

January 13, 2016

[...]

You alluded to Barthes's experience with Twombly, and his desire to imitate the "producing" instead of the thing produced, and ultimately his desire to inhabit another body. In my opinion, this is also the story of an encounter with that thing in a work of art (or arguably, in any material object) that demands something from those who encounter it. This demand is at once supplemental (or epiphenomenal) and essential to the work; it cannot quite be articulated or conceptualized, though it is still possible to communicate it to (or about it to) others; it is louder and more acute with works of art, but faintly audible in even the humblest furniture of everyday life. And the problem is that the demand cannot be met, or perhaps that we have not yet understood how to meet it. It is my belief that no matter how we draw, sing, dance, sight-read, write, buy and sell, possess and give, use or archive, or simply look, the object always demands something else, and more, some greater excess or expenditure. In this light looking is, as you have already recognized, no better than any other mode of response, though in the purity and intensity of its sustained application among Birds, it perhaps has gone further than expected. The bodily gesture, the movement by which one performs and is performed by an artwork as with Barthes's musician – this engesturing – is among many possible (and necessarily insufficient) responses to this impossible, unfulfillable, yet urgently insistent demand that is one of the central mysteries of the greater fund of mystery that is the Order.

I wonder if this demand made upon us is something like the mirror image of what Barthes calls (so suggestively) the Third Meaning of an image, in his essay of the same name. Hovering between the objective and the imaginary like Saussure's proliferating anagrams, the Third Meaning is beyond language, concept, and critique, but fully within "interlocution" – it becomes ripe for fruition precisely within a collective, a Colloquy. In other words it rises to reality, like Hélène Cixous's "Third Body," "at the intersection of our tongues" (her book of the same name centrally features, of course, a riddle whose answer is "Oiseau.")

For all this, however, one could one still speculate that the bodily gesture (Barthes, elsewhere: "an act that is slight, complex, tenuous, almost scatterbrained: a sudden movement of the head like a bird who understands nothing of what we hear, who hears what we do not understand") responds to the object's irrational, urgent demand upon us in a way that nothing else can?

I am also reminded here, as you might guess, of the great Bird, philosopher and mystic Vincent Attayir, whose strange theory of the Birdish "geste" has been, in my opinion, poorly understood and even misrepresented. If you'll excuse my quoting his original, since my translation is hasty:

Au-delà de ses propres intentions et de toute conséquence calculable, il y a bien dans la forme de l'Action une marge [...] où brille un feu d'oiseaux pâles à perte de vue. Dans le geste, dans l'acte imprudent ou manqué [...] c'est toujours une forme qui part, méconnue, et qui parle." [Beyond its own intentions and any calculable consequence, there is surely in the form of the Action a margin ... where a fire of pale birds glimmers as far as the eyes can see. In the gesture, in the

imprudent or useless act ... it is always a form that departs, unrecognized, and that speaks.]

Attayir writes of a kind of dialogue between “material forms” and one’s own bodily form, such that they “opèrent sur nos gestes leurs déviations secrètes, intimement mêlées à l’avenir de nos mains” [...work their secret deviations upon our gestures, intimately joined to the future of our hands].

There does, then, appear to be some support among the “classics” for the importance and necessity of a protocol of gestural replication. I am also writing to you, in fact, to ask whether you would be interested in formulating a novel example of such a Protocol, based on your discoveries amid the works of Barthes, Scarry, and others. You might prefer to submit this Protocol directly to the community of Birds, for their use and edification [...].

My best to you,

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