

ARROW ACADEMY
PRESENTS

The
**JACQUES
RIVETTE**
Collection



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DUELLE

(UNE QUARANTAINE)

Scenario **Eduardo de Gregorio** and **Marilù Parolini**
Dialogue **Eduardo de Gregorio**

Director of Photography **William Lubtchansky**
Edited by **Nicole Lubtchansky**
Produced by **Stéphane Tchal Gadjieff**
Directed by **Jacques Rivette**

Bulle Ogier Viva
Juliet Berto Leni
Jean Babilée Pierrot
Hermine Karagheuz Lucie
Nicole Garcia Jeanne/Elsa
Claire Nadeau Sylvia Stern
Elisabeth Wiener Alliée de Viva

Musicians **Jean Wiener, André Dauchy** and **Roger Fugen**



NOROÎT

(UNE VENGEANCE)

Scenariò **Eduardo de Gregorio, Marilù Parolini** and
Jacques Rivette
From **The Revenger's Tragedy** by **Cyril Tourneur**
Dialogue **Eduardo de Gregorio** and **Marilù Parolini**

Director of Photography **William Lubtchansky**
Edited by **Nicole Lubtchansky**
Produced by **Stéphane Tchal Gadjeff**
Directed by **Jacques Rivette**

Geraldine Chaplin Morag
Bernadette Lafont Giulia
Kika Markham Erika
Humbert Balsan Jacob
Larrio Ekson Ludovico
Anne-Marie Reynaud Arno
Babette Lamy Regina
Danièle Rosencranz Celia
Elisabeth Medveczky Elisa
Carole Laurenty Charlotte
Anne-Marie Fijal Fiao
Marie-Christine Meynard Tony
Anne Bedou Romain
Georges Gatecloud Frère d'Arno

Musicians **Jean Cohen-Solal, Robert Cohen-Solal** and
Daniel Ponsard



MERRY-GO-ROUND

Scenari **Eduardo de Gregorio, Suzanne Schiffman and Jacques Rivette**

Dialogue **Eduardo de Gregorio**

Director of Photography **William Lubtchansky**

Edited by **Nicole Lubtchansky** and **Catherine Quesemand**

Produced by **Stéphane Tchal Gadjeff**

Directed by **Jacques Rivette**

Maria Schneider Léo

Joe Dallesandro Ben

Danièle Gégauff Elisabeth

Sylvie Meyer Shirley

Françoise Prévost Renée Novick

Maurice Garrel Julius Danvers

Michel Berto Jérôme

Dominique Erlanger la secrétaire

Frédéric Mitterand le conseil

Jean-François Stévenin le décorateur

Pascale Dauman l'infirmière

Marc Labrousse le premier complice

Jean Hernandez le deuxième complice

Benjamin Legrand le chauffeur

Florence Bernard la femme du cimetière

Humbert Balsan le chevalier

Hermine Karagheuz l'autre

Musicians **Barre Phillips** and **John Surman**

MOVING BACKSTAGE

by Mary M. Wiles

In the spring of 1957, Jacques Rivette had just completed his first short film, *Le Coup du berger* (*Fool's Mate*, 1956), while continuing to write incisive critical pieces for the Paris film journal, *Cahiers du cinéma*. Not yet thirty years old, he was already a veteran film critic and an aspiring director...

Rivette was born on March 1, 1928 and raised in the Norman city of Rouen. He commenced an undergraduate degree at the University of Rouen, but his scholastic work was placed on indefinite hold when he discovered Jean Cocteau's diary of the filming of *La Belle et la bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1946), a fortuitous event that marked the beginning of his vocation as a filmmaker. In 1949, he packed a copy of his first 16mm short film, *Aux quatre coins* (*On Four Corners*, 1949), and left his native town determined to pursue a filmmaking career in Paris. In the months that followed, Rivette frequented the Cinémathèque française on Avenue de Messine and the Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin where he became acquainted with Jean Gruault, Suzanne Schiffman, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard and Maurice Schéer, who would later become Éric Rohmer. In the early 1950s, the fledgling filmmakers whom André Bazin playfully dubbed the "Hitchcocko-Hawksians" met daily at *Cahiers* and collaborated on each other's 16mm productions. Rivette completed two 16mm short films, *Le Quadrille* (1950, produced by Godard) and *Le Divertissement* (1952). In 1956, he completed *Le Coup du berger* (produced by Claude Chabrol), a 35mm film that scholars consider to be the first professional production of the French New Wave, as the previous shorts directed by Rivette, Truffaut, Rohmer and Godard had been shot in 16mm, a format considered 'unprofessional'.¹ Rivette filmed *Le Coup du berger* in Chabrol's apartment, where Godard, Truffaut and cinematographer Charles Bitsch gathered to discuss each shot setup. While aspects of the film's story about lovers' schemes predict Rivette's future work, the film lacks the mediation of theatrical *mise en scène* that would lend his first feature film its contemplative reflexivity.²

1 - Michel Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*, trans. Richard Neupert (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), p. 59.
2 - Hélène Frappat, *Jacques Rivette: secret compris* (Paris: *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 2001), p. 99.

Paris nous appartient (*Paris Belongs to Us*, 1961) draws on the situationist theatre of Sartre to address questions of personal culpability, capitalist expansionism, and conspiracy. The existential struggle of a Paris theatre director attempting to produce a little-known Shakespeare play mirrors Rivette's own commitment to present the plight of the individual engaged in combating those institutional forces that conspire to delimit his freedom. It is not difficult to see elements of the young, idealistic filmmaker in the beleaguered theatre director; Rivette similarly encountered financial difficulties during the filming of *Paris nous appartient*, which was among the first of the French New Wave films to go into production in the summer of 1958, but the last to be released in late 1961. We can surmise that Rivette also encountered the moral dilemmas borne by the dramaturge in the course of the film's protracted production process. He must have felt himself to be – far more so than his *Cahiers* colleagues – a chartered member of the "order of exiles" that the fictional theatre director insists he has been inducted into. Rivette's preoccupation with the interrelation between film and theatre evolved over the years, expanding to encompass the relation between cinema and various arts, particularly painting, literature, music, and dance. His firmly held belief in the dynamic community of the arts shaped his two-year tenure as editor-in-chief of *Cahiers du cinéma*. From 1963 until 1965, Rivette expanded the journal's repertoire to include key figures from the Paris literary, philosophical and artistic community, such as Roland Barthes, Pierre Boulez, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and even Sartre (although the conversation never occurred).

In May 1965, Rivette resigned from his position at *Cahiers* and joined forces with producer Georges de Beaugregard. *La Religieuse* (*The Nun*), based on the Denis Diderot novel and starring Anna Karina, defends the right of a young woman to decide her own destiny amidst the hierarchical system of oppression imposed by eighteenth-century French convent life. Rivette was understandably taken aback when the Gaullist government placed a total ban on the film. A manifesto protesting the ban procured "1789" signatures, and Godard published an open letter condemning the censors, "that gestapo of the spirit."³ After the ban was lifted a little more than a year later in 1967, the film became a *succès à scandale*.

It was during the filming of the three-part television documentary, *Jean Renoir le patron* (1966), that Rivette discovered a new vision of filmmaking based on that of

3 - Jean-Luc Godard, 'Lettre Ouverte à André Malraux', *Nouvel Observateur* (6 April 1966), reprinted in Serge Toubiana, 'Censure, Danger Immédiat', *Cahiers du cinéma* 413 (November 1988).

the aging director. In Rivette's estimation, Renoir had created a cinema that was open to "dialogue at every level, with the actors, with the situation, with the people you meet, where the act of filming is part of the film itself."⁴ Rivette's stylistic revolution also coincided with the cultural revolution in France following the events of May 1968. Testifying to the radical moment of cultural change, the nearly thirteen-hour *Out 1: Noli me tangere* (*Out 1: Touch Me Not*, 1970) and the re-edited four-hour version, *Out 1: Spectre* (1974), represent the culmination of Rivette's effort, which began with *L'amour fou* (*Mad Love*, 1969), to break from the strictures of narrative form, from the inflexibility imposed by a script, and from the acting style required by rigid adherence to the script. The four-hour experimental *L'amour fou* (the title pays tribute to André Breton's surrealist text) initiates Rivette's exploration of duration. The film uses a *mise en abyme* construction where Rivette's 35mm film records a television crew directed by André S. Labarthe, which uses 16mm film stock to document theatre rehearsals of Jean Racine's *Andromaque* in a mock *cinéma vérité* style. The film narrative recounts the progressive unravelling of the backstage relationship between the play's director (Jean-Pierre Kalfon) and his partner (Bulle Ogier), an actress who appears to go mad after she forfeits her role in the play. Rivette encouraged Kalfon and Ogier to develop their own characters in conversation with him and also allowed them to improvise, a strategy that he would take even further in *Out 1* where each actor was invited to invent the social context for his/her own character and, while filming, develop this character as he/she wished. The prologue of Honoré de Balzac's *History of the Thirteen*, in which the myth of the nineteenth-century criminal conspiracy takes shape, provided each actor with a point of departure. Michèle Moretti and Michael Lonsdale direct rival theatre troupes each rehearsing productions of Aeschylus, while Jean-Pierre Léaud and Juliet Berto are street hustlers who find their way to Ogier's out-of-the-way hippie boutique, which serves as a front for an underground newspaper possibly allied with the Thirteen. The film's labyrinthine evolution ultimately would present all its participants – the actor, the director and the spectator alike – with different pathways to follow.

Rivette again enlisted his actors as scriptwriters in *Céline and Julie vont en bateau: Phantom Ladies Over Paris* (*Celine and Julie Go Boating*, 1974), a film whose commercial release coincided with the onset of post-'68 feminism. Rivette's most

4 - Jacques Aumont, Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Narboni, and Sylvie Pierre, 'Time Overflowing: Interview with Jacques Rivette', *Cahiers du cinéma* 204 (September 1968), reprinted in Jonathan Rosenbaum, ed., *Rivette, Texts and Interviews*, trans. Amy Gateff (London: British Film Institute, 1977), p. 11.

well-known film among international audiences, *Céline et Julie* enjoyed immediate and far-reaching success. We might attribute this to the timeliness of its feminist story, which explores the dimensions of female friendship in its depiction of a librarian (Dominique Labourier) and a magician (Berto), who witness a bizarre melodrama being staged within a haunted Phantom House and decide to magically intervene as actresses in the 'theatrical' scenes that are being rehearsed there. Inspired by Henry James's fiction, the film draws on the nostalgic ambience elicited by the codes of silent cinema, the esoteric conveyed by magic formulas, and the remoteness of a supernatural world that surpasses the everyday. Rivette's first comedy, *Céline et Julie* pays tribute to Jerry Lewis's delirious performances and to the Marx Brothers' wacky antics; it could also be understood as directly participating in the comic lineage of the Commedia dell'arte.

In 1975 Rivette reunited with Stéphane Tchala Gadjeff (who had produced *Out 1*) to conceptualise a Nervalian cycle of four films: *Les Filles du feu* (*Girls of Fire*). Rivette conceived of the four films as united through "the intervention of music on action".⁵ Each was to have represented a different genre – a love story (*Marie et Julien*), a fantastic thriller (*Duelle*), a western (*Noroît*), and a musical comedy with Anna Karina and Jean Marais. Only *Duelle* and *Noroît* (both 1976) were completed. They are fantastic tales in which sun and moon goddesses enter into treacherous intrigues that end in murder and mysterious duels. Jean Cocteau's legacy of theatrical style is everywhere apparent in *Duelle* (starring Ogier, Berto and Jean Babilée), which takes its inspiration directly from his 1937 play, *Les Chevaliers de la table ronde* (*The Knights of the Round Table*). *Noroît* (starring Bernadette Lafont and Geraldine Chaplin) is more indebted to opera in its conception, creating its fantastical dimension through theatrical gesture, elliptical verse, and improvised music that disclose the legacy of operatic style passed on to Rivette from Cocteau, and ultimately, from Maurice Maeterlinck and Claude Debussy. Rivette had only shot some scenes of *Marie et Julien*, the first film in the proposed cycle, with Leslie Caron and Albert Finney before he abandoned the shoot altogether, succumbing to nervous exhaustion. *Merry-Go-Round* (completed 1978 and released 1983) is not considered part of the unfinished tetralogy, although it does rely on musicians' improvisation, as do *Duelle* and *Noroît*. *Merry-Go-Round* is also informed by the genre conventions that shaped Rivette's

5 - Serge Daney and Jean Narboni, 'Entretien avec Jacques Rivette', Special Issue: 'Situation du cinéma français', *Cahiers du cinéma* 323-24 (May-June 1981).

overall conception of the tetralogy, relying on the codes of the detective film and the road movie. The film opens as two drifters, Maria Schneider and Joe Dallesandro, turn up at Charles de Gaulle airport to await the arrival a woman known to them both. When she fails to appear, the two commence a search for her, which takes the form of a rambling odyssey through the environs of Paris. In each of the three films, the improvisation of musicians – Jean Wiener on piano in *Duelle*, the Cohen-Solal brothers on drums and flute in *Noroît*, and Barre Phillips and John Surman on bass and clarinet in *Merry-Go-Round* – complements the actors' improvisational style.

Rivette returned to the terrors and pleasures of the contemporary cityscape in *Le Pont du Nord* (1982), casting his glance once more over Paris that was still in the grip of Giscardianism at the time of filming. He joined producer Martine Marignac (who has remained his producer) to complete the final film within the conspiracy trilogy (following *Paris nous appartient* and *Out 1*) in which each successive film takes the pulse of the city at the close of the preceding decade.⁶ *Le Pont du Nord* might be read as either a chilling political allegory or hailed as a modern day ballad, which chronicles the perambulations of its two errant heroines, a former prisoner and her young cohort (Bulle and Pascale Ogier). Imperilled by mysterious enemies, the two undaunted women trace the circumference of the gridded city, for as Marguerite Duras observed, “they can no longer stop, they roll along like automobiles, like the news, like New York in Europe, like the cinema, like eternity.”⁷

In certain respects, the theatricality of *L'Amour par terre* (*Love on the Ground*, 1984) and *La Bande des quatre* (*Gang of Four*, 1989) represented a departure from the formal concerns that had preoccupied Rivette during the previous decade. In these films, theatre is no longer associated with improvisational stylistics or an operatic, esoteric *mise en scène*. In both, theatricality becomes equivalent to the work of a dramatic text. In *L'Amour par terre*, actresses (Jane Birkin and Geraldine Chaplin) rehearse the new play of a theatre director (Jean-Pierre Kalfon) within his isolated villa located on the outskirts of Paris. Like a conjurer, the *metteur en scène* commands doubles, casting Chaplin in the central role of the phantom woman from his past who has mysteriously disappeared from the villa. In *La Bande des quatre*, a band of apprentice actresses attend a theatre course taught by the mysterious actress and *metteur en*

6 - Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Film: The Front Line 1983* (Denver, Colorado: Arden Press, 1983), p. 171.

7 - Marguerite Duras, and Jacques Rivette, ‘Sur le Pont du Nord un bal y est donné: Un Dialogue avec Marguerite Duras et Jacques Rivette’, *Le Monde* (25 March 1982).

scène Bulle Ogier, taking their places on the proscenium stage to recite their lines from Marivaux. While both films revisit ‘exteriorised’ theatricality in which the director, troupe, and text are placed on display, they also reinvent the representation of the Jamesian occult found in *Céline and Julie's Phantom House*. Ghosts haunt the houses of *L'amour par terre* and *La Bande des quatre*, becoming as audible as an ocean from behind a locked door or soft footsteps from within hollow walls. In both films, theatrical and cinematic scripts intersect at times, calling our attention to the relation between the dramatic role and the real. Shortly after the release of *La Bande des quatre*, Rivette returned to the theatre to direct Pierre Corneille's *Tite et Bérénice* and Jean Racine's *Bajazet* with same actresses who had performed in the film.

Rivette's work with theatrical tableaux in his adaptation of *La Religieuse* laid the groundwork for *Hurlevent* (*Wuthering Heights*, 1985), an adaptation of Emily Brontë's novel, and *La Belle noiseuse* (1991), an adaptation of Balzac's 1831 novella, *Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu* (*The Unknown Masterpiece*). Revealing a tendency towards pictorial citation already evident in the Diderot adaptation, Rivette transposed Brontë's novel by modelling certain scenes on the Indian ink illustrations of Balthus (Balthasar Klossowski de Rola). The French painter's tableaux provided Rivette with an important point of reference in recounting the tragic story of Brontë's heroine (Fabienne Babe), a woman not unlike *La Religieuse's* Suzanne Simonin, whose passionate love for the gypsy waif (Lucas Belvaux) is curtailed due to the demands of social norms and conventional morality. Rivette returned to the tableau again in *La Belle noiseuse* (1991), as does its Balzacian painter (Michel Piccoli), after having abandoned the style for certain period of time. Awarded the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival, *La Belle noiseuse* tells the story of an aging painter who works with a young model (Emmanuelle Béart) to rediscover the source of artistic creation. Rivette's study of duration in the four-hour film may have been inspired by André Bazin who maintained that painting and cinema present two modes of temporality, noting that film confers a temporal unity that is “horizontal and, so to speak, geographical”, whereas time in painting develops “geologically and in depth”.⁸ In *La Belle noiseuse*, the audience is invited to share in the process of painting itself, to join the artist in what he describes as a geological expedition to “the sound of the origins. The forest and the sea mixed together. That's what painting is.”

8 - André Bazin, *What Is Cinema? vol. 1*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 165.

In the mid-1990s, Rivette shifted direction to work with film genres, reinventing them through reference to theatrical styles. In the two-part historical epic, *Jeanne la Pucelle* (1994), the story of the Christian martyr and mystic Joan of Arc is re-envisioned as a contemporary feminist parable in which arthouse star Sandrine Bonnaire takes centre stage. Catholic playwright Charles Péguy's *Jeanne d'Arc* (1897) provides the impetus for the film, whose epic expanse distinguishes it from Carl Theodor Dreyer's 1928 silent classic, *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, a microscopic study of Joan's anguished martyrdom, and also from Robert Bresson's 1962 portrait of an unyielding, stoic Joan, *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc*. Rivette handpicked Bonnaire, who he viewed as a corporal performer able to incarnate the popular side of Jeanne tied to an historical trajectory, rather than to a cold, abstract ideal of sainthood.⁹

An intoxicating excursion into the American musical genre, *Haut bas fragile* (*Up, Down, Fragile*, 1995), chronicled the daily lives of three women (Marianne Denicourt, Laurence Côte, and Nathalie Richard) who live in Paris. Modelled on Henry Miller's New York taxi-dance hall and 1930s Hollywood song-and-dance numbers, Rivette's idiosyncratic musical provides a stylistic idiom through which female subjectivity finds expression. Occasional vocal performances of Anna Karina recall her appearances within the 1960s cinema 'de la jeunesse'. Rivette reinvented the Hitchcockian thriller in his next film, *Secret défense* (1998), in which Bonnaire assumed the role of a researcher and investigator who seeks to avenge the death of her father. The film's revenge narrative is based on Jean Giraudoux's *Electra* (1937), an updated version of the Greek legend. In the play, the character Electra is an inspirational, mythic figure, similar to Joan of Arc, who is destined to serve as the moral scourge of a nation. Rivette refashions the Electra myth in his film by interlacing it with the complex crime patterns of film noir, and the darkness and mystery associated with the Hitchcockian crime thriller, in order to align the everyday world with the ceremonial space of the film.

In *Va savoir* (2001), Rivette fashioned a romantic farce modelled on the classical screwball comedies of Howard Hawks and Frank Capra in which a prominent French actress (Jeanne Balibar) returns to Paris accompanied by her companion, Italian theatre director (Sergio Castellitto). The two are co-starring in Luigi Pirandello's play, *Come tu mi vuoi* (*As You Desire Me*, 1930), but difficulties arise when they each engage in a light flirtation offstage. The playful, humorous tone of the actors'

9 - Jean Collet, 'Jeanne la Pucelle: Histoire et territoire', in *Jacques Rivette: critique et cinéaste*, ed. Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues (Paris: Lettres modernes/minard, 1998), p. 152.

backstage machinations offsets the reflective quality of Pirandello's play, which offers a serious study of madness and feminine identity. At the film's close, the separate domains of theatre and cinema converge as all players reunite on the proscenium stage where as the stage lights dim, the gentle strains of 'Senza fine' convey the sentiment of the moment: "There's no end to our love, our hearts, our dreams, our sighs./No end at all, no sad goodbyes."

Rivette's enduring interest in magic and fantasy resurfaces in *Histoire de Marie et Julien* (2003) from its source in the supernatural feminine cosmology of *Les Filles de feu* and largely conforms to the original script of *Marie et Julien*, the phantom film from the 1970s cycle. Alongside scriptwriters Pascal Bonitzer and Christine Laurent – the team with whom he had worked since *La Bande des quatre* – Rivette reconceptualised the storyline to suit the requirements of his actors, Emmanuelle Béart and Jerzy Radziwiłowicz. The film recounts the haunting love story between an amiable bachelor (Radziwiłowicz) who repairs clocks and a mysterious young woman (Béart) who grows increasingly reluctant to disclose her status as a revenant, a supernatural being that spans two worlds. It is the lens of William Lubtchansky (Rivette's cinematographer since *Duelle* and *Noroît*) that once again in this film recaptures the visual magnificence of the *quarantaine* (the forty), the magical temporal zone of forty days during which goddesses can appear on Earth.

Rivette returned to the historical costume drama in *Ne touchez pas la hache* (*Don't Touch the Axe*, 2007), his largely faithful adaptation of the second novella of Balzac's *History of the Thirteen*. Rivette's theatrical structuring is very much in evidence in the film's prologue when we first encounter the Armand de Montriveau (Guillaume Depardieu), a celebrated French military officer who has been desperately searching for her for the past five years. The film's central story unfolds in a flashback that recounts the Duchess's theatrically orchestrated seduction and humiliation of the General in her boudoir, the General's vengeance on the Duchess in his lair, and their final missed rendezvous, which precipitates the Duchess's final departure.

If *Ne touchez pas la hache* can be considered as a return to adaptation and the scenarios of possession and abandon associated with it, *36 vues du Pic Saint Loup* (*Around a Small Mountain*, 2009), might be viewed as an unprecedented departure

to a new arena: the circus. The film chronicles the journey of a small family circus troupe in and around the Pic Saint Loup in southern France. When the troupe's founder dies unexpectedly, his daughter (Jane Birkin) agrees to join them on their summer tour, and on the way encounters a meticulously-dressed Italian (Sergio Castellitto) who emerges, like a modern-day knight who has materialized from the medieval legend for which the film is named. He steps quietly into Rivette's role of *metteur en scène*/psychoanalyst/conspirator when he devises a carnivalesque ritual of passage intended to liberate the troubled woman from the ghosts of her past. This watchful *metteur en scène* intercedes on behalf of the tormented circus aerialist, placing her in a position to reassert control over her own past and proceed undaunted into the uncertain future. At the close of the director's career, we can trace within Rivette's last two films, *La hache* and *36 vues*, the two distinctive trends that have continued to evolve side by side within his work, from the introspective tableau of an aristocratic boudoir to the free-form physicality of an acrobatic performance; from scripted adaptation to ad hoc invention during a shoot, from the inexorability of the tragic denouement to the unanticipated comic improvisation of clowns.

Some time ago, Rivette likened the role of the filmmaker, as Marc Chevré reminds us, to that of an acrobat on "a high wire above the void, which itself is the very soul of cinema".¹⁰ At the close of the sixth decade of Rivette's career, we watch as he strikes a subtle balance between the political and deeply personal obsession, between myth and fiction, between theatre and cinema, in his films that continue to redefine the art of cinema around the world.

Mary M. Wiles is a lecturer in cinema studies at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand and the author of Jacques Rivette, published in 2012 by the University of Illinois Press.

10 - Marc Chevré, 'Supplément aux voyages de Jacques Rivette/J.R.', *Cahiers du cinéma* 416 (February 1989).





RIVETTE X 4

by Jonathan Rosenbaum, Gilbert Adair
and Michael Graham

[The following article was originally published in Sight & Sound's Autumn 1975 issue. It consists of four on-set reports from Duelle (une quarantaine) and Noroît (une vengeance) before their titles had been finalised. The opening paragraph sets out a plan for a quartet of features which never happened. See Mary M. Wiles and Nick Pinkerton's essays for further details – ANJ]

In theory, from the vantage point of early spring, it would besomething like this: four movies to be shot consecutively, each one an average-length feature to be filmed in three weeks; editing to begin after the fourth is shot, the four films edited in the order of their successive releases. For practical reasons, shooting order – 2, 4, 1, 3 – has to differ from editing and release order... In practice, from the vantage point of late July, the three-week schedules had to be abandoned once the separate films grew – in scale if not running time – and Jacques Rivette is currently preparing to shoot the third film, No. 1 in the series.

Some preliminary ground rules: each film covers the same 40-day Carnival period, extending from the last new moon of winter to the first full moon of spring, when goddesses are permitted commerce with mortals. These 'daughters of fire' – the title is taken from Nerval – come in two varieties, Daughters of the Sun (fairies) and Daughters of the Moon (ghosts). No. 1, a love story, will have a mortal (Albert Finney) as hero, a ghost (Leslie Caron) as heroine. No. 2, a film noir, pits a ghost (Juliet Berto) against a fairy (Bulle Ogier) while each searches for a diamond that can keep her alive past the allotted forty days, leaving three mortal female victims in their wake. No. 3, a musical comedy conceived for Anna Karina and Jean Marais, will have a fairy playfully switching around the identities of three mortal men. No. 4, a Jacobean tragedy, sets two vengeful ghosts (Geraldine Chaplin, Kika Markham) against a pirate fairy (Bernadette Lafont), with plenty of perishable mortals in between.

Some goddesses may appear in separate guises in later movies, but each film is designed as a discrete unit. Live music from onscreen musicians will figure

increasingly from one film to the next, in instrumentation as well as frequency. For the first time since *La Religieuse* (1966), all the shooting will be in 35mm, in the same widescreen ratio (1.85:1) as the former.

By necessity, the following reports are not of completed works, but of *tournages*. Rivette's working methods change radically from one project to the next, making predictions extremely difficult; and from its inception, *Les Filles du feu* has been in a state of constant evolution. Thus many of the projections here and below are subject to revision, and the events described relate less to the films themselves than to particular stages in their developments.

1

April 14, Paris: Arriving late morning in Parc Montsouris, not far from Cité Universitaire, I come upon Rivette and his crew shooting part of the final sequence of *L'Oeil froid* (a tentative title later replaced by *Viva*, which is no less tentative [the film would later become *Duelle*]), a sort of duel between Hermine Karagheuz (Lucie, a mortal) and Juliet Berto (Leni, a ghost) in front of an imposing tree. Lucie is holding out an enormous diamond that glows an improbably bright and bloody red, a trick contrived with batteries and invisible wires. "Red Magic," Rivette says to me in English, laughing between takes.

Both actresses are veterans of *Out 1* (1971) and *Spectre* (1974), Rivette's most extended experience with what he calls "improvisation sauvage", but this time they aren't improvising at all. All 27 sequences in the film have been mapped out in advance by Rivette and a screenwriter, Eduardo de Gregorio, and the latter and Marilù Parolini are writing the dialogue every days only hours – sometimes minutes – before the players commit the lines to memory and deliver them for the cameras; if adjustments are made, it is Rivette alone who makes them.

There's no dialogue in the present shot, and while Karagheuz glints menacingly at the camera in red jacket and jeans, Berto is standing out of camera range in a flowing cape, looking quite a bit like a ghost. Some of the appearances, like those of the other goddesses, will be heralded by gusts of wind, in interiors as well as exteriors, and theoretically her features will gradually grow whiter and paler over the course



of the film while her lips turn steadily redder, until the climactic confrontation, when she assumes some of the pallor of the phantom princess in Kenji Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu Monogatari* (1953).

In some ways, the relaxed and congenial mood of the crew suggests a family reunion. Karagheuz has acted in two previous Rivettes, Berto in three and Bulle Ogier in four; Parolini worked on *L'Amour fou* (1969), de Gregorio on *Céline et Julie vont en bateau: Phantom Ladies Over Paris* (1974) and the unproduced *Phenix*, and both collaborated with Bernardo Bertolucci on the script of *The Spider's Stratagem (Strategia del ragno, 1970)*; the project has the same producer, Stéphane Tchakadjieff, as *Out 1* and *Spectre*; the script girl worked on *L'Amour fou*, and the stills photographer is Berto's sister.

During lunch in a nearby bistro, Rivette quickly goes over the afternoon's hand-written dialogue, alters the order of two sentences, gives it back to de Gregorio so final copies can be written out for the actors, and then continues to talk about the movies he saw over the weekend. A rarity among directors, he keeps up with cinema as religiously as a daily critic, and not even a *tournage* will necessarily encourage him to swear off entirely. The story is told that on one occasion, when *The Golden Coach (La Carrosse d'or, 1952)* opened in Paris, he spent an entire day in the cinema, from first show to last – testimony to the kind of dedication and endurance that may not be unrelated to the running times of his last four films.

While the crew sets itself up in the Labyrinth of the Jardin des Plantes – a spiral footpath which leads up a hill overlooking the promenade and greenhouse – for an afternoon of retakes, de Gregorio describes a few of the cinematic reference points at work in the film. Before shooting started, *The Seventh Victim* (1943), perhaps the most elliptical and troubling of Val Lewton's films, was screened for members of the cast and crew (three months later, for the next film, *Moonfleet* [1955] will be projected for comparable reasons), and film noir conventions are constantly kept in mind. Tomorrow's shooting in the adjacent greenhouse is partially prompted by *The Big Sleep* (1946), just as a future meeting in an aquarium is suggested by *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947); and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) seems to be regarded as a *locus classicus* throughout.

The present scene is an earlier meeting between Leni and Lucie which will occur roughly halfway through the film; in principle, a series of short dialogues separated by jump cuts as they meet and walk along parts of the spiral path and elsewhere. Initially filmed near the beginning of shooting, this is partially redone with different dialogue now that Rivette has had a chance to look at the rushes and rethink the *mise en scène*. The time will be dusk, the location rather dark under a network of branches; like the other ghosts in the tetralogy, Leni functions best at night, just as Viva, along with the other fairies, prefers the brightness of day.

By late afternoon, a light rain has started, but the crew goes on shooting well past official break-up time, in the cramped quarters of the curious little gazebo on top of the hill. There hasn't been enough time to secure permission from the park authorities to use the location, which Rivette selected on the spur of the moment, so there's a slightly tense and watchful mood as the camera makes 360° pans following Leni and Lucie round the small perimeter of the raised platform.

April 15: In the sweltering greenhouse, Viva (Bulle Ogier), the sun goddess, meets Jeanne (Nicole Garcia), another mortal, known as Elsa when she works as a ticket-girl in a dance hall. Will this scene between blondes 'double' the meeting between brunettes Leni and Lucie in the former's shadowy domain in the Labyrinth, which is planned to transpire two sequences earlier? Ogier, outfitted in a grey velvet pants suit with pink scarf and blouse, black gloves and stick – the latter concealing a mean-looking blade – greets Jeanne in a film noir trenchcoat streaked with a yellow scarf. But if the actresses' costumes are correspondingly ethereal and earthy, the expressions playing over the faces often provide a strange contrast and counterpoint – a paradox which seems to surface at odd junctures in yesterday's shooting as well, when Lucie would suddenly take on an unearthly look or Leni would begin to seem human.

Once again, the characters walk while they talk, and the camera is frequently on the move as well. William Lubtchansky – cameraman on *Les Violins du bal* (1974) and husband of Nicole, who edited *L'Amour fou* and *Out 1* with Rivette – is having to manoeuvre some fairly tricky tracks and handheld turns in the narrow passages between the plants. At one point, he has to be pulled backwards by assistants and then swung around to one side while the women approach on parallel paths and converge at the tip of the botanical island, then criss-cross their positions. This shot,

too, is a retake of something filmed three weeks ago, and among the many changes, it now lasts 50 seconds instead of 103. Jeanne begins all of her lines with phrases from *Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde* (1937) – Cocteau is quoted fairly often the dialogue – and continues in an increasingly dreamy and glassy-eyed manner while unseen birds chatter wildly around her. By the end of their exchange, she's gazing at the ceiling like a somnambulist: "*Elsa... Jeanne? Elle sont mortes. Il ne reste que moi. Invulnérable. De fer.*"

After lunch, the crew drives to the edge of Paris, a grey neighbourhood near Avenue d'Ivry – "Rivette likes it because it's depressing," someone cracks, although the assistant director, Bertrand Van Effenterre, picked the spot. A poster displaying a pop singer is covered with tarpaulin for the background of the first shot of a scene where Lucie follows Viva. The composition, Lubtchansky notes, is a Delvaux; Viva, some distance away, descends a steep flight of steps and approaches the camera while Lucie stealthily slinks around corners and moves after her in sudden angular bursts, making staccato zigzag motions as she darts from one hiding place to the next.

The next shot occurs on an even bleaker adjacent street with decrepit turn-of-the-century houses and peeling paint, Viva and Lucie approaching from some distance again. But this time something extraordinary happens: a portly middle-aged woman with hair the colour of ashes and sawdust, unaware of the presence of actors and crew, wanders down the street after the take begins and stoops over to peep through a mail slot in a tin fence – a Lumière subject suddenly come to life. She steps back a bit, looks around: will she notice the camera on one side, the approaching actresses on the other? Rivette can barely contain himself; everyone holds his breath. She looks through the slot again, and just as she passes, Karagheuz has the ingenious idea of incorporating her as a prop, a temporary shield to hide behind... Lubtchansky declares it a successful take; certainly it's an unrepeatable one. The woman wanders off, still oblivious to the movie she's stumbled into, and I step over the mail slot to see what she was peering at. The answer: nothing at all.

It's already starting to drizzle and grow dimmer when Lucie and Viva proceed down opposite sides of an underpass, away from the camera; by the time they're crossing a footbridge towards the camera over some railway tracks, it's *mise on scène* under a driving rain, Lubtchansky and camera protected by waterproof plastic, everybody else getting soaked. If improvisation in this movie is being denied to the players,

it's nonetheless figuring in the writing, directing and spirited scampering about, the unwitting extras and the elements themselves.

April 16: Very elaborate tracking in a dingy, labyrinthine corner of Gare d'Austerlitz occupied by baggage lockers – this location selected by Rivette. The camera moves 30 feet to the left where Lucie enters, following her in medium shot to a locker. A static, closer shot shows her opening it with a key, taking out a tiny box and shaking it (the diamond is inside). Shot three, starting in a close-up, has the camera precede her over 46 feet of curving tracks as she returns the way she came; after she leaves the shot, it tracks forward again as Viva descends a spiral staircase directly across its line of vision. All in all, one very small and complicated piece of a very complicated plot.

Between shots, Rivette amuses himself by cheerfully reading aloud from a copy of François Truffaut's recently published criticism, which someone has brought along. To translate freely: "Fellini shows [in *8½*] that a director is first of all a man whom everybody worries from morning to night by asking questions which he can't or won't answer. His head is filled with small divergent ideas, impressions, new-born desires, and one requires him to deliver certainties, precise names, exact figures, indications of time and place."

Jonathan Rosenbaum

2

I offer here no more than random gleanings of a casual observer, as I am convinced that any attempt at analysis on my part would be dishonest and as fraught with booby-traps as the undergrowth of criss-crossing wires on the floor of a film set itself. I am not a frequenter of films on location, but what most impressed me about my visit to *Viva* was the sense of there being two distinct narratives that I might follow: that of the film proper and that, even more intricate and mysterious, of the filming, a disjointed narrative that would nevertheless, and sooner than I anticipated, gather its own momentum, with its own dramatic highlights, comic relief, and so on. A film outside a film, as one says: a film within a film.



It is in the Hotel Meurice, a sumptuous old pile on the Rue de Rivoli and the terminus of an exceptionally circuitous route that has taken Rivette and his actors from the Jardin des Plantes to a working-class dance hall, from an aquarium to a gambling den, that I watch part of the shooting. There, camping in one of its mirrored salons, is a largely young and blue-jeaned crew, busy adjusting the arc lights, testing the boom that is perched over the set like a fishing rod, or lugging the camera, and William Lubtchansky, who is sitting on it, along heaving tracking rails. And there, at the far end of these rails, Rivette himself sits, cross-legged and patient, in the midst of this monstrous train set.

The shot being set up is somewhat complicated, Elsa (Nicole Garcia) nervously enquires at the reception desk for a certain Monsieur Pierre, the clerk offers her a seat and sets off in search of the elusive guest. After picking up this little scene in long-shot, Lubtchansky's camera, followed closely by Bulle Ogier as Viva, all in pearl-grey velveteen and as radiant with supernatural health and malice as the other girl is deathly white, begins a slow track to where Elsa is seated, passing a vacant chair beside hers, then turning, no less abruptly than Elsa does herself, to reveal that same empty chair now magically occupied by Viva, the actress having neatly slipped herself into it at the very instant it left the frame. As I watch this shot eerily turn first-person en route and twist its own tail with the minimum of fuss, I can't help thinking of certain equally beautiful 'shots' in sport: a hole in one, or one of those apparently effortless manoeuvres in billiards, thrilling even to one ignorant of the game. After four or five takes, Rivette is satisfied, the clerk returns to his desk, and the two actresses to their own reflections.

It is during preparations for the following scene, in which Viva wickedly attempts to worm from Elsa the nature of her relationship to the mysterious Monsieur Pierre, that I have a chat with Jean Wiener, who improvises at the piano throughout the film. In the 1920s, Wiener played piano at the Boeuf sur le Toit, was friend to Cocteau and Stravinsky, 'discovered' jazz and was, in a general way, the seventh member of Les Six. Obviously delighted to be once more part of an avant-garde, if so unlike that of his own generation, he confesses that, though fully concurring in the idea of improvising during a *tournage*, his merry-go-round (and melancholy-go-round) waltzes and foxtrots being recorded simultaneously with the dialogue, it has puzzled him to see, in the rushes, scenes in which he himself '*un vieux monsieur chauve au piano*' is perfectly visible. He is even more bemused by Rivette's explanation: that, given the complexity of certain camera movements, it was the simplest solution.

As the shot is rather long in setting up, in part due to the omnipresent mirrors creating unwanted sources of light, in part to Rivette's increasingly evident concern with pure *mise en scène*, Wiener installs himself at his piano, tinkling out medleys of Gershwin and Kern that add to the strong silent-film atmosphere already present in the palmy décor of the Meurice, haunted by the ghosts of aviators, spies and sleeping-car Madonnas.

It is Nicole Garcia's scene, and she carries it off brilliantly. Drawn out by Viva, Elsa admits that she is not at all what she seems, that her name is not even Elsa, but Jeanne, that she was merely "befriended" by Pierre, and that she is nothing more than a hostess in a cheap *dancing* (this said with head cupped low in hands)... a *dancing* (pause)... (turns head to the camera-lens to stare directly into Viva's face)... *Le Rhumba!* Her monologue, like most of the script, was written just a few hours before the take, and it is not only in the choice of the word "rhumba" that I recognise the amusing, unsettling 'touch' of the film's Argentinian co-scenarist, Eduardo de Gregorio.

Garcia, a newcomer to the *bande à Rivette*, is all nervous tension, barely controlled, in striking contrast to Ogier, whose mannish dress and suave style suggest, to this observer, some odd mixture of George Sand and George Sanders. Here as elsewhere, Lubtchansky's camera is on the move, tracking into Elsa's ghostly features as if to force a confession out of her. It becomes obvious that, in terms of camera movement, this (and the other three chapters of *Les Filles du feu*) will be by far Rivette's most considered work to date, with two principal poles of reference: Kenji Mizoguchi for the long takes and Max Ophüls, of course, for the frequent tracking shots. What this will mean in the context of the completed work is a mystery to me and, I suspect, to some of those most intimate with the project. I am no longer as astonished as I was by the small degree to which Rivette himself appears to participate in the actual shooting. My impression is of a director whose basic decisions have been made, one of which is to employ as little as possible the kind of improvisation for which he is famous – except for the music, which may well affect the playing almost as a good or bad audience will do in the theatre.

This said, Rivette remains Rivette; and the last shot that I witness, in which the two goddesses – Viva and Elizabeth – played, in a gorgeous scarlet cape, by Wiener's daughter Elizabeth – mock the naïve pretensions of mortals, is a good example of

how one take will often serve as rehearsal for the next, the actresses accumulating or discarding detail at such a dizzy rate that, once it is over, I find I have no clear recollection of what piece of business is or is not in the final take.

The set is a table for two in one of the smaller salons, a table laden with ice cream, champagne and petits fours. Around it the two young women gaily disport themselves – popping corks, feeding each other smeary chocolate éclairs, and making curious 'vroom vroom' noises *à la Kiss Me Deadly* – with Wiener's sprightly accompaniment turning the whole thing into musical chairs. The first take, however, is wretchedly flat, the second a clutter of cute details. It is only with the third that the actresses start to scent out the scene's real possibilities and its rhythm, so much so that they cease, quite spontaneously, to block each other in front of the slowly tracking camera. Rivette does not guide them in either verbal or mimetic fashion, but between takes he will venture to advise against certain inventions and for others, so that, in the end, the shot will doubtless conform to all his first feelings about it.

Whatever else it may be, a film is also a record of its own *tournage*. In Rivette's case, the film set becomes a theatre of imponderables, which shape the result much as a sleeper's movements will govern the nature of his dreams; and from the evidence of interviews one realises that the only guidelines of a Rivette film are those of *tournage*, the idea of a definitive form, at least until editing begins, being a nonsense. In the past (*L'Amour fou*, *Out 1*) his overriding concern as a director has been to record the work's gestation, which tempts me to suggest that, though the 'legendary' 13-hour version of *Out 1* may indeed be extraordinary, it must be less than the six-week version, i.e. the *tournage*. From *Viva*, whose camera movements are plotted out in advance but whose dialogue is written the evening before, whose actors have specific things to do but whose music is improvised, one can have no idea what to expect.

Gilbert Adair

3

Like any Rivette film, *Le Vengeur* [the working title for *Noroît*] took shape gradually, drawing on a large number of deliberately chosen ideas and as many fortuitous circumstances. As important as Rivette's interest in Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's*



Tragedy (drawn to his attention by Eduardo de Gregorio), and the curious traditions surrounding the period of Carnival, was the availability of Geraldine Chaplin and Bernadette Lafont together with that of a group of dancers from Carolyn Carlson's company. It must be kept in mind that Rivette often conceives a film around particular people; *Céline et Julie* began as 'a film for Juliet Berto'. Any casting decision is consequently of primary importance. Further, the selection of Brittany as a location arose as much from certain union allowances permitting a six-day week outside Paris, as from a vague desire to spend some time in the country. Once the different ideas and practical considerations began to sort themselves out and interact, the narrative itself starts to acquire definition. Even after shooting has begun, however, Rivette is enormously influenced by what he may discover the actors capable of achieving. Finding that an actor is able to do something he hadn't suspected, Rivette might add a scene at the last minute (if, of course, there is time, of all things the most rare and precious). One of Rivette's talents is his ability to begin rehearsing a scene without any fixed idea of how it will actually be played for the camera. The final outcome is invariably the product of close collaboration with his actors.

In this film, the elements of *mise en scène*, the use of costume, dance, and allusion, are so strikingly disparate that it would almost seem that Rivette purposely set out to amalgamate the most wildly divergent sorts of material. For the most part, the camera movements appeared to suggest an affinity with recent films of Miklos Jancsó and with Federico Fellini's procedures in *Roma* (1972), but the things which the camera had to photograph plunge one into the world of Cecil B. DeMille, or even of Raoul Walsh's *Blackbeard the Pirate* (1952). Certainly, the pointedly approximate nature of the costumes and the singular use of décor keep the players and the plot in curious kind of cinematic limbo. The grating juxtaposition of assorted, eccentrically chosen verse from the play, with scenes that allude strongly to musical comedy, defies an attempt to comprehend the kind of synthesis that might eventually come to bear.

From watching different aspects of the shooting, even for so long a period as ten days, it is impossible to draw conclusions as to the final result. Nor must one rule out an alternative possibility: Rivette may be exploiting sharply contrasting effects in an attempt to keep the viewer in a continual state of discomfort as the gears grind joltingly back and forth. Considering the context, one is reminded of certain Renaissance plays where the tone remains so complex and ambiguous as never to be wholly tragic or wholly comic, where everything seems just barely contiguous,

and where audience reactions remain confused and uncertain. There is no room here for improvised bits of dialogue and for the sorts of hesitations and *temps morts* that improvisation produces, effects which have been so remarkably utilised by Rivette in the past. While spontaneity is not sacrificed, the camera movements are of such complexity that great discipline is imposed on the actors.

Furthermore, while Rivette was present during the discussions leading to the creation of the script, he allowed Parolini and de Gregorio enormous freedom. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that Rivette relied strongly on material that they were able to provide independently of him. Virtually all the dialogue, with the exception of Tourneur's verse and one brief scene, was invented by the two writers. It seemed an ideal collaboration in the sense that, being intimately familiar with Rivette's work and methods, there were able to stimulate him to try things he might otherwise not have attempted.

In its broad lines, the film deals with a band of pirates led by Giulia (Bernadette Lafont) and infiltrated for purposes of revenge by Morag (Geraldine Chaplin) and her accomplice Erika (Kika Markham). As Morag wreaks havoc among the pirates, it becomes clear that she is a moon goddess waging war with a sun goddess – who is of course Giulia. There is no dearth of violent death; it abounds in the best Jacobean manner, until finally there are no survivors at all. There are drownings and throat-cuttings, poisonings and death by lightning. A special end was invented for Erika, who is mysteriously described as being “eclipsed”.

The first two weeks of shooting took place in the 15th century Château de la Roche-Jagu. Outside and in, the château had been so reconstructed and patched up that it had the air of having been built by an eccentric millionaire who wished to own a medieval castle as imagined by Paramount or RKO. Apart from this advantage of singularly recalling the Hollywood past, the rooms were large and gave the camera plenty of space in which to move.

While Tourneur's play may have been a starting point for Rivette and his writers, the transformations it underwent at different stages of preparation and shooting are so far-reaching that the play itself is of only minor importance. Rivette has retained the lushness of violence typical of Jacobean horror shows, but he has wandered far from *The Revenger's Tragedy*. At one point, Morag and Erika present a scene

from the play to Giulia and her cohorts, the scene having been chosen because it represents a murder similar to one that they had recently perpetrated on a member of Giulia's band. But even here, the allusion is through Tourneur to *Hamlet*; not only is the play put on before the corrupt little court in the hope of eliciting a violent reaction, but except for a few fragments of verse dredged up by the actresses – bits of one line violently grafted on to bits of another – the scene is presented in dumb show, modified by assorted cries, squeals and gasps. Their recitation is a parody of melodramatic excess; Erika chases Morag around the room, attacking her with a variety of lethal weapons.

Music plays an even more important part in *Le Vengeur* than in *Viva*. Here there are three musicians playing perhaps a dozen instruments between them, from traditional flutes and violins to more exotic instruments from Africa and South America. Their sensitivity is wholly remarkable; again and again their musical choice is exactly right. They articulate the performance admirably and, in turn, are very much influenced by the rhythms and tones of the actors. In the dumb show, they punctuate the actresses' cries, playing music of a marked 17th century colour treated freely in post-Viennese fashion. There is no attempt to conceal them from the camera. In fact they have their own 'costumes', and are often in the frame by themselves.

An afternoon was spent filming a number of reverse shots in which the pirates react to the little play. Their mirth changes to seriousness as they perceive that the death of one of their colleagues is being mocked. Giulia, unlike Claudius, innocent of the deed imitated by Erika and Morag, only begins to enjoy herself when she realises that the play refers to recent events. Together with her two lovers, Jacob (Humbert Balsan) and Ludovico (Larrio Ekson), she laughs morbidly. Appalled at her callousness (and we know from Hollywood films that pirates can be a sensitive lot with a highly developed moral sense), the pirates rise up spontaneously; but Giulia suppresses this incipient revolt by slitting the throat of a female pirate. This murder called for special effects one doesn't associate with Rivette, although Bulle Ogier bleeds quite a lot in *Céline et Julie*. An elaborate system of rubber tubes and little valves were employed, producing a distressing amount of gore. The victim's screams, while undoubtedly an anatomical impossibility, added to the scene. It was all very horrible and unsettling.

A scene in which lines were drawn directly from Tourneur's play afforded a further glimpse of Rivette's methods in shaping a scene. The actresses had chosen a



dozen verses from different scenes in the play that they were to recite as though encouraging each other to see their vendetta through to the end. In one of the attics of the château, beautifully lit to suggest daybreak, Erika and Morag were to pace the length of the room and speak their lines alternately in an incantatory manner, as they approached the camera. When the scene was ready to shoot, Rivette announced his dissatisfaction with the idea. For the next two hours the scene was discussed and slowly took an entirely different form; the principle of singsong recitation was wholly abandoned, and the lines were spoken much as they might be on the English stage. While Morag paced nervously back and forth, Erika sat on a bed, in an attitude of dejection. Both actresses spoke their lines with great intensity accompanied by highly wrought little sounds from the musicians. The effect was far more austere than the more ritualistic initial idea; and extremely dramatic.

Michael Graham

4

June 25-29: Fort La Latte, a 12th century fortress near St. Cast on the Brittany coast – entered by a drawbridge and surrounded by sea which is white and foamy against the rocks, green and translucent by the shore, blue and hazy in the distance. The last time a movie crew took over this spectacular location was nearly twenty years ago, for *The Vikings* (1958), and a few placards from that invasion still linger in a nearby shed.

In comparison with what I watched three months ago, *Le Vengeur* (again, a tentative title) seems even wilder and more disturbing; in its clash of foreign elements, a somewhat bigger risk and dare. The crew is the same as on *Viva*, the cast much more varied in terms of background and experience: Markham was Anne, the more worldly of the sisters in François Truffaut's *Les Deux Anglaises et le continent* (1971); Chaplin has worked for directors as different as Carlos Saura, David Lean and Robert Altman; Lafont is a seasoned New Wave and *Out 1* veteran. Among Giulia's band, four members are played by dancers, including Arno (Anne-Marie Reynaud), her lieutenant, while Anne-Marie Fijal, a pianist, plays her jester Fiao; Balsan was Gauvain in Robert Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac* (1974) and Danièle Rosencranz was the female lead in Claude Chabrol's *Une Partie de plaisir* (1975); the part of Elisa, a teenage pirate, is taken by Elizabeth Medvecky, Lafont's daughter.

Rather than try to be inclusive or to impose a continuity over several days of shooting, I will restrict myself to two of the more elaborate scenes I saw being filmed inside the fortress. But it might be relevant to quote two passages from a prospectus about *Les Filles du feu* written by Rivette a few months ago (the translation is mine):

“The ambition of these films is to invent a new approach to film acting, where speech, pared down to essential phrases, precise formulae, would play a role of ‘poetic’ punctuation. Neither a return to silent cinema nor pantomime nor choreography: something else, where the movement of bodies, their counterpoint and inscription in the space of the screen, will be the basis of *mise en scène*.”

“To create by the movements of their bodies their own space, to take possession of and traverse the spaces imposed by the décor and the camera’s field, to move and act within (and in function to) the simultaneous musical space: these are the three parameters according to which our actresses and actors will attempt to work.”

On the battlements: Giulia’s ‘reply’ to Morag and Erika’s enactment of the scene from *Tourneur* is to stage a nasty bit of theatre of her own – a swordfight between Jacob and Ludovico designed to convince Erika, who loves Jacob, that it is real. This is a pivotal scene in which Morag loses Erika as an accomplice, but I am around only for its preliminary stages, which consume parts of two separate afternoons of shooting and are disquieting enough in themselves.

The scene begins with Jacob and Ludovico entering from one side of the battlements, passing the musicians on their way, and rehearsing their swordfight – a rehearsal in their space time, with a trainer, over the past few days – before they retreat to a corner and rest. The camera pans with them throughout except for when they first take their positions, when it tracks away from them, moving approximately from medium to long shot.

The next two shots, running about 90 seconds each, follow the entrances of Morag, Arno and Fiao and their frolics as they play blindman’s buff in the same spot occupied by the rehearsed fight, with Morag as the blindfolded victim; the camera tracking as they dance about. Although Chaplin can see through her black blindfold, this is not apparent to the off-camera bystanders when she enters, and there are several unnerving instants when she nearly topples over the edge of the vertiginous battlements as Arno and Fiao buffet her like malicious children.

The musicians have been improvising visibly throughout the sequence, between as well as during each of the takes, so that each run-through of a shot becomes appreciably different from the one preceding it. In the next shot, also running close to 90 seconds, their apparent autonomy from the action is given a disconcerting wrench when Elisa enters, a mischievous grin on her face, and playfully hits a gong and taps a conga drum as she passes them. (A day later, I learn from one of the musicians that this was Rivette’s idea.) Behind her come Erika and Giulia, and a flute starts to play over the light percussion; the camera pans back to frame their entrance, finally settling on Erika as she stares blankly into space.

A stationary set-up shows Ludovico step up behind her with his sword, ready to provoke the fight, and jabs her in the back. She cries out sharply, as though waking from a nightmare, spins around and steps to one side. By now it is the second afternoon, and a strong, flappy wind comes over the battlements from the sea (a few hours ago, it gave a love scene between Morag and Jacob on a hillside a distinct *Wuthering Heights* flavour); the mood is tense and edgy, the musicians’ playing becomes increasingly ceremonial in sound from one take to the next, suggesting some sort of blood sacrifice...

In the dungeon: Morag and Erika enter and stalk round the body of Morag’s dead brother Shane – who, for reasons that are unexplained, looks exactly like Jacob and is played by the same actor – reciting lines from *Tourneur* (in English) which they will subsequently use in the scene that they stage from Giulia and her band. This time their delivery is strictly incantatory and ritualistic, their voices overlapping as Erika echoes Morag, repeating the same edited speech several times:

*Now to my tragic business.
I have not fashioned this only for show
And useless property; no, it shall be a part
E’en in its own revenge. This very skull,
With this drug,
The mortal curse of the earth shall be revenged.*

The musicians play off-camera in a cramped chamber behind the bright lights being used in this dank interior, stopping and starting their dirge – a drawling bowed bass

and cymbal struck with mallets – in accordance with the simultaneous pauses of Chaplin and Markham in their recitation and pacing. This accompaniment becomes increasingly hypnotic through all five takes, and I'm hardly surprised to hear from Markham afterwards that she wasn't even aware of the music playing, so completely had it become absorbed by and blended into the action of the scene.

The separate circular trajectories of the actresses round the body on the floor – wrapped from head to foot in sailcloth – and a hammock made of chains which hangs beside it, are complex indeed, and my efforts to trace them in my notebook lead to an impenetrable jumble. Each take improves on the last as Rivette slows the action down and stretches it out: the first runs for 112 seconds, the last for 140. The script-girl informs me that the longest take in the film so far is 230 seconds; but this is nothing compared to a few separate shots of Michael Lonsdale's theatre group in the 13-hour, 16mm *Out 1*, which apparently ran over ten times longer.

The shot ends with both actresses kneeling beside her body and Morag drawing out her knife (there are some smiles from the crew each time Rivette says 'Cut'). In the next shot, which shows them tearing apart the fabric to look at Shane, the camera assumes a low angle and becomes mobile, pushed forward on wheels in a path which somewhat resembles an inverted S – beginning at the top end of the figure and proceeding towards Shane's features in horizontal profile before panning up to Morag's face – a manoeuvre that requires Markham to move out of her position silently when the camera approaches. No music this time, only the sound of rippling cloth as Balsan in his heavy corpse make-up gets unveiled through several retakes...

As Michael Graham suggests above, Rivette's route into a scene is often trial by error, and it appears that his customary method of composing a plot with his writers is to ask for a string of suggestions, systematically rejecting each of them until he arrives at what he likes. When I ask Geraldine Chaplin about his manner of directing performances, she describes a process which again seems similar: "Rivette is very positive that he doesn't know what he wants. But he knows what he doesn't want – and he's very particular, too. He's very tough. You have to invent 35 different ideas and show them to him like you were selling carpets, and then he says, 'Okay, do that.' But it's exhausting."

This kind of aggressive passivity has led to a different formula for group collaboration on each of his projects, but in each case it appears to be grounded in the habits of a spectator-critic, a person more accustomed to watching and evaluating what he sees than to creating something *ex nihilo* for someone else to see – a desire to experiment which seems born out of curiosity, the question 'What would happen if...?' Perhaps this is why he usually places so much importance on editing, where questions can be asked and asked again. It will be interesting to see how much he can do with editing in these films, when so much of the footage is composed of long takes, the plots are extremely dense, and there evidently isn't enough material to make lengthy features out of them. Whatever emerges, one suspects that it will only extend the questions about authorship that each of his films since *L'Amour fou* has raised.

The closer emphasis and attention in *Les Filles du feu* on framing, composition, camera movement, actors' movements and all other physical co-ordinates of *mise en scène* will undoubtedly produce some changes in what we suppose a 'Rivette film' to be, and in the process will likely raise questions about many things than they begin to resolve. The excitement and adventure of a Rivette project is quite literally that of a leap into the unknown – a form of suspense and suspension that begins when it is conceived, grows and deepens while it is being filmed and edited, obstinately persists well past the point when the film is completed, continuing in the mind of each spectator who sees it and interrogates it in his own fashion.

Jonathan Rosenbaum



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VAGABOND CHARM

by Nick Pinkerton

Merry-Go-Round, a film spun out of thin air to a degree unusual even for director Jacques Rivette, to whose practice improvisation has always been essential, sprang from a kernel of an idea: “Two people get together because a third, who has arranged to meet them, does not show up” is how Rivette later described it.

A Brooklynite abroad, Ben (Joe Dallesandro), arrives at l’Hôtel Sofitel Roissy-en-France, near Charles de Gaulle Airport. He’s been summoned by a girlfriend, Elisabeth, who’d sent him a one-way ticket to Paris. Instead he encounters a small, dark, pouty woman who proves to be Elisabeth’s sister, Léo (Maria Schneider). “She stood me up before,” Ben later says in his wheedling, unmistakably New Yorkian accent, “but Manhattan’s not that far from Brooklyn.” Joining forces, Ben and Léo follow a trail of clues to one of the homes in which Léo was raised, where they find Elisabeth (Danièle Gégauff, the first wife of Claude Chabrol’s frequent screenwriter Paul). Elisabeth has only time enough to put Ben and Léo onto the scent of a fresh mystery – she believes that her and Léo’s father, David Hoffmann, presumed dead in a plane crash, is in fact still alive, and that 20 million francs of his money is sitting in a bank somewhere in Switzerland, ripe for the taking – before she’s thrown into the back of an ambulance by and kidnapped by a thug posing as an interior designer (Jean-François Stévenin).

From here a profusion of characters who may or may not be what they seem drift through the narrative, presenting unclear functions and motives. There’s Shirley (Sylvie Meyer), a tall, slender blonde with a translucent complexion and a swim cap hairdo who is alternately identified as Ben’s inexplicably-European sister, Elisabeth’s best friend, or the ex-lover of the missing patriarch; a cool, business-like female lawyer, Renée Novick (Françoise Prévost), who has somehow taken on the role of overseeing the search for the missing money; her compact, curt, chrome-domed secretary, Jérôme (Michel Berto, husband of Rivette regular Juliet); and lastly, Mr. Danvers (Maurice Garrel), a dapper gent who’s suspected to be the post-plastic surgery alter-ego of David Hoffmann, and who, in the most bizarre twist in a movie full of them, reveals that he is blessed with psychic abilities.

Trailing after Ben and Léo on the path to her father and his money, we are blindsided with cutaways to alternate narratives. In one, Léo is wandering across sand dunes, where she is assailed in turn by a shotgun-toting Ben and a nest of pythons. In another, Ben is pursued through a forest by a variety of threats, including a knight in full plate armour and a pack of baying hounds led by none other than Léo – or Léo's doppelganger, for while this character wears Léo's unmistakable sullen expression and double-denim getup, in these scenes the part is played by Hermine Karagheuz, who played Marie in Rivette's *Out 1* (1971), and who took over the Léo part after Schneider walked off the shoot. In addition to these digressions – one struggles to identify them as flashbacks or premonitions, though they never connect to the main body of the film in any traditionally satisfying way – we periodically revisit the scene with which the film begins, a jam between bass clarinetist John Surman and double bass player Barre Phillips, who would later, with Ornette Coleman, contribute to the soundtrack of David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* (1991). Phillips and Surman are filmed recording a duet, a creaky, seasick number which provides the film's musical score and seems to guide the action, though the importance of the film's *musique concrète* sound design shouldn't be underestimated: the wind in the trees, the overpowering whoosh of traffic in the grey Parisian suburbs where much of the film takes place, or the sound of the surf with which the film concludes.

A great many of Rivette's movies are identified with a play-within-the-film theatrical predecessor – Shakespeare or Henry James or Racine or Pirandello. *Merry-Go-Round* has no such antecedent, though the surname Hoffmann does suggest the German fantasist E.T.A., and the film does make something the French nursery rhyme 'Cadet Rousselle', which is presented as a clue. With its succession of empty graves and mysterious calls from payphones and X-marks-the-spots, *Merry-Go-Round* has the air of an espionage thriller, fringed with the intimations of paranoid conspiracy which so preoccupy Rivette. Ben and Léo approach the mystery as something less to be investigated than played along with, and the movie is full of games: intrigues cross-cut with a match of billiards, an antique game which involves pitching coins into a metal frog's mouth, and a climax on a golf course, by which point the high stakes of this particular contest have become clear. ("What role do you play?" Léo asks a strange woman shortly before her sister's kidnapping; she replies "Me, I'm not playing.")

Merry-Go-Round was theatrically released in France in spring of 1983, though it had wrapped shooting five years earlier, at which point the insolvency of Rivette's Russian-born producer Stéphane Tchaj Gadjieff and distributor Gaumont's scepticism about the film's commercial potential kept it on ice. To understand the circumstances of *Merry-Go-Round's* production, however, it is necessary to go back to 1974, when *Céline et Julie vont en bateau: Phantom Ladies Over Paris (Celine and Julie Go Boating)*, had garnered Rivette some the best notices of his career to date. Cashing in on his reputation and intending to take his experiments in epic, immersive filmmaking further after the near-thirteen-hour *Out 1*, for his next act Rivette planned to shoot a tetralogy of mixed-bag genre films, originally titled *Les Filles du feu (Girls of Fire)* but ultimately submitted to the Centre national de la cinématographie as *Scènes de la vie parallèle (Scenes from a Parallel Life)*. The first two instalments, *Duelle (une quarantaine)* and *Noroît (une vengeance)*, which presage *Merry-Go-Round* in their use of improvised music as a structural guideline, were completed in short order, but the proposed back-to-back-to-back-to-back shooting schedule eventually took its toll on the director, and production on the third film, *Marie et Julien*, shut down after only a few days, when Rivette suffered what has been described as a nervous collapse. (The material was finally resurrected in 2003 for *Histoire de Marie et Julien*, part of his extraordinarily effervescent late output in the 21st century.)

Merry-Go-Round marked Rivette's return to work, though *Le Pont du Nord* – filmed afterwards but released in France earlier, in 1982 – might be better suited to the phrase 'return to form', displaying as it does the maturation of certain methods which are seen being worked through in the earlier film. *Merry-Go-Round's* screenplay was developed with Suzanne Schiffman and Eduardo de Gregorio, who'd previously worked with Rivette, respectively, on *Out 1* and the *Scènes de la vie parallèle* films. Also along for the ride was Tchaj Gadjieff, Rivette's then-regular producer, and William and Nicole Lubtchansky, husband and wife acting respectively as cinematographer and editor, as they would do throughout Rivette's career, though William, who died in 2010, was replaced by their daughter on 2009's *36 vues du Pic Saint Loup*.

Rivette's reliance on a small, core group of collaborators is one aspect of a practice which might be called wilfully amateur – a descriptor which both champions and detractors have hung on the director. This identifies Rivette with a small cadre of contemporaries working in narrative fiction who waved the banner of amateurism in the face of industrial filmmaking practice. Close to home, fellow *Cahiers du cinéma*

contributor Luc Moullet would be one such kindred spirit; on the other side of the Atlantic, Andy Warhol and cohort Paul Morrissey would be others. The presence in *Merry-Go-Round* of 'Little Joe' Dallesandro, the New York latchkey kid with the God-given bull physique who'd appeared in Warhol and Paul Morrissey's *Four Stars* (1967) after making a living from getting greased up for muscle mags, would seem to be an acknowledgement on the part of Rivette of common cause with Warhol. Becoming one of the brightest stars in the Warhol firmament in films including *Lonesome Cowboys* (1968), *Trash* (1970) and *Heat* (1972), Dallesandro stayed on in Europe after shooting Morrissey's *Blood for Dracula* (1974, aka *Andy Warhol's Dracula*) in Italy, and subsequently attracted the attentions of a fascinating array of filmmakers, including Louis Malle (*Black Moon*, 1975), *chanteur*-turned-director Serge Gainsbourg (*Je t'aime moi non plus*, 1975), Walerian Borowczyk (*La Marge*, 1976) and, after *Merry-Go-Round*, a young Catherine Breillat (*Tapage nocturne*, 1979).

Through these years Dallesandro was losing ground to a drinking problem, exacerbated at the time of the *Merry-Go-Round* shoot by the suicide of his brother, Bob, on New Year's Eve, 1977. Dallesandro's weakness for illicit substances was shared by his female lead, Schneider, whose career after her star-making role in *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), filmed when she was only nineteen, had been marked by broken contracts and drug problems. (In one curious moment in Rivette's film she appears to take a couple discreet bumps of coke, while Dallesandro spends the last reel draining a bottle of brown liquor.) Schneider, who would abandon *Merry-Go-Round* before its conclusion, was its genesis. In contact with Tchal Gadjeff about another project which fell through, she expressed an interest in working with Rivette. In the same interview quoted earlier, a two-part interview with Serge Daney and Jean Narboni spread over issue 323-24 of *Cahiers du cinéma*, published in spring of 1981, Rivette described the beginning of the film, then in limbo:

"I met [Schneider] and asked her if there was an actor she would like to work with. She told me Joe Dallesandro. And so a month before we began filming, I didn't know either actor, we started work with the two actors, and after eight days, things were going very badly. It was like a machine that, once set in motion, must continue running despite changing regimes, forced or arbitrary accelerations, until the energy was all burned up, exhausted... It's an exaggeration to say that we placed Maria and Joe together in front of the camera and waited to see what would happen. We had a starting point of course, and then we made up the beginning of a story, with





a father who had disappeared, but all along we told ourselves, this is just a pretext for Maria and Joe to get to know each other... But since the relationship between Maria and Joe rapidly became hostile, we were forced to develop the storyline; from a mere pretext it took on a disproportionate importance. Maybe that gives the film a certain vagabond charm, I don't know, but it really is a film with a first half-hour that's quite coherent, and then it searches for itself three times, three times searches for a way out..."

The number three, as it happens, plays a crucial role in *Merry-Go-Round* – inasmuch, that is, as anything in its hopelessly knotty narrative can be said to be crucial. About midway through the film, Ben and Léo set out to search two former Hoffmann family homes for the security code that corresponds to the bank deposit box in which the money is presumed to be stashed, their only clue the number three, a refrain in 'Cadet Rousselle'. As they tramp through one dilapidated house, Dallesandro playing the clown, rattles off ever-larger numbers composed of only the digit three, while Schneider stomps along after him, petulantly tearing at sheets of mouldering wallpaper before finally turning to claw at her co-star. In another house, the two sit down to an improvised candlelit dinner made with leftovers from the cupboard, Dallesandro is at his most touching when confessing to his pining for bourgeois living. ("Sardines and marmalade, but the style is my style.") It's not 'chemistry', exactly, but watching Little Joe cut capers for a withdrawn, defiantly unamused Schneider makes for curiously compelling viewing, and their tense, snippy interplay connects beguilingly to the cutaways of hide-and-go-seek pursuit.

The developing enmity between Rivette's leads wasn't his only problem. After the disappointment of *Scènes de la vie parallèle* and subsequent nervous exhaustion, he was still operating in a diminished capacity. Here, then, was a film whose circumstances of production – director and two stars and the end of their tether – closely mirrored the story which it sets out to tell, one of confused, harried, hunted men and women. A phrase that Novick uses to describe the puzzle that Hoffman has left behind doubles in describing the interpretation-defying labyrinth-without-an-exit that Rivette was building: "Typical of him. To throw a message in a bottle into the sea and punish those who would decipher it."

Dallesandro, years later, would describe the *Merry-Go-Round* shoot to biographer Michael Ferguson: "Rivette was trying to make this movie last forever – we shot a

ton of footage – and it was turning out to be one of those twenty-four-hour movies. In fact, when the producers wanted the film to end, because they thought Jacques had lost his mind... They kept shooting these scenes where I was running... It got so bad that I wasn't even aware Maria had left the picture. She was so far away during these endless scenes that I had no idea they'd replaced her with a double. That's when I really understood that this movie could go on forever. If they'd have replaced me with a double, they'd still be out there shooting."

However fraught the journey may have been, and however unlikely Dallesandro's account that he could've been unaware that his co-star had walked off is, Rivette found an evocative way out of his baggy, vagabond picture with a final visit to the parallel narrative. Ben and Karagheuz's Léo, finally ceasing the chase, face one another while sitting Indian-style on opposite dunes, pacifically listening to the sound of the surf. It's a lovely, restive coda for a movie whose creation was anything but peaceful.

Nick Pinkerton is a New York City-based writer and programmer born in Cincinnati, Ohio. He has written extensively for publications including Film Comment, Artforum, Sight & Sound, Reverse Shot and The Village Voice.



ABOUT THE RESTORATIONS

The original camera negatives were scanned, graded and restored at 2K resolution. The majority of the picture restoration work was conducted on Diamant Film Restoration systems, with Phoenix and Flame software used on selected sequences.

Picture issues such as dirt, debris and scratches, torn frames, damaged splices, instability and mould were all corrected or minimised.

Colour grading was carried out using a P3 DCI colour space. 35mm original prints were used as a visual reference throughout by the colourist.

The original magnetic reels were too damaged for use, so the soundtracks were sourced from the original optical sound negatives and, in some cases, digital Betacam tapes produced in the 1990s. The majority of this work was carried out by L.E. Diapason in Paris.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Book Produced by Anthony Nield

Executive Producers Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni

Production Assistant Liane Cunje

Technical Producer James White

QC Manager Nora Mehenni

Blu-ray and DVD Mastering David Mackenzie

Subtitling IBF

Artist Ignatius Fitzpatrick

Design Obviously Creative

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Frédéric Atellian, Daniel Bird, Michael Brooke,
Robert Fischer, Loli Geneste, Elsa Lonne-Smith, Christian Lurin,
Nick Pinkerton, Jonathan Rosenbaum, Brad Stevens,
Mary M. Wiles, Rob Winter

