

ANTONIONI × GODARD

JEAN-LUC GODARD — Does *Red Desert* also help you to settle personal problems?

MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI — While making a film, we live, and nevertheless, we are always settling personal problems. Problems which concern our work, but also our private life. If the things we talk about are not those we were talking about right after the war, it is because the world around us has, in fact, changed and, also, we ourselves have changed. Our requirements have changed, our purposes, our themes.

Right after the war, there were numerous things to be said; it was interesting to show social reality, the social condition of the individual. Today, all that has already been seen and done. The new themes we can treat of today are those about which we were just speaking. I don't know yet how we can approach them, present them. I have tried to develop one of these themes in *Red Desert* and I don't think I exhausted it. It is only the beginning of a series of problems and aspects of our modern society and of the way of life that is ours. Moreover, you too, Godard, you make very modern films, your way of treating subjects reveals an intense need to break with the past.



Jean-Luc Godard

When you begin or end certain sequences with quasi-abstract forms of objects or details, do you do it in a pictorial spirit?

I feel the need to express reality in terms that are not completely realistic. The abstract white line that enters the picture at the beginning of the sequence of the little gray street interests me much more than the car that arrives: it's a way of approaching the character in terms of things rather than by means of her life. Her life, basically, interests me only relatively. It is a character that participates in the story as a function of her femininity; her feminine aspect and character are the essential things for me. It is exactly for that reason that I had this role played a bit statically.

Thus, there is also on this point a break with your previous films.

Yes, it is a less realistic film, from a figurative point of view. That is to say, it is realistic in a different way. For example, I used the telescopic lens a great deal in order not to have deep-focus, which is for good reason an indispensable element of

realism. What interests me now is to place the character in contact with things, for it is things, objects and materials that have weight today. I do not consider *Red Desert* a result: it is a research. I want to tell different stories with different means. Everything that's been done, everything I've done until now no longer interests me, it bores me. Perhaps you, too, feel the same things?

Was filming in color an important change?

Very important. I had to change my technique because of it, but not only because of it. I already had a need to change my technique, for the reasons we've spoken about. My requirements were no longer the same. The fact of using color accelerated this change. With color, you don't use the same lenses. Also, I perceived that certain camera movements didn't always jell with it: a rapid panoramic sweep is efficacious on brilliant red, but it does nothing for a sour green, unless you're looking for a new contrast. I believe there is a relationship between camera movement and color. A single film is not sufficient for studying the problem in depth, but it's a problem that must be examined. I made, for this reason, some 16mm tests. They were very interesting, but I was unable

to achieve, in the film itself, certain effects I had found by this means. Up to this point, I've been in too much of a corner.

You know that a psycho-physiology of color exists; studies, experiments have been done on this subject. The interior of the factory seen in the film was painted red; two weeks later the workers were fighting amongst one another. It was re-painted in pale green and everyone was peaceful. The worker's eyes must have a rest.

How did you choose the colors for the store?

It was necessary to choose between warm colors and cool colors. Giuliana wants cool colors for her store. These are colors that are less discordant with the objects displayed. If you paint a wall orange, this color will kill any object nearby, while sky-blue or pale green will set the objects off without overwhelming them. I wanted this contrast between warm colors and cool colors: there is an orange, a yellow, a maroon ceiling, and my character discovers that, for her, they don't go well together.

The film's title was *Celeste e verde* (Heavenly Blue And Green).

I abandoned it, because it didn't seem to be a virile enough title; it was too directly linked to the color. Moreover, I had never thought about color in itself. The film was born in colors, but I always thought, first of all, of the thing to be said — this is natural — and thus aided the expression by means of the color. I never thought: I'm going to put a blue next to a maroon. I dyed the grass around the shed on the edge of the marsh in order to reinforce the sense of desolation, of death. The landscape had to be rendered truthfully: when trees are dead, they have that color.

The drama is thus no longer psychological, but plastic... It's the same thing.

Thus, all those shots of objects during the conversation about Patagonia?

It's a sort of "distraction" on the character's part. He is tired of listening to all these conversations. He is thinking of Giuliana.

The dialogue is simpler, more functional than that of your previous films; isn't their traditional role of "commentary" taken by the color?

Yes, I believe that is true. Let us say that, here, the dialogue is reduced to an indispensable minimum and that, in this sense, it is linked to the color. For example, I would never have done the scene in the shack where they talk about drugs, aphrodisiacs, without using red. I would never have done it in black and white. The red puts the spectator in a state of mind that permits him to accept this dialogue. The color is correct for the characters (who are justified by it) and also for the spectator.

Do you feel yourself to be closer to the researches of painters than to those of novelists?

I don't feel too distant from the researches of the New Novel, but they help me less than the others: painting and scientific research interest me more. I don't believe they influence me directly. There is, in this film, no pictorial research at all; we are far from painting, it seems to me. And, naturally, the requirements of painting have nothing to do with narrative content, where one is found in the cinema: this is where the novel's researches join those of painting.

Did you re-work the color in the laboratory, as is permitted with Technicolor?

I placed no confidence at all in the laboratory, during the shooting. That is to say, I tried, during the shooting, to put the colors I wanted on the things themselves, on the landscapes. I painted directly, instead of trafficking with color in the laboratory. After that, what I demanded from the laboratory was a faithful reproduction of the effects I had obtained. It wasn't easy, for Technicolor, as you know, requires numerous operations involving the master print: the job was very long and delicate.

You verified things during the shooting, as you went along...

Exactly, I believe one mustn't place too much trust in the work that can be done in the laboratory. It's not their fault. It's just that technically, color is still a long way behind.

In your opinion, does Giuliana see the color as you show it?

You know, there are neurotics who see color differently. Doctors have done experiments on this subject, with mescaline for example, in order to try to know what they see. At a certain point, I had the intention of having some effects of this nature. But now there is no longer

anything of this but one single moment, when you see stains on a wall. I also thought of modifying the color of certain objects, and then the fact of using all those "tricks" very quickly seemed to me to become artificial; it was an artificial way of saying things which could be said in a much more simple way. Well, I eliminated these effects. But we may think that she sees color differently.

It's amusing: at this moment, I am speaking with Godard, one of the most modern talented *cinéastes* of today, and just a little while ago, I lunched with René Clair, one of the greatest directors of the past: it wasn't at all the same genre of conversation... he is preoccupied with the future of the cinema. We, on the contrary (you agree, I believe), have confidence in the future of the cinema.

Excerpt from Jean-Luc Godard's interview with M. Antonioni, *Cahiers du cinéma*, No. 160, Nov. 1964

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