

# CINEMA COMPARAT/IVE CINEMA



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**Original design and layout:** Pau Masaló.

**Special Thanks:** Miguel Armas, Álvaro Arroba, Nicole Brenez, Bernard Eisenschitz, Fernando Ganzo, Miguel García, Flo Jacobs, Ken Jacobs, Alexandra Jordana, Pierre Léon, David Phelps, Jackie Raynal, Gina Telaroli, Marta Verheyen.

**Manager:** Aitor Martos.

**Publisher:** Colectivo de Investigación Estética de los Medios Audiovisuales (CINEMA), Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF).

This issue has been funded with the economic support of the Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad, through OCEC Project (Observatory on Contemporary European Cinema), with reference number HAR2009-11786.

**Place of publication:** Universitat Pompeu Fabra. Departamento de Comunicación. Campus de la Comunicación – Poblenou. Roc Boronat, 138 08018, Barcelona (Spain).

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*Cinema Comparative Cinema*, Volume 1, N° 2, «Forms in revolution», Barcelona, 2013.

**Legal Deposit:** B.29702-2012.

**ISSN:** 2014-8933.

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**Cover image:** *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967)

# Introduction

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*Cinema Comparative Cinema* is a biannual publication founded in 2012. It is edited by Colectivo de Investigación Estética de los Medios Audiovisuales (CINEMA) at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), and focuses on comparative cinema and the reception and interpretation of film in different social and political contexts. Each issue investigates the conceptual and formal relationships between films, material processes and production and exhibition practices, the history of ideas and film criticism.

*Cinema Comparative Cinema* addresses an original area of research, developing a series of methodologies for a comparative study of cinema. With this aim, it also explores the relationship between cinema and comparative literature as well as other contemporary arts such as painting, photography, music or dance, and audio-visual media.

*Cinema Comparative Cinema* is published in three languages: Catalan, Spanish and English. The issues come out in June and December. At least half of the articles included in the journal are original texts, of which at least 50% are written by authors external to the publishing organisation. The journal is peer-reviewed and uses internal and external evaluation committees.

Finally, each issue of the journal is complemented by documentary materials and texts published online, which facilitate and enrich the topics studied in each volume, thus establishing links between longer research projects and monographic focuses throughout this process.



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## Editorial. *Forms in Revolution*

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Gonzalo de Lucas

In a recent interview, Brian Eno reminisced his idea, in relation to the digital, that the problems or imperfections of a medium end up becoming its most characteristic form: ‘when you distort something digitally it sounds ‘wrong’ in traditional terms. But that glitch, those little tics, are the character of this new digital world; they are its sonic form, if you like. Distortion is always the signature of things. If you see a 1930s photograph and it has grain, what it shows doesn’t matter much; you know its origin because of its physical aspect. Each era shows its personality through what is wrong’. (GALINDO, 2012: 25).

In the 1960s, the awareness of the possibilities of distortion was expanded in relation to photosensitive film, 16mm in particular. In that time, more perhaps than in any other period, cinema expressed itself through distortions, through what was ‘wrong’, recording and amplifying the margins and defects of the medium itself, such as the grain of the film or the noise of direct sound, and hence working on its matter. In Hollywood, the old masters explored the shadows, and in New York luminosity, until they blinded the images.

It was a period brimming with formal inventions that would result in the germ of the stylistic findings of successive decades: the descent of the sacred to worldly life (in Buñuel, Oliveira, Pasolini and later Garrel), would only be an example. Inventions in all the cinemas and places: the old and the new, here and elsewhere,

classical, modern, experimental, documentary, and without the need to separate them in such strict categories, as it would happen later on and until the present day.

During the years before May 68, in an arc that could be traced between 1963 and 67, if we take as a reference the two key editions of Knokke of that decade, cinema experienced a formal revolution in which aesthetics and politics were in sync. Just before entering academic departments, cinema declared itself anti-academic and anti-canonical, a thought to be continuously discussed and experienced. It is not surprising then, that those were untameable years, and that they also represent a distortion for any honest attempt at a lineal order.

After that would come all the conquests of academic regulation that would culminate in cinema festivals as we know them today. In 1976, precisely during his *anti-cours* for Canadian television, Langlois already warned: ‘There are two film-makers that today represent what I call cinema in freedom. (...) One day I listened to Picasso explain to someone, when talking about Van Gogh: “He is the man who taught us to paint badly”. Well, the man who taught us to make films badly is called Andy Warhol. (...) If you watch closely a film by Godard, or one by Warhol, you will see that they are both completely immersed in life. This is what I call cinema in freedom. A cinema that is not afraid of breaking something and to show it’. (LANGLOIS, 2006: 259). •

LANGLOIS, Henri (2006), «Le cinéma en liberté. Warhol / Godard». In *Jean-Luc Godard. Documents*. Paris. Centre Pompidou.

GALINDO, Bruno (2012). «Brian Eno. Brian the Brian». En *Rockdelux*, nº311, November, p.25.



# The Power of Political, Militant, ‘Leftist’ Cinema. Interview with Jacques Rancière

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Javier Bassas Vila

## ABSTRACT

In this interview, Jacques Rancière tackles specific questions about politics, aesthetics and cinema, presenting explanations that may help to orientate readers through the thought of the French thinker. The several periods characterising his work since the 1970s and, mainly from the publication of *Proletarian Nights* in 1981: his supposed ‘aesthetic turn’ – from workers’ history or political theory to aesthetics, which was always present since his first Works, theory, art and politics from the point of view of the ‘gaps of cinema’, the concept of the ‘politics of the amateur’ and its possible application in other arts, the distinction between the Brechtian paradigm (Group Dziga Vertov, Medvedkine) and the post-Brechtian paradigm (Straub-Huillet), as well as the relationship between ‘filmic language’ and the political struggles or the possible distinction between European cinema (the mythological order) and the American one (the order of the legendary), questions that he has addressed in his works of the last years, in which cinema has an increasing importance.

## KEYWORDS

Workers’ history, political theory, gaps of cinema, politics of the amateur, Brechtian paradigm, filmic language, political struggles, Pedro Costa, Straub-Huillet, Dziga Vertov Group.

Jacques Rancière's thought is undisciplined, at least in two different but interlinked senses. On the one hand, in the 1970s Rancière suggested a reading of Marxism that broke with the dominant interpretations of the time, specially with the scientist Marxism imposed by Althusser (see *La leçon d'Althusser*, originally published in 1976 and re-published in 2012 by La Fabrique – and due to come out soon in Spanish). On the other hand, the broad interest that his thought has triggered at an international level seems to be also the consequence of another in-discipline: his reflections are constructed in the cross-over between different disciplines – such as the theory of cinema, literature and contemporary art – from a prism founded in a powerful Reading of the history of workers in the nineteenth century. The texts ensuing from this crossover have not only sparked the interest of philosophers, historians and militants, but also of artists, film and art critics and curators.

We have asked Jacques Rancière general and specific questions about politics, aesthetics and cinema, which are here preceded by some explanations that we hope will help to orientate the readers who are less familiar with the thought of the French philosopher. We also refer to his books in some instances, to invite readers to undertake a more in-depth reading, according to the interests of each reader. All of this because what is at stake in this interview, as in thought more generally, is to trace one's own path, to translate with one's own words and experiences the words that our predecessors have translated and experienced for themselves.

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**Politics and aesthetics: In light of the most recent books that you have published, some readers have claimed that over recent years**

**your thought has focused on aesthetics rather than in workers' history or political theory itself – what has been referred to as an 'aesthetic turn' in your trajectory. However you have dismissed such 'turn' in several occasions, arguing that the aesthetic reflection was already at the centre of your works from the 1970s about the history of workers insofar as, already then, your point of departure was a reflection on what you consider 'the aesthetics', that is, the relation between what can be seen, said and thought. Nonetheless one can't but notice that since the year 2000, and aside collections of interviews and articles, you have exclusively published books on literature, art and cinema in relationship to politics.<sup>1</sup> Following on your first Works on the history of workers, what is it that interests you in these artistic forms? Or, perhaps more precisely, given that you state that political subjectivation can be defined as an interval to be occupied between two identities, do you consider artworks as paradigmatic examples of such 'intervals' in which a political subjectivation is produced?**

First of all, let me start by making clear that I have never written a general theory of subjectivation as an interval between identities, the examples of which would be provided by artistic manifestations alongside political manifestations. My interest rather lies in the phenomena of un-identification and in the material and symbolic intervals that authorise them. In *Proletarian Night*, I focused on the gap that opens up between the being-worker, as an imposed condition and habit, and the subjectivation of the worker produced by the distance taken from that being-worker. I attempted to show the cross-overs between those different universes that produced such intervals – for instance, the appropriation on the part of the workers not only of culture, but also of forms of speaking, looking and of affects that weren't

1. *La Fable cinématographique* (2001), *Le destin des images* (2003), *Malaise dans l'esthétique* (2004), *L'Espace des mots* (2005), *Politique de la littérature* (2007), *Le spectateur*

*émancipé* (2008), *Les écarts du cinéma* (2011), *Béla Tarr* (2011) and the collections of articles and lectures *Aisthesis* (2011) and *Figures de l'histoire* (2012).

made for them. I tried to rethink the figure of the political subject based on those crossovers and those intervals, in contrast with the theories that insisted on citizenship or militancy from the point of view of belonging. It seems clear, then, that this determines an interest in the forms of interference of identities that may be produced by the arts and specially those art forms with an uncertain status given their double character of 'mechanical reproduction' and form of entertainment. In this sense, cinema created an unprecedented form to bring together not only art and entertainment, but also the reproduction of the worlds lived and the pleasure of the shadows. This is why cinema has been subject to interferences of identities. Among the symptoms of May'68 in France, we find manifestations in support of the director of the Cinémathèque Française, whom the Minister of Culture attempted to sack on the basis that he wasn't following the working methods of a good cultural manager. This battle was led by the Nouvelle Vague, which was itself a significant expression of a gap between identities. In the 1960s in France there were two 'nouvelles vagues'. There was a sociological identity constructed by an influential reformist newspaper that identified a new youth, liberal in its way of living, and, at the same time, less marked by ideology, more pragmatic, more open to reformist policies. Now, the Nouvelle Vague appropriated this 'sociological' subject to make something else out of it, to create a figure of ironic distance. I am thinking here of the figure of distance embodied by Jean-Pierre Léaud in particular: the figure of a youngster half-rebel, half-simple, à la Buster Keaton. Godard made him represent, for instance, the posture of the 'Chinese' militant. It might have seemed ludic, but even the ludic side of these political postures corresponded to certain political subjectivity important at the time. In spite of the militant positions that some film-makers of the period may have adopted, the figures they produced played a certain role in the political subjectivations of the period.

Let's talk about your general approach to cinema. In *The Gaps of Cinema* (2011), you state that there

exist gaps between cinema, on the one hand, and theory, art and politics, on the other. I wanted to ask you three questions in relation to these gaps:

**The gap of cinema from theory: you say that you don't see yourself as a philosopher nor film critic and that, instead of film theory, you prefer to speak of cinephilia and of amateurism. You suggest then the 'politics of the amateur' as the position that best defines your particular relationship to cinema (RANCIÈRE, 2011d: 15). You also add that amateurism cannot be reduced to enjoying the existing filmic diversity, but rather constitutes a theoretical position – cinema as a cross-over of experiences and knowledges – as well as a political one – cinema belongs to all, not only to specialists. In that sense, is the politics of the amateur another name for the emancipation of the spectator, which you developed in your previous texts (*The Emancipated Spectator*, 2008)? In light of the emancipation of the spectator and the politics of the amateur, what room is there left for the critics, for the theorists (Deleuze, Bazin, Bergala, etc.), in short, for film specialists?**

The 'politics of the amateur' defines, to begin with, a position in the field of what is called 'theory'. The politics of the amateur opposes the idea that there would be a position – a discipline – that would belong to the literary or film theorist, the social historian or the cultural historian, etc.; and it opposes it because there is no univocal definition of these spheres, there is no reason to consider that the phenomena classified under these names constitute a set of objects that can be defined using rigorous criteria. The idea that they would define specific areas that would depend on their own methods is precisely a way to eschew the most essential problems therein posed and which are, precisely, the problems relative to the distribution of the genres of discourse, of action, of spectacle and, finally, of human beings. In fact, I already applied a politics of the amateur in *Proletarian Night*, placing myself in the territory of the social historian without holding a passport. Obviously, this politics gains a specific resonance

in relation to spectacle, and especially in those spectacles where the pleasure of judgement gets mixed together with pleasure itself. I have insisted on the function of cinephilia as an appropriation of cinema on behalf of the spectators, altering thus the criteria of taste. This is something that already began with Chaplin, who became the icon of an art of cinema opposed to the 'films d'art', and which was very important when the cinephilia of the 1950s and 60s glorified the authors of the westerns, of cinema noir and of musicals, dismissed by the dominant taste of the period. If cinema played the function that we evoked above, it is because during that period it belonged to the spectators alone. There weren't academic departments on film studies. And critic/theorists such as Bazin had a side a bit amateur, self-taught. Nothing to do with the style of the likes of David Bordwell. In any case, the politics of the amateur doesn't prevent specialists from doing their job. Nonetheless, it is useful to remember every now and then that 'cinema' is not in any way the name of a sphere of homogeneous objects that depends on the same form of rationality. What relationship a priori can be determined between theories of movement, the learning of the use of a camera in the different moments of the evolution of the techniques, the poetics of narration developed by this or that film-maker, the feelings that preside the outings on a Saturday evening, the management of the multiplex and the Deleuzian theory of the movement of images? At a certain moment, it was debated whether a theory of 'cinematographic language' could be constructed but, besides the fact that it incredibly restricted what 'cinema' signifies, the basic elements of that language could not be univocally defined. The famous language is slippery in many ways. A language always entails an idea of what makes language and what language makes. Cinema is always, at the same time, a form of entertainment and an art form, an art form and an industry, an art form and an idea of utopia of art, images and reminiscences of those images, words on the images, etc. In short, cinema is an art form only insofar as it is a world. And the 'theories of cinema' are then forms of circulating in that world; they

are investigations on particular segments of that world or the bridges between the different realities that the word 'cinema' encompasses. Such work of building bridges begins already with the need to say with words written on a page what has been perceived in a *défilement*, or a sequence, of images on a screen. The 'theories' of cinema or the 'film reviews' contribute to the production of cinema by remaking films and connecting their different realities, which constitutes the grouping we call 'cinema'.

**Gap between cinema and art: In this sense, what is the relationship between the 'entertainment' side of cinema and the politics of the amateur you are proposing? Can the politics of the amateur be applied to other arts that are, so to speak, less popular and entertaining than cinema (say, for example, opera or a certain form of theatre)?**

The popular or elitist character of an art form is not a fact, a constant. Opera is now a symbol of a form of spectacle reserved for the wealthy ones who can afford it, but it has not always been this way. Without the need to refer to emblematic events such as the representations of *La Muette de Portici* in Brussels in 1830 or *Nabucco* in Milan in 1842, which became truly popular manifestations, there was a time in which many small, provincial cities had their own 'lyrical theatre' and in which opera or operetta melodies circulated broadly and in parallel to the music then called 'of varieties' (in fact, they have continued to circulate since, albeit in the form of a commodity consumed in an inert form, via the soundtracks of films and advertisements). Likewise theatre in the nineteenth century was also a place where popular entertainment and high-brow culture could still be mixed together and where, therefore, the politics of the amateur could question dominant borders and criteria. In an article for the journal *Révoltes logiques*, I analysed the way in which the mixture still present in theatre could alter the meaning and effect of the works. More recently, in two chapters from the book *Aisthesis* (2011) I studied the way in which the poets, the spectators

of the 'little theatres', dedicated to popular entertainment, could elaborate the new artistic sensibility that influenced so strongly the art of theatre and performance later on. And when the public found itself outside of the theatres and the museums, cinema took over and produced the effects that other arts could have produced beforehand. And it could produce them because the border between art and entertainment was not fixed: the authorities that legislated about art didn't worry too much about cinema and didn't really have stable criteria. And so, on the one hand, people could feel a certain emotion without the need to decide if it was art or entertainment; and, inversely, undisciplined spectators could unfold their passion for art in Works that were in principle conceived as entertainment. Such alterations or interferences of legitimacy were essential for the constitution of cinema as an object of passion and, finally, as a world of its own. Obviously, after that, all forms of formatting have been produced, which tend to cancel the power of amateurs by predetermining the relationship of the films to *their* spectators.

**The gap between cinema and politics: The relationship between politics and cinema is not, in any way, a simple, direct and causal relationship. In the chapter titled 'Politics of Films', you differentiate a 'Brechtian paradigm' from a 'post-Brechtian paradigm' (RANCIÈRE, 2011d: 106): the Brechtian paradigm is characterised by a form that unveils the tensions and contradictions of the situations with aim at 'sharpening the gaze and the judgement in order to elevate the level of certitude that backs the adhesion to an explanation of the world: the Marxist explanation'; the post-Brechtian paradigm, conversely, does not offer an explanation of the world that would serve to resolve the tensions, but instead remains in 'a tension without resolution'. Does such shift from one paradigm to the other also represent a change in the practices and the aims of the political struggles in the turn from the 1960s to the 70s? What happened, for instance, between the practice**

**and the filmic language of the Dziga Vertov Group or the Medvedkin Group (Brechtian paradigm) and, on the other, the practice and the language of a film such as Straub-Huillet's *From the Cloud to Resistance (Dalla nube alla resistenza, Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet, 1979)* (post-Brechtian paradigm)?**

The Brechtian paradigm or the other types of paradigms of the politicisation of art that were operating after 1968 (to turn cinema into a medium of communication of the struggle, to break the separation between the specialists and the people by offering cameras to the people participating in the struggle, etc.) were based on the material existence of those struggles and on the Marxist 'horizon' that gave them meaning and intellectually granted their efficiency, without the need to demonstrate it materially. No one has ever verified the extent of the awareness produced by Brechtian distance nor the contribution of *Wind from the East (Vent d'Est, Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin, Gérard Martin, Groupe Dziga Vertov, 1970)* or *Vladimir and Rosa (Vladimir et Rosa, Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin, Groupe Dziga Vertov, 1970)* to the development of the struggles of the 1970s. When the double support of this politicisation – the materiality of the existing struggles and its ideal convergence in a scheme of interpretation of society and its evolution – crumbled, the critical models orientated by an anticipation of its effect also entered in crisis. On the one hand, criticism was duplicated: the procedure of 'distancing' that were at the core of a Marxist critique of situations, discourses and images were used to interrogate this form of criticism itself. This is what I tried to demonstrate in the way Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet appropriated Pavese's texts and used them to divide the Marxist certitudes that ruled over their film *History Lessons (Geschichtsunterricht, Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet, 1972)*. This is what can be seen, for example, in the dialogue between the father and the son in *From the Cloud to Resistance*, where the crude sense of injustice and the strategic consideration of the means and the aims oppose

each other without possible resolution. On the other hand, the sense of what is political was displaced: the emphasis shifted from laying bare the reasons of oppression to the manifestation of the capacity of the oppressed. See the difference between *Othon* (Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet, 1970), in which Corneille's text is recited in a monochord manner by people belonging to the art world, in order to make of that work a lesson on power that will always remain up to date (hence the importance of the sounds of city traffic that can be heard on the background) and *Operai, contadini* (Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet, 2002), in which Vittorini's text is recited in the midst of the countryside, almost in a liturgical manner by amateur actors, because the story of this ephemeral community is, first of all, a means to show the elevation of thought and of language to which the common people can aspire. The aim of the distance produced by the *mise-en-scène* is not to give a lesson about society, but rather to express the sensible capacity that characterises a period of time. I believe that such a displacement corresponds to a thought movement and to the politics of the last decades: when the Marxist forms of explanation of the world and of the struggle were, on the one hand, disqualified by the collapse of revolutionary hopes and, on the other hand, recovered from the services of the dominant order, the question of the ability of anonymous citizens and of the constitution of a new sensible tissue took over the lead from models of strategic action based upon the explanation of the modes upon which domination works.

**Continuation about filmic language and political struggles: in *The Gaps of Cinema*, you also discuss Eisenstein's *The Old and the New* (*Staroye i novoye*, 1929). There you state that, in that film, one can perceive the faith in a new political and economic system – collectivised agriculture – as well as the faith in a new filmic language. In that sense, which film of our time could be said to correspond to Eisenstein's film in that period? That is, in what new filmic language could we 'believe' today? Or, what filmic language should be avoided by the**

**films being filmed today about current social movements (such as 15M, Occupy Wall Street or Arab Spring) and what filmic language is associated to a new idea of the 'collective' – a collective life and economy?**

We shouldn't expect any correspondence there. Eisenstein, like Vertov, wanted to align the power of a new medium of expression with that of a new society. The aim of 'filmic language' was not to translate communist faith but to construct a social practice that opened up the construction of a communist world. Such identity of saying and doing pretended to suppress the mediation of images. It is clear that we are now witnesses to a completely different relationship. No one can think of making of cinema a communist symphony of coordinated movements à la Vertov, or a tractor that cultivates brain, to use Eisenstein's expression. Cinema exists massively as a technique, as industry, as a consecrated art, as academic discipline, etc. Hence film-makers can hardly imagine the identification of cinema with a new social practice. However they are rather faced with problems such as: how can situations and conflicts be represented today so as to break with the dominant logic of representation, the consensual logic that has previously subjected images to its own ends? These are the problematics – which in themselves do not have a determined relationship to recent movements – that have occupied me in my work: for instance, how to break with the victimist figure of the immigrant, as in Pedro Costa's researches/fictions about the end of a shanty town in Fontainhas and the character of the worker Ventura? How to break with the dominant vision of the pain and the ruins of the Middle East, as attempted both in Elia Suleiman's bittersweet comedies on Palestine and Khalil Joreige and Joanna Hadjithomas's films, in which the images of the destruction brought about by the war are replaced by the modification of the visible and the disappearance of the images produced by the war? We know that such attempts also question the distribution of the genres documentary/fiction, as well as prompt a new reflection on the forms of fiction. We know that

cinema is not only in the work of investigation/fiction about the present, its contradictions and struggles. There is also all that circulates instantly through the internet – the images of Tahrir square or Puerta del Sol yesterday, the images of Taksim today – and all that the form of video and video-installation encompasses today: this all entails a different relationship to technique than the dream of the Soviet avant-garde in the 1920s. New techniques are not used today as a form of constructivist practice that negates the mediation of the image. Internet, social media and the videos that circulate through these channels are rather used as a great common tissue that serves to bring together people and, at the same time, to extend such union via its images.

**In 1976, you responded to the questions asked by Serge Daney and Serge Toubiana in an interview titled ‘The fraternal image’ (RANCIÈRE, 2009: 15). We are interested in the distinctions that you trace therein and that serve to better understand the history of cinema and, more precisely, the political power of images. We will formulate two questions about this. In an interview, you first establish a distinction between European cinema (focused on the mythological order, the effect of the real on the code of representation) in opposition to American cinema (rather focused on the order of legends and their genealogy). You also add that European fiction refers to the impossibility of an origin that unites us (‘we are this way’), whereas American fiction tends towards the unity of a community (‘we come from here’)...**

The distinction that I established then didn't oppose European to American cinema, but was instead focused on the relationship between the figures of the nation, or the peoples, characteristic of traditional American fiction and the French tradition. I didn't speak there as a historian.

**But is that distinction still valid today? Could that distinction be understood as a symptom at a political and social level, and, if so, of what exactly? And also, what could be said about the**

### **fiction of the nation in other cinemas (Asian or Latin-American cinemas, for instance)?**

What I aimed to do then was to intervene in a French situation, which was the recycling of the ideas of the Left and of the figure of the people, which eventually led into the official culture of the Left during the Mitterrand period: a culture in which collectivity was thought of as a form of family meeting and of the distribution of types (the Renoir model, to say it bluntly). To this ‘family picture’ I opposed there the American model based on the narrative of a foundation, as the Western narrative, in which collectivity is born out of the conflict between mythological figures rather than realist ones. Obviously, such opposition was rather simplistic and the landscape I then drew quickly changed. The American legend about the birth of the Law was altered, either because of the assimilation of the cynicism of the Spaghetti Western, or because of attempts at violent contestation, such as *Heaven's Gate* (1980) by Cimino. And the American fiction of that time, from Scorsese to Ferrara to Terence Malik and Clint Eastwood, has recreated time and again the defeat of the Law and the cul-de-sac of the community. However it has done so preserving the same figures of epical enlargement. And European cinema, because of the market it wanted to occupy, has often exploited the familiar vein, either under the guise of the comedy of local customs in the French tradition, or Rohmer's tradition, or under the guise of the out-there family tale à la Almodóvar. It seems obvious that the game has become more complex given the emergence of the new Asian cinemas, which have relied in different affects than the dominant distribution: tensions between a dominant urban form of living and traditional cultures (Kiarostami) or between the standardisation of the ‘American’ mode of life and the relationships, temporalities and mythologies from other locations (Hou-Hsiao Hsien, Tsai Ming-liang, Wong Kar-Wai); interferences in the relationship between the imaginary and the real tied to specific forms of religiosity (Weerasethakul), for instance, amongst other tensions.

**Continuing with the interview from 1976, you state that Leftist cinema tends to artificially bring together the people, effaces the contradictions of the struggle and supports a nationalist imaginary through the workers' struggle. Do you perceive a change in the tendency of today's Leftist films (*The Shock Doctrine* [Mat Whitecross, Michael Winterbottom, 2009], *Inside Job* [Charles Ferguson, 2010], *Dormíamos, despertamos* (Twiggy Hirota, Alfonso Domingo, Andrés Linares y Daniel Quiñones, 2012), *Tahrir-liberation square* (Stefano Savona, 2011), Michel Moore's films, or others)?**

In that framework, I also established a distinction between features made for a wide audience, which aimed to put popular and workers' history at the service of a certain Leftist culture, and the films of the struggle which circulate essentially within a militant circuit such as *Un simple exemple* (Cinélutte, 1974), a film about the strike of a printing house in which the problem resided, as far as I understand, not so much on film itself but on the exemplarity given to that for of 'film of the struggle', that is, in the model of Leftist thought that turned particular workers' conflicts not only into 'examples' but also into proofs of existence of a collective process. It is clear, however, that this model fell out of favour with the workers' defeats in the 1980s. Today the dominant form of the political film is that of the documentary, which no longer accompanies a fight, but rather a catastrophe – for instance, the Columbine massacre or the crisis of the *subprimes* – focusing then on an analysis of the system that has produced such catastrophe. As well as vain manifestations of 'critical' self-satisfaction, as is the case of Michael Moore, this genre may produce incisive

analysis of the financial system (*Inside Job*) or original mise-en-scène, such as *Cleveland versus Wall Street* (Jean-Stéphane Bron, 2010), where the effective battle of the inhabitants dispossessed of their dwellings by the insurance companies led to a fictional trial. Now the authors of such analyses know from the start that being aware of the laws of the system is not enough to generate a revolt. This is not say that they are useless. We have seen how a moral sentiment that was seen as useless, indignation, has been able to display a renewed force in recent years. But that means, precisely, that the effect of such analyses of domination is not the unveiling of the laws of the system – which has increasingly become fatalist logic – but rather the constitution of a sentiment of what is intolerable and in the sharing of that sentiment. This is also the framework in which to think about the films made about the recent movements (Tahrir, 15M or Occupy Wall Street). Today these films participate in the constitution of a new collective sentiment, made of intolerance of the dominant order and, at the same time, of communal trust amongst individuals: the sentiment of a world of affects to be shared and not simply the sentiment of injustice or the absurdity of the world. Amongst the videos that contribute to the instantaneous circulation of images of new struggles and the more elaborate films, one has the feeling of a sort of common bet on the union of anonymous peoples and in the power of images. The rehabilitation of images against the so-called critical tradition is perhaps an essential question today. Perhaps such rehabilitation even relegates to the background the idea of a radical use of the cinematographic instrument. •

*Translated by Helena Vilalta.*

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# A French Roman. A Story about the Influence of Soviet Avant-Garde on Cahiers du Cinéma and the Later Rediscovery of Nicholas Ray. An Interview with Bernard Eisenschitz

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Fernando Ganzo

## ABSTRACT

Conversation with the critic and historian Bernard Eisenschitz about the influence of 1920s avant-garde Soviet cinema in the magazine *Cahiers du cinéma* in the late 1960s and early 70s and specifically during the turbulent period in which he was part of the magazine (1967–72). Repercussion of the rediscovery of that cinema (in which Eisenschitz played a key role thanks to his travels to Moscow in the late 1960s) for the ideological line of the magazine: the impact, specifically, of Eisenstein and his writings, in an editorial team whose ideological father, André Bazin, was always against the manipulation through editing. The article also traces a parallel with the arrival of the ‘New Cinemas’ during that period. The political consequences of such rediscoveries are logically an important point in the period of critical radicalisation of which Eisenschitz narrates his own itinerary, which finally leads to a late revision of American cinema and Nicholas Ray.

## KEYWORDS

Criticism, montage, *Cahiers du cinéma*, Sergei M. Eisenstein, André Bazin, Jean-Luc Godard, avant-garde, Soviet cinema, Dziga Vertov, Nicholas Ray.

**You belonged to *Cahiers du cinema* from 1967 until 1972, that is, during a period of great ideological turbulence in the magazine, with intense leanings towards Maoism and communism. After this, you were a member of *La Nouvelle Critique*, a magazine that was very close to the communist party, from 1970 until 1977. Most recently, you directed the magazine *Cinéma* from 2001 until 2007.**

I had worked at *Cahiers du cinema* before that, in the period of the yellow *Cahiers*, on the special issue on American cinema, no. 150/151. That was over two or three months, at the end of 1963. At that time the magazine was directed by Jacques Rivette. When I joined the magazine later on, the team was not the same. That more definitive return took place in 1967, on the occasion of a trip to the UK: I visited the shooting of *Accident* (1967) by Joseph Losey. Then I started writing notes on the monthly premieres, which we all found a lot of fun, and then I joined the team; it was the moment of the 'affaire Langlois'.

**Could you describe how you perceived the political and aesthetic developments during the period 1963–67, until you returned to *Cahiers*? How did that period become more turbulent and radicalised?**

Radicalisation arrived later, in 1967. The film that best describes it is *Masculin, féminin: 15 faits précis* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1966). My political culture was inherited. Cinephilia was a way to break with that tradition, although you know that when you throw that political culture out of the window, it will come back through the door. These were years marked by the primitive accumulation of films, of cinephilia, marked by American cinema, with some bursts of rejection of the 'New Cinemas'. Things precipitated. On the one hand, there were discoveries of forgettable –and in fact forgotten– American film-makers, who were disproportionately celebrated, as was the case with Don Weis and his film *The Adventures of Hajji Baba* (1954), very refined in terms of colour, as it was produced by Walter Wanger, but at the

end of the day it wasn't but an adventure film like any other. And on the other hand, we discovered, of course, the films of the Nouvelle Vague, and later on the so-called 'national cinemas', which we found fascinating. At the same time, there was a certain idea of superiority of American cinema, as it was a question of birth or divine right, while we kept on discovering things in other places. I am not sure whether it can be said that all of this crystallised at one specific time...

**Perhaps it's not a question of crystallisation, but rather the intuition that something was changing.**

The films we saw at the Cinémathèque Française –even though they were many– didn't signify this either. I thin in the presentations of the new films, Langlois's friendly programmes, who showed the works of young film-makers, but we didn't see great revelations in that sense. Langlois was reluctant –and by then we thought along these same lines– to the 'new cinema' and, in particular to all that was *self-conscious* in cinema. On one occasion he made a well-known introduction of the New American Cinema in the presence of P. Adams Sitney, who was bringing the film cans. He said he disliked that cinema but that even so he thought it was important to show those films. Reading *Cahiers*, one can clearly perceive how it was hostile to the American *underground*. It wasn't until 1970–71 that those films were rediscovered, with great delay.

During that time I used to travel frequently to Italy: I was doing research for a book that I never wrote, but I also looked for the traces of a global talent in film production, and an 'equality of rights' in the films that could be compared to American cinema: Luchino Visconti at the same level as Ricardo Freda's peplums; *Hercules and the Conquest of Atlantis* (*Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide*, Vittorio Cottafavi, 1961) had the same right to exist than *Viva Italia!* (*Viva l'Italia*, 1961) by Roberto Rossellini. I used to see the work of film-makers such as Cottafavi, Freda and Matarazzo. The communication between

France and Italy was uneasy at the time, and Louis Marcorelles, the director of the *Semaine de la critique* at Cannes, asked me to suggest films that might be suitable to show there. I then saw *Antes de la revolución* (*Prima della rivoluzione*, Bernardo Bertolucci, 1964), which was for me, as well as for *Cahiers* a couple of years later, a true revelation. Hence, in Italy, one could find the most fascinating cinema in B movies, genre films, comedies, historical films, in peplums, and in action films. And at the same time Bertolucci and Pasolini were there, whose films I really liked since the beginning and whom I recommended to Langlois when he asked me to look for films for his museum. The situation of film in Italy was like a cross-fade or an overlaying. But the radicalization arrived to 'national cinemas' with the politicization, mostly in France. For a number of years, American cinema, and even cinema itself, was abandoned in favour of our political activities.

**Were the dialogues and exchanges with other institutions usual, such as Godard's visits to the university in 1968?**

I didn't follow those visits at all. Luckily, several members of *Cahiers* went to the university when there wasn't an education of that sort and based their in their political positions of the time, which were certainly very radical, such as: 'Whomever is not with us is against us.' The dialogue was complicated and during two or three years I stopped talking with some of the members of the editorial team. But those who worked at the university were on the Maoist side of things. Meanwhile, in 1970, I worked at Unicité, an audio-visual communication company that belonged to the Communist Party. There I worked on the distribution of films, namely those that belonged to the archive of the party, a sort of 'litter bin', since it was there where the propaganda documentaries and feature films of (mostly) socialist countries sent their films. In that archive we sometimes found classics from former Eastern Europe or old French militant films; films that arrived there by chance, that had been produced by Unicité

or that we commissioned from film-makers that were ideologically like-minded. Using that archive, I worked on a distribution strategy that was 'militant' and 'commercial' at the same time. In two or three years, I managed to premiere 5 or 6 films, some of them Soviet films, not necessarily political ones, and even some of them not even very 'official', such as *Premiya* (Sergei Mikaelyan, 1976), a *huis clos* often compared to *12 hommes sin piedad* (*12 Angry Men*, Sidney Lumet, 1957). The film was about the internal structure of a factory, but was also a film that challenged the old methods by which power had been officialised: even if the successive governments of the USSR spoke of fighting against bureaucracy, pretending to fight against it, bureaucracy lived on generation after generation, since it was always the other's fault, and one could always say 'Down with bureaucracy!' That film was very ambiguous and we wanted to 'use' it to show that things could still move in the USSR.

**How is your work on the distribution of those films related to the special issue of *Cahiers* dedicated to Russian cinema of the 1920s ('Russie années 20', n° 220/221)? Could you narrate the sequence of events? What was the motivation or evolution of your critical thought during this period?**

We lived in a strict community. I travelled to Moscow in 1969, but the decision to work on the Russian and Soviet avant-gardes came before then. Regarding the evolution and motivation to do this, it's important to say that we weren't the only ones interested in this period, since there was a very important previous step: at the end of 1967 Langlois organised a great retrospective of Soviet cinema, interrupted in February 1968 due to the 'affaire Langlois', which continued in July that year at the Festival d'Avignon. That edition of the festival was very politicised and was very turbulent, with many antagonistic events of all sorts. Langlois titled his season 'Les inconnues du cinéma soviétique', calling attention to the work of Boris Barnet. He also screened Dziga Vertov's *The Sixth Part of the World* (*Shestaya chast mira*,

1926), which hadn't been shown in the West since the 1930s, and had since been considered lost. He also showed us film-makers such as Yuli Raizman, thus encouraging us to work on that cinema and, on the other hand, from then we started to look for the writings of Sergei M. Eisenstein. Because of the opposition of the Bazinian tendency, these had largely been forgotten.

With the impulse of that season, I travelled to the 1969 edition of the Moscow Festival with the aim of preparing the documentation for that issue. There I got in touch with Eisenstein's studio, in order to publish his writings. Later, in 1971, *Cahiers* published a second special issue (n° 226-227) dedicated to Eisenstein with texts by Jean Narboni and Jacques Aumont, the only one able to translate Eisenstein's writings into English. After leaving *Cahiers*, I carried on with this Project at *La Nouvelle Critique*, with several programmes on Soviet cinema, one of them Langlois's programme at Avignon, which was then also shown at the Centre Georges Pompidou.

**We are interested in that opposition between the Bazin and Eisenstein tendencies of understanding montage, that is: how could Eisenstein's ideological montage be defended by a magazine whose ideological father defended the apparently opposed notion of montage? To what extent were those programmes and the special issue on Soviet cinema able to change the editorial line of the journal?**

I never aimed to influence the editorial line. My position was that of an historian, not the one of an ideologue. Bazin's idea, as the most important thinker and member of *Cahiers*, was never questioned, in the same way that it happened with Godard, Straub or Renoir. They were fixed references, much stronger than Hitchcock or Hawks. What they all had in common –perhaps except Bazin– was that they were all figures 'against' something. With only his presence, Renoir rendered 'negative' all the French 'quality cinema', and was hated for that. In the cases of Godard and Straub, it seems

unnecessary to explain. But what is important to consider is that, by developing the 'ideology of transparency', the heirs of Bazin his ideas took to an extreme, in particular the 'macmahonians' and other admirers of American cinema –among which myself, to a certain extent. Bazin didn't talk about this, but about a 'window' open to the world. It was the idea of an art that concealed its own traces, which was not noticeable. Such perversion –or radicalization– of Bazin's idea, allowed rediscovering the work of any American film-maker who would have had enough with having his script filmed.

The Eisensteinian reaction against this idea was, actually, a political one. If you read the Jacques Lourcelles's film dictionary –a magnificent book, as well as the summit of that ideology that comes from Bazin– you can notice that, as Daney said, that tendency is translated into a conservative thought. I am not saying that Lourcelles is politically conservative, but his form of thought is –he in fact considers himself apolitical, which is common amongst the conservatives. Lourcelles is very generous, on the other hand, and was very critical with the 'black list'. In one of his last texts, in issue no. 3 of *Trafic*, Daney explains it very well (DANEY, 1995: 5-25). Art was 'trapped' in a political and historical movement, and could not get rid of it. It is not only a passive reflection, but also an instrument: films are an image of reality, but they can contribute to change it. Being somewhat utopian, it could 'function' politically. The reaction against the ideology of transparency aimed to politically revolutionise film thought. It may be that Eisenstein's cinema wasn't useful to understand the October Revolution, or that Vertov's helped better to understand the situation, but that direction was justified insofar as it enabled spectators to better assimilate what it showed and its own dream; to make cinema based on that dream. Even if this idea wasn't precisely formulated during that period, in *Cahiers*, more radically, once I had already left, they realised a somewhat absurd taxonomy dividing the films that passively reflected reality, even those that admirably did so (John Ford) and those that

intervened in reality (Brecht or Eisenstein, I guess). It was a double editorial written by Jean Narboni and Jean-Louis Comolli, across issues 216 and 217, and titled 'Cinéma/idéologie/critique'.

**Which were the most influential points in taht rediscovery? At the time, people spoke of Eisenstein's montage against Pudovkin's montage.**

They were Eisenstein and Vertov. To be entirely honest, I think that, at the time, in *Cahiers* they didn't see Pudovkin's films. He was considered as a sort of a placeholder, used as an example of a film-maker who hadn't understood montage. But I think they didn't see his films. They did see a bit of Kulechov, who wasn't a great film-maker, but not Pudovkin. Therefore the discussion was fraught since the beginning.

**It seems relatively easy to follow the traces of that will to ideologically shake the theory of montage, which arrives to its formal materialization in *Two or Three Things I Know About Her (2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle, Jean-Luc Godard, 1967)*, which is a very Eisensteinian film.**

Yes, but it is very difficult. I have never understood, not even after having spent six months reading Godard's writings and his biographies, how he captured things about the cinema that were contradictory, and far from being obvious. How he knew, since he started to make cinema, so many things about Bazin's open window to the world and at the same time about Eisenstein's montage. How he was able to understand all the equations of cinema, to use Scott Fitzgerald's expression in the beginning of *The Last Tycoon* (1941), if adapted to the idea of the 'author' in France. It is the delirium of a systematic poetic interpretation, for instance, of the critique of *Bitter Victory* (Nicholas Ray, 1956). How could he realise so early on that the two greatest editors were Eisenstein and Resnais, or to what extent Jean Rouch was fundamental for cinema? It is

strange for someone to be so much ahead of his own time and peer group, something that was also the case with Jacques Rivette. Having understood this, Rohmer had chosen another form of making films. And Truffaut –generalisations are useless–, the more films he made, the better he understood the mechanism of American classical cinema and the more he knew about its culmination and nemesis: Hitchcock. If he had chosen Ford or Renoir, it would have been different, but he chose Hitchcock, heir of Kulechov, with his Anglo-American puritanism.

**What relationship did you have with Godard during the making of *Histoire(s) du cinéma (1989)*?**

Soviet cinema was key here. In 1993 I wrote an article in *Trafic*, 'Journal de Moscou'. I had attended the first retrospective of Boris Barnet, where I had the chance to see some films that had been considered lost or forbidden. At that time, Godard was preparing *Les Enfants jouent à la Russie* (1993) and read the text, where I state that the counter-shot didn't exist in Russian cinema until the period of the Thawing, when they started watching American cinema. Before that, they did not have any theoretical or practical notion about the counter-shot. Godard was interested in this argument, and invited me to speak about it in the film, together with André S. Labarthe.

During the making of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* his only interlocutor was Daney. I visited him when the series was already finished, or at least the first two chapters were, which were determining for the rest of what was to come. He showed them to me and we talked about them, since we've always agreed on many things, but I was most closet o him when Gaumont decided to commercialise the series and asked Godard to submit a detailed index of all the fragments used. Godard said that he would never do any such thing, but that perhaps I could do. So, together with my partner, who is an archivist, we created an index of all the images, trying to remember all the films that appeared. Marie was in charge

of the pictorial element. It wasn't so difficult; I only had trouble identifying two or three images. Later on I travelled to Rolle to give him the index and ask him a few questions. We saw each other a few times only, doing a *run through Histoire(s) du cinéma*, commenting each image. We looked for the cassettes or the recordings. In some cases, I worked as a detective, since Godard would only conserve a cut-out from an exhibition catalogue as the only document, for example, so that we had to follow some improbable clues. There were also fragments of porn films that Godard identified by country: 'German porn', 'Russian porn'. With Daney, by contrast, he spoke so much about the project that he even included him in one of the episodes. I think that he showed him the beginning of the film and that the conversations started there, although only a little fragment is conserved in the film. As far as I am concerned, at the beginning I was too intimidated to be a true interlocutor. We had hardly seen each other during my time at *Cahiers* –in contrast with Narboni, with whom he had talked often and who even appeared in *Two or Three Things*. The Godard ideologue of the late 1960s scared me. Jean-Pierre Gorin or Romain Goupil, his colleagues at the time, seemed very arrogant and chauvinist, unlike Jean-Henri Roger, with whom he made *British Sounds* (Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Henri Roger, Groupe Dziga Vertov, 1969) and *Pravda* (Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Henri Roger, Paul Burron, Groupe Dziga Vertov, 1969). Even if he was a bit arrogant, Roger didn't have the others' egos. I met him as a student at the film school ran by Noël Burch and Jean-André Fieschi. He filmed one of his films in my building, in which I think Adolpho Arrietta was in charge of photography.

I also met Godard in 1995, when Marco Müller invited him to present *Histoire(s) du cinéma* in Locarno, on the occasion of the centenary of film. But Godard only accepted verbally and never fulfilled what he had promised: the book wasn't edited and the exhibition never happened. He only took part in one of three round tables. Perhaps Godard's attitude responded to the idea that the funds of the Swiss government were

owed to him in any case, because he was of Swiss nationality. We saw each other in a few occasions then, because I was in charge of selecting the speakers for the round tables.

**Going back to that ideological shake to montage and to the impact of the rediscovery of Russian avant-gardes in the critical evolution of *Cahiers*, what was left of American cinema after that? After that initial rejection of the New American Cinema, after that Soviet turn and the discovery of the new cinemas, did the view of classical cinema change in later film criticism?**

On specific occasions, I can use the plural 'we' to refer to *La Nouvelle Critique* or *Cahiers*, but I can't speak collectively here. The crux of the question is Nicholas Ray. In 1967 I left Unicity and abandoned active political life. I worked making subtitles, and that allowed me to see new films. And then Wim Wenders arrived, one of the most representative film-makers of the time, for whom I have great respect and with whom I have learned about music, although I wasn't a fan of his films. During the period of politicisation we saw as the echo of a certain cinephilia that hadn't reflected enough about what it was. Wenders was beginning to reflect, but in another way. As far as I am concerned, I couldn't go any further politically. I had an in-depth knowledge of cinema, but I had to go back to all that I hadn't understood before: American cinema, but in another way, trying to understand the films as a Frenchman, without focusing on the industrial context or the prestige of that particular film-maker at the time that the film was premiered. I knew the technique and the violent reaction of the Americans to or way of seeing his cinema. We were those who liked Jerry Lewis.

During that time arrived *Nick's Movie*, later called *Lightning over water* (Wim Wenders, 1980). My best friend, Pierre Cottrell was a key figure in the construction of the film, he knew well Wenders and his operator, Martin Schäfer, as well as the American crew and Pascale Dauman, who was still

distributing his films and who was the first one to distribute, around 1972, American underground cinema. After organising a programme about the New American Cinema based on the work of five film-makers, she premiered *La Région Centrale* (Michael Snow, 1971). I didn't see *Chelsea Girls* (Andy Warhol, 1966) in the famous screening at the Cinémathèque Française, but I did do in London, and even so, by comparison, Snow's film was the film that had a bigger impact on me during that time, because it was so different to anything we were used to. Before those underground screenings organised by Dauman, we weren't interested in that self-conscious American cinema. Those who wrote about it, such as Guy Fihman or Claudine Eyzikman, mostly looked for an institutional recognition. In *Cahiers* we were passionate about Sylvina Boissonnas, about the films of Philippe Garrel or Patrick Deval, the most interesting film-makers of the Grupo Zanzibar. Why were we excited by those films and not by the New American Cinema?

As far as the Cinémathèque is concerned, Langlois programmed three screenings each evening, one in each room. He had screened for instance Louis Feuillade 6 one-hour film series in one day: the screening began at 18h.30 and finished at 00h.30, with a little pause every two hours. We saw *Fantomas* (1913) or *Vampires* (*Les Vampires*, 1915), without intertitles, only following the images, something that was essential for Rivette. Among other long screenings, I would only highlight the 4-and-a-half-hour screening of *Jaguar* (1954-1967) by Jean Rouch, showing the unfinished film and commenting it. As Adriano Aprà said in his festival 'Il cinema e il suo oltre', Langlois, being a man of his time, had the capacity of inventing a cinema that went beyond cinema.

Let's go back to Nicholas Ray. When Cottrell, who also worked making subtitles and to whom I frequently spoke, said that Wenders was preparing a film with Ray, I thought that it would be the perfect occasion of travelling to the US for the first time and observing. I visited the shooting for a week. Then, little by little,

I kept a correspondence with his wife, who mentioned the possibility of writing a biography about him. She considered Nick as a hero, which is understandable in her case, but this wasn't my attitude. The genre of the biography didn't still exist in cinema, the only example I knew was *Citizen Hearst* (W. A. Swanberg, 1961), a reference for me, since it was based on documents; it was a beautiful book that taught me a lot about America. I started to have the desire to write a biography of Ray when I realised that it was a way to think about American cinema and the way we are used to writing about it. I asked myself if we would have treated it the same way had we known how it was made, since there they said that if that was the case we would have never taken Ray or Jerry Lewis seriously. Since Ray had 'wounded' many people that weren't still dead and I didn't want to upset them, I decided to approach the project not from a biographic point of view, but from the point of view of his working method as a film-maker. Biography played a part in the work of the film-makers that were no longer making impersonal films, as Howard Hawks, and were instead making films with a purely biographical sensibility: it is difficult to leave biography aside when writing about Ray's cinema, for instance. By showing how the films were made, I aimed to prove that the Americans were wrong as well as to conciliate what my generation appreciated of American cinema (Ray represented an important possibility for us) and what it rejected (Ray was excluded from that system and concluded his career with a demented and experimental film, *We Can't Go Home Again* [1976], which, as I see it, was linked to all his previous films, and forced us to review all his previous work as a form of commitment).

Anatole Dauman, the producer of *Night and Fog* (*Nuit et brouillard*, 1955) or *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) by Alain Resnais, among others, prepared then a film with Elia Kazan about his relationship to Turkey, a project thus related to *America America* (Elia Kazan, 1963). I met Kazan in the Street, when I was with Glauber Rocha, who came often to Paris. In spite of the cinema he made, Kazan

was someone warm and curious, so he was my first interviewee. Over the next five or six years, with the money I earned with the subtitles, I travelled to the US to continue conducting interviews during that transitional period in the history of cinema. When I started writing, in 1979, the first video recordings and VHS appeared, which offered the opportunity to watch the films again. But towards the end of the project there were many films that I wasn't able to see again. On the other hand, the Major Studios thought that it was tax-wise more interesting to donate the official and personal archives to American university libraries. In Los Angeles, in the university library one can access the archives of the RKO, where Ray made at least half of his films. Labarthe also conducted his research on Orson Welles there. Studying the different versions of the scripts or the production archives, I could work according to the American criteria. Over time, I collected VHS and was able to watch the films again. This is why I titled the book *Roman américain*, rather than 'Nicholas Ray'. For me, it was an opportunity to go back, in an objective way, to American cinema and the way we had seen it. For me, it was a personal journey, but one that was also satisfied my curiosity about non-film history, something rather rare amongst film writers: in *Cahiers* they saw me as the member that was most interested in history, something natural in Marxism. And American history is fascinating – not only the one about the crisis and the black lists, but also the rest. The book was, for me, like a shake and when I finished it I felt I have closed something. It wasn't a very structured book from an academic point of view – there are certain documents I didn't consult, I didn't interview certain people; instead I let myself go due to the fatigue and the need to finish the book, which took me 10 years to write.

**What was your experience of reviewing American cinema from another perspective at the same time that you received the impact of *La Région Centrale* ?**

There was a subversive side to Ray's work that I may have intuitively sensed but didn't see sharply when I began the book. It was the utopian side

identified by Ray himself in *Lightening over Water*: he dreamt of another cinema that could concentrate everything in an image and could say everything via the image; with a stronger image than all the history of literature and music, in which one could find all of Dostoevski and Conrad. This is what he tried to do and what he did. It was such attempt that the film-makers of the previous generation had discovered in his work, such as Rivette, Godard or Truffaut: something that one recognises in *They Live by Night* (Nicholas Ray, 1948) or in *Bitter Victory*; these films show another form of making cinema, this is why his career was interrupted. My research reinforced the tradition of *Cahiers*. Ray moves forward by going beyond the rules set by Hollywood. It was like the anecdote of Fritz Lang and the "test tube babies": Ray was presenting films in a university together with Fritz Lang and, after he began speaking, Lang interrupted him to say that what was going on in the world was horrible, that the next generation would only make "test tube babies". He thought that even sexual pleasure would be extirpated from humanity. Ray replied: 'But maybe that will be the ultimate kick: breaking the tube'. This was the idea: to follow the rules and at the same time try to break them. Rivette said that what was interesting about the book is that they couldn't have imagined that Ray was a crazy visionary like Abel Gance.

**And what was left of the French cinema then? I am thinking here of Eustache's idea that French cinema had lost its intensity.**

Eustache knew – I think he says it in a note to Jean-André Fieschi in *Cahiers* – that there are certain experiences that reach their limit, that when we reach a certain age, we understand that we won't live the great impacts of the past again, be they a film by Pasolini or by Snow. For me, as for Eustache, who at the end of his life would only see the films he recorded from television, the experience of cinema changed at a certain point. He worked on several beautiful projects, not all of which have been published, but we couldn't think of cinema as something to materialise. However he felt a great pleasure when watching certain films again and in

finding in them the few things that really mattered to him. For me, it's also complicated to assess what French cinema was then, because I never liked it that much. As a *boutade*, Daney said that it wasn't French cinema that was good, but those who thought about cinema in France, the critics: Jean Epstein, Roger Leenhardt, Bazin... I can agree with him and at the same time, for a moment, believe in the absolute opposite. It's obvious that this is false, as together with Hollywood cinema, Russian cinema –bar the aberrations of the dictatorship–, Italian cinema –in limited periods– and the Japanese one, French cinema is among the five most free cinemas of all history. In addition, it is the only one that achieved such freedom outside the studios and the great producers. That said, I like certain film-makers, not 'French cinema'.

**But the recuperation of a more radical cinema allowed 'French cinema' to see that other forms were possible, and in that sense I would like to speak about the importance of the figure of Glauber Rocha, which went beyond the forms of the young cinema that was being defended, and that were a Little codified, perhaps.**

There were several cultural bubbles, and he brought them together. A European bubble, a Brazilian one, and a mass of instincts. With Rocha, at a certain point, I had to take a certain distance. He showed me *Claro* (1975), but I was never able to give him my opinion. I have no opinion about that film, I was no longer there. What was extraordinary about him is that, at the same time, he concentrated tropicalism, knew Eisenstein as well as we did, and was able to say what was it that separated him fundamentally from Pasolini.

**What have been the decisive formal changes –comparable to your experience with Ray– in film-makers that, for you, could have renovated film itself?**

I am not sure if we could find anything similar today. Perhaps it is in so-called 'non-fiction'. Is it perhaps because the world changes? Because the cinema changes? Or, simply, because attention changes? I think that, from this point of view, Rouch was been more fundamental than Rosellini. •

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## BERNARD EISENSCHITZ

Bernard Eisenschitz is a film historian and critic and translator of films and books. He is the author of *Humphrey Bogart* (1967), *Ernst Lubitsch* (1969), *Douglas*

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*de Fritz Lang* (2001) and *Chaplin Today : Monsieur Verdoux* (2003). As an actor, he has appeared in *Out 1* (1971), by Jacques Rivette, *La Maman et la putain* (1973), by Jean Eustache, *Les Enfants jouent à la Russie* (1993) by Jean-Luc Godard, *Le Prestige de la mort* (2006) by Luc Moullet, *L'Idiot* (2008) by Pierre Léon or *Les Favoris de la lune* (1985) and *Chantrapas* (2010) by Otar Iosseliani. He has also worked in the restoration of *L'Atalante* (1934) by Jean Vigo.

## FERNANDO GANZO

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# A conversation with Jackie Raynal

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Pierre Léon (in collaboration with Fernando Ganzo)

## ABSTRACT

This conversation between two film-makers belonging navigates the progressive changes of cinema as lived by Jackie Raynal since the 1960s (her education, Langlois's programmes, her experience Turing the period of radicalisation, the so-called 'critical generation', the creation and development of the Group Zanzibar, collective forms of working), which are set in relationship to the experience of Pierre Léon since the 1980s. In addition, Raynal and Léon discuss the work of film-makers such as Jean Rouch or Mario Ruspoli and the relationship of 'direct cinema' to New American Cinema, the link Renoir-Rohmer, the transformation of 'language' in 'idiom' in relationship to classical cinema and its reception at the time, feminism and the reaction to *Deus foix*, collectives' such as Medvedkine or Cinélutte vs. Zanzibar, the differences between the New York *underground* (Warhol, Jacobs, Malanga) and the French one (Deval, Arrietta, Bard) and, finally, the work of Raynal as film programmer alter leaving Paris and the Zanzibar Group, at the Bleecker St. Cinema, tackling issues such as the evolution of the audience in that venue, the different positions of American and French criticism, the programmes 'Rivette in Context' (Rosenbaum) and 'New French Cinema' (Daney and Skorecki) or the differences in the role of the 'passeur' of the critic and the programmer.

## KEYWORDS

"Critical generation", Langlois, programming, Group Zanzibar, collective forms of working, underground, aesthetic radicalization, evolution of the audience, Andy Warhol, Jean Rouch.

**Pierre Léon:** Let's talk about how you perceived the progressive change in cinema, if there finally was one, even before you began working in the field, in the 60s.

**Jackie Raynal:** In the beginning, I only saw films at the Cinémathèque Française. I started frequenting it when I was quite young. I went to the cinema regularly since I was 7, which distinguished me from the general public. The sensation I had was similar to that of contemplating a treasure: at the time, the high number of possibilities one could choose from as a spectator was incredible. At the time, when I watched films, I used to notice details related to changes in social customs: why elderly women kept on painting their lips, why they dressed that way. I was particularly fond of gangster films. Yet I would be lying if I were to say that I was aware of that sort of transformation in cinema in the 1960s.

I worked as a photographer at first. After that I made some films. Shortly afterwards, I began working as a film editor for Éric Rohmer. But this was unthinkable for me in those first years when I began to go to the Cinémathèque Française. You would arrive, and that afternoon Henri Langlois might tell you that the scheduled film had not arrived yet, so he would choose to show another one, but the main thing is that it was always a fantastic film. This was a fundamental change for me, because to have the possibility to listen to Langlois, to count on his presence there, inevitably created a movement. Because Langlois would go as far as selecting his clients. When people entered the premises of the Cinémathèque, they came across a large staircase that led to the main auditorium. And, on the other side, near Langlois's office, there was a second auditorium, a smaller one. There in front of the staircase, he would deal with the distribution: he would ask some viewers to go up, and he would accompany the others to the small auditorium. He was like Jamin, the great chef, who would serve food according to the client's face. What's more, Langlois could carry out this sort of ritual because he would select his programme during that very week.

Did I notice a general radicalisation at the time? God, no! I was pretty and kept quiet. I knew that I could sleep with whomever I wanted and that I could choose. It turned out I chose a great cameraman who was like a bear, and that is how I got into cinema. So in no way can I say that I broke down any barriers. I now realise that I did, but I got into this for love.

**P. L.:** And one day they told you 'come and edit a film'?

**J. R.:** I knew how to dress well and how to behave in high society, (because at the end of the day, the film intelligentsia was a society; these were people with money, the film studios were still working then), I was asked to work as an extra in *The Busybody* (*Le Tracassin ou Les plaisirs de la ville*, Alex Joffé, 1961), starring Bourvil. Joffé's assistant noticed me. He asked me whether I was interested in editing, whether I wanted to start to work in film. But I didn't even know what film editing was. When I saw the Moviola, it reminded me of the sewing machines I used to use to make my own dresses, copying patterns off *Marie Claire* or *Elle* – I was never interested in the communist magazines my father used to read. Because of this, I wasn't scared of working manually with film. For me it was like mixing fabrics.

But I didn't think about making films. I didn't think about the future. I didn't have any expectations. You have to keep in mind that money was overflowing. At 18 I was offered an MG convertible. Which is unthinkable today. What I mean by this is that we lived in the moment; we didn't think about whether we wanted to make films or how we would make them.

**P. L.:** In any case, going back to the issue of the radicalisation of that era, I am convinced that one is not aware of it when one is 'living it'. You are part of that era, you're working. And, when you do this as part of a group, as is your case, everything is very casual. We only realise what it is in hindsight. So, a few years later, were you aware that the Zanzibar Group's work left a witness to a

change in perspective about cinema, or about the filmmaking process?

**J. R.:** It's important to speak about teamwork, seeing as with the arrival of digital film it is quite difficult to understand. We were a group of craftsmen. We worked in a process of trial and error. As an editor, for example, I needed the Foley artist's help, that is to say, someone who was in charge of recording a series of sounds to be included at the editing stage. I also needed to work directly with the camera operators. One has to try and understand what collective work was like under those circumstances. The tasks were *passed on* from one to the other; it's like fishing on a boat: you don't know which way you're heading, you work, you rest a while to smoke or drink, you get to know the people you are with, you fall in love, you see that it might bother someone else and you stop. It's something that affects creativity; it affects the speed of the working process.

**P. L.:** Even though I have only shot one 35mm film, what you are talking about sounds very familiar to me. Our way of making films is very similar, even if we shoot on digital.

**J. R.:** In your case, this is probably due to your being a great actor, you write very well, you are a good film-maker, and cultivated. You are even capable of making a Dostoyevsky adaptation<sup>1</sup>. There is a 15-year gap between us. The Zanzibar Group was like a family: we didn't work in a studio, but we had our means. When that family broke, things were over for me. What makes me despair, in terms of technical changes, is to have to learn anew, over and over, something I already know how to do perfectly. And this is due to the instruments, as they are increasingly smaller. It annoys me that the market imposes those changes, as we came from the tradition of Pathé, the Lumière brothers, the daguerreotype and Niépce. Your training is in theatre, you know the opera and music well. Mine comes from film. I know film the way Langlois taught it.

1. A reference to *The Idiot* (*L'Idiot*, Pierre Léon, 2008).

**P. L.:** It's true. My background is above all literary. I think that all film-makers hold an inheritance from different arts in varying proportions. Now I understand what you explain better, as your origin, in terms of film, is in the very fact of manually working with the filmstrip.

**J. R.:** Exactly. It's like Cézanne, who said it wasn't he who painted, but his thumb. Or Manet, who said he only painted 'what he saw'. We mustn't forget the impact that 'Caméra/Stylo', Alexandre Astruc's text, had on us. It was an important step when the film-makers from the Nouvelle Vague understood that one could make a travelling shot using a wheelchair, and they confronted the studios with it. *Sign of Leo* (*Le Signe du lion*, Éric Rohmer, 1959) emerged out of that. It was shot entirely on natural locations, just like *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*, Jean-Luc Godard, 1960). For me, the great masterpiece of those years – even if it went unnoticed at the time, like *The Rules of the Game* (*La Règle du Jeu*, Jean Renoir, 1939) – was *Sign of Leo*, because it doesn't let you know whether it was shot using a handheld camera or a tripod. In any case, it doesn't matter much whilst we contemplate its beauty. All of this is comparable to Martha Graham's democratisation of dance. And, on the other side of the ocean there was Jonas Mekas, who put into practice a way of making films that Jean Rouch only dreamed about.

**F. G.:** It is true that, upon reading Rouch's writings on film, one cannot help thinking his ideas were close to what Jonas Mekas or Stan Brakhage were doing in the United States at that time. Had Jean Rouch seen their films?

**J. R.:** In Rouch's case, the key was Mario Ruspoli and his idea of 'direct cinema'. Rouch travelled less to the United States; he was more influenced by the films of Ruspoli, who was a great film-maker. In the early 1960s, when he was thinking about how to build a camera prototype that was identical

to the Coutant, with synchronic sound, Ruspoli invited Albert Maysles over. Rouch was already there. For Ruspoli, the camera had to integrate the direct dynamics of the shoot, just like another character in the film, to the point of having the characters pass the camera on from hand to hand. This sort of film created a lot of employment. But, once again, what was fundamental was the format: because they were shot on 16mm, those films could only be screened in schools, town halls, or workers' unions. Therefore, that film movement did not reach the bigger film theatres, as they were not equipped for it.

**F. G.:** Perhaps this link could be traced down in a less direct manner, through the influence of Dziga Vertov himself.

**J. R.:** Yes. And Robert Kramer could have also been a link between Rouch and Mekas. Chris Marker, who only wanted to shoot in 16mm, was also important, though he was capable of shooting on 35mm very well. All these filmmakers were publically committed. Our interests as a group were far closer to the ideas of Andy Warhol. In Paris, we were taken for hippies, the first factory boys and girls. All of this took place between 1967 and 1968, not before.

The members of the Zanzibar were much younger than Rohmer, who was twenty years older than me, or Godard, who is 12 years my senior. The generational difference can define everything. When I edited Rohmer's films, I remember paying great attention to the soundtrack. I used to go to clubs and jazz clubs, record people and send him the tapes. To him, all of this was very unusual. I proposed to Rohmer that we insert these recordings in the films, as they would make them seem more modern. In *The Collector* (*La Collectionneuse*, Éric Rohmer, 1967), for example, you hear some Tibetan trumpets that I recorded. At the time, even if we worked with excellent sound engineers, an editor also took care of these matters. It was like DIY. Rohmer loved the recordings that I made in the street, which matched quite closely to the dandies in

*The Collector*. A common practice consisted in inserting that sort of sound at a very high volume. Ambient sound shaped the film. We would work with up to 18 soundtracks.

**P. L.:** You made a funny connection between Rohmer and Renoir earlier on. Thinking about the idea of the double screenings... *Sign of Leo* begins where *Boudu Saved from Drowning* (*Boudu sauvé des eaux*, Jean Renoir, 1932) left off. The link between Renoir and Rohmer does not stand out at first, but *Sign of Leo* is a very violent film, so the connection between them is quite crude.

**J. R.:** Renoir always made his characters speak in a peculiar fashion. In *The Rules of the Game* there were two foreigners, something the French audience didn't like much. In *Sign of Leo*, there is an American with an incredible accent. The French weren't quite prepared for this; we mustn't forget their anti-Americanism. But yes, as you say, the relation with *Sign of Leo* begins where *Boudu Saved from Drowning* ends. It's very interesting. Dreyer and Renoir were Rohmer's favourite filmmakers.

On the other hand, one must keep in mind that at the time, a sort of split had already taken place: on the one hand, we saw films from the Nouvelle Vague on a daily basis, because we were young and we felt close to them, and, on the other hand, we continued to learn with the great American classics. André S. Labarthe used to say that film had found the formula of suspense. Cinema was the story of a high-speed train that had arrived on time.

**P. L.:** When you and Jean-Claude Biette started making films, in the mid 1960s, you were what Biette called 'the critical generation'. With this he meant the films of both the Diagonale Group and of the Zanzibar Group. I would situate this generation between 1963 and Pasolini's death.

**F. G.:** In fact, Biette's critical spirit was always marked by an attempt to speak about old films as if they were new releases, and of new releases as

if they were already classics. I think this started getting complicated when your generation began making films, when American films started to be seen through that critical filter.

**P. L.:** For Biette it was a way of continuing to affirm that there is no difference. Or that this difference is merely a historical one, not a real one. The films are alive, they can't be tucked away in a cupboard. Biette could watch a film by Hawks as if it were a contemporary one. When a present-day critic watches a film classic, he may find it good, but to him it will always be 'a good old film'. Why? Because critics believe in rhetoric. They are incapable of breaking away from the rhetoric of the specific era that the film carries with it. A present-day viewer can doubtlessly enjoy watching *An Affair to Remember* (Leo McCarey, 1957), but it is possible that he might find it too melodramatic or unrealistic. In this case, one would have to explain to him that those elements are part of a rhetoric that is specific to that era, and that they are present in all those films. It is a sort of 'obligation of language'. If they are not capable of perforating that 'language' to reach the true 'speech' of the film, they are lost. But it is not the audience's fault. We have to be able to distinguish what is part of historical rhetoric, which is often quite 'hysterical'. In Soviet films, for example, if you are not capable of seeing this, you will not be able to understand a single film. The same goes for Hollywood classics. In any film there will inevitably be an ideology. There is one in contemporary film as well, although it isn't the same one. In 50 years' time, I think the audience will have great trouble understanding the American films of our time. For the same reasons.

**J. R.:** I remember that I didn't go to see *Frenzy* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1972) when it was released. The catastrophe that was feminism had arrived during that time. For my friends, it was unconceivable that one of us might like *Frenzy*. It was seen as an attack on women, a film that compared us to dolls. And yet, later on, I watched it and realised that it was not at all aggressive in

that sense. At that moment, this feminist reaction against a certain kind of cinema triggered endless comments such as 'What are you doing watching these things? Women are naked and are murdered in the film! They're cooking all the time!' To be honest, I fell into the feminist 'soup', even if I wasn't really interested in its discourse. I was however fascinated by the feminist sublime of women like Delphine Seyrig, for example. But feminism wanted to scare men, which in my point of view caused great damage. Above all, it led to a broader marginalisation.

**P. L.:** In this sense, did you ever have any problems with *Deux Fois*?

**J. R.:** As I was saying before, we weren't going through a crisis at the time. AIDS didn't exist either. It was a blossoming era, a golden age. On the other hand, I think that we are still in a golden age of film, even if there is one big difference: more and more films are being made, but, at the same time, there are far less film theatres to show them in, which makes everyone unhappy.

**P. L.:** When they asked Welles to give advice to new generations about how to make films, he always answered that if people had a television set at home, they could make their own films with it. The problem today is distribution. Distributors don't think it's possible to do things differently. Film-makers cannot defend themselves from that, although this argument can never be used as a reason for not making films. We make do with what we have the best we can. I am from a generation that was always between films on celluloid and the first VHS tapes – I welcomed them with much happiness. I have never tried to theorise over this change in the nature of the image. For me, you either make films or you don't. The format is not important.

When I started making films I would sometimes react against films that impressed me, as they somehow 'prevented' me to think about the ones I wanted to make. Yet this didn't happen to me with Dreyer's films: they are so beautiful they

make you want to carry out your own projects. When I discovered the Diagonale Group's films, or those of Adolpho Arrietta, or your films, Jackie, I said to myself that I was also capable of making them. But I went for it without projecting myself socially, which is what I find most shocking at the moment. Today, youths who want to 'make films', want to be 'inside film'. My films had nothing to do with this 'social' aspect. For me, going to see films wasn't a social practice. In 1980, Mathieu Riboulet and I picked up a camera and made a film, as simple as that. 6 years went by before I shot another film, *Two Serious Ladies* (*Deux dames sérieuses*, Pierre Léon, 1986). It was an adaptation of a novel by Jane Bowles that Louis Skorecki had lent me when we were working at *Libération*. It is not that common to read this book and feel the desire to shoot a film, because the novel takes place in different parts of the world. But shortly before that I had seen *Winter Journey* (*Weißer Reise*, Werner Schroeter, 1980), a story about sailors and about travels that was shot using canvases and painted walls as its only backdrop, Mèliés style. So I realised that Schroeter was right. In my film there were trips to different places in Central America by boat, so every weekend we would paint the walls of the room in order to change location. It was a simple process, almost an unconscious one. To take a step from watching a film to making one was almost natural. Afterwards I became less naïve and less interesting, because at a certain point I learned how to shoot and edit, while at the time I didn't even know whether I needed to split up a sequence shot with another shot. Marie-Catherine Miqueau, the editor, would laugh at me when she was editing because she would say there was nothing she could do because there were no additional shots. So I learned that there are certain things you have to do in order to have various possibilities, and about the importance of editing.

**J. R.:** It's interesting that you should talk about possibilities. Together with the radicalisation of *Cahiers du cinéma* came a socialist-communist fascism. It was so extreme that you were no longer

allowed to use the shot-reverse shot, whilst before we had done whatever we pleased in that sense.

**F. G.:** Before Cinélutte or the Group Medvedkine, through whose members one could see a rejection of the Auteur theory, you get the feeling that Zanzibar was very different. Before you said that you felt closer to the spirit shaped by Andy Warhol around the Factory. Were you in contact with the New York community that congregated around figures such as Jonas Mekas, Ken Jacobs or P. Adams Sitney?

**J. R.:** Patrick Deval, Laurent Condominas and Alain Dister travelled to the United States in September of 1968. I did the same two months later. When Sylvina Boissonnas – who had been our patron up until then – became a feminist, she didn't want to have anything to do with us. So I sold my apartment in Paris and used the money to maintain them, taking Sylvina's place. We lived in this way during three years. We bought a car in San Francisco and visited all the communities, even going as far as Colorado and Mexico. Yet unlike in New York, we watched no films in San Francisco. We went to concerts to see The Who, Cream or Led Zeppelin.

In New York, Mekas, Jacobs, Sitney, Warhol or Gerard Malanda already formed a true community when we met them. As a group, they were much poorer than we were. They lived in the Bronx or in Queens. Ken Jacobs's family was really humble. My impression was that the Zanzibar's story was an operetta compared to theirs. By living as a community, in their own way they managed to change the world: New York was bankrupt then, so they recuperated apartments and old factories. In the areas between 38th Avenue and the edge of the city there were hardly any shops, so it was full of people squatting apartments. But life was really tough, as you can see in *On the Bowery* (Lionel Rogosin, 1956). A good portrait of New York in those years, where people were dying of starvation in the streets, is *The Connection*

(Shirley Clarke, 1961). So, the way we saw it, the American movement was totally 'demented', but not political.

Therefore our idea of a collective, in that sense, was much more American than French. We were not that interested in the 'engaged' or 'political' aspect of the French collectives. They were, above all, left-wing groups, Maoists. We did not want to be catalogued in that way. We were part of the same 'broth', as our parents were communists. In fact, almost all intellectuals were communists – I could quote Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Yves Montand, Simone Signoret... But for me, it was not interesting to turn to communism or Maoism, because it had been part of my education. When I was in Rome in 1968, working on the *Ciné-tracts* we had shot in May, we were all tagged as hippies, as dandies driving a convertible. As to our appearance, we imitated British and American aesthetics, as we found them far more brazen than French ones. That time in Rome was also important because the Cinecittà studios lived on there. One could find beautiful actresses such as Valérie Lagrange, Tina Aumont or Margareth Clémenti working with Pasolini or Fellini. We were interested in Italian films from that era because they were more playful than the French. You may say that the fall of French cinema after '68 was very hard. On one occasion, I posed naked for a photo feature, after which no one would hire me, except for Rohmer. In fact, *Deux fois* was a big scandal. Because of it, among other things, I had to move to the United States.

In any case, if Zanzibar, as a collective, felt closer to the work of Warhol or Mekas, this was due to the fact that we had seen their films at the Cinémathèque Française. So we go back to Langlois once again; he educated us. We would go to see films on Fridays at midnight or on Sundays at eleven. And you could only see them there for the simple reason that they had been shot on 16mm. The film theatres were not equipped to project that format then. You could blow them up into 35mm, but you needed money to do that and it was very expensive.

**F. G.:** In an article, Louis Skorecki (SKORECI, 1977: 51-52) comments that, after *Deux fois*, he found it very difficult to continue working in Paris, whilst in New York the film even opened some doors for him. Our impression was that other filmmakers such as Adolpho Arrietta might have also done better in New York than in Paris.

**J. R.:** That is absolutely true. In Paris, the small ghetto in Le Marais could watch Arrietta's films thanks to Jacques Robert, the great director of the film theatre. As for myself, a woman in France who was working as chief editor of the *Nouvelle Vague* – I mean *Six in Paris* (*Paris vu par...*, Claude Chabrol Jean Douchet, Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Daniel Pollet, Éric Rohmer, Jean Rouch, 1965) in particular –, I was not easily allowed to move onto directing. It was unacceptable for an editor to appear nude or urinating on the carpet in her own films. At the screening of *Deux fois* in 1968, at the Cinémathèque Française, a guy went as far as slapping me. He wanted to impress his girlfriend, who came crying to me saying 'Why did you do this to me?' But Rohmer and Rivette liked it, even if they never wrote about it. Daney did a little later. But it's funny, because in the United States, indeed, it did much better. An individual who does something different is respected more, whilst the French find this irritating. Even so, I must say that in Memphis I went through another controversial experience with the film, in 1972. The viewers thought they were going to see an Andy Warhol film, a sort of 'filming contest' by the Zanzibar Group. The theatre was full, because Warhol films were never shown there. Doubtless, they wanted to see a depraved, harmful, film. A guy broke a beer bottle and came to attack me: 'You are trash!' I responded something that made everyone laugh: 'It must be Saturday night!'

**P. L.:** When did you start to work as a programmer? I must point out that I detest the word 'programme'; I find it confusing. People may think that it is a political programme, while 'programming' means to carry out a form of editing similar to the one Langlois put into

practice: you place one film next to another and you surprise the viewer.

**J. R.:** I travelled to the United States to stay for good in 1973 to edit quite a big film, *Saturday Night at the Baths* (David Buckley, 1975). Soon after that, I was asked to make a small programme, a small *carte blanche*. For me it was no effort to 'alinear' those films. Without quite knowing what I was doing, they actually worked. For me it was like a bet, just to make some ideas emerge. It was a 'pioneering', 'adventurous' experience, keeping in mind, above all, that I had just arrived in America.

**F. G.:** Could you mention some of the cases when having placed one film next to another, you noticed a sort of meeting, a friction or transformation?

**J. R.:** I think we managed to do something like that on several occasions: to create a new meaning through the programme itself. One of the most accomplished seasons was the one on Jacques Rivette, whose films were shown together with some American films. The presence of Jonathan Rosenbaum was fundamental, as he participated in the conception of this programme, 'Rivette in Context'<sup>2</sup>, which took place at the Bleecker in February 1979 after the book *Introduction to Rivette: Texts & Interviews* (1977) had been published. Rivette was greatly influenced by American films, but which ones? We needed a critic that was as dedicated as him to know that we had to see *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Howard Hawks, 1953) next to *Celine and Julie go Boating* (*Céline et Julie vont en bateau*, Jacques Rivette, 1974), to mention one of Rivette's films. What Rosenbaum did was highly noteworthy. It is proof that films are influenced greatly by their environment, whether it is another film, a book, or a review. It's something we noticed in the case of the MacMahonians in particular, as they were

groups of critics or cinephiles that used to group film-makers together. In any case, you always have to look for a good 'frame' for a film. Because of this, when we now watch *Gertrud* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1964), for example, we find it hard to understand why it wasn't appreciated by a French audience. It was probably as a result of this issue. Sometimes, a series of common themes exist that the public might not notice are there which make us pay attention to certain elements.

**F. G.:** The Bleecker Street Cinema had already screened experimental films such as *Flaming Creatures* (1963) by Jack Smith before it was banned. How did you deal with the inheritance of the former programmes of the film theatre? What distinguished your programmes from the film seasons that were normally organised there before you arrived?

**J. R.:** I had seen Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963) in that same theatre. The Bleecker Street Cinema only opened on weekends. The building was rented out by Lionel Rogosin. Rogosin distributed the main *underground* films from New York through Impact Films, but it stopped going well because Mekas, Rogosin and Smith split up. There was a considerable difference in class between Rogosin and Mekas or Smith, who were much poorer. Subsequently, Rogosin ended up losing his economic means and ended up programming his own films. At the beginning, the Bleecker was a 'speakeasy' with a mainly lesbian audience, especially during the 1930s. It used to be called Mori. In fact, there is a very famous photograph of Berenice Abbott where you can see the old building on Bleecker Street, which was built by Raymond Hood, the same man who designed the Rockefeller Center. He made this building with five Italian style columns just for fun.

In New York, both the film theatres and the audience were very diverse. If you are in charge

2. See Jonathan Rosenbaum's article in the first issue of *Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema* about this series.

of the programme of a theatre there, it is most important for it to be as close to downtown as possible, as that's where the New York University, the New School and the School of Visual Arts are. This sort of audience wanted to see the films of its time, whose characters were their same age. The auditorium of the Anthology or of Bleecker Street Cinema had a very young audience. That of the Carnegie Hall was instead far more conservative. At the beginning, my husband, together with a programmer, was in charge of the latter, while I worked at the Bleecker, as I was younger than he was and knew my audience better. My auditorium was much cosier. Some beggars or fugitives would come to sleep or take refuge there.

The main thing is, an auditorium provides nothing unless you have many subscribers or you are 'specialised' in something. The MoMA or the Anthology were non-profit institutions, but the MoMA had much more money paid by members or subscribers than the Anthology. Under the law, both were obliged to show films that were not very commercial, or that weren't particularly supported by the critics. One must remember that, in the United States, the press is far more important than advertising. American film critics can work without being afraid of being censored; they can write a very negative review of a great film without fear of repercussions. In France, on the other hand, the 'army spirit' prevails, they don't want to attack their allies. In New York you knew that if Jim Hoberman defended a film you had programmed, or if the *New York Times* did, you would have a hit at the box office.

In this sense, the 1970s were a time for taking a stance, when disputes between magazines were commonplace, for example between *Film Culture* and *Film Comment*, to the point that those disagreements would lead to small sects. Even Mekas would come to see me to say he would beat me up if I didn't show independent films. Surely not in those words, because Mekas was an adorable person. I set him straight and told him that, being the good daughter of Langlois that I was, I would programme all sorts of films.

**P. L.:** There is also a snobbish side, an aspect of 'the happy few' that I think is necessary, and that consists in looking for what nobody wants to see. When I discovered *Women Women (Femmes femmes, Paul Vecchiali, 1974)* nobody knew it. It was as if that film belonged to us. Soon after that, we travelled to the south of France to watch the rest of the Diagonale Group's films. The taste for 'the invisible' changed my way of thinking, as it generated a general distrust towards anything that was successful. Marie-Claude Treilhou often says that what bothered us about commercial films was its falseness, how easy it was to unmask it. That happened to me with *Clean Up (Coup de torchon, Bertrand Tavernier, 1981)*. I don't know whether it was a matter of intelligence, but at least it was important for thought to move. Etymologically, the word 'intelligence' means 'to connect things'.

**J. R.:** And it's done from the heart.

**P. L.:** That's true. Perhaps that's why I felt so close to the films by the Diagonale Group at the time. I used to read *Cahiers du cinéma* regularly, but there was something about its dogma that I didn't like: the denial of psychology. They would deny that something beyond the formal or the political could exist in a film. I needed small nothings to continue to exist in films. I used to find this simple aspect in Vecchiali's films: they might fail sometimes, but the life contained in those films was generally not directed towards formalism. For me, Jean Renoir was a sensual film-maker, whilst for *Cahiers* he wasn't. I understood Hitchcock's films when I realised that they dealt with the burning desire that circulated between men and women. He was only interested in how a man and a woman might meet, how they might make love, how they could be together. Suspense in his films is not about the question of 'who killed who?', but about the meeting between man and woman. It is something I recognise in almost all of his films. You just need to think about the idea of the wife in *The 39 Steps* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1935). I don't find this dimension in Fritz Lang's films of course, so in that case I agree with *Cahiers*. The only film he made that was less cerebral, the most

captivating one in terms of emotion, is *Clash by Night* (Fritz Lang, 1952). I have never seen a film with such a terrible psychological game, as the question that matters is always that of love. That is why I used to read *Cahiers du cinéma*, even though I kept my distance.

**J. R.:** In my case, I experienced the same feeling with Stephen Dwoskin's films. I remember the day I saw his film *Jesus Blood* (1972). It was in a small theatre run by Langlois at the Musée de Cinéma, where he had installed a giant cushion. He used to screen films on a small screen, so that the experience of seeing them was different.

**F. G.:** How were film-makers such as Jean Rouch known in New York?

**J. R.:** Actually, they didn't really know Jean Rouch or Jean-Daniel Pollet that well, but Truffaut was very famous. I hadn't worked with him as an editor, but I had worked with Godard, Rohmer, or Chabrol. They were not just popular amongst more avant-garde circles or museums, but also in art house theatres, of which there were quite a few in New York. Their films were released thanks to the work of uniFrance and Truffaut, whose help I must continue to acknowledge. With Truffaut's death came the end of what we might call 'independent cinema', as he used to travel to the United States quite often to interview film-makers. And he would do it without speaking a word of English, as he always managed to collaborate with a translator. Truffaut was the 'bridge'. Now there is no one, but at the time Truffaut's visits were very fruitful for those who screened French films, he provided a lot of publicity. He used to ask for many films to be screened in New York, especially at my film theatre.

During that time Langlois was also travelling to New York all the time, he wanted to build a cinemateque there, but the Museum of Modern Art deceived him. They must have noticed he was dangerous, that the audience might diversify.

That was the time, more or less, when they began to prepare their present collection, which is about 50 years old.

**F. G.:** Could you tell us a little bit about the programme Serge Daney was invited to do at the Bleecker Street Cinema in 1977? The idea, if I am correct, consisted in showing some films from the so called 'New French Cinema', among others *Number Two, Here and Elsewhere* (*Nombre deux, Ici et ailleurs*, Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, 1976), *How's it Going?* (*Comment ça va?*, Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, 1978), *Kings of the Road* (*Im Lauf der Zeit*, Wim Wenders, 1975), *News from Home* (Chantal Akerman, 1977), *The Musician Killer* (*L'Assassin musicien*, Benoît Jacquot, 1976), *Fortini/Cani* (Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, 1977) and *I, Pierre Rivière Having Slaughtered My Mother, My Sister And My Brother* (*Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma soeur et mon frère...*, René Allio, 1976).

**J. R.:** Indeed, we showed those films within the framework of a *Cahiers du cinéma* programme. I yielded the theatre to the team from the magazine during two weeks in 1977. We invited Daney and Louis Skorecki. Our cinema was like a museum to us, a place where we programmed the way you would normally do in a cinemateque. Sometimes it would take us two years to conceive a programme, as New York is a very demanding city. As to the selection, *Number Two* was well received, once again thanks to a subterfuge: we found an unconventional way of showing it. We would sell a ticket that would be marked upon entering the auditorium, and with it the viewers could watch the film as many times as they pleased for the duration of one month. At the beginning, a large part of the audience would leave the auditorium half way through the film, but they would keep their tickets. Later, after seeing the positive feedback the film had received, especially from the press, they would return. This was my husband's idea, which made us no money, although we did manage to cover costs. As to Straub and Huillet, it was very difficult for

their films to do well. In Duras's case, it was a little better because she had literary prestige, but her readers were not always interested in films. Rohmer's films, on the other hand, also did rather well.

**F. G.:** I think that when he selected the 'New French Cinema' films, Daney chose some fairly 'elevated' films. We are not dealing with Adolpho Arrietta films here, so to speak. Yet in New York, far more 'daring' films were being screened. When he was interviewed by Bill Krohn (KROHN, 1977: 31), Daney said that one cannot write about 'experimental' films, because they work on primary systems, in the sense that they don't need the critic's reflections.

**J. R.:** And he's right. In France hardly anyone has written about those films. I think that at the time of the surrealist movement it was still possible, but it never happened with the underground movement. In the interview with Krohn, Daney uses films by Godard and Straub as examples, while for me they were not avant-garde filmmakers at all.

**P. L.:** I think we can accept Daney's words about 'experimental' film. The problem is he decided not to show the films as part of that season. He could have considered that although it wasn't possible for him to write about those films, perhaps they could be shown. It is not compulsory to write about the films that get screened.

**J. R.:** Daney wasn't really someone who programmed films for a living.

**P. L.:** No. His work was to write about them, to 'talk' about them.

**J. R.:** Like Jean-Claude Biette.

**P. L.:** Yes, but Biette showed more films. It's normal: he showed what he made, and he made films.

**J. R.:** Apparently, Daney was terrified when he was faced with the shoot of *Jacques Rivette. The*

*Night Watchman (Jacques Rivette. Le veilleur, Serge Daney and Claire Denis, 1990).* He told André S. Labarthe he didn't know how to direct his team. That's why Claire Denis intervened.

**F. G.:** Regarding those supposed 'borders', there are two ideas that I would like to discuss with you. One of them deals with an observation Langlois made, where he said that there aren't two or three types of films, but only one, which is the perfect interaction between past and present. For him, this is what makes a film exciting. The second one is a sort of reply, by Jonas Mekas, to the question 'what is cinema?': 'Cinema is cinema is cinema is...' Do you agree with them?

**J. R.:** Of course. The rest are mere clichés. Nowadays we find ourselves before a different landscape; there are festivals all over the place. I get the feeling that there are no programmes overwhelming the viewer, in a good sense. These festivals design their programmes based on categories. If Mekas can reply in that way, it is partly due to having worked as a programmer in a cinema for many years. A common criticism at the time consisted in telling us off for having flyers in our auditoriums that advertised other local cinemas. They used to tell us we would spoil business, but it was the total opposite. In New York, on 46th street, one may find many different restaurants. The clients can choose which one they fancy the most, which is why the street is always packed. Our case was similar to that. We thought that the more we educated the viewers, the way Langlois did, the more they would be open to discover new films, or to share them with others.

**F. G.:** Jean-Luc Godard often says the history of cinema should be told from the history of the viewer. In your case, did you notice an evolution in the audience that attended your film theatre?

**J. R.:** Yes. To start with, the neighbourhood itself was in constant transformation, so the audience changed to the rhythm of the neighbourhood. More importantly, the way to keep a cinema

like this one going, is to have an audience that ranges from 7 to 77 years old, which is almost impossible. Another very important question is to have one or several available screens. If you only have one, you can lose your entire audience with a single mistake. When I started working at the Bleecker we did made a mistake: we had a small space where we set up a bookshop, from which books were being stolen all the time, and where we barely had any customers. I realised we had to get rid of the bookshop and set up a second auditorium. In this way, we could keep a film that was doing well running for longer, such as *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, 1975). That film was a find of ours, and a real success. But if you only had one auditorium, you were forced to screen the next film you had booked, so that someone else would take advantage of your discovery. That's why we decided to have two screens, both at the Bleecker and at the Carnegie. The big screen at the Bleecker had 145 seats. The little one, which was called the James Agee Room, inspired by the Jacques Robert room in Paris, was equipped with 85 seats. At the beginning, to keep up our condition of a non-profit organisation, I decided to offer this auditorium to some film-makers who came with their films on Mondays and Thursdays. They would come straight 'from the streets' and screen what they had shot. That's how Jim Jarmusch and Amos Poe came by.

During those years everything was connected: to get to what we called the 'new new wave', it was necessary for those film-makers to emerge out of the underground scene. Neighbourhood cinemas took them in and showed their films. As

film-makers, Jarmusch or Poe were very much influenced by French film. There they found their audience, as there was constant movement, also in music. We used to go to a club at the end of Bleecker Street, in the suburbs, in front of the Salvation Army. I remember seeing Sid Vicious there, for example. The Blue Note was on 6th Avenue, and you could listen to rock or new and old jazz. There was constant movement around that area. The Factory was also around that quarter. Some painters also took part. Roy Lichtenstein himself used to watch films in our theatre. The interests of this movement weren't commercial, it was just about exchanging ideas in a friendly manner. I remember that when Langlois screened films without subtitles at the Cinémathèque Française, he used to tell us that we would learn about cinema better that way. For a while I worked as a projectionist and I realised he was right. Sometimes, when you watch a film without sound, you are far more aware of how it has been made, especially if you see the audience's reaction from the projection booth. Overall, I think that when things are overly organised, it is detrimental for the arts: you cannot make art with too much order.

My process consisted in programming and stopping once in a while to make small films. During those brief intervals I would be replaced by another programmer. At the time we had no fear. I really like the English expression 'to dare'. It was like leaving a restaurant without paying. It consisted in taking risks, something which has been lost completely as a result of consumerism. •

*Translated by Alex Reynolds*

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## PIERRE LÉON

Born in 1959 in Moscow, residing in Paris, the filmmaker Pierre Léon is also a member of the editorial board of *Trafic*. He made his first official feature film in 1994. He also stands out as an actor in the works of other filmmakers such as Bertrand Bonello, Serge Bozon, or Jean-Paul Civeyrac. As a critic, after training at the *Libération* newspaper (together with Serge Daney and Louis Skorecki), as well as in *Trafic*, his texts were published in other

publications such as *Vertigo*, or *Archipiélago* and *Lumière* from Spain. He teaches film direction at the Parisian school La Femis, and also gives conferences often about cinema in Paris, Lisbon and Moscow. His work as a singer joined his film work in 2010 at the Pompidou Centre, when a found footage film of his was projected over his own live concert, titled *Notre Brecht*. He is currently writing a monograph about Jean-Claude Biette.

# Interview with Ken and Flo Jacobs.

## Part I: Interruptions

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David Phelps

### ABSTRACT

In this conversation the author discusses with Ken Jacobs – in the presence of his wife, Flo Jacobs – different passages from his life: his childhood in Williamsburg; the revelation of his adoption by his father and the vicissitudes lived by his mother, reflected in the role of the woman in some films of the time – especially those by Frank Capra; classical and modern Jewish culture; the double bills he used to attend, with a cowboy and a Yiddish film; his education in a school of the Eastern District; his discovery of the screenings at MoMA and Cinema 16, the screening of *The Blood of Jesus* at Anthology Film Archives and the programme ‘Essential Cinema’ and the classes with Hans Hofmann and his possible influence in some works by Jacobs, such as *Window*.

### KEYWORDS

Ken Jacobs, Flo Jacobs, biography, *underground*, Jewish culture, ‘Essential Cinema’, Hans Hoffmann, Anthology Film Archives, Yiddish film, MoMA.

*The Bicycle Thief* on one shoulder, Betty Boop on the other, Jacobs' films work, I think, something like a Luftmensch's peregrinations: an explorations into strange lands that can only unfold as a series of digressions from one place to another. A shaggy dog story for the eyes. So as we agreed, our conversation, our first of some to follow, would be open-air and open to sidetracking—whether our own wayward thoughts or people stopping by. On abysmal audio, I recorded the three of us—Ken, Flo, me—as we sat in the MoMA lobby before the première of new Ernie Gehr films, and then sauntered down to our seats. We started with childhood, and the rest, appropriately, is a sequence of interruptions.

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**David Phelps:** Let's start—you grew up in Williamsburg?

**Ken Jacobs:** Yes.

**DP:** Which part of Williamsburg?

**KJ:** Near the water, Berry Street near Division.

**DP:** Do you ever go back there?

**KJ:** Oh, sure.

**DP:** Yeah?

**KJ:** I look at it and I mourn and I—

[First interruption. Telephone]

**KJ:** This is one of the great filmmakers. Jim Jennings. [Inaudible discussion of Jennings' *Train of Thought*]

[to Jim Jennings] We brought back something for you—so let's see you soon.

**DP:** We're talking about Williamsburg. What do you mourn?

**KJ:** Well, it was before my experience of middle-class upbringing.

**DP:** I read that. I always read about how you come from this working class life, but then I also read about how you went to country clubs when you were sixteen and all these bar mitzvahs.

**KJ:** Country clubs? Bar mitzvahs. Barely. But—the fact is I never knew my father. And this guy, who said he was my father, took me away from Williamsburg after my mother died. And only a few years ago did I realize he could not have been my biological father. A big relief.

**DP:** How did you know this?

**KJ:** I'd been told he was, so I believed it. It only occurred to me, I think at the beginning of the 2000s, that there's no resemblance whatsoever. And he had three kids who did resemble him. My mother first became sick, my grandmother told me, when she ran out of the house on a winter day with no coat to escape his brothers, who were calling her a whore.

She was nineteen when I was born. Very bright, a high school valedictorian, and pretty but I suspect a victim of the romance propaganda of the period. Dad I figure was Mister Hanky Panky. So she needed to marry and Joe then saw she was pregnant. They divorced before I was born.

**DP:** But also, then, this guy is responsible for her death.

**KJ:** Yes. Yes, with the gangster brothers.

**DP:** So he took you in out of guilt?

**KJ:** Guilt. No, he didn't know guilt. He never knew guilt. He and his second wife had a two-year old, and they didn't want to have any more kids, and I think she felt sorry for me because I was in the slums with my grandparents and they had made it to the middle class. So I think it was her idea to take me in. But that marriage didn't last very long either.

I didn't know Joe other than a few visits when he and my mother would shout at each other, I assume about child support. I didn't know my name was Jacobs and it's an uncomfortable fit to this day.

**DP:** So you don't think your name is Jacobs.

**KJ:** Well, it had been Rosenthal or so I'd thought.

[Flo interjects, something about his mother marrying to give KJ a father's name. Nearly inaudible.]

**KJ:** I think that was very necessary at the time—we've been watching movies from the early 30s, and many films are about women who have babies outside of marriage.

**DP:** Barbara Stanwyck, Loretta Young.

**KJ:** Yeah, one after the other. Lustrous victims.

**DP:** Which films in particular?

**Flo Jacobs:** One we just saw called *Young Bride*. And the reality—the real ending is almost always different from the happy ending.

**KJ:** Hollywood's achievement is the happy ending.

**DP:** Yeah, they show her dead, and then the next shot, they show her alive again.

**FJ:** She drops the poison—

**KJ:** She drops the poison—

**FJ:** -she was about to drink.

**KJ:** Barbara Stanwyck is *fantastic* in this early film by Capra,

**FJ:** A great one is called *Ladies of Leisure*.

**DP:** I haven't seen that.

**KJ:** If you're trying to understand how come the fame of Barbara Stanwyck—she looks terrible in her later years—here, she's incredible. Throws herself into her parts.

**DP:** So you watch these films and you see them as your parents' youth.

**KJ:** I understand how my mother... First of all, there's the powerful propaganda to make love. No thought of propagation, only love. You must find love, win a guy and give him all you can. And then, movie over, be occupied for a lifetime with the real-world consequences.

It saved capitalism. The poor monkeys were to be preoccupied with the romance built around the sex act, immediate economic concerns taking it from there. This was consciously done, the love-movie sidelining revolution until the next war, for which preparations were made by the action-movie.

**DP:** It's interesting how that makes—at least in the movies, how that makes for these really tough women, because even though they're dependent on men, they have to go out and achieve that. And they go through all these men who are useless to them in their quest. Which is not true of films today.

**KJ:** Joe Jacobs had reason to resent me in his mind. Many beatings, beginning age 7. He didn't call me by name until forced to by his third wife, it was Stupid and Moron until age 12 or 13. I left when I turned 16, returning to Williamsburg. It took years before my stammering let up.

So this is really something that TCM is making the past available to us.

**DP:** Your past.

**KJ:** Yes. Certainly what brought me into the world. So I even forgive Professor Dimples for being such a pain in the ass.

**DP:** Professor Dimples?

**KJ:** The guy who introduces the films.

**FJ:** Robert Osborne.

**DP:** With the official history of films you're never sure he's actually seen.

**KJ:** We don't listen—we're Robert Osborne virgins... And this morbid music they play before the show—I mean, really morbid.

**DP:** I'm always fascinated between the differences in the sets between the younger introducer's bachelor pad, and Robert Osborne, who's supposedly watching Loretta Young movies next to leather-bound books.

**FJ:** And the fireplace.

**DP:** Last time we were talking about *Man's Castle*.

**KJ:** Yeah—wonderful. I was one of the many who loved Loretta Young when I was young. And so married Flo.

**DP:** And her actual story, that she had this child with Clark Gable that she had to hide.

**FJ:** And then she adopted the child.

**DP:** It was a fucked-up era for parents and children.

**KJ:** So fucked-up. Those are the right words. Not just messed up, they're *fucked up*.

**DP:** We'll have to tell the Spaniards not to translate that phrase, since everyone knows it, and there's no good way to translate it.

**KJ:** Which tells you what a place it has in our lives. We don't know what to do with that sexual energy—look at all these people, they wouldn't exist, except for this unremitting sexual energy. It must be used; it must make other humans, other

creatures of its kind. This bountiful luck we have as beings is what allows all these wars to happen, that we can be so profligate with ourselves.

**DP:** I was reading that in Gaza right now, part of the reason there were so many children that were just killed in Israeli strikes was because over 50% of the city is children.

**KJ:** Now you're talking about Israel.

**DP:** Well—I do want to hear about the Jewish culture, since that's my father's background, too. But we can jump ahead to the modern Jewish culture.

**KJ:** I didn't know the world—I mean, when I understood that Jews were a minority, I thought, *what?* I mean, *everybody I know is Jewish*. But the bad lesson of World War II, for Israel, is that if you're weak you ally with and serve the biggest bully around. Then you can freely victimize.

**DP:** Do what was done to you.

**KJ:** Their experience conditioned them.

**DP:** It's a very fucked-up thing. It feels politically correct to more than half the nation to support Israel because now it's supporting the minority that was trampled upon in the Holocaust—

**KJ:** It's because of 9/11.

**DP:** Right, because now we have a new evil minority, which is the Muslims. We're told constantly that if you don't support Israel, you're anti-Semitic, which seems very anti-Semitic to believe that all of Jewish culture has to be co-opted into war culture, that all of Judaism is Zionism. The opposite side of that would be—

**KJ:** Betty Boop.

**DP:** Yeah! Yiddish, the Fleischer Bros. My father on the Lower East Side would have to buy his mother movie tickets because it was against the

Sabbath for her to buy them, so she would give him a present of money, and then he would buy her tickets and go home. And she thought she was the reincarnation of Queen Esther, so she would walk down the street and greet the fish-peddlers with a dainty wave in the morning. And where do you hear or see these things recorded in culture? When we talk about Jewish culture now it's all monolithic.

**FJ:** My mother said that she and all of her sisters would go to the Saturday matinee, and her father disapproved, but her mother just made sure that the father would not officially know.

**KJ:** How many children were there?

**FJ:** Eight.

**KJ:** Yeah, my grandmother had seven daughters and one son.

**DP:** And you have brothers and sisters—you have *fake* brothers and sisters, I guess?

**KJ:** Yeah, I have fake brothers and sisters. Two fake brothers.

**DP:** Do you talk to them?

**KJ:** Only one of them, Alan, and we talk maybe twice a year—he's very nice. And my father—Joe Jacobs—was very talented in sports. And he was coming up in the minor leagues of baseball [inaudible about *The Giants*], and he hurt his back, long story, ok. But obviously he played baseball after that, and he was always very, very impressive. And so Alan had this talent, this sports talent.

**DP:** Did you play sports when you were a kid?

**KJ:** Yeah, but I was regular, normal, I wasn't exceptional. I mean *this* was something else.

**DP:** But what were you doing for fun in 1940? You're seven years old and it's already World War II.

**KJ:** I was a normal kid.

**DP:** But is that a normal childhood for anybody?

**KJ:** No, but my grandmother was a great mother to me. And my grandfather was always too tired to be involved—but very sweet, very nice. He took me to the movies Sundays to see one cowboy movie and one Yiddish movie.

**DP:** Do you remember were they like the Ulmer films?

**KJ:** I remember one film where a man—I think we actually saw it years later—a man comes back to his home after he's been in prison, and the home is gone, and he sits on the curb crying.

**DP:** Like a pre-*Grapes of Wrath*.

**KJ:** So the films were often very sad, the Yiddish films, and the cowboy films were, you know, happily idiotic.

**FJ:** It was generous of him, since he wouldn't have known English.

**DP:** And they were double bills or in separate theaters?

**KJ:** No, no, double bills.

**DP:** And was there a big audience of people who didn't speak Yiddish going into Yiddish films and people who didn't speak English going into English-language films?

**KJ:** There was an audience—enough. I remember playing under the seats when, for some reason, different people were taking me to see *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

**FJ:** And also you said there was a Hollywood theater, is that right? The theater where you saw *Freaks*?

**DP:** You saw *Freaks* as a kid?

**KJ:** As a teenager. And it was *incredible*. It was at some little theater underneath the Broadway tracks in Brooklyn, the L, and it showed all the great films. I always went, *Who did this? Who had this idea?* All the Hollywood older films—great ones.

**DP:** So you start watching De Sica and Italian neorealism when you get to MoMA, but that's years later.

**KJ:** Yeah, but when I get to MoMA I learnt about Cinema 16, I learnt about the art theaters in New York. I'm still in Williamsburg at that time.

**DP:** But the Yiddish films are underground films in a way too—they're made for local audiences for nothing.

**KJ:** I hadn't thought of that. We loved one that we saw years later—a theater on 2nd avenue began showing old Yiddish films with a stage-show. And it was wonderful. And usually the stage-show was the old performers coming out and doing their stuff, their old routines—and young performers.

**FJ:** And the people in the theaters were all familiar with them.

**DP:** What year was this?

**FJ:** The Sixties.

**KJ:** And this became—the theater became—

**FJ:** The Fillmore East.

**KJ:** The Fillmore East. We were young, and big compared to the rest of the audience.

**DP:** Did you take the other avant-garde people to see these shows?

**KJ:** No, no I didn't. I tried to show—sometime after Anthology started, I pressed them to take a look at one of the black films, *The Blood of Jesus*, directed by and starring Spencer Williams. And

P. Adams Sitney was there, and after the film was over, he said, "we have to wash the screen now." I was really wounded by that—I thought it was a wonderful movie. And I tried to get Anthology to be interested in it as part of their Essential Cinema. Essential Cinema I think is one of the worst ideas ever. One of the worst ideas ever. It should be Jonas's essential cinema, or those people's essential cinema. Who decides what is essential in cinema? You know, it's essential to your life. And we have different lives.

**DP:** So it becomes bowdlerized when you do it by committee.

**KJ:** When you do a thing called "Essential Cinema," that's it—that's stupid. It should be so-and-so's essential cinema.

[Flo suggests we go downstairs to the theater. We go downstairs—everywhere there are sounds and images from speakers and screens, the whole floors converted into cinemas—then wait by the doors for the theater to open.]

**DP:** Maybe we should grab a stall in the bathroom—it's probably the only quiet place left.

**KJ:** The bathroom here used to be forbidden territory to me—it was a gay hangout. And so, one day, I had to go—and that's how I discovered that downstairs they showed movies. If not for a real need to pee, I might never have gotten anywhere. [Laughs]

**DP:** It was a fatal piss.

[Take seats]

**DP:** I guess we have to speed through your life—do the greatest hits.

**KJ:** When I got back to Williamsburg I went to Eastern District High School and the best thing that happened there was that they gave me a pass to the Museum of Modern Art. But I belonged nowhere. I didn't belong in the

middle class, the Jewish world, I didn't belong there anymore. My friends and I had diverged over the years and I was just very alone. I was thinking and writing about this just yesterday, and it put me in a terrible state. I was so fucking alone. I had a basketball and I'd go out and play by myself, or sometimes find someone to play with.

**DP:** How old were you at this point?

**KJ:** You know, 15 or 16. And I just stayed with my grandmother and uncle, I guess not more than a year or so, maybe a year and a half, and then I moved into a furnished room in Manhattan. I went to many different public schools—grammar schools and high schools—and I figured that by the last one, it probably makes a dozen, a dozen different schools.

**DP:** How did that happen? Joe Jacobs is moving around taking you?

**KJ:** No, he and the first wife divorced. And I just began living in different places.

**FJ:** With different aunts.

**KJ:** Crazy aunts.

**FJ:** You were going to high school.

**KJ:** Yes, I was going to high school, and living in places where they didn't want me and I didn't want them. It was awful. And then, he, uh—Joe succeeded in rebuilding, for a second time—it had been torched 2 weeks before we were to move in, this big house in West Hempstead. Moved in again with him and his third wife, but that just lasted about a year—and I was back in Williamsburg. I was able to keep my connections with Williamsburg through the years because I was living in Brooklyn just a half-hour trolley-car ride away, and so I was able to study for my bar mitzvah with somebody around the corner from my grandmother's home. So I was able to stay in touch with her.

**DP:** What was the bar mitzvah like in 1946?

**KJ:** Ludicrous. Yeah, 1946. And then Joe remarried the day after and I wasn't invited.

**DP:** Did you know he was gonna get remarried?

**KJ:** Oh yeah. But I wasn't invited to the wedding because I looked too old.

**DP:** Because you were now 13!

**KJ:** Because he was embarrassed to have this 13 year old son. I made him look too old.

**DP:** So he was a man of social appearances.

**KJ:** A forceful jerk.

**DP:** Where was the bar mitzvah?

**KJ:** Brooklyn. It was in the temple; it was perfunctory, but there was a spread of food in the basement—they had some kind of room for that. So it was no affair—and one of the most remarkable things that happened, was, that I had studied for some months to be able to say these Hebrew things, none of which I remember. The guy who taught me was very nice, one of the rare Jewish alcoholics. He had a tiny room overlooking the street, and I could watch kids playing, and he liked to have me drink some alcohol with him—it was nice. We could hardly speak to each other.

**DP:** He only spoke Hebrew?

**KJ:** Yiddish. My grandmother only spoke Yiddish, you know—so I must've spoke Yiddish as my first language.

**DP:** My father, too.

**KJ:** Yeah. So I'm there at the podium, whatever, at the beginning, and to my amazement, these guys who are officiating, hanging over me as I'm reading, pass me a phonetic English translation. It was *shocking*. I was shocked by it: it was corruption.

**DP:** It was profane.

**KJ:** You know, it really was. I mean here, we—

[Interruption by another man, who thanks Ken for lending him equipment]

**KJ:** So that was a shock. But you know, God, all these religious things simply fell away. I told you that when I no longer believed in the Easter Bunny, God went. I mean there was never a crisis or anything—it was simply outgrown.

**DP:** But I feel—I don't know—I feel like a lot of people are still religious without believing in God. They like the rites and the rituals.

**KJ:** Yes, well, I can understand that. Flo wants to celebrate Passover.

**FJ:** Yeah.

**KJ:** Why? [inaudible]

**FJ:** Don't you like the food?

**KJ:** I like it a bit, it's so—ridiculous.

[Interruption—someone asks if we're still talking]

**FJ:** Maybe I should put our jackets in the center—

**KJ:** No, no, we'll have seats. [Laughs] The avant-garde is not that popular.

[Flo takes jackets to claim seats]

**DP:** So what do you do for work after high school—you go straight into the coast guard? And you dropped out of high school or did you graduate?

**KJ:** I sort of graduated—I got enough credits. I didn't really graduate: I don't have a diploma or anything; I have a *certificate of attendance*.

[John MacKay comes by, asks about Hurricane

Sandy, which left the Jacobs in the dark for a week]

**DP:** I wanted to ask you what you were doing for work. You worked as a janitor at some point?

**KJ:** Oh, that came later—that was one of the great things.

**DP** [laughs]: Stable boy...

**KJ:** Yeah, I did work as a stable boy. And, you know, horrible, horrible, lowest, minimum wage jobs is what I did. Oh God, you're not gonna take me through that. We met in—

**FJ:** Provincetown.

**KJ:** —Provincetown, 2001.

**FJ** [laughs]: 1961.

**KJ:** Oh no, sorry, sorry. I'm confused because of what we're talking about. The period was horrible.

**DP:** Why were you in Provincetown for the summer? What was the reason?

**KJ:** Hofmann—Hans Hofmann—taught, and even though he wasn't supposed to, he actually was having classes—informal classes.

**FJ:** Though he had already retired then.

**KJ:** Yeah.

**DP:** So what are your days like when you start getting involved with Hans Hofmann? You're working days, or you're working nights? And you're going for a couple of hours to Hans Hofmann?

**KJ:** Yeah stuff like that. Well it was the GI bill which paid for school, and I was able to study painting—at a *bad*, bad school. With Raphael Soyer, who was a horrible teacher, for me, and then I went with a friend to the Whitney museum: they had an American exhibition of works—

**FJ:** Or maybe it was the biennial.

**KJ:** Biennial. And there was a painting by Hofmann that just knocked me out. My friend said he teaches in New York and often takes on people as monitors or whatever.

**FJ:** Wasn't it your friend Alan Becker?

**KJ:** Yeah, Alan Becker. And I put together a portfolio and went to see him, and he looked through it and said sure. [Laughs] And I never really had duties, but I was able to attend classes and study like everyone else. I don't remember being called upon to do much, you know.

**DP:** Do you remember his reaction to your work?

**KJ:** He—let's say this—he would come around, and very often he would tear up your work. He'd tear it up, and then shift things around.

**FJ:** He was known for that.

**DP:** It's just like what you did with Jack Smith in the subway.

**FJ:** Yeah... you'd tear up the subway posters.

**KJ:** Oh my *god*, I'd never related that. [Laughs] But it's true.

**FJ:** Our friend Max has charcoal drawings which—Hofmann had reassembled the picture by tearing and shifting sections.

**DP:** Did he ever do that for his own work?

**KJ:** I think that more than one person—I think de Kooning was using that method. Anyway, this one time, he came in and did this, he shifted things around—*this should go here, this should go here*—and then in the end, he stood back and said, I didn't mean to do that, that was a good drawing.

**DP:** He couldn't help himself.

**KJ:** Yeah.

**DP:** So he had a way of looking at art where he would rework it.

**KJ:** Yes. And he also liked my head. And one day he took hold of it, like it was a cabbage or something, turned it around, you know, looking at this plane and that plane. [Laughs]

**DP:** But his method of teaching is not that different from yours, right? You do similar things with films you find—you tear them apart, and put them back together.

**KJ:** That's interesting. Man.

**DP:** You don't think so?

**KJ:** No, I do think so. What you're saying surprises me.

**DP:** Because there's been so much that's been written about how you've been inspired by Hofmann's *art*, but not about how you were inspired by how he would teach...

**KJ:** That's undoubtedly true—oh my God. I'm shocked. You know, we do these things—

**FJ:** It stems from analysis too.

**KJ:** Analysis, true, but that was his analysis.

**DP:** It's just a whole different way of looking at art at that point?

**FJ:** Well, it has to do with dynamics. He pushed you to see space as dynamic within the four right-angled edges of the frame.

**DP:** Like an aesthetic of seeing what was there that you didn't think was there?

**KJ:** He'd say that very, very slight surface shifts can become enormous plunges in space. So he's always after the truth of the surface, ok, the fact

of its flatness—but indicating all kinds of spatial events, movements at odds with the surface. He's very attentive to the model: this is an architectonic structure one should be entirely respectful of, respectful of.

**DP:** Which could compare to something in your own work like *Window* (1964), where first it's the camera moving, but then it seems to be the building moving, but then it seems to be the screen itself that's moving, all of which depends on this idea that the screen is a stable plane within which objects can move—so the respect for the screen comes at the expense of the reality you filmed, and vice-versa.

**KJ:** Yeah, I'm an old Hofmann student. [Laughs] I owe him a lot.

**FJ:** You've been saying that ever since I met you.

**DP:** Do you see any real differences between your approach and his?

**KJ:** My approach is essentially Marx Brothers.

[Inaudible. Another interruption.]

**DP:** I guess we have to zoom ahead to the 60s, which is what we're supposed to be talking about—but there's so much, too many things.

**KJ:** My heart-breaking girlfriend, who committed suicide eventually.

**DP:** Oh boy.

**KJ:** Yeah.

**DP:** You're living on Orchard St.

**KJ:** No—no, I filmed *Orchard St.*—and while I did I lived a block east of it, Ludlow—in order not to have to come up with carfare. I was looking for a subject that would be contained, *contained*. I really had very little money. I would often walk from the Lower East Side to my grandmother's in Williamsburg in order to have dinner, and then I'd walk back; I could never tell her how broke I was. I did that for years.

**DP:** I just remember that shot where the car pulls out, and everyone just watches the car, and there's this idea that even someone just leaving this street and going to another street, even just a block away, is a big event—you know, that someone has a car and that they can leave the neighborhood even for a few minutes.

**KJ:** I learned a lot about filming in the world, that you just do it like it's your job—you know, you don't ask questions, you don't apologize, you don't mind the embarrassments.

[Next interruption. Jytte Jensen, MoMA curator—and my ex-boss. More talk about missed emails from the storm, and MoMA's 3D capabilities.]

**KJ:** Have you seen work by the openendedgroup? You must see it.... Beautiful.

[Another interruption—Gina Telaroli.]

**DP:** We haven't even gotten to the 60s... but all these people coming I guess is another kind of history—a living history. •

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# EXPRMNTL: an Expanded Festival. Programming and Polemics at EXPRMNTL 4, Knokke-le-Zoute, 1967

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## ABSTRACT

This article compiles the several manifestations and witness' accounts of the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the International Festival of International Cinema of Knokke-le-Zoute (EXPRMNTL 4), celebrated in 1967: its conception by Jacques Ledoux and the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique and the evolution of the festival through its first editions, the aesthetic, political and cultural concerns, the competition programme and the non-filmic activities, as well as other events, such as the multimedia spectacle *Moviemovie*, the meetings to stimulate the creation of an international network of American, European and Asian experimental film-makers or the concerts and performances, which extended well beyond the spaces of the Casino where the festival was held. Finally, the essay details some of the events that happened within the atmosphere of protest that marked that edition of 1967: from clandestine screenings to several demonstrations and forms of boycott, signalling the moment at which aesthetic and political avant-gardes began to diverge. Among the witnesses here compiled, it is worth mentioning the accounts of the film-makers Birgit and Wilhelm Hein and Harun Farocki.

## KEYWORDS

EXPRMNTL, Knokke-le-Zoute, Jacques Ledoux, Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique, film programming, politics, experimental film, expanded cinema, Harun Farocki.

‘For once I was ahead of Godard: at the start of the year we interrupted an experimental film festival at Knokke, in Belgium, but, fortunately, not the films of Shirley Clarke and Michael Snow.’<sup>1</sup> In 2009 Harun Farocki recalled the intervention he took part in, while he was a film student, at the fourth edition of the international experimental film festival at Knokke-le-Zoute, summing up, forty years later and just in three sentences, what 1968 meant for him.

Towards the end of December 1967, along with other students from Berlin and Ulm, drawn like him to emerging film trends, Farocki had begun the journey to this spa on the Belgian seaside, which was deserted in the middle of winter. There, over the course of a week spent by the sea, within the odd context of a casino crowded with hundreds of film-makers and avant-garde artists, visionaries, cinephiles, curious bystanders and hippies, EXPRMNTL 4 considered the state of experimentation in cinema and the arts.

EXPRMNTL, organised by the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique and conceived by Jacques Ledoux, its curator from 1948 until his death in 1988, had only had three previous editions. The first one, in June 1949, attempted to put together the first complete retrospective of all avant-garde films made since the invention of cinema, from Oskar Fischinger to Norman McLaren, from Charles Dekeukeleire to Maya Deren, from Joris Ivens to Kenneth Anger. The second one (the first one that was actually called EXPRMNTL), was organised in 1958 within the context of the Brussels universal exhibition; it let the world discover the early films of Agnès Varda, Jean-Daniel Pollet, Walerian Borowczyk, Roman Polanski, Peter Kubelka and film-makers who would soon be referred to as *underground*, such as Stan Brakhage, Stan VanDerBeek, Shirley

Clarke or Robert Breer. The third edition, in 1963, established the set up that would make the event become the stuff of legends: held between Christmas and New Year in the Knokke-le-Zoute casino, it brought together film-makers but also musicians, writers, researchers and artists from all disciplines into the heart of a programme that even today amazes due to its breadth, and for the vision which Ledoux tried to inspire it with. For Ledoux, avant-garde film couldn't be placed separately from parallel, formal projects in the other arts: it could only be understood in relation to music, literature, the visual arts, and only at the heart of a network linking all these disciplines.

Along screenings of films by Gregory J. Markopoulos, Henri Chopin, Ed Emshwiller, Takahiko Iimura, Ferdinand Khittl or Edmond Bernhard, the festival held a day-long event dedicated to electronic music. Contributors included the Groupe de Recherche de l'ORTF (Ferrari, Parmegiani, Bayle) and the electronic music studio from Cologne's Westdeutscher Rundfunk; a concert with works by Maderna, Boulez and Stockhausen; an exhibition of works by the Groupe de Recherches d'Art Visuel de Paris (Le Parc, Sobrino, Morellet) and debates with writers associated with the *nouveau roman* (Duras, Pinget) and with the magazine *Tel Quel* (Baudry, Sollers), but also with researchers, such as Lucien Goldmann and Nicolas Ruwet. In the same edition, the clandestine screenings of *Flaming Creatures* (Jack Smith, 1963), a film cursed by EXPRMNTL 3, which had been excluded from the contest and was projected by Jonas Mekas, P. Adams Sitney and Barbara Rubin in their hotel rooms, would for the European audience mean the discovery of *underground* cinema – for its aesthetic and its strategies of distribution.

1. FAROCKI, Harun (2009). 'Written Trailers', in *Harun Farocki. Against What? Against Whom?*. London, Koenig Books/ Raven Row, p. 222. Farocki also recalls the events at Knokke in an article included in *Trafic* magazine ('Une

extrême passion', in *Trafic*, n. 30, summer, 1999, pp. 17-20) and in the second of two films that Gerd Conradt, his former classmate at the Berlin Academy, dedicated to Holger Meins (*Starbuck - Holger Meins*, 2001).

Up until then, every edition of the festival had brought together an international panorama of the most striking contemporary happenings, and EXPRMNTL 4 went even further. It crystalized like few events the energy and the preoccupations – aesthetic, cultural and political – of a time. In a document dated 1974, Ledoux unveiled, later on, the key to his programme: ‘There are three parts to the festival: first, the film competition, second the non-film related activities, third the unexpected. The first and the second lead to the third.’<sup>2</sup> The strength of EXPRMNTL lies in the articulation of these three parts, the ‘secret’ of this open construction whose complexity has been remarked upon by several witnesses.

To begin with, let’s be precise: just as everyone who collaborated with Ledoux agrees about his thorough attention at all stages of conceiving and organising a project (not to mention his tyrannical nature),<sup>3</sup> when Ledoux is discussed within the context of EXPRMNTL, as Jean-Marie Buchet recalls, ‘it’s important not to forget that we’re talking about a collective institution, which he’s only the head of (but consequently also the face to).’<sup>4</sup> If Ledoux certainly decided everything down to the minutest detail, this was because a collective all around him nurtured his thoughts and let him develop the event. Long-term accomplices René Micha, Paul Davay, Yannick Bruynoghe and Dimitri Balachoff (critics all of them, passionate about cinema and culture, but also artists) made up this programming team hovering around Ledoux, which helped him in all

aspects of the project, from fundraising through planning events outside the screenings, and also with the film selection process.<sup>5</sup>

The first part of the programming process involved choosing the venues. A completely deserted bourgeois spa, over the Christmas holidays Knokke-le-Zoute seemed like a ghost city, a backdrop conjured up for an unlikely situation. This abstract world-and-time-bubble was all about mixing subjects, and asked anyone interested in going to the festival (between two and three thousand people in 1967) to submit to a total immersion experience, over a week, without a break. Facing the sea, the casino was a space to inhabit and reinvent. But EXPRMNTL was also what it was thanks to the relationship between the president of the film archive, Pierre Vermeylen, a diplomatic and influential person,<sup>6</sup> with Gustave Nellens, the casino’s director. An art collector (with a penchant for surrealist Belgian painting, shown by the Magritte and Delvaux frescoes that decorate the walls of his venue), Nellens offered his casino and staff to the festival.

Looking through the list of films in the competition, what’s striking is the wide understanding of the term ‘experimental’, which the organisers juxtaposed a wide range of projects around. According to the regulations of the competition, ‘the term “experimental cinema” would be understood to comprise all works made for film or television, which would show evidence of trying to regenerate or widen film as a

2. ‘Comité Consultatif X5. Réunion du 11 février 1974’: Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique, X5. Programmed non-cinema protests, under the name Rapport Comité Consultatif. This programme also serves as proof; it was put together after the tumultuous editions of the festival in 1963 and 1967.

3. «Everything that Ledoux has ever set out to do has always been Ledoux’ business from the beginning in *fine*» (Gabrielle Claes, interview with the author, 26 abril, 1999); «Jacques Ledoux was very possessive, a tiranical and dominant person, who wanted to do and control everything» (Dimitri Balachoff, quoted by HEAD, Anne, *A true love for cinema. Jacques Ledoux,*

*1921-1988*, Rotterdam, Universitaire Pers, 1988, p. 16).

4. BUCHET, Jean-Marie, ‘Ledoux exprmntl film’, *Revue belge du cinéma*, n. 40, November, 1995, p.34.

5. The selection jury, which was always fully Belgian, in 1963 included Dimitri Balachoff, Yannick Bruynoghe, Paul Davay, André Vandembunder and Roland Verhavert.

6. A member of the Belgian Socialist Party, Vermeylen was a senator from 1945 to 1974, Home Office Minister from 1947 to 1949 and from 1954 to 1958, Justice Minister from 1961 to 1964 and Education Minister from 1968 to 1972.

medium for cinematic expression'.<sup>7</sup> A third of the selected films are American, but EXPRMNTL 4 is not satisfied with giving a seal of approval to the *underground* canon. The programme presents (and sets in tension) a great variety of projects, in which experimentation can exist both formally and as a background, or as a way of dealing with a topic: pre-structural films, surrealist essays, poetic documentaries, humorous animations and animated collages, dance films and even an erotic feature in Cinemascope.

Ledoux insisted on the exclusive nature of the films in the programme: save for a few exceptions, the competition was strictly reserved for works that had not previously been screened, which meant risking not including films whose importance, however, was already agreed.<sup>8</sup> Here is where the organiser's genius came into play. To promote the creation of new works, the festival became a producer. Ledoux worked out an agreement with Agfa-Gevaert which meant that the Cinémathèque would receive a considerable amount of 16mm film, to be given to a hundred film-makers, who'd agreed to use it. Actually, in this inspired gesture there's 'a mixture of calculation and generosity'.<sup>9</sup> 'Generosity': Ledoux offered straightforward and concrete assistance to out-of-pocket film-makers. 'Calculation': he ensured, at the same time, that the films shown at Knokke would be original. Among the 59 films made with the stock given by the festival and submitted to the selection jury are projects by Marcel Broodthaers, Martin Scorsese, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Piero Heliczer, Jud Yalkut and Werner Nekes, as well as of course a large number

of unknown artists, whose names have not been preserved by history. Twenty-four of these films would be chosen, to which 66 others would be added. In total, the competition was made up of ninety films, distributed among 11 programmes, which were each presented twice a day.

Ledoux continued developing the festival by choosing the competition jury. Shirley Clarke, Vera Chytilova, Walerian Borowczyk and Edgar Reitz were the jury for EXPRMNTL 4.<sup>10</sup> Each of them had already taken part in at least one edition of the festival. They knew its spirit. Ledoux worked to build an international community, careful to make sure there's a balanced representation of various trends and understandings of what 'experimental' means. This jury gave the main prize to *Wavelength* (1967) by Michael Snow, and special awards to films by Lutz Mommartz (*Selbstschusse*, 1967), Stephen Dwoskin (*Chinese Checkers, Naissant, Soliloquy*, 1965-1967) and Martin Scorsese (*The Big Shave*, 1967).

Out of the competition, split among five programmes each shown only once, EXPRMNTL 4 showed a further 70 films. This included works by film-makers both in and out of the competition, or by the members of the jury of the competition and the films that have come too late to be included in the programme, or that are not recent enough for the organisers to consider (but still relevant, according to Ledoux), there are also the works in the expanded cinema festival, in which everything leads to thinking that it is precisely their 'expanded' character that has kept them apart from the competition

7. *EXPRMNTL 4. Fourth International Experimental Film Competition organized by the Royal Belgian Archive of Belgium. Casino Knokke / 25.XII.1967-2.I.1968*, Royal Filmarchive of Belgium, published with assistance from the Belgian Commission for UNESCO, 1967, unpaginated.

8. *Unsere Afrikareise* (1966) by Peter Kubelka for example, was excluded from the competition because it had already been shown a few times in Europe, particularly by Ledoux at the Musée du Cinéma. «The possibility of discovering new talent had never before been so explicit, or had been

pushed so far», P. Adams Sitney remarked. SITNEY, P. Adams, 'Report on the Fourth International Experimental Film Exposition at Knokke-le-Zoute', in *Film Culture*, n. 46, Autumn, 1967, published –belatedly– in October 1968, p. 7.

9. According to Danielle Nicolas, who later on became Ledoux's assistant (HEAD, Anne, op. cit., pp. 54-55).

10. Pontus Hulten would be announced as the fifth member of the jury. Due to illness he was unable to attend.

(Ledoux wanted all films to be screened in the same conditions): *Le Corbeau et le renard* (Marcel Broodthaers, 1967), whose projection required a prepared screen with various inscriptions; *Hawaiian Lullaby* (Wim van der Linden, 1967), in which a shirtless dancer prances through the stage in front of a screening of a sunset; *The New Electric Cinema* (Piet Verdonk, 1967), projected on an aluminium foil screen and accompanied by the sound made by a vacuum cleaner; and lastly, *Speak* (1962), by the English artist John Latham, whose projection opens with the performance *Juliet & Romeo*, in which a man and a woman painted in red and blue and covered in newspapers undress each other. Only two films in the competition were shown on double screens: *Il mostro verde* (Tonino De Bernardi and Paolo Menzio, 1967) and *A dam rib bed* (Stan VanDerBeek, 1967).

Besides these projects, the organisers invited the Eventstructure Research Group and Sigma Projects from The Netherlands (Jeffrey Shaw, Tjebbe Van Tijen and Theo Botschuijver) to show *Moviemovie*, a multimedia spectacle in which four projectors diffuse abstract and coloured images over a gigantic transparent inflatable structure that was shapeless and changing, embracing spectators wishing to immerse themselves inside it. Somewhere between expanded cinema performance, lightshow (a form that was in full development in the US, in parallel to the rise of psychedelic music) and an alluring sophisticated party, *Moviemovie* was the most spectacular reconfiguration of the classic cinematic set-up shown at Knokke. By including this work and all the others mentioned above, EXPRMNTL 4 played an essential role in spreading the practices of *expanded cinema* and of the lightshow in Europe.<sup>11</sup>

11. 'Interview. Gabriele Jutz with Birgit Hein', in MICHALKA, Matthias (ed.), *X-Screen. Film Installations and Actions in the 1960s and 1970s*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien / Walther König, Vienna / Cologne, 2004, p.125.

The film programming continued after the festival throughout February in Brussels, at the Cinémathèque and the Musée du Cinéma. Put together in five categories (award-winning films, films in the competition, films out of competition, films that arrived after the deadline, films rejected by the selection jury), this side of the programming process reveals a fascinating initiative that doesn't just show or allow us to revisit all the criteria, but that, above all, allows the criteria to be relativised: according to the first view, the selection jury and the competition jury. This process was completed by two full days of debates on the 'Study weekend about the Knokke Competition', organised by the Palais des Beaux-Arts. By way of introduction to this programme, Ledoux made the following statement, which sounds rather precious within the context of his not very frequent public pronouncements: 'In Knokke, at the recent experimental film competition, it's trendy to call films "bad" or "boring". As if these opinions had any meaning, when they're applied to experimental film! [...] It's not very important whether films are "good", or whether the experience "works", as long as it shows something tapping into a bigger drive, and it is more considered. If we wanted to set up a parallel with scientific experimentation, we would happily say that here we're very often dealing with a *fundamental* search, which is not necessarily found to be *applied* from one day to the next'.<sup>12</sup>

It's important to value the unique opportunity these sessions represented altogether. In what was then a fragmented landscape, in which film-makers worked in relative isolation, ignoring research started by others, and in which the chances to see these films were so extremely rare, 'Knokke-le-Zoute [...] was still standing strong as the only international meeting point for avant-garde film-makers'.<sup>13</sup> In 1967, there was no other

12. February 1968 programme at the Musée du Cinéma, Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique.

13. SITNEY, P. Adams, Op. Cit., p. 6.

event that, like EXPRMNTL, was exclusively dedicated to cinematic experimentation, and that provided such a wide international view of it. At Knokke, film-makers could find out what was being made in other places and the public could find out what's being made everywhere. Ledoux's first preoccupation was to showcase, provoke encounters and create links.<sup>14</sup>

EXPRMNTL effectively played this catalyst role. It's at Knokke that Mekas met Kubelka, in 1963, and where Varda, in the edition in Brussels in 1958, met Brakhage. For some film-makers, the very existence of the festival was a firing range: 'Knokke was like the start', said Birgit Hein. 'We were artists, we were painters. We didn't know anything about film'.<sup>15</sup> We know that EXPRMNTL 4 would give an essential push not just to the career of Birgit and Wilhelm Hein (who at the time were still students) but also to setting up the German independent film scene. 'For us, Knokke was a tremendously important event. Particularly, because our first film was shown in the competition, but also because Knokke gave us a chance to break through our isolation. And of course Knokke was also supposed to be where you could appear in public for the first time within the right framework. There was a huge number of meetings and get-togethers, and everyone was extremely enthusiastic. Our aim was to create a film co-op with American film-makers. We didn't manage to, but from then there was an international network, contacts, names. In large part XSCREEN's foundation was due to Knokke; that's where we began inviting international film-makers to Cologne'.<sup>16</sup>

14. This is why, for example, the festival catalogue includes contributions from all the film-makers. «We did this to encourage engagement between film-makers, their work and between the film-makers and their public. To us this seemed to be more necessary in the context of experimental film, where there is a large risk of misunderstandings and incomprehension. We hope to gain and provoke those kinds of exchanges on every level, whether it be economic, aesthetic or critical» (*EXPRMNTL 4*, op. cit.).

15. Birgit Hein, interview with the author, Berlin, 26 August 2012.

A similar interest in setting up networks had inspired Ledoux to organise during EXPRMNTL 4 an international meeting of film co-ops, which were the structures of distribution for independent cinema that emerged everywhere after the creation of the Film-makers' Co-op in New York in 1960. This need to join up, to make a cultural network, was felt everywhere. 'In truth, no one knows anyone. Not even on a national level'.<sup>17</sup> On 28 December 1967, representatives of several co-ops met up in Knokke to talk about the issue of distributing avant-garde films on an international scale, and of the possibility of creating a European co-op. Shirley Clarke and P. Adams Sitney (New York), Robert Nelson (California), Stephen Dwoskin (London), Kirby Siber (Zürich), Alfredo Leonardi and Gabriele Orian (Naples), Andi Engel (Frankfurt), Werner Nekes (Hamburg), among others, took part in these debates. Some of these co-ops had just been set up, such as the one in Hamburg, established a month earlier; others were set up right there and then, in the heat of these discussions.<sup>18</sup>

But Ledoux's vision would have been incomplete if the programme had been limited to film. The project was more ambitious: it was about making the links between avant-garde film and other arts explicit, and to point to its central role in the arrangement. 'Ledoux believes film is the creative language that's going to make everything explode',<sup>19</sup> Jean-Pierre Van Tieghem declared; he took part in organising non-film-related events.

16. MICHALKA, Matthias, Op. Cit., pp. 118-119.

17. Birgit Hein, interview with the author, Berlin, 26 August 2012.

18. A second gathering followed this meeting at Knokke, in Munich, November 1968, organised by the Heins and Klaus Schönherr.

19. Jean-Pierre Van Tieghem, interview with the author, 11 January 1999.

By organizing a meeting between experimental film, visual arts, music and theory, EXPRMNTL opened up, both in words and in actions a space for reflection and exchange. Talks, exhibitions, concerts, conferences, theatrical performances and happenings were layered and woven into a complex network of ideas. Robert Breer showed his *Floats*, small motor-animated sculptures in permanent motion. Edmond Couchot, French pioneer of interactive art, presented *Semaphora III*, 'a cybernetic system capable of reacting to any kind of sound, whether noise, voice or music, and to visually interpret it via light and motion elements'.<sup>20</sup> Michelangelo Pistoletto's paintings on mirrors and other reflective media integrated the viewer into his device. Lastly, the Denise René Gallery showed a series of multimedia works by Vasarely, Demarco, Soto, Sobrino, Le Parc, Morellet and Yvaral. Movement, light, reflection, reproduction: conceptually, all the exhibitions at EXPRMNTL 4 could be related to film.

Mauricio Kagel directed several works interpreted by the Kölner Ensemble für Neue Musik, while the collective Musica Elettronica Viva<sup>21</sup> gave an epic 4-hour-long improvisation at the Salle du Lustre, right beneath Magritte's fresco *Le Domaine Enchanté*. Armand Gatti read his last work, *La Naissance*, dedicated to Latin American guerrillas. It was there that Hugo Claus created *Masscheroen*, a theatrical piece inspired by the medieval tale of Marieke van Niemegen, whose blaspheming character and whose appearance as the Trinity on stage with several nude actors (among them, the English poet Bob Cobbing) ended up in some legal complications. Lastly, there were panels. Five debates around the theme of 'Art in Today's Society' were coordinated by the critic René Micha. Among the contributors

figured artists such as Martial Raysse, Julio Le Parc, Yaacov Agam and Piotr Kowalski, writers such as Peter Handke, Maurice Roche, Claude Roy, Jean-Pierre Attal, Alfred Kern, Armand Gatti, Jérôme Savary, Edoardo Sanguineti and Claude Ollier, as well as composers like Frederik Rzewski, Michel Philippot, André Souris and Konrad Boehmer.

Another roundtable took place under the theme of 'Art of experimentation and large public', as well as a panel discussion around the use of the human voice as an instrument.

In this way, the programme of EXPRMNTL 4 spilled out of the screening room. Four of the casino spaces were used, so that Ledoux's project unfolded across the whole building, in permanent motion, conceptually, artistically and spatially<sup>22</sup>. The constant movement is created by the festival visitors, who the press refers to as the 'hippies' invading the casino, frightening off the regulars. It is an audience that comes and goes during the screenings, that boos the films it disapproves of, that has appropriated the building. In this effervescent atmosphere, it's not surprising that many projects were quickly added to the official programme. It's the unexpected part of the festival, which Ledoux did not realise would gain such significant proportion<sup>23</sup>.

In purest *underground* tradition, some of the screenings happened outside the official programme. Everyone has heard about *Flaming Creatures* being banned and its subsequent clandestine screenings over the course of EXPRMNTL 3. No doubt the mythical aura that grew around these events played an important role in the expectations of visitors to EXPRMNTL 4. Some film-makers brought a film to show that it hasn't been selected by the festival,

20. Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique, EXPRMNTL 4/ drukwerken/imprimés, 25.

21. Allan Bryant, Alvin Curran, Jon Phetteplace, Carol Plantamura, Frederic Rzewski, Richard Teitelbaum and Ivan Vandro.

22. Without taking into consideration the spaces taken up by off-festival events, something that will be discussed later on.

23. YALKUT, Jud, 'Freaking the Festival Factions. Report from the Belgium Film Festival', in *New York Free Press*, 8 February 1968, p. 14.

others come with their latest work. In this way, and rather quickly, many parallel events are improvised inside, but above all outside, the casino (in a hotel room, in the room next door to a café). The French performer Jean-Jacques Lebel, who had been invited by the organisers of Knokke to be part of the talks, helped organise these events. Of these ‘illegal’ screenings, details of which are still mostly unknown (as they left no traces behind), we know at least a few:<sup>24</sup> an 8mm pornographic poem by Henry Howard (member of the Living Theatre), *Le Corbeau et le renard* by Marcel Broodthaers, some reels by Pierre Clémenti, a film by Lebel. These events, which were very successful, entailed a questioning of the authority of the festival and of the very principle behind its selection.

In this increasingly challenging atmosphere, several unexpected interventions emerge in the casino itself: having arrived to accompany the out of competition screening of her *Film Number Four* (1967), Yoko Ono also performed her *Black Bag Piece*, for which she spent several hours under a cover of black canvas in the casino’s lobby. Arriving with various musician friends, Pierre Clémenti improvised with them all around the festival. Mouna Aguigui, an eccentric personality in the streets of Paris and Niza, came to Knokke to rally the crowd. Improv-style, Musica Elettronica Viva made an accompaniment for *Moviemovie*, but also for John Latham’s performance *Juliet & Romeo*. In a climate of uninterrupted exchange, spontaneous bonds were made between artists. It’s easy to agree with Maxa Zoller, who has

described EXPRMNTL 4 as ‘a total expanded cinema experience’ and as ‘a festival of expanded art’.<sup>25</sup>

‘Everyone has complete freedom of expression’, Ledoux had announced. ‘This year the festival will continue this tradition.’<sup>26</sup> In what starts to feel like a gigantic improvisation, other surprise guests arrived. A few months before May 1968, and in the heat of the protests already shaking up Germany at the height of the student movement, representatives for all leftist causes – maoists, marxists, anarchists, provos from Amsterdam<sup>27</sup> – converged at Knokke. Among them, a group of German students have made the journey. Coming primarily from two schools, the Deutschen Film- und Fernsehakademie in Berlin and the Institut für Filmgestaltung in Ulm, they were driven to Knokke by their passion for film.<sup>28</sup> However, the students were going to protest against the majority of the films shown at EXPRMNTL and against the festival itself by way of various spectacular actions. Situating itself against the lack of political commitment by most of the avant-garde film-makers, and particularly against the American participants, their protest was both about experimental cinema in its quasi-totality and the festival itself.

Harun Farocki, Holger Meins, Gerd Conradt (Berlin) and Oimel Mai (Ulm) form part of this group<sup>29</sup>. Conradt was the only one among them who was showing a film at Knokke, out of competition: *Frederic Rzewski ißt spaghetti*

24. SITNEY, P. Adams, Op. Cit., p. 9; YALKUT, Jud, Op. Cit., p. 9.

25. ZOLLER, Maximiliane, *Places of Projection. Re-contextualizing the European Experimental Film Canon*, doctoral thesis, Birbeck College London, School of History of Art, Film and Visual Media. Tutor: Professor Ian Christie, 2007, pp. 129 and 124.

26. MAELSTAF, Raoul, ‘Knokke 1967-8’, interview with Jacques Ledoux, *Cinema TV Digest*, n. 18 (vol. 5, n. 2), Autumn, 1967, p. 3.

27. MICHA, René, ‘Cinéma expérimental’, *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, n. 184, April, 1968, p. 717; BOUQUET,

Stéphane, BURDEAU, Emmanuel, ‘Rhizome universel. Entretien avec Jean-Jacques Lebel’, in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, special edition: *Cinéma 68*, 1998, p. 65; Jean-Marie Buchet, interview with the author, Brussels, 12 November 1998.

28. Some of them were connected to the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS), the federation of German socialist students.

29. Two other film students, Hartmut Bitomsky (Berlin) and Jeanine Meerapfel (Ulm) were also present at Knokke, but it appears they did not take part in the demonstrations. FAROCKI, Harun, interview with the author, Brussels, 20 April 2013.

*bei Carlone – Via della Luce 55 – Rom – Italien – 26 August 1967* (1966), filmed with the composer Frederic Rzewski, who is also at Knokke with the group Musica Elettronica Viva. Farocki had just produced the short film *Die Worte des Vorsitzenden* (1967), as a direct reaction against the death of a student knocked down by the police in the protests organised in Berlin against the Shah of Iran's visit – an event which would mark the spread of the protest movement beyond the university context.

According to Farocki, Meins and Mai led the actions at Knokke<sup>30</sup>. The first one is still linked above all with the history of the Red Army Faction, but at the time of EXPRMNTL 4 Meins still obviously hadn't chosen the path of terrorism. Other than *Oskar Langenfeld* (1966), the school documentary he made a year before and the only work he's credited with directing, Meins had also collaborated in works by some of his classmates, specially as the camera in the Farocki film referred to above, *Die Worte des Vorsitzenden*. Most importantly, a year later he would also be credited with directing *Herstellung eines Molotow-Cocktails* (1968), an *agit-prop* film of which there are no extant copies<sup>31</sup>, which details, through images, how to make a molotov cocktail. Oimel Mai, who studied with Alexander Kluge in Ulm, in 1969, would direct *Elitetruppe Fleur de Marie*, a political-fiction work described by Jean-Pierre Bouyxou in *La science-fiction au cinéma* as a 'space opera with marxist-leninist pretensions'.<sup>32</sup>

30. *Starbuck - Holger Meins* (Gerd Conradt, 2001).

31. A reconstruction of the film can be seen in Gerd Conradt's film *Starbuck – Holger Meins* (2001).

32. BOUYXOU, Jean-Pierre, *La science-fiction au cinéma*, Union Générale d'Édition, Paris, 1971, p. 116.

33. BAUMGÄRTEL, Tilman 'Der kleine Ausschlag für eine große Entscheidung Interview mit Harun Farocki über den deutschen Herbst', [www.libertad.de/inhalt/spezial/holger/jw41harunFarocki.shtml](http://www.libertad.de/inhalt/spezial/holger/jw41harunFarocki.shtml), undated, last accessed: 16 March 2013.

34. Harun Farocki commenting retrospectively on the

If Farocki has commented on Meins' (and his) enthusiasm for some of the films discovered by EXPRMNTL 4, such as Michael Snow's *Wavelength*,<sup>33</sup> what really struck them was the political aphasia in most of the films they saw at Knokke. During this period of demonstrations against the Vietnam War, students let themselves get carried away by the feeling of an imminent revolution and by the reaction against the senselessness of their position as spectators, and decide to speak up: 'We can't stay sitting down at a film festival. We have to do something, here too'.<sup>34</sup> Their intervention was recorded by several actions, some of which oddly recall expanded cinema performances.<sup>35</sup> The first one was related to the screening of Wolfgang Ramsbott's film *Der weisse Hopfengarten* (1966), during which, parading around in front of the screen like soldiers, the students took hold of the Christmas trees on the stage and point them at the audience, resembling a firing squad. The second one disrupted the screening of *The Embryo* (Koji Wakamatsu, 1966) in which, kidnapped and drugged, a shoeshop saleswoman endures awful torture by her boss. Roland Lethem had found *The Embryo* on a trip to Tokyo, and had advised Wakamatsu to submit his film to the competition at Knokke. 'His film,' Lethem would relate, 'was a scandal, and leftist students in Berlin tried to stop the second screening by making a human pyramid in front of the screen. These students wanted to light the stage backdrop on fire. I can still

events at Knokke in Gerd Conradt's film *Starbuck - Holger Meins* (2001).

35. The footage taken at the festival by Claudia Aleman and Reinold E. Thiel for the Westdeutscher Rundfunk document the events well (*Experimental 4 – Knokke. Vierter Wettbewerb des experimentellen Films*, broadcast programme, WDR, Cologne, 1968). Aleman and Thiel seem to share implicitly the point of view of the students – something not very surprising considering that Claudia Aleman was at the time also studying at the Ulm school. Thiel will later on in 1969 produce Harun Farocki's film *Nicht Lösbares Feuer* (on which Gerd Conradt was cameraman).

see Wakamatsu, facing the spectacle of these hostile protestors, laughing his head off in a corner of the screening room.<sup>36</sup>

Leaving the screening, the German students, accompanied by some others from Belgium, began to put together a large manifesto-panel directed against American imperialism, in politics as well as in film. Besides this text, which would make a comparison between the military operations conducted by the US in Vietnam and the activity of experimental film-makers, stands this slogan: 'The FLN is the only jury'. Exhibited for a few seconds in the casino hall, the manifesto would soon be destroyed by the casino's director, who wanted to stop any political demonstrations within the context of his establishment. If the violence of his reaction would grant the students the solidarity of some spectators, others, like Shirley Clarke, did not take shortcuts with their reasonings: 'You're blaming the wrong Americans',<sup>37</sup> they'd point out to the students.

On 31 December 1967, the last day of the festival, the EXPRMNTL programme foresaw a debate about the films in the competition. Ledoux's interesting initiative gave the audience the chance to ask the selection jury questions about the criteria that had guided their work, but above all to question the relevance of the very idea of a selection. Lebel quickly took the floor. After congratulating the organisers for their transdisciplinary approach, he announced the immediate selection of *Miss Expérimentation 1967*. On the stage, nude, two young men and women (one of them being Yoko Ono) put themselves forward for the contest. One of the young men was chosen. Taking advantage of the chaos, just as has been agreed with Lebel, demonstrators took the stage, waving a banner onto which the

torn fragments of their sign have been glued, and brandished placards on which slogans such as 'Long live Roger Pic, Chris Marker, Joris Ivens', 'Dissolve art in the living time', 'No reality without the death of spectacle', 'Silent cinema' or even 'Long live Dziga Vertov' could be read. While the winner of the *Miss Expérimentation* contest swung his hips over the table of the selection jury, the demonstrators threw pamphlets towards the crowd, shouting 'Reality!' and 'Awareness!' It's worth seeing images of this astounding scene, which breaks out immediately after in the hall – protestors, casino guards and police coming to blows. The show *Moviemovie* followed the fight, and later the traditional breughellesque Christmas Eve dinner. An unforgettable evening, the final bouquet for a rough week.

Temporary and of a pragmatic nature, the exclusive bond between the performative form of the radical militancy and the libertarian opposition had suddenly put in question the power of the organisers (exercised particularly through the selection of films), the links between the organisation and power and money (Pierre Vermeylen, president of the Cinémathèque, was a minister; the event was supported by private companies), and the films themselves. This critique had its relevance inasmuch as it highlighted the undeniable institutional regulations of the event, and the low number of explicitly political films at the heart of the programme. But in 1967, could political compromise in film not also happen within formal experimentation? Could it not be the vehicle for a new radical questioning of values, whose reach was also political? Recontextualizing the disagreement that in Germany, and also in other places, set up an opposition between experimental and political film-makers, Birgit Hein recalls: 'political film-makers totally ignored

36. LETHEM, Roland, 'Koji Wakamatsu à Knokke, Noël-Nouvel An 1967-68', published in Japanese in the journal *Bun Gei*, special Wakamatsu edition (*Koji Wakamatsu, the genius who kept fighting*), January 2013, Kawade, Tokyo, p. 135. Original text in French given to the author by Roland Lethem. Ironically, the

protestors' action interrupted a film by a film-maker very renowned for his commitment (at least in Japan), to the point that in his home country students refer to him as 'Che'.

37. YALKUT, Jud, Op. Cit., p. 14.

the relevance of a formally innovative art. At that time we were considered reactionary avant-garde film-makers, which really annoyed us. In the contrary, we felt that some political films, with their clear claims, were reactionary, because they were working with the same signs as traditional commercial cinema. Back then, these two contexts were truly separate'.<sup>38</sup> And nevertheless: 'It wasn't easy because of course we were all on the same side'.<sup>39</sup>

Opposed to the repressive attitude of the casino director and of the president of the Cinémathèque regarding problems encountered at the festival, Ledoux's seemed conciliatory. Although he would remain in his role, the curator of the film archive seemed to have understood that those out of control skids formed an integral part of the event. 'Far from seeing an attempt to sabotage his work in outbursts of all kinds [...], he considered them to be the extension of it, even if their nature sometimes left him perplexed'.<sup>40</sup> One would think that at the core of EXPRMNTL, Ledoux, despite his reputation, was working to replace it with an open structure, conscious that otherwise it could get away from him. In this locked up space, like in a lab, his attitude as programmer consisted of setting up the conditions and the actors for the experience, and to precipitate the encounter, embracing the idea of allowing himself to be surprised as the events unfolded.

Spilling out of the conventional limits of a film festival, EXPRMNTL 4 was a multipurpose affair. The encounter, the opening, all the way to the outburst, were at the heart of its project. EXPRMNTL worked to reinvent the very notion

of the festival, underscoring the specificity of this very particular presentation context: the festival, neither a museum, nor gallery, nor film theatre, was the construction of a temporary and collective situation, an experience of itself. Ledoux provided the framework for a phenomenon of which he did not know the limits, and the happening came to answer itself. 'There were several sideshow attractions,' Werner Nekes said, 'and the political happening was also like a kind of attraction'.<sup>41</sup>

A few months later, Harun Farocki, Holger Meins, Hartmut Bitomsky, Wolfgang Petersen and about ten more students were kicked out of the Deutschen Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin for their political activities.<sup>42</sup> Meins went on to join the Red Army Faction in 1970. Arrested two years later, he died in jail in November 1974, following a hunger strike. Besides the two portraits dedicated to him by his old classmate Gerd Conradt, at least two films were dedicated to his memory: *La Tête d'un frère* (Roland Lethem, 1974, screened outside the competition at EXPRMNTL 5) and *Moses und Aron* (Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet, 1974).

Soon after the festival, Shirley Clarke was interviewed in Paris by Noël Burch and André S. Labarthe, in one of the most relaxed portraits in the *Cinéastes, de notre temps*<sup>43</sup> series. Jean-Jacques Lebel and Yoko Ono were also in the room, providing a feeling of being at the EXPRMNTL 4 afterparty for the viewer. Clarke evokes the urgency of those new cinematic approximations, which for her have everything to do with the profound crisis affecting society at all levels at that time: 'I think Rome is burning. Which is always a good time to let oneself go. [...] A new

38. «Interview. Gabriele Jutz with Birgit Hein», p. 121.

39. Birgit Hein, interview. Regarding Harun Farocki and EXPRMNTL 4: «Retrospectively, it was the last time when politics and the avant-garde, aesthetics and politics, still held equal presence. From then on they became separate. In 1968 they started to grow apart in full force. [...] Different factions started to emerge. Up to then it had been a single force with many different elements, but that were all happening together». FAROCKI, Harun, op. cit.

40. BUCHET, Jean-Marie, Op. Cit., p. 33.

41. Werner Nekes, interview with the author, Brussels, 11 July, 1998.

42. FAROCKI, Harun, Op. Cit., p. 222.

43. *Rome is Burning (Portrait of Shirley Clarke)* (Noël Burch and André S. Labarthe, 1970).

world is coming. The end of this world is coming, but a new world will take its place’.

Six months after EXPRMNTL 4, with May 1968 in full swing (Jean-Jacques Lebel will be a feverish participant), the Cannes film festival was called off under the influence of *nouvelle vague* film-makers, including Jean-Luc Godard, who as

it happens also interrupted a film festival a few months after Harun Farocki. No Palm D’Ors were awarded that year.

EXPRMNTL held one more edition, its last, seven years later, in 1974. •

*Translated by Lupe Núñez-Fernández.*

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## XAVIER GARCÍA BARDÓN

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under Nicole Brenez’s supervision, and has conducted extensive research on the history of the EXPRMNTL film festival at Knokke-le-Zoute (1949-1974), to which he has also devoted several film programmes and publications.

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

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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 ucellini* (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».

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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 is 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.

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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 cinephiliias 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...

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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.

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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*

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(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?

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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.

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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 been 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, Jirěs, 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».

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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 cinephilia 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 cinephilia - 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

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## 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

## 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,

Internacional de Cine de Buenos Aires. As an actor, he has appeared in *Drifting Clouds (Kauas pilvet karkaavat*, 1996), *Juba* (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.

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*.

# Paradoxes of the Nouvelle Vague

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Marcos Uzal

## ABSTRACT

This essay begins at the start of the magazine *Cahiers du cinéma* and with the film-making debut of five of its main members: François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette and Jean-Luc Godard. At the start they have shared approaches, tastes, passions and dislikes (above all, about a group of related film-makers from so-called 'classical cinema'). Over the course of time, their aesthetic and political positions begin to divide them, both as people and in terms of their work, until they reach a point where reconciliation is not possible between the 'midfield' film-makers (Truffaut and Chabrol) and the others, who choose to control their conditions or methods of production: Rohmer, Rivette and Godard. The essay also proposes a new view of work by Rivette and Godard, exploring a relationship between their interest in film shoots and montage processes, and their affinities with various avant-gardes: early Russian avant-garde in Godard's case and in Rivette's, 1970s American avant-gardes and their European translation.

## KEYWORDS

Nouvelle Vague, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut, radical, politics, aesthetics, montage.

In this essay the term ‘Nouvelle Vague’ refers specifically to the five film-makers in this group who emerged from the magazine *Cahiers du cinéma*: Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol and François Truffaut. Considering each of their respective careers, it might seem awkward to group them together like this, but not if we take into account that they started out at the same time, sometimes closely collaborating with each other, sharing their dislikes, their reference points (namely Hitchcock, Hawks, Lang, Renoir, Rossellini) and the same claims. What brought them together at the beginning wasn’t wanting to create a *tabula rasa* out of the past, but the opposite: a need to be part of a continuum, to explore some avenues that were barely known or neglected by the 1950s mainstream film industry (as Chabrol used to say, ‘following the old ships that no one else was following any longer’). The ‘young Turks’ from *Cahiers du cinéma* did not include the avant-garde in any significant capacity within the critical selection they first used to situate themselves within film history. Their references – whether cinematic, literary or musical – were essentially classical, the opposite of the film-makers from the ‘rive gauche’, like Alain Resnais, Chris Marker or Jean-Daniel Pollet, whose works were in sync with the *nouveau roman*, the magazine *Tel Quel* and with music and image-based experiments that intermingled in the 1960s.

The years from 1963 to 67 represent the end of the *Nouvelle Vague*’s ‘state of grace’, after a fruitful ‘misunderstanding’ between the film industry and these young iconoclasts. While there were obvious correspondences between the five film-makers’ first films, formally as well as economically, their paths grew apart more and more, until eventually they sometimes became opposed. When the recognition and success of the Nouvelle Vague died down and each of them had to choose a way of making a living, Truffaut and Chabrol were the most loyal to the American cinema they had loved and to the ‘auteur theory’

that had emerged from it: they considered that cinematic form should be explored as a kind of contraband, using the classic art of *mise-en-scène* rather than a revolutionary or modernist position. They therefore rejected any kind of marginalisation to remain great ‘midfield’ film-makers (Jean-Claude Biette’s expression, about Chabrol), taking the risk of accepting unlikely commissions (Chabrol) or alternating between dry, dark films and other lighter, more optimistic ones (the Jekyll and Hyde side of Truffaut that Daney used to talk about). In France this was possible because the film industry has always been strong, and because of this, it has always been perceived as something to take over from within, or by enclosing it.

Rohmer and Rivette searched for an independence both more complete and more humble than Truffaut’s, an independence that would let them continue being ‘amateurs’, something that Jean Rouch had himself extolled. This financial independence paralleled an economy of technical and formal means. Formally, what can be referred to as Rivette and Rohmer’s ‘modernity’ is mainly an extension of Bazin’s theories and of the cinema of Renoir and Rossellini: it rests on the idea of film as above all an art of recording. Therefore, if anything needs to be revolutionised it shouldn’t be an imaginary, pure form, or any abstract theorising, but, more concretely, the way films are made. This is something that can come up as the main issue during the film shoot, with the actors and the light. After the commercial failure of *The Sign of Leo* (*Le Signe du lion*, 1959), Rohmer had to wait for *The Collector* (*La Collectionneuse*), in 1967, to receive some recognition, an audience and the financial stability he would manage to keep until the end, which allowed him to not be an outsider, while also not compromising in any way to the industry (one of the things he was proudest of for a long time was not asking the CNC for any support<sup>1</sup>). In that respect, he was the most strictly faithful to the main claim of the Nouvelle Vague,

1. Centre National du Cinéma.

which Truffaut had signaled as having an ethical, rather than aesthetic, aim: transforming the means of production, freeing the cinema from technical tedium, allowing film-makers to 'point themselves to the subject' (as the impressionist used to say) almost as freely and weightlessly as a painter.

Of the five, Rivette was the most open to the artistic developments of his time, developments with which even Godard had an ambiguous relationship. What's more, in 1963, the generation of young critics that had arrived at *Cahiers du cinéma* in the early 1960s (such as Jean Narboni, Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean-André Fieschi) chose him to replace Rohmer as the magazine's managing editor. Rohmer was seen as too conservative and not open minded enough to the new styles of film-making that were emerging throughout the world. As a film-maker, Rivette from early on takes on the role of inherent outsider to the shooting and narrative styles Rivette was searching for. In 1964 he makes the following statement, distancing himself both from Truffaut and Chabrol's position, but also from Rohmer's classicism: 'I think the beginning of the Nouvelle Vague [...] is a phenomenon of interruption. In the end, it's the party pooper. Which means it will always have something to do with failure or misunderstanding. I don't think there can be real success in the Nouvelle Vague. I think the truth about the Nouvelle Vague is its own failure'.<sup>2</sup> And after the two consecutive setbacks which were the commercial failures of *Paris nous appartient* (1960) and later the censoring of *La Religieuse* (1966), Rivette became radicalised through *L'Amour fou* (1968), taking further his film shooting experience, opening up to improvisation and changing the duration of his story. Rivette's film shoots have much in common with some of the experiments the theatre was undergoing in the 1960s. He drafted a significant portion of his actors from the *metteur en scène* Marc'O's troupe. To understand Rivette's interest

in the experimental forms which seemed to not have really affected his four comrades, one need just read his answers to a questionnaire in the magazine *Positif* in 1982 (n. 254-255), in which he puts *La Région centrale* (1971) by Michael Snow, *Der Tod der Maria Malibran* (1972) by Werner Schroeter and *Central Bazaar* (1976) by Stephen Dwoskin among the thirty best films made between 1952 and 1982. It's hard to imagine another member of the Nouvelle Vague referring to these films in the 1970s, in a clear break both with classical Hollywood cinema and with the new trends of the 1960s; not even Godard. But Rivette also chooses films that continue being more about the experiential filmshoot process than about the montage, more about recording rather than intervening with the texture of the image. Connected essentially with the theatre, he is not seeking the purity of a certain kind of avant-garde movement, but is always following Bazin's theory, which advocates the fundamental impurity of the cinema.

Godard is the most clearly formalist and revolutionary film-maker out of the five that constituted then the core group of the Nouvelle Vague. For starters, this is because he brings together Bazin and Malraux, Renoir and Eisenstein, Cézanne and Picasso, giving equal place to the montage and the film shooting. Montage lets him not only deconstruct a scene's narration or structure, but above all to develop relationships, combinations. He distances himself from Bazin through the discontinuity of montage, but he finds him in the impurity of collage. The idea of collage, so often called up when talking about Godard, shows to what degree his composition starts from reality and from series of pre-existing images, shaking up the agreed hierarchies: pointing to the truth of the recorded moment, but also to sociological reality; showing images and sounds in art, but also in popular culture or advertisements. In this sense, Godard should be associated more with

2. RIVETTE, Jacques, in VALEY, Robert. *La Nouvelle vague par elle-même*, episode in the series *Cinéastes de notre temps*, 1964.

the happy audacity of Pop Art than with the disembodied braininess of the *nouveau roman*: re-appropriation and *derive* over theorising and the illusion of purity. All this is what sets him in opposition to the cold abstraction of *Last Year in Marienbad* (*L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, 1961), a beautiful object closed in on itself (which Resnais himself will respond to with *Muriel* in 1963). And this is the reason he is not as receptive to the French avant-gardes from the 1920s or American experimental film than to Eisenstein and Vertov, who will continue being his references in terms of montage. The last point also shows to what degree the conceptualisation of Godard's montage is political, firstly in a general sense (letting all of reality come into it, including elements coming from journalism and sociology), and then, more and more, in an exact way (referencing the wars in Algeria and Vietnam, his characters' leftist politics). Godard's political leaning is progressive and very coherent, but it could be said that the first great rupture takes place around 1966, while he's directing both *Made in USA* and *Two or three things I know about her* (*Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*). The second rupture takes place after May 1968, when he breaks with the film industry and with narrative films in order to make militant films. Between 1966 and May 68 a turning point takes place during which he makes essential works – the two just mentioned but also *La Chinoise* (1967) and *Weekend* (1967). What happens in these four features? Often, politics take preference over emotions (something which, until then, had only been the case in *Les Carabiniers* [1963]). To put it a different way, these films are a record of what *Alphaville* (1965) had imagined: a society in which political and economic oppression would crush the individual's emotions and would turn the fantasy which til then had lifted up Godard's characters above the evils of the world into something impossible. Because, as the end of *Made in USA* says, 'the left is too sentimental'; it's as if Godard were returning to his previous films from a political, rather than melancholic, point of view. In this way, *Two or three things I know about her* is like a 'cool' remake of *Vivre sa vie* (1962), one in

which sociological analysis prevails over fantasy. In the same way, in *La Chinoise* it's as if he had preserved the militance of the young characters in *Masculin féminin* (1966), but gotten rid of all their amorous and sexual preoccupations. In terms of *Weekend*, it extends the libertine vein and comic violence of *Les Carabiniers*, to the point of making its characters into grotesque figures, thrashing around in a society that has become absurd: war from now on is everywhere, it's the apocalyptic victory of consumerist egoism over reason, art and emotion, which can only be answered by the cruel and savage poetry of Lautréamont. Formally, it's about granting collage its full political and subversive dimension (which Lautréamont was justly a literary precursor to), something summed up by the lines that end *Made in USA*: 'A film by Walt Disney starring Humphrey Bogart; therefore, a political film'. Continuing to work within the film industry, Godard recycles images and myths to make them clash, and it's through this combination of genres and bringing together such disparate elements that he is political to begin with: placing them in the same shot, showing that Walt Disney and Humphrey Bogart belong to the same world as Mao or a worker from the Parisian suburbs. In these four films he takes the use of vivid colours farther than ever, showing visually how advertising has influenced the world, that the arrangement of the HLM housing estates are like laundry soap boxes, or how maoism is before anything else the colour red of the little book, which can drench the new images with a new blood. He uses this strident hyperrealism to translate a broader 'de-realising' caused by capitalism, television and advertising, but also (in *La Chinoise* and *Weekend*), by abstraction, or even the violence of the leftist theory which Godard films with irony and tenderness in equal measure. These four films represent equally the confirmation of political discourse in Godard's films, of clear and well-formulated theory, and not just commentary, or philosophical digression, driving the film. In *Two or three things I know about her*, the voiceover is for the first time not a narrative or fantasy element; instead, it thinks

up the images and the film as it's made, which became the beginning of the 1970s films. In *La Chinoise*, what interests Godard is the incarnation and recitation of discourse; not so much what the little red book says, more the theatricality that it imposes (something that will also be one of the main issues for the Dziga Vertov Group). In other words: Mao lets him become fully Brechtian. Always being a film-maker above all else, this new formal questioning is what Godard is seeking in order to begin his revolutionary theory: new discourses for a new theatre, new theory for new montages, and the colour red, lots of it. When he embarks into militant cinema after May 68, his main theme will still be film: how to make politically a film, and not just make a film that's satisfied with illustrating a discourse. In a burlesque scene in *Vladimir and Rosa* (*Vladimir et Rosa*, 1970) in which Jean-Pierre Gorin and him mumble through a discussion in a tennis court, he shows the things that will always save him from cold theorising: 1) the flow of words, images and ideas should be as concrete, alive and unpredictable as the back and forth of tennis balls; 2) practice should make theory tremble, and viceversa.

Despite all their differences, this quote from *Bande à part* (1964) connects all the Nouvelle Vague film-makers: 'Everything that is unquestionably new is, by the same logic, automatically old.' And even the most iconoclastic film-makers from this movement will continue to be faithful to the etymology of the word 'radical', despite it being so tainted: 'that which is at the roots'. While making *Out 1* (1971), Rivette is conscious of Feuillade and Renoir, and even in his most revolutionary period Godard refers above all else to the film-makers of the past – Rossellini, Vertov, Eisenstein. Even Jean Eustache and Philippe Garrel, the most direct and talented offspring of the Nouvelle Vague, will both be obsessed by the cinema made before they were born – silent cinema (Garrel) or Hollywood and French pre-war cinema (Eustache). For them, the Nouvelle Vague stands as the extension of an ancient path (one that goes through Lumière, Griffith, Vigo, Renoir, Rossellini) and the possibility of furthering it through the present and for itself. Eustache's brilliant idea starts there: in film, a revolution means to go back to the Lumière brothers always. •

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## MARCOS UZAL

Marcos Uzal writes for *Exploding Cinema*, *Vertigo* and *Trafic*, and is on *Trafic's* editorial board. He co-edited the book *Pour João Cesar Monteiro*. He is also co-director of the 'Côté Films' book series, published by Yellow Now, for which he contributed an essay on *I Walked with a Zombie*,

by Jacques Tourneur (1943). He has co-edited books about Tod Browning and Jerzy Skolimowski. He is the film curator at the Musée d'Orsay and has produced four short films.

# Salvadó Corretger, Glòria: *Spectres of Contemporary Portuguese Cinema: History and Ghost in the Images*

Leonard Muntaner, Barcelona, 2012, 324 pp.

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Miguel Armas

In the 1980s, Serge Daney defined Portuguese film-makers as 'archaeologists in love' that 'achieve to bring back the strange and glorious past of Portugal from very far away'. In *Spectres of Contemporary Portuguese Cinema: History and Phantom in the Images*, Glòria Salvadó focuses on how this past is shown in the images of the present. Through a comparative study of images by three essential directors (Manoel de Oliveira, João César Monteiro and Pedro Costa), Salvadó undertakes a broad journey through Portuguese cinema in parallel to the history and literature of that country.

The main reference of the book is French philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman, who elaborates his theory based on the works of Walter Benjamin, Aby Warburg and Carl Einstein. In books such as *Devant le temps*, *L'Image survivante* or *Devant l'image*, Didi-Huberman proposes to study the history of art through the search for connections, resonances and dialogue between images. Such method based on montage allows Salvadó to trace a new map of Portuguese cinematography, always from a non-chronological, nor linear perspective. At the same time, the book is highly accessible, as such methodology is used as a structural principle, and doesn't abuse theoretical references, as has become common ground in other recent studies inspired by Didi-Huberman.

The hypothesis of the research is that the cinema of Manoel de Oliveira, João César Monteiro and Pedro Costa resides, if unconsciously, in the historical survival (*Nachleben*) of the Portuguese imaginary, specifically that linked to the time of the sailors and the conquistadores. Such imaginary would always be accompanied by its own negative image, that is, colonial exploitation and slavery. As in Straub-Huillet's cinema, the image is responsible of burying these events in invisible layers, so that the function of montage would be to make these fissures visible, among which the spectres of these survivals manifest themselves. Hence we see how the historical memory of Portugal surfaces in the images of the present through a series of parallelisms, comparisons, oppositions between images, links to Portuguese literature and history, etc.

The study is divided in four chapters, which complement each other constantly. In the first chapter, Salvadó tackles the two main figures that live on in Portuguese cinema, two constant leitmotifs: the *counter-shot with death* and the *face to face with infinity*. The second and third chapters are respectively focused on the sea and the journey and the sailor. Finally, the final chapter is centred on the emergence of the fantastic and the phantom. In this itinerary, Monteiro's eye at the end of *Vai-e-vem* finds a correspondence with the final shot of *Um filme*

*falado* (Manoel de Oliveira), the boat of *A flor do mar* (João César Monteiro) lead to *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau), which in its turn takes us to the houses of Fontainhas (*No Quarto da Vanda* and *Juventude em marcha* by Pedro Costa), which then takes us to the shade of *I Walked with a Zombie* (Jacques Tourneur). Resonances emerge in a natural manner between film-makers who belong to different generations and champion different styles. In addition to her in-depth study of the filmographies of Oliveira, Monteiro and Costa, Salvadó also establishes other connections, with non-Portuguese film-makers (Murnau, Tourneur, Straub-Huillet) as well as with Portuguese ones (António Reis and Margarida Cordeiro, Miguel Gomes, João Nicolau, Teresa Villaverde, João Pedro Rodrigues, etc.)

Recommended for those who want to gain familiarity with Portuguese film-makers as well as those who are already familiar with it, *Spectres of Contemporary Portuguese Cinema: History and*

*Phantom in the Images* has the virtue of tracing a map that can continue to be broadened by the reader: it is enough to think about recent films such as *O Gebo e a sombra* (Manoel de Oliveira), *Tabu* (Miguel Gomes), *48* (Susana de Sousa Dias) or *Sweet Exorcist* (Pedro Costa) to see that the structural principle of Salvadó's book lives on beyond the works she discusses and that the reflection upon these recurrent figures of the Portuguese imaginary (the counter-shot with death, the sea as an unexplored and unknown space, the zombie and the phantom...) will modify our way of seeing and analyzing Portuguese films. In this sense, this book will become a referent, specially at a time when Portuguese cinema lives its worst moment at an economic level (absence of market and audience, interruption of public support, crisis of the Portuguese Cinémathèque) but one of its best moments at a creative level, albeit always in a solitary manner and in resistance against the slogans of the industry (in contrast with most European countries, specially Spain). •

## Rithy Panh (in collaboration with Christophe Bataille). *La eliminación*

Editorial Anagrama, Barcelona, 2013, 220 pp.

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Alfonso Crespo

‘I want to understand, explain and remember, and precisely in that order.’ This is how the Cambodian Rithy Panh sums up the Project of suture that his film-making and writing longs for. It is only now, with the publication of *The Elimination*, that the dimension of his project can be fully grasped in its artistic singularity, almost always neutralised by the ethical and aesthetic tutelage of Claude Lanzmann. Panh always recognised the debt and celebrated the filiation, and here he acknowledges the mastery of Shoah again, his training in the possibility of ‘seeing through words’, in the corollary that perforates echoes and repetitions about the present time, in the potential of montage as a weapon of refutation, but it is worth also noting that which separates them, and that these pages again reveal with painful precision: Panh’s condition of direct victim –whom the dictatorship of the Khmer Rouge (1975-79) left with almost no family left–, and foremost of miraculous survivor, as in the particular Bildungsroman here narrated he details the forced renunciations that were dictated from the black hole to which a country in ideological fugue precipitated itself, a country which forbid glasses and specialist knowledge as well as fishing and agriculture with ‘individualistic’ aims while the population was fell prey of famine. In Panh, cinema (and writing) are foremost a means of salvation, a means of letting out the rage and the torment accumulated, and if *The Elimination* has been compared to works by Primo Levi, Robert Antelme or Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, that is, with

the memoirs of authors who have returned from hell, it should also have been related to that of Jean Améry, whose ferrous ideology of resistance and perennial witness is so close to Panh’s approach.

How to speak, write and shoot from the wound without letting oneself to be taken over by the demons, without giving in to dismay either. Such is Panh’s puzzle, the self-imposed task that in *The Elimination* presents us with a particular writing of disaster, fragmentary, unclassifiable, on the brink of disintegration. Developed in parallel to the shooting of *Duch, le maître des forges de l’enfer* (2011), Panh uses the intermittent tête-à-tête with the former responsable of torture and execution S21 – precisely with the absence, the X to which they all pointed at in *S-21, la machine de mort Khmère rouge* (2003) – to make of the book a crucible of times in which to encapsulate his own tale about the abrasive years of the communist delirium in Cambodia. Nonetheless personal memory is not the end, but another step, a key (if a master one) that provides valuable materials with which to force the new masks and subterfuges of those bosses and torturers who now shield themselves in abiding the rules and the service to the motherland. The rest of the voices that emerge and disappear are the ones by Duch himself and others, pure glows of grief that present brief witnesses as counterpoints or spell out terrifying Khmer Rouge slogans. The intertwinement and contrast of perspective and points of view literarily perform that which Panh had already outlined in

his austere cinematographic practice; that is, that ethics resides in montage. The shocks of montage, its passages and returns, delineate a politics and construct a combative hermeneutics about the displacements and slippages of language. ‘Duch has a weak point’, states Panh, ‘he knows cinema, he doesn’t believe in repetitions, comparisons and echoes.’

This is how, finally, the ethics and politics of forms are combined to produce a critique of the brutality of the Khmer Rouge based on the verification of the deterioration of a language or, rather, its cancellation and the emergence of a new one, a violent one. If the Nazis threw to the ditches their figures, the Khmer Rouge did the same with their ‘bits of wood’, both of them rejoicing in an abuse of power that even pretended to efface death. Hence the neologism that gave place to the machinery of the S21, *kamtech*, ‘to pulverise’, the annihilation to which Duch threw the children of the ‘enemies’ once these had already been executed: the order was to destroy and not to leave any trace. The limits of the language of the Khmer Rouge were, as Wittgenstein would have said, those of its revolution, its world, one where surveillance and interrogations were before

alphabetisation, but with the hindsight of time and the strata accumulated about recent history, it was Panh himself, precisely one of the survivors of that Cambodia, who came back to make executioners and victims pass through the tribunal of words, which were sought to be rehabilitated as a source of witness and confession. This is what the Cambodian film-maker has been attempting since decades, to allow protagonists ‘to explain themselves’, that someone like Duch ‘recovers his humanity through words’. While in his films Panh lets people speak and, by way of contrast with the veteran Lanzmann, doesn’t interrupt, hoping that the filmic dispositive will become a truth machine in association with montage – which may bring into play another witness or a sequence from the propaganda archive, in order to contradict fake or biased witnesses – it is in *The Elimination*, which transcribes his dialogues with Duch, that his arduous and steep creative work is most visible. Such back room contains: the doubts, the anxiety, the anger, the suspicion of following the game of the criminal, the shock at his laugh, which opens tremendous distances amongst men, that marks the fragility of his project and, at the same time, its absolute necessity. •

# Guidelines for submissions

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## 1. SUBMISSION OF ARTICLES

*Cinema Comparative Cinema* accepts unpublished articles on comparative cinema. Articles that are not original will not be accepted. The maximum number of authors per article will be three.  
The main research strands of the journal are:

- The interpretation of filmic forms and the relationships between films, images and sounds.
- The history of interpretation and cinematographic ideas, and the analysis of critical and political contexts.
- Comparative essays on processes and practices of creation, distribution and exhibition.
- The study of the methodologies of comparative cinema and its relationship to literature and visual arts.
- The revision of the history of cinema based on the investigation of forms and the aesthetic confluences between films and narrative videos, non-fiction, avant-garde, scientific, industrial and expanded cinema.
- The essay and visual thought.

### Articles

The research articles will have a minimum length of 2,000 words and a maximum of 6,000 words, including footnotes. They will be related to thematic questions that will be published in the section Call for Papers of the website. The section 'Films in Discussion' includes interviews and conversations, aimed at research, debate and documentation, and in relation to the monographic topics tackled in each issue. The minimum length is 3,000 words and the maximum is 10,000 words. We are accepting submissions on a permanent basis. The journal will also include certain documents that act as the conceptual basis for the themes and research strands proposed in each issue.

### Reviews

The length of the reviews will be 800–1,000 words. The information of the reviewed book shall include: full name of the author, publisher, city of publication, year of publication and number of pages. The author of the review must indicate his or her name and email address. We accept reviews of books whose first edition has been published over the last 8 years.

## 2. ASSESSMENT OF SUBMISSIONS

*Cinema Comparative Cinema* will only publish the articles after having received a positive feedback from two reviewers external to the publisher. Once the article is submitted, the journal will confirm receipt of the text within 10 days. During the assessment process, the identity of the author/s and reviewer/s will remain anonymous. If there is a discrepancy between the assessment of both reviewers, the publisher will ask for a third reviewer. The journal will give a response to the authors within two months, and this will include a report from the reviewers. In the instance that the article is accepted for publication but changes and corrections are needed, the authors will have 20 days to re-submit the article.

## 3. GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

**Submission:** The texts shall be submitted in a Word file and via email to: [comparativecinema@upf.edu](mailto:comparativecinema@upf.edu). Images must be submitted separately, in a TIF format, numbered and their placement shall be indicated in the article. We recommend using the software PowerDVD (version 9, for PC) or GrabMac (for MAC). The images shall not be included in the text. The author shall also submit a signed declaration (download at [www.upf.edu/comparativecinema](http://www.upf.edu/comparativecinema)).

**CV:** All articles must be accompanied by a brief CV of 150 words or less. In the instance of articles written by more than one author, their Cvs will be published separately.

**Abstract:** Abstracts will be 300 words or less and only one paragraph. Abstracts must be submitted in Catalan or Spanish and English.

**Keywords:** Keywords will include 6–10 words, separated by comas. They must be submitted in Catalan or Spanish and English.

**Funding:** Authors are responsible for indicating funding and institutional support received for the research.

**Typeset and font size:** Articles must be submitted using Times New Roman, 12 points. Paragraphs must be justified; indents won't be used. Titles and subtitles must be indicated in bold.

**Word processor tools:** Please refrain from using tools such as tables, numbering, columns, headings, hyperlinks, footnotes, etc. Any numbering must be made manually.

**Bibliography:** The sources of both texts and ideas by other authors must be clearly identified. Sources must be indicated in the body of the text using the HARVARD style (LAST NAME, Year: Page number). Please list all the bibliography used at the end of the text

## 4. STYLE GUIDELINES

Download at [www.upf.edu/comparativecinema](http://www.upf.edu/comparativecinema).

