

PARADIS INFERNAUX / ENFERS PARADISIAQUES

Infernal Paradises / Paradisiacal Hells

INTRODUCTION

The "Photography and architecture" triennial is organized within the cultural missions taken on by the faculties of architecture of La Cambre/Horta and the Free University of Brussels.

This framework is important. When a faculty of architecture decides to organize a photography exposition, it invites its community and visitors to exercise their view.

Indeed the educational mission of its faculty consists primarily in the development of a consciousness according to which architecture is, first and foremost, the reading and understanding of a specific situation before it is interpreted and transformed.

Reading, understanding and interpreting that is to say "to represent the world to one's self"

To transform, that is to say, to shape proposals of worlds where existences will be arranged, as Nicolas Hannequin likes to say. The famous American architect Louis Kahn speaks of architecture as "a world within the world". In this way, photography is architecture as it is constituted of an inhabited space, constructed by the sense of an informed view. These marvelous disciplines share the fact that they can only be generous propositions of singular realities and that they are to be experienced far more than they are trying to prove something, that they represent traces of this fabulous adventure of the human mind.

We would like one of the characteristics of our triennial to be that architecture be essentially evoked beyond its formal value and its esthetic dimension so that it may invest its humanized layers, invisible, coded, mapped, its values of exchange, non-marketable, the sense which it contributes to establish with its signs, in its more anonymous reality, more day to day, the furthest from its status as an object. This "sensibility" will certainly contribute to our choices.

THEME

Autuona, Marquesas islands, may 1903.

Paul Gauguin is living his last days in the "maison du Jouis".

He is reminiscing about a game he used to play as a child in the city of Lima. "Paradise-a little further...": in the playground of a catholic school, a circle of children constantly changing position around a blindfolded classmate in the center, he is "being punished".

The "punished" child is going haphazardly from one classmate to the next, looking for a warm liberating answer always asking the same repetitive question: "Is this Paradise?". And always he is receiving the same answer, almost like a guilty reversed mantra: "No my friend, not here. Go ask a bit further on." (1)

This visionary had fled old Europe for an initiatory journey of "acculturation", in order to renew with the spontaneity, force and vigor of a fresh artistic vision.

At the dusk of his days, almost blind, this modern day Icarus must accept the inevitable: his frenetic search for an absolute, has plunged him in hell, although he had always been proclaiming the possibility of heaven on earth.

If we stray from the protecting figure of this libertarian painter who embodied the three dimensions, the "ask a bit further on", which he refers to in the false childhood pleasantries, does not specify if it is placed in time, space or our capacity to existential autonomism (what Nietzsche might call the "beyond").

And it is exactly for this reason, because of these three paradigms, that the subject will always remain relevant. As the question of paradise intimately linked to that of hell inevitably leads us to wonder what constitutes and institutes them, and what we must do to adhere or escape from them in an ever more complex world. To find one's way, one's place, to join, to find but also to flee, to flee from, to run away, to join, to reach all the while finding one's way, one's place...

There are multiple paths to follow while moving through a civilization system where pressure and collective control have never been more insidiously active, all while official rhetoric of all type proclaims and declares liberty and individual emancipation.

In other words, because they are heirs of the age of enlightenment our modern societies should contribute to the emancipation of individuals if they want to be coherent with the values they advocate, however they reveal themselves as monstrously sophisticated systems of organized surveillance, of individual and collective annihilation, and as such

the generators of codes, rules, explicit and implied norms, all an appropriate arsenal for this...infernally machine.

Gilles Deleuze would probably have represented this machine as “diagram, an abstract machine (...), an almost blind and silent machine, although it is itself that which lets us see and talk” (2) This diagram would then be “the exhibit of the balance of power which constructs this power” (3), a systematic power with one sole objective, that has always been to maintain the consubstantial conditions for its full exercise in an non-egalitarian system.

For this reason, modern capitalistic or financial powers control time. They control time by killing it, we live in a dead time (4), one where the present is carefree and exacerbated, where it is cut from an historical perspective or comprehension, disconnected from the past and disengaged from the future. A time where the individual, instead of building a future, consumes the moment with pleasure.

Simultaneously, the same modern power, capitalistic or financial, constrain space. They do this through globalization. We live in a world uniform to the point that nothing can be differentiated, this world draws an advantage from generic contamination, normalization and standardization. A space where the universal does not draw on the ideal of egalitarian harmonization of differences but in uniformitarianism, where individuals assimilate what resembles and what assembles.

Finally, modern financial or ultra-liberal power concentrate their efforts on the dissolution of singular existential identity. It creates the conditions for unconsciousness, docility, blindness, and the alienation of contemporary individualism through mechanisms of soft brainwashing or rough subjection. The individual dissolves, and regresses to the ultimate point of becoming interchangeable.

Modern power expects the contemporary individual, without any hold over time, space or his own existential potential, to adhere to the predigested mega narrative, and to do so unconsciously, or better yet collaboratively.

This mega narrative is presented as a model, as a manual for happiness, as an imperative injunction of which the power, be it sovereign or normalizing, vouches and protects. It meticulously controls, rewards total loyalty and represses any act of transgression or subversion.

From gratification to repression, this consumeristic mega narrative offers and classifies hells and paradises, with its chosen few and its outcasts, all this within and outside of its boundaries. But also, and most importantly to us, within its spaces, places and territories.

These hells and paradises of our consumeristic world are obviously incarnated here and now. Sometimes, in our universe where pathos is stronger than ethos, we “like” or we “hate” them accordingly.

Opposing to it, somewhat all too easily, would be, prisons, asylums, refugee camps, correctional facilities and derelict suburbs on one side and private colleges, public schools, relaxation centers, gyms, malls, supermarkets, museum cities, tourist centers, amusement parks, gated communities, sex shops, night clubs, masonic temples, evangelical churches, factories, other workplaces etc....on the other side.

Unless our critical sense can unmask “the strategies of argumentative fallacies used by power or the system” (6) but also their critics and thus render the categories of the catalogue more contestable and its limits less clear. Obviously, without forgetting the infinite creativity of the subversive space reserved to those who cannot be constrained to “moral orthopedics” institutionalized by a world where the horizon would be “of generalized prosperity, of peace, abundance and security for all” (7) and who find alternate pamphlets to intellectual orthodoxy.

In a certain manner to give thanks to he who, as a child, spun relentlessly round within a circle only to discover as an adult, that he only needed to lift the blindfold to clarify and discern the imperfections of an open world.

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- (1) Lire à ce propos le livre magnifique de MARIO VARGAS LLOSA, *El Paraiso en la otra esquina*, Gallimard, Folio, 2003 pour la traduction française.
- (2) GILLES DELEUZE, « Un nouveau cartographe », dans *Foucault*, Paris, 1986, page 42
- (3) Ibid page 44
- (4) Selon MICHEL ONFRAY, *La construction d’un contre-temps*, conférence sur France Culture, 30 juillet 2016
- (5) Pour reprendre la classification de Michel Foucault, énoncée dans CINTHYA FLEURY, *Les irremplaçables*, Gallimard, 2015, page 128
- (6) Ibid page 139
- (7) ALAIN ACCARDO, *Le petit-bourgeois gentilhomme ou la moyennisation de la société*, Editions Labor / Editions Espace de Libertés, 2003, page 12