

Martin Scorsese

It's a strange experience to watch a Bresson film at this particular moment in history, because a great deal of today's popular cinema is so big, loud, kinetic and, in many cases, grotesque. In other words, the antithesis of Bresson's cinema. I saw *A Man Escaped* again recently, and it's such a completely pure experience, with absolutely nothing extraneous—it functions like a delicate and perfectly calibrated hand-made machine. I have to wonder whether or not young people who have grown up on digitally engineered effects and DTS soundtracks can actually find the patience required to watch a film by a Bresson or, for that matter, an Ozu or an Antonioni. In a way, it seems impossible: it's as though they're from different worlds. To be honest, I also find Bresson's films difficult at times. But once I settle into his particular orbit, the experience is always rewarding, because he focuses on things that are beyond the reach of most movies. You can call it transcendental but perhaps it's simpler to say that Bresson focuses on the moments that happen between the ones that appear in most other movies. But he is also an incredibly dynamic filmmaker, and I learn a lot each time I watch one of his pictures. There's a cheap dynamism that's easily attainable through the many recent technological advances in movies, but in Bresson you get a true dynamism generated by the most elemental relationships between image and sound. He's created some of the most breathtaking set-pieces in cinema—the pickpockets at the racetrack in *Pickpocket*; Joan's burning at the stake in *The Trial of Joan of Arc*; the final massacre in *L'Argent*. Once Elvis Costello said that whenever he's writing a song he asks himself: is it as tough as Hank Williams? Meaning: is it as ruthlessly pared down, as direct, as unflinching in its gaze at aspects of life I might feel more comfortable ignoring? Young filmmakers might ask themselves: is it as tough as Bresson?