

JE VEUX REVENIR sur un tableau de *Derelicts* qui s'intitule *La chute* (200 x 210 cm) et qui date de 2005. Ce tableau m'est revenu à la mémoire en

découvrant celui que Guy de Malherbe intitule *Chute*, supprimant volontairement l'article, un tableau de l'hiver 2009. Le second tableau : des jambes et une main, amputées par le cadre, semblent glisser d'une tâche jaune qui envahit l'espace jusqu'à la grotte du fond, espace crépusculaire et onirique, sombre et inquiétant, où les rochers sont peints comme le serait l'aile d'un aigle, d'un corbeau, ou d'un albatros ; humides, fragiles, friables, évoquant le minéral mais sous le mode onirique. Ces deux tableaux se répondent. Il m'aura fallu deux ans et plus pour comprendre la nuit qui constitue le fond des œuvres de Guy de Malherbe, de la plupart des œuvres qui concluent *Derelicts*. Avant d'essayer d'écrire ce qui vient de se modifier dans son œuvre, je veux revenir sur cette nuit. Dans *La chute*, le corps est en apesanteur, il tombe dans un mouvement de ralenti sans fin, la nuit ou l'obscurité est l'espace de cette chute, le seul espace possible, et cet espace, hors-cadre, constitue le hors-champ qui fait que l'on croit à cette chute. L'obscurité se prolonge bien au-delà du cadre, le cadre est l'écrin du corps, l'écran du corps, son arrêt dans l'image. Ce serait sur-interpréter que de tirer ce tableau vers une dimension religieuse malgré son titre même si j'ai la conviction que cette nuit n'est pas seulement celle métaphorique du sommeil ; elle incline l'ensemble des œuvres qui concluent *Derelicts* vers une dimension numineuse, cette expérience singulière du sacré, où l'obscurité travaille avec la loi de l'effroi. Sans cette nuit et le mystère qui fait frissonner, on ne peut pas voir véritablement pour ce qu'il est le tableau qui est au centre de ces deux ans de travail, et que Guy de Malherbe intitule *La flaque jaune*. L'éblouissement puis l'aveuglement que déclenche le tableau procèdent de cette nuit.

C'EST ENTRE

le mystère qui fait frissonner et l'angoisse nue et aveuglante de la flaque jaune que s'organisent ces tableaux. Je reviens à la paroi d'obscurité qui déborde le cadre, et où, hors champ, glisse ce corps de femme comme un ange déchu. Rudolf Otto souligne que l'art ne dispose pour représenter le numineux, en occident du moins, que de deux moyens directs, et que ces moyens, fait significatif, sont tous deux négatifs : l'obscurité et le silence. Il cite Tersteegen (R. Otto, *Le sacré*, Payot, 1995, p. 107) : « Seigneur, parle moi seul / Dans le plus profond du silence, / Dans l'obscurité ».

L'obscurité doit être rehaussée par un contraste qui la rend encore plus sensible ; elle doit être sur le point d'effacer une dernière clarté. Je retrouve ce scénario d'une représentation du numineux dans ce tableau intitulé *La chute*. La peinture n'est bien sûr pas une peinture du religieux, mais elle conspire avec cette dimension numineuse. Le long des falaises qui s'effondrent, la nuit gagne, l'obscurité s'impose, et j'ai la conviction qu'en peignant ce tableau intitulé *Grotte*, un tableau récent de petit format, et qui inaugure pour moi la série qui suit, Guy de Malherbe retrouve sur le motif l'origine de cette nuit qui servait de fond à ses dormeuses, mais surtout à *La chute* en 2005. Cette grotte, nous la retrouvons dans *Chute* fin 2009. Entre ces deux tableaux qui portent presque le même titre, Guy de Malherbe semble avoir, sans le prémediter et encore moins en le théorisant, voulu retrouver l'origine d'une nuit, qui paradoxalement à partir de la grotte va s'estomper jusqu'à disparaître. Le mystère qui fait frissonner, cet effroi, lié à l'obscurité, dès lors va céder devant l'aveuglement, cette phénoménalité dont j'essaierai de comprendre qu'elle est celle de l'angoisse, et où le jaune, ce jaune solaire, étamant une flaque au crépuscule, devient la couleur de l'angoisse.

GUY DE MALHERBE

intitule un tableau de septembre 2009, où précisément le brasillement du soleil sur cette flaue jaune se durcit et se sédimente, *Matrice*. J'ai envie de sous-titrer le tableau intitulé *Grotte* de la même manière : il est la matrice retrouvée de la nuit hors champ, qui servait la plupart des tableaux concluant *Dere-licts*. J'ai peur d'oublier l'essentiel : dans ce mouvement, quelque chose s'est inversé, ce n'est plus la peinture qui se met au service du motif, mais le motif qui tout d'un coup est absorbé, comme par un maelström, par la peinture : la forme de la flaue jaune, cette forme se métamorphosant, chaque fois qu'on la regarde, en une anamorphose différente. (J'entends anamorphose au sens strictement étymologique de montée à la forme.) Cette flaue jaune bien sûr se visagéise, mais elle peut prendre aussi la forme d'un vortex ou celle d'une oreille rendue sourde par un grondement ou un cri. Les images du crépuscule à l'obscurité totale, constituent un repérage pour cet ensemble décomposé en stations, où l'on a la sensation que les tableaux sont pris dans cet étau entre l'éblouissement et la nuit. Cet étau se resserre et brise la peinture apprise ; tout ce que Malherbe sait, et sait faire mieux qu'un autre, il prend le risque de le détruire. La flaue jaune est l'épicentre d'un séisme. Disloqués, les éléments de la peinture d'hier vont devoir se recomposer, ils sont les répliques, au sens sismographique, de ce tremblement, de cet aveuglement nés de cette énorme faille de lumière (j'insiste sur le fait que le mot réplique est ici l'exact antonyme de l'emploi qu'on pourrait en faire en peinture, ce qui se passe ici est tout le contraire d'une redite, mais les effets multiples d'une fracture et d'une remise en question). Malherbe, j'aimerais le dire un peu plus loin, va les recueillir pour reconstituer des tableaux si déroutants, qu'ils en appellent à un rêve qu'il serait beaucoup trop commode de rattacher à l'onirisme que les surréalistes recherchaient.

JE RETARDE

d'évoquer cette lumière, cette flaqué jaune, ce tableau où s'est pétrifié l'apparaître de l'angoisse. Je reste et me réfugie dans cette obscurité impossible à décrire et que j'essaie de comprendre. Sa manifestation travaille selon l'effacement de la dernière clarté, et à mesure qu'un pan d'obscurité se consolide, le corps, dans le sommeil ou dans la chute, s'impose. La dimension descriptive cèdera dès lors que cette nuit hors champ va s'estomper.

Mon intuition est la suivante : le « film » de la nuit avoue la peinture, accouche des corps endormis ou de la chute des corps. Cette paroi d'obscurité s'était imposée comme le subjectile, la surface et la matière d'image, indissociable d'une telle manifestation. Je leste cette intuition, et c'est pourquoi j'ai cité Rudolf Otto, d'une dimension singulière. Le mot numineux – qu'emploie Rudolf Otto – convient mieux que le mot sacré. Quand Malherbe a fini de peindre, même si j'ai la sensation que la peinture se continue en lui sans le tableau, la nuit continue de creuser les falaises des Vaches Noires en un chenal mystérieux, elle cherche, d'images en images, et jusqu'au fond des cavernes, ce qu'il reste des corps. Comment ne pas être frappé par le fait qu'ici, presque tous les corps sont mutilés ; il faut deux corps pour en faire un, ou, encore, c'est le cadre qui coupe une main. J'ai conscience que je surinterprète cette nuit, parce que j'ai la sensation que dans tous ces tableaux où elle a été effacée par le jaune strident, solaire et toxique, il fallait qu'elle fût autre qu'une simple nuit. Je laisse monter le soupçon d'une autre nuit, une nuit celle-là aussi invisible que le pan d'obscurité est condition de visibilité. Ce qui est rendu visible constitue en fait le seuil pour une autre nuit, celle que la théologie a appelé nuit spirituelle – je vais y revenir – ; il y aurait donc dans ces images deux nuits, celle réelle, constituée selon ce pan d'obscurité, subjectile indissocié des corps et qui ouvrirait à une nuit où l'homme, privé de tout appui sensible, serait livré à l'obscurité de la foi nue. Je risque qu'il y a dans le travail de Guy de Malherbe une pratique de la peinture qui, *mutatis mutandis*, me renvoie aux théologies négatives. Et ce n'est pas un paradoxe que cette nuit spirituelle soit le temps qui s'ouvre sur la lumière. Et que précisément elle s'ouvre selon un séisme, sur une simple flaqué au crépuscule où le soleil se reflète, et qui devient le tableau de l'aveuglement.

SI JE CHERCHAIS

à le dire dans une langue phénoménologique, je suggèrerais que la nuit devenue subjectile prouve que les corps sont les déterminations, l'écran paradoxal qui sépare et ouvre au mystère, lui proprement ontologique, d'une nuit « active des sens », et il est, dans ces tableaux, remarquable qu'une nuit matérielle renforcée par cette dimension propre du corps qu'elle consolide ouvre à une nuit qui porte le même nom, et qui est cachée à l'intérieur des images, comme s'il fallait traverser une porte, ouvrir le tableau, passer le seuil de sable d'une friche de plage pour y accéder. La plupart des tableaux qui concluent *Derelicts* cherchent une ligne de démarcation accentuée par ce cadre et qui revient systématiquement, avertissant que l'écran – le tableau – est l'instance qui me sépare de ce qui m'est donné. Il faut l'écrire, les corps dans *Derelicts* étaient des corps indemnes, ceux qui gisent dans les tableaux de cette exposition sont des corps amputés, et malgré cela, il ne me semble pas que le désir soit moins grand, que sa logique et sa revendication soient moins grandes, que la douleur qu'il porte en lui soit moins grande.

CES CORPS sont les motifs paradoxaux de l'immobilité et du silence ; en devenant picturaux et presque abstraits ils investissent l'écran selon le cadre qu'est ce mur d'obscurité. Ils sont là tels des signes au sens premier du mot *signum*. Il faut ajouter que dès que le mur d'obscurité s'est constitué en cadre, la perspective s'est trouvée abolie. En d'autres termes, le relief du visible a changé de nature. Le relief du visible ne lui vient dès lors plus de l'invisible qui le relèverait en l'évidant et en le traversant, mais d'une phénoménalité où le mystère travaille contre la perspective. Le relief procède directement de la lumière (pardon d'en appeler à l'étymologie, mais selon Littré le mot relief réfère à la noblesse, qui après être tombée en déshérence est relevée : « Anciennement, lettres de relief, lettres de réhabilitation de noblesse, proprement lettres qui relèvent »). Le relief de ces images ne procède donc pas de la perspective, qui est, autant qu'elle est l'ennemie du processus abstracteur, souvent l'antonyme de l'expérience mystique. Le relief vient ici, reprenant le droit à l'invisible une noblesse perdue, de cette phénoménalité qu'instaure chaque image : faire entrer le hors champ de la nuit dans le cadre afin qu'il se consolide en subjectile et que les corps échappent à la description pour être les signes d'une expérience où ce visible ainsi consolidé rend à l'invisible son droit, sa noblesse et son mystère. Il lui rend aussi ce qu'il y a de mystère et d'indicible dans l'érotisme, dans cette douceur douloureuse encore plus sensible dans les corps mutilés des derniers tableaux.

DANS LE PETIT TABLEAU

intitulé *Grotte*, et que je sous-titre *Matrice*, c'est parce que Malherbe absente le corps qu'il retrouve l'origine de l'obscurité. Ce petit paysage sombre, cette grotte, cette paroi dont les rochers sont comme les papiers froissés et sombres d'une crèche impossible laisse passer le frisson d'une absence ; théâtre de la chute des corps, l'espace ne laisse même pas de place pour un corps déchu. Je me suis souvenu, après avoir usé de l'expression mur d'obscurité, que le cinéma de Dreyer était marqué, et *Gertrud*, son dernier film, tout particulièrement, de façon leitmotiv par un « mur de lumière », ce blanc intense et diffus, qui aimante et absorbe si souvent Gertrud, lorsqu'elle s'avance vers une paroi – est-ce une fenêtre ? – qui est en vérité ce mur de lumière. A ce blanc souverain, ultime objet pictural de la contemplation, répond non pas ce pan d'obscurité comme tel dans la peinture de Guy de Malherbe, mais la nuit spirituelle vers laquelle elle fait signe. Il existe un mot sanskrit, *asura*, ce mot énigmatique veut dire « ce qui fait frissonner ». Cet arrière-plan métaphysique qui constitue l'essence de ce travail s'accomplit selon une singularité constituée de paradoxes parfaitement maîtrisés. J'entends une expérience du *mysterium tremendum*, du désir dans son perpétuel inachèvement et de la peinture. Les tableaux de la nuit empruntent le hors-champ de l'obscurité, dispositif ou *parergon*, indissociable de sa phénoménalité. Et en faisant entrer le « hors-champ » dans le cadre, en cimentant l'obscurité, il donne au corps leur relief, c'est-à-dire une noblesse, une douceur et une douleur au-delà de la description. Depuis Rudolf Otto, on n'a cessé de souligner que ce dispositif valait pour les spectacles et les rites, comme condition de l'émergence du sacré. La singularité des grands portraits des femmes endormies ou de la chute est d'accomplir que le *parergon*, ou pour le dire plus simplement tout ce qui sert, entoure et offre l'œuvre, devienne « matière d'images », subjectile tenu par le cadre, par ce paradigme de l'intentionnalité qu'est le cadre.

DANS L'ENSEMBLE

des peintures qui nous occupe ici, l'intentionnalité du cadre doit lutter contre l'hétérogène. La lumière et la couleur jaune ont bousculé tout le système de reconnaissance par lequel Guy de Malherbe aurait pu se rassurer. Chaque fragment de peinture est comme la réplique de cette faille initiale de lumière, de ce séisme que manifeste la flaque jaune. C'était là un premier paradoxe, que l'expérience numineuse du hors-champ, de la nuit et de l'infini, tienne dans le cadre sans pour autant qu'à aucun moment cela n'apparaisse comme un procédé. Ce phénomène saturé par excellence, l'immensité, l'infini de la nuit, non seulement tient dans le cadre, mais le construit. L'intuition spirituelle est portée implicitement par une hypothèse théorique forte et indiscutable qu'une référence permanente à l'histoire de la peinture vient ensuite consolider – comment ne pas penser à Goya. Guy de Malherbe en appelle à un procès d'anamnèse où remontent à la surface de notre mémoire d'autres tableaux, *La mort de Sardanapale* par exemple ; et le rouge qu'il retrouve dans ses tableaux est celui de Delacroix. Ailleurs, la nuit est celle d'une anxiété que cimente et retient le fond.

CETTE ANXIÉTÉ du crépuscule va éclater, éclater en lumière,
et tout sera comme dans le *Partage de midi* :

« YSÉ : N'ouvrez pas la toile, au nom du ciel !

AMALRIC : Je suis aveuglé comme par un coup de fusil ! Ce n'est plus du soleil, cela !

DE CIZ : C'est la foudre ! Comme on se sent réduit et consumé dans ce four à réverbère !

AMALRIC : Tout est horriblement pur. Entre la lumière et le miroir.

On se sent horriblement visible, comme un pou entre deux lames de verre.

MESA : Que c'est beau ! Que c'est dur !

La mer à l'échine resplendissante

Est comme une vache terrassée que l'on marque au fer rouge ».

Mais se ressouvenir de la peinture est plus complexe, il ne tient pas seulement à une couleur. Il y a un orgueil assumé dans la peinture de Malherbe, celui d'une fraternité des métaphores : un tableau me revient à la mémoire, de Delacroix précisément *La Grèce sur les ruines de Missolonghi*, de 1826. Entre les ruines se dégage la main d'un mort que l'on ne voit pas. Il n'y a jamais de citations dans les tableaux de Malherbe, mais une mémoire de la peinture qui s'est perdue et qui remonte à la surface des toiles.

LES TABLEAUX

de Guy de Malherbe sont travaillés de l'intérieur par une alternative esthétique, qu'il porte parfois à une rare complexité. Avant que tout n'explose et s'ouvre pour se reconstruire, l'image est inséparable de son fond, de sa matière, de ce pan d'obscurité devenu subjectile. Malherbe remonte le cours d'une histoire marquée par la logique duelle de la figure et du fond. Il veut revenir à l'origine, quand cette séparation n'existe pas. La question de la couleur dans ces tableaux peut d'ailleurs se poser à l'aune de ce retour à l'origine, et se comprendre dans le sillage d'une phénoménologie proche de Merleau-Ponty, teintée, dans ses prémisses, par la *Gestalttheorie*. Ainsi, l'enfant qui apprend à voir les couleurs n'ajoute pas les couleurs à un monde qui auparavant était lacunaire ou en noir et blanc, il reconfigure tout l'espace et se met à apercevoir les couleurs comme un mode qui n'était auparavant pas pris en compte. Pour Merleau-Ponty : « Apprendre à voir les couleurs, c'est acquérir un certain style de vision, un nouvel usage du corps propre ». Les couleurs, dans le travail de Malherbe, participent d'un système de « puissance motrice », ou de « puissance perceptive ». Affrontant la nuit et redécouvrant les couleurs pour leur conférer cette puissance picturale, notre corps n'est pas un objet pour un « je pense » mais « un ensemble de significations vécues qui va vers son équilibre » (M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Gallimard, 1945, p. 179).

LES COULEURS

mettent en mouvement l'immobilité de la nuit, et souvent le rouge, qui est la couleur de l'*Augenblick*, cet instant du regard, dont Guy de Malherbe dit qu'il est aussi « le reflet du soleil sur la lame de la guillotine », domine. Je me réfère plus précisément à ce torse drapé de rouge, peint en 2009, où le rouge lutte contre le jaune solaire de l'angoisse, lutte contre ce qui reste du corps. Mais s'agit-il vraiment d'une lutte, plutôt d'un pacte entre l'angoisse, la mort et le désir. L'instant du regard se confond alors avec ce que j'ai désigné par métaphore comme une des répliques du séisme opéré par l'explosion d'angoisse qui inonde le grand tableau intitulé *Flaque jaune*. Le hors champ de la nuit qui entrait dans le cadre obligeait Malherbe à un travail de nuance du noir (combien de fois l'ai-je entendu dire « il faut que je reprenne le noir » ?). Les couleurs affirment dans les derniers tableaux le caractère intrinsèquement pictural de l'image. Dans un tableau comme *Métamorphose*, le minéral, grâce et selon la peinture littéralement se métamorphose (on retrouve ce que je suggérais d'un motif qui se met au service de la peinture). Le rocher du premier plan devient corallien, et l'on a la sensation – on retrouve là au plus haut point cette définition de la peinture de Malherbe où il s'agit d'éprouver plutôt que de décrire – que si l'on touche la peinture, que si l'on pose la paume de sa main sur le tableau, on va se brûler, qu'il y a là quelque chose de toxique, et qui est une des répliques du séisme né de l'angoisse. Mais la métamorphose va plus loin encore, le minéral fait que l'on se met à douter même de son règne, il y a là, lové entre les rochers, comme des murènes.

DANS QUEL RÊVE

sommes-nous ? Sommes-nous à la surface du visible dans l'espace rescapé d'une surface inondée de lumière et aveuglante, sur cette petite plage au bord du mur d'obscurité que Malherbe faisait voir dans le premier tableau de cette série ? Et que fait dans le coin gauche du tableau, en bas, cette pierre qui s'anthropomorphise, gardien ou veilleur du cauchemar ? Mais surtout, mais enfin, quel est ce corps de femme, et peut-on encore le dire ainsi, lové entre les rochers qui le broient plus qu'ils ne le protègent, menacé par l'énorme tâche jaune et qui semble pousser ce corps en bas du tableau, pour le faire basculer ? C'est une chute, mais la chute d'un moignon de corps. Je me souviens – je cite de mémoire – des mots par lesquels Artaud avait ouvert son catalogue de dessins exposés à la galerie Drouin en 1946 : « Le visage humain est une force vide, un champ de mort. La vieille revendication révolutionnaire d'une forme qui n'a jamais correspondu à son corps, qui partait pour être autre chose que le corps. » Ce qui me saisit dans la flaque jaune, c'est qu'elle est elle aussi une métamorphose, un corps, un visage, une oreille tout en même temps. J'ai beaucoup dit la douceur et la douleur qui s'enlacent et s'érotisent dans les corps, même fragmentés (surtout fragmentés), que peint Guy de Malherbe. Dans *Métamorphose*, la douleur définitivement l'emporte. Bien sûr, on pense à la tradition des torses féminins, de Camille Claudel à Wilhelm Lehmbruck, mais en dernière instance, ce corps amputé ne se minéralise pas, ne subit pas la contagion du minéral, au contraire il bascule du côté de la chair, une chair dont il ne reste rien du désir, seulement la douleur. Fautrier dans la série des Otages avait cherché, à mon sens sans y parvenir, à ce que la chair emporte le corps et l'emporte sur le corps. Dans *Métamorphose* ce corps endormi est avant tout un corps perdu.

QUAND ON S'ENDORT

dans le soleil, il est impossible d'éviter la fièvre et les cauchemars. J'ai juste oublié de redire cette distinction phénoménologique cardinale entre corps et chair : le corps appartient à ce qui peut être décrit, démembré, reconstitué ; la chair au contraire, selon ce qu'on appelle en phénoménologie une réduction, et plus spécialement une réduction érotique, est ce qui me donne accès à autrui. La douceur, la douleur et le désir sont les modes pour dire plus prosaïquement ce mouvement de l'*epochè*, ce suspens où le corps se métamorphose en chair. Le paradoxe des paradoxes est qu'ici, Guy de Malherbe use des outils de la peinture pour peindre un fragment de corps, et que pourtant, ce que nous éprouvons, c'est cette sensation douloureuse qui naît de ce passage où le corps, dans le désir, la détresse ou la douleur, se métamorphose en chair. Ici, le désir est la détresse. Je continue à explorer ce tableau intitulé *Métamorphose* et toute cette zone caverneuse qui borde la flaque jaune. Il y a là quelques petits fantômes modelés, comme de la glaise qui s'anthropomorphisent ; en surplomb ils observent ce qui dans le tableau se consume.

JE VEUX NOTER

un dernier paradoxe. Ces derniers tableaux sont assurément des objets, au sens étymologique de ce qui fait obstacle, et en même temps absolument le contraire, parce qu'ils sont des objets au second degré : ce qui est à la surface du jour, posé dans le réel, s'inverse. Les cavernes où les cauchemars inondés de soleil conjuguent pour Guy de Malherbe les falaises d'Houlgate et la mémoire de Cadaques, si elles existent pour elles-mêmes, sont d'abord là pour faire voir la nuit, pour que, cette nuit au second degré dissimulée, enfouie, mystérieuse, que j'évoquais, pèse sur nous, ou plutôt nous regarde, pupille infinie. L'obscurité et le soleil qui aveugle se rejoignent à cet instant. Je ne peux m'empêcher de penser à cette anecdote que relate Antonioni, elle concerne son premier tournage. Elle me fait penser à cette façon dont l'obscurité et la faille de soleil où ce qui aveugle, aveugle dans la peinture de Guy de Malherbe, se rejoignent. Je cite : « Nous avions décidé avec des amis de tourner un documentaire sur les fous... J'ordonnai d'allumer les projecteurs... D'un seul coup, la salle s'embrasa de lumière. Un instant les malades restèrent immobiles, pétrifiés. Je n'ai jamais vu sur le visage d'un acteur une épouvante aussi profonde et totale. Cela ne dura qu'un instant, je le répète, et puis se produisit une scène indescriptible. Les fous commencèrent à se tordre, à hurler, à se rouler par terre. Désespérément, ils cherchaient à s'abriter de la lumière comme d'un monstre préhistorique... C'était maintenant à nous d'être pétrifiés devant ce spectacle. Ce fut le directeur qui cria : stop ! éteignez ! [...] Et dans la pièce rendue à la pénombre et au silence, nous vîmes un grouillement de corps remuant dans les sursauts d'une agonie. » (*Cinema Nuovo*, n°138, juillet-août 1958). Je pense aussi inévitablement aux mots de Blanchot que ressasse sans trêve Godard : « Les images qui masquent le néant sont le poids du néant sur nous. » Ce qui pèse ici, même si le néant, est bien un nom de l'être, excède l'analyse philosophique et se joue dans et à l'intérieur de la peinture.

J'AI ÉVOQUÉ

la nuit spirituelle, il convient d'insister. Et cela tient également à la méthode et à l'intelligence d'une aventure, celle de la peinture, comme si ces images tentaient de déterminer dans quelle mesure la science de la perception peut éclairer l'art en général, comme s'il s'agissait en un sens de prolonger l'entreprise de Ernst Gombrich sur la question de la psychologie de la représentation picturale. Au cœur de ce travail, il y a également ce que Gombrich appelait « l'énigme du style », un apprentissage de la vision qui métamorphose ce qui pourrait rester comme motif, non seulement en œuvres, mais les leste d'une dimension numineuse, érotique et inquiétante. Je redis une fois encore ce privilège de ce qui s'éprouve par rapport à ce qui se décrit dans l'œuvre de Malherbe, et pour mieux le faire comprendre, j'insiste sur un passage, où pour illustrer le voir, Gombrich aime à rappeler une anecdote. « James Cheng, qui avait été chargé de donner des cours de peinture à un groupe d'étudiants chinois de formation artistique très variée, me parlait un jour d'une sortie qu'il avait faite avec ses élèves dans le but de dessiner un site d'une beauté réputée – une des anciennes portes de Pékin. Les élèves furent déconcertés par cette tâche. Finalement, l'un d'entre eux demanda qu'on leur fournisse à tout le moins une carte postale représentant l'édifice, afin qu'ils disposent de quelque chose qu'il leur soit possible de copier. » Cette anecdote révèle que le monde demeure indifférencié tant que l'on ne peut en extraire des schémas perceptifs ou représentatifs. Gombrich en revient alors à la belle formule de Constable : « L'art de voir la nature est, aussi bien que l'art de déchiffrer les hiéroglyphes d'Egypte, une chose qui doit s'apprendre. » (*L'art et l'illusion, Psychologie de la représentation du monde*, Gallimard).

LE MOTIF en appelle chez Guy de Malherbe avant tout à être éprouvé, ce que prouvent ses derniers tableaux, puisque je l'ai dit, le motif semble se mettre au service de la peinture et non l'inverse. Ce motif ainsi éprouvé exerce une fascination au sens où Blanchot l'a défini dans *L'espace littéraire*, (Gallimard, 1955, pp. 25-27) non pas une fascination comme fin en soi, mais bien une fascination conçue tel l'outil d'un projet d'une autre nature. Déjà souligné dans *Derelicts*, cette fascination s'accentue dans les œuvres des deux dernières années. Elle devient une fascination qui ne laisse plus le choix ; elle aimante à la mesure où la lumière étame ce qu'elle touche et qui la réverbère. On ne saurait mieux expliquer les derniers tableaux de Guy de Malherbe ; c'est exactement cette sensation que nous éprouvons lorsque nous approchons de la peinture, quelque chose nous aimante et nous donne envie de toucher ces formes, et à la même seconde nous l'interdit, la sensation d'un danger, d'une contamination possible, d'une brûlure. Ce qui est éprouvé là déborde du tableau, en appelle au même hors-champ qu'en appelait l'obscurité et le noir. Ainsi, en cadrant, Guy de Malherbe informe ce qui lui apparaît, informe ce qui fascine, afin que cette fascination instaure selon le cadre un avant-champ, qui, en même temps qu'il anéantit la règle de la *diminutio*, qui gouvernait la représentation du proche jusqu'au lointain, instaure cette « décision séparatrice », à la fois interdit et appel. Cet avant-champ, nous le retrouvons sous diverses formes dans quasiment chaque tableau, qu'il s'agisse du corps qui barre le premier plan de la grande *Flaque jaune*, du corps en avant-champ de ce tableau de mai 2010, ou de celui de *Métamorphose*. Ce qui en appelle le plus à être touché devient intouchable, et le regard procède alors véritablement comme le toucher. La fascination qu'exercent ces tableaux n'est pas une fin en soi, elle est bien l'instrument de ce qui accapare et « laisse absolument à distance ». Le cadre est l'instance de cette séparation, et pourtant la nuit est partout, la nuit domine, cette fois la nuit d'un rêve en plein soleil, et il semble que d'image en image, c'est un seul dessein sans limites qui s'accomplit, adossé au mur de la nuit, sans cadre ni limites. Et j'ai parfois la sensation que si ce travail s'élabore selon une continuité frontale cadre par cadre, il renvoie à la nuit qui se déroule, englobe, enferme et protège, qui emprisonne aussi, cette prison de la nuit – nuit, je le redis, métaphorique, issue de l'expérience aveuglante de l'angoisse –, et qui ouvre à une expérience qui est l'expérience intérieure même, une expérience qui aurait franchit l'ultime obstacle : ces corps qui gardent le dessin du corps et pourtant instillent en nous la sensation de la chair.

OUI, JE PENSE

qu'il existe non pas des formes de l'angoisse, mais ce que je décrirai dans la langue de la phénoménologie une phénoménalité propre à l'angoisse – l'espace et le temps dans lesquels ce qui ne peut m'apparaître m'apparaît. La tâche jaune en est l'emblème, elle est l'expérience de ce qui aveugle, et ce qui aveugle est précisément cette phénoménalité de l'angoisse. Le tableau relate une *epochè* à travers l'expérience de l'aveuglement, et au lieu de peindre la nuit, c'est cet aveuglement que peint Guy de Malherbe. Il y a dans ce tableau quelque chose qui me fait penser à la fin de *L'éclipse* d'Antonioni, son épilogue, qui est un film dans le film en même temps que sa conclusion. Le passage d'un monde en otage de la facticité, à un monde sous réduction puisque saisi par l'angoisse. Le titre dit ceci : ce qui doit être vu là est aveuglant ; l'angoisse aveugle. Ni la mort ni le soleil ne peuvent se regarder en face, ni l'angoisse ; la filmer, la peindre, la faire voir, déceler ce qui brûle en elle – ce nom de l'être – c'est forcément la saisir au moment de l'éclipse. En termes heideggériens, au moment où ce qui la cache permet et rend possible de la voir. Guy de Malherbe, en peignant cette *Flaque jaune*, tente de peindre cette ontophanie.

CE N'EST PAS

la lumière seule ou seulement la lumière qu'il peint mais ce qui, de l'être, vibre dans une telle lumière. Elle éclaire, envahit de lumière la nuit du tableau, et là encore ce tableau s'éprouve. Il me fait songer à deux œuvres célèbres, *Le cri* de Munch, et le *Regulus* de Turner. *La Flaque jaune* ne décrit pas le cri, qui est l'équivalent de l'aveuglement, ce qui rend sourd comme le soleil rend aveugle, mais le fait éprouver. En ce qui concerne *Regulus*, il est indispensable de se reporter à l'analyse qu'en fait Pierre Wat dans son ouvrage *Naissance de l'art romantique* (Paris, Flammarion, 1998), l'histoire du centurion romain, et le paysage qui abrite son histoire tragique est un des tableaux les plus connus de Turner. L'histoire de ce héros romain, exemplaire de stoïcisme et de patriotisme, est connue. Turner, si l'on se réfère à l'inventaire de sa bibliothèque, a trouvé sa source dans son exemplaire de l'*Histoire romaine* d'Oliver Goldsmith, mais de nombreuses sources romaines – Horace et Cicéron, notamment – racontent l'histoire de ce consul romain actif durant la première guerre punique (264-241 av. J.-C.). D'abord vainqueur des Carthaginois à Ecnome, en 256, Regulus est finalement capturé par eux en 255. En 249, il est envoyé à Rome et mandaté par les Carthaginois pour convaincre le Sénat romain de négocier la paix. Sénat auquel il va déconseiller d'accepter cette offre. Fidèle à son serment, il revient ensuite à Carthage où il est torturé – on lui coupe les paupières avant de l'exposer au soleil jusqu'à ce qu'il devienne aveugle. Dans ce port de Carthage dont les formes s'effacent sous la violence de la lumière, Regulus n'est pas identifiable parmi les silhouettes que l'on arrive à discerner mais dont aucune ne parvient à une véritable individuation. Ce que nous voyons ici – ou plutôt ce qui nous aveugle – n'est pas Regulus lui-même, mais ce qui l'aveugle aussi : ce soleil moins visible par sa forme que par son action de dissolution des formes, et qui occupe le centre réel et symbolique de la toile. Artiste, spectateur et personnage se confondent ainsi en un seul point de vue. De *Regulus*, ce qu'il faut retenir essentiellement ici pour comprendre la peinture de Guy de Malherbe, c'est que ce qui aveugle ne peut pas être décrit, mais en revanche que le travail de l'artiste est de le faire éprouver. Aporie de la peinture, faire éprouver ce qui aveugle.

UNE DESCRIPTION

de Sir John Gilbert complète l'étude sur la technique de Turner, à propos de *Regulus* précisément : « Il avait passé toute la matinée ici [à la British Institution] et il était probable, à en juger par le tableau, qu'il y resterait toute la journée. Il était absorbé par son travail, ne regardait pas autour de lui, mais continuait à passer une grande quantité de blanc sur son tableau – sur presque toute la surface. Le sujet en était une composition à la Claude Lorrain, une baie ou un port avec des édifices classiques de chaque côté et au centre le soleil. Le soleil était un amas de rouge et de jaune de toutes sortes. Chaque élément avait une couleur de feu. Il avait une grande palette sur laquelle était posée un énorme bâton de blanc d'argent. Il avait deux ou trois instruments de travail rudimentaires assez grands avec lesquels il mettait du blanc dans tous les coins... le tableau devint petit à petit extraordinairement saisissant, le soleil brillant absorbant tout et déposant sur chaque chose un voile brumeux. En regardant la toile de côté, je vis que le soleil était un bloc de blanc faisant saillie comme l'omblon d'un bouclier. » Dans le tableau de Guy de Malherbe, je ne sais pas la taille réelle de la flaue jaune, j'éprouve seulement qu'elle semble ne pas pouvoir contenir le soleil qu'elle réfracte. La lumière semble vouloir envahir l'espace, et non seulement l'envahir mais le creuser, et c'est cette sensation sur laquelle je voudrais conclure. J'éprouvais déjà dans ce tableau de petit format, *La grotte*, cette sensation que dans le déni de toute perspective la peinture cherche à creuser quelque chose dans la toile. Je risquerai volontiers ce néologisme : la peinture veut « caverner » la toile, en faire l'abri impossible de quelque chose de perdu, et que seule la peinture peut, pour Guy de Malherbe, encore sauver.

Alain Bonfand
avril 2010

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RESPONSES

I would like to go back to a painting from *Derelicts* entitled *The Fall* (200 x 210 cm) and which dates from 2005. This painting came back to mind when I discovered the painting that Guy de Malherbe, deliberately omitting the article, entitles *Fall*, a painting from the winter of 2009. In the second painting, legs and a hand, cut off by the frame, seem to slip on a yellow patch that invades the space as far as the cave in the background, a darkening and dream-like space, sombre and worrying, where the rocks are painted as would be the wing of an eagle, a crow, or an albatross ; damp, fragile, crumbling, evoking the mineral but in a dream-like fashion. These two paintings are related. It has taken me two years or more to understand the nighttime that constitutes the background of Guy de Malherbe's paintings in most of the works that conclude *Derelicts*. Before trying to write about what has recently shifted in his work, I would like to return to this nighttime. In *The Fall*, the body is in weightlessness, it falls in an endlessly slow movement, the night or darkness is the space of this fall, the only possible space, and this space, outside the frame, constitutes the *hors champ*- what is unseen- and makes us believe in this fall. The darkness is prolonged well beyond the frame, the frame is the casing of the body, the screen of the body, its halt within the image. It would be over-interpreting to endow this painting with a religious dimension despite its title even if I am convinced that this night is more than the metaphoric night of sleep : it leads the body of works that concludes *Derelicts* towards a numinous dimension, that peculiar experience of the sacred, where darkness works together with the laws of fear. Without this night, and a shiver-inducing mystery, one cannot properly see the painting which Guy de Malherbe entitles *The yellow puddle*, and that is at the centre of these two years of work. The dazzlement, then the blindness that the painting provokes proceed from this nighttime.

It is precisely between the shiver-inducing mystery and the naked and blinding anguish of the yellow puddle that these paintings are organized.

Let us go back to the wall of darkness that overflows the frame, and where, out of sight, the body of a woman slides like a fallen angel. Rudolf Otto emphasizes the fact that art, at least in the Western world, only disposes of two direct means in order to represent the numinous, and that these means, significantly, are both negative: darkness and silence. He cites Tersteegen (R. Otto, *Le sacré*, Payot, 1995) : « Lord, speak to me alone / In the depths of silence, / In the darkness /».

The darkness must be emphasized by a contrast that renders it even more sensitive ; it must be on the verge of effacing a last light. I recognize this scenario of representation of the numinous in the painting entitled *The Fall*. The painting is not of course a painting of the religious, but it does conspire

with the numinous dimension. The length of the crumbling cliffs, the nights wins, the darkness imposes itself, and I have the conviction that on painting this picture entitled *Cave*, a recent and relatively small painting, which for me inaugurates the series that follows, Guy de Malherbe re-finds within the motif the origin of the night that served as a background to his sleepers, above all in *The Fall* in 2005. We come across this cave again in *Fall* from late 2009. Between these two paintings that bear almost the same title, Guy de Malherbe seems, without premeditation, and with even less theorizing, to have wanted to recover the origin of the night, which paradoxically, from the cave onwards, is to fade to the point of disappearing. The shiver-inducing mystery, the fear linked to the darkness, henceforth give way to blindness, the phenomenality that I will try to comprehend here is one of anguish, and one in which the yellow, this solar yellow, shimmering on a puddle at sunset, becomes the colour of anguish.

There is a painting from September 2009, in which the glistening of the sun on this yellow puddle hardens and gathers, that Guy de Malherbe calls *Matrice*. I feel inclined to give the same sub-title to the painting called *Cave*: it is the re-found matrice of the off-screen, unseen night, as used in most of the paintings that conclude *Derelicts*. I fear forgetting the most important thing: in this movement, something has been reversed, it is no longer the paint that is at the service of the subject-matter, but the subject that is suddenly absorbed, as if by a maelstrom, by the paint : the shape of the yellow puddle, this shape metamorphosing, each time we look at it, into a different anamorphosis. (I mean anamorphosis in the strictly etymological sense of rising to a shape.) This yellow puddle of course becomes almost human, but it can also take on the shape of a vortex or that of an ear deafened by a rumble or a scream. The images, from sunset to complete darkness, constitute a reference point for this series, broken up into stations, where we have the feeling that the paintings are caught in a grip between dazzlement and night. This grip tightens and breaks up the achieved painting ; all that Malherbe knows, and knows how to do better than any other, he then takes the risk of destroying. The yellow puddle is the epicenter of a seism. Dislocated, the elements of the former painting must recompose themselves, they are responses, in the seismographic sense, to this quaking, to this blindness born from the huge slash of light (I must insist on the fact that the word response here is the exact opposite to how it might be used in painting, what happens here is the contrary of a repetition, rather the multiple effects of a fracture and a questioning). Malherbe, as I would like to say a little later, gathers them up to reconstitute paintings so unsettling, that they rather refer to a dream-like state that it would be too easy to link to those sought after by the surrealists.

I will postpone evoking the light, this yellow puddle, the painting in which the very appearance of anguish has become petrified, to linger and take refuge in this darkness, impossible to describe, the better to try to understand it. Its manifestation works according to the stifling of a last light, and as a measure of darkness consolidates, the body, in sleep or in falling, imposes itself. The descriptive dimension gives way as soon as this unseen night fades away. My intuition is the following : that the « film » of the night admits the paint, gives birth to sleeping or falling bodies. This wall of darkness imposed itself as the subjectile, the surface and the texture of the image as indissociable from such a manifestation. I weigh this intuition with a particular dimension, which is why I quoted Rudolf Otto. The word numinous – as used by Rudolf Otto – is more appropriate than sacred. When Malherbe has finished painting, even if I have the impression that the painting carries on within him without the picture, the night continues to hollow out the Vaches Noires cliffs in a mysterious channel, it seeks, from image to image, and to the very depth of the caves, what remains of the bodies. How can one not be struck by the fact that here, nearly all the bodies are mutilated : it takes two bodies to make up one, or, again, it is the frame that cuts off a hand. I am aware that I am perhaps over-interpreting this night, because I have a feeling that in all these paintings in which it has been effaced by the strident, solar and toxic yellow, it must have been something other than a mere night. I give way to the suspicion of another night, a night as invisible as the fold of darkness is the condition of visibility. What is rendered visible constitutes in fact the threshold of another night, what theology calls spiritual night – I'll come back to that – ; there are in these images two nights, the real one, constituted upon this fold of darkness, subjectile indissociated from the bodies that would open up to a night where man, deprived of any susceptible hold, would be delivered up to the darkness of naked faith. I would risk the fact that in Guy de Malherbe's work there is a use of painting that, *mutatis mutandis*, refers me to negative theologies. And it is not a paradox that this spiritual night be the time that opens onto light. And that, precisely, it opens up according to a seism, on a simple puddle in the sunset where the sun is reflected, and becomes painting of a blindness.

If I wanted to say it in phenomenological language, I would suggest that the night becoming subjectile proves that the bodies are the very determinants, the paradoxical screen that separates and opens up to the ontological mystery of a night that is « active of the senses », and it is, in these paintings, remarkable that a material night reinforced by the dimension specific to the body that it consolidates opens up to a night that bears the same name, and that is hidden within the images, as if one needed to go through a door, open a painting, cross the threshold of a wasted parcel of beach in order to reach it. Most of the

paintings that conclude *Derelicts* seek for a demarcation line accentuated by this framing which comes back systematically, alerting us to the fact that the screen – the painting – is the instance which separates me from what is delivered to me. It must be said that the bodies in *Derelicts* were intact bodies, while those that lie motionless in the paintings of this exhibition are amputated bodies, and despite that, it doesn't seem that the desire is any the less great, that its logic and demands be any the less great, any more than the pain that it bears within be any the less great.

These bodies are the paradoxical motifs or subjects of immobility and silence ; on becoming pictorial and almost abstract they invest the surface according to the screen that is the wall of darkness. They are here like signs in the original sense of the word *signum*. One should add that as soon as the wall of darkness has taken place as a frame, the perspective is abolished.

In other terms, the 'relief' of the visible has changed its nature. The 'relief' of the visible is henceforth no longer issue from the invisible that would reveal it by emptying it out and traversing it, but from a phenomenality where mystery works as a perspective. The 'relief' proceeds directly from the light (forgive the reference to etymology, but according to Littré the word 'relief' refers to nobility, which having fallen into disarray is brought to light « Formerly, letters of relief, letters of rehabilitation of nobility, specifically letters that reveal »). The 'relief' of these images doesn't then proceed from the perspective, which is, as much as the enemy of the abstracting process, often the antonym of the mystical experience. Reclaiming the right of the invisible to a lost nobility, the relief here comes from the phenomenality that each image installs : to bring the *hors champ* of the night into the frame in order that it consolidate itself as subjectile and that the bodies escape description to become signs of an experience where the visible thus consolidated renders its due, its nobility and mystery to the invisible. It also renders the mystery, what is indescribable in eroticism, in the gentle pain that is even more sensitive in the mutilated bodies of these last paintings.

In the small painting entitled *Cave*, and that I sub-title *Matrice*, it is because Malherbe absents the body that he retrieves the very origin of the darkness. This small dark landscape, this cave, this wall, whose rocks are like the dark and crumpled papers of an impossible cradle, lets through the shiver of an absence ; the very theatre of the fall of the bodies, the space doesn't even leave room for a fallen body.

Having used the expression 'wall of darkness', I was reminded that Dreyer's cinema, and his last film, *Gertrud*, in particular, were marked, almost as a leitmotiv, by a « wall of light », that intense and diffuse white that so often

attracts and absorbs Gertrud when she advances towards a wall – is it a window ? – which is in truth this wall of light. To this sovereign white, ultimate pictorial object of contemplation, responds not the fold of darkness as such in Guy de Malherbe's painting, but the spiritual night towards which it tends. There is a sanskrit word, *asura* ; this enigmatic word means « that which makes shiver ». This metaphysical background that constitutes the essence of the work is accomplished according to a particularity made up of perfectly-mastered paradoxes. I mean an experience of *mysterium tremendum*, of desire in its perpetual unendingness, and of paint. The paintings of the night borrow what is unseen from the darkness, a device or parergon, indissociable from its phenomenality. And by bringing the « hors champ » into the frame, by cementing the darkness, it gives the bodies their relief, that is to say a nobility, a gentleness and a pain beyond description. Since Rudolf Otto, we have constantly emphasized the fact that this dispositive served for spectacles and rites, as a condition for the emergence of the sacred. The particularity of the large portraits of sleeping or falling women is to make the *parergon*, or to put it simply everything that serves, surrounds and is delivered up by work, become the « stuff of images », the subjectile as held by the frame, by the paradigm of intentionality that is the frame.

In the body of the paintings that concerns us here, the intentionality of the frame struggles against the heterogeneous.

The light and the yellow colour have upset the whole system of recognition by which Guy de Malherbe could have played safe. Each fragment of painting is like the response of this initial slash of light, of this seism that the yellow puddle expresses. There is a first paradox, that the numinous experience of the out-of-sight, of the night and infinity, fit in the frame without this ever, however, showing as such as a technique. This ultimate saturated phenomenon, the immensity, the infinity of the night, not only fits within the frame, but constructs it. The spiritual intuition is implicitly borne by a strong and undeniable hypothetical theory that a constant reference to the history of painting then comes to consolidate – how not to think of Goya ? Guy de Malherbe makes use of a process of anamnesis, other paintings rising up to the surface of our memory, *The Death of Sardanapalus* for example ; and the red that he recreates in his paintings is that of Delacroix. Elsewhere, the night is that of an anxiety that the background cements and retains.

This anxiety of the setting sun explodes, explodes into light, and all is as in Paul Claudel's *Midday division* :

« Ysé : Do not open the cloth, in heaven's name !

AMALRIC : I am blinded as if by a rifle-shot ! It is no longer sun, this !

DE CIZ : It is lightning ! How reduced and consumed we feel in this reverberating oven !

AMALRIC : Everything is horribly pure. Between the light and the mirror. One feels horribly visible, like a louse caught between two shards of glass.

MESA : How beautiful it is ! How harsh !

The sea with its dazzling spine

Is like a slayed cow marked by a red iron ».

But to re-remember painting is more complex, it is not just a matter of colour. There is a conscious pride in Malherbe's painting, that of a brotherhood of metaphors : a painting comes back to mind, by Delacroix precisely, *Greece on the ruins of Missolonghi*, from 1826. Amongst the ruins comes forth the hand of a cadaver that is out of sight. There are never direct quotes in Malherbe's paintings, but the memory of painting that has been lost and that comes back up to the surface of the canvases.

Guy de Malherbe's paintings are worked from the inside by an alternative esthetic, that he sometimes carries to a rare complexity. Before everything explodes and opens up to rebuild itself, the image is inseparable from its background, its texture, from the fold of darkness become subjectile.

Malherbe retraces the course of a history marked by the duel logic of figure and background. He wants to go back to the origin, to when that separation did not yet exist. The question of colour in these paintings can, come to that, be posed in relation to this return to the origin, and be understood in the wake of a phenomenology close to Merleau-Ponty, similar, in its first instances, to his *Gestalttheorie*. Thus, the child who learns to see colours doesn't add colours to a world that was previously lacking or black-and-white, he reconfigures all space and starts to perceive colours in a way that was not previously taken into account. For Merleau-Ponty : « Learning to see colours, is to acquire a certain style of vision, a new use of specific bodies ». Colours, in Malherbe's work, participate in a system of « driving power », or of « perceptive power ». Confronting the night and rediscovering the colours, to confer this pictorial power onto them, the body is not the subject of an « I think » but « an ensemble of experienced significations that lead to its equilibrium » (M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Gallimard, 1945, p. 179).

The colours set the immobility of the night into movement, and often the red, which is the colour of the *Augenblick*, the very instant of the gaze, that Guy de Malherbe says is also « the reflection of the sun on the blade of the guillotine », dominates. I refer more specifically to the torso draped in red, painted in 2009, where the red struggles against the solar yellow of anguish, struggles against what remains of the body. But is it really a struggle, or rather a pact between

anguish, death and desire ? The instant of the gaze becomes mixed up then with what I have designated by metaphor as one of the responses of the seism operated by the explosion of anguish that inundates the large painting entitled Yellow puddle. The *hors champ* of the night that entered into the frame obliged Malherbe to work on nuances of black (how many times have I heard him say « I must re-work the black » ?). The colours in the last paintings confirm the intrinsically pictorial character of the image. In a painting such as *Metamorphosis*, the mineral, thanks and according to the paint, literally transforms (we find here what I suggested of a ‘motif’ that is at the service of the painting). The rock in the foreground becomes coral-like, and we have the sensation – we here find at the highest level the definition of Malherbe’s painting as a matter of sensing rather than describing – that if we touch the paint, if we place the palm of the hand on the painting, we would be burnt, that there is something toxic there, and this is one of the responses of the seism born from the anguish. But the transformation goes further still, the mineral means that we begin to doubt even its reign, there, cradled between the rocks, are what are almost eels.

In what dream are we ? Are we at the surface of the visible in a space escaping from a surface that is flooded in light and blinding – the small beach at the edge of a wall of darkness that Malherbe showed in the first painting of this series ? And in the left corner of the painting, at the bottom, what is this anthropomorphic stone, that becomes human, actually doing, guardian or watchman over a nightmare ? And above all, finally, what is this woman’s body, and can we even call it such, cradled between the rocks that crush it more than they protect it, threatened by the huge yellow stain which seems to push the body to the bottom of the painting, to make it topple ? It is a fall, but the falling of the stump of a body. I remember – I quote from memory – the words with which Artaud opened the catalogue of his drawings exhibited at the Drouin gallery in 1946 : « The human face is an empty strength, a field of death. The old revolutionary demand of a shape that has never corresponded to its body, that set off to be something other than the body. » What strikes me in the yellow puddle, is that it is also a metamorphosis, a body, a face, an ear all at the same time. I have said much of the gentleness and pain that enlace each other and become erotic in the bodies, even fragmented (especially fragmented), that Guy de Malherbe paints. In *Metamorphosis*, the pain definitively wins over. Of course, one thinks of the tradition of female torsos, from Camille Claudel to Wilhelm Lehmbruck, but in the last instance, these amputated bodies do not become mineral, do not undergo the contagion of the mineral, on the contrary swing over to the side of flesh, a flesh in which nothing of desire remains, only pain. Fautrier in his series Hostages had attempted, to my sense without

achieving it, to make the flesh carry off and win over the body. In *Metamorphosis* this sleeping body is above all a lost body.

When you fall asleep in the sun, it is impossible to avoid fever and nightmares. I was forgetting to return to the essential phenomenological distinction between body and flesh : the body belongs to what can be described, dismembered, reconstituted ; the flesh on the contrary, according to what in phenomenology we call a reduction, and more particularly an erotic reduction, is what gives access to the other. Gentleness, pain and desire are means by which to express more prosaically this movement of *époque*, the suspense where the body transforms into flesh. The ultimate paradox is that here, Guy de Malherbe uses the tools of painting to paint a fragment of a body, and that yet, what we experience is this painful sensation that is born from the passage where the body, in desire, distress or pain, transforms into flesh. Here, desire is distress. I continue to explore the painting titled *Metamorphosis* and the whole of the cave-like area that borders the yellow puddle. There are a few small ghosts modeled, like clay that transforms, life-like ; overhead, they observe what is taking place in the painting.

I would like to note one last paradox. These latest paintings are assuredly objects, in the etymological sense of that which creates an obstacle, and at the same time precisely the opposite, for they are objects in the ironic sense : what is at the surface of the day, poised in reality, is reversed. The caves where the nightmares flooded in sunlight conjugate for Guy de Malherbe the cliffs of Houlgate and the memory of Cadaquès, if they exist for themselves, are foremost here to render the night visible, so that this ironic and dissimulated night, hidden, mysterious, that I have evoked, weighs upon us, or rather watches us, an infinite eye. The darkness and the sun that blinds come together in this instant. I cannot help thinking of the anecdote related by Antonioni, concerning his first shoot. It makes me think of the way in which the darkness and the slash of the sun, where what blinds, blinds in Guy de Malherbe’s painting, come together. I quote : « With some friends we decided to film a documentary on the insane... I ordered them to turn on the projectors... In a flash, the room was blazing with light. For an instant the patients remained immobile, petrified. I never saw a horror so deep and absolute on any actor’s face. It only lasted an instant, I repeat, and then an indescribable scene took place. The insane started to double up, to shout, to roll around on the ground. Desperately they tried to shelter from the light like a prehistoric monster... It was now our turn to be petrified, in the face of the spectacle. It was the director who shouted: stop ! lights out ! [...] And in the room returned to shadow and silence, we saw a crawling of bodies moving in the aftermath of an agony. »

(*Cinema Nuovo*, n°138, July-August 1958). I also inevitably think of Blanchot's words, constantly citing Godard: « Images that mask nothingness are the weight of nothingness upon us. » What weighs here, even if nothingness is indeed the name of the being, exceeds philosophical analysis and plays out in and within the painting.

I evoked the spiritual night, this needs to be emphasized. And this also belongs to the method and the intelligence of an adventure, that of painting, as if these images attempted to determine in what measure the science of perception can clarify art in general, as if it were a matter in a sense of prolonging Ernst Gombrich's undertaking on the question of the psychology of pictorial representation. At the heart of this work, there is also what Gombrich called « the enigma of style », an apprenticeship of the vision that transforms what might remain of the subject, not only in art-works, but the weight of a numinous dimension, erotic and disturbing. I reiterate once again the privilege of what is felt over what is described in Malherbe's work, and to better make it understood, I would like to insist on a passage, in which, to illustrate seeing, Gombrich recalls an anecdote. « James Cheng, who had been charged with giving painting classes to a group of Chinese students of very varied artistic formation, spoke to me one day of an outing he had made with his students to draw a site of reputed beauty – one of the antique doors of Peking. The students were disconcerted by this task. Finally one of them asked to be provided with at least a postcard of the building, that they might dispose of something that it would be possible to copy. » This anecdote shows that the world remains undifferentiated until one can extract perceptive and representative patterns or schemas. Gombrich then goes back to Constable's beautiful formula : « The art of seeing nature, just as the art of deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics, is something that has to be learnt. » (*Art and illusion, Psychology of the representation of the world*).

The subject with Guy de Malherbe requires above all to be felt, sensed, as proved by his latest paintings ; as I have said, the motif seems to put itself at the service of the painting and not the opposite. This motif thus experienced exerts a fascination in the sense that Blanchot defined it in *L'espace littéraire*, (Gallimard, 1955, pp. 25-27) not as fascination as an end in itself, but indeed as a fascination conceived as the tool in a project of a different nature. Already underlined in *Derelicts*, this fascination is accentuated in the works of the last two years. It becomes a fascination that leaves no choice ; it attracts in the measure that the light glazes what it touches and reflects it back. One cannot better describe Guy de Malherbe's last paintings ; it is exactly this sensation that we experience when we approach the paint, something pulls us to it and

makes us want to touch these shapes, and in the same instant prevents us from doing so, the sensation of a danger, of a possible contamination, a burn. What is felt or experienced there overflows from the painting, refers to the same *hors champ* that the darkness and night called up. Thus, by framing, Guy de Malherbe informs of what appears to him, informs of what fascinates, in order that this fascination install, according to a front ground, which, at the same time as it destroys the rule of *diminutio*, governing the representation of the near and far, sets up this « separating decision », at the same time both interdiction and call. We find this front ground in different forms in almost all of the paintings, whether it be the body that bars the fore-ground of the large *Yellow puddle*, the body in the foreground of this painting from May 2010, or that of *Metamorphosis*. What calls the most to be touched becomes untouchable, and the eye then truly proceeds like touch. The fascination that these paintings exert is not an end in itself, it is indeed the instrument of what seizes and « leaves absolutely at a distance ». The frame is the instance of this separation, and yet the night is everywhere, the night dominates, this time the nighttime of a dream in broad daylight, and it seems that from image to image, it is a single limitless intention that takes form, backed up against the wall of the night, without frame nor limits. And I sometimes have the sense that this work is elaborated according to a frontal continuity frame by frame, it refers to the night that takes place, englobes, encloses and protects, that imprisons too, this prison of the night – metaphorical night, I repeat, issue from the blinding experience of anguish- that opens up to an experience that is the very inner experience itself, an experience that would have gone beyond the ultimate obstacle : these bodies that retain the form of the body and yet instill in us the sensation of flesh.

Indeed, I believe that there are not so much shapes of anguish, but what I would describe, in the language of phenomenology, as a phenomenality specific to anguish – the space and time in which what cannot appear to me appears to me. The yellow stain is the emblem of this, is the experience of what blinds, and what blinds is precisely this phenomenality of anguish. The painting relates an époche through the experience of blinding, and instead of painting the night, it is this blinding that Guy de Malherbe paints. In this painting there is something that makes me think of the end of Antonioni's *Eclipse*, its epilogue, which is a film within the film at the same time as its conclusion. The shift from a world hostage to facticity, to a world in reduction being as it is seized by an anguish. The title says this : what must be seen there is a blinding ; anguish blinds. Neither death nor the sun can be looked at full-on, nor anguish ; filming, painting, showing it, deciphering what burns within it – this name of the being – is necessarily to capture it at the moment of its eclipse.

In heideggerian terms, at the moment when what would hide, allows and renders seeing possible. Guy de Malherbe on painting this *Yellow puddle* attempts to paint this ontophany.

It is not the light alone nor only the light that he paints but that which, of the being, vibrates in such a light. It lights up, invades the night of the painting with light, and there again the painting is felt. It makes me think of two famous paintings, Munch's *The Scream*, and Turner's *Regulus*.

The Scream doesn't describe a scream, which is the equivalent of a blinding, that which renders deaf as the sun renders blind, but rather makes it felt.

As for *Regulus*, one must refer to Pierre Wat's analysis of it in his *Naissance de l'art romantique* (Paris, Flammarion, 1998) ; the story of the Roman centurion, and the landscape that shelters his tragic story is one of Turner's best known paintings. The story of this Roman hero, an ideal of stoicism and patriotism, is familiar. Turner, if we refer to the inventory of his library, found his source in his copy of Oliver Goldsmith's *Roman History*, but many Roman sources – Horace and Cicero, in particular – relate the story of this Roman consul who was active during the first Punic War (264-241 B.C.). After vanquishing the Carthaginians at Ecnome, in 256, Regulus was finally captured by them in 255. In 249, he was sent to Rome and mandated by the Carthaginians to convince the Roman senate to negotiate peace. He advised the senate not to accept this offer. Faithful to his word, he then returned to Carthage where he was tortured – his eyelids were cut off and he was exposed to the sun until he became blind. In this port of Carthage whose outlines fade in the harshness of the light, Regulus is not identifiable amongst the silhouettes that we can make out, none of whom reaches a veritable individuation. What we see here – or rather what blinds us – is not Regulus himself, but what blinds him : the sun, less visible by its shape than by its action of dissolving shape or form, and which occupies the real and symbolic centre of the canvas. Artist, spectator and subject thus become bound up in one point of view. What one must above all retain from Regulus, in order to understand Guy de Malherbe's painting, is that what blinds cannot be described, but that the artist's work is to make us feel it. An apory of painting, making us experience what blinds.

A description by Sir John Gilbert completes the study of Turner's technique, concerning Regulus in particular : « He had been at the Royal Academy all the morning, and seemed likely, judging by the state of the painting, to remain for the rest of the day.

He was absorbed in his work, did not look about him, but kept on scumbling a lot of white into his picture – nearly all over it. The subject was a Claude-like composition, a bay or harbour - classic buildings on the banks of either side

and in the centre the sun. The picture was a mass of red and yellow in all varieties. Each object was in this fiery state. He had a large palette, nothing on it but a huge lump of flake white ; he had two or three biggish hog tools to work with, and with these he was driving the white into all the hollows, and every part of the surface... The picture gradually became wonderfully effective, just the effect of brilliant sunshine absorbing everything and throwing a misty haze over every object. Standing sideway of the canvas I saw that the sun was a lump of white standing out like the boss of a shield. » In Guy de Malherbe's painting, I do not know the actual size of the yellow puddle, I only feel that it doesn't seem to be able to contain the sun that it reflects. The light seems to want to invade the space, and not only invade it but dig into it, and it is on this sensation that I would like to conclude. I already felt this in the small painting entitled *The cave*, the sensation that by denying all perspective the painting seeks to dig something into the canvas. I would willingly risk this neologism : the paint itself wants to « cave » the canvas, make it the impossible shelter of something lost, and that only painting can, for Guy de Malherbe, still save.

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Paris, April 2010

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DERELICTS

Derelict: from the English word and from the Latin *derelicta*: things abandoned. It was the name given by sailors to shipwrecks floating at the surface of the sea, or between two waters.

The body of the sleeping woman is usually in the very foreground, barring the space, and what strikes us in Guy de Malherbe's latest paintings, is that this sturdy mass in the foreground results in a widening of the pictorial space. Almost buttress-like, a veritable barrier, the foreground opens up a space that seems vast, almost disproportionate, in that it seems to subvert the usual proportional system of geometric perspective. The body of the woman (or of reefs at low tide) seems to mould itself to the format whereas it is, in fact, rather determined by it. The vastness and the body tend to balance each other out, and the recourse to diptychs is probably an avowal of the necessity of this. It operates counter to description, but is conform to the traditions of landscape painting at the very time when it accomplished an essential subversion of the genre. It is thus that in a first instance, Guy de Malherbe's paintings are for me, as I will explain, evocative of the œuvre of Caspar David Friedrich.

The recent paintings function counter to any identity of place while yet working with it; it is their intention that the place not be identified as such. And yet, if one knows Guy de Malherbe's work from the inside a little, one understands the extent to which this beach at low tide is not an abstraction, to what extent it belongs to both a veritable geography and a geography of the memory. What sets it apart from a sense of place is the way in which Malherbe leads us to feel its humidity, the sand, the very sensations that affect it and affect his painting: one might say that it is in the way it affects itself that the paintings lose the name of place, and open up to a more general experience of what they desire and seek, make felt rather than describe. To pass the barrier of the foreground is to take the risk of losing the reality of what lies before us completely. In front of the work, we have a sense of our eye sliding around the woman's body, to go further and bury itself in the sand at low tide. Yet it's a very careful movement, of slipping in over the body without touching it, as if trying not to awaken someone who is sleeping, without disturbing their rest, in order to approach that place beyond which, as I will explain, is perhaps less a real landscape than the landscape of which the sleeping woman is dreaming. The horizon line is a magnet which, while playing with the strength of its vastness, dissolves and absorbs objects away from the body, which is definitively anchored in the space. We should remember that pictorial representation is governed by the rules of *diminutio*: from close-up to far-off, where the sky and the earth meet, the indistinct place of all things; Guy de Malherbe's paintings operate counter to this principle: the horizon line

is submitted to a sort of atmospheric or geological disturbance, that of a sensation which takes precedence over description.

It is this that explains why the body is sometimes dissected by the format of the canvas. In this painting for example, in which the pictorial space is only barred by the model's legs, set on a par with the rocks where the woman's absent body has fallen asleep, (opposite page). Guy de Malherbe has achieved an effect of strangeness. He renders sensation complex. Our eyes touch on the rocks in the foreground, which are wet, but by the same gesture we touch the model's legs, and it is only then that we understand that the painting leads us to feel two distinct sensations, and in the latter we recognize a form of desire that was unexpected. It is in paintings such as this that the haptic dimension of Guy de Malherbe's work is more fully revealed and understood. This haptic dimension (from the Greek verb *āpto*, to touch - clearly showing here that the eye proceeds as if by touch, sensing in one same place both subject and background), notable in his work from the very beginning, some twenty years ago, has attained a particular complexity in the last two years, both less explicit, as if dissimulated by the subject matter, and at the same time highly effective. It is not a question of any theoretical hypothesis nor of a pre-conceived intention, of a type of process slapped onto the visible: it is on the contrary from a very particular visible, chosen and subjective, that what I am suggesting takes hold and persists. The place is informative as to this intuition, which finds its markers and shapes both immediately and progressively. By returning to the question of location, of what is the minimal form of landscape in painting, they pose formal questions that are more complex than they may seem at first glance. *Where is this?* is the leitmotiv of landscape-as-subject in painting; it is differed here by movements that are those of an opening and closing, of the near and far, and that inevitably lead us to the question of the framing. We should underline the extent to which the question of framing is decisive in the work of Guy de Malherbe: the format in which the body of the sleeper can, must, or precisely mustn't be contained. The question of the support reinforces that of the framing, is the condition which allows the painting to render sensation rather than to describe: the thickness of the stretcher varies, would seem to be an additional and adjoining clause to what Malherbe wants to make felt.

Such determinations are to be found in the very foundations of landscape painting as practised by Friedrich; without otherwise defending that analogy here, there is a simple formal figure that suffices to make it felt – that of a hyperbola. The painting I have just evoked is one example of this, but the structure I'm alluding to is at work in many of his paintings. Through coincidence rather than influence, this structure evokes those paintings by

Friedrich that represent the curves of two opposing hyperbolas, visible in both the line and the colours: one in the sky, the other on the land, producing an in-between that is in constant variation. The play of opposition between concave and convex, with the effect of a central force and pressure and a lateral dilating, can be found in many of Malherbe's paintings, in which the woman's body often exercises a comparable pressure. What is at stake here is most certainly the "need" for a horizon, an absence of limits, which is vastly amplified by the beach, and whose marker is the foreground. On the subject of the sublime, Kant speaks "of a halt of the vital forces followed by an even greater flow" (§ 23), and further on, again in *Criticism of the faculty to judge*, he writes "for the imagination, the transcendent is in a certain way an abyss, within which lies the fear of its losing its very self..." (§ 27).

Halt and emotion, attraction and blockage; rather than nostalgia, there is here a sort of stupefaction that is closer to what Blanchot (in *The space of literature*) calls fascination: "Why fascination? Seeing implies a distance, a separating decision, the power to not be in contact and to avoid the confusion of contact. Seeing signifies that this separation has, however, become an encounter. But what happens when what we see, even from afar, seems to touch us with a striking contact, when the way of seeing is a sort of touch, when seeing is a contact from afar? When what is seen imposes itself on the eye, as if the eye were caught, touched, thrown into contact with the visible? Not an active contact, or what remains of initiative and action in a real touch, but the eye is led on, absorbed by an immobile movement and a shallow depth. What a distant contact gives us is rather a passion for the image... He who is fascinated, doesn't see what he sees in the literal sense of the word, but it touches him with an immediate closeness, it grabs him and takes a hold of him, even if keeping him totally at a distance." Malherbe's paintings don't paint what fascinates, they are the very tool of fascination, or more precisely they operate a setting up of the visible in order that this fascination may take place. Yet it would be wrong to believe that these paintings are paintings of the moment, they are on the contrary the moment of fascination as understood by Blanchot, with the additional clause of the sense of separation from the very thing that has just been delivered up, what has just, in the literal sense of the words, taken place, and plunges itself into a moment that, if present, persists, and of which the beach and sleep are the metaphors. We are well and truly "absorbed in an immobile movement and a shallow depth", the body of the sleeping woman is the motif of fascination, but a motif in which the very origin of the word motif becomes an oxymoron: if motif means "to set into motion", it is here, paradoxically, a movement of immobility. Not painting an immobility that struggles against movement, but expressing the immobility of sleep as a movement.

If one looks at Malherbe's recent paintings for a long time, and here I am thinking in particular of the large diptych in which the model's body turns her back on us, and in which the night is falling, one has the sense that the model's body tenses and stiffens in its sleep. Guy de Malherbe also manages to express the sort of backwash of a body about to fall asleep, or agitated by a dream, a shiver, a short and brusque movement that is invisible, and impossible to paint. What I have just tried to describe is utterly dependent on the paintwork, not only of course of that technical know-how that very few painters today possess, but the equivalence of the painting with what it expresses, as if it could conform to what it wants to make felt.

There is a text concerning a work by Friedrich, his most famous perhaps: *The monk by the sea*, that may allow us a better understanding of this. This seemingly unexpected and unclaimed inheritance of German romanticism in the internal logic of Malherbe's paintings is not in fact, so surprising. It is a painting that he has always been familiar with, a work whose very substance is in evident superposition with his own, not in terms of a quotation, but rather in the manner of an imprint. I quote this comment, by Kleist: "What enchantment to let the eye wander on a limitless spread of water, in an infinite solitude at the water's edge, under a stormy sky. Yet one still has to have the desire to go there and hence return, even if one would want to cross to the other side and it's impossible; and one would wish to be stripped of all that helps us to live, and yet still hear the voice of life in the roaring of the waves, in the breath of the wind, in the chase of the clouds, in the solitary cry of birds. For that one needs a demanding spirit, and the preconception, one might say, of what nature carries within it. But in front of the painting all of this is possible and all that I should have found in the painting I found between the painting and myself, that is to say a demand imposed on the painting by my heart and the preconception that this gave me. And thus I become a monk, the painting becomes a dune but the sea upon which my nostalgic eye should roam is completely absent. Nothing can be sadder and more painful than such a situation in the midst of the universe: a unique spark of life in the vast Kingdom of the Dead, a solitary point in a deserted circle. The painting, with its two or three highly mysterious objects, is a sort of apocalypse; it is as if it carried within it the nocturnal thoughts of Young, and, because in its monotony and infinity, its foreground is only a frame, on looking at it we have the impression that our eyelids have been stripped away. And yet the painter has no doubt opened up a new path in the field of his art; and I am certain that with such a spirit, one might represent a square mile of Brandebourg sand, with a bush of thorns in which to lose a solitary crow puffing up his feathers, and that a painting of this kind would give an impression worthy of Ossian

or Kosegarten. Yes, if one could paint this landscape with its clayish land and its water, one could, I believe, make all the foxes and wolves cry out: and that is certainly the highest praise that one can give to this kind of landscape painting." (H. von Kleist, *Empfindungen vor Friedrichs Seelandschaft*, in "Berliner Abendblätter", 1810.)

One must first of all emphasize what in this text seems directly relevant to Malherbe, "painting this landscape with its clayish earth and its water": the co-existence within the painting of what it feels and makes felt. Next I will retain two other dimensions which are particularly appropriate to Malherbe's paintings. First of all the notion of enlargement or vastness that I suggested earlier, and above all the idea of the frame as a barrier: "the foreground is only a frame, on looking at it one has the impression that eyelids have been stripped away". It is literally the frame that strips the eyelids away. The frame is the delimitation of a screen that separates, just as much as it is what designates the work as such, encased. This frame that Kleist speaks of is doubled in the works of Malherbe, doubled in the familiar sense of the word by the foreground, the firmness that subordinates the frame and that affirms what renders Friedrich's painting so particular. What does: "I found it between the painting and myself" signify? It signifies that I cannot approach. The screen imposes an immobility, a refusal that is in echo to the fixity of the lidless gaze, and, if I refer to the works of Guy de Malherbe, this immobility corresponds to the immobility of sleep, the imperceptible tide of dreams. I cannot advance, the screen maintains me at a distance.

Whereas previously the screen separated me from what it showed me, henceforth it informs me of the fact. This may be comprehended at two levels, through understanding that positional experience overrules that of vision: if I advance I no longer see what I see. When I approach Malherbe's paintings, it is first of all the body of the sleeper that I come up against, the body is a rampart, and the notion of the nude is almost contradicted by the coat, the sheet, the raincoat, the clothing which covers it, and which, apart from acting to preserve a sense of propriety, is above all a way of bringing an added dose of painterliness to play within the picture. The raincoat, for example, is a means of creating desire for the body by hiding it, but it is also a pretext for painting a sort of mountain. And it is the paint-work, and the paint-work alone, that identifies the rock and the coat. But this screen also creates a separation according to a second definition: if I advance, I confront the separation, I enter into its order. If I advance, I admit that what I am requesting of the painting is the *impossible* ("that is to say a demand imposed by my heart upon the painting"). Thus, seeking the horizon by "going beyond" the frontier of the body, the very subject, is well and truly to demand the impossible.

There are in fact very few nudes in the strict sense of the genre in Malherbe's work – as if this subject in particular should be differed by the experimentation of the painting (painting a raincoat like a mountain) –, and in this nude (painting opposite), asleep, or washed up in the center of the painting, what dominates is the sensation of a sculpture, a hollow bronze, captured within the space of the painting the better to communicate the sense that the women's body is lodged therein. It floats, and yet, paradoxically, it finds its form through the weight of the paint-matter. What surrounds it is not really a landscape, but an open coffer, I almost wrote a casket, but the notion of preciousness is not entirely in accordance with the sensation of something vast that has opened up and cannot be closed up again. Other paradox, and what is probably one of the most particular elements of Malherbe's painting, is the sensation we have that it effectively cannot be closed again, and nor yet can it stay definitively open: something threatens the body, something threatens the painting. Malherbe's space is that of an in-between, that of the sleep of his sleepers, a half-sleep and one has the sensation that they are in fact dreaming of the landscape that threatens them.

There is a word that has in French fallen into disuse and that is appropriate to the affective tonality that irrigates these paintings: the word derelict. If it is still in use in English, the French word derived from it, and from the Latin *derelicta*, things that are abandoned, has henceforth disappeared from the dictionary. It was the name given by sailors to the shipwrecks floating at the surface of the sea, or between two waters. The example of its use as given by the Larousse in its 1929 edition would no doubt be appropriate to Guy de Malherbe's painting: "Derelicts are a danger for ships that are circulating at high speed" (Thus, these nudes washed up in one painting or in a diptych, pose a threat, I believe, to the critical gaze that passes too quickly or navigates according to the critical conventions of today.) This sensation of strangeness, of peril and portent, comes from the sense of danger represented by the body in space. And this space is always made for the body, the format is in fact a space of portent. Something has opened up, but it has opened up to imprison us, and we then have the impression that the colours pass. They don't, of course, pass in the sense that they fade, Malherbe has taken great care to weighten them beforehand, no, they pass in the sense that clouds pass, wander, flee in the sky. The colours are that movement of paint which carries the derelict and brings us the body, until it comes to be washed up almost at the foreground of the painting, henceforth solid, at low tide. In that painting particularly, I get a sense of what is humid surrounding the body. I sense what is around the body so as not to feel desire for the body. Desire, which the painting not only neutralizes, but titillates in a desire for paint, then becomes an abstraction. Which, come to that, echoes the sensation of cold sculpture, or recumbent figures, that I have just evoked.

The question of incarnation is differed by the twilight, by chaos and by a sense of wreckage. Guy de Malherbe pronounces the word chaos when speaking of his most recent paintings, and the word had also come to my mind. He uses it essentially for what one must still call landscapes, I should say the landscapes that do without the body of the sleeper. One must understand the word chaos in its philosophical sense. Schlegel, in his course on dramatical literature, affirms that there is one whole facet of romanticism that is "the expression of a mysterious return towards chaos in a work in order to constantly bring forth new and marvelous offspring, that chaos which twists below and even within the very breast of creation." (Cited by Pierre Wat, *Naissance de l'art romantique*, Flammarion, Paris, 1998.)

There is, come to that, something unquestionably Romantic in Malherbe's painting. To this question of chaos, the notion of horizon gives a formal response, almost in the manner of a schema, at least as it is understood in philosophy. Not only it allows the painter to displace the question of perspective and to reconsider it, it is first and foremost a tool that, depending the painting, renders chaos, if not intelligible, at least visible. "This necessity already represents a view on all that fixes and outlines. In Greek, what is outlined is called *to orizon*. It belongs to the essence of the living by its vitality, the secureness of its consistence in having a horizon, in the sense that it feels the need for schemas. Through this, the horizon is not confused with a limit, a barrier which, from the outside, occurs to the living, against which to strike by weakening the activity of life", writes Heidegger. (Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*) What the horizon "schematizes" is thus chaos. The horizon for Malherbe spreads out the whole range of its possibilities, and it is, it seems to me, only thus that one can understand to what extent these diptychs are necessary to him. The line that separates the two paintings is there to pull them together. The horizon is then expressed by its power to unify. It is in a certain way even the ultimate schema because what it schematizes, as I said, is chaos, the inexhaustible flow proper to the living: "Knowing signifies: imposing regulating forms on Chaos (...) Xaos initially means *space in between*, referring us to the notion of an Opening without any base, without background, abyssal, of the gaping slit. »

The **horizon** for Malherbe is not however so much the line that reestablishes perspective, to bring us into the order of the descriptive. The horizon is the floating line of the derelict. It doesn't protect the living against the surrounding chaos as perspective would, but renders this chaos visible, and above all sensitive, makes it felt in its very strength both as a metaphor and as a dream. There is not one of the sleeping women's bodies that escapes this rule. In the

foreground of the painting, they have arrived at the end of their drifting, could even slip over, but the frame retains them. Behind them there is what has led them hence: chaos. And these landscapes that Malherbe calls chaos, the landscapes without sleepers, that, by referring more to the romantic notion of *Erdlebenbildkunst*, are reminiscent of all "the philosophy of nature" of Romantic Germany. We will make do with quoting Carus' 7th letter in which he proposes an alternative name for landscape painting: *Erdlebenbildkunst* – the art of figuration of the life of the earth: "Considered in this way, the name landscape can no longer suffice, it has a rudimentary side to it that I reject with my whole being. We must find and introduce another term, and I propose *Erdlebenbildkunst*" (C.G.Carus and C.D.Friedrich, *De la peinture de paysage dans l'Allemagne romantique*, Ed. Klincksieck, Paris, 1988, p. 119). The idea of chaos is equally useful in emphasizing the fact that Malherbe's painting is heir to the romantic in painting. Chaos is the genre of Romantic work, or, to be more precise, it is a category that covers, combines, or even abolishes all genres. As underlined by Pierre Wat (Op. Cit. p 114) following Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, the *Kunstchaos*, the "work-fragment", as elaborated in the romantic pictorial system, is placed under the sign of the oxymoron, otherwise said of the alliance of contradictory qualities within one same object. This might be one key to understanding the boxing of one genre within another, nude and landscape, for example, in the work of Guy de Malherbe.

Guy de Malherbe seems in his painting to take us back to the very origin of the word horizon. For Alberti, the use of the term horizon is attached to its Greek etymology of "limits" or "markers" of a physical entity, to define the visual limits in question within the perspective dispositive. Alberti doesn't use the word horizon, but the expression "centric line" borrowed from medieval optics to designate what we call the horizon line within the logic of a perspective: this line which corresponds to two things, both the height of the spectator's gaze, and the limit of his visual field. In Malherbe's paintings, there is no perspective in the classical sense, yet the horizon is present, and is so according to both of these definitions.

Alberti opens his treatise by distinguishing between two inherent types of surfaces: those of outlines, and those that are rather "like a skin stretched out across the whole back of a surface": "yet, there are two permanent types of surfaces. The first makes itself known through that outer circle that encloses a surface, circle that to tell the truth some call "horizon"; for our part, if we may, we will through a certain analogy call it by its Latin name of *ora*, which means "shore", or, if we like, that of "contour". (Alberti, *On Painting*, De Pictura, 1435). We are struck by the coincidence between Alberti's words and the description

of one of Malherbe's paintings, one diptych in particular (cf. page 37), in which the model's body enters, or lodges itself, within the framework according to a sort of horizon-contour, which is in some ways "like a skin stretched out over the whole back of the surface".

But the analogy goes further: the remanence of white, of the white used to cover up the body, is insistent. White: a cloth of paint, a covering over of paint, orographic, snowy – Malherbe paints white the way Courbet painted it. A sort of shroud of paint, this white clearly responds to the depth of nights, to the black, I should rather say the blacks, that made up the essential and were the essence of the paintings in the previous exhibition. Yet for Alberti, the horizon had a colour, white: "There are thus four types of colour whose variations, according to the quantity of white or black that is added, are in truth infinite. We see, in effect, green foliage lose its greenness by degrees until it becomes almost white. And we see that in the air itself which, very often impregnated on the edge of the horizon by a whitish vapor, returns little by little to its veritable colour" (*op. cit.* p. 65). Either the body, haloed and veiled by the white, becomes a sort of intial horizon, which is the case most often, and is so in the works evoked, or it is the white line of the horizon which becomes blurred with the very background of the painting.

The most striking example is the sleeper whose face is hidden by a mask of paint, a stain which is echoed in the painting's background by the white foam that designates the horizon. But it is no longer sea-foam, on becoming the horizon, it has become an abstraction of paint, a sort of background of the world, either its very origin, or its return. This horizon line is for that matter totally blurred by the paint, it is no longer a line in the strict sense of the word, and doesn't coincide with the format, in the same way that the body in the foreground not only has its face masked by paint but is, as if through the process of enlargement, dissected by the format. The foam is in effect "the horizon of a whitish vapor", but solidified, petrified in an abstraction. The paint dominates what it describes to the point of no longer describing it, a whitish vapor, a mask of paint. The painting confronts us all the more in that it turns away from us.

In the series of paintings that we have just evoked, one constant imposes itself: a sense of expectation. This notion of expectation is amplified by a theoretical dimension; the geometry of the world requires and demands a ground and an earth, and it is therein that we find confirmation of the fact that with Malherbe, there is no perspective in the classical or usual sense of the word. Guy de Malherbe overturns and contradicts two of the determining topoi of painting: both perspective and the notion of the instant.

The paintings of the last two years aspire to a paradoxical incarnation; the sleeping women are this complex incarnation, a horizon that is incarnate. It was in 1934 that Husserl wrote *The Originary Ark: The earth does not move*: on an earth that is ground, and not sphere, the ground of all perception. And in which all perception supposes the experience "of a ground as ground". Husserl here explains that the Copernican invention occurred at the cost of setting aside "the world of life". This primordial experience of "the world of life", Husserl wrote, being spatiality and corporeity as an experience of the *Earth*. Earth that is ground and not sphere. A ground of all perception like each step taken, a ground for all living things, for all flesh. Not a universal and timeless ground, but the ground of our own particular experiences; whether we be "sons of the sea" or rather find ourselves in a "flying machine", we all have a ground. All perception supposes the experience of a ground as ground. Thus, the Earth is not a body (sphere, globe, or celestial body), but first and foremost a ground.

To consider the Earth as a celestial body, is to annul or deny its "original form" as a ground: and the Copernican theory reposes on this very annullment.

What sets apart Guy de Malherbe's recent paintings, the need to render sensation rather than describe, the redefinition of the horizon to the detriment of the classical conception of perspective, constitutes a statement of that order: rooting the experience of painting in a terrain that is absolutely its own, being "a painter" in the sense that one is a "son of the sea" or in a "flying machine". In these paintings the background is dug out of night and darkness. The woman's body is then cemented, snowed under by a white colour or covered up in a grey coat. This coat is, as I said, a mountain, and the grey is as close as it can possibly be to paint as such. This eminently figurative painting hence becomes abstract. The white dress and the snow are the same, the grey coat and the mountain identify with one other, and when the body is absent, the stones or slabs which replace it in the foreground, are like those of buried tombs. To use an etymological reference, we might say sarcophagi (from the Greek word *sarkophagos*; from *sark*, *sarkos*, flesh, and *phagein*, to eat; that eats, destroys, flesh), archetypal forms and metamorphoses of a derelict-woman in whom is henceforth anchored an expectation, that towards which expectation stretches out, and is the other name for the horizon.

Alain Bonfand, April-May 2008