

The Diagonal of the Void

La Salle de Bains Art Center, Lyon France

A well-known concept in French sociology, “The Diagonal of the Void” designates a zone with low population density that stretches across France from the Ardennes to the Landes. In time, this expression has become charged with its own mythology and fantasies about the countryside and its desertification. What exists in the center of France? Is this diagonal truly empty? Is there such a thing as a neutral landscape?

“The Diagonal of the Void” is foremost an exhibition in relation to the cinema of Éric Rohmer. In the manner of 17th century moral philosophers such as Labruyère or La Rochefoucauld, this filmmaker was a very keen observer of the mores of his time and of their expression in language.

But from the Classical century, he also inherited the arcadian sensibility of La Fontaine and the geometric eye of Pascal and he tirelessly filmed the French landscape in its various archetypes: Paris, provincial cities, beaches in Brittany visited by bourgeois vacationers or even the deserted villages of the diagonal of the void.

He evoked the Drôme and the valley of the Rhône in this way, as a site of exchange and above all as a territory having a lozenge shape (and this is a case of word-play on the name of his production company founded in 1962 with Barbet Schroeder, *les Films du Losange*).

In addition, “the diagonal of the void” has long served to designate a zone of low population density that stretches across France from the Ardennes to the Landes. It resonates with the history of the entire French landscape, from the process of extreme centralization to that of progressive and hesitant decentralization and the incessant rivalry between Paris and the rest of France. This expression belongs first and foremost to the language of political and administrative action: the repopulation of this axis has long been a priority in the social debate.

We can also understand it differently. The diagonal is a kind of line; between the horizontal and the vertical. Thus in *Point, Line and Plane*, his grammar of forms, Kandinsky evokes the perceptual effect of the diagonal in a pictorial composition. It is more or less warm or cold according to its inclination. What then is the place of abstraction in the administrative conception of a territory? Is it a political tool in the same way as statistics?

The exhibition brings together artworks that for the most part were produced specifically for the exhibition. Some of the artists incessantly criss-cross this diagonal (Éric Tabuchi, Justin Meekel). Others have imagined ritual practices for this territory (Pierre Vadi, Andreas Dobler). Others finally have borrowed from it various abstract forms (David Malek, Andaud Vérin, Simon Boudvin). Jill Gasparina and Caroline Soyez-Petithomme are the exhibition’s curators.

paris
art

