

December 14, 2007

Last time, I started writing by saying that not much had changed in Odomez. Somehow I already knew that I was bragging at the fate's face. Or turning my back to it, though almost consciously knowing that it was there, and that things would change very soon.

And changed they have. One half of the buildings is down, gradually erased by the machines, first tearing them down to rubble, then making piles with bricks, piles with metals, etc. These are then picked up by a pair of tippers, who slowly go their way up to the water station and deposit everything into a new huge pile. They dig deep and muddy, black trenches onto what was a grass path, going back and forth like tired, giant insects. A couple of guys from the nearby project got the authorization of the site foreman to pick up the metals they could find onto the pile. It's funny how they agreed together on that, like an oral contract with shared interested. The two guys will most likely sell these rusted metal parts; and while they are there, they prevent any damage to happen to the expensive water pump working on the other side of the water station, slowly emptying it. For a few weeks ago, some unidentified guys from the project cut a piece of the pipe and stole some cables. T., the foreman, warned us several times against «them», explaining that he once saw a bunch roaming around with large knives. «At this hour of the day it's ok,» says he as we arrived, at usual, by the end of the morning. «They're still sleeping. But they come out by late afternoon. If they ever come by you, don't argue, just run.» True that with our photo gear and the flashing security jackets, we're definitely spotted as strangers. We never had trouble really, though one day, as we had came to the water station through the project, we have been almost thrown out by a band of kids, the very ones that nicely agreed to be photographed in front of the water station a few days before, making me fear they would fall into it. That day school was out, and the half-dozen streets of the project were filled with kids at mid-day, screaming and messing around. But - never saw the ones with the knives. After that happened, T. hired a couple of nightwatchmen more for the weekends.

We have good relations with that guy, and it's for the best. First we have to be grateful to him letting us come and go almost as we please. We're under his responsibility, and he could have just told us to forget about it. We're not working for anyone, his demolition society, nor their client, the local metropolis. He's friendly, and seems always happy to answer our dozens of curious questions about the demolition and his plans for it.

But more deeply, what I feel the most thankful for is that he prevented us from sinking into a simple feeling of anger towards the workers and what they do to what became, as we retrospectively

realize, our workshop, for a year and a half. If he had rejected us, we would have been compelled to watch the disappearance of Odomez at a distance, without understanding. Maybe watching the whole site from the burned out roof of one of the Compagnons' buildings, as we did once.

Whereas this long agony of Odomez appears in a much less painful way to us as we can still visit the site once a week. And we realize how much destruction was also a full part of it. Each time a building gets crashed, it also opens new ways of seeing the others, new perspectives, not to mention access to rooms that have been shut for decades. Things that we wouldn't have discovered about Odomez if it stayed wild. Like that psychological story of the kid who crashes his toy to see the insides, to see how it works. But of course, sometimes, you realize that things won't come up as easily as they got down.

Last Monday, we had arrived for about a quarter of an hour when T., who was passing by, came over to us to say hello. Aurélie and I were both standing on the remnants of the former huge hall, once used by the Compagnons to stock their stuff. A week ago, a roof was above our heads, in the large and dark hall, scanned by the copper green metallic girders. But we were standing both fascinated, as a tiny part of the building had been left standing by the machines, to avoid disturbing the guys just beneath that wall still busy with the removal of the asbestos. Creating a strange vision of the hall still existing but now exposed to the weather and the sunlight. Water started to gather in flakes on the tired concrete floor, reflecting the girders and the windows, and creating beautiful visions, things drowning in it. Switches were still on the wall, like nothing had happened for a century. I even stumbled upon a copy of a Sega Saturn game: box, CD, book, everything was there if you need it; a trace of the Compagnons' 20 years passage. They couldn't, eventually, erase it completely.

Aurélie was readying her camera on the tripod for a new photo in her serie, and T. asked us what exactly we were photographing. I could only answer in a whisper: «There's so much things to shoot!» He laughed: «You have imagination.»

Then he started explaining that a week before, they had demolished the other standing building, on the other half of the site. We didn't see it yet, as it was hidden from where we were. «It all crumbled at once like a house of cards. We pulled one beam, and everything crashed down with it.» The whole thing was about 25 meters wide and 50 meters long, two storeys high.

I don't know what I would have liked better, if I could have chosen: be there to see it or not? And would it have been less bitter if it took three weeks as they planned it would?

I was thinking about this moment for weeks: when the giants would fall. These anthropomorphic silhouettes had emerged from the disappearance of the roofs. They linked me deeply and emotionally to the whole place, like figures to salute on arrival. At first, I thought it was too obvious, too simple, but why deny any longer that have an anthropomorphic relationship with Odomez?

By visiting it, we gave it again a human dimension. Sure, it was never completely void of human presence. Our year is not much compared to the twenty of the Compagnons, who didn't fail to come watching from the other side of the fence, as the machines tore down their building, including some of the bedrooms they occupied for a while. And the wilder parts have always been used as a temporary shelter by people around, drinking alcohol and who knows what else... kill time... for it's true that time seems to stop whenever we go there.

First, pointing out that emotional relationship is important to me, for a negative reason. It



