



“Je t’aime” to Art and Deconstruction
Ekphraser. Nouvelles poétiques de l’ekphrasis en
***déconstruction* by Ginette Michaud, Les Presses de**
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In the new book *Ekphraser. Nouvelles poétiques de l'ekphrasis en déconstruction* by Ginette Michaud, who plays the central role of the interpreter of the Deconstruction of "spatial arts" (Derrida 1994),¹ in the invaluable bibliography that accompanies the text, a reference goes to the Derridean essay "Le ressassement ou le droit à la littérature (Nœud, point – arriver à s'effacer)" (2001). Derrida's lecture inspires Michaud's interpretation of the work of the Canadian painter Julie Ouellet, to whom she dedicates an important chapter of analysis. The lecture given by Derrida, indeed, plays an inspiring influence on the entire collection of essays that Michaud dedicates to the "new poetics of Ekphrasis", the productive, inventive and original (non)relations that Deconstruction constructs with the image, the question of sight, the act of seeing (Michaud 2015).

At one point of his lecture, Derrida turns his sensitive attention to the French sentence, the locution "Je t'aime", which is untranslatable, different from the English "I love you", and whose untranslatability, as he maintains, announces, in its idiom, the oath, *l'avœu*, the promise of bringing respect to the arrival and the alterity of the one who arrives, when and if she arrives. Indeed, what the sentence declares is its love for the idiom, its absolute singularity, the love for language. Enamoured of itself, "Je t'aime" does not say or explain, appropriate or possess; it keeps faith in the secret, the enigma, the alterity of what and who comes, and to whom it is addressed. Derrida explains that not-knowing what the expression means, and what it says, is not an element that forbids or negates. Differently, the non-power of knowledge opens the loving scene to the needs and the desires of interpretation: "Tais-toi et parle" says the double bind of speaking by hushing, signing, thus, the commencement of narration, le *récit* of the stories which do not describe or comment, but stay and remain excessive to any limit or boundary, to the frames meant to enclose, order, stabilise, translate and appropriate them. The idiomatic "Je t'aime" says the excessive force that comes from the other, *puissance* that exceeds and displaces the subject, explodes her subjectivity, lets her body and mind – here, her eyes – rest in the e/affect of its loving excess.

Our point of entry into *Ekphraser. Nouvelles poétiques de l'ekphrasis en déconstruction* is to assert that the French "Je t'aime" is here addressed to art and to Deconstruction, to the deconstruction of arts, and to the new visions and communications it announces for the image, for the creative act, for creativity itself. Michaud's book consists of essays that are known to her readership;² here and now, their "gathering" – that Derrida associates to the destinies of Deconstruction³ – inscribes the respons(e)ability that the authors, thinkers, critics, philosophers studied and gathered in Michaud's writings feel in the face ("le visage, toile des passions") (Cixous 1993, 820)⁴ of the absolute alterity of art. Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Hélène Cixous, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Sarah

¹ Here Derrida explains that "if in fact I do say 'spatial' more readily than 'visual', I would give the following reason: it is because I am not sure that space is essentially mastered by (*livré à*) the look... For that reason I would speak of the spatial arts. It more conveniently allows me to link it with the notion of text, spacing, and so on" (24).

² The "provenance" of the texts here collected can be found at pp. 389-91.

³ The deconstructive "gathering" is central in the work devoted by Derrida to "spatial arts". In the interview quoted above, the philosopher refers to "... the "gathering" (in English), the being together, the assembly, the now (*maintenant*), the maintaining. Deconstruction does not consist simply of dissociating or disarticulating or destroying, but of affirming a certain 'being together', a certain *maintenant*" (27). In 1974, J. Derrida, S. Kofman, P. Lacoue-Labarthe and J.-L. Nancy created the series "La philosophie en effet" for Éditions Galilée.

⁴ In particular, on the question of the "face", see Cixous' "Portraits de Portraits. Le jour même de Roni Horn", in the catalogue *Roni Horn*, Málaga, CAC Málaga, 2008, republished in Cixous 2010.

Kofman, Georges Didi-Huberman assemble *l'école* of thinking and friendship; the editorial collaboration for the Galilée series “La philosophie en effet”; the alliance and commonality in deconstructing the instrumental predominance assigned by western metaphysics to theory, to the eye, to the *dé-voilement* or un-veiling of Truth. Their works, and the way in which Michaud’s book proves their deconstructive tasks, write the promise, po/ethically, politically, radically, to salute the singular idioms operated by artistic creation on the stage, on the page, within and beyond the frame, always already able to *regarder* us and the writing that declares love to them.

Ekphraser. Nouvelles poétiques de l'ekphrasis en déconstruction consists of Michaud’s analyses of single works, various media (drawing, painting, photography, cinema, installation, choreo-graphy), different interventions and “points of view” gathered in the hospitality and “cura” for the extraneity and alterity of art. The scholar is one of the most influential editors (and co-editors) of works of Deconstruction.⁵ Here, she chooses to take care of the poetics, the interventions – Cixous would call them the “operations” (Cixous 2022)⁶ – of the school’s curatorial *transcriptions* (11): the exhibition “Memoirs of the Blind” curated by Derrida; the epistolary exchange between Cixous and Simon Hantai, which provides the material for the matter/matrix of *Peinture (Écriture rose)*; Kiarostami’s mobile cinema touching Nancy’s writing; the itinerant exhibition “*Soulèvements / Uprisings*” organised by Didi-Huberman⁷... Deconstructive love pushes thinking towards the practices of care for the coming of art, the event of its idiomatic arrival. These events expose their *oeuvres* – which are, as Nancy understands them, tones, colours, and schemas (135) – to loving partage, to the exposition or *l'espace*ment of different – textual, pictorial, sculptural, architectonic – inscriptions of *tecknè* that refuse to unveil their enigmas, mysteries, beautiful secrets (in the initial chapter, which reads the vicissitudes of the last painting by Leonardo da Vinci, Michaud speaks of the tension of *l'incertissima*, 45). Continuously, as an obsession, a real *hantise* (Derrida 2001b),⁸ the responsible task is given to be touched by, and respond with tact to, the secrets of art, the enigmas lying at the foundation of its becoming, following the excess or difference of the image in its making-event.

What stories does Michaud narrate in the essays that constitute the first part of *Ekphraser*? Her own story *autour* the genius of Leonardo, who cannot help but re-elaborate his unique and last *Sant’Anna*; the blind figure intent, as Derrida imagines, on thinking what she does not to see, her eyes almost closed, full of tears; the caress in Nancy; the kiss blessing the wedding, the marriage, *la co-vivance* of reading and seeing (p.122) in Cixous; radical dis/symmetry, the critique of *eidōs*, the point of view “aboculaire” in Derrida (the three thinkers exposed, in Michaud’s “petit triptyque” (81), to the flying thing, *le vol, voler, le Velò* of painting) (Cixous 2000). And, encore, the graphy of light, the dream (and its photo), the velocity of oneiric passing, *la vietesse, l’immémorial d’Écho* (the nymph and her loving repetitions, resonant in Lacoue-Labarthe’s elemental and archaic other), melancholy (Sarah Kofman’s notion of art as the rest that cannot be subsumed by philosophy, beauty in mourning of philosophy, and, together, its

⁵ For the immense work of editing texts and authors in the field of Deconstruction, see, in the book, the bibliographical references (403-5).

⁶ Here the *récit* narrates the experience of the laser-operation of Cixous’ ‘secret’ severe myopia.

⁷ The website of Gallery Jeu de Paume, Paris, presents a short video of some of the gathered works: <https://jeudepaume.org/mediateque/soulevements-uprisings/>. Last accessed 12-5-2022.

⁸ Here Derrida narrates his intense encounter with the *Primates* that regard – look and concern – him in the atelier of his friend Camilla Adami: *C.A.* – the “thing” free of *dessin* and design, from any anthropomorphic hold, even from the label of *art engagé*, as some critics would claim.

suspension as the "point de survivance même", 94), *la petite foule* of experience (impossible to detach from risk, that the joyous fragments signed by Georges Didi-Huberman write as a new chance). In these stories, the force comes from the other, the excess explodes the subject; in the surge of life (the rhythm of Michaud's analysis palpitates, like a musical accord, its gallery full of traces, differences and continuities), the eyes are finally open to "Dessiner, désigner, signer, enseigner" (*Ekphraser* is dedicated to the students of her Seminar Fra 6486) *autrement/otherwise* (Derrida 2005, 4; here quoted at 89).⁹

In its wholeness, this is an extraordinary text, that celebrates (the excess of) the other of art by breaking with what aesthetics, perception and theory always understand as anticipating, pre-seeing, making alterity pre-seeable, thus, appropriable and appropriated. Michaud signs/countersigns an immense work, a necessary task (the apparatus of notes is extraordinary, almost her haunted version of Derrida's *Circumfession*, a second text, a text below that repeats the text above in *différance*, the general system open to the expanse of reading) (Bennington and Derrida 1991)¹⁰. *Ekphraser* is an urgent work, which attracts and deserves celebration and gratitude. The grace of the author, however, would not salute the "individuality" of her figure placed in a "lonely" way at the centre of this book-painting (the reproductions of the artwork that accompany its writing are, indeed, beautiful). Michaud loves to be "together" with the ones who have already and always knocked at the door of her interpretative hospitality. The second part of the book, "Accompagnements" (257-368) gathers five essays on contemporary Canadian art: the "danse-poème" by Françoise Sullivan, the experimental paintings by Marc Garneau, the paper sculptures of Isabelle Leduc, the threads and knots that texture Julie Ouellet's drawings, the "lettres venues du Bleu" signed by the painter Edmund Alleyn (Michaud writes to me that "Le 'Bleu' d'Edmund Alleyn 'répond' en quelque sorte au 'Bleu' de Léonard en ouverture)¹¹. Here, "Je t'aime" is addressed to the inventions, resistant and persistent singularities, papermachines and subjectiles operated by the dances, the tangos, and the gestures of their weavings of/with/by art. These artists and their *oeuvres* accompany Michaud's acts of ekphrasis through the surge of a new sense of the world (its "animation" different from any representation, quoting Jean-Luc Nancy, who left this world to gain entrance to the world of memory; a beloved friend of Michaud, and of all the *inoperosa* community that mourns his loss in those very days) that maintains the enigma, and, at the same time, in the muteness of art, calls for the stories and inventions of love: "Je t'aime".

It is, then, not to unveil any of the infinite enigmas of this important text, but to accompany it in its further unfolding, that we note that Michaud rarely refers to "sexual difference" as such in her work, or in the works she reads and by which she is read. Still, without looking for it, like a discreet gift, sexual difference, D.S., *la déesse*, is *there* to be "a-perceived", as Didi-Huberman would entitle, or, with Derrida, to be "intended". *La déesse* of the invention of drawing is Dibutade, who re-traces the figure of her lover in technical acts of memory; the *déesse* is the gathering of Colette Deblé, Micaëla Henich and Camilla Adami, to whom Derrida dedicates three extraordinary "poems of blind thinking"; *la déesse* is Hélène Cixous, who offers the chance for the title of Michaud's text: the verb "ekphraser", which the mother of *écriture féminine* invented in her

⁹ The "otherwise" of art and of the relationship with it is an insistent element that can be traced throughout Michaud's text and the whole *oeuvres* of the philosophers of Deconstruction.

¹⁰ Consisting of "Derridabase" by G. Bennington and "Circumfession" by J. Derrida.

¹¹ Private conversation with the author dated 25-6-2022.

participation to the research edited in *Études françaises* (2015). Michaud shares the sense of her invention, thus writing "... by making a verb of a Greek name, Cixous gives back a singular energy to a figure of discourse which is stabilised too quickly as reproduction of a painting or an image. 'EKphraser' assumes an inédit expansion, that pushes the confines of the description or the commentary, and becomes souffle, gesture, action, performative event." (Cixous 2015, 207; 181, my translation). La *déesse* is, perhaps, (the painting of) Sant'Anna, who opens and closes – in bind and bond – the first section of the book on the legacy of Sarah Kofman's reading of Leonardo's *oeuvre*; finally, the goddesses are the women-artists that accompany Michaud on her path through the Canadian idioms of contemporary art, at the end of her interpretative itinerary. Are these conclusions? "Je t'aime" uttered by Michaud to the deconstruction of art is, every time, the unique time; we remain waiting for *l'à-venir* of her new sentences of love...

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