

Denys Riout

Temporal Conflagrations

In « Seuils », Ed. Libel, Lyon, 2010

Éric Rondepierre has been an actor, dancer and painter. A passionate watcher of films, too. For some twenty years now he has been using the medium of photography, yet without calling himself a photographer. For a long time he has mined his gold from the continuum of film reels, bringing us nuggets that without him would never have existed. In 1989 the artist began digging for black images in subtitled films. Extremely rare and almost invisible during a projection, these frames were magnified by photography. Images of an absent image, these *Excédents* confer an often hilarious and always enigmatic power on the accompanying subtitles, as in the example where, below a black rectangle, we read the words — *J'éteins ? — Non...* (Shall I switch off? No...).

When Rondepierre photographs film images he reveals a cinematographic reality that is denied by the movement of the projection. His *Bandes-annonces* (1991–93) grasp the disturbing perturbations in representation engendered by the text taking form, image by image. The *Précis de décomposition* series (1993–95) explores the material deterioration of the film stock over time. The varying degrees of decomposition transform the image originally recorded. Photography thus gleans opportunities for wonder amidst the ruins of film.

In his *Stances*, exhibited in 1998, Rondepierre shows photographs

of the landscape flashing past within the frame formed by the half-open window of a train travelling through Germany. For the series of *Loupes/Dormeurs* (1999) he composed images in which a fragment of film appears and adjoined to these the text from a fiction that weaves together the visible elements. Begun in 2002, the ongoing *Agendas* series use the same kind of superposition: mosaics of everyday photographs are inlaid with handwriting from his diary. In these two series his photographs are not independent works in their own right, but elements of a more complex universe. The *Parties communes* series (2007) organises other forms of collusion. Figures from the material used in the *Agendas* turn up in the space of frames taken from silent films. *Seuils*, another suite in progress, reprises and amplifies these intense, flashing visions combining strata of time, mediums and imaginaries. They are all the more fascinating in that their implacable formal cohesion is placed in the service of a fundamental heterogeneity, that of a mental activity combining concentrated attention and the diversions of the unconscious. The artist sometimes appears in his images in the form of a reflection, this being a modest way of indicating their personal nature.

The generic title of this series, "Seuils," is perfect for the wavering engendered by these fragments of space devoted to passage, to those in-between places that cannot be understood by means of any definition and that must be experienced as part of the movement of life if we are to grasp their emotional potential. The threshold is eminently the place of encounters, clashes and expectancy. And also of decisions. It is there that the artist draws his strength, as he himself says: "My research is always stimulated

by the relations, continuities and interchanges between practices as different as theatre, dance, painting, cinema, photography and literature. My hypothesis is that everything is always already oblique, transversal. And so I can only grasp parameters that are already refracted, mediated by another. Experienced for itself, the process is endlessly displaced, is constantly rebounding.”ⁱ

The implicit Proustian reference becomes evident to anyone who looks at these “thresholds” in which the past gusts into the present (*Sortie, Compagnie*), or vice versa (*Arkadin*). There are various markers signalling this dis-synchrony. One of them is the opposition of black and white. Others are the clothes, the hair and the postures. Many elements that seem “natural” are in fact eminently cultural. Éric Rondepierre once noted how false voices sound when figures in a costume drama speak the language of the past with modern intonations. The magic of the images of *Seuils* is due, for one thing, to the tension induced by the gaps between the perception of their visual coherence – in this respect, they are certainly not collages – and the simultaneous or almost simultaneous understanding of their heterogeneity.

Like literature, cinema tells stories. Each of the works in the *Seuils* series is a concentrate and speaks to our imagination through the figures that haunt it. Whether they are turning their back on us, as in *Champs-Élysées, Loge* or *Perspective*, closing their eyes (*Nocturne*) or conspicuously taking no interest in us (*Sortie*), these men and women are all absorbed in their own affairs, their tragedies. Several are holding a gun, others are quarrelling. A dead woman drifts by. A movement runs through these scenes whose protagonists are often walking, sometimes running, and are nearly

always seen in a setting full of oblique lines, where things are usually askew. An electric sense of precariousness endows these photographs with the power of dazzlement. They can thus resonate with a psychic function that knows nothing of the frontiers between past and present, between photography, cinema and life.

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ⁱ Éric Rondepierre, "La tache aveugle," *Apartés*, Trézélan, Filigranes Éditions, p. 29.