

THIRD NATURE OR THE END OF ORIGINS

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Rather than embarking on a historical reassessment about the notion of origins in philosophy, a truly daunting task for which I feel anything but prepared, and much less willing, what I would like to do here is outline a tentative, by no means exhaustive—and hopefully not exhausting—cultural trajectory of this notion, in other words, to attempt a certain understanding of the logic of origins, of how origins work in culture.

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1 » ORIGINS AND ESSENTIALISM

To begin with, “origin” comes from the latin “origo” [from “oriri”, to rise], which means source, like in source of life, and is therefore loaded with organic and vital connotations, implying the beginning of life, or birth. This etymology is crucial, as it indicates that from the moment go the notion of origins (usually referred to in the plural) was related to nature or to what may be called the natural order of things. In this sense, it is useful to compare “origo” with “arche” or “principium”, which also meant beginning, in Greek and Latin respectively, yet without any organic implications. It is therefore right from its beginnings, its origins, so to speak, that the notion of origins acquired its particular identity and, above all, an affiliation that granted it an almost untouchable legitimacy.

The notion of origins is one of the cornerstones of intellectual discussions, for which knowing where ideas come from, that is, who or what gave them “birth” first, seems sometimes more relevant than understanding the trajectory these ideas followed once they were in existence. We are faced here with a recurrent problem in the history of thought and therefore of the social, which is that of essentialism, a tacit consensus whereby ideas, and in consequence people and things, have an acquired value granted by seniority, or being there first. I am not speaking here of the value of experience, that wisdom of age which used to be so appreciated in other times, and

which, given the speed of change in our hypermodern culture, has become apparently totally useless. On the contrary, I believe that essentialism is by definition opposed to experience, and therefore is deeply ahistorical in the sense that it wishes itself larger than life and independent of time.

In other words, essentialism, the idea of an immanent and pure element or condition, draws its strength from being immaterial, given that anything concrete or tangible is by force inscribed in both space and time. In this material sense, the logic of essentialism diverges from that of origins in that the latter does not refuse its temporal inscription. On the contrary, origins validate time, but a chronological rather than a historical time: it’s the time of who was there first, that is, who supposedly laid the foundations. This primacy would seem to convey to origins a fundamental weight that makes origins more authentic than whatever follows them, in particular the present, always considered less relevant because of its historical contingency and its proximity, both of which lack the legitimacy of times past.

It is in this very artificial opposition between past and present that the essentialist character of origins is established, insofar as the notion of origins, representing the onset of specific cultural aspects, borrows from nature its role as eternal source of life. As such, origins free themselves from temporal restraints to become a foundation beyond time, a move authorized by their apparent affiliation to a nature that can overcome time in its endless ability to renew itself. In this way, the logic of essentialism and that of origins become one and the same. This can be seen, for example, in the way race is treated as a form of essentialism. I would specify that race is an origin that behaves like, or pretends to be, essential: a beginning that claims foundational rights. Consequently, the racial, national or cultural origin of someone (the context where that person is born) becomes the privileged sign of that person’s belonging to a supra-material essence, for better or worse.

Origins and essentialism meet therefore in their basic ahistoricism, except that the logic of origins retains a relationship to time, even if in a mainly chronological sense, whereas for essentialism time is there only to be transcended. This [breach] between foundational truths and historical contingencies (that is, between origins as essence and history as experience) depends on two contradictions. The first is the obvious “naturalization” of a cultural concept, that of origins, which attempts to escape its human-made character in an identification with nature, even as this very nature, essentialized by such idealization, becomes denaturalized and immaterial.

This naturalization of a cultural notion not only reduces its complexity as a human product or creation, but also renders it susceptible to fitting into a transcendental hierarchy whereby all that is natural (that is, foundational, essential or original) is good, whereas everything cultural (and by consequence contingent, secondary or imitative) is by definition less than good, not necessarily bad but certainly inferior. Having awarded its foundational status to the notion of origins, nature is paradoxically voided, remaining like an empty matrix useful only for the raw materials which it provides to a culture that will use them to the max. On one hand there is a culture that seeks its legitimacy in its supposedly natural affiliation, on the other, a nature rendered abstract by this cultural equation.

One of the best examples of this contradictory exchange is the use of foreign or “exotic” elements in modern culture. Usually from the Third World, the exotic emblemizes an archaic relationship to nature, and therefore a supposedly higher degree of authenticity and spirituality than that of industrial societies. But this new relationship between so-called “primitive” cultures and a modernity which uses them to create a new art that wishes itself original in the full sense of the term (originality being one of the obsessions of modern art, and for a reason, since

modernity crushes everything that came before it), this new relationship, then, does not imply a change of status for the originating culture, which is forced to remain as a natural origins provider. Losing this status, that is, entering into an equivalence with the appropriating culture would compromise the exoticized culture’s authenticity, and therefore lose all its interest for the West. Nature and everything considered natural must remain immutable so that culture, in this case hegemonic Western culture, can benefit of an endless mobility.

Despite appearances, the modern relationship between art and nature doesn’t begin in the twentieth century, but can be traced all the way to the late Middle Ages, that is to the 1200 and 1300s. It is there, in the beginnings of what will eventually become the great collections of “natural and artificial objects”, as they were called, that one can find, dare I say, the origins of this peculiar relationship, so determining for them both. Generally speaking, one can say that until the end of the Middle Ages, nature had enjoyed of a very central position in Western culture, where it was considered a manifestation of divine will. This is why natural elements, raw or manufactured alike (stones, woods, bones, etc), were often cult objects, and therefore invested with the powers of cult, whether religious, spiritual or magical.

This begins to change with the collections of “wonders” or wonder chambers (“wunderkammern”) where natural objects, specially those considered strange or bizarre, gained an added status beyond that of cult objects by the simple fact of being extraordinary. It is not by chance that these collections began to be formed in churches and palaces with holy relics (the fragments of bones or clothes of saints, considered as invested with their holiness and therefore treasured as sacred remains), these relics quickly surrounded by all sort of organic remains such as fossils, coral, alligators (the latter hung from churches’ ceilings to emphasize their divine nature), as well as by valuable manufactured objects such as coins, paintings, jewelry and so on.

The history of these collections is long and fascinating, but what interests me most here is the gradual transition, in a few centuries, from the cult value of natural objects to what is called exhibition value. That is, from a use that is relatively functional (if we agree that the votive value of cult objects is partly derived from their capacity to protect, satisfy wishes and produce miracles), to another use that is much more aesthetic or intellectual. Even if this latter use is loaded with deep emotion, the sacred aspect of natural objects begins to lose ground to a feeling of wonder which itself will eventually be displaced by scientific inquiry.

This change from a sacralized nature to one that, already in the 18th century has become a relic of itself, or of how it used to be perceived, becoming instead what will later be known as “natural history”, that is, a field of knowledge, is so gradual and dramatic that we still have trouble assessing its full impact. The change from cult value to exhibition value of organic objects is in fact the transformation of a living nature, with which culture maintains an active, dynamic relationship, to a dead nature, which far from being the agent of divine power, is reduced to a passive object of human curiosity.

Curiously enough, it is at this time that the category of “dead nature” or “nature morte” appears in art. And dead nature is, in the sense of deprived of mystical meaning, of a cultural relationship now gone, a signifying dimension left behind. Obviously, nature is still alive, despite our systematic efforts to the contrary, and can be very much so in creative interventions which give it new dimensions of meaning, as I will soon show. Yet, as far as cultural object, nature is dead in that it went, as psychoanalysis would say, from subject to object, even if only in our social imaginary.

The transition from cult object to exhibition object, which determines the modern relationship between culture and nature, is accentuated by the industrialization characteristic of recent modernity,

which further annihilates the mystical dimension nature once enjoyed. Modernity, then, not only destroys a living connection to nature, but also destroys nature itself, all the while maintaining the notion of an essential nature (or a natural essence) as the theoretical referent of its cultural legitimacy. And where can we best appreciate this contradiction between the theory and practice of modernity towards nature? In the notion of origins.

3 » ORIGINALITY AND AUTHENTICITY

I would now like to concentrate on what we will call for clarity’s sake recent modernity, or that of industrialization proper (most of the 19th and 20th centuries), in order to distinguish it from a larger sense of the modern as an increasingly laic, or atheist, cultural period. Even though it pertains to this larger period, from which it derives logics such as that of essentialism and origins, recent modernity is characterized by the violence of its industrial development and its consequences, such as the fragmentation of time and the homogenization of space. Above all, it is characterized by an idea of progress that underlies and nurtures industrialization, and which is manifested in an almost total disdain for all that which precedes, resists or simply differs from modernity.

Cultural traditions, for example, so important to most societies, which find in them an anchor for their beliefs and organization, are drastically abolished or set aside by this modern impulse, for which such traditions are an obstacle towards the future. The future, a notion that came into existence precisely during this period, was to be characterized by economic development and efficiency, the basic conditions for a wellbeing as overblown as it has been irregular and partially accomplished.

Without going into all the social implications of the disparity between the modern promise and its relative achievement, whose consequences we can gage nowadays more than ever, what I would like to discuss here are the the cultural concepts



that accompanied this notion of progress, since they had an enormous importance for all modern creative activity. These concepts are originality and authenticity. Both belong to a time where tradition becomes a thing of the past, and when an appreciation of the past as relevant historical memory and social experience as a collective phenomenon are quickly becoming obsolete. For modernity, futuristic and individualistic, what matters is the movement towards tomorrow, a concept marked by novelty and constant change, a sort of eternal youth which is as much a constitutive sign of this cultural era as the fatal trap that it set for itself.

Stable and solid, traditions were also static and repetitive, and thus hardly adaptable to a modernity whose trademark was the constant production of novelty. This created an unprecedented material excess, itself supported and reproduced by a cultural practice where maintenance gave way to substitution. This material proliferation, made possible by the capitalist principle of continuous reproduction, depends on a situation where use value, whether symbolic or literal, is displaced by exchange value, thus violently cutting down the lifespan of objects, which are made to last only for the short term. This excess, in turn, produces a phenomenon typical of consumer societies, that of trash. Junk, debris and the disposable will become from this moment on a constitutive part of the cultural landscape.

The notions of authenticity and originality are derived from this new situation. They are a response to mass reproduction, which they try to resist by framing it within a system of traditional values represented by notions such as essentialism and origins, with which they establish a mirror relationship. In this sense, one could say that authenticity and originality are reactionary in the strictest sense of the term: they react to a new cultural condition by attempting to impose on it antiquated parameters, refusing whatever this new condition means as profound change.

Ironically, authenticity and originality would not exist without modernity. Authenticity, to begin with, is practically irrelevant until put into question. Then it becomes an issue, as Walter Benjamin clearly shows in his essay on mechanical reproduction, even though this was not his goal. Only when the proliferation of copies threatens and in effect displaces the singularity of an object does this singularity become important, representing an experience and a presence considered unique in space and time. This experience is that of authenticity, and it is made present in the original.

Yet, even though they are both part and parcel of modernity, authenticity and originality must be contrasted insofar as they are different aspects of this phenomenon. Authenticity is connected to a quest for truth, which opposes the authentic, considered truthful, to the fake, which would be the illusory. Originality, on the other hand, is a measure of singularity: an original is unique or singular as opposed to its copies, which are multiple. The problem is that, just like we saw earlier in the conflation between the notions of origins and essentialism, which takes place through their use of nature as common source of meaning, the original reaches beyond its quantitative status (that of uniqueness, being one and therefore indivisible and monolithic) by appropriating qualitative elements from authenticity (basically, an exclusive right to the truth), becoming itself an essentialist index of what is true, that is good, in culture. The modern original becomes then the new authentic, while vintage authenticity is busy fighting off sword and dagger an army of modern imitators.

Originality becomes in this way the modern measure of value, specially of aesthetic value, which by definition will be attributed to what is produced and not reproduced, that is, to that which is outside mass culture. This is why modernity almost immediately, and very nostalgically, reinvokes folklore and the primitive arts. The genial outcome of a unique will (that of the solitary creator in full

effervescence, a very male and Romantic image that manages to hold fast despite all changes), originality is even above culture in that this genial creature is not, at least theoretically, a social product, but rather the outcome of a theologized domain: that of sacred inspiration.

To say it briefly, originality is a way of facing modernity that, even while borrowing some of its features like the abstraction and innovation typical of industrialization, simultaneously pushes asides other equally constitutive aspects like the sensorial and repetitive, which are qualified as too obvious or effective (in the sense of producing only effects, not truth-laden epiphanies) to be original. Whereby the great divide of modern culture between an avant-garde that regards itself as genial and original, and a mass culture it considers simplistic and imitative. Such is the final paradox of a culture that has one foot on modern technology and the other on a pre-modern ideology.

To clarify a little further this paradox, one must distinguish between a social condition or phenomenon and the thought that comes out of it, two quite different things. Modernity as a social phenomenon should not be confused with modernism, which is constituted by the intellectual and artistic movements (the different “isms” and avantgardes) that tried to articulate cognitively and creatively this new phenomenon during the first part of the twentieth century. While modernity is a social phenomenon independent of singular wills, modernism is one of its cultural by-products, and therefore does not hold exclusive rights to its definition.

Why is this so? Because all that modernism rejects as not worthy of being modern (and consequently, of lacking the essential value of what it considers modern) all that is at the very heart of modernity as a phenomenon: materiality, appropriation, repetition, hybridity and excess. It is hardly surprising, then, that it is in the cultural moment known as postmodernity that these rejected elements find

their moment of glory, theoretically recognized as valuable after decades of being considered artistic trash. Because even if postmodernity cannot be separated from the modern process that gave it existence, it must be understood as a distinct moment of this process, a moment when those elements which had seemed indispensable to modernism, such as originality, were no longer meaningful.

4 » MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION

Without getting into a discussion about postmodernity, which at any rate has itself been left behind by hypermodernity, where only the speed of exchange counts, I would like to finish this discussion about originality by distinguishing between kinds of copies. While the classic opposition between the authentic and the fake (that is, essence and appearance) dates as far back as Plato’s allegory of the cave, with industrialization and the massive proliferation of copies this opposition is shattered. The dichotomy between real and false becomes more opaque and ambiguous than ever, and the predominance of novelty, as said before, displaces everything that came before it, even if the traditional ideologies that supported the premodern period are left intact. Faced with an unbridled and serialised reproduction in a world where rationality and homogeneity are valued above difference and the extraordinary, the notions of authenticity and originality attempt to survive by granting each novelty an essentialist, foundational character, proper of a time where references were felt as more stable.

While the copy is certainly not an invention of modernity, pre-modern copies didn’t threaten the primacy of the original, but instead further validated it by what might be called an “admiring” reproduction. Here there was no questioning of the original, for pre-modern copies fully participated of a hierarchical system where appearances were only that: secondary and subordinated to an essence belonging exclusively to the unique object. Mechanical



reproduction, however, does not seek to repeat or imitate this singular experience provoked by the unique object's essence, but rather to induce the experience of singularity itself. In other words, as cult objects, pre-modern things, whether original or copies, remained the center of meaning. This is not to say that they enjoyed the same intrinsic value, but that they had a relative interchangeability given their capacity to evoke similar experiences.

Modern copies, on the other hand, could care less for the object, which they can reproduce to perfection, but which has been voided of its previous cult status in the transit from tradition to modernity. The difference, then, does not reside in the exactness of the copy (assuming that such verosimilitude could replicate the effect of the original), but rather on the kind of experience that the copy can produce precisely as a copy, given that it is not a fake, pretending to pass for the original, but a modern copy, that is, one without inferiority complexes.

Insofar as it produces copies of originals which have lost their cult value to either exhibit or exchange value, if not both, what mechanical reproduction still seeks to elicit is the feeling of singularity, by which an object is lived as something personal and individual in an era of massive consumption. In this sense, the modern object is no longer a cult object in the traditional sense but in the modern one: it becomes part of what is known as commodity fetishism, where the material and fragmentary relationship between subject and object, despite taking precedence over the more mystical and collective character of this relationship in tradition, manages to retain these qualities as part of its own seduction.

It isn't easy to state this aspect of modernity without falling into moral judgements such as we have lost the capacity to relate cosmically or spiritually with the world, therefore we are worse off than before, we are less human, more mechanical and cold, and so on. Benjamin undoes this argument as early as the 1930s by reaffirming the revolution-

ary, democratic qualities of modern materialism as opposed to a conservative idealism that thrived on notions like authenticity. Authenticity, if there was such a thing for Benjamin and I think this is the case, would reside rather in the leftovers of the experience of the world, instead of in a singularity which is for him more than anything a utopic, not to say Romantic, illusion.

5 » THIRD NATURE

Yet the question of the relationship between the modern original (and copy) and nature, specially human nature, still remains, and here we go back to the beginning of this talk (that is to say, we return to the origins of my proposal), which at the same time will bring us to its end. What happens when nature is freed from this originating, [gestative], normative (insofar as it determines what is authentic) quality, and taken instead as another element of human constitution, a basic element of course, but equally important to the experience which makes of us cultural beings? Can we think of nature without immediately attaching to it the notion of origin and its corollary of authenticity? In other words, is it possible to unload nature of these concepts, not to render it more ideal, but rather to enable it to be so materially intertwined with the cultural that they become undistinguishable, rendering obsolete the notion of authenticity?

It is, of course, impossible to conceive of nature outside culture, given that all that we consider natural is always/already, as the once-fashionable marxist vocabulary would have said, a cultural construction. From the moment it goes beyond the strictly sensorial, our relationship to nature becomes a second-degree relationship, one that is not direct and immediate, but filtered by culture. However, this is a two-way street, since in the same way that nature becomes cultural to our eyes and through our actions, our own human nature is susceptible itself to this change. That is, our "original" nature is transformed

by culture in what is sometimes perceived as a "second nature", usually indicating that something outside us has become such a part of ourselves that we now consider it part of our very nature.

This second nature is no longer a biological and non-socialized matter, but on the contrary, a condition we've adapted to and whose familiarity renders it "natural", but in a way that is understood as added, secondary as opposed to primary. Benjamin, for example, declares modern technology as our second nature, and his criticism of anti-modern discourses (those which privilege authenticity over repetition) is based precisely on this understanding. One cannot qualify mechanical repetition as inhuman when it has become part and parcel of our sensorial apparatus and through it of our nervous system and our body, not to speak of our psyche, if the psychoanalytic diagnose of obsessive neuroses is correct.

In sum, our relationship to nature is not only social in that it is mediated by language and culture, but also proactive in that this relationship transforms nature but also transforms us. As it grows and evolves, human nature necessarily changes from essential to experiential, mixing the biological with the cultural, and therefore exposing the notion of the natural as something flexible and mobile, far from the static and permanent essence imagined by the idealist tradition.

In a context where origins are no longer the basic determinant of subjectivity, since subjectivity is understood as being in constant transformation, in such a context, then, can we distinguish between the authentic and the fake, the original and the derived? I believe that, once the illusion of the natural as something essential and uncontaminated by culture is shattered, such distinctions, and the value judgements that go along with them, become irrelevant. Faced with genetics, for instance, where from unique beings we've become originals susceptible of being copied, originals carrying their own dupli-

cation code, how can we establish the limits between a legitimate and an illegitimate humanity?

In cloning, unlike the robotics behind cyborgs or replicants, there is no longer a mix of biological and artificial (that is, natural and cultural) because it is all biological, made from our very own cells. Rather than an artificial gestation without copulation (the case of artificial insemination) what we are presented with in cloning is a duplicate reproduction that presents all the attributes of the original raw material, so to speak, without being such. In fact, the term clone, from the Greek klôn, means twig as in branch or in offshoot, something that is reproduced by growth out of the same matter, which is what happens in cloning, where the genetic code is inserted in an ovule whose own [cellular code] has been eliminated.

The clone is therefore not a copy, and much less a fake: everything in it is as legitimate as the original. In a way, then, cloning presents us the paradox of two originals or of double (triple, quadruple and so on) originality, one that is no longer associated with essence or uniqueness (authenticity or singularity), but rather remits us immediately to experience as the basic source of human subjectivity, that is, unless we think that even our way of being is genetically predetermined, overruling the impact of personal history.

With genetics, then, we have come to the other end of the notion of origins, since here what matters, and what determines reproduction, is not the beginning but the end, in the sense of the final goal, whether it is juicier lambs or custom-designed human beings. Gone is the importance of human nature as the essence of humanity--humanity is now understood as a raw material susceptible to fragmentation, design, exchange and of course disposal. Humanity becomes a replacement part (a body part, quite literally) in case of factory defect, goodbye to that essential singularity on which modern identity stood for a couple of centuries, after all those

when it believed it had an immanent relationship to divinity.

Even the simulacre, that copy without original, that virtual reality which postmodernity was so proud of, even the very criticized simulacre is reduced to a simple cultural convention when compared to a genetical project where each element is programmed (pre-programmed, in fact, since it was always this way, we just didn't know it) for an infinite duplication in time and space. In genetics, origin and end meet to produce the strangest duplicate, or offshoot, of all times, that which being equal to the original has none of its entitlements, namely the right to subjectivity. The clone is non-essential, non-foundational and non-original. Denied these attributes considered proper of human nature, reduced to being sheer matter, the clone can only be a denatured original, or rather an original that is only nature, nothing else.

What we are dealing with here is no longer a second nature nor even a nature to the second degree, where we could still find an active relationship between nature and culture, but instead with a nature that has a [tertiary] value. I would in fact like to propose it as a third nature, in order to distinguish it from the first, organic and sensorial, as well as from the second, where the first becomes social and cultural, yet keeping the idea of nature as its basic foundation. In third nature what we find is a manipulation of nature that has no cultural presence other than itself: here the technological apparatus has reached such perfection that it remains invisible, it does not form part of the body as in second nature, it leaves no traces of its agency. To the point that this third nature could easily be mistook for the first one: who will be able to distinguish a clone from its originating source?

This third nature, which leaves the once revolutionary cyborg (half human, half robot) in the dust, should not be considered only negatively, as if it were the end of humanity. Instead, third nature can be welcomed as an opportunity to rethink exactly

what humanity should be built on, specially when we see that after three thousand years of so-called civilization, human beings destroy themselves with more fury than ever before, something which, by the way, distinguishes us radically from the other animal species on the planet, far more attentive to their own survival.

I would like to end with a couple of concrete examples of what I consider different forms of third nature. The first is from the French artist Hubert Duprat, who works constantly on the boundaries of natural fiction. One of his most outstanding works is what he has done with the ???, which he manually envelops with different elements of custom jewelry, then waiting for the bejewelled creatures to shed this layer of skin, usually known as the exoskeleton, or the outer skeleton of invertebrates, in what is a totally natural process. What is left is a carapace which sits midway between organic and artificial, being a combination of both, but where human intervention consists in letting nature take its course, even if to come out with a very "unnatural" product.

It is a similar process to that of pearl farming, where an object is artificially inseminated into an oyster to produce what is called a "cultivated pearl". Yet while this pearl is practically identical to a natural one, Duprat's ??? do the opposite: while in both the form is an organic residue whose content has been manufactured or at least manually enhanced, Duprat's ??? emphasize the artificiality of the mix, whereas cultivated pearls erase it. Instead of seeking a natural effect, or to raise the status of the ??? by making them into objects (the case of the collections of natural history, where nature became culture), Duprat has made a simple intervention that escapes both first and second natures, creating a hybrid of them both. This hybrid issued from nature and culture, yet somehow surpassing them both, is third nature.

Donald Lawrence's pinhole photos of anemones and starfish is another example of the peculiar

mix of nature and culture present in third nature. At first sight, one might think that his attempt to reproduce the origins of photography (which started with underwater photography in...), by resisting the use of digital cameras and advanced technology, is simply a nostalgic effort to recreate a "lo-tech" object. Indeed, the visual texture of analog photography has an onirical, dream-like quality (partly because of its implied reference to 19th century photography) whose intensity defies the effect-laden gloss of sophisticated technology, producing a strong feeling of reality, of first-degree or unmediated experience, precisely by putting forward that opaqueness and ambiguity which the perfection of hi-technology continually seeks to deny and erase.

Yet rather than a comeback to a glorified early industrialization, that is, rather than a simple reaction to hi-technology, Donald's photos, as most lo-tech art, is an attempt to grasp what technology has repressed or left out, that murky, fuzzy layer of reality constituted by our cultural imaginary. In its reliance on a binary system that by definition moves between fixed meanings and their infinite combinations, yet leaving out the intermediate shades of gray, hi-technology privileges the controlled and controlling fantasies of virtual reality, while ignoring the unsettled and unsettling imaginary of day-to-day realities. It is to these that lo-tech art speaks, and Donald's work shows it admirably, for here nature is not redeemed as a forever-lost dimension, which it is, nor theorized as a stratified provider of meaning, as happened in modernity, but accepted and presented as a highly cultural element of our collective unconscious.

For all their beauty, Donald's anemones and starfish are eerily unreal: they carry the triple load of nature, culture and a voluntary disinvestment from, although not rejection of, technology. In them, technology is present as an active absence, instead of a passive one, which would be the case of 19th century photography, still innocent to the history that

would follow it. Like clones, Donald's anemones and starfish could practically be 19th century originals, yet they don't quite make it there, nor seek to do so, although we wouldn't know that from looking at them. In these photos, there are no traces of technology except for the implied desire to go beyond it, a desire that, as contemporary spectators, we cannot pretend to ignore, as we cannot deny our [thirst] for use and cult value, those markers of foreign times. Yet it is this desire, and the before-hand acceptance of its impossibility in the haziness of the underwater scene, that makes of these images third nature, a nature that stopped being natural a long time ago, yet basks in the glow of successive cultural appropriations and technological [misencounters; misses] as the brightest star of an inner universe.