

## Le pari(s) de BKK

François Roche

(English interpreter Camille Lacadée)

### (... betting on BKK/)

Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG) is a transactional transitory zone, a transdoor<sup>1</sup> opening to a parallel, simultaneous, negotiable universe... The escape it offers may be narrow, it's wonderful anyway... just right for a native emigrant.

Every other week, at a minimum, over the last ten years, to extricate myself from the museum city, frozen, transfixed in its smothering conservatism and pedantic degradation... CDG Airport Terminal 1... "Beam me up, Scotty."

### Complaint/

Paris, Charles de Gaulle Airport, Terminal 1, vanishing point... Escape this sick body... Go far from the necrotic petit bourgeois city, capital of voluntary hostages huddling themselves up in sleepy ideals, where alienation is considered as good as a union contract... Flee this accretion of corrupt sycophantic institutions whose state clerks are amassing in Colbert's shadows, with their moral stench, vomiting their universalism to mask their pettiness.

Bataille's Paris was a wager, a city where you came willingly to get robbed, where people traveling across town knew they risked falling into a trap.<sup>2</sup> The danger of that Paris was intrinsic to its nature. There was no line between its heterotopia and its display case.

Hausmann was the first to perceive the danger of that tangled city planning. And in 1871 traveling down the avenues he cut through the city to allow for parades and military repression the Versailles troops drowned the Paris Commune in blood. The mechanisms of circus and enslavement of today's "urban displays,"<sup>3</sup> to revisit Étienne de La Boétie,<sup>4</sup> have put an end once and for all to the popular and transgressive nature of the city. The alienation they produce among its inhabitants are far longer lasting than the substances of the previous kind. They lull people to sleep while giving them the illusion of existence.

What was once a paranoid urban area has been replaced by the stench of a hygienic, moral, passive city life punctuated by ecstatic celebrations (such as La Fête à Neu-Neu),<sup>5</sup> each one spreading contamination further into the suburbs like Sarkozy's Le Grand Paris<sup>6</sup>, disguising the coming servitude as territorial equality.

### Line of escape/

Yet BKK seems to last longer this time... It can neither be simply a rejection, a repulsion turned pathological, nor a stop-over, quarantine, transience... Nor a sort of "Interzone," the improbable grounds of which, made of experimentation and subversion, have already been tread by Burroughs<sup>7</sup> (fundamental although dated and complaisant)... It cannot feed on renunciation seasoned with tropical Buddhism dressing, subcutaneous afflictions, compassionate knickknacks included... Even less excused by the immersion in a humid and sweaty biotope, here in the heart of this entirely made up colonialist polyethnic neologism "Indochina"... with the affective, sexual, and economic transactional corollary of the aging man performing a platform of exchanges, to borrow from Michel Houellebecq.<sup>8</sup>

All these are possibilities, true and false simultaneously, yet they cannot entirely account for the sacrifice of the bar tabac on the other side of the street,<sup>9</sup> of this daily ritornello on Paname's ground... Unless one develops an irrational and pathological masochism one cannot free oneself

from the addiction to a black coffee, early morning, served by a sleepy, moody, not-yet-showered waiter... The last islet of resistance.

Le pari(s) de BKK is precisely here, in the blackness of this coffee... the ghost of its future anterior... a time machine for the price of a one-way ticket... to rejoin... to rejoice in this Pari(s)... the one of Bataille... dirty, smelly, a swarm of men, women, rats, and cockroaches, of interloped mores, the Pari(s) of society men and “Il est cinq heures”<sup>10</sup>... Whenever it rains, Alphaville’s<sup>11</sup> macadam is covered with gray seeping soot, in daytime rasping the lungs, blackening the slightest apparition... at night coating the stooped grounds.

Le pari(s) de BKK would mean to embrace the street theater, human and machinist, erotic and tragic... the self-contradictory, never-ending messy interlacement; the polyphony of beings and encounters protected and/or exhibited in filth and noise, and yet freed from time and space, “unplugged,” in a mute, blind, and deaf zone<sup>12</sup>... creating simultaneously and in parallel the conditions for a city open to the world, to its species... disrupting and challenging its transactional modes day after day.

### **BKK/**

The dust enshrouds the city and its biotope, modifies its climate... Within this fog of specks and particles<sup>13</sup> Bangkok turns into a melting pot of hypertrophic human activity, of convulsive exchanges of energy. At the antipode of the canons of modern urbanism and its panoply of instruments of prediction, planning, determinism, the city of Bangkok,<sup>14</sup> ectoplasmic, is conceived in between aleatory rhizomes where the arborescent growth is at the same time a factor of its transformation and its operational mode... It is an urban environment made of protuberances and emergences, where capitalist merchandise flows through a profusion of gigantic, aseptic, cold, and deterritorialized malls, immersed in an intoxicating urban chaos. Le pari(s) de BKK is a mixture of dirtiness and beauty, of metabolism and verticality, of traffic jams and flat-smashed motorcycles swiftly finding their way through, of fly-over concrete-bridge-networks snaking their trajectories through a stochastic urbanism, with a permanent confusion, indistinction, deidentification between publicness and privacy, exhibitionism and intimacy, repulsion and magnetism... It’s an apparatus (and not display) whose emergences do not pretend to be long-lasting or eternal... Surviving, dying, resurrecting, dying again in a logic of contingency and vitalism, the logic of a palpitating organism stuttering between life-and-death drives, Eros and Thanatos... a second nature where the urban tissue is alive, and where the city is not limited and framed by its “representation,” not frozen in a normative and panoptical system of survey and representation...

Le pari(s) de BKK is an inter-zone where the possible is uncertain and the impossible plausible... an ad hoc principle of urban (un)planning...

### **Stuttering/**

In the hotchpotch entanglement of flux, friction, trifle, and cum, a few spots sparkle, ingrain, identify as the temples of normalized shopping mall exchanges: Terminal 21, Siam Paragon, MBK, Emporium, Gateway, Future Town, Central World, Robinson, plus a handful always under construction, like Samaritaine, Galerie Lafayette, BHV-Bazar Napoléon, or Bon Marché in Paris... These 19th-century temples of commerce work under ritualized transactional modes, as the first penitentiary worlds of exchange, socialized and hierarchical biospheres, from the cashier to the department head, where the customer, machine subject and object of desire, is able to

exercise the fiction of his/her power, of his/her supposed *jouissance*, where the climate as well as the ambulatory and relational social modes are codified, formatted, artificialized, as the counterpoint to the swarming and untameable city blighting its accesses... But in Paris these capitalized zones have malevolently reversed inside out, and the city itself is now confused with their merchandized display, originally limited, contained and recognizable within geographic (id)entities...

Paris and BKK, two points on the planet, two asymmetrical evolutions, as if following two divergent, contingent space-time *cynosures*... one confusing the client with the citizen, the other still relying on the original contradiction between the object and the “subject” of capitalism.<sup>15</sup> Let us not be mistaken... This is not so much an opposition between two cities as it is an opposition between several temporalities: *Le pari(s) de BKK* is the Paris of a future anterior eviscerated of all nostalgia, projecting a time when the city was not (yet) conditioned by the subordination of the little bourgeois *Ecolo* plugged into his/her iPod mini, on a *Velib* ride, whatever his/her origins, education, salary and gender, to a standardization of appearances... free-willingly becoming the symptom of a global intellectual fraud.

### **Psycho transfer and Digression/**

This apparently ideal “Parisian way of life” increases the schizoid negotiation of double belonging and double membership, framed by local reactionary injunctions on “living together” and, simultaneously, by the need to escape, to go anywhere, like a “transdoor” opening a two-way window between the “here, but...” and the “but elsewhere”... On one side the local forces of permanency and immobility seeking to conserve a supposed “authenticity” regulated by rules and policies... a revived Puritanism driven by society-friendly standards for “good behavior” and phony friendly attitudes, moralistic totalizing scrutiny, recipes for organic health food and hyper-moisturizing soap for a perfect body in the idealized Truman Show village... Or in escaping all this, fulfilling irreducible needs such as reaching, touching the forbidden, jumping through the only window authorizing objectionable behavior in the multiple infra-zones of electronic machinery doors (socializing, virtualizing, fictionalizing, pornoizing, criminalizing, and playing the game)... the legitimate need to be somebody else, the recognition of a contradictory, Siamese dualism... A symmetrical antagonism between the physical hoax of sedentary statements and the illusion of dematerialized nomadism... A permanent schizoid contingency, naturally intertwined. It seems that our times have invited two demons to the same cozy dinner party, thus provoking a divorce between the next door and the door after the next... a permanent schizophrenia.

This basic and symptomatic opposition imposes itself like a cliché... Even stronger than a cliché, a new standard of “life,” a two-way caricature showing both the petrification of the local and the artificialized eroticism of the illusory-but-necessary objective of freedom, as a natural compensation for the stone-aged statement of the former.

For example, we could easily spend time in the bricolage-DIY village-mall to buy the perpetuation of what already exists, to maintain the sclerosis of the environment by adding two screws on the little ringlet of our personal Haussmannian set... White, obviously white... We could also easily buy a condo in any downtown to simulate the happiness of 1950s urbanism transposed into a Peyton Place, or Pleasantville, vertical village, with swimming pool, sports center, healthy food shop, and security cameras... self-adapting to your shape for the ultimate comfort in sleeping equipment, with trendy “flagshit” design, featured in the latest issue of *Wallpaper* magazine... including the newest ice-cube-crushing fridge to keep your imported 20-

year-old Island Scotch at the right temperature... It's the setting of Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*, but in our case, with all psycho-human dimension eviscerated...

These two transfers (patrimonial addiction or fashionable formats) cannot compensate each other; for the amount of repressed emotion and sensation cannot be balanced by providing a kind of pseudo-stimuli discharging catharsis via the other windows, similar to the illusion of keying in the depths of the network infra-zone: the joy of keyboard intimacy, the insulated privacy as the endless possibility of personal and collective neurosis-psychosis which renegotiates human pathologies, the multiple identities syndrome, the temptation of insurrection through "inappropriate language and attitudes" no longer tolerated in the physical petit-bourgeois global village (please pay per view some of your "altered state" on the net at the condition to be a gentle boy and girl in the street).

This predictable, Manichaean yo-yoing between the next door and another door beyond poses as the opposite of post-puritanical capitalism by simultaneously marketing the local and the global. This Siamese business plan traps our free will in a new double mass production of products and desires, from the moralistic values of "living together" to eschatological, scatological, compulsive, and pathological gimmicks meant to serve as compensation for missing bodies. Paris is becoming, with sublime effort and talent, the "sinthome"<sup>16</sup> of this capital(ism) city evolution... Urbanism as a regressive knot, a format of constraints, rules, policies... Smart speeches, small talks, flirts, merchandises, and all the "online" inhibited pathologies, on psychoactive antidepressants, on compulsive gambling officially organized by the French national lottery, *La Française des Jeux*. In opposition, *Le pari(s) de BKK* could run as an experiment in which the "village" is a matrix across multiple doors, articulating the immanent conflict of living together without denying the unpredictable nature of this very conflict, directly revealing the sophistication or the lack of social contract, of neighborhood protocols, adjusted in real time, articulating phantasms and realities, obstacles and possibilities, garbage and fresh blooms, threats and various forms of protection, technical prowess and forces of nature... interlocked... in keeping with the vitality of the species inhabiting them.

The "restoration" of the notion of democracy has to extend its potential of refabrication to the tooling and procedures that structurally produce city planning. Western democracy developed such a high level of control through the legitimate delegation of power as described and analyzed by Michel Foucault, that the energies of the multitude are framed, ghettoized in a predictable determinist master-planning agenda opposite of the notion of a heterotopic agenda, preliminary stones of urban contract emerging from the *Multitudes* ...

In this sense, BKK, simultaneously "tragicable" and "expectanciable," can be seen as the pursuit of Rimbaud's poetry,<sup>17</sup> *La commune était une fête*, including its (un)predictable fragility and failure<sup>18</sup>... Not in terms of the political structure of the system, but in the logic of a city (un)planning, through flux and reflux between "top-down" and "bottom-up" ... reconditioning the loophole between the looseness of an administration and the individual dynamic innovation able to infiltrate this tolerance... in a succession of extension, entropy, graft... a permanent mutation of the "tissue" (neither constrained by the ideology of *tabula rasa*... nor by archaeological preservation).

### **Schizoid apparatuses/**

What perhaps is most relevant in *Le pari(s) de BKK* is the potential confrontation between the antagonistic forces of two urban models, a permanent union and divorce of the "Commune and the Capital," intrinsically intertwining to generate a systemic live output.

The first model is made of the sound of the human swarm, musical and terrestrial, on the city's ground, and includes permissiveness of transformation, adaptation, graft, and necrosis, on its first four-five floors from the ground... where one can erect, destroy, alter, gangrene, and nest one's familial, commercial, or amicable system without having to report to public authority, as if in the midst of a judicial vacuum... The other is looking down on the first, appearing as a skyline, a vertical succession of malls, condos, and hybrids<sup>19</sup>... emerging without creating any centralized downtown, subject to opportunities, speculations and resistances... themselves subject to strict rules of materiality, normality, and global representational aesthetics.

Le pari(s) de BKK is this caress, rustle, friction territory... It makes possible the encounter between the one who only exercises his/her power through the compulsive merchandise of turnkey life models, and the one who, oppositely, is in synchronicity with the animal pleasure of things and beings, smells and sounds, illusions and ripe fruits... One makes a skyline, the other humming asphalt ... One is capitalizing his/her economy by freezing it in the standardization of an imaginary vertical home (a condo 70 percent unoccupied, like so many financial products where habitability is a fiction), a producer but not consumer of a horizontal urban line, a financial transfer zone... The homogenization of desires and satisfaction allows for the flow of merchandise and the circulation of the money-narrative<sup>20</sup> (the city has turned into a transactional economic vector), which disincarnates in the construction of pseudo-luxurious, pseudo-comfortable, pseudo-designed, pseudo-inhabited, speculated, and volatile products in a skylinization process... before the bursting of the financial bubble into a myriad of collateral effects, junk bonds, and fatal contingencies... The predictable deorganization of profits... The other has nothing to capitalize except its daily ritornello of "difference and repetition" in an erotic pornographic rustle conditioning, as Lacan wrote, "the epidermal contact, complete, total, between the body and a world itself open and quivering . . . from a touch, and at the horizon, a lifestyle of which the poet shows the way and the direction."<sup>21</sup>

Le pari(s) de BKK stutters on two models of jouissance, between the city-as-product-of-the-capital and the city-that-doesn't-give-a-shit, busy as it is getting pleasure from it, in the superimposition of two strata, two morphologies, two mechanics of nonlinear exchanges... But Paris only has one model left: the human bourgeois, or bourgeois-becoming,<sup>22</sup> insulated in his/her soundproofed home, listening for the least untimely noise that might get through the partition-walls to immediately denounce it, confusing life with its representation... with its corollary of sadness, and its dependency on the display organized by the central system of power delegation, the political, social, monarchical operator: la Mairie de Paris.

On the other side, BKK, where two stories of time are still plausible... Like an urbanism for Schrödinger's cat, it is simultaneously dead and alive, a contingency, a place of parallel stories... exuding the possibility to navigate in their frictions, the crib of their folds and of the generated possibilities, without subscribing to the one or the other as the unique mode of existence...

The jump has been made... One year ago... Le pari(s) de BKK... Could it only be a 14-hour flight, a glass of whisky, three meals, two movies, some writing, half a drawing...? A normalized distance... linear... almost disappointing... inasmuch as one carries one's psyche in one's baggage... and the distance travelled will not metabolize its dependencies....

## BIO

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<sup>1</sup> In Dan Simmons' novel *Hyperion*, the transdoor is a vector of physical translation.

<sup>2</sup> The Bataille' Paris is a kind of "portmanteau-word", the Battle of Paris (*Bataille* is French for battle) or the bet of Bataille (*pari* means bet), including unlimited disorder as a precondition of the order of the discourse, coming from the notion of Heterology developed by Georges Bataille, without to omit first the legacy of his transgressive thinking and writing; mixture of murky, occultism, "accursed share" and flamboyances, and secondly his violent pamphlet "la chiourme architecturale / "architecture convicts slavery" (Documents #2, 1929); a text battling monumental and totemic architectural production as the expression of an urban-human domination. See Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

Georges Bataille is a protean French philosopher and writer, involved in many domains – economy, anthropology, history of art and erotism. Disqualified by André Breton and J.P.Sartre in 1943 as a "psychasthenic trapped in his senile, rancid, filthy, lewd personal pathology," he was rehabilitated by Michel Foucault's preface in 1970 to the publication of his complete works. See Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, (Paris: Gallimard).

<sup>3</sup> Public festivals such as Paris Plage, Paris Nuit Blanche, Paris Marché des Fiertés, Paris Fêtes des Tuileries, Paris Carnaval Tropical, Paris Famillathion, Paris Quartier d'été, Paris Techno Parade, Paris Fête de la musique, Paris Future en Seine, Paris..., Paris of boredom and tourists in shorts, etc., etc., the city as a display...

<sup>4</sup> See Etienne de la Boétie, *The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*, trans. Harry Kurz (New York: Black Rose, 1975).

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<sup>5</sup> La Fête à Neu-Neu is an annual celebration in the Bois de Boulogne established by Napoléon I in 1815 – the first drug-display for “Valium-ing” citizens.

<sup>6</sup> Le Grand Paris (Greater Paris project) is an initiative launched by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy for “a new global plan for the Paris metropolitan region.”

<sup>7</sup> See William S. Burroughs, *Interzone* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> *Plateforme* is a novel by Michel Houellebecq, published in 2001 by Flammarion, the theme of which is Thailand’s prostitution its affective and economic transactions

<sup>9</sup> “I’m nothing. / I’ll never be anything. / I can’t wish I were anything. / Even so, I have all the dreams of the world in me. . . . Esteves turned and saw me. / He waved goodbye, I shouted ‘So long, Esteves!’, and the universe / Reconstructed itself to me with neither ideal nor hope, and the Owner / of the Tobacco Shop smiled.” Álvaro de Campos [Fernando Pessoa], “Tobacco Shop,” in *The Collected Poems of Álvaro de Campos*, vol. 2, 1928–1935, trans. Chris Daniels (Exeter, UK: Shearsman Books, 2009), 13–18.

<sup>10</sup> “Il est cinq heures, Paris s’éveille,” a song by Jacques Dutronc and Jacques Lanzmann.

<sup>11</sup> *Alphaville*, a 1965 science fiction film by Jean-Luc Godard shot in the natural setting of Paris.

<sup>12</sup> The three wise monkeys are a pictorial maxim well-known throughout Asia. Each monkey is depicted as covering its ears, eyes, or mouth with its hands to embody the proverbial saying, “Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.”

<sup>13</sup> The city is covered by CO+CO<sub>2</sub> particles that filter the light through spectral frequencies of grey, creating a glossy, luminous, vaporous, pheromonal, hideous, shaded, transpiring, cottony, rugged, dirty, hazy, suffocating, hairy grey atmosphere that both reveals the degree of pollution and wraps the city in an extremely sophisticated coat, as the witness of ambivalence to the situation.

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<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, the bottom-up, under the freeway... a self-organized, “messy,” excessively rustling human zone, where frictions and encounters are intrinsically implemented, embedded... a potential of adaptability, transformability, tolerance, and indeterminism... from the shapelessness of the city to human pathologies and improvisations... where everything is dedicated to the logic and illogic of the swarm... in the exchanges’ dynamism, in the smelled, swallowed, digested, shitted substances, in the confusion between the taste of stir-fried food, the fragrance of rain on asphalt... the dirtiness and the beauty in the hell of human energies and vitalism...

On the other hand, the top-down, the freeway ... a disseminated downtown dedicated to its own representation, its self-satisfaction with its emergence in the sky, which embodies the running of the financial ideology through multiple condominiums of personal social “successes,” stacked and disconnected from each other... both *alive and dead*: alive through the endlessly upward high-rising of the city, with numerous sites under construction, symbolizing the activity, working potential, and efficiency of the economic model; and simultaneously dead for the same reasons, especially when the condos are completed... then working as financial products more than as actual living places.

The freeways, organized as a gigantic octopus-like network floating in the urban tissue, are the “horizontal” line separating and distinguishing these two types of human habitudes of self-representation or social strata... enabling a myriad of connections, flirts, touches, caresses, and collision points between the two.

<sup>15</sup> “Subject” here refers to a subordinate, as in a King’s subject.

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<sup>16</sup> The *sinthome* (an archaic French spelling of the word *symptom*) is a concept introduced by Jacques Lacan to redefine the psychoanalytic symptom in terms of his topology of the subject. “The *sinthome* works as a substitution of phallic function . . . and by this way authorizes the symbolic to operate in its play to perforate the real.” Moustapha Safouan, *Lacanian: les séminaires de Jacques Lacan* (Paris: Fayard, 2001). In this sense we could consider that Paris represents the *sinthome* of its citizens.

<sup>17</sup> “The Communards defending their revolutionary Paris against the government forces attacking from Versailles roam about the city like ants (*fourmiller*) in Rimbaud’s poetry and their barricades bustle with activity like anthills (*fourmilières*). Why would Rimbaud describe the Communards whom he loves and admires as swarming ants? When we look more closely we can see that all of Rimbaud’s poetry is full of insects, particularly the sounds of insects, buzzing, swarming, teeming (*bourdonner, grouillier*). ‘Insect-verse’ is how one reader describes Rimbaud’s poetry, ‘music of the swarm.’ The reawakening and reinvention of the senses in the youthful body – the centerpiece of Rimbaud’s poetic world – takes place in the buzzing and swarming of the flesh. This is a new kind of intelligence, a collective intelligence, a swarm intelligence, that Rimbaud and the Communards anticipated.” Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin, 2004) 92–93.

<sup>18</sup> The riots in BKK between the “Red Shirts” (People’s Power Party) and “Yellow Shirts” (People’s Alliance for Democracy) during the Thai political crisis from 2008 to 2010 were reminiscent of the Paris Commune in 1871 and the revolts of 1830 and 1848, where the city was not only zones of consummation, works, play, and sleeping but the territory of tension, where public space as the theater of the antagonisms stretching and pulling human society.

<sup>19</sup> One hundred high-rise buildings are currently planned and/or under construction in Bangkok.

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<sup>20</sup> “Capitalism is nearly indifferent to the contents of the stories of which it enables the circulation. The money-narrative is its canonical story because it brings together its two properties: it tells us that we can tell any stories we like, but that the stories’ profits must return to their author, or at least to those who convey their narratives (green washing, social washing, security washing). Jean-François Lyotard, *Instructions Païennes* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1977).

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire*, vol. 7, *L'éthique de la psychanalyse 1959-1960* (Paris, Seuil, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> Paris is used like a beta development zone for the luxury industry. International magazines often depict Paris as a place where people on the street look like fashion models, provoking the Paris Syndrome: a transient psychological disorder encountered by tourists visiting Paris, and Japanese visitors in particular. It is characterized by a number of psychiatric symptoms such as acute delusional states, hallucinations, feelings of persecution (perceptions of being a victim of prejudice, aggression, or hostility from others), derealization, depersonalization, anxiety, and also psychosomatic manifestations such as dizziness, tachycardia, sweating, and others. See “Paris Syndrome,” *Wikipedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris\\_syndrome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_syndrome).