The Archaeology of Fiction

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REFERENCES

Forest, Philippe. *Raymond Hains : uns romans*, Paris : Gallimard, 2004, (Art et artistes)

Le Gac, Jean. *Et le peintre : tout l'œuvre roman 1968-2003*, Paris : Galilée, 2004, (Ecritures / Figures)

Morsillo, Sandrine. *Habiter la peinture : expositions, fictions avec Jean Le Gac*, Paris : L'Harmattan, 2004, (Esthétiques)

- 1 "Catalogue raisonné, novelized, illustrated, fantasized be-all and end-all of my artistic life, infra-œuvre? In any event, it took a bit more than 35 years for this book to be written unbeknownst to me."¹
- 2 All fiction writers must protest the sincerity and veracity of what they relate by way of some preliminary narrative which makes their narrative endlessly repetitive—like a tale within a tale within a tale... Thus Jean Le Gac, who from the early 1970s on wrote his texts with the vague notion that he might one day gather the together like a writer into one great big book—a compilation of all his writings—felt the need to introduce his book *Et le peintre : tout l'œuvre roman 1968-2003* with this preliminary declaration, before admitting, a few lines later on, that the editing of the texts was not effortless. "Starting off from a chronological compilation of writings from the late 1960s to the present day, in the end of the day I did not accept it."
- 3 The editing had to have the finishing touches put to it, organized in seven chapters with the redundant parts abbreviated, and a certain progression in the plot had to be suggested. The result is quite persuasive, even if, when faced with the many different voices and styles, the reader hesitates in the first instance with regard to what reader's stance he should take. It would actually be difficult to encompass in one and the same reading these disjointed and colourful tales of children's games, developed as occult

activities of uncertain adults. Because these collections of painters and artists run through different lives at times relived several times over. The same goes for these marginal and incidental considerations about literary theory, the art world, film, and children's literature, and these confidences made by a teacher-*cum*-painter and unsuccessful educator still awaiting confirmation from those he addresses of the proper understanding of his observations, and lastly this work of writing that I resolve not to deal with in two words. With Le Gac, there is a fascination with language which cannot be set in words, but in the alternation of styles, voices, addresses, and genres, which prompts him to relate a similar tale involving a single and unique character, but setting him in a different way in relation to the reader from one page to the next, and from one paragraph to the next. Rather than reminding the reader of the successive embodiments of the painter as Florent Max, Ange Glacé and such as Asfalto Chavès, whom we get to know and discover with an imagery of commonplaces, it is important to urge him to lose himself in the discontinuities of the tales, abbreviated and full of inclusions of other stories, and to imagine, with the help of the illustration presented as secondhand, the text-image articulations, as well as seeing between the words these prescriptions which represent some view or scene, or else tell of some other image, drawing, painting, film, etc.

- 4 Like the Michel Foucault of *Les Mots et des choses*, instrumentalized by Raymond Hains, the reader of Le Gac may thus organize an archaeology of knowledge to unravel scholarly culture, true-phoney artists in the art business, and didactic imagery for young and malleable minds.
- 5 Unlike Le Gac, his elder Raymond Hains probably did not foresee that his artistic career, like many of his works, would derive its coherence from its inclusion in a narrative where the many meanings of the words and names, just like portmanteau words, puns and other kinds of word play would guarantee a link between the images, things, characters, and places encountered and reinstated by the artist. Philippe Forest has drawn up a portrait of this incomparable figure, who has exercised such fascination among young artists for almost 20 years, which would possibly not have been so well sketched by a specialized art critic. Actually, without ignoring art history and its various problems, Philippe Forest refers to them from a distance like views of literature and elsewhere. His narrative is precise, and it complements the knowledge of the root of this "gallant escort of criticism", but he considers it with dogmatism by openly broaching his relationship with Surrealism, Lettrism, and New Realism caught in the trend of the New Wave and the New Novel. He emphasizes the anachronism and the untopical nature of his references while at the same time reintroducing their unlikely sequences erected as a working method by Raymond Hains. It would be hard to heap too much praise on this work which with the artist's complicity, revisits the earliest hypnagogic photographs, the first film attempts, posters and *décollages*, and the contribution to New Realism which seems to have somewhat frozen the uncontrolled development of an œuvre which criticism has committed to the slammer or the stockades, before conjuring up the more recent developments, where the artist conceives of exhibitions that have become works in themselves, and of a lightness of spirit which others might well deem guilty. "Raymond Hains sends art on holiday. He gives it its leave and grants it the thoroughly temporary and relative paradise of a well deserved rest in a world looking like a seaside resort. For a long time Hains has defined himself as an inaction painter and, by way of this formula, he turns inside out all the old mythologies on which modern art has been heroically

constructed, and which attribute to the artist the demiurgic mission of leaving his mark on the world, and thus creating an œuvre which is added to nature, and which utterly reinvents it, and with it the triumph of nothingness.”²

- 6 Sandrine Morsillo might possibly be advised to reflect on this thought when she seems keen to include her artist's œuvre in the wake of Jean Le Gac, and to have wanted to experience with him his painterly fiction, having revisited a history of the exhibition whose unfinished chapters she completes in her own way. Is it possible, in one and the same book, to mix history and fiction, aesthetic reflection and formulation of an art project? Le Gac and Hains have done just this; Sandrine Morsillo is in turn having a shot at it.
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NOTES

1. Le Gac, Jean. “Prière d’insérer”, in *Et le peintre : tout l’œuvre roman 1968-2003*, Paris : Galilée, 2004, (Ecritures / Figures)
2. Forest, Philippe. *Raymond Hains : uns romans*, Paris : Gallimard, 2004, (Art et artistes), p. 227