

## TIME DEVOURS THINGS

*„In the building of thought, I have found no category over which to rest my forehead. In contrast, what better cushion is there than Chaos!“*

*Emile Cioran. Syllogismes de l'amertume*

*It was probably on this same cushion that God planned the Creation. Or at least, this is what two of the great tales tell us about the origins of life on earth: the book of Genesis in the Bible and the „Metamorphosis“ by Ovidio. In both pieces a God appears who, in spite of the chaos and disorder, separates, divides and reconciles the elements.*

*Conflict and change, just as many passages of these two great works of universal literature suggest, make up the dynamic strength that rules the continuous renewal and transformation of natural being. And contemporary science has done nothing more than also remind us, from Einstein to Hawkins, that the universe is not harmonious: order, when it appears, never rests, but experiences multiple transformations.*

*Possibly, and following along the lines of the great accounts about the beginnings of human life on earth, when we lose paradise, not only do we separate ourselves eternally from God, but we also lose the ability to dominate chaos, to control our lives and ignore time.*

*The notion of chaos as constructive energy, which is an underlying factor, above all, in the poem of Ovidio, is also present in the actual literary structure of the work. His epic tales occur on a journey through the ages of Mankind, with different narratives in which his characters, both gods and men, are the leading players of stories whose unity is seen to be latent, sometimes clearly so and other times totally incidentally, starting from the notion of „metamorphosis“.*

*This introduction about the beginning of the beginnings has its relevance when speaking about the work „The Iron Age“, by Istvan Balogh. This is precisely because Balogh does not only borrow from Ovidio the title of one of his chapters, „The Iron Age“, for his book, the period in which Ovidio considers that Humanity has its origins, but he also bases part of his work on some of these philosophical and literary notions.*

*The influence of Ovidio on western art and literature does not pass unnoticed. His poem „Metamorphosis“ inspired writers such as Dante or Shakespeare and painters such as Peter Brueghel or Johann Wilhelm Baue, whose engravings, produced in the first half of the XVII century, illustrated many later editions of Ovidio's book. However, Balogh's work, despite gravitating around the spirit that moved Ovidio to write his metaphoric tale about the vicissitudes of humanity, adapts some of these ideas to contemporary settings and concerns, also adding autobiographical elements and the author's personal concerns.*

*As in Ovidio's work, transformation, change and mutation are some of the central themes in Balogh's work. „Time devours things“, wrote Ovidio. And on each of the 22 images that make up this piece by Balogh, one gets the feeling that time slips away between the characters. It deals with a dynamic time that moves around between the spaces, landscapes, individuals and their actions or gestures. In all the scenes, simultaneously familiar and disturbing, one gets the impression that something is about to happen. We perceive that we are not dealing with anything that is essentially definitive but simply distinct and at the same time, unique. Balogh does not capture a moment within a set of possible moments, nor does he trap a „decisive moment“ that takes place by chance*

*before the expert eye of the photographer. This is precisely the strategy employed by documentary photography, from Harry Callahan to Cartier Bresson, even including Robert Frank or Lee Friedlander and a form that Balogh distances himself from consciously and voluntarily. Time, for Balogh, does not stop even if one photographs it, but it is a continuous, relentless and transforming element.*

*Contrary to the photographs that control time, Balogh's control the setting. The images here are totally constructed, prepared and set under a meticulous personal involvement in all the details. The location, characters, scenes, light and space appear under the author's watchfulness, turning to planning strategies befitting a film director. But in contrast to a film director, Balogh does not construct a series of scenes whose syntax makes sense of the narrative, but that, in one single and unique image, manages to synthesise the discourse of the work. For this reason, Balogh's work makes more connections with allegories or realist paintings than with the cinematographic discourse.*

*If time is a recurring element in all his work, the human presence invades all of Balogh's „tableaux“. The characters are found in „déjà vu“ situations, some of them anodyne, others mysterious, but all of them with a certain aftertaste of known or memorised characters from our subconscious.*

*It is hardly worth mentioning here, once again, that photography possesses many registers of power over the memory, which is, briefly, the function that gives our experience its sensitive content. The camera extends our memory file ability, but often the price we have to pay -as W. Benjamin wrote- is the loss of the role of imagination in the memory. That is why, before these images of Balogh, the danger rests in that the spectator, an essential part of the reinterpretation process of these works, is left lost, searching around their own memory file for something that coincides with their own stored visual experience. In this concept lies the arbitrariness of the look.*

*One of the most powerful features of photography and the image in general is precisely its ability to generate visual stereotypes through repetition and ritualisation. These processes simultaneously provide us with some conventionalisms and many prejudices about the world around us. In other words, our way of seeing, understanding and knowing who we are and what our relationship is with that which surrounds us. For this reason, delegating our experience and knowledge of the world merely to that which we could call the credulous look may well deeply affect our capacity to discriminate, analyse and interpret reality.*

*In any case, it is true that in the universal world of images in which we move it is increasingly more difficult to establish a theoretical distinction between documentary image and fictional image. Nevertheless, and even at the risk of oversimplifying things, perhaps it would be better if there were images that were produced to be believed and others produced for transmitting evidence or information. We should also add, even within these limits, the two are completely permeable these days, that given the fact that documentary strategies are often used for fictional products and vice versa, there are fictional images that inform or illustrate. Therefore, the spectator has no other choice than to resort to other sources, such as the production conditions or institutional circulation of the product in order to know what rules to stick to.*

*It is just in this way that the images of „The Iron Age“ are constructed to be believed: they are not true images but they are true-to-life, which gives them an illusion of reality. In this way, Balogh ably meets the spectator's expectations as regards the conventional rules as to what a photograph should be. In other words, he convinces the spectator. When it becomes clear exactly what the rules are, as occurs in fictional cinema films, the spectator feels absolved from the need to find any similarity with reality (the indexical nature of the photograph) and accepts crossing the border from that*

*which is clear to face a universe (of an iconographic nature) where metaphor and allegory (of a symbolic nature) subvert the strictly photographic reference, in order to enter the world of literature and painting, that is to say, art.*

*Allegory, an artistic strategy repeatedly employed by Balogh, makes use of narrativity in his discourse of cause and effect. In this sense, each of the elements represented must become a symbol, with the aim of helping bring about the interpretation, or the word, because the word is the human instrument par excellence for alleviating disorder and chaos. The word orders and relates feelings and thoughts. The balance, always so desired, between one and the other produces what we call knowledge, which helps us to understand the world, although it is expressed in different ways and with distinct strategies.*

*In this way Balogh demands from the spectator, placed in the same centre of the process where the action has still not been resolved, to put words to the images and to use his ability to reflect on his relationship with what is real, conventional, figurative or imagined.*

*In this way, the discontinuity of the photographic image's own narrative becomes the authentic nodule of the narrative; it is the impossibility of the photograph to create a continuous narrative discourse, which gives it this value for suggesting, pointing and „not saying“, creating silent spaces where the artist demands, explicitly or implicitly, this complicity from the spectator.*

*Just as occurred in the use of allegory in Renaissance painting or in pictorial photography, the name of the work (the word, yet again!) is an important element for uncovering its meaning. Therefore, Balogh sometimes opts for approaching the interpretation of the work through the title („Ideal landscape“ page, „The mouth of truth“ page, „Appropriation“ page, etc.), whereas in others, („untitled“) he leaves the spectator alone with their own personal experience and the image they have before them. In one way or another, as Victor Burgin suggests, „The influence of language goes beyond the physical presence of writing as a deliberate addition to the image. Even the uncaptioned photograph, framed and isolated on a gallery wall, is invaded by language when it is looked at“.*

*In summing up, „The Iron Age“ is a work that subverts the notion of limits and as such, of private territory or of safe and unerring places. On the one hand, it challenges the limits of looking. By refuting the notion of truth, even when representing the real world, Balogh questions the preponderance of the eye as a source of knowledge compared to the other senses that tell us about the world. The unquestionable certainty that we place in looking becomes archaic (see „Allegory“ photograph crime page) when we are able to subject our experience to the many sensibilities of our body and spirit.*

*On the other hand, the series represents totally current and known scenes, but with ancestral question marks about the meaning of life. Universal and unworldly questions such as the loneliness, trust, incomprehension, disillusionment, power, rootlessness, violence, pride, vanity, love and lack of affection that flow from these images, evoking, once again, the changing nature of human nature itself.*

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