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| **Straub, Jean-Marie (1933-) and Huillet, Danièle (1936-2006)** |
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| Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet were a filmmaking couple working from the early 1960s to the latter’s death in 2006, after which point Straub has continued to make films alone. Although they were initially associated with the New German Cinema movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the majority of their work has been filmed in either Italy or France, and both individuals are French by birth.  Straub/Huillet’s early work consisted of a pair of adaptations of Heinrich Böll stories (*Machorka-Muff* in 1962 and *Nicht Versöhnt* [*Not Reconciled*] in 1965), their feature debut *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* (*Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, 1968) and the short film *Der Bräutigam, die Comödiantin und der Zuhälter* (*The Bridegroom, the Comedian and the Pimp*, 1969). |
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All were shot in Germany, using black and white film stock, with a tendency towards baroque camera angles, intricate narrative structures and an intransigent use of direct sound (an unconventional practice at the time). From this point, however, their work undertook a more radical turn: their adaptation of Corneille’s neglected play *Othon* – filmed in French on Rome’s Palatine hill in 1969 – initiated a heated critical debate between the journals *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif*, and since this time Straub/Huillet have been seen as paragons, alongside Godard, Oshima and Pasolini, of ‘political modernism’ in the cinema, a viewpoint which has been bolstered by the stridently militant tone of many of the interviews given by Straub.  File: Image Othon.jpg  Figure 1.  Source: <http://i.imgur.com/lloYttx.png>  While the highpoint of their popularity was undoubtedly in the 1970s, with the release of *Geschichtsunterricht* (*History Lessons*, 1972) and *Moses und Aaron* (*Moses and Aaron*, 1974), some of Straub/Huillet’s most fascinating work has come in more recent decades. In 1984 they directed a visually striking adaptation of Kafka’s novel *Amerika* (*Klassenverhältnisse* [*Class Relations*]), while the late 1980s saw a series of films based on the work of the German writer Friedrich Hölderlin, which was followed by a number of adaptations of the Italian Marxist authors Cesare Pavese and Elio Vittorini, including *Sicilia!* (1998) and *Operai, contadini* (*Workers, Peasants*, 2000). Indeed, Jacques Rancière (in Lafosse, 2007) has located 1979’s *Dalla nube alla resistenza* (*From the Clouds to the Resistance*, based on a pair of Pavese texts) as the major turning point in the duo’s œuvre: for the French philosopher, this film marked a shift from a dialectical to a lyrical outlook in Straub/Huillet’s work, and from an orthodox Marxist conception of communism to a peasant-based, ecological communist ideal.  Straub/Huillet have always been divisive figures: few of their films have found broad appeal with audiences, and some critics have castigated their work as tedious, or even artistically fraudulent. Even their advocates frequently have recourse to adjectives such as ‘austere’ and ‘rigorous’. Indeed, extended long-takes with a minimum of narrative action preponderate in their work, the source texts for almost all their films are drawn from the Western literary/artistic canon, and the systems they have devised for articulating shots depart markedly from the norms of mainstream cinema. Moreover, perhaps the greatest degree of critical opprobrium is provoked by their unique approach to filmed speech: invariably, the non-professional actors in Straub/Huillet’s films reject the conventions of naturalistic speech and adopt a diction more closely adhering to the rhythmic qualities of *Sprechgesang*.  File: Image Antigone.jpg  Source:  In defence of their films, meanwhile, a minority of critics has emphasised the sensuous nature of Straub/Huillet’s work, the rare access they give the viewer to the visceral sights and sounds of the environment surrounding the shoot: the droning of insects, the gushing of a nearby stream, or leaves rustling in the wind. It is this deeply materialist quality to their cinema which, in recent years, has had a significant influence on a generation of younger filmmakers, including the Portuguese director Pedro Costa, whose documentary *Où gît votre sourire enfoui?* (*Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?*, 1996) constitutes an informative insight into the working methods of the couple. List of Works *Machorka-Muff* (West Germany, 1962).  *Nicht Versöhnt, oder Es hilft nur die Gewalt, wo die Gewalt herrscht* (*Not Reconciled*, West Germany, 1965).  *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* (*Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, West Germany, 1968).  *Der Bräutigam, die Comödiantin und der Zuhälter* (*The Bridegroom, the Comedian and the Pimp*, West Germany, 1969).  *Les Yeux ne veulent pas en tout temps se fermer, ou Peut-être qu'un jour Rome se permettra de choisir à son tour* (*Othon*, France/Italy, 1970).  *Geschichtsunterricht* (*History Lessons*, West Germany/Italy, 1972).  *Moses und Aron* (*Moses and Aaron*, West Germany/Italy, 1974).  *Dalla nube alla resistenza* (*From the Clouds to the Resistance*, 1979  *Klassenverhältnisse* (*Class Relations*, West Germany, 1984).  Der Tod des Empedokles (*The Death of Empedocles*, West Germany/Italy, 1987)  *Antigone* (Germany/Italy, 1991).  *Sicilia!* (Italy, 1998)  *Operai, contadini* (*Workers, Peasants*, Italy, 2000).  *Quei loro incontri* (Italy, 2006) |
| Further reading:  (Byg)  (Böser)  (Lafosse)  (Ofner)  (Roud) |