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### **Annie Le Brun and the Archeology of the Sensible**

To present Annie Le Brun's *Appel d'air* [*A Breath of Air*] constitutes a redoubtable task. This text is a literary and philosophical essay, offering a subjective interpretation of the world, born of theoretical reflection and ethical exigency<sup>1</sup>. In Annie Le Brun, intellectual and moral rigor go hand in hand. Published in 1988, this book immediately drew the attention of readers and critics alike. The following year, it won a literary award from the Académie Française (the Berdin prize), an award which Annie Le Brun, faithful to her convictions, refused on the spot, unhesitatingly and without fuss. Since the appearance of this essay, she has written at least ten new books, a few prefaces for works or authors she admires, several interviews and many newspaper and magazine articles. We now have sufficient material to be able to evaluate this book, to situate it within her general work and to recognize its importance in contemporary intellectual debate.

#### I. The Argument of the Book

The thesis submitted in *A Breath of Air* may be summed up thus: since the end of World War II, the conditions under which thought can evolve have changed immeasurably. Our capacity for representation, that is to say, our capacity for imagining and conceiving is weighted down by threats. Imagination, and theoretical thought that is intrinsically linked to it, are now impoverished; new phenomena which are neither tangible nor possible to subdue have engendered, in the intellectual field, theories

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<sup>1</sup> Annie Le Brun, *Appel d'air* (Paris: Editions Plon, 1988).

and practices which surrender to the contemporary situation without criticism. Annie Le Brun identifies two major events which are at the core of this perversion of thought, both linked to the post-war period: on the one hand the extermination camps, on the other the nuclear threat. Not that our contemporaries have ignored these phenomena; on the contrary, they have written abundantly on the subject; but, according to Le Brun, with the exception of Adorno and a few others, they have rarely taken the full measure of their consequences on collective existence and theoretical thought. Without attempting to equate them, these two events should be viewed side by side. They engendered new conditions for thought in the sense that they deprived human beings of the possibility of an absolute negation whose intellectual potential had been conceptualized by Sade. The real catastrophe constituted by the existence of the camps and the nuclear threat deprives us, in fact, of the use in discourse of the symbolic catastrophe implied in absolute negation. These two events have, moreover, displaced the starting point from which these problems as a whole might be envisioned.

This point which in the domain of thought might be equivalent to the imaginary point from which all lines of perspective take off in the realm of painting, that is to say, the eye of the observer, is seen by Annie Le Brun as represented by death. For her, there can be no thought of any value which is not confronted by death, which alone gives human beings the full measure of their existence. Thus, the sudden irruption of an inhuman death, an absolute death which is no longer on a human scale, (a death actually practiced in the extermination camps and only announced with the creation of the atomic bomb), this new phenomenon has modified the imaginary place of death in our intellectual and sensible landscape, simultaneously transforming the conditions of thought of which it was the ultimate reference. The contemporary, absolute death is, at the same time, too close and too distant to remain at the root of analysis, ethics and sensibility. In other words, it can no longer be symbolized as was traditional death. Consequently, thought has lost its foundation; it drifts in a no-man's-land, complacently using fragmentation which, sooner or later lead to the equivalence of everything, that is to say, to nihilism. The celebration of lack, of waiting or of the fragmentary among many contemporary intellectuals goes with a novelty in the domain of

sensibility diagnosed by Annie Le Brun as the secret malady of our times, indifference.

To stay the course of this drift, the author pleads for a return to the source of imagination and to sensibility. Her book is a fervent appeal in favor of poetry, this last word referring less to a literary practice than to a global attitude consisting today of both negation and the refusal to constrain within the boundaries of what is currently possible. While recalling the genesis of such a poetic conception, whose way was paved by such writers as Sade, Novalis, Rimbaud, Lautreamont, Jarry, Cravan, or Césaire (to mention but a few), Le Brun attempts to reestablish a perspective for the contemporary view, by revealing the importance of catastrophe: “Earthquakes and volcanoes are not as foreign to us as we would claim. At the core of man, there is an intuition of catastrophe, as haunting as the echo of long range impulses whose magnitude can be discerned, but whose origin remains unknown.”<sup>2</sup> The author shows that human beings can escape indifference and the fragmentary only by confronting catastrophe, both within and outside themselves, in nature as much as in history. Her book is a true manifesto, that is to say an action which will renew the conditions under which a new thought could originate.

## II. The Loss of Sensibility and the Process of Indifference

*A Breath of Air* is an philosophical text which develops upon themes presented in previous volumes by Annie Le Brun, particularly her works on Sade; it also contains the germs of ideas which will be eventually expanded upon in her later writings, among others in *Perspective deprave*, a short text but one essential to the development of the notion of catastrophe.<sup>3</sup> The richness and diversity of the intuitions submitted in *A Breath of Air* make it impossible to analyze all the theses addressed by the author. We will only address one of these, that of the mutation of sensibility and the process of indifference as its direct consequence.

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<sup>2</sup> *A Breath of Air*, p. 41. All translations are mine.

<sup>3</sup> Annie Le Brun, *Sade, A Sudden Abyss*, translated by Camille Naish (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1990); *Perspective deprave* (Bruxelles: La Lettre volée, 1991).

This will allow us to outline an archeology of the sensible in the Western tradition, using Annie Le Brun's analyses as a guideline. Indeed, even if she rightly claims that she does not have systematic theory, the essays published by this author since *Les Châteaux de la subversion* present a remarkable coherence; they delineate the history of our relationship with ourself, with others and with nature from an original perspective that only she can offer us today.

Le Brun argues that we live in a period of important mutation of sensibility. According to her, this phenomenon is both recent and increasing on a great scale. Just as the Renaissance was accompanied by a general phenomenon of disenchantment of the universe, so similarly the contemporary period goes along with another global mutation, i.e., the desensibilization of humanity. This translates itself into behavior and thought through indifference, disengagement and a gap between theory and practice. We live in the period of the neutral, of indifferentiation, that is to say, at a time when there appear to be few ideas worthy of our commitment. No horror is indeed formidable enough to oblige us to react beyond the brief shiver we experience when its image appears on our television screen; no cause is deserving of our love or hatred; all the less because such excessive passions are tacitly condemned in favor of benevolent neutrality which we grant indiscriminately to all causes and all individuals. Above all, there is no cause worth dying for. Death, once the bet of those decided to risk everything to change an unbearable state of affairs, no longer has any significance. The idea of death is nowadays replaced by biological notions severed from all emotional connotations such as extinction, termination, fatality and annihilation.

Such symptoms of indifference have been observed in the past, often by psychiatrists or psychoanalysts, in their therapeutic practice. Joseph Gabel<sup>4</sup>, for example in his pioneer research, brought to light the psychic roots of false consciousness which, according to him, characterized our modern era. A few years later, Georges Devereux argued that schizophrenia could be identified as "an ethnic psychosis", equivalent in our time to Freud's "hysteria" at the beginning of the century<sup>5</sup>. Devereux

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Gabel, *La fausse conscience*, 1962 (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Georges Devereux, *Basic Problems of Ethnopsychiatry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

saw this as the exacerbation of normal behavior, as an acceptable way of “going crazy” in a society favoring emotional indifference. Annie Le Brun’s originality consists of addressing the problem from a far broader perspective, that of the loss of a sensible frame of reference. Our ability to accept anything and the opposite of anything is, according to her, less the proof of our openmindedness than the sign of a general indifference which prevents us from pronouncing judgments in the domain of ethics as well as in the domain of ideas. Unable to imagine any life other than the one we have chosen, we often miss utopia. The lack of another dimension requires that we take refuge in a flaccid consensus. This latter is not so much a sign of intellectual health as the consequence of our fears.

According to Le Brun, the living thought is that which, finding its source in subjective and bodily experience, takes its bearings from the emotional framework in order to go beyond it, transforming it into an intellectual framework. Thus, our sensible link with the world is nowadays a radically distorted blessing. True, we ceaselessly invoke the body, but this is only in order to reduce it to an abstraction which finds in itself its own function and finality. However, observation shows us that it is only in confronting the emotions of others that the individual can discover his or her own emotions and accord them a place in the general economy of his or her behavior. Moreover, both the emotional exchange and the exchange of commodities create the grounds for the social link and for the possibility of identification with our peers. We acquire intimate knowledge and recognition of other people’s humanity from the emotion we derive in their presence. Emotion is not only an affective impulse that we experience physically with a degree of intensity depending on the circumstances, it is also a social relationship between people that is mediated by emotional signs. If we cannot feel emotion, the other acquires for us the status of a mere thing which we feel free to move like a pawn, or discard, should it be in our way.

Contemporary narcissism and the insensibility which accompanies it are directly opposed to the dialectic of the sensible which permits us to discover a common humanity in the stranger. Far from favoring intellectual and emotional exchanges, the contemporary cult of the

body engenders the isolation and seriality of individuals. Each of us is more or less enclosed in our body as in protective armor, sealed and aseptitized; intercourse with the other person is reduced to a bare minimum, the ideal exchange still being the one least charged with emotion. Effectively, the prevailing exchange between people today, which imposes its rationale upon all other exchanges, is that of commodity. Severed from our emotional roots, contact with our peers reifies human beings in a process of objectivation whose scope has not yet been assessed. Man is no longer a wolf to other men, he has become an object. In our relation to other people, we are reduced to the situation of a commodity, identifiable and quantifiable according to the laws of supply and demand. The notion of contract is implicit even in the sphere of private life, and can now be applied to all human activities. It can even be found in the domain of sentiment and sexuality, where, unable to deal with the imaginary dimension implied in any sexual and emotional intercourse, we seek to protect ourselves by reducing it to the model of any other social exchange, regulated by a legal code which allows us to eliminate its unpredictable and baffling aspect. While threatening individuality and identity, the process of indifferenciation also undermines our intimate rapport with nature. Our relationships nowadays are deprived of their sensible dimension, thus destroying our attachment to the natural environment. Lacking the ability to empathize with nature and lacking the knowledge the numerous ties that bind us to her, we transgress the natural order (chemical weapons, uncontrollable radio-active fall-out, all sorts of pollution) in such a way that the consequences cannot be foreseen. Contemporary man is not only a total stranger to the world he inhabits, he becomes its enemy. He neither addresses himself to nature nor to those inhabiting the same space as himself, because he has lost the sensible compass permitting him the awareness of his exact place in the life-system. He is content to exchange, according to a model which finds its origin in the material world and whose implicit philosophy asserts that nobody is irreplaceable and everything can become *matter* for exploitation.

### III. The Symbolic Place of Death

We still have to link this process of indifferentiation to the question of death. The threat of absolute death has changed the symbolic and imaginary place of death in our society. Our end has become unimaginable, depriving us of absolute negation which used to be an incomparable philosophical weapon. This also explains why the process of indifferentiation has had such success. The sensible relationship to the world developed as a corollary to the confrontation with death. On an individual level, this phenomenon can be observed even in childhood. When the human offspring perceives (at approximately 8 years of age) the inescapability of death, her own or that of loved ones, she is able to develop a symbolic empathy with his surroundings. In Freud's second topics, this moment follows immediately upon the resolution of the Oedipus complex, that is to say, showing that the child has acquired a certain affective autonomy.

However, death does not have the same significance in all societies, nor in all historical circumstances. Since Frazer and Hocart, most anthropologists stress the fact that fear of death was less overwhelming in primitive cultures than in technologically advanced societies. In the latter, the passage from peace to war paradoxically engenders a lessening of fear among those who face great physical danger. In other words, war generates a mutation of the imaginary perspective on death, principally upon those who are about to be sent to the front lines. In a given society, the symbolic place of death is thus linked to the greater or lesser options offered to the individual. As Edgar Morin remarked, the more a culture favors individualism and its values, the stronger the trauma of death amongst its members<sup>6</sup>. In individualistic societies, the fact that someone can put her life at stake gives a greater value to the existence of the self. Thus, confronting one's own death is the ultimate proof of life; it is also a unique opportunity to incarnate this energy we call stream of life. The ability to envision death, to confront it, seems to be the primordial experience of the sensible individual since it is the prime factor providing access to the notion of the instant.

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<sup>6</sup> Edgar Morin, *L'Homme et la mort*, 2<sup>ème</sup> édition (Paris: Seuil, 1970), chapitre II.

Thus, the individual can develop a complex understanding of time, i.e., he can situate himself in a genealogy which includes not only the people with whom he currently lives, but also previous generations as well as those to come, only through the experience of the instant, through the subjective discovery of the atom of social time. The impossibility of symbolizing death brings with it a different perception of life. In a society based on an intimate relation to death, human beings share a conception of time which includes both a recognition of the past and a prospect for the future, present time being apprehended in its irreplaceable immediacy: each instant is unique and should ideally be lived with a maximum of intensity since it contains death within itself. In the society of indifferentiation, human beings are deprived of a strong notion of the future because they live in an endlessly renewed present. Therefore, they perceive the social world less in terms of history, i.e., as the consequence of evolution, social struggle, conflicts and negotiations, than in terms of essence i.e., as abstract entities which, even if they can be justified by science, nevertheless escape men's actions and responsibilities. Thus, they develop a non-linear perspective on time according to which human beings are subjected to their biological fate, without any other escape than to claim their innocence under any and all circumstances.

#### IV. The Ontological Status of the Sensible

Annie Le Brun perceives the sensible as the invisible thread attaching us to life. At first, it is manifested through the intimate knowledge that each of us has of our own subjectivity, and later, through the recognition of the subjectivity of others. Thus, the sensible appears to mean life, not so much as a biological phenomenon but as a unique and irreducible experience on which all other experiences are based.

According to Michel Henry, one of the fundamental traits of life is subjectivity, a concept describing the very fact of living and feeling in and for oneself. Life is not to be proved, it is only to be experienced through concrete behavior such as pleasure, pain, hunger, cold, sorrow or desire; "All of life is subjective, begins and ends with subjectivity, to the point of being nothing else but this". And so that one cannot mistake



the meaning with which he invests the word, Michel Henry adds that “subjectivity constitutes the most essential reality of this individual, his metaphysical and ontological condition, his logical being, insofar as this being is life itself”<sup>7</sup>.

According to Annie Le Brun, the loss of the sensible would result at first in a rupture with life and the forms permitting us to express it, both internally and externally. Furthermore, this would benefit such abstractions (those of the sciences, social sciences or philosophy) which constantly demand a monopoly over the definition of reality. Certainly, Annie Le Brun does not attack all systems of philosophy equally. She reserves her arrows for authors whose theoretical constructions, intentionally or otherwise, favor the decline of the sensible. Nevertheless, what must be deciphered in her too-often polemical proposals is less an in-depth analysis of a given philosophical school than a general criticism of “theory”. Having broken its ties with the sensible, theory attempts to impose its abstract entities on life. According to Le Brun, Being cannot be reduced to a signification offered by conscience. Theory and sensibility do not belong to the same sphere; each of them has its own legitimacy but should not attempt to destroy one another. In other words, science cannot claim any monopoly over the definition of reality, because the rational reality proposed in its theory does not cover all the different manifestations of life. Since Being does not exhaust itself in the definition of one philosophy or another, it cannot alienate itself within the system of representation, the verb alienate being understood here in its radical sense of “becoming a stranger to oneself”. Thus, besides the necessity for theory, it is important to develop intellectual tools which will permit a better and more appropriate expression of life. One of these mechanisms is analogy, which can be found both at the heart of the image and that of the unconscious. For Annie Le Brun, image does not essentially participate in the general system of representation. While not foreign to it, image belongs to another sphere of reality which differs from the reality analyzed by sciences: a surreality, perhaps?

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<sup>7</sup> Michel Henry, *Du communisme au capitalisme. Théorie d'une catastrophe* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1990), pp. 29-30.

For Annie Le Brun, the sensible attitude lies somewhere between the magical and the theoretical attitude. It is a compromise-formation simultaneously allowing for a greater latitude of action and an imagination which does not confine itself to an immediately perceptible reality. According to her, the time for the magical is up; we cannot even speak of magical art; it is a contradiction in terms, since art now occupies the place vacated by magic, along with, and in rivalry with, religion. On the other hand, theory cannot be the single guide for action; it is only the temporary period during which action considers itself in order to find in this abstract mirror a new impulse and a greater efficacy. In no case should theory transform itself into dogma or manifest to a definitive Truth from which the mind might then receive perpetual annuities. This explains why Annie Le Brun refuses to be locked into a dogma or to depend upon any intellectual movement, even one purporting to bear the colors of Surrealism. If the magical attitude is founded on an analogical perception of the universe, the theoretical attitude tends to marginalize it, substituting a system of equivalencies which permits a greater efficacy over the material world. The sensible attitude as it is understood by Le Brun refuses to choose between analogy and tautology. Rather, she welcomes both one and another in a permanent state of conflict whose solution will ultimately determine the path taken by any individual in the world.

## V. The Process of Falsification

If we have developed upon what Annie Le Brun has explicitly stated in *A Breath of Air*, it is because it was essential to shed light on the status of the sensible. It must be placed between the magical and the theoretical as one of the three great modes of relating to the world. Thought and action can only be unified in a coherent whole when they are implanted in the intermediary zone of the sensible. Having perceived the role of the sensible rapport, having understood that it is at the origin of all authentic action, we can better appreciate Le Brun's arguments on poetry, lyricism and her attempts to reestablish a poetic approach to the universe. For her, poetry is above all a tool to be used to free us of the yoke of narrow realism. In her view, poetic creation cannot be reduced

to a mere literary activity: even if sometimes it can be seen as such, it is more of a general attitude towards life, which includes both negation and utopia. Once we eliminate the hypothesis of suicide, the following questions must be raised: “Where is life going? What freedom is at our disposal? And desire, where does desire meet love? As for the road already travelled, how much has it depended upon us or we upon it? Finally, are those attempting to lift the veil doomed to misfortune?”<sup>8</sup>

Here we recognize an emerging system of values which, even if it is never explicitly presented as a theory, remains nevertheless conscious and coherent. It appears to be based on a series of oppositions whose key elements are the following: Le Brun prefers sensibility to sentimentality, because the latter is an objectified sensibility which does not come from the depths of the human being but rather from social convention. She prefers violence to brutality, because if the former is intrinsically linked to life, the latter is a violence never symbolized, a violence locked up in the solipsism related to magic realism. She chooses negation over contradiction, negation being for her an essential value while contradiction is the renunciation of oneself, the refusal to assume responsibility for one’s past, through silence and oblivion. Poetry counters literature because the latter is an intellectual activity with no real stakes since it is restricted to the autonomous sphere of esthetics. Thus, her personal conception of poetry implies giving, and the risk of death as the ultimate form of gift. The literature she denounces profits from ideas and forms already used, in other words, benefits from things already dead. If all poetry must create its own new and personal language, literature is content to use a frozen language and stereotyped formula. Le Brun pits the novelists for whom passions are stronger than any reality against realistic novelists whose characters are subjected to irreversible time and social determinism. The poetic image is preferable to the advertising image; however, in Le Brun’s view, the latter does not allude to the images created by marketing but rather to the images which have a particular content, that is to say a message to advertise. She chooses an intense perception which involves confrontation with death over annihilation. Not for her the State utopia,

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<sup>8</sup> *A Breath of Air*, p. 49.

extolling rational management of life and total control over individuals; she prefers utopias such as that of Charles Fourier which propose a radical subjectivity against the State.

Whenever Annie Le Brun affirms values or ideas, it is not in order to impugn their opposites, but rather to denounce their falsification; in a world of indifference, the clear-cut opposition is less to be feared than the fraudulent imitation taking the place of the original. Tirelessly denouncing fallaciousness rather than opposition to her ideas, Le Brun points out to critical theorists the new adversary to be fought. In the past, the antagonist, whose weaknesses and strengths were known, came forward openly and undisguised. Today, it is the impostor, counterfeiting ideas, distorting and bankrupting them while circulating their plausible imitation. The confusion between what appears to be externally similar is a typical malady of the society of indifferenciation. It begins in the sphere of language: since nowadays, dominant ideologies tend to overemphasize their positions in the terms of victims and oppressed people, it is difficult to designate what is indeed false or genuine. To avoid this common mistake, Annie Le Brun is careful to distinguish, as much in word as in deed, between her position and the apparently similar position of groups or individuals in which she denounces a new brand of imposture.

## VI. Le Brun and the XXth Century Avant-Garde

Annie Le Brun's intellectual roots can be traced back to some of the great avant-garde movements: above all, Surrealism, but also the Dada movement, and to a certain extent, the Situationist International. Although a member of the surrealist movement in the sixties, she does not consider herself the disciple of any particular master, nor the custodian of any specific dogma. This is why she does not hesitate to question the success of the movement launched by Andre Breton. Amongst other things, she questions the "recuperation" of a movement which always declared itself offensive and its transformation into a chapter in the general history of art, together with Impressionism and Cubism. According to her, Surrealism has been exemplary in favorising a state of permanent crisis: therefore, if one is to remain faithful to the

movement, it should only be to this subversive spirit. Annie Le Brun tries to define a Surrealist attitude in our contemporary life. Instead of repeating old postures, a contemporary rebellion should create new forms related to the present situation.

The other avant-garde movement with which Annie Le Brun feels an affinity is the Situationist International (1957-1972). Here again, her sympathies signify neither unconditional agreement nor implementation of its intellectual heritage. In a recent interview, she stresses what separates her from the Situationists: “As for the latter, if, around 1963, I was attracted by their radicality, I kept my distance mainly because of their negation of the sensible world, not to mention their blindness towards everything which cannot be theorized.”<sup>9</sup> While crediting this movement with aiming the most dangerous arrows against the dominant society, she still insists on her disagreement on the fundamental question of image. Although the Situationists defended a vision of poetry similar to that of the Surrealists, they nevertheless expressed a distrust with regard to images which is unacceptable to Annie Le Brun. This hostility is particularly obvious in Guy Debord’s theory of the spectacle, even though the concept of spectacle cannot be reduced to the realm of images. It may be said that the Situationists understood the image as a means of reproducing reality, whereas Le Brun is more sensitive to the fact that an image can give life to what does not yet exist: “There is no poetry without a sudden concretization of the inexpressible, which sometimes plays with it, in order to give it life.”<sup>10</sup> To Debord, the image is, above all, representation, that is to say, the atom of the spectacle. Le Brun admits that the image can participate in the spectacular world; she does not oppose Debord’s theses, but she complicates them by refusing to limit herself to a rational understanding of the image. For her, the latter is a vehicle for the sensible; it constitutes a way to the unknown. If Debord considers

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<sup>9</sup> Annie Le Brun, “Portrait d’une indésirable” (*Les Inrockuptibles*, 19, 26 juillet-8 août 1995), p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> Annie Le Brun, “L’ombre des mots, la proie des choses”, Jean-Michel Devésá, *Magie et écriture au Congo* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994), p. 75.

the image as an illusory means to understanding the world, Le Brun sees it as a way of life, a means of existing more passionately in the world. If, for Debord, the image is principally absence, i.e. a lie and an illusion, for Le Brun it is presence, thus, truth in the sensible communication. Ceaselessly denouncing the image as the instrument of false consciousness, the Situationists were the last representatives of the iconoclast movement. Taking for herself Baudelaire's phrase, Annie Le Brun celebrates in the image the true way to poetic liberty. Here we find one of the most profound disagreements between Le Brun and Debord. There is yet another point upon which Debord and Le Brun disagree, and we will conclude with this. Debord wished to freeze his image along with his style: "by referring to the vast corpus of classical texts that have appeared in French throughout the five centuries before my birth, but especially in the last two, it will always be easy to translate me adequately into any future idiom, even when French has become a dead language."<sup>11</sup>

He models his writing along the lines of classical prose, sincerely desiring to succeed the great moralists, La Rochefoucauld, Retz or Saint-Simon. In a word, confronted with the conflict between the exigencies of expression and those of communication, a conflict experienced by all authors, the exigencies of expression prevail in Debord's work, as they did in the case of most classical writers. Annie Le Brun, on the other hand, remaining faithful to Breton, considers style as a problem of communication, if not of heuristic. Indeed, like Breton, she seeks to apply the poetic method to social and political analysis, even to philosophy. She circulates disturbing ideas by violently breaking mental and verbal habits petrified with time. She tries to garner new images (which she calls "windfalls") which vibrate to the point of creating a series of associations freed of traditional ruts. Annie Le Brun's style tries to recover the very murmur of life, espousing the pulsation, finding its origin in an experience which is subjective and recognized as such. Thus, the author favors writing deriving from physical experience, from the sensible, requesting from

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<sup>11</sup> Guy Debord, *Panegyric*, translated by James Brook (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 10.

her reader, in return, a similar sensibility. She captures the “sensible currents” within her grasp, which she detects with an uncommon assurance, at times merely recording them, that is to say, indicating their sources. Rather than dissecting them, she transmits her own enthusiasm which explains the polemical character of some of her assertions.

To read Annie Le Brun is therefore to go beyond conventional signification: it is to accept an unusual thought which seeks its expression in poetical language; it is to abandon oneself to a sensibility which permits an intellectual drift outside the common path.