What Documents Permit

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Delpoux, Sophie. *Le Corps-caméra : le performer et son image*, Paris : Textuel, 2010, (L'Écriture photographique)
L'Image-document, entre réalité et fiction, Paris : Le Bal ; Marseille : Images en manœuvres, 2010, (Les Carnets du bal)
Ouvrir le document : enjeux et pratiques de la documentation dans les arts visuels contemporains, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2010, (Perceptions)

- 1 Along with archives, which they are often associated with, documents have a central place in exhibitions, as they do in present-day contemporary art publications. The aim of the books here considered is not to shed light on this huge mnemonic turning-point which seems to have taken hold of art praxis and art discourse since the beginning of this third millennium, even if the contributions of some of their authors pinpoint circumstantial (post 9/11) and technical (the digital age) factors which might be part of that. A reading of these texts, in the diverse range of their historian and philosophical approaches, through the recurrence of one or two themes and arguments to do with concepts, nevertheless helps us to sketch out some hypotheses about the present-day lot of the “document” in the field of research.
- 2 *L'Image-document, entre réalité et fiction* partly borrows the papers presented at a conference held on 3 and 4 November 2009 at the fémis, and essentially restricts its studies to the photographic document in its relations with two orders, reality and fiction, where it works like a lever making it possible to redistribute and rethink qualities and divisions. With the image-document, links between the photographic and the documentary are introduced, along with those between document and monument or work (based on the respective contrasts proffered by Erwin Panofsky and Walter Benjamin), and art and archaeology—that science of the document based on which a

relation between art and history and truth is imagined. The thrust produced by the documentary lever (and this is confirmed by other writings in other books) is wielded for the most part on three levels in the artistic arena. To teach and instruct (this is the etymological meaning of the verb: to document), to deliver information and convey knowledge, all documents must be read, and result from a science of interpretation and authentication. As a fragment more than a totality, a sample in a whole which goes beyond it, the document is defined at the point where two distinct axes meet: in its relation to the work, insofar as it affects its totality; and in its relation to reality, insofar as it reveals its depth. In such a way that the archaeological science involved in the fields of art and imagery (since the document here usually is, or makes, an image) is defined by the complementary exercise of two disciplines: hermeneutics and ontology. This is the overall conceptual framework with which the writings brought together in *L'Image-document, entre réalité et fiction* comply: the image-document understood as instructing the eye and how it sees—among others in Georges Didi-Huberman returning to the work of Harun Farocki—which leads to “knowing what one sees” and “knowing how to see what one knows”; the image-document as medium of a perceptible ontology—in particular with Jean-Christophe Bailly—revealing the fragility of reality itself. With one general reservation. Perceptible ontology, as an extension of hermeneutics, is based on a set of associations which may nowadays stem from commonplaces, yielding to a melancholy tonality in which are asserted the following pairs: trace and survival, evidence and vestige, clue and stammer, memory and resonance, appearance and disappearance... which, in this terminological inebriation, poeticize a dance of signs from which the virtuosity of the interpreting hermeneut emerges, above all.

- 3 A more pragmatic history of art, based on case studies, is at work in *Ouvrir le document : enjeux et pratiques de la documentation dans les arts visuels contemporains*, where the majority of the texts also come from a conference (*Documenter : le rôle et le statut de la documentation dans la constitution du patrimoine artistique contemporain*), organized by Véronique Rodriguez and Anne Bénichou at McGill University in Montreal. To be sure, the book uses the two aforementioned hermeneutic and ontological paths, but it puts them through practical tests. Artistic practices of Land Art, Conceptual Art and Performance Art—we should underscore Marie-Josée Jean's studies of Iain Baxter's work, “La Documentation comme projet conceptuel de la N.E. Thing Co.” (pp. 133-152), and Judith Rodenbeck's on the development of the status of photography in Allan Kaprow's work, “Presque-peinture, quasi-rituel, placage — Allan Kaprow et la photographie” (pp. 77-101). This approach through the (at times strategic) use of the document in art is continued by examining methods of mediating and distributing artists' documents, the role of documentation in the writing of histories of art (we should mention the excellent contribution by Bertrand Clavez, emphasizing the importance of oral transmission and legends in the writing of the history of Fluxus [“Du dédale au réseau, les impasses communicantes de l'historiographie de Fluxus”], pp. 221-257), and documentation practices in museums.
- 4 The stance taken by Sophie Delpoux in her book devoted to the relations between the performer and his/her image makes a sideways approach to the issue of the document, but without having previously situated the specific frameworks to which her field of research limits her. If we consider performance just at the level of experience lived through, here and now, it remains totally impossible to scale it down to any documentation fragmenting and impoverishing the whole. Be that as it may, when we

recognize it as plural, if only through the number of its subjects and participants, experience, regarded as sacred, will not lose its properties of irreducibility. The documentation of performance, placed under the diktat of an idealist conception of experience, becomes a knot of phoney problems. So the cursor must be moved. Not by considering the objective knowledge that permits the photographic document as interface or (according to Kristine Stiles) “commissure”, capable of bringing the event back to life, but by rethinking the relations between image and body in the context of an expanded mimesis, the terms of which were specified by Catherine Perret—to whom Sophie Delpeux explicitly refers—in *Les Porteurs d'ombre : mimesis et modernité* (Paris: Belin, 2001). In considering the photographic recording as consubstantial with the emergence of these practices, she posits the hypothesis of a mimetic identification between artist's body and representation, by affirming a “camera body” with the value of a “representational plane”.