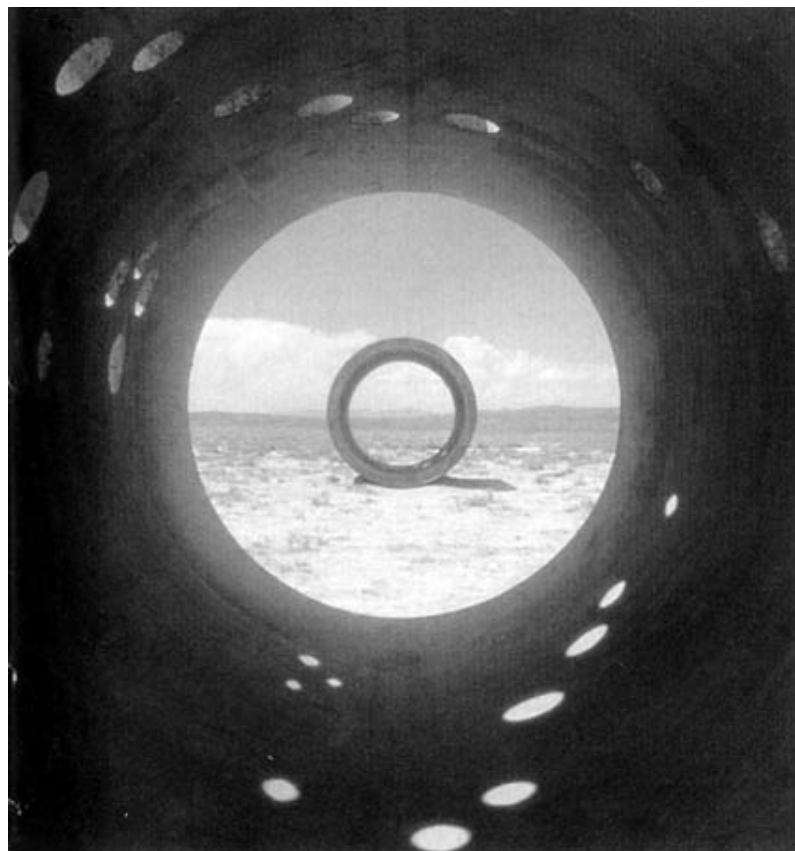


# *Out of the blue wild movie,*

a film by manuela morgaine



MAUBERT  
Galerie d'art moderne et contemporain  
PARIS



*OUT OF THE BLUE*

*wild movie*  
(52')

some artists and celestial bodies of the  
American Far West

a film by Manuela Morgaine

playfilm  
la muse en circuit  
artistes&associés  
envers compagnie  
2002

images : Sabine Lancelin  
sound designer : Laurent Sellier  
editing : Dora Soltani  
consultant and translator: Francesca Pollock



*“If you want to destroy someone, begin by making him out to be a savage.” Bertold Brecht*

\*

### **Invisible star**

A Persian tale tells the story that one day there is a gathering in the land of the butterflies. They are tormented by the mystery of the flame.

One of them goes to see the candle flame and describes it. He comes back with the treasure of what he saw.

The wise man says that the butterfly is not telling them anything new about the secret of the flame.

Another goes to touch the candle flame; he burns the edge of his wings. And comes back with his burn. He tells his story.

The wise man says that the butterfly is not telling him anything new either.

The third one throws himself in the flame and burns.

The wise man who saw the scene from a distance says that only the dead butterfly holds the secret of the flame.

We call black holes those invisible stars or celestial objects that capture material and light with no hope of return. Free particles, gravitating without the desire to shine, ready to consume themselves on the energy of their faith and sense of mystery.

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**Nevada - Utah - Arizona - New Mexico -  
Four states – four artists – four utopias**

**synopsis**

**the mystery of the flame**



We think in terms of the world that surrounds us, its territories at our measure. We invent objects we can hold in our hands or that fall within the scope of our eyesight. And if we are infinitely small in the greatness of the cosmos, we invent shapes that do not try to be on the scale of the universe. Probably because, here in Europe, we do not often have greatness of space in front of our eyes. Therefore, our artistic utopias are on the scale of our countries and our seas. Something which crosses us and that we can cross. Living in town leads us to make art for boxes: the multicolored television box, the white box of the gallery, the black box of the theater, the music box, the movie box, the book box.

Six years ago I discovered the existence of a New World invented by certain artists as a space for creation, a horizon, within the greatness of the world and their utopias.

Extreme artists, “wild”, refusing to let their art, or themselves, be tamed by the world of cities and culture, refusing to be put in a box. They all have in common the necessity to invent in the heart of the immensity of the desert.

In the 60s, in many areas of the Western American desert, recognized artists, loners, tired of show biz or galleries came to set up their space. The more or less intimate, the freest, the most utopic. Water lilies atop the rocks, sand stars; they chose a free zone, deserted, they moved off center in order to invent their own center of the world. How and where to draw the fourth dimension?

Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, four states, four human utopias as grand as the human spirit and the geographical spaces chosen. Physical, spatial, temporal experiences of art or of nature. Marginal attitudes, exceptional figures, rare birds. They all have the sky in mind:

**Marta Becket**, dancer of the New York City Ballet, nearly eighty years old, created a theater in an old gas station in the heart of Nevada, in Death Valley.

Discovering her in 1996 was the starting point of this film.

**Nancy Holt**, avant-garde artist, known in the 60s, part of the Land Art group, came to Utah, near Salt Lake City, to install her *Sun Tunnels* and her *Buried Poems*.

**Ira Steiner**, not an artist, but a landscaper musician, a man, a specialist in the fauna and flora of the Sonoran desert, its guide, in the heart of Arizona.

**Charles Ross**, artist-astrophysicist, has been working for over thirty years on the installation of an astronomic observatory, *Star Axis*, in the heart of New Mexico.



## Nevada

“Death Valley” valley of the Mojave desert, located in California, south east of Nevada. Sand dunes like moon craters, marbled canyons, a salt lake, and volcanic remains. There we encounter coyotes, lynx, tarantulas, numerous lizards, and rattlesnakes. Few human beings. It is the hottest, driest and most arid region of the American West. Discovered in 1849 by a hundred pioneers who died of thirst, it was named Death Valley.

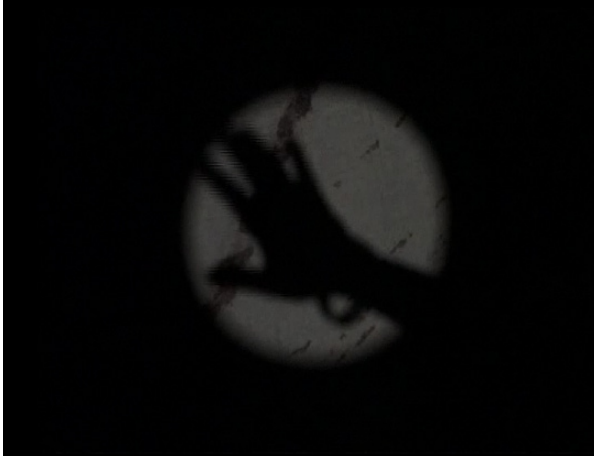
## The dancer: Marta Becket

## The Good Time Cabaret

A dancer, no relation to Samuel whose Becket takes two ts’, a 78-year-old dancer who dances twice a week, alone, for real or painted spectators, in a gas station she fixed up into a theater and a motel in the heart of the Nevada desert. The place is in itself is a pure cinematographic object. You can actually see the motel in David Lynch’s *Lost Highway*. Its situation – the decor – what happens there – the action – is a western version of Tati’s *Playtime*. Born in 1924 in New York, with a passion for dance, Marta Becket had a modest career until she decides to create her own choreographies. In 1967, Marta Becket and her husband go west in a camping car. Strange destiny: in Death Valley, they get a flat tire. To fix it they go to the nearest gas station at the DeathValley junction. Marta Becket looks at the place. A big abandoned Mexican building. Looking through a hole in the wall, she discovers a theater with an oak floor, a stage, and seats covered with years of dust. It is a revelation. The next day, Marta Becket meets a local personality. For a symbolic dollar, the run down theater is hers. Four months later, Marta Becket moves in. Nearby only two Mormon families. For a year, the couple works on the place. The theater opens on February 10th 1968. It is called the AMARGOSA OPERA HOUSE. The first evening there are twelve stragglers. Then, for days and days, nobody. That is when Marta Becket decides to paint a public on the walls of the theater. For four years, she paints everyday, from the orchestra to the balcony, a sixteenth century public: the nobility, the gypsies, the priests, and the “galantes”. On the ceiling she writes: “ the walls of this theater and I dedicate these paintings to the past without which our present would be without beauty”. Since then, and no matter what, at 8:15 pm, on Mondays and Saturdays, Marta Becket dances in her white tutu. And little by little her story has become known. Besides her painted spectators, some flesh and blood ones come from Las Vegas, from all over California, from New York, from Florida in flesh and blood to Death Valley Junction to watch an old body that might have been in Oh les beaux jours! dance against death. Somebody for Nobody: to decide to dance in the heart of the desert, at the junction of Death Valley, when one is 78 years old, that is what the film tries to show. The realization of a fabulous utopia, art for art’s sake, to life and to death, to the last breath.







## Utah

Salt Lake City, close by, as dry as Death Valley, as empty, without vegetation, a small piece of salt desert bought by Nancy Holt to make her *Sun Tunnels*. One of the only places from which the curve of the Earth can be seen. Flat ground. Horizon as far as the eye can see. No marker in this wide spread of land left here by a salt lake. Fossilized landscape.

**The artist: Nancy Holt**

*Sun tunnels* and *burried poems*

**Land Art** - artist, who wanted to enlarge exhibition spaces to burst them open, work with the land, change scale and open their world. Some of them like Smithson or James Turrell bought land to build their utopias: *Spiral Jetty* and *the Roden Crater*. Many dug in the ground, engraved a drawing on the flank, others carved in the rock, Christo stretched a canvas as long as the Great Wall of China; some set up observatories as if these places needed an audience. Here the audience is not painted but imagined by dreamers, observers, sleep walkers. These are sets, forms of representation, and a whole world apart that acts every day for the horizon, the lizards, the rattlesnakes, the coyotes, the lynx, the tarantula and the pupfish.

**Sun Tunnels:** Large cement lenses that the artist built and placed on this site between 1973 and 1976. 3.72 meters in exterior diameter and 2.44 meters in interior diameter. They are like giant viewfinders crossed by the rising sun during the summer solstice, ten days a year. There are four of them. Indicating four directions, four orientations. They are made to be crossed by the rays of the sun. But they are bigger than human scale and permit the visitor to cross them. Inside the tunnels, the artist made constellations. That way we are, at one and the same time, in a nocturnal and diurnal landscape. Here again the work is a framework and almost an authentic film lens. The *Sun Tunnels* offer a reflection on the take, and on the point of view. How can one assess the scale of the sky and the land at the same time? This is the attitude proposed to the rare spectator. Again, the place is far away. These four tunnels are here, like witnesses to the singular vision of an artist who began her career in the movies.

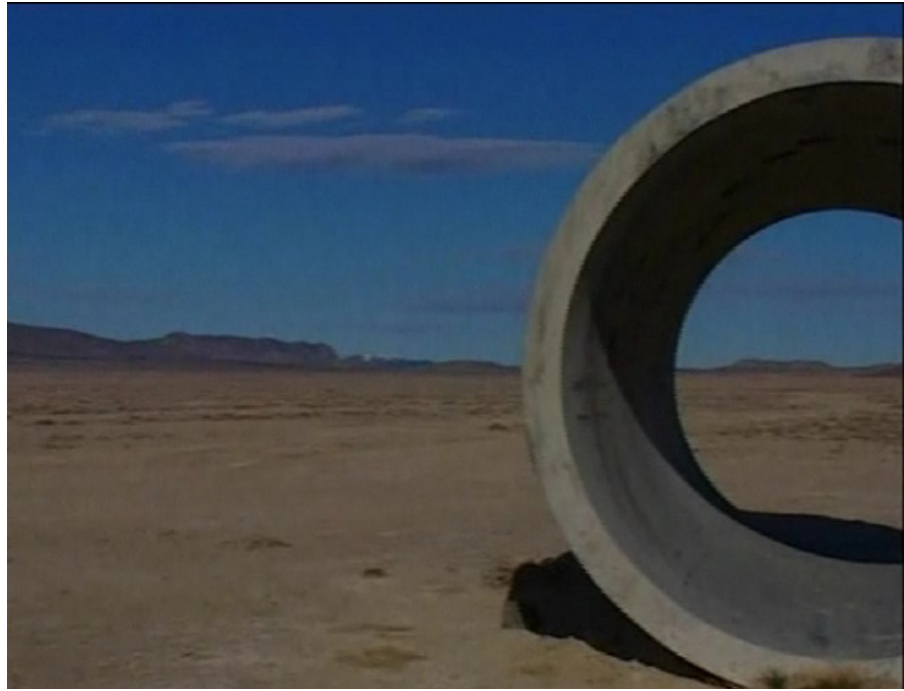
**Bringing up to date and burying.**

Her **Buried poems** are another adventure, more extreme and still more elementary because perfectly invisible. They were made between 1969 and 1971 and destined for five people.

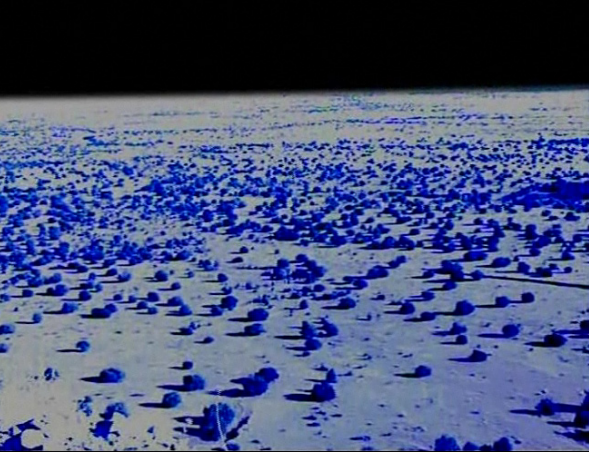
*“My Buried poems were originally to be confidential. I buried an object poem made for a particular person, in a place such as an uninhabited island in Florida or the arches of the National Monument in Utah. Some physical, spatial, atmospheric qualities of a site would remind me of someone I knew. I would research the site, its history, its geological characteristics, its flora and fauna and would include passages of my readings in a brochure that would have plans, photos, precise directions to find the Buried Poems, as well as postcards, images cut out or specimens of the leaves or rocks. After reading the brochure, the addressee of the poem would understand what linked him to the site. Because all the sites were wild, the poem was shrink-packed and buried in a crate in order to protect its contents for as long as the life of a human being. That way it could be dug up any time if the person happened to be in the area”* Nancy Holt.

If the *Sun Tunnels* show and surround the rays of the sun on a land forever flat, the *Buried poems* are invisible and suggest the poetic presence of the landscape. Here the places are silent and emptied of the artist’s body. If Death Valley gives a continuous spectacle of the body of a dancer, the salt desert of Utah is a pure frame, circle of light, cosmic experience of the image. Literal proposition of a point of view.









## New Mexico

New Mexico is Rio Grande. Mesas, pueblos. Chihuahua: long tongues of sand and fields of black lava Malpaïs, or bad earth. Alamogordo and near Albuquerque, rock engravings of over 1000 years. Taos, Pecos, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Abo, Quarai, Gran Quivira, Indian villages where people still live. The Apaches in the South and in the East, the Utes in the North. A tribe in the middle: the Navajos came from Canada. New Mexico as we have seen it so many times in Westerns.

The Wild West, the far away west is here. It is blood red.

It is precisely here, where the mountains meet the plains, that Charles Ross, after four years of research, decided, in 1971, to dig the site for his *Star Axis*.

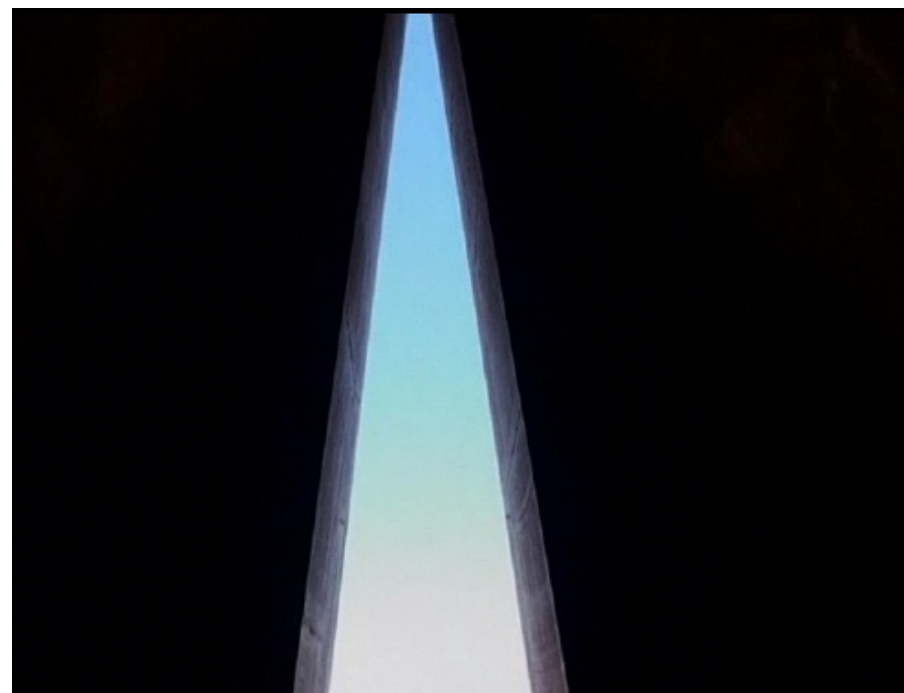
## The demiurge: Charles Ross

### *Star Axis*

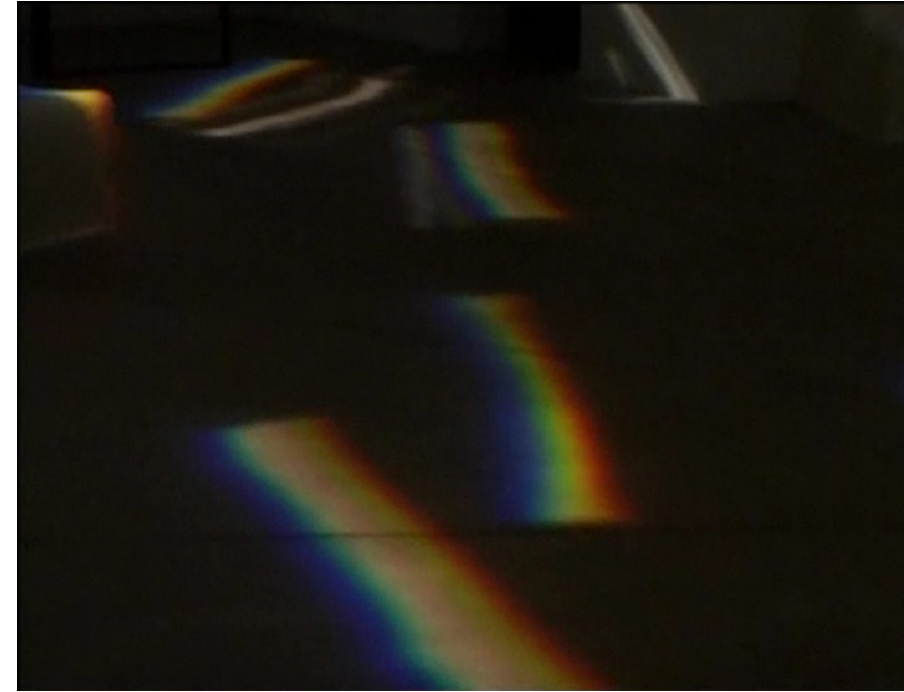
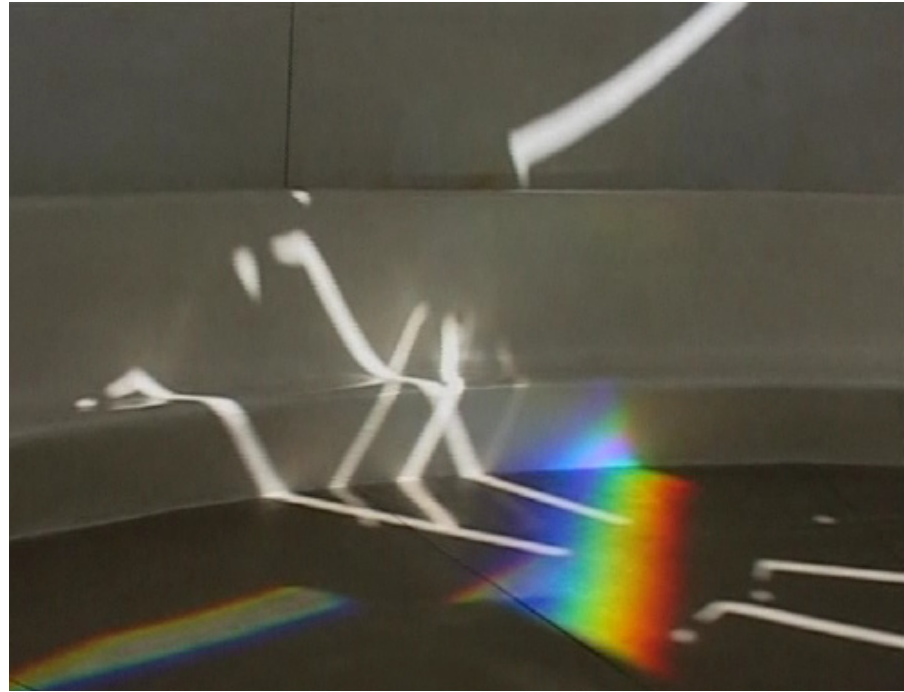
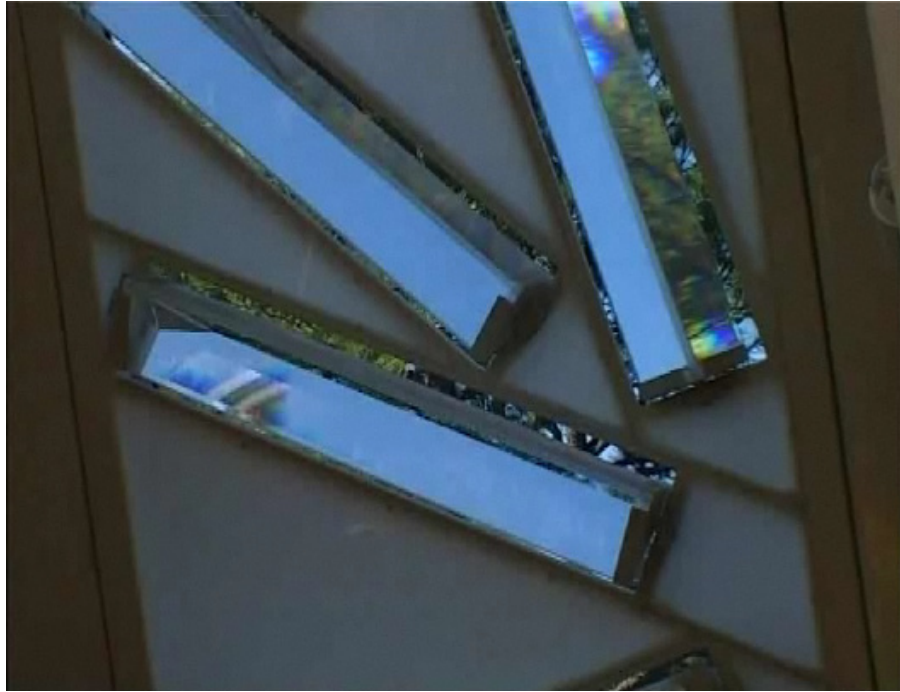
It is a gigantic observatory that this artist, trained as an astrophysicist, chose to impose in the heart of nature. Naked eye observatory, that places the individual in axis of the North Star. It is made of a *solar pyramid*, a *shadow field*, an *hour chamber*, and a *star tunnel*. Each situation of the individual or observer in the space is the result of infinite astronomical calculation. When one climbs each step towards the sky, one can reconstitute the path of stars since the beginning of time. At that point, Man is the continuous link between Earth and Sky. Sky link. Like a living hand, human axis at the heart of the planisphere. If the *Sun Tunnels* are essentially about frame and point of view on the horizon, *Star Axis* is a true sensorial and vertical experience of space. Experience that requires an ascending movement towards the sky. A movement that makes us look up, ask for the moon, orient us, replaces us, aims the camera. Celestial experience dug out of the earth itself. At once, an esthetic, scientific, spiritual proposition, that projects us vertically in the cosmos. A supra erudite work that replaces man in the axis of a star.

*Star Axis* required over thirty years of work, dozens of financial contributions and will only be finished in 2004. Over thirty years to dig into the rocks, to carve the stairs and the pyramid, to perfect the work and the utopia of a lifetime.

Not far away, the *Dawn Light Sanctuary*, a sanctuary of light for meditation, for which Charles Ross invented a stained glass window system with multicolored prisms. It is always the sun that Charles Ross proposes as if to make it a work of art. The sun is his element. As a New York astronomer, explorer of the treasures of New Mexico, he possesses the secret of the movement of his specter. His colored refractions, I see them as the primary colors of the feather fineries American Indians used for ceremonies.



Dwan Light Sanctuary





Albuquerque



Randy Kemp



Rykell Kemp



## Arizona

Arizona. It is also a desert. But a bushy and technicolor desert. With an abundance of plants and giant cactuses: the Saguaros. As if handmade, immense, they are almost 200 years old. They are the only natives of the Sonoran desert, desert of Arizona as grand as Death Valley. There you find multicolored flowers that grow in the stony rocks despite the dryness. There are also the Chollas, feminine version of the Saguaros. A “corps de ballet” that replaces Marta Becket’s. Arizona, images of nature in movement: plants that bend in the wind, plants that roll on themselves and a guide who walks on the ground, shows his green hand, imprints them in the ground, points to nature’s treasures, comes up behind a rock or from the inside of a trees.

### The walker: Ira Steiner

### Take a walk on the wild side

He lives in Phoenix. Trained as a landscape architect, familiar with cactuses, makes gardens, knows the fauna and flora of the Sonoran desert of Arizona like no one else, acts as a guide for long-distance hikers, feet that walk, hands that point, compass man, the desert has no secret for him. He is not an artist. His body is as one with nature. Land Man – in that way he is connected to the works the film shows. He plays jazz, which goes with his walks in the heart of the dry lands. He knows the tones, in nature as in music. He holds a certain rhythm necessary to the film. He walks. He is the walker and the solitude of man. He is the witness of the reign of the living. With country music in the background, he drives us in his red jeep from Arizona to New Mexico. With him we are on the road, we cross the landscapes and live. One of his friends is a Native American flutist, Randy Kemp, who has come from Oklahoma. Oklahoma means red skin. With him we play music in the Sonoran desert, as if to say again that the desert is a visual, resonant space. Place of infinite representations. Together on the way to New Mexico, we cross Navajo and Hopi reservations. There we do not film. For the Hopis, images are the death of living faces. There we cross and hold on to those living treasures deep in our eyes. The Wild West, the Far West, is above all a land of fire, the land of Native Americans or Indians, those who, better than any one, link Earth and Sky. Those who know the ceremonies and who have possessed the secret of the flame since the beginning of time.









## Intention:

**where I come from – where I want to go..**

I left from Hollywood. In March 2002, after six years thinking about it, dreaming about it, without finding the means to do it, like one dreams about going to discover a people, an unknown tribe with the secret of the flame. I speak of faith in art for art, to life and to death, to the last breath. Working as a theater director within Envers Compagnie, a nomadic company, outsider, without budget, inventing, years after years a way of resisting the system, inventing ways to produce, a non-profit company (literally and figuratively) whose experiments since 1991 took on various forms: theater, cinema and music. The only desire is to remain forever a gang of explorers whose artistic gesture cannot be formed. I left from Hollywood. From one of the most profit-making places. From Hollywood, I left. Paris-Los Angeles, with the trust and the means of Playfilm. As if the encounter with Playfilm, name that evokes the most avant-garde film of all times: Jacques Tati's Playtime, was a reminder of the film director who died of it, burning his own butterfly in front of us all and leaving us today this masterpiece discovered too late. He taught us an incredible lesson: to create despite all odds and it is as if my encounter with Mahmoud Chokrollahi, his team and his own political, esthetic, poetic, utopias permitted the realization of this project. I left from Hollywood, America's holy wood, white letters written H O L L Y W O O D, like ultra bright white teeth planted on the mountains after Mulholland Drive, on the Holly Wood, the hill of the holy wood, teeth planted there by California show biz, Hollywood, temple of the movies, in the land of *King Kong*, in the sea of *Jaws*, in the sky of E.T. I left from Hollywood, from Universal Studios, the heart of the 7th American art, the shooting stars. There we filmed, three smugglers, with a minimum material. Sabine Lancelin for the images and Laurent Sellier for sound, we filmed smuggling, recorded the studios and their mummies to fabricate fright, death in the shape of blue dummies, the fake Marilyn, the King Kong robot, then Sunset Boulevard, the avenue of the Stars, the hand imprints of the stars, and their names imprinted in star shapes on the ground, like that of Madonna, Travolta and others. From Hollywood, I left, like the characters that are the subject of my film, who left the big American towns and the culture forever to come and set up a New World in the heart of the American desert. The film begins with the Universal symbol, the one that turns too round, like the MGM lion who roars and will roar for ever, the cry of glory of the king of the cinema, the Universal globe turns to begin the film that hits the West, in the heart of the Mojave desert, in Death Valley, in Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, West always West. The Wild West, the Far West, desert of cactuses with human limbs. I went as an ethnologist to study the zone saturated in sounds and images, the film industry place, Universal Studios in Hollywood and then west to discover these artists or wild Americans who got out of it, who left to save a native America, an untouched America, a virgin America, a desert America. The one Christopher Columbus saw.

In four American deserts, I found constellations, not stars, constellations that we could call black holes. Black holes are luminous constellations - but invisible ones.

## Project:

### space-time or the film in its own Nature

#### Landscape – Faces

Artists out of frame, out of setting, inventors of their own space-time. As an echo, my film invents for them a form and a duration. The film is in the time of the cinema, the time of a journey. One needs time to drive, to let the landscape unroll which acts as the story line. To install the rhythm of the four characters in their four states. From one state to another the road changes, the colors undergo a transformation. The gaze needs time for a true change in scenery. In a blink of an eye, you are in Hollywood. It is fast, it speaks for itself, it shines, it goes straight to the point, perfectly professional, they are fabricated images, explosive, efficient. However, one needs time to go where I want to take you. We drove for hours and hours, hundreds of miles. From one motel to another. From one gas station to the next. From a geological world to an artistic one. It takes time. No special effects. The time for you to see the yellow moon like rocks of Death Valley in the heart of Nevada as an echo to be the old hands, the perfectly wrinkled face of Marta Becket. The almost white clear sand of the salt lake of Utah as an echo to the calm solitude Nancy Holt chose. The multicolored cactuses of Arizona superimposed on to Ira Steiner's body so that the Westerns shot there come back to you, so that you see an Indian hopping out from behind a giant Saguaro or the cowboy on the horse figured in the mountain. Time for you to be connected to the universe, like Charles Ross, the artist-astrophysicist through the blood red land and the sky of multicolored feathers of New Mexico. One needs time for landscape and faces. This is the reason why I write on the lands that we cross. If the camera crosses the landscapes like a brush, as an echo to the Land Art artists' gestures, I write the names of the States on the land. The film leaves its mark where it goes.

N E VA D A I dig it in the Nevada sand.  
U T A H I engrave it in the Utah salt flats.  
A R I Z O N A I write it with blue pigment on the land of Arizona.  
N E W M E X I C O I scatter it with stone letters on the rock of New Mexico

Time so that, through my abstract images, you make your own film. Where the desert, with its elementary colors, paints before our very eyes the seven days of creation and replays itself endlessly to Eden. The material of the landscape is treated like a palette. If the film is above all a reflection on creation and its true stakes, it states above all that nature is an artist and that she is our first model. Here the camera, like a brush, throws, projects, rubs, tears, passes repeatedly like a brush on the landscapes. Because this is not the spirit of a documentary that photographs, but that here the landscape is a true set-up where the action takes place, it is a body and a story. For that reason we filmed some sequences in super-8: we needed the grain and the vibration of the cinema. In some super-8 takes, Laurent Sellier and I appear at a distance like simple figures or extras in order to give an idea of the scale. On scale 1, a man and a woman cross the big space. They too change color in the four states: cloth and red hair in Nevada, yellow in Utah, blue in Arizona, purple in New Mexico. Dream-like figures and not tourists in these no man's lands. Tribute to the film that guided my steps from the beginning Zabriskie Point by Antonioni. A political and poetic film that tells the story of the two Americas: that of the paradise of Nature and the hell of the Capital. The orgies in the sand dunes and the atomic wreckage. The artist who chooses to work there despite everything, is that not the temptation to come and return to the essence in order to redo or perfect the world? Marta Becket pushes death away. Ira Steiner walks the dry land, irrigates it, so that it never ends. Nancy Holt reinvents a frame in the sun. Charles Ross puts man back in the axis of a star.

#### Reasons:

Besides the landscapes, recurrent images, leitmotifs guide you. They are **hands** that points out the spots, the things, hands with green thumbs that detain the secret of plants, children's hands that caress the "pétroglyphes", my hands that follow the journey's map all through the film. Hands are marks, lucky stars. **Feet** that do not cease to walk, mine passing through, sometimes on the windshield of the cars we rented. Marta Becket's feet dancing on tiptoes, then limping through her theater, her dancing slippers resting like youthful pink envelopes. Ira Steiner's feet (my *Easy Rider*) who climbs on the rocks with mountain shoes and walks across Arizona. All kinds of **stars**. Those of the stones of Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles that have the names of their star, of their Hollywood studios on them to reproduce them. Those that I scattered, and the stars of the ocean that I put down in the old salt lake of Utah, like the memories of the waters. The **snake**. Essential figure of the desert, symbol of wildlife. He is the plumed serpent as a drawing, as a cactus, as an object, in different guises all through the journey. The white and yellow **lines** on the road, our axis, our equator, lines of paint. The **kites** like celestial bodies that cross the sky from one desert to another, comet tails. Paper kites called combat kites from Afghanistan, first objects forbidden by the Talibans because symbols of freedom. Flying them in the American sky today has a special sense for me. Here again, linking the political gesture to the poetic one. They are like punctuation, commas, rhythm, hyphens between the four geographic and artistic dimensions. They are gestures. Gesture is second nature in my film. Because I come from the theater, the living spectacle will never cease. The artist's gesture, his intervention in nature, like the poems I deposited as a tribute to Nancy Holt's *Buried Poems*. Poems I collected from contemporary writers living here in France before I left: Christophe Tarkos, Olivier Cadiot, Katalin Molnar, Sabine Macher, Suzanne Doppelt, Georges Didi-Huberman, Michèle Métail, Maylis de Kerangal, Bernard Heidsieck - and a drawing by Paul Cox. Poems put down, deposited, planted, hidden, floating away here and there to make a sentence, inscribe a meaning and poetry in space.

## Language

### or nature of the resounding space

The film is bilingual. I tell the tale, the “characters” tell their stories and describe the sight, the plant, or the work we have before of our eyes. All the words collected in American English are subtitled in French. All the words, said, read, spoken in French are subtitled in American English. Because my film talks about the confrontation between the two languages, our encounter. I will be the voice-over that recounts the journey. I am the narrative that links the landscapes and the faces, tries to give them meaning and pierce their secret. If the hand on the map is like a guide, and our bodies at a distance give the scale, the voice-over will tell the story like of the Persian Tale. The artists talk and comment on their work. Ira Steiner’s voice enumerates the fauna and flora, spells out the names of the colors, and goes towards music. American English and French, alternatively. Because the phonic, linguistic and rhythmic rubbing is betting on a musical border, outsider, borderline. Laurent Sellier took the sound on the premises, sound effects from Hollywood, interviews with Marta Becket and Nancy Holt, interviews of witnesses of the desert encountered on the way, winds, steps, birds, echoes of the rocks, stones thrown, road, truck, absence of silence, silence anyway, my voice, his voice reading the poems deposited, speaking a bit about what we are seeing, Charles Ross’s voice on the phone describing Star Axis and the flute of the Indian Randy Kemp composing for us, in the heart of Arizona, a resounding space. So many musics to compose besides all the sounds taken on the premises, a music created from scratch in *La Muse en Circuit*, the electro-acoustic studio which has been accompanying me from the very beginning. We will make the soundtrack before we assemble the images. It comes before in order not to illustrate, but to be film soundtrack. Because we want to believe that the soundtrack can spread the images, give them rhythm and energy.

## The end

*“... the desert is only that: an ecstatic criticism of culture, an ecstatic form of disappearance. The greatness of the deserts and what they are, in their dryness, the negative of the terrestrial and that of our civilized humors. Place where humors and fluids are rare and where constellations come directly, since the air is so pure, the influence sidereal”.* Amérique, Jean Baudrillard.

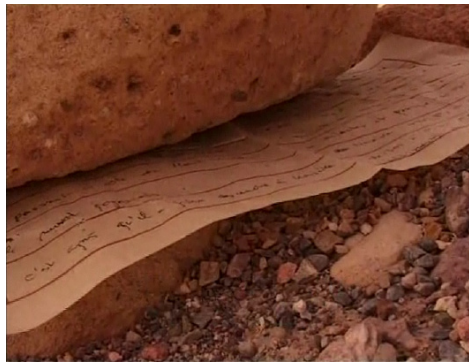
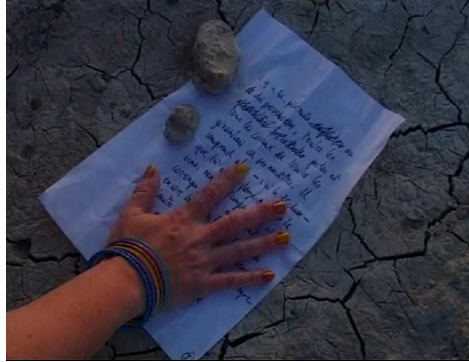
I left from Hollywood to burn myself in the dry desert and discover the face and the brave thoughts of its unique inhabitants. I went there to find a reason for working alone in more space with more time and with the hope of continuing to believe that the singularity of an artist, working alone and freely with his utopias against all odds, still has a little shining power.

Living stars or invisible constellations have, I now know that, the secret of the flame.

My film is not saying that these artists are right. However, it does say that they are right to be. Outsiders. In the heart of the desert, they grew in spite of everything, like cactus, like a miracle, growing in spite of everything, keeping water inside them, making flowers, while an explosive and economically profitable world suffocates us.

Manuela Morgaine  
June 2002





## *Jean Baudrillard dit Amérique* de Jean Baudrillard

Words, sentences alone :  
Jean Baudrillard  
America  
Vanishing Point  
Desert for ever

I went in search of astral America, not social and cultural America, but the America of the empty, absolute freedom of the freeways, not the deep America of mores and mentalities, but the America of desert speed, of motels and mineral surfaces. I looked for it in the speed of the screenplay, in the indifferent reflex of television, in the film of days and nights projected across an empty space, in the marvellously affectless succession of signs, images, faces, and ritual acts on the road (...) I sought the finished form of the future catastrophe of the social in geology, in that upturning of depth that can be seen in the striated spaces, the reliefs of salt and stone, the canyons where the fossil river flows down, the immemorial abyss of slowness that shows itself in erosion and geology. I even looked for it in the verticality of the great cities. (...) L The inhumanity of our ulterior, asocial, superficial world immediately finds its aesthetic form here, its ecstatic form. For the desert is simply that: an ecstatic critique of culture, an ecstatic form of disappearance. (...) The grandeur of deserts derives from their being, in their aridity, the negative of the earth's surface and of our civilized humours. They are places where humours and fluids become rarefied, where the air is so pure that the influence of the stars descends direct from the constellations. Speed creates pure objects. It is itself a pure object, since it cancels out the ground and territorial reference-points, since it runs ahead of time to annul time itself, since it moves more quickly than its own cause and obliterates that cause by outstripping it. (...) Driving like this produces a kind of invisibility, transparency, or transversality in things, simply by emptying them out. Driving is a spectacular form of amnesia. Everything is to be discovered, everything to be obliterated. It is not the least of America's charms that even outside the movie theatres the whole country is cinematic. The desert you pass through is like the set of a Western, the city a screen of signs and formulas. Death Valley is as big and mysterious as ever. However beautiful the deserts of Utah and California may be, this one is something else again - something sublime. The preternatural heat haze that enshrouds it, its inverse depth - below sea level - this landscape with its underwater features, its salt surfaces and mudhills, the high mountain chains surrounding it, making it a kind of inner sanctuary - a gentle, spectral place of initiation, which comes from its geological depth and the atmosphere of spiritual limbo. What has always struck me about Death Valley is its mildness, its pastel shades and its fossil veil, the misty fantasmagoria of its mineral opera. There is nothing funereal or morbid about it: a trans- verberation in which everything is palpable, the mineral softness of the air, the mineral substance of the light, the corpuscular fluid of the colours, the total extra version of one's body in the heat. A fragment of another planet (at least predating any form of human life ...) It is the only place where it is possible to relive, alongside the physical spectrum of colours, the spectrum of the inhuman metamorphoses that preceded us, our successive historical forms: the mineral, the organic, salt desert, sand dunes, rock, ore, light, heat, everything the earth has been, all the inhuman forms it has been through, gathered together in a single anthologizing vision. I was here in my imagination long before I actually came here. What is new in America is the clash of the first level (primitive and wild) and the 'third kind' (the absolute simulacrum). There is no second level.

## Manuela MORGAINE

Filmmaker Manuela Morgaine is the director of LIGHTNING. Of Egyptian and Mediterranean descent, she was born in 1962 in Paris, where she continues to live and work. Since 1991, she has been president of Envers Compagnie, which is devoted to the production of interdisciplinary works. She was the recipient of the 1994 Prix de Rome for scenography, and was a Villa Médicis Hors les Murs Laureate in 2004.

**[www.enverscompagnie.com](http://www.enverscompagnie.com)**



## FILM DIRECTING :

*Posthumes*, a 16mm film, 1994.

*VA*, a 35mm film based on Casanova, with Yann Collette, at the MK2 Beaubourg cinema in Paris, and at the Lieu unique in Nantes, between 1999 and 2001, at the Paris Cinéma festival in Paris at MK2 Quai de Seine in 2003.

*Out of the blue*, a 52' DV film, 2003.

*If a Swallow does not make spring, which swallow ?* a 94' DV film coproduced with Pascal Convert, Artistes&Associés in 2007.

*Pathos Mathos*, a 59' DV film produced by Mezzanine Films with funding from the Centre National du Cinéma and the CNAP, in 2007 (the wintertime of Foudre, a feature film in four seasons).

*The Legend of Symeon*, a 44' DV film produced by Mezzanine films with funding from CNAP, 2008 (the springtime of Foudre).

*Baal*, a 94' DV film produced by Envers Compagnie and Mezzanine Films, 2009 (the autumn season of Foudre).

*Apocalypse 2,2*, a 20' DV film produced by Envers Compagnie, 2009.

*Atoms*, a 52' DV film produced by Envers Compagnie and Mezzanine Films, 2011 (the summertime of Foudre).

*Lightning*, (a 3-hour 50-minute feature, made between 2004 and 2012 against all odds and without the support of cinema and television institutions). Currently on tour in major international festivals and coming soon to a theater near you. **www.foudre-lefilm.com**

## STAGING THEATRE / MUSIC

*Dieu Grammairien*, théâtre de la Bastille, 1991

*L'Analogue*, théâtre de la Bastille, 1994

*Par les dents*, théâtre de la Bastille, 1997

*Juliette Pose 97*, with Anne de Broca, Ecole des Beaux Arts de Paris, 1997

*Blanche Neige*, based on Walser, Centre Culturel Suisse, 2001

*Maliétès*, bands from Greece and Turkey, at the Chai du Terral in Montpellier in 2003, at the Cabaret Sauvage in Paris in 2004.

*L'art de la figue*, an opera based on Francis Ponge and Johann Sebastian Bach, composed by Johannes Schöllhorn, at the Strasbourg Musica Festival and at the Lille Opera in 2006.

*Handmade*, a performance with 5 puppeteers and 5 musicians produced by the Union des Musiciens de Jazz and Theema, Le Grand Parquet, Paris, October 15, 2011.

*Le Cabinet du docteur Cagnolari*, A radio lab workshop co-written and directed with Christophe Cagnolari of the Ensemble ANIYA, broadcast on France Culture January 5th, 2011.



## PUBLICATIONS

*Le sommeil d'Ecume*, with photos by Patrick Faigenbaum, Editions Creaphis.

*Les metamorphoses*, based on Ovid, Editions Albin Michel. Le Potager du Roi, Editions Gallimard.

*Buvar et Ricochet*, an encyclopedia of great writers for small readers, Editions Le Baron Perché (Livre jeunesse Award, 2007, Bologne)

*Tohu Bohu* directed by Thierry Roisin, Le Journal de bois, directed by Jean-Pierre Larroche.

*Zeurope*, directed by Natacha Kantor. Wpsyché, morbid ideations and blind spots, with Dr. William de Carvalho, Editions Al Dante.

Author of numerous *Radio Lab Workshops* broadcast on France Culture as well as fairytales for children.

## VOICE WORK:

Musical theater pieces including those of Richard Dubelski and Georges Aperghis in the 1990s.

Documentary and fiction films:

*Time Regained*, by Raoul Ruiz, 2002.

*The Origin of Christianity and The Apocalypse*, a series of 22 documentaries by Jérôme Prieur and Gérard Mordillat, Arte, 2004 & 2008. For INA (French Radio and Television Archives) the Medmem Website, designed by Matthieu Serrière, 2010.

## PERFORMANCES

In the form of projections on blocks of ice for the *Paris Nuit Blanches*, 2002 and 2003 :

*Blanche Neige Nuit Blanche*, Parvis de la Gaïeté Lyrique, Paris, 2002

*Iceremony*, Sweedish Cultural Centre, Paris, 2003.

And for the event Paris-Ville Lumières :

*Icelectric*, Swedish Cultural Centre, Paris, December 2004.

Projections of lightning impacts on ice, foreshadowing the feature film Foudre (in coproduction with the EDF Foundation).

In the form of *Sound Pillows* during JAVAMOUR a concert-performance organized by Cyril Hernandez at La Java, Paris, June 20, 2011.

## PROJETS

*ORAKL a door that speaks to you*, an interactive ice installation [www.enverscompagnie.com](http://www.enverscompagnie.com).

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