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CAHIERS DU CINEMA IN ENGLISH

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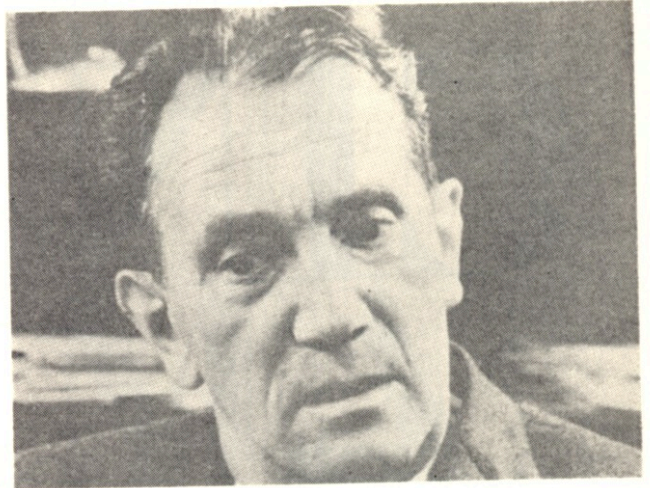


The Late ANDRE BAZIN



JEAN-LUC GODARD

ROGER LEENHARDT



The Late MAX OPHULS



FRANCOIS TRUFFAUT



Cahiers in Context

by Andrew Sarris, Editor

The first issue of a magazine almost automatically demands a detailed declaration of intentions, perhaps even a rousing call to arms for all right-minded readers. Unfortunately, my feelings on this occasion are suffused with a vague nostalgia for ancient aesthetic battles only dimly defined through the mists of memory. What was it about *Cahiers du Cinéma* that excited some of us so much? Partly, I suppose, it was a case of *Cahiers* releasing our cultural inhibitions the way Paris traditionally has released the sexual inhibitions of backward Anglo-Saxons. Not that there is more sin and sex in Paris than anywhere else, simply more *savoir faire*, more *élan vital*, more *joie de vivre*, and, what is more important, more "sensual complicity in the language itself. Paris, where everything is possible and nothing is necessary, has been for many years the capital of the world for film enthusiasts, partly because of the extraordinary efforts of the Cinémathèque Française, particularly in its slightly subversive Rue d'Ulm period, and partly because of the cultural vitality of *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

As a long-time reader of *Cahiers en français*, I should at least attempt to set the record straight about the magazine's alleged lunacies. Now in its fifteenth year of publication as a monthly film magazine, *Cahiers* has printed hundreds of articles ranging over every color of the critical spectrum from art-film gray to Hollywood De Luxe. Actually the articles I have chosen to reprint in this issue run to the conservative side. Bazin, Godard, Truffaut, Leenhardt, Astruc and Ophüls are eminently respectable names advancing eminently sound positions. There are articles on Ingmar Bergman, Kenji Mizoguchi and F. W. Murnau, an interview with Antonioni. How safe can you get? What's on next week? Sergei Eisenstein or that painter's son, Jean Renoir? Where are the articles on Hitchcock and Hawks, and, even more outrageously, on Esther Williams and Edgar G. Ulmer?

I ask myself these questions only semi-rhetorically because I am far from sure I know the answers. The full context of *Cahiers* long antedates the *nouvelle vague* and the New Criticism. The qualities I have looked for in these opening pieces for the English-language edition are elucidation, evocativeness and enthusiasm. I have chosen not to convert the converted, but rather to intrigue the uninitiated. As a consolation to fanatics of the faith, I have festooned my article



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B

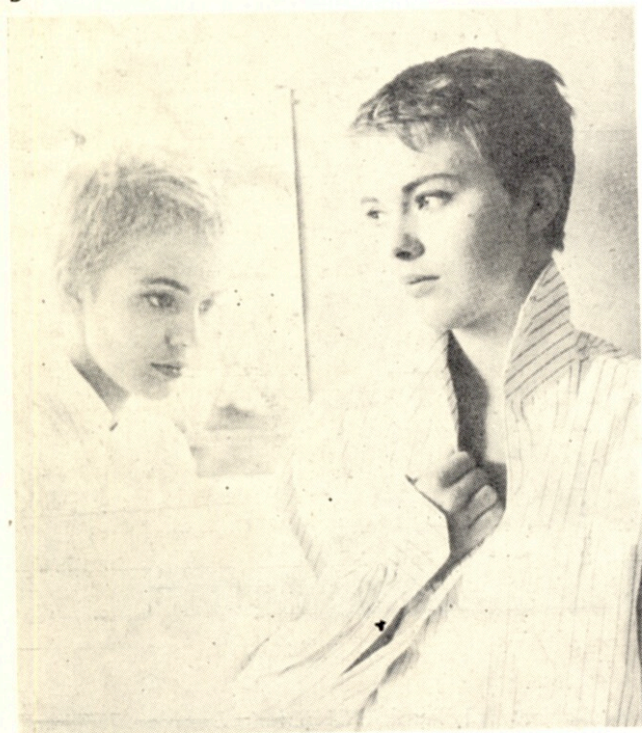


A. *Cahiers* #1, April 1951 (Gloria Swanson, William Holden; Billy Wilder: *Sunset Blvd.*) B. *Cahiers* #2, May 1951 (Bette Davis, Gary Merrill, Anne Baxter; Joseph L. Mankiewicz: *All About Eve*)

A



B



A. Cahiers #150/51 (Jane Fonda; Rene Clement: *Joy House*). B. Cahiers #103 (Jean Seberg; Jean-Luc Godard: *Breathless*).

C



Cahiers #128, (Ingrid Thulin, Glenn Ford; Vincente Minnelli: *The Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse*).

with old Cahiers covers, and there is no doubt that the soul of a film magazine is ultimately reflected in its covers. Yet even the relatively authoritative articles I have selected will manage to outrage many readers. I would be the first to admit that much of *Cahiers* has always been elliptical, elusive, esoteric and even downright obscure. In a way that's what I've always liked about the magazine. It opens more doors than it closes, and it is often most stimulating when it is most outrageous. I don't think there is a film magazine in the world, irrespective of its socio-aesthetic orientation, which would turn down an article by Bazin or Astruc or Leenhardt or Truffaut or Godard or Rohmer etc. The style of a magazine asserts itself at its breaking point, at that precise instant when the editor has run out of sound, satisfactory articles and must dip deep into the barrel. At that moment, *Sight and Sound* will degenerate into dull authority while *Cahiers* will degenerate into delirious anarchy. That is why, to transpose Godard's comment vis a vis Visconti's *White Nights* and Bergman's *Sommarek*, I admire *Sight and Sound* but I love *Cahiers du Cinema*.

I should speak at some length about the problems of translating film vocabulary, but I prefer to wait for more specific reader reactions to suggest where more clarification is needed. Hugh Gray has observed in his admirable translation of Bazin that the French "*objectif*" for "lens" creates an ambiguous play of ideas difficult to render in English. I myself spent years pondering over Lo Duca's metaphysical implications in a caption for a Mexican nude in *Erotisme Au Cinema*,



D

Cahiers #64, November 1956 (Marilyn Monroe; Joshua Logan: *Bus Stop*)

said caption reading in part "*devant l'objectif*." More embarrassingly, I read *Cahiers* for years before realizing that *gros plan* meant close-up, and not master shot or group image. In this issue, we became hopelessly entangled semantically by Leenhardt's distinction between the American usage of "directed by" and the corresponding French usage involving *mis en scène*. Generally speaking, the English language coins new words to express new concepts while the French language adds new meanings to the words it already has. Consequently, French writing tends to possess a built-in ambiguity even when it seeks to be most explicit. Nuance is everything, and, quite often, substance is nothing. Nonetheless, I must soon decide the fate of such Gallicisms as *auteur*, *mis en scène*, *politique* etc. Have these and other terms really entered the English Language intact without italics or will the literary establishment consign them permanently to the limbo of jargon? Future issues of *Cahiers* should tell the story. Meanwhile I welcome English-speaking film enthusiasts to *Cahiers du Cinema en Anglais*, which very shortly will be published concurrently with the Paris edition on the Seine where *mise-en-scène* was born. Your comments and criticisms will be appreciated and taken to mind and heart. And I do consider this enterprise an affair of the heart for one who discovered some years ago through *Cahiers* that the most maniacal moviegoing might one day be culturally redeemed. For the rest, I prefer to let *Cahiers* speak for itself.



A

B



A. *Cahiers* #107, May 1960 (Cyd Charisse; Nicholas Ray: *Party Girl*). B. *Cahiers* #90, December 1958 (Nicolai Cherkassov; Sergei Eisenstein: *Ivan The Terrible, Part Two*)

On The Politique des Auteurs

By André Bazin

"Goethe? Shakespeare? Everything signed with their names is considered good, and people take great pains to find beauty in their stupidities and failures, thus corrupting the general taste. All these great talents, the Goethes, the Shakespeares, the Beethovens, the Michelangelos, created, side by side with their masterpieces, works not merely mediocre, but quite simply frightful."

Tolstoy, Journal, years 1895-1899.

A Small difference

I fully appreciate the dangers of my initiative. *Cahiers du Cinema* supposedly practices a "*politique des auteurs*." This opinion, if it is not justified by the totality of articles, has some basis in the majority of them, especially in the last two years. It would be vain or hypocritical to pretend in the name of a few contrary references that our journal has a blessed critical neutrality, and that the very clever letter of Barthélemy Amengual (which we published in our No. 63) was not beside the point.

Nevertheless, our readers have evidently noticed that this critical postulate — implicit or stated — has not been adopted with equal constancy by all of *Cahiers*' customary collaborators, and that there might even be serious divergences of admiration, or more exactly in its degrees. However, it is true that it is almost always the most enthusiastic among us who win in the long run, and this for a reason which Eric Rohmer explained satisfactorily in his reply to a reader (No. 64): we generally prefer in the case of divergent opinions on an important film to give the last word to the one who likes it best. It follows that the strictest adherents of the *politique des auteurs* have the advantage in the long run since, wrongly or rightly, they always discern in their preferred *auteurs* the flowering of the same specific beauties. Thus Hitchcock, Renoir, Rossellini, Fritz Lang, Howard Hawks or Nicholas Ray may appear, in the pages of *Cahiers*, as nearly infallible, *auteurs*, none of whose films could be a failure.

I would therefore like to avoid a misunderstanding immediately. The quarrel I'm going to seek with my comrades, the ones most convinced of the grounds of their *politique des auteurs*, is a discussion which does not place the general orientation of *Cahiers* on trial. Whatever our differences of opinion on the works and the creators, our common admirations and dislikes are

numerous enough and strong enough to bind our group together, and if I do not think I conceive of the role of the *auteur* in the cinema as do François Truffaut and Eric Rohmer, for example, that does not prevent me, insofar as I myself also believe in the reality of the *auteur*, from generally sharing their judgments, if not always their passions. I follow them, it is true, less often in the negative, that is to say in their severity on films which I happen to find defensible, but, even then and most often, it is because I consider that the work surpasses its *auteur* (a phenomenon which they contest and take to be a critical contradiction). In other terms, we scarcely differ except in our appreciation of the relationship between the *oeuvre* and the creator, but there is no *auteur* whom I am sorry to have seen defended by *Cahiers*, on the whole, even if I do not always agree on the films which have served for this illustration.

I would add lastly that if the "*politique des auteurs*" seems to me to have led its supporters into more than one particular error, it seems to me, as far as its total result is concerned, fruitful enough to justify them against their detractors. It is quite rare that the arguments in whose name I hear them most often condemned oblige me in all sincerity to pass over to the other side.

It is thus within these limits, which are somewhat those of a family quarrel, that I would like to come to grips with what seems to me nevertheless to have the value not at all of a wrong sense, but of a critical "false sense." The occasion has been furnished me by the article of my friend Domarchi on Vincente Minnelli's *Van Gogh*. However intelligent and moderate his praise may have been, it seems to me that such an article should not have been published in the same magazine which had permitted, in its preceding issue, the demolition of *Huston* by Eric Rohmer. This implacable severity on the one hand and this admiring



A

A. Jean Renoir: *La Règle Du Jeu* (Rules Of The Game)

B. Jean Renoir: *Elena Et Les Hommes* (Paris Does Strange Things) Decline or Evolution

B





Orson Welles: *Citizen Kane*

indulgence on the other can be explained only by acknowledging Minnelli is one of Domarchi's pets while Huston is not a "Cahiers" *auteur*. A happy partiality up to a certain point since it brings us to defend a film which illustrates certain facts of American culture much more than the personal talent of Vincente Minnelli. Besides I shall trap Domarchi in a contradiction by making him notice that he should have, under the circumstances, sacrificed Minnelli to Renoir, since it was the realization of this *Van Gogh* which obliged the *auteur* of *French Cancan* to give up his. Will he maintain that a *Van Gogh* by Jean Renoir would not have been more prestigious for the *politique des auteurs* than a film by Minnelli? The project called for a painter's son, and obtained instead a director of movie ballets.

However that may be, this example is only a pretext for me, and I have been disturbed on many other

occasions by the subtlety of an argumentation which could not prevail against the naïveté of the postulate, lending, for example, to minor films of the second rank the intentions and the coherence of a work consciously conceived.

And, of course, from the moment that one affirms that the cinéaste is totally the son of his works, there are no more minor films since the least among them is still in the image of its creator. But let us examine what that means, and for this, let us go back, with your permission, to the deluge.

It is evident that the "*politique des auteurs*" here is nothing but the application to the cinema of a general notion admitted in the individual arts. François Truffaut likes to cite the words of Giraudoux: "There are no works, there are only *auteurs*"; a polemical sally whose import finally seems to me to be quite limited. One could certainly just as well propose the

contrary proposition for the meditation of baccalaureate candidates on to university faculties. The two formulas, like the maxims of La Rochefoucauld and de Chamfort, would simply have inverse proportions of truth and error. Eric Rohmer, for his part, declares (or affirms) that what remains in art is not the works but the *auteurs*, and that the programs of film societies do not in the end belie this critical truth.

But let us notice first that Rohmer's argument has a much more restrained scope than the aphorism of Giraudoux for, if it is the *auteurs* who remain, it is not at all necessarily due to the totality of their work. Examples abound to the contrary. If it is accurate that the name of Voltaire signifies still more than his bibliography, it is finally less the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* which counts in retrospect than the spirit of Voltaire, a certain style of thinking and writing. But where today can we recognize the principle and the example of it? In an abundant and execrable theatre, or in the slight volume of *Contes*? And Beaumarchais, must we also seek him in *La Mère coupable*?

Nevertheless the "*auteurs*" of those times seemed to be conscious themselves of the relativity of their value, since they easily denied their children though they allowed themselves to accept, without too much embarrassment, libels that seemed flattering. For them, on the contrary, there was scarcely anything but works, even their own, and it is only at the end of the 18th century, precisely with Beaumarchais, that the notion of the *auteur* achieves its definition juridically by its rights, its duties, and its responsibilities. Of course I make allowance for historical and social contingencies: police or moral censorship rendered anonymity sometimes necessary and always excusable, but we know full well that in the case of the Resistance writers in France such anonymity did not diminish the dignity and responsibility of the writer at all. It was only in the 19th century that imitation, or plagiarism, took the shape of a marked professional fault disqualifying its author.

Similarly in painting, if the least smearing today is paid for almost exclusively according to the number

Orson Welles: *Mr. Arkadin* (Confidential File)



of inches and the notoriety of the signature, the objective quality of the work was formerly much more valued. The more so, as is proved by the difficulty of authenticating many an early painting, since what came out of a workshop might be only the work of a pupil, without our being able to demonstrate or affirm it today, and, if we go even further back, we are compelled to consider anonymous works which have come down to us as daughters not of an artist but of an art, not of a man but of a society.

I naturally see the reply coming. We must not objectify our ignorance, or crystalize it in reality. Each one of these works, the Venus de Milo like the Negro mask, had in fact an *auteur*, and all modern historical science, in filling up the gaps, tends to put names on works; but have we waited for this supplement of erudition in order to admire them and nourish ourselves on them? Biographical criticism is only one of the multiple dimensions of criticism possible, and this is so true that the identity of Shakespeare and Molière is still being debated.

And it's proper that they be so debated! Their identity, then, is not a matter of indifference. Indeed, it is absolutely necessary to maintain the evolution of Western art toward a greater personalization in order to promote an advancement, a refining of the culture, but on condition that this individualization tends to round out the culture without pretending to define it. This is the moment to remember a commonplace which is scholarly but irrefutable: the individual surpasses society, but society is also, and at first, in him. There is consequently no total criticism of genius or talent which does not first make allowance for the social determinisms, for historical juncture, and for the technical background which, for a large part, determine them. This is why the anonymity of a work is only a very relative handicap in understanding it. Relative in any case to the art in question, to the style adopted, and to the sociological context. Negro art can remain anonymous, even though in return, it is vexatious to know so little of its social component.

GOD IS NOT AN ARTIST

But *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Europe 51*, and *Bigger Than Life* are contemporary with the paintings of Picasso, Matisse, and Singier! Does it follow that they take their place, for all that, at the same level of individualization? It doesn't seem so to me!

Let this new commonplace be excused, the cinema is a popular and industrial art. These preliminary conditions of existence do not at all constitute only an ensemble of servitudes—no more than for architecture—they represent an ensemble of positive and negative quantities which must be reckoned with. Particularly in the American cinema where our theorists of the *politique des auteurs* place their principal admiration. What gives Hollywood its world superiority

is of course the value of a few men, but it is also the vitality, and, in a certain measure, the excellence of a tradition. The superiority of Hollywood is only secondarily of a technical order, it resides much more in what could be called, in a word, the American cinematographic genius, which must, however, be analyzed, then defined, by a sociology of production. The American cinema has known how to translate in a prodigiously appropriate fashion the image that American society wished to have of itself. Not at all passively, as a simple activity of gratification and escape, but dynamically, that is to say by participating with its own means in the establishment of this society. The admirable thing in the American cinema is precisely its need for spontaneity. Fruit of the free enterprise system and the capitalism whose active or virtual poisons it hides simultaneously, it is nonetheless in a certain fashion the most true and the most realistic of all cinemas, since it translates the very contradictions of this society. Domarchi, who has demonstrated this very well through a penetrating and documented analysis, excuses me from developing this argument.

But it follows that every director has embarked on this powerful tide and that his artistic itinerary should naturally be calculated while bearing the current in mind, and not as if he were navigating as he pleases on a tranquil lake.

In fact it is not even true in the most individualistic artistic disciplines that genius is free and always equal to itself. And besides, what is genius but a certain juncture of incontestably personal endowments, the fairy's gift, and the historical moment? Genius is an H bomb. The fission of the uranium atom provokes the fusion of the hydrogen mass. But a sun is not born from the mere disintegration of the individual if the latter does not echo itself in the structures of the art which surrounds it. Whence the paradox of Rimbaud's life. His poetic *novae* decline all at once and the adventurer seems to recede like a star, still reddening, but burning itself out. No doubt it was not that Rimbaud had changed, but that nothing was coming any longer to nourish an incandescence which had reduced literature to ashes all around it. It is simply that the usual rhythm of this combustion in the great artistic cycles ordinarily extends beyond one man's life. Literature proceeds by centuries. They only last sixty years or so, it is true, but that is enough, with the time-lag of success, to assure Voltaire or Gide of dying with his laurels still unfaded. One could say that genius foreshadows what will follow it. This is true, but dialectically! For one could also say that every epoch has geniuses whom it needs in order to define itself, to disavow itself, and to surpass itself. Consequently, Voltaire was a detestable dramatic *auteur* when he believed himself the heir of Racine, and a storyteller of genius when he launched ideas which would make the 18th century explode.

And even without referring to failures as absolute, whose cause goes back almost exclusively to the sociology of art, the psychology of creation alone would suffice to account for many of the inequalities among the best *auteurs*. *Notre-Dame de Paris* is a trifle next to *La Légende des siècles*, *Salambô* isn't worth *Madame Bovary*, or *Corydon* *The Counterfeiters*. Let us not dispute these examples, there always remains each one's taste. We can admit the permanence of talent without identifying it with some artistic infallibility or some assurance against error which could only be a divine attribute. But God, Sartre has already told us, is not an artist! If we granted the creator, against all psychological likelihood, an imperturbable liberality of inspiration, we would have to admit that each time this inspiration confronts a whole complex of particular circumstances, which render the result a thousand times more hazardous still in the cinema than in painting or in literature.

Inversely there ought to be able to exist, and there do indeed exist, brilliant strokes in the otherwise mediocre production of an *auteur*. The myth of Arvers' sonnet is judicious and ought to incite the critic to vigilance. Fruit of a happy conjunction, at a moment of precarious equilibrium, between a talent and the milieu, these fleeting brilliances do not in fact prove much about personal creative worth, but they are not intrinsically inferior to others for all that, and doubtless would not appear so in a criticism which did not begin by reading the signature at the bottom of the canvas.

GENIUS BURNS

Now what is true of literature is even more so of the cinema, in so far as this art, the last to appear, accelerates and multiplies the factors of evolution common to all the others. In 50 years the cinema, having started from the crudest forms of spectacle (primitive but not inferior), has had to travel the road which raises it today sometimes to the level of the theatre or the novel. In the same time, its technical evolution has been such that no traditional art has known a comparable one in such a short length of time (unless it is perhaps architecture, another industrial art). In these conditions, it is normal for genius to burn ten times faster and for the *auteur*, still in full possession of his medium, to cease being carried by the wave. This was the case of Stroheim, of Abel Gance, of Orson Welles. We are even beginning to have enough distance in time to witness a curious phenomenon: even in the cinéaste's lifetime, the following wave can set him afloat again. Thus it is with the message of Abel Gance or of Stroheim, whose modernism is reaffirmed today. I understand that this demonstrates their quality as *auteurs*, without, for all that, reducing their eclipse as film-makers to the contradictions of capitalism or the stupidity of producers. Making all allowances, it is the same with men of genius in the brief history of the cinema as it might have been with a

Racine 120 years old writing racinian theatre in the middle of the 18th century; would his tragedies have been better than those of Voltaire? It could be disputed, but I wager they would not.

People will oppose me with Chaplin or Renoir or Clair; it is true, but it is because each one of them benefits from other gifts which do not depend on genius and which were precisely what permitted them to adapt themselves to the cinematographic situation. The case of Chaplin naturally being unique and exemplary since he was an *auteur*-producer, he knew how to be, in himself, both the cinema and its evolution.

It then follows, adhering to the most general laws of psychology of creation, that the objective factors of genius having more chance to modify themselves in the cinema than in any other art, rapid dislocations may be engendered between the cinéaste and the cinema which, with the same blow, brutally lowers the value of his works. I certainly admire *Mr. Arkadin* and I find in it the same gifts as in *Citizen Kane*. But *Citizen Kane* opens up a new age of American cinema, and *Mr. Arkadin* is only a second-rate film.

IT IS THE CINEMA THAT GROWS OLD

But let us stop at this proposition which permits us, I think, to touch the nerve of the debate. I think indeed that my interlocutors not only would never accept the statement that *Mr. Arkadin* is a lesser film than *Citizen Kane*; they would more willingly affirm the contrary, and I see well how they are able to. *Mr. Arkadin* being the sixth film of Orson Welles, there is already presumption of progress. Not only did Welles have more experience of himself and of his art in 1953 than in 1941, but no matter how great the liberty he had been able to win in Hollywood, his *Citizen Kane* inevitably remains to a certain extent a product of R.K.O. The film would hardly have seen the light of day without at least the complicity of a marvelous technical apparatus and of its no less admirable technicians. Gregg Toland, to name only him, certainly counts for something in the result. By contrast *Arkadin* is wholly signed by Welles. Until the contrary is proved, it would thus *a priori* be held superior, since it is more personal and because his personality can only have progressed while growing older.

At this point, obviously, I can only side with my young polemicists when they affirm that age, as such, could not diminish the talent of a cinéaste, and when they react violently against the critical prejudice which consist always in finding works of youth or maturity superior to works of old age. Thus we have read that *Monsieur Verdoux* is not worth *The Gold Rush* or seen the Renoir of *La Règle du jeu* lamented while the Renoir of *The River* or *The Golden Coach* was being criticized. Eric Rohmer replied very well on this matter: "The history of art offers us, to my

knowledge, no example at all of an authentic genius experiencing a period of true decline at the end of his career; it incites us, rather, to find, under seeming clumsiness or impoverishment, the trace of the will to strip bare which characterizes the "late manner?" of a Titian, a Rembrandt, a Beethoven, or, nearer to us, a Bonnard, a Matisse, a Stravinsky . . ." (*Cahiers du Cinéma* No. 8 "Renoir American".) It is only through an absurd discrimination that one could attribute to cinéastes alone a senility from which other artists would be protected. Aside from exceptional cases of senile decay, but they are more rare than one would think. Baudelaire, paralyzed and no longer articulating his own name, was he less baudelairean? Robert Mallet tells us, in regard to Valéry Larbaud, condemned for twenty years to immobility and silence, how the translator of Joyce, battling his paralysis, reconstituted for himself a vocabulary of about twenty simple words with which he still succeeded in articulating extraordinarily penetrating literary judgments. Truly the rare exceptions that could be invoked would only confirm the rule. Great talent matures but does not age. This law of artistic creation has no reason to spare the cinema, and criticism founded implicitly on the hypothesis of senility falls by its own weight. It is the inverse postulate which should be applied, and we should tell ourselves that where we think we discern a decadence, our critical sense must be at fault, since an impoverishment of inspiration would be an unlikely phenomenon. From this point of view, the *parti pris* of the *politique des auteurs* is fecund, and I side with it against the naiveté, if not the foolishness, of the prejudices it combats.

But bearing in mind this call to order, we must nevertheless account for certain eclipses or decrepitudes affecting the work of incontestably great men. I think I have already sketched the justification above. It is not actually of a psychological but of an historical order. The drama is not in the aging of men, but in that of the cinema: All those who cannot grow old with the medium must be bypassed by its evolution. Whence the possibility of a series of failures which can end in complete collapse, without our having to suppose that the genius of yesterday has become an imbecile. It is only, once more, the sudden appearance of a disharmony between the subjective inspiration of the creator and the objective juncture of the cinema which is involved, and it is that disharmony which the *politique des auteurs* would ignore. For its adherents, *Mr. Arkadin* is therefore more important than *Citizen Kane* since they discover in it, justly, still more of Orson Welles. In other terms, they want to retain of the equation, *auteur* + subject = the work, only the *auteur*, the subject being reduced to 0. Some of these *auteur* adherents would feign to grant me that, all other things being equal, a good subject is obviously worth more than a bad one, but the most frank or

the most insolent will admit to me that anything goes, as if their preference were on the contrary for little B films in which the acknowledged banality of the scenario leaves that much more room for the personal contribution of the *auteur*.

AN ESTHETIC CULT OF PERSONALITY

Most certainly, it is on the very concept of the *auteur* that I am going to be attacked, and I admit that the equation posed above is artificial, as much as the scholarly distinction between form and content. In order to benefit from the *politique des auteurs*, one must be deserving of it, and this school justly distinguishes genuine "*auteurs*" from "directors," even talented ones: Nicholas Ray is an *auteur*, Huston would be only a director, Bresson and Rossellini are *auteurs*, Clément is only a great *metteur-en-scène*, etc. This concept of the *auteur* is then consequently opposed to the *auteur*-subject distinction, because to be deserving of entry into the society of *auteurs* implies still more than improvement upon raw material. In a certain measure at least, the *auteur* is always his own subject. Whatever the scenario, it is always the same story that he tells us, or if the word "story" lends confusion, let us say that it is always the same gaze and the same moral judgment cast upon the action of the characters. Jacques Rivette says that the *auteur* is he who speaks in the first person. The definition is good, let us adopt it.

The *politique des auteurs* consists, in sum, more of designating the personal factor as the reference criterion in artistic creation, then in postulating its permanence and even its progress from one work to the following one. It is well recognized that there exist "important" or "quality" films which escape this net, but, justly, one would systematically prefer, to them, those in which one can read the *auteur's* blazon in watermark, were it on the worst scenario written for the occasion.

Far from me to deny the positive spirit and the methodological value of this *parti pris*. First, it has the merit of treating the cinema as an adult art, and of reacting against the impressionistic relativism which still prevails most often in film criticism. I admit that the explicit or recognized claim of a critic to review the production of a cinéaste each time in the light of his own judgment has something of the Ubu-like and presumptuous about it. I am willing for it to be said that this is a human servitude and that unless one gives up all criticism, one must start with the feelings, the pleasures, and the unpleasantness personally undergone in contact with the work. So be it, but on the condition, precisely, of reducing impression to its role of servitude. We must pass by that way, but not start from it. In other words, each critical act ought to consist of referring the work in question to a value system, but this reference does not depend upon in-

A

A. Charles Chaplin: *Limelight* (Claire Bloom and Chaplin)

Senility?

or

Disharmony?

B. Chaplin and Buster Keaton



B





A

A. Howard Hawks: *Scarface* (Osgood Perkins, Paul Muni, Karen Morley)—Onward or Downward to

B. Hawks: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell)

telligence alone; the surety of judgment proceeds also, or first (if one gives to the adverb only its chronological sense) from the total impression experienced in front of the film. Thus I take for two symmetrical heresies the act of objectively applying to a work a critical free pass as well as that of considering sufficient the affirmation of one's pleasure or one's distaste. The first approach denies the role of taste, the second poses *a priori* the superiority of the critic's taste over that of the *auteur*. Barrenness or presumption!

What pleases me in the *politique des auteurs* is that it reacts against impressionism while taking the best from it. In fact, the system of values which it proposes is not ideological. It starts from an appreciation in which taste and sensitivity have the greater part,

since it is a question of discerning the contribution of the *auteur* as such, beyond the essential of the subject or of technique: the man behind the style. But having made this distinction, our criticism is waylaid by the begging of the question, which consists of laying down at the beginning of its analysis that the film is good, since it is by an *auteur*. The free pass that it gives the work then being the esthetic portrait of the cinéaste deduced from his preceding works. It is right in so far as it is not mistaken in its promotion of the cinéaste to the dignity of the *auteur*; for it is objectively better founded in having faith, then, in the genius of the artist than in his critic's intelligence, and it is in this way that the *politique des auteurs* finds a use for the principle of "criticism of beauties." When one is dealing with genius, it is always a good method



to consider *a priori* that a supposed weakness of the work is only a beauty that one has not yet arrived at understanding. But I have shown that this method had its same limits in the traditionally individualistic arts like literature, and does so with all the more reason in the cinema, whose sociological and historical anastomoses are innumerable. In granting such an importance to "B films," the *politique des auteurs* recognizes and confirms this dependency *a contrario*.

On the other hand, the *politique des auteurs* is without doubt the most perilous of critiques, for its criteria are very difficult to formulate. It is significant that, having been worked on for three or four years by our finest pens, it still in large measure awaits its theory, and one is not ready to forget how Rivette proposed Hawks for our admiration: Obviousness is the mark of Hawks' genius; *Monkey Business* is a genial film and imposes itself on the mind by its obviousness. Certain people rejected it, still reject it to satisfy their pride of affirmation. The misunderstanding perhaps has no other causes at all" . . . We see the danger, which is an esthetic cult of personality.

USEFUL AND DANGEROUS

This is not, however, the principal thing, at least so long as the *politique des auteurs* is used by men of taste who are able to keep vigilant. It is its negative aspect which seems to me the most grave. It is unfortunate to praise wrongly a work which does not merit it, but the risk is less disastrous than to reject an estimable film because its maker has not up until now produced anything good. Not that the *auteur's* critics do not take pleasure on occasion in discovering or encouraging a talent which reveals itself, but because they systematically disdain everything in a film which comes from a common ground and which constitutes, however, at times the most admirable part, just as, in other circumstances, it constitutes the most detestable part. Thus, a certain form of popular American culture is at the origin of Minnelli's *Van Gogh*, but another more spontaneous culture is also the principle of the American comedy, the western, and the gangster film, whose influence this time is salutary, for it produces the richness and the vitality of these cinematographic genres, fruit of an artistic evolution in wonderful symbiosis with the public. Thus one sees a western by Anthony Mann (and God knows how I love the westerns of Anthony Mann!) criticized as if it were not first a question of a western, that is to say of a whole ensemble of scenario conventions, the play of materials and of *mise-en-scène*. I know that in a film journal one can make an ellipsis of these preliminary themes, but still they should at least be implied whereas now their existence would seem to be sooner killed by shame, as a slightly ridiculous servitude, the reminder of which might be incongruous. In any case, a western by a director who has

not been approved will be disdained or treated with condescension, though it were round and polished as an egg. Now what is *Stagecoach* if not an ultra classical western in which the art of Ford, in fact, consists only of carrying characters and situations to an absolute degree of perfection; and I have happened to see, at the censorship board, admirable westerns of third rank and almost anonymous, but which reflect an admirable understanding of the laws of the genre and respect them from beginning to end.

Paradoxically, the adherents of the *politique des auteurs* particularly admire the American cinema, although it is here that the servitudes to production is the heaviest. It is true that it is also here that the maximum of technical facilities are put at the disposal of the director, but this does not make up for that. I admit nevertheless that liberty in Hollywood is greater than people say, provided that one knows how to read the manifestations of it, and I would add even that the tradition of genres is a basis for creative liberty. The American cinema is a classical art, to be sure, but why not admire in it that which is most admirable, that is to say not only the talent of such and such of its cinéastes, but also the genius of the system, the richness of its tradition, always lively, and its fecundity in contact with new contributions, as such films as *An American in Paris*, *The Seven Year Itch*, or *Bus Stop* would demonstrate, if that were necessary. It is true that Logan is lucky to be taken for an *auteur*, at least for an *auteur* attending his courses. But then in *Picnic* and *Bus Stop* there is no longer praise for what seems to me, however, to be the essential thing, that is to say the social truth, not of course presented as an end sufficient unto itself, but integrated into a style of cinematographic narrative in the same manner as pre-war America was integrated into American comedy.

Let us try, finally, to conclude. The *politique des auteurs* seems to me to harbor and to defend an essential critical truth, of which the cinema has need more than all the other arts, precisely in the measure to which the act of veritable artistic creation finds itself more uncertain and menaced there than elsewhere. But its exclusive use would lead to another peril: the negation of the work to the profit of the exaltation of its *auteur*. We have tried to show why mediocre *auteurs* were able, by accident, to make admirable films, and how, in turn, genius itself was menaced by a sterility no less accidental. The *politique des auteurs* will ignore the first and deny the second. Useful and fecund, it then seems to me, independently of its polemical value, to have been filled out by other approaches to the cinematographic fact which restores to the film its value as an *oeuvre*. This is not at all to deny the role of the *auteur*, but to restore to it the preposition without which the noun is only a lame concept. "*Auteur*," without doubt, but of what?



Night, Eclipse, Dawn...

*An Interview With Michelangelo
Antonioni By Jean-Luc Godard*

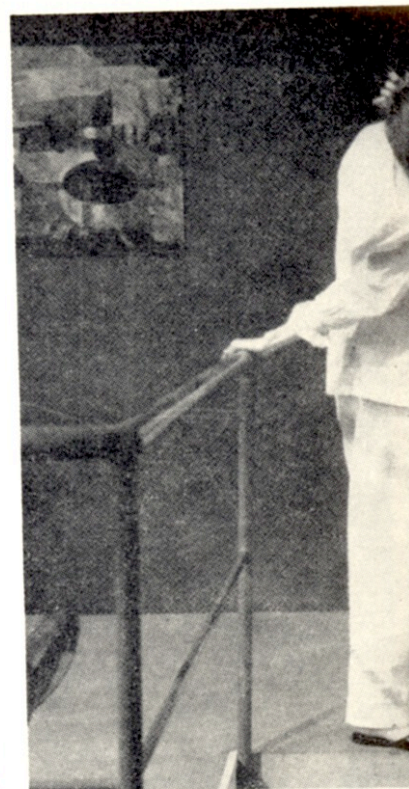
GODARD—Your three previous films, *L'Avventura*, *La Notte*, *L'Eclisse*, gave us the impression of being in a straight line, going ahead, searching; and now, you arrived in a new area, which is called, perhaps, the *Red Desert*, which is perhaps, a desert for this woman but which, for you, is, on the contrary a film about the entire world, and not only about some fuller and more complete world or other: it's a film about the entire world, and not only about today's world . . .

ANTONIONI—It is very difficult for me to talk about this film now. It's too recent. I am still too tied up with the "intentions" that pushed me to make it; I have neither the lucidity nor the detachment necessary in order to be able to judge it. I believe I can say, however, that this time it's not a question of a film about sentiments. The results (whether they be good or bad, beautiful or ugly) obtained in my previous films are, here, out-dated, null and void. This is another matter altogether. Before, it was the relationship of one character to another that interested me. Here, the central character is confronted with a social milieu as well, and this means I must treat my story in a completely different way. It simplifies things too much (as many have done) to say that I accuse this inhuman, industrialized world in which the individual is crushed and led to neurosis. My intention, on the contrary (moreover, we may know very well where we start but not at all where we'll end up), was to translate the beauty of this world, in which even the factories can be very beautiful . . . The line, the curves of factories and their smoke-stacks, are perhaps more beautiful than a row of trees — which every eye has already seen to the point of monotony. It's a rich world — living, useful. As for me, I hold that the sort of neurosis seen in *Red Desert* is above all a question of adaptation. There are people who adapt themselves, and others who haven't yet done this, for they are too tied to structures, or life-rhythms, that are now out of date. This is the case with Giuliana. The violence of the variation, the wedge between her sensitivity, intelligence and psychology and the cadence that is imposed on her, provoke the character's breakdown. It is a breakdown concerning not only her epidemic contacts with the world, her perception of the noises, colors, cold personalities surrounding her, but also her system of value (education, morality, faith), which are no longer valuable and no longer sustain her. She finds herself, thus, in the position of needing to renew herself completely, as a woman. This is what the doctors advise and this is what she strives to do.

GODARD—What is the explanation for the insert of the episode of the story she tells the little boy?

ANTONIONI—There is a woman and a sick child. The mother must tell the child a story, but he has already heard all the ones she knows. She must therefore, invent one. Giuliana's psychology being given, it seems natural to me that this story become, for her —

A



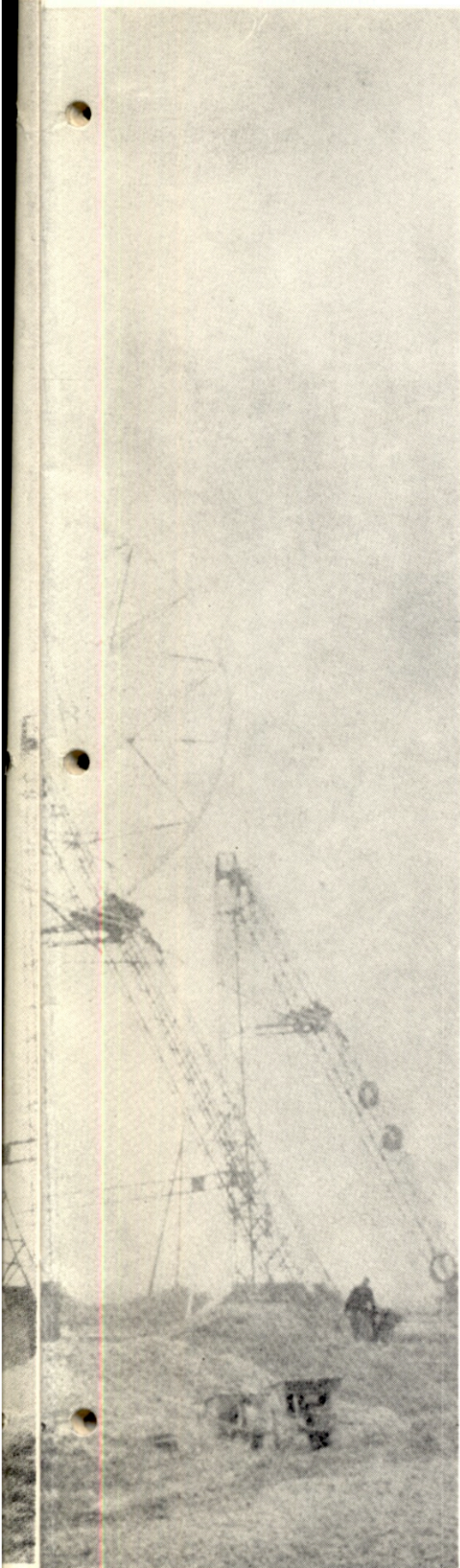
At the core of *Red Desert* is the woman; then the husband, the son, the lover: A. Giuliana (Monica Vitti) with Ugo (Carlo Chionetti); B. With Valerio (Valerio Bartoleschi); C. With Corrado (Richard Harris)



B







Red Desert (Monica Vitti and Richard Harris)

unconsciously — an evasion of the reality surrounding her, towards a world where the colors belong to nature: the blue sea, the pink sand. The rocks themselves take on human form, embrace her and sing sweetly.

Do you remember the scene in the room, with Corrado? She says, leaning against the wall, "Do you know what I'd like? . . . Everyone who ever loved me . . . to have them here, around me, like a wall." She needs them in fact, to help her to live, because she is afraid she won't be able to arrive at it alone.

GODARD—The modern world is therefore only the revealer of an older and more profound neurosis?

ANTONIONI—The milieu in which Giuliana lives accelerates the personality's breakdown, but, naturally, the personality must carry within itself a favorable terrain for this breakdown. It isn't easy to determine the causes and origins of neurosis; it is manifested in such different forms, at times going as far as schizophrenia, whose symptoms often resemble neurotic symptoms. But it is by means of a like exasperation that one arrives at encompassing a situation. I have been reproached for having chosen a pathological case. But, if I had chosen a normally adapted woman, there would no longer be a drama, the drama concerns those who do not adapt.

GODARD—Aren't there already traces of this character in the one in *L'Eclisse*?

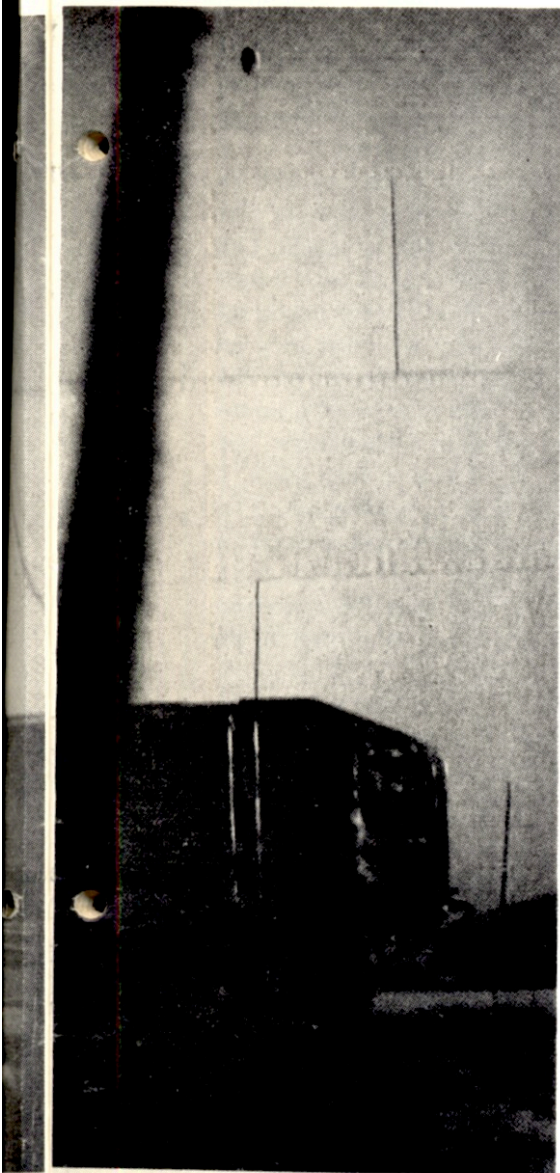
ANTONIONI—The character of Vittoria in *L'Eclisse* is the opposite of that of Giuliana. In *L'Eclisse*, Vittoria is a calm and well-balanced girl, who thinks about what she does. There isn't a single neurotic element in her. The crisis, in *L'Eclisse*, is a crisis of the sentiments. In *Red Desert*, the sentiments are a ready-made fact. Moreover, the relationship between Giuliana and her husband is normal. If you were to ask her, "Do you love your husband?," she would answer yes. Until her attempt at suicide, the crisis is underground, it is not visible.

I want to underline the fact that it isn't the milieu that gives birth to the breakdown: it only makes it show. One may think that outside of this milieu, there is no breakdown. But that's not true. Our life, even if we don't take account of it, is dominated by "industry." And "industry" shouldn't be understood to mean factories only, but also and above all, products. These products are everywhere, they enter our homes, made of plastics and other materials unknown barely a few years ago; they overtake us wherever we may be. With the help of publicity, which considers our psychology and our subconscious more and more carefully, they obsess us. I can say this: by situating the story of *Red Desert* in the world of factories, I have gone back to the source of that sort of crisis which, like a torrential river, swelled a thousand tributaries, divides in a thousand arms in order, finally, to submerge everything and spread everywhere.

A



B



In the night, on the deck of phantom vessel, A. a questing Antonioni and a lost Giuliana. B. Monica Vitti. C. In the fog, Giuliana flees from the group (Xenia Valderi, Aldo Grotti, Carlo Chionetti, Rita Renoir).



C

GODARD—But isn't this beauty of the modern world also the resolution of the characters' psychological difficulties, doesn't it show vanity?

ANTONIONI—One must not underestimate the drama of man thus conditioned. Without drama, there are perhaps no longer men. Furthermore, I do not believe that the beauty of the modern world in itself can resolve our dramas. I believe, on the contrary, that once adapted to new life-techniques we will perhaps find new solutions to our problems.

But why have me speak of these things? I am not a philosopher and all these observations have nothing to do with the "invention" of the film.

GODARD—Was the presence of the robot in the little boy's room benevolent or malevolent?

ANTONIONI—In my opinion, benevolent. Because the child, by playing with this genre of toy, will adapt very well to the life waiting for him. But here we come back to what we were just talking about. The toys are produced by industry, which in this way even influences the education of children.

I am still stupified by a conversation I had with a cybernetics professor from the University of Milan, Silvio Ceccato, considered by the Americans to be another Einstein. A formidable type, who has invented a machine that looks and describes, a machine that can drive a car, make a report from an aesthetic point of view — or ethical or journalistic, etc. And it's not a matter of television: it's an electronic brain. This man, who, moreover, proved to be extraordinarily lucid, never spoke one technical word in the course of a conversation I didn't understand. Well, I went crazy. At the end of each minute, I no longer understood anything of what he had just said to me. He forced himself to use my language, but he was in another world. With him was a young girl, 24 or 25 years old, pretty, of *petit bourgeois* origin—his secretary. Now she understood it perfectly. In Italy, these are generally very young and very simple girls, who have only a modest diploma, who work at programming electronic brains: for them, it's very simple and very easy to program an electronic brain — while it isn't easy at all for me.

Another savant, Robert M. Stewart, came to see me, six months ago, in Rome. He had invented a chemical brain and presented himself at a cybernetics congress in Naples to give an account of his discovery, which is one of the most extraordinary discoveries in the world. It's a very small box, mounted on tubes: it's a matter of cells, into whose composition gold enters, mixed with other substances. The cells are alive in a liquid chemical and they live an autonomous life; they have reactions: if you come into the room, the cell takes on a certain form and if I come in, it takes on another form, etc. In this little box there are only a few million cells, but

starting from that, one can arrive at remaking the human brain. This savant feeds them, puts them to sleep . . . he talked to me about all that, which was very clear but so unbelievable that at a certain point I was no longer following him. By contrast, when he gets a little older, the little boy who plays with the robot from earliest childhood will understand very well; he will have no trouble at all in going, if he wants to, out to space in a rocket.

I look at all that with a great deal of envy, and would like to be already in this new world. Unfortunately, we aren't there yet; it's a drama that will last several generations — mine, yours and the generation of those born right after WW II. I think that, in the years to come, there are going to be very violent transformations, both in the world and in the individual's interior. Today's crisis comes from this spiritual confusion, from this confusion of conscience, of faith and of politics; there are so many symptoms of the transformations to come. Then I said to myself, "What does one say, today, in the cinema?" And I wanted to tell a story based on these motivations I was talking about before.

GODARD—However, the heroes of this film are integrated with this mentality, these are engineers, they're part of this world. . . .

ANTONIONI—Not all of them. The character played by Richard Harris is almost a romantic, who thinks about fleeing to Patagonia and has no idea at all about what he must do. He is taking flight and believes he is resolving, in this way, the problems of his life. But this problem is inside, not outside, of him. All the more true that it is enough for him to meet a woman in order to provoke a crisis, and he no longer knows whether he will leave or not, the whole thing turns him around. I would like to point out a moment in the film which is an accusation of the old world: when, at the breaking point, this woman needs someone to help her, she finds a man who profits from her and from that crisis. She finds herself face-to-face with old things, and it is the old things that shake her and sweep her off her feet. If she had met someone like her husband, he would have acted differently; he would have, first of all, tried to take care of her, then, after that, perhaps. . . . When there, it's her own world that betrays her.

GODARD—At the end of the film is she going to become like her husband?

ANTONIONI—I believe that, following the efforts she makes to find a link with reality, she ends by finding a compromise. Neurotics have crises, but also moments of lucidity which may last all their lives. Perhaps she finds a compromise, but the neurosis stays with her. I believe I have given the idea of this continuity of illness by means of the slightly soft image: she is in a static phase. What is she

going to become? Another film would have to be made in order to know that.

GODARD—Do you think that this new world's heightened consciousness may have repercussions on aesthetics, on the conception of the artist?

ANTONIONI—Yes, I believe so. That changes the way of seeing, of thinking: everything changes. Pop Art demonstrated that something else is sought. One must not underestimate Pop Art. It is an "ironic" movement, and this conscious irony is very important. The Pop Art painters know very well that they are making things whose aesthetic value is not yet ripe — except for Rauschenberg, who is more of a painter than the others . . . even though Oldenburg's "soft typewriter" is very fine. . . . I like it very much. It believes it is good that all that is coming out. That can only accelerate the transformation process in question.

GODARD—But does the savant have the conscience we do? Does he reason as we do, in respect to the world?

ANTONIONI—I asked that of Stewart, the inventor of the chemical brain. He answered that his very specialized work, without a doubt, had reverberations in his private life, even including his relationship with his family.

GODARD—And must the sentiments be preserved?

ANTONIONI—What a question! Do you think it is easy to answer that? All I can say about sentiments is that they must change. "Must" isn't what I mean to say. They are changing. They have already changed.

GODARD—In the science-fiction novels, there are never artists, poets. . . .

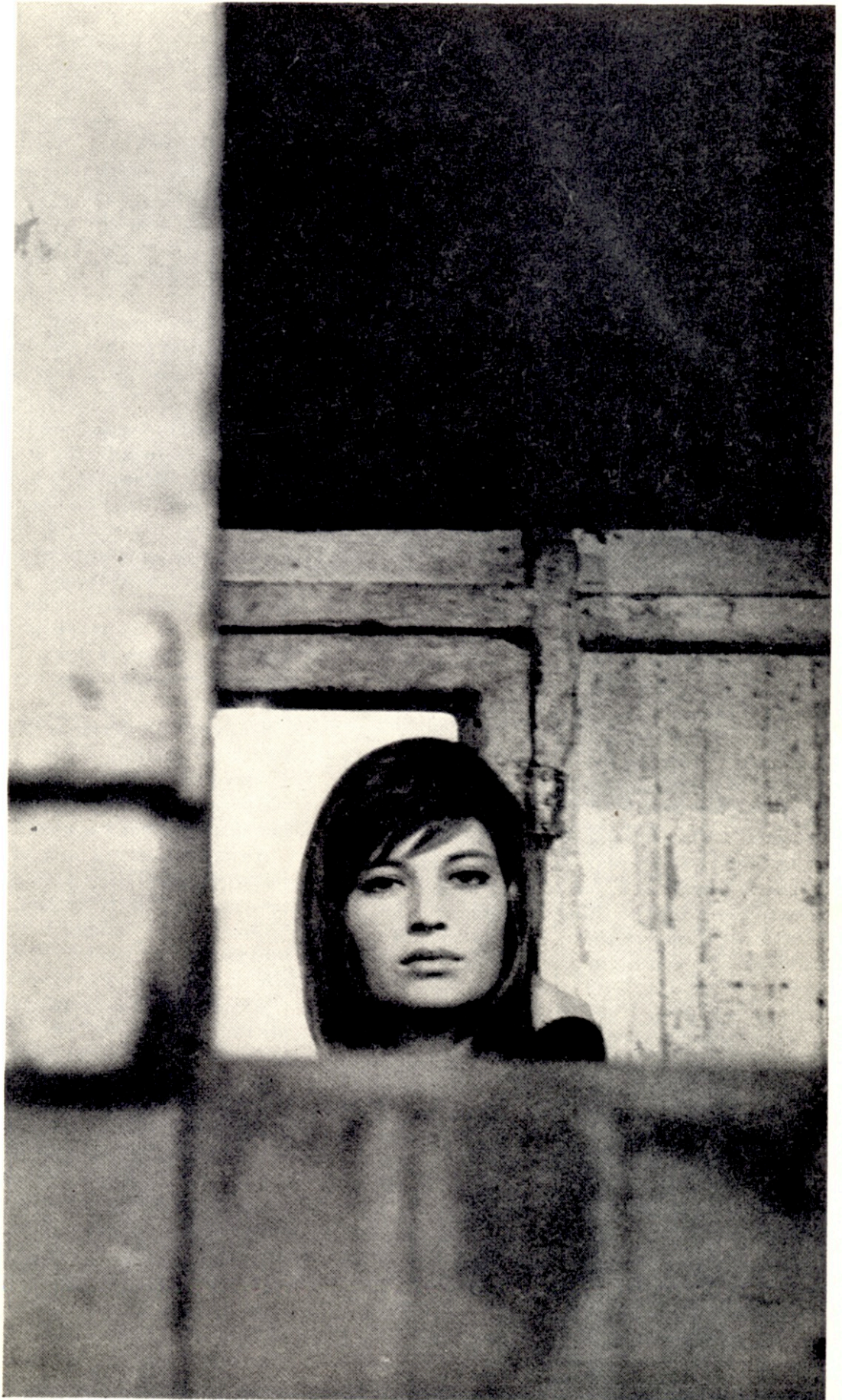
ANTONIONI—Yes, it's curious. Perhaps they think that one can do without art. Perhaps we are the last to produce things so apparently gratuitous as are works of art.

GODARD—Does *Red Desert* also help you to settle personal problems?

ANTONIONI—While making a film, we live, and nevertheless, we are always settling personal problems. Problems which concern our work, but also our private life. If the things we talk about are not those we were talking about right after the war, it is because the world around us has, in fact, changed and, also we ourselves have changed. Our requirements have changed, our purposes, our themes.

Right after the war, there were numerous things to be said; it was interesting to show social reality, the social condition of the individual. Today, all that has already been seen and done. The new themes we can treat of today are those about which we were just speaking. I don't know yet how we can approach them, present them. I have tried to develop one of these themes in *Red Desert* and I don't think I exhausted it. It is only the beginning of a series of problems and aspects of our modern society and of

Monica Vitti



the way of life that is ours. Moreover, you too, Godard, you make very modern films, your way of treating subjects reveals an intense need to break with the past.

GODARD—When you begin or end certain sequences with quasi-abstract forms of objects or details, do you do it in a pictorial spirit?

ANTONIONI—I feel the need to express reality in terms that are not completely realistic. The abstract white line that enters the picture at the beginning of the sequence of the little gray street interests me much more than the car that arrives: it's a way of approaching the character in terms of things rather than by means of her life. Her life, basically, interests me only relatively. It is a character that participates in the story as a function of her femininity; her feminine aspect and character are the essential things for me. It is exactly for that reason that I had this role played a bit statically.

GODARD—Thus, there is also on this point a break with your previous films.

ANTONIONI—Yes, it is a less realistic film, from a figurative point of view. That is to say, it is realistic in a different way. For example, I used the telescopic lens a great deal in order not to have deep-focus, which is for good reason an indispensable element of realism. What interests me now is to place the character in contact with things, for it is things, objects and materials that have weight today. I do not consider *Red Desert* a result: it is a research. I want to tell different stories with different means. Everything that's been done, everything I've done until now no longer interests me, it bores me. Perhaps you, too, feel the same thing?

GODARD—Was filming in color an important change?

ANTONIONI—Very important. I had to change my technique because of it, but not only because of it. I already had a need to change my technique, for the reasons we've spoken about. My requirements were no longer the same. The fact of using color accelerated this change. With color, you don't use the same lenses. Also, I perceived that certain camera movements didn't always jell with it: a rapid panoramic sweep is efficacious on brilliant red, but it does nothing for a sour green, unless you're looking for a new contrast. I believe there is a relationship between camera movement and color. A single film is not sufficient for studying the problem in depth, but it's a problem that must be examined. I made, for this reason, some 16mm tests. They were very interesting, but I was unable to achieve, in the film itself, certain effects I had found by this means. Up to this point, I've been in too much of a corner.

You know that a psycho-physiology of color exists; studies, experiments have been done on this subject. The interior of the factory seen in the film was painted red; two weeks later the workers were fighting

amongst one another. It was re-painted in pale green and everyone was peaceful. The workers' eyes must have a rest.

GODARD—How did you choose the colors for the store?

ANTONIONI—It was necessary to choose between warm colors and cool colors. Giuliana wants cool colors for her store. These are colors that are less discordant with the objects displayed. If you paint a wall orange, this color will kill any object nearby, while sky-blue or pale green will set the objects off without overwhelming them. I wanted this contrast between warm colors and cool colors: there is an orange, a yellow, a maroon ceiling, and my character discovers that, for her, they don't go well together.

GODARD—The film's title was *Celeste E Verde* (Heavenly Blue And Green).

ANTONIONI—I abandoned it, because it didn't seem to be a virile enough title; it was too directly linked to the color. Moreover, I had never thought about color in itself. The film was born in colors, but I always thought, first of all, of the thing to be said, this is natural, and thus aided the expression by means of the color. I never thought: I'm going to put a blue next to a maroon. I dyed the grass around the shed on the edge of the marsh in order to reinforce the sense of desolation, of death. The landscape had to be rendered truthfully: when trees are dead, they have that color.

GODARD—The drama is thus no longer psychological, but plastic. . . .

ANTONIONI—It's the same thing.

GODARD—Thus, all those shots of objects during the conversation about Patagonia? . . .

ANTONIONI—It's a sort of "distraction" on the character's part. He is tired of listening to all these conversations. He is thinking of Giuliana.

GODARD—The dialogue is simpler, more functional than that of your previous films; isn't their traditional role of "commentary" taken by the color?

ANTONIONI—Yes, I believe that is true. Let us say that, here, the dialogue is reduced to an indispensable minimum and that, in this sense, it is linked to the color. For example, I would never have done the scene in the shack where they talk about drugs, aphrodisiacs, without using red. I would never have done it in black and white. The red puts the spectator in a state of mind that permits him to accept this dialogue. The color is correct for the characters (who are justified by it) and also for the spectator.

GODARD—Do you feel yourself to be closer to the researches of painters than to those of novelists?

ANTONIONI—I don't feel too distant from the researches of the New Novel, but they help me less than the others: painting and scientific research interest me more. I don't believe they influence me



Monica Vitti

directly. There is, in this film, no pictorial research at all; we are far from painting, it seems to me. And, naturally, the requirements of painting have nothing to do with narrative content, where one is found in the cinema: this is where the novel's researches join those of painting.

GODARD—Did you re-work the color in the laboratory, as is permitted with Technicolor?

ANTONIONI—I placed no confidence at all in the laboratory, during the shooting. That is to say, I tried, during the shooting, to put the colors I wanted on the things themselves, on the landscapes. I painted directly, instead of trafficking with color in the laboratory. After that, what I demanded from the laboratory was a faithful reproduction of the effects I had obtained. It wasn't easy, for Technicolor, as you know, requires numerous operations involving the master print: the job was very long and delicate.

GODARD—You verified things during the shooting, as you went along. . . .

ANTONIONI—Exactly. I believe one mustn't place too much trust in the work that can be done in the laboratory. It's not their fault. It's just that technically, color is still a long way behind.

GODARD—In your opinion, does Giuliana see the color as you show it?

ANTONIONI—You know, there are neurotics who see color differently. Doctors have done experiments

on this subject, with mescaline for example, in order to try to know what they see. At a certain point, I had the intention of having some effects of this nature. But now there is no longer anything of this but one single moment, when you see stains on a wall. I also thought of modifying the color of certain objects and then, the fact of using all those "tricks" very quickly seemed to me to become artificial; it was an artificial way of saying things which could be said in a much more simple way. Well, I eliminated these effects. But we may think that she sees color differently.

It's amusing; at this moment, I am speaking with Godard, one of the most modern talented *cinéastes* of today and, just a little while ago, I lunched with René Clair, one of the greatest directors of the past: it wasn't at all the same genre of conversation . . . he is preoccupied with the future of the cinema. We, on the contrary (you agree, I believe), have confidence in the future of the cinema.

GODARD—And what are you going to do now?

ANTONIONI—I am going to do a sketch with Soraya. . . . This sketch interests me because I am going to pursue my researches with color, push ahead the experiments I did with *Red Desert*. After that, I'm going to make a film that interests me more. If I find a producer who will let me do it. . . .

(*Materials, transcribed from tapes, re-read and corrected by Michelangelo Antonioni.*)



Jean Aurenche



Claude Autant-Lara



Jean Delannoy and Christian Jacque

These notes have no other object than to attempt to define a certain tendency of the French cinema-tendency called "psychological realism"—and to sketch its limits.

TEN OR TWELVE FILMS

If the French cinema exists by means of about a hundred films a year, it is well understood that only ten or twelve merit the attention of critics and cinéphiles, the attention, therefore, of "Cahiers."

These ten or twelve films constitute what has been prettily named the "Tradition of Quality"; they are, by their ambitiousness, the admiration of the foreign press, defend the French flag twice a year at Cannes and at Venice where, since 1946, they regularly carry off medals, golden lions and *grands prix*.

With the advent of "talkies," the French cinema was a frank plagiarism of the American cinema. Under the influence of *Scarface*, we made the amusing *Pierrot Le Moko*. Then, the French scenario is most clearly obliged to Prévert for its evolution; *Quai Des Brumes* (*Port Of Shadows*) remains the masterpiece of poetic realism.

The war and the post-war period renewed the French cinema. It evolved under the effect of an international pressure and for poetic realism — about which one might say that it died closing *Les Portes De La Nuit* behind it—was substituted psychological realism, illustrated by Claude Autant-Lara, Jean Delannoy, René Clément, Yves Allégret and Marcel Pagliaro.

SCENARISTS' FILMS

If one is willing to remember that not so long ago Delannoy filmed *Le Bossu* and *La Part De L'Homme*, Claude Autant-Lara *Le Plombier Amoureux* and *Les Dames D'Amour*, Yves Allégret *La Boite Aux Rêves* and *Les Démones De L'Aube*, that all these films are just recognized as strictly commercial enterprises, one must admit that, the successes or failures of these cinémas being a function of the scenarios they chose, *Symphonie Pastorale*, *Le Diable Au Corps* (*Devil In The Flesh*), *Jeux Interdits* (*Forbidden Game*), *Manèges*, *Un Homme Marche Dans La Ville*, are essentially scenarists' films.

TODAY NO ONE IS IGNORANT ANY LONGER . . .

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At the same time Pierre Bost was publishing excellent little novels at the N.R.F.

Aurenche and Bost worked together for the first time while adapting and writing dialogue for *Docteur Mystère* directed by Claude Autant-Lara.

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A Certain Tendency Of The French Cinema

*By François
Truffaut*

and substituting for it the contrary idea of being faithful to the spirit—to the point that this audacious aphorism has been written: "An honest adaptation is a betrayal" (Carlo Rim, "Traveling And Sex-Appeal").

In adaptation there exists filmable scenes and un-filmable scenes, and that instead of omitting the latter (as was done not long ago) it is necessary to invent *equivalent* scenes, that is to say, scenes as the novel's author would have written them for the cinema.

"Invention without betrayal" is the watchword Aurenche and Bost like to cite, forgetting that one can also betray by omission.

The system of Aurenche and Bost is so seductive, even in the enunciation of its principles, that nobody even dreamed of verifying its functioning close-at-hand. I propose to do a little of this here.

The entire reputation of Aurenche and Bost is built on two precise points:

1. *Faithfulness* to the spirit of the works they adapt;
2. The talent they use.

THAT FAMOUS FAITHFULNESS . . .

Since 1943 Aurenche and Bost have adapted and written dialogue for: *Douce* by Michel Davet, *La Symphonie Pastorale* by Gide, *Le Diable Au Corps* by Radiguet, *Un Recteur A L'Ile De Sein* (*Dieu A Besoin Des Hommes—God Needs Men*) by Queffelec, *Les Jeux Inconnus* (*Jeux Interdits*) by François Boyer, *Le Blé En Herbe* by Colette.

In addition, they wrote an adaptation of *Journal D'Un Curé De Campagne* that was never filmed, a scenario on *Jeanne D'Arc* of which only one part has been made (by Jean Delannoy) and, lastly, scenario and dialogue for *L'Auberge Rouge* (*The Red Inn*) (directed by Claude Autant-Lara).

You will have noticed the profound diversity of inspiration of the works and authors adapted. In order to accomplish this tour de force which consists of remaining faithful to the spirit of Michel Davet, Gide, Radiguet, Queffelec, François Boyer, Colette and Bernanos, one must oneself possess, I imagine, a suppleness of spirit, a habitually geared-down personality as well as singular eclecticism.

You must also consider that Aurenche and Bost are led to collaborate with the most diverse directors: Jean Delannoy, for example, sees himself as a mystical moralist. But the petty meanness of *Garçon Sauvage* (*Savage Triangle*), the shabbiness of *La Minute De l'Érêre*, the insignificance of *La Route Napoleon* show rather clearly the intermittent character of that vocation.

Claude Autant-Lara, on the contrary, is well known for his non-conformity, his "advanced" ideas, his wild anti-clericalism; let us recognize in this cinéaste the virtue of always remaining, in his films, honest with himself.

Pierre Bost being the technician in tandem; the spiritual element in this communal work seems to come from Jean Aurenche.

Educated by the Jesuits, Jean Aurenche has held on to nostalgia and rebellion, both at the same time. His flirtation with surrealism seemed to be out of sympathy for the anarchists of the thirties. This tells how strong his personality is, also how apparently incompatible it was with the personalities of Gide, Bernanos, Queffelec, Radiguet. But an examination of the works will doubtless give us more information.

Abbot Amédée Ayffre knew very well how to analyze *La Symphonie Pastorale* and how to define the relationship between the written work and the filmed work:

"Reduction of Faith to religious psychology in the hands of Gide, now becomes a reduction to psychology, plain and simple . . . with this qualitative abasement we will now have, according to a law well-known to aestheticians, a corresponding quantitative augmentation. New characters are added: Piette and Casteran, charged with representing certain sentiments. Tragedy becomes drama, melodrama." (Dieu Au Cinema, p. 131).

WHAT ANNOYS ME . . .

What annoys me about this famous process of equivalence is that I'm not at all certain that a novel contains unfilmable scenes, and even less certain that these scenes, decreed unfilmable, would be so for everyone.

Praising Robert Bresson for his faithfulness to Bernanos, André Bazin ended his excellent article "La Stylistique de Robert Bresson," with these words, "After *The Diary Of A Country Priest*, Aurenche and Bost are no longer anything but the Viollet-Leduc of adaptation."

All those who admire and know Bresson's film well will remember the admirable scene in the confessional when Chantal's face "began to appear little by little, by degrees" (Bernanos).

When, several years before Bresson, Jean Aurenche wrote an adaptation of *Diary*, refused by Bernanos, he judged this scene to be unfilmable and substituted for it the one we reproduce here.

"Do you want me to listen to you here?" He indicates the confessional.

"I never confess."

"Nevertheless, you must have confessed yesterday, since you took communion this morning?"

"I didn't take communion."

He looks at her, very surprised.

"Pardon me, I gave you communion."

Chantal turns rapidly towards the *prie-Dieu* she had occupied that morning.

"Come see."

The curé follows her. Chantal indicates the missal she had left there.

"Look in this book, Sir. Me, I no longer, perhaps, have the right to touch it."

The curé, very intrigued, opens the book and discovers, between two pages, the host that Chantal had spit out. His face is stupefied and confused.

"I spit out the host," says Chantal.

"I see," says the curé, with a neutral voice.

"You've never seen anything like that, right?" says Chantal, harsh almost triumphant.

"No, never," says the curé, very calmly.

"Do you know what must be done?"

The curé closes his eyes for a brief instant. He is thinking or praying, he says, "It is very simple to repair, Miss. But it is very horrible to commit."

He heads for the altar, carrying the open book. Chantal follows him.

"No, it's not horrible. What is horrible is to receive the host in a state of sin."

"You were, then, in a state of sin?"

"Less than the others, but then—it's all the same to them."

"Do not judge."

"I do not judge, I condemn," says Chantal with violence.

"Silence in front of the body of Christ!"

He kneels before the altar, takes the host from the book and swallows it.

In the middle of the book, the curé and an obtuse atheist named Arsène are opposed in a discussion of Faith. This discussion ends with this line by Arsène: "When one is dead, everything is dead." In the adaptation, this discussion takes place on the very tomb of the curé, between Arsène and another curé, and *terminates the film*. This line, "When one is dead, everything is dead," carries, perhaps the only one retained by the public. Bernanos did not say, for conclusion, "When one is dead, everything is dead," but "What does it matter, all is grace."

"Invention without betrayal," you say—it seems to me that it's a question here of little enough invention for a great deal of betrayal. One or two more details: Aurenche and Bost were unable to make *The Diary Of A Country Priest* because Bernanos was alive. Bresson declared that were Bernanos alive he would have taken more liberties. Thus, Aurenche and Bost are annoyed because someone is alive, but Bresson is annoyed because he is dead.

UNMASK

From a simple reading of that extract, there stand out:

1. A constant and deliberate care to be *unfaithful* to the spirit as well as the letter;

2. A very marked taste for profanation and blasphemy.

This unfaithfulness to the spirit also degrades *Diabole Au Corps*—a love story that becomes an militaristic, anti-bourgeois film, *La Symphonie Pastorale*—a love story about an amorous pastor—transformed into a Béatrix Beck, *Un Recteur à l'île de Dieu* whose title is swapped for the equivocal or blasphemous *Dieu A Besoin Des Hommes* in which the Islamic

are shown like the famous "cretins" in Buñuel's *Land Without Bread*.

As for the taste for blasphemy, it is constantly manifested in a more or less insidious manner, depending on the subject, the *metteur-en-scène*, nay, even the star.

I recall from memory the confessional scene from *Douce*, Marthe's funeral in *Le Diable*, the profaned hosts in that adaptation of *Diary* (scene carries over to *Dieu A Besoin Des Hommes*), the whole scenario and the character played by Fernandel in *L'Auberge Rouge*, the scenario *in toto* of *Jeux Interdits* (joking in the cemetery).

Thus, everything indicates that Aurenche and Bost are the authors of *frankly* anti-clerical films, but, since films about the cloth are fashionable, our authors have allowed themselves to fall in with that style. But as it suits them—they think—not to betray their convictions, the theme of profanation and blasphemy, dialogues with double meanings, turn up here and there to prove to the guys that they know the art of "cheating the producer," all the while giving him satisfaction, as well as that of cheating the "great public," which is equally satisfied.

This process well deserves the name of "alibi-ism"; it is excusable and its use is necessary during a time when one must ceaselessly feign stupidity in order to work intelligently, but if it's all in the game to "cheat the producer," isn't it a bit scandalous to re-write Gide, Bernanos and Radiguet?

In truth, Aurenche and Bost work like all the scen-

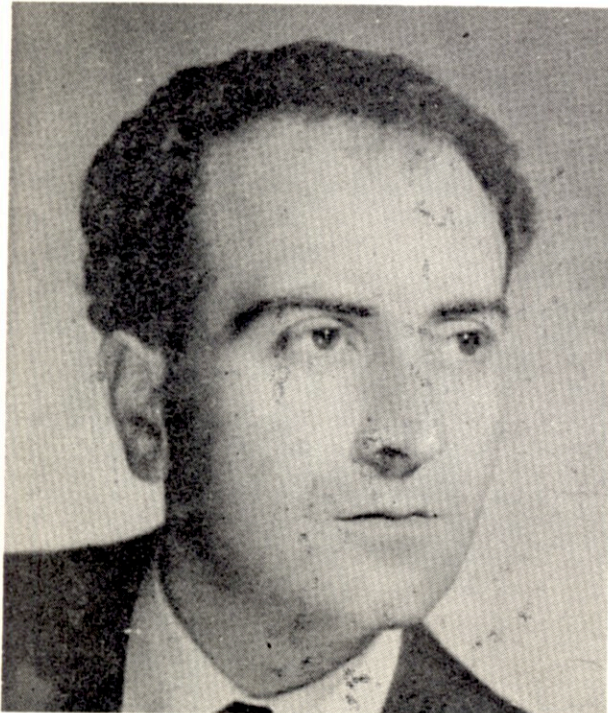
arists in the world, like pre-war Spaak and Natanson.

To their way of thinking, every story includes characters A, B, C, and D. In the interior of that equation, everything is organized in function of criteria known to them alone. The sun rises and sets like clockwork, characters disappear, others are invented, the script deviates little by little from the original and becomes a whole, formless but brilliant; a new film, step by step makes its solemn entrance into the "Tradition of Quality."

SO BE IT, THEY WILL TELL ME . . .

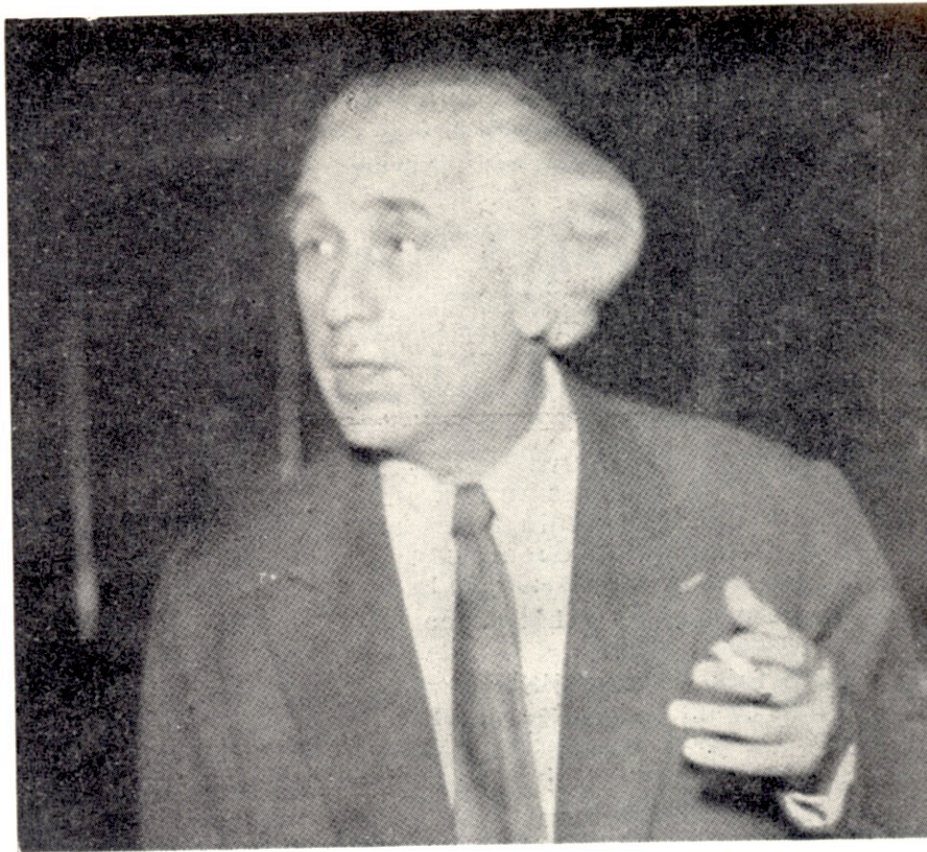
They will tell me, "Let us admit that Aurenche and Bost are unfaithful, but do you also deny the existence of their talent . . . ?" Talent, to be sure, is not a function of fidelity, but I consider an adaptation of value only when written by a *man of the cinema*. Aurenche and Bost are essentially literary men and I reproach them here for being contemptuous of the cinema by underestimating it. They behave, *vis-a-vis* the scenario, as if they thought to reeducate a delinquent by finding him a job; they always believe they've "done the maximum" for it by embellishing it with subtleties, out of that science of nuances that make up the slender merit of modern novels. It is, moreover, only the smallest caprice on the part of the exegetists of our art that they believe to honor the cinema by using literary jargon. (Haven't Sartre and Camus been talked about for Pagliero's work, and phenomenology for Allégret's?)

The truth is, Aurenche and Bost have made the works they adapt insipid, for *equivalence* is always



A. Jacques Sigurd. B. Yves Allégret.

Abel Gance



Jean Cocteau



with us, whether in the form of treason or timidity. Here is a brief example: in *Le Diable Au Corps*, as Radiguet wrote it, Francois meets Marthe on a train platform with Marthe jumping from the train while it is still moving; in the film, they meet in the school which has been transformed into a hospital. What is the point of this *equivalence*? It's a decoy for the anti-militarist elements added to the work, in concert with Claude Autant-Lara.

Well, it is evident that Radiguet's idea was one of *mise en scène*, whereas the scene invented by Aurenche and Bost is *literary*. One could, believe me, multiply these examples infinitely.

ONE OF THESE DAYS . . .

Secrets are only kept for a time, formulas are divulged, new scientific knowledge is the object of communications to the Academy of Sciences and since, if we will believe Aurenche and Bost, adaptation is an exact science, one of these days they really could apprise us in the name of what criterion, by virtue of what system, by what mysterious and internal geometry of the work, they abridge, add multiply, devise and "rectify" these masterpieces.

Now that this idea is uttered, the idea that these equivalences are only timid astuteness to the end of getting around the difficulty, of resolving on the soundtrack problems that concern the image, plundering in order to no longer obtain anything on the screen but scholarly framing, complicated lighting-effects, "polished" photography, the whole keeping the "Tradition of Quality" quite alive—it is time to come to an examination of the ensemble of these films adapted, with dialogue, by Aurenche and Bost, and to research the permanent nature of certain themes that will explain, without justifying, the constant *unfaithfulness* of two scenarists to works taken by them as "pretext" and "occasion."

In a two line résumé, here is the way scenarios treated by Aurenche and Bost appear:

La Symphonie Pastorale: He is a pastor, his is married. He loves and has no right to.

Le Diable Au Corps: They make the gestures of love and have no right to.

Dieu A Besoin Des Hommes: He officiates, gives benedictions, gives extreme unction and has no right to.

Jeux Interdits: They bury the dead and have no right to.

Le Blé En Herbe: They love each other and have no right to.

You will say to me that the book also tells the same story, which I do not deny. Only, I notice that Gide also wrote *La Porte Etroite*, Radiguet *La Bal Du Comte d'Orgel*, Colette *La Vagabonde* and that each one of these novels did not tempt Delannoy or Autant-Lara.

Let us notice also that these scenarios, about which

I don't believe it useful to speak here, fit into the sense of my thesis: *Au Delà Des Grilles, Le Château De Verre, L'Auberge Rouge*. . . .

One sees how competent the promoters of the "Tradition of Quality" are in choosing only subjects that favor the misunderstandings on which the whole system rests.

Under the cover of literature—and, of course, of quality—they give the public its habitual dose of smut, non-conformity and facile audacity.

THE INFLUENCE OF AURENCHÉ AND BOST IS IMMENSE . . .

The writers who have come to do film dialogue have observed the same imperatives: Anouilh, between the dialogues for *Dégourdis de la Ile* and *Un Caprice De Caroline Chérie* introduced into more ambitious films his universe with its affection of the bizarre with a background of nordic mists transposed to Brittany (*Pattes Blanches*). Another writer Jean Ferry, made sacrifices for fashion, he too, and the dialogue for *Manon* could just as well have been signed by Aurenche and Bost: "He believed me a virgin and, in private life, he is a professor of psychology!" Nothing better to hope for from the young scenarists. They simply work their shift, taking good care not to break any taboos.

Jacques Sigurd, one of the last to come to "scenario and dialogue," teamed up with Yves Allégret. Together, they bequeathed the French cinema some of its blackest masterpieces: *Dédée D'Anvers*, *Manèges*, *Une Si Jolie Petite Plage*, *Les Miracles N'Ont Jeu Qu'une Fois*, *La Jeune Folle*. Jacques Sigurd very quickly assimilated the recipe; he must be endowed with an admirable spirit of synthesis, for his scenarios oscillate ingeniously between Aurenche and Bost, Prévost and Clouzot, the whole lightly modernized. Religion is never involved, but blasphemy always makes its timid entrance thanks to several daughters of Mary or several good sisters who make their way across the field of vision at the moment when their presence would be least expected (*Manèges*, *Une Si Jolie Petite Plage*).

The cruelty by which they aspire to "rouse the trembling of the bourgeois" finds its place in well-expressed lines like: "he was old, he could drop dead" (*Manèges*). In *Une Si Jolie Petite Plage*, Jane Marken envies Berck's prosperity because of the tubercular cases found there: *Their family comes to see them and that makes business good!* (One dreams of the prayer of the rector of Sein Island).

Roland Laudenbach, who would seem to be more endowed than most of his colleagues, has collaborated on films that are most typical of that spirit: *La Minute De Vérité*, *Le Bon Dieu Sans Confession*, *La Maison Du Silence*.

Robert Scipion is a talented man of letters. He has

only written one book; a book of pastiches. Singular badges: the daily frequenting of the Saint-Germain-des-Prés cafés, the friendship of Marcel Pagliero who is called the Sartre of the cinema, probably because his films resemble the articles in "Temps Modernes." Here are several lines from *Amants De Brasmort*, a populist film in which sailors are "heroes," like the dockers were in *Un Homme Marche Dans La Ville*:

"The wives of friends are made to sleep with."

"You do what agrees with you; as for that, you'd mount anybody, you might well say."

In one single reel of the film, towards the end, you can hear in less than ten minutes such words as: *prostitute, whore, slut and bitchiness*. Is this realism?

PREVERT IS TO BE REGRETTED . . .

Considering the uniformity and equal filthiness of today's scenarios, one takes to regretting Prévert's scenarios. He believed in the Devil, thus in God, and if, for the most part, his characters were by his whim alone charged with all the sins in creation, there was always a couple, the new Adam and Eve, who could end the film, so that the story could begin again.

PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM,

NEITHER REAL NOR PSYCHOLOGICAL . . .

There are scarcely more than seven or eight scenarists working regularly for the French cinema. Each one of these scenarists has but one story to tell, and, since each only aspires to the success of the "two greats," it is not exaggerating to say that the hundred-odd French films made each year tell the same story: it's always a question of a victim, generally a cuckold. (The cuckold would be the only sympathetic character in the film if he weren't always infinitely grotesque: Blier-Vilbert, etc. . . .) The knavery of his kin and the hatred among the members of his family lead the "hero" to his doom; the injustice of life, and for local color, the wickedness of the world (the curés, the concierges, the neighbors, the passers-by, the rich, the poor, the soldiers, etc. . . .)

For distraction, during the long winter nights, look for titles of French films that do not fit into this framework and, while you're at it, find among these films those in which this line or its equivalent does not figure, spoken by the most abject couple in the film: "It's always they that have the money (or the luck, or love, or happiness. It's too unjust, in the end."

This school which aspires to realism destroys it at the moment of finally grabbing it, so careful is the school to lock these beings in a closed world, barricaded by formulas, plays on words, maxims, instead of letting us see them for ourselves, with our own eyes. The artist cannot always dominate his work. He must be, sometimes, God and, sometimes, his creature. You know that modern play in which the principal character, normally constituted when the curtain rises on

him, finds himself crippled at the end of the play, the loss of each of his members punctuating the changes of acts. Curious epoch when the least flash-in-the-pan performer uses Kafkaesque words to qualify his domestic avatars. This form of cinema comes straight from modern literature—half-Kafka, half-Bovary!

A film is no longer made in France that the authors do not believe they are re-making Madame Bovary.

For the first time in French literature, an author adopted a distant, exterior attitude in relation to his subject, the subject becoming like an insect under the entomologist's microscope. But if, when starting this enterprise, Flaubert could have said, "I will roll them all in the same mud—and be right" (which today's authors would voluntarily make their exergue), he could declare afterwards "I am Madame Bovary" and I doubt that the same authors could take up that line and be sincere!

MISE-EN-SCENE, METTEUR EN SCENE, TEXTS

The object of these notes is limited to an examination of a certain form of cinema, from the point of view of the scenarios and scenarists only. But it is appropriate, I think, to make it clear that the *metteurs-en-scène* are and wish to be responsible for the scenarios and dialogues they illustrate.

Scenarist' films, I wrote above, and certainly it isn't Aurenche and Bost who will contradict me. When they hand in their scenario, the film is done; the *metteur-en-scène*, in their eyes, is the gentleman who adds the pictures to it and it's true, alas! I spoke of the mania for adding funerals everywhere. And, for all that, death is always juggled away. Let us remember Nana's admirable death, or that of Emma Bovary presented by Renoir; in *La Pastorale*, death is only a make-up job and an exercise for the camera man; compare the close-ups of Michèle Morgan in *La Pastorale*, Dominique Blanchard in *Le Secret D Mayerling* and Madeleine Sologne in *L'Eternel Retour*: it's the same face! Everything happens *after* death.

Let us cite, lastly, that declaration by Delannoy that we dedicate, with perfidy, to the French scenarists: "When it happens that authors of talent, whether in the spirit of gain or out of weakness, one day let themselves go to 'write for the cinema,' they do it with the feeling of lowering themselves. They deliver themselves rather to a curious temptation towards mediocrity, so careful are they to not compromise their talent and certain that, to write for the cinema, one must make oneself understood by the lowliest. (*L. Symphonie Pastorale ou L'Amour Du Métier*," *revue Verger*, November 1947).

I must, without further ado, denounce a sophism that will not fail to be thrown at me in the guise of an argument: "This dialogue is spoken by abject people and it is in order to better point out their nastiness."

that we give them this hard language. It is our way of being moralists."

To which I answer: it is inexact to say that these lines are spoken by the most abject characters. To be sure, in the films of "psychological realism" there are nothing but vile beings, but so inordinate is the authors' desire to be superior to their characters that those who, perchance, are not infamous are, at best, infinitely grotesque.

Well, as for these abject characters, who deliver these abject lines—I know a handful of men in France who would be INCAPABLE of conceiving them, several cinéastes whose world-view is at least as valuable as that of Aurenche and Bost, Sigurd and Jeanson. I mean Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau, Jacques Becker, Abel Gance, Max Ophuls, Jacques Tati, Roger Leenhardt; these are, nevertheless, French cinéastes and it happens—curious coincidence—that they are *auteurs* who often write their dialogue and some of them themselves invent the stories they direct.

THEY WILL STILL SAY TO ME . . .

"But why," they will say to me, "why couldn't one have the same admiration for all those cinéastes who strive to work in the bosom of this "Tradition of Quality" that you make sport of so lightly? Why not admire Yves Allégret as much as Becker, Jean Delannoy as much as Bresson, Claude Autant-Lara as much as Renoir?"*

Well—I do not believe in the peaceful co-existence of the "Tradition of Quality" and an "*auteur's* cinema."

Basically, Yves Allégret and Delannoy are only caricatures of Clouzot, of Bresson.

It is not the desire to create a scandal that leads me to depreciate a cinema so praised elsewhere. I rest convinced that the exaggeratedly prolonged existence of *psychological realism* is the cause of the lack of public comprehension when faced with such new works as *Le Carrosse D'Or* (*The Golden Coach*),

* "Taste is made of a thousand distastes"—Paul Valéry



Max Ophuls

A



B



A. Jacques Becker and Robert Bresson.

B. Roger Leenhardt.

Casque D'or, not to mention *Les Dames Du Bois De Boulogne* and *Orphée*.

Long live audacity, to be sure, still it must be revealed as it is. In terms of this year, 1953, if I had to draw up a balance-sheet of the French cinema's audacities, there would be no place in it for either the vomiting in *Les Orgueilleux* (*The Proud And The Beautiful*) or Claude Laydu's refusal to be sprinkled with holy water in *Le Bon Dieu Sans Confession* or the homosexual relationships of the characters in *Le Salaire De La Peur* (*The Wages Of Fear*), but rather the gait of *Hulot*, the maid's soliloquies in *La Rue De L'Estrapade*, the *mise-en-scène* of *La Carrosse D'Or*, the direction of the actors in *Madame de* (*The Earrings Of Madame De*), and also Abel Gance's studies in polyvision. You will have understood that these audacities are those of *men of the cinema* and no longer of scenarists, directors and litterateurs.

For example, I take it as significant that the most brilliant scenarists and *metteur-en-scène* of the "Tradition of Quality" have met with failure when they approach comedy: Ferry-Clouzot *Miquette Et Sa Mère*, Sigurd-Boyer *Tous Les Chemins Mènent A Rome*, Scipion-Pagliero *La Rose Rouge*, Laudenbach-Delannoy *La Route Napoléon*, Auranche-Bost-Autant-Lara *L'Auberge Rouge* or, if you like, *Occupe-toi d'Amélie*.

Whoever has tried, one day, to write a scenario wouldn't be able to deny that comedy is by far the most difficult genre, the one that demands the most work, the most talent, also the most humility.

ALL BOURGEOIS . . .

The dominant trait of psychological realism is its anti-bourgeois will. But what are Aurenche and Bost, Sigurd, Jeanson, Autant-Lara, Allégret, if not bourgeois, and what are the fifty thousand new readers, who do not fail to see each film from a novel, if not bourgeois?

What then is the value of an anti-bourgeois cinema made by the bourgeois for the bourgeois? Workers, you know very well, do not appreciate this form of cinema at all even when it aims at relating to them. They refused to recognize themselves in the dockers of *Un Homme Marche Dans La Ville*, or in the sailors of *Les Amants De Brasmort*. Perhaps it is necessary to send the children out on the stairway landing in order to make love, but their parents don't like to hear it said, above all at the cinema, even with "benevolence." If the public likes to mix with low company under the alibi of literature, it also likes to do it under the alibi of society. It is instructive to consider the programming of films in Paris, by neighborhoods. One comes to realize that the public-at-large perhaps prefers little naïve foreign films that show it men "as they should be" and not in the way that Aurenche and Bost believe them to be.

LIKE GIVING ONESELF A GOOD ADDRESS . . .

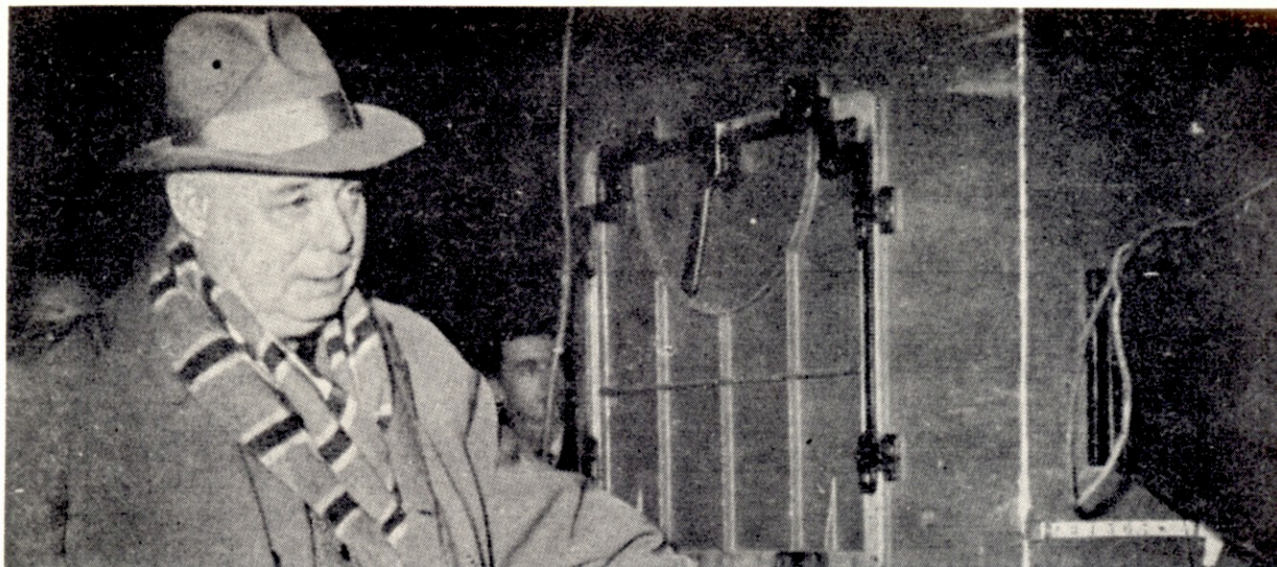
It is always good to conclude, that gives everyone pleasure. It is remarkable that the "great" *metteurs-en-scène* and the "great" scenarists have, for a long time, all made minor films, and the talent they have put into them hasn't been sufficient to enable one to distinguish them from others (those who don't put in talent). It is also remarkable that they all came to "Quality" at the same time, as if they were giving themselves a good address. And then, a producer—even a director—earns more money making *Le Blé En Herbe* than by making *Le Plombier Amoureux*. The "courageous" films are revealed to be very profitable. The proof: someone like Ralph Habib abruptly renounces demi-pornography, makes *Les Compagnes De La Nuit* and refers to Cayatte. Well, what's keeping the André Tabets, Compagneer, the Jean Guittons, the Pierre Vérys, the Jean Lavirons, the Ciampis, the Grangiers, from making, from one day to the next, intellectual films, from adapting masterpieces (there are still a few left) and, of course, adding funerals, here, there and everywhere?

Well, on that day we will be in the "Tradition of Quality" up to the neck and the French cinema, with rivalry among "psychological realism," "violence," "strictness," "ambiguity," will no longer be anything but one vast funeral that will be able to leave the studio in Billancourt and enter the cemetery directly—it seems to have been placed next door expressly, in order to get more quickly from the producer to the grave-digger.

Only, by dint of repeating to the public that it identified with the "heroes" of the films, it might well end by believing it, and on the day that it understands that this fine big cuckold whose misadventures it is solicited to sympathize with (a little) and to laugh at (a lot), is not, as had been thought, a cousin or neighbor down the hall but ITSELF, that abject family ITS family, that scoffed-at religion ITS religion—well, on that day it may show itself to be ungrateful to a cinema that will have labored so hard to show it life as one sees it on the fourth floor in Saint-Germain-des-Près.

To be sure, I must recognize it, a great deal of emotion and taking-sides are the controlling factors in the deliberately pessimistic examination I have undertaken of a certain tendency of the French cinema. I am assured that this famous "school of psychological realism" had to exist in order that, in turn, *The Diary Of A Country Priest*, *La Carrosse D'Or*, *Orpheus*, *Casque D'Or*, *Mr. Hulot's Holiday* might exist.

But our authors who wanted to educate the public should understand that perhaps they have strayed from the primary paths in order to become involved with the more subtle paths of psychology; they have passed on to that sixth grade so dear to Jouhandeau, but it isn't necessary to repeat a grade indefinitely!



Jean Renoir

NOTES

1. *La Symphonie Pastorale*. Characters added to the film: Piette, Jacques' fiancée; Casteran, Piette's father. Characters omitted: the Pastor's three children. In the film, no mention is made of what happens to Jacques after Gertrude's death. In the book, Jacques enters an order.

Operation *Symphonie Pastorale*: a. Gide himself writes an adaptation of his book; b. This adaptation is judged "unfilmable"; c. Jean Aurenche and Jean Delannoy, in turn, write an adaptation; d. Gide refuses it; e. Pierre Bost's entry on the scene conciliates everyone.

2. *Le Diable Au Corps*. On the radio, in the course of a program by André Parinaud devoted to Radiguet, Claude Autant-Lara declared in substance, "What led me to make a film out of *Le Diable Au Corps* was that I saw it as an anti-war novel."

On the same program, Francois Poulenc, a friend of Radiguet's, said he had found nothing of the book on seeing the film.

3. To the proposed producer of *The Diary Of A Country Priest*, who was astonished to see the character of Doctor Delbende disappear in the adaptation, Jean Aurenche (who had signed the script) answered, "Perhaps, in ten years, a scenarist will be able to retain a character who dies midway through the film but, as for me, I don't feel capable of it." Three years later, Robert Bresson retained Doctor Delbende and allowed him to die in the middle of the film.

4. Aurenche and Bost never said they were "faithful." This was the critics.

5. *Le Blé En Herbe*. There was an adaptation of Colette's novel as early as 1946. Claude Autant-Lara

accused Roger Leenhardt of having plagiarized Colette's *Le Blé En Herbe* with his *Les Dernières Vacances*. The arbitration of Maurice Garçon was against Claude Autant-Lara. With Aurenche: Bost the intrigue imagined by Colette was enriched by a new character, that of Dick, a lesbian who lives with the "White Lady." This character was suppressed, several weeks before the film was shot, Madame Ghislaine Auboin, who "reviewed" the adaptation with Claude Autant-Lara.

6. The characters of Aurenche and Bost speak will, in maxims. Several examples: *La Symphonie Pastorale*: "Ah! It would be better if children had been that were never born." "Not everyone has the right to be blind." "A cripple is someone who pretends to be like everyone else."

Le Diable Au Corps (a soldier has lost a leg): "This is perhaps the last of the wounded." "That makes a fine leg for him."

Jeux Interdits: Francis: "What does this mean—put the cart before the horse?" Berthe: "Oh, what we're doing." (They are making love.) Francois: "I didn't know that's what it was called."

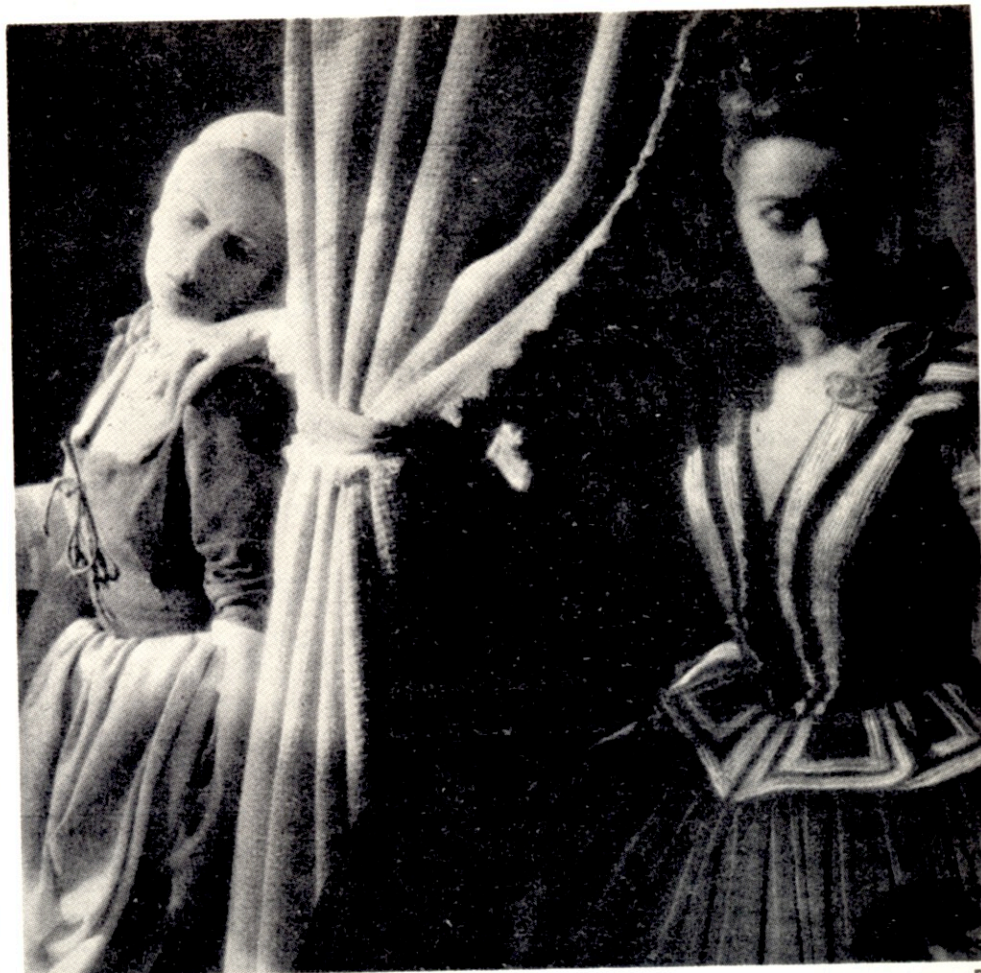
7. Jean Aurenche was on the crew of *Les Dames Du Bois De Boulogne*, but he had to leave Bresson because of incompatibility of inspiration.

8. An extract from the dialogue Aurenche and Bost wrote for *Jeanne D'Arc* was published in "La Revue Du Cinéma;" #8, page 9.

9. In fact, "psychological realism" was created parallel to "poetic realism," which had the tandem Spaey and Feyder. It really will be necessary, one day, to settle an ultimate quarrel with Feyder, before he has dropped definitively into oblivion.

A

A. Jean Cocteau: *Beauty And The Beast*.



B. Max Ophuls: *Letter From An Unknown Woman*.



B

Ambiguity of the Cinema

By Roger Leenhardt

The discovery of the new American cinema: Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*



(The following is a speech delivered by Roger Leenhardt at the 19th Congress of Philosophical Societies of the French Language, on September 2nd, 1957 at Aix-en-Provence. The text is verbatim.)

I will consider the word "cinema" in the limited sense of cinematographic art. Undoubtedly the cinema is more often a means of expression, a language. The savant using the camera for experimentation, the pedagogue making a film for instructional purposes, are not involved in an artistic activity. A film becomes a work of art only when made by an artist, to the end of expressing a style or a vision of the world and of producing in the spectator a moral effect accompanied by aesthetic pleasure. It is not that I minimize the extra-artistic aspect of cinema — but with a subject so vast as Man and Cinematographic Works one must limit himself from the start.

As soon as one wants to reflect upon the cinema with any rigor one is faced with a major difficulty. Unlike the classical arts, it was born quite recently, and its evolution — still in progress — has been so rapid and so considerable that one hardly knows how to grasp the cinema-in-itself.⁶ The insistence by its theoreticians on speaking of the "specificity" of the cinema is a direct betrayal, I believe, of the ambiguous and equivocal nature of screen art.

For the vagaries of critical thought, as peremptory as they are unstable, have not followed the evolution of cinematographic style and technique in a parallel way.

AN INFLATION OF CINEMATOGRAPHIC THOUGHT

During the epoch that some still call the golden age of movies, between 1920 and 1930, philosophy was not yet interested in the screen, and academic aesthetics even refused to call it art. They called it simple reproduction and claimed it was not a transposition of reality. In opposition to this, a young avant-garde group discovered and baptized the seventh art, calling it the universal language of image and the privileged expression of the modern world. It was in a literary mode, effusive and quite baroque and constituted less a philosophy than a mystique. It should have collapsed with the advent of sound but, in spite of the bugbear of filmed theatre, this curious art of the image, proud of its muteness, integrated the word with the greatest of ease.

The power of words — like that of photogeneity, for example — is such that this primary (at least in the historical sense) concept of the cinema reappears even in contemporary cinematic studies — enterprises of scientific strictness for all that.

After the war in effect — I was stationed in France — the discovery of the new American and Italian films provoked a renewal, a stirring-up, I'd say almost an

inflation of cinematographic thought. The number of texts and works on the film was abruptly multiplied by twenty. The movement occurred on two axes. One was termed the New Criticism and the other Filmology.

From 1949 on, the ardent and erudite young group at *Cahiers du Cinema* abandons impressionistic, psychological and even historical criticism in favor of a technical and one might even say philosophical criticism. André Bazin, leader of this generation, proved to what level of thought precise problems of cutting and shooting such as flash-backs and deep focus could be analyzed.

Certain of his disciples have pushed the method a bit far. And one cannot help feeling a certain uneasiness when the slightest account of a curious Western (for these young turks prefer "B" films to obviously major works) leads to a discussion of ontology and alienation, this genre of terms being at times handled very casually.

Of course one is reassured to find this vocabulary coming from the filmologists as well, but at times one feels the opposite sort of uneasiness. Certainly one must praise Cohen-Séat for having led great specialists in intellectual disciplines such as aesthetics, sociology or psychology, with their own familiar scientific precision, to the world of film. And we shouldn't be astonished if, the realities of the screen being less familiar to them, the results are, uncertain at first. An article by André Bazin, entitled amusingly enough (if my memory is correct) "Prolegomena for All Filmology," explains this phenomenon admirably. I must admit that I am, unfortunately, rather ignorant of the development of filmology — having ceased my activity as critic after its birth. But I don't doubt that the method, now that it is more organized, has produced and is producing remarkable works.

A recent study which I have just finished reading — and I don't know whether it belongs to orthodox filmology — that is, in any case, a model type of dense and brilliant philosophical analysis of cinema by an informed man, has, however, renewed in me a feeling of equivocation that it would be useful to dispel.

It is the "Essay on Sociological Anthropology" by Edgar Morin entitled "The Cinema and Visionary Man." I am sorry to speak in a somewhat unpleasant critical fashion for a few moments, but at times it is necessary to clear the air in order to arrive at a clean, concrete statement.

What is Morin's central thesis? It consists of demonstrating that the cinema, born dialectically out of



Alfred Hitchcock: *Rope*

the movie camera's simple optical and objective reproduction of reality, establishes a subjective vision, relative to the visionary, to onirism, to magic. It amounts to a "virtual surrealizing of the screen." Valentin's formula, which he cites, is characteristic: "The lens confers an air of legend to whatever it approaches; transports everything that falls within its field outside of reality."

I do not propose to dispute this thesis. In one sense it is evident. Any aesthetic vision, whether it is painting or literature, consists of transposing a given reality, of affecting a certain coefficient of subjectivity, of super-reality.

THE EVOLUTION OF STYLE

It is interesting to analyze the specific cinematic elements that determine this transfiguration. With respect to the author, it is worth the trouble of turning to technique for a moment. He studies successively the "phantomness" of the cinematic image — air-like, transparent, with the first stylization of black and white; the importance of playing with time — accel-

erated or slow motion — or with space — dissolves, superimpositions; the necessary accompaniment of this succession of images by an expressive and affective music; the fragmentation of time and space by montage; cutting for scenes with fascinating angles; the framing itself — that arbitrary composition within the screen's rectangle; and finally, the macroscopic — that is to say, the systematic use of close-ups, psychological when it involves a face and animistic when objects are shown.

Well, what is extraordinary is that all of these elements, undoubtedly current usage for the silent film of 1928, correspond to modalities of expression that the evolution of cinematic style has gone beyond and even abandoned. I'll go over them quickly. All technical effort for the past twenty years has tended to be more and more fixed, clean and dense. And yet people are still making films in black and white, not for aesthetic reasons — no matter what they say — it's purely a question of budget. One would hardly put to cite, with the exception of documentaries, a single recent film that uses speeded-up or slow motion in the course of a story. I pass on to music. Y

know that important films are now being made without music, or with briefer and briefer musical intrusions — and it is generally justified. I am thinking of an example: shortly you are going to see a film by Clouzot (*Mystère Picasso*). Well! My friend Georges Auric was very upset by the fact that a critic who liked the film attacked the music Auric had written at Clouzot's request and in the style demanded. I believe that it has nothing at all to do with the nature of the music but rather with its very existence — it was put in out of habit and was not only inessential to the film but foreign to it.

As for special effects, although black-outs and dissolves etc. are still used, these so-called filmic punctuation marks have practically disappeared. Superimposition, once called "essential to stylistic cinematography," nowadays produces a profoundly uneasy sensation in any spectator of taste.

Montage itself has become a secondary cinematic element. We know that for the past ten years the montage of successive sequences, such as long-shot followed by close-up, tends to be replaced by *mise-en-scène* in depth — utilizing deep focus and supplying

in a single sequence of long duration a kind of vision in which the spectator, as when faced with reality, does the job of selecting that which, one used to think, devolved on the camera . . . But today we see that both methods may be employed concurrently without anything essential being changed. Five years ago, Hitchcock achieved a tour de force: *Rope*, in a single sequence. Although the film retains its feeling of tone and atmosphere, it appears in retrospect no different than it would had it been made with a classical cutting technique. This seems to me to lessen the interest of Kuleshov's famous experiment (the same shot of Mosjoukine's assuming different expressions in relation to a coffin, a little girl or a bowl of soup) which is ritualistically cited in every work on the cinema.

Of course, as far as shooting angles are concerned, the director continues to calculate them carefully but, except for rare effects, only neophytes and the rear guard use extraordinary angles.

THE SACROSANCT CLOSE-UP

To tell the truth, the creators themselves (for we must always be suspicious of statements by artists)

John Ford: *Stagecoach*



A



B

A. Andre Cayatte: *The Lovers*
Verona. However, the real auteur
the film is the Jacques Prévert scri

B. Carl Th. Dreyer: *The Passion*
Joan Of Arc.

are very much responsible for the perpetuation, among their exegetists, of points of view that are basically out of date. In their declarations, and not in their comportment, they are constantly mistaken about the evolution of the cinema. When "talkies" appeared, they unanimously prophesized the end of the art of the image and at the same time they plunged into experiments with sound.

When color came, each declared that he would use it only in a stylized way, like painters do, but that went by the boards as soon as it became sufficiently true-to-life.

Only four years ago, after the first showing of Cinemascope in Paris, *Figaro* asked several French directors how they felt about the future of the process. The majority, from Becker to René Clair, downgraded the wide screen on the ground that it rendered plastic composition too difficult. I believe I was, along with Alexander Astruc, one of only two directors to think that the wide screen would become a permanent fixture — part of the inevitable progress in the inevitable evolution towards an ever more realistic screen vision.

The following was one of the major arguments against Cinemascope: it would do away with the close-up, the sacrosanct close-up. They were simply forgetting that the close-up, as a major element in cinematic expression, has in fact disappeared of its own accord — just like special angles, rapid montage and superimposition — a completely abandoned style, definitively abandoned because it was, in fact, extremely limited: powerful but poor.

The analysis of the face in close-up, they said and still say, is for the cinéaste the means of psychologically delving into a character, of going into the soul with the camera. A total error. Certainly the physical comportment, the expression of the actor, is the equivalent of the novelist's commentary on the character — but precisely when he is seen on the screen normally, as today, on a medium shot. An exaggerated close-up of a face is not psychological and complex but lyrical and elementary. Any woman's face, seen from very close, looks like — if the face is without make-up and the texture of the skin is a thousand times enlarged — Falconetti in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, and, if it is taken in shimmering sunlight against a flesh-colored background it looks like Greta Garbo. While sculptors never grow weary of translating an infinite reality onto a marble face, the cinéastes are tired of putting the same face on film, are tired of what is called pure cinema. For all classical style is the same. For example, any rapid montage of a dance scene expresses, in a surprising way, the fact of dance — but treats a Spanish, Russian or Scottish dance in identical fashion. There is no leeway for anything new. Briefly, these are the limitations of what has been

called the specifics of cinematic expressions, its rigidly defined domain, out of which the art of the screen has evolved.

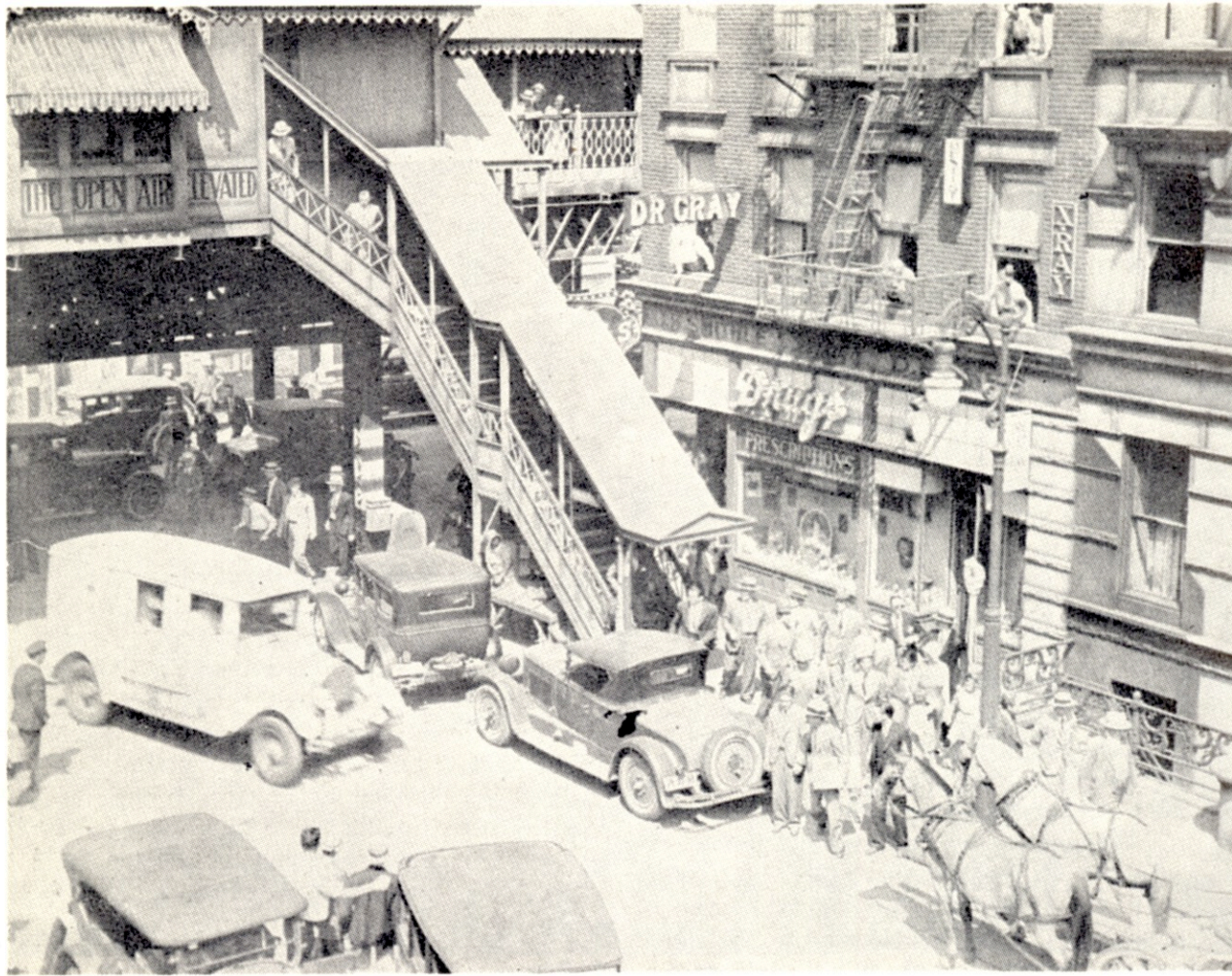
We will pass now to the second point of view from which we may examine the cinema, like any creation or work — that of content, to the extent that one can, in art, separate it from form.

I recall, in 1946, having tried, at Sartre's request, in the first issue of *Temps Modernes*, to draw up a balance-sheet; it was an attempt with no preoccupation about aesthetic and formal problems, to find out what the cinema had brought that was new and profound to our knowledge of the cosmos and of Man. The list of the cinema's conquests didn't go very far. It consisted, essentially, of simple landscapes on a grand scale: the desert, mountains, snow, the sea (but, for example, try and find the subtlety and humanity of the countryside near Aix presented on the screen!) And then you had the City, the Machine, the Crowd, the Child, the Animal . . . the great elementary sentiments, violence, terror, sublime love, some forays into the categories of lyricism and the epic, while as far as psychology and a nuanced metaphysical vision of the world were concerned, the cinema continued to remain behind literature and the theatre. Well, I wouldn't say the same things today because as soon as it freed itself from a formal style that was limiting its possibilities, cinematographic creation progressed in depth in its apprehension of the world and the spirit.

A PERSONALIZATION OF CREATION

It is for this reason that I was obliged to go on at such length in my analysis of a conception of cinema that is still too frequently accepted (not only among philosophers, but among the most fervent screen adepts, notably the film societies)—in order to cleanly reject it. It somewhat resembles a novelistic philosophy that takes off from the epic, its ancestor. People still talk about meter, an essential component of the Romantic style, and you see the principal romantic function, the creation of the hero tending to become myth. This language of the image, which is universal, was a popular art, finding itself again in contact with the public at large—something that was lost by the other individualized arts adapted to the bourgeoisie.

Well, we should make it clear that, whether one dislikes it or not, it seems that all forms of artistic expression tend to move from a formal art with precise canons, well-defined genres, a simple but powerful inspiration that appeals to the collective emotions, towards polymorphous arts with freer style, a more complex and subtle message designed for the aesthetic pleasure of an individual reader or listener or spectator. You have this evolution from the rigorous religious fresco offered to the crowd to the easel paint-



King Vidor: Street Scene

ing destined to delight the amateur. The same occurs with the passage from lyric recitation to the poem in blank verse, from the amphitheatre to the small stage or bourgeois comedy, from the epic to the novel.

The cinema has evolved in the same way. Certainly, many popular films have not obeyed this law just as the adventure novel, a residue from the epic recitation, has subsisted side by side with the modern psychological novel. But the new worthwhile films correspond closely to the forms of contemporary art. I am thinking of the ten best films of last year (1956) according to a referendum made up by a group of critics, running from *Senso* to *Smiles of a Summer Night*, from *A Man Escaped* to *Mystère Picasso*. I believe that eight out of ten of these films are difficult and designed for the individual, informed spectator; all of them are somewhat ambiguous and a mélange of genres. We have come a long way from the three antique masks, from the way we classified films twenty years ago (the way my concierge still does)—as drama, comedy or cops-and-robbers.

And if I am asked about the most important new thing in films in the past ten years, I answer, perhaps: the utilization of the flash-back and the introduction of narration. They have given the suppleness and complexity of literature to cinematic construction. The most subtle nuances of personal expression are now open to the film-maker.

This general movement of the arts I spoke of just now has been simultaneously an individualization of the public and a personalization of the creation (not mentioning the personal genius of Homer) of the creators themselves. More, it tends toward the expression, pushed by the creator more and more, not of what values have in common but their differences.

The actual evolution of the cinema thus occurs in a general sense as a personalization of creation. Certainly Stroheim and Murnau did personal work. But aren't we deluding ourselves about certain great names of the classical cinema — or the primitive cinema, if you will — who were stronger on technique than on an original world-view? Don't Eisenstein and Pudovkin, in spite of their different temperaments, express above all a certain formal style — that of post-World War I Russia? Whereas, on the contrary, after World War II, Italian neo-realism's pretention to express an essentially social reality and to be founded on a communal method, as well as the abandonment of actor's cinema, very quickly disintegrated to permit the appearance of irrepressible personalities, such as Rossellini, Visconti and Fellini.

Since we have come from the work to the man, before attempting to describe the creator of the contemporary cinema, in control of a highly evolved technique and making use of this supple instrument in order to deliver an interior message — very much like

the novelist who is not preoccupied first of all or essentially with literary technique — I must however express a reservation and more or less go back on what I just said.

It has occurred to me from time to time to define the conception of cinema I have just presented and which holds true objectively, at least as I believe it, in the sense of the evolution of the seventh art, with a somewhat provocative formulation: the cinema is not a spectacle.

Well, if aesthetically, in its best efforts, cinema seeks in effect not to be a spectacle; practically, sociologically, economically it actually remains a spectacle. This is where the drama of the cinéaste comes in. I'd like to give an example here. I worked recently for several months with René Clément on the screen adaptation of Giono's *Hussard sur le toit*. The story is somewhat picaresque, constructed, Giono says, like an Italian opera. Well, Clément, who has great finesse and sensitivity, really wanted to retain the unexpected aspect of the story and the originality of tone but he wanted at the same time — and this was the origin of our conflict — a tight construction, a dramatic progression, suspense . . . etc. "You understand," he said to me, "my film must be applauded in Tokyo and Buenos Aires, too." There you see that the creator of cinema is torn, not only between art and commerce, but more exactly between the desire for the freedom and depth of expression possessed by the novel and the necessity for immediate efficacy that any spectacle must have.

"And then, the film would be too long," Clément told me, and he was right. I believe it was Thibaudet who made the distinction among the arts involving time that the limited arts like the sonnet, the novella and the play, even allowing for the restrictions of form, are more dramatic than the unlimited arts like the novel.

By aesthetic vocation, the cinema is an unlimited art (the few great films of several hours' duration give us a presentiment of the temporal perspectives that can be deployed, using the memory, like in a book, at the interior of the work.) In fact, the cinema is a limited art in which the director must seize and hold a vast public in one hour and forty minutes.

THE FILM AUTEUR

We can now approach the problem of the film *auteur* more concretely, that is to say the role of the individual in cinematographic creation. I reject immediately the false problem of collective film creation. The numerous technical specialists, even if you call them collaborators in the production, contribute to the success of the film, but simply in terms of its production — not its creation.

On the contrary, a major problem and, to tell the truth, an insoluble one is that of the *auteur's* moral

right which arises in a film in the relation of the scenarist to the director. This problem is similar to but separate from the problem of the relationship between conception and realization. From time to time, the scenarist and director are spoken of as a pair of equals, but in works of value one partner is actually always subordinate to the other — the creator-leader. A Prévert scenario directed by Christian-Jaque, Cayatte or Carné will give you, with more or less success, a Prévert film. Inversely, a film directed by John Ford is a John Ford film no matter who writes the scenario.

What is certain is that in the evolution of the cinema more and more professional importance is given to the scenarist. One has only to look at the figures. On the other hand, directors who figure as *auteurs* today are more or less complete *auteurs*. In France, René Clair and Clouzot are writers. With different luck, Bresson and Becker are now writing their own dialogue. In America, the most plastic director, the one who has returned to the source of expressionism, is first of all a man of the world, a man of radio and the theatre: I mean Orson Welles.

The finished film, however, is a far cry from the most elaborate scenario, and if one were to sketch a characterology of the director, to define the "habits" of the cinéaste as compared to those of the writer, one would be inclined to place in the foreground such values as personality, authority, decision, communication in contrast to such values as scrupulousness, dreams and solitude which characterize the writer.

For a film, while it is being shot, is like an armored division that may never stop. On the set, at least, cinematic creation must be a stranger to the hesitations, mistakes and revisions that make up the normal course of events in literary creation. In this sense, the architect and the orator would have more in common with the cinéaste than the novelist or painter.

We come now to another aspect of the man of cinema: the director of actors. In the theatre the actors act amongst themselves, with each other. In the studio, each actor has the director as his principal partner. In the cinéaste's conscious memory a film is less the presentation of a scenario, the establishing of shooting angles, than the bloody battle carried on simultaneously for ten weeks with the faces, expressions, gestures and voices of four or five actors and actresses. It is curious, and even indicative of the cinema's ambiguities and contradictions, to note that at the moment when, in Italy and in France, De Sica and Bresson were seeking to eliminate professional actors, a new, brilliant generation of Hollywood directors from Nicholas Ray to Logan all emerged from the efforts of the Actors' Studio in New York.

If one were to combine the diverse characteristics I have sketched in the same individual there would appear the portrait of the typical man of the cinema: this could be Jean Renoir. A great animator, a bit of

an adventurer (as a youth he sold some of his father's pictures in order to finance his films), creator of dialogues, theatrical writer, maintaining the same ther in thirty films, a prodigious director of actors (not imposing like a Clouzot, but on the contrary by pushing the actor on his path), he is into the bargain the screen's greatest plastic artist which is, no matter what I may say, an essential attribute of the man of cinema.

CRISIS AND REGRESSION?

However, the cinema's human mystery resides in its being a vocation. Why did my friend Alexandre Astruc, who could have been a brilliant novelist or great essay writer, absolutely want to make films when expressing himself in this medium is so much more difficult? With many young people it is, I believe, essentially the desire for a greater audience (with its impure consequences called the glory and the gold).

Georges Neveux pointed out to me that there is an irreversible ladder; at the base you have the poet, the most pure and the most isolated. He normally comes at the age of thirty, a novelist and gradualist from the slim volume in five hundred copies to an edition of five thousand. But a novelist never publishes poems. The successful novelist often moves on to the theatre, like Mauriac and Montherlant. But an André Gide is never tempted to write a novel. Pagnol finally goes from the theatre to the cinema. But it would be utter madness for Jean Renoir to do the reverse.

Neveux told me this five years ago, and, perhaps it is no longer so true. I know a number of scenarists who like Prévert, return to literature which is today, even materially, as interesting.

Since the cinema's famous crisis is really and truly a reality, both artistic and economic, it is pleasant in the epoch when sociologists are interested in the social art and speak of the age of the man of the cinema to hear bankers (whose vision is often as clear as that of the sociologists) asking themselves if the film industry, whose importance in the first place has always been exaggerated (the total business of the French cinema, \$55 million, is less than that of the Galeries Lafayette [big department store chain]), if this "industry" isn't in a definite regression.

Regression from which television profits. For the film substitute is in the process of dismembering cinematic production and art. The cinema has responded to the absorption of the current and popular film by making spectaculars, superproductions in Cinerama scope that are most often too costly to permit the possibility of significant works.

Between the two there remains only a feeble margin, economically fragile, for films by *auteurs*, such as I have been trying to define, which are addressed to the highly evolved spectator, and which, having gone

beyond a constricting formalism, have finally caught up to the nobility and profundity of the traditional arts.

But let's not be too pessimistic. Who knows — a change in the way films are distributed, an amortization in depth over a period of ten or twenty years, will perhaps permit *auteur* films to subsist, side by side, with television and superproductions, in the way that an excellent book may come out in a limited edition

and hang on in spite of everything between the best sellers and the whodunits.

I regret ending this way on a questioning note, and having brought you a vision of the cinema that is more an analysis than a synthesis, with more ambiguity than clarity. Such is the nature of the cinema, I believe, and such perhaps is also the nature of my spirit — more at ease in a discussion than in an explanation.



Jean Renoir: *Picnic On The Grass*

Kenji Mizoguchi: *Life Of Oharu*



What Is *Mise-En-Scène*?

By Alexandre Astruc

One need not have made many films to realize that *mise-en-scène* does not exist—that the actors perform very well by themselves, that any director of photography knows where to place his equipment to obtain a good frame, that the shots connect well by themselves, etc. Mizoguchi and Ophüls must have grasped this very quickly, and then passed on to what interested them. And what was that? To watch people move about? Not exactly. Rather to present them and at the same time to watch them act and be acted upon.

The difference between cinema and anything else, including the novel, is chiefly the impossibility of the camera to lie, and secondarily, the absolute certainty, shared by viewer and author alike, that on the screen everything will turn out well—in the long run. If the director intervenes anywhere in the production of a film, this is where he does so. He is caught between two premises: the image whereby he *captures* and the time whereby he *concludes*.

Concludes, not destroys: the slow erosion of truth which is the art of a Proust, its explosion as with a Faulkner, presuppose that the novel is written with words, fragments of eternity. It defines reality, it is at the cost of a constant effort of decomposition, of a destruction of forms, of a forward movement thrown against the attack of a vocabulary, of which the flow carries the debris away.

The camera defines; it does not surpass, it observes reality. It is naive to believe that the systematic use of a wide-angle lens can change the course of events. To compensate for this passivity, the camera does not lie. What the lens captures is the movement of the body, revealing immediately *as is* everything physical—the dance, a woman's glance, a change of gait, beauty, truth, etc.

Cinema presumes a certain trust in the world as it is. Even in the midst of ugliness, even in the midst of misery; in fact, it is here where it uncovers that strange and cruel tenderness, the dread sweetness of *Hiroshima*, where, after evoking so many horrors, a few quick traveling sequences in the center of a city and a woman's voice are sufficient to throw the whole landscape into human perspective, as if, quite naturally and through some strange device, all its latent hope should one day be fulfilled. . .

One of the most beautiful films ever made was done by an old Japanese director—author of nearly a hundred films—with undoubtedly no other desire than

the honest exercise of his profession. After five minutes of projection, *Ugetsu* shows clearly what direction is—at least for some. It is a certain way of extending the *élans* of the soul into the movements of the body. It is a song, a rhythm, a dance. Mizoguchi knows well that what is expressed in physical violence is something which cannot be falsified. Not character, not self-comprehension, but that irresistible forward movement which always springs out along the same paths in pursuit of fulfillment—or destruction. I rather imagine that what interests him after so many films is no longer the spectacle, but the fact of not being able to turn one's eyes away from the spectacle. An author writes perhaps to deliver himself, a director also does so but never entirely. In the tenderness or horror of the universe he exploits, he will have to hit upon what, strictly speaking, one could call a certain forwardness or helpful complicity, but what for the artist is never more than the source of the grandeur that obsesses and what he believes he can reveal.

What, then, becomes of technique? It ceases to be a method of displaying—or concealing. Style is not a certain way of rendering the ugly beautiful and vice versa. No director in the world will have confidence in photography alone if his ambition is not limited to competing with Yvon. It is even more than interpretation; traveling sequences are not notes or explanatory references at the bottom of a page. It seems to me that it has no other goal than to create that mysterious distance between the author and his characters, whose stylized movements seem to accompany so faithfully the oscillations and mad courses through the forest.

But this only *seems* to be so, for the power and grandeur of this universe which again and again in work comes from the author's constant domination of its elements. He bends these elements, perhaps not to his own vision—Mizoguchi is a director, not a novelist—but to satisfy his need to see them at a distance, which is wisdom or the desire for wisdom. Thus the tragic poem has its force in the apparent insensitivity and coldness of the artist who seems installed, camera in hand, at the bend in the river, surveying the plain where the actors of the drama are to emerge.

The exquisite and touching delicacy of *Ugetsu* is made, as in certain Westerns, of that irremediable slowness which, if only by violence and anger, drives on a handful of individuals whose destinies are insignificant.



Alain Resnais: *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*

But Mizoguchi knows well that, after all, it is not very important for his film to turn out well; he is more concerned with knowing whether the strongest bonds between himself and his characters are those of tenderness or contempt. He is like the viewer who seeks the reflection of pleasure on the features of the one he watches, even though he also knows quite well that it is not this reflection alone which he is seeking but perhaps quite simply the tedious confirmation of something he has always known but cannot refrain from verifying.

So I consider *mise-en-scène* as a means of transforming the world into a spectacle given primarily to oneself—yet what artist does not know instinctively that what is seen is less important than the way of seeing, or a certain way of *needing to see* or be seen.

Between the canvas and the shapes which haunt him, what the painter introduces is not a different way of observing, but a new dimension. A picture by Manet is not “nature seen through a temperament” but a landscape through which an esthetic will has passed, irreducible to themes as well as to the secret motivations of the artist, upon which it may nourish itself, but which will never wear it out. Direction is not exclusively the will to give a new sense to the world, but nine times out of ten it is organized around the secret certainty of withholding a piece of truth about man first, about the work of art afterwards. These are indissolubly bound together. Mizoguchi avails himself of violence, greed, or sexual desire to express on the screen what he cannot release unless these elements are encountered. But it would be absurd to say that violence is the subject of his films; if he needs it, it is like an alcoholic needs drink—to feed his in-

toxication, not to fulfill it. With Mizoguchi, as with all the great masters of the screen, it is never the plot that comes to the fore, nor the form, nor even the effect, nor again the possibility of bringing frantic characters face to face in extreme situations. Mizoguchi, like most Orientals, laughs at psychology and verisimilitude. He needs violence as a lever—to see-saw into another universe. But as a baroque painting, the storm-rains which fall on those grimacing faces and dismantled bodies presage the abatement. Beyond desire and violence, the world of the Japanese, like that of Murnau, draws the veil of indifference where, in an “exotic” cinema, the metaphysical suddenly intrudes.

Is there, after all, much of a difference between a Japanese director conversant enough with his profession to be offered a seven-year Hollywood contract (which closely resembles the hiring of an engineer “by the month”) and a “maudit” poet in the style of the end of the 19th Century? Baudelaire’s opium and Mizoguchi’s profession really have the same function: they are pretexts, like Proust’s asthma or homosexuality, like the yellow on which Van Gogh would become intoxicated. But who can say that the yellow has always been the subject of Van Gogh’s paintings and not his goal? The artist searches where he believes he can find the conditions for his creation; the director at the studio, at the brothel, or at the museum. . . .

The universe of an artist is not the one that dominates him, but the one he needs to create, and to transform it perpetually into something which obsesses him still more than that by which he is obsessed.

The obsession of the artist is artistic creation.



Kenji Mizoguchi: *Ugetsu*

Bergmanorama

By Jean-Luc
Godard

In the history of the cinema there are five or six films about which one would like to say only the few words: "It's the most beautiful film!" Because there is no higher praise. Why speak, in effect, at greater length about *Tabu*, *l'oyage en Italie* or *The Golden Coach*? Like the starfish that opens and closes, these films know how to offer and hide the secret of a world of which they are at once the unambiguous depository and the fascinating reflection. Truth is the truth. They carry it in the deepest part of themselves no matter how the screen is torn apart at each frame to scatter it to the four winds. To say about these films that they are the most beautiful is to say everything. Why? Because that's the way it is. And of course the cinema may allow itself to use this infantile reasoning without false shame. Why? Because that's the cinema. And the cinema is sufficient unto itself. About Welles, Ophüls, Dreyer, Hawks, Cukor, even Visconti — to shout their praise it is enough to say: "This is cinema!" And when the names of great artists of centuries past come for comparison from our pen, we don't want to say anything else. Imagine, on the contrary, a critic vaunting Faulkner's latest work by saying it's literature; about Stravinsky, Paul Klee — about music, it's painting? Even less, in other respects, about Shakespeare, Mozart or Raphael. The idea of lauding a poet with the slogan "This is poetry!" would never enter the mind of an editor such as Bernard Grasset. Even Jean Vilar, when reviving *Le Cid*, would blush to announce, "This is theatre!" But "this is cinema" better than a password, remains the war cry of the seller as well as the scholar of films. Briefly, among all its privileges, the least, for the cinema, is certainly not that of setting up a *raison d'être* for its own existence and of making, for the same occasion, its aesthetic out of ethics.

Five or six films, I said +1 for *Sommarlek* is the most beautiful film.

THE LAST GREAT ROMANTIC

The great *auteurs* are probably those whose names are the only thing to say when it is impossible otherwise to explain the multiple sensations and sentiments that assail you in certain exceptional circumstances like an astonishing countryside or an unforeseen event.

A. & B. Maj-Britt Nilsson and Birger Malmsten
Sommarlek (Illicit Interlude).

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A. & B. Maj-Britt Nilsson and Birger Malmsten in *Sommarlek* (*Illicit Interlude*).

A



B



La Nuit Des Forains (The Naked Night)

Beethoven, under the stars, on the top of a cliff beaten by waves; Balzac when, seen from Montmartre, it seems that Paris belongs to you; but, henceforth, if the past plays hide-and-seek with the present on the face of someone you love, if death, when, humiliated and offended, you finally bring yourself to pose the supreme question, answers with a Valéry-like irony that you must try to live; henceforth, therefore, if the words "prodigious summer," "last vacation," "eternal mirage" return to your lips it is because, automatically, you have pronounced the name of the one whose second retrospective at the Cinémathèque Française will, for those who have seen only a few of his nineteen films, definitively establish him as the most original *auteur* of the modern European cinema: Ingmar Bergman.

Original? *The Seventh Seal* or *La Nuit des Forains* pass; if absolutely necessary *Smiles of a Summer Night*; but *Monika*, but *Rêves de femmes*, but *Toward Felicity* — all influenced by Maupassant, and as for the technique — framing à la Germaine Dulac, effects à la Man Ray, reflections in water à la Kirsanoff, flash-backs so outmoded as to be no longer permissible: "No — the cinema, that's something else," write our licensed technicians and, first of all, "it's a métier."

Well, no!! The cinema is not a métier. It's an art. It is not group work. One is always alone, on the sound stage as in front of the blank page. And it is for Bergman, a single being, to pose questions. And making films is answering them. One wouldn't know how to be more classically romantic.

Certainly, of all the contemporary cinéastes, he is without doubt the only one who doesn't overtly disavow the processes dear to the avant-garde of the Thirties, the sort of thing they still drag out at every festival of experimental or amateur films. But that is most likely audacity on the part of the director of *La Soif*, for Bergman, with perfect knowingness, destines this bric-a-brac to other ends. These scenes of lakes, forests, grasses, clouds, these falsely unusual angles, these far-fetched phony lights are no longer part of the Bergmanesque aesthetic of abstract camera games or photographic processes; they are integrated, on the contrary, into the psychology of the characters at the precise instant when it concerns, for Bergman, the expression of a sentiment no less precise; for example, *Monika's* pleasure while going across an awakening Stockholm by boat and then her lassitude on the return trip as Stockholm is going to sleep.

ETERNITY TO THE RESCUE OF THE INSTANTANEOUS

At the precise instant. In effect, Ingmar Bergman is the cinéaste of the instant. Each of his films is born out of the protagonist's reflection on the present mo-

ment, deepened by a kind of tearing to pieces of duration, a little in the manner of Proust, but with more power, as if one had multiplied Proust by both Joyce and Rousseau, and becoming finally a colossal and excessive *meditation springing from the instantaneous*. An Ingmar Bergman film is, if you will, a twenty-fourth of a second that metamorphoses and stretches over an hour and a half. It is the world between two blinks of the eyelids, the sadness between two heartbeats, the *joie de vivre* between two handclaps.

Here you have the primordial importance of the flash-back in these solitary walkers' Scandinavian reveries. In *Sommarlek*, one look in the mirror is enough to send Maj-Britt Nilsson off like Orpheus and Lancelot in pursuit of paradise lost and time regained. Used quasi-systematically by Bergman in the major part of his work, going back in time ceases to be one of the "poor tricks" Welles speaks of and becomes, if not the film's subject itself, at least its *sine qua non*. Into the bargain, this figure of style, even when employed in such a way, henceforth has the incomparable advantage of bolstering the scenario, since it constitutes as well the internal rhythm and dramatic skeleton. You have only to have seen any single Bergman film in order to notice that each flash-back always culminates in or arises from a situation, a double situation I should say, as the strongest thing is that this change of sequence, as with Hitchcock in top form always corresponds to the hero's interior ferment, provokes the rebounding of the action, which is the endowment of the greatest. We take as facility what is really an excess of strictness. Here Ingmar Bergman, decried as a self-taught cinéaste by "those of the *metier*," gives a lesson to the best of our scenarists. We shall see that it is not for the first time.

ALWAYS AHEAD

When Vadim appeared, we applauded him for being right on time when most of his colleagues were one war behind. When we saw Giulietta Masina's poetic grimaces we applauded Fellini whose baroque freshness was like a breath of spring. But five years earlier the son of a Swedish pastor had already carried this renaissance of modern cinema to its apogee. What were we dreaming of when *Monika* was first shown on the Parisian screen? Everything for which we reproached the French cinéastes for not having done Ingmar Bergman had already done. *Monika* was already *And God Created Woman* but successful in a perfect way. And the last scene of *The Nights of Cabiria*, when Giulietta Masina stares fixedly at the camera—have we forgotten that this too has already happened in the next-to-last reel of *Monika*? This brusque conspiracy between the spectator and the actor, that André Bazin was so enthusiastic about—have we forgotten that we lived in it, with a thousand

times more force and poetry, when Harriett Andersson, her mocking eyes rivetted, filled with confusion, made us bear witness to her disgust at choosing hell over heaven?

Wishing doesn't make one a goldsmith. Shouting from the rooftops doesn't make a person one step ahead of another. A truly original *auteur* is the one who never sets aside his scenarios in favor of society. Bergman proves to us that what is just is new and what is profound is just. Well, the profound novelty of *Sommarlek*, of *Monica*, of *La Soif*, of *The Seventh Seal* lies in having, above all, an admirable justice of tone. For Bergman, yes, certainly, a cat is a cat. But it is that for many others and that is the least of things. The important thing is that, endowed with a moral elegance, Bergman can accommodate himself to all sorts of truths, even the most scabrous (cf. of last sketch in *L'Attente des femmes*). What is unpredictable is profound, and each new film by our *auteur* often baffles the warmest partisans of the one before. One expects a comedy and medieval mystery appears. Often, their only point in common is this incredible liberty of situation pointed up by Feydeau, the way Montherlant could imbue dialogues with truth, while Giraudoux did the same for modesty. It goes without saying that this sovereign freedom of elaborating from the manuscript doubles itself as soon as the camera starts to purr, and this is due to an absolute mastery of directing actors. In this realm Ingmar Bergman is the equal of a Cukor or a Renoir. Of course, most of his actors (who moreover from time to time are part of his theatrical troupe) are remarkable. I am thinking above all of Maj-Britt Nilsson, whose forceful chin and expressions of disgust are not unreminiscent of Ingrid Bergman. But it is necessary to have seen Birger Malmsten as a dreamy youth in *Sommarlek* and to find him again, unrecognizable, as an excessively elegant bourgeois in *La Soif*; to have seen Gunnar Björnstrand and Harriett Andersson in the first episode of *Rêves de femmes* and find them again, different with new tics, new body rhythms, in *Smiles of a Summer Night*, in order to grasp the prodigious modelling job Bergman is capable of, starting with this "cattle" spoken of by Hitchcock.

BERGMAN VERSUS VISCONTI

Or, scenario as opposed to *mise-en-scène*. For sure? One might oppose an Alex Joffe to a René Clément, for example, since it's only a question of talent. But when talent brushes so close to genius that we get *Sommarlek* and *White Nights* is it useful to go on at such length in order to know which is, at the final reckoning, superior, the complete *auteur* or the pure *metteur-en-scène*? Possibly, because after all it is a question of analyzing two concepts of cinema and one may be worth more than the other.

Roughly speaking, there are two genres of cinéastes:

those who walk down the street with their heads lowered and those who walk with their heads up. The first, in order to see what's going on around them, are obliged to lift their heads, suddenly and often, turn left, turn right and take in what's presented to the field of vision by means of a series of glances. They *see*. The second group see nothing, they are *looking*, fixing their attention on the precise thing that interests them. When shooting a film, the framing of the first group will be airy and fluid (Rossellini) and that of the second tight, with every square inch worked out (Hitchcock). One will doubtlessly find the cutting of the first group disparate but terribly sensitive to chance opportunities; the second will use their cameras with precision, not only on the set but with movement in space that has abstract value (Lang). Bergman is closer to the first group, the free cinema; Visconti is part of the second, the strict cinema.

For my part, I prefer *Monika* to *Senso*, and the *Politique des Auteurs* to that of the *Metteurs-en-Scène*. For anyone who still doubts that Bergman represents, in effect, the most typical European cinéaste, Renoir excepted, *La Prison* will be, if not the proof, at least the most evident symbol. The subject is known: a *metteur-en-scène's* Math professor proposes a scenario about the Devil. However, it is not to the *metteur-en-scène* that a series of diabolical misadventures occurs, but to his scenarist who has been asked to supply a continuity.

As a man of the theatre, Bergman is in the position of being *metteur-en-scène* for the plays of others. But as a man of the cinema he is in complete command, contrary to a Bresson and a Visconti who transfigure an impersonal point of departure. Bergman creates *ex nihilo* the adventures and the characters. *The Seventh Seal* is less skilfully directed than *White Nights*; the framing is less precise, the angles not so strict—no one will deny this. But, in this is the distinction, for a man with a talent as immense as Visconti's to make a *very good* film is, in the final analysis, a matter of *very good taste*. He is sure of making no mistakes and, in a certain sense, it's easy. It's easy to choose the prettiest curtain, the most perfect furniture . . . for an artist, to know oneself too well is to give in to facility.

What is difficult, on the contrary, is to advance into unknown territory, to recognize danger, to take risk to be afraid. When the big flakes of snow fall around the boat bearing Maria Schell and Marcello Mastroianni in *White Nights* it is a sublime moment. But this sublimity is nothing compared to the old conductor in *Toward Felicity* who, stretched out on the grass, watches Stig Olin looking amorously at Maj-Britt Nilsson on her chaise-lounge and thinks, "How is it possible to describe a scene of such great beauty? I admire *White Nights*, but I love *Sommarlek*."



A. Lars Ekborg and Harriett Andersson in *Monika*. B. Eva Dahlbeck in *Lesson in Love*.





Eva Dahlbeck and Gunnar Bjornstrand in *Smiles Of A Summer Night*

My Experience

By Max Ophüls

Letter to the editor-in-chief*: . . . and believe, I know from experience that I am neither an essay writer nor a professional literary man. If you feel you absolutely must have an article about *my experience*, for your Easter edition, I ask you to be content with these notes that have no pretention to being a coherent ensemble.

Thoughts without definite form, pell-mell notes, reflections in fits and starts — for people like me, these things signify a kind of relaxation. The brain goes on vacation, on a cure, and wants to gather, instead of a red thread, a multitude of vari-colored ones. That's good because with a film everything is completely opposite; you must construct, calculate, you need a general view since film is an industrial product and, as I am in this industry up to my neck, my experience has been . . . but that's what I'm going to tell you about now.

"Indeed! You'll end up having your experience!" (Prophetic words of 1922). My uncle was right. All uncles are right when they prudently give such pessimistic advice to young people at the beginning of their career. Experience — one only learns this late — means losing the ignorance and dreams of childhood. One exchanges illusion for reality; one passes from things, divined, desired, inaccessible, to the world of limitations. A man of experience is a broken child. We like to place our destiny in the hands of politicians, pilots and dentists.

In Darmstadt, I once met a bankrupt theatre director. It was winter, during the occupations after the first World War. Having come from Aix-la-Chapelle, I was obliged, in order to visit him, to cross the Mayence bridge on foot in a snow storm. My small valise was full of publicity brochures and hope. He was at home, lying on a sofa and he looked grey in the daylight. He had an ice-bag on his head and dirty handkerchiefs spread over his chest. A performance under his direction (I believe it was *Egmont*) had been a complete fiasco because of defections, strikes, the theatre crisis, a row and the reviews after opening night. "All this — these aren't men," he groaned, "excuse me if I can't listen to you today . . . even the musicians in the orchestra, even the chief designers, not to mention the actors: they're all big babies."

Thirty-five years later, the day before yesterday to be exact, I paid a visit to a Parisian studio. A col-

league, a director had a very resigned air: "I'm fed up. All this — it's kid stuff and nothing else." But as for me, I like children. I don't like little children, not at all, but big ones. Unfortunately, in my *métier*, it appears that the time of the adults has begun, the time of broken children. The cinema was taking its first steps, barely forty years ago, when my uncle prophesized, "You'll end up having your experience!" Was he right? If we have truly entered the era of the *experienced* cinema, we can only hope that this stability will be short lived.

"Seek qualified engineer; no experience necessary." If I were in iron-and-steel following an ad like that I would go and present myself immediately. But they don't look for directors in this fashion. That's why, these last few years, before each film I place this ad in my imaginary newspaper and then I answer it myself.

In order to illustrate what I mean, Paris traffic is the best example. There are laws. Many people know these laws. Many hardly know them. Some people pay attention to them, others hardly at all. The police know that they are taken seriously and also made light of. That's why they change continually. Result: everyone knows how to drive. The traffic in Paris is a work of art. The police commissioners are marvelous directors. When they have proven their capacities, they have to go away. To Morocco, even. The traffic in Paris should be studied by all aspiring directors. Not from manuals or diagrams, but nonchalantly, just glancing at it, from the terrace of a cafe. In any case, that's the reason my friends give in order to justify the long hours they spend at the café terraces.

If one gave the commissioners — or their lieutenants or the patrolman at the Place de la Concorde — a free hand with the problems of production or distribution, it would result in a gigantic mish-mash. The film wouldn't obey them. Film demands a rigorous order. Today it wants to be sure of itself, and there is its drama. Once, when it lacked assurance, it was not yet menaced. Today, it tries to be a *divertissement* that has proved itself, that is constructed on conventions it can rely on, hanging desperately on to proven recipes instead of going on a search for the

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Max Ophuls: *Le Plaisir*. The Director Dances in the corner

marvelous and mysterious. Perhaps it's the fault of the financiers, who are now rich and fashionable people. The big banks and the Ministry of Finance have taken the place of the speculators and they are responsible for the savings that have been entrusted to them. It is necessary to understand them.

THE IMPETUOUS LASSO-THROWERS OF THE CINEMATOGRAPHIC ADVENTURE

There is a man in the history of the cinema that I like very much without ever having made his acquaintance, and for whom I would have liked to work. It is the merchant who founded this profession and who was nearly an artist. This man is the Laskys, the Samuels, the Mayers, the Loews. Today he has practically disappeared. Such a man must have been an impetuous lasso-thrower of the cinematographic adventure. I see him in front of me with a large cowboy hat, boots, cartridge pouch and a revolver. But

this uniform is worn only for me, for, experienced spectator that I am, I can imagine a pioneer in no other way. In reality, perhaps he wore a monocle and a cutaway. This magic merchant, with no experience, saw little strips of celluloid, on which little things jumped around for two minutes — an acrobatic cyclist or a monkey — and the merchant cowboy believed one could put long stories on this celluloid, with a beginning, a middle, and an end and a dramatic action.

And then these cowboys left in a caravan or on horseback or perhaps by express train, towards California, for the desert. There, there was nothing — except the sun. And that's a lot. There, on the sand, they built studios, laboratories and production houses. The money that was gathered wasn't "invested;" it was risked. They were the first adventurers of the imagination. What they photographed were the first dreams, the first kisses, the first fires and the first waters, the first war and the first peace, the first birth

and the first death. What they shot was the first shooting.

Today, the adventure has become a commercial branch on which are installed the successors to these pioneers: the presidents, the employees, the advisors. So that no one will saw their branch off. They only let go of their money for a sure thing. I fear that this is the illness from which all industrial trees suffer. For when we make films we are building castles in the clouds. But there are no castles in the clouds that are solid. When you want to consolidate them you must bring them down to earth.

A DISCOURSE FOR 1969.

Extract from a discourse (to be delivered to the students of some university or other around 1969): "... With that, I wouldn't want, for the love of God, to venerate chaos, to give the cue to the iconoclasts who didn't even have the time to learn to paint, by dint of destroying. The self-styled avant-gardists grow old quickly because they want to stay young forever. The make-up on their interior face doesn't efface the wrinkles of years. There is a knowledge that, in my opinion, escapes explanation, a miraculous knowledge. I don't know why, but it has always obliged me to stop, to mark a classic and refreshing pause. When you meet with it, your heart starts to pound. You mustn't copy it but, more humbly, try to follow it on its path. Honoring masterpieces is an experience that must be preserved living. The golden number of this knowledge must be transmitted across the ages with infinite precautions, from the hands of the master to the heart of the disciple. For, whoever has not been touched by the healing breath of what was made before him will never meet with the benedictions of tradition. Full of respect and admiration, we look at the films of Murnau, Lubitsch, Griffith, Eisenstein and Podovkin. We feel them, like the last echoes of a divine music; they prevent us from taking ourselves too seriously in the concert of time and we..." Student's remark, to his neighbor: "Ahh! How solemn he is! The professor is beginning to act like an old man!"

Extract from a speech I gave January 15th, 1956, in Hamburg: "... and then, Ladies and Gentlemen, your president gave me to understand that he would like to have a speech entitled: *experience of a creator of films*. I didn't refuse this title, I simply changed it to *experience*. For I don't believe there is a creator in a film: I think, and this is nearly an axiom with me, that there are as many creators to a film as there are people who work on it. My job as director consists of making, out of this choir of people, a creator of films. A film cannot live with the aid of one man alone. I can only—and as far as I'm concerned my colleagues can only—awaken the creative drive in each person, whether he be an electrician or an actor,

a musician, an editor or a decorator. I haven't the time to enumerate everyone in this little world that I love). It is necessary to discover in them the creator, nurse them until they come to life—and then we have a good film. But how to arrive: Ladies and Gentlemen, at having my costumer design prettier costumes for me than I myself could ever have imagined? How attain to—this word is often abused but here it is used in the proper sense—this "freedom"? By not clinging to experience. For, I fear, when you are hooked on your experience, routine awaits you at the next day's shooting. The door must stay open. Although we generally like closed doors—at the studio or at home, when someone from the gas company or a cousin is always dropping in—but the door, in a profession, must always stay wide open for the unknown, the unexperienced. When we have open house, guests do not fail to arrive.

In the history of the cinema, as I see it, a very peculiar thing happens. The *métier* advances only when there is an opening, when experience can no longer help us. These "holes" are the keynotes of evolution. It is at these times that Chaplin is born, fully grown, at the beginning. When, after the war, Roberto Rossellini made *Open City* in Italy, the same thing happened, with no precedent at all. Until that time, there had been no example of someone's going out with a camera under his arm, with damaged materials and no floodlights, and setting it up in entrance-ways, in order to extract a drama out of daily life and make a poem out of it—without permission, almost clandestinely. A marvelous moment, full of magic and surprise. A lack of experience is an important factor in the health of our *métier*: for it is quite simply appalling to think that a dramatic means of expression, dating from only forty years ago, already has the temerity to pretend to establish laws.

NICE PEOPLE, BUT . . .

If you come, as I do, from the theatre, which is more than a thousand years old, you find that the pride taken by the *cinéaste* in his professional experience is a bit precocious. The technicians, above all, try to forge a system out of their new technical discoveries. Beware the technicians! They can be our friends, when they set themselves to it, but they can be tyrants when they decide that technique comes first. They are nice people, but they have no idea how dangerous they can be, when they welcome us with open arms, declaring, "This or that must be like that and you can't do this or that because, for example, when it's developed, the print will lose clarity. . . ." And then they whisper a thousand things in our ear that sound like cryptograms from

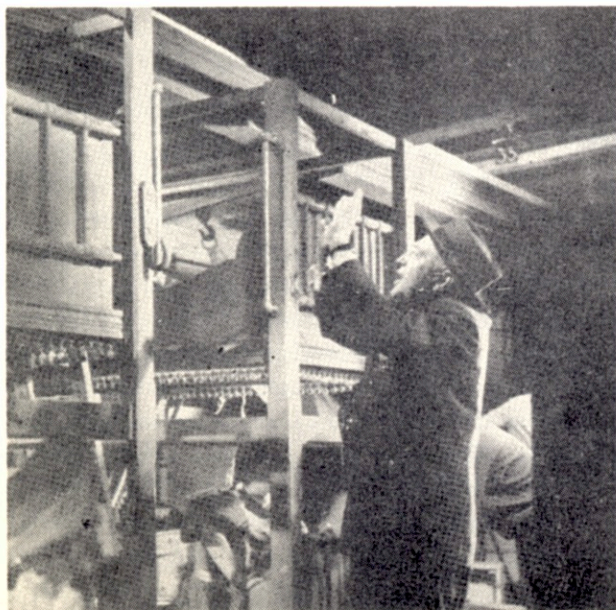
the middle ages. I lose my head and can hardly follow them. I no longer understand about it. Only one thing persists in my thoughts: at this moment they are in the process of leading the soul of our profession astray.

It's very serious, for the consequences are far reaching. Already they are beginning to contaminate the actor. Today, all over the world, we see actors involved with technique, even before being actors.

In Berlin, in the Thirties, there was a great lady who taught me many things. She was old and her name was Rosa Valetti. I saw her, for the first time at the studio. She had to do a scene and someone was hammering nails. She got up and said, "Where I act, people do not drive nails." And she went home. Today, all the actors are ready to accept an uproar without batting an eyelash. There is no longer any true respect for creation in the proper sense of the word. They allow themselves to be intimidated by technique, they come out of the guts of technique. They no longer have the courage to avoid it. And technique becomes insolent.

Several weeks ago, I went to a laboratory. There, they had come up with some very clean prints, with the help of chemical preparations, of some sonorous passages in my film that I had wanted to be very confused. I didn't want to allow it. The gentleman who had directed this operation declared to me: "The policy of our laboratories is this: people must always understand what one is saying." I tried to explain to him what it was all about. He cut me off with: "You must consider, Mister Ophuls, that you are working in an entertainment industry." I answered: "That's true. That's why I try to do what gives me pleasure."

Max Ophuls directing.



CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE FINANCIER AND THE DIRECTOR

Extract from my private journal (April 1st, 1956):
"Today I met a financier. He had an air of being sort of new to the *métier*. It wasn't I who telephoned him, but the contrary. I know from experience that it's better that way.

Financier: Will you make films for your pleasure?

Director (me): Not entirely. More exactly, because it gives me pleasure.

F: That means you amuse yourself continually?

D: No, but one's sorrows procure pleasure.

F: And who, permit me to use harsh words, guarantees me that what gives you pleasure will give the spectators pleasure?

D (stealing away): Well, one believes that one has a heart that beats for them, feelings that see for them, in brief, after all, a nose.

F: Aside from that, there are other guarantees?

D: None.

F: None?

D: None (Silence).

F: And your experience?

D: In this domain, nothing. You cannot calculate success in advance. Yesterday I went for a walk with Henri Jeanson down that Champs-Élysées. The Champs-Élysées is a good place to talk. Maybe that's where it gets its name. Well, he said, "When Julien Duvivier and I were finished with *Pépé Le Moko* (and *Pépé*, as you know, Sir, was one of the most successful films ever made in France) and when we saw the first print, we were convinced that it had been a catastrophe. We left for London before the premiere so as not to be present at this disaster." So much for guarantees!

F: You please me enormously, you know, because you don't tell stories. I will give you all the necessary capital for the film.

D:

F: At least if it doesn't require too much. Of course, it would be on condition that you employ, beyond your talent, all of your experience. Not only a good film, but an economically good one. (He looks in his portfolio, in which is found my *curriculum vitae*). You have experience, that is correct?

D: Yes, I've done some small things.

F: Many?

D: Many small things.

F (bluntly): And color, for example? What do you think of color?

D: If you aim to be in the black, it isn't too necessary to show it.

F: And the camera, sound, the cutting, the décor, the costumes, the scenario—you know how to handle all that?

A



B



Max Ophüls directing *Madame De . . .* A. Charles Boyer, Vittorio de Sica. B. Danielle Darrieux.

D (in a peremptory tone): Like a surgeon his instruments, a pilot his log book, a painter his brushes. One learns that.

F: And the actors?

D (bantering): You must liberate their desire to express themselves, by trying to do everything to make them believe in it. It's a bagatelle. Aside from that, there isn't much to do.

F: And the time?

D (for the first time, truly, serious, conscientious and desirous of convincing): Look, everything is made of a multitude of little experiences. And this is the real core of the subject. Obviously one can make plans. There is so much of it. You go around the world, from "Time is money" to "Stakhanov." There are many people who can be bought. They are strong and take care that an established time-table is respected: the production director, the stage manager, the propertyman. In the United States, they particularly knuckle down. It's guaranteed that the film's director won't be late: he is taken there by plane, nothing is unforeseen, he arrives on time. I have never understood how. When these specialists are intelligent, they adapt their plan to the subject. An *adagio* is directed more slowly than a polka.

One might well shoot a detective story at a very accelerated pace but *Tristan and Isolde* will be arrived at more rapidly if it unfolds slowly. Obviously, Sir, these little experiences are perhaps in contradiction to the big ones, the essentials. May I read you something without presuming on your time.

The Financier indicates "Yes." The Director puts on his glasses:

"The artist is everything to his subject. He communicates with it with love. He carries the best of his spirit and his heart to it. He makes it be born again. In this act of rebirth, time doesn't count, for it is love that accomplishes it. What lover feels the passage of time in the presence of the object of his adoration? What true artist pays heed to time when he is working? (Silence). . . . The author of this truth without guarantee, Sir, is called Johann Wolfgang. His family name is undecipherable. As you see, Sir, it can't be Goethe."

I raised my head. My financier had disappeared on tip-toe. It was no loss. Since, in any case, he was only imaginary." End of extract.

MENACED BY INTELLIGENCE

In spite of everything, I do not feel abandoned if I shoot or if I write—private journal or article—if I pace in my room or walk down the street, head full of projects, but without a film to make. In Hollywood, I spent four years without work, but I never felt myself abandoned, for I believe in a certain current. There is a certain current that carries the ship of our life, an immense boat on which actors and directors are giving a performance. This is neither an electric nor an atomic current, but poets live on its banks. It is the current of the imagination. It runs across all the arts and if, from time to time, it sprinkles

the cinema a little, we should feel joy and contentment. At the moment, this current is menaced by an excess of intelligence. It was Musset, I believe, who said one day, "Whoever abuses his intelligence, in order to stop the imagination's flow, would have been better born stupid." To keep this current from drying up is our duty, the duty of people of the cinema and guardians of the flow—this current of poetry that was ahead of us, that is around us or will be

born tomorrow. It is up to us to detect it, to stay with it on its course, even when it runs underground, to let ourselves be carried along.

As long as we do that, in spite of crisis, our *métier*, I believe, will continue to exist. To be able, one day, to say to oneself that one was lucky enough to help keep it alive, should be the most beautiful and essential experience one could have.



Max Ophüls: *Lola Montes* (Peter Ustinov)

Fire And Ice

By Alexander Astruc

Balzac in the admirable article he devotes to *Le Rouge et le Noir*, a unique homage rendered by one writer to another, compares the style of the Idea with the style of the Image, Chateaubriand to Voltaire and Walter Scott to Stendahl. He adds: "A third style exists: the one, my own, in which the image reflects the idea." Let us dare to say that it suffices to look through the keyhole at Madame de Morsauf in her death throes on a bed of lilies whose enervating perfume suddenly recalls to her the odor of the bestial illness from which she is dying, to understand immediately what he means; quite simply, he is speaking of the language of the cinema.

Gance, Murnau, Rossellini have the audacity by which one recognizes nobility of spirit and heart. German expressionism makes a complete diet of it. Opening the book that Lotte Eisner has just dedicated to this movement, I come upon images that stop my hand on the page. A man leaning against an immensely empty wall at the extreme corner of the frame looks at a reflection that recalls to him a mirror sparkling with the image of his wife in the embrace of a transitory rival.

You will have recognized an image from *Montreur d'Ombres*. Similar visions abound. From what do they originate? From an inordinate confidence in the powers of abstraction to touch the heart. In other terms, from this certitude that formal rhetoric, beyond the frozen flowers of its language, conceals the consuming fire to which the fascinated spectator comes to be burned.

German expressionism, apart from schoolboy quarrels, tries to affect with the least sensitive part of artistic activity. Believing not in ideas but in themes, it is the exact cinematic counterpart of that lyricism of ideas linking Shakespeare and Beethoven, Holderlein and Melville, Caravaggio and the Balzac of *Illusions Perdues* or *Secrets de la Princesse*. Astonishingly, for the most part these examples were borrowed by the Germans. What I like, much more than the vague references to psychoanalysis Kracauer's book is full of, is the way German expressionism in Lotte Eisner's book, reminds one quite simply of the German genius through its philosophers, its poets and its composers, at once lyrical and intellectual, that is to say realizing this fundamental obsession with the irruption of the abstract in the material world and of God in nature.

A metaphysical obsession, the architectural sense, that of music, the premeditated, wilful and proudly constructed expression of the least obviously cinematic themes, the most highly evolved plastic means put to the service of the most abstract obsessions, a prodigious sense of shadow and light, symbols of the struggle between the powers of good and evil—these are the characteristics of an art in which the use of painted décor (as in *Caligari*) has much less importance than one might think. How does this art operate for Murnau? By photographing the beyond. Beyond the world of appearances. . . . Simply think for a moment about the fact that the natives in *Tabu* with their pale eyes hollowed by the horror of a fundamental malediction, are the same ones who frolicked, with no thought for the morrow, in front of Flaherty's innocent camera.

I consider Murnau to be the greatest poet the screen has ever known. Perhaps Eisenstein is higher, Stroheim more brilliant, and Renoir more generous, but that icy horror, never base and never complacent, that makes the characters in *Faust* and *Tartuffe* glide toward one another under Karl Freund's trembling light, remains the fascinating revelation of what the screen art has in common with the other arts and, at the same time, definitively points up the prodigious difference. Lang erected papier mache sets for his *Niebelungen* (because he wasn't enough of a poet?), but found his poetry again when nostalgia for his lost country permitted him to transform the American reality—yes, for Lang it was exile that helped him find himself—and Pabst set up the décors that would later bring him international fame after he had brushed close to genius with *Loulou* and with only *Loulou*, and Wiene—commercially facile—and so many others (I except Robison because of *Montreur d'Ombres*), but it is with Murnau, and Murnau alone, that German expressionism found its flowering. Not theoretically, of course, nor historically; *there is no question either of social dramas or of culpability*; you can't write newspaper articles about it or have profitable lectures at Film Societies; it's not picturesque, lacks brutality, but I am so grateful to Lotte Eisner for giving him his place, his proper place, and for having presented him quite simply as the greatest German director.

On what is his art based? On the transformation of the Real. A lyrical and passionate orchestration of the visual exacerbated by an overwhelming plastic

sense in which, however, the plastic endlessly refuses to be received as such, makes of his work from *Nosferatu* to *Tartuffe* and from *Sunrise* to *Tabu* the arena for the most formidable *will to expression* yet seen on the screen. And in that it is expressionistic: the representation by plastic dramatization of themes fundamental to Western Art: restlessness and destiny. A not merely dramatic representation such as appears later in the American cinema, but at once plastic, architectural, symphonic, musical, in which the lighting, the sets, the costumes, the stylized acting become the elements in a superior game that the director has at his disposal in order to orchestrate a fundamental theme that rises into view and disappears again time after time the way the mysterious trumpets in the *Fifth* act as annunciators of destiny. . . .

What must be experienced here is plainly at the limits of the power of human resistance: dancing shadows, the quenching of lights on the rooftops of forgotten cities, torrents of invective, clouds, kingdoms menaced by the wrinkles in a great yellow robe—and why that pitiless bar of shadow running across the frame if not to remind us that this square of sparkling light will henceforth be the geometric lieu for tortured beauty?

Here the image is a support. What will it become? The meeting place for a certain number of lines of force whose placement will directly call to mind Velasquez and Caravaggio, but brought to this point of extreme tension so that henceforth only their destruction can be conceived and supported. With Murnau, each image demands annihilation by another image. Every sequence announces its own end. Look at a frame from *Nosferatu* or from *Faust*. Nothing could be simpler in appearance or more reassuring. A man and a woman seated on a bench, a young girl in a boat leaning on the oars, a silhouette in the shadow of a window frame, a spinning wheel in the foreground . . . a Lang, a Pabst would not spare us the warning of a set thirty-five feet high photographed against the light, its sinister mass blocking out the sky, a horrible close-up to create atmosphere and sentiment. But with Murnau tragedy will be installed right at the heart of the indifferent. Look at the sequences he makes use of: the most harmless American style sequences. Certain of his frames could even be straight out of a comedy, or inserted into a work by Hawks or Capra. But watch how corruption is born out of this tranquility. Murnau operates slyly. A nameless horror lies in wait in the shadows beyond these tranquil people, installed in a corner of the frame like a hunter in a blind, waiting for his prey. All of this has the stamp of presentiment, the tranquility is menaced in advance, its destruction clearly inscribed in the lines of these happy and peaceful frames. And this is, I think, the key to all of Murnau's work—this fatality hidden



F. W. Murnau; *Tartuffe* (Camilla Horn)

behind the most harmless elements of the frame; this diffuse presence of an irremediable something that will gnaw at and corrupt each image the way it wells up behind each of Kafka's sentences.

How will it manifest itself? By happening in the sequence. Every frame of Murnau's is the story of a murder. The camera will have the simplest and most shocking of roles: that of being the announcing and prescient terrain of an assassination. Its task will be aided by all of the elements of the *mise-en-scène*. The shooting angle, the placement of the people within the frame, the distribution of the lights—all serve to *construct the lines of a dramatic scene whose unbearable tension will end in annihilation*. The story of the sequence is the accomplishment of that promise of death. Its temporal unravelling is no other than the definitive realization in time of an original plastic fatality in which everything that must play itself out in these few seconds will be given once and for all.

This is why montage is practically non-existent for

Murnau, as for all the Germans. Each image is an unstable equilibrium, better still the destruction of a stable equilibrium brought about by its own *élan*. So long as this destruction is not accomplished the image remains on the screen. So long as the movement has not resolved itself no other image can be tolerated. Whence that hieratic slowness which is never anything but the accomplishment of a promise. The promise of death, as in *Nosferatu*, of chastisement, as in *Faust* or *Tartuffe*. Running through all of Murnau's work from beginning to end there is a straight line from which the work derives its true subject, and if, precisely, it is never a question of anything but fatality and passion, hypocrisy, obsession with the supreme power—and always pushed to its extreme limits—how can one be astonished by it? And by the fact that the director of the irremediable has always been drawn, fascinated only by figures who have brought upon themselves, with that secret premeditation that is the mark of strong souls, these ruins and disasters, inscribed at the very heart of their

F. W. Murnau: *Nosferatu*

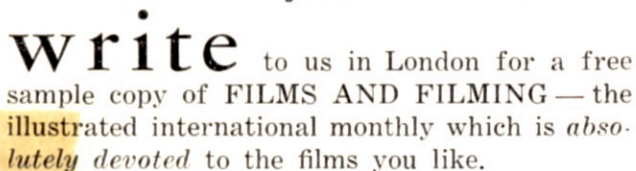
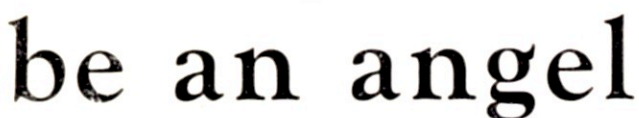




F. W. Murnau: *Nosferatu*

Lil Dagover, who may still be seen in the faded photos of the histories of the Cinema, her head somewhat inclined to one shoulder, crinoline between two fingers, gliding like a shadow down the length of a uniformly grey wall relieved only by the monstrous silhouette of a baroque chandelier, while Jannings passes, monstrous, oblivious, concentrating—absorbed in his breviary—and the reason that this Prussian *Tartuffe*, in which Sans-Souci mimics Versailles atrociously, is as true in its monstrousness as is the Parisian vaudeville in which a husband hides under the table to test his wife's virtue—Lil Dagover, then, met one evening at a dance-hall, told me how necessary it was to Murnau that not only every part of the set be built under his very eyes and according to his plans but also each accessory, every bit of silver called for by the *mise-en-scène*—as if it were impossible for

We know how Murnau died. While making *Tabu* he moved a sacred stone in order to install his camera. Several months later, on his return to the United States, he met his death. I imagine that the director of *Nosferatu* must have known what he was doing when he left himself open to spells and witchcraft. I dare believe that it was with open-eyed understanding that the most *magic* director in the entire history of the cinema let himself go so far as provoke the Gods, and, at that, the most humble, most primitive of all.



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