

IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE BLUE 'SOUVENIR'

Mimesis. The concept of mimesis has recently undergone a considerable theoretical reworking, yet for the theoreticians who reflected on the matter, it was rather a question of filing mimesis away with old or outdated operations. I make an exception of the book by Catherine Perret, *Les Porteurs d'Ombre: mimésis et modernité* (Belin, 2001). In any event, I would like to write about Ingrid Luche's work by playing on this category in the widest possible sense. My hypothesis is in fact that this *word* (without judging what might be the *concept* or *practice* it may convey *here*) casts light on many remarkable traits in Ingrid's work. Firstly there is a kind of strange dissipation or dispersal that gives the viewer of her work as a whole the feeling that the artist behaves like Proteus in the artistic field: so well does she change style, medium, tone and spirit that we often even wonder whether it is the same Ingrid orchestrating such variety. Now let's suppose that the logic behind this extreme changeability pertains to the principle of camouflage—tantamount to saying that it stems from a mimesis. Ingrid Luche has always been brilliant, but if we put to one side for a moment the reflective surfaces (elegant loops, recursive *mises en abyme*, formal economy) adorning her offerings, we find a pathos *sans qualité*, as it is pathos that wells up simply from life in the opposite camp (let's say 'art'). Now let's suppose that pathos or affect, generic and vital, seeks in mimesis a shelter for its pure non-quality: it will conform to banal images and familiar forms, imparting to them a little more silence than they would have naturally. It is at this point that the affect movement joins the art of camouflage, flowing into it. Yet this does not lead to hermetism, if by hermetism we mean some process of encoding; it is rather like blue, remembrance, seeds, sound and the rest—precisely their non-metaphorical equivalent. When I follow the—very—subtle meanderings of mimesis taken by Ingrid, I am not going to refrain from providing their literary counterparts, either as imitations, transcriptions or echoes (and thus forms of mimesis). I am quite aware that it is a difficult undertaking and think of all the authors—poets

in particular—who intended to substitute their literature-echo for an 'exterior' critical discursive reasoning and achieved nothing worthwhile—a daring gesture in the face of this old trap!

Dwelling. It is a reasonable guess that every civilisation and every human being that they foster or have fostered know something about dwelling. *Cultura* (culture in every sense of the term) comes from the Indo-European root *quel*, whose primary meaning is to turn around, for 'to dwell', as people who dwell somewhere are always seen going here and there *around* their home, aren't they? In Latin, *Cultura* more than likely celebrates the accompanying process of settling and agriculture, yet there is nothing to stop us thinking that nomadic dwellings themselves also give rise to *circles* and *circulations*, of hunting, gathering and fishing around their temporary dwelling. In any event, what I want to say here is that dwelling is a metonymy for living, or to put it more simply, that living is inconceivable without the idea of dwelling. This brings me to the hypothesis that images (more or less problematic) of dwelling in Ingrid's work carry with them the pathos of living. And there is even a Kafka-style sense inherent in these images. Ingrid's little balconies—glassed in or with neon lighting—hanging below the ceilings of art centres or galleries have a quality of unique desolation in that they combine smallness (uninhabitable), a permanent festive air or sense of obsolete attraction (neon lighting in cities at night) and the idea of *domination* (see, roughly, Manet's *Balcony*) watched and watchful, dramatically isolated from all functional architecture (there is no entrance or exit door) (there is nobody on the balcony). While from the formal point of view, this series of works assumes an enticing neo-minimal character (box, neon, Plexiglas, plywood, paint), I wager that beneath their impeccably citational wrapping, they conceal a pathetic non-dwelling, namely an effect of dwelling blocked by the form of its impossibility. In other words, high-speed trains leave their stations in Ingrid's videos, the sky flees in remembrance of their silent departure, super-filmed as a 'souvenir', a remembrance of nothing at all: we are leaving, we are going away and live neither here nor there, no. No.

Desubjectivation. The desubjectivation motif runs throughout the second phase of modernity, until supposed post-Modernism (no longer able to declare our love simply *in the first person*, we will say 'I love you desperately, as Barbara Cartland would say', *scripsit* in substance Umberto Eco in *Postscript to Name of the Rose*). Yet in the realm of psychiatry, there exists a form of desubjectivation that is marked by affective discord, that is to say that the patient does not accompany his speech or gesture with the affective tonality 'normally' required; for example, he remains extremely neutral while recounting something horrific. It is this form of desubjectivation that interests me here, because to me it seems to describe something slightly *dislocated* in which many of Ingrid's works find expression. In the collective exhibition *Lee 3 Tau Ceti Central Armory Show* at the Villa Arson, Ingrid occupied two perpendicular walls in particular with a vast 'fresco' in Ketchup (*Untitled (Hot Ketchup)*¹) in which the late Princess Diana could be recognised among other more or less notable figures, blurred, foreshortened or enlarged. In this case, providing a precise reproduction in Ketchup of an icon popularized (through the media) may appear to be a surprising operation, yet for good connoisseurs of contemporary art, the surprise is not so great; it comes down rather to a crossing of already familiar operations reworked. On the other hand, the 'fresco' was executed with such panache that it is hard to grasp its affective tonality. A critic might speak of 'a humorous dimension' and leave it at that; however, if we seek to explore this dimension in greater depth, indeed delving as far as the mechanism of humour, we may be hungry for more. There is nothing to stop us from projecting tragedy, citational irony, simple gaiety or even a sort of capitalist realism (an updated version of Soviet propaganda in painting). For me, the fact remains that the motif—the most secret part of this work—is a *silent* tonal absence that is marked by the subject's negative fading. Where you would expect to find *articulation* (in every sense of the word), there is emptiness. It is as if through the slight dislocation of two operations known for being artistic, someone reported missing, *no longer dwelling at the address shown*.

1 . This 2003 work was an updated version of *Untitled (Hot Ketchup)*, a similar fresco executed in Nuremberg in 1998.

Remembrance. I think that we must have formed a cheery crowd at L'ESPACE TRANSFORMER, a kind of bizarre nightclub in the port area of Nice (now long closed). We must have attended a private viewing, probably followed by a meal for the occasion and in the end we found ourselves 'all' in this large room with its plush seats and low lighting, with MTV non-stop and a soundtrack that bore no relation to it. At the time, I would often spend days on end theorizing about PUISSANCE 4, a kind of battery-operated noughts and crosses that is played by stacking up tokens in seven columns of six levels, the winner being whoever manages to line up four tokens vertically, horizontally or obliquely. By dint of being focussed on this game on my own—which, by the way, I had discovered at L'ESPACE TRANSFORMER—I had become virtually unbeatable, a bit like the impassive player in *Last Year in Marienbad*, who always won at the matchstick game. That evening, I had just thrashed whoever tried to challenge me; only Philippe Mayaux managed a draw, a fact he attributed to the 'implacable rationality' contained within his brain. Then it was Ingrid's turn to play against someone, I forget who; for fun, I gave her a few tips and taught her the strategic rudiments of the game. She was laughing away in fine form. She teased me a bit, I think, about my determination to win, which really scared me. I remember that she smiled at me then in the sparkle across the shadow and she suddenly looked to me like a *French actress*. By *French actress*, I meant (and still mean) a woman who seems to be next to you, like Delphine Seyrig or Jeanne Moreau might be; of course, there is the whole magical world of the silver screen that you cannot share, yet the French actress is indeed there, touching you in an overwhelmingly natural way. In other words, the French actress is a certain frequency of female beauty that brings together remoteness and pure presence, yes, yes, I am here. Ingrid's smile that evening seemed to reveal her face, and gradually all of the mobile architecture of her body, up to the way she accentuated her words—not only in a brief epiphany, but in lasting sense, making it into a real remembrance.

Poetry. In early September 2006, I felt like writing something quite different from what I had written up to then, something that I *did not know how to write*. I tried to string together sentences simply—all kinds of sentences, from those that came to me unannounced to those that I had read or even that I could hear at that very moment. I don't know why, but the result reminds me of Ingrid's work. So I will set it down here.

Title. Dream that in dreamland you would dream that in dreamland you would dream that in dreamland you would dream that in dreamland you would dream of that. Smoking was her only pastime: forty-four packets in eleven days. Behind the idea of the antenna of a spindle of wheat, a hare. Three swirls of a skirt, some red and a burst of podium laughter are enough to show that each spring has sprung. Just say the word and you shall be heeled. Then we simply go with the flow. Is it a rhetorical question? Thomas has no idea. From the dazzling gleam of the sentences to the top of the hat stand. The blue Bentley, the water-skiing sessions, mind-boggling jewel-shopping. This word 'river' gave me the key to what had happened. Oh! The ho leopards leave straightaway! It is I, the conductor of the resurrection on the ultra-green grass of the verge and beneath a dense, exhilarating light. Overheating, a tranquilizer, a farewell to drags. There's not even a screwdriver within reach to defend ourselves. I'd like to do animals but I've forgotten how. Measure me for my penetration ability. Did he have a photographic memory according to the doctors? The future stirs the seasonal shade, no one, a shade, the statue of no one, cliff, façade, psalm. I can imagine neither the nature of such objects nor their mode of expression. Ebb tide and wintry weather: nothingness on line. On me my mother sets the poem of sleeping waters like a summer garment. Boss, with the boss' head, legging it with the boss' head, straight to tomorrow. On me my mother sets the poem of sleeping waters like an autumn garment. There is an affability about drooping shoulders going around in the little familiar desert. Child moves at night horses remember the mood bay. 'I can give a knight to any lady and still win.' Turn within oneself, sleep and turn the water's vault beginning, a clear shoe, bounding, blonding. An all-wooden façade, a cosy hall with a giant fireplace, a playroom for the children, a library, a marked pedestrian footpath, three restaurant rooms, a bar with a terrace. The garden for the initiated is hidden behind the faded, very ancient

walls slicing it as if into a string of open-air rooms, where I see various kinds of animals, including a bear sleeping beneath the water of a fountain, and a lion in the last chamber, after the conversation of three old Arcadian hunters sitting on their heels, beyond which I dare not go as I have no right to be here. The end a rowing weight on the heart. No one ever committed self-suicide. Weighing out the waters. It's a question of walking at the heart, rather than the surface of the lake: passing the arches of ruined bridges. A juice shimmering with evening moon on the avenues. Never allow the device to be in contact with water. The sound of punch being drunk and we are revived: praise be! Museum, truck, sieve, grasshopper, lemonade, night. Your reserve of money lets you treat yourself without digging into your savings. Yet melancholy sticks to the world's skin.

Dream. Ingrid was in a bed, which was in the middle of a big lofty room, which was quite probably in an old dwelling place (a castle?) that had been made into a hotel—no, not made into a hotel. Anyway, from her bed itself or her body itself—in any event, from the place where her body touched her bed (now that in surprise she was sitting on the bottom sheet with her bust straight and head bent over what was happening)—that is, from the little space that remained between the sheet and her genitals and buttocks there were ants coming out, many ants, that she destroyed as they came out, perhaps by crushing them beneath her hands, yet to no avail—there were always more coming out than she could kill. Then a woman opened the bedroom door, as if the door had not been expressly closed, crossed the room, with hardly so much as a glance at Ingrid the nocturnal anthill, and went out through another door, at the top of a small staircase. Me: 'How old was this woman?' Ingrid: 'Oh! She was quite old, older than me in any case...' Sigmund F.: 'It was a mother figure...' Me: 'No, it was not my mother!' Ingrid: 'For me, the most surprising thing was that I was alone in this bed!' (laughter) Sigmund F. (turning to me): 'How would you interpret the ants?' Me: 'Oh! You know, insects or small animals often represent younger siblings, children, but as I do not know the context I would not venture really to suggest an interpretation...' Sigmund F.: 'Hm! Hm!' Me (*in pectore*): 'In any event, there are serious disruptions in the dwelling, dear Ingrid...'² We were sitting side by side in the slow train taking us away to Paris. It was already dark as it was autumn, I think. We talked about the current book as we would about a book to come and talked about this and that. About a quarter of an hour before we arrived in Paris, Ingrid started addressing me politely as one would a stranger. I couldn't get over it. I didn't rise to it. What had happened?

2 . The dream I describe here is true, but only *roughly so*; when re-transcribing it, I invent details to make up for the gaps in my memory or inaccuracies in Ingrid's tale. My text is therefore not reliable.

Voyage. How nice it would be to see the words *voyage* and the French *vouvoiment* (using the polite pronoun ‘vous’ to address people) deriving from one and the same root (some illocutionary *highway*); this would explain why we can lapse into polite forms and start using the polite pronoun for everyone, ourselves included when abroad, while on a *trip* as we used to say. When I watch *Dragon Palace*, a slideshow created by Ingrid in 2002, I see that the film uses *vouvoiment* to me, as it does to all who see it. At the time, the vogue for slideshows had perhaps already reached its eddying point—that is, once again Ingrid took hold of a form that had taken on a sheen through use, albeit as fleeting as that of fashion. If a slideshow is plunged into the fluid of signs *sans qualité*, it will automatically give off a negative aura, unless banality, the age-old boredom of ‘slideshow evenings’, these flashes of reality that are strung together in endless succession, give rise to the idea of positive glory—or not. Yet Ingrid is only really at ease when working with negative auras, in the black light deserted by all splendour. *Dragon Palace* tells us that we are somewhere—anywhere—else, and the constant stream of images under this heading do indeed hail from so many foreign parts, each slightly exotic, that they bear witness rather to a generic voyage, an exile with neither destiny nor destination (‘He journeyed’, the first line of the penultimate chapter of Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education*). There is no doubt that the artist *was there*, as is indeed attested once by his shadow on a road; otherwise this cliché would conversely call into question the authenticity of the whole as it works rather as a quite conventional sign of authenticity. So who was there? Someone, no one, you. Light music, as we used to say, accompanies you throughout the report; the music is sufficiently international, beautiful and ordinary at the same time, to hold your hand familiarly at night in nightclubs, yet without ever telling you anything personal. The images form views in waves (= rising and falling) within what brings us back to the metonymies of *living*, namely here food (for *eating*), discotheques (for *dancing*), buildings, terraces, hotels and the HOTEL SABADELL (for *dwelling*), the sounds of a shower (for *washing*), stations and airports (for *arriving* and *leaving*). Anaphorically speaking, would *souvenir* in French not be a vain anagram of *VOUS RIEN* (lit. ‘you nothing’), just as remembrance in English might give *MERE CRAB MEN*?

Ambiance. The word 'ambiance' came into the language quite late and fairly bluntly, taking the Latin *ambi* (= of both sides) and adding a suffix of state that might lead us to believe that we can *ambie* just as we can be *vacant* (or *vaquer* as the French might say thanks to Edmond de Goncourt's old neologism) on *vacation*. 'It is through ambiance that a beautiful and ardent woman [...] acts upon the poet, the artist, the sage, the philosopher or the man of action...' (Léon Daudet, in *La Femme et l'Amour*, our translation). I would like to use the 'both sides' first suggested by the word to feature *living* from Ingrid here and to *represent* it there. If *representing* tends to mimic the course of the representations itself, *living* cannot be represented there in the slightest; it is just hiding there, in a sense *squatting* her images just as petals of boiled ham slide beneath the sign of *Dragon Palace* (= *eating* = *living* in the basements of the Embassy-over-there). This is not to say that there is no love lost between both sides which are unaware of and are separate from each other—doesn't ambiance itself creep in through some wilderness? It is from here that emanates all the work Ingrid devotes to light, handling lost volume (the air that fills the gallery space), decorative elements, to this minimal and subliminal theatricality of airlocks, mists, fasteners, transparency and distant interiors. In Ingrid's art, the 'work' acts rather as a point on which the attention is fixed, while the main action happens on the fringes, in the harmonies that go from the 'work's point' to the space temporarily occupied by this point, unless the 'work' is not in itself an intervening period or supplementary point with varying degrees of subtlety. Then, I thought while holding a seminar at the Villa Arson when Ingrid began studying there, that *ambiance* is located between the subject and the object; as such does it draw its subjective force only from a subject that never says 'I': mainly you, no one.

History. Marcel Broodthaers thought that there were mussel-artists and jellyfish-artists. He himself identified with the former category, in which he saw a kind of withdrawal into oneself, somewhere between autonomy and autism, able to withstand the fluctuations of the *Zeitgeist*. Moreover, mussels took pride of place in his early works. As for the jellyfish-artists, he evidently considered them as the opposite of the mussel-artists—that is, complete beings plunged into the Water of Time, failing even to counter its currents with a decent opaqueness. Having said that, we should not make of this couple simply a channelled antinomy (Deleuze-style) for in the book *Pense-bêtes*, several copies of which Marcel cast in plaster to begin his career as an artist, we find poems including one siding with the mussel and another understanding of the jellyfish—and what is more, no one has ever really understood Marcel Broodthaers, I think. In any case, there is no offence whatsoever implied if I tend to see a jellyfish-artist in Ingrid, temperamentally speaking. During the first part of her artistic life, she used her temperament to allow the world to appear as it is represented—through the media—and we were therefore justified in attributing her works to the register of critical (or simply slightly acidic) mimesis, which is actually nothing more than the mould of her generation. Yet today the outward signs of this critical mimesis have all but disappeared in her, and another part begins. Let us suppose that melancholy (bile, humour, temper or black fluid) may be quintessenced to the extent that it loses its colour; let us suppose, in short, and—to drop the metaphor—that what makes up its particular force, *id* is the perpetual metamorphosis difficult to control that it orchestrates between bottomless sadness and joyous joy without reason, depicted in a pure manner. We would thus find a variator of affects by definition neutral, a ‘pathosful’ fluid colourless as water, before being blackened or irradiated. This is what time has done to Ingrid the jellyfish; it has driven her into the corner of her native transparency, as though enclosing her in her constituent diaphanousness. Consequently we can understand her recent attempt to construct a ‘denarration’ that the interpretation of other artists alone could actualize. We can also understand that blue is not a colour in the primary sense of the term (*color* referred to any primer used for concealing things by covering them up), but rather a spectral frequency (in this case the latest, most faraway one in

the atmosphere), and by extension a metonymy for diaphanousness, which in itself is without colour as it is latent in all.

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