

modern cinema as media criticism (2) on the form of
modern cinema

What you used to call "cinema" is over, it is dead. And visual media are increasingly specializing in textual information. The relationship between visual and textual information on television and the Web is becoming one in which the former follows the latter, or even attaches a visual file to prove or supplement the textual information. Information is enclosed within the frame and erased outside how? It is either ear-muffled by music or simply sound-aligned and disappears. Sound sources are made explicit within the screen, and off-screen voices become subordinate, explaining what is on screen. This is similar to the increasing tendency in TV dramas for the person speaking the dialogue = the person transmitting the information to be identifiable and therefore to be in the screen. Alain Robbe-Grillet once said, "I asked Resnais (about the discrepancy between the images and the sound), and (Alain) Resnais replied that the people who would see the film wouldn't understand. Even a writer like Resnais was hesitant to break a certain taboo, namely, that the sound and the image do not match" (1). Looking now at *The Burning World* (1970), a short film co-produced by Marshall McLuhan with Jayne Jacobs and David McKay, it is unclear whether the author of "The Media is the Message" was watching Godard or Jacques Tati's films at the time, but it is clear that the use of noises that would never be available on television today, such as construction drills and police sirens mixed in with unnecessary country music in documentary films, we can only assume that he himself knew what only film could do, which he must have once said, "Television killed cinema and made cinema an art form. (2)

In the current large-scale environmental improvement to create passive human beings who can be easily manipulated by the viewers, if we consider images in general without being confined to the small frame of cinema, we can see that all expensive images are there to serve the investors, and even the poor and personal images on the web are trying to replace them, but still, they are not able to do so. Because they're trying to flatter the desires of the unspecified multitude. Modern cinema, by exposing its own existence and function, by making the audience aware of its non-naturalness, by surprising and bewildering them, can critique the classic films that have become tools of war and their would-be heirs, and free them from the sin of audience manipulation or incitement. When the eyes and ears of the viewers who have passed through such films see again classic films and images that seek to become heirs of classic films, they will be able to make visible the various functions that constitute "naturalness" that they have not been able to see, that is, they will be able to pass through criticism and gain a defensive gaze. The fact that modern cinema receives a "difficult to understand" or "esoteric" reaction from audiences and critics when it is released, or is avoided or ignored, is because they have become accustomed to the one-way media guidance/incitement of the classical film and television lines that try to keep good modern cinema away from them and try to liberate them, although such modern

films prepare and aid them for an increasingly complex visual society.

What then is the form of contemporary cinema as a critique of the media? In the previous article, I discussed the space and existence outside the frame of Rossellini's and Bresson's films, which opened the door to this critique, when the former is made ambiguous or undetermined in order to microscopically follow the subject in the frame (where time, which encompasses the subject's movement, also becomes a subject), and when the latter is forced to relay to the auditory sense from the visual disconnection caused by a figure leaving the frame with footsteps, the audience is forced to break free from the passivity of classical cinema/film, and thus, the film is a starting point of modern cinema in the sense that it is a work that forces the audience to acquire a new way of seeing/listening to the film on a new level. The modern cinema made by a number of filmmakers who followed them, and which first reached their zenith in the 1960s, had three characteristics. These are the three qualities that I have often referred to in my previous articles: 1) nondeterminism, 2) theater=cinema, and 3) films of analysis and dismantling.

The first type of nondeterminism is a type of cinema in which the viewer cannot decide which of the various boundaries the image he or she is watching is on: past or present, dream or reality, life or death, one place or another, documentary or fiction, and so on. As I have already written in "Audiovisuals of the Masters at the End of the 1960s" in *Chuo Review* No. 281, describing how this nondeterminism manifested itself in representative films of the 1960s, this nondeterminism has become a kind of "emergency shelter" for contemporary filmmakers as the easiest genre to realize within the framework of classical cinematic and commercial images.

Moreover, this is an element that can be found even in the earliest films. For example Lumière brothers' *Déjeuner du chat* (1897) is documentary or fiction? In Georges Méliès' *Le Cauchemar* (1896) images are dreams or reality?. And often appears as part of the modernity of works by both classical and experimental filmmakers. So, on the contrary, this alone does not guarantee that a work is a contemporary film. It is when this non-determinism is combined with the film's own self-criticism that a contemporary film emerges.

The "theater=cinema" in (2), whether it is a dramatic film or a documentary (where it is linked to the aforementioned nondeterminism), is when the dramatic representation is made the subject, when it strongly indicates itself to be "a documentary of the encounter between the performance of the play in front of the camera and space-time". As same as (3 as described below), there is a self-criticality that directs the viewer to deconstruct and analyze what he or she is seeing. As we have often mentioned, this "theater=cinema", especially in the 1960s, was the baton passed from the final destination of the classical filmmakers (John Ford, Carl Th. Dreyer, etc.) to the new generation of filmmakers (Jacques Rivette, Straub-Huillet, etc.). At that time also Manoel de Oliveira, who belonged to the former generation but was deprived of filming opportunities by the Portuguese film industry under the

Salazar dictatorship, took up the baton "as a new generation of filmmakers" and re-emerged with *O Acto da Primavera* (1963). In the U.S., it must be argued that the approach of Orson Welles and other writers of the 1950s after John Ford, and of John Cassavetes, Robert Altman, and Clint Eastwood in the 1990s, from classic films to theater=cinema is a "negative" picture of Hollywood cinema = self-criticism. It must be discussed. In the case of Brazilian cinema, it is necessary to discuss Glauber Rocha's encounter with Carmelo Bene in Italy and where they both headed. (In Japan, for example Tai Kato's *The Ondekoza* (1981) and Shinsuke Ogawa's *1000nen kizami no hidokei/Magino Village: A tale* (1987) could also be discussed in this global context.)

The "films of dismantling and analysis" mentioned in (3) are not limited to feature and documentary films, but also include film essays and other visual works that use subjects other than dramatic representations, and in which signs of self-criticism as a medium appear in some way, making the audience aware of their own functions in the process of being told. I am only referring to such a group of films. Of course, all of Jean-Luc Godard's films would fall into this category, as well as those of Jean Rouch (*La Pyramide humaine*, *Jaguar*, *Dionysos*), Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras, Marcel Hanoun, Jean Eustache in his late works, and Harun Farocki, Hartmut Bitomsky and Klaus Wybony in Germany, Rafael Filippelli (<*El Ausente* (1987) and *Esas cuatro notas* (2004) >and Pampero Cine directors in Argentina, etc....

These three qualities of modern cinema are not genres or categories, but three axes found in a single work, which could be graphed. 3) are adjacent parts of a single work, and depending on the work in some cases, the three axes are adjacent to each other, and in other cases, they may all be traversed, with (2) leading to (1), which in turn leads the audience to (3), and so on. And the emergence of this modern cinema is related to the crisis or collapse of the social system that supports filmmaking, and when that society is solid, it has isolated filmmakers who have made contemporary films, forcing them into a situation where production is impossible and eliminating them. Perhaps more so in the current age of terminal devices than in the days when moving images could be viewed only in movie theaters, the moving image is associated with power, and as a medium, it is produced for the purpose of manipulating the viewer's beliefs and actions. Modern cinema that I mentioned is above all an obstacle to those who seek to manipulate people because it forces the viewer to analyze and examine the functions of the image. Even if it is not someone like Pere Portabella, who was arrested for participating in the resistance movement under the Franco dictatorship in Spain, or Sergei Parajanov, who was imprisoned in a concentration camp during the Soviet era, even though he did not oppose the authorities in the form of textual information, or Coffin Joe, who was arrested during the Brazilian military regime, even though he did not oppose the authorities in the form of textual information. Even with regard to Coffin Joe, one might infer that there is more than official reasons for his arrest, which is hard to believe today. And since the 1960s, for example in Portugal after the democratic revolution of 1974 and in the former Soviet states before and after the collapse of the Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there have been many works

that criticize and question the visual media that supported the "naturalness" of the regime itself. (And yet they still remain invisible, and their importance remains unexamined by audiences and critics alike). And in the Western European cinema of the same period, modern cinema was at its peak. This is because it appeared at the end of the U.S.-Soviet system, even if each film was produced as a solitary work. Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet system, the visual media again began to overtly function as a tool for information manipulation after the Gulf War, and even "naturalness" became a weapon for manipulating people's hearts and minds. For example, the famous Nayirah testimony video on October 10, 1990 as an incitement promotion of the Gulf War is a case in point, and what confronts and criticizes it is a video that was produced just a short time ago in Iran, Islamic country, in which the production process of "documentary or fiction" is made the subject of the film. It was Abbas Kiarostami's *Where is the Friend's Home?* (1987), *Homework* (1989) and *Close Up* (1990) that were put on the chopping block, and at the same time reexamined and revived the rigorously produced "naturalness" of Sohrab Shahid Saless' *A Simple event* (1973) and *Still Life* (1974), who went into exile under the Khomeini regime.

As I mentioned a little in the previous issue and once in another article long ago (2), Jean-Luc Godard's *King Lear*, shot in 1987, has more subjective/POV shots of "apparent" characters than the films before and after it, Godard's *Detective* and *Soigne ta droite*. And the voices heard from off-screen = the voice of Peter Sellers, who plays the main character Shakespeare V, can be described as the monologue of the main character, and is easy to understand, as if the film was seriously intended for American distribution under the "apparent" Cannon Films production. However, in the film's off-screen sound, in addition to the voices of Burgess Meredith and Molly Ringwald, who appear on screen as performers, excerpts from *King Lear* in the voices of Ruth Malecheck and David Worrilow, two founders of the NY theater company Mabou Minds, who do not appear on screen. The readings surprise the listener with their powerful invisible presence. In this film, Godard criticizes the visualization of television-style theater of making the sound source appear on screen or to follow the chronology of the play, by using voices, including his own, appearing freely even when they are not on screen, and in which the same phrases are used over and over again. The editing of the shots in relation to the characters on the screen and the objects or people seen by the viewer is also criticized, as in the scene where Shakespeare V, eating a meal, listens to the conversation between Don Leallo and Cordelia, the father and daughter, sitting at the table in front of him, and when Mr. Shakespeare begins to think, the background noise slows down. The voices from outside the frame, such as the slowing of the background noises as Shakespeare begins to think (again, an American cinematic service that Godard has never done before), first appear as invisible to the viewer who is watching the reactions of the people in the screen, as an element outside the Rossellini style that I mentioned earlier, and before they are part of the turnaround

screen, they appear as an independent screen of the people. It is a dismantling and analysis that directs the viewer to look at it as an independent figure shot, rather than as a part of the turnaround screen. Similarly, in the scene where Molly Ringwald sees strange people (fairies) in an empty room, she is lured into the room by a sound effect reminiscent of a science fiction film and the sound of clanking dishes, and rather than showing us where her gaze is directed, we first see a long shot where we gaze at her listening to the sound, followed by a maid of the hotel, which is captured from the front at the back of the room over the shoulder of Ringwald. And the close-up of Molly Ringwald, in profile, as Sellers' narration is heard, makes it ambiguous to the viewer whether the next screen is a POV shot or not. That shot is a frontal shot of a man in a hat on a chair and another woman dancing while swinging her hips. Here, as in the dining scene described above, the shots of characters are shot one from the front and the other from the side, just as Griffith did with the lovers in "Susie's Sincerity" and "The Valley of Happiness," but with the background unknown to the audience. When Godard's film is a film in which the two people are shot in the same space, his editing does not allow the viewer to immediately recognize that the two lovers are in the same space, and rather makes the viewer question their positional relationship. When Ringwald enters the room in a jump cut, the man and woman have disappeared, and as she sits down to flip through Fuseli's painting book, Godard inserts the image and sound of a seagull in flight between a close-up of Ringwald and the Fuseli's book she is leafing through. One could say that this is a "readable" service, as Ringwald associates the fairy with Füsli's painting, but in fact the fairy's picture remains in the audience's mind because Godard cuts in there with the image of the seagull. Godard induces the audience, not Ringwald, to associate the painting and the seagull with the fairy, which is rather a disguised POV shot. In this way, Godard leads the spectator through all manner of deconstruction and analysis.

Jean-Marie Straub and Daniel Huillet's *Der Tod des Empedokles* (1987), also shot around the same time as Godard's *King Lear*, opens with a POV shot. In the foreground, a meadow shining golden in the strong Italian sunlight spreads out in the foreground, and a forest can be seen at the back of the screen. After a while, background sounds such as birdsong can be heard, and then the voice of a woman named Panthea, who adored the philosopher Empedocles, can be heard. The screen then shifts to a shot of the upper body of Delia, another woman who admonishes Panthea, with the yellow grass in the background and the forest in the background, slightly off-center to the right, and then to a shot of the upper body of Panthea, off-center to the left. The second time, the first distant view toward the forest appears, and the spectacular beauty of Panthea's childish but strong voice reciting long lines, strong golden light, yellow grass, and green forest in the distant view, first of all overcomes the POV function, and then comes forward. The presence of a single shot, beyond the editing of the scenes that incorporate it, leads the audience to think of deconstruction and analysis. This theater=cinema=deconstruction culminates in two recitations to Mount

Etna by Andreas von Rauch, who plays Empedocles. The voice echoes in the shadows of the sun and the ever-changing sound of the distant screen. Straub says that he referred to Chaplin's *The Dictator* (1940), Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), and Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), but in each of these films, there was a person giving a speech, while in *Der Tod des Empedokles* the recitation from outside the frame in the distant view of the mountain is heard endlessly on the screen where the audience hears endlessly, simply overwhelmed by the intensity of the shifting light, clouds, and voices, rather than by the function of the POV shot. In *Geschichtsunterricht/History Lessons* (1972), Straub-Huillet once shot a scene in which a young man in the present day listens to a Roman banker whom he first meets, in a way that other filmmakers would have used a moving shot with a crane to go around the two men, but in this case, they used editing to show a sense of seated figures and space that would have been forgotten. In *Der Tod des Empedokles* they takes a scene that is supposed to be the most American film in terms of screen function and editing, and directs the viewer to deconstruct it by passing through the theater=cinema, urging the viewer to first look at one shot and one movement.

Manoel de Oliveira's *Mon Cas/O Meu Caso* (1986) is another film based on theater, but unlike the two masterworks mentioned above which dare to construct a classical American film style that the medium still relies on, and does not take a critical stance by destroying its function. However, in this film, which should be considered the concluding part of the film cycle of theater=cinema from *O Acto da Primavera* to *Le Soulier de Satin* (1985) Oliveira shows a clapperboard before each scene in which José Regio's one-act (1963) play is repeated three times, descending before the curtain rises. Then, in an unmanned theater (there is an actor playing the audience, to be precise, and he goes on stage at the end), the actors who perform the play, which ends before all the claims of each person and the content of the play, including the intruder played by Luis Miguel Sintra, are revealed, play to the camera and try to be more like a news or variety show than a theater. In the second act, Beckett's "And so it ends again" is heard as an off-screen voice in a silent black-and-white repetition of the same play, which is of course appropriate to the play but not at all a visual commentary, as is the playback of the third act, perhaps with the actors' lines in reverse. The theater of the Book of Job after the third act is a criticism of textual information using the form of silent film, as is the playback of the actors' lines in reverse rotation in the third act. (This is a work before the advent of surveillance cameras and smart phones.) As I mentioned before (3), this film may be called a cold response to the last scene of Jean Renoir's *Le Carrosse d'Or* which is open to life, but it may also be a masterwork that foretold the present, as we are captured and captured again by the ever-increasing proliferation of images.

Reviewing these three films now, more than a quarter of a century later, it is clear that they represent a point of arrival in visual media criticism through the power of 35mm film, which has its

origins in the history of cinema, but that they were not fully grasped by the critics at the time of their production, before the collapse of the USSR, DVDs, and the spread of the Internet. However, it is not surprising that the critics at the time of its production could not grasp it. Unlike Wim Wenders' *Der Himmel über Berlin/Wings of Desire* (1987) which was critically acclaimed at the time and completed in its own time, I believe that the discourse on these works is increasing as time goes by, but what is more important is the fact that these works are now being reviewed in a "general" way, when we are driven by the way we perceive and are perceived in the visual image. But is there a movement emerging today to follow in the footsteps of these works? For example, French cinema, apart from Godard, as mentioned above, has been producing films such as Eustache's *Number Zero* (1971), the later *Une Sale Histoire* (1977) and *Les Photos d'Alix* (1980) or Marcel Hanoun's "*Authentique proces de Carl Emmanuel Jung /The True Trial of Carl Emmanuel Jung* (1966), and *Verite sur l'imaginaire passion d'un inconnu /The Truth of the Imaginary Passion of the Unknown* (1974), the "deconstruction" that shows the discrepancy between image and sound and the process of fiction formation is directly the mass media of the time, television, and its viewers and readers, who received and transmitted the "truth" of power without question, were criticized for plunging into "non-determinism" with documentaries. Naturally, the majority of the mass media audience was not receptive to the film, although Hanoun was no longer able to make films and became known abroad as a video artist through his website in his later years and he died. The current French cinema, which has been mass-producing pseudo-classics under the influence of Maurice Pialat within the framework of old cinema realism = art/entertainment, and has isolated Jean-Claude Rousseau, Eugène Greene, and others by bringing Philippe Garrel into the framework of commercial cinema, will give birth to "a film of dismantling and analysis". Is there room for it? The proliferation of characters and manipulated people in a media dominated by images and truths outside the frame makes the birth of President Someone to replace Le Pen no surprise (just as Donald Trump is no mystery in the U.S. and LDP with Unification Church is no mystery in Japan).

In the vibrancy of Spanish- and periphery-speaking cinema, which I mentioned last time, two black-and-white films about making films that we have seen in recent years, but which are by no means controlled masterpieces, but rather seem to have deliberately aimed for incompleteness in order to remain non-deterministic, Jonas Trueba's *Los ilusos* (2013), and In films such as Oliver Laxe's *Todos vós sodes capitáns/You are all captains* (2010), there is still an exploration of contemporary cinema. The former, like Garrel's *Elle a passe Tant d'Heures Sous les Sunlights/She Spent a Long Time in the Sunlight*(1984), seduces the viewer with its non-determinism (clappers, camera and microphone, voices outside the frame), in which always asking if one shot is either a film within a film or belongs to the making of a film. The latter, shot in a Moroccan film workshop, opens with a passenger plane flying into the sky and, shifts from the fictionalized story of a Frenchman, played by the Galician director himself, failing to make a film with Moroccan children to the daily lives of the children and their local

teachers, where documentary and fiction become more non-decisive. The fixed long shot that occupies the shot is just beautiful, and there is still non-determinism – a continuation of deconstruction and analysis, and an attempt to transcend it. We, who have become indispensable to live with the image and sound, are not confined to the past because we know that the attempts of our time are continuing.

(1) "Robbe-Grillet by Robbe-Grillet", Eureka, October 1996 issue p203~204, Seito-sha)

(2) "I was able to invent a new kind of sound effect for the visual image, and it was really effective."
<https://mcluhangalaxy.wordpress.com/2012/02/23/the-burning-would-1970-marshall-mcluhans-documentary-film/>

(3) "Godard's King Lear and American Cinema," Daisuke Akasaka, early October 1998 issue, Kinema Jumbo.

(4) "Manoel de OLIVEIRA and the 21st Century theater=cinema" Daisuke Akasaka, in "Manoel de OLIVEIRA and Contemporary Portuguese Cinema" (2003, E/M Books)

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