

BETWEEN TWO : SUBURBIA | Stuart Morgan

Surface is the stuff of photography, an art which poses particular problems for the literal-minded. Where is a photograph? It consists of dark specks suspended permanently on a piece of paper, and though the paper can be seen as sensual in its own right, the image exists to be looked through as much as at. Change the scale or the mode of presentation and looking must also change. Looking for, rather than looking at, is required in Thomas Florschuetz's *Suburbia* series, one feature of which is concentration on double or folded images, a reminder first that we have two eyes, second that they work in collaboration and third that looking is never arbitrary: that it always consists of looking *for*. Florschuetz's cibachrome diptychs play constantly on the quality of doubleness as well as on the rectilinearity of the photographic image. One other feature is relevant: the developing and printing processes which mean that no two images are alike. Untitled (Echo), for example, plays on this feature, which James Joyce called "*the ineluctable modality of the visible*". A curve of an ankle or wrist, half in shadow, could be read as a waist or part of an arm. (Not enough is revealed to enable the viewer to make a decision.) Curves are fattened, muscle less apparent. In a triptych each of three separate, similar images paraded before us undermines the ability to judge the others. In particular, direction and force become confused; a pair of feet, oddly illuminated, seem dysfunctional, grotesque or simply wrong.

Feet and legs play a large part in *Suburbia*, an exercise in virtuose cropping. Untitled (Diagonal), for example, uses feet again, with the same rim of hardened, discoloured skin around the heel. Arranged like a four-part flag, the practically toeless feet come to seem elongated, baggy, diseased, most like a display of vegetables or other shapes which have grown from the centre out. There is some-thing wretched about them, and something important, as important as grotesque in ancient times. Grotesque need not be wretched, however, as the role of the androgyne in Greek culture reminds us. The idea of bisexuality, of drifting sexual definition, is present in Triptych # 67, with its disconcerting elegance, and reference to a torso. In *Suburbia*, photography means cropping, above all. This leads to a redefinition of the subject, enhanced by magnification. (Here his inspiration might be Karl Blossfeldt, whose close-upsofflowersin particular delighted the Surrealists). As microscopes gained in power, this experience became commonplace. In Florschuetz, it serves as a source of beauty, for strangeness is a kind of beauty too. Most disturbing, perhaps, is the feeling of human presence, whether the particular body part itself is recognised or not. These are not medical studies, nor are they domestic photographs; they

are so large that the idea of a flimsy joke is out of the question, but not so large that they become monumental. Yet conclusions are hard to draw. After all, the function of the scale is to confuse.

One area of confusion is focus. In a series based on male body hair, the patterns that it makes and the quality of the skin from which hairs protrude combine to form a decorative frieze. Only areas less in focus might remind viewers that this is not "pure" abstraction. The motif is water; the way the drag of the tides is recorded on the beach as the tide goes out and leaves its traces. All decoration derives from nature - the clouds, the waves, the wind - and Florschuetz reminds us of this in his work. Once again there are hints that the human body is the subject: the slight shadow caused by the curvature of the limbs, for example. In one work in particular, Triptych # 70, in which the leg hair has been dragged in different directions, the result is expressionistic, a register of personal turmoil. Perhaps the most conventionally beautiful of the series is Diptych # 65: beads of sweat dangling from either pubic or underarm hair, the sudden loss of focus around it strongly reminiscent of dew on hedges in the early morning. Here the sudden loss of focus softens the entire composition and makes identification even more difficult than usual. The result seems less a photograph than a sculpture. The fact is that in Florschuetz's work, photography imitates sculpture as well as operating on a sculptural scale. The result is far from being a hybrid; on the contrary, it is a new medium. Other members of the same suite take as their task the mimicry first of human gestures but second, and more remarkably, the evocation of human emotions. Part of a hairy leg, between ankle and kneebone, touches the underside of a foot. Both look worn and used. Two heels appear, without even the toes that should accompany them, and the violence of the way the toes have been cropped leads to an uncomfortable pairing. Untitled (Total), in five almost identical parts, gives the impression of a leg-lock in wrestling. Each slightly different, the elements suggest some kind of slow torture, on the one hand, or, in metaphorical terms, a relationship in which one half is immobilised by the other. The growing oddness of the cropping is confirmed by Diptych # 160, a two-part portrait divided vertically, with the result that a portion of the face which is its subject is lost. Attempts to read the two parts as a whole are permanently defeated by the fact that in the central, vertical division the tip of the nose and one nostril are both lost. And, though the eye tends to elide this to make the expected image, *105x160cm c-prints*, the focus on the right-hand side is stronger than the left. The effect returns the viewer to babyhood, initial recognition of a face thrust forward, vast and smiling.

