

## Encountering oneself

It is not about pictures, really. It is not even about the photographer's skill. I want to come clean with you: with photography I am less concerned about composition and meaning and than I am in the artist's approach and how this relates to me. What I look for in a body of work, whether photographic or in another medium, is the quantity of space that it opens up for me, not for its author. No space, no impact, in my book, despite the artist's claims.

What is the breathing space I am striving for and how can I recognize when a work creates such a thing? Certainly, a life in words or images is everything and nothing. It is the smell of rotten wood and of disinfectant in the birthing room; the colour of a toilet and of a tyre imprint in the mud; the noise of an airport and the squeakiness of flip-flops. But it is not just about the senses. It is the mental preparation and a refusal to think. A fat stomach in the mirror and a love mood; the atmosphere of a bar and a car trip. And so on. How can someone I do not know possibly make such room for me by means of a photograph?

As I am slowly absorbing JHE's images a sort of paradox slowly appears in my mind: here, photography is to life what becoming is to being. In *Wells* – as well as in the previous *Trying to Dance* and *Haunts*, but also in *CDG/JHE*, which is apparently different but to me strikes the same chords – the account is permanently unfocussed, in emotional terms rather than technically speaking. The work is never stable. Its solidness, the materiality of 'the photographic', so to speak, is always slipping away, always one step in front of me – just far enough ahead to be ungraspable. An image visualizes something that does not have a straightforward relationship to what it depicts, and things gets beautifully complicated, thereby making space in which to wonder what my position is in all this.

What I find recurs here is a sense of in-betweenness. There is a sense of a contested

place, a push-pull process. I know where I am, since I know what I am looking at; yet I cannot precisely hold either my position or its meaning. JHE renders photography unstable. I am seduced by photography oriented towards the yet to happen, the possible future – not as a recording tool but rather as a system to ‘release to life’ (Campany) or a potential reality. Only when we engage with the possibility of something can we try to change what is important for us. *Wells* does not tell a story that has already happened, but rather a story yet to be told. This account is truly mine, or yours – independent of its author.

The work triggers in me a subtle feeling that is not so much about what I am now, but what I will become. Can I give up the little I know about the world in pursuit of a life of constant un-learning, not knowing and re-learning? Can I really apprehend anything new if I will not offload the accumulated stuff in my mind? Am I able to renounce knowledge to embrace something I do not know? Ultimately, what it is posed to the reader (I prefer to think of an audience of visual readers rather than viewers) is a question of how he or she wants to think about him or herself. This information is neither in books nor exhibitions, but stuffed in-between words and spread between photographic prints.

Do not ask me how he manages it, but JHE poses just such questions, or, rather, his work does. Visual encounters with himself, his landscapes and domestic details are as blurred as you can imagine and contain all the achromatic or colour-saturated imagery you can tolerate. The photographs harbour a coherent inconsistency, with every single image signalling an unnerving quest in which the reader renounces him or herself and prepares to embark upon a journey that cannot be contained within the visual. Intentionally or unintentionally, this transfers the responsibility and the weight of representation on to me – and you. And the length of time for which we bear this weight is up to us.

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