

journal

La Criée centre d'art contemporain, Rennes

01



La pose
et le
maritime

VERNACULAR AND CONTEMPORARY CREATION 2019-2021



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Kan hā dīshān¹ polylogue

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The conversation that opens here is the introductory text in the first issue of the journal that accompanies the *Lili, la rozell et le marimba* cycle.² It examines the connections between production, local knowledge and contemporary creation, and develops in the form of exhibitions, events, research, residencies, meetings, and other activities.

The journal aims to extend and broaden the questions raised by the guest artists in this cycle. The editorial committee is made up of artists, researchers and curators who share a common concern for each other and for doing things differently, while at the same time operating in different fields of research and sometimes with very different points of view.

These differences, however, are relative: they are all intellectuals and/or artists living and working in France. Whether this constituted a limiting factor in addressing the issues at the heart of the *Lili, la rozell et le marimba* cycle was a question that inevitably arose and, at one point, it was mooted that the editorial committee should encompass representatives from all over the world. But this option was soon recognized as illusory and disproportionate. In the end, the opposite approach was adopted: i.e., for this editorial committee to work with people geographically close to the art centre, thereby prioritising practical experience. This journal is therefore being published from Rennes, which is something that needs to be taken into account.

Émilie Renard: We chose the polylogue form for the first issue of the journal because it allows us to transcribe a thought process that developed collaboratively and is expressed in terms that are non-definitive, plural and even divergent. Whether spontaneous, reworked or entirely re-written, we felt that this form of writing seemed the most faithful way of reflecting the nature of our exchanges – in meetings, e-mails, and shared resources –, on the initial question that Sophie asked us. That question, which implies other questions, too, could be phrased as follows: What is the relationship between vernacular cultures and contemporary artistic practices? In the reflex respect that one pays to the elementary principles of proof, the question first requires us to define the terms of the relationship - the vernacular and the contemporary in art -, which is what we will do here, but, over and above the probably fairly robust definitions we may provide, we will need to be aware of how each one of us is likely to interpret and make use of that relationship.

To begin with, it is important for each of us to state where we are coming from and to make explicit our

experience and what motivated us to join you, Sophie, over the past two years, on this slippery slope. Can you kick off by telling us what prompted you to commit yourself to a long cycle of research, experiments and hypotheses with the Art Centre? In your programme at La Criée, you attach great importance to storytelling, quoting Senegalese writer Felwine Sarr on the subject: “What is important is the subject in action, creating and re-creating. The true territory of the human being is the intimate.”³ What is your own experience of the vernacular?

Sophie Kaplan: A few years ago, in 2011, when I was the director of the Crac Alsace, in Altkirch, a small town in Sundgau – which, incidentally, means Land of the South –, I presented an exhibition, in collaboration with the Art Centre of Fribourg in Switzerland, entitled *Folklore?*.⁴ The exhibition featured local folk objects, placed alongside contemporary works based on folk items from near and far. The exhibition shed light on various concerns that were closely linked to the nature of that folk culture but resonated in the present: local identity and celebration, a vanishing sense of uniqueness, the survival of customs,

1. *Kan ha diskān* is a polyphonic vocal tradition mainly practised in the centre of Brittany. It roughly translates as “call and response singing”. The lead singer is the kaner, and the second singer is the diskāner. The *kaner* sings a verse, and the *diskāner* sings the last few lines with the kaner, then repeats them alone. The repeated phrase acts as a sort of baton that is passed on from verse to verse. “Polylogue” is a neologism modelled on “monologue” intended to emphasise the importance of the plurality of voices here.

2. At La Criée from September 2019 to August 2021: <https://www.la-criee.org/fr/lili-la-rozell-et-le-marimba/>

3. Quoted by Étienne Anheim in his article “Felwine Sarr, humaniste et coauteur du rapport sur la restitution du patrimoine africain”, *Le Monde des idées*, 30 November 2018.

4. France has many regional contemporary art centres, usually referred to by the acronym Crac (Centre régional d’art contemporain) followed by the name of the region; in this case Crac Alsace.

the entrenchment of folk culture in cliché, the presence of mystical symbols, the relationship with the natural environment, etc. It drew particular attention to examples of the re-use and re-invention of motifs and it highlighted a two-fold movement: the recurrence of some motifs in very different contexts and the characteristics of local instances. It also touched on the question of circulation, borrowings, hybridisation and appropriations between different cultural groups.

Since then, I have continued to think about how local folk customs and artefacts - whether traditional or recent - are linked to the construction of identity, not only at the individual and collective levels, but also historical, political and economic identity.

An interest in the relationship between contemporary creation and local knowledge and production is an exciting field of study, particularly in that it raises questions about relationships between dominant and minority cultures and between vehicular and vernacular knowledge. It also brings to light the permanent reversals that artists have been operating within these categories which are themselves constantly shifting.

É.R.: With this cycle, are you reacting to the specific context of La Criée? To what extent have current shifts and developments in Breton cultural identity motivated this cycle? And finally, can you enlarge on the meanings of the words in the title of the *Lili, la rozell et le marimba* cycle, which lashes together identities and objects that are singular and typical and, at the same time, represent specific yet very different cultural contexts?

S.K.: I think that if you take into account the specific context in which you devise an artistic and cultural programme, you can root it in a relationship in which you are close to those who nurture it and are nurtured by it; you recognize them and are curious about them, whether they are artists or audience.

Shortly after my arrival at the Crac Alsace, I programmed two exhibitions on the theme of the fantastic in contemporary art; they resonated with *La Forêt enchantée*, an event that takes place in Altkirch every year in December as part of the Alsace Christmas celebrations. In a similar way, *Courir les rues, Battre la campagne, Fendre les flots* (2013-2016), the first cycle of exhibitions and events that I set up at La Criée, was based on some of the geographical, social, cultural and legendary characteristics of Rennes and Brittany.

What's more, because in a relatively short space of time I moved from the East of France to the West - from Alsace to Brittany, which are both regions with strong cultures, particularly because of their languages -, it prompted me to take a close interest in the vitality and importance of local cultures. It was this move that brought me to understand the extent to which being born somewhere lays down roots: when our children, who were born in Alsace, begged us to bake Alsatian Christmas cakes for their schoolfriends in our Breton village, and we have found ourselves, year after year, *transplanting* this Alsatian custom in Breton soil: from native to local - or vice versa. It was then that I properly realized that I, too, am deeply attached to - and shaped by - the local culture of my childhood and adolescence: the multicultural, communist suburb in which I grew up in the 1980s, with its people from Southern Europe, North Africa, the Creuse, the Auvergne, and so on, not to mention the creativity of its hybrid language, with its backslang and its blarney. In talking about these personal, small-scale experiences, I subscribe, as you pointed out, Emilie, to Felwine Sarr's line of thought; he holds that the personal is a way to understanding the collective, as do the microhistorians.⁵ I stress this point because it is, in my opinion, one of the keys to understanding the relationships and interactions between the vernacular and contemporary creative art.

So, for a number of years now I have been paying particular attention to the way in which artists not only work with the materials

of their native culture or the culture of the place they have made their home, but how they also work with and across the various forms those cultures take (arts, crafts, folk, scientific, or whatever). This focus has reinforced my conviction that none of us can be assigned to any given culture or identity, nor be contained or constrained by it. The concepts of Whole World, Relation, Identity-Relations and Creolization that Édouard Glissant formulated still remain formidable tools, I feel, for questioning the relations between such concepts as tradition and modernity, vernacular and vehicular, or local and global.⁶

The title of the cycle can thus be read using this Glissantian key as the encounter of realities which, though *a priori* remote from each other, nevertheless coexist: a Breton cooking instrument, since that's what a *rozell* is, and a hybrid musical instrument of Bantu origin that combines elements of pre-Columbian and European xylophones in its current Central American forms (journeys and musical mixes are among the most frequent and creative), two instruments that the figure of Lili might hold in her hands and take on her travels. Lili, whose name has an intimate, almost tender ring to it. Lili who could be a girl or a boy, who could be from Asia, Oceania or Occitania.

I have a question for you now, Emilie: power relationships are central to your curatorial practice. Which ones, would you say, are operative in the vernacular/contemporary art dichotomy?

É.R.: To set out some of the power relationships in play, I will begin by applying a form of institutional analysis to our editorial board. Looking at our committee from the vernacular point of view could be a way of elucidating the prerogatives of the interpretive community that we are in spite of our differences. When a practice or an aesthetic deviates from established practices (when a so-called vernacular culture deviates from accepted norms), it reveals, through contrast, the strength of the norm from which it is diverging. On this point, I would like to quote the North American literary theorist Stanley Fish, who describes so well the transparency of the context in which any obvious linguistic statement operates and the tacit influence of that context on a shared meaning: "The category 'normal' [...] is not transcendental but institutional; and while no institution is universally in force and so perdurable that the meanings it enables will be normal for ever, some institutions or forms of life are so widely lived in that for a great many people the meanings they enable will seem 'naturally' available and it takes a special effort to see that they are the products of circumstances."⁷ Each institutional context is governed by the authority of an interpretive community, creating instant tacit agreements between the interpreters who belong to it, in a kind of collectively internalised obviousness that is taken for granted. In this way, the power relationships over common concepts are established concretely in terms of numbers and strength of conviction. I wonder whether our own interpretive community, when it encounters other interpretive communities with their own vernacular cultures, will lose its familiarity and be transformed under the effect of a new closeness, and contact with the object of our study and the subjects involved in it.

I am thinking of the way in which the Belgian philosopher Vinciane Despret lets the object of her research guide her investigations. In her book *Au bonheur des morts*, she explores the relationship between the living and the dead, and in order to avoid responding to the dilemma of proof, she adopts an almost passive stance and allows herself to be carried along gradually by the advice, the stories, and the directions that the living

5. See, for example, Carlo Ginzburg, *History, Rhetoric, and Proof: The Menachem Stern Jerusalem Lectures*. London and Hanover. 1999.

6. Édouard Glissant, *Poétique I, II*, Paris, Seuil, 1956, 1969; *Poétique III, IV, V*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, 1997, 2005.

7. Stanley Fish, *Is There a text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: harvard University Press, 1980), 305 *Quand lire c'est faire. L'autorité des communautés interprétatives*, [1980], Paris, Les Prairies Ordinaires, 2007, préface d'Yves Citton.

or the dead provide her with.⁸ In this, she sees herself as the heir to those who, I quote, “have made the effort to develop an attitude that allows them to follow their actors, not to ‘explain’ them, but to account for what they do and what they are called upon to do, learning from them and with them the right ways to talk about it.” So it’s the matter of how we relate to each other that’s important to me in the first place.

S.K: Now that we’ve established the framework and the method, I’d like to ask you all, quite bluntly, this question: what do you understand by the vernacular? And to what extent does it seem to you to be or not to be a workable concept?

John Cornu: The word “vernacular”, from the Latin word *vernaculus*, implies the idea of an origin, of belonging to a country or a region.⁹ Which is vast, and according to that definition camembert would be vernacular, and so would livarot! These days there is a definite fashion for the vernacular in the field of contemporary art, as anyone who reads the specialist journals can tell you.¹⁰

It has to be acknowledged that there is an interesting friction between localised cultures and cultures that are more generalised. In 2008/2012, Leonor Antunes – an artist invited last year to represent Portugal at the Venice Biennale – was doing something of that nature when she recreated fishing nets unique to specific ports in Portugal in her installations.¹¹ How does this mix of local know-how with clearly identifiable modernist clichés – erected as emblems of globalisation – relate to a poetic attitude specific to our times? I am particularly thinking, among other things, of the Harley Davidsons that Olivier Mosset exhibits alongside abstract paintings.

So how do we distinguish the vernacular from that which is simply traditional? In my opinion, this question by itself will determine the scientific validity of our approach and the relevance of what we are studying. I hope, too, that our discussions will focus on quite specific forms. Because what I understand by vernacular would include, for example, the floral decorations on trade-guild anvils or aboriginal designs painted on bark from paperbark trees. Similarly, when Roger Caillois describes the verbal jousting of “Eskimos” (the word he used in 1967), we have to recognize that these are specific cultural practices that can be clearly localised.¹² What strikes a European as vernacular is not necessarily vernacular for someone from another continent or culture.

Katia Kameli: The vernacular is rather off-putting, it has become a kind of all-purpose word that it would be nice to be able to do without for a time, but we’re going to be stuck with it for two years! I’d like to take another look at how Clément Chéroux approaches this notion from the other side in his book *Vernaculaires. Essais d’histoire de la photographie*.¹³

It’s always interesting to look at the root of a word. Etymologically, “vernacular is derived from the Latin *verna* which meant ‘slave’. It operated [...] in an area of human activity related to servility, or at least to *service*. It’s a useful word. In Roman law, the word *vernaculus* denoted a particular category of slaves who were born in the home, as opposed to those who were bought or traded. The word then came to be used for everything that was produced, raised or grown at home.”¹⁴

To take a few modern expressions, you might say that the vernacular also covers *Do-It-Yourself* things, and home-made or hand-made products. In which case, it can clearly be associated

with subcultures, the underground, punk, anti-consumerism or open-source movements, in the sense that the vernacular seems to escape or resist the hegemonic (re-)production system of images.

This takes me back to Clément Chéroux’s definition: “The vernacular is thus utilitarian, domestic and also heterotopic,” picking up on Foucault’s concept of “other space” as being outside while remaining perfectly tangible.¹⁵

Lotte Arndt: When Sophie invited me to take part in this discussion about the vernacular, I was sceptical. I felt that the use of this word might run the risk of defining entities that might be described as vernacular and then opposing them to other entities that would be defined as universal. I think that such an opposition is damaging and has serious political consequences that are widespread in French discourse. So, I would like to start by formulating a critical approach to the notion of the vernacular by placing it in a historical and a cultural context.

I think it’s significant that the collections of the regional ethnographic museums in France developed in parallel with the great collecting campaigns of the colonial period – Georges-Henri Rivière, who launched the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (ATP), was co-director of it with Paul Rivet, director of the Musée du Trocadéro, from 1928 onwards. In his book *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire*, American art historian Daniel Sherman demonstrates how, in parallel with the “missions” conducted by the French colonial ethnologists, there were collecting campaigns in the 1930s in rural parts of mainland France that shared similar primitivist methodologies and preconceptions.¹⁶ What was produced in the regions vis-à-vis the nation and what was produced in the colonies vis-à-vis the Empire were seen as two sides of the same coin: in the context of national unity, the rural population at that time was conceived as the antithesis of urban modernity – part of an immutable “tradition” deserving of protection and veneration for its supposed cultural authenticity, but divorced from the present and from the giant steps forward of society as a whole. Local and regional cultures, it was thought, were doomed to disappear in the march of progress and unstoppable modernisation, but the museum would organise collection campaigns to save and preserve for ever the material traces of those cultures.

What interests me first of all about folk traditions in museums is the power relationship that they imply: the superiority of the city, of science and notions of progress is based on the idea that its opposite is inferior – with the picturesque as its correlate. Local or vernacular cultures, now defined and geographically circumscribed, are so only insofar as they are distinguished from and juxtaposed with “national culture”, with a “universal” vocation. At the same time, this distinction establishes a hierarchy. By categorising we dominate, as feminist theorist Christine Delphy insightfully observed in *Classer, dominer, Qui sont les “autres”?*

If this opposition operates in Western cultural history, it can probably be turned on its head, as it has been by writers like Isabelle Stengers, Bruno Latour, Anselm Franke or Irene Albers, on notions of modernity, fetishism, witchcraft, and animism –

8. Vinciane Despret, *Au bonheur des morts*, Paris, Éditions La Découverte, 2006.

9. Cf. notice “Vernaculaire”, in *Le Nouveau Littéraire*, Paris, Garnier, 2007, p. 1981.

10. A search for *vernaculaire* in the journal 02 turned up 35 uses of the word in various numbers: <http://www.zerodeux.fr/?s=vernaculaire>

11. Leonor Antunes, *The Tiles Are Black in the Studio Area*, 2008-2012, Collection Frac Bretagne.

12. Roger Caillois, *Les Jeux et les Hommes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1967, p. 95-97.

13. Clément Chéroux, *Vernaculaires. Essais d’histoire de la photographie*, Paris, Le Point du jour, 2013.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

16. Daniel Sherman, *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire*, 1945-1975, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011).

which are all concepts that lead to the identification and Othering of groups on the basis of their cultural practices.¹⁷ What would these notions give us if we looked at Western societies through their lens? How would we describe the vernacular at the Élysée Palace? And suppose we thought of the Greek sculptures in the Louvre in terms of folklore? How would we perceive the Mona Lisa if it were exhibited in the darkened, “organic” rooms of the Musée du Quai-Branly, or conversely – and this would be a very Duchampian exercise –, suppose we placed a Savoyard household implement from the MUCEM in Marseilles (which holds the collections of the now defunct Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires) in an exhibition of conceptual works at the Institut d’Art Contemporain in Villeurbanne?

The work of the Rennes-based choreographer Latifa Laâbissi also comes to mind. She is constantly inventing tricks and dodges, and ways of removing identity. She has also borrowed William T. Lhamon Jr’s concept of “lore”: she breaks up the word folklore to contrast “folk”, which corresponds to the fixed elements of a culture, with “lore”, “which incorporates a fabric of knowledge, popular stories, practices and handed-down borrowings that are embodied in people’s gestures and body language.”¹⁸ Laâbissi uses ‘lore’ to highlight what “has to be constantly hybridised” in order to stay alive and moving, and to avoid the assignation of identity.¹⁹ It seems important to me, especially when an umpteenth debate about identity is being inflicted on us by the state, that we should keep looking for ways to counter the mirage that local cultural continuity and tradition are somehow life-saving, or the idea that a “return to the past” would not be affected by the upheavals of the present. As the poet Kathy Acker so aptly puts it: “I’ve never regarded identity as anything more than performative. However, there are always contexts.”²⁰

Jean-Roch Bouiller: For me, the notion of vernacular is first and foremost linked to a family culture which, very early on, made me an admirer of rural museums like the ones in Champlitte, Ambierle, Ballenberg, Hessenpark or Skansen, which were designed as microcosms. The context in which I consider this notion is therefore primarily that of the French and European regions in which I grew up and now work. I also very soon came to the conclusion that the world presented in these museums is irrevocably no longer the world of today. Which leads to the nagging question of how to link these two apparently opposite worlds – how can one be interested in a bygone world without being backward-looking, how does one come to terms with the gulf between localism and an aspiration toward the universal? There are, of course, a great many possible responses to this disconnect, and reasons why we nevertheless continue to be interested in such questions: a desire for historical knowledge (the present can only be properly understood if we draw on the past to become familiar with the roots that nourish the present, which is particularly the case, for example, in architecture or linguistics); a desire for exoticism and a change of viewpoint (by being exposed to a different world, one increases tenfold one’s ability to step back and analyse this one); or a taste for geography and the various subjects it encompasses (geology, climate, hydrology, and also subjects like linguistics, architecture, and ethnology).

So, for me, the vernacular is fairly clearly linked to a geographically localised culture, which has its roots in a history that is also local, but which has a capacity to reactivate itself or to reactivate questions that arise in a globalized present.

It has to be said that there is quite a lot of stuff in the domain of the vernacular that no one would want to throw out: local vineyards, the AOC and AOP – the appellations of origin of all those fine gourmet foods –, the particular methods of construction, restoration and designing public spaces that give such different landscapes in Savoie, Brittany or Provence. Conversely, the vernacular also conveys ideas or practices that are commonly despised by intellectuals and artists, and which are readily described as nauseating (and give rise to the distrust mentioned above): an inward-looking attitude, dislike of outsiders, traditions that have usually been resurrected in order to be presented as untouchable markers of identity, the folklorisation of certain festivals; I could go on.

The ambivalent feelings one may have towards the vernacular should also be examined historically. Contempt for the local developed in the twentieth century along with the spread of the phenomenon of globalisation. The renewed interest in the local that began at the beginning of the twenty-first century could be seen as a response to the various crises - ethical, ecological, economic - that have arisen out of that same globalisation.

Baptiste Brun: As Jean-Roch points out, we need to be aware, from the outset, of the ambivalence of the word “vernacular”. It is important not to underestimate the “bipolar” nature of the word. The recent reception of what Laurent Jeanpierre calls “politics of the roundabouts” in relation to the vast phenomenon of relocation, of which the *Gilet Jaune* movement is the tip of the iceberg, shows how difficult the matter is.²¹ Admiration for the local often goes hand in hand with an underlying contempt.

Actually, I find the label “vernacular” a tad irksome. Apart from its would-be scholarly tone, and the fact that by definition it’s a bit pretentious, it prolongs the fascination for a localised, slightly ingenuous, quite probably cute and praiseworthy Other. At least as long as it behaves itself. In my research and my thinking, I’ve never used the term. My thesis strayed into the field of *Art Brut* as Dubuffet conceived it. Dubuffet had originally coined the expression as a poet rather than a theorist, without defining it. He sought out his “*art brut*” (“raw art”) in folklore, colonial ethnography, psychiatry and archaeology. The works he looked at in museums, among amateurs or in psychiatric hospitals were literally the objects of those sciences. They based their authority on a number of artefacts that defined their own jealously guarded discipline. The bald Dubuffet was not fooled: it is through the act of labelling and defining that things get assigned to a fixed category. Thought is frozen, preserved, kneaded, and in a box. Preferring to search for objects resistant to these categories, Dubuffet called that rush to formulate “asphyxiating culture”. The culture of the “clergy” – which has to include us, incidentally! In this system, which is still prevalent, the vernacular is what is minor and will remain minor, i.e. at the bottom of the hierarchy: peasants, natives, Arabs. The omnipresence of the minor is necessary to the dominant way of thinking. If this state of affairs is to be

17. See for example: Anselm Franke, Irene Albers (ed.),

Animism. Revisions of Modernity, Zurich, Diaphanes, 2012.

18. Emmanuelle Chérel, *Loredreamsong de Latifa Laâbissi. Déjouer le Blackface*, 2011, downloadable on; http://recherche.beauxartsnantes.fr/sites/recherche.beauxartsnantes.fr/files/140617_LLAABISSI_Lore_1.pdf

19. Presentation of the show *White dog* by Latifa Laâbissi during the presentation of the 2019 programme at the Théâtre National de Bretagne, Rennes, 2019.

20. Kathy Acker, “Paragraphs”, in *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 28, No 1, Identities (Spring, 1995), p. 87.

21. Laurent Jeanpierre, *In Girum. Les leçons politiques des ronds-points*, Paris, Éditions La Découverte, 2019.

brought to an end, there will have to be radical changes.

Sherman's thesis is vital of course and stimulating. But its imperialist component - an Americano-centric view of the Old Continent - suggests misleadingly that French ethnology as embodied in the post-war ATPs (*Arts et Traditions Populaires*) was purely and simply an adaptation of the colonial apparatus, an ethnology of the Other, repatriated and adapted to mainland France in the context of the primitivist withdrawal that followed decolonisation. I don't think that is the case. While the former did not necessarily anticipate the latter, historically, the two advanced together side by side. The Breton alcoholic or the Savoyard cretin were still "the natives" for Parisians when the notion of folklore developed in the 19th century. While the conditions and the consequences were not the same for populations as for communities, the effects of domination were often similar with respect to the vernacular.

Lotte asked how one would view the Mona Lisa in a darkened, Quai-Branly Museum-type scenography. As the Mona Lisa, I would say. And a Savoyard sharpening-stone sheath in a conceptual art installation at the IAC? There, as a conceptual art object. The gaze does not attach meaning in that context. It is simply exercised, although it is an informed and, de facto, conditioned gaze. This is why the vernacular has to be viewed through the prism of historicity, like any object. It is more a matter of how things are used that is crucial here, rather than their categorisation in some fantasised *appellation d'origine contrôlée* ("verified origin" is such a strange assertion, when you think about it). The vernacular, or at least the gaze that one brings to things and practices that are designated as such, is by definition a matter of conditioning, a situated gaze. And usually an *overseeing* gaze.

É.R.: It is important to be explicit in our use of the term "vernacular" as well as what we mean by "contemporary art" because it seems to me that the two terms cannot easily be equated. As a way of defining what I understand by the vernacular, I would say that the signs of vernacular cultures are more easily recognizable when they contrast with the manifestations of a global culture (I use the plural for the one and the singular for the other, a theoretical bias that oversimplifies the relationship). For example, Bruno Dumont's *Joan of Arc* (2019) is to Adrian Grunberg's *Rambo, Last Blood* (2019) what vernacular cultures are to the dominant culture: i.e., living forms versus a fixed standard. The comparison is easy with films, where formats are easily recognizable, but less so elsewhere.

If the definition of the vernacular is clear enough in its opposition to the vehicular, which is associated with the expression of an unattached, dominant, global culture, it is less clear how it relates to art, which is not fully in line with the vehicular. What should one do then with these oppositions without battering them down? I turn to Geneviève Fraisse: "The stereotypes we are invited to combat are images, imaginary figures rooted in the collective unconscious. [...] The stereotype, despite the effort to combat it, could trap us in an archaic invariant. The act of challenging it might reinforce it."²² Identifying contemporary vernacular forms in art can help us rethink our formal and aesthetic conceptual frameworks and our habits. The vernacular can perhaps reveal what is art culture as opposed to the false naturalness of a cultural

background, and thus disaccustom me from the environment in which I am steeped. Indeed, this is often the role we expect of anything that seems to be in opposition to a given "milieu": for a long time, primitive art was assigned this revelatory role, and the female muse also had her turn – all those designated as the Other with a capital "O". But that would be to use vernacular cultures for curative and fantasy purposes. And what milieu is so pure and capable of being contrasted with another? We can observe their effects from the way they blend and influence each other. Could art be observed from the standpoint of the vernacular rather than the other way around? By reversing the perspectives, contemporary art could be seen as a specific vernacular culture that would abandon any urge towards hegemony.

As Lotte suggests, it is important today to recognize the distinctive features of art, of its system and its history. By removing the various fig-leaves that art history uses to disguise class and race, we rediscover the pale nakedness of uniform aesthetics. Turning the tables like this works quite well if we imagine Jeff Koons - key figure, archetype of the artist as businessman, dominant force in the international art market - as an insular folk artist, living on the island of Manhattan. Although his island has a long-standing international reputation, the aesthetic he has developed is a pure product of his milieu. True to the image of the great original artist, he proclaims proudly that his aesthetics, his imagination and his values are typical of a white North American upper-middle class man of the 2000s. Is it a dominant form of vernacular art? Today, many critical approaches contextualize, genderize and racialize art history, effectively ending the primacy of historical models. They identify dominant spheres of aesthetic influence and offer insights into minor but nonetheless powerful parallel histories and aesthetics. Scholarship has entered a phase in which a "multiple truth" is expressed, to use a term coined by Geneviève Fraisse. This is why, following Fraisse, I think, as Isabelle Alfonsi does in her recent book *Pour une esthétique de l'émancipation*, that by composing "lineages" of artists from our approach, by linking artists who have, in their practice, given expression to their own vernacular culture, we will see mixed practices and aesthetics fall into place alongside them.²³

If I pin great hopes on what the vernacular does for art - although I don't know if the reverse is true; whether art does anything for the vernacular - the dream that art can influence, acts upon and revitalise popular, neglected, marginalised or invisible cultural forms is an old one. Art is more accurately a place where such forms are registered rather than a place where they are transformed. Artists assimilate their environment and refresh their practice in contact with it. Whether they transform it is another matter. If art acts on our private or collective imaginations, that, in my opinion, is something significant in itself; it is already "that old shifting dream" (*Ce Vieux Rêve qui Bouge*).²⁴

S. K.: I have one more question for Katia and John, and it's as "blunt" as my first one: to what extent do you think about working locally? I use the word "local" here deliberately, following film-maker René Vautier and his idea that one can "live and film in one's own region."²⁵ A recent reading of art history argues that with globalisation a new international art and a new international style have emerged and developed simultaneously across the globe. This would be the case of modernism or conceptual art, for example. But characteristics linked to the place and context in which a particular work is created must still exist. And those characteristics could surely be described as vernacular, could they not?

22. Geneviève Fraisse, *Les Excès du genre. Une enquête philosophique*. Post-scriptum: la "multiple vérité", [2014], Seuil, collection "Point", réédition 2019.

23. Éditions B42, 2019.

24. Titre d'un film d'Alain Giraudie, (2001), autre exemple d'un cinéma vernaculaire contemporain.

25. In 1970, after a number of years of work and militancy in Africa, René Vautier created *L'Unité de Production Cinéma Bretagne* (UPCB). This film production cooperative promoted independent Breton filmmaking using its own technical and human resources. It was with the UPCB that he made his best-known film, *Avoir vingt ans dans les Aurès* ["Twenty years old in the Aures Mountains"], as well as other films about political battles in Brittany (*Quand les femmes ont pris la colère*, 1976, *Marée noire colère rouge*, 1978), but also and always about the world political situation, for example his 1976, anti-apartheid film *Front Line*.

J.C.: In my creative work, I don't particularly seek to connect with vernacular practice. I don't think the notion legitimises any kind of creation. And although I am not specifically adopting an artist's point of view for the purposes of this journal, it nevertheless influences the way I analyse things. I'll give you an example. I'm fascinated by props - things like acrow-props or wooden beams used to shore up buildings during construction because they embody stresses and strains in action. As a result, I became interested in those wooden struts that are wedged into openings such as doors or windows - and I've kept notes on them whenever I've come across them. Some builders arrange them in a zigzag, others in an X, and so on, everyone has their own method. I have made quite a number of pieces from these shapes, which I regard as characteristic of the vernacular. The builder makes a formal decision depending on the wood at hand, what they have been taught, and the architecture itself. I could apply this kind of analysis - which is linked to very localized know-how - to several other of my productions. *La Mort dans l'âme* relates to the butchery trades, *Réserves* is about the genocide of the Aborigines through alcohol, *Butoir* is a multiple replica of a Fulani stool and I used tie and dye for some of my paintings. These genuinely local technical approaches and some form of documentary aesthetic underpin my thinking.

You make the point in your question that there are various readings of art history. I actually think it is wise not to fall into any form of historicism. Having said that, the idea of modernity in arts, and its culmination, modernism, are part of a dominant school of thought that is gradually becoming established, not in a style, but in international norms and practices. That's a fact. But, on the strength of that, to imagine that the white cube, curatorial and museum dynamics, critical approaches, the effects of "biennialisation" and other specific features of contemporary art might be capable of producing a vernacular form: I don't think so, and I even think the exact opposite is the case. It has been said that we get "the same" Carl André exhibition in Berlin, New York, Sydney or Paris. But it strikes me as a real *tour de force* when one remembers that Carl André's work had incorporated the place, the light and the visitors, as a basis for the sensitive, intelligible scenario intrinsic to the ontology of a work of art.

Working to fit the context: i.e., the possibility of a subtler and more focused approach that involves constantly readjusting things. It strikes me that some artists - in spite of this tendency towards generalisation through globalised and globalising thinking - manage

to find the cracks that enable them to bring out something that is local: Simon Starling did this with the magnificent gesture that won him the Turner Prize (*Shedboatshed - Mobile Architecture No.2*, 2005) but also some works by Adrian Piper or Gina Pane. Actually, we have seen that some artists use specific contexts to engage in poetic, creative and technical processes. I am thinking of Laurent Tixador reconstructing World War I pillboxes in documentary mode; or of Andrea Zittel's Living Units in which the interaction between local know-how and the production contexts converge with great intelligence.

K. K.: My work clearly begs the question of localisation. What point of view do adopt in order to observe and understand the world? It seems to me that working "in context", as John puts it, is always fascinating. This can often lead to a collision that has to be turned into a symphony. This kind of gymnastics enables us, and obliges us, to move not only physically but also intellectually. To commit oneself to liminality, to have the guts to step outside one's comfort zone, to venture away from home and see how other people do things and try to understand what is involved for them. So my area of work is located on this threshold, between the comfort of my personal culture and the many fields and territories to be explored. I did a lot of athletics when I was young, I was a hurdler, which is about getting over obstacles while keeping your balance and your foothold. I digress a little, but I am thinking here about the distinction Emmanuel Hocquard draws between "frontier", "limit" and "edge", from which he draws three different political notions of translation. There is the traditional idea of the translator as a person who helps people cross borders, where translation is an exchange. Then there are translators who are confined by the limits of the genius of their language, in other words, the ethnocentric translators. Finally, there is what Hocquard calls the "blank spot" idea (after the habit in old maps of leaving unexplored territories blank), which sees translation as a "blank spot" on the map of one's own language: at a distance, an in-between, a hedge between the fields of literature or art.²⁶ The position and the task of the translator has occupied my thoughts for a long time. That task is surely ours, I would have thought.

26. Emmanuel Hocquard, *Ma haie*, Paris, P.O.L., 2003, p. 526.

Châ Uâ

LOUdîS MîUX à L'Mason

a JACQUES TROVIC
KîNd OF îNVENTORY
BAPÊTîTE BRUN

d'îN aUÊ'¹

Sketch for a monograph

Jacques Trovic was born on 15 June 1948 in Anzin, on the banks of the Escaut in the suburbs of Valenciennes, northern France. Creator of almost 400 “tapestries”, the biggest of which are some five metres wide, he has exhibited in many different countries. His work has been acquired by museums including the Collection de l’Art Brut in Lausanne, Switzerland and, in France, the Musée d’Art et d’Histoire in Cholet, the Musée des Arts Naïfs et Singuliers in Laval, the Centre Historique Minier in Lewarde and the Musée de la Création Franche in Bègles. This diversity makes you stop and think: there’s no pigeonholing the Trovic oeuvre, given its defiance of the habitual cultural categories.

Trovic himself has often recounted the beginnings of this unique body of work. With health problems keeping him out of school, he countered forced idleness by learning dressmaking and embroidering from his mother and sister in the family home, which would remain his workplace for the next fifty years. In his early teens he acquired the basics in painting and mosaic during a brief spell at the art school at Saint-Amand-les-Eaux, where he famously offered to help out a group of “tapestry ladies” running late with an exhibition for abroad. “I’m real good at sewing,”² he told them, and the offer was taken up. This doubtless boosted the timid youngster’s confidence, especially given the working-class cultural codes governing this mining community: “It didn’t go down well at first, with the locals. I mean, a boy sewing...” Things changed a bit, though, in the early 1980s, when the TV crews started turning up.

His first work, Trovic says, was begun in 1964 and finished three years later. He has kept it ever since. *La Scène espagnole* (Spanish Scene) is a wool tapestry measuring 135 x 235 cm that won him an art prize in Anzin. The title says it all: a fantasy of men and women flamenco dancers urged on by guitars and an enthusiastic audience under “Andalusian” arcades. A commonplace – a folksy cliché – backed up by a new technique and a fresh style. Once established, the style changed little, but the technique, while sure, evolved, and the 1970s brought relative success with collectors and gallerists interested in the fields of naive art and art brut. With exhibition following exhibition, Trovic had to keep producing, and all-wool works were out of the question. The solution was a blend of tapestry, embroidery and patchwork, using a miscellaneous accumulation of fine felt, glitter sheet, velvet and printed fabrics. Plus trinkets and lucky charms for highlighting. As a rule work began in the kitchen, with Trovic cutting up a piece of hessian to no fixed pattern. With his sister lending a hand he hems the hessian, then adds the overlay, on which he outlines a summary drawing with chalk or a marker. Next the different pieces of fabric are cut to match the elements of the drawing. His scenes are generally framed

1. “You always think things are better in other people’s homes.”
(Chti patois proverb, northern France.)

2. Jean-Michel Zazzi, *Le Monde de Jacques Trovic*, 2004, documentary film, 55’.
Unless otherwise indicated, the quotations are transcribed from the film.

along all four sides by a cartouche containing objects or figures echoing the central image: the diversity of the items making up *La Parade du cirque* (Circus Parade; 2013), for example, is amplified by the presence of jugglers, strongmen, clowns, acrobats and a seal with a ball on its nose. As if the artist were out to deepen space, to reveal all its sumptuousness, to satisfy our curiosity and our urge to embrace all the things and beings of this world. Trovic was generous.

A draft inventory

After *La Scène espagnole* Jacques Trovic worked continuously on his “tapestries”. His studio was the house he was born in, where the ground floor walls were decorated with posters for his solo exhibitions, and which he left only when age and infirmity dictated. His last years were spent in the La Pommeraie centre for the handicapped in Ellignies-Sainte-Anne, in Belgium, where he pursued his projects in the workshop run by artist Bruno Gérard. He died on 27 October 2018 in Ath, Belgium. According to Bruno Gérard, who has identified some 250 works by Trovic, the artist himself put the figure at around 400. There follows, in no particular order, a list of some of the subjects that gave their titles to pieces:

Les enfants dans la mine/Children in the Mine
 Carnaval du Portel/The Carnival at Le Portel
 La jonction souterraine/The Underground Junction
 Sainte Barbe/Saint Barbara
 La ronde des fleurs. Carnaval de Nice/ Carnival in Nice
 Hommage à Tintin/Tribute to Tintin
 Vernissage d'art contemporain/Contemporary Art Opening
 La fête foraine/The Fairground
 Le cheval de Troie/The Trojan Horse
 Danse de l'épée au Pays basque/Sword Dance, Basque Country
 Le marchand de ballons/Balloon Seller
 Halloween
 Soleil fumant la pipe/The Sun Smoking a Pipe
 Le tiercé/At the Races
 Paysage d'Extrême-Orient/Oriental Landscape
 Terre-Lune/Earth-Moon
 La modiste/The Milliner
 La pause-café/Coffee Break
 La parade du cirque/The Circus Parade
 Décor alsacien/Alsatian Setting
 Fanfare d'Haspres/The Haspres Brass Band
 J'irai revoir ma Normandie/I'll See My Normandy Again
 Enfants qui jouent à la planche à roulettes/Children Skateboarding
 Le port bigouden/Bigouden Harbour
 Boucherie-Charcuterie-Traiteur/Butcher-Pork Butcher-Caterer
 La prière du soir/Evening Prayer
 Le marchand de journaux/The Newsvendor
 Tapisserie écologie/Ecology Tapestry
 Le marché/The Market
 Le pardon de Lannien/Ceremony at Lannien
 Le hippie/The Hippie
 Coupeurs de canne à sucre/Cane Cutters
 La danseuse de french cancan/French Cancan Dancer
 Le cordonnier/The Cobbler
 Hommage à Van Gogh/Homage to Van Gogh
 Carnaval de Dunkerque/Carnival in Dunkirk
 La sidérurgie/Steelworks
 L'atelier de tatouages/The Tattoo Parlour
 La toilette ancienne/The Old Dressing Table
 Le casino/The Casino
 Adam et Ève/Adam and Eve
 Bassin houiller/Coalfield
 Babar/Babar
 Couple de mineurs polonais/Two Polish Miners
 Marché en Hollande/Market in Holland
 Le photographe et son modèle/The Photographer and His Model
 Les montgolfières/Balloons
 Les schlitteurs/The Sled-Drivers
 Les tricoteuses/The Knitters
 Les amants/Lovers
 Les gitans/Gypsies
 Les touristes photographient/Tourists Taking Photos



Jacques Tovic, *La Parade du cirque (The Circus Parade)*, 2013, tapestry and patchwork, 210 x 280 cm, private collection, On loan to the Paul Duhem Foundation, Belgium.



Jacques Tovic, *Les Enfants dans la mine (Children in the Mine)*, undated, tapestry and patchwork, private collection.

Le Tyrol/Tyrol
 Le Suisse de l'église/The Swiss at the Church
 Le rap/Rap
 Les botanistes à la recherche d'orchidées/Botanists Hunting Orchids
 Kermesse de la bière/Beer Festival
 Etc.

This draft of an inventory reveals the paradoxical ambitiousness of a humble, modest man. There is something all-embracing about this litany, something of a universe intermingling local memories, everyday trades, vernacular cultures and all the world's diversity: a universe on the scale of the kitchen in a small, working-class house in Anzin.

Trovic, poacher

As Jean-Michel Zazzi, director of a documentary about Trovic, has remarked; it would be both unjust and mistaken to see his work as that of a mere regionalist³. Trovic loved his natal North and made it one of his subjects, but there's no chauvinism here: he was celebrating what he was familiar with. "I love my region. The celebrations and traditions that have been kept alive. The carnivals and fairs in Dunkirk and Le Portel. The carnivals are still very much alive. There's a great atmosphere in Dunkirk, with processions and people in disguise, and there are the herrings thrown from the town hall balcony. It's really fun." A celebration of life, of neighbourliness, of the everyday. Here, of course, it's the local that prevails. Trovic bought his fabrics on the market in Anzin, where he also did his food shopping. The hessian backing amused him with the notion of "a potato sack or coal sack"⁴ holding the work together. Trovic was a child of the region's economic decline. Living in Anzin in the years following the first oil crisis was no sinecure: this was when the mines and the steelworks were shutting down and relocation of the textile industry was looming. In 1999 unemployment was running at 30%. Cradle of French capitalism in the mid-18th century – the Anzin Mining Company was founded in 1757 and counted Adolphe Thiers and Jean Casimir-Perier among its leading shareholders in the 19th century – a hundred years later Anzin was also that of the pauperisation of the working class and the rise of the miners' unions. Émile Zola's visit during the great strike of 1884 would give rise to his *Germinal*.

This is the traumatic history – a region and its people dominated – that Trovic engages with, fully aware of its potential for resilience. The smiling woollen sun that gladdens many of his works serves exactly this purpose: "The sun's my signature, more than my name. Every tapestry has a different sun . . . When the sun's out the people are happy, they're not sad and gloomy. I love the sun. You can feel that in my tapestries. What I hate is storms. Storms terrify me. I cover all the windows so as not to see the lightning."

It's true that there's a sense of nostalgia here. You can feel it in a lot of his interviews. He was fond of saying he wanted to preserve the memory of "vanishing occupations", conjuring up "the beauty of the dead" Michel de Certeau associates with popular cultures. Memory was a crucial issue for Trovic, as can be seen in *Children in the Mine*, with its figures bent under the weight of their subterranean labour, *Galibot* (Young Miner) and *Horse in the Mine*. At the same time his work looked to the present. He knew about working mines and showed one with gleaming sunlight dominating the monumental scene of his tapestry. He knew about the pride of work, too, when his *Jonction dans la mine* (Junction in the Mine; 1974) showed the miners of the Ledoux and Vieux-Condé pits meeting and shaking hands more than 500 metres underground on 26 June 1974. No more coal was to be extracted. Here only the beauty of that handshake seems to count – a fraternity in time that also shows through when he imagines a pair of miners in Poland. Beyond the iron curtain the alter ego remained the same, regardless of differences. And when he went to Nice to exhibit *La Ronde des fleurs* (Carnival in Nice, executed before he had ever been there) and other tapestries at the Musée Anatole Jakovsky in 2001, he was delighted to realise that the buildings he had portrayed were those, not of the Mediterranean, but of the working-class North: "You'll have noticed that the lady [who dominates the composition] is pretty much like the giants you see in festivals in the North. You've got North and South at the same time. A mix. I'd never been to Nice and the houses weren't like I'd made them, but hey, it came out okay!"

Trovic worked a lot at night and Bruno Gérard has related how his sister made coffee for him:⁵ "*Dins ch'nord, y'a toudis eun'alambic sus ch'fû.*"⁶

3. Collective work, *Petit Dictionnaire "Hors-Champs" de l'Art brut au cinéma* (Antibes: Les Éditions de l'Ancre, 2008,) entry 61, pp. 103–104.

4. *À la rencontre de Jacques Trovic*, interview by Pascal Rigeade at La Pommerai, April 2013. <https://vimeo.com/67809126>.



Jacques Tropic, *Inauguration d'une exposition d'art contemporain* (Contemporary Art Opening), 1977, tapestry and patchwork, 145 x 302 cm, Laval, musée des Arts natifs et singuliers, inv. 80.2.1

Jacques Tropic, *La Fête foraine* (The Fairground), 2012, tapestry on jute, embroideries and various sewn fabrics, 2012, 254 x 254 cm, Bruxelles, Art & Marges Museum



This nocturnal needlework took place against the diffuse backdrop the artist demanded: French TV in colour and a window open onto the world of vehicles and vernacular. The reputedly passive viewer was *making things*. The standard image of media trickle-down from supposed centres to supposed peripheries was transformed by human activity. Commonplaces and standardised, generic discourse might convince us of the homogenisation of forms, but Trovic metamorphoses and *in fine* reinvents them. As Michel de Certeau sees it, the everyday is invented out of countless ways of *poaching*. In this sense Trovic poached and reinvented this everyday, as illustrated by Jean-Pierre Kocherhans' photos of December 1983. Accompanied by his friend and neighbour Selim Mokhtar, Trovic is shown spreading his tapestries on the ground in a street in the working-class heart of Raismes or along the Sabatier slag-heap; and it's obvious that he's embellishing a territory marked by social violence, productivism and abandonment. Reclaiming a life bearing the stamp of domination – and doing it his way: “Everything with the left hand. I can't do anything right-handed, and I was often punished for that.” He took on agency for his own existence, for a practice involving no advance planning and no discourse: two features that probably explain why his work has often been associated with naive art – with which he identified in a clear, and *positively* ingenuous way – or *art brut*.

These attributions deserve our attention. If the connections between contemporary and vernacular are pivotal for this journal, the works of Dubuffet's “irregulars of art” most certainly have their place here. Fenced off from the dominant culture – from art in its sociological acceptance, in which discourse takes precedence over form – these works allow us to consider the qualifying processes that still prevail in today's art world. The recent writings of Kaira M. Cabañas⁷ have shown how globalisation has been turning to its advantage anything and everything to do with art brut for at least a decade, without acknowledging the specific character of the works. Yet thinking in the light of the vernacular can facilitate a better understanding of them in their historical context and by extension the resituating of the creative subject at the core of his or her relationship with the world. In the course of time Dubuffet came to see he'd been mistaken in regarding art brut as distinct from art culture generally; instead of his early, radical attempts to define the concept he had come up with in 1945, he opted for a more relativistic stance reflecting the inanity of speaking in the singular about a plurality of art cultures. Initially an ideal point of focus, art brut became a horizon, a functional concept which, once developed, enabled analysis of the artistic singularities it specified, together with the contexts they emerged from or which generated them.

Here the question of the local, if not the vernacular, has real potential. It leaves room for finessing, for evaluating works that escape the codes of the dominant, contemporary culture and so address forms and usages that de facto resist its imperialism. At the junction of mass culture and local cultures, these works – by, for example, Bernese farmer Adolf Wölfli, Tennessee-born African American Mary T. Smith or Jacques Trovic from Anzin – raise the issue of the dynamics of creative arts and practices in the 20th and 21st centuries. Voices of discord that let us discreetly dodge what is being imposed on our way of being. Discovered by Bruno Gérard in a wardrobe in the artist's house a few years ago, Jacques Trovic's *Trojan Horse* might in fact contain the key to an entire programme.

5. Bruno Gérard, “Jacques Trovic. Brodeur de métier”, in *Sous toutes les coutures*, (exh. cat., 17 May–23 June 2013) Bègles, Musée de la Création Franche, 2013.

6. Chti saying: “In the North there's always a coffee pot on the fire.”

7. Kaira M. Cabañas, *Learning from Madness: Brazilian Modernism and Global Contemporary Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).



Jacques Trovic, *La Pausse-café (Coffee Break)*, undated, tapestry and patchwork, 130 x 147 cm, Centre historique minier de Lewarde (inv. 1998.10903)

Jean-Pierre Kocherhans, *Sunlight in the grey North* with works by Jacques Tropic and the artist, under the watchful eye of Saim Mokhtar. Terril de Sabatier, 31 December 1983.



Jean-Pierre Kocherhans, Installation of tapestries by Jacques Tropic (15 June 1948-27 October 2018), *Raismes* (Northern France), December 1983.





Jacques Tropic, *Le Cheval de Troie (The Trojan Horse)*, 1967
tapestry and patchwork, 240 x 302 cm, Paul Duhem Foundation, Belgium.

Marc Jouffé, *La Ville es Bret*, 1974.



Images on the side and pages 20,21,25:
Vincent Victor Jouffé, *Les Auvents (The Awnings)*
2012-2019



a place, a name

JEAN-MARC HUITOREL
and VINCENT VICTOR JOUFFE

"The space of our life is neither continuous, nor infinite, nor homogeneous, nor isotropic. But do we really know where it shatters, where it curves, where it is disconnected and where it assembles itself? We feel a confused sensation of cracks, hiatus, points of friction, sometimes we have the vague impression that it is getting jammed somewhere, or that it is bursting, or colliding. We rarely try to know more about it and more often than not go from one place to another, from one space to another, without trying to measure, to grasp, to consider these gaps in space. The issue is not to invent space, and even less to re-invent it (too many well-meaning people are responsible for thinking about our environment...), but to interrogate it, or to just read it; because what we call everydayness is not self-evidence but opacity: a form of blindness, a mode of anaesthesia.¹"

— Georges Perec

Just as you're entering – or leaving, it depends – the village of Saint-Méloir-des-Bois, in northwestern France, a side road leads off to La Ville es Bret, where Vincent-Victor Jouffe's house is set back from the fork in the road and seems to be keeping a watchful eye on visitors. It's a big, solid building whose granite façade embraces both the living quarters and the farming facilities. The rear extends outwards in the form of two vast, cantilevered awning: beginning of privacy, but end of withdrawal; open to the north light, like a studio. This is where the artist lives and what a great deal of his oeuvre is about. This place is the true subject, in the course of a conversation supposedly about the notion of the vernacular. But isn't the term place enough, on its own, to take us straight to the heart of the vernacular? Isn't the oeuvre, by its very nature, vernacular? But then, contrariwise, doesn't the oeuvre take shape out of this contradictory, dialectical tension between describing the place and breaking free of it.

Jean-Marc Huitorel: On the way here in the car I was listening to the philosopher Cynthia Fleury quoting Novalis: "I'm not for the absolute, I'm for things. And there is no antinomy between things and the universal." And there I was coming to see you to talk about things and try to say a little something about the place they're in – the place where *you* are. *Local* stuff, because *locus* is Latin for "place". While obviously also trying not to talk solely about local colour. When I arrived just now you showed me some photos, not of you, but of your family, both sides, the Jouffes and the Roberts, and of your grandparents' wedding, your parents and your 27 cousins on the Jouffe side, and just as many for the Roberts. You also showed the 11 kids in your dad's family. And you said to me, very quickly, "When I was small I felt as if I'd been subpoenaed: Vincent-Victor is the one who'll remember. The one responsible for preserving not just things, but memory as well. I'm the one who recollects."

Vincent Victor Jouffe: That's a realisation that came later, when I was in an analytical phase. What I can say in concrete terms is that the cupboards were full. And when there are no accompanying words cupboards full of mute objects are no more than cupboards full of objects. There have to be people to pass the words on. The first person to take on this task was the grandmother who raised me. She was the last child in a family that had known deaths, conflicts and wars, and she lived in the same house as my parents. Among her many talents, she was an excellent dressmaker, pastrycook and gardener. Maybe I'm making things up in retrospect, but it seems to me that she taught me the names of flowers and the vernacular names of plants. In the family novel you don't have to be a genius to know your place exactly. For example, there are children who take up the family occupation, which is vital in the problematic world of farming. Then there are others more inclined towards regarding, watching over, keeping vigil, conserving;

1. Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, trans. John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 1999). Slightly revised translation.





and from that point of view we can see the relationship between the words “regard”, “watch over” and “grasp”. To regard is to gaze at intensely. The importance of the gaze and language. I belong to the category of artists who regard, represent, and cultivate the art of re-reading.

J.-M.H.: In this sense it’s significant that your *modus operandi* is fairly substantially photography; and in a way it’s your gaze that makes you the depository of everyday objects. After a tour of the hamlet of La Ville es Bret, where you happen to be the only resident, you invited me into your house and its rooms alternating, as you pointed out, between full and empty. You showed me lots of family bits and pieces, including clogs made by your grandfather Victor, and tools and stuff to do with agriculture and the farming life. All of it vernacular, of course, because there’s an attachment to a particular spot, but at the same time this is the opposite of a museum. It’s a rough-hewn, almost formless place. It’s the anti-ecomuseum. If we think in terms of the eccentric circles of Perec’s *Species of Spaces*, here we have the room we’re in, then the house, the awnings, the garden, the field; it all adds up to place, but there’s nothing picturesque about it – because if there’s something your images reject absolutely, it’s the picturesque.

V.V.J.: I was shaped by a literary education and I stick by my lyricism in an age that has given us so many icy, objective, detached images. I really want to preserve that element of lyricism, in the sense of the “poetic documentation” oxymoron that’s been applied to the cinema of Jean Vigo.

J.-M.H.: I can see why you defend lyricism, which is maybe the opposite of picturesqueness and doesn’t identify the vernacular with localism. You’ve spoken of La Ville es Bret as a matrix: could you tell me a little about the place – about this wellspring?

V.V.J.: Even if I only ever left the district for eight years, to study in Paris, that was the sole period of actually feeling Breton. Less Breton than provincial, in fact, being from a rural rather than a bourgeois background. That became clear to me much later on. At the same time, when you’re young a kind of miracle takes place, a suspension of a certain class consciousness, although it’s only temporary. Rootedness/uprootedness: the important thing was to do your studies a long way away – not even Rennes, but Paris. Then in 1994 finding myself in a parlous situation and getting back here in a hurry, with someone to put me up for free. I realised that to calm, cover up and pacify the symbolic violence I was faced with, I had to find words: for instance, saying the choice was not imposed, but voluntary; considering this place I’d been forced to return to as a workplace and a subject. This real is tangible: these paving stones, this grassy courtyard, these treeless embankments, this awning, this fibrocement in the farm next door. That’s the thing, that’s real, that’s where you are. Here’s the hamlet, and the words to describe it.

J.-M.H.: That’s why I like the term *lieu-dit* [literally “said-place”, a small, sometimes uninhabited locality]. A term that means what it says and says what it means. Cynthia Fleury stresses the importance of the dwelling and the act of dwelling. I’m thinking here of Étienne-Martin’s series of sculptures *Dwellings*.

V.V.J.: Speaking of dwellings, I once used the word “legacy” in a text, but now, at the age of 52, I realise there was no legacy. No one bequeathed me this place; I just watch over it. Psychoanalytically it’s more an imaginary,

bequest from my father. I recall that this house was part of the sharing-out of an inheritance between my father and his brother, a doctor living on the other side of the world. Not an easy heritage to handle for my father, who had given up farming. When I arrived totally panicked from the student residence in Antony, near Paris, I ended up here in this intractable place. No question of bequeathing something like this. It was more like a shelter for his children; that’s the important thing, especially coming from very loving parents. You were talking just now of the importance of a dwelling: when I arrived distressed, homeless because of water damage, works destroyed, no entitlements left at the student residence, this dwelling – pretty dirty, completely empty – became a shelter, an asylum in the primary sense.

J.-M.H.: Very soon, what was a providential shelter seemed to you embedded in a world threatened with rack and ruin. First of all because it’s an ancient building, rundown, fragile and surrounded by the devastated landscape of a declining agricultural world. These photos – the soil, mud, vegetation run wild – generate the tension your work is built on, with this shelter becoming somewhat entropic. At the same time all this is something very vernacular, in that you’re localised and this tension means you internalise your world. And thus offer landscape visions of an internalised world.

V.V.J.: I wanted to set this building in its surroundings, in its enclosure, and on 15 August 1995, the day of pardon by the Virgin Mary, I managed to take this series of 20 polaroids. Obviously they’re both a measurement of the time my walk took and, with regard to the entropy you mentioned, a kind of echoing of Robert Smithson’s *The Monuments of Passaic*. As I see it, my *Promenade de l’Assomption* is a seminal work: no frontal view of La Ville es Bret, but a sort of sliding gaze that brushes over a wayside cross with its crucifix gone, a shed, and the stream that’s been widened to form a little pool in the farm next door.

J.-M.H.: You photograph landscapes from very close, often looking towards the ground. A ground without horizon or sky.

V.V.J.: Much as I love the English approach to skies Bonington, Turner, etc. – for me the sky can’t be photographed and reproduced. Today it has been accepted that the sky is empty. I’m someone who looks at the ground.

J.-M.H.: It was the work of Yves Trémorin made me realise that the closer you get to your subject, the less local and more general and universal it becomes. You start out from a very specific place that opens out onto the commonality, precisely because a local ethnography is not part of your project.

V.V.J.: The first agricultural implements I found here – grain measures and horse collars – I photographed against a white backdrop, as isolated patterns. They formed the perfect interconnection with a whole series of drawings and paintings organised around a nodal gap. Years later, before they were destroyed, they were rephotographed in context, as part of this rapprochement.

J.-M.H.: You’re in this interspace between, on the one hand, an object destined for an ecomuseum and, on the other, the same object doomed to disappear. You’re halfway between the object’s disappearance and its reification in the ethnographic museum. I wonder if the same idea doesn’t apply to what, for convenience, we call landscape.

V.V.J.: To capture and disappearance I prefer vacillation between two states. I think the dissolution conjured up by Shakespeare's Hamlet "O that this too too solid flesh would melt / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!" can be readily applied to the world's flesh, i.e. landscape. The polaroid process is just right for crystallising this graphic, chromatic dissolution.

J.-M.H.: Your work is to a fairly large extent photographic and has long been associated – maybe it still is – with the polaroid. Could you tell me something about that? About the connection between the choice of medium and tool and this recreation of the world?

V.V.J.: Initially it was chance that started me using polaroids as quick notes in the studio in Antony. I think there were several reasons: ease of use, no adjustments, not having to get tangled up in all the technical stuff, the poverty of the images according to "professional" criteria, and the concreteness of the final object. The polaroid camera can be seen as a tool for a kleptomaniac or a food-gatherer, ideal for putting together sequences for each outing. The explanation is simple: unlike the 36-exposure roll of film, the stroller-photographer instantly has the image developing in his hand, and the resultant image will necessarily reflect this sequence. It's a kind of archaic montage. The polaroid also has a very practical virtue: it short-circuits the economic model of production. The artist is immediately in possession of the concrete elements to be organised via montage. The great thing about the polaroid is that it's simultaneously an image, an object and a reproduction immediately endowed with a certain weight. So, image, object, reflection and at the same time a rabbit you pull out of a hat. I was a dreamer as a kid, I loved sneaking off and losing myself in the natural world.

J.-M.H.: Fleeing, elusive – your photography's elusive.

V.V.J.: The work I managed to get done between 2000 and 2007 in the 75 hectares of the Jean de Dieu hospital in Dinan, Brittany, and which I'm now returning to in another context, is almost a health promenade; My use of the term "promenade" is not at all anodyne: the activity facilitates a kind of fluctuating attentiveness at the same time as you obtain something, as in food-gathering.

J.-M.H.: Where health is concerned, and mental health in particular, the tutelary figure is Robert Walser, author of *The Promenade*.

V.V.J.: I've just shown you the originals of this *Promenade de l'Assomption* of 1995, and since I had this offer from La Criée, I've been able to look through and sort the digital images. I've done a tour of the hamlet and noticed how vastly things have changed since last time. Not only has this empty house become completely saturated with stuff inherited after various deaths, the outside spaces have been greatly changed, with bits of gardens here and there around the building. After running a sample check I put all the digital La Ville es Bret photos indiscriminately into the same file. And there are utilitarian photos too, like the ones for the roofer, for example.

J.-M.H.: It seems to me that in addition to all this you had something else on your mind. Isn't it time we started talking documents?

V.V.J.: This group of images I'm showing you is just a sample from this year, but you know my twisted relationship with tools and technology. My father was *the* photographer in the family and that left me feeling highly ambivalent

about his passion; so for years, until 2014, I didn't have a camera except for the film and digital bodies he passed on to me. Psychoanalytically speaking that's really something! (*Laughter*) On the other hand I've addressed that iconic vernacular object, the family photo, in a number of exhibitions, among them *L'Île Manifeste (2): RÉVÉLER*, then *Arrangement*. It often sprang to mind, up until this summer, when I celebrated a big family reunion by starting a digitisation campaign that produced the images I showed you when you arrived. I think this archive is now the raw material for something different from everything I've done in polaroid and kodachrome.

J.-M.H.: Does it ever occur to you that your archive could be the actual artwork? Or is it still just a resource? I don't know what you're going to do with all these digital photos; some of them are postcard-ish and glamorised to the point of seeming ironic. And apart from the ones you showed me, I know you've worked a lot with contact sheets, with groups of images.

V.V.J.: I think there are two ways of fashioning a work of art: the modernist montage model and the picture model. When I put contact sheets together from several polaroids, there's an element of narrative involved, complete with ellipses and tensions. These aren't series, but edited sequences. Conversely, when I decided to enlarge 12 polaroids of earth and grass to picture size for the *Des-compositions* exhibition in 2004, they harked back to the abstract colour field model, and this changed the image's status.

J.-M.H.: To come back to the question of documentation, Jean-François Chevrier's seminar really counted for you.

V.V.J.: Profoundly so. I was one of the first students to take his classes when he was appointed to the *École des Beaux-Arts* in 1989, and I went to his final seminar – inevitably on Mallarmé – on 15 April 2019. It was titled *Transmission (construire, jouer, etc.) 1996–1997*. 1997 was also a year when I went back to Paris, where I attended Chevrier's tutorials, with their unhurried, descriptive and highly methodical analysis of the role of montage in Walker Evans's *American Photographs*. The interesting thing is the way the subtlety of the montage enables the book to transcend the mere collection of vernacular images. This was also the year of the run-up to Catherine David's *Documenta X*, with Chevrier as artistic advisor. What I discovered in Kassel was utterly different from all the art I'd come to know during my years of training, which seemed to be behind a glass wall. This was a post-Pop art, more and more eye-catching, post-semiotic: first you had an idea, then you tried to put it into effect. And when I saw the kids of *In the Street*, the film by Helen Levitt, James Agee and Janice Loeb, and plenty of other artworks, such as Marc Patout's unassuming images of the Le Cornillon site, I felt I had the right to go ahead.

J.-M.H.: In your work is the photograph, its aesthetic quality aside, a documentary object?

V.V.J.: Yes. I have no qualms about that, but it's a document that isn't afraid to assert itself, sometimes, as poetic, and even lyrical, as I was saying.

J.-M.H.: There's also in your case an unblushing subjectivity whose repetition ultimately creates art objects. Your eye is extremely subjective: it stems from you, the places you've lived in, your personal history and your family. But there's such a constant emphasis on bringing all this together that it ends up creating something which is the opposite of vernacular because it's a universal object. That's when the biography, or autobiography, also becomes omnibiography.

In *I Remember* each of Georges Perec's memories becomes shareable for his potential community of readers.

V.V.J.: It's this embodied subjectivity that renders the work's real much more complex. The absence of bodies in my work is only apparent. In these traces, these ruts left by tractors or cars in the grassy courtyard, there's nothing but body; body everywhere. Including in the private family tradition of the post mortem portrait. In the perilous exercise of photographing children. Not to mention in the still life.

J.-M.H.: Why are Chardin's still lifes sublime? Because they are part of the painter's biography. And you're right to speak of still lifes in your work, in the digital corpus of the interior views of La Ville es Bret – but also, sometimes, in the photos taken outside, objects on the ground or on the old furniture brought back from the family business in town.

Now it's time to talk about *Comices* (Agricultural Fairs). For anybody looking for a link with the vernacular in your work *Comices* is naturally going to spring to mind. Firstly because it's the best-known grouping, having been shown at the art centre in Dourven; and also because it was a long, ongoing project. This would appear to say something about a local custom, but in fact not as local as all that, since there are agricultural fairs all over the place. This group, and the films in particular, I found very touching. In a truly documentary sense you've pinned down what a deep-rooted small-farming culture could be on the cusp between the 20th and 21st centuries. These sixtyish men in caps, these children who are the small farmers of the future, all this speaks to me: this is my background and I taught for a long time in an agricultural secondary school, so I feel entitled to tell myself there's vernacular here. But documentary as well.

V.V.J.: I'd say documentary above all. When I went back looking for the people involved in the fair, I ran into a wall. They didn't want to hear about it. I'd been the familiar outsider who'd been gathering these images, this fake archive, for ten years; but also the witness to the extinction of the local fair. And faced with the fact that hardly anybody came to the exhibition, I told myself let's get back to basics: rather than pass the agricultural fairs off as vernacular celebrations, let's dig into the *département* archives for official evidence that they weren't local folklore, but a politico-administrative gambit designed to promote French agriculture. The *comices* are the exact opposite of the threshing festivals that proliferated in Brittany after 1968. I recall going as a child to one of the very first harvest festivals. Another, even more intense memory is of the centenary of the church of Plélan-le-Petit, with the whole parish dressed as in 1876; my father, of course, had assumed the role of village photographer, and I've only just rediscovered his Kodachrome coverage. There I am with my sister, both of us sporting black aprons and clogs.

To come back to the *Comices*, unlike a lot of artists I've never tried to set myself a programme or a protocol. For me the theory develops along with the work and I accept the doubt and discouragement this involves. I started off with the night images, prowling around before the animals and participants arrived. These images read like an exploration of a kind of fairground theatre; they're not like the photos of each episode, from the first competitions to the closing dinner. Firstly there's the insistent physical presence of the cameraman, recording the different moments and actions. Then there's the follow-up, the re-reading of the images, when a sort of syntax of the event emerges, along with established markers, such as the barrier, the cattle and the calves' buckets. It's the steady gaze of this "familiar outsider" that becomes analytical in the etymological sense. This is why long-term ventures are always rewarding.

J.-M.H.: You said just now that the *comices* aren't as selfless as people think, and that they're part of an agricultural promotion strategy. But that's the way things are now. The world of farming is no picturesque idyll. And there you are putting forward a vision of the *comices* that's both distressing and pretty lucid where the economics of farming are concerned. That's the real of things today. It's not a folksy local custom, but very much a vernacular practice in that it comes from the place. The *comice* at Plélan-le-Petit isn't exactly the same as in Plouguerneau and other places. There are local characteristics to be seen in your images; and don't they tie in with the intimate aspect of this place where we are right now, with its family context?

V.V.J.: I'm thinking of this morning and the beginning of this visit, with a few random family photos taken in the course of a particularly grief-stricken year. And I was thinking again of my uncle the sculptor: the son of a cobbler; he succeeded in getting admitted to the art school in Rennes in the complicated context of the 1940s. He had set up as a sculptor in Plélan-le-Petit before becoming a stone-cutter for the reconstruction of cathedrals destroyed during the war.

J.-M.H.: That's why video's relevant today, both as documentation and work of art. There's nothing to be ashamed of in speaking about place. With regard to literature, I think of Pierre Bergounioux, Pierre Michon, Annie Ernaux.

V.V.J.: In fact, just yesterday I was mulling over this business of Breton identity, and I said to myself that the writers Annie Ernaux, daughter of a bar-and-grocery owner in Yvetot, and Marie-Hélène Lafon, whose father was a farmer in the Auvergne, were more familiar to me than the Breton man of letters Pierre-Jakez Hélias. What's enriching me now, after an intellectual itinerary – psychoanalysis, semiotics forged at Paris 8 University, is the urgent need for recognition of the social history of creative people, notably in respect of the (admittedly controversial) transclasses. I think that no investigation of the issue of artistic creation and the vernacular can afford to ignore where the protagonists are coming from, class loyalties and the conflict inherent in moving from one class to another.

J.-M.H.: One thinks here of Didier Éribon's *Returning to Reims*, and of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology-inflected *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*.

V.V.J.: In this year of 2019, if there's a context where I really came to grips with the vernacular, it was in the brand new junior secondary school in the little next-door town of Broons. The exhibition was called *Si loin, si proche, Maroc 2005-2019* (So Near and Yet So Far: Morocco 2005–2019) and I was able to show fragments of an investigation in pictures into villages in the Tafilalet region of Southern Morocco. I showed oasis agriculture under stress from lack of water and the vernacular architecture of the Ksour (fortified adobe villages) falling apart because of non-transmission of ancestral skills: this moment when pisé is being abandoned in favour of cinderblocks.

J.-M.H.: You did this as a slide show?

V.V.J.: Yes, same as I've been doing on a regular basis ever since the *Aperçus* (Glimpses) exhibition at Château de La Roche-Jagu in 1997, then in *Kompost*, an exhibition in Germany. Projected images were so familiar to me as the son of a driving teacher and someone who'd learned art history from slides at high school. I really loved putting slide shows together, and some of them were filmed and made into video montages.



When I arrived here – after the first Polaroids of inherited objects, as I recall from what was written on the envelope they were in – I borrowed a video camera. The site was so arid, so harsh. Using the formats of the time – S8, HI8 – I set up my tripod and, working for hours in sequences of less than a minute, I literally cut the Ville es Bret building up into individual shots, along with the two awnings, which were still sheltering farm machinery that included a harrow. This slicing-up and this doubling of the gaze with video bring together a clinical metaphor: I'd really sensed this house as a body to be sounded and even – who knows? – dissected. Barely three years earlier I'd failed to hand in my MA dissertation on art and psychoanalysis. The field of reference was triple: phenomenology with Merleau-Ponty, Lacan's theory of the gaze as part-object, and most importantly Foucault's analysis of medical perception in *The Birth of the Clinic*. The title was an exercise in grandiloquence:

La Veille du corps, trajets de l'objet regard. (Invigilating the Body: Paths of the Gaze-Object). and nobody had advised me to rein in my ambitions. To make up for this failure, this non-delivery, and plagued by a sense of debt, I put together *Veille – La Ville es Bret*: and to a greater or lesser extent the entire chain of images that followed is resonant with this unfinished dissertation. So two projects await me: to digitise all this video stuff and to plunge anew into the existing digital mass. Except that I no longer want to work alone.

J.-M.H.: But maybe one day you'll leave this place...

V.V.J.: Who can tell? Maybe one day I'll no longer be the caretaker of this house.

Ḥāṭīā Ḥāmēlī
wrote to
Seulgi Lee
Seulgi Lee
wrote to
Ḥāṭīā Ḥāmēlī

Tues. 1 Oct. 2019 07:03,

Katia Kameli <katia.kameli@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Seulgi,

I suggest that our exchange take the form of a to-and-fro in words and pictures.

I've started to collect some documents together that I would like to share with you.

Here, to kick off, are my first questions:

What made you want to start researching Berber ceramics?

Was it the forms or the signs that caught your attention?

Have you established a connection with other vernacular forms?

I've attached a first photo taken in Oulja, the potters' village where I went in September during the opening week of the Rabat Biennial where I presented the sixth instalment of my *Stream of Stories* project.

Love,

Katia

[LL.1]



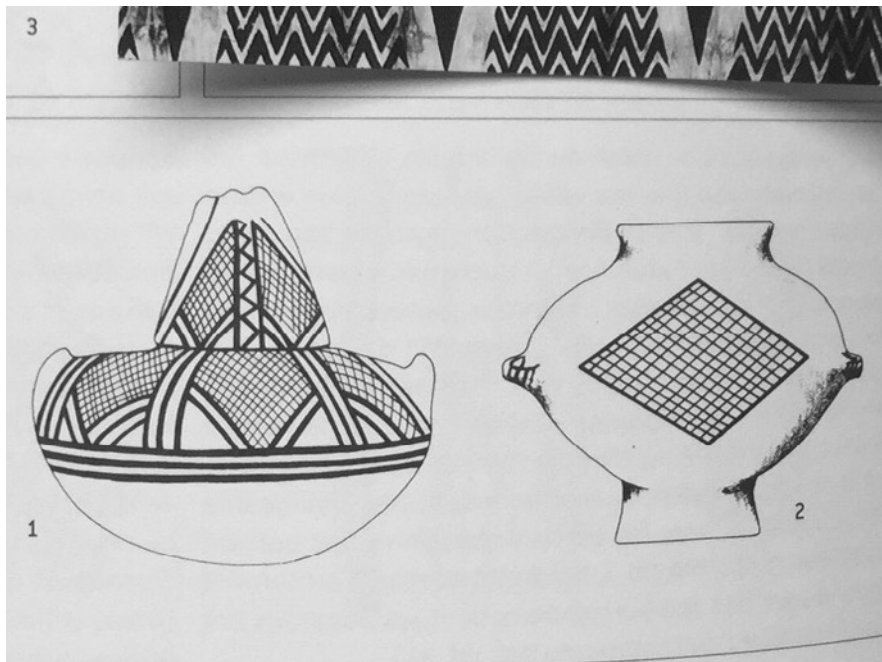
[LL.1] A kiln in Oulja, Morocco,
photo by Katia Kameli, 2019.

Wed. 9 Oct. 2019 11:34,
Seulgi Lee <seulgi2@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Katia,

I first became interested in the basketwork. Archaeologists had apparently noted traces of basketry on the oldest pottery found. They deduced that people began by weaving a basket and then modelled the clay inside it. This completely overturned previously accepted hypotheses that pottery was the oldest material that humans had ever made.

When Claire Staebler, the curator, invited me to do a project at L'appartement 22 in Rabat, an art and research centre created by Abdellah Karroum in 2002, I decided I wanted to work with craftsmen. It was there that I became aware of the existence of rural pottery in the Rif, in the north of Morocco. It intrigued me because of the very schematic, drawn motifs which reminded me of the prehistoric carvings in Marija Gimbutas's book, *The Language of the Goddess*.



[ILL.2]

[ILL.2] Extract from the book: Marija Gimbutas,
The Language of the Goddess,
Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1991.

Thurs. 10 Oct. 2019 16:02,
Seulgi Lee <seulgi2@gmail.com> wrote:

Katia,

What was it that attracted your attention on the photo of the kiln at Oulja that you sent me?

In Rabat, my idea was to work on a form of vernacular pottery called machruk or chwari jaj, which became the title of my project. It consists of a baby's bottle with a pair of spheres linked together, reminiscent of breasts. The pottery is porous, even when it is fired, which is ideal for refreshing or purifying the liquid it contains. It is fired in the open air in an improvised kiln with donkey dung pellets for fuel. I extrapolated this form to suggest it to a potter, Aïcha Lakhali, who has been making proper machruk for a long time. Some traditional Rif pottery, which is produced outside the market, is becoming less utilitarian and more decorative. The pieces are getting smaller and smaller. In the past, they were very sturdy, with a wealth of shapes and patterns depending on who modelled them and decorated them. Jar - khabia, pitcher - guembour, jug - barrada, goblet - ghorraf, ablution basin - qdah, milk vase - hallab, churn - chekoua or afkir, dish - gas'aa or farrah, lidded tureen - jabbana, brazier - mejmar, butter pot - qallouch, terrada for preparing pastilla leaves, etc.

If I had to remember one image from this adventure in the Rif, it would be this: in a thick mist, fruit on the prickly pear that grows next to the khabia, which is as big as the little boy following me. He is the grandson of the potter from the village of Ain Bouchrik, where the serious mountains overlooking the great lake El-Wahda begin.

Accessible from Ourzagh by collective taxi, three hours drive to the north of Fez, then you have to go up into the mountains; it can take hours to find someone returning from another weekly souk who is willing to take you there.

Aïcha has an ethereal smile, in a flash, she throws a small pot in front of my eyes, working it energetically in yellow clay with her nimble hands. In nine minutes flat. Her son handles the business side and even sells abroad. In the course of travel and research, I found myself with a long, long list of rural souks. Apparently,

there is even a souk reserved for women. The women's pottery appellation stretches from one of the Canary Islands to Tripoli. This form of pottery is always rustic and is modelled, not turned. Things I saw: there is no traditional pottery in the Pre-Rifian rural souks, in Ourzagh, in Taounate, nor in Ain Aïcha, apart from undecorated tagines and braziers adapted to small gas bottles. It was raining, humid and very cold in about April. It seems that the potters fire the day before the souks. Which I didn't see. I'm beginning to think that this pottery is no longer part of local life.
Seulgi

Thurs. 10 Oct. 2019 16:32,
Katia Kameli <katia.kameli@gmail.com> wrote:

I know exactly which pottery you're talking about. I saw some pieces in Oulja in the village I told you about, near Rabat. They particularly struck me because they are very close to what the Berber women do in Kabylia.

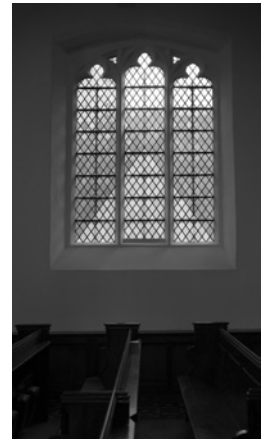
It's interesting that it was basketwork that led you to ceramics. For my part, I got into it from textiles when I was invited to exhibit at the Church of St John the Baptist, Newcastle for my exhibition *Ritournelle*. I covered six of the stained glass windows of that medieval church with translucent vinyl. Each assemblage of colours and geometric shapes was created from a diamond pattern. They were based on patterns found in the traditional crafts of the countries from which the main migrant communities in Newcastle come from: Phulkari textiles from the Punjab region, clothing from the Kuba community in the Congo, Chinese fabrics, embroidered carpets from Syria, fabrics from the Rashaida community in Eritrea and mosaics from Iranian and Iraqi mosques.

In *A Thousand Plateaus (Mille Plateaux)*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define the notion of refrain (*ritournelle*) in terms of territory and territorialisation. The recurrence of certain motifs makes up our cultural fabric. These motifs can then become bearers of national identity or emblems of cultural specificities. *Ritournelle* relates to the idea of the native land. People often take a piece of earth from their country in their suitcases. During my research on textiles, I realized that certain motifs were recurrent, such as the triangle, the diamond, the snake, etc., motifs that are also found on Berber ceramics.

Here are some images.

Katia

[ILL.3]

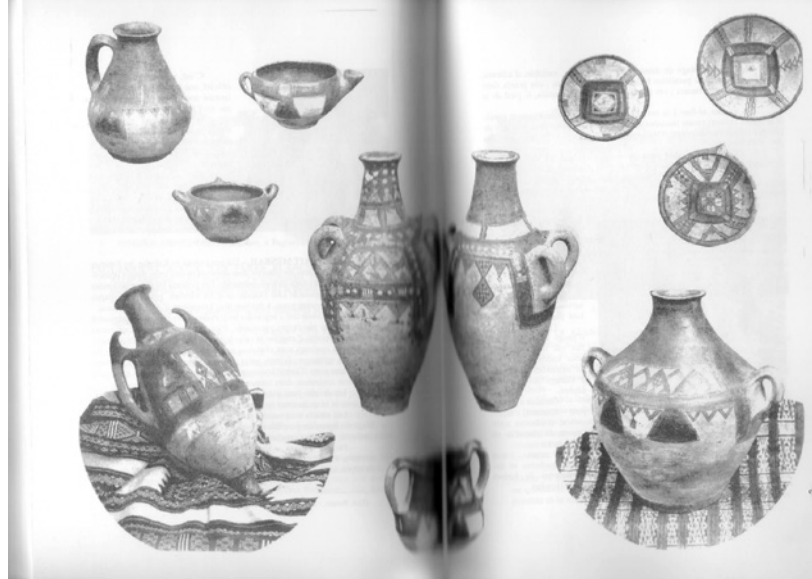


[ILL.3.4] Katia Kameli, exhibition views,
Ritournelle at the Church of St John the Baptist,
Newcastle, 2018.

[ILL.4]



[ILL.5]



Fri. 11 Oct. 2019 16:41,
Katia Kameli <katia.kameli@gmail.com> wrote:

To answer your question about the Oulja photo, I found that kiln somehow inspired me to get firing.

I really like the way you describe your experience in Ain Bouchrik, it's very vivid. I imagine you in the Rif trying to climb the mountain to see Aïcha. That's also the name of a very dear aunt of mine, she must be about the same age, she's always smiling and jovial too, and spends her life looking after other people. When I was little she taught me how to make matlouh: it's a semolina bread that you knead for a long time and then bake in a large clay pan. Binding, creating, caring, protecting, this is undoubtedly the role of women in the Maghreb culture. The bread and the clay, which you knead and then bake... I'm beginning to see that photo of a kiln that I sent you as a matriochka.

Did you achieve what you wanted with Aïcha?

As I wait for your reply, here is a picture of some Kabyle pottery that I took some time ago. On the jar you can see the multiple diamond patterns that form triangles. It is a standard pattern, an ideogram of fertility; it is called maqrouth in Arabic like the semolina and honey cake with an almond in the centre. I'm sure you've already tasted it :)

[ILL.6]

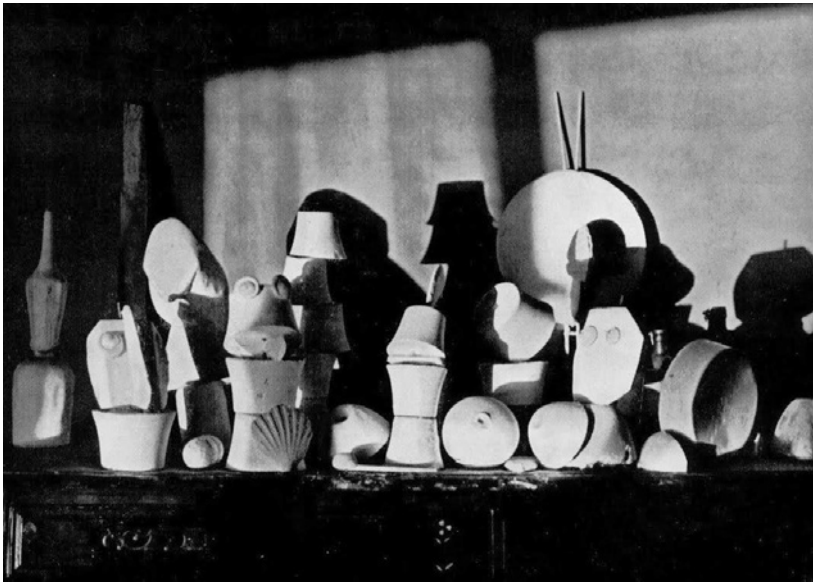


[ILL.5] Extract from the book: Martial Remond,
*Au cœur du pays kabyle. La Kabylie touristique
illustrée des années trente*, (1933),
Alger, Necib éditions, 2018

[ILL.6] A montage of Kabyle pottery
by Katia Kameli,
photo by Katia Kameli, 2019.

Mon. 14 oct. 2019 10:00,
Seulgi Lee <seulgi2@gmail.com> wrote:

Katia! Is that an assemblage that you made yourself by placing one piece of pottery on top of another, with one object upside down? And the one on top, is it a brazier? I see there's a picture of Max Ernst behind your assemblage, here's another one that I've had on my computer desktop for ages... Well, how about that! Then a photo in the village of Ain Bouchrik, where Aïcha works.



[ILL.7]



[ILL.8]



[ILL.9]

[ILL.7] Max Ernst, *Jeu de constructions anthropomorphes*, 1935, fragments of plaster sculpture.

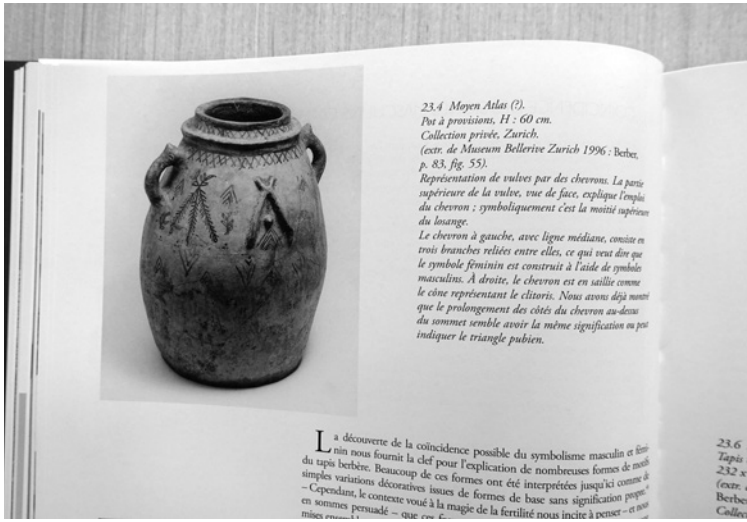
[ILL.8] In the entrance of the Lakhels' house in Ain Bouchrik, 31 October 2018.

The prickly pear fruit takes on the shape of large jars.

[ILL.9] Oughoulmi, Fom Zguid, southeastern Morocco. Storage jars, terracotta, rounded bottom, cut-out lid, 1st half 20th century, H. 63 and 58 cm. Private collection B.-A., Zurich.

"The two vases form a couple. The handles of 'the woman' are placed horizontally, those of 'the man', however, are placed vertically and extended upwards by two ears. In addition, the male jar has a spout. The decoration of these two specimens, placed on circular rings, is identical; it represents both sexes: reticulated trapezoids alternating with empty spaces adorned with fine wavy lines on the neck and parallel lines on the lid."

Extract from the book by Bruno Barbatti, *Tapis berbères du Maroc : La symbolique. Origines et significations*, Courbevoie, ACR Édition, 2006, consulted at the house of Sara Ouhaddou, a French artist of Moroccan parentage who recently settled in Rabat. Incidentally, at the Tetouan School of Fine Arts, artist-teachers such as Younes Rahmoun conduct workshops for students to familiarise themselves with craft skills as well as notions of contemporary art from the West.



[ILL.10]

Thurs. 24 oct. 2019 14:53,
Katia Kameli <katia.kameli@gmail.com> wrote:

Thank you for your reply and sorry for the delay in answering.

Yes, it's an upside-downer, a kind of backslang, you might say. It is a brazier on top, kanoun in Arabic, which means order, law, more of a representation of the masculine. I think it strikes a nice balance with the jug, the jar, ikufan in Berber, which is more specifically a representation of woman.

It's amazing how many images connect up our research. We've known each other for so long without knowing that we share these lines of desire.

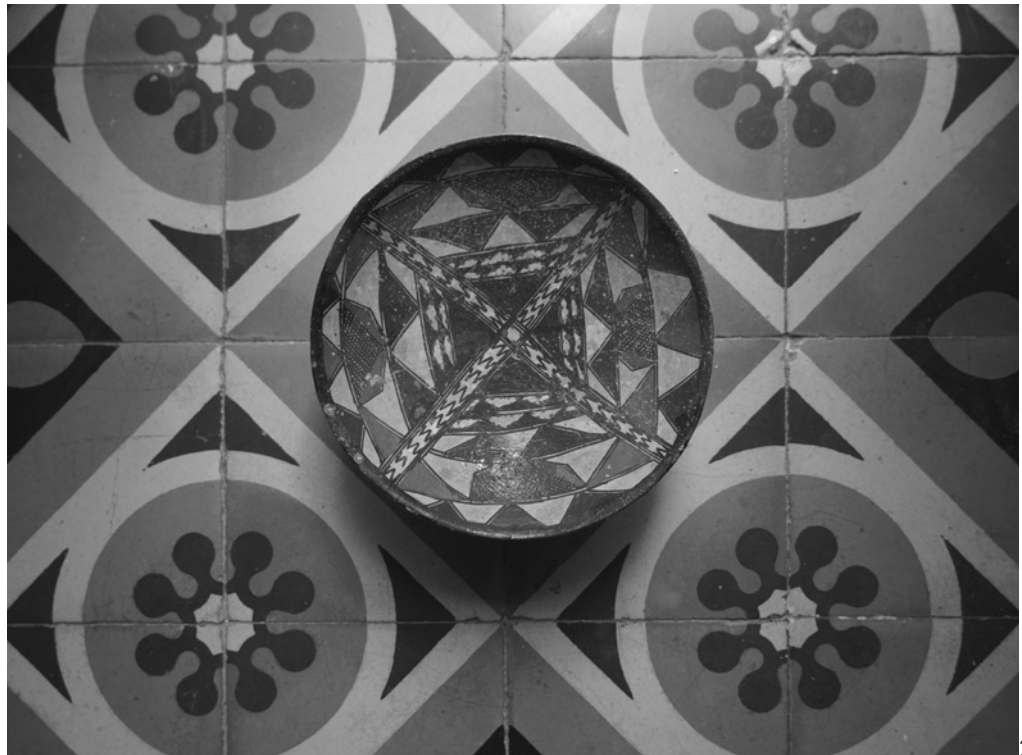
Will you be showing the result of your work with Aïcha in your exhibition at La Criée?

Here is another photo of Kabyle pottery taken in Algeria and one of me with Lucie Laflorentie in Oulja, we are looking at the techniques of the potters who add concrete to the clay!

Gabrielle from the Cube in Rabat took this one.

Love

[ILL.11]



2

[ILL.10] Mid-Atlas (?). Storage pot, H. 60 cm. Private collection, Zurich, in *Berber*, Museum Bellerive, 1996,

p. 83, fig. 55.

"Vulvae represented by chevrons. The upper part of the vulva, seen from the front, explains the use of the chevron; symbolically it is the upper half of the diamond. The chevron on the left, with a median line, consists of three branches connected to one another, which means that the female symbol is constructed using male symbols. On the right, the chevron protrudes like the cone representing the clitoris. We have already shown that the extension of the sides of the chevron above the apex seems to have the same meaning, or may indicate the pubic triangle."

Extract from Bruno Barbatti, *Tapis berbères du Maroc : La symbolique. Origines et significations*, Courbevoie, ACR Édition, 2006.

[ILL.11] Kabyle pottery in Algeria, photo Katia Kameli, 2018. .

[ILL.12]



[ILL.12] Katia Kameli with Lucie Lafflorentie in Oulja, photo by Gabrielle Camuset, 2019.

[ILL.13] Extract from the book by Martial Remond, *Au cœur du pays kabyle. La Kabylie touristique illustrée des années trente*, (1933), Alger, Necib éditions, 2018.

Mon. 28 oct. 2019 00:40,
Katia Kameli <katia.kameli@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Seulgi,

These are pictures that I found in Martial Remond's *Au cœur du pays Kabyle*, the photographs were taken between 1920 and 1930. The caption of the photo entitled *The Potter at Work* reads: "Like all work that Kabyle women do, making pottery is fraught with superstitions; for example, never fire on a Wednesday, otherwise all the objects will crack. The best day is Tuesday."

[ILL.13]

Le matériel est des plus modestes : des supports en terre cuite remplacent les tours ; des raclettes de bois et des galets de rivière servent à égaliser et polir, parfaire, en un mot, le travail fruste des mains.



Comme tous les travaux auxquels se livre la femme kabyle, la fabrication de la poterie s'accompagne de multiples superstitions ; par exemple, il ne faut jamais cuire un mercredi, sinon tous les objets seraient fendus. Le meilleur jour est le mardi.

Outre les articles d'usage courant, on en fait qui sont vernissés, pour cadeaux et fêtes, ou ustensiles d'apparat, à l'usage des familles aisées.

Certains modèles, pour touristes, représentent d'adroites stylisations du chameau ou de la tortue.

D'autres sont des lampadaires et des gargoulettes de formes compliquées.

Potière au travail

In the other scan, which accompanies a postcard from my collection, you see statuettes from the sanctuary of Knossos in Crete. In six hours' time I'll be on my way to admire it with my daughter :)

In the lower half, you see a pregnant-woman vase from Kabylia. The text here is interesting as well: "A pregnant woman cannot make pottery: working clay is manipulating as yet unborn life, which could have a damaging influence on the unborn child or on the fertility of the woman."

[ILL.14]



(a) Déesse en attitude de *jelwa*. Statuette en terre cuite du Sanctuaire des Bipennes, Cnossos, Crète, époque minoenne.
(b-c) Vase femme-enceinte, Kabylie (Algérie). Coll. Makilam, Brême.

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de cette période – un interdit qui était aussi de mise dans la culture populaire européenne. Mai est le mois de la croissance, d'un processus de vie qui a déjà commencé et que l'on ne peut pas entamer « en retard ». De même, on ne cuira pas la poterie que l'on a façonnée avant le quarantième jour après la récolte. Si un décès survient, toute l'argile non encore utilisée doit être jetée. Les produits inachevés également. L'argile est une matière vivante qui, d'après les anciennes croyances des Kabyles, peut attirer l'âme dangereuse du défunt⁴³.

Une femme enceinte ne peut pas faire de la poterie: travailler la terre, c'est manipuler la vie encore à naître, ce qui pourrait avoir une influence néfaste sur l'enfant en gestation ou sur la fécondité de la femme. La matière souterraine est analogue à la matière devenant vie dans l'utérus « pétrissant » et modelant. Tisser, c'est aussi donner la vie: le tissage est donc à mettre en parallèle avec la maturation de l'enfant avant la naissance. Voilà pourquoi, dans tout le Maghreb, de nombreux rites protecteurs pour les jeunes filles célibataires étaient en vigueur: celles-ci devaient certes apprendre à manier le métier à tisser, mais en prenant les précautions nécessaires.

Symboliquement, le tissage est analogue aux noces et au travail de la terre: les trois processus libèrent des forces qui, en l'absence d'une attitude correcte, peuvent s'avérer catastrophiques. La tisseuse doit avoir une éthique irréprochable, sinon elle attire des forces indésirables qui chargent son œuvre d'une influence



Do you know if Aicha has similar rites in the Rif?
Much love, Katia

[ILL.14] Extract from the book by Paul Vanderbroeck, *Azetta. L'art des femmes berbères*, exhibition catalogue (Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 25 February-21 May 2000), Ghent, Ludion, Paris, Flammarion, Brussels, Société des expositions du palais des Beaux-Arts, 2000.

Mon. 28 oct. 2019 00:46,
Seulgi Lee <seulgi2@gmail.com> wrote:

Thank you, Katia.
Yes, I moved the whole exhibition from Apartment 22 to La Criée!
As we didn't find a nice pattern on our pottery, I designed a shelf
that begins to suggest alphabets. As for the rest, I'll give you
an answer in pictures.



[ILL.15]

[ILL.15] Seulgi Lee, *MACHRUK* كورثيم, terracotta and painted wood, 2018-2019
In collaboration with Aïcha Lakhali, Ain Bouchrik, The Rif, Morocco. Exhibition view at L'appartement 22, Rabat
Seulgi Lee © adagp

[ILL.16] Aïcha the potter at work in a drawing by Seulgi, a kind of extension of Rif pottery.

[ILL.17] We find Aïcha in the 1980s, in a book by André Bazzana, Rahma Elhraiki, Yves Montmessin, *La Mémoire du geste. La poterie féminine et domestique du Rif marocain*, Maisonneuve & Larose, 2003.

The caption on the photo says: "Successive phases in the assembly of a khabia in a Slès potter's workshop" Like most women's potter in the Rif, it is shaped, not thrown.



[ILL.16]



[ILL.17]



[ILL.18]

[ILL.18] At an antique dealer's in Fez. He has the largest collection of Rif pottery in the medina. In the middle is one of the forms of *machruk*, which means "together" in Arabic, a traditional baby's bottle with two round shapes joined together. The merchant apparently sold his personal collection of photographs of potters to Berrada Hammad for her book, *La Poterie féminine au Maroc*, Casablanca, Publiday Multidia, 2002.

[ILL.19] With Latifa Toujani in Rabat, the artist and founder of the pottery museum in Chefchaouen. The motif running through the handle of the jar seems to depict a frog. Photo Seulgi Lee



[ILL.19]



[ILL.20]



[ILL.21]



[ILL.22]

[ILL.20] Drawing No. 1 of Figure 422, after 7000 year old Central Anatolian pottery, depicting an anthropomorphic bee, bears a striking resemblance to our frog from the Rif.

Extract from Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1991.

[ILL.21] Women weavers at work near Fez on an order from Europe. In the centre is a piece of pottery. The price of the work is calculated by the metre. They work in an apartment adjoining a kitchen. Their children play next door. They are part of an association that helps them find work. In actual fact, it's a bit more complicated than that.

Photo Seulgi Lee

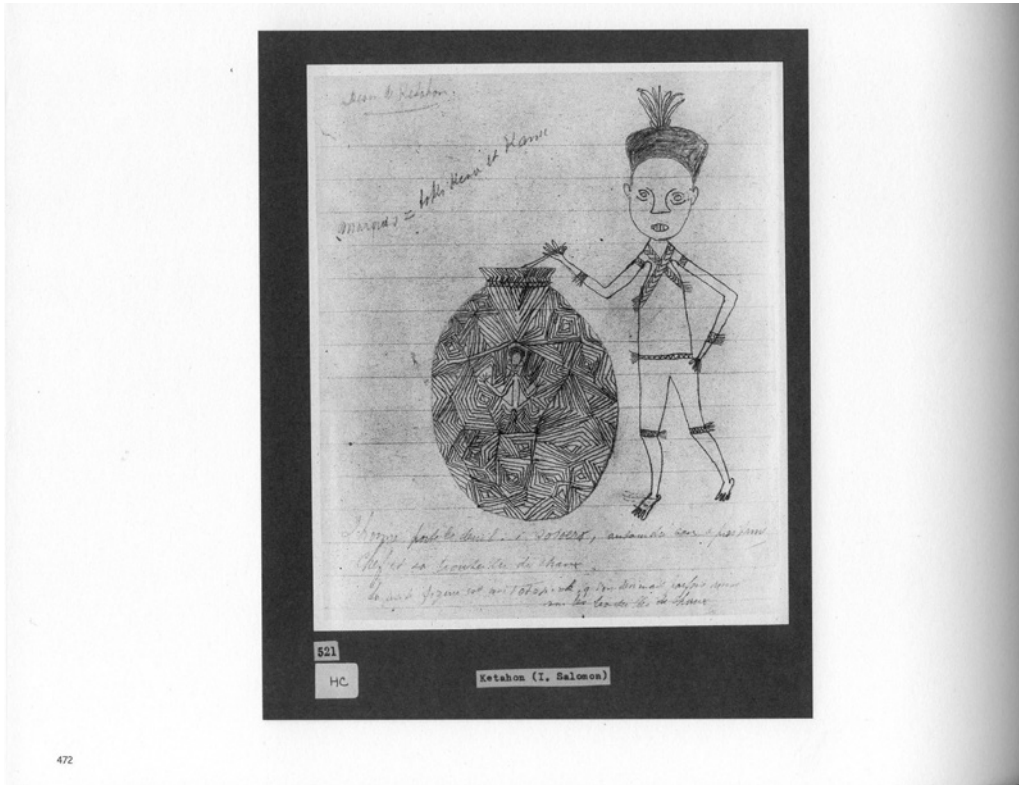
[ILL.22] At the weekly souk in Ourtzagh, the day after rain, I couldn't find any pottery apart from a few braziers and large undecorated dishes.

I get the impression that Neolithic motifs are perpetuated, not in the traditional pottery, which is made for antique dealers, but rather in the contemporary motifs of uncertain origin on fabrics and mats. Although the only explanation I was given was that it was raining, I would like to go back and see if there is still any traditional pottery intended for local people.

Photo Seulgi Lee



[ILL.23]



[ILL.24]

Thurs. 31 oct. 2019 10:20,
Katia Kameli <katia.kameli@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Seulgi,

I conclude our dialogue from warm and beautiful Crete. I've walked around the magnificent Archaeological Museum of Heraklion.

I thought of you as I admired the Minoan terracottas from 6000 to 1900 B.C. They are really impressive, they have a mystical aura, I fee.

[ILL.25]

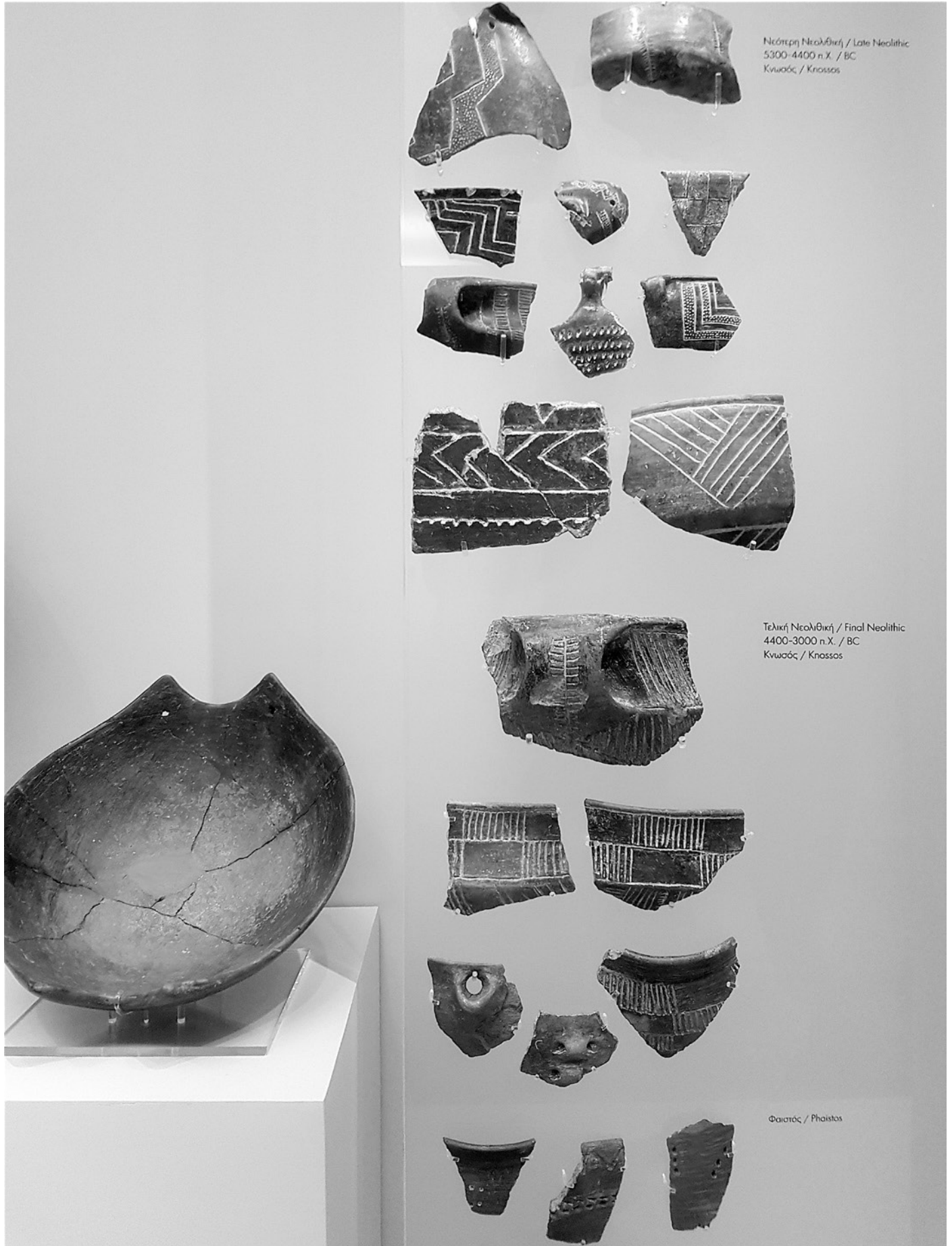


[ILL.23] Pottery from the Majiayao culture, 5,000 years ago in China! We talk about "ceramics" here. Extract from Soichi Tominaga, *The Great Museums of the World*, Vol. 15, Chinese Art, Tokyo, The Zauho Press, Shogakukan Publisher, 1971.

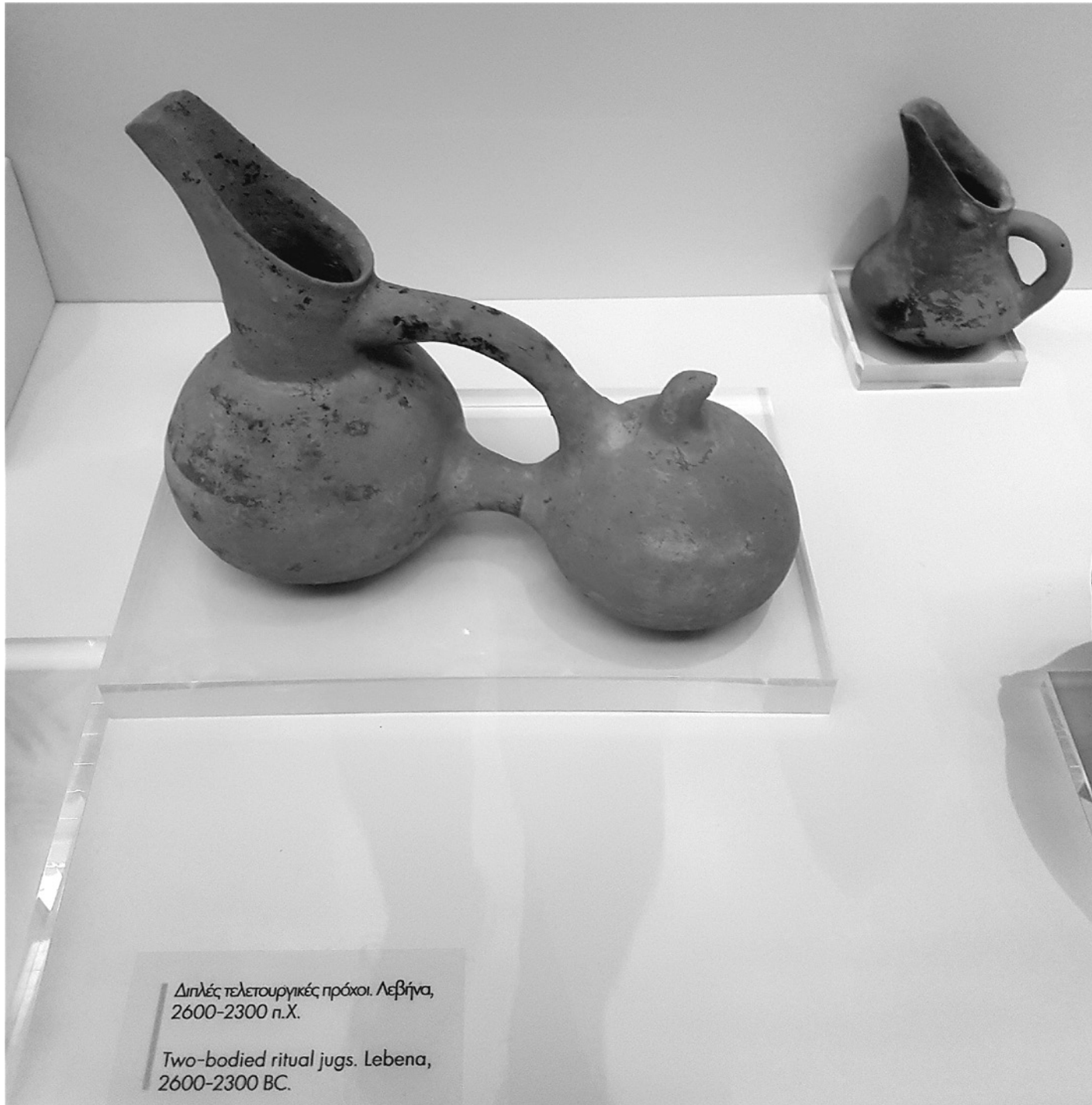
[ILL.24] Ketahon (I.Salomon), extract from photo album number 7, in *Les Albums photographiques* by Jean Dubuffet, Lausanne, Collection de l'Art Brut, 2017, p. 472.

[ILL.25] Pottery from the Heraklion Archaeological Museum, in Knossos, Crete, photo Katia Kameli, 2019.

[ILL.26]



[ILL.26] Pottery from the Heraklion Archaeological Museum, in Knossos, Crete, photo Katia Kameli, 2019.



[ILL.27] Pottery from the Heraklion
Archaeological Museum, in Knossos, Crete,
photo Katia Kameli, 2019.

[ILL.28]



[ILL.28,29,30] Pottery from the Heraklion Archaeological Museum, in Knossos, Crete, photo Katia Kameli, 2019.

[ILL.29]



[ILL.30]





Valentin Carron *Archaïque Fades Cercle*, 2011, bronze, black laquer, 6 x 10,5 x 8 cm
© Valentin Carron Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich Courtesy the artist
and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / New York



FRAGMENTS OF THE FRAME

JOHN CORNU
and VALENTIN CARRON

In their reinterpretation of vernacular forms and symbols frequently drawing on the cultural heritage of his native canton of Valais, Valentin Carron's works – sculptures, paintings, installations – point up the nature of identity as construct. Playing on the ambiguity of materials and an iconography of power and authority, they challenge the very authenticity of things.
A conversation with the artist

John Cornu: "I attach no excessive importance to these recollections from various stages of my childhood, but it's convenient for me to collect them here at this moment, for they are the frame – or fragments of the frame – in which everything else has been set." I'm quoting Michel Leiris from that incredible book, *Manhood*,¹ Impeccable prose reminiscent of the best of Georges Bataille, punctilious and readable at the same time... It's clearly a question of roots and a kind of "geolocatable" determinism. How do you see this in your creative process of creation? The notion of cultural origins is a hovering presence in all your work, wouldn't you say?

Valentin Carron: I don't know if it's actually something tangible. I have vague memories that were imprinted on my mind during my childhood and teen years in Fully, in the district of Martigny. I still live there and I don't see myself suddenly upping stakes to spend my twilight years in Punta Cana. Fully's small and set in the bottom of a U-shaped glacier valley, so that seen from below the mountains are great formless, immobile masses. I recall the accents you heard in the 1980s, my father's generation trying to get out of winemaking and into building, the Opel Senator the mayor drove, and the reek of petrol. Not to mention the dances each village organised, usually to raise money for the football club; they always ended badly, in a kind of muted mournfulness. But my memories have more to do with the senses: roughcast on the walls for touch; the smell of frying on the way home from school just before noon; a couple having a shouting match with Iron Maiden in the background; and for sight, following an open sewer and watching the trout hooking onto the current with the help sometimes of algae, sometimes of toilet paper. But that's all gone now; the place doesn't exist any more and I don't miss it. But I've got occasional flashbacks and maybe I try to make use of these situations – these vague sensations – and instil them into my works. I like to think that can be called style.

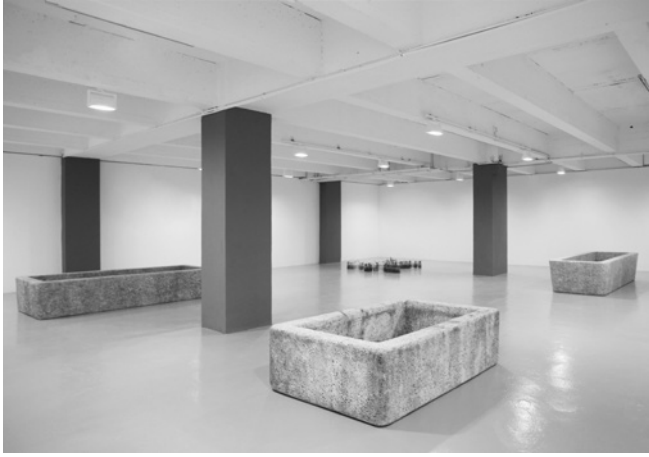
J.C.: Style... A tall order. That makes me think of Meyer Schapiro's *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society*², which sets out to study styles

from a historical viewpoint: "The historian of art," Schapiro says, "attempts, with the help of common-sense psychology and social theory, to account for the changes of style."³ He doesn't beat around the bush: he deconstructs Freud in his own abrasive way, then takes on Heidegger. So yes, the concept of style seems relevant and the sensory reminiscences you mention take me back to reconsidering things in terms of their origins. This could be a response to Fabrice Stroun in the interview,⁴ when he questions you about alpine imagery, vintage wine, drystone walls and so on. I've also had the chance to see some of your pieces, like *Bassins* (2017), which are directly related to your everyday setting. I like the idea that our immediate context is a sort of reservoir of forms the artist uses as the basis for technical, visual and poetic scenarios. For me, dwelling on localised, singular objects and media represents a creative asset. To put the matter simply, doesn't the intensity of specific situations like arguments with Iron Maiden playing or certain skateboarding tricks make them triggers for works of art?

V.C.: I'd like to come back to the matter of authenticity raised in that interview. It's a concept I've always wanted to take issue with, because it seems to me that the very fact of laying a claim to authenticity proves that the claimant doesn't have it, or not any more. I didn't learn this from someone like Meyer Schapiro, but by reversing a McCain French fries slogan to make it read, "Those who talk most eat least." For me there's nothing sadder than seeing entire regions of Europe playing the folksy roles expected of them, with local people happy to slot into their allotted parts. Of course, I understand that these regions are striving to maintain a balance between a "traditional" local authenticity and a tourist economy that can generate other economic benefits. Art, unfortunately, has often been caught up in this. What interests me here is the loss of balance, the slippage – certainly not the collapse, which would be too spectacular for my taste. And hey, I've just realised that what we were saying earlier can be applied to art and the art market: marital arguments and certain skateboard tricks really can act as triggers, and if there's Iron Maiden's Aces

1. Michel Leiris, *Manhood*, trans. Richard Howard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1984) p. 14. Slightly revised translation.
2. Meyer Schapiro, *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), p. 52.

3. *Idem.*, p. 36.
4. Fabrice Stroun, "Entretien avec Valentin Carron" in Katya Garcia Anton and Beatrix Ruf (eds.), Valentin Carron, (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2006), p. 25.



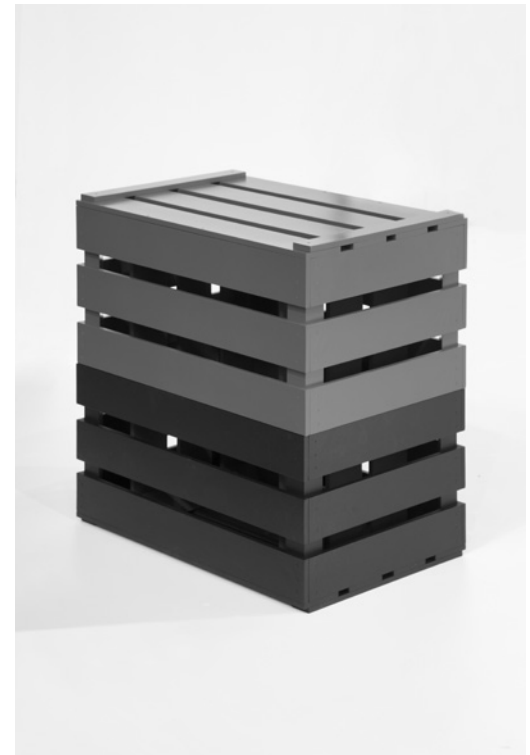
[ILL.1]



[ILL.2]



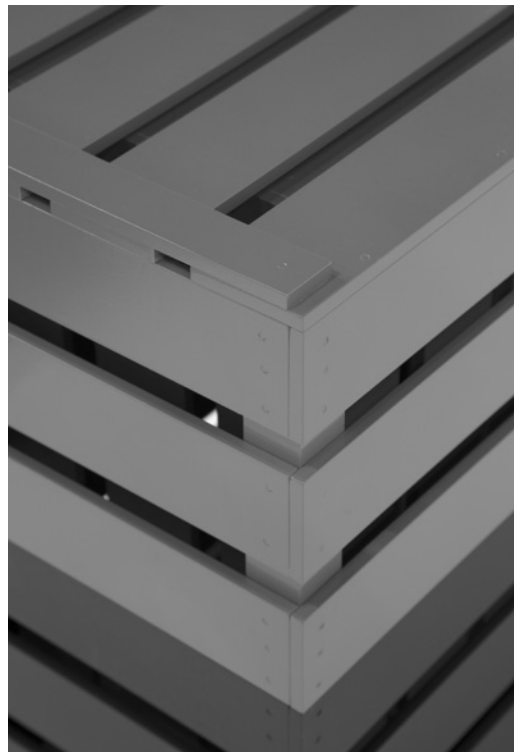
[ILL.3]



[ILL.5]

[ILL.1] View of the Exhibition "Valentin Carron, Gioia e Polvere", Galerie Art & Essai – Université Rennes 2, 2018 © Valentin Carron Photo. Galerie Art & Essai Courtesy Valentin Carron ; Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich/New York and kamel mennour, Paris/London
[ILL.2] Valentin Carron, *Bassin (rouille)*, 2017, Polysterene, glass fiber and acrylic resin, acrylic paint, 52 x 191 x 111 cm © Valentin Carron Photo. archives kamel mennour Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris/London

[ILL.3] Valentin Carron, *Ravage with Granite (after André Tommasini)*, 2014, Polysterene and resin, 147 x 162 x 130 cm, View of the Exhibition "L'autoroute du soleil à minuit", kamel mennour, Paris, 2015 © Valentin Carron Photo. archives kamel mennour Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris/London



[ILL.4]

[ILL.4.5] Valentin Carron, *Feu ultra foncé*, 2018, aluminium and enamel paint, 40 x 60 x 64 cm © Valentin Carron Photo. archives kamel mennour Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris/London

Fragments of the Frame

[ILL.6.7] Valentin Carron, *Aluminium clair aluminium*, 2018, aluminium and enamel paint 40 x 60 x 64 cm
© Valentin Carron Photo. archives kamel mennour
Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour,
Paris/London

[ILL.8] Valentin Carron, *Teflon Longways Wearily*, 2013, bronze – 8 elements, variable dimensions
© Valentin Carron Photo. archives kamel mennour
Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour,
Paris/London

[ILL.9,10] Valentin Carron, *The Sour Ricotta Stands out and Laughed Blindly*, 2016, glass fiber and resin 230 x 118 x 6 cm
© Valentin Carron Photo. archives kamel mennour
Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour,
Paris/London



[ILL.6]

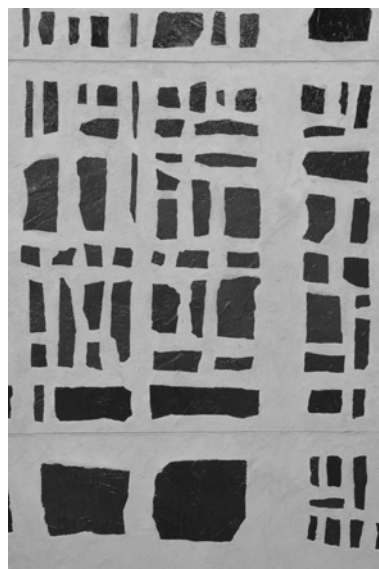
[ILL.7]



[ILL.8]



[ILL.9]



[ILL.10]

High in the background, so much the better.

J.C.: The concept of authenticity and the issues revolving around it seem to me different from certain ecologies – in the broad sense of rationales for living – signalled by your work. I'm not unaware that there have been some pretty absurd controversies about some of your works, but I'm thinking in terms of more contemplative stuff. In particular of Julien Maret's text, which throws together the bottle-green Peugeot 505, the Café de l'Avenir and the brass band receptions, the all-purpose room upstairs (ham, lotto, basket of goodies, round of cheese, etc.), crates of apples from the fruit co-op, Madame Irma in apron and headscarf, the games room (Street Fighter, Pac-Man, Arkanoid), the slides in the community centre, changing skateboard wheels and decks (Santa Cruz, Zorlac, Vision, etc.), and ollies over two or three boards. And so on. This text offers a near-exhaustive list, a reaction which sometimes reflects a Helvetian form of authenticity but above all embraces the spectrum of a shared experience. In other words we're dealing not with the traditional and the touristic, but with certain specific cultural traits, hybridised, compiled and sampled within the actual exhibitions. This can range from mopeds to crushed brass instruments to skateboards. There's a recurring element that strikes me in this probably autobiographical approach: an alliance between a form of retrospective melancholy and an attitude inclining a little (for some a little more) towards irreverence. But maybe this interpretation is highly subjective, not to say wide of the mark – what do you think?

V.C.: I think in the text you quote from Julien Maret was retrospectively letting off steam, often cruelly but detachedly re-memorising what our pre-teen years in this village gave us. A pride and a sense of belonging that slide into lucid disillusionment. An adolescence which, whatever it's like and whatever the context, was essentially irreverent. The irreverence you mention, which I might even call resentment, is like a pebble carefully stashed away in a pocket. Speaking ironically, I could say it's a part of my personal specifications.

J.C.: I'd like to get away from these generalities and look more closely at some of your works. I'm thinking of *Maurice, Richard Harelip* of 2013 and similar pieces shown in the Swiss pavilion at the Venice Biennale. I'm thinking of *Souffleteur* of 2005 and *Bassins*, respectively shown at galerie kamel mennour in Paris in 2017 and Galerie Art & Essai in Rennes) in 2018. Could you explain some of the circumstances or mechanisms that draw you towards this kind of idea?

V.C.: I think the main thing these works have in common is my relationship to the idea of any form of authority. *Maurice, Richard Harelip* originated in a local café that's the headquarters of a brass band. There were flattened instruments hanging on the walls; I didn't really try to find out who had decided to do this, and it wouldn't have interested me much anyway. What did interest me, on the other hand, was to pay tribute to this kind of bad taste. So via small ads and, more directly, music stores, I got together some old wind instruments and crushed them by jumping on them. Then I took the results to a foundry. There's no hiding the pleasure I got out of playing the belated New Realist artist.

J.C.: In an earlier discussion we talked about our respective tastes in sound, which ranged from Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds/Kylie Minogue to Hubert-Félix Thiéfaine and including Pixies and Jeff Buckley. We must be teenagers at heart. You also mentioned more "unsung" French groups like Scorpion Violente, Noir Boy George and Ventre de Biche. I know, too, that you're interested in an "aesthetic" form of music video – the scare quotes being needed to make it clear that this isn't immersion in some kind of saccharine HD idealism. What are the features or characteristics that attract you to these sometimes slightly outmoded materials?

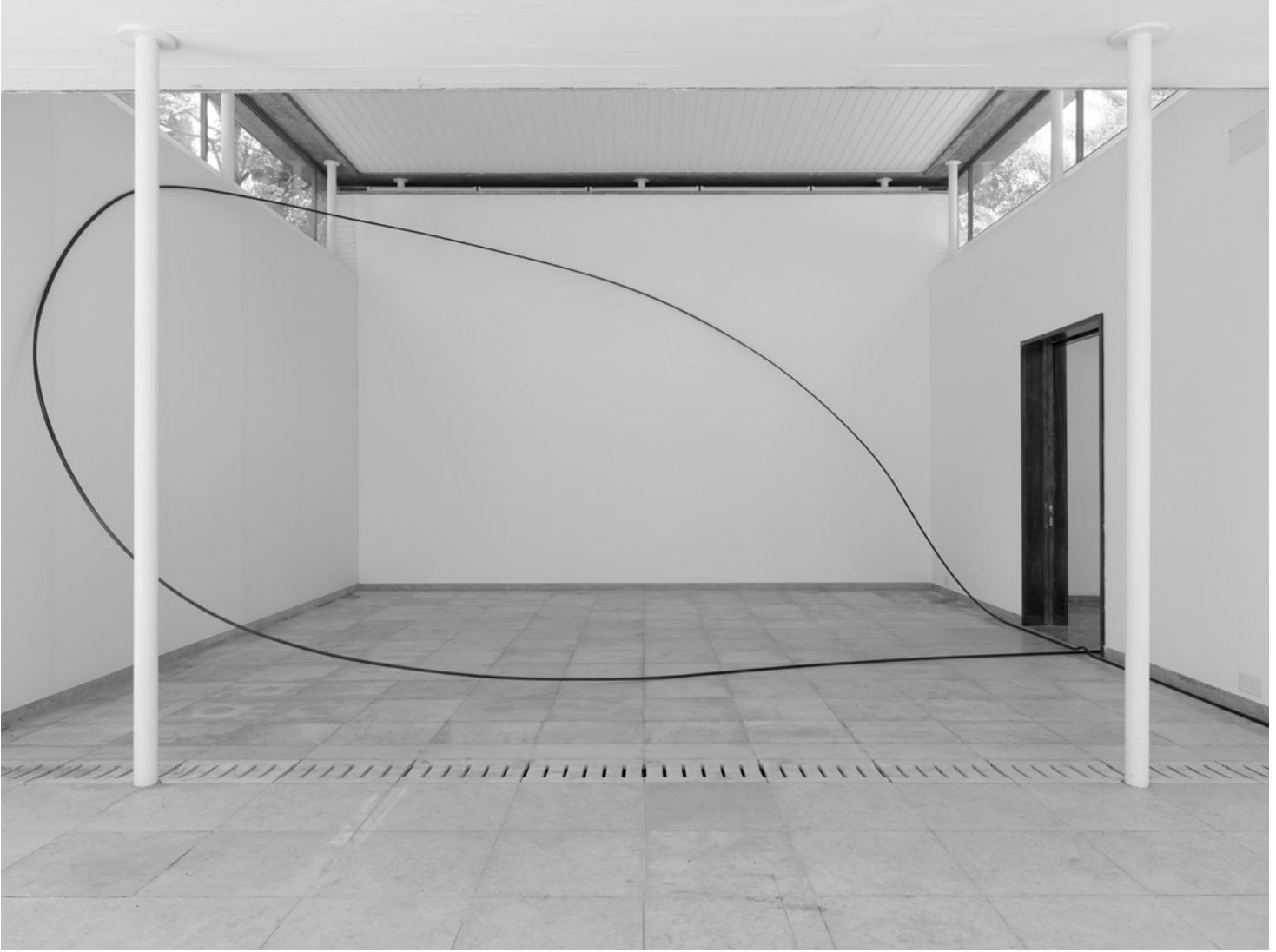
V.C.: First off, the outmoded aspect. Then the setbacks, the dejection, the fear, failure, the desert. The awareness of a vain search for an oasis. Like art objects in general, pop and more alternative types of music console me. Are you sure we talked about Kylie Minogue?

J.C.: For Kylie, it was a duet with Nick Cave, and I assume responsibility for bringing that up, but for Mylène Farmer... Having said that, for sound in contemporary art it's possible to map not only "dominant", widespread ideas and practices, but also local and even endogenous ways of proceeding. In your own practice isn't there this back-and-forth between local features – such as these rings you use, whose original function was tying up animals – and other uses for the walls of the white cube?

V.C.: Right, I do indulge in these comings and goings. I lift these features out and highlight them, sometimes by initially "dignifying" them with bronze (the instruments, the rings) or contrariwise by mitigating them with more "Pop" materials like polystyrene, fibre and acrylic resin (the cannons, the pools, the third-rate sculptures); and a second time – but not systematically – with the aid of the white walls, which are inherently authoritative. I've never really grasped the white cube issue. The market/world of institutional art has already reclaimed, not to say sorted and appropriated, most of the best experimental attempts at getting art out of this much talked-about white cube.

5. Cf. Julien Maret, "Rideaux tapis", texte publié pour la Biennale de Venise in *Valentin*, Zurich, JRP/Ringier, 2013.

6. Cf. Valentin Carron et John Cornu, "Morceaux cultes, fragments d'une discussion", in *Gioia e Polvere*, Rennes, Art & Essai + cultureclub-studio, 2019.



View of the exhibition, Swiss Pavillon, Venice Biennale, Italy, 2013
© Valentin Carron Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / New York



bUÎLdÎnG

LOTTE ARNDT

as

dWELLÎnG

Naked Spaces-Living is round is Trinh T. Minh-ha's second film, in 1985 with images filmed during a journey of several months across Western African rural areas. It isn't though a discourse *about* these areas: The film unfolds a narrative of inhabitation, understanding "building as dwelling", or, as one of the three voice-overs says at an advanced moment of the film: "We dwell altogether unpoetically. But dwelling can be unpoetic only because it is in essence poetic." It comprises at its core a multiplicity of states of being and perceiving, themselves mediated and interdependent. Doing, thinking, observing, and giving shape; producing, transforming, and believing are constantly articulated in the dense composition of images, voices and sound, creating a network of entangled relationships. Rarely, images and text meet in close correspondence, and never with the authority to explain. Rather, the calm but steadily moving rhythm of the film is assembled of sequences focusing on situations sensed through color, light and sound; of passages giving interpretations by referring to writings and sayings; of shots signaling distance, only to abandon it shortly later.

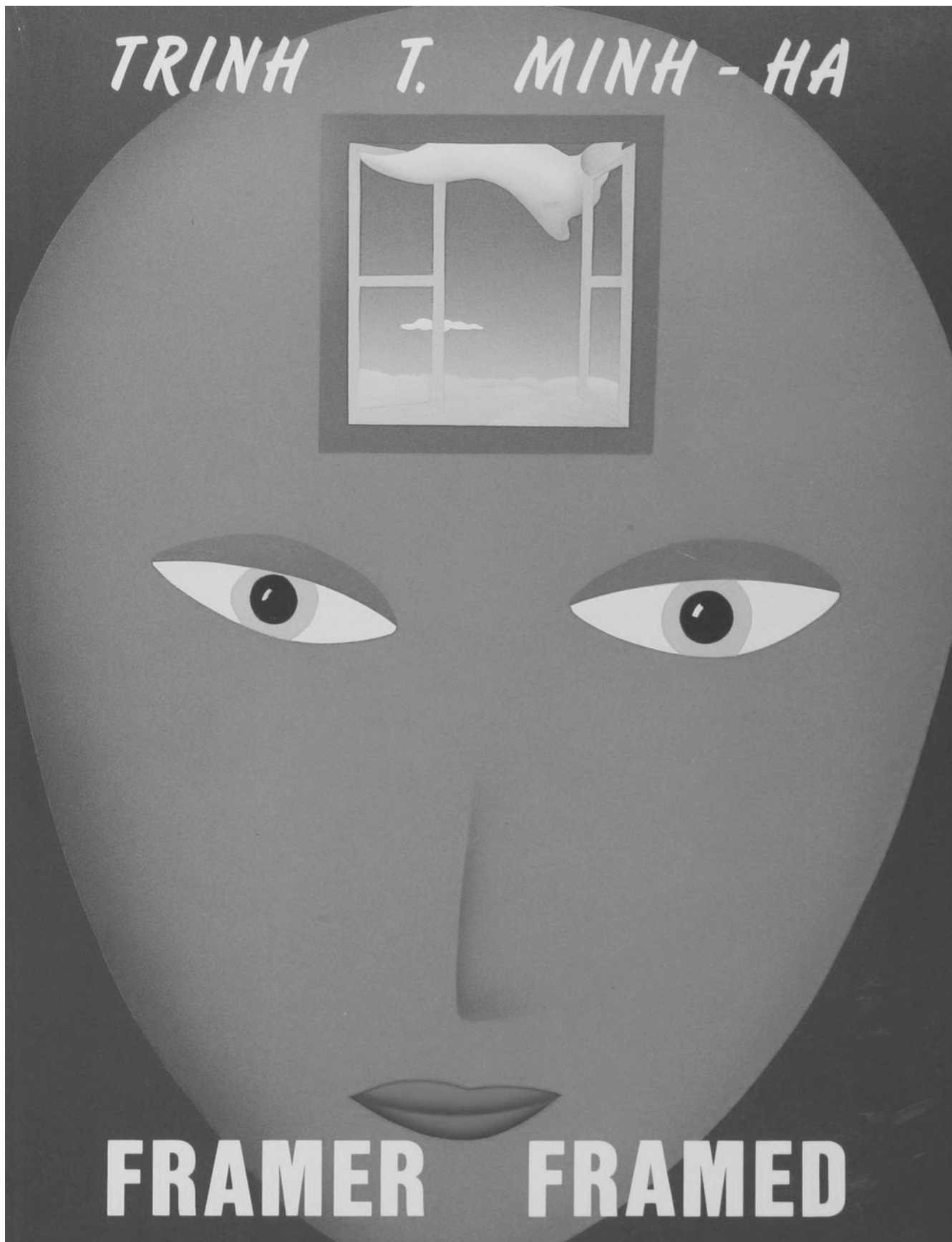
The first sequences of the film take the viewer to a village animated by working women, filmed with the camera close to the ground, close to where the operations of daily life take place. The sensitive images follow the movements of the people, rest on ornamented walls, stray over the places where cooking, playing, celebrating, and constructing is going on. Far from being a subject matter, dwelling is here a practice where inside and outside are not separated, but mutually constituted. The house is not what divides the inner and the outer world, but what articulates them. Doors are kept open, air is flowing, eyes are meeting, legs and looks are crossing spaces, lit by bright sunlight, or nearly totally obscure. The Cartesian subject that makes the world its object by splitting itself from the environment is obsolete in these sensitive entanglements. Obscurity is here fully part of film making; advancing in the dark, sensing rather than seeing. This does not mean that things lose their shape: with high precision, the film puts emphasis on the transitory states, on the constant recomposition of living spaces, on the verb rather than the noun.

For a present day reader who may be at moments astonished about language and images, it may be useful to recall that 35 years ago, Trinh challenged traditional ethnographic filmmaking while engaging its terrain. She unsettles codes without opposing them frontally. Rather, she shifts the attention in order to allow a new sensitivity to occur. At some moments, Trinh's film comments explicitly and critically on ethnographic filmmaking. The voice-over all of the sudden starts stammering when affirming that "the anthro, anthro, anthropological shot turns people into human species" and "only sees objects". But mostly, the composition itself challenges any classificatory divisions by unfolding a world of entanglements in which nothing is stable. Perception, matter and organic life are closely interwoven in reciprocally transformative interlacements.

Filmmaking as a subjective and material process is part and parcel of this moving web. The intense, sometimes-reddish and then green colors recall the materiality of celluloid, reacting to heat and sun; and the frames and editing are balancing the precarious equilibrium between closeness and distance, reciprocity and observation, cuts and articulations.

The film script of *Naked Spaces – Living is Round* has been previously published in English in Trinh's book *Framer Framed* (New York, Routledge, 1992) accompanied by a selection of film stills. Publishing the script alongside the images as originally layout by Jean-Paul Bourdier shifts the attention from the relation between the voice-over, the sound, and the moving images, to the dense poetry of the writing and the delicate composition of the film stills. The distinction between

the three voices gains here importance, and lets the script appear as a composite poem. On many levels, the writing escapes unifying gestures, sentences finish without closing them, quotes intersect with observations, point of views jump without previous indication. Subjectivity is here non-unitary but assembled, shifting, and porous. It occurs in the encounters between transiting components, rather than to reside in fix entities. Instinct and intellect, the concrete and the abstract do not appear as opposed but as co-evolving moments of the same movements. Trinh T. Minh-ha's writing affirms the strengths of theory precisely where it chooses to leave its expected mode of expression, and to favor a language emerging from its movement, initiated in relation to images and sound, articulating senses and thoughts in a reflexive, composite assemblage.



TRINH T. MINH - HA

FRAMER FRAMED



1

Naked Spaces – Living is Round

West Africa, 1985. 135 minute color film.

Produced by: Jean-Paul Bourdier

Directed, photographed, written, and edited by: Trinh T. Minh-ha

Narrators: Barbara Christian, Linda Peckham, and Trinh T. Minh-ha

Distributed by: Women Make Movies (New York); The Museum of Modern Art (New York); Idera (Vancouver); Cinenova (London); The National Library of Australia (Canberra).

First published in *Cinematograph*, Vol. 3, October 1988.

Film stills from the film *Naked Spaces. Living is round* (16 mm, color, 135 min, 1985) by Trinh T. Minh-ha.

Copyrighted Moongift films.

First publication of the images in Trinh T. Minh-ha:

Framer Framed, Routledge, London and New York, 1992).

(Text written for three women's voices, represented here by three types of printed letters. The low voice [bold], the only one that can sound assertive, quotes the villagers' sayings and statements, as well as African writers' works. The high-range voice [plain] informs according to Western logic and mainly cites Western thinkers. The medium-range voices [italics] speaks in the first person and relates personal feelings and observations. Words in parentheses are not heard on film; the names of nations and of peoples appear as burnt-in subtitles on the lower corner of the film frames.)

(Sénégal)

(Joola)

People of the earth

Not descriptive, not informative, not interesting
Sounds are bubbles on the surface of silence

**Untrue, superstitious, supernatural
the civilized mind qualifies many of the realities it does not understand untrue,
superstitious, supernatural**

*truth and fact
naked and plain
a wise Dogon man used to say :*

« to be naked is to be speechless » (Ogotommeli)

Truth or fact

The correct vibration. A body resonates to music as does a string
A music that elicits physical response and calls for mediated involvement.
It does not simply “play”, in such a way as not to impinge on the viewing

An African man wrote:

**Contrary to what some westerners think, religion in Africa is not a cause
for man’s stagnation, nor a source of interterritorial conflicts.
The more profound a believer the black man is, the more tolerant he proves to be.**
(Amadou Hampaté Ba)

*The circumcised young men beat time with a walking stick while chanting
They are holding in their hands femininity, water and light*

Building as dwelling
On earth, under the sky, before the divinities, among mortals, with things
They dwell in that
They neither master the earth nor subjugate it
They leave to the sun and the moon their journey and do not turn night into day
They do not make their gods for themselves and do not worship idols
They initiate mortals into the nature of death

(Sereer)

The circle is a form that characterizes the general plan of the house, the granaries, the court, the shrines, sometimes the rooms, the village, the tomb, the cemetery

(Mandingo)

Life is round

This is not a fact. Not a data gathering

Air, earth, water, light.

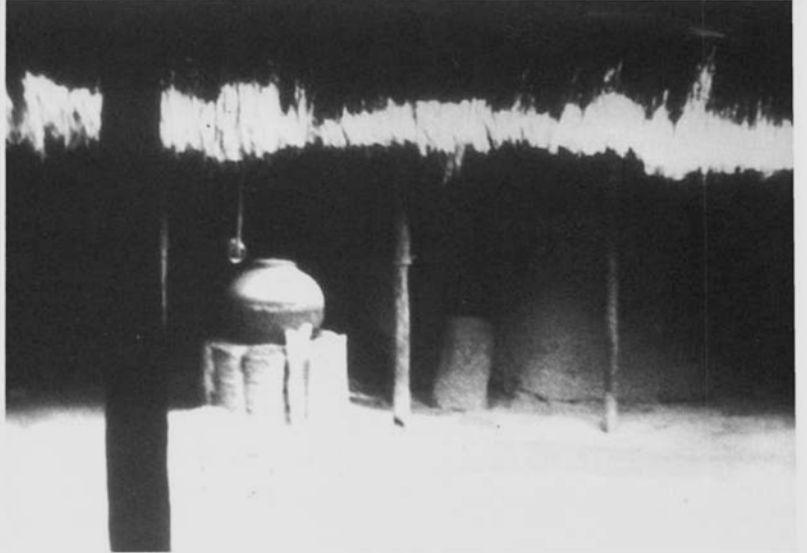
The four elements that explain
the creation of men and women
in African mythologies

Earth-born and earth-bound.

**Dusty grey-white bodies made out of clay. Stark naked children
“ She made a hole and breathed air into it: a child is born ”**

(Jaxanke)

The sun, the calabash, the court, the arching sky.
Everything round invites touch and caress.
The circle is the perfect form



You'll never spread doubt in their mind by convincing them of seeing 'yes' when they already saw 'no'.

When all what they perceived was a hut or a mud shelter.

They went away the way they came

For many of us, the hut is the tap root of the function of inhabiting.
A universe inside and outside the universe, it possesses the felicity
of intense poverty (Gaston Bachelard)

She said:

Man, woman and child

Line/Sun/Star/calabash cover

turtle/big snake/fox

Calabash

They help the plants to grow

You ask me, " what is the use of these paintings? "

They help the plants to grow

They promote germination

(Bassari)

Every illness is a musical problem

" Music has a magical, energizing and creative power. The mere shaking of a cow bell is enough to make people drift into a state of excitement. It is then said that 'strength has entered them'. Elders who can hardly move in daily situation without a cane would emit war-crisis and danse frantically to the sound of music. Farmers who feel tired and lack enthusiasm will be fired with desire upon hearing the drum beats or the chants of the masks."

" Even if you have eaten and are full, a man said,

You have no sustaining strength to plough the land vigorously and endure the hard work if no music flows in you "

(Soninke)

Space: even when close I feel distance



“ Whether a house is lively or not depends on the way it breathes “

“ Houses and humans are both made out of small balls on earth “

Music rests on accord between darkness and light

(Mauritanie)

(Soninke)

Listen in the wind to the bush sobbing:

it is our beloved dead's breathing.

The dead are not dead. (Birago Diop)

People of the earth

**The reason two deers walk together is that one has to take the mote from
the other's eye** (Proverb)

A sense of time, not only of hours and days, but also of decades and centuries

A sense of space as light and void

Space has always reduced me to silence.

A space that speaks the mellowness of inner life

Scantily furnished, devoid of concealment or disguise

«The truth appears so naked on my side, that any purblind eye may find it out»

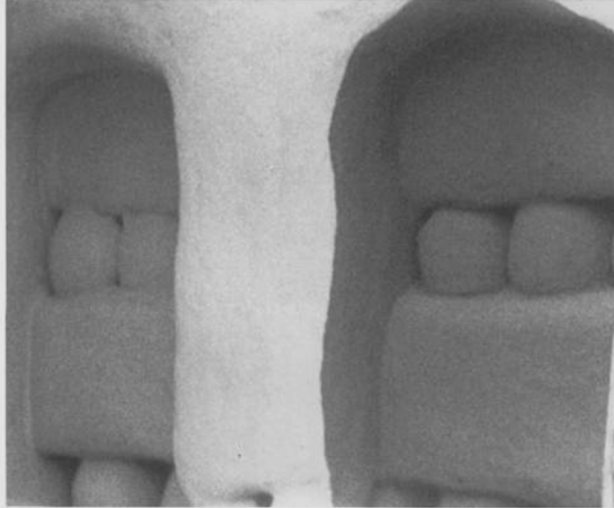
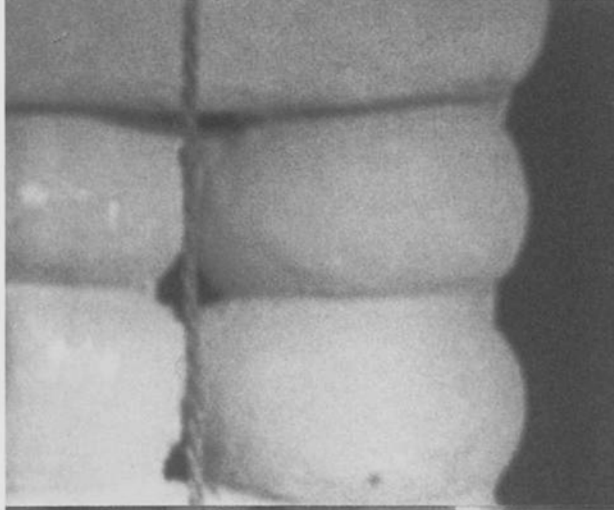
(Shakespeare)

A house that breathes

That encloses as well as opens wide onto the world

We often took our own limits for those of the culture we looked at

All definitions are devices



Color does not exist, being first and foremost a sensation

*She would often sing while she worked,
the air filled with her voice,
the song scanned by her regular sniffings,
First and foremost a sensation*

Do you the see the same colour when the sky is red?
Colors can blind.
Some greyness has to remain for clarity to be

*Nice colors are called 'shades'
Red attracts and irritates, while bright yellow is bound to hurt.
In places where the sun dazzles
and where sandscapes prevail,
people dress in blue, deep blue; shades are soothing to the eye*

Color is life

Light become music

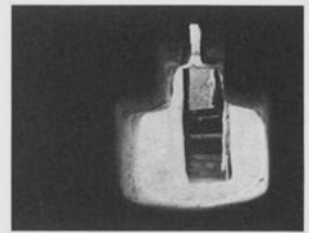
*She would often sing while she worked
The air filled with her voice*

**Songs cure bodily pains
soothe the pangs of bereavement
calm anger and cleans the mind**

**To explain the scornful lower lip of the camel, Moore men have this to say:
«The prophet has a hundred names. Men know 99 of them, only the camel knows
the hundredth one; hence its superior 'marabout' – like expression»
(according to Jean Gabus)**

(Peuples d'Oualata)

**They help the plants to grow
They promote germination**



A long wail tore through the air
Blue-veiled figures
She sailed down the alley,
her indigo-blue garment flowing behind her

*As if for centuries
She sat there
Instinctively veiling her face as the men came in
Unveiling it as soon as they left*

Being truthful: being in the in-between of all definitions of truth

*There was much covert peeping through the veils as we walked around looking carefully
at the rooms and their details*

*Caught each other looking. She laughed and I laughed.
Soon all the women in the court were laughing together*

The earth is blue like an orange

*« La terre est bleue comme une orange.
Jamais une erreur les mots ne mentent pas. » (Paul Éluard)*

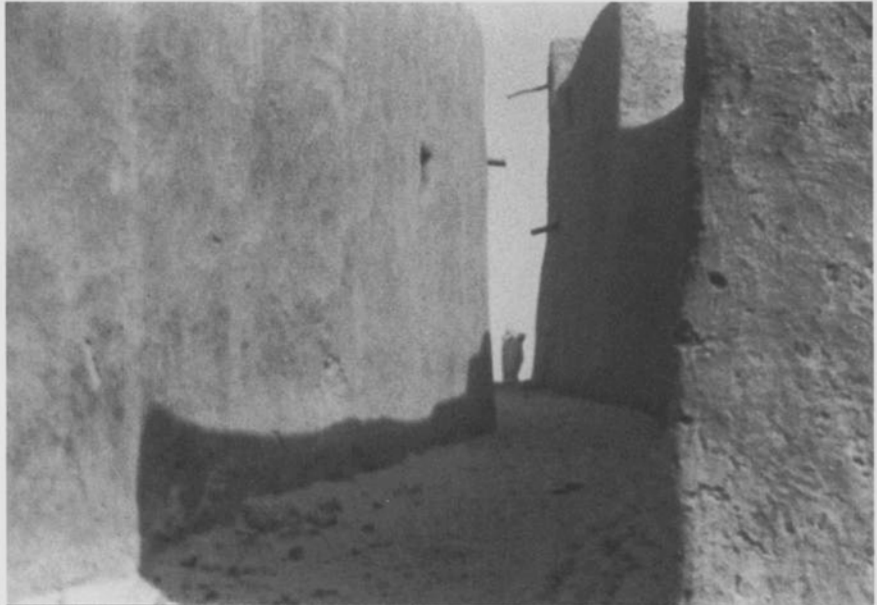
**Sky, earth, sea, sun
Air, earth, water, light**

Outside is a bare as inside is ornate

*For 15 minutes we stood in the street, slightly off the house door, waiting until we were
allowed in. Time for the men to inform the women to go back to their rooms and stay in there
all the time while the visitors were present.*

*How can you explain this excitement to live in an old house?
One that a ages with the imprints of previous lives*

**The severe aspect of the exterior often stands in contrast
with the exuberant decorations of the interior.**





*She steps into my room abruptly and stood there staring at me intently.
I stared back at her questioningly but she remained silent. For a long time we stared at each other without a word; there was more fear in her eyes than curiosity. She turned away a few seconds, then looked back straight into my eyes and said: "Oil, I want some oil for my cooking"*

Walked down the empty narrow streets and thought for a while I was truly alone. . I was soon to discover blinded walls had eyes. Giggling and laughter spurted out around me as I stopped and looked carefully at the faces that swiftly appear and disappear from the discreet openings on the walls. Or above me, from the terrace-roofs of the houses. Women, unveiled, mostly young, all share the look of intense curiosity

(Togo)

(Moba)

The world is round around the round being (Gaston Bachelard)

Religion is living without conflict.

Entering the womb of the earth, sheltered from heat and sun, from rain and wind, from all other living creatures.

"The earth is round. We all know that. No part is longer than the other. When we enter, we enter the mouth – the door – When we exit, we step out onto a large calabash – the court – We call it the vault of heaven."

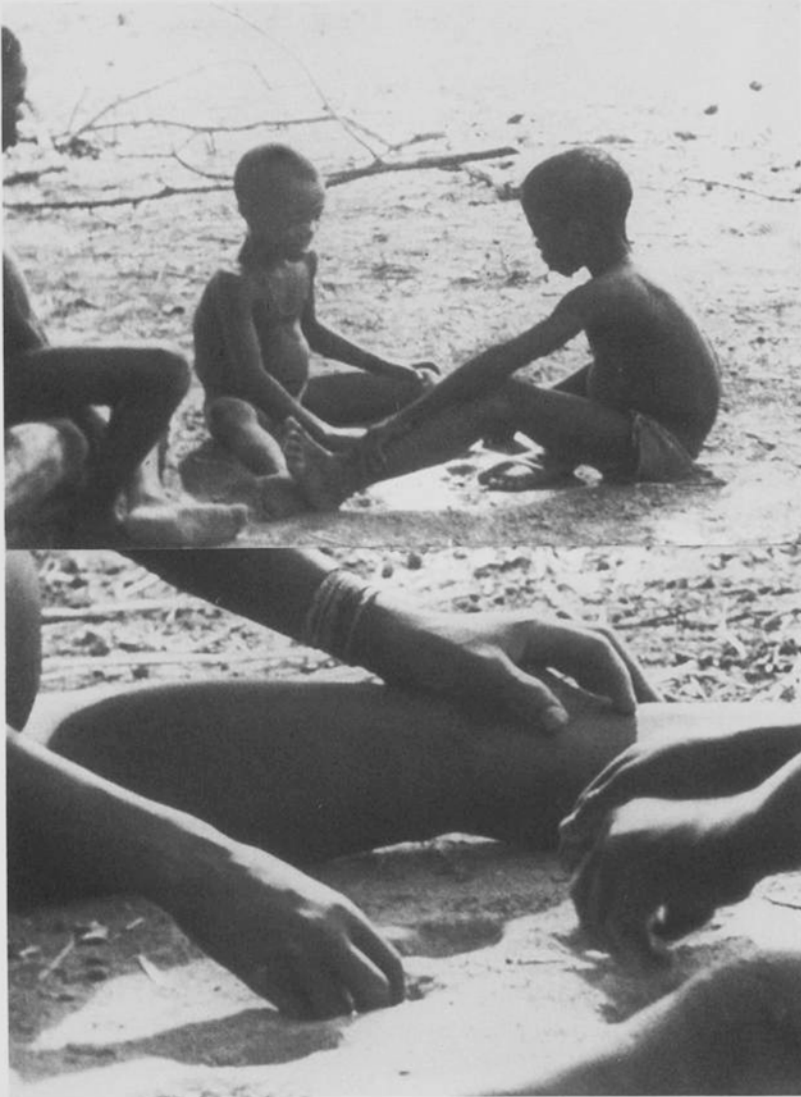
The house opens onto the sky in a perfect circle.

Rhythms are built into the way people relate to each other

(Tamberma)

**"We call ourselves Batammariba,
'the people who create well with the earth,'
'the people who are builders'"**

The designers, the architects



Tribute to the dead

**“We say the placement of the house is that which is important”
“A house is beautiful when its back is not coming out”
“Not too high, not too low, not too far outside nor too far inside.
His house is really smooth. He knows how to build,
he does not leave his finger marks”**

(A Tamberma architect, according to Suzanne P. Blier)

The house as cosmos

**“The ground level of the house interior is the underworld,
the terrace-level is the earth, and the granaries upper level is the sky”
“Granaries elevated on the front façade ‘make the house look well”**

The cosmic house is both cell and world.
Each dweller inhabits the universe while the universe inhabits her space

**Dark and cool / Red like the sun
Untrue, superstitious, supernatural
“As the sun descends, the rays enter the cattle room
and touch the ancestors, speaking to them while they ask for health
and protection of the family”**

The Tamberma house is a sanctuary

**“These mounds are for the sun; for the reproduction of human beings and the
expansion of the family”**

The horns of the entrance and the mounds are the focus for Sun ceremonies

*Upon entering we stepped into a somber central room where I could smell and hear a cow
munching on my left. We then climbed up to the tiny oval kitchen lit by the soft morning
light that came in from the upper portal leading to the terrace roof of the house*

She who wears an antelope headdress is said to portray the deceased's daughter

The third act for a funeral drama. Funeral performances are referred to as plays; the
house of the deceased being the stage, a group of skillful performers, the actors, and
the villagers attendance, the critical audience. Drums, flutes and horns are the voices
of the ancestors.





“Sun’s house is a circle. This is what we’ve been told”

“Sun protects us all.

Like mother it brings out children

Like father it has wives, the earth and the moon”

“It is beautiful because his fingers leave lines and his lines are visible.”

**“If the woman plasters the walls such that from far away you don’t see
the different levels, we say the house is beautiful”**

The egg-shaped granaries are raised above the terrace at the house front corner,
Closest to the sky, their opening facing the sky god who provides rain for the grain
(According to Suzanne P. Blier)

“When you climb it, it leads you to the sky”

The sky is like a tree. It is formed from the branches of a huge tree

(Kabye)

People of the earth

**“The more profound a believer the black man is,
the more tolerant he proves to be”**

In one of the rites of initiation during which a man is born again in his community,
the initiate has to go naked, his body painted with red earth, color of the newly born

(Konkomba)

“A village that neglects music and dancing is a dead village”

Red: a warm limitless color that often acts as a sign of life

Black: an absence of light, of sun, therefore of life, color

In many parts of the world, white is the color of mourning

Truth or fact?

*Poetry becomes only poetry when I become adept
at consuming truth as fact*

“The house like a woman must have secret parts to inspire desire”

(according to Ogotemmel)



“Unadorned she is not desirable. Adornment excites love; If there is a connection between ornaments and love, that is because the first ornaments of all were in the center-jar of the celestial granary; and that jar is the symbol of the world’s womb.”
(according to Ogotemmel)

In certain societies where sounds have become letters with sharps and flats, those unfortunate enough not to fit into these letters are tossed out of the system and qualified unmusical. They are called ‘noises’. *It is known that one of the primary task of ethnomusicologists is to study what traditional societies consider music and what they reject as non-music.* A music bound up with movement, dance and speech, one in which the listener becomes a co-performer, one that has no overall form except one of continually recurring sequences of notes and rhythms, one that play endlessly—for *nobody has enough of life*—has been repeatedly called elemental or rudimentary. Is irritable to most Western ears

The sound of a swelling cry of ululation
That high wail that speaks her joy, excitement or grief

*I am inhabited by a cry
Joy sorrow anger it curls out
Sharp and vivid in the night
Inhumanly human
The cry I hear, she said
is from the other side of life*

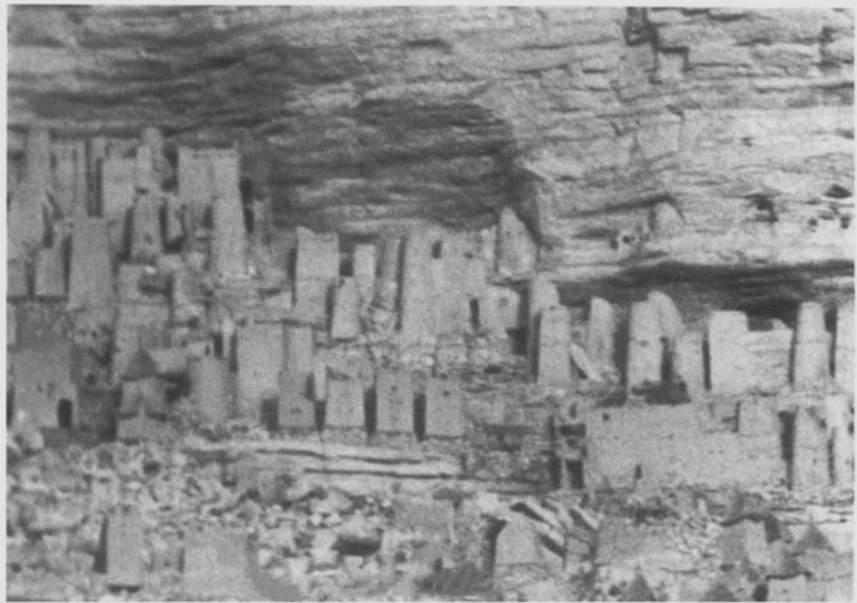
Deeper insight always entails moments of blindness

(Mali)
(Dogon)

“Step into the footmarks of your ancestors. Tradition may weaken but cannot disappear” (A Dogon prayer)

Scale as an element to impress, to dominate
or to speak up a mutual vulnerability?

A journey in these villages may have a cathartic effect, for a man seeing a hundred-storey building often gets conceited.



There is also a way of viewing nature as a challenge to man's conquest;
therefore, of seeing in the smallness of man and woman
a need for im-prove-ment

**Ogo, the first who stood against God Amma
and introduced psychological diversification in the universe
was transformed into a Fox and thus reduced to speaking only with its paws
on the divination tables**

The figures are drawn on the smoothed sand by the diviners before sunset.
The Fox which comes out at night, is lured onto the tables by means of peanuts which
the diviners have carefully scattered over them. The next day, the diviners will come
back to the site after sunrise to read the traces left by the Fox. Their interpretations
vary according to the latter's itinerary whose imprints may join, border, or avoid the
figures. The divination table is the Earth turning under the action of the Fox's legs

The divination table is the Earth turning under the action of the Fox's legs

How "very much content am I to lie low, to cling to the soil, to be of kin to the sod.
My soul squirms comfortably in the soil and sand and is happy. Sometimes when
one is drunk with this earth one's spirit seems so light that one is in heaven. But
actually one seldom rises six feet above the ground"

(Lin Yutang)

**"When you climb it, it leads you to the sky. The sky is like a tree; it is formed by
the branches of a huge tree."**

**Togu na: 'the mother's shelter,' 'the house of words'
or 'the men's house' is the reference point for every Dogon villages**

The life-force of the earth is water

The remaining facade of the large house
with its eighty niches, home of the ancestors

Reality and truth: neither relative nor absolute

*I can't take hold of it nor lose it
When I am silent it projects
When I project, it is silent*



**“The calabash is a symbol of woman and the sun, who is female”
Signs are things that move about in the world
Signs are the things of all men and women**

11616 signs express and indicate all things and beings
of the universe as well as all possible situations seen by the Dogon men

*Each sign opens onto other signs
Each sign contains in itself a summary of the whole
And the drop is the very ocean*

**The Dogon house is said to be a model of the universe at a smaller scale,
and to symbolize man, woman and their union. The central room, the store rooms
on each side and the back room with the hearth represent the woman lying on her
back with outstretched arms, ready for intercourse as the communicating door
stays open. The ceiling of the central room is the man and its beams, his skeleton.
The woman and the man’s breath finds its outlet through the opening on the roof
(according to Ogotemmel)**

(Burkina Faso)

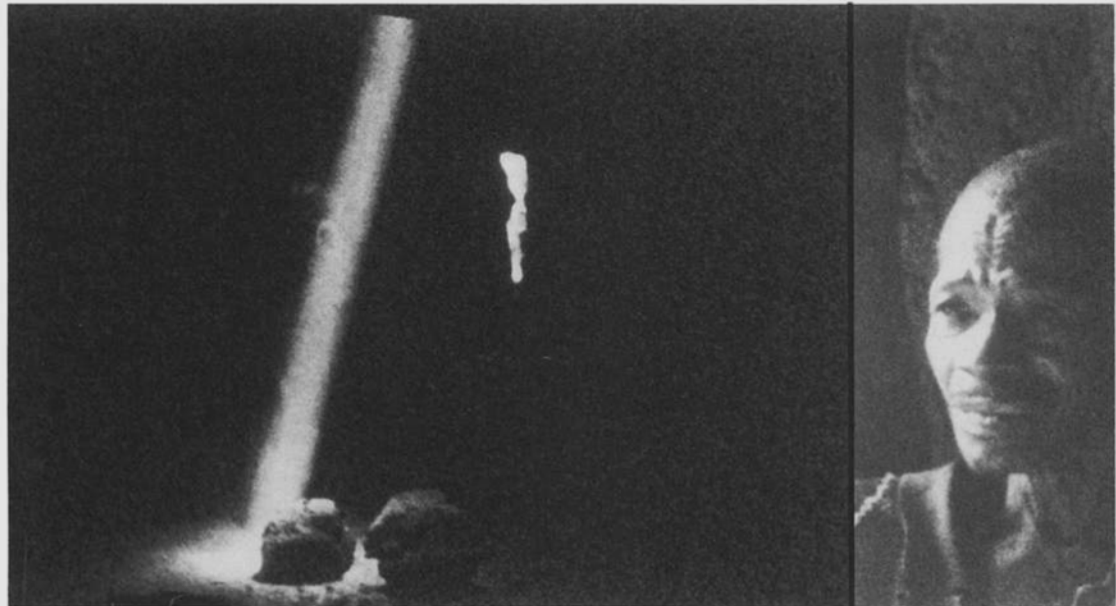
(Birifor)

**Listen to the ancestor’s breathing in the wind, the fire, the water
Those who are dead, who were never gone,
who were not under the ground, who were not dead
They are there, in the house, in the crowd
In a woman’s breast, in a child’s cry
In the stones, trees, grass
In the dark that lightens, in the dark that deepens
In the fire that warms, burns and destroys
In the water that flows, in the water that stagnates
The dead are not dead.**

*The ancestor’s room
Spider webs and dust have aged with them*

**“Bathed in the sunlight, one after the other they took turn to speak
to the sun, keeping in touch with it from dawn to dusk”**

One after the other, they took turn to speak to the sun,
keeping in touch with it from dawn to dusk
The sun touches them as they ask for health and protection of the family



“It is beautiful because when you enter you see there where the sun penetrates where there is light, and the rest is dark”

Houses with a sculptured head on the roof are said to belong to hunters

The supernatural—term widely used in pro-scientific milieu— is an anti-scientific invention of the West, a wise African man observed (Boubou Hama)

The diagnostic power of a fact-oriented language

**The sky is
A calabash
The water jar is
A woman’s womb**

Blindness occurs precisely during the short moment of adjustment; when, from full sun we step into the dim inside. Abrupt transition from bright to dark. To advance, we must go sightless, time to cross an immaterial threshold that links the social to the personal

The dead are not dead

When night constantly floats in certain parts of the house

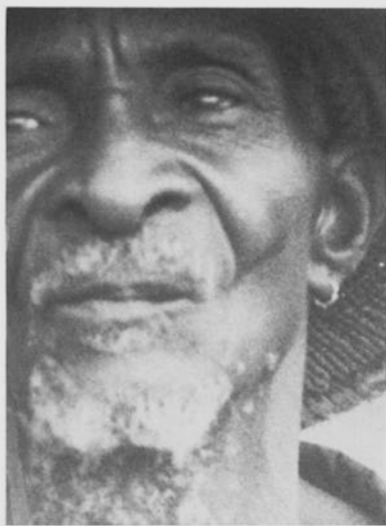
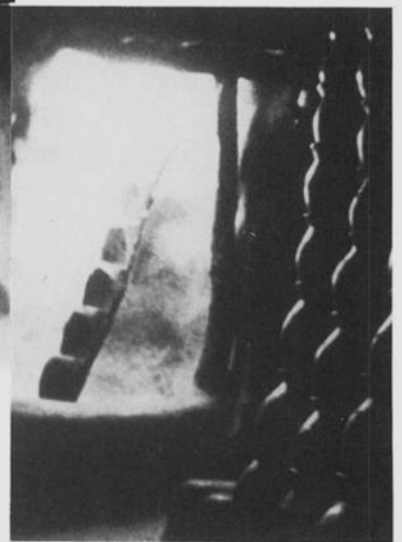
It never appears to me in its totality. Here a small round hole, there a carved ladder leading up to the source of light, a wall, another wall, a bench, a straw mat, her water jar, a long dark room ending in several nest-like spaces. The whole thing is scattered about inside me. I can only see it in fragmentary form.

**An act of light lets day in night
Makes far nearer and near farther
Why is it so dark?**

*Everything is at the same time transparent and opaque
Irreducibly complex in its simplicity*

Not really a dwelling or a living space
as an observer said because of the overall absence of windows

See our own idiosyncracies as other people’s nature



When men go hunting in parties they know the rules of precedence;
they know him who is higher than another; they understand when one says « I
speak, you remain silent»... there are dangerous things in the bush and a small
quarrel may bring many arrows

(Victor Aboya, according to Robert Sutherland Rattray)

Before the hunters set forth, they were told this by the man in charge
of the hunting parties

**“If we meet a lion, let it be like cold water
If we meet a leopard, let it be like cold water
If we meet a snake, let it be like cold water
But if a man wishes to quarrel while out hunting
Let him get headache and belly-ache
So that he may have to return home”**

(Victor Aboya, according to Robert Sutherland Rattray)

*An anthropo...an anthropo...an anthropological shot:
one that turns people into human species*

**Both ancestors and children are ‘builders up of a compound! When a man dies, his
son, upon sacrificing a sheep will ask this man to join his father and grandfather
in guarding the house properly. When a man has no children, he is sometimes
laughed at, and told: ‘What are you if you were to die, they would break down
your house and plant tobacco in it’**

(Victor Aboya, according to Robert Sutherland Rattray)

Color is life

A light without shadow generates an emotion without reserve (Roland Barthes)

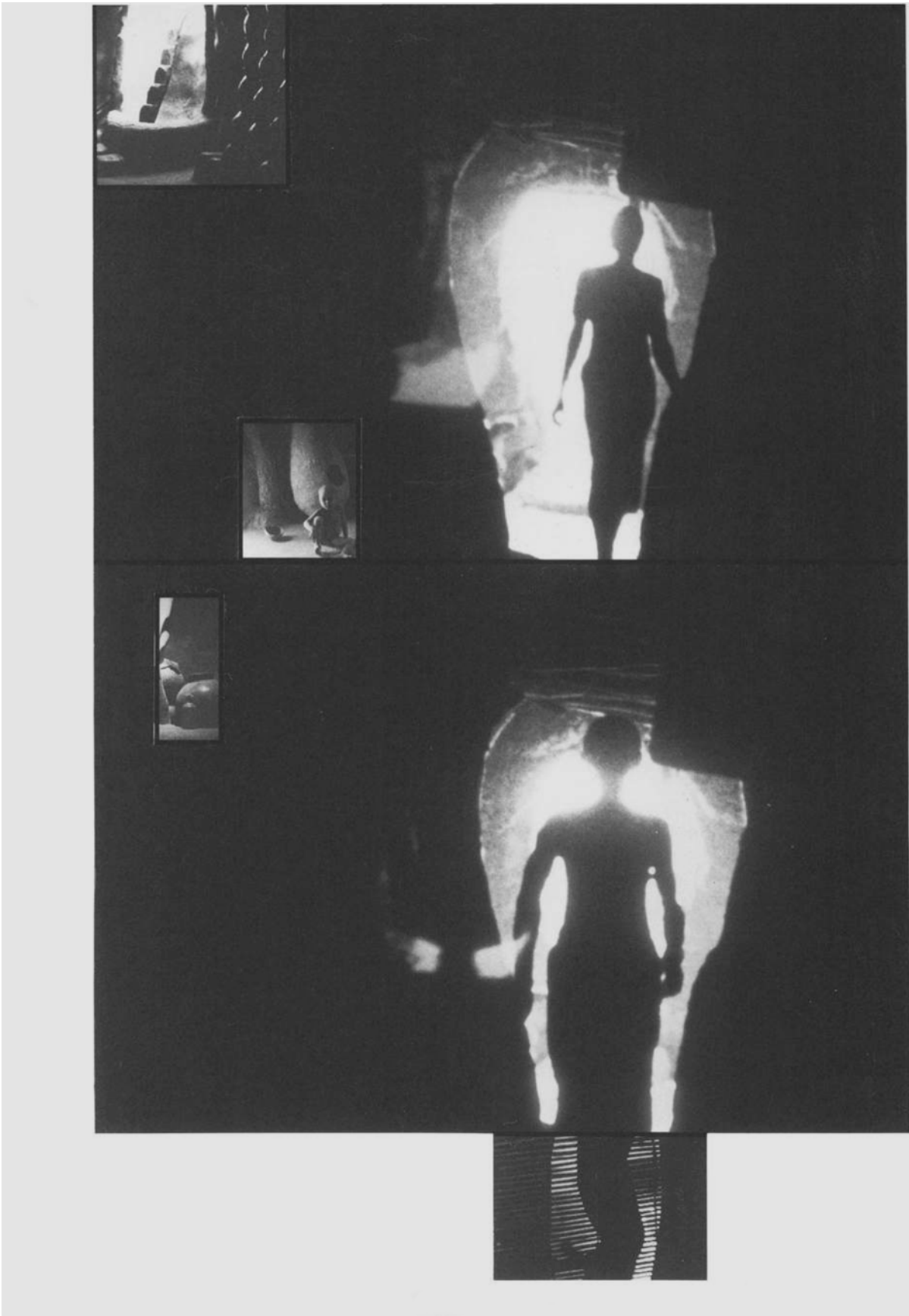
Entering and exiting as love-making.
The door remains open, for a house with a door closed
is an infertile house

**It is by way of the ‘house hole’ that the rays of the noon Sun enter into the house
to look at the family and speak with them. Family eats around it. The food cooked
and spilled while eating are so much offered to the Sun. Women give birth under
it to secure the Sun’s blessings.**

The house like a woman must have secret parts to inspire desire

The womb image of the house
The nest-like powers of curves

Floating around in these dark spaces is the subtle smell of clay, earth and straw



There is a saying that
'a man should not see all the dark corners of another's house'.
"If life be called the life-blood of a space, darkness could be called its soul"»

Color is first and foremost a sensation

"The house's eye. It looks out and sees like a woman"

A male is buried facing east, a female facing west

"A man faces eastward, that he may know when to rise and hunt.
A woman looks to the west, that she may know when to prepare her husband's food"
(Victor Aboya, according to Robert Sutherland Rattray).

(Bisa)

The world is round

Are you seeing it? Hearing it? Or projecting it?

Unadorned she is not desirable. Adornment excites love. If there is a connection between ornaments and love, that is because the first ornaments of all were in the center-jar of the celestial granary; and that jar is the symbol of the world's womb
(according to Ogotemmel)

The earth is an overturned calabash. For the death of a man or a woman, the priest sprinkles in the air earth taken from the center of the circle formed by the calabash while making a circle around the house

Here, patience is one of the first rules of education

*Orange and blue; warmer or colder;
more luminosity, more presence.
Timing acts as a link between natural
and artificial light*



The earth is blue like an orange

You can't take hold of it but you can't lose it

So please, let the smoke go
and let the seed die to its outer shell

Be a stranger to myself

*No matter what we call it, we will miss it
Relieved of so many words, we went naked*

Objects in her surrounding ... The naming of spaces rarely refers to their function.
It refers, instead, to the various parts of the human body

**The house is composed like the human body: the earth or clay is the flesh;
the water, the blood; the stones, the bones; and the plastered surface
of the walls, the skin**

Sun rolling in space

"The bobbin, which is wound off in spinning is the sun rolling in space"
(according to Suzanne P. Blier).

(Bénin)

(Fon)

They call it giving

We call it self-gratification

We call it self-gratification

They call it give-and-take

We call it take-and-take

We call it take-and-take

They call it generosity

We call it conditioning the beggar's mind

We call it conditioning the beggar's mind

Today, to survive the poor can hardly refuse to accept

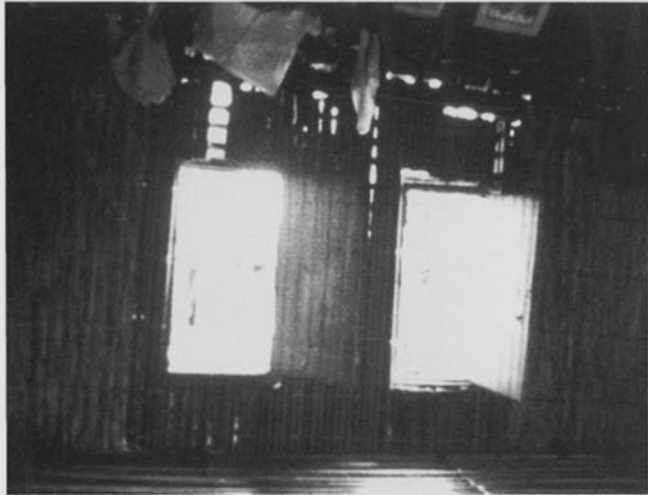
They say they don't give anymore

Because we are ungrateful

The ungrateful acceptor/ *The expecting donor*

They say they don't give anymore because we are ungrateful.

We ponder: will the donor species survive?





*We substitute expectation for hope and easily speak about 'falling short of'
or 'failing to come up to' our expectations
Strategies of rupture and incorrectness need some airing*

A cloud of oratorical precaution
Fear

*Fear of making
Out of a cristallized I*

Any expectation, even that of peace, brings restlessness

Question and answer: a mutual deception

*Life on the water
Never can one walk home and feel the contact of solid, secure ground*

*Floating, flowing constantly
The house suspended between water and sky*

What they name generosity
Arrogance
A mutual deception

You should be able to accept with simplicity
Simply accept

**From We, Us
who are neither a source of authority
nor a seal of authenticity**

**They see no life
When they look
They see only objects**

The dead are not dead

Humble enough to accept without trying to return

*Be a stranger to myself
And the drop is the ocean*

The earth is blue like an orange

*An instant's freezing
To be lived directly
Silence: People having faith in each other*

*Void is always capable of being filled by solid
The entire lake within me
And I look at the myriad of reflections
Unable to quench it
Quench an endless thirst*

*The charm of its nudity lights up our desire for both retreat and expansion
The more naked the space, the more it fires my imagination*

*Blue like an orange
And orange becomes blue
Earth becomes Sun
Sun becomes Water
Water becomes Sky
And blue becomes orange, like the Earth*

(Sénégal)

(Peul)

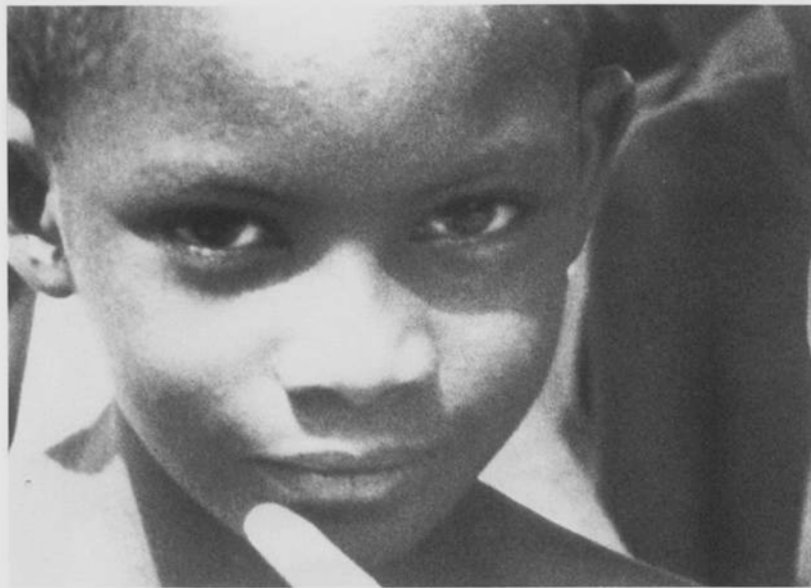
The circle is the spirit in eternal motion

*While giving there is no thought of giving
While accepting there is no thought of accepting
"Who could ever think of the gift as a gift that takes?" (Hélène Cixous)*

*Beyond logic to experience what is large in what is small
Clear, simple, irreducibly complex in its simplicity*

To build out of dwelling
A philosopher observed that "man's homelessness consists in this,
that man still does not even think of the real plight of dwelling as the plight"
(Martin Heidegger)

We dwell altogether unpoetically
But dwelling can be unpoetic only because it is in essence poetic
(Martin Heidegger)



Have you seen such a look in a child's face? Such a look?
A sunlit smile that sticks in your eyes

Spirit in eternal motion

For many foreign observer, these people have no notion whatsoever of the private garden. This is hardly surprising: there is no point in fencing off a piece of land as one's own; their houses are situated such that wherever they wander they own the entire landscape

The earth is an overturned calabash

(Joola)

**They are holding in their hands
femininity, water and light**

People of the earth

Those whose serenity of understanding and simplicity of spirit
is the despair of bigger men

**The reason two deers walk together
is that one has to take the mote from the other's eye** (Proverb)

«Life with its rhythms and cycles is dance and dance is life»
(Opoka, according to John Miller Chernoff)

Roof in the shape of a funnel

The Joola people: Renowned for having raised a fierce armed resistance to the French colonial administration at the start of the century

For the one who travels in this restfully green part of Senegal today, the Casamance, the dreamland of research workers and tourists alike, it is quite difficult to imagine no foreigner had dared to venture here without an armed escort a few decades ago

Light, air, earth, woman, palm leaf, dust, children

Space has always reduced me to silence



*They can't really afford this, they said
But bought it anyway
Flew to Africa
And waited with an anguished excitement
For the paid shock of exoticism*

A Joola proverb says:
"those who are proud of their nudity will be insolent once clothed"
This is not a fact

Light, air, people, sound

The impluvium: a house built around an inner court with an inwardly inclined roof and as some said, "a tank to catch rain water"

Some call it the 'Senegalese Florida', ideal for the visitor who hungers for tropical adventures made to measure

A life-generating power

"A house without a fence is not a house", the old man says

An earthen castle, according to a tourist guide book

*A place for communion
Sharing
A Sun Chapel*

**They took turn to speak to the sun, keeping in touch with it from dawn to dusk
"The dead are often buried in their own rooms, which will remain locked forever.
The room will crumble with time on the grave"**

*Infinitely secure in its nudity
Insecure in its infiniteness*

**A damaged house is a damaged family. Very often,
family and house bear the same name**



Femininity, water and light
An interior court
A time clock
A sun chapel
A reserve of air, light, water

Each woman prepares her own meal.
Each household has its own hearth
located all around the court under a circular covered gallery

A pit
A tank for catching rain water
A place for reunion
A place for rest and conversation

Music rests on accord between darkness and light

Every religion is based on a lie device.
All methods may be viewed as lies
At best, they create a situation

Rhythm creates a storage of energy

Eager for an indigenous answer, someone walked around asking:
'What is music?' People would look at him as if he had said something funny or
strange. They would laugh and say: 'Don't you know?'

"A danse that does not attract many villagers and foreigners from afar is said to turn
out badly, for the spirits have not come to attend it." The animation of a dance is a
sign of the spirits's presence. Dance and music form a dialogue between movement
and sound. One who hears the music understands it with a dance. The dancers do
not imitate or express the music heard; they converse with it and dance to the gaps
in it. Both marked and unmarked beats. A different beat, one that is not there, one
that you add because you feel it and fit it in. Your own beat. Your own move. Your
own reading

It usually signals arrest and has long been forgotten as a wind instrument.
The whistle here is a musical cue for change

Dramatic action is stimulated by the flute-, horn-, whistle- and bellplayers who do
not form part of the drum ensemble. They wander round the circle of dancers,
blowing, striking a few notes on their instrument to urge them on.

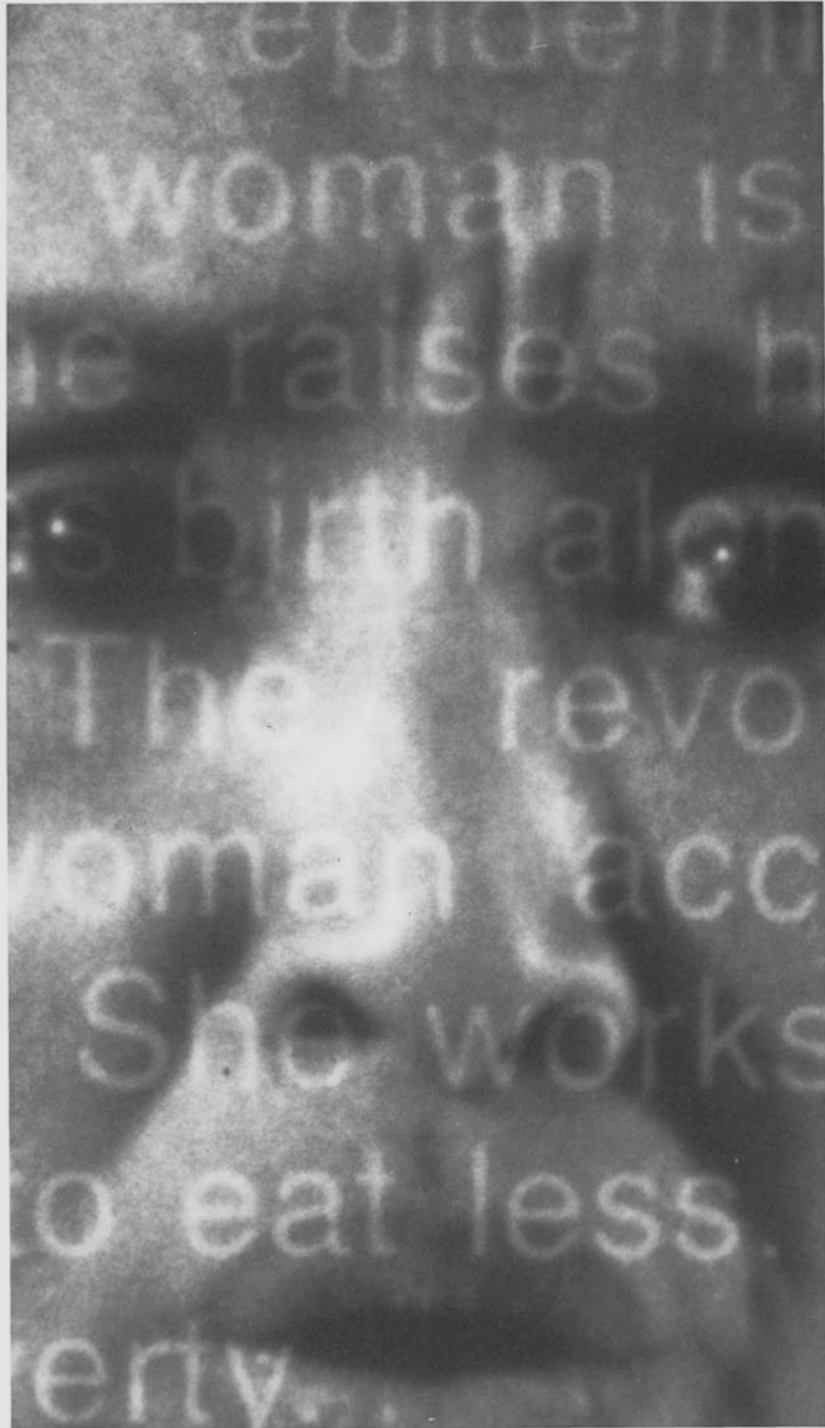
A drummer explains that one should not breathe too strongly while performing if one does not want to miss the rhythmic formulas and to get tired too quickly. One should take in reserves of air during the pauses, between each dance

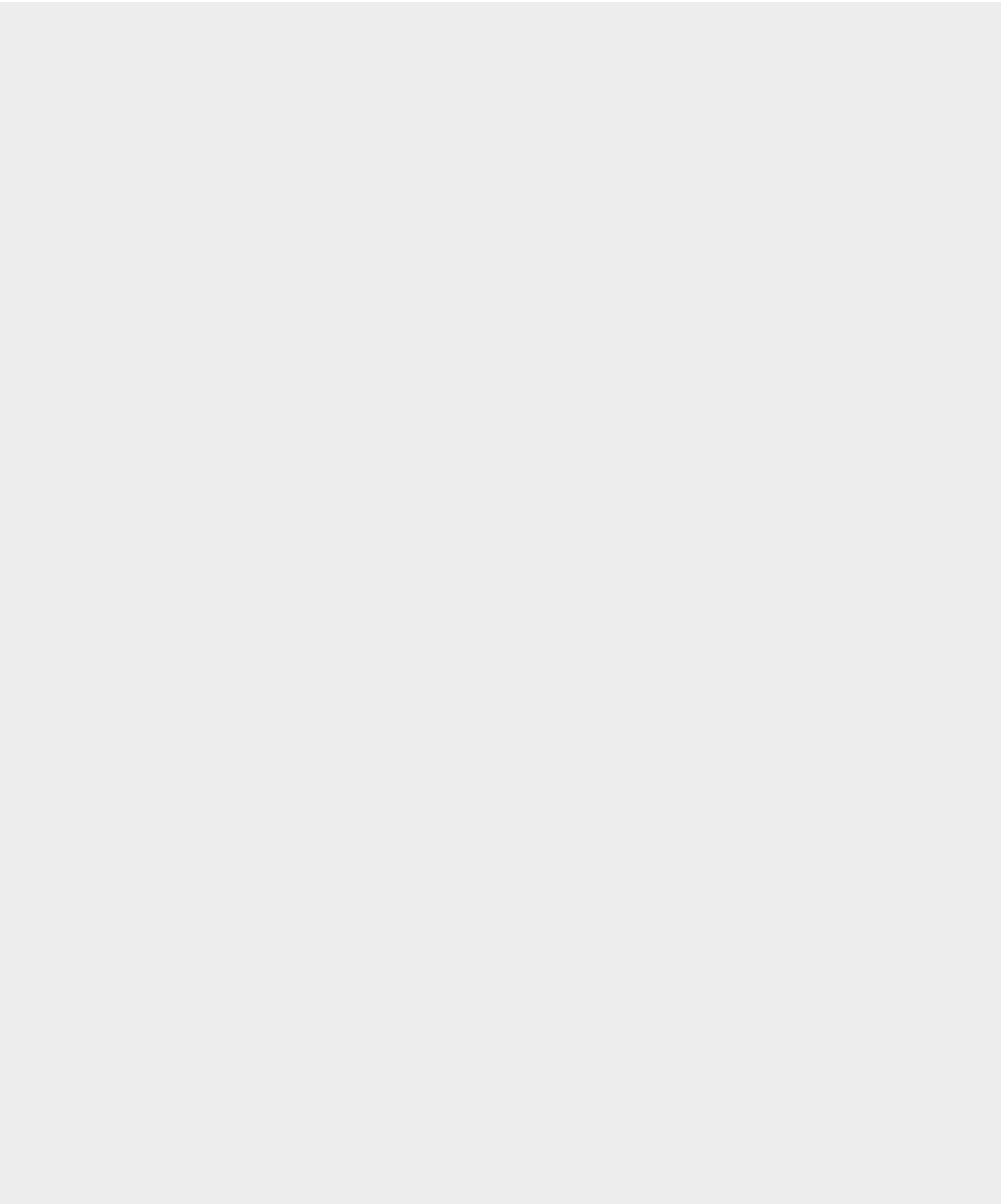
Every illness is a musical problem

'My wrist is fast': that is not drumming. As you are beating, it is your heart that is talking, and what your heart is going to say, your hand will collect and play. And unless you cool your heart, your drumming will not stand. When your heart cools, your arm will cool too, and as you are bringing your strength you will also be leaving it. At that time, the drum will cry well. The one who has learned to play well can beat a drum and the sound will spread out and you will hear it vibrating inside the ground. But the one whose heart gets up he is beating hard, his drum will not sound.

"Drumming has no end", the drummer said. "No one can know everything about drumming; everyone knows only to his extend." If you know everything, what are you going to do and know it? ... in our drumming way, no one blames another. If someone doesn't know, you don't say 'this man doesn't know.' If you say that, you have demeaned yourself. Maybe as you say you know, someone too knows better than you, and as you are bending down looking at someone's anus, someone is bending down looking at yours (Ibrahim Abdulay selon John Miller Chernoff)







TAKING a POSITION ÉMILIE RENARD on the BUREAU of DEPOSITIONS

A *lingua franca*, as every schoolchild who has (or even hasn't) studied Latin knows, is a vehicle for communication between speakers who don't understand one another's languages. Sociolinguists call this a "vehicular language" which, if you're not listening carefully, can sound very similar to a "vernacular language" but is quite different. The "vehicular", like the "vehicle" that it derives from, can move lightly and effortlessly over the surface of the world, whereas the "vernacular" is bound to a locality. The etymology of the word is revealing: *vernaculus* in Latin was an adjective describing a slave born in the house of his or her master and, by extension, was used to describe things domestic – things to do with the home or the native country. A Latin dictionary gives further examples: *vernaculae volucres* were the native birds of a country; *vernaculum crimen* was a baseless accusation, one cooked up at home, as it were; and *vernaculi* was a plural noun meaning buffoons or jesters. So, *vernaculus*, in the ancient tongue, could describe a domestic slave, a clown, a bird, or a dog, a bitch, a horse or a mare from the local area. The range of the word "vernacular" in Latin could probably encompass the movements of a quasi-domesticated vehicle that blends into its surroundings so as to become virtually invisible. And the metamorphoses of this spectrum of senses mean that it becomes a stabilising factor, capable of rooting, locating and solving up the vehicular; the "vernacular" carves out a space and a duration for the "vehicular". Vernacular and vehicular are therefore temporary qualities, that swing like a pendulum, sometimes gently, sometimes vigorously or violently. And between them, all manner of things, animals and human beings can move.

Who can travel? Who is able to circulate freely and become "vernacularised"? People like me, who with a passport and a credit card, are sufficiently light. And then there are those who flee their country, leave their loved ones, and move from one place to another, without these documents and with no way of choosing their final destination. The vernacular as a factor of the sedentary life, and the allegation which the Romans called *vernaculum crimen*, describe the contradictory status imposed on people in exile who are *a priori* alleged to have left their homeland without sufficient cause, and who then have to prove that their story is true, that they have an address, an income and family connections in order to obtain asylum in a member state of the European Union. The laws that prohibit them from stopping anywhere force them into hiding, keep them outside the law, compel them to hide in temporary spaces for unspecified periods of time and to live a life of insecurity.

The *Bureau of Depositions* is "an intangible, performative work in process without end" produced by eleven co-authors of varying administrative status, documented and undocumented, living in Grenoble. It is a collaborative work in which each author's participation is inseparable from the work itself. It is also "an application

1. Dictionnaire Brunot, t. VIII, p. 787.

2. F. Martin, *Les Mots latins*, Hachette, 1941, p. 291.

3. Gaffiot, *Dictionnaire Latin Français*, Hachette, [1934], 1984, p. 1661.

for legal remedy in the context of a litigation concerning copyright.” The work, which consists of texts

and words that count as evidence submitted, is a living archive describing its own conditions of existence and those of the co-authors who are responsible for it.

The members of the *Bureau of Depositions* are reacting collectively to a specific political situation through an artistic activity that combines art and law in order to guard against the violence caused by the migration policies of the member states of the European Union. Their first countermeasure is the collective experience of an artistic activity; their next riposte is a legal challenge. Taken together, the whole is a promise that has already had an effect within the *Bureau* and beyond.

From a legal point of view, this “exercise in speculative justice” calls for a justice that speculates and that could transmit some of its performative power to art: “We appeal to the creative power of the judge.” Basing its approach on the *Plaidoirie pour une jurisprudence. X et Y c/Préfet de...* [Case for the Defence as Precedent. X and Y versus the Prefect of...], a performance written by lawyers Sylvia Preuss-Laussinotte and Sébastien Canevet and artists Olive Martin and Patrick Bernier, *The Bureau of Depositions* digs away at the breach opened by this legal instrument which was designed to be adaptable to any given person. Here, *X and Y* are called Mamadou Djouldé Baldé (removed between March and April 2019), Ben Bangoura, Saâ Raphaël Moudekeno, Pathé Diallo, Marie Moreau, Ousmane Kouyaté, Sarah Mekdjian, Mamy Kaba, Aliou Diallo, Aguibou Diallo and Diakité Laye (removed between April and June 2019). They work together, publish their texts, make their statements public, and broadcast them on the radio.¹ With each new public performance of the *Bureau of Depositions*, the work grows at the same time as its co-authors gain visibility and perhaps even legitimacy in the eyes of the administration.

Soon this work will be the subject of an application to the Regional Court, based on the premise that all the co-authors involved in this joint work will be protected by copyright. Because this work, whose performance depends on the joint presence of its authors, is what defines its authors as an *inseparable* group. According to Wikipedia, in France, “a collaborative work is a work created by several individuals, called co-authors; each co-author can independently exploit their contribution to the work as long as they do not prejudice the original work.” What Wikipedia does not say is that such persons as prevent one of the co-authors of the work from carrying it on, co-creating it or co-performing it publicly because they have been arrested, locked up or deported, prejudice the integrity of the original work and are in breach of copyright. With their first attempt at an application, first published on 11 June 2019 in the form of a brochure in Grenoble, the *Bureau of Depositions* took the gamble that copyright takes precedence over the laws of States for the recognition of their right of asylum. Two weeks later, on the night of 29-30 June 2019, Carlotta Rackete used maritime law as a lever to force her way, with 56 survivors on board, into the Italian port of Lampedusa in defiance of Matteo Salvini’s laws.

When I invited them to publish the “Application for remedy for infringement of the integrity of the work”, which follows in this journal, the *Bureau of Depositions* replied: “Vernacular-vehicular, we imagine that the idea is less to oppose the two than to consider their associations, insofar as a logistical and capitalist continuum, both local and global, creates the conditions for exploiting the lives of people forced into illegal status. We are trying to build on our fundamental equality and co-dependency here and now and, out of our cooperation, to distribute a work that binds us together.” Returning to the local context of the initial situation: in Grenoble, eleven people have decided that they can do together what none of them can do individually in the violent circumstances they share with others. From this obvious fact, their joint work is being written, described and made public and at the same time, the people involved in it are writing about themselves, describing themselves and making themselves visible. As this activity has developed, a form of co-dependence has emerged between the co-authors and with the work. Everyone is united by a collective effort in which the artistic activity is one element among others, but it is through art that all this is shared. The initial political situation that determined the material conditions of the work requires that, in order to respond to it, the work should also exist for others. By setting out this situation publicly, they create new performances of it and make progress on the political front. By using a political issue as their point of departure, they have become engaged in an artistic process, and they have created performances and forms of collective emancipation out of that artistic activity. When asked who they are addressing, who they want to share this experience with, their answer is, in substance, with whoever wants it: “Today, it is imperative for us to create an audience – an audience for these problems, made up of these problems – to pursue what our lawyer calls our ‘battering-ram strategy’. We also call it our ‘Trojan horse or mare.’” Let’s hope that their mare is fast enough for it to be heard speaking far away among speakers of different languages, in languages other than those of the media and the ministry.

4. *The Bureau of Depositions* has been hosted in Grenoble by Le Patio Solidaire, the Magasin des Horizons, and the Théâtre Midi/Minuit. In October 2019, they produced a programme on web radio station R22, Plateau du Tout-monde, and at Un lieu pour Respirer, in Les Lilas, to whom I am grateful for the encounter. <https://r22.fr/antennes/tout-monde/les-plateaux-du-tout-monde/plateau-du-tout-monde-n2-oeuvrer-les-limites-du-droit>

The Bureau of Depositions. An exercise in speculative justice

By the members of *The Bureau of Depositions*: Mamadou Djouldé Baldé, Ben Bangoura, Saâ Raphaël Moudekeno, Pathé Diallo, Marie Moreau, Ousmane Kouyaté, Sarah Mekdjian, Mamy Kaba, Aliou Diallo, Aguibou Diallo, Diakité Laye

6 November 2019

Ousmane Kouyaté:

Thank you for coming. Thank you for reading us. We are addressing you, the audience here present, the audience on the airwaves, the people who are reading us, in your capacity as witnesses to this application for legal remedy.

We are the co-authors of the work *The Bureau of Depositions*, and I who stand here in front of you, am Ousmane Kouyaté. We will each introduce ourselves.

Those present stand up:

- Mamadou Djouldé Baldé, co-author of *The Bureau of Depositions*,
- Ben Bangoura, co-author of *The Bureau of Depositions*,
- Saâ Raphaël Moudekeno, co-author of *The Bureau of Depositions*,
- My name is Pathé Diallo, co-author of *The Bureau of Depositions*,
- My name is Marie Moreau, co-author of *The Bureau of Depositions*,
- Diakité Laye, co-author of *The Bureau of Depositions*,
- Ousmane Kouyaté, co-author of *The Bureau of Depositions*,
- Sarah Mekdjian, co-author of *The Bureau of Depositions*,
- Mamy Kaba, co-author of *The Bureau of Depositions*,
- My name is Aliou Diallo, co-author of *The Bureau of Depositions*,
- Aguibou Diallo, co-author of *The Bureau of Depositions*,
- one chair is empty: a silence arises from the absence indicated by this empty chair.

Mamy Kaba speaks first:

We are obliged to inform you that the work *The Bureau of Depositions* is being sabotaged as a consequence of migration policies. One of the co-authors was unable to be here today, because of the Dublin procedure, because he has been turned into an illegal immigrant. Because this co-author is absent against his will, because the *Bureau of Depositions* depends on the co-presence of its co-authors, what you see here, what you hear here, is a sabotaged expression of the work, *The Bureau of Depositions*.

Ousmane Kouyaté continues:

We are therefore making an application for legal remedy regarding copyright and intellectual property law, and in regard to fundamental freedom, and freedom of artistic creation. We write letters, witness statements, as a group. These letters allow us to raise the question of responsibility for the violence we are subjected to and that we are living witnesses to. Out of this practice of writing as a group, we are standing up to say that what is happening today is not being done in our name. It is from a desire for and a lack of justice that we are involved as a group in this exercise of speculative justice. What we mean by “speculative justice” is a suspension

of current justice, while at the same time relying on existing law, the creative strength of case law and the creative power of judges.

Sarah Mekdjian stands up and speaks:

In this place, here and now, under existing laws, we hereby halt the course of present-day justice.

Mamy Kaba takes the floor again:

The arguments we are presenting in our case are as follows:

We use the *Bureau of Depositions*, an intangible, performative work in process, without purpose and without end, to force the hand of the law to recognize our co-dependence. When a co-author is expelled, mistreated, or forced into clandestinity, the expression of the work is thwarted, its integrity is attacked, and our creative freedom is fettered.

We express ourselves, we share our ideas, our experiences, our anger and everything we have gone through as a result of migration policies. We are called “migrants”; the prefecture tries to separate us, to disperse us, to expel some of us, and to break us up.

Our application file analyses the causes of the litigation and raises the question of responsibility

SUMMARY OF THE APPLICATION FILE

I - Properties of the intangible, performative work in process, written in co-authorship

Attachment 1. Properties of the work *The Bureau of Depositions*

Attachment 2. Proof of the ongoing process of creation and research for the work, duration of the performance

Attachment 3. Co-author contracts

Appendices : Attachments A, B, C

Attachment A. The work *Bureau of Depositions* is intangible

– Extract from a UNESCO Convention

Attachment B. The work *Bureau of Depositions* is an evolving and infinite set of expressions; it is also the creative process, as a process without end or purpose.

– Quotations from texts by Sol LeWitt and François Deck

Attachment C. When one or more co-authors are expelled, the work is hindered

– Quotation from a text by Bernard Edelman

II - There is prejudice to the entirety of the work, obstruction to the freedom of artistic creation, through the expulsion and ill-treatment of its co-authors, resulting from:

1 - the continuum of internal and external policies in Europe and Africa; in particular, the imperialist relations between France and Guinea produced by the internal and external policies of the two States (section 1);

Attachment 4. Letter from Mamy Kaba

Attachment 5. Letter from Aguibou Diallo

Attachment 6. Letter from Aliou Diallo

2 - the conditions of the migrant journey and life in France; illegal work as the outcome of legal process (section 2);

Attachment 7. Letter from Mamadou Djouldé Baldé

Attachment 8. Letter from Diakité Laye

Attachment 9. Letter from Ousmane Kouyaté

Attachment 10. Letter from Pathé Diallo,
followed by additional testimony from Mamadou Djouldé Baldé
témoignage complémentaire de Mamadou Djouldé Baldé

Attachment 11. Letter from Pathé Diallo

3 - an existing justice system that is unfair, inequitable and reproduces violence and rejection; in this context, what does it mean to dispense justice (section 3)?

Attachment 12. Letter from Ousmane Kouyaté

Attachment 13. Letter from Mamadou Djouldé Baldé

Attachment 14. Letter from Aliou Diallo

Attachment 15. Letter from an anonymous author, read by Sarah Mekdjian

Attachment 16. Letter from Mamy Kaba

Attachment 17. Letter from Marie Moreau

of current justice, while at the same time relying on existing law, the creative strength of case law and the creative power of judges.

Sarah Mekdjian stands up and speaks:

In this place, here and now, under existing laws, we hereby halt the course of present-day justice.

Mamy Kaba takes the floor again:

The arguments we are presenting in our case are as follows:

We use the *Bureau of Depositions*, an intangible, performative and procedural work without purpose and without end, to force the hand of the law to recognize our co-dependence. When a co-author is expelled, mistreated, or forced into clandestinity, the expression of the work is thwarted, its integrity is attacked, and our creative freedom is fettered.

We express ourselves, we share our ideas, our experiences, our anger and everything we have gone through as a result of migration policies. We are called “migrants”; the prefecture tries to separate us, to disperse us, to expel some of us, and to break us up.

Our application file analyses the causes of the litigation and raises the question of responsibility.

THE APPLICATION FILE

I - Properties of the intangible, performative work in process, written in co-authorship

Saâ Raphaël Moudekeno speaks:

I call Marie Moreau to read Attachment 1 of the Action.

Attachment 1. Properties of the work *Bureau of Depositions*

The intangible, performative, procedural, infinite work *Bureau of Depositions* is declared to have been in progress since December 2017 and will remain so for an indeterminate and infinite length of time. It is an original work. As an intangible, performative, procedural, infinite work, it is a weapon against the destruction of our lives and our ties. It is a caress, an offering, springing from our creative, transformative powers.

Bureau of Depositions has taken shape since and during the absence of those men and women who have been unable to come to this *Bureau of Depositions*. They include:

- Those who have been deported against their will.
- Those who have been silenced and victimised.
- Those who have died at sea, in the desert and in the mountains who might have been able to join us.
- Those whose words cannot be authenticated for want of administrative stamps and papers.
- Those who have been dissuaded and have given up the idea that the journey is feasible.
- Those who are ignorant of migration policies.
- Those who have been refused entry by the European Union on the other side of the barrier, and who cannot scale the walls, particularly because of Frontex.
- Those who have been exploited, raped, imprisoned or killed because they are women.

Attachment 2. Proof of the ongoing process of creation and research for the work, duration of the performance

- Publication of the score of *Bureau des dépositions. Angle de transformation des politiques migratoires et des États-nations capitalistes*, Grenoble, Éditions Brouillon général, 2018.
- Residencies at the Patio Solidaire since December 2017 and at the Magasin des Horizons – Centre National d'Art et de Culture from February 2019 to now, Grenoble.
- Radio Antenne *Bureau des dépositions*, webradio R22, on the set of Tout-monde, from June 2019 to now.
- Performance *Bureau des dépositions. Exercice de justice spéculative*, at the Théâtre Midi/Minuit 13, 14, 17, 18 June 2019, Grenoble.
- Publication of the score of *Requête pour atteinte à l'intégrité de : Bureau des dépositions. Exercice de justice spéculative*, Grenoble, Édition Brouillon général, 2019.
- Performance *Bureau des dépositions. Exercice de justice spéculative*, («*Bureau of Depositions, an Exercise in Speculative Justice*») Lussas, village documentaire de Lussas, 25 juin 2019.
- Residency in Un lieu Pour Respirer, «*Œuvrer les limites du droit*», with Barbara Manzetti, *Bureau des Dépositions* et Rester. Étranger, webradio R22, plateau du Tout-monde, Les Lilas, 27, 28, 29 septembre 2019.
- Plateau Radio «*Œuvrer les limites du droit*», with Barbara Manzetti, *Bureau des dépositions* and Rester. Étranger, webradio R22, plateau du Tout-monde, 28 September 2019.

– Other performances have been scheduled, although the process of creation and research is on-going.

Attachment 3. Co-author contracts

In recent performances of the work the co-authors have been: Mamadou Djouldé Baldé, Ben Bangoura, Aguibou Diallo, Aliou Diallo, Pathé Diallo, Mamy Kaba, Ousmane Kouyaté, Diakité Laye, Sarah Mekdjian, Marie Moreau, Saâ Raphaël Moudekeno. Other co-authors may join us.

We, present: Mamadou Djouldé Baldé, Pathé Diallo, Aliou Diallo, Mamy Kaba, Saâ Raphaël Moudekeno, Diakité Laye, Ousmane Kouyaté, Ben Bangoura, Sarah Mekdjian, Marie Moreau, declare ourselves to be the co-authors and exclusive performers for an indefinite period of time of the work *Bureau of Depositions. An Exercise in Speculative Justice*, which means that none of us is replaceable. We must all be present together for the work to exist in its entirety.

APPENDICES (Attachments A, B, C):

Attachment A. The work *Bureau of Depositions. An Exercise in Speculative Justice* is intangible.

We quote:

– The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Unesco), 2003.

1. The purposes of this Convention are:

- (a) to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage;
- (b) to ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned;
- (c) to raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof;
- (d) to provide for international cooperation and assistance.

2. The “intangible cultural heritage”, as defined in paragraph 1 above, is manifested inter alia in the following domains:

- (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- (b) performing arts;
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events;
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- (e) traditional craftsmanship.

This work is part of a contemporary art movement that has been in progress for several decades and which considers that since we have already been able to sculpt earth, wood, stone, bronze, and vegetable matter, and since we have worked with the soil, the air, with pigments, movements, emptiness and fullness, we hereby declare that we sculpt and create justice and life. Our work is the sculpture of social practices. This sculpture is intangible.

The *Bureau of Depositions* is a work of art and research in favour of life and is opposed to those who kill and allow people to die.

Attachment B. The work *Bureau of Depositions. An Exercise in Speculative Justice* is a performance; it is sustained by a process of creation and continuous research, and is part of a field of art history that also defines an artwork as a creative process.

We quote:

– Sol LeWitt, *Sentences on Conceptual Art*, New York, Art & Language, 1969.

27. “The concept of a work of art may involve the matter of the piece or the process in which it is made.”

– François Deck, «Brouillon général (brouillon)», *Ce qui vient*, Rennes, Les Ateliers de Rennes, Dijon, Les Presses du réel, 2010.

“The process of work is the destination of work.”

– François Deck, 2004, “Reciprocal expertise”. This text, published in the journal *Third Text* (Vol. 18, Issue 6, December 2004), is based on a paper presented at the Tate Modern, London, on 25 October 2003, in the conference *Collaborative Practice in Contemporary Art*.

“The dematerialisation of art is of course, nothing new. Conceptual art pointed the way. [...]

Art is now able to move concretely into spaces that had previously been considered outside all artistic legitimacy. Principles of action, which may have had a utopian character some thirty or forty years ago – for instance, attitudes as forms, process-based or concept-based art, installation or situation art – can today be re-interpreted as operative modes of the real. [...]

The experience of art can constitute a model for complex contemporary activities: the production of intelligibility is not linked to any prescribed finality.”

Attachment C. When one or more co-authors are expelled, the work is hindered.

We quote:

– Bernard Edelman, *La Propriété littéraire et artistique* («Literary and Artistic Property»), Paris, collection « Que sais-je ? », Presses universitaires de France, 1989, ch. II, § 3., (quotation translated by Kate Davis)

“The nature of the link between the artist and the work.

If a work is “intangible property” and, even more so, if it is analysed as the production of a person, the logical result is that this work is an incarnation of the person and again logically, this work must be protected in the same way as the person who gave birth to it. In other words, the work as an incarnation of the identity of the subject is then in some way the subject himself.”

II - There is prejudice to the entirety of the work, obstruction to the freedom of artistic creation, through the expulsion and ill-treatment of its co-authors, resulting from:

1 - the continuum of internal and external policies in Europe and Africa; in particular, the imperialist relations between France and Guinea produced by the internal and external policies of the two States (section 1);

Attachment 4. Call Mamy Kaba, attachment 4, section 1 (extract from a letter).

To the attention of fellow Guineans, Ivorians, Liberians, French, Sierra Leoneans, the Embassies, the President of the French Republic, the French Foreign Minister, the Mayor of Grenoble, the editorial staff of Mediapart, and our friends,

Friday 2 March 2018
Le Patio, Saint-Martin-d'Hères, France

Dear Sir or Madam,

At the present time, Guineans have been deprived of their resources and we are witnessing the same state of affairs in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and in France. From an economic point of view, the exploitation of resources has not had a positive impact on local populations and this has led to social problems. For example, from the very beginning of their operations at the Simandou site in Guinea, Rio Tinto and Bellezone flouted the rules and conditions laid down, namely the construction of a rail network that would facilitate the movement of people. The operating companies had undertaken to develop the local communities surrounding the sites they had been allocated. There were several rebellions to oust these operators and for state resources to be shared out equally. These problems of democratic redistribution did nothing to decrease ethnic violence and fuelled conservative traditional cultures. Instead of traditions being a source of wealth, they gave rise to frenetic totalitarian regimes. Traditionalist patriarchs seized power and this has had political repercussions. We describe these aspects according to two standards: a national standard and an extra-national standard. Foreign policy in Guinea, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia does not benefit the population. Under these conditions, we, the peoples, cannot rely on the sovereignty of our resources.

In the name of the people of Guinea, from the Patio,
Campus of Saint-Martin-d'Hères, France

Attachment 5. Call Aguibou Diallo, attachment 5, section 1 (extract from a letter).

Europeans are in America, Americans are in Asia, Africans are in America... We are often told that the world is vast but sometimes it becomes so small that we wonder how we can forge a path towards expressing ourselves and enjoying one of the most important things that is freedom. Africans are told not to migrate, on the grounds that they are economic migrants. People forget the part our grandparents played in restoring peace in 1914-1918 and 1939-1945. People forget that the European empires migrated to Africa to plunder its resources and that the situation, as regards the export of raw materials, is essentially the same today. A currency has been imposed, for example in ECOWAS Africa, which covers the area of former French West Africa; a kind of diplomatic cooperation that benefits the European Union and corrupt heads of state who tarnish the image of Africa. I am a victim just as much as you who are reading this letter and of course you people listening. I recognize that a lot of people are doing the best they can here in France – especially in Grenoble, through voluntary organisations –, to change things. I am aware of this, but there is still work to be done and the hardest part is to follow the historical and geographical continuum of these policies, to understand the complicities, the responsibilities, to follow the money, to decolonize our established comforts, to decolonize the feelings of charity, protection or hatred that merely perpetuate the long-established relationships on either side of the Mediterranean and the oceans.

Attachment 6. Call Aliou Diallo, attachment 6, section 1 (extract from a letter).

I don't understand how anyone can be at peace with themselves and keep silent about what is destroyed. It is high time and very necessary that our workers and our executives realized that there is no such thing as harmless destruction, and that there are many other ways of living, that there are ways of living with respect. In 2018, in France, homeless people died of cold. We experienced slavery for four hundred years. Guinea-Conakry has significant mineral resources, the main ones being bauxite (one third of the world's reserves), gold, diamonds (mined since 1936), iron, oil, uranium, phosphates and manganese. In 1958, Guinea gained its independence; General de Gaulle, however, refused to put an end to colonial habits. The President of Guinea, Sékou Touré, was keen to prevent an independent Guinea from aligning itself with France. Since Sékou Touré's death on 26 March 1984, Guinea has remained under the influence of French politics. The French suction pump that draws in Guinean workers continues to operate. We want peace, we have not chosen to live in France in ignorance.

2 - the conditions of the migrant journey and life in France; illegal work as the outcome of legal process (section 2;

Attachment 7. Call Mamadou Djouldé Baldé, attachment 7, section 2 (extract from a letter). *Letter read in a tone of furious determination.*

I suffered, I walked, the path taught me a lesson. So many people have crossed the desert, the Mediterranean, Morocco, Spain, Libya and Italy, I survived and I feel deep sorrow for all those people who lost their lives in the hope of finding a better life. And yet, Europe is not the picnic our African brothers think it is. I am in Europe and I feel like I am in hell on earth. Courage is coming to terms with fear for one minute longer.

Attachment 8. Call Diakité Laye, attachment 8, section 2 (extract from a letter).

Once upon a time, there were about fifty people aboard a dinghy, led by a captain and a navigator. At 2am, departure of the convoy from the middle of a mountain forest to the seashore for embarkation. At 3 a.m., the dinghy cast off, heading for Europe, knowing that there was no turning back, however dangerous it might turn out to be. At about 9 a.m., a jerrycan of fuel fell out of the dinghy into the sea; there were only 4 jerrycans left, each containing 25 litres of fuel. By 12 noon, three were already empty, and there was only one left. Arriving in international waters at 3 p.m., the captain emptied the 4th can. After that, the engine broke down. The navigator tried to restart the engine, but had forgotten to secure the compass, which promptly fell into the sea: no more compass. Steering was now all down to chance. No more hope, just absolute silence, listening to the sound of the sea. At 9pm, a voice from a Spanish navy ship. Without them, this story would just have been about dying. At the same time, the Spanish government was driving people into hiding, killing them or leaving them to die. And then people talk about human rights. Since these human rights are not asylum seekers like us, especially not for people from countries in Africa. Where is the justice? For me, justice is created by the weak to guide the strong. When the strong never glories in property that does not belong to him.

Attachment 9. Call Ousmane Kouyaté, attachment 9, section 2. Piece read by Ousmane Kouyaté with Ousmane dead (extract from a letter).

I was the eldest in my family. Today I am 25 years old. I decided to leave, hoping to find work. On 15 January 2016 I set off. After crossing Libya, came another leg of the journey. It was 3 o'clock in the morning. In the open sea, a huge wave overturned our boat which we were crammed into like cattle. That's where I died, and with me 149 other people. I died without my mother knowing where I was buried, I died without my sisters knowing where I died. I died like a coward, while my mother thinks I'm going to come back one day to save her from hardship. I died because some men, some countries, some powerful people wanted it to be like this. By trying to avoid all their checkpoints, I ended up avoiding life. I'll come back as a zombie to put an end to all this indifference.

Attachment 10. Call Pathé Diallo, attachment 10, section 2 (extract from a letter).

A letter to the French authorities, to all those who draft and pass these wicked laws.

When you arrive at the prefecture, you are thrust into the problems of the Dublin Procedure, which leads you to other, more serious problems. you are summoned for police questioning so they can get their hands on you and send you back to the country of entry; once the police have got you for questioning, you are arrested and handcuffed, put on a plane and repatriated to your country of entry. Italy, Spain, Greece. When you arrive in that country, you are no longer recognized and you are abandoned in the countryside and exposed to all kinds of weather, and you're back to square one. A lot of people go crazy because of that.

Call Mamadou Djouldé Baldé, for additional testimony.

Attachment 11. Call Pathé Diallo, attachment 11, section 2.

Letter to the European Union and to those who pass these bad laws against foreigners.

European countries are guilty of deliberately not issuing documents to everyone so that others can exploit undocumented migrants, in harsh conditions, on construction sites or in tourist ski resorts, or in domestic work. For the past few months in Grenoble, exploited, undocumented people have been delivering food on bicycles. They are poorly paid victims of Uber and the States which allow labour law to be rendered meaningless. It's as if people give all their energy to get nothing in return. Like in the field of security. The going rate for security is 12 or even 15 euros an hour for the night. The people who subcontract to you will pay you 7 or 8 euros per hour. Toi tu es sur le terrain dans l'insécurité. Sometimes it's better than sitting around all day doing nothing. A lot of people go crazy waiting for the papers. You end up preferring to be exploited rather than sitting around, spending the whole day doing nothing for years on end, not knowing when those papers will come. It is the governments that are responsible, by not allowing people to work. It is a vicious circle: to achieve legal status, you have to have a job; to get a job, you have to have papers. Creating a union of undocumented workers would reduce the rate of unemployment. We could take a leaf out of the book of the undocumented workers in the United States and their union activism. In Germany, the receipt for your application for asylum allows you to work legally, which is good for the development of the country. Workers pay taxes. In France, driving workers underground reduces the cost of labour, to the benefit of employers and their subcontractors, who thus escape taxation. There should be respect for people. It is people who make the papers, not papers that make people.

3 - an existing justice system that is unfair, inequitable and reproduces violence and rejection; in this context, what does it mean to dispense justice (section 3)?

Attachment 12. Call Ousmane Kouyate, attachment 12, section 3 (extract from a letter).

There is a saying that “You can’t find a lost needle when your neighbour has his foot on it”. Meaning that it is difficult if not impossible to judge the crimes of someone who conceals them, who refuses to see them. Our dear President Condé is one of the people who ordered the massacres in Guinea, including the massacres of the people on 28 September 2009. He is the peddler of hatred and ethnic segregation into which the Guinean State has sunk. Being unwilling to run the risk of tarnishing his power, President Condé prefers to prevent any mention of this injustice.

Once in France, the right of asylum exists to protect the other from the violence and persecution they have suffered. This protective function of asylum is being replaced by a form of social repression. Instead of dispensing justice, the judicial officers, who are civil servants attached to the Ministry of the Interior, create conditions of injustice.

Attachment 13. Call Mamadou Djouldé Baldé, attachment 13, section 3.

How do you demand justice?

Are we talking about a claim?

How is justice to be dispensed?

Dispensed or seized?

How do you seize justice?

Remedial justice?

Punitive justice?

Remedy what, whom?

Punish what, whom?

Punish to remedy; remedy without punishing?

I ask that justice be done, but not from institutions that think they are gods on earth. Render to Caesar that which is Caesar’s. We will emerge from the chaos one day, our days are numbered, life is so short, so what is the good of power, war and ambition, since only my writings can deliver me? I prefer remedial justice. Why? Because I want those who are wrong to acknowledge that they are wrong and to agree to live with the victims.

Attachment 14. Call Aliou Diallo, attachment 14, section 3.

However long you leave a chunk of wood in the water, it will never turn into a crocodile. I hereby declare from life, death, blood, fear, doubts, hours, days, time, man, woman, fury, drama, war, peace. I ask that justice be remediable. Why? Because you can’t put out a fire with fire. We seek peace in time of war and we seek war in time of peace.

Attachment 15. Letter written by an anonymous author. Call Sarah Mekdjian for her reading, attachment 15, section 3 (extract from a letter).

We eventually set up the Court of Injustice and Justice. Bellem had been involved in free courts, or whatever he called them, they were some sort of people’s assemblies. These had been modelled on the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal that had been created in Algeria in 1975

during the *Antémonde* to judge the colonial policies of the time. The idea was to have a court that judged facts, actions and organisations, but not people. A court where you could press charges and plead, but without punishment. I had never heard of it before, but Bellem was enthusiastic: in the south of Haraka, along almost the entire Mediterranean coast, laws had been judged for years. They would judge judgments, judge past or present collective choices that had been harmful. A large number of Haraks flocked to *The Bureau of Depositions* to file petitions concerning past, present or future matters brought before the Tribunal. They judged the judgment, identified what had been harmful, recognized what could be done differently. And it could have gone on forever. There was no punishment, no exclusion, no banishment.

Bellem, a member of Patio Solidaire, has taken part in the proceedings of *The Bureau of Depositions* from Patio Solidaire, where *The Bureau of Depositions* has been meeting since February 2018. Patio Solidaire is a collective and a squat in a building earmarked for demolition on the campus of Grenoble University, formerly the premises of a law research team.

Attachment 16. Unknown author, call Mamy Kaba for the reading of attachment 16, section 3.

Where does anger go if there is no punishment? What does convicting the European Union mean? Does it mean obliging them to pay? If so, whom and how much? How can we dispense justice without dividing people into torturers and victims? How does one judge complicity? Could our lives set a legal precedent?

Attachment 17. Call Marie Moreau, attachment 17, section 3.

With the work *Bureau of Depositions*, we put present-day justice on hold and seize justice, we dispense justice. We take up what others have written on city walls: “Women did not gain the right to vote by voting”, which confirms that we need to establish our rights through social movements that safeguard life and relationships, when others kill them.

By speculative justice, we mean potential justice, which takes place within the existing framework of the justice we wish to pass judgment on. By uniting together, we also create a kind of transformative justice, in the sense of a justice that gives voice to the causes and consequences of these acts of violence, and thereby opens up new possibilities.

Our work is in process. Proceeding. In the middle of proceedings. Proceeding. Each *Bureau of Depositions* presented to the public enables us to start afresh, to reopen the debate and the disagreements about our positions. This work is open to new authors. It is not a work of fiction; it continues in ongoing research with a lawyer and will be the subject of an application to a county court or an administrative court.

The *Bureau of Depositions* is a space to be seized, to be revived, it is for people who journey, who arrive, who leave or who stay, for people who are disturbed by what our political regimes are doing with our lives. We want to abolish the commonplace crimes produced as a result of borders, those thick, diffuse, logistical, sometimes dramatised sometimes invisible and ubiquitous continuums. We are not illegal migrants, we are resisting the criminality of nation-states, of the private and semi-private interests that are behind those structures which kill people or leave them to die, or exploit them. And by resisting we are changing them.

This text is the score of the performance entitled *Bureau of Depositions, an Exercise in Speculative Justice*. The performance is an application for legal remedy in the context of a litigation concerning copyright and fundamental freedoms. The litigation concerns restrictions placed on the exercise of freedom of artistic creation for the co-authors of the work *Bureau of Depositions, an Exercise in Speculative Justice*, and a violation of the work as a whole.

During the performance, this score is improvised upon, debated, and discussed by all its co-authors. This score is therefore not the work.

The performance *Bureau of Depositions, an Exercise in Speculative Justice*, is part of a continuous process of creation and research which began in 2017. The process includes the writing and publication of letters of evidence, radio broadcasts, creative residencies, research seminars, and the publication of articles. The aim of all these activities is to multiply and to share cases and concerns in order to work on the limits of the law and to sculpt the absence of justice.

Many of the co-authors are under threat of expulsion at the time of writing and have been driven underground. Many co-authors have been deported and driven out of France since the work first began to be created as well as during several performances. This has constituted a series of obstacles to our freedom of artistic creation and a series of violations of the work as a whole.

We appeal to the creative power of the judge. We are using copyright as a Trojan mare to attack litigation concerning the rights of foreigners.

We have drawn inspiration – with their agreement – from *Plaidoirie pour une jurisprudence. X et Y c/Préfet de...* [*Case for the Defence as Precedent. X and Y versus the Prefect of...*], a performance written by Sylvia Preuss-Laussinotte, Sébastien Canevet, Olive Martin, and Patrick Bernier. In the wake of their creation, we are seeking to set a precedent. We are extremely grateful to them.

Patio Solidaire in Grenoble for the powerfully subversive effect they generate and convey;
The shop, *Magasin des Horizons*, in Grenoble for their support;
Théâtre Midi/Minuit in Grenoble;
Radio R22 Tout-monde at Les Lilas;
Éditions du Brouillon Général;
The La Criée contemporary art centre in Rennes and its journal *Lili, la rozell et le marimba*.

author

biographies

in order
of appearance

Sophie Kaplan

I am a white woman of Jewish descent in a Christian culture, and something of an animist. I grew up in a left-wing intellectual milieu, in a multicultural socialist, working-class suburb. I have lived in Essonne, Paris, Sundgau and romantic Brittany. I have been running the La Criée contemporary art centre in Rennes since September 2012.

My critical approach and curatorial practice are built on the importance of collaboration, particularly with artists, by setting up a programme of thematic cycles and affiliated artists at La Criée; allowing space for narratives as engines of research, creation and transmission; and an interest in a cross-fertilisation of arts, disciplines and knowledge.

I like J.-S. Bach, Patti Smith and Tiken Jah Fakoli; Matrix, Wong Kar-wai and Jonas Mekas; John Giorno, Italo Calvino and Benoîte Groult; Fra Angelico, Robert Filliou and Etel Adnan.

Émilie Renard

My name means “fox” in French, but I am a 42 year old, white, cisgender, actively heterosexual mother – a non-believer and non-heteronormative, non-binormative woman with a strong sense of sisterhood. From a social point of view, it’s simple: as an independent/dependent senior executive, I currently benefit from a research grant from the French Employment Agency (Pôle Emploi) paid in the form of unemployment benefit. I am taking advantage of the French welfare system in the best possible way. In fact, I have been a curator and author since 2000 and I ran an art centre, La Galerie, in Noisy-le-Sec from 2012 to 2018. My curatorial practice has developed according to these two types of function: as an independent author, my research focus is based on the power of art to act within the structures of the imaginary, trusting in the power of the art experience to transform personal perceptions and collective representations. In an institutional context, I have sought to use the artistic programme of an art centre as a lever to act on the aesthetic, social and symbolic relationships between the people who make it work: the artists, the staff, the public, and the partners. I take an attentive, interconnected, feminist approach to the effects of the power structures that operate within institutions – those that allocate roles and separate out practices. To overcome these cleavages, I seek to connect what is separate within and around the practice of art: the personal and the professional, making art and administrating art, majority and minority conditions.

John Cornu

I am an artist and a senior lecturer in visual arts at the University of Rennes 2. I am responsible for the artistic programme at the Galerie Art & Essai¹. Since 2006, I have done a large number of interviews with contemporary artists².

I love art, above all for their human purpose. I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to study and I am now trying to repay that debt at the university while at the same time developing my own artistic practice.³ My interests are varied, but I am particularly interested in certain features of modernism and certain coercive societal structures.

1. As part of my activities at the Galerie Art & Essai and the label *Hypothèse*, I have collaborated with and curated programmes for, amongst others: Liam Everett, Estèla Alliaud, Claire Chesnier, Quentin Lefranc, Jean-Luc Moulène, Valentin Carron, Felice Varini, Laurent Tixador, Francis Raynaud, Michel Verjux, Avelina Fuentes, Clément Laigle, Eva Nielsen, Gina Pane, Jérémy Demester, Karina Bisch, Nicolas Chardon, Aurélie Godard, Eva Taulois, Étienne Bossut, Louise Bossut, Ann Veronica Janssens, Mathieu Mercier, Claude Rutault, Armand Morin, Claude Lévêque, and François Morellet.

2. Daniel Buren, Cécile Bart, Claude Lévêque, Mathieu Mercier, Michel Verjux, Claude Rutault, Felice Varini, Étienne Bossut, Jean-Luc Moulène, Valentin Carron, Francis Raynaud, Ivan Liovik Ebel, Laurent Tixador, Mohamed Bourouissa, Eva Nielsen, Clément Laigle, Anne-Charlotte Yver, Yann Sérandour, Karina Bisch, Nicolas Chardon, Liam Everett, and many others.

3. In my capacity as an artist I have exhibited at the Palais de Tokyo, the Maison Rouge and the CNEAI (Paris), at Mains d'Œuvres (Saint-Ouen), at the Hub Hug/40mcube (Rennes), at the Parvis Centre d'Art Contemporain (Ibos), at the Trinitaires (Metz), at BF15 (Lyon), at the EAC-Espace de l'Art Concret (Mouans-Sartoux), at the BBB Centre d'Art and at the Abattoirs-Frac Midi-Pyrénées (Toulouse), at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes et de Calais, at Attic et Maison Particulière (Brussels), at the SCVA-Sainsbury Center for Visual Arts (Norwich), at the MACRO-Museo di Arte Contemporanea di Roma (Rome), at CIRCA (Montreal), at the Chambre Blanche (Quebec), at ZQM and at the Galerie Gilla Lörcher (Berlin); in the Lyon Biennale and the Biennale de Busan (South Korea). I did a public commission, *Comme un gant*, in Thuin, Belgium in 2015 and I am presently working on a project for a park up north of New York.

Katia Kameli

Katia Kameli, born in the centre of France, in the Auvergne, the result of an incongruous encounter on a dance floor. Moussa, an Algerian worker with an Afro haircut, was visibly smitten with Danièle, a young nurse from the Berry region. After the disco-funk years, it was the fiasco system and, for me, the beginning of the UM years between Algeria and France. Since then, I've been particularly comfortable with airports. As a teenager, I wanted to be in *Fame* in New York, but I consoled myself with the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Bourges. As a post-graduate, I had important encounters with Maria and Michelangelo Pistoletto, Pierre Savatier, Eric Duyckaerts, and Paul Devautour. Each of them in their own way gave me the urge to pursue and to persist in my chosen research areas, the in-between, feminism, and post colonialism. It was later in New York, where I did a residency, that I encountered the terms *visual* and *cultural* studies. I am a utopian; I still believe that art can change standardised thinking.

Lotte Arndt

Lotte Arndt believes that identities are ongoing conversations, socially structured, and in a constant state of flux. Sinzo Aanza's assertion "Man is not watertight; he is inevitably porous; it is insidious but inevitable" in his novel *Genealogy of a Banality* – in spite of its masculine, anthropocentric tone – seems to her to be good company in the context of the journal, as do the probings of American historian Joan Scott into the (impossible) "evidence of experience": these are implements deployed in the hope that, through exchanges and conversations, we may see the emergence of conceptual and relational spaces that are conducive to detours, side-steps, shifts, shadowy areas, and transversal alliances seeking to evade or resist the mechanisms of capture.

Jean-Roch Bouiller:

Jean-Roch Bouiller, white French man, married to a Canadian woman, father of two children, 46 years old, that's fine, it's easy, but there are a number of other subjects on which I would be less assertive. As for my social origins, it seems to me that, in order to be accurate, I would have to go back over several generations of my family history (or to have reached the end of a long bout of psychoanalysis). I grew up in the country a stone's throw from a museum of folk arts and traditions where my father was the curator. I had wanted to become a museum curator (like Dad) since the age of about 7 or 8 (which is much too early, as everyone would agree). Nevertheless, I achieved this objective with the help of the Institut National du Patrimoine (INP) after studies in ethnology (Master I) and art history (PhD). What never ceases to fascinate me about museums is their detachment from the real world and at the same time the delusion that they can take account of the real world and explain it; the constant flow of visitors who, as if in some kind of ritual, come to interact with this unreal-real world; the infinite variety of human inventions that they contain.

Baptiste Brun

My name is Baptiste Brun. I was born in the Alps where I spent the first twenty years of my life. My great-great-aunt was the object of great fundraising efforts by the MNATP (a museum of the popular arts and traditions of France). Freud told me in a dream that this episode of my family history was a condition for my involvement in this project. I moved to the city as a student, a period that was almost as long. My main activity is teaching, one of the places I do this is the university. I also like putting on exhibitions where art is involved. My more sporadic, performative work is very important to me. Stimulated by my work on something akin to Art Brut, but also by rock music technique, whether working alone (*Les Conférences du Docteur Bâton*) or with others (*Les Schizomètres de Marco Decorpeliada*), my performative work explores discourse and the principles for assigning value. I mistrust them like the plague. I am troubled by the question of mental illness as a social illness. I'm very fond of the French bands *Poil* and *PinioL*.

Jean-Marc Huitorel

Art critic, exhibition curator, and teacher, Jean-Marc Huitorel was born in 1953 and lives in Rennes. Since the end of the 1980s, he has taken part in numerous artistic events in France and abroad, as art critic, essayist, curator, expert and member of professional associations. In addition to the many artists with whom he collaborates, his research focuses on the question of representation, and the economic, political and, more broadly, anthropological aspects of art. Since the late 1990s, he has been working on the links between art and sport.

He began his activity as an art critic with the journal *Sens Large* in 1984-1985. From 1989 to 1991, he was a contributor to *Opus International*, then to *Attitude* and *02*. Since the beginning of the 1990s, he has written regularly for the journals *Art Press* and *Critique d'Art*, of which he is a member of the reading committee. He is the author of monographs on the painters François Dilasser (*La Différence*, 1990, Musée de Brest, 2008) and Gilbert Dupuis (*La Différence*, 1992), Yves Chaudouët (*Actes Sud*, 2003), the photographer Yves Trémorin (*Joca Seria*, 1996), Gérard Deschamps (*Éditions du Regard*, 2017), Tal Coat (*Musée de Pont-Aven*, 2019), as well as theoretical works such as *Les Règles du jeu. Le peintre et la contrainte* (Frac Basse-Normandie, 1999), *La Beauté du geste. L'art contemporain et le sport* (Éditions du Regard, 2005), *Art et économie* (Éditions Cercle d'art, 2008), *Une forme olympique/Sur l'art, le sport, le jeu* (Espace d'art contemporain HEC, 2017). He has contributed to a number of group publications: *Negro Toi-même* (Isthme éditions, 2005), *Rita Mc Bride* (IAC Villeurbanne, 2002), *Neal Beggs* (Isthme éditions, 2004), *Pascal Rivet* (Isthme éditions, 2004), *Gilles Mahé* (Jean-Michel Place, 2004). In addition, he has written articles and catalogue prefaces on Marcel Dinahet, Marylène Negro, Alain Séchas, Neal Beggs, Étienne Bossut, Bernard Piffaretti, Christelle Familiari, Berdaguer & Péjus, Alain Bernardini, Lara Almarcegui, Nicolas Chardon, Stephen Dean, Yann Sérandour, Benoît Laffiché, Renée Levi, Guillaume Bresson, Régis Perray, Dector & Dupuy, Yves Bêlorgey, Les Frères Chapuisat, Jean-Benoit Lallemand, and Nicolas Floc'h, amongst others.

As an independent curator, he was joint Artistic Director of Mai de la Photo, 11, Reims, 1996, and curator of the exhibitions: *Neal Beggs, Claire Chevrier, Marcel Dinahet* (Atelier/Jean Brolly, Paris, 2006); *Mimetic* (Centre d'art de l'Yonne, 2007); *Étienne Bossut* (Abbaye de Quincy, 2007); Roderick Buchanan (*La Criée*, Rennes, 2007); *L'art est un sport de combat* (Musée des Beaux-arts de Calais, 2011, cat.), and co-curator of *Ulysses, l'autre mer* (Frac Bretagne, 2013).

He has been a member of the specialist committees of several regional contemporary art collections (FRAC): Frac Basse-Normandie (1993-2000), Frac Bourgogne (2000-2005) and Frac Franche-Comté (2006-2010) and a member of the bureau of AICA France, (1997-2009).

He was a member of the oversight committees of La Criée-Centre d'Art Contemporain, Rennes (2009-2011), and of the biennial, Les Ateliers de Rennes (2006-2010). Since 2015, he has been President of the academic council of the Archives de la Critique d'Art.

Vincent Victor Jouffe

Vincent Victor Jouffe born 1968 in Dinan, lives and works in Saint-Méloir-des-Bois, in Brittany.

After graduating from the drawing and engraving departments at the Beaux-Arts de Paris and the University of Paris 8, in 1994, Vincent Victor Jouffe moved into an old farmhouse: La Ville es Bret. With this return to his roots, he set about building up a corpus of photographs and films, while at the same time developing his own practice of drawing. *La Promenade de l'Assomption* (1995), consists of 17 Polaroids documenting the hamlet of La Ville es Bret. Several parameters – theoretical, historical, social and biographical – are at play in this programmatic work. His works can thus be read as both visual narrative forms, as a picture newspaper for example, or as the social chronicle of a rural world losing its roots and identity. The most widely circulated example is a collection of more than 800 items relating to the last agricultural events in his canton, which he assembled between 1996 and 2006.

Works by Jouffe can be found in several public collections including the Musée Français de la Photographie, FRAC Bretagne, and the painting department of the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris.

Vincent Victor Jouffe has been involved since 1989 in artists' collectives, having organized several exhibitions from 1993 to 2011. He is a founding member of Fraap, a federation

of networks and associations of visual artists. For further information, see the website Documents d'Artistes Bretagne: www.ddab.org/jouffe

Seulgi Lee

Seulgi Lee has developed an atypical body of work infused with humour and populated by monsters, goddesses, anthropomorphic vegetal figures, objects that are both useful and opaque. In her work, colours, gestures, shapes and performances inspired by the banalities of everyday life and geometric abstraction spring forth in the shadow of a disquieting strangeness. Her work formalises an aesthetic and conceptual analysis of the concept of tools, based on folk traditions and customs as well as craftsmanship. She describes her sculptural practice as utilitarian, accessible, and invariably linked to the power, the weakness and the contingency of bodies - an extension of her reflections on the instability of human beings, objects, and works of art.

Born in Seoul in 1972, Seulgi Lee studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris (1994-2000) and the Art Institute of Chicago (1999). Her solo exhibitions include: the opening of the cycle *Lili, la rozell et le marimba* (2019) recently at La Criée, an exhibition following her Sindoh award for contemporary art, in Seoul (2016), The Mimesis Museum, Paju, Korea (2015), and at La Ferme du Buisson de Noisiel (2009). She was artist in residence at L'Appartement 22 in Rabat, Morocco in 2019 (curator Claire Staebler). Major joint exhibitions include: *Burning Down the House* (Gwangju Biennale, 2014), *Intense Proximité* (La Triennale, Palais de Tokyo, 2012), *Evento* (Bordeaux Biennale, 2009), *Annual Report* (Gwangju Biennale, 2007). Between 2001 and 2003, along with Simon Boudvin, she founded a space for art experiments, Paris Project Room, in Paris. She is represented in France by Galerie Jousse Entreprise and in Seoul by Gallery Hyundai.

Valentin Carron, born 1977 in Martigny (Switzerland), where he lives and works, was invited to represent Switzerland at the 55th Venice Biennale of Contemporary Art in 2013. His work epitomises a significant renewal of the Swiss art scene. He has featured in a great many solo exhibitions, including: the Consortium Museum, Dijon (2020), the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes and the Galerie Art & Essai Université Rennes (2018), the Centre d'Édition Contemporaine, Geneva (2016); the Kunsthalle Bern (2014), the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2010), La Conservera Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Ceuti/Murcia (2009), The Swiss Institute, New York, (2006); with Mai-Thu Perret at the Chisenhale Gallery, London (2006) and the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva (2015); with Stéphane Dafflon, at Fri Art, Fribourg (2013). He has also taken part in many joint exhibitions, including: Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich (2019), the Mudac, Lausanne (2015), the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich (2013), the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva (2013), the Kunsthaus, Aarau (2012), the Consortium, Dijon (2012), the Rubell Family Collection, Miami (2012), the Mudac, Lausanne (2015), CAPC-Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux (2008), SculptureCenter, New York (2007).

Trinh T. Minh-ha

Trinh T. Minh-ha is a film-maker, writer, composer, and Professor of Gender & Women's Studies and Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley. Her many publications include *Lovecidal. Walking with the Disappeared* (2016), *D-Passage. The Digital Way* (2013), *Elsewhere, Within Here* (2011), *The Digital Film Event* (2005), *Cinema Interval* (1999), *Framer Framed* (1992), *When the Moon Waxes Red* (1991), *Woman, Native Other* (1989). She has made eight feature-length films, including *Forgetting Vietnam* (2015-2016), *Night Passage* (2004), *The Fourth Dimension* (2001), *A Tale of Love* (1996), *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989), which have been the object of numerous retrospectives throughout the world. Major collaborative installations include *Old Land New Waters* (2007-2008, 3rd Guangzhou Triennial, China 2008), *L'Autre Marche* (Musée du Quai-Branly - Jacques Chirac, Paris 2006-2009), *The Desert Is Watching* (Kyoto Biennial, 2003) and *Nothing but Ways* (Yerba Buena, 1999). The many prizes she has been awarded include The Wild Dreamer Lifetime Achievement Award at the Subversive Festival, Zagreb, Croatia, 2014, The Lifetime Achievement Award of the Women's Caucus for Art, 2012, The Critics' Choice Book Award of the American Educational Studies Association (AESA) for her book *Elsewhere within Here* (2012) and The MIPDoc Trailblazer Award (2006), Cannes, France.

Le Bureau des dépositions

The Bureau of Depositions comprises eleven members: Mamadou Djouldé Baldé, Ben Bangoura, Saâ Raphaël Moudekeno, Pathé Diallo, Marie Moreau, Ousmane Kouyaté, Sarah Mekdjian, Mamy Kaba, Aliou Diallo, Aguibou Diallo, Diakitè Laye.

The performance *Bureau of Depositions. An Exercise in Speculative Justice* is part of an ongoing process of creation and research that was launched in 2017. This process involves the writing and publication of letters of deposition, radio broadcasts, creative residencies, research seminars, and the publication of articles. All these activities are aimed at multiplying and sharing cases and concerns in order to work on the limits of the law and to sculpt the lack of justice.

Several co-authors are under threat of deportation at the time of writing this text, and are in hiding. Several co-authors have been deported, removed from French territory, since the process of creation of the work began, as well as during several performances. This represents a series of restrictions on our freedom of artistic creation, and is an infringement of both the integrity of the work and our moral rights vis à vis the work. We are making an appeal to the creative power of the judge. We are using copyright as a Trojan mare to challenge litigation related to the rights of foreigners.

Jocelyn Cottencin

From the age of 15 to 20, Jocelyn Cottencin was active on the international Windsurfing circuit. After one last world championship in South Africa, he took a joint degree in arts and architecture, graduating from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris.

He uses recurring themes such as the notion of group and community in his work on form, images, signs and space. His projects involve installation, film, graphic design, typography, performance and books.

In 2001, he founded the studio Lieux Communs, a working platform for graphic design, typography and publishing activities. As an artist and graphic designer, he deals extensively with codes and language, the transmission and reception of images and, most importantly, with ensuring that a project or piece of work is not confined to a particular geographical area, but circulates between different points. Many of Jocelyn Cottencin's friends are choreographers. He has created scenography for Olivia Grandville, Loïc Touzé, Latifa Laabissi, and Alain Michard. In recent years, he has worked closely with Emmanuelle Huynh, designing installations and performances with her. His latest projects include a film *Faire Feu*, which was presented at Kanal Centre Pompidou in Brussels in March 2019, and *Monumental*, a performance work for twelve dancers that was presented this year in Philadelphia, Brussels and Paris. Last January, he exhibited *Échauffement Général* ("General Warm-up") at the Centre Chorégraphique de Montpellier. It was directed by Christian Rizzo and consists of a set of warm-ups. The texts were commissioned by various choreographers and performers. He has just completed an installation, *Chronique d'un Automne, les formes du travail* ("Chronicle of an Autumn, the forms work takes"), for the IUT C technology university in Roubaix. It consists of three films that straddle documentary, fiction and performance.

Jocelyn Cottencin's work is regularly presented in France and abroad. In the last few years, his work has been shown in Paris, at the Palais de Tokyo, and the Pompidou Centre; in Malaga; at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (Mana); Mana, Jersey City; Kanal, Brussels; UArts, Philadelphia.

He has been a visiting artist in various schools in France and abroad, and teaches on the Master's programme EXERCE at the Centre Chorégraphique, Montpellier. He has one son and three daughters. He lives and works everywhere, and likes to live in spaces where both are possible.

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Note on form:

Out of respect for the formal choices of our authors, we, the journal's
graphic designer and editorial board, have opted for the original font
of each contribution and the authors' use (or not) of inclusive writing.

E-mail from the graphic designer to the editorial board:

"The journal's graphic project involves the questioning of the forms
and the graphic and visual tools habitually used by the various contributors
and the printer of the journal.

The journal's folded format is the maximum permitted by the presses
at the City of Rennes printers. The printing tool habitually used for faultless
reproduction of documents is utilised here to produce one-off copies
by varying mechanical adjustments such as damping. On some pages,
including the cover, an area of solid colour will be randomly modified
by variations in damping, the effect being unpredictability of the area's
quality and contours. Overall the graphic and typographic grid reflects
the idea of transcribing a dynamic – the rhythm of conversation
and orality. The principle is to take up the typographic habits of each
contributor and compose the texts unjustified, with different indents/
alignments in each case.

The grid varies in its organisation of the columns according
to the context of the discussions. The face-to-face discussions are rendered
with a double column system, whereas, for example, the e-mail conversation
between Katia and Seulgi is laid out as a column transcribing the question/
answer time frame.

For the texts which are neither conversations or dialogues, a final
variation on the grid is used which corresponds more closely to theoretical
or critical pieces.

The reproduction of documents also embodies the idea of staying
as close as possible to the original. For T. Minh-ha I have re-used the format
and composition of the book, but with greater precision in the composition
of the actual texts. The copy appears as a book in the journal, playing on
the idea of a facsimile or a reprint; the same applies for the Bureau
des Dépôts. The visual identity of the *Lili*, *la rozell* et *le mariba* series
has been created from a selection of original fonts, a kind of vernacular
from my own studio based on association of ideas and forms that produces
a font for each word. In the signature there are four fonts; there are four
journals, with one font per journal for the titles. The book font for the other
texts is Miedinger versus Licko, created for La Criée in 2008."

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LA CRIÉE
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Valentin Carron *Archaïque Fade Cercle*, 2011, bronze, black laquer, 6 x 10,5 x 8cm
© Valentin Carron Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / New York

In the entrance of the Lakhels' house in Ain Bouchrik, 31 October 2018, photo Seulgi Lee
(with the support of Appartement 22, Rabat)

The exhibitions, events and research in *the Lili, la rozell et le marimba* cycle, which is being held at the La Criée Contemporary Art Centre from September 2019 to August 2021, explore the links between contemporary art and vernacular techniques and traditions. This first issue of the journal that accompanies the cycle contains, for the most part, conversations. It follows trains of thought that were shared at the same time as they were given utterance to – thoughts that needed absolutely to be transmitted in words.

Vernacular cultures find expression within communities according to custom, unlike vehicular forms which are uniformly propagated and independent of locality. Vernacular art might therefore be defined as practices for which a local context is all-important. At a time when the global dimension seems to have become too narrow and when universalist thought has shown the limits of its supposed neutrality, a multitude of vernacular counter-cultures are now emerging. They reveal a determination, on the part of those who promote them, to adapt themselves to specific entities, to locate in outlying places, to speak the languages of a local area. These forms of vernacular renewal appear as a vector for rootedness, integration and, indeed, a slowing down. As the gaps between situated expression and a freely circulating, hegemonic culture widen, underground links connect these localities to others all over the world. These tensions between the vernacular and the vehicular are things that structure our collective imagination, whether we are convinced of the autonomy of art or of its capacity to invent alternative forms.



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