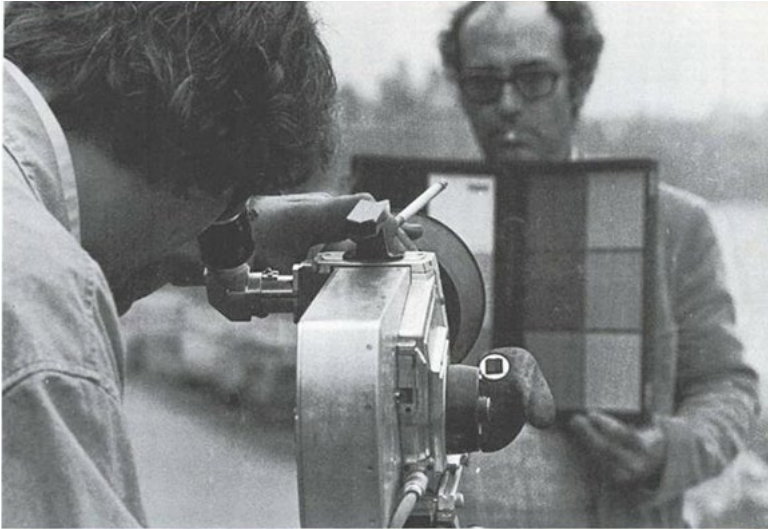


Jean-Pierre Beauviala and Jean-Luc Godard **Genesis of a camera.**

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Jean-Pierre Beauviala and Jean-Luc Godard (Anne-Marie Miéville)

How a Camera Changes Name When It Changes Hands

- J P B** The camera you wanted at the beginning still exists as a prototype, and I'm keeping it for Langlois' Cinematheque. It's very close to the camera you wanted to "attach" to your eye, and which I found adequate for my own reasons.
- J L G** The image was out of focus because of the beam-splitter.
- J P B** *Not* because of the beam-splitter; the Imax high-definition cameras also use the same principle for their reflex-mirror system, and so do the Mitchell BNCs.
- J L G** We never really talked together because you're more of a technician than a creator, from that point of view also. You're like a restaurant owner: you say, "What would you like, gentlemen?" and I say, "What do you have, gentlemen?" The dialogue could go on like that forever. The technicians say to me, "What do you want, Jean-Luc? We'll make it for you." Now I've resigned myself to saying, "I don't know, we'll find a solution."
- J P B** We had a talk after *Sauve qui peut* and that's not what happened!

- J L G** Look, I don't know, without having used the camera, if the beam-splitter will give us as sharp or "pointed" a resolution, you know what I mean? For example, as long as you don't show me a Renoir or an Ingres painting, I don't know what it means. So, we do it; then when I see the result, I understand what's wrong, and at that point we realize it has to change, that it needs a rotating-mirror, which means 700,000 francs worth of research, which I understand completely.
- J P B** Who said after the tests that it needed a rotating-mirror more than a beam-splitter? Not me, anyway, and certainly not because of the sharpness... Let's get to the bottom of this, what led to the conception of this camera where the cost sheet was...
- J L G** There was never a cost sheet...
- J P B** Yes, there was; I drew up a paper for you with the anticipated figures. In fact, I prepared this paper with you. I wasn't the restaurant owner asking you, "What would you like?" We discussed it for a long time and we determined that for this type of cinema, we'd need this type of camera: light, small, low noise level...
- J L G** With an image quality that could match the Arri 35 BL.
- J P B** I opted for technical solutions such that you could get the largest image possible, ultra sharp and stable, so as to be able to play inside the frame of the image, what I now call "Bonnardising". With Bonnard, "reframing" isn't just selecting new borders for the image which are smaller than the large frame at the beginning; it's modifying masses according to their values and their *colors*, and even deforming "Renaissance perspective". This should let you *recenter* the meaning of the picture without even changing the geometric center of the photo. That's why I agreed to start this project; it allowed me to make a camera almost as small, in relation to the body and the hand, as the *paluche*, but capable of registering enormous images, a sort of vein you could mine by means of digital video and computer technology. Bonnard always used canvases much bigger than the painting he had in mind, and at the end recentered the subject by playing with the area around the actual painting. It was this, and not just a question of time or money, which made me choose the semi-transparent reflex

beam-splitter. It allowed me to cover a larger image without the camera becoming a monster.

(At this point in the text, a free-hand drawing of the beam-splitter system is shown, with the following caption, written by Jean-Pierre Beauviala: Mao would have appreciated the semi-transparent beam-splitter system, in which “one divides into two”: 1/3 of the light coming into the lens goes to the ground-glass of the viewfinder; the rest goes uninterrupted to the film.)

(Another free-hand drawing depicts the rotating-mirror system, with the following caption, written by Jean-Pierre Beauviala: The rotating-mirror system works on the principal of democratic alternation. 100% of the light passes alternately to the film stock during exposure of the image (1/50 of a second), then 100% to the ground-glass of the viewfinder during the positioning of the following image. Similar to the way the heart beats, the image exposed on film is never quite the same as the one the cameraman sees.)

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J P B

The camera we gave you was the prototype; instead of playing with it first, you put it right to work on *Sauve qui peut*, a film that already had a technical crew and everything else. It wasn't even painted black yet – we didn't have time to do it – and the image that came out of this camera, in tests that were really tough for a prototype, didn't have, not the sharpness, but the contrast that classic cameras have. (One shouldn't confuse contrast with definition, even if they look the same to the naked eye.) But I didn't think this was a reason to condemn the whole system. The point at which each of us effectively lost control of this “little” 35-8, was, in my opinion, when the cameramen and technicians around us said, “There's no rotating-mirror reflex shutter, it can't work. We don't want it!” But they were speaking as standard-sync-sound-filmmakers/cameramen; what we had in mind was, for you, a director's camera, and for me, a device for registering (reframed? [word partially obscured here-BF]), “Bonnardized” images. Besides, every time things go wrong between us, and we've got yet another example in *Prénom: Carmen*, it's because all these people come between us. And you, you hide yourself away; I don't know how or by what mysterious means!

J L G

I hide myself when I shoot a film, or rather, I don't hide myself, but the film hides me.

- J P B** And people hide you from yourself completely. You forget your original intention and your initial remarks, which were to have a camera for a very precise application...
- J L G** ...to have a sharp image and to operate it myself; I realized there were a certain number of things – like the viewfinder – to work on. After the tests for *Sauve qui peut*, the only thing we decided together was that you were going to try to find the money to work on getting rid of the beam-splitter system, which wasn't competitive.
- J P B** So now you've finally said it: *Not competitive*, but it was for another market, for the camera operators or the cameramen/filmmakers!
- J L G** I personally don't know how the image is registered: rotating-mirror, beam-splitter – it's Chinese to me! But I'm told it's because of the beam-splitter that the image is diffuse...
- J P B** There's no physical reason for the beam-splitter to make lower-contrast images. There are fifteen elements in a lens, so it's not because there's a beam-splitter added.
- J L G** Look, I don't know anything about it. You have to find a less precarious system.
- J P B** If at the time we had both been more ambitious, in other words, if we had really wanted to make this camera, because you still felt the need, we could have made the beam-splitter work. In an optical instrument, this isn't a problem.
- J L G** It's a mystery to me how things turned out that way.
- J P B** Because of *your own* crew.
- J L G** It's not "my" crew.
- J P B** It was so your crew. There were Chapius, Berta, Lubtchansky. It was clear that you brought them to me as people you had confidence in, and they pressured us incredibly. They said this beam-splitter was shit. And from their point of view as filmmakers/cameramen, they're right; the beam-splitter isn't

perfect: it's fragile and it eats up light that should go to the film stock. So I took account of their demands and of Aaton's finances: that's what's called "integrating the constraints"... There are sixty people at Aaton, and they have to live off this competitive market. But to get back to your people, the people you trust, to whom you entrust your images...

J L G They're employees!

J P B Maybe so, but you picked them!

J L G I took them on for a shoot, and when I saw afterwards that they didn't follow, I no longer considered them my people.

J P B The real tragedy is that they left behind a cloud of smoke between us, which means that the camera has become another kind of tool than the one you wanted at the outset.

J L G But I'm not the one who provoked the drama. Everybody just let it... happen.

J P B You let them trash this poor little camera. You know very well that for me this project meant contributing to a certain type of film, to a certain kind of image; it wasn't just a technical thing.

J L G Look, if you think they're bad, then I have to hold you responsible for having believed my employees!

J P B I didn't say they were bad at what they do, but they weren't good for our project. They were your envoys, so I believed them.

J L G Me, too, I believed them. Everybody believed them, and we were wrong, and at that point we saw that dialogue is difficult, that industries are very different even though they may be similar, which means we were mistaken. What do you want me to say? Why did you believe the cameramen?

J P B They have another point of view: they represent another lobby.

J L G I believed this lobby. But after three months, I got rid of them; I realized it served no purpose. In fact, I asked the technicians to

use the camera, but when I saw they didn't want to, I stopped.

J P B That means you weren't sufficiently master of the project; you delegated "the word of the creator" to others.

J L G I was *less* than the master. At one point, I just wanted to say, "I give you this camera". I gave it to Berta and Goupil. When they didn't want it, I took it back, and then I gave it to Menoud. We'll see!

J P B It's no longer the same. They didn't want the little camera, but Menoud's camera is the Aaton 35. How can you complain about lack of communication, when you let others speak for you?

J L G OK, at certain times there *was* a sort of intermediary body, the actual camera operators, who screwed everything up. That's how it is with pretentious, over-paid people, and then the two inventors tell each other off, when there's really no reason to. What I'd like to have now is a viewfinder that focuses and does everything else it's supposed to do, I forget what. That's all I ask. I'd ask the same of the Arriflex.

J P B Also with time-code, a light meter, auto-focus...

J L G Also the fact that we can agree on something. And we haven't understood between us that we should really come to an agreement on all these things. When we saw the first tests projected to normal size – and these images were made under difficult conditions, like direct sunlight and back-lighting, in order to get a classic flat image – they couldn't be intercut with images made by the Arri BL, although the Aaton's registration is much better. It's only because of the claw mechanism that I was able to catch my error in diagnosis! At that point, I didn't notice any dialogue between my technicians and yours, like, "There's no need for a rotating-mirror, or a laser system. If you want to make such a thing, you have to study it first". The image was dissatisfying because it was slightly diffuse.

J P B I remember the image that was made with that first prototype, in a street in the 16th *arrondissement* in Paris. There was a big "One Way" sign, and really, it's hard to tell the difference from an image made with the BL.

- J L G** I've seen it again, I still have it. It was the very first image, and with the first image, it's like in the movies. You're so happy to be looking at it that you see a lot more than is actually there.
- J P B** It was quite beautiful!
- J L G** I'm starting to get used to these things, to this sort of psychological feeling. As for me, I often find the dailies magnificent, and the next day they seem so much less beautiful. I think there's a lot of psychology on our part...it's not really better than any other image.
- J P B** Still, emotion counts...What do they care about a slight halo on the image?
- J L G** When we told you, "This beam-splitter system is no good" you didn't tell us, "Do another week of tests with more images and convince me it's not as good". On top of which, there was this purely practical thing; every time we changed the lens, it twisted the beam-splitter and damaged it. As far as I'm concerned, I think it must've aggravated something that didn't belong to the beam-splitter, but to its mounting.
- J P B** That's true, the mounting was badly done, but there's something else: it was no longer your camera as soon as it was put into someone else's hands. Don't you remember? You wanted this prototype to be yours. You wanted to cuddle it and take it everywhere with you.
- J L G** But films are made by more than one person!
- J P B** Yes, I know: the producer, the sound engineer, the script girl, the editor, etc. But it was you who were supposed to hold the camera. If somebody who wasn't too careful changed the lens, and didn't pay attention to the beam-splitter...
- J L G** ...even somebody careful, because you can't find anyone more careful than me with objects like that.
- J P B** Exactly: you're a careful man, but it just so happens that you put this newborn baby in the hands of people who aren't exactly midwives.

- J L G** That's just talk. It was called the 35-8; and what is 8mm anyway? It's a camera that Daddy gives to his little girl, the little girl gives it to the concierge, who in turn gives it to the gardener, who gives it back to Daddy. Cinema is made by several people, unlike novels, or painting or sculpture. Cinema is made by many and you're forced to go through others. You don't make a film by yourself. It just doesn't happen that way!
- J P B** Your camera, I repeat, was a prototype, barely dry; suddenly it was dropped into hands accustomed to different gestures.
- J L G** Dropped too quickly: I shouldn't have used it in my films right away. It's like a girl you put on the street too quickly.
- J P B** People started messing in our business, which killed our little 35-8.

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