

What is the Creative Act?

I would also like to ask a few questions of my own. Ask you a few and ask myself a few. They would be of the type: What do you do exactly, when you do cinema? And what do I do when I do or hope to do philosophy?

I could ask the question a different way. What does it mean to have an idea in cinema? If someone does or wants to do cinema, what does it mean to have an idea? What happens when you say: "Hey, I have an idea?" Because, on the one hand, everyone knows that having an idea is a rare event, it is a kind of celebration, not very common. And then, on the other hand, having an idea is not something general. No one has an idea in general. An idea—like the one who has the idea—is already dedicated to a particular field. Sometimes it is an idea in painting, or an idea in a novel, or an idea in philosophy or an idea in science. And obviously the same person won't have all of those ideas. Ideas have to be treated like potentials already *engaged* in one mode of expression or another and inseparable from the mode of expression, such that I cannot say that I have an idea in general. Depending on the techniques I am familiar with, I can have an idea in a certain domain, an idea in cinema or an idea in philosophy.

I'll go back to the principle that I do philosophy and you do cinema. Once that is settled, it would be too easy to say that since philosophy is ready to think about anything, why couldn't it think about cinema? A stupid question. Philosophy is not made to think about anything. Treating philosophy as the power to "think about" seems to be giving it a great deal, but it in fact takes everything away from it. No one needs philosophy to think. The only people capable of thinking effectively about cinema are the filmmakers and film critics or those who love cinema. Those people don't need philosophy to think about film. The idea that mathematicians need philosophy to think about mathematics is comical. If philosophy had to be used to think about something, it would have no reason to exist. If philosophy exists, it is because it has its own content.

It's very simple: philosophy is a discipline that is just as inventive, just as creative as any other discipline, and it consists in creating or inventing concepts. Concepts do not exist ready-made in a kind of heaven waiting for some philosopher to come grab them. Concepts have to be produced. Of course, you can't just make them like that. You don't say one day, "Hey, I am going to invent this concept," no more than a painter says "Hey, I'm going to make a painting like this" or a filmmaker, "Hey, I'm going to make this film!" There has to be a necessity, in philosophy and elsewhere; otherwise there is nothing. A creator is not a preacher working for the fun of it. A creator only does what he or she absolutely needs to do. It remains to be said that this necessity—which is a very complex thing, if it exists—means that a philosopher (and here I at least know what they deal with) proposes to invent, to create concepts and not to get involved with thinking, even about cinema.

I say that I do philosophy, that I try to invent concepts. If I ask, those of you who do cinema, what do you do? You do not invent concepts—that is not your concern—but blocks of movement / duration. Someone who makes a block of movement / duration might be doing cinema. This has nothing to do with invoking a story or rejecting it. Everything has a story. Philosophy also tells stories. Stories with concepts. Cinema tells stories with blocks of movement / duration. Painting invents an entirely different type of block. They are not blocks of concepts or blocks of movement / duration, but blocks of lines / colors. Music invents another type of blocks that are just as specific. And alongside all of that, science is no less creative. I do not see much opposition between the sciences and the arts.

If I ask scientists what they do, they also invent. They do not discover—discovery exists but that is not how we describe scientific activity as such—they create as much as an artist. It is not complicated, a scientist is someone who invents or creates functions. They are the only ones who do that. A scientist as a scientist has nothing to do with concepts. That is even why—thankfully—there is philosophy. There is, however, one thing a scientist knows how to do: invent and create functions. What is a function? A function occurs when there is a regulated correspondence between at least two sets. The basic notion of science—and not since yesterday but for a very long time—is the notion of the set. A set has nothing to do with a concept. As soon as you put sets into regulated correlation, you obtain functions and you can say, "I am doing science."

Anyone can speak to anybody else, a filmmaker can speak to a person of science, a person of science can have something to say to a philosopher, and vice versa, only in terms of and according to their own creative activity. They would not speak about creation—creation is something very solitary—but I do have something to say to someone else in the name of my creation. If I lined up all the disciplines that define themselves through creative activity, I would say that they have a common limit. The limit common to all of these series of inventions—inventions of functions, inventions of blocks of duration / movement, inventions of concepts—is space-time. All of these disciplines communicate at the level of something that never emerges for its own sake, but is engaged in every creative discipline: the formation of space-times.

In Bresson's films, as we all know, there are seldom complete spaces. They are spaces we could call disconnected. For example, there is a corner, the corner of a cell. Then we see another corner or part of the wall. Everything takes place as if Bressonian space was made up of a series of little pieces with no predetermined connection. There are some great filmmakers who, on the contrary, use whole spaces. I am not saying it is easier to manage a whole space. But Bresson's space is a distinct type of space. It has certainly been used again in a very creative way by others who renewed it. But Bresson was one of the first to make space with little disconnected pieces, little pieces with no predetermined connection. And I would add: at the limit of all of these attempts at creation are space-times. Only space-times, Bresson's blocks of duration / movement will tend towards this type of space among others.

The question then becomes what connects these little pieces of visual space if their connection is not predetermined. The hand connects them. This is not theory or philosophy. It cannot be deduced like that. I say that Bresson's type of space gives cinematographic value to the hand in the image. The links between the little bits of Bressonian space—due to the very fact that they are bits, disconnected pieces of

space—can only be done manually. This explains the exhaustion of hands in his films. Bresson's block of expanse / movement thus has the hand as the particular character of this creator, this space, the hand that comes directly from them. Only the hand can effectively make connections between one part of space and another. Bresson is certainly the greatest filmmaker to have reintroduced tactile values into film. Not only because he knows how to take excellent shots of hands. He knows how to take excellent images of hands because he needs them. A creator is not someone who works for pleasure. A creator only does what he or she absolutely needs to do.

Again, having an idea in cinema is not the same thing as having an idea somewhere else. There are, however, ideas in cinema that could also work in other disciplines, could be wonderful in a novel, for example. But they would not have the same appearance at all. And ideas in cinema can only be cinematographic. No matter. Even if there are ideas in cinema that could work in a novel, the ideas are already engaged in a cinematographic process that makes them destined in advance for cinema. This is a way of asking a question that interests me: What makes a filmmaker truly want to adapt a novel, for example? It seems obvious to me that the reason is that he or she has ideas in cinema that resonate with what the novel presents as novel-ideas. Sometimes powerful encounters can occur. The problem is not the filmmaker adapting an eminently mediocre novel. He or she might need the so-so novel, and it does not mean the film will not be brilliant; it would be interesting to look at that problem. My question is different: What happens when the novel is an excellent novel and an affinity is revealed through which someone has an idea in cinema that corresponds to the idea *in the novel*?

One of the most beautiful examples is Kurosawa. Why is he so familiar with Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky? Why does it take a man from Japan to be so familiar with Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky? I will give an answer that may concern philosophy as well. Something rather curious often happens to Dostoyevsky's characters, something that can come from a minor detail. They are in general very troubled. A character leaves, goes down into the street and says, "Tanya, the woman I love, has called for my help. I must hurry; she will die if I do not go to her." He goes downstairs and meets a friend or sees a dying dog in the street and he forgets, he completely forgets Tanya is waiting for him. He forgets. He starts talking, meets another acquaintance, goes to have tea at his home and suddenly says again, "Tanya is waiting for me. I must go." What does that mean? Dostoyevsky's characters are constantly caught up in emergencies, and while they are caught up in these life-and-death emergencies, they know that there is a more urgent question—but they do not know what it is. That is what stops them. Everything happens as if in the worst emergencies—"Can't wait, I've got to go"—they said to themselves: "No, there is something more urgent. I am not budging until I know what it is." It's the Idiot. It's the Idiot's formula: "You know, there is a deeper problem. I am not sure what it is. But leave me alone. Let everything rot... this more urgent problem must be found." Kurosawa did not learn that from Dostoyevsky. All of Kurosawa's characters are like that. This is a felicitous encounter. Kurosawa can adapt Dostoyevsky at least because he can say: "I share a concern with him, a shared problem, this problem." Kurosawa's characters are in impossible situations, but hold on! there is a more urgent problem. And they have to know what that problem is. *Ikiru* may be the film that goes the farthest in this sense. But all of his films go in this direction. *The Seven Samurai*, for example. Kurosawa's entire space depends on it, a necessarily oval space drenched in

rain. In *The Seven Samurai*, the characters are caught up in an urgent situation—they have accepted to defend the village—and from the beginning of the film to the end, a more profound question gnaws away at them. The question is formulated at the end of the film by the leader of the samurai as they leave: "What is a samurai? What is a samurai, not in general, but at this time?" Someone who no longer serves a purpose. The rules do not need them and the peasants will soon learn to defend themselves. Throughout the film, despite the urgency of the situation, the samurai are haunted by this question, one worthy of the Idiot: we samurai, what are we?

An idea in cinema is of this type once it is engaged in a cinematographic process. Then you can say, "I have an idea" even if you borrow it from Dostoyevsky.

An idea is very simple. It is not a concept; it is not philosophy. Even if one may be able to draw a concept from every idea. I am thinking of Minnelli, who had an extraordinary idea about dreams. It is a simple idea—it can be said—and it is engaged in a cinematographic process in Minnelli's work. Minnelli's big idea about dreams is that they most of all concern those who are not dreaming. The dream of those who are dreaming concerns those who are not dreaming. Why does it concern them? Because as soon as someone else dreams, there is danger. People's dreams are always all-consuming and threaten to devour us. What other people dream is very dangerous. Dreams are a terrifying will to power. Each of us is more or less a victim of other people's dreams. Even the most graceful young woman is a horrific ravager, not because of her soul, but because of her dreams. Beware of the dreams of others, because if you are caught in their dream, you are done for.

A cinematographic idea is, for example, the famous dissociation of seeing and speaking in relatively recent films, be it—taking the most well-known—Syberberg, the Straubs, or Marguerite Duras. What do they have in common, and how is it a particularly cinematographic idea to disconnect sight from sound? Why couldn't it be done in the theater? It could at least be done, but if it is done in the theater, barring any exception and if theater found the means to do it, one could say the theater borrowed it from film. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is such a cinematographic idea to disconnect sight from sound, seeing from speaking, that it would be an exemplary response to what an idea is in cinema.

A voice is speaking about something. Someone is talking about something. At the same time, we are shown something else. And finally, what they are talking about is *under* what we are shown. This third point is very important. You can see how theater cannot follow here. The theater could take on the first two propositions: someone is telling us something, and we are shown something else. But having what someone is telling us be at the same time *under* what we are shown—which is necessary, otherwise the first two propositions would make no sense and be of little interest. We could put it another way: the words rise into the air as the ground we see drops further down. Or as these words rise into the air, what they are talking about goes underground.

What is it if only cinema can do it? I am not saying it has to do it, just that it has done it two or three times. I can simply say that great filmmakers had this idea. This is a cinematographic idea. It is exceptional because it ensures a veritable transformation of elements at the level of cinema, a cycle that suddenly makes cinema resonate with the qualitative physics of the elements. It produces a kind of transformation, a vast

circulation of elements in cinema starting with air, earth, water and fire. Everything I am saying does not eliminate its history. The history of cinema is still there, but what strikes us is why this history is so interesting, unless it is because it has all of this behind it and with it. In the cycle I have just quickly defined—the voice rising while what the voice is talking about drops under the ground—you may have recognized most of the Straubs' films, the great cycle of the elements in their work. We only see the deserted ground, but this deserted ground seems heavy with what lies underneath it. You might ask: How do we know what lies underneath it? That is precisely what the voice is telling us. As if the earth were buckling from what the voice is telling us; it is that which comes to take its place underground when ready. If the voice speaks to us of corpses, of the lineage of corpses which comes to take its place underground at that moment, then the slightest whisper of wind on the deserted land, on the empty space that you have before your eyes, the smallest hollow in this earth will all take on meaning.

I consider that having an idea, in any case, is not on the order of communication. This is the point I was aiming for. Everything we are talking about is irreducible to any communication. This is not a problem. What does it mean? Primarily, communication is the transmission and propagation of information. What is information? It is not very complicated, everyone knows what it is. Information is a set of imperatives, slogans, directions—order-words. When you are informed, you are told what you are supposed to believe. In other words, informing means circulating an order-word. Police declarations are appropriately called communiqués. Information is communicated to us, they tell us what we are supposed to be ready to, or have to, or be held to believe. And not even believe, but pretend like we believe. We are not asked to believe but to behave as if we did. That is information, communication. And outside these orders and their transmission, there is no information, no communication. This is the same thing as saying that information is exactly the system of control. It is obvious and it particularly concerns us all today.

It is true that we are entering a society that could be called a control society. A thinker like Michel Foucault analyzed two types of societies relatively close to ours. He called one type *sovereign society* and the other *disciplinary society*. He had the typical passage from a sovereign to a disciplinary society coincide with Napoleon. Disciplinary society was defined—Foucault's analyses have remained famous, and rightly so—by the establishment of areas of confinement: prisons, schools, workshops, hospitals. Disciplinary societies needed them. His analysis gave rise to ambiguous interpretations for some readers because they thought it was his final word. Obviously not. Foucault never believed it and clearly said that disciplinary societies were not eternal. He clearly thought that we were entering a new type of society. There have been, of course, various remnants of disciplinary societies for years, but we already know we are in societies of a different type that should be called, using Burroughs' term—and Foucault had a very deep admiration for Burroughs—control societies. We are entering control societies that are defined very differently than disciplinary societies. Those who are concerned about our welfare no longer need, or will no longer need, places of confinement. The prisons, schools and hospitals are already places of permanent discussion. Wouldn't it be better to expand home visits by doctors? Yes, that is certainly the future. Workshops and factories are bursting at the seams. Wouldn't it be better to use more sub-contracting and working from home? Aren't there other ways to punish people than prison? Control societies

will no longer pass through places of confinement. Even the schools. We should closely watch the themes that develop over the next forty or fifty years. They will explain how wonderful it would be to pursue both school and a profession. It would be interesting to see what the identity of schools and professions will become with constant training, which is our future. It will no longer entail gathering children in a place of confinement. Control is not discipline. You do not confine people with a highway. But by making highways, you multiply the means of control. I am not saying this is the only aim of highways, but people can travel infinitely and "freely" without being confined while being perfectly controlled. That is our future.

Let's say that is what information is, the controlled system of the order-words used in a given society. What does the work of art have to do with it? Let's not talk about works of art, but let's at least say that there is counter-information. In Hitler's time, the Jews arriving from Germany who were the first to tell us about the concentration camps were performing counter-information. We must realize that counter-information was never enough to do anything. No counter-information ever bothered Hitler. Except in one case. What case? This is what's important. Counter-information only becomes really effective when it is—and it is by nature—or becomes an act of resistance. An act of resistance is not information or counter-information. Counter-information is only effective when it becomes an act of resistance.

What relationship is there between the work of art and communication? None at all. A work of art is not an instrument of communication. A work of art has nothing to do with communication. A work of art does not contain the least bit of information. In contrast, there is a fundamental affinity between a work of art and an act of resistance. It has something to do with information and communication as an act of resistance. What is this mysterious relationship between a work of art and an act of resistance when the men and women who resist neither have the time nor sometimes the culture necessary to have the slightest connection with art? I do not know. Malraux developed an admirable philosophical concept. He said something very simple about art. He said it was the only thing that resists death. Let's go back to the beginning: What does someone who does philosophy do? They invent concepts. I think this is the start of an admirable philosophical concept. Think about it... what resists death? You only have to look at a statuette from three thousand years before the Common Era to see that Malraux's response is a pretty one. We could then say, not as well, from the point of view that concerns us, that art resists, even if it is not the only thing that resists. Whence the close relationship between an act of resistance and a work of art. Every act of resistance is not a work of art, even though, in a certain way, it is. Every work of art is not an act of resistance, and yet, in a certain way, it is.

Take the case of the Straubs, for example, when they operate the disconnection of voice and visual image. They approach it in the following way: the voice rises, it rises, it rises and what it is talking about passes under the naked, deserted ground that the visual image was showing us, a visual image that had nothing to do with the sound image. What is this speech act rising in the air while its object passes underground? Resistance. Act of resistance. And in all of the Straubs' works, the speech act is an act of resistance. From *Moses* to the last Kafka including—I am not citing them in order—*Not Reconciled* or *Bach*. Bach's speech act is that his music is an act of resistance, an active struggle against the separation of the profane and the sacred. This act of resistance in the music ends with a cry. Just as there is a cry in *Wozzeck*, there is a cry in Bach: "Out! Out! Get out! I don't want to see you!" When the Straubs place

an emphasis on this cry, on Bach's cry, or the cry of the old schizophrenic women in *Not Reconciled*, it has to account for a double aspect. The act of resistance has two faces. It is human and it is also the act of art. Only the act of resistance resists death, either as a work of art or as human struggle.

What relationship is there between human struggle and a work of art? The closest and for me the most mysterious relationship of all. Exactly what Paul Klee meant when he said: "You know, the people are missing." The people are missing and at the same time, they are not missing. The people are missing means that the fundamental affinity between a work of art and a people that does not yet exist is not, will never be clear. There is no work of art that does not call on a people who does not yet exist.