



## The Literature of the 'Extreme Contemporary': Between 'Death' and Renewal\*

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"POSTMODERN", "hypermodern" or "extreme contemporary" are generally the adjectives attributed to literary texts which have been produced since the 1980's. Such appellations advocate a certain ironic allusion to an "end" or «death» not only of art but also of literature, the literature which starts from the past, replays its codes, and announces the recommencement. It is a literature «in-between» which seeks to make palpable a dynamic of renewal with a playful and a parodic scope, and to recommend the construction from the deconstruction. Moreover, since the 1980s, there has been the question of the transition from modernity to "postmodernity", which often creates a certain amount of embarrassment among critics and researchers, where one wonders if he/she is out of step with literary modernity or continuity. The present work will focus first on the notion of "end" or "death" in architecture, and then in literature. Second, it will highlight aspects of the evolution of the literary "paradigm".

### I. DISCUSSION

In the 1970s, if anyone spoke of a transition to "postmodernity", one should think about the horizon of surpassing and the possibilities of rupture that architecture offers compared to modernity. We must mention especially Charles Jenks, the American architect who published his book entitled *The Language of the Post-Modern Architecture* (1977), in which he announces the break with modernist architecture.

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One can also mention the German architect Walter Gropius who wanted to oppose the functionalism of some modernist architects. In other words, he sought to oppose the artistic purity and the required originality of any work which the artists in the early twentieth century wanted. Such changes are part of a quarrel of contemporary art around the aesthetic and artistic requirements to evaluate any work. Nevertheless, if the notion of "the end" is evoked, among others *The End of painting in art*, it is to look for new issues to art, which enhance it and ensure its growth, and take into account its relationship with a reality which is changing, discontinuous and elusive.

The renewal, which was wanted and announced by different artists and in various fields, especially in architecture and painting, opened the way to a cultural debate and provoked research in literature that, has been wanted to be innovative and to introduce a new aesthetic design, since the 70s and especially in the early 80s. However, we still hesitate about the change that is happening in the field of literature. From one critic to another, we can notice the use of various appellations of this literature with generally a more or less categorical intention, which evokes the change and shows the specificity of a different literature, sometimes refractory, but often difficult to grasp.

Moreover, if we are talking about a new literature, we should not approach it "outside the frames of the already thought", while considering that "the criticisms and experiences of previous decades have not become empty or silent again. Although "since the Eighties, the French novel has entered a period of profound renewal, [and that] the decline of a certain literature of research seems to give rise to the search for a new literature, which no longer forbids the pleasure of the narrative, the expression of the subject nor the confrontation with the reality".

It is between renewal and the return to the old, between the present and the past, that unfolds the literature of "the extreme contemporary" which is located in the "in-between", a literature which can only occur in filiation. Indeed, after the innovative thoughts of writers of the New Roman, after "the spirit that Beckett and Pinget have installed at Midnight", we see the emergence of a whole generation of young writers who can show a certain convergence. Authors such as Jean Echenoz, Jean Philippe-Toussaint, Patrick Deville, Christian Gailly, Christian Oster, Marie Redonnet and Eric Chevillard have been involved in the development of "extreme contemporary" literature in France since the 1980s, and in an "aesthetic who renounces the "clean slate" advocated by the avant-garde of modernity and renews interest in the past, writes Viart. No matter the label, he adds: in the uncertainty that underlies our present, the concern has grown to understand our history and its avatars. In the artistic and cultural world, this means restoring the gaze given to the subject and its vicissitudes, to the reality and to the ways in which we live it.

We evoke what some literary critics, Danielle Sallenave in 1990<sup>21</sup> and Dominique Viart in 2004<sup>22</sup>, call "transitive" literature, where we do not witness a textual autonomy when the writer, with an autotelic vision, tries to define the fiction in its textual framework and within the structures giving priority to language, which in turn denies any representational design, but to a fiction that re-plays the modes of referencing and representation so that it participates in a considerable aesthetic mutation which has been installed since the seventies.

The writing of the extreme contemporary serves to disturb the certainties of the reader and invites him to look for other possibilities of experience, other truths still elusive, hence the poetics of creating what does not exist from what exists. If the reader has to live the fictional experience emotionally, if he produces meaning and is involved in chronological and historical duration, if he agrees to become even a fictional character, it is to say the refusal of the world as it is. The writers of the "extreme contemporary" do indeed leave the sphere of reality, aspire to elsewhere and to exoticism, but they return to it, that is to say that they make fictitious and possible worlds a pretext for recreating the real world, seeking to extract the rational from the illogical and to detect the new stereotype and the truth of the deception. Thus, the intelligence of the reader is always challenged and his imagination is often aroused, in the sense of translating a cumulative emotional effect throughout the reading.

Certainly, this literature does not allow itself to abolish traditional codes. Rather, it reworks them to make them meet the literary and aesthetic requirements. The new literary imaginary consists in treating the elements back in the narrative as literary questions that go beyond their traditional conception and which represent a part of the innovative quests of the writers of the "extreme contemporary" who can only revive themselves in a purely playful universe, replaying history and culture in a perspective of constructive reinterpretation. It is a renewal that aspires to generate a whole aesthetic of disruption, which draws its essence from paradox, ambivalence and in-betweenness: between the return and the critical detour, between continuity and rupture, for and against logic.

## II. CONCLUSION

From the 80s to the present day, we are witnessing the development of a literature that starts from the past, advocates the return, shows the detour, and announces the departure or the recommencement. This literature seeks to concretize the dynamism of renewal of the novel, which should occur in relation to a former recognized in its aesthetic totality. The new perspectives aim at a certain poetic renewal that would allow the replay of the norms of traditional fiction and its multiple powers, in a game scope, playful and parodic, and preaching construction from deconstruction.

Admittedly, the new literature does not allow itself to abolish traditional codes, but it reworks and adopts them to contemporary concerns, which are related to reality and particularly to the literary and aesthetic requirements sought. The novel appeals to everyday life with its various anxieties and its various commitments, but always with a certain "critical distance". An interest in printing an imaginary of literature consists in treating elements back in the narrative as processes and questions of literature that go beyond their traditional conception and are part of the innovative quests of the writers of the "extreme contemporary". It is perhaps this transcendence that generates a whole aesthetic of derangement, which draws its essence from the very paradox, ambivalence and in-between: between the power and impotence of language, between return and the critical detour between transition and rupture, for and against logic.

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