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IETM

SPRING PLENARY
MEETING

MONTPELLIER

LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON

REPORT



▶▶▶ **TRANS** **BORDERS**
FORMATIONS
GENDERS

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Welcome speech

“Dear everyone here all gather, I send you my warmest greetings and, I can confess to you, my happiness and pride as President to welcome you here in this beautiful region of Languedoc-Roussillon and in the city of Montpellier.

This edition of the IETM makes us think about the richness and diversity of the prefix TRANS, when it is added as a complement. This reflection seems very relevant in this time of generalized withdrawal, of rejection of the other, of rising of extremism which is not afraid to express its desire to exclude, to stigmatize, to refuse the other. We have to face everyday the devastating effects of these problems in Europe. We defend not only with clarity, but also with strength and conviction, Europe’s destiny to enable us to live together united AND different in a world of perpetual conflicts of interest, who are far from the daily general interests of people.

This need is imperative for all of us. It is not just a choice. Artists who speak the world, who open incredible spaces in our imaginations, help us and accompany us in accepting the Other. “I is Another”, said the poet Arthur Rimbaud.

Then, how can we bear in mind the possibility, in our France of Enlightenment, of Human Rights, to be asked to remove from the library some books for children such as “John has two moms” by Ophelia Texier published by the Ecole des Loisirs? To utter threats against a publishing director from Sarbacane for the publication of a book, “A quoi tu joues?”. To be bothered about the distribution of a book published in 2004, “Daddy wears a dress”, and consider it as a “satanic influence”, no less!, just on the basis of his title, without even having read it?

How to understand to ban children’s classes to attend to shows created for them as “The princess did not like princes” of the same Co. La même perché or “Oh Boys” directed by Olivier Letellier?

How to accept the arrest and custody for a day of the performer Steven Cohen, South African artist who faces a year of prison, being accused of exhibitionism

because of his performance at 9:30 am on the esplanade du Trocadéro in Paris? Whereas this artist, living in France for 10 years is defending his creative process by using his body as a political subject, tool of presentation of a male identity, white, homosexual Jewish and South African?

How to understand demonstrations in front of a theater, where its dance performance is qualified as pornographic on the grounds that the performers are performing naked, without even having seen the show, and having to hear words of sinister memory made by a National Front elected, “one of these decadent artist claiming hypocritically belong to cultural field”... This performance is “Tragedy” by the choreographer Olivier Dubois, who is also the Director of the National Choreographic Centre of Roubaix.

We have to be all eyes: that little nagging music against culture, exacerbated by the financial crisis which paralyzes all thoughts. Against the art that queries, which scans certainties, which also can disturb, and which, since men painted on the caves walls, makes Humanity. This uninhibition of public speech, of thought, is not only a “return of the repressed”; it is, for those who claim them, for these intolerant associations, the way to impose an order they consider as “natural and universal”...

We must be attentive to all those artists who, needing to be in the world, offer to our eyes, to our sensitivities, to our intelligence, performances that trans-gress, trans-form, trans-cendent the reality. That gives us our freedom to think by ourselves and by our most valuable asset: our humanity.

I hope that these working days where we will discover or re-discover the artists of the French scene will offer the opportunity to strengthen the need of a Europe of Art and Culture that we share, for which we commit and IETM is an historical example.”

Solange Dondi

Presidente of Réseau en scène Languedoc-Roussillon

Edito

When we were thinking about problems that the plenary Spring European cultural network IETM would find, we made three observations:

- First observation: a few weeks before the European elections, we anticipated the raise of extremists or Euro-skeptics because of the general crises.
- Second observation: in a French societal context particularly tense about sex and gender issues, we noticed the growing difficulties for European artists to deal with these subjects freely throughout Europe.
- Third observation: given the budgetary constraints, we questioned our cultural models, realizing how their historic structure was under a lot of pressure.

Unfortunately, a few months after this meeting, rich in exchanges, European news only confirm the validity of these concerns.

In France, the score of the National Front party, listed in the right wing of the political spectrum, raised from 6 to 25%. And although it is not illegitimate to criticize the European construction as it is, the score of the Euro-skeptics or sovereignist parties in Denmark, Austria, the United Kingdom (scores above 15%) can be interpreted as a sign of defiance, also as a warning. The results in all the different countries are complex, hence they need to be analyzed carefully. But the trend highlights the need to build Europe otherwise, the need for cultural professionals to address topics they are naturally holders : citizenship, human rights, people's dignity.

In Poland, the representations of Golgotha Picnic were simply cancelled. In 2011 in France, some Catholic associations contested against Rodrigo Garcia's work, accusing him of "blasphemy" and "Christianophobia". His work had to be performed twice at the interdisciplinary Malta Festival in Poznan. As controversy grew and pressure intensified, the Church decided to take part in the debate, first with a letter from the Archbishop of Poznan, Stanislaw Gadecki condemning the piece, described as "vulgar" and "pornographic", and also referring to an infringement of the law. In response to that fact, about 220 intellectuals and artists from around the world,

including South African writer and Nobel laureate John Coetzee, directors Andrzej Wajda and Agnieszka Holland, published an open letter to show their support to Garcia (source: French newspaper " Le Monde ", 26 June 2014).

Once again in France, as an echo to the social movements started in summer 2003, the tough negotiations about the special system of people employed in show movement led to a massive strike, cancellation of certain festivals, and the rise of a deleterious climate between the government and professionals. All this in a context where, throughout Europe, public funding has been scaled down. Here, as elsewhere, the search for alternative models, that is if such models exist, becomes adorned by its promoters.

These three examples are far from describing all the challenges that we have to face today and, of course, these four working days at the plenary meeting in Montpellier Languedoc-Roussillon were less than a drop of water in this ocean full of snakes. But we are happy to have modestly contributed to create a working session between performing arts' professionals, in an economic, political and contemporary societal context that reinforce this need.

The document that you are holding in your hands is not an exhaustive overview of this dynamic in which the unconscious or informal dimension is important. But you will find some of the lines of force of these days, as an invitation to continue still further reflection and never lose sight of the requirement of meaning that we carry.

Digital revolution

Technologies as the environment

We all know that relationships between theater and technologies are complex and that the mainstream theater is resisting toward technologies. In 2014, is there still some kind of “technophobia” in the world of performing arts?

Even most reluctant directors are users of digital culture, without knowing or admitting it. And it is given by the close relationship they maintain with their smartphones or emails, as well as Facebook.

We can consider technologies as the environment which determine or condition the way we think, perceive, write, create. Technologies are in our minds and, therefore, on the stage.

Writing theater is changing

The question today is: what does Theater talk about? On one hand, transformations brought by technologies on the scripts and sets, and on the other hand, what society has to say about the world; all this leads to the same conclusion: Printed text isn't the master of the world anymore.

Some texts are written on the Web, without human intervention or barely! The way we write is changing by the use of specific tools which allow dynamic exchanges (videos, images, 3D scenography, music). One of the radical changes for performing arts is the digital and networking writing. With the intervention of wider artistical and technical communities, these techniques are also transforming the scenographic aesthetic. Using images, as well as video, give birth to very different stories, indeed, but does not reduce the thought. Many new creators have a remarkable ability to write using images, and they not really focus anymore on the text, in the classical sense of the term. This new scenic trend has its aesthetic value but has also the advantages of simplicity and accessibility. These new trends can appear for good or bad reasons.

What about humans?

Technologies are not only a new media (new tool) for theater, but they also change radically its practice. They change the way we produce, rehearse or perceive theater. They change the way the director, the actors, the technical staff work, as well as the relationships between them.

The growing importance of video and the ability of sharing information on the Internet especially within social networks are changing the landscape of promoting works. It can lead to a phenomena of over-visibility of certain theatrical works.

In fact, audience is more open towards new technologies than we think but there is also a generational gap between two groups: “Digital natives” (people who were born inside the world of technologies) and “Digital immigrants” (those who have known the digital revolution and are trying to adapt to it). The public is shifting : they can be called to be part of the performance; they can become an e-audience on line, they can be co-writers.

The gravity center of the theater is moving: from printed text to new kinds of performative texts and direct communication with the public.

“I don't think
of technology as technology.
I think of it as a landscape.”

Alvin Lucier

Stage: a unique place for experimentations

Almost all directors who work with new technologies are claiming an interdisciplinary approach of theater: “Everything starts around a text. But I feel more than ever that we have to come back to the idea of theater as a meeting point between architecture, music, dance, literature, acrobatics, game”, affirm

has already happened

Lepage. The stage is a complex and accurate place for experimenting.

In this global changing situation, performing arts are playing a very special role: digital technologies are in fact not prerecorded technologies but live technologies which can interact with every dimension of the representation. A virtual scenography which is not cinema but a live scenography. More and more the "live" determines the place of the living, a key question for theater.

In this new digital world, we are witnesses of major transformations at every level of our field: writing, scenography, aesthetics, way of working, promotion of works, relationship and interaction of the audience, etc. This is now, for everyone: reluctant or not, digital natives or immigrants, text conservatives, professionals, amateurs, novices...

Shakespeare said that the world is a stage. *Can we conceive Internet as a stage?*



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Representing sexuality

“The performer Steven Cohen has been judged for having danced with a cock attached to his sex” entitled “Liberation next”, March 24th 2014. And it was in Paris that this 51-year-old artist living in France appeared in criminal court for the first time for indecent exposure. This artist has done over 150 performances worldwide. One example among others of the raising tensions related to sexual matters’ representation in public space. Debating about “transgender” issue at the IETM Montpellier made all his sense.

The idea of exhibiting body, of manhandling it on stage, of distorting it, showing it, making someone touch it, is not, as one might think at first glance, a pure provocation: that would not make any sense. Artists are constantly seeking to express their own universe or highlight the flaws of society, shoving codes, “to change the symbolism, the general perception of representation, create a new vocabulary”*.

Artists dealing with this subject are generally in need: either a need of expression, or existence. According to the geo-political and religious context, it is not the same need but it is even stronger in a repressive context. The common point is that this subject never goes without reactions, more or less violent: insults of the audience while leaving the theater, the “waste of public money” that medias yell, artistic directors who self-censor, police repression and censorship, penalties of court and banishment of religion.

The main challenge for artists is to find a space for creation, outside the context of repression and censorship. When an artist is creating, he doesn’t create in a purpose of provocation, or even in any purpose at all. Otherwise, we wouldn’t be talking about art, but need.

In Poland, working on the theme of sexuality is extremely delicate. In Canada, this revolution was made on stage. A huge work have been done by professionals, artists and programmers, to defend the idea of being able to show nudity and sexuality on stage, to break taboos. “There was no need to rely on people on the

street, everything was done within the framework of the theater. A real education of the audience has been done, as well as persistence and real motivation of the professionals.”**

In this story, the role of the programmer is essential in the presentation of these artworks. Not only has he to let freedom to artists to express their art, but also he must protect the audience, by means of information and mediation. Moreover, according to Sebastian Kempf (CDN Lower Normandy), “the stage is a democratic space where viewers have the right to leave it whenever they want. When the performance is held outdoors, passers-by have also the same right to leave.” It is not up to the programmer to play the role of censor.

After the conference, this hot topic raised the desire to debate on many new issues. A second meeting was organized in off. Numerous requests for information exchanges, for experience sharing, for documentation were felt, because in reality, few structures exist, above all at a European scale.

A linkedin group has been created. It will be used as a platform for sharing and exchanging online to keep the debate alive between members of IETM :

www.linkedin.com/groups/IETM-TransGender-Group-8110924/about

This group is dedicated to :

- Information about artists, festivals, organizations
- Personal experiences with audiences
- Personal experiences with authorities (politicians, laws, censorship...)
- Different work practices and artistic processes
- Other relevant subjects: political media, sexual education, activism...

Géoliane Arab - Interview

Moderator of G5 : “Revisit the concept of sexualities and its portrayal”

* *Words of Matthieu Hocquemiller*

** *Words of de Géoliane Arab*



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Beyond the boundaries

The theme of transborder has been an important axis of these four working days. It has dealt with artists' position and point of view about these issues - as Michael Laub did -, the reflexion about regional European and Euro-regional dynamics, taking news of artists and of the Syrian context and economic crisis' consequences on our ability to exchange between countries well endowed and countries with lower resources.

In a context where goods and services are exchanging more and more quickly, where financial flows are beyond geographic barriers, the concept of border and all the tensions associated with it re-emerge everywhere. Here, walls are built, and straight after tunnels try to circumvent them. Land claims strengthen by democratic or military means, it depends when the supra-national institutions weaken the boundaries of old states.

“Syrian drama is being written
in Beirut, Amman, London,
Paris, Munich, Berlin
and Brussels, in the refugee camps
in Turkey... but also
in Damascus and inside Syria.”

At the heart of this dynamics, artists are interpreters, flag bearers or victims of these claims at the same time. The testimony of Jumana Al Yasiri reflects the combination of these three dimensions in a Syrian scene now mostly exiled: “in March 2011, during six months, the protests in the form of shows – music, songs, performances, lighting, slogans and even rôle-playing – swarm across the streets with a lot of hope and un precedented creativity”. “Today, the repertoire of the National Theatre, which depends on the Syrian Ministry of Culture, has the function of giving the illusion of stability – more than 69 plays, 39 show for children, and 6 big cultural events have

been presented on the national scene, which is a lot for a country at war.” “The Syrians cannot move freely within the region, being confronted with the same restrictions as (...) Palestinians and Iraqis. Nowadays, Syrian drama is being written in Beirut, Amman, London, Paris, Munich, Berlin, and Brussels, in the refugee camps in Turkey... but also in Damascus and inside Syria.”

Fortunately, inter-regional cooperation dynamics exist. Apart from international cooperation, we now have the possibility to work in an inter-local way, from region to region, from citizens to citizens, thanks to the development of information and communication technology, as well as to connect artists and citizens across established borders.

The border issue remains a fundamental challenge for Europe, whether it is its internal borders or external borders and the need to build a union fully aware of its identity problems: “the state is a European network, in negotiation with other international actors; while people's identity is national, or even local and regional in certain cases. In a democratic society, this kind of structural, cognitive dissonance may be unsustainable. While integrating Europe without sharing an European identity is a workable proposition when everything goes well, any major crisis, in Europe or in a given country, may trigger an European implosion of unpredictable consequences.” (Manuel Castells - 2004)

Thomas Perrin's presentation on Euro-regions is a positive example of the opportunities that are being offered to artists and cultural entrepreneurs to develop projects dealing with the border issue, which contribute to rethink intelligent territories: “culture and cultural policies fall within the normative paradigm of the knowledge and smart economy, largely based on cognitive and intangible resources and on the notion of sustainable development, in which creative and cultural activities are considered fundamental resources.”

we give ourselves

“Euroregional cultural policies question the cultural and territorial dimensions of European construction, in which euroregions appear to be (...) geopolitical in-between : local and global, identity and diversity, convergence and differentiation.”

These spaces are some real laboratories in cultural term which let the possibility of re-examining the notion of borders but also to put culture as a tool for human development as well as a tool for economic development.



Audience development, a major

The workshop was dedicated to artistic processes transformation and it focused on the relationship with the audience.

Nowadays, it seems like relationships with the audience and its involvement in the creation process have become one of the most relevant places for artistic innovation since the beginning of the 2000s. This phenomenon has developed quickly, in many ways: outdoor arts, interviews with inhabitants, participatory art, different forms of audience development, etc. Are these new ways really that new? Why do the artists want to explore them? How does it transform the connection between art and the audience? What do they imply for artists, programmers, as well as venues and festivals? The artists presented their work to the group, so that gave us the chance to discuss some of these key questions all together.

Three main issues were brought up by the questions and discussions.

First of all, how does that focus on audience development and growth of outdoor arts and participatory performances impact artistic creation, especially for the artists who want to work indoors, on a stage based approach? Are the artists who create "conventional" performing arts bound to become oldfashioned? The idea of offering the audience an "experience" was strongly brought up, as if the audience position in a theatre, sitting and watching the show, was outmoded. What will the consequences be of such evolution?

Also, are the involvement and the participation of the audience and inhabitants just a fashion or a deep transformation of artistic creation?

Afterwards, the question of audience development was also tackled by the participants within the frame of the Europe Creative and national subsidies programmes guidelines, in which that issue has become central. Engaging with the audiences, reaching new audiences in Europe, supporting community involvement and participatory work are expressions that can be found in almost every application form. Several participants underlined evaluation as a key problem, as it is mostly based on quantity. How many new members of the

audience will you or did you reach? Collectively, the group insisted on the need to find a more qualitative approach, that takes into account other aspects of audience development, such as personal development, empowerment, quality time and share of knowledge, etc. The criterias should be rethought, as the quality of the audience does not only have to do with numbers. What matters the most is the aesthetic experience.

"We have some kind of God complex!"

Finally, the issue of ethics was a matter of concern for several participants. How do the residents of the neighbourhood where the performance takes place react to it? Do they accept it? Do they have the choice? Regarding participatory work, which is the real engagement with people? How and why do people participate? Is their participation real? One participant pointed out an ethical question regarding language: "When we write grants, we use certain words to describe people, "marginalized people" for example, words that we would never use with the people we're actually going to work and want to work with. It feels paradoxical. I speak with one language to the people who have the power to let me do what I think is important and I speak in other terms and with a different voice to the people I'm actually working with. I think that what I do is right and that people can tell it is, but it's an ethical question I'm wrestling with all the time." Doing so, added another participant, artists and projects managers have to face a situation where they might predict what people are going to feel and experience. "We have some kind of God complex!" said one participant. Plus, this dominant position leads to an underestimation and lack of valorization of the participants themselves, of what they bring to the project.

Anne Gonon

Research manager, HorsLesMurs

FOCUS

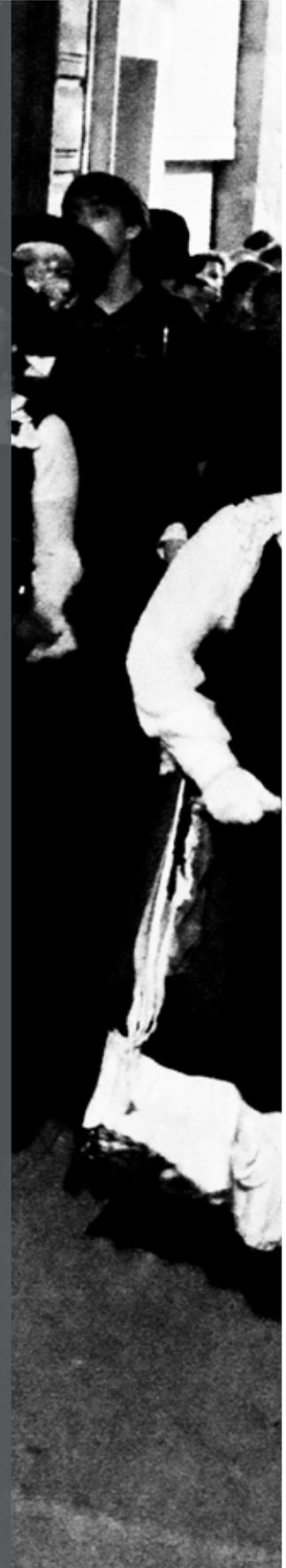
Julien Marchaisseau, artistic director of the French company Rara Woulib, and Daniella Groenberg, artist representing the Dutch company Female Economy presented respectively the projects *Deblozay* and *SuburbSafari*, in which the inclusion of inhabitants and different kinds of relationship with the audience are crucial issues. They both insisted strongly on the fact that working with people, especially in marginalized neighbourhoods, is not social work. Their choice is purely and clearly artistic. Daniella Groenberg pointed out two main motivations. One is to actually reach new audiences, since the company was tired of always seeing the same people in theatre. "Somehow, we felt that something was missing – or actually someone", she said. "We are not telling people that they have to go the theatre, but that they can if they want to, that the city theatre also belongs to them." She also stressed the fact that the foundations of the company are «our curiosity about people, wherever we are».

Performing a very different kind of work – a strolling musical procession based on haitian aesthetics – Julien Marchaisseau's motivations are not that different from Daniella Groenberg's. He wants to explore new spaces (residential areas, city edges, etc.) to reach people living there and to mix their inhabitants with the audience coming specifically for the performance.

Both insisted very much on fighting the separation of social and cultural communities. The participatory dimension of their projects, both based on the participation of inhabitants, is thought as a strong way to connect them with the city, but also to connect the city to itself.



© Maxime Demartin - Cie Rara Woulib



Night adventure playground

Lost dimension of the city, the night has been for long this space and time completely left to fears and fantasies. Times are changing. The former nocturnal border is now a heart. European nights light up. Conflicts increase between individuals, groups and districts of the multiple-times city. Within insecurity and freedom, these transformations require people and organizations to adapt themselves in new forms. As a fleeting and cyclic territory, the night has become a great field of experimentation and exploration for researchers, artists and authorities, and a place for renewal, innovation and creativity for the community.

Perpetually trying to emancipate from natural rhythms, man has gradually artificialised the urban life and colonized the night. Having turned into a forgotten dimension of the city, urban night should no longer be seen as a foil given to representations and fantasies but as a space for projects, the last border between the city and the XXIst century man, an adventure playground for art and artists.

Colonization. Not long time ago, the urban night, symbolized by the curfew, was still the time of darkness, sleep and social rest. It inspired poets looking for freedom, it was a refuge for criminals and a threat for power, who tried to control it. Contrary to claims made by nocturnal people jealous of their prerogatives, the conquest of the night has begun. Beyond dreams, fears and fantasies, henceforth there is a life after daytime. Gradually, human activities colonize this space-time which crystallizes the needs and tensions of a changing society. The other side of the city is starting to take part in our current events. Our cities are being transformed, for better or for worse. Emancipating from natural constraints, our metropolises come alive under the influence of lifestyles increasingly out of sync, of the reduction of working hours and new lighting and communication technologies. The light

has gradually dominated the urban space, erasing part of the threatening darkness of our nights, allowing daytime activities to go on. The mediatic curfew is over: radios and televisions are working 24h/24, 7 days out of 7, and allow communication though the Internet with some regions where it's daylight. The "people of the night" is thriving. Industrial enterprises operate continuously to make profits on their equipment and, in most fields, night work is becoming commonplace. Service companies practice the "24h/24, 7/7." Everywhere, the trend is to enlarge the periodicity, the amplitude and frequency of transports. Numerous activities and businesses are adapting their schedules to evening and nighttimes, experiencing a large influx. Between Before and After, parties begin later. Even our biological rhythms are disrupted: as diurnal animals, we sleep one hour less than our grandparents. There are increasing pressures on the night that crystallize economic, political and social rights stakes. The non-stop activity of the economy and networks goes against the circadian rhythm of our bodies and our cities. The global time is in conflict with the local time. The conflict is growing between individuals, groups and neighbourhoods of the sleeping city, the working city and the city who has fun.

"It is at night that it is beautiful
to believe in the light"

Edmond Rostand

Invention. Caricature of the day, space-time that highlights the contradictions and potentials, place where differences between areas, activities, populations and territories are emphasized, urban night is an observatory of the evolution of our lifestyles and our abilities to live together in the metropolises. The Night is a wonderful area of investigation, a border for invention and creativity we need to explore, understand, think and delight. Source of tensions for society, the city at night asks each of us -researcher elected, technician, artist-citizen-, to consider differently the city and the society by adopting a more holistic view of

for art and artists

the Cité. It integrates time aspects which are essential to its understanding and its governance. Explored and under debate, the night can recharge day's batteries.

Experimentation and debate. The night can bring the watertight boundaries down between research and experimentation, between citizen makers, artists and technicians. Solutions in terms of sustainable urban development are not only to be found in infrastructures ; they can also be found on the side of the sensible, game, pleasure and artists from every step of the metropolitan factory. Why for? To cross, design, reveal, provoke, mobilize, represent, simulate, delight and co-produce in situ nocturnal metamorphosis irrigating the day. In a society which is rethinking its nycthemeres, night has definitely its word to day. Artistic approaches become the occasion to give birth to a wider discussion about the city at night. Do we want to maintain our traditional rhythms or to switch to a continuously society, a city at our choice 24h/24, 7/7, meaning comfort for some,

yet hell for others? If we hide these issues, or we let them be arbitrated in private spheres, we allow the economy to dictate its laws and we take the risk to let isolated decisions generate new conflicts and new inequalities. Provocative, watchmen and guard crazy, all in one, "geo-artists" who invest nocturnal space in our cities, whiten our nights and encourage us to let go, to live and "ex-ist". In the meaning and experience of the city, they know how to reveal our contradictions and our post-modern paradoxes, and how to open new possibilities and the public space to debate.

Without light, there is no city at night. But too much light kills night. Should we put more 'day' inside the 'night' or protect it? Is the result worth the effort? It is up to us to decide. On the other side of the day, artists open up our eyes.

Luc Gwiazdzinski

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