

**THE MIME.** *By Jacinto Lageira.*

Though he neither looks the part nor strikes the pose, in terms of his general attitude the mime almost irresistibly brings to mind Watteau's Gilles, or Nadar's famous shot of the mime artist Debureau disguised as Pierrot, miming the photographic act in front of a camera. It is doubtless the combination of the photograph's somber colors and either the character's (feigned) melancholy, or the (real) melancholy of the actor playing him (but which is it exactly?) which brings these references to mind. Or perhaps it is that they are presented in the manner of old family photographs, testimony to past lives. As a character, the mime recalls the image of the magician inasmuch as he too makes gestures representing an action whose object is invisible: painting. The virgin canvas which Agut often uses is merely suggested by the gesture miming the act of painting, without it being of course possible to establish whether it is in fact a virgin canvas or not. More than the lack a support, it is the very invisibility of the painting and its perception which is at issue. As in the art of mime and in the art of magic, the more the thing is visibly asserted by the body, the more invisible it is to the eye. In another presentation, which includes the photographs of the mime artist, entitled *Rescue Attempt, Nonsense* (1994), two tondi hanging on the wall are invisible at first sight, because of the blinding intensity of the lighting.

All the mime-painter's attention is focused on painting the portrait of whoever is posing. Applied, yet caricatural in its fastidiousness, the character is suddenly plausible as a mime: the mime has to exaggerate his poses and gestures in order to better present the scenes to the viewer. Oscillating between the truthful and the make-believe, the mime creates the illusion of the thing, making what does not exist at all appear possible: climbing up a rope, walking into the wind, or as in this particular case, nonchalantly sitting back in a chair. Here again we come across the Agutian theme of the complementary opposition between reality and art: because everything is illusion, it seems all the more real; yet all verisimilitude, fancy or fiction can only be based on the factualness of the real. Only that which actually exists can be mimed.

At once the subject sitting for the work and the portraitist who carries it out, Pep Agut (for it is indeed him) fills the roles of the different actors in the world of art, in both cases staging the classical genre of self-portraiture. Aside from *Mimo* and the photograph actually entitled *Self-portrait* (1993), the few photographic self-portraits that Agut has done — *El Mago* and *S/T*, 1993 — have less to do with a pictorial self-representation than with a staging of representation which takes self-portraiture as its pretext. Moreover, in an earlier triptych version, another character can be seen more or less miming the arrangement adopted by Velázquez in *The Maids of Honor*, whose principal subject is painting as the subject of representation. Without aesthetically — rather than materially — eluding the question of representation, the photographs are but one more artifice in the chain of references and quotations linking Agut's works to each other, each new piece being a commentary elaborated on the basis of the preceding one. In the fashion of the Cabalists, Agut seems to start from an original text which leads him to commentaries of commentaries, which in turn become the founding texts for still further commentaries. But what might the original text actually be in this case? Does one even exist? And even if it existed, would the commentaries ensuing from it not be of greater importance than the text itself — as certain currents of Cabalistic thought suggest? In this sense, aside from the self-portrait as representation, there is a second path which might lead us to this founding text which would be autobiography, or more broadly speaking, lived experience.

If, in a general way, the mime virtually reproduces the gestures of the everyday, could the same not be said of the artist who mimes his experience in his works? Miming, as well as doing magic or photography are actions which are made up primarily of dramatizing gestures and bodies, and therefore gazes and perceptions. In so doing, language is not directly dramatized. Agut thus

makes metaphors out of certain more or less identifiable autobiographical elements — objects stemming from childhood memories (canvases or a table, for instance), or more recent objects, such as the plans of his house — by simply showing them, by staging mute bodies whose activity indeed requires silence if it is to be effective. These mute bodies, which do not verbalize but which can express a feeling or a thought through a gesture addressed at the viewers' gazes, can almost withhold themselves from perception, as in the Self-portrait, where the photographic image is so dark that the artist's face cannot immediately be seen. Images without language, images without perception, language without images are not irreversible dichotomies created by Agut, but have to be understood as a step toward the constitution of meaning. Toward the discovery of the meaning of existence which all of us seek.

Many of Agut's works include bits of texts or a few words whereas the rest of the work (photography or painting) merely shows the support or an abstract image — in other words, nothingness. And the latter, because it has more to do with a concept than with a thing or a concrete state of affairs which could be shown, has nonetheless taken form in Agut's work, in the virgin canvases showing nothing, but which are nevertheless something inasmuch as they are the site from which the question of nothingness suddenly appears. The virgin canvas is the figure of a "there is", an intermediary state between nothingness and being, which, though inclined to become one or the other, is however neither one nor the other. In other — and somewhat paradoxical — terms: there is some nothing. This problematic is one of the beginnings of the "there is" of existence. That the windows or the hands of the magician are empty, that we are unable to see the canvas of the mime or the chair in no way inhibits us from seeing the effects. The fact that there is being, a "there is" of things, in no way inhibits us from feeling the effects of the nothing.

This "there is" could also be apprehended as the "there was" of photography. But if photography is a "mirror which remembers", it no doubt has to be understood as a memory of form, because the content of remembrance is not photographable. As in Chinese or Balinese shadow theater, we see only the forms, neither the faces nor the colors of the clothes. In the case of twin mimes, one could be perceived as the shadow cast by the other. Strangely, this simple remark may be highly revealing of one specific trait of Agut's work: the shadow never corresponds to the form of its object, just as the object never projects the shadow of its form. Somewhat different in this respect from the Proustian network of ideas and perceptions, in which a new state or element would call forth another similar or different state or element, the memory of experience in Agut's work is made up of the incompleteness of shadows and their shapes. Memory cannot be fixed in space and time, insofar as it is steeped with layers of duration, with the thoughts in perpetual movement which make it up and unmake it again, passing back and forth from nothingness to the "there is" of consciousness which posits the existence of things. Only the "there is" or the "there was" can be mimed. Between the two: nothing. **JL**