

Discussions in the studio between Jean-Pierre Sergent and Michel Pétiard | 11 parts | Besançon studio | May 8th 2019

Caméras: Christine Chatelet et Lionel Georges.

1/11: THE TOTAL ARTISTIC COMMITMENT - [Watch the video \(In French only\)](#)

Jean-Pierre Sergent: Hello, I would like to introduce you to Michel Pétiard, who is a friend of mine and came do this interview today. It is May 8th 2019, Lionel Georges is running the camera as usual and Christine Chatelet is running the camera too. There you go, Michel, you have the floor.

Michel Pétiard: Thank you Jean-Pierre for welcoming me to ask you some questions about your work and about yourself as well. The first question I wanted to ask you was about your commitment to your artistic creation. I wanted to start with a text from you that I found in your Influences, in the last text about the people who influenced you. It's a text about Sade, where you say the following:

"Sade is important, not only for his writings, but also for his incredible capacity for resilience and willingness to proclaim his thinking. Even when imprisoned and sentenced to death, he continued to write what he considered essential: the right to pleasure and the freedom to think and act. This is a great example for me and probably for many artists, because very often we are confronted with terrible financial difficulties, but also with the problem of the lack of places of diffusion to be able to show our art, our paintings, which are victims of the aesthetic and dogmatic hegemonic ostracism of the French cultural policy imposed by its representatives."

So beyond the end, I wanted to know - we understand from this text the difficulty that the practice of your art can represent for you - how you conceive your commitment?

JPS: Yes, well, of course we are always in a state of resilience when we are an artist. It is more or less difficult depending on the countries in which you live. Being in France today, I find it quite difficult to practice my art, my artistic practice. And I wanted to bounce back on Sade, because he attacked religions, everything that enclosed human thought. He really wanted absolute desire, it's a bit of a caricature of the will of ecstasy. But despite everything, I think, for example, to come back to the current situation, that in the Arab revolutions, they may lack a philosopher like Sade? We know very well that the French revolution was possible thanks to the spirit of the Enlightenment, so we have to think about these things. And in my artistic practice, I am a little subversive, that's for sure, I push the envelope of sexuality and pleasure a little bit, in opposition to a completely bourgeois, gentrified society.

MP: But beyond what Sade represents in terms of idea, of strength, of progress - let's put it that way - are you referring to him in terms of commitment, commitment to art, with the difficulties it represents for an artist? That is, at

some point, we must be able to ask ourselves the question: do I continue, or do I not? Because it's difficult!

JPS: Of course! Yes!

MP: It's difficult, so what I wanted to know is in your life - I think I understood it perfectly well by reading various writings from you, and your references - we understood well that art, your art, is your whole life?

JPS: Yes, it's my whole life, and if I didn't have art, I'd do something else! It's true that it's something I'm passionate about; of course, I'm passionate about it. It's a passion. And it's a commitment, of course, it's physical, it's moral, yes, of course!

MP: It's a commitment. But I mean it's a total commitment?

JPS: Yes! But then, after that, I have done other things in my life too. But it is the commitment that gives me the most pleasure today. And I think that a human being is something that can reveal itself to itself through a society, through an artistic practice. For example, I felt much more "normal" in New York than here! Where I feel a little withdrawn, where I can't have that dimension that you can acquire in a society that leaves you open-minded. And for me, to be an artist is to have a freedom of mind, a willingness to develop one's consciousness too...

MP: Yes, okay, I understand your definition of your status as an artist, of course I understand it; I will try to understand it anyway. But what has always challenged me with you, as in other artists, is this total commitment. Once again, I am talking about a total commitment, and this is far from obvious because it is not often found in society.

JPS: Yes.

MP: Do you understand what I mean? Whether in the field of art or in other fields, of course.

JPS: Yes, that's right! I'm committed...!

MP: Despite the difficulties, despite the tribulations, despite the pain, the suffering, well... you continue.

JPS: Of course. Yes!

MP: You keep going!

JPS: That's right, I like it!

MP: Yes, you like it, but it probably goes beyond suffering, difficulty...

JPS: It transcends, yes, that's true.

MP: It transcends that.

JPS: Art transcends life!

MP: Because I was reading an interview with you just yesterday, which is on your website; I don't know in which magazine, they asked you: "What makes you get up in the morning?"

JPS: Yes, I remember!

MP: "I get up with the sun and work." (Interview with Jean-Paul Gavard-Perret, for *Le littéraire.com*, March 2013).

So in the end, it can almost summarize your existence?

JPS: Yes and no, because I love being in nature, being with friends. You understand, there are other things too.

MP: Yes, I agree, but I...

JPS: Human relationships are also very important.

MP: They are very important too! All right, perfect!

2/11: THE AXIS MUNDIS - [Watch the video \(In French only\)](#)

MP: So, another question, Jean-Pierre, is about verticality, which is important in your work, with a really fundamental place, it seems, of the axis mundi. I noticed that this place, it is about an early experience in Egypt, a trip to Egypt when you were 21 years old; could you elaborate a little bit on this idea of verticality?

JPS: Yes, it's quite complex. That is to say, verticality is felt when you are dying or when you are born, it is the relationship to the cosmos. Period. It is being connected with the universe as a whole. And it is true that in Egypt, it is not totally premature because I was already a young adult; I was in that cubic priest's cell and that had a window in the center of the ceiling that was square. And so I did everything (during this trip, I was with my grandfather Maurice and my sister Marie-Paule) to try to get away from the tourists to have this personal experience with architecture and the cosmos. I didn't know I would have this experience, but it's true that I had a kind of revelation in this cell. That is, I felt a little bit like I was having an out of body experience. This is the role of all sacred architecture... whether it is in a cathedral, a church, a temple, we are supposed to start in this vertical axis.

MP: In this vertical axis.

JPS: That's it, yes.

MP: I understood the relationship with the sacred building, that's clear. Does this verticality in you correspond to an inner verticality, a verticality that would then correspond to a concern for spiritual elevation? Is it inside?

JPS: It's both inside and out!

MP: So here it is, where do you look at the world as a verticality, as if there were a hierarchy in the world?

JPS: In the axis mundi of the first peoples, there is the underground world where there are five levels, the celestial world where there are nine levels, according to the shamans it is different! But there is this whole hierarchy of spirits, yes, to achieve great wisdom. And, Buddhists also say it, it is this kind of revelation of the state of *satori*, also among Buddhists! That is, at some point, we understand the mechanisms of the Universe. It may seem completely stupid to a French mind, but it's a bit like that.

MP: Would that correspond to what has perhaps been called in the West: the oceanic feeling?

JPS: Yes, that is to say, the oceanic feeling, we feel it more in sexuality. It is more of a transversal relationship, because you feel like you're in the sea; and the sea is the land! So it's a little bit like that, but it's more than that!

MP: Okay.

JPS: That is, we are really beyond the body; we are really in a world... I wouldn't talk about a wonderful world, but we are all the collective memory of

the universe and the world! We carry within us the memory of the big bang. So that's kind of the feeling you get. It's not the oceanic feeling at all. It's not that, it's more than that!

MP: Isn't that the oceanic feeling?

JPS: No, no.

MP: Not really, okay; so it's both something more inner, but still oriented towards the world? To the cosmos?

JPS: The Universe, yes, it's the Bindu point, we're at the beginning of the world! Yes !

MP: Okay. From that point on, I would like us to come to the notion of nature, which for me derives from the concept of verticality; that is, for me, nature would then be horizontality, in my mind. But that doesn't seem to be the case for you. Here, I will repeat the rules that you had set for yourself, that you imposed on yourself and that are mentioned in the text you call the Third Breakdown.

JPS: Yes.

MP: Okay, there are six. There are six new rules, all but one of which have to do with the material. So for me, horizontality. So I will name them: work on the floor, the place of color as energy, variations on series on a formal theme, expression of feelings, work on a body scale, research into new materials... and there you place the axis mundi in the work rule on verticality. So how do you articulate that? Do you understand what I mean? We have the impression that a large part of these rules concern horizontality?

JPS: Yes!

MP: In other words, the material world?

JPS: To be able to have a verticality, you need a base that is stable.

MP: Of course.

JPS: So I work flat... It's true that easel painting annoys me a lot; I can't go to museums anymore to see easel paintings... Because it's a false vision of cosmic man; so by working on the ground, a little like Pollock, it's Pollock's lesson.

MP: Like Pollock, yes, of course.

JPS: I have this relationship with the earth! And from the earth, you can go elsewhere.

MP: That's it, all right!

JPS: It's a base.

MP: It's a base, it's essential?

JPS: But absolutely, the body is essential!

MP: Okay, the material? So for you, there has to be a match between the two?

JPS: Of course, there is no antinomy, there is no paradox.

MP: No, no, of course, I don't think there is any antinomy or paradox, but I'm trying to find out how these two notions are related. Do you understand what I mean?

JPS: Yes, of course.

MP: Because we may come back to this later when we talk about the square, but it is true that it is not necessarily obvious, and it is not necessarily obvious

for a Western mind, to combine these two notions. Because in the Western mind, perhaps verticality was conceived as a hierarchy, as the hierarchy of nature with a number of successive elements that are more or less inferior to each other. But for some people, verticality is an inner verticality.

JPS: Yes, but I am aware that the body is essential; it is very important.

MP: Because we are vertical beings.

JPS: That's it, we're vertical beings! That's right. That's right. After that, is it an illusion of the mind, I don't know! But I think that relationship exists. I think we are connected to each other in various ways that are much deeper than what science today wants us to know.

MP: You mean the interpersonal relationship, between people, between people.

JPS: That's it, yes, of course... there's a lot more energy going around.

MP: And then we would be in the horizontal? or in the vertical?

JPS: It doesn't matter!

MP: Doesn't it matter to you?

JPS: It doesn't matter, it's without space!

MP: Agreed

JPS: Well, yes!

MP: Maybe we're both in both?

JPS: It's a false question! I still remember Black Elk (Black Elk Speaks), who was a great Sioux chief who came to London to tour with the Buffalo Bill Circus. He got sick, and he did this shamanic trance where he came back to his village where he saw his mother; so space no longer matters. Just like in shamanic trance, who cares? Whether it is vertical or horizontal, the important thing is to be connected.

MP: Okay.

JPS: We are beyond matter at that moment.

MP: Are we beyond matter?

JPS: Oh yes!

MP: And yet we have our feet on it?

JPS: And yes: so what! Yes, of course, it's the morphic fields... it's all that!

MP: Is that all of it? Yes, okay, but you understand that I'm trying to detect that, because I have a Western mind, which was formed by Western philosophy, and it's true that it's not necessarily easy to get out of it! So that's it, I'm trying to make you...

JPS: Yes, yes, as long as it's benevolent, there's no problem.

MP: You have to be benevolent!

JPS: That's it.

MP: There, you're right, thank you Jean-Pierre!

3/11: FIRST CULTURES - [Watch the video \(In French only\)](#)

MP: Jean-Pierre, my third question will focus on the Aztec divinities that you talk about in your Influences texts. So to begin I will again quote you:

"But my relationship with the first cultures is not an unhealthy and colonizing curiosity, I am not looking for something in them that I would not have, but rather something that I had and that progress, rationality, book culture,

religion, atheism, philosophical currents, fear of self and sometimes science in its empirical and cultural destructive blindness, has hidden and stolen from me. It's like a memory, a dream of experiences lived, long ago, in different cultures and places."

And I will finish with a text by Claude Levi-Strauss that you quote:

"The work of the painter, poet, or musician, the myths and symbols of the "savage" must appear to us, if not as a superior form of knowledge, at least as the most fundamental, the only truly common, and whose scientific thought constitutes only the sharp point: more penetrating because it is sharpened on the stone of the facts, but at the cost of a loss of substance, and whose effectiveness lies in its ability to penetrate deep enough for the mass of the tool to completely follow the head."

in *Tistes Tropiques & Influences V*.

JPS: Yes!

MP: Interesting text, so I quoted these two texts because, as I said at the beginning, I want to ask you some questions about these Aztec deities and rituals. So today we will have a look at this world, gone, this view is perhaps linked to its discovery and interpretation by archaeologists and ethnologists who have shown it to us. This insight they have given us is a Westerner's view, do you think you discovered them in your own way?

JPS: That would be pretentious! Except that I had emotions and revelations in front of these works. As I say in this text or as Claude Levi-Strauss says, the original art has a much more... how could we say: primal/fundamental! That is, they had to regenerate the world, because they were afraid that the world would stop. It is always the myths: how to create the world, how to create beauty, how to create flowers, how to honor this nature? And this disappearance of rituals scares me very much. Pasolini talked about it in his films: the disappearance of spirituality, that is, the disappearance of ritual, leads humanity to do nonsense. And somewhere, yes, it's true, I feel like something has been stolen from me, because I no longer know, even with all "my knowledge and my culture", I no longer know how to live! At least, the people around me don't know how to live anymore! These are people who are lost, they are drowning in information, in alcohol, in what do I know? These are people who no longer dream! And I think the first people were... But we still think it was better in another time. You know there was the Iron Age, the Bronze Age and the Golden Age. Well, we all think that the past times were more important than ours. Nevertheless, the art that emerges from these societies speaks to me much more than a painting in a museum. So somewhere along the line, this attraction, it comes from a need for me, to quench my thirst.

MP: I also read in your *Influences* that you were also marked by the work of Karl Gustave Jung; do you think that precisely, this need in you, that these Aztec cultures, these Aztec rituals allowed you to reveal, do you think that it corresponds to Jung's idea of this universal collective imaginary consciousness?

JPS: Yes, but I would remove the word imaginary. Because we often talk about

magic also in relation to these societies, but for them it is something very technical; shamans have a technique to access the different levels of trance. It takes twenty years of training to become a shaman among the Achuars (in the Amazon).

MP: All right!

JPS: So it's a little light to say that it's... yes, decoration in quotation marks, folklore, magic like that... I think it's a different level of knowledge! And that's where I'm very angry with Western science that demolished these people without even understanding who they were; you can't talk about a level of evolution, but they had a degree of spirituality that was just as valid as the Christians of the time.

MP: Yes, we totally agree.

JPS: Without making a value scale.

MP: I'm bound to find you again. The question I asked you was whether you consider that in the end, all of us (we are Westerners marked by our culture), do you consider that we are potentially able to enter into its rituals, its cultures, because in the end it corresponds to something that would be universal, to an almost universal need?

JPS: Probably because that's what it is about; these practices touch as closely as possible on birth and death, it doesn't talk much about love, but about the regeneration of the world. To get the sun up in the morning, Aztec or Mayan priests made self-sacrifices. They pierced their fingers, tongue or penis so that God would wake up. And among the Egyptians as well. All this practice of learning about the world and respecting it and wanting it to regenerate itself, to persist. We are the complete opposite, since we are destroying the world with impunity in an absolutely catastrophic way today. So we are the opposite, the opposite of its societies.

MP: I understand well!

JPS: Although some of them destroyed their world, like the Mayans whose population has increased (so they destroyed their biotope, it happens too), but despite everything, there was this kind of will and humility. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, there is the story of God flooding the world because men make too much noise! And of course today the noise of humanity is enormous, deafening! That's terrible!

MP: Yes, precisely, you speak in the books that have influenced you, marked you, you speak of the Epic of Gilgamesh, you also speak of Homer?

JPS: Yes!

MP: It even seems to me that it is at the top of the list in your Influences on the site, so you also consider that something has existed in our culture, in the culture we will say Western, if we start it in the Middle East and then...

JPS: In Egypt.

MP: In Ancient Egypt and then in Greece. Do you consider it as though something has been lost?

JPS: Yes!

MP: And you're accusing science or religion?

JPS: It's both! It's the two of them together!

MP: It's the two of them together!

JPS: Well, to say that Indians have no souls!

MP: All right, all right, all right!

JPS: It goes a long way! We objectify people!

MP: This is Bartolomé de Las Casas' book (Very brief account of the destruction of India)! Yes, I saw that it was also part of your books, of course, okay. But in that revelation you finally had, isn't that something you were expecting?

JPS: It's like falling in love, will we love this woman or not?

MP: That's it, is it?

JPS: Jung says there are happy coincidences, well... happy coincidences. It's probably something I was looking for, because as a child, I will always remember that I had strong asthma attacks and of course when I have asthma attacks, you always have the impression that you're going to die.

MP: Of course, I know that!

JPS: So we're surely looking for another place! Maybe I found this one somewhere else! Yes!

MP: Did you find this somewhere else?

JPS: Yes, yes!

MP: Yes, it's important, it's interesting... because somewhere we can also think that for each of us when we discover, or when we have the impression of discovering something, a philosophy for example - it's my personal case -, you feel a certain number of years in your youth and then one day, ah! And then something finally reveals itself to you and you say, oh well it's good, it's good!

JPS: Yes!

MP: But in fact, it may only be revealing itself to you, do you understand what I mean? Does that put into words your... the philosopher in question or does philosophy put into words what you thought was confusing?

JPS: Yes, probably, but well, we didn't get out of Jupiter's thigh, we still need to learn in life.

MP: Of course you have to!

JPS: No, but it's obvious!

MP: It's obvious, we need to learn, and we often talk about it.

JPS: You have to meet the right people!

MP: Well, yes!

JPS: If I wouldn't have met a friend who was doing shamanic trance in New York, I would never have been able to experience these trances!

MP: Yes, I had read about this experience.

JPS: So that's it, I don't think we should neglect what life brings us... by chance or by necessity.

MP: Of course, what I meant simply was that the word revelation is perhaps an excessive word? Do you understand what I mean?

JPS: But then why not? I want to come back to this point; in France we can't say what we think: once, I had a serious operation and I told the mother of a friend that it was almost a miracle! She said to me, "If I were you, I wouldn't use that word!" Fuck you piece of shit! I use the words I want to use!

MP: Yes!

JPS: But so what? It's in the dictionary!

MP: Of course, of course! And no one is stopping you!

JPS: Yes, but I, the Cartesian mind, it bothers me. I can't be free and it really bothers me.

MP: Does that bother you?

JPS: Oh yes! What right do people have to judge me?

MP: No, but it's not a judgment.

JPS: Yes, of course!

MP: When I say that, it's not a judgment. I seek to understand, I seek to understand myself. I'm trying to see a little bit how it works, just the discovery of something. Is this a real discovery, I don't know?

JPS: It doesn't matter!

MP: It may not be important, no, no, no.

JPS: At this level, words are not important at all.

MP: Maybe it's intellectual masturbation, I agree.

JPS: Yes, that's it.

4/11: SOUL AND NATURE - [Watch the video \(In French only\)](#)

MP: So a question, Jean-Pierre, about nature, and the way you look at nature and the world. It's a little bit of an association, it's similar to the two previous questions, because very often you evoke the notion of transcendence in the elements of nature. So in relation to this notion of transcendence, which is a notion that is strongly connoted, at least in Western language, do you... how do you consider yourself in relation to this notion of transcendence? I've often noticed that you refer to polytheism or even pantheism. How do you situate yourself in relation to this notion?

JPS: Yes, I'm more like the Japanese, I think that nature is animated. They have kamis, they call them kamis, they're spirits for almost everything: for trees, for flowers, for stones...

MP: That's it!

JPS: I had the chance to discover nature thanks to my grandfather who was really in love with it and always went for walks in the nature; and we spent long moments together, and it was also an awakening to beauty! You really need someone to initiate you!

MP: In the way you look at nature, there is this notion of elements that are at the same time separate, but at the same time brought together?

JPS: It's a totality of course.

MP: Is that right?

MP: So you consider that there are indeed elements in nature that would escape us, and that would be... A moment ago, in the last interview, you mentioned the notion of energy? In nature, in the elements of nature, we're going to talk about trees, rivers, mountains, snow, cold, sun, etc. In all these elements, can you isolate them for example?

JPS: No, I don't isolate them, it's something that makes sense to me.

MP: Which makes sense, yes?

JPS: I don't materialize them, I don't isolate them. It's like the prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi to Brother Sun, it's a set of things...

HYMN OF BROTHER SUN OR CREATURES

Most High, Almighty and Good Lord,

to thee praise, glory, honor,

and every blessing;

Thou alone art fit for them, O Most High,

and no man is worthy to name you.

Praise be to you, my Lord, with all your creatures...,

especially Sir Brother Sunshine.

through whom you give us the day, the light:

it is beautiful, radiating with great splendor,

and from you, the Most High, he offers us the symbol.

Praise be to you, my Lord, for Sister Moon and the stars:

in the sky you formed them,

clear, precious and beautiful.

Praise be to you, my Lord, for Brother Wind,

and for the air and for the clouds,

for the calm azure and all weather:

thanks to them you keep all creatures alive.

Praise be to you, my Lord, for sister Water.

who is very useful and very humble,

precious and chaste.

Praise be to you, my Lord, for sisterly Mother Earth,

that carries us and feeds us,

that produces the diversity of fruit,

with the variegated flowers and herbs...

JPS: That's hard to answer your question!

MP: Yes, it is difficult, I understand.

JPS: I don't want to convince Westerners, I don't care what they think. There are other cultures that think differently, and I'm more attracted to those cultures, than to Western culture, yes! Yes!

MP: It's not necessarily a question of convincing! Maybe it's a question of trying to understand the Westerner that I am, you know what I mean!

JPS: Yes, but that's your problem, I can't explain things to you?

MP: Can't we put words in?

JPS: You can't reveal something to someone, I'm not a guru.

MP: Because in Western culture and philosophy...

JPS: Yes.

MP: There are philosophers that we could broadly call the materialist philosophers, who have a view of nature that is not a vision, how shall I put it... dualistic, there is no separation between the soul and matter, in this materialist vision; that is to say that the soul is matter, it is in matter.

JPS: No, above all, there is no soul! Excuse me! It's above all that there is no

soul, there are no gods!

MP: No, but I'm talking about these philosophies.

JPS: Yes, that's right!

MP: We have the impression that this world you're talking about also exists in the Western world, that it has perhaps been a little bit hidden, hidden.

JPS: Of course, yes.

MP: Erased, in favour of the mechanisation of the world.

JPS: Absolutely, yes of course, yes but?

MP: I mean, in this Western philosophy, aren't you going to find yourself?

JPS: No! Besides, philosophy bores me, period, in general!

MP: Philosophy bores you?

JPS: Yes!

JPS: Yes, very much so. No, but I like reading Nietzsche, but I couldn't finish Zarathustra! It's interesting, his ideas are interesting...

MP: Yes?

JPS: But after a while it bothers me.

MP: Does it bother you?

JPS: Yes, yes!

MP: And yet you read, I looked at your library a bit, you read books that have a little to do with philosophy?

JPS: Yes, you can call it philosophy, but it's Eastern philosophy; well, maybe I'm more fascinated?

MP: Yes, but there is no difference?

JPS: But there is a big difference between the two philosophies!

MP: There is a big difference?

JPS: Yes there is! On the one hand Western philosophy wants to demonstrate the death or existence of God! I don't give a damn! For me God doesn't exist...! So write whatever you want on that, I don't have time to waste.

MP: Yes, but it's important, it seemed important to me! But is it?

JPS: Everybody is obsessed with this idea of God, we don't give a damn!

Excuse me, it's not a problem! From the moment you feel energy in the Universe, whether that energy is single or multiple or quintuple or...

MP: Don't you think that those who advocated the death of God...

JPS: I don't care!

MP: I understand, but don't you think these people are going a little bit in your direction?

JPS: Maybe, but I don't like to read them, I prefer to read Giono's books?

MP: Well exactly?

JS: Precisely because he wants joy, he wants joy in creation!

MP: Of course!

JPS: But these people are the opposite! These philosophers are so sad to die! You see their faces! You watch Houellebecq on TV, you think: "But shoot yourself!"

MP: He's not a philosopher, Houellebecq!

JPS: It's the Frenchman who has just been awarded the Legion of Honour!

Excuse me, we're getting to historical aberrations. Contemporary French art

sucks! French philosophy sucks! Excuse me, I'm not interested!

MP: Okay.

JPS: But that's my opinion, that's my humble opinion. I prefer to read Aztec poetry, or Kabîr, or I don't know!

MP: Okay.

JPS: I prefer, because there is a fluidity, a joy and a sensuality.

MP: I'm thinking of a philosopher I know well, because he's a philosopher who has been really important in my life, and that's Spinoza.

JPS: Yes.

MP: And if you like, Spinoza, he doesn't try to talk about the death of God, but on the other hand, joy is fundamental in his philosophy!

JPS: Yes, but it's unreadable! Have you seen how it's built? The structure of the book is completely illegible.

MP: It depends which ones, but some books are easier to read than others.

JPS: On Ethics here...!

MP: Ethics, yes! Ah, it's complicated!

JPS: It's complicated! Well then, maybe my thoughts join Spinoza?

MP: But that's the big difficulty, of course. OK, so I think we'll leave it at that, dear Darrin.

JPS: Thank you, so we were going to talk about nature and then we'll finish with philosophy.

MP: That's normal!

JPS: Yes, but there is an energy in nature that no philosopher can show, that poets or artists can show.

MP: Okay.

JPS: That's where poetry is stronger and art is stronger!

MP: But there are a number of people who think that, indeed, poetry is a form of philosophy.

JPS: Yes, but no doubt.

MP: Of course, and this I think deeply, I think of people like René Char, for example, who has formulas that you might like - I'll send you some, because there are extracts from texts by René Char that are really beautiful, and which I'm sure you'd like to hear about! I don't know if you know him?

JPS: Yes, I've already read it.

MP: Thank you Jean-Pierre.

5/11: RITUALS AND THE SACRED - [Watch the video \(In French only\)](#)

MP: Now, Jean-Pierre, I'm going to ask you about an important notion in your work, and that is the notion of the sacred. I will start with a text from you.

JPS: Yes.

MP: Still caught up in your Influences, I'm going to read the text:

"There is a quote that could answer this question about spirituality, it's a question asked by an American journalist to a Mayan woman who was embroidering a tunic: - *The design weave of your drawing is so intricate, entangled and complex that no one will ever be able to see it, decipher it or*

understand it? And The Mayan weaver simply said: Yes, but God can see it. I think that's the only appropriate answer to that question. The Indians worked for the Wakan Tanka of the Sioux, the Grand Manitou of the Algonquin or for some trickster spirits like the Coyote or the Raven... Their "art" not only created and wove links between human beings, but also opened the portal to the underworld, through the cosmic links to the soul force of the universe. And we will never again belong, understand or participate in the rituals using these highly sacred esoteric languages! It is not simply the disappearance of these rituals (sometimes superstitious, sometimes grotesque, sometimes even too theatrical) that is harmful, but, in an induced way, the disappearance of the bonds created between individuals when they practice these rituals: doing it together, abandoning the ego to put oneself at the service of the community, sharing a common emotion, exchanging and transmitting knowledge and know-how to the younger generations, the feeling of belonging and of creating something useful. Ultimately, the disappearance of ritual practices unfortunately caused, almost systematically and fundamentally, the disappearance and annihilation of what the West simply named : CULTURE!." JPS: Yes!

MP: It's a very strong text, which I find very strong, because it brings us back to the sacred. So you also say in some of your Notes: "the only way to grasp the sacred is within ourselves and in contemplation." Can you elaborate on that notion and do you think the sacred is disappearing in our society? The question is the answer, you've given it before, I think you think the sacred is disappearing in our society.

JPS: Yes, not only the sacred, but the culture; at the same time, the culture is disappearing completely. It's a statement, it's an absolute failure! When you see contemporary art today, except for some artists, but most of the time, this sacred dimension no longer exists; and all these rituals that used to link us together (we can think back to Pasolini's films, who showed sacred rituals in almost all his films, whether it was the Thousand and One Nights or the Canterbury Tales, Theorem, and so on). Even Saint Francis of Assisi (Uccellacci e uccellini). This putting together of the common thought, that is to say that we have passed from a collective unconscious to an individual unconscious. I think that the collective unconscious is completely disintegrating. We can see it, people no longer share much among themselves; it is serious, I think it is serious. And that's why it's important for us artists to try to reanimate this culture. Because it's obvious that today we have entered a post-cultural society. Culture has disappeared. We see it every time we see exhibitions, it's not culture, it's cultural animation! That's what it is!

MP: Okay, that's entertainment!

JPS: Entertainment, yes!

MP: The entertainment of the Anglo-Saxons. But you say it and I reminded you earlier: the only way to apprehend the sacred is within ourselves! And in contemplation!

JPS: Of course, because it remains in us (the vital force) - we'll talk about nature again - we still have this force in us, since we were born with it! Who

stole that from us? Was it at birth? Was it at adolescence? Is it at school? Who stole it from us? We shouldn't be paranoid, but there is this notion of love and joy of existence that has been stolen from us somewhere! When I meet people from other cultures, they don't seem so empty... We've taken less from them. I think I'm a diminished person, so I have to go and see! I have to have a curiosity! I have to read a lot, I have to internalise all this within myself to understand all this, to feed off all this, all these cultures, yes. And contemplation, in the same way: if you are in front of an important site, you regenerate yourself, you breathe the air, you touch the trees, you look at and re-appropriate the world!

MP: Okay, so you consider the sacred and the sacred as a universal need?

JPS: That's a big question, I don't have the answer! There are people who think that the sacred doesn't exist, yes!

MP: Me, I think it's a universal need, yes, personally! But I'm asking you if it's a need that we all have in each one of us?

JPS: Probably, but who knows? No, I don't have the answer.

MP: Yes.

JPS: We see how cultures evolve, how societies evolve... We see Bolsonaro in Brazil, does this guy have a notion of the sacred?

MP: No!

JPS: Well then, it's not universal! Period.

MP: What I meant was that it's a universal feeling that would have been lost and diverted to something else.

JPS: Yes, but then you come across notions like the idea of paradise lost. Man is what he is! That's it!

MP: In the text I read earlier, do you mention the importance of rituals?

JPS: Yes!

MP: The question I wanted to ask you was whether the practice of a ritual is the only, or a very important way to access the sacred?

JPS: Yes, it's the only one!

MP: It is the only one?

JPS: Apart from birth and death, and death is accompanied by Buddhism. They make prayers for a month to accompany the souls of the dead. So without a ritual, what happens to the soul? It's a bit of a dumb question for a Westerner, but, it's a question! Among Buddhists, when people die, they cut them up, they give the body to vultures so that it can regenerate in nature. There are all cycles of life and death, they say prayers to accompany the soul of the dead. Apparently, the soul would take a month to leave the earth and go elsewhere. For us, these rituals have completely disappeared, we still go to churches to bury someone, but I feel quite helpless myself, you know? And to have lived through some shamanic rituals, where you have to burn sage to purify the soul and the body, these are important things. And when it's gone, what do I do? We become objects, no more and no less. So we die, well, it's an object, we cut you up, we throw you away, we throw you in the garbage, we no longer have an existence!

MP: Yes, yes, it's Kafka's Metamorphosis.

- I'M A HUMAN BEING, I'M NOT AN OBJECT--

JPS: Not only is it the attitude towards the dead, but towards the living too: we see how contemporary societies treat people, but it's terrible! You know, art exists because people died; the first traces of art were to accompany the dead to their graves.

MP: Do you think so?

JPS: Oh yes, I think that without death there is no art!

MP: Without death there is no art?

JPS: No, no! When I went to see Nefertari's tomb in Egypt, the magnificence of the paintings was to accompany the dead in the afterlife, to offer them life! Do you understand?

MP: Yes, but it corresponded to a very important person in ancient Egypt, but the common man?

JPS: They survived collectively thanks to the mausoleum.

MP: Whose names and very existence have been forgotten?

JPS: We agree that art is made for, and by, the elite. It's a reality!

MP: Art is made for the elite?

JPS: The art that remains!

MP: The art that remains! But I mean on a daily basis?

JPS: Because it was buried; it's like in prehistoric caves, probably there was a lot of art on the clothes, on the jewels, but all that disappeared, obviously it was not protected in caves, so all that art disappeared, you understand!

MP: There must have been probably some accompanying rituals?

JPS: Of course. But the most important rituals, initiatory ones, were still to accompany the dead... the spirits of the dead.

MP: And then the initiation rituals found for example in Ancient Greece, what do you think about them, what do they remind you of? Weren't they rituals to accompany the dead? For example the mysteries of Eleusis, that's the most famous?

JPS: Maybe man needs to make up myths and keep them alive. Because living without myths is what we see today, it's terrible.

MP: That's it, of course. It's important and in myths, it's also important perhaps to consider the ritual, which regularly reactivates the myth.

JPS: Yes, but since we no longer have a myth, we don't reactivate rituals.

MP: And we feel, it seems to me, that our contemporaries feel a certain need for ritualisation.

JPS: I mean, if it's to go to a Johnny concert or a football match, yes, OK! It's a communion, but it's not a ritual. There's no spiritual dimension other than a communion (a walkabout)!

MP: No, there is no spiritual dimension, I wasn't thinking about that. Well, thank you!

JPS: Thank you!

6/11: THE TRANCE AND THE DREAMS - [Watch the video \(In French only\)](#)

MP: An important place in your work and in your writings about your work: it is

the shamanic trance, it counted a lot, and the dream. I'm going to start with a little text from you in the New York Notes

JPS: Yes.

MP: So I quote you: "Both artist and shaman are the mediums of life of which rationally we perceive only 10%, the rest is in the realm of the invisible and the spirit, buried under water like the invisible mass of icebergs." Very well written by the way, I think your writing is very good. So I wanted to ask you a question about the dream that has to do with your trance experience. Today with advances in understanding brain function, we realize that the electrical activity of the brain during dreaming, or waking are very similar. That is to say that we have practically the same electrical activities and some neurophysiologists put forward the idea that the waking state would in fact correspond to a waking dream, the difference in the electrical trace would then be linked to the intense activity of the sensory organs, which would therefore differentiate it from the period of the dream, where the sensory organs are if not stopped, or at least do not have the same importance at all. So is this something that you can relate to your own experience, and to your idea of the dream, of the trance, of what you have experienced, and of your immersion in reality?

JPS: Yes? First of all a trance... I really like the dream, but the trance, since we're talking about numbers, science, rationality, the trance is a dream to the power of one hundred! So it's much more powerful, since you have to compare things, it's difficult to compare them. But I will always remember this energy that I felt in trance and that I felt once in a dream, because I went to New York, to my acupuncturist friend Kimberly, I told her that I had problems sleeping and she put two needles behind the lobes of the brain, there, behind ; and then that night I had a trance dream where I met the white light that you encounter when you die, the energy vortex, and only that dream had the power of shamanic trance. So probably during dreams you can access this level of trance, but it's not the same thing. I have just given a lecture at the Remiremont museum, and Jean-Louis Garillon, who is a doctor friend of mine who is also interested in morphic fields and everything that is a little beyond science, which is in quantum science, quantum energies. He told me that a shaman had agreed to be recorded when she was in a trance state, since we are talking about science. She had accepted to have her brain recorded and the energy in her brain was absolutely mind-boggling, they had never seen that before! It's just to get back to something rational, that's all. But that's it!

MP: So the question she was asking was of course about the dream, the trance, but also about the perception of reality? It would seem that this corresponds to the note I read earlier, namely that the perception we have of reality is of the same order as dreaming, it's of the same physiological order as dreaming. In other words, it seems that it corresponds to what you're saying, namely that, in fact, the perception we have of reality is not really objective!

JPS: Of course not!

MP: You understand what I mean!

JPS: We know that everything is empty, that we are just vibrations. You know what I mean! If you bring back all the matter from the Universe, it fits in an

orange or an apple.

MP: Of course.

JPS: So we're vibrations, so we're not aware of that reality, but it exists! It's part of us! So it's a different level of consciousness!

MP: That's it! That's it!

JPS: But maybe it has nothing to do with the brain? I don't know where it's going? Maybe the brain is just the receiver of subtle information circulating in the collective unconscious, like the computer is the receiver of information from the web, but it's not the basis of information?

MP: Oh yes of course, it can also have something to do with the brain?

JPS: Maybe, but so what? It's not important! What's important is the universes that we are lucky enough to encounter when we are in a trance, the journeys we can make. And that's important! And it doesn't matter why, how?

MP: What I just wanted to say is that contemporary science would seem to go in your direction, that's what I meant!

JPS: In my way? But I am an artist! I'm talking... again, who am I? But the problem is that the public and even the doctors are completely behind this new science (these new discoveries), quantum medicine and all that! They are not aware of it. Reality is still reality, a leg is a leg! But what's going on inside, the billions of tasks going on in a body simultaneously, can you imagine how it works? You're a doctor, it's unbelievable, unimaginable!

MP: Of course, I know that, I know that!

JPS: But even if you're a doctor, you can't know everything! We are in front of a fabulous universe, (the great mystery)!

MP: Of course, and from that point of view, there is a blindness to science and technology, especially today. Coming back to the dream and the trance, it's probably very difficult to share that?

JPS: But for me, it's my responsibility to bear witness, to share it in my work. Afterwards it's like Pollock, he was talking about the shamanic trance, but you don't have to know that he has... I don't know if he had experienced trance, in any case, he went to the Navajo Indians, so you can still feel this cosmic feeling in his paintings, without apprehending the shamanic side.

MP: Yes, but the experience, even lived?

JPS: Oh no, we can't share it.

MP: We can talk about it, but we won't share it.

JPS: No, no.

JPS: And what's quite strange about the trance is these particular lights and colours that you find in my work.

MP: Right, right!

JPS: It's like the mystics or the "enlightened ones"!

MP: Yes?

JPS: People are said to be "enlightened"! Well, I'm enlightened and fuck you! That's right, that's my experience.

MP: Oh yes of course, your experience is interesting!

JPS: It's like we love art brut, because these artists are talking to us about something we'll never know! Crazy people paint their world...

MP: They paint their world, yes.

JPS: And we find it interesting, because we don't have the courage...!

MP: You say crazy?

JPS: Well, in quotes!

MP: Quotation marks, we're going to say that!

JPS: It's a universe that the big rational bourgeois will never know.... Why do people buy Basquiat? Not only because it's worth money, but because it's a universe (a degree of energy) that they'll never reach! Unless they're doing coke, or whatever! It doesn't matter!

MP: But it's still very important in your work?

JPS: Yes, of course.

MP: In your life and in your work?

JPS: Yes, it's also the sexual trance!

MP: Sexual trance?

JPS: Ecstasy!

MP: Do you talk less about ecstasy, do you think?

JPS: Yes.

MP: Maybe, all right, thanks Jean-Pierre!

7/11: THE SQUARE & THE AXIS MUNDIS - [Watch the video \(In French only\)](#)

MP: Jean-Pierre, there is one shape that is important in your work: the square. So I wanted to ask you about this formal aspect, the place and importance of the square in your work. We have the feeling that this choice is the result of several attempts, a choice that seems to be fixed today. We have the impression that it's the square, period, as you often say. So I think that, and we can think that this is not by chance, that it is a path, and do you think that this geometric form, therefore the square, has a symbolic force and how do you insert it in your work?

JPS: Of course, yes, I think we'll talk about the axis mundi later on, the square is the four directions and the center, that's it. And yes it's little by little, but already in the eighties when I was painting in France, I started working on the square, because for me, when I work, I want to get rid of all superficial ideas, how can I say: the dustbin, I think about the dustbin! Of everything that bothers my mind: composition for example! Do you understand what I mean? The painters, they thought a year about composing, I don't give a damn! I want it to be like a spillway where I can put all the possible energies, where I can put whatever I want. So yes, it's a bit... it's my module, and it turns out that it has developed over time and that this unity has imposed itself in small formats as well as in large formats. Sometimes, I still do work on paper in 1/2 ratio, but often I like the square because I don't have these problems of composition, nor of thinking about : do I want a 1/3, 2/3 format, it's necessary to simplify my mind (the thought), that's it ! And besides it's a work of assembly that we see in the big walls, and the way to put the most information in a surface, it's the bees who found it: it's the hexagon, except that painting on hexagons it would be very complicated to do, with the positive films and everything! For me it

would be very complicated. So somewhere I copy on the bees but I make squares.

MP: At the limit, you would prefer the hexagon but you chose the square?

JPS: Yes!

MP: But more for practical reasons, it seems?

JPS: Practical, that's it!

MP: Only for symbolic questions?

JPS: That's it.

MP: The square is not for you?

JPS: Because to put the most information on this surface with a hexagon I would have more information than with the square.

MP: Yes, right, right!

JPS: The bees have figured that out!

MP: But now I'm discovering something here, you see, but the circle doesn't?

JPS: But how do you want to put circles together?

MP: No, but how?

JPS: Well, it's a practical question, quite simply.

MP: But if you isolate an element, because then of course you put them together, but when you isolate an element... but maybe they don't have to be isolated in the end?

JPS: Yes, but when I isolate them, I still add the square turn around.

MP: Yes, so there's this idea of a frame, because somewhere in your Notes, you also reject the window painting? The window frame?

JPS: Yes, window painting, absolutely!

MP: At some point you talk about the open window and so on. But on the other hand you have added frames to your Plexiglas, how do you explain that?

JPS: For me, it's like a kind of swastika, it's something that spins, because it creates (adds) another dimension to me. The painting, you go into the painting like this frontally, (horizontally) and the swastika turns like this (perpetual motion), so it's like a solar symbol and it defines a sacred space!

MP: You don't consider it as a frame?

JPS: No!

MP: It's really part of what's inside?

JPS: Well, yes, and besides the trick is something industrial, these are industrial colours: reds, blues, blacks, industrially tinted Plexiglas, but in my paints each colour is unique, each time I make my mixes I never put the same colour.

MP: Oh yes, right.

JPS: So it's a differentiation between: industrial product and craft product, between quotation marks, handmade with love, between quotation marks! It's a kitchen! And it's also a protection!

MP: It's a protection?

JPS: Yes, it's a protection, the paint is fragile!

MP: Of course, so today we can consider that your choice of the square is fixed, ?

JPS: No, we don't know, nothing is definitive!

MP: Yes, okay, nothing is final. So there are no symbolic forces associated with squares?

JPS: Ah so obviously!

MP: Yes there are!

JPS: I told you it's the four directions in the square necessarily: North, East, South, West, and for example in all the Navajo drawings on the sand, they put..., it was always oriented and each time the colors were different, for example North was red, South was white...

MP: Yes it was oriented?

JPS: It's quite symbolic, the symbolic of the colours.

MP: So it's a symbolism of the colours, not of the form?

JPS: Of course it is! Because it's necessarily square, the four directions!

MP: It had to be square?

JPS: Well yes, or inscribed into the circle!

MP: So we understand that at the beginning you did indeed evoke this notion of the four directions and that the square was chosen for practical reasons?

JPS: Yes, practical reasons, but for example for the Indians of the plains nothing is square, they say nothing is square!

MP: Nothing is square?

JPS: In their world, their tepees are round...

MP: Yes that's right!

JPS: For them, thinking square is the Westerner thinking square. I happen to be a Westerner, I do painting, but maybe it would shock them, my work on the square?

MP: Oh you think so?

JPS: Maybe, I don't know? Is that a question?

MP: Yes, okay.

JPS: Everything is cyclical with them (time too), so I'm necessarily going out of the circle and into the square, but it's the only way I've found to do things.

MP: Okay, can't we make a link between that and a mandala for example?

JPS: Of course it's mandalas, or yantras, yes absolutely, meditation patterns?

MP: Okay, fine.

JPS: Because, it's what's most centered the square, it's what centers things (with its axis), precisely this place where we switch between different universes, the center of the world, the axis mundi.

MP: Thank you Jean-Pierre on the square.

8/11: SEPTEMBER 11th 2001 IN NEW YORK - [Watch the video \(In French only\)](#)

MP: So now we come, Jean-Pierre, to an event that was very important to you when you were living in New York and that all of us have in mind, it's September 11, 2001.

JPS: Yes.

MP: Which you experienced as a deep trauma, as you write yourself, and which seems to have had a lasting influence on your work. Because at that moment

you talk about it, you write about it: the need for a healing effect after such a trauma. And then you develop new codes, from that moment on I read it and among those codes I noted, and I quote, "Finding unity to escape all conflicting duality." So could you elaborate on that? I had noted in your work Beauty Is Energy, the presence of both the Egyptian offering bearer, which is a symbol of peace.

JPS: Yes.

MP: And at the same time the Aztec flaying, symbol of violence. How is unity achieved in the face of this duality?

JPS: It's a bit complicated. My work is precisely to bring opposites together, to confront them. But also to say that everything is in the human anyway: the greatest violence and the greatest love, and the greatest will to heal the world. And it is precisely this Egyptian woman and the flayed man. But both have their function in the world. I don't believe in the devil or the gods, but I do believe in the symbolism of things. And so to see this Egyptian woman, who regenerates the world and who accompanies us, and this Aztec priest, who on the other hand regenerates the world in his own way by practicing a human sacrifice, he also regenerates the world! And we have to accept both sides of things. And violence and sacrifice are sometimes necessary in nature, as we can see. And this duality is the duality of men - and women too! But I am not too dualistic in my thinking.

MP: I understand that you are not.

JPS: But, in this series, you can think, yes I was... Because there is this incredible violence of war. I've been fortunate enough not to have experienced war. Of course, our ancestors, our fathers, our grandfathers knew both world wars, so I was from a generation that at that time had not known that! And I think that September 11th in New York was a state of war, it shocked me and perhaps it made me understand my role as an artist, which was perhaps to calm the world a little and to be more violent by showing life, the beauty of life and its fragility! To be more relevant, to show sexuality, worlds that regenerate themselves.

MP: OK, but this violence of September 11th that you experienced as a state of war in the end, which is quite real, this violence, do you think it is in man, in each of us?

JPS: Of course!

MP: Do you think it's in all of us? But the healing aspect of this Egyptian priestess, is that it? The bearer of offerings is a beautiful title. You think that this ability, I am a doctor, I am part of the healing, I am part of the people who heal!

JPS: That's it!

MP: It's very important to me.

JPS: Of course it does, yes.

MP: I couldn't conceive of a care that is violent!

JPS: Yes, it's a lifestyle choice!

MP; Do you understand what I mean? Do we have to fight this violence? Does your work also aim to fight it, or at least to neutralise it?

JPS: It's complicated, because bondage images, for example, you might think that's violence, but for me it's not violence, it's acquiring another state (a metamorphosis, overcoming suffering), so it's very ambiguous.

MP: It's very ambiguous, yes.

JPS: But I like, throughout my life I've always been attracted to people who tried to make things more flexible, to make things work together; that's why I miss my grandfather and my father so much. There are people who live in constant conflict and that for me is very hard to conceive of, because it's a lack of politeness somewhere.

MP: Yes, that's what you think a lot of people live in permanent conflict, they are torn between two tendencies that tear them apart.

JPS: Not to be Manichean, but there are some people who are completely nuts!

MP: Yes, right!

JPS: Violence!

MP: Yes of course, I agree with that idea.

JPS: In order to be kind, you still have to be in a good structure, the family has to be good, society has to be good. Today people are no longer good, you see the yellow vests, they are in a situation of absolute distress.

MP: Of course!

JPS: And so even I feel that even I go on weekends to see my family, my sister is terrible with me with the whole family, and when I get home I can't even see the beauty of nature while driving. And that's a big deal for me because I've lost that side of joy and beauty that I learned to have with the landscape. Sometimes, I can't see the beauty so much anymore, there are negative people who are a burden on our lives and it's very difficult for me to live that. On the contrary, there are people who open up and are kind, and on the other hand, there are people who are completely destructive.

MP: So this is the reality.

JPS: That's reality.

MP: And in the face of this, art is fundamental?

JPS: That's it, but the problem is that art also goes in this direction of destruction (Freud's death instinct, in *Le Malaise dans la civilisation*), because we're talking about September 11th, I'm going to tell you an anecdote that I haven't talked much about (out of shame) and that I'm going to talk about at my next conference in Remiremont, that is to say that September 11th was a Tuesday, and there was an expression that was planned at the Swiss Cultural Centre. The team of artists had planned as a title: "Mayday, Mayday", or the anguish of the plane pilot at the time of the crash! So coincidences, coincidences... so it was a magnificent exhibition etc... And these idiots, these barbarians of artists, they had already dismantled planes in the Swiss Cultural Centre, it was in ruins. And then on September 11th, the ruin was there in the street!

MP: In the street!

JPS: In the street there were tanks, crushed, flattened fire trucks, grapples everywhere! Because the Swiss Cultural Centre is on Canal Street, it's one or two km from the World Trade Center, it's very close. And I say to a friend

Miguel here, the following Thursday there's the opening, do you want to go? And Miguel had just escaped from the World Trade Center, he had breathed in the dust.

MP: You mentioned that in your text.

JPS : And the artists, I think they're big assholes...! Fascists, those people! They had taken away the planes that were destroyed and they destroyed mopeds. And the exhibition was called: the anguish of the guy who's going to spit motorcycles! That's what contemporary art is today! It's people who have absolutely no notion of the other! Because just imagine taking out the rubble from the planes they had crashed in their gallery, they had taken everything apart, I don't know if they had taken the planes from Switzerland or not? So what, who cares! And those assholes had dismantled it when everyone was completely, but appalled by the event! This team of artists with the director, took apart motorcycles in space! And they did the exhibition!

MP: And they just changed the title!

JPS: And they changed the of the exhibition title! And I would be an artist in that case, I could have thought about: The anguish of the goalkeeper at the time of the penalty kick (by Peter Handke), OK! But I would have filled the gallery with flowers (in homage to the dead)! Shameful! And contemporary art is always like that! And those people... and the guy became director of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris !

MP: He did the right thing!

JPS: You understand! And that's disgusting!

MP: But maybe more than contemporary art, it's political correctness?

JPS: Well no, that's not politically correct, it's precisely because it's not politically correct that they've had this impact! But they came out of humanity, it's inconceivable to do that! My friend Miguel, he was crying and so was I! We ran away! I said it's not possible to be that stupid!

MP : Yes, you mention it in your lyrics.

JPS: It's terrible, yes, it's September 11th. Luckily my friends, my friend Bruno Dellinger who wrote a book about it (World Trade Center 47th floor) got through it, and my friend Mayumi, who worked at a Japanese restaurant under the World Trade Center, got through it too, but it was really a shock. And also what was important was all this solidarity that was deployed, people were going to bring bottles of water to the rescuers, it was a huge logistics, to save the people who were still alive.

MP: To save a few people, yes.

JPS: And it burned for three months! And when I found that out (my friend Pierre Louaver had called me), I went to the roof of my building in L.I.C. Queens, and there was nothing left! Before there were the two towers and now nothing...! dust! So life goes fast, nothing...!

MP: It goes very fast of course! Thank you!

9/11: TEXT AND IMAGE - [Watch the video \(In French only\)](#)

MP: For this question, I'm going to start with a quote from Antonin Artaud in

these Notebooks that you quote yourself!

JPS: Yes.

MP: "My drawings are not drawings but documents, you have to look at them and understand what's inside..." Les Cahiers d'Artaud. It's interesting and that's why I'm going to ask you a question about the relationship between image and text. I think, and I've already told you that you write very well about your work, and that when we read you, we get into your work without in any way diminishing it, I think you evoke it very, very well in your texts.

JPS: Yes!

MP: But on the other hand it's not always the case, it's far from always being the case when people talk as well about their work or talk about the work of someone, an artist! So I wonder about the place of the image in relation to the text. Is it necessary to explain the image, at the risk of killing its symbolic force, or is the image more, or even better than the text?

JPS: Of course yes, no one dreams in text. That is to say that the image is really what nourishes the collective unconscious, of course! Yes, it's more important! For me, and we see for example a loss of the force of art as soon as writing arrives, necessarily, since we multiply the information!

MP: Of course!

JPS: But what I like to do, for example in my work, I often reintegrate erotic or even obscene texts with my images, because it calls upon two different areas of the brain, so both are important to me!

MP: Both are important?

JPS: Yes of course!

MP: And you can feel it in your lyrics, because indeed, I find that in the lyrics you write about your work, it's something that brings something to your work.

JPS: Good, yes.

MP: Personally, that's the way I see it. But you yourself, in your curriculum and in your daily life, in your reading, you have to read texts about art history, about artists?

JPS: No.

MP: Oh no, you don't read them?

JPS: More!

MP: Where did you read some?

JPS: I read some, but I don't read any more.

MP: And what do you think?

JPS: Each one is different, each one... for me, my texts are not a justification, it's a testimony again. That is to say that yes, perhaps, I am afraid that my work will not be understood or ignored! I say to myself, you who only think with the text, because the French only think with the text, French thought is formatted on the text and not at all on the image. As you can see, there are very few important French painters in history. We can count them on the fingers of one hand!

MP: Today?

JPS: Today, in history and since the beginning of time, most of them were Italian or Spanish people, immigrants, it doesn't matter. There's who: there's

Gauguin, Matisse, a few...

MP: Picasso!

JPS: But Picasso, excuse me, he's Spanish! We shouldn't make fun of the world and appropriate the artists that we literally let starve to death at the beginning of the twentieth century in France, but those people were immigrants like me! Poliakoff, Soutine, Modigliani, you understand!

MP: That's the name I was looking for the other day to talk about an artist!

JPS: Yes, you understand, all these people came to France, I wonder why they came to France? Fuck the French! It's too hard to work here!

MP: Somehow they explained it!

JPS: Yes, they explained it, that's it, and maybe there was some kind of dynamic at that time, I think it was a bit the same kind of dynamic that there was in New York when I was there, probably not there anymore. There are cities that attract artists at a given time. At one time it was Venice, or whatever!

MP: I think what's interesting about this relationship between text and image is that, in the end, the artists, the great artists, have written very little about their work.

JPS: But if you're great, you don't need to write!

MP: That's right!

JPS: Maybe I'm not tall enough?

MP: What I mean is that the other day I was at an exhibition at the opening in quotation marks of a contemporary art exhibition in Belfort, as part of the Libres Regards festival, well it was an installation, a performance, for me it left me totally indifferent, and I read the presentation text, and this text itself was incomprehensible.

JPS: Of course.

MP: It was jargon!

JPS: Yes, but we're getting off the subject, we're talking about French contemporary art, which is one of the most conceptual in the world.

MP: Yes, but in this case, the text was about the work, but there should have been an explanation of the text!

JPS: But no, there is no explanation, contemporary art is just a huge mystification!

MP: It's a mystification, it's jargon, yes! That's how I understood it! That's how it turns out! But in the end, in the interviews that we conduct, we also try to find out something about the work? Do you understand what I mean? With words!

JPS: Yes, of course! We have to talk about things, I'm not at all against it!

MP: No, no of course, but I think you talk about it well, that's what's interesting!

JPS: But also out of necessity! Because the other day there was Julian Schnabel talking on France Inter about an exhibition he had in Paris and he said that it wasn't up to him to explain his work! But his work is shown in all the museums and in all the big galleries in the world, so he has people who do that work for him! Nobody does this work for me, and I like to do it, it's a respect for my work to know how to explain it!

MP: Okay, okay!

JPS: It's not that my work is not good enough!

MP: Yes, it's not an extra to your work?

JPS: No, it just so happens that sometimes, for example, for two years I couldn't work, because I didn't have the money to produce works of art, so I started writing, my text for Influences for example.

MP: Oh yes, right!

JPS: But for me the image and the text are important because you can't be unicerebral or lobotomized. I see my contemporaries and I have the impression that they are lobotomized, that they use only one part of their brain, precisely the rational part, which is the left brain! and the right brain, which is more feminine, they no longer use it at all: intuition, joy, it disappears!

MP: Desire!

JPS: Desire! That's it!

MP: Of course, yes, yes! I think that you actually handle both of them well, it's important, it's important to actually go on your site to see your writings etc, it's really very important. Thank you for answering this question.

10/11: SEX AND DESIRE - [Watch the video \(In French only\)](#)

MP: So, Jean-Pierre, we're going to talk about a fundamental aspect of your work, the place of sexuality, which is very important. When we take your last Shakti-Yoni exhibition, it's still very important.

JPS: Yes!

MP: So in particular I wanted to ask you about the use of pornographic images, which I think come from Japanese manga, but also other pornographic images? And you say somewhere that it's: "Using the weapons of the enemy" (The Art of War, Sun Tzu). So could you make the link between these figures, which are sometimes evocative of pain, I'm thinking in particular of bondage, and the figures of the Aztec deities, which they sometimes rub shoulders with in your work? And why did you choose this type of pornographic images, and why are they different, for example, from what you could find in the West, where there is no shortage of them?

JPS: No, but yes?

MP: Yes, there is another question: can't art in general, and therefore yours, be considered as an expression of desire? As Pascal Quignard expresses it in *Le sexe et l'effroi*, a quote you should know: "Art always prefers desire, art is indestructible desire, desire without pleasure, appetite without disgust, life without death."

JP : Yes?

MP: Afterwards, I will complete my question!

JPS: Me, I recover what is called: trash, that is to say that they are trash images (trash cans). Pornography is the biggest arms business in the world. So we're flooded with images like that, and what I mean is that sometimes in these erotic poses, there's something like a regeneration ritual. And that's why I want to reintegrate these images to reinvigorate the world, yes of course! It

can be Japanese manga with erotic texts, yes!

MP: Erotic texts, but on the other hand, you don't refer to what exists in our western world?

JPS: There is nothing, it's a big void (except in literature)!

MP: Does pornography still exist in our country?

JPS: Yes, but if you go to a museum, have you ever seen an erotic work in a museum?

MP: No!

JPS: But it's a big problem. I've just done an exhibition at the Remiremont museum, where I put a big erect cock next to Adam & Eve by a 15th century painter; well, you see naked people, they have a vine leaf...

MP: Yes!

JPS: And sex is never meant or described! Not only is it not meant, it is never erect! Male sex is never signified, female sex even less! How do you expect people to be normal? It's the imagination of a society you find in museums!

MP: Yes!

JPS: How do you want to train people to believe that they have a fig leaf stuck on sex? There is a complete dissociation (creating neurosis and schizophrenia)!

MP: No, the question I was asking you was why do you only look for your images in Japanese manga?

JPS: Not necessarily! In erotic images too!

MP: Yes, erotic images, but Japanese ones?

JPS : No ! Not necessarily !

MP: Ah, not necessarily, ok!

JPS: No, I use pornographic images in general.

MP: Pornography in general, right!

JPS: Because I think these images are sacred somewhere! I want to re-sacralize things that are desacralized, that are business, that are consumer things. That's a little bit what Warhol did, except that Warhol's images were already sacred: Marilyn Monroe she already had a reputation (she was already an icon), Mao had a reputation, Mick Jagger had a reputation so, he already used strong, iconic images! Me, I create icons, in quotation marks.

MP: Yes, it's interesting!

JPS: By images that don't matter! Except the images of rituals, which are important in different cultures!

MP: Yes, for example the bondage images, can we consider it ritualised?

JPS: Absolutely, yes, it's ritualised!

M: Of course! And I read that a few years ago. I had done some work on pain, suffering and I had read about suspension rituals that also exist in Central American cultures, I don't know if you know these things? And where there are testimonies that are evoked there, pain, but pain that is almost transcended into pleasure? Doesn't that sound familiar?

JPS: Yes it does, of course it does, but as I said before the priests, for example the women, used to pierce their tongues with cords full of thorns to meet the cosmic serpent, to meet the spirit. It is a way to access the spirits, to access

transcendence, to access a level of transcendence.

MP: Yes, okay, so that's the link you could make between these evocative images of pain, as we see in your works?

JPS: There's not a lot of pain in my work, there's rather pleasure and ecstasy! But afterwards everyone sees noon at their door. There are some female friends who are very shocked by my bondage images, there are others who find that it's the liberation of the woman, and of her desire! So, really there, I don't want to get involved in that because everyone... and it's also their sexual history, their own history.

MP: Their own story, yes of course! Yes of course!

JPS: I don't want to be neither persecutor nor persecuted, I say what is!

MP: But then when we talk about sexuality, we are talking about desire and what do you think of this quote from Quignard in relation to desire and art: "Art, he always prefers desire, art is indestructible desire, desire without pleasure, appetite without disgust, life without death".

JPS: Yes, he's absolutely right, yes!

MP: Yes, you adhere to that idea, it's in Sex and Fear, does it speak to you?

JPS: I've read the book.

MP: Does it speak to you?

JPS: There's immeasurable pleasure in making art and enjoying it sexually, of course! Yes!

MP: Yes, and somewhere is your art and the expression of your desire?

JPS: Well yes!

MP: I'm not giving you a psychoanalysis!

JPS: I like shape, I like colour, I like images, I like women! Of course you do!

MP: Somewhere you express your desire?

JPS: Live in front of the world!

MP: As other artists have done! It's a desire that carries you! When you get up in the morning?

JPS: Yes!

MP: So a question, another quote from Pascal Quignard: "Artists are the murderers of death!" it's in Les Ombres errantes.

JPS: Yes of course, we love life!

MP: That's it! In fact that's it!

JPS: We've got life energy maybe a little bit more!

MP: It's magnifying life! You are the ones! You are those people!

JPS: Not all artists are.

MP: At first glance, I think all artists worthy of the name?

JPS: There are artists who have no life energy!

JPS: No, I wouldn't say that. There are artists who are obsessed with death, Anselm Kiefer and Gerhard Richter are obsessed with death. These are their stories, they lived through the Second World War, they come from Germany. Do you get it?

MP: You can see it, you can see it with Munch or...

JPS: Or Schiele, or all of them, so everyone has different experiences. You can't say generalities like that, but it's true that I love life of course!

MP: So since we're talking about sexuality, let's talk about the phallus!

JPS: Yes!

MP: The erect phallus, do you consider it a symbol of axis mundi?

JPS: Ah, ah! ah, yes!

MP: Does it then make the link, the unity between the spiritual and the material?

JPS: Yes of course!

MP: Yes, it's unequivocal?

JPS: When you lie down and get hard, of course you meet the other, it's a good way to meet the other, woman or God!

MP: Okay, okay, and this is another manifestation of this axis mundi, it connects you somewhere with the forces...

JPS: Life forces, yes!

MP: The forces of the cosmos, the life forces.

JPS: Right, yes!

MP: Is that important to you?

JPS: Besides there are many Gods who ejaculate to reconquer and fertilize the Universe! Yes, sexuality and without sexuality there would be no life! It is the condition sine qua non!

MP: Yes absolutely, we agree. Thank you for your answers on this question.

11/11: THE FUTURE? - [Watch the video \(In French only\)](#)

MP: We are coming to the end of the interview Jean-Pierre and the question will be about the evolution of your work. In your work there is a great coherence, an absolutely certain unity in your work since I've known it, with evolutions that you explain well in your texts, it's very good, I thought it was perfect. So where are you today after your Shakti-Yoni exhibition? And what could your work evolve towards? Do you already have an idea of this possible evolution?

JPS: No, no!

MP: No?

JPS: No, because I am continuing the Shakti-Yoni series.

MP: You continue?

JPS: Yes, I think it's an important work, about sexuality, sacredness, beauty, colour, transcendence, and it doesn't matter if I print on Plexiglas or on paper, I think the theme is the same. So, I think I will continue on small formats with great pleasure!

MP: Okay, do you feel that your Shakti-Yoni series is not finished?

JPS: No, I won't change the title, it's important: female energy is important.

MP: But don't you feel an attraction for other themes? Other things that could perhaps take over?

JPS: But it's life that brings me these things!

MP: It's always the same thing, yes!

JPS: Maybe I'll go on with this for the rest of my life? or maybe not, I don't know? Really, it's not a question that bothers me very much. I have no idea,

maybe I'll work on the video more, who knows?

MP: Oh, right!

JPS: Maybe? Or maybe not. You know, when I was in France I didn't think I'd work on Plexiglas, I didn't think I'd reintegrate the image into my work by making abstraction. I would never have thought... so there may or may not be other avenues that will open up? It's not scary for me!

MP: It's not scary for you! So you still have a long way to go?

JPS: Yes, I have a long way to go! But the big problem I have is in relation to contemporary art, the contemporary art market which is still based solely on speculation and the sale of works of art. And then I have a friend in Paris who wrote to a gallery owner, who has two galleries in New York and Paris, she presented my work to him, and this guy said, my collectors need to be surprised and want something new! Like my work isn't new! So it comes down to the collectors (buyers) dictating the market. And if someone buys you, you can exhibit, and if no one buys you, you don't exhibit! Not in museums, not in cultural centres! Because you are not known! And that's a big problem. The sale of the work of art decides everything and it's to power one hundred now, what's happening today!

MP: Yes of course.

JPS: So, as I have very little influence over that, I try to do video interviews as much as possible, like we do today! And to present my work, we often film with my friend Christine when I'm working and I present my work as best I can, and then that's it, we'll see! I've got a few leads opening up in London, Australia.

MP: Some French people understand!

JPS: Well, you're an exception! There are a few exceptions!

MP: Or try to understand, at least we like it!

JPS: That's it, it's not important to understand, the most important thing is to love and respect!

MP: We agree, that's what it's all about, it's about loving the artist's work, at least I do! And thank you again for this interview.

JPS: Thank you very much!

MP: And I wish you a long, long, long way for this adventure!

JPS: Thank you Michel, thank you all! Thank you to Christine and thank you to Lionel!

MP: Thank you to you!

THE BONUSES

MP: Is it good like that?

JPS: Yes it's good, except you don't have to look at the cameras! When you talk to me, they have to be invisible both of them!

MP: They have to be invisible!

MP: It's a book I bought not long ago, it's called In Praise of the Erection!

CC: It comes to life!

JPS: It's coming to life a bit!

MP: Yes, you're getting a bit animated!

JPS: Because people always want me to be able to answer their questions, but

I don't always have the answers!

MP: No but it's an interview, I ask you questions, you answer or not!

JPS: You have to give me a little massage!

MP: You will put a little blindfold down!

JPS: You didn't say the title!

MP: Yes I did: In Praise of the Erection, but it's several authors!