

Valbelle, Myth or Fiction?
Reading Photography as a Myth

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the dialectic between fact and fiction, their extension into the notion of myth and their relation to photography. It takes the ruins of an 18th-century castle in southern France as the starting point of the research. This castle is contemporary to the first known clear conceptualisation of photography. This period of history was also pregnant with many aspects of today's society found in the fashion for *Jardin de Fabriques* (English garden), in which the 'natural' was 'fabricated' and of which the castle was a striking example. My first study artist is therefore Piranesi whose engraving of Roman ruins strongly influenced that movement. My second artist is Jeff Wall for his carefully fabricated photographic fictions that look like reality. My third artist is Wong Hoy Cheong who also works on the thin line dividing facts and fictions in an ethnographic context. This aspect in turn connects with my own work largely based on an artistic ethnological approach. My work has also been dealing with the notion of fragmentation/reconstitution, a notion central to antique myths, to classical and by extension neo-classical architecture and to the optical illusion of cinema, an illusion based on the fundamental properties of photography. All these notions find their focus in the conclusion around a new theory of physical science that develops a revolutionary concept of time.

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Mapping the Territory

My work has been mostly concerned with the use of time and space to construct a perception of reality. The purpose of this dissertation is to look at how facts and fictions interact to create the web of events regarded as reality. I will rest my research on the study of the ruins of an 18th century castle in Southern France. I will then look at how the tension between facts and fiction is used by my three references artists: Giovanni Piranesi, Jeff Wall and Wong Hoy Cheong. In the third chapter I will parallel this with my own practice. Lastly, my conclusion will bring the findings of my research in relation to a new theory of time in physical science that cast a possible new light on the nature of photography.

1.1 The Territory

When passing by the village of Tourves near Marseille, one can see the ruins of a castle standing on a hill between the highway and the old village. Most of it is in a dire state of derelict. However, a few architectural elements in relatively good condition, such as a massive colonnade and an obelisk (Fig.1), hint at the fact that this must have been a grand construction of unusual style. These are the remains of the Valbelle's castle, a prominent family of the 18th century in Provence. An investigation into the history of the site led me to define it as a 'photograph' of the rise and fall of Absolute Monarchy¹ in France.

I use the term 'photograph' in that the Valbelle family's story captures a moment in history. The family of cobblers of the 14th century became prosperous pharmacists in Marseille in the 16th century. Honorat Valbelle could buy some noble land and the minor title that went along with it. His son, a captain in the King's army during the War of Religions, was raised to full nobility and became Marquis de Valbelle. The family then began making alliances with the highest strata of Provence society. By the 18th century, they owned a large part of Provence and rights to the taxes on goods travelling between the Southern Alps and Marseille. Enters Omer de Valbelle (1729-1778), the man behind the unusual ruins earlier mentioned (Fig.2).

The second son of the family, Valbelle was not meant to inherit the family title. Fate has it that his brother passed away without offspring and in 1766 Omer suddenly became one of the richest men in Provence while having been until then something of a free spirit. Valbelle was emblematic of his time, a libertine of good taste who enjoyed life to the fullest. He embarked on a program of wide scale renovation of the castle. The last phase of embellishment, the imposing colonnade, was completed after Valbelle's death and less than 10 years before the revolutionary storm of 1789.

From there on it was downhill all the way. Furniture and objet d'arts were sold in 1792. The building was turned into a hospital for the Republic's army and later burned down by the local population to get rid of an epidemic of cholera. In 1798 the property was sold for the exploitation of trees in the

park. Modern times saw the train track laid across the northern park and in the 1970's a highway contoured the village by cutting across the southern park.

In present day, the ruins of the park in Tourves are known as one of the only four examples of *Parc de Fabriques* (English gardens) in France outside Paris region. This form of landscaping typifies the evolution of European society towards 19th century romanticism. A characteristic of these parks is the *fabriques* or decorative buildings that often carried esoteric meanings relating to the ancient traditions of Greece and Pharaohs' Egypt.

1.2 The Map

The *Vacherie* (barn), the only building left fully standing, highlights the interest of Valbelle for such subjects. It can be read as a 'fiction' that has become a 'myth'. By this I mean that the building was conceived as an architectural fiction, an antique Roman temple that was turned into a church during the Middle Age, to finally be used as a barn. It was built accordingly with fake Roman ruins elements and gothic tower (Fig.3), and carried an inscription written by Valbelle himself that told its story to passers-by. It strangely predicted the course of events that were about to take place:

Splendour too often is followed by ignominy. From temple that I was I became a church. I took too much pride in it and was turned into a barn. Passer-by, see the affront done to my glory and learn without complaining how to yield to fate.

The fact that this building stands today right next to a clover-leaf junction of a highway gives extra depth to this statement (Fig.4). Furthermore, the stone bearing the inscription was stolen in the 1980's (Fig.5). We are thus confronted with a fiction that teaches a lesson on an aspect of human destiny, a lesson to which one must first be 'initiated' in order to read its full significance, in every aspect what a myth is meant to be.

I spent most of my holidays as a young boy in Tourves. The castle and its park were the subjects of many stories perpetuated through the village's oral tradition. I learned much later that if some of the stories I eagerly listened to when a child were true, others were of course legends and fictions. Humanity is constantly re-writing its history, turning fictions into facts and facts into fiction, whichever way will serve its purpose. This of course raises the question of reality and how we perceive it, a question that I propose to explore in this thesis, specifically in regards to the photographic medium. In other words, how does photography use time and space to play around with facts and fictions, and in doing so is it merely representing reality?

The history of the family and its castle typifies the social process of an era pregnant with the transformations carried out by the modern era. From democracy to industrialism to colonialism, we are currently trying to come to terms with these transformations in order to fully move into the next phase. It is interesting to note for example that Valbelle was a contemporary of Tiphaigne de la Roche (1722-1774), generally credited for formulating the first clear conceptualisation of photography and television in his fictional book

Giphantie published in 1760. It could be that Tiphaigne de la Roche had his bright vision while on a leisure stay in the Château de Tourves. Or so the story goes...

The Archaeologist, the Box Maker and the Ethnologist (Reality (*ies?*) and Photography)

I will now look at the tension between facts and fictions in the work of Giovanni Piranesi, a contemporary of Valbelle. I will carry on by investigating the work of Jeff Wall who uses photography as a medium for conceptual art, and Wong Hoy Cheong whose evolution led him into using video to further his blurring between facts and fictions. This in turn, will lead me to question the nature of photography on the basis of the seminal contributions of Walter Benjamin, Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes.

2.1 The Archaeologist

Many artists have walked the thin line dividing facts and fictions in the course of art history, but Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) has been arguably one of the most successful at fully developing both aspects of this endeavour. On the one hand, his factual study of Roman antiquity was among the first attempts at a scientific approach to archaeology. On the other, the hallucinated visions of the famous *carceri* fascinated the artists of the 19th century and played a decisive role in the development of Romantic literature. The wealth of technical details relating to Roman construction technology found in *Antichità Romane* (Fig.6/6B) pays tribute to his methodology, while the frontispieces of these portfolios (Fig.7) pave the way towards the Surrealistic urban landscapes of Giorgio De Chirico. The work of Piranesi is characterised by a “combination of committed scholarship and emotive imagery”² that explain his long lasting influence.

A major stylistic element found in Piranese's work is the glorification of ruins. This aspect is particularly striking in a view of the baths in Hadrian's villa in Tivoli (Fig.8) that reflects "his ability to convey the actual passage of time through the various degree of decomposition"³ of the decaying masonry. The importance given to the aestheticism of ruins grew along with a new understanding of the relation between humankind and nature, first expressed by Rousseau in his *Contrat Social*. This forceful reaction against the mannerism of the Rococo period induced a taste for the Natural⁴ of which Valbelle's *Vacherie* is a striking example. What long fascinated me in the *Vacherie* is the use of fake ruined elements intended to make the fiction look more real. The 'ruined' parts of the columns were sculpted with great care to probably resemble some of Piranesi's engravings. The view of the ruined *Arch of Gallienus* in *Antichità Romane* (Fig.9) befits particularly the beginning of the inscription composed by Valbelle as if the *vacherie* was telling its story: "*Splendour too often is followed by ignominy*".

Piranese was born on Venetian terra firma within a family of 'builders' who imparted in him a practical understanding of construction technologies. Furthermore, the family originated from Piran in Istria, the source of the limestone used in the building of Venice. However, monumental Venice was also seemingly floating over the fluid horizon of a sea that kept its port prosperous, and with it, its artistic life flourishing. Trained as an architect in the city famous for the extravagance of its carnival, Piranese's training also included the practice of stage design in the theatres and opera houses where Baroque fictions resembled the mystery of the canals lined with palaces. His

down-to-earth artisan background combined well with his brimming creativity when he visited Rome for the first time in 1740. His sense of artistic destiny resulted in the 'reconstruction' of Rome, completed with the publication of the *Ichnographia* and *Il Campo Marzio dell'Antica Roma* in the early 1760's. In doing so, he also imparted to the subject the breath of his personality, and eventually "transformed the conventional *veduta* from a mere topographical souvenir into an image of the greatest expressive power – an image which has continued to haunt the European imagination to this day."⁵

2.2 The Box Maker

My first encounter with a work by Jeff Wall was *Eviction Struggle* (Fig.10). At 229cm by 414cm, this work happens to be among the largest produced by Wall, and the sheer size of the light box was in itself an arresting experience. Another aspect of the work quickly beguiled me: the impression of being confronted with an image that oscillated between reality and fiction. There was something very 'real' about that scene set in a modern western suburb and the emotions expressed by the diverse protagonists. The flawless photographic technique however ruled out the use of a small format camera typical of a photojournalistic approach. The shot had been obviously orchestrated in every detail. Yet it exuded a sense of 'here and now' precisely associated with photojournalism. It could have been a scene extracted from a movie, but it was not. It could have been a social reportage but it was not. It could have been a painting but it was not. Somehow, it was also all these at the same time.

Most of Wall's works are carefully fabricated and fictional, they nonetheless exude a powerful sense of realism. Throughout his career, Jeff Wall has purposely walked the thin line dividing facts and fictions, or at least the part of his career debated in today's art world. For there is a 'pre-photographic' Jeff Wall, a painter whose work is little publicised. According to Thierry de Duve, Wall decided to turn to photography in the late seventies when "various painters, himself included, gave up painting for conceptual art."⁶ Confronted with the so-called 'end of painting' in the form of monochromes, "Wall had gone back to a fork in the roadway of art history, to that very moment when, around Manet, painting was registering the shock of photography; and as though he had then followed the route that had not been taken by modern painting, and had incarnated the painter of modern life as a photographer."⁷

Wall's reference to Manet is central to any critic of his work. "The painter of modern life as a photographer"⁷ carefully plans and assembles the elements that will make-up his shot. And if one is to refer to the construction of Manet's painting *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, one can see emerging a parallel with Valbelle's *Vacherie*. *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* is renowned for having broken the entrenched rule of the 'genre' by combining all of them into one single image. It is a 'made-up' image that gathers still life, nude, society scene and landscape. Yet the fragmented composition works as a whole and create its own reality, perceived by us as 'a painting'. Similarly, Jeff Wall's compositions bring together a string of disparate elements that end-up being perceived as a seamless whole, a fiction that looks like fact. Precisely what

the *Vacherie* also achieves. In each of these works, the reality within the fiction is fragmented, but the resulting fiction within the reality is whole.

The light boxes used to present the transparencies are another technique used to tweak our perception of things (Fig.11). They largely define Walls' approach, and like other aspects of his work, have been commented as a social, if not political choice, alluding in this case to cinema and consumerism. Commenting an article on Wall's work by Thomas Crow, de Duve highlights that "nowhere does [Crow] take into serious account the fact that Wall has produced his *painting* in *photography*."⁸ What strikes me about most readings of Wall's work is that no one seems to take into serious account the fact that he uses the technically most sophisticated form of photography.

While the technique of a painter is often discussed at great length in monographs, none of the articles in the comprehensive book I referred to for this essay even hinted at Wall's use of a very large format camera. Such high-end equipment results in a highly detailed image in which the photographic grain disappears. The technique erases any reference to the photographic support of the perceived image and Wall almost manages to have us forget the 'support' to see only the 'content'. Yet at the last moment he forcefully reintroduces the physicality of the image by placing it in 'a box' that gives it at once a thickness and a glow and clearly reinstates its manipulated origin. This shattering of a so well constructed fiction strongly reminds me of the text

composed by Valbelle for the *Vacherie*. In it, the manipulative architectural fantasy laid its secret bare. It does so in order to convey a message.

If one is to refer to the production still showing the making of *Insomnia* (Fig.12), one can see that many of Wall's shots are fabricated by concretely 'boxing' the scene (Fig.13). And according to Wall himself, even his outdoor shots are metaphorically 'boxed': "One of the problems I have with my pictures is that since they are constructed, since they are what I call 'cinematographic', you can get the feeling that the construction contains everything, that there is no outside to it the way there is with photography in general."⁹ This 'boxing' is equivalent to the diorama display used in museum in which reality is turned into a fiction presenting itself as reality, just as the *Vacherie* does. And just as in the case of Valbelle with his *Vacherie*, Wall chooses to emphasize the work's discourse by revealing in the end its conceptual origin. Valbelle's quote is the equivalent of Jeff Wall's light boxes, they turn the fiction into a reality of a higher order imbued with a message, which is precisely the role of myths.

2.3 The Ethnologist

Wong's self declared political intention in developing his work gives the ground by which it is most often read and approached. "His art is first an act of social and political engagement"¹⁰, states Hou Hanru in the catalogue of Wong's first major retrospective. However, if one is to study the tactic by which Wong Hoy Cheong most often achieves his purpose, one can see an altogether different level of concern, one of a more intangible nature that

seems to be progressively taking the better part of his work as the artist mature.

Beverly Yong hints at these concerns in the introduction of the same catalogue: “His works are constructs of apparent realities, designed to expose gaps and flaws within the realities assumed.”¹¹ Here lies I believe the subtle sense of fascination on which his works operate. One of Wong’s main intentions is to expose the vast array of manipulations that influence our perception of today’s society. In order to do so, he crafts some fictitious objects that seem all the more convincing because of the solid academic and scientific referential basis upon which they rest.

Most representative of Wong’s approach is *Buckingham Street and its Vicinity* (Fig.14). It epitomizes the tensions between the formal realistic background from which the works spring and the exquisite refinement of the imaginative forms through which they exist. Again, the initial concept is meant to take us by surprise, and it does so by fully respecting “the trappings of objective scholarship.” Having noticed some uncanny similarities in the names and orientations of certain streets between his native Georgetown in Penang and Buckingham Street’s vicinity in London, Wong produced a map in which the two cities superimpose onto one another. Applying his process of thorough academic research, Wong chose to painstakingly reproduce the style of ancient maps that characterised the expansion of colonial powers. The resulting offset lithograph fool our perception at first and only on closer inspection do we realize that ‘something is not quite right’. Just as in the case

of Valbelle's text that made the *Vacherie* 'speak', Wong leaves some graphic signs that surreptitiously put us on the right track: the clouds drifting around the seemingly accurate map. Despite all appearances, the town represented there is an improbable fiction floating in its own time-space continuum. What is more, the said clouds are designed according to a typically Asian graphic tradition. Hovering around the minutiae of architectural information, they leave us in a state of wonderment. Which side of the world are we looking at?

The superimposition of maps creating a fictitious reality and the superimposition of styles in the *Vacherie* both use well-defined elements known to everyone, and respect their initial integrity. It is only through the juxtaposition of the fragments that surprises happen. Wong bases his art on the study of cultural aspects of societies (hence my terming him 'the ethnologist') and works his imaginary within their constraints. His superimposition of cultural elements found a particularly effective expression in the video installation *Re:Looking* presented in 2003 Venice Biennale (Fig.15). In it, he imagines that Austria was colonized by Malaysia two hundred years ago and shows what life has become for Austrian citizens, either as migrants in Malaysia, or at home in Austria under Malaysian rule. *Re:Looking* was presented in the form of a documentary shown on a TV set within the context of a supposedly contemporary Malaysian interior. In the living room, a computer was linked to the homepage of MBC, a fictitious Malaysian Broadcasting Corporation, supposedly the producer of the said documentary (Fig.16). The video, according to Gerhard Haupt and Pat Binder, seemed "so serious and convincing" that they assumed at first being

confronted with gaps in their knowledge of history. Only when told about the establishment of Malaysia's royal family as colonial power in Europe, could they finally "do a double take and realise that here the colonial history is being satirised as an inverted fiction."¹²

The initial release of *Re:Looking* in Vienna in 2003 was complemented by a workshop organised by the Arts Center Vienna and entitled *Fact-Fiction*. If one is to refer to Haupt and Binder's encounter with *Re:Looking* in Venice Biennale, it is precisely this unsettling aspect of a fiction presented in great detail as facts that truly attracted their attention. In some way, the provocative and political aspect happened to be interesting *as well*. Describing Wong's critical and almost tongue-in cheek re-reading history Hou Hanru mentions how Wong "invents ways of re-reading history through reinterpretation of a rich reservoir of images"¹³. This is paralleled to the historian Manuel de Landa's "provocative and insightful methodology of history-reading [which] opens a radically inspiring perspective on understanding both history and reality."¹⁴

2.4 Reality(ies) and Photography

In today's society, photography and its derived technologies stand as the obvious medium by which today's Reality becomes tomorrow's History. When coming to the subject of photography, one cannot ignore Walter Benjamin's seminal contribution. In his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin opened up a whole new field of investigation when saying: "Earlier, much futile thought had been devoted to

the question of whether photography is an art. The primary question – whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art – was not raised.”¹⁵ But much more than just transforming the nature of art and society, should not one consider the possibility that photography transformed mankind’s perception of Reality in a much deeper sense? As Susan Sontag points out: “The notions of image and reality are complementary. When the notion of reality changes, so does that of the image, and vice versa.”¹⁶ With the invention of photography, the ‘real’ images of the loved ones could be preserved long after they had passed away and the ‘real’ landscapes of faraway countries could be admired without travelling. Photography induced a transformation of the human perception of space and time, the effect of which we are still trying to fathom. From the packet of cereals on our breakfast table, to the identity card in our wallet, to our most intimate sexual fantasies, photography has invaded every aspects of modern life, blurring even further the thin line between ‘facts’ and ‘fiction’. And although we know almost everything about ‘how to do photography’, we hardly know anything about ‘what photography does’.

Benjamin was concerned with a purely Marxist analysis of his subject and ignored a possible phenomenological approach. Roland Barthes picked up that task in 1980 in his essay entitled *La Chambre Claire*. In it, for the first time was asked the question of the role of photography on a very personal level: “ So I make myself the measure of photographic ‘knowledge’. What does my body know of Photography?”¹⁷ Barthes’ book then unfolds as an attempt to answer that question by analysing his intuitive reaction to

photographs important to him. The basis for Barthes' most powerful observation on the puzzling way photography works, comes to him while browsing through the photographs of his recently deceased mother. Because of an almost natural association with the remembrance of the departed, photography has been often associated with the phenomenon of death. Although Barthes' book is a real ground-breaking study of the medium, he too cannot escape the reading of photography as the 'death' of a moment: "I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future."¹⁸ Sontag too dwells on this almost cliché-like reading of photography: "Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading towards their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people."¹⁹ Photography certainly confronts us in a particularly violent way to our own transience. However, rather than reading a photograph as the death of a moment, I prefer to see it as a moment that detaches itself from the time-space continuum and carries on 'floating' within it by switching to its own continuum, thus creating a 'reality' of its own. What happens to those countless realities created by the countless photographs taken since the invention of the medium is anybody's guess. In any case, Sontag points out in her conclusion that "Images are much more real than anyone could have thought in the first place."²⁰ This statement made in 1973 takes on a rather disturbing twist thirty years later within the context of a society that largely feeds its imagination on virtual images. Born and raised within the context of that society, both Wall and Wong have made an extensive use of the photographic image's aptitude at blurring reality. Is it too far-fetched then

to suggest, that had Piranese been able to use virtual images, he would have probably favoured them over engraving for the rendering of his reconstructed ancient Rome?

When Ethnography meets Mythobiography

I will now begin by clarifying a few points on the notion of ‘myth’ and that of ‘artistic ethnographic’. I will carry on by looking at the tension between facts and fictions in my own work and its evolution over the years. Lastly, the observations deducted from my work will be linked to Valbelle’s castle through a parallel with myths in classical architecture and fragmentation in cinema.

3.1 On the subject of artistic ethnography

I can clearly trace the beginning of my research on time and space in visual arts to a work I did in 1977 (Fig.17). It explored the notions of ‘reality’ and ‘imagination’ in photography and painting. However I was not so clear how this research had evolved to become a question on ‘fact and fiction’, much less ‘myth and fiction’.

If ‘reality’ can easily be equalled to ‘facts’ and ‘imagination’ to ‘fictions’, the notion of myth is more complex as it involves various degrees of both. Film director Julie Dash says it clearly in an interview with bell hooks about her movie *Daughters of the Dust*: “So I learned that myth is very important in the struggle to maintain a sense of self and to move forward into the future.”²¹ This declaration was concerning the Ibo Landing myth found among the Gullah people of the Sea Islands archipelago, off the coast of South Carolina, a story in which black slaves had drowned themselves to avoid a life of misery. Yet in the process of her research, she also discovered that “almost every Sea Island has a little inlet, or a little area where the people say: *this is*

*Ibo Landing. This is where it really happened.*²² This is so because “that message is so strong, so powerful, so sustaining of the tradition of resistance, by any means possible, that every Gullah community embraces this myth.”²³ So while an element of recorded history has become quintessential to the local communities’ identity, one that sustains their ‘reality’, it also does so through multiple fictions in which that same historical event is said to have taken places in countless places across the archipelago.

While my research on time and space had often been at the forefront of my preoccupations, questions concerning ‘reality’ and ‘imagination’ had not always been directly addressed. My formative years as a teenager in France had been influenced by Surrealism and other art movements thriving on the appeal of fantasy worlds. Things however took an unexpected turn in 1984 when after a few years in Singapore I began working as a travel photographer/writer. ‘Reality’ which until then had been little featured in my work became the main source of inspiration. To photograph Asia was a way to explore a part of the world about which I had everything to learn. As the result of this evolution, cultures and way of life that I documented for my editorial articles spontaneously became the subject of my artistic work. My practice then became concerned with reality as it was, while transcribing it from a personal point of view. I was even at that time making clear references to the earlier forms of travel artistic documentation that blossomed in the 18th century, in the form of books and engravings.²⁴ On the one hand, these books are most representative of the history of colonialism. On the other, they contributed to the development of the encyclopaedic movement and paved

the way for the birth of ethnology. In short, they had been key elements of the slow yet powerful movement that imperceptibly made the world a smaller place.

There was however one major difference in my intent compared to what it might have been in the 18th century. I happen to have always favoured the metaphysical over the social. As such, my regard over the foreign cultures I encountered was mostly concerned with the intangible in everyday life, things that bind human beings across the globe through apparently insignificant moments, such as sitting for a drink in a coffee shop and watching the world goes by. The movie director Trinh T. Min-ha whose work deals with an artistic approach to ethnologic documentary, express a similar idea when she says that she would rather *speak nearby* than *speak about* her subject. "The language tries to locate a position that does not end with possession or pretending knowledge *of* as the phrase 'speaking about' implies. [...Trinh T. Min-ha] seeks a position that functions in the gap, namely, 'speaking nearby'. The phrase conveys an idea of a closeness but with a necessary distance because of difference; a concept of 'approaching' rather than 'knowing' an other."²⁵ I enjoyed exploring foreign cultures because it helped me to see what made me human in a universal way. Being physically a 'stranger in a strange land' made me understand a feeling of a much more elusive but similar nature that had been with me from childhood days. It then occurred to me that things were becoming much clearer and inclusive of one another if I simply interchanged the words 'reality' and 'ethnography' within the context of my past work. The far-reaching consequences of that 1977

seminal drawing could then be seen running through the years, even when the work was concerned with travel impressions. 'Ethnography/Emotion' echoed 'Reality/Imagination' to extend into 'Facts/Fictions'.

3.2 A few steps on the road

With this possible perspective over my work, I can now begin the relevant analysis. On one side of my horizon is *Time Frame* (Fig.17), the 1977 work mentioned earlier. In it photography is used to pinpoint 'reality' through the physicality of the 'here and now'. Contrasting drawings extend the photographic 'here and now' into imaginary worlds, past and present, presence and absence. The photograph central to the drawing was an image of myself extracted from a posed series done with friends. It remained essentially concerned with 'imagination', given that in it I pretended to be someone else than the actual 'Gilles'.

On the other side is my last major work to date, the project *Retro Specks – Future Pixs*, which turned out to be a subconscious development of *Time Frame* into a full-fledged exhibition. The work was based on the train line that links Singapore to Johor Bahru in Malaysia. In it, the discourse on time and space featured prominently. It also posed the question of geographical facts (as in 'land') and political fictions (as in 'borders') through the rather unusual geo-political situation of that piece of territory: it sees a traveller administratively enter a territory while having yet to physically exit the other one. Interestingly enough, while working on the installation of the

exhibition, it occurred to me that its floor plan reproduced exactly the layout of *Time Frame* (Fig.18).

In between these two markers of my process, the pendulum oscillated between 'facts' and 'fictions', at time leading me into imagination for the exhibition *Plastic Resurrection*, at others seeing me wholly absorbed into factual research for the book *Bintan, Phoenix of the Malay Archipelago*. *Plastic Resurrection* showed for the first time the paintings based on imagination, which so far had remained in the privacy of my studio. The 3 years long research on the Riau Archipelago on the other hand allowed me to grasp the implications of the 'fact and fiction' dialectic when dealing with academic researches. The exploration of the relation between photography and painting initiated with *Time Frame* remained however a recurrent theme. In keeping with my new 'ethnological' source of inspiration, it was based on the observation of a few Asian cities that happened to be on the road of the photojournalist.

In 1984, the exhibition *Singapore from BW to C* was my first presentation of works using the camera as a tool for an artistic ethnographic approach. The images featured the reality of Singapore as a city in transition between old and new. Yet, the work was not so much concerned with a journalistic approach as opposed to a conceptual one. The abstraction brought to Reality by the stark duality of black and white photographs was further emphasized with the progressive inclusion of colours, from subtle, to realistic, to graphic. The last prints were treated with a riot of colours that took

reality into imagination (Fig.19-20). The question on time and space that stood at the core of *Time Frame* moved into the background of *Singapore from BW to C* to support a dialogue between photographic and graphic techniques. With *Fragmented Whole / Les Moments de l'Instant*, it came back to the forefront as the underlying concept of a body of work that evolved over a period of 4 years from photography to painting to sculpture.

This work was based on Kathmandu, and the colourful Nepalese culture featured prominently in the pictures. Yet the intention was to focus on the nature of the photographic act rather than the photographed culture as such. The approach was largely based on the tiled collages developed by David Hockney in the 1980's. Some friends recently back from Kathmandu showed me photographs featuring the local brick architecture just as I was about to go there myself. This made me think of Hockney's collages and I packed my bag with films and sketchbook to develop my own interpretation of this concept. The images were first composed as sketches that took into account the lenses and angles used by the photographic eye (Fig.21). Thus the resulting tiled collages were in a way more 'realistic' than straightforward photographs since they reproduced the time element in the way the eye roamed over a scene (Fig.22). Sketches and plain photographic collages were presented in 1989 as *Fragmented Whole*.

The second phase of the work saw me unify the tiled collage with oil paint (Fig.23). The deconstruction of Reality was smoothed out with graphic fictions while painting extended the photographic instant into moments of

reflection in the quiet of my studio. I wanted the final work to reflect the dual nature of the mediums: the unique painting and the reproducible photograph. I then began experimenting with laser copying which combined a photographic reproduction using light and images made of pigments as in the case of paint. These copies were turned into three-dimensional objects that re-fragmented the image with a fictitious evocation of space. By combining laser copying and handmade sculptural process, the final objects were thus at once reproductions and unique pieces of work. They were presented in 1991 under the title *Les Moments de l'Instant* (Fig.24-25).

Concomitantly to this long process I developed in 1990 *The Imaginary Façades of Calcutta* (Fig.26). The *façades* are perhaps the most balanced of my works in regard to the facts/fictions dialogue as they stand half way between the two. The work developed during a four months stay in the Bengali capital. Elements of facades were recorded across Calcutta in a factual manner, as if for documentation purpose. Those straightforward documents were later rearranged into collages combining pieces of different façade into a single fictitious one. I believe the resulting images to be close to a 'myth'. They stand into a realm of their own, of this world yet floating across it, telling a story about the vicissitude of the material world, the buildings being a metaphor for human condition.

The 1991 exhibition *Singapore, ... Boy! Time Flies with You* was intended to celebrate my tenth anniversary in Singapore. It applied the concepts and techniques developed for Kathmandu to the city I had come to

regard as 'home'. Painting and photography stayed apart from one another but presented some developments in their respective field. The tiled collages turned photo-objects were given much more sculptural forms than previously (Fig.27-28-29). On the other hand, the paintings used the tiled technique of the collages to create compositions gathering different viewpoints of the same subject within one image. An unexpected development turned out to be the stylistic approach that emerged spontaneously. Paintings and drawings featured an almost 'naïve' style which was way apart from the surrealistic images of my teenage (Fig.30-31). Then, things came out of my imagination between the four walls of my room. Along with my new lifestyle, my traveller's eye never had enough of new horizons in the real world. That newfound steadfast relation to Reality expressed itself in a down-to-earth graphic style.

In 2000, *Hang in There* featured a collection of black and white photos selected from my stock gathered over twenty years of travel around Asia. This show marked an important step with the completion of my first book in which I began to formalize my ideas about photo, painting, time and space. This eventually opened the door onto the current phase in which the dialectic between 'facts' and 'fictions' and the nature of the photographic act has become central to my research. *Moving Images – Disturbed Realities*, presented for the Month of Photography 2002, was my first intended effort in this direction. It looked at the giant advertisings on buses and the effect of their movement across the cityscape. The photographs were printed on canvas and re-worked with oil paint to extend the fiction of the advertisements into the reality of the surroundings (Fig.32-33). The more successful images

turned appearances around and saw reality and fiction cross each other's path.

3.3 On Mythobiography and Fragmentation

The current step sees the introduction of the notion of myth. "Myth of course, plays a very important part in all our lives, in everyone's culture. Without myth and tradition, what is there?"²⁶ So myths are most important in sustaining the reality of civilisation. Yet, the word 'myth' has also developed a secondary meaning in which it is plainly equalled to 'fiction', and that meaning tends to become the most current in contemporary language: "The belief that fibre helps cure constipation is a myth which should have been dispelled long ago."²⁷ This line extracted from a health care article in the Straits Times illustrates the point rather well. So just as the original meaning of 'myth' bridges a gap between the tangible and the intangible, the word itself today oscillates between its original 'reality' and the 'fiction' it has become. This ambivalence is reflected in bell hooks' appraisal of Julie Dash's movie when she says: "...you say that you wanted to bring back 'a basic integrity to the historical events' [...] and I think it is that effort on your part that creates a tension between the notion of history and a kind of mythobiography."²⁸ And a little later: "Part of the challenge of *Daughter of the Dust* is that it brings us what could be called ethnographic details, though in fact it's set within a much more poetic, mythic universe."²⁹

No doubt there is a strong parallel here with my original intention to bring "certain factual information [into the] mythopoetic context"³⁰ of my

childhood perception of Tourves' castle. In fact, the word 'mythobiography' coined by bell hooks for the purpose of this interview applies remarkably well to the *Vacherie*. The word is of course fully open to personal interpretation. In my case, it conjured up images of Valbelle's own biography and the many 'myths' surrounding it, the fictitious genealogy of the family, and the only preserved building in the whole castle. As developed previously, this building can be read as a 'myth in stone'. Furthermore, the story told by the building is nothing else but its own history, its 'biography'. So while the *Vacherie* becomes a 'mythobiography', I can see bell hooks' highlight of the tension between 'ethnographic details' and 'poetic universe' run across my work all through the years.

But if the *Vacherie* allows a potential reading of the whole site as a myth, the question of course is "what could that myth be?" And how does it relate to my own evolution? I believe that the answer lies in the other major element left of Tourves' castle, the stark and enigmatic colonnade (Fig.34) that stands at the other end of the hill along which the castle spread its constructions. In the beginning of my research, fascinated as I was with the mysterious appearance of the colonnade, I read a book by George Hersey entitled *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture*. According to Hersey, the form of Greek temples was influenced by the ancient practice that saw sacred trees "decorated with the gear and materials used in sacrifice and with the victim's remains: bones, horns, urns, lamp, fruit and vegetable relics, flowers and weapons."³¹ These elements became over time the decorative vocabulary of classical architecture, influencing our society even to this day.

He then goes on to say: “Greek sacrifice thus involved the deconstruction and the reconstruction of the victim’s body”³², and quoting Walter Burket: “ Time and again in myth, the remnants of a victim torn apart are collected, deposited, brought back to life.”³³ That sentence immediately connected in my mind with my own practice of tiled photographic collages. This in turn recalled an article read some years ago (which I unfortunately can not trace back) in which an art critic highlighted the wide spread use of fragmentation as characterizing the art of the 1990’s. Fragmentation seems to be indeed an unavoidable aspect of the photographic process over Reality. It frames, crops and isolates moments in time. Just as the parts of a sacrifice were reassembled to form the temple of old, the fragmentation induced by photography on a strip of celluloid is reassembled into the illusion of life in the form of a movie.

The *Imaginary Facades of Calcutta* assembles fragments of reality to create a myth in the form of fictitious architecture. The *Vacherie* assemble the fragments of its fictitious past to play the story of its life. There is indeed some sort of parallel between the constructs of classical temples, the neoclassical *Vacherie*, modern cinema and my own attempt with the *Façades*. As we are about to see in the conclusion, it echoes a recent theory of Physics on the structure of time, or rather the illusion of it.

“What if...?”

Reading Photography as a Myth

4.1 Valbelle, myth or fiction?

The introduction of an article published in 1904 about Valbelle and his castle strangely echoes the question of my research. In it, the journalist André Hallays notices how the strange ruins fool at first the visitor from afar. The colonnade in particular “with its harmonious rhythm [...] confirms the lie of this extraordinary décor. The most wondrous illusion takes hold of our imagination: this is Greece!”³⁴ However, once having reached the esplanade, one is forced to reckon that this is not quite the case and the epitaph inscribed on the obelisk gives the last blow to the mirage. The words and the phrasing of it are so typical of the 18th century that one has to admit, “here comes to an end the illusion of Greece.”³⁵ Hallays then opens the main part of his article with a sentence that arrested my attention: “Now it is reality that grabs our curiosity.”³⁶ Reality or so he thought, for I realised that his article had in fact comforted, if not initiated, many of the popular fictions that had in turn fed my childhood imagination.

Indeed such is the puzzling appearance of these ruins that Hallays, myself and many others react in the same way: in it we perceive something that is not quite what it seemed at first but eventually proves to be more interesting than the original illusion. The *Vacherie* is a myth in stone, and Laurent Puech proposes in his thesis that the whole site should in fact be read as such. Valbelle turned the original Provençal castle into a canvas ‘framed’

by the Century of Lights on which he expressed his vision. Many aspects of Tourves' estate are "elements of novelties that bear testimony to the modernist exigencies of Valbelle"³⁷, an avant-garde creation in which "beyond the Athenian lessons rise the mists of Romanticism."³⁸ In light of the angle of my own research, I propose that Valbelle might have in fact even come to an intuitive (if hazy) perception of today's civilisation of images, induced by his personal understanding of the transient and illusory nature of reality.

A few aspect of Valbelle's life as a young man allow us to assume that he must have developed some perception of the tension between facts and fictions and the notion of 'image' in society. In regard to his older brother, he was raised as the spectator of an attention focused on the preservation of a fictitious family name.³⁹ As the lover of the famous actress Clairon (Fig.34), "the first actress who dared to laugh in a tragedy"⁴⁰, he was once more the spectator of human vanity and public image, while mingling with the most prominent intellectuals and artists of the time⁴¹. Should we be surprised then if the very last *fabrique* of his ambitious project in Tourves took the form of a massive stage backdrop behind which all dreams crumbled to dust as soon as it was erected, a surrealistic colonnade (Fig.33) that now stands as a threshold between classic and modern eras?⁴² To the west, Valbelle built with the *Vacherie* the enduring element that allows us to read the site as a myth. To the east he erected with the colonnade a 'photograph' of his story, the very content of that myth.

4.2 The Myth

Barthes highlights the dual nature of Photography and the way it works on the perception of 'facts' and 'fictions': "Such is the two ways of the Photograph. The choice is mine: to subject its spectacle to the civilised code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the wakening of intractable reality."⁴³ Indeed what is *really* happening to me when I look at an image made of the very light that hit the subject sometime in the past? What kind of information is actually transmitted by light? Is there really a past to begin with? I thus began reading books of physical science to try to get some grasp over such questions. Newton's concept of an absolute time and absolute space 'containing' Reality was the foundation of science throughout the 19th century. Meanwhile photography was beginning to change the perception of reality. The notion of absolute time was shattered by Einstein's theory in which time and space are relative to one another to form the very fabric of reality. This took place 10 years after photography had played Reality as a film⁴⁴. Quantum Physics then described reality as waves of mere probabilities while giving ground for electronic technology to develop. By the 1990's, photographs had become virtual and travelled the world through electronic transmission. Meanwhile, String Theory had envisioned a timeless universe deep into the subatomic world: "In the raw state, before the strings that make up the cosmic fabric engage in the orderly, coherent vibrational dance we are discussing, *there is no realisation of space or time*. Even our language is too coarse to handle these ideas, for, in fact, there is even no notion of *before*."⁴⁵ Within just about a century, Time had turned from 'fact' to 'fiction'.

Finally, I came across *The End of Time*, a book by Julian Barbour⁴⁶. His is a rather arresting concept: that of an absolutely static universe, in which not only 'time' but also 'motion' do not exist.⁴⁷ What he sees is a universal wave function that chooses the most likely 'immobile' Quantum probabilities and plays the reality we experience as a succession of Nows, like the brain turns the photographic Nows into an illusion of movement called 'movie'. "The coherence of this picture hangs on the ability of the universal wave function to seek out time capsules that tell a story of organic growth."⁴⁸ However challenging this concept might seem at first, one has to reckon that many a thing in the evolution of the modern world came to either announce it, such as Duchamp's *Nude Going Down a Staircase*, or illustrate it, such as the time-freeze special effects of the movie *Matrix*. Sontag as well in the conclusion of *On Photography* highlights the fact that Balzac had expressed a concept of a similar nature when talking about Photography with Nadar.⁴⁹ Furthermore, with this kind of construct as a paradigm, the concept of 'decisive moment' devised by Cartier Bresson as a corner stone of classical street photography becomes almost self-evident. It is indeed a moment of perfect eternity, in which everything, photographer included, is forever at the right place. It is 'Now' and nothing else.

Einstein himself was deeply perplexed over that notion of Now, "something essential [...] which is just outside the realm of science"⁵⁰, a notion that stands as the enigmatic core of the photographic process. In the mirror, the Now looks at Now. In a photograph, the Now looks at...'just now'. I believe it is precisely that delay that allowed Photography to probe into Reality in a

revolutionary way. What truly happened when Reality, in the form of Niecephore Niepce, looked at itself in the form of the first known fixed photograph is anybody's guess.⁵¹ But Reality must have liked a lot what It then experienced for events making it up engaged in an ever more immediate orgy of photographic self-contemplation, which resulted in today's 24 hours channel news. This civilisation of images was shaping up in the background of Valbelle's society and I believe it is the hazy perception of it that guided him for the erection of a massive and mysterious Now in the form of his colonnade.⁵² This happened at about the same time as Tiphaigne de la Roche was departing this world. Valbelle also inherited his fortune 6 years after Tiphaigne's visionary words⁵³, in which, to the exception of the camera's mechanics, everything is there to describe the photographic process. A process of which Barthes said: "[...] in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past."⁵⁴ Yet as Barbour points out: "Our only evidence for the past is through present records. If we have them, the actual existence of the past is immaterial."⁵⁵

In Lasalle's promotional brochure, there is a quote from George Lucas that reads: "The secret of film is that it is an illusion."⁵⁶ What if far from being an illusion, cinema was, according to Barbour's theory, the very reflection of the elusive nature of Reality? The 'photographs' then making that 'movie' would be the 'atoms' of that reality, "the smallest indivisible unit of matter"⁵⁷ sought after by the Greek philosophers of the fifth century B.C.E. What if, in the end, Photography was the Myth behind the fiction that is Time?

Notes

1. Absolute Monarchy is the period of French history encompassing the 17th and 18th centuries during which the three kings, Louis the 14th, 15th and 16th, held absolute power over the country, from political to religious to economic. It is epitomised by Louis the 14th famous statement: "the State is I".
2. John Wilton-Ely. *The Mind and Art of Giovanni Battista Piranesi*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1978, p.39.
3. Ibid., p.46.
4. In his search for the 'original' human condition, Rousseau placed feelings above reason as the most primitive – and hence the most 'natural' – of human expression. This resulted in a fashion for the joy and sorrow of uncorrupted 'natural' people, as featured in the rustic dwelling scenes of Jean-Baptiste Greuze or the simple life of Jean-Baptiste Chardin's domestic scenes. The most striking symbol of this fashion is probably Marie Antoinette's Hameau in Versailles where the queen played at being a shepherdess.
5. Wilton-Ely, op. cit., p.44.
6. Thierry de Duve, "The Main Stream and the Crooked Path." *Jeff Wall*. London: Phaidon, p.26-54, 1996. p.44.
7. Ibid., p.44.
8. Ibid., p.28.
9. Arielle Pelenc, "Interview." *Jeff Wall*. London: Phaidon, 9-22, 1996. p.9.
10. Hou Hanru, "Re-reading of History: from Discourse to Action." *Wong Hoy Cheong*. Valentine Willy Fine Arts & OVA, p.10-13, 2002, p11.
11. Beverly Yong, "Introduction." *Wong Hoy Cheong*. Valentine Willy Fine Arts & OVA, p.7-9, 2002.
12. Gerhard Haupt and Pat Binder, "Wong Hoy Cheong, Re:Looking" *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World*, issue 9, December 2004. <<http://www.universes-in-universe.de/islam/eng/2004/09/wong/index.html>>
13. Hou Hanru, "Re-reading of History: from Discourse to Action." *Wong Hoy Cheong*. Valentine Willy Fine Arts & OVA, p.10-13, 2002, p11.
14. Ibid., p.11.
15. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". *Illuminations*. New York, Schocken Books, 1968. p.227.
16. Susan Sontag, *On Photography*. London: Penguin Books, 1979, p.160.

17. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Richard Howard, trans. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981, p.9.
18. Ibid., p. 96.
19. Susan Sontag, op. cit., p. 70.
20. Ibid., p.180.
21. Julie Dash, "Dialogue between bell hooks and Julie Dash", *Daughters of the Dust*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1997, p.30.
22. Ibid., p.30.
23. Ibid., p.30.
24. Incidentally, the type of books that must have been part of Valbelle's library in Tourves
25. E. Ann Kaplan, "Speaking Nearby": Trinh t. Minh-ha's *Reassemblage* and *Shoot for the Contents*". *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze*. Oxford: Routledge, 1997. p201.
26. Julie Dash, op.cit., p.29.
27. The *Straits Times* n.d.
28. bell hooks, "Dialogue between bell hooks and Julie Dash", *Daughters of the Dust*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1997, p.28.
29. Ibid., p.29.
30. Ibid., p.29.
31. George Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture*. London: the MIT Press, 1998. p.13.
32. Ibid., p.16.
33. Ibid.
34. André Hallays, *En flânant Valbelle*. Tourves: Cahier de l'Histoire Populaire, 2004. p.33.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.

37. Laurent Puech, *Portrait d'un aristocrate à la fin du XVIII siècle, le Comte de Valbelle et son château de Tourves*. Aix en Provence: Université de Provence, these de doctorat, 1984, p.174.

38. Ibid. p.149.

39. Valbelle was born the youngest son of an aristocratic family, at an age when "the law of primogeniture is among all rights the most sacred of all" (ibid, p.13). He received some form of serious education with a Jesuit, Père Monclar, but was meant to follow a military career of secondary importance. One can then imagine his line of thoughts when he learned that the grandeur imparted onto his older sibling on the basis of his birth was in fact a lie. The fictitious family tree tracing the family ancestry to noble warriors of the Middle Ages had been devised in 1730, one year after he was born. By then the Valbelle family was at the pinnacle of its power and needed credentials to secure its position.

40. Edmond de Goncourt, *Mademoiselle Clairon*. Paris: Flammarion, 1889, p.1.

41. For almost twenty years, while still a broke aristocrat of lesser rank, Valbelle was the lover of Claire-Joseph Lerys, 6 years older than him and better known as Hippolyte de la Tude Clairon. Otherwise known as 'La Clairon', this actress is acknowledged in the history of theatre as having revolutionised the art of acting by favouring the authenticity of expression over the classical declamatory tone. The fame of the actress went far beyond the Parisian scene to reach the capitals of Europe and she bore all the foretelling signs of what would become the 20th century Hollywood star. She was Voltaire's favourite actress and the two of them worked closely for the creation of the philosopher's plays. With Clairon, Valbelle experienced life as a stage, studied mythology, learned how to appreciate paintings and sculptures, and talked about philosophy and poetry with Voltaire, Diderot and the like in the intimacy of her salon. Not surprisingly, some of the most widespread fictions about Valbelle concern his relation with Clairon. One of them is that the actress would have performed in Tourves using the colonnade as a stage, which is impossible given that they had separated before the work on the colonnade had even begun.

42. When Valbelle unexpectedly inherits the family's fortune in 1766, the amateur dilettante could at last concretise his vision of a utopian architecture. He purchased the houses and the church of the ancient village in which his ancestors were buried and disrespectfully had them raised to the ground to build the esplanade, east of the castle. Beside Clairon, the man had had countless mistresses but not one single child. By then probably aware of his sterility and that the family, if not a whole era, was coming to an end with him, he ironically built a fashionable monument of 'filial piety' in the form of an obelisk. "Valbelle had understood that the image of power and piety mattered more than their reality in a modern world" (Puech, p.185).

43. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Richard Howard, trans. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981, p.119.

44. Einstein published his famous paper on Relativity in 1905 and the Lumière Brothers gave the first public cinema screening in 1895.

45. Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe*. New York: Vintage Books, 1999, p.378.

46. After a Ph.D. on Einstein's theory of gravitation, Barbour discovered that he could make a comfortable living by translating scientific papers from Russian to English and eventually chose to stay away from a standard academic career. This allowed him "to work on topics other physicists felt they could not risk, either because nothing might come out of the work or because their reputation might suffer." He is now regarded as an expert on the theory of time and inertia. His theory is described by some of his colleagues as "the most interesting and provocative new idea about time to be proposed in many years" that "will change the way we see reality if proven to be true" (from the introduction of *The End of Time*).

47. This universe, which Barbour calls Platonia, is made of an infinite number of virtual possible Nows, each one a time capsule forever finite and immobile, each one a probability considered by Quantum Physics. In short, Barbour turns the table around. Instead of Reality unfolding through Time as in the Newtonian model, he proposes Time as the pathway travelling across Reality.

48. Julian Harbour, *The End of Time*. London: Phoenix, 1999, p. 298.

49. "Balzac's fanciful theory, expressed to Nadar, that a body is composed of an infinite series of 'ghostly images', eerily parallels the supposedly realistic theory expressed in his novels, that a person is an aggregate of appearances, appearances which can be made to yield, by proper focusing, infinite layers of significance. To view reality as an endless set of situations which mirror each other, to extract analogies from the most dissimilar things, is to anticipate the characteristic form of perception stimulated by photographic images. Reality itself has started to be understood as some kind of writing which has to be decoded – even as photographed images were themselves first compared to writing (Niepce's name for the process whereby the image appears on the plate was heliography, sun-writing; Fox Talbot called the camera 'the pencil of nature'.)" Susan Sontag, op. cit., p.160.

50. Julian Harbour, *The End of Time*. London: Phoenix, 1999, p.143.

51. The first known preserved photograph, entitled *Point de vue d'une fenêtre du Gras*, was produced by Niecephore Niepce in 1826 with an exposure time estimated today at eight hours.

52. I suggested in the second chapter that rather than reading a photograph as the death of a moment, I prefer to see it as a moment that detaches itself from the time-space continuum and carries on 'floating' within it by switching

to its own continuum, thus creating a 'reality' of its own. I now propose to parallel this to Valbelle's colonnade. It detached itself from the spell of destruction that befitted other parts of the property to remain in its own reality, resembling in that the subject of a photograph oblivious to the passing of time around it (fig.33).

53. "You know that the rays of light, reflected from different bodies, form a picture, and paint the image reflected on all polished surfaces, for instance, on the retina of the eye, on water, and on glass. The elementary spirits have sought to fix these fleeting images; they have composed a subtle matter, very viscous and quick to harden and dry, by means of which a picture is formed in the twinkling of an eye. They coat a piece of fabric with this matter, and hold it in front of the objects they wish to paint. The first effect of this canvas is similar to that of a mirror; one sees there all objects near and far, the image of which light can transmit. But what a glass cannot do, the canvas by means of its viscous matter, retains the images. The mirror represents the objects faithfully but retains them not; our canvas shows them with the same exactness and retains them all. This impression of the image is instantaneous, and the canvas is immediately carried away into some dark place. An hour later the impression is dry, and you have a picture the more valuable in that it cannot be imitated by art or destroyed by time . . . " Tiphaigne de La Roche, Giphantie.

54. Roland Barthes, *op.cit.*, p.76.

55. Julien Barbour, *op.cit.*, p.300.

56. George Lucas, quoted in LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts. Singapore, 2005, p.47.

57. Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*. Boston: Shambala Publications, 1975, p.21.

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Fig.1: Ruins of the Valbelle Castle



Fig.2: Bust of Valbelle by Houdon and the obelisk on the esplanade



Fig.3: The Vacherie and its different architectural styles



Fig.4: The Vacherie and its present day surroundings



Fig.5: The former location of the stolen inscription

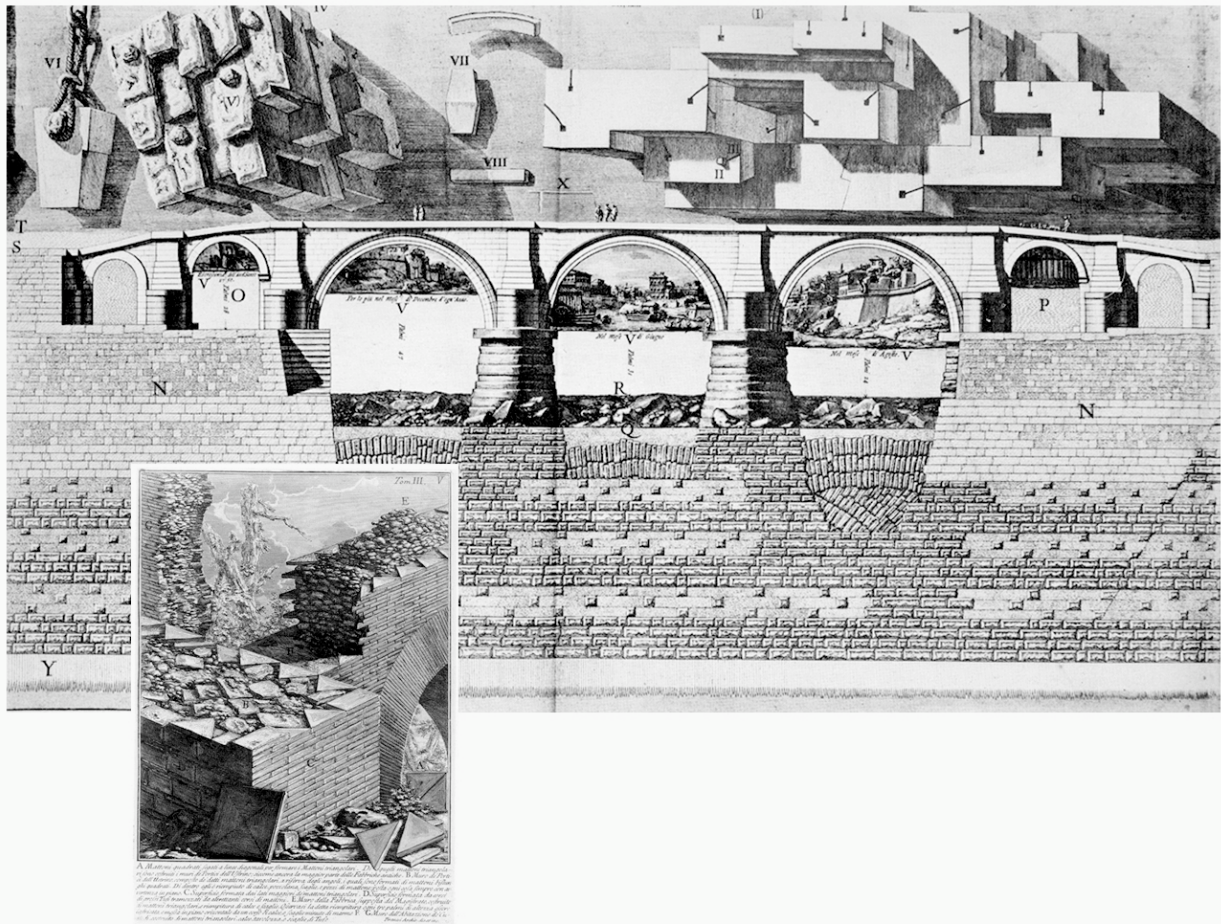


Fig.6: Piranesi, *Section of the foundations of the Pons Aelius and of Castel S. Angelo* (detail) from *Antichità Romane*

Fig.6B: Piranesi, *Gateway to crematorium* from *Antichità Romane*.

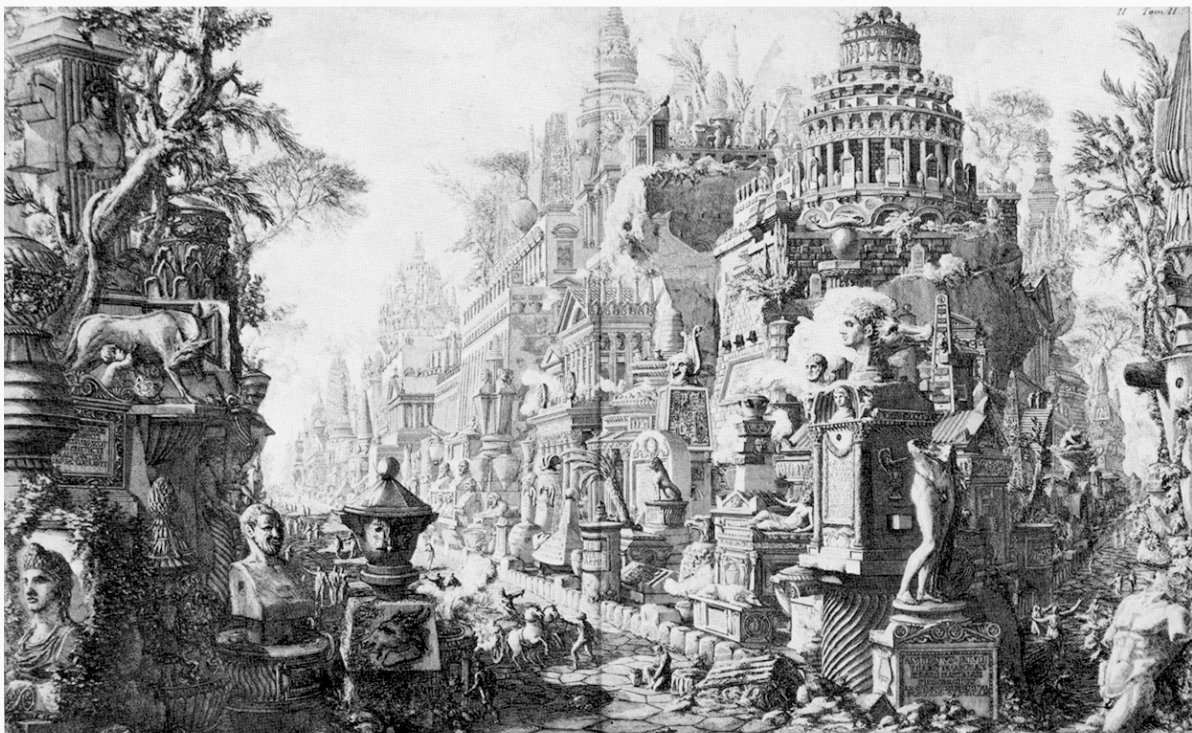


Fig.7: Piranesi, *Second frontispiece of Volume II* from *Antichità Romane*



Fig.8: Piranesi, *View of the baths in Hadrian's villa from Antichità Romane.*



Fig.9: Piranesi, *Arch of Gallienus, from Antichità Romane*



Fig.10: Jeff Wall, *Eviction Struggle*, transparency in light box, 229x414cm, 1988

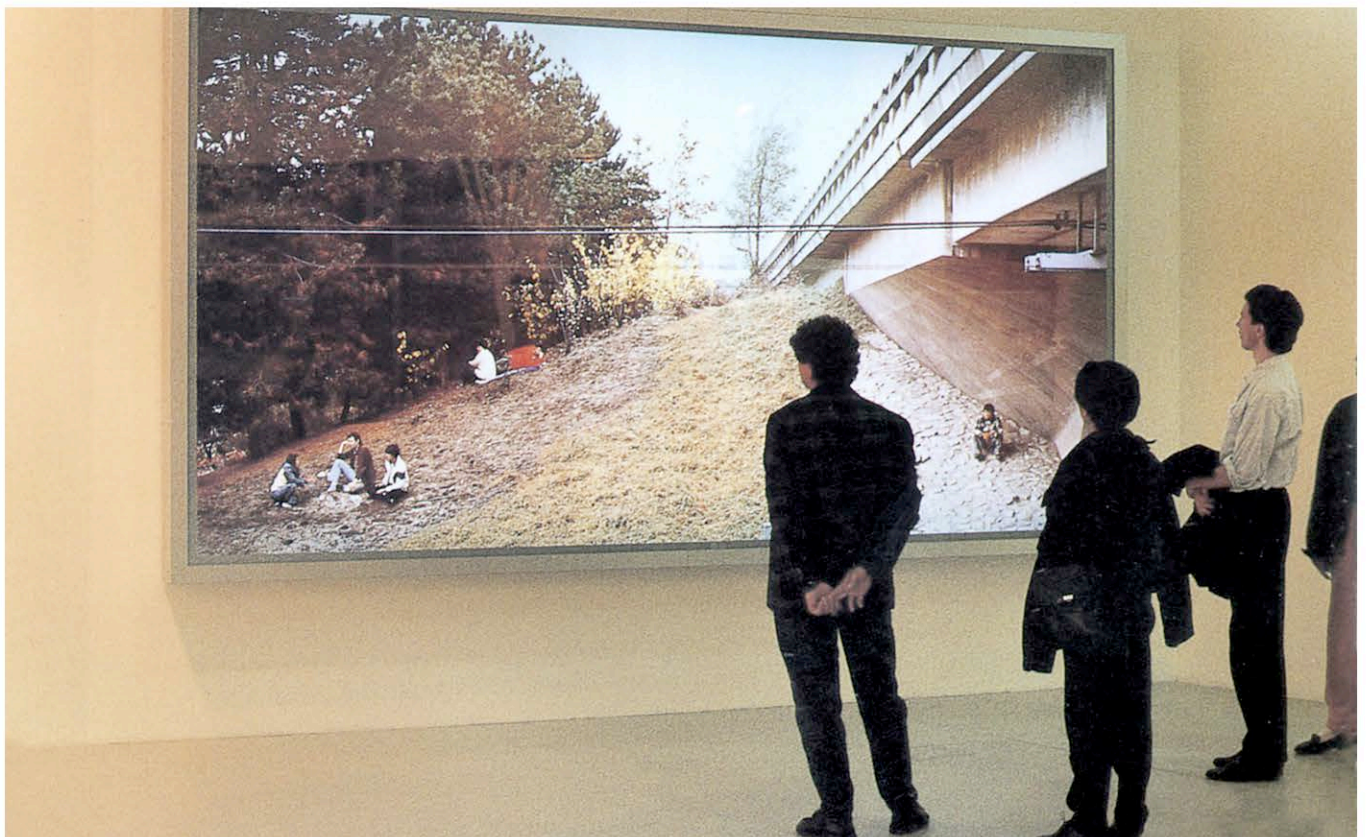


Fig.11: Jeff Wall, *The Story Teller*, transparency in light box, 229x437cm, 1986.



Fig.12: Jeff Wall, *Insomnia*, transparency in light box, 172x213cm, 1994.

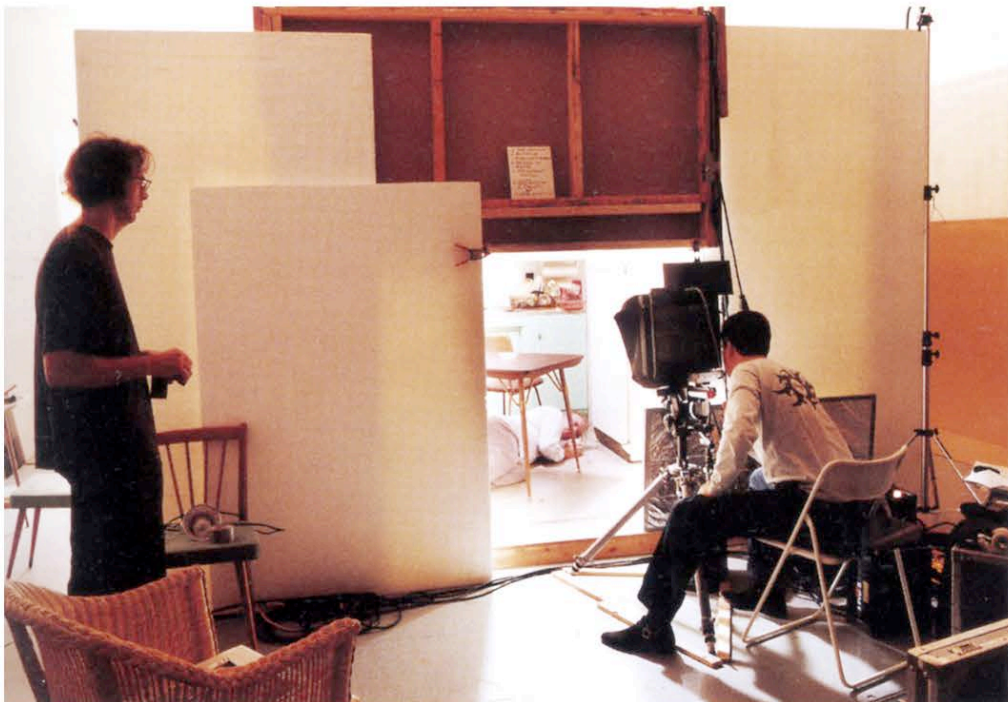


Fig.13: *Insomnia*, production still



Fig.14: Wong Hoy Cheong, *Buckingham Street and its Vicinity*, offset lithograph, 62x82cm, 2002.

Contemporary Art from the Islamic World

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Issue 9 / Wong Hoy Cheong

Wong Hoy Cheong, Re:Looking

Re:Looking, 2002-2003
Installation at the 50th Venice Biennial, exhibition *Z.O.U. - Zone of Urgency*, curated by Hou Hanru

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Text / Photos - overview

Fig.15: Wong Hoy Cheong, *Re:Looking*, installation at the 50th Venice Biennale, 2003. In *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World*, issue 9, December 2004.

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Fig.16: Wong Hoy Cheong, *Re:Looking*, website, 2003.



Fig.17: Gilles Massot, *Time Frame*, mixed media on paper, 50x65cm, 1977.

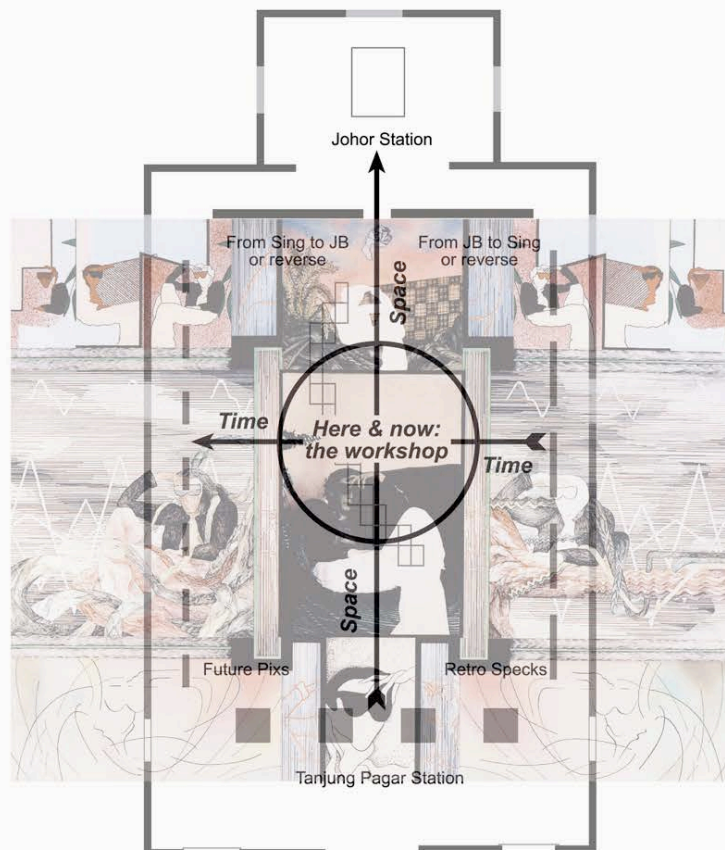


Fig.18: Gilles Massot, superimposition of *Time Frame* and floor plan of *Retro Specks Future Pix*.



Fig.19: Gilles Massot, *Time Frame(???)*, mixed media on silver print, 17x25cm, 1984.



Fig.20: Gilles Massot, *Les vélos de Vincent*, mixed media on silver print, 17x25cm, 1984.



Fig.21: Gilles Massot, *The Blue House I*, water colour and pencil , 35x25cm, 1989.

Fig.22: *The Blue House II*, photo collage, 37x25cm, 1989.

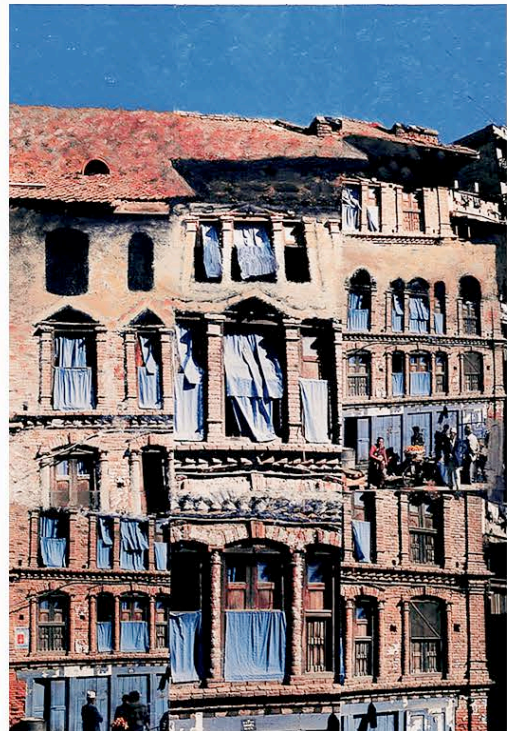
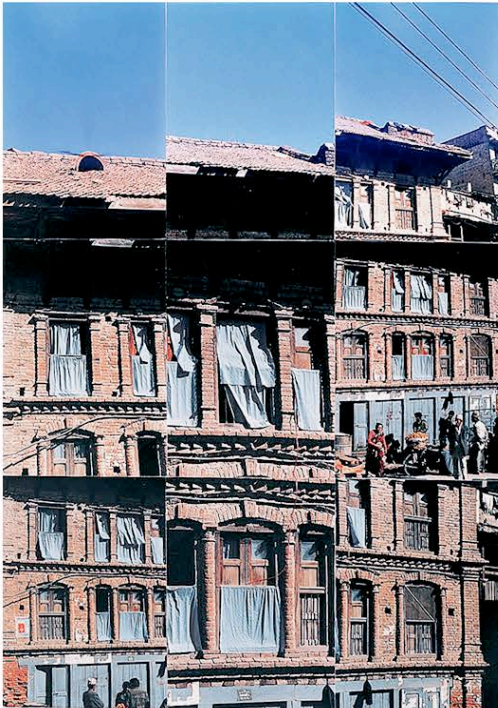


Fig.23: *The Blue House III*, oil paint on photo collage, 37x25cm, 1990.



Fig.24: Gilles Massot, *Les Moments de l'Instant*, Maison du Peuple de Gardanne, 1991.

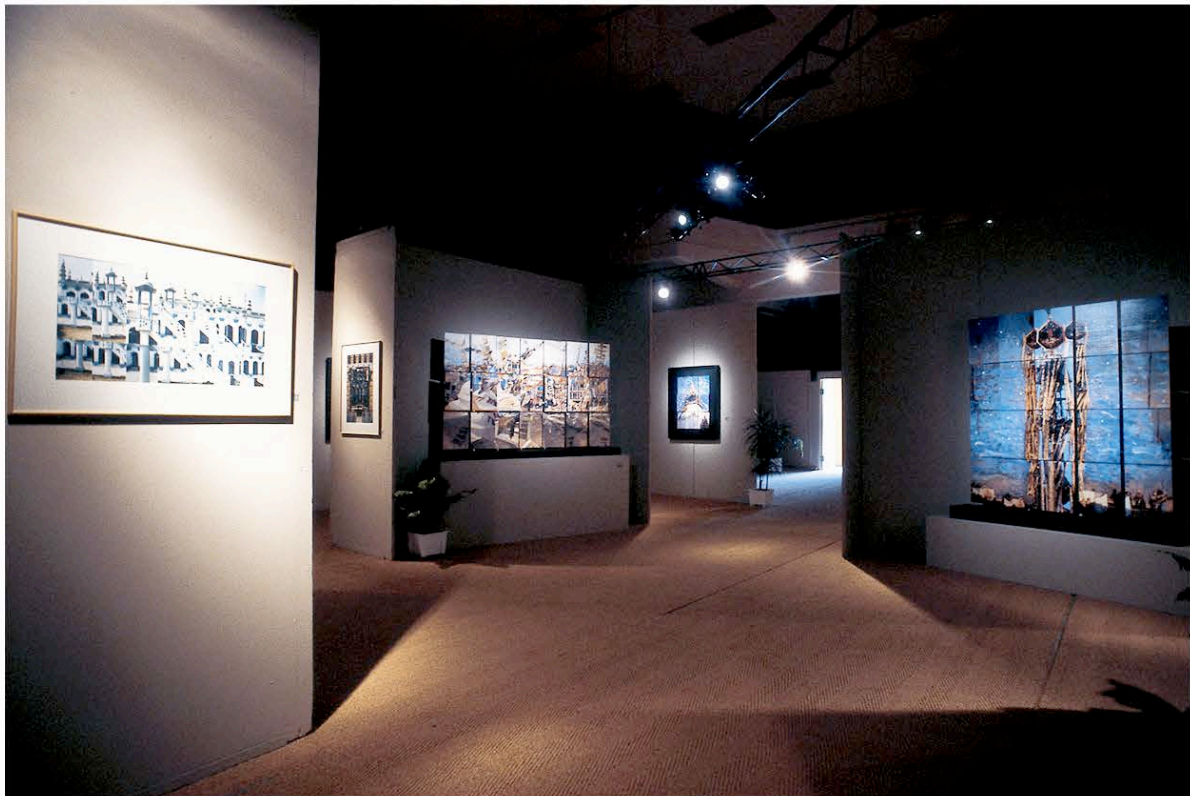


Fig.25: Gilles Massot, *Les Moments de l'Instant*, Maison du Peuple de Gardanne, 1991.



Fig.26: Gilles Massot, *Imaginary Façade of Calcutta (4)*, photo collage, 60x50cm, 1989.



Fig.27: Gilles Massot, *Fu*, laser print on wood, 68x39x19cm, 1991

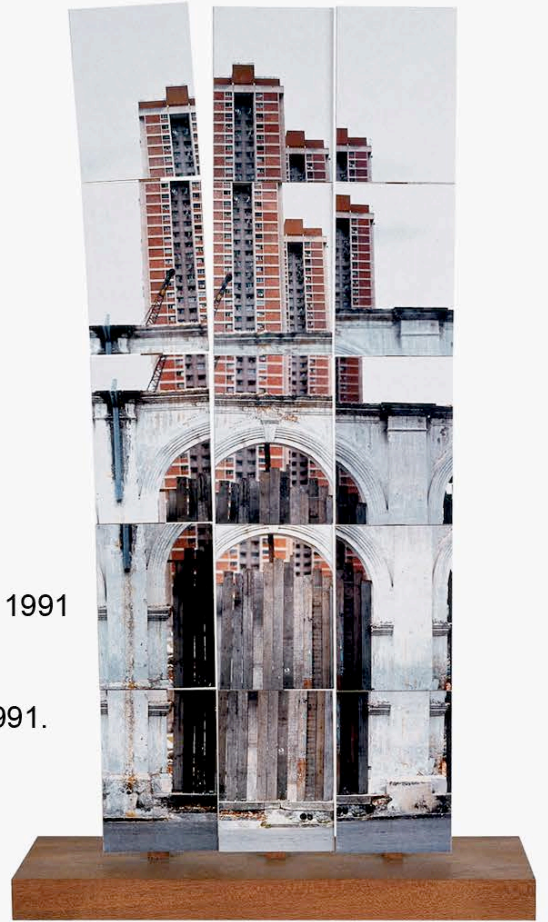


Fig.28: *About to Leave*, laser print on wood, 63x27x12cm, 1991.



Fig.29: *Dancing Perspective*, laser print on wood, 78x96x15cm, 1991.



Fig.17: Gilles Massot, *Time Frame*, mixed media on paper, 50x65cm, 1977.



Fig.31: Gilles Massot, *Singapore Madonna*, oil on canvas, 121x88cm, 1991.



Fig.32: Gilles Massot, *Come on, Bite into Me*, oil and digital print on canvas, 54x83cm, 2002.



Fig.33: Gilles Massot, *Anonymous et plus encore*, oil and digital print on canvas, 54x83cm, 2002.

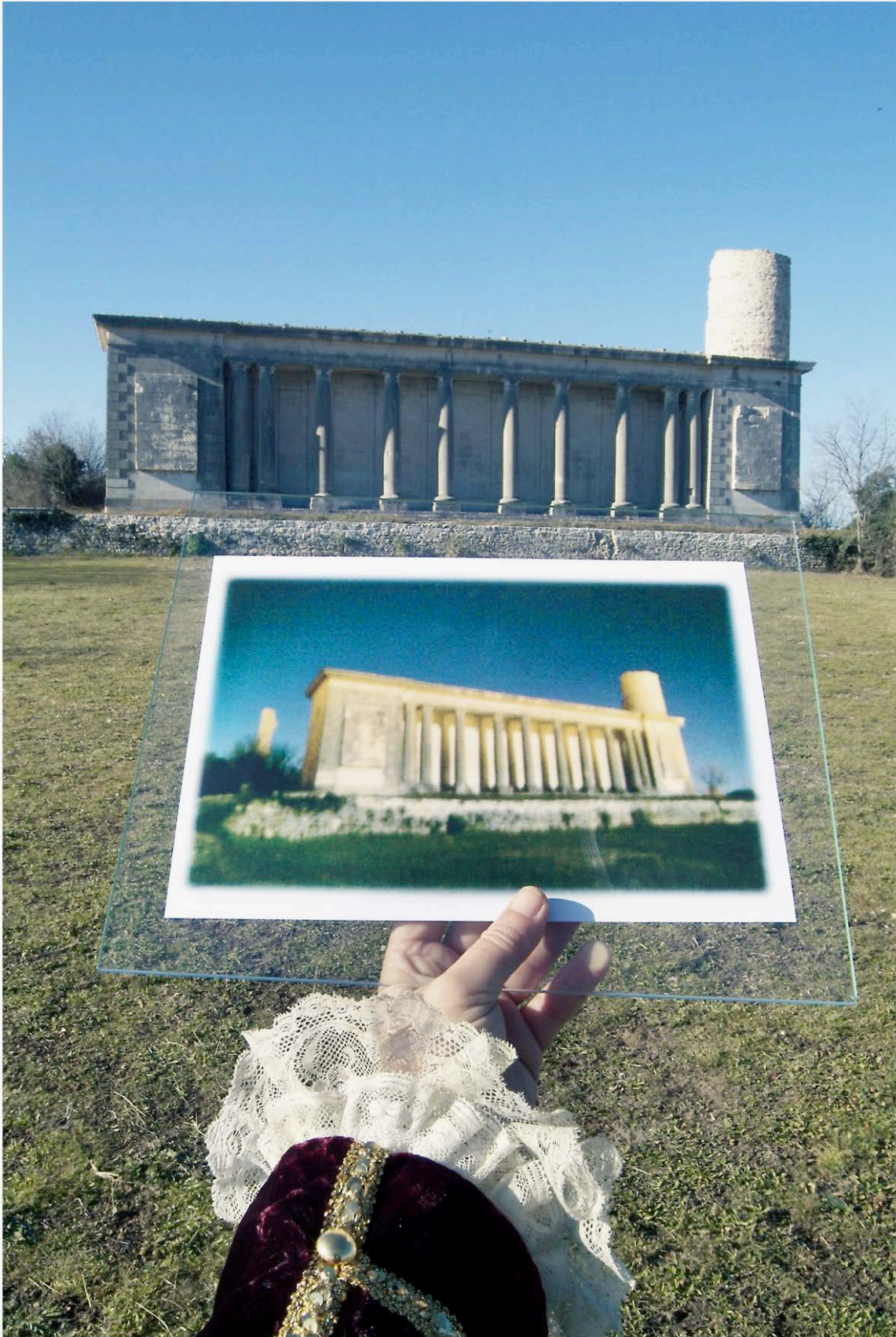


Fig.34: Gilles Massot, *Floating in Time*, digital photograph, 2006



Fig.35: J.Baptiste Michel, *La Clairon*, engraving from a painting by Pougin de Saint Aubin.

Glossary

<i>Jardin de Fabriques</i>	English garden
<i>Vacherie</i>	barn
<i>Carceri</i>	prisons
<i>Veduta</i>	view, engraved view of antique ruins

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