



[FIG. 01] COLOUR BARS.

# Ouvrage

## Nathalie Bujold Over Time and Movement

SONIA PELLETIER

This monograph, the result of a long period of study delving into Nathalie Bujold's body of work over the last thirty years, brings together her most emblematic works. The authors whose essays appear here have closely followed her explorations or consider her artistic approach in a spirit of discovery and adventure. Their gaze, both probing and playful, is reflected in their relevant, enthusiastic writings about Bujold's multidisciplinary and multimedia practice, now focused particularly on video production. The questions they raise cut across disciplines, prompting us to re-examine certain specific aspects of the foundations of her oeuvre. In turn, Dominique Sirois-Rouleau, Nathalie Bachand, Sylvain Campeau, and Édouard Monnet write about works with content related to the concepts of the object, the motif, the image, time, and movement intrinsic to the making of Bujold's "books." Taking us through time and including the artist's incorporation of new technological tools, this nonlinear, often light-hearted overview encourages us to browse and constantly piques our curiosity about the forms of a vision constantly renewed by movement and the fragmentation of the object.

In her introduction, Dominique Sirois-Rouleau comments on several videos produced and distributed by the artist-run centre Vidéographe in Montréal. First, she discusses the multichannel installation HIT (2009–20). This important series of nine videos features movements by the drummer Michel Langevin of the group Voïvod. Decomposing gestures and drumbeats into fragments while maintaining a harmonious whole through animation processes, this series reveals, in Sirois-Rouleau's view, the meticulous deconstructing and reconstructing that characterizes Bujold's video practice. She also underlines how the narrative structure is shaped by a through-line that cuts reality into motifs and constructs a new, fanciful one. Addressing the "warp thread" procedure, she highlights how Bujold's skilful manipulation transforms subject into object by exposing video as



[ FIG. 12 ] ÉTUDES VIDÉOGRAPHIQUES POUR INSTRUMENTS À CORDES, 2015.

both material and concept. Finally, she suggests works from other series that readers may discover and refers to the influence of historical avant-gardes, the democratization of the video medium, and Bujold's transition to using digital technology.

In her essay, Nathalie Bachand discusses how movement acts as a transformative agent in many of Bujold's video works, unlinking and fragmenting the visual to create a continuous, fluid flow. This alteration of digital material redirects our attention toward the pixel and the flux, two digitization states that allow for immersion in the image as we traverse and explore it. Bachand rightly observes that "motif" refers to the principles of recurrence and form, which Bujold deploys in complex rhythmic compositions inspired by her musical training. In her videos, Bachand notes, Bujold initially deepened temporality by reducing the material weight of her sculptures to concentrate on the potential of figurative motion. Some of her earlier works, such as *Études vidéographiques pour instruments à cordes* (2015), demonstrate an economy of means and a desire to exploit variation starting from repetition of a motif.

Bachand also observes that Bujold exploits the interplay between movement and stillness by multiplying sequences to create motifs in an accelerated space-time loop. It is a question of speed. In the series *Les fleurs du tapis* (2018) and *Manège* (2018), she explores this relationship by defying stable perception and revealing hidden patterns through video compositions. Bachand asserts that sound plays an essential role here, as it participates in the processes of subdivision and superimposition of the image.

Finally, noting that "nothing exists outside of time," Bachand writes that *Les Nocturnes* (2018–21) flows in continuity with preceding works, as Bujold recomposes nocturnal sequences into visual and space-time motifs. Bachand sees this as a fusion of microcosm and macrocosm that refers simultaneously to an expanding universe and a miniature textile world. In her view, Bujold is showing that video is not space but time: "The movement of this interweaving [of images] is time that slips, like liquid, over the objects of the world ... filtering the motifs that figure our lives."

Sylvain Campeau observes that Bujold stands out for the variety of media that she uses, even though video has been predominant in recent years. He highlights this evolution through her early group of works called *Postures*, composed of traditional woollen socks arranged to evoke anthropomorphic and allomorphic positions. The previous exhibition, *Fait main* (2018), showed similar socks rolled and under glass, forming suggestive poses and, in another iteration, offering a serial dimension through detailed photographs. Then, a 2018 video titled *Promenade dans la bourgade plastique* presented interlaced cut-out rings against a background of photographs of roses, creating dynamic movement through chromatic

interplays. Other video series, such as *Mires*, show Bujold's evolution and the diversification of her art practice, which has involved such varied media as embroidery, sculpture, photography, and video.

In terms of content, Campeau notes that these works also reveal a marked interest in the vernacular and in popular art, as Bujold explores elementary geometric forms, recurrent motifs, and primary colours. Her use of weaving, embroidery, and sewing thus serve to make connections among diverse objects and cultural elements, demonstrating a constancy in her creative approach beyond support and medium. In hindsight, video becomes an essential tool for isolating unique fragments of space-time, with pieces such as *HIT* highlighting the rhythm between sound and image.

The diversity of media used by Bujold is manifested in recent exhibitions and offers, in Campeau's view, a retrospective vision of her work. He shows, also, that her preference for *tékhnê* (manual arts, dexterity) remains perceptible in all media, whereas the mechanics specific to each support bring each work a distinctive colour. In short, Campeau concludes, Bujold engages in creation by exploring connections, shapes, and motifs among a variety of media while demonstrating a conceptual coherence beyond the range of her supports.

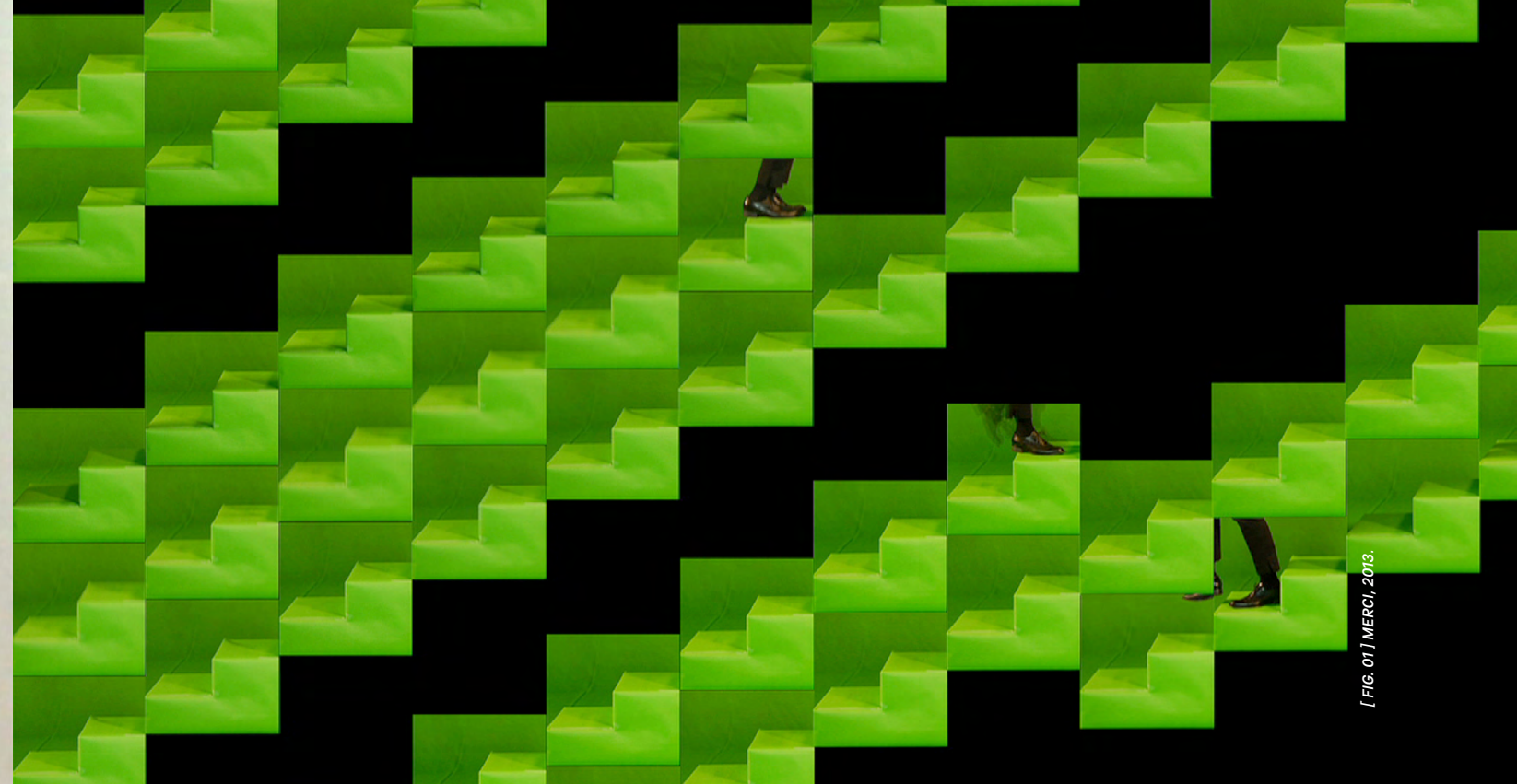
Finally, Édouard Monnet has written an enlightening essay in which he proposes that the expression "the practical mind" (found on Bujold's website) summarizes Bujold's approach and is the common denominator in all her productions. She creates with the resources she has within reach, and she tinkers and diverts rather than innovating. He shows that her work falls within the heritage of contemporary art (objectality, in situ, conceptualism, and so on) even as she seeks to free herself from it. In Monnet's view, Bujold finds ways to create despite the constraints of this artistic heritage. In this sense, she uses evocation as motivation rather than as a final result.

Bujold's work provides the spectator with real, virtual, and memory-related dimensions all at once. Her process is related to bricolage: she reuses, recycles, and rearranges pre-existing materials and forms (embroideries, woven pieces, prints, recovered objects) in an empirical and itinerant approach. She draws on a "trove" of patiently gathered elements to engage in a dialogue with her material composed of permutations and substitutions.

Monnet also notes that Bujold summons and diverts classic pictorial genres (portrait, landscape, still life) as well as geometric abstraction. For example, works such as *Variation bûcheron* (1998) cite, glancingly, modern styles such as hard-edge. Her bricolage also calls upon an aspect of self-quotation and discreet autobiography through references to her domestic daily life



[ FIG. 09 ] ALL THE GOOD THINGS, 2008.



[ FIG. 01 ] MERCI, 2013.

(home appliances, plants, food) and those around her (family, friends, locals) – as can be seen in her videos *Emporium* (1999), *Jeu vidéo* (2008), and *Ruchée* (2016).

As Bujold is thus confronted with the paradox of being at once constrained by the artistic heritage and impelled to free herself from it, Monnet makes a judicious referential aside by reminding us that her creative tinkering allows her to reconcile these contradictory injunctions invoked by Gregory Bateson's theory of the "double bind." Her work as a whole thus expresses a poetics of bricolage – in which, without ever completing an ideal project, "the bricoleur always puts something of himself into it," as Claude Lévi-Strauss writes. This is what endows Bujold's works with the autobiographical dimensions beyond their play on citations and diversions.

Following these short summaries of the authors' analyses, which should be read without delay for the insight and detail that they bring to the body of images gathered in this book, I can't conclude without thanking the authors and the artist Nathalie Bujold warmly for their contributions. More personally, I would like to underline Nathalie's collaboration and generosity in producing this book, as well as her tireless engagement in every step of the work. For me, these values proved to be my driving motivation to undertake this wonderful adventure, which, we hope, will continue for a long time to come.

## The Warps and Wefts of HIT

DOMINIQUE SIROIS-ROULEAU

*HIT* (2009-2020) is a nine-video multi-channel installation in which Nathalie Bujold composes and decomposes the movements and music of Michel Langevin, the drummer for the band Voïvod. Gestures and sounds, segmented into a canvas of kaleidoscopes, are also, paradoxically, perfectly commingled in the animation – images fragmented and reconstructed in reaction to the drumbeat variations. The geometric undulations and the mutation of reality into a digital dance track offer an illustration of Bujold's detailed processing procedure: original captures are quilted into an abstract composition that develops its own soundtrack.

How the pieces in this series, gathered under the cleverly titled *Le meilleur de HIT* [The Best of HIT] (2009-20), were assembled exemplifies Bujold's approach to her practice. Aside from audio tempo and animation, her video works stand out for their meticulous play on deconstruction and reconstruction. Her surgically precise editing is based not only on obvious attention to detail but also on an unusual narrative intuition, which emerges from a short look back at her career.

### The Weft Thread

Bujold imbues her videos with a narrative weft. Cutting reality – or, at least, its evidence – into motifs, she then rearranges them in a new and fanciful narrative structure that subverts normalcy, diverts the habitual, and magnifies the ordinary into a sort of flirtation with nonconformity. The video work *Emporium* (1999) offers an eloquent example: Bujold performs a sequence of vignettes involving different parts of her body. Her inventive mapping of corporeal behaviours offers a playful perspective on daily activities. Even as she highlights the artfulness of her subjects by centring our attention on them, she reveals their absurdity. The obvious humour of *Emporium* resides in the gap among degrees of appreciation, as well as in the ridiculousness behind portrayals of the self in unproductive action. The succession of short sketches evokes the work of Christian Boltanski who, in 1974, created a fictional history of "petit Christian" in pastels on photographs. Boltanski's *Saynètes comiques* and Bujold's *Emporium* share an ironic gaze at the presumed grandiloquence of the artist's life, as the legend of self-representation is undercut by a deliberately ordinary *mise en scène*. The recurrent format of the scenes



[ FIG. 05 ] ONELIE DE L'ONELIE, 2000. V



[ FIG. 06 ] TEXTILE DE CORDES, 2013. V

amplifies the narrative ambivalence; spectators eagerly await the beginning of each vignette, for the pure pleasure of its meaninglessness.

This floating, detached quality of expression is notable also in *Onelie de l'Onelie* (2000). Against a background of feminine affects, Bujold presents a self-reflective work featuring her formal chromatic and rhythmic explorations of the video medium. The off-the-wall narrative inspired by historical art-video currents bends to the structured chaos of an almost metronomic edit and a staging inspired by the colour bars on old CRT screens. The tight knitting together of images, gestures, and video demonstrates a holistic mastery of the image in movement – its history, its materiality, and its technical and cultural properties.

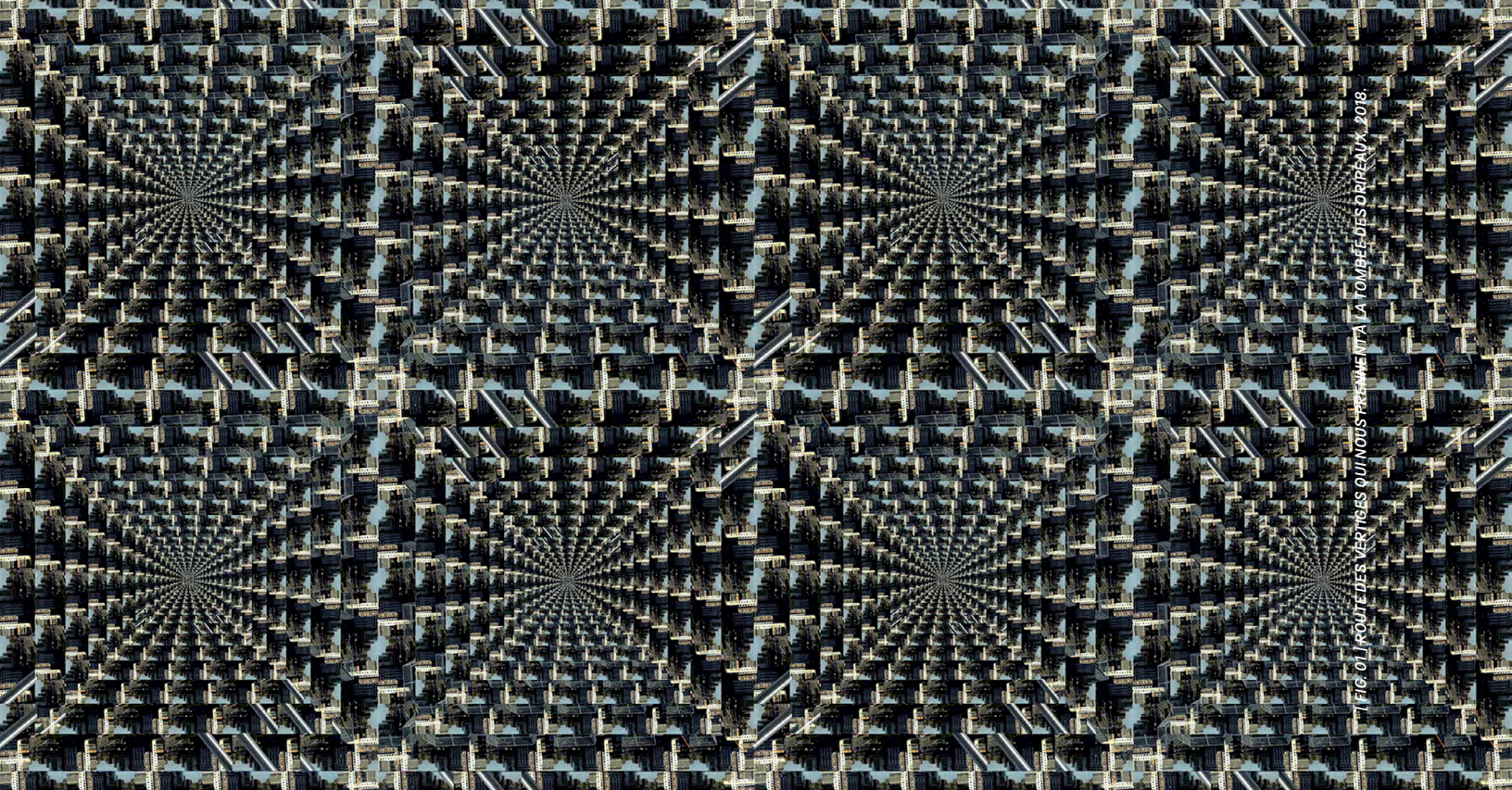
### The Warp Thread

The warp thread runs the entire length of a piece of fabric; here, it defines how Bujold's style unfolds. Images are cut up and dismantled, accelerated and slowed; Bujold manipulates video like others sculpt matter. Works such as *La Montagne Ste-Victoire* (2005) and *Comptes à rebours* (2002) demonstrate her careful treatment of time, space, and their substance in a way that affirms the video as object. The subject of the image becomes the object of her work. In fact, the mutability of subjects, through her editing and construction, reveals the alterity of the document. Even the crudest and most direct video capture loses evidentiary value in favour of visual matter.

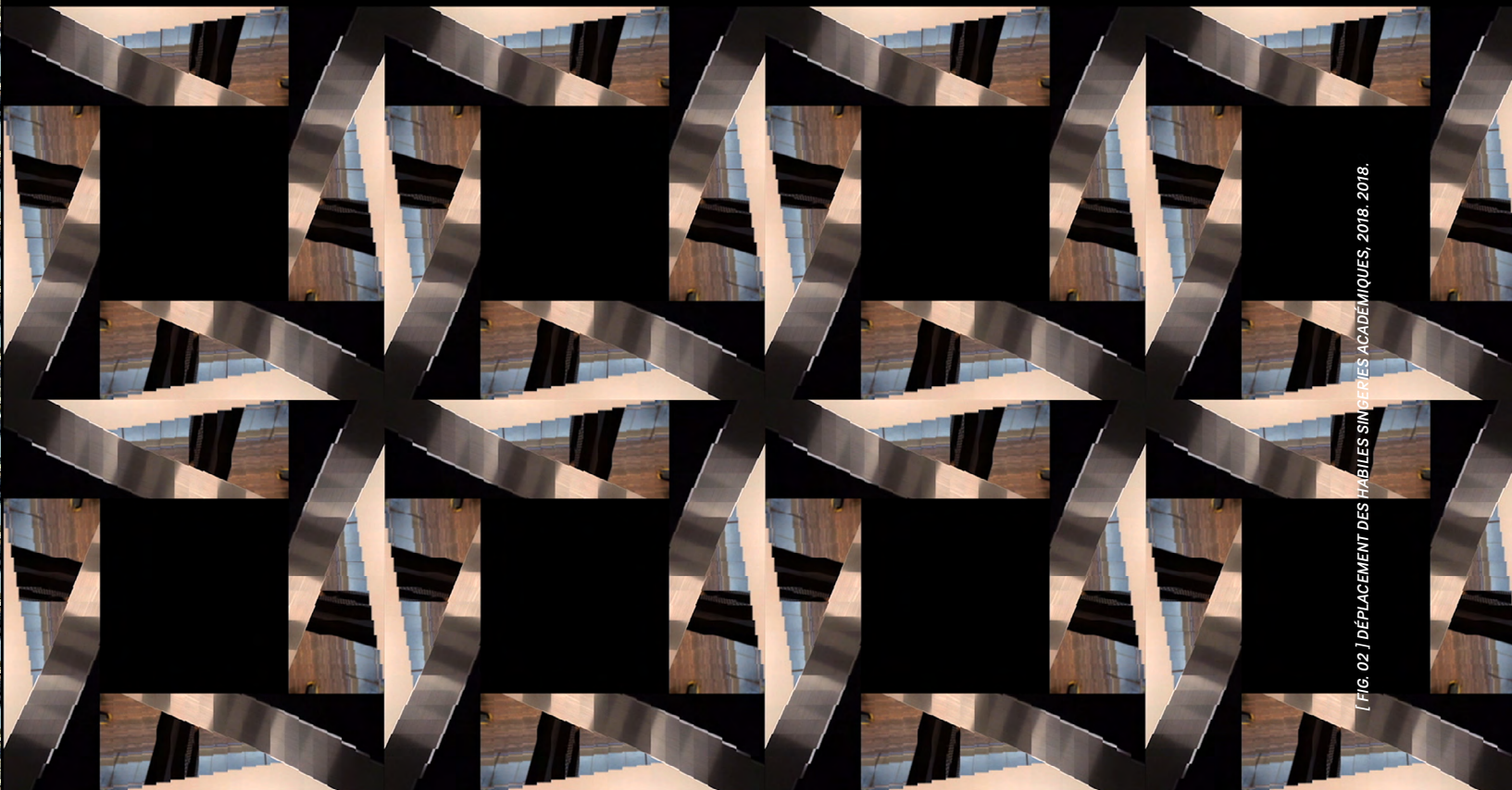
Bujold exposes video not only as a material but as a concept. Indeed, her capture, manipulation, and editing processes are inspired by art history and the image in movement. Her radical exploration and rebellious aesthetic evoke the eclectic and quirky spirit of historical avant-gardes, without sacrificing the accessibility of her work; playful, even light-hearted works such as *Bonjour* (2003) are reminiscent of early art videos centred on play and the desire for democratization of a quickly spreading medium. Finally, the gradual integration of digital technology into Bujold's practice triggered her baroque treatment of the image in an original interpretation of the *Plasticiens'* graphic and systematic style. The geometric refinement of *Textile de cordes* (2013) and *Merci* (2013) foreshadows her later *Hits* while formally conveying the narrative format in sketches. Like puzzle pieces, these works, with their compartmentalized, multiplied images, become segments and pixels of the broader composition of Bujold's signature.

### The Fabric

Our retrospective exercise involves a shift of perspectives and proportions inspired by *All the Good Things* (2008), in which we follow the adventures of ants on a plate of fruit. This busy group's detailed examination of the produce and the occasional shots of an idle insect reclining in some crumbs, lazily waving an antenna, summarize the subtlety of Bujold's body of work, in which the simplicity is herculean. Nothing – or very little – ever happens. We merely have to watch *Permanent Smile* (2008) to grasp how much seeing is an art to which nothing can be compared except knowing how to look and letting oneself be surprised.



[ FIG. 01 ] ROUTE DES VERTICES OÙ NOUS PÉNALENT LA TOMBE DES DÉSORDRES, 2018.



[ FIG. 02 ] DÉPLACEMENT DES HABILES SINGULIÈRES ACADÉMIQUES, 2018.

## Figuring the Motif, Undoing the Figuration, Reconfiguring Time

NATHALIE BACHAND

*X is the unknown. The laws  
of dynamics are  
indifferent to the direction  
of time.*

*Emmanuel Hocquard, L'invention du verre<sup>1</sup>*

The movement that Nathalie Bujold breathes into her video works acts like water –infiltrating everything and wiping away edges. Unfettered and fragmented, the deconstructed image loses its initial reference and becomes a flowing river, a fluid interweaving. With this alteration of the digital matter, of “the very material of images ... the electronic material becomes semiotic substance,”<sup>2</sup> as the art historian René Payant wrote presciently in a 1986 essay about pre-digital video. And so, our attention is redirected toward the pixel as common denominator, and to flow as vector of movement. Starting from these two digital “states” – pixel and flow – it is possible to enter, traverse, and “surf” on the image. Whether digital or pre-digital, the video image bears within itself a multitude of temporalities ingrained in its very materiality. For more than fifteen years, Bujold has produced bodies of work through which she configures and reconfigures these possible timeframes.

<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Hocquard, *L'invention du verre* (Paris: P.O.L., 2003), 57 (our translation).

<sup>2</sup> René Payant, “La frénésie de l'image,” in *VEDUTE – Pièces détachées sur l'art, 1976-1987*, preface by Louis Marin (Laval: Éditions TROIS, 1987), 571 (our translation).

Initially, her main intention was to reduce the material weight of her practice by abandoning sculptural objects for the potential of the image in movement, but she soon began to transpose into her video explorations some of the themes that she was already working with, including that of the motif. The motif encompasses principles of recurrence and form. It can be infinitely repeated or isolated at the core of its own multiplication. In her video *Les trains où vont les choses* (2006), she multiplied the video image in an on-screen grid for the first time; this allowed her to introduce a rhythmic gap, both aural and visual. She then added complexity with multi-screen multi-channel works in which certain elements of the image in movement became nomadic motifs within a compartmentalized, orchestrated composition.

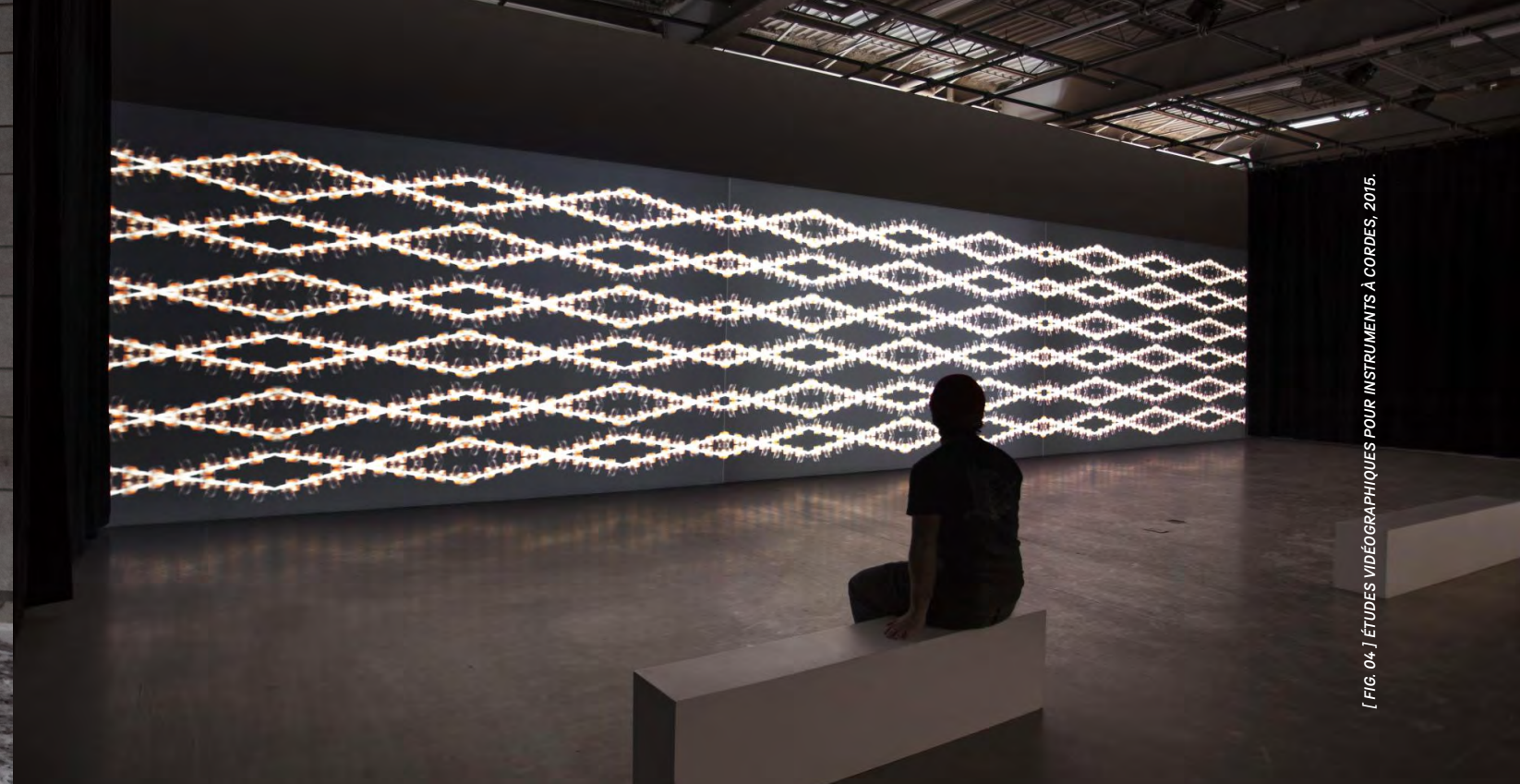
### **Time x movement = redefining the rules of scale and liberating oneself from the moment**

In the video triptych *Études vidéographiques pour instruments à cordes* (2015), Bujold began to work with multiple channels. This strategy for cutting up the image enabled her to create compositions, almost in the musical sense of the term. In fact, her musical training greatly influences how she works with video, a skill at which she is self-taught. Here, she expressed her desire to explore the potential of variation through repetition of a motif. The bodies of work that followed were marked by a certain economy of means in her production. The principle of making much with little can be likened to do-it-yourself and recycling, even patching. A reference to textiles is present in *Études vidéographiques pour instruments à cordes*: the isolation of one element amid the grouping and its multiplied recomposition evoke quilting patterns. In such reconfigurations from a single visual element, the meaning of the first image is subsumed in a new proposal that can redefine the initial narrative thread. In this sense, we brush up against fractal logic and, in a way, approach the notion of the infinite. When a modulation, whether visual or audio, encounters no limitations to its expansion, does it not cross the space-time frontier? Freed from its original purposes, it no longer belongs to the same perceptual schema or the same rule of scale: the modulation in question transcends the measurable states with which we are familiar.

The *Métrosopies* series, ongoing since 2021, is presented as a collection of space-time crossings. It consists of sequences that take us, in real time, from station to station in the Montréal metro. These sequences, however, subvert the usual course of time and distort our idea of travelling from point A to point B. Here, Bujold creates a particular point of view: we come, it seems, as close as possible to the ultimate unit of the moving image: the pixel. Then, with the deceleration into each station, the image sometimes dwells on reality for a moment, releasing from the digital web a few seconds of daily life. Alternating between an abstract plastic position and an almost-documentary witnessing of reality, this video series draws in its wake a reflection on our perceptual mechanisms, which colour our comprehension of the world: our capacity to recognize and identify our environment



[ FIG. 08 ] BALADE DU REFUS DE TOUTE INTENTION, 2018.



[ FIG. 04 ] ÉTUDES VIDÉOGRAPHIQUES POUR INSTRUMENTS À CORDES, 2015.

is the subject of a relatively specific framing. Similarly, memory evolves under the aegis of its own internal rules: it is altered by the duration and distancing of the moment; the image blurs in places while retaining certain contours, fragments of clarity, and zooms forward toward memory's centre. *Métroscopies* is presented as a series of observations (scopes) of movement in space and in time made possible by digital capture. In a way, the series offers a redefinition of the notion of "moment," which we tend to associate with a state of immobility, such as the stopped action in a photographic image. Yet, everything is in perpetual motion, even if only at its molecular core.

#### **Movement x velocity = reversing stability and revealing the hidden order**

As counterintuitive as it might seem at first glance, movement and immobility are more interrelated than they are opposed: they exist and coexist in correspondence to each other. A textile can similarly be extended as long as one conserves its initial cohesion by not cutting the fibre that underlies the ensemble. By definition, a weft links and crosses: it's both the basis and the connection; in this sense, it refers as much to immobility as to movement. In the series *Les fleurs du tapis*, made in 2018, Bujold explores the very question of connection in the image in movement. She also dwells on getting tangled up in details (the Québécois expression is *s'enfarger dans les fleurs du tapis*) – the immaterial motifs that metaphorically trip us up. This use of the vernacular, which appears in the titles of many of Bujold's works<sup>3</sup>, refers us back to the hidden meaning of things and the broad reach of a simple formulation. Through the intangibility of language, the "tangled details" are suddenly embodied and materialized. They come alive and emerge from the background: they are details of the image, undulating in a parallel space-time in which the alteration of a given moment takes on a particular consistency, foreign to the known laws of reality. In the video works *Avancée d'un point de fuite éperdue* (2018) and *Transport du débordement de nos inquiétudes* (2018), as well as the sub-series *Balade du refus de toute intention* (2018) – to name just a few examples – this relationship between immobility and movement takes the form of a temporal deployment; as Bujold says, "you unfold time." Bridges, ships, and other features at the water's edge become open, living, wavering entities that overturn our perceptual stability.

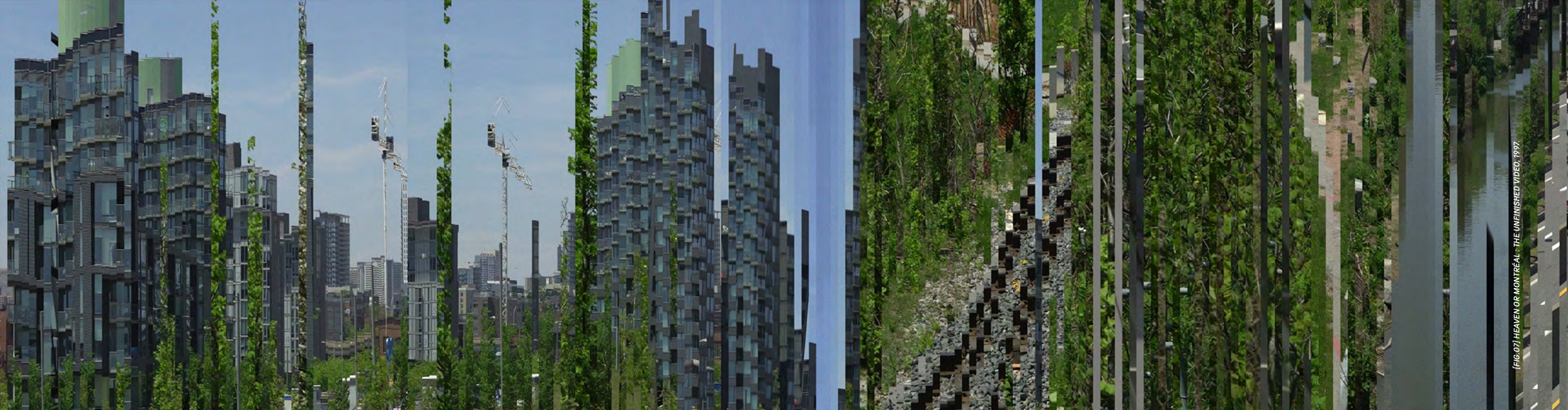
<sup>3</sup> In the case of the series *Les fleurs du tapis*, these titles come from words that evoke the idea of displacement, associated with other words drawn from the *Refus global manifesto* (1948). "The titles foreground the revolutionary and poetic nature of the manifesto and propose taking the perspective of a single moment, a single glance at a general overview," Bujold notes (our translation).

Other sub-series, "concealed" within *Les fleurs du tapis* – for example, *Descente de la poursuite dans la joie* (2018) and *Aller-retour dans l'inconnu qui attend à pied d'œuvre* (2018) – offer a point of view that is closer to the matrix. Here, we enter into the details – or, rather, the landscape, both natural and urban. The image is segmented to suggest an almost atomic perspective of its visual content, a point of view that immerses us in the asperities of the pixel – evoking, in passing, the disordered, chaotic intrusion of the glitch. But there is a hidden order to these works, an internal logic that flows from the background weft over which the image glides. It reveals an entire series of formal proposals that quickly bring us back to quilting, to textiles, but also to composition and orchestration, even choreography. Indeed, the interwoven, duplicated, inverted, and multiplied motifs are dancing. The velocity and luminosity of the video sequences, assembled in a grid with variable subdivisions, generate a rhythmic, kaleidoscopic geometry. Occasionally, parallaxes redefine the grouping, drawing new lines that reunify the image. *Déplacement des habiles singeries académiques* (2018) and *Route des vertiges qui nous prennent à la tombée des oripeaux* (2018) are just two examples of the many videos produced for this portion of the *Les fleurs du tapis* corpus. Rather than stretch out the linearity of a shift and altering its duration – or, at least, its perception – these videos condense its visual potential in an accelerated and recursive space-time loop. These are works in the Op Art tradition – except that here the eye remains passive, because it is the image in motion that generates the visual effect. *Les fleurs du tapis* is also available in multi-channel mode in the series *Manège* (à trois, quatre ou cinq), begun in 2018 and ongoing.

#### **Time x movement x velocity = the anchoring of sound and its cohesive capacity**

Sound plays a prominent role in most of Bujold's video series: the strategy of subdividing the image also transforms the audio dimension. As mentioned above, Bujold's musical training – specifically, in piano – has a sizable influence on her visual work. When she recomposes the image into temporal slices, the sound linked to the initial sequence follows the same rhythmic cutting. In "Introduction to Themes & Variations," John Cage wrote, "Nonintention (the acceptance of silence) leading to nature; renunciation of control; let sounds be sounds."<sup>4</sup> Of the many aphorisms contained in Cage's foundational essay, published in 1982, this one speaks about a certain conception of sound and how it inhabits and contributes to the world. Whatever happens, whatever movement or gesture one makes, its own audio reality accompanies it. In Bujold's video works, we note the double non-intentional presence of sound: on the one hand is the ambient sound of the recording; on the other hand is the audio arising from

<sup>4</sup> John Cage, "Introduction to Themes & Variations," in *Audio Culture – Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York and London: Continuum, 2009), 221.



the sequential editing, a gridded cutting that, by default, generates a state of visual and audio variation. The sound thus becomes a material relative to the space, worked by time. The result is a totally cohesive cohabitation between image and sound in which the reality of one is anchored in the wake of the other.

#### Microcosm x macrocosm = nothing exists outside of time

In one of his essays in VEDUTE, René Payant wrote, "Video is time: the present that passes – that is, the default image – and at the same time the past that persists by returning – that is, excess images. In other words, the present is constructed at the same time as the past. The video image apparently lets us experience this space (of division) where we see time. Where we see it, because it is there that time is."<sup>5</sup> Bujold's body of work titled *Nocturnes* (2018–21) is in continuity with those discussed above, in that an initial sequence constitutes the unit from which a brand-new proposal is composed that is not only visual but also spatial and temporal. In the video *Vol de nuit* (2018),<sup>6</sup> for example, the sequence of a night-time landing at the Toronto airport is finely cut, reframed, then multiplied and rearranged in a motif whose repetition recalls quilting of fabric, or even embroidery of the thread that traverses it. As much as it evokes familiar textiles, the work opens to the image of an expanding universe. It is as if we had before us simultaneously a microcosm and a macrocosm merged into one and the same thing, whose visible movement seems oriented both inward and outward, compressing and liberating the image at once. *Vol de nuit* is a "temporal panorama," as Bujold says – an accommodation between past, present, and future evoking the fabric of time itself.

Each work in *Nocturnes* is composed of luminous sequences shot at night, processed in a variety of ways. Whereas *Vol de nuit* presents an obvious relationship with *Études vidéographiques pour instruments à cordes* in that it "fractalizes" the content of the initial sequence, *Ronde de nuit* (2018) takes up the modus operandi of *Métroscopies*, with accelerations and decelerations, activating a diffraction effect. In both cases, the suggestion of a space-time shift is reinforced by the presence of a glow whose sources are sometimes difficult to identify. In this sense, the *Nocturnes* corpus resonates with the iconic "Stargate Sequence" in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), which illustrates a passage through space-time – the power held by the speed of light. Being alive necessarily involves time; what can we see when we move into and, speculatively, cross it?

<sup>5</sup> Payant, "La frénésie de l'image," 577 (our translation).

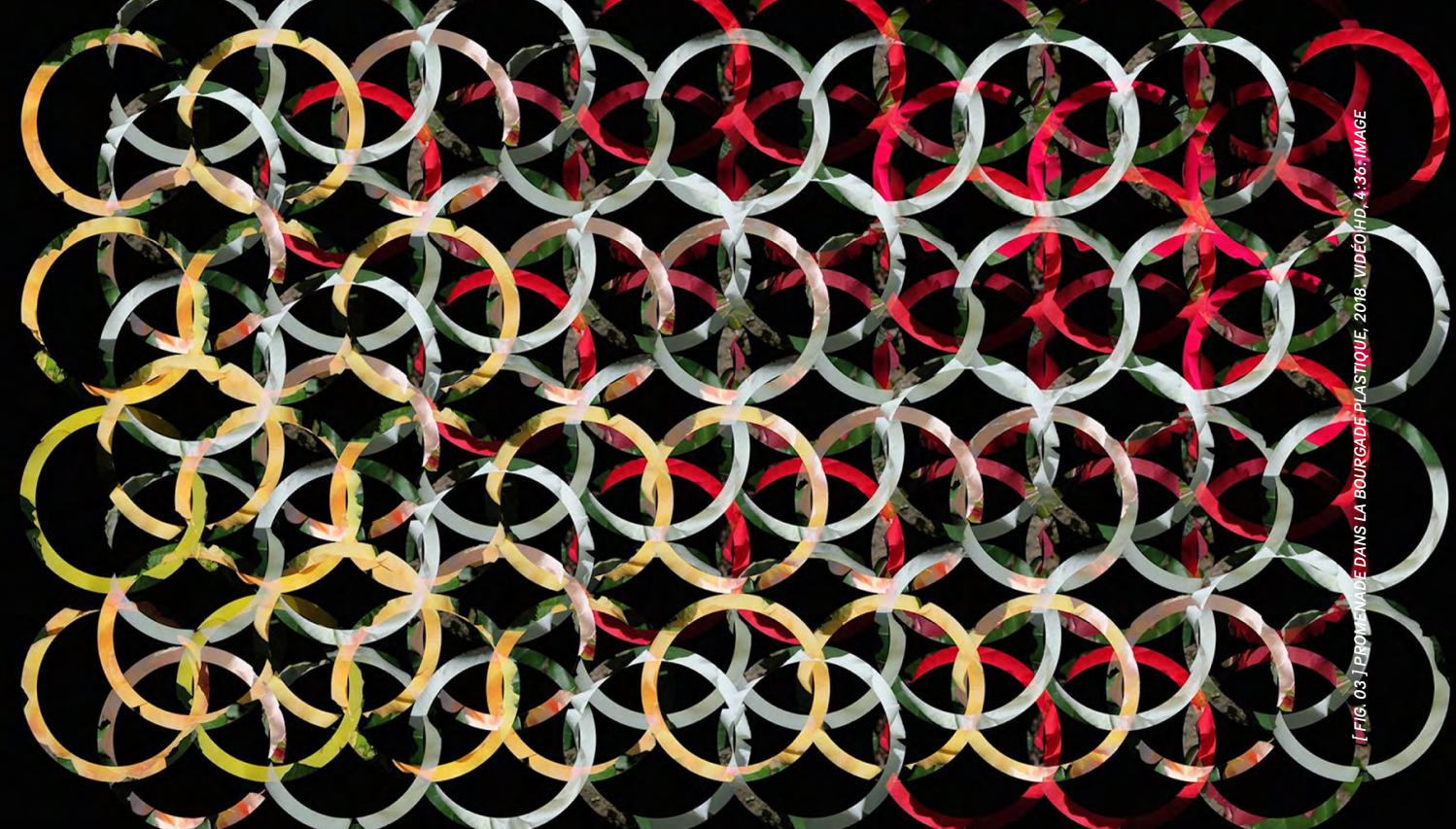
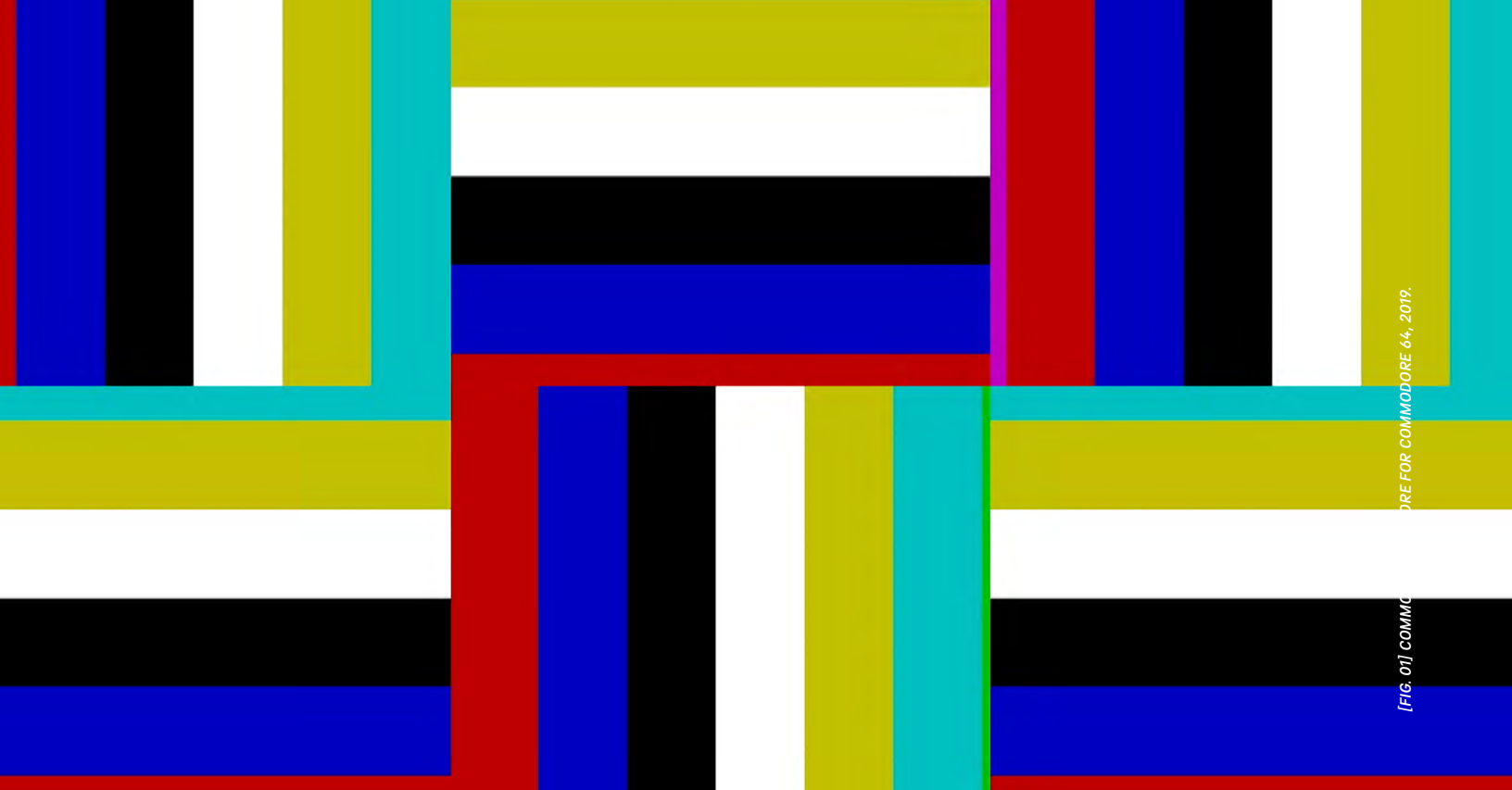
<sup>6</sup> This work was acquired by the MNBAQ for its collection in 2018.

#### Seeing time =

"Video is not space but time,"<sup>7</sup> said Nam June Paik. Time, doubled with a perspective, a gaze. A video, of whatever kind, tells us, "This is what I see." Bujold's works tell us, "I see time. I make and unmake it, figure and reconfigure it." Time, though, proves to be elusive. Because it occupies a particular spectrum of visibility, we don't perceive it fully, through the veil of duration, until afterward. It passes and, like water, it traverses, infiltrates, and alters. "The laws of dynamics are indifferent to the direction of time," wrote Emmanuel Hocquard in *L'invention du verre*. In other words, time's dynamic and direction evolve in parallel without necessarily contradicting each other. Similarly, Bujold's fluidly interweaving images surf on the background weft, which is solidly inscribed in the duration of the video capture – that of the transition between two metro stations; of the momentary contemplation of a bridge; of the perspective offered by a plane landing; of crossing a boulevard at a corner, at night, in the rain. The movement of this interweaving is time that slips, like liquid, over the objects of the world, moving and unmoving all at once – filtering the motifs that figure our lives.

An independent curator and director of digital arts development for Sporobole, Nathalie Bachand is interested in issues around digitization and how it emerges in contemporary art. Her exhibitions have been presented in Québec and in Paris, Lyon, Geneva, and Budapest. Her most recent autonomous project, *Nouveaux environnements: approcher l'intouchable*, featuring six virtual reality works, was produced by Moliar and exhibited at Livart, in Montréal, in March 2023. She regularly writes about the visual and media/digital arts.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Payant, "La frénésie de l'image," 573 (our translation).



## Strolls in the Plastic Village: There's Tékhnhê in Everything

SYLVAIN CAMPEAU

Nathalie Bujold's work is characterized by the host of media that she tends to use to construct her pieces. It seems that she doesn't favour any particular medium, although in recent years video has been an important aspect of her production. So, it may be interesting to describe a few of her works.

Postures is a first intriguing grouping. The basic material for these works is woollen socks – those traditionally worn by lumberjacks and *coureurs des bois* that recently re-emerged as a fashion statement. In the exhibition *Fait main* (2018), curated by Bernard Lamarche at the MNBAQ, Bujold presented, in a glass showcase, such socks rolled and recomposed to evoke body positions and familiar domestic objects. The grouping exudes a whiff of anthropomorphism and allomorphism. In the showcase, they're bunched together and difficult to distinguish from each other. However, photographs make it possible to see them in detail and repertory them as a sort of organized series. These pieces made from practical pieces of clothing are offered both in their material uniqueness – as forms in themselves – and arranged in a configuration as pictures in a grid.

*Promenade dans la bourgade plastique*, a video made in 2018, is also revealing in many ways. Based on photographs of roses taken at the Botanical Garden, rings in repeated rows appear in a continuous interlacing. On a perfectly arithmetical level, there are four rows of nine rings, for a total of thirty-six, and five rows of eight rings, for a total of forty. Therefore, there are a total of seventy-six states of a primary geometrical figure that become animated as the rings are infused with different colours. Movement is created simply by the effects of the diverse luminosities that run through them in waves. This single form, repeated, gains meaning through its colorations.

Reading the description of these two works, it's hard to believe that they were created by the same artist. This might seem like a superficial exercise, but it points out the diversity of forms that Bujold's art encompasses. Sometimes, in a single exhibition, she deploys a veritable armada of practices and media. For instance, in *Ménage/Montage*, presented as a retrospective (almost) exhibition at VidéoChroniques in Marseille, curated by Edouard Monnet, a wide range of these different aspects of Bujold's work were on display. Videos, a showcase of Polaroids in a tight grid, socks and slippers stuffed and sewn together, minimalist sculptures in coloured geometric forms, jacquard-woven photographic images – it was all there. The show culminated in a series of exchanges among media with a work from the corpus *Pixels et petits points* (2004), *Mire de couleurs*: an embroidery of an off-air television set, showing the colour bars in the test pattern, cut off at the bottom of the screen. Here, more than elsewhere, we can see the interweaving, borrowing, and carrying over of practices – exchanges of materiality, as Monnet wrote – the intermedial criss-crossing of forms, motifs, materials.

Versions of the colour bar recur, including in an installation that deconstructs the colours by showing the balls of coloured wool with which the weft is produced. The titles of the video variants always begin with *Mire* (which means test pattern). The colour bar shows up for the first time, being knitted, in the video *Onelie de l'Oneli* (2000). Around 2019 came *Mires et effets*, *Mires et carreaux*, and *Mires et autres effets*. These reference points convey the idea of an intention, an objective to attain – a standard by which to judge the quality and exactness of colours – modulated into different media. So, it seems that the goal may be reached in various ways, that we can turn to many dissimilar states and maintain coherence in the progression. The test pattern, it should be noted, is also closely linked to the video medium – that of the video signal, today mutated into an electronic binary codification of data. We will return to video below, as its use also informs of us of what is at play here.

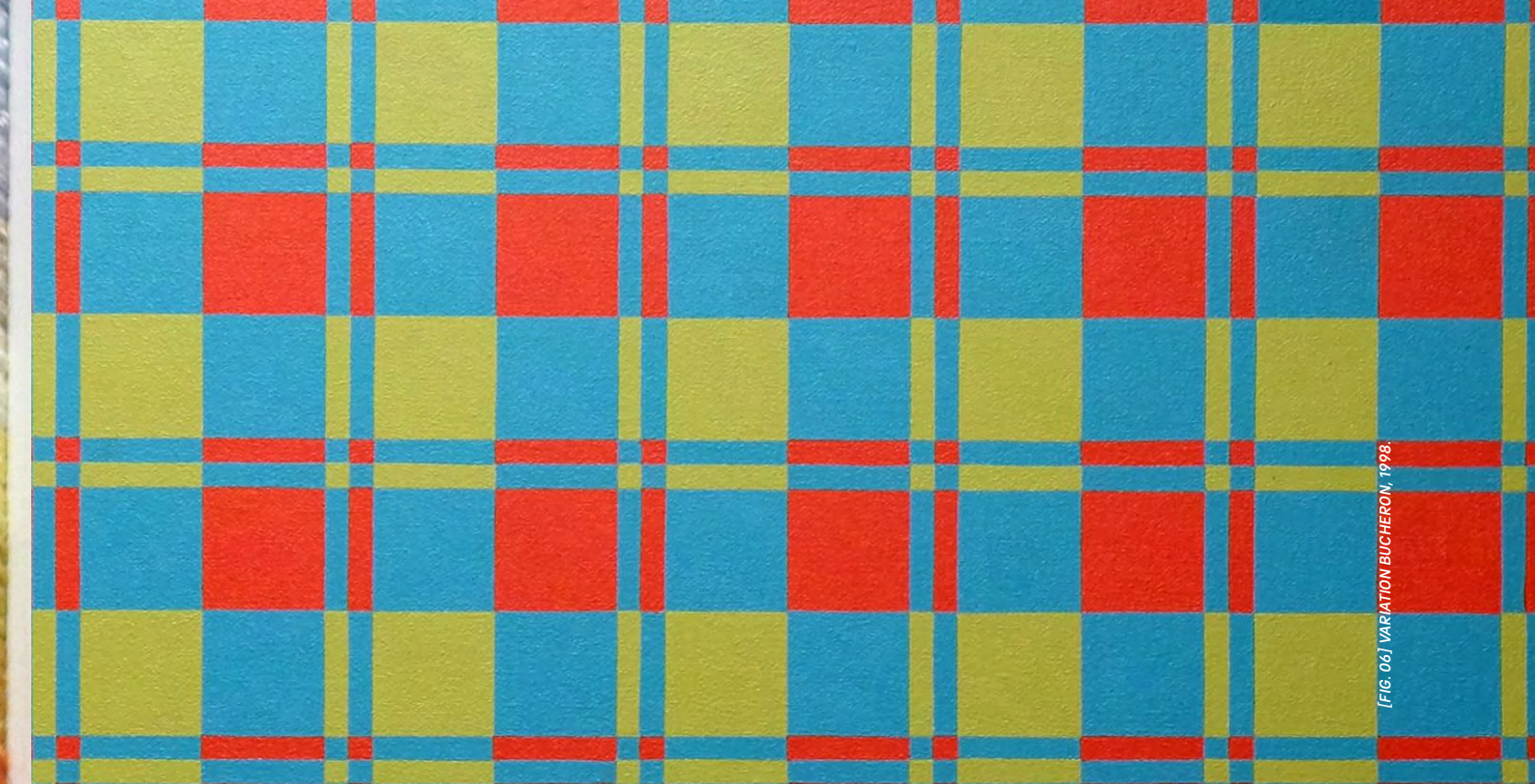
In the meantime, I'll add to the list of works contributing to our effort at interpretation another piece, *Pixels et petits points*, an embroidery measuring 10 cm by 11 cm, representing an additive synthesis of colours. Unlike the previous *Mires*, this object is an educational aid that follows colour-composition logic<sup>1</sup>. Transcending video, the colour bar proves to be a constant.

<sup>1</sup> For painting, though, this synthesis is subtractive instead. But it's a synthesis all the same!





[FIG. 04] NUANCIER, 2004.



[FIG. 06] VARIATION BUCHERON, 1998.

Something vaguely analogous is found in *Variation bûcheron* (1998): on a shelf are frames, eminently material, over which are stretched the familiar checked patterns of work shirts, a canonical dress code dubbed "mackinaw" by the author Jacques Ferron. These acrylic canvases – which may be perceived as fabric – are a selection of about thirty out of total of the eighty-eight painted by Bujold; but no matter, the word *Variation* remains singular; because it's a single reality, no doubt. There is an obvious relationship with women's work: hand weaving, making clothing, quilting utilitarian fabrics, patching made necessary by a concern with saving money by the almost-needy, recycling of trimmings and vestiges. But it is also a reference to Malevich's white square, the primary shapes of the Québec Automatistes, and the visual considerations of the Constructivists and others besotted with basic geometric shapes. This doesn't have to do with an effort to raise a "trivial" artisanal practice to the more "serious" and austere objectives of the art world; nor, on the contrary, to trivialize that world by reducing it to the simple utilitarian gestures of making things. Rather, it's to show that beyond the object as conceived, a constant exists in the fact of creating: that these forms do not fall within these categories but overflow them. That the impulse to create takes up the same issues and leads to the same formal efforts.

*Variation bûcheron* was part of the project *En wing en hein* (1998–2000), which was exhibited fairly widely. The reference here to Québec pop culture could not be clearer; the title alludes to the gibberish in the refrain of a well-known song by Oscar Thiffault, "Le rapide blanc," whose lyrics mention weaving, embroidery, and hand sewing (as opposed to high style!). If "l'hiver sera long" (the winter will be long), as the song says, the work socks hung on the wall are just as long. Piles of wool sit on the floor. The slippers in *Foyers, doux foyers* are a piecework construction of stuffed knitted fabric pieces; similar knitted pieces are also configured to resemble dwellings such as nests, burrows, and igloos that can be fit into each other. A teapot made of stiffened fabrics is hung on the wall like a painting (*Confidences*). Its materiality results from a technique once used by farm women: it was preserved by being soaked in a mixture of water and sugar and then dried<sup>2</sup>. In a showcase, a cornucopia also evinces destabilizing materiality.

<sup>2</sup> Pieces of socks were sewn onto a teapot, and both were immersed in the sugar-water mixture. Then, after the piece was dried, Bujold broke the teapot and removed the pieces, leaving just the fabric teapot.

So, these years involved weaving, as one would do with connections that might exist among different objects, whether they are associated with a garment or with pop culture. For weaving is an activity that anyone can do, and does, especially for utilitarian reasons, as I've mentioned. That what is woven becomes sculpture even though it was originally a garment is of little importance.

The French word that means "to weave," *tisser*, is derived from the common Indo-European word *tekþ*, which means "working with wood or fabric." Other derivations of the word, in Czech (*tesat*), Latin (*texo*), and other languages, seem to waver consistently between the two materials, but the sense of labour, of working with their warp and weft, does not change. It is also interesting to note that the Greek word is *τέχνη*, or *tékhnê*, which, in French, means manual art, manual skill, trade, industry. And Wikipédia then quotes Herodotus: *τὴν τέχνην ἐπίστασθαι* (Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 3, *Thalia*, 130) which translates as "knowing one's trade." We can close the loop by noting that the French word for loom, "*métier*," also means "trade, professional occupation." So, in effect, we weave on a trade.

First and foremost, for Bujold, it is a question more of the fundamental commitment to creating links and less of the medium that gets us there. Through her interest in the vernacular and popular art, the depth hidden behind her casual focus on the common and the banal,<sup>3</sup> she found material for expression in women's work – embroidering, weaving, sewing, everything that engages the body in the interlacing of correspondences to explore. All of tangible reality becomes meaningful only in these connections in a creative objective that is also intended to reveal them. Everything can be connected, as everything exists together and therefore inevitably engages in active conversation.

So, motifs are created, first by joining together patches of pieces. For instance, from tablecloths and curtains come checked shirts, dishtowels, washcloths, and even, perhaps, other tablecloths and curtains. This is how people of modest means recycle and save: the infinite reconversion of the same materials. Everything can and will be done with the world's recycled and recyclable stuff. The total sum of fabric available may be limited, but the combinations are infinite.

<sup>3</sup> In *Le petit mot*, a 1997 video, one might sense the influence of Sylvie Laliberté and Manon Labrecque. Another Nathalie, Nathalie Caron, also weaves within her photographic images. These are, perhaps, less influences than a sort of community of spirit. One could add to this list the BGL art trio. And the song is by Charles Guilbert, and Bujold performed it first in the video by him and Serge Murphy titled *Sois sage, ô ma douleur (et tiens-toi tranquille)*. So, *Le petit mot* is more an excerpt than a video in itself.



[ FIG. 02 ] POSTURES C, 2018.

Because these works of Bujold's are based on the simplicity of means used, there are simple and logical figures, and also tiling. Later, in the video works, other elementary geometric figures are added, in configurations that combine strokes, squares, diamonds, and other shapes, all modulated in grids or arranged in various lines. There is always the grid, the classification – the sorting, one might say – for the material is sparse and must be assembled. As this is done, the material is not subjected to a hierarchy but deployed equipotentially in compartments in which, it seems, its diverse versions are equivalent. This, again, creates geometric figuration, adds to the global bazaar, even if there's an attempt to order everything. So, making these combinations is arduous, difficult, a conquest to be constantly refought as materials, shapes, and things accumulate. Creating is incessant combat, and Bujold is well aware that it is always in vain. Thus, she allows us to see all the energy she expends on sorting through the world's infinity, with motifs, things, and methods that might give a semblance of order and cohesion. But she does so in a way that lets us see that chaos is never far away and that it feeds the desire to regulate everything.

This explains why the forms are kind of similar; the motifs, kind of similar; the materials, kind of varied and variable. The colours, primary in some projects, are foregrounded, and there is initially the question of their animation in different media, as they wax and wane in importance. And all of the works offer the mechanical singularity of different media, with their conditions of possibility – their own related singularity. This quality, obviously, is to be excavated, always and endlessly. It is what we find in Bujold's sculptures, paintings,<sup>4</sup> photographs, videos, and installations.

Video. Yes, exactly! It has become an important aspect of Bujold's career in recent years. Her range of tools has thus expanded to include a medium that specifically measures the weft of reality, isolates fragments of singular space-time.<sup>5</sup> Music also has its part to play, as we see in pieces such as HIT (2020–09), Métronomies (2022), and Études vidéographiques pour instruments à cordes (2015). In the first case, a performance by drummer Michel Langevin becomes an object of video trituration. Bujold takes full advantage of the medium's possibilities for overlays. The musician's movements are multiplied: the captures of his performances, reprised in figures that occupy the full screen, make sound and image vibrate in concert, each reciprocally stimulating the other's rhythm. In the weft of these screens, figures appear – one might come gradually to recognize the instrument and its player. But above all, we see a painting of motifs. When undulations follow, we are able to distinguish the overall composition, how the activated whole is generated and animated.

<sup>4</sup> Pinacothèque aléatoire (2019–21) is a less-well-known series in which Bujold experimented with painting. From this body of work, only the video Abstraction liquide was presented at the Toronto Art Fair in the booth of Galerie ELLEPHANT. <https://vimeo.com/anage/videos/354433278>.  
<sup>5</sup> Bujold was already drawing on all the figures and materials in the world.

Similarly, in Métronomies, the very form of the metronome, staunchly triangular, allows for various possibilities of representation. The scansion of the sound also generates an audio and image rhythm that is all-transcending. The same mastery is manifest in the variants created in Études vidéographiques pour instruments à cordes: reprises, gaps, scans, multiplications of the same image, an analogue taken up and woven into numerous different states forming motifs that create the whole, allowing animation, organizing diversification. All of these actions are manoeuvres made possible by the very mechanics of video – how it works on matter – by the technical potential that it contains within itself.

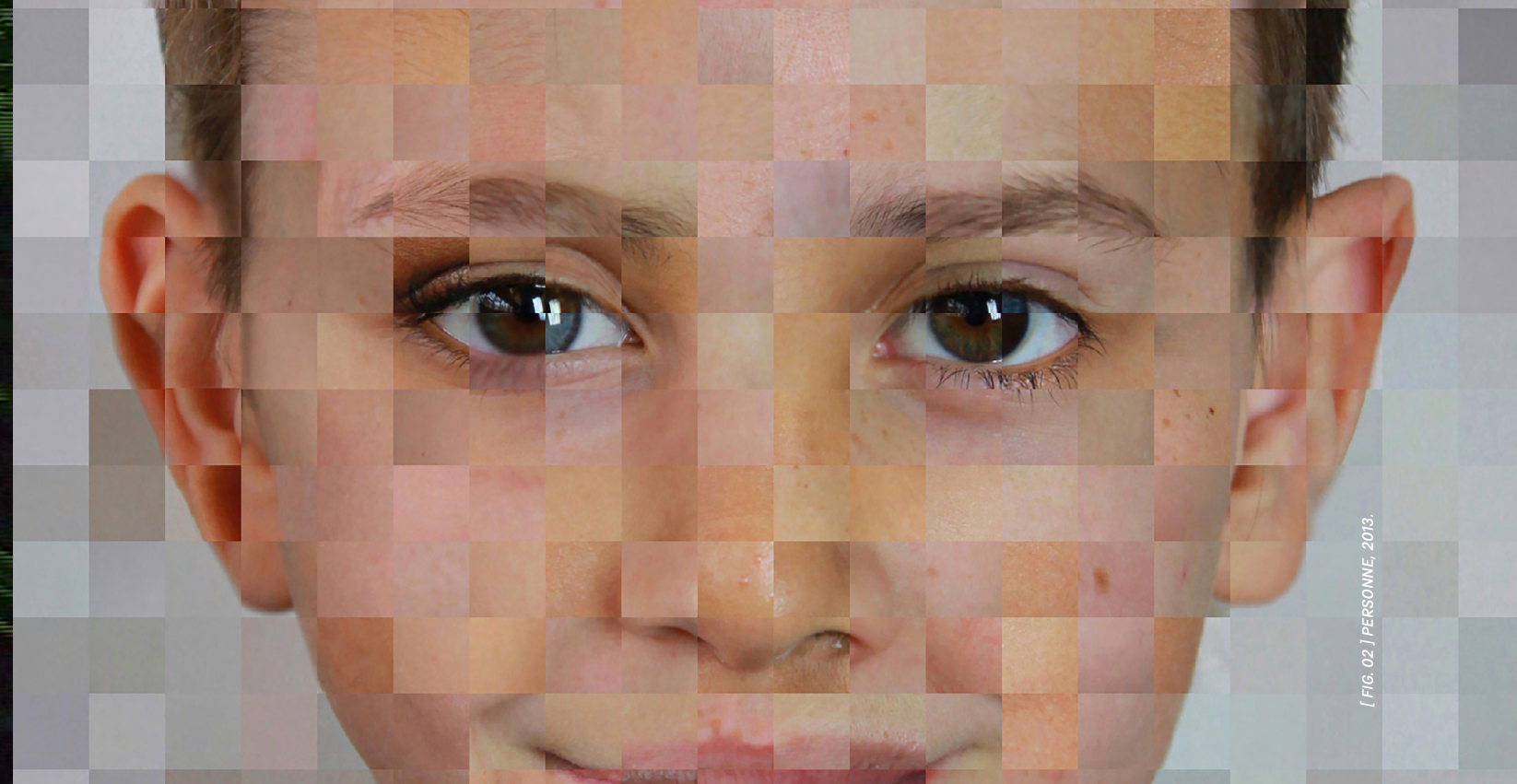
Then comes Métroscopies. Many of the videos in this series feature tiling or tracing of lines. Avatars of pixels emerge from the composition of images that is now fundamental – small specific points of the videographic work – and so do vertical lines, a souvenir of early videoscopic scanning. Bidden or unbidden, they weave in and out, creating the wefts of the image. Like the piecing together of petit point embroidery.

Lines, diamonds, and geometric forms in regulated groupings are the basic components of Bujold's work. Their animation depends on the tékhnhê specific to each medium. In the interweavings of the works appear their respective methods. But the basic components, nevertheless, are transversal; they are common to all the pieces shown. The preference for tékhnhê is therefore perceptible throughout; it traverses the media for which it shows fairly constant praxeological conditions for composition of images and effects. But the mechanics specific to each ultimately emerge to give each work its own colour.

If we were to ask Bujold to speak plainly about what she does, she would no doubt say, "I keep busy, I keep busy. My hands and my head are always in the material composing figures, colours, lines, motifs. I keep busy ..."



[ FIG. 01 ] FLEURS JAUN



[ FIG. 02 ] PERSONNE, 2013.

## Q: What Are Images Made Of?

ÉDOUARD MONNET

Nathalie Bujold's use of the expression "l'esprit pratique" (the practical mind) in various contexts offers the first clear and emblematic evidence of the values embodied in her works. As far back as the late 1980s, it was incorporated into both titles and graphic design. Then she began to employ it, for example, to name her website and in the credits for her videos ("Les productions de l'esprit pratique"), and later in an expanded form ("L'esprit pratique au service de la pratique de l'esprit," the practical mind serving the mind's practice).

It's a maxim so generic that, at first glance, it could be a slogan. Paradoxically, however, though it is concise and striking, in Bujold's work it conveys none of the authoritarianism and dogmatism that usually characterizes such a rhetorical turn of phrase. On the contrary, it evokes concentration, diligence, adaptation, attention, and experience, even as it simultaneously exposes these virtues to question. It also refers to the humility, discretion, and freshness inherent to her methodological regime, which seems to be directly related to the enlightened, self-sufficient amateurism of the do-it-yourself movement. In fact, Bujold makes do with rather than dictating, exaggerates rather than ordering, tinkers rather than innovating.

In part, of course, as any decently educated artist today knows, such a configuration alludes to an artistic heritage moulded by visual lexicons and to issues now largely settled (subject matter, site-specificity, conceptualism, performativity, process- or protocol-related practices, figuration, relational art, and so on). We understand from this that, whatever the particular details, artists' knowledge and comprehension of the aesthetic and theoretical basis for and horizons of this legacy are ultimately both an attraction and an obstruction. So, how can this trap – this "double bind,"<sup>1</sup> as Gregory Bateson would call it – and its contradictory or conflicting messages be dismantled and overcome? Bateson envisaged two outcomes to the paradoxical

injunction that frames this double constraint: one engendering confusion – and, as a consequence, pathology – and the other exalting the gift that "may promote creativity."<sup>2</sup>

### Double Link

Today, artists face an inevitable paradox: oscillating between homage (to styles, positions, themes, materials, ambiances) and the desire to be free of it. In terms of generating forms, the tension between these two positions triggers all the mechanisms of ambiguity associated with contemporary poetics: the creative process and the potentialities that induce it, that which precedes making and at the same time allows for making, in the sense of making a work. Condemned both to the discretion that their training presupposes and to the inventiveness that conditions the possibility of prevailing over it, artists want to create without true power – naively, in all cases – necessitating the formulation of ways to make creation conceivable nonetheless, in other words, a reconciliation between the categories of the necessary and the possible, to take up Deleuzian terminology.<sup>3</sup> One approach that offers freedom from the constraints of an imposed heritage is based on the power or potency of evocation, whose quality resides precisely in its lack of felicity, the incomplete and unresolved nature of its "oxygen of possibility"<sup>4</sup>: it is related to impulse, energy, and movement, and not to effect, solution, or conclusion. As a result, viewers looking at each work, rather than being subjected to a single objective and literal presence, autonomous in principle, now face three types of exposure: real, virtual, and memory-related.

Bujold is no exception to this condition. She cobbles together heritage and practice with spirit – with the clever mix of seriousness and lightness imposed by circumstances. Her many references to the history of forms and of representation are manifested in her constant use of classic pictorial genres (portrait, landscape, and still life), on the one hand, and by nonfigurative and geometric abstraction, on the other. The faces that appear among the group of embroideries in *Pixels et petits points* (2004) and in certain woven pieces (*Annick et James à Saint-Iréné*, 2013) and prints (*Personne*, 2013) fall into the first category, as do the repeated depictions of *Montagne Sainte-Victoire* (*La montagne Sainte-Victoire*, reprised on

<sup>1</sup> This expression is borrowed from Gregory Bateson, Don D. Jackson, Jay Haley, and John Weakland, "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia," *Behavioral Science* 1, no. 4 (1956): 251.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory Bateson, "Double Bind, 1969," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1987), 282 (emphasis in original).

<sup>3</sup> Concepts mentioned by Gilles Deleuze in "Michel Tournier and the World Without Others," in *Ideological Representation and Power in Social Relations*, ed. Mike Gane (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 118–36 (originally published in Deleuze, *La logique du sens* [1969]).

<sup>4</sup> Søren Kierkegaard quoted in Deleuze, "Michel Tournier."



jacquard in 2013 from an eponymous video from 2005). Into the second category fall the corpus once grouped under the title *Artefacts* (a mixed group of scraps, models, drafts, manufactured objects, and details recycled from previous groupings), the rest of the embroideries (including the additive synthesis schema, singularly absurd given the technique employed), *Mire de couleurs* (1999), and *Déviaton chromatique* (a collection of Polaroids begun in 1988).

*Variation bûcheron* (1998) is also, and very explicitly, related to the second category. This series of eighty-one small paintings on stretcher-mounted canvas, with motifs consisting of coloured grids suggesting tartans, is in effect the pretext for an amused questioning of modern and contemporary painting that is constructivist, in the broad sense of the term. One of the many reasons Bujold gave for producing this grouping was to take a stance in opposition to the affected Expressionist revival that was all the rage in her immediate community. Her response was hard-edge, seemingly impersonal, no less anachronistic but arising from a deliberate, assumed, and distanced reinterpretation. Certain aspects of the project, such as the repetition of solid painted elements, the sharp transitions, the insistence on the materiality of the colour, and the flatness of the pictorial space, certainly evoke "hard-edge" style, which is widely known to be characterized by the systematic use of masking tools to create firm, sharp contours. Each of these canvases, however – all eighty-one of them – was meticulously painted with a brush. Bujold devoted herself to this work for as long as it took, stubbornly, until a kind friend advised her to stop and go on to something else.

Because of the significant position that this series occupies in Bujold's approach (reprinted in 2013 in *Hourra pour la pitoune*, an interactive digital work dedicated to the internet), it merits deeper examination. Despite the three predetermined rectangular templates on which it is based, which provide six formats depending on the orientation (portrait or landscape), the sheer number of paintings involved allows for a wide range of variations in presentation, limited only by the linear arrangement dictated by the support employed. The position of the paintings, the angle at which they are placed, and their painted fields underline their objectality. Further accentuated by offset of the display shelves, the interplay of superimposed, overlapping, and overflowing objects is combined with the optical and physical phenomena produced by the crossing of vertical and horizontal lines, the organization of the colours, and the repetition of the motif. And if the motif itself, borrowed from textiles, is a constraint, it is counterbalanced by the arbitrary chromatic selection, which – unlike a woven piece, for example – obeys no logic or scientific principle. It's in this way – except that the painting is suggested rather than presented – that the delightful embroidered synthesis schema mentioned above proceeds, as it shows colour combinations that are incoherent in terms of

both light and matter, whether they are the result of addition or subtraction.

In fact, this is precisely where the bricolage really begins, beyond our initial metaphor. Although Bujold skilfully incorporates a scholarly artistic legacy, she casts her net much wider; her borrowings come from forms and practices that are traditional, domestic and vernacular, popular and quotidian. "*Les ouvrages de dames*"<sup>5</sup> (literally, ladies' work) begin to figure prominently, as she regularly incorporates knitting, embroidery and tapestry, sewing, and darning into her work. In a citation-based approach, she combines resources both intrinsic and extrinsic to art; she sees them as heteronomous, anchored in a social and cultural reality that goes far beyond simple academic, formal, and aesthetic issues. The modesty of these media also bespeaks the discretion that seems to characterize many of her works, in terms of format, duration, or materiology. A perfect match for her production methods and content, they are also an antidote to grandiloquence, emphasis, and logorrhea – in other words, the generalized spectacularization to which much of today's art falls prey. Here, the volume control never exceeds the necessary and sufficient.

So, this is where the bricolage begins. But even once we have these details about the heterogeneity of Bujold's resources, one question remains unanswered: why is "bricolage" such an appropriate description of Bujold's work? Although one or another of its definitions could provide an answer, let us turn to the one supplied by ethnologist and anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who uses the word in a way that is so complex and complete that it becomes, in his writing, a uniquely fertile concept. He reminds us that "in its earlier sense, the French verb *bricoler* is applied to ball games and billiards, hunting and horseback riding, but always to indicate a movement off the expected path: that of a rebounding ball, of a dog that strays, or of a horse swerving off the straight course to avoid an obstacle."<sup>6</sup> Beyond these examples, he is interested in incidental movement; he wants to consider more generally what occurs by happenstance, what breaks the normal course of a thing. So, bricolage would consist of making do with what is found without looking for it, leading to unpremeditated effects.

Although it is already tempting, at this stage, to associate Bujold's work with bricolage, Lévi-Strauss's anthropological account takes a subtler turn that is worth further consideration, for he sees bricolage as flowing from a foundational distinction: "In

<sup>5</sup> The expression *les ouvrages des femmes*, which may have other previous references, is taken here from a manual published by Thérèse de Dillmont (1846–1890) titled *Encyclopédie des ouvrages de dames* [Encyclopedia of women's work].

<sup>6</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Wild Thought*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and John Leavitt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 20.



[ FIG. 06 ] HOURRA POUR LA PITOUNE, 2013.



[ FIG. 09 ] FOYERS DOUX FOYERS, 1998.

our own day, the bricoleur [is] someone who works with his hands, using means that are skewed in comparison with those of the professional craftsman.<sup>7</sup> It goes without saying that Lévi-Strauss is here describing the activity of the scientist or engineer rather than that of the artist, art lover, or art critic. In short, his "man of art" is, rather, a "man of science." The "hard" and "natural" sciences – we leave aside the awkward case of the human sciences – are said to be exact, obeying fixed laws and models, proceeding from a reality that can be described, and using predictable processes that can be mathematically defined. Conversely, Lévi-Strauss views bricolage as an approach inherited from a "primitive" science – though neither less technical nor less scientific – the results of which, he notes, are no less real on its own terms:

The comparison is worth pursuing, since it gives us better access to the real relations between the two types of scientific knowledge that I have distinguished. The bricoleur is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each one to the availability of raw materials and tools designed and acquired to fit his project. His universe of instruments is closed, and the rule of his game is always to make do with "whatever is at hand" – that is to say, a set of tools and materials that is finite at each moment, as well as heterogeneous, because the composition of the set is not related to the current project, nor indeed to any given project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions that have presented themselves for renewing or enriching his stock, or for maintaining it with leftovers from earlier constructions and destructions. Thus the bricoleur's set of potentially useful elements cannot be defined by a project ... it is defined solely by its instrumentality, or, to use the bricoleur's own language, by the fact that the elements are collected or kept on the principle that "this could always come in handy."<sup>8</sup>

Bujold's actions clearly demonstrate such an aptitude for diversification – for the execution of projects in which bricoleurs have free rein because fate limits their possibilities, although these expand as other opportunities emerge – opportunities that are unexpected, eclectic, measureless, and disordered. The parallel holds again in the sense that her "bricolages" are subjected to the accumulation of reserves, made of bits of string, and to a recycling practice that provides ad hoc enhancement, making use of elements that are nevertheless inadequate:

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

Such elements are thus halfway specialized: enough for the bricoleur not to require the equipment and knowledge of all the building trades, but not enough for each element to be restricted to a precise and determined use. Each element represents a sense of relations that are both concrete and virtual.<sup>9</sup>

Artefacts, an assemblage of scattered resources brought together between 1988 and 2016, notably taken from a previous ensemble titled *En wing en hein* (1998–2000), is exemplary of this so-unmethodical method, as is the temporal back-and-forth that it allows between that which has been made, is being made, and may yet be made. This empirical behaviour, presciently termed "itinerant" in 1998 by Patrice Duhamel<sup>10</sup> with regard to Bujold's work, is based, among other things, on having experience and maturity and on the pre-existence of a patiently gathered and inventoried set of materials, whether collected or constructed.

For artists who adopt bricolage, time invariably plays in their favour and is undoubtedly their ally. Like do-it-yourselfers and although excited by their own project, their "first practical move is retrospective"<sup>11</sup>: they explore the treasure that they've collected and engage in a dialogue with it full of permutations and substitutions, remorse and additions, hesitations and decisions. Then, given the problem they pose themselves – in other words, the problem posed by what they have at their disposal – they turn to us, the viewers and users of their art, to propose an answer or provide a result – one that will never be anything other than a flexible accommodation, a compromise between the initial or ideal intention and the contingent and immanent necessities that they must grapple with. This condition might seem frustrating at first, but it is fertile ground for a doubly liberating form of expression:

The poetry of bricolage also, and above all, comes from the fact that it does not limit itself to accomplishment or execution; it "speaks," not only with things, as has already been shown, but also by means of things: recounting, through the choices it makes among limited possibilities, the character and life of its author. Even if he never completes his project, the bricoleur always puts something of himself into it.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>10</sup> In his introductory essay for Bujold's exhibition *En wing en hein* at Centre Clark in Montréal, January 8–February 8, 1998, Duhamel wrote, "Under *En Wing en hein*, for our eyes unused to uncovering the local nuance of an accent in written form, there is 'en voyageant' [as we travel]. This expression, taken from a well-known Québécois song, lends the exhibition its title and underlines its itinerant vocation" (our translation), <https://centreclark.com/exposition/en-wing-en-hein>.  
<sup>11</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *Wild Thought*, 22.  
<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 35.



[FIG.08] PORTRAIT DE JAMES, 1998.



[FIG.07] PORTRAIT DE GERARD, 2004.

Just as bricolage allows for a form of self-quotation, because it is both retrospective and prospective, it also encourages autobiography, as Lévi-Strauss reminds us. Although delivered with reserve and modesty, or at any rate with the necessary discernment, the labour performed by Bujold indeed displays this autobiographical trait.

Bujold's references, sometimes intermixed, have always abounded: references to her condition, her domestic environment, her appliances, her plants, or her food, and to other humble conjunctures that she conjures up in the form of dachshund, snail, flower, or insect. This is evident in many of her videos, including *Emporium* (1999), *Onelie de l'Oneli* (2002), *Jeu vidéo* (2008), *Cabaret* (2009), *Seize danses brèves* (2009), and *Ruchée* (2016). Similarly, she makes use of her family and friends, her local surroundings, encounters, friendships, and other, more tenuous relationships. *Bonjour* (2003) and *OK Gérard* (2009) are examples of this in her videos, and they also pop up in other, varied forms of expression, such as *Annick et James à Saint-Iréné* (jacquard weaving, 2013), *Personne* (inkjet print, 2013), and the portraits that are part of *Pixels et petits points* (cotton-thread embroideries on Aida canvas, 2004). Infiltrated into her work in a similar way are her trips (*Les trains où vont les choses*, video installation, 2006; *La montagne Sainte-Victoire*, video, 2005; *6 km*, video, 2007) and her musical pantheon: inserted here and there, it is more deliberately highlighted in what she calls her "anti-MTV" series of music videos (*These Days*, *Some Velvet Morning*, *All the Good Things*, and *Permanent Smile*, 2008).

### Playground

In light of my interpretation and with the appropriate tools provided by Lévi-Strauss, the apparatus that makes up the HIT series (2009–21) is worth a closer look. First, it is remarkable for the longevity of its deployment over time, which Bujold induced through multiple arrangements and rearrangements that helped, in turn, to extend its life. Again, given this duration, it is also understood that the autobiographical dimension of the work, as mentioned above, is more obvious here than elsewhere. But above all, HIT represents the accomplishment and precision of an approach that had been intuitive up to then.

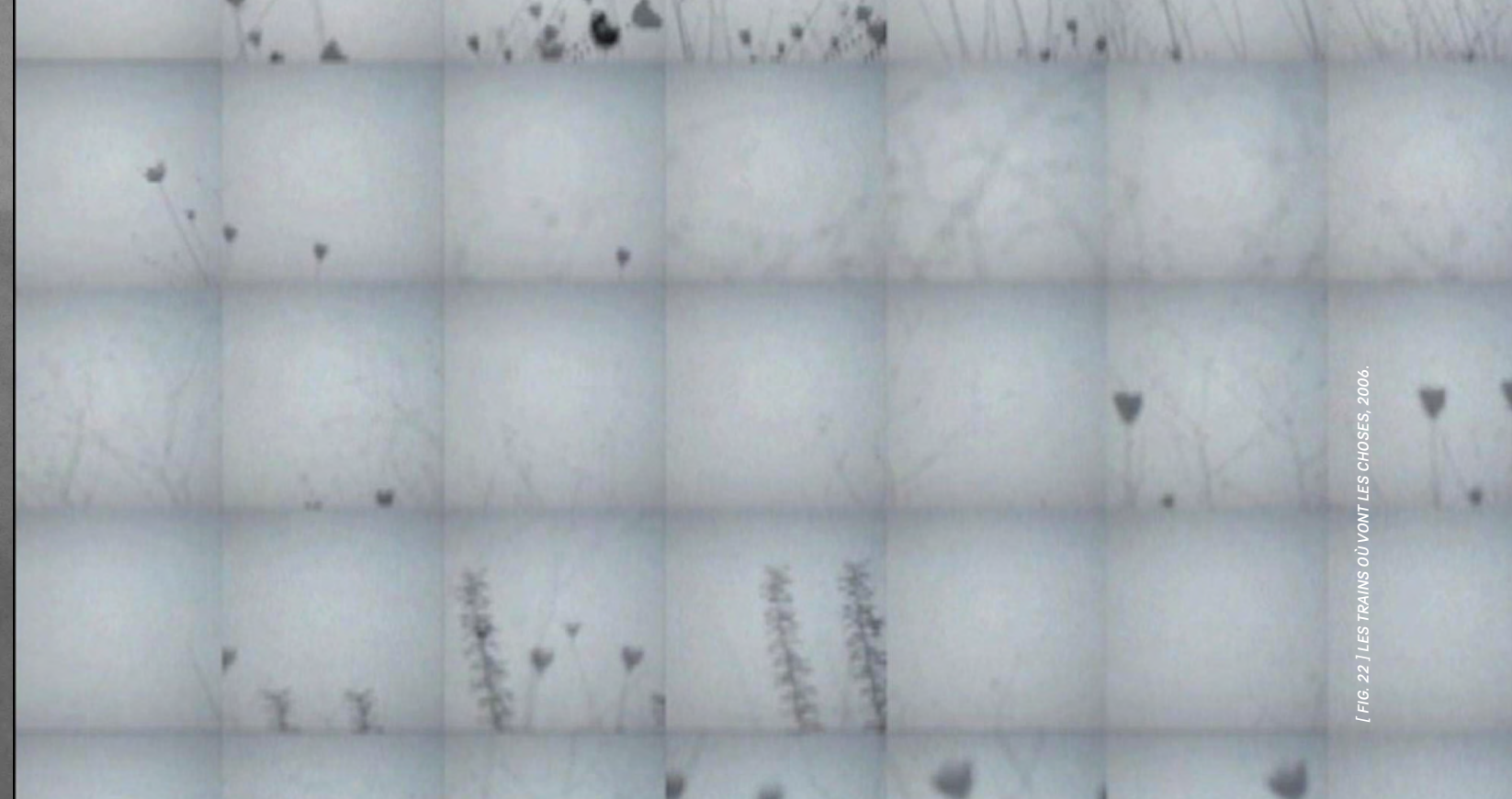
During the 2000s, Bujold developed in parallel two visual programs that were relatively distinct, although they fed into, borrowed from, and inspired each other. In one, she used traditional textile supports and their related techniques; in the other, she explored digital video, the devices for which were just then becoming widely available to the general public. The confrontation of the two bodies of work, which also displayed the understated penchant for zany humour, jokes, and mockery – even self-mockery – that has always characterized her work, is based on her bias essentially toward analogue and metaphor: dots refer to pixels and vice versa, but insects also occasionally appear, in a reflective and metaphoric way, to stand in for those most common denominators of the image. More generally, this close relationship summons a lexicon composed of textures, wefts, interlacing, samples, sequences, repetitions, variations, and motifs – all expressions that can apply equally to textiles and to videos, and even to music. In fact, they designate phenomena, processes, or objects that are closely related – or, more precisely, analogous – in one or another of these disciplines.

The associations that form HIT largely transcend this connection, however, to attain a different order of contiguity, one that is obviously structural and conceptual. Once again combining video sequences and textile works, the corpus, composed over more than a decade, stands out from Bujold's previous attempts to bring the two together for its coherence and for the relevance and complexity of its articulations and pairings. First and foremost, a single motif traverses the series: that of an instrumentalist<sup>13</sup>, in this case a drummer, accompanied by his instrument. As often happens in her work, the simplicity of a motif allows for recurrence, ornamentation, and multiple transformations. It makes play possible. After a few scattered preliminary experiments, Bujold turns repeatedly to jacquard, highlighting an already fertile approach commensurate with the historical and technical information that it contains. Her exploration brings to light a scientific narrative and refinements to the equipment over time, from Basile Bouchon's first weaving loom (fitted with a perforated tape inspired by the clockwork mechanisms used in music boxes) to Jean-Baptiste Falcon's punch-card looms, then to the Jacquard loom (apparently invented by Lady Lovelace, Lord Byron's daughter, said to be the first programmer in history). Above all, Bujold's tour de force arises from her ability to incorporate a figure – and just one, we should remember – into her digital video recording and to tangibly translate it into fabric. Although the images in the jacquards are taken from videograms pulled from video recordings, they show different variations of the motif (by repetition, mirroring, and so on) reminiscent, in turn, of the variations

<sup>13</sup> This is Michel "Away" Langevin, one of the original members of the heavy metal band Voivod, of which he is now the only member from the original band, formed in 1982. Also an illustrator, he is considered the creator of the mythology associated with the figure of the post-apocalyptic vampire Lord Voivod, founder of the group, and of the science fiction themes that have always been its inspiration. In other musical fields and as a sign of his flexibility, Langevin has collaborated, among others, with the industrial rock musician James George Thirwell (within Steroid Maximus, for the album *Gondwanaland* in 1992); the group Men Without Hats (*Sideways*, 1991); the DJ and visual artist Martin Tétrault for improvised music; and Thisquietarmy, of which Eric Quash is also a member.



[ FIG. 10 ] ARTÉFACTS, 2016.



[ FIG. 22 ] LES TRAINS OÙ VONT LES CHOSES, 2006.

incorporated into certain kinds of textile production, especially quilting. In addition, the drummer's doubled movements (involving cadenced sounds and silences) have a response in the loom's (alternating threads lifted or lowered, warps and wefts, black or white threads), and they also echo the 0s and 1s in the numerical sequences that form the contemporary digital image. Ultimately, the work's reflexivity lies precisely in the intrinsic nature of these three elements, which serve Bujold's singular focus on the comparable binarity of the operations performed (whether human, mechanical, or computerized) and on the countless combinations that they engender, if not the play that they encourage.

In fact, here's the truth: Bujold intends to play, and she has always done so! In HIT, the playful dimension of the work takes a different turn as she advances her white and black pieces, navigating the full and empty spaces, as one would do in a game of chess, checkers, or go.

With this in mind, we then have to agree on a definition of "play" applicable to the situation – in this case, an artistic one. The popular approaches from the fields of education, cognitive science, and pedagogy, which associate play with children's activity, don't help much. Aside from the misguided and possibly pejorative interpretation to which they lend themselves, they do not refer in any way to the specifically human activity of practising art. Indeed, as the philosopher Johan Huizinga reminds us, "animals play just like men"<sup>14</sup>:

Play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing ... We have only to watch young dogs to see that all the essentials of human play are present in their merry gambols. They invite one another to play by a certain ceremoniousness of attitude and gesture ... And – what is most important – in all these doings they plainly experience tremendous fun and enjoyment. Such romplings of young dogs are only one of the simpler forms of animal play.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 1.  
<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Such play is apparently not the prerogative of art, as it is neither cultural nor human, nor even performed by adults. Furthermore, the sometimes-fertile recourse to etymology is not enlightening here: the French word *jeu*, we learn, comes from the Latin *jucus*, which means "joke" or "banter," and from it the French word *jouet* (toy) is also derived.<sup>16</sup> Yet, the laughter and underlying wellspring of humour associated with these definitions, perfectly conveying the unserious, can be in no way be confused with or seen as equivalent to play, as experienced even at a very young age. Although laughter is not systematically excluded, children, for instance, play with great seriousness, as do adults playing chess or rugby, among other games. From this point of view, the notion of play defies oppositional categories and the hierarchies that they induce. The liberties that it takes with reality in no way preclude the extreme seriousness with which such licence is ultimately exercised.

In general, it is common to consider play, whether intellectual or physical, an activity with no short-term productive purpose;<sup>17</sup> essentially, it is intended to entertain and bring pleasure to those who engage in it. This is not, however, a satisfactory explanation for the case being discussed here, and it is unacceptable to limit it to the realm of leisure, as is customarily done.

So, I have to look elsewhere for ways to describe and analyze the dimension of Bujold's work that is both playful and aesthetic; I would wager that it arises neither from childhood nor from entertainment or recreation in themselves – although it might incidentally refer to them, which is a different matter.

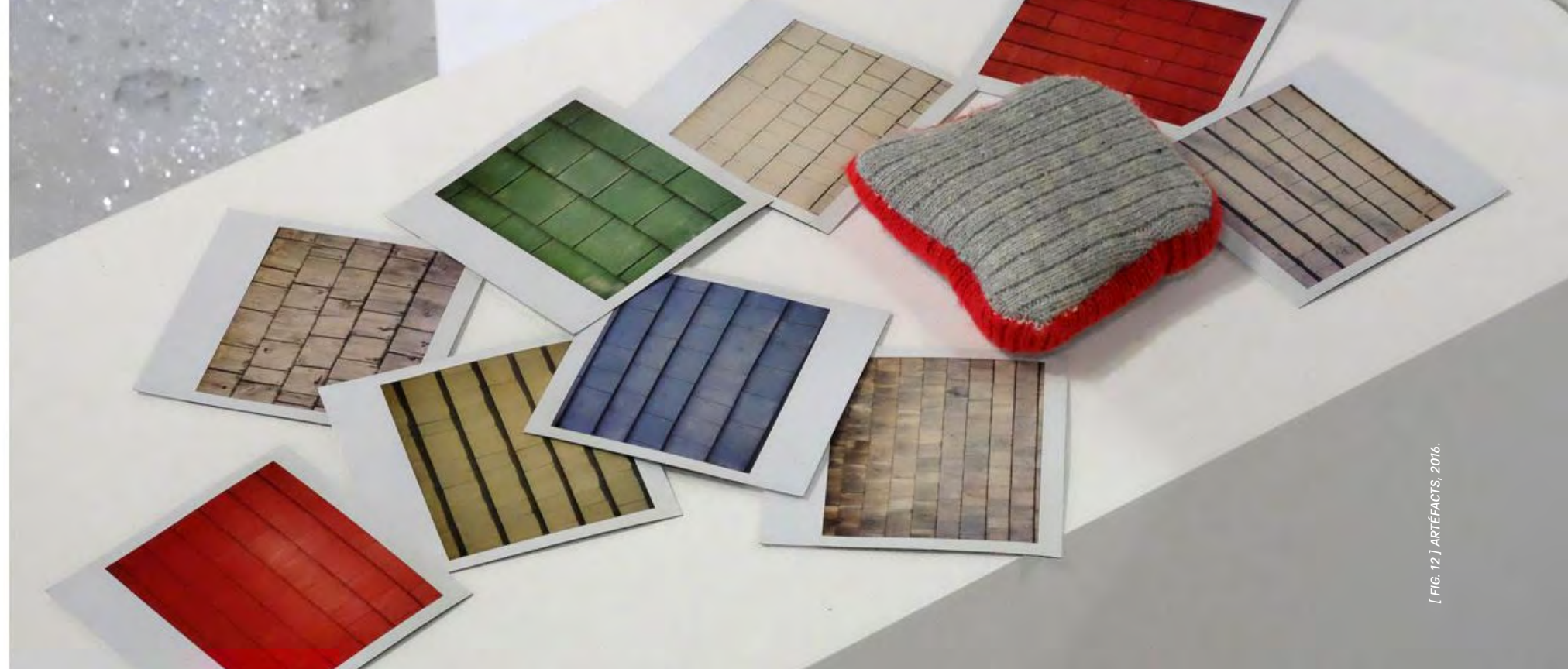
Here, Huizinga proposes a lexical avenue that is worth our attention. He considers art in light of the subtle nuances provided by ancient Greek in a way that qualifies it as something other than play, but without denying its playful aspect. If, he writes, artistic expression is intended to be pleasurable, "according to rules freely accepted, and outside the sphere of necessity or material utility"<sup>18</sup> and "outside the norms of reason, duty, or truth,"<sup>19</sup> it arises in fact from play and from what the Hellenes

<sup>16</sup> Translator's note: The etymology of "play," though the roots are different, is similarly unhelpful: "Middle English *pleien*, from Old English *plegan*, *plegian*: move lightly and quickly, occupy or busy oneself, amuse oneself; engage in active exercise; frolic; engage in children's play ..." "Play," Online Etymological Dictionary, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/play>.

<sup>17</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss other vocations for play, it is worth mentioning its specific role in learning and education of young children, as analyzed by the fields mentioned (cognitive science, pedagogy, and so on).

<sup>18</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 132.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 133.



[ FIG. 12 ] ARTEFACTS, 2016.

called *paideia*. He points out that both Plato and Aristotle were dissatisfied with this reductive qualification because it passes over the fact that art, in their view, contained something superior to the basic enjoyment offered by play. Aristotle proposed that art makes a double and indivisible contribution to mental relaxation (*diagôgè*) and to knowledge (*phronêsis*). Focusing on the former word, he posited that this relationship is distinct from *skholè* (leisure), to which it might otherwise be connected, because this "relaxation" is expressly that of the mind. Above all, he provides us with the literal meaning of *skholè* (passing the time), salient in other ways in Bujold's case.

### Nonsense

Beyond the rather general nature of these comments, Bujold certainly devotes herself pointedly, even consummately, to the game of passing the time. And what better tool than video to accomplish this purpose? The pioneering video artist Gary Hill had this very idea in mind when he began to use the medium – its unique relationship with time – in 1973, as he remarked in retrospect:

Video allowed a kind of real time play, the possibility to "think out loud." Here was a process immediately accessible and seemingly a much closer parallel to thinking ... Time, this is what is central to video; it is not seeing as its etymological roots imply. Video's intrinsic principal [sic] is feedback. So it's not linear time but a movement that is bound up in thinking – a topology of time that is accessible.<sup>20</sup>

For both Hill and Bujold, passing the time cannot – or not only – be interpreted in the sense of a pastime, as "play" implies. It is clearly of a different nature, as evidenced by Hill's allusion to feedback: either the action of an effect on its own cause or, more generally, non-linear movement ultimately analogous to the workings of thought. All this to say that temporal dissipation, here, would be the product of entanglement and confusion and not of forgetfulness.

Bujold's sprawling body of video works is replete with examples that confirm this hypothesis by testing the plasticity of time, from her earliest, intuitive experiments to her more recent methodical, meticulous works. The recurrent figures employed,

<sup>20</sup> Gary Hill, "Inter-view," in Gary Hill. *Ausstellungskatalog* (Amsterdam and Vienna: Stedelijk Museum and Kunsthalle Wien, 1993), 13. Quoted by Yvonne Spielmann, "Gary Hill: Biography," *Fondation Daniel Langlois*, 2005, <https://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=727>.

such as departure, arrival, roads, strolling, travel, means of transportation, ferries, and housecleaning, are all temporal markers systematically troubled by the processes of stacking, modulation, transformation, or distortion, slowing, and acceleration. Similarly, she uses the image of a metronome or a drummer or other instrumentalists recurrently to challenge temporal logics, similar to how Johann Sebastian Bach composed using symmetry, inversion, and transposition on his "celestial sewing machine." Sometimes her titles are paradoxical (*Balade du refus de toute intention* [Ballad of rejection of all intentions], 2019; *Voyage des mystères objectifs* [Voyage of objective mysteries], 2021; *Partir/revenir* [Leaving/Coming back], 2022; *Aller-retour dans l'inconnu qui attend à pied d'œuvre* [Round trip to the unknown that waits at the job site], 2018; *Comptes à rebours* [Countdown], 2002): drawn from the *Refus Global* manifesto,<sup>21</sup> they coincide opportunely with her blurring exercise, coming within an inch of absurdity – or, rather, nonsense.

There is a remarkable precedent for this approach, this one from the literary field. It comes from a master in the subject, the peerless Victorian logician Lewis Carroll – author, in his spare time, of books for children replete with codes and esoteric formulas, and underlain by "profound psychoanalytic content and an exemplary ... linguistic formalism."<sup>22</sup> One of his stories contains a sequence that deserves our attention here. It appears in the middle of *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, which succeeded the ground-breaking *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In the chapter titled "Wool and Water," which takes place on a chessboard, Alice is offered a job by the White Queen. Alice responds to the vague proposal made by her venerable interlocutor with impertinent frankness:

"I'm sure I'll take you with pleasure!" the Queen said. "Twopence a week, and jam every other day."

Alice couldn't help laughing, as she said, "I don't want you to hire me – and I don't care for jam."

"It's very good jam," said the Queen.

<sup>21</sup> Paul-Émile Borduas, *Refus Global* (Montréal: Mithra-Mythe, 1948).

<sup>22</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), xiii.





"Well, I don't want any to-day, at any rate."

"You couldn't have it if you did want it," the Queen said. "The rule is, jam to-morrow and jam yesterday – but never jam to-day."

"It must come sometimes to 'jam to-day,'" Alice objected.

"No it can't," said the Queen. "It's jam every other day: to-day isn't any other day, you know."<sup>23</sup>

So, Alice refuses the jam offered to her, royal jelly or not! This ingenuous rejection happens to establish her virtue as a spokesperson; her talents as a Latinist seem to leave no doubt – along with other leanings, some of which were more photographic and guiltier.<sup>24</sup> Here, Carroll shows how skilful manipulation of a dead language may, in its turn, make a work that is very much alive. He has made a pun on the word "jam," referring to the Latin adverb iam, often written and pronounced "jam." This term can be translated as "in a moment," "very soon," or "right now," thus designating the present, but from a unique angle. Unlike nunc – the conjugated expression of the present in the present – iam is paradoxically used only in the future or in the past: "I'll keep you informed, at the moment when I've finished this essay" is one example (of course, a dubious proposition for the publisher concerned). Although Alice expresses successive reservations, the continuation of her conversation with the White Queen is, in fact, edifying on this subject:

"I don't understand you," said Alice. "It's dreadfully confusing!"

"That's the effect of living backwards," the Queen said kindly: "it always makes one a little giddy at first –"

<sup>23</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass: And What Alice Found There* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus Company, 1897), 97.

<sup>24</sup> I mention these because they stitch together the recto and the verso – that of surfaces, of the mirror, and of the photosensitive plate whose result could be seen indiscriminately, due to its reflective properties, as negative or positive depending on the angle from which one examined it.

"Living backwards!" Alice repeated in great astonishment. "I never heard of such a thing!"

"– but there's one great advantage in it, that one's memory works both ways."

"I'm sure mine only works one way," Alice remarked. "I can't remember things before they happen."

"It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards," the Queen remarked.

"What sort of things do you remember best?" Alice ventured to ask.

"Oh, things that happen the week after next," the Queen replied in a careless tone. "For instance, now," she went on, sticking a large piece of plaster on her finger as she spoke, "there's the King's Messenger. He's in prison now, being punished: and the trial doesn't even begin till next Wednesday: and of course the crime comes last of all."<sup>25</sup>

Beyond his heroine's incomprehension (and the first degree of the story), Carroll commits the crime of linguistic subterfuge by reflexively establishing a confusion of temporalities. In interfering symbolically with the game that is underway, he shows the disruption that Alice faces once she steps through the looking-glass: the world before her is nothing less than topsy-turvy pandemonium. And if space is under attack, so is time. The phenomena that she experiences, in the here and now, are no longer even barely intelligible to her, especially not with the tools of rationality at her disposal.

It is the kind of temporal imbroglio illustrated in Carroll's tale that Deleuze seems to take as a first example in his *The Logic of Sense*. The theory of sense that he lays out leads him to paradoxical propositions, which he sees as inherent to the goal he

<sup>25</sup> Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, 97–98.



[ FIG. 21 ] JEU VIDÉO, 2008.

is striving for, as they were to his Stoic sources. He points out the problematic dimension of sense, due to its paradoxical but paired relationship with nonsense; thus, he turns to Carroll, whom he sees as the first great accountant of the paradoxes of meaning, "sometimes collecting, sometimes renewing, sometimes inventing, and sometimes preparing them."<sup>26</sup> By mingling the literal and literary interpretations of the words he assigns to his purpose – just as Carroll does – Deleuze here provides specifics of common sense, which would go from point A to point B in a determined (or, at least, determinable) direction from beginning to end, from past to future, of course via the present. But then he adds the option of an "affirmation of both senses ... at the same time,"<sup>27</sup> which he refutes as an aporia, since it is the manifestation – a fertile one, in fact – of paradox, an avoidance of the univocity that seems to bear the promise of constant semantic connections and disconnections, always reconfigured or reconfigurable:

When I say "Alice becomes larger," I mean that she becomes larger than she was. By the same token, however, she becomes smaller than she is now. Certainly, she is not bigger and smaller at the same time. She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes.<sup>28</sup>

The concept of "becoming" – or, more precisely, of a becoming that always stops being so as to continue to change (without which it would freeze and stop becoming) – clearly articulates Deleuze's reasoning around the Carrollian material that he discusses. In effect, it is a property of that which becomes to come and go, infinitely and identically, in both directions at once (thus, to grow and shrink at the same time, making a mockery of what anyone might say), without ever worrying about the present – or, to paraphrase Deleuze, by avoiding it – mainly because becoming excludes "the distinction of before and after, of past and future," as well as other associated differences (more and less, too much and not enough, and so on). This paradoxical becoming (which makes possible both identity and infinitude) now constitutes a refutation not only of good sense but also of common sense as it is defined, according to Deleuze, precisely by "the assignment of fixed identities."<sup>29</sup> Pursuant to this analysis, and to the light that it sheds on Carroll's fantasies and his tour de force (his use of language based on the limits that it is supposed to set and on his capacity to surpass those limits), all disorder is now permitted, whether it consists of "the reversal of cause and effect: to be punished before having committed a fault," for example, or "the reversal of the day before and the day after, the present always being eluded,"<sup>30</sup> most appropriately expressed in our case study of jam.

<sup>26</sup> Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, xiii.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*