

The machine captures sensuality and instability

In George Cukor's *Two Faced woman*, the director sealed his own usual method like flowing and elegant horizontally moving shots, fascinating long take, and rupture actor's play which we can see as long as we like in *Girls about Town*, *The Women* to *The Philadelphia Story*, *A Star is Born*. etc. Starring Greta Garbo, who had been nominated for Oscar in 1936 for *Camille* directed by Cukor, so she can't be said not to be fitted in his film anyway. I believe Cukor tried to challenge something else in *Two Faced Woman*.

In this film Melvin Douglas always plays skillfully and it's easy to imagine for us that the company had expected great hit by this screwball comedy. It tells the story of Karin, a female ski coach who become married with a rich gentleman=great publisher but soon separated because of his busiest life as a top of company. So she transformed herself into her "sister" Katherin, a seductive city woman and tries to handle her husband to return to country life. It seems to be a suitable plan to Cukor who have treated the theme of "play" in *Sylvia Scarlett* and *A Double Life*.

But from the first gag of Douglas' ski which is hooked and dragged by a lift in the snow, we feel something wrong. We would feel uncomfortable something as we listen to Garbo's fresh Swedish accent, on the contrary in Lubitsch's "*Ninotchka*" while we see her face without laugh and sudden burst out. When we see Garbo's dancing and moving towards middle aged Douglas I remember Roland Barthes's argument about her "face as an object" in *Mythologies*(1956) and this film destroyed the image of Garbo but we see her hidden sensuality brought out at the same time. Probably people at that time hadn't seen the sensuality or refused it - for Garbo, she had needed to release it- I don't know the true reason of her retirement but the misunderstanding should be considered...

And probably Cukor had sealed usual movement to capture such moving sensuality of Garbo? Floating and gliding, traveling shots can be suitable for actress like Judy Holliday and Katharine Hepburn who can do cartwheel, but as for Garbo, it was necessary to take time to observe hard face softening and trembling. Cukor transformed moving camera into microscope to capture the subtle changes with real-time. So *Two Faced Woman* Cukor seems to foretell films of Rivette and Cassavetes in 1960s. Garbo/Karin plays her sister Katherine, and drunks and tempts Melvin Douglas, and she lets him become disgusted with Katherin and return to Karin, but she failed because Douglas pretends to fall in love with Katherin...Cukor constructs each scene as one scene=one act from the side. When Cukor directs Douglas wants Garbo who plays Katherin and lets him return to Karin more and more, he makes them go up higher and higher on the sofa. The relation between position and dialogue makes me remember Jacques Doillon's masterpiece *Comedy!*(1987), whose space becomes smaller as much as dialogue becomes longer. Cukor already had reached to the point that we can not determine a failure as failure. It's not a classic like Leo McCarey's film, but it's closer to a modern film.

Madonna's acting in "*Dangerous Game/Snake Eyes*" that Abel Ferrara said "She is alive"(1) is not sensual in Cukor , but it's painful because it's born from irritation and anxiety. Although we don't know/decide if those scenes are true takes or rehearsals or not, we can see the actors in unstable and dangerous states anyway. In this film Madonna plays actress Sarah and a wife whom Sarah plays in a film *Mother of Mirrors*, and we never confuse them. But the setting seems to be a pretext for capturing the state of actors. When we see Madonna/Sarah/a wife who is sitting in front of Harvey Keitel/director Eddie and camera and Keitel begins to provoke and bring out Madonna's anger, we don't know if it's improvisation or not but we can see her unstable state...Although we don't know if images on b/w monitor are selected from rehearsal tape or not, they're fascinating because of the unstable state. Certainly almost of all Hollywood movies lack such instability today.

I don't know if Ferrara aimed to reveal the raw Madonna that has passed through setting, rehearsal and even production system so she got angry with him. But I think there is a historical difference. Certainly the system of Hollywood had tolerated Cukor and Ferrara had no such a system. Ferrara already had exposed historical limit of expression like in "Addiction" and "Driller Killer" which he could make with 35mm like poor 8mm. In her own MTV, Madonna had wanted images of the golden age of Hollywood, but historically it had been impossible anymore in cinema. Ferrara was able to get "the living body" appropriate for his time. Ironically, the more "beautiful" images spread in excess the more people would not attend to such images. Instead, time of exposure of the raw images captured in films exceed the years.

Daisuke Akasaka

(1)<http://www.madonnarama.com/posts-en/2011/08/14/abel-ferrara-and-ken-kelsch-discuss-dangerous-game-and-madonna/>