

Cognac, 26th June 2015

Dear Olivier,

I have allowed myself a certain familiarity here, seeing as we « fraternised » during the construction of the second bell tower in the Abbey of Dames de Saintes, two weeks ago. During this memorable occasion, we had the opportunity to discuss your work, your artistic projects, my impressions, my intention to put down on paper (or rather on screen) to deepen these thoughts fed by the day.

So, this is a feedback “with layers” which I’m offering. I hope you will find this modest construction pleasant and that it will contribute to alleviating, in a way, the debt, made with the artist, as a swap.

I, hereby, take this opportunity to send you my thanks and my best wishes for your future projects which I will have great pleasure following.

Yours enthusiastically,

Pascal Faure

*Handmade construction reproduction in cardboard of the Bell tower of the Abbey of Dames de Saintes for the annual festival of the Abbey. Height : 21 m. Collective project to unite hundreds of people. Design and realization by Olivier Grossetête and his team.*

*Feedback :*

Transitional Area : recreate our primary exchange links and our knowledge of others, of our footprint on nature via play. Through creating a fun space where the imagination and reality of each other can meet to create a symbolic oeuvre. The oeuvre is not only the building but the links created between the individuals, their dialogue. This is the theory of the English psychoanalyst Winnicott who defines the construction of identity, the psyche and individual social rapports around these early issues in the development of the little man, in an intermediate place with undefined limits between oneself and the other. He, who knows how to dialogue with the world earns the right to act, receives the gift of meetings and his independence of thought. The one who invites you to play poses as a demiurge.

Assemble-dismantle toys, inside-outside, gravitational force with cubes, up-down, standing up-lying down, sharing and owning, mine-yours. So many schemes associate and transform destructive drive, sexual and scopic assault to fabricate a social bond. So many individual nostalgic impressions of early childhood which find a space in which to be integrated and expressed in a group.

In play, I recreate the world, I'm emancipated from limits, I change the rules.

Agora : The public space devoted, in the Greek cities, to debate, to exchange, political place where everyone had the right to express his convictions. Every culture and every era delimit a stage on which to show the paradigm of its essence. The squares of religious buildings for the medieval acrobats, the field for welcoming the mutual funds of potlatch by the Amerindians, the esplanade around the Totem... So many empty spaces where individuals collect and gather in crowds to become a social body. From the Menhir to the Cathedral spires via the Totem, the Obelisk and the column, this emptiness is exorcised by building a phallic verticality. Through the passage of time, it symbolises the tutelary presence of social unification, acting as a collective suture against dereliction and disorder.

The human pyramid (Catalonia) shows the choice of radical figuration of this amalgam rather than an emblematic architectural symbol. From this knot, culture can be woven.

Gesture : Gesture is an animated representation of a founding narrative where the actors incarnate mythical heroes, who tell the origins of the world, in which the unifying speech is physically embodied, making real the imaginary and symbolic figures organising social history links (Mahabharata, Nô, Medieval liturgic and eschatological mysteries, historical reconstitutions, etc...). In this way temporality is abolished in profit of a permanent dramaturgic tension. Here the body is the principal mediator in its dimensions of physical effort, through the aesthetic of dance, ritual subjectivation...

Staging and choreography organise the harmonious relationship of the characters and individual groups and initiate a sort of cathartic trance in the individual solicitation of sensorial perceptions, coenaesthesia, physical and emotional through action or through identification of the public with the actors. The element ordinarily circumscribed by the super-ego control, intellectual and social distancing are released to the benefit of noisy animality : jumps, capers, snaking, shouts, moans, physical contact, destructivity... Thus, via self-renunciation and a physical test, a communion with an instinctual life and a group identity is realized. Because the story in question is about identity, community and indefinitely federating individuals into a group.

In the individual sense of identity are contained early sensorial experiences of electoral joy such as holding

a baby by the parent ensuring his security and comfort and the acknowledgement of his distinct image in the game of mirrors. All are determined by the quality of the ineluctable presence of the other as a parent. The ostensible mark shows the link in the social field will be fixed in the totem, the bell tower, the effigy under which the weft of this union will have been woven. It is from this exaltation that surge epic and poetic effects.

Cardboard : A poor and depreciated material, weak and misleading, from common wood, without the delicacy of paper, it only maintains value through its lightness, its plasticity and its relative rigidity. An ideal artefact it allows us to make trompe-l'oeil décor, suitcases from cardboard and other packaging, to build models, preparatory sketches... As such, it is one of the instruments by which a child can exercise his power on the world, reproduce forms and his sad helplessness. This game was taken up again by the architect when he wanted to project a plan in three dimensions until the recent invention of 3D software.

Here is a false pretence which has become a great tool for representation and perspectives of the world. It oppose, however, another serious artefact which mobilises all our adult capacities of abstraction : money and all that it can concretely buy, massive and solid! The symbol of power, of heritage, of the immutability and the ferocity which articulates our society.

The idea of juxtaposing funny faces, a wink at the ready-made, of the dummy reproduction of an emblematic building takes on a subversive character by re-establishing adults in their childhood creativity. In this dynamic, the seriousness and the value are displaced to the multi-secular monument towards the spontaneous and group gesture in building the object. The greatest joy of the forger is the resemblance of the accomplished oeuvre. The paltry material gives birth to a burlesque form whose touching fragility moves us just like Chaplin, the universal tramp.

Utopia : a philosophical concept elaborated in the XVI century by the English Thomas More, utopia has its roots in the world of Platon. The idea (associated with the beautiful by essence) is still more beautiful and stronger than the thing, from which it becomes... What part of an unreal island, of a technical drawing, artistic or from an architectural project, it often leads to a social and political theory. On the architectural plan I will cite N. Ledoux's XVIII century. La Saline d'Arc-et-Senans and the Phalansteries according to Fournier and St Simon, XIX century. Every time it concerns a totalising choice uniting industrial, urbanistic and social projects. In each case, it's about an innovative action with a humanist prospective of progress. We could also associate plans of machines and the innovative trials of Leonardo de Vinci, up to Marx's capital. Therefore, an artistic project which engages with the public as actors and not only as passive spectators, as an artist who positions himself as an instigator (an agitator?) rather than as a recipient to inevitably federate to a crowd around a progressive utopia to do better things together. It is about leaving patrimonial and hereditary conservatism behind to reconnect with the forward march of history in its continuous cycle.

If the stake is the complete reform of society the result can prove to be tragic. If you have to build an official monument from cardboard, it's exciting. Because it reveals that the object of utopia is not in the end result but in the process : to invent what doesn't exist, show what is left to be done !

Art : the aim of art, before it became a market value, was the desire to materialise, to create in reality that which meets the eye. Connecting emotions, enabling emotions to communicate. The artist, through his profession, produces objects which represent his "overpower". His works of art are reputedly unique and their duplication, outside of the market, shows only the desire to represent representation. The creation would be the finality of a solitary act and radically original, in the same category as a birth, as giving birth, as suffering, as joy and death. The artwork and the artist are indissociably linked, to each other, identified

outside by collective experiences associating several authors or insiders...

What should we think of a work of art which is designed and orchestrated by an artist but realised by anonymous people ? Does the work of art have value because it is a produced object, because of the artistic process, the charisma of the artist and his capacity to transmit his ideal (messianism), because of the political leadership which was used on the crowd (entryism, activism), because of the creator's withdrawal from the creative action to benefit the non-initiated anonymous ?

I can distinguish three propositions corresponding to this challenge : one moral and the other political, with the intention of desacralizing art in its social function and its market reference, what could apply to the symbolic destruction of the final object ; one humanist, one altruistic, by a transmissive and initiative approach within the illusion of a fraternalizing communion; the last one being unconscious and inhibiting, in an auto-defensive process in front of psychic threat of megalomaniac and paranoid danger which generates all mechanisms of artistic creation.

Finally, there's a tower, not virtually, but in reality !

Ephemeral : artwork, monuments are generally considered as in-temporal even eternal. Listed in museums or on lists of historic building, they are intended to survive the individual to shine over the generations through their universalism. In this light they become precious and sacred and sometimes objects of worship. They become symbols of human genius even the superiority of a culture. They frame the conventional building of Beauty and are sometimes reduced to emblems of identity. The creative circle is therefore always in danger of being integrated in a conservative matrix. In this sense all creation comes from a subversive rupture. Hence the question to know if beauty really resides in an ephemeral moment. Olivier Grossetête associates with this temptation two other variables : the collective action and the savagery which presides not only the construction but also the destruction. The instantaneous vital driving element is summoned at the same time as the staged obsolescence of the oeuvre and the desacralisation of our cultural institution. The facticity of the cardboard reminds him, Was it colossal? Remains the individual and collective gesture, the instant of meeting and of wonder. The conviction of possibilities !