

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

Miguel Abreu Gallery presents 2 films by Danièle Huillet & Jean-Marie Straub

THURSDAY, MARCH 22 & FRIDAY, MARCH 23 2007
8PM

EVERY REVOLUTION IS A THROW OF THE DICE (1977, 11 minutes)

Photography: William Lubtchansky (35 mm, Eastmancolor)

Sound: Louis Hochet

Actors: Danièle Huillet, Marilu Parolini, Dominique Villain, Andrea Spingler, Helmut Farber, Michael Delahaye, Manfred Blank, Georges Goldfayn, Aksar Khaled

Based on the poem *A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance* by Stéphane Mallarmé

Filmed on location in the Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris, May 1977



Straub's simplest film is also his most mysterious, a tribute to Mallarmé that not only asserts the continuing relevance of his work but also confronts its literary ambiguities with political and filmic ambiguities of its own. In outline, the film could not be more straightforward: it offers a (re)citation of one of Mallarmé's most celebrated and complex poems (it was his last published work in his own lifetime, appearing in 1897, a year before his death) and proposes a filmic equivalent for the author's original experiment with typography and layout by assigning the words to nine different speakers, separating each speaker from the other as she or he speaks, and using slight pauses to correspond with white spaces on the original page. But it is clear that Straub's aim was not simply to render the poem in film; as he has consistently stressed in interviews, he and Danièle Huillet choose to work with pre-existing texts in their films precisely because they are attracted to texts that 'resist' them, that retain their challenge at some level.

— Tony Rayns

FROM THE CLOUD TO THE RESISTANCE (1978, 105 minutes)

Photography: Saverio Diamanti, Gianni Canfarelli (35 mm color)

Sound: Louis Hochet, Georges Vaglio

Actors: Olimpia Carlisi (Nephele, the Cloud), Gino Felici (Hippolocus), Ennio Lauricella (Tiresias), Mauro Monni (the Bastard) and Carmelo Lacorte (Nuto)

Based on the books: *Dialogues with Leuco* and *The Moon and the Bonfires* by Cesare Pavese



The first half of the film consists of six of the original 27 dialogues from *Dialogues with Leuco* presented in their entirety. Taken from the first two sections of Pavese's work, these six dialogues revolve around the birth of the human world, the sublunar arena of mortality, out of chaos, and the fixing of limits upon the actions of mankind. This world of gods and goddesses, of the Olympians and the Titans, of nymphs and ancient heroes, would seem at odds with the leftist commitments of Pavese, a writer jailed by

the Fascists in the earlier Thirties, a member of the Resistance during the war, and a writer of and for the common people. While *Dialogues with Leuco* remained Pavese's favorite work, it was much maligned in its time for precisely these distant mythic and symbolic concerns. Why then did Pavese write it, what relation does it have to the material realities of Italy, the War, the rural peasantry of Pavese's homeland, and why, in turn, have Straub and Huillet appropriated it directly for their radical project?

To begin to answer this, we must turn to Pavese's deceptively simple preface to the *Dialogues*. He begins, "Had it been possible, I would gladly have done without all this mythology. But myth, it seems to me, is a language of its own, an instrument of expression." What, for Pavese, a myth expresses is a "core of reality which quickens and feeds a whole organic growth of passion and human existence, an entire conceptual complex." Pavese here doubly acknowledges myth as ideology – both ideology in its older, philosophical meaning as pertaining to the nature and origin of ideas and, I would claim, in its Marxist sense as an illusory system of values and beliefs which masks social contradictions. What Pavese's self-admitted "stubborn concentration" on the myth aims to reveal and unmask are our basic beliefs, inculcated since childhood in the form of these classical myths – myths which like language and as a language delimit our comprehension of material reality. [...] The second part of the film begins in the same rural district of Italy where the ancient shepherds had lit their bonfire sacrifices to the gods. Like the movement from the poetic to the political that we saw in *Every Revolution is a Throw of the Dice*, the second part of *From the Cloud to the Resistance*, in adapting Pavese's *The Moon and the Bonfires*, brings us out of the timeless ideology of the past, the classical realm of myth, and into the contemporary world of social and political concerns. But this world of postwar Italy seems even more inexplicable than the ancient world, as the gods have long since vanished, leaving in their place the landowners, the priests, the government officials, as the only indicators of human limitation, of the law of the gods. The protagonist of this modern idyll has journeyed back to Italy from his refuge in America in order to recapture his lost past, the pastoral memories of his childhood. What he finds is a land abandoned by not only the heroes of classical mythology, but also the now dead partisan fighters from the War. The ancient sacrifices to the gods have been supplanted by the meaningless ravages of the War – monumental battles which have reduced everything and changed very little.

— Bruce Jenkins