

## TOAST N°4

Mid-fall. Middle of the week. Early evening. In a residential neighborhood, the main door of one of the houses is wide open on the street, pouring some of its light out in the dark night. Small groups of people enter little by little and gather in the main room. Elderberry wine is served for the opening of an exhibition. The room, entirely empty at first, slowly fills up. Conversations become louder.

*On the occasion of the exhibition Rose Bruit, (SIC), Brussels, on November 13th, 2014. At the invitation of Sébastien Biset and Raphaël Pirenne.*

*Once everybody has arrived, cut off the electricity of the house on the power panel and start speaking anonymously in the dark.*

I'd like to give a toast to my hosts:

Raphaël,

Jeanne,

Carl

and Gustave.

But also to the publishing house (SIC) that's based here.

And of course to all of you who should make yourselves at home too.

Thank you for hosting me.

I also sleep here at the moment,

right at the top of this house.

Last night,

I woke up very thirsty.

The glass on the bedside table was empty.

I don't like to switch the lights on when I wake up in the middle of the night,

so I took the glass and walked toward the bathroom in the dark.

In the bathroom,

it was really very dark.

I groped to find the tap,

opened it,

put my glass under,

and started wondering when to close it.

How will I know when it's full?

I don't know why but my first idea was to count.

But count what?

It was better to try to imagine the glass filling up,

to imagine the flow of water from its sound,

and to stop one finger before the edge,

one finger that I could just as well put in the glass,

and that would give me, once in contact with the water

a much reliable indication of the volume,

and of the moment to close the tap.

Here I was, when I suddenly got the feeling that the glass was about to brim over.

I shut off the water sharply,

and went back with a indefinite quantity of liquid in my hand.

Now,

I had to be twice as cautious.

To avoid bumping in a wall,

of course,

but also not to spill the glass

that I was trying my best to visualize,

its stormy surface becoming rougher

as I was awkwardly pushing forward in the dark.

And even though my eyes were starting to get used to the dark,

what I was able to distinguish only added to my confusion,

as if I could see the molecules dancing in the cupboard

or in the velvet of the armchair.

I preferred to close my eyes,  
and even though I could see the molecules of my eyelids dancing in front of me in black and white,  
at least there was no risk of tripping over them.  
I finally found my bed.  
Sat down.  
Drank the glass of water.  
Put it down on the bedside table.  
And fell back to sleep.

Just to say that it's probably better that we all finish our glasses  
before we start anything,  
or at least put them down somewhere,  
in a place where each of you can easily find his or hers later.

*Put the glass down on the floor along the wall. Wait until everybody has found a place for his or hers. Take the roll of paper on the chimney and unroll it on the floor like a blueprint. The details of the photograph appear progressively as the eyes get used to the dark.*



At the moment,  
I'm building a house.  
It's not my house.  
Nor someone else's.  
It's just a house.

*Point the different elements on the photograph.*



I started by building a balcony.  
To lean on and look at the distance,  
talk with a friend,  
imagine together what the house could look like one day,  
when it will be finished.  
To imagine what we will do inside,  
and the conversations that will fill it with life.



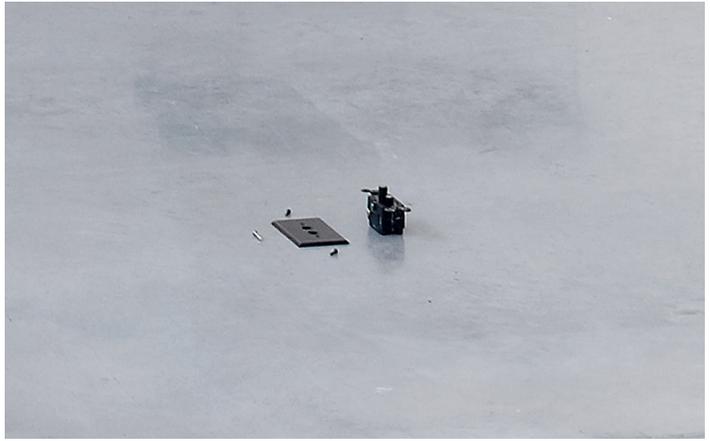
Then,  
I reproduced a step,  
as faithfully as I could.  
I tried to make its portrait,  
with clay.  
It was quite a unique step,  
because in the place where it was,  
there was no other.  
It was the one and only step in the surroundings,  
which gave it a lot of personality.



I also reproduced a window pane.  
A large window  
with ideal proportions,  
and I turned it into a mirror,  
to see if the copy was faithful.



In a planetarium,  
I took a door off its hinges.  
A door that had remained closed for years,  
between a long empty corridor  
and an abandoned office.  
I took a picture of it on the rooftop,  
by night,  
under the stars,  
and took it with me,  
leaving its photograph behind in exchange.



In a former cinema,  
I reinstalled the original lights on the ceiling  
where they used to be 100 years earlier,  
when people would gather in front of the screen,  
and wait impatiently for them to switch off.  
I left the lights there,  
but I took the switch.



In an old house,  
I took a window off its hinges because the view was blocked.  
I took a picture of it,  
surrounded with friends,  
and I walled up the opening.  
I left with the window  
leaving its photograph behind on the new wall.



Then,  
I went to get some stones in the mountains.  
Flat stones, good to make paths,  
or press lithographies.  
One day, I'd like to print plans  
with those stones.  
The plans of a house that you access on a stone path.  
A house that won't be my house.  
Nor someone else's.  
Just a house.

*Pause. Keep on looking at the photograph that appears  
more clearly now.*

To adapt to night vision,  
the eye goes through several steps.  
First,  
during 2 seconds,  
the pupil dilates.

*Take 2 steps toward the garden.*

Then,  
during 5 seconds,  
it adjusts.

*Take 5 more steps.*

After 10 minutes,  
the eye can perceive a light one billion times weaker than in broad daylight.

*Take 10 steps to arrive on the garden terrace. It is pitch  
dark.*

From that moment,  
you can start looking at the stars.

*Point toward the Big Dipper.*

Over there,  
is the Big Dipper,  
also known as the “Great Bear.”  
One way of knowing if you have a good view,  
of knowing for instance if you could’ve been one of Gengis Khan’s archers,  
is to look at the second star starting from the tail of the Great Bear.  
If you see it double,  
you have a very good view.

*Point toward the ground and follow the drawing of the constellations on the other side of the Earth with the finger.*

Now if you look on the other side,  
toward the Southern Hemisphere,  
you can see the beautiful constellation Centaurus.  
Here is his head,  
there his human torso,  
his arms holding a spear,  
and if you look down you can also see his horse rump,  
and his legs suspended in full gallop.  
At the level of his front right hoof,  
right there,  
is the closest star from us.  
That’s why it is called Proxima Centauri.  
Its light only takes 4 years to arrive here.  
But as it’s 18,000 times weaker than the light of the sun,  
we cannot see it.  
At least not with the naked eye.  
To see it,  
you need a tool.

*While speaking, go at the back of the garden and cut a branch. Remove the pith with a knife. Look regularly inside the hole until you can see through it. Pick up the pith and the sawdust and put it in your pocket.*

As its name suggests,  
a telescope  
allows you to see far ahead.  
To see what’s coming,  
and to have time to get ready.  
Except things don’t always come,  
and sometimes even go away,  
and so instead of looking at what lies ahead,  
you end up looking at what you’ll never be able to catch up.

*Go back on the terrace, with the back to the tree. Cut a slit at one finger's length to its end, perpendicular to the branch. From this slit, go down about 2 centimeters and cut diagonally toward the first slit. By repeating these two steps, slit the branch progressively until a hole appears in the inside hollow part. Carry on until the hole is about 5 millimeters. Cut a 3- or 4-centimeter long piece of pith and flatten it on one side. Insert it in the opening between the mouthpiece and the first slit. Test the flute pressing more or less on the piece of pith until a sound comes out.*

The tree at the back of the garden  
is about 100 years old.  
Same as the house.  
It protects it from lightning,  
and its inhabitants from diseases.  
It also facilitates the passage between worlds,  
and reconciles day and night.  
Inside the elderberry tree lives the wife of Pan.  
It can't always be easy  
to live with a guy who's half man,  
half goat,  
always chasing you with his flute,  
and who's so keen on spreading mischief  
that he gave his name to panique.  
That's maybe why his wife hides in a tree.  
Anyhow,  
I don't think Raphaël knew that she lived there  
when he offered me to cut a branch  
for the house that I'm building.  
I said thanks,  
but I have to admit that I had no idea  
what to do with a branch,  
except maybe a wedge.  
It made me think of the draughts  
that storm through houses,  
whistle in your ears,  
throw all your papers on the floor  
and slam the doors like angry teenagers,  
and I thought I'd make a flute.  
I thought that Pan's wife would understand,  
and that this way,  
when the house I'm building will be finished,  
I can blow into the flute,  
and check if the house sounds good.

*Go back inside the house and go up to the second floor  
blowing into the elderberry branch. Stop on the landing  
and wait until everybody squeezes in. Speak low, like  
an intruder.*

To test the acoustics of a building,  
there is a frequency called the pink noise.  
It's like a constant air blast,  
like the sound of a waterfall.  
I wanted to give Raphaël something  
in exchange of the pink noise I was hoping to make with the branch of his elderberry tree,  
to test the acoustics of the house I'm building.  
I wanted to leave him a souvenir.  
Something that will remind him this moment.  
A kind of landmark.

I had just read something on Carbon-14.  
An article explaining all the process.  
First,  
you have to collect a sample of the thing you want to date,  
then you turn it into carbon powder,  
and finally put this powder in a particle accelerator.  
At that moment,  
the particles fly all over the place until there is nothing left at all,  
except for a date,  
the date of the thing that was scattered everywhere like a molecule shower.  
I found that wonderful.  
I thought I'd keep the pith removed from the branch,  
and send it to a Carbon-14 lab.  
I could already see myself receiving a paper from the lab  
with the date of the day I will have cut the branch,  
and I was all excited at the idea of offering Raphaël this paper,  
as a souvenir of our exchange.  
To be sure,  
I wrote to a lab that answered almost immediately  
to tell me they could prepare the sample  
but as for the date,  
their margin of error was about 500 years.

My enthusiasm fell back a little.  
I had to find something else.  
Unless I waited of course.  
But in that case,  
Raphaël's descendants would have to pass on the sample  
from generation to generation,  
which was unlikely to succeed,  
and each time the story would be distorted,  
until it would have nothing to do with the original story,  
that the carbon powder would get lost,  
replaced by something else or even by nothing at all,

that the story itself would be forgotten,  
reinvented,  
turned into a joke,  
a joke that we have no idea of today  
because this type of humor hasn't been invented yet,  
a joke that will be nothing but a sound maybe,  
a facial expression,  
a way of folding your lips  
that for some reason everybody will find hilarious  
and will set off endless giggles.

I wrote to the lab, very excited,  
to ask them if they could just send me the sample back  
once they would have turned it into carbon powder.  
They said no problem,  
but I had to understand that more than a powder,  
it looks like dust,  
and even a very small amount of dust,  
almost invisible,  
almost nothing,  
something you don't even see usually,  
something you really need to concentrate on if you want to see it,  
like when you clean the lens of your camera  
and there is always a tiny bit of dust  
that comes from who knows where,  
and that you have to accept,  
because there's no way of getting completely rid of it,  
you just have to live with it that's all.

I told them it was fine.

And here I am.  
With sawdust in my pocket,  
and in my head, a macroscopic image of a grain of dust  
over the ultra polished surface of a camera lens.

*Pause.*

The last adaptive phase to night vision is rather long.  
About 45 minutes.  
After that time,  
you are able to distinguish a candlelight in the dark at a 27-kilometer distance.  
You have then reached the maximum of your vision capacity.  
Your eyes cannot open wider.

*Stay still for a while without saying anything, squeezed  
in the dark on the landing, and go back down in silence to  
the first room. 45 minutes after the beginning of the toast,  
all the lights of the house come back at once. The room is  
dotted with glasses scattered on the floor.*

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The publication *TOAST* gathers a series of public speeches that have punctuated Mark Geffriaud's work since 2011. As their names indicate, these toasts take an oral form, generally associated with a celebration or an inauguration, and whose history goes back to ancient times. Bringing together in a book the notes and indications that the artist used to give these toasts is both a way to archive them—since no other documentation exists—and to update them, putting the reader in the situation of the performer.

The artist's book gathers a selection of seven toasts from the eleven Mark Geffriaud has given to this date, as well as a new and unpublished script that was activated in public on September 26, 2018 as part of his solo exhibition *A Certain Mildness Too* at gallery gb agency, in Paris. Both a script and a transcript, a tool and an archive, *TOAST* seeks to trace the evolution of the project by anticipating its continuation.