



PIERRE DUNOYER tableaux
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Interview Pierre Dunoyer / Alain Cueff

Translated by Gila Walker & Isabelle D. Philippe

Alain Cueff : Your work triggers a sense of confrontation rather than some sort of contemplative attitude. The forms do not admit the slightest recognition, the colors maintain with one another a state of non-relation...

Pierre Dunoyer : The *tableau**, in its plastic cantonment, determines the *a priori* blossoming of color. Thus revealed, the pressing plurality of the colors manifests the meaning of the monochrome. Remember that color is a structure that imparts weight that sustains the fruition of the propinquities linking colors and forms in the primacy of the plane. Here, propinquity and *topos* designate the same thing. More simply stated, on the plane of the *tableau*, matter is color's topological grace.

A.C. : This idea goes against all formulations of abstract art.

P.D. : My work is fundamentally an abstraction. The fact that it is abstract interests me little. Obviously the concept of representation is no longer accredited; there is a veritable status of resistance to interpretation.

A.C. : Is the term figure pertinent to your work?

P.D. : Only if we recover what resonates in the term. Dissociated from the idea of representation, figure can be envisioned as truth of place. In any case, whenever there is a work, truth is necessarily put to work, and from that moment on we are dealing with something that is termed figure.

A.C. : But there is only one figure....

* There is no equivalent in English for the word '*tableau*' as Pierre Dunoyer uses it. Derived from the diminutive for table, *tableau* means board, blackboard, chart, and is also the commonly used term to designate picture or painting but with a more substantial – Pierre Dunoyer would say 'objectal' – sense than either picture or painting. (*Translator's Note*)

P.D. : The concept of figure in the plural is of no interest. The figural event can probably only be approached from the moment that there is a *tableau*. There is, *Es Gibt*. And what can we call this moment? I can not say that Philippe de Champaigne's works are *tableaux*. But I can say that they disclose the blooming of the moment, a nuptial moment wherein the *tableau* is preeminent over the pictorial, over the mediate. With Champaigne there is conquest of place, a *topos*, a topological event. The work is no longer there to pronounce judgment on anthropological capacities, or the 'means of expression', but to emancipate non-spatial presence. The *tableau* immediates a place that is objectal rather than spatial, and that remains to be declined. It is a question that does not date from today but perhaps our contemporaneity puts us in a position to contend with the issue of the *tableau* in itself. I am faced with an historical tradition going back to Greek Antiquity that says that it's impossible, that no one can do it, that 'from nothingness, nothing can be made', etc. I challenge this tradition: to make, strictly speaking, is to cause something to be out of nothing. And the *tableau* comes veritably from nothing. If it came from another thing rather than from nothing, it could be a *crypto-tableau* or a project of a *tableau* but not a *tableau*. On this level, there is no difference between Mondrian and Champaigne. Mondrian's abstraction is less important than that of Manet. But the abstract phenomenon of the former allows us to solidly underpin the problem of abstraction which involves freeing oneself from any mediating link in order to reach the unequivocally established propinquity between being and world.

If the world presents itself in the form of a tree, we are faced with an ontic, thingy, aporia. If it presents itself in any form whatsoever, we are transported into a relational, identificatory, causal universe. The *tableau* constitutes a true *statement** of being-in-the-world. Can we say where it begins, where it ends? It's an anthropological investigation. Are we within the question of the *tableau*? Are we in front of a *tableau* and nothing else? The question is so elementary that it becomes difficult to conceive. Is it possible, in other words, to envision a presence with no other aim than being there?

A.C. : Others in the history of art have claimed to accomplish this.

P.D. : Yes. Ryman claims to be making a *tableau*. But I see a screw nut! Notwithstanding all the respect I have for his work, I must point out that a nut can by no means enter the field of a *tableau*. There must be a fundamental differentiation between the totality of beings and a privileged being: the *tableau*. When a thing is represented, mediation arises. In Mondrian, the representation is of space, and that won't do; there must be no representation at all. Ad Reinhardt was the first to give us a *tableau* that articulates *tableau* as object of thought and no longer as work of art. But he did so with a primitive, rustic means and mobile. And his literalness is somewhat annoying. The paradoxes between the said and the shown must be thought out. The ideal would have been an individual whose name was Reinhardt and De Kooning – that would have been one hell of a leap forward! It is our business today to contend with paradoxes without thinking that they necessarily imply uprootedness, exile. The certitude of object exists. The object is a fundamental concept of our contemporaneity which has been sullied.

* In English in the text.

A.C. : The object you're speaking of has nothing to do with the idea of object as it has been used and fetishized in recent years.

P.D. : The veritable object still remains to be produced. The *tableau* is the only object that can be indicated without risk of committing an error or a subjectivization. The subject holds little interest for me; in my opinion it is phenomenally excommunicated from the problem.

There is an object starting at the moment that we distinguish in the order of the world what pertains to being from what pertains to beingness. To do so we need a privileged being which, by its presence, articulates beingness as different from the totality of beings.

This differentiation can not be accomplished if we take a tree, a car, a sun, a moon. There will be confusion: Where does the car begin? Where does the sun end? There is no way out. From the moment we say *tableau*, we are in quest of a radical differentiation that is our human property: our considerate capacity to emancipate a *logos* and to attack a particular language, specific cases.

The concept of object ontologically implies that humans do not pertain to any specific case. There is one shared event in tune with being in the world. Where does it show itself? I'm certain that the materials that go into making a *tableau* vitalize this teleology. Paint, cantonment, color, plane, substance, all authorize the hypothesis of a *tableau* as a privileged being.

Since I am an ultra-contemporary of my own words, I can not refer to the past. There are no *tableaux* at the Louvre – it's a radical hypothesis – but varying degrees of propinquity with the *tableau*.

George de La Tour is definitely in the realm of the picture, whereas Philippe de Champaigne is in the immediacy of the *tableau*. Why? Because he overcame image, idolatry, the imaginary, the illusory, the anthropic. Someone who endeavors to make a *tableau* stands out as a 'beingness' among all others and articulates majesty, grandeur, and consciousness in a way that has no counterpart elsewhere. It is worth specifying that the *tableau* is a strictly Occidental claim. Heidegger made the idea of decline of Occident perfectly explicit. To decline does not mean to regress but rather to inflect knowledge, to implement cognizance. If there is a place that can be associated with cognizance, it is the West. And if such a place exists, it certainly has something to show: an object, with a name, which has nothing to do with the notion of art or work of art: the *tableau*. Is it possible to find oneself before a will of this order without it ineluctably entailing pathos but to the contrary a signifying sovereignty, a balance between the saying and the showing?

The *tableau* is a companion of our trajectory – we, the living. It has nothing to do with the world of yesterday, by which I mean the world as it has always been, the metaphysical world enchained in causalities and categories. We are faced here with a strange solitude that subjugates us. We are the guardians of past and future through an enormous present. The *tableau* articulates the enormity of present.

A.C. : The object is essentially defined by its freedom?

P.D. : By being freed of freedom. Freedom is no longer a moral, psychological issue; it is given to us as a structure. It is at our disposal. To implement it means to erect a place that is called object, that stands upright.

A.C. : You have also said that a *tableau* is neither a thing nor a tool but a structure.

P.D. : The *tableau* is a gathering of structures, a structural fruit. But as a being, it implies more a world than a structure. I can say mineral, vegetal, animal, and I can say that the verb 'to be' doesn't pertain to any. The *tableau*, on the contrary, is objectal. We leave the realm of anthropology and ontologically rejoin the passage from the reason of species to the reason of beingness by means of a place that articulates beingness for all of us. It is less a question of saying that it is a *tableau*, than of being universally capable of recognizing it as such. Only then are we in an objectal world, that adds, joins, and enriches something sterile that we call nature. Nature engenders only itself and in that sense it is the epitome of sterility for the human.'

Beingness is project, fertility ; objectality engenders the fertilization of that which the beingness of man must be – a vertical growing, upright, outside spatial, atomic categories, outside all our evident, accepted suppositions. If you take an apple, the extraordinary difference between it and the apple tree is immediately apparent.

A.C. : But the apple contains the seeds of another apple tree...

P.D. : Of course. But the objectal event of the thing that is producing itself subordinates the declination of fertility as reproduction. Similarly, the iconic difference between flowers and the soil on which they grow must be taken into account. The *tableau* doesn't resemble us, has nothing to do with any sort of causality, serves no apparent purpose, and this is precisely why it activates the old ontological question of something and nothing. Being certain in front of a *tableau* of being in front of something is all the more certain since it stems from nothing.

Hence the nothing is possibilization to the point of fertility. That implies, within the nothing, resources to be, and it is fantastic to see nothingness blossom! The *tableau* is a springtime of nothingness. When I began this work, the *tableau* was authorized by nothing. In that sense, I experienced a truly privileged moment.

A.C. : Ad Reinhardt had a two-fold legacy: painterly-painting on one hand, and the object or minimalist thing on the other.

P.D. : It was an understandable historical flaw. A new structure, a deletion of what is not the question a kind of serendipity are necessary to distinguish object from thing, from art. It allowed me to conceive the phenomenal possibility of a *tableau*. An unhoped for showing. And it is because it is unhoped for, that it can answer to the philosophical reason: it is precisely its dazzling past that authorizes the *tableau* to be. Metaphysics, inasmuch as it is over, is a primordial ground. Now we can immediately conceive modernity as access. The last seven centuries can not be swept away, and the threshold crossed empty-handed, ingenuously. We arrive with something. But with what? An equation? A novel? A technique? A tool? It's not enough. How does it come that there is something at your disposal which is a gift of yourself? Not a mere dwelling used to withstand bad weather, but a surplus, by which I mean something surpassing the self. This surplus, this gift, is the *tableau*. The object is a concept, the *tableau* is not: it is the mission fulfilled by the concept in order to appear in the considerate

showing of an ontology – the *tableau* has no sense other than its existential ontology.

I am not speaking of a situation that is ethereal, singular, disciplinary, but of the ordinary, simple affairs of the world. All these affairs are manageable on condition that we have something that surpasses the self. This is why we have termed *tableau* those pictorial works that preceded the advent of the *tableau* itself. If we can say of Philippe de Champaigne that he made *tableaux*, we can say the same, though much more cautiously, of Hals or Rembrandt...

A.C. : In an interview with Alain Pomarède you made a distinction between three levels: the phenomenological, iconological and ontological.

P.D. : The first level, which I call ‘phenomenological’, consist of establishing the components of a *tableau*: how it is made, its mode of manifestation, the materials, its destiny. For instance, matter, color, plane, the tools, the brush. Firstly, they must articulate their perfect compatibility with the spoken word of the beingness, consideration, affection, with the being-other who is not a subject assumed to know. There is a common will of the being-oneself. We have no phenomenon of the human being as unique but rather many examples designating plurality. We need a plane that is vast enough to support this variety, this immensity which is identified with the infinite, devoid of limits. It is curious how *topos* entails limits as articulation of the immense.

As soon as I place a canvas on a stretcher, I have limits that articulate the vastness of place. If there were no limits, if the *tableau* were a fresco, it would be over. A thing that ends in its composition as in its demonstration is always greater than something endless. And no painting radically articulates this. Each time there is a longing for space, to pursue the job further, and we don’t really know why the painting stops except that there are edges. I take the canvas edge as the world, there not to be exceeded but to be lived fully, in all its depth, in its miracle of place. Limits are the splendid moment of life. The concept of the infinite is of little interest since it is entirely dominated by the concept of freedom. The *tableau* treats infinities which become interesting when they crisscross. The infinities of upper and lower, of right and left interpenetrate within the superior volume of freedom. The *tableau*, by its deployment, can produce a distantiation of the concept of object and of the order of things. In other words, stop calling a glass of water or an ashtray an object. Only a being as it is in a *tableau* is worthy of being called object.

What is the *tableau*? In the same way, what is the blackboard to the physicist writing an equation in white chalk? What indicates precedence? Do I paint on a *tableau*? No, the *tableau* does not preexist the act but requires many acts in order to be. Only when it is freed of all intervention does it exist as such. Painting remains in a utilitarian, causal working. The *tableau* advenes as an object. The iconological instance is the instance of the showing and the *tableau* does not deadlock showing – whence the despair of monochrome by itself. The access to monochrome has been indubitable for many long years; it is even the entire history of painting.

A *tableau* is much more ‘monochrome’ than any identically named painting in the sense that the purpose of color is to stand out topologically, not chromatically. How could that which is a *tableau* forget red, green, yellow and give way to the falsely trance, to confusing the appropriating event of the non-apparent with

the psychological restriction of dominating the radiant being of objectality. The *tableau* is a complete place. Nothing is missing, particularly not the definitive absence of *mimesis*!

The iconic shortcoming of monochrome alone is important since it abandons the interpretation set up to endorse the event of being-in-time.

A.C. : But you paint on monochrome. Does the material come onto the monochrome before it or after it?

P.D. : All paintings tending toward the *tableau* have a monochrome ground. This is the case for Manet, Champaigne, Caravaggio and for most of the 20th-century works that use wash or, more directly, holland to present a surface with an iconic instance. *The Fifer* appears from the ground. It's great to know how to use these categories without having to paint this or that, to have the entire affair in hand including the object itself which then presents itself in all its states.

It is precisely iconology that provides the way for a present being to arise from the non-appearing. Matter comes immediately to hand, a plastic matter that collapses, just like the surface itself is a collapsed phenomenological matter that no longer shows itself other than an immense 'foreground'.

Until now, matter and color have been amalgamated. Working on this understanding, I realized that there was no reason that freedom of matter and freedom of color be simultaneous. Would it be possible to enjoy separately these two kinds of freedom? Placing a canvas on a stretcher has nothing to do with color. To dispose of color is to dispose of a color that is free of any surface. And if I pursue the question by using uncolored matter, I activate weight, I make the surface color resound and determine its topological affirmation. In this first habitat of the *tableau* plane, I find myself with a set of pre-iconic, dynamic materials, since a substance is topologically linked to a color.

I can then, once again, take possession of this disposed matter, along with color, and slowly, gradually, make the *tableau* emerge through the free cantonment of its deployment. Harmony distinguishes the intelligence of the *tableau* from my own. Two intelligences – one objectal, the other human – can then converse. The *tableau* is not the product of thought but the capacity of the latter to produce an appropriate object.

The third level, the ontological, is the destination of the showing. Showing what? To whom? This is the ontological in the existential sense: the question of beingness explodes. We can not limit ourselves to painting as a function of a story, or a fancy. The question must be pursued right up to its own historicity; to the other, to the *logos*.

A.C. : How are these three levels articulated?

P.D. : Everything is possible. The advent of the *tableau* is stated in its perfection of being a *tableau*. Why this specific appearance, this figure? That is precisely the question that is set forth. With the 24 *tableaux* of 1989, I want to make every state of the *tableau* visible. But each time we are faced willy-nilly with one *tableau*. Even if we were to employ identical characteristics, we would have a specific *tableau* which could not even slightly alter the one by its side. Representation in art does not allow such a wide range. Try to imagine *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* 24 times. There's the masterpiece, and then there are the studies, the sketches...

To me the *tableau* event can not be envisioned outside the speaking event. The spoken word based on the *tableau* is speech that is inscribed in the linkage between beingness and world. There is no proper spoken word without object. We have at our disposal an object that is greater than anything that anthropology, philosophy or history as disciplines can give us. I do not really know if we are up to living this gift roughly. I don't acknowledge philosophy as an ability to be-in-common of the human essence. Neither do I acknowledge the origin of the human being. What I do know is the capacity of the human being to give himself something – *hic* and *nunc*, today – to manifest the being-in-common of his essence, through the possibilization that he encourages in producing a privileged being that bears the name *tableau*. The *tableau* welcomes all worlds; it shelters the totality of the beings. A *tableau* does not plastically hierarchize chairs or coat racks. The *tableau* is overall tolerance; it participates not in the order of things but in what we are in the world.

Geometry is not made for a particular type of showing but to show all things. On the contrary, matter implements this geometrical preliminary to show something that has no geometrical project. In front of colors or the plane of the *tableau*, the eye lodges and finds rest. Like a bottle, the beings exhaust themselves just to be and it is difficult to pose our eyes on things that are pathetically working at non-being. The *tableau* makes no effort at being neither at enduring: it is complimentary authority of the ecstatic phenomenon of 'being-in-the-world' and is not subalternated by the effort to be in the being. The telephone had better function or it will be thrown in the garbage. A *tableau* doesn't function. The project of the *tableau* is being there, without evasion.

A.C. : You say that the *tableau* welcomes and that it is irreducible. Isn't that a contradiction?

P.D. : I don't know to what extent cultures are ready for an affection for the human being. Whether this contradiction persists or disappears, will depend on the *tableau's* reception. At any rate, no contradiction will ever be iconoclastic, none will ever destabilize the *tableau*. It should be specified in such a way that the iconological status will have the power to assimilate the hostility it may trigger. Let us recall Manet – although I have no desire to do the same thing again. I don't want to scandalize thought. I don't believe that joy, fulfillment, suggest only happy words. When Manet painted *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, he knew there would be Mondrian, that the aggressiveness his work could spark would never be absolute, precisely because history would press onwards.

A.C. : Doesn't your work have a transparent quality?

P.D. : Yes. It is see-through. Nothing is concealed. But then again it doesn't elicit the desire to see something since behind the *tableau* is the wall. There is nothing of the opacity produced by substituting one place for another. The *tableau* does not throw the object back into depravation; it erects it, hypostatizes it in splendor, in freedom, which is to say, in flagrant contrast to the alienated vision we have of the concept of object. Therein lies the urgency.

A.C. : One of the recurrent ideas of the 70s was autonomy...

P.D. : It's a false, pathogenic idea. We also say automobile when it would be more apt to say heteromobile since without someone to drive it, it wouldn't self-drive. At the utmost, the concept of autonomy has poetic value in that it indicates spontaneity, detachment, non-causality. But it is aberrant in the sense that no thing names itself. The availability of freedom is not autonomy.

A.C. : You can put autonomy aside since art is not your major preoccupation.

P.D. : Obviously. But I'm not independent of the history of art. It's a relationship of authority: I admit that art has a history without which the *tableau* could not advene. The dynamics of the work is no longer a question of art. I am certain that the *tableau* organizes itself so as never to articulate art as thought, as 'philosophy', as the means of making a *tableau*. There is no question as to art in the execution of a work today. On the other hand, the history of art has a bright future as a human being's secret history if it is correlated with the moment's punctuality wherein art is no longer the status of the work, and the *tableau* perdures as a spoken word.

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