

**JEAN PERRET
MIKE HOOLBOOM**



TOUCHING PICTURES

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Touching Pictures: a conversation with Jean Perret

Jean Perret. When I google his name a Swiss watch-making firm (what else?) arrives at jeanperret.com, located in his home city of Geneva, no less. Their motto might be his own: The symbol of time trapped in technology. But the tech he is concerned with turns out to be his own body, made and remade in the digital revolution, swarmed and stuffed to overflowing with pictures he can't seem to stop watching. Why does he need so many pictures? Jean is one of a few select professionals who spend their lives racing across the globe, insatiable in their quest for new movies. As the director of the Visions du Reel Festival in Nyon, an annual springtime gathering of documentary professionals (journalists, dealmakers, artists and producers), he is forever condemned to articulating the time of the festival's week-long encounters. Somehow he has managed to spare himself the shiny armour of the professional. Instead, he is still the loving amateur, throwing his arms around movies which hurt him, not to mention difficult makers who draw blood and tears. He finds in each encounter a way to keep his blurry, too-fast life from carrying him away, and instead allows these single awful moments to enter him so that he can remain human. The temptation to become the kind of monster that usually runs organizations (some are monsters of politeness, or work, while most are warmed by more traditional forms of greed) must be overwhelming. He is not on the top of the mountain, forever pronouncing, bending lesser wills toward his prodigious intellect. Instead, he always has an ear open, at least for a moment, until he has to rush off to the airport again. There is another mystery waiting to be revealed, or even better, to be pointed at and maintained, in another part of the world, and he will be there too, opening, always opening, though he knows better than any of us the cost of these openings.

These dialogues were gathered over the past years, sometimes in daily morning hotel vigils, or through intermittent correspondence, or by cut and pasting texts initially aimed in other directions. Jean speaks about the four major tenets of the documentary, the three great lies of globalized media, and the importance of being tired. He is an elusive and generous correspondent, and while I wish this volume were many times longer, I am grateful for each word, which has been lived before its release, and which emerges, as the reader will discover soon enough, in explosive bursts which cut to the very heart of the matter before he retreats again beneath his Swiss exteriors and his next appointment. It's always time.







The Names

Mike: You never use the word “documentary” — or only to name something which has passed, which might have lit up screens once upon a time, but not any longer. Instead, you propose a new term, the “cinema du reel.” What do these new words mean? And why, as the director of what most people would call “a documentary film festival” in Switzerland, have you chosen to leave the D word behind, and collect your pictures inside this new alphabetic frame?

Jean: The cinema du reel, in its many variations, must encounter difficulties in freeing itself from the normative rhetoric of the television industry. Yet this independent cinema does prove capable of providing us with thrilling accounts, arresting testimonies, stimulating visions, poetic warnings, committed points of view on ourselves and on others. These films start out not knowing their audience, and hence address it with even greater ambition and higher expectations. Consequently they are indeed able to break away from the audiovisual mainstream, to play along different lines, developing their own pace. They dare to “waste” time, claiming it back from the chinks and cracks left by the frantic, ubiquitous strategies of globalized communication. Where audio-visual communication reveals its vacuousness, real-life films reflect the profusion and inexhaustibility of their subject matter.

“Reality is the icon.” (Meister Eckhart)

Come back from Locarno, where too many films are part of an uninteresting disorder. It’s pretty difficult to organize a disorder which makes sense, giving pleasure to be lost and to find some fragments of a path through the world of signs and illusions.



Our Present Life



Jean: Cinema du reel remains the open-air laboratory it has always been, one in which cinema is constantly being reinvented—from the experimental film to the large-scale investigation, from the self portrait to the portrait, from the unsteady image made by a handheld camera to the perfectly framed static shot, from the fragment to the sequential take, from the self to the other in not too hasty transitions, allowing for the thorough examination required by the complexity of true stories experienced by common people from all walks of life.

"A true encounter, itself something fragile, in turn makes us fragile because we do not know where it will take us. My films are attempts at encounters." (Nicolas Philbert)

Visions du Reel, Nyon's international film festival, aims to be a place for encounters as well as for dissemination. We aim to raise our voice to speak not about cinema but from within it, through the films that have imposed our attention, echoing the many other voices rising in murmurs and in cries from the multitude of narratives. Preconceived notions must give way to new insights; there must be room for both solitude and company, peaks and lulls, moments of silence and an invigorating din.

A search for the words to express a state of both communicative exultation and brooding meditation with respect to these films which enable us to keep looking into the distance with unwavering curiosity and wonder.

"In our cultural interactions we must accept that to some extent our life stories remain indecipherable, our differences irreconcilable, that in the damage we suffer as well as in that which we inflict there must be something irreparable." (Paul Ricoeur)

What is interesting is not informed journalism describing situations in the world, but to show a diversity of feelings and stories, the connections between memory and our present life.



We are currently witnessing a technological revolution owing to the recording of images on small, handy digital video cameras. This revolution builds on technological developments that have led to an unheard-of ease of camera handling, sensitivity to the lowest of lights, and computer programmes that enable immediate film processing. The most important factor, however, is economic. The said tools are affordable even to those of slender financial means, and no monopoly (political, national or commercial) can prevent access to these tools. On the contrary, the globalized, capitalist audiovisual market is ensuring that they become ever more affordable by the greatest possible number of consumers. Film production has been radically transformed, in many ways simplified, and so made accessible to a large number of people who previously would hardly have dreamed of making a film.

For over ten years, now, the younger generations have been seizing on constantly developing audiovisual technology to put forward their pictures, their stories, their points of view. There can be no doubt that without this digital revolution, a considerable number of representative works would never have seen the light of day. Worth mentioning in particular is the dawn of a fresh wave of digital film makers from China, who are giving the world unexpected narratives of their lives and their country. Digital video simply removes a lot of barriers between the wish to express oneself in images and the possibility of doing so. It is about me-films, an approach which places the authors themselves at the centre of the process, a centre from where they lay claim to and question their own identity as well as their relationships with the outer world. We are convinced that the expression of their individuality is a privileged mode of access to their vision of the world, which in turn opens a window for us to the collective mentality of the society they come from. With the media distorting our perception by endlessly harping on the virtues of a world turning into a global village thanks to the constant flow of goods, services, people and communication, the voice of each "small", independent film based on the perception of an individual is a precious form of resistance. Each one is a representation of unique human experience which enriches our understanding of a particular culture by depicting some of its fascinating complexity.





Four Steps

Jean: There are four things I look for whenever I watch a film. The first step in the cinema which is important for me is the gesture. What is the first gesture of making cinema? It's like Peter Mettler's hand in *Balifilm*, you see his hand caressing a wall which is living by light and shadows and darkness. This is an expression of the first gesture of filmmaking: to establish a relation with the world. To touch. To get along. You touch the concrete world with the camera hand. This hand is not in a relation of confrontation or provocation, it receives the world. It is an open-hearted hand. To organize your hand holding the camera, to make your eyes available to receive what is going on around you.



The second step of cinema du réel is to look for strong frames and shots, before editing, before any storied articulation with scenes and sequences. Take, for instance, the first shot of Russian filmmaker Sergei Dvortsevoy's *Bread Day*. It's 12 minutes long, showing a train wagon full of bread bound for a small village north of St. Petersburg. Because the railway tracks are too weak to hold the locomotive, villagers have to push this wagon. It's wintertime, and the wagon is heavy and they have to push for a long time. In 12 minutes you have a universe — so many impressions, feelings and emotions — because the filmmaker risks a real shot, a strong frame. I believe in a strong commitment in terms of images. In order to find our own roots in stories told by filmmakers, I need to find myself in pictures which carry a specific weight. The shot could be just ten seconds, it's not a question of length, I'm not an ayatollah of *plus sequence*. But I think that it's important for spectators to find roots in each single shot before being involved in the story's construction. To take time for the ambiguity of filmic bodies.

Mike, in your films, you take out of the magma of pictures we live in a few pictures, sometimes just a few frames, to begin to tell our story again. And yours. Whenever you look, you are confronted with all the pictures you know. The world as it presents itself is already part of this culture of images we're living in. So even if you're working with sometimes very short shots, the frame and its editing provides new articulations of pictures. You grant us a feeling that it's possible to see in other ways — not only the world but images of the world. Short shots can also give this feeling of making roots.

When you're sailing in the sea you need markers to show where danger and home are.

The third point is the depth of the pictures. If you bring attention to gestures and shots, you are interested in the depth of each frame. Yervent Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi work with found footage from archives. Their first task is to restore the picture, to grant it a new life. Then they work into the depth of each frame in order to tell new stories with old pictures. These new stories are related politically to our time now, and concern the main themes of humanity: colonialization, war and violence. What is interesting in this work is that they look inside each frame to find elements you couldn't see normally. They reframe and enlighten details from the original frames to show what might be called an amnesia of pictures. They use slow motion to see better. The speed of reproduction has a specific value. This slowing allows us to arrive, for instance, at the long line of prisoners walking from one place to another. Each prisoner, each face, has to be seen. They give us time enough to see.



Gianikian and Lucchi also add colours, like in silent movies, tones and tints which overlay the original black and white material, which are up to each spectator to interpret. Colour lends a dramatic atmosphere, a surrounding, removing the pictures from a naturalistic level.

They also risk the repetition of shots. With a thirty second shot they can make a sequence of five minutes, replaying small details inside the frame. In the depths of a fragment they can find new stories, once unknown and forgotten. This depth is one of cinema's main commitments in terms of politics and poetics.



Films are made to show death on its way. It's important not to forget the phantoms we're living with. Cinema is a way of not forgetting. Everyone in film is already older or dead by the time we see them. It's the work of cinema to remind us of these persons, their faces and voices. Cinema is an epiphany, a revelation of spirit, in the simple act of showing it insists: this person in this frame has been here. It's not a question of information, but the possibility for spectators to arrive at this face, this body, in what it has been, and in what we can imagine for ourselves. How to import these people in our own life? Cinema is a way to learn with dead people. That's why I couldn't live without pictures.

Gianikian and Lucchi made a film based on pornographic films they collected. They present details of bodies fucking. In the beginning it's funny, you laugh, but by the end you see once again the main

themes of humanity: the way to dominate, to hurt, to have fantasies of sensuality and death. In a few minutes with these found footage films they show all that, it's amazing, and of course it's presented without explanation or voice-over, the usual crap of documentary.

The fourth step is to put all these fragments into a story which is not easy in cinema du réel. Stories have their own rooms. There are keys to develop dramaturgy in the classical literature of the nineteenth century. But in cinema du réel it's quite complex because on the one hand filmmakers have to tell their stories using rules to maintain a strong structure, while on the other hand they need to "respect the real situations."



In many documentaries, you see how real situations are not taken seriously by the filmmaker. More attention is given to the story, rather than having the real situation in its spirit and richness. Many documentary films work against reality. It's disturbing. In cinema du réel, filmmakers don't trust expressions of the real enough, often because they have no strong ideas about frames, depth and gestures. They don't believe in what they're filming, so of course they don't pay attention to the real situation. The art of cinema is to tell stories inspired by the "spirit of moments filmed by camera." Not the contrary. Let me give as an example the last film by Johan van der Keuken.

He knows he has cancer which he can't escape. He wants to travel with his wife, who has been a sound engineer for most of his films, in

order to make a last journey and enjoy the world. We are in a film typical for these times, an I-film, where the filmmaker speaks about himself. But because of his talent and generosity, van der Keuken is receptive to the situations, landscapes, and faces he meets on this journey. He's interested in himself and others, and this articulation is a big story. Many films are connected only with themselves, video has made possible a proliferation of these selfish, narcissistic movies and most are crap. When Van der Keuken travels he confronts his illness and at the same time remains open to the world. The story of the film is how he's able to receive what's going on around him.



He's walking a path up on the mountain, filming himself. He's breathing heavily, he has strength to walk although he's tired, you feel a body in action. At the end of this path he comes to a new and unexpected place. There's a small bush and in the middle a long, wooden penis, like a trophy on a church altar. In a single shot he discovers with us, without words or explanations, this beautiful, wooden male sex. His simple wish to look, to receive this in his film: this is storytelling in cinema du réel. Now it's up to the spectators to make an interpretation, how to understand what is given by chance. This ill person looking at a symbol of fertility and sexuality, it's a whole story in a few shots. As filmmakers you need to receive things by chance, you need to provoke chance, not only to have a good script, but to step into your daily life, and the persons you're living with, in order to discover



Human Rights

Jean: Why do we need these pictures? It's a question of my own identity, to know myself better, to be committed with other people, to share and communicate. To be open. Cinema du réel is a way to understand how profoundly different others are. I hate this idea of a global village where everyone can understand each other without problems. It's a lie. Cinema du réel shows the beauty of difference, how it's fundamentally impossible to reduce the distance between me and another. To establish and invent the right distance between the filmmaker and the others is a question of morals and ethics and aesthetics. Now we are living in a trend of human rights festivals, but every film du réel is a film working for human rights, in fact, it's a way to understand the other as completely different from you and at same time insist that they are your sister or neighbour.

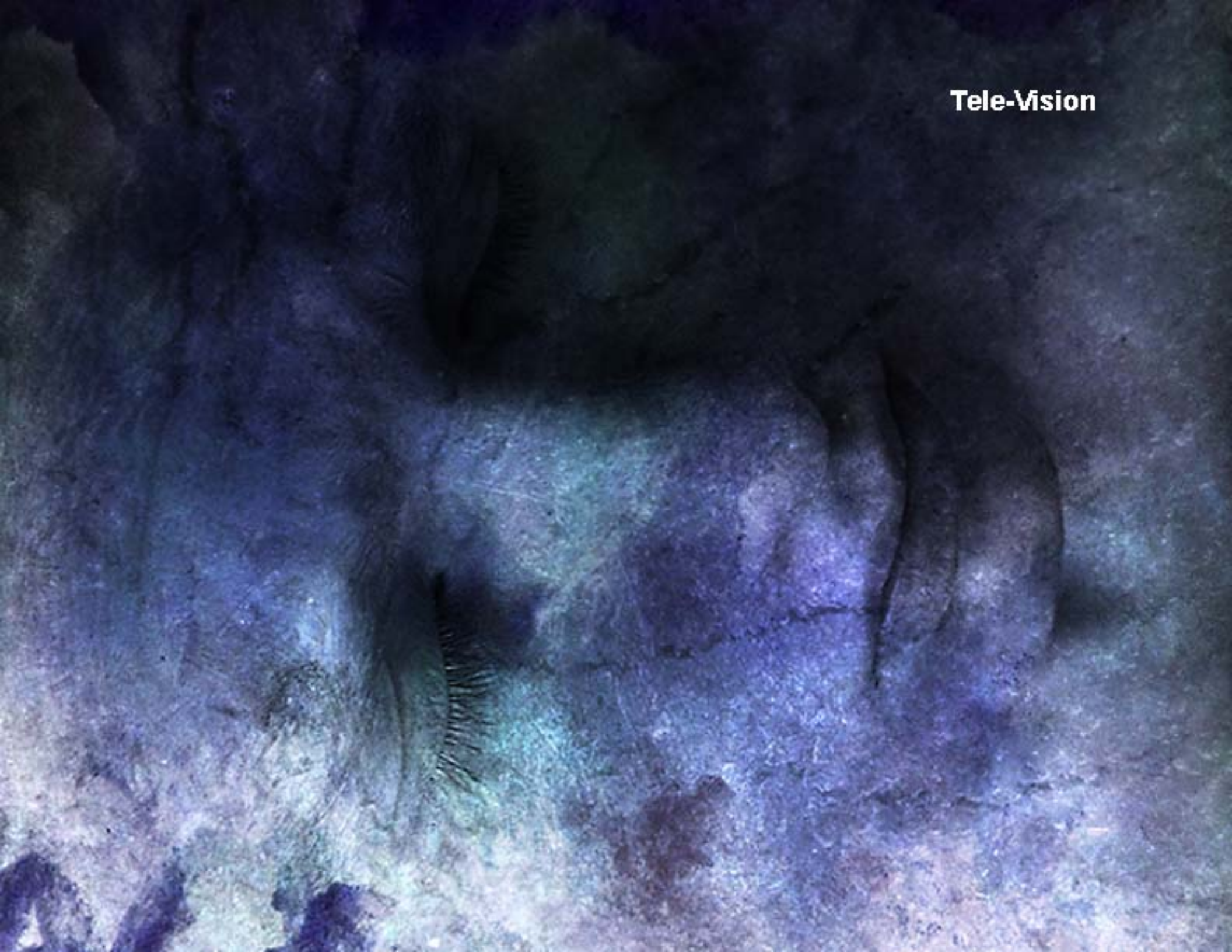
I was invited on a TV show to speak about Michael Moore's 9-11 because the moderator knew I didn't like the film. By way of provocation I said that Moore is working against human rights. Why? Because Michael Moore is telling a story with no interest in the real situation he's facing. The logic of his story is more important than the facts, except in two instances. He's not giving any time or distance to the spectator to find our own point of view, to think, to have our own emotions and to dream, instead he invites us to fit directly on the nose of his film. He's just giving opportunities to laugh against, which is the easiest thing to do. Everyone knows he's on the good side and we're onside with him. It's the good guys against the bad, and this is stupid.

If you lose any opportunity to laugh, to dream, this is a problem. Though sometimes films are made so we can sleep a little bit.

Cinema du réel opens towards the beauty and complexity of life and history, and of the utopias we need to live. Celebrating diversity. Around us the cinema business tries to explain the world by simplifying and banalizing it. To tell a story in this field, to acknowledge complexity, instead of reducing it, to acknowledge the urgency of the situation and only then to begin producing the story, to give us back our time, as spectators, to grant us the luxury of memory and faces, this is the task of cinema du réel.



Tele-Vision



Jean: I think cinema on TV is an experience of a lost pleasure, and you can find pleasure in feeling a lost pleasure. Television is the systematic repetition of a frustration. It shows you what isn't there anymore. Though along with DVDs, it allows access to some films. Recently, I bought DVDs by Ozu and Naruse, two Japanese filmmakers I love, and old black-and-whites from Bergman and Cassavetes and Satyajit Ray. I can buy a disc and watch it on television and enjoy the film because I've seen it before in a real cinema situation.

Because of the memory of what you experienced before, you will have a subtle pleasure of perversion, seeing this fantastic, big film on a small screen. If you haven't seen it before you have the ability to imagine it in a real cinema, with light coming from behind you. In television, the light is coming in front of you, it's not the same thing. In the cinema you are invited to move your body, in the movement of light towards the screen. Because you're sitting in the dark, the cinema invites you to project yourself on the screen. You move back and forth, we know this from Brecht. Freud also wrote about this in and out, to be near and to find distance again. The cinema is a tremendous fort and da experience. Looking at a film in a theatre is exhausting because you're projected as an interested observer, while on television you're crushed onto the screen.



When I was younger I watched television on Sundays. Afterwards I usually felt depressed and lonely. I was looking but had this feeling of not seeing anything. I had shared nothing. Earlier I often went to the cinema by myself, and left screenings with a delicious loneliness which related to the world. Sometimes I was excited enough to talk about the film to someone I didn't know. Loneliness in front of TV is violent and painful, while loneliness in cinema is a very subtle and fragile pleasure.

Youssef Ishaghpour: *You talk about cinema not being preserved from time but preserving time (M Blanchot), you talk about trying in your work to tune your ear to time but also to give it expression, and you contrast that with the totalitarianism of the present, the organization of a unified time whose task is to abolish time. Isn't it that very disappearance of time, which could be said to be an effect of "real time" information technology and the generalized circulation of image-communications-merchandise through the television screen and its ephemera that destroy the present by obscuring it continuously it as it occurs? Isn't it that urgency of the present, the disappearance of time and even the hopelessness it engenders, that also determined the existence of Histoires du Cinema as a mémoire of the cinema and the century, a memoir of time inside time? Proceeding from the urgency of the present to a salvaging of the past seems to me one of the similarities between your film and what Walter Benjamin hoped to achieve in his book Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle. If what has to be saved isn't saved now, Benjamin says, it may vanish forever, and that's how your film relates to cinema.* "Cinema" by Youssef Ishaghpour and Jean-Luc Godard, translated by John Howe New York: Berg Publishers, 2005.

In today's situation we are met with a globalization of audio visual communications. We live in a world wide circulation of information, committed by big business. In this flow you can't find pictures any more, that's the problem. We're living in the three main lies: continuity of information, to be collected simultaneously to the event, and in proximity to it. We are told we are near. The obscene moment of these three lies together was 9-11. Everyone has seen, at the same moment, the crash of the plane. It's a big orgasm of the news, but you can look at these pictures a hundred times and never understand what is going on. It's a lie because you don't get to the point, as spectators you don't understand, there's no space for your intelligence. You can't find your roots, so it's the beginning of a collective fantastic amnesia.



Competitive television is committed to covering things happening on people's doorsteps. Its images purport to remove any distance between themselves and the people close to the subject. It appears to listening like a good friend, a passionate soul mate. Above all, it seems to speak the same language and its point-of-view meltings into an ideal transparency. This sometimes arrives under the guise of interactivity, which misleads viewers into believing they are in control of the program.

It searches out immediacy and action, something TV channels thrive on and which confers legitimacy on the substantial technical and financial resources it requires. The quintessential ambition is to get on the spot in real time. When pictures flirt with death-at-work, violence and mourning — the emotional charge is ten times greater. This is why TV images revel in day-to-day violence, the fall of the luxury towers of its megalopolises and the growth of poverty-stricken shantytowns.

The audiovisual flux is this endless outpouring of images and sound, these information superhighways whose ambition is to explain the world, reduced to a global village whose entire meaning they are supposed to exhaust. The mechanisms of these colossal lies and the flimsiness of the messages they carry of necessity require their continual liquefaction in the ocean of opacity that substitutes for knowledge and reflection.

What is really striking is that this flux results in the gradual disappearance, on a vast scale, of the notion of the shot. The shot is the prime element capable of constructing knowledge and articulating meaning. Presupposing a recognized point of view, this cutting in space and time defines the initial gesture. It provides the basis for an audiovisual culture. The shot is an arbitrary fragment and is defined by its ability to think in innovative and meaningful aesthetic and narrative terms its relationship to the world. This is what reality cinema has to offer, the ability to take shots of ways of life, its unfathomable conflicts and indescribably beauties. The shot calls for editing, the birth of the narrative, the beginning of the story, even if disjointed or reduced to scattered fragments.





Proximity, Immediacy, Continuity

Jean: The least that can be said is that flux dominates our understanding of everyday life, the wide world, its stories from the past and its current affairs. The audiovisual as formatted by television constantly seeks legitimacy for its three major phantasms, its three great paradigmatic images: proximity, immediacy and continuity.

The flux wipes out images and the shots that produce them. This is where reality cinema parts company with contemporary visual art, which often has trouble filming "for real." In the spectacular inflation of video screens in contemporary art, where animated images are the rule, we cannot but note how casually the images are produced. Badly filmed. Sloppily edited or not edited at all. All that of course, but also a reflection of the culture of the cinematographic and videographic image, of their history and techniques. Cameras that are childishly simple to operate do not automatically enable space and time to be cut up in discerning ways. If truth be told, the images in a great deal of contemporary art, mostly made in video, belong to the flux! Light and fast, they are surface images that instrumentalize concepts that may be astute and remarkable, but are nonetheless sometimes crippling.

What is being played out behind the scenes on this issue is the iconic nature of images, their ability to resemble their models, to be faithful to them! Reality cinema, whose diversity of practices and sources of inspiration extend way beyond the concept of the 'documentary film,' injects undeniable traces of the concrete experience of the artist's confrontation with the world. From the viewpoint of film people, the question of reality is crucial, as is the social, philosophical- in a word, political- function of art. Its responsibility lies in an ability to create ties among people in the public arena. Visions of reality-an inspired, committed world view-create bonds and so stand as a fundamental criticism of the ideology of unassailable freedom and unbridled individualism postulated by modernity, which has also jumped into bed with contemporary art.



Reality cinema in the best instances becomes a hinge between the self and the other by its recourse to pan shots, or sometimes combining a shot and a reverse shot. There is no general rule here, but the duration of the gaze passing between me and the other sets a convenient distance to establish the irreducible otherness that makes us what we are. It creates a bond that neither forces nor yields. At its very best, reality cinema is this poetic, anthropological gaze which takes root and looks out beyond the boundaries of the self.

Many installations thrive on the uncertain status of the image not only because they are reduced to the state of a flux, but also because they are digitized to the point of undermining their relationship of ontological resemblance to reality. For all that, we now need to re-establish a modicum of trust in images. Granted, this is a pretty naïve thing to say, but what is at stake here is a fundamental aspect of our culture, based on our wanting to believe in images. Given how it has evolved and its integration of new technologies (digital images are genuinely revolutionary), reality cinema is an ideal place for reflecting on and resisting the smooth, virtual representations of the world. Its privilege, its task, its beauty and its difficulty, lie in sticking to reality in all its stubborn depth, which cinema technique can unfold in terms of shots, sequences, narratives and fragments jointed together or not. In moments of history and memory.

Thus when film artists meet practitioners of the plastic arts, they engage in disturbing, stimulating dialogues that instill in the former the desire to dismantle traditional narrative structures and in the latter the wish to discover the virtues of images weighted down by a framework with already established co-ordinates in space and time.





Your Time Will Come

Mike: Godard (the word I use as a shorthand for “pictures which think”) said that the only way to watch television was to record it on videotape, 24 hours at a time, and then see it ten years later. It might take that long for pictures to arrive, though we’re under the illusion that pictures reach us as soon as they’re available. But to watch this weekend, for example, American coverage of the Vietnam War (which was hardly different from British or French or Japanese coverage), demonstrates how much time networks spend on repeating administration lies (under the camouflage of neutrality), how a parade of the usual government spokespeople fabricate an electronic theatre (called “news”) and how occasionally, through the feints and dodges of these posturings, there arrives a picture, sometimes by accident, which shows something of what happened in Vietnam.

The VCR permits the viewer to step out of the flow of a consensual present, it allows us to escape the inexorable forward motion of media time, slowing time down in order to look, in order to find a picture. In its live broadcast moment, the picture arrives too quickly to be seen, but the same technologies might be used to change speeds in the other direction, and grant viewers the time to recollect.

I think this is a key problem with the new digital technology: the picture arrives before you’re able to see it, and so what is presented is not an image at all, but the place an image would be if there were one. Disguising this lack, this absence, is the amalgam of pixels which appears, in every respect, like an image. Jean, if I point the camera in your direction it delivers, without pause or hesitation, a picture of your face. But this is not the way you really look. For instance, there’s a light which comes from your face (as opposed to the light which falls onto it) which the video recorder is insensible to. Your face is part of your inner life, it refuses exactly this separation between inside and out, which the camera blindly affirms. Oh no, it says, this is what is there, what is exactly there, this is really an image of Jean’s face. But upon closer examination, one finds it simply isn’t so. It takes time for the picture to arrive, and we used to be able to measure this time before we became part of the pictures which now look back and see us.

In English we have this expression: Your time will come. And when time comes, it’s over, you’re dead and finished and done. Everyone has their own time, waiting for them (your time has already arrived, you will catch up to it, in the end), though when your time arrives it’s already too late.





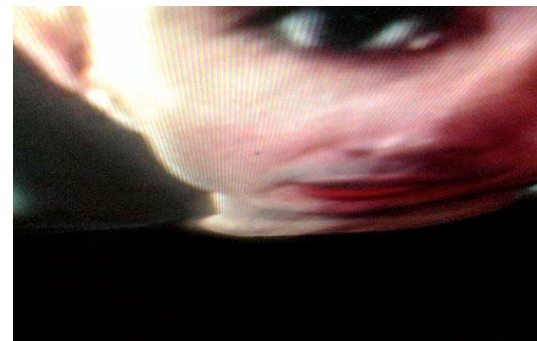
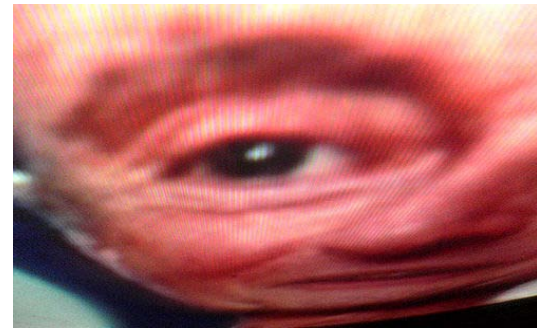
The Politics of Time

Mike: Cinema and video: Cain and Abel writes Godard. Two brothers, bent on mutual destruction. At last the day will arrive when the fratricide will be complete, no more cinema, only television, and not only that, but even the memory of cinema will fade. (Was there ever? Even once?) Most documentaries are shown and financed by television, at once source and destination. On television the work of memory is abandoned. Television serves to erase memory, to issue an endless present, a flow, in which no recollection is possible. What is the relation between the documentary today (what you call cinema du réel) and television's erasure of memory?

Jean: Why does TV have no memory? Because this medium is a cold one, while cinema is warm. This is what McLuhan says. You have to feel warmth around you to begin to work with your memory, you can't do it in the cold.

The concept of flow is to give no time in between. Video tapes have no interruption in the surface of information. If you consider our tradition of celluloid cinema, you have one frame, then an interruption and then the next frame. In between each frame there is a suspension of picture, and this break is necessary to make the work of recollection, it happens in between. It's a little space we need to find our own place, to step in and make our own work in terms of intelligence and memory.

Our eye can't make out the short interruptions between frames, so we experience a continuity which doesn't exist through the persistence of vision. The moment is cut, but the eye reconstructs continuity. The eye means the brain, which works on two levels. We believe in the continuity of images, while at the same time understanding that this continuity is possible only through fragmentation.



One important distinction in French is between *souvenir* and *mémoire*. The *souvenir* is the very near recollection of what you've lived, seen or experienced. The *souvenir* is already a story. *Mémoires* are unreconstructed elements made of rough cuts; a pre-story. If you undergo psychoanalysis you try to retrieve from your unconscious elements which arrive in very rough shapes. The *mémoire* is a pre-story, to speak of memory is to speak in fragments, and it's interesting for cinema to look for these rough elements of memory, more than for souvenirs, to gather rough scenes of what has been experienced, rather than pre-digested tales. That's the difference between television and cinema. Television is at the level of *souvenirs* while *mémoires* belong to the cinema.

Television images have no time for depth, because they have to go on, there's no time to lose. But I believe cinema is made to lose time, to have good times. This is also a way for memory to work. Cinema constructs a specific time for its stories, but it's important to create new times for thinking about emotions and memory. Television fits into a social, collective time. It's a lie, we know that, but television pretends to be in the "real time" of society, with its economics and news tickers, but is this the time of our minds and souls or only a pretentious lie? Cinema is completely different, it is in charge of creating a different temporal politics. In the cinema we lose time, and this loss works against the organized social time we're living in. This is the politics of time.





Oedipal Compass

Mike: Wait, wait. Are you thinking my thoughts? Or rather: are you thinking the thoughts of my future self? How strange to find you talking in the same direction (this is the first step in making a biography, to find a picture which is looking in the same direction), you who have been so committed to the documentary for these many years, and me, lonely fringe straggler, who has known few roads at all, but instead the field. In the cinema there is a road, and beside the road a field. Most movies hike the road, they travel in order to arrive, to be at The End. To disclose, to know. Fringe movies, on the other hand, graze across the field. They may wind up where they started from, though most usually find themselves between, between bodies, between the first kiss and the last one, and the point is not to drive towards closure, but to find your own happiness along the way.

Could there be a politics of pleasure?

I am still haunted, as I listen to you, by the words of the replicants inventor, the father, in *Bladerunner*, as he looks into the eyes of his invented son, the Aryan Rutger Hauer, a Nazi eugenics wet dream come to life. "Revel in your time," he tells his son the robot, before he is strangled.

My Oedipus, my father, my cinema. Revel in your time. And then die. Please don't forget to die. This is my heritage, and now yours too, Jean?





My Life as Pictures

Mike: My life in pictures, as pictures. Yesterday, when I was waiting to go into Kim and Lisa's party, as usual I am caught at the threshold, savouring my fear, relishing it. (I can't go in there. I can't.) I look up to see a sky filled with puffy cumulous clouds. Oh, the Simpsons, I thought. Yes, the sky belongs to the Simpsons, or at least those clouds, this moment, and armed with that knowledge was able to shuffle my feet towards the door, where a roomful of uncertainties lay in wait. The awkwardness of having to gather without pictures to wrap around us. Small talk and canapés providing fuel for first worlders of discomfort.





Sex Hotel

Mike: Jean, we spoke in the morning, just after breakfast, but while you were speaking, laying down that red carpet of words which invites me to join, to take my place, to understand, I was a bit distracted. I can admit this only now, back home in Toronto, crouched inside the safety of my computer. The night before I had cut out early from the festival, already having seen too many good movies, and too many not-so-good ones, now it was time to digest alone, back in the hotel. The hotel is severe and opulent at the same time, a former monastery, big wood beams score the room, and the school marms that helm the desk give off an atmosphere of faint disapproval that I find bracing. Imagine my surprise when I enter to find a teenaged manchild screaming his lungs out, not in pain or greeting, just screaming his "I am" cry in drunken happiness while mom isn't looking up at all, busying herself with some moment of accounting, as if it wasn't happening at all. A tremendous buzz pours through from some distant wing, and revelers are poking their way across the labyrinth of hallways downstairs. Like everywhere else in the Czech Republic, this party, this hotel, belongs to the very young.

Wondering if I would be getting any sleep tonight (what day was it exactly? Someone else's weekend perhaps) I climbed the stairs to the top floor, just three stories up. The floor is divided into two wings, separated by a massive stone intrusion. I begin hearing sounds, familiar, unmistakable, but not yet distinct. I'm facing the stone wall and these sounds are growing louder now, more perfect, more fully themselves as I round the corner to see, lying right in front of my door, a beautiful young couple doing some serious fucking. Both are moaning, heads turning, pants half off, hunkered down on the carpet in this most secluded spot. I wait there a moment, then walk on towards them and reach for my keys which sound like someone has put dynamite inside a church bell, bang crash go the keys in my hand, and I approach walking neither slow nor fast. Migod they are lovely, the two of them, and they can hear me now. You know the way a stranger's face will turn towards you on the subway if you're looking at them too long? Some distant early warning system says someone is looking even though your eyes are pointing the other way. You know. And they know you know. That's how I walk towards them, almost close enough to touch, and then close enough, and they never flinch, or try to hide themselves, or miss a single, furious tender stroke. I walk past and they never break rhythm, those long



slow strokes and the quick urgent ones. The story of oh. It never stops as I fumble the key and oh it doesn't fit and why isn't this door handle turning and how do I do this again? And finally the door is open and they never look up because they are having their moment, perfect and together and giving it all up, no room for strangers or distractions, they know that pleasure is a serious business and they're getting on with it. Half an hour later a jangle of key chains and belts and a soft murmuring of voices, and then they're off and out of there. I had a camera in my room and thought should I? But couldn't bear the chance of ruining their perfect moment. How many do we get in a lifetime? They're still young, they think it goes on and on, but my camera self knows better. The camera can wait, but the image remains, even as you're speaking Jean, about the kinds of memory which are already stories, and the other kind, dangerous sometimes, repulsive sometimes, strangely beautiful at others, the difficult task of beginning the work of the mémoire, the fragment.

They had no shame, can you imagine? A body without shame. They remind me that montage can also occur in a single image, that something can be missing, something which should be present, which is always present, may be missing, and this can conjure montage. Montage is not only about addition and multiplication, but also subtraction and division. They take it away, they remove it, their shame, and so remove my own. Three bodies joined in the pleasure of shamelessness. I could kiss them for that. I am kissing them now.



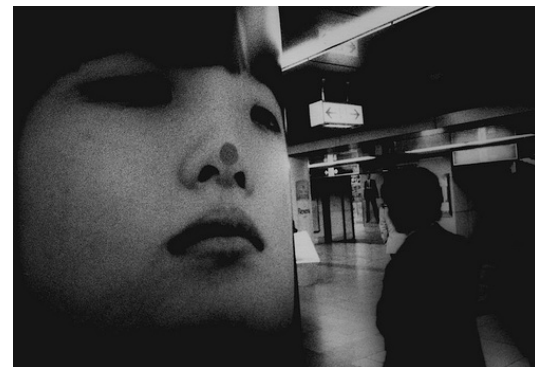


Sound and Picture

Mike: The sound of Jean Perret's voice accompanies the image of this couple having sex. These pictures and sound belong together, natural companions. Unlike my camera which delivers to me the lie of synchronous sound. Look, look, the lips move and the sound issues exactly in time. But this is not synchronous, this is only the machine speaking. The way I experience sound, the breath of the voice, is never in a continuous stream. Some words disappear before they are spoken, while others enter me like a virus, and perform themselves, repeat themselves, over and again. One of video's necessary catastrophes is the marriage of sound and image, both arrive at the same time, as if they belonged together. Mounted on top of the video camera is the phallus (though the relation is illusory, the sound is only a slave to the image, following it, no matter where). The shotgun microphone provides sound for this shotgun marriage, not even as accompaniment, but already as part of the image, a subset to be sure, a lesser quality, a serf, part of the underclass, like shadow detail. In this duet, the image leads and the sound follows, inevitably, presenting, as usual, the utopian illusion of real life.

Once again the chemical cinema (as opposed to the electronic one) is instructive, this production respects a strict separation of powers (church and state, sound and image), and while they may be joined again on the editing table, this is a conscious choice, a decision. Video delivers both, and so provides an inexorable gravity, an overwhelming tendency, towards synchronous sound. Till death do us part. Enshrined in the halls of cinema vérité (Whose vérité? Whose cinema?) the illusions of transparency are maintained (I am not my camera, this is not a picture). The white man, the heterosexual couple, the union of sound and image.

Walter Ong: If a picture is worth a thousand words, why does it have to be a saying?





Forgetting

Jean: Memory is related to forgetting. Forgetting is a necessary part of memory, if our daily life with memory were always awake we would explode. What we forget are the logical, constructed stories and explanations of our past. But they are not lost to us. In your computer you have many files, you may not know all the names, you forget the details, but you have them on your hard disk. They are part of your memory even if you don't remember them.

The unremembered is the largest part of our memory. It is out of the unremembered that the *mémoire* arrives. The *mémoire* is a deep bodily complex of many things we had in our lives. The *mémoire* is a body expressing in very different ways, some part of ourselves. One can observe in the special behaviour of people who are unable to live inside accepted explanations, that their actions are impelled by memory, by the unconscious body of their memory. We watch their body remembering. Sometimes this memory is violence because memory is a wild piece of the body inside ourselves. Memory isn't a discursive organization but something untamed. In terms of psychology, we can find some expressions of our memory in the storytelling of dreams, where we always face fragments which don't connect exactly. They produce impossible stories, which are also an image of memory.

The *mémoire* can arrive in daily life, for instance, when we fall in love, this is an action also related to memory. In love we open ourselves to our fears, acknowledge our need to be comforted, to be recognized. To fall in love is something very brutal, it's not explainable, or logical, because it's related to this deep field of *mémoire*. *Mémoire* is the state before the story, the structure, before explanations. Le material brut.

The *souvenir* is something different, it's already a story with a beginning and an end. It's something ordered and organized. But memory is on the side of disorder.



Memory is a Dead Body



Mike: How do the pictures which surround us — the movies for instance, both large and small, the ones that play everywhere at once, around the world, but also the home-made movies, which might play just a few times, around the corner — what is the relation between these pictures and the *memoire*? Do movies have a role in shaping these fragments? Do they allow them to erupt, and provoke their appearance?

Jean: Sometimes it's possible to feel, as a spectator, that the filmmaker is dealing with a confused body of images (typically in work by new filmmakers), trying to tell stories in order to be connected with his/her *mémoire*. Some filmmakers try to suggest paths between the film they are making and their *mémoire*. I can recognize this in connection with deeply forgotten feelings of the unconscious.

Another level is to have your own memory touched by this process. A film can arouse out of your memory some moments which can be activated. Memory is a dead body, a sleeping body, of many fragments related to your life. Sometimes a film, or a sequence, or just a shot, is able to awake some part of this sleeping *mémoire*.





The Film Looks at you

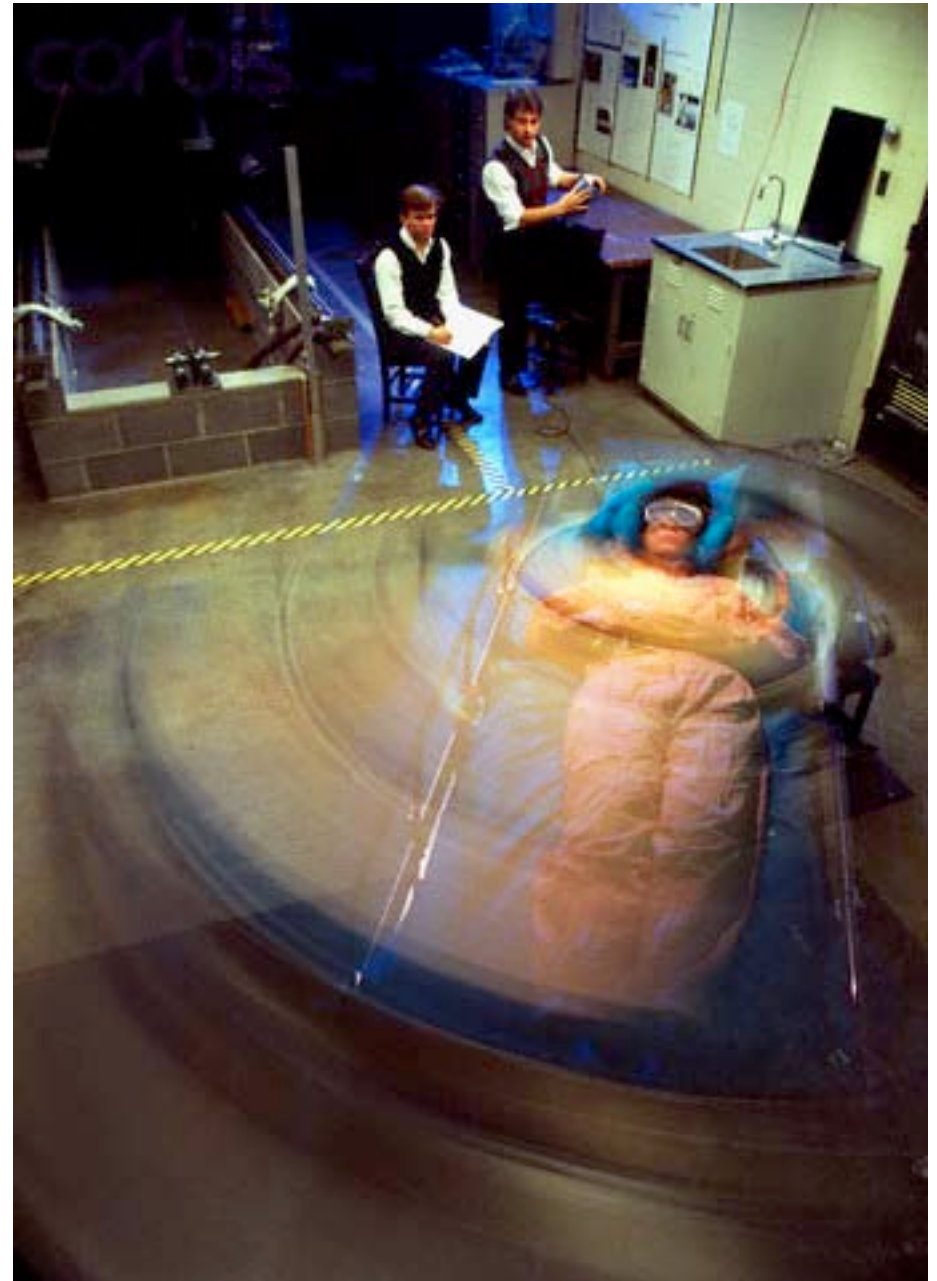
Jean: I like what Roland Barthes said, that in a text or picture, one can find both the studium and punctum. Studium means to study, if you face a film you can study its structure of unfolding, you can make of this film a good piece of study. Barthes says that film also has its punctum, a point, the film is pointing to you, in you, it's something you're not able to prevent. The film looks at you, touching a specific point in yourself and vice versa. Looking at the film you find one detail, one moment, and make of this fragment something very personal and deep for yourself. You will be the only lonesome spectator looking at this punctum, attaching this fragment of film with yourself. Why? That is the mystery of your personality, between the film's memory and your own memory something is connecting and it belongs to you. It's very intimate. I wonder if you could call this in English, remembrance.



The Business of Stories



Jean: We are part of a tradition of memory which derives from nineteenth century literature, and this underlies the daily business of communication. The main doxa is to tell simplified stories everyone can understand, and these stories give the impression that truth is being told. That truth is a transparent matter. The main doxa says that we can film a story and convey the impression of what happened. We are bound in a literate tradition, with all these old ways to explain everything, which grants the reader a comfortable place where he can see and understand without any troubles. As a result, storytelling in today's cinema, and often in documentary, is a way to lie.





Politics of Time 2

Jean: There is also the question of time. The souvenir of memory is the time of stories, and most of us are living in a social, daily time, amidst films which tell logical stories. These films replay the industrial time of their creation, of the rest of our lives, in their logical, ordered stories. Time is always organized in the same way.

But the *mémoire* is another way of experiencing time, and this is important, as a personal and political gesture. Mike, in your films you create texts which dis-organize the use of time. You use fragments of other films, displacing the original times of these stories to pose another time; in your films you have not only one time but many. This cluster of time is a way to deal with memory, this dis-organization of social time is a poetic and social responsibility for filmmakers. Industrial time disconnects us from memory, kills our fantasies, our eyes, our social time reduces the complexities and beauty of the world to a couple of stories we are made to listen to all our lives. I'm being very schematic here, that's for sure. It's difficult in a foreign language, in the English you're making me speak.

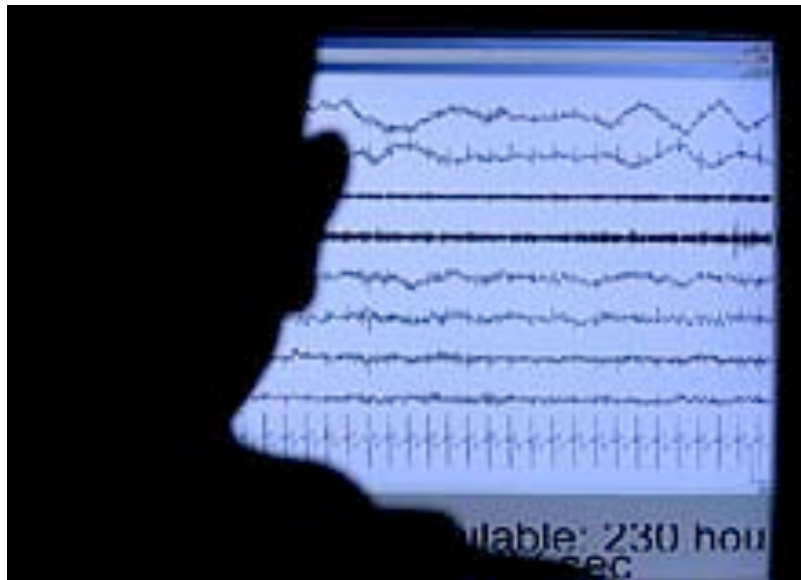
The cinema of the *mémoire* might produce a meditation which tries to make unknown connections between thoughts and feelings, re-organize different times, put memories together in a different way, and in doing this one discovers that you're not only a reaction to daily life. You're not simply a symptom, a response to stimuli. In order not to be institutionalized, you have to behave according to a certain order, this acceptance is necessary to function. But it's also necessary to refuse this acceptance and to step outside (where time is past and present).





No Censorship IS

Jean: On the first level, the past is the souvenir, which narrates well rehearsed and well known organized events of the past. It is a story of the past with censorship, arranged in a structure you make possible. In this story you remain in a good light, you may suffer as a victim, but only to provoke compassion. In the mémoire, on the other hand, there is no censorship. The first basic voice of memory is a voice without censorship.



Silver Wound



Mike: It's my feeling that the cinema gives but also takes, that for those who are truly committed to it there is a wound, a silver wound onscreen, which is replicated and repeated again in its viewer. Somewhere in the body of the viewer one can find a mark, a tattoo, and this mark shows the cinema at work. Can the mémoire exist as a social space?





Postcard

Jean: The mémoire lies in a field with your intimate privacies, intimate ways to be happy, to suffer, and as I get older, with mourning, it takes up the intimate nature of mourning. The mémoire is also a way to live with dead people, working around you and in yourself. This is important. You're not supposed to think every day, in an organized way, of people who died, but you have them in your mémoire. Sometimes a sentence fragment can come up in your mind from someone you knew, and that fragment makes life possible, though often you don't know you even have these fragments. This gives time depth. Mémoire is a deep time. The souvenir is not so deep, it's more like a postcard.

The sociologist Pontalis has written about the mémoire, and he expresses doubts that we have a collective memory (for instance, a Jewish collective memory of the holocaust). The mémoire, for him, is something entirely personal.

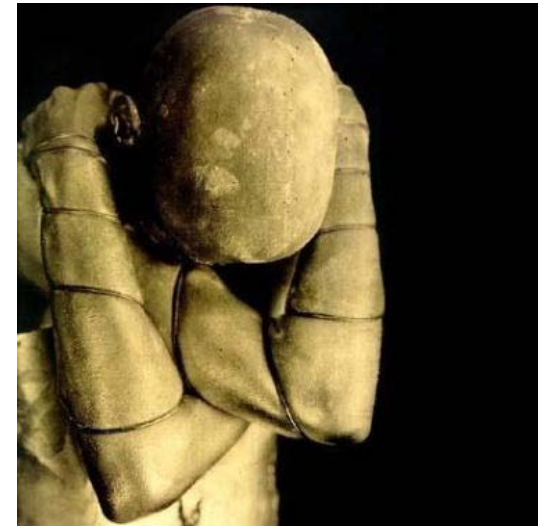




Sex as Politics

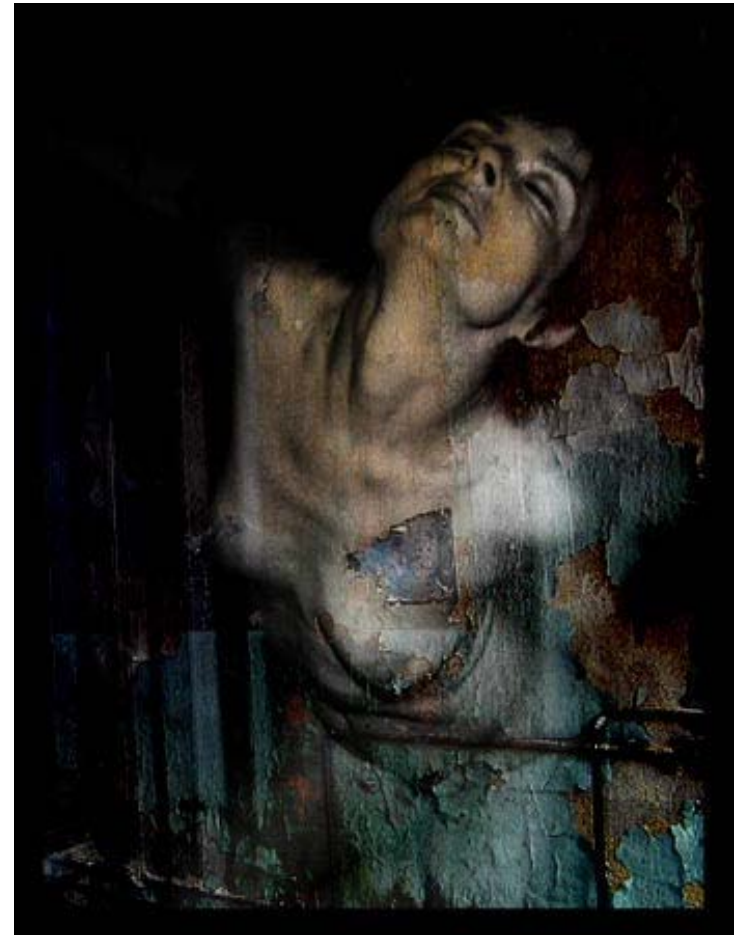
Jean: A few days ago I read a newspaper review about a novel written by David Grossman whose new book is called in French *I Am Listening With My Body*. In English, however, it's called *In Another Life*. Grossman is a very committed Jewish peace activist, angry with Sharon's government, and for him it is a political matter to speak about singular bodies. He insists that intimacy is a conquest, that the fragile territory of intimacy is troubled by the tyranny of politics. One way to exist in freedom is to acknowledge the voice of your body. Listening to the memories of your body is already a political act.

Mike: I have been dragging this question around lately as the nature of my intimacy has changed. As my relations of touch are less "decent" or "respectful," certainly less equal, in other words, as the sexual act at last includes the indecent and appalling, the shameful, the powerless and helpless, the deep grief and sadness, along with an ecstasy which is hardly human. I have felt exactly these mémoires of pleasure, alongside older mémoires of pain, which can be reconvened in the present as pleasure. These memories of others which I've experienced through my body do not arrive as stories until after, (afterwards they tell me, "You touched me like my father," or "That was the man who raped me") but at the moment it is happening between us, it is happening again, not in the flushed tones of recollection, but occurring once more, horribly and beautifully rising up out of the body where it's been stored these too many years. The same memory can be "touched" again and again, though not in a dependable, read-the-manual sort of way, and different parts of this moment might arrive. It is a nearly infinite moment with a boundless number of faces and shadings.



For too long I have been, I fear, a lover content with the body's souvenirs, the first story the body tells, like this, and this, touch me here. It's the story that makes sex work, the kind of sex that can be shown with a video camera perhaps, because it's still part of the visible world. But the *mémoire* you describe, with its unexpected, sometimes dangerous eruptions which might occur through submission (I'm not speaking here of the costumed variety though it might could do), or some gesture which banishes us, the two of us (so far, but why not three or eleven? Does pleasure come in pairs, like hands and eyes? Or is it as multiple as the skin?) puts us outside the socially organized time of the souvenir, and allows memory to begin to work, and shape new kinds of pleasure. When I asked you if the *mémoire* could take a social form, I wasn't thinking yet of this forum, but hoping somehow that cinema might be that place. Now I'm wondering if it might be possible to make a sex film which could show the *mémoire*, though in the end it would only be viewed by strangers, the public, in public time, in other words, as pornography. Or is it possible that some new form of cinema can carry these *mémoires*, can provide a punctum for its viewers, who are not over there, but rising up in the heat of it? Perhaps this is too much to ask for, a reach beyond the place of pictures. And yet.

Jean: Our bodies carry memories of every kind of wound. If you broke your leg, your body has a memory of that. If you have been hurt psychologically, your body similarly has a memory of that. And these memories can be roused, just as you have described, through touch.



Stealing Fire



Mike: I've been dreaming about the myth of Prometheus again. P is punished for the hubris of stealing fire, he is chained to a rock where a bird visits him each day and eats his liver. At night the organ grows again and the cycle continues. This is also a story about a recurrent patterning of the body, an obsessive pooling of memory around certain moments in the body, which long to be visited again and again. But wait, could this also be an image of pleasure? Couldn't we see in his captivity a mixture of high and low (even though chained, Prometheus carries the memory of the other place, of how high he had managed to get), painful as it is, he is now doing the work of the Gods (and so is God-like). Could we imagine that, over time, he might look forward to the visit of his only visitor, this bird who knows no language save the touch of appetite? Couldn't we re-imagine this myth as an erotic tale? And couldn't we go further and append to it the last words that Camus used to describe another Greek tragic hero, Sisyphus: that one must imagine Prometheus happy? Even: in ecstasy. Heaven sent, borne on a wing, and embodied.

Jean: I read a Japanese novel which told the story of a couple joined in a strong sexual relationship. At last the young Japanese woman has to get married and leaves this man and it's finished, it's over. The writer describes how they are completely, traumatically, together making love, and completely alone. Each of them loves the other while at the same time they are alone. Dealing in these moments with the needs of your own body, taking from the other what you need, instead of giving.

I was speaking with a friend of mine who likes to make love to women. I made a stupid joke asking about the difference between a woman who makes love for herself, taking her orgasm, and a woman who gives her orgasm to you. It's not the same feeling. It's not the same gesture of memory or how to share your memory or involve your body (every part of it) in this love and sex making.



Mike: Yes, I know this feeling very well. It's led me to have orgasms inside my body, sometimes several across an evening, but only to avoid some kind of sharing. No, sorry, this isn't for you. I keep them inside. As if they were a gift, as if my body thinks of this release as a gift which can't be shared. Little by little, suddenly. This protection and withholding is also a way of refusing this new time we are having together, by continuing it (time without end). In English we have the expression "Making time" which means: to make love. An out-of-date usage but nonetheless (a time which belongs to another time?): Are you making time with him? With her? This time, as you suggest, is exactly the time of the *mémoire*, not the *souvenir*. It is the time which two people have to create together because it's not already there, given and laid out. Not a story to be told, but invented. Again and again, as if for the first time.

Jean: During this intimate sex you can express as much violence as tenderness, the memory of your body may carry a need to express violence. Sadomasochism is a genre of sexuality which expresses itself in particular rituals dedicated to the recollection of the *mémoire*.





Falling (in love)

Mike: When John Berger met up with a photographer friend in France he was walked through the idea of temporal span, that the mark of any successful photograph is not that it manages to capture a slice of a moment, but instead, that it contains the past and future in it, that it contains a 'span' of time which is revealed in an instant. This has something to do with looking and with desire, in our culture, these terms often belong together. When we meet someone and fall in love I think this experience, this kind of looking, also narrates a 'temporal span.' I think that desire, as a function of the unconscious, knows very well the precise attributes which are required (a man who has been sexually abused, a woman who is dominating), attributes which are not in evidence 'at first glance', or at least, not to anyone glancing from afar. But in the state of looking which precedes the fall of falling in love, there is an openness to the world which I believe relates to the openness required for the documentary filmmaker. A new kind of opening, an aperture of the eyes, a willingness to allow the Other entrance, and in order to find the Other, the outreach of desire is enacted, and so knowing is this outreach, that all of what may pass between these two people, barely met, is already contained in 'the look of love.' Am hoping you could comment on 'temporal span' on looking 'as if in love' and the documentary cinema, the cinema du réel.



Jean: Is there a "right moment" in Cinéma du Réel? We know the right moment for great photographers such as Henri Cartier-Bresson or Robert Frank for example. But what does "the right moment" mean for the documentary, the feature film and television? Is it "random programming" (Nicolas Philibert)? How does one create the possibility of the "decisive", "unique" moment that will ensure success? For the debate on the existence (or non-existence?) of the "right moment" in Cinéma du Réel we propose four central themes: the choice of subject, the shooting, the editing and the reaction of the audience.

For a start, the subjects or the development of the theme can be decisive in defining the "right moment": What are the strategies used by professionals during the development of subjects and the planning of a program to propose the right subject at the "right time"? How are the formats for documentaries on television defined to avoid them being dependent only on events in the news? During the shoot, how to be at the heart of the action, "where it is all happening?" How to capture the moment? How does one integrate the "right moment" within the narrative structure? What is the filmmaker's position regarding reality and how does this translate into the "right moment"? What happens if one refuses the "spectacular," the "unique," therefore the "right moment". Another outlook? Another perspective? Another relation to time? Can the camera create the right moment? Who makes the "right moment" possible? Isn't "the right moment" created by the camera? What is the relation between the editing and the "right moment?" Isn't a successful film du réel, an alignment of "right moments?" Or is it just the opposite? Isn't the notion of the "right moment" one of the objectives at the editing stage? Or are these moments of knowledge? If the editing goes against the grain of the filmed images, could it be that the capacity to give meaning to the moment is prolonged? How does the documentary position the audience around the "right moment?" How does the audience proceed with the different ways of perceiving and experiencing this "moment?" How are these different ways audiences see "their personal," "decisive moments" expressed? Is there a place for the viewers to find and maybe even to invent their own moments in the film? For some of us there are undoubtedly incredible, profound moments that leave others cold. There surely must exist "non-moments" which are "good moments."





Rescued by Fatigue

Jean: I meet many people because of my work. I ask questions and listen to their stories about the films they're making. Most often, it's a one-way discussion, a monologue. Many filmmakers possess a necessary selfishness, necessary because their work requires strength and ego, it's not easy to make films I know. But this listening produces a deep fatigue from which I will never recover.

Being tired is also a way to add to your memory.

As soon as something is stored in your memory you can't erase it, except by dying. You can't decide to erase something, it's impossible. For me the circus of making this festival, its rounds and encounters, will vanish. It's of no importance. I can't take it, or take myself, too seriously. I'm serious in my commitment but can't take myself too seriously. Listening to people gives depth to my tiredness, it's a good feeling because it's a way to recollect myself. I would be lost in these travels if I wasn't so tired. This is a way I have to come back to myself, to feel my body again. I'm rescued by this fatigue.

I need to be more than a speaking subject, a convincing actor in social time, I need to leave this place in order to come back to myself. Like in the act of making love. Pushing, giving, receiving, sometimes in the same gesture. Sometimes you have to leave in order to receive a gesture from someone else. It's fort and da. I go back to my body, to my home in Geneva, to the effects of all this on myself. It's how I can keep romance alive. While meeting people sometimes it happens that you fall in love, or you fall into falling in love. Or with a friend, even without sex, it can be a falling into friendship, and in these moments tiredness is not an issue anymore, you're at another level.







Jean: Speaking with many people, being accepted and received, becoming more or less well known, all this is important for my ego, of course, I have to be aware of that. I also have selfishness. I am also trying to convince my father that I am a good son. I am trying to show to my mother who died of exhaustion that I am the one they were expecting.

All this tiredness in meetings is a way to have the feeling of something unique, an emotion, a smile, a tear, something deep in the body of your memory.







TOUCHING PICTURES



**JEAN PERRET
MIKE HOOLBOOM**

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