In Search of Lost Space

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The fact that *99:1* by Arjan de Nooy is based on Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style* (in the original French: *Exercices de style*, 1947) might give the viewer a number of leads for reading the work. In any case, it prompted me to reread Queneau's quite singular opusculum, which is a highlight of his oeuvre and considered by many to be a literary gem. At my first reading in Dutch (as translated by Rudy Kousbroek as *Stijloefeningen*) and after having reread it in French, I did not understand why it failed to charm me and why I found several 'exercises' even annoying. After all, my attention had already shifted towards the breed of writers whose texts not need rely on content or plot, but instead seem dominated by clarity of form and reasoning, essayistic or (natural) scientific tendencies, or logical inclinations. Queneau is precisely considered to be that kind of writer. I thus wondered whether De Nooy's 99 exercises in looking might offer an explanation, and more specifically if looking at De Nooy's set of photographs—constituting some sort of 'remediation' of Queneau's texts—might as by-product yield a 'remedy' for my reading of these texts. There exist several points of connection between the works: both present 99 variations on a single theme, namely a possible situation taken from tangible reality (a 'connectivity'); both are set in Paris; both contain identical elements (an autobus and two male characters); both are mundane (the constellation Queneau and De Nooy present us is 'arbitrary', banal even, an insipid affair); and each of the 99 individual 'exercises' is titled.

After my renewed double reading (in French and Dutch) of Queneau's variations on a theme—which in reality amounts to exercises in form or genre or even more so, exercises in translation—I was still unable to judge it as something more than some kind of textbook or language manual (excellent fodder for translators, albeit too much seasoned with silly jokes). It was obvious to assume this impression was caused by Queneau's style in *Exercises in Style* (the 'Exercises in Style-style'). As this seemed too facile a conclusion, I decided to further examine the matter. Firstly, I thought that to read other translations might offer solace, even if only to combat my own confirmation bias. Secondly, a deeper dive into the work and personality of Queneau might could be helpful. Thirdly, media theory (which as of the 1980s had gained credence) is meanwhile better applicable. Last but certainly not least, this work by De Nooy—who, in terms of content, transposed this work of literature rather faithfully (if not verbatim, then at least in spirit) into a photographic equivalent—clearly offers an exquisite opportunity for comparative research into the same material (the same subject) in a different form (a different medium). Below, I will primarily discuss the fruits of this maneuver. I will be considerably more succinct with the first three aspects, to the extent that I have condensed the results into one comprehensive footnote. [1]

The fact that photographs give such detailed depiction is sometimes suggested as the reason why photography was invented in the first place; in order to give painters the

opportunity to produce ever more faithful representations of so-called reality. This idea is diametrically opposed to the more accepted notion (or indeed, the *idée reçue*) that photography freed painting from the need for realistic depiction. [2] Regardless of what assessment one ascribes to, it is perhaps no coincidence that 1839 (the year in which the photography was officially invented) falls, as far as the realms of painting and literature are concerned, in the period of Realism: the art movement, that got saddled with a highly problematic art historical term and that formed the prelude to modernism. Reacting to Romanticism, the Realists strove to achieve 'objective' (empirically; as perceived through the senses) and 'true to life' representations of reality, focusing on description down to the tiniest details of the daily life of the 'ordinary person' (instead of idealized, romantic 'beauty'). Gustave Flaubert, whose novels *Madame Bovary* (1856) and *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869) are generally considered the apex of literary realism, was the first to place form before content (his ideal was 'a novel about nothing'), and in whose prose the process of writing itself (and its formal-stylistic limitations) takes center stage instead of a romantic free-floating fantasy. [3] Flaubert's obsession with precision and his desire to remain 'impersonal', as invisible in his work as God in his creation, cannot be seen as separate issues. [4] He was the first to consciously apply 'text as image', writing in an exceedingly sensual, visual, detailed, descriptive way (and, as action is secondary, therefore a static way). Nowadays we would naturally refer to this style as 'photographic'. Flaubert's particular dialectics between text and image is interesting in the framework of this discussion. One might say he wanted his words to shine and function like the grains of silver in a daguerreotype. Christopher Isherwood's memorable words from a century onwards could have been Flaubert's motto—"I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking." [5]

But this literary drudge, who sometimes spent weeks searching for the right word (*le mot juste*), is interesting for yet another reason. The aforementioned connections between the 99 exercises in looking and reading are so obvious that the viewer might easily overlook another correspondence between Queneau and De Nooy, one that perhaps reaches deeper: the influence of the hermit of Croisset's thought and poetics on the work of both. [6] Queneau and De Nooy's fascination for Flaubert has almost certainly to do with yet another one of his pioneering roles, namely to be the first to problematize style in fiction. Literary style had previously been a more or less spontaneous, instinctive-automatic phenomenon (for example in Cervantes or Rabelais), perhaps thanks to an unaffected parlando akin to spoken language. After Flaubert, style was to become a 'product' in its own right, something wrought in such a way that it made authors become acutely self-aware. For this reason alone, Flaubert's work marks a turning point in literature.

What undoubtedly must have charmed both De Nooy and Queneau was Flaubert's sublime (and frequently quoted) wording with regard to the problem of style, in particular the reversed proportionality between subject and style. (As I refer to this issue in footnote 3, in a fragment from a letter to Louise Colet, I will refrain from further commenting on it here.) What needs more attention, however, and what is worthy of an extra paragraph, is the status of the subject (in the sense of the 'protagonist' as well as the 'main motif') in Realism, as this position remains somewhat paradoxical.

It is sufficiently known that in Realist literature the subject is allotted a seemingly subservient role (think of the 'ordinary' Emma Bovary, later superseded in *L'Éducation sentimentale* by the in many ways even more 'trivial' Frédéric Moreau). But in Realist painting too, in response to the exalted subjects of Romanticism, it were the apparently unpretentious that were put on canvas (consider the contrast between the heroes in the history paintings of Géricault and Delacroix and the peasants and workers in the genre paintings of Courbet and Millet). In other words, in Realism the most banal, not to say vulgar, could be the subject of a novel or a painting—things so trivial one might even speak of non-subjects. (And this is not even considering the 'inconsequential' compositions, the 'loose' framing and the poses *sur le vif* by painters such as Degas, Manet and Toulouse-Lautrec, whose work has so often been associated with Niépce's invention of photography.) There is something of a paradox in the fact that even a non-subject does have to be selected and wilfully written or pictured in order to come into being at all.

Vilém Flusser—a thinker often referred to as 'media philosopher' and who devoted considerable attention to photography, to language in general (written language in particular) as well as to images, communication and media—didn't spill much ink on such art historical or literary considerations. He ascribed to the phenomenological approach and in doing so ignored aesthetic discourse. One of the revelations of this method is that the invention of photography appears as a belated technical solution to the theoretical dichotomy that existed between rationalism and empirical idealism. [7] Even so, in phenomenologically comparing the photographic with the painterly medium, Flusser made a statement that is aptly pertinent to the aforementioned problem of the 'subject' that emerged in Realism. To elucidate that the photographic revolution reversed the previously existing relationship between a concrete phenomenon and our idea of that phenomenon, Flusser came up with the following maxim: "The subject is the cause of photography and the meaning of painting."

I am not sufficiently familiar with Queneau's oeuvre to say for certain that the subject plays an equally subservient role in his other works as it does in the Exercises, but I do know De Nooy's work well enough to know that *99:1* evolved from questions he raised about the crucial importance played by the subject in photography, such as is the opinion of the British philosopher-aesthete Roger Scruton. In Scruton's view to see a photograph can only yield an experience of beauty when its subject is beautiful, whereas this is not necessarily the case when seeing a painting. Scruton to a certain degree attributes more value to the photograph as evidence, for it is the (photochemical) authenticity and not the (optical) representation that is decisive; in other words, the fact that something took place in front of the camera counts instead of the way it is depicted. [8]

De Nooy problematizes the photographic subject (which for the sake of convenience I will define as 'what's in the photograph') by using, investigating and applying it in different ways. Without wishing to claim this as his explicit intention, this suggests an experimental way of testing, and potentially undermining, Scruton's aesthetics. (Indeed, the more experiences of beauty are produced by insubstantial subjects the less convincing Scruton's theory becomes.) Neither am I saying here that De Nooy went as far as to apply literally and figuratively Flaubert's belletristic motto (reversing the proportionality between subject and style) to the photographic medium. That would mean his asymptote must be 'a photograph about

nothing' viz. 'a photograph that stands on the internal strength of its style' (see footnote 3). But his work does not point in that direction. As far as his diverse projects to date are concerned, including *Ornithology* (with Anne Geene), *Haarscherp* and *De facto*, the opposite seems to be the case: in these photographic series its subjects and visual motifs play a more or less guiding role. Nevertheless, De Nooy in these projects neither concretizes the subject nor presents it in a 'literal' manner. Instead, he may sometimes multiply it so that it becomes trivialized and grows into a visual motif to be employed as an argument for a photographic thesis or as a complement in a visual rhyme. Occasionally he may give it a comic twist so that it stands for something different than what it seemed to represent at first sight. Likewise, he may subordinate it to a personage, character, alter ego, heteronym, or some or another mystification. What De Nooy's procedures (the term 'exercises in style' urges itself upon me) reveal is that he seems to adhere to a second credo from Flaubert's poetics, namely the author should be impersonal in his work and that "one should not write oneself." (*Il ne faut pas s'écrire*. From a letter to Marie-Sophie Leroyer de Chantepie, see footnote 4.) If De Nooy's use of aforementioned procedures does not make this clear immediately, note that his frequent use of found photographs imparts a familiarity with such a motto. Pertaining to the issue of the subject, a comparable Flaubertian adage cherished by De Nooy is that the subject chooses the artist rather than the other way around (which since Realism has become almost a truism). Thus 'the bear' wrote to George Sand, who on another occasion expressed amazement at Flaubert's colossal work ethic, "On ne choisit pas ses sujets, ils s'imposent." [9] Flaubert goes on to compare this imposition of the subject with eczema (sic), stating that he doesn't manage to come around to writing what he wants to write, ascribing his maniacal scribbling to the constant urge to scratch himself. For De Nooy, the subject is at most a means but never the objective, a means he often exploits to place the viewer on the wrong track, as his diverse pastiches and parodies convey. It is about an image's function and its use value. Any other intrinsic aesthetic or figurative value (i.e. composition, visual quality, format, framing, lighting, contrast) comes second. For such a pragmatic temperament, for whom 'the meaning is the use', a concept like 'documentary value' is irrelevant, perhaps even a thing to be mocked. [10] It also goes without saying that it is fully justified to make use of other people's material to achieve own goals, for instance by transforming materials through collage. In De Nooy's case these goals reside at the conceptual level (a 'Zitatenkritik' à la Walter Benjamin as he envisioned in his Passagen-Werk, which itself had been strongly influenced by Flaubert's unfinished novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet*) [11] and also occur at the satirical level (canards and falsifications à la the artist Joan Fontcuberta, who in a Flusserian manner took issue with 'photographic-scientific truth.' [12]

Although De Nooy asserts that *99:1* is based on Queneau's exercises, its deeper connections and affinities lie elsewhere, with figures like Flaubert and Flusser among others. I already pointed out the affinity with Flaubert. The kinship with Flusser lies in the fact that De Nooy seeks the strength of the photographic in the specific characteristics and technical possibilities of this medium (in lieu of content or subject matter) and by giving substance to and playing with the four primary elements of Flusser's media theory (image, apparatus, program, information): these are the basic variables De Nooy uses to produce the unexpected and to 'play against the camera' (and the 'photographic apparatus' in the wider sense). [13] He achieves this in part by abandoning 'old' (photographic-artistic) criteria and dichotomies such

as (un)truthfulness, authorship, indexicality, authenticity, analog-digital, amateurism-professionalism and subjectivity-objectivity, and favor instead 'probability' and 'possibility'. In this era of abundant availability of cultural artifacts, most notably technical images, and attention shifting from use to acquisition, De Nooy refuses to adding yet more redundant photographs to the ever-growing image deluge. In earlier projects De Nooy often reused photographs and placed them in new contexts, thus making them informative once again. He did not restrict himself to the binary nature of technical images, but also applied texts in various ways (seemingly preferring presentations of photography in books including printed text). The photographic trajectory thus far pursued by De Nooy is littered with all kinds of encounters, direction indicators and detours from the world of scientific description and literary fiction (it is perhaps characteristic that *99:1* is also presented in book form and that he was unable to resist adding a motto, and not just any old one at that). [14] Yet another indication is to be found in the many heteronyms and alter egos used by De Nooy to proffer up contexts for his photographs; from art historian and feminist to curator and ornithologist. [15] Every now and then he also poses as 'the collector' or 'the historian of photography': not a bad choice in view of the fact that for many makers today management (acquisition, distribution, archiving, redundancy control) has become the new substance of cultural artifacts.

For *99:1* De Nooy chose to adopt a different strategy for the creation of images outside 'the apparatus', by extracting his information from a single source and by circumventing (and playing with) the photographic program. 95 of 99 entries have been produced without a camera. The project not only shows that he searched for new (i.e. informative, improbable, accidental, striking) images outside the program but also the way in which he did so: not by asking what they mean to show (a justified question for traditional images, but the wrong question for technical images) but to what end they mean what they show. Because what photographs show is in function of what they signify. In the last few decades it has become out of the question to doubt the existence of a 'new' idolatry, and many even happily indulge in it. [16] Be that as it may, with *99:1* De Nooy positively distanced himself thereof –– which, of course, cannot eliminate the fact that also he will ultimately enrich the 'program of the apparatus' with these informative images, as this seems inevitable. [17] In addition, De Nooy endows us, viewers of *99:1*, with the notion that we could execute a project like this with any random photograph. The 'redundant' (non-informative, probable, inconspicuous) source photograph is mundane to the extent that anyone could have taken it, banal to the extent that it is more or less 'a photograph about nothing' (satisfying Flaubert's first credo as cited earlier). Especially poignant within this framework (i.e. applicable to this photograph) is a quote by Flaubert in which he considered the unsightly town of Yvetot, close to where he lived, 'just as worthy' as Constantinople. [18] De Nooy's source photograph as well as his creative elaboration of it seems to meet Flaubert's artistic criterium as well as Flusser's philosophical criterium.

To come back to my initial question, could De Nooy's photographs—constituting some sort of 'remediation' of Queneau's texts—offer 'remedy' for reading those very texts? The 'high fidelity' with which De Nooy converted the content of Queneau's texts, turned Queneau's literary message into photographic content, illustrates Marshall McLuhan's famous adage of 'the medium is the message' (or *massage*, as a later variation has it). Were it to be De Nooy's ambition to create a 'Queneauian' work, then his remediation surely *massaged* away Queneau's

content. To this may be added that the fulfillment of his choice for the photographic medium bestowed on his message a 'Flusserian' tone. (Insofar as Queneau may have ever had the ambition to create a work in Flaubert's invisible style, he certainly did not accomplish this with *Exercices de style*. [19] Where the latter criterion is concerned De Nooy comes close to achieving it, even if many consider photography's 'invisibility'—the term transparency comes to mind—to be inherent to the medium.) With *99:1* De Nooy delivered a subtle work attesting to the sort of playfulness also present in the work of a philosopher like Flusser or an artist like Fontcuberta. What Queneau must have had in mind but failed at, was brought to successful fruition by De Nooy. In this sense indeed might looking at his photographs provide a 'remedy' for reading Queneau's 99 exercises in style.

Footnotes

[1] Concerning the first, purely textual aspect: after having read *Exercises in Style*, *Ejercicios de estilo*, *Stilübungen* and *Esercizi di stile* my reservation with regard to this work quadrupled. The explanations, introductions, prefaces and epilogues by the various translators and publishers also convinced me that it is easier to argue about style than about taste. It became crystal clear that I could attribute my doubts about the text itself to the way in which Raymond Queneau deals with the written medium (his 'style'). About the work and the person of Queneau I should first mention that he initially moved in Surrealist circles. Surrealists attached great value to the role of coincidence, not just in art, but also in the way our brains function, considering that our minds, as it were, are led by *trouvailles* and coincidental *rencontres*. True ideation would manifest itself because the spirit blows wherever it wishes. Only a purely autonomous psychism, unencumbered by any rational intervention, could give expression to the true function of cognition. Around 1930, Queneau began to distance himself from the Surrealists but it would take a long time before he was able to discard their influence. In 1960, the year in which he co-found Oulipo (see below), he had come to the point that—as happens more frequently with pioneers of extreme freedom—he sought to curtail what he had cultivated with the Surrealists as *écriture automatique*. He began to apply strict rules to writing, rules as random as they were rigid. 'Free inspiration' would only subjugate the writer to the randomness of a supposed boundless subconscious allowing him to write whatever would pop up. Queneau was now seeking full and conscious control over the writing process, notably by way of numerical restrictions. He did not shy away from applying all kinds of Pythagorean-mystical treatments to the most inane numbers (the number of letters of his own name, his mother's birth date, a so-called 'nice round cipher', the 'unlucky number' 13, 'symbolic' numbers such as 2, 3, 7, 666, and so on), undoubtedly in the conviction of creating a 'playful' effect. The Oulipists (who seemed to have taken Goethe's maxim "In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister" as their principle) spoke of *contrainte* (constraint, meaning both limitation and coercion): a creative restriction the maker imposes on himself by means of a formal straitjacket so to avoid certain existing and familiar forms. This would allow for either new and unimagined forms or for old and neglected forms to come to light. Although the procedure could entail all sorts of restrictions (semantic, phonetic, numerical, combinatorial, algorithmic, syntactic, grammatical), it often amounted to simple arithmetical operations being imposed on linguistic material (letters, letter groups, words, sentences). In a sense the Oulipists were to writing what the serialists were to music. We should, however, not deny Queneau his due, recognizing that he succeeded in integrating textual and numerical codes with his experimental collection of poems called *100.000.000.000.000 Poèmes /A Hundred Trillion Poems.* This brochure has the merit of being a fairly traditional cultural artifact (a book) while also being a contrivance to overcome the linearity of texts by virtue of an ingenious book design. It comprises a collection of ten sonnets (already a constrained form) in a book designed such that each line of verse is

printed on a separate strip to be 'leafed through' and to be juxtaposed to any other line. Given that the ten sonnets not only share the same rhyme scheme but also the same rhyme sounds, each line can be combined with any line of the nine other verses so to form a new sonnet. Since a sonnet counts 4+4+3+3 verses, there are 10^{14} possible poems to be had. With this detour, including alphabetical and numerical codes, we have arrived at the mediamatic aspect, such as the question as to why and to what extent Queneau's *Exercices* (an iterative text tending towards the 'alphanumerical' and thus not necessarily being a one-dimensional linear text) lends itself to conversion into a numerical, zero-dimensional, 'technical' image (such as a photograph). An answer could be found by applying Flusser's media theory, but for now it suffices to rely on the relatively traditional (art) historical perspective of the literary tradition from which Queneau evolved and what links there are to be discovered between that tradition and the moment of photography's invention.

[2] As had been aptly stated by the film critic André Bazin: "A partir du moment où la photographie (puis le cinéma) a satisfait par un moyen mécanique l'obsession de la ressemblance, elle a libéré la peinture. Elle a induit dès le 19ème siècle une crise du pseudo-réalisme et donné libre cours au véritable réalisme, qui est le besoin d'exprimer la vérité du monde par d'autres moyens que l'illusion visuelle. Libéré du complexe de la ressemblance, le peintre moderne l'abandonne au peuple (la photographie populaire)."

From the moment when photography (later followed by cinema) had satisfied painting's obsession with resemblance by mechanical means, painting was liberated. Since the 19th century painting anointed a crisis in pseudo-realism and gave free rein to a genuine realism, i.e. the need to express the truth of the world by other means than visual illusion. Freed from the complex of resemblance, the modern painter leaves that to the people (the popular photography).

André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, Les Editions du cerf, 2002, p. 12. (English translation by Marc Geerards.)

[3] "Ce qui me semble beau, ce que je voudrais faire, c'est un livre sur rien, un livre sans attache extérieure, qui se tiendrait de lui-même par la force interne de son style, comme la terre sans être soutenue se tient en l'air, un livre qui n'aurait presque pas de sujet ou du moins où le sujet serait presque invisible, si cela se peut. Les oeuvres les plus belles sont celles où il y a le moins de matière. [...] C'est pour cela qu'il n'y a ni beaux ni vilains sujets et qu'on pourrait presque établir comme axiome, en se plaçant au point de vue de l'Art pur, qu'il n'y en a aucun, le style étant à lui seul une manière absolue de voir les choses."

What seems beautiful to me, what I should like to write, is a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style, just as the earth, suspended in the void, depends on nothing external for its support; a book which would have almost no subject, or at least in which the subject would be almost invisible, if such a thing is possible. The finest works are those that contain the least matter. [...] It is for this reason that there are no noble subjects or ignoble subjects; from the standpoint of pure Art one might almost establish the axiom that there is no such thing as subject, style in itself being an absolute manner of seeing things.

Gustave Flaubert in a letter to Louise Colet, 16 January 1852. (English translation by Francis Steegmuller.)

[4] "Madame Bovary n'a rien de vrai. C'est une histoire totalement inventée ; je n'y ai rien mis ni de mes sentiments ni de mon existence. L'illusion (s'il y en a une) vient au contraire de l'impersonnalité de l'oeuvre. C'est un de mes principes, qu'il ne faut pas s'écrire. L'artiste doit être dans son oeuvre comme Dieu dans la création, invisible et tout-puissant ; qu'on le sente partout, mais qu'on ne le voie pas."

Madame Bovary has nothing «true» in it. It is a totally invented story; into it I put none of my own feelings and nothing from my own life. The illusion (if there is one) comes, on the contrary, from the impersonality of the work. It is a principle of mine that a writer must not be his own theme. The artist in his work must be like God in his creation—invisible and all-powerful: he must be everywhere felt, but never seen.

Gustave Flaubert in a letter to Marie-Sophie Leroyer de Chantepie, 18 March, 1857. (English translation by Francis Steegmuller.)

[5] These by now famous words by Christopher Isherwood are to be found on the first page of his novella *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), published exactly one century after the public announcement of the invention of photography.

[6] Queneau considered Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* to be a masterpiece of world literature. It impressed him to the extent that he was unable to finish the various essays he had begun writing about it, and thus

Flaubert's *Unvollendete* led to his own *Inachevée*. Indeed, he felt intimidated—as an encyclopaedic describer of someone else with a penchant for encyclopaedism—and he must have been afraid of falling into the same trap as did Flaubert's describer-copyists of other people's encyclopaedic knowledge. Queneau's novel *Enfants du limon* (Children of Clay) contains countless allusions to this work. De Nooy, in collaboration with Anne Geene, recently published *The Universal Photographer* (De Hef Publishers, 2018), which is a kind of photographic adaptation of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, which Flaubert himself considered as his masterpiece, too.

[7] The English empiricists of the 17th century thought that ideas imprint themselves on us like photographs, while their rationalist contemporaries believed that ideas, like paintings, are designed by us. The invention of photography proved that ideas work both ways. It arrived too late to have an influence on the philosophical discussion, as in the 19th century the diverse implications of the revised points of view from both sides had become more or less accepted. This is an example of technology coming after theory. The invention is still revolutionary insofar it makes possible the discussion about the difference between the 'objective' and the 'ideological' on a pure technological level. In this context, photographs are taken to be 'objective' ideas whereas paintings qualify as 'subjective' or 'ideological' ideas in relation to the phenomena surrounding us. This is an example of technology generating theory. Nearly two centuries after the invention of photography we are becoming more aware of the theoretical possibilities arising from comparisons between photography and painting. If we consider photographs to be caused by phenomena, and paintings to point out phenomena (in the sense that they signify these phenomena), we could then analyze the distinction between causal and semiological explanations. According to this distinction, photographs can be explained when one knows the electromagnetic, chemical and other processes behind them, while paintings can be 'explained' when one sees the intentionality expressed in them. [...] There are objective phases in the act of painting and subjective phases in the act of photographing, to such a strong degree that the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity is more than problematic.

Vilém Flusser, 'Het gebaar van het fotograferen', in: *EXTRA* No. 20 (Apparatus), Fw:Books & Fomu Antwerp, 2016, pp. 115-127. (English translation from the Dutch by Marc Geerards.)

[8] "The photograph is transparent to its subject, and if it holds our interest it does so because it acts as a surrogate for the represented thing. Thus if one finds a photograph beautiful, it is because one finds something beautiful in its subject. A painting may be beautiful, on the other hand, even when it represents an ugly thing."

Roger Scruton, 'Photography and Representation', in: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Spring, 1981), pp. 577-603, p. 590.

[9] "Quant à ma rage de travail, je la comparerai à une dartre. Je me gratte en criant. C'est à la fois un plaisir et un supplice. Et je ne fais rien de ce que je veux ! Car on ne choisit pas ses sujets, ils s'imposent. Trouverai-je jamais le mien?"

As for my frenzy for work, I compare it to an attack of herpes. I scratch myself while I cry. It is both a pleasure and a torture at the same time. And I am doing nothing that I want to! For one does not choose one's subjects, they force themselves on one. Shall I ever find mine?

Gustave Flaubert in a letter to George Sand, 1 January 1869. (English translation by Francis Steegmuller.)

[10] "For a large class of cases of the employment of the word 'meaning'—though not for all—this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language." (§ 43) Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (edited and translated by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte), Wiley-Blackwell, 2009 (4th edition), p. 52.

[11] "Eine gute Kritik setzt sich aus zwei Bestandteilen maximal zusammen: der kritischen Glosse und dem Zitat. Durch Glossierung wie auch durch Zitate allein lassen sich sehr gute Kritiken machen. Unbedingt zu vermeiden ist die »Inhaltsangabe«. Dagegen ist die reine Zitatenkritik als ganze auszuarbeiten."

A good criticism is composed of up to two components: the critical comment and the citation. Outstanding criticism can be made by commentary as well as by only selecting citations. The 'synopsis' must be avoided at all cost. Instead, a criticism purely consisting of citations should be elaborated. (English translation by Arjan de Nooy)

Walter Benjamin, 'Programm der literarischen Kritik' (previously unpublished), *Gesammelte Schriften VI* (Fragmente, Autobiographische Schriften), Suhrkamp, 1991, pp. 165-166, p. 162.

We must also note here that Benjamin's 'literary program', in the framework of applying to the writing of history montage principles from photography and film, assumed an ever stronger visual (i.e. photographic) character, to the extent that Benjamim became convinced that "Geschichte zerfällt in Bilder, nicht in Geschichten" (History breaks down into images instead of stories). It may come as no surprise that Benjamin possessed a fine copy of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and regularly read from Flaubert's 'Sottisier' (*Catalogue des opinions chics*, or the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*).

[12] Joan Fontcuberta, a Catalonian artist who describes himself as a 'conceptual photographer' (and who was also a friend of Flusser's), takes issue with the epistemological status of photography. He earned his reputation with falsifications of fact and fiction, the fantastical staging of flora and fauna, and photographic science fictions.

[13] Most photographers assume they exercise free choice when they take photographs, while in fact their choices are limited by the categories of the apparatus, and so their freedom only constitutes a 'programmed freedom'. The 'taking of photographs' amounts to a mere function in the program of the apparatus, which indeed does what the photographer wants it to do, while the photographer can only want what the apparatus is able to do. Furthermore, the camera (the apparatus at the micro-level) is embedded within all kinds of apparatuses on macro-levels (military-industrial, macro-economical, financial, and so on).

[14] The binary must have been something familiar for the famous Danish prince, if we would consider his most quoted words ("to be or not to be"); and if the title of my essay contains a Proustian puff this is to be partly attributed to the circumstance of Hamlet's cosmic parlance, which De Nooy took as the motto for his book.

[15] Such that, for example, the literary critic Marja Pruis, who always focuses on the battle of the sexes, was led astray by a faux photo magazine from the 1970s promoting the emancipation of the female gaze in photography. Pruis frankly described how she fell—hook, line and sinker—for this canard, in her article 'Gefixeerd op het eigen tussenbeense', published in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 5 April 2012, pp. 34-37.

[16] Idolatry: "The inability to read off ideas from the elements of the image, despite the ability to read these elements themselves; hence: worship of images." The degree to which billions of mobile phone users automatically assume their photographs to be neutrally generated evidence of something that 'really happened' in the world, prevents them from seeing (if they want to see) the degree to which their apparatus succeeds in steering their intentions to the benefit of the larger apparatus-programs underlying it (the big five 'apparatuses': Google, Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Microsoft). Users in fact are functionaries in the service of their mini-apparatus(es) and the underlying mega-apparatus(es), they are managed by their cameras, which are programmed to program both the 'maker' and the viewer of the photograph. Maker/producer and viewer/consumer have become products themselves, and as such can be seen as victims of disinformation, redundancy and alienation. To the extent that this is true there indeed seems to be a question of a new idolatry.

[17] The Flusserian photographer plays against his apparatus. The human being forms a unit with the apparatus which, if properly programmed, can neither be read by a photographer nor by the combined effort of all photographers: the apparatus remains a black box. Behind it stand yet more meta-programs, programmed by one another: by the photographic industry, the industrial complex, the socio-economic system, and so on. There can be no 'ultimate' program of an 'ultimate' apparatus, the hierarchy of programs remains open at the top. An 'operator' (apparatchik) is a 'person' in the post-historical sense: he functions neither 'active' nor 'passive' in the service of functions, which function in his function. In the way that ancient humans invented tools and machines to render work (functions of the body) redundant, we invented symbolizing and symbol-processing machines (apparatuses) to render thinking (functions of the brain) redundant, their most important function having become *giving meaning*, *making sense.* Flusser appeals to the human imagination and carries the banner on behalf of experimental photography (as 'anti-photography' attempting to bypass the camera, because it is precisely in bypassing that freedom is to be found), to be summarized as a variation on De Nooy's motto for *99:1*: "To be programmed or to program, that is the question."

[18] "Il n'y a pas en littérature de beaux sujets d'art, et qu' Yvetot donc vaut Constantinople; et qu'en conséquence l'on peut écrire n'importe quoi aussi bien que quoi que ce soit."

In literature there are no such things as beautiful subjects, and it is therefore that Yvetot is the equal of Constantinople; and that consequently one can write about no matter what equally well as about any other old thing whatsoever.
Gustave Flaubert in a letter to Louise Colet, 25/26 June 1853. (English translation by Francis Steegmuller.)
[19] The reason why Queneau comes off rather badly must be sought in the media sphere: he arguably made a mistake, or was too ambitious, while trying to transfer a musical idea to language. That idea evolved after he and his friend Michel Leiris had attended a concert where Bach's *Die Kunst der Fuge* (The Art of Fugue, BWV 1080) was performed. Queneau wanted to use words in the way that Bach had used musical material to compose all sorts of variations on a theme (reversals, modulations, reflections, contractions, transpositions, insertions, ellipses). Many of Queneau's variations are indeed motivated phonologically rather than semantically or syntactically. An understandable choice given that both media progress in time (although neither literature nor music generally falls under the heading of the so-called time-based arts), but also a problematic one: there exists considerable difference between the transcendent character of tone scales and the character of linguistic sounds (syllables, exclamations), the latter of which easily invoke semantic connotations. Nevertheless, it seems a matter of time for the original 99 exercises to appear on film or video. The sequentiality in works 12, 38 and 90 might be considered its prefiguration.