

**Muriel Berthou-Crestey**

## « Nights capturer on a blank screen »

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Eric Rondepierre explore cinematic frames. Since the end of the 80s, this visual artist has been continually diverting their messages by detaching them from their original films. He has suspended their frame rate, distorted their projection and disrupted their cinematic intention. At the beginning, a single photogram, invisible to the eye during a normal projection, escapes from the narrative flow. He has stopped this by pressing down the « Stop » button of his vidéo recorder. No doubt, were it not for this trick, the monochrome of the white subtitle on a black background would have gone quite unnoticed. The frame almost disappears in the speed of projection, making it as difficult to spot as a minute facial expression. Rondepierre was able to see the fleeting vision, his trained eye picking out of intrusion into the film narrative. At times, fragments of the text so captured are interplayed with genre types such as in *Comédie de mœurs* (Comedy of manners), with the announcement of the word « Rideau » 'curtain ») suspended on the frame (Opening night, 1993). This was the artist's endeavour in this visual art form, representing the birth of his art series *Excedents* (Excess), in 1989.

It was a récent technological invention that inspired his new work, that is, télévision via the internet (DSL 2010-2011). By highlighting the interférences generated by the High-speed Internet, Eric Rondepierre corrupts classic film frames, such those of Hitchcock, Lynch and Truffaut, producing unusual displays of diffracted colours. The figurative image transforms, in certain places, into abstraction. Rondepierre exploits the loss of the signal. At this point, the sequences blend as they are driven by the transmission flow. He captures the moment where the frame gets lost, caught up in the accumulation of images, never managing to appears as an authentic one.

Between these two time frames, Rondepierre has followed the art hybridisation movement, using cinéma as a starting point. In contact with other art mediums, such as photography, design and performance, the meaning diverge and fictional ideas inspire him with yet more stories. In the Works of multifaceted artist, whose facets include comedian, photographer and writer, amongst others, fictional scènes are constantly displaced from their own original domains. Detached from the film, they drift towards other scènes, projected from the imagination of both the artist and that of the public, which is contemplating them.

Amidst the changes of area, Rondepierre seems to ensconce the observer at the heart of the romance in his work *Loupe/Dormeurs* (Magnifying glass/Sleepers) (1999-2002). In the vagueness of background the présence of women, sometimes undressed, can be distinguished. The artist has superimposed other shots on these frames, which are permeated with false impression. First of all, a tiny white text caption covers the surface of the photograph. This is the text of the first version of a novel called *La Nuit cinéma* (Cinema night), which was published as an amended version by the French publishing house, Seuil, in 2005. Each frame comprises of a total of 156,000 tiny signals. Finally, a hand belonging to the artist holds a magnifying glass in a foreground in front of photograph. These heterogeneous éléments interact as if they were part of a thriller, where the key to the plot can only be discovered right at the very end. It is solely by use of these pointers that the hypothesis is established and the connections can be made between the vision of using to construct his narrative. The principle of these works, where everything is not supposed to be seen at the same time, generates a narrative tension. The clashing of images belonging to opposite registers, namely love and war, conveys a sens of mystery. The fiction of the filmic photograms and the réalism of photographs taken by the artist blend together and Foster a principle of uncertainty. The excessive increase of the visual stimuli perturbs the observer/reader, who no longer knows where to look or from which angle to observe. The next does not necessarily go with the image. Its purpose is to create a kind of shield that prevents the eye immediately perceiving the blurry contours. It is about focusing on one aspect of the work. Nevertheless, our repeated either on the text or on the frame, would be made in vain, as discerning them in their entirety is always impossible.

As he pursues his objective, Rondepierre highlights the gaps présent in the réception of the work. Since 2002, with *Agendas* (The Diaries), he has embarked upon an enigmatic autobiography, accumulating all sorts of tiny iconographic labels taken from day-to-day living. The narrative of his activities immediately superimposes on this compact and dense Framework, featuring the corpus of candid photographic images. There are many détails which disrupt the Reading even more. Diverting from the documentary principle, his Works once again question distance in relation to the observer: from afar, the shapes of the picture are detached, but the writing is completely illegible. In contrast, as we move in closer, our capacity to see the shapes in the background, in order to pick up some snatches of the text, is lost. Curiosity reaches its peak when we try to decipher accurately the sentence, the word or the letter. However, the Reading contains an underlying meaning, hindered by the confusion of colliding signals. The observer is deconcerted. Rondepierre has stretched him to the limits of his perception. If he was equipped with a magnifying glass, would the observer perhaps manage to read the diaries? Slowly, he would decipher each real-life action, an act initiated on the understanding of détails, which were, a priori, banal. *Agendas* appears to be more an attempt to grasp the ebb and flow of life in order to freeze time in a frame. This principle will subsequently be taken up or reused in the same way in other frames.

The Works of the Moins X séries (2003) (Minus X) were produced from pornographic films. The freeze frame éliminates the characteristics associated with this genre of production. There is no longer a démonstration, but, to the contrary, an avoidance of eye

contact with the observer. Here, Rondepierre thwarts the onlooker by only alluding to the sexual act. The freeze frame cause an abstraction. The passage from black to white amplifies this distancing effect, aestheticising the frames so they appear to be transformed. The spectator does indeed perceive fragments of bodies, often, of hands and faces, referring them to their own context. Nevertheless, the raw vocabulary of the moving image has opened the door to a peculiar and sheltered atmosphere. By gathering these extracts of scenes, Rondepierre has displaced them into another register of expression, which could, similarly, be that of film noir. This is notably characterised by the meeting of the protagonist – usually a private détective – with a *femme fatale*. Rondepierre visually symbolises the meeting of bodies : the image is cut into two parts. No intervention by the artist can control this deconstruction, besides the desaturation of the colours. In fact, this series is a redevelopment based on previous endeavours, that is, *Dyptika* and *Suite*, since it concerns shots taken between two photograms. The top of the following frame and the bottom of the preceding one blur the réception. Deconstructed, the frame acquires the potential to be extrapolated. Two years later, Rondepierre increases these possibilities by mixing universes.

Between 2005 and 2007, Rondepierre was introduced into the cinéma : in the series *Parties communes* (Common parts), the fiction of old-time cinéma joins up with the modern-day photos taken by the artist in his daily life. They come directly from *Agendas*. From then on, two frames are combined. Beings from the past join with our contemporaries. The subjective expérience is superimposed on stories fictionalised by filmmakers. Rondepierre gives life to the make-believe, enabling a symbiosis between dream and reality. In these ventures, he plays with context and produces a friction between different registers. He brings hope and certainty together to meet. His black and white silhouettes come to inhabit the colourful landscape of the town, flicking through the era. Rondepierre established science fiction in the heart of reality, making art a machine for travelling through time. Visitors from the past infiltrate among us. They take the underground, walk in the street, converse as if from our era. Fugitives from their films, they switch their rôles, establishing themselves at the centre of new environments. Rondepierre's life flows everywhere throughout this are reoccurring motifs, such as shadows, sleepers and the sight of hand-to-hand combat. The artist explores the ultimate point, where the difference between the two images can be perceived. Therefore, it is often difficult to detach the photographs that have been merged together, because the artistic meeting point is so minute. With the initiation of the *Seuils* series in 2008, this undertaking is all the more delicate than the fragments borrowed from the films and the sense of reality increase. These sophisticated compositions actually belong to the visual patchworking, with tackles different narratives. By cleaning up the archives frames to match those of the 21st century, Rondepierre causes confusion between history and its falsification. The past becomes the présent and day becomes night, one often passing for the other, as in *La Nuit américaine* (Day for Night). Some dazzling connections emerge from this, belonging in turn to dramatic comedy (*Passagère*, 2008), Romance (*Bagatelle*, 2008), police film (*Photographie*, 2008) or even gangster film (*Compagnie*, 2009). A woman carrying a large suitcase appears to be escaping from a field of ruins, perhaps, fleeing from the tragedy of a disaster movie. Two lovers jest at the edge of calm waters. Armed with a camera, the artist appears to be busy stalking, gathering proof, while the suspected man glances over inquisitively. Obsessed with their own affairs, a group walks on by quickly, impassive to any other

distractions. Somewhere else, there is melodrama. The two characters run in the opposite direction. A lone man appears lost in his thoughts. In the foreground of *Campement* (2008), Sleeping Beauty is laid out, abandoning herself to the full view of the observer, helpless and made defenceless by the situation. In *Arkadin*, a black screen displays these words « *C'était une nuit à Naples...* » (2008) (« Once upon a time in Naples »). In this way, the artist delivers a sort of parody of *Excédents*. With *Loge*, there is an ongoing question around the waiting man behind, flagrantly caught spying. So the commentary would go, if there was a voice-over varying according to the interpretation chosen by the observer.

In the Visconti film *Le notti bianche*, the narrator's words are superimposed over nocturnal images, verifying that the « imagination dooms [the dreamers] to follow a shadow darker than reality » by fusing these domains, which appear condemned to remain at a distance. Rondepierre has erased this dichotomy. Determined to pursue the which normally escapes our view, the artist is casting a subjective lens, highlighting his sublime as a starting point.

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