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about LAb[au]

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the exhibition catalogue for the Art Grandeur Nature, Biennale 2008
and the installation inauguration of: binary waves – cybernetic urban installation

It is a common mistake when one talks about a work of art to evoke its aesthetical or technical qualities. The work as such is thus deprived of its very value: its sense and its effects, direct consequences of the author.

Who is LAB[au]?

Four complementary artists rigorously involved and focused in a research which production can be seen since a few years in their laboratory in Brussels, and in increasingly larger public spaces in Europe and the world. Thanks to the collaboration of a group of multiples competences, their creations are grounded on an acute knowledge of purely scientifically, physical, acoustical and visual phenomena, and on a thorough practice of all technologies able to translate their ideas, even the more complex ones.

From its very beginning, LAB[au] favoured what is now called interactivity, this causal relation between a work and its context, setting it in symbiosis with a public space. With time and a permanent stream of ideas, their space of interaction has broadened and installation spaces have increased in size. The interactive graphics displayed on the Brussels Dexia Tower set a new milestone, already challenged by this much more complex idea of a kinetic wall installed in Saint-Denis which intention and multiple parameters they alone can describe, producing a random combinatory rule out of its interactivity. The continuous evolution of LAB[au] should without a doubt see a new iteration in the exciting context offered by Asian countries.

One purpose for art and artists is to be witnesses of their time, to expose the artistic result of new technologies applied to new materials carrying new ideas. Escaping from the old forms, LAB[au]'s creations challenge, stimulate curiosity, and for the audience, this knowledge contributes to its enrichment. Through an artwork, the idea of interactivity is immediately perceived and easy to accept and integrate: the public likes to feel active, "creative", participating in the work through the effects that s/he introduces. What goes beyond his or her understanding, the waves, the sounds and their interaction, form a magic that exceeds them, exerting a fascination that carries the spectator away from its daily life – that dull constraint of material life. An artwork has this power to elevate through fascination and amazement. Through this testimony, the audience becomes open to receive an additional significance of the work, if we substitute the word "interactive" by "cybernetics", coining the term used by Nicolas Schöffner (1912-1992), starting with CYSP 1, the first sculpture with an autonomous displacement reacting to external influences of the environment (1961): a milestone in the history of art. This notion of cybernetics, theorised by the American scientist Norbert Wiener, had to be transcended by art, so that this awakening of a small number could propagate to a larger audience. As a matter of fact, in the history of mankind, we do not go from a war to the next, a king to the next, from economic treaties to peace treaties, but rather from a new awareness to the next, as these new realizations are the marks of fantastic changes in our way of perceiving, living, acting. Let us only evoke the invention of fire, the hot cooking after the raw cooking, writing, printing...

More recently, the conscientisation of liberty, equality, fraternity and the human rights, that were the privileged knowledge of a few high spirits, before entering the public domain during the French Revolution. Which does not mean that all humans are yet enough aware of it to have integrated it? This integration only happens during very long periods of time. Anyway, the cybernetic awareness, of which interactivity is an "horizontal" aspect, is another step in the human kind evolution as a whole. But let us see things on a "vertical" aspect.

Everything in the universe holds in balance, nothing falls upon our head. And yet, every component of this balance is constantly being challenged, only to undertake a new adjustment. Take for instance a boat: its rudder (kybernetos in greek), cannot stay still pointing to the destination, because it must accommodate for the pressure of the waves on the one hand, the wind on the other hand, and the right cape can only be maintained with constant adjustments. A walk is another good horizontal example of vertical cybernetics, since in the equilibrium of the standing position, as soon as one lifts a foot forward, one falls until its other foot sets the new equilibrium. In the meanwhile, a small "step forward" has been produced. Cybernetics can then be understood as the very law of evolution itself: action – reaction, calling all the intelligence/perception/consciousness of the system at stake, notwithstanding the fact that all systems are linked to each other, like this enormous information spider web made possible by computers which were direct consequences of the awareness theorised by Norbert Wiener.

Looking at a work by LAB[au], or by Schöffner, who would have loved watching their work in continuity of his premonitory ideas and his Tour Lumière Cybernétique that was to be erected at la Défense, translating the city of Paris 's functioning data flows into luminous and kinetic effects -, one is struck, not only by its aesthetical beauty, but by all this significance that emerges, if the perceiver goes to the point of investigating the invisible part of the work – its meaning. Art on this level is a formidable pedagogical mean, providing that the artist shapes significant and "digestible" ideas for the good of mankind and its elevation, not out of personal ambition or greed...

A work signed by LAB[au] is like a work signed by the "XXI century anonyms", in direct line with the tradition of the Middle-Age companions... The shapes have changed because the tools have changed, the science and the technology have changed, the ideas conveyed are differently articulated, yet the spirit is there, right there. Without this work to present this page would not have held the precious information that will make its path in the very life of the spectator and reader that is my wish: the importance of disturbance of any piece of information, whatever the nature and beauty.