

ALFRED PALESTRA

2014

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Alfred Palestra, Sandwichman

Alfred Palestra

At the end of the 19th Century a school in Rennes, today referred to as the Lycée Émile-Zola, became a point of intersection of two historical tendencies: the birth of the avant-garde - through the presence of Alfred Jarry as a pupil - and the crisis of the Republic - through the 2nd Dreyfus Trial that took place there.

The gym of the Napoleonic cadet school was used in the summer of 1899 by the French military court; it hosted the 2nd trial of Alfred Dreyfus. The school, which had affiliations with the army, was adjacent to the Rennes prison, where Dreyfus was held captive after his return from Devil's Island, and was therefore a convenient location for the trial (while also being intentionally far from Dreyfus' supporters in Paris and his native Alsace).

Was it a mere accident that the creation of *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician*, or *King Ubu*, which are commonly referred to as precursors of Dada and Surrealism, the forerunners of the avant-garde, coincided with the culmination of the Dreyfus Affair in time and space?

In pataphysical terms, this coincidence can be viewed as 'equality of contrarities' or 'unity of antinomies'.

The project

We proposed an intervention in the notorious gym with the participation of the Zolala theater collective, a group of drama students of the Lycée. who regularly use the same location for rehearsals. The project aims to help the students to address this 'equality of contrarities' as a significant heritage of the school and of its students. The intervention took the form of a workshop with the students, followed by a performance for the public.

We have based our collaboration on quotes selected from two coinciding and contrasting literary canons, Jarry's library, the 27 books from *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician* and a selection of books from Alfred Dreyfus's reading from his captivity (1895-1898) on Devil's Island.

The workshop became a process of collective reading, a learning experience for all concerned (artists, students and visitors), an alternative method for the interpretation of the given period.

The props and costumes were on view in the form of an installation at FRAC Bretagne, in the framework of Play Time / The 4th Edition of Les Ateliers de Rennes, 27.09. - 30.11.2014.

The workshop took place at Lycée Emile Zola 08.11.-15.11.2014.

The performance took place on 19.11.2014.

The performance

The act was conceived in a way that there is no stage and no audience in the traditional sense, neither was there a *play*. The act did not have a beginning nor an end, and the visitor was granted the liberty to choose his/her individual duration and perspective(s). Through our method, no two visitors experienced the same act, neither have one been given the illusion of receiving an overall view.

The collective's performance was an attempt to occupy and scan the space and its time, in accordance with the pataphysical inquiry of Alfred Jarry, investigating time as a three dimensional space (*How to Construct the Time Machine*, 1899.)

The visitors experienced the act by passing through the gym. They could come and go freely, like in an exhibition situation. Passing through the room, they encountered random constellations of selected texts from the two conflicting canons quoted by readers, and moving objects that are symbols representing the ghosts of the space.

The act was on view for a period of three hours. Around 150 people attended the event.

The objects

We developed a series of objects that were used during Alfred Palestra workshop and performance. This "family" of objects carries rather anachronistic features, resemblance to an early bourgeois life-form. Hardwood, crafty finish, simple ornaments. Nevertheless, the style we developed is void of specific features of a given time or space, it rather stands for a general Western attitude. We debate the responsibility of the middle-class in the context of the performance with these artifacts, by juxtaposing unusual, rather symbolic functions with the style, the material and the means of production.

AS: In Alfred Jarry's probably most influential novel, *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician*, Dr. Faustroll travels the islands of the sea on his very special boat-bed that is called the AS, in company with Panmuphle, the lawyer and Bosse-de-Nage, a dog-faced monkey.

In our interpretation the AS is a stylized floating recamiere, with a pair of leather legcuffs. It is an object designed for comfort, journey and captivity at once. Through this object Dr. Faustroll's Odyssey merges with the tragic faith of Alfred Dreyfus, tied to his own bed at Devil's Island.



Alfred Palestra, installation view
FRAC Bretagne, Play Time / Les Ateliers de Rennes, 2014



Alfred Palestra, installation view
FRAC Bretagne, Play Time / Les Ateliers de Rennes, 2014

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QUAND LA CRISE DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE COÏNCIDE AVEC LA NAISSANCE DE LA PATAPHYSIQUE

19 novembre 2014, 18h - 21h, Cité Scolaire Émile Zola, entrée*: 6 rue Toullier

* Parcours de visite libre
(entrées régulières, jauge
maximale de 50 personnes)

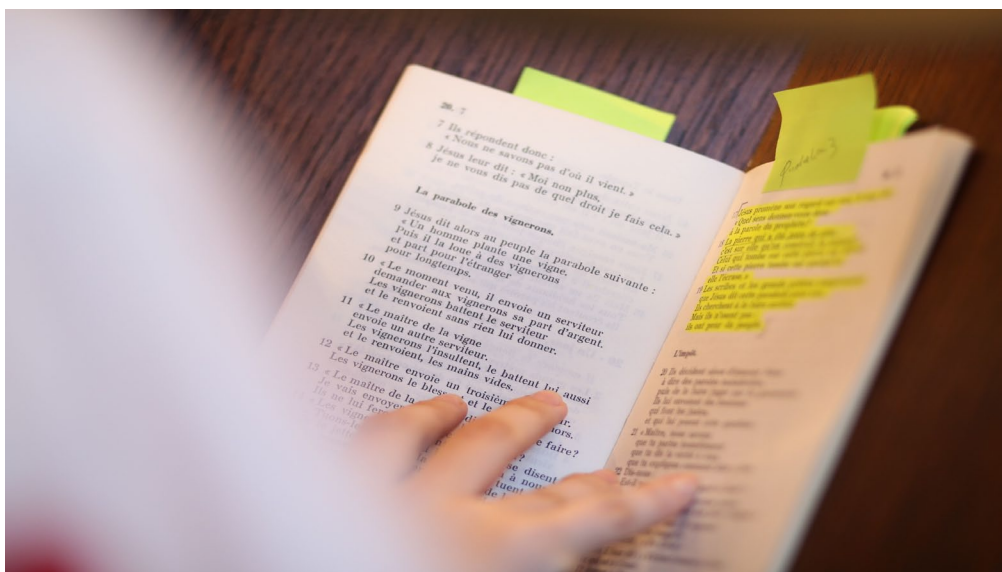
LITTÉRATURE CITÉE PENDANT LA PERFORMANCE:

Les Livres de l'Île du Diable: 29 livres lus par Alfred Dreyfus pendant sa captivité (1895-1899)

- Pêcheur d'Islande de Pierre Loti
- Boule de Suif de Guy de Maupassant
- Outre-mer (Notes sur l'Amérique) de Paul Bourget
- Mémoires de Saint-Simon
- Tarass Boulba de Nicolas Gogol
- Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne
- Discours sur la méthode de René Descartes
- Méditations métaphysiques de René Descartes
- De l'esprit des lois de Montesquieu
- Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales de François de La Rochefoucauld
- L'homme de génie de Cesare Lombroso
- Histoire de la littérature anglaise de Hippolyte Taine
- Histoire de France de Jules Michelet
- La Cité antique de Fustel de Coulanges
- Les Déracinés de Maurice Barrés
- Guerre et Paix de Léon Tolstoï
- Crime et Châtiment de Fiodor Mikhaïlovitch Dostoïevski
- King Lear de William Shakespeare
- Hamlet de William Shakespeare
- Othello de William Shakespeare
- Les Misérables de Victor Hugo
- Histoire de la littérature française de Gustave Lanson
- Mémoires de Paul Barras
- Petite Critique de Jules Janin
- Récits des temps mérovingiens d'Augustin Thierry
- L'Histoire générale du IV^e siècle à nos jours de Lavis de Rambaud
- Candide de Voltaire
- Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse de Jean-Jacques Rousseau
- John Gabriel Borkman d'Henrik Ibsen

Liste des 27 ouvrages constituant la bibliothèque du Docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien d'Alfred Jarry (1898):

- Un tome d'Edgar Poe traduit par Charles Baudelaire
- Le second tome des Œuvres de Cyrano de Bergerac, contenant "l'Histoire des États et Empires du Soleil" et "l'Histoire des oiseaux"
- L'Évangile selon Luc en grec
- Le Mendiant ingrat de Léon Bloy
- The Rime of the ancient Mariner de Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- Le Voleur de Georges Darien
- Le Serment des petits hommes de Marceline Desbordes-Valmore
- Enluminures de Max Elskamp
- Un volume dépareillé du Théâtre de Florian
- Un volume dépareillé des Mille et Une Nuits traduits par Antoine Galland
- Scherz, Satire, Ironie und tiefere Bedeutung de Christian Dietrich Grabbe
- Le Conte de l'or et du silence de Gustave Kahn
- Les Chants de Maldoror de Lautréamont
- Aglavaine et Sélysette de Maurice Maeterlinck
- Vers et prose de Mallarmé
- Gog de Catulle Mendès
- L'Odyssée d'Homère, dans l'édition Teubner
- Babylone de Joséphin Péladan
- Gargantua et Pantagruel de François Rabelais
- L'Heure sexuelle de Jean de Chailly
- La Canne de jaspé d'Henri de Régnier
- Illuminations d'Arthur Rimbaud
- La Croisade des Enfants de Marcel Schwob
- Ubu roi d'Alfred Jarry
- Les Campagnes hallucinées d'Émile Verhaeren
- Sagesse de Paul Verlaine
- Voyage au centre de la Terre de Jules Verne



Alfred Palestra, workshops, documentation
Lycée Emile Zola, Rennes, 08.11.-15.11.2014.



Alfred Palestra, performance
Lycée Emile Zola, Rennes, 19.11.2014.



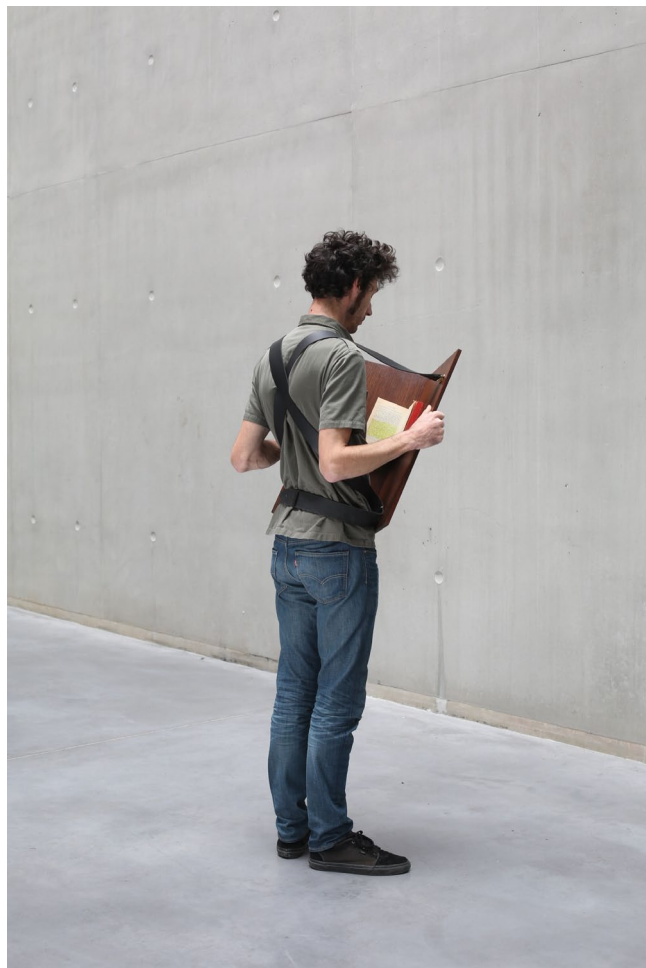
Alfred Palestra, performance
Lycée Emile Zola, Rennes, 19.11.2014.



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Alfred Palestra, documentation of the objects



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