

## The Night at the Crossroads of Arts and Cultures: Perception, Imaginary, Representations

*Proposed by Patrick Otto and Marie Laureillard  
with the support of Véronique Alexandre Journeau*



Bill Viola, *The Sleep of Reason*, 1988, Video/sound installation continuously running (Photo: Kira Perov)

The night fascinates the human being in various ways: aiming to access its contour, fear emerges and senses sharpen. Artists are no exception to it and their attitude, work and comments reveal impressions and concepts generated by their attempt to grasp the night's familiar and mysterious aspects; regardless of their provenance - Occident or Orient - personal, intimate and revealing perspectives influence their perception. According to Merleau-Ponty, "when, for instance, the world of clear and articulated objects is eliminated, our perception, being deprived of its world, shapes an empty kind of spatiality. This is what happens at night."

In daylight, those impressions and questions continue. Do the elements, fruit of observation, play a role? Are they connected? Should we regard them as a kind of alchemy full of secrets? Considering this questioning, is fantasy a source of knowledge or rather, the very truth? Does the ambivalent moon - sometimes malicious, sometimes benevolent, embodied in Roman mythology by the goddess Hecate with her three faces, arousing contemplation and inspiring scholars from the Extreme Orient, play only a symbolic role in artistic works?

As far as night is concerned, frontiers between perception and imagination become tenuous. It makes us think about those metamorphoses and apparitions depicted by the poet Novalis in his *Hymns to the Night*: "To us, more heavenly than those radiant stars are the endless eyes that night has opened within us." In its ambivalence, the night, on one hand, seems to be a way of liberation an inspiring moment while on other hand it's synonymous with boredom, meditation or death. Isn't it the situation described by Guy Debord in 1978 when he notes that *in girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* in his eponymous movie?

Interfaces involving perception and imaginary, incidentally, get more dense as soon as a representation of the night emerges. What should we think of each appearance of the *Queen of the Night* in *The Magic Flute* of W. A. Mozart, imposing, unemotional, and followed by a deceitful laughter? Do we feel closer to that moment when a work is dedicated to the night? What is significant about composing and/or performing a Nocturne? Does time's inversion at midnight (as Mallarmé wrote *Igitur*) operate in Stravinsky's *Les noces* or in the performance of a shabbath night representation? If only in a dream? Is black the color of the night, contradicting Van Gogh's *Starry*

*Night?* “What becomes of our gaze when light fades? What are we able to see in the shadows?” (Milner). Does the image disappear for the benefit of material body, shapeless mass, sensation, space without landmarks? The aesthetics of night in Japan and in Korea, the achievements of the group Stars in China in the late 1970s raise a veil while suggesting quite a few of possible pathways. Finally, do night dreams, which are so significant in India for example, belong only to the domaine of unconsciousness?

The idea of night may change according to our lifestyles: the urban electric night, nocturnal entertainment was celebrated through the photographs of Brassai, the movie *Midnight in Paris* of Woody Allen...

The persistence of night as a major source of inspiration brings out a perennial question to artistic expression. In order to provide elements of response to these initial non-exhaustive questions, this seminar proposes to deal with the theme of night through artistic and literary interfaces. Most importantly, coming from different backgrounds, by sharing therefore different cultural and perceptive aspects, either by communicating individually (as in Dutilleux's *Ainsi la nuit* after *La nuit étoilée* by Vincent van Gogh, *Haiga-s* by Ion Codrescu after the Chopin *Nocturnes*, Chinese poems on musical game at night ...) or in a collaborative manner.

#### SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHIE

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The seminar will take place Fridays mornings at the INHA from 10:00 to 13:00, once a month, beginning November 2019.

We hope that the communication duos give a large place to doctoral students or young doctors.

Please send your proposals to Marie Laureillard and Patrick Otto via the e-mails: mlaureillard@free.fr and otto.p@wanadoo.fr

A publication is planned.