

Mirage study: on and of the other kind

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Mirage Study, 2013

The appeal to the hallucinatory element in the viewers' mechanism of mental representation is a remarkable way to bring about the reflexion of fundamental issues in art (and photography especially), philosophy and even social affairs. It is precisely because such concepts as phenomenon (sc. Vorstellungen), imagination, simulacra, social construction and distortion make up the bedrock of our theories and the way of thinking about the most intriguing issues. The long gone sentiment for eternal substances has been replaced by the ever more self-conscious investigation of the so-called correlated reality. And this is where Quentin De Wispelaere's photography series *Mirage Study* (2013) has its say.

Quentin De Wispelaere, a Belgian-born photographer, educated at La Cambre School of Visual Arts (Brussels, Belgium), was originally trained as an airline pilot. His works move away from common photographic narrative pervasive in the current orthodoxy. Therefore, his pictures share a certain ideal dimension that hints the viewer to the unknown, the unreal, i.e. something, that transcends a mere representation of an object and has a fundamental power to transform its initial factuality. While retouching remains of minimal importance and real-time handling of camera stands out as artist's manual skill, Quentin De Wispelaere's world appears to be turned upside down; as what is supposed to be real is no longer trusted or relied on, and that, what is intuitively considered to be a mere mirage, turns out to be an essential condition in order to *Mirage Study* exist.

Ordinarily we think of objects as constituted by their shape, material, texture, physical place they inhabit and their dimension that induces the extension of space. Only later in a rather strange empathic matter we ascribe them certain judgements of aesthetic or moral kind. We give them character and taste. However, the very condition for such judgements is a perceptual givenness. According to Alfred North Whitehead, "'order' means more than 'givenness', though it presupposes 'givenness' [and] 'disorder' is also 'given'"¹. Thus, accordingly Quentin De Wispelaere aims

to bypass the emergent order and disorder to penetrate into the more fundamental level of visual perception and, furthermore, to tear it apart.

As the shapes, materials, textures and positions of objects disintegrate into separate layers, the photographer explores the boundaries of representation and hallucination – a task that has occupied the majority of modern philosophers.

As for example Descartes did in his first two Meditations calling into doubt every perceptual experience and summoning his Evil Demon².

Moreover, the photographer puts into question our axiology, i. e.

the 'order' and the 'disorder' we seek. Thus the artistic decision to advance an axiological (moral-social-political) inquiry through an investigation of perceptual forms is a conceptually mature method, requiring sophisticated deliberation on Quentin De Wispelaere's part. All of the



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¹ Alfred North Whitehead, 2010, *Process and Reality*, Simon and Schuster, pp.83-84.

theoretical twists and perks are prominent in Quentin De Wispelaere's series *Mirage Study*.

The photography series begins and ends with pictures that are taken using an additional mediator so that they would become meta-representations or second-order representations. As the viewer dwells on the features of this double-folded experience, he is forced to put into doubt his own perceptual apparatus. If the meta-representation, an image of an image, has a clear influence on the final perspective, does not a single-folded representation have an effect too? And therefore, are we not always destined to view the world in an affected way? Is not 'mere' perceptual reality the only one? It seems as if, in Derrida's words, "The time out of joint. The world is going badly. It is worn but its wear no longer counts. Old age or youth – one no longer counts in that way. The world has more than one age. We lack the measure of measure"³. The last picture in the series represents a mirage observed by photographic techniques that simply blurs the line between brute reality and correlated, imaginative, illusionary and affected way of being.

Furthermore, the sequence of distinctive pictures of Qatar's buildings and social life serves the same purpose. Contrasted with sublime landscapes of the desert and the dunes, it emphasises the paradox of Qatar's state. It is an ultra-modern, technologically packed world in the middle of one of the most uninhabitable natural environments. It feels that it has been created as an experiment. The mirroring skyscrapers, depicted through reflections and obstructions, the cars, the screens and lights – it's all filled with (meta-)representations. The social reality that has been constructed there begs the same question as the perceptual reality behind the mirage. Therefore, the whole system of institutions, rules and techniques that comprise an ideal 'order' is no more than a mirage of some sorts.



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Moreover, not only this effect of mirage is self-referential, and therefore never truly carries fixed or same meaning, form or material; it is also trapped in the process-of-making itself. This is the reason why artist's images feel so intense and hard to grasp in the first place. An infinite variety of possible interpretations does not suppose that the images are based on prior trust in the viewer's competence, potential or capability to establish himself as an important mediator between object-subject (and therefore picture-meaning) exchange, but rather illustrates how their interpretive obstacle governs the intentional

orientation towards the experience of the other kind. Thus, the autonomous and accidental flux visible in the *Mirage Study* photographs also suggests their intentional direction of projecting towards the external world and not vice versa.

² Rene Descartes, 2005, 'Meditations of First Philosophy' in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 12-24..

³ Jacques Derrida, 1994, *Specters of Marx*, New York : Routledge, p. 96.