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## Masters of Cinema

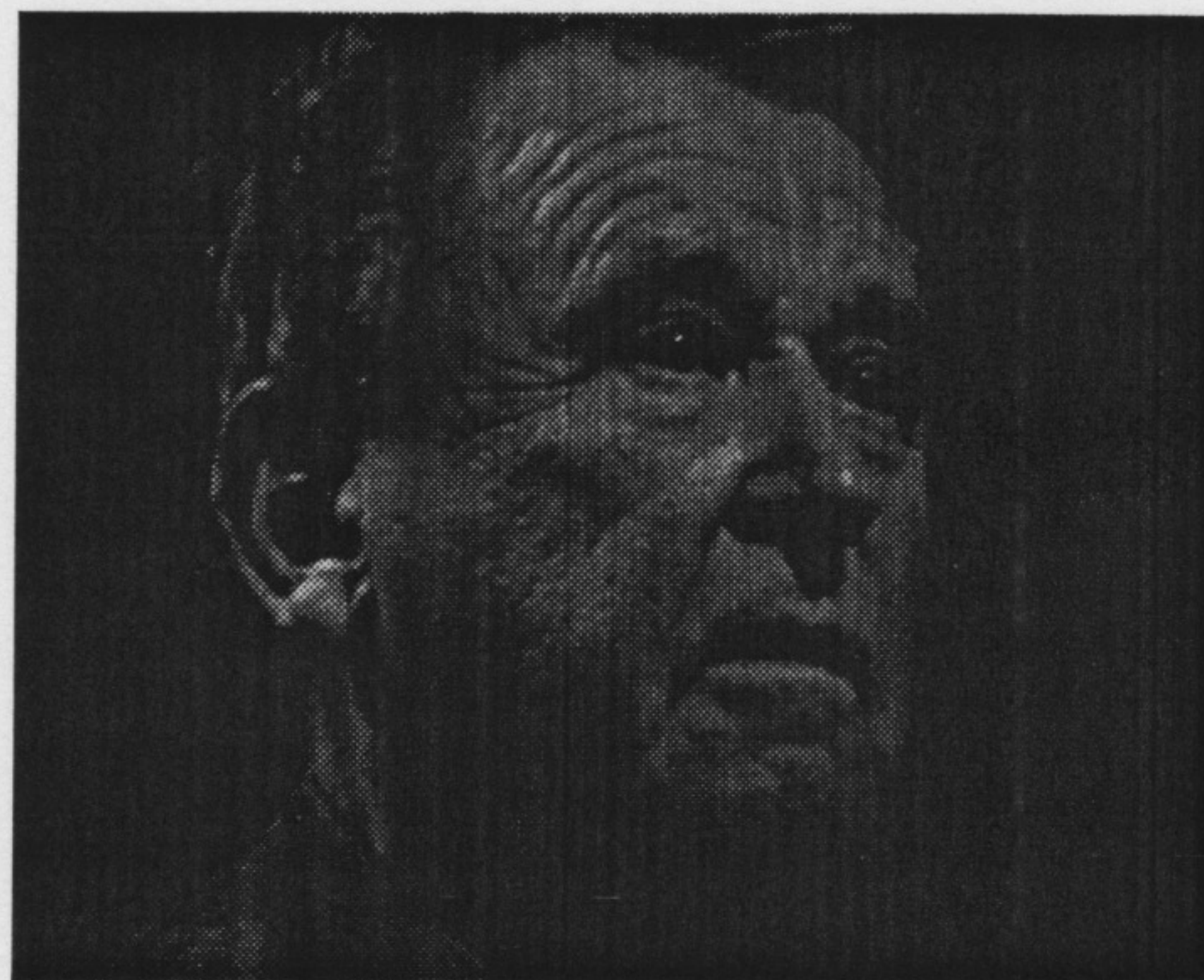
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COLLATING &amp; DISSEMINATING INFORMATION FOR DISCERNING CINEPHILES THE WORLD OVER

## THE 62ND VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL AND STRAUB-HUILLET

by Craig Keller (for MoC), September 2006.

The 63rd annual **Venice International Film Festival** ended this past weekend with welcome recognition for some of the most important figures currently working in cinema. The award for "Best Young Actor" was granted to the magnificent **Isild Le Besco** (a formidable filmmaker in her own right) for her performance in Benoît Jacquot's picture **L'Intouchable [The Untouchable]**. The Best Director award went to **Alain Resnais** for his new feature **Coeurs [Hearts] / Private Fears in Public Faces**. The award for Best Film went to **Jia Zhang-ke's Sanxia haoren / Still Life** (one of the two films Jia screened at the festival; the other being the documentary portrait **Dong**). **David Lynch** received a career-spanning award for lifetime-achievement. His nearly three-hour long new film, **INLAND EMPIRE** (the title of which, according to Lynch, should always appear entirely in capital letters), has been predictably greeted by the English-language press with charges of self-indulgence and arrogance — charges which English and American critics seem to feel entitled to lob at every film that could not have been born from either the Sundance Lab or Robert McKee's story seminar, given said critics' bizarre sympathy for financiers instead of filmmakers (when was the last time a painter had to defend himself in the modern press over either his working method or the result?), and their presumable hatred for cinema, human idiosyncrasy, and individual thought. Sylvia Plath expressed the condition well in her poem "**Daddy**".



Which brings us to *lo scandalo di Straub-Huillet*.

**Tag Gallagher** reports:

A new film by **Jean-Marie Straub** and **Danièle Huillet**, **Quei loro incontri [Those Encounters of Theirs]**, had its world premiere a few days ago in competition at the Venice Film Festival. The movie's dialogue consists of the last five dialogues of **Cesare Pavese's Dialoghi con Leucò [Dialogues with Leucò]**. And the jury (headed by Catherine Deneuve) had determined to give a special Lion to the Straubs "for invention of cinematic language in the ensemble of their work." The Straubs, however, did not show up for their film or ceremony. Instead they sent a number of their actors who left Pisa at 4 a.m. to be in Venice on time for the film's press conference, where Festival director **Marco Müller** announced Danièle was ill and that Jean-Marie had sent a statement, which **Giovanna Daddi**, one of the actors, read:

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### Three Messages

by **Jean-Marie Straub** [translation by Tag Gallagher]

### First Message:

It's come too soon for our death — too late for our life.

Anyway, I thank Marco Müller for his courage. But what do I expect from it? Nothing. Nothing at all? Yes, a small revenge. A revenge "*against the intrigues of the court*," as is said in **The Golden Coach**. Against so many ruffians.

Why Pavese? Because he wrote: "*Communist doesn't mean just wanting to be. We're too ignorant in this country. We need communists who aren't ignorant, who don't spoil the name.*" Or again: "*If once it was enough to have a bonfire to make it rain, or to burn a vagabond on one to save a harvest, how many owners' houses need to be burnt down, how many owners killed in the streets and squares, before the world turns just and we have our words to say?*"

Pavese has the bastard say: "*The other day I passed by the Mora. The pine tree by the gate's not there anymore.*" Replies Nuto: "*The bookkeeper had it cut down — Nicoletto, that ignorant man. He had it cut down because the tramps would stop in its shade and beg, you understand...*"

Again Nuto, elsewhere: "*Given the life he leads, I can't call him a poor fool, as if it would do any good... First,*



*the government should burn up all the money and the people who defend it."*

Best wishes.

### Second Message:

I have been:

1. At the Venice Festival (as journalist) in 1954, I chose to write on three films: **Sanshô dayû — El Río y la muerte — Rear Window**. No prizes!
2. At the Festival (short films) in 1953 with my first film **Machorka-Muff** ('62): no prize.
3. At the Festival in '66 with **Nichtversöhnt (Not Reconciled, 1965)**. Projection paid for by Godard!
4. At the Festival with **Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach**!
5. At Venice for retrospective in 1975 (wanted by Gambetti) of all our films up to **Moses and Aron** (included), 1974.

At the Festival of Cinematographic Art with **Quei loro incontri** for A Roaring Lion.

### Third Message:

Besides I wouldn't be able to be festive in a festival where there are so many public and private police looking for a terrorist — **I** am the terrorist, and I tell you, paraphrasing Franco Fortini: so long as there's American imperialistic capitalism, there'll never be enough terrorists in the world.

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Gallagher continues:

*Marco Müller then closed the press conference without any of the actors getting a chance to say a word. (Straub's citations are from Pavese's **La luna e i falò [The Moon and the Bonfires]**, which the Straubs filmed in 1979 as part of **Dalla nube alla Resistenza [From the Cloud to the Resistance]**.)*

*Straub's messages caused a furor at the Festival and in the Italian press — but have been virtually unreported outside of Italy. Was an award still in order? The jury met again. At least one jury member, American **Cameron Crowe**, objected it was not opportune, on the eve of the anniversary of 9/11, but consented on an understanding that the Festival would "distance" itself from Straub's "anti-American" message. (Apparently it's anti-American to oppose imperialism.)*

*The award was given but the "distance" was not announced — thank goodness! We have nothing to fear from the world being filled with "terrorists" such as Straub defines himself — people making movies like Straub. But we have everything to fear from neo-McCarthyites who seek to hinge artistic recognition on an endorsement of imperialism.*

Facsimiles of Straub's three statements can be viewed at Andy Rector's **Kino Slang** blog **here**. In addition, two fascinating dossiers on Straub and Huillet have been compiled by Klaus Volkmer, and appear in German on the **new filmkritik für lange texte** website **here** and **here**.