



The Minimalist Conception of the Present in Sundborn or Days of Light of Philippe Delerm*

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CONSIDERED by critics as one of the representatives of "positive minimalists", Philippe Delerm is interested, in most of his novels and short stories, in bringing out the sensuality of simple moments in life and in representing the everyday life that is often associated with the celebration of the joy of life. That is why the importance is mainly given to the tireless quest for happiness, however stealthy it may be. This perception of life reflects a minimalist philosophy: you have to be simple, enjoy the present moment and enjoy accessible things, instead of wasting your life looking for happiness elsewhere. The illustration is all given to us by *Sundborn or Days of Light* (1996), a hybrid work that positions the narrative at the confluence of the diary, biographical fiction and epistolary, where the emphasis is placed on the happy moments experienced by the narrator, Ulrik Tercier, within a small community of Scandinavian painters who came to Grez-sur-Loing in search of light in 1884.

This article aims to answer the following question: how does the minimalist ethic, which is a specific way of being in the world, consecrating the present as a unique time and the day as the only possible space for fulfilment, transform into a true aesthetic?

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In studying the narrative processes used in *Sundborn or Days of Light*, we have noticed that the first-person narrative is articulated around two key dates: 1919, which is the time of enunciation, coinciding with the death of the Swedish painter and main character in the story, Carl Larsson, and 1884, which corresponds to the beginning of the analeptic narrative. The overall structure is circular in the sense that the story opens and closes on the same date: January 1919. The confrontation of the time of the narrative with that time in history has led us to deduce that it is a retrospective narrative in the form of juxtaposed sequences that are fragments of the past, chosen by a selective memory and marked by temporal distortions. Indeed, the narrator, source of the gaze and narrative, manipulates time and arranges memories according to his perception of things and feelings: he eternalizes the moments he likes to remember and eliminates the moments he wants to forget. Diegetic fiction is thus orchestrated by the perception of a subject who is only interested in moments of happiness, only in "days of light" that he never stops stretching in order to eternalize and stop them.

Nevertheless, this intention to fix the euphoria of the moment is not only achieved by means of a circular and discontinuous narrative but also by other means of representation, in this case painting and photography.

These two art forms are not only present in the text as themes, but also permeate the narrator's viewpoint. The latter uses photographic techniques to frame and fix his images as if they were photos taken by a photographer. He also draws inspiration from the impressionist pictorial principles that his painter friends apply to their canvases. We can highlight, for example, the subjectivity of vision and the primacy of sensation since everything is told and described through a subjective perspective that seeks to capture fleeting impressions. It is in fact the primacy of sensation, a return to nature translated by the "theory of the innocent eye", attaching itself to the name of Jean Ruskin who influenced the impressionists and who is a member of the pre-Raphaelite movement. Ulrik paints those moments he remembers with the intensity and innocence of the childhood gaze in order to restore them in more or less fresh images. Reminiscence allows him to taste again and more intensely the memories he has had with his friends, to the point that present and past merge.

Nevertheless, behind this sensitive look to light and detail, the main artist is Delerm himself. By wanting to paint with words and write the sensation, the writer makes simple moments in life very beautiful paintings. Like an impressionist painter who represents the world with small, fuzzy and suggestive touches, Delerm manages to deploy a vague lyricism of everyday life and to bring out the sensuality of simple

moments in life. His writing also competes with photography and borrows techniques from it, such as the technique of enumerating photographic snapshots that promotes immediate representation and an impressive grasp of the world. Indeed, Delerm uses it in his text to describe in detail the moments of "simple pleasure" which is a feeling of well-being, contentment and fullness that Ulrik enjoys when he is surrounded by his Scandinavian friends or when he is in a pleasant place. The juxtaposition of these innocuous moments captured according to the photographic model contributes, in fact, to the crumbling of everyday life and gives the escape of time a certain form of immobility. This proves that Delerm's main objective is to stop time, to "lock it in a bubble", because time is reduced to a fragile and ephemeral moment from which it is a question of extracting the entire flavor. This led us to deduce that, in *Sundborn or the days of light*, behind the banality of everyday life lays a bitter reality and behind apparent hedonism lays a real anguish: it is that happiness is fleeting and never lasts.

Keywords— Happiness, minimalism, painting, photography, present.

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