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Muting the image: lighting and photochemical techniques of Bresson's cinematographers

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Abstract

The practical accomplishments of Robert Bresson's collaborators have rarely been acknowledged. This paper argues that Bresson's productions were the site of creative solutions to unique photographic problems that led his cinematographers to develop bounce light and flashing techniques, as well as to use the 50 mm lens. Research into these aspects of Bresson's cinema not only grants one access to the dynamics of Bresson's unique mode of production, but starts us on our way to placing Bresson's films and the work of his technicians in the history of French film style.

Keywords

Bresson
Burel
Agostini
Cinematography

Although the use of the term 'Jansenist'[1] to evoke the style of Robert Bresson's films has been exposed by the director as 'madness', Bresson himself may well be the source (Ciment 1998: 501). In an interview from the 26 May 1966 edition of *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, he comments on Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton: 'I admire their "Jansenism". But also their mathematical precision (particularly Keaton), whence their elegance' (Estève 1983: 120 n. 1). Bresson has used the term in reference to his own work as well, most notably in his conversation with Jean-Luc Godard and Michel Delahaye (also in 1966) (Godard and Delahaye 1998: 476). A closer look, however, reveals that it was employed as early as 1957 by critic Muriel Reed, in an article entitled 'Robert Bresson, le janséniste du cinéma'.

Despite its continued preponderance, as in the case of Keith Reader's monograph (Reader 2000: 6), one is left to wonder just how precise it and other such theological terminology is in addressing this director's style. The predilection in religious-based treatments of the films' stylistic features is to swathe them in ruminations about their maker's ostensible worldview, thus failing to acknowledge the ways in which even a very 'personal' film style is mediated by the means and challenges of film practice. One of this paper's aims is to show that an investigation of the techniques Bresson used in the making of his films shows a more punctilious visual vocabulary. By making use of available testimonies and anecdotes to document the context for the emergence of photographic aspects of Bresson's personal style, we might therefore evade the terminological vagaries apparent in the quarrel between transcendentalists and materialists over the nature of his filmmaking. But this method yields further benefits, ones that broach the equally significant subject of the history of French cinematography.

1. See Quandt 1998: 511 for Ciment's explanation of Jansenism. See also Cunneen 2003.

Bresson is on record saying that he has 'never been influenced' by 'the methods' of these cinematographers, that they 'simply agreed to everything [he] asked' (Ciment 1998: 506). Accounts from a few of them suggest that perhaps Bresson relied upon them in ways that he was not accustomed to acknowledging in public or that few critics seemed interested in investigating. Two especially – Philippe Agostini and Léonce-Henri Burel – may have played crucial roles in assisting Bresson at the beginning of his career to develop his style in photographic terms.

I have little reason to doubt that Bresson, already a painter and photographer before making his first film, had a sense of how his films should look. What seems unlikely, however, is that he had the technical know-how to achieve this look. This is hardly uncommon even amongst the most talented of directors, and serves as a reminder of why directors employ technicians like cinematographers in the first place. While even at the beginning of his career Bresson would never cede to a cinematographer's general aesthetic sensibility or visual style, his approach to collaboration always permitted his personnel a certain amount of creative leeway in responding to major photographic problems.

In the early stages of his career especially, Bresson tended to define what he wanted from his production team mostly in negative terms, meaning that he seemed to know what he did not want more clearly than he knew what he did want. If the accounts given by his collaborators are accurate, then it becomes evident that Bresson's first films were formative, not in the sense of being practice runs and therefore less accomplished or amateurish, but in the sense that he was presenting his collaborators with relatively large stylistic problems, the solutions to which may have profoundly affected the way Bresson chose to make films from then on. Using techniques and equipment as diverse as lens and lamp diffusers, bounce lighting and flashing, these cinematographers each found creative ways of addressing the stylistic problems emerging from Bresson's unique aesthetic principles and the demands of filming this or that scene from the script.[2]

Bresson's two cinematographers in the period running from 1943 to 1962 were major figures in French production. Before shooting Bresson's *Les Anges du péché/The Angels of Sin* (1943) and *Les Dames du bois de Boulogne/Ladies of the Bois de Boulogne* (1945), Philippe Agostini (1910–2001) had shot *Un carnet de bal/Life Dances On* (1937), directed by Julien Duvivier and written by Henri Jeanson, Marcel Carné's *Le Jour se lèvel/Daybreak* (1939), and two films written (or co-written) by Jean Aurenche, *Le Mariage de chiffon* (1942) and *Lettres d'amour/Love Letters* (1942), both directed by Claude Autant-Lara. Collaborating with the major directors and screenwriters of the time, Agostini worked on pictures that were very much 'of the moment' stylistically, which is not to deny his inventiveness. For his part, L.-H. Burel (1892–1977), known affectionately as the 'cameraman with the white gloves',[3] joined the prestigious Film d'Art company in 1915 and was assigned to work with Abel Gance, with whom he made *J'Accuse/I Accuse* (1919), *La Roue/The Wheel* (1923) and *Napoléon* (1927), among many others. His long-term collaboration with Gance ended in 1941, but along the way and after it, he shot 113 films, some with the likes of Jacques Feyder, Maurice Tourneur, Marcel L'Herbier and Rex Ingram. For Bresson, he shot *Journal d'un curé de* campagne *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951), *Un condamné à mort*

2. Not enough material was available to draw conclusions about the techniques of Toporkoff (1885–1965), Bresson's first DoP on *Les Affaires publiques/Public Affairs* (1939).

3. Burel wore these gloves as 'protection against a slight haemophilic (*sic*) condition' (Nogueira 1998: 513).

s'est échappé/*A Man Escaped* (1956), *Pickpocket* (1959) and *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc*/*The Trial of Joan of Arc* (1962).

Marcel Martin, in his interview with Agostini, observes that he became 'at a certain time the expert in lustrous, very soft images that deliberately play with halo and contre-jour effects' (Martin 1976: 146). Apart from these stylistic tendencies, Martin describes 'lighting typical of the "Agostini style" of the 40s': 'The subtle combination of a number of light sources' that 'both plays with cast shadow and gives a vigorous sense of relief to the decor' – qualities on display in *Les Anges du péché* (Martin 1976: 146).

A number of problems caused by technical innovations and limitations in the 1940s called for inventive solutions. Agostini recalls that he responded to the problem of the higher sensitivity of the relatively new panchromatic film, which tended to expose flaws in actors' skin pigmentation, by employing lens diffusers that would 'produce images with less contrast' (Martin 1976: 148).[4] He points out that the biggest danger of the time was producing images that were too harsh, due either to the lenses used or to available printing techniques. The way to handle this problem was to present actors in large frame sizes, positioning the camera at a distance from them, and to envelop them in soft or diffused light. Beyond this, Agostini created his 'soft' look by exploiting various filters and gauzes, and using a technique common amongst Bresson's cinematographers, indirect or reflected light. Furthermore, he 'pre-flashed' the stock. Employed 'to augment the stock's sensitivity', pre-flashing or 'latensification' compensated for the limits of the available lenses, which could only open so much and therefore allow relatively limited amount of light in, ultimately softening the contrast of the images produced.

Concern for achieving 'flattened' images with particular attention paid to contrast became increasingly important as Bresson's career progressed. Contrast in photography refers to the difference between the brightest highlight and the darkest shadow in the frame. Reducing the impact of this difference either by muting the highlights or bringing out the shadow detail has the effect, for all intents and purposes, of flattening the image, of making of it a relief with rolling hills, rather than sharply contrasting peaks and valleys. Edward Lipnick, in 'Creative Post-Flashing Technique for *The Long Goodbye*', demonstrates how DoP Vilmos Zsigmond, director Robert Altman and Technicolor used flashing to modify characteristics of the film's colour negative. While what Zsigmond wanted to achieve with colour in *The Long Goodbye* (Altman 1973) may not directly apply to Bresson's films (particularly the black and white ones), many of the points made by Lipnick are certainly relevant to their visual characteristics.

Lipnick defines flashing as 'providing an additional amount of *overall* exposure to the negative, either by pre-exposing it to a controlled amount of light before exposure or post-exposing it after exposure' (Lipnick 1973: 281; italics in source). Used to control contrast, flashing 'tends to make all the colors more pastel, as it adds overall white light to all areas, thus lightening the values of all the colors' (Lipnick 1973: 188). The image therefore picks up soft, 'muted' colour qualities while remaining 'bright, sharp and well-defined' (Lipnick 1973: 334). The percentage of flash is calculated in relation to lighting chosen for the shoot:[5] 'In night exteriors and other very low-key scenes 10–15% flash has a pronounced effect', he notes (Lipnick 1973: 334).

4. Agostini first started doing studio work in 1929–30 in which image style was still being determined by the demands of orthochromatic film. He recalls the introduction of 'panchro', 'which completely upended lighting and makeup techniques, the rendering of colours, and the effects of our filters!' (Martin 1976: 147). Many of his stylistic tactics were developed in the process of adapting to this and other significant technological advancements of the period.

5. In Lipnick's words, the percentage of flash is 'the percentage of increase in the density of the most dense [*sic*] portions of the negative over what it would have been without flashing' (Lipnick 1973: 335).

A number of Bresson's colour films made between 1969 and 1983 contain lighting conditions of this sort, and so Bresson's later DoPs were likely to have used the technique favoured by Agostini. Scenes appearing late in *Le Diable probablement*/*The Devil Probably* (1977) – Charles' death at the hands of his friend in the cemetery – and *L'Argent*/*Money* (1983) – Yvon's murder of the grey-haired woman in her home – were shot in conditions with sparse illumination. Bresson was not fond of deep or cast shadows for they tended to privilege certain areas of the frame over others. By post-exposing images that have shadows of this kind, Bresson's cinematographers brought out shadow detail to the point where objects covered in shadow 'would print as something other than undifferentiated black', thus flattening the image out and distributing indexed information more equally across the frame (Lipnick 1973: 335). A side benefit of this process is that night exteriors could be shot without much fill light, as 'the use of extra generators, arcs, and lamp operators makes shooting large street scenes at night a costly proposition' (Lipnick 1973: 335). The cinematographers on Bresson's colour films probably found this less costly, less cumbersome solution attractive.

Figure 1: L'Argent.

As Lipnick describes it, flashing is a solution that became prominent in the mid-1960s due to characteristics of the available colour stock. With black and white stock, contrast is relatively easy to manipulate in the development process, with a longer development time producing greater contrast and shorter producing a softer effect. Colour emulsions could not bear such a wide range of development time without generating intolerable shifts in colour. All the same, Lipnick correctly points out that flashing was employed on black and white stock as well.

Having used the technique on black and white pictures in the 1940s, Agostini notes that at that time it was still 'experimental and very mysterious'

(Agostini in Martin 1976: 148). 'Lab work was a lot less certain than it is today', remarked Agostini in the mid-1970s (Martin 1976: 147). He recalls being on a shoot (that goes unnamed) and having an hour to head off to a dark room to pre-expose the film while certain other technical adjustments were being made. He had to develop the film immediately without knowing whether or not it had been made 'quicker' by 1 or 10 per cent (which refers to how much the stock was pushed to increase its sensitivity). The process was quite clearly an imprecise one at this stage, but, he explains, 'this pre-exposure slightly overexcites the emulsion', thus allowing him to obtain details in the image that he would not have normally been able to (Agostini in Martin 1976: 148).

Despite his view that the cinematographer 'is someone who spends his life, like all technicians, at the service of others' (Martin 1976: 149), Agostini found working on Bresson's first and second feature length films challenging: 'For his first film, he was very demanding, but he was never able to define want he wanted' (Agostini in Martin 1976: 148). He explains further that Bresson:

> Expressed himself in negations: 'No, no !' Thus, we framed the shot: 'No!'; an actor performed: 'No!' But he didn't indicate what he wanted.... The book he published recently (*Notes sur le cinématographe*), it would have been marvelous to have had had it for his first film because we would have known exactly what he wanted! But he was very determined and what was admirable was that he stuck to a very precise plan and there was no question of changing styles…. At first, it was a little difficult working with him, but I really enjoyed collaborating with him.
>
> (Agostini in Martin 1976: 148)

Even as his career progressed, Bresson often let his collaborators know what he wanted by informing them of what he did *not* want. With Agostini however, Bresson probably did not have a developed sense of what could be accomplished photographically, and this was just as likely to have been a source of frustration for the young director as it clearly was for Agostini. Helping to fill an important gap, Agostini, through his ability to improvise with the available technology, appears to have played a significant role in helping Bresson forge a visual style for his earliest pictures, and as we shall see, may have had an important influence on the techniques of Bresson's later collaborators.

The director's relationship with Burel was no less productive. One of the more significant innovations they developed involved bounce lighting. Bounce lighting was a European innovation and a practice that by the end of the 1960s would influence American techniques. As Salt comments: 'The central figure in these radical changes was Raoul Coutard, not only in his work for Jean-Luc Godard, but also in the lighting he did for François Truffaut and other "Nouvelle Vague" directors' (Salt 1983: 327). In *Le Petit soldat*/*The Little Soldier* (Godard 1963), Coutard 'introduced' the practice by bouncing light emanating from photoflood reflector bulbs pointing up at the ceiling. The upshot is twofold in that, aesthetically speaking, the 'non-directional' nature of the light would 'mimic and boost' natural light coming in from windows, and, practically speaking, the development of the film would not have to be 'forced' if shot with 'super-fast stock' (Salt 1983: 327). Moreover, the convenience of the equipment itself

would permit shooting in all directions without having to choreograph the movement and position of the lighting unit, therefore speeding up production. Indirect lighting of this kind did have drawbacks, however. Principal among them is an absence of 'catch light' used to 'give life' to actors' faces, thus leaving their eyes 'slightly shadowed' (Salt 1983: 327). Salt indicates that this process was quite difficult to use at first, producing 'the unfortunate result that the upper parts of the walls which are visible in the shot just below the lighting units and the top of the frame are brighter than the lower parts of the walls, and this looks rather unnatural' (Salt 1983: 327). A further limitation is that this process only works at its optimum capacity in all-white rooms. None of these constraints deterred Bresson's cinematographers from using this and other indirect lighting techniques, and research indicates that they not only used it fruitfully but well before Coutard had the opportunity to.

Agostini used indirect or reflected light as early as the 1940s, on such films as *Les Portes de la nuit*/*Gates of the Night* (1946) and *Pattes blanches*/*White Paws* (1948). This suggests that while Coutard may have introduced bounce or reflected light techniques as the unique or dominant source of illumination in some of Godard's early work, he certainly did not invent it. Indirect light was probably used in the 1940s as one technique among many to generate localized lighting effects, and probably not to light entire films or scenes on its own. Bresson may have demanded 'all-white sets' for *Les Anges du péché* (Martin 1976: 148), but bounce light was probably not the lone light source. The film itself contains hard, geometrical shadowing among softer fill lighting, which confirms that indirect lighting was not used to illuminate entire sets. Moreover, the conditions of the studio-bound

Figure 2: Les Anges du péché.

production of *Les Anges* make it so that bounce light, a technique tailored to shooting on location in rooms with ceilings, would have most likely been deemed impossible as a primary source of illumination, given available lighting and diffusion equipment.[6]

Even if some doubt might be cast on whether Agostini used the technique consistently or to full effect, it is relatively certain that Salt's account of the emergence and development of bounce light remains incomplete based on L.-H. Burel's experimentation with it in the making of *Un condamné à mort*.

With *Un condamné à mort* the principal stylistic problems stemmed from the locations chosen for the shoot: '[M]any scenes had to be shot in studio sets and these same scenes would begin or end in the real setting of the prison at Lyon', notes Burel (Nogueira 1998: 517). He spent considerable time observing the lighting in the cell and then trying to repeat that light in the studio. Not only did the studio cell have to match the lighting of the actual cell at Lyon, but, because the location shots show the prisoners coming out of their cells into the gallery, a 'correlation' had to be created between the cell and the corridor, which on its own had more natural illumination than the cell. To create a more realistic feel 'without artifice or dramatic effect', Burel decided to 'live dangerously by filming almost without light' (Nogueira 1998: 517). He was therefore working within a relatively narrow range of error. The actual cell was lit with a fanlight (which is visible in a shot late in the film), so in order to duplicate its effect for the studio-shot elements, Burel used a technique uncommon for the period but which would catch on and be used by Pasqualino De Santis (1927–1996), DoP on *L'Argent*, and Coutard. 'I think I was one of the first cameramen to use reflected instead of direct light', he claims. He describes the technique further:

> I threw light on to a sort of large white shield, so that instead of falling directly on the actors it was reflected on to them. It became an ambiance, an atmosphere, and though directed, came not from a particular point but from an extensive surface. It was easy enough really because Bresson works so much in close-up and because there were never more than three actors in shot. With a big set or a wider field, I could never have done it.
>
> (Burel in Nogueira 1998: 518)

Acknowledging a problem and then developing a creative answer, viewing limitations as a platform rather than a hindrance, Burel perhaps initiates a revolution in European (and then American) film lighting technique. This claim is not so far fetched given that there are seven years between the release of the Bresson film and Godard's *Le Petit soldat*. Agostini's indirect lighting practices may predate *Un condamné à mort*, but he did not use them as exclusively or to as strong an effect as bounce light is used here. In all likelihood, Godard's cinematographer knew Burel's work quite well.

In order to maintain consistency and create a sense of contrast, Burel used more direct light sources to illuminate the corridors, in order 'to suggest illumination from much larger windows' (Burel in Nogueira 1998: 518). In the scenes shot at night depicting the actual escape, he used virtually no light at all, electing to give the viewer only the slightest hint of Fontaine and Jost's escape: 'Sometimes there's a bit of light and you can just barely see the two of

6. Salt mentions that bounce light caught on in American production of the 1960s, particularly as it moved outside the studio. Hitchcock experimented with the effects of diffusing and bouncing light in the studio-bound *Torn Curtain* (1966), but it was never undertaken again (Salt 1983: 327).

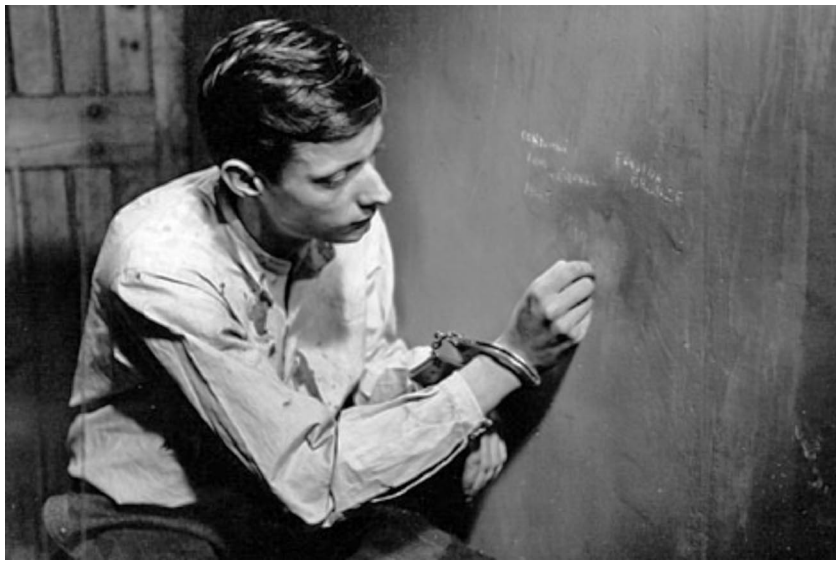

Figure 3: Un condamné à mort s'est échappé.

them; but since there was almost nothing else on the screen, you knew they were there' (Burel in Nogueira 1998: 518). This tendency to shoot in very low lighting conditions carried over from the first Bresson–Burel collaboration.

Indeed, Burel's most innovative and lasting contributions to the Bresson aesthetic came in the making of *Journal d'un curé de campagne*. It is on this film that Bresson develops, with his cinematographer's vital assistance, several key photographic techniques without which one would be left wondering how different a filmmaker Bresson would have become.

Bresson clearly wanted to make of this a special film, one with narrative and technical innovations. He had had several established cinematographers[7] conduct photographic tests before requesting Burel from the Union Générale Cinématographique (UGC), the company producing the film. Being 'an old dog' 'with a hundred films behind [him]', Burel was stunned that he had to test at all (Nogueira 1998: 514). When he first met with Bresson in Paris (I assume some time in late 1949 or early 1950), the director asked Burel to accompany him to a screening of the new film *The Third Man* (Reed 1949) indicating to him in advance that 'it isn't what I want, but it is something like it' (Burel in Nogueira 1998: 515). Burel recalls reacting badly to the film: 'I thought it was awful – I don't like that kind of photography' (Burel in Nogueira 1998: 515). Demeaning the film's 'high contrast style', with 'no half-tones and no detail' (p. 515), he wondered why Bresson would want to shoot his story of a country priest in such a style. In a meal after the screening, Bresson indicated to Burel that, in the end, his idea was to create 'a photography that was almost blurred, very diffuse, very woolly, very faded, without contrast', or more precisely, 'a film with strong contrasts but very diffuse', a difficult task because, as Burel notes, 'diffusion breaks contrasts: if you diffuse a lot, you have to light with strong contrasts without which the image would have no volume' (Burel in Prédal 1975: n. p.).[8] As they worked out what Bresson wanted, it became increasingly apparent that the director was interested not in avoiding *high* contrast, but *hard* contrast photography.

7. According to Burel, these include Robert Lefebvre (1907–), Christian Matras (1903–77) and Armand Thirard (1899–1973).

8. In researching the available sources for this section, I discovered that Rui Nogueira's *Sight & Sound* interview with Burel is in fact simply an annexation and translation of passages from Burel's book of memoirs, with sometimes slight, sometimes major modifications made to the manuscript.

Figure 4: Journal d'un curé de campagne.

Burel accepted to do a few tests for the director during his stay in Paris. It is worth citing Burel at length here:

> When Bresson asked me what kind of lens I was going to use, I said I was thinking of 50 mm. It doesn't give you much depth, which he evidently didn't want anyway, and it concentrates the action. I also told him I would use relatively powerful diffusers which were made specifically for me and which were in effect cylindrical additional lenses. We shot various tests using 50 and 75 mm lenses. But the man who was acting as my assistant wasn't used to these diffusers and he must have changed them while changing lenses, getting them on back to front. When I saw the rushes I was appalled; it wasn't diffused, it was out of focus. At which point Bresson came rushing up excitedly saying, 'That's it! You've got it, my dear Burel. That's exactly what I want for my film.'
>
> (Burel in Nogueira 1998: 515)

While he certainly enjoyed diffused effects and despised high definition, Burel 'wasn't going to make a film that was to be entirely out of focus' (p. 515). After some negotiation, the director agreed to allow Burel to work as he liked as long as he produced material that was in some way similar to those original rushes.

Burel shot *Journal* with a 50 mm lens, using his patented diffusers and very light gauze to generate the softness of image that Bresson requested. In exchange, the cinematographer required that the film contain no 'luminous contrasts', that it have an 'insubstantial' or 'immaterial' feel to it, 'without any suggestion of shadows' (Nogueira 1998: 516). Seizing the opportunity to take advantage of the director's relatively 'generous' budget and long shooting schedule,[9] Burel suggested that in order to create this soft-contrast look, they would have to shoot without the sun, 'doing the exact opposite of

9. In the interview with Nogueira, Burel states that *Journal d'un curé de campagne* 'turned out to be the only Bresson film that *did* have a long schedule' (Burel in Nogueira 1998: 515).

what everybody else usually does and shooting indoors whenever the sun did come out' (p. 516). Much of the film was shot before dawn, which required a lot of testing and wasted footage. The tests for *Journal* were 'counted not in feet but in miles' (p. 516).

The production company became understandably concerned about their investment and sent a technical advisor to oversee the affair. When Burel, who had not signed a contract to work on the film, threatened to walk away, UGC backed off and allowed the film to be completed as such. In conditions which saw 'nobody agree(ing) about anything', and in which the footage had to be 'corrected' by the laboratory during development in order to adjust the contrast,[10] *Journal* was completed (Nogueira 1998: 517). Not only did they receive individual Grand Prix awards at the Venice Film Festival in 1951 for their work on the film, but Bresson and Burel designed a visual style that, in its manipulation of various diffusion techniques and its use of the 50 mm lens, came to be immediately recognizable as that of a Bresson film.

Bresson's collaboration with his cinematographer on this film helped him develop a moderate photographic means of creating an image characterized by an unassuming, low-range chiaroscuro that did not involve resorting to totally out of focus images; he and Burel ultimately produce photography that contrasts starkly with that of *The Third Man* yet that distinguishes itself immediately.

In their individual efforts to generate the flattened image that Bresson so famously desired, Agostini and Burel each used a combination of equipment and techniques, including the 50 mm lens and various flashing and light diffusion or reflecting techniques.[11] Perhaps because Bresson is the most idiosyncratic of narrative feature filmmakers and the kind of artist that critics use to validate film as a form of highly personal expression, the work of his collaborators tends to be overlooked. What has been shown here is that Bresson's art and the craft of his photographers, far from requiring a foray into 'spiritual' interpretation to analyse their visual qualities and assess their significance, are immanently testable by close stylistic analysis, and benefit from a consideration of available historical documentation.

The story of Bresson's restricted stylistic paradigm is one of overarching continuity and slight change over the course of his half-century of filmmaking. While I would disagree with the precipitous view that each new cinematographer brought with him a unique visual style, I would state that two of Bresson's most important cinematographers, in the concrete decisions that they were making alongside the director, guided Bresson toward certain film-specific techniques and devices that would permit him to forge the style that he was looking for. This does not mean that Bresson's style is in fact Agostini's or Burel's or anyone else's. These films are neither Robert Bresson's in name only nor are they his alone, for if anything should be retained about the director is that his working method permitted more experimentation and spontaneity for his collaborators, albeit within certain limits, than most normally think or allow, as he himself has suggested: 'I like exercise for its own sake ... that is why I regard my films as attempts rather than accomplishments' (Bresson in Samuels 1972: 62). If his films are stabs at innovation within certain parameters, then the work of his cinematographers cannot be overlooked. And yet, especially given

10. Though Burel does not mention the process by name, the negative was probably flashed.

11. Preliminary research shows that Pasqualino De Santis used both flashing and bounce light in his collaborations with Bresson.

that many of the effects that they create are intended to go unnoticed, the possibility of neglecting their accomplishments is a difficult trap to avoid falling into.

Most importantly, this type of critical analysis and historical scholarship can work towards revising the place of Bresson's films in the history of film style. As we begin to see the director's work from a longer range, it becomes both more desirable and more difficult to piece together the role that techniques like bounce light and flashing played in the web of considerations and factors that influenced the development of his personal style.

Despite the challenges posed by the approach adopted by this paper (collecting available testimonies and drawing the conclusions that can be drawn, even if they are provisional), the findings themselves go a long way to laying the groundwork needed to alleviate the sense of stagnation one gets from reading Bresson criticism, particularly at the level of visual vocabulary. The contributions of the director and his collaborators to the aesthetic history of the art is virtually an open field of study, given that most critics tend to succumb to the urge to decode the secret that one cannot help but feel lies behind the works. In the worst cases, this approach has led to the unfortunate suggestion that Bresson's style emerged as a result of an idiosyncratic desire to induce religious belief in the spectator. I hope to have shown that Bresson was, like all filmmakers, a working artist, developing along with his crew facets of his style in the process of working out the practical considerations attendant to filmmaking.

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