one see the world by means of various "specialized mediations" (it can no longer be grasped directly) naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs; the most abstract, the most mystifiable sense corresponds to the generalized abstraction of present-day society*

Guy Debord, "The Society of the spectacle"

In my photographs of the last four years I have used the camera to imitate the strokes of a gesticulative abstract expressionist painter, the "material" used being light<sup>1</sup>.

With the camera in one hand, I leave the shutter open for one or several seconds. The sweep of the arm and camera through space is recorded on the film. With this imitative action I have reproduced the performative qualities of abstract expressionism. (Normally one refers to gesture as the trace on the canvas, while actually what remains thereon is the mark of the gesture). The general title of the serie is "Camerastrokes"<sup>2</sup>.

Just as in the case of painting the mark left on the canvas is instantaneous, so the graphic result of the camerastroke procedure is that of a memory. There is no awareness of what has been produced until it is seen on the print. (The gestures are empty of any kind of psychological meaning).

There is something of a paradox in using the camera this way. Considering the traditional, normative use of the device; wich is to freeze an instant, considering that the kinaesthetic implications of the photographer's body have to be suppressed during the process. The use of a tripod or of short exposure means that the film does bit physically register wat happens on one of the two sides of the lens, i.e. that the image does not come out "moved". The physical and sensory experience of the observer is situated in an "ideal" relation established between the device and a world (mystified as objectively true) given in advance<sup>3</sup>.

The type of camera used at first was a Polaroid in order to quickly test the results of the executed movements. Later, following these preliminary results, I also used a reflex camera with negative film.

Since the movement in the space of the "real event" was something purely automatic, the outcome of the image is not the representation of an object before the lens, but rather the dissolution of the virtual distance between subject and object that the use of the lens implies.

The spaces in which the performances were carried out with the camera correspond to an interior, public space of a gothic cathedral, in fron of the windows, and to another, domestic space in front of a television screen.

2

*The spectacle is the material reconstruccion of the religious illusion. Spectacular technology has not dispelled the religious clouds where men had placed their own powers detached from themselves- it has only tied them to an earthly base. The most earthly life thus becomes opaque and unbreathable, Itno longer proiects into the sky but shelters within itself ist absolute denial, its falla cious paradise. The spectacle is the technicalrealization of the exile of human powers into a beyond; it is separation perfected within the interior of man.*

Guy Debord, "The Society of the spectacle"

In the entrance of the cathedral in Burgos there is a sign that prohibits the taking of photographs. I remember how zealously the guards enforced this prohibition. Every time a visitor made an aflemtpt to raise the viewfinder to his eye, he was reminded. But I do not remember any hindrance when I myself was

taking a series of photographs in that same cathedral (although the guards were astonished). The fact is that for those in charge of maintaining order, the business of moving the camera spasmodically with the hand (even if they heard the click of a long exposure), was not associated with the taking of a photograph. Or at least not with the taking of a normal photograph, the result had to be a disaster, and for them the prohibition referred to the taking of photographs on a common sense basis.

In the course of that worksession my main interest was to direct the lens in my hand toward an area of high up windows. Once I had selected the light source, my coordinated body, arm, and hand moved the camera (automatically and very quickly) thru a non-static field of vision. This field was occupied by as many windows as I had chosen beforehand. (It could happen that a rose window in the distance, diametrically opposite two adjoining windows closer to me, would register in the same photograph). Sometimes I chose the windows, and carried out the action, with closed eyes. In such cases a tenuous luminosity was enough to indicate the position of the windows.

I was aware that the light I perceived was physically the same as that which strike the retinae of a gothic man. But the interior of a cathedral was for such a man the space in which light manifested the constant gaze of a divine eye<sup>4</sup>. However, in the contemporaneity of my gaze there is an optical unconscious<sup>5</sup> (as a consequence of the different ((constructions)) of vision) that causes me to experience light in a different manner.

### 3

*More and more the so called ercontent,, of television shifts in this direction: it is not at all a question of the replication of life, but of its reduction to abstract and manipulable elements ready to be harmonized with a plethora of other electronic flows.../... Yet as reproductive technology attains new parameters of mimetic "fidelity" (holography, high resolution TV) there is an inverse move of the image toward pure surface, so that whatever drifts across the screen of either television or home computer is part of the same homogeneity.*

Jonathan Crary, "Eclipse of the Spectacle"

The imaginative capacities of photography, cinema, and television have generally corresponded to a point of view, static or mobile, in real space. The appearance of these media has in no case caused the disappearance of their precursors, although there may be modifications of the earlier form's "absolute" or intrinsic achievements. Furthermore, *the epochs in which the various inventions arise are not grids analogous one to another, in which "the inventions" occupy the same relative positions*<sup>6</sup>. The position and function of each medium can vary with social structure and with a new arrangement of the visible. Each of them coexists with the rest. and the possible displacement caused by a new medium that usurps earlier functions. gives rise to a change in the preceding function.

Since the time of Alberti's window<sup>7</sup>, through the period of the camera obscura, and up to the time of television, there have been a great many changes in which he who looks is the product of a set of conventions. There has never been a human sight not mediated and transparent.

In the photographs subtitled "TV set" the camera is situated in front of a tele-vision screen. The procedure is similar to that employed in the gothic cathedral. The only change is that the light source is a single window. The light is electronic and produces a scintillation that makes the intermittent images appear before the eye as a continuum. Not being perceptible by the human eye, the flashes manifests themselves on the film in forms of small multiple images from a single television set. These follow a path that corresponds to the movement of my arm during the exposure.

Unlike the effect of light in the serie *erGothic Cathedral*", the effect here is of "figuration" (instantaneous flashes of paradoxical illumination). Although its quality is more abstract, the result of the fragmentation of the luminous traces (when the dynamic television image freezes) is that the configurations of the television set appear as overlapped representations, like ghosts.

In the two parts of the serie "Camerastrokes". the distance separating the observer from the embodiment of sight is the nucleus of my experimentation.

---

<sup>1</sup> I started taking these photographs when I was making the last serie ot paintings that uneil that time was made with motives of simultaneous brushstrokes (double. triple, etc.). That work was painted on canvases situated in (he bidimensionality of the wall, using a device where several brushes were attached ,leaving simulatenous and identical marks. Unlike these, the paintings I have been making since then. are always made on the (loon in the space of real events. I don't use brushes or other tools related to leeving an antropomorphic mark on a support. The movement of the support, the pouring of a fluid materia and the gravity force are the elements of process in this works. Similarly, in the serie camerastrokes the movement of the photographic support isa fundamental pan of the process but the implications are different.

<sup>2</sup> This title came to my mind by virtue of its analogy with the word brush-stroke.

<sup>3</sup> Let us not forget that the 17th century cartesian separation of mind and body is repeated in the camera obscura, In this mode appear a certain metaphysics of interiority through the process of individuation of an observer enclosed in a dark space, isolated from the outer world. for Descartes, mental perception of the world requires the situating of the "I" in an interior space, in which the eye of the mind distrust the senses because they impose confusion and disorder on an act of awareness that is possible only in the light of reason. *Jonathan Crary "Techniques of the observer" MIT press, 1990 Cambridge ,Massachussets*

<sup>4</sup> For a man of the Middle Ages, objects were visible by virtue of rays emanating from the eye. Towards the end of the 16th century, Juan Bautista Porta explained and demonstrated the mechanism of vision in terms not of such rays, but of light from the object and of ist impression on the visual organ. This Neapolitan physicist is held to be one of the discoverers of the camera obscura.

<sup>5</sup> The term optical unconscious is used in Walter Benjamin's text "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction".

<sup>6</sup> Since the time when images started to be generated by computer, many of the traditional functions of the human eye have given way to practices in which *the images have no reference to the position of an observer in an optically perceived real world.* *Jonathan Crary "Techniques of the observer" MIT press, 1990, Cambridge ,Masassachusset*

<sup>7</sup> The invention of linear perspective in the 15th century constituted a model of vision that would become standard, with the aim to objectify an equivalent of "natural vision". The effect of vivid reality that arose with this invention quickly became a way of looking.