JOSEPH PAPP
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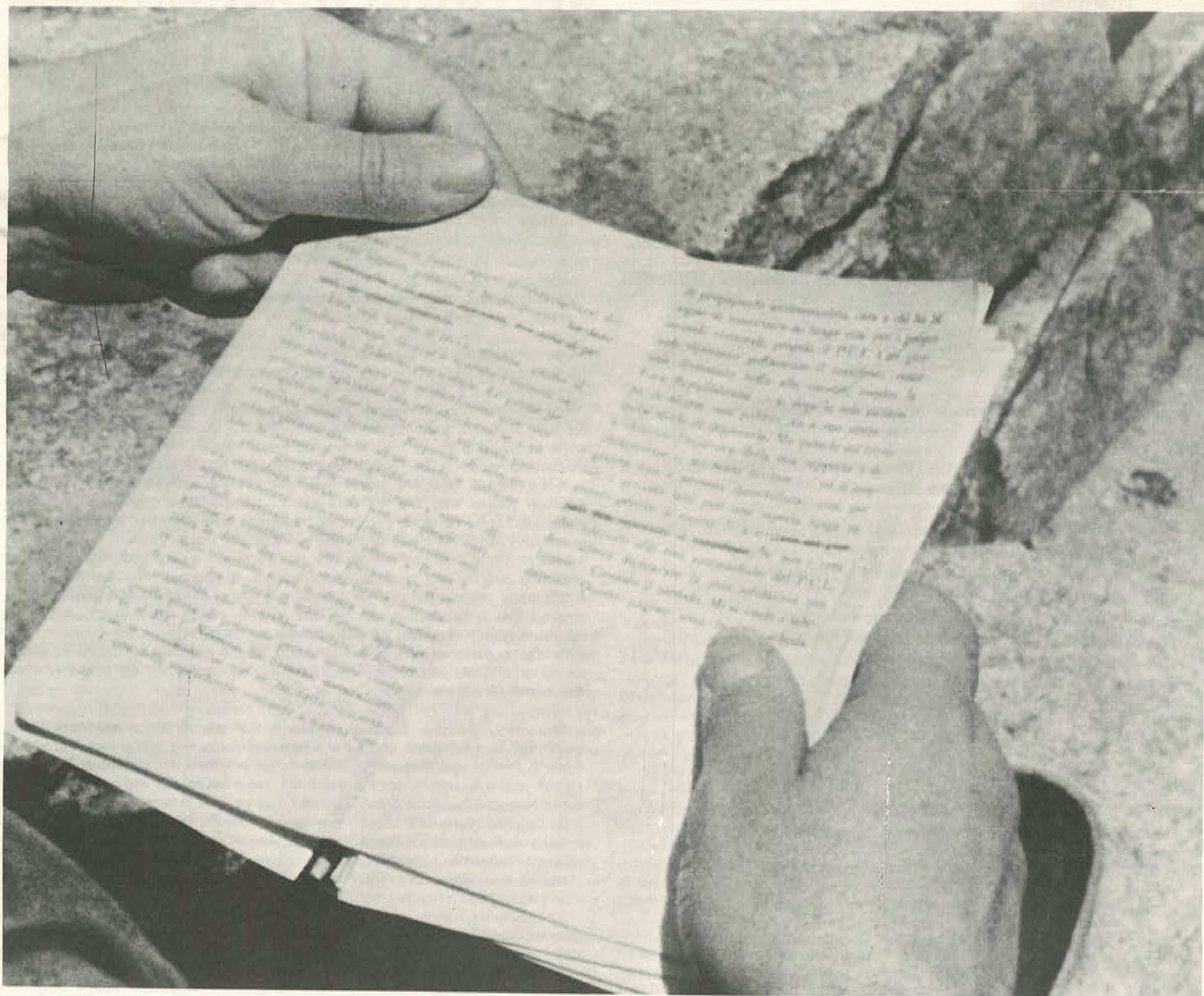
THE CINEMA OF JEAN-MARIE STRAUB AND DANIELE HUILLET

November 2-14, 1982



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The Cinema of Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet

November 2-14, 1982

FILM PROGRAM DIRECTOR **FABIANO CANOSA**
FILM PROGRAM COORDINATOR **STEPHEN SOBA**

Nov. 2 MACHORKA-MUFF (1963)
NICHT VERSOHNT (NOT RECONCILED, 1965)
plus ANTONIO DAS MORTES (Glauber Rocha, 1969)

Nov. 3 CHRONIK DER ANNA MAGDALENA BACH
(CHRONICLE OF ANNA MAGDALENA BACH, 1968)
EINLEITUNG ZU ARNOLD SCHOENBERGS BEGLEITMUSIK ZU EINER LICHTSPIELSCENE
(INTRODUCTION TO ARNOLD SCHOENBERG'S "ACCOMPANIMENT TO A CINEMATOGRAPHIC SCENE," 1972)
plus VREDENS DAG (DAY OF WRATH, Carl Dreyer, 1943)

Nov. 4 OTHON (1969)
"TOUTE REVOLUTION EST UN COUP DE DES"
(EVERY REVOLUTION IS A THROW OF THE DICE, 1977)
plus A KING IN NEW YORK (Charles Chaplin, 1957)

Nov. 5 GESCHICHTSUNTERRICHT (HISTORY LESSONS, 1972)
DER BRAUTIGAM, DIE KOMODIANTIN UND DER ZUHALTER
(THE BRIDEGROOM, THE COMEDIENNE, AND THE PIMP, 1968)
plus A CORNER IN WHEAT (D. W. Griffith, 1909)
LAS HURDES (LAND WITHOUT BREAD, Luis Bunuel, 1932)
CIVIL WAR (John Ford, 1962)

Nov. 6 & 7 MOSES UND ARON (MOSES AND AARON, 1975)
plus ALEXANDER NEVSKY (Sergei Eisenstein, 1938) (matinees)
BLIND HUSBANDS (Erich von Stroheim, 1918) (evenings)

Nov. 9 FORTINI-CANI (I CANI DEL SINAI / THE DOGS OF SINAI, 1976)
plus THIS LAND IS MINE (Jean Renoir, 1943)

Nov. 10 DALLA NUBE RESISTENZA (FROM THE CLOUD TO THE RESISTANCE, 1978)
TROP TOT, TROP TARD (TOO EARLY, TOO LATE, 1981)

Nov. 11 FORTINI-CANI
FROM THE CLOUD TO THE RESISTANCE

Nov. 12 FORTINI-CANI
TOO EARLY, TOO LATE

Nov. 13 & 14 FROM THE CLOUD TO THE RESISTANCE
plus ZANGIKU MONOGATARI (THE STORY OF THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUMS, Kenji Mizoguchi, 1939)
UNE AVENTURE DE BILLY LE KID (A GIRL IS A GUN, Luc Moullet, 1970)

Unless otherwise indicated, all films listed above are by Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet.

This program is subject to change.

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COVER
Franco Fortini reading his own text in *Fortini-Cani*, 1976.

Daniele Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub relax in America.

Introduction: Once it was Fire. . .

Jonathan Rosenbaum

D.W. Griffith at the end of his life: "What modern movies lack is the wind in the trees."

Rosa Luxembourg: "The fate of insects is not less important than the revolution."

Cezanne, who painted Mont Saint-Victoire again and again: "Look at this mountain, once it was fire."

(Quotations cited by Jean-Marie Straub before screening of *Too Early, Too Late* at the Collective for Living Cinema in New York City, April 30, 1982)

*

Although this booklet exists chiefly in order to assist the films of Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet — more precisely, to assist, accompany and amplify a season consisting of all their films to date and a selection of films by others that they consider exemplary to their own practice — it also aims deliberately at being obstinate, angry and difficult in certain ways: unreconciled. For starters, it won't do to try to convince people that Straub-Huillet films can be as easy to take as gumdrops. One has to acknowledge the problematic side of their work and then do something about it — curse, rage, marvel, give up, renegotiate, avoid, confront.

It's been said that Straub and Huillet sit around in Parisian cafes trying to dream up ways of forcing audiences to flee from theaters. Actually, such a statement bears some relationship to the truth. Asked at the Edinburgh Film Festival why the long sequences inside a car being driven through Rome in *History Lessons* were included, Straub replied (I quote from memory), in order to empty the theater, because people who are not able to look at the street will never be able to understand class struggle. (He added that being able to look at the street was not necessarily easy, that it had taken him some time to learn himself.)

This might be regarded dismissively as intransigence pure and simple, like many of Straub and Huillet's provocative statements. But further reflection may suggest that it is the commercial cinema and its own way of observing and perceiving — a process that precisely prevents us from looking at the street in any way except falsely, in search of certain things that block our awareness of other things — that is intransigent, perverse and oppressive, and all the more so for being so easy to consume. ("Ninety percent of films are based on contempt for the people who go to see them," Straub has said.)

*

Undeniably the most European figures in that branch of the neo-Marxist avant-garde that was educated at the Paris Cinematheque — a group that also includes Godard, Rivette and Moullet — Straub-Huillet are the least chewable, the angriest ("Look at this mountain, once it was fire"), the most mulish and intractable, and in some respects the most purely beautiful *and* political in their sounds and images. (What's most European about them is their assumption that formal beauty and morality are intimately related; for most American neo-Marxists, they're entirely different ballgames.) Nothing stylish (Godard), existential (Rivette) or comic (Moullet) ever seems to threaten their iron determination to change the world every time they position a camera and microphone.

Straub-Huillet literally "have no place" in the impoverished consumer and service oriented American film culture that currently dominates the scene; scarcely any place, even, in the timid pages of supposedly enlightened avant-garde magazines like *Millennium Film Journal* or *Film Culture* or *October*, which tend to thrive on local talent, unthreatening iconoclasts, and relative conservatives like Frampton or Fassbinder. No film by Straub-Huillet has opened commercially in the U.S. or even played at the New York Film Festival since 1975. (A curious anomaly, since the first

Moses and Aaron, 1975.

eight of their films up through *Moses and Aaron* — reviewed by Richard Eder in *The New York Times* as *Aaron and Moses* — have shown there.)

The various academic and/or marketing categories designed for classifying, grouping, cataloging, studying and consuming films are confounded by the troublesome, cumbersome, ambiguous relations of Straub-Huillet's films to nationality, genre and authorship. Their conflation and/or confusion of aesthetics with politics and vice versa place too many critics on the spot, forcing certain contradictions to the surface which otherwise might remain peacefully dormant in the theories (acknowledged or otherwise) as well as the practices of such critics. A Kael, Sarris or Denby could not even begin to cope with any of these films on their own terms without cracking apart at the seams — which is already a promising sign. The power and beauty in these films are not the kind that they (or we) can comfortably live with, because they essentially tell us to change our life — which "movies" aren't supposed to do, except metaphorically. The trouble with Straub-Huillet: they mean business.

*

A strange two-headed beast, this Straub-Huillet. Notwithstanding all the familiar sexist arguments that reduce this couple to a husband and an assistant, the degree to which every aspect of their work is predicated on a division and sharing of duties cannot be simply rationalized into a solitary genius figure. (This is a problem encountered even by Tony Rayns here, in his otherwise excellent review of *Every Revolution is a Throw of the Dice.*) Consider, for instance, the degree to which Huillet handles all the business — a factor in production no less essential than many other aspects. So what does one call them, how does one write about them, what does one *do* with them? Like Laura (Riding) Jackson, they tend to confound indexes and standard package labels, not to mention reviews, book spines and marquees. The format of *The New Yorker*'s very metaphysical, nonmaterialist "Goings on About Town" is not likely to have a good time with them.

On the other hand, certain publications (such as *Cahiers du Cinema, Filmkritik, Screen, Wedge* and this booklet) tend to coddle and protect Straub-Huillet, reinforcing the same ghetto strategy from within. The most familiar act of piety towards them, by now something of an international mania, is to print one of their scripts — which practically everyone does, and practically no one else reads. Certainly these can be useful as work tools — although the original texts used in each film almost invariably turn out to be more relevant and interesting.* The point to be made here is that (a) the printing of these scripts has frequently come to replace the necessary critical work, and (b) the fact that their films are so difficult to grapple with critically is partially what makes them so exciting; they really *are* doing something new. It should also be noted that some criticism of distinction about their work is already available in English — I'm thinking principally of the four essays in Martin Walsh's *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema* and Jean-Andre Fieschi's lyrical outburst in Richard Roud's *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary.*

*

It may be possible to argue that anger assumes much the same role in Straub-Huillet's work that carnality-spirituality assumes in Dreyer's and Bresson's. For them, it sometimes seems that anger and resistance can even become a form of mysticism — or, at the very least, a discipline that constitutes a sheer act of faith. *They believe in the world,* one is tempted to say; which isn't true of most of us. (See Straub's comments, both at the beginning of this Introduction and in section #3 of "Straub and Huillet on Filmmakers They Like. . .", about the wind and Griffith. Look at this mountain of cinema, he seems to be saying; once it was fire. Or, as Godard quotes Lubitsch in his recent short *Letter to Freddy Buache:* "If you know how to shoot mountains, water and greenery you can also shoot people.")

*

What drew me initially to their work, I must confess, is the particular stamp of their youthful cinephilia — strictly as another one-time frequenter of the Cinematheque Francaise and passionate fan of *La Nuit du Carrefour* and *Scarface,* Lang and Chaplin and Mizoguchi. For better and for worse, a particular tradition, which I have tried to outline in the selection of texts called "Straub and Huillet on Filmmakers They Like and Related Matters" — which may help to explain why I've omitted most of their negative comments about films and filmmakers they dislike. (For further material, the reader should consult the bibliography of interviews, scripts and other statements and texts by Straub-Huillet on the back cover of the March 1976 *Monthly Film Bulletin,* vol. 43, no. 506.)

Echoes of this tradition can be seen in the work of such contemporaries as Eustache, Rivette and Moullet. Examples abound: the direct evocations of Murnau in *The Mother and the Whore,* of *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* in *Mes Petits Amoureuses;* the Hitchcockian doubling and inspirations of Hollywood cartoons and musicals in *Celine and Julie Go Boating;* or the special resonance given to the title of Moullet's *Les Contrebandieres (The Smugglers)* by the fact that the French title of Lang's *Moonfleet* is *Les Contrebandieres de Moonfleet.*

"Language is theft," Moullet aptly pointed out to Roland Barthes in Pesaro in 1966, in reference to the language of Hollywood and its decadent derivatives. (See "A la Recherche du Luc Moullet: 25 Propositions" in the November-December 1977 *Film Comment* for further details about the least known of all the filmmakers in this season — and a figure whom one of my more starstruck colleagues once accused me of inventing.) This is only to say that the relations of Godard, Rivette, Eustache, Moullet and Straub-Huillet to commercial filmmaking are invariably dialectical, unlike the slobbering tributes, cribs and variations of Bogdanovich, Carpenter and De Palma (whom, even at their best, are never bringing critical perspectives to what they pilfer — merely simplifying them into formal diagrams).

The profound distrust and fear of the world that "the movies" bequeath to us in their alienated soundtracks and falsified images (see Moullet's "Film is Only a Reflection of the Class Struggle," below) is a tradition that Straub-Huillet's films are designed directly to oppose, even though significant parts of that tradition are also being honored by them in this season — exceptional instances where the work of a Ford, a Renoir, a Hawks or a Lang can transcend these material limitations.

"No aspect of artistic creation is without a political basis for Straub and Huillet," David Ehrenstein wrote recently (October 1, 1982) in the *Los Angeles Reader.* The list of films that they admire for this particular season is eccentric,* yet anything but arbitrary. I can't claim to know the reasons for the selection in every case. At a meeting with Straub and Huillet last spring, one of them (I forget which one) inadvertently cleared up my curiosity about the inclusion of Erich von Stroheim's *Blind Husbands* (over, say, Stroheim's *Foolish Wives* or *Greed)* with the simple remark that it was the only film of Stroheim's in which Stroheim himself had control over the final editing. An obvious point, perhaps, in retrospect, but how many of us are so politically focused that the same reason for the selection might have occurred to us?

Indeed, all the choices of films by Straub and Huillet in this season can be called political choices, although some may be quasi-mystical as well. (See, for instance, the remarks about Lang's *Der Tiger von Eschnapur* and *Das indische Grabmal* in section #6 of "Straub and Huillet on Filmmakers They Like. . .") This doesn't necessarily make their decisions simple-minded either. There are no "of courses" in this season that I can think of: the relation of Straub-Huillet to *The Big Sky,* for instance, is not immediately obvious. As with their own films, some form of work is required.

What remains essential to the controversy of their work is not their grasp of either politics or art — their sophistication about both is evident in much of what they say — but the precise point(s) at which their art and their politics intersect.

As an example of the impact that Straub-Huillet have made on the work of a wholly American artist, consider the testimony of Martha Rosler, interviewed by Jane Weinstock in *October* #17:

> ROSLER: . . . I think my video has been influenced by the Straub-Huillet films. . . . At least I felt a strong sympathy when I saw them, but I don't think I use film as they do. I'm not sure when I saw their work, but I'd be willing to admit either influence or similarity.
>
> WEINSTOCK: In what aspect?
>
> ROSLER: The aggressively self-conscious camera-work; the insistence that every movement counts; the way shots are edited together; a distanciation in acting; a cool, formalized relation to subjectivity — I always think of Gustav Leonhardt playing the harpsichord in the Bach film.
>
> WEINSTOCK: What about your texts? They seem very dissimilar to those of Straub and Huillet.
>
> ROSLER: Really? Including *History Lessons?*
>
> WEINSTOCK: Yes. They use a preexistent text, one of Brecht's.
>
> ROSLER: Yet because of the film's meditative setting, it floats free of the narrative and becomes a philosophical text.

*

A couple of personal biases:

(1) Straub-Huillet strike me as major filmmakers, but I certainly can't pretend to accept their work without qualm or difficulty. Even after repeated viewings, the Bach film seems to suffer from a certain academic exactness (of performance, of framing, of conception) that its many beauties fail to overwhelm for me. Some of the same problems may hound the more interesting *Introduction to Arnold Schoenberg's Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene.*

(2) Apart from Michael Snow's *La Region Centrale,* I don't know any more interesting films about landscapes than the last three Straub-Huillet features: *Fortini-Cani, From the Cloud to the Resistance* and *Too Early, Too Late.* But their relationship to history is antithetical to Snow's in most respects, especially insofar as every site for them becomes the token (remnant, witness, symbol, pretext) of a political struggle. (Aside from the nationalistic, Canadian context of Snow's structural epic, the landscape there is wholly *other* — undefined by any human presence, apart from the shadow of a computer-operated camera.)

*In the case of *Moses and Aaron,* it is simply not possible to appreciate certain directorial decisions unless one has read the stage directions in Schoenberg's libretto, which Straub-Huillet simultaneously interpret and critique. For spectators who argue that this kind of work should be extraneous to The Aesthetic Experience — a cultural position that rules out T.S. Eliot and Antonioni while permitting Woody Allen and Fassbinder — a desired end-product, not a process, is the point of aesthetics. Straub-Huillet's utopian heresy: to present us with desired end-products in impossible times, times when it is impossible to cope with them, and then dare us to want to cope with them — intellectual striptease of a puritannical cast, pressed to agitational purposes.

*Due to a shortage of programming space and/or lack of availability, four films selected by Straub and Huillet have been omitted from this season: Robert Bresson's *Journal d'un cure de campagne (Diary of a Country Priest),* Howard Hawks' *The Big Sky,* and Fritz Lang's *Der Tiger von Eschnapur (The Tiger of Eschnapur)* and *Das indische Grabmal (The Hindu Tomb).* For the record, their alternate choices were Lang's *Cloak and Dagger,* Mizoguchi's *Miss Oyu* and *Street of Shame,* and Moullet's *Les Contrebandieres (The Smugglers).* In a similar season held in Paris last February, a few other selections were different: Chaplin's *City Lights,* Abel Gance's *Capitaine Fracasse,* Mizoguchi's *Sansho Dayu,* Renoir's *Une Partie de Campagne* and *Boudu sauve des eaux.*

Too Early, Too Late, 1981.

An extraordinary facet of *Too Early, Too Late:* that it is the first Straub-Huillet film without characters, yet feels more populated than any of the others (chiefly in the second part). Hence the locations register as something more than tourist spots, as something much denser — places one has actually been, soaked with human presence.

*

One of the major political lessons of Straub-Huillet: that the anger of art and individuals can be just as implacable as the collective weight and inertia of institutions. Give me a moment as beautifully angry as the violent chop of water at the beginning of the pan in the last shot of *Too Early, Too Late*, and I think I can believe in the human will again, and in the force of nature too.

*

"A film that one shoots is always in the present": Straub's statement of an important agreement with Jacques Rivette about history (in section #19 of "Straub and Huillet on Filmmakers They Like. . .") points to a significant aspect of all the texts in this book — that they are all *dated* in very concrete ways. Thus the time of the first appearance of each is important to note. Luc Moullet's article, published in *Cahiers du Cinema* in 1967, bristles with references to French rock and films of that period, as well as the French and American economies of the mid-Sixties. Gilberto Perez's superb, lengthy study of Straub-Huillet — the real centerpiece of this collection, and the best account of their work in English that I know — was published over eleven years later in *Artforum*, at a point in their work when they were still only beginning their concentration on (mainly) rural landscapes which has dominated their subsequent features.

Tony Rayns' synopsis and review of *Every Revolution is a Throw of the Dice* was written for the British Film Institute's *Monthly Film Bulletin* in 1979, and follows that publication's particular format in its division between an informational summary of a film's contents and an interpretation/evaluation of those contents. Bruce Jenkins' "Adaptation and Ideology: Two Films by Straub and Huillet" is adapted only slightly from a lecture given by the author in Buffalo at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in April 1981, as part of a four-part film-and-lecture series on contemporary European cinema. (To the best of my knowledge, these were the first American screenings of these films.)

My own "Transcendental Cuisine," which is also about *From the Cloud to the Resistance*, written for (but not published by) *Soho News* in 1981, is perhaps the most mired in 'local' history of all the texts reproduced here, with specific references to both a column by Andrew Sarris that appeared in the *Village Voice* the previous week and a college course I was teaching at the time (as well as a 1962 essay by Manny Farber, "White Elephant Art vs. Termite Art") — although Serge Daney's very beautiful and lighthearted "Cinemeteorology," published in the Paris newspaper *Liberation* last February, begins with a reference to *Blow Out*, which opened in Paris the same week as *Trop Tot, Trop Tard (Too Early, Too Late)*. Even the filmography, which is adapted and slightly expanded from one published in Paris around the same time — in conjunction with a retrospective at Studio 43 which inspired the present season — is limited and defined in part by information available to me in the summer and fall of 1982.

A final word about the selection of texts for this booklet: the articles by Perez and myself are both included at Straub's suggestion; Huillet suggested the Moullet article and sent me a copy of the piece by Daney; all the other editorial decisions are my own. Regarding the translations by myself and others, it should be noted that the occasional awkwardness of the language spoken (or written) by Straub and Huillet, while never consciously sought in any concerted way, was never consistently avoided either. Like the natural sounds and heavy accents heard in early sound films by Renoir such as *La Nuit du Carrefour* and *Toni*, this roughness is often only the by-product of an effort to be direct, accurate, honest and clear rather than slick or decorative.

For special and invaluable assistance in the preparation of this booklet and season I'd like to thank Fabiano Canosa (who literally made the whole thing possible), as well as Manny Farber and Patricia Patterson, Sandy Flitterman, Frederic de Goldschmidt of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, Phil Mariani, Luc Moullet, Gerald O'Grady and Bruce Jenkins of Media Study/Buffalo, New Yorker Films, Joseph Papp, Gilberto Perez, Berenice Reynaud (for help with the translations), Nancy Sher and Tony Safford of the American Film Institute, Ingrid Scheib-Rothbart of New York's Goethe House, Steven Soba (for advice, encouragement and help every step of the way), and Elliott Stein — not to mention Amy Taubin, whose assistance was entirely inadvertent, but who got me angry enough to want to launch this project. . . . And, finally, Straub and Huillet themselves, who indirectly taught me how to put this anger to work.

J. R.
October 1982

Filmography

Daniele Huillet: born May 1, 1936.

Jean-Marie Straub: born (in Metz) January 8, 1933.

Met Daniele Huillet in Paris in 1954.

Assisted Jacques Rivette on *Le Coup du Berger* (a 1956 short).

Left France in June 1958. Sentenced (in his absence) to a year in prison by the Armed Forces Tribunal in Metz. Pardoned in June 1971. Resided in Munich until 1969.

Since then, they have both lived in Rome.

1962

MACHORKA-MUFF (17½ minutes)
Photography: Wendelin Sachtler (35 mm)
Sound: Janos Rozner, Jean-Marie Straub
Actors: Erich Kuby *(Erich von Machorka-Muff)*, Renate Lang *(Inniga von Zaster-Pehnunz)*
Based on the story "Bonn Diary" by Heinrich Boll
Filmed in ten days on location in Bonn and Munich, September 1962

1964-65

NOT RECONCILED or "Only Violence Helps Where Violence Rules" (53 minutes)
Photography: Wendelin Sachtler (35 mm)
Sound: Lutz Grubnau
Actors: Henning Harmssen *(Robert Fahmel, age 40)*, Ulrich Hopmann *(Robert Fahmel, age 18)*, Ernst Kutzinski *(Schrella, age 15)*, Ulrich von Thuna *(Schrella, age about 35)*, Martha Standner *(Johanna Fahmel, age 70)*, Daniele Huillet *(Johanna Fahmel as a young woman)*
Based on the novel *Billiards at Half-Past Nine* by Heinrich Boll
Filmed in six weeks on location in Cologne and Munich, August-September 1964, and two weeks at Easter 1965

1967

CHRONICLE OF ANNA MAGDALENA BACH (93 minutes)
Photography: Ugo Piccone, Saverio Diamanti, Giovanni Canfarelli (35 mm)
Sound: Louis Hochet, Lucien Moreau
Actors: Gustav Leonhardt *(Johann Sebastian Bach)*, Christiane Lang *(Anna Magdalena Bach)*, and diverse orchestras
Filmed in eight weeks on location in Preetz, Stade, Hamburg, Eutin, Luneburg, Lubeck, Nurnberg, Freiberg/Sachsen, East Berlin, Regensburg and Haseldorf, August-October 1967

1968

THE BRIDEGROOM, THE COMEDIENNE AND THE PIMP (23 minutes)
Photography: Klaus Schilling, Hubs Hagen (35 mm)
Sound: Peter Lutz, Klaus Eckelt
Actors: Rainer Werner Fassbinder *(Freder in the play, Pimp in the film)*, Lillith Ungerer *(Marie in the play, Lillith in the film)*, Hanna Schygulla *(Lucy)*, Peer Raben *(Alt in the play, Willi in the film)*
Filmed in five days on location in Munich, August 1968

1969

OTHON or Eyes do not want to close at all times or perhaps one day Rome will permit herself to choose in her turn (83 minutes)
Photography: Ugo Piccone, Renato Berta (16 mm, Eastman Color)
Sound: Louis Hochet, Lucien Moreau
Editing: Straub, Huillet
Actors: Olimpia Carlisi *(Camille)*, Adriano Apra *(Othon)*, Anne Brumagne *(Plautine)*, Ennio Lauricella *(Galba)*, Marilu Parolini *(Flavie)*, Jean-Claude Biette *(Martian)*, Jean-Marie Straub *(Lacus)*, Eduardo de Gregorio *(Atticus)*
Based on the play *Othon* by Pierre Corneille
Filmed in four weeks on location at the Palatine Hill and in the gardens of the Villa Doria Pamphili in Rome, August-September 1969

1972

HISTORY LESSONS (85 minutes)
Photography: Renato Berta, Emilio Bestetti (16 mm, Eastman Color)
Sound: Jeti Grigioni
Actors: Gottfried Bold *(The Banker)*, Johann Unterpertinger *(The Peasant)*, Henri Ludwigg *(The Lawyer)*, Carl Vaillant *(The Writer)* Benedikt Zulauf *(The Young Man)*
Based on the novel *The Business Affairs of Mr. Julius Caesar* by Bertolt Brecht
Filmed on location in Rome, Frascati, Terenten (Alto Adige), and on the island of Elba, June-July 1972

1972 **INTRODUCTION TO ARNOLD SCHOENBERG'S ACCOMPANIMENT TO A CINEMATOGRAPHIC SCENE** (15 minutes)

Photography: Renato Berta (16 mm, Eastman Color)
Sound: Jeti Grigioni
Music: Arnold Schoenberg
Actors: Gunter Peter Straschek, Daniele Huillet, Jean-Marie Straub, Peter Nestler
Filmed in Rome and Baden-Baden, July-September 1972

1975 **MOSES AND AARON** (105 minutes)

Photography: Ugo Piccone, Saverio Diamanti, Gianni Canfarelli (35 mm, Eastman Color)
Sound: Louis Hochet, Ernst Neuspiel, Georges Vaglio
Actors: Gunter Reich *(Moses)*, Louis Devos *(Aaron)*, Eva Csapo *(Young Woman)*, Richard Salter *(Man)*. Choir and Symphony Orchestra of the ORF (Vienna), under the musical direction of Michael Gielen
Based on the opera *Moses and Aaron* by Arnold Schoenberg
Filmed on location in the amphitheater of Alba Fucense and at Lago Matese, August-September 1974

1976 **FORTINI-CANI** (88 minutes)

Photography: Renato Berta, Emilio Bestetti (16 mm, Eastman Color)
Sound: Jeti Grigioni
Actors: Franco Lattes *(Franco Fortini)*, Luciana Nissim, Adriano Apra
Based on the book *The Dogs of Sinai* by Franco Fortini

1977 **EVERY REVOLUTION IS A THROW OF THE DICE** (11 minutes)

Photography: Willy Lubtchansky (35 mm, color)
Sound: Louis Hochet
Actors: Daniele Huillet, Marilu Parolini, Dominique Villain, Andrea Spingler, Helmut Farber, Michel Delahaye
Based on the poem *A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance* by Stephane Mallarme

1978 **FROM THE CLOUD TO THE RESISTANCE** (105 minutes)

Photography: Saverio Diamanti, Gianni Canfarelli (35 mm, color)
Sound: Louis Hochet, Georges Vaglio
Music: Gustav Leonhardt
Actors: Olimpia Carlisi *(Nephele, the Cloud)*, Gino Felici *(Hippolocus)*, Ennio Lauricella *(Tiresias)*, Mauro Monni *(The Bastard)*, Carmelo Lacorte *(Nuto)*
Based on the books *Dialogues with Leuco* and *The Moon and the Bonfires* by Cesare Pavese

1980-81 **TOO EARLY, TOO LATE** (105 minutes)

Photography: Willy Lubtchansky, R. Alazraki (16 mm, color)
Sound: Louis Hochet
Commentary: Daniele Huillet (first part: letter sent by Friedrich Engels to Karl Kautsky), Bhagat El Nadi (second part: text by Mahmoud Hussein)
Filmed on locations in France (including Treogan, Mottreff, Marbeuf, Harville and outside Lyon and Rennes) in June 1980 and in Egypt in May 1981

1982 **EN RACHACHANT** (10 minutes)

Photography: Henri Alekan (35 mm, black & white)
Filmed on location in Paris in August 1982

Not Reconciled, 1965. Daniele Huillet (Johanna Fahmel as a young woman) in center.

Straub and Huillet on Filmmakers They Like and Related Matters*

1. On Robert Bresson

PHIL MARIANI: How did your collaboration begin? Were you involved primarily in the theoretical nature of film, or were you interested in becoming filmmakers?

STRAUB: No, I was not interested. Daniele was. I was interested in showing films because I had the occasion to lead a film group in Metz and Nancy. At that time I showed films from Mizoguchi, Chaplin, Renoir, Hitchcock, Eisenstein, and so on. I wanted to write about them. It was only the *Chronicle* project, which I discovered one day. I went to Bresson and said to him, "There could be something interesting for you," and he said, "No, no, you have to make the film yourself." And so I was trapped, that's all. And before, I had only studied literature. Daniele and I met at school in 1954. I think she wanted to make films.

HUILLET: I wanted to make documentaries.

STRAUB: I think I understood that she wanted to make ethnological films. And then she was trapped by me. I said to her, "I have this project and Bresson said to me, 'do it yourself.' "

2. On Bresson, Gremillon, Lang, Cezanne, Giotto, Dreyer. . .

JOEL ROGERS: . . . You would count Bresson as a great influence on your work, wouldn't you?

STRAUB: I have great admiration for *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* and *Diary of a Country Priest*, and he has certainly influenced our work. But his later movies I don't like at all. *Lancelot du lac*, for example, holds no interest for me at all. It's difficult to talk about my influences. Richard Roud always says that my culture is German culture, which is not true. I have the cultural training of a French university student, and no specific or deep training in German literary culture. I learned my German in first grade, during the war, did my extensive studies in French literature, and was in Germany really for the first time in 1956. And then on the contrary he says I have a French cinematographic culture, citing Bresson and Gremillon as influences. Gremillon interests me very much, as a true communist filmmaker. But I haven't had a chance to look at his films carefully at all. And with Bresson I saw those two early films, and I'm sure they influenced me greatly, but I'm not able to say just how. So I will leave such comparisons to people who know all of both our work.

But really I think my most important influences in terms of films were from *German* directors. When I look over Fritz Lang's German movies and American movies again, I see not only in the former the problems and concerns of the German expressionist theater in the thirties, but something more, in the American movies, the subversion of American movies, his reflection on cinema, on American cinema. And, as Louis Seguin has rightly pointed out, there is the influence from before 1933, the influence of Lang's *Niebelungen*, and even *Metropolis*, on *Moses and Aaron*. Then there are lots of American movies that I've seen that have made an influence, although I would say a hundred times less than Godard or Rivette, for example, and because I soon left Paris and went to Germany, and it was hard to see them there. And really that's all. I'd seen some movies of Lang, and three or four films by Mizoguchi, and some films of Renoir who influenced me at least as much as Bresson did, by the way, and some films of Eisenstein, and that's about all. But that's enough. It's not important to know them all, but just to know a few well. You don't need to know all the museum when you go to a museum, but only a few paintings. In my case, in fact, for example, I know three paintings by Cezanne very well. It didn't do me any good at all to go to the museum all the time, but to reflect concretely on a limited amount of work. That's culture, as they say. It does not consist of having it all, but in having reflected concretely on a few things. For that matter, in painting there's another thing that I'm very familiar with, because in 1952 I spent some time in a church where some work by Giotto is. I returned there several times and that, I am sure, has also been a great influence on our work. In this sense, our culture, or what they would like to call our "culture," is precise, centered on two or three or four points. And to go back to your question, the influence of Bresson has played a role like these other examples. I should mention also Dreyer. Two films in particular, *Day of Anger* and *Vampire*, I know better than the films of Bresson. The difference is just that I know Bresson personally, and I didn't know Dreyer.

3. On D. W. Griffith

STRAUB: . . . There is a very beautiful sentence by Griffith, "What the modern movie lacks is beauty, beauty from the moving wind in the trees." The wind is important in the [*Chronicle*], the wigs and the costumes contribute towards this, the wind is nothing but the spirit. . .

4. On Kenji Mizoguchi

STRAUB: The [*Chronicle*] is chronological. The first images that one sees concern the period when Bach was thirty-five, hence rather close to the age of our Leonhardt. What pleased me was to shoot a film about a man whom one wouldn't see age. I still had no intention of putting makeup on him in any way — I still haven't used makeup on anyone in front of the camera, neither for *Machorka-Muff* nor for *Not Reconciled*. And at the end, when one holds on a window and one hears how he died — "expiring gently and happily," as the commentary says — he will look exactly the same way that he did at thirty-five. Perhaps I'm deceiving myself, for I haven't seen the film in ten years, but I believe that in Mizoguchi's *The Life of Oharu*, the woman, the central character, was also shown over a lifespan, without trying in any way to foster the illusion that she was growing older. Simply, as the text of a cantata puts it, "That your old age will be like your youth."

STRAUB: I am not a Marxist — not as far as I know, in any case. Maybe I'm being a little grandiloquent, but I submit that the [*Chronicle*] is a Marxist film, insofar as it shows people whom one can respect with their mentality, the mentality of the period in which they lived. For me, the most Marxist film that I know is Mizoguchi's *Sansho the Bailiff*, which is a film profoundly affected by Buddha, but not Buddhist. To help people to be lucid in the present, one has to help them to acquire this lucidity. A film on the past which is lucid can contribute to helping the present more than a film on the present without any lucidity on this present. It is very difficult to make films on the events of the present. I saw some films in Venice on the May Events in Paris.

*The sources of these quotations are listed at the end of this section.

Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach, 1967.

These films are documents assembled to make a film which is still to be made, for one never finds oneself in the right place at the right time. The best film on the Russian Revolution, *October*, was shot by Eisenstein in 1927, ten years afterwards. To make a film in the present, the author has to be capable of thinking very rapidly.

5. On Glauber Rocha and Brazil

HUILLET: . . . Among those who speak the same language, a film can be more accessible to people who aren't necessarily intellectuals, or specifically those types that one sees in the arthouses. I believe that there, Rocha was right: *Othon*, although Brazil doesn't speak French, is easier in a certain way for Brazilian peasants than it is for many Parisian intellectuals.

STRAUB: Yes, in Brazil they saw the Bach film four times in one day, and each time there were two thousand people in the theater. And it was a film without subtitles: it was a copy that I don't know which Goethe Institute in Germany had sent or relayed, without subtitles, without anything. The people stayed; I asked Rocha if people walked out and he said that no, not one person left. Because in Germany, when *Bach* is shown, it touches them more directly because they understand what's going on, what information — because there is a lot of information, it is also a film of information — is given by the narration, the language, etc. Fine. So although they're more involved than they could be otherwise, many walk out. In Brazil, they stay seated.

6. On Fritz Lang and Germany

QUESTION: In the extended take [of *Othon*] where Lacus and Martian walk together, what role does the camera play?

STRAUB: It first must be emphasized that the camera isn't an eye but, to be precise, a look. That's the operation at work. Above all, one must certainly not have the impression that the camera is an eye which moves about, but precisely that it's a look. And one must know the distance — moral and material distance, they're the same thing — between what one shows and the camera. The Germans say "Einstellung" for framing. "Einstellung" also means moral disposition. It's obvious that when one sees Lacus and Martian taking their little stroll, it's the idea of complicity, quite simply. I believe what is necessary is an idea. An idea, but one which has neither a symbolic nor a psychological intention. A moral idea, therefore a political one.

QUESTION: In the films of Fritz Lang, every reverse-angle always gives the impression that the camera really occupies the place of the character situated next to it.

STRAUB: Fritz Lang is the one who has the surest moral sense among those who make films.

QUESTION: So you agree with what Godard said: a tracking shot is a moral question.

STRAUB: Certainly, since one says "Einstellung" in German. "Einstellung" is what the French call the framing and the shot. Materially that means: to be placed; "Ein," with a direction. That means to place the camera with a direction.

Fritz Lang has a morality of iron, one feels that in each of his shots and his camera placements, but one also feels that in his relations with his producers; he's the only one who succeeds in making a superproduction that isn't a superproduct. *Der Tiger von Eschnapur* and *Das indische Grabmal* are the only films that are superproductions without being superproducts, which are made with all the money that he had at his disposal without creating a smokescreen. And which nevertheless are not made *against* money; because now, that's easier to do: Godard, in his evolution, has discovered that it is necessary to make oppositional films. But for a man of Fritz Lang's generation, this wasn't possible, an idea like that. And yet he succeeded in making these two films, where he really gave something to the Germans who had been dying of hunger for so many years — since '33 and even before '33, up to the Wahrungs-Reform for which the leftist intellectuals had so much contempt, until the moment when the people would begin again to be able to know a little what it meant to live: this is what has been called the German economic miracle. For a good many people, this was the first time that they finally revived, that they were eating normally — of course there was the speculation and all the rest, okay. (The arrival of the consumer society, that's the negative aspect of it.) But Fritz Lang, at this moment, made something for the people which was a gift, let's say, of gold. Without it being a golden calf. That's the important thing. Anyone else would have made a golden calf. The producer was really eager to make a golden calf. Fritz Lang made a film.

7. On Ernst Lubitsch

STRAUB: His films have become as important for me as those by Lang and Murnau. *Die Augen der Mumie Ma* is already *Eschnapur*, and *Carmen, The Golden Coach*. *Der Stolz der Firma*, so funny and, finally, so Brechtian; the same goes for *Madame Dubarry*, which demonstrates in three shots a *policier* provocation, and *Lady Windermere's Fan*, more beautiful and more dense than the most marvelous Hitchcocks.

8. On John Ford and Bertolt Brecht

STRAUB: . . . John Ford is still the most Brechtian of all filmmakers, because he shows things that make people think, "Damn it, is that true or not?" For instance, the end of *Fort Apache*, which was completely misunderstood, even by Sadoul, it doesn't have a happy ending and this is correct to make the audience collaborate on the film: in the middle of the battlefield you can see General Custer, he dies there and all his soldiers have been shot, then a few minutes later John Wayne looks at it and says, "This man is crazy," literally. Then finally we have the so-called happy ending, one sees John Wayne, he is sitting there, behind him you can see a huge historical picture, representing the battle. And in front of John Wayne, in a circle, there are journalists taking notes and asking questions; somebody suddenly notices the picture on the wall, the rather heroic historical picture, and asks, "Is that correct? Was it really like that?" Then John Wayne turns around, startled and surprised, looks at it, wants to answer, turns around again to answer, turns around again to answer and one notices for a fraction of a second that he is about to say, "It is all crap, it has been made too heroic, it is false, etc.," but he says instead, "Yes, gentlemen, it was really like that." Then John Ford goes another step further, and John Wayne says, "Right now I haven't got any time. I must go back to work." And then he puts on his cap — until then, he had on quite a different one, exactly like the one [Henry] Fonda had earlier in the battle. And then one sees him ride away on horseback, they are going to another battle. That is what I call a Brechtian film.

. . . I think that the reason why people call John Ford a fascist is that he is better at showing, for instance, what a settler was — when I saw *The Searchers* I understood better the attitude of the settlers in Algeria. I had really tried hard to understand them when I was in Paris during the Algerian war; when I saw the film by John Ford, the one that shows the settler and the Indian-hunter with a certain initial respect because he understands him. That is why people have said that he makes fascist films. In this sense, yes, but not in any other.

9. On John Ford and Howard Hawks

QUESTION: Does the fact of shooting [*History Lessons*] in exteriors have anything to do with Hollywood, with adventure stories?

STRAUB: I love the films of John Ford . . . The film, if it recalls an American film, it isn't me who had the idea, but [Jean-Andre] Fieschi in Paris. He thought of *The Big Sleep* with the old man in the greenhouse, who also receives a visit from a young man.

10. On Howard Hawks

PHIL MARIANI: Your films are generally constructed in a highly controlled, reflective manner, similar to documentary or reportage. Now, assuming that you began making films with a particular ethical or political purpose, did you consider this austere, documentary format (what you have called "matter" as opposed to illustration or representation) to be the only formal structure which could convey your ideas?

STRAUB: You mean, it should be the same for all filmmakers? But, alas, this is not so. I am not feeling better than, let us say, for example, Howard Hawks, who, when he is making a film like *Scarface*, spends at least six months inquiring about Al Capone. Or it is completely different when he is making films about flying people or people catching animals — he is forced to know exactly how people can catch animals, that's all. For *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, we worked a lot of time on different texts, on scores, manuscripts. . .

HUILLET: We could not read any music notes, for example. We had to learn that before making the film. . . .

11. On Jean Renoir, Robert Flaherty and Roberto Rossellini

STRAUB: . . . The most beautiful films in existence in my opinion are the first sound films by Renoir, not only because they speak so beautifully with a southern French accent, but also because of the fact that it is original ["direct"] sound. For me one of the ten most beautiful films is *La Nuit du Carrefour* by Renoir, the thriller taken from Simenon's novel . . . . Anyway, the film is one of the best thrillers in existence . . . in that, I agree completely with Godard.*

. . . This sound of the first talkies remains for me the best that has ever been done. A film like *Man of Aran* was one of the things that made the strongest impression on me. And *Toni* and *La Chienne* and again *La Voix Humaine* or *Miracolo* by Rossellini. In *La Voix Humaine* you can hear the dolly moving. That is very beautiful. Not if one does it systematically, like the stupid intellectuals who say, "I will let people hear the dolly, so that they remain conscious of being in the cinema." I don't go along with that. But if it is there and comes by itself, then one shouldn't hide it.

12. On Jean Renoir

STRAUB: I very much like accents in the cinema. Language is most alive if it is spoken by people who have some difficulty handling it: thus there are obstacles which lend a greater veracity. That's nothing new. The films of Renoir which have met the strongest resistance are those in which the characters speak with an accent, for example *Toni*, or *La Nuit du Carrefour* — where there is a sublime woman character whom one can't understand a good third of the time [Winna Winfried], because she speaks with an Austrian or Danish accent.

*"Every detail, every second of each shot makes *La Nuit du Carrefour* the only great French thriller, or rather, the greatest French adventure film of all." Jean-Luc Godard. (See his notes on the film in Tom Milne's *Godard on Godard*, New York, The Viking Press, 1972.)

13. On Jacques Tati and Jean Renoir

STRAUB: . . . The films of Tati are successions of difficulties.

HUILLET: Precisely, the most difficult thing to recapture in cinema is what one sees continually in the street: awkward gestures, gestures which are interrupted.

STRAUB: The most beautiful shot of Renoir's *Picnic on the Grass* is when Paul Meurisse is in the kitchen, when he has rediscovered Nenette; she leaves, she goes out to look for some thread, and when she has left, Renoir lingers on Meurisse. It is obvious that Meurisse (this wasn't anticipated in the shot) at this moment is facing death, one feels it very strongly. He looks forty years older than his age. It's the moment when he reaches his decision to marry the girl. That is, to throw everything overboard and revolt . . . that is felt. Any producer would have cut that. Renoir in fact kept it.

14. On Jacques Tati

STRAUB: . . . I like very much the last Tati.* Rivette was absolutely right when he said that Tati has become a political filmmaker. What he does with the blown-up video material, what he gets from it, is extraordinary. And it's outside that political group, those people who come out of the cinema in the evenings and experience reality entirely differently. What is exciting in *Parade* is that it is a film about all the degrees of nervous flux, beginning with the child which cannot yet make a gesture, which can't co-ordinate its hand and its brain, and goes up to the most accomplished acrobats.

15. On satire, humor, Resnais, Hawks, Tati, Bunuel. . .

PHIL MARIANI: *Machorka-Muff* was criticized by the left because you did not satirize or caricature the militarists in order to make them thoroughly evil. How do you feel about the use of satire or humor in general?

STRAUB: I hate satire.

HUILLET: But, even so, I think *Moses and Aaron*, for example, is very funny in some parts.

STRAUB: But I hate humor and especially satire. During the whole Nazi time in Germany they had a lot of satire. It is kind of important that when people are no longer able to rebel or to change what happens or, to use a bad word, influence politics or history, they begin to make satires. I hate also so-called English humor, that's the reason why I hate all English movies, even when they are made by Resnais. Then we are again in the so-called psychological sphere.

HUILLET: But he likes very much *Bringing up Baby* or Tati's films.

STRAUB: Bunuel is very funny, not satirical and not humorous. But I hope for some that *Othon* is a real comedy. . .

16. On Charlie Chaplin

STRAUB: . . . Seeing *Limelight* again, you are struck by something you've never seen in the cinema and which has a relation to the class struggle. Knowing how far this is conscious, etc., is not of much importance.

17. On Luc Moullet

STRAUB: . . . Then there is a filmmaker I admire very much. I am willing to defend him until next year — things can change — even against all those who accuse him of being a fascist which he is not. He's the most important filmmaker of the French post-Godard generation — Luc Moullet. Especially for *Les Contrebandieres* more than for the other two.

18. On Godard, Eisenstein, Rivette, Chaplin and Moullet

HUILLET: I think [Straub] has the same kind of relationship with Godard as he has with Eisenstein, even though they are not at all the same person.

STRAUB: Yes, a kind of hate and love complex. But I like Godard very much, even when he's an awful guy, because he's always conscious of how and why he's [making a film]. What I like most in Godard is that he is always funny, even when his films are very serious. But as work, I think Rivette is no less important than Godard.

HUILLET: And Rivette is probably the greatest editor of film since Chaplin.

STRAUB: A lot of people think that Eisenstein is the greatest editor, because he has some theories about it, but this is not true. Chaplin was greater, I think, in editing, only it is not so obvious. Chaplin was more precise than Eisenstein, and the man after Chaplin who is the most precise is surely Rivette. . . . Somebody now in France, to speak about French filmmakers, from the generation not much after Godard/Rivette (nobody knows him, or few people). The man is called Luc Moullet. As important as Rivette/Godard, completely different, but as important. . . . Maybe the best film not made by Godard is *Les Contrebandieres* by Luc Moullet.

19. On Jacques Rivette and D.W. Griffith

QUESTION: You and Rivette have committed yourself to the "historical" film in direct sound.

STRAUB: We have wound up in agreement, without speaking about it much, that a film that one shoots is always about the present. That's all. Rivette said that *Intolerance* is a document not on Babylon, but very much more on the period when it was shot. . . .

20. On Luis Bunuel and Nicholas Ray

PHIL MARIANI: In *Machorka-Muff*, the opening night sequence, the dream, the circumstantial discovery of the letter, all have a Surrealistic quality.

STRAUB: That was conscious.

MARIANI: Surrealism doesn't seem relevant in the general context of your films, but was it an early influence?

HUILLET: Even in *Chronicle*.

STRAUB: In *Machorka-Muff* it was conscious because at that time I was a little bit more interested in the paintings of Salvador Dali. The film has nothing to do with his paintings. I was not trying to say, like some filmmakers, that I was inspired by Salvador Dali — no, you are making a film. Bresson said, "I used to be a painter, that is exactly the reason why when I am making a film, I avoid painting." But in *Machorka-Muff* it was conscious. Even the scene of laying the cornerstone, that was completely Surrealistic. . .

MARIANI: How about Bunuel? Had you seen his films by that point?

STRAUB: Oh, yes, that must have been an influence. I saw a lot of times many "B" pictures that he made in Mexico . . . and I knew very well *Las Hurdes, L'Age d'or, Un Chien andalou.*

HUILLET: There is a French film by Bunuel called *La Fievre monte a El Pao* from which [Straub] always said he would not have ever made *Othon* if he had not seen this film.

STRAUB: The films are completely different, I hope. But that's a story about a dictatorship in a small South American country.

HUILLET: The two films I saw, after which I decided I would try to make documentaries, were *Los Olvidados* and another one by Mizoguchi.

MARIANI: Bunuel would be another person for that category of uncompromising resister?

STRAUB: I did not say uncompromising but, yes, able to resist.

HUILLET: Bunuel was and has become a real good bourgeois and that was very interesting because in *Los Olvidados* he is not compromising with violence, and he is not fascinated by it, but he is very clear and unsentimental about it, like Hawks in *Scarface*.

STRAUB: The exact contrary to Bunuel is Nicholas Ray, even when I am interested in his films (but not like Mr. Wenders or a lot of French people). He is always fascinated by violence—

HUILLET: — afraid and fascinated —

STRAUB: — and so, at a certain moment, he slips on the side of the police.

HUILLET: Which Bunuel never does.

21. On Carl Dreyer

Ferocious

Jean-Marie Straub

What I particularly admire in the Dreyer films that I've been able to see or see again over the past few years is their ferocity in respect to the bourgeois world: its notion of justice *(The President*, which is one of the most astonishing narrative constructions that I've known, and one of the most Griffith-like films, hence one of the most beautiful), its vanity (the feelings and decors of *Michael)*, its intolerance *(Day of Wrath*, stupefying through its violence, and through its dialectic), its angelic hypocrisy ("She's dead . . . she's no longer here . . . she's in heaven," says the father in *Ordet*, and the son replies: "Yes, but I loved her body, too. . ."), and its puritanism *(Gertrud*, so well-received for that by the Parisians on the Champs-Elysees).

In other respects, *Vampyr* ("There are no children here and no dogs") remains, ever since the day I saw it thirteen years ago on rue d'Ulm, for me the most resonant of all films. And in 1933, Dreyer was sending out that call that, apart from Amico and Bertolucci, the present-day Italian filmmakers would do well to finally understand:

"If one is striving to create a realistic space, the same thing must be done with sound. While I am writing these lines, I can hear church bells ring in the distance; now I perceive the buzzing of the elevator; the distant, very-far-away clang of a streetcar, the clock of city hall, a door slamming. All these sounds would exist, too, if the walls in my room, instead of seeing a man working, were witnessing a moving, dramatic scene as background to which these sounds might even take on symbolic value — is it right then to leave them out? . . . In the real sound film, the *real* diction, corresponding to the unpainted face in an actually lived-in room, means common everyday speech as it is spoken by ordinary people."

And at the present, when so many young authors dream only of imposing their ideas and their petty reflections in their films, seducing or raping (patronizing Brechtianism, or the utilizaiton of advertising techniques and the propaganda of capitalist society) or even disappearing (collages, etc.), let us listen to Dreyer:

Carl Dreyer's *Day of Wrath*, 1943.

*A 1973 film of a circus performance in Sweden, *Parade* was shot in videotape that was blown up to 35mm; it has not yet been shown in the U.S. (J.R.)

The Danish author, Johannes V. Jensen, describes "art" as "soulfully composed form." That is a definition which is simple and very much to the point. The same goes for the definition the English philosopher Chesterfield gives to the concept of "style." He says "Style is the dress of thoughts." That is right, provided that "the dress" is not too conspicuous, for a characteristic of good style must be that it enters into such an intimate bond with matter that it is absorbed into a higher unity with it. If it imposes and strikes the eye, it is no longer "style" but "mannerism."

Style in an artistic film is the product of many different components, such as the play of rhythm and composition, the mutual tension of color surfaces, the interaction of light and shadow, the measured gliding of the camera. All these things, in association with the conception that a director has of his material, determines his style. . .

I don't underestimate the teamwork performed by cinematographers, color technicians, set decorators, etc., but within this collectivity, the director must remain the driving force, the man behind the work who makes the writer's words resound and the feelings and passions spring forth, so that we are moved and touched. . . . So this is my understanding of a director's importance — and his *responsibility.*

. . . To show that there is a world outside the dullness and boredom of naturalism, the world of the imagination. Of course, this conversion must take place without the director and his collaborators losing their grasp of the world of reality. His remodeled reality must always remain something that the public can recognize and believe in. It is important that the first steps towards abstraction be taken with tact and discretion. One should not shock people, but guide them gently onto new paths.

Each subject implies a certain voice (route).* And that must be heeded. It is necessary to find the possibility for expressing as many voices (routes) as one can. It is very dangerous to limit oneself to a certain form, a certain style. . . . That is something I really tried to do: to find a style that has value for only a single film, for *this* milieu, *this* action, *this* character, *this* subject.

In the cinema, you cannot *play* the role of a Jew, you have to be one.

The fact that Dreyer was never able to produce a film in color (he had thought about it for more than twenty years) nor his film on Christ (a profound revolt against the state and the origins of anti-Semitism) reminds us that we live in a society that is not worth a frog's fart.

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(Translations from French in *Ca, Cahiers du Cinema* and *Cenobio* by Jonathan Rosenbaum; the other interviews are all in English.)

*Straub's quotations from Dreyer are drawn from four sources: "The Real Talking Film" (1933), "Imagination and Color" (1955), a 1965 interview with Michel Delahaye and an unknown text, respectively. The versions of the first two here are adapted from Donald Skoller's *Dreyer in Double Reflection* (New York, E.P. Dutton, 1973); the third is adapted from the English translation of the Delahaye interview in Andrew Sarris's *Interviews with Film Directors* (New York, Avon, 1967). In the original French version (in *Cahiers du Cinema* No. 170, Septembre 1965), it isn't clear whether Dreyer is saying "voix" (voice) or "voie" (route). *(Trans.)*

Film is Only a Reflection of the Class Struggle

Luc Moullet

Many people take the habits of current cinema as laws imposed by the profound nature of the cinematographic spectacle: thus the breaking up of the film into tiny fragments, the consistency of the dramatic situation and the developments of the camera, the musical filler, shimmering images, the abundance of sets, the audibility of the dialogue, the notions of a beginning and an ending, the credits, the willful scam (even in excellent films like *La Guerre est finie* the principle of the scam is respected, a principle which consists of insuring that actors and fiction be taken for real characters and action) are only the expression of this civilization of petty bourgeois who arrange *beautiful* paintings on their walls. It is a cinema of masks: the filmmaker avoids difficulties by means of artifice; he hides reality — *their* reality — from himself and from the spectator through decoration and apparent order. Current cinema artificially reintroduces *beautiful* elements in a universe which is unaware of this beauty. When I go from the Gare du Nord (Euston Station) to the Gare de l'Est (King's Cross), I don't pass through the Bois de Boulogne (Hyde Park). Still, it's pretty. Well, most filmmakers pass through the Bois de Boulogne. In this way they offer a false conception of life. They make the exploited person believe that beautiful *external* elements can be integrated into his sad actual life. Insofar as the discovery of beauty creates happiness, it is important to discover true, rather than false, beauty within normal life.

That is why repetition — the same gestures without obvious interest, daily washing, shaving, dressing, walking — variety — the lack of dramatic ordering of the human day — the absence of poetry — modern decor and rhythm of life, invasion of the Civil Code — all must be sources of emotion, interest, and beauty. Modern music (Antoine, Dutronc, Gall, Sheila 62 and 66, Vartan) offers an example by basing its beauty on anti-poetical words and sounds and on repetition. I would even say that the value of a film is connected to the degree to which it creates beauty through repetition, and that the aim of cinema is to allow the spectator to pee every day in the literal sense without getting pissed off in the figurative sense.*

Analysis, opposition, reflection, all methods are good. I prefer exaggeration: the careful accumulation of uninteresting elements provokes a certain dizziness, a source of beauty and humor, which allows us to beat the modern world and its henchmen at their own game, to anticipate their absurdity, to disconcert and thus to defeat them. That is why in shot 163 (c) of *Brigitte et Brigitte,*** Colette Descombes says that it's logical for man to "prefer human absurdity, to which he must contribute in order to adopt it."

The predominance of bourgeois values in films originates in the success of the cinema of the past: the first filmmakers all became big businessmen. Then, in order to enter the milieu of cinema it was necessary to belong to an equivalent milieu. That's why 41% of Frenchmen, but 0% of filmmakers, have a father who is a worker or an agricultural wage-earner; 71% of filmmakers but 7.8% of Frenchmen have fathers belonging to the upper classes of society. Today [1967], the minimum salary of a director is around $9000.00. He shoots a film every two years, on the average. Nevertheless, only 6% of the French earn more than he does. Wherefore the crisis of the cinema: as long as the salary of the director is not identical to the earnings of the average Frenchman, he will be cut off from the average spectator and from reality.

Add to that the betrayal of the other sectors of the C.G.T. and F.O. (organized labor) by the actors' and technicians' unions: The industry bringing in so much, they require gigantic salaries (an average of $160 a week) and personnel which the State tends to render obligatory, even for small-budget artistic films. Thus directors, having to spend more, are forced to respect commercial demands, derived from tastes which the bourgeoisie impose on the exploited class, with the help of advertising, demands which they wouldn't have to respect if films only cost what they were supposed to. They are forced to avoid taking political or artistic risks.

Currently, leftist labor unions glorify right-wing films which alienate the exploited class, like *La Grande Vadrouille* or *Is Paris Burning?,* films which cost millions of dollars and bring in plenty. They sabotage incisive films which only cost $10,000 or $20,000 and don't bring in much. An actor who resents being offered $240 a month as a travelling salesman wouldn't even suspect that this contact with reality would make him a better actor. As with the novel and painting, 70% of the time film must be a moonlighting job, in which a person condenses what he's acquired in the course of his main work. Pecas or me, Patelliere or Godard, we're too professional, too marked by the cinema to give it new blood: Everyone, agricultural worker, baker, coal-merchant, dock-worker, elevator-operator, fireman, garage-mechanic, hospital-attendant, ice cream vendor, journalist: there aren't any, knife-and-scissors grinder, locksmith, miner, nickel-plater, office-worker, postman, quiz show host, railroad worker, secret agent, ticket-puncher, urbanologist, veterinarian, watchmaker: there aren't any, must make *his own* film. Each person can realize a good film at least once in his life. Therefore, access to film-directing for 50 million Frenchmen must be facilitated, especially since there is room, each year in France, for thirty films costing one million dollars, but also for at least five hundred feature-length films costing $6000.

Today, if a studio film like *Brigitte et Brigitte* costs much more, a French feature film made under normal conditions, without useless expenses (remember that insurance, the office, and the staff are the founding fathers of bankruptcy) costs $9,800, $6000 with real ingenuity (but I think by 1970, with a little bit of organization, we'll be able to arrive at this figure *normally),* $3000 for 8mm (a format sufficient for 200-seat theaters). We must democratize the cinema. Here we have a prodigious possibility of growth for culture, for industry, which can't help but develop through the multiplication of clients, and also for employment: 500 films, that's 4000 new jobs.

The more the stooges of diverse bourgeoisies and trusts — Messieurs Goebbels and Fourre-Cormeray — struggled against the free access of the individual (Jew or amateur) to film production, the more the individual rebelled, wanting to take up the challenge and do the forbidden thing. That is why we mustn't protest the absurdity of the current cinematic policy, which will one day produce a hilarious comedy, and which has already given us a good laugh. If a National Center of the Novel were created, many more people would all of a sudden want to write. There are disadvantages, but many more advantages to the fact that the current status of filmmakers is identical to that of smugglers.

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Translated by Sandy Flitterman

*This is an untranslatable pun on *"se raser,"* which is slang for "being bored." *(Trans.)*

**Luc Moullet's first feature, completed in 1966.

History Lessons, 1972. The young man driving in the streets of Rome.

Modernist Cinema

The History Lessons of Straub and Huillet

Gilberto Perez

Long thought a higher thing than history, poetry in the 19th century begins to seek a ground in history. Poetry was the higher thing, for Aristotle, because it can express the universal, whereas history is bound to the particular. A historian, he explained, is obliged to tell us about a sea battle simply because it happened, little connected as it may be with other events which happened elsewhere and which have to be included in a historical account. A poet, on the other hand, can leave out the sea battle if he doesn't think it relevant to his subject, licensed as he is to set aside particulars in order to make the right connections and get at the essentials. In this view, advanced in the fourth century B.C. and still widely held, art occupies a privileged position apart from life, a realm of beauty and truth above life's confusions and contingencies.

But only at a time when life was simpler, when the connections between things were more readily apparent, could one decide with Aristotle's certainty that the sea battle need not be taken into account: art's claim to the essential, ideal coherence it might attain in exhibiting just what is relevant depended on the intelligibility of life. In the 19th century, with the industrialization of Western Europe, life started to become more complicated than it had ever been before. Already in Dickens' London and Baudelaire's Paris we encounter the shifting and opaque surface of the modern big city, the city of industrial capitalism, crowded with strangers where we continually meet (in Baudelaire's words) "the unexpectedly emergent, . . . the passing unknown." That has been a characteristic modern experience, the rush and diversity of particulars which we can neither fully assimilate nor safely disregard. Photography was invented, in the mid-19th century, to record those particulars, and around the same time the realistic novel was devised to set them down. It became important to record and set down the particulars of modern life precisely because their meaning is less accessible: one has to pay more attention to the surface when it isn't so clear what lies behind. Referring the meaning of things to a higher order as the art of the past had done, involving a divine system or ideal scheme that would explain the world, no longer carried conviction in the modern situation; now art had to bring out that meaning, produce it, at the ground level of history.

A higher order would supply the answers, but from the ground, one must continually ask the questions, without assuming a privileged vantage point on the nature of things. A modern artist may still, like Aristotle's poet, decide to leave the sea battle out of his work, along with most of the world. But if he is serious he won't pretend to certainty that his choice is the perfect one, that the sea battle, or any of the innumerable particulars omitted from his work, may not, after all, be relevant. Beginning in the 19th century, and more and more as we get into the 20th, events all over the world need to be taken into account as possibly having a bearing upon any matter at hand. One must put everything into a film, Godard has said, although of course one can't: what one *can* do is acknowledge all that is left out.

The serious modern artist, aware as he is of omitting from his work much that may have bearing upon it, will want his audience to notice the omission. He will want to make his audience conscious that these are but his choices, his activity in producing meaning through the arrangement of materials, rather than attempting to efface that activity as if his choices were ideal and his medium transparent. Questioning the world, he will question the means he employs to conduct that questioning. Just as a modern scientist no longer assumes that the energy or momentum of a particle has an ideal existence unaffected by his measurements, so a modern artist will acknowledge in his work the interaction of the observer with the thing observed, the way his devices affect the result. In the world of our modernity, "not only the result," as Karl Marx wrote, "but the road to it also, is a part of the truth."

The modernist impulse "to make it new" — the continual challenge to established conventions which has taken place in advanced art over the past century — is often regarded as a pursuit of formal experimentation for its own sake. Modern art, in the view of many of its champions and detractors alike, is held to be more abstract that the art of previous centuries, more exclusively concerned with form at the expense of content. But the Cezanne who took such pains to be faithful to his perception of nature, the Joyce who gave such a detailed account of the life of Dublin, the Brecht whose theater would help change the world can hardly be called formalists disdainful of content. All three are formalistic, to be sure, in the prominence they give to form in their work, in their insistence that we examine their procedures of arrangement. They lay bare the device, as the Russian formalists say, they draw attention to the process by which an artist's materials are put together and made to yield meaning — paint applied on the canvas in a certain design, and so on. Formal devices are not an end in themselves for these modern masters who expose them precisely as a means to meaning.

"The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name," Ferdinand de Saussure wrote in a famous passage, "but a concept and a sound-image" — a signified and a signifier, as the Swiss linguist went on to call them. This was a bold reversal of the old model which had abstract words referring to concrete things: instead the signifier is now material, sensory, and the signified it refers to is conceptual. We may likewise reverse the common assumption of a more abstract modern art and argue that, on the contrary, modern art has been more concrete than the art of the past in the way it has tended to assert the materiality of its means. Surely the old masters were no less concerned with form than modernists have been, but their concern was with exhibiting, in the finished product, an ideal unity of form and content, a perfect adequacy of signifier to signified. What distinguishes the modernists is not a neglect of content for the sake of form — no serious artist can be guilty of that — but an acknowledgment of form as a mediation of content, an emphasis on the signifier coming between us and the signified.

Because the photographic image is peculiarly close to reality, constituting a direct reproduction of what was there before the camera, the fact that our experience of that reality is not direct but mediated is often disregarded, as if the camera could virtually put us in the presence of the things it reproduces. In a photograph or a movie, it has been argued, the very appearance of things in the world serves to convey their meaning: a photographed tree is a real tree to which we supposedly respond in the picture as we would in life. But the tree we see photographed has been framed within a rectangle and rendered in two dimensions according to rules of perspective which the camera automatically applies; built into the photographic process are the rectangular frame and monocular perspective conventional in Western painting since the Renaissance. This is not to deny the reality of the photographed tree — its fundamental difference from a painting in being a piece of the world, mechanically reproduced — but to insist that what we have before us is a picture all the same, a framed flat image cast in the scheme of a Renaissance painting, not the reality we would perceive firsthand.

For long stretches in *History Lessons,* a film made in 1972 by Jean-Marie Straub and his wife and collaborator Daniele Huillet, the camera is inside a car that a young man drives around the streets of Rome. We get a documentary view of the city and hear its sounds recorded on the spot. Yet we are rigorously discouraged from the illusion that this is the city as we would perceive it if we were riding in that car. As the car wends its way around different avenues and alleys, in emptier and more crowded places where it speeds up and slows down, getting caught in traffic and sometimes stopping or backing up, the camera all the while maintains a fixed position in the back seat looking out toward the front. Without any cuts or pans, or even the slightest wavering, the city is photographed from that fixed viewing point inside the moving car, through a kind of grid constituted by the two side windows on the left and right of the screen, the windshield at the center, and an open sunroof at the top. We are made conscious of the perspective imposed from a single viewpoint, as we are of the unchanging frame, that gridlike demarcation of our view: it is like watching the set pictorial scheme of a Renaissance painting carried around the city streets and applied to the diverse actualities there encountered. This is a baring of the *device,* of the process by which the camera turns reality into a picture.

For being aware of the picture we are not any less aware of the reality. It is an image that we watch, acknowledged as such, yet not to be regarded as a pure image conjured up out of nowhere. We retain a vivid sense of the city streets and the people in them, of the source of the images in an actual place where the camera was, even though we are conscious that watching the image is not like being there ourselves. We are denied the illusion of reality without being allowed to forget the fact of its photographic reproduction — the fact that this is a picture taken of reality, not a firsthand experience of the streets of Rome but not a self-contained design apart from life either.

Rather than dematerializing the image, as if it were transparent to reality, or the reality, as if the image constituted a realm of its own, Straub and Huillet materialize the commerce between the image and reality peculiar to a medium which is both pictorial and documentary. The camera is identified with that other machine carrying it around, the car, as equally subject to the constraints of being in the world, with limited access to a concrete historical situation. Whereas a Renaissance painting exhibits, as if through an ideal window, a world arranged into the higher order of a designed whole, here the pictorial scheme is equated with the material windows of a car out in the streets; it is grounded in an actual world which is not arranged within the conventions of a picture.

The first time D. W. Griffith used a close-up, breaking a scene with the unprecedented insertion of a shot showing just an actor's face, the Biograph Movie Company is said to have objected on the grounds that the audience would feel cheated if it got less than a full actor for its money. We may laugh at the stupidity of those early movie producers, who were soon proved wrong by the great success of the close-up, but their objection was not without its point: why should an audience accustomed to getting a whole scene on the stage consent to being shown, on the screen, just a small fragment? Because that fragment is what is important, the answer usually goes. Griffith inserted the actor's face in close-up at a moment in the action when the expression on that face needed emphasis and enlargement. Still, it was Griffith's emphasis, and he was asking the audience to go along with him, to agree that it should look at just that, his choice of what to show. It may have gone along because his choice seemed right dramatically, but it was in fact accepting a new convention, the granting to the filmmaker the license to frame in a shot what he saw fit, calling attention to that and leaving out the rest. That face on the screen, which was all that Griffith let the viewers look at, they agreed to take as being, for the moment, all they needed to look at.

The frame had served as the conventional enclosure of a painting, establishing within four edges the separate domain of an image complete in itself. Surely nobody in the audience watching Griffith's close-up took it for a complete image: its effect depended on keeping in mind the larger scene of which it was a part. Before a painting we are to concentrate on what is contained within the frame; at the movies we are to keep in mind the area lying without.* Breaking down a film scene into a succession of shots, with the camera closer or farther away, in one place and then another, designates each image on the screen as only a section of an implied larger space extending beyond the frame. We are to grant the existence of the rest, lying outside our view in the space off screen, and consent to our not being shown, at least not for the moment, the things we grant to be there. No longer an enclosure for the whole, the space of all there is to see, the frame in the movies became a convention by which to single out the significant part, marking out the space of all that we should see.

In his valuable book *The Technique of Film Editing,* Karel Reisz gives the following illustration of the breakdown of a scene into shots for a more effective presentation. In the first shot we see a man sitting on a chair, taking out a cigarette, finding no matches on him and then, from his chair, looking around the room — which is mostly off screen — until his gaze comes to rest on some point outside our view where we are to understand matches have been spotted. Then Reisz proposes to cut to a shot of the matches where they were spotted on a table across the room, with the *man* now off screen until, having gotten up and walked across, he enters the frame, picks up the matches, and lights his cagarette. Like Griffith's close-up, each of these two shots is intended to show us the right thing, just that section of the scene where the relevant action is taking place. We don't need to see the rest of the room while the man is in his chair looking for matches, nor do we need to see him walk across once he has found them, since the cut to the table with matches on it comes at the right time, just when the center of interest shifts from the looking to the finding. The first shot sets up a situation which the second brings to a conclusion with the lighting of the cigarette. Two partial views which, even if added together, omit much of the room and most of the man's walking across it, these two shots would still show us all that seems necessary, with a beginning in the first shot, a continuation in the second and then an end — a complete action presented with visual, but no dramatic, gaps. Anything visually omitted we are to take as being of no major dramatic importance — an implied background, with much the same function as a stage backdrop, to the action happening in the space within our view.

* In modern paintings which have challenged the convention, and also in paintings by such old masters as Brueghel or Rogier van der Weyden, the image seems to be cut off by the frame rather than wholly contained within it. But the frame still marks the boundary of the visible; what lies outside can only be imagined, whereas in the movies it can be brought into view. Even if we don't in fact get to see the things off screen, the continual possibility that we may affects our attitude toward the film image.

These two shots are a simple example of the kind of shot arrangement conventional since Griffith: the treatment of the screen as a dramatic space where, in such successive image, the action is unfolded against the background off screen. Griffith's development of editing is said to have freed the cinema from conventions of the theater, which, of course, is true if one means the imitation of the theater in primitive movies where each scene would be played out within a stagelike area before an immobile camera. Yet the kind of editing Griffith developed was a new cinematic version of the same basic dramatic convention: the area shown on the screen, variable as it may be from one moment to the next, is at every moment nonetheless designated, like the fixed area of the stage, as the space containing the action.

Cinema is said to differ from painting or the theater in being an art of partial views; yet, in most films, the audience is not meant to consider the partiality of the views, the choice to show this particular aspect of things and then that among others equally possible, but to accept each shot as determined by dramatic necessity. The fragment of the visual field shown in each shot is to be regarded as a part lacking nothing essential to the whole, fitting exactly into the unfolding scheme of a complete action. With the screen treated in this manner, its four edges still function, like the frame of a painting, as the boundary of a separate domain: even though a space is implied outside each image, inside the space of the succession of images an enclosed system is established where each part submits to a higher order of the whole.

Let us examine the familiar procedure known as the "shot - reverse shot" — or, in French, *champ contre-champ* — used to render on the screen a scene of dialogue between two characters. An exchange of shots, back and forth, matches the exchange between the two characters, focusing on each speaker in turn, or on the reaction of the listener, with the camera placement in each case more or less corresponding to the place occupied in the scene by the opposite character. It is often supposed that this constitutes a shift back and forth between two different points of view on the situation, making us alternately adopt each character's way of regarding things — which would be rather disconcerting if it were true, and which would open to question which is the right way of regarding things, something strictly undesirable in conventional filmmaking. But the shot-reverse shot, on the contrary, is designed to enforce an unchanging point of view, a single way in which we are to regard the situation.

In the elementary form of the procedure the camera occupies, in turn, nearly the same position as each character. Standing close together, the two characters will be shown in alternating eye-level close-ups, each over the other's shoulder, or with the other entirely off screen. Talking across some distance — say, one at an upstairs window and the other down in the street — two characters will be shown in alternating long shots, looking upward at the window and downward at the street. This scheme, however, is seldom rigidly applied: variations are permissible when warranted by the dramatic situation, which very often takes precedence over the characters' physical location in determining the camera placement in shot and reverse shot. In a romantic scene, for example, it may be deemed appropriate, throughout the exchange of shots, to keep both lovers framed together, and have each one in turn appear in three-quarter view next to the other in back profile; two people arguing, by contrast, are likely to be framed separately, maybe in increasingly closer shots corresponding to the increased intensity of the argument rather than to any change in the location of the arguers; a police officer interrogating a suspect, for another example, may be shown in profile and the suspect in frontal view, so as to point up the relationship of the questioner to the one being questioned. Yet, whatever the variations, the conventional shot-reverse shot strictly adheres to certain rules governing the orientation of the audience with respect to the scene. Briefly put, the purpose of these rules is to insure that, in the reverse shot, the orientation established in the shot will not actually have been reversed.

If in no other tradition of dramatic performance have the actor's eyes enjoyed the peculiar importance we have given them in the West, nowhere in Western drama have the eyes played such a major part as in the movies. In the arrangement of shot and reverse shot, a central consideration is the line along which the eyes of the two characters meet. Now, the camera angle in each case must not coincide exactly with that eye line, or else the character would look straight at the audience, but it mustn't deviate too much from the eye line either, or else the audience would become aware of a discrepancy between its view and that of the other character. Moreover, once the camera has been placed on one side, it mustn't cross over to the other side of the plane defined by the eye line and the vertical, or else, in any shot taken from the other side, the apparent direction on the screen of each character's glance would be reversed (filmmakers call that "cross the line"). Soon enough the audience would find its bearings and recognize that the characters didn't suddenly switch places in the scene, but such momentary disorientation is to be avoided by the filmmaker whose aim is the acceptance without question of the perfect adequacy of the shot. The audience is to be spared any effort of reorientation which may lead to reassessing its stance toward the depicted situation.

Throughout its alternation in the scene from one character's side to the other's, the camera is to stay on the same side of both characters, never crossing the plane of their confrontation. As a corollary to this "180-degree rule," the two characters are assigned to fixed opposite sides of the screen; whenever the two are shown together, one will invariably appear on the left facing right and the other on the right facing left. Even when only one character is shown at a time, it is deemed advisable that each should appear at least a little off center on his assigned screen side, with a space left empty on the other side to signal the presence of the other character in that direction off screen. It is permissible to have the character appear screen-center, but not over on the side opposite to that assigned him, with the empty space on the side away from the direction of his glance at the other character. That would tend to draw the audience's interest away from the glance, toward what may be found off screen in the opposite direction, in the world outside the conversation — just as a camera angle too far removed from the eye line, making it impossible to attribute the view to either character's perspective, would tend to draw the audience's perspective outside the conversation. In the alternation of shot and reverse shot, any consideration of the real alternative to the way things are presented is strictly discouraged; any shift in point of view is effectively excluded by the conventional rules. The reverse shot is not a reversal of the shot but its perfect complement: the two shots interlock and together enclose a space of the conversation where the audience is comfortably installed. It is basically the same point of view we get in both shots — the point of view, so to speak, shared by both characters along the eye line.

History Lessons. Our first view of the young man and the banker.

History Lessons. During the shot he briefly glances at the young man for the first time.

In *History Lessons,* the car rides around modern Rome alternate with conversations about Julius Caesar that the young man we've seen driving the car has with a number of ancient Romans. The first Roman he talks to is a knowing banker, who gives him the inside story on (to use the title of Brecht's unfinished novel on which the film is based) the business deals of Mr. Julius Caesar; then a Latin peasant, a veteran of conscripted service in Caesar's army, tells a different side of the story. After another car ride, the young man talks to a jurist, a plebeian risen in life who admires Caesar for his championing against the patricians the democratic tradition of the Gracchi; then a poet, reclining on a chaise lounge in a terrace by the sea, expresses disdain for the dirty business of politics, likening the Senate to a marketplace. The final conversation, after a third car ride, is again with the banker, who, from the position of one who stood to profit, expands on the dirty business Caesar was up to. From the first time we see the young man, in a modern suit, sitting on a garden bench next to the banker in his Roman toga, all illusion of the reality of these Romans is indeed destroyed. Playing an alienation effect is intended, making the viewer aware that these ancient Romans speaking in German are in fact impersonated by actors, whose rather flat delivery of their lines further makes evident the fact that they are reciting a written text.

But haven't the actors in this version of Brecht's novel taken too literally the author's advice (invoked by Straub in an earlier film) that the actors should acknowledge that they are quoting? Certainly an uninflected recital isn't the kind of acting Brecht had in mind for his theater, but then the passages from his historical novel quoted straight in the film aren't dramatic dialogue either. Are we to regard the young man as a student taking lessons in Roman history from teachers dressed up in togas for the occasion? But what are we to make of these teachers whose different standpoints on the subject are impossible to reconcile, of these lessons which are fragmentary and full of information difficult to assimilate? Our wondering how we are to respond is the proper response to a film where, rather than suspending our disbelief, we are continually to question what we see and hear, and to reflect on its meaning.

Our first view of the young man and the banker is from an oblique overhead angle behind the bench where they are both sitting, the young man seen from the back, screen-right, turned to face the banker, and the banker in back profile, screen-left, gazing straight ahead into space. A cut to a closer view of the banker comes quickly, as if manifesting our curiosity about what this ancient Roman is doing here; again he appears screen-left, with the young man off screen to the right, but with the same oblique angle maintained, markedly distinct from the young man's perspective. Then the camera, as if unsure of what angle to take on this Roman banker who recalls Julius Caesar in his days as an ambitious young lawyer, crosses over to the front side of the bench and holds a large close-up of the banker, now shown screen center, though still obliquely, in an overhead front profile. The next shot is more nearly frontal and closer to eye level, showing the banker screen-center from the waist up — a more conventional view, as if the camera were, by now, more comfortable with him. This shot is the first so far which would be passable in Hollywood as a shot alternating with a reverse shot of the young man, though here the banker is not facing the young man and no reverse shot interrupts this long-held shot. At one point during it, however, the banker, as he disparages those generals who boast that the grass no longer grows where their legions have set foot ("You know, from one of those grasses bread is made"), suddenly glances at the young man for the first time. With the darting of this glance, off screen to the left (the implied place now of the young man) a flash of life comes to the banker's hitherto impassive face. This brief first meeting of the eyes, in the first shot of the banker from an angle anywhere near the young man's perspective, has on us what may be called an *involvement* (rather than an alienation) effect. For a moment we are less detached, more drawn into this impossible conversation with a ghost from ancient Rome.

Like those who tell us they found a Brecht play moving "in spite of his intentions," many of those committed modernists who swear by the alienation effect have failed to grasp that the alienation is only effective as a curb on some involvement, that little purpose is served by pulling us back where nothing is drawing us in. Certain avant-gardists seem to think the job is done once the "deconstruction of the medium" has been carried out, but the medium is automatically deconstructed by simple incompetence — bad acting, for example, as a reliable producer of alienation effects. To be sure, we are never drawn into believing that the banker in *History Lessons* is a real Roman. Yet we come intermittently to regard him as a possible Roman or a possible banker, a modern counterpart suggesting what a banker might have been like in ancient Rome. Certainly the actor playing him looks like a crafty banker — an actual one, not a caricature in the manner of Eisenstein. Implausible as they may be as Romans, the actors in *History Lessons* all look quite convincing as people of a definite occupation and social standing, the actor's physical attributes vividly evoking in each case the appearance of a banker, a peasant, a jurist or a poet whom we can imagine encountering in life. Dwelling on the material presence of the signifier — the actor — makes us aware of a discrepancy but also of a coincidence with the character signified. The alienation, like the involvement, is a matter of degree, and the degree may vary considerably as we are led to reassess our response.

On the banker's glance, a cut to the young man's reaction would have involved us further by confirming the scarcely established eye line. But instead the banker resumes his vacant gaze straight ahead, and we may come to question why we should even assume that the young man, who so far hasn't said a word, is still there, off screen, attentively looking at the banker from the same place on the bench where we saw him briefly in the initial shot. (Later, during a stroll in a garden, only the young man is shown in a prolonged traveling shot which follows him steadily as he, like a student replying to the teacher, tells the banker the story found in the history books of Caesar's kidnapping by pirates. Here, too, a sustained withholding of the other character from our view opens to question the convention of his presence off screen: we may doubt whether the listening banker, whom we don't get to see but who is implied by the young man's addressing gaze, is actually there walking alongside him in the garden.) In the initial shot of the two characters we may have taken the young man as our point of entry into the scene, as, so to speak, the representative of our modernity in this peculiar confrontation with ancient Rome. But for a long while we are denied any further glimpse of him, any sense of his response as something upon which to base ours. So we are left on our own to find our bearings as the camera continues its ruminative exploration of the ancient Roman from a succession of different perspectives.

Having gone around from a back profile of the banker to a front profile, to a nearly frontal view, the camera keeps circling him in three more held shots, each a successively closer view from an angle successively higher and more sideways — a near reversal, now on his other side, of the progression in the three previous shots. The camera angles now, going around to the side away from the young man, are so dissociated from his perspective that we may come more or less to forget about his presence as we concentrate on the banker, who seems to be addressing no one in particular, and who has many interesting things to say about the man he refers to as "C." Our alienation from the ancient character lessens as we become less aware of the modern character sitting beside him, and more absorbed in the insider's account of Caesar's career. As the banker keeps talking, we are drawn, if not exactly into suspending our disbelief in the character, or even our mistrust in the truth of his statements, at least into listening with puzzled fascination and entertaining the possibility of this somehow being a firsthand account of the facts. A measure of the degree of our involvement is that, when the camera gets all the way around to the banker's other profile, shown screen-right in an overhead close-up, the reappearance into frame of part of the young man's body, screen-left, comes as something of a surprise, rather as if we hadn't seen the modern character before, and the alienation effect of the incongruous encounter with the ancient character. The oblique overhead angle in this close-up, barely from the front side of the bench, is maintained in the following long shot of the two characters, a near reversal of the view from behind in the initial shot, which brings to a conclusion, as the banker comes to a pause in his monologue, the interrogative circle of camera angles.

History Lessons. The young man asking his first question.

History Lessons. The banker in profile near the end of the second conversation with the young man. His mansion is in the background.

Now the young man speaks for the first time. He is shown in a sudden close-up from below, looking wide-eyed and eager to learn as he asks a question about the democratic party in ancient Rome. His glance to the right, at the banker off screen, is returned by the banker's glance to the left in the next shot — a close-up of him as he replies to the question. Now the banker, in this first exchange of dialogue between the two characters, gazes steadily at the young man for the first time, with the camera angle on the banker — in this first exchange of something like shot and reverse shot — not far from the eye line now established. But the two characters, each glancing at the other off screen in the conventional opposite directions, appear each on the wrong side of the screen, according to the rules, leaving a conspicuous empty space in the direction away from the other character. And the shot of the banker continues to be held, with no further reverse shot of the young man even as he asks several further questions. In the next shot, which is the prolonged camera movement alongside the young man walking (a kind of reverse shot, from eye level, except in a different place), he continuously appears again on the wrong side, screen-right looking off to the right. Our involvement in the conversation, increased by the exchanged gaze and by the fair proximity of the camera angles to the eye line, is checked by sparse intercutting and by the empty space pointing away from the other character.

Back from the stroll in the garden, the banker sits down on the bench again, with the young man now on a chair facing it. Now the two characters, more directly facing each other across a more comfortable distance, come to be shown in shot and reverse shot approaching the conventional, the young man screen-left looking off to the right, the banker screen-right looking off to the left, as if each character, having taken his time, were now settling on his assigned side. But the young man is shown only briefly, as he says his one line of dialogue for the remainder of the scene, which continues at length with the banker's account of Caesar's part in what, according to the banker, was behind the incident with the so-called pirates (who were really just merchants) — the struggle over control of the Mediterranean slave trade. As the banker goes on talking, his gaze all the while directed at the young man off screen to the left, several momentary blackouts keep returning to the same shot at an indeterminate later point, with a slight abrupt change in the light suggesting a later time of day, a slight abrupt change in the banker's face and a discontinuity in his statements suggesting perhaps a response to some remark we haven't heard or some expression we haven't seen on the young man's face. It is as if, once the two characters have been shown in conventional shot and reverse shot, the reverse shot of the young man might just as well be skipped and a section of black leader inserted instead.

The deconstruction and partial reinstatement of a conventional device is a characteristic strategy in the work of Straub and Huillet. *Fortini/Cani*, which they made in 1977, centers on a book, *I Cani del Sinai* (The Dogs of the Sinai), written in response to the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War of 1967 by the Florentine poet and journalist Franco Fortini, who now in the film reads aloud from his book of ten years before. At that time Fortini, a Communist and a Jew, undertook a defense of the Arabs against the pro-Israeli bias of most of his fellow countrymen and especially of his fellow Jews; his book is a polemic from a Marxist standpoint and also an elucidation of how the author came to this position from his own background as an Italian Jew. In one long section of the film, the same shot of Fortini is maintained over a series of omentary whiteouts marking transitions to his reading of different passages from his book: he appears in profile, screen-right, his gaze fixed downward, on the book off screen below the bottom edge of the frame. When he comes to a pause in his reading, however, he looks up and stares straight ahead, off screen to the left, with the empty space screen-left now drawing our attention in the direction of his glance, as in a conventional shot preparing us for a cut to a point-of-view shot through a character's eyes. Then comes a cut to the base of a public monument in Florence, on which we can read the inscription commemorating the patriots who liberated Italy in the last century. We get an eye-level view of the base, not facing head-on but from an angle to the right, and with an empty space screen-right, as in a conventional point-of-view shot indicating the presence off screen to the right of the character shown looking from that direction in the previous shot. Although we may get that impression for an instant after the cut, this monument in the city couldn't be what Fortini is looking at from the porch where he's sitting in a country house. The expectation is raised and then frustrated that we would share his perspective in this shot.

The shot continues to be held, now with Fortini's voice heard over it, as he resumes his reading, coming in time to a passage which refers to the monument. When he was a boy in Fascist Italy, his freethinking father used to take him to that monument to the Italian liberation, and Fortini came to notice the mark left on the steps of the monument by the Masonic triangle which had been there before the Fascists removed it. As Fortini reads this passage, the camera moves down to the steps, where the triangular dent in the stone can still be seen: a movement which indeed evokes a glance downward, through the eyes of someone turning to an object that has come to his attention. We do get a kind of point-of-view shot after all, a reinstatement of the device: neither what Fortini is looking at now, nor a flashback to the boy then, but something like the recollected point of view, by Fortini now, of the boy with his father then.

After a lecture I once attended on Baudelaire and Freud, I heard the objection, voiced on the way out by some professors there, that it was naive to attach much importance to sexuality in Baudelaire, when it had been conclusively established that the real subject of his poetry is the writing of poetry itself. This emasculation of Baudelaire is an instance of what may be called the fallacy of self-expressive form — the notion that, with modernism, art comes to be really about nothing but itself, any other subject being merely a pretext for art's self-reflection. Such esthetic narcissism, embodied as it has been in many works passing for avant-garde, shouldn't be confused with the reflection, in genuine modernism, upon the means of art's transaction with reality. As Straub has said, it is necessary but not sufficient to bring under scrutiny the devices of the medium. For the devices must still be put to their function as instruments of meaning, serving to deal with the subject matter of life. Straub and Huillet call attention to the film medium in the process of employing it to conduct a larger scrutiny. Their films are about filmmaking, to be sure, but in the course of their being about something else; their real subject is history, they are history lessons all, one of the lessons being that we must attend to the means of our access to history.

Driving around Rome serves the young man as his method of conducting a scrutiny of the city; like the sequence of camera angles around the banker, the winding, exploratory path the car follows in the streets (sometimes returning to a place gone by before) traces a kind of interrogative circle. The car ride is the young man's means of access to the reality of the city, the film of the car ride, ours; the discrepancy between his means and ours is made manifest in the film. Yet there is also an equation between the instruments employed, between the car and the camera affixed to it, moving with it through the city along exactly the same path. The car, physically there amid the traffic in the streets, is made into a metaphor for the camera, equally a concrete part of the reality it serves to explore. Just as the car is limited to the available pathways, and restricted in its motion along them by the surrounding traffic, so too the camera is necessarily limited by the material circumstances under which it operates.

Obviously the camera needn't have been limited to the particular path followed by the car, but any other course the camera might have followed would still have yielded only a particular sequence of partial views. Moreover, the analogy between the car and the camera — different devices with a different effect upon the resulting experience — implies a broader analogy between the car and any other device through which one gains access to a concrete reality. Whether a documentary of modern Rome or an actor dressed up as an ancient Roman, a satirical novel by Brecht or a sober scholarly treatise, any approach taken to history must be recognized as itself a part of history, inevitably affected by the material circumstances under which one drives a car, writes (or reads) a book, makes (or watches) a film. Everywhere in the films of Straub and Huillet we are made conscious of the activity of filmmaking as itself inscribed in history — just as the mark of the Masonic triangle is inscribed in the steps of the Florentine monument.

The traces of history, the marks left by the past in the present, are a central concern in the work of Straub and Huillet. The mark left by the Masonic triangle in the stone, the memory in Fortini's mind of his having gone there as a boy with his father, the account he gave of that memory in the book written directly after the Six Day War, the sound of his voice reading that passage from his book in the film made ten years later, the accompanying image of the triangular dent still there: all these signs of that removed triangle, in various contexts and with various connotations, are brought to our attention together at one moment in the film. We are led to compare them with one another, the image on the screen with our sense of the mental image from Fortini's boyhood, the words read aloud on the soundtrack with our sense of the words at the time of their writing, the printed or the uttered words with the remembered or photographed image. The signs of the past are seen to take on a new meaning in each new situation in the present — including our situation at a showing of the film as spectators invited to make our own connections. (Fortini's description of his father in some ways reminded me of my own father, a connection which is peculiar to me, but not irrelevant to a film which encourages each one of us to examine what we bring to it.) Straub has described *Moses and Aaron* (1975), his and Huillet's film of Schoenberg's opera, as a comparison among three concrete historical periods: the time of the Biblical events, the time in the early '30s when the opera was written, and the time when the film was made. Every film by Straub and Huillet may be described as a document of documents, a juxtaposition of traces from different times in the past, concrete pieces of evidence to be compared with one another in the present.

In *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (1968), the actor playing Bach is a musician mostly playing the music that is the chief trace Bach left us of his existence. Rather than the man in some dramatization of what he was like then, the music itself is the rightful protagonist: the music performed by musicians now and recorded direct, grounded in this particular performance of it taking place before the camera. Unlike a concert, however, the film demands that we also consider the original ground of the music in the life of the man who composed it in 18th-century Germany. Even though we remain aware that the players are contemporary musicians, they wear the wigs and costumes and play the instruments of Bach's time in actual old churches and rooms; even though not much is reenacted of Bach's life outside the musical performances, the narrated chronicle of his second wife Anna Magdalena tells about family matters, money problems, the endeavors and frustrations of her husband's job as a musician. The film becomes a kind of dialogue between Bach as he survives in his music and Bach as he lived and worked. We get a sense of the materials Bach worked with, the difficulties he faced, the concrete circumstances under which he composed the music we are hearing — even as we recognize that in this enduringly beautiful music he was able to trans-

cend those often troublesome circumstances. Bach's music also is used by Straub and Huillet in other films as a symbol of the possible transcendence of one's situation, a magnificent reminder that human beings need not accept their circumstances as given but can work to overcome them.

The Bridegroom, the Comedienne, and the Pimp (1968) opens with an extended traveling shot along a dark street on the outskirts of Munich which is a gathering place for whores waiting to be picked up by customers driving by. This shot remains silent for awhile; then suddenly we start to hear Bach's *Ascension Oratorio* on the soundtrack, a strikingly incongruous musical accompaniment that continues through the second half of the shot. The silent shot documents the sordid reality of the street; the addition of the exalted music does not, of course, change the street that we go on seeing, but it registers as an assertive choice exercised by the filmmaker against that reality, a refusal to let it stand as it is. At the end of this short film, a young woman who may have been one of the whores we saw in the street begins a new life married to a black man; he speaks to her in lines of poetry, a German translation of the Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross. When the couple arrive at their new home, her pimp is there waiting, but she takes his gun from him and shoots him forthwith. Then the camera follows her to a window, and the film closes with the brightly overexposed image of the trees outside, accompanied on the soundtrack by more of St. John's poetry, recited by her, and by a section of Bach's music played again.

The film, one might say, begins with the darkness of prostitution and ends with the light of redemption, but the prostitution is a documented reality and the redemption a manifest contrivance which we are not to take as an accomplished fact. The shooting of the pimp is deliberately made unbelievable; the beauty of the trees does not cancel the ugliness of the whores' street; Bach's music and St. John's poetry are remnants of the past which do not provide in themselves an answer to the problems of the present. A feeling of transcendence is nonetheless evoked, but transcendence as a goal not yet achieved in the present as it was in the past by Bach and by St. John. The pimp, we are led to recognize, has not yet been shot, nor is the whore yet married: the shooting and the marriage are not realities but symbols of the kinds of actions that can be taken against intolerable realities. Bach and St. John are not offered as an answer but enlisted in opposition to that reality: they are symbols of the kind of answer we must find for ourselves in our time as they did in theirs. These traces of the past are evidence that an answer can be found, pointed reminders that the present can be changed.

Straub and Huillet are no less concerned with the missing pieces of evidence, the things that have been forgotten, the traces effaced by time. In one section of *Fortini/Cani*, the camera inspects the countryside near Florence in a series of slow, extended panning shots (interrogative circles too) around places where large numbers of Italian partisans were massacred by the Nazis during the Second World War — pretty landscapes where no trace is left of the blood spilled there. When the last of these shots goes around full-circle and keeps going over the same ground we've seen before, enough time has passed since we saw it, owing to the slowness of the panning, that we have to make an effort of recognition: after only a few moments we have already started to forget. *Not Reconciled* (1965) deals with the effort Germans must make to remember their history in this century, with their general failure to recognize that they are going over once again the same ground they went over before at the time of the Nazis and of the Kaiser before that. In this film, too, the camera pans slowly around the space of the present, searching for traces of the violent past. When Schrella, an anti-Nazi militant who has been in exile since the 1930s, returns to the street where he had lived in Cologne, the camera pans full-circle around the utterly changed street and stops in front of his old house, where, according to a child from the neighborhood whom he consults, no family named Schrella ever lived.

A "lacunary film" is Straub's term for *Not Reconciled:* a film in which the gaps, the omissions, are no less noticeable than the inclusions and no less important. "Tell what, boy?" asks Robert Fahmel in the abrupt opening line: tell what about his experience under the Nazis, when he was roughly the same age as the adolescent boy to whom he's talking now? Tell what about the German past, in what connection to the concerns of the present? asks the film implicitly throughout: the question is built into the fragmentary, dislocated arrangement of the largely retrospective narrative. The main characters are Schrella and the Fahmels, three generations of a Rhineland family prompted by his return to delve into their history. Out of a long story spanning half a century, we get an agglomerate of fragments, bits and pieces of the past recollected by the various characters in conversation or reenacted in flashbacks to Nazi and to Kaiser Germany, with sudden disconcerting shifts to different characters or to a different period, and with no clear links provided among the tangled pieces of retrospection. Hence the missing pieces carry as much weight as those included — the weight, we feel, of all in the past that has been forgotten or repressed and yet continues to bear upon the present.

Usually we find it easier to comprehend our past than our present, for we have the advantage of hindsight and are better able to see the whole picture looking back. But hindsight, in its tendency to see things as over and done with, is apt to yield a consoling delusion when the past in fact remains unresolved. In *Not Reconciled* we are denied that advantage, denied any long perspective from which to sum up the past. Instead we must confront, one by one, the particular fragments we are offered, rather as if we were inspecting the contents of an unfamiliar room for information about the life of its occupants, drawing such inferences as we can from miscellaneous items accumulated over the years and now encountered all together. Our view of the past in *Not Reconciled* is not of a chronology of progressing events, successive stages on the road to an outcome, but of a simultaneity of remnants, miscellaneous items all deposited in the present. The occupants of the room are the German people, and they must themselves take stock of its contents, the items from the past determining the shape of the present. No outcome has yet been reached, the film implies, from which to look back at the past and see clearly what it has all amounted to: the German past is entangled in a present which is a continuation and a reenactment of it, and its meaning must be sorted out amid the confusion of that present, through such an effort of collective recall as the unreconciled characters undertake. The outcome is up to the German people, whose coming to an understanding of their situation is the first step toward changing it, to be followed by their taking action against its perpetuation, in an endeavor to make the room into a better place to inhabit.

Not Reconciled portrays the process of coming to such an understanding. The only action that is taken against the situation is rather ineffectual. The character who takes this action is Johanna Fahmel, Robert's somewhat crazy old mother, who had gotten herself in trouble during the First World War by publicly calling the Kaiser a fool, and whose equally vocal opposition to the Nazis had necessitated her being put away in a mental asylum to save her life during World War II. Now that Johanna, expecting to plead insanity, decides to shoot, during a parade of war veterans, one of the reinstated Nazis in attendance, she's not sure which one among various deserving candidates. When she goes to a greenhouse to get the gardener's gun for the shooting, a frontal outside view of the shut greenhouse door gives us at first an impression of flat space, until she opens the door and walks inside the surprisingly deep greenhouse, entering well into the background, into the unspected depths of a space which feels as if she were excavating it.

In her craziness, which causes her to mix up past and present in her mind, Johanna is better able than the other characters to detect the pattern of perpetuation underlying German history — better able, as the image of her entering the greenhouse implies, to penetrate the surface and get at the bottom of things. Her penetration into the depths yields a gun, and she proceeds to shoot a prominent government minister, but he's not seriously wounded. "I hope the great look of astonishment will not disappear from his face," comments her husband Heinrich in the last line of the film, at a family party for his 80th birthday, which becomes also a celebration of Johanna's act of protest. The camera pans over the members of the Fahmel family, now (except for Johanna) all gathered together for the first time in the film, and continues to a window, to the bright closing image of trees by the Rhine outside, accompanied by a section of a Bach suite heard on the soundtrack. As in the similar ending of *The Bridegroom, the Comedienne, and the Pimp,* we get a sense of redemption here, of a transcendence of the situation, even though we are conscious that little has been accomplished as yet. All Johanna managed to do was put a look of astonishment on the enemy's face, not much of a change in the reality the gun was aimed against. Yet her action is invested with symbolic resonance as a gesture asserting her consciousness, her refusal to accept things as they are, pointing to the kind of action that must be taken so that the German people can be redeemed.

The young man's second conversation with the banker, which concludes *History Lessons,* differs significantly from the first in treatment and implications. The setting is the same Mediterranean garden as before, with the banker seated on the bench again and the young man on a chair across a table, which is how they remain throughout the scene, steadily facing each other. On the table there is a ptcher of red wine, which they are sharing in an afternoon drink: this is a friendlier and more comfortable occasion, it may seem, than the young man's earlier visit. We begin by getting something pretty close to a conventional shot-reverse shot: a frontal view of the banker, screen-center, looking off to the left, followed by a profile view of the young man, screen-left, looking off to the right. Moreover, this is a mode of shot-reverse shot conventional in scenes where one character, or interviewer, seeks information from another: the young man, like the interviewer he resembles, is shown in profile, whereas the banker, the one giving the answers, is shown frontally. The profile tends more to direct our attention off screen, the frontal view to become more the center of attention. We may notice here, however, that the pitcher of wine — cut off halfway by the left edge of the frame in the shot of the banker, halfway by the right edge in the shot of the young man — marks a kind of boundary between the two shots, which are thus seen neatly to divide space between the two characters, with no area of overlap: a hint that they may share little in common but the wine. Although they are sitting near each other across the small garden table, the young man and the banker are never framed together during this second conversation, and the persistently separate shots of each character haven't even any area in common with the shots of the other character. Each character seems to be in his own camp, as if a rift between the two were tacitly coming about. After a while we lose sense of their physical proximity, especially since the scale of the shots changes, getting closer to the banker and farther away from the young man — as if he were putting distance between himself and the banker.

During their earlier meeting the young man asked several questions, but (aside from the stroll in the garden, when it was his turn to answer a question) he was shown only briefly. During this meeting, where he asks no questions, says nothing at all, he is shown as regularly as the banker. In alternating long-held views of each character, the young man's silent reaction is given as much importance as the banker's statements — even more importance, one might say, since in the succession of shots the young man comes to be shown more and more frontally and the banker more and more in profile, as if the two were gradually exchanging roles as interviewer and interviewed. Certainly the young man no longer gives us the impression we got earlier of a naive student seeking to learn from the teacher; he looks no less keenly interested in what he is hearing about Roman history, but his expression seems stern now, his gaze penetrating rather than trustful.

By the end of the scene, as he listens to the banker's gloating description of a particularly dirty business — Caesar's subjugation of rebellious Lusitanian mountaineers whom he brought down in large numbers to work as slaves in profitable silver mines — we may read something like hatred on the young man's face. "My confidence in him proved well founded," says the banker about Caesar in the last line of the film. "Our little bank was no longer a little bank." Right after the first conversation with the banker, the young man talked to the peasant; right after the jurist, to the poet: in each case one account was opposed by another from a different point of view. No other account follows the second conversation with the banker, but he's not really allowed to have the last word: his account is opposed by the barely contained anger we detect in the young man's stare at him. In a way, this is again a reinstatement of a familiar device, the reaction shot, the prompting of a response in the audience by cutting to the reaction on a character's face.

Our response here, however, is much more complex than the sharing of a character's feelings in a standard reaction shot. We can't be sure of what the young man is feeling, we can only conjecture, which leads us to examine our own feelings in relation to the scene. The progressive reversal of the initial shot-reverse shot, so that the banker in profile comes to seem like the interviewer, and the young man in full face like the one being interviewed, does more than simply direct our attention to the young man's reaction; it implies that he must react, turning the banker's narrative into a kind of question put to the young man. He had started out as the student confronting history, and history ends up confronting him, as it were, challenging him to take a stand on the basis of what he has learned. Taken into the

banker's confidence over sips of a doubtless excellent wine, with a sumptuous villa becoming visible in the background as the camera turns to the banker's profile, the young man is invited into a complicity with the exploiters which he appears to repudiate — about which, in any case, he must make up his mind, for or against the banker and all that he represents. The young man's silent anger might be our projection, but his loss of innocence and gain of responsibility are a certainty.

Like *Not Reconciled, History Lessons* portrays the process of a coming to consciousness, a process in which we are led to participate. We may have noticed, during the young man's last car ride, the recurrence of Communist posters on the walls of the Roman buildings along this route, an indication that perhaps he has come to a Marxist standpoint, or is contemplating it; whether he has or not, his face exhibits a new look of understanding in the final conversation, and his stance toward the banker seems clearly to have changed. Our having to ponder his reaciton, in the context given it by the allusive shot arrangement, presses us to ponder our own reaction, to decide where we ourselves stand. We must, the film implies, develop our own anger at the banker, rather than simply share the young man's; for (as Mother Courage explains to a young soldier in Brecht's play) a long anger is required, an anger based on reflection rather than on the emotion of the moment. We may almost expect, by the end of the film, that the young man will get up from his chair and shoot the banker — the burst of Bach music on the soundtrack following the banker's last statement feels indeed like a shot — but we are aware that this ancient Roman has long been dead, that now the enemy is to be found in his modern counterparts, lurking in the streets of contemporary Rome.

If modernist art is problematic in its very nature — because it seeks, not the simple discarding of old conventions, but the questioning even of those being employed — modernism poses a peculiar problem in the case of films. The modernist movement was well under way in painting and poetry when D.W. Griffith was just beginning to develop the elementary conventions of cinema. Great as he was an an innovator, he was no modernist: instead of making something new in an old medium, he was exploring a new one, and fashioning it for rather traditional purposes. Yet the new medium, in the mobility he was the first to give it, seemed to promise a new way of seeing better suited to modern experience. "Cinematic" has been a word often applied to the modernist procedures of such works as *Ulysses*, although it's hard to imagine from which films *(The Musketeers of Pig Alley?)* Joyce could have drawn inspiration, and although most films that have been made since Griffith have not lived up to the promise of a new art that would keep abreast of a new age, but have lagged well behind the other arts in dealing with modern experience. For some, it is precisely the newness of films that exempts them from the modernist imperative to *make it new*, their freedom from the burdens of tradition enabling them to be the last traditional art, giving us the old-fashioned pleasures of a good story plainly told. For others, on the contrary, films are to fulfill their potential as a modern art in the avant-gardist eschewal of story-telling and the pursuit of visual abstraction in the manner of modern painting.

Abstraction, however, has not been the goal of modern painting, but a concomitant of its undertaking to lay bare the formative procedures of the medium — the way a painting is put together out of shapes and colors arranged by the painter on a flat surface. Photographic images, unlike painted ones, are put together largely automatically; turning them into abstractions may lay bare a mechanical process, but not any formative human arrangement through which the medium is made expressive. Moreover, photographic abstraction works to dissemble a fundamental fact of the medium; the presence in the world of the things reproduced by the camera. Reality is not an illusion in a photographic image, at least not in the same way that it is in a representational painting: rather, one might say, it is part of the materials out of which the image is constituted.

Near or complete abstraction is, of course, an option available to the filmmaker, though I would argue that the purely pictorial resources of cinema, even with the added dimension of movement, are poorer than those of painting and unlikely to produce abstractions any more visually gripping than a kind of moving wallpaper. It isn't my intention here, however, to dissuade anyone from a predilection for moving wallpaper, but to point out that avant-garde films given over to purely visual patterns, whether made in France in the 1920s or more recently in America, have little to do with genuine modernism.* The effacement of reality in abstract films is simply an alternative convention to the effacement of the camera in standard films. If in one case we are asked to pretend that the camera wasn't there and to look at the picture as if it were just like life, in the other we are asked to pretend that reality wasn't there and look at the visual patterns projected on the screen as if they had no other source but in the filmmaker's head. Admittedly, this alternative convention is harder for most audiences to accept in a film of any length, but its unquestioned acceptance is nonetheless what is demanded by the film abstractionist, to whose pristine vision we are to surrender ourselves.

It is a common avant-gardist misconception that the illusion of reality is the chief adversary against which the modernist challenge has been directed. Except for very small children, nobody watching a Hollywood movie or a representational painting or a naturalistic play believes he's watching reality. What is expected of the spectator in traditional art is surely not that he should mistake it for the real world but that he should take it as an ideal surrogate, satisfyingly coherent and complete within the realm ruled by its conventions. So long as he's comfortable with these conventions, his awareness of the artificiality of this realm, of its discrepancy from reality, won't hold back his involvement in it, his "willing suspension of disbelief." The obvious artificiality of slow motion, for example, hasn't prevented its gaining general acceptance as a cinematic convention, regularly used in commercial films, and television commercials, to connote instant lyricism. The more extreme distortions in a film by Stan Brakhage have a similar lyrical aim and similarly invite the viewer to give in and become attuned to them: he may refuse the invitation, but not because anything in the film qualifies or calls into question the unbridled expression of Brakhage's soul. By contrast, the justly celebrated use of slow motion during the climactic boys' revolt in Vigo's *Zero for Conduct* achieves not only a truly lyrical effect but also a truly modernist one in its sudden interruption of the hitherto naturalistic presentation of the scene, turning a spontaneous-looking pillow fight into a strange and exalted ceremony. It is not any device in itself, but the questioning of the device, that constitutes a modernist procedure: in Vigo's scene the two incongruous modes of presentation hold each other in check. The use of non-naturalistic devices is not a certification of modernism, or the use of naturalistic ones a disqualification from it.

In Jean Vigo we have the interesting case of a filmmaker who has won praise from avant-gardist admirers for his imaginative experimentation, and also from realist-minded ones for his earthy naturalism. Yet his films are neither slices of life nor flights of avant-gardist fancy: rather they are instances of the characteristically modernist conflation of materiality and formalization. The basic materials of cinema are images and sounds mechanically constituted from their source in reality: to disregard or dilute that reality for the sake of the pure image may be a visionary approach but it is not a modernist one, and not one that was pursued by Vigo or Bunuel or Eisenstein or Dovzhenko, to name several of the men who first succeeded in making the new medium into a truly modern art. Their work is at once more strikingly artificial than we are used to in films and also vividly real — more emphatically arranged and more solidly grounded in the physical world. These artists, in their different ways, all apply an assertive formalization against the weight of a concrete reality; they all compound naturalistic and nonnaturalistic devices so as to produce a conflict in our experience of their films — and thus an active rather than an acquiescent response.

To their names I would add that of another great filmmaker, Jean Renoir, whose impulse, in his ground-breaking work of the 1930s, was largely naturalistic, yet who, in his own gentler way, was as thoroughgoing a modernist, though he hasn't been recognized as one.* A chief reason why he hasn't, I submit, is that the cinematic devices which he lays bare, the conventions he opens to question, are peculiar to a medium whose attributes remain insufficiently understood. What usually passes for modernism in films is what, in the avant-garde, reminds some people of modern painting, or what reminds others of modern literature in Bergman or Fellini. Renoir has been a major influence on the subsequent development of genuine modernism in the film medium: on Antonioni, who refuted the neo-realist tenet that reality speaks for itself by exploring the different paths the camera can follow in the attempt to make it speak; on Godard, who more boldly and broadly than anyone before him took apart the diverse artifice of films while rescuing it for his purposes until, around 1968, he apparently decided it was beyond rescue; and on Straub and Huillet.

It is not out of the official avant-garde, but out of this checkered tradition of modernist cinema — of Eisenstein, Renoir, Dovzhenko, Godard — that the work of Straub and Huillet has emerged. In many of their procedures one may detect the distinctive influence of their predecessors: of Renoir in their insistence on direct sound, of Dovzhenko in their often having an actor remain still holding a telling gesture, of Godard in their mixing pointedly implausible fiction with documentary veracity. More important than any particular procedures, however, is what may be called a dialectical spirit which Straub and Huillet carry forward from their predecessors. What all these different filmmakers have in common, setting them apart both from Hollywood and from most of the avant-garde, is their refusal to enforce the acceptance of any mode of presentation — any consistent way in which we are to respond — and their endeavor, instead, to bring their formative activity under our scrutiny, having us entertain the alternative and ponder conflicting ways of regarding things.

From *Artforum*, October 1978

* Nor is it my intention to relegate to the category of moving wallpaper all films associated with these avant-gardes. Within this area of cinema, too often either championed or condemned as a whole, I believe it's important to make distinctions — between, for example, the estimable ambition and accomplishment of a Hollis Frampton and the triviality of Ken Jacobs' esthetic narcissism.

* Such a naturalistic procedure in Renoir as his use of direct sound, for example, with the noises recorded in an actual place getting to be as accentuated as the dialogue, serves both to increase our sense of reality and to dispute the conventional primacy of the dialogue over the rest of the soundtrack. Renoir continually challenges the fundamental convention of cinema, the ideal adequacy of the shot as a view of the action, by having action of central importance take place in the background of his shots — which in his films is no longer a conventional background to the action in front — or spill out of the frame into the space off screen — which in his films is no longer a conventional implied background to the action in view. A more extensive discussion of Renoir in this connection may be found in my essay, "The Narrative Sequence," *The Hudson Review*, XXX/1 (Spring 1977).

Synopsis and Review of *Every Revolution is a Throw of the Dice*

Tony Rayns

An opening shot shows the Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris, the wall plaque commemorating the Paris Commune dead of 1871 and, sitting near it on the grass, a semi-circle of nine women and men. These people (billed as "(re)-citants" in the film's titles) speak the text of Stephane Mallarme's poem *Un coup de des jamais n'abolira le hasard*. Each change of typeface in the layout of the original poem is marked by a change of speaker in the film, and each time a person speaks, they are shown in an uninterrupted take from a fixed camera position. The poem is thus broken down into 43 units, and shown in 43 shots. A final shot, accompanied only by natural sound, shows a view of the Paris cityscape from over the cemetery wall.

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Straub's simplest film is also his most mysterious, a tribute to Mallarme that not only asserts the continuing relevance of his work but also confronts its literary ambiguities with political and filmic ambiguities of its own. In outline, the film could not be more straightforward: it offers a (re)citation of one of Mallarme's most celebrated and complex poems (it was his last published work in his own lifetime, appearing in 1897, a year before his death) and proposes a filmic equivalent for the author's original experiments with typography and layout by assigning the words to nine different speakers, separating each speaker from the others as she or he speaks, and using slight pauses to correspond with white spaces on the original page. But it is clear that Straub's aim was not simply to render the poem on film; as he has consistently stressed in interviews, he and Daniele Huillet choose to work with pre-existing texts in their films precisely because they are attracted to texts that 'resist' them, that retain their challenge at some level. *Un coup de des jamais n'abolira le hasard* poses a very evident challenge; it could be clarified through the semiotic equation Concrete Signifiers + Elusive Signifieds = Paradoxical Signs. The poem is essentially an extended shipwreck metaphor in Mallarme's most applied Symbolist vein, alternately choking with images of panic and despair and guttering into the 'silence' of blank paper. It is commonly interpreted as a statement of the chaos of artistic creation, an account of the artist literally drowning in his own uncertainties until, or unless, he orients himself by catching a glimpse of the Pole Star. Its central paradox hinges on the image of the dice-throw: the final line is "Toute Pensee emet un Coup de Des" (i.e., each thought emits a throw of dice), which returns the reader to the poem's title (a throw of dice will never do away with chance). In other words, perhaps, no amount of conscious effort can eliminate the gamble that is intrinsic in any utterance. Straub first confronts this paradox with the title of his film, which is a quotation from Jules Michelet. At one level, this consolidates the celebration of Mallarme as a 'revolutionary' artist, a poet struggling to 'liberate' his language while caught between the engaged social realism of Zola and the decadent aestheticism of Huysmans. At another level, though, the Michelet quotation interrogates the poem by positioning an alternative frame of reference — one which connects with the setting of the film in a real, contemporary space, near the monument to the Communards. And Straub has some dice of his own to throw. He introduces, for instance, a kind of sexual politics into the reading of the poem, assigning the isolated words that are capitalized on the page to his male speakers, and the main body of the text printed in lower-case letters to the females. This division has the effect of giving the poem's streams of imagery to the women and its gutteral interjections to the men. The effect is extended into a simple formal dialectic: each speaker is shown isolated in medium-shot, from a side angle, but the women all face off-screen left while the men face off-screen right. The disjunctions are, of course, striking and in a sense they destroy the integrity of the poem. But that description is, at the same time, a process of accretion: an *addition* of layers of meaning to the poem, layers that represent both the present in which the film is made and the years that have elapsed since Mallarme wrote. The final shot in the film (aside from the closing titles, which include a full-screen photograph of Mallarme) is an 'ordinary' view of Paris, an unimpressive vista of rooftops, tower blocks, television aerials under a cloudy sky, a 'neutral' stare at the city in which Mallarme settled in the year that the Communards died. Straub has apparently described the film as his "declaration of love for the city of Paris," but its passions are in reality more specific: the film's true joy lies in its reading of a poem through a set of historical and political contradictions and sexual differences, in its testing of Mallarme's resonant words against the natural sounds of traffic and birdsong.

From *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 46, no. 541, February 1979

Adaptation and Ideology: Two Films by Straub and Huillet

Bruce Jenkins

One of the central themes of this series has been the notion of adaptation, an acknowledgement within the films we have seen of prior texts, and — to go a bit further — a foregrounding of textuality as such within the work. In Eric Rohmer's *Perceval*, for example, we found a faithful rendering of Chretien de Troye's 12th century verse on the soundtrack and ample visual references to and cinematic adaptations of the formal, spatial and iconographic features of medieval art on the image track. Wim Wenders' *Wrong Movement* adapted for its cinematic narrative an older text, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, which it restructured into the loose narrative contours of a so-called "art film," and in which the wandering protagonist became the sounding board for a variety of textual presentations offered by his cohorts: poems, philosophical mediations, war stories, dream accounts, etc.

I might, at some risk, have extended my analysis of the Wenders film last week by claiming that *Wrong Movement* involved less a parody of the Goethe novel and to a greater extent a parody of the "art film" itself. We need only have acknowledged the over-seriousness of the protagonist's pursuit in relation to the absolute fortuitousness of its outcome. The film had us accompany Wilhelm for over 100 minutes, while it became increasingly clear that his own self-ignorance was equalled only by the near-total void in his understanding of social and political matters. The protagonist of the "art film," lost in his quest for self-knowledge, failed to even understand that this pursuit itself has been foreclosed by the politics of his times and the ideology of his culture.

These concerns — concerns with adaptation, textuality, politics and ideology — may serve as reference points for some of the issues raised by two recent films by Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet. Both films are adaptations: one of Mallarme's poem "A throw of the dice will never abolish chance" and the other a juxtaposition of two texts by Italian writer Cesare Pavese — his mythic meditations, *Dialogues with Leuco*, and his final novel, *The Moon and the Bonfires*. And both films foreground the texts *as* texts by their strategies of presentation, which, while acknowledging the political dimension of the content, strike a blow to the ideology of representation — the realism of the illusion of cinema.

We'll begin by looking at Straub-Huillet's adaptation of Mallarme, *Every Revolution is a Throw of the Dice.* Its title is taken not from the poem, but from Jean Michelet's quote on the Paris Commune, and the film is set in Paris' Pere Lachaise Cemetery near the graves of several heroes from the Commune. The Mallarme poem is recited in its entirety by an assembly of nine readers. To understand the film's structure, it might be useful to see the typography of the poem itself. The text presents adequately Mallarme's break with ordinary 19th century versification and his attempt at orchestrating type size, spacing and precise layout into a "symphonic equation" The poem is to be read across double pages, with the paper intervening to mark breaks, or what Mallarme termed "prismatic subdivisions." In all, Mallarme uses nine different typefaces (marked by size and by style), and in the Straub-Huillet film these are transformed into the nine reading roles.

On one level, Straub and Huillet have simply performed the public recitation of the poem in the combinatory manner which Mallarme had so desired. On another level, though, we find the text presented as a doubled tribute: to the dead radicals of the Paris Commune (the plaque acknowledges this) and to the living radicals of the French film journal, *Cahiers du Cinema*, to whom the film is dedicated. It is precisely the juxtaposition of the aesthetic radicality of Mallarme's poem and the radical politics of the Paris Commune which is emblematic of Straub and Huillet's work. The dedication to the critics of one of *Cahiers'* most politically-engaged periods casts this juxtaposition of art and politics, in turn, into the arena of film. Straub and Huillet have displaced Mallarme's text from the pristine page onto the grassy incline of Pere Lachaise in contemporary Paris, from the pursuits of the imagination to the space of action of the political and the cinematic.

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A similar movement, though with greater complexity, informs their most recent feature film, *From the Cloud to the Resistance.* Divided into two parts, the film juxtaposes Pavese's two most extreme texts: *Dialogues with Leuco*, his neo-classical interpretation of Greek myths of creation and mortality, published in 1947, and *The Moon and the Bonfires*, his neo-realist novel on post-war Italy published shortly before the author's suicide in 1950.

As French critic Louis Marcorelles has noted, Straub and Huillet have tended in their filmic adaptations to present texts by French authors *in toto* (as in the case of the Mallarme short and their adaptation of Corneille's *Othon)*, while they have severely compressed the texts of the various German and Italian writers whose works they have adapted (Heinrich Boll, Ferdinand Bruckner, Brecht, Franco Fortini). *From the Cloud to the Resistance* partakes of both types of adaptation.

The first half of the film consists of six of the original 27 dialogues from *Dialogues with Leuco* presented in their entirety. Taken from the first two sections of Pavese's work, these six dialogues revolve around the birth of the human world, the sublunar arena of mortality, out of chaos, and the fixing of limits upon the actions of mankind. This world of gods and goddesses, of the Olympians and the Titans, of nymphs and ancient heroes, would seem at odds with the leftist commitments of Pavese, a writer jailed by the Fascists in the early Thirties, a member of the Resistance during the war, and a writer of and for the common people. While *Dialogues with Leuco* remained Pavese's favorite work, it was much maligned in its time for precisely these distant mythic and symbolic concerns. Why then did Pavese write it, what relation does it have to the material realities of Italy, the War, the rural peasantry of Pavese's homeland, and why, in turn, have Straub and Huillet appropriated it directly for their radical project?

Olimpia Carlisi (Nephele, the Cloud) in *From the Cloud to the Resistance*, 1978.

To begin to answer this, we must turn to Pavese's deceptively simple preface to the *Dialogues*. He begins, "Had it been possible, I would gladly have done without all this mythology. But myth, it seems to me, is a language of its own, an instrument of expression." What, for Pavese, a myth expresses is a "core of reality which quickens and feeds a whole organic growth of passion and human existence, an entire conceptual complex." Pavese here doubly acknowledges myth as ideology — both ideology in its older, philosophical meaning as pertaining to the nature and origin of ideas and, I would claim, in its Marxist sense as an illusory system of values and beliefs which masks social contradictions. What Pavese's self-admitted "stubborn concentration" on the mythic aims to reveal and unmask are our basic beliefs, inculcated since childhood in the form of these classical myths — myths which like language and *as* a language delimit our comprehension of material reality.

Pavese indirectly acknowledges this political aspiration of the *Dialogues* in a letter to his friends Tullio and Maria Christina Pinelli written in December of 1947: "I must explain to you that not being involved in politics is a form of involvement . . . not to study language is one way of studying it. . . ." A political presence through an *absence*, then, underpins Pavese's seemingly pantheistic meditations on origins, superstitions, and the relationship between ancient peoples and the gods.

Pavese ends his preface with a description of his working method, as well as a note to the reader (and a note for Straub and Huillet, too): "The surest, and the quickest way for us to arouse the sense of wonder is to stare, unafraid, at a single object. Suddenly — miraculously — it will look like something we have never seen before." What Pavese's fixed stare, his singular concentration on the classical myths will then reveal is "something we have never seen before" — the veil of ideology *through* which we see, but which itself is never seen. Similarly, the fixed stare of Straub and Huillet's camera, their singular concentration on Pavese's text itself, aims to foreground another ideology through which we see, but is never seen — the cinema's illusion of reality *as* an illusion, its transparency as an ideological veil.

The Cloud of the film's title is at once the veil of ideology and the first dialogue of Pavese's text. The film begins then with the first of Pavese's dialogues, "The Cloud," in which Nephele, a nymph of the clouds, seated in a tree, warns Ixion, a future hero of the Trojan Wars, of man's new fate, his necessary submission to the law, the limits now imposed upon him by the invisible gods. Man's fate, the Cloud tells Ixion, is, like the Marxist notion of alienation, to be reduced to a shadow, "a shade that wants to live but never dies."

By the second dialogue, man's fate has already been sealed. The Chimera, the last mythical monster, has been slain by Bellerphone, who now suffers the tragic fate of alienation — discussed in this dialogue by his progeny, the son Hippolochus and the grandson Sarpendon. Man's fallen state is given a more contemporary gloss in the third dialogue between the blind prophet Tiresias and the young Oedipus. Waxing Freudian, Tiresias tells Oedipus (soon to blind himself from this revelation) that, while the gods turn everything into words, illusions and threats, there are no gods above sex — "sex is the rock." Following this discourse on sex and illusion comes Pavese's dialogue on death, "The Werewolf," performed by two young hunters who have slain the ancient hero Lycaon, whom Zeus has transformed into a wolf. The final two dialogues in this first part of the film extend this theme of death into the domain of agrarian ritual and pagan superstition. In the first of these, Hericles, the guest from Greece, is asked by his host, the Phrygian Lityerses, to sacrifice his life in order to renew the future harvest. In the second, two shepherds, a father and his son, discuss the meaning of the ritual bonfires of the equinox.

The second part of the film begins in the same rural district of Italy where the ancient shepherds had lit their bonfire sacrifices to the gods. Like the movement from the poetic to the political that we saw in *Every Revolution is a Throw of the Dice*, the second part of *From the Cloud to the Resistance*, in adapting Pavese's *The Moon and the Bonfires*, brings us out of the timeless ideology of the past, the classical realm of myth, and into the contemporary world of social and political concerns. But this world of postwar Italy seems even more inexplicable than the ancient world, as the gods have long since vanished, leaving in their place the landowners, the priests, the government officials, as the only indicators of human limitation, of the law of the gods. The protagonist of this modern idyll has journeyed back to Italy from his refuge in America in order to recapture his lost past, the pastoral memories of his childhood. What he finds is a land abandoned by not only the heroes of classical mythology, but also the now dead partisan fighters from the War. The ancient sacrifices to the gods have been supplanted by the meaningless ravages of the War — monumental battles which have reduced everything and changed very little.

While Pavese's dialogues of mythic ideology were recited verbatim from the original text, in the second part of the film, Straub and Huillet have partaken of the other type of adaptation of which we spoke, compressing the basic narrative of *The Moon and the Bonfires* into a series of dialogues. Somewhat like the protagonist/narrator of Wenders' *Wrong Movement*, who has set out on a quest for self-knowledge, Anguilla (or Eel, as he's nicknamed), Pavese's protagonist/narrator, becomes an auditor for the stories of others, seeking to learn of his past from the tales of his former countrymen: from Nuto, his childhood friend; from the Cavaliere, the displaced landowner; from Cinto, the peasant boy.

In reducing nearly everything except the very opening section, the final scene, and occasional voice-over explanations to dialogue, Straub and Huillet create (as they did in their adaptations of Boll and Brecht in earlier films) an elliptical narrative in which the central enigma of the novel (and of Eel's search for the past) and the major complications in its action are abstracted and distanced through the framework of the dialogue structure. Straub and Huillet have eliminated as well most of the narrator's own recollections about the past (Pavese's three chapters on Eel in America, several chapters on Eel's memories of his boyhood servitude with Nuto on the estate of La Mora, and especially his memories of the landowner's three daughters, Silvia, Irene and Santa). For Straub and Huillet — and this is a central concern in all their films — his past must be uncovered in the present, in dialogues which relate many of the ancient conflicts in their contemporary guises. The contradictions, the paradoxes, the seeming futility of man's fate discussed in *Dialogues with Leuco* from the first part of the film are transformed from a metaphysical statement into the physical realities of rural Italy.

Now, some of you may feel that in introducing this film, I've given away the tale. In having told you the story (the *histoire)*, however, I have barely described the film — the *discours* of Straub and Huillet. It would be as if I had analyzed a painting by Cezanne by saying that it is a picture of a bottle of peppermint and some fruit, or that another one is a rendition of Mt. St.-Victoire. For, as with Cezanne, much of the meaning of *From the Cloud to the Resistance* resides not so much in its substance, but in its form.

Invoking Cezanne in this context is not without its motivations. On the anecdotal level, it relates most directly to Straub and Huillet who, when they came to America for the first time in the fall of 1975, visited Chicago, and, as tourists, voiced three requests: they wanted to see the factories; they wanted to see the neighborhoods where the black people live; and they wanted to see the Cezannes at the Art Institute — the Cezannes and only the Cezannes.

On a critical level, the films of Straub and Huillet bear a strong affinity to Cezanne's late work, in which he laid the foundations for a new language of modernism in painting by foregrounding the tension between naturalism and impressionism, between maintaining a fidelity to nature and acknowledging the integrity (and presence) of the painted surface. The cinema of Straub and Huillet articulates a similar tension between mimesis and textual presence, between the told and its telling. The images of the film are presented in that fixed stare of Pavese's, within the deep-focus, sync-sound space of a veristic cinematography — but distanced by that stare, that fixity, which casts the actors into an almost theatrical presence. Straub and Huillet frame these actors obliquely, recording their actions from behind or to the side, refusing the spectator the security of a direct, centered identification. The continuity of a sequence is provided either by single continuous camera takes, or by a form of cutting which, breaking the conventions of classical continuity editing in film, undermines the suturing of a continuous space, much like the spatial disjunctures of the readers presented in the Mallarme short. Often, an unbalanced framing (with a character placed close to one edge) is utilized to acknowledge the presence of the (off-screen) listener, while at the same time shifting the dialogue into the form of a soliloquy, transforming intimate conversation into discourse, and reducing the narrative flow to a foregrounded textual presence.

In breaking the *reality of the illusion* — the continuity of space, our identification with the characters — Straub and Huillet have unmasked that *illusion of reality* — ideology — which has displaced the ancient limits set by the gods upon humankind. Like the fight between mankind and the gods, of the Resistance against Fascism, Straub and Huillet have challenged in their work the authority of the image, the reproduction of the real, and in so doing, have refused the transcendence of art in the pursuit of the political.

Previously unpublished; adapted from lecture given in April 1981

Mario di Mattia (Cinto) in *From the Cloud to the Resistance*, 1978.

Transcendental Cuisine

Jonathan Rosenbaum

Zorro, the Gay Blade
Written by Hal Dressner
Directed by Peter Medak

Heart to Heart (Confidences pur Confidences)
Written by Jacques Lourcelles and Pascal Thomas
Directed by Pascal Thomas

From the Cloud to the Resistance (Dalla Nube resistenza)
Text by Cesare Pavese (from Dialogues with Leuco, 1947,
and The Moon and the Bonfires, 1950)
A film by Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet

In a characteristically gross and funny episode about a *haute cuisine* establishment in William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, we're told at one point that "Robert's brother Paul emerges from retirement in a local nut house and takes over the restaurant to dispense something he calls the 'Transcendental Cuisine' . . . . Imperceptibly the quality of the food declines until he is serving literal garbage, the clients being too intimidated by the reputation of *Chez Robert* to protest."

It's a passage that often comes grimly to mind when I contemplate The Art of Movies as it's officially defined in our Transcendental Culture. But insofar as the analogy with film actually holds, I'm afraid that things are even worse off in my profession than in Burroughs's Swiftian nightmare. At least the clientele of *Chez Robert* smells or suspects the presence of something rotten, while by and large, the possibility that we're all consuming literal garbage seems less likely to cross the standard film buff's mind. Worse still, the possibility that better fare actually exists somewhere, even though it rarely finds its way to our plates, seems scarcely to have occurred to most moviegoers. They certainly haven't been helped or guided much in this process by critics, whose professional loyalty seems to belong more to the garbage merchants (who treat them to free meals) than to their fellow hapless consumers.

I'm one of those garbage freeloaders and consumer guides too, even though every once in a blue moon a real movie comes along, something capable of changing my life, and it makes me gag a little on the others. I even have trouble holding the real movie down as a total entity, especially at first, because it's generally too much for me. I have to break it down into manageable units first, and I only get bits and pieces; friends, critics and cohorts help me find others; still other parts slide perpetually out of grasp, remain elusive. I'm the reverse of that critic on a rival weekly — the one who just referred to me, flatteringly, as "Some of the people who have written recently on *Juke Girl*" — who categorically states, "I cannot even begin to evaluate a movie unless I have seen it from beginning to end."

It's a reasonable-sounding statement, but one predicated on closure — the kind of movie which doesn't change your life much except by extending it a little, which is the kind we both usually get paid to promote. He clearly *isn't* talking about Snow's *La Region Centrale* or Tati's *Playtime* or Godard and Mieville's *Numero Deux* or Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet's *From the Cloud to the Resistance*, which are too radical as movies to begin or end in the ordinary sense. The latter film began for me many weeks ago, when I booked the film for my Seminar in Current Cinema at NYU, continued when I checked out translations of the two Pavese books it uses from a library, was overturned when I saw it with students and friends last week, and is still in dazzling progress. *Playtime* hasn't ended yet, either; to "evaluate" it, one has to look at a lot more than other movies.

From the Cloud to the Resistance: an interesting, descriptive title that lucidly traces a passage between the two mythological and political possibilities of film itself — from the idealism of the medium, where stars are like gods in the sky and transcendental fiction is bigger than life (Part I — Pavese's 27 poetic, difficult 1947 dialogues between gods and mortals, 6 of which are used in the film) to the material resistance of the earth and human and animal life to aggression and oppression imposed from above (Part II — Pavese's last book before his suicide in 1950, a novel about the Italian resistance against Mussolini). Common to both parts is the same lush, brightly lit countryside and Pavesean imagery: blood, stone, trees, moon, bonfires, fields.

It should be stressed that this beautiful, intractable, 1979 Cezanne-like landscape film is being distributed non-theatrically in the U.S. by New Yorker Films, and is not going to open here, perhaps not ever. Straub and Huillet are major European filmmakers, but ever since their *Moses and Aaron* showed at the New York Film Festival in 1975, and was reviewed in *The New York Times* as *Aaron and Moses* (a title Vincent Canby persists in getting wrong even today), their subsequent films — one short and two features — have been almost totally ignored in this country, and will continue to be. *From the Cloud to the Resistance*, one of their very best, hasn't a ghose of a chance of opening here.

The incapacity of New York to deal with it on any level is neither surprising nor unprecedented, given the personal stake we all have in keeping up the garbage flow (our Transcendental Cuisine) and shunning the very possibility of a movie that requires a certain kind of work and engagement. For one thing, it forestalls the convenient digestibility of a beginning and end that clearly separates it from life. . . . But let me turn first to my professional duties.

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Zorro, the Gay Blade is dedicated to Rouben Mamoulian — director of *The Mark of Zorro* (1940), which this mainly lame parody is loosely patterned after — "and the other great filmmakers whose past gave us our future." Grim words, but it's important to remember that garbage likes to stay contextual and pattern itself after other garbage. So we start off with a nostalgic black and white clip of the original Big Z, before the movie obligingly moves on to other spinoffs and replays. I haven't seen *Love at First Bite*, the previous George Hamilton genre spoof, but when I hear Hamilton's clotted Spanish accent saying "ship" for "sheep" or waffling on about his desire to fight for the downtrodden "pipples," I'm immediately brought back to the Gallic verbal fractures of Peter Sellers's Inspector Clouseau. (Later on, Lauren Hutton has a sexy way of teaching him how to say "vulnerable".)

There are plenty of more chances here to remember other garbage. The shrill stridency of Ron Leibman as the villain evokes Richard Mulligan in *S.O.B.* Fans of Brenda Vaccaro's TV ads for Playtex tampons who were chagrined to find her wheezy intakes of breath removed from the soundtrack after a spell will be gratified to discover that her gaspy punctuations are retained here. Director Peter Medak usually has a nice sense of when to cut to high-angle interior setups that, if I recall correctly, also served him well on *The Ruling Class* in 1972. (This of course is only an interim report that may ultimately change in relation to the cosmic long view of international film history; clearly I'd have to see *The Ruling Class* again from beginning to end before I could make a measured judgement on this matter.)

To make another tentative evaluation: A teenager looking for a dumb action matinee farce could probably do worse *or* better than *Zorro, the Gay Blade*. He or she might find Hamilton tolerable as Don Diega Vega and bloody awful as his gay English-bred twin brother Bunny Wigglesworth, who incidentally figures in this "swishbuckler" as the least convincing transvestite since the horse in Disney's *Icabod and Mr. Toad*. Personally, I think I would have preferred the more dapper, equally self-ingratiated Peter Bogdanovich, giving his all to both parts.

*

Heart to Heart — yet another French nostalgia movie about female adolescence, made in 1978 — seems designed to warm the innards of the sort of gooey, xenophobic garbage critics who think that Alain Resnais is a heartless structuralist. Just think of the emotional impact of a movie beginning *and* ending with a freeze-frame, whose narration starts with a female voice saying, "I feel sad — I want to tell the story of my family." Before long, one can hear "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" being sung in French in a snow-covered courtyard that's grey *retro*-style, and then see cozily lit family interiors, nicely shot by Renan Polles, that resembles old full-color ads in *Collier's*. Around that same period, movies like *Heart to Heart* were already being made — starring actresses like Doris Day, Linda Darnell, and Jean Peters, and usually set 30 years or more before the present — only this is French transcendental cuisine for Yankee export, higher grade stuff, which means Hollywood without the Hays Office and production code.

Jacques Lourcelles, an intelligent film critic who has written a book on Otto Preminger and translated novels by Samuel Fuller — one of the French generals in *The Big Red One* is named after him — collaborated with Pascal Thomas on the script, which is serviceable fluff about three daughters growing up. A few teenagers, both young and old, may get a few good cries and chuckles out of this; I was mainly bored by the movie's efforts to dish out endless quantities of goodwill, like a Truffaut vending machine that has somehow gone berserk.

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According to an Italian anthropologist who visited my class, *From the Cloud to the Resistance* is post-Pasolini in its relation to linguistics. (The relevance of Straub/Huillet to Pasolini and vice versa is problematic but unavoidable, because the issues of *translation* on multiple levels and a Marxist, dialectical relation between antiquity and the present seems central to both.) Part I features formalized deliveries of a wide variety of regional peasant dialects, while in Part II the non-professionals speak in the local dialect of Piedmont, the northern region where the action is set.

One of the most remarkable sequences in Part I is a dialogue between Oedipus and Teresias shortly before the former's misfortunes begin. The camera is stationed directly behind them on a wagon drawn by oxen that's being pulled along a lovely country road by a male peasant. The peasant is never mentioned or acknowledged once by either speaker, yet he's the constant, bobbing center of all the long takes recording the dialogue and its silent aftermath — the precise equivalent of the offscreen cameraperson behind the speakers (another ignored worker setting the whole show in motion), who are conversing mainly about sex and blindness, and there's a stunning moment at the end of the conversation when Oedipus prays to god that he won't become blind, just as a beautiful clump of red flowers — rhyming with a red toga over Teresias's left shoulder — appears on the right side of the road. Earlier, their discussion of sex occurs under dark tree branches punctuated by flickers of light, before returning to a bright patch of road that, as critic Gilberto Perez points out to me, traces a full circle.

Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest*, 1950.

Perez—whose essay, "Modernist Cinema: The History Lessons of Straub and Huillet" in the October 1978 *Artforum* is an invaluable guide to their work — informs me that the long car ride through Rome in *History Lessons* (1972), a clear forerunner of this gorgeous sequence, is also circular, and notes that the rear-view mirror at screen center framing the driver's eyes offers a parallel to the peasant/camera dichotomy. Offsetting one thing with another — including the visible with the non-visible — is basic to Straub/Huillet's strategies. And I like what another critic, Serge Daney, says about material resistance itself being a constant theme of their work — the resistance of texts to bodies, of locations to texts, of bodies to locations. (This is already implicit in the very title of their first feature, in 1965, *Not Reconciled.)*

Straub/Huillet seem to identify with only two characters in their new movie — a baby wolf* in Part I who appears to be dying (occasioning a dialogue between the two hunters about the man, Lycaon, he once was before Zeus punished him) and a little boy who survives the death of his family in Part II. The monumentality of their best compositions is like the obstinate will that has enabled them to raise money and produce all 11 of their beautiful, impossible films — as hard and angry as granite, as implacable as Fritz Lang or Carl Dreyer or Kenji Mizoguchi, often brutally thwarting our desires (such as holding the most handsomely framed and colored interior shot in the movie — a summary of 8 rugged anti-partisans standing at a bar, singled out in preceding shots — for scarcely an instant, so that it hits you like a brick). Yet the tenderness of their work ("This is a gentle Marxism in the metaphysical realm," writes Pamela Moorehead, one of my students) perhaps places it within the termite range, as coined by Manny Farber, and outside the whole bluff of White Elephant art.

The weather was beautiful in Washington Square Park before and after I saw *From the Cloud to the Resistance;* the movie didn't make it that way, but it made me see, hear and feel more of it. According to the present state of received ideas, the right-wing formalism of Carpenter, De Palma and Lucas/Spielberg is "good clean fun," not politics or ideology, while the left-wing formalism of Godard or Straub/Huillet is supposed to be pleasureless politics, no fun at all — torture to critics who hate to think too much, hence impossible for most of us to see.

But the talent of the good-clean-fun guys mainly has to do with their capacity to make me either forget or enjoy the fact that they're shoveling garbage. They haven't got anything to say to me about the weather outside. And the absence of Straub/Huillet and other exemplary termites here has also meant the absence of what might have produced some thrilling criticism. The silence of Manny Farber and Patricia Patterson for the past 4 years as film critics (their last published article, significantly, was on another undistributed European masterwork of the 70's, Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman)* can probably be explained in part by the quarantine placed on the kind of movies they appreciate and support the most — a quarantine collectively maintained by a community of "scholars" who despise the possibility of having to think too hard.

"For all their usefulness, termites can never be entombed in the Pantheon," a local and celebrated garbage collector recently had the considered loftiness to announce. No, thank God, but at least they can eat away at the crumbling pillars supporting that Pantheon — which may prove to be more useful in the long run. Who wants to be entombed, anyway, except for people who are already dead? Next to that transcendental version of Forest Lawn, I'll take Straub/Huillet's material resistance in a flash. The fact that most of us are unable to see it is our problem, not theirs — White Elephant criticism (which is all we have, alas), not Termite Art.

Previously unpublished; written for *Soho News*, July 1981

Textual Postscript

Tracy Young, my editor at *Soho News*, accorded me an unusual amount of freedom and a minimum of editing (which often amounted to the same thing), but she didn't allow me to publish the above column. She approved it in principle when I proposed it, then refused it after it was written — the first and only time this ever happened during my year and a half on the magazine. Later on, she wound up ripping out (or, in capitalist terms, salvaging) the reviews of *Zorro, the Gay Blade* and *Heart to Heart*, and running them with Seth Cagin's review of *Victory*, under the title "Transcendental Cuisine," without explanation. I am grateful to be able to publish this suppressed column at long last, although I disagree now with one sentiment in particular that is expressed there. I no longer feel that "a gentle Marxism" adequately describes Straub-Huillet's work; a serene terrorism is perhaps closer to the mark.

*"The only small mistake of your article: it is not a 'baby' wolf, but an adult normal one — coming from the Abruzzi—; it was the rock, the stone, which was very big. . ." (From a letter by Daniele Huillet to author, 18 May 1982).

Cinemeteorology

Serge Daney

What do John Travolta and Jean-Marie Straub have in common? A difficult question, I admit. One dances, the other doesn't. One is Marxist, the other isn't. One is very well known, the other less so. Both have their fans. Me, for instance.

However, one merely has to see their two films surface on the same day on Parisian screens in order to understand that the same worry eats away at both of them. Worry? Let's say passion, rather — a passion for sound. I'm referring to *Blow Out* (directed by Brian De Palma) and to *Too Early, Too Late* (co-signed by Daniele Huillet), two good films, two magnificent soundtracks.

The cinema, you may persist in thinking, is "images and sounds". But what if it were the reverse? What if it were "sounds *and* images"? Sounds which make one imagine what one sees and see what one imagines? And what if the cinema were also the ear which pricks itself up — erectile and alert, like a dog's — when the eye loses its bearings? In the open country, for instance.

In *Blow Out*, John Travolta plays the part of a sound effects freak who, starting off with *one* sound, goes on to identify a crime and its author. In *Too Early, Too Late*, Straub, Huillet and their regular sound engineer, the inspired Louis Hochet, lose themselves in the French countryside before they set about wandering along the Nile and within its delta, in Egypt. Starting off with sounds — *all* the sounds, from the most infinitesmal to the subtlest — they too identify a crime. Scene of the crime: the earth; victims: peasants; witnesses to the crime: landscapes. That is, clouds, roads, grass, wind.

MAHMOUD ENGELS

In June 1980, the Straubs spent two weeks filming in the French countryside. They were seen in places as improbable as Treogan, Mottreff, Marbeuf and Harville. They were seen prowling close to big cities: Lyon, Rennes. Their idea, which presides over the execution of this opus 12 in their oeuvre (already twenty years of filmmaking!), was to film *as they are today* a certain number of places mentioned in a letter sent by Engels to the future renegade Kautsky. In this letter (read offscreen by Daniele Huillet), Engels, bolstered with figures, describes the misery of the countryside on the eve of the French Revolution. One suspects that these places have changed. For one thing, they are deserted. The French countryside, Straub says, has a "science fiction, deserted-planet aspect". Maybe people live there, but they don't inhabit the locale. The fields, roadways, fences and rows of trees are traces of human activity, but the actors are birds, a few vehicles, a faint murmur, the wind.

In May 1981, the Straubs are in Egypt and film other landscapes. This time the guide isn't Engels but a more up-to-date Marxist, author of the recent and celebrated *Class Struggles in Egypt*, Mahmoud Hussein. Again offscreen, the voice of an Arab intellectual speaks in French (but with an accent) about the peasant resistance to the English occupation, up until the "petit-bourgeois" revolution of Neguib in 1952. Once again, the peasants revolt *too early* and succeed *too late* as far as power is concerned. This obsessive recurrence is the film's "content". Like a musical motif, it is established from the outset: "that the middle-class here as always were too cowardly to support their own interests/ that since the Bastille, the plebes had to do all the work" (Engels).

The film is thus a diptych. One, France. Two, Egypt. No actors, not even characters, especially not extras. If there is an actor in *Too Early, Too Late*, it's the landscape. This actor has a text to recite: History (the peasants who resist, the land which remains), of which it is the living witness. The actor performs with a certain amount of talent: the cloud which passes, a breaking loose of birds, a bouquet of trees bent by the wind, a break in the clouds; this is what the landscape's *performance* consists of. This kind of performing is meteorological. One hasn't seen anything like it for quite some time. Since the silent period, to be precise.

THE WIND MAKES NOISE

While seeing *Too Early, Too Late* (especially the first part), I recalled another film, shot in Hollywood in 1928 by the Swedish director Victor Sjostrom: *The Wind*. This magnificent movie showed how the sound of the wind drove Lillian Gish mad. The film was "silent," which only gave it more force. Anyone who has seen *The Wind* knows that it's an auditory hallucination. Anyway, there's never been a "silent cinema," only a cinema deaf to the racket produced inside each spectator, in his very body, when he becomes the echo chamber of images. Those of the wind, for instance.

One had to wait for the sound film before silence had a chance. Again, Bresson is optimistic when he writes, "The sound film invented silence." The possibility of silence, at least. Take the example of the wind. One doesn't have a clear memory of the wind in the films of the Thirties, Forties, Fifties. Or, rather, it was thunderstorms which went *whoosh* in pirate films. But the North wind, the draught, the air current, all those winds so close to silence? The West wind? And the evening breeze? No. One had to wait for the Sixties, the small sync-sound cameras, the New Waves. One had to wait for Straub and Huillet.

THE EAR SEES

For at the point of refinement when they arrived at the practive of direct sound, a very strange phenomenon is produced in their films (such as *From the Cloud to the Resistance)*. One rediscovers there the "auditory hallucinations" proper to the "silent" cinema. The same phenomenon crops up in certain recent films by some "old" figures of the New Wave: Rouch *(Ambara Damba)*, Rohmer *(The Aviator's Wife)*, Rivette *(North Bridge)*. As if the direct sound brought back the absence of sound. As if, out of a world that's integrally sonorous, the body of a burlesque actor once again emerges.

It's normal: when the cinema was "silent," we were free to lend it *all* the noises, the tiniest as well as the most intimate. It was when it set about talking, and especially after the invention of dubbing (1935), that nothing remained to challenge the victory of dialogue and music. Weak, imperceptible noises no longer had a chance. It was genocide.

Too Early, Too Late, 1981.

They came back again, gradually. In America through an orgy of sonorous effects (see Travolta), in France through the re-education of the ear (see Straub). *Too Early, Too Late* is, to the best of my knowledge, one of the few movies since Sjostrom's that has filmed the wind. This has to be seen — and heard — to be believed. It's as if the camera and the fragile crew took the wind for a sail and the landscape for a sea. The camera plays with the wind, follows it, anticipates it, comes back behind it like a ricocheting bullet. As if it were held on a leash or tied to another machine, like the one invented by Michael Snow in that stupefying film that was *The Central Region* (in Snow's case as well, the terrain of the camera's performance was a deserted planet of sorts. This explained that.)

To see and hear *at the same time* — but that's impossible, you'll say! Certainly, but (1) the Straubs are stout-hearted, and (2) voyages into the impossible are very instructive. With *Too Early, Too Late*, an experience is attempted, with us and in spite of us: at moments, one begins to see (the grass bent by the wind) before hearing (the wind responsible for this bending). At other moments, one hears first (the wind), then one sees (the grass). Image and sound are synchronous and yet, at each instant, each of us can create the experience in the same order in which one arranges the sensations. It is therefore a sensational film.

DO NOT DISTURB

This is the first part, the French desert. It works differently in overpopulated Egypt. There, the fields are no longer empty, fellahs work there, one can no longer go anywhere and film anyone any which way. The terrain of performance becomes again the territory of others. The Straubs (whoever knows their films realizes that they're intransigent on this matter) accord much importance to the fact that a filmmaker should not *disturb those whom he films*. One therefore has to see the second part of *Too Early, Too Late* as an odd performance, made up of approaches and retreats, where the filmmakers, less meteorologists than acupuncturists, search for the spot — the only spot, the right spot — where their camera can catch people without bothering them. Two dangers immediately present themselves: exotic tourism and the invisible camera. Too close, too far. In a lengthy "scene," the camera is planted in front of a factory gate and allows one to see the Egyptian workers who pass, enter and leave. Too close for them not to see the camera, too far away for them to be tempted to go towards it. To find this point, this *moral* point, is at this moment the entire art of the Straubs. With perhaps the hope that for the "extras" thus filmed, the camera and the fragile crew "hidden" right in the middle of a field or a vacant lot would only be an accident of the landscape, a gentle scarecrow, another mirage carried by the wind.

These scruples are astonishing. They are not fashionable. To shoot a film, especially in the country, means generally to devestate everything, disrupt the lives of people while manufacturing country snapshots, local color, rancid back-to-nature museum pieces. Because the cinema belongs to the city and no one knows exactly what a "peasant cinema" would be, anchored in the lived experience, the space-time of peasants. It is necessary therefore to see the Straubs, city inhabitants,* mainland navigators, as *lost*. It is necessary to see them in the middle of the field, moistened fingers raised to catch the wind and ears pricked up to hear what it's saying. So the most naked sensations serve as a compass. Everything else, ethics and aesthetics, content and form, derives from this.

One may find the experience unbearable; that sometimes happens. One may stop finding the very *idea* of the experience bearable; that happens every day. One may decide that filming the wind is a ridiculous activity. What a lot of hot air! One may also bypass the cinema when it takes the risk of straying from its own turf, away from the beaten paths.

From *Liberation*, 20-21 Fevrier 1982
Translated by Jonathan Rosenbaum

*One small caveat from Daniele Huillet: "Jean-Marie is a 'Stadtkind' (city-child), but I grew up in the country, though born in Paris. . ." (From a letter to Jonathan Rosenbaum, 18 May 1982).

Above: Portrait of Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet by Digne Meller Marcovicz.
Below: John Wayne as General Sherman in John Ford's Civil War episode, *How the West Was Won*, 1962.

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