

Roland Barthes Reads *The Map and the Territory* by Michel Houellebecq

Szymon Wróbel

University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

In his most personal book *La Chambre Claire. Note sur la Photographie*, Roland Barthes proposed a hypothesis, claiming that the genius of photography is concealed in special, one-time, and absolutely idiomatic existence, in a language expressible only with the help of the word: contingency, which means both contiguity and randomness. The evocation of Barthes and meditation on *La Chambre Claire* are supposed to create a mood for a more inquisitive and sensitive approach to the latest book by Michel Houellebecq: *The Map and the Territory*. The author was concerned not only with the fact that all the tropes concerning photography and set into motion by Barthes and partly by Benjamin return in Houellebecq's book. He is also not interested that Barthes or Benjamin provides methodological devices that make it possible to conduct a more scrupulous "interpretation" of *The Map and the Territory*. Actually, a confrontation of the confessions made by Barthes and the novel by Houellebecq allows me to rethink the category of evidence and the process of providing evidence by the art of photography. It permits to ask the question: What is registration? What is evidence? And what is the function fulfilled today by registration and photographic modelling in "evidence" about the outer surface (if not the nature) of the world, and in particular the world of objects deprived of speech?

Keywords: images, image system, interpellation, money, photograph, videograms, writer

Adjacency and Randomness

Roland Barthes, in his perhaps most risky and personal book entitled *La Chambre Claire. Note sur la Photographie*, puts forward a hypothesis that the genius of photography is hidden in the individual, singular existence, absolutely idiomatic in the language which can only be expressed by the word "contingence (contingency)", signifying both adjacency and randomness. Barthes (1982) confronted us with a statement, which is not at all obvious: "What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially" (p. 4). Barthes's non-obviousness does not stem from the fact that he does not talk about what cannot be repeated but above all, as he suggests, from the fact that the ambiguity of the photograph stems from the sameness of the image and the subject: The photograph is "never distinguished from its referent", "a pipe here is always and intractably a pipe", "Photograph always carries its referent with itself" or rather abducts it, affected by "amorous or funeral immobility" (pp. 5-6). To remain in the bondage of photography is to remain in the bondage of mourning.

It seems that Barthes is particularly intrigued by the question of: Why from all the things in the world, in

the whole chaos of images which surrounds us, we are always stricken by one image, which is the very singularity, “contingence”—adjacency to the world, and randomness in the world? Why is truth, our truth, always singular and always a most intimate image demanding the “impossible”, the “scandalous” act of being made public? Truth, identity, and death are in Barthes so tightly linked that they are doomed to their random adjacency. The position from which Barthes observes and describes photography is obvious. Barthes does not write as a photographer, the subject taking the pictures, and the predator hunting for images. Nor does Barthes write from the position of the victim, the position of the photographed, who becomes the image. What is then the position occupied by the author of *La Chambre Claire*?

Barthes writes about three significant forms of practicing photography: The subject can take the pictures (hunt), the subject can be subjected to the process of depiction (die), and finally the subject may view the images (call them to resurrection). Barthes is convinced that in the moment of depiction, the subject has a micro-experience of death and becomes an apparition, but Barthes also believes that in the moment of reviewing the photograph, the apparition acquires a new reality and becomes its double. Hence, the risk: The return of one’s most familiar deceased, the most intimate photograph (mother) is inevitable. Barthes does not kill, Barthes does not die, but Barthes calls for the resurrection of the image.

This last practice—calling and summoning the dead through images—is dangerous inasmuch as it is always linked with the work of mourning and the return of the dead, especially when, as in the case of Barthes, during the recollection of images, we are dealing with an attempt to reach a new science, new knowledge—phenomenology of singularity (*mathesis singularis*) and when we are dealing with “unsuccessful” mourning, mourning which is futile, only distances us in time from the object of suffering, but does not change suffering itself. “The photograph itself is in no way animated (I do not believe in “life like” photographs), but it animates me: this is what creates every adventure” (Barthes, 1982, p. 20). In such phenomenology, the “essence of things” always presents itself as a wound. Barthes (1982) considered photography from the point of view of inquisitiveness, *punctum*, i.e., the sting which a photograph gives to the viewer; Barthes considers photography from the point of view of the wound (being). “A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (p. 28). But also, stings, marks, cuts, punctuates, throws, penetrates, and finally “inflicts” the wound. He talks about the transition of the photograph during its development (*developer*), but that which is transformed by chemical reactions is already given; it is the very essence of being wounded, something, which can no longer be transformed, but can only be repeated. It is a living motionlessness. Photography may develop (*reveler*), but what gets developed is the persistent existence of the developed object.

Barthes is not interested in phenomenology understood as a science about the eidetic, universal, and timeless (Husserl’s case), but he is interested in neither the pure idiomaticity, singleness, nor elevating the individual biography of the individual to the sole model of truth which we have at our disposal (Freud’s case). For Barthes, truth is always the truth of someone and the discussion of photographs has to end with a reflection on the subject of the image, the most personal and intimate, adjacent to my body and to my imagination, but also the most unified with me in the randomness of my existence. “Death is the *eidōs* of that Photograph” (Barthes, 1982, p. 15). Because of this stigmatization with death, photography for Barthes has more to do with theater than with the discovery of the camera: The first actors were marked in the community by the fact of playing (calling and summoning) the dead.

It is no different in the case of the first photographers who worked for the theater. Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, a French painter, set designer, author of a work entitled *Descriptions des procédés de peinture et*

d'éclairage inventés par Daguerre, et appliqués par lui aux tableaux du Diorama, is credited with the invention of photography, apart from inventing the daguerreotype in 1839, and also has to his credit a theatrical invention—diorama, i.e., a kind of painting created on both sides of translucent fabric which with proper lighting gave the impression of three-dimensionality of the objects. Let us also recall that Daguerre's method allowed him to obtain a proper photograph, but only in one copy, because the image formed on the plate was already a positive image. There was only one image. "Daguerre's photographs", writes Benjamin in an essay with the telling title "A Short History of Photography",

are iodized silver plates exposed in the *camera obscura* which could be turned back and forth until, in the proper light, one could make out a delicate, light gray image. They were unique and they cost, on the average, 25 gold francs per plate. They were frequently kept in cases as decorations [...]. (Benjamin, 1977, p. 201)

Among the objects adored by Barthes, a photograph is the object perhaps the most coveted and beneficial at the same time. It is the *punctum* of all his work. To Barthes, literature is an object with enigmatic signifier, which causes the desire to overthrow the written language, to abolish the distinction between the meta-language and the language of analysis, and the desire of unification with something, which can only be called the "practice of writing" (Barthes, 1986, pp. 3-10). Fashion, on the other hand, is an institution torn between the pragmatism of clothing and the nonchalant pursuit of the novelty, and being the pretense of luxury (Barthes, 1983), which condemns it to the ambiguous antinomy—fashion is constructed as both a "pragmatic program" and a "spectacle of luxury", because it has to propagate the aristocratic model, for which the source of prestige is pure fashion and must simultaneously create a world of consumers, the consequence of which is the naturalized fashion. The language, as a prototypical semiological system, is an institution torn between the system and the event, paradigmality and syntagmaticity, the signifier and the signified, metaphor and metonymy and in this sense (Barthes, 1964), it is never reconciled with itself, and hence becomes synonymous with the division of the subject. Myth is a *logos* stolen and hijacked, sentenced to a constant escape of the signified, and the work of the myth consists therein that it does not lead to the disappearance of the deformed material, whereby the relation linking the meaning proper with its explicit sense is a relation of distortion (Barthes, 1972).

Finally, the love discourse is condemned not only to a fragmentary character, but above all to the absence of the subject, the Other (loved) is constantly on the move, on a journey, and the loving (I) is always present, at home, defined by the one who is constantly in motion (Barthes, 2002). Thus, photography is the only hope for a coherence and continuity, truth and resurrection. Photography is the Easter Sunday, an empty grave. Although Barthes perceived the organ of the photographer to be the finger and not the eye, the cameras themselves were, and are, in fact, "clocks for seeing", in which one can still hear the "living sound of the wood", still only photography gives one the chance to recover the truth about one's adjacency to oneself and to one's body, only photography gives hope for "contingence", which signifies random adjacency. Photography, therefore, is the *punctum* of Barthes's whole life.

As a result, Barthes (1982) wrote that what he seeks in the picture is neither art nor message, but reference, which constitutes the primary assumption of photography. "I call 'photographic referent' not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph" (p. 76). Image is not a reflection of some shape on a photographic film, or a range of light intensities, but is the very emanation of the object; it is taken out,

expressed, and extracted through the operation of light. Image is more of a sculpture than a painting. That is why photography has something in common with the resurrection, with the case of the Shroud of Turin, and its essence is the sole confirmation of what it presents; it is the sole certification of the event's authenticity. It is a wound, a *punctum*.

These long citations from Barthes, this introductory meditation on *La Chambre Claire* is basically supposed to put me in a more inquisitive, sensitive frame of mind, a wounded reading of Michel Houellebecq's last novel entitled *The Map and the Territory*. It is not just about the fact all the tracks left by Barthes, and partly also by Benjamin, concerning the topic of photography return in Houellebecq's work. It is also not about the fact that Barthes or Benjamin provides us the methodological instruments which allow us to dissect the corpse of *The Map and the Territory* with greater precision. It is more about the fact that the juxtaposition of Barthes's confessions and Houellebecq's novel allows me to think again about the category of testimony and giving testimony through the art of photography. It allows me to ask the questions: What is registering? What is a testimony? And what function do registration and photographic depiction fulfill today in the "testimony" about the surface (if not the nature) of the world, especially the world of objects devoid of voice?

Benjamin (1977), cited here, quoted Brecht, who writes soberly

A photograph of the Krupp works or the A. E.G. tells us next to nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations—the factory, say—means that they are no longer explicit. (Benjamin, 1977, pp. 213-214)

If then "photography tells us next to nothing about these institutions" because "reality has slipped into the functional", then what does it say? And is its silence not speech just the same, speech which is more radical and politically critical than the speech of numerous words reaching the roots of reality? Is photography not a subversive factor, when it does not frighten, repel or even stigmatize, but when it provides one too much to think about? But when does it provide food for thought? When does the image not restrain thinking, but initiates it? Is thinking possible at all, if the image here is touched with "amorous or funeral immobility"? Is it possible to return to the old photographic plates of lower photosensitivity, which—as Benjamin notes—necessitated longer exposure in the open air and to "station the model as well as possible in a place where nothing stood in the way of quiet exposure"? Does the work *Michel Houellebecq, Writer* have a similarly aimed *punctum*?

Painting Entitled *Michel Houellebecq, Writer*

Barthes (1982) said that "[...] look is always potentially crazy: it is at once the effect of truth and the effect of madness" (p. 113). I understand that this is a declaration in favor of the thesis of the indeterminacy of the look. Look is potentially crazy because it does not have a designated object of the look. The object of the look is always random. Randomness determines the madness. Yet madness does not exhaust the look. The look is the result of madness and truth. The truth requires attaching the look to the object. Probably no one gave a stronger argument to Barthes's thesis than Michel Houellebecq, who devotes his latest novel entirely to madness and the truth of the image. The main character of *The Map and the Territory* is an "artist", Jed Martin. "Becoming a bit confused, Jed ended up saying that yes, in a certain sense, you could say he was an artist" (Houellebecq, 2012, p. 42). Michel Houellebecq, writing about his artist, Jed Martin, states: "Jed devoted his life (or at least his professional life, which quite quickly became the whole of his life) to art, to the production

of representations of the world, in which people were never meant to live” (Houellebecq, 2012, p. 19). The idea which became the *logo* of the novel is the murder of Michel Houellebecq, a writer. Michel Houellebecq, thanks to Jed Martin, creates an image (map) of the territory of Michel Houellebecq. Jed Martin does the painting *Michel Houellebecq, Writer* which is the reason of the death of Michel Houellebecq, a writer and the author of *The Map and the Territory*, as well as the author of the “introduction” to Jed Martin’s works.

The evolution of Jed Martin’s aesthetics goes through three non-accidental phases. Jed Martin’s eye is crazy, but his paintings are the result of madness and truth. In the first phase of his creative activity, as a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts, Jed Martin dealt with photography. His ambition was to develop a comprehensive catalogue of human products of the industrial age. “His six years of work had produced more than eleven thousand photos. Stored in TIFF format, with a lowest-resolution JPEG, they were easily held on a Western Digital 640 GB hard disk, which weighed a little under seven ounces” (Houellebecq, 2012, p. 20). In Martin’s work screws, nuts and wrenches took an appearance of discreetly shining jewels (Houellebecq, 2012, p. 26). Let us say that it is the Iron Age, the aesthetic Industrial Age, the age of faith in the durability of objects and truth stemming from the long process of exposure of the shell of the object.

The next stage of his artistic work was the idea of taking pictures of Michelin’s maps. During the trip exploring the most beautiful countryside of France, he has an epiphany: The map is more important than the territory.

This map was sublime. Overcome, he began to tremble in front of the food display. Never had he contemplated an object as magnificent, as rich in emotion and meaning, as this 1/150,000-scale Michelin map of the Creuse and the Haute-Vienne. The essence of modernity, of scientific and technical apprehension of the world, was here combined with the essence of animal life. (Houellebecq, 2012, p. 28)

Martin employed a technique of photographing a map at an angle of 30 degrees from the horizontal, to achieve the highest “depth of field”, and subsequently adding the blur effect in Photoshop. Visible in the background are winding roads, villages, and woods, which looked like a landscape out of dreams, fabulous and completely inaccessible. Jed Martin’s real discovery was therefore not aesthetic, but economic.

When he put the first photograph online, an enlargement of the Hazebrouck region, the series was sold out in a little under three hours. Obviously, the price wasn’t quite right. After a few tentative weeks it stabilized at around two thousand euros for a 40-by-60-format print. There, that was now sorted out: he knew his market price. (Houellebecq, 2012, p. 54)

In this way, he acquired his vocation and his profession—profession and vocation of an artist. The calling to truth means for the cultural subject of the West the finding of one’s vocation and profession (*Beruf*)¹. Let us say that in the history of the work of Jed Martin, it is the representational era, the aesthetic era of reproduction, the era of belief in the repeatability of a thing in its copy, its double and the truth stemming from the structural, architectural, and syntactic recovery of the object. Martin’s images repeat what can never repeat itself existentially.

This calling, this interpellation to become his profession is most fully revealed in the third period of Jed’s work. Jed Martin abandons the creation of maps for easel painting. According to the description in the novel,

¹ Max Weber (1950, p. 79) wrote: “Now it is unmistakable that even in the German word *Beruf*, and perhaps still more clearly in the English calling, a religious conception, that of a task set by God, is at least suggested. [...] And if we trace the history of the word through the civilized languages, it appears that neither the predominantly Catholic peoples nor those of classical antiquity have possessed any expression of similar connotation for what we know as a calling (in the sense of a life-task, a definite field in which to work), while one has existed for all predominantly Protestant peoples”.

one should probably assume that Jed Martin was a hyperrealist. For several years, his paintings were created in two series: presenting humans at work (a waiter, a call center employee, and a prostitute) and presenting meetings. Jed Martin creates the following series of paintings: *Haymaking in Germany*, *Ferdinand Desroches*, *Horse Butcher*, *Claude Vorilhon*, *Bar-Tabac Manager*, *Maya Dubois*, *Remote Maintenance Assistant*, *The Journalist Jean-Pierre Pernaut Chairing an Editorial Meeting*, *The Stock Exchange Flotation of Shares in Beate Uhse*, *The Engineer Ferdinand Piëch Visiting the Production Workshops at Molsheim*, *Forward to Irrigated Rice Growing in the Province of Hunan!*, *Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons Dividing Up the Art Market*², *The Architect Jean-Pierre Martin Leaving the Management of His Business*, *Aimée*, *Escort Girl*, *Bill Gates and Steve Jobs Discussing the Future of Information Technology*, and *Michel Houellebecq, Writer*. Jed Martin in his work depicts 42 typical professions, jobs, callings of a man of the west (*Beruf*), offering us a kind of phenomenology of work which allows for a reconstruction of the working conditions in a post-industrial society. Twenty-two further paintings, called the Series of Business Compositions, are devoted to confrontations and meetings and are supposed to show the functioning of the economy as such, apart from the subjective engagement of the subject of work. Let us say that in the works of Jed Martin, it is the age of identification, an aesthetic age of interpellation, i.e., the age of faith that the human organisms become subjects thanks to their answer to the interpellation (recruitment, call, and seduction) of the ideology/discourse, hence becoming a kind of effect of interpellation³.

The key moment of the book is the meeting between Michel Houellebecq, the writer, with Jed Martin, the artist, during which Jed, the artist, makes the writer an offer of writing an introductory essay for a catalog of his exhibition, for the price of €10,000. Additional payment would constitute a painting done by Jed Martin, entitled: *Michel Houellebecq, Writer*. This painting completes the third phase of Jed Martin's work, the age of "paintings of professions". It is also important for us to experience what kind of transfer occurs between the writer and the artist, the word and the painting, the territory and the map, Michel Houellebecq and Jade Martin. Well, both craftsmen make their own replicas (doubles): The writer creates a map (interpretation) of the territory of work (paintings) of the artist, and the artist makes a map of the territory (words) of the writer. After this exchange, after this transfer, after this mutual wounding, i.e., finding one's *punctum*, after the "scandalous" act of being made public and having put a price on one's work, i.e., giving it a market identity, the writer-artist has no other reason (argument) for repeating the process of life, at least in its present form. That is why Houellebecq, being in possession of the painting *Michel Houellebecq, Writer*, is murdered with surgical precision, and Jed Martin has to abandon the age of "paintings of professions". Houellebecq's crime has been extensively photographed and got its map. This map has become the domain of the most objective order, the order of the police.

² Damien Hirst, an English avant-garde artist, born in 1965, Turner award laureate. Among the best-well known works of Hirst is the *Natural History* series, which includes dead, dissected animals (among others: a cow, a sheep, and a shark) immersed in formalin and placed in glass cases. The series includes, inter alia, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, depicting a tiger shark which measures 14 feet in length. It was sold in 2004 for \$8 million. Jeff Koons, born in 1955 in Pennsylvania, is an American artist who uses the everyday objects, readymade toys, and is inspired by advertising. In the beginning of the 90's, he made a scandalous series of sculptures in glass and plastic, *Made in Heaven*, showing him with his wife in positions of the *Kama Sutra*, kept in a kitschy style.

³ I refer here to Louis Althusser's theory of ideological apparatuses. Althusser uses the term *interpellator*, which has several meanings in French. To trivialize the matter slightly, I would say that for Althusser interpellation was a practice subordinated to a particular ritual and the most appropriate translation of this word to English would be the word "recruitment" or "call" (Althusser, 1971).

[In the police file] there were about fifty A4 prints on glossy paper. Each represented a rectangle of the floor of the living room where the murder had taken place, of basically a square meter. The photographs were clear and well exposed, devoid of shadow, taken from practically directly above. They overlapped only very slightly, and put together they faithfully re-created the floor of the room. (Houellebecq, 2012, p. 195)

Benjamin remarks that the pictures of Eugène Atget and August Sander—two of the greatest artists of the image, to whom we will return in a moment—are similar to the pictures which register the crime scenes, adding immediately: But is there even a piece of land today which is not a crime scene? Here, finally, is an image devoid of *punctum*, an image in which *punctum* is only a subject, it is a uniform photograph, containing only a clear field of vision without the seeing subject, a pure study. The police picture is, after all, an image of the object set apart, in a place of seclusion, where nothing interrupts the absolute concentration. But will it allow for the exposure of the truth?

Yet, the truth is exposed not thanks to the neutral image of the police, but thanks to the artist, Jed Martin, who in the territory of the writer notices a lack of his painting (map). The work *Michel Houellebecq, Writer* does not return to the market for years, but finally the perpetrator of the murder, a surgeon, and an art collector, is exposed. Jed crosses another threshold of his life—he stops painting the pictures of the calling (work) and after the euthanasia of his father, who, ill with cancer, had fled in secret to a Swiss center with the pathetic name Dignitas, sells his house and settles in the countryside, in his grandparents' estate. The painting of the writer (map) entitled *Michel Houellebecq, Writer* returns to the territory of the artist, Jed becomes its owner again, but the artist cannot keep this gift marked with the death of the writer, hence he puts it into circulation, giving it nothing more than the meaning of exchange value: "He phoned Franz that very evening to explain to him what had happened, and his intention to put *Michel Houellebecq, Writer* on the market" (Houellebecq, 2012, p. 250).

After many years of silence, he returns to his paintings and creates videograms. During more than 10 of the final years of his life, Jed only gives testimony of existence of the world: Since 10 years he has been throwing his audiovisual equipment to his van and looking for a point of solitude, a secluded place, where nothing stands in the way of absolute concentration, a place, in which photography hijacks its reference and continues to exist in the slavery of mourning. After having found such a place, Jed abandoned his lenses with 1.9 Aperture and maximum focal length of 1,200 mm for a 24-by-26 format and allowed them to register random fragments of the ground.

Once the framing was done, he plugged the power supply of the cameoscope into the cigarette lighter socket, switched it on, and walked back home, leaving the motor to run for several hours, sometimes during the rest of the day and even overnight—the capacity of the hard disk would have allowed him almost a week of continuous shooting. (Houellebecq, 2012, p. 265)

Next, he processed the footage, which consisted primarily in editing, because the author would leave only a couple of frames from a three-hour-long session. Such editing enabled him to obtain "those moving plant tissues, with their carnivorous suppleness, peaceful and pitiless at the same time, which constitute without any doubt the most successful attempt, in Western art, at representing how plants see the world" (Houellebecq, 2012, p. 266). Is this not a return to the situation of the first photographs, which Benjamin recalls: The lower sensitivity to light of the early plates made necessary a long period of exposure in the open. Jed Martin photographs in the open air in places of absolute seclusion.

Yet, this was not the end of the evolution of Jed Martin, who after 10 years devoted himself entirely to filming used objects: cell phones, a computer keyboard, a desk lamp, and computer motherboards. Sometimes, he accelerated the decomposition of these objects by pouring sulfuric acid over them. However, the finale of his artistic work was the development of a program for superimposing images, which allowed for superimposition of 96 video images, with the option of adjusting the brightness, saturation, and contrast.

It was this software that allowed him to obtain those long, hypnotic shots where the industrial objects seem to drown, progressively submerged by the proliferation of layers of vegetation. Occasionally they give the impression of struggling, of trying to return to the surface; then they are swept away by a wave of grass and leaves and plunge back into a plant magma, at the same time as their surfaces fall apart, revealing microprocessors, batteries, and memory cards. (Houellebecq, 2012, p. 267)

Certainly, here death became the *eidos* of the Photograph. Certainly, these photographs may invoke, call out, but what has been invoked is the persistent existence of the object, at once developed but also recalled and invoked.

Father or the Pre-Raphaelites

In the book *The Map and the Territory*, we encounter the subject of a painting strictly connected with the subject of death—the suicidal disappearance of the mother and the return of the terminally ill father. Jed Martin's memory did not preserve any image of the mother, although it retained the memory of her photographs which enshrined her beauty. However, the relationship with his father, a man who had been trying to become an architect-artist throughout his life, and at the age of 10 had built in the barn a nest for swallows, which swallows refused to occupy, this relationship with his father is exhibited by Houellebecq as the central relationship—the main painting. Above all, it is astounding that at the time of his approaching death, Jed's father speaks to him in a confessional tone, moved, nearly awed, as if his voice demanded comfort, care, support and his son's very presence. At the moment of his father's death, the son becomes his father's father.

The father visits his son at Christmas and tells him about his struggles with life. Above all, he relates him about his two intellectual fascinations—Charles Fourier and William Morris. According to Jed's father, what really interested Fourier was not sex, as is commonly believed, but the organization of production. Primarily, Fournier asked: Why does man work at all? Liberals respond that this is due to the pursuit of profit; Marxists turn this problem into the question about the conditions for the elimination of the labor process. According to Fourier, people had worked before capitalism emerged and their work was related to the love of God and a sense of honor. Jed's father suggests that this was what his son, Jed Martin—the artist, wanted to convey in his paintings of professions.

Thus, Jed Martin becomes the artist of the times of post-production. Marx's great dream of the coming of the day, in which humanity will be fully socialized, and its sole purpose will be to provide hospitality to the process of life, and the difference between work and production will disappear completely, so that all production will be work, well this great dream of Marx, which de facto is the great dream of mankind, is fulfilled before our eyes, in our world, but it is fulfilled as a curse. After all, at all stages of his work Marx defines the human through work, and then leads him to the society in which this most powerful human force has ceased to be necessary. As a result, humanity is faced with the tragic choice: between a productive slave and an unproductive freedom. The price of absolute freedom is that the place of real life (work) is usurped by a supplementary life—unlimited consumption. Jed Martin, therefore, depicts the last working man.

Hence, according to Marx, capitalism was born around the 16th century, when the model: commodity-money-commodity, representing the earlier forms of economy, changes into the model: money-commodity-money, which means that the sale with the purpose of buying is replaced by buying in order to sell. The essence of capitalism is, therefore, that the capitalist invests money in the production of goods which he sells in order to get even more money. Marx refers to the surplus emerging during production as the value added. Jed Martin experiences it all as a formula: Sustaining the process of accumulation constitutes the meaning of life; the exchange value in the form of a numerical value of money is the only value (Marx, 1967).

At the heart of *Capital*, Marx points to the encounter of two elements: On one side, the worker who has become free and naked, having to sell his labor capacity; and on the other side, decoded money that has become capital and is capable of buying it. What is more, each of these elements brings into play several processes of decoding having different origins. For the free worker: the decoding of the soil through privatization; the decoding of the instruments of production through appropriation; the loss of the means of consumption through the dissolution of the family and the corporation; and finally, the decoding of the worker in favour of the work itself or of the machine. And for capital: the decoding of wealth through monetary abstraction; the decoding of the flows of production through merchant capital; the decoding of States through financial capital and public debts; the decoding of the means of production through the formation of industrial capital (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 225). In a sense, it is the bank that controls the whole system and the investment of desire. Unfortunate that Marxist economists too often dwell on considerations concerning the mode of production, and on the theory of money as the general equivalent as found in the first section of *Capital*, without attaching enough importance to banking practice, to financial operations, and to the specific circulation of credit money—which would be the meaning of a return to Marx, to the Marxist theory of money (Brunhoff, 1976).

Yet it is not Fourier, but William Morris who is the main character to whom Jed's father is trying to allude. Morris is an appropriate object of artistic identification of the dying father. Thanks to Morris, Jed's father can above all tell the story of degeneration and decline of art, and as a result of work, and present the views of artistic formation usually defined as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. According Pre-Raphaelites, one should abolish the distinction between art and craft, between the concept (project) and the execution (incarnation): Each person can be the creator of works of art in the form of a painting, clothes, or furniture, and in everyday life every person deserves to be surrounded by beautiful objects. Morris combined this belief with his socialist activities, which led him in the direction of becoming involved in the movement for the liberation of the proletariat. He believed in the coming of the golden age, when industrialists will be replaced by artists. Nearing death, Jed's father mentions Fourier and Morris, reminiscing the images from his youth, reliving the hopes which constituted the history of his life and their loss. Son listens: He photographs his father's dead hopes that suddenly come alive at the time of his death.

Interestingly, the character of William Morris returns in his book *The Map and the Territory* in an interview between Jed Martin and Michel Houellebecq. Houellebecq—the writer is surprised that Jed's father—an unfulfilled artist was fascinated with Morris, whom “almost nobody knows”. Houellebecq is in possession of Morris's book, decorated with Art Nouveau designs, in which this Pre-Raphaelite states that artists are the last representatives of the craft, which was annihilated by industrial production. William Morris is not only a painter and illustrator; he is also the editor of books: In 1890, he opens the printing house on the outskirts of London with the resolution to restore the dignity of the book. The prints in Morris's printing house were set by hand and copied by hand presses. The Pre-Raphaelite ideal was the Renaissance book and

illuminated medieval codes, so they used the decorative motifs of the Renaissance, and for typesetting they used the font modeled on Jenson's Roman typeface.

In a sense, the author of *Elementary Particles* develops and completes for Jed Martin Morris's story, related by his father only in fragments. Houellebecq completes Morris's story with the intimate details of life of a Pre-Raphaelite: He reminds Jed that another artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti replaces Morris in his own marriage bed. Perhaps in this way, Houellebecq indicates the paradox of Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics and ethics: They committed themselves to handicraft, thus creating expensive works, and as a result inaccessible and in conflict with the socialist desire to popularize beautiful objects. Similarly, they were devoted to the idea of joint property, *community art*, the art of speaking with the others; yet in their private life, they became victims of their own selfishness.

Jed's father and Houellebecq communicate to Jed not only the story of William Morris, but, above all, their own death, or in fact the form of this death, its inscriptions. Houellebecq dies butchered, the father dies cremated. Houellebecq is murdered in contract hit put out by doctor Petissaud, who created compositions from human bodies. The doctor's office contained a picture of the artist Francis Bacon, two plastinations of von Hagens and a canvas titled *Michel Houellebecq, Writer*. However, Jed's father chooses a "dignified death" in the Swiss resort dealing with serene demise by euthanasia. Like most visitors of the resort, he chooses cremation as the most appropriate form of his own disappearance. But it is not the point that the writer's death and the death of the architect are ways of dying worthy of the biopolitical times, that are part of the politics of death and the politics of life; the point is that this death must have its presentation, it must have its map, and as a result must have its witness. Jed Martin is a witness to the death of Houellebecq—the writer and the death of his father.

Now, after his father's cremation and the dismemberment of Houellebecq, it becomes clear why they both gave Jed lessons on William Morris. Jed Martin is supposed to become not so much a contemporary of William Morris—a Pre-Raphaelite, but rather a modern Franciscan Tertiary, a Giotto di Bondone of late capitalism. Giotto, at the request of the Prince of Naples, created the prototype of Jed's work about human professions, decorating the palace chapel with frescoes and creating a series of paintings entitled *Famous people* in the great hall of the royal palace. Capitalism, by transforming goods into an image and by compressing space does not so much exceed its physical limitations as it acquires an external form—the form of the image. In this way, aesthetics has triumphed over ethics, the image dominated the narrative, map dominated the territory, and the ephemerality and fragmentation outweighed the eternal laws and coherent policy.

Involuntary Images

Walter Benjamin, stating that the fog which encircles the beginnings of photography is not as thick as the darkness which envelops the beginnings of print, basically evokes only two names from this short history emerging from the aura—those of Eugène Atget and August Sander. Atget photographically documented Paris: George Eastman House collection currently holds 500 pictures of the city. For over 20 years, Atget collected photographs in the 18-by-24 format, depicting all streets of the old Paris; they became the testimony of the architecture of the city space from the 15th to the 19th century. This enormous documentation is so monstrous that Atget surely had the right to say towards the end of his life: *I possess all of Old Paris!* August Sander, on the other hand, tried to realize a gigantic project under the title *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts*. It was supposed to document the full spectrum of people living in the 20th century Germany. The photographs were

supposed to be divided into seven groups, corresponding to seven social classes. Sander intended to portray the peasants, workers, and the unemployed, as well as students, artists, and politicians. A part of the photographs from the planned five hundred appeared in a publication entitled *Antlitz der Zeit*. In 1933, the publication of the *Face of our Time* was prohibited because Sander presented the diversity of the German nation, which did not match the Nazi vision of the Germans and the Aryan type. For a long time, there was silence surrounding the human face, permeated by a curious glance, Sander, as opposed to the photographs of the paparazzi, radicalized this silence. Certainly, this provides us with a confirmation of Barthes's intuition: "Photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks" (Barthes, 1982, p. 38).

Benjamin points to the fact that Atget's photographs showing Paris are not so much lonely, as devoid of a mood; the city in the pictures is empty like an apartment waiting for a new tenant. On the other hand, Sander's photographs, which are not only an album, but above all an atlas, change our perception and understanding of the human figure as well as what the definition of a portrait is. Sander approached the task of giving testimony of the human physiognomy not as a scholar, instructed by anthropologists and sociologists expert on human races, not as a physician possessing knowledge about human tendencies, but based on direct observation, film speed itself, he provided us with a serious argument that image is a result of truth and madness. When a human face found its way to the photographic plate, uniqueness, and continuity of the human face intermingled as much as the repeatability and the surface of the human image. "Man is created in the image of God and God's image cannot be captured by any human machine" (Benjamin, 1977, p. 200). Perhaps this is the reason why the "first people to be reproduced entered the visual space of photography with their innocence intact – or rather, without inscription" (p. 205).

One cannot fail to notice the affinity and similarity between the works of Eugène Atget and August Sander and the work of Jed Martin. This phase of Jed Martin's work, which we named "professional", reproduces and simply repeats Sander's project entitled *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts*. On the other hand, the last phase of Martin's artistic work, in which he returns to the lonely photography of still life, is a paraphrase of Atget's project. In his work, however, it is not Paris that is lonely and deserted, but the whole planet Earth is completely subject-less: spotless and unsigned, i.e., uninterpellated.

Roland Barthes (1994), in his alphabetic autobiography, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* confesses:

I have kept only the images which enthrall me, without my knowing why [...]. And, as it happens, only the images of my youth fascinate me. [...] When consideration (with the etymological sense of seeing the stars together as significant constellation) treats the image as a detached being, makes it the object of an immediate pleasure, it no longer has anything to do with the reflection, however oneiric, of an identity; it torments and enthralls itself with a vision which is not morphological (I never look like myself) but organic. [...] Once I produce, once I write, it is the Text itself which (fortunately) dispossesses me of my narrative continuity. [...] The image-repertoire will therefore be closed at the onset of productive life (which for me was my departure from the sanatorium). Another repertoire will then be constituted; that of writing. (p. 7)

What has amazed me since the first reading of the mysterious book by Barthes on Barthes is the privileging of the image system. Barthes writes explicitly in the entry on the *Image system* (*L'imaginaire*): "The vital effort of this book is to stage an image-system" (Barthes, 1994, p. 1097). To stage means here to simply play a role of a theater director—set up the backstage, assign roles, rewrite the script, design the costumes, and place the sources of light. However, what amazes me when I juxtapose the thinking about the images of Barthes and Houellebecq's narration is not only the profound analogy with the experience of the image, not only the

approximation of the politics of the image, but above all this feeling of dispossession of the narrative continuity by means of word production. Since I have been producing, since I have been writing, the text (luckily) dispossesses me of my narrative continuity. Both—Barthes and Houellebecq—have an equal right to say: The image-repertoire will be closed at the onset of productive life; in the life of writing only images of writing will remain. Michel Houellebecq and Jed Martin are one and the same person, but it is Houellebecq who is defeated, doomed to the images of the word and the loss of the continuity of his life, separated from images, which amaze and fascinate—the images of childhood. Jed Martin, through images, which become bodies, is not only alienated from himself and his body, but above all inserts himself in the design of the world, becoming again and anew its territory.

References

- Althusser, L. (1971). *Ideology and ideological state apparatuses*. (B. Brewster, Trans.). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Barthes, R. (1964). *Elements of semiology*. (A. Lavers and C. Smith, Trans.). New York: Hill & Wang.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. (A. Lavers, Trans.). New York: Hill & Wang.
- Barthes, R. (1982). *Camera Lucida: Reflections on photography*. (R. Howard, Trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Barthes, R. (1983). *The fashion system*. (M. Ward and R. Howard, Trans.). New York: Hill & Wang.
- Barthes, R. (1994). *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. (R. Howard, Trans.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Barthes, R. (2002). *A lover's discourse: Fragments*. (R. Howard, Trans.). London: Vintage Books.
- Barthes, R. (Ed.). (1986). From science to literature. In *The rustle of language* (R. Howard, Trans., pp. 3-10). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Benjamin, W. (1977). A short history of photography. (P. Patton, Trans.). *Artforum*, 15(6), 58-64.
- Brunhoff, S. (1976). *Marx on money*. (M. J. Goldbloom, Trans.). New York: Urizen Books.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2004). *Anti-oedipus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. (R. Hurley, M. Seem, H. R. Lane, preface by M. Foucault, Trans.). London: Continuum.
- Houellebecq, M. (2012). *The map and the territory*. (G. Bowd, Trans.). New York: Vintage.
- Marx, K. (1967). *Capital*. (E. Untermann, Trans.). New York: International Publishers.
- Weber, M. (1950). *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. (T. Parsons, Trans.). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.