

ATCHOUM

2005

The tree on Place René Payot has a cold. Personified by Daniel Bourquin (Les Nouveaux Monstres, Lausanne) who lends his voice, the tree sneezes, sniffs, groans, complains. It is trying to rest but people approaching and passing under its branches on the sidewalk disturb its nap. Their presence triggers a set of terrifying sneezes that upset the old crank.

The linden tree, laid bare by winter, is now covered by shining lights that follow the intensity of its moods by the tone of its voice. Fifty five mysterious spotlights hidden inside the tree are activated independently by samples of voices prerecorded on a computer every time a passer-by enters the field of a sensor concealed under a branch. Lights flicker during the pedestrian's movement then turn off as soon as he exits the sensor's field. The lights then shine quietly as if the tree was awake, thinking. The recorded program controls up to 192 samples, grouped in hourly sections, that play day and night.

«Atch'iiii...!!»; «Heisse Marroni» (=Warm chestnuts); «Quelle fricasse!!» (=What a cold!); «Venise, Venise, mais on n'est pas à Venise!» (=Venice, but we are not in Venice!); «Passez si vous ne voulez pas vous retourner!» (=Go on your way if don't want to turn back!)



passers-by surprised by the voice and the lights descending from the linden tree



wires, sensor and loudspeakers are barely visible among the branches of the tree

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By the surprise effect it produces, the speaking and sneezing tree arouses astonishment, amusement and good mood in a time of cold weather and grey winter skies. Thanks to its interactive process, ATCHOUM generates exchanges not only between passers-by and the tree but also between people themselves. We have seen people startled, looking up in the air and exclaiming: «Bless you!» or children turning around the old tree trunk hoping to hear it swearing or singing *Cé qu'é lainô* (a famous old patriotic Geneva's song). Old people slightly shocked were asking themselves where was the distressed person shouting from inside the tree.

ATCHOUM was part of the *Festival Arbres et Lumières 2005* in Geneva. This project has been realized thanks to the cooperation of Antoine Petroff's work on electronics and MAX/MSP program. The installation was active from 2nd December 2005 to 8th January 2006 by any kind of weather.