

ARCHITECTURE AND FRAMES

On 2 October 2018, AA held a new conversation at AtelierTarkett in Paris as part of the ‘Creatives Affinities’ series and brought together director Raphaël Vital-Durand and architect Stéphane Maupin. Here are some selected extracts of the discussion.

**Emmanuelle Borne: Raphaël Vital-Durand, with your brother David, you directed a film which was released in August 2017, called *Et mon cœur transparent*. It is the story of a man whose wife dies in a car accident and who finds out more about her after her death. Stéphane Maupin, you have designed the M housing units in the 17th arrondissement of Paris and the centre of the public transport operator RATP in the 19th arrondissement. This track maintenance centre on the edge of Paris, near the ring road, is full of cinematographic references...**

**Stéphane Maupin:** The RATP building is indeed inspired by the film industry, especially by Bond films. Watch *The Man with the Golden Gun* and you will see the extent to which the RATP building is part of the Bond universe. This building is particular as we had to work on its purpose. I wanted a functional building which was not merely reduced to its title. I wanted it to become a workers’ palace, something other than a depot which was the initial commission. It is an early work, a melting pot of references.

**EB: It is a site which has borrowed from various styles. *Et mon cœur transparent* is also of multiple genres, a thriller, a romance and a more surrealist universe.**

**Raphaël Vital-Durand, are references important?**

**Raphaël Vital-Durand:** Yes, to make a film is to encompass all the films which have existed in the last century, since filmmaking began. The best director at placing references is Quentin Tarantino, who makes a celebration of them, providing nods to another film every minute. In our first movie, there may not be one every minute, but references are part of the film’s DNA: some will catch them, others won’t. As with architecture, filmmaking is a fight. We must champion films that are strong enough so that we don’t always end up making documentaries. There are some very good documentaries but there is room for everything: going into a dark room and seeing a big screen light up and tell us a story is something that is being lost. Cinema must restore its exhilaration. We must fight on and create to give people something to dream about.

**EB: In *Et mon cœur transparent*, the frames are extremely pictorial and architecture seems to be used as a framing tool...**

**RVD:** Yes, we do use architecture to set up a frame. In fact, everything is a frame, nature is also a form of architecture. All this helps us to position ourselves, and to position our characters. The frame is linked

to the way you want to tell the story: when you do a close-up shot, you are closer to the characters; when you pan out, you get a microscopic view, as if you were studying an ant. In this way, we leave our characters to get on with it. Each frame tells a different part of the story.

**EB: Architects work with constraints all the time. What are the constraints of a director?**

**RVD:** There are many, because a film costs money, as does architecture, unlike painting or writing which are more solitary artforms. Just as an architect builds with people, directors work with an entire team... It can be seen in the film credits, which list 100-150 people. Otherwise, the other constraints are more abstract than in architecture, where everything is visible before construction, on a plan. Some adverts are based on prior storyboards but, with a feature film, we can’t really work like that. The film reveals itself gradually, in the editing suite. A director’s decisions are not immediately visible.

**SM:** When I draw up my plans, a bit like Asterix, once built, I throw them away, so there is an element of surprise when we get to the building site. I don’t have actors but a lot of things happen with the contractors which are involved, some of which



go bankrupt, between the start of the project and its completion. There are always surprises. It is satisfying to see a project take shape and reach completion, but some unexpected things do happen.

**EB: Raphaël, you have directed music videos and adverts. Stéphane, you have experience in design. Can the same method be adapted to different formats?**

**RVD:** Yes, the act of creating something is the same. The big difference is that a music video or an advert requires one month of work, while our first film took us seven years of work and everything changes and develops in seven years. But the creation process is the same. Now that we have got through our first feature film, we will go faster with the second one as we know what pitfalls to avoid.

**SM:** Architects and designers don’t tackle the project in the same way at all. When an architect designs a chair, he considers it as a project and will follow an architectural process as if it were a building. The architect will imagine it with all its accessories and refine it, while the designer will be influenced by the production tool. The designer will wonder which mould to use and how to make the chair in a single piece. It’s a totally different attitude.

With the designer, the industrial tools are important while the architect will conduct meticulous assembly work.

As with architecture, filmmaking is a fight.

**EB: Does the public/private order dichotomy, which is very strong in architecture, also exist in the film industry?**

**RVD:** When you work on an advert or a music video, a record company or an advertiser is behind the order. There is more listening involved, especially as an agency will have worked on the concept for a year already, there have been many changes made and the director arrives towards the end of the process, to direct what has been decided between the agency and the client. The main question is therefore: what additional value can we bring to the table? How can the decisions be made cinematographic? You have to respect what the client and agency have outlined without losing sight of what you can add to it, that’s why we are brought into the project.

**SM:** In architecture, we are experiencing a crisis: public commissions have collapsed and have been taken over by

private stakeholders. With public commissions, we were expected to comply with costs and timelines and the issue of the building’s creation and identity was not called into question. With the competition process, a building was selected and its integrity respected. In private commissions, we are moving to the dark side, meaning that clients think they know better than the architect how to design and complete a building. Their ignorance is imposed on us, which is a real ordeal. Like Raphaël, I want to design dreams and pleasure. I know that in Paris we are living in a moment of eternity because we have Haussmann-style façades envied by the rest of the world but I think that despite that we can avoid it. There are places where we can do it differently. ■

À gauche : Image extraite du film *Et mon cœur transparent* (2017), par David et Raphaël Vital-Durand.

Left: Picture taken from the film *Et mon cœur transparent* (2017), by David and Raphaël Vital-Durand.

À droite : Stéphane Maupin Architecture Design, Centre de maintenance et de formation de la RATP, Paris, 2010.

Right: Stéphane Maupin Architecture Design, RATP maintenance and training centre, Paris, 2010.