

Oliver, Claire. Les Écritures de l'image par Jean-Philippe Toussaint: Expérimentation et sémentation au XXI^e siècle. Faux Titre 447

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Oliver, Claire. *Les Écritures de l'image par Jean-Philippe Toussaint: Expérimentation et sémentation au XXI^e siècle*. Faux Titre 447. Leiden et Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2021. 404 p.

Since first appearing in the mid-1980s, Jean-Philippe Toussaint's works have been peppered with allusions to art: consider the narrator's interest in Mondrian's immobility from *La Salle de bain* or the quavering Rothko outline in *L'Appareil-photo* for two examples among many. His novels have always focused on the visual as a means to explore the creative powers of the imagination. Toussaint summons images that push one to see, think, and dream. As his style has evolved, and the minimalist drawings of his early novels gave way to the grands formats style of his texts in the twenty-first century, this proclivity has only increased. At the same time, Toussaint's own interest in forms of artistic expression outside of the written word surged, from films based on his novels in the 1990s, to videos, photographs, and a number of art exhibits and installations in the 2000s, the most well known of which was his show *Livre/Louvre* at the Musée du Louvre in 2012.

It is this convergence of the written and the visual, the junction between “la main et le regard,” as the catalog for the Louvre show is entitled, that is the focus of Claire Olivier's dense, complex, and insightful book. What distinguishes Toussaint from other writers who produce several forms of art is the intersectionality and reflexivity of his work. Toussaint frequently makes art that is derived from or comments on his written work, or vice versa. His semi-autobiographical book, *Made in China*, for example, recounts the production of *The Honey Dress*, a short film based on a scene from his novel *Nue*. Simultaneously, he relates that being in China gives him the impression that he is (re)enacting scenes from his novel *Fuir*. Olivier qualifies this fluidity between Toussaint's texts and other artistic endeavors as “essai-image.” There is an overall coherence to Toussaint's corpus as new productions are both integrated into and redefine his artistic practice at the center of which is always the *je énonciateur*.

Although Olivier occasionally references previous and later works, she focuses on the years 2000-15, like her 2018 dissertation, on which this book is based. It also possesses both some of the strengths and weaknesses of most dissertations. *Les Écritures de l'image* is very well documented, with Genette's rhetorical vocabulary and Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical concepts as important critical guideposts. Furthermore, her use of Georges Didi-Huberman's theories of art and seeing are extremely insightful. She should also be commended for her discussion of many of Toussaint's less well-known texts, such as “L'Ile des anamorphoses” and “Le Mans.” However, at times her arguments can seem tangential and repetitive, but this may well be deliberate, given her approach.

Olivier's goal is not to exhaustively list every instance of the play between word and image, but rather to focus on important and recurrent examples that epitomize Toussaint's techniques. The book is divided into three long chapters, the first of which, “Études au(x) miroir(s),” examines specular qualities of Toussaint's works. The purpose of these mirrors is not their mimetic possibilities; indeed, they provide varied constructions of the self unfettered by a pulsion toward faithfulness. One compelling example she explores is when Toussaint breaks the illusion of fiction in his novels by including small self-portraits and references. The echoes between texts create a hypothetical, fragmented, uncertain image that is constantly being (re)made. The specularity and ludic qualities of Toussaint's works seem to “signifier qu'il s'agit toujours, au bout du compte, d'autre chose” (65). This is further complicated by comparisons the narrators use to describe what they look and feel like without directly describing themselves. We find a similar technique with the photograph from the Louvre show of an MRI of Toussaint's head while reading. While it appears to offer scientific precision, this retouched work obfuscates as much as it

illuminates. These specular constructions with their multiple references, create “cette « distortion du réel » que ressent le « JE » ” (121).

This distortion of the real, or “dé-réalisation” of images, which results from the melding of multiple elements, what Olivier calls “composés” or “chimères eidétiques,” is the subject of the second chapter. In *Faire l’amour*, for example, the narrator describes several large hotel chandeliers. Through the fluidity of his gaze, noting their indistinct granularity, using comparison and metaphor, he creates a composite image of both a bottle and its contents, of light and water. To quote Toussaint, they are like “trois gigantesques larmes de lumières étincelantes. . . dans un poudrolement de paillettes et de nacre” (146). This description in turn brings to mind Marie, the heroine of the *M.M.M.M.* tetralogy, and her “disposition océanique.” Another “poudrolement” can be found in Toussaint’s 2000 photograph *Lustres de l’hôtel Regency Hyatt, Tokyo*. The chandeliers, with their grainy, jellyfish-like appearance on a black background, express a more universal meaning. This image of the bottle and its contents is also found in the “photo matricielle” *Sainte Madeleine à la 4L* (240), which depicts Toussaint’s wife with an unguentarium, recalling the narrator’s bottle of acid in *Faire l’amour*, Li Qi’s perfume bottle from *Fuir*, or Marie herself, since these receptacles are also known as tear vessels. For Olivier, as she explains in Chapter 3, these motifs go beyond diegetic coherence: “le flacon est un agent de liaison flacon-flamme, « incandescent » qui met en lumière d’autres images” (243).

One of the lights that reoccurs in Olivier’s book is that of fireflies, an image that Toussaint evokes in *Football*, referring in turn to Didi-Huberman’s *Survivance des lucioles*. Like the interplay of fireflies, Olivier’s book is fascinating, but difficult to summarize; it offers a field where blinking lights (texts, videos, images) signal back and forth, indicating presence, glowing strongly or faintly, and fading away, only to reappear in response to another word, image, thought, reverie.

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Gonzague-Frick, Louis de. *Sédentaire citoyen d’Haussmannie*. Poèmes choisis. Édition d’Anne-Françoise Bourreau-Steele et Stephen Steele. Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2021. 468 p.

Après avoir contribué à ressusciter l’ombre élégante et fluette de Louis de Gonzague-Frick avec une biographie remarquable, dont nous avons déjà parlé dans ces pages, Anne-Françoise Bourreau-Steele et Stephen Steele ajoutent une pierre de plus au monument posthume de ce poète insolite avec un beau, gros volume de poèmes choisis, glanés dans une production abondante mais dispersée, qui permet d’apprécier pleinement la nature de la création très inhabituelle de Frick et son évolution au fil des ans.

S’il reste encore une image de Louis de Gonzague-Frick dans l’esprit des contemporains, c’est probablement celle du dandy à monocle qui surgit dans le film *Zéro de conduite* de Jean Vigo – le fils de l’anarchiste Almereyda, au destin tragique, qui partageait les opinions libertaires de son père. Frick, écrivain à « l’indépendance très participative » (8), connaît ce milieu et ne s’y déplaît guère, tout comme, toutefois, il aime à se mêler à toutes les sociétés, gardant partout ce « raffinement guetté par le désuet » (18) qui le caractérise. Mais ses sympathies sont perceptibles. Ses poèmes se retrouvent aussi dans *Les Hommes du jour* de Victor Méric et dans *L’Unique* d’E. Armand, journaux libertaires bien connus. Et s’il peut consacrer un poème à Laurent Tailhade, le pamphlétaire anarchisant auteur d’*Au pays du mufle*, il ne sera jamais tenté d’en faire de même pour Léon Daudet, gros bonnet de l’Action Française et « souverain de la pinguïtude » (174).

Cette formidable capacité à être partout à son aise tout en demeurant toujours lui-même ressort dans ses textes, qui se lisent parfois comme un *Who’s who* de la littérature