

To Speak with Words of Your Own

SEPTEMBRE 10th, 2018

In 2018, alongside the becoming zombie of Khiasma, I published on [Khiasma's blog](#) a fragmented and speculative story of this place established since 2001 perhaps in Les Lilas, Seine-Saint-Denis, in the vibrant heart of the French Capitalist Republic.

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*.

Here I would like to thank Leila Ghaist for her beautiful translation from the French, which is a poetic and creative act, and also for her remarks and generous overview on my way of colourfully mistreating my mother tongue.