

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

IN MEMORIAM: DANIELE HUILLET (1936-2006)

Miguel Abreu Gallery and Redmond Entwistle present two films by Danièle Huillet & Jean-Marie Straub.

**Thursday October 26, 2006**

*Too Early, Too Late*, 7pm

*Fortini/Cani*, 9:15pm

*Too Early, Too Late* (1980-81)

105 minutes

Photography: William Lubtchansky, Robert Alazraki (16 mm, Eastmancolor)

Sound: Louis Hochet

Voices: First part, letter sent by Friedrich Engels to Karl Kautsky: Danièle Huillet; second part, except from *Luttes sociales en Egypte* by Mahmud Hussein: Gérard Samaan (German and Italian versions), Bhagat el Nadi (French and English versions)

Filmed on locations in France (including Tréogan, Motreff, Maubeuf, Harville, and outside Lyon and Rennes) in June 1980 and in Egypt in May 1981



In June 1980, the Straubs spent two weeks filming in the French countryside. They were seen in places as improbable as Tréogan, Motreff, Maubeuf and Harville. They were seen prowling close to big cities: Lyons, Rennes. Their idea, which presides over the execution of this opus 12 in their oeuvre (already twenty years of filmmaking!), was to film *as they are today* a certain number of places mentioned in a letter sent by Engels to the future renegade Kautsky. In this letter (read offscreen by Danièle Huillet), Engels, bolstered with figures, describes the misery of the countryside on the eve of the French Revolution. One suspects that these places have changed. For one thing, they are deserted. The French countryside, Straub says, has a “science fiction, deserted-planet aspect.” Maybe people live there, but they don’t inhabit the locale. The fields, roadways, fences and rows of trees are traces of human activity, but the actors are birds, a few vehicles, a faint murmur, the wind.

In May 1981, the Straubs are in Egypt and film other landscapes. This time the guide isn’t Engels but a more up-to-date Marxist, author of the recent and celebrated *Class Struggles in Egypt*, Mahmoud Hussein. Again offscreen, the voice of an Arab intellectual speaks in French (but with an accent) about the peasant resistance to the English occupation, up until

the “petit-bourgeois” revolution of Neguib in 1952. Once again, the peasants revolt *too early* and succeed *too late* as far as power is concerned. This obsessive recurrence is the film’s “content.” Like a musical motif, it is established from the outset: “that the middle-class here as always were too cowardly to support their own interests/that since the Bastille, the plebes had to do all the work” (Engles).

The film is thus a diptych. One, France. Two, Egypt. No actors, not even characters, especially not extras. If there is an actor in *Too Early, Too Late*, it’s the landscape. This actor has a text to recite: History (the peasants who resist, the land which remains), of which it is the living witness. The actor performs with a certain amount of talent: the cloud which passes, a breaking loose of birds, a bouquet of trees bent by the wind, a break in the clouds; this is what the landscape’s *performance* consists of. This kind of performing is meteorological. One hasn’t seen anything like it for quite some time. Since the silent period, to be precise.

—Serge Daney

### ***Fortini/Cani*** (1976)

83 minutes

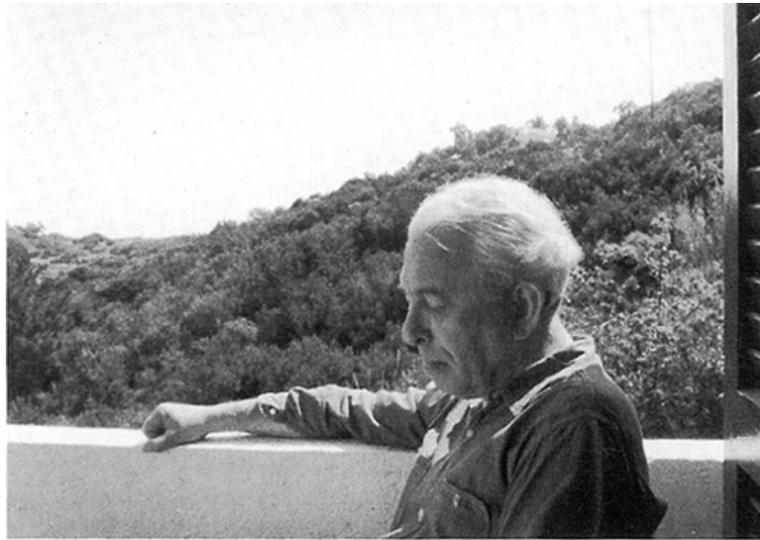
Photography: Renato Berta, Emilio Bestetti (16 mm, Eastmancolor)

Sound: Jetti Grigioni

Actors: Franco Fortini, Franco Lattes, Luciana Nissim, Adriano Aprà

Based on the book *I cani del Sinai/The Dogs of Sinai* by Franco Fortini

Published screenplays: *Screen* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1978): 9-40; *Filmkritik* 1 (1977): 14-35; *Les Chiens du Sinai—Fortini/Cani* (Paris: Dossiers Cahiers du Cinéma, March 1979)



The deconstruction and partial reinstatement of a conventional device is a characteristic strategy in the work of Straub and Huillet. *Fortini/Cani*, which they made in 1977, centers on a book, *I Cani del Sinai* (The Dogs of the Sinai), written in response to the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War of 1967 by the Florentine poet and journalist Franco Fortini, who now in the film reads aloud from his book of ten years before. At that time Fortini, a Communist and a Jew, undertook a defense of the Arabs against the pro-Israeli bias of most of his fellow countrymen and especially of his fellow Jews; his book is a polemic from a Marxist standpoint and also an elucidation of how the author came to this position from his own background as an Italian Jew.

—Gilberto Perez