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PANORAMIS PARAMOUNT PARANORMAL

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Press release

PROLOGUE

PANORAMIS PARAMOUNT PARANORMAL is a film essay whose subject is the history of a specific place within the history of film, and the history of certain films related to this place. The exhibition can be considered a prologue consisting of a short trailer, a 25-minute condensed short version of a planned feature, two series of photographs, and archival materials. The project focuses on the site of the former film studios of St. Maurice near Paris, founded in 1913 and destroyed by fire in 1971: later in the 1970s, an apartment complex, Le Panoramis, was built there.

LES STUDIOS DE ST. MAURICE / RESIDENCE LE PANORAMIS

In 1913, the French film company Pathé founded Les Studios de Saint-Maurice in the small town of St. Maurice. In 1930, the American company Paramount took over the studios until 1937, when they were returned to Pathé Film. In 1947 another French company, Gaumont, associated itself with Pathé to run the studios as a joint subsidiary: Franstudio.

The layout of the apartment complex, built after the destruction of the studios in the 1970s and consisting of several buildings, recalls the shape of a film projector, and the central axis leading through the site is named after the Lumière brothers. Nevertheless, its architect Claude Marty stated in an interview that the history of the site was of no importance to his design.

LA DIFFICULTÉ D'UNE PERSPECTIVE / UNE FEMME EST UNE FEMME / GODARD

The interest for this place emerges from an earlier project: a series of photographs also on display in this exhibition, entitled *La difficulté d'une perspective: A Life of Renewal*, which was completed in Paris in 2013 – precisely 100 years after the founding of the Studios de St. Maurice. This series explored shooting locations from Jean-Luc Godard's film *Une femme est une femme* (1961). In the course of the research for this work, we discovered the history of the film studios and Le Panoramis.

For this photographic series, eight locations in *Une femme est une femme* were shot from two different perspectives: first as a precise replica of a shot from the original film (the Godardian perspective); then as a representation of the subjective perspective of the main female character (Angela/Anna Karina), which could be traced to her point of view in space and to the "objective" perspective of the film camera: the photos show what Anna Karina must have seen when she herself was seen by Godard and his camera.

In *Une femme est une femme*, Anna Karina plays the role of a young striptease dancer, Angela, who lives with her lover Emile in a small apartment in the Porte Saint-Denis neighborhood in Paris. The plot of the film (Godard calls it a musical) remains rudimentary – *Une femme est une femme* seems rather like a documentary on this neighborhood. Apart from the sequences that show Angela and Emile in their apartment, the film was shot without exception on location. In this way, the borders between reality and fiction become permeable, while the film itself already points towards post-modern forms: reality seems to be fictional, and the fiction itself appears like reality – in accordance with Bazin's dictum that *life itself becomes fiction, that it is cinema that transforms life into itself*.

Angela and Emile, the young lovers, live at 73 rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis. They quarrel and make up again; they promise eternal love only to break up forever just a brief instant later. The outside shot of the apartment from *Une femme est une femme* made it possible for us to return to the exact location of the apartment fifty years after the film was made. Later it turned out that the apartment's interior shots had been filmed elsewhere: the apartment owner cancelled their authorization for the shoot just before it was to begin. Therefore, Godard had to find another solution. Under his supervision, the apartment was reconstructed in detail in the Saint-Maurice studios. In an interview, Anna Karina recalls:

He wanted to shoot in a small apartment in the rue St. Denis. But the old people who lived there didn't want to move. So he had the apartment reconstructed in the studios of St. Maurice, with immovable walls and ceilings. He locked the door every night with a key. No one could enter the apartment until his return in the morning, when he unlocked it again.

In the photo series based on *Une femme est une femme*, the diptych's left motif always refers to the original shot from the Godard film, while the right photograph corresponds to the subjective perspective, Anna Karina's point of view. As a whole, the series follows the film's chronology.

GHOST / CASTING

The notion of casting constitutes another focus of *PANORAMIS PARAMOUNT PARANORMAL* (and by coincidence, in one of the locations from *Une femme est une femme* there is a casting company today). "Casting" as a subject and motif reveals itself as a methodology within which the relationship between director and actor, of interpretive dominance and representation, is always negotiated through the question of power relations and self-realization. The casting creates a passageway between "life" and "art," between the real person and the character, by literally testing the actors as "beings" – and always under the terms of a subjective assessment regarding the requirement of the part and talent of the actor. Therefore, it is precisely in the casting situation that the relation of art and life, of representation and staging is literally at stake and "put to the test" (as it also is, in a way, in *Une femme est une femme*).

In *PANORAMIS PARAMOUNT PARANORMAL*, the subject of casting metonymically represents contemporary forms and conditions of labor. But there is another relationship, concerning historic film material discovered in the *Archives françaises du film* in Bois d'Arcy, that will become an important part of the film. A scene shot on 35mm film in 1951 shows the French director Marcel Carné while he casts actors for roles in his upcoming production *Juliette ou la clé des songes*, to be shot later that year in the St. Maurice studios – among them Anouk Aimée, Leslie Caron, Suzanne Cloutier and Roland Lesaffre. This casting scene has been restaged for *PANORAMIS PARAMOUNT PARANORMAL*: the actors try out for the part of a ghost in a fictional film entitled *The Ghost Casting*. And in reference to Derrida's seminal publication *Specters of Marx* the question is: what kind of work is it that is being performed by the specters?

It is in this context that the subjects of return and repetition become fundamental to the production, as they are indissolubly linked with the notion of the specter: a concept that, on the one hand, follows the Freudian concept of the return of the repressed, and on the other connects with a very specific sub-history of the St. Maurice studios, concerning the so-called multiple-language version films.

FILMS À VERSIONS MULTIPLES / DIE DREIGROSCHENOPER

In the beginning of the 1930s and with the transition from silent cinema to sound, a technical and aesthetic revolution took place. After the great success of the first sound film, *The Jazz Singer* (1927, Alan Crosland), the major Hollywood producers attempted to adapt the film industry to the new technology. While trying to conquer European markets, they confronted a number of difficulties: mostly language barriers that seemed insurmountable, as European viewers were fiercely opposed to subtitling or dubbing. Consequently, the American production company Paramount opened a European branch by taking over the financially stricken Studios de Saint-Maurice, where they developed a mode of production which is commonly treated as a footnote to film history, and which has mostly fallen into oblivion: the production of so-called *films à versions multiples* – versions in multiple languages of an originally English-language production. This seemed to be the solution for American productions to conquer European markets. Staging, decoration and often the supporting actors remained unchanged, while the principal characters were cast according to their native language, and directors were replaced – with some exceptions, one of the most famous of which was G. W. Pabst, who directed both the German and the French versions of Brecht/Weill's *Threepenny Opera*.

Between 1930 and 1937, a large number of MLV-films was produced in the St. Maurice studios. But as these films were extremely costly, this practice was abandoned after only a few years. In 1937, Paramount left the studios, which were taken over by Pathé and Bernard Natan. Ten years later, Pathé Société Nouvelle joined with Gaumont in order to found a subsidiary under the name of Franstudio that operated the studios until the fire of 1971. Directors like Luis Buñuel, Marcel Carné, Henri-Georges Clouzot, Jean Cocteau, Jean Grémillon, Louis Malle and Jacques Tati – followed later by François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette and Jean-Luc Godard – made some of their films in these studios.

PANORAMIS PARAMOUNT PARANORMAL alludes to a number of films shot in St. Maurice – among them *Une femme est une femme* by Godard; *Juliette ou la clé des songes* by Carné; *Les amants* by Louis Malle, *Le journal d'une femme de chambre* by Buñuel and *La petite Lise* by Jean Grémillon. It also makes reference to one of the most famous MLV films of all time: *The Threepenny Opera* by Brecht/Weill, shot by G. W. Pabst in a German and a French version, even though it was actually filmed in the German studios at Staaken and Halensee. The history of these version films, and the possibility – or impossibility – of comparison, has a dedicated chapter in *PANORAMIS PARAMOUNT PARANORMAL*.

BIRDS

We were setting up our equipment in the small park in the midst of the apartment complex. A woman walked towards us slowly, curiously. She told us about the birds. She said that the birds had not returned this year for the first time. For years she had watched the flock come back in November, to take up their winter residence, noisy and busy, big and black, talking to each other constantly in bird language. These birds, she said, were her own secret guests. After a while she had begun to understand their bird language. That's how they would spend the winter: digging up food, negotiating their territory, fleeing the dogs. She said: Then, my days were brighter.

The story of the "disappearance of the birds" constitutes another narrative thread: it emerged from encounters with residents in Le Panoramis. It recounts a mysterious incident: the inexplicable disappearance of all the birds in Le Panoramis. "She said that the birds had not returned this year." From Alfred Hitchcock to Robert Gardner and Joyce Wieland or Stan Brakhage, to contemporary directors like Philipp Scheffner, the real and metaphorical character of the bird in film history turns into a bearer of multiple meanings. Birds disappear before the catastrophe happens; their behavior anticipates imminent dangers or predicts the future. In shamanism, birds are sacred, magical animals. They represent the spirits of the deceased, or enemies afflict them with curses: as vectors, they carry the curses into a community that is to be destroyed. Žižek's observation that Hitchcock's birds represent maternal power comes to mind. And Chris Marker's famous owl should not be neglected: like the cat in his oeuvre, the owl represents the director's alter ego; it is the mascot of Argos Films which produced many of his films; and through the acronym O.W.L. (Optional World Link), it refers to a world wide virtual network which plays an important role in his 1997 film *Level Five*.

The birds that have disappeared from St. Maurice return to the casting company, where the casting for *The Ghost Casting* takes place: as professional animal actors who compete for a role (in the end, the two macaws Jeanne and Angela are defeated by a cockatoo named Klaus Kinski who finally gets the part). This character of the bird represents a fictitious, metaphorical constellation: it stands for everything that has been edited out of the montage, or the text, that has been eliminated from the story or the script and dialogue. The bird becomes a metonymy for that which the film represses, for that which must not appear. In the play by George Neveux that was the template for Carné's film *Juliette...*, a parrot plays a part. Carné wrote the bird out of his film, but *PANORAMIS...* returns it to its fiction.

FOUR TIMES A FOREST

These fictitious birds as tropes for remembrance and forgetting literally take us to a thicket, or a brushwood – a forest that appears in the film in various versions and guises. A deep, fairytale forest (perhaps a symbol for the unconscious) is a prominent location in Carné's film. It is where Juliette and Michel re-encounter one another after their separation three years earlier (the singing of a bird guides them to their meeting spot). It is where a big celebration takes place, where people dance themselves into oblivion. Someone sells fake memories, there is no future and no past, just an eternally looping present tense – perhaps a commentary on France's amnesia after the war.

The forest by Carné is a studio decor, just like Godard's apartment. Due to bad weather conditions in the summer of 1952, Carné had to abandon his plan to shoot in the forest of Fontainebleau. Instead, he asked his set designer Alexandre Trauner to construct an artificial, Fontainebleau-like forest for the studio in St. Maurice (which was quite small). Trauner resolved this difficulty by attaching real branches, twigs and foliage to huge trunks made of plaster whose wooden

support structure was mounted on rails. In this way, the "forest" could be moved in several directions and the individual trees could be reversed as well, if needed. In the very same year, another director, Jacqueline Audry, shot a film called *Olivia* (a French version of the German *Mädchen in Uniform*), which also included a few scenes in a forest. As she was confronted with the same weather conditions as Carné, she asked him if she could reuse his studio forest after he had finished his shoot – Carné agreed. However, there is no trace of the forest in *Olivia*. It might be correct to assume that the respective scenes have been edited out.

Another version of the forest of Fontainebleau exists as a kind of staged nature, as a "silvarium" in the center of the Bibliothèque François Mitterrand in Paris. The forest's flora has been "restaged" in miniature with the appropriate tree population. All these forests and trees – the real forest of Fontainebleau, the artificial studio forest of Carné, the "silvarium" in the Bibliothèque and finally, the tree population in the park of Le Panoramis – are digitally reconstructed for the film as an artificial nature in order to recount the history of transformation from nature to artificiality, from reality to fiction, from experience to memory and recollection, all this in relation to a *forêt versionnée*.

GOOGLE TRANSLATOR. AND A GHOST WRITES A LETTER TO THE LIVING.

In 1948, Henri-Georges Clouzot shot the film *Manon*, partly in the St. Maurice studios. The film is based on the novel *Manon Lescaut* by the Abbé Prévost, and tells the story of a French resistance fighter who falls in love with a Nazi collaborator. On the Internet one can find a version which is subtitled with a French-English translation obviously produced by Google Translator, or the like: when an actor says, for example: *Merde alors !* the subtitle says: *Caramba Excrement!*

In *PANORAMIS...*, this translation program madness is rendered productive for working with different texts in an experimental fashion – especially regarding issues such as repetition and difference, version and variation, as well as multilingualism, issues which are at the heart of the production. A paragraph from *Specters of Marx* by Derrida, discussing the relation of the dead to the living and posing the question of how one can possibly learn to live with the specters, was subjected to multiple processes of translation and re-translation, always using Google Translator. The resulting texts, which were often more than bizarre, became the basis for new texts, a new layer added to the script of the film: in the end, the text became a letter of a ghost writing to the living. It is this letter that the actors read during their casting for the role of a specter. In the end, it becomes evident that the basis of a possible relation to and with specters is economic, not spiritualistic.

Within all these different aspects, *PANORAMIS PARAMOUNT PARANORMAL* investigates the role of cinema concerning the production of memory and recollection, and it poses the question of what it is that one will have to reckon with if one refuses to remember. Which form is it that the work against forgetting needs to adopt, and how is it possible to live peacefully with the specters – and is that even desirable, after all? Derrida replies, that one has no other option than to learn to live with the *ghosts*, in whichever way: *apprendre à vivre avec les fantômes*.

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