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Review of Richard Hamilton: Introspective

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par Aaron Sheon en 1984, à savoir que les théories physiognomiques auraient inspiré la création des types sociaux de Gavarni.³ Lerner soutient que l'uniformisation du physique des typologies reflète plutôt la volonté du dessinateur d'exprimer l'évolution des mœurs à travers les détails malléables, provisoires et performatifs de l'identité, soit leur attitude et leurs vêtements (p. 94).

Ceci est d'autant plus évident dans *Les Heures du jour* (1829) d'Achille Devéria, celles-ci examinées de près dans le quatrième chapitre, «The Hours of Her Day: Fashion Prints, Feminine Ideals, and the Circle of Achille Devéria». Parce qu'elles ne promeuvent ni produits ni marchands, les dix-huit planches de cette série se présentent comme des mises en scène du privé féminin. Laure, sœur cadette de la fratrie Devéria, y est portraiturée à quelques reprises aux côtés des amies intimes de l'artiste. Par la représentation de leurs vêtements et des nombreuses activités qui régissent leur quotidien à la manière de petits rituels, ces images recommandent un style et une attitude incarnant les valeurs de la bourgeoisie. À l'instar des illustrations de mode qui feront rage sous la monarchie de Juillet, *Les Heures du jour* promeuvent et commercialisent ainsi une domesticité idéalisée dont les paramètres sont scrupuleusement définis par Devéria. Lerner observe que l'influence du dessinateur dans la consécration des goûts et des modes augmente rapidement sous la monarchie de Juillet (p. 143).

L'exemple le plus probant de ce transfert d'influence, que Lerner évoque dans le cinquième et dernier chapitre de son essai, «Gavarni's Costumes: Masquerade and the Social Theatres of Paris», est certainement incarné par Gavarni qui, par l'invention du type du débardeur en 1836, renouvelle les déguisements portés en période de carnaval. Ce n'est toutefois qu'en 1840, alors que la talentueuse actrice Virginie Déjazet apparaît sur scène vêtue en débardeur, que ce costume est

massivement adopté par les Parisiens (p. 159). Il est néanmoins davantage prisé par les prostituées qui sont alors légion à Paris. Composé d'une chemise blanche rentrée dans un ample pantalon resserré à la taille par une ceinture d'étoffe, ce costume accentue les courbes féminines tout en accordant une grande liberté de mouvement. Par ailleurs, la mascarade s'affirme également comme la manifestation radicale des changements sociaux qui s'opèrent depuis la Révolution française: elle confirme la perméabilité des identités et témoigne de la performativité des genres et des classes grâce au caractère transgressif du travestissement. Lerner démontre comment Gavarni performe son apparence afin de promouvoir à la fois sa personne et son art: sa nette préférence pour la sobriété d'un habit coupé à la perfection évoque, pour ses contemporains, les costumes qu'il dessine dans ses caricatures.

Comme les dessinateurs qu'elle étudie, Lerner aspire à une vision panoramique de la culture du livre et de l'imprimé. Si Gavarni, un artiste

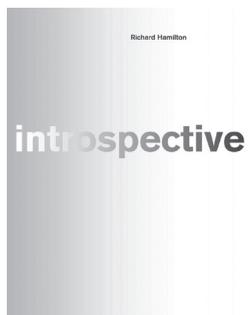
son ouvrage, qui demeure malgré tout stimulant par son approche interdisciplinaire et ses analyses originales et nuancées, Lerner, par la valorisation de l'objet éphémère, expose la complexité sémiotique de l'imprimé tout en le réinsérant dans son contexte sociohistorique. Tant par sa forme que par son contenu, ce livre constitue une contribution importante aux études sur l'estampes et la culture de l'imprimé, et notamment sur la fascinante question de la fabrique de l'identité artistique au XIX^e siècle. ¶

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1. Jillian Lerner, «The French Profiled by Themselves: Social Typologies, Advertising Posters, and the Illustration of Consumer Lifestyles», *Grey Room*, n° 27, printemps 2007, p. 6-35.

2. Id., «A Devil's-Eye View of Paris: Gavarni's Portrait of the Editor», *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 31, n° 2, 2008, p. 235-250.

3. Aaron Sheon, «Parisian Social Statistics: Gavarni, "Le Diable à Paris", and Early Realism», *Art Journal*, vol. 44, n° 2, été 1984, p. 139-148.



Phillip Spectre

Richard Hamilton: Introspective

Köln: Walther König, 2019

408 pp. 540 colour and b/w illus.

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Charles Reeve

encore trop peu étudié, s'avère instrumental à son argumentaire, on peut regretter que Lerner n'ait pas davantage approfondi l'apport des femmes dans la production, la commercialisation et la promotion de l'art sous la monarchie de Juillet, sujet qu'elle n'a que survolé en citant l'exemple de Laure Devéria dans le quatrième chapitre. Consciente des limites de

Paradox entranced Richard Hamilton throughout his artistic career (which ended when he died in 2011, at age 89), which perhaps explains this book's caginess about the identity of its author. Across the top of its spare, handsome cover, we read the artist's name and then, about halfway down, the book's title. So that seems clear: a book by Richard Hamilton called *Introspective*. Except

that the inside title page presents a third term: “Richard Hamilton/INTROSPECTIVE/By Phillip Spectre.”

Intriguing. After all, Hamilton had links to rock and roll: *pace* the standard art history survey, his best-known work is his 1968 cover for the Beatles’ “White Album,” not the collage *Just what is it that makes today’s home so different, so appealing?* from a decade earlier. Could this biography be the work of the notorious pop musician-cum-record producer-cum-convicted murderer (recently deceased of COVID-19) Phil—no, wait. That’s Spectre. So, is this Spectre an illusion? Yes. But also no. And examining Hamilton’s images of himself, which this book discusses a fair bit, helps us understand why.

While self-portraiture interested Hamilton for decades, his most notable explorations of the genre started in 1980, following several years of having other artists photograph him with a Polaroid camera. At a certain point, Spectre observes, “boredom set in and photography came to a slow halt” (307). Seeking a new path for the project, Hamilton continued the Polaroids but shifted his emphasis to self-portraits, in a way that accentuated the sense of mediation. Equipping the camera with a remote release that he triggered by foot, Hamilton interposed paint-streaked glass panes between himself and the lens, the unexpected swipes of impasto interfering with our view of the artist’s face while calling attention to the picture plane (effects that Hamilton took to augmenting—“to change rather than reinforce,” Spectre says—by rephotographing the image, printing it on canvas and then applying more paint). Yet the contrast between the handmade character of the brushstrokes and the smoothness—at least visually—of the photograph also has the opposite effect, foregrounding (literally) the *facture’s* three-dimensionality. Interference notwithstanding, these images still operate as self-portraits—but as

self-portraits that schematize “the difference between a diagram and a photograph and a mark which is simply sensuous paint,” as Hamilton says in his 1969 essay “Photography and Painting.”¹

For Hamilton that difference lay in the “how” not the “what.” “Photography is a medium with its own conventions though we tend to treat its products as a truth less flexible than hand-done art,” he wrote two years prior, in “Notes on Photographs,” his point being that belief in this distinction was at best ill-informed, at worst naïve.² Juxtaposing paint to photograph makes the argument that both are systems of mark-making; photographs just hide it better. Consequently, what these self-portraits depict is not the artist but rather the difference between the artist and the image—which difference is precisely *not* qualitative. Meeting Hamilton in real life would differ substantially from viewing a self-portrait. However, on Hamilton’s theory, which of these experiences is “truest” or “most authentic” is down to opinion, not fact, given Hamilton’s considerable scepticism regarding both truth and authenticity. (It seems entirely predictable that Hamilton was emerging as an artist while Erving Goffman was writing *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*—an early and influential exploration of the idea that the social self is a performance).

Nor, on this theory, is there any “outside” to these systems of mark-making. What’s true of visual art also applies to every other register of communication—literature, say. (Whether Hamilton read the Swiss linguist Saussure or picked up Saussure’s ideas from his milieu, there are strong affinities.) Thus, if the brush strokes in Hamilton’s self-portraits act as scare-quotes around those images, Phillip Spectre takes that same role in *Introspective*. For the name is a pseudonym for Hamilton, positioning him in the third person in order to square the circle created

when an artist is both a control freak and convinced of their significance (how better to guard against your well-deserved biography being a hatchet job than to write it yourself), while allowing for intermittent dry humour. On a half-done suite of prints for Joyce’s *Ulysses*: “While there has been no decision about the project being set aside as unfinished, there is little expectation that the series of nineteen large plates will be completed” (21). And the name is its own joke, of course, since “Spectre” is indeed a figment. But it’s also a description, for what else is Hamilton (or anyone) but a cobbling together of pre-existing scraps and clichés—to paraphrase the philosopher Michel Foucault (another Hamilton contemporary), “author-effect,” not “author.” (The book remained unfinished at Hamilton’s death and is published as he left it, blank pages and all.)

Certainly, anyone hoping for a well-developed picture of Hamilton’s life should look elsewhere than this book, though it starts out like a conventional biography, with anecdotes about his parents, upbringing, and schooling that may well be true but read as if invented (key example: a fortuitous encounter at a child’s art competition with “Sir Guy Dawber,” a name that sounds made-up for comic effect in this context, but a real architect nonetheless). However, the focus quickly narrows to concentrate almost exclusively on blow-by-blow accounts of the genesis and execution of many of Hamilton’s major projects: from his involvement in the influential London exhibitions *Growth and Form* (1951) and *This is Tomorrow* (1956, and the context for his *Just what is it that makes today’s home so different...?* collage), to his early series *Hers is a lush situation* (1957–1964) through to *I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas* (1967–1971) and *Swinging London* (1967–1968) as his career takes off and then, as it winds down, on to his efforts at political engagement (*Medal of Dishonour*,

2008; *Shock and Awe*, 2010) and institutional critique (*The Saensbury Wing*, 1999–2000; *Untitled*, 2011).

The book does glance to the side, however, and some of those looks are exceptionally interesting—particularly, the huge efforts that Hamilton put into reconstructing Duchamp's *Large Glass* (along with organizing and translating Duchamp's associated notes) and conserving and relocating Kurt Schwitters' *MerzBarn*. Other sidebars, though, are less well-considered. Early on, for example, Hamilton describes being booted from the Royal Academy in part because of his irreverence toward Augustus John. Yet their respective autobiographies show that, in one way at least, Hamilton overestimates his difference from John: both married and started families young; both lost their first wives very early (John through illness, Hamilton through a horrifying car accident); and both recount these and subsequent relationships with disconcerting insouciance. In Hamilton's case, having briefly mentioned Terry O'Reilly's death and the subsequent generosity of his mother-in-law relocating to his house to help with his two young children, Hamilton quickly moves on to the first of a series of visits to Teeny and Marcel Duchamp in Spain—and that's the last acknowledgement we read of the considerable support Hamilton must have had to raise two children while deeply engaged in his career, including regularly traveling throughout Europe and North America.

Indeed, John's offhandedness is less surprising, since he never claimed to be anything but an incorrigible bounder.³ By contrast, Hamilton's efforts to sympathize with feminism exacerbate the situation. Discussing the negative response to his painting *Pin-up* (1961), he writes, "Hamilton thought of his painting as a demonstration of support for feminism but the feminists were not amused. Later, when discarding the bra became for

a while symbolic of the rejection of the macho view of women, the artist felt vindicated" (133). So much so, apparently, that in the last fifteen years of his life, young, naked women routinely populated his images aimed at institutional critique (*The Passage of the Bride*, 1998–1999; the afore-mentioned *Saensbury Wing*; *Chiara & chair*, 2004; *FlorVence*, 2004–2005; *Untitled*, 2011) while Hamilton continued to profess being at a loss regarding this negative reaction (as in a 2003 conversation with Carles Guerra).⁴

Title notwithstanding, that is to say, this book isn't especially introspective—or circumspect. With his writing as with his art, Hamilton wants to hold his audience at bay, to push us away, and so his prose displays the same "anti-style" style used by many other artists (particularly male artists) of his generation who also wrote prolifically, such as Dan Graham or—even more so—Donald Judd. But this impulse sits uneasily with the knot Hamilton twists himself into over his worship of Duchamp. How to be a follower of someone who detested having followers? Be an anti-follower. So, if Duchamp sought to produce art that denied the retina, then the most Duchampian of post-Duchampian gestures, the greatest homage to Duchamp would be to do the opposite: make art that appealed to the retina. However, that positions Hamilton as currying favour with his audience—the refusal of which is what he valued in Duchamp in the first place.

Hamilton's failure to resolve this issue, or to live fully in the paradoxes that he meticulously cultivated, means this book is not one of the more engaging artists' autobiographies that I've read (and I've read dozens). However, for those with the patience to work through it, *Introspective* reveals that Hamilton contributed to post-war modernism far more substantially than we tend to realize. I was particularly taken with his discussion of *Lux 50* (1979),

in which he collaborated with engineers at the Lux audio corporation to produce an image of one of their high-end amplifiers that also is a fully-functional amp—Joseph Kosuth redux, except that it goes far beyond anything that Kosuth imagined. And it nicely captures the animating spirit of Hamilton's art and writing: not especially interested in artists or art, except insofar as they promote the right of the most mundane objects—toasters, toilet paper, vacuum cleaners—to be seen. ¶

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1. "Photography and painting" (1969), rep. in *Richard Hamilton*, exh. cat. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1973), 50.

2. "Notes on Photographs" (1967), rep. in *Richard Hamilton*, *ibid.*, 56.

3. I discuss this point in my review of *The Good Bohemian: the letters of Ida John*, *Life Writing* 17 no. 4 (Fall 2020): 613–616.

4. "Deleted Scenes: Richard Hamilton," 2003, <https://rwm.macba.cat/en/extra/richard-hamilton-deleted-scenes>, accessed February 1, 2021.

Anthony W. Lee
**The Global Flows of Early Scottish
Photography: Encounters in
Scotland, Canada, and China**
Montreal and Kingston: McGill-
Queen's University Press, 2019

344 pp. 193 colour illus.
\$ 55.00 (cloth) ISBN 9780773557130

Catherine Stuer

Anthony Lee's new book is a beautifully written, richly engaging account of three sets of early Scottish photographers and their relations to the globalizing forces of modernity and imperialism. His three chapters track these "global flows" as they transformed the lives of the photographers and the subjects they encountered on the Scottish coast just outside Edinburgh, in