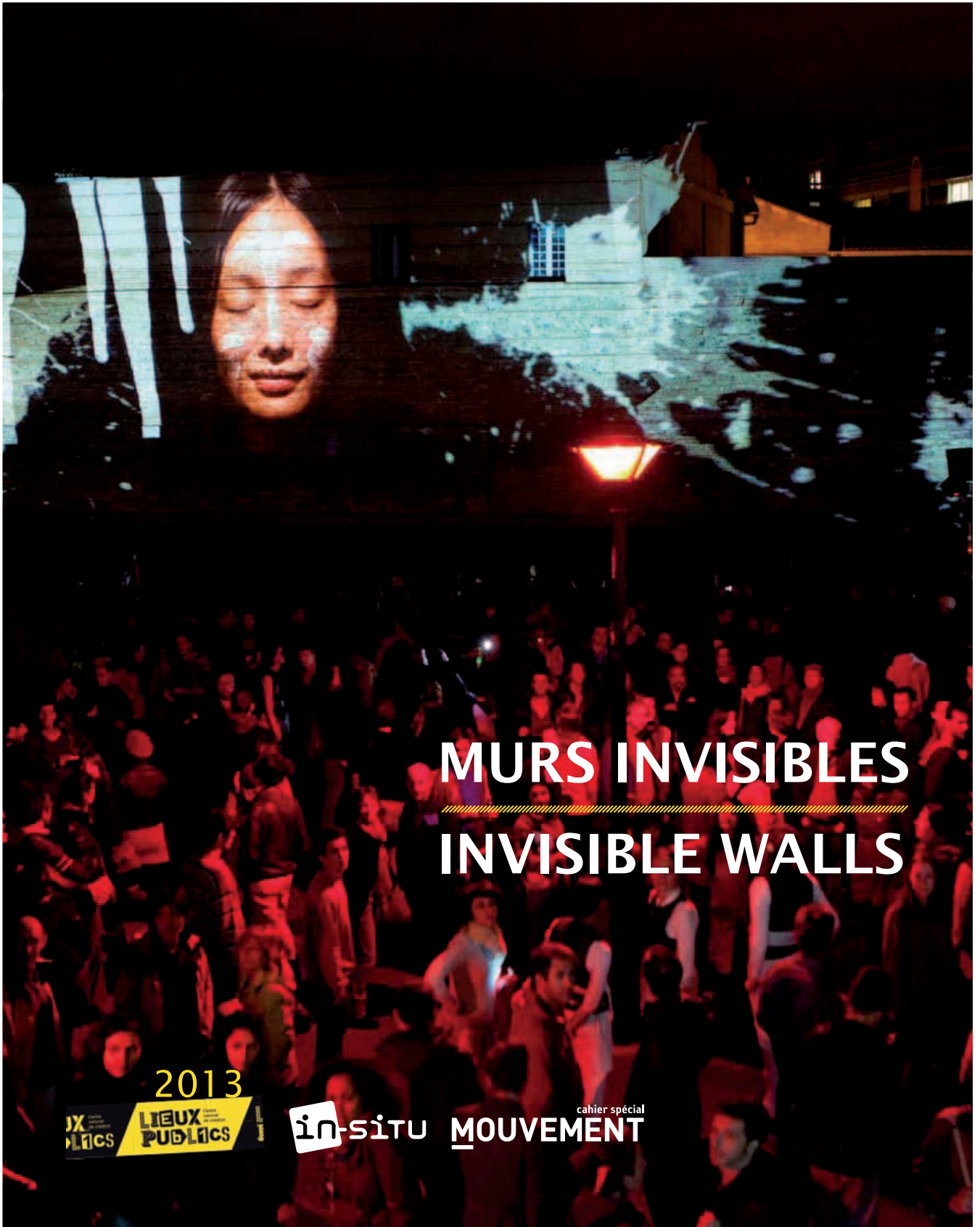


MOUVEMENT

2 CAHIER SPÉCIAL JUIN 013



MURS INVISIBLES INVISIBLE WALLS

2013

LES LIEUX PUBLICS

in-situ

cahier spécial MOUVEMENT

PERSISTENCE OF RITUALS

Like Rara Woulib group and their strollings, some artists are endeavouring to revive the spirit of grand collective rituals. New ceremonial behaviour patterns are carving out a niche for themselves in public spaces.

Julie Bordenave

Traduit par Sarah Jane Mellor



Rara Woulib, *Deblozay*.
Photo: Bushido.

With their talent for bringing about an upheaval and restructuring the collective urban framework, artists who penetrate and occupy public space are the most capable of getting to grips with social taboos. Amongst these features death which is denied in a society where ageing as well as illness have been ignored, hushed up and brushed under the carpet for a long time. *“Bringing back the dead to our town centres”*, is as well the fervent wish of Alexandra Tobelaim, actress trained at Erac at Cannes who is a founder of the Tandaim company. With Lieux publics she initiated last November an artistic work intitled *Le Mois du chrysanthème (The Month of Chrysanthemum)*: on the tarmac strips of turf welcome back the dead to the land of the living for a shortlived intergenerational communion, like a rite of passage, an initiation ceremony between the different stages of life: *“In an entropic fashion we will greet the dead from everywhere, creating a kind of cemetery without borders.”*

If the West has gradually evicted, banished and expurgated death from daily life, and in parallel re-

moved cemeteries from its town centres, other civilisations still cohabit and live in close proximity with their dead in a more tangible fashion. On his return after four years spent in Haiti, Julien Marchaisse founded in 2007 the Rara Woulib collective: *“L... there is fragile and precarious but the greater the presence of death in everyday life, the greater the sense of vitality which pervades people’s lives. On my return to France, I was shocked to see to what extent death is hidden and excluded concealed behind the walls of retirement homes, of hospitals; undertakers deal with everything, there are no more vigils and wakes... Hence the idea of confronting the public once again with death by conferring on it a soft and poetic complexion.”* Musical parade at night, *Deblozay* (meaning “disorder” in Haitian creole) draws its inspiration from *rara* (a carnivalesque and musical form of voodoo), summoning up Haitian *guédés* (spirits) and Mexican aesthetics from the Festival of the Dead, combining zombies and the living in a bewitching, frenzied dance: cultural syncretism both joyful and formidable which seizes hold of the onlooker by holding this sight so as to make him lose his bearings and anchorage points, engulfing him in a swirling, uplifting and transfixing urban trance. This collective, comprising around twenty musicians and visual artists, initially tested out and experimented with this spectacle in the streets of Marseilles, occupying the Parc Longchamp at nightfall, or transforming the Pavillon de partage des eaux des Chutes-Lavie into giant “music box”: *“This approach consists in inhabiting city at night, which is a habit that we have lost and grown unaccustomed to in many places. Each new spot gives rise and brings into being a new form of writing.”*

The elders and transmission

A society which is in denial about its dead and death also averts its gaze from the elderly. In *Echappées belles* by the Adhok company, the latter take the revenge by escaping from a retirement home to evolve and deliver moving scenes, slices of life, before setting off to the sound of the Ramones. Posing ourselves collectively the question of transmission, also means reconciling ourselves with our own history. With *Enfants de la terre (Sons of the Soil)* the Dutch company Schweigman celebrates and commemorates the memory of the elderly in order to root and anchor the family heritage in the present: *“Behind every individual there lurks an imaginary triangle of ancestors. Physical features, just like psychological and emotional patterns are handed down from generation to generation.”* The plastic artifact in the landscape symbolizes seven generations of forebears, embodied and portrayed by the same number of masks planted

on stakes, with ever vaguer and uncertain features the further we go back in time.

In a more symbolic way, Dries Verhoeven chooses to pay homage to a fading memory of a whole world through *Fare Thee Well* which is a show intended to “bid farewell to what has disappeared and what is doomed to vanish in the future; to lost fragments of our civilisations”. These vestiges can be visualized by means of a telescope; encrusted at the centre of the image there is a flowing text which enumerates all those things from which we will have to take our leave. One prediction succeeds another to the background music of one of Haendel’s operatic arias; we are gripped by the poignant sensation that we are witnessing the waning and fading away of our own contemporary existence and through this the fleeting glimpse of our own identity. This is a dizzying sinking feeling for the isolated viewer who becomes the hapless observer of a world from which he temporarily withdraws: “a visual requiem for our epoch, an elegy of dystopias in a crisis-hit era, exposing the world as being in a state of flux”, the artist comments.

The rituals invented

Before paying homage to the vestiges and remnants of a civilization, the street arts put forward the idea of enshrining it amongst beings who are well and truly alive. Street artists have never been lacking in creativity in inventing collective rites and rituals: at the turn of the Millennium, Théâtre de l’Unité offered its irresistible *Manifestations de Joie (Manifestations of Joy)*; more vehemently, the “Manifs de droite” (Right-wing demos), created in 2003 in the wake of the movement of casual and intermittent employees, experienced their heyday following the election of Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007... Places of manufacture give rise to traditions which create ties and bonds that knit closely together the social fabric of a geographical area: at the Channel in Calais, bringing in the New Year has for a long time been celebrated collectively, on the occasion of Feux d’hiver (Winter fires); for the inauguration of Les Thermes d’Encausse in 2011, Les Pronomade(s) initiated a Poste Restante service, inviting local inhabitants to deposit sealed messages with the postal authorities, to be delivered to the intended recipients or addresses in 2036 (that is to say twenty-five years later, the duration of the lease)... In Marseilles, Lieux publics introduced in 2003 the urban ritual *Sirènes et midi net*. On the first Wednesday of each month, the test of the civil protection and defence siren is blended by artists into a unique ephemeral creative work on the Opera forecourt: “A creative work of art which resonates with this urban sound signal, with what imaginary ideas it conveys, between war and aquatic divinity, amidst musical glissando and screeching seabirds sweeping the mariners of The Odyssey to a

watery grave...” Over the years, this monthly event has brought together a crowd, a whole fraternity of faithful spectators; people also turn up to attend in order to learn the latest tidings, a habit of yesterday, of times gone by...

Other rituals have been introduced by Lieux publics connected with the city’s cultural heritage, such as *Stars on Stairs*, which is acted out on the monumental steps of Saint-Charles railway station and its breathtaking open-air stage overlooking the city. A more “immaterial” heritage, the legendary verve and sparkle of Marseilles will enjoy pride of place

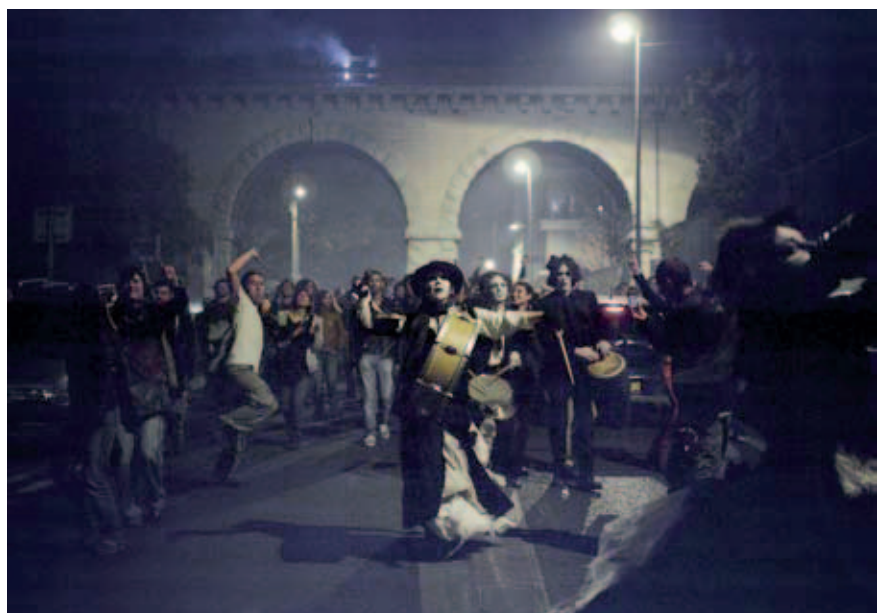
and be honoured on the occasion of *Le Grand Bavardage (The Big Talk)* next September during Métamorphoses event. This will consist in a Sunday banquet for one thousand guests, set out on tables laid along La Canebière, where local artists

(Ilotopie, Agence de Voyages Imaginaires, No Tunes International...) will take part in this feast, partying and carousing with the invited public in order to “render audible to the whole world the expressive language and gift of the gab for which this city is so famous”.

Public space is well and truly the dedicated place to bring out the full force of a collective body, going beyond and transcending normality, even resulting in the creation of new customs. Thus by taming and domesticating set limits and forbidden things, real, imaginary or fantasised, street arts can also transgress and contravene them by opposing reinvigorating, liberating, transgressive or reflective acts and gestures; sometimes a mere spark is all that is required as a catalyst to enable us to reclaim and repossess this supposedly public space, where frontiers existing in our minds sometimes outnumber and outweigh physical frontiers.

To pay homage to a fading memory of a whole world.

Rara Woulib, *Deblozay*.
Photo: Bushido.



Politis

19 SEPTEMBRE 2013

Un savant >
mélange de
douceur et
d'étrangeté,
digne d'une
opérette
d'outre-
tombe.

JEAN ROCHÉ



Rara des villes, rara des champs

Avec *Deblozay*, la compagnie Rara Woulib revisite la tradition du « rara » haïtien.

Dans l'ombre, un visage grimé émerge puis s'évanouit. Plus rien. Que la nuit, où même les espaces les mieux connus se teintent de mystère. Et la sensation d'une présence tapie quelque part, sur le chemin que la compagnie Rara Woulib a défini à partir de la trame de son spectacle, *Deblozay*, pour ses spectateurs, ou plutôt pour son cortège de déterreurs de mémoire urbaine ou rurale. Puis des sons envahissent le silence, d'abord discontinus, enfin rassemblés en une étrange mélodie accompagnée de chants haïtiens.

Lentement, le rara du collectif composé d'une quinzaine de musiciens, comédiens, plasticiens, costumiers et artificiers prend forme. Il invite à une relecture des rues, des places, des champs ou marais dans lesquels il trimbale son savant mélange de douceur et d'étrangeté. Parfois presque comme jadis en Haïti, où le rara sillonnait villes et campagnes durant le Carême en un carnaval de chants et de danses mi-sacrés mi-profanes. Parfois avec une teneur théâtrale et une modernité étrangères à la tradition d'origine, mais toujours mises au service d'une exploration de l'histoire et de l'âme du lieu investi.

Nous, c'est en Camargue, dans le marais du domaine de la Palissade, que nous avons suivi la procession de *Deblozay*. Toute une nuit de marche en plein dédale de végétation et d'eau stagnante dans le cadre

du festival Envies Rhône-ments, rythmée par les va-et-vient des artistes aux faces cadavériques et aux tenues dignes d'une opérette d'outre-tombe. Surtout musical, discrètement clownesque et théâtral, leur jeu laissait sentir la nature environnante, en soulignait la magie changeante au fil des heures. Subtils et discrets, les chorégraphies, les invocations des ancêtres et les dialogues entre des chanteuses aux mille jupons et des joueurs de klewon et de vaskin – instruments haïtiens – aux airs de soldats en permission formaient avec le paysage une partition visuelle et sonore minimaliste.

Un parti pris qui crée l'attente – d'un drame, d'une ébauche d'intrigue – avant de laisser place à un état d'entière réceptivité aux micro-événements qui jalonnent le parcours. Une relève aux flambeaux vaguement monstrueuse, une muette course-poursuite, l'apparition d'une immense tablée garnie de vin et de soupe au détour d'un chemin. Autant de cristallisations de la délicate présence de Rara Woulib qui nous incitent à sonder notre rapport aux banals sentiers dans lesquels se balade notre quotidien.

» Anais Heluin

Deblozay, de Rara Woulib, les 27 et 28 septembre à Marseille pour le festival Métamorphoses (www.lieuxpublics.com) et le 4 octobre au Théâtre de la Foudre à Mont-Saint-Aignan (www.scenationale.fr).