

Christophe Bident. *Reconnaissances: Antelme, Blanchot, Deleuze.*

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Reconnaître: to recognise, to acknowledge. As Christophe Bident states in the incipit of his book, this verb predicates something ambiguous, fluctuating, evasive; but, he adds, at the same time decisive and necessary. Especially in our time, the age of the TV-reality, when everything is proclaimed recognisable in anything else, and therefore everything is undifferentiated. Bident's slender but dense book is a meditation on the acts of recognition which strongly argues for the inescapable necessity of the *reconnaissance*, recurring principally – but not exclusively – in the works of Robert Antelme, Maurice Blanchot and Gilles Deleuze. *Reconnaissances*: the plural hints at the many facets and uses of the term, from the singular of “recognizing a baby,” to the collective of “recognizing a state, a nation”; from the juridical of “recognizing a crime, a right,” to the metaphysical of “recognizing a god, or a truth” (13); but, most of all, the plural, already in the title, suggests and stresses the argument and thesis of the book: recognition is not a single act, punctual and determinant, but an incessant and infinite movement.

Our age is the epoch of the impossibility of recognition, what Bident calls “*la maladie de la reconnaissance*” (15): the excess of visibility leads to in-visibility; the speed and unilateralism of the mediatization of the real excludes the act of recognition. Its substitute is *communication*, the inflational use of language, the wordy violence of the lack of precision, of the false representation. False representations that create false recognitions, the illusion of the domination of the real through its unilateral nomination. This *nomination*, empty and tyrannical, is the negation of the intellectual work, it is the interruption and crystallization of the flowing movement of recognition, and ends in a monistic nihilism, in the catchwords of the “*philosophes de télévision*” (31), who work for the disappearance of thought. Therefore,

argues Bident, now more than ever, we need the work of *reconnaissance*: a precision of names, words and languages, which at the same time is able to include the infinity of the alterity, the necessity of the contestation, the impossibility of a final scene: infinite movement. The task and responsibility of our time is, for Bident, “to recognise recognition,” *reconnaître la reconnaissance* (43).

Usually philosophers have been suspicious of this term and have used it with caution and reservation. Thus, Bident interrogates art and literature of the twentieth century which have respected and preserved the infinite gesture of recognition, the tension between visible and invisible, readable and unreadable, knowable (*connaissable*) and acknowledgeable (*reconnaissable*). Recognition, insists Bident, is not posterior to cognition, but is its ultimate and most profound act: recognition leads beyond cognition, to the rejection of any resolution of identity, of any totalitarian recuperation, in the name of an “exhausting attention to the other” (57). Thus, in Bataille, *reconnaissance* can face and confront “the impossible,” in Bresson “the invisible,” in Resnais “the undecidable,” in Beckett “the unnameable,” in Antelme “the indestructible.” Rejecting the onto-teleological foundation of western culture, the act of recognition preserves a “*petite santé*” (58), a tiny remain of intellectual health against our age’s malady of indifferenciation.

In Antelme’s testimony about War World II, *L’Espèce humaine*, Bident stresses the perseverance of the recognition of the other within a human machinery that aimed precisely at the abolition of any possible recognition. The concentration camp is the annulment of every distinction through a generalised indifferenciation that attempts to reduce the other to naught. Antelme’s perseverance in recognition is based on *resemblance*, the common belonging to the same *espèce humaine*, the human race, which unites SS and prisoners. But to recognise the resemblance means, for Bident, to reject assimilation in the name of an ineliminable alterity, “to prevent every assimilation thoroughly considering every resemblance” (73). The act of recognition remains faithful to its object in respecting the constant change of its vantage point, of its address, of the conditions of its enunciation, in conserving the heterogeneity and the internal movement of the other. The most truthful recognition is to denounce any external resemblance.

Blanchot’s texts are thus, for Bident, the privileged *locus* that opens up the space of contestation for the incessant movement or recognition. His intellectual trajectory as literary critic and author of fiction merged into a peculiar genre, where the philosophical thought fragments and the voice of the narrator interweaves with the one of the critic. Blanchot’s “*récit critique*,” suspended between literary theory and *art poétique*, takes on the mission of recognising and preserving the singularity of every creative act, the un-

appropriable *solitude essentiel* of every work and its “interminable, anonymous, impersonal affirmation” (95). With the notion of *neutre*, Blanchot’s acts of recognition preserve in the other the movement of incessant creation – that impersonal alteration which permeates every singularity – and therefore perform recognition beyond the prevarication of a nomination and definition, beyond any relation to name and label, *hors de tout rapport*. To recognise the movement of in-propriety and in-appropriation in every singular work means to exclude the possibility of labelling it with a name, and is therefore infinite reflexion at the heart of the abysmal un-recognisable. The narrative voice attempts recognition through blind gestures, fragile traces, impossible routes and, in these gaps between book and silence, it enacts its necessity.

Reconnaissance is thus “deterritorialization of thought” (114), adventure beyond or behind every limit, which never forsakes its movement. That’s why, argues Bident, its perfect image is the sea: like the sea, the movement of recognition is the drifting of any singularity, of any unifying drive, of any propriety: suspension in space. Deleuze’s *événement* enacts this infinite movement: it asks for the recognition of a determining indeterminacy, of an individuating neutrality, of an impersonal singularity, of an identity in incessant process of becoming. The *événement* is beyond any characterization, *au-delà de tout personnage*. The extreme attention to gestures, impressions, sensations, marked by a desubjectifying power, becomes the concern of every possible recognition: “prendre figure n’est jamais de repos” (131). *Reconnaître* is thus a movement at the same time neutral and singular, “*intime*” and “*extime*,” with no end, which infinitely exposes the subject and the object of its predication, and cannot be reduced to any formula, any deed, any causality or determinism. It does not implicate any belonging and therefore suspends each time initiality and finality.

It is hard to pay full justice to (to *reconnaître*) the complexity and density of this book in a short summary. But, unlike the infinite movement of *reconnaissance*, the reviewer must stop at a certain point. And there is no better such point than Bident’s last image: love is the final and most appropriate gesture of signification for the acts of recognition. Love does not make claims for identity, but each time resists recognition, determination, and its own fulfilment thus preserving thus that part of ignorance that belongs to the incessant movement of being. Like love, “*reconnaître est le sens du sens*” (157), the meaning of meaning, and the incessant and impossible research for that meaning: “*on n’a jamais fini de reconnaître.*”

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