"Ciné-Transe": The Vision of Jean Rouch: An Interview

Author(s): Dan Yakir and Jean Rouch

Source: *Film Quarterly*, Spring, 1978, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Spring, 1978), pp. 2-11

Published by: University of California Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1211721

Ciné-transe: The Vision of Jean Rouch

DAN YAKIR

AN INTERVIEW

Jean Rouch is himself a paradox of the cinema. Though French, he has lived in Africa much of his life and made many films there. Known as an ethnographic documentarist whose films sometimes provided glimpses of human life too terrible to bear, he made* Chronique d'un Eté *in Paris, with sociologist Edgar Morin, in 1961; its elegant interpenetration of documentary and narrative cinema gave a new formal and political sophistication to* cinéma-vérité. *Whether harrowing or funny (which they also sometimes are) Rouch's films turn out to be profoundly poetic and personal. He is an important figure among those artists who work with the materials of direct reality.

In what state is African cinema today?

It exists and it goes in all directions, which is normal for a young, turbulent cinema. What upsets me is the sad direction of the *cinéma d' information*: the official political militancy. Ousmane Sembene is someone who has left this militant path and I think it's good. His last film, *Ceddo*, which he made after *Xala*, is against Islamic imperialism in Africa. I think it's very courageous. The film was shown at the Moscow Film Festival a month and a half ago and didn't win any prize at the demand of the Arab countries which claimed that the film was prejudiced against Islam. The Soviets, who are a bit stupid, didn't give it a prize. As if Islam had nothing to do with religion, that opium of the masses. . . . It's good because we get out of a ridiculous situation in which Islam is considered a progressive religion simply because it's the religion of immigrant workers in Europe.

On the other hand, in Niger where I work, there is a man like Moustapha Alassane, who has also departed from the norm and is taking a sabbatical at Columbia University. It is also a sign that something new is about to arrive. He needs a certain distance vis-à-vis Africa to make a new cinema. He has reinvented cinema all alone, starting with making his own camera from an old 16mm projector. Then he worked for the National Film Board in Montreal and learnt animation from Norman McLaren. He then returned to Niger to direct completely independent films. His is a formidable voice. He follows a path which seems to me essential.

The third example that I can give you is another film-maker from Niger: Inousa Husseini. He wants to make a film on French ethnology. He studied at Tours, in the Val-de-Loire, and prepared a project on the sexual life of the local people. His project couldn't be realized but it's his dream. It's ethnography in reverse.

There, you have three very different directions in African cinema. Of course, I am not speaking about the official cinema, the great danger of which is the bureaucracy. I have just returned from Mozambique where I went at the invitation of the Film Institute to present a few films and work with some local directors. I think my visit shook them up a bit, as I urged them not to make films about party congresses—to get out of official cinema. Together, we made a little film which is a kind of follow-up to *Come Back Africa* by Lionel

 0015-1386/78/1300-0002$00.25

Rogosin: on the workers of Mozambique who return to their country in song and dance. I think I showed that creativity is everywhere and one could make films like this, that one should continually fight against conformism, against accepted ideas, and that it's necessary to stir people up. If I play a little role in African cinema, this is it. Even if my films are censored and criticized . . .

Does it happen often?

Very often. My first feature film, *Moi, Un Noir,* was censored by the government of the Ivory Coast for showing a person who lives in the street, a tramp rather than a lawyer or a doctor—a bourgeois. The French government also tried to get the film banned in Africa because the black hero fights with a white man. After all, one shouldn't show things like that . . .

My second film, *La Pyramide Humaine,* dealt with the problem of racism in a high school between black and white students. Again, a problem which is better left unmentioned. It's better not to speak about racism even if it exists . . . The film was censored in all African countries.

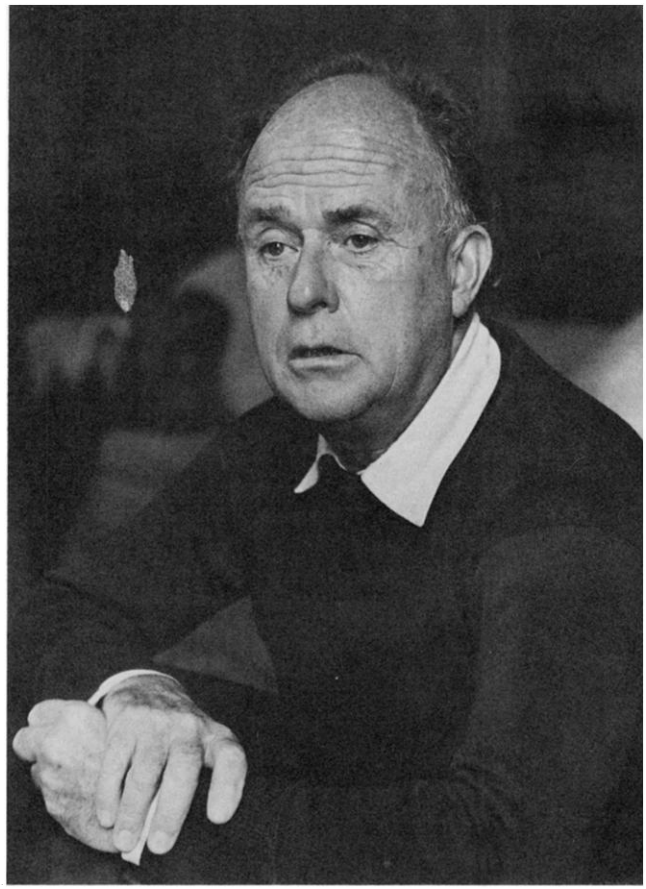
Les Maitres Fous was controversial everywhere. It was criticized by the British and by young African intellectuals. The late Senegalese director Blaise Senghor told me that when he came out of the theater in Paris, the spectators looked at him, saying to each other: "Here's another one who is going to eat a dog!" It took them a long time to understand the real meaning of the film.

I think it's necessary to fight against censorship, even that of friends. For example, *Cocorico! Monsieur Poulet,* although uncensored, was considered scandalous: it is scandalous to tell a funny story when there is a drought in Niger. But the film was shot in a region where, by chance, they never had a better crop. I think that it's very interesting to show that in the middle of a natural disaster there's also success.

I made these films because I thought it was necessary. I was very lucky to make films which had no great commercial success. One cannot accuse me of carrying on a "slave trade" by filming in Africa.

Do you think political considerations are less valid than social ones?

No, I think the two are important but one must have imagination. Sociology for sociology's sake



Jean Rouch (Photo: Sonia Moskowitz)

makes terrible screen material, which prevents you from *seeing* problems since you *study* them. So, you have a conscience, you make a report, etc., but you don't apply it; you're not really concerned. Sometimes political ideology itself is improper, no matter what your position is: you are "right" and being "right" is a mistake because problems do not present themselves like this. One is never "right" or "wrong." It is ineffectual to continuously assert your own opinions. It's a refuge. I think these are the two great obstacles to the development of cinema in the world.

Militant cinema, which is widespread in the US, Canada, and France, is always intended for people who are already convinced, so it's useless. The best political film is Michel Brault's *Les Ordres* because it's directed at cops, that is: the enemy. It is they who should be convinced. I

Rouch's most recent film, COCORICO! M. POULET

think this is the reason why there is not one real film on May 1968.

And before?

Before, yes. *La Chinoise* by Godard was the film that announced it but Godard was incapable of making a film in '68. I too was incapable, maybe because I was doing other things. Film was in the street and it was not worth making. One had to *live* it. There is not one good book on '68. Cohn-Bendit's book isn't valid. The only valid book is by the chief of the Paris police who tells everything that took place. He was confused by May '68. He was completely in agreement with Cohn-Bendit and the others. This is wonderful, but it's sad it's the only one. All the people who participated—sociologists like Touraine, Edgar Morin—were incapable of saying anything about it.

Even now, after taking a certain distance?

I think we can expect fiction films. *October* was shot ten years after the Soviet Revolution. *Potemkin* and *October* were not at all the way it really happened. I think it'll come with distance. Eye-witness stuff is awful, like the young girl who was taped on video in '68 and who now sees it, ten years later, when she's a good petite bourgeoise . . . And films like Kramer's *Ice* or *Punishment Park* are bad. This is not how it is.

In France today do you see any cinema of value?

Yes. I participate in the jury that gives the Prix Georges Sadoul every year to a first feature film, both French and foreign. For the last four years, we've been giving it to French films that were, in a sense, bad, while there were fantastic foreign films. Last year, we gave it to *Trobriand Cricket* by Gary Kildea and Jerry Leach. It's a wonderful film, perhaps one of the greatest anthropological films of recent time. It shows the way the Papuans adopted cricket, a colonial game, while deciding to change everything: I don't know how many people there are in a cricket team, but they decided to replace the leather ball with a wooden one, so that if you get hit, it'll injure you. From the moment there is risk, it becomes important. They decided that flannel pants weren't very practical for the game, so they retrieved their old war uniforms that were used to celebrate sexual symbols: the lingam, etc. The film is subtitled "An Ingenuous Response to Colonialism."

This year we have a good vintage and I hope we'll give the prize to an extraordinary film-mak-

er, who is a photographer for the GAMMA agency: Raymond Depardon. He became quite well known in France after making a film on Madame Claustre who was a prisoner in Tibesti (northern Chad) for two years. He made two fantastic films: one on President Giscard-d'Estaing's primary, which is the portrait of a president, shot in direct cinema style, like Leacock, and a new film on the birth of a leftist paper called *Le Matin de Paris*—on the three days that preceded the first issue. It's a pitiless film on the press. It was so cruel that now he wants to make a film about a photographer of a press agency, to show that he can be as cruel toward himself as toward the others.

Someone like Rivette?

Of course. I liked *Duelle* a lot, it's fantastic. And he keeps going . . . Truffaut is a very strange case: he follows the road, there are ups and downs, but he has charm. And the great master Luis Buñuel who, even more than Margaret Mead, is always so young. This is extraordinary.

And Godard's video films?

I find them very interesting but I think he has to go further. This is the only problem with Godard, who is maybe the most fantastic personality in world cinema. He was at the peak of international success and decided to leave everything to make experimental cinema. Unfortunately, his health is very precarious, which is why he can't do all he wants. For example, five months ago he went to Mozambique. He stayed fifteen days in a hotel and could do nothing. He was so weary that they offered to reimburse his air fare. This is not his fault. But I also think he made a mistake going to Grenoble because it's a return to the source, near Switzerland, and a Swiss like him must be completely de-nationalized and go to Paris. But he goes on and the *films de communication* he made are wonderful.

Why did you choose to make films in Africa?

It's not by chance. During the war I was arrested by the Germans and the only way to leave France was to find a job outside of the occupied zone. Since I was a civil engineer, I found work in Africa and was sent to Niger, in 1941. A year later, I was expelled by the Petainist governor as a Gaullist and sent to Dakar. Luckily, at that time the Americans entered North Africa. You see, I am a Catalan and when we are forbidden to do something, the only way for us is just to go ahead and do it. After the war, there was the same governor in Niger but with a different uniform . . .

Before leaving school, I studied anthropology, so I shot my films there. I also know the people there: Damouré with whom I shot *Cocorico! Monsieur Poulet* and who did the sound for *Les Maitres Fous*—I've known him since 1942. Thirty-five years of friendship are irreplaceable. We are accomplices and we can do anything.

You returned to Paris in the sixties to make Chronique d'un Été *and* Paris Vu Par. *Why? Is it a different period?*

No, it's because Edgar Morin offered me the chance to make a film on Paris. He said I shouldn't shoot only in Africa and should try to see what was going on in my own country, which I hardly know at all. I spent most of my time in Africa and when I was in France, it was to write my PhD. or produce my first film, so I didn't know France at all. It interested me. It is very hard to make a film among one's own group. But I'd like to do it again now.

It's a fiction film that I plan to direct on Jean-Pierre Boviala, a friend of Godard, who has built the best 16mm camera in the world. He wants to invent a tiny video camera that can be hand-held, to enable one to look with the hand. I'll film him, introducing fiction into his life—he's very unhappy. Koudelsky, who invented the Nagra, was a wonderful man who travelled and was happy. After making the Nagra, which is the best tape-recorder in the world, he became a businessman and as unhappy as they all are.

Marceline in Chronique d'un Ete

Boviala's problem is that if he succeeds, there'll be no more Sony or General Electric—only his. He'll be the most important executive in the world but he'll also be finished as Jean-Pierre Boviala, and he doesn't want it. Since it's an enormous problem for him, I offered to give him a role in a film I plan to direct this year, based on an idea by Hugh Gray who teaches film and classics in Los Angeles. He's a friend of Robert Flaherty and I met him, just like I met Michel Brault, in a Flaherty seminar given in California in 1957. It's a beautiful story about the cult of Dionysus: about the need for a nature cult in industrial society. Boviala will be a Dionysus who has returned to earth to write a thesis at the Sorbonne with a group of young thinkers who are a bit crazy, like Foucault, Althusser . . . He gets a job in an electronics factory, makes that camera, and faces the dilemma. Finally, the camera devours him—in fact, we don't know the end because maybe the camera won't work . . . We'll really shoot while he works on the camera, which will enable us to turn toward the imaginary.

The great problem I have is with music and dance. I found a crazy guy who studied music in India and discovered that the music system there can be learnt much more easily than Western classical music. He set up an atelier in St. Nazaire, which is a port where they build boats with Portuguese, North African and French workers. He taught them Indian music and they discovered they could use dockyard materials to make music: a kind of sitar with a metal plate that has a fantastic resonance. It fits well with the theme of industrial society—someone who plays the role of Orpheus. Now we need a dancer, which is a great difficulty. In Africa, it's enough to play music and the Africans will dance beautifully, no matter what. If we turn to dancers like Bejart, it'll be pretentious and bad. Maybe we'll use some American troupe in Paris.

It seems to me you are increasingly interested in making fiction films.

Not really. Fiction films are my vacations. I make one fiction film for five or six documentaries. For me, documentary and fiction are similar. For example, I plan to make a ciné-portrait of Margaret Mead. For me, she is what we call in anthropology a "totemic ancestor," so we're already in the imaginary. I know that with the camera, when we have a dialogue, it'll be a fiction film on the world, the US, what we think, our dreams, etc. I'll provoke her with the camera, interview her and be the cameraman all at once. And we'll shoot for 10 minutes or so until we're tired. We won't know in advance what will be the end. The conclusion will come somehow.

And a film like Babatu?

It's historical fiction, a very ambitious film because it's fiction on history. It's a very subjective film in which the story is told in two different ways that are both false. The truth will never be told, especially when it's a story of a war. And in history, it's always war stories that one tells and nobody can really tell them. They always tell lies. In the film, one of the heroes is forced to tell his son that it's necessary to go to war, even though he knows it's terrible. I think it's difficult to make such a film. It was very controversial in Africa because it shows that African wars were ridiculous. In fact, when I shot it I thought a lot about Godard's *Les Carabiniers.* I have had the unfortunate privilege of participating in war and I know what it is. In 1945 it was necessary, but one always says it's necessary. So, to say that the African wars of the last century were ridiculous is prejudiced against African culture—it's strange that one should think so. That people will be proud of their wars! . . .

A Bridge Too Far is a film that completely destroys a character who has been seen as a god by the whole world—Montgomery—who was really an imbecile. I'm sure of that or he'd never be a general . . . So, it's possible to do it in our civilization, but how can one say that an African warrior was an imbecile? It insults Africa . . . So, I think it's necessary to say it. For Babatu and the others, force was the important thing. The film shows what could happen in such a war of slavery in which there were no dead. We show the war as a sort of sport tournament, as words and insults rather than action. The epic account that people make, the oral tradition—the minstrels—is completely false. They say they killed 1,000 people while in the film there's only one or two dead. The second story, which is true, is never told to anyone, just mentioned among themselves.

Rivette told me it was the only interesting film he saw last year.

In Cannes. Yes, he received it quite warmly.

BABATU

What relationship do you see between the objective and the subjective in cinéma vérité?

It's the same as in the humanistic sciences. When you observe people, you're automatically present and there's nothing you can do about it; so there's a distortion of truth. The humanistic sciences are terribly subjective. Even when you use a computer, the way the question is posed influences the answer. The way of shooting influences whatever you're filming. This may be the reason why I work with a very small team and why I want to be my own cameraman: to be subjectively responsible for what I shoot.

My rule of shooting is simple. When students ask me what should the length of a sequence be, I answer: "Press the button and when you get bored stop. That's all." When I get bored, I start using zooms, etc., which I know I'll cut later on.

That is, you try to be objective but, like everybody else . . .

One cannot be . . . I'm completely against what Vertov—whom I admire very much otherwise—said about unexpected cinema. I think that to hide a camera is disgusting and dishonest. I increasingly use what I call a *camera de contact:* a close focal point and a wide-angle lens, to be close to people. The new Zeiss Optagon lenses are fantastic: in 16mm you can get a very wide angle which allows you extreme closeness and the camera makes no sound. At that moment, the camera becomes a third character: a combination of Flaherty's "participant camera" and Vertov's theory. You can make a synthesis there. The objectivity of the lens is in being an additional tool, an incredible stimulant for the observed as well as the observer.

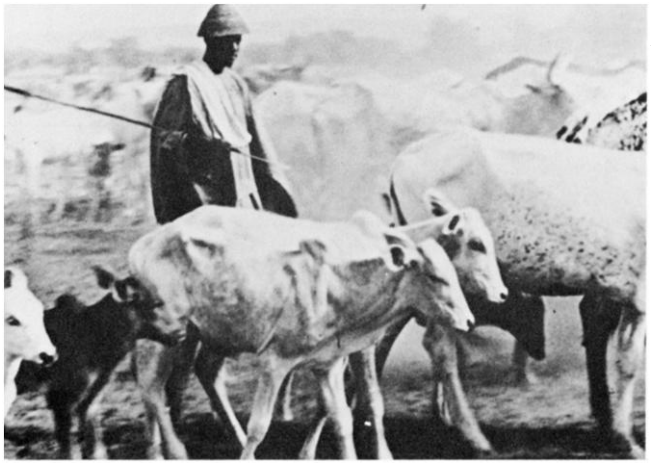
Boviala is working on a 16mm single-system camera, entirely autonomous, that allows simultaneous sound recording while adopting the process used in Super 8 for automatic sound. If it works out, I think that cinema and television will never be the same. It'll be a real face-to-face dialogue, recorded by a camera as small as a tape recorder. There won't be any need for a crew. And the "victim," the Christian devoured by the lion, namely the camera . . . Cinema will become completely subjective.

When we made *Chronique d'un Été,* it undermined all the previously used television techniques. From then on, people started walking with the camera, up to the ridiculous point where they shot in 35mm, with the camera on a tripod, and they shook the tripod a bit so that the image would move as if it were hand-held . . .

Depardon has already used this method while shooting the birth of *Le Matin de Paris* with a sound camera to which he attached a gun mike and a small SL Nagra. He was alone among the journalists and the result is terrific.

In my films, I have a sound technician. But in Africa, when I shoot in Mali with the Dogon, the sound man is a Dogon. In Niger, I have two or three local technicians who work with me—I never use foreigners.

So, objectivity consists of inserting what one knows into what one films, inserting one's self with a tool which will provoke the emergence of a certain reality. Here I join Flaherty's theory, who in fact was a man of practice rather than a theoretician. I have often been reproached for speaking about *cinéma vérité.* They said about *Chronique d'un Été* that it couldn't be the truth, that truth doesn't exist in the cinema. When Vertov spoke of Kino-Pravda, it wasn't simply filming the journal *Pravda.* It was an attempt to search for the truth. But he said it very clearly: the ciné-vérité is the truth of cinema, the truth that one can show in the cinema with a mechanical eye and an electronic ear. When I have a camera and a microphone, I'm not my usual self, I'm in a strange state, in a *ciné-transe.* This is the objectivity that one can expect, being perfectly conscious that the camera is there and that people know it. From that moment, we live in an audio-visual galaxy: a new truth emerges, *cinéma vérité,* which has nothing to do with



La Chasse au Lion a L'Arc

normal reality. I would never talk that way to you had there not been a tape-recorder here . . .

In La Chasse au Lion à l'Arc *you show the telegram that invited you.*

The American version was cut by 20 minutes by the distributor. Those were 20 minutes that explain the whole story and where I play a subjective role. The narration in French is very subjective. For example, when I say that the mountains by which we pass have been forgotten and we call them "Mountains of the Moon," the mountains of crystal—it's from Tarzan's memories. It's a terribly subjective film. This is why I constantly show the car—there was no reason for it.

And yet there's a distance: when the lioness dies, we look from a distance, with respect . . .

Yes, but the distance is there because I was afraid . . . It's normal. Secondly, because it's very impressive—everyone was impressed. So, at that moment, I was subjectively in the same mood. The death of the lioness, for which I have often been reproached—they said it was terrible—of course, it's terrible! Death is terrible and it's like that! If we filmed Hitler's death, it would be the terrible death of a terrible man, but that's how it is.

And yet the death scene is very beautiful in contrast to a film like Mondo Cane, *which is repulsive.*

Yes, but this is the point of view. The film was shot during a long period of time and I tried to understand what was going on around me. The hunters had the "privilege" of bringing about the death of the animals, but it was very risky. The commentary is true: the hunter who killed the lion's cub lost his own son the following year because of it. I wanted to show that there was a very strange relationship between hunter and prey.

At that time, I was influenced by an old American science-fiction film made in 1932: *The Most Dangerous Game* (The Hounds of Zaroff), directed by Ernest Schoedsack. Two rich Americans, a guy and a girl, are stranded on a Pacific island and are received by a Russian count who plays the piano and tells them he's a hunter. He says he hunts men. He gives them a two-day headstart, providing the man with a knife for self-defense. He himself has a bow. Whoever wins, gets the woman. It's a fantastic material for Freudian interpretation—relations between hunter and prey.

The lion in my film has a name and he's known, loved and respected. There's a lot of respect for the lioness because she's been beaten. After that film, I couldn't go hunting anymore. What's interesting is that we never see the lion: he was always there, merging with the vegetation, but we never saw him. His presence was felt.

How about your own presence in Chronique d'un Été? *We mostly see Morin.*

Because I was often behind the camera. Maybe it was also a bit hypocritical on my part: all the people in the film were Morin's friends, so I was a sort of an observer, having an observer's impunity. It's not a very nice role. In fact, the relations between Morin and the young leftist intellectuals, here the French Communist Party—he has left it since . . . I was terrified by this film: these people, Regis Debray and the others, were all desperate at twenty. The only person who has evolved during the film is Marceline. She is very shy in the beginning but becomes an actress in the end. It's an extraordinary transformation.

I was deeply impressed by the scene where she walks in Les Halles, becoming more and more emotional while the camera becomes increasingly detached.

It's the first two shots we shot with Brault. It was the discovery of another cinema. All of a sudden, we came out of what we were doing—we started shooting with a blimped Arriflex on a tripod, and I didn't like it too much. So I told Dauman, the producer, that we had to have a

new camera and should invite Michel Brault who alone could teach us something.

It was a gamble. We didn't know what was going to happen. I liked Les Halles, which was destroyed by Mr. Pompidou. It was beautiful: Les Halles was empty on a Sunday in August. We chose the Place de la Concorde and we couldn't hear what she was saying since she wore a tape-recorder around her neck. She was the only one to hear her own words. In Les Halles, we wanted to track backwards and Brault said we should put the camera on the back seat of the Renault 2cv. We put the motor on and pushed it more quickly than Marceline's pace. Nobody looked through the view-finder: we didn't know what image we were getting. It was surrealistic because we did it unconsciously, and Marceline, in that decor, started thinking of a train station and when we returned she started talking about her brother, the train station where he had been deported . . . She was completely sincere and when she said later on "I was acting," it was because she was shy and wanted to appear above all that. It's a bit dangerous to make a film like that.

Psychodrama?

Yes, it modified their lives. For Marceline, it was OK. She became the wife of Joris Ivens and with him she shot these films on China. Regis Debray left for Cuba to make a film on Che Guevara. Jean-Pierre Sergent (Marceline's lover in the film) also became involved with the cinema: he made a reportage on Algeria with Marceline at the time of Ben Bella and it was banned because of Boumedienne's coup d'état. Michel Brault has become a director. And of course Rivette . . . Edgar Morin was very frustrated because he thought he could reach objectivity, without personalizing things. This was my influence. He got divorced and married a black woman from Montreal, who was a friend of Claude Jutra, himself a friend of Michel Brault, and she brought a smile into his life. He became one of the most cheerful of sociologists and *le gai savoir* is quite rare these days.

All the people in the film were directly influenced by it, except Angelo the worker. He was fired from the Renault plant where he worked because of his involvement with film and was making a living as a worker in Billancourt Studios. There he created a trade union where none had existed—of the stage-hands—and was fired for political reasons. Edgar Morin was involved with a publishing house called Editions du Seuil and hired Angelo to work there. In six months, he was going to create a union there and Morin said: "No, you can't do this to me!" Finally, we gave him money to buy a small workshop in Levallois, where he worked as a mechanic.

Yes, and Marilou became a stills photographer for Bertolucci and Godard and made a film in Rome.

Chronique d'un Été *had an incredible influence on the New Wave.*

Yes, it was nice. We played with fire . . .

A few words about the contribution of the New Wave to French cinema.

For me, it marked the moment that cinema came out of the claws of the film industry to become an art. Before the New Wave, it was impossible to make a film: it was forbidden to buy 35mm film without the permission of the Centre du Cinéma. When Melville shot *Le Silence de la Mer,* he had to steal the film. The New Wave was the first reaction to the terrible threat to all art: corporatism. When a corporation protects itself and prevents others from entering, which was the case with the cinema, it is what we call in French *le fils d'archevêque,* the archbishop's son: you have to belong to the gang, your father is in the group and you're admitted because of it. All of a sudden, the New Wave said: "We'll make films without decor, without actors, without authorization and almost without cameras."

The man who played the essential role in all this was Roberto Rossellini. He came to Paris with his fame and Ingrid Bergman and told us: "You can make all the films you want. I'll find you the money in the US or in Italy." He asked each of us to tell his story. We dreamt with him in his hotel and did our best. One day, he disappeared—there was no money and no films, but we had already prepared our projects. He was the real stimulant. The first films by Rivette and Godard were stimulated by this madman. We loved Roberto enormously. He was god to us. He said: "*Voilà*! The old cinema is dead. It's up to you now!"

The New Wave opened the door but, unfortu-

nately, it's closed again now. People are afraid to make a mistake, take a risk. Truffaut's *400 Blows* made about $800,000 that he could invest in future films. So he became a businessman. Godard could have fallen into this trap, but being completely mad, he evaded it.

I'm lucky that my films didn't have commercial success and that I was a paid researcher for the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, so I could do anything, take any risk.

Now there's no new New Wave, but it'll come. It's in the process of emerging. Just as 16mm played a crucial role in the opening of cinema, now the Super 8 and video will change everything. Now you can make marvelous films with Super 8 sync-sound single-system. The University of Nanterre this year gave the first three diplomas for films shot in Super 8. One was about the second-hand clothing merchants in Paris and it cost $100. Another was shot in the Metro and also cost $100. The people from Kodak paid the cost of the print to show it as an example of what could be done with Super 8.

Alexandre Astruc spoke in the beginning of the New Wave about the *camera-stylo* (camera-pen). Now we have a *camera-crayon* (camera-pencil) that can be put in every hand. It ceases to be someone's monopoly, no longer are there the sacred forests of Hollywood . . .

Your camera is more mobile in Cocorico! Monsieur Poulet *than in* La Chasse au Lion à l'Arc. *Why?*

In *Chasse au Lion à l'Arc* we used an old Bell & Howell which was very stable in front and since I took very short shots—20 seconds at most—I avoided moving it too much because it could stop in the middle of a movement. In *Cocorico! Monsieur Poulet* I had a camera with an electric motor, which gave me 10 minutes of autonomy at a time, and it enabled me to take sequence-length shots. The discovery of sync-cinema is the discovery of real-time in film. My dream is to start shooting a few minutes before the climax and continue. *Cocorico!* is made completely of sequence-length shots: like in newsreels, we never stopped. We edited it, but very little.

It's not the subject that dictates camera movement?

I don't know. There shouldn't be a relationship. If you start making theories about my films, you're losing. You should just follow the movement. If there's a theory, there are no longer improvisation and creativity. When I read what the *Cahiers du Cinéma* people write about my films, I'm very surprised. Even if it's true, it's unconscious. I prefer to speak about *ciné-transe.* When I have a camera, I'm someone completely different, so don't ask me why I did what I did.

So, it's emotional rather than intellectual?

Certainly. You make a film with the heart rather than the brain. It's essential.

What do you think of the documentary films of Chris Marker and Louis Malle?

The whole *India* series by Malle is fantastic. It's the most beautiful thing ever made because it's the eye of a foreigner, which is rare. It's not ethnography. It's the first glance at a strange culture. So, it's total curiosity. It was very courageous to make.

I think that Chris Marker is too intelligent. That's his problem: his brain keeps interfering. The series he made on Chile is too intelligent. In the Alain Resnais short *Les Statues Meurent Aussi,* Chris Marker's commentary is a masterpiece. But when you create masterpieces it's annoying because you can't improve them . . . It's brilliant and the quality of the form tends to obscure the message.

In your films do you see form and message as related?

Absolutely. If there's no message, there's no form. I've always been wary of beautiful photography. It means there's nothing in it. The beauty is in the core which comes out: all of a sudden, an emotion emerges and it's completely unexpected.

Surrealism is something that has always impressed me. I believe in chance. The most beautiful shots I get happen when my lightmeter shows there's no light. No cameraman will shoot but I do it anyway and something happens. I strongly believe in this total improvisation. I am my first spectator when I look through the viewfinder. It's very strange to walk with the camera and sit in the screening room: be at the same time my own critic. But I stay away from *la belle image.* Aestheticism is the great danger.

Why do you prefer to work with collaborators—

co-directors rather than assistants, or is it simply a question of terminology?

No, I prefer it because there are a lot of things I don't know. I knew nothing about France in 1960, so the co-director was Morin. *Cocorico!* is a work of collective improvisation: Damouré, Lam and myself. Each of us had his role, like in a jam session.

Speaking about music, can a musical rhythm dictate the rhythm of a scene?

No, never, except if the music is part of the scene. I use very little background music, except in *La Chasse au Lion à l'Arc:* there is some guitar music which creates a war atmosphere and which is repeated in *Babatu.* It creates an epic dimension. It's an indication of something else, then. But I detest film music—it's like pretty images, enveloping something in a pretty wrapping, as if it were a Christmas present: cheap but with a magnificent wrapping. It's what's inside that counts. This is the role of music in cinema, except in the Western. There, it gives an epic dimension—it indicates falseness. Everything that is announced as false is accompanied by music.

Are you optimistic?

Of course, and you?

Sometimes.

Why sometimes? And the rest of the time?

There are doubts.

Doubts are optimism. There is nothing more pessimistic than a puritan. The moment you have doubts, everything is possible.

DON WILLIS

A Singing Blackbird, and Georgian Cinema

In the last few years films from the Soviet Republic of Georgia have been getting some overdue recognition at film festivals and retrospectives around the world, but they still qualify as one of the better-kept secrets of international cinema. The relatively well known *Pirosmani* (1971), by Georgi Shengelaya, is only one of a number of sharply stylized, idiosyncratic Georgian films currently making the archive circuit, in a package put together by National Film Theatre of London programmer John Gillett.

No one film is like another. *Molba,* or *The Prayer,* (Abuladze, 1968), is a genre of one, an epic "poem" of apocalyptic brutality and horror ironically framed by a fervent profession of absolute faith in God. Alternately static in its recitations ("I'm sick to death of tombs" is one of the less fortunate speeches) and awesome in its Revelations-like imagery, *Molba* is guaranteed to overwhelm one way or another. *My Grandmother* (Mikaberidze, 1929) is a savage, Vigo-esque satire of Russian bureaucracy employing fantasy, dreams, stop-motion animation, double and triple exposure, slow motion, etc. Sample nightmare image: a lazy bureaucrat speared through the chest by a giant fountain pen. The film isn't just an argument for diligence. It goes way beyond plain argument into outrage, malicious glee, and comic horror: in one sequence a woman and her little daughter Charleston giddily in delight at their breadwinner's supposed success at the office ("I've such a good husband!"), oblivious of the just-fired husband hanging rather foolishly from a noose on the chandelier. (He proves inept at suicide too.) This astonishing silent comedy should be at least a page in future film history books. You wonder why it isn't in the current ones.

Almost conventional—by Georgian standards—but also quite likeable and full of visual verve

 0015-1386/78/1300-0011$00.25