

## Document Citation

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## Jacques Rivette: A Differential Cinema



Jacques Rivette *The Nun* 1966

For the past five decades, Jacques Rivette has produced an incredibly rich and prolific body of work cementing his reputation as one of the masters of the French New Wave. His name is often uttered in reverence along with Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut and Eric Rohmer, his comrades in the New Wave's Gang of Four. His films have not been screened as widely as his peers however, largely due to a perceived inaccessibility attributed to their extended running times; many of these works run well over two hours, most notably the over twelve hour long *Out One: Noli Me Tangere* (sadly this version is currently unavailable with English subtitles). Yet these larger canvases afford Rivette the space to develop a complex interplay between fiction and reality in which his layering of a world within the larger world of his films is both reflexive and magical.

Rivette had no formal education in cinema. Rather, he spent hours at the Cinémathèque Française in the early 1950s, where he forged lasting relationships with many New Wave contemporaries including Claude Chabrol and Truffaut. During this time he experimented with the short film format while working as an assistant to such filmmakers as Jean Renoir and Jacques Becker. Along with Godard, Truffaut and Alain Resnais, Rivette began writing for *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1952, where the critics collectively championed the auteurist aesthetic of directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, Otto Preminger and Anthony Mann. Rivette began production on his first feature in 1957, *Paris Belongs to Us*. Due to funding problems, it took almost four years to complete. Within this early work, Rivette studies the interactions among a group of stage actors, a frequent concern throughout his career. His next film, *The Nun*, was also delayed but in this case, it was the interference of censors which limited the film's release. *The Nun* marked Rivette's last project in which he employed more conventional narrative techniques. Beginning with *L'Amour fou* in 1969, Rivette's experimentation with documentary techniques frequently featured improvisational performances from his actors. In the 1970s he embarked on some of his most ambitious projects, including the aforementioned *Out One* and a never-completed quartet of films titled "Les filles du feu" (later renamed "Scenes de la vie parallèle") which he revisited in 2003 with *The Story of Marie and Julien*. This period also marked his greatest commercial success with *Céline and Julie Go Boating*.

Since the 1980s Rivette has continued to explore the complexities of the artistic process (*Love on the Ground*, *La Belle noiseuse*, *Va savoir*) as well as producing fascinating reflections on genre (*Up Down Fragile*, *Secret Defense*). In an early interview Rivette described the art of crafting a "differential cinema" which seeks to create a unique experience for the viewer outside of narrative convention. In this varied, essential body of work, Rivette has proven that he continues to welcome that challenge.

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◆ January 5 (Friday) 6:30 pm

◆ January 6 (Saturday) 9 pm

*Paris Belongs to Us*

(*Paris nous appartient*)

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 1960, 35mm, b/w, 140 min.

With Betty Schneider, Giani Esposito,

Françoise Prévost

French with English subtitles

SET IN A near-deserted Paris in summer, *Paris Belongs to Us*—the first feature by Rivette, made with a camera borrowed from Chabrol and shot on film stock bought by Truffaut—follows a group of enthusiastic young theatrical amateurs who come together to present a production of Shakespeare's *Pericles*. Little by little, sexual and political tensions develop within the group. As misfortunes begin to befall them, the actors become haunted by a vague, unseen menace with increasingly conspiratorial undertones that suggest the state of the contemporary world. Poetic in its vision and realist in its expression, *Paris Belongs to Us* remains one of the key works of the early Nouvelle Vague.

◆ January 5 (Friday) 9:15 pm

◆ January 6 (Saturday) 6:30 pm

*The Nun* (*La Religieuse*)

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 1966, 35mm, color, 140 min.

With Anna Karina, Liselotte Pulver,

Micheline Presle

French with English subtitles

BASED ON THE ACCLAIMED eighteenth-century novel by Enlightenment philosopher Denis Diderot, Rivette's second feature stars Anna Karina as Suzanne Simonin, a free-spirited young woman who is forced by her parents to enter a convent. Within this cloistered world she encounters church leaders who abuse their positions of power and others who question their calling to serve their faith. Despite Rivette's reassurances to the censors, the film was banned for two years after its initial release for its tyrannical representation of the Catholic hierarchy.

◆ January 7 (Sunday) 2 pm and 7 pm

*Céline and Julie Go Boating*

(*Céline et Julie vont en bateau*)

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 1974, 35mm, color, 193 min.

With Juliet Berto, Dominique Labourier,

Barbet Schroeder

French with English subtitles

RIVETTE ACHIEVED his widest commercial success with this beguiling Mobius strip chronicling the relationship between two women in Montmartre. Céline (Berto), a magician, and Julie (Labourier), a librarian, develop an intimate bond as they delight in the pleasures of daily life in Paris. Their lives are magically transformed when they visit the home of a wealthy widower (Schroeder) and become characters in a surreal whodunit. Much of the film's dialogue was developed through improvisational exercises between the actresses, Rivette, and screenwriter Edouardo de Grigorio, adding to the freewheeling nature of what many consider to be the director's most charming work.





Jacques Rivette *Céline and Julie Go Boating* 1974

◆ January 9 (Tuesday) 6:30 pm

*Duelle*

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 1976, 35mm, color, 121 min.

With Juliet Berto, Bulle Ogier,

Jean Babilée

French with English subtitles

ALTHOUGH CONCEIVED as the second film in his planned "Les Filles du feu" quartet, Rivette filmed this puzzling work first. It posits a battle between goddesses of the sun and moon (Berto and Ogier), two supernatural beings who travel from present day Paris to an idealized pre-WWII setting as they seek control of a magic diamond. Dismissed on its release as a failed follow-up to the largely successful (and more accessible) *Céline and Julie Go Boating*, *Duelle* offers an incisive yet more subtle consideration of many of its predecessors themes.

◆ January 9 (Tuesday) 8:45 pm

*Nor'west (Noroît)*

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 1976, 35mm, color, 145 min.

With Bernadette Lafont, Geraldine Chaplin,

Kika Markham

English and French with English subtitles

ORIGINALLY ENVISIONED as the third part of a tetralogy of films exploring women and mythology, *Nor'west* employs an unlikely genre, the pirate film, to consider these themes. Geraldine Chaplin stars as a woman intent on avenging the death of her brother at the hands of a band of female swashbucklers led by veteran New Wave actress Bernadette Lafont. Based on Cyril Tourneur's play *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *Nor'west* further explores the boundaries of reflexivity in the film's stunning climactic sequence. Production of the film proved so exhausting that Rivette shelved the project for over twenty years.

◆ January 8 (Monday) 7 pm

*Out 1: Spectre*

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 1972, 35mm, color, 270 min.

With Jean-Pierre Léaud, Bulle Ogier,

Michel Lonsdale

French with English subtitles

IN 1970, RIVETTE filmed *Out One: Noli me tangere*, an improvisational film about the bohemian theater scene which was intended to be screened as a twelve-and-a-half hour television miniseries. When French broadcasters rejected the film, Rivette went back to the editing room and emerged with a radically different work which had evolved into an existential mystery populated with stage actors and hippies. The director championed his new film, describing it as "not a digest of the long version, but another film having its own logic: closer to a puzzle or a crossword game, playing less on affectivity and more on rhymes or oppositions, ruptures or connections, caesuras or censorshipships."

◆ January 15 (Monday) 7 pm

*Gang of Four (La Bande des quatre)*

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 1988, 35mm, color, 140 min.

With Bulle Ogier, Benoit Regent,

Laurence Côte

French with English subtitles

TURNING ONCE MORE to the subject of theater, Rivette explores the intertwined relationships of four actresses who live together in a suburban house and study with a famed instructor (Ogier). While rehearsing for a production of Pierre Marivaux's *La double inconstance*, they are visited by a mysterious stranger (Regent) who develops an intimate relationship with each of the women while concealing his motives. As in his earlier films about the stage, the boundaries between the "real lives" of Rivette's characters and the play-within-the-film are effortlessly blurred, furthering the director's career-long contemplation of performance in everyday life.

◆ January 16 (Tuesday) 7 pm

*Love on the Ground (L'Amour par terre)*

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 1984, 16mm, color, 127 min.

With Geraldine Chaplin, Jane Birkin,

Jean-Pierre Kalfon

French with English subtitles

AN ECCENTRIC PLAYWRIGHT (Kalfon) enlists the services of two international actresses (Chaplin and Birkin) to perform in a production to be staged within the confines of his mansion. Life begins to imitate art as the play's scripted love triangle is transposed onto the relationship between the three leads. Rivette received criticism upon the release of the film for its similarities to his earlier success, *Céline and Julie Go Boating*. While it uses many of the same stylistic elements as its predecessor, *Love on the Ground* continues to raise provocative questions as Rivette explores the thin line between performance and reality.

◆ January 16 (Tuesday) 9:15 pm

*Jacques Rivette: The Night Watchman*

(Jacques Rivette - Le veilleur)

Directed by Claire Denis

France 1990, video, b/w & color, 125 min.

French with English subtitles

IN AN EXTENDED interview with legendary French film critic Serge Daney (*Trafic*), Jacques Rivette recalls his early days as editor of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, working alongside André Bazin, and reflects on his fellowship in the New Wave's "Gang of Four." Denis punctuates this fascinating oral history with clips from films such as *Paris Belongs to Us*, *L'Amour fou* and *Out One*.

◆ January 18 (Thursday) 7 pm

◆ January 20 (Saturday) 7 pm

*L'Amour fou*

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 1969, 35mm, b/w & color, 252 min.

With Bulle Ogier, Jean-Pierre Kalfon,

Josée Destoop

French with English subtitles

A STUDY OF DISINTEGRATING PERSONAL relationships, *L'Amour fou* focuses on a theater group preparing to stage Racine's *Andromaque* while being filmed by a television crew. During the rehearsal, the play's director replaces his wife in the lead with his former mistress. The film, shot in both 16mm and 35mm, was developed from ideas of the cast and technicians and improvised during filming. Its extreme length is integral to its meaning and texture, which critic James Monaco has compared to the musical form of Indian tals—"long, enormously complex rhythmic structures of as much as thirty-two beats."



Jacques Rivette *L'Amour fou* 1969



# Jacques Rivette: A Differential Cinema

continued from page 9



Jacques Rivette *La Belle Noiseuse* 1991

- ◆ February 2 (Friday) 7 pm
- ◆ February 4 (Sunday) 7 pm

La Belle Noiseuse

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 1991, 35mm, color, 240 min.

With Michel Piccoli, Jane Birkin,  
Emmanuelle Béart

French with English subtitles

A ONCE-GREAT PAINTER (Piccoli) lives a quiet life in Provence with his wife (Birkin), having never completed his would-be masterpiece, "La Belle Noiseuse," an intensely personal work based on a Balzac heroine. When he is visited by a young artist and his girlfriend (Béart), he gradually accepts the young woman as his new muse and attempts to finish the long delayed project, disrupting the already tenuous relationships which exist between the artists and their respective lovers. Rivette continues his exploration of the creative process, focusing on painting rather than theater, in this improvisational work which received the Grand Prix at the 1991 Cannes Film Festival.

- ◆ February 3 (Saturday) 7 pm
- ◆ February 5 (Monday) 7 pm

Joan the Maid (Jeanne la Pucelle)

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 1994, 35mm, color, 237 min.

With Sandrine Bonnaire, Tatiana  
Moukhine, Jean-Marie Richier

French with English subtitles

BASED ON THE oft-told story of Joan of Arc, Rivette's two-part epic stars Sandrine Bonnaire in an unsentimental portrait of the French heroine. Part one chronicles the initial spiritual calling which drove Joan to battles in Domremy and Orleans; part two features her imprisonment by the British and her public execution. Notably omitted from the story is Joan's well-documented

trial, which provided inspiration for both Carl Theodor Dreyer and Robert Bresson. The performance of Bonnaire and the distanced cinematography of Rivette elevate the events of the film by embracing the more quotidian concerns of this fabled figure.

- ◆ February 9 (Friday) 8 pm
- ◆ February 11 (Sunday) 7 pm

Up Down Fragile (Haut bas fragile)

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 1995, 35mm, color, 169 min.

With Marianne Denicourt,  
Nathalie Richard, Laurence Côte

French with English subtitles

RIVETTE PAYS TRIBUTE TO MGM's low-budget musicals of the 1950s in a work which lovingly defies all expectations of the genre. The film follows three women who are each at a turning point in their lives: one has just awoken from a five-year coma, the second is trying to escape her criminal boyfriend, and the third seeks her long-lost birth parents. They dance about the Paris streets before the film makes a surprising, genre-bending transformation. Many of the songs performed in the film were written by the actors themselves and infuse the film with a seemingly incongruous pairing of vérité style and fantastic plotting.

- ◆ February 10 (Saturday) 7 pm
- ◆ February 12 (Monday) 8 pm

Secret Defense

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 1998, 35mm, color, 170 min.

With Sandrine Bonnaire,  
Jerzy Radziwilowicz, Grégoire Colin

French with English subtitles

JACQUES RIVETTE has continued to reinvent and extend the medium in such recent films as *Va savoir* and *Haut bas*

*fragile*. Between these two films is the lesser known *Secret Defense*, an icy murder thriller and contemporary version of the Electra myth. In a performance of considerable intensity, Sandrine Bonnaire stars as a research scientist who seeks revenge on the industrialist she believes has killed her father. The taut psychological suspense is heightened as the twists and turns of plot are echoed in a constant maze of trains, bicycles, and pedestrians. But it is in the interstices between action-spaces—areas which often hold the utmost fascination for Rivette—that *Secret Defense* tells its real story.

- ◆ February 16 (Friday) 8 pm
- ◆ February 18 (Sunday) 7 pm

Va savoir

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France 2001, 35mm, color, 154 min.

With Jeanne Balibar, Marianne Basler,  
Sergio Castellitto

French with English subtitles

RIVETTE EXPLORES the intersecting lives of six characters in his latest tableau of theatrical life. Jeanne Balibar stars as Camille, the lead actress of an Italian stage production who has returned to Paris after three years and must confront her newly married ex-boyfriend. Her current lover Ugo is the director of the play and is unaware of her conflict, largely due to his own preoccupation with the search for a missing eighteenth-century Italian manuscript. He enlists the aid of a mysterious but alluring student who helps him in his quest but also has complicated entanglements which tie her to both Camille and Ugo. *Va savoir* leisurely weaves together its alluring characters in one of Rivette's lighter and most enjoyable works.

- ◆ February 17 (Saturday) 7 pm
- ◆ February 19 (Monday) 8 pm

The Story of Marie and Julien

(l'histoire de Marie et Julien)

Directed by Jacques Rivette

France/Italy 2003, 35mm, color, 150 min.

With Emmanuelle Béart,

Jerzy Radziwilowicz, Anne Brochet

French with English subtitles  
TWENTY SEVEN YEARS after the release of *Duelle* and *Nor'west*, Rivette revisits his mythical quartet with a film originally intended for Leslie Caron and Albert Finney (part four, a musical which was to feature Anna Karina and the late Jean Marais, has yet to be produced). Julien (Radziwilowicz) is a clock maker who is blackmailing a wealthy businesswoman (Brochet). He develops an intimate relationship with Marie (Béart) but is confounded by her inexplicably detached behavior. In the time since the original quartet was conceived, Rivette has downplayed the mythological concerns in favor of a somber supernatural love story.