

Hal Hartley

GRAHAM FULLER: The elliptical treatment of the human body occurs in Robert Bresson's films. There's a compositional austerity in your work that also reminds me of Bresson.

HAL HARTLEY: I am very affected by Bresson and, more and more, I am consciously using that knowledge—whatever that means. Sometimes it's just an emotional clarity that I sense in his films, that I try to bring to mine when I'm writing. When I'm shooting too. Bresson cuts right past everything that's superfluous and isolates an image that says exactly what it's meant to say.

In *Surviving Desire*, I show Jude's hand reaching across a table to almost touch Sofie's hand. My treatment of that action struck me as Bressonian. Recognizing that the gesture itself was expressive. Nothing else was needed. It's about getting rid of the superfluous and the presumptuous—that's what keeps coming up in my notebooks. A lot of my experience over the past four or five years as a filmmaker has been in finding out what I need and what I'm going to look at in order to tell a story. And this approach of getting rid of what's unnecessary requires being totally alive at the moment of photography. I always thought that this particular shot in *Surviving Desire* would be done in close-up or two matching singles. I thought it was their faces that were important at that moment. But it wasn't. It was their hands and nothing else. . . .

FULLER: You've been compared to Harold Pinter and David Mamet, because there's a similar stylized accent on the words in your films.

HARTLEY: I'm flattered by the comparison, though I don't really know a whole lot about either of them. Their work is primarily in theatre. Specificity is something I like about Mamet's movie *House of Games*. It's also why I like Bresson. He doesn't waste time on things that don't convey meaning. Every single frame of his films conveys meaning, even if it's an image of someone sitting with nothing to say. Everything Bresson shows you says something. I figure that's what films does best—convey those moments of meaning in action.