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Des visages, des figures
Dévisagent, défigurent
Des figurants à effacer
des faces A, des faces B

Appâts feutrés
Attrait des formes
Déforment, altèrent
Malentendu entre les tours
Et c'est le fou
Qui était pour

Bertrand Cantat (Noir Désir), *Des visages des figures*

The story of *Des visages des figures*, the last album of the infamous French rock band Noir Désir, is an odd one to say the least. Released on September 11, 2001—by pure coincidence—it prefigured the 9/11 attacks in several places: “Malentendu entre les tours/ Et c'est le fou / Qui était pour” was one of them. As was the song titled “Le grand incendie.” It was also the band’s most challenging album ever released and it did much to reveal front-man Bertrand Cantat’s unique sense of composition. Finally, it was the last album released before, two years later in 2003, Cantat killed his then-girlfriend, the actress Marie Trintignant, in the course of a rowdy quarrel in a hotel-room in Vilnius, Lithuania.

As a teenager studying at a *lycée* in the late 1990s, I found a way to evade the strict rules of the academic system by adding my *own* rules: thus, I would spice up the weekly *dissertations* and *commentaires de textes* on French

classic novels with my own references. No matter what the topic, from Balzac to Camus, I had made it a habit to include at least one reference to a Noir Désir song, and at least one other reference to a French rap song by any group (Passi, IAM, or the irreplaceable NTM). Every week, unfailingly, my teacher who didn't like me much would write in red ink, next to the quotes: *was this really necessary?*

Ten years later here we are, two colleagues—both, incidentally, survivors of the same French education system—and we have founded SEACHANGE. Our mission is simple—it is, in essence, the same one I was giving myself back at the *lycée*: while rules and codes are important—decisive, in fact—who is to say that scholarly writing can and should not also be *creative*, and, to make things even crazier, *fun*? A forum for bilingual work of quality, then, with the additional twist of creativity and the aim of showcasing approaches of a slightly different, edgier, flashier even, nature. Approaches situating themselves beyond disciplinary affiliations, of course. But beyond straightforward interdisciplinary affiliations, too.

For our first issue, we have chosen the theme of the face-to-face. *Faces, figures, A Sides and B Sides...* Noir Désir's words certainly had a part in this. As did, perhaps, Lars von Trier's last film to date, released in 2009: *Antichrist* presents us with the quintessential face-to-face, man and woman, patient and doctor, nature and culture, city and forest. Duality at its rawest, its most unforgiving. The heterosexual couple, torn apart by difference until the annihilation of all difference. Maybe this is what happened in the hotel-room in Vilnius? *Dévisagent, défigurent...* maybe Cantat had foreseen this too?

The face-to-face is also present in Alain Badiou's short essay entitled *Éloge de l'amour*, which was selling like hotcakes over Christmas in Paris this winter. Love, writes Badiou, begins with the chance-encounter, but the real

mystery is what happens *after*. “Comment passe-t-on de la pure rencontre au paradoxe d’un seul monde où se déchiffre que nous sommes deux?”¹ Love, in other words, is the coming to terms with twoness. For Badiou, this occurs in two ways: firstly, love presents a unique instance where the world is experienced together, *through* difference. Sexual difference, sometimes, ontological difference, always. Secondly, the coming to terms with twoness might occur with the arrival of a child—three-ness, then. In our interview, the Dutch new media scholar Jan Simons offers a reading of *Antichrist* where the explosive twoness of the couple is explained through the absence-yet-presence of the dead child. Thus, the number three is never very far-removed from the number two. Where we imagine a closed one-on-one, often we find we are, in fact, at the beginning of something—a series perhaps... *repetition*. Conversely, where there is three, as Deleuze points out, the possibility for twoness (three instances of it, to be precise) is always already present.

The face-to-face, the one-on-one encounter. Twoness and all that lies beyond... Such was our starting point. We were curious to see what associations it would conjure up for others: scholars, graduate students, both within and outside of our own fields of study. The results have been varied, challenging, and a pleasure to read.

Firstly, the literal face-to-face is, of course, that of the interview. There is the one with Jan Simons with whom we conversed—most graciously and with remarkably few glitches and misunderstandings—over email. We did not, then, have a face-to-face, strictly speaking, but he answered all we had desired to ask him about *Antichrist*, and went well beyond what we had expected or thought to imagine. There is also our joint meeting with the performance art scholar Amelia Jones, recently arrived in the Department of Art History and

¹ Alain Badiou. *Éloge de l’amour*. (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 24.

Communication Studies, here at McGill. From two to three (both in number, and also in hour, if memory serves us well), we had an animated discussion with her where, with much passion and patience, she took us through questions of disciplinary affiliation, the construction of objects of study within the arts, and the topical subject of Marina Abramović's New York Museum of Modern Art retrospective. Finally, there is the gift we received from Kathleen MacQueen, a PhD graduate of Stony Brook University, who had conducted an extensive interview with the German-American artist Hans Haacke in 2008—her fascinating exchange with the artist, as well as her enlightening commentary of his exhibition, *The State of the Union*, bring us back to the Bush Administration's darkest days and address some of the most central topics within American politics until today: democracy, war, torture, and the value of national symbols.

After the interviews, there are the papers: in his careful and original analysis of T. S. Eliot's poem, "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Everett Wilson not only touches on a range of interconnected questions relating to the theme of the face-to-face in a pertinent way (politics, the society of communication, depression), but he also takes on the greater challenge of intellectual or scholarly creativity which lies at the heart of SEACHANGE. Taking further the aspect of community formation which derives from the face-to-face encounter (we here think, of course, of the ethical imperative associated by Lévinas with the face-to-face), Maria Victoria Guglietti's paper describes an intriguing—and far too little-known—facet of Aboriginal artistic production. It illuminates relations between the use of the internet in a very specific segment of the population, examined over a prolonged period of time, and community formation as it occurs around art and, most specifically, the

internet. Thereby, it extends the face-to-face to include virtual encounters amongst larger numbers of participants.

In these two papers, the tension between the individual and the communal is striking. At a time of heightened reflection around the question of community (within the social sciences, politics, and relational aesthetics in art historical discourse) the notion of the face-to-face takes on new or different shapes. While still a possibility (a film such as *Antichrist* attests of its ongoing relevance), the individual one-on-one encounter appears to get more and more subsumed into wider, more complex networks of exchanges within and amongst larger communities. Drawing on both performance studies and the visual arts, Caroline's paper, which focuses on Berlin-based artist Tino Sehgal's recent show at the New York Guggenheim, proposes to reflect on the changing position of the face-to-face in relation to this generalized drive toward ethically-oriented community formation. As her paper shows, the individual face-to-face presents a site where the possibility for genuine intersubjectivity strives to survive. As suggested in a comparison set up by art historian David Shapiro² between relational artworks and the internet's latest fad—Chatroulette—perhaps this development finds itself reflected in recent practices of transient exchanges where users easily spend all night zapping from one stranger to the next, in a sort of unsatisfiable quest, a bulimic frenzy for more and more of that same sense of intersubjective possibility.

Within the two 'faces' of our theme, there is also the potentially transitional matter of the 'to.' While the face-to-face implies a given, situated encounter between two elements, it also points to the prepositional imperatives of direction, situation, destination, condition, recognition, relation,

² David Shapiro. "Tino Sehgal's Chat Roulette: Is this Progress?," *Museo Magazine*, March 13, 2010. <http://www.museomagazine.com/muse/2010/03/tino-sehgal-chat-roulette-is-this-progress>

exchange, multiplication, connection, comparison, purpose, intention, absence, and closure; ‘to,’ in its very positionality, orients thought, action, and experience. Its positionality is contingent, dependent on individuals, times, and places, and so its usages are both multiple and mobile. The work of ‘to’ is to prepare relationality. If the face-to-face is a full event of encounter, its ‘to’ is the field in which exchange can occur. Event, encounter, and exchange are three terms for ‘to’ as well.

It is precisely this open relational field, anchored by the event in question, that also stands at the root of SEACHANGE’s mission to reconfigure inherited critical discourses in art, media, culture, and technology. It is often hard to fathom that our present, a definite present, is neither one of crisis nor of progress, stasis or development, of timely ones or latecomers. A definite present is a time for the aged. They, of a present, are those few amongst us that still hold onto debts to be paid, extending them, bestowing them—both the debt and the few—as inheritances. It is the event, and that of the face-to-face stands in for the original red ledger, that marks the relation of the inheritor.

It is interesting to take the example of the fall of the Berlin Wall—a fall, for us, here and now, that was one of optimism and hope, albeit, as life-time would foretell, with similar restitutions to be made. For whom is that fall to be an inheritance? This is a directed question of bequeathing. Ask it of a contemporary and the fall becomes present, a face-value that demands interpretation and iteration—the answers are given and they add themselves to the others which lie at hand. Explanations cohere, momentum gathers, and the answers at hand go towards solving the problem at hand; the multiple to the single, and so on. To ask who is to inherit that fall is also to ask what remains? “Performances!,” shouts the debtor. The argument is made; the

iteration plays; the faces are seen, they turn from the screen, and...apathetic spleen. There is no inventory to be taken from the fragments that remain. These traces are not clues to a whole case-to-be-built, or, in the realm of thought, a 'house-of-theory,' but well placed props, scattered here and there, that can be inherited and lead to a partial restitution of the wall as debt. It is interesting to take the example of the fall of the Berlin wall because in its very twoness, a basic division that seemed both so cherished and so arbitrary, it is also that other, alter 'to' that bespeaks its relational field between problems of mediation and coercion that are still everpresent—aged, yes, certainly, but outstanding nonetheless as an inheritance of the 'for whom.'

What sociality props up our 'to' is actually contested and forced to face up to its limited positionality by this 'for.' And yet they articulate each other in that they both have the means to speak. Thought of as two parts that establish a bond that can at some point be broken, their articulation, momentary as it is, is a gain for critique. Under certain conditions (social, political, economic, at base, cultural), 'to' speaks of 'for,' and 'for' performs the possibility of a structured relation between multiple debts. 'To' and 'for,' as temporally whole as they seem, are contingent on a greater scale than that of the single everyday—an event comes with retrospect, otherwise it is the strength of incident, collision, and participation without closure.

La pensée du vivant doit tenir du vivant l'idée du vivant.

Georges Canguilhem, "La Pensée et le vivant"

At one of the earliest meetings in the history of the youthful existence of SEACHANGE, we discussed the possibility of contacting Kostas Axelos, the French philosopher of Greek origin, to see if he might be willing to grant us a moment to speak with him about his life and his work. We were busy, struggling to justify (or even think about why we had to justify) bringing yet another journal to bear on questions that could perhaps be better addressed through, for instance, a play—what Strindberg calls “an intimate course of events.” By way of example:

MISS JULIE [*tempo presto*]. You've never been abroad, Kristin—you should get away and see the world. —You've no idea what fun it is to travel by train—new people all the time—new countries—we'll pass through Hamburg and see the Zoo—you'll like that—and when we get to Munich there'll be the museums—you know, with Rubens and Raphael and all the great painters—you've heard of Munich, haven't you, where King Ludwig used to live—you know, the mad one—and then we'll see his castles—some of them are just like the ones in fairy-tales—and from there it's not far to Switzerland—and the Alps, Kristin—just fancy the Alps, with snow in the middle of the summer—oranges grow there, and laurel trees that are green all the year round— — —

JEAN *can be seen in the wings to the right, whetting his razor on a strop, which he is holding between his teeth and left hand; he listens with satisfaction to the conversation and then nods approvingly.*

MISS JULIE [*tempo prestissimo*]. —and there we'll take over a hotel—and I'll sit in the office while Jean welcomes the guests—I'll go out shopping—write letters—oh, what a life it will be, Kristin—trains whistling, buses arriving, bells ringing on every floor and in the restaurant—and I'll make out the

bills—I can salt them, yes I can—you’ve no idea how timid tourists are when it comes to paying the bill!—And you—you’ll sit like a queen in the kitchen.—You won’t have to stand over the stove yourself, of course—and you’ll be nicely and neatly dressed when you appear before the guests—and with your looks—I’m not flattering you, Kristin—one day you’ll get hold of a husband, a rich Englishman, you’ll see—they’re so easy to [*slowing down*]—catch—and then we’ll get rich—and build ourselves a villa on Lake Como—it rains a little there now and then, of course—but [*subsiding*] the sun must shine there too, sometimes— — —though it looks dark— — —and—then—otherwise, we can always come home again—back to [*pause*] — — —here—or somewhere else— — —³

It was precisely with that that we struggled—from life into fast, and on to the slow, still moment. The realization of the stillness of our enterprise only came later. Axelos’s work was relatively new to us, and, given his age, his stature, and his editorship at *Editions de Minuit*, it was intriguing to think of him as a generation’s ‘arguments’; intra-closure, that ‘to’ speaking of ‘for.’ We joked about writing him a letter, laughing at how anachronistic a medium can become in the span of twenty odd years. A few days after this meeting, Axelos died in Paris at the age of eighty-six. This is to say that one of the happenstance, contextual events that marked the beginnings of SEACHANGE was a letter neither composed nor sent, media laughter and play, and a discussion of arguments that, already at that original meeting, seemed distant, curious, the full spectrum of the pros and cons of the quixotic. Axelos is not ours to elegize—we’ve read little and, in all frankness, will probably not read a great deal more. But, as a living intellectual marker in the course alluded to

³ August Strindberg, *Miss Julie and Other Plays*, trans. by Michael Robinson. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 104-105. Of particular note is Strindberg’s Preface to *Miss Julie* and his endorsement therein of naturalism in the theatre.

above, Axelos deserves a voicing. In “Entretien avec «soi-même»” he speaks (‘to’ the moment) and so writes (‘for’ a durable generation):

Nous pensons de plus en plus difficilement ce à quoi nous pensons, cela-même qui nous pense. L’enseignement de la philosophie et la recherche scientifique, les bavardages sur la place publique et l’incontinence verbale journalistique ou publicisite, les divers colloques et entretiens font encore une fois apparaître une pensée sans monde et un monde sans pensée. Car il ne suffit pas de saisir au vol les thèmes du monde à la mode, mais d’articuler et de désarticuler la pensée qui se remémore, la pensée pensante, la pensée avançante. La patrie de la pensée est-ce l’exil?⁴

Necessary thoughts for a seachange.

⁴ Kostas Axelos. *Entretiens: “Réels,” imaginaires et avec “soi-même.”* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1973), 100.

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