

Touring an Approach in Transition

In recent years, my work has taken many directions then found a certain coherence again following an existential crisis in my practice. *Touring a World in Transition* is a presentation of my research from the past ten years, yet the material is presented in a way that embodies a more nuanced perspective, the formulation of which is still in flux. The diversity of forms that I use now serves the mapping of contemporary existence. This publication is more a progress report than the celebration of a job well done.

For over a decade the heart of my practice has been creating positive representations of under-valued places: disadvantaged suburbs; obscure corners of the former Soviet empire served by low-cost flights; deindustrialized zones or places undergoing economic change... In parallel, I tested the hypothesis that a portrait of a city would emerge from an inventory of the objects contained in its museums (*Museums of the World*, 2009 - 2015).

My *modus operandi* was to distill the atmosphere of a target place by studying its urban fabric and creating a repertoire of pictograms. These schematic representations were the basis of a fictitious tourist promotion campaign. They were intended to allow immediate recognition of the place's most recognizable characteristics. True to their advertising logic, they transformed settings for people's lives into places to be consumed. The process is much like the reduction of a city to a list of "must-see" visits when mass tourism moves in.

Little by little I added observational drawings, collages and photographs to better describe each place. They refined the pictographic representation by adding layers of information, but the continuing aim was to enhance the place's brand. How the repertoire was used depended on the exhibiting context. The works could take various forms (paintings, advertising billboards, souvenir plates, wall paintings, pdf files, road signs, enameled panels...). The environments that staged these elements were conceived as visitors' centers or trade fair stands.

Reading translation theory caused me to question this process of reduction, which was the starting point of each project. I was challenged by the distinction made between *target-oriented* and *source-oriented* translations. The former, which favors readability in the target language, flatters the cultural assumptions of the translation's readers. Lawrence Venuti (1995) goes so far as to draw parallels between the target-oriented approach and imperialism, since the culture of the target language seeks to impose its own values on the original text, thus colonizing and subjugating it. He sees this approach as based on a model of dominant and dominated rather than a relationship between equals. According to Antoine Berman (1984, 16): "All cultures would like to be self-sufficient so they can, based on this imagined self-sufficiency, influence others and appropriate their heritage."

The source-oriented approach, on the other hand, confronts the reader with the impossibility of a fluid translation because of the intractable foreignness of the original text. The translator's choices in this case favor the specificities of the source text, even if it means confusing the reader. My representations of peripheral places were clearly target-oriented.

I realized that my pseudo-tourist campaigns formatted places that I had chosen precisely because they had not succumbed to globalization. If the intention was to question residential or geopolitical hierarchies by singing the praises of unlikely destinations, I was still acting as though the periphery should resemble the center. At the same time, I was sometimes annoyed when reading source-oriented translations, which could be abstruse and therefore unfaithful in their own way to the source's logic. Was there a middle ground?

I decided to fine-tune my representations and acquire some theoretical baggage by spending a year at university (a Master 2 at Université Paris 8). During this period, I was sedentary and cut off from my usual subject. I felt intuitively that the addition of text could help me singularize my generic representations, as drawing, collage and photography had done in the past. The use of found texts effectively serves this function. It is the introduction of anecdotes written in the first person that shifts the distilling of atmosphere towards the construction of stories. The downloadable booklet *Mapping a Year Without Travel* (2018) was my first attempt at finding a new language that combined image and text without using pictograms; at embodying a subjective life experience rather than a physical place presented as fact.

This booklet brought together elements related to my naturalization as a French citizen and anecdotes about the occupation of the university by migrants; quotes from information boards and spam; text messages received and T-shirt slogans seen on Parisian chests; graffiti and ads in the metro. These different layers of information evoked consumer society and its social tensions, my relationship to the French language and to France, as well as the irruption of technology in our personal lives. The juxtaposition of text and image was used in the same way as field - counter-field shots in movies: different angles are used to flesh out a story.

In addition, the creation of two websites during this period allowed me to experiment with different ways of documenting my practice: an ordered approach to archives derailed by *Detours* that pop up unexpectedly (heidiwood.net), and a blog-style accumulation of research material (nouvelles-du-monde.fr). Since 2020, my attempts at representing current affairs have taken the form of monthly *Journals*, replaced in 2022 by the series *Breaking News (À la une)*.

A public art project at the Aretha Franklin high school in Drancy in 2020 was an opportunity to renew my approach to the glorification of disadvantaged suburbs by integrating my research on heritage as a vector of shared identity. The project, as before, began with a study of the urban fabric but there were also workshops with the school's pupils. We worked together to imagine a new city, called *Alentour*. After mapping its tangible and intangible heritage, we put together a fictitious application to have it classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This time, the scenario was based on the perspective of the inhabitants, marking a step towards a source-oriented translation. However, their participation implied the construction of a consensual narrative, recognizable to all. This aspect mirrored the reduction of a place to a repertoire of pictograms. The project was also partly target-oriented.

Alentour, as well as my downloadable booklets, indicate that my period of transformation has not resulted in a clean slate of forms but rather in an ongoing balancing act between the generic and the singular. Consulting others disrupts the "imagined self-sufficiency" of my gaze. The pictogram has been rehabilitated for its legibility. It is now part of an arsenal of tools at the service of stratified representations that seek to reveal the world's complexity. My reorientation has been less about adding new visual means than replacing advertising-style positivism with a more ironic approach to the absurdity of the world we live in.

For the past five years I have produced pdf files and monumental public art projects with almost nothing in between. These works situate my thinking in a negotiation between target and source-oriented approaches. A return to exhibiting is now necessary so I can translate contemporary experience into contemporary cultural practice. For this publication, which bears the lessons of my ongoing research, the work of the last ten years, as well as non project-specific visuals and texts, are classified by theme: contemporary existence; museums and heritage; urban environment.

Chapters documenting projects alternate with micro-narratives made up of diverse elements. This is where my narrative turn reveals itself, as well as the wide range of forms that constitute my practice. Added to this are texts that are just as diverse in form: I compose, I quote, I delegate the writing to others (see the 3 pages of administrative science fiction written by an anonymous senior civil servant in the *Urban Environment* section).

These swings between generic and singular, between text and image, between asserting my perspective and integrating that of others, reflect my conception of contemporary existence as a succession of seductive clichés and random disruptions. I no longer promote the exotic pleasures of peripheries, or at least not in the same way. I now try to translate my wanderings between the familiar and the disconcerting in this unending period of restricted mobility.

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