

# Conversation on *Wanda* by Barbara Loden

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Marguerite Duras and Elia Kazan

On Autumn 1980, Elia Kazan arrived in Paris for the re-release of *Baby Doll* and *America America*. Marguerite Duras, who wrote on his cinema in *Green Eyes*, meets him for *Cahiers du Cinéma* and talks him about *Wanda*.

**Marguerite Duras:** I want to distribute *Wanda*, your wife, Barbara Loden's film. I am not a distributor. I mean something else by this word. I mean to use all my energy to make certain that this movie reaches the French public. I believe I can. I think that there is a miracle in *Wanda*. Usually there is a distance between the visual representation and the text, as well as the subject and the action. Here this distance is completely nullified; there is an instant and permanent continuity between Barbara Loden and *Wanda*.

**Elia Kazan:** Her acting career showed her that no script was permanent. For her, there was always an element of improvisation. (I am speaking English in order to be more precise.) There was always an element of improvisation, a surprise, in what she was doing. The only one, as far as I know, who was like that is Brando when he was young. He never knew exactly what he was going to say, therefore everything would come out of his mouth very alive.

**M.D.:** The miracle for me isn't in the acting. It's that she seems even more herself in the movie, so it seems to me –I didn't know her– than she must have been in life. She's even more real in the movie than in life; it's completely miraculous.

**E.K.:** It's true. She had great difficulty in communicating, except in moments of strong feeling, passion or rage, sexual passion, anger, etc., when the controls would snap. In some way there was an invisible wall between her and the world, but her work permitted her to make some openings in this wall. She would do this every time. She played with me in the theater in a play by Arthur Miller; I don't like the play but there was one good thing in this play: what Barbara did.

**M.D.:** What play?

**E.K.:** *After the Fall*.

**M.D.:** I haven't seen it. I am insisting because I was very moved by her being herself in her movie. It's as if she had found a way

in the movie to make sacred what she wants to portray as a demoralization, which I find to be an achievement, a very, very powerful achievement, very violent and profound. That's the way I see it.

**E.K.:** In this movie she plays a character we have in America, and who I suppose exists in France and everywhere, that we call *floating*, a wanderer. A woman who floats on the surface of society, drifting here or there, with the currents. But in the story of this movie, for a few days the man she meets needs her; during these few days she has a direction and at the end of the movie, when he dies, she goes back to her wandering. Barbara Loden understood this character very, very well because when she was young she was a bit like that, she would go here and there. She once told me a very sad thing; she told me: 'I have always needed a man to protect me.' I will say that most women in our society are familiar with this, understand this, need this, but are not honest enough to say it. And she was saying it sadly.

**M.D.:** Personally –this is getting a little beyond the subject– I feel very close to her. Like her I'm acquainted with the cafes, the last ones open, where you linger without any other reason but to while away the time, and I'm very well acquainted with alcohol, very intensely, the way I'd be acquainted with someone.

**E.K.:** You know, *Wanda* is a movie that was made with no money. With \$160,000, which doesn't pay the salaries of a big crew for a week. I was there all the time during the shooting; I took care of the children, I played nursemaid. The crew consisted of a cameraman, a sound engineer, a technician, an assistant, and, on occasion, me.

**M.D.:** (Laughter.) I'm familiar with this kind of production. (...) There's a public for *Wanda*. Perhaps America is uncivilized in a way that I'm not very familiar with, that I haven't explored. But what I do know is that there is a public for this movie. It's simply a matter of finding it, of letting it know that this film exists. If I let them know, since the cinema I do is on that track, in that same off-beat split, they will come the way they come to see my movies. I want to make it clear that my doing this has nothing to do with her being a woman and my being a woman. If a man had made this movie, I would stand up for him in the same way. (...)

**M.D.:** I need information about Barbara Loden. I'd like to know your views and hers about the fact that this marvelous movie hasn't worked.

**E.K.:** Barbara was bitter, but not only because of the film. The film was well-received among English intellectuals and here as well, however, she never had enough money for her next projects, and this was painful for her. She had some things ready, for example, she wanted to film Wedekind's *Loulou*. The screenplay was finished but she had no money. She had a screenplay about a film star (*A Movie Star of my Own*), which in my opinion was very good, but there was no money. She always had the feeling of knocking on doors that remained closed.

**M.D.:** Yes, but it's because this movie should have worked... Are there in America circuits around film archives or film clubs? My movies have been seen, Godard's ones as well...

**E.K.:** It has been shown in universities, but anywhere else. She ended up doing speeches with the movie in universities. She answered the questions of the audience after the screening, she came along with the film. She also went to many schools in the South and the West. She was very proud of it. She owed that just to herself, so she was very proud.

**M.D.:** How long ago did she shoot the film?

**E.K.:** In 1971. The shooting went on for seven weeks, in Pennsylvania. I was there, directing the extras, stopping the cars, etc. And I took care of the children.

**M.D.:** Do you recommend me reading the screenplay of *Wanda*?

**E.K.:** I don't think so. If you want it, I can give it to you, but I think it is better just to watch the movie. She changed the screenplay every day. It was me who wrote the first screenplay, as a favour, to give her something to work with. Then she rewrite it over and over again, and it ended up being her screenplay instead of mine. It became her screenplay. And each day, during the shooting, she kept changing everything...

**M.D.:** *Wanda* is a movie about "someone". Have you ever directed a film about someone?

**E.K.:** I did a film about my uncle, *America America*. All my family is here.

**M.D.:** When I say someone, I mean someone who has been isolated, someone who has been considered on himself, separated from social conditions where he is. Like extracted from society and observed by you. I think there is always something in the self, in you, that society cannot reach, something insurmountable, impenetrable and decisive. •

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