

At the centre of speed (1996)

The construction of the tunnel under the channel is the symbol of European construction and its territorial development. This development favours communications networks and high-speed exchanges. Those in power decided on just-in-time distribution for the communications logistics. Speed and just-in-time, to the point of saturation, have become the very attributes of the powers-that-be.

The abolition of the natural obstacle has inevitably brought about a banalization of the voyage itself, a cosmopolitan standardisation of the places of transit and even of the destinations, articulated in a language consisting of pictograms and elementary English. Like the „Transsiberian“, the „Simplon Orient Express“, or the „Etoile du Nord“, will Eurostar engender its own prose?

Wolfgang Zurborn was intrigued by this „compression“ of significations of the contemporary world at two moments which are themselves significative. On the one hand, the inauguration, which is conceived as a concerted and decisive moment. With the projection of the images and, if possible, other poetics – for a shuttle, fundamentally, is nothing more than an international subway – and on the other hand, the city of Europe which sees itself in permanence as a panorama of the continent, and which has thus taken on the form of a megamall.

Could a better symbol have been imagined?

Strange reversal. Turner, in 1844, who for the first time, in his painting „Rain, steam and speed“ addressed himself to the train, had a presentiment of the change in perception of the world due to speed. A world of fugitive impressions that would be a revelation for Monet and Pissaro.

On the contrary, Wolfgang Zurborn, working around the central theme of the High Speed Train, spots the flow, just-in-time and, in the end, stripped of meaning, of the moving images in which we live. This ironic halt is eminently political. It is no longer the consumer, nor the amateur of art, who is concerned, but the citizen. He will need silence and time to think.

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Translated by Nina Bogin