



By Sara Gebran.

A part of the artistic research *The Physical Order of Power*.

Published in *"The Page as a Dancing Site"*, edited by Paula Caspao.

*"The Page as a Dancing Site"* is supported by Danish National School of Performing Arts.

*The word transparency is such a catch word, from governmental ideologies speech, academia, institutions, architecture, internet, painting, economy, the news, from material to immaterial labor, a cover up for undemocratic wars, a camouflage, a war zone, a game, an illusion, a strategy...*

## SUNDAY CHAT

(a 20% live, 80% quoted conversation)

Featuring (by order of appearance)

**Mathias Kryger: MK**

**Sara Gebran: SG**

**Paul Scheerbart: PS**

**Alexander Scrimgeor: AS**

**Madame Google: MG**

**Anja Henckel & Nadim Samman: AH & NS**

**Blandine Vié: BV**

**Brian Massumi: BM**

**Jeffrey Bussolini: JB**

**Michel Foucault: MF**

**Erwin Panofsky: EP**

**Georges Didi Huberman: GDH**

**Susan Sontag: SS**

**MK:** Here you go baby, the film about transparency:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOOHJ128NsU>

**SG:** Beny Wagner is cool... in relation to transparency. I like the quotes, architecture directly linked to culture instead of only linked to economy as I thought...

**MK:** Yes, the text in the video is taken from the book *Glass Architecture* (Glasarchitektur)

by Scheerbart (Berlin 1914).<sup>1</sup>

It is a visionary mad man talking about cities of colored glass architecture, kind of referencing the glass work in the gothic cathedrals, sort of a manic neo gothic super transparent ideal city. Eliminating the walls and doors for glasses, a new culture and a new man could be raised...

**PS:** *"We mostly live in closed spaces. These form the environment, out of which our culture grows. Our culture is to some extent a product of our architecture. If we want to elevate our culture, we must, for better or for worse, transform our architecture. And this will be possible only if we remove the insularity from the spaces in which we live. This however, we can only do by introducing glass architecture, which lets the sunlight and the light of the moon and the stars into our spaces, not just through a few windows, but simultaneously through as many walls as possible, entirely made*

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpts are available online: [http://arch5541.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/sheerbart-glass\\_architecture.pdf](http://arch5541.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/sheerbart-glass_architecture.pdf).

of glass – of colored glasses. The new milieu that we will thereby create for ourselves, must bring us a new culture.”<sup>2</sup>

**SG:** ...eliminating the walls for glasses into a new culture and a new man, gee! I wouldn't like that, but I see the point.

**AS:** “We spend a lot of time looking *through* transparent surfaces – windows, screens – but far less time looking *at* them. After all, such objects are typically taken for granted; their ideal condition is a form of invisibility. And yet despite – or perhaps because of – this elusiveness, transparency has acquired a powerful symbolism, imbued with the moral values of openness, truth...”<sup>3</sup>

**BV:** Les transparences avérées: *Hyalines (incolores) ou cristallines, elles ne sont nullement troublées. Avec une texture qui peut être liquide, colloïdale (insoluble dans l'eau : résine fossile), visqueuse, gélatineuse, dure et solide, mésomorphe (entre l'état amorphe et l'état cristallin). / Pas toujours visibles à l'oeil nu, d'ailleurs, comme ces filigranes qu'il faut deviner dans le corps d'un papier.*<sup>4</sup>

**MG:** “True Transparency is a very quick, simple way to have the Vista transparency effect on your XP windows, it adds a sleek transparency effect to your windows.”<sup>5</sup>

**MK:** The cultural history of transparent architecture is super interesting; it's kind of a story of inventions and enlightenment, ideas and ideals. But it is also very tied to early twentieth century colonial and imperial ideas in a way.

**AH & NS:** “*Invisible Measure* investigates narratives that are hidden in plain view. The areas of investigation span the last century and attempt to understand how our relationship to transparency has evolved alongside the gradual shift from material to immaterial labor processes. From the use of transparent materials in architecture beginning at the turn of the last century, to the political necessity of transparency today, the project focuses on the use of transparency as a vehicle for ideological social reform. The notion itself seems to imply a certain absolute, a one-to-one assurance of accurate vision. Yet the word defines not accuracy, but appearance. Appearance, however, is not solid, it can be fleeting, momentary, prone to deception and hallucination. If we break the word down: trans apparent: through – it – appearance, what then, is IT?”<sup>6</sup>

**BV:** Les transparences incertaines, qui hésitent: *Clair-obscur laissant deviner les formes et les objets malgré l'ombre ; ombres chinoises se découpant sur un écran transparent rétro-éclairé ; radiographies et échographies ; jours à travers un tissu ; Claire-voie (clôture à jour). Le qualificatif le plus 'troublant' reste pellucide (du latin pellucidus, de per = à travers, et lucidus = luisant), signifiant transparent... ou translucide !*

<sup>2</sup> This is an excerpt from the voice off that Beny Wagner uses in his video work *Invisible Measure* (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Scrimgeour on Beny Wagner's *Invisible Measure*, in ARTFORUM: <https://artforum.com/inprint/issue=201402&id=45018>.

<sup>4</sup> Blandine Vié, *transparences: dix façons de les préparer* (Paris, Les Editions de l'Épure), Préface.

<sup>5</sup> <http://truetransparency.en.softonic.com>.

<sup>6</sup> IMPORT PROJECTS, Press Release *Invisible Measure*: <http://import-projects.org/invisiblemeasure.html>.

*Sans parler de ces fascinantes transparences génésiques que sont le blanc d'œuf fœtal (ou glaire) et le sperme.*

*De quoi rester médusé ! Tiens, que vient faire ici la méduse, avec ses transparences fluorescentes ?<sup>7</sup>*

**MG:** *Transparency International* (TI) is the global civil society organization leading the fight against corruption. It's a non-governmental organization that monitors and publicizes corporate and political corruption in international development, founded in May 1993, with the participation of Peter Eigen, a former regional director for the World Bank.<sup>8</sup>

**MK:** ...but then glass now is also very energy efficient, saving heating, etc.

**SG:** Hmmm, I looked only at the result of language in the use of transparency = democracy, as one of the neoliberal camouflages for corruption, politicians strategies of dirty business, etc... now looking at architecture it all seems connected...

**BV:** Les fausses transparences: *Translucidité, du latin translucidus, de trans = du-delà, et lux = lumière : qui laisse passer la lumière, sans permettre de voir nettement les objets. C'est aussi le sens du mot diaphane (du grec diaphanes = transparent).*<sup>9</sup>

**BM:** "Mimickry, according to Lacan, is camouflage. It constitutes a war zone. There is a power inherent in the false: the positive power of ruse, the power to gain a strategic advantage by masking one's life force."<sup>10</sup>

**JB:** "The concept of the dispositive in Foucault is also integrated with his theory of power and his descriptions of its operations. [...] the dispositive is a tool for analyzing or understanding a multiplicity of forces in movement and contest. [...] it seems first and foremost a tool to think about power in the perpetually dynamic social field. It bears on the relationship between different actors and discourses in an ongoing series of rivalries."<sup>11</sup>

**MK:** ...and there is also something to be said about living far from the equator and the amount of light you can let into your houses.

**SG:** I still love to not be seen. It's like being in the book 1984, with big brother peeping into houses, not only computers and mobile phones.

**BM:** "As Eric Alliez and Michel Feher observe, the best weapon against the simulacrum is not to unmask it as a false copy, but to force it to be a true copy,

<sup>7</sup> Blandine Vié, *op. cit.*, Préface.

<sup>8</sup> Collage borrowing excerpts from Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transparency\\_International](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transparency_International).

<sup>9</sup> Blandine Vié, *op. cit.*, Préface.

<sup>10</sup> Brian Masumi, "Realer than Real: The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari", *Copyright* no.1, 1987, pp. 90-97, p.91, 92. Online: <http://www.brianmasumi.com/textes/REALER%20THAN%20REAL.pdf>. See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York, Norton, 1981), p. 99.

Cited by Eric Alliez and Michel Feher, "Notes on the Sophisticated City", *Zone*, no. 1/2 (1986), p. 55 n.1.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Bussolini, "What is a dispositive?", *Foucault Studies*, No. 10, pp. 85-107, November 2010, p. 90, 91.

thereby resubmitting it to representation and the mastery of the model: the corporation that built the rebellious replicants introduces a new version complete with second-hand human memories."<sup>12</sup>

**MK:** Well, what Orwell got wrong is that the watching is being done not as old school surveillance, but on the digital level, so the real transparency/opaqueness is right here on the internet

satellites are watching from above  
drones from the sides  
and information/data from the wires

**SG:** Yeah, that is what I mean, we are differently surveilled nowadays; not anymore in the way Orwell meant it, but of course he couldn't see what the world would turn to be 80 years later. Now if on top of digital surveillance we have transparent houses, man... we are screwed.

**BV:** *Bouteille de vodka prise dans les glaces (Halo)*

*1 bouteille de vodka + eau*

Mettre la bouteille de vodka debout dans un seau à champagne supportant le congélateur. Attendre au moins 12h.

Pour démouler le bloc de glace, plonger le seau quelques secondes dans l'eau chaude.

Si la bouteille remonte, verser d'abord 10cm d'eau, puis dès que l'eau a gelé, stabilisant la bouteille, compléter jusqu'à 2cm du bord.<sup>13</sup>

**MF:** "I said that the dispositive is by nature essentially strategic, which indicates that it deals with a certain manipulation of forces, of a rational and concerted intervention in the relations of force, to orient them in a certain direction, to block them, or to fix and utilize them. The dispositive is always inscribed in a game of power and, at the same time, always tied to the limits of knowledge, which derive from it and, in the same measure, condition it. The dispositive is precisely this: an ensemble (set) of strategies of relations of force which condition certain types of knowledge and is conditioned by them."<sup>14</sup>

**SG:** I say, NO to transparent homes, and YES to transparent business

**MK:** Maybe somebody should do research onto how modernism totally fucked up the possibility to hide within architecture.

**SG:** Yeah, a research on how fortresses are necessary today.

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<sup>12</sup> Brian Massumi, *art. cit.*, p. 92. See also Eric Alliez and Michel Feher, *art. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> Blandine Vié, *op. cit.*, Préface.

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. III, quoted by Jeffrey Bussolini (*art. cit.*, p. 91, 92) and by Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* (Roma, Notte-tempo, 2006, p. 3, 4).

**BM:** “Deleuze and Guattari insist on the collective nature of this process of becoming, even when it is seemingly embodied in a solitary artist. Revolutionary or ‘minor’ artists marshal all of the powers of the false their community has to offer.”<sup>15</sup>

**EP:** “If books were subject to the same laws and regulations as pharmaceutical products, the dust jacket of every copy would have to bear the label “Use with Care” – or as it used to say on old medicine containers: CAUTIUS.”<sup>16</sup>

**MK:** Old architecture had secret rooms, under the floors, under the stairs, in the attic non-linear structures, where you could hide yourself, or the ones who were hunted (the Jews, the homosexuals, the Arabs, etc...).

**GDH:** “Thanks to Panofsky, we are aware that the very transparency of a window, in the context of an *Annunciation*, can serve as a vehicle for the most resistant of theological mysteries (the Virgin’s hymen, traversed by the divine seed, remaining intact like a pane of glass traversed by a ray of light).”<sup>17</sup>

**MK:** Modernism wanted a transparent society and thought that building transparent structures would help and make everybody understand, holistically, what the world is about.

**SG:** Do you think that is why transparent buildings came to exist?

**MK:** Well I haven’t looked at that part of history so I don’t know.

**SS:** “Transparency is the highest, most liberating value in art – and in criticism – today. Transparency means experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are. This is the greatness of, for example, the films of Bresson and Ozu and Renoir’s *The Rules of the Game*.”<sup>18</sup>

**BV:** *Quoi de plus trouble que la transparence?*

Du latin trans = *au-delà de*, et parens = *apparaissant: se laissant aisément traverser par la lumière, ce qui permet de distinguer nettement les objets à travers; au sens figure: dont le sens se laisse deviner (allusion transparente). Aisément et nettement? Est-ce si limpide, si évident?*<sup>19</sup>

**BM:** “[...] simulation is a process that *produces* the real, or, more precisely, more real (a more-than-real) on the basis of the real. ‘It carries the real beyond its principle to the point where it is effectively produced’.”<sup>20</sup>

**GDH:** “I mean the danger posed by the image to those whose profession it is to know it. How can we know an image if the image is the very thing (Panofsky never forgot his Plato) that imperils – through its power to take hold of us, which is to say

<sup>15</sup> Brian Massumi, *art. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>16</sup> Erwin Panofsky quoted (from *Idea*, 1959) by Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), p. XVI.

<sup>17</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *ibid.*, p. XV.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York, 1967), p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Blandine Vié, *op. cit.*, Préface.

<sup>20</sup> Brian Massumi, *art. cit.*, p. 92 (quoting Deleuze and Guattari from *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 87).

its *call to imagine* – the positive or ‘objective’ exercise of knowledge? If the image is what makes us imagine, and if the (sensible) imagination is an obstacle to (intelligible) knowledge, how then can one *know an image?*”<sup>21</sup>

Two days later, I am thinking of houses made of bricks, with fake surfaces looking as if they were windows, a window camouflage, or a façade of pre-recorded people living indoors (fake loops to protect one’s own privacy), or windows that could be transparent inside-out but not outside-in...

**NEW SHELLS.**

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<sup>21</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *art. cit.*, p. XVI, XVII.