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Duane Michals, the invention of the storyteller figure

Hybrid prints: writing with photographs - a pun of text and images?

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to study the historical shift that happened in the 1960s-70s that made it possible for artists to develop new artistic ways to convey emotions and portray themselves. This turn of events led to the development of mixed media artworks and the creation of a new, international artistic archetype: the story teller. Duane Michals is one of the best examples of this general trend, being one of the first to create hybrid artworks mixing texts and images. While he opened new doors to artistic ways of expression, he also entirely modified the relationship between literature and photography. Over the years, the photographic medium evolved to become an adaptation/editing art *par excellence*, while our contemporary world of interconnectedness, where capitalism and post-industrial society rule not only the economic but also the artistic exchanges, led to both new abilities (young artists started using tools their predecessors did not have) and to a crisis of human beliefs in the greater history, dereliction and individualism being immediate effects of this global upheaval. Can one therefore consider that, to counter the social and economical context of the 1960s-80s, a revalorization of narrative forms emerged as an answer to this disbelief in greater myths? If so, can the artists' relationships with texts and images be read in this perspective? I chose to consider Duane Michals' serial portraits as one of the first answers to our global need for narratives. With regards to this initial storyteller, a new generation of artists re-enacted the text/image tension in the past twenty years, seizing the opportunities and tools at hand and, in a way, extended Duane Michals' plight for a stronger interaction of text and images. This relationship appears in today's artistic practices to be, if not more vital, just as topical as ever.

With the establishment of photography as an independent art and the development of a specific trend called the *Narrative Art* in the 1960s, new artists were given a voice and means of expressing themselves. Duane Michals, a 92-year-old American photographer, is one of them, and in a way, one of the most charismatic figures of this movement.

Through Michals' work, the divisions and categories in which the arts were rooted started to melt: he added words into images. Eventually, the words became sentences, poems, and ended up taking more space on the pages and walls than the photographs, reversing his original tendency. He changed the ways in which the art practice was considered by breaking a considerable taboo, as he himself stated. Writing on the borders of the image, he drifted away from the "decisive moment" and mimetic capacity of the medium. He also welcomed an elliptic form of narration, close to what we would today define as a storyboard, redefining the relationship between images and texts in an unprecedented way.

The aim of this paper is to study the historical shift that happened in the 1960s-70s that made it possible for artists to develop new artistic ways to convey emotions. This turn of events led to the creation of a new and international artistic figure: the storyteller. From today's perspective, this needs a re-reading, an onlook that enables the critic to picture, from a distance, a contemporary and collective need for new narrative forms, concomitant to this surfacing artist figure. While Michal opened new doors to artists, the intellectual foundation they based on underwent several transformations. The photographic medium evolved to become an adaptation/editing art *par excellence*, while our contemporary world of interconnectedness, where capitalism and post-industrial society rule not only the economic but also the artistic exchanges, led to a crisis of human beliefs in a greater history. Dereliction and individualism were immediate effects of this global upheaval. Can one therefore consider that, to counter the socioeconomical context of the 1960s-80s, a revalorization of narrative forms emerged? If so, can the artists' relationships with texts and images be read within this framework? Were Duane Michals' serial portraits the firsts to introduce the figure of the storyteller? All in all, it seems that Michals paved the way for a new generation who, with its digital capabilities and easily reachable tools, re-wrote the relationship between texts and images.

How he became the king of a photographic world that craved innovation

When one tries to create a typology of the various historical relationships between literature and photography, the way seems to be full of pitfalls. The critic stumbles onto a first trap: the value of the image compared to that of the text. This subject has led to a lot of discourses over the years and has been debated since antiquity. Putting the question of hierarchy aside, one must remember Horace's words and his principle of "ut pictura poesis". It led to a complete shift in aesthetics. Horace, whose writings date back to 65 BC, explained that poetry is like painting. One can draw a parallel between poetry and literature and painting and photography as *media* using a figurative representation or a non-verbal representation of reality. The cornerstone in Horace's theory lies in the notion of *mimesis*, a term that refers to the mimetic representation of reality in the arts. Both poetry and painting translate the world through words and images and offer the reader a view into it. Horace is the first one to clearly assess the possibility of two art practices being similar and therefore equal in value.

The association of texts and images in the arts, however, is a late process. Although the art world frequently shows that literature and photography share a common creative process, divisions between the various arts remained static until the 1950s-60s. Before then, each medium was considered a separate art form. Duane Michals' career developed in a context where the compartmentalization of the arts was called into question, and he certainly played a significant role in the reassessment of the definition of art. The idea of photography speaking a specific language was born out of the concomitant idea of a possible autonomy of each. The first theories on photography compared the new art to its older brother: painting. Roland Barthes¹ is a useful guide in this context: "it's not through Painting that Photography touches the Art, it is through Theatre". Its drama, or rather its narrative dimension, is considered the specificity of photography, not its mimetic capacity. At which point does Michals touch theatre? For the Greeks, drama was the third pillar of the Antique trilogy, between tragedy and comedy. Michals perfectly achieves this thin line between fear and humor in his photographs. The themes he developed cast a chill on the series (eg. the passing of time, desire, death) and display a satirical tone that forces a smile out of the viewer, who finds himself torn between tears and laughter (the playwright Jean Racine's definition of what good theatre provokes). Marco Livingstone² has also addressed the influence of theatre in Michals' art practice. When he mentioned the deserted NYC streets Michals photographed, he wrote, „this is the time when he started considering his shots as theatre scenes. Then, from this idea, he started adding actors. Creating staged photographs was the obvious logic next step.” The photographic art being suddenly considered for its dramatic potential, one can already foresee the possibility of a new artist character and of a mixed-media practice that, in those years, started to mix texts and images.

The advent of Duane Michals' serial works is also a direct consequence of a contextual change in fine arts. It traces back to a movement called *Narrative Art* (United States) or *Art Narratif* (France) that developed in the 1960s. Even though he was probably closer to his French and Belgian cousins such as Marcel Broodthaers than most of the American artists, one can draw a parallel between his works and William Wegman's sequences and narrative photographs. In France, the first collective exhibition to be officially claimed as a *Narrative Art* show took place at the French Museum of Modern Art in Paris in 1964, under the initiative of the critic G erald Gassiot-Talabot and various painters like Bernard Rancillac and Herv  T l maque. This movement had one common line: the art of storytelling. For this reason, it is not accidental that the curatorial team behind Michals' last show at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum in (November 1, 2014 – February 16, 2015) has chosen the title *Storyteller: The Photographs of Duane Michals...* All the artists who took part in the *Narrative Art* movement shared a special manner of conveying ideas through words, sounds or images and shaping those elements into time based sequences or stories. The story could either be real or fictive, that was not the issue at stake. In Taschen's book *20th Century Photography*, Reinhold Misselbeck³ explains that "these artists associate to their systematic analysis of the arts poetic narrations in which the artist-author was also often acting as the main character». Through this "acting as a character" the relation to theatre becomes an evident element in the construction of the author's identity.

Art historians generally see two trends inside the *Narrative Art* group. On one side, critics assemble artistic works that are akin to personal myths. Within this trend, the artist is positioned at the core of works focusing on intimate subjects. Portraiture found a lot of *amateurs* in those years. The second trend gathers together politically-oriented *tableaux*, photographs and/or texts. Duane Michals' works are decisive: they stand at the crossroads of these two tendencies. In New York, the development of this subculture conceptual group influenced numerous later schools of thoughts, museology research, as well as today's presentation of hybrid artworks in museums. Museography took the full extent of this movements' influence on contemporary art and gives it pride of place.

To fully understand the measure of the photographic medium's changes, it is necessary to fully grasp the frame in which Michals' photographs came to light. Alexandre Quoi, a graduate assistant at Paris IV University wrote a comprehensive analysis of the "photo conceptualism diffusion in France in the 1970s", focusing on the input of Michel Nuridsany's 1980 show at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris titled *They call themselves painters, They call themselves photographers*. The following review of the show was published in *Le Figaro* on November 21 of that

same year: “For photography in Paris in November, the moment of glory has come. Not only did it “gain the recognition” we hoped it would ten years ago, it freed itself (...) Since 1970 it meant something much vaguer, but that only has to do with a photography meant for museums, the ones that are exhibited, that can be seen on exhibition walls of galleries and museums.” In an article published in *L’Aurore* on December 12, 1980, journalist Jean-Marie Tasset also explained: “Sweet revenge! Dear triumph! Despised yesterday, misunderstood, not fully tolerated, photography finally imposed itself as a major art, equal to painting or sculpture... Photography stands in the watershed of its own history. Maybe in a critical phase out of which she’ll come in full bloom.” Clearly, painters were the ones who showed the earliest interest for photography and 1980s exhibitions helped legitimize photoconceptualism. It showed as well how an entire generation of artists resorted to photography as their main tool, contributing to its integration in the field of Fine Arts.

A new expression was coined to refer to the producers of hybrid artworks. Christian Boltanski, a French filmmaker, photographer, and painter, liked to call them „painter-photographers”. This expression reminds us of Nuridsany’s second hanging in Chalon-sur-Saone. For this sequel, he focused on the artists’ tendency to present photographs that re-enacted painting concepts. It exhibited mainly the photo sequences or fragments that flourished in those years, drawing a parallel between photographic processes and literary narratives. Michals should be considered as part of this movement, even though he recently confirmed he had no knowledge of its existence in France. To quote Pierre de Fenöyl who introduced Michals’ *Wonders of Egypt*, „Those photographs do not encompass the seriousness of photo reports; they refuse any commitment to ‘reality’. They do not show a reflection of it, but a reflexion of Duane Michals”. In essence, Duane Michals’ work has nothing to do with photo reportage. He is the author of a resolutely unrealistic novel and it is for that very reason that his photo-texts can be read in the framework of *Narrative Art*, even though Michals marches to his own beat.

The development of narrative theories also paved the way for new artistic developments. In 1928, Russian writer Vladimir Propp developed in *Morphology of the Folktale* a literary theory devoted to the structures of fairytales. He identified their simplest irreducible narrative elements. Only translated into English in 1958, the text was re-published in 1968 and translated into French, German and Spanish between 1970 and 1975. The influence of this narrative theory is considerable as it created plot patterns, studied functions and typical characters as symbols of greater themes: villains and heroes, the initial situation, the disruptive factor or the resolution. This classification set structural guidelines for writers and still influences narratology research today. This background should be kept in mind when considering the rise of artistic works marked by a pluridisciplinary inclination. Duane Michals’ move can be construed as a parallel to the creation of the *Nouveau Roman* group in France in the 1950s-70s, a movement of writers who shared the ideal of a writing process that would express an individual vision of things.

Overall, this specific context of the 1960s-70s can be read as a defining moment in the history of the arts, with several parallel developments in the theory of literature, in art groups and with photography finally considered as an independent art form. Those were structuring times during which art and society gave the floor to artists who were conscious of the difficulty of comprehending the world that was around them. They had to find reading keys to an overflow of images whose meaning escaped the image-spectators, whether they be active or passive, mere passers-by or museophiles. A large mass of viewers became avid readers of stories, men and women who demanded artworks’ sub-texts. Artists were faced with an obligation: they could no longer simply present images, they were expected to explain, which ultimately implied a justification of their work, their status, and even of their contribution to a productive society where they struggled to find their place. Over the years, the protagonists of the 1960s art world gained awareness of issues such as style and language. Microgenesis, also called narrative sequences, was at first a stylistic tool, but soon became for Michals and others a path to bend the rules of a medium to suit their own ends, to leave behind the prints and the primacy of the instant in order to convey visual stories.

An imaginary representation of the self – the Duane Michals case

To dive further into our subject, a small detour can help understand the issue at stake. Douglas Huebler, an American photographer, provides an interesting perspective to this regard. A pioneer of minimalism and conceptual art, he brought up the idea of a common language for photography and literature, explaining he “used them to summarize a state of absolute coexistence of the <image> and the <language>”.⁴ From there, we can jump to F. de Saussure, the French linguist who wrote in his *Course in General Linguistics*⁵ that „there is no language without a voice”. It seems that reading is the process of imagining that voice. It is a fiction of diction, just like the voice of an author filters through each novel.

In Duane Michals’ works, the comparison with the literary process is interesting insofar as one takes into account the question of authorship that lies behind a text. His artistic process is encased in a problematic relationship to

authorship. This is beautifully expressed by S. Sontag⁶ who wrote, „each photograph is physically mute... It talks through the mouth of the text beneath it”. Captions can be interpreted as the mouth. They are definitely not a simple description of the photograph we are looking at. “The caption that goes with the image is the voice that was needed but even an entirely accurate caption is only one interpretation”. Michals’ photographs give no indication of what is to be seen on the image – they are interpretations. Their value is no higher or lower than that of the image, they are a figment of the author’s imagination. Sontag went on to explain how the emotional impact depends on the context in which the photograph is inserted. A good example of this is Duane Michals’ photograph “The most beautiful part of a woman’s body „that shows a woman’s breasts. The image works in itself, with a perfect framing, with its shades of grey that evoke the sensual dimension of the body. Nevertheless, the added poem develops what the image frontally depicts in a different manner. The poem includes alliteration of the letter “r”, which expresses the roundness of the breasts’ curves. The language is the common notion between texts and images, as well as the core of those artworks that mix literature and photography.

What do these photo-texts actually talk about? The self suddenly became the main focus of artworks, and this is also a visible trend today in contemporary art. The swing took place within the definition of the creative force behind the work and modified the artist status. As an author, Michals signs texts, he takes a stand. Sontag mentioned that authors try to make their style “easily recognizable”, explaining that photography implies an equivocal relationship between the artwork and its *author*. In Michals’ case, the signature is in the handwritten text more than in the way he signs his pieces. In his captions, one can see connections with the narrator of a novel most autobiographies present us with in the very first pages. One can think of F.-R. Chateaubriand’s *Mémoires d’ Outre-Tombe*,⁷ in which the narrator explains to the reader that since it’s impossible to predict his death time, he will, in order to “stave off boredom” give his writing motives. Michals’ images don’t shed that much insight into his own person, and some viewers might miss his photographs without recalling his name. He nevertheless creates an imaginary representation of the self, picking his own person as the main subject in many of his images. This goes with the introduction of a specific character/narrator. We can feel his presence in the title of his book *What I Wrote* for example. This character is depicted by Renaud Camus who quotes Michals in his *Photo Poche*’s⁸ introduction: “nobody can reproduce my scribbling, while someone else could always print one of my photographs”. He stages his own hands (“I am making black marks. These marks are my thoughts”) and shouts across to the reader: “It’s no accident that you are reading this”. In doing so, he calls for a clever reader, an amateur as keen on humor as he is, who might immortalize the author-photographer. In the association between texts and images, one can imagine the outline of the author’s stylus, and a taste of “I have been here” that is usually so typical of novels.

Self-portraits are symbolic of the invention of the author figure. Duane Michals’ 1989 exhibition’s catalogue for the Hamburg Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe explains how the author can be perceived when one considers the photographers’ humorous tone, but also in his (typo)graphic choices. It is no accident either that Michals had worked as a graphic designer and photo editor for a magazine at the beginning of his career and that commissions were (and still are) an important source of income for him. His eye probably grew accustomed to the composition of texts and images very early. Later, as he started photographing, his use of graphic tools did not diminish. While in his first portraits, Michals used lowercases, he changed to capital letters in his self-portraits, starting with „Duane Michals Photographed by Stefan Mihal”. It is at the exact moment he started working with self-portraits that he firmly engraved his words in captions.

Another point worth noticing is the photographer’s use of a fictitious double as part of an imaginary identity creation process. Stefan Mihal is one of Duane’s avatars. During the opening week of the Rencontres d’Arles festival in 2009, while on stage, Michals said “I am Dr. Duanus”, with a laughter that reminded the audience of the distance between the photographer and his alter ego. The creation of a fictive figure was also developed in the arts around the 1970s as a necessity to put the subject at a distance. Harald Szeemann’s *Individual Mythologies* introduced the public to this idea in a collective show presented in 1972. The show combined artworks related to the notions of personal myths, of personal rituals of artists. The artist-author myth and figure appeared in those years. Renaud Camus explains that Michals was named Duane after his mom’s boss’s son, whom the artist always called „the original Duane”, as if he himself was the poor copy of the latter. This split personality is peculiar to the author’s artistic process in literature. In Michals’ case, it is rather a satirical version of himself, an incisive alter ego who has the cheek to criticize what he calls the “artists”, those who preach fame and fashionable photography. The satirical double could be blamed for his moral stands: “Stop looking for art in fickle fashion whims and you will soon find: it’s not out there, out there’s in your...” Within the singular of an artist’s expression, this myth of the author is representative of striving for a universal voice. This is also true in the series of photographs titled “Who is Sidney Sherman?” The wig and the masquerade costume come together to create a character. This figure can be the answer to the necessity to have both the author and the photographer sitting side by side, keeping the integrity of the photographer and developing a snappy subversive alter ego. In doing so, Duane Michals took part in this mythification process of the author-narrator-artist figure. So did H. Szeemann who signed his exhibition, creating at the approximate same period a new narrative figure that would be essential to the development of contemporary art in later years, writing and signing exhibitions: the curator.

The author is the one who takes the stand. Historians are uncertain about the correct etymology of the term „author”, but some mentioned the Latin “auctor” as the authority figure. Clearly this relates to the myth of the story teller, who offers strong insights on polemical subjects, the way Michals does in *What I Wrote*. It seems that his photographs became more and more politically aware around the 1980s, as highlighted in this biography, a decade in which one can feel a “renewed political interest as well as a growing concern for the intolerance of the moral majority”. Duane Michals expressed his doubts about the consumer society with a cutting tone easily decipherable in the captions. “Gursky’s Gherkin”, a photograph shot in 2001, criticizes the hyper realistic works of Andreas Gursky as well as his artistic choices (photo retouching amongst others). Michal denounces the marchandization of the art market Gursky takes part in, with most of his photographs being sold at prohibitive prices. *99 Cent II Diptych* (2001) was sold at Sotheby’s for 1.7 million pounds in 2007. The pickle comparison in “Gursky’s Gherkin” reveals Michals’ point of view on the subject. Michals’ book *Foto-follies – How Photography Lost Its Virginity to the Bank*⁹ also revisits contemporary top-rated artworks and the critics’ formal and empty words.

Apart from his invention of an author-narrator figure, Duane Michals’ works are also related to literary practices through the question of time. From the discontinuity of the images to the linearity of the text, he re-enacts the question of timing that has always been the core issue within photography. In *La Chambre Claire* R. Barthes develops the idea of what he calls the *punctum* to express how photography always intrinsically expresses what “has been”. Photography was referred to as the reign of the instant, but sequences develop duration. The medium a fixation of a time that has gone, and of the fixer on the paper at the same time, a way to fight back the passing of time with a potential eternity. There is something strikingly narrative in resorting to sequences. Strangely enough, if critics never tried to question the narrative dimension of cinematography since movies are based on a script, this was not the case with photography. Its temporal dimension is less obvious, but cannot be missed within Michals’ sequences. Hervé Guibert, the author of *L’Imagefantôme*,¹⁰ recalled the photographer’s series called *Changes*, which traces back Duane’s history, from the youngest to the oldest age highlighting the ageing process and ending with the photographer’s potential photographer’s death. In the chapter “Sequel, series and sequences”, Guibert analyses this device, explaining that “a sequence is the symbol of narrative continuity and could be compared to the continuity editing in cinema; the series would be the exploitation and wearing out of a single idea or object: the sequel would be a montage of several photographs which would, associated with one another, convey something that isn’t included in themselves, like a message”. This is exactly the parceled-out interval in which Michals plays, creating ellipsis between images. While the movie makes the viewer go from stage 1 to stage 2 in a unidirectional and constraint manner, Michals’ artistic process relies on the potential lying in that very space between the photographs. It’s the viewer’s role to make up for that connection just the way a reader would in literature. It is reminiscent of Laurence Sterne, who pushes us to interact with the text by leaving blank pages within his book *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*,¹¹ or with the art of fotonovelas that developed in the aftermath of WWII as short pamphlets, similar in format to those of the comic-books, including photographs and dialogue bubbles. Some of Michals’ narrative sequences could clearly relate to those. Take for example, the one that includes Richard Gere and Cindy Crawford, entitled “Amazing Rick Dick!” It is not in the bubble that one can hear Duane Michals’ voice, but rather in the captions or small texts below the photographs.

If not the comic-book or the fotonovela, Duane Michals’ works could be read in direct lines of descent from fables and fairytales. Those succinct fictional stories led to an interpretation of a moral of universal range. In *What I Wrote*,¹² he tells the tale of a mouse that steals Santa’s presents to give them to all the naughty children. This reversal of the traditional story of Christmas is the very basis of the farcical and carnivalesque genre as studied by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*¹³. Bakhtin explained that a reversal of the logic and of the roles is the core device of fables. The mouse in Michals’ story magically shrinks a rascal’s presents. As a response, Paul, disappointed by the size of them, sets up a mousetrap. The moral of this story, written in capital letters says: “A mouse should never be nice to a lousy kid!” This reversal is also obvious in *Upside Down Inside Out and Backwards*.¹⁴ It clearly is the subversive dimension of the fable that Michals addresses, derived from one-sided interpretation and “pretensions of a definite meaning”, to quote Bakhtin. This simple sentence encapsulates both his photographs’ humorous tone, the moral or satirical dimension of the captions, as well as the multiplicity of interpretations he favors. Dreams and freedom of interpretation are key devices and it is up to the reader-viewer to grasp the meaning of each sequence.

Back to the future – how a growing demand for narratives led to a renewal of the text/image relationship

Rémi Coignet is an art and photography critic. In 2013, he wrote a text about the French emerging artist Amaury da Cunha, called “After all”. He talked about “allusive narrations” and the importance of the author’s subjectivity. He also stated that an „extreme attention to literature guides [Amaury’s] artistic work”. Praising “visual poems” and “photographic short stories”, he introduces the work of this young artist just the way one would introduce Michals’.

Fifty years separate them both but it seems that the one follows the path of the other. A general trend has appeared in the arts in the past twenty years. Out of the new generation of visual artists, many share a common interest for storytelling. With the development of Internet and the new means of communication/broadcasting of images, this desire took a new and decisive turn. Those recent technological changes modified the way hybrid works could be presented but also affected the creative process itself. The artists' role and the curator and critic's status subsequently changed, the image being the prime issue of this shift into the digital world from the pre-Internet age to a network era.

Duane Michals left a considerable artistic heritage to his followers. Contemporary artists went further; they renewed the text/image relationship being accustomed to an almost immediate and tight interaction between the two, while it was more of a craftsman's work when Duane started his photo-sequences. It seems as if the artists were tasked with answering a general demand for narratives and that they assumed this role quite naturally. This need for stories or even fairytales echoes the way in which History was writing itself in the second part of the 20th century. At a time when each and every one's personal experience could be read in parallel with collective (for example the activist movements of 1968 in France), people tried to influence the course of History (with a capital H). People's stories became historically relevant. Meanwhile, the great artistic depictions which had always been linked with religion, from the Renaissance to modernism, were put into question. Casting doubts on religion, intellectuals within the contemporary society (coincides with post WWII times, modern art being defined as extending till the 1950s-60s), artists and theorists made way for a great emptiness: the lack of greater narratives. Various historians and sociologists who studied the post-war years noted a kind of disarray within the minds of spectators, readers and citizens who lacked seminal myths. Smaller narratives supplanted broader ones, the personal overriding the mythical or what was called the "great" telling of history, the intimate alleviating the centennial narrations the Church and the arts has spread since time immemorial. The Bible is obviously here read as one of those first great narratives.

It is therefore no surprise to witness the number of hybrid artworks that sprung up, mixing narration with other *media*. Michals' art pieces voiced this demand for fictions very early. Within his practice, this slowly led to a multiplication of textual fragments, each longer than the one before, and to the recurrent use of prose poetry. Seriality met the expressive limitations of the photograph but also enabled him and his followers to multiply the layers of meaning and rhizomatically organize the data pictured by their cameras. For Horacio Fernández, this is one of the prerogatives of the photographic medium. Fernández explains this in his introduction to the 2015 Reina Sofia Museum exhibition: "for a long time the aesthetic consideration of photography has been limited to individual images that are able to work in a similar way to paintings or etchings... Yet this model is not the only one, and many photographers cannot synthesize their work in a single image, devising it instead in a series. Both models give rise to two coherent histories of photography: one comprised of photos to hang on walls, with a limited number of copies and on sale at art galleries; the other in book form, possibly with a reissue, available in bookstores." This demand for an art that comes out of the gallery's walls and exits its own frontiers into narrative sequences is one of the explanations of today's recurrent art books dedicated exhibitions.

What exactly is this current need for storytelling and what does it derive from? C. Lévi-Strauss' writings offered clarifying considerations on this subject. He explained that myths and tales coexist in each society and are in fact complementary. Every civilization is always in search of its own narrative, meaning and history or for a structural pattern. The overflow of images our eyes are subjected to today implied a reshuffling of the data and a desire to read their sub-text or the story behind the great amount of sometimes indigestible visuals that surround us. One tries to find binding elements that are not necessarily inscribed below the image. Within the narrative lies the possibility of weaving a pattern or a supplementary layer of meaning. This need is also a demand for dreams, for a fictional potential inside a somewhat bland reality. "There are things here not seen in this photograph"'s title winks at a benevolent reader who would willingly let go of his belief to jump into a world of fiction the way one did with surrealist René Magritte's painting "Cecin'est pas une pipe". Using the exact same device, Michal writes that an unseen dimension lies before us, creating an off-screen space for us to imagine. The text associated with the image describes a scene that is not on the image: "a drunk was talking to another drunk about Nixon." The photograph only shows an empty space and we viewers have the responsibility for making up for the rest of the stories. The viewer is more than happy to surrender to D. Michals' aphorism: "dreams are the midnight movies of the mind". Same goes with „Alice's Mirror"; the tale seems based on a potential double interpretation, between dreams and nightmares, we stand in a state of awakening. Based on the use of images within images, the series' outcome is surprising. The reader falls into the narrative trap reminding us how Alice falls into the hole in Lewis Carroll's¹⁵ novel. This is also the case in „Things are queer" with the series' last image being identical to the opening one. The photographer creates a loop and plays on scales to loose us viewers. Even if this pun of words and images is at the very heart of Michals' character, one should not forget that much of his work's success lies within our desire for a fictional and somewhat fictitious tale.

From the great history to smaller stories, art slid towards intimate tales. Susan Sontag mentioned photography's inclination for personal mythification. Our contemporary need for narratives could be better understood if one took into account how the medium aspires towards intimacy. In a recent interview given to the Carnegie Museum curatorial team, Duane Michals explained how he wished his personal collection of artworks could be seen in context (meaning

in his own house). Obviously, this impossible request echoes a contemporary trend. Artworks are linked with personal encounters and are beautiful insofar as they tell something about the person who gave them life. It is interesting to consider photographs in a larger body of work, in the cloud of hypertexts and references they link with. This brings to mind H. Guibert once more, who developed a chapter on his “favorite photographs” describing the ones that inspired him and thus emphasizing on the hyper referentiality inherent of the artistic process. It is what Duane Michals states when he explains that „the text is the language without its imaginary world”. It falls to us to give birth to a language that would not be discontinuous anymore, but rather as a discussion between elements. However, what is this contemporary language that enables today’s viewers to read hybrid works and separated elements as an ensemble?

In the digital age, the contemporary image underwent a revolution in its relationship with the text. This new language we made a dent in could be called hypertext or hyperlink. The study written by Jean Clément called *Du texte à l’hypertexte: vers une épistémologie de la discursivité hypertextuelle*¹⁶ (From the text to the hypertext, towards an epistemology of hypertextual discursivity), reminds us of the genesis of this word. Invented in 1965 by Ted Nelson, it has been used more and more frequently recently with its field of application spreading even though its main context remains the Internet world. Clément questions the digital sphere as an enunciative process potential space. It clearly implied a profound change in both the arts and in literature. He points that “the hypertext’s interest doesn’t exclusively lie in the information units it includes... but in the possibility to build a thought or a story based on those datas”. He also evokes a non linear „literary path”, the hypertext leading to a leap from one piece of data to the other in the exact same way than Michals’ photo-texts implied the interconnexion of disparate data. This parallel is even more interesting in the sense that Clément mentions the spatial dimension of the hypertext. Oral speeches are described as horizontally linear. Take the example of the idiom “to follow the thread of a conversation”. As the opposite figure, he brings up the vertical dimension of the printed text that manages to escape from the binary relationship before/after to work in a top/bottom pattern. The hypertext works differently. It gives a panoramic vision through a “tabular „reading, the way Michals explains that his texts are inseparable from his photographs. The spectator synthesizes diverse elements to get an overview, the reading of both the text and the image being completely concomitant. The digital text opened new windows to narratives and made the hyperlink and the cloud of data a process in which the text cannot be dissociated from the image, just like it is on Twitter where the hash tag is embedded in the image itself. The interconnexion of texts and images is made even stronger within the digital age, and this probably explains why the emerging artists reenacted the association process of Duane Michals in an even more interconnected way.

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The relationship between texts and images has constantly changed, and the development of the fairly recent art of photography is an interesting field of study to witness those developments. Our contemporary society nurtures images: they are everywhere. Photographs are praised for their strong visual impact, but one should not omit what develops in time and that –with the suspense it implies – conveys emotions. Duane Michals’ prints are symbolic of this attention to both striking photographs and to the intimate and rather slow process necessary to decipher the scribbling of his handwriting. His humor, his tone of voice, and evidently his hybrid artworks make him one of the best examples of the new artistic figure that developed in the 20th and 21st centuries. His artistic choices, though a clear product of the 1960s-70s shift in art, paved the way for emerging artists that see photography as the ideal malleable material. Michals probably also voiced a general demand for storytelling and narratives, a desire to experience both committed and humorous artworks, but more importantly that shared an intimate view on the world. Michals was one of the first photo-writers. He definitely enabled the text to find its space on the photographic paper, and raised public and museum awareness of mixed-media artworks. He should have the last say. Quoted by Blake Gopnik for the *New York Time Magazine* last October he said: “photography needs to expand, or it will be in a ghetto, it will be a minor art form”. Let us hope that the recent development of new media and the growing interconnectedness of texts and images will offer tools to artists who might hear the word.

Biography

Valentine Umansky has devoted herself to both literature and photography. She is currently working for the Filles du Calvaire Gallery as Assistant Director, and over the years she has worked for the Photoquai biennale, Julie Saul’s Gallery, the Rencontres d’Arles Festival and the Pictet Prize. Apart from her professional involvement in the arts field, she has a strong background in literature and takes part in several activist or activist groups. Her thesis for her Master of Arts degree at EHESS (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales) in Paris was devoted to the relationship of text and images and this paper gives an overview of a book she is about to publish on this very subject.

¹ Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire* (Camera Lucida), Cahiers du cinéma – Gallimard, 1980.

² Marco Livingstone, "A Meeting with Duane Michals", *Duane Michals - Photographs/Sequences/Texts, 1968-1984*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1984.

³ Reinhold Misselbeck, *20th Century Photography*, Taschen, 2005.

⁴ Anaël Lejeune, *The Work of Douglas Huebler*, Université Catholique de Louvain, 2014.

⁵ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics (Cours de linguistique générale)* is an influential book compiled by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye from lectures given by F. de Saussure at the University of Geneva between 1906 and 1911. It was published in 1916, after Saussure's death, 1916.

⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, Penguin, London, 1977.

⁷ F-R. de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, Gallimard, Pléiade, volume 1, 1848.

⁸ Duane Michals, *Duane Michals*, Centre National de la Photographie, Photopoché, 1997.

⁹ Duane Michals, *Foto-follies – How photography lost its virginity on the way to the bank*, Thames & Hudson, 2006.

¹⁰ Hervé Guibert, *L'Image fantôme*, Editions de Minuit, 1981.

¹¹ Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, Paperback, 1759-67.

¹² Duane Michals, *What I Wrote*, Delpire, 2008.

¹³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968.

¹⁴ Duane Michals, *Upside Down Inside Out and Backwards*, A Sonny Boy Book, 1993.

¹⁵ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Kessinger Publishing, 1865.

¹⁶ Jean Clément, *Hypertextes et hypermédias: Réalisations, Outils, Méthodes*, Hermès, 1995.