

DOUBLE EXPOSURE

Columbia University's undergraduate film journal

At the cinema, we do not think. We are thought. Jean-Luc Godard
Why think when you can just watch a cool movie? Alex C. Garnick

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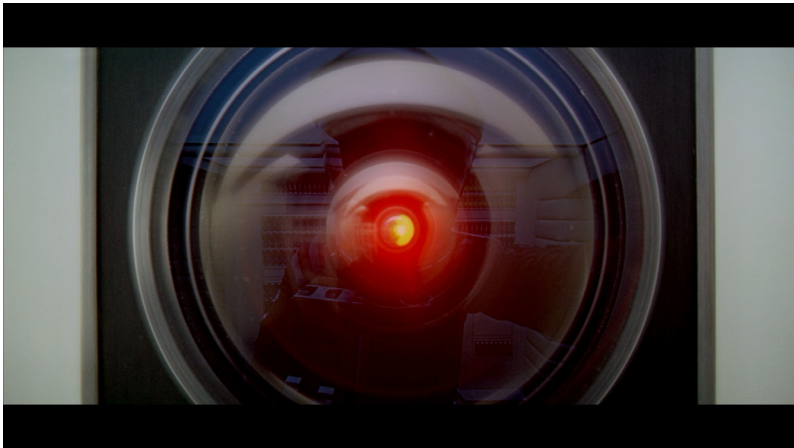
SPECIAL THANKS to **SOPHIE KOVEL & KATY NELSON**

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2001: A Space Odyssey

d. Stanley Kubrick



by GLYNNIS ELDRIDGE

WHEN MY FATHER WAS TEN, his father took him to see *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It was the summer before my grandfather died of a heart attack from eating too much dairy or dessert, or from taking too many variants of speed, or from sampling too many of the drugs he had been prescribing to his patients. When my dad took me and my younger brother to see the film, I was afraid it was an indication that my dad might soon die too, and that by taking us to this movie he was sealing his fate and he knew it. He held a camera in front of us throughout the film, taking pictures of us together as we watched what he called “certain future” unfold. I was scared. I saw this act as his own memorializing. In each photograph, my brother appears terrified, covering his face, and mirroring Dad who moves farther out of frame with each image, by moving farther out of focus and deeper into his seat. I appear numbed in these pictures, eyes diverging, red-nosed and stunned. It was the summer of 2001. It was the summer before we knew anything.

The first time I saw *2001: A Space Odyssey* was before I could name any of my traumas. I had been exposed to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* by then, hospital rooms and twice daily steroid injections, my parents splitting, my dad moving out, my dad moving back in and then out again, and police appearing in our living room, the death of a beloved pet frog by decapitation, the death of a hamster, stapling my thumbs together, witnessing a seizure from afar, witnessing a bombing from afar, and plenty worse, but nothing, not even the impending collapse of skyscrapers across the street from the then affordable housing complex I grew up in could have prepared me for the trauma

of time itself in the way *2001* presented it. “Y2K” (or, the year 2000) was introduced to me as my dad’s worst nightmare; the shift from 1999 to 2000 was going to be incomprehensible to the computers he and his peers had become so devoted to. It would be the end of something. It would be the end of a blipped era, and their fear would come to affect every lucid person within at least two degrees of separation from any computer nerd. To welcome in the year 2000, I was allowed to apply my own eyeshadow and wear a costume piece my mom had made when she still worked in theater. We went to a New Year’s party, a kid-friendly masquerade ball in the winter garden, an enormous glass room at the feet of the Twin Towers where a stage had been built before rows of green metal benches and towering palm trees. At midnight I was audibly nervous, shrieking to myself with hands over my ears to drown out explosion sounds I somehow expected to meet in the last moments of the ten second countdown away from the year 1999. But nothing happened. But I remember the fear.

Pre-9/11, the scariest thing I ever did see was the glass of water falling off a table and shattering; the camera meeting it on the floor, then settling back in on the face of a man who had suddenly aged a lifetime. All other moments paled in comparison (though the recurring monolith came close); it was the closest I had ever come to fainting. I saw this movie in a theater that sat 2,000 in Times Square, in the year of its namesake. My dad brought me and my brother to see it, insisting that what we were about to see was indeed the future, with little other preface. I was excited. I loved science then. I was dedicated, body and brain, to *Bill Nye: The Science Guy*, and Martin and Kris Kratt (of *Zoboomafoo*

/ The Kratt Brothers / Wild Kratts), and aspired to name and identify every creature I met. When the movie opened I thought *amazing*, peering at the apes, preparing for a feature-length work that would follow the behavior of our ancestors.

My brother tells me he remembers the music scaring him the most. The chorus whirring, a sharp howling sound announcing the arrival of something unnatural: the future, ours. A monolith. But, aliens? Now I claw through my digital archive, trying to find some unlikely saved snapchat clip I made two years back, in my second semester at Columbia, filming the film while watching it for the second time ever. I watched it with the lights on. To dull the gentle terror, I drew on the screen in bright colors with my finger, adding text to illustrate babbled emotion. In efforts to recall the recorded encounter with a once future, I get lost remembering two moments I cannot say with certainty ever existed. I move farther away from any distinction between lived experiences and dreams.

I cannot remember the name of any of the characters except HAL, who I do not want to remember, but who I am reminded of every day. My roommate has a 2018 HAL: Alexa, and so does my brother, and so does my boyfriend's brother. My dad talks to his cellphone, chirps *OK GOOGLE* to get directions and answers to trivia questions, to fill gaps in conversation. He carries his phone with him at all times, asks it everything. He trusts it. He trusts his phone more than I trust him.

I'm talking to Siri, and Siri gets defensive. I want to ask Siri about their ideology. I want Siri to tell me my future. Siri tries to tell me a joke. I say *come on Siri, tell me the*

truth, and Siri says *I'm just doing my job* and evades what I mean.

I type "*2001: a space odyssey* final scene" into a YouTube search and I am unable to watch the scene from start to finish. I pause the video and stare. I notice the skin on the face of this character, whose name I can't remember, is not aged in the same kind of way I have known aged skin to look. This character's aging seems to end with his face. His neck remains young. The skin on his cheeks is baggy, loose, droopy. His nose is still perky. He has lost all of his hair. He is wearing all white. He is lying down in a set of emerald green sheets and there is absolutely no sound. Even in the library, with people I know sitting beside me, the gentle terror seeps in again. This is the feeling of a horror I can sort of coast, keep down like waves of orgasm. But again I am scared. The fear hits me in the brain like I feel what is maybe an irrational fear of telepathy with extraterrestrials, in the same way I am scared of being walked in on while shitting, in the same way I am afraid of forgetting how to spell and having computers take over. I hit play again. The character raises his right arm. The silence is hitting me in the pelvis and the back of the neck. I don't want to know what is going to happen. I don't want this future. I already know the ending. I don't want to know it again.

He has dropped his arm, and the shot is wide and the whole room is white and olive green and here is the monolith now, centered by the framing, staring down this character. He is old, but he is not so old. He is as old as he thinks he is. I am older than I think I am but I will never be that imagined age again. I will always be younger than Beyonce, always older than my boyfriend, always ten years old when

I watched this movie and saw the Twin Towers collapsing the first time.

The future arrives at the foot of our bed, staring us down, blurring the line between lived and dreamt. The future—the monolith—exists rectangular, flat from head on, flat like a paranoid existence, flat and rectangular like the surface of smartphones, like the bodies that contain Siri, and OK Google. Alexa now exists spherically, stands loud and stoutly on my roommate's bedside table, staring him down as well.

I am shivering in the silence of the protagonist pointing at the monolith from bed. I want to explore the room he is in. I want to open the closets, smell his sheets, adjust the lights, name the shade of purple coming up from the floor and in from the other room to the character's left. What is so scary about a grey rectangle? I can't say. I can't fucking say. I carry one with me all the time and I would very much like not to. I shiver again remembering I used my own grey rectangle to distract me from the pointed fear I felt when watching this film that second time. This third time, I peer down at my grey rectangle beside me. It is cracking, letting in other shades of lighter grey. I feel some sympathy for it. I feel so devoted to it. I feel myself reflected by it. I wish to heal it so it might heal me.

The character is last seen elderly or something like it, pointing to the monolith. We enter his perspective, peer at the monolith from bed ourselves, look back at ourselves and shiver, cold. He has become a glowing orb, a far developed fetus, still curled around his body, still encased in his glowing circular sac. I watch the end of the movie as the music plays out, letting fear go through shivers let loose, goose bumps that

roll off of other goosebumps. The fetus is the moon? The fetus is an alien? The moon is an alien? The past is the future? The fetus has huge, open eyes. I remember this scene made me cry. I think I remember crying then because I knew the brass would be louder than snuffle sounds. I would rather you didn't know this upset me, I would rather you didn't know the future freaks me out, I would rather watch a movie about monkeys, not apes.

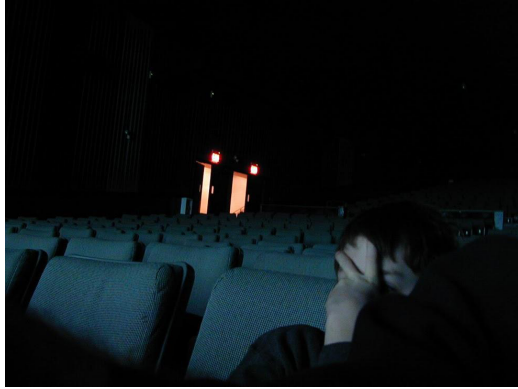
As I write this, I receive four individual emails from my dad. He has received word of this project, wishes to fill in the gaps. He has sent a link to one of his many google photo albums, one which locates us in the movie theater. I revise my introduction to detail our reactions to the film. But I must change this essay further, must make note that the camera used to document the moment dated the day we saw *2001* as January 3, 2002. But I remember this day vividly; I remember the city was hot when we saw the future. I remember the World Trade Center was still upright. I retrace my mind, unsure whether I should trust myself or the computer that identifies and dates the images. I could rewrite this essay. I could google the thought: *how often is google wrong about date and time? Or, how often is google wrong?*

But what would HAL say? Alexa?
Why do I care?

I have to fact check everything against the internet, because I have been taught it is my mind that is more often wrong than the web. So, reader, who knows when I saw the future. Maybe I wasn't so scared.

Dad also sends a link to the screenplay. I stop reading after the apes. ♦





Saute Ma Ville

d. Chantal Akerman



by ADINA GLICKSTEIN

IN FEBRUARY OF 1968, HENRI Langlois's ousting from the Paris Cinémathèque incited the first in a wave of protests that would change European film culture. Citing Langlois's administrative failures, the French government forcibly intervened in the independent Cinémathèque, demanding that Langlois step down from his position as director. Public demonstrations gathered to demand Langlois's reinstatement, eventually joined by the likes of Roland Barthes and Jean-Luc Godard. Finally, after weeks of protest, Langlois resumed his post as a tentative compromise was struck—but the momentum that built within the film world as directors and cinephiles alike joined in protest was far from dead. Scarcely a month later, another wave of protests began at the University of Nanterre, spreading to the Sorbonne, and resulting in violent clashes between students and police. Film technicians and auto workers alike joined students' unions in protest, calling for a national revolutionary project: from greater sexual liberation to ending the war in Vietnam, the values that have come to be central on the Left were articulated forcefully throughout the streets of Paris, and concurrently echoed across the world.

The same year, an 18-year-old Chantal Akerman would complete her first and only year of film school at the Institut National Supérieur des Arts du Spectacle et des Techniques de Diffusion in Belgium. While no official accounts confirm her participation in the widespread student protests of that year, Akerman's first film, *Saute ma ville* (*Blow Up My Town*), serves as an unofficial document of her dedication

to the cause. The 12-minute short features Akerman as a young woman attached to her home as if by magnetic force. The film opens with a sweeping pan onto a high-rise building, which a humming Akerman bursts into with enthusiastic urgency. As she makes her way upstairs, she seems machine-like. Her continued humming is audible from behind the elevator's closed doors, as though her body were itself a part of the mechanical process. Taped to the back of her front door—which she will soon emphatically bust through—is a cartoon of a Smurf, captioned "GO HOME," a mission that the protagonist is apparently eager to complete.

Successfully having made it indoors, the protagonist begins to boil water for pasta. To a contemporary viewer familiar with Akerman's work, this gesture recalls her three-hour magnum opus, *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai de Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*—a tome that tracks its protagonist's diligent housework, from cooking to cleaning. However, the similarity to *Jeanne Dielman* quickly reverses as it becomes clear that the younger Akerman is, in fact, engaged in a sort of *reverse* housework. First, she tapes her door shut, sealing off any contact to the outside world—an intensification of her entrapment within the domestic space, that will soon become the site of her protest. She sits down for a meal, abandoning her pasta after a few bites, moving her plate to the floor. Soon an assemblage of pots, pans, and kitchen gadgets joins it as the protagonist pushes them around in an ineffective attempt at mopping.

She soon extends this un-cleaning

to her body: sitting on the floor, she dirties her legs with shoe-shine, suggesting the inextricability of the feminine body and the domestic space. In the half-century since May '68, the notion that "the personal is political" has become an aphorism bordering on overuse. But might there still, even fifty years out, be something to gain from Akerman's cinematic foray into the politics of the personal? Better yet, can we challenge the very notion that the film, for all its emphasis on the domestic space and inner struggle of one young woman, is "personal" at all? The domestic space has long had an association with the personal: the nuanced intimacies of daily existence, perhaps the most "personal" features of life, take place within the interior space. The kitchen is so laden with symbolic weight in discourses on women's liberation that to point out its relationship to the cult of domesticity and female subjugation feels nearly too obvious—but it is precisely this apparent obviousness that obscures the kitchen's importance *as a site of labor*.

While the protests of '68 were primarily concerned with a masculinized, workerist conception of labor, *Saute ma ville* centers on the forms of work that, too often, evade recognition and compensation. The young woman's kitchen destruction spree constitutes a refusal to carry out the unpaid domestic work that, for centuries, has primarily been assigned to women; in a sense, her actions could be read as a symbolic strike, an analogue to the contemporaneous student strikes but relocated within the domestic space. Thirty years before Michael Hardt coined the term

"affective labor" to describe work that relies on the production of affect and sensation—a type of labor that, from the service industry to more informal care work, has historically been carried out predominately by women—Akerman makes clear what a significant subset of the population has known since the invention of the domus: that the forms of work performed within the home are equally deserving of the status of "labor."

The realities of domestic labor would be heavily foregrounded in 1975's *Jeanne Dielman*—but *Saute ma ville* approaches them with a playful aggression energized by teen angst. While the titular Jeanne, a middle-aged widow, is already resigned to a lifetime of domestic work, the 18-year-old Akerman of *Saute ma ville* points towards the possibility of escape. As the short film progresses, she becomes increasingly unhinged, her already erratic humming growing louder and more urgent. The film's eventual ending, foreshadowed by its title, is catalyzed as the protagonist looks at her reflection in the mirror, moisturizing her face with hysterical intensity. The culminating gesture of her reverse-housework builds on the connection between the protagonist's home and her body: she is driven to revolt by the realization that, confined within her kitchen, her physical being might as well be another appliance. If *Jeanne Dielman's* famous ending constitutes an insurrection against the patriarchy on the level of interpersonal interaction, *Saute ma ville's* explosive finish expands this gesture: the entire diegetic world, along with its oppressive social orders, is eviscerated, cutting to black. ♦



The Adventures of Horus, Prince of the Sun

d. Isao Takahata



by SAM FENTRESS

FIRST FEATURES CAN BE RADICAL triumphs or embarrassing mistakes. Directors with long filmographies—even ones who debuted to roaring applause—tend to look back on early attempts as limited. They didn't quite know yet how to place the camera or talk to actors; their editing was rushed, their schedule overambitious.

In contemporary cinema, first features are rarely well-funded, which means they can provide an early form of a director's vision and, additionally, a sense of how that director would operate under financial duress. The recent American canon is rife with examples from Wes Anderson's *Bottle Rocket* to Soderbergh's *sex, lies, and videotape*. Both films can be understood as seeds for later films in their director's catalogue, but also as important examples of those filmmakers working under a specific kind of pressure.

Applied to *Horus, Prince of the Sun*, the first film of the late Isao Takahata, this auteurist notion of style works remarkably well in some respects and falls demonstrably short in others. *Horus* is, in both visual style and narrative content, the precursor to nearly every Studio Ghibli film. Beyond surface-level similarities (and there are countless, starting with *Horus* himself, a kind of proto-character for *Princess Mononoke*), *Horus* is the first full realization of what we might call *ghibligeki*. Its first words on folk culture, landscape, and female agency become full statements in films like *Nausicaä* and *Only Yesterday*. Still, the "director-driven" attitude fails to acknowledge two things: first, that Takahata himself

was not an animator, and second, that feature animation demands an even more dynamically collaborative process than live-action filmmaking.

The year is 1965. *Horus* will exceed, as many of Takahata's films did, its anticipated budget and schedule, not landing in theaters until 1968. The young Takahata has been given his first feature at Toei Doga. His crew includes a handful of character designers, colorists, and "in-betweeners" who will go on to form the ranks of Studio Ghibli. It also includes a key animator named Miyazaki Hayao, who will later reflect with ambiguity on the production: "I don't really remember it well. I was never given orders by the company, nor was I ever acknowledged, but somehow I ended up there."

Among the crew are a handful of women, still at this time a rare occurrence for animated films in Japan. One is Okuyama Reiko, who will go on to animate several Takahata films and help him realize the profound vision of *Grave of the Fireflies*. Reiko had worked, several years before, as an in-betweener (an artist who supports the animators by drawing the images between key frames) on a film called *The Tale of the White Serpent*, a film Miyazaki cites as his first great influence. In the year that production begins on *Horus*, Miyazaki marries another of *White Serpent's* key animators, the promising Akemi Ōta. Together, Ōta and Miyazaki support Takahata's fantastic vision of nature, culture, and adventure that will eventually outlive him.

Besides the frightfully animated

climax I'll discuss momentarily, *Horus's* most surprising feature is its narrative direction. The film opens with the death of Horus's father, a man who rather arbitrarily appears much older than we would expect of the father of a child Horus's age. It is something like watching Yoda and Anakin Skywalker die in one person; this character is both mentor and patriarch, and although it remains unclear what he has done for Horus prior to this opening, it seems that it is probably a great deal.

This ambiguity is characteristic of *Horus*, which feels upon second viewing both unfinished and cut down. Despite an astounding range of color and motion, several action scenes consist merely of camera pans across static images (basically a compilation of key frames). This incompleteness carries over to the narrative which begins as a kind of made-for-TV-monomyth and becomes an increasingly fragmented subversion of that worn out structure. Our initial center—the male adventure plot—loses its

heft upon the introduction of an inscrutable princess, Hilda, whose psychic uncertainty becomes the animating current of the film. Unlike Mr. Disney, Takahata does not insist we “like” or even “understand” Hilda as audience members; the film insists that we accept her complexity.

Viewers can see hints of this tilt in later works by both Miyazaki and Takahata, and Takahata's final film *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* can be read as a kind of return to his first outing. *Kaguya* depicts a woman rejecting wholeheartedly the chains of domestic existence. *Horus* is less graceful, more crude, but Hilda manages to get the same point across, berating the villagers who insist she find a man: “I have better things to do than sewing!”

Horus' penultimate scene is an early display of brilliance. Much more than Miyazaki's, Takahata's films concern the interior, and his great skill is externalizing emotional experience. That *Horus* is generally an action film, and certainly a film



for a younger audience, makes this rich visual interiority all the more delightful and surprising.

As in other Ghibli films, the narrative climax is a stylistic climax, and the height of emotional tension actually comes before the final battle when Horus is navigating Hilda's many selves. She alone has the power to save the male hero from ruin, and her singing—her unique gift, a specifically gendered power—is the weapon of defeat. Hilda's darker side, her guilt-ridden superego bound to the authority of her demonic older brother, pushes Horus into the Forest of Doubt, a kind of imagistic unconscious. The ease of Takahata's imagination takes hold; we move from bare-branched forests to charging waves, translucent landscapes cast over and around Horus's factual body; he sees many Hildas, all posing in different manners; he sees his grandfather, sailing away on a giant boat. The moment of *anagnorisis*, of recognition, is abstract. He hears her voice: "Divided...divided..." For Horus to escape, to "understand,"

he must acknowledge the possibility of a complex female consciousness, to make way for dividedness, for ambivalence. He must, in other words, literally *realize* a contradictory (and therefore irreducible) female character, one who exists for her own sake.

Takahata was sometimes characterized as the lazier of the two Ghibli directors, though he often pushed his animators far beyond their limits. He certainly was slower than Miyazaki, lovingly called "Pakusan" by his coworkers because he would arrive each morning "barely on time, drinking tap water, and wolfing down bread" (per Miyazaki). But few directors would risk their career—and Takahata paid for this—to spend three years making a film supposed to take eight months, especially one that would not necessarily go to make them look good. Takahata made *animation* look good; he could draw as he thought. This, I think he knew then and when he passed, was his gift. ♦







COLLAGE BY MILES EMANUEL

Stolen Kisses

d. François Truffaut



by MATTHEW RIVERA

LONG AFTER FIRST SEEING François Truffaut's *Stolen Kisses*, the second of two films he released in 1968, the song that plays under the opening titles and reappears throughout the movie lingers in my mind: *Que reste-t-il de nos amours?* Featuring the syrupy, seductive voice of French crooner Charles Trenet, and the fade quality of a recording from the early 1940s that only gets hazier over time, "What Remains of Our Love?" directs our ears to the past while our eyes see the stark present of 1968. Out of the difference we must ask just what Trenet asks: "what remains?"

**Que reste-t-il de nos amours?
Que reste-t-il de ces beaux jours?
Une photo, vieille photo
De ma jeuneuse**

*What remains of our love?
What remains of those beautiful
days?
A photo, an old photo
Of my youth*

The circumstances in which we see *Stolen Kisses* tarnishes this photo of youth. The film is meant to age. Its muted colors, its pensive tone, its images of a dying Paris become increasingly resonant with each fading year and each fading memory. Every time the song reappears in the film, echoes from the past ring out in bitter undertones of loss and uncertainty. The lyrics tell of a scorned lover who wonders not just what has happened to his love, but why their love has ended.

**Que reste-t-il des billets doux
Des mois d'avril, des rendez-vous
Un souvenir qui me poursuit
Sans cesse**

*What remains of tickets for two
Of April months, of rendez-vous
A memory that follows me
Ceaselessly*

All the gushing pride and heartfelt idealism of the film can hardly cover the scorn for a world that has changed faster than Truffaut's beloved hero Antoine Doinel in the nine years since *The 400 Blows* and six since the short *Antoine and Colette*. We see a postcard image of the Eiffel Tower peeking out triumphantly against spring clouds and at first Trenet's ballad seems to be an anthem to the Paris of Ernst Lubitsch or René Clair. Then the camera pans down to the barred gate of the old Cinémathèque Française and on fades a superimposed title card dedicating the film to Henri Langlois, the Cinémathèque's recently-ousted founder and mentor to the filmmakers of the New Wave. The song now obtains its more resonant meaning; the ode to love becomes a lamentation of love betrayed.

**Bonheur fané, cheveux au vent
Baisers volés, rêves mouvants
Que reste-t-il de tout cela?
Dites-le-moi**

*Happiness faded, hair to the wind
Stolen kisses, moving dreams
What remains of all that?
Tell me*



Historians and film scholars alike have given the story of the Cinémathèque's dismissal of Langlois in March of 1968 and the protest that ensued its due attention. Some connect those events to the larger and more violent student uprising in May of that tumultuous year. Released in the fall of '68, Truffaut's film seems surprisingly muted in its response to all that had happened in the spring. His dedication hardly has the fervent passion that one would expect. But instead the film feels like a naive question from a forsaken lover. Rather than demand a change as his New Wave comrades had and would continue to in the coming years, Truffaut begs for answers. *What's happened to us?* he asks. Against a background of turmoil, of course Truffaut turned to his old alter-ego Antoine Doinel.

At the beginning of the film, the free-spirited Doinel is, like the Cinémathèque, behind bars. He has enlisted in the military but gets a dishonorable discharge after

going AWOL at a number of posts. Doinel is no revolutionary—no more directed in his rebelliousness than he ever has been. His joining the military signifies an unassuming carelessness rather than a strategic stance. When an officer takes Doinel into his office to sign his dismissal forms he asks why Doinel joined in the first place. "Because of some girl, no doubt," the officer guesses correctly. His next quip is biting, if accidentally, insightful: "You're like a dog who goes everywhere but where it's told."

Getting a job as a detective, Doinel goes many places in *Stolen Kisses*, and much of what he sees makes us think about what has and hasn't changed. Watching *Stolen Kisses*, one is always aware of the change that is soon to occur. Paris in the spring of 1968, when the film was shot, is peaceful, defiantly old-fashioned, moving as carefree of danger as a target in the crosshairs. The Cinémathèque is at its old location near the center of Paris instead of at its current fortress-like

complex on the outskirts. Most of the film takes place on the more conservative right bank, leaving the student protests on the Sorbonne's left bank out of sight but not out of the collective consciousness. The white domes of Sacré-Cœur loom over Doinel's humble one room apartment and the area around it is deserted, an image foreign to those familiar with the swathes of tourists and spiked rents that plague the area now. Not present are the huge housing complexes that today rest around the city's limits, or the populations of immigrants of all nationalities concentrated there. What has gone and what has come makes the film's theme music chillingly prophetic.

**Un petit village, un vieux clocher
Un paysage si bien caché**

*A small village, an old tower
A landscape so well hidden*

Stolen Kisses has a strange tone of ironic stoicism, a feeling of ambivalence towards the future. The film moves through characters like geographic topographies. The same officer who dismisses Doinel makes an extended analogy between disarming a bomb and "undressing a woman." An acquaintance of Doinel's who turns out to be an unemployed writer greets him on the street after rummaging through a trash can. A prostitute demands more money from Doinel to take off her clothes, and more to touch her hair. The parents of Doinel's love interest adopt Doinel into their bourgeois family long before

Christine forgives him for leaving her. A man in a trench coat who might be a detective himself follows Christine around for the entire film until in its last moments he reveals himself to be an obsessive aristocratic suitor who doesn't work and has "no obligations in life." Truffaut is acutely aware that with change comes loss. So with great change on the horizon, he records Paris with something like an ethnographic attention, seeking to capture everything before it's too late.

**Et dans un nuage le cher visage
De mon passé**

*And in a cloud the dear vision
Of my past*

In a style that anticipates the further developments of Godard's *cinéma politique*, compositions are flat, light is directionless, color is muted, and the camera seems to interrogate the characters into direct discourse. But answers are scant; uncertainty still riddles the film 50 years later. Much of what it depicts is gone, but what remains is Antoine Doinel, a character whose confusion and buoyancy are timeless. Nothing is predetermined for Doinel, and so through him we can better see what is and what has been. If any tone is prominent in his '68, it's neither a radical nor a conservative one, but the feeling that complicated things change while simple things stay the same. Doinel, like Truffaut, finds resonance in simple things, leaving the complicated ones to be worked out by someone else. ♦

Je t'aime, je t'aime

d. Alain Resnais



by ETAN WEISFOGEL

THE IDEA OF ALAIN RESNAIS' *JE t'aime, je t'aime*, from a script by novelist Jacques Sternberg, is simple: scientists have created a time travel device that operates using the memories of its participant. They pick up Claude, who has just been released from hospital after a failed suicide attempt, and ask him to be their first human test subject. He is asked to focus on a specific, very strong memory and go back in time for exactly one minute before returning to the present. However, the strength of his memories, focused on his relationship with his last girlfriend, proves too much, and he becomes stuck in time.

In most imaginings of time travel, the character or characters going back in time have an awareness of their position as time travelers and an agency to change the events of the past. Here, the time travel scenes function more like flashbacks or memories. Claude never registers his predicament and no matter how many times the film returns to a scene, Claude's behavior/actions remain the same.

One might ask the question: why include the sci-fi premise at all? The idea here is essentially to chart the disintegration of a couple non-linearly, piecing together a narrative from randomly arranged moments throughout the relationship, almost like a free-form collage of a breakup. This effect could certainly be achieved without the 20-minute opening setup or the brief cutaways throughout the rest of the film to the scientists attempting to extract Claude from the device. Allow me to offer up a few perspectives on how these seemingly non-essential parts of the film function within the context of the work and within the context of Resnais' work more broadly.

The film opens rather nondescriptly in a hospital where one of the scientists

is shown being led by a doctor to the room where Claude lies unconscious following his suicide attempt. The camera is positioned at one end of a corridor, while the doctor and the scientist are positioned at the other end. They open the door to Claude's room, and there's a brief but jarring cut to a close-up of Claude before a cut back to the same wide shot of doctor and scientist at the end of the long corridor. The understated subversion of traditional film form might not immediately register to the viewer, but the withholding of the conventional reverse shot that would establish an eyeline match between the scientist's gaze and Claude's dormant body has two effects. First, it aligns our sympathies with Claude—we identify with him because we can literally identify him, in opposition to the distant figures of the doctor and scientist—while simultaneously positioning him as an object to be inspected. Second, it subtly disorients and discomfits the viewer, continuing an effect initially established by Krzysztof Penderecki's eerie score over the minimalist opening credits (simple red text over a black screen), and one continued by the abrupt cutting patterns of the subsequent scene, or really scenes—a sort of montage of the doctor and scientist discussing the logistics of Claude's participation in this experiment in various settings.

Those patterns in and of themselves are not unusual for French cinema of the time; Godard began the decade by creating the jump cut in *Breathless*, while Maurice Pialat, who made his debut in 1968 with his great *L'Enfance Nue*, would soon become associated with the abrupt scene transition, or ellipsis, as a technique. What's unusual here is how they mimic and foreshadow the cutting patterns that will occur once the film enters Claude's



mind, the way a scene will begin, then be interrupted by another scene, then continue or restart, and then jump to another scene. In that sense, Resnais associates the act of editing itself with the process of memory: the association of moments in time filtered through a device that segments, fragments, removes the inessential, and perhaps replays or revisits the essential.

The next sequence, a long car ride that takes Claude from the hospital to the research center, is one of my favorites in the film, displaying Sternberg's knack for sardonic, witty banter. The scene alternates between wide shots of the car, seen from the front, making its way towards the destination and medium shots through the windshield that portray brief back-and-forth interactions between Claude and the scientists. When one tries to reassure Claude that they act in good faith by saying "this is not a kidnapping," Claude responds "there would be no ransom, I have no family." The film mines significant humor from Claude's dramatic displays of despair, his willingness to freely share his complete and utter lack of interest in being

alive to two total strangers, and though that despair will become the subject of the film's ostensibly serious inquiry, there is a sense in which the film gladly, if sympathetically, takes the piss out of the inconsolable lovesick male. If Claude seems certain, even accepting of the fact that his life is over, the film seems to confirm it for him. The whole driving scene is scored to a slow but driving choral piece that sounds ominously like a requiem; in this context, the black car appears like a hearse.

The subsequent expositional scenes at the research center where Claude is informed of his task follow suit from the previous sequences, jumping between a series of tableaux in which Claude and the head scientist talk and exchange quips. The actual function of the time travel device is then presented, and with it new insights into Resnais' approach. The so-called machine appears as a giant brownish mass of clay in the shape of a brain. When Claude lies down inside it, he looks like he is about to take a nap on a beanbag chair. As the film continues, and he becomes more deeply entrenched in his memories, his body begins to disappear within the



bulbous, claylike structure of the device. The metaphor is, in one sense, quite obvious: he is disappearing inside his own brain, being eaten up by his inability to let go of the past. It is, quite literally, killing him.

That the metaphor is obvious does not necessarily preclude that the metaphor might be potent. Indeed, the idea of the man subsumed and destroyed by his memories both justifies the necessity of the sci-fi narrative framework to tell the story of Claude and Catherine's relationship and acts as a powerful examination of Resnais' own obsession with memory. If a work like *Hiroshima Mon Amour* confirms the importance of memory, of keeping history alive, it also shares with *Je T'aime, Je T'aime* an awareness of memory as essentially painful, as a mechanism to make one relive trauma. One might draw a comparison to *Last Year At Marienbad* too, a work where the memory of individuals is not connected to a collective historical or political consciousness, as tends to be the case with Resnais. It might seem surprising that Resnais, among the most politically minded of the French New Wave directors

(perhaps only Marker and Godard surpass him in this regard), chose not to make a film dealing expressly with politics in the year of *Mai '68*. Of course, there are always politics at play in every film portraying social relations between individuals (and even those that don't, the most avant-garde and abstract of films, are engaging with a politics of taste and culture), but *Je T'aime, Je T'aime* is otherwise an intensely insular film, one that literally takes place inside a brain.

Then again, Resnais was always less interested in direct political tracts and more interested in the interaction between personal and political histories. (The next feature he would make, 1974's *Stavisky...*, parallels the rise and fall of a gangster with the exile and death of Leon Trotsky.) In that sense, one can construct a paradigm by which the death of middle-aged, bourgeois Claude, depressed, self-obsessed and stuck in the past, contrasts the rise of a young, inspired, socially conscious class looking towards the future. I would highly doubt such an idea was intentional on Resnais' part, but I bet he'd appreciate the unexpected resonance. ♦

Skidoo

d. Otto Preminger



by HUNTER KOCH

SKIDOO IS NOT A FILM RIPE FOR critical reevaluation. Contrary to what has become an almost standardized response to the forgotten back-catalogues of Hollywood directors both famous and unknown, *Skidoo* is not a hidden gem, not a masterpiece, and not all that *good*. Echoing the sentiments of Jonathan Rosenbaum, whatever merit *Skidoo* lacks as film *qua* film does not preclude a deep fascination with this off-the-wall piece of filmmaking. Perhaps the reason why we at *Double Exposure* sought to include this film in our issue is the sheer absurdity in describing it: a 1968 Otto Preminger film about mob hit-men, Merry Prankster-like roving hippies, and LSD, starring Jackie Gleason, Carol Channing, Mickey Rooney, and an aging Groucho Marx in his last film appearance as a crime boss named "God." So what does this film offer us, other than a bricolage of stars, cultural references, and bright colors?

Maybe nothing. Or, not *nothing*, but seeking a "deep" reading of this film is maybe misguided. Reading not in a hermeneutical sense, but more in terms of our expectation of what a film from 1968 ought to reveal, expose, or give light to in a concrete sense. I would be hard-pressed to put forth a clear enunciation of what this film's "message" is or what it is trying to do. It seems to embrace drug culture without idealizing it, question power hierarchies without entirely abrogating them, and employ contrasting styles without resolving into a secretly subversive political film. For instance, Jackie Gleason drops acid and loses his ego, but only to avoid having to carry out one last assassination and to save his family from mob retaliation. On one hand, you have the stability of the nuclear family and resolution of sexual

anxiety (Gleason's character fears he is not the true father of his only daughter), yet on the other a routine embrace of "free-love" and the non-normative community of the film's hippie cohort. Neither wins out and takes on univocal preeminence. These styles and tropes just seem to *exist*, not in paltry liberal pluralism, but in a strange constellation of disparate parts that seem to do something other than form a nice, coherent film.

I think that may be the best descriptor for this film and for our intrigue: constellation. Back to Jonathan Rosenbaum, one of the few critics who finds similar interest in this strange work. Rosenbaum disagrees with the characterization of *Skidoo* as "contradictory," instead advocating for "dialectical." At the risk of this essay devolving into a debate over which single adjective describes *Skidoo* best, I wonder if "contradictory" and "dialectical" push too far against my interest in this film. Those words imply a sort of political tension that the film advocates for or wrestles with. But I want to stay with this surface reading and instead put forth "constellation" as a different way of understanding this film.

Skidoo is a film that is all surface, functioning on the level of the immediate. The acid trips are less consciousness-expanding experiences than a tapestry of color and cute sight gags; the hippies are not revolutionaries, but cosmically-painted jokesters poking fun at the banality of civil life, their run-ins with the police a series of snarky quips that never lead to violence. But in less psychedelic territory, *Skidoo* is replete with quick, immediate montage. The intro scene in particular is an exercise in the montage of the electronic-age. Before any character is seen, the first



two-and-a-half minutes feature a close-up of a TV while someone channel surfs. We see a flurry of images, among them: clips from Otto Preminger's 1965 film *In Harm's Way* (which Channing's character doesn't want to watch, "I don't like films on TV, they always cut them to pieces"), fake advertisements for something called "Fat Cola," a beer commercial featuring a German man and a pig, a commercial with two children and a dog advertising cigarettes (yes, they are smoking), and guns ("Remember, for family fun, get your gun!"). It's a flurry of one-liners and weird sight gags, a disorienting sequence that is just as funny as the LSD sequences (more on that in a moment). The cast, too, is a hodgepodge that does not really align with any expectation. TV stars abound; Jackie Gleason obviously, but Burgess Meredith and Frank Gorschin are here; Hollywood stars past prime, like Groucho Marx and Mickey Rooney; and even Carol Channing, a theater star more than anything at this point. There are no sex-symbols or teen idols (Frankie Avalon maybe, but he seems a bit square); instead it's old TV stars and actors thrown into a free-love hippie extravaganza. This incongruity is a casting parallel to the intro montage, a point onto which TV stars, old Hollywood, and the stage take up equal space in a film produced on the cusp of New Hollywood.

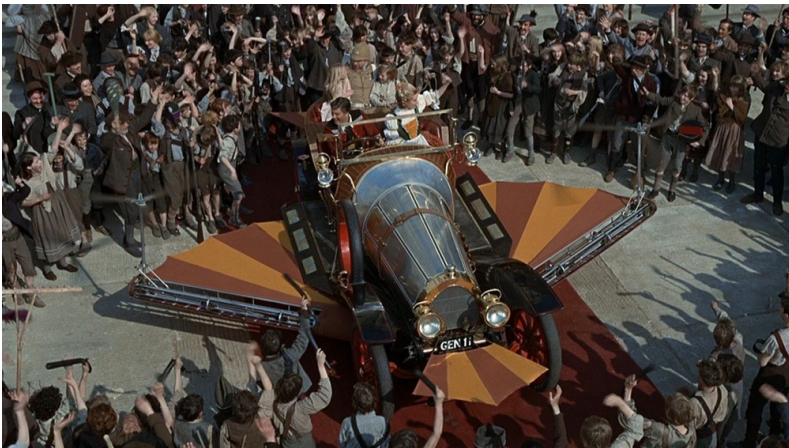
Maybe all this madness means something. Maybe there's some political statement here. Maybe Otto Preminger really wished to be a hippie, or is commenting on Hollywood's death. I'm not sure, and I'm not sure I want to even consider that. Like I said, maybe a film like this one is best thought of as a constellation of parts, of images and surfaces that form some idea about its historical moment. Not a concrete idea,

not a mere "reflection" of the moment. Maybe instead, a movie like this one creates a space for us to just feel, for a moment, what kind of disparate parts exist in the midst of all this upheaval. 1968 is metonymic for the entire kind of political disruption occurring during that time, and we might look to movies for a way of imagining political advancement, or perhaps retrograde ideas. But *Skidoo* seems more as if it is a constellation at the nexus of this historical rupture, a film showing us not a vilification of anything in particular, but an enjoyment and embrace of both old-fashioned comedy show business and whatever changes the young kids might bring.

Otto Preminger did take acid; his guide was Timothy Leary of all people. But he was no hippie. The same with Groucho Marx. Groucho dropped acid with Paul Krassner, who recalled this in his article "My Acid Trip with Groucho" for *High Times Magazine* in 1981. Groucho partook during the filming of *Skidoo*, and I can think of no better example to demonstrate my feelings about this film than this anecdote. Krassner, a Yippie, dope fiend, and Merry Prankster, and Groucho, an aging Hollywood comedian respected by the counter-culture of the late 60s, dropping acid together in his Beverley Hills home. Maybe *Skidoo* isn't a political film, but reading its surface makes me wonder about the continuity of it all. While tripping, and after a long silence, Groucho ostensibly started chuckling and spoke: "I'm really getting quite a kick out of this notion of playing God like a dirty old man in *Skidoo*. You wanna know why? Do you realize that irreverence and reverence are the *same thing*?" I'm not sure I know what that means, but I'm not sure there's a better statement to be made about all of this. ♦

Chitty Chitty Bang Bang

d. Ken Hughes



by ZOE KURLAND

IT IS 12:07 ON A WEDNESDAY night and I am googling child-nappings in Britain, hoping to make a discovery. For the last week I have been plagued by *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, an eerie, arbitrary film. *Chitty* contains, among various subplots, one playing around the idea of never taking candy from strangers. My Google search marks a last ditch effort to figure out what exactly this film means.

Set inexplicably in 1910, Ken Hughes' *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* appears oblivious to its iconic release year. Its plot works more like a board game than a thorough narrative, taking the key players, Caractacus Potts (Dick Van Dyke), his two children, and the heir to a high class candy empire, Truly Scrumptious (Sally Ann Howes), through a convoluted track of land and sea, of British Countryside and German-ish villages, of candy and dogs, all for the sake of the titular car, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, a former grand-prix winning vehicle newly resuscitated and given the power of flight.

When I ask people if they've seen *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, their faces light up in recognition. The very name incites nostalgia, generates emphatic cries of "I used to watch that all the time," and all variations of "I loved that film." Yet every accolade comes in the past tense, the general consensus being that today it would be utterly unwatchable.

It's a nostalgic touchstone for me, a movie that my brother and I watched weekly for about a year for no reason in particular. No one in

my family remembers how it got into the house. *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* simply appeared in the video cabinet one day and then popped itself into the VHS player. I ask my brother why we liked it so much and what he writes back reads like a free association exercise:

It's a fantastical movie and I loved cars

At least that's my reasoning

There are some funny moments too.

Grandpa's song spelling out P O S H

Was there an Egg Machine

Scary smoking barbershop hat

Dick Van Dyke's carnival song

"Scrumptious" as a last name lol

But also shit like the child catcher

It was a twisted fascination

Also the car could fly

But also it was a movie about a single

dad falling in love and their kids moving towards approval

I'll not read too much into that

No please do, I write back.

He does not.

I ponder further. Perhaps it was because it had a flying car, perhaps because it was whimsical and strange, perhaps because "chitty chitty" is deliciously, dangerously one slip of a sound away from "shitty shitty."

I try the free association exercise myself. The plot goes in every direction; I think in every direction. Old things: antique cars, junk and grandpas having souls and value. Candy being something for the people. Children being the

only people who are allowed to be children. Inventions! Dick Van Dyke's terrifying cockney accent. How was he ever allowed to do anything remotely British again? How this movie is co-written by Hughes and Roald Dahl and is in so many ways a failed follow up to *Mary Poppins* and a preposterous precursor to *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. How, like a vile stem of broccoli hidden in macaroni and cheese, this movie contains startling anti-Semitism in the form of a child catcher, a horrific villain built from the mould of Nazi propaganda.

I remember exactly when I learned Roald Dahl was an anti-Semite. It was the very beginning of high school, and marked my introduction into the kind of disillusionment that now arrives daily: a never-ending series of curtains pulled back on things treasured in childhood, revealing them to be in the best case unremarkable and, at worst, despicable.

At my elementary school, Roald Dahl was king. My third grade year was comprised primarily of Dahl books. We read so many that I began to forget that any other authors ever existed. The books were so perfectly digestible, poetic and fantastical, with those fabulous chicken-scratch illustrations. We even had a Roald Dahl day in which everyone dressed up as a character from one of his books. Only on this day would you see 12 small Willy Wonkas in formation against a wall like a police lineup. I dressed as Grandpa Joe.

"What? No! But his books!" I said helplessly as my friend gestured to a set of damning quotes on the

library computer, one in particular from a 1983 interview with *The New Statesman*:

There is a trait in the Jewish character that does provoke animosity, maybe it's a kind of lack of generosity towards non-Jews. I mean there is always a reason why anti-anything crops up anywhere; even a stinker like Hitler didn't just pick on them for no reason.

I tried to forget it but I could not. Retroactively watching *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, this quote, recorded years after the film's release, gives a new shade to the movie's villain, the Child Catcher: his long nose, light feet and greed, his propensity for going after small blonde and blue eyed children like the Potts kids. His line, "You have to know where to look. Like cockroaches, they get under the floors, in the cracks in the walls, in the woodwork," is hard to see as anything but a weird Holocaust dog whistle. This was way over my head as a child.

However, the fear was not. I had nightmares about the child-catcher for years to come. I had nightmares that he was coming for me and for my younger brother, who as a child had an unstoppable wanderlust that I feared would get him into trouble. He'd push open gates, scramble into dog doors, run across streets, breathe on the windows of cars and write his name with his finger in wobbly letters. I imagined the child stealer coming up behind him noiselessly, wielding his black butterfly net and snatching him away.

The more I watched the film,

the more afraid I became of the child catcher. Eventually I could only watch through my fingers. I begged my brother to fast forward through the worst of it, which, in tandem with our other edits, clipped the 2 hour and 25 min movie down to a cool 1 hr 45. We skipped over the romantic subplot, rocketed through the child catcher scenes, ending up only with the sugar, giddily shaping the film into one of our own making.

I believe that sugar is the key; the film's agenda is revealed by taking a closer look at the first 30 minutes of the film, particularly at the song "Toot Sweets," which was written by same Sherman brothers responsible for the music of *Mary Poppins* and *The Jungle Book*. The songs they composed for *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* didn't quite measure up; a 1968 review in *Time* described them as having "all of the musical variety of an automobile horn."

"Toot Sweets" is an ode to a whistling candy that Caractacus accidentally creates while tinkering away in his garage with his rattletrap inventions, none of which are quite right: a mechanical barbershop that balds its clients, an early jet pack of fireworks that grounds its wearer, and an elaborate Rube Goldberg breakfast machine that fails to deliver on its promise of fried eggs. After these false starts, Caractacus accidentally and miraculously invents a sugary whistle.

Caractacus, with great derring-do, attempts to market this sweet to the local candy boss, Lord Scrumptious, calling his creation "a mouthful of cheer, that sweet without peer, that musical morsel

supreme!" Truly, who we learn is the daughter of Lord Scrumptious, wheels into the frame on a candy cart trilling, "No longer need candy be mute!"

When was anyone ever upset that their candy failed to emit a noise? No one asked for this useless advancement in dessert technology and Lord Scrumptious knows it, barking "No! take it away."

As he turns his back, Truly makes a final appeal: "Father, please," and hands him a sweet. The entire factory stops as everyone peers over from their stations to watch Lord Scrumptious examine the whistle. The audience examines it as well. We assume due to the noise that it's a hard candy, but it looks like a large gummy that paradoxically exhibits a unique rigidity. Is it a meringue?

With one toot of the sweet, Lord Scrumptious softens. He takes an alarmingly large yet silent bite which involves an exaggerated chewing motion (I thought he was choking) suggesting a sort of in-your-teeth stickiness. Perhaps it's a taffy?

The song that ensues absolutely boggles the mind. The toot sweets are described in a way which obscures any notion of actual flavor; the song lists everything they are not: they are not toffee, marshmallows, suckers, mints, etc. Instead, they are "savory," have "the flavor of fruit," "a luscious" texture, "intrinsic value," and are simply "the best," giving the viewer a wide range of flavors and textural experiences.

The movie itself feels like a sweet, ineffable accident. It tastes like everything and nothing, and by golly it whistles. ♦

