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CONFUSED FORCES

Jean Arnaud

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Confused Forces: The Tree, Living Memory in Twenty-First Century Art

JEAN ARNAUD

ABSTRACT

This article concerns the way in which a perceptual shock caused by a tree can constitute an event for artists, to the point of motivating the project and then the production of a work. In other words, the issue is to analyze how the encounter with certain alive or dead trees, whether physical or through a medium/reported, can determine a creative process in which memory plays an important role. The analysis will be carried out through two works in progress that are very different in their conception as well as in their means of production (the “Beuys’ acorns” project by the artist couple Ackroyd and Harvey and a personal project entitled “Forces confuses”). Various conceptual tools from psychoanalytical theory, anthropology, sociology, phenomenology of perception, theory of memory, and art history structure the case studies; these define a specific relationship between the life of forms and forms of life, linked in the experience of these works, in relation to the aesthetic, ecological, and sociopolitical context of the beginning of the twenty-first century.

KEYWORDS: *biomorphism, empathy, life of forms, memory, tree, visual narrative*

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CONFUSED FORCES: THE TREE, LIVING MEMORY IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY ART

This article concerns the way in which a perceptive shock caused by a tree can constitute an event for artists, to the point of motivating the project and then the realization of a work. In other words, the issue is to analyze how the encounter with certain alive or dead trees, whether physical or through a medium/reported, can determine a creative process. The analysis will be carried out through two works in progress that are very different in their conception as well as in their means of production; the aim is to understand what can link or differentiate the approaches that characterize them in relation to the aesthetic and social context of the beginning of the twenty-first century. The first evolving project is called “Beuys’ acorns” (Fig. 1–3); it consists of live oak trees and started in 2007 by the English artist couple Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey; I initiated the second project called “Forces confuses” (Confused forces. Fig. 4–15) in 2018; a number of successive exhibitions were made from two old photographs of a centuries-old elm tree felled in 1983 (Fig. 4–5).

On a general level, let us first recall that like matter or being delivered to our senses, any tree can be the object of a sensitive experience without necessarily becoming the subject or material of a creative process. Concerning this phenomenology of reception, we should remind with Merleau-Ponty that

At every moment my perceptive field is filled with reflections, cracks, fleeting tactile impressions that I am unable to link to the perceived context and that I nevertheless place in the world, without ever confusing them with my reveries. At every moment I also dream around things, I imagine objects or people whose presence here is not incompatible with the context, and yet they do not mingle with the world, they are ahead of the world, on the theatre of the imagination.¹
(Merleau-Ponty 1945, IV)

If the interactions between the real, factual, and imaginary presence of things globally characterize the phenomena of perception, let us now specify three topics that will guide our reflection, which focuses on that of trees from “Beuys’ acorns” and “Forces confuses”:

1. *Dynamic memory, empathy.* A vivid memory of bodies (vegetal and human) structures the conception, fabrication, and reception of “Beuys’ acorns” and “Forces confuses.” Faced to the latter, the viewer experiences a subjective time in which the past, present, and future are intertwined—“Duration is the continuous progress of the past which erodes the future and swells as it moves forward”² (Bergson 1941, 4). The temporality of both works is determined by a dynamic memory, and the artists’ approach is based on an empathy with the trees that caused the initial psychological shock:

We have the faculty of interpreting at any moment what we perceive as a reflection, more or less faithful, of our own interiority. . . . This ability to recognize that the self is something that the subject can share with his environment is what is called “empathy” (from the German “*Einfühlung*,” literally: “the fact of feeling oneself in something.”³ (Romand et Bernard 2021, 705–6)

The artists who made “Beuys’ acorns” and “Forces confuses” did indeed “feel themselves” in the trees that impregnated their approach, whether they were living oaks in Ackroyd and Dan Harvey’s work or various living and extinct trees in my “Forces confuses” project. Confronting trees arouses emotion and empathy for all sorts of reasons: longevity, spectacular forms, material, relationship to life and death, morality or sacredness, mirror effect for self-writing, etc. Alexander de Humboldt assured us, for example, in the middle of the nineteenth century,

. . . that it was the astonishment created by the sight of a colossal dragon tree in an old tower of the Berlin Botanical Gardens that immediately provoked in him the shock of the unexpected born of “direct observation of the great forms of the plant kingdom” (Humboldt 2000, 346–7), and determined his vocation as a scholar-explorer.”⁴ (Corbin 2020, 11)

2. *Stunning reminiscence, narrative.* The perception of trees is defined by a common denominator in the two approaches: the plants that have made events for the artists qualify places of memory or are marked by a particular history, more or less known. In the two works analysed, trees are thus used as “arborical”⁵ cultural objects, inscribed during their lifetime or after their death in a historical, institutional heritage or not.

These trees/events are carriers of narratives projected onto them by a human community. They can thus suggest various mental archaeologies to artists: being the object of a reenactment or a plastic redeployment, arousing a reinvestment of this narrative material, inspiring new visual fictions. Originally, the memory-images (Bergson 1990, 86) of these trees are anchored in the minds of the artists; by reminiscence and sometimes in a staggering way, the perception of these singular natural objects in the present has activated in them a more or less conscious link between voluntary and involuntary memories, in the Bergsonian sense, which pushes them to act through a creative process.⁶ “Beuys’ acorns” and “confuses” are responses to a past that is both factual and imaginary, whose memory-images have taken shape in a present event. In other words, the artists elaborate a passage between the memory that has conditioned their emotion and intention upstream, and the material that concretizes their work. Let us remember that Proust once reformulated the Bergsonian relationship between matter and memory in these terms:

For me, voluntary memory, which is above all a memory of the intellect and of the eyes, gives us of the past only faces without truth; but that a smell, a flavour rediscovered, in quite different circumstances, reawakens in us, in spite of ourselves, the past, we feel how different that past was from what we thought we remembered, and our voluntary memory painted, like bad painters, with colours without truth. . . . My work is dominated by the distinction between involuntary memory and voluntary memory.⁷ (Proust quoted by Dreyfus 1926, 287–89)

The role of the memory-image in the creative process will be discussed, especially in relation to the “Forces confuses” project, in the second part of this study.

3. *Patrimonialization, transition to art.* The first of the two evolving works was made by Ackroyd and Harvey following their striking perception of 7000 *Eichen* (7000 Oaktrees, 1982–87), a work made by Joseph Beuys for documenta 7 in Kassel in 1982, itself still growing today (Fig. 3). In this case, Beuys’s oak trees were a direct event for both artists, as a living part of a site-specific work with a wide landscape perimeter. These oaks are accompanied by basalt columns, which are also planted in the ground, as we shall see below. The trees are scattered individually or in small groups; while they

are all linked to Beuys's individual gesture, they are also linked by a collective memory that has gradually become attached to them over the years in Kassel. In the rural and urban landscape, these living beings have become cultural objects whose memory is also rooted in art history. In the second project we are interested in, "Forces confuses," the event was produced by the mediated but disturbing perception of a centuries-old elm tree in two photographs that triggered a very active process of recollection of an old experience with the tree. It is the representation of this elm tree, a living being classified long before its death and now a cultural object, that has initiated an evolving work that is materializing as a visual narrative in several episodes in different countries.

In both "Beuys' acorns" and "Forces confuses," the artists were troubled by prominent trees/events that must be considered, in the context of this study, as cultural objects—the result of their museification, their heritage classification, or their artification—as well as living or dead natural objects. We refer to the concept of artification rather than artialization because it better characterizes the phenomena we are dealing with here in relation to trees, which are considered more as cultural objects. Alain Roger defined artialization, in his *Court Traité du Paysage* (Short Treatise on Landscape 1997), in relation to the intervention of art in the transformation of nature or the country into landscape. But in 2004, Roberta Shapiro used the term artification to indicate the transformation of non-art into art according to a neo-Darwinian theory. This refers to the process by which beings, things, and ways of doing or thinking have achieved the status of works or creative approach (Shapiro 2004). In any case, "Beuys' acorns" or "Forces confuses" are structured, upstream of their conception, on the passage to art or heritage of certain trees, whether they are living or represented. They signify a strong relationship between history and topicality according to different intentions—ecological, socio-political, anthropological . . . —that it's time to analyze.

"BEUYS' ACORNS": THE TREE HIDES THE FOREST

"I felt, some days, that the trees were looking at me, talking to me . . . I was there, listening . . ."⁸ (Marchand 31).

In order to define how Ackroyd and Harvey used the memory of trees following the landmark reception of *7000 Eichen*, a quick historical review is necessary in relation to the use of real trees in an artwork. Two sculptures by



FIG. 1 Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey, *Trees on Tour*, “Beuys’ acorns,” 2015, 10 x 25 m. One hundred and twelve oak trees in pots, Bordeaux Botanical Garden. Photograph by the author.



FIG. 2 Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey, *Trees on tour*, “Beuys’ acorns.” Oak tree planted at the end of 2015 in the Bordeaux Botanical Garden. Photograph by the author.



FIG 3 7000 Eichen. The first oak tree planted by Beuys on Friedrichplatz in front of the Fredericianum in 1982. Black and white photograph by Dieter Schwerdtle. Rights reserved.

Giuseppe Penone will serve as examples; the first one used a living tree and the second one dead trees as materials. First, to make *Alpes maritimes*, 1968. *Il poursuivra sa croissance sauf en ce point* (Maritime Alps, 1968. It will continue to grow except at this point), the artist made a bronze cast of his hand from a photograph of him clutching a young tree in the forest of Garessio,

Penone's home village in the Italian Piedmont. He then placed this hand on the tree, which continued to grow with the lasting presence of this intruder embedded in its bark. In *Alpes maritimes*, the artist questions the metamorphic power of the tree and, more globally, the impact of human actions on nature. Later, in his *Alberi* series (Trees, begun in the early 1970s), the artist revealed the organicity of the tree that was used to make an industrial beam, by uncovering the growth rings to the original sapling. By digging into the wood, each of the *Alberi* presents the intimate memory of a beam. In the context of our study, these two sculptures by Penone are counter-examples of sorts. First, because the tree chosen to make *Alpes maritimes* did not provoke any more of a perceptual shock in the artist than another that might have been selected in its place in the same forest. Second, there are multiple versions of the *Alberi*, all carved from anonymous timbers. In both cases, the trees are subject and material; they are not considered as individuals with specific and differentiated stories, which they would have shared upstream with a human group and which Penone might have taken into account in his approach.

In this sense, the thousands of oak trees that make up *7000 Eichen* were no more a reception event for Joseph Beuys when he undertook his action in 1982 in front of the Fredericianum Museum for documenta 7 in Kassel⁹ (Fig. 3). It is the number of trees that counts here, their becoming-forest, but not their individual history; the action consists of planting them to campaign for a more ecological urban development. Like Penone at the same time, the German artist extended the field of sculpture to include a reflection on time and envisaged the work of art in an evolutionary perspective from a living material. But Beuys used the phenomenon of natural growth—the young oaks planted are now about forty years old—in a more directly sociopolitical way: each donor or buyer of one or more young oaks participated in its collective creation. This action is part of the artist's overall project, namely an ecopolitical and spiritual transformation of society through art, in its relationship to living beings in general. Like Penone, Beuys used trees as natural materials, but they are not the symbolic repositories of common narratives that have already been formed. In contrast, Beuys's work was an important reception event for Ackroyd and Harvey in 2007. *7000 Eichen* served as a material, historical, and political substratum for their own work, without being a mere quotation: it is a generational extension of Beuys's gesture, a form of re-enactment.

The "Beuys' acorns" project began with a collection of acorns produced by the famous oak trees, which were then about twenty-five years old. The

7000 Eichen are to be seen as conductive bodies¹⁰ for Ackroyd and Harvey. By planting these acorns, they not only use the trees as witnesses of their recent history with humans, but they amplify the anthropological and socio-political implications of Beuys's gesture. Returning to the perceptual phenomena engendered by such an appropriation of *7000 Eichen*, a folding of the future into the past takes place in the present when a viewer experiences "Beuys' acorns." This evolving work reminds us that "The past and the future exist only too much in the world, they exist in the present, and what is missing from being itself to be temporal is the non-being of the elsewhere, of the once and the tomorrow. . . . The presence of the past to consciousness remains a mere presence of fact."¹¹ (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 471–72).

"Beuys' acorns" is not a simple homage to Beuys, because for Ackroyd and Harvey this reception event is almost consubstantial with their own history as artists. They have been working together since 1990, and their joint work generally reflects a commitment to the survival of threatened ecosystems. For example, in 2019 they collaborated with the environmental movement Extinction Rebellion, making grass art coats for London protesters. Plant materials are prominent in their work, where the forms of the living are inseparable from the life of the forms and a reflection on duration. "Beuys' acorns" extend the *7000 Eichen* action by respecting the German artist's initial intention, which was to build our cities and our environment according to the model of the forest. In other words, the tree-events received from Beuys by Ackroyd and Harvey are to be seen in a continuous and lasting relationship to be established between the individual (a tree, a human) and the collective (the forest, the society), both literally and metaphorically. But they add to the evolutionary dimension of Beuys's work in progress a reflection on genealogy, by inserting art into a question on the lineage of a living work, in Tim Ingold's meaning:

Is life more of a growth or a flow? . . . After all, a tree's growth depends on the sap that flows through its bark and nourishes it, in the same way that the river feeds and fertilizes the land on its banks. Throughout the history of the Western world, from classical antiquity to the present day, the metaphors of water and tree have always competed for first place.¹² (Ingold, 137)

Ackroyd and Harvey produced from the harvested acorns 250 historically charged shrubs by descent, beginning a new activist process of conceptually endless forest production. In the first presentations in England,

the young oaks were displayed in small pots as if in a garden center. The story then branches out in a spreading manner, often far from Kassel and England. The pots grew larger, and then the oaks began to be planted in the ground as their European travels dictated. The artists were invited in 2015 to participate in the events accompanying COP 21 in France. Thanks to private funding from the Nature Addict Fund,¹³ they developed a travelling project in seven French cities: Bordeaux, Nantes, Mulhouse, Lyon, Nice, Paris, and Versailles. The program had several components. The first one was called *Trees on tour*: between October 2015 and February 2016, the collection was moved from one city to another to raise awareness of the climate cause. In the Bordeaux stage, the pots were displayed in various public places: the city's botanical garden hosted 112 pots (Fig. 1), and other shrubs were distributed among the *Centre d'Arts Plastiques Contemporains* (CAPC, Center for Contemporary Plastic Arts) and a library in Bordeaux. Various tree ceremonies were organized to plant one of the oaks purchased during the trip, the term ceremony giving something of a ritualistic and mystical tone to the symbolic gesture of reforestation, which Beuys would no doubt have appreciated. A second-generation oak tree planted in the Bordeaux Botanical Garden in late 2015 can be seen today (Fig. 2), but Ackroyd and Harvey are now considering

Mass plantings in particularly tree-poor English towns. Aesthetically, this is a call to cover our cities with trees and plants, to prepare us for an uncertain future. Instead of 7,000 trees, the artists are calling for 7 million to be planted across cities in England and Europe.¹⁴ (COAL presentation 2011)

In Ackroyd and Harvey's various actions to perpetuate Beuys's gesture, the generational renewal potential of trees reflects the artists' commitment to safeguarding ecosystems, which can increase the chances of sustainable survival of our own species. Like Beuys, Ackroyd and Harvey advocate a more balanced cohabitation with the living world. "Beuys' acorns" is a work that is capable of self-engendering in time because it incorporates the reproductive mechanisms of oak trees; we are thus caught up in a double temporal movement of transformation. First, let us remember at a general level that the reception of a work changes over time, but that the cultural object it constitutes does not change form. In the preface to *Pour une esthétique de la réception* (Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, Jauss 1972), Jean Starobinski stated that

Reception is a dynamic process that transforms, from age to age, the concretizations of a work and changes its values and meaning. Obviously, a tension exists between the horizon of the present—from which the reception of the past work takes place—and the horizon of the past, which is gone forever; nevertheless, the horizon of the present comes from the past and the understanding of a work of the past results from the “fusion of horizons,” an expression that H. R. Jauss borrows from Gadamer.¹⁵

These words about the original reception of literature are transferable to the reception of a visual work. But on a second, more singular level, the reception of “Beuys’ acorns” does not only change according to the interpretation one makes of it at different moments by “merging horizons”; this work perpetuates itself like any living being, and its perception also transforms itself according to a permanent metamorphic movement, *of body to body* subjected to a vital cycle (birth, growth, aging, death, regeneration). On a phenomenological level, such aesthetic experiences take place in “a single time that confirms itself, that cannot bring anything into existence without having already founded it as present and as past to come, and that establishes itself all at once”¹⁶ (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 481).

“FORCES CONFUSES”: THE FOREST HIDES THE TREE

“Trees spoke before men”¹⁷ (Bacon 7).

When describing such sensitive experiences, refer to the concept of haptics (the gaze that touches, in the sense of Riegl taken up by Deleuze¹⁸) is relevant because it applies particularly well to works based on natural beings whose corporeality is experienced. In “Forces Confuses,” the empathic reception of the trees took place first indirectly through two photographs (Fig. 4 and 5), and then directly through the physical encounter of several trees in different locations.

“L’Ormolvier.”

The “Forces confuses” project grew out of the initial perception of a particular elm tree through two photographs that were eventful for me in 2017. These black and white images were taken in 1966 and I discovered them by chance while sorting through a family archive following a series of deaths. They show this ancient tree that died from graphiosis—an infectious disease that decimated most elms in the twentieth century—and was felled

in 1983. However, the shock came from the fact that I recognized the child I was in 1966, in and in front of this hollow tree that was then a familiar playground. The monumental elm tree, planted in 1598 under Henry IV, had stood in the village square as a symbol of freedom since the end of the religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. Sensations, emotions, smells, time lost, time regained, precise or diffuse memories came back regularly to my memory in this period of mourning.

The two photos were taken a few minutes apart by my father and show the young boy moving from one image to the other with an identical framing. This type of recollection mechanism was described by Roland Barthes in *La chambre claire*; he defined reception as the complementarity of *studium* and *punctum*. On the one hand, “It is through the *studium* that I am interested in many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimonies or as good historical pictures”¹⁹ (Barthes 1980, 48). It is culturally that I can participate in the action represented in the photograph that illustrates a fact. But on the other hand, “The *punctum* of a photograph is that chance which, in it, points to me (but also bruises me, grips me)”²⁰ (Barthes 1980, 49). That last sentence states exactly what happened for me in 2017.

Another element helps us to understand the way in which these photos became an event in a period of mourning, which no doubt explains why a creative process gradually took shape after receiving them like two



FIG. 4 The elm tree of Ramatuelle (Var, France) in 1966, 13 × 9 cm, black and white photograph by Félix Arnaud.



FIG. 5 The elm tree of Ramatuelle (Var, France) in 1966, 13 × 9 cm, black and white photograph by Félix Arnaud.

lightning bolts. In a commentary on the theory of memory in Bergson and Proust, in which he refers to Freud, Walter Benjamin writes that “The more consciousness is forced to deal with shocks, the more voluntary memory will develop, and the more involuntary memory will decline”²¹ (Benjamin 2003, 316–17). The idea that the creative gesture is caused by the telescoping of two memories lies at the basis of what motivated the whole “Forces confuses” project: in front of these photos, a voluntary and conscious memory has exhumed mental images from the past, whose relationship to any factual truth is based on illusions, on the one hand. On the other hand, an involuntary memory has generated strong and unexpected sensations, through the rediscovery of this tree in a place frequented in my childhood—the Place de l’Ormeau.

To date, three chapters of “Forces confuses” have been completed or are in production since the initial photographic shock. In fact, various successive and striking encounters with trees led me by steps from the village of Ramatuelle to the Russian border in Finnish Lapland. Initially, the sedimentation of memory caused by the two photos led me to investigate the history of the disappeared tree-monument in Ramatuelle by combing all

sorts of public and family archives. I collected testimonies from inhabitants, the oldest of whom remembered the party around the elm tree with the American soldiers after the landing on the French shores in 1945 and also remembered me as a child. I found parts of the elm tree that were kept by local people or the municipality (Fig. 6). These fragments of the tree are exhibited in the first act of this work in progress, called “L’Ormolivier” (The elmolive tree, a portmanteau word)²² for a simple reason: an olive tree replaced the elm tree that disappeared in 1985, but it still stands today in front of the Café de l’Ormeau on the Place de l’Ormeau, never renowned.²³ The olive tree carries the memory of its predecessor and the images of the two trees are superimposed, suspended between reality and fiction in a common space. For this first chapter of “Forces confuses,” I produced a series of digital drawings that determine transtemporal portraits of the elm tree and a plural portrait of the imaginary elmolive tree, based on various documents and according to a stratification principle (Fig. 7 and 8).



FIG. 6 Fragments of elm tree kept at the town hall and by some inhabitants of the village since 1983. Photographs by the author.

Everyone can experience that “what is often without immediate relationship in clock time or measurable space can be brought together and ordered within language in a close contiguity”²⁴ (Simon 1970, 9–10).



FIG. 7 Jean Arnaud, *L'Ormolivier 01*, 2020, variable dimensions, digital drawing on tracing paper or watercolor paper.



FIG. 8 Jean Arnaud, *L'Ormeau 06*, 2020, variable dimensions, digital drawing on tracing paper or watercolor paper.

“À LA LISIÈRE” (TO THE EDGE).

At the same time as I produced the drawings for “L’Ormolivier,” I was invited to the “Reception Events” conference and to propose an exhibition on this theme in Tartu. “À la lisière” was presented in the monumental staircase of the University of Tartu and is the second chapter of “Forces confuses.” The exhibition project was quickly thought of as an opportunity to distance myself from the significant event triggered by the two found photos; I looked for a local equivalent in Estonia to create a kind of repetition of the first Ramatuelle act, but whose memory would involve me personally as little as possible. Guided by chance, I found in the new *Eesti Rahva Muuseum* in Tartu (Estonian National Museum) an ancient tree whose lower trunk (about five meters high), covered with Latin cross-shaped notches, is displayed as a sculpture in the museum (Fig. 9). This cross pine (*ristimänd* in Estonian) is also a heritage object, but its history, which I have appropriated in “À la lisière” in connection with that of the elm tree, was unknown to me

at that stage and concerned people whose language and culture I did not know.

I learned from an investigation that the cross pine was a guardian tree located at the edge of the Laatre forest, seventy-five kilometres south of Tartu, in Valga County. The incision of the crosses, gradually fossilized in the bark, corresponds to a pagan survival consisting in putting the soul of a deceased relative under the protection of the spirits of the forest before burying it in the cemetery.²⁵ Unlike the elm tree planted as a symbol of republican freedom in the middle of a village, the pine was a psychopomp tree, a bifacial and “semi-civilized” being, one of those

pines of the outskirts bound to certain sacrifices in their part turned toward the wood, but free of their development in their part facing the fields, the void, the non-wooded world. It is their function to border their society, to hide its mysteries, to conceal its inner deprivation (austerity, sacrifices, lacks) by the development of their lower parts.”²⁶ (Ponge 146–47)

The image of this commemorative pine tree was in turn superimposed, after that of the Ramatuelle olive tree, on that of the elm tree, in a process of embedding and mental transfer. (Fig. 10).

Although the initial idea behind “À la lisière” was to displace the self-centered gesture that led to the exhibition “L’Ormolivier,” the project quickly shifted to an intercultural form. The exhibition crosses the history of the elm tree and the cross pine in an open and multiple visual dialogue and graphic narrative. At the entrance, at the foot of the stairs, is the upper part of the pine tree trunk; kept in the reserves of the National Museum, it was presented here for the first time to the public²⁷ (Fig. 11). Documents (images and texts) also bear witness to the relationship between the pine tree and those who knew it alive or dead in Laatre (Valga county); nearby are images of fragments of the Ramatuelle elm tree. These juxtapositions establish a continuity between autonomous cultures; each spectator can construct his or her own story from the elements presented, according to the memory of certain trees that he or she may have encountered and without linguistic barriers.

The exhibition follows the spiral movement of the grand staircase, and the works are all created in a transparent graphic superimposition, like those in the exhibition “L’Ormolivier.” The images of the three trees—the northern pine, the elm, and the southern olive trees—are intermingled in



FIG. 9 Bottom part of the trunk with crosses from Laatre, *Eesti Rahva Muuseum* (Estonian National Museum). Photograph by the author, 2020.

whole or in part in laminated spaces (Arnaud 2014) (Fig. 14 and 15). These drawings are characterized by heterogeneity. On the one hand, the places perceived in them are heterotopic. “Heterotopias are linked, more often



FIG. 10 Left: Laatre cross-pine (died 1990) pictured before it was cut down in 2014. Photograph Kaarel Tarand. © *Eesti Rahva Muuseum* (Estonian National Museum). Courtesy of the Museum.

Right: The living Laatre cross-pine, photographed in 1958 at the side of the Laatre-Õruste road (Valga County, Estonia). Unknown author. Rights reserved.

than not, to cuttings of time, that is to say, they open onto what could be called by pure symmetry heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function fully when men find themselves in a kind of absolute rupture with their traditional time²⁸ (Foucault 1994, 759). But on the other hand, these layered works also attempt to attribute a heteronomous (nonautonomous) character to two European cultures by mixing the images of memory trees that refer to them. However, even though “À la lisière” proposes a visual experience of crossing cultures, this project is not transcultural in the sense that Fernando Ortiz originally gave to this term. The Cuban anthropologist invented the idea of transculturation in 1940 to account for the ethnic complexity of a country (Cuba) and to synthesize the concepts of acculturation and deculturation of peoples.²⁹ This does not correspond to the way in which the French and Estonian cultures are connected here in relation to memory works.



FIG. 11 View of the exhibition “À la lisière,” University of Tartu, 16 November 2020–20 February 2021). The upper part of the trunk of the cross-pine, with the frame in which it is currently kept in the Estonian National Museum. Height 2.5 m. Photograph by Stella Mõttus. © Stella Mõttus. Courtesy of the author.



FIG. 12 Jean Arnaud, *Laatre Ristimänd 01*, 2020, 138 × 200 cm, digital drawing on tracing paper.

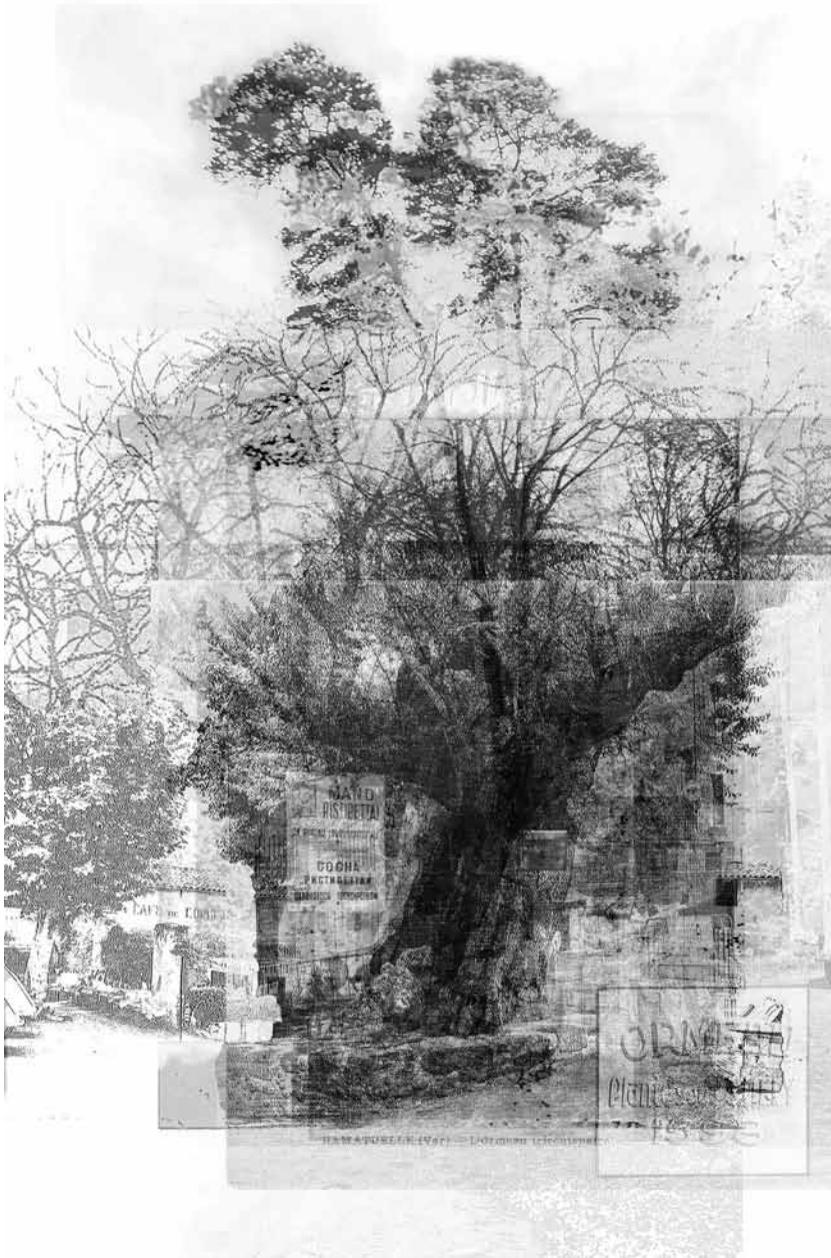


FIG. 13 Jean Arnaud, *L'Ormeau-pin*, 2020, variable dimensions, digital drawing on tracing paper or watercolor paper.

“FORCES CONFUSES, GARDIENS COSMIQUES” (CONFUSED FORCES, COSMIC GUARDIANS).

“Man, like tree, is a being where confused forces come to stand”³⁰ (Bachelard 1943, 268).

This last part concerns the third event of “Forces confuses,” currently in preparation. It is entitled “Forces confuses, gardiens cosmiques,” and its conception is broadly similar to that of “À la lisière,” concerning the distancing of the initial shock caused by the two photographs. It was developed following an invitation to the University of Lapland (Rovaniemi, Finland) to present “Forces confuses.” During the journey from Helsinki to Lapland in 2021, I continued the search for heritage trees, museified or “ratified,” crossing different cultural contexts from the south to the north of Finland. The result of their implementation in the project “Forces confuses, gardiens cosmiques” will be exhibited at the Arktikum Research Centre in Rovaniemi in 2023. Although it is conceived according to the same principle of interculturality as “À la lisière,” this third part differs from it on several points:

1. *Repetitions, metamorphoses.* At least six trees will be used, chosen from among others encountered during a road trip from Helsinki to Lapland via Central Finland. The perception of these singular trees is based on the same mental transfer as for the *ristimänd* in “À la lisière.” These cultural objects, whether living (three of them) or dead (three), are all part of cultural heritage or museum collections, and they denote different aspects of Finnish cultural history. Some of these trees (the “museified dead”) may be physically present in the exhibition. And various documents or photographs collected will be used to make the drawings presented at the Arktikum in summer 2023. This Finnish act of “Forces confuses” is still determined by a strong link between plastic art metamorphoses and visual narrative, plant material and graphic signs mixed together (see in Appendix: the legends of Figs. I to VI document the six trees).
2. *Trees and rocks.* Two of these trees (Fig. IV and V) were chosen in relation to the territory in which they grew. In this sense, some of the works made for this third Finnish chapter will take up the idea developed in 2021 for a project related to “Forces confuses” but that could not be realized. The planned installation was both a factual and fictional representation of two intertwined bodies: a tree known for its role in World War I—the Montpy oak located in the forest of Mont-Dieu,

French Ardennes—and a large meteorite that fell a little over a century ago in the forest. But to better describe the relationship between plant and mineral, which will also determine some of the works in the exhibition “Forces confuses, gardiens cosmiques” in Lapland, let us shortly reconsider the works of Beuys and Penone. First, we had overlooked an important aspect of Beuys’s *7000 Eichen* work above, namely that each oak tree was associated with a column of basalt (Fig. 1). With this double planting, Beuys confronted, as he often does in his work, the material-specific energy and duration of the two elements—in this case living wood and inert basalt—in a cosmic and social metaphor. In addition, in 2014 Penone created a sculpture entitled *Essere vento* (To be wind), in which he used a petrified trunk on which he placed two pairs of grains of sand in order to question the relationship between plant and mineral in relation to geological time.³¹ According to a principle that is both metamorphic and entropic, this sculpture highlights the transformative power of life: wood has become stone, and rock will disintegrate into grains of sand and then into molecules that will recombine in other ways, over time, into new living or inert bodies.

In “Forces confuses, gardiens cosmiques,” the dialogue between plant and mineral will operate differently in the few works that use the two trees associated with rocks. The latter were direct witnesses of the Winter War (1939–40) in the Savukoski and Salla forests in Lapland, where Finnish soldiers clashed with the Soviets on their common border (Fig. IV and V). Despite the diversity of their mediums, what *7000 Eichen*, *Essere vento*, and these forthcoming works for “Forces confuses, gardiens cosmiques” have in common is that they raise awareness of the overall activity and balance of life forces on our planet, with the past and the future intertwined in their experience in the present. Here, trees and rocks will be poetically considered as cosmic guardians that pass through time, preserving in their matter a memory of humans.

3. *Living thought*. In the exhibition at the Arktikum, these works associating plant and mineral, body to body or sign to sign, will concretize the way in which the living and the inert inhabit the depths of our memory without sometimes clearly distinguishing one from the other. Let us remember that in morphogenesis, the limit between the laws governing the phenomena of growth of inert and living forms is still not very precise, and the biomorphic imaginary of these works will be established at this blurred border.

4. *World-trees, narrative.* More globally, this third part of “Forces confuses, gardiens cosmiques” will implement the notion of the world-tree in a more diversified way than the first two (“L’Ormolivier” et “À la lisière”). This concept is present in the mythology of many cultures, and on a symbolic level it generally refers to the existence of a tree vertically linking the different parts of the universe (celestial, terrestrial, and underground). The world-tree is a universal concept; it is called *Kien mou* (upright wood) in China, *KisKanû* in Persia, *Yggdrasil* in Scandinavia, *ArminDer* in Romania, *Aal Luuk Mas* among the Yakuts in Siberia, or *Kauri/Tane* in New Zealand, and so forth. The six world-trees used in the works of “Forces confuses, gardiens cosmiques” are the bearers of an implicit imagination, sacred or profane, which is expressed in numerous stories and legends, and which are used as a substratum for the exhibition.

To conclude our discussion on the implications of a perceptual shock on the implementation of various creative processes linked to the memory of trees, let us first mention that reminiscence and repetition determine all the works discussed here, between life and death drives (Freud). Various conceptual borrowings, not only from psychoanalytical theory but also from anthropology, sociology, phenomenology of perception, theory of memory, or even art history, have structured our analyses; the latter sought to define a relationship between the life of forms and forms of life, linked in the experience of these tree works, in relation to the aesthetic, ecological, and sociopolitical context of this beginning of the twenty-first century. The formal geneses that characterize both “Beuys’ acorns” and the various chapters of “Forces confuses” are based on metamorphic shifts that refer to the general idea that

Not only can any activity be discerned and defined insofar as it takes shape, insofar as it inscribes its curve in space and time, but also life acts essentially as a creator of forms. Life is form, and form is the statement of life. The formal relations within a work and between works constitute an order, a metaphor of the universe.³² (Focillon, 6)

Again with Focillon, but more precisely, we have considered that plastic forms constitute an order “animated by the movement of life. They are

subject to the principle of metamorphosis, which perpetually renews them”³³ (Focillon, 9). Trees have been considered through their physical and imaginary presence, both as living beings and as objects of culture. The “Forces confuses” project is thus part of a biomorphist conception of creation, testifying to the preeminence of corporeality in the aesthetic experience, whatever the objects and materials taken into account or the mediums employed (Arnaud 2021). The different stages of the work in progress “Forces confuses” also indicate that “The living is not explained, but told. At the heart of the theory of evolution, as at the heart of narrativity, is the concept of transformation”³⁴ (Bertrand et Canque 2011, 26). From such perspectives, the concepts of nature and culture are no longer in opposition in contemporary creation (Descola 2005). Artists produce not only living works or exhibitions—Ackroyd and Harvey but also Michel Blazy, Pierre Huyghe, Olafur Eliasson, and so on—or works in which the memory of the living plays a decisive role. Today, these productions are a form of commitment through and with art, in a world where the living, omnipresent in our image-based societies, is nevertheless increasingly absent from our lives. They are also part of a profound movement that is now driving the way we think about the relationship between the human and the nonhuman, if we refer, for example, to the theory of shared signs, developed by the anthropologist Eduardo Kohn in *Comment pensent les forêts* (How forests think, 2017), which consists in no longer opposing language beings and other.³⁵

JEAN ARNAUD lives and works in Marseille; artist and university professor in Visual Arts at AMU in the Arts department (Laboratoire d’Études en Sciences des Arts–LESA), he develops his research-action and collective arts/sciences projects between various artistic institutions and the university, in France and abroad. He recently coproduced “Sauver sa peau” (exhibition/conference on animal survival, Aix-en-Provence, 2018) and “Biomorphisme—Sensitive and conceptual approaches to the forms of the living” (Friche Belle de Mai, CNRS / AMU / IMERA, Marseille), a transdisciplinary arts/sciences program between 2016 and 2021. He codirects the “Images en tr@nsit” program at LESA.

Appendix

Notes on the trees used for “Forces confuses, gardiens cosmiques” third part of the project “Forces confuses”

FIGURE I



This pine was the “spiritual tree” (*urhimanty*) of a house that used to stand on this spot, but now it lives among buildings in the Laajasalo district of Helsinki. Such trees were never cut down but protected, and the rituals varied from place to place and from tree to tree. Perhaps gifts were placed between the cracks in its bark, or perhaps at the base of the tree near its roots. But it is certain that this tree today contributes to maintaining a form of archaic (and artificial?) contact with nature in the midst of the buildings under construction. Photographs by the author, 2021.

FIGURE II



Lasipalatsi willow, Helsinki. The first tree at this location was a rare species of willow planted in the 1830s. It was protected as a natural monument in 1924. The tree fell during a storm on 29 December 2003. The shoots of the fallen willow were rooted to produce a new plant. The name *Lasipalatsi* corresponds to its original location. The tree was planted on 14 April 2011, text engraved on the brass panel (metal fence surrounding the tree in the photo on the right).

The stump of the old willow tree has been transferred as a relic to the artificial hill of Vuosaaren täytömäki in eastern Helsinki. It is over sixty-five meters high and was built from six million cubic meters of soil from the nearby Vuosaari harbor construction site and the former Vuosaari landfill (in operation between 1966 and 1988). Photographs by the author, 2021.

FIGURE III

Above: Three images of the memorial pine (*karsikkopuu*) that used to grow in a sacred grove on the island of Pohjois-Lanstu (North Lanstu), in the South Etelä-Konnevesi National Park (Central Finland). The area was devastated by the Asta storm in 2010, and the trunk is now kept in the *Konneveden kotiseutumuseo* (Konnevesi Local History Museum). The museum displays engravings made mainly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Finns used trunks, large branches or panels of spruce or pine to commemorate events: weddings, patron saint days, visitors to be honored, and so forth.

Below: Marking, incising, or carving trees are universal anthropological gestures. On the shore of Lake Kivisalmi (Konnevesi to Rautalampi road), a trunk has been erected by the *Konnevesi Kotiseutuyhdistys ry* (Konnevesi Local Heritage Society) for travelers' to make a wish and carve their name as a sign of welcome. Photographs by the author, 2021.

FIGURE IV



On previous page, top: This section of pine tree serves as an *historiaa vanhan petäjän kertomana* (old history teacher, above left picture) at the *Rovaniemien kotiseutumuseo* in Pöykkölä (Local History Museum, Rovaniemi, Finnish Lapland). Born around 1610, it was cut down in the forest of Savukoski, a small town located about fifty kilometers from the Russian border.

Center: This forest was ravaged by World War II. The picture shows a pine tree strangled by a barbed wire abandoned in 1940, and in this wooded area there are still bullets of different calibers stuck in the trees.

“In these places, trees and humans were subjected to a common dismemberment. The trees that were killed, torn to pieces in close proximity to the torn human corpses, underlined the kinship of the flesh of the living wood and the body of the man.”³⁶ (Corbin 157).

Below: During the confrontation with Soviet troops (Winter War, 1939–40—which corresponds to the growth ring labelled no. 24 on the “old history teacher” in the top right picture—the Finnish army built a double anti-tank defense line (sometimes triple or quadruple) with erected granite blocks, all along the border with the former USSR. Among the remaining stones in the Savukoski and Salla woods, new pine trees have now grown up: a natural scenario is being written between the mineral and the vegetal, which come together in a kind of large memorial to the missing soldiers. There are certain formal analogies between this chaotic wild memorial and the oak trees associated with the basalt columns of Beuys’s social sculpture. But this last was not commemorating anything, if not the nature itself; with the *7000 Eichen* action, Beuys was trying to encourage the reforestation of cities on the model of an organized forest. Photographs by the author, 2021.

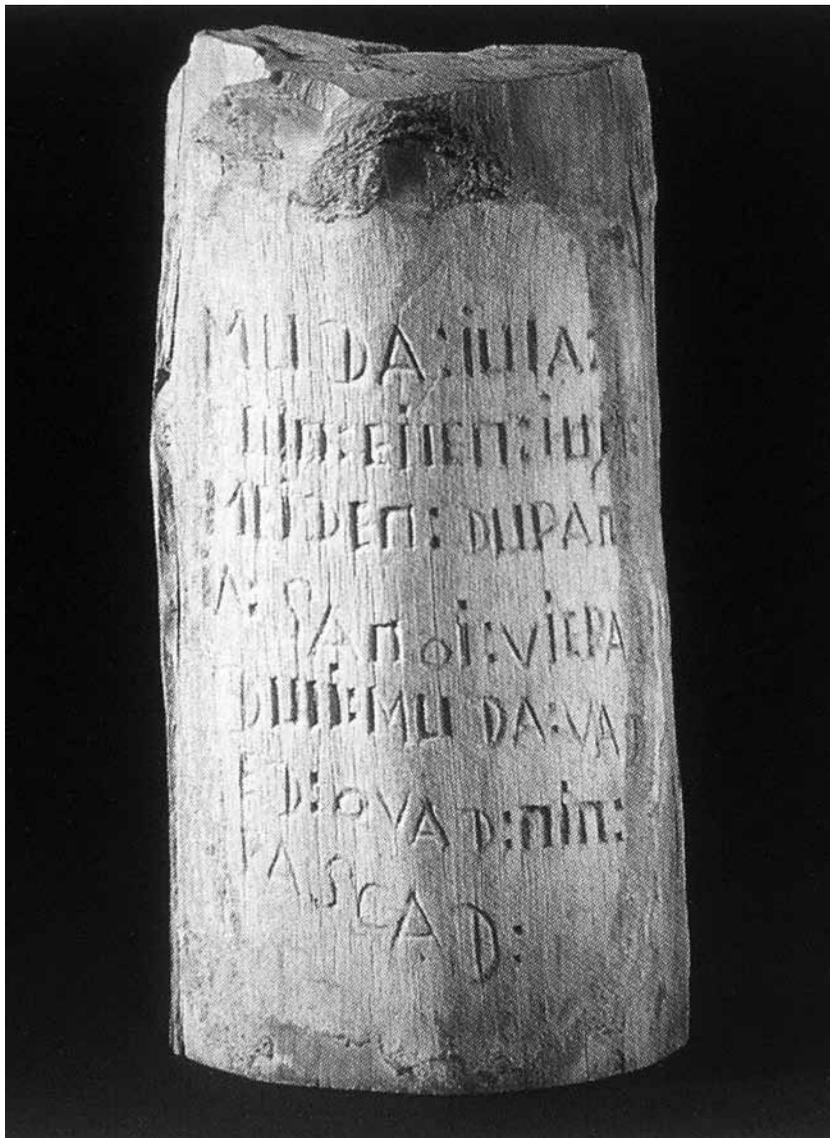
FIGURE V



This giant pine tree was discovered by the association *Sotavainajien etsintäryhmä kelsinkäinen ry* (Research Group for the War Wounded) about five years ago in the Savukoski Forest. This group is doing memory work by trying to identify the soldiers who died during the war in this area. The tree resembles the “history teacher” of the *Rovaniemien kotiseutumuseo*, which lived in the same forest before part of its trunk was taken to the museum. This pine tree was “offered” to me in 2021, and a small metal panel now mentions the name I gave it: Wilfrid. Apart from the new mental transference that this gesture represents in relation to the Ramatuelle elm tree, we should note with Richard Powers that

If he could read, if he could translate . . . If he were a slightly different creature, perhaps he could learn how the sun shone, how the rain fell, which way the wind blew against that trunk, how hard and how long. He could decipher the vast projects the soil has undertaken, the murderous frosts, the sufferings and struggles, the dearths and surpluses, the attacks repelled, the lush years, the storms overcome, the sum of all the dangers and hazards from everywhere, in every season this tree has lived” (Powers, 240).
Photographs by Marie-Laure Lions-Olivieri and the author, 2021.

FIGURE VI



Trunk carving at *Siida-Saamelaimuseo* (Sami Museum and Nature Centre, Inari). Among the Sami of Lapland, this type of sculpture could deliver messages to the borders of a region, share memories of a visit to the area or indicate a traveler's route. Photographer unknown. Rights reserved.

NOTES

Many thanks to Marie-Laure Lions-Olivieri for her precious help in the English translation of this text written in French.

1. “À chaque moment mon champ perceptif est rempli de reflets, de craquements, d'impressions tactiles fugaces que je suis hors d'état de relier au contexte perçu et que cependant je place d'emblée dans le monde, sans les confondre jamais avec mes rêveries. À chaque instant aussi je rêve autour des choses, j'imagine des objets ou des personnes dont la présence ici n'est pas incompatible avec le contexte, et pourtant ils ne se mêlent pas au monde, ils sont en avant du monde, sur le théâtre de l'imaginaire.” My translation.
2. “La durée est le progrès continu du passé qui ronge l'avenir et qui gonfle en s'avançant.” My translation.
3. “Nous avons la faculté d'interpréter à tout moment ce que nous percevons comme le reflet, plus ou moins fidèle, de notre propre intériorité. . . . Cette aptitude à reconnaître que le moi est quelque chose que le sujet peut avoir en partage avec son environnement est ce que l'on nomme “empathie” (de l'allemand *'Einfühlung'*, littéralement: ‘le fait de se ressentir soi-même dans quelque chose.’)” My translation.
4. “C'est la sidération créée par la vue d'un dragonnier colossal, dans une vieille tour du jardin botanique de Berlin, qui a d'emblée provoqué chez lui le choc de l'inattendu né de l'observation directe des grandes formes du règne végétal” (Humboldt 2000, 346–47), et déterminé sa vocation de savant explorateur.” My translation.
5. Here we take up a somewhat forgotten term. *Arborique* is a French neologism coined by Cyrano de Bergerac, the real writer, in the mid-seventeenth century. In *Les États et Empires du Soleil* (States and Empires of the Sun), the language of trees, birds, or solar creatures is discussed in a world of metamorphoses: “I had my attention very much focused on the speeches that this *arboric* voice was giving to me, and I was awaiting further, when all of a sudden it ceased in a tone similar to that of a person whose shortness of breath would prevent him from speaking.” (“J'avais l'attention fort bandée aux discours dont cette voix arborique m'entretenait, et j'attendais la suite, quand tout à coup elle cessa d'un ton semblable à celui d'une personne que la courte haleine empêcherait de parler” (Bergerac, 280). My translation.
6. Henri Bergson defines the notion of image-memory and distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary memory in *Matière et Mémoire* (Matter and Memory 1896).
7. “Pour moi, la mémoire volontaire, qui est surtout une mémoire de l'intelligence et des yeux, ne nous donne du passé que des faces sans vérité; mais qu'une odeur, une saveur retrouvées, dans des circonstances toutes différentes, réveille en nous, malgré nous, le passé, nous sentons combien ce passé était différent de ce que nous croyions nous rappeler, et notre mémoire volontaire peignait, comme les mauvais peintres, avec des couleurs sans vérité. . . . Mon œuvre est dominée par la distinction entre la mémoire involontaire et la mémoire volontaire, distinction qui non seulement ne figure pas dans l'œuvre de M. Bergson, mais est même contredite par elle.” My translation.

8. “J’ai senti, certains jours, que c’étaient les arbres qui me regardaient, qui me parlaient. . . . Moi j’étais là, écoutant.” André Marchand, quoted by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964, 31). My translation.
9. The Joseph Beuys action, initiated at documenta 7, was completed after the artist’s death by his son Wenzel at the opening of the following documenta (1987).
10. For Claude Simon, words are also conductive bodies. The writer structured his eponymous novel (1971) from emotions caused by various objects and by images of Rauschenberg’s combine paintings that he had never seen. These conductive bodies triggered a New York rambling with multiple entries in the narrative, based on contextual displacement and montage. *Les corps conducteurs* is the title of an expanded version of *Orion aveugle* (Blind Orion 1970, Skira).
11. “Le passé et l’avenir n’existent que trop dans le monde, ils existent au présent, et ce qui manque à l’être lui-même pour être temporel, c’est le non-être de l’ailleurs, de l’autrefois et du demain.” My translation.
12. “La vie est-elle plutôt une croissance ou un flux? . . . Après tout, la croissance d’un arbre dépend de la sève qui s’écoule dans son écorce et le nourrit, de la même façon que le fleuve alimente et fertilise la terre sur ses rives. Dans toute l’histoire du monde occidental, de l’Antiquité classique à nos jours, les métaphores de l’eau et de l’arbre se sont toujours disputées la première place.” My translation.
13. [N.A.] project, created by the private label structure [N.A.] (Nature Addict). Repéré ici.
14. “. . . des plantations massives dans des villes anglaises particulièrement pauvres en arbre. Esthétiquement, il s’agit d’un appel à couvrir nos villes d’arbres et de plantes, afin de nous préparer à un futur incertain. Au lieu de 7000 arbres, les artistes appellent à en planter 7 millions à travers les villes d’Angleterre et d’Europe.” Commentary on the work awarded the COAL prize in 2011. My translation. Repéré ici.
15. “La réception est un processus dynamique qui transforme, d’âge en âge, les concrétisations d’une œuvre et en modifie les valeurs et le sens. À l’évidence, une tension existe entre l’horizon du présent—à partir duquel s’effectue la réception de l’œuvre passée—et l’horizon du passé, à jamais révolu ; néanmoins, l’horizon du présent provient du passé et la compréhension d’une œuvre du passé résulte de la ‘fusion des horizons,’ expression que H. R. Jauss emprunte à Gadamer.” My translation.
16. “Un seul temps qui se confirme lui-même, qui ne peut rien amener à l’existence sans l’avoir déjà fondé comme présent et comme passé à venir, et qui s’établit d’un seul coup.” My translation.
17. “Les arbres ont parlé avant les hommes.” My translation.
18. For the art historian Aloïs Riegl, art progresses by revealing a universe of the sensible from haptics to optics. In *L’industrie d’art romaine tardive* (The Late Roman Art Industry 1901), he uses the term *haptik*, but also *taktil* or *taktisch*. But in *1000 Plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari clarify the notion of haptic space: “It is the Smooth that seems to us to be both the object of a close vision par

- excellence and the element of a haptic space (which can be visual, auditory as well as tactile). On the contrary, the Striated would refer to a more distant vision, and to a more optical space.” (“C’est le Lisse qui nous paraît à la fois l’objet d’une vision rapprochée par excellence et l’élément d’un espace haptique (qui peut être visuel, auditif autant que tactile). Au contraire, le Strié renverrait à une vision plus lointaine, et à un espace plus optique.”) (615). My translation.
19. “C’est par le *studium* que je m’intéresse à beaucoup de photographies, soit que je les reçoive comme des témoignages politiques, soit que je les reçoive comme de bons tableaux historiques.” My translation.
 20. “Le *punctum* d’une photo, c’est ce hasard qui, en elle, me point (mais aussi me meurtrit, me poigne).” My translation.
 21. “Plus la conscience sera obligée à parer aux chocs, plus se développera la mémoire volontaire, et plus périlitera la mémoire involontaire.” My translation.
 22. The exhibition “L’ormolivier” will be presented at the gallery Le garage (Ramatuelle) from 25 August to 11 September 2022.
 23. Curiously, the olive tree is still listed as an elm tree in the departmental heritage register.
 24. “. . . ce qui est souvent sans rapports immédiats dans le temps des horloges ou l’espace mesurable peut se trouver rassemblé et ordonné au sein du langage dans une étroite contiguïté.” My translation.
 25. The pine tree with the crosses, which died in 1990, was cut down in 2014 because it was in danger of collapsing on the Laatre-Ôruste road. The tree was born in 1754 and was covered with crosses mainly between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the practice having continued beyond the Christianization of the country. An explanatory panel now replaces the cut tree, which has been carefully restored in the museum. The text was written by Marju Kõivupuu (professor at the University of Tallinn), whom I thank for the valuable information she gave me about the trees with crosses (Bardone, Grünberg, et al. 252–77).
 26. Ces “pins de l’orée, tenus à certains sacrifices dans leur partie tournée vers le bois, mais libres de leur développement dans leur partie face aux champs, au vide, au monde non boisé. Il leur revient la fonction de border leur société, d’en cacher les arcanes, d’en cacher le dénuement intérieur.” My translation.
 27. The trunk had to be cut in two parts because it was too high to be erected in one piece in the museum room. I wanted to show the higher part of the trunk in its wooden frame, as this is how it is currently conditioned in the storerooms. Special thanks to Anna Liisa Regensperger (animator at the National Museum in Tartu) and Kristjan Raba (head of the collections) for making its transport and exhibition possible.
 28. “Les hétérotopies sont liées, le plus souvent, à des découpages du temps, c’est-à-dire qu’elles ouvrent sur ce qu’on pourrait appeler par pure symétrie des hétérochronies. L’hétérotopie se met à fonctionner à plein lorsque les hommes se trouvent dans une sorte de rupture absolue avec leur temps traditionnel.” My translation.

29. Ortiz, Fernando. 1940. *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar*. La Habana: Jesús Montero Editor.
30. “L’homme, comme l’arbre, est un être où des forces confuses viennent se tenir debout.” My translation.
31. *Essere vento* also explores the relationship between natural objects and artifacts. Penone has had grains of sand identical to natural grains of sand sculpted by a nanotechnology institute in Grenoble (France). In each pair of grains (the natural and the sculpted), the viewer, at the threshold of visual perception, hopes to spot the infra-thin difference between two similar objects.
32. “Non seulement toute activité se laisse discerner et définir dans la mesure où elle prend forme, où elle inscrit sa courbe dans l’espace et le temps, mais encore la vie agit essentiellement comme créatrice de formes. La vie est forme, et la forme est le mode de la vie. Les relations formelles dans une œuvre et entre les œuvres constituent un ordre, une métaphore de l’univers.” My translation.
33. Un ordre “animé du mouvement de la vie. Elles sont soumises au principe des métamorphoses, qui les renouvelle perpétuellement.” My translation.
34. “Le vivant ne s’explique pas, mais il se raconte. Au cœur de la théorie de l’évolution, comme au cœur de la narrativité, se trouve le concept de transformation.” My translation.
35. For Kohn, life and thought are not separate things. Selves are signs. Lives are thoughts. Semiosis is alive. And the world, as a result, is animate (Kohn 2017, 142). See also the work of biosemioticians Claus Emmeche and Kalevi Kull on this subject. Biosemiotics, or the semiology of the living, studies biological signs and seeks to understand their production processes, their codification, and their communication. (Emmeche and Kull 2011).
36. “En ces lieux, les arbres et les humains ont été soumis à un commun démembrement. Les arbres mis à mort, déchiquetés tout près des cadavres humains déchirés ont souligné la parenté des chairs du bois vif et du corps de l’homme.” My translation.

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