

"Faults" Kader Attia - Artist Statement 2009

For several years now, I am questioning fundamental issues through Art, conducting my research- es on these topics always in the light of philosophy, psychoanalysis and poetry. I always try to view my work in a dialogue, which questions the fundamental issues of the exis- tence, and what binds them. It shall often be considered in the spatio-temporal context (geogra- phy and history), it was produced in.

The world we are living in is currently discovering reality again. Some years ago, after the crisis of the Internet bubble's bursting, a new wild unlimited economical speculation has appeared. Even people's loans have become financial products, and economy has been based on virtual assets, more than it had ever been before. Global economy has become virtual, because it is based on money that does not exist: credits. Maybe the short era of the end of social ideologies is going to be replaced by a new era of "new ideas", like Alain Badiou said in *le Monde* of October 17th 2008, in his article entitled: "De quelle réalité cette crise est-elle le spectacle ?" (Which reality this crisis is the spectacle of ?). This has produced a virtual failure, the conse- quences of which are real. We are back to reality.

I am interested in finding what Human Beings have forgotten to look at: what separates reality from the virtual, and what binds them together. Reason demonstrates that the order of things does not only lean on a system based on comparisons or similarities. Indeed, through inference, we can also assimilate differences between things as analogies that bind things together (Rene Descartes, *Les Regulae*).

This is in the direct line of my reflections on what exists between paradoxical notions: between emptiness and fullness, absence and presence, space and time, life and death. This fault between these paradoxical elements, as soon as thought envisages them, reveals a multitude of meanings that do not appear in each of these elements. Indeed this fault separates them as much as it binds them. In this both sharp and wide way, any kind of experience can be envisaged.

Spending my childhood between France and Algeria has led me to feel close to Oriental and Arab philosophy, as well as to Western philosophy. My father, who has immigrated to France from Algeria in the 70's, has always told me: "The most important thing, when you emigrate, is not the place where you come from or where you go to, it is the journey."

I have had to develop an "ergonomic of the mind", to always be between two things, rather than feeling trapped in one side or the other. This obligation to "go back and forth" has led me to never feel comfortable in the same place, in the same position, and by extension in the same state of mind. I have developed, inspired by the behavior of my ancestors, as well as by my immi- grant parents, a nomadic way of thinking. I frequently question myself. I apply this duality of thought to my artistic process. I have always been more interested in hybridism than in opposites sides. I feel that Human Being should come back to this flexible space, which separates any extremely different issues, even if in between the virtual and reality.

When I was in France, in the suburbs where I used to work, every night as I walked home from my studio, I spent a lot of time watching a crowd of people waiting with empty plastic bags, standing on the street in front of a truck, from which they could receive free food. They could get a container of milk, a bar of butter, a bag of rice, a

box of sugar. They waited silently in groups, huddled some against each other in the cold, holding empty plastic bags.

One day, after I had looked for a long time at an empty bag (left on a bench by a homeless guy, who had just taken the sugar, the milk and the rice from it, that had been given to him, to sell them to the nearest shop), the traces the food left on the plastic bag were stuck in my memory. The bag was empty but standing, suggestively keeping the shape of what it contained. The emptiness of these shapes illustrated, in my eyes, with both political and poetical relevance, the numerous questions I had for several years.

For me, this empty bag, standing like this, represented something in between what can be and what can not be seen: by its presence, it showed the void inside and outside the bag; a physical void. From China to the Arab World, the paradoxical relationship between the void and fullness has a long history. Maybe this idea has evolved during ages through the Silk Road, from calligraphy to architecture, from religion to philosophy.

The void has a strong importance in the Orient, an area stretching from Rabat to Tokyo. From Lao Tsu to Henri Moore, the void has always been a spatial data, opposite to fullness. Lao Tsu's sentence: "Man creates things, but Void gives them meaning", puts it very well. When Yves Klein exhibited "le vide" (the void) in 1958, as an otherness in a social context of political doubt (between French 4th and 5th Republic), he showed that the void can also be thought as political and historical. Indeed, at that time, France was in the middle of a period of transition between the 4th and the 5th Republic. It was also in the middle of the decolonization wars, in Indo-China and in Algeria. Doubts about the future, sensed through the idea of emptiness that the loss of colonies would leave behind, on the economical, geopolitical and cultural levels, have raised a social anguish about a future that was seen like a huge void.

In the installation "Faults", made of empty plastic bags, the political reference of void (its "history or archive", as Michel Foucault would say) coexists with its poetic form. These two aspects of the void, political and poetical, exist in a way related to space as well as to time. These notions indeed exist through the space contained in and surrounding each sculpture, but they are also linked to the medium's fragility, which then gives them an ephemeral existence.

I use material - empty plastic bags, which could easily disappear. The fragility of these sculptures presupposes that it will have an ephemeral existence. These sculptures then create a fault in time, which, from a metaphorical point of view, is a temporal void. Void is then not only a physical and spatial reality. The void and its geometry are variable. It is ephemeral and then temporal.

The empty plastic bags, as items, are not the whole work of art. They are everyday life's goods reappropriated so that they raise questions. This reappropriation aims at involving the viewer in an experience, that will remain beyond the work of art. In "The Order of Things", Michel Foucault demonstrates how all representations of things neither depend completely on our culture, nor totally on the scientific rules that define them, but also on the space between these two extreme notions, which is experience. This experience affects our perception of the world more than we would like to believe, and the way things appear to our eyes is subordinated to it.

The experience of an artwork that you perceive through its historical content, its "archive", is, in my opinion, more than an objective iconological notion contained in its boundaries, but rather what subjectively binds us to the artwork. It arises from an intimate dialogue that works like a "sonar" between the artwork and the individual, and produces a personalized echo deep inside each one of us. The sound made by this "sonar" resonates deeply inside our own personal history, searching for an echo that will come back in the work, and vice versa, and this in as many different ways as there are individuals and their "self" on Earth. If two people look at the Van Eyck painting "The Arnolfini Couple", they may both appreciate it (or not), but not for the same reasons. I believe that the experience of an artwork has a very personal flavor, which belongs neither to the artist nor to the viewer, but which is a perpetual extension of a dialogue that differs among epochs and geographical position: space and time.

As I have said before, the experience of the void that these empty plastic bags reveal is a notion that has different and sometimes paradoxical sources. It underlines absence through presence, emptiness through fullness, space and time, but always in a subjective, almost intimate way.

When I think about these bags in space, they embody a shape, a message, an idea, but in an ephemeral way, for a very short time, meant to disappear, because of their fragility. This fragility gives the sculpture a very short lifetime, from which only experience will remain. This experience of the bag, which keeps the trace of what he had contained until it is destroyed or thrown away, is, for me, very close to an intimate moment, to a poetical experience with reality; like a poem you would experience instead of reading it.

In conclusion, this experience binds us to the work in time as well as in space, in a dark, untouchable, but true way - I mean beyond the myth of form, and in an "in between" space, in which poetry can exist. This space, which is similar sometimes to a boundary, sometimes to a limit, sometimes to what binds and separates space and time, void and fullness, "ethics and aesthetic," is the essence of all these opposite sides. At this level of the origin, poetry could exist. It is a void that is similar to a physical form as well as to a political and metaphysical referent. It is made, through its fragile experience, of a poetry that is simply similar to life...

I feel that this poetry of the artwork, through the experience that emanates from it, feeds, since ever, the desire for creation. I like to believe and see that, in contrast to prosaic daily life of Human Beings, this poetry brings us back to our deepest and natural instincts. Edgar Morin says, that human life interweaves poetry and prose. Prose represents the boring activities, necessary to make a living, like going to work everyday, reading emails, etc... Poetry corresponds to the natural activities, for which Human Being has always been prone to: sleeping, eating, making love, "consumation", as Georges Bataille would say. We have to live poetically. Unfortunately, Man lives on Earth prosaically. Poetry should not be only written, it must also be lived and thought.