

# Alexis Guillier

EXHIBITION TWILIGHT ZONE : THE MOVIE

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**Your work depends on a multitude of images and documents linked to particular events or phenomena or both of them. To start with, can you tell us what prompts you to work on a particular subject ?**

I sometimes find it hard to identify the “origins” as I often operate through the association of ideas, and as these sometimes take place in quick succession, I may lose trace of the starting point. Each project perhaps consists in searching out that origin...

Sometimes there is a root to it all, like a striking or distant memory, or an obsession, like a scene from my childhood, from a film, or a drawing in a comic book. Or then again I might stumble on something, or someone mentions something to me, a simple isolated fact, and, if it's something I find interesting, I will no doubt associate it with similar cases, additional examples, the idea of what preceded or followed it. It's a little like mapping out a territory, until something clicks and I tell myself that this is a project that has to be done.

**What prompted you to pick on the shooting of John Landis's film *The Twilight Zone* ?**

The images of the accident have continued to play in my mind and quickly induced me to look into it. I soon got the impression that what happened that evening was very unusual and that the accident was the outcome of a range of issues; it was like a junction where figures, phenomena, accounts and myths all came together. I read the two books on it written by journalists after the trial, which also stimulated a whole raft of images that were

missing in my mind. First I wanted to find them to tell what seemed to me like an eminently visual story. Then I needed to research the subject myself, with my own intuitions and methods, first at a distance, and then on the spot, which I did during two trips I made to Los Angeles.

**Since you started working on this subject, the project has taken many forms: lectures, films, performances and more. At the centre d'art image/imatge you are presenting the whole of your inquiry as an exhibition for the first time. What does this bring to the project that is new for you?**

It is in fact a decisive step as, since the start, I have envisaged presenting this project in space. More recently, I thought about it in terms of the fragmentation of a film, which corresponds to the “many splattered thing” – the fourth dimension seen by Jack Kirby – in a comic book exhibited in the show. I wanted to visualise space as a synthesis of different realities and times. It is thus also a fragmented cinema, the one that used to be in the building before the art centre took it over, while also the “cinema machine” as submitted to the *Twilight Zone* case. That allows me to work on the intersection of two elements/entities that are essential to me: the use of documentation and the relationship with fiction in the same space.

**Can you tell us something of the layout of the exhibition? How have you planned the organisation of your research, documents, files and objects ?**

Aside from what I have just been talking about, I

wanted each element or part of the exhibition to refer to several realities or contexts. Presented in this way, the documents stand as images, like the walls or boards of documents that can be seen in films or series, but which are also a form of content, a multitude of textual and visual information edited together, that are also a film. The lyre (a moving head projector) is also functional: it reveals the documents and the editing work but, as an object, it also refers to other sources of light that can be seen in the film shown on the large screen and the monitor.

At the end of the segment in John Landis's film "Twilight Zone: The Movie", the character played by Vic Morrow is shut in a wagon on a train that is preparing to pull out. Through the gaps in the boards he tries to call to two friends from the start of the segment, who are in front of the bar door and seem to be gazing around the car park looking for their friend. He sees them but they don't see him, and we have this situation of strangeness in which two realities coexist. That's also what I was interested by in this confrontation of screens and documents, that there's like a mental background that materialises. And that the voices in the film are heard during the reading of the documents and the movements of the lyre. And that the film is really present here as well. The caps also can be thought of as either a by-product or a movie (or exhibition) prop. To end with what we see at the beginning when we enter the space, the few sentences displayed on the wall seem to me to speak of the relationship to a territory, in the spatial and temporal sense, and also to announce the territory of the exhibition.

Afterwards, like concentric circles, there is the relationship between inside and outside, or how the spaces affect one another. By-products are present outside the exhibition space and, on account of the city billboards, there is a constant interaction with fiction.

**Your working method is like that of an investigative journalist or university researcher. What do you share with those disciplines and what sets you apart?**

I'm tempted to add others but those two seem spot on too. I think that every now and then the methods are exactly the same, especially if we consider that, depending on their individual personality, detectives and researchers in the broad sense go more or less with their intuition or are more or less "methodical". During a single day's work, it's possible to go from utter rigorousness to

a chaotic approach, just as I have the impression that many researchers find themselves from time to time submerged by their work. What distinguishes me from them is that I shift from one method or type to another, without the need to be constant. And there is of course the question of the purpose and related issues. Even in the case of the Twilight Zone, the project doesn't have the goal of bringing the inquiry to an end by demonstrating either guilt or an idea, in the same way that I am not writing a thesis, or that, just like the visitor maybe, I come out of my projects with as many questions as when I started, only the content might have changed. In this sense, mystery acts both as a source and a destination.

**The dramatic case of the shooting of Twilight Zone could prompt us to take a moral or ethical stand. Does your choice of "polemical" or "ambiguous" subjects represent a wish to expose something?**

No. What interests me primarily is what I consider to be their lack of clarity. In the case of Twilight Zone, some people see it as a simple case, that it is either simply a question of an "industrial accident" or the responsibility of the director, John Landis. What is really interesting for me is that the real complexity of this case has sparked a flood of stories and myths that inevitably echo the original subject, a film that was to be a tribute to a cult series through the exploration of the concept of the "twilight zone". Because of the accident, the film underwent a "shift", it turned into a saga with the attention devoted to the affair, then a trial, or an exhibition. The TV helicopter replaces the film helicopter, the director is charged on the day the film is released, the names in the credits are those of the "actors" in the trial, who were duty-bound to "fictionalise" their accounts. On each occasion, the shift meant that the operating procedures were "cut up" or deconstructed, those of the culture industries, the media and the justice system, and the mythology linked with them, while participating actively.

But the exploration of the related or following developments, even in the comic scenes and zombie dances, is permanently indissociable from the horror of the accident, and it is that that is so dizzying, like rollercoasters themselves. Director Ivan Reitman (of *Ghostbusters* fame, featuring Dan Aykroyd), who didn't really want to say anything, once said on a TV program that «those children shouldn't've been there», in reference to the illegality of their presence. This issue, which was a matter of civil justice, could not fully be treated

in criminal justice. But that sentence, those few words summarise the horror of the accident, and also evince a material reality, the machine that smashed down on their bodies. Leaving aside the order or natural human reflex, the 150 or 200 people who ran off as quickly as possible after the accident occurred attest the impossibility of this material reality being the shooting of a film. Under the pretext of “there’s nothing I can do“, absenting oneself from the scene was a way to escape the violence of this conflicting circumstance. It’s literally the rocket in the climax of the firework display that blows up in your face.

I believe that all of my projects have something in common: each speaks about our history and its violence. In each case I always see an emblematic moment, a collision where, under the guise of being “anecdotal“ or “unusual“, a lot is going on.

**Interview by Cécile Archambeaud,  
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