

Saâdane Afif: Palais de Tokyo

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A little "new French theory" first of all: "Plasticity today demands access to the concept." In several works, including *La Plasticite au soir de l'écriture: Dialectique, destruction, déconstruction* (Editions Leo Scheer, 2005), the philosopher Catherine Malabou attempts to elucidate an increasingly pregnant "motor scheme" in philosophy, art, neurobiology, and psychoanalysis: plasticity. While the neurobiologist Jean-Pierre Changeux uses the term "plasticity of the brain" to refer to the capacity of synapses to form or reform a bit of information, Malabou's concept of plasticity refers to a being's strategy and capacity to be transgressed, to be other--a dual, contradictory yet inseparable movement involving the sudden emergence and annihilation of form.

As it happens, this dynamic of plasticity is fully at work in Saadane Afif's exhibition "Lyrics." Over the past year or so, in exhibitions in Moscow, Lyon, Essen, and elsewhere, each of Afif's objects was accompanied by a text attached to the wall: a song bearing the title of the piece and written by one or another friend of his--a by-product through which the work of art escapes the fine arts to join the world of industrial culture and pop music. And this all the more so because the French artist then had the lyrics set to music. Now, to complete the project, he's had a "best of" compiled--a dozen songs that evoke previous works of his. This exhibition, "Lyrics," thus takes the new form of a "sung retrospective." The difference is radical: Until now Afif has presented the work and the song accompanying it together, while here the original pieces were nowhere to be found and only the songs were "exhibited." One could read them on the wall, or listen to them on a headset, inconspicuously installed on the edge of an empty concert stage in the middle of the room, plunged in a hazy chiaroscuro punctuated here and there by the beams of spotlights, as at rock concerts--a play of lights that soon go out and light up again elsewhere, slowly making their way around the space. One began to realize that the emptiness is not a negative space but a hollow memory, an indefinitely rechargeable storehouse.

Hence, the particular magic--impalpable, intangible--of this exhibition, which has to do in large part with its conceptual grace, its atmosphere divided between the empty and the full, its temporality placed between before and after, its gently positive radicality. What is a work of art once it can be dissolved into a song? At the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris a

few months ago, Rirkrit Tiravanija offered a narrated retrospective. With his sung retrospective, Afif likewise participates in an accentuated reflection on the artwork's dematerialization. For more is at stake in this reprise of art as pop music than just the passage from one area of creation to another: It makes even the barrier separating form from nonform porous and contingent. The work of art, in all its materiality, is converted into something that brings about its dematerialization. And so we come back to plasticity as absolute exchangeability, Malabou's new, eminently metamorphic materialism; "The favored regime of change today," she has written, "is the continuous implosion of form, by which it is reworked and reshaped continually."

Translated from French by Jeanine Herman.

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