

## BOOTLEGGERS

*Worlds scoop their Arcs -  
And Firmaments - row -  
Diadems - drop - and Doges - surrender -  
Soundless as dots - on a Disc of Snow -  
Emily Dickinson<sup>1</sup>*

Fri. 07-09-06

Big Sur River Inn Hotel Restaurant

**1 p.m.** In the *Los Angeles Times* Susan King describes the Sam Peckinpah retrospective at Santa Monica's Aero Theatre. *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* has been restored and reedited to be as close as possible to Peckinpah's original vision. The screening is scheduled for Saturday at 7.30 p.m. He smiles, as he knows that, contrary to all expectations, Billy the Kid was not left-handed. The only photograph that exists was printed in reverse. Sometimes a minor detail is all it takes to build a myth, he says to himself. The outward signs of imaginative life are as much a matter of a desire for confrontation and a fight against the natural order of things as a search to identify with this same order through self-abnegation. Magic and poetry always go hand in hand; together they form what we call *the fantastic*. This operation brings fertility to the most barren areas of social life.

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Just as he was getting ready to order a third glass of port (despite his resolve to stop drinking sweet liquor), I. L. comes into the restaurant wearing huge black glasses, a white tee-shirt on which is written 'Masturbation is not a crime', jeans that have seen much better days and black leather sneakers. She stands still, her handbag slung over her shoulder, as she scans the room. She goes up to him: 'Are you J. K.?' The Big Sur River Inn barman, with whom he has become quite friendly, verging on connivance, now looks at him oddly. Sitting at a table on the restaurant's terrace facing the lush vegetation, he begins their interview by explaining the story behind the name *Big Sur*, one of his latest books to be published; in it he settles a few of his scores with some Beats who have become quite crazy, and more fundamentally with himself and some of his demons—nightmares, 'vultures' and 'monsters'. Yet, despite it all, there are some he still believes in, starting with those older than him, including Emily Dickinson.

*The minor circumstance  
Assisting in a bright affair  
So intricately done,  
Then offered as a butterfly  
To the meridian<sup>2</sup>*

'The minor circumstance...' she repeats as if in agreement. I. L. gazes at him intently with a gravity in keeping with the serious tone of his words.

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‘You told me that you were working on a film, *Blue*, which is at the same time a project. What do you mean exactly by that? – It is a long series of some twenty sequences, shot on Super 8 and edited in such a way that no real narration is imposed. Elliptical, it suggests more than it affirms. The whole is an observation of the temporal nature of rushes that other artists may interpret and adapt according to their own sensibility and personal approach. What I am looking for is both a colour—a blue—in the strict sense and figuratively in the veiled affective tonality... some kind of expectation. The balance I have found lies in a material that has a certain force, its own identity and which remains receptive. – An open account... the initial proposition you are invited to become part of. We are in the land of myths, aren’t we? – ... In a poetic sense, if you like. And artists who now work from this device produce films that are aware of this. Brice Dellsperger, who is here in Los Angeles, asked me to pose for a sequence he was experimenting with. I am seen from the back from a hill overlooking the city, facing the smoggy downtown. In the evening, when the light is dwindling and the sky turns orange-red with tints of blue and grey, I find the whole tonal effect quite fitting. Laetitia Benat went for a more narrative option. Everything depends on the links between the sequences, which opt to be an open account... She decided to shoot in colour but within a range of black and white. Laetitia has produced a very fine sequence in snow. Another using a mirror and a young woman’s reflection... There is a real depth apparent. – I understand, he says, you are looking for and invite others to look for a sense of reality in another place, something fantastic... whereby coincidences appear and atmospheres are embodied...’

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'*Blue* is not a particularly happy film, she confides. – The fantastic does not rule out the tragic! he stresses. And anyway, this ghostly sensation you describe of blue unreality and moments of waiting are hiatuses in the lives of the characters. This is clearly perceptible, perhaps precisely because of the silence and the relative slowness... – There is a very dreamlike atmosphere, she insists, with jumps and flashbacks, like holes in the fabric of existence... *Blue* speaks of an almost subconscious, hypnotic state. Actions are undertaken without any clear objective... Only the intentions remain perhaps. – I have written a book called *The Book of Dreams* in which I recorded my dreams over several years, noting them each time I woke up. For me, it is a way of opening up my awareness, to gain access paradoxically to an enhanced waking state and a wider vision of the world. Intentions and perspectives are altered, as if seen through a prism... – My approach to dreams is unusual, like an implicit presence in reality. I prefer spaces, places and planes that combine, mingle and intertwine. This is more apparent in the interplay of filters, openings and extensions. *Blue* conjures this up, evoking a motionless route, a series of sequences arranged like secant planes in geometry—coming together and apart at the same time. This might come close to the link between waking life and the realm of dreams. In the same gallery, I also created a curtain that conceals and cuts up the space. For me, the curtain is an effective way of perceiving different worlds, different affective moments. For Ancient Greek thinkers such as Heraclitus and Anaximander, clouds were the dust raised in Olympic struggles and lightning flashes like divine spears.<sup>3</sup> Night was also compared to a veil that covered the world; only a few holes allowed the sunlight still to shine through. We call them stars.'

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'If I get what you're saying, you're not really interested like me in real movement, the quest for initiatory experiences or the crossing of limitless natural spaces, barren and original... – Rather than travel or displacement, I prefer urban areas that exist in reflections and relief, the 'town standing up'<sup>4</sup> as Céline described New York. My studies of balconies seek to take a look at particular architectural spaces. Balconies are an experiment in going there and back—but from which place and to where? Such spaces fall both within and outside of architecture... They make it possible to appropriate a piece of geography, town planning or a landscape. On a balcony, we are just between... as if we were right next to but... between... in a chink... both within and outside of the space. And so it is the site of tension. – I see... – I wonder who a city belongs to when it is seen from a balcony... and likewise, to whom do the façade and the balcony belong? To whoever is living in the house or flat? Or to whoever sees it from the street? – What do you think? he asks. – In my opinion, it belongs to no one; *it* is there in our midst, like the collective unconscious. Before leaving, I saw a film again in Paris called *Claire Dolan*.<sup>5</sup> The beginning makes me ponder, with its slow-motion panning of the façades of the buildings of Manhattan; the long-angle shots are unusual and highly graphic—they are quite ethereal as the angle is short and thus remains fairly soft, as if in suspension. There is an interesting approach to architecture, also to be found in the contemporary design of the business-class hotel bedroom interiors. Everything is shot in a cold and chic pearly grey colour. The characters are then placed in this tonality as if plunged into a demand for concentration, as if their privacy were at the centre of a circle, that of contemporary design itself. The architecture, and more particularly the interior spaces and places, are the venue of the most vivid inversion of desire: desire for another's desire. From street level, the façades are mirrors; in the flats or hotels we have indeed gone through the looking glass. This has to come across somehow in the relationships between the individuals. Even if they are unaware of it, they are living it... To desire is to desire another's desire.'

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‘This kind of inversion exactly... – It is inverted architecture; *All Day and all of the Night* and *Blanc*, for example, as well as *Terracita* and *Patricia* form luminous extensions to the façade. I discovered this afterwards here in Los Angeles. On the heights facing the bay there are some villas with balconies glassed in with tinted or coloured panes. The effect is the same as what I saw through my creations: signs and passages. The fact that the glass is more or less transparent always reminds me of Jeff Wall’s essay on Dan Graham’s *Kammerspiel*; at night when light comes from within the houses, the activity that during the daytime is hidden by the sky, by the landscape and by the cities reflected in these glass panes emerges in a halo of otherworldly light. People’s lives are played out inside constructions. Jeff Wall interprets this as the dramatic interplay of ‘vampiric symbolism’.<sup>6</sup> During the daytime, these façade elements create a form of ‘introjected’ landscape inside the house; at night, the occupants come to life like vampires trapped in mirrors which, from the inside, reflect their own images on the black ground of darkness. The aristocratic ideal of a princely pavilion or belvedere, made accessible to a ‘perturbed bourgeois sensibility’, enjoys a fit of enthusiasm that backfires on the occupants, taking them in turn from a dominant position to one of isolation, introspection and traumatism. A tragic-comical version of this is to be found in the films of Jacques Tati, in *Mon Oncle* and particularly in *Playtime*. – So you are in this line of criticism too? – The railings that I propose are placed within the exhibition site and let in the urban lights of the night via one or more neons. So it is indeed inverted architecture. I am interested in making the gallery space—a *public* place—into an obvious form of interior space. Not an interiority, but a ‘space of within’ as Henri Michaux might say. – What is the difference? – It is not an enclosed area, not a prison as Jeff Wall said; this *public* space-cum-psychological structure is completely open to the outside world; in fact, that is all it is. Between and through the walls, the idea of separation is abolished. Here is the street, the urban landscape, the place of others.’

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‘In my novel *Big Sur*, I leave San Francisco behind for a remote cabin. In fact, I am leaving other people behind and become immersed in nature, hostile and plentiful. The little house has been loaned to me by a poet friend, Monsanto<sup>7</sup>, who set up a bookshop and publishing company, *City Lights*. That should be up your street, the name at least... One after the other, friends, acquaintances and old flames come to partake of this space cut off from the outside world... This becomes intrusive, before turning into an invasion and occupation, until my final nightmare that causes me to cut myself loose and leave Big Sur. – To take flight? – Quite probably... to return to New York and go back to William Burroughs. Perhaps to start my life again from scratch. – I agree with you that places cut off from the outside world are often places of transit... Out of all the balconies I have made, there is one that is a bit different. Its title is *Sydne Rome*, from the name of the actress engraved on it. It is made completely out of wood, like a cabin or fence perhaps... It can also be classed as architecture; I’m thinking of shop windows or façades that are concealed during alterations behind large plywood boards. Before long, they are covered with posters and anarchic inscriptions. My offering also has something of this about it. I scorched designs in pokerwork onto it. Once again we find a dreamlike world here: a face, a tree with wings, enigmatic signs. With this object I sought more to attack the balcony physically; of the units I have produced, it is probably the most personified. As I was making it, I was also thinking of tattooing, where there is also a form of desire-inverted relationship in play. It is an appeal to another person. The view through the glass is obstructed, nor can it reflect back the image of the viewer. As a result, it becomes a medium whereby signs reflected back elsewhere are recorded... like clues. Its force is that of interference and transience, like something that imposes itself for a while in the urban landscape, disappearing ever to reappear elsewhere, further on, in another district in a form of perpetual movement. It is always the same thing, but each time distinct.’

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‘For artists, she confided to him, living areas, however comfortable they may be, give rise to this type of experience: renewal and transit. This is how I took a series of photographs in different European cities. I chose signboards, viewpoints, atmospheres and objects that all help to mark out living spaces while at the same time representing a certain universality. They can be found everywhere... – You mean the marks of an industrialised and materialistic consumer society, don’t you? – In fact, I realised that the result, *Dragon Palace*, is a film where all the images may seem the same to some, as if independent of the motif... A kind of equalising via the digital process and the fade in-fade out or a series of urban signs that help to encode reality. You might call it globalisation in the ‘off’ position. I then created a soundtrack made up essentially of pieces of music that evoke walkabout—a kind of aimless sauntering with no origin... a distanced visual account. – How do you hope to achieve this distancing? – By proposing a paradoxical situation: the images are arranged in a relatively objective order, which is formal in that they are listed in alphabetical order of the names I gave them when they were recorded. These names, often little more than nicknames, are not intended to be documentary or even subjective. They are clear to me as they encapsulate various takes on the image or evocations. As a result, the images follow one another in neutral succession. – But sound as walkabout? ... you are looking for a sense of unity, a way of captivating the viewer aren’t you? – Rather than projecting him or her into the movement... this movement is like loops, a continual to-ing and fro-ing. Travelling interests me in that it is short, circular and derivative, rather than in the notion of going forward or progressing. I like the idea that ‘*we are not walking but turning and falling, and what we call “freedom” is merely our expectation that things that have already happened will return. Our “identification” is in itself and through itself nostalgia, the desire to go back to another state of the wheel*’.<sup>8</sup> I think that things are forever repeated, yet they continue to move us, perhaps because we want to see in them a promise of something new, rich and strange. And this is borne out... We were talking about this earlier: *The minor circumstance / Assisting in a bright affair / So intricately done...* – *Assisting in existence / So intricately done...* – If you like... maybe... she murmured, gazing out towards the vast expanse of the bay.’