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## “Braided Fibres”

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## REFERENCES

Junod, Philippe. *Transparence et opacité : essai sur les fondements théoriques de l'art moderne, pour une nouvelle lecture de Konrad Fiedler*, Nîmes : Jacqueline Chambon, 2004, (Rayon art)

- 1 Philippe Junod's *Transparence et opacité* is one of the most comprehensive, fascinating and dizzy-making explorations of the theoretical sources of modern art. Written between 1968 and 1971, and published in 1975, the goal, back then, of this stout volume was to "posit a few milestones for an 'archaeology' of western aesthetics" (p.13). The discreet allusion to Michel Foucault probably suggested the author's wish to grant no privileges to philosophy, but rather to deal on one and the same level with apparently heterogeneous forms of discourse and praxis: artistic doctrines, canonical writings belonging to art criticism, and works stemming from art history, as well as artists' works, like so many historical examples revealing an artistic representation ceaselessly changing throughout the 19th century. In the maze of texts, what was involved was finding the historical movement culminating in the in-depth transformation of the western conception of *mimesis*. But then, without recourse to the linear model of the chronological sequence of theoretical formations, Junod uses the image of "braided fibres", disappearing, turn by turn, from sight, but never ceasing to exist, to describe the disappearances and reappearances of the aesthetics of creation lying at the root of 20th century modern art. Junod's work, which is a crucial one, but impossible to lay hands on for many years, has thus been reissued by Jacqueline Chambon (we may, however, lament the fact that the publisher did not deem it fitting to offer the reader a new foreword or preface shedding light on the challenges of such a survey, for a history of art that is increasingly sensitive to its history, but just as neglectful of the history of thought that permeates it and lends it its conceptual vigour).

- 2 Junod's book is organized like a sort of three-act theoretical drama. Act I: "Transparency of *mimesis*". For centuries, a strict conception of imitation prevailed, be it the ideal imitation peculiar to the classical doctrine, or the illusionist conception of representation. According to Junod, far from sundering this framework, Romanticism merely took over from it with its theme focused on the expression of feeling. Faced with the progress of technology, in particular the invention of photography, this conception finds in the naturalistic doctrine its final shudder. As a symmetrical opposite of Naturalism, the symbolist doctrine remained confined within the contrast between idea and sign. By developing in tandem a theory of the Idea and a theory of the form which both absorb each other in the old theory of expression, Symbolism was unable to go beyond the traditional conception of *mimesis*, which postulates an antecedence of a model or pre-existing reality.
- 3 This broad historical outlook makes it possible to explode the originality of the thinking of the art theoretician which lies at the heart of the book, the German Konrad Fiedler (1841-1895), as well as his abundant thoughts about the evolution of modern art in the 20th century. Act II: "Opacity of *poiesis*". As Junod explains—and this shows how simplistic it is to limit the German's contribution to a mere theory of "pure visibility", within formalism—, Fiedler formulates a radical criticism of *mimesis* in all its forms, be it the imitation of styles, nature, or ideas. Perception is accordingly conceived as the active organization of a visual reality, forever being challenged and questioned. In a pivotal essay, published in 1876, titled: "On the Manner of Judging Visual Works of Art", Fiedler developed the idea that the visible does not proceed from a refinement of perception, but, quite to the contrary, from an active process of "objectivization of the world". Well removed from romantic attempts at insurrection, far from eclecticism, Naturalism and Platonic idealism, Fiedler conceived the quest for pure visibility as an enrichment of consciousness, an "addition to being", or, as Georges Gusdorf would put it at a later date, a "hunt for being". This kind of active conception of form would be largely shared and applied not only by a good many art theoreticians, but by artists involved in a modernity whose originality would have to do with the fact that it would be aware of the opaqueness of art. It tallied with a slow but relentless rehabilitation of the act of making, understood as material execution. From Georges Seurat and Paul Cézanne to Paul Klee and Juan Gris, the author shows how the Fiedlerian reversal of the relation between idea and form had nothing speculative about it, but, on the contrary, announced and developed what would be accomplished in artists' activities. In this respect Junod introduced many more overviews: so in the history of orchestration, the shift from a "pure" music with Johann Sebastian Bach, for whom the transcription from one instrument to another was a current and flexible thing, to modern orchestration, which painstakingly and methodically differentiates the tones, is another illustration of this.
- 4 Act III: "Immanence of meaning". As we have seen, Junod made use of Fiedler's thinking like a sort of "theoretical compass" to shed light on the radical upheaval of the conception of *mimesis* brought about by the late 19th century avant-gardes. In the latter art, the author brings in Fiedler like a critical operator, so as to appraise the scope and import of the paradigms which were common currency in the 1960s, from the semiology of Roland Barthes to the iconology of Erwin Panofsky, from *Geistesgeschichte* to Marxist sociology, right up to the psychoanalytical approach, all, in Junod's view, powerless to properly grasp the reflective tendency of modern art. Lastly, there is a theme that runs discreetly through the book: the author dedicates his work to artists, without whom the

book "would not be what it is". Fielder, as we know, spent his life in studios. A friend of the sculptor and theoretician Adolf von Hildebrand and the painter Hans von Marées, with whom he had acquired a cloister in Florence to live in, Fielder explicitly set his critique in the extension of works, as close as possible to the artistic productive doubt. His work illustrates an aesthetic line of thinking forever subject to the ceaseless and exacting monitoring of an experience lived by artistic creation. These fibres of modern art could only be definitively braided by the historian within the intimacy of artists.