

You spin you spin you spin you spin...

Do not stop making pictures

Larys Frogier

When image becomes communication, propaganda and standardisation, art can make the difference... At least, there are artists who will try their hand.

Alexandre Perigot creates his pieces by getting down to a delicate and hazardous task: entangling the threads of representation to clear the grime from the aesthetic and political engagement of art. His entire *oeuvre* constitutes a vast mine clearance operation in the established wisdom concerning images and artists. His pieces create a sense of unease: light and superficial form or challenging conceptualism? Seduction or critical distance? Masterly stagecraft or questioning of spectacle? The questioning in his work may irritate, but it has the merit of defusing the discourse of authority and imposed certainties.

His artistic enterprise has also been to develop an *oeuvre* in a permanent state of becoming, in other words to generate unstable installations for which the power of the truth of the image is never sufficient. Alexandre Perigot produces blocks of images in ceaseless proliferation through aggregation, friction, combination, paradox, sequencing, repetition, division, dissonance, rotation, shrinkage, multiplication, spinning, extension...

For example, *Elvis House* (2005) has materialised as large as life in several cities around the world – Chiang Mai, Glasgow, Lisbon, Marseille, Paris, Riga... - in a vast skeleton of steel or bamboo, stripping the flesh from the walls which enclosed the King's life there, whilst infiltrating into it new geopolitical takes on the contemporary history of rock and the performing arts.

In a different way, *Funkypipe* (2007) sets off a belly dance performed by bookcases and steel pipes, structures which are themselves (dis)located in front of a tapestry reproducing a popular painting of a romantic sunset over an oilfield in Bakou.

By entangling the threads of representation, Perigot's is also the art of gaps and unlikely relations through a dizzying box-in-a-box sequence of unabashed references to iconic or anonymous figures from popular culture (Popeye, Dalida, Dumbo, James Bond, Claudia Schiffer and other dishevelled blondes, dubbing actors for TV and cinema, the everyday heroes of video games...) and to the history of the visual and performing arts (Arnold Böcklin, Marcel Duchamp, Martin Kippenberger, Richard Hoeck, Xavier Boussiron, Yves-Noël Genod...) to cinema (Robert Altman, João César Monteiro, Quentin Tarentino...) and to the music scene (Elvis Presley, Simon Fisher Turner, Agoskodo Teliverek, Diamond for Ever, air guitar performers...).

As for the artist in person, he is never where you expect to find him. Alexandre Perigot has often invited a number of artists with widely varying aesthetics to infiltrate his installations. The sculpture *Sometimes You Win Sometimes You Lose* (2007), in which the title phrase is spelled out through space in pipes and sound, also takes the form of a book bringing together the visual propositions of some fifty artists. In 2006, when his exhibition *Palaispopeye* opened at the La Criée contemporary art centre in Rennes, Alexandre Perigot refused to attend, delegating his sidekick, Yves-Noël Genod, to play the artist and reply as he saw fit to the public's questions and comments.

Pieces by Alexandre Perigot have a certain raw and material quality, often inelegant and irreverent, both in the process of production and in their public presentation. The conceptual devices are extremely elaborate but the form is kept simple and always in an ambiguous state of incompleteness or permanent construction. This home-made quality is unsettling, but Perigot's precarious representations induce functionalities and semantic effects not to be overlooked. It is as though what matters to Perigot is to keep his pieces at the point where they start to take form and to perform, in order to test the limits and open up the possibilities of what makes them exist and work as representation. Philippe Vergne has observed that the strength of Perigot's work is the way he positions himself "between" projects, "between" forms, "between" spectacles, not so much as an evasive tactic, but instead to "*offer a version that exposes the conditions of existence as much as the rough edges. Or rather that which wasn't intended for display, the small kitchen of illusion, the stage machinery, the rigging up. The disappointment, the sweat stains, the odour of Trisha Brown.*"¹

The celebratory visual jumble, sometimes teetering but never lacking in drive, of Alexandre Perigot's work points to an essential aspect of his art: contemporary art work exacerbates the illusion, the staging of the stage, the representation of representation, to emerge as an absurd monster of the ultra-artificiality of representation. Ultra-artificiality undermines modernity in its pretension and ability to discipline artifice, be it through scientific, technical, military, political or artistic means. In his book *L'heure du crime et le temps de l'œuvre d'art*, the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk has observed that:

"The characteristic of the modern age is not so much the discovery of virgin territories (...) as the opening wider of possibilities with the help of new operational routines. The nautical routines of the Portuguese and Spanish brought the Americas to light, in the form of material by-products, the manufacturing routines of architects, doctors and painters in the fifteenth century brought to light, as their material result, new horizons of what could be done. The world is not everything waiting to be discovered, but rather everything that can be included in the routines of

¹ Philippe Vergne, "En clair vos chances d'être célèbre sont plus grandes", *Mouvement*, 1999.

action. Accordingly, the term “modern times” designates the “operativistic” revolution. This leads to a new state in the world where mastery of the highly artificial becomes normal.”²

Indeed, according to Peter Sloterdijk, the essence of modernity lies in leaving behind the supra-natural for all-powerful artificiality, but this also means that from now on man designates himself as the author and actor of his own monstrosity.

In the field of art, the predicates of modernity have already been broken down through Dada’s crucial experiments in Berlin, Duchamp’s ready-mades, the permanent creations of John Cage and Robert Filliou, the artists of the institutional critics (Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Dan Graham), as well as the works of feminist artists of recent decades - Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke, Louise Lawler, Cindy Sherman...

In the nineteen eighties, art went through the decisive stage of deconstruction, consisting of rendering artifice artificial in order to neutralise the myth of modernity: Sherrie Levine photographed the photographs of modernist photographers, Allan McCollum reproduced *ad infinitum* framed black canvases in his *Surrogate Paintings*. These works applied Roland Barthes’ pre-cognizance to perfection: strict repetition of artefacts which, in fact, render outrageously artificial the myth of modernity and defuse its ideological sights:

“To tell the truth, the best way to fight myth is to mythify around it, in other words to produce an artificial myth: and this reconstituted myth will be a real mythology. As myth steals from language, why not steal the myth?”³

This phase of deconstruction had its moments of glory until it exhausted itself, often in excessive and narrow dogmatization of the simulacrum, the copy of the copy.

Alexandre Perigot is not unaware of this historical deconstruction-demythification, but feels the need to go further. His work poses a new riddle for art: how to produce a critique of the image and its institutions, but which goes beyond mere observation in a mood of melancholy disillusionment ?

How is it possible to generate pleasure in looking which needs more than just slick and refined poetry, and which derives from necessary visual accidents, contrasting combinations of materials, unlikely and unembarrassed *montage*?

How is it possible to produce works of art where the political issue is not reduced either to a timid bourgeois and conservative protest, or to the agenda of a handful of elitist militants?

² Peter Sloterdijk, *L’Heure du crime et le temps de l’œuvre d’art*, Paris : Calmann-Lévy, 2000, p.14.

³ Roland Barthes, « Le Mythe, aujourd’hui », in *Mythologies*, Paris : Seuil, 1957. Text reissued in *Roland Barthes, Œuvres complètes, Tome 1, 1942-1965*, Paris : Seuil, 1993, p.702.

How can we produce art where it is possible to think without reasoning?

These concerns are explored in the work of Alexandre Perigot and serve to set his artistic endeavours against two dominant contemporary aesthetics, radically different from each other but ultimately complementary and indissociable:

1 – Perigot's work considers the clutter, the incoherent babbling of the living, the chaotic energy of the mega-cities, the uncontrolled flow of images and sonorities. His pieces therefore stand apart from those works of contemporary art given over to the vast virgin territories – ice floes, oceans, mountains and other poles of neutralisation – because these images are symptomatic of a new form of territorial colonisation by a dominant middle class emerging from neo-liberalism and multi-culturalism, busy developing its puny resistance in the protective folds of a “democratic” eco-culture just when the concept of “democracy” has become extremely problematic, including and especially in the west – southward and eastward displacement of war by the major western powers, the rapid pauperization of the population, media propaganda, exclusion of immigrants who parade before our eyes in a deafening silence.

In other words, the work of Alexandre Perigot is the opposite of a levelling aesthetic, an aesthetic that accords itself a form of resistance but above all neither the power of creation nor revolution, which offers titillating provocation whilst first taking care to empty it of any critical apparatus, avoid the beginnings of its critical apparatus, which validates the artistic quality of a visual object by their hi-tech qualities and minimalistic refinement because, in the end, all this serves to smooth out any roughness, to dazzle the eye and occupy our minds.

2 – Perigot's work finds its critique of image and its creative power in the industries and apparatus that capitalise images: reality TV, advertising, journalism, video games, large exhibitions and other multimedia spectacles... Finance and the media are now the sponsors and managers of art and culture. One of the production-management-broadcasting strategies of media image is to purge the image of all discordant and illogical thought, to foster belief in the truth, the news, the debate of ideas and the naturalness of our human behaviour, just as our bodies, feelings and thoughts will from now on be pre-imagined, meta-spectacularised, pre-dictated and hyper-sexualised, before we even have the time to see and act. Perigot's art manages the interstices at the heart of these saturated images by infiltrating the absurd, producing discordant sonorities, generating a flow of images and thoughts as powerful as the flow of communication. Perigot's work proposes an aesthetic that irritates, that goes against the grain, because it skids through incongruous assemblies, tracks the wrong way down one-way streets, creates through radical fusions and cleavages, tacks through opposing winds.

PIPEDREAM is certainly a term which responds well to this implosion of the last misadventures of modernity, ecological and socialising economies, which manage and speculate in images. PIPEDREAM: a dream with no feet to stand on, a proliferation of pipes propelling, blowing, transmitting, contaminating fluids, gas, oil, money, language, winds, raw materials, grey matter, sexual energy, labour input... PIPEDREAM is the term chosen by Alexandre Perigot as the name for his project of exhibitions in 2007 and 2008 in the cities of Glasgow, Rennes and Lisbon. It goes without saying that Alexandre Perigot's PIPEDREAM makes the piping backfire, not so much in terms of productivity at any cost, and not so much in controlled topographical and territorial management, but in an ever increasing flux, proceeding by ramification, by returning from inside out, from top down, in short a simple pipe which manifests a visual and conceptual energy that is uncontrollable. Alexandre Perigot belongs to that too rare family of artists and thinkers who dare to use anti-reason as the raw materials for creation and thought. Or to return to the words of Peter Sloterdijk:

*"The violent anti-rationalist impulse in western countries is the reaction to a state of mind where all thought has become strategy; it bears witness to the repugnance that inspires a certain form of self-preservation. It is like a startled reaction of the senses to the cold breath of a reality where knowledge is power, and power is knowledge."*⁴

⁴ Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique de la raison cynique*, Paris : Christian Bourgois, 1987 (1983), p.9.

Ob-scening art

Stages, façades and cardboard: the potential for representation

When Marcel Duchamp created *Etant Donn *, 1° *La chute d'eau*, 2° *Le gaz d' clairage* (1946-1966), he gave material form to four postulates necessary for the fabrication of contemporary images:

1 – An ordinary wooden door with a peephole takes the place of a painting, undermining the pretension of the tableau to absorb the gaze and giving the viewer the keys to access the production conditions and the visibility of the image. The set-up in *Etant donn ...* is unabashedly staged. It is carefully arranged, but it sets out to be banal so as to induce the simplest act of the desire to look.

2 – In looking through the peephole to discover what is on the other side, the viewer intervenes as the subject caught in the act of looking, but he is also a subject who knows himself to be looking, and is ultimately a seer seen by another viewer at the exhibition. We should guard against rushing to use the term *voyeur* which immediately connotes the viewer with a clinical psychological disorder... We shall merely say that this visual arrangement shuns the space in front of the door in the foreground where the absurd drama of seeing (*clair-voyance*) in art is played out.

3 – The scene which presents itself behind the door evades the control of the eye. There is a trick of perspective which brings the eye to the peephole, then the peephole that leads the eye to the silhouetted entrance to a cave, then the cave wall that leads directly to the woman's vagina, then this vagina that turns to the gas light, and then this gas light that illuminates a Renaissance landscape as background. The visual trajectory as traced here is anything but linear: the eye blunders around all the meanings of the scene to find its way. This is therefore a deeply anomalous perspective, a perspective that changes into the *mise en abyme* of a story of the eye.

4 – *Etant Donn ...* activates backwards the visual paralysis experienced before the famous work by Gustave Courbet executed a century earlier, *L'Origine du monde* (1866), a small canvas representing the buttocks, vagina and belly of a woman, offered shamelessly for view. In 1955, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan bought *L'Origine du monde* and kept it in his country house, sheltered from view and in a curious staging: he commissioned the surrealist painter Andr  Masson to design a double frame, with *L'Origine du monde* underneath, covered by a painting by Masson, *Terre  rotique*, an anthropomorphic landscape, altogether more digressive and literary than the literal obscenity of Courbet's canvas.

So Marcel Duchamp's *Etant donné*... returns to the obscene at the point where Lacan conjured Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* out of view. Duchamp creates a view of the slit of the vagina, not to reduce the view to a simple voyeur-enjoyer of the scene, but to give him the means to experience and to question the redoubtable effectiveness of ob-scenity in art. The complex staging created by Marcel Duchamp bears no similarity to classical theatre where the viewer would do nothing but see the scene set before him. *Etant donné*... pushes staging to the limits: Ob-scene means literally before and against the scene. In other words, the ob-scene is this trial where the viewer does not simply see the scene, but is rather the moment when he feels seen by the scene, as if the scene had come out front to see his person more closely.

An understanding of the critical staged device is not without implications for our analysis of the Alexandre Perigot's artistic enterprise. Many of his works are to be viewed and interpreted in a staged context:

On Tour is a blue big top that can be transported from town to town, in a size which is neither too large nor too small, making it ambiguous in terms of function, somewhere between a circus, a rock concert stage, a mini television set, an artist's studio, a tent for a gallery opening...

Café des Sports comprises a circular stage installed on springs, combined with a tapestry in waving coloured forms. The stage on springs is necessarily unstable, wobbling under the feet of visitors who make the space into a bar, a place for observation and perception, a place for celebrating art or simply something to look at.

356X9X7,65 is a long corridor in cardboard and wood, visible first from the outside, like the back of a stage set. The structure is riddled with bullet holes, of the calibres making up the title, referring to popular films and television series: the Colt 356 is the calibre used by *Starsky & Hutch* and *The Incorruptibles*, the 9 mm is the preferred weapon of *Mannix*, the 7.65 is used by *James Bond*. Peeping through the holes, the viewer sees nothing as the interior is plunged in darkness, like a cinema or a darkroom. In any case, this nothing-to-see unfolds itself in the space of the possible, on a screen for projection of a collective visual memory or a ghostly vision of art.

La Maison de Dalida is a structure in wood, plasterboard and wallpaper comprising a life-size reproduction of the façade of this very ordinary stone house in the form of a film or stage set. When visitors walk through this compartment/stage-set they traverse a jewelbox of architectural image, an ordinary piece of stage carpentry and equally something of added iconic value because it's *really* Dalida's house.

Elvis House is digitalised on computer to retain only its lines and edges. The structure is reproduced life-size using what is used for building, namely scaffolding pipes in steel – or in

bamboo in Asian countries. The skeleton of the *Elvis House* then becomes the stage for various musical and other performances.

In the palace series - *Palaispopeye*, *Polkapalace*, *Borderpalace* – the viewer's experience of walking around is constrained and guided by rotating stages and moving partitions. The viewer penetrates an installation which draws on the design of video games (in particular the *Doom* software developed by Id Software, which served as the model for scenic design of future video games), the cinema set (in *Palaispopeye* we find photography of the décor used to film Altman's *Popeye*), the reserve collection of a contemporary art gallery (*Polkapalace* brought together a part of the Arsenal Gallery's collection of work by Polish artists).

This overview of the installations designed by Alexandre Perigot provides an indication that the artist's aim has not been to use stagecraft for pure blind enjoyment but rather to use enjoyment to undermine the usual exhibition scenario and to envisage new ways of displaying art.

The ob-scenity of the pieces developed by Alexandre Perigot starts with a procedure of amalgamating representation venues previously kept separate: cinema, theatre, gallery, photo laboratory, video game, concert room... The amalgamation caused by Perigot's staged pieces causes representation venues to collide and the resulting conflicts, impacts and telescoping send each artistic discipline back to its own puzzles/impasses/aesthetic and ideological possibilities. So amalgamation into Perigot's work has nothing to do with naïve blending of artistic genres and interdisciplinary approaches that reduce artistic projects to the lowest common denominator. In other words, amalgamation in the work of Alexandre Perigot is something hybrid and incongruous, a block which displays its protuberances, its gaps, its failures, its extensions, because it is precisely here that renewed production of art becomes possible.

Accordingly, the ob-scene quality of *On Tour* is to contain in this modest object, the big top, the work, the exhibition, the artist and the public. This place, where there is nothing to see but everything to do, insidiously encourages the block of work-exhibition-artist-public to put on its own circus. But this obviously cuts both ways. *On Tour* proposes an art circus which undermines the celebration of the heroic figure of the artist and the merchandising of the object. *On Tour* is a simple big top which is put up, maybe next to an art venue, maybe next to a tennis court, but in any case it constitutes the arena for potential representation.

We will now hazard two perilous historical leaps in this big top for art proposed by *On Tour*. The first will be a quick comparison between the *On Tour* big top and Courbet's pavilions built by the realist artist in reaction to the triumphal globalisation of the universal expositions of 1855 and 1867. The cultural and ideological levelling of universal expositions was of no interest to Courbet as they prevented him from showing his canvases in ideal display conditions. So the

Courbet pavilions blocked the effective and already well-oiled machine of globalisation which penetrated the economy, politics and art. It would be wrong to reduce Courbet's marginal pavilions simply to a gesture of modernist autonomy in art. His pavilions are acts with a deep structural effect in the quest for a prospective and subversive vision for art. *On Tour* is just this modest big top which is placed beside the hyper-structures of capitalisation and globalisation of image. But the modesty of the big top, the ambiguity of its size is where its strength lies: it offers a venue which is always possible for the making of art.

The second leap is a reference to the Russian constructivist artist El Lissitzky who, in the nineteen twenties, devoted himself to creating places of perception which abandoned the exhibition as the venue of contemplation, turning instead to a constructivist and critical practice of works and spaces. Today, the issues are radically different. The exhibition as a place of critical perception has become an exercise of style or a dogma, to the point where its countless contemporary manifestations compromise artists and institutions in works-exhibitions limited to a beatific stage-play where decoration, design and pretty poetry are at the fore. The absurd and ob-scene nakedness of *On Tour* runs counter to the staginess of art spectacles, proposing a new critical space. This is perhaps the real art circus.

In 356X9X7,65 the corridor riddled with cinematic bullets is a powerful allegory which combines in the crossfire the death row of a film hero with the corridor where the image lives on. The piece pays homage to the predicates analysed above in Marcel Duchamp's *Etant donné...*, as it definitively lays claim to the critical and subversive capacity of an installation that upturns our vision. But in contrast to Marcel Duchamp, the ob-scene no longer refers to the single question of the retinal and libidinal economy of art. The ob-scene is also found in the cinematographic bullet holes, as if to say that our eye, even before we looked behind the set, has already been bombarded by thousands of prefabricated images. Visual paralysis quickly sets in with the view of darkness, or rather in this (utopian) capacity to make darkness, in other words to design interior space as a virgin screen on which each viewer will generate his own image.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres also set out a similar line of questioning with his photographs and stacks of black sheets of paper labelled with dates and names which resonated (or not) with the subjective and collective memory of the viewer, causing the black background to serve as the receiver and generator of images both ready-made and waiting to be made.

356X9X7,65 produces another stupefying amalgamation: the cavern in Plato's images is here combined with the contemporary theme park. In the Platonic myth, man is chained to the imperfect world of appearances, images and artefacts being no more than pale copies of the pure ideas and of the perfect Being. In the theme park, we find the careful grooming of image to match unflinching revenues – mass-produced staging, costumes, physical performances, lip movements, shifting gaze, positioning of objects in space, the elevation of artist to hero before

his fictional figure – that guarantees the popular success of the spectacle, the film or the exhibition.

But let there be no mistake. Between the two myths, that of the Plato's vertical ontological hierarchy and that of the horizontal capitalist levelling, Perigot introduces visual extravagances and air pockets which can drive the eye and mind crazy.

It is clear that the ob-scenity in Perigot's works makes no use of the entertainment element for relational, socialising, community or tribal purposes. The real aim is rather to question the capacity of the piece – and the responsibility of the artist - to disengage from the technicalities of these theme parks in order to weave visual webs which are considerably more risky, monstrous, dangerous and exciting.

Heroes & Artists & Co: it's all been seen before but there's everything left to do

Perigot draws the outlines of a zoo-politics of art, in which he unabashedly mixes professional dubbing actors, artists, comic strip heroes, choreographers, sound effect technicians, film icons, musicians, mime artists, anonymous actors and monsters from video games.

Double-double (1995) is a series of seven photographic portraits. The artist first sought to use photography to restore a "real" body to professional dubbing actors whose voices are used to dub the words of film actors and animation characters: Aladdin, Donna Mills, Peter Falk, Kirk Douglas, Jean-Claude Van Damme, Clint Eastwood and Harrison Ford.

Each portrait is therefore a many-layered image. There is the first level of the photographic image which restores a body to the voice of the dubbing actor. But this layer is immediately covered by another: is the photographic portrait as real as they intend to show us? In the pose taken by the gentleman or the young lady's expression, isn't there already something of *déjà vu*? Whilst the photograph offers us the image of the real body of the dubbing actor, this body appears to be already inhabited by another. The fictional character is easy to recognize – for instance, the portrait of the actor dubbing Peter Falk resembles Inspector Colombo in every feature – or else we have a vague feeling that we recognize the on-camera bodily pose and facial expression. This second stratum clouds any assertion of identity in the portrait, and any pretension to truth-telling. It shows us above all that our contemporary bodies actually incarnate media images to the extent that they carry no natural or ontological identity. To live in society today there is the need to exist within the image of the other, generating frenzied cannibalistic ingestion of images of others in order to fabricate individual's own bodies.

Is this a tragedy? A sad observation? A piece of luck?

These same questions recur in the video *Kill Kill Chorégraphie* (1996): Alexandre Perigot's set out to specify the performance of individuals that he had asked to mime their own death. The resulting video recording is a homogenous and repetitive series of postures, bodies dropping to the ground, expressions of pain, as if death could no longer be imagined except through the filter of cinematographic images of violence and slaughter.

Kill Kill Chorégraphie is therefore a homage to the films of Quentin Tarantino. Tarantino is the film maker who has most effectively taken advantage of this modelling of the body by image. He is now a past master in the radical transformation of cinematic stereotypes into hybrids and mutants which excel in the choreographic subversion, who wield the sword and the gun as easily as the conceptual weapon, who spill as much blood as grey matter. In his masterpiece *Kill Bill*, the hero is a woman who rises through all the ignominies of power, signing up for the

full range of human monstrosity so as to regurgitate it in its full and explosive glory of killing machine and machine of desire.

In order to reach a better understanding of this milestone of a new politics of the body and of a reworked economy of image, the biologist and theoretician Donna Haraway formulated in 1994 the concept of the cyborg as the paradigm of the contemporary subject caught in a constructive hybridisation between animal-machine-organism. Her *Cyborg Manifesto* has nothing to do with the post-humanist stylisations of art of the nineteen nineties. Running counter to the radical revision wrought by the anti-biological postulates of the feminists and the dogmatic impasses of socialism, it proposes that:

“A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. The international women's movements have constructed 'women's experience', as well as uncovered or discovered this crucial collective object. This experience is a fiction and fact of the most crucial, political kind. Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion. (...)

The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polls based partly on a revolution of social relations in the oikos, the household. Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world. Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden; that is, through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos.”⁵

Donna Haraway's thesis, once we get beyond the polemical tone, is fascinating because its conception of the modelling of the body is no longer based on melancholy slant or observation of the failure of a lost (post-)humanity. She definitively records the end of ontology, superseded by social politics, organic schemes and much more creative and diversified artistic representations.

⁵ Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*.

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/Haraway/CyborgManifesto.html>, consulted 6 August 2008.

The heroine of Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* rejoins in this sense Donna Haraway's cyborg and Perigot's work looks forward to this zoo-politics of a human park designed in the bottomless well of mutant images.

Synopsis-Catharsis (1998) is a performance which lasts four minutes during a crescendo of fictional fighting and growing waves of breathtaking special effects achieved using foam machines, lighting, fire, cannon shots, shouts... The action, which is utterly unreal, is performed by around twenty young people from a difficult neighbourhood in Seine-Saint-Denis, taking over the entire façade and roof of a new building, the Métafort arts centre, in Aubervilliers. Somewhere between video game, *son et lumière* spectacular, ~~fête de quartier~~ local parties and suburban riot, the semantic and visual thrust of *Synopsis-Catharsis* is remarkably effective.

The performance was filmed and is the subject of a video with a duration of 1 minute and 50 seconds.

Synopsis-Catharsis provides a script to be performed and filmed, but it functions here as a manifesto against the staged spectaculars of the mass culture industry. Alexandre Perigot's *Synopsis-Catharsis* takes issue with supposedly historical performances, which are in fact cunning propaganda vehicles and deeply reactionary, such as the cloak and dagger spectacle offered at the Puy-du-Fou theme park in the Vendée region of France. In order to reveal the ideological deviance of these amusement parks, Alexandre Perigot sets about hybridising these spectacles with the synopses of video games, offering a sort of virtual combat between adolescents and monstrous creatures. The viewer of *Synopsis-Catharsis* is confronted with a critique of twofold violence: the explicit visual violence from video games and caricatured to an extreme point by the young performers in Aubervilliers, and an ideological and covert violence contained in mass entertainment spectacles, the *ciné-scénies* of the political media, which are here rebutted in the heart of a working class neighbourhood.

Fanclubbing (1999) returns to the topography of humanity in full transformation. *Fanclubbing* is a changing piece, constantly growing, reactivating an *atelier* at various locations around the world where drawings are created on the basis of the autographs of stars from the worlds of film, sport and music. There is also video footage of musical performances by the Japanese drag group *Diamond for Ever*. At the same time, a slide show projects alternating images of street musicians and figures from the Japanese star system.

Fanclubbing is a vortex of visual, sound and performance elements where nothing knows what is what any longer, as each one imprints on the other, imitation of words undermining the reproduction of images, bodies transforming themselves as they take on the voices of others – for instance, Simone Fukuyaki singing Charles Aznavour is worth the trip... *Fanclubbing* is a piece which definitively topples the reproducibility of the work of art in the era of unsuspected

creative power. *Fanclubbing* is also a vast landscape of linguistic, sound, human and fictional creatures. *Fanclubbing* is obviously not about celebrating the other in the self, nor about “stupid” imitations of the star of our dreams. The piece sets in motion a mechanism of representations which reveal and “perform” – as much in it linguistic, bodily and visual range – the artificiality of what is habitually regarded as natural and ontological.

In his essay *Règles pour un parc humain* (Rules for the Human Park) Peter Sloterdijk offers a review of humanism, pointing out how far the centralised knowledge and power of man and the ontological question have infiltrated the arts and politics, generating their most beautiful creations as well as their worst totalitarian outcomes:

“Literature, correspondence and humanist ideology today exert only a marginal influence on modern mega-societies in the production of the politico-cultural connection. (...) The latent theme of humanism is therefore the de-savaging of man, and its latent thesis is the following: good reading will tame customs. (...) To think that men are “animals under the influence” is part of the humanist creed, and hence the importance of subjecting men to good influences. The rules of humanist behaviour recall – with false innocence – that the battle for man is ongoing, that it unfolds as a struggle between bestialisation and domestication.”⁶

Underneath its light-hearted surface of a drawing workshop and mimetic performances, Perigot's *Fanclubbing* uproots the postulates of the ontology of the work of art, turning instead to a Dionysian creation which embraces Nietzsche's proposition of the power of permanent creation, always unfinished because it is ceaselessly being varied, mutated and extended.

⁶ English translation from: Peter Sloterdijk, *Règles pour un parc humain*, Paris : Mille et une nuits, 2000.

Overthrowing the image

In the twentieth century, the work of art was assimilated into a language. The images of art are decrypted using the syntactical and paradigmatic structures of the linguistic and semiological model. Art historians and theoreticians have used these disciplines to open up the work to a better understanding of its discursive modes – narration, description, fiction, poetry, story-telling... - and to free it from its exclusively ontological status in which it was trapped as an aesthetic object subject to a judgement of taste.

Some questions still remain:

- By positing the artwork as a pure sign and a pure discursive structure, are we not taking the risk of reproducing a new essentialist stance in art?
- Are we not mistaking the object of study, as analysis reduces the work to a signifier, without at the same time analysing the administrative, institutional, political and economic apparatus that produces discourse on art?
- And even when the institutions engaged in speaking of and managing works of art are studied, are not certain works encouraged to generate their own discursive and aesthetic impasse, as is the case today, for example, of the art of institutional criticism?

It will be clear that these issues are raised here as self-criticism as it is impossible today to deny the crucial contribution made by these studies in the field of knowledge of art. Nonetheless, certain thinkers have alerted us to the risks of excessive dogmatism trapping the object of study within the sole status of sign and structure. Michel Foucault is very explicit in this regard, when he distinguishes his research from the structuralist methodology:

“Structuralism consists of taking sets of discourse and treating them merely as utterances, in looking for the laws of passage and transformation, the isomorphisms between these sets of utterances. That doesn’t interest me.”⁷

It goes without saying that Foucault's thought is never reduced to the study of discourse as strict form or structure. For the philosopher, discourse is a *praxis*, it builds power relations, it legislates, administers (itself), institutionalises, instructs, disciplines the body and the life of individuals. In reality, the study of language and the analysis of discourse could never be contained within a science. They will discover their effectiveness in unveiling discursive practices from which power relations can better be detected and combated in their claims to speak the truth.

⁷ Translated from: Michel Foucault, « La vérité et les formes juridiques » (1973), in *Dits et écrits, volume II, 1970-1975*, Paris : nrf/Gallimard, 1994, p.636.

On the subject of the forms of art, Michel Foucault also specifies that the work of the artist and the philosopher consists not of categorising, structuring and systematising, but of evading categories, taking the risk of a-categorical thought:

“To think in the form of categories, is to discover the truth in order to distinguish it from the false; to think an ‘a-categorical’ thought is to stand up to dark stupidity, and, in a lightning flash, to distinguish ourselves from it. Stupidity contemplates itself: we gaze at it, allow ourselves to be fascinated, it carries you gently, we mimic it as we surrender to it; we lean on its formless fluidity; we look out for the first start of imperceptible difference, and the gaze empties, we spy, without fever, the return of the glow. To error we say no and we delete it; we say yes to stupidity, we see it, repeat it and, gently, we call for total immersion.”⁸

Montage

The work of Alexandre Perigot has to be recognized for clinging at all times to the a-categorical thread, for taking the risk of error rather than that of resplendent stupidity. Perigot’s pieces effectively involve fabrication, accident, a reversal in the situation. They also reflect a deeply sophistic stance which consists of taking charge of the materiality of visual or textual language. Once said, there it is, it has to be worked with and the junctions have to be found to produce something else.

What is absolutely astonishing in Perigot’s work is that the materiality of the language, the anomaly, the a-categorical approach are revealed in the most conventional and codified forms of image production.

This is what happens with one of his earliest works, *Réanimations* (1994), which consists of an artist’s book and a video showing in a continuous loop a succession of drawings taken from manuals for household, paramedical and industrial appliances. A never-ending display of hands. Hands are placed at the service of correct use of the consumer artefact. They turn, screw, cover, fit together, take the top off, block, position, open, turn over, skewer, swivel... These are disembodied hands, hands instrumentalised in death, most often the hands of women that know only how to do this and nothing else. They are pure insignificant signifiers, hands cut off from the rest of the body to be reduced to a function and a stereotype of the standard consumer.

The video *Réanimations* accentuates the loop of decontextualised units, unconnected with each other. The *montage* procedure exploits not so much the association of images as the joint presentation and juxtaposition of units. It is this articulation of differential units that generates

⁸ Translated from: Michel Foucault, « *Theatrum philisophicum* » (1970), in *Dits et écrits, volume II, 1970-1975*,

friction, a differential relationship in repetition, a movement that undoes automatism. It is also no accident that the video is accompanied by a single, dry, rhythmic sound, which appears to bear time for the hands. The video and audio *montage* in *Réanimations* recovers the correct use of things for something else: a totally absurd and useless way of using image. But this visual anomaly in the *montage* allows the hands to be reinvested with a physical, energetic, erotic and conceptual charge. They are reanimated in carrying their power of manipulation to the limit.

In *Réanimations* it is possible to perceive that the meaning of the image is no longer restricted to a single semiological model, despite the all-powerful presence of the ultra-sign “hand” which uses the object whilst indexing the viewer’s eye. The model is no longer that where the structure of the connections between the units, the parts and whole would form a coherent whole. *Réanimations* makes use of the creative procedure of *montage*. In *montage* the associative linearity between the images which would constitute the narration is not exposed. Instead, *montage* shows the confrontation between the sequences and that which exists between the sequences. As Dork Zabunyan has judiciously observed in his analysis of the writings of Gilles Deleuze on *montage* in image-movement:

*“It indicates that the ‘false join’ is not absent from this cinema, but it intervenes only by way of ‘anomaly of movement’ or ‘troubled association’ between the images, not affecting ‘the indirect action of everything on the parts of the whole’. According to Deleuze, ‘the question is not that of association or attraction between images’, but that of ‘the interstice between images, between two images’”.*⁹

Agencement and dislocation

In his video-sound piece *Blondasses* (2006), Alexandre Perigot inflects *montage* through the use of *agencement* (often translated as “assemblage”).

The artist first identified and conducted a visual selection of blonde models and actresses: Claudia Schiffer, Pamela Anderson, Sharon Stone...

This preparatory stage might appear anecdotal, but it nevertheless shows how the resulting video-sound piece rests already on an image of an image of an image: stereotypes of femininity have been developed from the real bodies of women, and star icons from the world of entertainment have emerged from these stereotypes of femininity: the blonde reduced to her hair and the surrounding emptiness. The fetichisation of the body and the visual instrumentalisation of the woman are pushed to paroxysm in *Blondasses*: the selected hairstyle of the blonde icon is tousled and restyled in a wheat field in the open country. Labourers, artist

⁹ Translated from: Dork Zabunyan, *Voir, parler, penser au risque du cinéma*, Paris : Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2006, p.199.

and assistants come together to build haystacks of blonde hair like ears of corn. But this is also dislocated from the farm field to the audio-visual *montage* bench: the agro-capillary action was photographed and filmed, and then the whole was reassembled in video sequences, in the manner of a slide show. The *Blondasses* video has nothing of the documentary about it. *Blondasses* emerges from an extremely particular video and audio *montage*. The visual *montage* follows the slideshow format, with the assembly of fixed images in a sequence, a procedure which was until very recently looked down on because of its bastard status, somewhere between film and photographic exhibition. The audio *montage* derives from a text written by the art critic Jean-Yves Jouannais on the *Blondasses* project. This text was then digitalised and read by a computerised voice, designed to translate literally from English to French. This results in a sound score where the digitalised voice becomes almost incomprehensible, except for a few short phrases, but a text where the digitalised voice seems to have eaten the words at the same time as pronouncing them.

With *Blondasses* we are faced with a work where the art of *agencement* attains a rare degree of power. Unlike narrative or documentary composition, *agencement* works on the disjunction of elements, on digging gaps and not on unitary harmony. *Agencement* creates blocks which are sometimes amalgamated whilst retaining their differences, sometimes drily juxtaposed, other time rubbing up against each other in confrontation. These are all types of *agencement* which go into the making of *Blondasses* and produce instability, passage, rupture, visual, sound and semantic story within a story. In any case, the piece compromises the regimes of truth, obviously that of the fetichisation of the female body, but also that of the making of images. Suffice it to see how Perigot moves cheerfully from references from the start system culture to that of the agricultural world in the midst of GM crop mutation, whilst making a detour through the history of art – the fields of Van Gogh and Millet's harvesters, all within spitting distances... The *agencement* of *Blondasses* also turns its derision on the figure of the artist, refusing any heroic authority for the creator other than the responsibility to undergo the unstable test of sensation and thought drawing on profoundly heterogeneous meditations.

The analysis of *agencement* would be incomplete if this procedure were not seen in its political perspective. *Agencement* actually tests the limits of representation by subjecting it to the trial of irrationality, in other words by driving through it the possibilities of a critique of the *topos* to be reconfigured, de-spatialised, transported, upset, stretched...

Elvis House is a stunning sculpture in steel or bamboo, minimalistic, rigorous, dry, stretched like a bow, which generates its exact opposite, in other words a chaotic, vertiginous and swirling space of sound blocks and geopolitical blocks at constantly shifting frontiers.

Elvis House sets out to reconstruct the King's house, Graceland, originally built in Memphis in the United States. The architecture of the 24-room house has been digitalised and reduced on a

computer to retain only the skeleton of the lines marking the façades and interior walls. The digitalised image is then redeployed in three dimensions over a surface of 150 m² and a height of 9 m. The specific feature of *Elvis House* is the material in which it is built: scaffolding in steel for the western version, bamboo scaffolding for the Asian version. Materialist tautology: the material in which *Elvis House* is built is the same material that is used in building houses. Scaffolding is above all the material which best indexed this starting point for a permanent and unlimited construction. *Elvis House* has been erected and will continue to be shown in various cities around the world: in the grounds of Parc de la Villette in Paris (2005), in the paddy fields of The Land Foundation in Chiang Mai in Thailand (2006), in a public square in Riga, Latvia (2006), inside the Tramway contemporary arts centre in Glasgow (2007), and at the Berardo Contemporary Art Museum in Lisbon (2008)...

Here we are in the presence of *Elvis House*, where the extreme rigour of the architecture contrasts with its extensions, its aggregations, its visual and sound transfers. *Elvis House* doesn't possess the space but it infiltrates and lets itself be infiltrated from all sides. It's a house that turns upside down the power of globalisation and standardisation.

Elvis House was first uprooted from its private pedestal and national territory – the United States of America – recalling on the way the uprooting experienced and practiced in his work by Elvis Presley himself, who never ceased to rub up against his Native American origins, his references to the African sonorities of Rhythm & Blues, reprojecting a hybrid musicality on the city of Memphis which was then to become a nodal point in the musical and historical revolution in the United States. *Elvis House* was then shown at various locations around the world, but this was to cover the world mapping of another neglected topography, that of the sound territories fusing Western and Eastern Europe, the Americas with the countries of Asia. Alexandre Perigot will take care, with each showing of *Elvis House*, to activate it through sound performances confounding any tendency to a fixed territorial position, and instead propel the exhibition and its venue into a dense and uncontrollable web of sound.

So when *Elvis House* was shown at the Tramway Gallery in Glasgow in 2007, it was erected actually inside the building, partly blocking off the entry and saturating the exhibition space. Visitors found themselves right inside the vast metal structure, walking unawares through rooms in Elvis' house. It was only on coming out of the other side of the structure that they could step back and view the outline of the *Elvis House*. For the opening, Alexandre Perigot invited three very different musical outfits to perform and inhabit the *Elvis House*:

- A Glasgow choir – The Parsonage – which sang the Elvis Presley ballad “If I can dream”, an explicit homage to Martin Luther King.
- The British/Hungarian rock duo, Agoskodo Teliverek, which electrified the venue with their guitars and untrammelled vocals.

- Simon Fisher Turner whose electronic mix offered the experience of a masterly layering of rock music from Eastern Europe.

Elvis House is therefore a visual clutch connecting to the political static of frontiers, showing that local, national, European and global identities are constantly overstepped by the sounds emanating from the house. It matters little that the defenders of the autonomy of art are disappointed, it matters little than the champions of art for looking at are disturbed by the music in their viewing of the fine sculpture, it matters little that the sounds cannot be definitively contained within the House, and it matters little that the partisans of one musical style cannot stand the cohabitation with differing and opposing sound worlds. We are there at the heart of a creative power belonging to *agencement* as defined by the philosopher Gille Deleuze:

“The minimum real unity is neither the word, nor the idea or the concept, nor the signifier, but agencement. It is always agencement that produces the utterances. (...) The utterance is the product of collective agencement, which brings into play, within us and outside us, populations, multiplicities, territories, futures, affects, events. (...) The difficult thing is to make all the elements of a non-homogenous ensemble to conspire, to make them function together. Structures are connected to conditions of homogeneity, but not agencement. Agencement is the co-functioning, ‘sympathy’, symbiosis. (...) But sympathy is nothing, hand-to-hand fighting, hatred of what threatens and infects life, loving where it proliferates (not posterity or descendents, but proliferation...)”¹⁰

So it should be no surprise that the artist Alexandre Perigot has chosen the scaffolding pipe to trace the line of flight. Line in *Elvis House* draws not only the architecture, it doesn't shut in individuals or life, it doesn't define the history of music: it opens, it mixes, it connects, it fans an incandescence in the life around it. Line in *Elvis House* is also a visual material – the scaffolding pipe – an abstraction of a sonority which manifests itself in infinitely extendable infra-low and ultra-high notes. Line radically eliminates location. As Chris Abani did in his novel *Graceland*¹¹, a hallucinatory transposition of Elvis' house to the city of Lagos in Nigeria, reincarnating Elvis in the skin of an adolescent, cutting the house off in a creeping ghetto of poverty, crime and delinquency. The lines of de-territorialisation worked by Perigot and Abani with their *Elvis Houses* constitute the measureless and indomitable power of working through *agencement*.

“It is all a question of line, there is no considerable difference between painting, music and writing. These activities are distinguished by their substances, their codes and respective territorialities, but not by the abstract line they trace, that runs between them and carries them to a common destination. When we trace a line, we might say, “this is philosophy”. Not at all because the line would be a final discipline, a last root that would contain the truth of others, on

¹⁰ Translated from: Gilles Deleuze, Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, Paris : Flammarion, 1977, p.65, 67

¹¹ Chris Abani, *Graceland*, Paris : Albin Michel, 2008 (2004).

*the contrary. Even less than popular wisdom. It's because philosophy is born or produced from behind the painter, the musician, the writer, each time the melodic line leads the sound, or the pure drawn line leads the colour or the written line leads the articulate voice".*¹²

Flows and winds

Alexandre Perigot uses *agencement* to set the air circulating, in currents.

An example of flow is found in *Sometimes You Win Sometimes You Lose*, a phrase written in 50 metres of PVC piping, which is disconnected and propelled through space. It's impossible to read the phrase, the piping of the letters is stretched, and then contracts, disseminating itself through the host venue, as empty space opens up for it and in line with the partitions which close it in. A mysterious object is propelled through the closed tubular circuit and the visit can try to reconstitute the phrase from the sound. The object is closed in the tub but the sound it generates cracks open a new space. *Sometimes You Win Sometimes You Lose* is also an artist's book to be read in the two senses, a book saturated with contradictory images. After linguistic and visual experiments of Mallarmé - *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* – or Marcel Duchamp – *A bruit secret* – Perigot unfolds a work where the phrase “readymade” acquires a particular density according to which it resonates with the contradictory babbling of language and the media of the contemporary world. As Pavel Moscicki has astutely observed, we should not let this ambiguity be clouded by a one-sided vision of his work:

*“Because just as the ambivalence of Sometimes You Win Sometimes You Lose is nothing less than an aporia of our time, inscribed on the very heart of its Leitkultur. There is no turning back on the path which leads – as Perigot has magnificently and very clearly demonstrated – to the pandemonium of fundamental incoherence that nestles at the heart of our sensory and social experience. If we want to bear these “difficult times” and invent another soundtrack for the coming century, another music capable of filling our empty shells, we need to start by listening carefully to the murmur of the past which is forgotten and therefore so intensely present.”*¹³

Funkypipe is a seriously grotesque piece, where three deranged bookcases in steel piping perform a belly dance in front of a tapestry reproducing a popular painting of a sunset over an oilfield in Bakou. The viewer is the frustrated witness of a party that celebrates with sticky romanticism the coming death of the black gold, but above all the domination of world populations by petroleum cash. In the absence of wine, Dionysus will have to make do with oil.

¹² Translated from: Gilles Deleuze, op.cit., p.89.

¹³ Pavel Moscicki, in catalogue intra, p.

There is also the brewing of titanic winds in the series of diptyches entitled *Fighting Assholes*. Satellite photographs of the eye of a cyclone are juxtaposed with a drawing taken from a manual of karate holds. Like a Don Quixote of the global world, man fights against the cyclones that, when seen from a distance, look just like assholes. An absurd dialogue gets going between the errant knight and the cyclones, passing from asshole to asshole, those belonging to Emily, Estelle, Katrina, Luis, Kirk, Larry... Why do the weather men give them human names? Simply because of the mnemonic effectiveness of naming natural elements after someone close to us, most often a lady friend. And why did cyclones originally only have girls' names. Because the meteorologists were mostly men and then, when they became aware of the sexism in the naming policy, they had to change their practice and start giving them boys' names too. In this world of winds, Alexandre Perigot marches against the prevailing winds. In *Fighting Assholes* he encourages us to look below the belt where science poses its dominant world view. In the same way that Mike Kelley was able to explore geology to establish links between the anal nature of cave openings and the dominant optical nature of exhibition spaces, Alexandre Perigot turns to geography and meteorology to undermine the ideology of globalisation. Whilst social, economic and artistic activities are now to be money-led, everyone knows that money has a smell. The devastating reality of the winds and cyclones is here transposed as an allegory of human vacuity and monstrosity in this age of global everything.

Fighting Assholes also makes important references to the writings of William Burroughs, especially with the memorable extract from *Naked Lunch*¹⁴ where the narrator conducts a dialogue with his own asshole. This extract, performed by Frank Zappa and adapted to film by David Cronenberg, inverts the relationships of strength and the vertical hierarchies which form the basis for humanity: man's transition from all-fours to being a vertical biped marked the start of the reign of language and the predominance of vision over the other senses. In Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, as in Perigot's *Fighting Assholes*, it is evidently the eye and the mouth that fall back on anality. In Perigot's work the asshole generates pleasure to the eye, but this is accompanied by something deceptive and grotesque: the viewer perceives in the series of diptyches that the cyclones or the assholes are seeking to dominate the world. The dominant ideology of the moment is that of globalisation, in which living beings and materials are cast into a world united by financial speculation and communication. But as John Saul has pointed out in his book *The Collapse of Globalism and the Rebirth of the World*¹⁵, globalisation has never been inevitable: it is a historical construction which has been profitable for certain people and in any case devastating for millions of living beings. John Saul also stresses that the ideology of globalism is already crumbling. Many countries have already left the global ship to pursue destructive policies or to invent new forms of social and economic organization. At the end of the day, the assholes of globalism may not come to much...

¹⁴ William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (1959).

¹⁵ John Saul, *Mort de la globalisation*, Paris : Payot, 2006.

The false lure of the global image

Faced with the illusion of a global culture, Alexandre Perigot has no intention of protesting from the outside like a disillusioned nihilist. Instead, he infiltrates the saturated network of images from entertainment, art and communication, to unmask the misleading lure of the global image. The question he poses is: how to block the machine for making emptiness out of plenty so as to introduce trouble, chaos and instability in the domain where the image is consumed as touristic and cultural fast food?

Let us examine his juxtaposition of a photograph of James Bond Island in Thailand and a painting, *The Isle of the Dead*, executed in 1886 by the symbolist painter Arnold Böcklin. The viewer notices a striking formal similarity between the island in Thailand and the painting of *The Isle of the Dead*: to either side, two huge rocky peaks rise heavenwards and close in a central area which serves as a landing jetty: where the dead disembark in Böcklin's canvas and where the tourists disembark in endless streams on the island in Thailand.

But between these two representations, what does image do in Alexandre Perigot's conception? Is it the construction of the landscape proposed in painting by Böcklin, reflecting psychological affects, religious and cultural symbols? Is it the photograph of the contemporary artist after Land Art and before the picture postcard?

Instead, the diptych sheds light on how a real place mutates into pure image and how a consumer image is transformed into reality.

In the first place, if the island in Thailand is overrun by tourists, it is because it was the location for the filming in 1974 of *James Bond: The Man with the Golden Gun*. The thousands of tourists that disembark every day on the island come above all to consume the image of the film. To the point that the island has lost its original name, Koh Piggan, to be renamed James Bond Island. The hero has jumped off the screen to inscribe his name and image on the geography of the island,

As for Böcklin's painting, *The Isle of the Dead* has met a fate worthy of the work of art in the era when it is technical reproducible: after the painter himself executed five different versions between 1880 and 1886, it was reproduced in an engraving by Max Klinger and it grew so popular that it is now impossible to count the number of reproductions and plagiarised versions. Lenin, Hitler, Clemenceau and Freud were amongst those to have possessed a reproduction of the painting. Theatre and film directors have used it as a backdrop for their creations (Strindberg, Patrice Chéreau, Mark Robson, Giger...). So *The Isle of the Dead* may be a painting, but it is also an icon.

When Alexandre Perigot places these two images – James Bond Island and *The Isle of the Dead* – side by side, does he place us in the presence of the one-way trip of the image, which in his view exhausts it in the abyss of reproductions and reflections, cancelling out any pretension to originality of work or reality of places? Indeed he does, but that is no longer enough in the context of the broadcast, capitalised and globalised image.

Might the figure of the island be the last symbolic place to describe passage, crossing, oblivion between life and death, but also between reality and pretence, originality and reproducibility? We might rather say that this outdated symbolism has today given way to the figure of the island as the ideological paradigm of globalisation, the whole fantasy of possession of space. Islands and the wide open seas have in effect become the common places needed by the leaders of globalism. The need to find new happy castaways on the islands in order to believe that there is still territory to be conquered. So the *topoi* of the islands reproduced by Perigot no longer designate an image of u-topia intended for reproduction *ad infinitum*, but rather present themselves as the opposite of this: a dys-topia, in other words the *topos* thrust into a more vulgar reality of individual property and new forms of colonisation. In a dystopia, the image and its reproductions would serve only to assuage this need for possession. Dystopia poses its characters in the unrelieved light of individualism, and the privileged few of globalisation become misfits who refuse or decline to work in society.

Alexandre Perigot produces work where the question of reproducibility remains current, but the issue now is to see how the contemporary dystopia of the reproducible image can be turned back on itself and thereby open the way to a reproducible image which is instead constructive and celebratory.

Radiopopeye and *Palaispopeye* experiment with this. Perigot once again turns to an island, Malta in this case, to take a photograph of Popeye's artificial village created in 1981 for the filming of Robert Altman's *Popeye*. This village has remained intact and is now used as a theme park for tourists. In this photographic reproduction of the cinematographic village, there are at first sight two missing elements which disrupt the codification of the image: Popeye and Altman.

Popeye is the archetypal antihero created in 1929 by Elsie Crisler Segar, at the time of the stock market crash and the ensuing social crisis in America. Popeye is a sailor who has run aground, no longer on desert islands, but under the searing and relentless sun of socio-economic reality. His mission will be to defend the community against its oppressors, but he will defend them as a reluctant and clumsy hero, sometimes lazy and often grumpy. There is always a Popeye in the people around us. The nickname has become common, not to say indispensable, to the life of the community. Popeye is also a figure that has straddled the history of comic strip, literature and film. In his novel *Sanctuary*, published in 1931, William Faulkner

celebrates Popeye in the guise of an asocial and criminal thug. In his film of *Popeye*, dating from 1981, Robert Altman cocked a snook at Disney and Hollywood, the factories turning out superheroes that save humanity and the values of American society. Altman decides to film Popeye as a modest citizen living within the confines of a village huddled around a harbour, a village that all the stock characters of conservative society in the United States: the sanctimonious churchwoman, the greedy businessman, the moraliser, the informer....

Alexandre Perigot then sets about dematerialising the figure of Popeye in this cinematic village washed up on Malta. Popeye will never get into the image, but it is no exaggeration that he will make his shadow felt, in other words in the multiple variants of the photographic image in different media and at different places. So in 2002 the photograph was printed on tarpaulin (250 x 500 cm) and displayed to the sound of a recording of Xavier Boussiron freely interpreting the songs of the American crooner, Roy Orbison. The same photograph was then printed in 2003 on a monumental tarpaulin – 10 x 30 m, giving a surface of 300 m² – which covered the façade of a Venetian palace during the biennale. Displayed near the exit from the railway station, the gigantic photograph of Popeye's village greeted tourists coming to consume the near-island, its picture postcard, its cultural heritage and its contemporary art biennale. The overvalued image of Venice is replaced by the devalued image of Popeye's village. The figure of Popeye could therefore be assumed equally by the artist, the visitor, the exhibition curator, the singer, the tourist...

In 2006, the photograph was then deployed on a vast tapestry covering the entire 200 m² of wall space at the La Criée art centre. *Palaispopeye*, an installation comprising rotating stages with moving partitions, carries the viewer into a maze of fragmented images of Popeye's village. Simultaneously constrained and hooked by the game, the viewer seeks in vain to reconstitute the unity of the photograph. *Palaispopeye* offers a hybrid mix of cinematic montage, video game and stage set. Popeye becomes an eye-popping experience in the popular figure of Popeye and in the ob-scenity of the exhibition.

As we have already seen, cinematic montage proceeds by rubbing distinct units together and through realization of interstitial space. In *Palaispopeye*, the interstice is the visitor, and the visitor is responsible for the montage, connecting or separating the units. The viewer no longer pronounces as ontological subject contemplating the work, but instead presents himself as operator-assembler between one image "and" another, between one space "and" another. He is involved in the act of making the image, albeit free of pretension, just like Popeye, dragging his feet as the viewer drags his eye, vacillating on the rotating stages, running up against an abstract stretch of blue, a fragment of a rock or a cabin. He carries in himself the accidental nature and the impurity of the image to be assembled/shown.

Palaispopeye will be set up again in 2008 in amongst the contemporary art collection of the Museu Berardo in Lisbon. This new manifestation finds real relevance in the way visitors find their way around, creating ambiguity between hybrid film-spectacle-exhibition that is *Palaispopeye* and the route around a collection which retraces the steps of art from the early twentieth centuries to the present day. Between two galleries, *Palaispopeye* will be an interfering presence temporarily trapping the viewer, changing his individual route or his guided tour around the museum. Maybe he will risk the impression of walking around in circles inside *Palaispopeye*; maybe he'll find it fun, or else annoying, to find his way through this labyrinth of fragmented images. In any case, *Palaispopeye* will be an image set between two galleries. So unavoidably, on entering through one room and stumbling into the next, the visitor will have this visual experience which is bound to have some effect on his discovery of the rest of the museum.

Sutures and borders

Alexandre Perigot is committed to working towards a definitive rupture with the thought and art of substance. His art is one of deployment and voluntary conflagration of artistic and geopolitical frontiers. To return to the terms of Peter Sloterdijk, it is now a question of proposing forms of creation and theories "of the contemporary age, from the standpoint that the deployment of 'life' is multi-focal, with multiple perspectives, heterarchical. (...) Life is expressed through scenes which are simultaneous and overlapping, it is produced and consumed in networked studios; it puts itself in space where it finds itself and that finds itself in it in a way which is always specific."¹⁶

In other words, these redeployments of the living, of artistic creation and thought have a threefold agenda:

- To close the chapter of substance and ontology
- To recognize that the chapter of the absolute signifier and the disillusioned simulacrum was merely the pretext for setting up the void as the ideological basis of globalisation
- To invent forms of art and thought where the simulacrum becomes a creating form and where the concepts of instability, sutures and borders become zones and practices necessary to the conditions for the existence of art works. Not that these notions consolidate a destructive force in art, but on the contrary because they carry within themselves the germinations of a creative force.

It is revelatory to observe how Perigot's latest works are meticulously devised – object, frame, scene, habitat... - whilst radically opening themselves up to disintegration, instability, illegitimate joins and associations.

¹⁶ Translated from: Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphères III : Ecumes*, Paris : Maren Sell, 2005 (2003), 18.

It's as if he needed to create pieces which are undermined from the inside.

The common denominators in the palace series - *Palaispopeye*, *Polkapalace*, *Borderpalace* - are the moving stages and partitions. *Polkapalace* (2007) reduces the palatial setting to a venue for unstable hanging space: works from the collection of Polish art belonging to the Arsenal Gallery in Bialystok are hung on all the moving and fixed walls, utterly saturating the space which is turned into exhibition space. But this is a tense exhibition, an exhibition that, by virtue of its permanent motion, seems always to escape our eyes or to recall that Polish art is (re)turning on/to its own history. In making a moving museum, *Polkapalace* is not seeking to entertain. The shifting walls in *Polkapalace* are like the shaking of artistic frontiers being reworked at this particular moment in contemporary history.

In 2007, Perigot was invited by the curator Hou Hanru to contribute to the 10th Istanbul biennale of contemporary art. The artist created *Borderpalace*, a visual, typographical and sound device. The names of alternative rock bands from Eastern Europe are spelled out in a huge array of tubular letters on the moving partitions. *Borderpalace* unfolds a series of names that for many visitors will perhaps be remote and difficult to grasp. But *Borderpalace* conveys a set of names that, on being stuck on the moving partitions and on (dis)connecting with each other, clearly projects the vibration, the networking and the proliferation of a creative activity. The repetitive turning of the device mutates into a long process of unwinding.

On top of this, the written names are encased in a density of sound that infiltrates the smallest empty space in *Borderpalace*: sounds created by Eastern European bands and then mixed by the British composer Simon Fisher Turner. This produces something like a sound ball that invades the exhibition space. This energetic and overbearing amalgam of sound gives the lie to all notions of flat space, identical space or levelled space that the culture of globalism would like us to swallow. These groups have generated their own hybrid, powerful, vigorous and crazy sounds, utterly unknown in the West. *Borderpalace* dislocates musical scenes like tectonic plates, offering an implacable response to the single, global and mass-market cultural product.

Perigot's work intervenes in floating areas where the frontiers can be shifted, where the forms of creation are accepted with their radical differences. Running counter to the globalism of standardised obedience to the laws of planetary capitalism, running counter to the inverse (but intrinsic) correlative of this which is individual identities separated in their closed and substantial groups, Perigot's *Palaces* are zones of sutures and borders, the *topoi* where the dizzying power of heterotopic creation, necessarily paradoxical, is manifest.

Perigot's *Palaces* are the opposite of benevolent and slyly standardising multiculturalism. There is today a form of multiculturalism that advocates the tolerant discovery of the other, on the condition that it is integrated, absorbed and alienated.

The thinker Slavoj Žižek has perfectly theorised the issues of planetary multiculturalism:

*“Multiculturalism, of course, is the ideal form of the ideology of this planetary capitalism, the attitude that, from a position we may call the global void, treats each local culture in the same way as the coloniser treats the colonised population. (...) in the same way that global capitalism induces the paradox of colonisation with no metropolis, with out any colonising state-nation, multiculturalism is a form of disavowed racism, inert and self-referential, a ‘racism at a distance’ – it respects the identity of the Other, conceiving of it as an ‘authentic’ community closed in on itself from which the advocate of multiculturalism keeps a distance which renders possible his universal privileged position”.*¹⁷

So Perigot's work takes an unsteady position, both physically and politically: to take the risk of accepting differences and generating creative *topoi* is to repudiate both tolerant multiculturalism and the narrowness of exclusive identities. To practice the art of gaps and unlikely *agencement* is to find alternatives for permanent creativity. This creativity needs to conceive and practice the differences, not as exclusions or opposites, but as diversions. Perigot's *Palaces* are real platforms/flat-forms for diversion. The variety accumulated in *Bordersplace* is not intended to affirm the self or the other, but as a simple diversion that maintains the tension of the unpredictable.

¹⁷ Translated from: Slavoj Žižek, *Plaidoyer en faveur de l'intolérance*, Paris : Climats, 2007, p.72-73.