

Catalogue of the exhibition "Feu de Bois", Frac des Pays de la Loire, Carquefou, 2003

Conversation between Alexis Vaillant & Pia Rönicke

147. Au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, la Joconde a perdu ses sourcils

## Fragments of a Conversation

*Pia Rönicke & Alexis Vaillant*

We talked about it Jean-Michel Wicker and I: at one point, your work is put into a certain category. In my case, it has been a certain reading of architecture and modernism and high/low culture. I would say that is only half the truth. I am concerned with many things especially how to make films! You can locate an obsession... in the films, one chapter after the other in the way I tread the images and sounds... to bring through a structure or a kind of system for people to read something.

Architecture is an element - something I started out with - but you could say that my main interest is to make films that allow for a free space for you to create your own vision of things. In the first collage films I made, I played around with matters, which are often really static and heavy - architecture and historical monuments....

... Play in the sense that I found a way to bring various elements together (historical buildings, symbols from different cultures, city plans, elements from mainstream culture, etc.) to create new contexts out of the collected image and sound material, and tell a different kind of story. In that way, I could make the landscape of image and sound alive - sometimes, with a critical eye to examine a vision of an idealistic time in history? I was interested in architecture as a pheno-

menon (a structure of our everyday life, being quite fascinated by Bauhaus idealism and esthetics, I mean the idealism behind) but I don't know if I have ever been interested in design.

And now, it could be something else...

But being fascinated by Bauhaus in 2003 is also a kind of romance! I am still amazed that they were able to build so much at the time, big complex housing with so good standards. There's nothing like that today, that's terrible. We live in extremely capitalist time, it's just about building, as fast and as cheap as possible, to gain as much capital as possible.

Frank Lloyd Wright had this very idealistic vision of the suburb. According to him, it would be a massive improvement for human beings if they could get their own piece of land, their own house and a car. His idea of the suburb was to use modern technologies to create a better life for people. No doubt that Los Angeles has been built on this ideology combined with a good amount of hardcore capitalism. But LA is a unique kind of suburb, it has qualities that other suburbs don't have. It has been built on a myth and the myth keeps on reproducing itself in different forms.

There are so many parallel stories in our society, they have a co-existence but are not meant to be mixed up. We are aware of these different kinds of realities, but

we don't know the real matter of them all, unless we are "forced" to learn their reality.

The prison, for example, is something which exists in our unconscious, like a kind of fear, a power (for some people it could even be a safety!), but we don't have an integrated picture of it (either you are there or not). It is visible through a threatening gesture but it is invisible in its economy...

Fascination is about pursuing unknown matters. We might have an idea about what fascinates us but it's not about getting to know the "true" nature of the fascination. But to get closer to our own version and idea of that which fascinates us. The whole idea to bring several people together on the subject matter of "fascination" might be a failure in certain aspects because fascination is something, which is extremely personal and is not meant to be comprehended.

To bring people together around their fascinations is difficult because we are fascinated!

And by the way, I am fascinated by the situation here. I have experienced a "déjà vu": being in the suburb of Nantes, walking to the supermarket, living in a room with a direct door to the yard, etc. (It reminds me about living in LA)

I think about global system of capitalism: the same and not the same, the exportation of a model. On a global level yeah, everything resembles each other or is drawn out to look the same. And that is really scary. You can wonder how a global model reacts to local context and what happens with a local area when it is taken over by a mass production society. I think it's quite extreme to see this model take over a small village in West France! And for some reasons, it looks a little more authentic!

We can go on making stories about what's around us, on different levels. As an artist, I try to operate inside and around these levels.

Harun Farocki says that the film itself first becomes

political in the meeting with the viewer and in relation to how the viewer is doing the reading. I like this statement very much. We can try to be critical, to give something to the viewer, to raise some questions or doubts, but I don't think we can claim our work to be political. But the framework of our work might have a potential of becoming political, depending on how it is put into use †