

**RIVIERA BUZZ: H el ene, you are a citizen of Nice, a subscription holder of the TNN, and an ecologist. On what level does the demolition of the TNN and Acropolis affect you the most, and why?**

**H el ene Granouillac:** You don't touch the salt of life. Here we are dealing with two ecosystems living in symbiosis - culture and ecology - which are essential for a good life, and mutually beneficial.

Invoking the fallacious pretext of "creating an urban forest to alleviate and reduce urban pollution", the City of Nice pursues the demolition of the TNN, a National Centre of the Dramatic Arts, while at the same time advancing two ecologically anachronistic and mortifying projects: turning Europe's most fertile plain, the Var river valley, into a concrete desert, and supporting the extension of terminal 2 of Nice International Airport.

This vision is incoherent. Hence the counter-project proposed by ecologists to reconcile maintaining the centerpiece, the TNN, with the development of green spaces as recommended by its architect, Yves Bayard, with his vision of gardens and footbridges.

How can one apply for the title of 2028 European Capital of Culture by destroying these places - a first in France where theatres have always been rebuilt on the spot! - and all this in the year of the 400th anniversary of Moli re's birth? What inconsistency, what a puny vision of culture...

**Let's look at things through your lens as a citizen of Nice: what impact will this project have on the residents and businesses in this popular district?**

It is a lifestyle in the heart of Nice that will be disrupted. This base, this agora that is the theatre, so central to the heart of the local residents, will be razed to the ground. Along with the TNN, the Acropolis congress centre, which is also a performance venue, is also to be destroyed. This means loss of attendance and subscribers for the theatre, and loss of convention visitors. We're destroying existing space before we've even built new one!

The desertion of these cultural venues is yet another blow to local shops already weakened by Covid-19 and the drop in purchasing power. Who benefits from this crime? We are concerned about the phenomenon of gentrification, and the district's real estate will increase further,

excluding the lower and middle classes. Five-star hotels and more yachts in the nearby port are on the horizon, and there is a risk that the city will become an elitist tourist destination to the detriment of the local population.

**And what about culture? The TNN's 1,300 seats will be replaced with various smaller stages across town. What does that mean for theatre goers like you, and also for the artists?**

With this demolition, film buffs would sum up the state of Nice's theatre culture as "scattered in little pieces like a puzzle", minus Lautner's humour. The feared effect is a hemorrhage of attendance. Who will want to attend a play at the Franciscans - certainly a beautiful heritage site to rehabilitate - knowing that many places in the auditorium are standing room only? Or what production company will want to come given the logistical challenges such as the delivery of sets when you cannot park and unload the truck? Anyone who works in the field of arts knows that seasons and programmes are prepared two to three years in advance.

As for the congresses, why farm them out in an office zone near the airport, depriving attendees of the charm of the historic city, and further burdening the local shops? After a day's work, savouring the local cuisine, walking through a neighbourhood with walls steeped in history is more attractive than the icy-cold environment of the modern city built to the west.

Moreover, this whole newly developing area is at the crossroads of a major artery - the eastern exit of the expressway that crosses Nice. It will be paralysed by large scale construction works over the next few years, traffic is likely to be congested.

Nice must remain open and accessible for all social classes. Precisely because of its current location, the theatre acts as a cauldron of culture. We walk up..., up to the theatre to flee from the prosaic life. Discovering authors, texts, actors, bodies, and music cannot be improvised.

Moreover, the current building is the fruit of the labor and knowledge of an arts lover, architect, photographer, and much more: Yves Bayard designed it in dialogue with its alter ego, the Mamac (Museum of Modern Art and Contemporary Art) - performing arts meet plastic arts. To deprive this aesthetic physiognomy of this balancing pillar shows a lack of taste, or even a disturbing ignorance in defiance of elementary rules.

Besides, didn't Saca, the Architects' Union of the Côte d'Azur - a reference if ever there was one - give an unfavourable opinion to this destruction? It is unheard of for a minister to approve such a demolition. There is incomprehension everywhere.

## **As an ecologist, why do you find the demolition problematic for the environment?**

We are in favour of the plurality of cultural sites and the "green corridor" (part of the "green grid" programme) but we are also keen to preserve the strong symbol that the TNN represents. This is why our alternative project offers to keep it, to modernize without demolishing it. Apart from the financial aspect of the whole project - a sinkhole of several hundred million euro – simply renovating this building entails a cost of about fifty million euro. This includes the development of green spaces.

The environmental cost of this destruction is also considerable. The green space and 1,500 trees promised will not be enough to combat the heat of our city and make us forget the irreversible concreting that has been done elsewhere. At best they will offer a modest respite.

Some materials, like the TNN's marble tile cladding, can be recycled, but the constant stream of trucks and heavy machinery will have a harmful impact on the residents of the neighborhood. No local Niçois facility has the skills or equipment to recycle certain materials here, meaning they will have to be transported outside the area, thus again generating an unacceptable carbon footprint.

Another major point is that, for the time being, we simply have neither data on the environmental impact of this destruction, nor prior studies.

## **Do you think that TNN director Muriel Mayette-Holtz has been put in a "mission impossible" situation?**

Michel Cova - engineer, scenographer, and collaborator of Jean Nouvel – dug up a film and presented it during the January 20 Round Table organised by the Club de la Presse 06. It shows the director praising the TNN in dithyrambic fashion. In Muriel's defence, the start of her mandate almost coincided with the pandemic, making things hard for her. But does this justify such a rapid about-face - an exalted promotion of this place followed by praising an ambulant theatre "outside the walls"? This leaves subscribers and fans perplexed.

Furthermore, the staff we met at Acropolis or the Nice Opéra (a temporary substitute venue) expressed concern, particularly about the use of the halls during this transition. Some are worried about seeing an already understaffed training programme (for the opera) reduced. Others are concerned that the precarious status of "permittents" (permanent/intermittent) in the performing arts will disappear or that young applicants will shun Nice. This pooling of scant resources affects the staff of the TNN and the Opera. It must not hinder the quality of the work provided.

In addition to taking into account logistics and accounting, we also demand that musicians, technicians and companies must be involved and associated with this decision. These essential men and women embody the influence of these pillars of culture at a time when Nice is applying for the title of European Capital of Culture. We must give them the means to do so.

**Do you have an explanation of how mayor Estrosi came up with this idea? Who or what, do you think, inspires him to remake the city to his liking? Economically, who will pay the enormous bills?**

If there is one constant, it is the incomprehension that persists in the minds of the people I met in Nice. And like a leitmotif, this question reappears: "*Why this destruction?*" The lack of consultation, the unpreparedness, the haste of such a decision - on the eve of the second round of the municipal election in the middle of a pandemic and a severe lockdown - took people by surprise, most of them not being aware of this choice. This is now being observed on the ground. I'm not sure that even with more pedagogy, this demolition will be understood and accepted. The future will tell.

The mayor of Nice recently indicated in the local press that for every 1 euro paid by the city, investors are matching 10 euros. But what taxpayers need to better understand about this vast contract is how high the price and how long they will have to pay! By destroying the Paillon river bed, we are feeding the ogre that is the OIN ["operation of national interest"] of the Var plain and its insatiable appetite for markets and for concrete... far from an eco-responsible policy! You can't build a cultural policy worthy of the name on financial considerations alone.

**What message would you still like to add?**

Architectural cohesion is a fundamental principle built on a common denominator, as are the aesthetics which reflect their environment: unity of materials, colours, construction techniques, balance. We only have to look around us.

When they were conceived and built, the TNN and its alter ego, the Mamac, responded precisely to these elementary principles, both feet planted above the bed of the Paillon, overhanging the surroundings, offering themselves up to all eyes. In a dialogue between performing and plastic arts, the theatre, the museum, and the media library offer a unique triptych that is the envy of many cities, including those abroad.

Nice must not become a sanitized city and sell itself out to bling-bling merchants. The beauty of nature, here in the city, has always preceded us, it existed before us. The symbiosis that they

maintain with the arts is essential. After the pandemic, more than ever. It is this very essence that we want to preserve.

**Thank you, H  l  ne Granouillac!**