

“Only he who is chosen chooses well or effectively” (Deleuze) :  
The World View Cinematographically Conveyed in *Ma nuit chez Maud*

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Introduction

Eric Rohmer, who is considered as one of the Nouvelle Vague directors, thinks carefully of the cinema's way of telling a story, especially when he writes novels and then makes them into films. He says, “I was unable to write them [i. e. the stories] well enough. That's why I filmed them.”<sup>1)</sup> He also says that there are “great and necessary subject[s], the like of which the cinema had to tackle some day.”<sup>2)</sup> Then, there must be a certain world view to be conveyed cinematographically in Rohmer's films.

To see this, first, I take up the film *Ma nuit chez Maud* (in English, *My night at Maud's or My night with Maud*) directed by Rohmer in 1969, because it clearly shows Rohmer's world view in terms of choice, as is evident in such words of the character's as “You must choose between the finite and the infinite,” and because it has the director's typical style of shooting on location. Next, I take up Gilles Deleuze's and Rohmer's theories about the cinematographic discourse. For as far as Rohmer compares the cinema with novels, we should approach the matter of discourse. Through this, I hope one aspect of cinema's nature in representing the world will be made clear.

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- 1) Eric Rohmer, “Letter to a critic [concerning my Contes moraux (Moral tales)],” 1971, in *The Taste for Beauty*, translated by Carol Volk, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 80-81.
- 2) “The Taste for Beauty,” 1961, in *The Taste for Beauty*, p. 78.

## A. Analysis of *Ma nuit chez Maud*

### A-1. World view conveyed through story

The story of *Ma nuit chez Maud* is as follows: the protagonist—I call him *the protagonist* because he is unnamed in this film—encounters a girl named Françoise four times. Although he spends a night with an attractive woman named Maud, he rejects her temptation. He does so because he believes the encounters with Françoise to be his fate.<sup>3)</sup> In connecting the meaning of his life with the world, he chooses his way of life. In other words, his choice is to believe in the world. At the same time, since the encounter is the grace of God for the Catholic protagonist, he is chosen by God. As Gilles Deleuze observes, “only he who is chosen chooses well or effectively; this could be one of Rohmer’s proverbs.”<sup>4)</sup>

### A-2. World view conveyed visually

#### A-2-1. *Choosing* conveyed through the camera’s nature of recording everything

This world view about *choosing* and *being chosen* is conveyed visually in the encounter scenes. Each of the scenes has the subjective shot or the optical “point of view shot,” i. e. “a shot in which the camera assumes the position of a subject in order to show us what the subject sees.”<sup>5)</sup> For example, in the second encounter scene in which the protagonist is driving, the camera continues showing us what the protagonist sees through the window of the car, and suddenly Françoise comes into this shot (Figure 1). Then in the third encounter scene, there is a shot of the protagonist looking outside of the frame (Figure 2),

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3) The night with Maud is so important as to be the film’s title, because this situation puts to the test the protagonist’s belief in this fate. However, I do not analyze this scene, because my argument focuses on the very moments at which he makes his choice.

4) Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 1985, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p. 178.

5) Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema*, Mouton Publishers, 1984, p. 103.

followed by his optical point of view shot in which Françoise is seen through the window of the café (Figure 3). And in the fourth encounter scene, a camera shows again what the protagonist sees through the window of the car, this time from behind him, over his shoulder (Figure 4). Although this is not the point of view shot in technical terms, it is still a shot carrying the protagonist's subjectivity.<sup>6)</sup>

However, we should remember here that a camera records everything in front of it that the frame can include, wholly and equally. Strictly speaking, then, in the second encounter, there are also in the frame some passengers, some cars, shops, street furniture, and so on. The protagonist not only sees Françoise but faces the world. As discussed later, this is the moment he chooses to believe in the world. By making use of the camera's nature of recording everything in front, and of being capable of assuming the position of the subject, Rohmer seems to show choice.

#### **A-2-2. *Being chosen conveyed through the camera's nature of recording within a frame***

While facing the world, the protagonist still recognizes Françoise. It is because she comes into the center of his view, of the frame of the shot. The camera records within a frame, and the frame limits the view. Because of this limitation, the most noticeable element in the frame, like Françoise moving in the center of the frame, looks important.

In the encounter scenes mentioned above, the frame is emphasized by the window frames. The protagonist always sees Françoise through windows. She comes into such a limited and passive view, noticeably. Then the protagonist seems to be obliged to see her, or Françoise seems to be chosen for him. Making use of the frame, Rohmer seems to show what it is like “to be chosen.”

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6) Françoise is seen here vaguely at the left of this shot. In the fourth encounter, it does not matter for the protagonist whether he actually sees Françoise or not, any more. What is important here is that he believes in his fate. “Even if there had been only ten chances to a hundred in which it were you, I would have stopped!” he says to Françoise in this encounter.

This would be apparent when we look at the first encounter at the church, which occurs during the Eucharist. This scene is different from the other encounters mostly in two respects. First, although this scene is important as the very first encounter of the protagonist with Françoise, his optical point of view is represented vaguely. In shot 1, which is a shot to establish the locale of this scene, Françoise does not appear. Even the protagonist is not seen clearly because he is shot from the back in the dark (Figure 5). Françoise appears suddenly in shot 4, without any specific glance given to her (Figure 6). The protagonist's optical glance (Figure 7) given to Françoise in the next shot (Figure 8) is shown only once in shot 5, though there are four shots of Françoise. It could be said, then, there seems to be someone seeing her besides the protagonist.<sup>7)</sup>

Second, the status of Françoise becomes ambiguous in shot 9. From shot 3, we can hear a woman's loud voice, and then from shot 4 we take it to be the voice of Françoise. In shot 9, however, as the camera passes by Françoise and two other persons (Figure 9a and Figure 9b), the voice cannot be thought of as her voice any more. It could be the voice of the other dark-haired girl. Therefore, it becomes unclear whether Françoise is an important character in this film or not.

This shot 9 lets us know that the important things should be more noticeable than other things. If not, everything and everyone in the frame seems to be equally important. There is such a shot in this film that shows the protagonist not in the center of the frame, thus not very prominent. It is the shot of the protagonist walking among some other men (Figure 10). If this were our first time to see the protagonist, we might miss him, and we might think that the man glancing at the camera is important, since he is more noticeable than the protagonist. The following shot shows the protagonist in the center of the frame again. Then the preceding shot reminds us that he is chosen as the protagonist in the film. As seen in these scenes, Rohmer is conscious of how he should show *being chosen*, by the use of the frame.

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7) For this and the second points, I have been inspired by Maria Tortajada, *Le spectateur séduit : Le libertinage dans le cinéma d'Eric Rohmer*, Edition Kimé, 1999, pp. 187-192.

Speaking of the first encounter again, Françoise is finally chosen firmly in close-up in shot 11 (Figure 11), which follows the shot of the priest saying "Here is the lamb of God," the declaration of Christ's presence. It is God or "the outside" as I will mention afterwards, who makes the choice for the protagonist.

## B. Cinematographic discourse for conveying world view

### B-1. Deleuze's theory

#### B-1-1. Importance of "choice"

This analysis applies to what Gilles Deleuze says of the relation between "choice" and cinematographic discourse.

First, Deleuze remarks on the importance of "choice" as follows: "The modern fact is that we no longer believe in this world. We do not even believe in the events which happen to us, love, death, as if they only half concerned us. [...] The link between man and the world is broken. Henceforth, this link must become an object of belief: it is the impossible which can only be restored within a faith [...]. Restoring our belief in the world—this is the power of modern cinema."<sup>8)</sup> Deleuze then names some films about "choice," including *Ma nuit chez Maud* and says, "[...] choice being posed between choice and non-choice (and all their variants) sends us back to an absolute relation with the outside, beyond the inward psychological consciousness, but equally beyond the relative external world, and finds that it [the outside] alone is capable of restoring the world and the ego to us."<sup>9)</sup>

Like this, we do not know why we are born or we die, we are uncertain about the world itself. We are isolated by the world itself. However, when we see that there is "the outside" which contains both human beings and the world, we have an absolute link with the world. Therefore, we cannot but choose to believe in "the outside," and then believe in the world.

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8) Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, pp. 171–172.

9) *Ibid.*, p. 177.

In *Ma nuit chez Maud*, “the outside” is, for the narrative and also for the protagonist, the encounter with Françoise, that is the grace of God. This is because the encounter contains both the protagonist and the world itself, and relates them. Deleuze also says, “the outside, is it grace or chance?”<sup>10)</sup>

### **B-1-2. “Free indirect subjective discourse” as “the outside”**

Also, Deleuze observes three types of discourse in cinema, in respect of subjectivity. According to him, first, “the subjective-image is the thing seen by someone ‘qualified’ or the set as it is seen by someone who forms part of the set,”<sup>11)</sup> and “subjective [...] image is direct discourse.”<sup>12)</sup> Second, “The image is objective when the thing or the set are seen from the viewpoint of someone who remains external to the set,”<sup>13)</sup> and “the objective [...] image is like an indirect discourse.”<sup>14)</sup>

Third, the camera is there in cinema, prior to anyone. Even if the camera assumes the position of someone, it keeps taking its own vision. Cinematographic discourse is, therefore, ‘semi-subjective.’ A character’s subjectivity is not complete because the camera’s subjectivity always transforms what the character sees. Deleuze names it “free indirect subjective discourse/vision/images,” referring to linguistics. What is different from novels, however, is this : in cinema it can be a camera that becomes the other subjectivity.

In *Ma nuit chez Maud*, then, because of this kind of discourse, the protagonist, a subject, seems to be choosing with the other subject, the camera. Deleuze says, “As for Rohmer, he is perhaps the most striking example of the construction of free indirect subjective images, this time through the intermediary of a truly ethical consciousness.”<sup>15)</sup> The camera plays the role of “ethical consciousness,” which means God here, in other words, “the outside,” to show the link between

10) Ibid.

11) Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 1983, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 71.

12) Ibid., p. 72.

13) Ibid., p. 71.

14) Ibid., P. 72.

15) Ibid., p. 75.

human beings and the world.

## **B-2. Rohmer's theory**

### **B-2-1. Three discourses in cinema in respect of necessity**

Rohmer also talks of the cinematographic discourse, in his 1977 essay, "Film and three levels of discourse : indirect, direct, and hyperdirect." Different from Deleuze, Rohmer argues in respect of necessity and about characters' words in comparison with other arts. He says that there are two kinds of words in theater ; "the necessary" and "verisimilitude," and he says, "the marriage of verisimilitude and the necessary has never been impeded"<sup>16)</sup> in novels, because of "what we traditionally call *discourse*."<sup>17)</sup> For example, indirect discourse such as "The waiter [...] tells Simon that a gentleman has asked for him,"<sup>18)</sup> "weaves speech into the narrative [...] and permits it to remain in the background [...] only as a bearer of information."<sup>19)</sup> On the other hand, direct discourse such as "I want to be served by Simon,"<sup>20)</sup> adds to information the way a gentleman speaks or his feeling. Here, "verisimilitude unites with the necessities of a narrative."<sup>21)</sup>

As for cinema, according to Rohmer, there is one more discourse besides indirect and direct. He takes an example of a scene in a restaurant, such as "Bring me two cutlets with spinach."<sup>22)</sup> These words about a specific order are "unnecessary true-to-life details"<sup>23)</sup> for the story, but "a pure tribute to verisimilitude."<sup>24)</sup> Because of this very direct relation to life, Rohmer calls it "hyperdirect discourse."

This type of discourse occurs in cinema because a camera records everything

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16) Eric Rohmer, "Film and three levels of discourse : indirect, direct, and hyperdirect," 1977, in *The Taste for Beauty*, p. 86.

17) Ibid.

18) Ibid., p. 87.

19) Ibid., p. 88.

20) Ibid., p. 87.

21) Ibid.

22) Ibid.

23) Ibid., p. 89.

24) Ibid., p. 87.

in front of it, even if things are unnecessary for a story. Then “hyperdirect discourse,” along with the other two types of discourse, applies to images as well as to words. When a meaning of images is simply understood as ‘the protagonist sees Françoise,’ it can be said to be indirect, since it only shows us what is necessary for understanding the story. The encounter of the protagonist with Maud is such a case (Figure 12). On the other hand, when an image is taken from the protagonist’s optical point of view, as if saying “*I see Françoise*,” it can be said to be direct. What is added here is verisimilitude about the protagonist’s consciousness. In addition, in every image, whether direct or indirect, there are hyperdirect factors. For example in the second encounter, passengers, cars, etc. belong to hyperdirect discourse.

Rohmer insists that these three discourses are all important. If unaware of them, a camera records so many “unnecessary true-to-life details” that world views cannot be conveyed. He says, then, “here we are [...] faced with the demands of the necessity.”<sup>25)</sup> “The necessity” has two meanings here: one is “the necessary” for understanding a story in a verisimilar way, that is the indirect and direct discourses, and the other is what is inevitably recorded by a camera, the hyperdirect discourse.

#### Conclusion: Making use of the discourses in *Ma nuit chez Maud*

In *Ma nuit chez Maud*, by making use of the discourses, Rohmer conveys the world view about *choosing* and *being chosen*. In the second encounter (Figure 1), there is the necessary, that is Françoise, and there are unnecessary details such as cars, passengers, etc. Since this is his subjective shot, there is also verisimilitude about the protagonist’s consciousness. Further, because of the limitation of the view within the frame, as mentioned above, “the outside” is perceptible.

Then, in respect of the world view, Françoise is the choice for the protagonist. Passengers, cars, etc. are the world. And the protagonist is *the chosen* in the sense

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25) Ibid., p. 86.

that his subjectivity is the matter here. Then it is God, “the outside,” “the free indirect subjectivity,” or the camera, that chooses the protagonist and obliges him to face the world and make the choice. The world view, “only he who is chosen chooses well or effectively,” is conveyed like this.

Finally, I would like to end this paper by making clear two characteristics of Rohmer. By the emphasis on the frame, Rohmer not only shows what it is like to be chosen, but also makes “the free indirect subjectivity” or the camera obvious. However, in the classical Hollywood cinema, the omnipresence of a camera does not make us perceive the camera, but conduces us to a better understanding of the story.

Second, by shooting on location in a real church, on a real road and so on, Rohmer calls attention to the camera’s function of recording “unnecessary true-to-life details.” This puts an emphasis not only on the camera, but also on the contrast between “the necessary” and “the unnecessary” details. In the classical Hollywood cinema, and even in films made with computer graphics, the directors try to show “unnecessary details,” only for “verisimilitude” about the situation. However, by making use of the discourses, Rohmer shows the contrast between “the necessary” and “the unnecessary” details, in other words, the contrast between “the chosen” and “the world.”



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9a



Fig. 9b



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

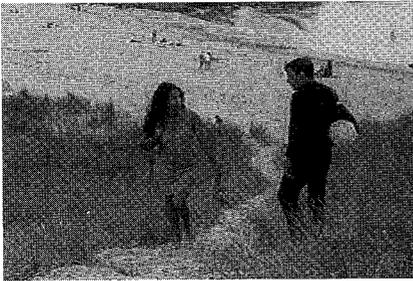


Fig. 12