

Nantes-Pornic, 2012-2013

The "Nantes-Pornic" series was made in 2012 and 2013 in the context of the research programme "Péri-ville invisible", in association with the LAUA (Language Actions Urbaines Altérités) laboratories of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Art in Nantes and LATCH of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture et de Paysage in Lille.

The considerations of this research programme instigated by PUCA¹ were an opportunity for me to prolong the photographic experimentations I had been making in the Parisian peripheral areas, particularly in the series "Périphérie" (Peripheries) and "Instantané" (Instantaneous)².

In "Périphérie", a multitude of signs coexist in the image and reproduce the complexity of the situations by rendering the experience of the real as a material. Vitrified in its process of flux, the real is at once the past, present and anticipated future in a montage of heterogeneous time. Originating from the very nature of the photographic medium by their descriptive essence, these images favour the reification of the real that is both strange and familiar, a simple vision with no particular condition that avoids any over-determination and requires us to go beyond initial appearances. Such images, which refer us to familiar places that we have lost the habit of observing, with their "objects" that we recognize without ever having seen them, favour the tensions between familiar and unknown to construct an enigmatic, almost disquieting, photography that proposes nothing more than its subject. The following quote applies perfectly to this photography: "we have long been aware that the role of philosophy is not to discover that which is hidden but precisely to make visible that which is visible, in other words to reveal that which is so near, immediate, and intimately linked to us that we do not perceive it."³

The "Instantané" series doesn't attempt to respond to the demands of the territory with the connotation of the decisive instant intended by Henri Cartier-Bresson but rather in the sense of the reproduction of an image that imposes itself upon my gaze, the production of a literal image of a still object, a faithful copy of an image that existed before I did. As when crossing the river Paissac under the midday sun, Robert Smithson transformed the bridge into an overexposed image, he had the sensation of photographing a photograph⁴. Or when penetrating the room where his grandmother was sleeping, Marcel Proust had the impression of being in a photograph.⁵

Can the theme of the suburban contribute to a renewal of the analytical frameworks of contemporary urban space?

In response to this research⁶ direction, we proposed the following hypotheses: investigate the tools for recording analysis and restoration of the activities which take place in spaces which are primarily characterized as relevant to diffuse urbanization.

It is in the context of documentary approaches that we situate ourselves. The gazes we adopt seek to fabricate the processes of production of knowledge about these territories, outside of or, rather,

¹ "Du périurbain à l'urbain", 2011, Plan - Urbanisme - Construction - Architecture

² www.emmanuelpinard.com

³ Michel Foucault "La philosophie analytique de la politique", conference 27/04/1978

⁴ Robert Smithson "The Monuments of Passaic", 1967

⁵ Brassai "Marcel Proust sous l'emprise de la photographie", Gallimard 1997

⁶ François Andrieux, Arnaud Bertolotti, Anne Bossé, Laurent Devisme (coord.), Guillaume Ertaud, Bénédicte Grosjean, Myriam Héaulmé, Elisabeth Pasquier, Emmanuel Pinard.

before any model by distributing the very practices of users and observation by surveying, like an "urban hunt", through photography...

Our methodological hypotheses are thus to maintain a principle motivation which is description with the object of renewing the gaze, and the common denominator of the selected objects is the need to be guided to explore. Different types of objects are identified; the modalities of a descriptive urbanism are tested. The spaces, supports for investigations, are in the main located in the Nantes region where half those involved live.

We didn't want to depart from a type of preferred territory but rather to identify generic situations; we concentrated on different know-how, all producers of descriptions and narratives: the social scientist, the urban designer and the photographer⁷.

The Nantes-Pornic tram-train line imposed its route on me. It links Nantes to the sea by crossing the communes of the first ring of the metropolis, rural villages increasingly altered with signs of metropolisation and the seaside villages along the coast. It provides a representative cross-section of this journey from the urban to the periphery. The ten stations along the way are the shoot locations. It remained to fix each work zone, which I didn't want to plot out arbitrarily. It was the use I made of the territory that fixed its limits. These appeared very clearly and delineated the *station landscape* in a clear way. Only the Sainte-Pazanne series has a number of images taken in a construction lot, probably favoured by the arrival of the tram-train, along the tracks on leaving the city. The number of photographs in each series is set by the scale of the sites: fourteen for Rezé Pont-Rousseau, six for Pornic and ten for Bougneuf-en-Retz... As with all my series I use a normal lens at eye level, to favour an ordinary view that relates to the details unlike the overhead general views of aerial photography.

Two objects are planned for distributing this work. The first, in extending my desire to reduce choices as far as possible, is a box containing ten envelopes (one per station and per series) in which the one hundred and fourteen photographs produced along the line are distributed. In this way the images are not linked, the viewer composes the series as they like, no narrative is imposed. The second, adapted to the delivery of our research, accompanies the "ambulatory stories" of Elisabeth Pasquier and Laurent Devisme's work from the trackside. In this case it's a booklet linked to where the images are composed by series and so by station. Here the page binding ensures continuity and allows variations of recto verso and the spreads offered by double pages.

All along the line I looked for the most significant images of the phenomena of metropolisation. My quest then fell on the most ordinary images of these territories that were becoming increasingly homogeneous. What caught my attention, was not the station itself but the phenomena related to it, the effects of the train's arrival on this environment. I attempted to represent these ordinary spaces by concentrating on the natural thickness of things, in order to avoid any escape into a poetic representation of the marvels of daily life, with no unconscious association even if what motivates the choice of this photograph rather than another remains mysterious. The image is not composed; it imposes as a whole, as evidence. It imposes by the force of its generality, at the risk of a certain formalism.

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⁷ Response to the call for research proposals, November 2011.