

B

ohemian in the Mirror

Kneeling on the kitchen floor, I put a little of the most expensive cat food in my mouth, but didn't swallow it. The cat was beside me, because of the good smell of food. I put the mush back on the floor and the cat immediately ate it. Then I tried to stand up again. But I had drunk too much. It was December 24th. Beside me was the bench. I lay on it. Then it occurred to me that in the last few days I was trying to make something of an unpleasant sentence but hadn't got anywhere with it. Only, a stupid compulsion to keep repeating it plagued me, so I said, "Prussia, wake up, wake up, but wake up only in me." In the morning, when I had just got up, I caught sight of myself in the round mirror, and for the first time saw something really unusual. I saw not the normal face, which now and again had perhaps just got a bit older - this time it was a quite new, unknown face. And I knew, this looks like a bohemian, this is the face of a goast of a bohemian. But that's something I certainly never wanted to be, never yet, never had I thought I myself would ever experience the vie de bohème or anything like it, and far less, it's certain, did I think then, that I myself would suddenly assume the face of a bohemian in the mirror.

After my Christmas encounter with the mirror which showed, as if in a photographic moment, not my present but my past, an "inner" biographical past which I had suppressed, as if in a prolonged state of fatigue and lack of close self-observation, I decided I would from then on do all I could to ensure that the bohemian in the mirror was suppressed, became invisible again for the future. Unfortunately I just tried to extinguish the results of the past not within myself, but at least from my face, by leading an ordered, regular life.

Seemingly for no good reason, that meeting in the mirror makes me think of that critical moment, which, nonsensical as it may sound, may have a great deal to do with a fundamental aesthetic approach to photography. It was like an uncanny pose not struck by me, but invented by my mirror image. It was just as Roland Barthes says, "that photography offers me the pose's perfect past, it places death for me in the future. I shudder at a catastrophe that has already happened." People say that mirrors and photography are closely connected. Like photographs the mirror image pursues us and, according to Barthes, mediates through the feeling of decay and time past. Till now I could never understand why, and I found the connection somewhat strained and stupid before, that photos are capable of offering some kind of evidence, the evidence of a mirror of our past in the eye of that essence of photography. For that organic essence there is only time, aging, and decay, there is no present.