



D'ici là (Jean-Charles Fitoussi, 1997)

Oscar Pedersen På arbejde med Danièle Huillet og Jean-Marie Straub: – En samtale med Jean-Charles Fitoussi

OP Hvordan mødte du Danièle Huillet og Jean-Marie Straub?

JCF Da jeg havde færdiggjort min første film, *Aura été* (1994), anbefalede en ven mig at se Straubernes film. Det gjorde jeg, og jeg var imponeret. Senere, da jeg var i Rom for at indspille min anden film, *D'ici là* (1997), fandt jeg bare deres nummer i telefonbogen og ringede dem op. Jeg forklarede, at jeg var ved at optage en film, og at jeg gerne ville møde dem. Straub accepterede, men advarede mig, "Du finder aldrig vores hus." Og det var rigtigt nok meget svært at finde: et sted i en af Roms forstæder, tæt på lufthavnen. Alle vejene var blinde, så jeg måtte køre rundt og prøve igen, men til sidst fandt jeg dem. Jeg ringede på dørtelefonen, og han svarede, "Jeg kommer, men du skal vide, at jeg nægter at blive filmet." Så talte vi om... jeg ved snart ikke... om John Ford og Fritz Lang, og jeg forklarede min film. Pludselig sagde han: "Hvornår skal vi optage?", og sådan kom han med i min film. Han spillede en meget lille rolle, men efter det

foreslog jeg Danièle og Jean-Marie, at jeg kunne være assistent på deres film. Et år senere, da de var ved at forberede produktionen af *Von heute auf morgen* (1997), kontaktede de mig. Jeg går ud fra, at det gik godt, da de bad mig om at arbejde sammen med dem igen i de næste ti år.

OP Huillet og Straub arbejdede med små filmhold. Hvordan adskilte deres arbejdsmetode sig fra det, du før havde oplevet?

JCF Jeg havde været assistent på én film, før jeg begyndte at arbejde med Strauberne, og det var selvfølgelig noget helt andet. Danièle var den *egentlige* førsteassistent, ikke mig. Hun organiserede det hele. Alt var blevet planlagt. De øvede længe med skuespillerne, så de kendte alle rollerne inden optagelserne gik i gang. De havde også udarbejdet *découpagen*. Faktisk var et manuskript af Huillet og Straub en *découpage*, det bestod ikke kun af dialog, alt var allerede udarbejdet og inddelt i kameraindstillinger. De vidste, hvad der var brug for til hver indstilling, hvilken linse der skulle bruges, fra hvilken vinkel der skulle filmes, etc. Kort fortalt, alt var så veltilrettelagt, at man havde masser af tid på set.

Dette forbliver den største forskel mellem deres måde at arbejde på og den standardiserede måde. På andre filmsets har alle travlt, de kæmper mod tiden, er fuldstændig hysteriske. Med Danièle og Jean-Marie gælder det modsatte. Som de ofte sagde, var det at have tid deres luksus. Vi havde tid til at vente, til at vente på miraklerne, til at lyset blev uforudsigeligt og så videre. Det var meget fredfyldt.

OP Hvad var din rolle som assistent?

JCF Det var en meget lille rolle. Vi var to assistenter. Efter- som Danièle havde planlagt det hele så godt, var det

vores opgave at transportere negativerne tilbage til Frankrig, til det franske laboratorium, vi rejste med nattoget. Filmrul- lerne var meget tunge, og man var nødt til at beskytte dem som et barn, fordi Danièle og Jean-Marie ikke stolede på postku- rererne. Så man passede på dem, og når man ankom om mor- genen, tog man hen til laboratoriet for at fremkalde filmen. Man tilbragte en nat i Paris, og morgenen efter tog man hen til laboratoriet for at gennemgå positiverne. Man skulle altid tjekke dem for at se, hvordan de sorte og hvide toner var ble- vet, for at se om kontrasterne var, som Strauberne havde øn- sket. Så jeg var en slags spion. Jeg skulle altid tage til gennem- synsvisningen og ringe til Danièle for at beskrive, hvad der var blevet fremkaldt. Nogle gange opdagede jeg noget i bille- derne, som laboratoriet ikke havde nævnt, og så ringe- de hun til laboratoriet med sine noter og bad dem om at lave en ny kopi. Dem fra laboratoriet kunne selvfølgelig ikke lide mig. Engang gav de mig med vilje et forkert visningstidspunkt, så da jeg ankom, var kopien allerede blevet testet, og de forsikrede mig om, at “nej nej, det er allerede ovre og der er ingen problemer, lad os ikke spil- de din tid.” Danièle ringede til dem, “Det må I aldrig gøre igen! Vi skal se dem igennem.” Så jeg var lidt deres tredje øje. Den efterfølgende nat ville jeg tage tilbage til Itali- en med positiverne, og Danièle og Jean-Marie ville tjekke alt materialet igennem.

OP Er det også det, du viser i din film *Sicilia! Si gira* (2001), som følger produktionen af *Sicilia!* (1999)? Da Straub peger på et lærred og kommenterer på kontrasten?

JCF Ja, præcis, når han siger, at de sorte og hvide nuancer minder ham om *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (Robert Bresson, 1951). Så det var sådan, vi arbejdede som assi- stenter. Som nævnt var vi to assistenter, og vi byttede

altid plads, rejste frem og tilbage med toget om natten. Én var på set, mens den anden var i Paris, og vice versa. Der var så lidt at lave på set, fordi alt var så roligt og gennemtænkt. Det opdagede jeg under optagelserne af *Von heute auf morgen* i Frankfurt, og da vi skulle til at indspille *Sicilia!*, spurgte jeg, om jeg måtte filme produktionen. De sagde, at det ville være okay, hvis jeg var usynlig.

OP Ændrede din rolle sig nogensinde i løbet af de ti år, I arbejdede sammen?

JCF Nej, den var altid den samme. Intet ændrede sig. Den eneste forandring var under indspilningen af *Sicilia!*, hvor jeg også rejste med fly. Danièle og Jean-Marie ville ikke have, at negativerne skulle røntgenfotograferes. Det var svært at overbevise sikkerhedsfolkene om at lade mig rejse uden. Filmfotografen havde godt nok sagt til Strauberne, at negativerne ikke ville blive påvirket af røntgenfotografering, men de ville ikke tage chancen. Det var sjovt. Engang var lufthavnspolitiet nødt til at køre mig i bil, fordi jeg ikke kunne komme igennem sikkerhedskontrollen. I dag ville det være fuldkommen umuligt.

OP Du nævnte luksussen ved at have tid. Jeg gætter på, at det var denne luksus, som gjorde det muligt for dem at arbejde så omhyggeligt med kompositionen af hvert eneste billede.

JCF Ja, det er også det, jeg forsøger at vise i min film, *Sicilia! Si gira*. Vi ser, at de kun anvender én synsvinkel til interiør-scenerne i *Sicilia!*. Det er fra denne ene position, at alle indstillingerne er filmet. Der er et og kun et kameraøje, og det ser alt. Med andre ord ændres rummet ikke i løbet af sekvensen. Det er kun linserne, der bliver skiftet. Derfor har man en

rumopfattelse, som man ikke finder i nogen anden film. At nå frem til dette perspektiv er lidt af et geometrisk problem. Man kender til rummet samt skuespillernes positioner, og så afprøver man forskellige kamerapositioner. Det er tålmodigt arbejde. Man rykker kameraet lidt efter lidt. Når man først har fundet kameraets position, flytter det sig ikke. Ikke i flere uger. Der vil ikke blive rykket rundt på kameraet, før alle optagelser er i hus. Indtil da skabes alle indstillinger udelukkende ved at panorere kameraet.

I andre produktioner optager man almindeligvis hele scenen fra en kameraposition, og så går man videre til den næste. Man sparer tid og penge på den måde. Der er en økonomisk logik ved dette. Men det var ikke, hvad Danièle og Jean-Marie gjorde. De optog sekventielt; efter sekvensens rækkefølge. Hvis to skuespillere talte sammen i en scene, optog de en del af dialogen i indstilling A, så skiftede de perspektiv til indstilling B, hvor anden del af dialogen vil blive optaget, og så bevægede de kameraet tilbage igen i et forsøg på at finde frem til kompositionen i indstilling A. Når de filmede indenfor, var de nødt til at ændre lyssætningen for hver indstilling. Når man ser *Sicilia!*, synes jeg, at man kan mærke dette – at kompositionen har ændret sig; at en given indstilling ikke tilhører præcis samme øjeblik som den forudgående. Man får ikke kun en fornemmelse af rum, men også af tid. Man mærker, at tiden er gået mellem indstillingerne. Straub sagde engang til mig, at ... Eisenstein, tror jeg nok, arbejdede på en lignende måde. Selv når Eisenstein havde en indstilling, der gik igen i en scene, genfandt han indstillingen i stedet for at filme hele scenen en indstilling efter en anden. Jeg er ikke sikker på, at jeg husker rigtigt, men jeg mener, at Straub fortalte, at Dreyer også gjorde noget lignende.

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OP Og jeg går ud fra at lyden også blev optaget på samme vis?

JCF Som du ved, anvendte de kun synkronlyd. Ingen postproduktion og ingen lydredigering, det var kun ét monospor. Så ja, lyden blev optaget indstilling efter indstilling. Noget ændrede sig dog under optagelserne af *Sicilia!*, da deres faste lydtekniker, Louis Hochet, gik bort, og Jean-Pierre Duret tog over. Vi befandt os i skoven, da Jean-Pierre ankom til Italien. Han ville gerne tilføje en mikrofon, hvilket var yderst uortodokst. I årevis havde der kun været én mikrofon. Men han spurgte, om han måtte placere en mikrofon i nærheden af en flod. Danièle ønskede ikke at forbyde det, for hun ville respektere hans idé, men hun garanterede ikke at bruge det. Meget langt fra skuespillerne placerede han så en mikrofon. Jeg er ikke sikker på, om de endte med at bruge lyden af floden. Men efter denne film lod de ham altid sætte en anden mikrofon op. Jeg burde spørge ham, om han nogensinde tjekkede under lyd-mixingen, om de beholdt dens lyd eller ej.

OP Dette vidner også om den sammenhæng mellem det til-sigtede og det tilfældige, som kendetegner deres måde at arbejde på. De arbejdede for at nå det punkt, hvor verdens uregerlighed trængte ind i billedet.

JCF Ja, at byde dét velkommen, som er anderledes og større end en selv. Når hver kameraposition var fundet, lavede vi mange *takes*, så teksten blev udført korrekt. Men vi lod også tilfældet råde. En skuespiller kan bevæge sig eller sige noget på en bestemt måde, som ikke var blevet prøvet i andre *takes*, og pludselig hører du, jeg ved ikke, en fugl eller en hest, eller pludseligt kan lyset se helt specielt ud. Målet er at være åben for det tilfældige. Det er derfor, man har en følelse af virkeligheden og verdens nærvær i deres film.

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OP Du nævnte, at du arbejdede på *D'ici là*, da du mødte Huillet og Straub. Ændrede deres tilgang til film din egen måde at instruere på?

JCF De giver dig styrken til arbejde en smule imod de tekniske standarder og skabe simple film. Og man behøver ikke mange mennesker for at lave en film. Man kan udføre præcise ting med et lille hold, med mennesker, man stoler på, og med tid. Efter at have mødt Strauberne blev mine egne sets meget mere fredfyldte, fordi vi havde tid. Det var det afgørende. Når man taler med sin producer om at lave en film, diskuterer man længden på optagelsesperioden. Og da man har mange, mange ting at gøre på kort tid, ender man med at skynde sig, og så kan man ikke længere se, hvad man laver. Hvis man normalt har brug for otte uger til at filme, og man kun får givet seks, er det vanvittigt ikke at skære ens materiale til at passe til seks uger. Hvis man forsøger at lave otte ugers arbejde på seks, vil man skabe noget skrækkeligt, så man bliver nødt til at tilpasse det, man skal filme, til den tid, man skal filme i.

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OP I *D'ici là* er der et billede af Straub, som står foran nogle tætte buske og bunker af metal. Ved siden af ham står en nedslidt rutsjebane. Han løfter sin højre hånd i en modstandshandling. Det er et kompakt billede: Straub, rutsjebanen, knytnæven. Det næste billede er af et barn, der taler om verdens storhed. Hvordan forbinder du barndommen med Huillet og Straubs film?

JCF Fra man bliver født, er ens øjne åbne, og man ser alting for første gang. Jo ældre man bliver, desto mindre overrasket bliver man over ting. Men tingene har ikke ændret sig, det er en selv, der har ændret sig, tingene kan stadig være meget overraskende. Det er sådan en skam, at vi mister

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opfattelsen af, hvor overraskende ting er. Jeg tror på, at vi i Huillet og Straubs film får givet følelsen af en overraskende verden tilbage. At se de ting, der er foran os, bliver fuldkommen fantastisk. Det er næsten en religiøs oplevelse. Man er så til stede i det øjeblik, at alt bliver af største betydning. I Godards *Hélas pour moi* (1993) taler en person om, at han gerne vil se firbenet i en af Straubernes film. Det er netop pointen, pludselig ser man den, eller man ser en flue, virkelig ser den. Fluen har samme betydning som krigen, eller hvad det nu kan være. Jeg mener, at dette er et barns (eller en fuld mands) privilegie: at se på ting og blive forundret. *Découpage*n, billedkompositionerne, alt ved Danèle og Jean-Maries film er meget enkelt. Selvfølgelig skal man være dygtig for at nå hertil, men det er det modsatte af teknisk virtuositet. De bevarede Lumière-brødrenes filmkunst.

Da folk opdagede Lumière-brødrenes *cinématographe*, var de tryllebundet af at se et træ; af at se det, de så hver dag, men nu som en opdagelse. Bladene bevægede sig, det var selvfølgelig, men de havde ikke været opmærksomme. På grund af kinematografen var de nu det. Den afslørede nye glæder, som var tilgængelige for alle, simpelthen glæden ved at se, og dermed glæden ved at være. Hvilket hurtigt gik tabt. Der er en kendt sætning af Pavese, som jeg mener, at Straub brugte i *Dalla nube alla resistenza* (1979): "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." Det er ligesom, når man udtaler et ord mange gange, isoleret fra sin sætning. Dette ord bliver mærkeligt, dette meget normale ord. Det minder mig om Antoine Doinel, der gentager sit navn foran spejlet i *Baisers volés* (François Truffaut, 1968): Antoine Doinel Antoine Doinel ... og så forvandler navnet sig til noget andet, Fabienne Tabard Fabienne Tabard Fabienne Tabard ... Så det er derfor, deres film klinger af så intens glæde,

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det er simpelthen glæden ved at være i verden. En glæde, som er så nem at miste.

OP Det er en ukompliceret filmkunst i den forstand, at den er fundamental.

JCF Ja, lige netop.

OP Du begyndte at arbejde med Huillet og Straub i 1997 under produktionen af *Von heute auf morgen*. Filmen knytter sig til deres grundlæggende metode og interesser, herunder Arnold Schönbergs operaer, men den adskiller sig også fra de film, der kommer før og efter, f.eks. *Lothringen!* (1994) og *Sicilia!*. For det første blev den indspillet på en teaterscene. Det gav dem mulighed for at optage lyd på måder, der ikke havde været mulige under indspilningen af deres forrige Schönberg-opera, *Moses und Aron* (1975). Diskuterede de deres interesse for denne opera med dig?

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JCF Det er nok bedst at betragte hver film som sin egen entitet, der følger sine egne regler. Efter *Operai, contadini* (2001), tror jeg, begyndte de at lave variationer over de samme regler og temaer, du ved, ligesom Bach gjorde med *Fugaens kunst*: ét motiv der spilles variationer over. Det ser vi for eksempel i *Operai, contadini* og *Umiliati* (2003), *Itinéraire de Jean Bricard* (2008) er forbundet til *Trop tôt/Trop tard* (1981) ... men stadigvæk, hver film havde sine egne regler. Jeg er ikke sikker på, hvorfor de pludselig besluttede sig for at filme *Von heute auf morgen* efter *Lothringen!*.

Men der er ingen tvivl om, at produktionen af *Von heute auf morgen* adskilte sig fra de andre Straub-film, jeg arbejdede på. Først og fremmest var den indendørs. Men

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også teknisk krævede filmen noget andet. Der var et orkester på 70 musikere, hvilket blev optaget med synkronlyn. Ligesom med kameraet var der en *découpage* for musikken. En *découpage* til at angive, hvornår man kunne klippe i overensstemmelse med hver indstilling. Musikken blev aldrig optaget ud i én køre, men i fragmenter og sat sammen i klipperummet. Når man ser filmen, kan ens ører høre musikkens kontinuitet, men ens øjne kan opdage musikkens struktur, dens skelet. Selvom man ikke kan høre det, ved man, at både billedet og lyden er blevet klippet. Det er utroligt.

OP *Le Genou d'Artémide* (2008) og *Itinéraire de Jean Bricard* var de første film, der udkom efter Huillets død. Hvad var din oplevelse med disse to produktioner?

JCF De havde forberedt *Itinéraire de Jean Bricard*, før Danièle gik bort. Så det var et fællesprojekt, anderledes end de film, han lavede efterfølgende. Selve optagelserne var selvfølgelig anderledes fra de tidligere film i den forstand, at Danièle ikke var der, men produktionsmetoden ændrede sig ikke. Nu var der blot to øjne og to ører, hvor der før havde været fire øjne og fire ører. Da Danièle var i live, og de lavede film, gik hun i seng meget, meget sent. Hun arbejdede altid med teksterne og fodrede hundene og kattene. Hun var også filmenes producent, og hun brugte meget af sin tid på at finde finansiering. Da hun døde, var det også slut med 35mm.

OP Hvorfor stoppede du med at lave film med Straub efter *Itinéraire de Jean Bricard*?

JCF Han havde ikke brug for mig længere. Han holdt op med at optage på film og gik over til video. Ingen grund til at tage nattoget længere.

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OP Hvornår så du sidst Straub?

JCF Det var i maj 2018 i Metz, hans fødeby. De tildelte ham byens æresmedalje og gjorde ham til "æresborger". Han sad i kørestol og var meget mindre snakkesalig end normalt, i hvert fald i offentligheden. Jeg tror faktisk ikke, han sagde et ord. Han virkede lidt ligeglad med den ceremoni, der hyldede ham, men tilstedeværelsen af små børn, som selv var fremmede over for de voksnes komiske skikke, tryllebandt ham.

Paris, 20. marts 2023.

Oscar Pedersen

At Work with Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub: — A Conversation with Jean-Charles Fitoussi

OP How did you meet Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub?

JCF After I had finished my first film, *Aura été* (1994), a friend told me I should watch the Straubs' films. I did, and I was impressed. When I was in Rome shooting my second film, *D'ici là* (1997), I simply found their number in the phone book and phoned them. I explained that I was shooting a film and I would like to meet them. Straub accepted but warned me, "You will never find our house." And it was true, it was very complicated to find; somewhere in the suburbs of Rome, near the airport. The roads were all dead ends, so you had to drive around and try again, but finally, I found them. I buzzed the door phone, and he answered, "I'm coming, but you must know I absolutely refuse to be filmed". Then we talked about... I don't know... about John Ford and Fritz Lang, and I explained my film. Suddenly he said: "When are we shooting?" and so, he entered my film. He played a very small part, but after that, I suggested to Danièle and Jean-Marie that I could assist them with their films.

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One year later, when they are about to make *Von heute auf morgen* (1997), they contacted me. I suppose it went okay because they asked me to work with them again for the next ten years.

OP Huillet and Straub worked with small crews. How did their working method differ from what you had experienced prior to this?

JCF I had been an assistant on one film before working with the Straubs, and it was of course completely different. Danièle was the real first assistant, not me. She was the organizer of everything. Everything had been planned. They rehearsed extensively with the actors, so they knew all the parts before shooting. They had also done the *découpage*. In fact, a script by Huillet and Straub *was* the *découpage*, it did not consist of just dialogue, everything had been worked out and divided into a series of shots. They knew what was needed for each shot, what lens to use, from which point of view to film, etc. In short, everything was so well prepared that you had plenty of time on set.

This remains the main difference between how they worked and the standardised way. On other sets, everybody is rushing, fighting against time, being completely hysterical. With Huillet and Straub, it is the opposite. As they often said, having time was their luxury. We had time to wait, to wait for the miracles, for the light to be unpredictable, and so on. It was very peaceful.

OP What was your role as an assistant?

JCF It was a very small part. We were two assistants. Since Danièle had planned everything so well, our role was to transport the negatives back to France, to the French laboratory, traveling by night train. They were very heavy,

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the rushes, and you had to protect them like a child because Huillet and Straub did not trust the mail couriers. So, you took care of it, and when you arrived in the morning, you would go to the laboratory to develop the film. You would spend one night in Paris, and the next morning you would return to the laboratory to review the positive print. You always had to check them, to see how the blacks and whites had turned out, to see if the contrast was what the Straubs wanted. So, I was kind of a spy. I would go to the screening, and I'd call Danièle to describe what had been developed. Sometimes I noticed something in the images that the laboratory had not mentioned, so she called the laboratory with notes and told them to produce a new print. Naturally, the laboratory did not like me. Once, they intentionally told me the wrong screening time, so when I arrived the print had already been screened, and they assured me, "No, no, it's already over, there are no problems, we do not need to waste your time." Danièle called, "Don't you ever do that again! We must see." I was kind of an extended eye. The following night I would return to Italy with the positives and Huillet and Straub would screen the material.

OP Is that also what is shown in *Sicilia! Si gira* (2001) – which follows the production of *Sicilia!* (1999) – when Straub points to a screen, commenting on the light?

JCF Yes, exactly, when he says that the black and white reminds him of *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (Robert Bresson, 1951). So that is how we worked as assistants. As mentioned, we were two assistants and we always switched places; travelled back and forth during the night by train. One was on set while the other was in Paris, and vice versa. On set, there were very few things to do because it was so quiet and thought-out. When we were making *Von heute auf morgen* in Frankfurt, I noticed this, and when we were about to make *Sicilia!*, I asked

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if I could film the production. If I was invisible, it would be okay, they told me.

OP Did your role ever change during the ten years of working together?

JCF No, it was always the same. Nothing changed. The only change was during *Sicilia!*, where I also travelled by plane. Danièle and Jean-Marie did not want the negatives to be x-rayed. It was hard to convince security to let me travel without the x-ray scan. The director of photography had said to Danièle and Jean-Marie that the negatives would not be affected by x-ray, but even so, they did not want it. It was funny. Once the airport police had to drive me by car because I could not get through security. Today, it would be completely impossible.

OP You mentioned the luxury of having time. I guess it was this luxury that allowed them to work so meticulously with the framing of each shot.

JCF Yes, that is also what I try show in my film, *Sicilia! Si gira*. We see that for the interior scenes in *Sicilia!*, there is only one point of view. It is from this single point of view that all the shots are filmed. There is one and only one camera eye that sees everything. In other words, the space is not modified during the whole sequence. It is only the lenses that change. You, therefore, have a sense of space, which you won't find in other films. To find this point of perspective is kind of a geometrical problem. You have the space, and the actors' positions, and then you try out different camera positions. It is patient work. You move the camera, little by little. Once you have found the position of the camera, it will not move. Not for weeks. Until every shot has been carried out, the camera will not move, only pan around.

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In other productions, you normally record the whole scene from one camera position and then you move on to the next. You save time and money. There is an economic logic to this. But this is not what Danièle and Jean-Marie did. They shot in the order of sequence. If two people were talking in a scene, they shot one piece of dialogue in shot A, then changed perspective to shot B, another piece of dialogue, and then they moved back, trying to find the framing of shot A again. When they filmed inside, they had to change the light, etc., for each shot. I believe that when you see the film, you feel *that* – that the framing has moved, that the shot does not belong to exactly the same moment as the shot before. You do not only get a feeling of space but also a feeling of time. You sense that time has passed between shots. I remember Straub saying that... Eisenstein, I believe, did the same thing. Even when Eisenstein had the same shot repeating in a sequence, he was re-finding the shot instead of filming the whole scene one shot after another. I am not sure I remember correctly, but I think Straub said that Dreyer did something similar.

OP And the sound, I presume, was also recorded shot by shot?

JCF With sound, as you know, it was all direct sound. No postproduction, and no sound editing, it was only one mono track. The sound was made shot by shot, yes. A change did occur, however, during the making of *Sicilia!*, after their regular sound engineer, Louis Hochet, had passed away and Jean-Pierre Duret took over. When Jean-Pierre arrived in Italy, we were in the forest. He wanted to add another microphone, which was very unorthodox. There had only been one microphone for years. But he asked if he could place a microphone near a river. Danièle did not want to forbid it, because she wanted to respect his idea, but she did not guarantee to use it. So,

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quite far from the actors, he placed a microphone. I am not sure if they ended up using the river. But after this film, they always let him put another microphone where he wanted. I should ask him if he checked during the mixing if they kept it or not.

OP This also testifies to the convergence of the intentional and coincidental that permeate their way of working. They work to reach the point where the unruliness of the world can enter the image.

JCF Yes, to welcome that which is different and bigger than yourself. When each camera position had been found, you would shoot many takes for the text to be carried out correctly. But you also allow chances to happen. An actor can move or say something in a nice way that hadn't been tried in other takes, and suddenly you hear, I don't know, a bird or a horse, or the light can be special. The aim is to be open for chances to happen. That is why you have a feeling of reality and the presence of the world in their films.

OP You mentioned that you were working on *D'ici là* when you met Huillet and Straub. Did their approach to cinema change your own way of directing?

JCF They give you the strength to work against the technical standards a bit and make a simpler cinema. And you do not need many people to make a film. You can do precise things with a small crew, with people you trust, and with time. After meeting the Straubs, my own sets were much more peaceful because we had time. That was the main thing. When you talk to your producer about making a film, you discuss the length of the shoot. And since you have to do many, many things in a short period of time, you end up rushing, and

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you can no longer see what you are doing. If you normally need eight weeks for a shoot, but you can only get six, it is crazy not to cut down the material to fit six weeks. If you try to make eight weeks' worth of material in six, you will make horrible stuff, so you must adapt what you have to shoot to the time you can shoot it in.

OP In *D'ici là*, there is a shot of Straub standing in front of some thick bushes and piles of metal. Next to him is a worn-down slide, he raises his right hand in an act of resistance. It is a dense image: Straub, the slide, the fist. The next image is of a child talking about the grandness of the world. In your view, how does childhood connect with Huillet and Straub's cinema?

JCF From the time you are born, your eyes are open, and you see everything for the first time. The older you get, the less you are surprised by things. But things have not changed, it is just you who have changed, things can still be very surprising. It is such a pity that we are losing the perception of how surprising things are. I believe that in Huillet and Straub's films, you are given back the feeling of a surprising world. To see the things that are in front of you becomes completely incredible. It is almost a religious experience. You are so present at that moment that everything becomes of great importance. In Godard's *Hélas pour moi* (1993), a person talks about wanting to see the lizard in one of the Straubs' films. This is exactly the point, all of a sudden you see it, or you see a fly, really see it. The fly has the same importance as the war or anything else. I think this is the privilege of a child (or a drunken man): to look at things and be astonished. Also, the *découpage*, the framing, all of Danièle and Jean-Marie's films are very simple. Of course, you have to be skilful to get to this point, but it is the opposite of technical virtuosity. They kept the cinema of the Lumières'.

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When people discovered the Lumières' *cinématographe*, they were in awe of seeing a tree, of seeing what they saw every day, but now as a discovery. The leaves were moving, it was obvious, but they had not paid attention. Because of the *cinématographe*, they did. It revealed new joys that were accessible to everyone, simply the joy of seeing, hence the joy of being. This was lost very quickly. There is a famous sentence by Pavese, which I believe Straub used in *Dalla nube alla resistenza* (1979): "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." It is like when you pronounce a word many times, isolated from its sentence. This word will become strange, this very common word. It reminds me of Antoine Doinel repeating his name in front of the mirror in *Baisers volés* (François Truffaut, 1968): Antoine Doinel Antoine Doinel Antoine Doinel... and then the name becomes something else, Fabienne Tabard Fabienne Tabard Fabienne Tabard... So, this is why their films ring with such intense joy, it is simply the joy of being in the world. A joy that is so easy to lose.

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OP It is an uncomplicated cinema in the sense that is fundamental.

JCF Yes, that is right.

OP You began working with Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub in 1997 during the production of *Von heute auf morgen*. The film is tied to their general method and interests, including Arnold Schönberg's operas, but it also varies somewhat from the films preceding and following it, e.g. *Lothringen!* (1994) and *Sicilia!*. For one thing, it was filmed on a sound stage. The

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sound stage allowed them to record sound in ways that hadn't been possible during the filming of their other Schönberg opera, *Moses und Aron* (1975). Did they discuss their interest in this opera with you?

JCF Perhaps it is best to view each film as its own, following its own rules. *After Operai, contadini* (2001), I think, they began making variations on the same rules and subjects, you know, like Bach did with *The Art of Fugue*, one motif played in variation. We see this with *Operai, contadini* and *Umiliati* (2003), for example. . . . *Itinéraire de Jean Bricard* (2008) connects to *Trop tôt/Trop tard* (1981) . . . But still, each film has its own rules. I am not sure why they suddenly decided to film *Von heute auf morgen* after *Lothringen!*.

But there is no doubt that the production of *Von heute auf morgen* differed from the other Straub films I worked on. First, it was inside. But also technically, the film demanded something different. There was an orchestra of 70 musicians playing, which was recorded using direct sound. So, like the camera, there was a *découpage* for the score. A *découpage* to note when you could cut in accordance with each shot. The score was never recorded in one, but in fragments and put together in the editing. When viewing the film, your ears can hear the continuity of the music, but your eyes can discover the structure of the score, its skeleton. Even if you can't hear it, you know that there has been a cut in both the image and sound. That's incredible.

OP *Le Genou d'Artémide* (2008) and *Itinéraire de Jean Bricard* was the first films after Danièle Huillet's passing. How did you experience these two productions?

JCF Well, they had prepared *Itinéraire de Jean Bricard* before Danièle's passing. So, it was a shared project, different from the films he would make afterward. The shooting was of

course different in the sense that Danièle was not there, but the production method did not change. Now there were only two eyes and two ears whereas before there had been four eyes and four ears. When Danièle was alive and they were making films, she would go to sleep very, very late. She was always working on the texts and feeding the dogs and the cats. She was also the producer and she spent much of her time finding partners and funding, so when she died, it was also the end of 35mm.

OP How come you stopped making films with Straub after *Itinéraire de Jean Bricard*?

JCF He did not need me anymore since he stopped shooting on film and turned to video. No need to take the night train any longer.

OP When was the last time you saw Jean-Marie?

JCF It was in May 2018 in Metz, his city of birth, which awarded him the city's medal of honour, making him an "honorary citizen". He was in a wheelchair and was much less talkative than usual, at least in public. In fact, I don't think he said a word. He seemed vaguely indifferent to the ceremony that honoured him, but the presence of young children, themselves strangers to the comical conventions of adults, kept him enthralled.

Paris, March 20, 2023.