

**BEYOND THE END  
OF NARRATIVE:  
ALLEGORIES,  
CONSTELLATIONS,  
DISPOSITIFS**

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When François Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), acknowledged the exhaustion of the major teleological narratives of emancipation, he was signalling the collective awareness of the end of an era. This ending had already largely been prefigured in modern literature and filmmaking, and it paved the way for *new modes of narrative*, which are multiplying today as a set of hybrid practices in which the participatory relationship between spectators and the space of the work transforms spectators into performers of their own representation. Although we are no longer talking about a relationship between a narrator and an audience member who exchange positions by turns, the process of the work nonetheless becomes the sensory matrix of a relationship that reinvents the potential for new forms of intersubjectivity. The *coming narrative* is one in which individuals are no longer subjected to the evolution of the story; on the contrary, it enables individuals to replenish their personal position as a subject of their own story.

## THE END OF NARRATIVE

“Since the late nineteenth century, literature has been perpetually staging its own death.”<sup>1</sup> “The weakening of the connections between literature and reality,” the depreciation of imitation, and, beginning in the late nineteenth century, the domination of the musical paradigm have continuously devalued the power of poetry and literature, stealing more and more of the transparency of the referent. The disaster of the Second World War and the discovery of the camps only radicalized this pessimism, prompting Theodor Adorno to remark, “The poetry of failed language is no more acceptable than poetry that has confidence in words.”<sup>2</sup> In short, no matter how one considers the question, according to Roland Barthes – whose last courses at the Collège de France were dedicated to listing the various symptoms of the “obsolescence” apparent in literature<sup>3</sup> – poetry and the novel have, for more than a century, been constantly celebrating their own death.<sup>4</sup>

Where film is concerned, the changing stances of Jean-Luc Godard and of his most faithful critic, Serge Daney, provide a good barometer of what the ends of the story in cinema were to look like. First as a critic, in two famous essays on Alfred Hitchcock and Howard Hawks, Godard came to the defence of a style of cinema that was utterly condemned not only by the criticism of the time, but also by the one critic he most respected: André Bazin. Rather than argue for “ontological realism” in the cinema, Godard defended the idea that action is the essence of the art form – action divorced from any moral purpose, any psychological analysis of the characters, or, indeed, any expressivity apart from its own movement. Action summarizes cinematic writing at a certain speed, the speed of the action, implying a stylization of attitudes and, paradoxically, making every moment in a film an accomplished whole. For Godard, the pleasure of watching a film is thus not dependent on the moral or message that may be drawn from it. On the contrary: every instant, because of the pace at which it is filmed, generates its own pleasure. The fictional logic of the story that is being told therefore appears secondary to the concatenation of instants that it is merely linking together. This is exactly what Godard would later demonstrate in his series of films beginning with *Breathless* (1960) – as would John Cassavetes in the United States with *Shadows* (1959). Classic, “pure” action cinema was thereafter transformed into a matrix in which “a torrent of spontaneous actions” followed one another, whereby a film could seem more like an odyssey onto which are grafted – thus materializing the tendency toward discontinuity – a whole series of remarks, asides, moments of emotional intensity, and digressions.

Modern cinema thus foretold Roland Barthes’s “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives” (1966).<sup>5</sup> In this seminal text, Barthes demonstrates that “meaning is not ‘at the end’ of the narrative;

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1. Theodor Adorno quoted in William Marx, *L'Adieu à la littérature. Histoire d'une dévalorisation, XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Éd. de Minuit, 2005), 28. (Our translation). 2. *Ibid.*, 129. (Our translation). 3. *Ibid.*, p. 163. (Our translation). 4. See Roland Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. IV, 1972–1976 (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 866. 5. Roland Barthes’s essay “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives” has been included in several collections, including Susan Sontag’s *A Barthes Reader* (1982) and S. Onega and J.A.G. Landa eds., *Narratology* (1996).

it runs through it." In seeking to bring to light the logic of sequences constraining the organization of the narrative, he uncovers a generic law governing the construction of all narratives by means of a process of dissociation into discrete elements or signifying units. He points specifically to the play of *permutation*, as well as to the possibility of *distending* the "functional nuclei" structuring narratives, via "unpredictable expansions [...] that can be filled almost infinitely." This process of inventing new narratives drawn from redistributed components of a single storyline is part of what interests the Argentinean conceptual artist David Lamelas in his *Film Script (Manipulation of Meaning)* (1972). In examining a series of elementary, purely visual actions – walking, driving, opening a door, a pane of glass being broken, a telephone ringing – most of which are denotative rather than connotative, he pits the consecutive logic of a filmed sequence against the multiple permutative possibilities of a set of three slide sequences projected at the same time, repeating in a different order the images of the film from which they are excerpted. As the Israeli director Amos Gitai said recently during a debate following the screening of his latest film, *News from Home* (2006), presented simultaneously in an "installed" version called *News from Home/News from House*, the distinguishing feature of the principle of installation, as opposed to projection, is the potential for confronting a diverse series of possible montages. In moving from one version to the other, what becomes important is the multiplication of modes of linkage between the various moments and sequences – as if the one-way connection were less legitimate than ever before. From the shift between one state and another of a single film emerges a mutation of montage (assembly) into *démontage* (disassembly); during this shift, the notions seem themselves to have been transferred from the lexicon of cinema to that of construction – as if suddenly, or gradually, the architectural paradigm had overtaken that of the cinema.

Daney's distrust and defiance of fiction goes back to when he first saw Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1955). As for Adorno with regard to poetry, for Daney the reality of the camps put a decisive stop to the previously obvious relationship, writ both large and small, between cinema and story. Daney's approach, however, is interesting and original because of the unexpected consequence that he drew from it: his experience of *Night and Fog* made him realize that the subjective effectiveness of a film springs from a single element that seems to be extracted from the film itself. The memory of a film is completely summed up in a single shot, image, character or line of dialogue. The image, in which a mnesic *trace* is encapsulated, is all that remains of the film after it has been seen.<sup>6</sup>

I will not delve into the entire chain of repercussions that this initial *freeze framing* – Daney places its first occurrence in cinema in the final image of François Truffaut's film *The 400 Blows* (1959) – was to have on critical thought. It appears, however, that if the cinema is no longer made for telling stories, this discovery of Daney's – which he would consistently develop thereafter and which in fact sets off a turnaround, a complete reversion of the moving pictures of a film into a parade of frozen images, as demonstrated literally by Godard in a key sequence of *Ici et ailleurs* (1974) – is a key marker in that thought. Twenty years later, by the time of Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma et de la télévision* (1998), it had evolved into the notion that cinema is nothing but an immense archive composed of the *debris* left by the subjective memory of films, part of an attempt to "to *remake*, using snippets already cut from the filmed world, the movement of the world" as if the history of cinema could from that point on be understood only as an "introspective" one, a conversation that *each individual* has with himself through cinema.

As Peter Sloterdijk has very persuasively written,<sup>7</sup> the end of the need to link things via a narrative thread marks the meeting point between posthistorical forms of experience and the internal mode of capitalist economics. The experience specific to the posthistorical era, then, is that of unlinking – hence the obsolescence of the montage form, its derisory, artificial nature, in a space now entirely governed by the principle of accumulation.

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6. "Le cinéma: ce qui ne retient qu'un moment (la mort au travail)," republished in Serge Daney, *La rampe: cahier critique, 1970-82* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma/Gallimard, 1983), 33. 7. Peter Sloterdijk, *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals: Für eine philosophische Theorie der Globalisierung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005).

The archival image stops, synthesizes and condenses time. It is immediately *history*. But, dissociated into so many accumulated fragments, it no longer projects any particular story. In this sense, cinema differs from photography only in its underlying numbers: it is simply “images in quantity.”<sup>8</sup> According to this meaning, it is the name given to an accumulation, a *collection* – a quantitative and indefinitely open-ended amassing of visual and aural material, no longer distinguishable from the archive itself. The archive is the cinema of the end of cinema as representation of the story in motion, the prelude to a cinema of immobility. There is no shortage of examples, in contemporary art, of works that have adopted accumulation as a principle and model. Pierre Bismuth, for instance, in *From Some Folded Shirts to... (1000 images)* (1997–1998), presents the cinematic unfurling of a non-predetermined succession of photographic recordings on a strip of film, in the manner of a sequence of lapses that reveal the subjectivity of one who, *a priori*, has seen fit to align them without any preconceived program or plan (i.e., the opposite of cinema). The principle here is equivalency of all images – images of images, of films, images of friends, landscapes, details – in other words, a quantitative principle of accumulation rather than montage.

## THE STORYTELLER

The crisis in narrative in fact originated long before the birth of literature and, later, of cinema. And paradoxically, each is – if we subscribe to Walter Benjamin's discourse – a symptom, rather than a renaissance, of narrative. Storytelling had long constituted a mode of transmission and exchange in which individual experience and collective representations could be articulated. The birth of literature, however, relegated the notions of narrative and narration to a solitary, private use of language. Benjamin, in his essay *Der Erzähler (The Storyteller)*, showed how the birth of journalism and literature (what Barthes termed the autarkic universe of the nineteenth-century novel) was synonymous with the end of narrative as a form of intersubjective transmission. Novelistic writing is equated with a fictive staging of an experience of the world, positing things or situations as signifiers according to the needs of the narrative, with the author's conceptions and intentions projected thereupon. Storytelling, on the other hand, has to do with oral transmission, and implies a context of exchange between at least two interlocutors, involving concrete realities and lived experiences that directly concern them. Seen from this perspective, fiction appears as the end of narration – as the privatization and the confiscation of meaning. Conversely, storytelling is not tied to the thread of a discourse that has predetermined its ordering. It arises as the coherent collection (but without assigned terms) of segments of stories, of practical advice, assembled randomly through encounters between individuals. Storytelling takes the familiarity of the moment produced as part of oral exchange, constantly repeated and enhanced under new circumstances via new narratives, as the locus of constitution of the subject. It is the living process by which each listener appears virtually as a new narrator. According to this conception, novelistic writing belongs to the *fictum* – that which is feigned, while storytelling refers to the *fictio*, the action of shaping, the act of forging with words, and to the *fictor*, the sculptor or modeller, the “artisan of speech,” connected to the concreteness of experience. Storytelling causes the experience recounted to become the experience of those who are listening. Benjamin defines *experience* as the mode of exchange in which the constitution of self is mapped out based on the apprehension of a collectively shared meaning. “Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word,” he writes, “certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past, through which the individual may receive an image of himself.”<sup>9</sup>

Storytelling consists in one's experience of solidarity with a world as yet incomprehensible; the apprehension of that world is at the same time a singular experience of oneself. The conjunction of time and space, of places and stories, insofar as it represents the central issue of the aesthetic construction of individuality, is a good summation of the specificity of narration: it is above all a mode

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8. As pointed out to me by the great Spanish filmmaker Martin Basilio Patino in Madrid, November 2006. 9. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), 153, 155.

of confrontation and subjective reorganization of the concrete heterogeneity of the world. By bringing together the sets of spaces in which it actualizes itself on the as-yet-undefined stage of combinations of present worlds and worlds of memory, storytelling makes, from shared language, its specific non-locus.

In 1987, Jeff Wall, writing about the lightbox picture that he created as a direct tribute to Benjamin, noted, "The 'figura' of the storyteller is an archaism, a social type which has lost its function as a result of the technological transformations of literacy. It has been relegated to the margins of modernity."<sup>10</sup> We may wonder, however, if whether for the artist or for the philosopher this very obsolescence functions as the basis of a program for discovering new avenues for its actualization. Above and beyond his singular work titled *The Storyteller* (1987) (illus. p. 226), then, it may be that Wall's entire iconographic project speaks to the rehabilitation of the "figura of the storyteller." Although the various elements represented in Wall's "photographic paintings" fit unambiguously into an aesthetics of imitation, the specific manner in which the pictures are constructed, by accumulating of superimposed layers of meaning, blurs or hinders any immediate readability. This subtle way of undoing the self-sufficiency of the act of looking at the picture, and of implying the need for a second voice capable of untangling its intertwined threads, is one typically contemporary strategy for reconstructing the *equivalent* of intersubjective reciprocity. The deliberate effect of condensation and encryption of the picture, which does not detract in advance from the general message that it seeks to produce, calls in exchange for the unwinding of a commentary within which the depositing of the various accumulated films of meaning, one by one, can be envisaged, without anyone ever being sure that she has finished with the object about which she is talking. To return to a concept typical of Benjaminian discourse, this type of *allegorical* construction seems to me to be one of the initial post-modern occurrences of the reactualizing of narrative. Craig Owens, the first critic to have restored the relevance of storytelling after Benjamin, showed how the logic of the supplement is inextricably linked to the allegorical dimension of works: "[A]llegory occurs whenever one text is doubled by another... [The allegorist] adds another meaning to the image... [H]e does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a *supplement*."<sup>11</sup> Accumulation is a form of layering in one spot, of superimposition, as if each work were a vessel for receiving sensory impressions. The palimpsest, in terms of the image, and the principle, purely additive and infinite, of creating a sort of *subjective archive*, in terms of the interpreter, thus appear as the two sides of a single allegorical paradigm.

The works of Marco Poloni provide a revealing example of how this allegorical process can effect a shift from condensation into a single image to construction of spatial constellations. This is true of *Displacement Island*, an installation-series of sixty-seven photos shown in the fall of 2006 at the Centre de la photographie in Geneva and later at the Kunstverein Freiburg, and *The Desert Room* (2006) (illus. p. 226), a series of fifteen photos created for the artist's solo show at the Kunsthalle Fri-Art in Freiburg.

Both series feature combinations of heterogeneous sources and types of representation of a single place. In the first work, a selection of press photographs of the island of Lampedusa, off the coast of Sicily, is combined with photographs taken recently by the artist; in the second, images of the hotel depicted in Michelangelo Antonioni's famous film *The Passenger* (1973) are blended with archival images and contemporary ones made by the artist for the exhibition. In both cases, tension is

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10. In Jeff Wall, *Essais et entretiens. 1984-2001* (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 2004), 77–78. (Our translation). 11. In this sense, allegory is particularly well suited to the work of a growing number of present-day artists who stage archives of images, whether they employ film directly or use diversified forms of dispositifs of images. According to Craig Owens, "Film should be the primary vehicle for modern allegory" because it allows the materialization of the logic of accumulation that is the basis of allegory, by composing stories "out of a succession of concrete images." See Craig Owens, *The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism*, first published in *October*, vols. 12 and 13 (Spring and Summer 1980). (Our translation). Benjamin Buchloh also references this form of second-order text that is allegory by addressing the Barthesian definition of myth (see Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), 107–59) in his essay "Marcel Broodthaers, Allegories of the Avant-garde," *Artforum* (May–June 1980).

created by at least two contradictory representations of a single reality. In *Displacement Island*, the island's image as a tourist paradise famed for its fine beaches and crystal-clear water is set against reminders of its strategic role in the political space of the European Community via, among other things, images of the detention centre for illegal immigrants built there. The summer holiday haven of Northern Europe's "included" is confronted with the experience of those excluded from the Schengen zone, which is continuously swept by satellite monitoring systems and border patrols. In *The Desert Room*, the film set – today converted into an old-age home for veterans of the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale – is juxtaposed against various phases of its transformation.

In both pieces, the complexity of what I would term "the image" – that is, the impossible synthesizing of the multiplicity of images making up each of the two constellations – involves its deployment into a multiplicity of other images across the entire surface of at least one wall. The primary effect of the spatialization, or flattening, of "the image" conceived as the depositing, or layering, into a multiplicity of other images, is to reveal and materialize the gaps between the layers themselves, embodied by each image in each of the two series. The primary role of these gaps is therefore to materialize the fragmentation of the image. They materialize the ruined state of representation. They present its allegorical representation. I therefore posit that, rather than seeking out the missing image (the one, real or virtual, that would link all the others together) Poloni's constellations make the empty gaps between the images their true starting point. Thus it appears to me that a heretofore unseen continuity emerges between this allegorical "ruined state" of representation, the two ambiguous figures of habitation around which each is organized – the entire island on the one hand, the deserted hotel on the other – and, finally, the depiction of the flat surface of the sea the Sahara, each of which is made conspicuous by the atmosphere in a dominant hue: the turquoise blue of the Mediterranean and the ochre red of the sand. Thus the dominant feature in both series of images would seem to be the tendency to project differing representations of emptiness, vacancy, and imprisonment as visual synonyms culminating in representations of the deserted. In both cases, the primary representation is complemented by a new image, bringing into play the logic of the *supplement*, which, as I have stated, is highly characteristic of the process of allegory; hence the representation of the tourist is complemented by that of the migrant, fictional representation by archival representation, and so on. In both cases, the final representation embodying the experience of the work is indeed the result of a subjective accumulation of differing layers of information emergent from the shift, without montage, from one image to the next.

The linking together of the images, the shift from one image to the next, can be effected at two qualitatively distinct levels. The first level, that of reading, is purely one of observation; it allows us merely to acknowledge the informational elements that are present along with their logical commensurability – even though their existential experience may be contradictory. The second level is purely allegorical and causes the exercise of reading the two series of images to culminate in two differing representations of the desert(ed). The open space of the sea or the Sahara, their accompanying representations of imprisonment (island, detention centre, hotel room), the tourist and the migrant, the subject of the cinematic fiction and the converted remains of its setting are thus no more than polarizations of a single image – an entirely other, unrepresentable one that speaks to the dereliction of the contemporary subject. Poloni's constellations thus materialize the multiple projections of a contemporary state of subjection – revealed allegorically in this case by the fragmented dispersal of the image.

#### LANGUAGE OF SPACE/LANGUAGE OF EXPOSITION: THE CONSTELLATION AS PARADIGM

The modern age has placed narration in a state of crisis in the two favoured domains of storytelling: literature and the cinema. Indeed, in the name of the specificity of practices, the condemnation of an art deemed literary became the criterion for the development of the identity of modernist art: "Modern art especially fought against the illustrative function of image, content, and script, its

narrative, literary mooring; it sought to purify the image of all that might resemble illustration."<sup>12</sup> To some, however, this period marked a linguistic turning point in the humanities and in philosophy, to the point that they became enamoured – in France, for example – of a model of *textuality* in general, in which the concept of *writing*, as posited in 1953 by Barthes, was to be the analytic operator in a wide variety of fields. In the visual arts, a growing interest in exposing the process of development of a work<sup>13</sup> soon became the common denominator in many conceptual and postconceptual propositions of the 1960s and 1970s. *The Landscape Manual* (1969), the last work created by Jeff Wall before he temporarily abandoned art until the late 1970s, provides a valuable example. This handbook for the reading of urban landscapes is presented as a textual and photographic account of several trips by car through Vancouver – a horizontal city without readable hierarchies if there ever was one – that attempts to divine the city's internal structure (as such, it may be seen as a draft of Mike Davis's famous 1992 essay on Los Angeles, *City of Quartz*). A semi-objective, semi-subjective mapping of urban space, *The Landscape Manual* is an accumulation of *states* that, taken as a whole, sketch out the figure of a space.

In the early 1960s, the emergence of minimalism – the shift from the surface of the canvas to the reification of the picture as an autonomous object that could be placed on the floor and integrated into the real space of the exhibition – upset the traditional relationship between the work and the spectator. Exposition as a *scene* – this is certainly the feeling that we get from many of Carl André's ground sculptures – deconstructed the opposition of form (the art object) and ground (the space in which it is presented) and presaged the deconstruction of the opposition of subject and object. The insistence on the temporal experience of the work thus gave birth to a *language of exposition*.

Marcel Broodthaers was among the first to expand the potential of this language by making exposition the vessel for the multiple forms of representation. In a 1968 interview about his *Le Corbeau et le Renard* (1967), for example, Broodthaers stated, "For me, film is simply an extension of language. [...] My film expands the domain of the 'conventional' film. [...] It's an environment."<sup>14</sup> The shift from film to exposition signified the shift from narrating the experience to experiencing the narrative. From that point on, the quality of one's experience of a work became the criterion for its authenticity. It became a form of narrative of that very activity. Broodthaers stated emphatically how the invention of this new space was indebted to the final works of Stéphane Mallarmé. A handwritten sheet presented at his show at Galerie MTL<sup>14</sup> stated, "Mallarmé is at the source of modern art. [...] He unwittingly invented modern space [...] *Un coup de dés*. This would have been a treatise on art."<sup>15</sup> *Le Corbeau et le Renard* and *L'Exposition littéraire autour de Mallarmé* (1969) were the first art environments to draw their direct inspiration from the Mallarmeian constellations – a mode of representation that was to be fully realized in the "puzzle" constructions made by large ensembles in the 1970s, in which apparently disparate elements echo each other through a series of coincidences.

Written in 1897, two years after the Lumière brothers' first film screening, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* ("A roll of the dice will never abolish chance") famously features its titular phrase exploded across the entire space of the page. Many saw this work as "the founding poem of

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12. Boris Groys, "Portrait du curateur en iconoclaste," *Mouvement*, No. 43 (April–June 2007). (Our translation). 13. See, for example, the catalogue *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* (Whitney Museum, 1965). Works from this period by Robert Morris, one of the influential members of the second generation of heirs to Duchamp, are key examples of this renunciation of the finished work of art, in favour of art made from "mutable stuff which need not arrive at a point of being finalised with respect to time and space. The notion that work is an irreversible process ending in a static icon-object no longer has much relevance." Irving Sandler, *Le triomphe de l'art américain. Les années soixante*. II, (Paris: Éditions Carré, 1990), 335. (Our translation). \* Translator's note: this interview was translated in vol. 42 of *October* (Autumn, 1987), a special issue titled *Marcel Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs* and republished in a book of the same name edited by B. H. D. Buchloh (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1988). (Our translation). 14. Brussels, March 13–April 10, 1970. 15. The same statement would be repeated on several occasions, including as part of a note accompanying his *Ma Collection*, presented at the European contemporary art retrospective at New York City's Guggenheim Museum in October–November 1972. Cf: *Marcel Broodthaers* (Paris: Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, 1991), 160 (Our translation). Also in *October*, vol. 42, "Marcel Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs" (Autumn, 1987), 101–125.

poetic modernity [...], the culmination of poetry, in all senses of the term."<sup>16</sup> It is no accident that the poem relates all the details of a shipwreck. As the most perfect example of "a disaster from which there is no return," the poem, according to William Marx, illustrates "the very impossibility of discourse [...] the closing in of language upon itself and its disconnection from the world. The poem remains naked, in its pure act, in its most concrete form: '*rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu, excepté peut-être, une constellation*' [nothing will have taken place but the place, except perhaps, a constellation]."

This culmination of literature was to give rise to a century of poetic experimentation that went beyond the limits of language.<sup>17</sup> It also resulted in a branching out of the uses of language within literature itself. It is no exaggeration to say that, among other things, it opened the way, as Michel Foucault has noted, to "the first mutterings of a language, the limits of which are still a long way off, that would be dedicated to space." "A literary work is made with nothing other than language," Foucault continues, "that is, starting from a system of signs that is part of an entire network of other signs, those that circulate within a society at a given time. [...] Language is space, but this has been forgotten because it functions in time (the sequence of speech); it functions to tell time, but the essence of language is to be space. [...] If literature currently has a meaning and if literary analysis in the sense that I have just described it currently has a meaning, it is perhaps because they foretell what this language will be; it is perhaps because they are signs that this language is being born. Literature is the relationship that is in the process of being constituted, as yet dimly visible but not yet thinkable, between language and space."<sup>18</sup>

A few years earlier, Alain Robbe-Grillet, in his 1958 essay "Nature, Humanism, Tragedy," had defined the program of the New Novel as follows: "Recording the distance between the object and me, and the distances of the object itself (its *outside* distances – that is, its measurements) and the distances between objects, and emphasizing the fact that these are *only distances* (and not rifts) – this serves to establish that things are there and that they are nothing but things, each one self-limited".<sup>19</sup> In the New Novel, the spatialization of language is first and foremost associated with the insistence placed on *description*. Philippe Hamon notes, "In literary tradition, exposition refers to the inaugural part of a play, which involves familiarizing the audience with the characters – whether they are speaking, spoken to, or spoken of – as well as the time and place of the action."<sup>20</sup> As a novel of exposition, the New Novel extended to all of fiction what up to then had defined the first instants of the narrative, to the point of rendering undecidable the classic parameters of exposition. The place from which one speaks is no longer solid ground. It diffracts into a series of sets of spaces in which "reality" and representation blur together; the present tense of writing blends into that of memories; and narrator and characters exchange their speech, to create a single "horizontality" of language.

Examples of this principle of spatial redistribution of linear narrative abound in the contemporary cinema. Johan van der Keuken's film *Face Value* (1990) exemplifies its application to the temporal unfolding of a film, according to a viewer-specific ordering, via the after-effect (*après-coup*) of memory. Sequences filmed in single takes, under the most diverse circumstances, and assembled with no obviously discernible narrative logic create heterogeneous visual material, composed of both concrete information and visual impressions. Selected by the viewer's memory randomly during the film's projection, they create for each individual viewer a new "figure" of political and social Europe captured at a moment in its history, as an after-effect of the projection.

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16. Marx, *op. cit.*, p. 132. (Our translation). 17. The scope of this phenomenon, as regards concrete and visual poetry, can be seen in the comprehensive catalogue of the exhibition *Poésure et peinture*, curated by Bernard Blistène at the Vieille Charité, Marseille, 1986. 18. Michel Foucault, unpublished lecture given at the Université de Louvain, 1967. Archives Michel Foucault, Paris. (Our translation). 19. *Pour un nouveau roman* (Paris: Éd. de Minuit, 1961), 6. (Our translation). See also "Nature, Humanism, Tragedy," in *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove, 1965), 49–75. 20. Philippe Hamon, *Expositions: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth-Century France*, transl. Katia Sainson-Frank and Lisa Maguire (Berkeley: University of California Press), 103, note 14.

The principle of montage led to the invention of a form of narrative that invited the viewer to engage in a new type of relationship with the work. The practice can be traced to Charles Baudelaire's visit to the Paris World Fair in 1855, which led to his formulating his famous theory of correspondences, later taken up by the Surrealists.<sup>21</sup> The cinematic technique of montage governing the alternation of shots, from long shot to close-up, as shown as early as 1916 in D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance*, is merely one principle of reduction of the "mechanism of association" – to use Benjamin's expression referring to Surrealist constructive photography – allowing the staging of an action. It is as if "the tension demanded from the mind of the spectator," extended in duration in the form of a representation of an action, were itself to become the subject of the work. Griffith had indeed understood that *suspense* – seen, for example, in his famous parallel montage of the chase scenes in *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *The Adventures of Dollie* (1908) – is the fundamental underpinning of film directing. For the suspense is indeed a transposition of the *lightest thing* resulting from the continual tension, without synthesis, between two elements.

Daney has written of montage that it allows for the construction of a "viewer's space" (*lieu du spectateur*).<sup>22</sup> This does not necessarily imply a lack of linearity or discursive continuity. The interval, on the contrary, deliberately provokes a breakdown in the autonomy of the diegetic process, enabling the viewer to participate actively in the production of the work, by detaching him/her from psychological identification with the characters. The effects of considering the interval as a mode of narrative discontinuity enabling the viewer to be involved in the work were fully experimented with in the spectacle of "attractions" of 1920s German and Russian theatre – which was enriched by performers from the circus, variety shows and ballet. For example, Sergei Eisenstein's discovery of directing via the montage of attractions stemmed from the practices of Meyerhold's Workshops of 1921–1922, which were entirely guided by a desire to deconstruct the rigid relationships of stage and theatre, which assign the spectator a fixed position within the performance space.

Similarly, contrary to what some may believe, the New Novel was perhaps not primarily the prerogative of a type of "objective literature," but a new form of writing the subject. "The true evolution of the New Novel is that of an increasingly complex approach to the subjective," Alain Robbe-Grillet once told me in an interview; "[...] Philippe Hamon said that the reader of a novel by Balzac was carried from 'fullness to fullness,' while a reader of Flaubert went from emptiness to emptiness: this is a possible definition of modernity. The emptinesses embody the story's openness to Otherness while the fullnesses leaves no space for the reader. [...] The New Novel favours the freedom of 'builders.' Writing, in fact, tends to reconstruct, independently of any theory of communication, the potential for intersubjectivity."<sup>23</sup> The investigation of content thus equates fully with the issue of the conditions for enunciation of the text: How does one *enter*? How does one make one's way? What are the *dispositifs* available to me so that, as the reader, I may write *my* story?

The *constellation* is one of the typical forms in the work of the Swiss artist Silvia Bächli, as seen once again in her recent exhibition *Poèmes sans prénoms* (1999–2006) (illus. p. 231) at MAMCO in Geneva; the title is an homage to three 1939 drawings by Sophie Taeuber-Arp illustrating an eponymous poem by Hans Arp. From the free line of the drawings to the snowy roads in the few photographs in the exhibition (which produce a kind of inversion of the black-on-white of the lines on the sheets of paper), from the specific constellation of the hanging of the works to the continuous circulation through the spaces suggested by it – all methods of representation converge here to create

21. The system of "correspondences" was explicitly proclaimed by André Breton in such works as *Du surréalisme en ses œuvres vives* (1954); he simultaneously challenged the idea of simple analogy with that of the free metaphor, whereby the affinity stems from the relationship established later (as an after-effect) between the terms compared. Incidentally, *Correspondances* was the title of a Belgian Surrealist magazine founded in 1924 by Paul Nougé. 22. Serge Daney, "Itinéraire d'un ciné-fils," *Océaniques*, FR3 (May 1992). 23. Excerpts from a conversation with the author, *Galleries Magazine*, No. 54 (April–May 1993). (Our translation).

a network of intermingled lines, a true grid or nest whose manufacture, as it does among some familiar insects, forms a precarious habitat, a sort of nest, web or map. It is something like a *framework* that is at once physical and mental – strong, pulled taut like a net, but at the same time almost evanescent, to which the viewer is invited to cling during his or her visit. The line in Silvia Bächli's drawings must be considered a translation into “waves” of her memories of travels through space and of the inner movements of what one would once have called her “soul.” The line is a hypersensitive seismograph transcribing the specificity of the impressions left by the conjunction of the body's movements and psychic intensities – a sophisticated and novel form of “degree zero of writing” entirely dedicated to the exteriorization of the elementary “deposits” inherent to the relationship formed between the subject and the outside.

Everything seems to play out here in the reciprocal relationship between “tracks” and “traces” (*le tracé* and *la trace*). One might say that the trace is the tangible element of memory; that which constitutes an archive, that which tends toward “volume,” a “material” dimension: drawings and photographs. Amos Gitaï said to me recently that, unlike the other arts, cinema is imprinted directly on memory without leaving tangible traces: it is when it is exhibited (exposed) that cinema produces traces. Tracks, on the other hand, represent a “going toward”: a forward movement that clears the path of the real – in other words, an operation that may potentially leave traces, for any track carries with it its own traces, sometimes unpredictable and discontinuous. Here, the paradox of drawing (but also, of course, one of its generic features) is a desire to set down as a trace (in the sense of *line*) the track itself. Photography, on the contrary, is always the moment in time “*T*” of an interruption. If drawings are potential reminiscences of real movements, travels, wanderings in the landscape, then photographs are their snapshots. Drawing would thus be the paradox of a continuity (the drawn line) and a discontinuity (the blank rectangle of the page). The continuity is nevertheless reconstituted, or reconstructed as an after-effect, in the second line produced by the relationship between the format of each drawing and the spacing of the drawings on the walls: the constellation. One of the notable particularities of this second line is that it renders palpable the “hollow” produced by the gaps between the drawings. Between the traces and the tracks, these gaps that create the rhythm and the mute musicality of the whole seem to have a status in and of themselves that belongs neither to the image nor to the drawing – they are a sort of Morse code representing the *dispositif* in its constellation. They truly anchor the second line in space – that allow it to be inscribed not *on* (as in hanging a picture on a wall) but *in*, and thus to give form to the space itself, to construct it as an architecture within the architecture. They permit a twisting, knotting and restarting of the very line of the track, causing it to constantly branch off. In a way, they allow us to disregard the wall: they remove us as viewers from the frontality that has long dictated our relationship with represented objects. In one sense, they lend a sculptural character to the track, which has an advantage over the rigid, solid, material line of sculpture in that it permits a greater plasticity by never imposing a definitive opposition between the real and the virtual; by inventing a sort of new substance that is something like the raw material, half-physical and half-psychic, of the drawings themselves.

As it is for a whole new generation of contemporary artist-architects who are interested in manufacturing sensitive envelopes that are as reactive as living organisms,<sup>24</sup> the particularity of the constellation is that it makes the exhibition into a precarious habitat conceived in the mode of a reactive Otherness.

## POST-CINEMATIC DISPOSITIFS

Foucault was one of the first theorists in France of the 1960s to make extensive use of the concept of *dispositif*. In a recent text that reconstructs the genealogy of the term, Giorgio Agamben ventures to suggest a generalization: “I term a *dispositif* anything that, in one way or another, has the ability

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24. Examples in France would include François Roche, Philippe Rahm, Berdeger, and Pêjus.

to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, and ensure the actions, behaviours, opinions, and discourses of living beings.<sup>25</sup> In so doing he demonstrates the original relationship between this concept and the existence of systems of constraints by which individuals are unwittingly directed. He underscores the intrinsic relationship linking each dispositif to the production of a specific type of subject. A dispositif, he explains, is “a machine that produces subjectivations.”

In two seminal texts of the early 1970s,<sup>26</sup> Jean-Louis Baudry grafted the meaning of dispositif onto film theory, where it soon emerged as a key concept. The word began to be used to refer to the set of characteristics specific to transmission of the “mode of institutional representation” of a film in a theatre: the technology of projection, the positioning of the viewer in the theatre with respect to the screen, and the characteristics of the cinematic form itself. At the crossroads of the material and the psychic, the immobilization of the viewer, who loses the feeling of relationship with his body in favour of what is happening on the screen, is an intrinsic characteristic of the cinematic dispositif – which, moreover, precludes any effect of discontinuity. The processes of montage exist to create the impression of narrative continuity, in the image of the continuity of the classic subject imprisoned in the illusion of its plenitude. The operation of projection rests on the principle of viewer identification with what is happening on the screen. The temporal unfolding of the film thus causes the concrete spatial reality of the dispositif to be forgotten, despite the fact that it is the *sine qua non* condition for transmission. As soon as we emphasize the dispositif, on the contrary, we emphasize the reappearance of the various components of the medium in the process of representation. What I am here calling a dispositif corresponds to that status of a post-cinematic form whose basic elements, because they have been dissociated, again become an immediately observable intrinsic condition of the narration itself. From that point on, the dispositif constitutes the primary proof of what it is we see, even as the object of the projection is obviated, reduced, and fragmented into several entities so that we can no longer be sure, *a priori*, of the coherence created by the projection.

Let us look at the example of *The Prehistoric Experience*<sup>27</sup> (2003–2007) by Christelle Lheureux. The project was developed in two stages. The first involved the transposition to a new visual track, reduced to a few elementary referential traits, of the original version of a little-known film by Kenji Mizoguchi, preserving only the running time, storyboard, interior/exterior relationships, day/night temporal markers, and the number and gender of the characters in each shot. What remains of the story is a series of gaps between the characters and images, which when multiplied produce what I will call an *archive*. Through this new space of “in-betweeness,” a new narrative can be constructed.

With Mizoguchi’s film deconstructed (*démonté*) in this way, the artist, whenever the project is presented, engages a new narrator to *interpréter*, live, in a more or less improvised manner as the images stream past, the connections that the characters on the screen maintain among themselves. The relationship of each new narrator with the mute, inexpressive immobility of the images ensures a constant renewal of the interpretation. What I feel is important here is the project’s goal of generating ever-changing stories that the dispositif of exposition accumulates horizontally one beside the next, in languages that are also different each time. The dialogue originally imagined by the Japanese director is thus replaced by a coexisting, potentially infinite range of new stories. Through the multiplied representations of the relationships knitted *between* the characters, and the different ways of saying them and how they are said, something is recounted. What finally replaces the film, but still relates to the necessity of the story, is thus, quite simply, the invention, begun again and again, of new forms of *associations*. These relationships are no longer pre-written by the ordering of montage, for the ever-recurring central issue of the dispositif is to continually begin again

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25. Giorgio Agamben, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?* (Paris: Rivages poche, 2007). (Our translation). 26. Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,” in Bill Nichols ed., *Movie and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 531–542; and “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema” in Philip Rosen ed., *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 299–318. 27. For an extensive analysis of this proposition, see Jean-Christophe Royoux, “Un Remake multipiste,” *Pointlignean*, Paris, April 2004. Artist’s Web site: [www.christellelheureux.com](http://www.christellelheureux.com)

at the generic degree zero of *mise en scène*, to investigate the conditions for the potential of any relationship. Its enunciation always has to do with a process of interpretation in which the tension between the different versions is a constitutive element of the dispositif itself. For the contemporary subject subjected to the daily experience of dissociation is also an individual who, to become the subject of his own story, wonders in many ways about the conditions of coexistence and cohabitation. It would thus appear that this *prehistorical* experience can just as easily be posthistorical: it leads to an investigation into the potentiality of the “common” and the precariousness of the relationships and divisions on which it is based.

The central issue of postcinematic forms of narrative is constructed, in an extremely diversified manner, on the *relationship of interpretation*. These forms create a *space* of representation that is organized but eludes the logic of montage. They exclude the pre-established construction of any fiction or discourse. Rather, they function as forms of vessels – image and voice banks. Consequently, it is the *simultaneity* of the relationships between their dissociated components that forms the paradigm underlying their forms of association. *Seven Minutes Before* (2005) (illus. p. 235), a seven-screen video installation by Melik Ohanian, exemplifies this. In strict technical terms, what is recounted by the seven juxtaposed screens is the shift from the vectorized verticality of projection normally constitutive of a film or video to the simultaneity of seven trajectories that converge at one time, during the few minutes of the accident, and later, the final explosion that marks the completion of what is anticipated by the seventeen minutes that actually make up the video. The work no longer constructs a single-voiced temporal sequence. Rather, it spatially organizes the convergence of seven distinct temporal flows and, for a few minutes more, after the accident, the divergence of seven further trajectories. The explosion is foremost a diffraction, a non-hierarchical scattering of the representation of time that signals a certain exhaustion of the narrative form as well as a new primacy accorded to space – a veritable symptom of the world in which we live.

## THE INTERSUBJECTIVITY OF ENVELOPES

Exposition is the movement by which the work is ex-posed into x positions. Thus it constitutes a shelter in which the viewer is exposed to the exposition itself, in the manner of two interlocking components whose grafting, branching or articulation generates a recharging effect. Beyond the deconstruction of the established forms of narration, then, the key characteristic of the new modes of narrative may be that they create envelopes – inclusive spaces or world-spaces – that continuously investigate the nature of cohabitations. The central issue that they share and which we can now attempt to formulate would thus be that of the constitution of intelligent envelopes that demonstrate reactivity and interactivity, creating a new form of intersubjectivity.

In this sense, the *coming narrative* opens up the relationship with the image to a new approach to the *politics* of representation. It sets itself a goal that is no longer to be mistaken for critical negativity, to which the historical avant-gardes and the neo-avant-gardes had accustomed us. The narrative no longer acts in the modes of pastiche, parody, transgression or reinscription, experience with which shows just how quickly they are absorbed by the very system that they denounce and claim to be overturning. The *coming narrative* functions in the experimental mode of a material arrangement that reconstitutes, in the form of a spatial or spatialized image (which also signifies the end of the image as transparent, full, complete, or unique), the daily relations of immersion of the individual in a world that dominates him/her. At the same time, it implies the sensitive stimulation of the modes of appropriation, opening up to the individual the path to a *habitus* with the potential to transfigure the world's alienating effects. In other words, the relationship between an individual and a constellation – or, more broadly, a dispositif – is a twofold one. It represents all at once, in the allegorical mode of fragmentation, the unprotected totality of the posthistorical world in which we now find ourselves, and in so doing posits within itself the potential for another world that exists only through the subjective apprehension of a constructed system of echoes or correspondences

between its discrete elements. The mere possibility of giving form, through the act of amassing, to what is otherwise unceasingly subtracted from representation creates a plane of immanence sufficient to reverse the relationship between the individual and that which is submerging him/her, by opening the doors to an experience of himself/herself as subject.

This infinitely open *withholding* of the identification of the story with its end is equivalent to a spacing-out of *time spent*. Regarding the experience of *Time as Activity* (1969), a series of three photographs of three distinct loci of the activity of a city, accompanied by the projection of three four-minute films that recorded static shots of the same places, David Lamelas has said, "It's not about the image but about getting the viewers to understand the nature of the time they spend watching the piece. [...] The viewer should be able [...] to link the film to his own activity of watching it." This shift from a measurable or diegetic temporality to the experience of time spent, perceived by the observer as inconstant, subjective time, would seem to validate the notion of a "refutation of time," to quote the particularly well-chosen title of the catalogue for the most recent retrospective of Lamelas's work. Similarly, the idea of composing, by means of heterogeneous snatches of space-time, an *Other time* specific to the experience lived by the subject, no longer divided and measurable but immediately *global* – as Tacita Dean attempted to elucidate in *Friday/Saturday* (2000) – or the identical idea of indefinitely expanding the limits of the moment (another consequence of the Mallarmean constellation taken up by Marcel Broodthaers), represents the quest for what might be termed an *ecology of time* with the potential not only to connect the present and the future with the most remote past, but also to link the solitary "I" with the world conceived of as a totality.

The political dimension of art today lies in the capacity to multiply the conditions for apprehending these forms of psychic and subjective re-education of the individual, for whom no other experience can now offer the same effect of aesthetic recharging. In this world fashioned by merchandise, all that remains are situations of brutal, momentary discharging; generalized consumerism is their absorbent pump. These situations are perfectly symmetrical corollaries to other situations that the individual now merely undergoes. The exercise of the self that constitutes the escape from this twofold constraint lies in part in the constantly renewable potential for inventing forms of reconfiguration of the world-space in which we live. It also resides in the possibility of tracing the pathways via which it may be subjectively domesticated so as to become a world in itself. This movement is constitutive of the new modes of narrative; it has quite simply become a condition for apprehending the *aisthesis*. The conditions for success of the experience are directly dependent on the quality of reactivity of the envelopes created. The better they crystallize the conditions for the alienated experience, the more the multiplication of the gaps configuring that experience leave it open to transfiguration by drawing forth new modes of circulation within it.

Translation from the French By Michael Gilson

Curator and art critic Jean-Christophe Royoux, currently a visual arts adviser for the Ministère de la Culture (France), has authored numerous essays on post-cinematographic contemporary practices and is now preparing a book on the "cinema of exhibition." He co-edited *Cosmograms* (New York/Berlin: Lukas & Sternberg, 2005). *Multiplistes* is his latest exhibition (Argos, Brussels, fall 2005).