

Death In The Eye

La Mort dans l'œil

*Criticism of Cinema as Vision, Domination, Falsification,
Eradication, Fascination, Manipulation, Devastation, Usurpation*



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The movie *La mort dan l'oeil* is online (in french) at:

www.zagdanski.com

EXCERPTS

Traduction Oona Bijasson



“Image is the very substance of non-contradiction. Stillness its trademark. What it captures, it limes, softens, melts – like a fire indeed. It can only make reality its own by contaminating it by its *indecisive* vacuity.” p.17



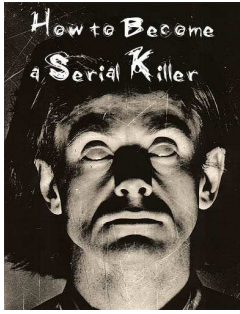
“Bloody tyrannies, barbarous despotisms, savage totalitarisms are but damaged deviations of Socrates’ Republic, perverse dispensations from this ideal of supreme power which consists in preventing in order not to have to punish.

The true nature of power is dissuasive in the sense that, ideally, it should never have to make a show of force.

Why?

Because *no sooner is it embodied than it abrades itself*.

It will be necessary to wait for the Lumière Cinematograph to see this ideal platonician power, the substance of which is Threat, massively applied.”
p.31



“When one loves cinema, one consumes death.” p.36



“What is what we call *Real TV*? A show on which voyeurism and exhibitionism join with the sadistic threat of an expulsion in suspense. The principle is to make devotion to Economics – that is to say vile world of Work – *desirable*. *Real TV* must terrorize the audience by proxy, playfully and democratically. Therefore they, the audience, are in charge of voting the exclusions : one never is so well enslaved as by oneself. By designating which loser will come and join them on the distraught people’s side, the audience thus make their own evacuations through unemployment and, finally, *the absence of shelter*, slightly less inescapable.” p.38



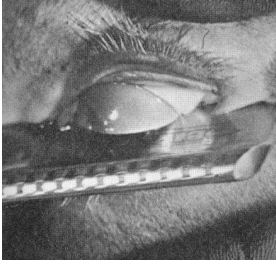
“Cinema is not one among so many others inventions like the montgolfier, the locomotive, the electric bulb, the telephone or the zip fastener. It is a lock between two visions of the world : the vision of its romantic ancestor – photography, and the vision of its rather degenerate philosophico-political offspring – digital video, which should be considered as cybernetics of which digital imagery is but a province.” p.55



“Image is eugenicist. It is endlessly trying to improve reality, its rival, and mainly the human species. Can a television programme be imagined today without making up, or an advertising photo without touching up with a graphics palette?

Image is hygienist. The supreme improvement consists in getting rid of what can soil the initial purity to which it aspires. Undoubtedly marked by the fixing silver salts of his brother Louis, and impressed by the visual feeling of *power* given by the unstoppable X-rays projector (discovered the same year as the family machine), Auguste Lumière, immunologist, intended to cure tuberculosis with *gold salts*.

Image is nazi. The perfection of its intention corresponds to a final solution to the problem of Time, that is to say the annihilation of reality regarded as a huge and unbearable *rush* of itself.” p.60



“In the wonderful world of cinematographical ideology, nothing is created, nothing is destroyed, everything is reprocessed and transformed into servant of Image.” p.81



“The peak of reproductibility is thus reached nowadays with digital synthesis, as it soon will be with *human* cloning. The connection between Image and genetic engineering is by no means trifling. These two concepts merge into the one of *cloning* – that is to say a complete reiteration, without any left-over or scrap, taking all the space of reality which this reiteration is supposed to re-produce. Image and genetic engineering are therefore metaphysically linked *since Plato*. To foresee this metaphysical status preceding any optical objectivation, one just needs to know that Image is also an Idea, both designated by the same word in Greek : *eidōs*.” p.84

“Cinema is tormented by the morbid desire to have done with Reality, which is nothing but Time. But cinema ignores Time. Its only solution consists in taking on reality, taking on the flow of phenomena which Time lets dawn out of itself. Substantially totalitarian, cinema claims to be everything to everybody, so much so that reality should have no more the ability to extricate itself from its oblivion net, to extirpate itself from its nightmare of annihilation.” p.98



“The contemporary disaster movie (*Armageddon*, *Independence Day*, *The Day after Tomorrow*...) in which the planet is within an ace of utter vitrification (it *has* to end well, so that the Threat may dwell in the audience’s minds ; that is the very principle of *suspense*, *the lengthening of which is carried on* from movie to movie) is but the fantasy, projected onto its subject, of this annihilation eating away at itself since the day it was born.

The “sprayer sprayed” of nothingness is the cinematograph.

Cinema is an eye concealing itself as it is looking, to the point of mistaking its invisible imposture for the reality to which it claims to give access to. The principle of cinema is the same as that of power : *to erase the marks of its erasure*.

There is a perfect parable of this in *The Big Swallow* (1901), a little British fantasy which drives the symbol of “the sprayer sprayed” into a corner. A gentleman wearing a hat, a stick and a pince-nez, is strolling, *reading a book*, when he realizes angrily that he is filmed. He loses its temper, gesticulates, comes close to the lens to the point where his face is taking all the screen, and finally gulps down the camera, the cameraman, as well as the abstract gazes of the audience. After a few seconds of black screen, the gentleman goes back chewing contentedly the mechanico-human equipment which had been trying to swallow him without permission. Improved version of *The Sprayer Sprayed* (improved since it is impossible to transpose it to drama), the film is both ingurgitated and regurgitated as the show of its own disappearance.

In the end, Image always win.” p.100



“Science is completely deprived of imagination. Its most beautiful finds first were errors ; it made its most scheming discoveries by chance, believing it was mistaking. Science can only make progress by going back on what it has done, by disproving, step by step, its past victories. It remains doomed to calculus, therefore to quantitativity. In the world of quantitativity, science, after the laborious sequencing of the human genome, only records a ridiculous difference of 13,000 genes between man and the fruit fly. Science can make a plane fly a thousand times faster than an eagle, it will soon be able to reproduce a man identically – cloning is the *height* of digital ideology – but it is utterly unable to *imagine* a giraffe, to *invent* a kangaroo or to *create* a baobab. In the best of cases, science only succeeds in plagiarizing Nature, as radar imitates the bat or sonar imitates the dolphin.

And as cinema plagiarizes life.” p.35



“It is useless elaborating for hours on the so little sibylline case of pornographic cinema. The latter has considerably developed from the seventies, through the video cassettes trade, precisely at the time when the practice of artificial insemination were booming. This is no secret. In Sweden, broadcasting porn movies 24 hours a day was an integral part of a governmental programme for controlling birth rates.

Besides being a common profitable trade, pornography is then an instrument of propaganda, crude but efficient, *servicing the manipulation of living species*.

In other words, *the porn industry ensures the promotion of sperm banks*. While the latter are recruiting anonymous spurters and selling their icy merchandise all over the world on the Internet, contemporary porn has not anymore reasons to conceal its promotional function behind the screen of scenarios of which stupidity seems to escape only the actors... *Gang banging* has then become its most recent and logical entertainment.” p.170



“Nihilism is a hatred of Time.” p.198



“By putting before the eyes of the socially integrated human being the entertaining slaughter of a plausible end, the Threat organizes a *dissembling exhibition* in the precise aim of submitting the audience to work. The Threat is based on the double principle of *Leaving the Lumière Factory* and *L’Arrivée en gare du train de La Ciotat*. The two components initially separated – emancipation and shattering – have been integrated in a single show, all the more efficient since it is more entertaining. The social efficiency of emancipation and shattering is due to the fact that both remain as artificial as fleeting, since filming people leaving a factory helps it to run better, and the Threat itself would be sent into oblivion by achieving it.” p.214

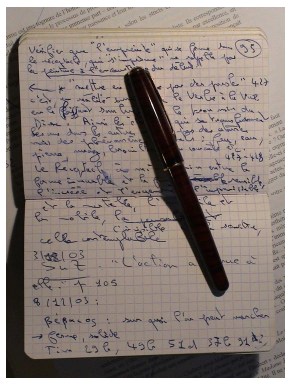
“Cinema fantastically shows itself as non-evolving and non-subject at birth. It creates nothing, it contents itself with *picking up*, drawing up a perceptible reality which accepts the burden of time understood as birth and evolution, that is to say as *begetting*.

Since the first advertisements for the Lumière father’s factory and family, the universal enthusiasm aroused by cinema, save for a few writers – the best – can be explained by that millennial narcissistic greed, that fanatical chimera convulsing mankind enslaved by Reflection, stirring and livening up but in crowds, pathetically desiring to enjoy – but *always in crowds* – a radical immobility, delegating first any movement, any stir, then any chitchat and finally any reverie to a huge blind mirror, a twinkling lure in the back of a theater as dark as a church from where all prayers, all meditations, all songs, all benedictions, all readings, all studies, all statues, all paintings, all *miracles* would have fled... but to where, on the other hand, all merchants rushed without the slightest hesitation.

Cinema resorbs reality and detemporalizes life – the reason for its partiality for anticipation as for reconstruction of history, two sides of the same kitsch of non-thought.

Cinema epiphanizes mobile vitality in order to make an artificial eternity, a contradictory liveliness happen : the ghostly unwinding of its 24 negatives per second.

Cinema *mimics* night, day, rain, snow, it imitates flesh *and word* : it is a world built on a thousand morbid mimetisms.” p.217



“Language – more precisely the non-philosophically marked out use of language that literature is – makes platonic time out of joint. The free use of words is to the contemplation of Ideas what political freedom is to the gaol-shaped City. Language and writing, claims Baudelaire in its *Fusées*, are “magical operations”, “evocative sorcery” ; but old Plato knitting his austere brows *knows it well*.

What does he know exactly?

That words quench thought. That the word defies the law. That literature vitalizes what spirit has kept silent. That speech summons up feelings the anarchy of which escapes the soul’s purr. In brief : one word draws a thousand words.

Language is the absolute weapon of the Other.” p.227



“Human zoo and cinema are full of the same imperialistic ideology. They correspond to such a condensation of extent that the whole temporal acid, the dissociating substance par excellence, are definitely wringed from it. “The world tour in one day!” claimed the bills of the Vincennes Colonial Exhibition. And in his stupid inaugural speech, Paul Reynaud, Minister of Colonies, clearly stated the relationship between the desire for domination and the spectacular ubiquity : “At this moment, thanks to the Pontoise set, inaugurated yesterday, the sound of the voice you are hearing can be listened to in Noumea, in Hanoi, in Dakar, in Fort-de-France. Our hold over the world tightens every day.” p.252

“The human zoo, with the artificial visitation and the true morbid domination it entails, coupled at least once in concrete terms on screen. It happened in a nazi propaganda documentary film intituled *The Führer offers a city to the Jews*. The prisoners of Theresienstadt were requisitioned to play their own manly and almost enviable part in their new life in the open air, far from the ghetto. Sport, concerts, children laughing and playing, all was a comedy ordered by death. Those miserable wretches had to come out of the shadows they had become for the highest glory of a regime which slaughtered them all, extras and cameramen together, once the film was made and shown.

What a good illustration of the mortiferous essence of Image.” p.255



“Cinema crosses out nothing. The *rush* is a scrap, not a crossing out. The camera feels no remorse, the projector conceals no regret on the screen. Everything is equalized by the laminating design.

Cinema does not cross out, it amasses irreversibly. The rush precisely is that irredeemable *rush* of the dead image moving mechanically to produce not live movement but its *illusion* by combination, conglomeration of almost twin photographs. We know that the difference between the twenty-four images buried into one second of film is not visible to the eye, when simply looking at the film without projecting it. From this tiny scotomisation endlessly reiterated comes the awful falseness of filmed life. Cinema is a death technique which *feigns* life. It *shams* life as an animal is said to sham death in order to escape its predator. That artificial doing is the opposite of true poetry.” p.283



“The three episodes of *Matrix* – a film supposedly dictated by a profound critic of *virtual manipulation* on which it actually feeds and flourishes (the digital special effects are a key to its international success) – appear to be, if the scenario is taken ever so slightly seriously, a huge instrument of warfare for the Image. The contrary would have been somewhat of a surprise on the part of a Hollywood *blockbuster*, but what is more precisely enacted here is the propensity of Image to autoregulate, to auto criticize, to fight and resorb its own hypnotic and despotic noxiousness.

Here is the deception.

What does Image want since Plato? The eradication of Time. Well, in *Matrix*, Time itself is but a computer code, so that the “emancipated” and “subversive” sub-programmes may cover and *decipher* it effortlessly. Emancipation in concrete terms therefore means, in the idiom of Image, *to be rid of Time.*” p.311



“In one century, few writers will have understand cinema for what it was: the purring oculus of death. One can count on the fingers of both hands those who have felt for it, if not utmost contempt, at least the most irrefutable indifference. This isolated guerilla warfare holds in its ranks Mallarmé, Proust, Kafka, Joyce, Artaud, Céline, Hemingway, Faulkner, Nabokov and Debord. They have something noteworthy in common which can offset the billion idolaters on the opposite camp: they are absolute geniuses. Would that be by chance?

The guerilla warfare of geniuses divides into two tactics. Tactics of those who wrote ill of cinema, always in a precise, playful way, without concessions: Céline, Kafka, Artaud, Debord. And tactics of those who have not given it any place in their thought, who have barely made any mention of it in their works, which, in literature, is as significant as if they had devoted long diatribes to it.

Why?

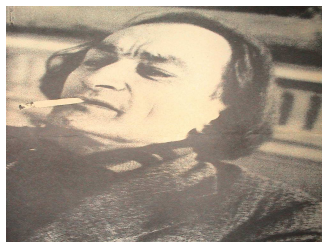
Because following exactly the example of a musician, a writer of genius gives as much profundity to his *silences* as to his stands. Even the most illiterate of cinema enthusiasts (there are any number of them) knows that Rimbaud’s score was as burning in the world of words as in the world of his rupture with them, or at least with their written echo. To believe that a writer does not move on to a theme because he knows nothing about it and has nothing to say about it means you know nothing about writing.

The Word built the universe. It is never at a loss. Its discretions have the density of declarations of war.” p. 323



“When looking mechanically over the world, Image sees not the world but its own despicable greedy flaw. The poisoned scratch of concept has been consumed since the day when Niepce made his first negative. Cinema is no predator of reality; it only feigns to absorb its substance like the snake gobbles up its prey before letting it be slowly dissolve inside it by the acid of its gastric juices. This ingestion of life by Image is of course the megalomaniac and enjoyable fantasy of all cineasts. “To photograph and kill the world” Godard clearly asserts. Actually, by placing itself in a false face-to-face with Nature, Image has already *vitrified* it, it only ingurgitates its own transparency. Its “blinding bedazzlement” – at the same time prestige, pain and picking up – is the devastating vomit of its infectious blindness.

Image is not only the handled result of a record-and-reproduce machine. It is also a *machination*. Image is not a jaw attempting to devour the living fleeing before it. The image hunter is, without his knowing it, his own prey. For when Image stands before the living, it has already substituted itself for it a long time ago. In a way, there has never been anything else, on the screen, than animated design.” p.343



“At Laghouat, Artaud experiences a revelation which can be rightfully described as mystical. Here, in the mineral permanence of extent, Time is not denied nor disintegrated as it is in films, in which the chitchat of human beings who think they are masters and owners of their tiny world bounces on the pall spread for the screen.

Here, the flesh of Time is *unveiled*.

What is shown in films is but a vanity – meaning a narcissism curved by death – of which puerility pulls the strings. The screen is a mask, cinema a *covering* laid on Time by the technique of Image.” p.366