

## INTRODUCTION

The story of this notebook is quite particular. Java was not totally unknown to me, even if I was not really familiar with that faraway island, but its name sounded familiar to me through...

It can make you smile, but after all, such phrases are indications, words have a meaning, they have a history too. They reflect something, they are clues. "Parler javanais" is a phrase based on a process of slang coding. I have often been told that I was speaking "javanais", not because I was clever enough to introduce a superfluous phonology by inserting an extra syllable between vowels and consonants, but because I did not articulate my words. My speech was emitted in a very fast flow which could not be understood.

"Faire la java" I needn't explain what it means: to live it up all night long, which is exceptional for me, but I may happen to leave my philosophical concepts to go to parties.

My journey to Java is the sweet fruit of chance and coincidences. Chance. Can chance be explained? Marie Le Sourd was the first to answer my message about Julien Friedler's *Forest of Souls* project. My message had been sent to different people, but she was the first to react immediately. In that time she was the director of the *French Cultural Centre* in Yogyakarta. Immediately she answered :

— It is here that your project must start.

Coincidence. I had met Marie Le Sourd eight years before during the *International Festival of films at Creteil* including a programme Asia-Europe. A long battle, wonderful films. And a film director who delighted us and the jury too: Yasmin Ahmad. Poetic images from the ends of the earth. Enchantment, a magical 'elsewhere' raising skin-deep emotions.

Strokes of luck and coincidences. I adore travelling, questioning my usual ways of thinking. Reconsidering our Europe-centred reflections (at least mine). This certainly corresponds to my love of freedom and to my attempt to express myself out of my world. This mixture of chance and coincidences also involved my refusing a position in a highly rated company to create my enterprise and apply Julien Friedler's artistic and philosophical ideas. On such a line of chance and coincidences, Java appeared as the ideal destination. A place where myths are related in the present and regarded as an anti-establishment force.

THE *FOREST OF SOULS*:

A PROJECT, A VANITY, A MIRROR OF OUR HUMANITY?

The *Forest of Souls* is one of Julien Friedler's installations. An installation to be produced in the future. It is based on the collection of questionnaires. These questionnaires consist of six questions. Always the same. Presented in the same way all over the world, sometimes in risky situations. Six questions which look simple and are basic for the structure of any society:

- Does God exist?
- How would you describe this era?
- How do you see the future?
- Is sexuality important?

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- Are you happy?

- Who am I?

It is funny to see how such trivial questions can trigger diverse answers, accidental ways of behaving, ideas, exchanges, conflicts. Six questions, six paradoxes.

The originality of this project or the heart of its vanity resides in the fact that it must last eighty years. A few seconds on the scale of galaxies and stars. An eternity for us. It is vanity as a priori neither Julien Friedler, nor any member of the present team of *Spirit of Boz association* (underlying the project), will see the end of the project. It started in December 2006 in Brussels during a *Night of Boz*. I was one of the dancing shadows of that initial night. So logically this project is expected to come to an end in December 2086.

In the meantime, questionnaires will be collected through the world, in all languages, with all the possible ways of expression, with a number of renunciations, designations, misunderstandings, attempts. Then the questionnaires will be scanned in order to keep a trace. After that, the original documents will be placed in pillars. These pillars are trees. And from that moment, all the souls placed inside these trees will belong to the *Forest of Souls*.

The first trees are expected in 2013 in Knokke. Then all along coincidences and chances, other trees should appear in partner towns or countries.

Why eighty years? Just to be the opposite of our society? To go against our speedy passing on things? Jules Verne had invented *Le Tour du monde en 80 jours*. Now we can fly round the world in 48, even fewer, hours. Julien Friedler reinvents time, its slow development, its eternity.

Eighty years, it is the right time to discover and understand other people. The right time for a real meeting. Some will say: "But why should we start?". Some others will say: "Well, where should we start?". And others will decide to say: "It is already in

progress, so why should we follow this course, it must go on by itself, without any handover.”

None of these positions suits me. Personally I consider the *Forest of Souls* an ambitious vanity. A mirror-project. A way to regard the world, to see differences and try to understand them. To put this *Forest of Souls* into practice by collecting statements and provoking meetings is my challenge. To go over there, far away from this place, heading for any ‘elsewhere’ with my notebook, my camera, my doubts, my uncertainties, my joys, my pains, my questions.

Such a plunge into the depths of the *Forest of Souls* is a real challenge. I like to go away. I like to come back with the flow of questions raised during the journey. The *Forest of Souls* is turning into a mirror, humanity through multiple looks. Vanity. Without doubt. But what is life but vanity?

#### BEFORE STARTING

There are discussions with the *Spirit of Boz* team, crossed ideas, idealistic views, things to collect, data to inventory. All the possibilities are stated, but will they be favourably received in Indonesia, and particularly in Java?

There are conversations with Marie Le Sourd who spent a few years in South East Asia, especially five years in Java, and is now back in Paris. She gives me a list of contacts and tells me how to get in touch with her successor. So in Paris I make a list of things to do and arrange. I have to give form to the *Forest of Souls*, a form which could be easily understood and immediately grasped. I have to consider all that is possible, imagine what is beyond any limit. To foresee. But the problem is that *Boz* cannot be foreseen, it is a word with no definition. A container-word which underlies or includes all that may happen.

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Marie invites me at *Louis Vuitton Cultural Space* where she has contributed to prepare an exhibition, some essential contacts will be there. To reach that place is not easy, you have to make your way through the crowd on the Champs-Élysées. But you do not have to enter the famous Louis Vuitton store, you must take a back street. More funny and concealed. Leave the noise. Enter the lifts. The lifts of that space are jewels. Muffled black. Not a sound. Not a hint of light. I like that principle. You leave your worries and troubles outdoors, you concentrate and are open to a new experience.

On our first ascent we feel like a regular visitor. So no special anxiety. Just enjoying complete rest for a minute. Then the lift opens on Indonesian works of art. First shock!

The fascinating exhibition entitled *Trans-figurations. Indonesian Mythology* displays modern sensual works of art, I am dumbfounded. I am there among the visitors, present at a meeting between Marie Le Sourd, Elisabeth D. Inandiakk, Marie-Ange Moulounguet, Hervé Mikaeloff...

The words heard during that meeting, the images, the works of art, all that is taking shape, then is distorted in my mind. Does it mean that art is everywhere in Indonesia?

Elisabeth D. Inandiak recites the poet Ronggowarsito:

*To know for oneself troubled times,  
Is to know trouble in one's mind.  
The self lives inside, outside the body dies,  
And all falls when its time has come.  
In the moon's secret signs,  
The urn's ashes silently well up.  
The pierced screen of the sun collapses,  
Under the force of hate and swell.  
Oh mad peoples! Look into the waves,  
And see the sick light of the world.*

In the catalogue of the exhibition, she prolongs that quotation:

..Thus, in the second half of the 19th century, the last great Javanese poet laureate was Ronggowarsito. One hundred and fifty years later, millions of Indonesians continue to read this visionary poem, a national bestseller, which holds up an implacable mirror reflecting the collision of stars in the chaos of their being, the defragmentation of reality, the hallucinatory celebration of life that comes and goes. A sort of eternally frustrated apocalypse to be savored in all its splendor. An endless amplification of the cosmic drama designed to take the drama out of it until the human body is swept away by lethal telluric impulses. And terror is brought crashing down.\*

On the thread of life, Indonesian creation is its ultimate expression. A report, a hint of humour and ashes. I am left speechless.

At the end of the debate, I speak a moment with Marie and she introduces me to Veronique Mathelin who has been working on *Campus France* for two years in Jakarta. This programme is intended to allow Indonesian students to complete their studies in France. We have a short talk and agree to exchange mails about that crazy project the *Forest of Souls*. She has some ideas. And I must say she has been the cornerstone of that project and its success in Jakarta.

Let's go back to the lifts. Now I can feel the anxiety of my ephemeral companions. Useless conversations fulfil the silence. The doors are open. Paris swallows me. The list of my contacts is longer and longer. I carry on my research, I read travel guide books. Finally I get tired of all of them with their promises of faraway places and lost paradise.

#### LABELS AND THINGS. A LINK OUT OF TIME.

Labels and things, simple observation of our contemporary time. A movement out of time. Let's mention the preface to *Recherche de la Vérité* (Research of Truth) by Malebranche: "prices only depend on fancy, passion and chance". Going into the depths of a

\* Cf. Elisabeth D. Inandiak, *Bienvenue aux îles de Tohu et Bohu*, in *Trans-Figurations*, éd. Espace Culturel Louis Vuitton, 2011

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phrase launched by Elisabeth D. Inandiak: "The DJ and the Philosopher". One evening during a conversation, she used the same words as Claire had used to introduce us both: "I am a DJ and Sonia is a philosopher" and she said with a smile:

— There was *Le Lièvre et la Tortue (the Hare and the Tortoise)*, from now on there will be *The DJ and the Philosopher*.

A pun as an introduction, play on words and labels. Why does it matter so much? Simply because the way to introduce oneself is important wherever we are. The play on labels. The play of sham. We approach one another through modern labels. Such is the price of our sociability. A handicap. As an idealist, I think we should not need such labels. But in fact what do we do when we look at a person coming toward us? We watch a figure, we cling to a prejudiced representation of that person.

Through her very relevant observation, Elisabeth D. Inandiak puts a special emphasis on that experience (even more relevant far away) consisting in applying a word on a thing or a person. In a split second, my bergsonian feeling arises. The word as an obstacle, as a limited frame, as a label stuck on things. "We do not see the very things, most of the time we just read labels stuck on them. This tendency, born from need, has got more important under the influence of language. Because words (except proper nouns) indicate genders... And this does not concern only external objects, but also our moods whose most intimate, personal, originally experienced part escapes. So most of the time we perceive our own moods only through what appears externally. We just catch the impersonal aspect of our feelings, the one that language could seize once and for all because it is nearly the same for all human beings in the same conditions. So even in our deep self, individuality escapes. We are moving among generalities and symbols."\*

\* Cf. Bergson, *Le Rire*, éd. PUF

Is a DJ expected to use a camera? Is a philosopher expected to be an observer sometimes dumb, sometimes naïve? Of course, they are not. Today a DJ has just to amuse the audience, provoke shock waves, trances. A philosopher has to declaim concepts, nebulous inaccessible explanations.

I have signed a contract with Claire for this journey about the *Forest of Souls* in Java. A piece of paper so fragile, so trivial compared with crossed landscapes. Vast translation between two universes. Of course this narrative relates a journey, but also the way a project is implemented with its impossibilities, its achievements, its transformations.

From the stifling hills of Jakarta to the pleasures of the monsoon in Yogyakarta, passing by Merapi slopes, the labels are getting torn, the masks fall.

#### WHAT ABOUT MYTHS IN HISTORY?

In Europe, and even in all the Western world, myths are dusty, put away from all our trustworthy certainties. Our society has been partly built against ancient myths, “against” meaning that they were used as a support, a counterpoint. Ephemeral levers of barbaric beliefs. Put away are gods, spirits, groundless beliefs. If you open a dictionary or look at the definition of “myth” on the Internet, you will sink into negative contemplation: “Legendary narrative staging imaginary characters (gods, demigods, heroes, natural elements) in an allegorical way.”

Therefore to invoke spirits, know how to push back rain, feel the forces of nature, all that is to escape into a world of fancy (or allegory). It is to pretend not to see that our reality rests on a simple evident pragmatic basis. We are expected to count our belongings and cut ourselves from our senses. Does it mean that

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our humanity is dehumanized? disillusioned humanity?

While writing these questions, I am thinking of Bachelard's statement: "In the core of the matter grows an obscure vegetation; in the night blossom black flowers. They already have their velvet and the formula of their perfume."\* I enjoy reading this statement, I savour it. Tea in the monsoon. The taste of the volcano, the smell of *tempe*. All that takes its whole meaning.

Let's watch more closely our ways of behaving. We are always governed by simple elements: water, air, fire and earth. The earth may shake even in Europe, water is missing, but it can also be devastating, fire burns our forests in summer... Confronted with natural catastrophes in the West, how do we react? We call out for insurance?

This is an observation. Not a judgment. Yet we go to the cinema to wallow in catastrophes, we devour the end of the world. We are cut off from our former myths, and yet we are in search of them. In each story, we need a savior of humanity, a *super-man*. Even Nietzsche, after destroying idols, built that *super-man*. Well, who is that man? It is just the one who understands that he is not only a body or a mind, but he depends on their dynamic connection. This dynamics can be expressed in different ways according to our location. Dynamics, harmony, cycle, etc.

We can't help thinking of Descartes and his *Metaphysical Meditations*. "Finally what am I? A thinking thing. But what is a thinking thing? That is a thing that doubts, conceives, asserts, denies, wants, does not want, imagines too, and feels".

We are beings with senses, sensations. Our senses are sometimes misleading, sometimes guides, but they are the location of our mythology.

\* Cf. Gaston Bachelard, *L'eau et les rêves*

REVIVING MYTHS.

‘Reviving’ is an odd term which appeared when I was writing the first few lines of this book. I like the way it sounds. It is a hard sound and yet it evokes blowing on embers to keep a fire burning.

What is the use of reviving myths?

And where to start?

“We are going through an economic crisis, the indignant are revolted, a lot of enterprises close, and you bother us with your myths!”

I adore this answer, a negation into a question. To come back to myths, it is to come back to foundations, to the foundations of societies, it is to play with the six questions of the *Forest of Souls*. It is to realize that we do not come from a unique myth, that of the cave. Thanks to Platon for his observation. We prefer to watch images. Fragile shadows dancing on a wall. We watch the dance of the world in movies, on various screens. We are not good at making a distinction between the reality of a world and our dreams, our ideals. Fukushima is far away. Libya is on the other side of the sea. As for Iran, what is the use of talking about it? We delude ourselves with our illusions and we are progressively cut out from that so particular feeling called empathy.

So Java is all that. To start life again where I had left it. It is to feel again that empathy I had forgotten. It is to put aside my ‘westernness’. It is to play the melody of meetings. It is to learn from things and from life. It is to throw away our labels and take new ones. It is to knock down our certainties. It is to imagine what is unconceivable. It is to come back to living wisdom. It is to come back to pre-socratic conceptions when wisdom and magic were interwoven and complemented each other. It is to be open.