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These pieces are alien to most of us, since we have not created any of them. They do not look like anything we would typically use, do, make. We live a different life. We are parents, activists, lovers, linguists, caretakers, or engaged in some other form of commitment.

Not only did we not create these works of art, we would not have the space to do so, to devote ourselves to such a creation would mean leaving our real lives behind. Yet these works seem to matter. But in what sense?

There are disparities between our individual commitments. It's probably simpler to overcome them when they relate to two different art practices. Artists talk to each other. Is that not enough? It is fair. And we can take this as a starting point. I am a writer, I think I can testify. I have already been influenced by sculptures and installations, and I've engaged in projects based on them, decisions that bind you over a long period.

When I encountered Muriel Leray's works, I was moved by a power that was beyond the reach of my writing. Sculpture and

literature do not have the same means. What would you do if you were jealous of another discipline's means, of the results they achieve? I thought I could translate this jealousy into new knowledge: it would teach me something about the grounds I was walking on when I was writing.

A jealousy exposes a void. This void in my literature is what it cannot achieve through its own means, and which is suddenly created before me by a sculpture.

Qu'ils ont dit avoir ouvert et, parfois, la réponse est non
Muriel Leray, 2014

Literary collages tend to unify their disparate elements under one single idea. The fractures between the samples are always read in the same way, according to an alphabet that the 20th century has well consolidated: simultanism, violence against the individual, chaotic real, hysterical author, expression of the unconscious... we would always end up using one of these interpretations. Muriel's work frees itself from them by confronting two heterogeneous logics — a one-line poem, a minimal sculpture — that don't quite merge into one single idea. I was moved by such a divided piece; in order to be able to explore this new emotion of another dimension, I spent several years merging two logics as well: mathematics and narratives. I had to take a different road than Muriel's, building upon one of the options that literature gave me: instead of a single-line poem, I could include a fairly comprehensive mathematical theory. This had a set of poetic consequences: new grammatical tenses, renewed description. This would allow me to be faithful to an incompatible work by different means — opposite means, to some extent.

When I encountered John Cornu's works, something quite similar happened. The landscape is different though. Let me put it like this. The most brutal reality presents

itself to us — more often than not — in an odiously spectacular form. John would never do that. His works would move me through its delicate touch to such an experience: the most brutal part of it would stay off-screen, or at the edge of the frame, so to speak. This delicate touch ends up using all the means that art exhibitions would provide; it renews some of the most worn-out interaction that this context provides — cultural mediation being one of them.

CUT UP (Libération)
John Cornu, 2019

The word is never the item it describes, but the word is never totally abstracted from its referent. A text constantly keeps denoted items off-screen that we neither manage to include nor to forget. In this respect, a writer will not be disoriented by a work like CUT UP (Liberation) which keeps its cruel referent at a distance: the fall of a man during a massacre. Yet the work still manages to touch, with tact, the brutal reality that it puts out of focus; it includes and forgets its referent, simultaneously; it holds on to this paradoxical balance. The writer can only envy this touch, as he seems to have to choose between getting closer to the traces of reality (like Reznikoff) or moving away from it (like Mallarmé). Can he actually combine both at the same time? How?

In this case, the envy that dwells in me makes me feel as if I was walking on a ridge; this ridge splits my poetic space in half; by imagining John's touch incorporated into literature, I am led to a crossroad, with an apparent need to make a choice:

literal material in plain sight, or ideal object off-screen.

Chasms, ridges: aesthetically, distant experiences underline the reliefs of my closest experience. The hilly landscape of writing is shone upon by distant arts.

Conversely, our own journey in literature may shine upon some other distant ground. A sculptor can certainly envy a writer.

One would have the impression that everyone could remain in his or her own discipline. In my case, subordinate myself to literature only, in inevitable rebellion against its tradition, but first confronting its reliefs. We might be forgetting something.

There is an intermediate step. There is a moment in between. A discreet one. When, as a writer, I am moved by an installation, and before I realize that this emotion is as if inaccessible by my means, I dream it within reach; I speak in the conditional tense: "What would be a literary off-field for a raw reality?" "What would it be like to read a text that could not quite be counted as one?"

When I use these modalities, I place myself somewhere in between: out of literature (forgetting about the limits of writing) and out of visual arts (forgetting that this emotion that I'm targeting has already been reached by the art piece in front of me). Out of any discipline. Possibly beyond.

Then, coming back to earth, I feel the limits of my own tradition; and, maybe, I discover some other paths.

There is a book by Ivan Liovik Ebel and Anne-Françoise Schmid that keeps this momentum going. Both authors are from a different field: visual arts on one hand, philosophy on the other. They look for each other in a modal moment, try to explore simultaneously, to meet in this parallel exploration. We fly above two distinct practices, or beside, or below: this would neither be a philosophical essay nor a set of artistic thoughts. A moment out of time.

This is undoubtedly how light could sometimes pass from one discipline to another. There would be a kind of propagation medium between two distinct realities; our distant earths would see each other through this foggy ether.

Topographie discrète, scénario pour un texte sans dimensions
Anne-Françoise Schmid and Ivan Liovik Ebel, 2021

Some books would strike you by the way they seem to think through the very same problem you've been trying to tackle for years. We suddenly seem to share the exact same pain. Am I the only one to be suffering from loneliness? I'm not. None of us would be longing for such a feeling, but it crawls in while we're trying to achieve perfection. We would first dig into a discipline that we love, and we tend to become a specialist; then our honest dedication turns us against its tradition, our masters and our peers. So we end up isolating ourselves twice: first as a servant, then as a rebel — as Anne-Françoise Schmid might say, before adding: now we would like to get back to the human, the ordinary and the generic. And, as this is a polyphonic book, the voice of Ivan Liovik Ebel would be adding simultaneously: a discipline is a sacrifice, we want to restore what they had separated and divided, and give this back to common use. Their polyphonic writing conducts a speculative search for a place where this desire would be fulfilled: venturing far from discipline grounds, abstracting away their specific thinking methods up to a point where they become foggy, allowing a philosopher and an artist to meet in a common place. And it works, I can feel that. So much so that it could make me leave my own discipline to let my thoughts live in this new place. The temptation is particularly strong when your discipline consists in writing too. I would be home. I'll fight this temptation, I know that. I'll get back to serve literature and poetry; and will rebel against both, once more. Yet I shall not pretend that this never happened; I shall keep the fog close to me, right behind my back.

Chasms, ridges, fogs. All this draws a strange geography. Strange? Why so? Foreign, perhaps, to most of us? We know what happens when we talk about these places: we see, in the eyes of others, that we seem to be moving away from our contemporaries. And possibly from ourselves as well: from this part of our being that knows how to cook, wash the dishes, get paid, love and be loved. Would this hilly landscape exist only between arts?

I had to face the terrible question of a philosopher friend (Bernard Aspe): would this type of exploration be condemned to take place only between artists, and does it also concern non-artists? Does it tell us something about the boundary between art and life, and how it could be crossed?

Art? There are other types of singular works: in philosophy, in mathematics, for example. The problem is the same for these disciplines; the distance between theorem and life is no less. A singular work will always drift away from life. From the point of view of life, a singular work seems to force oneself to a problematic withdrawal.

One could hypothesize that this withdrawal would be a misleading perspective. When we meet a stranger and start talking to him, we have several strategies at our disposal. One of them would be to try to find some common interest, or maybe just some common ground; and this strategy has a fair chance to succeed, since we all share some common core experience: commercial relationships, widespread cultural references, the State as the main and only form of political organization. Two

complete strangers would typically talk about jobs, elections, TV shows. From this common ground, things that really count for us would certainly seem to be quite distant from the general community.

But there is no particular reason to focus on the lowest common denominator. We can come closer together in what makes us different. Many anthropologists would claim that this angle is as good as the other: it seemed to have been the preferred point of view in pre-Columbian America, and probably in stateless societies in Eurasia.

Amongst other things, we could talk about impossible twinness (Levi-Strauss) or perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro). Here, I would simply rely on The Dawn of Everything, by Graeber and Wengrow. This book shows how schismogenesis — cultures' tendency to define against one another — could go along with three primordial freedoms: the freedom to move, the freedom to disobey and the freedom to create or transform social relationships. Chasms, ridges and fog seem to be in direct connection with life and its promises.

Now this hilly landscape only seems to show up between works (of art, of thought). In our time, we tend towards a certain global cultural homogeneity but singular works stand out strongly, and this is perhaps a place where the work of difference takes refuge.

Perhaps life should start to envy this to the works. Modern artists have tried to bring art and life close together, but this attempt is bound to fail if life does not come closer to art. This is not about aesthetics; this is about love of freedom, of communities, of hospitality, and love for the colorful cultural landforms that these ideas generate. The political plasticity demonstrated by humanity for millennia has not been annihilated in a handful of centuries; any activist knows that this capacity is constantly repressed, by a process that seems tireless... but that we will have to tire out, before it impedes all life.

Jérôme Guitton