

On my Experience at L'École erratique  
Patrice Loubier, June 15, 2011

I was at Skol on a Thursday evening last summer to hear participants in François Deck's *École erratique* present and share their work and experiences, and found myself at the very heart of what the project the "artist consultant" had conceived. For the project I thought we would be lectured about was in fact still going on in the very presentation that we were taking part in. The five participants' conversation, conducted following Deck's rules, had not really ended; it now embraced and engaged all of us as we formed a circle that made no distinction between initial participants and "mere spectators." And the meaning and bearing one might give to the presentation-cum-assembly, our interrogations as to what we could make of the shared presence, precisely what we were meant to talk about, and the responsibility that finally befell us in deciding on the situation, all this was the very subject of the questions, comments, and reflections we were exchanging.

An experience of the phenomenon, then, rather than discussion of it; the transfer of formal, controlled knowledge concerning a concluded experience giving way to the fluid production of collective knowledge fuelled by its own immersion in an experience which it seeks to grasp but on the delimitations of which it has no control. (All in all, metalanguage does not obtain; or rather, metalanguage and the remarks that one can make about the experience and the school are immediately reincorporated to feed the process: the paradox of an utterance that melds use and mention.) The uneasiness of not knowing the next step in the dance, but also the joy of playing on the unsteadiness itself, of discovering that the meaning of the situation invents and reveals itself before our eyes, as we probe and act.

What's most peculiar, and surprising, is the indeterminate nature of the very activity we are engaged in: presentation? group discussion? workshop on the production of collective knowledge? Pondering, some express a sense of queasiness, some the euphoria of taking part in an open, profoundly undetermined situation. It is by no means chaotic, however, as the talk goes around harmoniously, like a serenely meandering discourse leisurely searching for its own *raison d'être*, enjoying the self-creation and the process of taking shape, over and over again. Both the "informed" participants of l'école erratique who preceded us in experiencing the process and we visitors, curious about this "erratic school" and what it could teach us, wondered how we might evaluate the situation in which we found ourselves, our presence together at Skol on a midsummer's Thursday evening; in the end, the situation takes on body and form in the repartee of our thinking out loud—with the snake surprised to find it is biting its own tail.

Recollecting the dancing, joyous uncertainty and deliriously heady cognitive sensation of that surprising hour and a half, I recall a word-work of Robert Barry's that perhaps best expresses the tenor of that shared experience: *Some places to which we can come and for a while "be free to think about what we are going to do"* (1970).