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Petit manuel d'histoire de France (Short history of France),
Ruiz, Raoul, 1979

Le jeu de l'oie (Snakes and ladders), Ruiz, Raoul, 1980

Mensch verstreut und welt verkehrt (The scattered body and the
world upside down), Ruiz, Raoul, 1975

SNAKES AND LADDERS

The career of Raúl Ruiz



To describe Raúl Ruiz as the best known unknown film-maker in the world is probably quite accurate, if paradoxical. Paradox, however, lies at the heart of both his own work and some of his favourite authors: Chesterton, Kafka, Wittgenstein. Like the hero of one of his recent television films, *Le jeu de l'oie* (Snakes and Ladders), he has survived a bizarre series of misadventures with his radical enthusiasm and wry sense of humour still intact. Many, perhaps most, of his films are lost or inaccessible. Some of his best work, commissioned by French, German and Italian television, has been cut or simply shelved. Only the loyal support of a number of influential festival directors and archivists has preserved even a part of his scattered output.

Since the early 60s, Ruiz has been variously Chile's most prolific playwright, leader of the Chilean cinema revival, film adviser to the Socialist Party in Allende's coalition, an impoverished political exile and, latterly, a favourite director of both French television's INA and the redoubtable *Cahiers du cinéma*.

Witty, curious and devastatingly honest, he fits into no comfortable category. His short films are as ambitious and thought-provoking as most features, while his long films often seem to have been spun out of a simple, speculative 'what if . . .?'

Quotations from medieval philosophers mingle with comic strips and (other people's) historical epics. The results are often hilarious, yet always related to an underlying passion for analysis.

This partial retrospective, organised in conjunction with the Edinburgh Festival, will introduce Ruiz to

English-speaking audiences for the first time. Apart from the discovery of a fascinating work-in-progress, it should raise some pertinent questions about the potential of working independently for television and the relationship between the pleasures and politics of creativity.—Ian Christie.

Late arrivals As this programme goes to press, two films believed lost have been discovered.

Nobody Said Anything

Wed 30 Sep 8.30

Based on Beerbohm's autobiographical story, this film is set in the same world as *Tres tristes tigres* and deals with the isolation of Chilean intellectuals 'who live in their own reality and believe that it is actually Chile.' Italy 1971.

Socialist Realism Considered as One of the Fine Arts

Thu 10 Sep 8.30

Hidden in Santiago since the 1973 military coup, *Socialist Realism* will now be seen in Europe for the first time. Raúl Ruiz will introduce extracts from what was originally an improvised 4-hour film, intended to provoke critical discussion amongst militants at a critical moment in the Chilean revolution. The film however took on a life of its own . . . Chile 1972.

A dossier on Ruiz appears in Afterimage 10, published to coincide with the season, and it is hoped to arrange one or more additional programmes of video during the season.

'Suddenly there was a chance to make a film in which Chileans would recognise themselves.' For his first professional feature, Ruiz transformed a conventional play into a fluent, hypnotic evocation of the 'everyday violence' of lower middle class city life. In that same year as *Valparaiso mi amor* and *The Jackal of Nahueltoro*, the new Chilean cinema was born and proclaimed a cultural revolution to the outside world. *Chile 1968/With Nelson Villagra, Shenda Roman, Luis Alarcon.*

Tue 1 Sep
6.15/
Sun 13 Sep
8.45

Three Sad Tigers
(Tres tristes tigres)



A year before Allende's election victory, Ruiz invented a brilliant, 'irresponsible' metaphor for the Latin American situation, loosely based on Kafka's story. His Pacific island off the coast of Peru has progressed steadily from penitentiary to independence, but it retains its prison rules and customs. A visiting journalist finds evidence of torture and repression—which, of course, she must have invented, since news production is the island's staple industry . . . *Chile 1971.* Also *Sotelo*, a 1976 documentary on the Chilean painter.

Tue 1 Sep
8.30/
Thu 10 Sep
6.15

The Penal Colony
(La Colonia penal)



A government agent arrives at a country estate to supervise the transfer of land to the peasants. He finds that he has much in common with the landowner and his family but, faced with the peasants' militancy, he tries unconvincingly to persuade them that the law will prevail. Criticised in 1972 for casting doubts on the strategy of Popular Unity, Ruiz withheld his bold parable and only completed it in Paris after the coup. *Chile-France 1971-3.* Also *Now We'll Call You Brother*, a 1971 short on Allende's policy towards the Indians.

Wed 2 Sep
6.15/
Sun 13 Sep
4.15

The Expropriation
(La Expropiación)



Controversy followed Ruiz into exile in France, where *Diálogo* was denounced by fellow-exiles as a slander, with its story of a singer held as political hostage. Consequently the film has been little seen and perhaps at this distance its ironic handling of refugee politics will be better understood, both as an expression of bitterness and a call for reappraisal of aims. Ruiz quotes Brecht: 'exiles are the most skilful dialecticians . . . they have a sharp eye for contradictions'. *France 1974/With Françoise Arnoul, Daniel Gélin.*

Wed 2 Sep
8.30

Dialogues of Exiles
(Diálogo de Exilados)



Financed by German television's ZDF, Ruiz returned to Latin America to make another ironic and somewhat macabre parable. Two travelling salesmen in Honduras are searching for pieces of the body of a lost friend. Each time they find one they meet a group of peasants practising isolated features of Utopian socialism. *Germany 1975. Video.* Also *Snakes and Ladders*, a 'didactic fiction about cartography' for television, which plunges its puzzled hero into a dizzying topographical nightmare.

Sat 5 Sep
6.15

The Scattered Body and the World Upside Down

(Mensch verstreut und Welt verkehrt)



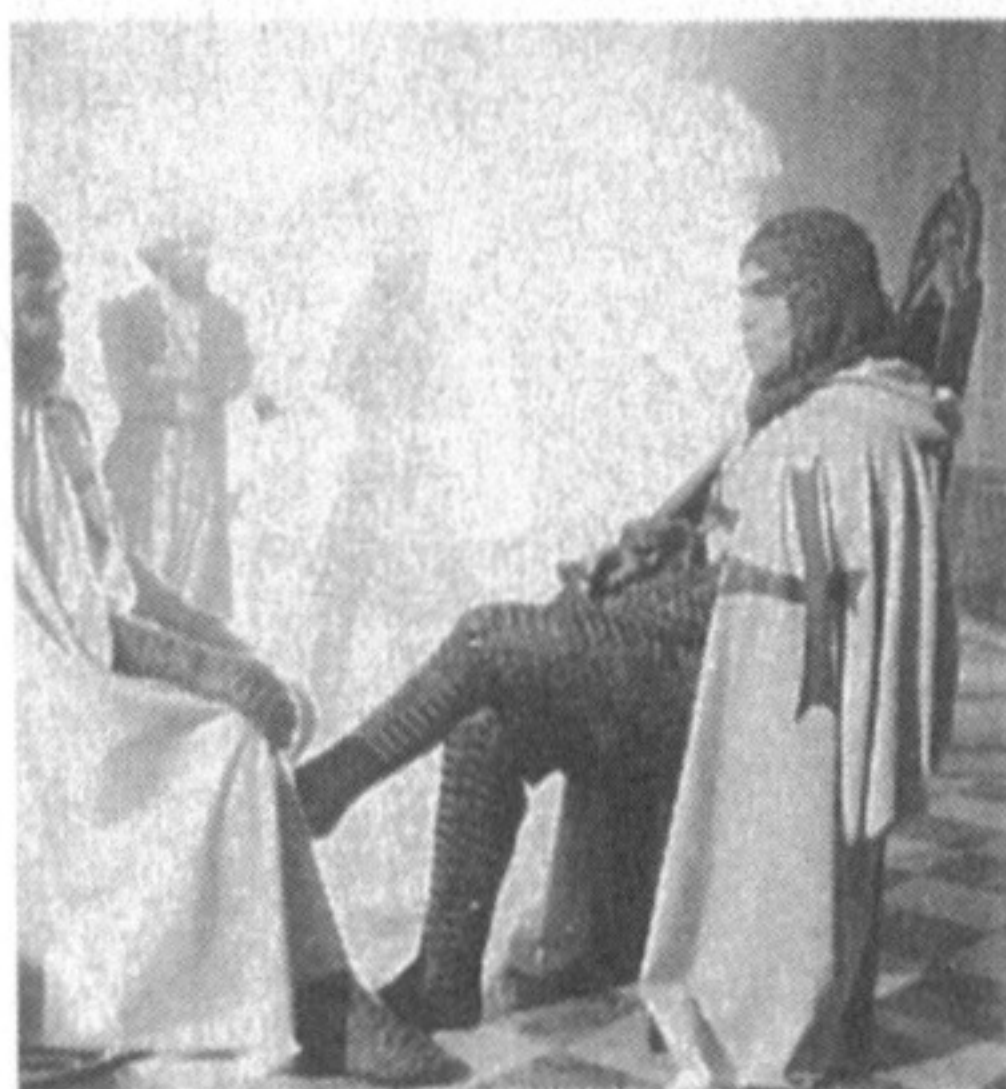


Mon 7 Sep
6.30

The Suspended Vocation

(La Vocation suspendue)

Ostensibly a faithful adaptation of Klossowski's autobiographical novel about the struggles between rival doctrinal factions within the Catholic church, *The Suspended Vocation* emerges as a puzzle film to rival *Marienbad* and a perverse metaphor for political behaviour. By turns baffling and hilarious, it illustrates Ruiz's belief (shared by St Augustine and Stalin) that institutions, to survive, must become like besieged citadels, treating all dissidence as treason. *France 1977/With Pascal Bonitzer, Edith Scob.*



Sat 5 Sep
8.30/

Sun 13 Sep
6.30

The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting

(L'Hypothèse du tableau volé)

After *The Suspended Vocation*, Ruiz persuaded French television to commission a documentary on Klossowski and soon converted this into a 'fiction about theory'. But the result is a film truly unlike any other, an interpretation of some forgotten paintings that becomes a guided tour of a fantastic gallery of 'living pictures'. In a series of haunting images, Ruiz explores the relationship between words and pictures that is cinema. *France 1978.* Also his prize-winning short, *Colloque de chiens*, a breathless photo-novel that ruthlessly re-cycles its characters.



Sun 6 Sep
Wed 30 Sep
6.15

Great Events and Ordinary People

(De grands événements et des gens ordinaires)

An innocent beginning, as in many Ruiz films, leads to unexpected developments. From a commission to provide a 'personal' view of the 1978 elections in his district of Paris, Ruiz fashioned both a poignant account of the exile's isolation and a witty destruction of normal television documentary. As the images visibly lose their meaning, the narrator concludes that documentary is essentially a colonial art. *France 1979.* Also *The Divisions of Nature*, in which the Château de Chambord is revealed as a 'work of pure representation'.



Sun 6 Sep
8.30

Short Manual of French History

(Petit manuel d'histoire de France)

A television series of archive-based programmes gave Ruiz the opportunity to range over the many series dealing with traditional French history – kings, battles, dates – and rearrange these into a brisk chronicle which devastatingly refutes the chestnuts of school history books (read as narration) and brilliantly collapses the conventions of tele-history. Highlights of the story – running from 'our ancestors the Gauls' to the invention of cinema – are multiple Joans of Arc and Charlemagne inadvertently reincarnated as Napoleon. *France 1979. Video.*



Mon 7 Sep
8.45

The One-Eyed Man

(Le Borgne)

As an antidote to commissioned work for television, Ruiz embarked last year on an open-ended serial film, shot mainly at weekends with friends and members of his regular television crew. From the four episodes completed at time of writing, it can best be described as a metaphysical cliff-hanger – the main question being not who is in front of the camera, but who is *behind* it? Through whose eyes are we looking? *France 1981.* Raúl Ruiz will be present to discuss his work after this screening – unless he manages to make several more episodes!