

RED STAR REVISITED

Thinking of a body in terms of a disappearance is equivalent to think of the consistency of this body as an image. In abstract this body, this figure, is drawn against a background. In the manner of a cut-out, and in a more or less precise form, some attributes are for one moment retained on one side of the border, configuring an inside, and therefore an outside, as well. The attribution is volatile and porous, yet sufficient. This delimitation, sustained by others via recognition and by oneself via some actions of consistency, is displayed on multiple simultaneous and interdependent planes, from the most pure physicality to the network of social linkages. To think about disappearance is equivalent, as such, to identifying and eradicating, according to a program based on extreme paranoia, all those points in which this body crystallizes, the space in which this image is confirmed.

Skin sheds continuously, hair falls out, traces of saliva are left on receptacles and traces of urine in the bathroom. The same consideration should be made in respect to fat, sweat, semen, blood, excrement. Every item of clothing, every knob of every door, every rug, every telephone retains some part of this body. One must be sure, however, to clean every surface within reach, even those which we believe not to have touched, since many of our actions take place in a state of semi-consciousness, of automatism. We will use alcohol-soaked Kleenex, which we will after toss in the toilet. When we drink, we will place a napkin around the glass. We

will begin to open doors with the back of our hands, until it becomes a habit. Disappearance, however, is a process that cannot be successfully completed from one day to the next. Under normal conditions, a minimum of four months will be employed in order to carry out all of the necessary actions. One of the first objectives is to cut ties with those with whom one has relationships, associates, friends, family. We will abandon as priority any group, club, or social network of which we are a part. It is essential not to do this in an abrupt way. Over a period of months we should little by little miss more meetings, gradually stop returning calls and responding to messages. Once disappearance is complete some emotional reactions will be experienced, depending upon personality, abilities, the confidence level, and the environment in which we find ourselves. Understanding these psychological factors will help to minimize their effect. For example, a certain level of initial shock is inevitable. After a certain time, other factors will come into play, principally boredom and loneliness, depression, and lack of determination. These are factors that will cause a debilitation in the desire to go on, and the best way to combat them is to stay occupied.

It is thus a matter of thinking of disappearance as a conscious, deliberated decision, not as suicide, but rather as putting in crisis all that which constitutes itself as a figure in/over the body: name, profession, manner of gesturing or walking, personal tastes, style, social class, past, projects, physical markings, ideology,

character. In this manner the body is recognized momentarily as writing, as the bearer of a sign, diffuse yet consistent: the body is a medium. This body is a media support, and as such it had remained until now invisible beneath the sign it carried. Now it appears for the first time RAW, open, as primary MATERIAL. At the extreme limit of this same logic, the paramilitary camouflage serves the media elements of a formal analysis whose only objective is the dissolution of the figure in the background.

shape

shadow

shine

silhouette

surface

sound

smell

movement

Through this operation the body becomes exceptionally pure material, susceptible to ordainment and recognition, assimilable in this sense to any other material, alive or inert, in the process of formalization of the real. We can say that while the sign –the figure–remains in force on the media surface it is possible to distinguish between the pertinence or not to the sign, between an inside and an outside. However, access to the material that sustains the sign only occurs under extraordinary and transitory circumstances, as with the experience of the sudden strangeness which is produced by detaching oneself for a few moments from the meaning of a familiar word, without being able to access what is designated by CARROT carrot carrot? Perceiving the tone of the phonemes in a determined order, their composition, the verbal artifact.

Boris Groys affirms in *Under Suspicion* that the relationship of the spectator to the sub-media surface is necessarily one of paranoia and that the conflict in no case will be resolved by an “objective” analysis, since we can only scientifically analyze the media supports, man included, when they no longer serve effectively as bearers of symbols. We can disembowel a

television and examine its insides, but we will only discover cables and circuits. As regards sign supports, continues Groys, a canvas is just as inaccessible as an audiovisual apparatus. The truth of the medium, the media sincerity is, in this sense, refractory to the scientific truth.

Access to the truth of the media will occur preferentially as “confession”, voluntary or forced, of the media surface. As such, we will only be able to access the sub media when the media becomes literally the message, by a deactivation or a momentary displacement of the sustaining sign, a circumstance that will occur always as a state of exception.

AS A SPECTATOR,
WHAT YOU ARE
REALLY DOING IS
WAITING FOR
THE ACCIDENT
TO HAPPEN.

At the end of the nineties, a photograph came into my hands which shows a particular event which took place in Sofia, Bulgaria, a few months following the collapse of the Bulgarian communist regime in 1989. In the spring of 1990 the National Parliament wished to underscore the historical change of path by approval of a law that obliged removal of all symbols recalling its recent, dark past as a faithful soviet satellite. The most significant of all of these was precisely the enormous red star that crowned the Party House, the

building of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party.

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The five-pointed star had been installed in the upper part of the Party House at the time of its construction, in 1954. In 1987, however, two years prior to the collapse of communism, the apparatchiks [апаратчики], the party functionaries, decided to substitute it with a better and more modern star, which could be illuminated from within, a star which would rival that of the Kremlin. The new star was manufactured in the Soviet Union using synthetic rubies, costing the Bulgarian state more than half a million rubles. Designed by Russian experts with the assistance of a Bulgarian architect, the professor Ivan Ivanchev, the star weighed 1.300 kilos and measured 2.5 meters across.

The dismantling process, however, turned out to take longer than anticipated. With successive deadlines unfulfilled, the popular pressure grew until the people, furious, set fire to the Party building. Finally, on October 9th 1990, the star was removed with the help of a helicopter, in just three minutes, according to the testimony of those who witnessed the operation from the street. What the photograph shows is the precise moment, reduced today to a mere cadaver, in which the helicopter flew away with the red star.

For those who witnessed this event, the experience must have presented the ambivalence of two planes of reality unfurling in parallel. In the first place it is evident that the sign embodied in the star, detested or not, was put into play in that moment. It is

probable that many threw their hopes into the event about to be witnessed with the willingness to “see” the dismantling of the communist regime in the form of that flying star. However, it is also quite possible that that image could only be construed a posteriori, for example using a photo like the one now left to us. As regards spectators of the media surface, we also expect an exceptional instant, an empty interval through which we are granted a glimpse of the interior, and the irruption of the heavy metal structure must have been in that moment a much more indisputable truth; as would be the operatives removing the bearings, laboriously affixing the clamps, and adjusting the weights.

Divesting for a brief moment of time from the thematic, the subjective, the literary, the narrative, the referential, the metaphysical, the star managed to thematize in explicit way the media, managed to convert itself into the message.

We can follow this story a little further, given that we know that the “pride of the nation” was carried to the prairies of Dolni Bogrov, a village on the outskirts of Sofia. A few hours later it was transported anew to the capital in a truck. The only place where it was finally found to fit was in the garage of the ex-dictator Todor Zhivkov. Even so, the truck transporting the star could not pass through the entrance with said cargo onboard, and the driver had to deflate the tires so as to decrease the height of the vehicle. We also know that the gold laminate which covered the structure (nearly two kilos) was taken by the Bulgarian National Bank. Years later, still in the decade of the 90s, the star was offered to a museum in the capital, but the

direction rejected it and nothing is known of what happened afterwards. Maybe it was broken up and sold as scrap. According to other theories, the fake rubies were used to pay off Bulgaria’s external debt. It is also speculated that it may have been returned to Russia.

This momentary truth of media sincerity disappears, as is logical, in the next instant, because the empty space which follows is shown, inevitably, as a new sign. We can even venture to suppose what signs were those that immediately occupied this empty space, given that the symbolic potency of the image had to properly serve the imagination of the entropic process that was initiated during those months. Likewise, the figure of the romantic hero, of the fugitive, the pseudocide or the terrorist rapidly comes to fill the space created by disappearance, thus following the logic of the displacement of signs.

The truth of media sincerity, furthermore, as Groys assures, is extremely fragile, and is worn down by repetition, rather than being confirmed by it, as occurs in scientific life. It is for this reason that the truth of the sub-media can only occur as an exception, something that in repetition becomes pure routine. The five-pointed star was constructed based in the framework of a formalization of the real, that of a regime of the soviet orbit, and as embodiment of an abstract thought pattern; that is to say, as writing. It formed part of the staging of power and of the immanence of the order upheld by the Party. In a certain way the star was always there. However, it could also be said that on that day it was seen for the first time, just before vanishing.

