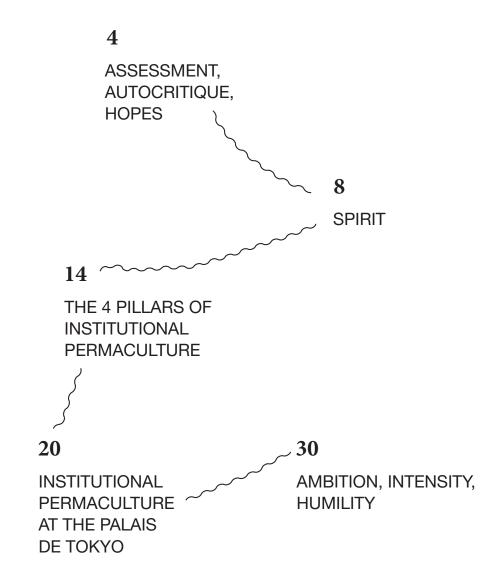


ON INSTITUTIONAL PERMACULTURE

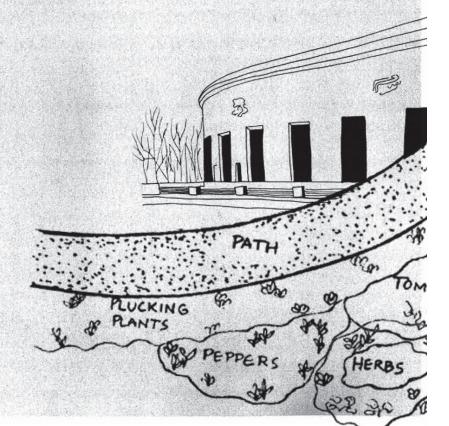
FOR A LIVING AND PRODUCTIVE SITE OF CONTEMPORARY CREATION

Guillaume Désanges





IF THE ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION IS TO BE MORE THAN A PARTIAL OR COSMETIC ONE, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT IT MUST DRAW UPON ARTISTIC WAYS OF THINKING, UPON THIS FORMIDABLE PLASTICITY OF IMAGINARIES, THROUGH A PROGRAMME THAT I CALL INSTITUTIONAL PERMACULTURE



Ι

ASSESSMENT, AUTOCRITIQUE, HOPES

ASSESSMENT, AUTOCRITIQUE, HOPES

Ever scarcer resources, dwindling biodiversity, destruction of soils and ecosystems, climatic collapse: with each day that passes, we become a more aware of how yesterday's predictions have become

today's reality, a reality whose consequences for our bodies and our societies we must account for without let's face it - always knowing how to. In order to not stand by, looking on helplessly as this devastating logic runs its course, and beyond the concrete decisions that we find ourselves taking out of urgency and with a feeling of inadequacy, we can envisage more holistic ways of thinking, broader and longerterm perspectives and working philosophies

that stand as a turning point in the history of our economies and activities. In just a few years, everything has changed.

OUR IDEOLOGICAL AND MORAL FOUNDATIONS ARE CRACKING UNDER THE PRESSURE OF NEW DEMANDS IN TERMS OF ETHICS, REPRESENTATION, CONSIDERATION, DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND PARITY.

The Covid-19 pandemic, from which many public and private institutions have emerged in a state of marked fatigue, has had the effect of accelerating awareness.

Alongside the ecological emergency, new issues are continuously shaking up and dividing society. Our ideological and moral foundations are cracking under the pressure of new demands in terms of

ethics, representation, consideration, diversity, equality and parity. Everywhere, ways of doing and speaking are being questioned and dominant positions challenged.

When it comes to the ecological question, despite its vocal denunciations of the destructive effects of extractivist capitalism, contemporary art as an industry undeniably forms part of the problem. It is faced with seemingly insurmountable problems:

its event-driven logics, its mass cultural productions, its gargantuan projects, as well as the planned obsolescence of art and artists and the globalization of exhibitions and markets. The very notion of the avantgarde, to which we owe so much, turns upon a principle of novelty and permanent replacement that inevitably has an ecological impact. Its logic is aligned with what economist Joseph Schumpeter memorably referred to as "creative destruction." Heirs to a triumphant modernity that believed resources both economic and artistic to be inexhaustible, we produce a vast amount of materiality, and deploy great energies

to create new forms, new ideas, new texts, generating as we do so a mass of physical and intellectual waste products. What is today referred to as "art washing", the recuperation of creation by parties looking to improve their image and mask their misdeeds,

is perhaps a phenomenon perpetrated by the art world itself. We cannot afford to remain ignorant of these questions.

And yet culture and art worlds also possess a conscience, a vitality and

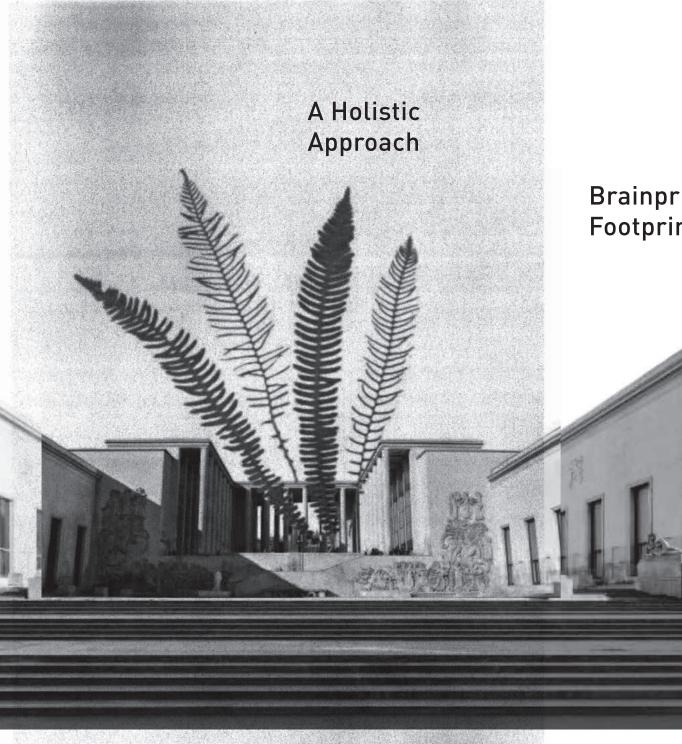
an incredible capacity for invention and reinvention, one equal to the hopes raised by these troubled times. Perhaps this is simply because artists have always been champions of adaptation, able to optimize the resources at their disposal, sublimate the real and create worlds from very little or even from nothing at all. With a history much longer than that of industrial modernity, when it comes to the questions that the world is asking today, art has much to teach us in terms of autonomy, critical reflection on materials, sustainability, recycling, precarity as strength and creativity in simplicity. If the ecological transition is to be more than a partial or cosmetic one, it seems to me that it must draw upon artistic ways of thinking, upon this formidable plasticity of

imaginaries, through a programme that I call institutional permaculture which I hope to see applied with hope and with enthusiasm at the central institution that is the Palais de Tokyo. This, in order to ensure that, with the collaboration of the entire team, it

can become an institution that works and thinks ecologically rather than an institution that takes ecology as one subject amongst others. Faithful to the spirit of permaculture, I hope that this way of thinking

and this programme will be spread, be shared, and be enriched over time. To this end, this short treatise aims to be a manifesto, a guide and a tool for vigilance across all of our activities.





Necessities

Brainprint & Footprint

II

SPIRIT

Mindful **Production** **SPIRIT**

SPIRIT

A Holistic Approach

Institutional permaculture is above all a holistic approach. It is a tool of conception and reflection more than a set of rules. an ethic more than a technique. It is a positive way of rethinking the missions and the functioning of the institution in accordance with a logic of permanence and sustainability.

It is this systemic approach, whose most powerful effects are invisible and quite literally inestimable. that ensures the effectiveness of institutional

permaculture. Beyond thematic exhibitions or initiatives around recycling or carbon footprint reduction, permaculture infuses the institution as a whole with its spirit: governance, communication, buildings, programming, management, sponsorship, etc. Inspired by the 'Gaia hypothesis' developed by theorist 3 James Lovelock, institutional permaculture envisages the artistic institution as a living body, that is, as an entity at once active, reactive, and vulnerable. Composed of interdependent vital organs, of which artistic programming is only the most visible, it is animated

IT IS A TOOL OF CONCEPTION AND REFLECTION MORE THAN A SET OF RULES, AN ETHIC MORE THAN A TECHNIQUE.

by as if by a biological principle of constant evolution, adaptation and modification. Its trajectory, its actions and its destiny are thus never fixed, never settled.

Necessities

Institutional permaculture affirms a principle

of necessity. Where modern art gradually evacuated the various functions inherent to classical art - be they religious. allegorical or political - the permacultural approach seeks to recover multiple functions for art: sensitive, poetic and

symbolic, but also pedagogical, therapeutic and social. With this in mind, the questions we must ask ourselves are no longer simply "What to show?" and "How to show?" but first and foremost other, more engaging ones: "Why to show?", "For who?" It is imperative that we question our reasons for doing things if we are to avoid uselessly expending energies in the blind pursuit of production. In short, without being inhibited by the potential insignificance of our actions, and precisely because we believe in the vital necessity of art for society, we must fully take on responsibility for what we do and how we do it.

Mindful Production

The Palais de Tokyo, by its missions, its central position and its scale, is particularly enmeshed in the imaginary of production that underpins the contemporary art sector

as a whole. The exalting temptation of the original and spectacular grand gesture that is indeed part of our DNA must not be posed as an imperative: to do so would be to risk a gratuitous and vain overproduction. Though production remains an essential part of our métiers, it

is essential that we pursue it in a way that is reflexive and reflective and imagined in collaboration with artists, one that readily recirculates, when it is pertinent to do so. pre-existing forms, practices and ideas. Art remains a site of all possibilities, yet this formidable absence of limits is embedded in a world which does have its limits. These limits are fertile, though, and

so it is not a question of doing less, but of doing better.

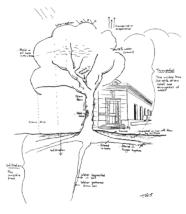
Brainprint & Footprint

Institutional permaculture is terribly ambitious: it aims not only to limit our negative impacts but to amplify our positive ones. This means working not only on our biological impact - our footprint - but also on our consciousness - our brainprint -, on the highly influential ways of seeing and ways of feeling that have been ours since the beginnings of the history of art. Without fearing utopias or failures, it is a question of ensuring that our exhibitions

are not instants of pure pleasure reserved to a happy few, are not simple supplements for the soul, but rather levers for modifying the real, for changing our lives with the means at our disposal, namely the new sensorial experiences of forms and ideas

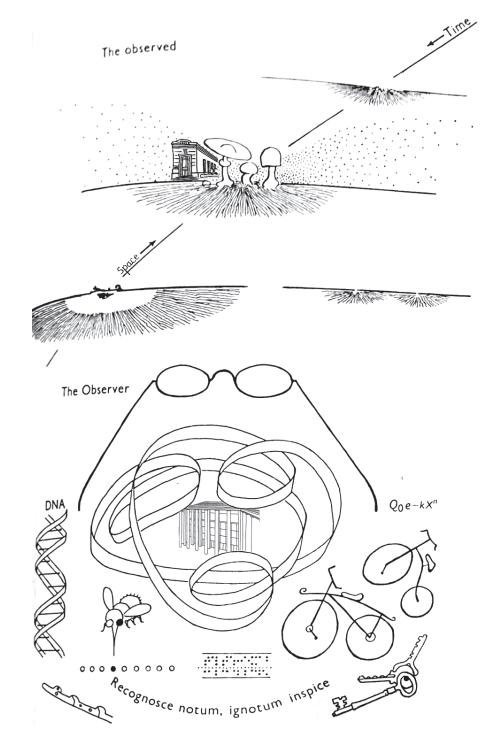
> created by artists. In other words, modifying affects and imaginaries, with our horizon, today more than ever, as a change of horizon.

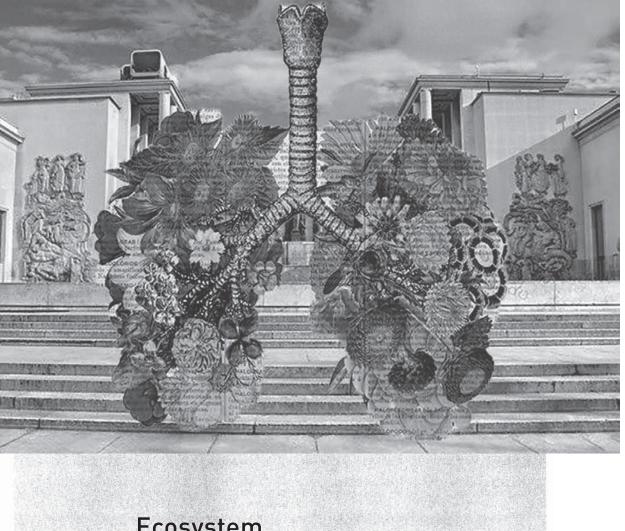
10



SPIRIT

MODIFYING AFFECTS IMAGINARIES HORIZON, DAY MORE THAN EVER, AS A CHANGE OF HORIZON.





(Bio)diversity of Forms

III

THE 4 PILLARS OF INSTITUTIONAL **PERMACULTURE**

Local network

Ecosystem

Zoning

THE 4 PILLARS OF INSTITUTIONAL **PERMACULTURE**

Ecosystem

Thinking and programming through ecosystems means privileging collaboration between institutions over competition or indifference.

Rather than working in a solitary fashion and blindly superimposing layers of potentially redundant programming, we should look to take into account the artistic, economic and cultural environment of which we are part and upon which we depend, guided by logics of attention, distribution and the sharing of resources.

While this way of working in tandem and in networks has already existed for some time, today it must be adopted systematically, not only in accordance with economic or political imperatives but with truly ecological ones. This means defining and taking a fair share of the artistic offer, refusing hegemonic or competitive impulses, and reflecting as to the real needs of artists and audiences through an enlarged vision of cultural action.

Zoning

Re-envisioning time and space in a fashion at once ingenious and optimized is one of the basic principles of permaculture. Built in 1937 on the occasion of a world's fair, the Palais de Tokyo is a large building. Too large, some might be tempted to say, for these times of economic and ecological sobriety. But this generous space, magnificently

and ecologically revealed through a highly sensitive renovation carried out by architects Lacaton & Vassal, 5 can remain a formidable asset on the condition that we activate it in a manner which draws on sustainable agriculture, that is to say which rejects intensive monoculture in favour diversified usages.

In order to do so, we might take inspiration from zoning, a technique through which terrain is virtually divided up according to the intensity with which its different parts are to be used, in order to optimize resources whilst caring for the building and its users. We could, for example, alternate exhibition spaces so as to leave some 'fallow' at any given time. These spaces would remain sites of intensive work but work of a different kind, privileging activities which would allow various seeds planted there to emerge. For example, these fallow areas could play host to artists, collectives, researchers or publishers, providing them with physical workspaces and an intellectual environment.

The idea of a more rational sharing of space also concerns the public, who could find other types of activities and services at the Palais. For example, by shifting the ticketed area further back into the building, we could create a space that could be accessed free of charge featuring areas for work, reading, relaxation, for browsing temporary exhibitions, books and newspapers, or for the programming of documentary films or nonprofit activities, and which would be shared by the public and the institution's employees.



This multiform presence corresponds to the needs of artists and public alike, as well as - especially - to those of the establishment itself, by 'naturally' nourishing its programming and its dynamism: permacultural logic holds that if we want to be a living space, we must first become spaces that welcome life.

Local network

In opposition to a frenetic race to show the same set of international artists and present their work free of any grounding or context, we could look to the notion of the 'local network' which invites us to pay

particular attention to local creativity and cultures. This, not on the basis of some inward-looking nationalist movement, but rather as part of a mutually beneficial and reinforcing interweaving of the history of a territory on the one hand and of global creation on the other. Though at times lending itself to aesthetic standardization, the principal virtue of the globalization of art over the past few decades has been to shed light upon the way in which specific and vernacular issues are inscribed in particular geographies.

Just as we would not sow the seeds of just any plants in a garden, however appealing

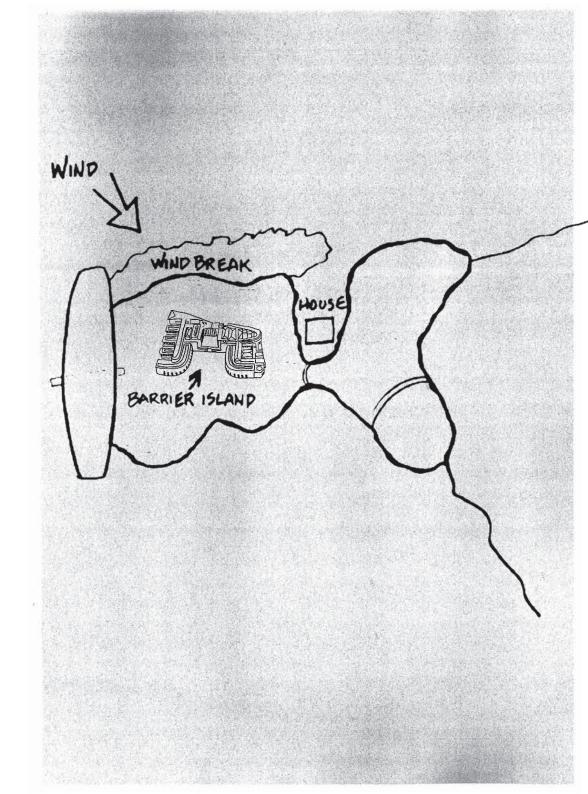
or fashionable a variety of plant they may promise, we must devise our programming in line with our contexts, with a particular attention for artists and works that resonate with our own terrain. And we must do this whilst maintaining a rigorously international ambition and outlook. Which as-yet under-recognized forms in our local scenes should we exhibit to the rest of the world? With which international creations might they dialogue? And in return, what blind spots, lacks or needs can foreign scenes help us to work upon?

(Bio)diversity of Forms

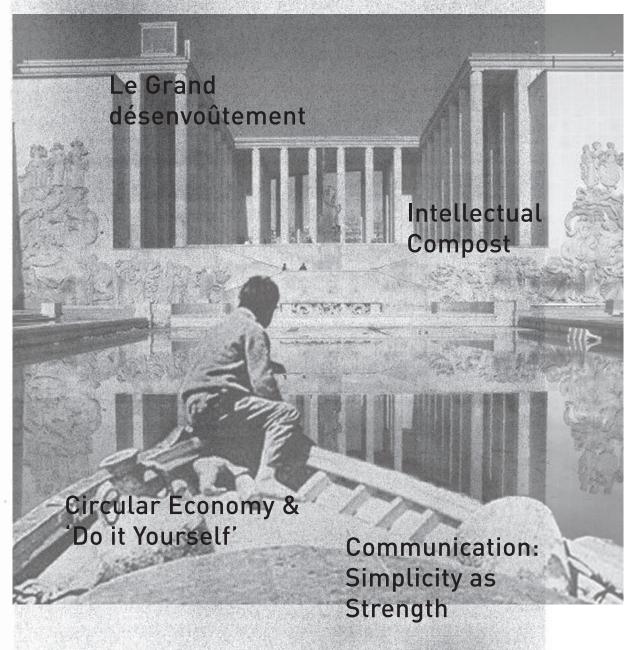
We know how the history of art was written in a situated manner, founded upon aesthetic canons that neglected and marginalized many genres and forms. In order to avoid this 'monoculture', which standardizes imaginaries and impoverishes creation, institutional permaculture calls for an expanded programming. That means projects which include other aesthetics and other disciplines, including those 'bad objects' which are too often considered – like weeds, or other nameless plants – as unwanted intruders in art's garden. Beyond the pleasure of discovery and of mixing together, this

ART REMAINS A SITE OF ALL POSSIBILITIES, YET THIS FORMIDABLE ABSENCE OF LIMITS IS EMBEDDED IN A WORLD WHICH DOES HAVE ITS LIMITS.

biodiversity of forms responds to a duty, namely our duty to offer new stories to the world which are more varied, less monolithic, and less dominant, and which reach wider cultural fields and audiences. Like permaculture in the agricultural field, institutional permaculture is a philosophy which will take on concrete form progressively, with a period of observation and a method and a rhythm adapted to specific situations and desires. Instead of acting brutally on an ecosystem in order to modify it from overnight, or blindly imposing a new model onto a prior reality, it audaciously and inventively draw inspiration from the existing situation in order to orient it towards new objectives. While this project will develop over time, the following elements, just a few amongst a number of others, offer specific examples from the Palais de Tokyo of the application of the permacultural spirit to the artistic institution.



Programming Lines



Natural Properties of the Site

Shareable Garden

IV

INSTITUTIONAL PERMACULTURE AT THE PALAIS DE TOKYO

Work Collectives

A Sustainable Sponsorship



BEYOND THE PLEASURE
OF DISCOVERY AND OF
MIXING TOGETHER, THIS
BIODIVERSITY OF FORMS
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INSTITUTIONAL PERMACULTURE AT PALAIS DE TOKYO

Le Grand désenvoûtement

In agriculture, permaculture begins with the idea that there is no such thing as neutral ground. Every terrain is different, and we cannot sow seeds before we know the soil beneath our feet. At the Palais de Tokyo, our ground is our building and our history. It is a history that is rich and chaotic, thrilling and epic, and which intersects with that of French cultural policy since the start of the 20th century.

In order to better know this terrain, we have launched a project entitled 'Le Grand désenvoûtement' [Breaking the spell] that freely draws upon institutional psychotherapy, a theory that conceives of institutions as suffering from pathologies that must be cared for. This long-term project involves collaborations with artists, historians, researchers, practitioners and shamans, as well as with all of the teams of the Palais de Tokyo, in order to explore which unconscious mechanisms – stories, rumours, desires, ideologies and powers – might secretly determine our ways of doing and making today.

This remediation of the soil, at once serious and joyful, seeks to answer a series of questions. What are the phantoms that have haunted us since 1937, or perhaps since even before then? How can we act to reappropriate our history?

Through exhibitions, performances, talks, moments of exchange and publications, this initiative also has an emancipatory horizon: in a spirit of transparence, it seeks to share with the public a process of critical introspection and reflection upon the history, the functioning and the role of cultural institutions today.

Intellectual Compost

Artistic creation and curating take place over long timescales, which mobilize a great deal of knowledge and expertise. Since not everything can fit into our limited spaces, this preparatory work generates a large amount of unused research, abandoned ideas and lost forms.

The idea of intellectual compost is to mutualize all of those resources through a digital or physical tool that is available to all of the institution's departments. In this way, these resources can be stored and allowed to settle, blend with one another and ferment, finding new forms in the process. This recycling operation will allow the Palais de Tokyo to create its own naturally enriched and refined fuel for future exhibitions, in an imitation of natural cycles wherein everything that dies nourishes what comes after.

Programming Lines

In another effort to limit a throwaway approach to ideas, the programming of

the Palais de Tokyo draws inspiration from permacultural plant techniques founded upon rootedness and self-fertilization to organize its work along specific lines that unfold over time. Broad enough to encompass varied projects and limited enough to avoid dispersal, they frequently change and clarify according to shifts in contexts, discoveries and desires.

Acting as bases for dialogue with all the artists and individuals who interact with the Palais, these lines allow for the ploughing of creative furrows in place of a rapid cycling through and multiplication of different subjects. Of course, this involves relinquishing a desire to do everything, to show everything.

Beyond its ability to bestow an identity upon the institution, this programming in lines (which often intersect and interlace) allows has the advantage of enabling us to invite artists on multiple occasions, over a longer time period and across different projects at various scales. It allows us to follow and accompany careers and thus develop a kind of support and fidelity that are all too rare in the institutional sector of the visual arts.

Work Collectives

Agricultural permaculture is a way of caring for and others through working the land.

Inspired by this, institutional permaculture operates more precisely in the wake of the phenomena that sociologist Howard Becker described in terms of "Art Worlds" 6 i.e. in an awareness of the collective nature of all works of art. This is something that the visual arts, marked by the figure of the solitary, demiurge artist, have tended to minimise through the effacement of a whole range of professions and services that have been all but rendered invisible.

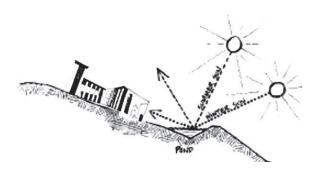
> TAKING CARE OF PEOPLE. AND NOT JUST OF ARTISTS, MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO FIGHT AGAINST THE INVISIBLE **VIOLENCE**

In managerial terms, the attention that institutional permaculture demands means taking into account - in human, legal, social and economic terms as well as in terms of participative decision-making - the whole of the ecosystem inside and outside the institution. Taking care of people, and not just of artists, makes it possible to fight against the invisible violence (precarity, stress, overwork) that is all too often considered unremarkable - or worse still, that is sometimes glamorised - in artistic professions.

24

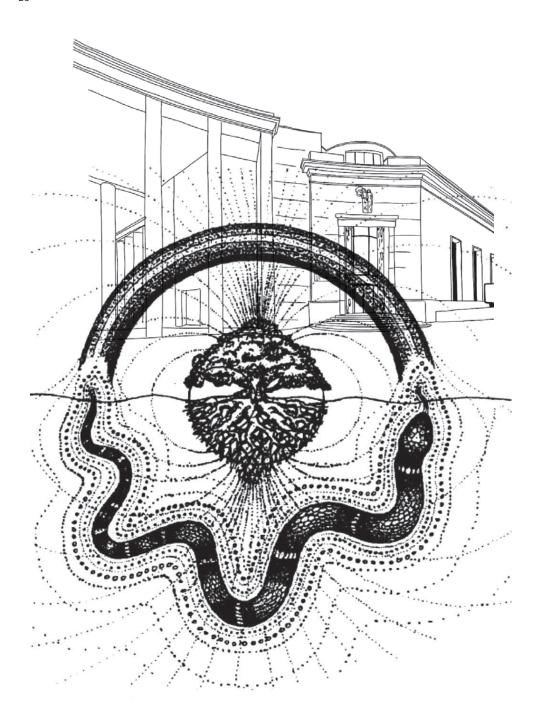
Shareable Garden

In terms of the public, our institution's raison d'être, permaculture invites us to favour an inclusive and qualitative approach based on diversity and on a personalised welcome, decoupling cultural democratisation from the imperatives of attendance figures.



As we know, art and culture are spaces of differentiation that generate a homogeneity in terms of visitor profiles, and which can sometimes deepen inequalities more than they reduce them. This is a situation that must be monitored and combated, ambitiously rather than complacently, and we can do so by moving away from a quantitative logic that masks imbalances in the typologies of our audiences.

To reinforce this social vocation and work on it in depth, the Palais de Tokyo has at its disposal a singular tool: the HAMO. This is a facility specifically dedicated to inclusion, education and well-being through art. Ideally located in the heart of the building, and with a particular focus on visitors with mental and psychological disabilities, this new 700 m² living space inspires the Palais' programming as a whole - nourishing it, deviating from it, questioning it and ultimately enriching it.



Natural Properties of the Site

Faced with the cruelly pressing nature of climate change, permacultural logic implies working with nature rather than against it.



For example, while we have to undertake structural work, we have decided not to air-condition the entire building for ecological reasons. Instead, we will favour the circulation of air and the greening of the surroundings, as well as adapting the scenography, exhibition spaces, opening hours and reception of the public - all this to propose another way of taking care of the building and its environment.

Circular Economy & 'Do it Yourself'

The application of permaculture requires that we favour a circular economy in all of our activities, inside and outside the institution's walls, in our productions and with our suppliers.

It is not only a question of recycling our materials through external circuits but also of thinking about developing our autonomy by making as wide a use as possible of the materials left over from all of our activities, be they internal, artist-oriented or public-oriented. For example, the elements of scenography transformed by the teams of the Palais de Tokyo to become tables available for use by the public can subsequently be reused for exhibitions.

We plan to broaden our already significant skills and tools in terms of manufacturing, construction, printing and restoration, in order to become less dependent on geographically distant sources. Furthermore, these skills and resources are being made available to other local structures and initiatives, following a logic of territorial ecology.

Beyond the material, the circular economy also concerns thought and ideas, in a logic of circulation and exchange, and of the coconstruction and co-design of activities. It valorizes internal skills by creating a collective intelligence that can define and clarify the projet's orientations, nourishing institutional permaculture from within.

Communication: Simplicity as Strength

Permaculture can inspire us even in terms of our communication and public engagement. It encourages us to adopt a form of humility (from the Latin *humus*, earth) and efficiency to reach the greatest number of people, without compromising on our complex and demanding vision of a sociopolitically engaged and engaging contemporary art.

To do this, while preserving the pleasure of poetry and acknowledging our taste for mystery, we avoid unnecessarily inflating concepts and complacently accumulating layers of meaning, at times preferring silence to the proliferation of terms and ideas. In short, we foreground precision over profusion. This shock of simplification does not mean renouncing intelligence or narrative, but rather an active and ongoing tribute to the power of simplicity, which is a form of generosity and mental ecology that we look to make perceptible in each of our images and words.

A Sustainable Sponsorship

We cannot meaningfully talk about ecology without talking about the economy, which is, today more than ever, a crucial issue for the arts sector.

First of all, we must recognize that the urgent social and ecological transition necessarily comes at a cost, something which should not be neglected or minimised, but rather taken into account as part of the overall equation. In financial terms, the Palais de Tokyo already forms part of a kind of circular economy, with almost two thirds of its budget constituted by its own resources and thus requiring an active and inventive policy of private partnerships and sponsorship.

Faced with the economic and political uncertainties of the world, permaculture helps us, once again, to think about the vital adaptation of our sponsorship policies. Indeed, it promotes the idea that acting ecologically is not only about doing, but also about sharing and spreading a spirit. With this in mind, our sponsorship policy has been oriented towards a programme entitled "Sustainable Palace", which brings together companies that contribute at two levels – both financially and in kind or through the sharing of skills – and around two essential issues: the ecological impact and the social impact of the institution. In this way, instead of a one-way financial exchange, sponsorship becomes a sharing of values, actions and ideas that irrigates and inaugurates new, more lasting relationships between the

institution and its patrons. In short, sponsoring the Palais de Tokyo is not only about supporting the most innovative and stimulating forms of contemporary creation, but also about associating oneself with a spirit, a set of ideas, and a pioneering identity that is as active in the social and economic landscape as it is in the artistic sphere.



JUST AS PERMACULTURE IMPLIES, IT IS A **QUESTION OF** LIVING BETTER WITH OURSELVES AND WITH OTHERS IN A FORM OF CONSCIOUS AND JOYFUL SOBRIETY WHICH IS ALSO A FORM OF arle ext KEYPOINT

V

AMBITION, INTENSITY, HUMILITY

AMBITION, INTENSITY, HUMILITY

In these times in which the present and the still-to-come have shifted in colour and in brightness, in which the future is worrying and dreams sometimes seem things of the past, there remain possibilities that we must cultivate. By adopting a holistic ecological approach rather than one circumscribed to certain specific projects, we do not have to limit our actions, but will instead be empowered to consider anew the sustainability of our activities, our expertise and our ambitions by improving our relationship with the world. When we borrow from permaculture, many of the things we hold dear can continue in a more sustainable fashion: far from ceasing the production of new forms and ideas, the mounting of exhibitions and the sharing of art with the public, we will can continue and redouble our efforts, perhaps with more intensity than ever before. In this, the ecological emergency can also represent an opportunity. An opportunity to join together more closely, thanks to a globalization which is not only considered in economic terms but also philosophical and moral ones.

An opportunity to connect with the preoccupations of an active and engaged youth who are pushing us to reconsider our ways of doing things. An opportunity to get closer to our most profound desires, those that led us to choose our metiers at the outset: intelligence, beauty, idealism, sharing, kindness, rigor... Just as permaculture implies, it is a question of living better with ourselves and with others in a form of conscious and joyful sobriety which is also a form of pleasure. Finally, and on a more personal note, as the President of a leading art centre, institutional permaculture has allowed me to return to the etymological root of my initial vocation as a curator: that is, "to care for".



- 1 The term originates from the Portuguese "extractivismo", which referred to the abusive exploitation of the Amazon rainforest, and now extends more generally to economic activities based on the extraction of large quantities of natural resources (mineral, plant or animal) for commercial purposes that fail to take into account the devastating impact of such activities on the natural and social environment.
- 2 Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1883-1950) was an Austro-Hungarian and later American economist, historian and thinker who theorized the historical development of capitalism and its consequences for societies.
- 3 James Ephraim Lovelock (1919-2022) was a British scientist and thinker, as well as a pioneer of environmental protection. His writings and actions have exerted a significant influence upon environmental activism and politics throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.
- A neologism derived from the term "carbon footprint" used to refer to the possibility of inspiring thinking, research and innovations, particularly those that might help reduce our carbon footprints.
- 5 French architectural firm founded in 1987 by Anne Lacaton (b. 1955) and Jean-Philippe Vassal (b. 1954), based in Montreuil (Seine-Saint-Denis), winners of the Pritzker Prize in 2021 and responsible for two successive renovations of the Palais de Tokyo in 2002 and 2012.
- 6 Howard Saul Becker (b. 1928), American sociologist, criminologist and jazz musician who notably developed the idea that art is a collective and not an individual activity that arises from "art worlds", networks of individuals cooperating to create and make works of art accessible.

PALAIS TOKYO

ON INSTITUTIONAL PERMACULTURE

FOR A LIVING AND PRODUCTIVE SITE OF CONTEMPORARY CREATION

Guillaume Désanges

SUSTAINABLE PALAIS PROGRAMME

ART & ECOLOGY











ART & SOCIETY











