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Grégory Chatonsky: Capturing Impermanence

Grégory Chatonsky (ed.), *Capture*. Orléans: Éditions HYX, 2010, ISBN: 978-2-910385-65-1, 194 pages, hardcover

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GRÉGORY CHATONSKY: CAPTURING IMPERMANENCE

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For more than a decade, Grégory Chatonsky (Paris, 1971)¹ has explored the relationships between technology and affectivity, as well as the new forms of fiction, in theory and practice. His background in multimedia and philosophy has provided him with the knowledge of programming languages and production tools, as well as the need to question both the nature and the semiotics of new media. An early adopter of the creative possibilities brought by the Internet, he founded the net art collective *incident.net*² in 1994, and has since produced a large amount of works at the rather unusual rate of about five to twenty projects per year. Given this prolificacy, the

publication of a book devoted to Chatonsky's career is more than justified, and at the same time the task of analyzing his work is quite imposing. Probably for this reason, the artist decided to collaborate with five authors, each of whom has been assigned a specific part of the book. The volume thus is divided into

four main chapters (*Dislocation*, *Flußgeist*, *Variation and Variables*, *Fiction*) and a foreword, establishing a thematic—instead of chronological—order that underlines the coherence in Chatonsky's artistic practice. Despite having developed an interesting theoretical reflection on his own work, which can be found in his blog entries,³ the artist does not contribute in writing to this book beyond the consciously neutral descriptions of the artworks, which have been extracted from his website. Even so, the selection of the main subjects into which this volume (hence, the reading of his work) is divided, as well as the distribution of the 74 featured artworks into several sub-categories give shape to Chatonsky's personal statement.

By avoiding a chronological order, the artist also asserts the transience of his artistic practice, its fluidity. As Michael Joyce states in the foreword: "He summons his audiences to something more evocative and real than William Gibson's famous 'consensual hallucination'; let us say instead sensual elucidation, leading us forth from the light of the computer screen (...) into the real world (...) knowing that our bodies, silver disks, cloud memories and flash drives will one day melt back into the aether that surrounds us." The notions of transience and

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fluidity become key elements of Chatonsky's work, the main subjects described in this book being streams or affluents in which his projects evolve, some in the fixed form of a photograph, a video or an object, others being constantly re-shaped by ever-changing flows of data. This movement is initiated by dislocation, a displacement of form and thought that is generated by an incident. Violaine Boutet indicates: "In Grégory Chatonsky's work, the notion of incident has always been linked to an active and engaging punctuation, a point of articulation between one situation and another (...) during any disruptive event that challenges our connection to the world." Dislocation leads to fragmentation and reconstruction, creating something new out of the pieces at hand. What is being created, though, does not need to be fixed, and in this sense Chatonsky embraces the unstable by generating combinations from the flows of data on the Internet. He coins the term *Flußgeist* in order to find a way to define the times we live in, a "spirit of the flow" that replaces the notion of *Zeitgeist*. The works grouped under this neologism speak to us about a certain flow of conscience distributed on the Internet, real and fictional at the same time, which lead the artist to consider the possibility of creating "a fiction which is not in this absolute need of the whole, which is incomplete, fragmented, approachable and very close to our existences."⁴ The representation of the world that these works carry out is both true to their source and inaccurate as any translation. Nathalie Leleu points out the algorithmic nature of these compositions and asserts that "the numeric entity is capable of converting the space into time, but also the text into image or sound and inversely (...) The possible representation modalities of the same subject are neither true nor false: they are relative." This relativity can also refer to our relationship with our (fictional) self on the web. As Jay Murphy states: "Chatonsky brings up to date Rimbaud's '*Je est un autre*' in the collective memory and fluid movement of the Internet present—*Each one of our lives is another life*." The fiction in Chatonsky's work mirrors the fiction in our daily lives.

Capture, the title of the book, refers to one of Chatonsky's latest ongoing projects, but also to his intention of capturing what is fleeting or unstable, be it the moving image of a film, the data flow on the Internet, the stories people tell to each other or the many aspects of the world that surrounds us. Yet these

captured fragments of reality are not fixed, they remain in movement and even emphasize their transience. What is being captured, in the end, is the notion of impermanence itself.

Pau Waelder

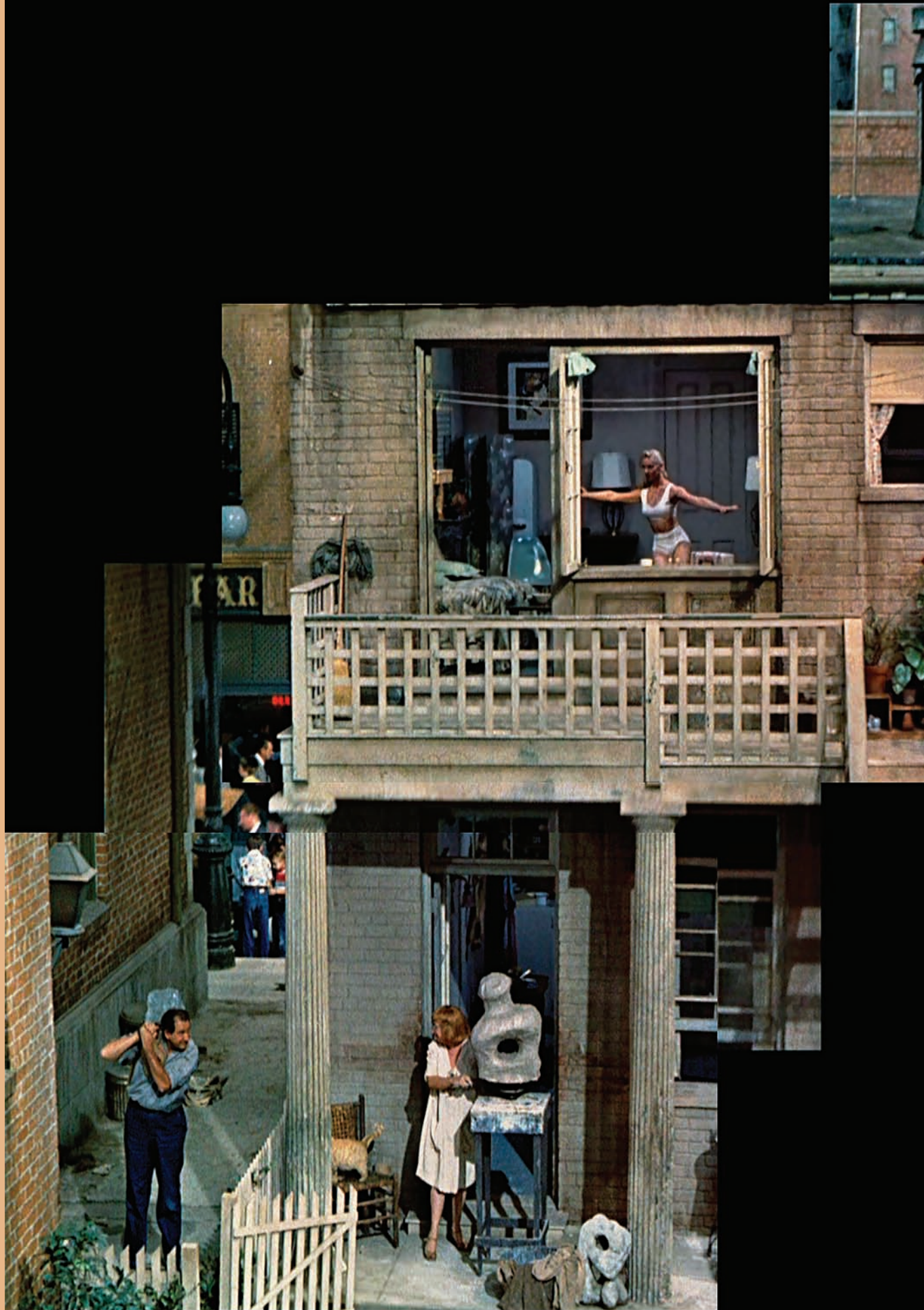
Pau Waelder is an art critic, curator and researcher in digital art and culture. Among his latest projects are the conferences En_lloc (Now_Here), Digital Culture (Fundacio Pilar i Joan Miro a Mallorca). As a reviewer and editor, he has collaborated with several art magazines. He is New Media Editor at *art.es* magazine.

Notes

- 1 Grégory Chatonsky | *Works*. <<http://www.incident.net/users/gregory/>>
- 2 *Incident*. <<http://www.incident.net/>>
- 3 Grégory Chatonsky | *Fragments*.
- 4 Grégory Chatonsky, "Flußgeist, a fiction without narration," 13/2/2007. <<http://incident.net/users/gregory/wordpress/13-flussgeist-une-fiction-sans-narration/>>



Grégory Chatonsky, *Hisland*, 2008. Photographs, generative installation. Photo: Courtesy of Grégory Chatonsky.

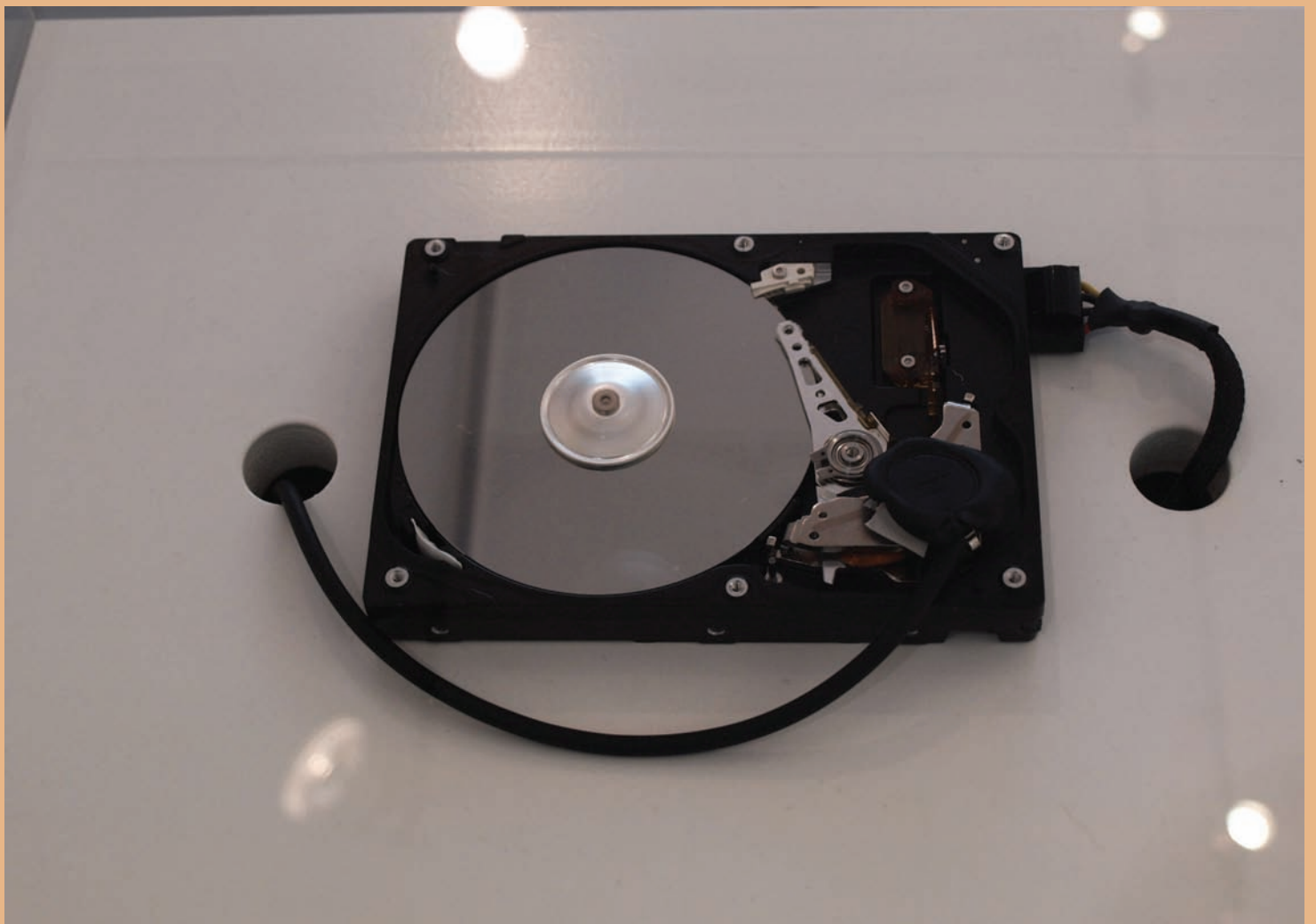




Grégory Chatonsky, *Readonlymemories, Fenêtres sur Cour*, 2003. Photograph, inkjet print. Photo: Courtesy of Grégory Chatonsky.



Grégory Chatonsky, *My life is an Interactive Fiction 2*, 2009. Photo: Courtesy of Grégory Chatonsky.



Grégory Chatonsky, *My Hard Drive is Experiencing Some Strange Noises*, 2007. Audio installation. Photo: Courtesy of Grégory Chatonsky.