

DESTROY, HE SAYS

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Préface to « Parties communes », Janvier/Léo Scheer, Paris, 2007, translated by Charles Penwarden

By bringing together in this book two series made at different times, and apparently with no close connection ('without common measure', *Carnets*,ⁱ page 124), Eric Rondepierre keeps faith with the mode of composition he has favoured right from the beginning: juxtaposition. The book you have in your hands could thus be seen as a new variation on these operations of montage that punctuate the work like so many accidental encounters. Add in the fact that this operation also constitutes the principle of composition informing each of the photographs reproduced here, and that each of the images in the *Loupe/Dormeurs* series is also a book in its own right (but, frustration being the name of the game here, an illegible one), and you have the full panoply of mirror effects and works within works apparently favoured by Rondepierre, who in his recent novelⁱⁱ presented himself by the name of Stein and partially reappropriated some of his own earlier theoretical texts.

Not so long ago Rondepierre seemed to consider this disparity as a necessary evil in his work ('If evil, the enemy, is the plural, then make it part of the method', *Carnets* [2], p.124). However it is only apparent, and, beyond the lack of visual homogeneity across the different series, there is no overlooking the fact that an unvarying fundamental principle informs his art, from the *Excédents* (1989), involving the confrontation of an opaque ground and white letters (the insignificance of the monochrome surface, the significance of the text), to *Diptyqua, Suites, Moins X* (1998-2003), in which the images are divided by a horizontal bar that separates two dissonant spaces, and including the

Moires, playing on the conflict between the image and its material, or, more recently, the *Hypothèses* (2002-2004) with their unmatching shots. We can call this protean principle montage: not realist montage, the plausible linkage of classical narrative continuity, but a montage of dissemblance: montage as conflict, in the tradition of Eisenstein – or Vertov. Montage that, evidently, is also an enterprise of deconstruction and de-composition (‘The pure and simple pleasure of seeing something’, *Apartés*, page 65).

For over ten years this enterprise was articulated essentially around the notion of discovery – the discovery of a pre-existing image, the still, that the photographic act revealed by isolating it. Today, it is driven more by the figure of invention: these last few years (2002-2004) the diverted images have been replaced by the made images of the *Agendas*, the *Hypothèses* and the *Doubliner*. The former were born of penumbra, the latter call for light, and the transition between them has meant a change of method. The artist’s approach is now more conscious, leaving less room to the accidental (‘To go from an accidental non-intervention [as serendipity dictates] to a premeditated intervention where the role of the random is reduced’, *Carnets*, page 106).

It would be a mistake, however, to oppose them too schematically: first of all, because each photograph implies the operation of the readymade, the appropriation of a pre-existing reality (‘I merely sample pieces from a fabric of images that already exists’, *Carnets*, page 70); and secondly, because the paradigm of error informs both the earlier series and the recently produced images. In this regard, Rondepierre’s work since the *Excédents* could on the surface be read as an encyclopaedia of the failures that punctuate the history of photography. This artist who ironically titled his first image *Le Voyeur* plays constantly and deceptively on the impossibility of seeing everything: black screens, awkward framing and chemical deformation are recurring motifs in his iconography of the welcomed accident, and plunge the spectator into a double state of jubilation and frustration. Defying the traditional rules of optics, the two

series presented in this book also adhere to this model: we see at once too much (double, triple) and too little. The image is dissolved in the proliferation of levels or the absence of depth.

The principle of overprinting that governs *Parties Communes* is as old as the history of photography. It is one of those many cases of mistakes that, not least by the influence of its use in cinema as the model of the cross fade, became canonical figures of photographic modernity in the interwar years. These figures have now been reassessed and reinvigorated with the advent of digital technology. Godard's *Histoires du cinéma* are thus constructed essentially around this figure of overprinting, of worlds that interpenetrate without excluding, working more in the mode of simultaneity than of succession. But Rondepierre's use of this technique takes on other auras – those of a certain aesthetic of wandering, beloved of the Surrealists, for which, because it affords so many possibilities for fortuitous encounters, the city is the privileged playground; and those, too, of spirit photography, most of which was contemporaneous with the invention of cinema – these, to borrow the term used by certain spiritualists to describe their photographic experiences, were genuine 'projections':ⁱⁱⁱ it is like an invocation of ghosts from the imaginary, from cinema and from the now bygone era of silver gelatine prints. A new variation on these text-image relations in Rondepierre's work, the *Loupe/Dormeurs* share with the first series the impression of a failed photograph (the prominent blurriness) while proposing another form of perceptual divorce, due to the impossibility of focusing on three different points: the female object of desire, only just glimpsed in the blur of the background; the overly present photo still, the 'sleeper' roughly awakened by the intermediary of the magnifying glass; and, finally, the text, which in places almost totally merges into the image that it covers, and reveals itself to the viewer in only an aleatory way, depending on their distance and on the light.

This change of focal length ultimately sums up the way we need to think about Rondepierre's work. In this regard, *Les Moires* is much more than the singular title of one of his works. All Rondepierre's series are *moires*: each one carries within itself the work of destroying the image. Remember that a moiré effect is obtained by a violent operation that alters the fabric by crushing its grain in an irregular pattern. Each one has the changing, undulating finish of a surface that changes in accordance with the element the beholder focuses on. The *Loupe/Dormeurs* obviously carry this logic to extremes, but so do *Les Parties communes*, which oblige the spectator to attentively decipher the intertwining images. For *Les Moires* are also a metaphor of the image as fabric and of montage as braiding – here the work of François Rouan may come to mind ('François Rouan discovered a principle for organising space based on a material support: the braid. Using this support, he made a surface. Then he turned that surface into a trompe l'oeil: a false braid. Likewise, my hypotheses are false sequences.' *Carnets*, page 86).

An intertwining of time and space, of autobiography and fiction, the *Parties communes* and the *Loupe/Dormeurs* are the only mixed series so far produced by Rondepierre. In them he juxtaposes, admittedly in different ways, traces of the cinema and the presence of the real, *views taken* and *views reprised*. They borrow from the world of shadow and from that of light. In relation to the more recent works, the *Agendas*, the *Hypothèses* and the *Dubliners*, the two series brought together here, while made, respectively, before and after the other aforementioned works, are united by the return of cinema. The previous works had evacuated it, they come back to it, while without letting themselves become totally overwhelmed. The real continues to resist, even if it is disrupted by transparency and blurring, which it give it a phantasmagoric effect that is new in Rondepierre's work. The cinema enters them, but remains literally and metaphorically kept at a distance.

It would be a mistake to see this development as indicating a move towards an increased autobiographical element: this autobiographical dimension existed in the work as far back as the *Excédents*,^{iv} masked but very real. More obvious is a new physical presence on the part of the artist. *Les Parties communes* delimit an imaginary space at a human height – as if in a POV shot (*The Lady in the Lake* and *Peeping Tom*, which both use this procedure, are, symptomatically, two of the films that Rondepierre most frequently cites). The looks of some of the characters (as in *Poses*, *Seuil* and *Passe*) are like direct addresses to the spectator/artist. These ‘looks to camera’ cancel the distance between what is in and out of the frame. As for the *Loupe/Dormeurs* series, Rondepierre intervenes systematically in the frame, making his first appearance in his images by means of a recurrent image: a hand holding a magnifying glass.

As a tool, the magnifying glass is synonymous with the detective. (‘The detective tries to recover the thread of the work by examining the traces left by the artist’. *La nuit cinéma*, page 24). It is hard not to suppose that in these latest series, despite his reservations,^v Rondepierre espouses his now position as both artist and detective, author and exegete of his own work – and no doubt its leading exegete, for his work is constantly turning back on itself, recycling and quoting itself from one medium to another. From photography to cinema, from cinema to literature and, within literature, in the genres of autobiography, criticism and novel. Genres get mixed up, roles confused. *Loupe/Dormeurs* and *Parties communes* are not so much works *on* or *of* cinema, or even really photographs, as an attempt to open up new spaces in-between: between cinema and literature, between photography and cinema, between photography and literature, between artistic practice and the critique of that practice: objects with changing highlights like *moirés*, the attempt to name which fluctuates according with one’s point of view (‘The work collapses under the burden of meanings.’ *Carnets*, p. 114).

Extrait du catalogue “Parties communes”, 2007, ed. Léo Scheer/ Janvier

ⁱ Eric Rondepierre, *Carnets*, Paris: Revue Littéraire/ Editions Léo Scheer, 2005.

ⁱⁱ Eric Rondepierre, *La Nuit cinéma*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2005.

ⁱⁱⁱ Clément Chéroux, *Fautographie, Petite histoire de l'erreur photographique*, Yellow Now, 2003.

^{iv} Denys Ryout, ‘L’ombre des images’, in *Eric Rondepierre*, Paris: Editions Léo Scheer, 2003.

^v ‘Dans l’œil du cyclope’, interview with Evence Verdier, *Art Press*, April 2005.