

Projectionisms

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2015.

1. Beaudemont Project

Intending to write a few lines about Pauline Beaudemont. Scratching our head and reflecting on the sanctimonious notion of the project. Lovingly caressing this new compartment that's just formed in the mind, stroking this excrescence. Enjoying this intimacy. Appreciating this inviolate potential, this solitary tête-à-tête. Contemplating the white screen edged with grey. A Document1, not yet named, not yet saved on the computer's hard drive. But enough of going round in circles. Opening a dictionary. Looking up a definition. Project: "Aim that one proposes to achieve". Thanks for the proposal. And the Larousse, that gypsy child, illustrating it with the example: "projet chimérique", a pipedream. There's a fine line between the project and the dream. One tends towards reality and action, the other to illusion and torpor. Carrying out a project is to experience heaviness, that of the divided body, its head wanting to break free while its feet grip the ground. Intending to write a text on Pauline Beaudemont's work already implies not contemplating writing just any old text. It means considering ideas with sufficient indulgence to convince oneself that they're worth dwelling on. It's a hazy start, but already it's not a pipedream any more. Admitting, then, that the projected text is in three movements like a concerto, dealing successively with the notions of project, projection and projectile. Three notions that pervade Pauline Beaudemont's work. Casually, like the Larousse, proposing to explain how the artist redefines and combines them. Drawing on several works, especially the series of texts taped onto concrete slabs entitled *After Artemidore* (2013); the three pieces of furniture *Hans, James and Walter* produced for the exhibition *L'Âge d'or* at SALTS (2014) and the video installation for five monitors and two projections *If You Put A Roof On...* (2012).

Each group takes architecture as its starting point. A partly biographical approach since Mr Beaudemont senior is a professional architect. After *Artemidore* was made during a residency in Chandigarh. The artist, who habitually writes down her dreams on waking up, dictated some of them to street typists in the Indian city designed by Le Corbusier. They transcribed the creations of the artist's unconscious into near phonetic English. Far from revealing any deeper meaning, the Indian typists' interpretations further encrypt the narratives. The artist then attached these typescript pages to integrally coloured concrete casts of the slabs that pave the city's streets and squares. An exhibition process that thereby resembles a public information display system. It puts the intimate content of dreams back into the urban context that suggested them and into that of their production, since the Indian street typists work in Chandigarh's squares and use the paving slabs as desks. The materiality of the piece evokes ancient cuneiform writing on clay tablets and traces a line of descent between the scribes of Antiquity and these street typists, between pictographic writing and these dreams, which are firstly figments of the imagination and therefore mental images. This approximate transmission of language takes us back to the origins of writing. As well as serving as substrates for the texts and as frames for the work in an exhibition context, the concrete casts also function as projection screens for these dream-images. The cinematic metaphor is accentuated by the pastel colours that simulate the way dreams and flashbacks are treated in movies, indicated by the appearance of the blurred edges of a dissolve; colour in dreams cannot be strong, but only lightly pigmented, faded by the night. By projecting her dreams onto the surface of the city, Pauline Beaudemont revives the utopian dimension of the project of a modernist city. The countless descriptions, criticisms and interpretations of this urbanistic monument make Chandigarh an elusive urban object. Even before any kind of commentary on the constructed object, a gulf already separated this kaleidoscopic reality from the vision on paper of its designer. The architectural project may differ significantly from the constructed object, but even more so with a third world city. At Chandigarh, several elements designed by Le Corbusier were either never built or finished. The inhabitants took over an incomplete, makeshift piece of work, bringing to it their own unforeseeable practices and alterations. The architectural project is the expression of a personal ideal, the constructed city a collective and shared reality. "The image we draw as an architect is the reflection of our questioning and of the means devoted to it. However, this image dissolves in the group and becomes the reflection of the other: the reflection of the person who commissioned it and of the person who identifies with it", notes the architect Patrick Mestelan. The architectural project is a virtual world, a proto-reality. It's an illusion that is never attained, an image with no real direct referent, born out of the meeting of an imagination, an ideology and the study of a context. "The project can be seen as a kind of alchemy in which the rational meets the irrational,

sometimes at unexpected junctures", continues Mestelan. Pauline Beaudemont orchestrates this encounter by displaying the distorted reflection of her own dreams on the built manifestation of those of the great French-Swiss architect. The intimate, the collective and reality intersect, recombine and catalyse into this group of works, giving rise to a collage of subjectivities.

2. Projection between you and me or the mirror stage

Going back to our grey edged screen, now covered with characters underlined in red by the spell checker. Thinking about the dual nature of projection as technological system and psychic process. Projecting our ideas, our complexes and our joys onto you and your work. Making you the receptive screen for our fantasies, as you make Chandigarh's paving slabs the representational surface for your distorted nocturnal fantasies.

Walter, Hans and James are all made of Dibond panels printed with a film screenshot, and combined with concrete elements that serve as feet, bases or simply decoration. You've made these concrete sculptures using industrial cake moulds in the shape of architectural motifs like Greek columns, rosettes, furniture legs, etc. Through this, you project us into an alternative history of architecture: that of cake architecture, what Z movies are to cinema, in which you'd be the pie thrower and the hero Marie-Antoine Carême. This brilliant pastry chef, long in the service of the French diplomat Talleyrand, who set him the challenge of not cooking the same dish twice in a year, is remembered for his alarmingly high and detailed tiered cakes and for a series of inventions that are still eaten today, like the mille-feuille with 1459 layers of puff pastry. He perfected his art through his enthusiastic study of the architectural treatises of Palladio and Vignola. More than just tasting good, his confections had first and foremost to be beautiful. What's more, his book *Le Pâtissier pittoresque*, published in 1815, resembles a treatise on building construction according to Vignola's five orders of architecture rather than a recipe book. His tiered cakes are the baking equivalent of the follies and mills found in princely parks and gardens. Exoticism, surprise and dreams are the rules governing these pagodas, rotundas or fake shepherd's cottages that make immoderate use of the ornamentation banished from the architectural vocabulary by modernism. Carême drew inspiration from Ottoman, Chinese, and Egyptian styles for his sugar creations, and was particularly fond of ruins in the manner of Piranesi. A taste that you share, since the images you've appropriated show emblems of modernism in ruins, destroyed by the pop culture.

You've designed Walter like a projection screen. On this four-panelled folding screen in Dibond is a brief scene from Roland Emmerich's Hollywood blockbuster *Godzilla* (1998). The image shows the MetLife Building in New York ripped open after an attack by

the mutant reptile, transformed into the Godzilla creature after exposure to radiation.² This palisade echoes the huge barrier on the New York skyline formed by the skyscraper designed by Emery Roth & Sons, Walter Gropius and Pietro Belluschi. In 1963, when this structure, then known as the Pan Am Building, had just been inaugurated, the New York Times commented bitterly: “We have gained the world’s largest office building. We have lost some of the world’s most impressive views.” This 59-floor skyscraper does indeed totally block out the view of Park Avenue just a few steps away from Grand Central Station. It’s still one of the towers hated most by New Yorkers for its implantation with no regard for context. The MetLife Building embodies the paradox between the ideal of modernist transparency defended by the writer Paul Scheerbart in his manifesto *Glasmarchitektur* (1910) and the opacity of the capitalist activities that take place within these ice palaces. Immense, impenetrable, impermeable, the neutrality of the skyscraper’s surface makes it analogous to an enigmatic and disturbingly beautiful monolith. The grid motif of the facade, so common in modern times that it prompted Rosalind Krauss to say that it has imprisoned its adepts, is expressed in all its literality. According to Scheerbart, glass must allow light to pass through architectural spaces so as to be compatible with the development of a democratic society. But with its octagonal and Panopticon structure, its reflective glass and aluminium, the MetLife Building suggests quite the opposite, a watchtower, that lets nothing filter through. You can’t help but think of the NSA headquarters in Maryland, where the hypocrisy of glass reaches its zenith. The only available, authorized image of this glass rectangular parallelepiped, with proportions based on the golden ratio, shows a building that intercepts everything and emits nothing, not even the name of its designer, classed as top secret. “Absolute transparency is only visual; glass separates the visual from the verbal, isolating the outsider from what goes on in the decision making process, and the invisible, but real inter-relationships between business operations and society³”, writes Dan Graham. Your folding screen recreates the barrier of the MetLife Building in a domestic context, on a scale that makes it quite comical. Not without irony either, you heighten its autistic and mysterious appearance through a gold mirror surface treatment. You’re almost certainly thinking of Walter Benjamin, another Walter, who in his book *Passages* describes the Parisian shop mirrors that reflect images of goods in all their phantasmagorical intensity. In this way, you ridicule the ideal of transparency, which has served as a screen for the conjunction of late capitalism and generalised surveillance. Shiny and seductive, the opaque surface of your objects only reflects the golden brown mirror image of the person looking into them. Another piece made for the exhibition at SALTS, the mirror Hans expresses even more clearly this idea of the subject caught in the trap of the prism. The image printed on the mirror comes from the film *The Black Cat* (1934), in which an architect played by Bela Lugosi, scared by a cat, falls backwards through the squared glass panel of a Bauhaus style house. What with the animal’s shadow that

moves menacingly across the glass panel, the figure of the architect in distress, the presence of a second character who witnesses the incident and the reflection of the spectator in the mirror object, roles and positions become confused, inverted and duplicate at a dizzying rate in the different specular surfaces. The architect’s fall appears the result of the terror of the individual’s *mise en abîme*, caught up in the net of delusions and distorted reflections of their unconscious and their desires, which are constantly reflected back to them.

On facing Walter, similarly, the viewer’s reflection is projected into the gaping hole made by the reptilian creature in the MetLife Building. The New Yorkers’ dream of getting their view of Park Avenue back again and the utopia of transparency are materialized in this Hollywood image. But you don’t actually go through the mirror for all that. Behind the screen there’s another screen, behind the illusion another illusion, the consequence here of the world’s greatest dream factory. The vain but beautiful gesture of ruined architecture paired with a tiered cake whose sheer lunacy explodes the Athens

3. Erectile projectile or death to the superego

The urge to rip a hole in the MetLife Building, the desire to break with conventions and to penetrate the mirrored surfaces that block our senses and hide an inaccessible truth is a driving force of art. In action or on standby, the projectile is a constantly recurring motif in Pauline Beaudemont’s work. We ask ourselves, “What’s its range, its trajectory and more importantly its target?” The multiple *Trophée* (2013), a skyrocket firework with its stick embedded in a heavy concrete block and *Artifice* (2013), the large, printed image of an exploding firework, fixed to a helium balloon that sinks to the ground as its gas disperses, both attest to the previously mentioned dichotomy between the heaviness of materiality and the soaring desires of pure ideas. The motif returns in the figure of Godzilla in Walter, in the image of a car spectacularly crashing through a modernist glass pavilion printed on the table top James, and in that of Bela Lugosi falling through the glass panel in Hans. Three scenes in which, similarly, architecture forms the film set and then is dramatically set aside. The human projectile shown on Hans reminds us of the cruel sport of dwarf tossing, Baron Munchausen being unwittingly shot through the sky on a cannonball and smashing into the Turkish fortress, the falls of Jan Bas Ader and the leap into the void of Yves Klein, which metaphorically exploded the picture frame while at the same time confronting the absurdity of reality through this idiotic act.

Another idiotic act, another primed grenade hurled like an assault on the heart of an architectural emblem to reveal its subconscious, the video *If You Put A Roof On...* shows a Jamaican Dancehall queen performing at the artist’s request in Le Corbusier’s White House in La Chaux-de-Fonds. She is filmed in different rooms in

the villa. Disturbing eroticism in the sovereign tranquillity of the architect’s neoclassical, first building. Chromatic contrast. The black body of the dancer in her black leotard against the flowery Arts and Crafts wallpaper. The insolence of this inverted body with its tensed and relaxed buttocks, its swinging pelvis and rolling hips, and which undulates face down on a table⁴.

This Salome wired up to infra-bass who’s just loudly shattered the Elysian calm of the house built by Le Corbusier for his parents, where he himself lived sporadically for several years between 1912 and 1917, this supple, languorous she-devil, is she a gift from the artist to the erotomaniac architect? To the lover of Josephine Baker? To the infernal Don Juan, who scoured the streets of Algiers and Rio, frequented prostitutes, had a string of mistresses, and then returned sagely to his wife Yvonne? To the lover of Matisse’s generously curved female figures? To the man about whom the writer Nicolas Verdan said: “You are the Minotaur, discovering the day between the thighs of Pasiphae. You are male and female, animal and beast, man and woman, the sun and the moon. The eternal divide?” This dance resembles a mediumistic ritual, the invoking of a spirit, a vigorous attempt to awaken a ghost by tempting him with what made him love life most passionately. The infra-basses send out blasts that rock the house, wake it up, shake it out of its bourgeois torpor, its respectable status as an association financed by the State of Neuchâtel, the Loterie Romande and the Pourcent Culturel Migros. The dancer’s buttocks roll like spiritualists’ tipping tables. In one sequence, stretched out on the floor on her back, she writhes as though seized with convulsions, in a trance. Has the architect’s spirit entered her body? Or has she taken possession of him? Who is haunting whom? The video’s title refers to Le Corbusier’s famous words: “Si l’on mettait un toit sur La Chaux-de-Fonds, on aurait le plus grand bordel du monde.” (If you put a roof on La Chaux-de-Fonds, it would be the biggest brothel/mess in the world), “bordel” in French having two meanings. In English slang, the expression “to put a roof on” implies to have sex as a favour, which takes us straight back to the idea of the projectile. As it is the vector of the imagination, architecture is a projectile that catapults us into other levels of consciousness, into the world of dreams and fantasy. The suggestive power of the setting. As it is linked to capital and to power, architecture can also become a prison. Between body and soul, infrastructure and superstructure, cakes and blockbusters, Pauline Beaudemont’s work injects drive and the irrational back into the origins of the architectural project.