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The Enigmatic Body

Essays on the Arts by Jean Louis Schefer

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY

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INTRODUCTION

Paul Smith

Jean Louis Schefer's work, which now consists of more than ten books and scores of essays, has been appearing in French over the past twenty-five years without attracting a great deal of attention in the anglophone world; indeed, prior to the present collection, scarcely any of it had been translated into English. The first design of this book is simply to remedy that situation and to introduce Schefer's writing by way of a selection ranging from some of his earliest work to his most recent. This is, then, a chronologically organized selection, and it is the chronology which perhaps provides the most secure thread to what is in many respects a heterogeneous body of work. It deals with (or perhaps better, approaches) a varied collection of painting and kinds of painting, as well as the cinema, literature, philosophy, theology, and theory. At the same time, each essay approaches its object with a different task in view, and I attempt to explain the nature of those tasks in the short introductions I have provided for each chapter of this collection. Even though the heterogeneity of the work is quite marked, this collection does try to sketch out what Schefer calls (in a way that recalls Paul Valéry) an intellectual biography. What is important to Schefer in writing these texts is not so much the particular objects about which he writes, but rather the registration of the very complexity, even instability, of his encounters with them.

The series of encounters represented here is, in my view, held together by a focus upon a particular fantasy, a fantasy of something that Schefer proposes is in fact absent from the objects viewed or read – that is, what I have called an enigmatic body. The enigmatic body can be considered a fantasy of Schefer's reading. It is the construct that emerges from the encounter between object and subject, or between a painting and its viewing, a text and its reading. It is, finally, an ideological notion, in that it marks a resistance to the demands of both the object and the codified ways of interpreting. In other words, while the enigmatic body depends in a sense upon the force of the representation at hand and on the habits of interpretation that have been safeguarded for such representations, it is the product

of a resistance to both. Or, to put it yet another way, the enigmatic body is what will not or cannot be accounted for by our legitimated systems of representation or our rationalized procedures of interpretation: the enigmatic body is what is elided or missing, precisely, from those systems and procedures. One might say that it constitutes the unrepresentable and that the impossible task Schefer has set himself is to represent the unrepresentable, to make visible in writing what is invisible in the encounter with the object.

So the idea of the enigmatic body becomes what is probably the privileged trope by means of which Schefer's resistance to what he calls the doxical pressures of representation and interpretation are consistently played out. This enigmatic, *para*doxical body, then, is for him always present as a pressure on the doxical, juridical body. Or else, the enigmatic always remains to be discovered in its relation to the dogmatic. So in that sense Schefer sees his task not as the undertaking of endless hermeneutic analyses of his object (which would always be to submit to the doxa and produce a dogmatic view of the object), but as the solicitation of the object for what it hides, or for its enigma. For him, the enigma consists in that part of ourselves and our histories that has been disinherited in the attempt to represent, rationalize, and regulate. In relation to the doxical body, then, and against the forms of rationality in which it lives on the everyday level, Schefer attempts to construe what he calls the "unknown center of ourselves."

Schefer's rejection of the formulated rationality of interpretative procedures derives from his sense that these are insufficient to register either the historical or the autobiographical aspects of our encounter with the text or image. His perspective may be construed from the way he prefaces a book of essays, *Espèce de chose mélancolie* (1979a). He begins with the remark that his writing is intended to militate against "the image of the good intellectual": "So there's something I don't like. The space, for example, where every intellectual is called upon to interpret the world endlessly . . . to impose the traits of rationality upon the image of the world. . . . So the image of the good intellectual (the one who attaches his writing to a certain kind of immobile world, to the sleep of the species) is uninhabitable so far as I'm concerned."

Schefer's writing, then, cannot constitute a conventional hermeneutical or scholarly project. Yet it is the case that his writing did begin to appear in one of the privileged arenas of contemporary theoretical discourses. That is, the first essay collected here, "Spilt Color/Blur" (1970c), along with his first book, *Scénographie d'un tableau* (1969), both derived from his collaboration with the group who gathered around the journal *Tel Quel* in the 1960s (writers like Kristeva, Sollers, Barthes, and Derrida whose work marks the transition between structuralism and poststructuralism, and also an increas-

ingly severe departure from the possibilities of Marxist and feminist thinking). "Spilt Color/Blur" explores the codes of painting as system, but in a way that most importantly tries to account for the neglect of color within perspectival systems and within the theory of painting; thus it is an article that, while it is in dialogue with Panofsky and with structuralism, and indeed with the whole history of art theory, already gives a hint of Schefer's dissatisfaction with conventional modes of pictorial and semiological analysis.

In the early 1970s such work already seemed a unique intervention into art theory by dint of its attempt to free critical interpretation from what Schefer then saw as inhibitive traditional methodologies. Yet, despite the successes of these early analyses, Schefer soon abandoned this semiological approach, which he had begun to think of as a merely pseudoscientific pretension. Like his friend and mentor Roland Barthes, he began to lose faith in the project of producing a generalizing and generalizable reading schema (a mathesis) by way of investigation of the system of the text (a semiotic). Like Barthes, Schefer began to recognize the insufficiency of this project and started to write, as Barthes put it, *"à découvert"* – on the hunt for something but also, as it were, un-covered, without the intellectual protection of presignified methodologies and schemas, and without the goal of producing a universal truth.[1]

In that regard, even in *Scénographie* one can already discern the outline of one of the principal aims of much of Schefer's subsequent work. There he suggests that part of the work to be done is that of "reintroducing the object into one's text, that is, into our history" (1969: 171). Thus, between *Scénographie* and later work Schefer appears to be working out how to do that, how to rearticulate the relation between the text that is the painting and the text that is the writing. This project appears to have involved a shift away from the strict issue of figuration as system, and toward a more flexible sense of figuration as a trope which must be elaborated and made visible within the writer's text. It is a trope that has crucial elements of the word *history* written within it. History, first, in the sense that it implies a historical sense and understanding of the ideological and juridical effects of figurative demands and intellectual schemes of rationality. But history, too, in that it pulls the writer toward a sense of the history of the self, the viewing subject – this is where Schefer's project of the intellectual autobiography perhaps begins in earnest, and where the effort to delineate the enigmatic body that is missing from painting but equally engaged by it has its immediate roots.

Some of the groundwork for such an "autobiographical" project is undertaken in a series of writings that are not directly represented in this volume – Schefer's work on Augustine and on Vico. What is offered here are the traces and sketches of that work, particularly "On the Object of Figuration," "Thanatography/Skiagraphy," and

the excerpt from the book on Uccello, *Le Déluge, la peste, Paolo Uccello*. These texts, all in their way, foreground the specificity of the body, and particularly at the point where it is divided (in a skiagraphy) between the sensible and the intelligible in early Christian theology (Schefer's "thanatography"). *L'Invention du corps chrétien,* on Augustine and the early thought of Christendom, appeared six years after *Scénographie* and maps the theoretical and historical ground on which his work built thereafter. Investigating the tension between paganism and early Christianity, especially in relation to the practices of painting and writing, Schefer discovers the beginnings of the problematic of figuration in the cultures of Christianity, or of the representation and conception of the body in our cultures. That is, the book delineates these relationships at their moment of formation during what Schefer sees as the beginning of Christian culture's theoretical consolidation in the work of Saint Augustine and traces the construction of a division in the subject between, on the one hand, the actually existing body and, on the other hand, the idealized moral subject of institutionalized Christianity. As Schefer himself puts it, the book is "a reading of Augustine – a very autobiographical one (I was very heavily influenced by the *Confessions*). The point at the time was the relation between *De Trinitate* and the *Confessions:* the Trinity gives theoretical form – anthropological – trinitarian, thought about time – to the existential aporias posited in the *Confessions*" (private communication, August 1993).

According to Schefer, Augustine's thought institutes a moral division in the subject's perception of itself that is later played out across the art and writing of the Renaissance. Indeed, as he suggests in "The Plague" (Chapter 4), this tension not only constitutes a whole drama for the Renaissance but informs the relation of Western thought to drama itself (that is, to the theater). Schefer's later work will itself replay and reevaluate this division across a number of other cultural texts and practices. Much of this is evident in his work on Vico in *Espèce* where Vico's history and his "new science" are seen as privileged moments in a resistant registration of Christianity's division of the body across the moral and juridical fields. If Vico is important for Schefer at the theoretical level, it is in Uccello that Schefer sees the emergence of the most provocative explorations of this drama in art. (Uccello's important place for Schefer is reflected in the return to him in "What Are Red Things?" [1990c].) But it is a drama that Schefer investigates also in later texts as various as Freud's writing on the paranoiac Schreber, or Chris Marker's film *La Jetée* (Chapter 9). In the present volume, the parameters of this division are perhaps most beautifully set out in "Thanatography/Skiagraphy" (Chapter 3); pass through Schefer's texts on the cinema (Chapters 8 and 9), where questions of the body's memory are foregrounded;[2] and carry on into Schefer's encounter with Cy Twombly's drawing and paint-

ing (Chapter 10), where the division is cast in terms of a "childish knowledge" or memory that resists rational science and legitimated representational strategies in art.

To reduce crudely, then, what Schefer spends several books meticulously demonstrating and enacting, the concerns sketched out here – the figuration of the body, the subject's experience and memory, the moral and juridical (or ideological) pressure exerted on the body by Western traditions of thought, and the particular historical and artistic location of contradictions between all these – are often worked out as questions of time and the subject's memory, and are discovered and continually rediscovered as relations between the subject and painting, cinema, writing, or lived experience itself. The selections here are intended to represent Schefer's elaboration of such relations and to demonstrate how his analyses constitute an ongoing attempt to construct a writing that will figure the contradictions between representations and the subject's processes of consciousness and interpretation. The privileged figure of those contradictions, or the figure he most often wants to make visible, is this enigmatic body (or what he variously calls "an internal being" or a "paradoxical body"), which, he says, constitutes "what is missing" from our encounters with art objects and writing: time and memory separate us from any realizable figuration of ourselves. This separation is the condition of possibility for the residue – the repressed, or even the trace, as it might be described in other discursive regimes – of the "internal body."

So Schefer wants to propose that representation always figures not so much its ostensible referents but rather this "unknown center of ourselves," a fantasy of the experience of the body which has no expression except through the prismatic figuration of other objects. As he puts it at the end of *La Lumière, la proie:* "the question could be asked, whether pictures are mirrors of ourselves. Of course they are mirrors, but it's not our bodies they reflect; what they reflect is what we lack."

This "enigmatic body" is not, of course, some spiritual essence or some mystical entity that Schefer is positing. Rather, it is to be understood as a trope or fantasy that gives shape to the subject's experiencing of the object. This experience is never fixed or essential, but constitutes exactly an ongoing history, a changing relation of two changing entities – the subject and the object. It is exactly this continually shifting relation or construction of what we are missing, the enigmatic body, that lends itself to Schefer's peculiar emphasis on and respect for the act of writing. This emphasis in his work is perhaps best exhibited in "Someone Writing" and "Roland Barthes" (Chapters 6 and 7), where there is what can be called an existential premium placed on this activity which is the locus for the registration of the shifting and unfinished relations of time, memory, and

the body. It is that registration that is important, more than the objects themselves which finally seem to be "only a surface upon which Schefer's commentary acts out its own representational drama, writing the crisis that it concomitantly reads in the objects it describes."[3] Hence some of the difficulty or unattainability of this work as it radically confronts at one and the same time the history both of the object (painting, cinema, writing) and of the viewing/reading subject.

In the context of such complex and unorthodox aims and effects, it is perhaps un-Scheferian to try to suggest a key to his writing. But what might be said is that, in the continual effort to represent the unfinished and relational status of texts and objects (and indeed of knowledge itself), Schefer's writing bears some comparison to the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In his *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty describes a view of the subject and its relation to the object such that one might imagine, to conclude, that in a certain sense Schefer's writing constitutes exactly an elaboration (a working out, even an acting out) of what Merleau-Ponty might mean when he proposes that "I am a psychological and historical structure and have received, with existence, a manner of existing, a style. . . . [T]his significant life, this certain significance of nature and history which I am, does not limit my access to the world, but on the contrary is my means of entering into communication with it. . . . Nothing determines me from outside, not because nothing acts on me, but on the contrary because I am from the start outside myself and open to the world."[4]

ALL translators necessarily make some noise about the peculiar difficulties of their projects, and I don't intend to be an exception. The qualities and affects of Schefer's thinking produce an immensely complex and distinctive prose that is fundamentally difficult to read for French speakers and still more difficult to translate into English. Here the severity of my own difficulties can be alluded to by the fact that, in referring to the translations while speaking to Schefer about them, I have always spoken of them as my "traductions," meaning to allude to my feeling of always traducing or betraying the texts even as I translated them. One sense in which I have betrayed Schefer's texts is simply by dint of the fact that I am not a "professional" translator. My view of them is more that of a friend and sympathetic reader, and much less that of a meticulous or rigorously expert conduit of the French into English. I justify the results of what might be considered this demerit by simply saying that Schefer makes sense to me only in the way that I have translated him. More fastidious translations than the ones given here would, I claim, reflect neither Schefer's intentions nor my own sense of the meaning, effect, and affect of those intentions.

One result of this attitude is that I have tried to give something of

both the voice of the English language and my own voice to what can perhaps only be described as the grain of the voice in Schefer's writing. Even when conducting the most complex interrogations, Schefer writes in a manner that is deliberately and provocatively distanced both from the logic of traditional "doxical" argumentation and from the expressivity of traditional lyricism. In his effort to convey the very undefinable nature and the vertiginous excitement of the interaction between objects and the writing subject, he often pays scant attention to orthodox French syntax and punctuation, or sometimes even grammar. He produces long, complex sentences and paragraphs, which intend to produce both an *effect* and an *affect* in the reader as much as to produce a graspable meaning – Schefer's texts are written so as to encourage the invisible and enigmatic body to *appear*. It might be said that the challenge for the translator here has been to balance the requirements of sense with the requirements of sensation, and to allow for the slow emergence of the fantasy of the Scheferian enigma.

I have had to make myself willing to alter Schefer's syntax and punctuation so that the prose can be rendered within recognizable parameters of English usage – for instance, I will often break down his longer sentences, recast the punctuation, paraphrase his ellipses, and so on. But at the same time, I want to lose as little as possible of the peculiar sensation of his work, so I have not sought absolute conformity with English conventions: sentences without verbs, for instance, often take on a kind of exclamatory role in Schefer's work, and such an effect needs to be reproduced, I think.

Another way in which I have perhaps traduced rather than translated Schefer's intentions is in regard to footnotes and references. Apart from the first and early essay translated here, "Spilt Color/Blur," Schefer's work includes scant footnotes or references. Quotations, when they are marked at all, are usually registered by little more than the name of an author; he frequently interpolates his own words into these "quotations"; sometimes he neither uses quotation marks nor offers the name of the quoted author; every now and then he even invents quotations. I cite Schefer's own explanation for this way of working: "Generally, I hardly ever quote a text as such, but I lightly modify it in such a way as to make it 'meld' into my own text. This is much closer to the effect of memory in a text. The authors I quote are usually 'naturalized' and the origin of the quotations hidden so as to leave the syntax free" (private communication, April 1993). Yet my own process of coming to understand Schefer's work over the years has been greatly aided by following up on some of the points of reference that he does provide. Consequently, I've thought it useful to offer other readers a few more intertextual certainties than Schefer himself might condone. The reader will find here, then, that most of Schefer's "quotations" are either rendered

by standard or readily available English translations of the texts concerned, or footnoted (or both). Often the use of already existing translations has meant distorting Schefer's originals a little bit. To minimize the effect of this I have usually employed the most literal and least stylized translations I could find – for instance, the Loeb translations of Latin and Greek authors have been especially useful in that regard.

I might add here that during the preparation of this book Schefer has appeared rather amused by my requests for help in tracking down sources of quotations, even though he has not fundamentally objected to the procedure. For my own part, I have found it more than a little odd that he can always recite verbatim the quotations he uses while often claiming not to remember precisely where they came from. This is perhaps only to recognize a symptom of the ultimately tendentious nature of Schefer's enigmatic style.

PREFACE

Jean Louis Schefer

This preface will, I fear, seem indiscreet – it already is, because of the need for simplicity.

Monsieur Teste at the theater (Valéry's *La Soirée avec Monsieur Teste*), or myself at the cinema. A bit of theology, a few paintings, some literature: a variegated forest of the aesthetic objects which, for a long time now, have guided my pleasure and made themselves the point of my studies. If I need to explain the way this collection is composed (and of course that's the least I can do), first of all I have to avow that I've neither the inclination nor the patience to be a scholar, and I don't have the kind of vision needed to become the author of novels. I'm a writer without a story – someone who chronicles, bit by bit, his own intellectual adventure, which is articulated across a collection of multifarious objects. It's in the capriciousness of my own choices and preferences that I've found my universe, my procedures, my way of being – my happiness.

When I was very young, I was educated by Paul Valéry (reading him, his presence around my family): novels and fiction aren't my thing – rather, objects and the construction of ideas constitute my kind of novel. I cling to the faint hope that one day one of my books will make this sheaf of apparently diverse objects cohere.

How can I really explain the mode, the style of my texts? In terms of themes? – that would be a job for the editor of this collection. These texts are one part of my own adventure. What determined that adventure isn't simply what I learned in schools, but the way I had to learn. My education was aesthetic: painters in the family, my father's watercolors, Berthe Morisot; patrons – Gabriel Thomas and Henri Rouart; a tradition of learning (orientalists), and of public service (diplomats). My whole childhood was intimidated by the great men of the family: so I had to undertake to be myself, to write an "other" French language, and that was my first aesthetic concern. This is a classic scenario for postwar children coming out of the grand bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century and from the aristocracy: a rejection of what has survived from that culture only as snobbery. Yet there was still something essential I needed to retain from

it: the idea of an heir's obligation and a sense of personal duty (which I could only translate into a "style," that is, into a particular way of relating to objects).

I hope I'll be forgiven these biographical indiscretions: they constitute, perhaps, the most profound determination of my choice of objects. Coming to France at the beginning of the nineteenth century, we gave up a name that had a much more gothic or chivalric ring to it, the name of our ancestors from eastern Prussia – my schooldays were caught up in a teutonic novel, tournaments, castles, rides across the plains of northern Europe, family legends. . . . Most importantly, I was sure that the truncating of this name had rendered me invisible – a spectator.

The thread or common argument in the texts here could be "thematic" (though only ever in an enigmatic way: which is the insistence of the fantasy of composing). At a distance, whatever thread there might be is for me autobiographical (perhaps it's like those Proustian parentheses, to be understood as digressions within a story). The autobiographical character of many of these texts is no accident: it constitutes, or endlessly proves, the limits of theoretical or philosophical abstraction, of the intellectual treatment of objects – which only "speak" to me once they've been appropriated. The only trick, the only technique that the work had to teach me is like the task of the entomologist: butterflies, insects, they have to be caught alive; to grasp onto, then, a body (of ideas, rhythms, colors . . .) without destroying it and without dissecting it. The accident is that the life that goes on in things actually resembles me.

But what's the real or more precise linkage among these texts or topics? – the constitution of a territory (is it literature, the legible, an unordered catalogue of images of life?).

It's always, in the end, necessary to interrogate oneself about the nature or the procedures of work. I remain marked, beyond the reasons I've indicated, by my reading *Monsieur Teste* (I read it as an adolescent, and for me it replaced Jules Verne; I managed to get to the end of *Five Weeks in a Balloon* because of an illness – linctus and syrups, poultices and wraps, antiseptics, those old-fashioned remedies remain the landscape of that novel). Monsieur Teste, or Valéry himself, accepting only an intellectual biography as a real novel: that's the idea in the end, looking back over these years of work, and that's also my project.

I ought to be able to suggest a way of using these texts; to explain myself, first of all, as to the diversity of these interests that don't readily add up to a single picture. And nor do they form a scholarly corpus. There's no shortage of models for my kind of intellectual or aesthetic vagabondage: Valéry, Bataille, or Barthes, to mention just the moderns; perhaps Cardinal Retz as well, composing his various writings under the rubric "forest" ("I've composed a wood") while

a fever confined him to his room. In fact, this vagabondage and this forest are part of the aesthetic calling of French literature (unless they constitute a faraway German horizon – my whole fantasy?).

I'm trying, by way of these detours, to introduce the texts in this anthology as simply as possible, to explain their mode – which is obviously that of a system of shifts of object (and includes my carelessness about quotations, about which Paul Smith asked me endless and probably despairing questions).

I hope that my English readers will forgive me these indiscretions: in my desire to illuminate at least the mode of these texts, I'm just talking about myself. I've never known how to do otherwise; and yet, when I speak of myself (or speak in my own name), I'm still only speaking about what it is that I'm looking for, rather than about what I am. This is perhaps a slightly better way of explaining the mode of my kind of literature: its objects are inconsistent, with a short and almost intermittent kind of life.

So what crosses these pages, and what might constitute their principle of legibility, is of a different order than what makes up the material of the project of novels (which proceed from the illusory notion, dressed up in bodies or figures, that our lives play out a consistent role). The essayist has other concerns; the essayist animates, or is drawn by, a different fiction; it's the idea (already Valérian) of covering the world with paper, with bits of writing. I recall a conversation with Michel de Certeau as he pointed out a window opposite his house: "Yesterday there was a man there standing on the balcony; I watched him tearing up bits of paper (letters?) and the little squares flew off over Paris. You see, I think that's all I'm doing – I'm haphazardly spreading paper all over the city."

The essayist (an indolent historian, a novelist beset by doubts about the material of fiction, a philosopher without a system) has the good fortune of a Don Juan: incessant choice and the aim of renewable pleasure. That of variation, of the turning prism of a kind of freedom; everything is clear, everything is hidden: not having a system, he reintroduces himself in the course of a work through a series of "themes." Paul Smith has read here, precisely, the theme of an "enigmatic body."

Theology, linguistics, art history, archaeology, music, moments of humor; what's the linkage among these things? – well, it isn't a theme, and it isn't in the things themselves; it resides, more than in myself (which is the most unknown thing), in the very act of gathering of what I steal and appropriate for myself and for my pleasure. The pleasure of stealing away, of appropriating for a moment, of identifying with the subject of a historical text or a distant painting, all this involves profound choices. What emerges most strongly from these years of work is what I've learned from Augustine, or what I've taken from my sympathy for Vico, "attached to his dia-

mond island" and reducing the human fact in his historical project to bits of etymological dust, to a dance of the material as it organizes itself according to the plans and structures that remain the forms of human freedom and thus become the object of his new history; but his science was always infused with the romantic suffering of the self expelled from the center of the world, reliving that primal place only by way of nostalgia and the desire to organize its history: such a history could no longer mobilize a body, it was incapable of a story; because its prism sometimes made visible the atoms (infinitesimal sounds), and sometimes the structures (the institutions, the constancy of the legislator). But Vico pushed me to know: he taught me, through his unfinished and genially ruined work, what Hegel might have taught me through antipathy. I took more to the weakness of his system than to Hegel's severity: following him I sought out all the texts of Roman law (I even bought a volume of Vossius that he might have actually used). I loved him, he opened up a part of my life that's somehow divided between the project of learning and "confessions." For I too am this dance of ideas, of affects, of choices that I can't reassemble into the shape of a character in a novel, am I not? And what might this book be that I'm waiting for, all the while working on something else? Another *Confessions of an English Opium Eater,* another *Gradiva?*

But perhaps there's another available vantage point on these texts: that is, from the point of view of a book I'm now writing on the legend of the Eucharist, where I'm beginning to be able to see the uncertainties of the story's basis coming together into bundles – the adventures of "substance" in theology, the way in which the sensory and the intelligible are cut off from each other, and the way figurational bodies are divided up by the requirements of the juridical, the dogmatic, and the economic. Is that the impulse for these essays, or just an after-the-fact rationalization?

Yet the idea of a plan (a synthesis, a system) is what's most clearly lacking in the subrogation of pleasure at the fulcrum of these texts. A little more than a vagabondage among objects, perhaps something other than the choice of new loves, it's the adventure itself, by an infinite substitution of poles of identification in the human thing; this is historical, intellectual, aesthetic. And what is its final justification? It is I who am the principle and the end of my collection: and the collection resembles me. Such would be – if it's still necessary to justify one's style before the academic bar – such could be the motto of the essayist, of this writer who accedes to fiction only by way of a knowledge rather than by novelistic conventions or inventions.

Perhaps, as I write this preface, I'm gradually forgetting the object of my commentary and beginning to invent another one, tomorrow's object? – but these are essentially the same thing. Within the text there's a labile, fleeting, polymorphous object. Like a prism, it

sometimes sends us the image of the object (a part of the world); or sometimes the image of the constructions that we try out on it (mediating bodies like what semiology was not so long ago – the project of a transparent language, open to other languages, the old dream of "general definition"); but sometimes it also sends us, by way of things, like a stain on the mirror or a fault in the paper, something of ourselves that we'd thought had been quite well disavowed. Less this sempiternal "ourselves" that's mixed in with things, less our indiscreet intellect infesting the thought of others; more a movement of arms, a way of closing the net, those always repetitious inflections by which, bit by bit, we draw things toward us as if, always, the middle of the world that we try to understand (sometimes as a fable, a rediscovered archive, sometimes as a mathematical formula) could only, more and more, be occupied by a body that's invisible but might, all the same, house our own body.

So the title given to this collection by the editor, "The Enigmatic Body," resonates with some part of this admission, this repeated idea, or this obsession.

The texts collected here represent a good number of years of work – they demonstrate less a continuity in my work than, perhaps, its fits and starts, its whole seismographic condition. Since the end of the 1960s (the time of my first book) our sensibility has changed. Principles of classification or interpretative grids (such as those of structuralism, psychoanalysis, and Marxism – an unstable trinity simultaneously guaranteeing the status of the real and the intelligible) have lost something of their power of stimulation (and inhibition). The anthropological object has got closer. It has seized us with its novelistic desire (a hunger that can't be satisfied just by formal experimentation); like some hallucinatory alarm from the eleventh century it has awoken in those of us who are incapable of novels a strange need for "confessions," for the admission of imaginary crimes. Perhaps this latest literature of guilt without religion is actually a compensation for the more or less Leibnitzian constructions that we were all trying out for a few years. As if its teaching were the lesson of the life upon which, just the same, we tried out our nets, our systems, and our seductions. As if the words of those departed were coming back to us: "What have you been doing all this time; how could you have distanced yourself so far from what you owed the duty of affection, so far from what you should have been writing?" There comes a time when this admonition is no longer the voice of our masters and teachers; we recognize it as our own. But too late: we've already changed styles, changed our lives.

I owe, to conclude, a few words of explanation about some of the specific texts collected here. "Thanatography/Skiagraphy" is the remnant of some work I did on hieroglyphs, a little trace. The text on Uccello (from *Le Déluge, la peste, Paolo Uccello*) is, in my under-

standing of the work, a passage between Augustine (my book on Augustine was written the year before) and Vico. This particular "flood" was written in August 1976, a time of drought. The mystical marriage of Saint Catherine (*Light and Its Prey*) was dedicated to another Catherine, who is now a new mother (the distorting mirror of the painting doesn't reflect anything of that story). The excerpts from the *Ordinary Man of the Cinema* (written in August 1979) are contemporaneous with that work on Correggio. *Ordinary Man* was a rather indirect response to a commission from *Cahiers du Cinéma,* which wanted a theoretical book about film: I took the opportunity, in a "Monsieur Teste at the Cinema," to begin a dissertation on time and the images that are in time, tracing the first lines of my imaginary of time. This is written only in figures – which are, without a doubt, what painting usually evokes for me, and that's also the motif of the final texts presented here. "What Are Red Things?": a bit of Aristotle and a few images from Uccello are used only to provoke the return of an image which could be the motif, the speaking center of what might be another text – a novel? not very likely! an intellectual biography? doubtless, but not only that. The origin of painting in me. Rousseau, in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages,* offers us the profound and marvelous idea of language having two origins, the one ruled by the necessity of exchange, the other arising from song, from the modulation of affects. Thus, I can imagine that the origin of what I love, in what I happen to have studied, described, analyzed, in everything that has become the material of my intellectual activity, that origin is contained, like the string at the beginning of a labyrinth, in the image given me by a childhood friend, and because of which, very early, I had to embark upon the hesitancy of interpretation.

I must put an end to this scarcely academic monologue (but I can't feign to be someone else, nor suddenly write a text other than my own) and give my warm thanks to Stephen Bann for his advice and support, and to Paul Smith for the patience, the skill, and the friendly obstinacy of his labors.

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