

Geometric forms—circle and square, triangle but also geometric moth—tend to get confused. Godard seems obsessed by the wild wish to square the circle. With *The Power of Speech*—sixty-nine screenings of which have not exhausted its riches—the cinema, as Chabrol said, becomes an “art of relationships,” following the first age of the ontological art (Rossellini, Renoir) which has come to pass. The death of ontology. *The Power of Speech*, whose only TV broadcaster, la Sept, showed it recently at five past midnight, figures among the top ten films in the history of cinema. And this evaluation seems fairly timid and deprecating to me. I have a hard time imagining that in the centuries ahead another film will surpass it.

In Water and Out of Focus by A.S. Hamrah

The following is an excerpt of an article published by Metrograph Journal, November 29, 2023

Focus is an area that narrative feature films almost never mess with. As an aesthetic issue in non-avant-garde cinema, it's really a last frontier. In movies, things are either in focus or in the background. For directors who have been adherents of the split diopter, like Brian De Palma and Raúl Ruiz, things in the background can be in focus, too.

If you notice someone out of focus in a feature film, someone a little soft, it's usually because an actor missed their mark... Or it's soft because it's the point of view of a character just coming out of unconsciousness looking at another character who is waking them up. The fuzziness of the world is only a temporary perspective. Not in *in water*, where missing the mark and not coming to consciousness is the whole point.

Before *in water*, the last film I can remember that made an issue of focus was Jean-Luc Godard's *Hélas pour moi* (1993), which deals in an Olympian view of human relationships *sur la terre*, a phrase I associate with Godard's late period and its wounded detachment from life on earth, the dwelling place of mortal man. Godard abandons his characters and his stories when they get “beyond images,” which is something it is becoming clear (so to speak) that Hong, after all his films, is unwilling to do. Here, he is “in water,” not “on the earth.” His films have always moved toward a zero point. He has to tell the same story over and over, reinventing it each time for the same kinds of characters without diminishing them and while still answering the question “What is cinema?”

One can get used to anything (watching a film shot out of focus), suffer any humiliation (trying to make a film at all), and if it's beautiful or crazy enough it works, not in spite of being pathetic but because of it. ♦

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ABOUT THE FILMS

In Water (Dir. Hong Sangsoo, 2023, 61 min)

A trio of friends venture to the rocky shores of a large island to shoot a film together. The director, Seongmo (Shin Seokho), recently gave up acting and has decided to make a film with his own money. His former classmate, Sangguk (Ha Seongguk), will operate the camera and Namhee (Kim Seungyun) will act in it. The only problem: Seongmo hasn't decided what to make.

The Daughters of Fire (Dir. Pedro Costa, 2023, 9 min)

The story of three young Cape Verdean sisters upon their arrival at a foreign European port, in an attempt to escape another devastating eruption of the Fogo volcano. In this unknown country, they roam, hand in hand, evoking their secret fears through music and singing.

The Power of Speech (Dir. Jean-Luc Godard, 1988, 25 min)

In the middle of the night a young man calls a young woman at the other side of the world. There are too many contrasts: when night falls in his world, she is just waking up. Their voices, their reproaches, fly through the universe and are flung back to earth by a satellite. In quickly changing images accompanied by the music of Bach and Cohen, the earthly, the banal is confronted with the heavenly, the things we don't want to understand with the things we cannot understand. With texts by Edgar Allen Poe and Charles Baudelaire. Presented digitally, from a file personally provided to Pedro Costa by Jean-Luc Godard.

TRT: 95 min.

The Daughters of Fire by Christopher Small

The following is an excerpt of an article originally published by MUBI Notebook, June 13, 2023

In English, the title of Pedro Costa's new nine-minute film is given as *The Daughters of Fire*, but it's important to note that the Portuguese, *As Filhas do Fogo*, names a volcano, Pico do Fogo, and the island it occupies, Fogo in Cape Verde. Costa's phantasmagorical vision of these three women in these three places will, startlingly, in its eighth minute, open out into documentary images of the island itself. We go from three shots together onscreen to handheld archival footage, shot by a famous Portuguese ethnographer, Orlando Ribeiro, after a devastating eruption in 1951.

This isn't Costa's first musical, but it's the first where the melody isn't disrupted. When characters in Pedro Costa films do listen to music, it's like they're searching for a waning song in a fatally disrupted world, all against an off-screen cacophony of deafening

construction work and muffled neighbors' conversations. In his earlier musical *Ne change rien* (2009), this subtext is very much text: we witness Jeanne Balibar and her band recording an album, falteringly, imperfectly, with many interruptions, repetitions—of a bar, a verse, or an entire song.

In *The Daughters of Fire*, the film is altogether more regulated and rigorous, at least on the level of the music, which flows harmoniously between the three separate screens and sisters. Amid the chaos of the Cannes Film Festival, this nine-minute incantation was a balm, almost medicinal. A tripartite screen test for a feature—also about the daughters of the Fogo—still yet to be made by Costa, *The Daughters of Fire* is no less self-contained or beguiling for being a fragment. It wouldn't be much of an exaggeration to say that the three images are like no others being produced today, awesome in their absolute strangeness and density of detail, and yet they are also part of a grand continuum with the phantoms of film history.

The Cosmic Film by Luc Moullet

The following is an excerpt of an article originally published by Bref, September 2005

The basis of *The Power of Speech* is the eponymous lyrical-scientific-metaphysical dialogue, written by Edgar Poe in 1846, between Oinos and Agathos, two angels (“in the period when we were mortal,” says Oinos)—from which Jean-Luc Godard takes 58 out of 149 lines, only replacing the word “ion” with “atom”—and two pages of dialogue between ex-lovers in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, written by James Cain in 1936, quoted in alternation. Godard wrote nothing: what good is writing when so many things have already been written. Such is his motto.

A somewhat iconoclastic association, as if Arthur Rimbaud and San Antonio were mixed together, Poe represents literature with a capital L, and Cain the pulp, dime store novel. In fact, the chosen passage is more like a melancholy tragedy than a trashy novel. There is even a common denominator, an intermediary, the “forever” written by Cain and by Poe, the pathos, among other things, often coming from a Bresson-like repetition of a word (“beyond, beyond,” etc.).

The movement of the music, the torrent, the lava, and the fire takes us toward the dimension of the academic film, but Godard vanquishes this risk by unceasingly cutting, breaking the emphasis, the frenzy, and the rhythm with syncopations and freeze frames, as if he wanted to both (repeating *Sauve aui peut*) show time—majestic, inexorable—pass by, and to stop it, break the pathos, stop the flowing water, to have both movement and immobility at once. All of this is pierced by the aggressive gulls from *Prénom Carmen*. This density—dense because it is brief—makes the film the equivalent of Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale* and Valéry's *Cimetière marin*.