

Honorary Degree Speech Concordia University, Montreal

Ulrike Ottinger, 21.09.2018

With Montreal I have a longstanding relation which goes back to 1981. Then I had been invited to the Montreal Film Festival with my movie *Freak Orlando*. I attended the premiere with the film's leading actress, Magdalena Montezuma.

Elle était une personnalité extraordinaire qui avait l'air de sortir d'un film expressionniste de Murnau ou de Fritz Lang. After this first visit, I received further invitations regarding not only my next films, but also retrospectives of my film oeuvre and my photographic works. In 1989, I received the Audience Prize for *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*. Again, I attended this festival with the wonderful actress and icon of the Nouvelle Vague, Delphine Seyrig. You will remember her unforgettable performance in *L'année dernière à Marienbad* by Resnais, her appearance in Chantal Akerman's film *Jeanne Dielmann, 23, Quai du Commerce* or *India Song* by Maguerite Duras. I had the great pleasure to realize three feature films with her. Only two years ago, I returned to Montreal once again to participate in a conference where I presented my latest movies. Of course, those visits would be meaningless without the wonderful people I met and the Montreal and especially to you, its wonderful inhabitants! Merci beaucoup!

Before I will continue with my remarks, I would like to show you a short film, a kind of a Berlin poem that I have produced on the occasion of the inauguration of *La Sept/ARTE* in 1986, the first French-German cultural tv channel.

The film, titled *Usinimage*, comprises images from my so-called *Berlin Trilogy*: *Allez jamais retour*, *The Portrait of a Woman Drinker*, and *Freak Orlando*, and *Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press*. For all three movies, I carefully selected places in Berlin that should play an important role due to the fact that I like to do *mis-en-scène* on real existing locations: industrial landscapes, royal parks, modern architectures and ruins from the 2nd World War. To me, locales are not mere settings but an integral part of the films' content.

For *Usinimage*, I have filmed some of the locations from the Berlin Trilogy again ten years later and intercut them with the staged scenes from my feature films. It is interesting to see how the same locations accrue new meaning within the *mis-en-scène*.

_____ (Film Screening)

This short film might be considered as an introduction to how I work and how I would like to have my movies to be understood. How I got there is a long story going back to the Sixties. Paris was my eye opener. I was just 20 years old when I decided to move to this city that in 1962 was the intellectual and artistic hot spot in Europe.

Before I set off to Paris, I painted my Isetta, my funny little egg shaped car, with owls; the only door opened to the front with the steering wheel hanging in the air. The car was an icon of modern design and a symbol of the European counterculture, and for me it meant independence and freedom.

Overwhelmed by my passion and emotions to become a great artist, this was the only thing I had in mind. However, reality set in very soon. I had to cope with finding accommodation, which in Paris was almost an impossible endeavor. Seulement des cellules sans chauffage et d'eau étaient payables. I had also to overcome the shyness of a twenty year old artist vis-a-vis highly admired artists, scholars and writers, not to speak of my limited financial means and other obstacles that prevented me to pursue my artistic ambitions. You as students may have similar daily life experiences, but this is something one has to learn to deal with.

Currently, I am working on a film about Paris in the 1960s – the time that I spent there. I, therefore, tried to recapitulate the events and experiences that fascinated and inspired me, or else irritated and sometimes even frightened me, and how I perceived these incidents. Working on this film, I find myself in the complicated situation to reflect the observation of a young artist that I was at the time from the perspective of a senior filmmaker and artist that I am now. It is not more and not less than the becoming of an artist. Of course, there were many people who supported me. Known and less known people whose work I read or saw, friends I had discussions with, who inspired or challenged me. This early period was marked by occasional insecurities, followed by phases of overestimating my own capabilities, and also of great happiness when my work met with approval or had even been understood, which does not always mean the same. Because of my intense engagement with this early phase in my life, I think, I can very well put myself in your position. I am sure, there are many of you who want to accomplish something special in their field, who passionately pursue knowledge, insight and understanding, and thereby often come up against boundaries. That is a very normal process in artistic work! Stay persistent because boundaries exist to be overcome. Once you have caught fire, you have already taken the first hurdle, because the more you know about a subject, the more interesting it becomes, and then, almost as if all by itself, new associative fields will emerge and multiply. When I met all the great artists, writers, cultural anthropologists and filmmakers in Paris, I was overwhelmed how much knowledge and how many skills they had acquired and accomplished; everything they wanted to tell was in such perfect form. It took me a long time to reach their level. And you, too, will need that time and perseverance. But do not allow yourself to be led astray. To become a star overnight exists only in commercials. The

essential can only be achieved through stamina, endurance and persistence. Put your ideas back on their feet.

Bonne chance et bon voyage into your future!