

Chantal Danjou. *Journal de la main*. Orizons, pp. 259

*Son verbe ne fut pas un aveugle bélier mais la toile où s'inscrivit mon souffle*

Its word was not a blind ram but the canvas on which my breath became inscribed

René Char

A dare. Imagine French abstract painter Henri Yéru one day suggesting to author Chantal Danjou that they write a journal composed of four kinds of writing. *Journal de la main*. *Mais quelle main?* asks ambidextrous Danjou. The one that draws or the one that writes? She could have asked: his, or mine? We encounter four hands in this interplay of different kinds of texts. And you, reader, the enmeshing of two languages.

I open this review with a citation from René Char's poem 'La liberté' for a number of reasons. First, because Henri Yéru illustrated the poem. Second, because like Char—whom she quotes (70), Chantal Danjou discovers anti-generic forms through the very act of writing. Third, because the book explores the transfer from image to word as well as the transference at work between two artists and different aspects of their subjectivity. Imaginary *ménage à trois* made all the more possible by their geographical proximity: Danjou lives and works in Camps-La-Source, Yéry in Toulon and Char's ghost roams L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue.

*Journal de la main* is very much a working journal and a fine exemplar of creative practice as research, or reflective practice in its iterative form. In it, Danjou recasts drawing as the visual matrix of writing. A writing that blurs the lines between private and public spheres by staging a selective historiography of the text. The journal, or diary, traditionally meant for private use, takes on the public exigency of incipient essays, especially towards the end where reflections on the rise of Islam are couched in personal, critic-philosophical and political terms. These micro-essays are anchored in the everyday: the business of living, loving, mothering, the discipline of writing, relationships, quarrels, deaths, Charlie Hebdo, French politics...

Chantal Danjou's interdisciplinary use of four hands creates a semiotic nexus in which distinct tropes—linguistic, visual and aural—become inscribed on a larger than life canvas. It is larger than life, indeed, due to the sheer breadth and depth of intratextual and intertextual references. We encounter those who, like René Char, partake of her symbolic universe: Sapho, Jean de la Croix, Samuel Beckett, Fernando Pessoa, Nabokov, Albert Camus, Vita Sackville-West, Claude Lorrain, Angélique Ionatos, Rembrandt, Schubert... *et bien d'autres*.

Ironically, it is not so much the collusion of drawing and writing which gives the text its impetus, but Yéru's absent painting in response to Char's poem, or rather his memory of the painting-in-process that "quickens" the narrative and lends it some visual fluidity:

20 novembre 2014, dans l'atelier, Henri Yéru répond

A ma question sur son acrylique sur toile accompagnant le poème *La liberté* de René Char:

En tant que peintre abstrait, j'avais pensé un jour que nous voyageons tous vers une image. L'énigme est entre la mémoire de ces images qui nous constituent et qui deviennent un signe et une structure dans l'abstraction. C'est le cas pour cette toile mais où ce qui reste concret, à mon avis, c'est l'espace. (10)

I would go even further and suggest that Chantal Danjou complicates this sense of visual fluidity with a vital acoustic image: *'une musique jazz, et...l'horrible, la multiple, l'indécente, la permanente, la questionneuse, belle, miroitante, saccade pluie'* which is metonymically displaced onto the sea outside the café Sunset's front window where she is writing:

*La mer est belle et grise, de ce gris profond des yeux clairs quand ils ne sont pas bleus. Quelque chose inlassablement nous sonde, nous pénètre, nous repousse. Tant d'eau, mer et pluie! Toutes ces hachures: les lignes d'écume, les transversales, les fouettantes et la disparition du paysage sous leurs dessins serrés; conjointement son expansion, paysage sous les portes, par les vérandas, son sous-bois humide partout... quelque chose remonte, craque, de mon enfance, hissé des eaux profondes. (11)*

*La mer. Mère aux yeux clairs qui peine-être. S'onde. Re-pousse. Disparaît. Re-naît le 6 octobre on an other continent. Trois-Rivières. Ça-gît-euh... 'dans l'air froid' (226).* Phantom limb, flag, cloud, rippling in the wind over the Saint Laurent. Beyond its shifty sea-like shore.

Jazz and rain creates an inner slide show conjuring art's psychosexual, cultural and political roots by rendering it 'subjective'—note the sliding of pronouns from first person plural to first person singular. While seeking visual verisimilitude, the image is narrativized, decomposed and recomposed in different yet overlapping contexts. One could say that Chantal Danjou's experiential *and* experimental method re-imagines writing against the grain of images and more elaborate pictorial representations in a multi-situational, multi-modal and anti-generic gesture where breath is inscribed *par saccades*. In Yéru's words:

L'oeuvre es une deposition, une exposition et une position de l'artiste qui conjugue son oeuvre à travers plusieurs temps, le passé, le present de la creation et quelque part, son future car je crois que certaines experiences formelles donc symboliques ouvrent des voies / voix ou rendent la voie / voix plus libre. (11)

*Journal de la main touches, ignites, melds, metamorphoses the image, returning it utterly altered. The work provokes encounters that stimulate affective and intellectual jubilation. There is here a kind of literary cruising: writing as charged transfer, as the alert address of arousing desire.*

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