



Une soirée à Combray

Gérard Bertrand

Imaginary Scenography

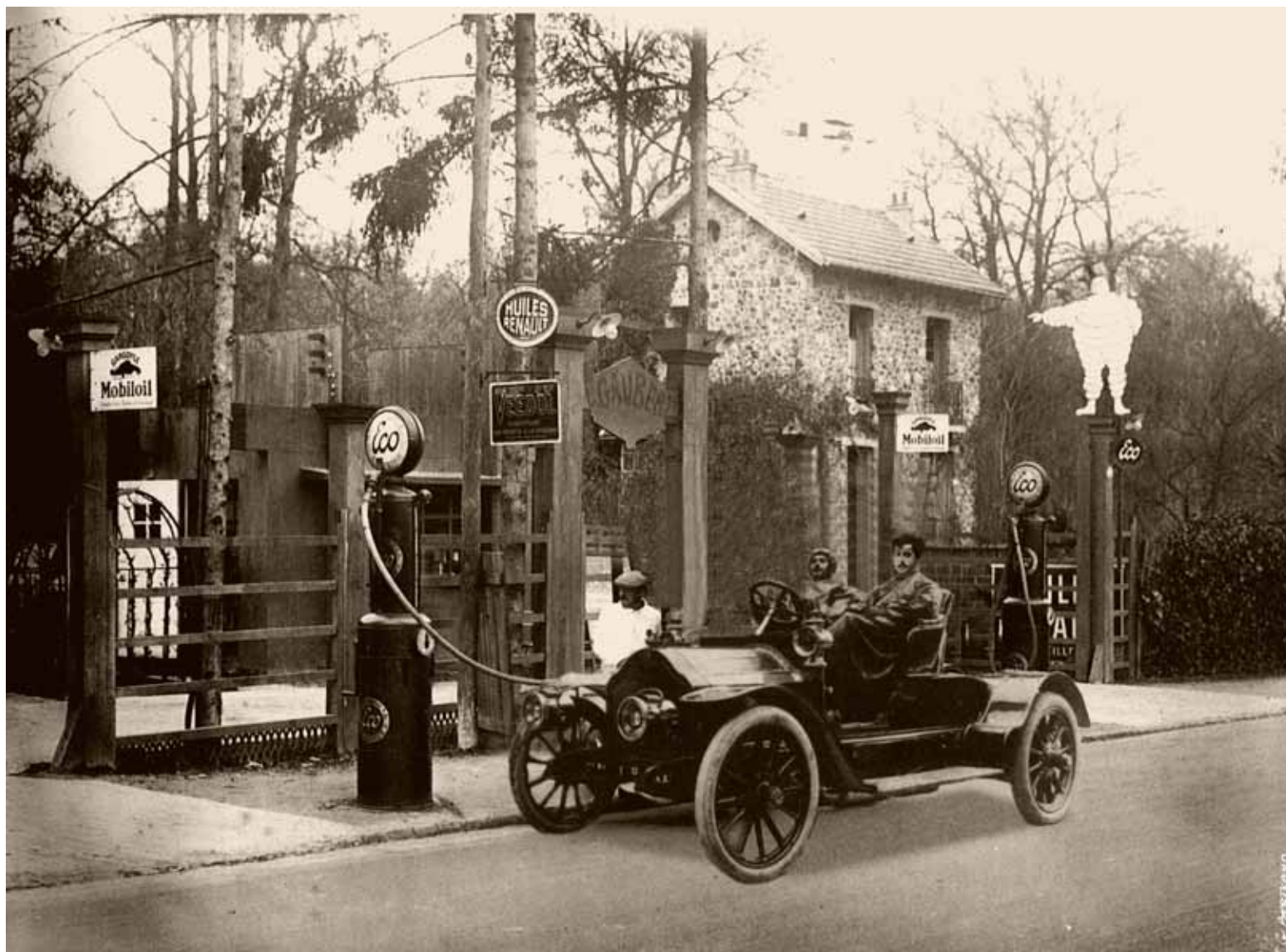


G. BERTRAND









© Gerard Bertrand, *En Normandie, avec Agostinelli*

Do not move! Kafka comes through here... Do not move forward! Look, there is Proust... Turn slowly around! Hitchcock is emerging from your shadow... Be careful, others will follow tomorrow. Little by little, the dream has slipped into a disturbing reality, and under your feet, swinging softly, the references of reason topple over in infinite astonishment.

The image is registered on the screen, the virtual meditation of Gérard Bertrand is offered to be deciphered: an enigma to unveil, a riddle to be solved, a spell to be exorcised. Under the penalty, and don't you doubt it, of being left for eternity on the uncertain edge between confusion and desire.

Questioning is essential before this familiar and intangible congregation. What are these characters doing here and at this moment, these characters which have emerged from a faraway memory? They seem to belong to everybody, icons placed there on the roads of history, speechless witnesses of an old-fashioned subject, such as the statues of our public interior gardens. Only one among them, without a doubt the most mischievous one, crosses in the blink of an eye over the cinema screen, expected like an old accomplice.⁽¹⁾

Be cautious, maybe, or, on the contrary, be eager to emphasise the confusion, Bertrand willingly accounts for the constraints he imposes on himself: a strict order would introduce respectability in a universe

which flees from rationality from the moment in which the symbolic texture of the image seems to get vaguer. The allegedly regulating numbers (number of images, identical formats, photographic tonality for every series) would they be vested with some kind of numerological spell? With some kind of mysterious divisibility? Why might they not be the result of one of those exhilarating Dadaist happenstances, like for some of the renowned predecessors? After all, is not the questioning more valuable than an argued answer? Are not we constantly surrounded by interrogation signs that indicate our progress? We must admit that through his artistic gesture Bertrand adds to the big mystery. And the lure works... Extracted from a false oversight, its protagonists return a little triumphant, insistent and strange, as if reprogrammed by the multiple manipulations of the visual artist.

Because it really is a sequence of rigorous forms, trajectories, matters, shadows and lights, which testify to a unique perspective and, in particular, to a very special attraction to the architecture, the urban environment, favourable to long travellings of receding lines, to the inextricable tangle of frameworks, overhead arches... and, as leitmotiv, the cube perspective of the Quattrocento, under the appearance of the interior scene, which has become the stage of the theatre.⁽²⁾

Because it is about our familiar, panoramic memory, expanded in the instant, in turn linked in sculptural

snare, the fantasised anecdotes, the subjects of a parallel world in black and white, in which honour and mystery run alongside love and protean culture.

But this unceasing pitching of reason—orchestrated by the learned architecture of the visual artist who draws his symbolic artefacts from the pixels—thus becomes all the more formidable: the dream is kaleidoscopic; the fleeting nightmare can turn viscous and brutal.

The “onlooker” is seized in these certainties, the captive of an infinite network of continuity shots, rays of light, absurd perspectives, incoherent scales, leading towards the frontiers of the tangible and the presence. Kafka, Freud, Proust, Hitchcock are well identified, but the memory is questioned. Is it about an injunction to reread a story that might have escaped us or has the author deceptively turned the order of the pages of a book with detachable pages upside down?

The endless questioning inexorably creates the “sleep of reason” (painfully experienced by Goya) or rather that ephemeral instant which makes it slip from the awakening into the unconscious state of falling asleep. This fragment of a delicious time, where the head balances, where the eyes open up to the inside, where the sick person forgets his suffering and where the mysterious enigmas of the thought go to get regenerated.



The "Go More"



© Gerard Bertrand, *Un retour à Venise*

Once these observations are made and the confusion has been analysed, it is mandatory to return to the author and the implemented means: the eye, combined with the tools of modernity, which are the camera and the computer. No doubt that these “image machines” have undergone some derisive manipulations in order to emit resonances and disharmonies, like those “prepared” pianos that creak and fascinate at the same time.

We would have understood; the image only exists in the eye or rather only his eye is capable of thus dissecting this complex and polysemic reality. It is, in fact, his entire culture which surfaces and starts to fertilise the chosen prey: he spreads a precipitate—in the chemical sense of the term—of life through the image which he has built through centres of attraction, his angers, his gluttony, his nostalgia, his cutting humour. Thus, he develops an alchemy of a double meaning: he seems to discover himself, while at the same time he has created a communication tool of learned richness.

He develops, while doing this, some kind of introspection to the extent that recomposing the image (in particular, in other series) - using his own words - requires a long effort of memorial and encyclopaedic research of interventions on the lights, the textures, matching with its universe. Bertrand seems at the same time to be summoned and disclosed through the initial image as acting like a developer.

And in this the approach appears in all the magnificent uselessness of the creation: this insatiable and voracious quest which only leads to himself along a looped journey with limits indefinitely pushed away...

If writing is a progress towards and through oneself, the instructions for caution which I expressed in my first lines also apply, I know that now, to Bertrand himself, discreetly concealed by the shadow of his phantoms.

And, thus, it is advisable to return from these images, which are alternately faded or richly coloured⁽³⁾, in which the harrowing saturation can make place for void vertiges, like when we come back from a journey side-stepping the narrative. Only the words of silence can accompany the commotion of the astonishment, and when the liberating word returns, it will be in order to report a new personal story of an additional knowledge within the human experience, but also to apologise for having dared to see from within through the forbidden oculus of the shameless voyeurism, “Farewell! I have seen much further than was allowed ...” It is quite possible that Nietzsche’s turn has come to become the centre point of a new theatricality, because it is the awaited image and the one which tends to prevail in its potential virtuality, such as a never achieved immaterial frontier.

I can even imagine that through a densification of the means and the thought, one single initial image could

be infinity recomposed in multiple avatars, as in many mirrors of curiosity that are always aware and of the passing time.

But that cannot be, because the obvious prevails and the shy injunction weakens: Bertrand would not know how to be registered in any ghostly logic. From now on, I know that I will pay attention to future appearances.

TEXT BY JACQUES REVERDY

- (1) The 3 Albums devoted to Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, Alfred Hitchcock and *The Encounters* with Julien Gracq.
- (2) The series *Photopictus*.
- (3) The series *Fortuitous encounters* (those in colour).

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