

Seiichi Furuya – Gravitation

Gravitation is that which we first experience when we leave it behind. As long as we are subject to gravitational force we don't feel it. Only when we become weightless – in water, in reduced gravity flight, in orbit (that is, beyond the confines of the earth) – does the absence of the body's weight strike us as liberating: a wondrous, literally fathomless lightness, the price for which is, however, the loss of footing, of solid ground. Just as a fish has no concept of water until it's writhing around on dry ground (and it's already too late), the exile only comes to grasp what his native land means after he has left it behind. Regardless how quickly he establishes himself in a new place, the loss of his home will become the decisive factor in his life. If anything serves to cast doubt on certainties, it is exile. For the earth binds us to it, the first contact with it is the answer to all questions. Those who leave their native country behind, for whatever reason, will live evermore on unsteady footing. And those who live on unsteady footing find it easier to "change countries like old shoes", switch sides, cross over the barriers of time.

If Furuya gives his new work (which isn't really new, but a necessary continuation of his previous work in a different register, and as such as incomplete as ever) the programmatic title *Gravitation*, the metaphor has not just a descriptive but also a kind of imploring character, though both metaphor and that to which it refers – the photographs themselves – do in fact carry a certain weight. For these images seem to come from very far below, from the sediment of memory. They come from the ground and refer back to the ground and are themselves – as now becomes evident, in retrospect – the foundation of all of Furuya's work. We recognize many of the photos from *Mémoires*. In that work, however, they were woven into meticulously conceived associative strands, whereas here they appear as erratic elements of a landscape of recollections, dreamlike visions that suddenly arise from the void. This demonstrates a new quality. In Furuya's previous works every picture was an element of the narrative that from the outset was told backwards. Each photograph, as powerful as it might have been individually, was only one voice in a larger chorus. Some of these pictures – precisely those brought together in *Gravitation* – now become characters in their own right: a story that isn't so much told (the age of the "great narrative" seems to be over for Furuya as well) as it is dreamed. Yet in reality the pictures are not so much characters as they are figurations: constellations. If photography, as W. H. Fox Talbot conceived it in his work *Pencil of Nature*, is nature's own self-portrait, in Furuya's hands the medium fully realises this potential – though it is by no means a narrative self-portrait and is only a "portrait" in a figurative sense. Everything that appears in these images becomes recognizable as something marked, something wounded. Even the light appears grey, though it is a wonderfully saturated grey that renders the most subtle nuances. Photography suddenly disburdens itself of all its illusoriness. It is not the weight of that which appears within it, but of its own unbearable significance, to which we have grown so accustomed that we simply see through it. These images don't "refer" to anything, as here it is the "referent" alone (to use Barthes' terminology) that speaks – and it has nothing to say. The photos from *Gravitation* penetrate beyond any kind of talkativeness, even beyond any form of speech, dwelling as they do on the border of speechlessness and muteness, for which reason they are – perhaps the greatest praise for any photograph – free of any additional meaning. They reach their consummation in that which they show. This does not, however, mean that they are meaningless. For what emerges in them through the aureole of their grey veil is that which signifies itself, the narrative. Here it becomes clear for the first time what penetrate beyond any kind of talkativeness, even beyond any form of speech, dwelling as they do on the border of speechlessness and muteness, for

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– Only as nearly overflowing vessels of the physical do the pictures find their metaphysical content. Shinto thisworldliness, the real presence of everything that has ever existed in the here and now, and Buddhist otherworldliness – albeit, of course, without any hope of being freed from the chain of suffering – pervade the photographs of *Gravitation*, by means of which the Japanese artist returns to his roots, by way of the medium of a European conception of time.

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