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RUIZ, RAUL

The Rubicon and the Rubik Cube

Exile, Paradox and Raul Ruiz

Gilbert Adair

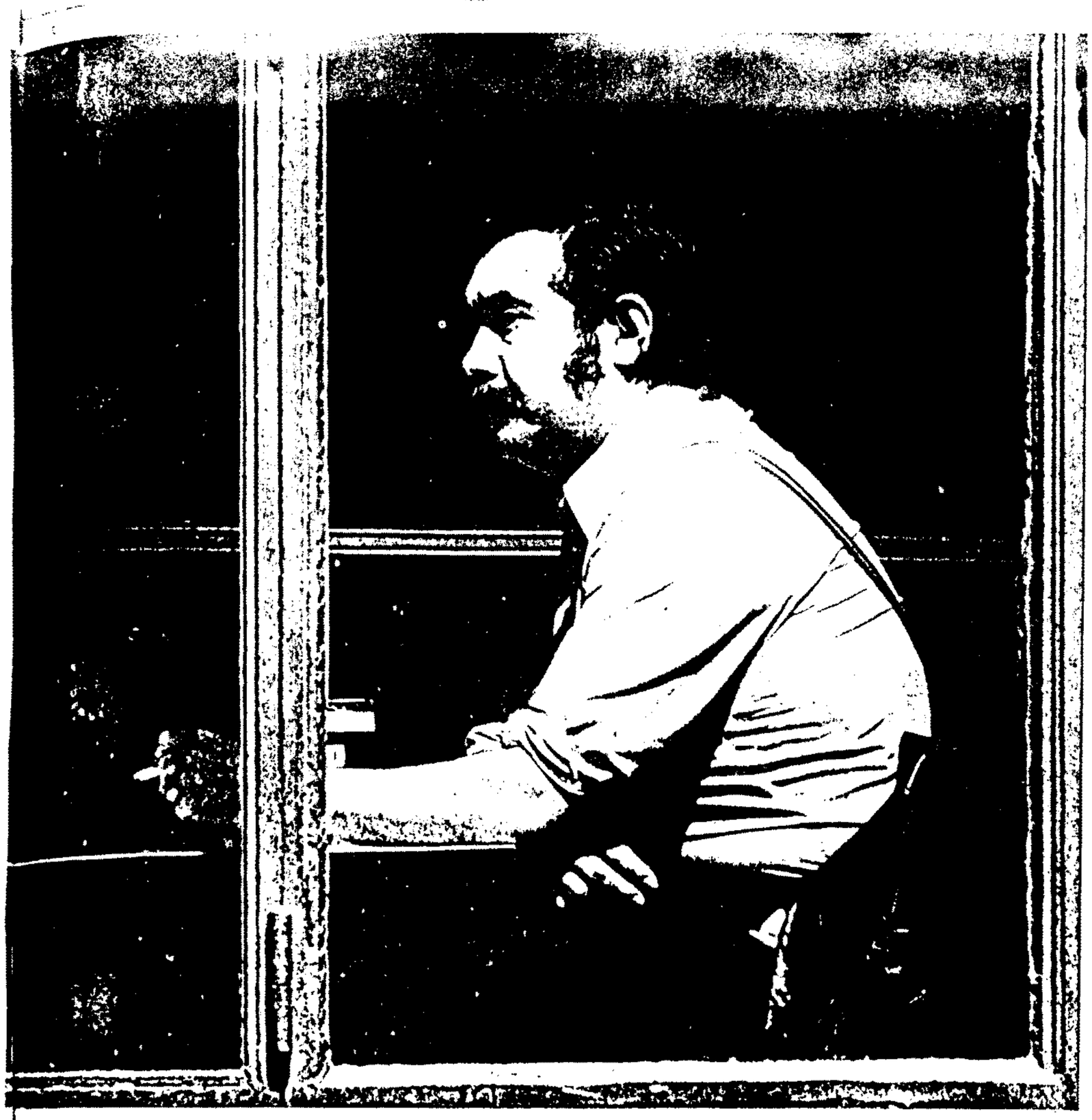
To paraphrase the establishing stage direction of Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, Raul Ruiz was born in Chile, i.e. nowhere. Indeed, his earliest memory—so at least he assured me when we were writing the script of *The Territory* together in a hotel room in Sintra—is of being actually 'discovered', while mooning around on the doorstep of his parents' home, by a party of English explorers, whom he conjured up for me as scanning the horizon in Jungle Jim safari outfits, earnest hands cupped over noble brows. (When, on the telling of another, no less outrageous, anecdote, I asked him point blank if he was lying, he vigorously protested his innocence—as, of course, would both a liar and an honest man.) Since the military coup of 1973, Ruiz has lived in exile, i.e. everywhere—for, from that point on, his filmography has imposed a different geographical abbreviation after virtually each entry (to date, Ital., Fran., Ger., Hond., Port., and Holl.). It was almost by chance that he decided to settle in Paris, the capital of exile, where he now lives with his wife, Valeria Sarmiento, a *cinéaste* herself who edits his films as unaffectedly as another woman might sew the buttons on her husband's shirts.

But even there, by refusing to emulate the example of his fellow countrymen, Helvio Soto and Miguel Littin, the glib euphoria of whose pro-Allende work has been followed, in Europe, by lachrymose autopsies of the débâcle, Ruiz has paradoxically contrived to exile himself again—from its tight little community of Latin American expatriates. In 1978, for instance, he acquired a whole new reputation with an apolitical 'art film' in a hallowed if by now somewhat discredited Parisian tradition, *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé* (*The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting*). It was based on a contemporary classic, *Le Baphomet*, by the novelist and Nietzschean philosopher Pierre Klossowski, was exquisitely shot by Sacha Vierny, and in no way sought to curb the discreet hamming of French avant-garde actors. Notwithstanding such apparently solid cultural foundations, he still managed to avoid ingratiating himself with his backers, the redoubtable INA. *L'Hypothèse* turned out to be less a straight adaptation than a witty series of variations on Klossowskian (and Ruizian) themes; the pearly black and white photography, a pastiche of Alekan's for *La Belle et la bête*, was revealed as too monochromatically grey for comfortable TV viewing; as for the cast, their potential for histrionics was effectively neutralised by their being obliged, throughout the film, to adopt and sustain kitschy *tableau vivant* poses (during which—the supreme irony—they were also supposed to *fidget*, surely the hardest thing to ask of any trained actor).

Since that breakthrough, Ruiz has worked extensively for television, never failing to secure commissions, though undertaking them in the spirit of a soldier performing some despised chore with just enough slyly exaggerated goodwill to make his troubled superiors suspect for a moment that he is being insolent, before shamefacedly dismissing the notion. He has become a Sunday director—quite literally, in the sense of a 'Sunday painter'—pottering every free weekend at an extraordinary serial, *Le Borgne* (*The One-Eyed Man*), with the assistance of friends and technicians from his television work. And, latterly, he persuaded Roger Corman to invest in what he has pleasantly described as 'a philosophical exploitation movie', *The Territory*, filmed in Portugal a year ago under hair-raising circumstances. Loosely translating from the title of one of his shorts, *Le Jeu de l'oie* (1980), Ian Christie captioned his brief introduction to a recent National Film Theatre retrospective of Ruiz's work 'Snakes and Ladders'; and though it's a term that could apply equally well to the roller-coaster careers of any number of adventurous film-makers, what sets him apart is that he would seem to have learned how to climb the snakes.

If *L'Hypothèse* and the feature that immediately preceded it, *La Vocation suspendue* (*The Suspended Vocation*, 1977, also based on a novel by Klossowski), did, as I say, represent something of a watershed in critical appreciation of Ruiz's work (which could no longer be filed indiscriminately under 'Third World'), the degree to which they constituted a definitive break with his Chilean preoccupations is less certain. In fact, at the very outset of his career, one might have been forgiven for writing him off as a *cinéphile* of the purest water. When in 1967 he was shooting his official opus I, *El Tango del viudo* (*Widower's Tango*), a self-styled 'expressionist' film *à la* Polanski which was left uncompleted and has since been mislaid, his initial reaction to the riots which were then a daily feature of Chilean life was an aesthete's tetchy exasperation at how police brutality kept getting in the way of the picturesquely ominous 'chirico-scuro', as it were, of Santiago's lonely streets and piazzas.

In two other films from that period, *Tres tristes tigres* (*Three Sad Tigers*, 1968—it shares its curious title, a tongue-twister in Spanish, with a celebrated novel by Guillermo Cabrera Infante), and *Nadie dijo nada* (*Nobody Said Anything*, 1971, from Max Beerbohm's short—and tall—story 'Enoch Soames'), current political issues were only peripherally touched upon. Yet, by virtue of the devious narrative strategies already practised by Ruiz, as well as his radical dismantling of cultural stereotypes through performance and dialogue, the relation they bore to the films that Chileans were accustomed to seeing—mostly steamy Mexican melodramas and the



ubiquitous Hollywood fare—undoubtedly deserved to be called political.

Both are set among Santiago's *lumpen*-intelligentsia, in a world of tiny, cramped apartments, furnished with little more than a bed, a shelf of books and a record-player, and unalluringly *louche* taverns whose décor and lighting are reminiscent of nothing so much as those ludicrous cinema ads for some restaurant, usually 'exotic', adjacent to the Odeon or whatever. In each case, the gist of the plot—respectively, a woman's self-prostitution as a favour to her nebbish of a brother and, of course, Soames' pact with the devil (here a crooner so unctuously suave in manner that he is forever being taken for an Argentinian)—is embedded in a packed tissue of verbal and situational digressions as characters are encouraged to ramble on at length on topics whose relevance is not immediately evident, while matters of greater *a priori* concern are dropped as soon as raised. E.g., an exchange from *Nobody Said Anything*:

> 'You remember the letter she sent me?'
>
> 'You mean, the suicide one?'
>
> 'No, no, the other one. . .?'

As it happens, the other letter *is* the essential one, but that lone reference to a suicide note, so nonchalantly tossed into the conversation, does tend to nag at one.

Though summoned to the foreground from time to time, the plotline appears to enjoy no particularly privileged status within the overall narrative fabric. And compounding the difficulties for a non-Spanish speaking spectator is the frequency with which the dialogue detaches itself from a character to take on wilful life of its own, so that anyone dependent on an earphone commentary, as at the NFT, may begin to find himself wondering whether the commentator has got his scripts muddled. Personal pronouns develop schizophrenia, verbs float freely, disengaged from any specified 'doer', and syntactical units that one would have thought crucial to comprehension are simply omitted. (By way of explaining how these devices function, Raul once told me an amusing riddle. A man enters a bar and asks for a glass of water. Instead of serving him, the barman pulls out a revolver and aims it at him. Whereupon the startled *but grateful* customer takes his leave. What has to be figured out is the single missing detail which would invest this weird sequence of events with a semblance of logic.)

Such play with the ambiguities of his native language is not only confined to his films. I recollect an evening in Sintra when we were celebrating the birthday of a crew member, who had just regaled us with a *fado*, one of those ineffably mournful Portuguese folk-songs. Afterwards, in lieu of a toast, a beaming Raul recited a Gongoresque sonnet (Gongora was the Spanish Mallarmé) which he had dashed off God knows when—and which, to my astonishment, was received none too enthusiastically by the object of its homage. I later learned from Raul, who remained quite unfazed, that what had cast a chill over the proceedings was the poem's equivocal punning on the word

Left above: Raul Ruiz. Top: 'The Territory' (1981); centre: 'La Vocation suspendue' (1977); bottom: 'Tres Tristes Tigres' (1968).

fardo, Spanish for 'burdensome', and that Chileans prefer their compliments to be so elaborately double-edged.

While *Nobody Said Anything* is visually undistinguished—like *La Expropiacion* (*The Expropriation*, 1972), an ironic dissection of the scheme whereby the Allende government transferred ownership of hitherto private estates to the peasants who had been employed on them—the narrative fragmentation of *Three Sad Tigers* is articulated through hand-held camerawork of real virtuosity. That one's perception of this tends to be retrospective (I certainly was unaware as the film unfolded of any eye-catching display of pyrotechnics) can be attributed in part to the ingrained belief among movie buffs that a highly wrought visual style demands correspondingly sumptuous décors, not at all the case here. More significant reasons, however, might be the film's raw, even discordant, editing, which doesn't cut so much as *undercut* the action, frustrating the spectator of that almost subliminal coda of repose that would enable him to regain his bearings from one sequence to another; its framing, always a mite 'off', so that during most of the running time one aches from a craving to set the screen 'straight', as though it were a painting hung ever so slightly askew; and, above all, its refusal to allow the twin trajectories of camera movement and movement within the frame to run concurrently, subjecting them rather to an overlapping rhythm as disorienting in its way as the machine-gun dialogue of a screwball comedy.

Ruiz's collaborators (plus those Chilean critics sympathetic to his work) probably saw the film as a synthesis of neo-realist content and a loose-textured, New Wave-inspired *mise en scène* (as was true of Brazilian *cinema novo*); his chronic scepticism allied to a no less chronic distaste for all codified systems, however progressive, wholly transformed it. Exile clearly wasn't something that just 'happened' to him overnight. It was a state of being, a generalised form of alienation in the Brechtian sense. Already in Chile, the distance separating him from confrères who were pursuing ostensibly parallel aims was that between two athletes running side by side, one of whom has lapped the other. Nor was it exclusively, or even primarily, an aesthetic posture. *La Colonia Penal* (*The Penal Colony*, 1971, based on Kafka's novella), an anti-militaristic, anti-totalitarian fable set on an island off the coast of Peru which, in the director's words, 'produces news instead of copper', was made two years before the coup—and, it's worth remembering, in a country whose history by South American standards had been notably immune from military dictatorships. Less hypothetically, *The Expropriation* and *El Realismo socialista* (*Socialist Realism Considered as one of the Fine Arts*, 1973) called into question, not the transference of property or the occupation of factories instituted by Popular Unity, but the kind of uncritical, dogmatically positivist attitudes towards these measures that became current as the revolutionary process gathered momentum—an 'irresponsible' standpoint of no mean courage, given that Ruiz was one of Allende's cultural advisers. It's possible to surmise that, had there been no *coup d'état*, had Popular Unity survived and thrived, he would still have been forced to leave Chile sooner or later.

Life has never been a sinecure for Raul, but the hardships he encountered upon his arrival in Europe were particularly severe. After all, he was virtually penniless, spoke only Spanish and was scarcely a name to conjure with outside Latin America. Yet the very first feature he completed abroad, *Dialogo de exilados* (*Dialogue of Exiles*, 1974)—'of Panamanian nationality', as he once wryly defined its confused origin—proved to be a direct descendant of his earlier work; and its sardonic self-questioning affronted, as it must have been calculated to do, a good number of his compatriots then seeking political asylum in France. It chronicled the misadventures of a group of Chilean émigrés who kidnap a popular singer to prevent him from appearing at the Olympia (a Parisian variety hall) and thereby publicly sanctioning the junta.

Yielding neither to morale-boosting fantasies nor the wistful masochism of exiles for whom 'the Revolution' belongs essentially to an Arcadian past, Arcadian because it *is* the past (as in Losey and Jorge Semprun's *Les Routes du sud*), the film instead provides a bitter, often very funny gloss on the humdrum mechanics of the expatriate condition: at one point, for instance, the aspiring activists consult an old pro at political exile, a smooth operator of an Argentinian (played by the director Edgardo Cozarinsky) who passes on a few useful hints on improving their public relations. But exiles are, as the group's lethargically inept handling of the kidnapping would seem to indicate, *failed* revolutionaries almost by definition.

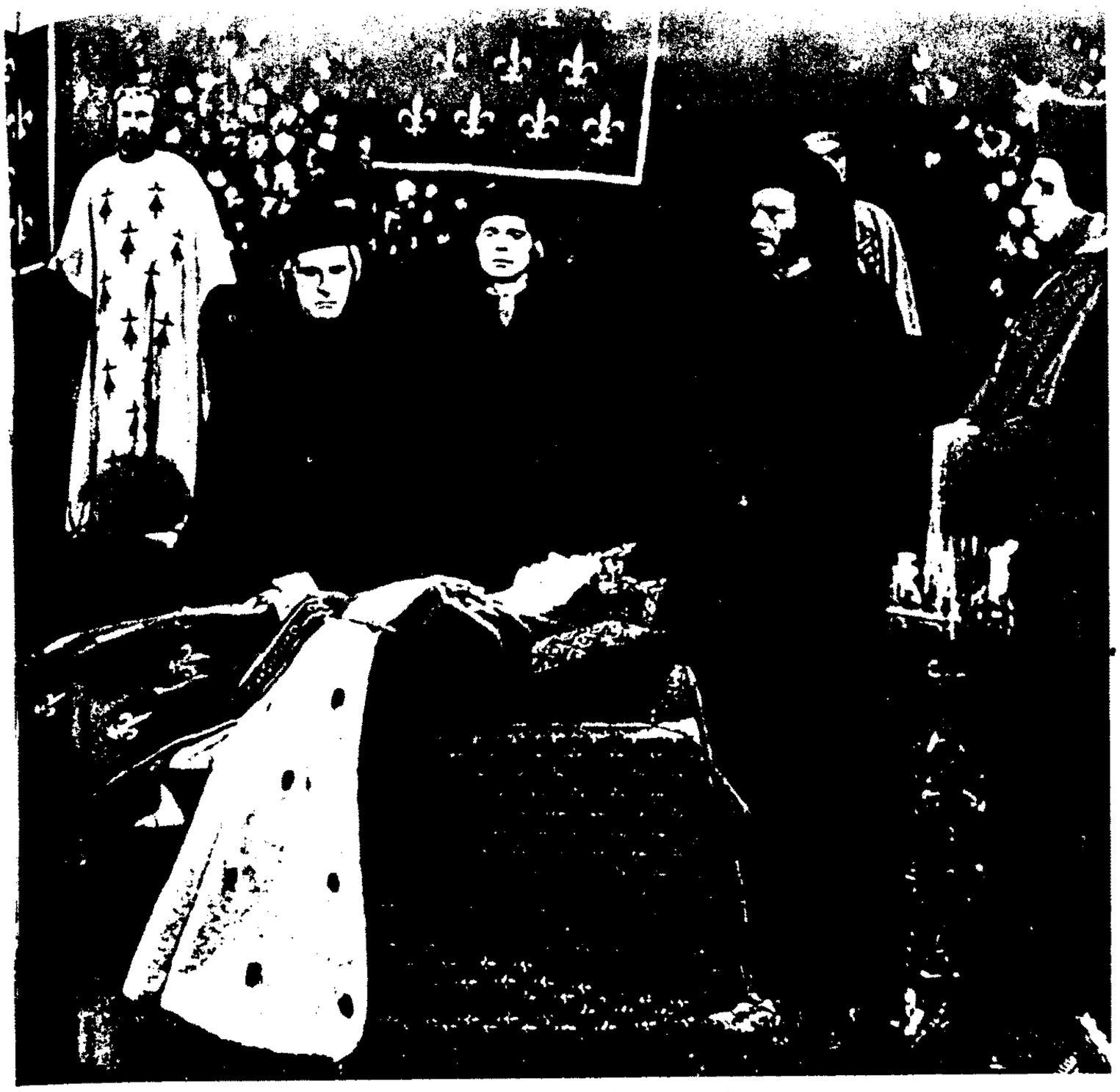
In the most controversial, most warmly contested sequence, funds donated to their cause by a liberal sympathiser melt away as each recipient of the envelope containing them is suddenly reminded of personal 'expenses' that require urgent settlement. Ruiz never goes so far as to imply that money is being embezzled (though he couldn't have been unprepared for the possibility of its being so interpreted); he limits himself to exposing a delicate problem likely to confront all clandestine political organisations. And again, considering the ease with which the hostage weaves in and out among his captors, his freedom of expression in no way circumscribed, it's tempting to regard his *petit-fasciste* (as one says *petit-bourgeois*) discourse—basically, 'yes, we disagree about how our country should be governed; yes, maybe the military have made mistakes; but, as Chileans together, we must learn to reconcile our differences for the good of all'—as voicing just another shade of opinion to be found in any heterogeneous collection of exiles. Of this character, Ruiz has commented: 'We always had the impression that among us exiles there

'Petit Manuel d'histoire de France' (1979),

was a fascist. Not one individual, but something in each of us; at one time I would be the fascist, another time it would be someone else. Fascism is alive, even among the exiles—this "Chileanism" which considers Chile as a country set apart in Latin America.'

Though the outline of the film's narrative was established in advance, its dialogue was mostly improvised, the non-professionals in the cast being 'carried' by the professionals (Daniel Gélin and Françoise Arnoul) much as the host of a talk show will endeavour to intercept any nervous fluffing on the part of his guests.

I can't report with much assurance on *Mensch verstreut und Welt verkehrt* (*The Scattered Body and the World Upside Down*, a Franco-German co-production of 1975), as the only print available for screening at the NFT retrospective was a bastardised version abridged for German television from ninety to sixty minutes. So insensitively was it re-edited that, had the programme booklet not synopsised its arresting Powell-and-Pressburgerish plot conceit—two travelling salesmen are searching Honduras for pieces of a friend's body and, wherever they find one, they encounter some aspect of utopian socialism in action—one would have been hard put to detect any trace of it. A pity, for nothing in his oeuvre could be more certifiably 'Ruizian'. Each half of the title refers to a rhetorical figure peculiar to Chile's numerous 'illiterate' bards. The World Upside Down dictates a series of contradictory images—the thief becomes the judge, the whore becomes the nun;



a potted replay of French history. Photo: Jacques Chevry.

whereas in the Scattered Body the poet envisions the dismemberment of his own body, its various components strewn around the globe. If one is to believe Raul, however, the latter trope is far from being merely metaphorical: as a child, he claims, his favourite pastime was clambering over the local railway tracks in the hope of 'spotting', not trains, but the mutilated limbs of suicide victims—who were apparently legion. (And, to be sure, there is a scene in *The Territory*—a film about, though not categorically against, cannibalism—in which one of the characters unearths a cache of bones which he proceeds, with the neurotic tentativeness of a jigsaw puzzle addict, to reassemble into the skeleton of a human hand.)

In the same cheerfully morbid vein are Raul's reminiscences of his own adventures in Honduras. It was at Christmas 1975 that he flew there, with several cans of film in the baggage compartment and his total budget—five thousand dollars—stashed inside his wallet. The plane was so crowded with immigrant workers on holiday that hand-straps had to be hitched up in the aisle for the benefit of those who were obliged to stand. Then, to Raul's dismay, the pilot blithely announced that, with passengers crammed into every nook and cranny, all luggage had been left behind in Europe and would arrive on a subsequent flight—a whole week later. Then again, the driver of the ramshackle coach bringing them from the airport fell asleep at his steering wheel, causing the vehicle to swerve crazily along the coastal highway before careening off it altogether and crashing into a tug which lay at anchor just offshore, an indignity borne by the majority of casualties with admirable fortitude. Finally, he told me, enquiring of one local why a set of two-way traffic lights was being installed on such an isolated thoroughfare, he was informed that accidents most frequently occurred between coaches and aircraft preparing to land! Henceforth, should the light be green for road traffic, any approaching plane would simply have to circle until such time as it changed to red. Hmm.

Before knuckling down to *La Vocation suspendue*, which strikes me as one of the indisputably great films of the 70s, a digression might be in order. There's a thesis to be written on the extent to which the stylistic modernity of certain film-makers appears to stem from the interpolation—sometimes playful, often not—of a number of filmic practices and by-products into the narrative substance of their work. Bresson's direction of non-professional actors, for instance, is founded on a sadistic exploitation of the dramatic possibilities of *le trac* (or stage fright); Ozu's later, and more static, films are alone in acknowledging (as has been pointed out by Jonathan Rosenbaum) that cinema viewing is a sedentary, contemplative occupation; Hitchcock and his epigones capitalise on the fact that, while we are absorbing their shock effects, we are in the dark among strangers; the topographical complexity of Tati's *Playtime*, on the other hand, is a direct reflection of the multiplicity of 'angles' upon a space about to choose a seat in the auditorium; and, by a beguiling reversal, Wenders' obsessive tracking shots owe much of their unique fascination to the way they evoke metacinematic epiphanies familiar to us all, such as watching a landscape disappear in the wake of a speeding car while 'cheap' music blares from its radio.

What Ruiz interpolates into his fictions is, to simplify grossly, a giggle (or, in more apposite French, *un fou rire*). Not that this is quite how they are greeted by most audiences. Actually, they solicit a reaction—halfway between giggling and utter solemnity—that tends to baffle the facial muscles. Still, I was intrigued, when invited recently to take a peek at the rushes of his latest film, *Le Toit de la baleine* (*The Roof of the Whale*), set in Patagonia and shot just outside Rotterdam, by the regularity with which the performers would crease up after his call of 'Cut'. Such unprofessional demeanour may, of course, have been provoked by the eccentric nature of the project—a film 'about language' spoken in five different tongues with no subtitles envisaged. Or by the nature of one particular sequence I saw—a fractured dialogue in German and English (which was also, in a sense, a dialogue *between* German and English) on the respective merits of Mozart and Beethoven, from the revolutionary thrust of their compositions down to which of the two had been allotted 'nicer record sleeves'. But even with the polished if somehow wobbly performances in *La Vocation* one has the distinct impression that nervous giggles are never far away and that the cutting-room floor must have been awash with them. All of which may sound spectacularly trivial. Except that there is finally nothing funnier than laughter itself, certainly nothing more contagiously so; and, intentional or not, I suspect that the *very* peculiar tone of Ruiz's later work can be ascribed to this submerged ripple of self-deflation.

A synopsis of the novel on which *La Vocation suspendue* was based would have to coincide word for word with the original, like Borges' globe of the world whose dimensions rivalled those of the world itself. That the film version preserves intact Klossowski's Byzantine occultation may explain why it has received such meagre coverage, even from those who profess to be admirers of Ruiz (how gratifying, then, to mention that one of the few articles ever to appear—an essay by Richard Roud usefully coupling it with Truffaut's *La Chambre verte*—was published in this magazine). But it can briefly be summarised as recounting the dilemma of a young seminarist caught up in the ideological feuding of the Jesuits and the partisans of a matriarchal Church based on the cult of the Virgin, the latter further subdividing into two equally opposed sects. Such doubling and redoubling functions as a *mise en abime* of the film's own esoteric construction (as of a *Radio Times* cover depicting the same *Radio Times* cover depicting the same cover. . .).

In fact, there purports to be *two* films, boasting separate casts, one supposedly

shot in the 40s, the other its revisionist remake from the 60s. These, respectively in black and white (or on occasion sepia) and colour, are by no means impeccably intercut. An actor from one will stray into the other; ambiguous cross-cutting between the two misleads us into believing the same cinematic space to be intimately cohabited; and the odd contemporary incidental—a Volkswagen van, a pinned-up reminder that Maurice Cloche's *Monsieur Vincent* (whose oleaginous textures are parodied by Vierny's photography) is playing on television—surfaces anachronistically in the earlier version. Further *outré* complications include a monastery fresco in which St Bernard, who rejected the doctrine of Immaculate Conception, is mysteriously painted into a Nativity; an atrocity snapshot of a ravished nun which turns out to have been fraudulently perpetrated by an atheistic painter (played by Daniel Gélin) and his mistress; and the fact that, by the film's end and according to the precepts of the World Upside Down, the mistress has indeed become a nun while the painter coolly serves Mass to the faithful.

Ruiz (a former seminarist himself, as was Klossowski) portrays the Catholic Church as a secret society, a freemasonry, the paradigm of all totalitarian institutions, not excluding its supposedly diametric antithesis, the Communist Party: Roud makes a neat comparison between St Bernard's suspect proximity to the Virgin and the inconvenient presence of Trotsky, say, in early photographs of the Bolsheviks. One of the gnomic apophthegms punctuating a recent issue of *Ca Cinéma* which Ruiz jointly edited with Jean-Louis Shefer was 'Un château est l'image de la peur'; and here the Church is only the first of those monolithic citadels—latent labyrinths no less than the barren Hungarian plains of Jancsó's films—which will reappear in *Les Divisions de la nature* (*The Divisions of Nature*, 1978, a whimsical 'anti-documentary' on the Château de Chambord), *Petit Manuel d'histoire de France* (*Short Primer of French History*, 1979, a potted replay of the country's history, as dramatised by French TV, from 'nos ancêtres' the Gauls to the invention of cinema), *The Territory* and even *Image de sable* (*Image of Sand*, 1981, a 15-minute short about a Ludwig II of sandcastles)—all commissioned works.

Because, for the first time, he respected both Klossowski's dialogue and the *découpage* of his own shooting script, there is an abundance of visual felicities of a kind unthinkable in the free-for-all of his Chilean period. Ruizian *trouvailles* abound: a gold-embossed family album in which lewd pin-ups jostle with childhood snaps, a hilarious Swingle Singers-type chorale to accompany some of the film's more austere imagery, a two-headed crucifix like a playing-card. If so profoundly *sui generis* an artefact as *La Vocation suspendue* can be compared to anything on this earth, it might be to a cross—appropriately enough—between *The Castle* and Firbank's *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* (or perhaps to a Gideon Bible I once found in an American motel and whose bookmark was a filthy postcard).

Ruiz has defined his cinema as deliberately caught 'between two stools', or as deliberately cancelling itself out. A loose, 'unframed' shot will be counterbalanced by an equally 'unframed' reverse-angle shot so as to achieve an effect of perfect symmetry. His regular composer, Jorge Arriagada, will write an immaculately dodecaphonic score (as he did for *The Territory*), which manages nevertheless to emerge on the soundtrack as closer in spirit to Elgar than Schoenberg. Just as Picasso has 'influenced' the painters he pastiched (Goya, Delacroix)—or at least influenced the way one looks at their work—so a film like *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé*, in which nothing is as it seems, may alter one's perception of its models (*La Belle et la bête*, French *cinéma de qualité* in general), as well as cast doubts on the 'sincerity' of the use of a hand-held camera in what one fondly imagined were more or less straightforward political statements.

In *L'Hypothèse*, we are guided by a 'collector' (the late Jean Rougeul, memorable as the garrulous intellectual in *8½*) around the pieces of his collection, all of them by an academic painter of the Second Empire, Frédéric Tonnerre. These paintings, however—Diana pursued by Actaeon, a game of chess between two Knights Templar, a naked, martyred youth with the glittering torso of an arrowless Sebastian—are not *tableaux* at all but *tableaux vivants*, disposed about his villa and garden like slightly gamy Art Nouveau statuary. What the film and its protagonist (albeit independently of each other) are seeking to elucidate is both the identity of the 'missing painting' and the reason behind its once scandalised rejection by polite society; and since not a few of the poetic traps sprung by Ruiz can claim kinship with the closed-room strategies of Gaston Leroux and John Dickson Carr, it would be unsporting of me to reveal the solution here (even if I—or, I suspect, anyone else—had fathomed it sufficiently to be able to do so). A *jeu d'esprit*, perhaps, but one which also proposes a serious meditation on four types of representational space: pictorial, sculptural, cinematic and, less easily definable, that curious amalgam of all three whose innocent expression might be the diminutive vistas one peers at through a View-Master device. And so rarefied has the kitsch become as to be well nigh indistinguishable from the Olympian 'high art' it cunningly parodies.

It would be impossible within the limits of a single article to do justice to the bewildering variety of Ruiz's television films: to those already mentioned one might add the well-known *Colloque de chiens* (*Dogs' Dialogue*, 1977), in which Vico's cyclical theory is superimposed on the grid of a lurid *roman-photo*, and *Débats* (*Debates*, 1979), or the TV panel discussion considered as one of the fine arts, in which various apparently simulated interviews—such as that with an Erik Satie fanatic who would like to see newspapers run a daily Satie feature next to the weather report and horoscope—prove to be quite genuine.

Ever the metaphysician, the admirer of Wittgenstein, Berkeley and Chesterton, Ruiz has begun to explore a field of philosophical speculation which must be without precedent in film history. It finds its purest, most abstract form in *Le Borgne*, the ambition of whose twenty episodes will be not only to encompass the entire spectrum of cinematic procedures but to co-opt them into serving as the very subject-matter of the film's narrative. From this angle, then, there is nothing illogical about his enthusiasm for flamboyant, even vulgar, special effects—which, it should be noted, are light years away from computerised science-fiction and have more to do with Georg Lukacs than George Lucas. Instead of contenting himself with mere imitation, Ruiz lured the veteran cinematographer Henri Alekan out of an enforced semi-retirement to be his lighting cameraman on *Les Divisions de la nature* and *The Territory*. As with the forest's shifting penumbra in the latter work, so Alekan dissolves the rock-solid façade of Chambord into an eye-dazzling kaleidoscope of filters until it recedes further and further from both view and comprehension. And if such use of photographic effects to undermine a spectator's perception seems simplistic, one has only to remember how important were 'optical illusions' to philosophers of the printed page.

When this article is published, Ruiz will have—*deo volente*—completed another feature in Portugal, *Las Cuatro coronas del marinero* (*The Four Crowns of the Sailor*), based on his own short story and, vaguely, on 'The Ancient Mariner'. For INA again, with Isabelle Weingarten, he plans to adapt a celebrated news item about a Frenchwoman who never once took her garbage out in almost thirty years. And there are hopes one day to film Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* and James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. (Channel 4?) In an interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, he described three characteristic Chilean attitudes. That of Lautaro, an Indian who was befriended by the Spaniards and who meticulously studied their methods for no other reason than to turn them against his masters. That of Jimmy Button, an illiterate Indian adopted by the captain of the 'Beagle' on Darwin's first voyage: although he learned English in three weeks, went to Oxford and was even called to the Bar, he forgot everything on his return to South America. And that of Valderomat, the Chilean Oscar Wilde, who was the darling of the salons before drowning himself in a sewer. Asked which of them he identified with, Raul replied, 'I have the feeling I float from one to the other...' Three-in-one, the Trinity: knowing him, I can imagine his amusement at thus embodying the most unintelligible of all theological paradoxes.

And by the way—if you're still wondering about the man who was treated so strangely when he requested a glass of water, the answer is that he had the hiccups. ■