



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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art and thought: a philosophical discussion

Here are some excerpts from the two philosophical "adda" (conversations in Bengali) that took place in Borotalpada village on January 28, 2017 during Night of Theatre n°9 • La Nuit des Idées. Videos and full audio recordings are available at <trimukhiplatform.org/artandthought/>. The transcription was reviewed by each of the authors.

Jean-Frédéric Chevallier – When, with Nicolas,¹ we were looking for a problematic for the *Night*, the first thing that came to our mind was to ask you about the relation between art and thought.

Samantak Das – To me, I think the relationship between the arts and thought, what joins them together, is experience. The experience of art creates thought. And thought has to be translated in a material way – as Patrice says in his capsule² – in order to make art. So thought-art, the relationship lies in experience.

JFC – Can you give an example of an experience?

SD – My experience with your first performance at Jadavpur University. That was January 2009, on the ground floor of our UG Arts building, in the corridor. I still remember that vividly.³ It didn't have a plot. There was no narrative. It was intensely theatrical. And it began to make me think: what is art, what does art do? Is it a combination? – as we heard in your philosophical capsule.⁴

Patrice Maniglier – I would say that there is no relation between art and thought because it's the same thing. It's my short answer. Now for the long one, I would say that art is a form of thought which doesn't use explication as a tool (as opposed to philosophy). In the history of western painting, perspective is a good example of this. Many people think it was invented just to produce more realistic images of the world, but in fact it came with the idea that the world is infinite and unified: if you have a perspective, it means that the way things seem to you depends on where you stand spatially in relation to them. It is impossible outside of a certain conception of the world. But it also provides us with new intellectual tools. When we say today, for instance, that each culture is a "point of view" on the world, in fact we are thinking with art, we are using an artistic invention, perspective, as a tool for thinking. Theatre is part of that and tonight we are reinventing other forms of perspective, changing the relation between vision and space. That means that

we are reinventing different forms of thought that might have consequences too in the future, as the invention of perspective had.⁵

JFC – Thank you both. Now I will ask the same question to André Éric.

André Éric Létourneau – There are many productions that are labeled as "art" that don't necessarily provoke serious thought. What is truly interesting about art is not the product, but the methodology behind it. Art is about intuition. And the beauty of intuition – when it is used properly – is that in the process, somehow, you become part of something bigger than yourself that challenges your own conventional boundaries. Art can become a transpersonal experience that, in turn, opens the possibility of creating experiences that can alter reality.

SD – Two things. I think that we are confusing thought with logical thought. It's not the same thing. Logical thought is only a sort of proper subset of thought. And the other thing which I think is that neither thought nor art are products. They are processes. They are evolving. Any great work of art is in a sense inexhaustible. That's why we keep going back to Matisse or Shakespeare or whatever.

PM – I agree. I think when you say art and thought, in fact, probably what you have in mind is verbal thought. Not logical... logical is a bit too strong (because we are very rarely logical), but philosophy is a verbal art, it's true.

SD – This is western philosophy. "Philosophy" is love of language: *philo-sophos*. But in Bengali (and Sanskrit languages), "*dorshon*" is also the root which gives a sight: "*dorsho*". So even if you are a "*dorshonic*" (a "philosopher" in Bengali), if I want to say it in English I would say that you are a *seer*, you are seeing things. While within the western sense, you say, if you are a philosopher, that you are a lover of language and argumentation. So there is a difference.

PM – Yes. In fact "*sophia*" doesn't really mean argumentation in Greek. It means wisdom. It means knowing. Besides I must add that, in Greek, the word "*theoria*" (theory) means seeing and the

¹ Nicolas Idier, at that time Attaché, Book office of the French Embassy in India. See, in this issue: Nicolas Idier, "Far from Borotalpada: Manifesto for a Culture of Ideas", p. 86-91.

² Cf. in this issue: Patrice Maniglier, "What is Thought?", p. 38-41.

³ Samantak Das gives details about that experience in this issue: cf. "Conversation after the Night: Wine Inspired Thinking", p. 92-99.

⁴ Cf. in this issue: Jean-Frédéric Chevallier, "What is art?", p. 34-37.

⁵ Patrice Maniglier develops his point in another text published in this issue: cf. "Seven Propositions: Philosophy on Arts", p. 56-59.

ultimate goal of the philosopher for Plato or Aristotle is intuition. “*Intuitio*”, in Latin, means seeing. So the vocabulary of sight is present in Greece as in India.

JFC – There is indeed the fact that “*theoria*”, as “*darshon*”, philosophy in Sanskrit languages, is linked to the act of looking, seeing, contemplating. And there is also, in ancient Greek, the word “theatre” whose root is the same. (It does not work in Bengali with the notions of “*natok*” and “*jatra*” which designate the theatrical act differently.) At first the “theatre” – the “*beatron*” – was the place from which one looked; it was the space where the spectators sat: bleachers, tier. With the theatre, with the theoretical activity, with the activity of the *darshonic*, the philosopher in Bengali, it is a matter of having a vision. But we can still wonder if having a vision is always equivalent to thinking. Deleuze and Guattari said that philosophy and art are both processes but processes that produce different things. On the one hand, that of philosophy, we produce concepts; on the other, that of art, we produce blocks of *affects* and *percepts*. (They spoke of *affects* and not of affections: what one feels without being entirely able to verbalise it, to name it; and *percepts* instead of perceptions: what one perceives without being able to fix it in a mental representation; they designated a process always at its beginning, always in movement.) In short, for these two philosophers, the activity of thinking – philosophy in that case (so I am cheating a little...) – and the activity of the arts are quite different activities.

AEL – An interesting example is Pythagoras. He was not an artist, he was a philosopher. Pythagoras believed that the way he looked physically, his appearance was a distraction for his audience. Not wanting to conform to the norms of teaching that would require the professor to be visible, he made himself invisible: he would hide behind a curtain while giving his classes. This example involves the idea of “thinking” in two ways. First, it forces us to think about the process itself. How (and, consequently, “what”) do we teach? Second, Pythagoras thought the visual impact of his presence was not the right thing to use to make people able to think properly. He thought that by subtracting

his image, it may make it easier for the students to learn and, consequently, to think.

~

Sunandan Roy Chowdhury – I do not agree with Patrice's contention that art and thought are not different. Art has always something to do with material reality. Many artworks have been born out of experiencing this material reality. One important target in arts is the aesthetic sense, the sensibility. I disagree to some extent with what Patrice has said because, if we take the notion of socialist art, or socialist literature, there is a certain socialist philosophy, a certain way of thinking that will inspire the artist to create an artwork. In the same way, different forms of art have been created from different kinds of religious beliefs. The motives are different because the notions are different. In a mosque there is no human figure due to the philosophical position of Islam. If you consider Buddhist art, or Hindu art, you will also see that the art forms are shaped by the respective philosophies.

Cuqui Jerez – In the case of artistic practice and thought, I would not make a difference between both concepts. It is the practice that produces theory and the theory that produces practice. In my case, since I am a choreographer, I call it “choreographic thought”. If we think about choreography as specifically a way to organise things and bodies in space and time, I can think by trying actions in space, I can think by observing things, I can think by juxtapositioning bodies and objects. And I am not saying that while I do this I think. What I mean is that the objects, the actions, the space and the time are my thinking tools. I can discover concepts in space and time by doing, by trying and by experimenting. In this process I discover and learn and therefore produce thought. So I would say creating is producing knowledge. And for me the key to doing that is to ask a question. To make a question by doing.

JFC – I must say that in my practice as an artist, I try not to think. Before starting rehearsals, I try not to think. For an example, when we (the whole team of Trimukhi Platform)

began working on the two performances you saw tonight (*Essay on Seasonal Variation in Santhal Society* and *Try Me Under Water*⁶), we tried not to think. Certainly, we had some starting points, some elements to begin with, some vague ideas, but we did not have anything like a great thought, like an activity of thought deployed and affirmed. I would assume that the task of thinking lies rather with the spectator. It is an activity that the spectator has to do – on the condition, of course, that something strong in terms of sensation has taken place in her or in him.⁷

Someone in the audience – I am into science. And anytime I did something remarkable in science I became an artist. So the question is whether the panelists would like to restrict art to certain things that we think of as art: then the answer is different. And if you make the definition broader then the answer will be different.

⁶ Cf. in this issue: Patrice Maniglier, "What Global Art Might Look Like", p. 99-103; Ariane Mnouchkine, "Theatre Today", p. 154-171.

⁷ "After attending a staging of our *Hamlet+Machine*, which we performed with the Proyecto 3 collective in a nave of the National Museum of Cultures in Mexico City in 2004, a spectator began to cry. She then explained that what she had seen and heard had "spoken" to her (these were her words) about her imprisonment in the city. She explained that here in this large urban agglomeration, she felt as if she was in prison. And surprisingly, she concluded by saying that she now had to behave differently with her children. (I can add that this was the first time that this mother from an unprivileged social background had gone to the theatre.) Our theatre performance that combined Heiner Müller's text with acrobatic sequences, minimalistic choreographies, movements of the public from one side of the nave to the other, the throwing of foldable chairs and unmatched furniture, neither "spoke" about Mexico City nor gave educational tips to parents. This meaning ("I feel like I'm in prison here") and this thought ("I'm going to behave differently with my children") were produced by this spectator who, upon seeing our work, experienced sensations that were as real as they were unique. This is what her internal stirring produced. The thought emerged because the series of experienced sensations ended up making sense." Jean-Frédéric Chevallier, "From Senses to Sense: The Arts of Presenting", *Fabricate (Fabric of) Art • Fabrique de l'Art*, n°2, op. cit., p. 37.

Samantak Das has successfully prolonged his misspent youth by remaining in university for more than 50% of his life, during which time he has written and lectured on 19th century literature, translation, the relationship between the biological sciences and literature, the environment, ecology and primary education. Head of Comparative Literature department at Jadavpur University, Calcutta, and weekly chronicler for *The Telegraph*, he spends a fair amount of time in rural Bengal, as a volunteer for an NGO offering vocational training for economic rehabilitation to impoverished young women and men. He is a (harassed) father to three children, a lover of food (and drink) and an enthusiastic (if inept) student of karate. His favorite activity is sleeping and his e-mail address is <kokopeli@gmail.com>.

André Éric Létourneau is a sound artist. Professor at the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM), he conducted the *Psychogeohörspiel II* radio manoeuvre during *Night of Theatre n°9 • La Nuit des idées* and presented a sound installation, *Standard IV*. He was also responsible for the live broadcast of the event on the web radio <wikiradio.ca>.

Sunandan Roy Chowdhury is a publisher. Based in Calcutta, he founded and runs Sampark Global Media, a house with which he produces books both in English and Bengali.

Jean-Frédéric Chevallier's biographical note is found on page 37, that of Cuqui Jerez on page 175 and that of **Patrice Maniglier** on page 41.



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