

**Fragmented Views Recomposed:**  
**Photography after Cinema**  
Christian Lebrat

**Part 1 of 4**

I came to photography through a preoccupation with cinematic concerns: decomposition of movement, discontinuity of shots, and re-composition of time. I worked through these concerns with three different series of images: *The Photographic Scrolls* and panoramas, *The Self-Portraits*, and *The Curtain Series*. In my explanation of a wide selection of images, I will show, on one hand, how cinema can become photographic and, on the other hand, I will show how photography, in its essential confrontation with cinema (and to a lesser extent painting), finds unexpected resources.

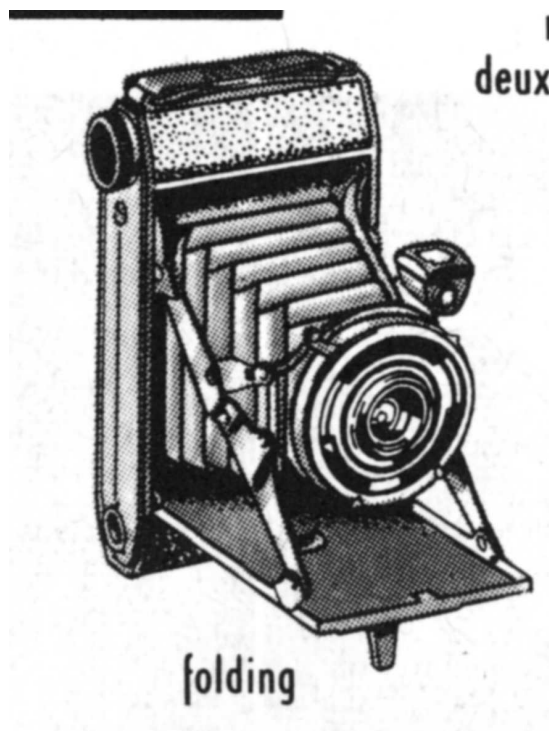
**1. *The Photographic Scrolls***

Bruce Elder, in *Harmony & Dissent*, studying “the precursors of the absolute film,” speaks about the scroll as an art form itself: “not the scroll as a starting point for an abstract film, but the scroll as an art form in itself.” Elder also wrote:

“For Richter, the scroll represented a fundamental change in the arts: the human capacity for optical conception had long rested on static spatial forms; the time had now come to develop the ability to think in optical series. The scroll required a new way of composing, for it imposed the problem of arranging individual forms in such a manner that the scroll unwound in a well-ordered progression. Problems of continuity and rhythm presented themselves a new way. Thus, the scroll represented a further means of creating dynamic forms.” (40-44)

I am not sure if I had seen the films of Viking Eggeling or of Hans Richter before I created my first *rubans photographiques* (photographic scrolls) in 1978, but it is of little importance. I had already created several films in which I posed, to myself, the problem of dynamic forms and of

their spatial and temporal development. This allowed me to transfer my formal and aesthetic preoccupations in the midst of photographing.



I discovered the way I could realize photographic scrolls by chance. In fact, at the time, I was very involved with film and wasn't interested at all by static photography. For many years I even refused to take static photos, "souvenir" photos. I thought that photography was too anecdotal. Photography was also a dead piece of time and I didn't feel concerned with dead time during this period. The fact is, I found out an old, folding photographic camera that my parents bought and never used. It was a photographic camera without any automatism. You had to do everything by hand, including moving the film by rolling a button, stopping when you see the numbers 1, 2, 3, and so on, appearing. I took it on a holiday and my wife used it to take photographs. She did not exactly pay attention to the numbers, so when we got the film developed, the instantanés (snapshots) were overlapping. I saw the results and felt immediately compelled. Well, I thought, that is a great way I can use photography. Overlapping the images

on the film (since I can unroll the film as I want and I can stop it when I want) allows me to make more than the expected 10 shots, I can have 20 shots, maybe more, on one scroll.

Working like that meant I was refracting, dilating and reconstructing the specific space of photography—transfiguring the reality and constructing visions. That is, the object or the place chosen determined the treatment of the scrolls. I was less concerned with the application of the procedure than in forming a relationship to the particularities of the subject (the subject indicating the form in some fashion).

An important element that is vital to the creation of both my photographic and film work is that the camera is always held in the hand, never placed on a tripod. The scroll, therefore, also registers the vibration of the body that is holding the camera: a trace of energy left in the moment. Held in the hand, the photographic camera can execute all kinds of movements, certain ones borrowed from cinema (traveling, panoramas), and others even more complex (reversing the camera's film trajectory).

Lastly, I often say that I work blind. This quality is equally valuable to the creation of my films as it is to my photographic works (both oftentimes using superimpositions). As a blind creator that does not “see” what he does, I do not recognize the result in advance. I can certainly have an idea of what I am going to present, but, I am often surprised. In general, when I am surprised that is the best scroll. Here are some examples:



***Piazza De Ferrari (Gênes), 1978***

Here is the first scroll: the frame is always the same, it is the shifting within the frame that varies. These instances overlap and create, in the final image, the vision of a “false” panorama.



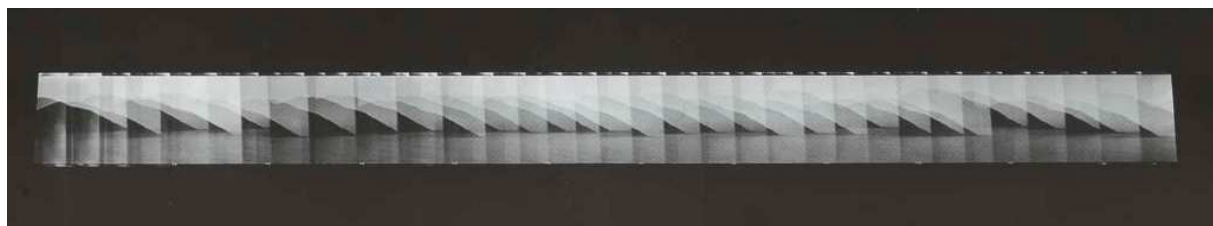
***Palmier (San Remo), 1980***

The Palm Tree: the object in itself is very graphic, making the repetition get closer and fall deep. Its collection, its superimposition, goes from photography's blackest blacks to its most intense clean whites.



***Maroc (Tanger-Casa), 1981***

The car's windshield defines the frame. The scroll is composed like a film strip turned onto its side.



***Punta Chiappa (Ligurie), 1981***

Repetition through time-lag. The time-lag is manual, running through multiple variations.



***Arcades (Turin), 1981***

A tracking of time under the arcades. Shooting the view from 5 to 6 meters as time unfolds. Finally, the construction of a space labyrinth (constructed, in a large part, courtesy of a formal motif: arcades with zebra stripes of light).



***Villa Imperiale (Gênes), 1981***

The camera takes the main picture of the garden first, then of the palace: the superimposition of the created views is a convex architectural motif, clean in the photograph (which doesn't exist in reality).



***Nervi, le parc (Gênes), 1982***

False panorama: I turn the camera around myself more than 180 degrees. I complete a turn and capture the passage of moving people.



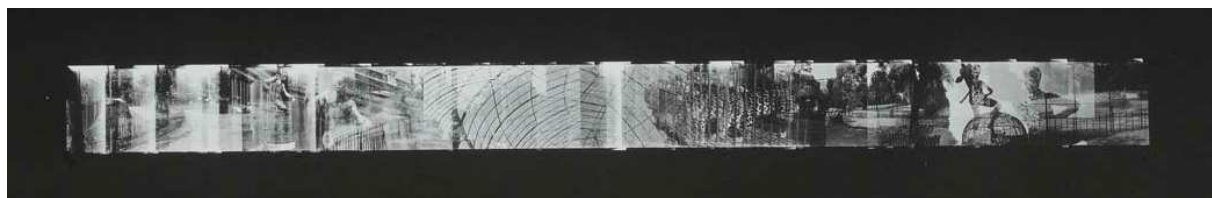
***Villa Bombrini (Gênes), 1984***

The camera is held by hand to start the panorama, then is, in effect, "thrown" in the air, reversing the image, and comes back to the first frame.



***Le Couple (Jardin de l'Observatoire, Paris), 1985***

Turning 180 degrees from the man to the woman: one foot at a time, regular footsteps through space, making a half-circle.



***Etrange Atmosphère au Zoo du Jardin des Plantes (Paris), 1985***

Investing in space: trying to disengage atmosphere with a collage of different spaces.



***Le Palais Royal (Paris), 1985***

Lateral movement in front of the gates of the Palais-Royal leading to a curving of the space.



***Signaux (Sicile), 1985***

Night in Sicily: the broken line is the light of the moon. The volutes are created by the movement of a flashlight facing the camera. This scroll marks the passage of time to abstraction.



***Le Départ du Bateau Blanc dans le Port de Gênes, 1985***

The abstraction in using a “photographic line”: it is the film that parades, that glides, regularly in front of the lens courtesy of a manual crank mounted on the camera. In indicating a boat (its trace) the boat doesn’t move, it’s the movement indicated by the negative which was used and which suggests the movements.



***Sans Titre (Hommage à Turner), 1985***

Always with the crank: a trail of orange/yellow colours, a homage to Turner.



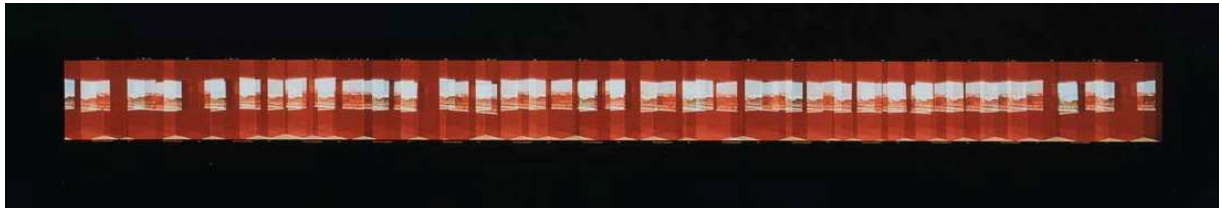
***Place de la République (Paris), 1985***

A series of coloured filters are manually placed in front of the object as one goes along creating the scroll.





***Absorption I (Parc de La Villette, Paris), 1993***



***Absorption II (Parc de La Villette, Paris), 1993***

The *Folie* of Tschumi in the Park of La Villette: An element of architecture is included with the opening of a red window looking over the park. Constructing an object in the form of an accordion (the repetition of collecting the light) with a sort of open eye over the space (traveling in time towards the window).



***Fontaine Tinguely—Niki De St-Phalle (Paris), 1993***

False panoramic, false panorama, false space, space purely photographic. The water assures the discontinued flux like in several other scrolls (*Jardin du Luxembourg* (Paris), 1994, for example: see below)



***Villa Grimaldi (Jardin Pallavicini de Pegli-Gênes), 1993***

In the years after 1990, I was particularly interested in architecture: the repetition of the Tempietto element of architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the lateral shifting of the frame in order to allow the luxurious vegetation of the place to make its appearance. It also consists of recreating an atmosphere.



***Pyramides (Paris), 1993***

The formal game with the pyramid (by Pei) answers to the architectural element, itself very rhythmical.



***Jardin du Luxembourg (Paris), 1994***

False panoramas. Games reflections in the Luxembourg Gardens.



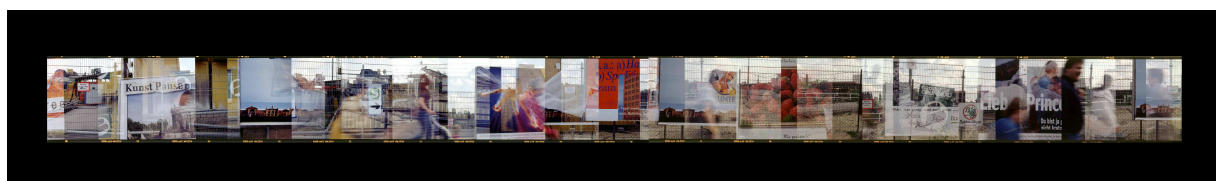
***Versailles (Paris), 1994***

Fragment of the garden with the reversal of the picture in the middle of the scroll.



***Manège (Paris), 1994***

Speed, thickness, vibration.



***Kunstpause (Berlin), 1997***

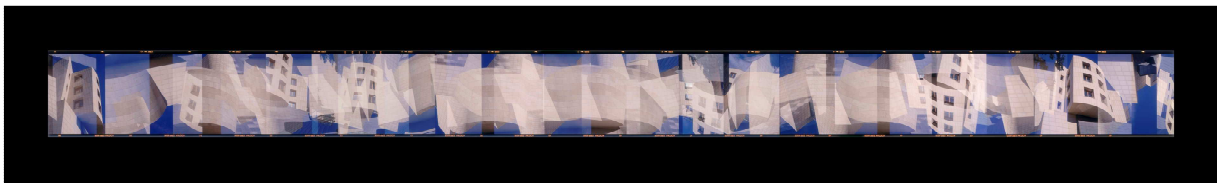
In Berlin, publicity and reconstruction, some years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.





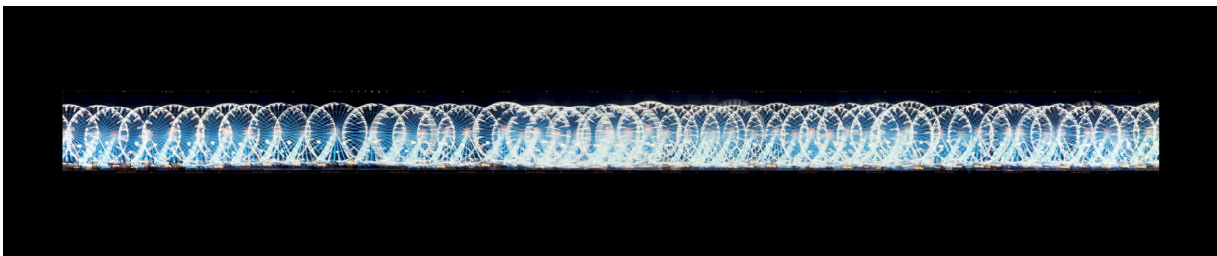
***Museum für Volkerkunde (Berlin), 1997***

Mixing, assembling extra-European faces.



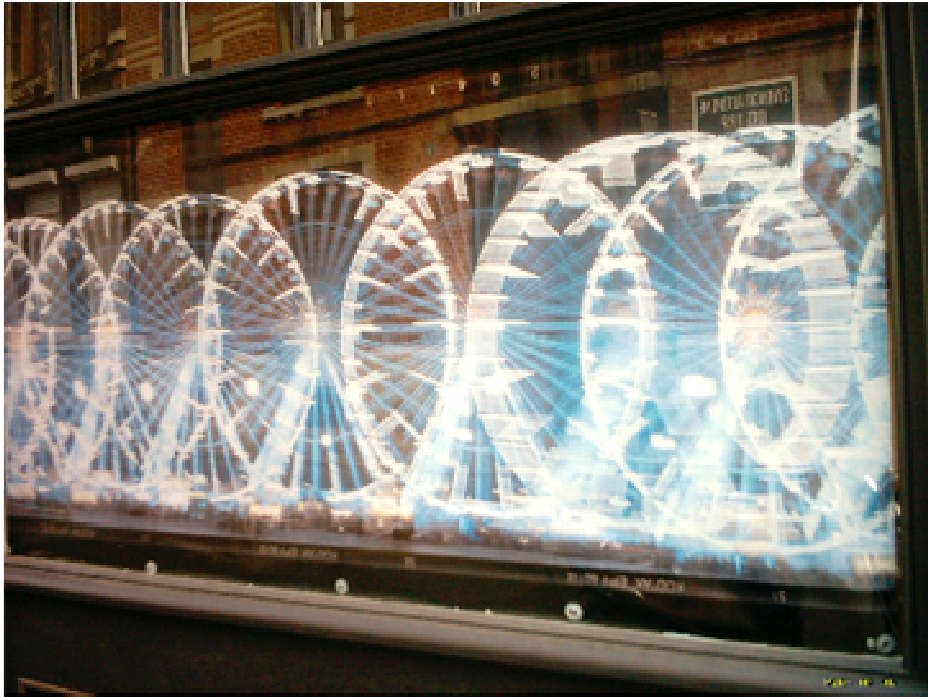
***Volume (Frank O’Gehry) (Paris), 1997***

The building, unfolded in space. Proceeding to “disassembly” by montaging different points of view. A completely unpredictable scroll.



***La Grande Roue (Paris), 1997***

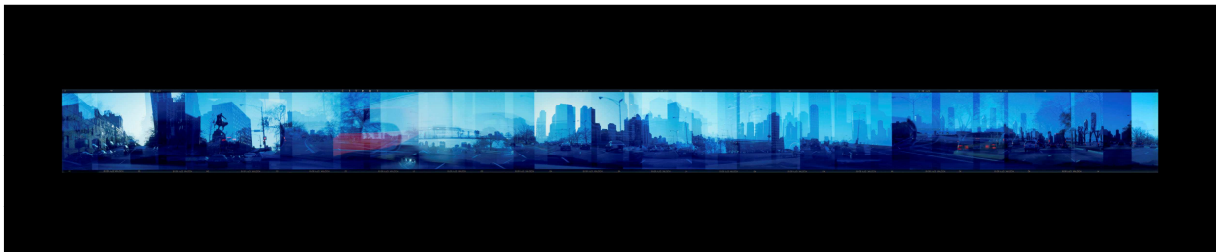
The Grand Roue in Paris at night: light turns the street. Blurred light (from where the hand is holding the camera) induces the effect of rotating the street itself, making it possible to move, overall, in this sort of spiral, which forms in the scroll completely (one also thinks upon seeing a scroll with spiral inscriptions of Man Ray’s film, *Retour à la raison*).



***La Grande Roue (Paris), 1997 (Detail)***

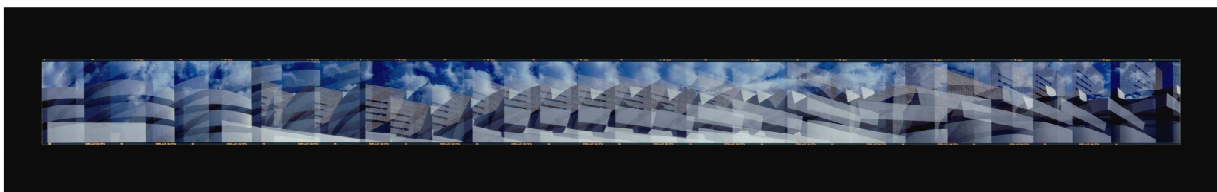
Size: 98 cm x 250 cm.

Installation in the window of the BAR gallery: Roubaix (F), June 2007.



***Chicago Blue, 2000***

The city, the night, a journey. *A kind of blue.*



***Guggenheim (Frank Lloyd Wright), 2000***

Frank Lloyd Wright's modernist building, in rhythm.



***Le Cirque (Paris), 2001***

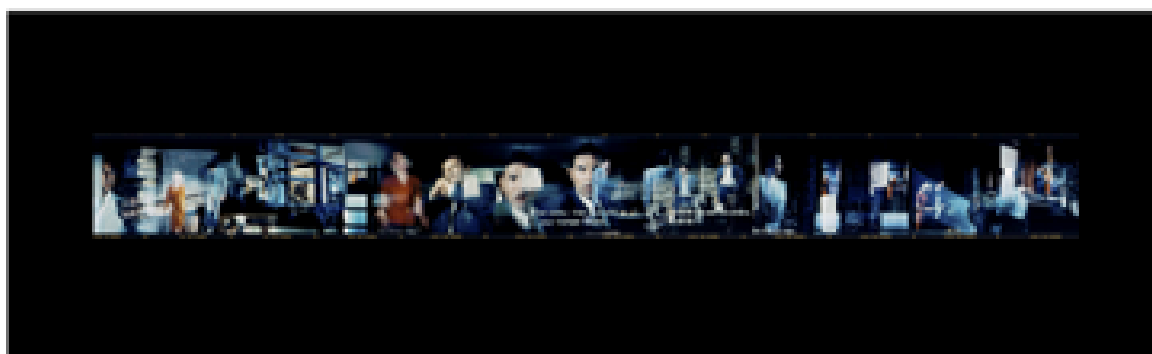
The circus ring, seen by top, in full light. Something between the *Nymphéas* of Monet and the exuberance of *Notes on the Circus* by Jonas Mekas. Something else also.



***TTTRRRR... n° 1 (Serie Hitchcock), 2006***

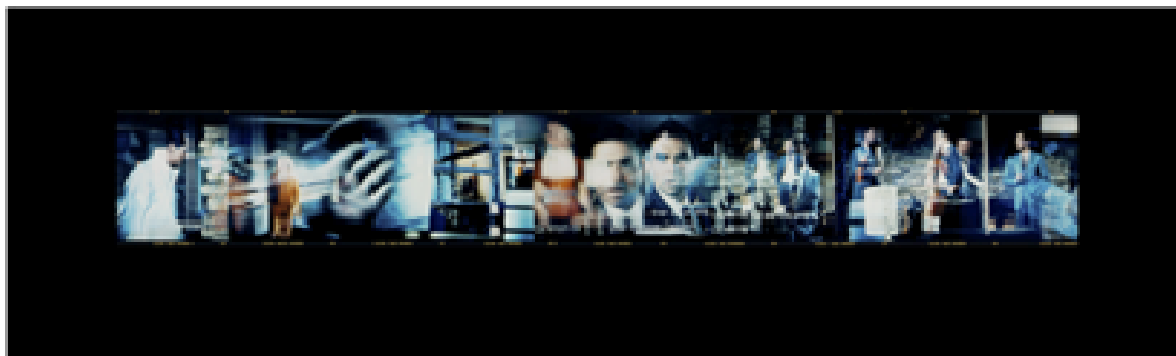
Size: 3 m x 21 m.

Installation on location in the façade of Cinéma 104 in Pantin (F), November 2006.



***TTTRRRR... n° 1 (Serie Hitchcock), 2006***

Reprise of a sequence of *North by northwest* by Hitchcock: reinventing the story (a narrative) selecting very precise maps (expressive faces and/or phantom figures and elements of architecture) associated with the reconstructed subtitles. The views create a labyrinth (with superimpositions composing the scroll in its entirety), which play with the figures, the repetitions, the time-lag, and the subtitles, and acquire their own autonomy.



***TTTRRRR... n° 2 (Serie Hitchcock), 2006***

A second version of the same sequence that takes advantage of the accent of certain gestures to remind us, one more time, what we can do with the hand.



***Haut Fourneau 1 (Gênes), 2009***



***Haut Fourneau 3 (Gênes), 2009***

The last blast furnace settled in Genoa, photographed just before its definitive destruction.

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