



FABRIQUE DE L'ART N°3 | 4
FABRICATE (FABRIC OF) ART

ANNÉES | YEARS | 2017 | 2018

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In 2018, **TRIMUKHI PLATFORM** celebrates ten years. On this occasion, the present issue of **FABRICATE (FABRIC OF) ART** (designated *double issue n°3/4* because to go to ten is to move to two digits) offers analyses, testimonies, conversations, reflections, images that give a lively account of this singular and joyous adventure which started in West Bengal with a few Santhal dance steps, one morning of August 2008, in the village of Borotalpada.

En 2018, **TRIMUKHI PLATFORM** fête ses dix ans. À cette occasion, la revue **FABRIQUE DE L'ART** (dans un numéro baptisé *3/4* car, passer à la dizaine, c'est passer à deux chiffres) rassemble des analyses, des témoignages des conversations, des réflexions, des images rendant compte de cette aventure singulière et joyeuse qui débuta au Bengale Occidental par quelques pas de danse, un matin d'août 2008, dans le village tribal de Borotalpada.

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99 SARAT PALLY | KOLKATA 700070 | INDIA

trimukhiplatform.org/fabriqueelart | fabriqueelart@trimukhiplatform.org

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seven propositions
philosophy on arts

This text was originally a “bombarding” lecture that Patrice Maniglier gave at Villa Gillet, France on February 4, 2011 during the round-table: The Shape of Space – The Shears of Time: Why Does Philosophy Need Art to Become Truly Experimental?

In what follows I would like to introduce you to a certain way of doing philosophy in relation to the plastic arts, which Elie During and I have been trying to develop. I will proceed by presenting a series of brief propositions, not to say aphorisms.

↳ – First proposition

Art is not merely an object for philosophy.

When confronting works of art, philosophy is not condemned to ask the eternal questions, “What is beautiful?” and “What is art?” Art has more to offer thought than a repository of metaphors. Artistic creations can help us to think the world in which we live. They allow us to delve into questions as profound as “What is being?” “What is the relation between thought and the world?” and “What holds things together?” These questions traditionally belong to metaphysics. I therefore want to argue that the fabrication of images in the arts enables us to invent new metaphysics. The invention of appearances informs us about the very being within which we think.

We have a particularly well documented and prestigious example of art's capacity to refresh our conceptions of the world, namely, perspective. Art historians have long been aware that perspective went hand in hand with a new vision of the world and of man's place in it. Indeed, perspective shows us that a subjective point of view, situated in the world, is not arbitrary but is rigorously determined by the subject's position in the world, so that there is no incompatibility between subjective freedom and objective truth. More generally, it shows that the way in which we represent the world depends on the type of space in which we think we are living. It was to insist on those philosophical issues that German art historian Erwin Panofsky characterised perspective as a "symbolic form" in his celebrated 1928 article, "Perspective as Symbolic Form". What Panofsky appeared to suggest was that the invention of perspective expressed a mutation in the very way in which the world was conceived. It should be noted, however, that the philosophical systems that Panofsky had in mind—those of Descartes, Leibniz, and even Kant—came into being at least two centuries after the invention of perspective in the arts. That is why I believe that Panofsky's proposition must be stood on its head: rather than say that the arts symbolise philosophical conceptions, we should say that they develop new ways of construing our bodily experiences so as to make a different experience of the world thinkable. Indeed, the philosophers who made use of perspective – Pascal, Descartes, Leibniz, and even Nietzsche – used it not as an object of thought but as a model or instrument to solve their own philosophical problems. In some respects, we can say that all of western metaphysics depends on the invention of perspective.

The critique of perspective by all the avant-gardes of modern art – Cubists, Suprematists, Futurists, etc. – involved questioning two conditions on which classic perspective was based: first, that the subject of the representation should be regarded as a single, perfectly immobile point, and second, that space should be considered as infinite,

and enveloping a priori all objects found within it. Nevertheless, these avant-gardes did not abandon the apparatus of perspective. The essence of perspective was not to have solved the problem that it posed but rather to have constructed an experimental apparatus in which it was possible to vary both forms of representation and spatial structures. When we modify certain properties of space, we obtain other types of representation, and conversely, problems of perspective have indeed returned in contemporary art with the advent of photography, video, film, and, more recently, digital art. Here I am thinking of work such as that of David Hockney, Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, and Peter Campus, among others. At this point I would like to give an example of a work that allows us to rethink problems raised in the past by the invention of perspective.

The work I want to describe is by two French artists, Laetitia Delafontaine and Grégory Niel, architects by training, and it is entitled *Rosemary's Place*. This work, as the title suggests, is intended to be a reconstitution of Rosemary's apartment as it appeared in Roman Polanski's 1968 film *Rosemary's Baby*. It was exhibited for the first time at the Gallery of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Montpellier in 2007. The two artists saw something that no film critic saw before them: that this well-known film depicted a space that was not coherent, that was in fact strictly impossible to construct. Polanski discreetly but systematically altered the dimensions and proportions of the rooms he filmed. This can be verified by juxtaposing images of the same rooms shot from opposite points of view. Or, if one is an architect like Niel and Delafontaine, one can try to draw a plan of the apartment. Polanski had already used this device to a limited extent in *The Tenant* and *Repulsion*, but here he generalised it to the entirety of the film. The artists analysed the space of the apartment very carefully and chose one possible way to reconstruct it. But what is the point of reconstructing a space that is by nature impossible to construct? Were they not entirely missing the point of Polanski's method? Not at all, as I will now show.

I propose to treat this work as an experiment with the apparatus of perspective, whose purpose is to develop in plastic terms the following philosophical hypothesis: What would happen if, contrary to the postulates of classical perspective, the space in which we live was not assumed to be infinite, homogeneous, and fully given in advance? In moving from one point to another, we could no longer be sure that we were dealing with the same space, the same laws, the same dimensions, the same proportions, or even the same topology. We could then move continuously from one place to another, say, by moving ten paces, only to discover that it takes two hundred paces to return, because we are moving in a space that changes over time. In fact, it is only thanks to these movements and sudden mutations affecting what we believed the local structure of space to be, that we are able progressively to reconstruct the depicted space. Modern physics and mathematics confront us with comparable situations. And isn't this also the political situation in which we find ourselves today? What is at stake in globalisation is not our ability to construct a unique image of the world but rather to translate a series of different but already global images into one another. In order to conceive of globalisation today, we need a new model, and the plastic arts can help us to construct one.

D – Fifth proposition

Such a “non-global” world is not incompatible with the idea of perspective. Suffice it to say that perspective does not extend to infinity, that it includes a finite *horizon* beyond which we cannot be sure that the structure of space remains exactly the same. As it happens, such a space can be represented in film. Indeed, in film, owing to the discontinuity of the editing, we can have the singular experience of a space that fuses different points of view, but, as Polanski's film shows, there is no guarantee that this space is coherent. By setting out to reconstruct this space, Delafontaine and Niel therefore pose the question of a non-global world in the plastic arts.

Rosemary's Place shows us that in such a world the question of representation is stood on its head: instead of going from architecture to image, we move from image to three-dimensional realisation. The same is true in theme parks such as Disneyland, where visitors are invited to enter bodily into the worlds of cinematographic fictions. More generally, we see the same thing in various types of virtual reality. This does not mean that we are dealing only with simulacra in Baudrillard's sense, as if the real were merely a copy of a copy. On the contrary, this work shows us that virtual environments must be interpreted in terms of the apparatus of perspective. They allow us to retain our freedom of movement in spaces that are purely represented or mental. To be represented means to refer back constantly to a fixed viewpoint (for instance, that of the spectator in his seat, or of the subject of classical perspective at his ideal vantage point). What characterises such spaces is that they are points of view within which we are able to move. What characterises virtual realities is therefore a sort of disconnect between two coordinate systems, two experiences of motion: in one, the spectator moves, he navigates the Milky Way aboard a spaceship, he fights with a proud ninja, etc., while in the other he does not move. *Rosemary's Place* shows us that one can depict a virtual experience without the slightest use of digital technology. It also shows that virtual realities must be defined in terms of the type of space they construct. In this respect, virtual reality is an element of a range of contemporary works, such as Lazzarini's skulls, which Mark Hansen has analysed in his book *New Philosophy for New Media*, in which he attempts to make us aware of the bizarre quality of the space in which we are now living, in which we cohabit with virtual worlds.

What *Rosemary's Place* reveals is the intimate relationship between two aspects of our contemporary world: on the one hand, its pluralistic character, that is, the fact that we can no longer assume the unity of the world but must construct it by comparing different ways of totalising it; and on the other hand, the presence in this world of virtual universes, which open up entire new worlds, but in such a way that those new worlds always remain localised, attached in some way to a point in the “real” world. From this I conclude that a philosophy that would take seriously the inventions of contemporary art might say that the world that we call “real,” our world, is in the end perhaps nothing other than that which makes it possible to communicate with these various virtual worlds. Real space is the space in which our virtualities communicate. And that, surely, is a metaphysical proposition, and one which describes what is most contemporary in our world today.

Patrice Maniglier's biographical note is found on page 41.



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FABRIQUEDELART@TRIMUKHIPLATFORM.ORG

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