

## Having an Idea in Cinema

*(On the Cinema of Straub-Huillet)*

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Translated by Eleanor Kaufman

I, too, would like to pose some questions. Pose them to you and to myself. They would be in this vein: What exactly do you, who do cinema, do? And for me: What exactly do I do when I do, or hope to do, philosophy?

I could pose the question otherwise: What is having an idea in cinema? If one does or wants to do cinema, what does having an idea mean? What happens when one says: "Wait, I have an idea"? For, on the one hand, everyone clearly knows that having an idea is an event that rarely takes place; it is a sort of celebration, very uncommon. And then, on the other hand, having an idea is not a general thing. One does not have an idea in general. An idea — like the one who has the idea — is already dedicated to this or that domain. It is sometimes an idea in painting, sometimes an idea in fiction, sometimes an idea in philosophy, sometimes an idea in science. And it is certainly not the same thing that can have all that. Ideas must be treated as potentials that are already engaged in this or that mode of expression and inseparable from it, so much so that I cannot say that I have an idea in general. According to the techniques that I know, I can have an idea in a given domain, an idea in cinema or rather an idea in philosophy.

What is having an idea in something?

So I begin again with the principle that I do philosophy and that you do cinema. Given this, it would be too easy to say that since philosophy is prepared to reflect on anything at all, why wouldn't it reflect on cinema? This is ridiculous. Philosophy is not made for reflecting on anything at all. In treating philosophy as a power of "reflecting on," much would seem to be accorded to it when in fact everything is taken from it. This is because no one needs philosophy for reflecting. Only filmmakers or cinema critics, or even those who like cinema, can effectively reflect on cinema. These people have no need of philosophy in order to reflect on cinema. The idea that mathematicians would need philosophy to reflect on mathematics is comical. If philosophy had to

serve as a means of reflecting on something, it would have no reason to exist. If philosophy exists, it is because it has its own content.

What is the content of philosophy?

It is very simple: philosophy is a discipline that is just as creative and inventive as any other discipline, and it entails creating or even inventing concepts. And concepts do not exist ready-made in the sky waiting for a philosopher to seize them. Concepts must be made. To be sure, they are not made just like that. It's not that one just says one day, "Look, I'm going to invent such and such a concept," no more than a painter says one day, "Look, I'm going to make a painting like this," or a filmmaker, "Look, I'm going to make such and such a film!" There must be a necessity, as much in philosophy as elsewhere, for if not there is nothing at all. A creator is not a being who works for pleasure. A creator does only what he or she absolutely needs to do. The fact remains that this necessity — which, if it exists, is a very complex thing — makes a philosopher (and here, I at least know what the concerns of the philosopher are) propose to invent, to create, concepts and not to concern himself or herself with reflecting, even on cinema.

I say that I do philosophy, which is to say that I try to invent concepts. What if I say, to you who do cinema: What do you do?

What you invent are not concepts — which are not your concern — but blocks of movements/duration. If one puts together a block of movements/duration, perhaps one does cinema. It is not a matter of invoking a story or of contesting one. Everything has a story. Philosophy tells stories as well. Stories with concepts. Cinema tells stories with blocks of movements/duration. Painting invents entirely different types of blocks. These are neither blocks of concepts nor blocks of movements/duration, but blocks of lines/colors. Music invents other types of blocks, equally specific. Beside all this, science is no less creative. I don't really see oppositions between the sciences and the arts.

If I ask a scientist what he or she does, the answer is that the scientist also invents. He or she does not discover — discovery exists, but it is not what defines scientific activity as such — but rather creates just as much as an artist. It is not complicated: a scientist is someone who invents or creates functions. And the scientist is the only one. A scientist as such has nothing to do with concepts. On the one hand, it is precisely — and fortunately — for this that there is philosophy. On the other hand, there is one thing that only a scientist knows how to do: invent and create functions. What is a function? There is a function as soon as at least two wholes are put into fixed correspondence. The fundamental notion of science — and not just of late but for a long time — is the notion of the whole. A whole has nothing to do with a concept. As soon as you put wholes into fixed correlation, you obtain functions and can say, "I do science."

If anyone can speak to anyone else — if a filmmaker can speak to a scientist, if a scientist can have something to say to a philosopher and vice versa —

it is according to and by function of each one's creative activity. It is not that talk of creation took place — creation, to the contrary, is something very solitary — but it is in the name of my creation that I have something to say to someone. If I lined up all these disciplines that are defined by their creative activity, I would say that there is a limit common to all of them. The limit common to all these series of inventions — inventions of functions, inventions of blocks of movements/duration, inventions of concepts — is space-time. If all the disciplines communicate together, it is on the level of that which never emerges for itself, but which is, as it were, *engaged* in every creative discipline, and this is the constitution of space-times.

An example of a cinematographic idea is the famous sight-sound dissociation in the relatively recent cinema of Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, the Straubs,<sup>1</sup> and Marguerite Duras, to take the best-known cases. What is common to these, and in what sense is this disjunction of the visual and the auditory a properly cinematic idea? Why could this not take place in theater? Or at least if this happened in theater, if the theater found the means, then one can say without exception that the theater borrowed it from cinema. There is nothing necessarily wrong with this, but the operation of disjunction between sight and sound, between the visual and the auditory, is just the sort of cinematographic idea that would respond to the question, What, for example, is having an idea in cinema?

A voice speaks of something. Something is spoken of. At the same time, we are made to see something else. And finally, what is spoken of is *under* what we are made to see. This third point is very important. You can tell that here is where theater cannot follow. Theater could take up the first two propositions: something is spoken of, and we are made to see something else. But at the same time what is spoken of is placed *under* what we are made to see — and this is necessary since otherwise the first two operations would have no meaning or interest whatsoever. This can be restated: speech rises into air, while the visible ground sinks farther and farther. Or rather, while this speech rises into air, what it speaks of sinks under the ground.

What is this, if only cinema can do it? I am not saying that cinema should do it but that cinema has done it two or three times; I can merely say that it was the great filmmakers who had this idea. This is a cinematographic idea. It is extraordinary in that it provides a veritable transformation of elements at the level of cinema, a cycle that in one stroke makes cinema resonate with a qualitative physics of elements. This produces a sort of transformation, a great circulation of elements in cinema, beginning with air, earth, water, and fire. All that I say does not diminish the story. The story is always there, but what strikes us is why the story is so interesting if not for the fact that all of this is behind it and with it. In this cycle that I have just defined so rapidly — where the voice rises while what it speaks of flees underground — you can recognize most of the Straubs's films, their great cycle of elements. Deserted ground is

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the only thing that can be seen, but this deserted ground is heavy with lies beneath. And you respond: But what is known about what lies beneath? It is precisely of this that the voice speaks. It is as if the ground buckled under what the voice tells us, and with what comes, in its time and place, to the underground. And if the voice speaks to us of corpses, of the whole of corpses that come to reside underground, at this very moment the squawking of wind on the deserted ground, on the empty space under our eyes, the slightest hollow in this ground — all of this becomes clear.

I would say that, in any case, having an idea is not on the order of communication.

↳ This is what I'm getting at. All that we speak of is irreducible to an order of communication. This is not a problem. Which is to say what? In this sense, communication is the transmission and the propagation of a piece of information. But what is a piece of information? As everyone knows, it is not very complicated: a piece of information is a grouping of order-words. When you are informed, you are told what you are supposed to believe. In other words, informing is circulating a keyword. Police statements are called *communiqués*. Information is communicated to us; we are told what we are supposed to be ready or able to do or what we are supposed to believe. Not even to believe but to act as if we believed. We are not asked to believe but to behave as if we believed. That is information, communication. Apart from these order-words and their transmission, there is no information, no communication. All of which underscores that information is precisely a system of control. This is clearly of particular concern to us today.

It is true that we are entering a society that can be called a society of control. A thinker such as Michel Foucault has analyzed two types of societies that are rather close to us. He calls the former sovereign societies and the latter disciplinary societies. He locates the typical passage of a sovereign society to a disciplinary society with Napoleon. Disciplinary society is defined by these structures of confinement: prisons, schools, workshops, hospitals. Disciplinary societies require this. This analysis engendered ambiguities in certain of Foucault's readers because it was believed that this was his last thought. That is certainly not the case. Foucault never believed and indeed said very plainly that disciplinary societies were not eternal. Moreover, he clearly thought that we were entering a new type of society. To be sure, there are all kinds of things left over from disciplinary societies, and this for years on end, but we know already that we are in societies of another sort that should be called to use the term put forth by William Burroughs — whom Foucault analyzed so greatly — societies of control. We are entering into societies of control that are defined very differently from disciplinary societies. Those who look for our interests do not need or will no longer need structures of confinement. These structures — prisons, schools, hospitals — are already sites of pernicious

discussion. Wouldn't it be better to spread out the treatment? To the home? Yes, this is unquestionably the future. The workshops, the factories — they are falling apart everywhere. Wouldn't systems of subcontracting and work at home be better? Aren't there means of punishing people other than prison? Societies of control will no longer pass through structures of confinement. Even the school. The themes that are surfacing, which will develop in forty or fifty years and which indicate that the most shocking thing would be to undertake school and a profession at once — these themes must be watched closely. It will be interesting to know what the identity of the school and the profession will be in the course of permanent training, which is our future and which will no longer necessarily imply the regrouping of school children in a structure of confinement. A control is not a discipline. In making highways, for example, you don't enclose people but instead multiply the means of control. I am not saying that this is the highway's exclusive purpose, but that people can drive infinitely and "freely" without being at all confined yet while still being perfectly controlled. This is our future.

So let us consider information as the controlled system of order-words that are used in a given society.

What does the work of art have to do with this?

Let us not speak of the work of art, but let us at least say that there is counterinformation. There are countries ruled by dictatorships where, under particularly cruel and difficult conditions, counterinformation exists. In the time of Hitler, the Jews who arrived from Germany, and who were the first to inform us of the existence of extermination camps, engaged in counterinformation. It must be noted that counterinformation was never sufficient to do anything. No counterinformation ever disturbed Hitler. Except in one case. What was the case? And here lies its importance. The only response would be that counterinformation only effectively becomes useful when it is — and it is this by nature — or when it becomes an act of resistance. And the act of resistance is neither information nor counterinformation. Counterinformation is effective only when it becomes an act of resistance.

What is the relation between the work of art and communication?

None whatsoever. The work of art is not an instrument of communication. The work of art has nothing to do with communication. The work of art strictly does not contain the least bit of information. To the contrary, there is a fundamental affinity between the work of art and the act of resistance. There, yes. It has something to do with information and communication as acts of resistance. What is this mysterious relation between a work of art and an act of resistance when men who resist have neither the time nor sometimes the necessary culture to have the least relation to art? I don't know. André Malraux develops a beautiful philosophical concept; he says something very simple about art; he says it is the only thing that resists death. Let's return to where we began: What does one do when one does philosophy? One invents con-

cepts. I think this is the basis of a beautiful philosophical concept. Think — What resists death? One need only see a statuette from three thousand years before our time to find that Malraux's response is a rather good one. From our point of view, we could then say, rather less elegantly, that art is what resists even if it is not the only thing that resists. Where does such a close relation between the act of resistance and the work of art come from? Each act of resistance is not a work of art while, in a certain sense, it is all the same. Each work of art is not an act of resistance and yet, in a certain sense, it is.

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Take the case, for example, of the Straubs when they perform this disjunction between auditory voice and visual image, which goes as follows: the voice rises, it rises, it rises, and what it speaks about passes under the naked, deserted ground that the visual image was showing us, a visual image that had no direct relation to the auditory image. But what is this speech act that rises in the air while its object passes underground? Resistance. An act of resistance. And in all of the Straubs' oeuvre, the speech act is an act of resistance. From *Moses and Aaron* to the last Kafka film (*Class Relations*) and passing through — now this is not in order — *Not Reconciled* or *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*. Bach's speech act is his music, which is an act of resistance, an active struggle against the partitioning of the profane and the sacred. This musical act of resistance culminates in a cry. Just as there is a cry in *Woyzeck*, there is a cry in *Bach*: "Outside! outside! Go on, I don't want to see you!" When the Straubs underscore the cry, that of Bach or that of the old schizophrenic in *Not Reconciled*, this reveals a double aspect. The act of resistance has two sides. It is human, and it is also the act of art. Only the act of resistance resists death, whether the act is in the form of a work of art or in the form of human struggle.

What relation is there between human struggle and the work of art?

It is the strictest and for me the most mysterious relation. Precisely what Paul Klee wanted to say when he said: "You know, the people are missing." The people are missing while at the same time they are not missing. The people are missing: that means that this fundamental affinity between a work of art and a people who do not yet exist is not, and never will be, clear. There is no work of art that does not appeal to a people who do not yet exist.

## Note

1. When Deleuze refers to the Straubs, he is actually referring to the team of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet. *Trans.*