

“The Audience and the Power”

A performance about adaptation

An original creation
of
Ludivine Thomas

Performed in the occasion of “Adaptations” colloquy
At the Catholic University of Lille
June 17 & 18, 2016

In the performance “The Audience and the Power”, I’m, Ludivine Thomas, the storyteller of a fantastic novel which plot is about an artist, his art and a visitor. But, putting myself between the audience’s hands, which is allowed, or actually invited, to intervene as much as it wants - as on the text than on the gesture - I’m obliged to obey and to adapt myself to try to get my story to its end. I always know perfectly how the story begins but I never know how it will end.

The performance duration is twenty minutes. Not more, not less...

After giving a full transcription of the performance and telling the story created during the performance I will make a few statements on this performance.



Full transcription of the performance

(Transcription in original language without correction or change. All the audience's interventions are kept and shown in bold font in the text)

[t-20:00]

[Ludivine Thomas start the chronometer - countdown on : 20:00]

"I will start my story by : "Once upon a time".

Once upon a time, an artist was exhibiting his last sculpture in a gallery. This sculpture is tricky to describe because it's totally abstract. And its name is "Untitled". The sculpture is displayed in the gallery when the artist leaves the gallery for a few minutes. A man passes by, on his way home, and sees through the window this sculpture which is so strange that he doesn't understand it. He reads the text, and the title, "Untitled": he realizes he doesn't get it even more and..."

[t-19:13] "And he started to cry!"

"So, Yes! He starts to cry... and... cries from angriness - and he decides to break it. So he takes it and throws it on the floor... And leaves. Crying again, still."

[t-18:55] "And a ghost appears!"

"So a ghost appears in the street and tells him; "Nooo! It will not be that easy, man". And leaves. The artist is back in the gallery and sees that his art piece is broken into two pieces. What should he do?

The day after, the artist is back with two new pedestals. He puts the two pieces of the former art piece on each new pedestal and gives a new name on each. It will be "Power 1" and "Power 2"."

[t-18:10] "While doing that, he suddenly sees a little worm appearing between the two art pieces. "

"So! A worm is moving between the two pieces and he realizes: "That's so extremely interesting. I take a photo and I keep it for later".

The other man, on his way home again, passes by the gallery. "What?! The art piece I broke is still here and actually became two art pieces...." What did he do? He comes in, looks at the names: Power 1, Power 2... "What?! He's kidding me!"

Pham!! Pham!! and [he] breaks both.

... and leaves again, of course!"

[t-17:19] "When he is gone somebody steals one of the pieces."

"Yes! During this moment when there is no one in the gallery someone steals one piece of four - so it makes it three pieces. So the artist is back and sees three pieces: "What? Strange! It's smaller number and... I don't know... I take a photo and I think about it for later". So what should he do? Beside a photo?

He goes home... and... think about it..."

[t-16:41] "While thinking about the sculpture, there are three children, or two kids, who are coming. They start playing hide-and-see among all the pieces."

"So it is in the morning when the children arrive? Yeah! So when the artist is back in the morning there are children in the gallery! So. And he installs one new pedestal; so there are three art pieces; "Power 1", "Power 2", "Power 3". And the children are playing hide-and- seek between. But they are really cool, they don't break anything, they only play, and leave."

And the other guy comes and sees. "What? They [the art pieces] are still here?! But no! I don't agree. It cannot be like that!" So he comes inside; takes each ones. Spling! Spling Spling [destroys them]. He broke it in two pieces each, so it makes; if my counts are good - six pieces. So the artist needs to build somethings. Of course now he has understood that. The

day after, the artist is back with three more pedestals. So they start to be really tiny, you know, the art pieces start to be tiny, but it is still possible to show it.

So; There are six new pedestals and six new art pieces called: "Power 1", "Power 2", "Power 3", "Power 4", "Power 5", "Power 6".

The guy the same gu..."

[t-15:05] **"And in the middle of the night."**

"Hmmm! Now we are in the night... So the guy did not come. He did not pass by, and nothing happened. And in the middle of the night, he is little drunk, and passes by this gallery because it's quite close to his home. And sees these six art pieces which are for him so still annoying because he still do not understand. For him all this is like a bad joke. And this artist starts to make him too irritated: And the alcohol makes him even more irritated. So what does he do? He breaks the window of the gallery, to come in and to break it [the art pieces]. So now it's not six pieces -he breaks all- so it makes twelve pieces. And NOW he is fine!"

[t-14:11] **"But suddenly; looking around him in this gallery he realized that the photos he took the day before were put on at the walls of the gallery - with something strange in one of those photos. You will tell us what was so strange!"**

"So the artist realises that the photos are on the wall: That's the thing?"

"Yes! Displayed on the wall."

"So; The gallerist is included in the story now because... Yes, now the artist realises that the gallerist did find the photos. Did hang it on the wall, and the photos were quite strange because when he did take the photos, it was... (if my memory is good) 4 to 6. And now on the photos there is... 5. And now the calculation is really tricky. What happens on this photos? "Is it me who did make something strange with the technic or is this art piece living ?"

Is it possible that this art piece can make new things by itself? That is a real mysterium! And we cannot answer that. That's a mysterium for everyone."

[t-12:55] **"And he notices that there is a shadow on one of the pictures, would that be the ghost? "**

"That could be yes! Maybe the ghost has really much power. Maybe it can acts on objects.

That's also a good point. It can be that. But no one would know because it can be the shadow of the artist taking photos. That's not possible to know.

The thing is... So now in the gallery there is 12... 24 pieces. Because the guy did come in the night and with the window... So it is..... 12 or....? Does someone...?"

[t-12:14] **"What if you forget the number of pieces?"**

"What happens if I forget?"

"Yes, the numbers. Is it important to know exactly the number?"

"Yes it's a kind of part of the story. But...."

"But, you need to do with that?"

"I decide that the number now is to big, so we cannot remember."

[t-11:54] **"So, there is so many art pieces, and there are photos of the art pieces. And the artist is really happy. But now he needs to work even more because his art pieces are on the floor and he needs to build the pedestals. To put it [the art piece] on each pedestal. So he built pedestals, pedestals, pedestals, pedestals. In a number we do not know, because they are so many, and so... They are really, really, really tiny, the art piece start to be really tricky to see. We are like; "Ahhh!! Is it (only) a pedestal or something ON the pedestal ?" It start to be tricky, but the audience is OK, the other people are OK. And there are these photos to attest that it has been earlier something real.**

So everyone is OK, besides the man which has no taste in arts. He doesn't understand anything. And even more, he is really angry in his life. So when he passes by the window and sees so many, many pedestals he is wondering "what happens? Is it me who create this or is it the artist who reacts to my art piece? I have no idea? It makes me so irritated"."

[t-10:49] **“And now you talk, without [using] body language.”**

“So the guy is so extremely irritated to see this because he wants to keep the power on it. He decides to make it like dust; to break it so extremely tiny that you cannot even find a piece. So he takes his foot and “scratch, scratch, scratch” on everything. And the pedestals are broken, everything is broken and now... “Yes it's good! Nothing can change more! I am the winner!”

[t-10:15] **“And now you speak little more slow, like slow motion.”**

So. The artist comes back and sees a mess in the gallery, and think like “What should I do?” He takes a little brush, takes all the dust, and goes to his laboratory.”

[t-09:40] **“He realises he has lost the key.”**

“...of the laboratory - that is a really boring thing. He needs to call someone before. He has a double key. So it takes quite long time. He is so scared to loose these little pieces, because; you know, this dust is so thin. He needs to keep it really really carefully. Because if he loses a piece of this dust, he can loose an art piece, You know! It's really really hard to him. So! He is waiting. The guy (friend) comes. Puff! Everything is solved. They have the key, they come into the laboratory.”

[t-09:09] **“And you go on, but you must sit please.”**

“So... And in the laboratory he finds his best friend which has this eyes [microscope] to see really really really little little ...this ehh... object. And so they decided to take this and to take photos of each little dust and to give it a name: “Power 1”, “Power 2”, “Power 3”, “Power 4”, “Power 6”. And this until all this little.... And it makes so many many photos. They know they now can make an extremely huge exhibition. They can exhibit in the biggest museum because they have now a big exhibition. So...”

[t-08:22] **“But someone opened the door when he was doing that and all that little pieces (as you call them) suddenly disappeared.”**

“Before they finished the photos?”

“Yeah! “

“So! They have enough before the opening of the door. But, yes, they did lose a part. And that he decides to write a text about, because he did think; “Yes! That's so sad. We can not miss a part of this huge art piece. Now we have a visual aspect and we need to have the other aspects.” So now the texts is coming to solve this situation. And he will describe how it should look, how it should be, how magnificent it should look like; this wonderful exhibition. So now th...”

[t-07:40] **“But now he sneezes and some of the dust just goes away; and then he inhales it.”**

“He he he” Yes! The rest of the dust (yes) are inside the artist. And that is something; now it's like the most... Deep Art piece. It's like we call it “Total Art”, because the artist is inside his art piece, everything is included, the artist is included in the art piece. So he can make a performance. Everything is included, so it's now... this is magical. It is so extremely magical so they send a letter to Tate Gallery. And they say; “Yes, we will exhibit your “Power-exhibition”. And...so.. “

[t-06:53] **“But he has an heart attack, when he gets to the Museum.”**

“But he can not die.”

“Good for him, this dust is so magical that his heart attack....Yes! he is close to death but survived, because he is a need to this art piece to exist. So now he can not die before this exhibition. So...”

[t-06:27] **“And suddenly; you arrive in your story. And you have a dialogue with this artist.”**

“Ahhh, yes! I visit him in the museum maybe?”

“Wherever you want!”

"Yes, the exhibition is started in this beautiful amazing place as Tate Gallery. And it's a success, so big success! That it's an International exhibition and so I hear about it and I am extremely interested by this because I feel something like him like "No! we cannot break art it's... it's something we need to talk about". So I go to the museum and try to find him, and I do. And we have a really amazing discussion because we decide to... I did explain to him that "Yes, I have been living exactly the same situation as you "

"Of course!"

"Yes, I had to find a way to to... make my art piece exist in any case and I had to..."

[t-05:27] ***"And he falls in love with you."***

"Ohhh! that's cool because he is really good looking."

"No! You have to move away with this...No! "

[t-05:19] ***"You make an illustration, which do not connect to this story."***

"At the same time?"

"At the same time!"

[Ludivine is drawing on the white paperboard - a tree and a squirrel]

"So we need to talk; we fall in love!"

"No no no!!! No no! He he!"

"And, yes I did start to show, "...The love is so huge so we decided to make something even better..."

[t-04:42] ***"Yes, because suddenly he said to do ...No! You think "I am in love. Don't you see I am part of you. Don't you think we are talking. In fact; You are talking to yourself. And this is about life." What is your reaction?"***

"Ahhh! My reaction is; "Oh, damn! I have been dreaming about it". I feel like... "Am I a medium?"

I don't know but that's something cool. But in my dream it was really scary, to see someone which is me but which is someone else that was really scary.

But in the real life I was like; "wow that's cool and I like it." So, we fall in love both now... It is made... And we have a child together. And the good thing with a child is that this little little little little.. "

[t-03:50] ***"But it is not a child; it is a cat."***

"It is not a cat, it is a piece of art !"

"This child is..."

[t-03:27] ***"You did gave birth to a cat!"***

"I gave birth to a cat?"

"No! Her name is Cat! But it is a girl. I did call her Cat for Catherine. Some... long story. So this girl is the most wonderful art piece ever, because she is made with love and with art piece - from dust of an art piece which could never die.

So it's from the start an art piece. And that's something which is connected to your story earlier [the performers talking just before] Your performance with motherhood and creation. But that's something else...

So now this artist and me and our child - we decide to make it; to continue these art piece which is - it is not disappeared - it did only change... form so this girl start to be the art piece. And so; we take photos of her. We paint her. We draw everything of her, but sadly ..."

[t-02:31] ***"But then she dies!"***

[Ludivine seems not to have heard this sentence]

"And the thing is... Yes! The copies we do are not the art piece; it's her, the art piece. And that's the most..."

[t-02:16] ***"And now you stand up to warm up for Marathon."***

[Ludivine stand up from her chair and moves energetically]

“So, the... I search a word... philosophical problem is that (yes!) she is an art piece and all the copies are not the art piece. So we need to exhibit her. But the law is not easy for that. You cannot exhibit a child during hours in a gallery, without having problems with the state, you know. It’s not allowed. So we decide to change the law. Because we need to exhibit our art piece. An art piece doesn’t exist without an exhibition. We need to find solutions. The law is the problem. So we go to course. We make all the process, what is possible to change. And is this about..? ...the care of a child? So we did change the law so it’s possible, so it’s included in the good care. The....”

[t-01:15] “But all the museums close. Because of your new law”

“Ahhh!?! They don’t agree.”

“People react! “

“Yes, it start to be a war. There are the ones who think that a person cannot be an art piece. That you cannot change the law to make a child an art piece, so you can exhibition it.”....It’s like “Wow! We reach our goal, because art is in the middle of all discussions. It’s like: “Now we make a war about arts”. It’s like this art piece is even a bigger, because wars are not about it [never about art]. It’s about money, it’s about power; but never about arts. Not about philosophy Now the people are like “NOO!!”... This art piece is too powerful; because it creates wars. But we are so (how do you say?) “

“Narrowminded?”

“So we do not want to change this.”

[00:00]

[The alarm rings - Time is off / 20:00min]

“Time is over !”

[Applause]¹



¹ The video of the performance is visible on www.ludivinethomas.com/audiencepower

The story created during the performance

Once upon a time, an artist was exhibiting his latest sculpture in a gallery. It looked abstract and did not wear any title. The same day, a man, walking in the neighbourhood, passes the window and sees the artwork. He doesn't understand what it is about, then he comes in to read its name, and gets totally helpless facing the title "Untitled". This causes a great anger in him. He starts to cry and breaks the sculpture before leaving. Outside the gallery, he meets a ghost who warns him that things will not continue so easily. The next day, the artist - who discovered the damage after the visitor had left - arrives at the gallery with a new pedestal. It has now a pedestal for each piece of his sculpture. He calls them "Power 1" and "Power 2". At this very moment, he discovers a little worm moving between the two pieces. He decides to take a photo of it and keep it for later. Later in the afternoon, the same visitor passes by the window of the gallery and sees the two pieces of the sculpture he had himself broken. Coming closer, he realizes that the artist gave them names. This awakens his anger. He then breaks again each piece and leaves. The sculpture is now in four pieces. But someone takes the chance that there is no one in the gallery to steal one piece of the sculpture. So, when the artist reappears in the gallery, he is not in front of two but three pieces (including one which is strangely small). It does not really get what happened but still takes a photo in order to consider it at home. The next morning, when the artist returns to the gallery with a new pedestal, there are children playing hide and seek between the pieces of the sculpture. But fortunately, they did not create any damage. So he moved his three pieces on their pedestal and called them "Power 1", "Power 2" and "Power 3". Later, the visitor passes the gallery's window and sees that the artwork is still exposed on several pedestals. He refuses to accept that it is still could be exhibited. He enters and breaks again each piece. Then he goes, leaving it in six pieces. The artist thus realizes he will again need to make pedestals. The next morning he arrives with three new pedestals and installs the pieces of his work while naming them "Power 1", "Power 2", "Power 3", "Power 4", "Power 5" and "Power 6". That day the visitor did not come. But in the middle of the night, he passes the window of the gallery going back home after a quite drunken night. He sees that the artwork is still there although in several very small pieces. He thinks to himself: "Is this a joke? This artist is making fun of me!". Alcohol, in this type of situation, does not help to appease anger. Indeed, he breaks the window to get in and conscientiously breaks each piece before returning home.

The next morning, when the artist returns to the gallery, he is not only surprised to find that the window was broken, that his work is again destroyed, but that the gallerist had decided to exhibit his photos taken a few days earlier. And what is strange is that the number of pieces of the sculpture we can see on the photos do not match the number of pieces the sculpture had. Even stranger, there was a shadow appearing on the photos and nobody is able to tell if it is the ghost from the beginning of the story or if it is only a shadow of the artist. Anyway, the artist must act quickly to keep the exhibition of his artwork so he runs to his studio to build all the pedestals that he misses. By late afternoon, the visitor returns to the gallery and see that the artist has already built pedestals, even if the pieces are so small that we could wonder if the pedestal is actually supporting anything. Now it is too much for him! He squarely decides to reduce it into dust. He comes in and crushes the foot on all the little pedestals and on all the beautiful little pieces of work. Everything is completely destroyed. He finally feels relieved. "I won!" He thinks.

When the artist discovers the damage, he decides to not give up. He takes a broom and collect all the dust to bring it in his laboratory. He then realizes that he has lost the keys, which requires him to call one of his friends who own doubles. This raises his anxiety because he is afraid of

losing a single crumb of his work. Fortunately, his friend opens the lab before there was any problem. The artist is then able to start looking at the dust through a microscope. He decides to take a photo of each and every dust through the microscope and to call them "Power 1", "Power 2", "Power 3", "4 Power", "Power 5" etc. Everything will be photographed and named one by one. This promises a great show. Or even an exhibition in one of the largest museums which are so many. While he is doing it, someone opens the door which creates an unpleasant draft then part of the dust flies away. It's really unlucky! He nevertheless decides to continue and that the photographs which have not already been made will be replaced by texts describing as accurately as possible what the photo would have looked like. To make matters worse, he got a cold from this air flow and then sneezes on the remaining dust that flies away and inhale part of it. His work is therefore part of him. And what could have felt like bad news make him really happy! His work gets even deeper with this event. It is not sculpture, or photography or text any longer, it is also performance! He is part of his work, it is part of him. It is so exceptional that it interests the Tate Gallery who offers to organise an exhibition named "Power."

But life is really hard with this artist: he has a heart attack while going to the museum. But he cannot die. His work needs his body to exist. He has been very close to death but survives his heart attack and makes this exhibition come true. This exhibition is so exceptional that everyone speaks about it around the world. It really stirs my curiosity and even more for reason that its theme is among my personal interest. So I went to the Tate Gallery to meet this artist.

We met, we discussed, we were really on the same wavelength. I explained that I had experienced the destruction of my artworks. We got along very well, so well that we fell in love. The amazing part of this story is that this artist, who is a person other than me, well, I realized that it's me. As in this dream I did last year where I was facing my double. I then got really scared. But at that time, I'm wasn't afraid, we loved each other. The love was so strong that we had a child together. She was named "Cat" as Catherine. She was obviously a work of art, the most wonderful work of art. She was born with love and carried the dust of the artwork transmitted by her father. It was then obvious to us that we should expose this child as an artwork, because an artwork only has existence through the exhibition. Except that the laws are not in that opinion. Exposing a child in a gallery is considered like abuse. So we decided to change the law in the direction that interested us and we made all the necessary steps.

When we finally reached our goal, all the museums closed their doors. They refused to accept to exhibit this child. And we realized that two sides were formed in the society. Those who accept and those who refuse. And it's so crucial that a war breaks out! We were so overwhelmed with joy because our work had created the war! Which is a first in the history of art: art never had to divide and especially never any war had erupted for an other reason than money or power. This work has tremendous power and we now become aware ...

Statements

“THE AUDIENCE AND THE POWER” A performance about adaptation

A free adaptation of the myth of Sisyphus.

The plot of *The Audience and the Power* features two main characters : an artist and a rebel visitor. These two characters are united in an absurd and frustrating fate : the artist's work gets smashed every single day by the same visitor, and this very visitor, who cannot stand the work of the artist, intends to destroy it, in vain, because the artist always manages to keep showing it. This original frame : repetitive, systematic and endless, is directly inspired by the myth of Sisyphus, a mythological hero in Homer's *Odyssey*². As a reminder, Sisyphus, who is famous for his ingenuity and intelligence, is condemned to eternal punishment for daring to challenge the gods. The purpose of his punishment was to make his existence absolutely absurd : he would forever try to push a rock up on a mountain, an impossible task to accomplish since this rock tirelessly falls back down the slope before reaching the top. Therefore, he would have to spend his eternal life in a thankless job, unnecessary and unworkable. The two characters of *The Audience and the Power* are like Sisyphus, "sentenced" to accomplish each day a "useless" task since one's action systematically cancels the other's..

If many interpretations of the myth reveal the symbolic relationship that it maintains with the astronomical cycles - or with the day/night rhythm - by its constant renewal, Albert Camus went further in his essay about this myth and evokes Sisyphus as the quintessential absurd hero and uses him as a starting point for his theory on the absurdity of existence. According to him, Sisyphus fully accepts the absurdity of the task he has been given and enjoys it as well. Thus, "we must imagine Sisyphus happy"³ because he does not try to make sense of his task but seeks to find enough energy to accomplish it only enjoying the fact of being here and doing it. Sisyphus therefore does not suffer of this nonsense. Nevertheless, everyone is not able to integrate so "easily" the absurdity of life. Does this mean that we should suffer for the rest of our lives? Is life, devoid of meaning worth living? Is there a way out? Is suicide the only outcome? For Albert Camus there is one alternative : revolting. The cause defended having much less matter than the act of revolt in itself. The act of rebellion itself matters much more than its cause. Revolting gives meaning to existence. Obviously, this is the path that the two characters of *The Audience and the Power* took. The visitor, smashing again and again the artist's work is a pure incarnation of the revolt. The apparent obsession in his anger and its irrational scale as it confronts an obviously peaceful target, reinforces this idea. Moreover, the visitor has no name, we don't know anything about him, apart from his aversion for the work of this artist. He is actually only defined through his act of rebellion. This revolt then clearly gives

² HOMÈRE. *Odyssée*. Gallimard, Folio, 1955

³ CAMUS, Albert. *Le mythe de Sisyphe*. Gallimard, 1942

meaning to his existence. The artist himself, by not repairing his artwork, as one would expect him to do, also makes his way to an act of rebellion. He revolts through his apparent passivity.

Moreover, *The Audience and the Power* is not only a story as we should not forget the other important part of this work : it is a performance. Thus, there is an audience and the people were invited to step in the performance as they liked, concerning the text or gestures, during the performance.

So what's about the public of this performance?

The story, which plot is based on a principle of repetition, using a very systematic, completely predictable canvas, which does not end, may seem boring. But as Theodor Adorno said: "In a movie, from the start, we know how it will end, who will be rewarded, punished, forgotten; and by hearing a light music, the trained ear can, from the first steps, guess the rest of the theme and feel satisfied when everything is going as planned"⁴. So far, instead of being a punishment, predictability can be, for some, an appreciable and appreciated quality. What about those who do not accept this predictability? Since the performance's protocol includes free public interventions, they have the possibility to react if they think the absurdity of the story is unbearable. They are allowed to "rebel" or at least to try, since my work as a performer consists in spite of everything in always trying to keep the course of my story. In regards to this fact, it is interesting to notice that the character of the visitor in the story does not rebel because the artwork is not entertaining enough or does not surprise him. He revolts because he feels confused or helpless and certainly comprehends his own absurdity. In an essay on modern music, Adorno reveals a similar thought: "The dissonances that scare (listeners) speak to their own condition; it is only for that reason that it is unbearable for them"⁵. It is this kind of "mirror effect", inherent to the artwork in general, that triggers this destructive drive for the viewer.

What would have happened if the public had reacted aggressively facing *The Audience and the Power*? If his rebellion had reached dangerous levels?

The adaptation process

No matter public's reactions, I had to adapt myself. And as Marina Abramovic said in an interview in 2012. "The most dangerous (performances) are those under audience's control."⁶ This performer world widely known for her boldness, did not hesitate in the 1970s to present a performance where different objects and a gun had been on free access for the public⁷ : "They took it over to attack me with an extreme violence. It reveals a lot about human nature"⁸. I had to be ready for all possibilities, and besides, I had stated publicly that they were free to act in the way they wanted to, but within the limits of the rules of the place and the laws governing our country. In this context, I was at least protected in my physical integrity. For the rest, it was a question of adaptation'.

The story that I tell in this performance is also and greatly a matter of adaptation. The artist, who undergoes the systematic destruction of his work never gives up. He turns everything into positive all the time, again and again. His resilience, his creative acceptance, his "passive" rebellion,

⁴ ADORNO, Théodor et HORKHEIMER, Max. *La dialectique de la raison*. Trad E. Kaufholz, Gallimard, 1974

⁵ ADORNO, Théodor. *Philosophie de la nouvelle musique*. Trad H. Hildenbrand, Gallimard, 1962

⁶ YOUSSE, Yasmine, *Marina Abramovic la grand-mère Kamikaze de l'art contemporain*, Téléràma, 8 décembre 2012, (en ligne)

<http://www.telerama.fr/scenes/marina-abramovic-la-grand-mere-kamikaze-de-l-art-contemporain,90368.php>, consulté le 15 octobre 2016.

⁷ *Rythm 0* de Marina Abramovic, performance à la Galerie Studio Mora à Naples en 1975

⁸ Id. n°5

not only gives meaning to his existence but also to his work. By adapting, he gives a continuation to the existence of his work. Adaptation thereby becomes the main condition for its existence. This seems absolutely logical if I refer to Edgar Morin for whom "Adaptation is the first and overall condition of all existence"⁹.

But, is adaptation a condition of existence of the work of art ?

If we look from Laurent Tixador's perspective, it is obvious. The notion of adaptation is central to his work and his concerns about it makes this its main material. His work consists for example, in the creation and the construction of architectures, in wilderness, only using the raw materials available locally¹⁰. He also is the first artist who has organized a real manhunt against himself¹¹, which only ended when he had managed to enter the gallery on the opening day. It is his adaptability which is tested constantly in his work.

With the performance *The Audience and the Power*, I can never know in advance how the public will react. The audience, which is always different, brings a raw material which it is under my responsibility to transform in real time. As Tixador, and through this performance, I'm experiencing "the art of adaptation."

It may seem somewhat redundant to tackle the theme of adaptation through the theme of performance. Indeed, this practice based on the live action, which can undergo unpredictable hazards and requires good capacities of consideration and adaptation to the unexpected. And that is, in general. However, by offering the public the opportunity to intervene, it is my ability to manage the unexpected which is at the center of the art piece. In this work, adaptation is the biggest condition of its existence.

The relationship between the artwork and its viewer

By inviting the viewer to intervene during the performance, I give him a part that goes beyond the one of a mere "viewer". As a matter of fact, a work of art cannot exist without an audience. Like Marcel Duchamp said : "I give to the viewer as much as importance as to the one who created it."¹² And indeed, with his first *Ready made*, he will forever change the definition of the artwork. Earlier the notion of "genius"¹³ attributed to the Artist, as the absolute original creator, seemed to confer a certain "aura"¹⁴ to strictly unique artworks. The fact that the work could have been mass produced in a factory and that the artist has had no part in the production was a major upheaval in Art History¹⁵. It is the

⁹ MORIN, Edgar. *La vie de la vie* in *La Méthode*. Tome 2, Le Seuil, 1985

¹⁰ Serie of is *Architectures transitoires*, rewarded in 2013 by the Prix Coal Art et Environnement, which include *Total Symbiose 2* built in Dordogne in 2002.

¹¹ *La Chasse à l'homme* of Laurent Tixador, Performance created for the exhibition Wani, Espace Paul Ricard, Paris, 2011

¹² DUCHAMPS, Marcel. *Ingenieur du temps perdu*, Entretiens avec Pierre Cabanne. Belfond, 1976,

¹³ Théorie développée par Emmanuel Kant dans *Critique de la faculté de juger*. Gallimard, 2008

¹⁴ Théorie développée par Walter Benjamin dans *L'oeuvre d'art à l'ère de sa reproductibilité technique*. (Trad M. de Gandillac, Denoël-Gonthier, 1971) about emerging of photography and cinema which refer to the experience of "unapproachable", a quite similar concept from "Sublime" in classical aesthetic.

¹⁵ These two theories, "genius" and "aura" are used in the same sentence by necessity of shortness and strong synthetisation but they need to get manipulated with caution. The aura of the artwork as described by Walter Benjamin is absolutely not a consequence of the artistic genius as described by Emmanuel Kant. Walter Benjamin insists in his text on his mindfully refusal of using this concept, putting "aside a serie of traditional concepts - like creation and genius, value of eternity and mystery -, concepts which the uncontrolled application (and yet difficult to control) drives to the conception of fascistic oriented ideas".

public's look that makes an art piece. If the public looks at an object as an artwork - the importance of context, like the museum or the gallery, is undeniable - this object become an artwork. This theory opened the door to contemporary practices in which the role of the artist is less "doing" than "thinking" or "telling".

The interactive performance *The Audience and the Power* deals with the key issue of the public's place in the existence of an artwork. The audience is the co-creator and this artwork, as a result, is moving, varying, changing. All interventions have an immediate and profound impact on the work, either on the text or on gestures, and finally on its overall shape and on what emerges from it. *The Audience and the Power* changes so much from one representation to another that it becomes a new art piece with its specificities each time although the plot of the story and the overall protocol performance are fixed. This is also what tells the story of *The Audience and the Power*: The visitor, by breaking the artwork and transforming it by is destructive gesture, somehow become a "sculptor" in spite of himself. And the artist, by keeping such, by not acting on the object's material and by adapting each time the title, legitimizes the gesture of the viewer, integrates it like new features, and almost labels it with the title. They are definitely linked through the existence of this artwork. Could the visitor claim authorship for the work under the pretext that his hands had "shaped" it through his act of violence? The artist, by giving titles to the pieces, is actually acting like Marcel Duchamp signing *Ready Made*. The rebel visitor is then not an artist in the sense that we understand it. He therefore could not claim for the role of "creator".

However, it would be simplistic to consider the role of spectator as a "viewer", limited as a passive consumer of images because he is not idle, he thinks and compares, he makes associations of ideas, and "makes his own poem with elements of the poem in front of him" as Jacques Rancière¹⁶ said. This thoughtful capacity is a fundamental point in the relationship Artwork / spectator since the artist ignores how will be perceived and received his work by the public which gives him a crucial role. A recent event on the contemporary art scene perfectly illustrates the consequence that the viewer's opinion can have on an artwork : the work "Tree"¹⁷ that Paul McCarthy exhibited in Paris, on Place Vendome, in 2014. This sculpture, a bouncy structure of several meters, officially described by the artist as a Christmas tree or as a green abstract form, was immediately identified by the audience, accustomed to the "controversial" style of the artist, as a giant "anal plug". This of course, awoke the rebellion of the public who felt insulted. It went so far that the artist got physically attacked by a man. All this ended with the complete withdrawal of the Artwork after only 24 hours of exhibition. We must not underestimate the public's eye ! The public has undoubtedly a true power over the future of an artwork. This public, who Marcel Duchamp defined as "the viewers of artworks who, by their vote, decide if something should remain or survive because it has a certain depth that the artist produced unknowingly"¹⁸ Who has the power to decide of the overnight disappearance of McCarthy's work, as well as the power to make an artwork become "eternal". Was it right to remove McCarthy's work from public space? This is a question I asked through the performance *The Audience and the Power* : the visitor, by breaking the sculpture of the artist, is trying to remove an object that he cannot bear. But the reasons that led him to hate it so much are obscure and the reasons finally do not matter. In the case of McCarthy's sculpture, a majority of spectators had recognized an 'anal plug' in its shape. But was that enough to accept the comparison ? How many innocent artworks of the Art History could with hindsight evoke "shocking" suggestive forms ? Were those who decided to see this subversive accessory and refused to see a Christmas tree, by not supporting the presence of this "infamous" work, the most legitimate ? Or the strongest ? This adversarial relationship between the audience and the artist has gone through Art History, and we have proof that many artworks, which initially awoke rebellion, ended up going into posterity. The first impression of hostility is not an immutable judgment

¹⁶ RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Le spectateur émancipé*. La fabrique, 2008

¹⁷ *Tree* de Paul McCarthy, Structure gonflable de 24 mètres de hauteur, Place Vendôme, Paris, 2014

¹⁸ DUCHAMPS, Marcel. *Ingenieur du temps perdu*, Entretiens avec Pierre Cabanne. Belfond, 1976

and it is up to the artist to persevere in his approach to give a chance to his work to receive recognition by the same public. In *The Audience and the Power*, the artist refuses to give up. He refuses to remove his work from the gallery. And, however it is maintaining the revolt of the visitor, he finds a way to legitimize its presence, even transformed, and especially does not extract it from the world's eye. It is, in my opinion, the only valid attitude from an artist who is aware of his commitment. Of course, if they are threatened in their physical integrity we need to protect them, and those who support their initiative need to be heard too but giving up and "bending" under the violence of the audience seems like an admission of weakness of the work?

This performance was then a way to question the relationship of power between the audience and the artist. And a way to experience it with my own "weapons" against the public and its unpredictable reactions. The performance lasted 20 minutes. I had no right to interrupt before, even if the conditions came to be very difficult or if my text was locked in a deadlock. There was no possible stalemate. This is what I consider to be my job : artist, creator and transformer, which must go on with his ideas.

Duality

In the story of *The Audience and the Power*, the artist tries to maintain the existence of his work despite the daily destruction. His preservation became his priesthood and his adaptability and creativity were the condition of survival of his work. Which artist does not live with the secret desire to see his work go into posterity and eternity? By creating a story modeled on the Myth of Sisyphus, which by definition has no end, I make this imaginary artistic work even if it suffers from an ironically difficult fate, eternal. Unfortunately eternity does not come from the common decision of all people to hold it under preservation, but it is doomed from the beginning to be reborn and to die every day. A tragic and absurd destiny. But this story is also, and especially, about rebellion. This existential rebellion, condition of the survival of the human being from the absurdity of existence, described by Camus. The visitor, who revolts on the work of the artist, and the "rebellious" and philosophist artist who turns adversity into positive to continue and to give meaning to his work.

By choosing to integrate this story to a performance, and by inviting the public to interact, I make a real *mise en abîme*. I placed myself in the same situation, to experience adaptation and to live what is depicted in the story I tell. And this practice, which is risky, has a strong matrix potential. By offering people the power to disrupt me, I mainly offer myself the opportunity to create a dialogue, an exchange, which can only enrich my work. As we have seen, without the public there is no work of art, his look is as important as the creative hands of the artist. Moreover, this and each performance is a unique experience, which also enriches a lot.

The relationship between the artwork and its audience is not always consensual, it is sometimes (even often) conflictual. And if the public has an enormous power over the future of an artwork, it is the artist's mission to ensure that it does not disappear.

This piece is based on duality : these opposing forces, those of the creative artist and those of the destructive spectator, are symbolically embodying the immutable forces of nature, or as scientists call "entropy" ... And if I chose to develop it in the form of a performance, evoking adaptation in that way, it is mainly to emphasize this fact. So, I chose the most ephemeral device to evoke eternity ...

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