

Proposal for Manifesta 2009 - Pour une nouvelle co-naissance

Manifesta as an action think-tank.

"Of course it's about the art. It's about representation. The individual cases, the kinds of cases, the facts of the cases, the arguments related to the cases, the numbers of cases and the distortions of those numbers, these too are very much matters of representation. The case against the Palestinians, the case against Islam, the case against pacifists, the case against independent science, the case against rural people who don't conceive of their knowledge as property, the case against all people who are in the way of the cannibalistic machine of global capital cannot only be won by force. It has to be fought in the field of representation, because we know too much. And because our legal system and ideals actually provide vigorous correctives to abuse of power—but only if we fight for them. What is clear is that those correctives, the right to free speech, to open and collective knowledge, to equality of race and religion, and to accountability and transparency of power, have to be actively reclaimed as a matter of daily life. And they have to be reclaimed in every arena where proto-fascism infests governance: in the police and the courts, in the establishment of racialized hierarchies, in ethnic and financial exclusions from education, in the restriction of creative endeavor, in the criminalization of curiosity, and in the monoculture of private property as the single medium of meaningful human exchange."

Reflections on the Case by the U.S. Justice Department against Steven Kurtz and Robert Ferrell by Claire Pentecost, April 6, 2005

Global Thought

What could stand alone for the Western world, as an image? What became the universal uniform of the civilized man? A couple of accessories might come to mind but maybe the most prevalent of them all is the tie. The Western male, the negotiator, the businessman, the one who runs the affairs of the world, he wears the tie. A knot at the level of the neck, the broken link between the heart and the head, between the body and the mind, between the mouth that speaks and the body that moves it. It is the symbolic expression of a disconnection, there to be seen, right away inscribed in the body of the symbolic animal that we are. The body of a civilization that lost its link, its lifeline: lost the ground it stands on.

The man with the tie is the ruler of the world, the axis of a system of coordinates that articulated for itself a History that goes from savage to gentleman, from the Heart of

Darkness to enlightened Europe. These coordinates have plummeted finally, and fully. We live in times that were inaugurated by the collapse of the coordinates of Man - that is the legacy of the XXth Century, from holocausts to colonialist brutality, to gulags - where nothing came to replace these coordinates. The new century is yet to be defined, in how it will deal with the major crisis that approaches from each cardinal point, by the accounts of the people who have opened their eyes to what the future has in store. The empty shell of the system that binds everything together in the Western world is revealing its insatiable hollowness.

Many gestures of etiquette were originally linked to survival. The hand shake and the hat tilt, the classic greeting signs of civilization, are a revelation that no weapon is hidden. Knocking glasses of wine together to the tune of the word "santé" is a gesture that has to do with spilling the liquid of one glass onto the other, so that both are poisoned if one of them is. Perhaps its time for us to reconnect to this dimension, of new gestures of survival, and an awareness of what they mean to us.

In this light lets bring up the rediscovery of the obvious, what we seem to be going through now, under the drum beat of the deep crisis of our society. Some surprising scientific studies have been coming around full circle to a dimension that only a few years ago would have been discarded in the waste basket of mysticism, speculation or divining:

For example:

"Your happiness depends not just on your choices and actions, but also on the choices and actions of people you don't even know who are one, two and three degrees removed from you"

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/05/health/05happy-web.html?em>

In the words of Dr. Nicholas A. Christakis, a physician and social scientist at Harvard Medical School, an author of a strange study that comes to these conclusions.

or

"Certain people are much more likely than others to be exposed to stressful life experiences, including specific traumas like car accidents, industrial injuries or being a crime victim. Some of this variation is traceable to genetics."

<http://judson.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/03/24/guest-column-mugged-by-our-genes/>

Wouldn't this have been the language of a Tarot reader only a few years ago?

Gravity

Any angle is good to start the argument of why this new version of Manifesta needs to live up to a new challenge. Any angle is good simply because you can look at any face of our planet and each of them is on red alert. The acceleration of each aspect of the world crisis cannot be minimized anymore. People who are not prone to that kind of vocabulary are speaking not just of "saving the planet" but of preventing the collapse of civilization.

Of all the possible scenarios at hand lets just mention the problem of water tables and its impact on food. Today we are witnessing the emergence of a dangerous politics of food scarcity, one in which individual countries act in their narrowly defined self-interest and are subsequently accelerating the deterioration of global equilibrium to an extremely dangerous place. Can we really imagine the scope of large masses of world population facing starvation? Not really, but we must:

"Nearly all of the projected 2.4 billion people to be added to world population by mid-century will be born in countries where agriculture's natural support systems are already deteriorating in the face of excessive demands. Water tables fall, soils erode, and temperatures rise..."

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,606937-2,00.htm>

and

"From one day to the next, human beings wipe out between three and 130 species, depending on which estimate you go by. Each year, virgin forest one-and-a-half times the size of Switzerland falls victim to logging. Moors are disappearing, rivers are being forced into concrete channels and erosion is transforming mountainsides into wasteland."

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,554982,00.html>

or

"According to a recent study by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), 77 percent of edible fish populations have been fished to the limit or beyond."

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,613246,00.html>

or

"The latest report from the climate panel predicted that the global climate is likely to rise between 3.5 and 8 degrees Fahrenheit if the carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere reaches twice the level

of 1750. By 2100, sea levels are likely to rise between 7 to 23 inches, it said, and the changes now underway will continue for centuries to come..."

<https://topics.nytimes.com/topics/news/science/topics/globalwarming/index.html>.

or

"A planetary crisis of water resources menaces us. If nothing is done the human and economic development and the political stability of many regions of the world will be in peril."

https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2009/03/11/combattre-la-crise-de-l-eau-une-urgence-pour-l-onu_1166409_3244.html

because

"The national obsession with soft paper has driven the growth of brands like Cottonelle Ultra, Quilted Northern Ultra and Charmin Ultra — which in 2008 alone increased its sales by 40 percent in some markets, according to Information Resources, Inc., a marketing research firm. But fluffiness comes at a price: millions of trees harvested in North America and in Latin American countries, including some percentage of trees from rare old-growth forests in Canada. Although toilet tissue can be made at similar cost from recycled material, it is the fiber taken from standing trees that help give it that plush feel, and most large manufacturers rely on them. Customers "demand soft and comfortable," said James Malone, a spokesman for Georgia Pacific, the maker of Quilted Northern. "Recycled fiber cannot do it."

https://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/26/science/earth/26charmin.html?_r=2&th&emc=th

BBC World service reported from Davos a month ago, on the standstill of all discourses on the economic crisis. There is no apt vocabulary, on the part of the bankers, or the economists or the politicians to address the economic collapse that grows insistently. What off off off shore could save the world from the possible collapse of the very foundations that money stands on? Not easy to say. What happens to a system based on the link between consumption and happiness, what happens if the link grows weak? What happens to the enormous machine that runs on it? Who will reinvent? Who can think all the way to the degree zero? Who can invoke that which is yet to be? Who can break "the monoculture of private property as the single medium of meaningful human exchange."? - to use Claire Pentecost's words as she opened up far reaching analogies with regards to the case against Steve Kurtz. (<https://www.caedefensefund.org/>)

Ça nous regarde: it looks at us/ concerns us.

Point

The Cartier foundation produced an exhibition called "Native Land, Stop, Eject". It was an amazing success and even attracted former heads of state and representatives of environmental organizations from all around the world. The exhibition based on ideas by artist Raymond Depardon and thinker Paul Virilio explored issues around belonging and immigration, underlined by the tragic dimension that these issues are taking in the face of droughts, scarcity and war. That exhibition is concentrated on mapping, a new kind of high tech mapping that has led Régis Debray to see it as a turning point in the "transmission of cultural meaning through language or images". Lets say that if the effort of that exhibition is oriented towards "mediology" (Debray's neologism), or the changing of a vision of the world, our project, on the other hand would like to open-up some discrete affirmative operations on the real. By that I mean concrete groundwork coming directly from the lessons learnt in those new visions of the world.

Paradigms

From the discrete interruption of business as usual that a local restaurant in Berlin performs by inviting people to calculate their consumption and pay accordingly (with the micro social changes that this produces), to the Nachbarschaftsheim which trade services, unmediated by money; to the new surge of the idea of communes worldwide, especially in France, which question the use of money and consumption and seek self-sufficiency, we want to think of these possibilities in an open and unprejudiced way. Essentially seeking local, micro-social dynamic initiatives of intense transformational power.

The original questions of the film that brings us together —*Chronique D'un Ete*— was marked precisely by this affirmative, creative thought on the Whole, on the issues that concern our destiny, on the way we are building a society, our mode of living. 1960 was an inaugural moment of our contemporary world, a coming out of the post-war years where the questions of how a society was to be shaped were addressed in very basic ways, "how do you live?" being the corner stone question of the film. It is this impulse which we are purporting to bring back from the 1960s. From the discussions that the film laid out, where colonialism and the Jewish holocaust were placed in an unprejudiced relationship; to the earliest testimony of a camp survivor who understood that her recount of the horror was already marked by the fiction of her self-presentation; to the frank openness of the monologues of students like the young Régis Debray on the Algerian war that was still going in full force; not forgetting the presentations, in front of the camera of the simplest, most intimate concerns about happiness in everyday life.

The artists, thinkers and activists invited to participate in this project (coming in some cases from the forums that have been organized in the 11 years of existence of 16beavergroup (<https://www.16beavergroup.org>) in New York, a group led by Rene Gabri and Ayreen Anastas) will enter the project as participants of a large think-tank. We will also be working

closely with the research that founds the new book that Edgar Morin is presently working on, an extensive research on new social articulations around the globe, on new civilization models. His research will be one of the main basis of this proposal which can be summed up as "The exhibition as think-tank".

Round Point

As I write this proposal, responding to the kind invitation of the Manifesta organizers I look out from Cafe Rich in Cairo, next to the window I see the face of New York Times OP Ed columnist Thomas Friedman on a TV monitor, presenting his ideas about the Arab world, his area of expertise. I don't need to listen to his words, I know his positions, his pragmatism, his projections. Outside, I see women who go by, their faces covered in different degrees, and I see a great big brown spot in many a man's forehead, from having touched the ground 17 times a day, all his life in front of Allah. Further, beyond the sidewalk is a round point, which I have been looking at in fascination from the bird's eye view of my hotel room. There are no rules in that round point, and the traffic controllers -standing there in an animated exchange with the passers by- do not seem to bring any more discipline to the situation than do the pedestrians who cross directly, diametrically through the traffic, conforming a choreography of cars and bodies. There are beeps all the time, hundreds of them per minute, but they are not disturbing, they are rather like a concert, they don't carry the energy of rage and frustration that comes from righteousness, from the feeling that bureaucracy or traffic rules have sheltered an individual from having to negotiate with the other members of society, at every step. In every part of the round point there is a negotiation going on, every one of those drivers and pedestrians has his/her awareness full-on to avoid collision. There are rules here, only they are very different, they are the rules of bodies in motion, in rhythm, like a flock of birds in the sky. There is no grand plan for the round point, no high dam that will stop the flood. Yet there is an awareness, a bodily, organic awareness that all actions, speeding, stopping, need to be in harmony with the flow. The whole thing fails sometimes, people crash eventually, but not with the catastrophic consequences of "more advanced" societies where individuals believe in a system that has premeditated their moves and protects them from a confrontation with their eco-system. All moves in this round point are underlined by the "care of oneself". The symphony of horns, if you close your eyes, sounds beautiful, like music, as everything that finds its rhythm, everything that is in touch with its organicity. Without making a complete apology of chaos lets just point out that the Aswan dam that was made to stop the floods of the Nile is the cause of huge environmental problems, whereas for millennia the floods where a yearly respiration of the river that fertilized the earth naturally. Other dams have been the cause of catastrophic natural disasters and all of them without exception have that looming potential. The financial crisis (finance = dam) is also the logical breakdown of a system that is not in touch anymore with the human scale, that is the very deep underlying problem that everyone fails to mention. The crash that I saw in the round point, on the other hand, was

only business as usual.

— François Bucher

TEAM

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