

MURIEL ANDRIN

## For an educational syncretism

**“The evolution of art, as an entity,** is expressed in the permanent swings between isolation (differentiation) and fusion. Each art taken individually exists and is developed in comparison with others, as individual species and as a variety. Depending on the eras, either one art or another tends to be an art of the masses and, inspired by the spirit of syncretism, aims to include elements of the other arts. In the history of arts, differentiation and syncretization, are permanent and equally important processes that evolve correlatively. The syncretic forms are not at all the exclusive attribute of primitive art or of the “people”, as was previously believed. Their tendency to reappear is a constant of artistic culture”. In 1926, Boris Eichenbaum, the Russian Formalist, in his article entitled “Problems of Film Stylistics”, started a debate about a subject that had already stirred up and fascinated thousands of critics right from the earliest films. The subject: cinema as a pure art or as an impure art, as André Bazin would say several decades later. Right at the peak of French impressionists and the European avant-garde, Eichenbaum established the cinema as a syncretic art form.

The syncretic nature of the cinema (of which there are currently several versions around a multi-disciplinary concept), along with the specificity of its language that it has created, no longer have to be demonstrated.. Quite to the contrary, the phenomenon has multiplied and systematically ignored the limits and contingencies of its techniques. Quotations, loans, assimilations, references, allusions, reminiscences, the film intertextuality combines every tone and every geometric. Constantly being refined, it is no longer defined simply from within, by the multiple influences of all art forms (literature, sculpture, painting, photography, etc.), but also by extensions, external repercussions, in museums, as it leaves its mark on the works of contemporary artists, and thus invades the artistic universe through the impact of its images, its plots, its aesthetic innovations, but above all, of its imagination.

Courtesy of Album Archivo Fotográfico, S.L.



Alfred Hitchcock *Psycho* 1960

Mamoru Oshii *Ghost in the Shell* 1995

This intrinsic multi-disciplinary aspect of films is the basis of how I believe this art should be taught. But the aim of this teaching is always based on two aspects. Initially, to explain the specific nature of the subject, but also, at a latter stage, to confront these specific aspects with those of other mediums. Painting, sculpture, photography, literary and theoretical texts or even installations, television and multimedia come together to form individual hybrids. What is unique about films has to be envisaged, then its opening up, as a constantly circulating object that feeds off its cultural context while nourishing it, and finally the economic, political or social sphere that must be considered at the same time to perfectly make out the source and impact of these new forms.

Yet I believe that the approach would not be as effective if the opening up, the syncretisation, was not also situat-

ed at the level of the objects and tools of the teaching. The examples chosen to be analysed must belong as much to the classical forms as to the more popular or less well-known, a need to approach both the high/low culture that directly echoes the outbreak of theoretical approaches in the post theory sphere of influence and spirit. The methodological critiques (linguistic, sociological, psychoanalytical, historical) have been replaced by a post-modern theoretical collage, which must nonetheless remain clear and conserve its relevance. In this educational philosophy, there is therefore a refusal to retreat into unique perspectives and a need to present the plurality of approaches without a priori rejecting any in order to find the most appropriate means to further analysis, but also to engender new thoughts, to offer extensions targeted at the critical elaboration in line with the subjects or works explored.

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The omnipresence of film images and particular and moving images in general require systematic learning. The democratisation of the tools to view the images and also to create visuals has changed the world, created other forms of language, and therefore has raised questions about how they are taught. This upheaval is at two levels. It has resulted in incalculable and unprecedented freedom in film use and analysis — video then DVD, dv cameras and other technological wonders allow us to construct and pull apart films at whim, in perfect autonomy. But it has also caused a whiplash effect where creative and critical indecision prevail. I believe that the teaching principles should be seen as tools for reflection, but also instruments likely to be immediately applied, without any delay, in situ. The idea is to create links, constant questions, in the teaching world, whether it be at the university or secondary level, where writing

and directing is emphasised, but also, and above all, in an everyday life saturated with moving images. Learning to see, revealing the specific vision that we may have lost in the flow.

In this new universe, Stanley Kubrick's twins in *The Shining* recall those photographed by Diane Arbus; Douglas Gordon talks to Alfred Hitchcock beyond the grave to deconstruct the 24 pictures/second and the film soul of his *Psychose* in an installation, *24 Hour Psycho* ; the post-human creature of *Ghost in the Shell* revisits the Futura of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* that is likewise based on the Eve Future of Villers de l'Isle-Adam ; Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* is rethashed and its narration redefined by a visual suture in *Papillon d'Amour* by Nicolas Provost, the young Belgian film maker. The movement is perpetual and ad infinitum, but the global village has not included images. They still exist by and for themselves. They are still our, despite being multiplied in infinite networks. Understanding how they have been created makes them unique, and also, perhaps, for us to create them. «

MURIEL ANDRIN lectures at the Free University of Brussels.