FABRIQUE DE L'ART N°1
FABRICATE (FABRIC OF) ART

ANNÉE | YEAR | 2015

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TRIMUKHI PLATFORM | is a not-for-profit organisation founded in West Bengal, India. It is born from a desire to create a platform enabling to operate in three different directions: social action, artistic production and theoretical research. Art and thought need to be produced by all strata of society so there is not only a diversity of propositions but also relevance and accuracy. This yearly journal on contemporary arts practices (*Fabricate (Fabric of) Art*) is published in this context.

| est une association à but non lucratif fondée à Calcutta. Elle est née du désir de créer, au Bengale Occidental, une plateforme depuis laquelle œuvrer dans trois directions : action sociale, production artistique et invention théorique. C'est à la condition d'être produits par des individus venant d'horizons sociaux différents que l'art et la pensée acquièrent non seulement leur pertinence mais aussi leur acuité. La publication d'une revue annuelle sur les pratiques artistiques contemporaines (*Fabrique de l'Art*) s'inscrit dans ce contexte.

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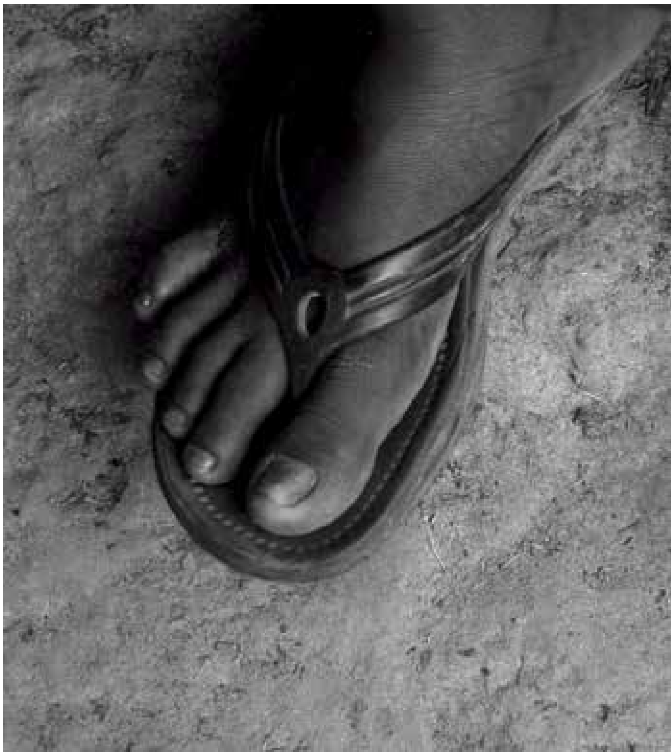

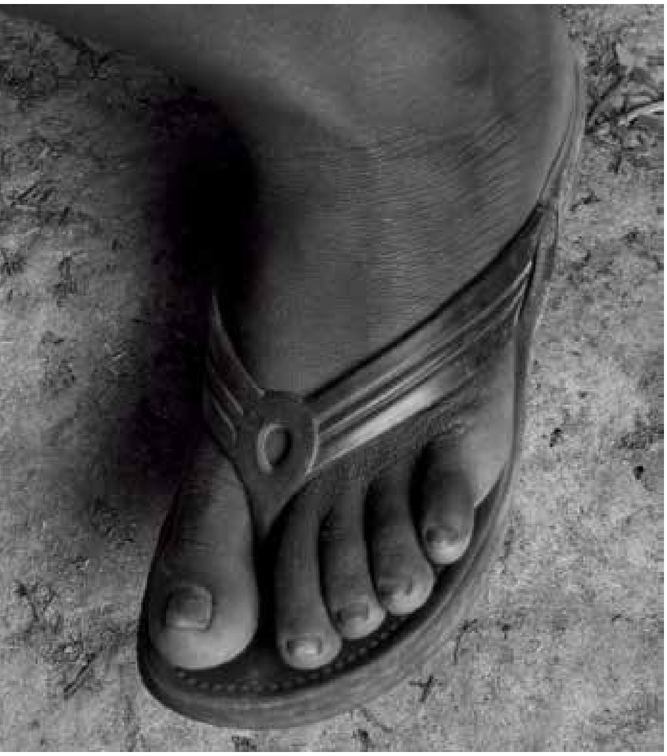

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8 points on godard's montage strategy

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I was fourteen years old when I first heard about Jean-Luc Godard. In the south suburbs of Paris where I lived, there was a very good cine-club.[1] That evening, I was there with my mother. Before the film we came to see started, people were talking. Behind us, two middle-aged ladies were speaking about next week's screening. One said that it would be the new Jean-Luc Godard film. The other exclaimed immediately: "Oh… Godard, I've stopped going to see his films now. Before it was fine but now I don't understand anything about what he does. There is no story to follow at all, nothing. It makes me feel quite angry!" These comments raised my interest: what is a film like when it has no story at all and nothing can be understood? I was curious and excited. Straight away I asked my mother about a so-called "Jean-Luc Godard". She informed me that he was a great filmmaker. I didn't need anything else; I had made up my mind: I would come back next week and see his new film: *Soigne ta droite* [*Take care of your right*].

It was a Sunday afternoon and I was with a friend preparing a Mathematics presentation. We stopped our homework and when we reached the cine-club, I told my friend what I had heard the week before. I suggested that we lay down comfortably in our seats and take the film as it would come, in a relaxed manner. In a sense, the lady was quite right: there was no such thing as a story to follow. In one image, Godard was lying on the floor holding the second volume of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*. In the next image, white-grey clouds were passing through a beautiful blue sky. And then the famous Rita Mitsuko electro-rock band was rehearsing a new song.

But that lady was completely wrong also. Neither did I feel angry about the lack of story, nor did I get bored. In fact, I felt extremely joyful, as if invited in an amazing manner to participate in life.

Being only a class 9 student by that time, I did not look for any better philosophical explanations. I was satisfied with the effect the film had produced on me. Also we had not finished preparing our presentation on sinusoidal curbs. We ran back home and stopped thinking about it. But it's true that we were in an especially good mood while fixing the last diode lights and cables on the device we would exhibit next day to our classmates.

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It's with the passing of time that I began to wonder: how does such a film work?

Suppose you attend a dinner at your friend's place and suppose that evening the food is so tasty that you end up asking him or her how it was prepared. You try to discover what is the cooking secret in it.

In exactly the same way, as years passed, I began to wonder about the cooking secret behind Jean-Luc Godard's images combination? How is a Godard film built? How to pass from one image (Godard on the floor with a book in his hand) to another (a blue sky with white-grey clouds)? What for? Why do that in such a way? In short: what is Godard's montage strategy?

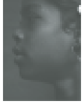
৩

If our lady was right to a certain extent (there was no story link to justify the passage from one image to another), the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze is even more specific. He observes a "break in the sensory-motor situations – to the benefit of [purely] optical and sound situations[2]". Even more: there is precisely a double break: in logical-narrative links as well as in sensory-motor links. The two kinds of links become very weak or even disappear in Godard's films.

In *Pierrot the fool* (1965) for instance, the escape sequence should follow a strong logical-narrative line, as it is a matter of escaping death. But nothing of the sort happens. First we see the two actors (Anna Karina and Jean-Paul Belmondo) running out of a Paris flat, then getting into a car and then again inside the same flat, then again in the car, etc. A little later, they stop in a pump station and, as they say to each other that they have no money to pay for the petrol, they attack the pump station worker. They drive a while and go to a bar-restaurant to enact a drama about

[1] This contribution was originally a Special Conference given on 23rd September 2011 during the Friday Seminar Group session, Department of Film Studies, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, India.

[2] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, tr. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, Mineapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 10, 18.



Vietnam War in order to get money (while they did not need it because they could easily steal petrol again). Back on the road, they burn the car and the audience discovers that the vehicle contained a huge amount of cash that could have been used from the beginning to pay for the petrol or even to escape by plane. The story line is completely weak – so weak that it cannot explain anything regarding the images succession order.

In *First Name: Carmen* (1983), it's not only logical-narrative links that become very fragile but sensory-motor ones too. There is a fabulous sequence where a group of young people attacks a bank. While the attack is taking place, the bullets fired here and there, the customers continue their normal activity: one reads the newspaper peacefully and another makes complicates mathematic calculations. But the "violence" of the "action" does not produce any fear. A bank employee carefully cleans the blood on the floor between two dead bodies. A policeman fires at an assailant but the latter continues running out as if no bullet had been fired. When the former catches a young woman attacker, instead of taking her to the closest police station, he kisses her passionately and drives with her to the nearest beach…

Neither the narrative cause/consequence nor the action/reaction schemes apply. Neither the second image comes as the first one's logical consequence nor as a physical result of it. That's precisely why the above-mentioned lady lost interest while watching recent Godard's films. There are no pre-established relations between images. There are no pre-established rules to go from one to another. Apparently there is not even reason for it.

But on the other hand, it would be hard to believe that Godard had chosen image 1 (the policeman catching the woman attacker) and then image 2 (they kissed) at random. In the passage from one to another, something very powerfully works. But what? How?

8

Here again Gilles Deleuze is extremely helpful. In the seventh chapter of *Cinema 2*, he explains:

> In Godard's method, it is not question of association. Given one image, another image has to be chosen which will induce an interstice between the two. This is not an operation of association, but of differentiation: given one potential, another one has to be chosen, not any whatever, but in such a way that a difference of potential is established between the two, which will be productive of a third or of something new. The fissure has become primary, and as such grows larger. It is the method of BETWEEN, "between two images". It is the method of AND, "this and then that". The whole undergoes a mutation, because it has ceased to be the One-Being, in order to become the constitutive "and" of things, the constitutive between-two of images. The whole thus merge with that Blanchot calls the "vertigo of spacing".[3]

Deleuze's analysis is not only brilliant but also surprising. To the question of how to put in relation two images incommensurably far from one another, Deleuze answers: by keeping incommensurable the distance between them.

Think about it. If I had told you: "*we don't use any logical-narrative link, we don't use any sensory-motor link, let's try to put together images*", most probably you would have looked for similar images. Let's say the face of a woman as image 1, the neck of the same woman as image 2; or an elephant as image 1, a camel as image 2, etc. If not narrative cause/consequence and action/reaction relations, you would have looked for other kind of pre-established links. You would have searched for common points. You would have inscribed all the images in a single topic frame: the body of a woman, the animals in India, etc. You would have managed to limit the difference between the images. You would have worked on reducing the gap between them. You would even have intended to fill this gap.

Completely opposed to that, what Deleuze proposes it's to think about a combination of images without intending to reduce the differences between them, without filling the gap that separates one from another. And Deleuze proposes us to think about such a strange strategy because he believes that it is inside the gap itself that what is important in contemporary cinema is found. The difference that separates two images is the place where the whole thing happens.[4]

Each image needs by itself a certain "potential", in other words consistency, singularity, uniqueness, a proper strength so when it is put in relation with the next one (which also has "potential", consistency, etc.), a third consistency may appear. Deleuze says thus a "third potential" is produced.[5] A first potential together with a second potential gives a "third potential".

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[3] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, *op. cit.*, p. 179-180.

[4] The idea of the gap is present already in *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image*: "The originality of the theory of interval is that it no longer marks a gap which is carved out, a distancing between two consecutive images but, on the contrary, a correlation of two images which are distant (and incommensurable from the viewpoint of our human perception)." Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image*, tr. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbera Habberjam, London, The Athlone Press, 1986, p. 82.

I have to confess that it took me some years to understand properly what I am talking about now.

Actually I understood it thanks to a food experience. Take a very peculiar red wine (a nuit-saint-georges, from the French region of Bourgogne, and better if it is at least six years old) and take a specific cheese (an époisses, famous because it has a quite strong – even disgusting – smell as well as a nearly trickling appearance). Take a small piece of cheese and then sip a bit of wine. What happens? For a little while, three flavours will be coexisting in your palate: a bitter and strong one from the cheese, a dry and acid one from the wine, and a third one, the fruit of their encounter. This third flavour is close to hazelnut, rising in the back part of the mouth while the wine aroma spreads along the tongue and the cheese smell sits in the lower part of the palate.

In a very concrete manner, first, there are two different elements: a cheese and a wine; second, there is an empty space: the mouth; and third, there is an attempt to put the two different elements in relation – by chewing and sipping – in this empty space. And by doing so a third element – a third flavour – is produced.

It is important to notice that this third flavour is not a mix of cheese with wine. It is really a third flavour different from the two other ones, and present at the time. Mathematically, I should write: $1 + 1 = 3$. Three elements are present at the same moment and in the same space: 1 wine, 1 cheese and what the encounter has produced: a "+". This "+" is the third potential Deleuze was speaking about. 1 image + 1 image = 3 images – the"+" being the third image.

The third flavour of hazelnut induces a new appreciation of the cheese and the wine: I enjoyed both more because their encounter produces a third flavour; they are more flavoursome because in between another flavour has grown. The "AND" strategy makes the two images more appreciable: Godard lying down on one hand, the sky with clouds on the other hand. Experiencing the emergence of a third image, I give to this first and that second much more importance now than before.

* * *

I discovered very recently the similarities between this idea of a third flavour and the theory of *rasa* as it appeared in the *Nâtyasâstra* – a theory that actually many have called "Theory of Flavour". At least one part of this old Sanskrit treaty seems to apply perfectly for our study:

> *Rasa* is the cumulative result of *vibhâna* (stimulus), *anubhâva* (involuntary reaction) and *Vyabhicârî bhâva* (voluntary reaction). For example, just as **when various condiments and sauces and herbs and other materials are mixed, a taste (different from the individual tastes of the components) is felt.** Because it is enjoyably tasted, it is called *rasa*. Persons who eat prepared food mixed with different condiments and sauces, etc., if they are sensitive, enjoy the different tastes and then feel pleasure (or satisfaction); the same happens with sensitive spectators.[6]

Could it be that our above-mentioned lady was not a "sensitive spectator" with the means to create flavourful links between apparently separated images? Is it because she could not taste anything that she could not "feel pleasure (or satisfaction)"?

* * *

Here comes our second series of questions: Why do that? What for?

Part of the answer can be simply this idea that $1 + 1 = 3$. The sensory experience of the "+" is enjoyable: the spectators will "enjoy the different tastes". And there is not only a joy but also an awakened desire when getting this third flavour of hazelnut in the palate.

Let's take another example: an extremely short film (1 minute duration) which Jean-Luc Godard made in 2008: *A Catastrophe*. In this film, the gap between images is even huger: we see an old Russian film extract

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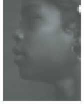
[5] That's why in *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image*, it was so important for Deleuze to give a list of the different kind of images. In his first volume about films, he spent most of his time describing one by one different kind of images, how they were built and how they worked to produce effects on the spectator. It was indispensable to see first what were the different singularities present here, before analysing what happens when they are put together. The starting point of *Cinema 2. The time-image* is: if we now enjoy pure optical and sound situations, if we take pleasure with autonomous images, why should we need to connect again? If each image is enough consistent by itself and if it doesn't pertain to any whole, why and howpass from one image to another? Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image*, *op. cit.*, p. 83; 95-96; 101; 118.

[6] Adya Rangacharya, *The Nâtyasâstra – English Translation with Critical Notes,* New Delhi, Munshiram Manohharlal, 2010, p. 55. My underligning.



(Eisenstein's *Potemkin*, 1925) followed by images of a war episode followed by an extract of an old German film (Siodmak's *People on Sunday*, 1930), each series of image being interrupted by a French poem text. And it happens exactly the same: something was not here and suddenly is here, another flavour, another image, another sensation. The borders of our immanent existences are shaken up and displaced: here and now, there is more than what there is. Part of the answer to the question "what for?" can be just this: the purpose is to allow the spectator to experience the fact that, sometimes, here, there is more than what there is…

But the question "what for?" is not fully answered like that. When I watch a Jean-Luc Godard's film, be it *Soigne ta droite*, be it *First Name: Carmen* or be it *A Catastrophe*, it is not correct to say I only jump from one instant of joyful discovery to another. Something also happens in the continuity of the process, in the whole succession of images.

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Let's come back briefly to our third (৩) point. If there were logical-narrative links, the purpose would be to tell a story, to make the spectator understand through a succession of images what happened to the hero and the heroine. For instance, they were in love but could not get married because of dissimilar social backgrounds, so they decided to kill themselves but their parents felt too sad with the idea and finally stood up against the gossiping of their own communities – as in *Bobby* (1973) by Raj Kapoor.

Or, if there were a sensory-motor link to be followed as in Eisenstein's *Potemkin*, the montage purpose would be to make the spectator realise that a specific new solution has to be implemented: it's too violent to see workers treated so badly and the feudalistic Russian society should be changed from top to bottom.

In both cases, the film-director would have something to say to the audience: a story to tell, an ideology to implement. But Jean-Luc Godard has nothing to say. He believes a filmmaker should not pretend to convey any message on the screen. What a film author wants to say has no relevance. Instead, what is important is the film itself.

> Now no one speaks about what there is on the screen but only about what the author meant. What the author wanted to say doesn't have anything to do with what he shows. In the notion of author, what was interesting for us was the author's politics. The author… we did not bother about him. I don't give a damn about what Nicholas Ray wants to say by doing *Johnny Guitar*; on the other hand, the film in itself…
>
> I knew Roberto [Rossellini], I was a guest in his family and he used to say to me: "Jean-Luc, you are impossible, you don't say anything, bah… go and do the washing up at least" and I went and did it. And I was happier because I was at Roberto's home and that for me was also cinema. I got on well with him and with his dog, he liked me very much but found me unbearable. And he held something against me too because I had invented an interview with him in *Les Cahiers du Cinéma,* about his film *India.*[7]

After watching the film *India*, Godard wrote an interview where he invented what Rossellini would have told if asked. But Rossellini was not there and Godard played both parts: the interviewer and the interviewee, the one who asks and the one who answers. The purpose was not to understand what the author wanted to say but to share what one – as spectator – wanted to express after watching the film. It is not question of understanding the mind of a supposed "author" but to speak out one's own mind.

৮

Till now we have two elements for an answer: on one side, the sensorial experience of the fact that 1 + 1 = 3 and, on the other side, the desire to speak out one's own mind. And we can put together these two elements: the spectator speaks out what he has in mind regarding the fact that 1 + 1 = 3. The purpose for the spectators is to experience in their present world both the possibility of relations and the necessity of thinking about it, to work deepening the "BETWEEN", the "AND". One watches Godard's film for that: to experience and think about the dynamic of creating relations.

First, we are sensitively touched. If later we think about it, that is because the diversity of relations, the multiplicity of links we have seen gave us to think. We are discovering that there are other links than pre-established ones: there are singular ones different from these before and different from those to come after.

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[7] In "Le petit soldat: Jean-Luc Godard", interview with Jean-Luc Godard published in the magazine *Les Inrockuptibles*, Paris, November 27, 1996. The approximate translation is mine.

Deleuze suggests that is what makes us able to believe again in our present world.

> We observe the erasure of the unity of the man and the world. We do not believe in the events which happen to us, love, death, as if they only half concerned us. It is not we who make cinema; it is the world which looks to us a bad film. The reaction of which man has been dispossessed can be replaced only by belief. Only belief in the world can reconnect man to what he sees and hears. The cinema must film, not the world, but the belief in this world, our only link. Restoring our belief in the world – this is the power of modern cinema (when it stops being bad). Whether we are believers or atheists, in our universal schizophrenia, we need reasons to believe in this world.[8]

At the end of John's Gospel (20, 24-29), Thomas asks Jesus for the physical proof that he has resurrected. Jesus shows him the wounds in his hands. And then Thomas believes. He believes that something else is possible – in this case: resurrection. In a similar way, by sharing us concrete potential between images, some films – for instance Godard's films – give us the proof we need that creative links – and idiosyncratic relations – can be built in our present world. And we are all the more convinced because we experience it sensorily first, and personally too: we see it happens to us and we enjoy it. That's why we get the strength to believe that somewhere else, outside the movie hall, creative and lively relations between differences (different people, different ideas, different things, etc.) not only can but also should be built. We start to believe that we are also, as Godard told about himself, a "line of union" [a hyphen i.e. a *trait d'union* in French]:

> My grand parents had a big property with five houses in front of the lake. My paternal family was not so rich but comfortable; they had only one house on the other side of the lake, in France. We would watch each other's house from the either side of the lake. With a telescope, we could see each other. When we went on holidays, we would say good morning to each other before lunch. There were rituals, ceremonies. My father had a boat called "Le trait d'union" [the line of union i.e. the hyphen]. So all that surely had a lot of influence on me. Myself I am only a line of union [a hyphen, a *trait d'union*]. I even have a double name.[9]

That what for Godard's films are. To help us to be producers of relations, to remember that we never stop to be hyphens.

A summary of **Jean-Frédéric Chevallier**'s biography is found on page 17.

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[8] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, *op. cit.*, p. 171-172, 188.

[9] Jean-Luc Godard, "Dans Marie il y a aimer" in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, Paris, Cahiers du cinema – l'Etoile, 1985, p. 599. The approximate translation is mine.

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