

## Examined Transparency Michel Le Du

What happens when yours use radiography for something else than its medical function? Precisely because it is used for something an image calls into question characteristics its normal uses implies without wondering about them. The dictionary teaches us that transparency is the characteristic of an object that lets light go through it and allows that which is behind it to appear. What is transparent makes a thing visible by becoming invisible itself. Nevertheless invisibility is never perfect and the medium's presence can be felt while the medium allows visibility. Thus, the interesting point is that transparency does not mean absence of any visual characteristic: an X-ray still suggests the skin although it goes through it. Everyone knows that because we are familiar to some objects we tend to become blind to them, it has happened to everyone to wish to be transparent (when we dream of being thieves or voyeurs), or when we fear we might become transparent (when we want to be seen as attention goes somewhere else). Finally, the notion of transparency is used to describe not only the aspect of some objects such as a window pane or tracing paper, but also the way representations work. This crucial point is the central issue here. Looking at a family photograph we forget about that to focus on what it shows. "This is Robert" rather than "this is a photo of Robert". Yet it implies selecting and elaborating. Here two notions of transparency are involved and challenging one another; one the one hand, staging something that fades away for the sake of what it shows; on the other hand, the apparent photographic naivety that seems to convey a message: "I was there". So we trust photography both because it is a clue to what it represents (like a footprint in the sand) and because of its capacity to provide a fair picture for us. Cinderella's shoe provides a clue to both the size and the morphology of her foot, but it also symbolizes the real way to find the person who left the ball again. The twofold authority of a photo, as it has just been stated, contributes to concealing its symbolical function; yet it is this very function that transforms it into (as specialists in political marketing know it) something staged, seriousness, determination or any other quality one wants one's object to be acknowledged for.

Hand play, which is also play with the notions of being full vs. being empty, does not only play with the transparency of its object (the skin); the hands play with the alleged transparency of stagecraft. We lose sight of the fact that real hands posed when the X-rayed hand represents a hand and the shape of a cat or else suggests a hand and belly dancing. At the same time, such play raises questions about the notion of representation itself: to what extent does an X-ray really look like a skeleton? Indeed, we never see bones the way an X-ray show them to us and we do not have any independent criterion to establish similarity. As a matter of fact, to a large extent similarity derives from the observation of the person who knows how to read an X-ray, not from an propriety that is inherent in that X-ray. Why not see in it the shape of an animal or of anything the title hand play suggests. Besides the underlying choreography of the bones is used with a view to exemplifying in lieu of the clinical study of cases the practitioner usually confronts with what he considers as norms; exemplifying grace through the dance of fingers, exemplifying the lightness of the stretched figure of a cat through the studied contraction of a hand etc. The ordering of bones thus becomes the symbol of an indefinite number of characteristics.

In an previous phase of his work the artist called "ossicles", big translucent blocks that seemed to have been scattered in that space by some übermensch. There is a kind of irony to use a diminutive to refer to objects that are far bigger than bones usually are, but ossicles are there to symbolize chance (the way casting dice does). The shapes incorporated in the X-rays, although they result from the artist's work, retain something of the lines that sculpt natural forces. Does the artist not appear as the person who

happened to be there at the right moment to catch some transient ordering? His skill is thus to combine transparency and chance. He gives us a strong proposition: seeing those pictures, which required a lot of work in reality, as if they reflected a natural dance. It would be edifying to compare them with X-rays of teeth or with scientific images (brain imaging, shots by an astrophysicist) of which we would like to believe that they are simple recordings of space phenomena. Yet we know that they have required a lot of work, that they too have been touched up, and occasionally become objects for an exhibition. At the crossroads of such practices, one can sate that no image can be said to be the right image, in the name of such transparency as other images would be more or less deprived of. No transparent language exists, neither does a transparent image, as this would require an image to be itself its own interpretation. Had we forgotten it, the modified presence of objects, distilled by the artist are there to remind us.

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(translation Marie-Jeanne Da Col Richert)