

1.

From the zombie moment

A place has an end. It may not necessarily coincide with its disappearance. On the contrary, we'd prefer that this end of the place be a particular moment of its existence, a terrain of experience where something new grows in its decomposing matter. This would inevitably be unpredictable. And we'd have to do our best so that it would also be a happy thing, a beautiful death, a rich compost, hard-boiled too, a supple and resistant matter. To appreciate this end, we have to read into what remains, decipher heritage in the process of putrefaction, extract the diamonds encrusted in smoked flesh, the gold coins placed on empty eye sockets. This end leaves behind a treasure, a bit dirty and noisy, which calls out to courageous organs to help it build a future with. It involves the body, which wants to know, how to tremble in its company. It isn't easy to take on this inconvenient matter, not for anyone who wants something unprecedented and new, for anyone who wants to set up shop on a crime scene washed of the stinking presence of the past.

In the chapter on decolonial practices I would happily place this gesture: knowing how to drag back the stink and bad manners of the dead onto the stage of the present-future, with their irritating perfume that fills nostrils and lungs. Imagine a body that was once domestic, the very one that escaped out a broken window, maliciously pulling with it the masters' tablecloth¹ Here it is, back again, limping on a rotting leg on which magnificent fungi are growing, its black face covered with seashells from having spent too long on the ocean floor with a half-human, half-squid army. With its chalky finger it returns again to scratch at the table and deposit its meal of indigestible and disturbing histories that tickle the intestines. Just long enough to reveal a transparent chest that dribbles down the thoracic cage and a scarred back on which all the Codes have been engraved, he or she is already disappearing with a sound of moist suckers, projecting streams of ink from an anus in the form of a talkative mouth. Understand what you can of this language. The prankster spirit doesn't occupy the stage, he or she crosses it to the rhythm of the racket made by skeletons tapping their tibiae somewhere offstage. The end of the place should be vital and joyous, welcoming and bizarre; it is a survivor, a dance, the slow gliding of strange but familiar creatures that turns everything upside down, including the order of the place. The end refuses the imposition of silence; it is a bazaar, it is din and cacophony. It demands a translation which is already...the place to come.

Because the end we're concerned with has nothing to do with the end of the obsessive and cadaverous body of the white male, with his endless and noisy agonizing, occupying the center of a stage he refuses to leave at any price. Here he is, a fat wrinkled baby, crying and demanding that his nappy be changed and that he be offered the breast of an obedient mistress. He who sees in his own finiteness the end of the world, a sterile and melancholy end, forbids any life that is not in the service of his worn out libido. It's the body of the old king who sees himself as society, as a world where any voice that is not his is necessarily barbaric. We do not want that death. We forcefully kick its ass.

People frequently ask you to share your experience of the creation of projects, places, cultural situations, of diverse triumphs and heroic adventures. Rarely are you asked about the experience of an end, which no one wants to see. Even though you need to know how to end and we're all ill prepared for it; you need to leave traces behind, juicy bones to gnaw, fertile matter. The end of the place is a place from which you can observe the place. It's always a bit sad to see the end of a place. But at the same time, it's also a bit sad to have to cling on to its survival. On principle. Just because you don't want it to end, at the precise moment where you no longer know what, exactly, is dying. And what is not dying.

The death of the place begins with the long zombie moment, a joyous ceremony that puts an end to force of habit, repetition of the same old thing, the wear and tear of the place in its most daily form, in its most permanent masquerade. The place leaves its present, begins to decompose, allows ambient sounds to penetrate its body, and the murmurs of struggles change its state. It lets go in order to welcome in possible transformations. This end liberates the times of the place, old thoughts, old angers that resonate in new textures. Everyone doesn't know that this is the end of the place. Everyone doesn't know it at the same time or in the same way. To notice it requires attention, it cannot be seen with the bare eye. In its wake lost landscapes re-emerge, mutilated bodies, music and voices without master. You need to know how to welcome them. Welcome. It's a ritual that some refuse to perform, a cuisine that requires applied mastication so that nothing remains blocked in the throat.

The Espace Khiasma was a refuge while Paris flaunted itself at its filthy margins, chasing the poor, erasing traces. And it is there that its disappearance could have the taste of defeat. This is why dying is necessary, but not disappearing, not as a refuge, even less as a story.

A place for culture and encounters, art and complicity, Khiasma opened its doors to the public in 2004 in Les Lilas, a suburb to the north-east of Paris, at a time when the Seine-Saint-Denis department was still relatively inaccessible to the purveyors of gentrification and *coolness*, thanks to a few traffic snarls on the peripheral highway, a fair number of vacant lots and bad reputations.

Khiasma started from the simple idea of a place based on no model, a place that didn't try to resemble an art center, cobbled together with no particular strategy and

narrating its life story as it happened alongside those who helped it emerge: polyphonic stories, convivial talk, steering maneuvers of awkward significance, poaching of forms. Khiasma was born in this economy of accident, in a moment unfettered by a culture police. This was before the arrival of those in the know, the embodied system that manages the imaginative heart of the place, demands accounts, proffers lessons, manners and methods, manufactures a time for the place, hunts down uncertainty, disguises the place so it can recognize itself in it, administers remedies for fear, cares for the place against its will, domesticates it, weighs it down with things it did not ask for. Khiasma tried to escape from this future. The Seine-Saint-Denis department, that rich and novel terrain for cultural and artistic experimentation, has also always had to contend with this same silly path and learned to lower its gaze when facing with the managers of the great tale of the future.

For this reason it is necessary to know how to enter into the moment of the death of the place, which occurs well before the notification of its official end, a secret moment when it removes itself from the bourgeois lesson, when it empties itself to allow other forms of life to inhabit it, when it hides, drifts and disappears already, becomes liquid, becomes sediment. S/he who wants to see it sees it leave the stage, slip out of the hands that wanted to own it, reinvent disorderly ways of doing and saying. The place gets back to the task of fleeing, beyond what no longer exists, far from what does not yet exist. From the light-deprived mangrove where it roams, from the ocean floor where it allies itself with other living creatures, the place sends out cries and poisoned arrows. It rediscovers its cutting poetry that twists the neck of administrative grammar. It amuses itself with the repetitive music of speech without consistency, the capture of words. It becomes unpronounceable. This is the zombie phase of the place, a long wake, the slow decomposition of its body. It now survives amidst the gases of its putrefying organs. Like a spirit escaped from its fleshy envelope, it cackles with laughter. Because it has learned to live in its death.

The collection of short texts which follows, published in the autumn of 2018, is part of this endless tale that has been unfolding since the place of the death of Khiasma, echos of a story decomposing and recomposing itself in the close-lying suburbs of Paris.

(1) See « To decolonise is to be present, to decolonise is to flee, marronage from toxic hospitality and alliances in the mangroves », Olivier Marboeuf, in « Let's decolonize the arts », Editions de l'Arche 2018

2.

To Speak with Words of Your Own

In the long story of Khiasma, the time has now come to try and tell the concrete and material tale that has fed the imagination situated within such a place. In the courtyard of a social housing block, a printing office. Precarity and friendship, neighbours and allies, the loyal and the forgotten, the debts, the anger and tiredness, unpromising evenings and afternoons of celebration, hypocritical politicians and idiotic policies incessantly inventing new flavours of disgust. We have a fierce love for Seine-Saint-Denis (A North-Eastern district in the close outskirts of Paris) as she enters with us into her zombie phase. Finished are the forbidden bodies, the friendly presences that lean as the night falls, the Kabyle cafés and communist smoke, those that speak too loud at dawn, those that do nothing but migrate, those that they kill and those that kill themselves through running as the only possible and desirable way to get through a life that doesn't count. We have a debt towards these stories, we have to recount them with carefully chosen words, words that have had it rough but that look you straight in the eye, words of your own.

To speak with words of your own is not just a question of language. It is also the undoing of a certain encoding of the most concrete and often fragile experiences of our lives, of their encapsulation within the key words that form the base of the fluid and Anglophone traffic of our contemporary "motorways of thought" - and of their economy of attention - where every existence could be described by a handful of narrators held within the gaseous suspension of globalisation, repeated until exhaustion by an assembly of enamoured students and other servile species.

Because of course, it is always a question of love and of care regardless of the violence that is done to and by words. And if you don't understand this, you will no longer be invited. And this religious love for repetition makes the most poetic of inventions from a silken hand; a knife that slices in the night, a torch thrown onto the faces of those that hide themselves within forms of bare life. We have almost come to bringing the nigger out of his dark cave where we threw him and where he withers away in silence, to take from him a last few vital principles, a final spark before he is completely exhausted.

For there is an urgent need to nourish the sick body of cultural institutions, to chuck the slop into the toothless mouth of this old man whose layers and mask must be changed. It will not be long until The Centre Pompidou sets itself into marronage, Kunsthalle and Art centres are already creolising and probably soon a queer MoMA will co-produce indigenous imaginaries with a fugitive Tate. This is the grotesque economy of minority practices that become the motifs of a neoliberal market of

unarmed knowledges. Dangerous bodies and dispossessed territories are now held at a reasonable distance and the cultural police assure a healthy cordon. Everything is fine. Everything is calm in the Ghetto tonight.

In this gluttonous economy of subjects, with a tenacious amnesia, we have almost become miserly with our conversations. Yet the very production of such an authentic place depends enormously on our capacity towards choral thinking and on the free circulation of words. Especially when this form of thinking is not so well informed and tries to find what it is saying along the way, is not afraid to disappoint or to not always be part of the family. A form of thinking that doesn't care to speak too loudly, nor at the same time as everybody else.

The Place depends also upon a kind of hospitality for thought that disturbs, for the body that doesn't know, the body that appears unannounced, accidentally, speaking a language that is still uncertain on this constantly moving terrain. Like the drunk guy that walks into the yard and tells of his life as a poet, the neighbour in his nightgown who has lost his voice or his memory, the girl that starts a thousand phrases but never finishes one, the children that roam like cats and those that search for a bit of warmth with their phosphorescent eyes. The Place depends upon an unpoliced kindness that goes without saying, an active principle that quite simply holds up the walls - but that has no value in any kind of market of « love ». It is just about being here with those that are here.

But to situate somewhere is not a simple matter of geography, it is not a kind little task done to impress the tourists of contemporary art and the holidaymakers of the political. We don't necessarily want to be those little dishevelled peasants, those complaining artisans whose « authentic production » people come to admire with a condescending hug. « This place is so amazing! So beautiful! » To situate a Place is to give close attention to its material conditions of appearance and existence, to its grime and its shit, its cowardice, its fears and its renunciation too, to give attention to what it demands and costs, and to who it costs, to that which has not been examined to tell its story, to that which has been hidden and thrown into the shadows. It is to say fuck you to violent shortcuts and to the insufferable ignorance of those who endlessly discover that you exist through looking at themselves in the mirror of your own body, only to then frown when they do not recognise themselves in it. It is to attempt to speak with those words there, affected by the anger and astonishment of still being alive. To speak to our allies far and wide. Like a Place, a Zombie Place.

3.

The place becomes within us

It would have been easier only to be a poetess – authentic, political, serene –, a feminist poet of course, obviously, communist of the right period, or a libertarian type, funny and erudite, a solid guy, a fluid girl, those who wherever they go find their place, those who go unnoticed in the tapestries of bourgeois salons and appear suddenly revolted over the course of an election night. Angry when one should be and good company otherwise, with no hesitations or hard feelings. Capable of forgetting the most sordid situations, amnesic witnesses of the harmful gestures, of the black bouncer's empty look, of the bodies we quietly ban on the doorstep of safe places, never on the bad side of an argument, gliding on the curtain's soft surface without ever lifting it, and who know how to play the cool fable of possibility, of let-everyone-give-what-they-have-and-may-the-best-win.

But the map is also populated with those who won't fit – sorry, not tonight. They have not chosen to but feel it very early on and carry out, with this peculiar feeling, a whole string of things that should not be done. Starting with wanting to speak up and look behind the curtain. Like Bluebeard's wife committing the fatal move and becoming a witness against her will, a witness of her whole body, marked, until she can no longer pretend as if it hadn't happened, act like before. So it's not tonight for these women and men, though they learnt to pee where they're told and listen to the lessons of those who always know what to do and how to live all the possible lives, including yours of course. When you don't have the means, you just wait for your turn to come, on hold in the toilets of history. Because if you don't have the means, the right gestures, if your words are a little off-kilter, your profile blurred, if you can't build ideal conditions, the smooth perfect surface of ideal conditions, then you should remain quiet because you won't be doing things properly. To make a place, truly, is to puncture this surface of the fable of the politically immaculate, it is to scuffle with the conditions, to dive to a situation's mucky source and inquire, about where it's all coming from, and to whom it really costs, to gigantic leeches basking in the shallows. One does not do this. One should stand still and quiet, looking to strike the perfect pose, the perfect grainless image. Be a good sport.

But there was a place to make. Fatally. Why so? We do not know. Khiasma is an accident that's become so meaningful in time that it's difficult to picture it as the result of pure chance. Difficult, too, to explain it otherwise than as an old itch turned one day into a thought in action. The place had to become. And it is us that it found this time around, lurking in the area.

The place had to be done or perhaps the "making place" grabbed us as it passed through with its animistic power. Maybe it figured we looked a little broken, that we were surely a bargain. We shouldn't play smart about it because the place found us a little ignorant and a little naive. It was forbearing in that way, no doubt about that.

It left us the time to learn and the time to undo some mess, and also to invent our lives by failing over and over again. The place became within us, all of us who worked within it, passed through it, came to it looking for something, a hand's warmth, some cold water to put out the city's fires. The place pushes its membrane to the outside, we are its skin and nerves. We filter the anger which makes the place, and the joy, which makes the place. Making place is to be caught, like Bluebeard's wife, our hand and soon our whole body at the heart of the problems, in the very matter of the political who, in turns, dazzles us, disappoints us, harms us. The place is surprise and lowness, is pleasure and ugliness. The place is deceptive in that it is generous, teaching us what we do not wish to know, putting us in the presence of undesirable thoughts and forcing us to live and think with them. It is not only a question of affinities, it is also subject to misunderstandings. It infiltrates us against our will. For a long time we ran after the right harmony, a way to understand each other but then we realised that the worst frustrations, the stupidest of attitudes are among the place's gifts as much as the most profound friendships. What we did wrong, the mistakes, the words that went too far and the words we lacked are the place's treasures, its specific knowledge, powerful and toxic, difficult to grasp, a place's pearls deep down inside a place's shit.

There is no heroic way to make place, no chance of succeeding over time. Each piece of good news brings its part of scum, all the ideas bear their weight and shape as they lay their fat behinds down onto your life's keyboard and write out something else than what was planned.

The place needs no heroes nor heroines, though it demands and consumes sacrifices. It is unclean matter, an ambiguous and misshapen distillation of all the presences that negotiate their space within it, of all the egos saving their skins for want of saving the world. One doesn't come out of it unscathed, or even proud. The place grinds, pushes and distorts, flees. There are no good thoughts other than those who make place and unmake it all at once.

One sometimes thinks that the place's most depressing mundanity, the dumbfounding litany of administrative literature, the muted violence of reptilian policies, the systems embarked inside young bodies through which they speak, the lacks and the losses, destroy the place's poetics and desire. But everything is contingency, and the place a machine fabricating new poetics, affected by and surviving to what could kill the place. The place welcomes since it translates the world, the thoughts and the voices, the works and the poems into its language where all have a place, inside its mouth full of matter and bruises.

It is a story that exceeds but does not forget, that swells with anger and with celebration. It isn't its appearance, it isn't its surface or its everyday routine. It isn't just local, it is in many places at once in such a way none can surround it, seize it, possess it. The place flees its envelope, builds alliances in the near, transduces the faraway.

The place becomes within us and does not disappear.

4.

What the end of Khiasma stands for

When a small-scale independent art centre like Espace Khiasma closes in the Paris suburbs, in the district of Seine-Saint-Denis specifically, it is necessarily a sign of the times. Of times when that and those that it defended and strived to render visible – artists, authors, thinkers or boiling issues, undesirable inhabitants, minoritarian practices, experiences of art or of forms of life and hospitality – cruelly lack a voice in a faltering society.

It is the end of a history, but perhaps not only that of one individual place. Perhaps also that of a territory, and its concrete utopias. Watch this space. Khiasma was nurtured, as were many of its colleagues, by the fertile land of a suburb that had made sure it had the means to talk and look into the eyes of all those who have made of fear their business.

Europe's richest region has today become the least welcoming, aimlessly wandering from one electoral fantasy to another, the spectre of a culture brought onto all regardless of individuals' lives and what knowledge they produce. The tired voter has become the only inhabitant of this map. And exhaustion the only confused form of consent. Meanwhile, the Grand Paris invents itself in a new amnesic colonisation of poor territories, trampling a terra nullius, waiting for the next revolts of the indigenous genius still breathing under the polished concrete. This can only bring back some memories, in a time when others talk of reconciliation with Africa – without grandpa's gross after-thoughts, it goes without saying.

So each and everyone builds their own little world on the elites' playground, while the public authority stands applauding the lesson of the rich, a docile spectator no longer interrogating a weakness it has integrated as a disease.

And it is said, over dessert in a bourgeois dinner, that the emplois aidés (government hiring incentives for non-profit organisations) are decidedly of no use to anyone, without a look for the servants who move about in silence and pour the drinks, saluting this slightly acid joke that will soon become law. Surprised by the sudden announcement, advisers rush to send out vague analyses, botched out during the night, proving by science what the master's voice said. The voice is viral, its policy is speed. And it is for the cleaner, crossing the suburb at dawn, a hard-fought public transport pass in hand, to find the leftovers, still fuming, of this fine decision, laying on a tired table.

Khiasma's closing down thus doesn't just concern Khiasma, but all art and cultural organisations that built themselves in the fragile economy of projects, where applications and reports take up more time than what we owe to transmission, to relation, to creating a community. Where we are doomed either to pretend or to perish from giving too much. We saw it settle at the end of the 90s and it is here now, this fine disastrous economy that has no use but to feed a blinded machine. A lack of the stable funding that a cultural public service mission would call for, a desire of the political that leaves no more space to delegating, to true innovation, to looking for understandings in the long-term, to a practice of arguing with a population that knows more than the 24-hour news channels' flashes.

This whole music sounds out of tune, and even the orchestra knows it. The sector's professionalization now serves only the desires of cultural watchdogs, security guards of art's sensitive experiences. We need to catch our breaths because we have run a lot without ever a moment's respite. And thus we unknowingly condoned this cultural economy that kills us, this ever-shrinking blanket we pull in every direction. And the only solution then offering itself to us was to invent a place of consumption, a little cultural industry, desirable and obedient, that would pretend not to leave out dangerous presences and bodies. We think there are other possible paths. We need to stop running to explore them and discover what culture could become, in a world that decides to no longer accelerate and becomes aware of its limits. And, in doing so, invents a new ecology of practices, another way of sharing and producing a common good. And the lives that go with it. The political word has become pure speed, it must cease to run through us effortlessly, it must feel the matter we are made of, of which is made the place that lives within us, a jagged hospitality, an alloy blessed with memory.

It's the end of the road for Khiasma. One must learn to disappear. To become a fable acting with agency, a poison. For others to replay, undo and redo elsewhere. Yours truly won't be begging for its survival. That's the way it is. Leftovers of a class consciousness, as one would have said in the 20th century.

We will soon be waking over the elegant dead body, winking at us from the bottom of its coffin. Moving away from the light in its footsteps. To those who took mandate to destroy, we say we have made alliances with the dead, that we cherish the ash that nurtures future becomings. To those who have made of violence an economy, and shine the statues of bankers, we say we will return in another body and with another dirty face. It isn't common to say goodbye this way, one would like a platform from which to demand something. We demand nothing. We are here.

So it's nothing other than goodbye, and see you soon.

Translate from French by Liz Young and Leila Ghaist.