



Taisuke Mohri's "The Mirror"

at
"Personal Structures"
European Cultural Centre,
Palazzo Mora, Venice, Italy
May 13th - November 26th, 2017

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From Powder to Mirrors

The Metamorphosis starts with the medium.¹ Mohri uses graphite, a substance close to what we perceive of as a vestige of things: something that leaves stains, that becomes powder we chafe our fingers with to show the pounding of something into nothing, material relative to ashes – an irreducible remainder of physical reality. This matter – inclined to keep itself formlessly visible – will be first of all worked neither into a spot or a line, nor into the form, but more so into the nonexistent space: the embedded into physical reality imaginary opening between two mirrors that are opposed to each other. The spreading of this distance will be sustained, multiplied and broadened by the recursive movement of the eye in between reflections that run into infinity in the structure that is grounded in optical laws: imaginable, maybe, but for the sake of the nonexistent. It is at this point when the visual experience starts to be ineluctably split on “here” and “there”.

It is often said that the work of art makes us lose our centre. It refractures our line of intervention into the visible that we perform from the master position. This is not exactly the case with “The Mirror”. This image – yes, and it is still an image after all – is counting on you in a way. If it is reluctant to face you, it is still leaning its back on the fundamental point in front of the work for the sake of its internal consistency. To make it more palpable, imagine extending “The Mirror” to the left and the right and rotating while staying in the same place. “The Mirror” will then make its way around, connecting its opposite sides surrounding you. You will find yourself in the donut-like figure of a torus: right in the middle, but outside. It is not that there is no centre, as you can see, just ... it is empty. An expression, by the way, Roland Barthes used to describe Tokyo, referring to the inaccessible “empty” space of The Emperor Palace in the heart of the city: the instance which, while generating inside the externality, could solidify and sustain “The National Circle” around it.

Thus, the void is excluded, but does its work. To bring it back to the Western perspective, the space is structured around the vanishing point; the only obstruction is that the blind spot is fixed on the place of the onlooker: the onlooker *is* a blind spot. Thus, Mohri goes

beyond himself (there is a part in the whole that doesn’t coincide with itself), creating his own exteriority and the hierarchy of reflections and identifications, which is inverted within.²

Figure with an Attitude

It might not come as totally unexpected, that on the opposite side of the mirror we will find something that – while observing itself – will strive for completeness. Yes, not as something suspended in the “middle” (as in “middle”-sex), but as a force of unification, the collecting being, incorporating its opposites, but at the same time shaving off its extremities. Look in its eyes: now it says “You know what I am going to say, right?” and now... “You know nothing!”.

Here is a rather paradoxical way, though inherent to the numerous art forms in Japan, to generate more by taking away. Like a Japanese poem – in pulling the elements into a single unit and compressing it with a minimum of elements and connections – is not long, and, yes, simply can not be long. Like a folding fan holding in a ... folded way, an image always ready to release the Sun and the Moon from the reverse perspective of its open form. (To fold up a fan is to shrink the world itself.) Like a wave by Hokusai, ready to crash, paused in stop-action, in a single instant capturing all possible wave movements, and more, its intervals, the wave-time.³ These numerous ways beckon all the oppositions into a unifying form.

When this implosive practise of concentration is related to humans it is called *kamae*, “the assuming of an attitude” both in physical and psychological senses. Whether in martial or performing arts or flower arrangement, taking a proper position would mean to reach the point from which not just any movement is possible, but where they all are, in a sense, happening. *Kamae* is not static, neither it is momentary, and the fixation of a concrete form will depend on how exactly the other – the one who is attacking in martial practise or the one who grasps the expression in narrative arts – will decide to come into it. The figure in the mirror has this type of attitude, compressed but without extremes, ready to move in any direction chosen by the one who is engaged in the act of looking at it. The process of internalizing the attitude appropriate to a particular



Taisuke Mohri, "The Mirror 3", pencil on paper, frame: 95.3x77.1x6.5cm/37.5x30.3x2.6in, drawing: 91x72.8cm/35.8x28.7in, 2017

art or school through imitation and repetition is called *keiko* in Japan, “training” or “practise”, or in another word, *askesis*.

Traversing Photo/Hyper/Realism

Mohri goes through hundreds of photos while preparing the synthetic image in between the mirrors: a shot of a wrinkle or an image capturing a reflection on the surface of the eye. Yet, here the purpose is neither to position the work counter to abstract, material-oriented, spontaneity-driven styles, nor try to reveal and interpret the essence of photographic media itself. The drawing at last gains nothing from “wow!” when it is mistaken for a photograph.

The space in the image of course generates an “alternative existence,” not without insightful links to the interventions of the digital world that we experience today. Nevertheless, to perceive it as something grounded exclusively on being a convincing illusion, without taking into consideration what is happening on *our* part (that of artistic practise or of the onlooker’s engagement with the work) would be, in a word, one-sided. It is not quite a reality, whether as an original or a copy, neither the inability to distinguish between two is at stake here.

We would gain more if we think of “The Mirror” as an art work in the life of the artist, which is perceived in a form of practise, one in the state that is triggered when the outside world has been separated from us, has become

while generating the misrecognition. It's self-referential nature envelopes the onlooker like a warm bath, taking him away from the external objects and reality, into auto-erotism. It is a reflection on its own, but at the same time on *my* own, since the image acts on my behalf, or I act as "*Me*" is an image ...

But, at the same time, this space between the mirrors is the same split without which there would be no desire for truth in the first place, because it opens the space for introspection, for the internality of consciousness, for our "space for reflection" but in another sense: the space for contemplation, for reflective reasoning. What if, beyond simple identification, we would have this space itself as an object: not to be dragged into this between, seduced into the stage created by the mirrors, but to scrutinize the phenomenon of "representation" itself, knowing it is an image.⁶ Thus, the problem here would not be how to go beyond the appearance, but how the appearance itself is possible. The error would simply set in the moment when the individual being grants reality to images such as this instead of examining his or her own intimacy.

This way, it is crucial to make a step back and dare to face not the image itself but the very lack that "The Mirror" produces and structures itself around, while being a continuation of it. Do not engage into identification, submerging into its dark imaginary depths, or worse, to approach the work from the position of a cult and consequent worship. Neither, from another end, to avoid noticing, with your eyes wide shut, the disturbing negativity of the art work, or worse, grab it as if it were a portrait. Neither slide into the image with pleasure, nor resist its intolerable jouissance, but confront the very paradoxical structure of it and all of the dynamics it generates within the visual. It would be an attempt to reflect on the paradoxes of our own subjectivity. And it is only then "The Mirror" starts to make sense.

Ecstasy

Does "The Mirror" in this case, in its own way, answer the question "Where are we when we think?" Where are we during those moments when we are contemplating, as if in trance, without noticing our surrounding reality; as if we are here, but at the same time somewhere else ... but where?

Doesn't this self-directed attitude visualize the self-absorbed "absence" of the thinker, who is capable of emigration to another non-existent spread in an imaginary space for reflection? Absence on this side and absorption into internal operations on the other side, with

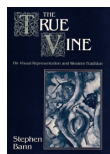
density and consistency provided by mirrors, which are then developed, through the imaginary, to the symbolic dimension of thoughts and ideas. "Suspended animation," the suspension of being here, for the sake of the running with full intensity chain of thoughts Elsewhere.⁷

It is worth looking in the end one more time on this condition of "absence" in the place in front of the image, and the asymmetry of its structure in general. It is only from this point, it would be worth it to reflect on the relationship of Mohri's work with photography (an image of reality that provides an observation without the camera-eye and subject which was doing it), and then go even further to the similarities of "The Mirror" with the nature of dreams that present the seen without the seer, a perceivable image with asleep onlooker, possible only due to the internal split in a human.

If we want to figure out a practise for ourselves from this experience, a practise of theoretical "attitude", then it would be a "withdrawal exercise". A practise of attempts of observing without taking a position, "an exercise in de-existentialization", a path of extracting our selves from the stance of participation toward the sphere of pure observation, a space for reflections where the things of life cease to affect us directly.

In this state of absence, when I already don't deal with "Me" as other, when the subject is stepping into nothingness, then the soul is losing its specificity, it is no longer completely itself, it is drawn outside itself, in extasis.⁶ It is not just toward the figure standing in the mirror where we should direct our adoration-attention, but toward the motion of extraction itself that creates a nonbeing, a condition of no difference with its ecstatic characteristics. Ecstasy (or ekstasis, the Greek for "to be or stand outside oneself" from ek- "out" and stasis "a stand") is the way in which the being represents itself as tenseness in an Elsewhere, with the inner pull beyond oneself. Consider that the etymological link between the Greek "ekstasis" and the Latin "existentia" should highlight existence itself as "being in a state of tension from here to there and from now to earlier or later"⁷. It might take some courage of course, but wouldn't it be now, in its fullest sense, "life-asserting" to let "The Mirror" create the opening and experiment with yourself, drawn by the tension toward the inner space beyond.

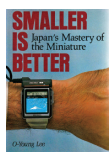
Rodion Trofimchenko
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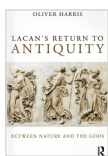
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Taisuke Mohri's "The Mirror"

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