The Silver Screen and the Gray Convertible

A few years ago, Film Forum in New York City had a William Wyler retrospective; some of the highlights included newly restored prints of *Wuthering Heights* (1939) and *Roman Holiday* (1953); watching these films, I was impressed with the clarity of the image, and the way the image had been cleaned so that there was almost no dust or scratches. But then I realized that something was missing. In the case of *Roman Holiday*, by removing almost all signs of film grain, the restoration had removed the distinction of the cinematography: Wyler had shot the movie on location in Rome, and he had hired a European crew to handle the outdoor sequences (Henri Alekan was one of the credited directors of photography; the other was Franz Planer). Wyler had wanted to mimic the documentary-style cinematography which had been a hallmark of the Neo-Realist movies; he had wanted the grainy, gritty look as a counterpoint to the fairy tale essence of the story, besides, the movie was being shot in Rome, and Wyler wanted the movie to have the distinction of looking like the movies that had been coming out of Rome, cf. Rossellini's *Open City* (1946), De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* (1949), De Santis's *Rome 11:00 O'Clock* (1951). Wyler had wanted that rough, grainy, semi-documentary look; he wanted his movie, shot on location, to look like a "foreign" film. Now that the graininess had been eliminated, the distinctive quality of the cinematography of *Roman Holiday* has been destroyed.

In the case of *Wuthering Heights*, something equally distressing had happened. I noticed it near the end, when the famous close-ups of Merle Oberon's face, as Cathy is dying, came on the screen. The absolute luminosity of Merle Oberon's face was missing. The reason for this became apparent: film is no longer processed in the same way as it was in 1939. For one thing, the film stock is no longer the same: since the 1960s, film stock shifted from nitrate to safety acetate. And the processing of acetate is different from the processing of nitrate in terms of the concentration of silver used. Safety acetate film stock is also faster than nitrate film stock, in that it does not require as much light to register, but it also means that acetate film stock does not register as deeply. Nitrate film stock, literally, would shine; the amount of silver required to generate an image had been quite extensive, and the wattage required to project the image from an old-fashioned professional 35mm projector would be exorbitant. But now, projectors are more reasonable in their electrical requirements, film stocks are not nearly as volatile, but they're also not nearly as glowing. The amount of reflective silver overlay is much less with acetate safety stock. But all this means is that the actual glow which used to be part of the experience of seeing a movie is missing. When movie stars such as Merle Oberon, Greta Garbo, Carole Lombard, Bette Davis and Katharine Hepburn were discussed in terms of their luminosity, their radiance, their "glowing" qualities, these qualities were literal: in an old 35mm nitrate print of *Wuthering Heights*, properly projected, Merle Oberon's face was lit so that the highlighted contours would actually radiate a silvery glow. And now, that silver is gone, it's been faded to gray. Though her face is still highlighted, it's no longer irradiated, no longer luminescent, no longer truly an image of the silver screen. So the magnificent lighting of Gregg Toland's astonishing cinematography in *Wuthering Heights* will never be seen as originally intended, now that the degree of luminosity is no longer possible.

And the scale is different. When people went to the movies in the 1950s and 1960s, the movie palaces which had been built in the 1920s were still operative, and if you were in a city of any size, you saw most of the first-run American commercial releases in one of those huge palaces:

these palaces would seat at least 2,000, and the screen was just enormous. The screens at these movie palaces were at least three stories high, and so the image was literally overwhelming. When Merle Oberon's face was in close-up during the first run of *Wuthering Heights*, or Audrey Hepburn's face was in close-up during the first run of *Roman Holiday* (and these movies were roadshow attractions, prestige productions which played at these palaces), those were *big* close-ups.

And this reminded me, when I first saw *Some Like It Hot* in 1959, it was during its first-run engagement. The movie was released during the summer, and I was taken to see the movie with family and friends at the huge movie palace at the summer resort town at which we were staying. I was five years old at the time, and I'd seen movies at movie palaces before (earlier that year, I'd been taken to Radio City Music Hall by my grandmother), and I'd even seen Marilyn Monroe before, but I had never seen Marilyn Monroe in black-and-white on such a huge screen before. (After 1952, most of Monroe's movies were in color; when she found out that *Some Like It Hot* was to be shot in black-and-white - when costume and make-up tests were done, it was discovered that the drag make-up on Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis was just too grotesque in color, so the decision was made to shoot in black-and-white - Monroe was furious, since she had geared her appearance for color.) And near the end of the movie, when Monroe is on the bandstand, with the spotlight on her, as she wears that beaded gown which barely covers her, singing "I'll Never Love Again," I'd never seen anything quite so glowing in my (young) life. The amount of silver that was being irradiated from her pale skin, her platinum hair, her shimmering beaded gown, and the scale of the illumination on that screen were enough to enthrall me to the movies forever. The 30-foot tall image of Marilyn Monroe, positively glowing in silvery black-and-white, is an image not likely to be repeated, not because there aren't any blonde bombshells anymore, not even because there isn't another Marilyn Monroe, but because the processing of black-and-white film no longer possesses that amount of luminescence, and there are few places where the projectors have the wattage to throw an image as big as that, and there are even fewer places with screens that big.

(A humorous aside: the next year, the major summer attraction was another Billy Wilder-Jack Lemmon collaboration, *The Apartment*, and so my twin sister and I were taken to the same movie palace to see it. But as the movie started, it was a lot more gray than *Some Like It Hot* had been, I'm not just talking about the story, I'm talking about the lighting and the settings of the movie. And as all the adults in the audience started laughing, the jokes about Jack Lemmon's presumed satyrism, the sexual innuendos, the situations about Fred MacMurray's philandering gamesmanship were - to put it mildly - a little over our heads. After a while, my sister and I whispered, as quietly as we could, "Do you understand what's going on?" "Not quite." "It's supposed to be funny." "Must be adult humor." "I guess we should laugh, too." So we decided to laugh, otherwise our parents would think we weren't enjoying the movie. Which freaked out our parents even more. After the movie, my father wanted to know what we understood, and we had to confess that we really didn't understand it, but we wanted to laugh like everybody else.)

If relatively "commonplace" commercial movies such as *Wuthering Heights*, *Roman Holiday* and *Some Like It Hot* can never be seen as originally released, there are many movies, of all sorts, which have now been removed from any context of their original release. Of course, for many of us who became part of what Stanley Kauffmann dubbed "the film generation" of the

1960s through the 1980s, that generation partaking of the cinephilia which Susan Sontag had written about so nostalgically, this idea of a movie losing its initial luster is all too comprehensible. Especially for those movies hailed as "innovative" or "revolutionary" upon their initial release, there was the period when the movie suddenly seemed dated or recherche, an unfortunate consequence of overfamiliarity. (This was especially true of the 1960s films of Godard and Resnais, initially so widely imitated; re-seeing these films in the 1970s, there was a sense of deja vu, as the many imitators had flooded the market, leaving the originals adrift. Of course, it wasn't long before those films became "classic" and their considerable virtues outlasted any semblance of modish "newness.") Yet that ascension to classic status brings with it a double-edged sword: it cuts against "faddishness" by which the stylistic innovations (cf., the jumpcuts of *Breathless*, the flashback-flashforward cutting of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*) are foregrounded, and it cuts into the "contemporaneity" by which those same films are vitally "present" in terms of the sociological and cultural context. Annette Michelson once remarked about the feeling of euphoria which the audience felt during the first run of *Breathless*, the sense that Godard, in fact, had been able to encapsulate so much of the ethos of 1960 into his film; she noted that the astonishment many felt at *Vivre Sa Vie* (1962) was not quite the same, because the latter film was not quite as overwhelmingly "contemporary," and Godard already seemed on his way to becoming "classical."

(One of the important issues in moviegoing is that, when we are young, most of us go to movies with friends, and those friendships condition a lot of our responses to the movies we are seeing. When Annette Michelson mentioned the euphoria of the audiences for *Breathless* and *Vivre Sa Vie*, she was living in Paris at the time, and her circle of friends included the filmmaker-theorist Noel Burch, as well as the novelist-critic Susan Sontag. The "astonishment" over *Vivre Sa Vie* would result in Susan Sontag's renowned essay on the film, part of Sontag's famous first collection of critical essays, *Against Interpretation*; in her original foreword to the book, Sontag acknowledged Michelson as a friend who shared her erudition and her taste.)

But even aside from the many questions of context, the fact remains that most "classic" movies cannot be seen in any condition remotely approaching the original. It's not just that movies are no longer shown in the kind of theaters that used to be prevalent, it's not just that the quality of the filmic prints are no longer comparable, it's not just that movies aren't even projected in the same way anymore, it's that the movies no longer have the same place in our culture. Certainly, from the mid-Twentieth Century to the end of the century, the movies represented the art of the times. But by the end of the 1960s, the dichotomy in what the movies represented became definite. During her first year as critic for *The New Yorker*, Pauline Kael described this development as follows: "In recent years, the movie audience has split into the audience for popular films - the mass audience - and the art-house audience, and movies, once heralded as the great new democratic art, have followed the route of the other arts. The advances are now made by 'difficult' artists who reach a minority audience, and soon afterward, the difficult artists, or their bowdlerizers, are consumed by the mass audience.... Infrequent moviegoers are likely to be irritated when they go to a highly recommended art-house picture and find it bewildering and obscure. What they may not be aware of is that in this new, divided world of film the commercial movies have become so omnivorous and so grossly corrupt that frequent moviegoers may, for the first time in movie history, be looking for traces of talent and for evidence of thought, and may care more for an 'interesting' failure than for a superficially entertaining 'hit.'"Going to the

movies in that period, it was not uncommon to go again and again to revival houses, repertory theaters, and museums, to see a favorite film over and over, often with different friends, so that you could share the excitement, the thrill, the artistry all over again.

And it's almost impossible to explain the effect when a film was "new" and seemed absolutely timely and of-the-moment. If you look at a filmography of, say, Lauren Bacall, it's difficult to understand her status, but the hype that surrounded her in 1944 upon the release of *To Have and Have Not* cannot be imagined today. The entertainment outlets are so numerous, the dispersal of entertainment options is so enormous, the atomizing of public attention is so overwhelming, that the unanimity which greeted Bacall in 1944 can never be duplicated. In 1944, more than 50% of the American population went to at least one movie a week; when a movie was a hit, as *To Have and Have Not* most definitely was, that meant that more than 50% of the United States had seen the movie, and knew the publicity juggernaut which surrounded her. Now, even when a movie is a hit, the percentage of people who know the star remains infinitesimal. In 1944, you could have walked anywhere in the United States and shown people a photo of Bacall, and more than half of them would have been able to identify her. Now, you can show a photo of Gwyneth Paltrow, Nicole Kidman, Charlize Theron, Angelina Jolie, or Naomi Watts, and most people would not know who they are. (This statement is not to be taken as a denigration of the talents of any of those recent actresses, just that the star-making publicity machine of Hollywood cannot operate in the same way, because the movies are no longer the central popular entertainment medium of the nation.) Movie "stars," such as they are, no longer have the same meaning in the culture. Going back to the case of Bacall, in 1944, the "daring" of her fresh, youthful (teen-age) appearance combined with the suggestions (the husky voice, the innuendos, the sidelong glances) of "experience" made her seem startlingly "new." She wasn't a typical ingenue: she wasn't all breathy and girlish, and an ingenue who suggested that she might not be a virgin (and remain a heroine) seemed totally original (though there had been precedents).

Within the last decade, television, which had provided communal mass media experiences, has become even more splintered, with the advent of cable, broadband, satellite, and other services. And the centralization of the entertainment industry, of "show business," in two locales (New York City and Los Angeles) was such that information was swift and instantaneous; that is, anyone who was having any sort of success or notoriety in New York City would become famous overnight around the country. There are two stories to verify this.

In 1946, Marlon Brando had achieved an enormous reputation in New York theater circles because of his performance in a supporting part in Maxwell Anderson's *Truckline Café*. The play only lasted for two weeks; a month later, Brando would play Marchbanks in Katherine Cornell's revival of George Bernard Shaw's *Candida*, a performance which was described by several people I know who saw it as utterly improbable, because Brando was physically all wrong for the poetic Marchbanks, yet he caught the essence of the character, giving a performance variously described as "gossamer," "ethereal," "wistful." *Candida* would run for a month, and would go on tour for the summer. But the reputation of this exciting young actor had reached Hollywood; that summer, Brando was offered a screentest for Warner Brothers, for a project called *Rebel Without a Cause*. (The project would, of course, not be realized until the mid-1950s, without Brando but with another young actor.)

While Brando was in Los Angeles, preparing for the screentest, he stayed with family friends, Henry Fonda and his family. Now: Henry Fonda and Marlon Brando had a considerable history. It was Dorothy ("Dodie") Brando (Marlon's mother), actively involved with the Omaha Neighborhood Playhouse, who "discovered" her young neighbor, Henry Fonda, and put him in a play during a summer when Fonda had come home from college. As Peter Fonda has described it, when the Fondas would go to Nebraska to visit their relatives, or when the Brandos would visit the West Coast, the families would always see each other; Peter Fonda has said that "Bud" (Marlon Brando's childhood nickname) was regarded as a member of their family. So it was not unusual for Marlon Brando to stay with the Fondas for the week of the screentest.

Brando was known to his family and friends for his propensity for getting into trouble. He was thrown out of several schools, he got into various scrapes with authorities. His acting career was just starting, and he already had a reputation for insolence: during the run of *I Remember Mama* (his Broadway debut; he played Nels, the son), he started to get bored with the part (a typical juvenile role) and, near the end of the run, he would improvise bits of business, or delay his entrances, and drive the other actors crazy.

The elements of "danger" were already present in the fascination people felt for Brando. But, of course, not for the Fondas: to them, he was "Bud." So imagine how strange it was for Peter (at age 6) and Jane (at age 8) to see the fuss being made over Bud. Their older sister, Pan, was 17 at the time, and her friends would come by, in order to get a glimpse of this young actor everyone was talking about. Peter couldn't take it any longer, he finally cried, "Bud, what did you do this time?"

But the point is that, from the two-week run of *Truckline Cafe*, the news of Brando's excitement, his volatility and his enormous talent, was known nationwide, so that everyone from studio executives to high school girls were already anxious to see him. Everyone knew about Brando, and this was in the era prior to the advent of television. Critical reviews, news items, gossip columns, radio commentaries (at this point, Louella Parsons, Hedda Hopper, and Walter Winchell were among those who had regular nationwide broadcasts) all contributed to the enormous publicity. People read newspapers and magazines, people listened to the radio, and so much of the media information came from New York City, so people around the country knew immediately of any sort of success in New York City, and it meant something nationwide.

[Nowadays, a Broadway success (such as Hugh Jackman's in *The Boy from Oz* two years ago) has not translated into immediate international stardom; in fact, Hugh Jackman's "Q" rating has remained unaffected by Broadway. Though many Broadway stars were not able to translate their stardom to the screen (one of the biggest examples was Tallulah Bankhead), some sort of stage experience was considered *de rigeur* for professional acting.

But the idea of a unified cultural background is no longer applicable. During the summers in New York City, there is the tradition of the outdoor performance of Shakespeare; not just the famous New York Shakespeare Festival started by Joseph Papp in the early 1960s, but many small theater companies take it upon themselves to bring the Bard to the parks and open spaces within the five boroughs. But this summer, a number of younger theater critics questioned the purpose of presenting Shakespeare.

But the tradition of presenting Shakespeare connects this country to a tradition of language and culture, an Anglo-American tradition, a tradition that defines the United States as a country whose primary language is English, and where the education system had been based on the teaching of English literature and culture; the process of assimilation was one in which those from other cultures (Eastern European, Italian, Asian) would learn the dominant language and understand the traditions. And part of that tradition is the consecration of Shakespeare as the most significant playwright in the language. That is why Shakespeare is to be presented as an event in ways which stress the populist, universal, democratic appeal of his art. Shakespeare is to be presented because he is the greatest playwright in the English language, and New York City is a major city in the United States, a country founded on the principles and traditions of the English language. The younger critics who are questioning the significance of presenting Shakespeare are questioning the policy of favoring the English language and its traditions over... what? That's the problem: there's no alternative being offered, it's just assumed that valorizing one tradition is racist and imperialist. It's not as if the young critics are saying (for example) that Spanish is now one of the predominant languages in the United States, that the Hispanic population is one of the fastest growing ethnic populations in the country, therefore there should be an acknowledgment of Spanish culture by presenting outdoor performances of Lope de Vega or Calderon. In fact, that's not what these younger critics are saying, because the very idea of "culture" per se is what they are attacking. They don't want Shakespeare because they don't want any culture period. In fact, these younger critics wouldn't know who Lope de Vega or Calderon are, they're attacking Shakespeare because they don't want to know anything which might derive from reading.

If the idea of culture as a continuum is unknown, the fact that (as used to be remarked upon) Shakespeare and Dickens and the Bronte Sisters were the popular culture of their day is no longer considered appropriate. When critics first took cinema seriously as an artform, it was because the cinema seemed to incarnate the possibilities for "the democratic art," presenting the best of all the arts to as wide an audience as possible. And at its best, this is exactly what the movies were able to do. That's why it's impossible to explain why a movie such as Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bete* (1946) was so special: it wasn't just because it was an exceptionally beautiful movie, but because it was the work of a significant *homme des lettres*, working with a notable artistic team, to create an uncompromisingly visionary work which nevertheless proved an enormous box office success worldwide. It proved that, without compromises, an avant-garde artist could reach the mass audience. (Luis Bunuel, with movies such as *Belle de Jour* and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, would prove the same point.) Critics such as Otis Ferguson, Harry Alan Potamkin, James Agee, Dwight MacDonald, and Herman G. Weinberg wanted movies to be the ultimate artform, to find the cinematic equivalent to the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the music of Bach and Beethoven, the plays of Ibsen and Shaw, the paintings of Michelangelo and Leonardo, or the operas of Verdi and Wagner. They wanted movies to be an *art*, both high and popular. What they didn't want was for movies to simply regurgitate the lowest forms of culture.]

When television was in its infancy, the visual dimensions were obviously mediocre: from old kinescopes, we can see the lack of visual definition, the fuzzy gray blur. Televisual technology has developed, so that digital transmission is now remarkably variegated. Nevertheless, digital

technology is not film technology, as fact made abundantly clear when The Museum of Modern Art showed a program of short films by Louis Feuillade in November of 2004. Though there had been seven films on the program, three had been recently restored by the Cinematheque Francaise, and no copies had yet been made; in order to show the program, those three films were transferred to digital versatile discs, and that was how those three films were projected. The other four were celluloid copies from the original restored negatives, and the contrast between the digital prints and the celluloid prints was striking: the celluloid had a depth and a clarity that was not present in the digital. Yet it was important to remember that the celluloid prints were acetate, when the originals had been nitrate. So the process of declension was multiplied by the variations between nitrate to acetate and between celluloid and digital. Seeing the digital "copy" versus the acetate "copy" was like seeing a photograph of a print versus an actual copy of a print: in the latter case, you're seeing the actual work, while in the former case, you're seeing a copy which retains the general outline and image, but cannot display the myriad detailings and shadings.

Yet the declension of our culture could be charted in terms of what is known as popular culture. During the 1950s, most of the television transmission emanated from New York City; because of that, the various talk shows and variety shows were dependent on the talent pool in New York City, which was considerable.

And this is my second point. When Johnny Carson died in 2004, a lot was made of the fact about the importance of his tenure as host of *The Tonight Show*. But what was not mentioned was how his decision, in the early 1970s, to move his show from New York City to Los Angeles was part of the change in our culture.

When *The Tonight Show* came from New York City in the 1960s, it was part of an entire cultural matrix: there were other talk shows, both local (*The David Susskind Show*) and national (*The Merv Griffin Show*), which were based in New York City, and all of these shows tried to maintain a mix of seriousness, show business, and comedy. All of the testimonials to Carson upon his death mentioned his importance to comedy, but the fact that he helped to destroy American culture was not mentioned, or even understood.

By moving to Los Angeles, Carson no longer had to deal with the mix of cultural life in New York City. Just as an example: on a typical variety show, specifically *The Ed Sullivan Show*, any one show might include an opera singer (Robert Merrill or Marilyn Horne or Joan Sutherland), a ballet company (the Bolshoi Ballet, the American Ballet Theater, the New York City Ballet), a pop music act (the Supremes or the Dave Clark Five or the Mamas and the Papas), a novelty act (Chinese acrobats from Taiwan, jugglers from Eastern Europe, Topo Gigio the little "Italian" mouse-puppet), a comic (Norm Crosby or Bob Newhart or Jackie Mason). (The recent reissues of *The Ed Sullivan Show* on DVD have only taken the pop music acts; the full range of talent on a single show has been ignored.) And on a typical talk show of that period, from New York City, there would be writers (Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, Gore Vidal), show business "personalities" (Tallulah Bankhead, Oscar Levant, Zsa Zsa Gabor), politicians (Robert Kennedy, John Lindsay, Daniel Patrick Monahan), playwrights (Arthur Miller, Lillian Hellman, Tennessee Williams), in addition to the usual panoply of movie stars, TV personalities, comedians. And people didn't go on just to shill a product, they went on to talk. (It was, for example, on a talk

show that Isak Dinesen appeared in the late 1950s; Vladimir Nabokov was also interviewed for television, and Jack Kerouac made a famous appearance on Steve Allen's show immediately after the publication of *On the Road*.)

But once Johnny Carson moved *The Tonight Show*, the balance of power in show business started to shift. The demise of the variety shows, the change in the format of the talk shows: the idea of "culture" was no longer applicable. Johnny Carson was (actually) not comfortable with the "cosmopolitan" culture in New York City; Merv Griffin actually delighted in meeting famous writers or scientists or urban planners, he loved feeling that there was a vast culture that he was able to be part of, and he was thrilled when he was able to listen to these people talking (Mailer, Vidal and Capote, for example, were frequent guests on his show). Griffin, of course, was noted for the various "trivia" games that he and his wife created for their parties, one of which became the game show *Jeopardy*. But Johnny Carson never liked trying to engage in conversation with anyone with interests outside of smalltown Americana or show business; though he had had such New York artworld figures as Charlotte Moorman and Alice Neal on *The Tonight Show* while it was broadcast from New York City, once in Los Angeles, he made sure that such *gaffes* never happened again.

As Carson contracted his guest list to concentrate on show business, the talk shows that followed in his wake (David Letterman, Jay Leno, Conan O'Brien) simply continued in this direction, so that the literary and theatrical cultures which had been so much a part of the talk show circuit were left adrift. Though some people have attempted to address this situation (Oprah Winfrey, for example, with her book club choices), it's hopeless. At one time, if you had a success on Broadway or even off-Broadway, everybody knew it, because you were soon seen on television, in the newspapers and magazines, on the radio. Now, what happens in New York City stays in New York City, and the culture is being influenced by Los Angeles.

This is a loss. It's the type of situation where, when I was growing up, I was taken to the movies by my grandmother; we went at least once a week! But my grandmother (who was born in New York City in 1899, and went to public high school) had a general education, which became apparent when we went to see *Far from the Madding Crowd* during its first-run, roadshow engagement. My grandmother didn't like the movie, and when we talked about it, she finally said that it was pretty, but it made the story too pretty (she'd read the book while she was in high school) and she didn't like Julie Christie, who seemed all wrong. (We had already seen *Darling* a few years earlier, and we had liked Julie Christie then.) I have to admit that, from that point on, I ceased being a fan of Julie Christie's (though I would be persuaded to change my mind after seeing her in *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*). But realizing that my grandmother had read Thomas Hardy when she was a teenager was startling; later, when I was reading Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*, it was amusing to read of her experiences with her grandmother: when she was in school, reading Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, her grandmother simply laughed and admitted that those had been the popular novels of *her* adolescence, and that she had read those novels years before.

But the context of a general culture is one which has been lost. Nowadays, when I'm on the internet, I come across comments on specific films, and I'm amazed at the fact that there is so much misinformation and outright ignorance out there. In particular: American popular culture

has become so ubiquitous, but it can never mean the same to someone in another country as it means to an American. There are many examples, but how can you explain to someone from Europe who wonders why Marilyn Monroe's part in *Monkey Business* (1952) is so small, when in 1952 Marilyn Monroe was not a star? (She would become a star in 1953, with three movies, *Niagra*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire*; by the time of the last, Monroe had become such a big star that she was top-billed, over Betty Grable and Lauren Bacall.)

The social, temporal, political, cultural, and physical contexts are not the same. And in the case of most popular movies, the frames of reference are often topical, and the excitement of certain movies, the reason those movies meant something, cannot be replicated. Though Elia Kazan and Joseph L. Mankiewicz are not as highly thought of now as (say) Nicholas Ray and Samuel Fuller, the topicality of their work at the time was jolting: race (*Pinky* or *No Way Out*), urban corruption (*House of Strangers* or *On the Waterfront*), the incursion of media into American life (*A Letter to Three Wives* or *A Face in the Crowd*). Their films had an almost journalistic function, bringing the movies into contact with then-contemporary realities. They were not visual stylists, but they were producer-directors who brought a sense of urgency and immediacy to their work. Otto Preminger, their colleague at 20th Century-Fox as a producer-director, also tried for this journalistic immediacy once he was on his own, but in an even more sensationalistic way (cf. *The Moon Is Blue*, *The Man With the Golden Arm*, *Anatomy of a Murder*). They tried for "important" subject matter, and are now looked down upon because, as the audience for old movies has dispersed, as DVDs become an international currency by which movie culture is disseminated, the only constant that international viewers can understand is "style." And style was not the criterion for valuing the work of Joseph L. Mankiewicz or Elia Kazan. (In Preminger's case, it's because he spent so much time working on a series of noir melodramas that he is highly regarded; it wasn't for his run of "serious" dramas done as an independent producer. If he had only made movies such as *The Man With the Golden Arm*, *Exodus*, *The Cardinal*, *In Harm's Way* and *Hurry Sundown*, his reputation would probably be on the level of Stanley Kramer.) But how can you understand "style" when the movies are no longer the same, when you're watching a digital version of something that had been a celluloid projection? Even the "values" (of black-and-white shadings, of luminosity, of light and shadow) can no longer be duplicated. And don't even mention Technicolor, which can no longer be processed in the proper three-strip separation procedure. (All of this has been discussed recently by Nick Zegarac in his essay "Griping the Light Fantastic," which was published on this website on August 20, 2005.)

If all these changes suggest that cinema can no longer be found in its pristine state, what is left? For example, in the cases of the "restored" prints of *Roman Holiday* and *Wuthering Heights*, the restoration enabled the translation of the films to the DVD format to proceed with greater acuity: the DVDs of *Roman Holiday* and *Wuthering Heights* are stellar examples of the capabilities of the medium of the digital versatile disc to approximate an experience of cinema. As with any translation, there are pluses and minuses. If there's no possibility of the same saturation, depth, or luminosity, there is the fact that the DVDs can offer incredible clarity, true brightness, and a clean, seemingly pristine image.

The ability (now) for DVDs to be available for instantaneous international consumption

(irrespective of the differences in the formatting, i.e., PAL or NTSC) has brought about a new and informed audience for films, but it is also a dispersed and radically decentralized audience. Finding a new community of film fanatics, it's often disconcerting to find out that there's no longer the context for understanding a movie. A few years ago, there was a great deal of critical and curatorial attention paid to the "discovery" of a 1950 Swedish film written and directed by Hasse Ekman, *Flicka och hyacinter* (*The Girl with Hyacinths*). It was a delicate psychological drama, about the investigation into a young woman's suicide. Most of the movie was told in flashbacks; the black-and-white cinematography by Goran Strindberg was exceptional, with subtle shadings (Swedish cinema has always been blessed with great cinematography), and the acting was extraordinary, with Eva Henning (Hasse Ekman's wife at the time) just incredibly moving as the tormented young woman. So many people I know were impressed when *Flicka och hyacinter* was showcased at the Sundance Film Festival. And I certainly thought highly of the film, and perhaps I would have thought even more highly of the film, if I hadn't seen a lot of Swedish movies from the 1940s, movies told in flashback, movies depicting the dramatic struggles of young women for sexual liberation, even movies in which the "secret" turned out to be the young woman's lesbianism. Some of these movies would include Alf Sjoberg's *Torment* (1947), Gustav Molander's *Affairs of a Model* (1946), *Life Starts Anew* (1948) and *Eva* (1948), Per Lindberg's *June Night* (actually 1940, but the last Swedish movie to star Ingrid Bergman for almost three decades), and, of course, Ingmar Bergman's *The Devil's Wanton* (1949) and *Three Strange Loves* (1949). In fact, the last has many similarities to *Flicka och hyacinter*, including Eva Henning as a young woman tortured by a lesbian affair.

In a recent (August 17, 2005) Indiewire (www.indiewire.com), Anthony Kaufman has an article titled "Asian Films Caught Between U.S. Distribs and DVD-Seeking Fans." Kaufman tries to examine whether or not the lag in U.S. distribution for Asian films, when those films have already been theatrically exhibited and are now in the secondary market of DVD releases in Asia (his primary example is Wong Kar-Wai's *2046*, which only received its theatrical release in the U.S. in August of 2005, but is already available on DVD in Hong Kong, Korea, and China, which can be attested by this website, which has already reviewed the "Region 0 - PAL" (China), the "Region 3 - NTSC" (Korea) and the "Region 0 - NTSC" (Hong Kong) DVDs of the film). But if you were really concerned with experiencing the work of this important filmmaker, especially *this* film, made in full Scope and color and Dolby-stereo sound, wouldn't you make the effort to see the film the way it was meant to be seen, in a theater with as big a screen as possible? Kaufman mentions the problem that Sony Pictures Classics had with Zhang Yimou's *The House of Flying Daggers*, which did not do nearly as well as expected when it was released in the fall of 2004; Miramax had released Zhang's previous *Hero* in the spring of 2004, where it became an unexpectedly popular box office success. But the problem was that, by holding onto *Hero* for at least two years, Miramax was able to claim the (considerable) arthouse audience for *Hero* (and gave that audience sufficient time from the release of Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*); but that same audience just wasn't in the mood to see a similar movie (same genre, same director, same star) a few months later. People just don't go to the movies that often anymore. When movies were the primary form of popular entertainment, people went to the movies at least once a month; now, the average person goes to about three movies a year.

It's not just moviegoing, it's moviemaking. An actress such as Cameron Diaz or Julia Roberts may make a movie once every two years (if that); the amount of time spent actually setting up

the project is much longer than the shooting schedule. Compare that to Loretta Young: in 1933 (probably her finest year), she starred in 10 movies, for a number of studios (Warners, Fox, Columbia, MGM), including such classics as Rowland V. Lee's lovely fairy tale *Zoo in Budapest*, William Wellman's tough melodrama *Midnight Mary* as well as his Depression lament *Heroes for Sale*, William Dieterle's exotic love triangle *The Devil's In Love*, Roy Del Ruth's racy novelette *Employee's Entrance*, and Frank Borzage's classic Depression drama *Man's Castle*. And she wasn't the only one (though few other stars were as prolific as Loretta Young in her prime): Barbara Stanwyck, Bette Davis, Carole Lombard, Claudette Colbert, Joan Crawford, Jean Arthur, Ginger Rogers and Myrna Loy were all making anywhere from three to six movies a year in the early 1930s. And this doesn't even begin to mention the second-tier actresses, such as Joan Blondell, Glenda Farrell, Ann Southern, Claire Trevor and Aline MacMahon, where five films per year was the norm. The studios had to supply the popular entertainment of the day, and they did: most of the major studios had production schedules with an average release of at least two movies a week This kept movie theaters supplied with enough product to ensure that regular moviegoers would be able to go to a new movie every week.

Yet we know that, as Nick Zegarac has made clear, most of those movies have not survived, and those that have survived may not have survived in conditions which are favorable to an ideal restoration. And trying to provide some sort of vigilance about this fact has been (mostly) unwelcome. When I tried to get an earlier article published about the problems with the much-publicized "restorations" that Paramount had done of *Sunset Boulevard* and *Roman Holiday*, that article was rejected by every single newspaper and magazine that I approached, because, I was told, "nobody cares." So the legacy of the movies is destroyed, through carelessness, stupidity, crass commercialism: who cares? So those of us who have become the most dedicated collectors of DVDs as a way of preserving (for ourselves) some semblance of cinematic and cultural history, our passion for demanding that there be standards for DVD production may be futile: the murky mess that often can be found as an excuse for DVD representation usually goes unnoticed.(Facets, Koch Lorber, and Wellspring are among the most egregious labels, because the titles which they have are often foreign titles of great worth, but little commercial value, so the appearance of substandard DVDs means that the works of Bela Tarr, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Denis Arcand, Tsai Ming-liang, Andrzej Munk, and many others of similar importance will never be found in even adequate DVD editions.)

Because of the decline in moviegoing attendance (this year has been one of the worst years in terms of box office in Hollywood history), what had been thought of as the "ancillary" market has, in fact, become a dominant market: many commercial films now make back their money on DVD sales. And Warners has become a leader with their boxsets, and their restored editions; for more specialty titles, the Criterion Collection has set the standard. But, increasingly, the pressures to maximize profits, to cut corners, to mass-produce product, will begin to erode those standards (and the recent purchase of Home Vision by Image is an ominous sign, though Criterion is supposedly to remain as its own label). The entire DVD revolution has, in fact, caught up with the movie industry, and it has had its effect: it has eroded the audience for the movies (just as television did in the 1950s), and now, DVDs themselves appear on the decline. Though many studios (now) make a pretense of preserving their heritage, one recent glaring example will suffice to show the exact state of film preservation.

Two years ago, there was a centennial celebration of the composer Richard Rodgers. For the occasion, The Museum of Modern Art programmed a series of films with music by Rodgers, including many films from the 1930s, such as the oddity *The Hot Heiress* from 1931. One of the highlights should have been the screening of *State Fair*, the 1945 musical remake of the 1933 film, with the only original film song score by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. But when it came time to get a decent print of the film, it was discovered that none existed.

The original Technicolor negative had long since disintegrated, and there were no Technicolor prints of the film that were in projectible condition. There wasn't even a compromise offered: the only alternative was to project the DVD version, which had been digitally restored (but not restored on celluloid). And the colors on the DVD were muted, far less vibrant than the Technicolor standard set by 20th Century Fox in the 1940s. In fact, since the colors on the DVD derive, not from the transfer from a pristine Technicolor print (which does not exist), but from the careful manipulation of color in the digital information, the colors (literally) are "colorized" digitally, which is why the DVD of the 1945 *State Fair* has the spooky look of a "colorized" DVD, the only difference being in this case the colors are not arbitrary, they derive from the original visual organization.

Not only is there *no* acceptable negative or print available of the 1945 *State Fair* (one of 20th Century Fox's most financially successful films of the 1940s, as well as one of its most acclaimed musicals, and an Academy Award winner in the bargain), there is also no acceptable negative or print that has survived of the 1933 version of *State Fair*, directed by Henry King, and starring two of Fox's most important stars, Janet Gaynor and Will Rogers. The 1933 version (in black and white) was also financially successful, it was also critically acclaimed, it was also nominated for innumerable Academy Awards (including Best Picture). Yet no one thought enough of these two movies to do *anything* to save them, until it was too late. So no matter what the archivists do *now* with the heritage of 20th Century Fox, it's too little, too late, as witness the fact that one of the most important properties in their archival holdings, the two early versions of *State Fair*, can no longer be found in any decent form. And will never be found in any decent form. Both the 1933 version and the 1945 version of *State Fair* are, effectively, lost forever. If financial success, critical acclaim, and Academy Awards don't ensure that a film will get proper archival preservation, what will? (Fox is coming out with a DVD set of the 1945 version of *State Fair* coupled with the 1963 remake; Fox dares not release the 1933 version, the most celebrated of the three versions, because it would reveal the deficiencies of its archives.)
And that speaks to the state of film history, and if you start to multiply this country by country, and you start to think of all the films internationally which no longer survive, the effect is staggering.

There are movies that I've seen, which I remember vividly, which I've never seen since their early release. One such movie is the Rene Clement-directed, Dino De Laurentiis-produced international co-production of Marguerite Duras's novel *The Sea Wall*, which was titled *This Angry Age* (1957). I remember with the most vivid clarity the astonishing Cinemascope Technicolor cinematography of Southeast Asia (the film is set in French Indochina in the 1930s, and the film was shot in Thailand and Laos), and scenes between Silvana Mangano and Anthony Perkins (playing sister and brother). The cinematographer was Otello Martelli, who was coming off his long association with Federico Fellini (he had photographed *I Vitelloni*, *La Strada*, *Il*

Bidone, *Notti di Cabiria* and would photograph *La Dolce Vita*). The cast was extraordinary: in addition to Mangano and Perkins, Jo Van Fleet played their mother, and the cast included Richard Conte, Alida Valli, and Nehemiah Persoff. *This Angry Age* should be an important film in cinema history: it marked the first attempt to translate Marguerite Duras's literary style into film, it was spectacularly beautiful, with incredible vistas of the coast of Southeast Asia, and it had some great performances. (Jo Van Fleet's performance as the old woman was preceded by her performance in *East of Eden* and followed by her performance in *Wild River*, and was equally remarkable; what's amazing about all three performances was that Jo Van Fleet was actually playing older, which is unusual for an actress; in *The Rose Tattoo*, made in the same year as *East of Eden*, she was actually playing her own age.) I recently asked my sister about the movie, and she remembered it as well: we had been taken to see it as children (possibly in 1958; we would have been four or five at the time), and we were very alert to any movie which centered on brother-and-sister relationships. (My sister and I are twins, and there aren't that many movies about twins, let alone brother-and-sister twins, so we took whatever we could get, and in *This Angry Age* Silvana Mangano and Anthony Perkins are made up and photographed so that their physical resemblance was accentuated: if they weren't supposed to be twins, they looked like twins in this movie.) Yet as far as I know, *This Angry Age* hasn't played in New York City in over 40 years, and hasn't been shown on television, and was never released on home video. So there has been no way to see this movie again. (When the touring retrospective of Marguerite Duras's films played across the country, including The Museum of Modern Art and the UCLA Film Archives, this film was conspicuous in its absence.) Whether or not any print exists (and in what version, since, as an international co-production, the film was made in several languages: French, Italian, English) is unknown.

And then there are those movies that one remembers, and recently (because of DVDs) one can see again. Two such movies are Douglas Sirk's *Lured* (1946) and Anatole Litvak's *The Long Night* (1947). Seeing them as a child, I was (of course) impressed by the stark *noir* ambience, the sense of menace and incredible design. But it was only within the last few years that both films became available on DVD (they were not shown on television, and they were never revived; once, about two decades ago, there was supposed to be a screening of *Lured* at The Collective for Living Cinema in New York City, but the print was pulled at the last minute). In the case of *Lured*, though I remembered certain scenes (such as Lucille Ball dressed in what I thought was a bridal gown, as Boris Karloff menaces her), since my childhood viewing, I had done a lot of reading on Douglas Sirk: the monograph from the Edinburgh Film Festival, the interview book *Sirk on Sirk* by Jon Halliday, essays by Laura Mulvey. I'd even had the opportunity of meeting Douglas Sirk and his wife (in 1980). So by the time I got to see *Lured* again, my re-viewing was tempered by my awareness of how other people now saw the film in terms of Sirk's *oeuvre*, and I understood the film from that perspective. (I have never had the opportunity to see Robert Siodmak's *Pieges*, on which *Lured* is based, though I certainly would like to.)

In the case of *The Long Night*, because of the issue of copyright, the film on which *The Long Night* had been based, Marcel Carne's *Le Jour se leve* (1939), had been unavailable in the United States until the early 1970s. But once it became available, it was frequently revived, and I saw it many times. I believe it is, with *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1946), one of the masterpieces of Carne's career: it is a distillation of the nascent Existentialist movement, and a profound depiction of the moral climate of France in that period. As if to prove this, in the Hugh Gray

translation of Andre Bazin's *What Is Cinema? Volume II*, the final essay in the collection is "The Destiny of Jean Gabin," in which Bazin attempts to provide the philosophical underpinnings for the "mythology" depicted in the films starring Gabin, the star vehicles such as *Pepe le Moko*, *Quai des brumes*, *Le Jour se leve*. And coming to *The Long Night*, not just with the knowledge of the original film, but also with the critical understanding provided by Bazin, the film still has marvelous components, but there's also the awareness that the film is slightly unmoored: the actions, which make perfect sense in a French context, seem out of place in an American context. As Bazin wrote, "In nearly all Gabin films - at least from *La Bete humaine* to *Au-dela des grilles* - he comes to a violent end that has the appearance, more or less, of suicide.... But can you see Gabin as a family man? Could anyone imagine that, at the end of *Quai des Brumes*, he had managed to snatch poor Michele Morgan from the clutches of Michel Simon and Pierre Brasseur, and sailed with her to a future in America; or that, having come to his senses, he preferred when day broke in *Le Jour se leve* to turn himself in and hope for a probable acquittal?" Well, of course, the joke is that, in *The Long Night*, the meanings have been so distorted because of the lack of context, that the ludicrous "happy ending" that Bazin dismisses is, in fact, tacked onto *The Long Night*. I still see the qualities in *The Long Night* that I loved when I saw it as a child, but I also see it in a wider cultural context, and I can see why it received a critical drubbing when it was released, and why it wasn't popular. Yet it's still a wonderfully designed film (production design by Eugene Lourie), with marvelous black-and-white photography (cinematography by Sol Polito), and an exceptional cast (Henry Fonda, Vincent Price, Ann Dvorak, and Barbara Bel Geddes in her screen debut). But the film can't mean what *Le Jour se leve* meant, not even in terms of the cast, because Henry Fonda's persona in this role doesn't have the mythic dimensions that Jean Gabin's persona had (and *Le Jour se leve* helped to define that myth); Ann Dvorak is a very good actress (anyone who has ever seen the 1932 version of *Scarface* is not likely to forget her), but she is not Arletty. *Le Jour se leve* was so highly thought of that, in several of the polls taken in the 1950s and 1960s, it was one of the films most frequently cited (the international film critics poll at the Brussels World's Fair in 1958; the Sight & Sound poll of international film critics in 1962). Bazin himself addressed this subject in the essay "La politique des auteurs" when, using the example of Orson Welles, he noted, "Of course I admire *Confidential Report*, and I see the same qualities in it as I see in *Citizen Kane*. But *Citizen Kane* opened up a new era in American cinema, and *Confidential Report* is a film of only secondary importance." In short: the importance of the cinema during the 20th Century was that it was not just an artform, it was a massive industrial machine, it was a medium of popular entertainment, it was a sociological and cultural enterprise, and those films which were able to attain the highest expression in every category could attain the status of masterworks.

One of the most perplexing issues in relation to film has always been what constitutes the values by which film is to be judged. That is: is it literary? Is it theatrical? Is it visual? But that was important when film was the primary medium of mass culture of the previous century; as the primacy of film has diminished, the unresolved tensions regarding the critical values to be brought to bear on film have not found some conclusion, they've simply been displaced. And film had such an immediacy that the overwhelming sensory experience could circumvent critical reasoning.

That's why people (to this day) are so passionate in terms of their judgements of movies. And it

also makes judgement problematic: what impresses us as children may not impress us as adults. But this can be aggravating: it's sometimes depressing to read someone who decides to deride his or her own history. (One critic I know had a game where he would ask friends to list the ten films they considered the most overrated in film history. What was depressing was that most of the people were always too sophisticated to name, say, such obvious Academy Award winners as *The Greatest Show on Earth* or *Around the World in 80 Days* or *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*; instead, they'd always name something like Rene Clement's *Forbidden Games* or Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thief* or Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up*, films which don't have a chance of being overexposed, and which have lost the cachet they once had anyway.) Ok, so *David and Lisa* now seems silly, but can't you have the imagination to remember the innocence with which you once approached a movie, and which made *David and Lisa* seem so profoundly moving? (Keir Dullea's almost ethereal remoteness, which was used in *The Hoodlum Priest* and would be used in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and Janet Margolin's defiant wistful sadness, which was showcased by Woody Allen in *Take the Money and Run*, certainly should retain some of the initial power.) It's almost impossible for us to recreate the impact that certain moments, certain stars, certain films have had. For example, in Lubitsch's *Ninotchka* (1939), which is certainly a distinguished film in the careers of many of those involved in its production, there is a moment described by Pauline Kael as "an historic encounter when the great instinctive artist of the screen (Greta Garbo) meets the great stylist and technician of the stage, Ina Claire: the fur flies exquisitely," yet for audiences of the time, there was the added *frisson* in the fact that, in 1927, Greta Garbo had jilted John Gilbert on the day of their wedding, and in 1929, John Gilbert would elope with Ina Claire. These two women, playing women in love with the same man, were (in fact) two women who had been in love with the same man. But now, with the DVD release of *Ninotchka*, will any of those who are seeing this movie for the first time in their home realize the "significance" of that scene?

But with the Warners DVD restoration, new audiences will get a pristine image and crystalline sound, and they will be able to get something of the wit and charm and intelligence which made *Ninotchka* one of the notable films during Hollywood's banner year of 1939. They may not be getting everything, but they're getting something. It's now our task to figure out what it is that we want to get from this new development, which the DVD revolution has brought about, of movies in our home. The idea that movies were the "democratic" art, and that the movies would provide an aesthetic experience which could unite the mass audience, has all but been forgotten. What we experience now is something else, and we'd better get used to it.

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