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Historical Fiction
A Body Too Much

Jean-Louis Comoli*

*What, in the last analysis, was the meaning of the Trojan War and similar tragic atrocities? There can be no doubt that they were intended as festivals for the gods. . . . Ancient humanity, an essentially public and visual world, unable to conceive of happiness without spectacles and fees, was full of tender regard for the "spectators". And as we have heard before, punishment too has its festive features."


What is to be made, in films, of fictional effects? How and on what basis do cinematic fiction work? What is in play, what tricks, in the conjunction of the machine of Fiction and the machine of Representation? I should like to approach these questions through a special type of fiction, historical fiction.†

† Originally published as "Un corps en trop" Cahiers du Cinema July 1977 p 278
** The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals, translated by Francis Coslin, Doubleday, Garden City NY, 1956, pp 100-3
1 See "Le Point Sain" Cahiers du Cinema n 277, the introduction to a series of articles of which this is the first.
2 There are other, more conjunctural reasons for this choice of historical fiction. First, the current revival of the genre, for better (Al advertising) or worse (Cassavets, "Hero"). Also the work carried out at the "Cinéma et Histoire" seminars at Valence, to which I shall return at the end of the series. More precisely, on the fringe of "Cinéma et Histoire", a course organised by the Valence ciné-club for a number of FPCC (Fédération Française des Ciné-Clubs) members, at which, with the theme "representation of history", we analysed three exemplary historical fictions, The New Babylon, Young Mr Lincoln and, of course, La Marseillaise. Hence it is on the basis of what was said during this course that the present text has been worked out. Finally, a more direct motive, at this moment Gérard Gauchemier, Serge Toublanc and I are working on the outline of a film on the Paris Commune.
Why? There is no 'historical film' that is not fiction first: how
indeed could the past be filmed live? Nor ask that, however serious its
documentation, does the fictionalise the most referenced his-
torical argument. However, even in the case of a work of plausory,
this inevitable putting into fiction comes to a stop at one or other
of the limits of the historically referential: a minimum of informa-
tion, a minimum of historical knowledge have to be provided;
and a minimum of period effects have to be produced too.

It is my hypothesis that the cinematic representation of History
defines Fiction although it holds only through it. In such a para-
doxical situation, both required and prevented, insurmountable and
impossible, historical fiction becomes a kind of analysis which
pushes up their most revealing limit the conditions of exercise and
stakes at play in all cinematic fiction. If one of the great questions
of the cinema, founding and launching the fictional mechanism, is
how does one believe in it, with historical fiction one has to
believe in it with additional difficulties, against more obstacles,
and above all to believe in it despite what might seem to rationalise
that belief, despite even the indices of truth and the referential
points which are used to replace the game of belief by an order
of knowledge.

1 Filming a fiction, staging it, mounting it in the field of a look,
begins by assigning to characters, those of the stage, physical
trajectories through concrete locations (speech too being a trajec-
tory). To this end these imaginary characters have to be endowed
with bodies, faces, looks and voices. Bodies which are quite real,
since they are those of the actors: the ones we see. The body filmed
is not an imaginary body, even if the fiction refers to it as some
purely invented character and whatever the phantasmagoria for which
it is the support.

It is not imaginary to the extent that we see its image and
know, as soon as we are it the spectator's place, that a real body,
the actor's, is required for there to be an image of a body. The
body of the imaginary character is the image of the real body of
the actor. This body caught in our look appears to us as an
attribute of the character? I do not think so. I know this is what
the motion and practice of the stage would like to convince us of. But
it seems that things happen otherwise than Eisenstein's lectures
tell us (I am not talking about his films, in which, as Barthes has
emphasised, the consistency of the denotation and connotation of
the Deux is fairly weak) and otherwise than in the class norma-

3 Cf 'The third meaning' in Image-sound-text selected and translated
by Stephen Heath, Fontana, London 1977
thirty one hours they might imply (a worker is like a worker, etc."
I think rather that it is the character who, being delineable only
by proxy, via an interposed actor, has for us the value of an attri-
bute of the active body. The character reaches us as a bodily
effect in the image. He may have been long worked over, defined,
conceived in a script, but it is not the order of investigation but
the order of exposition that is enounced in a film: first to appear
will be the body, the body as an empty mask, and the character
will only appear later and bit by bit as effects of this mask, effects
in the plenteous, changing, unstable, never quite achieved, thwarted,
complete.
If the mise-en-scene of a fiction is thus the attribution to real
bodies of imaginary characters, things are slightly more compli-
cated with historical fictions: all the characters in them are not
phantastic; often they presuppose a referential model; or they have
one and must make the best of it: when they do not use this
model as surety, only entering the film as representatives of the
historical referent, having no other diegetic consistency than to
guarantee, by a rapid and not undetective appearance, by a pre-
ence, often no more than photographic, that this is the serious
realm of History, real History. In short, most of these characters
have played, or are supposed to have played, their parts, big or
small, on the stage of History before they came to rest on that
of the film. These characters have a past, they have a history
before the film began and without noting it: other scriptwriters,
the historians, have dealt with them.

The actor Ardisson, in Renoir's La Marseillaise, plays the character
Jean-Joseph Bonnier, a figure from the lower classes of Marseilles,
enthusiastic and scatter-brained, "spontaneously anarchic", hence
the stake and the main target for the propagandist's efforts of the

4 Remember the advertising campaign run by the inevitable Studebaker for
the "revolution of manual labor" and these images of happy workers
knuckled up at every street corner in a depth. Typing was going on in it at
full blast and, as usual in advertisements, it was used both as a labelling
system and as a noun. Not incidentally the car, the product, one
might almost say the rigor, the advertising devoted to the imposition
of their "cast"! The bank type represented had to be at once imme-
diately identifiable, contextualizable and sufficiently generalized so that
stories from that timeless infinity, a no man's fall identification. Adver-
tising, and I shall return to this, is the present-day examination of the
system of typing recommended by Ermamo and the Soviet cinema of
the 1920s and illustrated after them and against them by the films of
"socialist realism." (Editorial note: Studebaker was a special sponsor for the
encouragement of manual work destined to give its social "purpose" and
"usefulness."
organised militant Arnaud (Andre). Like everything we finally come to know about this character, we learn this only from the development of the fiction. All we can know about him is what the film tells us. Perhaps Bonnier existed; perhaps there was a 'real' Bonnier, but that does not matter, for us he only exists in the film, there are no other traces of him than those left by Audisson's body in Renoir's images. For us, Bonnier is a fictional character who, despite his role in a 'historical film', has all the properties of an imaginary character.

In the same film, Louis XVI is Pierre Renoir, but there could hardly be a less imaginary character than Louis XVI: historical, the name was borne by a body (even a sacred body), and the figure of this body has been given to us, not in one but in many films, and before the film in numerous portraits. Audisson, for as long as the film lasts, lends his body to a fictional name, a bodiless name. Pierre Renoir can only confuse his body with the supposed (and supposedly familiar) body of Louis XVI: interference, even rivalry between the body of the actor and that other body, the 'real' one, whose (historical) disappearance has left traces in images other than cinematic ones which have to be taken into account.

If the imaginary person, even in a historical fiction, has no other body than that of the actor playing him, the historical character, filmed, has at least two bodies, that of the imagery and that of the actor who represents him for us. There are at least two bodies in competition, one body too much. And if for us Audisson is unambiguously the Maréchal Bonnier, whom we cannot see in any other way, whose image we can compare with no other, only refer it to itself as the film imposes it, there will on the contrary always be some doubt as to the pertinence of Pierre Renoir to Louis XVI.

Audisson's task is, so to speak, simple: Bonnier can only be him. Of course it is also necessary that Bonnier be, for initially he is nothing, he is only Audisson so long as Audisson does not produce the effects that constitute Bonnier. But these effects will all go to Bonnier's credit. Without any reservations, without the slightest doubt, even if they are contradictory and sometimes excursive: Bonnier is not a character all of a piece and in particular he is a character who has to change lines under Arnaud's influence. For this change to be manifest and convince the spectator more effectively, Bonnier will be led, over his dead body (he too denies), to positions he had earlier condemned: he will come to appreciate

5 Remember the date, 1939, and the circumstances of this film: the wave of enthusiasm for the Popular Front and rise of the national theme in left-wing discourse. As if in the praise of the 'Marseillaise', pronounced by Maurice Thorez in 1936, the film co-financed and the CTO launched the film project and tried to finance it by a national subscription.
the words of the "Marseillaise" which he had condemned as appallingly bombastic, or claim to be a supporter of the delegation of power he had constantly sneered against. Which, be it said in parenthesis, enables Renoir, by an accumulation of contrasting effects and a whole play of ruptures, to dispense with the fatal moment of "attaining consciousness" which so encumbered Les Vies de Ré Noirs.

So Ardissone's facial contortions, his omni-directional impulsive-ness, his overacting in mime, gesture and voice, all contribute to a split character, full of holes and residues, but the character is there for all that: such can only be Bomier, with self-evident inconstancy. Even inconsistent, the character is consistent with the actor. And nothing can disturb this consistency, either from within the fiction (which adopts the character's inconsistency, plays on it to make it acceptable) or from outside the film: in the name of what could we doubt this representation of Bomier?

No doubt? And yet here too we know that Ardissone is not Bomier. But this indisputable certainty which places every spectator in the position of nobody's fool from the moment the film begins is quite unproductive for us: it remains of the order of a frozen, fixed, unadventurous knowledge (we know, but how much rather would we not know . . . ). Of itself, it is incapable of gaining us the slightest pleasure, and we accept it as the inevitable precondition for the spectacle to be possible at all (there have to be actors, machines, theatres, etc.), the condition that every spectator knows and immediately recognizes its nature as simulacrum, is perfectly aware of and necessarily accepts the break and the distance between him or her and the scene. We experience this knowledge and certainty with a certain fatalism (it has to be . . . ). I would go so far as to say with boredom: we are in the position of those impatient gamblers who know the rules of the game and who one asks to remember those rules before playing: quick, the game is beginning!

This being knowledge has to be lost as soon as possible and these rules played. The certainty we always have, bearing it in mind, that the spectacle is not life nor the film reality, that the actor is not the character and that if we are there as spectators it is because we know it is a simulacrum, is a certainty we have.

6 His words: "There is something wild and bombastic in this song which I do not like."

7 The spectacle, and the cinema itself, despite all the reality effects they may produce, always offer themselves to spectators for what they are. There are no spectators unawares to the spectacle, even if they allow themselves (temporarily) to be caught by the delineating machine and fascinated by the simulacrum: that is exactly why they went.
to be able to doubt. Its only value is that it is put at risk: it only interests us if it can (temporarily) be abolished. The "I know very well" irresistibly calls for the "but all the same". includes it as its value, its intensity. The one is inseparable from the other, is valued without the other. We know, but we want something else: to believe. We want to be fooled, without ever quite ceasing to know that we are. We want both, both to be fools and nobody's fools, to oscillate, swing from knowledge to belief, from distance to adhesion, from criticism to fascination.

And in fact we never forget that Pierre Renoir is not Louis XVI, that Ardisson is not Bomier. But at the same time we believe that they are. If at least the actor and the film play them sufficiently with us. The spectacle is always a game. It requires the participation of the spectators not as consumers but as players, accomplices, masters of the game, even, if they are also its stakes. The simulacrum does not fool to "passive spectators" (there are no "passive spectators"); the spectator has to participate in his own footing: the simulacrum is the means whereby he is helped to fool himself. The spectator, never "passive", works: but his work, contrary to current orthodoxy, is not just decoding, reading, elaboration of signs and mobilisation of knowledge. First of all and just as much, if not more, it is to play the game, to fool himself for pleasure and despite this knowledge that strengthens his position as nobody's fool, to maintain, if the spectacle, the game, will allow, the mechanism of denegation at its regime of highest intensity. The more one knows the more difficult it is to believe and the more it is worth managing to do so.

That is why we enjoy the performances of Ardisson and Pierre Renoir in different ways. Ardisson is not Bomier! We agree and at the same time are quite happy for him to be so. Nothing prevents us giving him the benefit of our complicity: now it's his turn to play. He must convince us of what we know to be untrue but ask only to believe so that the game can begin and go on (the game stops, even if the spectacle does not, when we no longer believe). Between him and us the game is simple and, so to speak, without handicap: at the outset we guess that the actor may be Bomier because for us Bomier can only be this actor. It is up to him to do the rest, to fulfill his part of the bargain and, with the help of fiction and mise-en-scène, progressively (even if jeckily) construct the character, fortifying the initial supposition of identity since and more. What happens then works less unequivocally in the mode of denegation, more in that of confirmation. Or rather, the denegatory formula is reversed and becomes: "I know very well you are Bomier — but all the same, what an actor Ardisson is!" A new knowledge is constituted against the background of the first, denegated, no doubt too easily denegated, knowledge. And this new knowledge both satisfies us — the bargain is well fulfilled — and disappoints us a little: it does not raise the stakes, it turns
on itself in a loop of excommunication, each thing in its place, the body with the character and the actor with the performance.

"There is the risk of loss of tension, a regime of lesser pleasure, if the character is taken as given, regarded as so automatic that if there is left to enjoy is the actor’s talent: lack of interest in the character, decaesthesia from the fiction. This is what would happen in La Belle Studie, too, if Bombs was not built precisely out of inconsistencies and infringements of the code, in a stylizing figure. In the first stages of the fiction we learn to divine the character (the mask is only gradually filled in) and as everything is done to make him predictable for us we finally come to know him almost too well: a lapse into the overdosed. But, just as our predictions become so certain that they no longer interest us, he betrays them. He is no longer where we expected him, and the more marked he has been, the more he unmasks himself: new bet, higher stakes, the fictional energy is set going again, and it is this that enables us to believe (again) in this quite incredible disavowal of Bombs.

Pierre Renoir, it is clear, books a far more taxing bargain. We really do know that he is not Louis XVI and never quite will be. Something undefinable floats around him, a blur in the image, a dislocation: there is a ghost in this body. At any rate there is some historical knowledge, none reflexive constituting a screen for the image and preventing the actor and the mise-en-scène from playing on self-evidence (it can only be met) or assertion (it is not).

The anarchism has to be more devious, not so much to struggle against this disorienting effect as rather to use it and play on it: this will proceed from the double advection (it’s him and it’s me) which realizes the always improbable conjunction of two identities, two bodies which exclude one another while coinciding. No fit between character and actor, or one that is fleeting, lightning-like, immediately followed by a return of the discrepancy between body acting and body acted. Pierre Renoir’s Louis XVI never quite comes off, it can only be at the limit, and that is why despite

8 As Andras Batin notes, ‘miscegenation’ is almost a rule in Renoir’s films: ‘None of the major actors in The Rules of the Game is in his own right (with the exception of Gaston Modot and Pauline Dovetta). And who would claim that the cast of The Lower Depths stepped from the Cockil play? Gabin as a hero in a Romanesque novel is a long shot at best; and it would be difficult to conceive of a more spectacular bit of miscegenation than Valentin Tenner in Madame Bovary’ (Jean Renoir, by Francois Truffaut, trans W W Halby II and William H Simon, Ditch Books, New York 1973, p 54). Or again, from The Human Beast: ‘Renoir founds this justification on the psychology out on a metaphor of actors. What we see on the screen is not the murderous rage of Lantier, but that of Jean Gabin. Even when the actor does not correspond physically or mentally to the character in the book, the “error” of casting offers more advantages than disadvantages, because the presence of the actor, his powers of suggestion, are clearly superior to what is in the book.’ (bid p 69).
everything we can believe in it because it is worked out starting from this 'despite' as well: the difficulty of the playing is represented in the game itself.

As a result we are summoned to the delicate exercise of a double game: it is him and it is not, always and at the same time; we believe in it and we do not, at the same time. Neither of the terms ever really prevails over the other, each keeps the other as a ground against which it stands out, each bounces off the trampoline of the other. They are held together for us by this oscillating movement, by the to-and-fro which makes us pass from one to the other without ever abandoning either. And this game of proximity and distance, of complicity and criticism, to which we are thus introduced, far from leaving us in an unsatisfied reserve or leading us to detachment, fuels and reignites our desire to believe (all the same) better than would any fit between actor and character, any self-evidence, any well-furnished credibility. For now the denegation is working at full throttle, neither of the two contradictory propositions that constitute it making an end of the other and each, even, improving on the other. The moment Pierre Renoir, by acting whose springs I shall analyse later, manages what is not easy, to make us believe he is Louis XVI, while not preventing us from continuing to think that he is not, a dynamic of increasing intensity is set up. The more he is him, the more difficult it is to believe it: the more we believe in it, the more we know all the same that he is not him, and the more we believe in it all the same. The pleasure here is not without its unease, it derives from the unease that reignites it.

All cinematic fictions are stretched more or less tightly by this knot of denegation. But historical fiction (at least its masterpiece, La Marcheille) takes things further, and brings into play a movement of denegation to infinity. The coded is more visible, the supposedly known more awkward, the belief more problematic: there is more to denegate, a body and a knowledge too much. The irrational leap that marks the spectator's every entry into fiction, and whose gain of pleasure the latter risks quickly exhausting if it does not organise its repetition and amplification, is more difficult, more dangerous, in the case of historical fiction, since the belief and denial on which it is based are barred at every moment by the discourses of reason and have to prevail despite them, in an outburst of even greater irrationality.

9. See the beginning of section III above. The next article in this series will deal in more detail with the mechanism of this play and how it differs from both of the usual, and usually counterposed, schemes of 'identification' and 'dissimulation'.

10. Which is native in a film at more levels than that of fiction alone. For example, that of the 'impression of reality' whose artificial character is never quite forgotten.
Only one body, in our example, can be "too much": the one whose image we see, the body of Pierre Renoir, which belies as much as it figures that of Louis XVI. How can one play with a body too much? With one's own body too much? Why, by making this surplus visible, by disturbing the spectator's look with a bodily supplant, in other words by playing the most difficult game, by doing the opposite of what happens (today still) in most "historical films".

The latter usually try to ensure that the actor's body is forgotten, to cancel it, to keep it hidden, at least, beneath the supposedly known and allegedly pre-eminent body of the historical character to be represented. This is done by banishing on the (necessarily blurred) memory the spectator has of that historical body and imagining that therefore all that needs to be done is to cobble together a resemblance (vague and inaccurate like all resemblance), or to force the inadequate physique of the actor with make-up (which will always be denoted as such: it is the act of make-up to be visible), for the image of the historical body present in the spectator's memory to allow identification between the character and the actor's body (it really is him!) and for that image having thus performed this service to be entirely confused in the soldiering of copy and model.

No question in La Mauvaise Foi of attempting to obliterate the memory image. On the contrary, its persistence is allowed to float. It is played on as a kind of embarrassment, a screen, a rival for the current image. As if it were necessary that it could survive throughout the struggle unleashed against it by the image of the actor's body for that struggle really to take place. But for this to be true, the body too much, retained in the act of its repudiation, must not remain in the state of a memory trace: otherwise the image of the film could prevail over the image from memory. It must also be inscribed in the actuality of the vision, it must be manifest and come back from the screen into the spectator's look. In fact this can only be done if it is supported and carried by the body visible as that moment, the actor's.

Pierre Renoir is not content not to conceal his own body behind the supposed body of Louis XVI, not to apply it to the supposedly known model. He brings this body, his own, to the fore: he emphasizes its reality and presence, multiplies its effects. Far from making the spectator forget it, he points it out to him: henceforth this body will not be something automatic. It begins to count, to weigh. The self-evidence of the image of a body as a result of which it is seen without being seen, the apparent naturalness, the familiarity of the body are threatened here: Pierre Renoir plays his body as a problematic, paradoxical, body, strange to itself. (Note, in parenthesis, that all this is not just a matter of acting and the actor's technique: neither reaches as except doubly inscribed
in the disposition of the fiction and the frames of the mise-en-
scene; hence as effects.) How is this body made too present? How is it made, not just sufficiently visible to escape the normal site of most filmed bodies, insignificant, accessory, on the edge of non-visibility, but also so unassailable, inseparable? By making it the very centre and object of the scene, by displaying it in all its states. In all the sequences in La Marseillaise in which Pierre Renoir plays Louis XVI it is the royal body-inself that is questioned, in question. Fiction and mise-en-scene, far from seeking to avoid this problematic body, to minimize it by decentering it, by filming it in ceremonies and amidst crowds, appearing among others, take the opposite course and make this body the major preoccupation both of the character and of those surrounding him. It is dressed, powdered, fed; it is also venerated (see note). It is taken for walks, protected, hidden... Valets, artisans, soldiers are at its service. Jean Renoir is not trying to trick either history or the spectator: he takes seriously the central place of the body of the King in the monarchic system, he marks its devalorisation at the moment of the Revolution, he spares no avatar of the royal but devalued body of Louis XVI, in the end he takes the wager of his representation to its ultimate limits.

The first time we see it, in the scene of the lever du roi, the royal body seems to us both caught up in, and present to, the ritual mise-en-scene of the Court, which mediates its approach with a whole series of relays; and somewhat astray, not quite in the right place, already a little too much. Of course, the alienation effect produced by this lies in the contrast between the solemnity of the approach and the prosaic character of this body in night cap and gown. It lies perhaps above all in the discovery that this so carefully guarded body is nothing but the body of the actor, without make-up and as it were naked, deprived of the artifacts of resemblance as much as its character is supposed to embody is of the marks of royalty. Thus from the start we are made to feel quite sharply that on the one hand it is the body of Pierre Renoir that will command the scene, but on the other that the royal body has seen its best days and will have trouble holding its place. This impression is immediately strengthened: this body is dependent on the influence or assistance of other bodies subordinate to it, it is awkward, clumsy, incapable of autonomy; both furtive and gross, childlike and graceless; no authority emanates from it, no confidence; in short, it is a body visibly ill at ease wherever it is (except at table), almost always embarrassed and seemingly embarrassing its supposed master first of all. Pierre Renoir brings off the coup of making this work with and in his own body (which certainly does not embarrass him so much), cf., as it were, figuring a body in its own despite, discreet, displaced, always somewhere in between actor and character. The maintenance of such an uncertainty
as to the identity of the body of the actor with that of the character
raises the stakes in the fictional game, as we have seen; and this
embarrassment which threatens to blot the fiction cas, as is the
case here, be fictionalised in its turn: we thus discover, though
momentarily at much as information, that Louis XVI is at ease neither
in his body nor in his role.

The scene which epitomises all these surpluses and deficiencies,
the parade of the royal body, is the one in which, before the
battle for the Trianon Palace, Louis XVI unenthusiastically agrees
to review the troops defending him. Hardly has his valet finished
dressing him for this exhibition, which is no nonsense to his taste,
than we see him caught in a veritable embarrassment: his wig has
slipped and is in aslay. With some irritation he has it adjusted
and at last advances into the throng of brilliant nobles of the Court,
who, not ungraciously, go down on one knee and, with words drawn,
ing a fashionable royalist song ("Oh Richard, oh mon
Roi"). Louis XVI stares at them, dumbfounded; he does not know
what expression to put on or what to say; distraction captivates
this heavy body and it becomes almost obsolete juxtaposed to these
dignified chevaliers. He goes on. The cries of "Vive le Roi!", mechan-
ically repeated by Grenadiers and Swiss Guards, they draw a half-
smile from him, particularly since his wig is still trembling him.
Lower down, in the courtyard, the battalions of the National Guard,
royalists and others. First there are exclamations, more spontaneous
than those of the mercenaries: he is now almost reassured: the
people recognise him and are cheering him. He wants to go on
de spite attempts to dissuade him: the remaining companies to be
reviewed, the ones who have been put in the front line, are the
least certain. And their welcome is indeed an attack: their shout
on his face: "Vive la Nation!" Once again the royal body collapses;
we see his face disintegrate; he stops, arms drooping, unable either
to respond with contemptuous silence or to order a punishment;
he guiltily lowers his head, his wig goes sassy again and he adjusts
it mechanically. He is pulled away and brought into safety. He
eruptly disappears from the scene which shifts to a confrontation
between two officers, one of whom wants to push the least to the
King while the other prevents him with the most peremptory
firmness. Thus the displacement and repetitions of the conflict in
a minor scene no more penalises the outrage on the King's person
which remains unpunished: not only does the royal body no longer
embodies power, already there is no royal power left at all.

"An admirable touch", notes André Chénier. In passing, Louis

11 For this impossible body moves us, moves us because of all the
difficult and painful things the male-monarch makes it suffer. The
woman sympathy" for his character is usually attributed to René de
d'Argens whose true colour: quite the opposite of kindness or any kind of softness
or pity.

12 Jean Renoir op cit p 67
XVI is hindered by the fact that his wig is askew: admirable, indeed, for the sudden effect of condensation it produces. The wig here functions both as metaphor: it is in the place of the crown which is also slipping from me King's head; and as metonymy: it is this part which first detaches itself from the disintegrating royal body. Never has this body stopped falling apart as it was constructed before our eyes. It is no longer in any way sacred for its subjects who dare to hold themselves up in its presence and as if equal to it (La Marziale could also be summarised as the paw taken by the body of the people to reach power and to overthrow it, as the body of the people rising and breaking like a wave, before being taken in hand by new masters and, finally, regimented: the march on Talmay). It is an embarrassment to its last supporters, quite happy to be rid of it through the intervention of the big bourgeoisie (Rocheveur, all in black and revolutionary titles, spooking the royal body away and at the same time conducting its retreat like a funeral). It is unbearable even to its closest and most faithful friends, distraught at its constant inadequacy for its role. Finally it embarrasses the King himself: in short, this body is decidedly too much, and eventually it is too much for us too.

Hence when the accumulation of embarrassing effects by the fiction and by the actor's playing make this body more and more unbearable for us, too, today's spectators, and we catch ourselves relieved at its setting aside, that is the moment when we have really believed in Louis XVI in this film. Yet all we have seen is Pierre Renoir's body and we have never, in all the time it has been present in the image, been able to believe that this body could quite have been that of Louis XVI. And the moment this body has become, so to speak, so much too much that it has to disappear, we believe in it as we have never believed in it before. . . . By inscribing it in the private and public mise-en-scène of the Court, in parades and struggles, the mise-en-scène (of the film) has shown us the royal body only when caught in the looks of its subjects. It has dupli-
cated our look with theirs. As if the actor had acted for our eyes, but also for those of the characters, the unease felt by Louis XVI at being a body exposed to the looks of his subjects, but also to our looks. The spectacle of this body gradually becomes as painful for the spectators in the film as for the spectateurs of the film. The duplication of looks is accompanied by an overlapping of place. 13 The result is a kind of double transfer so that we recognise more and more the embarrassment we, the spectators, feel in the fictional embarrassment of the characters and of the King himself at the untenable place of the royal body; and in return make our own some of their reasons for no longer holding

13 Far and near, here and there, double inscription of the spectator's place in the auditorium and in the scene.
to that body or to that place. We have never seen anything but Pierre Renoir's body, but this body has made us see the body too much of Louis XVI with, dare I say, the eyes of his contemporaries, and made us condemn it as they did: may it disappear!

Translation by Ben Brewster.
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