

une violence, certes variablement métaphorisée, mais lexicalement ancrée : démembrement, vide, gouffre, non-guérison, brûlure, écrasement, pourriture, etc. On dirait quand même – vers et strophes courts, l’-à-côté, l’indirect, des *méta*-phores – que le recueil chercherait à éviter une pleine déclaration des énergies émotives qui tournoient et vibronnent dans la conscience du poète; que, comme si souvent là où le cœur serait en jeu, l’ellipse et l’oblique imposeraient la simultanéité de leur furtivité et d’une certaine peur d’aggraver douleur et plaie. Il est difficile de parler de l’autre, pourtant. Le poème est site de complexité, offrant toujours les plis et replis de son sens mouvant. Les mots du critique qui regardent de l’extérieur risquent l’aveuglement et même l’impertinence. Ceci dit, la troisième des trois suites, *Roses*, tourne visiblement autour d’un imaginaire gravement, peut-être tragiquement, blessé, de la beauté, de la délicatesse, de l’amour. La rose devient l’emblème de tels possibles tout en glissant implacablement, destinalement, vers la destruction, la mort. ‘Temple [saccagé]’ (72), site d’un vaste rêve impossible, la rose ‘s’étiole / dans l’informe’ (75), devient signe d’un ‘à quoi bon’ (81), d’une mort qui ‘fleurit’ (83), d’une perte totale de ce qu’elle aurait pu, idéalement, être (99). Des scènes intimes surgissent (92, 95), où la rose semble devenir ironie, insulte, blasphème presque, là où la vie du mort, de la morte se célèbre. Le dernier poème de la suite constitue une injonction, malgré toute la peine que les roses génèrent dans l’imaginaire de Marc Blanchet :

Un an déjà

Dans le jardin,
elles se tiennent droites ---
et c’est ailleurs.

Un an
et puis après.

Regarde les roses. (103)

Le poème comme injonction de méditer la rose, toujours et nécessairement, selon la perspective de cette inséparation du naissant-vivant et du disparaissant-mourant, de cette perte subite ou graduelle, toujours à peine concevable, de ce que l’on aurait pu croire n’offrir que grâce, tendresse, élévation. Injonction qui exige que l’on assume ainsi la pleine gamme de ce que ce regard et cette méditation peuvent imaginer. Mais en même temps tout ceci s’articule au sein du *poëin* qui le propulse, ce faire, ce créer, ce charme, ce raffinement, ce si curieux et paradoxal panache où chaque mot reste une résistance, une continuité, un aller-vers-et-pour qui, ironie inversée, reste désir, même si hanté de manque. ‘Suites’, certes, mais sans fin finement caressées vers cet imaginable au-delà, ‘fins’ autres que charrie, fatalement, le *poétique*.

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Duffy, Jean H. *Perceiving Dubuffet: Art, Embodiment, and the Viewer*. Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press. 2021.

Jean Dubuffet’s coarse-grained, often crude and thickly-textured paintings, drawings, and sculptures range from near-abstraction to childlike figuration. Not unlike many post-war French artists (such as the members of the *Art Informel* movement) reacting to the horrors of the mid-20th Century, his preoccupation with painterly texture and a materiality which emphasizes the real, led him to use a variety of materials, including charcoal emulsion, enamel, sand, grit, anthracite, fibreglass, tin foil, even butterfly wings. Rebellious in attitude toward prevailing notions of good taste and beauty found in mainstream culture, non-conformist in attitude, with a profound dislike of authority (which he labeled

“asphyxiating”), he left home at 17 to study painting at the Académie Julian in Paris. Finding classes useless after six months, he left.

While continuing to study art on his own, he spent the subsequent years painting and working in his father's wine business in Le Havre, taking over the business in 1924. Early on, he was inspired by the research of the German psychiatrist and art historian Hans Prinzhorn who, in his 1922 book, *Bildneri der Geisteskranken: Ein Beitrag zur Psychologie und Psychopathologie der Gestaltung* (*Artistry of the mentally ill: A Contribution to the Psychology and Psychopathology of Configuration*), was one of the first scholars to explore the relationship between psychiatry and art, drawing comparisons between the art of asylum inmates, outsiders, and the artwork of children, in a profusely illustrated volume. Prinzhorn's claim that savagery or base animal instinct, as opposed to intellectual theory or analysis would lead to universal harmony, greatly influenced Dubuffet's art practice, resulting in a unique manifestation of post-World War Two aesthetic activity. His fascination with cultural alterity - children's drawings, common graffiti, and the art of the insane - led Dubuffet to invent the category of *Art Brut*. Hence, Dubuffet would claim in 1945 that, “There was more art and poetry in the talk of a young barber - in his life - in his head - than among the specialists in art and poetry.”

Following his high impasto paintings of the 1940s, the *Texturologies* and *Matériologies*, Dubuffet, in later years, developed a new style and aesthetic, distinctly graphic with a downsized color palette, which he designated *Houreloupe*, from “hurler” meaning to roar.

On the question of whether or not outsider art could be rendered authentically within the cultural influence of an academic art tradition, Dubuffet, in 1968, concluded that his own work could not be *brut* in that “the man without culture...we all agree, does not exist. He is a utopian vision.” And, on this point, hinges the argument of Jean Duffy's comprehensive reconsideration of Dubuffet's work in her phenomenologically-grounded book, *Perceiving Dubuffet: Art, Embodiment, and the Viewer*. From a phenomenological perspective can the artist, critic and viewer successfully *bracket-out* culture in the manner proposed in Duffy's book and see Dubuffet's work *authentically*? That is, can we achieve “a utopian vision”?

In this eminently readable and amply illustrated inquiry into Dubuffet's career as artist and polemicist, Duffy takes critical aim at what is, in her view, a dearth of theoretically oriented criticism of his work. As she maintains, not only have certain important series been largely overlooked in the literature but the general tendency has been disproportionately weighted in favor of the ongoing publication of exhibition catalogues rather than scholarly monographs, with books in English being rare. To rectify this imbalance, she proposes a comprehensive phenomenological study of Dubuffet's work, the first of its kind. As she states in the Introduction, she “endeavours to address the need for a substantial, conceptually grounded, and methodologically coherent study of Dubuffet's oeuvre and to situate it more clearly and more fully in relation to its intellectual and cultural context” (6). She does so by employing the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's insights into the relationship between perception and embodiment and the central role it plays so as to “illuminate certain aspects of Dubuffet's painting” (7). As she furthermore observes, without being able to gauge Dubuffet's knowledge of phenomenology with precision, it is clear however that “not only is the body literally and implicitly present throughout his oeuvre, but in many respects that oeuvre can be interpreted as a sustained exploration of being-in-the-world, of the relationship between the embodied subject and her/his lifeworld” (10). Equipped with these theoretical coordinates, she then assembles a list of specific issues to be addressed in the eight chapters that comprise her study, including viewer involvement, the representation of movement, the evocation of figure-environment

and figure-object relationships, the coexistence within many works of multiple temporalities, and the thematisation of improvisation (11).

Following the first chapter, whose primary purpose is to identify, analyse, and illustrate Dubuffet's defamiliarisation techniques in his practice, the remaining chapters are organized around three conceptual concerns related to the experience of embodiment, namely, the body (Chapters 2, 3), memory (Chapters 4, 5), and time (Chapters 6-8). Each of the chapters include from one to eight black-and-white images which are subjected to nuanced analyses and close looking, with the exception of Chapter Six, which features no such images. As well, for the latter Chapter entitled "Times of Our Lives," Duffy makes no mention of, nor engages with, Heidegger and his profoundly influential 1927 meditation on time, *Being and Time*. This is a rather curious omission. Throughout this Chapter she in addition conflates *time* and *temporality*. This is somewhat problematic for, as David Couzens Hoy points out in his incisive and ambitious book, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality*¹, a conceptual distinction between the two terms needs to be made to avoid confusion, in that "the term 'time' can be used to refer to universal time, clock time, or objective time [while] 'temporality' is time insofar as it manifests itself in human existence" (2009 xiii). In view of this, it is particularly telling that the index to Duffy's book contains no entry for temporality. This is a minor quibble in a work that has much to recommend it, the least of which are the *tour de force* interpretations of Dubuffet's work that Duffy carries out, ostensibly, by adopting a *phenomenological attitude*.

As a methodological point of departure, Duffy asserts that "much of his artistic output lends itself readily to analysis in terms of the phenomenological reduction or *epoché*" (12). According to Richard Lanigan, "The goal of phenomenological reduction is to determine which parts of the description are essential [to conscious experience] and which parts are merely assumed" (1988 24)². With the principal aim of phenomenology being to interrogate how we interpret in the first place, to achieve this end requires a four-step process: 1) the *epoché*, *i.e.*, the suspension or "bracketing" of the taken-for-granted *natural attitude* so as to focus entirely on the thing that phenomenology aims to study; 2) the *phenomenological reduction*, the aim of which is to attend to the correlation between the object of experience and the experience itself; 3) the *eidetic reduction*, the search to isolate the essential or invariant qualities of the perception of a particular object; and 4) *intersubjective corroboration*, the concern with the replication and shareability of the discovered and described correlations. "Considered from a phenomenological perspective," Duffy, in her analysis of Dubuffet's early 1970's series *Mondanités*, suggests that,

the multi-headed, composite figures might then be read as visual articulations of the nexus of relationships that binds subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and embodiment. Thus viewed, the conjoining and interaction of the *Mondanités* figures are a means of approximating the pre-reflective, pre-personal, bodily rooted, and inter-subjective common ground that allows us to transcend the limits of solipsism, to interact with each other socially, and to relate to, draw on, and add to a shared culture. (101)

A further worry should be noted here. Any attempt to understand such notions as "subjectivity", "intersubjectivity", and "embodiment" necessitates a massive stock of background knowledge in order to "read" their "visual articulations of the nexus of

1 Hoy, David Couzens. *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2009.

2 Lanigan, R. *Phenomenology of Communication: Merleau-Ponty's Thematics in Communication and Semiology*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1988.

relationships”. Her readings, however brilliant they are, reach a methodological impasse. She speaks for us, functioning as a cipher or proxy, a stand-in for us: “as the viewer alternates between” (65), “as the viewer must *physically* negotiate” (44), “they [the *Hourloupe*] demand of us, that...we live according to *Hourloupe* time” (262). “as we advance toward the park...we become conscious” (267), “forces us” (78), “we know in our body that these painted bicycles are unrideable” (180), “drawing us into” (215), and “solicits from the viewer” (179). Perhaps phenomenology is *not* the right method for an analysis of Dubuffet’s work. Rather, I would suggest, without diminishing its overall noteworthiness, that Duffy’s study will be even more highly regarded and more successful as a *semiotic* engagement with signs and significance, especially when situated within Charles Sanders Peirce’s definition of sign: “A sign stands for something to somebody in some respect or capacity.” In its present manifestation, we come away from Duffy’s book clearly grounded in how Dubuffet’s signs work and in what respect and capacity - for her.

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