

If They Be Two

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All images have something to do with light. Yet light is not the condition of being seen. Photograms, produced by placing objects on light sensitive paper and exposing them, are the distillation of the problem, and promise, of pictures. An object finds form when lit and touched by light. Doing so it becomes opaque.

The surrealist elevation of the object was exemplified by the photogram. Whereas Man Ray constructed a cameraless dreamworld through the traces left behind by objects, Moholy-Nagy seemingly made objects appear from light alone. These impossible forms exert the pull of objects without them having been there at all. They are stains without a spill, an unattainable desire.

Turning things into other things is hard. Writing about desire is not like fucking you though neither lends itself to language. Words often turn me on but forcing desire to comply with form risks cementing it, as though putting it out in the world might also stub out its spark. In this thick summer heat, speaking too much about sex, and writing too little about desire, both amount to dead end pursuits.

To intervene in the monotony of your absence and my work, I masturbate. It's compulsive. Lazy too. In the kind of generic pornographic videos that jerk across my browser, the barest kind of language suffices. A familiar story unfolds through cursory dialogue. For all its material abundance, watching porn can be a strangely utilitarian experience. Arriving at its climax, the excesses of the image are stripped away. I become the object of my own gaze.

Narcissism is an object relation gone bad. The object of desire is determined at the location of sight. Form becomes me but it's not a good look. Instead, recognition relies on another whose gaze rests elsewhere. The wish to be seen or known or heard is simple enough but the flawed systems through which we negotiate our desires make things complicated. I am to X what Y is to Z, wrote Roland Barthes, everything I am told about Y affects me powerfully, though Y's person is a matter of indifference to me, or even unknown. To put it another way, this is love this is love, that I'm feeling.

Consider desire as an object rendered in light. Light fragments. It fills, floods and refracts. It splits the gaze. Becoming two, it becomes many more things than that. The trick I learn is this: I am not attempting to represent my desire. Words and images are desire. I become other to myself as I move to touch the object of my desire. It's you! Desire obliterates us both. It's a risk. It's a promise.

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