

The Wondrous 60s: an e-mail exchange between Miguel Marías and Peter von Bagh

Miguel Marías and Peter von Bagh

ABSTRACT

Drawing from the interview with Jean Narboni published in our most recent issue, Miguel Marías and Peter von Bagh reminisce how they each lived the decade of the 1960s, when five different generations of film-makers coexisted: from the last film-makers of silent cinema to the first films of the film-makers of the 'Nouvelle Vague', as well as the broad spectrum between each of them. Together they also analyse the aesthetic trajectory of certain authors, the confluence of 'popular cinema' and 'auteur cinema' and the concepts themselves, and even suggest some double bills or analyse some historical facts associated to their own countries (Spain and Finland) or others that affect cinema at a global level and their cinephilia in particular.

KEYWORDS

1960, cinephilia, Godard, Hollywood, Nouvelle Vague, generational differences, transmission, 'popular cinema', 'auteur cinema', 'new cinemas'.

Dear Peter,

Since they suggest as a starting point for our discussion on the very special decade of the '60s the following reflection made by Jean Narboni in the first issue of their magazine, I will quote it to you extensively:

«In the mid- and end 1960s we lived a unique moment in the history of cinema. Something like this will never happen again. I don't mean to say that the past is always better, but rather that this is a historical question. During those years, if it was possible to make a cut in time, as one does in geology, one would find diverse temporal layers. It was then when were premiered the last great films by the classical film-makers, often marvellous: *Gertrud* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1965), *A Distant Trumpet* (Raoul Walsh, 1964) or *Seven Women* (John Ford, 1966), which was only defended by *Cahiers*, even though it is one of the most beautiful films ever made. We published two articles, one by Comolli (COMOLLI, 1966: 16-20) and the other written by me (NARBONI, 1966: 20-25). Not even Ford's fans supported the film.

It was around that same time when the third and fourth films by the film-makers of the Nouvelle Vague were made. For instance, *Les Carabiniers* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963), or *L'Amour fou* (Jacques Rivette, 1969). The first works by the film-makers of the New Cinemas – such as Jerzy Skolimowski, Marco Bellocchio or Bernardo Bertolucci – and the latest works by *postclassical* film-makers such as Luis Buñuel or Michelangelo Antonioni, were also made at the same time. Within the same month, one could see a film by Skolimowski, Pasolini, Bertolucci, Godard and the most recent Ford. This will never happen again, because the first of the layers, that of the great classics, is over, they passed away. And, thanks to a historical chance, we found ourselves in a place where the fourth dimensions had to be kept at the same time. In one and the same issue, we had to defend *Seven Women*, *Uccellacci e uccellini* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1966), *Walkower* (Jerzy Skolimowski, 1965) or *Les Carabiniers*...

This is why a lineal succession can't be established. It happened just as in music, we had to find a counterpoint or a fugue in which two voices entered, then three, later four... We were very lucky to live in a period in which this fugue counted five different voices».

Dear Miguel,

I started a letter to you today, with the idea of confirming my participation; I must try to word the first reply during the next days.

It will be easier if we keep the debate to ourselves, meaning that the questions you passed on to me are a little too theoretical for my understanding, plus they are no doubt so much younger that their 1960s is an entirely different thing, a strange planet what for us is a homeground (taken the wise words you used about that period). The spontaneity and easiness that exists between us at any point of a 25-year old (or is it really that many years?) correspondence can't be maintained in any other way; and I am not so professional that I could produce a text that somehow seems already implied in the questions... So maybe there is a way to do all this in a more free-wheeling way. I don't know, nor do I know if what I hereby ponder makes any sense at all... but it would be our separate but quite similar experiences from two far corners of Europe, Finland and Spain.

Dear Peter,

I received today *Muisteja - pieni elokuva 50-luvun Oulusta* (Peter von Bagh, 2013), which both Mary Reyes & myself will watch tonight... it occurred to me that it might also provide a good starting point, since it will help a better understanding of whatever we may say to date our respective cinephilias and to explain that, to begin with, the '60s were a crucial point in the shaping of our likes and dislikes in movies.

Therefore, the '60s events (last masterpieces of the great old men or even the pioneers, although we were not aware that they would be their last, we took them as their *latest*; plus maturity films and then, sadly, the diaspora and dispersion and in many cases decay or premature silence of the middle generations; first, and in some cases only really great or best ever, films of the young filmmakers -plus things like the Vietnam War, the killings of JFK, Martin Luther King, Bobby Kennedy, or May 68) hit us in a way younger people cannot fully grasp, they are much too young; they may have read about it, and I guess contradictory accounts or fairly mythical tales, but they did not live it innocently...

Dear Miguel,

Good points - anyway, I am very enthusiastic about Narboni's conception of an extraordinary age. For me it's an explanation why I then felt the kind of total passion for films - new and old at the same time, totally equal as never before or after - that I haven't felt later.

Dear Peter,

Of course, I did like very much movies since I was 5 and watched as many as possible and very soon saw twice a double-bill two times per week, but I really became a cinephile in 1962 (my key year, also when I fell in love with Mary Reyes, started to read in English and ceased being an airplane buff & watcher) after watching, very belatedly, a most essential double-bill: *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959) + *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), and repeated *Vertigo* again, therefore arriving late at home without any dinner - the next day I began to buy film magazines, search filmographies and take notes.

I feel, however, that since most of the people that would read this will likely be very young

and did not directly (or at all, rather, if they are under 40) live out the experience of these years, they may usually rely too much on criticism and quotations, and take as general quite particular issues or trends. So I think, if you agree, that we can start talking about our own experience and then try to say something about those issues we might have not touched upon and we find can be of interest or somehow meaningful.

The point they refer to in the Narboni interview they had in the first issue of their magazine (which is called, by the way, *Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema*, mixing Catalanian and English... a title I think you would approve of...) is, I think, a main issue: that around the mid- and late '60s and even the early '70s there was a unique moment in history when 5 consecutive generations of filmmakers (let's say, from Walsh, Chaplin, Dreyer, Hawks, Renoir and Ford... to Garrel and Eustache and Pialat, and in the middle Buñuel and Oliveira, and Preminger and Rossellini, and Cukor and Fuller and Mankiewicz and Bergman and Tati, and the younger filmmakers Rohmer, Rivette, Godard, Straub, Demy, Chabrol, Marker or Resnais) were making films at the same time. What effect it had on us, and on the filmmakers which were aware of what was happening? I think that is quite an interesting issue about which those who did not live it can only infer something from writings or interviews, while we lived through it, and I would say, without any sort of anguish, tension, fear, uneasiness, discomfort or negative feelings. Rather than a rupture, the end of cinema or the start of some vague sort of revolution, we saw cinema well alive and plentiful and marching on... didn't we? And had, I feel, at least I did not have the slightest difficulty at all in passing from *Gertrud* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1964) to *Bande à part* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1964), from *A Distant Trumpet* (Raoul Walsh, 1964) to *Prima della rivoluzione* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1964) or *The Wild Bunch* (Sam Peckinpah, 1969), from *Red Line 7000* (Howard Hawks, 1965) to *Rysopis* (Jerzy Skolimowski, 1964), from *A Countess from Hong Kong* (Charles Chaplin, 1967) to *Playtime*

(Jacques Tati, 1967), *La Collectionneuse* (Eric Rohmer, 1967) and *Week End* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967), from *El ángel exterminador* (Luis Buñuel, 1962) and *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963) to *Les Carabiniers* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963), *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1966) and *Au hasard Balthazar* (Robert Bresson, 1966), from *Acto de Primavera* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1963) to *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1964), *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* (Roberto Rossellini, 1966) or *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* (Jean-Marie Straub y Danièle Huillet, 1968), from *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol*, Glauber Rocha, 1964) to *Edipo re* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1967) or *Uccellacci e uccellini* (1966), from *Vidas Sêcas* (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1963) to *Tropici* (Gianni Amico, 1969) or *Sotto il segno dello scorpione* (Paolo y Vittorio Taviani, 1969), from *La commare secca* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1962) to *La Baie des anges* (Jacques Demy, 1963), *Les Bonnes femmes* (Claude Chabrol, 1960) and *Le Procès* (Orson Welles, 1962), from *7 Women* (John Ford, 1966) to *Chimes at Midnight* (Orson Welles, 1965) and *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* (Robert Bresson, 1962) or *Mouchette* (Robert Bresson, 1967), from *Die Tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse* (Fritz Lang, 1960) or *Nicht versöhnt oder Es hilft nur Gewalt wo Gewalt herrscht* (Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet, 1965) to *The Edge* (Robert Kramer, 1968) and *Topaz* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1969) or *La Chinoise* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967), from *The Chapman Report* (George Cukor, 1962) to *La Pyramide humaine* (Jean Rouch, 1961), *The Honey Pot* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1967) and *Avanti!* (Billy Wilder, 1972), from *In Harm's Way* (Otto Preminger, 1965) to *A High Wind in Jamaica* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1965) or *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), from *Experiment in Terror* (Blake Edwards, 1962) to *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* (Vincente Minnelli, 1963), from *Cleopatra* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1963) to *Le Mépris* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963), *The Sandpiper* (Vincente Minnelli, 1965) or *O Dragão da Maldade contra o Santo Guerreiro* (Glauber Rocha, 1969), from *Adieu Philippine* (Jacques Rozier, 1962) to *Man's Favorite Sport?* (Howard Hawks, 1964) and *Kiss Me, Stupid*

(Billy Wilder, 1964)... I recall it as a joyful triumphant moment of cinema throughout the world, the old filmmakers daring and wise, the young daring and confident and strong. Did you have that feeling as well, which crashed with Rossellini's "death of cinema" discourse? Did you feel that the new waves had come AGAINST the older filmmakers or rather, on the contrary, were their disciples, and that Monte Hellman or Peckinpah were pursuing and refreshing and reshaping Boetticher and Anthony Mann and Aldrich and Ford and Dwan?

Dear Miguel,

Your thoughts here are very essential, and I could start right away from them, I can follow your train of thought. Shortly now I will follow, but I can advance you almost X-ray what I felt right then when these films you mention came out.

Dear Peter,

As a matter of fact, and I think I mentioned it when first telling you about this issue, I wrote in 2006, for the online magazine "Miradas de Cine" a long introduction to a selection of my favorite films from the 60s which I won't quote in its entirety, but approximatively translate some paragraphs from an earlier, longer version, to you:

"THE TEN-YEAR WONDER

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us..."

Charles Dickens

«[...] The 50s may seem at first glance and have for some time seen in such a perspective as a slackening of pace, almost as if the river had ceased to flow and had become a placid lake, but I feel that nowadays, with enough years of distance and the hindsight that it provides, that decade can be seen as the Golden Age of cinema practically everywhere even in Spain - , with audience records never equalled and the greatest possible communion or communication or feedback between a wide-ranging and composite audience and the most diverse creators; then the cinema was really a popular art, almost devoid of high-brow pretention, easily understandable by everybody and in every country, even by the uncultivated, and was a good business most of the time. Cinema had reached its age of maturity in only half a century, and was in its splendor, its classical period, without falling into any sort of mannerism. Never in ten years such an enormous quantity of the greatest masterpieces was made; any year of the 50s could easily provide a very good list of the ten best films in the history of cinema... even today.

After such flowering, the '60s were doomed to seem a period of relative decay, and they were the beginning of the end. The crisis of the Hollywood system – which was brewing since 1957 but only fully felt and realized around 1964 -, its shattering of local concurrence – as a sort of counterpart - in all foreign markets and the crisis of national cinemas with a long tradition that unfair competition entailed, the increasing influence of TV, the growing motorization of all countries, are factors that can explain that these years, which witnessed the retirement, the enforced inactivity or the physical death of most of the filmmakers which had started in the silent period, and the migration and anxiety and disorientation or demoralization of those of the following two generations (those arrived with the talkies and the postwar ones), are usually regarded as a period of decay and destruction, certainly, for the most visible of all cinemas, the American cinema.

But pointing only that that implies forgetting that in these same years the last surviving dinosaurs revise their achievements and discoveries of the '30s from the maturity of old age and with a sense of farewell, sharing their silent and discreet wisdom in often misunderstood terminal films, not always testamentary, but often full of energy and vitality, even sometimes surprisingly daring, youthful or healthily pessimistic; the filmmakers no more young, but rather middle-aged, then as yet relatively full of strength, either finally find themselves or begin also to say their farewell, on the verge of being lost. And there is a new spirit of renewal that break out like a fire which, far from being stopped, seems contagious and passes from one country to another. It had started in 1958-1959 in France, with the spectacular (although very short-lived) surge of the Nouvelle Vague, which, it should be recalled, even if its coming was understood as a “rupture” with anything old, was in fact characterized by an almost exhaustive knowledge of the cinema of the past, which the newcomers wanted to revitalize and refresh, linking with the heritage of silent cinema, which had been forcefully outdated – amongst other reasons – to end the concurrence of other smaller countries (there remains some evidence that, in the silent period, not only the new USSR, as before the Tsarist Russia, or Sweden and Denmark, or Japan, but China, Brazil, even Argentina, Mexico or Cuba could sometimes equal or even surpass the US, France or Germany). “Those of us who happened to witness “alive”, as teenagers or just 20-year olds, the '60s know – if we have not lost our memories – that it was a period of effervescence, illusions, enthusiasm almost without equal, and not only in the field of music, but also in that of cinema. We could impatiently and eagerly expect, and run to the premieres, or first showings, on one hand – while we listened to Bob Dylan, The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler, Archie Shepp, Eric Dolphy or Sonny Rollins as well as still to Elvis Presley or Sinatra – of the late (and sometimes last) works of John Ford, Ozu Yasujirō, Carl Th. Dreyer, Jean

Renoir, Fritz Lang, Leo McCarey, Frank Capra, Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, Raoul Walsh, Narusē Mikio, Henry King, Luis Buñuel, Abel Gance –, to the works of maturity of the “middle-aged” – from Otto Preminger to Blake Edwards, from Orson Welles to Richard Quine, from Robert Bresson to Stanley Donen, from Jacques Tati to Georges Franju, from Kurosawa Akira to Manoel de Oliveira, from Rossellini to Antonioni, from Visconti to Fellini, from Nicholas Ray to Satyajit Ray, from Robert Aldrich to Richard Brooks, Frank Tashlin, Robert Rossen, Elia Kazan, Anthony Mann, Richard Fleischer, Billy Wilder, William Wyler, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Terence Fisher, Alexander Mackendrick, Joseph Losey, Michael Powell, Budd Boetticher, Andre de Toth, Giuseppe De Santis, Pietro Germi, Vincente Minnelli, George Cukor, Samuel Fuller, Vittorio Cottafavi, Vittorio Cottafavi, Andrzej Wajda, Ingmar Bergman, Alf Sjöberg, Iuliia Solntseva, Jean-Pierre Melville, John Huston, Joris Ivens, Luigi Comencini, Dino Risi, Mauro Bolognini, Robert Wise, David Miller, Gordon Douglas, Henry Hathaway, George Seaton, Jacques Tourneur, John Sturges, George Sidney, David Lean, Xie Jin, Edward Ludwig, Mario Monicelli, Vladimir Basov, Tay Garnett, Carol Reed, Fred Zinnemann, Mrinal Sen, Joshua Logan, Abraham Polonsky, Edgar G. Ulmer, Luciano Emmer, Luis García Berlanga, Fernando Fernán-Gómez, Mario Soldati, Mikhail Romm, Ritwik Ghatak, Delmer Daves, Robert Parrish, Uchida Tomu, Don Siegel – and the revelation – sometimes short-lived or deceitful, sometimes lasting – of Godard, Rivette, Rohmer, Chabrol, Demy, Paul Vecchiali, Agnès Varda, Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, Jean Rouch, Alain Cavalier, Pasolini, Bertolucci, Bellocchio, los hermanos Taviani, Carmelo Bene, Vittorio De Seta, Gianfranco De Bosio, Zurlini, Olmi, Cassavetes, Shirley Clarke, Huillet y Straub, Jerry Lewis, Monte Hellman, Robert Kramer, Penn, Peckinpah, Shinoda, Hani, Imamura, Oshima, Makavejev, Skolimowski, Forman, Polanski, Jirès, Passer, Chytilová, Jancsó, Glauber Rocha, Paulo Rocha, Ruy Guerra, Carlos Diegues, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Delvaux, Giovanni, Garrel, Pialat, Eustache, Rozier, Pollet, Moullet,

Kluge, Truffaut, Warhol, los hermanos Mekas, Ivory, Ferreri, Hanoun, Yoshida, Masumura, Matsumoto, Alcoriza, Mikhailov-Konchalovsky, Khutsiiev, Snow, Leslie Stevens, Frank Perry, Malle, Suzuki Seijun, Santiago Álvarez, Michael Roemer, Peter Watkins, Juleen Compton, Pierre Perrault, Michel Brault, Marlon Brando, Paul Newman, Tarkovsky, Jack Clayton, Francesco Rosi, Jim McBride, Emile De Antonio, Guy Debord, Sembène Ousmane, Sydney Pollack, Michel Deville, Sergio Leone, Jean Dewever, Leonard Kastle, Gianni Amico, Silvina Boissonas, Antoine Bourseiller, René Allio, Paula Delsol, Marguerite Duras, Marc’O, Arrietta, Adrian Ditvoorst, Paradjanov, Risto Jarva, Pakkasvirtä, Widerberg, Mollberg, Henning Carlsen, Kevin Brownlow y Andrew Mollo, Paulo César Saraceni, Robert Machover, Oumarou Ganda, Moustapha Alassane, Robert Mulligan, Stanley Kubrick, Alan J. Pakula, Martin Ritt, John Frankenheimer, Sydney Lumet, Roberto Farias, Raoul Coutard, Pierre Schoendoerffer, Barbet Schroeder, Roland Gall, Ian Dunlop, Peter Fleischmann, Werner Herzog, Fassbinder, Gonzalo Suárez, Portabella... and no doubt I am forgetting a lot of them: I do not want to remove my memory in search of long-forgotten names, deceived hopes, unfilled promises, so many prematurely dead or merely vanished from the battlefield. But there were hundreds, perhaps thousands, wave after wave, sometimes single-handed and pennyless, but year after year, coming from anywhere and everywhere, even from countries with no prior cinematic tradition, or where there had been no previous film making at all. Thus the screen or the ten best lists of these years were shared by the classical and the rebel or revolutionary, the very old and the very young, the famous and the unknown filmmakers, with films that could not be judged or valued with the same criteria – how can you compare *Pierrot le fou* and *7 Women*, *Gertrud* and *Bande à part*, *The Cardinal* and *Les Carabiniers*, *La Chasse au lion à l’arc* and *Campanadas a medianoche*, even *Major Dundee* with *A Distant Trumpet* and *Cheyenne Autumn*? –, but since we could feel enthusiasm both for *A Countess from Hong Kong* and *Au hasard Balthazar*, *Persona* or 2

ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle, we had to learn (and not everyone succeeded, some did not try at all) how to make them compatible.

“Of some of these films – the “old ones” – we admired the perfection, the sobriety, the seeming simplicity, the apparent ease, the precision, the maturity, the wisdom; from others – at the same time – we enjoyed the lack of measure, the audacity, the daring, the freedom, the passion, the expressiveness. Pasolini provided one key, perhaps not wholly true, probably too simple but anyhow rather beautiful: there was, according to him, a “prose cinema” and a “cinema of poetry”, and nobody in his right mind, whether a practitioner of one or the other kind, would dare renounce to either of these fully compatible kinds of cinema, which, in fact, are most often than not, tightly interwoven into the very same films. Romanticism and skepticism, if not the cynical and the naïve, shook hands; sometimes the old revolutionaries surprised us by becoming the most serene classicists and some of the very young had the simplicity of the earlier primitives, while the most modern movies were not always those made by the youngest filmmakers- witness *Persona*, *Vargtimmen* and *L182* (alias *En passion*) by Bergman, *The Birds*, *El Ángel Exterminador* or *La Voie Lactée*, *Play Time* or *Quatre Nuits d'un rêveur*... There is not so much distance, after all, between *Nattvardsgästerna*, *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* and *De Man die zijn haar kort liet knippen*, nor *Rysopis* or *Walkover* are that far from *Red Line 7000*, nor *Le Mépris* from *Cleopatra* or *Two Weeks In Another Town*, nor *Hatari!* from *Jaguar* and *Adieu Philippine*..., nor *The Birds* and *El Ángel Exterminador*. It is, on the other, a ten-year period dominated by the omnipresent hiperactivity and the liberating model of Jean-Luc Godard, whose work is one of the summits of the '60s, from *Le Petit Soldat* up to (yeah!) *Le Gai Savoir*. “Is it possible, without having lived it while it was happening, to really understand what these years meant to whoever was then a young cinephile extremely curious? It was a very profitable exercise, and I hope it can seem understandable that for some years we firmly believed in the future of cinema, in

its almost unlimited and as yet not wholly explored possibilities, in the jumping continuity that made films advance toward yet unknown territories, taking support on the firm shoulders of Griffith and Lumière, Vertov and Murnau, Eisenstein and Stroheim, discovering the secret affinities between Chaplin and Renoir and Rossellini and Godard, imagining a chain that would link Lubitsch and Lang with Hitchcock and Buñuel... “Therefore I would consider both unfair and reductionist to forget or silence the fact that the '60s was a decade where the past, the present and the future were together, in parallel, sometimes in a process of conscious or unconscious emulation (Bellocchio could not be replying to Visconti, in the same year 1965, with *I pugni in tasca* to *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa*...). That may be the reason explaining why in those years *Cahiers* surmounts its long-standing blindness towards the one-eyed Ford, and Douchet realizes there is some sort of contradiction in understanding Hitchcock and defending Godard and not Buñuel... One must recall that time and include all that was going on then, what was coming to its end, what was only starting, what was about to end prematurely, or what was being born as a promise of renewal for the future, the last words from some people and the first from others, the astonishing simultaneous existence of the old and the new and everything in the middle, which happened in the '60s for the first, only and last time in the cinema. A cinema that was yet part of the normal commercial production (Ozu as well as Resnais or Antonioni or Godard) and which was as yet accepted by the normal moviegoers, by an audience not broken down into specialized and incompatible groups».

Dear Miguel,

I am deeply fascinated by the points you develop and from the parallel observations I understand were pointed out by Jean Narboni. You add an edge that somehow explains not only the basis of my cinephilie but my modest life.

Never later has my spectator life been happier than during the 1960s and a short stretch of the 1970s. I might announce myself as an ultimate case, and irresponsible at that: it's from that moment on that I lost my interest in trying to catch and see "all" new films, or follow the new trends in a systematic way. It's only partly because not one newspaper and magazine in my distant country - I write to you from Finland, that by now can be classified as a third world country in matters of cinephilia - would print my texts.

While commencing a dialogue on an important topic, Miguel - for me, a sort of visionary film historian visionary - , you have already stated, even if rather between the lines, what is for me the essential point: there was this one time when films, old and new simultaneously, went under the skin. It's only by returning to the natural dialectics of that time when one gets in a flash the perversity of the later times, after we've definitively lost our short happiness.

But I should at this point say a couple of words about our specific misère. A small country at the outer limits of Northern Europe. I can see from your old text, Miguel, how many central films never reached Finland, or did so belatedly. Like Spain, we had then an aggressive censorship, not catholic-conservative but more or less just absurd. On the other side, it was perversely objective: the essential films were banned, so you could define the best movies in advance from the information that they were listed by the censor. They were unlikely films as *À bout de souffle* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960) (after all, a policeman is killed!), *Le Testament du Docteur Cordelier* (Jean Renoir, 1959), *The Criminal* (Joseph Losey, 1960), *The Big Heat* (Fritz Lang, 1953) (that must have been a second or third try in the early sixties) or *Experiment in Terror* were banned; I mention here just titles that I managed to see on one trip to Stockholm, thanks to the local distributors... happy to have a good laugh at the expense of retarded Finnish people.

Yet I see some good points in the situation. The present-day ease of seeing any film immediately, or the theoretical availability of everything by a push of button, is fatal for the psychology of moviegoers. We lived years imagining films that we had set to see. The vision was a fulfillment that would hold a life-long memory. An anticipation was psychologically as poignant as the actual seeing, something that perhaps only happened 15 years after the dream process started.

A film had to be taken seriously as there was a perspective of not ever seeing it again. I was in Paris in September 1973 when I got to know that the National Film Theatre of London would screen Walsh's *The Revolt of Mamie Stover* (1956) I took a plane in the morning of that day, saw the film twice (I now know the chance was unique: not me, nor anyone else, will ever see the real CinemaScope print of 1x2.55 again). I went to see *L'invidia* (the Rossellini episode in the 1953 *Les 7 péchés capitaux*, now returning to the repertory) every day during the week - I had a critic's card, and enough youthful authority to enter the cinema at 19:40 when that episode started.

I know I slipped out of the 1960s, but how could you separate the new offer from the films that were older but still circulating?. One of the most depressing things of today is the disappearance of revivals and of whole blocks of old repertory that used to bless our experience. I might have then missed most of the 1940s films but much of the 1950s kept returning. With new films (often a week that more than matched a cinema year of the 2010s), film archive and several film clubs we got a paradisiac continuity. So my first vision of *Sunrise* (F. W. Murnau, 1927) and *Viaggio in Italia* (Roberto Rossellini, 1954), coincided with the premières of *Le Mépris* and *Marnie*; I wrote lengthy texts on each of them. Why this overwhelming enthusiasm? With one word: *mise-en-scène*. A touch from heart to heart, individual handwriting, filmic means, whether very simple or complicated (1960s was also the decade of the spectacular that fulfilled

all the signs of an intimate film: *The Birds*). It became a thirst. It was urgent to see all the relevant new films, of course all the shows of the film archive, and then still several film clubs of the town. It was life fulfilled, but meaningfully also with a hint of mortality, as there was often no evident perspective of seeing the same film again. (Nothing has hurt our cinephile sensibility more than the in-built idea that we have all films available to us by the push of button. Meaning that very little remains or even visits our heart.)

From the a note a friend preserved from late spring 1963 I can see that we in an improvised 10-15 member "Friday Club" (it was enough that we collected money to pay the projectionist):

- 5.4 Tourneur, *Stranger on Horseback* (1955)
- 19.4 Walsh, *Band of Angels* (1957)
- 26.4 Hawks, *I Was a Male War Bride* (1949)
- 3.5. Minnelli, *Designing Woman* (1957)
- 10.5 Tourneur, *Great Day in the Morning* (1956)
- 17.5 Tourneur, *Giant of Marathon* (1959)
- 21.5 Ray, *Hot Blood* (1956)
- 24.5 Tourneur, *The Flame and the Arrow* (1950)
- 31.5 Dwan, *Woman They Almost Lynched* (1953)

All copies were destroyed within next months. The same about several Fritz Lang films which I collected for my first festival programming, in the historical Jyväskylä Summer Festival dedicated to the interplay of all arts. It was an overwhelming spectator's joy and cinephilic tragedy, as well as the last sight of the *Eschnapur* films plus both RKOscope films, *While the City Sleeps* (1956) and *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (1956) - films we felt were the highest film can ever give us, impossible to surpass. I tend to think so even now, at the moment when the French critics - once so exemplary - are pondering about the details of Michael Haneke's supposed "mise-en-scène"...

I made this relative detour due to a re-reading of an inspirational text: the Godard interview in the december 1962 issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, a special on Nouvelle Vague. It is a beautiful, humble and precise continuation of Godard's

critical texts (written mostly around 1958, and as such now ever more clearly the peak of the period). He starts by saying that the *Cahiers* critics felt themselves to be "future directors". I let quotes speak: «Aujourd'hui je me considère toujours comme critique, et, en un sens, je le suis plus encore qu'avant». «J'ai toujours gardé (mon goût de citation). Pourquoi nous reprocher? Les gens, dans la vie, citent ce que leur plaît». «*À bout de souffle* était le genre de film où tout était permis. C'était sa nature». «L'idéal pour moi est d'obtenir tout de suite ce qui doit aller, et sans retouches. S'il en faut, c'est raté. Le tout de suite, c'est le hasard. En même temps, c'est le définitif. Ce que je veux, c'est le définitif par hasard».

Here we have elements of a full definition of our theme. The co-existence of old and new - new as a classic already, old as winningly modern - like *Gertrud* or *Marnie* would be. (Here I want to express my admiration to your "correspondences" listings, seeing *Adieu Philippine* and *Hatari!* as contemporaries breathing absolutely the same air.) This understanding of the inseparability of criticism and filmmaking illuminated a generation, happily living the last age before "film science", fashionable theories and university boredom.

Like texts of Epstein or Delluc or Eisenstein, the texts of Godard can inspire deeply real filmmaking, something rather impossible to say of almost anything worded after 1970. The golden age illuminated also film criticism. (Much of our life is co-incidence. It so happened that my first foreign friend was an Englishman - Charles Barr. Who kept writing letters about the plans to start a film magazine - which happened to be *Movie*, and is part of the better history).

It was indeed out of question that a serious critic (*Cahiers*, or even *Positif* that was much more often sidetracked) - I'm not speaking of newspaper hacks who are the most unchangeable thing in the world - would have celebrated a monumental fake like *The Artist* (Michel Hazanavicius, 2011).

(In passing, Godard already sets elements of how the the 60s cinema included a political sense that meant not only Marker, or De Antonio, Pasolini or Godard himself. All the field was alert, meaning that even if Vietnam was a taboo, films like *The Wild Bunch* or *Ulzana's Raid* (Robert Aldrich, 1972) told the story anyway. That sense has later disappeared from films.)

For instance *La Règle du jeu* (Jean Renoir, 1939) came to Finland for the first time only in 1964, and then as a contemporary of *La Peau douce* (François Truffaut, 1964) and *Une femme mariée* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1964). The early cinephilie - the first real film club movement in the 1950s - survived and developed a certain competence (and sometimes vision) without *Citizen Kane* that was invisible all of the 1950s. On the other side, we were a neighbouring nation and had privileged chances to see films from "socialist" countries fresh, meaning that we could glimpse almost the first in the world Munk's *Pasazerka* (*Pasazerka*, Andrzej Munk y Witold Lesiewicz, 1963), Passer's *Intimní osvetlení* (1965) or several Jancsó films... or perhaps even a Soviet film before it became a censored treasure in its own country. These were surely strong contenders for the most interesting films then made, over the more obvious French ones. Naturally my favourite among the new waves varied from week to week - what then in the last analysis? Perhaps it was Italy. For the same kind of reasons our argument holds.

Never in the history of that country - earlier or later - could there be a similar situation, with the generation of Visconti, De Sica and Rossellini signing new films (or even the earlier ones - Blasetti, Gallone, Matarazzo), with De Santis, Lattuada and Castellani, etc., joining them, as well as the 1950's directors like Fellini, Antonioni, then Pasolini, Bertolucci, Bellocchio, Olmi... There are so many that I mix them here quite freely without stopping to define their beginnings or prime periods.

Which seemed to be the natural state of grace for most filmmakers then. And with

this very summary list I have even delayed the definitive confirmation of the overwhelming period: the popular cinema was enjoying a spontaneous, irresistible high point exactly at the same time as the auteur films celebrated in film magazines. Freda was somehow the basic stone in that, but Leone surpassed everything with his popularity. And typically again, the golden age of the commedia italiana, the masterpieces of Risi, Monicelli and Scola, lasted almost exactly until the time we are talking about.

What I am trying to remind is that each country held a special position (plus wonder that in spite of the material differences the conclusions all over seemed to be the same, regardless of being in Paris, Madrid, or in a small Finnish town called Oulu where I started my spectator's life). As I have perhaps belittled our provincial position, I must contradict that by stating that Finland was then the only country outside France to distribute all the Godard films (including the "non-commercial" ones like *Les Carabiniers*, *Made in USA*, etc.), and that this met with considerable success. Even a little later all the three 1970s Bresson films brought more money in Helsinki than in Paris. We know now what we didn't know then (that Hollywood was dying, that "nouvelle vague" had such a short span - how else when we remember that a film like *Lola* (Jacques Demy, 1961) got only something like 30 000 entries?).

All in all, I think it was more probable than sometimes later for a talented director to make his mark, and guarantee a position (although some members of the generation renewing Hollywood after 1968 had a short span as they were, so to say, to be punished for their boldness). Even so, there are some great directors that in the long run somehow did not situate in the map according to their real value: De Seta, Rozier, Hutsiev. And as always it's not only the right films that "make it into film history" - I'm thinking of rewarding films that nearly disappeared, at least from the estimates: *The Courtship of Eddie's Father*, *Red Line 7000*, *In Harm's Way*.

It was a generous and inspiring time for all, and a privileged time personally, and not only because films thundered *pêle-mêle* towards us: *Most Dangerous Man Alive* (Allan Dwan, 1961) and *Ride in the Whirlwind* (Monte Hellman, 1966), *Le Caporal épinglé* (Jean Renoir, 1962) and *Faces* (John Cassavetes, 1968)... (I'm not trying to emulate your masterly symmetries - I just picked a couple of titles that are dear to me). I conducted my first taped interview with Carl Th. Dreyer in his home in Copenhagen, in the summer 1965, right after the Danish critics had butchered *Gertrud*. I wrote my first fan letter to Charlie Chaplin, reassuring him that *A Countess from Hongkong* is one of the masterpieces of the decade (an opinion I still hold, like most from that time).

The cinephilia intruded even to my modest studies, as I wrote my university thesis on *Vertigo* (against the wish of my professors who would have preferred an artistic film). Hitchcock visited Helsinki in August 1968 and agreed to see me,

even if he had absolutely to give interviews. Why? Perhaps because he understood that the first book-length film study on one film (there are thousands now) was in the making - why not then meet this nut? And he rewarded me with an aphorism that I haven't seen in any written source: "You know, my son - logic is dull!"

What the hell happened very soon afterwards? That is another story. At least I know that the innocence and infantile spirit of that age, whether tender (McCarey) or demented (Jerry Lewis), was more authentic than the industrial-machined infantilism of Spielberg, Lucas and too much of cinema after that. Even scribbling these words I feel a great nostalgic memory of entering a small cinema in the outskirts of Helsinki and seeing *Une femme est une femme* - our first Godard, a revelation, and for all of us - like André S. Labarthe worded it: «Lumière 1961». •

April-May 2013

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AAVV (2008): *Con y contra el cine. En torno a Mayo del 68*. Sevilla: Universidad Internacional de Andalucía.
- APRÀ, Adriano, ROSSELLINI, Roberto (1987). *Il Mio metodo: scritti e inserviste*. Venecia: Marsilio.
- CIOMPO, Valeria, MARÍAS, Miguel (2000). *Carol Reed*. Madrid, San Sebastián: Filmoteca Española, Festival Internacional de Cine de San Sebastián.
- CIOMPO, Valeria, MARÍAS, Miguel (1999). *John M. Stahl*. Madrid, San Sebastián: Filmoteca Española, Festival Internacional de Cine de San Sebastián.
- CIOMPO, Valeria, MARÍAS, Miguel, PARTEARROYO, Tony (1988). *Jacques Tourneur*. Madrid, San Sebastián: Filmoteca Española, Festival Internacional de Cine de San Sebastián.
- COMOLLI, Jean-Louis (1966). *Dé-composition. Cahiers du cinéma*, nº 182, septiembre, pp. 16-20.
- DA COSTA, João Bénard (1986). '50 Anos da Cinemateca Francesa, 60 Anos de Henri Langlois^a, en *Cinemateca Francesa 50 Anos - 1936-1986*. Lisboa,

- Cinemateca Portuguesa.
- DOUCHET, Jean (2003). *L'art d'aimer*. París, Cahiers du cinéma.
- EISENSCHITZ, Bernard (1995). *Fritz Lang*. Valencia: Filmoteca de la Generalitat Valenciana.
- ELSAESSER, Thomas, MICHAŁEK, Bolesław, PLAKHOV, Andrei, VON BAGH, Peter (1998). *Cinemas d'Europe du Nord : de Fritz Lang à Lars von Trier*. París: des Mille et une Nuits.
- FARBER, Manny (1974). *Arte termita contra elefante blanco y otros escritos sobre cine*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- FONT, Domènec (2002). *Paisajes de la modernidad: cine europeo, 1960-1980*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- GIFFARD, Philippe Valentin (2012). *Peter von Bagh*. Beau Bassin: Betascript Publishing.
- GODARD, Jean-Luc (1973). *À bout de souffle; Vivre sa vie; Une femme mariée; Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle; La Chinoise*. Cinco guiones (Traducción de Miguel Marías). Madrid: Alianza.

- GODARD, Jean-Luc (1980). *Introducción a una verdadera historia del cine*. (Traducción de Miguel Marías). Madrid: Alphaville.
- LANGLOIS, Henri (1986). *Trois cent ans de cinéma*. París. Cahiers du cinéma/ Cinémathèque Française/ Fondation Européenne des Métiers de l'Image et du son.
- MARÍAS, Miguel (1986). Jean-Luc Godard. Murcia: Editora Regional de Murcia.
- MARÍAS, Miguel (2006). 'La década prodigiosa. Dossier años 60^a. *Miradas de cine*, n° 53, agosto.
- MARÍAS, Miguel (1999). Leo McCarey: sonrisas y lágrimas. Madrid: Nickel Odeon.
- MARÍAS, Miguel (1992). Manuel Mur Oti: las raíces del drama. Lisboa: Cinemateca Portuguesa.
- NARBONI, Jean (1966). *La preuve par huit*. *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 182, septiembre, pp. 20-25
- OLOV, Qvist, VON BAGH, Peter (2000). Guide to the cinema of Sweden and Finland Auteurs. Londres: Greenwood Press.
- PHILIPPE, Claude-Jean, ROSSELLINI, Roberto (1972). *Diálogos casi socráticos con Roberto Rossellini*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- ROSSELLINI, Roberto (1979). *Un espíritu libre no debe aprender como esclavo: escritos sobre cine y educación*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- ROUD, Richard (1983). *A Passion for Films – Henri Langlois and the Cinémathèque Française*. Londres, Secker & Warburg.
- SADOUL, Georges (1962). *Le Cinéma Français : 1890-1962*. París: Flammarion.
- SKORECKI, Louis (1978). 'Contre la nouvelle cinéphilie^a. *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 293, octubre.
- VON BAGH, Peter (2006). *Aki Kaurismäki*. París, Locarno: Cahiers du cinéma, Festival de Locarno.
- VON BAGH, Peter (2003). «Lettre de Helsinki». *Trafic*, n° 48, diciembre.
- VON BAGH, Peter (2008). *Nuovole in paradiso. Una guida al cinema Finlandese*. Bolonia: Cineteca di Bologna.
- VON BAGH, Peter (2005). «Programmer, c'est écrire l'histoire du cinéma». *Cinéma*, n° 9, primavera.
- VON BAGH, Peter (2008). «Survol du cinéma actuel, d'un regard acéré : cinéma contemporain». *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 633, abril.

PETER VON BAGH

Peter von Bagh is a film historian, author of more than 20 books (including *History of World Cinema*, 1975) and a television and radio director. He has published over 100 books (from Balzac to Eisenstein, Bazin, Langlois and Fellini). As a film-maker, he has specialised in compilation films. Among others, it is worth mentioning *Kreivi* (1971), the 12-hour series *The Blue Song*, dedicated to the history of Finnish art, *Helsinki, ikuisesti* (2008), *Sodankylä ikuisesti* (2010), *Lastuja - taiteilijasuvun vuosisata* (2011) or *Muisteja - pieni elokuva 50-luvun Oulusta* (2013). Altogether, as film and television director, he has made 53 titles, some of which were screened at a recent retrospective at the Festival

Internacional de Cine de Buenos Aires. As an actor, he has appeared in *Drifting Clouds* (*Kauas pilvet karkaavat*, 1996), *Juha* (1999) y *A Man Without a Past* (*Mies vailla menneisyyttä*, 2002) by Aki Kaurismäki, to whom he has devoted several books. Between 1970 and 1985 he was the director of the Finnish Cinémathèque; from 1971 he was the director of the magazine *Filmihullu*; he has also been Professor of History at the University of Helsinki. He is Artistic Director of two festivals: The Midnight Sun Film Festival, in Lapland and Il Cinema Ritrovato, in Bologna, since 2001.

MIGUEL MARÍAS

Miguel Marías is an economist and film critic. He was the director of the Filmoteca Española and General Director of the ICAA. He is the author of the books *Leo McCarey: sonrisas y lágrimas* (1999), *Manuel Mur Oti: las raíces del drama* (1992), among others. He has coordinated books on the work of Jacques Tourneur, Carol Reed and John M. Stahl for the Festival de San Sebastián and the Filmoteca Española. He is the translator of some of Godard's scripts,

such as *Introducción a una verdadera historia del cine* (1980). He has collaborated in magazines such as *Nuestro cine*, *Banda aparte*, *Casablanca*, *Nuevo Fotogramas*, *Archivos de la Filmoteca*, *Nosferatu*, *Viridiana*, *Letras de Cine*, *Dirigido Por*, *Lumière*, *Trafic*, *Revista de Occidente* or *El Urogallo* and in newspapers such as *El Mundo* or *Diario 16*. He collaborated in the television programme *¿Qué grande es el cine!* from 1995 until 2005. He is preparing the book *Otro Buñuel*.