

the state of «naturalism»(naturalness or spontaneity)

A series of images circulated on the web during the ongoing Syrian civil war at this point in 2013, and which were used by the United States as the basis for its alleged military intervention (as of September 20, no conclusion has been reached as to whether the weapons were used by Syrian forces or rebels, and no U.S. military strikes have been made) in the Asad regime's use of chemical weapons, have been shown in the media. The images, which are gruesome and abundant and largely composed of the suffering and bodies of children, are still being questioned, as was the case with the congressional testimony in New York "played" by the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador who helped start the Gulf War in 1991. Even if we shelve the authenticity itself, why did the images of the children have to be used in this case, in which they might have had to join the war in blind obedience to the U.S. if they had been allowed to exercise their right to collective self-defense? André Bazin, in his essay on René Clément's *Jeux interdits* (1952)(1), once wrote that "the image of children is the manifestation of a conviction of purity" and Roberto Rossellini's *Germania anno zero* (1948) that "What we try to see in them is ourselves, more than our lost innocence, clumsiness, or naivete," and criticizes children's films for "being made entirely according to homosexism (the idea that adults and children have the same personality and way of thinking). However, these voices have gone unheeded, and films dealing with children, not limited to animated children's films, continue to be produced without stopping at the box office as a genre that can easily attract audiences. On the other hand, as a result of the neglect by governments around the world of educating the general public about images, the use of images of abused children as a weapon to incite war, as in this case, is a horrifying practice that continues unabated. Moreover, the images of children are accompanied by a suspicion of guilt (again, due to the "pure victimhood" of the images of children), which in some cases makes the person feel guilty for even having the image in his/her mind, whether it is true or false, and which stems from the "naturalness" of children, who are less captive to the images.

Bazin there discusses films that create an image that rejects "sentimental sympathy" that does not join the easy agitation with children. Rossellini's *Germania anno zero* (mentioned earlier), Buñuel's *Los olvidados* (1950) and Jean Vigo's *Zéro de conduite* (1933). Of course, if it were a contemporary film, Godard's *France tour détour deux enfants* (1977), Sohrab-Shahid Salles' *A Simple event* (1972), Abbas Kiarostami's *Homework* (1989), and many others would be mentioned in rapid succession. However, these films do not reject the "naturalness" of children. Rather, the filmmakers expect children to behave more spontaneously, to lead them in a way that is more akin to guidance than direction, and in some cases even to react freely and uncontrollably (such as the child in *Homework* who panics a little when he cannot answer a question). Even François Truffaut in *Les quatre cents coups* (1959) and *L'Argent de poche* (1976) which deal mostly with children, was able to capture the uncontrollable behavior of children through guided rather than strict direction, so his films succeeded in capturing a documentary vividness that was the fictionalized of his works. Another example is Jacques Doillon's *Ponette* (1996), which at first glance might be equated with an easy film that evokes sentimental sympathy because of its story of a young girl who waits for her mother's death without believing it. In fact, it is Doillon's most popular film, but as is usual in his

films, it looks like a documentary about a child actor practicing long lines of dialogue. In other words, this is a record of the studies of how far one can take a Doillon-esque performance to a younger age, and if one understands it well (and therein lies the problem with the film, which does not refuse to indulge the audience in the easy fantasy of the story's inviting imagery), one can see that this film, like other sentimental children's films), we should be able to see that this film is not easy to make like other sentimental children's films.

By the way, I have been talking about films dealing with children and the "naturalness" on which they depend, but it is fair to say that such spontaneity or "naturalness" of the actors has an effect that goes beyond the film's period style because it is filled with details that deviate from it. Even if the style and materials are outdated, the movement that intertwines with and deviates from them reveals the historical limits of the style and materials, and at the same time "exceeds the limits" by revealing the existence of an external movement that cannot be captured in them. However, if it is mistaken as if there exists a style of "naturalness," that style of "naturalness" itself will be easily transcended, forgotten, and never looked back upon by the times.

For example, in Toshio Matsumoto's "Itsudatsu no Eizo / Image of Deviance" (Getsuyosha, 2013), there is a description that "the fact that something looks natural without resistance is merely a habitual inertia in the way of looking at things," and the definition of "naturalness" is that "people call the scene unfolded by an inertial symbol system 'naturalness' without knowing that it is so. However, it goes on to say, "The TV news and the newspapers are not the only sources of information about nature. However, it goes on to say, "I, for one, would not like to be made aware of symbolic systems and poetic functions in every single TV newscast or entertainment movie I watch to pass the time," concluding that images that directly present incidents and facts are more important for daily communication. Of course, this text was written more than 30 years ago, in 1980, and it is not such a simple statement for those who read it today, when people are using video and DVD playback devices, the Internet, computers, and cell phones to capture and edit images for their daily lives and work. As in the case of the aforementioned massacre in Syria, there are even cases where countless images taken by common cameras are used as evidence of war, and the Internet is influencing public opinion = democracy. In an age when not only professionals who deal with images and news reports are constantly forced to analyze and judge what is true or false, the book's definition of "naturalness" has become more important for ordinary people who do not go to the movies. At the same time, it can be said that the "images of deviance" treated in this book have become important to the general public as well, so the fact that there are parts of the book that have been surpassed in the aforementioned era does not detract from the value of the text.



When Maurice Pialat said, "Adieu Philippines(1962) is a free film, a very improvised film, and in my opinion, that is the limit of (Jacques) Rosier's style, but at the same time what was done there deserves praise. That was the only one good film of its time" (2), was he really treating Rosier's "limitations" as something positive or negative? Although it is impossible to be sure now, if we follow the introduction of the Cinémathèque Française, which states that "Maurice Pialat's films speak in a raw autobiographical and naturalistic way," then Pialat's films, which have influenced later and current French cinema more than the Nouvelle Vague, are really those that

transcend the limits of Rosier's cinema? For example, Piara told his actors to "forget the camera" and shot a nearly 10-minute long cut in a few takes without rehearsal (although there was a scenario) (in fact, Piara was asked by Rosier if he did not worry about not signaling the actors during the cut) (2). In *La gueule ouverte*/The Mouth Agape (1974), Philippe Leotard's son eats fruit with his ailing mother, Monique Merinand, and after listening to Mozart, the mother stumbles as she tries to get up from her chair. What is truly moving in Piala's films is not the "natural" acting and direction that makes us forget that it is a film, but the moment of the two shots are unexpectedly connected after a lapse of time (most of them are jump cuts, as Piala himself admits that he is not good at matching cuts, or has a problem with it). For example, when Leotard and his wife Nathalie Baye are undressing to make love and are suddenly cut off and connected to the two lying on the floor, the light, the sound, and the subtle but obvious "joining of different times" - things realized with an intensity that could only be possible in cinema - are found there, and it is as if the traces of a film that should have been carefully erased by Pialat return and hit the viewer. Ironically, it is at this moment that the "cinema" appears and saves Pialat, even though Pialat himself expressed his dissatisfaction in order to shorten the four-hour rush to one hour and 20 minutes. It is ironic that in *Van Gogh* (1991), rather than the long, "natural" transition and completion of the painting of Van Gogh's daughter while he is talking with the art dealer, and drinking wine and chatting while avoiding the danger of a strong wind almost knocking over the canvas, some of the scenes of Van Gogh and the prostitute embracing, or the scenes before and after Van Gogh lies down on the bed and breathes his last, are ironically "against nature" edits that shorten the time, and thus go back to "cinema". This is somewhat reminiscent of the relationship between the completion of the shot and painting in Robert Bresson's films. Perhaps that is what made Philippe Garrel a follower of Pialat away from Godard. However, this is not to say that Piara's film is Bressonian. For example, when the silent couple facing each other across the bars in the prison in *L'Argent* (1983) appears, it is not a painting, but a film, and because it is cinema, it "starts moving" and thus cannot be completed as a painting. In Pialat's film, the shot, which is moving as if it were "natural," betrays "nature" because it is edited to "link time," and in that moment we find "cinema" barely at all.

The reason for "barely" here is that many of the filmmakers of the French Nouvelle Vague, whom he does not recognize as his contemporaries, "assume the existence of the camera". Jean-Luc Godard, who spoke of Pialat as a "pre-Nouvelle Vague auteur" while appreciating Pialat, is a natural, but Jacques Rivette also noted that "every bracketed contemporary film has traces of production in which painting is regarded as the work of the person. For example he said about the karate fight scene between Jean-François Stevenin and Pascal Ozier at the end of *Le Pont du Nord* (1981), "I was afraid that the two would be cut off from side to side and there would be no figures on the screen. ...In the end, cinema is most interesting when a crisis appears on the screen in any form" (*Cinematograph*, n.76, 1983). And even Eric Rohmer said, "Arielle Dombasle and Pascal Greggory have a wonderful sense of frame» about *L'arbre, le maire et la médiathèque* (*Cahiers du Cinema*, n.464, 1993). The Nouvelle Vague filmmakers are not trying to make the reality of filming disappear, as Jacques Rivette has said, "The important thing is that they are not skeptics. The important thing is not to live with skepticism, but to understand that we cannot live without an "illusion" with parentheses, so we must maintain it, while at the same time pushing it away somewhere." It may be better to replace the word

"illusion" with "image" or "visual image" in Rivette's words in the same article: The visual image has left the cinema and become "nature" in people's daily lives, but like the war-motivating images mentioned above, it is threatening ordinary people and even the nation. The Nouvelle Vague people learned how to live in the new century of images while staying at the Cinémathèque, and this may be something that we must learn as well.

The reality that the young filmmakers of the so-called FEMIS era after the 1990s, influenced by Maurice Pialat, generally do not live such a level of conflict of "naturalness" is easily confirmed by the boredom of their films, although some notable film such as Christophe Clavert's *Mon coursier hors d'haleine* (2008) have been produced. Arnaud Desplechin, who shot *La Vie des morts* (1991), and Alain Guiraudie, who shot *Ce vieux rêve qui bouge* (2001), each departed from Godard's *Detective* (1985) and *Passion* (1982), but went toward Pialat. So, do Japanese films, especially those by internationally acclaimed filmmakers and works praised for their "naturalness," live up to this level of "naturalness" conflict? Hirokazu Koreeda's *Kiseki/I Wish* (2011), for example, is one of the films that should be discussed in terms of this theme of children and "naturalness. In *Kiseki*, two elementary school siblings who live separately in Kagoshima and Fukuoka after their parents' divorce plan a short trip with their classmates to make a wish at a place where their bullet trains pass each other. The film tells the same story of parents' divorce and children's journey as *Yuki and Nina*, co-directed by (2009) by Hippolyte Girardot and Nobuhiro Suwa, which was shot just the year before. These two points, the parents' divorce and the children's wanderings, may immediately remind one of Shinji Somai's *Ohikkoshi/Moving* (1993). In fact, the reason why both films are interesting is that the issue of "distance" appears in the film, as well as the issue of "naturalness" in how the characters, especially the children, are portrayed on the screen, something that Shinji Somai had also struggled with more than 10 years before these two films.

In the case of *Kiseki*, if we take a scene in which the characters gather together to study, drink, watch fireworks, or attend a concert, the first shot of the scene, the one shown mainly in the distance, is the best shot in the scene. (Oddly enough, one such film, which has nothing to do with this film, is Katsuya Tomita's *Saudade*(2011)) In other words, the distant view that first shows the relationship between people and places is the most powerful, and when the subsequent view gets closer to the people, the power of the view disappears. Following this, at the end of Koreeda's new film *Soshite chichi ni naru/Like father, Like Son* (2013) there is a scene in which the protagonist (Masaharu Fukuyama) returns his son, who was mistakenly given to his biological parents at a maternity hospital, but goes to see him to accept him again, and the son walks down a parallel and finally intersecting path. The father walks down the road, looking at his son sideways and apologizing to him. In *Yuki and Nina*, Yuki, who refuses to accept her parents' divorce, wanders through the forest without Nina, who has run away from home with her, and somehow ends up in the Japanese countryside. In *Ohikkoshi*, the girl wanders through the woods by Lake Biwa and also sees a visionary scene. As in *Ohikkosi*, the problem in *Yuki to Nina* was the time and distance between the wandering girl and the screen that captured her. For example, the wandering of Ingrid Bergman and Anna Magnani in Rossellini's *Stromboli* (1950) and *Miracle/the second part of Amore*(1948) as well as that of the couple in *Viaggio in Italia* (1954) allowed the audience to experience "time and

distance together" with the subject as the camera persistently captured them from an almost constant distance and height. However, the wanderings were so abrupt that they had little reason or inevitability from a psychological point of view, almost endangering cinematic fiction itself, and were filled with an "unnaturalness" that left the audience perplexed. Shinji Somai could not come close to Rossellini's supreme, and he could not do away with the psychological set pieces such as festivals and fantastic scenes, but he did carve his film with a desperate attempt to flesh out his insistence on the absurdity of the story. In contrast, the father-son walk in *Soshite chichi ni naru* and Yuki's wanderings in *Yuki and Nina* are flat, lacking in continuity and rigor in their distance from the children. Although not a film with children, perhaps Jacques Rosier's *Les naufragés de l'île de la Tortue* (1976) is the film that, apart from Rossellini's film, has managed to achieve its "unnaturalness" by putting the filming process itself, a characteristic of Nouvelle Vague films, at risk and making the dramatic film frame a record of the adventure. What we realize here, as in the case of Maurice Pialat mentioned earlier, is that it is not "naturalness" that saves the film, but rather the moment when "unnaturalness," which is only a film-fiction, is revealed. It is not the means, such as a fixed shot or a hand-held camera, that saves the film. It is true that Rosier chose to use a hand-held camera, but it does not mean that Naomi Kawase, who used the same method in *Hanezu no Tsuki* (2011), has achieved the same intensity of film as Rosier. Indeed, the use of off-screen sound, and the use of professional actors and amateurs in the same scene, either by not shooting the former from the front or by using only their voices, are several steps more sophisticated than in her previous works up to *Nanayomachi* (2008), which were unbearable to watch until the end (this was a device necessary in films such as Mika Ninagawa's *Helter Skelter* (2012), for example). On the other hand, as in the previous film, there is a lack of strategy in the filming of water, which is probably due to the fact that the "working" is not shot in any other way than close-up. On the other hand, the scene of the bath in Noboru Tanaka's *Hitozuma shudan boko chishi jiken/ Rape and Death of a Housewife* (1978) was successful in the past because of the strategy. The water itself was filled with a physical sense of things that went beyond the sexual metaphor that *Hanezu no Tsuki* was stuck in.



Furthermore, "unnaturalness" = cinema at a point that goes beyond the naturalness and the actors' skill, which are the issues here, may be realized in *Like Someone in Love* (2012), which was shot in Japan by Abbas Kiarostami, I mentioned in *Homework* at the beginning of this article. Of course, it is the usual Kiarostami who abruptly throws out the fiction itself with an abrupt sound of breaking glass at the end of the film following the long wait for the man and woman in the room who are threatened by the angry voice and noise of the stalker man off-screen, but the easily imaginable off-screen sound is, in Rossellini's terms, a little debilitating. However, it

directly demonstrates what Japanese cinema and its audience/viewers, dominated by a television sensibility, lack in ability. The scene in which the woman (Mihoko Suzuki) who lives across the street from the entrance to the professor's apartment speaks to the heroine who has come to visit him in a long dialogue, along with the persistence of the barbed delivery that does not seem to be Japanese, confounds the viewer, but the way in which the woman is framed through the window frame and speaks to the viewer as if she were facing the front of the room is a bit of a surprise. The scene, which reminds me a little of Sergei Paradjanov's films, is symbolic of the film as a whole. The film is a continuation of Kiarostami's previous film *Shirin* (2008), which consisted only of the sound of the stage and the reactions of the audience, and it exposes the fact that we live under the disguise of "naturalness. That is why the woman's barbed voice is all the more impressive. Just as Manoel de Oliveira was once criticized for the poor acting of the peasants in his short masterpiece *A Caça* (1964), to which he replied, "Of course they are bad, but that's okay because this is a film that shows 'the peasants acting,'" so too is the film related to what the author calls "a film of performance," and is a film that reveals acting, and aims to create a screen that is unnatural in every sense of the word, which reveals what is being acted out.

On the other hand, in some of the more interesting works of the newer generation of Japanese filmmakers, such as Sho Miyake's *Playback* (2012), the tense shifts into "natural" as if it were a lie, and the camera positions in Koh Sakai and Ryusuke Hamaguchi's *Tohoku* trilogy (*I think Utauhito* (2012) is the most brilliant), despite sometimes the camera position is sometimes frontal, but does not interfere with the "natural" conversation of the interlocutors. While I admire the delicate attention, the "naturalness" (which in this case could be narrowly described as the erasure of the "sense of frame") is a situation in which the images have become the "environment" for the general public, and as I wrote at the beginning of this article, in some cases, the viewer's life is threatened by the truthfulness of the images. In this situation, one cannot help but wonder if this is indeed a new "double-edged blade» of "naturalness". The erasure of the frame is a function of television's fictional construction for media control, which can lead to the erasure of the outside. Moreover, with the major film festivals having become television-occupied film events, and the resistance of films that do not fit into that category (see, for example, the situation in Catalonia, Galicia, or Chile, where digitalization has made filmmaking possible against expensive film), the question of whether or not the web can be used to control the film industry is a question that needs to be answered seriously. The discourse that does not attempt to answer the question seriously is rapidly becoming old and cannot escape the accusation of Galapagosization.

(1)"L'enfance sans mythes" André Bazin, *Esprit* 197, December 1952

(2)[http://www2.cndp.fr/cav/amours/2\\_DocLect\\_3\\_4\\_3.htm](http://www2.cndp.fr/cav/amours/2_DocLect_3_4_3.htm)

(2)<http://eurekavideo.co.uk/moc/catalogue/la-gueule-ouverte/essay>

(September 29, 2013 first publishing *Cine-toride* n.1)



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