

Appreciation
From *Le Théâtre des métamorphoses* by Jean Ricardou
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I. The press

VOICE: "Press yourself: write for the press."

This sentence perhaps proposes a manner of quartet. It assembles and abridges, in effect, the four major pressures that, if he hopes to be appreciated, the writer constantly encounters nowadays, in the form of isolated demands or various combinations, sometimes explicit, occasionally indirect.

However, may the male and no less the female reader accept to follow several contradictory paragraphs on the matter: we shall respond four times no.

A. Appreciation

People of the press: write, we are told, for newspaper critics. Let us first agree: in its rigidity, this directive sits at a junction of irrecusable mechanisms. On the one hand, *the constitution of the audience:* whether appearing in dailies or printed in weeklies, the initial reviews, either to increase or decrease its number, undoubtedly contribute to the success of the newly published book. On the other hand, *the increase in efficiency:* once, amidst the profuse abundance of periodicals, what flourished was a flagrant plurality of judgments which, subsequently, counteracted one another; now, amidst the inexorable decline in papers, this diversity and its consequence are gradually being exhausted; the views that subsist therefore tend to do so without rejoinder. Further, *the regulation of readings:* amidst the increasing depletion of critical view-points, what henceforth is

outlined on the horizon is a uniform manner of reading. And finally, *the institution of the ephemeral*: with its modern machinery, with the principle of rapid turnover, distribution is now such that any book unable to gain instant recognition thereby usually signs its own death sentence. Formerly, the malefactors were devolved to public indignation: placed in the stocks, as it were. Today, the remainders are condemned to discreet indifference: prepared for pulp, if you will. Once, for each book, the press played a provisional role: after its instant impact, the work of time could begin. Either to consecrate the press's precocious opinions: restrict what it had reduced; make firm what it had affirmed. Or to contradict its premature verdicts: omit what had seduced it; acknowledge what it had undermined. Now, for certain books, the press is starting to perform a decisive function: what it cremates tends to definitely turn to ashes; what it forgets seems forever fated to amnesia.

—You do endure, do you not, from time to time, an incoercible V?

Hence, perhaps, the advent of a voluminous double malaise.

One bears fruit among the *critics*. No doubt several, intoxicated by the heavy taste of power, may find in their recent strength, irremediably extended with the evolution of the economic machinery, a callous motive for enjoyment, but no doubt various others, quite attentive to the increased responsibilities thereby accruing to them, may discover here many an occasion for alarm. The former issue decrees, dazzled by the way things subject to their direction. The latter waver, frazzled by the insistent struggle between their endless scruples.

The other concern may be found among the *writers*.

Some, those who are confirmed insofar as they conform, those whose writings always in some way aim at a previously targeted public, briefly those we must call fabricators, and even forgers, or mere letter-carriers, may well wink at this evolution. Reaching a target audience, be it composed of journalists, is child's play for the artful. The dangers, here, are next to nothing: in principle, at least, their minimal immediate success remains ensured.

Various others, those who are avoided insofar as they invent, those whose texts somehow occasionally provoke something unprecedented, briefly those we may name producers, and sometimes rhymers, or even letter-handlers, can only wince at this evolu-

tion. Disregarding the expectations of a public, be it composed of apologists, is a requirement of their art. The risks in this case are almost too glaring: the hasty scrapping of remainders makes any subsequent reading of their work highly improbable.

—You do endure, do you not, from time to time, an inadmissible verse?

Facing such a strange metamorphosis in progress, there is no doubt that two inverse policies might be conceived: that of the ostrich and that of Cassandra.

The former aims at restricting *reasons for fear*: it functions by submitting to the mechanism of complementary oversight. In this regard, it is appropriate that what takes place blots out what is being anticipated. In this regard, it is important that what is being effectively proposed (today's circumstances) disguises what is barely foreseeable (a tendency, nevertheless, fairly perceptible). In spite of maneuvers that diminish the number of major papers, and in spite of constraints that sometimes limit the space for its service, contemporary criticism is, evidently, still composed of a genuine diversity.

The latter policy claims to attain the *plural of metamorphosis*: it functions by submerging the mechanism of complementary oversight. In this regard, it is important that what is being announced does not blur the whole of what one has an inkling of. In this regard, it is appropriate that a first event does not conceal a second that is no less obvious. Such a first phenomenon could have been named an *internal monopolization* of the press: through the uniform effects that we have glimpsed, it is clear that the press, engaged in its bellicose relation with itself, endures the ruin of some of the publications that compose it. The second phenomenon should be called an *external monopolization* of the press: it is plain that the press, engaged in its conflictual relation with its object, inflicts on it an increasing tyranny. To put it briefly, only a very gross word seems able to grasp this insidious, insistent, contagious, convergent menace: the *mass-mediatization of reality*.

As a result, let us emphasize this: newspapers are the seat of a double-sided antagonism. In the first place, certainly, we have pointed this out, a manner of general competition unfolds: the publications', one against the other. Each paper, in some way, here, rivals another.

In the second place, no less, we are going to point this out, a species of intimate competition develops: within every publication itself. In one way or another, each one, here, fights with the previous issues: what outlives yesterday's delivery is tomorrow's copy. Hereafter, through the interplay of these periodical substitutions, the press, as if by principle, leads to its own disposal: except for special issues, except for collectors, every newspaper, save archives, is promised to prompt rejection. A specific double consumption ensues. One is concerned with the medium: what the press exacts from the paper, above all, is a provisional consistency. No harm if it is then condensed to nearly nothing: mere dust. The other one affects the object: what the press demands from the event, at least, is its temporary existence. There will not be any offense if later it is reduced to nothing: mere amnesia. Thereby, to formulate it in a promotional manner, what tends, through an unacceptable tendency, to manage the functioning of the press is today's agencies or, to write it in a derogatory way, the *dictatorship of the present*.

The present. This term perhaps proposes a manner of quartet. It assembles and abridges four major prescriptions: the ones an event constantly encounters nowadays if it hopes to be appreciated, not necessarily in the form of isolated demands but indeed through the interplay of various combinations.

—You do endure, do you not, from time to time, an incorruptible verandancy?

May the female and no less the male reader patiently accept to follow several complementary paragraphs on the matter: we shall comment on this noun four times.

On the one hand, it is desirable that the event *take place* in a current manner. Or, if one prefers, according to a double locale: in space, and in time.

It has to take place locally: whether it is green, or black, the tree fallen here, on a village street, is a more noticeable fact than the forest destroyed, but elsewhere, at the other end of the world. It has to take place at present: whether it is black, or green, the tree fallen now, in the course of the day, is a more profitable fact than the forest destroyed, but formerly, back in the dark ages. Briefly, an elementary combining distinguishes, in the first place, the *best* that is at once close in space and time from, in the second place, the *conditional* that is near either

in time though far in space (such as a contemporary distant fact), or in space though far in time (such as a fact of local history), and last, from the *worst*, that is apart in time as well as in space.

On the other hand, it is essential that the event *be related* in a current manner. Or, if one likes, according to a double connection: in space, and in time.

It must be related locally: as such high society entertainment must find space in a periodical called right wing, not left wing, worker layoffs must find a home in a periodical called left-wing, not right-wing. It must be related at once: if it is formulated on the spot, the event is given a contemporary flavor; if it exhibits itself later on, the event is exiled to the days of yore. Briefly, a rudimentary combination discriminates in the first place between the *best* that is speakable here and all at once, and in the second place the *conditional* that is speakable either here though later (such as a feature of retrospective importance), or at once but elsewhere (such as a fact publishable in another paper), and last the *worst* that is speakable elsewhere and later.

To obtain at present a complete roster of the *significant* would thereby revert, one guesses, to putting into play, indeed distant, a criterion of a *double present*. Briefly, combining elements that would ensue succeeding through the two previous combinations.

—You do endure, do you not, from time to time, an imperceptible vertigo?

May the male and no less the female reader shortly strive to recover: we shall spare them this exhaustion. May they, all by themselves, suppose instead the innumerable stages regularly interposed between two legible extremes. On the one hand, somewhat, the *best squared*: what takes place, and can be related, here and now. On the other hand, somehow, the *worst squared*: what did not take place, and could not be related, at best, but elsewhere and formerly.

To acquire now an open range of the *undiscernible*, one supposes, would hereby revert to setting to work, at least a *negative turn*. Briefly, within the previous combinations, one of the active parameters would be dissolved. There is indeed, as we saw, in one way or another, what did take place and could be related: briefly, from head to toe, the various grades of the *significant*. But there is equally what did not take place and could not be related: briefly, the *non existent*.

But there is also what did not take place and could be related: briefly, the *fallacious*. But there is no less what did take place and could not be related: briefly, the *unspeakable*.

Yet, here, one has to be acutely aware of a precaution: unless one is pleased with a somewhat comfortable misunderstanding, the unspeakable should be divided. The unspeakable is what involves either the ineffable, or the unformulatable. With the *ineffable*, the event tends to gain a mystical emphasis. The impossibility of its positive designation inflates it so far as assigning it a sort of ecstasy: it still concerns, on the whole, in a reversed mode, a manner of expression. It is an aphasic speech. With the *unformulatable*, the event tends to be representatively blotted out. The inability of its effective denotation debases it in a manner of ectoplasm: it already concerns, in fact, in a clandestine way, a mode of reducing. It is an evasive censorship.

But, one guesses that the latter mechanism is hardly indifferent. In effect, perhaps, the key to various imperceptible paradoxes is hereby disclosed.

If its inability to be formulated degrades the event to the extent of a problematic consistency, by contrast, it is clear that the probability that it will be related provides it with a kind of super existence. Briefly, *the representative gesture grants a premium of reality to the object it manages to render*. However odd it may at first seem, this representational guarantee enables one to grasp at least four species of distinct behaviors. If so many figures, in various eras, delighted and still delight in multiplying the number of their effigies, it is because in return, they received and still receive, even if they be caricatures, an indubitable supplement of reality. If so many people in this world relish seeing all engraving, all photography, all painting, and all cinematography as representing the places where they live, it is because these locales, and retroactively those who reside there, feel an irrefutable surplus of evidence. If such a lie, on many an occasion, succeeds in imposing itself so intensely, it is because its fallacious words, merely by the virtue of being spoken, gain an effective reinforcement of existence. If one fiction, and recognized as such, manages to accredit itself so immensely, it is because its acute fantasies, benefit, solely through the strength of its representation, from an efficient support of reality.

Therefore, what is important to submit to the brightest light is the antagonism that in principle opposes reality and the representational guarantee or, if one prefers, reality and the effect of reality. First let us

be precise: to say it succinctly, it is permissible to conceive reality, since it exceeds representation, at such and such a time and such and such a place, as a sum of two parts: the one, partaking of the representable; the other, belonging to what is not. But, exactly insofar as the representational guarantee adds a premium of reality to what is only representable, the former, by definition, exalts the latter to the detriment of what is not. Briefly, the effect of reality corresponds to the representative censorship of the non-representable part of reality. Briefly, *the effect of reality is proposed through a mutilation of reality.*

However, there may be a little more: *the effect of reality is what unceasingly sets a trap for reality itself.* We have just seen: the representational guarantee discriminates two parts, one that it inflates by the effect of reality and the one that it blurs in return. Subsequently, one figures out what kind of charm it is able to exert: in effect, all sorts of acts can be prone towards making themselves representatively suitable in order to receive, in return, the benefit of the premium of reality through the representational guarantee. Yet, in order to succeed, this adjustment supposes a paragon. And this one can certainly take a concrete shape: that of an overt entity. One surely knows the tendency, irremediable perhaps, that drives a number of teenagers to subject some of their ways to those of various individuals, certainly famous, taken as models. One is no less aware of what bond, of a surprising strength, subsequently settles between them and her, or him, whom today it is agreed to call their idol. It falls under the aegis of an *adoration*: in an inexorable fashion, whether intimate or intense, the star becomes the object of a sort of cult. Therefore, no doubt this apparent magnetism proceeds from the following four-phased process. First, these young people mimic a widely known person. Second, they then define the above as their official representative. Third, they immediately present themselves so as to actually represent this person. Fourth, and consequently, they hereby receive the inevitable, energetic, inextricable, euphoric excess of existence. Briefly, under such a circumstance, reality contorts itself in order to gain the representational guarantee. Briefly, *in this matter, reality mutilates itself in order to obtain the premium of reality.*

However, there may be something more: *reality, so trapped, is what unceasingly tends to set a trap for representation.* We have just seen: the prize of the representational guarantee divides itself into two aspects. One in which reality inflicts on itself the indispensable

mutilation and one in which it so forces representation to accomplish its function. Subsequently, one can suppose what sort of attraction the prize of the representational guarantee is in a position to arouse: in effect, all kinds of acts may be prone to making themselves suitably representative, in such a way to constrain, in return, through the ensuing advantage, the practice of the representative gesture. One knows that in order to succeed this modeling supposes a paragon. And this one can certainly take an abstract form: that of a scheme to be filled in. One needs this time to adjust, not so much, as we have just read, to a complete picture, but rather, as we are about to write, to an empty ordering. One surely knows the tendency, irremediable perhaps, that drives a number of authors to subject their work to the directives of some obviously accepted norms, taken as models. One does not, no less, know of what bond, of a surprising strength, subsequently settles between those and her, or him, whom today it is agreed to call a critic. It falls under the aegis of a *fascination*: in an inexorable fashion, the work, whether minimal or immense, becomes the object of a kind of infatuation. No doubt this apparent magic proceeds from the following four-phased process. First, the writings of these men of letters conform to a norm certainly recognized by such critical discourse. Second, they present themselves so as to potentially represent the latter. Third, they then define this discourse to be the official representative. Fourth, such discourse consequently desires to be an irrepressible, outrageous, irremissible, advantageous account. Briefly, in this instance, reality contrives itself in order to capture its representation. Briefly, *under the circumstances, reality mutilates itself in order to seduce what is supposed to furnish its representation.*

Therefore the process seems at present quite visible: within the play of its exercise, representation finds itself inevitably subjected to the risks of a backlash. In the first place, it actually achieves a manner of capture, the *representative prize*: what is representable is allowed a formulation whereas, correlatively, what is unnarratable endures a degradation. Then, representation gains momentum: it performs by meeting the resistance it operatively censors: it thereby entertains an effective rapport of partial suitability to its object. Meeting it in a problematic form is a way of making contact with reality. In the second place, it no less endures a kind of necrosis, the *representative depression*: everything tends to become formulatable, because everything tends to model toward this end. Then, representation loses

momentum: it performs but through an theatrical reality without any resistance to restrain it: as such, it joins in an illusory relationship of complete suitability to its object. This kind of encounter, seemingly without striking a blow, is a way of losing contact with reality. Briefly, the representative machinery tends to have its behaviors and works cast in the despotic mold of the formulatable. Briefly, *the representative machinery bears within itself, by principle, the incessant threat of a stereotypical reduction of reality.*

With this detour, we have hardly betrayed our subject: in effect (who would challenge it?), the press mostly functions through mechanisms of representation. "Universal reporting," Mallarmé used to murmur. With this return, we are then on our way to clearing up what was above syllabized, not without a massive consistency, as the "mass-mediazation of reality."

Let us be reminded of its source: by its present metamorphosis, the oral or written press develops, quantitatively, through an overflowing vector and, qualitatively, in a uniforming way. Subsequently four distinct phenomena bring themselves to light. Small a: one of which is not fruitless, if one considers the representative gesture, to a certain extent, as a hold on reality: there is a continuous and nearly global enlargement of the means of representation. Small b: the other one is not harmless at all if one thinks of the havoc it wreaks on itself: there is a parallel degradation of the unformulatable. Small c: the next one is fraught with a far-reaching threat: for some ample sectors of reality there is, under the pretence of the formulatable, a temptation to be reduced to an increasingly stereotypical representation. Small d: the last one bears an ultimate risk: there is an inclination, through the uniforming setting, towards the impoverishment of this very same conventionality.

Therefore, the injunction that one should write for newspaper critics displays its exact dimension. At first, in a benign manner, it may have presented itself as some simple and kind advice fit to induce sympathy, and even success. At present, the injunction clearly takes place among the maneuvers by which, through the increase in its hegemony, *representation tends to configure, in lieu and instead of reality, a well-tailored universe.*

However, there may be more. In effect, it turns out that such an initial command was rather ill-stipulated. In this instance, what ought to have been said is, not at all "write for newspaper critics," because under the cover of an apparent concrete form one thus refers, in an

anodyne and surely in a confusing way, only to individuals, but rather "write for the representative machinery," because, under the impact of an effective abstraction, one thus analyses, in a radical and undoubtedly precise manner, the features of a functional process.

However, there may be a little more. In effect, it appears that such terminal analysis is also capable of getting back to the everyday bedrock, not at all evidently, through secondary cases (individual acts), but rather certainly through a main scheme (the range of conducts). For, at present, with the cutting edge which it proposes, an incisive discrimination may, by a sharpened gesture, be achieved.

On the one hand, the accomplices of the theatrical representation are linked by mutual advantages: if the written restricts itself so as to comply beforehand with the categories of such criticism, then, limpid and fossilized, by principle it makes the task both more facile and more rapid, so that, in return, this criticism reformulating it at once, bestows, with the representational guarantee, upon this domestic matter the benefit of the premium of reality. Briefly, in this instance, no longer the people of the press, but rather, more precisely, if we are allowed this literal addition: the people of depress. Those whose indolence always delights in an illusory accordance with a fake reality. In a word: those who need us to enjoy writing for them.

On the other hand, required by a similar contest, those passionate of the unformulatable: if it composes itself without fear of immediately exceeding the categories of such critical tasks, then, so unprecedented and problematic, the work proposes a less anemic, less hypocritical criticism, so that it may give ground to those who, in journalism, intend to keep in touch with the savagery of writing. Briefly, under this circumstance, no longer the people of the press, but rather, more exactly, if we are granted this literal contraction: the people of impress. Those whose insolence goes so far as to always lay claim to the contact, be it of writing, with the so far unrepresentable part of reality. In a word: those who need people to keep from writing for them.

But, fortunately, it happens that an exact scheme deviates, through its specific mechanisms, from all phony representation. It is the *text*, if one has to give it a name, here, in a precise manner, before returning to it.