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Heritage / Fiction

For a Retro-Prospective of Dwelling-in-Ambiances

Nicolas TIXIER¹

Abstract. The sense of dwelling in a place is founded on multiple sources. Seeing and recounting the resultant constructions remain one of the major challenges we face in attempting to understand usages and the capacity of a place to renew itself while maintaining what makes it specific and whose ambiance is both a catalyst and a revelatory agent. Based on Etienne Souriau's works on modes of existence, reviewed by David Lapoujade, we will study the ways in which it is possible to see in a projectual framework a retro-prospective approaches of dwelling-in-ambiances. To illustrate these propositions, we will rely on an urban project that we developed: "L'Affaire de l'aqueduc de la Reine Pédauque" (Toulouse, France).

Keywords. Ambiance, Heritage, Fiction, Modes of Existence, the Becomings of a Place

Daily Life in Project and Modes of Existence

The sense of dwelling in a place is founded on multiple sources. *Seeing* and *recounting* the resultant constructions remain one of the major challenges we face in attempting to understand usages and the capacity of a place to renew itself² while maintaining what makes it specific and whose ambiance is both a catalyst and a revelatory agent.

The acts of *seeing* and *recounting* refer in part to the figure of witness and advocate, in which, according to David Lapoujade, Philosopher of pragmatism, "perceiving is not simply about understanding what is perceived, but also witnessing and attesting its value. The witness is never neutral or impartial. He has the responsibility to *make see* what he was privileged to see, feel or think. He becomes a creator. From a perceiving (see) subject, he becomes a creating one (make see). That is because, behind the witness, the advocate appears. He is the one who makes something appear, who ensures that every creation becomes advocacy in favour of the existence it makes appear." (Lapoujade, 2017, 19). Beyond reporting, it potentially implies advocating for the *modes of existence* that David Lapoujade considers minor, as they do not always have a legitimate place within our contemporary societies. *Seeing* can sometimes be *glimpsing*, which requires us to be attentive to what happens discreetly. *Recounting* can sometimes mean what is difficult to tell, if not the unspeakable, with a speech that would become public, or even with the simple use of words. We must be attentive, present and find other ways to recount this sensitive part or find ways to share the experience.

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Project in collaboration with Didier TALLAGRAND, ESAAA, France

2. Architect and researcher Pascal Amphoux, in an unpublished paper, proposes three values to make heritage: a historical, a use and a renewal value.

While reviewing Philosopher Etienne Souriau's works (1943), David Lapoujade proposes to examine these modes of existence according to four spheres: the world of phenomena (whose perfection of their way of being is to appear, art of appearing), the cosmos of things (art of remaining), the kingdom of fictions (art of nourishing) and the cloud of virtualities (art of being incomplete). This is relatively original for exploring what *makes* heritage, and how it is embodied in ambiances, but also for imagining *future developments* of dwelling places through narratives, uses, gestures and spatial configurations... We can imagine here a very stimulating perspective to articulate *seeing*, *recounting* and *doing*, for researchers interested in the evolutions of a place, in order to give these minor existences the right to exist, as well as their possible futures. In each minor existence, we can thus question: "with which founding *movements* do the existences successfully *settle*?" However, while we must identify these modes of existence, we also must not expose them unduly, at the risk of seeing them vanish³ (Zaoui, 2013).

Building the times and spaces for the utterance of these modes of existence often gives rise to questions of "translation" for researchers of ambiances. The conditions for reading and understanding between the "languages" and the modes of representation of the different actors and fields must be created. To that end, we can try to set up installations that are, as Paul Ricoeur stated (2004), welcoming to the other's language, to offer a "language hospitality" and organize the material in order to disseminate it, make it talk to other materials. The role of third party must be a desire and not an obligation, as Ricoeur states again, as to work for the "broadening of one's own language." We often refer to narrative, and sometimes to fiction, in multiple forms and formats that have full power of utterance and sharing: text, film, picture, sound, performance, installation, etc., but also of renewal of the experience (Tixier, 2017, 273-283).

In each place, dwelling weaves a heritage of uses that is perceived in the forms of presences, movements, stories, continuities, evolutions, as well as disappearances. Heritage also appears in the daily life through recursive and cyclical times, in embedded temporalities. It can also appear through traces, signs and stigmas, both physical and memory-based. Like strata, they compose our perception of every situation, draw different heritages and open up to fictions. Taking care of these and opening them to possible sequels means stepping away from solely programmatic stakes to work on the dialogue relations between the three modes, *seeing*, *recounting* and *doing*. They all fall within public matters as much as they act on it with their own performative dimensions. "Public matters" is to be understood here not as a thing defined once and for all, "but as a composition, a theatre of action, and as a society" (Joseph, 1998, 6). At all dwelling levels, it is about accepting and creating a dialogue between the materials of the public matter, which is naturally fitted with a plethora of points of view, as many committed perspectives, fictions about reality, opening up to public and collective stories. Such stories, whose forms are also plural, are both individual ones and collective ones that time has turned public and partly fictionalized. On that part, we agree with Camille de Toledo's propositions (2016) who argues, with others, for the collective elaboration of a reflection on open times, potential times to fight against the reality of finiteness and melancholy. It relies on a principle of expansion to all things and all scales by looking for modes of existence already at play, potentially, in our present, to create fictions in their own right. "In the 21st century, fictions

3. See Pierre Zaoui's works on discretion, in which "the experience of a modest time that is enough," in which "we surreptitiously drag beings and things towards the relationships that they produce" and in which "beneath its quiet, withdrawn, apolitical appearance, a new relation to politics appears."

are no longer additions to reality. The multiple strata of fiction are, as surely as the geological strata create a cliff, what makes “reality.” There is no *reality* before or beside *fiction*. We switch between the fictions that settle us down and turn us into aggregates of histories, beliefs, stories, in which we are born and we die.”

For each architectural, urban or territorial situation studied, we unavoidably extract certain *materials* and *histories* to the detriment of others in order to create stories and projects. Heritage is thus to be seen here firstly as a loan to build a filiation, a continuation, a fiction where the latter is not so much built on what we *passively* inherit as on what we choose to *willingly* inherit. It is about patiently and methodically building the narrative threads of a given situation. The threads that weave a specific and popular reading, as it deals with everyone’s daily life. Retro-prospective threads that, like the strata, compose our perception, draw heritages and open fictions in their own right⁴. Threads that weave a palimpsest of ambiances for all inhabited place (Marot, 2010; Gamal Saïd, 2014).

The point is to bear witness to the minor things. To advocate for their modes of existence. To write their possible becomings. These three actions, or missions, can change our points of view, initiate practices and build upon a use value as well as a renewal for all discreet forms of heritage, for anyone interested in its ambiances.

“L’Affaire de l’aqueduc de la Reine Pédauque”

To exemplify and engage a discussion about these propositions, we will rely on an urban project that we developed with Artist Didier Tallagrand: “L’affaire de l’aqueduc de la Reine Pédauque.” This project is located at Mirail in Toulouse (France).

Mirail is a large urban area composed of three neighbourhoods going from South to North: Bellefontaine, Reynerie and Mirail Université. It was fully built at the beginning of the 1970s by Architects Georges Candilis, Alexis Josic and Shadrach Woods. This neighbourhood, of over 20,000 inhabitants, is nowadays controversial, as is the case with many districts of the 1960s-70s modernity. Its renewal and evolution go through a rehabilitation of its history. Firstly, it deals with its recent history, a concrete utopia of its architectural and urban modernity. It also deals with its social history with the invention, partly disappointed, of a new life supporting the urbanity open to all. However, and it is often forgotten, it also deals with a history that is older and more deeply rooted in its geography (slope and water) and in its natural chrematistics (fauna and flora), i.e. a history of the ground.

It all started in 2013, when the renewal project of a park called *Le Petit Bois* in Bellefontaine brought back to attention the underground presence of a Roman aqueduct: the Reine Pédauque aqueduct. Michel Boulcourt, landscapist in charge of giving his opinion of the *Petit Bois* project, presented it as such: “We cannot forget the Roman aqueduct, whose origins date back to late-first and early-second century AD: some (last) traces are present on the site. About eight kilometres long, it was the last and most important of the two aqueducts that were built to provide the Gallo-Roman city with water. It contained deux sections. The first, from Monlong to Cépière,

4. Scottish biologist and urban planner Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) is undoubtedly one of the first people who thought a territory like that. He read the past times, like the one to come, in the traces of the physical, sensitive and social organisations of the present. For Geddes, whether they are urban, natural, social, etc., the delineations represent as much the history of a place and its mode of description as its future and its mode of projection (Torres, Chaudier, Tixier, 2016).

collected the sources and brought water to the castle (*castellum*) through an underground canal (*specus*). The second, from Cépière to the city, went over arches to cross the lower grounds of Saint-Cyprien. The aqueduct supplied around 12,500m² every day, i.e. around 500 to 600 litres every day per person... (a volume highly superior to current needs).” The aqueduct was relatively forgotten at this time. The first reason is that the aqueduct is... invisible: it is either buried in the south, or has been destroyed in the north, where it was overground with 517 arches and ended up passing over the Garonne. However, looking more closely and after more research and exploration, we discovered that the layout of its outline continues, and that it is available at more than 90%. All the way, we can find traces and clues that show its existence through different modes.

How can we make this line exist today, both in collective imagination and in unprecedented practices? How can we work on the modes of existence of this line to guarantee a secure outline tomorrow and give it possible futures with renewed uses? How can we nourish the original fictional imagination and how can we restore a sensitive potential of ordinary and extraordinary discovery? To create a narrative and a project, we organised a set of contributory workshops and a collection of archives⁵: a collective commented walk with experts in the different areas crossed (archaeologists, urban planners, sociologists, specialists in soft mobilities, etc.), a bike ride in search of the possible itinerary, organised on a Sunday morning with more than 80 participants from the whole city of Toulouse, a contributory roundtable to collect stories, perceptions and elements for the projects after the bike itinerary. Lastly, we organised a workshop gathering the institutional actors involved to discuss a first synthesis and deploy the project’s possibilities at different levels and according to different modalities. Ultimately, the itinerary is available nowadays on a website that tells graphically the story in five episodes, mentioning the elements from the previous workshops.

It allowed us to develop four narrative and projectual potentialities, as many cases to clarify and expand:

A mythological affair: or how the legend of a Visigoth queen with webbed feet gave her name to a Roman hydraulic installation elaborated in the early 3rd century. The queen, in her palace, owned a room for the “baths of the queen,” directly supplied in water by an aqueduct. How can this story of a queen and water continue to exist tomorrow?

A hydraulic affair: or how water, the vital and multisensory element, still appears today along the outline of the aqueduct. Fountains, lakes, ditches, canals and sources... originated from sources that are still active. They reveal an underground presence, which, overground, appears at times in a green vegetal flow. The revelation of this aqueduct, like a fine but real thread, offers Mirail the opportunity to reconnect with its ancient history, with its rural locality and vegetable lowlands, anterior to its construction as a new neighbourhood.

A metropolitan affair: or how the bicycle can here be assimilated to the liquid element of tomorrow. More than a stroll, the point is to propose an efficient crossing,

5. This project was developed in 2014 and 2015 as part of the *BazarUrbain* collective (www.bazarurbain.com) under the supervision of Toulouse Métropole and the City of Toulouse, thanks to the involvement of Pierre Pisani, Archaeologist, and David Coirier, mission head on the social stakes of urban renewal. A website was developed by Jérémie Bancillon in order to report interactively and graphically on the transect and the collected data: <http://aqueduc.jeb-project.net>

that no outline today allows to go from Mirail to the city centre by bike, based on the original outline of the aqueduct. The bicycle path could play with what already exists, compose with portions that are already usable. It could propose a unique point of view on the city, a section of it, a transect (Tixier, 2017). To whoever will use it, the straight and direct line of the aqueduct will offer a new reading perspective of Toulouse, almost literal, through the crossing of its successive crowns and a path through its urbanities.

A landscape affair with everyday practices: or how the three parks of Mirail (Bellefontaine, Reynerie, Mirail Université), which make the inhabitants proud, are clearly connected to each other and offer ways for daily commutes and strolls along this part of the Garonne where the aqueduct took roots. An active line where a thousand and one propositions can be connected and deployed: in the promotion of what exists as much as in the introduction of innovations, in the everyday ordinary as much as in the short-lived extraordinary.

According to Didier Tallagrand, the artist with whom we collaborated, “here, the landscape dissolves, the eye pulls away like an access to the wonderful, beyond the melody that meets expectations. Towards a place beyond the missing forms. It is not the construction of a violin case behind the back of the world, but the stream of water now. Maybe we should think like the underground, by gathering points of reality between the beginning and the end. From the source to the fountain: two toggling situations and then shooting straight. Crossing in startlement, in time, like steps that separate and make the vanished aqueduct resound from below. A rhythm, a distraction as an addition to architecture: “is the small tunnel that we cross the duct of the aqueduct?” asks a local. Producing a spark in the process, making a hole in space and time, a hole for nothing. A spark of light and building the place of the water that streams within the story and space, perhaps like a fiction.”



Figure 1. Outline of the aqueduct (light blue) and the possible path (orange)

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