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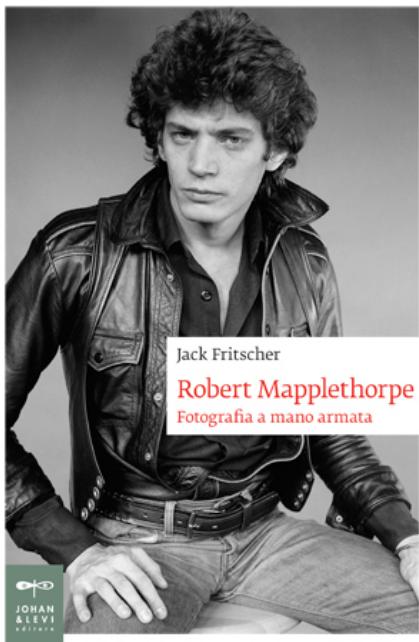
EVOLUTIONS AND REVOLUTIONS IN THE FUTURE, IN THE PRESENT AND IN THE PAST OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC



Michele Smargiassi

17 OCT 2016

Am-Mapplethorpe, what a metaphor!



The politically incorrect question is: are we sure that in order to appreciate Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs, I must be made aware, through detailed descriptions, of his sexual practices?

Agree, even extreme homoeroticism was his art, his life, his obsession and his commodity. But then why does no one tell me in the same detail how they behaved *with women* in the bedroom, or in other places of their choice, Helmut Newton or Nobuyoshi Araki (if anyone did, forgive me, I missed it)?

Is following step by step the transformation of lived eroticism into figurative eroticism a philological duty only if the artist is gay? Maybe. Perhaps in the specific case of Mapplethorpe, yes.

I bought the book on Mapplethorpe written by Jack Fritscher (editor, writer, journalist, protagonist of the American gay scene of the seventies) for my mania to read everything I can about photography, but with the vague fear of having to face one of those gossip books written in tow by a deceased star and modeled on the pattern "X and I were lovers, so only I can tell you who the real X was".

Well, after all it is also this, but it is also much more and I do not regret the 28 euros. It is not a biography, rather "a detective story" but of an unfinished investigation, a chaotic mass of provocations meditations clues testimonies memories narcissisms intuitions, *pop effect*, *beat writing*, it is a book to read, it comes from another world, chronologically and ideologically speaking, is a book that attacks you with a pandering desire to scandalize the self-styled *liberal* white heterosexual, mixed with the well-placed presumption of making you sincerely understand that what a self-styled *liberal* white heterosexual thinks about Mapplethorpe is more or not all wrong.

And if you trust Fritscher, who is after all a great son - of his time, the well-founded doubt that you have not understood much about Mapplethorpe will come to you. There will be the doubt, which has come to me, that we straight white self-styled liberals are a product of Mapplethorpe.

In the sense that he was able to convince us to defend by sword from the persecutions of his censors what he in reality was not and did not want to be, that is an artist-esthete ("Ah, the *perfect* scale of his platinum grays!" - I must I said it too), or a fake provocateur who uses leather pants open on the buttocks as abstract metaphors, the erect members as metonymies of pistils of flowers, the sadomasochistic whips threaded (I can't write it) as purified sublimations and so on and so on.

Well, reading I am quite convinced that he was not a brave defender of taboos, an artist *engagé* in the name of freedom and gay rights who sublimated provocation by holding it as a weapon of struggle against traditional morality. Mapplethorpe *really* wanted to disturb. He was also reproached by many homosexuals (in the book, referred to as "conformist queers").

Fritscher dismisses all the alibis with some satisfaction . Fishing here and there between the pages:

It's kind of fun to read what straight people write about Mapplethorpe, scrambling into mirrors with clumsy results to clear the leathersex photographs or nudes of color models.

Whoever defended Robo **implicitly defended himself. Few impliedly realized that Mapplethorpe, in his bigotry, was very similar to Senator Helms. His personal views on race and gender were on par with those prevailing in North Carolina before the Civil War.**

Robert Mapplethorpe was never politically correct for a single moment in his life.

He was not a free spirit nor a free thinker. To tell the truth, Robert was an intolerant crypto-republican, so women, blacks and gays had to stay in their place.

Robert discovered that the camera was an easy tool of power in the incestuous world of art, magazines and fashion, made of kissing in the wind and licking ass.

Robert's only soul image was the dramatization of his own body. Gays, he treated them as curious objects to be documented.

And it rages, hitting the mark:

If he did to women what he did to men, there would be no liberal to defend him from Senator Helms.

In short, his hagiographer, Mapplethorpe tells us, or you take it all, raw and true, without making excuses, or that Mapplethorpe you appreciate is just a mental *trip* of yours that he would hate, with which he surely played.



Norman Seef: Mapplethorpe with Patti Smith. Photo © by Norman Seeff, gc

What if he's right? Let's think about it. What if the Mapplethorpe we like (who likes it, of course) to us straight whites who want to be liberal wasn't just how we built it?

What if he wisely bluffed with us ? Let's try to convince ourselves that *he built us* as the politically correct audience that allowed him to sell as refined metaphors that transcend any sensual drive in art his images instead born to be convinced, lustfully homo-sensual, *fetish* and *leather* and even beyond (I won't translate what *scat* means , but Fritscher assures that Robert photographed that too). In other words, visual equivalents and iconic extensions of his personal explosion of vital lust.

I believe what perfidious Fritscher insinuates is true : his straight admirers, and in particular women, lull themselves without admitting it into the belief that Mapplethorpe was in

reality an undeclared heterosexual, that his works, read carefully and cultured, hide a consoling ethics, that after all his was a mischievous game of transgression, redeemed by aesthetics.

In short, all of us readers who try not to be disturbed by Mapplethorpe's visions hope that the restlessness that assails us when we defend his most indefensible and outrageous photographs can be miraculously appeased by some Sublime Revelation. For want of better, the most banal of all: "But he was an artist!".

What if "the photographer everyone thinks they understand" was, as this book tries to convince us, a genius, instinctive, unintentional cultural terrorist?

The Mapplethorpe that comes out of this book is in reality a character with nebulous and contrasting outlines, cultured and ignorant, shy and cynical, impetuous and calculating, materialist and poet. But perhaps not even *this* Mapplethorpe is the real one, it is only the one left in the nostalgic and in love heart of one of his "widowers".

Perhaps the real Mapplethorpe exists only as a painful, euphoric and sacrificial metaphor of a roaring decade, the pre-AIDS seventies, a hypersexual and doped decade of ephemeral freedom, but also hungry for paradoxical innocence, in short, a circle of naughty children on the brink. of the ravine where shortly after everything, women's emancipation, gay rights, racial liberation, has plunged back to the bottom.

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Tag: Aids, fotografia erotica, gay, Helmut Newton, Jack Fritscher, Nobuyoshi Araki, omosessualità, Robert Mapplethorpe

Scritto in *arte, censura, dispute, erotica, Venerati maestri, 6 Commenti*, script blocking software is interfering with this page.

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6 COMMENTI

zioluc 25 ottobre 2016 alle 14:36

Curioso, sono etero e non sono un conoscitore particolarmente approfondito di Mapplethorpe ma non ho mai avuto di lui un'immagine edulcorata o politicamente corretta, anche se trovo che l'estetica "redentrice" abbia un ruolo pesante nella sua opera. Consiglio vivamente il libro "Just Kids" di Patti Smith, anche se non centrato sulla fotografia.

Luca 18 ottobre 2016 alle 15:45

Chi ha esposto un po di lavori propri in giro e chiesto pareri sarà certamente al corrente di come il "pubblico" interpreti in modo del tutto inaspettato e personale tali lavori. Voglio dire che alla fine è difficile non rendersi conto che la creazione della propria opera la fa anche il fruttore. Per cui non mi stupisce di scoprire che Mapplethorpe pensasse diversamente da come pensano coloro che interpretano le sue fotografie. Se le fotografie non fosse una galassia plurisenso non avrebbe nemmeno ragione di esistere, o forse come un semiologo direbbe, la fotografie è polisemiotica.

marco guerriero 18 ottobre 2016 alle 15:41

La vita degli autori era legata alla vita delle opere quando l'autore era vivo. Da morto la sua storia è indifesa, e chiunque la può cambiare, lo stesso autore prima di morire può depistare i biografi o gli agiografi lasciando interviste o confessioni controverse(tipo Ser Ciapellotto prima di morire...come lo vidi nel film di PPP)rimane quindi qualcosa di veramente incerta

Michele Smargiassi 18 ottobre 2016 alle 08:55

Dal romanticismo in poi, la vita dell'artista è ufficialmente parte della sua opera. Prima, lo era di fatto, fa bene Marco a ricordare Vasari. Se l'arte è una relazione fra esseri umani, non credo sia possibile reprimere la domanda: ma chi è che mi sta parlando? Libero ovviamente il lettore di distinguere fra l'uomo e l'opera e di ignorare il primo se gli piace così.

// Fotocrate

marco guerriero 17 ottobre 2016 alle 21:45

C'è una buona parte di studi e scritti di storia dell'arte che si interessa alla vita degli artisti, addirittura vengono psicoanalizzati anche secoli dopo la loro morte. Poi ci sono i cronisti di gossip proprio specializzati in artisti(il primo fu un certo Vasari mi pare...). Saltano fuori curiosità e aneddoti, gusti sessuali e abitudini alimentari, convinzioni religiose politiche morali e chi più ne ha è più ne metta. addirittura Gli stessi artisti si infilano nelle proprie opere, ci mettono la loro faccia per dichiarare un proprio stato d'animo, una convinzione filosofica, il proprio punto di vista. La vita degli artisti è sempre la loro ultima opera d'arte credo, ma spetta ai posteri svelarla anche un po' alla volta.non conosco il testo di Jack Fritscher ma credo che sia un buon inizio per chi voglia interessarsi a questo artista, nel senso per chi voglia scrivere di lui.

personalmente io la penso come @ivano mercanzin....ma chi se ne frega.

Mi piacciono le sue foto da un punto di vista tecnico, da un punto di vista dei significati. Era vitale l'elemento scioccante e lui lo sapeva proporre con le sue opere. A me interessano soprattutto le opere che ha prodotto lui non tanto gli aneddoti sulla sua vita. Quest'ultima è un'opera ormai persa, e tutto quello che si dice sulla vita di un uomo dopo la sua morte è materia da becchini per me. Ma tant'è che la gente ci sguazza su queste cose.

IVANO MERCANZIN 17 ottobre 2016 alle 19:48

La domanda, politicamente scorrettissima, è: ma siamo sicuri che per apprezzare le fotografie di Robert Mapplethorpe io debba essere messo al corrente, attraverso dettagliate descrizioni, delle sue pratiche sessuali?

La mia risposta , politicamente scorretta è : MACHISSENFREGA!!!, non solo dei gusti sessuali ma nemmeno del gusto dei cibi, degli abiti , delle letture , nè altro , ma cosa può esserci di interessante nel conoscere la vita degli artisti, fotografi, pittori, musicisti , letterari : sapere che Montale faceva il contabile in un'azienda cambia qualcosa nella sua grandezza? o che Giacomelli era un tipografo, o che Kafka lavorava in una compagnia di assicurazione, e molti altri ancora, tralasciando lo spirito di "avventura" di Picasso etc. valutiamo e apprezziamo gli artisti per quello che riescono a creare e per il nostro stupore nell'ammirare le loro opere...il resto lo lasciamo al gossip e a chi di questo si bea.....

LASCIA UN COMMENTO

Nome (obbligatorio)



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