

THREE FRENCH NEO-BAROQUES
BEINEIX, BESSON, CARAX
from *Diva* to *Big Blue*

by Raphaël Bassan

In a few months, the '80s will end. Their « mandate » has been sealed, as has been remarked in this magazine, with the stamp of « coolness » (cf. : « La Revue du Cinéma », nos. 441 and 442). An overall correct assessment, but incomplete. It is not so easy to dismiss the work of three « newcomers » : Jean-Jacques Beineix, Luc Besson, and Leos Carax. Their work has broken with the chronic naturalism of our cinema, and has caused a lot of ink to flow. The aims of these « auteurs » are not necessarily identical, and the term « neo-baroque » used here is perhaps a convenient conceit. Nevertheless, some groundwork is needed in order to begin a study. A necessarily fragmentary, contradictory study, just like the works of these new « wonder boys ».¹

Jean-Jacques Beineix was the first of the three musketeers to appear on the scene. Contrary to Besson and Carax, who joined this problematic « neo-baroque » with their second movie, Beineix defined his intentions with *Diva* (1981) : without a doubt the foundational film of the « genre » (1)². The director had predecessors in France : Téchiné with *Barocco* (1976), Rivette with *Duelle* (1976), Garrel with *Le berceau de cristal* (1976). These were « pioneers » who worked only occasionally in this direction. Beineix is, moreover, the only one of his contemporaries to derive his screenplays from novels. He adds to these stories non-functional motifs, arabesques, and digressions that « overload » the initial meaning of the film. The meaning of the film shifts from narrativity toward a visual language that carries additional messages.

¹ The phrase “wonder boys” is in English in the original.

² (1) As such, it benefits from a more in-depth analysis than the others. A brief summary of all the films can be found in the filmography. [Note 1 : The author’s footnotes in the original are marked by a number in parentheses, like “(1).” Footnotes without the number in parentheses are the translator’s. Note 2 : Every article in *La Revue du Cinéma* included a “filmography” that described the films that were discussed in the article. This filmography has not been included in this translation. Note 3 : *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* is not discussed in this article. It would have been an important addition. It is mentioned in the filmography that it was currently in production in May 1989 when this article was published. —Tr.]

DIVORCE WITH CRITICISM ?

The desire to integrate the films of Beineix, Besson, and Carax into the new French (and international) intellectual landscape of the 1980s is not accidental. The decade that is ending has witnessed the erosion of many doctrines and ways of life. Whether political (intellectuals swimming in a hazy pale pink) or aesthetic : current « postmodernism » denies there is any progress in art, and puts on an equal footing « minor » artistic expressions — comic books (B.D.),³ graffiti, advertising — and « major » — painting, classical music, artistic films... Contrary to what purists and nostalgics maintain, this in no way marks the end of our civilization (not for the first time), but allows us to begin discussing art and advertising with a fresh perspective. There are a thousand and one ways to be « postmodern ».

The works of the filmmakers considered here would be too « trendy » [*branchées* in French] to be serious. « Trendy » (?) : “Dependent” [*tributaire* in French]⁴ on the ephemera of their time. For some critics, *Diva*, *Subway*, or *Mauvais sang* (the three most « neo-baroque » films of the lot) have no more cultural value than an advertisement for « Bas Dim »⁵ or a program by Patrick Sabatier⁶ (« Avis de recherche »,⁷ for example). This is to ignore a whole architectural organization of the material and a profound desire to make a film, absent from the advertisers of Dim and the producers of television shows. But moving on. These « intellectuals » forget that artists have always used the signs and symbols offered by their times. Can we adopt the attitude of an ostrich when faced with the arrival of VCRs, music videos, and the new brand of comic books ? Should we continue to use flat sociology and outdated humanism... and disregard cinema, the visual art par excellence ? The critic who has not known nor wanted to update their discourse, but still wishing to believe that a « message-film » is superior to a visual work, has lost their influence in the face of the multiplicity of images printed, drawn, videotaped, « laserdisked ». It is not uncommon, today, for a poster to offer better keys to understanding a film than of any number of critical articles. The ways of creating meaning have changed, and it is time that those who wish to guide the spectators in their choices take notice of it.

The heterogeneity of the registers within the same film is not a sign of weakness. We must understand this if we are to build a coherent critical system that can properly deal with the various artforms we are analyzing. Otherwise, incoherence awaits even the most competent journalist. Thus, with just a short time separating them, Michel Perez (a big professional film critic) uses substantially the same arguments to praise *Boy meets girl* and demolish *Mauvais sang*, films built on identical foundations ! « They (the protagonists in *Boy meets girl*) bear witness to the disdain that new generations have for conventional

³ « B.D. » in French stands for « *bandes dessinées* », which means literally « drawn strips ». They are the French version of comic books, something like a French version of Japanese manga.

⁴ “Branchée” and “tributaire” form a pun in French. In both English and French, “branch” of a river is a tributary. “Tributaire” in French also means “dependent,” as a “tributary” of a river is “dependent” on its source, and so “trendy” fashions are not serious, not essential, they are dependent on (or depended from) the more serious and essential movements of the time.

⁵ “Dim” is a brand of French lingerie. “Bas” means, generally, underclothes, in particular stockings.

⁶ A French gameshow host. Think Pat Sajak.

⁷ A modern French version of “This Is Your Life.”

beauty, for the Hollywood glamour that we thought was set in stone, indestructible. But Leos Carax, knowing perfectly well how far fashion should be used, is careful not to be seduced by his characters in the punk scene, and the miracle happens very quickly : these people become beautiful (2).⁸ » Two years later, Perez writes : « Visually, *Mauvais sang* is marked by the sign of negligent chic, by deconstruction (as perhaps prêt-à-porter designers would say) and cleverly calculated ugliness... The artistic blunder is here erected into an aesthetic system and the structural gaffe is claimed (3).⁹ »

This example, just one among many, is not an isolated phenomenon. Reading the hundreds of pages of criticism that have been generated by the eight films of our corpus, one senses a real uneasiness. The admirers—often insincere, one senses in their use of flowery epithets, which they dispense without any serious reflection—like the detractors, get bogged down in the anecdotal side of things. What expressions recur under their pens ? « Young filmmakers », « iconoclasts » ; « having assimilated the heritage of their elders » or (variant) « with impunity misuse the art of their elders » ; « long shots » ; « the screenplay doesn't matter as long as there is poetry » or « incapable of mastering the screenplay »... This embarrassment, this refusal to admit a different kind of cinema, sometimes translates into an outburst of temper and intolerance that is hardly to the credit of the critic. « If you must go see Leos Carax's film, do like me and choose the right theater. A hundred destroyed seats in a theater in Les Halles,¹⁰ the smell of joints, shaved heads, and above all, at the back of the theater, a huge guy, the size of a mirrored armoire, who neighs like a mare every time something happens up on the screen. But don't worry, in Carax's films things rarely ever happen, so you can always do like the rest of the theater, and doze in peace (4).¹¹ » This hateful prose, inherited from a thematic, « authoristic », sociological vision of cinema, refusing to evolve, declares in a rage that it gives up before any innovative film that outclasses it.

ADVERTISING AND CREATIVITY

However, opinions are being revised ; some « refocusing » is gradually taking over. When I went, last January 4, to see *Diva* again at the Vidéothèque in Paris, I perceived in the theater some cinephiles. Shortly before, during a televised segment on the movie, Serge Daney—not a fan of Beineix, but a defender of Carax—situated the debate properly : « The public latched onto *Diva*, but the critics only complained about it, contenting themselves with reproaching Jean-Jacques Beineix for engaging in a tedious exercise of “applied advertising.”... If the debate faltered, it is because the question was poorly stated. Advertising, in fact, is more than an “aesthetic” question, it is a way of being and of perceiving, of evaluating and judging, in short, an outlook on the world. The success of *Diva* came from the fact that Beineix, the first, wanted to moralize the heritage of advertising by

⁸ (2) In « Le Matin », 23 November 1984.

⁹ (3) In « Le Matin », 28 November 1986.

¹⁰ Les Halles is a seedy area in the center of Paris, full of sex shops and drugs and tattoos and shaved heads.

¹¹ (4) In « Jeune Cinéma », no. 164 (January / February 1985).

proposing a new dividing line between the unsaleable (the soul, creation) and the pre-sold (objects, clichés) (5).¹² »

Before going too far, a brief analysis of *Diva*, the film-standard containing all the themes, and their aesthetic translation, that we will encounter in the eight films comprising the focus of this article, will be helpful. Jules, the young postman, is a refined music-lover. He records, without her knowledge, a concert given by the black opera singer Cynthia Hawkins. That is the « artistic » track, the one that truly interests Beineix. A police intrigue is grafted onto this central trunk—an obligatory « rite of passage » for any new filmmaker in this decade wanting to make their first feature film—, « noirifies » the ambiance, and forces the action to take off again. Nadia, a call-girl, slips a cassette tape into the teenager’s mailbag, a recording of her exposing the crimes of the police commissioner Saporta. The postman becomes the point of convergence of these antagonistic forces that animate the film. Some Taiwanese businessmen want the recording of the diva : a rare commodity, because Cynthia has never allowed a recording of herself in concert. Saporta’s men are also chasing Jules in order to recoup Nadia’s compromising cassette. The young man lives in a loft that he has transformed into a veritable paradise of technology.

Beineix plays wonderfully on the contrasts of sounds and colors, accentuating the effects of light, overloading each frame with a decorative element. The smallest space, the most innocuous utensil become fetishes (and not the products, as in the advertising world) of a new urban mythology. In short, non-functional devices. We return, thematically, with *Diva*, to courtly love. In the course of the film, Jules crosses paths with Cynthia. Do they sleep together ? It is very vaguely hinted at, perhaps. What interests the young man is the voice of the star. That is to say, Art (with a capital A), the ultimate reality still able to interest young people. It is clear that, according to the dividing line traced by Daney, art does not sell for Beineix. Cynthia refuses to commercialize her voice, and Jules steals a piece of her performance to quench his solitary pleasure as a music-lover.

But what is the purpose of advertising ? To seduce potential clients to compel them to buy consumer products. By what method ? Through a short video clip, allusive, metaphoric, of heterogeneous realities, in order to marry a certain idea of well-being to the industrial sphere. What do those who are tempted learn that they need ? Rejuvenation (thanks to creams, cosmetics...), physical fitness (beers to quench the thirst, lingerie to accentuate the body), love without risk (new ads for condoms)... The messages remain anonymous (rich, poor, young, old, all receive them : only a fraction will use them) and barely takes into account the health or circumstances of each (a diabetic risks falling into a coma if she eats too much « Gervais » ice cream). This is the « basic advertising », the one we see at intermission, in theaters between two screenings.¹³ There is also the music video, a sophisticated form of advertising, which is an « artistic promotion » of its object (the album), and the poster (a « positive » visual criticism of a product.) Whatever the brilliance of these « creations », their purpose remains commercial.

¹² (5) In « Libération », 21 November 1988.

¹³ It may be interesting to note that the French had regular product advertising in movie theaters decades before Americans did. As far back as the '80s there were 15 or 20 minutes of ads before the trailers, before each movie. Movie listings* actually told you how many minutes of ads you’d have to sit through before the movie started.

*In the old days, movie showtimes were found in newspapers and (in France) weekly magazines.

Beineix, Besson, and Carax grew up in an environment where posters and advertisements were everywhere. They were influenced by this non-verbal way of expressing things and have used it (but with restraint : all of their films contain, whatever one thinks of them, a « classic » narrative framework). Did they try to sell something ? No, not in the normal sense of the word. Jules’s loft (*Diva*) is too cluttered to be recreated ; the « Iroquois » look of Isabelle Adjani (*Subway*,¹⁴ 1985) is only a distinctive idiosyncrasy, a self-cancelling coquetry. Lofts, hairstyles, ornaments, etc., already exist in the everyday environment. Why not use them ? They have been « pre-sold ». On the other hand, the seductive, flexible language of advertising, in tune with the current sensibilities, make it possible to convey additional messages. At the forefront of which there is the *re-evaluation of art*, the last refuge against the barbarism of urban metropolises. As we have noted, Jules, the postman in *Diva*, exalts his miserable existence with a consuming passion for opera. He transforms his loft into a true work of art by decorating it with mismatched gadgets. Betty is fascinated by Zorg’s novel (*37°2 le matin*,¹⁵ 1986), and sacrifices her sanity in order to get it published. After a nuclear cataclysm, the old doctor played by Jean Bouise (*Le dernier combat*,¹⁶ 1983), relearned the language of the man he had saved by reconstructing, on the walls of his laboratory, some cave frescoes. The diver Jacques Mayol (*Le grand bleu*,¹⁷ 1988) abandons everything for his art (and what an art it is !) : deep-sea diving. As for Alex, the central protagonist of the two films by Leos Carax (*Boy meets girl*,¹⁸ 1984, and *Mauvais sang*,¹⁹ 1986), a real dandy haunted by despair, he has transformed his life into a work of art.

DIFFICULTIES IN COMMUNICATING

Another important point : the films show young people who are incapable of communication... or love. Jules is captivated by the Diva’s voice, and even if he touches her shoulder for a moment, everything suggests that it is her singing alone that inspires him. Traumatized by the death of his sister who was violently raped and killed, Gérard the longshoreman, another of Beineix’s anti-heroes, is unable to form a real bond with a woman (*La lune dans le caniveau*,²⁰ 1983). *37°2 le matin*, the most physical of Beineix’s films, includes in its story the downfall of a girl who is too much in love, destroyed by her lover’s talent as a writer. This gift seems to Beineix to be superior to the cutesy personality of Zorg. Straddling two liaisons as tenuous as they are unhappy, Alex, always borderline autistic, compensates, in *Boy meets girl* and *Mauvais sang*, for his existential malaise with a tragic bent.

And what about Besson ? The only presence of a woman in *Le dernier combat* is a furtive and hidden figure. Adjani shines with the cold seduction of a mannequin (*Subway*). Fred-Christophe Lambert ventures to declare his love for her : « Why is it you that I love ?

¹⁴ Luc Besson’s second film.

¹⁵ *Betty Blue*, Jean-Jacques Beineix’s third film.

¹⁶ *The Last Battle*, Besson’s first film.

¹⁷ *The Big Blue*, Besson’s third film.

¹⁸ Leos Carax’s first film.

¹⁹ *Bad Blood*, Carax’s second film.

²⁰ *Moon in the Gutter*, Beineix’s second film.

—Because I am a wonderful woman. —Why don't you love me ? —Because I don't have the courage. —You are lazy. —Terribly ! » Besson wants to play down the situation by employing a laconic and « hip » dialogue. The end, inspired by the ending of *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*), shows that the situation is more tragic than it appears.

Diva, the first work in our collection, insisted both in big ways (the opera) and in small ways (the look, the set dressing, art direction) on the importance of art (and artifice) for young people. *Le grand bleu*, the last film on the list, would rather paint an existential portrait of the new generation. We see it in close-up ! Mayol prefers the depths of the ocean to the body of Johana (Rosanna Arquette, who has the most beautiful breasts in Hollywood !²¹) The movie was demolished by the critics. The journalists followed the same wrong path. Besson was « neo-baroque » in the *version clinquante* — the flashy Beineix style — only in *Subway*, although in other ways (mixing heterogeneous materials, unreal locations), his entire body of work falls squarely into this category. Some even wrote that *Le grand bleu* was nothing but a giant music video. And so ? It is a « realistic » drama (the beginning, in black and white, harkens back to the barrenness of *Dernier combat*) where the mythological dimension appears only through Jacques Mayol's boundless passion for the oceanic depths.

Once the cabal has passed, the psychoanalyst Daniel Sibony offers us some keys authorizing other readings of the film (and those of Beineix and Carax ?) : « ...she (Johana) is in love ; he (Mayol) is also “in love,” in quotation marks, because he does not know what “to be in love” means — he did not have a mother, nor a father who from his own desire would have taught him desire for a woman (because yes, these things are taught, the *possibility* of such things)... The girl who falls in love, in the beginning receives from him only the recording of a heart that beats to the rhythm of another world. Symbolism for modern misery : all the signs of life, a beating heart, but not enough to make a story of a heartfelt love... The woman wants to warm up this emotionally frozen man. But the illness of this very “modern” man is that his cold heart, his inert emotional tissue, has as much difficulty in resuscitating itself as in accepting its inertia. The woman wants to give him tenderness, but it means nothing when *words* of love are missing... Some critics have denounced the absence of sensations, of emotions ; but failed to ask themselves about *why* these things are missing, which would have forced them to risk exposing a little of themselves rather than “giving up understanding”... (6)²² » Besson hits the mark. (This is not to imply that I think the film is brilliant.) Questionnaires for single men and women have been appearing in magazines for some time. We are far from the utopian films of the seventies advocating for free love.

QUESTIONS OF STYLE

I do not want to play the sorcerer's apprentice going through a complete run-down of the reasons for this malaise (at least seen through the films considered here). There is, as Sibony remarked, the death or the resignation of « fathers ». Betty and Zorg (37°2 le

²¹ It is unlikely this sentence would have made the final edit of this article in 2023. We may still think such things, but we are no longer allowed to say them out loud.

²² (6) In « Libération », 10 August 1988.

matin), and the « zombies » of *Le Dernier combat*, seem to have no family. Héléna / Adjani (*Subway*) has a contemptible husband. Gérard has lost his sister, and the presence of his brother annoys him (*La lune dans le caniveau*). A father asks his son to kill him if he becomes senile (*Boy meets girl*). The fathers of Alex (*Mauvais sang*) and of Jacques (*Le grand bleu*) die at the beginning of those stories. The « heroes » of these films are, in general, of modest means (postman, house painter, unemployed). The desire to leave it all comes through the appreciation of an art (without his passion for opera, Jules would be condemned to play cards with his colleagues during coffee breaks), or even his occupation (*Le grand bleu*). The topic should then be completely obvious, that which excludes any deep and affective bond. The threat of nuclear radiation (*Le dernier combat*) or of AIDS (*Mauvais sang*), two more eminently contemporary evils, force the protagonists to close in on themselves. In the end, Beineix, Besson, and Carax appear as « nouveaux moralistes » for the 1980s. Zorg refuses to sleep with a friend because he loves Betty (*37°2 le matin*). Enzo, who had started flirting with Johana, fades away when he feels that she is close to Jacques (*Le grand bleu*). Carax expresses this « philosophy » the most overtly in *Mauvais sang*: those who make love without love contract STBO (no need to translate that !)

The style of these wonder boys may come from the advertising world —which we will see later —, but the purpose of their films is a radical departure from it : art and « passion » are unsaleable. That might explain the constant vacillation of critics from rejection to fascination. There is a disconnect between the package and the content. When you watch an Antonioni film, you know that tragedy will be the final outcome. With Lelouch²³ (for a simple example), things usually end up working out. For Beineix, Besson, and Carax, on the other hand, we are confronted, through a playful point of view, with the death or dereliction of « heroes ». All the elements of seduction (neon lights, colorful clothing, opera arias, extravagant hairstyles, sophisticated hi-fi equipment...) have negative connotations. They are no longer objects of well-being but signs of death. Paraphrasing the commercial for « Canada Dry » (« it has the taste, the color, the appearance of alcohol, but without the alcohol »), one can say about *Subway* or *Mauvais sang*: it has all the appearance of advertising for young people, for Paris by night, for the unusual tourist destinations, but they are only the desperate visions of individuals who suffocate — counter-advertising for « unhappiness ».

As for style, Guy Scarpetta, the author of a remarkable essay on the « neo-baroque », wrote : « fashion (ephemeral) and art (timeless) can perfectly have the same forms, the same materials, or the same states of mind — the line of demarcation lies less in the “nature” of the signs used than in the *regime* to which they are subjected (in the sense, if you will, that one speaks of “engine speed” : that which allows different vehicle speeds²⁴). But that, probably, is not enough — no doubt we must also identify, beyond the differences of regime, of temporality, a gap in function. In short, the thing that sets art apart, and

²³ Claude Lelouch. His most famous movie was *A Man and a Woman* (*Un homme et une femme*) (1966). It won many awards, including the Palm d'Or and an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. He is not disfavored, but his films are not as heavy as Antonioni's.

²⁴ What we call “engine speed,” the rpms of a car's motor, the French call the “regime of the motor” [“*régime du moteur*”]. The different phrase carries different significance for them. They think of engine speed as different bands of rpms (or regimes) for different driving situations. Low rpms for idling, high rpms for aggressive acceleration. That's the metaphor at play here. It's not a question of the different *kinds* of signs, as much as, perhaps, different intensities.

distinguishes it from fashion, could be its ability to arouse, simultaneously, an effect of enjoyment and an effect of truth — even if this truth results from the fiction, from artifice... (7).²⁵ » We find with Beineix and company, to varying degrees, this double effect of pleasure and veracity. It is interesting to note that these filmmakers are hypocritically attacked for the pleasurable effect (supposedly incongruous formalism) provided by their films. This exempts the critic from scratching under the surface, because there hides a very pessimistic (*too* pessimistic) view of the society of the 1980s. Advertising has its roots in the allusive language of contemporary art. The mental trigger caused by placing side by side realities of differing natures surprised the avant-garde at the beginning of the century. From 1912, Braque and Picasso were captivated by the new associative potentialities provided by the practice of collage (fabrics, newspaper clippings, product packaging, cut-out photographs, and so on). These practices developed alongside surrealism and pop art. Advertising found in this form of communication, which avoids any rational explanation, a perfect language for selling their products.

NEO-BAROQUES ALL THE SAME ?

With *Diva*, something changes in the manner of considering art within French commercial cinema. Unlike Epstein (impressionism) or Godard (New Wave), Beineix is not looking to establish a school or make a date with History. He knew that the eighties would not produce any innovative language. The works of this decade would be created with material borrowed from all periods of history, *matériaux recyclés* [recycled material], a feature of what has sometimes been called « postmodernism. » Diagnosing this state of mind, Scarpetta updated the notion of the « museum of the imagination » dear to Malraux²⁶ : « a meta-historicity, an art world that has become autonomous, where forms can respond to and provoke each other independently of any linear, positivist, narrowly chronological “art history”... allows access to a perceptual universe (and not only intellectual) where, exactly as in the books of Malraux, the “Nachi Waterfall” in the Nezu museum in Tokyo²⁷ can be confronted with Cézanne’s “Lac d’Annecy”... or some voodoo statue from Dahomey²⁸ with Picasso’s “Little girl jumping rope.” It is up to each painter, of

²⁵ (7) In « L’artifice », by Guy Scarpetta (Grasset, 1988), p. 126. Among numerous contemporary articles also dealing with the resurgence of the baroque : « Le banquet des anges », Dominique Fernandez (Plon) ; « La folie du voir », Christine Buci-Glucksmann (Galilée) ; « Barroco », Severa Sarduy (Seuil).

²⁶ Malraux is a famous French author. He was an art historian as well as a novelist. One of his most famous books is called the “Museum of the imagination.”

²⁷ Malraux spent a lot of time in Asia. Nezu Museum is a private art museum in Tokyo, perhaps similar to the Guggenheim in New York, that holds a 14th-century painting of the Nachi Waterfall in Japan. Malraux wrote about that painting.

²⁸ Dahomey was a kingdom in West Africa from the 17th century until 1904, located in the country that is today called Benin. The word “voodoo” is a derogatory westernization of the Vodun religion that stretches from Ghana, through Togo and Benin into Nigeria. France has an unsavory relationship with the Kingdom of Dahomey. Dahomey actually thrived during the Atlantic slave trade, becoming a major supplier of slaves to Europeans, and only began to decline in the 1840s when Britain began to pressure it to abolish the slave trade (even imposing a naval blockade against the kingdom). In 1894 they lost a war with France, becoming a French colony in 1904. They gained their independence in 1958 as the Republic of Dahomey, and changed

course, to each artist, to invent *her* own unique solution, in response to this unprecedented perceptual situation. But what is certain is that it is no longer possible to have nostalgia for a “virgin” eye, for a gaze that would not have registered, even unconsciously, the visual disturbance introduced by all this (8).²⁹ »

I now come to the question of the « neo-baroque » which is, I repeat, just a working hypothesis. It is a « convenient » definition of the work of the three filmmakers, but it is not without foundation, as one might have suspected by now. The « Petit Larousse »³⁰ gives, in the 1989 edition, the following definition of the word *baroque* (which comes from the Portuguese *barroco*, which means « an irregular pearl ») : « In art, the baroque wants to astonish, to touch the senses, to dazzle, and achieves this through effects of movement and contrasts of light and dark, of tense and upset forms to suggest the bursting of perspectives playing with trompe-l’œil ; architecture, sculpture, painting tend to merge into the unity of a sort of spectacle whose scintillating dynamism conveys exaltation. »

This new version of the spectacle « neo-baroque » (since reference to « baroque » is, historically, dated) that we find, to varying degrees, with our three « stylists », is made up of more or less similar ingredients. The symbiosis is perfect with *Diva* (9)³¹ : the narrative and the form are well-balanced. A decorative overload dominates *La lune dans le caniveau*. But, as this film is designed to express sadness, loss, neurosis, its « anti-narrative » quality is not really troublesome. *37°2 le matin* is guided by the demands of the screenplay. The visionary force of the filmmaker is concentrated at the beginning, when Betty and Zorg make their own surroundings unrealistic by painting the façades with aggressive colors. Beineix’s subject matter comes from pre-existing novels (Delacorta, Goodis, Djian), Besson draws his inspiration from popular literary or graphic (B.D.) genres : science-fiction, adventures... Carax develops his universe from a solid cinematic culture. *Le dernier combat* achieves a certain balance in the denuding of the environment. The baroque style is attenuated and comes from the filming (contrasted black and white) and framing that magnifies the most basic sets.. *Subway* is Besson’s true exercise in baroque style. Always situated in the ephemeral, the film rewards a second viewing. The « strangeness » of *Grand bleu* comes from the underwater depths themselves, which we are not used to seeing on screen. The baroque style of Besson is probably the least « thought out » of the three. The most « theoretical » is, undoubtedly, that of Leos Carax. Everything he « steals » from his elders (Godard, Garrel, Cocteau, Dreyer...) he *recycles* into the shape of his own universe. His films fit well with the definition of « irregular pearls ». What holds all this together ? The desire to tell, through situations and characters encountered in other films, his *autobiography*. This differentiates him from Beineix and Besson. Maybe Jules (*Diva*) is a distant alter ego of the filmmaker, and Mayol (*Le grand bleu*) has more than a little in common with Besson, but these characters are too romanticized to be truly autobiographical. Alex, the name of the main protagonist in *Boy meets girl* and *Mauvais*

their name to Benin in 1975. Vodun artwork and statues are associated with the Vodun religion. There is a remarkable resemblance between Picasso’s statue “Little girl jumping rope” and some Vodun statues.

²⁹ (8) Op. cit. page 97.

³⁰ Larousse is the authoritative French dictionary, like Oxford in English, or Merriam-Webster. “Petite” does not mean it’s a small dictionary. It means it’s smaller than the full-size version. The full-size Larousse is fifteen volumes of 1,000 pages each. The Petit Larousse is small at only 2,000 pages.

³¹ (9) The best film of the lot along with *Mauvais sang*. I admit it here, since this article is mainly aimed at analyzing the method of operation of these products, independently of their intrinsic qualities.

sang, played each time by Denis Lavant, is really a « double » of Carax (whose real name is Alex Dupont). Here, then, it is a question of baroque citation : each film refers to an experience of the real-life Carax who was living through various personal existential crises at the time he saw the films his movies allude to.

What will become of these filmmakers at the dawn of the nineties ? Naturalism is again gaining ground. With his movie *Deux*, Zidi reconciles advertising and its message : Paris is a beautiful city, and all love, even frustrated, can flourish there. A nice apartment on the Place du Trocadéro has nothing but rounded corners. Gone are the sordid lofts decorated with posters, the marginal, desperate young people, the difficulty of loving in a society without ideals. In nine months (January 1990), everything will be steeped in an idyllic dream. Is it possible Jean-Jacques, Luc, and Leos will give in to this appeal of « everyone is beautiful, everyone is nice » ? Let's hope not. Let's meet again in ten years. We will see then how the new decade will have affected our (ex) young filmmakers. R.B.³²

³² Translated by Gregory Berry.