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A Conversation With Patrice Chereau: To Be Closer

Patrice Chereau

Ronald Falzone
Columbia College Chicago

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COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO
FILM & VIDEO DEPARTMENT PRESENTS

TO BE CLOSER:

A Conversation With **Patrice Chereau**

EDITED BY **RONALD FALZONE**
SPRING 2006





I do movies to be closer to emotions, to show emotions and to share them.



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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Director/writer Patrice Chereau visited Columbia College Chicago on Friday, October 14, 2005.

His visit was jointly sponsored by the Visiting Director Program of the Film & Video Department, The Chicago International Film Festival and IFP/Chicago.

Patrice Chereau is an outsider. Fiercely independent and committed to film as a medium of self-expression, Chereau has charted his career with bold, at times controversial strokes. If the New Wave of Godard and Truffaut rejected the formalism of classical French cinema, Chereau rejects their now hidebound narrative and grammatical conceits. From roots planted firmly in the theater, Chereau's best work mixes inspiration from the classical masters of both stage and film. The shadows of August Strindberg and Ingmar

Bergman are clearly visible in "Gabrielle" (2005) while both Anton Chekhov and Jean Renoir move around the edges of "Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train" (1998). At the same time, these influences never dominate the work. The fluid, almost pugilistic camera movement, the relentless probing of the emotional moment, the insatiable curiosity aimed at the human condition are the particular hallmarks of Chereau. For all its influences drawn from other sources, a film by Patrice Chereau is uniquely his own.

Patrice Chereau arrived for his time with us after having just completed two weeks of grueling press and festival interviews. Although he professed to being tired, no one could have known this from his behavior. From the moment the interview began, Chereau was engaged, insightful and willing to explore himself and his films with precision, humor and eloquence.

LEDGMENTS

Any event of this nature is the work of many people, all of whom deserve credit for its success. For the past two years, Columbia College Chicago has been a co-sponsor of the Chicago International Film Festival. Our relationship with this important cultural institution has been instrumental in bringing artists of Chereau's stature to our students. Michael Kutza, Sophia Wong Boccio, Tony Karman, Naomi Walker, Phil Bajorat, Adam Smith and especially Helen Gramates have always seized the initiative and provided us with access to the very best they have to offer. Elizabeth Donius and Molly Hanson of IFP/Chicago applied their seemingly limitless energy to getting the word out and providing support wherever needed or requested. The brunt of the work, though, was absorbed by the Film & Video Department. Bruce Sheridan, Sandy Cuprisin, Eileen Coken, Chap Freeman, Ai Lene Chor, Nathalie Vidlak, Charlie

Celander and Larry Kapson were all instrumental in making this event a success. And a very special debt of gratitude must be paid to Jeff Smith. This year's Festival brought a number of events to the school, all of which ran like clockwork under Jeff's able and measured stewardship.

The biggest debt of thanks, though, must go to our guest. In the midst of a hectic schedule, Patrice Chereau found the time to sit for a ninety-minute conversation and to give his best for every moment of it. His insight, generosity and willingness to engage both students and faculty were gifts those present will long remember.

RONALD FALZONE FILM & VIDEO DEPARTMENT

BIOGRAPHY

Born November 2, 1944 in Lezigne, France, Patrice Chereau has built a reputation as a true Renaissance artist.

A director of theater and opera as well as a writer and director of film, Chereau's artistic curiosity and restlessness have been displayed in theatrical productions as diverse as the comedies of Moliere and the operas of Wagner. He has taken these same traits into his film work where his range of subject matter and genre would seem to defy any obvious surface categorization.

Chereau began his stage career in earnest in 1964 with a production of Victor Hugo's "L'Intervention." The success of this led to a three year term as artistic director of Le Theatre de Sartouville where he gained a reputation for

his series of deft interpretations of the plays of Moliere. In 1969, Chereau turned his talents toward opera. Once again, his success led to a new job, as co-director of the prestigious Le Theatre Nationale de Paris. During this period, he also found the time to stage a legendary production of Wagner's "Die Niebelungen" at the 1976 Bayreuth Festival. Future productions would include a well-known association with the operatic works of the composer Alban Berg, including productions of "Lulu" and "Wozzeck."

Chereau has been directing feature films since his 1974 production of "La Chair de L'orchidee". During the next several years, he would work on several films with producer/director Claude Berri including "L'Home Blessé" and "Hotel de France." Chereau found his first big international success with "La Reine Margot" in 1993. Adapted from

the Alexandre Dumas novel about the politically expedient marriage between the title character and Henri de Navarre, “La Reine Margot” helped to launch a wave of similar films of court intrigue that included “Elizabeth,” “The Madness of King George,” and “Braveheart.”

Since “La Reine Margot,” Chereau has become a fixture on the international film circuit. His 1998 film, “Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train,” was nominated for 11 Cesar Awards and won those for Cinematography, Supporting Actress and Direction. Three years later, he made his English language debut with “Intimacy,” a film whose graphic depiction of a zipless sexual relationship between a bar owner and a would-be actress enflamed a firestorm of controversy. In the same year, he released “Son Frère,” the tale of two estranged brothers, one straight and one gay,

who find they must come together when one is stricken with a deadly disease. His latest film, “Gabrielle,” is a tense and darkly painful chamber drama about a household in which the lack of love has consequences that neither the husband nor the wife can foresee.

Chereau’s work in toto represents an object lesson in walking a tightrope, one stretched between his heritage in the theater and his cinematic vision. The result has been a remarkable series of films which represent a hybrid of the best qualities of each form. In this sense, Chereau reveals himself as the true Renaissance man, an artist capable of fusing multiple and seemingly incompatible influences into a form uniquely his own.



AN INTERVIEW WITH

PATRICE CHEREAU

RON FALZONE (RF): You began your work in the theater. Was that originally your goal, or was film your goal and working in the theater a step in that direction?

PATRICE CHEREAU (PC): When I was 11 years old, I started immediately doing (stage) productions at school with my friends. I remember especially in the courtyard of the school a play by Moliere. I was eleven or twelve years old, so I think I wanted immediately to do theater. At the same time, there was something beautiful in Paris called Le Cinémathèque Française. It was very close to my school. We were able to watch sometimes three movies in the evening; six o'clock, eight o'clock, ten o'clock. I would stay for a long, long time. So I have a double life at that time, triple sometimes. I was

studying in school, I was doing theater on the weekends, and every night I was watching films. Everything was mixed in my mind. I didn't make any distinctions. I'm still not making any distinctions between theater and cinema. So I started to make theater in high school and then, ten years later when I was 29, I made my first film.

RF: You were going to those films at the Cinémathèque during what period? The late fifties, early sixties?

PC: Sixties, yes.

RF: Right around the same time as Godard and Truffaut?

PC: They were older than me. For me, the Cinémathèque was

the place where I was able to see Eisenstein, to see Fritz Lang and to watch all the German expressionism. A lot of these brought me away from the New Wave. I was in another world. More theatrical. Probably from watching all the silent movies I could.

RF: The great disadvantage of the theater, of course, is that it exists only in the moment. We over here couldn't see your theatrical work.

PC: I'm not doing anymore, anyway. I haven't done it for almost ten years, you know.

RF: You said that you were going to see the movies of Lang and the other German expressionists. Did their work inform the theatrical work that you did?

PC: Yes, of course, yes. I think the theater I did may have received two influences: Lang and Ingmar Bergman. I discovered Bergman when I was probably too young to understand. Anyway, the big change in my theater came after having made some movies myself. Coming back to the theater after that... It became strange to me because I now wanted to

make only movies.

RF: Given your background, it's not surprising that critics frequently cite theatrical as well as cinematic influences in your work. "Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train" is almost invariably compared to both Renoir's "Rules of the Game" and Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard." All three rest on the basic idea of taking a group of people, putting them in a restricted location then allowing them the time and opportunities to reveal themselves. The same is true of "Gabrielle" which also finds a good deal of its influence in the work of playwright Henrik Ibsen.

PC: And Strindberg.

RF: Yes. It's the mixing of those influences which gives your work its own distinct flavor. Theatrical inspiration inside of something enormously cinematic.

PC: I see this influence in "Gabrielle," I see it less so in "Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train." This one started with a real cinematic idea; to go on a journey to a funeral. The meeting of all those people on the train. Trains are cinematic.

I don't know why. Maybe it has to do with the tracks. I don't know.

RF: It's in movement.

PC: Yes, it's in movement. It's an incredible thing. The train is always an incredible location for films. And the airplane is an awful one. You cannot shoot in an airplane. The train has a love affair with cinema since Hitchcock. Even in the studio, even when it's not running at all.

RF: Especially when you have movement outside the window and you have stationary characters inside. In "Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train," we are very aware of the movement of the world outside the window. There's great velocity in this movie. And once we get off that train, you take us to the house. Here you introduce us to an extension of that metaphor for transition: The boxes of shoes.

PC: And it's a fetish for that character (laughs).

RF: The scene with the shoes is a nice example of your willingness to go after the emotional moment. So many

directors shy away from their characters' feelings. Your characters' feelings are particularly revealed in sudden shifts in point of view. When this happens, we are forced to readjust our own perspective. One of your most striking shifts is in "Intimacy." For the first half of the movie, Claire's basically objectified. We're seeing the world only from Jay's point of view.

PC: Yes.

RF: Then comes the scene where he follows her down the street. Suddenly, he gets confused as to where he is. The next thing we know, the point of view shifts to Claire as she sees Jay and starts following him. Everything changes at that moment. We start finding out about her in a way that really brings her home to us. It's a joltingly emotional moment. To this point, we know nothing about her. Now, we're hungry to learn all we can. We want to participate - to share - with her everything that this relationship must mean to her.

PC: I do movies to be closer to emotions, to show emotions and to share them. I cannot imagine making a movie without

sharing the feelings. There were always huge emotions in the theater I did. In fact, the magic of the theater disappeared for me when I wanted to be closer to those emotions than the physical scope of the theatre allowed me to be. By “closer” I mean closer of the skin, closer of the bodies, to the physical presence. This makes me closer to the emotion. That’s one of the main reasons I now want to make movies more than theater.

RF: One of your dominant themes is perfectly expressed in the title “Intimacy.” In many of your films, your characters are struggling with intimacy. Sometimes, they even fight it physically. The way they shout at each other is a way of holding each other at arm’s length. This really plays itself out in the opening scene of “Intimacy,” the movie’s first scene of lovemaking. There is absolutely no eye contact. They look at each other but they never make eye contact. The first time I was aware of any eye contact between the two occurs backstage when he goes to see her after the play.

PC: And they argue.

RF: Yes. After that, there’s this initiation of eye contact.

PC: In the beginning, it was strictly physical. They didn’t need eye contact. They have contact in a different way. Not with the eyes but with the body, with the hands. They don’t need to talk, they don’t need to look at each other.

RF: In so many of your films, your characters seem determined to avoid intimacy, that there’s some necessity in not being intimate. They try to establish a relationship where they don’t have to share themselves. In “Intimacy,” it’s only later when they start to really talk that they discover the impact of their relationship. You start with characters who have built very big fences around themselves. They then have to spend the movie breaking these down.

PC: I feel that to have a relationship with somebody is extremely difficult. If people were able to talk immediately, it would be easier. But nobody talks at the beginning of a relationship. We’re in the passion, in the fire of the relationship. Only after that do we know we have to build something different. I notice that we all have problems with

our intimacy. We have problems constructing a relationship. Maybe the most difficult problem in life, because people don't talk. People don't dare say exactly what they feel. They don't dare to say they're in love, or they're not in love. This interests me, how difficult this is.

RF: Do you see this as a consistent line of inquiry in your films?

PC: I'm always asking the same questions, movie after movie: How does it happen that people are living so stupidly? And how is it possible to make it better? To live better, to be more generous with others, is a question I'm asking all the time. And you don't know exactly what to think about yourself. You watch your best friends dealing with love. They can't do it so they have to discuss it with you. It is easy to talk about this because it is happening to them, not you. It's more difficult when you have to analyze your own case. But sometimes you see that people are managing everything in a stupid way and they don't see it. Not only in love, but also in everyday things. In our love relations, relations with people who have more power than us, or people who have less power. Everything is a

...how do you say?

RF: A power struggle?

PC: Yes, a power struggle. Everything.

RF: This is certainly apparent in "La Reine Margot." There you were examining a series of relationships all going through both personal and political court intrigues.

PC: There is for me a stronger theme about intolerance. About religious wars. That was an awful time. Unfortunately, that kind of intolerance is very much a part of today.

RF: This takes place during the French massacre of the Huguenots in 1572. In the film, we're looking at the problems between the Catholics and the Protestants. I suppose we can make an easy leap and say that it directly reflects the current problems in Ireland.

PC: It's opposite now. The Protestant people were oppressing the minority Catholics in France. In Ireland, it is exactly the opposite. What is the same, though, is that people were killing

in the name of God. That's still the problem, a huge problem. We are going back to the middle ages, slowly. Here and also in Iraq. Everywhere it's awful. When we started the script of "La Reine Margot," it was '89. We were really focused on the death and the funeral of the Ayatollah Khomeini. We were impressed by all this crying, by all these people shouting the name of God, and shouting about the intolerance. Then, when we finished, it was very strange and very weird. When we finished the film in '93 we were right in the middle of the war in Yugoslavia and Bosnia. I went to Sarajevo in the siege to show the movie. The people under siege in Sarajevo knew exactly what it was about. This was also the time of the big massacre in Rwanda. It was awful, between the beginning and the end of the making of that movie we saw so many things. Unfortunately, the film had to deal with this reality.

RF: After watching "La Reine Margot," I went back and looked at the same event covered in Griffith's "Intolerance." The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the one you portray in your film. And it was interesting just to see the two things. In the Griffith, the overall tone may have been violent but there was also a sense of his excitement in pulling off such a big scene.

The sequence in your film is more thematically tight. This is a battle motivated solely by hatred. The grime and the blood of that world. The dead bodies everywhere. It reinforced the ugliness of the intolerance as well as removing us from any kind of pretty picture of the past.

PC: People were sweating all the time, also.

RF: Sweating blood!

PC: Sweating blood also! At the end, sweating blood.

RF: That's a rather extraordinary moment when you see the blood flowing off of this man. He's literally sweating blood. Was that actually what would have happened in that kind of a plague?

PC: It's impossible to make a diagnosis but probably he was sweating blood very slightly. All the very small veins of his face were exploding. Of course the legend arrived after a few years, but he was sweating the blood of the Protestants, of all the people he killed. That is from Dumas (ed: the film is based on a novel by Alexandre Dumas, père). He put that in

“ (How) to live better, to be more generous with others, is a question I’m asking all the time. ”

the king himself. He said, "I'm sweating the blood of all the people I killed." It is a legend, of course. But with the cinema the legend becomes true.

STUDENT QUESTION (SQ): I know you've worked a lot with novels and short stories. Is that how you find your material?

PC: The last three were from books (ed, "Intimacy," "Son Frère" and "Gabrielle"), but I think it's important to be curious about everything. To be aware, to be awake. Sometimes there are only beautiful accidents. For example, (director/writer) Claude Berri saw a movie I made with my students called "Hotel de France." It's very bad, but he said there was a beautiful energy in it. He said, "Why don't you make "The Three Musketeers" with them?" "The Three Musketeers" is a child's memory for all of us in France. To make this film with very young people, I didn't think this was for me. But this made me read the book again and I found it a beautiful story. I said to Claude I would work on it. I did this three months then was very surprised when I discovered that Claude stole the idea from somebody who wanted to make that film. This director called me and said, "I'm about to do it. I have the

script. I have the production money." So I had to stop. I then called Daniele Thompson, the screenwriter, and asked her if she was somebody who wanted desperately to make "The Three Musketeers" but couldn't, what would she do? She asked if I had read "La Reine Margot." I said, no. She brought me the book. I read the it and said, well, okay, I'll make this. How could I know that I was starting a five year job? I started in '88 and we finished in '93. A few years after that, this same Daniele Thompson told me the story of a very good friend of hers who died. He lived his whole life in Paris but who wanted to be buried in Limoges. Limoges is right in the middle of France. They're famous for shoes and porcelain plates. You know, very famous. She told me this beautiful, real story about how he wanted to be buried in Limoges. She asked, "Why Limoges?" He said because it's my place, the place of my family and nobody knows his family in Paris. She said it's not convenient for your friends. It's very far. And he said, "Those who love me will take the train." (laughs). I liked this story, so we started working it out.

RF: Even though they are thematically connected to your earlier films, your more recent films, "Intimacy," "Son Frère"

and “Gabrielle,” are less driven by multiple storylines. They are basically two-character pieces. Why the shift?

PC: After “La Reine Margot” and “Those Who Love Me Can Take The Train,” I read the interviews I did. People were asking me, “Why so many characters? Why so many intrigues? Why so many stories in the same movie?” I noticed that I answered always in the same way: “Because I like stories with many characters, with many tangled intrigues.” I saw that this answer was mechanical for me. Maybe I’m wrong, I thought. Maybe it’s just because I don’t know how to do a two-character movie. So I looked for a story with two people. I read books and I tried to make some notes. I found a French novel I wanted to make into a movie but the rights weren’t free. Because I knew the work of Hanif Kureishi, I read “Intimacy.” I called the editor the same afternoon and I had an appointment with him in London three days later. I said I want to do this book. Sometimes, you are not choosing a script, you are not choosing a subject; sometimes, the book is choosing you. This certainly happened also with “Gabrielle.” I was at the countryside and I didn’t have anything to read. I went to the store and found the complete short stories of

Joseph Conrad. I bought it and started with the first one. After many beautiful short stories, I read “The Return.” I felt it so incredibly beautiful that I decided to make the film “Gabrielle” from it. I felt so touched emotionally, so deeply touched by everything that happened in that story.

RF: You’ve said that there is one line that really struck you in the book.

PC: But I won’t say it here. (laughs) It’s a surprise when it comes in the film. It’s a beautiful surprise - an awful surprise, but it’s beautiful.

RF: There is one aspect of “Gabrielle” that I was aware of from the first moment: the soundscape. Ironically, the use of subtle sounds like the rustling of the clothes kept reinforcing the silence in that household while also reinforcing the sense of formality that they lived in.

SQ: I just saw “Those Who Love Me Can Take The Train” an hour ago, and it will take some time to digest. But I was thinking about the character, Jean Baptiste. Are we meant to be intrigued by his death, or by the fact that he has this

essence that makes him more powerful and more intriguing after he is gone?

PC: I think it's not a movie about death. I think it's a movie about the reaction against death. It's about these people who are gathered because he died. They have to make a huge trip, a four-hour train ride back and forth. You have to love that person very much. Not everybody would do that. To me, the interesting thing is probably that he was a tyrant, this man. He was a very good teacher, but unbearable, and very probably intolerant. But he was loved by all these students. And all his lovers, too. Like many people, the dead man separated his life into different compartments so not all the people at the funeral know each other. I think the movie is about how to be another type of family. You have a biological family that's synonymous with hate and difficulty and oppression. Then you have other kinds of family. Family of students, family of lovers, family of kids you never had. I believe I have, personally, two families. The family of my father and my mother, of course. At the same time, I have students like this man, and I have lovers like this man, and I have very good friends. This is really my family. And with my students, I had the impression

of having children that just arrived later. But I think it's about that.

SQ: Is there just one film that you can point to and say I really nailed it with that one? I've said everything I wanted to say with that. Not necessarily with your whole being, but with the conception of that film.

PC: No one film. But I avoid watching them again, so it's easier. No. When you are doing it, you are right in the middle of it. When you are shooting, you have the impression that you have to be closer. You are looking to be as close as possible to something you want. Sometimes you don't want exactly what you see. You only know what you don't want, but if you're watching properly and if you concentrate and watch exactly what the actors are doing, what you are doing yourself with the camera, you can always decide if you don't want that. Certainly, you don't always know what you want. You are defining exactly what you want by eliminating what you don't want. Then, you have a beautiful time in the editing room, I must say. Beautiful because you discover in the editing room what you don't have. You have to deal with it.

There is a moment when you feel incredibly powerful in the editing room. You feel that you can make the actors act a different way, you can change everything, you can cut. It's a drug, it's an addiction. You know, you cut and you cut and you're happy. This is better than keeping everything which is dangerous, too. And then you do a few screenings. You have the impression that you have exactly what you wanted but the result is never what was foreseen. There are some directors, like Hitchcock, who thought the film was made in pre-production and that shooting was a terribly unpleasant experience. Everyone has to do what was drawn in the storyboards. He thought it was so boring to have to talk to the actors. I must say that I'm interested in discovering my movie step by step. I choose the actors, I write the text or I work with a screenwriter and we make the text together. I have to choose the locations. I decide with a set designer the wallpaper, the lamps, everything. Theoretically, everything is decided so I shouldn't have any surprises. But the day you suddenly see the set totally lit with the props, with the actors in the costumes, in the wigs, in their makeup, and they say their lines, all your plans fall apart because it doesn't look like

you thought it would. But it's good and you have to agree to accept this difference, this disappointment, sometimes. You need to accept every morning this surprise. And sometimes you make a terrible mistake. You wrote a scene and in your mind the door is on the left. You wrote with the thought that the actress has to come from the left but the door is on the right. The set designer made something different and it is a surprise. Even if everything is planned, you have to accept the differences. You have to deal with it every day. In other words, there is no moment where I can say that's exactly what I wanted. But you can have this impression after working in the editing room. You get used to the all the shots, to all the materials that you have, so there is a moment at the end of the making when you say that's exactly what I want. Not what I wanted then (in pre-production) but what I want now. This impression stays today. Then you go with the first copy to the first screening and you despair because you see all the mistakes you haven't seen before and you just want to reshoot everything. But then this impression gives you the energy to start another project.

RF: So, for you, each film leads to the next.

““ I’m someone who tries to understand the world he is living in. I try to understand life. It is my job.””

PC: Yes. You know, it's useless to look backwards. I'm not interested in looking at even the last one, "Gabrielle." When I come here, for example, I just check the sound at the beginning and I leave. I come back for the credits.

SQ: What are your disappointments with "Gabrielle"?

PC: I still don't know. They're arriving. They still have to come. You see, to be disappointed, I have to watch the film again and I haven't. I watched it in Venice at the film festival because we needed to be in the audience. I closed my eyes and tried to sleep which is difficult because it's noisy. (laughs)

SQ: I liked the intensity of "Gabrielle." The soundtrack is really striking. For instance, when the man drops the bottle of wine as he reaches for the letter. I knew he would drop it, but I was still startled because the sound was so effective. And the counterpoint to that was your use of silence. Particularly the silence of all the servants. Both visually and for my ear. It's beautiful.

PC: Thank you.

RF: There is an extraordinary moment in the kitchen. The maids are in the foreground, cleaning. In the background is one maid lighting a cigarette. That picture's been in my head since then and I don't know why. I've been examining it and trying to say, "What is it about that that's so striking?"

PC: I like the shot, too. Do you know where that came from?

RF: No.

PC: It's just because I watch many films. We made "Gabrielle" in a very strange way, because we had so little money and so little time. Just six weeks. It was August and of course very hot, especially in those costumes and under that lighting. I decided to work three weeks and then have one week free so everybody could go on holiday. This empty week was very useful because I could rewrite part of the script and watch the dailies in calm and quiet. I made the mistake of watching a few other films at the same time. Of course, I watched the "Age of Innocence" by Scorsese. I knew it couldn't help me so that was good. And then I watched "The Leopard" from Visconti, then I watched "Gosford Park" by Altman. I love very

much Altman, but this one not so much. But I think, oh, the maids have to smoke in the kitchen. One, Emily Watson, was smoking all the time. And I thought, oh my God, yes, they have to smoke.

RF: There you go.

PC: That's it. Thanks to Bob Altman.

RF: We do get inspired in strange places.

PC: Yes, we do (laughs).

RUSSELL PORTER: It's a slightly more boring question, but I'm interested in the current state of French cinema as an expression of national and cultural identity. I come from Australia. I grew up in the same time period as you, and in late 67-68 we would rush to the post office news stand, where they would get Cahiers du Cinema. Then we would rush to go and see this Nouvelle Vague ("New Wave") film or that. We were excited by the relationship between ideas - abstract ideas, philosophical theory ideas and cinema. I look at those films now and I scratch my head a little and say, what was I so

excited about? Driven by ideology, not driven by, as your films are, by curiosity about the world and a sense of the vitality of life and the complexity of human relationships. I admire the fact that you somehow have managed to survive in a post-ideological, or perhaps a post-modern, post-structuralist French cinema tradition.

PC: I stayed away from the Nouvelle Vague. When the Nouvelle Vague started I was still in high school. I'm able to watch those movies but, at that time, I was far more impressed by Ingmar Bergman. It struck me so much, the first Ingmar Bergman film I saw. It was "Le Visage" (ed, "The Face," 1958). I was sixteen, I think, and I was far too young to watch it. Then later I saw "Persona," and then "Wild Strawberries." It came out in '58, but I saw it in the '60s. I had the impression that this was my world. And, of course, it was, because it was not so far from the theater I was doing at that time. So I went very far away from the Nouvelle Vague. This is difficult for me because the whole French cinema still lives under the protection of the Nouvelle Vague.

RF: How do you interpret the impact of the Nouvelle Vague?

PC: Of course the Nouvelle Vague changed the whole cinema. And the break was so strong. Suddenly they stopped filming at the studio, they went outside on the streets and in the café. I remember when I was at the high school, there was a café in the Place de la Sorbonne. There I suddenly saw Godard filming. There is a scene in the film where I was behind the actors. I was fourteen or fifteen.

SQ: You were talking about how your films explore things that you're interested in and that you're drawn to. Do you feel that film will always be that venue for you to explore issues or do you feel that you only have a certain amount of films in you and then you'll be done?

PC: I think I will always be in film. I have a lot of possibilities ahead of me. I don't think I want to make theater again. Maybe sometime, maybe I will try to make a more extreme experience. I think I still have a lot of movies to make. I just have to rush it a little. I made ten. This is very few. It will be good if I could make five more.

RF: Well, you've had quite a few of them in the last few years.

PC: I rushed. I wanted to make the tenth before my sixtieth birthday. So I did it. The problem is that I cannot rush all the time like that. I make one every two years. I would be happy if I was able to write my own scripts. Then I would be in the same position as Woody Allen who is doing a film every year. I think that's a good way. I would love it. So I have to rush now, because I made this one in, "Gabrielle," in 2004. In other words, I have to do a movie in 2006. If I want a script for July 2006, I have to start immediately. I have to stop the promotion of "Gabrielle."

SQ: "Those Who Love Me Can Take The Train" was interesting in that it was very quick at the beginning then got very meditative at the end. I was curious if that rhythm was more in the screenplay or in the editing? Or how did that rhythm develop between writing of the screenplay and the final cut?

PC: I think there is something in me who forces me to start very quick at the beginning. This is the same with "Gabrielle." And then to slow down after a few moments. I don't know why. I think I have to capture the attention of the audience by going fast. That is certainly true in "Those Who Love Me Can Take

The Train.” I think we were pushed ahead by the train. We had such a huge excitement in that train. We bet we could film it with a handheld camera. It was Cinemascope so this means it’s a very heavy camera with long, long lenses. All the weight is forward, you know, and it’s difficult for the camera operator. But it was such a joke to be in a real train for eight hours a day, leaving at seven o’clock in the morning. And that train... we never know where we will be pushed. Even the actors were sometimes falling. Even Eric (Gauthier, the cinematographer) fell many times. But the train has an incredible, immediate rhythm and I liked that. And when we arrived at Limoges, we shot the rest of the film almost in the right sequence, in the right order.

SQ: A teacher of mine recently made a statement in Philosophical Issues in Film. He started the class by saying that philosophical ideas cannot be expressed in cinema. He said there is a disjunction between philosophy and cinema. When I first heard of that, it angered me. But I could eventually see that he was playing the devil’s advocate. He wanted us to discuss this idea. How do feel about that?

PC: I don’t know.

RF: I think an argument can be made. You do it all the time. There is a specific worldview in your films, in the way you see the world and develop the characters along that line.

PC: Well, it’s not about philosophy.

RF: Not nominally about philosophy. Subtextually it’s there.

PC: I’m from the old school, like Bergman. He tried to have a moral point of view about things. The word “philosophy” doesn’t help me a lot, you know. Of course, I try to have an opinion about destiny. In a moralistic way, to have an opinion, of course, about the world. I’m someone who tries to understand the world he is living in. I try to understand life. It is my job.

RF: That’s as good a definition of an artist as I know.

PC: Reduced but good. (laughs)



DIRECTOR

GABRIELLE (2005)
 SON FRÈRE (2003)
 INTIMACY (2001)
 THOSE WHO LOVE ME CAN TAKE THE TRAIN (1998)
 DANS LA SOLITUDE DES CHAMPS DE COTON (1996) (TV)
 LA REINE MARGOT (1994)
 WOZZECK (1994) (TV)
 LE TEMPS ET LA CHAMBRE (1992) (TV)
 CONTRE L'OUBLI (1991)
 HÔTEL DE FRANCE (1987)
 LA FAUSSE SUIVANTE (1985) (TV)
 L'HOMME BLESSÉ (1983)
 JUDITH THERPAUVE (1978)
 LA CHAIR DE L'ORCHIDÉE (1975)

WRITER

GABRIELLE (2005)
 SON FRÈRE (2003)
 INTIMACY (2001)
 THOSE WHO LOVE ME CAN TAKE THE TRAIN (1998)
 LA REINE MARGOT (1994)
 HÔTEL DE FRANCE (1987)
 L'HOMME BLESSÉ (1983)
 JUDITH THERPAUVE (1978)
 LES CONTES D'HOFFMANN (1978) (TV ADAPTATION)
 LA CHAIR DE L'ORCHIDÉE (1975)

ACTOR

COSÌ FAN TUTTE (2005) (TV)
 LE TEMPS DU LOUP (2003)
 AU PLUS PRÈS DU PARADIS (2002)
 LE TEMPS RETROUVÉ (1999) (VOICE ONLY)
 LUCIE AUBRAC (1997)
 DANS LA SOLITUDE DES CHAMPS DE COTON (1996) (TV)
 BÊTE DE SCÈNE (1994)
 THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS (USA/992)
 ADIEU BONAPARTE (1985)
 DANTON (1983)

FILMOGRAPHY

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COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO

FILM & VIDEO DEPARTMENT

1104 SOUTH WABASH AVENUE, SUITE 301

CHICAGO, IL 60605

312 344 6700

WWW.FILMATCOLUMBIA.COM



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