The Disappearance of Objects in "Surmodernity": From Object-images to Meta-objects

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In times of "surmodernity" where simulacra assume an appearance of reality, where novelty turns into the mere repetition of the same, the status of contemporary objects becomes extremely complex, if not entirely illusory.[1] What then defines the specificity of objects—or object-signs—in a world highly dominated by screen culture a world perhaps already eclipsed by hyperrealism, and now, by virtual reality?[2] At this stage of simulation, can objects even exist? The extreme velocity of the diffusion of information on a planetary scale has already put into question the very existence of events and images. As images paradoxically attempt to achieve a greater effect of reality, they dissolve into a mere nuclear succession: "An image is no longer sufficient as proof of reality; others are necessary to reinforce it: there where reality has disappeared, images proclaim that they exist because they themselves reproduce reproductions," writes Youssef Ishaghpour (31). Similarly Jean Baudrillard has demonstrated that, in fact, the Gulf war never really happened and, in the same line of thought, that the year 2000 may well never arrive: "history has disappeared because we will never be able to detach [it] from [its] model of perfection, which is at the same time [its] model of simulation, of [its] forced assumption in a transgressed truth, which is also [its] point of inertia and [its] point of no-return" (Kroker 40).[3] This "post-historical" condition not only reverses progress into routine and immobility, but expands to encompass a trivialization and cultural obliteration of the very means by which we apprehend everyday life. Language itself takes on the appearance of atomized advertising discourse. Marc Augé, using the example of newsletters printed by travel agencies,

asserts that history and exoticism function as quotes in a written text (138). The homogenization of information, history, and spectacle has reduced images, language, and objects to atoms of a sole signifying process of sameness within the make-believe. It is now clear that postulating the end of the object alongside the disappearance of aura and history does not suffice to explain the status of the object in "surmodernity." Indeed, Roland Barthes had already anticipated the end of the object in his study of Robbe-Grillet. Contrary to classical objects, objects in Robbe-Grillet's work, whether taken from the urban environment or from "ordinary surroundings," are bearers of silence. For Barthes, it is precisely this silence that "establishes the object's limit: this slice of tomato in an automat sandwich, described according to Robbe-Grillet's method, constitutes an object without heredity, without associations and without references, a stubborn object rigorously enclosed within the order of its particles, suggestive of nothing but itself, and not involving its reader in a functional or substantial *elsewhere*" (15). Before Robbe-Grillet, Walter Benjamin had already shown that modernity had dismissed the object from its aura and, therefore, from its interiority as well as its exteriority. Void of its referent, the object in modernity ceases to acquire a symbolic value. Bearer of a multiplicity of meanings, the object is allegorized and its mode of reproducibility corresponds to the circulation of value (as a pure value of exchange) specific to a capitalist system. De-objectified (*dé-chosifié*) and de-formalized, the modern object merges into theatricality.[4] The object in modernity tends to dissolve into a network of broken lines that allow for the infinite multiplication of space. Examples of this are to be found in Edvard Munch's painting of the scream in which the "dialectic of loops and spirals" creates a structural equivalence between pictorial and auditory signs so as to fuse them into a new visible medium, that of the "scream running through nature."[5] Similarly, in *Le Spleen de Paris*, Baudelaire's quest for a new poetic prose aims to level musicality and images by attempting to undo figures and objects into a new rhythmical entity, something Mallarmé later puts into practice.[6]

In modernity, objects inscribe themselves into a fragmentary system of representation (the mode is fetishistic: the part for the whole) and their mode of inscription remains unsteady: the promotion of their optical dimension generates an infinite circulation of signs from one mode of representation to the other, as in *Tableaux parisiens*.[7] This is not only applicable, of course, to the artistic or

the literary object, but to environmental objects as well. Benjamin demonstrated that in the urban space of modernity, objects (such as the enclosed *passages* of Paris) are characterized by a topographical undecidedness; they remain between an outside—the street—and an inside—the building. Their insignificance abolishes the physical space in an infinite network of visual angles, themselves submitted to an allegorical *Pan-Optikum*.[8] Although the object in modernity maintains an optical dominance, it reflects nothing but a closure of the gaze, such as the "inside eyes" Munch refers to concerning his own paintings or the fixed and Medusa-like gaze of Klimt's women.

From objects to image-objects

Even though the status of the object in modernity is defined by the loss of aura and its corollaries, this definition does not suffice to determine precisely the difference between modern and postmodern objects, since the postmodern object also falls under the rubric of the allegorical and the panoptical. In *La Folie du voir* (*The Madness of Seeing*), Buci-Glucksmann emphasizes that both modernity and postmodernity display women's body parts as well as a taste for mirrors and for the mournful. Thus, it would seem difficult from that sole point of view to distinguish between modernstyle, *art nouveau*, surrealism or pop art. However, Jameson reminds us that a clear difference can be seen between Van Gogh's rendition of shoes and the glossy advertising look of Andy Warhol's series of pumps. The distinction that Jameson proposes between the modern and the postmodern object is, therefore, based on the status of the referent. According to him, the referential frame in modernism still remains natural and somehow historical. Indeed, Van Gogh's original model is a real and functional object (connoting peasantry), whereas in postmodernism, the natural frame of reference disappears. Earlier, Barthes had already pointed out that in Robbe-Grillet the analogical background against which objects appear is borrowed from contemporary art, cinema, or new physics. In the fifties, the object was defined by its optical dimension and it is this promotion of the visual that moves the object out of the Euclidean space, thus eliminating both depth and volume. "Flattened" and "thinned," reduced to a mere surface, the object loses all of its substantial qualities. Warhol's paintings also proceed from a flattening and a suppression of the object as an original model. Thus, his

pumps originate from a hyperreal image that is, in fact, a two-dimensional image-object borrowed from an advertising billboard. As in Robbe-Grillet, this image-object has only optical characteristics and its analogical frame is that of mass culture and industrial mass production. Warhol's paintings are neutral ones in which the image-objects represented are also bearers of silence. Confronted by these series of pumps, a can of Campbell's soup, Marilyn Monroe, or the Statue of Liberty, the viewer has nothing to say. Contrary to surrealist objects, these image-objects neither show nor hide anything. Rather than simply pointing to the end of the object they expose a proliferation of images in a fractal or viral modes as Baudrillard would contend.[9]

The example of Van Gogh's shoes helps to underscore a mutation from modernity to postmodernity in the realm of the object, that is to say a passage from the object to the image-object. It would seem, however, that such is not the case of all objects. One finds in modernity and postmodernity a loss of referent, a fragmentary representation inscribed in a mimesis of death generating the closure of the gaze: "le Voir [devient] mémoire de soi, mise en scène répétée d'un Ego mort et désaffecté, qui attend 'l'Etre aux ailes de gaze' [que symbolise l'Angelus Novus de Klee ou celui du Talmud] et se remémore" 'Seeing becomes a memory of self, a repeated staging of a dead and disused Ego that awaits 'the Being with gauze wings' [symbolized by Klee's *Angelus Novus* or that of the Talmud] and that recalls itself' (Buci-Glucksmann 204). The closure of the gaze in this case already points to the disappearance of history.

Magic of the object-image: To name is to see

Modernity already bears the postmodern seal of fragmentary memory, precisely the one generated—according to Buci-Gluksmann—by the Baudelairean palimpsest.[10] In "Le Cygne" ("The Swan"), for example, the objects which define Parisian space have already lost their natural historical frame of reference. The *bric-à-brac* Baudelaire observes is no longer that of Haussmann's construction sites but rather that of image-objects and fictitious places borrowed from literature (e.g. Virgil, Balzac, Hugo).[11]

The disappearance of aura and history is therefore allied to the emergence of a fragmentary memory. It is in this void that the shift from the gaze to the voice takes place, since to name is to see. This generates the mutation of the object into an image-object which is

always spectral or ghostly. In "surmodernity" (i.e. the eighties and nineties) this phenomenon is further accentuated. Baudrillard attributes the end of history not to the disappearance of events but rather to an excess of referents and their fractal diffusion, a diffusion itself submitted to the double dialectic of velocity and inertia. Television provides the best example of this. The overflow of images interrupted by advertising spots freezes the event outside of time. On the one hand, TV mixes images from the past and the future in the ever present. On the other, it equates events (news reporting) with advertisements. One would have a hard time today distinguishing the mere arrival of a camera crew in Somalia ahead of the military from any other image of catastrophy, or even from the Gulf War. One also remembers the military terminology used in cigarette advertisements broadcasted during the Gulf War (e.g. "*Raid* Gauloises, pur et dur" 'Gaulois raid, rough and ready'). Frozen in simulation, the event can never take place nor can it have ever taken place; as Baudrillard says, "news broadcasting is nothing more than an erratic missile searching for its prey but always falling for the decoy" (*La Guerre* 38). Events only acquire their reality at the level of TV commentary. The fractal images and the commentary that accompanies them create a hyperreality.

In the same line of thought, Marc Augé takes the example of French highway signs indicating touristic points of interest to show that these places, as in the case of modernity (except for the fact that now they belong to the realm of the *cliché*), "exist only by the words that evoke them, *non-lieux* 'non-places' in this sense or rather imaginary, banal utopias, clichés. . . . The word, here, creates the image and the product that makes it function" (120). The driver, he explains, does not cross these places: he or she is exempted from looking at them and from crossing them. In Marie Redonnet's *Splendid Hôtel* (1986), whose Franglais title echoes Rimbaud's Splendide Hôtel in *Illuminations*, the "Splendid Hôtel" is in ruin, and only acquires a status because of the neon signs (themselves falling apart) that designate it: "sans ses enseignes au néon qui clignotent dans la nuit, le Splendid ne serait plus le Splendid" 'without the neon lights blinking in the night, the Splendid would no longer be the Splendid' (32/24). The "Splendid" is the *non-lieu* 'non-place' par excellence; it is a place of transit, a building with neither exteriority (the toilets are constantly plugged) nor interiority (it smells of the swamps on which it is built). The "Splendid" is a *hors-lieu* 'place

apart,' a crossroad which, as with high speed trains (*TGV*) or air-planes, is viable solely under the condition that it carry—by means of images and artifacts—the "guest-traveler" into an elsewhere: "Adel se croit au théâtre alors qu'elle est au Splendid"(19) 'Adel thinks she is in the theater when really she is in the Splendid' (12), writes Redonnet. Marc Augé stresses that in "surmodernity," the ethnology of "here" (*l'ici*) is also always that of "elsewhere" (*l'ailleurs*). In other words, "here" belongs to the spectral, or even, in some cases, the astral. One could cite as examples here the space names of cars in the late eighties and early nineties: the Renault *Espace*, the Chevrolet *Astro*, the Mitsubishi *Eclipse*, and luxury cars such as the *Infiniti*, etc. The space terminology creates a kind of virtual object that exists where we cannot see or use it. However, in order to have access to that object, all that is required is to displace it into the *non-lieu* 'non-place' of language.

If postmodern or "supermodern" objects can acquire only a spectral reality (contrary to modern objects), they tend to present a maximum of realism while offering the least possible reality (hyperrealism). Youssef Ishaghpour stresses that the TV image transgresses the basic interdiction that guarantees fiction by forcing the speaker or the character to look at the camera, thus reducing him to the status of a dwarf. Lyotard shows that what characterizes postmodernism is a demand for more and more reality and, consequently, communicability and simplicity. And this, in turn, explains the supremacy of photography to painting and of cinema to literature on the art market. Nowadays, one can even say that another step forward has been taken. Photography is constantly being supplanted by Polaroids or instamatic cameras, as is the case in Jean-Philippe Toussaint's novel *L'Appareil-photo* (*The Camera* 1988), and movies by videos and digitized imagery. The use of digital images brings about a fiction more real than reality itself: virtual reality or the living dream. The sets of George Lucas's *Star Wars* or the liquid robot in James Cameron's *Terminator* are prototypes of absolute hyperrealism: seeing is believing. In a similar manner, the video camera and the Polaroid reproduce objects with a maximum of proximity and a maximum of distance (e.g. miniaturization, fetishization). They either render the image literally erasable (as in the case of Dennis Hopper's Polaroid in *The American Friend*) or they replace it with a network of lines (the video band suppresses the frame). With gigantic digital images, virtual reality attains *telepresence* and reactivates the Warholian dream of the man-machine. Simulation pro-

ceeds from retroaction evolving in the *trans-avant-garde* and grow-
ing in the (so-called) wake of all avant-gardes, while going against
them. To the loss of referents, to the destruction of Cartesian logic
still present in early avant-garde movements, postmodernity op-
poses a maximization of referents and the attempt to reestablish
meaning in the middle of meaninglessness. The less the objects of
daily life convey meaning, the more their frame of reference is in-
serted into a *heterotropic* code; they become familiar to everyday
man, to mass culture. The Campbell's soup can, the Splendid Hotel,
and the highway signs have a spectral dimension due to their
quotational nature, which is borrowed from advertising slogans. In
short, objects in "surmodernity" accomplish Baudrillard's "utopie-
réalisée" 'realized-utopia' where everything uttered (and able to be
uttered) becomes a sign according to a fractal mode, and all of this
in a transaesthetics of banality.

Holography of the object

   If the folding of the gaze over the voice explains the spectral
status of the object in modernism, the folding of the gaze over an
even more fragmented voice in surmodernity allows for a mutation
of objects into image-objects. In "surmodernity" voice is reduced to
a quotational commentary whose prototype is found in advertise-
ment. Consequently, image-objects themselves appear in a
quotational mode. If we take for example Jean-Phillipe Toussaint's
novels, we notice that the narrative progresses in the void created
around a cluster of insignificant objects. These objects put urban
environment, mass culture, and artistic language on the same level.
In *La Salle de bain* (1985) the weather report, the football game,
Monopoly, the dart game, Jasper Johns's targets, and the narrative
are all randomly equated in a neutral rhetoric. Jasper Johns's tar-
gets inscribe themselves in a metonymical relation with these other
mass culture items. More specifically, the dart game that the narra-
tor buys in Venice fuses with Edmondsson's forehead (the narrator's
lover) creating one meaningless image-object (a serial image of a
target) into which the narrator then sticks a dart in order to better
reach emptiness. Jasper Johns's targets, like Warhol's objects, have
no functional value; they are empty symbols saturated with plastic
qualities and a profusion of images that block the gaze and dis-
course. Toussaint's objects are similar to image-objects in pop art.
They have lost all symbolic value. Nonetheless, they are used to fill

the blandness of a narrative constructed around an empty center. In Toussaint's novels, nothing ever happens except for a series of insignificant anecdotes of daily life that are often equated with, and modeled after, advertising slogans and TV narrative: "Peu à peu je commençais à sympathiser avec le barman. . . . L'absence d'une langue commune ne nous décourageait pas. . . . Moser, disait-il. Merckx, faisais-je remarquer au bout d'un moment. Coppi, disait-il, Fausto Coppi" 'Little by little I began to get on well with the barman. . . . The absence of a common language didn't discourage us. . . . Moser, he was saying. Merckx, I remarked after a moment. Coppi, he said, Fausto Coppi' (61). In these novels the only possible poetic function of objects is to fuse and to "thin out" objects, images, and text into a transpoetics and a transaesthetics of banality. No matter what one writes about, objects are a pre-text for writing and for filling the emptiness of the blank page when one no longer has anything to communicate.

Whether in contemporary art, literature, or daily life, the image-object in "surmodernity" deals with the phantasm of holography (to write everything and to put everything into images). The image-object's extreme form, the digitized image, dissolves language into true arithmography. Digital images are of a hybrid nature. They are neither image nor object; they are meta-objects. Digital images belong to a complex corpus, the image-program-machine. Their potential to appear can be endlessly modulated, according to Freudian dream mechanisms: condensation and displacement. One of the favored fields of application of digital images is modern war. The Gulf War has already provided us with multiple examples.

Digital images allow for an extreme manipulation of decor, space, and time. One could make Marilyn Monroe or Humphrey Bogart virtually appear in *Terminator 3*, writes Michel Frodon in the January 30, 1992, issue of *Le Monde*. According to Philippe Quéau virtual reality "represents a Copernican revolution:" if before "we used to revolve around images, now we are going to revolve *within* images" (9). Christian Guillon argues in an ironic fashion that digital images involve a new epistemological break (perhaps today without *epistémé*) since "[digital images] represent a change as important as the invention of perspective by Renaissance painters and will move audiovisual spectacle from the era of representation to that of simulation and sensation" (qtd. in Frodon 23). Nowadays, one can see movies composed entirely of digital images, such as *Starwatcher*. In this film by Moebius—one of the greatest masters of comic strip

art—each image, each character can be manipulated instantly by a data glove. Digital images abolish the frontier between reality and virtual reality and consequently eliminate the viewer. The viewer ceases to be simply a consumer of images and becomes a protagonist. Any move he or she makes implies a definite change in the simulated representation. The viewer can modify virtually at will everything in the spectacle, be it objects or characters. Digital images offer a new aesthetics which is based, as Philippe Quéau points out, on "an intimate hybridization between the body of the spectator-actor and the virtual space in which he or she is submerged" (14). In other words, digital images accomplish what McLuhan would call amputation by media.[12] This new aesthetics, which relies on video games, originated in the comics; it was first promoted by Lucas and Spielberg (Lucas is the founder of Industrial Light and Magic) and is based on speed and effect, on quotation and hypnosis.

In a similar vein, painting turns to the electronic paintbox, to produce images as close as possible to flesh, such as with Pierre Hughes' mutants. In times of simulation, seeing is believing. It is precisely this hallucinatory panopticism that now allows the subject of an experience to travel. From the image simulator of the experimental laboratory at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill to Wim Wenders' *Until the end of the world* or Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, the distance is shortened. In times of interface, not only does the closure of the gaze give birth to virtual reality, but even touch and sensation lose themselves in virtual reality. Meta-objects plunge us into a new hallucinatory space (without chemical drugs) which is far removed from the space of modernity or the avant-garde. What we now see, feel, or touch is the man-machine, the end of aesthetics and even historicity which, as Lyotard and Baudrillard like to point out, does not preclude the risk of reviving conservative modes of representation. Indeed, these modes of representation seem now to give birth to a new rhetoric of obscenity.

The obscene object

In accordance with a viral or fractal mode, the proliferation of signs and their excessiveness create a new obscenity. In an article dedicated to Benetton's advertisements published in the February 1992 issue of the *Nouvel Observateur*, Hervé Guibert asks "Where does obscenity start, in a troubling time where reality and fiction tend to dissolve into reality-shows, where wars are lived directly

like video games, and we are witness to the self-filmed journal of an anguished man with AIDS?" (85). For the first time on French television, Luciano Benetton used the spectacle of horror in order to sell consumers high-priced merchandise marked with the seal of fraternal universalism: "United Colors." Let us remember, however, that during the Gulf War, the United Colors of Benetton were already appearing in the middle of crosses at a military cemetery with the following slogan: "We are all equal in the face of death." In 1992, Benetton exhibited "a rebellious African with a human bone in hand, a corpse bathing in a puddle of blood somewhere in Lebanon, a young man dying of AIDS encircled by his parents, and an inflamed car in the streets of Belfast" ("Benetton" 85). This spectacle of the unwatchable in the united horrors of Benetton intended to "awaken, inform, and alert the consumer" (85). It is a game with death that (as the author of the article announces) forewarns a slump in the sale of Benetton products.

The unwatchable in Benetton advertisements does not consist of a simple rhetoric of horror and shock recuperated for purely commercial or political ends. Rather, it arises from a circulation of signs in the mode of a metastasis, or from a type of viral irradiation of signs in all directions. The code here responds neither to a logic of the infrastructure (of the product) nor to that of a superstructure. The reference mixes the political, economical, and aesthetic end of the century—that of a generalized catastrophe or of a universal nightmare—that succeeds the American dream.

The voyeurism put into image by Benetton remains directed onto a fractal object and falls into the *voyure* in the Lacanian sense (the schism between the gaze and the eye).[13] The *jouissance* 'pleasure' in the face of catastrophe proceeds here from pathos and panopticism released into the madness of a vision where there is nothing to see (Buci-Glucksmann). Will we buy fewer Benetton products because the screen bombards us with images of catastrophe, televized images, cut-out images, which are ultimately as uninformative as those of the Gulf War? What arises from horror becomes obscured by the opacity of signs, where terrorism, war, and AIDS are equated according to a logic of the neuter (somewhat as in pop art). Thus, the obscenity of these advertisements can no longer be defined by the dynamic of shock (shock remains an aesthetic for the Dadas and the Surrealists), nor by the transgression of any order, moral or otherwise. Baudrillard, in *La Transparence du mal*, explains that, unfortunately, it is impossible to calculate in terms of

the beautiful, the ugly, the good, the bad or, more generally, in terms of opposition. We are in the era of the virtual, of trances or of empty trances, what Lipovetski calls the sliding era, or what Baudrillard calls—due to the pure loss of reference—the transverse and universal crossing of signs. As he explains, "For there to be metaphor, there must be differential fields and distinct objects. Yet, the contamination of all disciplines makes this impossible" (16). The end of images, signs, and objects is, in this case, the contrary of a poetic or an artistic process since "the obscene is the representable: the absence of the phenomenon of the veil" (Ishaghpour 31). The disappearance of the veil and its substitution by the reproducible, the representable, eliminates the void. "Hyperrealism is obscene because it wants to be reassuring and claims to show that there is being and not simply nothingness" (33).

The disappearance of objects in "surmodernity" may very well place us in the position of Hervé Guibert's blind people whose initiation to real objects leads to "abstract orgies," those sculpted in a sandbox by means of geometrical figures and that, in their "blinded imagination," stand for representations of human bodies.[14]

Notes

1. The term *surmodernité* is borrowed from Marc Augé. "Surmodernity" designates the latest (and actual) stage of postmodernity in which the "figure of excess" predominates, whether it be the excess of the event, the spatial overabundance of *non-lieux*, or the frenetic claim for the return of the ego: "One could say that surmodernity is the face side of a coin whose reverse side alone is presented to us by postmodernity—the positive of a negative' (43). All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

2. Twenty years ago Baudrillard defined objects in consumer society as object-signs since they operate in a gadget-mode, that is to say as "make-believe" or as functional simulacra: "Insofar as the primary status of the object is concerned, far from being a pragmatic status that would overdetermine a social value of the sign, it is rather the exchange value of the sign that is fundamental, its value often being only a practical step (even a rationalization pure and simple)" (*Pour une critique* 8).

3. "War itself is also pure and speculative in the sense that one does not see the real event that it would signify, or that it could be. War recalls the suspense of advertising . . . today I trigger virtual war, tomorrow I trigger real war" (Baudrillard, *La guerre* 19).

4. As in Barthes's definition of theatricality (Baudelairean theater—a "theater-minus-text"), objects explode in a "density of signs," which submerges them beneath their functional and external appearance. Theatricality in Barthes's sense also involves the end of genres. Poetry and theater, for example, mix together by deconstructing signs into a same corpus of "artificial" signifiers. See *Critical Essays,* 27-28.

5. In fact, Jameson argues that *"The Scream* subtly but elaborately disconnects its own aesthetic of expression, all the while remaining imprisoned within it. Its gestural content already underscores its own failure, since the realm of the sonorous, the cry, the raw vibrations of the human throat, are incompatible with its medium (something underscored within the work by the homunculus's lack of ears). Yet the absent scream returns, as it were, in a dialectic of loops and spirals, circling ever more closely toward that even more absent experience of atrocious solitude and anxiety which the scream was itself to 'express' " (14).

6. Baudelaire's new poetic prose should be jerky and uneven enough to translate a dissonant element—a pre-linguistic oral form (the scream of the glazier or the noises of the city of Paris)—into musicality. The new prose that Baudelaire seeks is doubtless the prose of modernity, not only since it is said to be born from modern city life, but because it calls for the dynamics of "shock" [*choc*] and "clash" [*heurt*] as well as for fragile and transitory allegorical figures. Walter Benjamin has stressed that already in *Les Tableaux parisiens,* the poetry of modernity turns the "capricious fencing" [*fantasque escrime*] of *Le Soleil* (1857) into a principle of writing due to a wide use of jerky rhythm and to the fragmentary and transitory character of the representation of the city. See *Charles Baudelaire,* 160-63.

7. The "Tableaux parisiens," as the title already indicates, involve the contamination of poetic representation by the pictorial and the theatrical (*tableau* in French is both a theatrical and a painting term). This contamination effectively appears in Baudelaire's poem through a constant use of allegory.

8. See Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk,* 274.10 and Buci-Glucksmann, 214-30.

9. In what Baudrillard calls the fractal stage of postmodernity, "Equivalence, the natural, and the general no longer exist; properly speaking, the law of value no longer exists, there is only a sort of *epidemic of value,* a general metastasis of value, a proliferation and aleatory dispersion" (*La Transparence du mal* 13, my emphasis).

10. "Could we be in a Baudelairean a-present? To the extent that what one calls, a bit hastily and not without ambiguity, postmodernity in painting is rooted in the assumption of the palimpsest as historical and aesthetic memory" (215-16).

11. Starobinski showed that in "Le Cygne," places such as Troy, Buthrote, the old Louvre, and the new Carrousel correspond to various ages of poetry: Homer, Virgil, Racine, Romanticism, and modern invention (58).

12. For McLuhan an educational system based on television may only produce disabled people, as in William Golding's movie *The Lord of the Flies*. See *Pour Comprendre les média*, 377.

13. The Lacanian *voyure* is defined following Merleau-Ponty's conception of *voyance*, that is to say, as an operation of the gaze over the visible, implying a loss of the self. *Voyance* involves "not seeing from the outside, as others see it, the contour of the body that one inhabits, but especially being seen by it, to emigrate, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom" (183).

14. "Josette and Robert met regularly at the sandbox, when classes were over: one after the other, each believed to make a drawing of some part of his or her own body, making it touch the other in the sand, as if this first caress far from the body granted access under the clothing or through it. Simple motifs were drawn. Then, through the years, the mutual exploration taking different forms, abstract orgies like geometric shapes appeared and disappeared in the sand" (*Des Aveugles* 62-63).

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