

## François Lemieux. *Un soleil difficile*

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### — Robin Simpson

Friend,

That feel when you ran from the station. Your coat buttoned tight. Passing family and familiars as strangers. When you refused to sign your name. When you disowned your ideas, dodged the camera and held your tongue.

When you found a hotel. A room. And closed the door. When I followed and knocked.

I'm paraphrasing here, reading us into Brecht's *Hand Oracle for City Dwellers*, a collection of poems from which you draw the title of one of your works. To those behind the door, Brecht advised to keep it shut: "Cover your tracks!" After reading this I wrote to you asking what a "track" was. You answered: "Unlike other animals, humans can cover their tracks, they can lie, they can cheat." I asked you if there was another line from Brecht's poem, somewhere in that flight from the train station that might lead to another rhythm and way between the lines. You didn't answer.

That feel when you see through me. When I see through you. When we're both transparent in our words and actions, however fleetingly and however difficult it is to hold on. Is transparency simply about assuming a sure and possessive "I"? Or could we try to give up to each other or give in and let down? Is there a way to be transparent that isn't simply about surrender to the visual and objective, about allowing your insides to be mapped and carved up, or leaving behind every trace as raw material for collection?

Could transparency be about allowing passage? A state of being communicative without distortion, without resistance or friction, free from the discord and contact that might otherwise solicit or break off a trace? In the way that water is transparent to sound, maybe transparency is about conveying, carrying, supporting and maintaining fidelity between and within bodies. Maybe transparency is about passing along and sharing objection. Maybe it's about how we object together.

Is this how we can think about the expressive promises initiated by German architect Bruno Taut, signed Glas, through the Crystal Chain letters? In your interview with architecture historian Rosemary Bletter she describes how Taut and his circle found in glass and crystal the promise of mobility and metamorphosis. In Taut's Glass Pavilion, built in 1914, poet Paul Scheerbarth honoured the project with a series of aphorisms. I found these online: "Coloured glass destroys hatred," and "Without a glass palace, life is a conviction."

I'm wondering as I write to you about transparency if I'm starting to read like the friends Brecht describes in the second part of his poem. That I'm insisting that you stay at the table: "We note / That you drive the conversation faster / You seek the word which will let you / Make your exit / For it's a point with you / Not to attract attention."

Are you reading me or seeing through me? A closed door offers opacity as one answer to transparency and even if there is no mail slot I can still slip this letter under the door. When we're steeled together are we then left to read the surface? Are we left looking for symptoms, pathologizing each other and initiating an ugly phrenology? Are there other ways we can read and object together?

Another one of your interlocutors, philosopher Mireille Buydens, speaks of the velocity of transparency, how clarity connotes immediacy and how this is encoded upon seemingly opaque surfaces. She describes a chronoclasm that accompanied modern commercial design, where certain colours—namely, black, brown and grey—are thought to keep pace with or give in to an accelerated vision governed by transparency, while the remaining colours in the spectrum, those that smash hatred and break convictions, are found only to slow vision down.

When you place an opaque object on a sheet of paper primed with emulsion and leave it in the sun, the space around the object turns a deep, dark blue. You make a new negative. Blueprints, of course, are the preferred medium for architectural plans. With Taut and the Crystal Chain's experiments in mind you exposed layers of glass and other translucent materials. Knowing that negatives are at times too easily cast as demonstrations or evidence of simple binary oppositions, you've attempted to cover up the first negative with another exposure, doubling transparency and adding folds so that the once reactive surfaces can temporarily meet and correspond in order to become hidden interiors.

I've been playing this letter over in my head for a few months while your exhibition was in process, hoping to untangle it all and deliver something before I left town. Now I'm finishing it in Belfast and opacity rings hard in a city riven with walls, these fastened by gates that still close at the end of the day. This morning I left my hotel in the city centre and walked over to the west side to visit some Republican murals. Along Falls Road I followed a trail of stickers posted across transformer boxes, trashcans and poles. The size of a paperback, they spelled out over and over again "PSNI," which normally stands for Police Service of Northern Ireland, but which now neatly summarizes instructions for how to deal with the constabulary. It also reads like a line dropped from that poem you shared with me: People Should Not Inform.

This exhibition is presented with the support of the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, as well as the precious contributions of OBORO and VU.



Front:  
François Lemieux, *Un soleil difficile*, still, 2016, HD video and sound, 45 min. Courtesy of the artist.

Back:  
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