

REVIEW OF BOOKS

THE WORD OF HISTORY

Jean Luc Godard, *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Barcelona, Intermedio, 2007.

Reviewed by

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Recent years have given rise to much speculation as to the future of the cinema, almost all related with the museum. In other words, if many of the most interesting contemporary audiovisual works do not find their place in commercial cinema studios, be it due to their format or their aesthetic radicalism, a place will have to be found for them in the cosy rooms of art galleries. This is a dangerous solution, in some ways, in that it spurns the ritual, popular nature of the cinematographer privileging his more elitist facet. Would it not be more coherent, to this end, to reconsider the functions of traditional premises, on the one hand, and for once and for all an educational project that would allow access to the new proposals by their natural public, on the other? This is not the place to list the different relevant solutions –which range from a more imaginative policy on distribution and exhibition to the reinvention of pedagogical systems that are not solely obsessed by the profitability of their proposals understood in a strictly business sense, but also for their capacity to generate *knowledge*--, rather to provide another, yet more daring alternative, but one which has proved possible: the filmic object considered as a book which can be read and seen at the same time.

Some editions on DVD are already fulfilling this function, providing multiuse *packs* to see a film and also read about it, or *related to* it. The recent editions devoted to José Luis Guerín by the distributor Versus and to Pedro Costa or Jean-Luc Godard (in his Dziga Vertov phase) by Intermedio are perfect examples of this possibility. And it has precisely been Intermedio who have released for us, in an impeccable critical edition, the work which goes just that step further by proposing *itself* as an unidentified object, a multidisciplinary creation that would not even have required dissemination on DVD in order to be what it is, since the *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, also hatched by Godard between the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, put an end to the history of the cinema (at least the cinema as we knew it up until a certain moment) to include it in the cultural processes of contemporaneity via its conversion into a literary device.

Be that as it may, Godard's intention is quite clear: to explain the history of the cinema not as it has always been done, that is to say, chronologically, like the story of progress, of an evolution, but through associative mechanisms capable of mixing eras and styles, authors and films of different periods, so that the merely historiographical procedures give way to the writing of the fragmentary and aphoristic essay, in the tradition of Nietzsche and Benjamin, among others. And although its strategy is purely visual, especially in its juxtaposition through the assembly of the different images evoked, the *concept* is literary, from the moment there is an attempt to turn the pages of history just like Godard himself does at several times in his work, enclosed in the solitude of his library. Apart from the fact that the origin of the project lies precisely with a book entitled *Introducción a una verdadera historia del cine*, (1) and even the fact that Godard continued along these lines with several subsequent publications that are essential in order precisely to comprehend his work on film, (2) the strict novelty of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* lies in the fact that now the cinema becomes literature without ceasing to be cinema, inventing a new genre in which everything is possible, from the immediate shift from the image to the word, as happens with the different poetic and novelistic echoes evoked in the course of the journey, to the literal use of the characters of the alphabet as an integral part of the shot, sometimes *as the shot itself*, in such a way that the spectator automatically becomes a reader and the audiovisual work regains its links with the tradition of which it was born, from Flaubert to Adorno, Proust to Arendt and Dickens to Marx.

Not enough with this, the edition by Intermedio includes a series of materials that strengthen yet further the paradoxical condition of Godard's work, from a dialogue with Serge Daney in the form of a libretto to a DVD-Rom where you can find a vast catalogue of Natalia Ruiz in which all of the materials Godard uses are identified –of literary, pictorial, musical origin—and an enlightening essay by Fran Benavente on the birth and the development of the project, in which Montaigne is specifically mentioned as the prime source of inspiration. In the beginning, then, the inventor of the modern literary essay. At the end of the Intermedio edition, a bibliography as a conclusion. Is this or is this not the return to the book? Has the cinema of the last century simply been a small detour now returning to it in its new form? Here, to a great extent, lies the great importance of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, a headstone in commemoration of what was a certain idea of western culture.

notes

- 1 Spanish edition: Madrid, Alphaville, 1980.

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- 2 Among which the *Histoire(s)*... in book form, which results in the idea that seems to be in its origin: *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (4 vols.), Paris, Gallimard-Gaumont, 1998, re-edited in 2006 in a single volume.

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