

‘Are you Afraid of the Cinema?’: *Du Cinéma* and the Changing Question of Cinephilia and the Avant-Garde (1928-1930)

In December 1928, the prolific “editor of the Surrealists,” La Librairie José Corti, launched the deluxe, illustrated journal *Du Cinéma: Revue de Critique et de Recherches Cinématographiques*.¹ Its first issue, indeed its very first page, opened with a questionnaire that asked, “Are you afraid of the cinema?” (Fig. 1, 2) The following paragraphs describing the questionnaire’s logic and critical aims were not penned by the journal’s founding editor in chief, Jean-George Auriol (son of George Auriol, the illustrator, typographer, and managing editor of the fin-de-siècle journal *Le Chat Noir*); rather, they were composed by André Delons, poet, critic, and member of the Parisian avant-garde group Le Grand Jeu. “This simple question is, by design, of a frankness and a weight made to unsettle you. I warn you that it has a double sense and that the only thing that occupies us is to know which you will choose,” he wrote.²



1. Cover, *Du Cinéma*, No. 1. Pictured: a still from *Etudes Sur Paris* (André Sauvage, 1928)



2. Questionnaire, “Are You Afraid of the Cinema?” *Du Cinéma*, No. 1.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

² André Delons, “Avez-Vous Peur du Cinéma?” *Du Cinéma: Revue de Critique et de Recherches Cinématographiques*, 1st Series, no.1, (December 1928), reprint edition, ed. Odette et Alain Virmaux (Paris: Pierre Lherminier Editeur, 1979), 3.

Among the range of film magazines of the late twenties and early thirties, Richard Abel has suggested that as a “specialized magazine” *Du Cinéma* was less successful than the spate of more mainstream, if independent, film publications. Insofar as *Du Cinéma* aligned itself with avant-garde and also leftist discourses associated with Surrealism and Soviet filmmaking, it was also a more costly, luxuriously produced publication that grew in high-cultural prestige when La Librairie Gallimard took over publication by the third issue (May 1929), rebranding it as *La Revue du Cinéma* under the iconic banner of the N.R.F. (*Nouvelle Revue Française*; Fig. 3). For Odette and Alain Virmaux, “This label alone, around 1930, situated the publication at a certain level of demand and rigor; it openly presented itself as a journal for a ‘happy few’ [Eng., sic] and targeted an intellectual clientele who were not satisfied with cinema periodicals of the traditional variety.”³



3. Cover, *La Revue du Cinéma*, No. 4, published by Gallimard, N.R.F.

The “traditional variety” of film-industrial magazines, such as *La Cinématographie Française* and *La Critique Cinématographique*, sustained their popularity in part by opening up trade discourses on production, exhibition, and distribution to non-specialized audiences; other magazines such as *Pour Vous* and *Cinémonde* flourished as cheaper, “folio-format weeklies” that targeted a wide, general readership, as Abel notes.⁴ Alternately, Jean Tedesco’s journal *Cinéa-Ciné-pour-tous* sustained its readership by maintaining close ties with ciné-clubs including the one held at Le Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier that became one of Paris’s first cinemas for avant-garde film under Tedesco’s direction. Originally launched by Louis Delluc in 1921 as the weekly *Cinéa*, by 1923 under Tedesco’s editorial leadership *Cinéa-Ciné-pour-tous* “consolidated its position as the most important film journal encouraging discussion of a national as well as an international film art.”⁵ Arguably becoming the platform for the most serious readers, spectators, and film theorists—Jean Epstein among them—*Cinéa-Ciné-pour-*

³ Odette and Alain Virmaux, “La Première ‘Revue du Cinéma’: Les Mythologies et Leur Contestation,” in *Du Cinéma* reprint ed., XXIII.

⁴ Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism Vol. II (1929-1959)* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 6-7.

⁵ Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism Vol. I (1907-1929)* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 323. Abel’s collections offer the most comprehensive history of French film magazines and criticism.

tous aimed to distinguish itself from *Cinémagazine*, which not only published in-depth film criticism, but also had ties to ciné-clubs and their devotees.⁶

One of the great differences between *Du Cinéma* and these more “traditional” film magazines was that *Du Cinéma* declined to develop its contents and discursive aims around the familiar discourse of cinephilia. As the driving force of generalist, ciné-club, and trade film publications, cinephilia, in Sarah Keller’s words, associates “the pleasurable, often intensely personal experience of being ‘at’ the movies (...) with the specific kinds of images encountered therein.”⁷ Considering the numerous journals aimed at cinema “lovers” of the 1920s, Keller is right when she suggests that cinephilia has thrived both as a historical discourse, and as a prolific, critical paradigm in the field of cinema studies, most notably as a way to respond to the changing nature of the medium, or to navigate new and “variable media environments.” “Perhaps this helps to explain its [cinephilia’s] constancy in the field,” Keller writes, “if sometimes the only consistent part of the cinema experience is the love one bears for the moving image.” I would add that cinephilia in fact bears such a co-extensive, syntonic relationship to the disciplinary ego of cinema studies that its potential limitations to film and cinema scholarship—from narrowing the (film and theoretical) canon to restricting research objectives, methods, and objects—have yet to be fully understood, much less resolved.

With *Du Cinema*, however, Corti, Auriol, and the contributors sought to widen the contemporary understanding of the cinema medium beyond the strictures of either pure love or its reservoirs of pleasurable affirmation. In his memoir, Corti summarized the logic that fuelled the conception of the magazine as a vehicle for criticism and, importantly, research: “I welcomed, in this period, a group of all the young people whose desire was to found a journal. The cinema already knew that it was an art; it had even produced major works in France and abroad; but if a whole literature was born, criticism, aesthetics, technique, if it already had its thinkers, like Delluc, it still lacked its research laboratory, its laboratory for ideas.”⁸ While this statement may not imply an overt hostility to cinephilia, it acknowledges the coherence of contemporary film culture that consolidated films and their critical discourses around a stable, discursive center intent on celebrating and resolving, rather than prodding and testing, the limits of cinematic signification, aesthetics, or spectatorship. The alternative “laboratory for ideas” that Corti calls for defined the style and aims of at least the first three issues of *Du Cinema*, making it an important precedent to Georges Bataille’s, Georges-Henri Rivière’s, and Carl Einstein’s avant-garde journal *Documents* that appeared a year later in 1929, and that approached art, ethnography and anthropology, “doctrines” and “variétés,” including film, as a dynamic and fluid research terrain.

But Corti’s laboratory concept also describes the function of La Librairie José Corti itself, which became the “social domicile” for the group behind the *Du Cinéma* experiment, and also the most daring avant-garde writers and humanist thinkers of this period—from André Breton and Louis Aragon to Robert Aron and, slightly later, Gaston Bachelard.⁹ Conversely, Corti himself regarded the cultural milieu of the cinema as an equally fertile social domicile for his own critical project. It was a social laboratory of sorts that allowed him to publicly promote the “alliance of literature and cinema” as an integral part of the

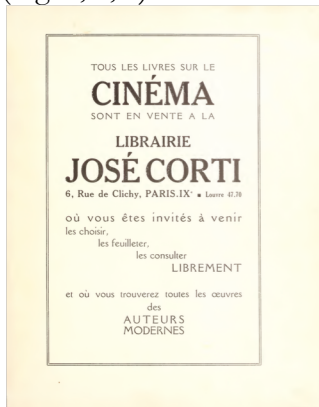
⁶ Abel, *French Film Theory*, Vol. I, p. 197-198.

⁷ Sarah Keller, “Cinephobia: To Wonder, to Worry,” *Lola* no. 5 (November, 2014), <http://www.lolajournal.com/5/cinephobia.html> (accessed July 3, 2015).

⁸ José Corti, *Souvenirs Désordonnés* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1983), p. 175.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

Corti brand of exploration. In this “*grande époque*,” as he described it, Corti maintained sales booths at alternative cinemas around Paris including the Ciné-Latin, Agriculteurs, and Studio 28 where in November 1930, during a screening of *L'Âge d'Or* (1930, Luis Buñuel), his literary wares were thrown about, stomped upon, and utterly torn apart by the conservative League of Patriots who stormed Studio 28 in protest of the film.¹⁰ Advertisements for La Librairie José Corti appeared throughout the journal, even well after Gallimard took over publication. These heralded the bookstore as Paris’ premiere location to peruse or purchase all of the most recent publications related to both the literary avant-garde and the cinema (Fig. 4, 5, 6).

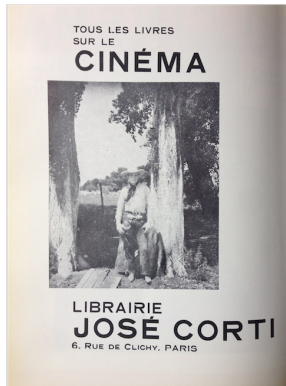


4. Advertisement, *Du Cinéma*, No. 1. “All the books on the cinema are on sale at the José Corti Bookstore, where you are invited to come to freely choose them, browse them, consult them and where you will find all the works of modern authors.”



5. Advertisement, *La Revue du Cinéma*, No. 4. Photo by Jacqueline Lamda.

¹⁰ Ibid., 177.



6. Advertisement, *La Revue du Cinéma*, Nos. 5, 6, 7, 9, 10.

In the rest of this essay, I consider Corti's early issues of *Du Cinéma* as part of an historical avant-garde complex that, in tandem with literary experiments, shaped another historical cinema discourse by looking beyond cinephilia as a structuring paradigm. Thus, I understand the journal as a prescient resource for a scholar like Keller who perceptively identifies *fear* as an equally powerful, historical feature of both the film text, and the experience of viewing film. Tracking and categorizing cinephobia as an anxious, spectatorial response to (aesthetic and cultural) loss, shifting moral values, and to being "captured" on film (and hence, to film's ability to produce worldly/material or uncanny representations), Keller suggests that "embracing the peculiar and shifting set of relationships between *fear and love* provides a more resilient foundation for thinking about the cinematic experience in a climate of constant change [...] than one predicated solely on love."¹¹ If Adrien Martin is correct in asserting that "we know almost nothing about the worldwide history of cinephilia," especially as a "motivating, and mobilizing passion," we know even less about fear and cinephobia as mobilizing, creative forces, or as historical, theoretical domains for understanding the cinema.¹²

Taking Keller's perceptive observations as an important cue, it would nevertheless be a misstep to categorize Delons' and *Du Cinéma's* opening question, "Are you afraid of the cinema?" as either a simple adoption of a "cinephobic" rhetoric, or a crafty inversion of a popular critical stance. Drawn not simply from Surrealism *tout court*, but from an historical mode of avant-garde criticism, literary experiment, and *research* more generally, Delons initially deployed the category of "fear" as a tool for exploring uncharted horizons of the cinema image and experience, and for unmooring the craft of cinema criticism from its stable, abiding anchor. Bringing together a diverse group of authors, approaches, and questions that, in Corti's words, "were headed toward the Unknown to discover the new,"¹³ the journal more broadly sought to expand and complicate the contemporary perception of the cinema as something that was, indeed, still unknown. Fear, in this sense, was a mode of inquiry that attempted to access, and in some cases excavate, "the limit point of knowledge" offered by the cinema—what Lee Edelman calls (albeit in another context) the "locus of

¹¹ Emphasis mine. Keller, "Cinephobia."

¹² Adrian Martin, "Cinephilia as War Machine," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* Vol. 50, Nos. 1 & 2 (Spring/Fall, 2009), 222-223.

¹³ Corti, *Souvenirs*, p. 69.

negativity.”¹⁴ What was truly non-conformist or “specialized,” then, about *Du Cinéma*, was that it not only strived to introduce the power of negativity to a wider audience, demonstrating that, far from being a stable, loveable object, the cinema was in fact a varied research field that proffered fewer answers than questions about the knowledge attained by the sensory phenomena of the screen. By using the enquête to introduce *Du Cinéma*’s critical sensibility, Delons also deployed the mobilizing force of avant-garde, dialectical research to unseal the cinema from a fate of immutability—and hence to dislodge its status in contemporary consciousness as, in Adorno’s words, “the idea of something eternal—of transcendence.”¹⁵ Just as Adorno’s negative dialectics “hinges” on the nonidentity between subject and object, “Are you afraid of the cinema?” was an attempt to resist the procedures of the traditional film magazine’s “compulsive identification” leading to uncritical affirmation or control of the object under the aegis of cinephilia.¹⁶

In what follows, I first contextualize *Du Cinéma*’s opening enquête or questionnaire within a history of Dada and Surrealism’s use of the form as a negative, dialectical approach. To be clear, this essay is not meant to be a complete history of the avant-garde questionnaire— a practice that Lori Cole suggests dates back to the Italian Renaissance practice of issuing *paragoni* (‘comparisons of the arts’) to prominent artists, and that later became popularized in Proust’s 1880s parlor game as it was additionally adopted in both the specialized and mainstream press including newspapers.¹⁷ I suggest that the avant-garde context surrounding the enquête provides another entry point to *Du Cinéma*’s early approach to cinematic research and inquiry beyond cinephilia, and before the journal was handed to Gallimard and the *N.R.F.* which removed the “critique and research” component of the title from the journal’s cover, adding “critique, research, and documents” above the internal masthead. This point matters: in contrast to the simplified vocation implied in Gallimard’s title, *La Revue du Cinéma*, “*Du Cinéma*” is not only more ambiguous, it is also somewhat untranslatable. “Of Cinema,” as one version might go, suggests an open terrain, where “the cinema” is not always a stable object, but where its diverse, centrifugal—material, conceptual, and non-conceptual— forces might be registered as part of a resistant critical enterprise, and a yet uncharted geography of sensory knowledge. As I go on to reassess “Are you afraid of the cinema?”, my aim is to bring additional nuance to our understanding of the literary avant-garde’s legacy in early cinematic thought. This legacy, I argue, is built on a kind of questioning and research that often refused to love the cinema outright. Rather, it identified the cinema’s far-reaching capacity in terms of loss and fear, but also the contingent, arbitrary, and ambiguous nature of cinematic images, myths, and questions themselves. Delons summarized this legacy in his “Chronicle of Lost Films,” published in *Du Cinéma*: “A mythology that is worth as much as the others unwinds around the cinema. It is better that the others, because it incessantly *destroys* itself. Don’t count on us to immobilize

¹⁴ Lee Edelman, “Antagonism, Negativity, and the Subject of Queer Theory,” *PMLA* 121.3 (May 2006), 822.

¹⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York, NY: Routledge, 1973), p. 95.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁷ Lori Cole, “What is the avant-garde? The questionnaire as historiography,” *Journal of Art Historiography* no. 5 (December, 2001), 2.

it.”¹⁸ In other words, in rejecting the immutability of the cinema, he consequently rejected the idea of its totalizing myth, which, as Adorno reminds, “is that which never changes.”¹⁹

L'Enquête: a query, a quest

Appearing in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*'s fourth edition (1762), “enquête” was defined as a procedure for research “that is done by order of Justice,” or, later, “by order of authority” (1932).²⁰ Etymologically, the word has always meant “research” (*enquête*, c. 1170), but in the 1778 edition of the *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française*, the word became associated with the verb “(s) enquêter,” to worry, which the author suggests was introduced “by corruption” of the more standard “s'inquiéter.”²¹ Here, we should hear an echo of Keller's titular assertion for cinephobia that elegantly dissects the term as an active balance between “to wonder” and “to worry.” In film history before 1920, trade press editors and popular critics alike commonly used the questionnaire format to simultaneously wonder and worry about new taxes and laws regulating cinema exhibition; the cinema's “corruption” of classic literary texts; or about the cinema's perceived “threat” to the theater and other traditional forms of entertainment. For example, in 1913 the illustrated daily *L'Excelsior* asked its readers, “Is there a crisis in our theaters to the cinema's advantage?” the responses to which subsequently reappeared in the film trade *Le Courrier Cinématographique*.²² While Georges Sebbag suggests that a 1918 enquête on humor and literature published in *Les Jeunes Lettres* had an important, early influence on nascent Surrealists, perhaps the most famous questionnaire in film history was Françoise Giroud's 1957 sociological survey for *Express* entitled “La Nouvelle Vague,” which queried the mores, politics, and attitudes of a generation of young people, to which the New Wave filmmakers belonged.²³ One of her questions would be heard a few years later spoken in the film *Chronique d'un été* (Jean Rouch, Edgar Morin, 1961): “*Etes-vous heureux?*” (Are you happy?).²⁴

The twentieth-century avant-garde questionnaire or enquête finds an early manifestation in the journal *Littérature*, which was founded by Breton, Aragon, and Philippe Souault in 1919. That year, the editors posed a seemingly benign question easily found in other literary and popular sources: “Why do you write?”²⁵ According to Sebbag, the impetus behind this open-ended question developed largely out of Breton's profound grief for the death of his conscripted friend Jacques Vaché, who had written to Breton from the front: “To write...certainly, and why not abstain from writing?”²⁶ But this grief was also a motor

¹⁸ My emphasis. André Delons, “Chronique des films perdus,” in *Du Cinéma* no. 2 (February 1929), reprint ed., p. 48.

¹⁹ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 56.

²⁰ *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 4th ed. (1787-88), 8th ed., (1932-35), Dictionnaires d'autrefois, <http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu.proxy.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/dicos/pubdico1look.pl?strippedhw=enqu%C3%AAt> (accessed July 25, 2015).

²¹ Jean-François Féraud, *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française* (1787-88), <http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu.proxy.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/dicos/pubdico1look.pl?strippedhw=enqu%C3%AAt> (accessed July 25, 2015).

²² Jennifer Wild, *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015), p. 176.

²³ Georges Sebbag, ed., *Enquêtes Surréalistes* (Paris: Jean Michel Place, 2004), 168. Françoise Giroud, “La Nouvelle Vague,” *L'Express* (December 5, 1957).

²⁴ Françoise Giroud, *La Nouvelle Vague: Portraits de la Jeunesse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 28.

²⁵ “Enquête,” *Littérature* No. 9 (November 1919), p. 1.

²⁶ As quoted in Sebbag, *Enquêtes*, p. 10.

for Breton's strategic development of an avant-garde tactics that would fulfill the artistic vision described in Vaché's last letter to Breton before his death: "[W]e resolved to leave the WORLD in a half-ignorance stunned to the point of some satisfying and perhaps scandalous manifestation."²⁷ Here, "half-ignorance" describes a spectatorial or receptive effect that was not based on pleasurable, affective, social, or identificatory edification, but rather on the destabilization of knowledge and Apollinarian surprise that the Dadaists transformed into a more violent shock.

Through correspondence, Breton came to discover that Tristan Tzara, leader of the Dada Movement and residing in Zürich at the time, shared this "passion for destruction," as Tzara put it, whereby a journal like *Littérature* could become, in Breton's words, "an attempt at ascendant demoralization."²⁸ The question, "Why do you write?" thus became a way to "demoralize" and destabilize the accepted understanding of literature especially as it was upheld in such a culturally sanctioned journal as the *N.R.F.* Sebbag notes that in 1919, the *N.R.F.* published an anonymous critique of the avant-garde "popycock" coming across the boarder in German Dada. Inspired by Tzara's reaction to these statements, Sebbag suggests that Breton developed *Littérature's* first questionnaire to "expose the conformism of their elders." Whereas Sebbag describes the questionnaire's function as a "work of public hygiene," I understand it more as an effort to confound, and hence to sully and undermine, the notion of a "clean," orderly perception of the work and function of literature, the act of writing, and literary reception.²⁹ As the questionnaire's seemingly transparent, democratic manner of generating data was assimilated to the aims of avant-garde critique, literary practice and research became like the components of a microscopic objective—lenses and mirrors that together magnify the view of an object for the sake of knowledge all the while deforming its "objective" appearance to the naked eye. Identifying the questionnaire as a literary device rather than as an analytical tool, Lori Cole clarifies that "the avant-garde questionnaire ultimately works against the form's mathematical logic to parody empiricism."³⁰ Between the published responses by conventionally esteemed cultural and literary figures such as Georges Lecomte, Président de la Société des gens de Lettres ("Why write? To try to see into myself more clearly [...] Before his white sheet of paper, the writer has the joy and the pride to feel that he only depends on himself. And this is one of the most noble joys."), to future members of Parisian Dada, such as Paul Dermée ("To enrage certain of my neighbors"), the reader cannot help but find herself in a "half-ignorance" (however humorous, for those in the know) as to the contemporary writer's true motivation. Although the *N.R.F.'s* editor in chief, Jacques Rivière, would write a lengthy defense of Dada in 1920 that emphasized its formless, negative aesthetics,³¹ this early enquête-critique of the *N.R.F.'s*

²⁷ Quoted in Sebbag, *Enquêtes*, 10. See also, Jacques Vaché, *Lettres de Guerre* (Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 2001), p. 47-49.

²⁸ As quoted in Sebbag, *Enquêtes*, 10.

²⁹ Sebbag, *Enquêtes*, p. 10-11.

³⁰ Cole, "What is the avant-garde?" p. 4.

³¹ Jacques Rivière, "Reconnaissance A Dada," *La Nouvelle Revue Française* 7e Année, No. 81 N.S., Tome XV (June 1, 1920), p. 232. "Dada, in what it has of the formless [*inform*], the negative, of what is exterior to art represents an accomplished style which has been the implicit dream of many generations of writers."

conservative, literary authority likely serves as background for understanding Breton's later distaste for the N.R.F.'s *La Revue du Cinéma*.³²

By 1922, *Littérature*'s questions became more personal when the editors asked, "What do you do when you are alone?"³³ The practice continued to evolve in the journal *La Révolution Surréaliste* when the young Surrealists asked perhaps their most famous and shockingly negative question of all in the first issue from 1924: "Is suicide a solution?"³⁴ In the same issue, the editors acknowledged the range of questionnaires that were appearing in all kinds of literary, popular, and philosophical publications at that time, and to which the Surrealists reserved the right to respond independently: *Les Cahiers Du Mois* ("on the reciprocal penetrability of the Orient and the Occident"); *Philosophies* ("Your meditation on God"); *Illusions* ("What does the cinema think: its influence on literature"); *Paris-Soir* ("What is the color of the light of the moon?").³⁵ With this list, the Surrealists playfully situated their enquête within the contemporary continuum, as it was used as a popular-cultural and even intellectual form for addressing different publics. And yet, theirs was clearly of an entirely different order than that of a large-circulation newspaper such as *Paris-Soir*.

Importantly, they specified that their question was not a moral one, but rather one concerning the will: "One lives, one dies. What is the role of will in all this? It seems that one kills oneself as one dreams. It is not a moral question that we pose." For Hal Foster, this formulation implies that life and death are not moral questions in and of themselves, and thus that volition is not central to their internal "mechanisms." Insofar as suicide "decentered," rather than defined the subject in Surrealist thought, Foster suggests that death emerges here as a dissociative, rather than Surrealist principle, and consequently opposes the central, liberating force of Bretonian Surrealism: love.³⁶ While the questionnaire additionally anticipates the Surrealists' later reception of Freud's concept of the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (translated in 1927), which was clearly manifested in the 1930 essay "The Sexual instinct and the death instinct" written in defense of *L'Âge d'Or*, as Foster notes, Surrealist love (or desire) and death play out in a history of Surrealist writing as a complicated dialectic that eschews "affirmative reconciliation," forwarding instead disruption and what Foster calls "a provocative ambiguity in artistic practice and cultural politics alike."³⁷ If Surrealist negativity is ultimately contained to the formal realm, as Jean-Paul Sartre criticized in "What is Literature?" (1949), then it follows for him that Surrealism constructs in order to (symbolically) destroy—an ultimately unconstructive negativity at odds with its own politics.³⁸ Answering the question "Why write?" in a post-WWII context as Sartre did certainly involved a different set of political stakes than it did in 1919 or 1924. But like the question "Are you afraid of the cinema?" to which I will return in the next section, the

³² See Dudley Andrew, "L'Âge d'Or and the Eroticism of the Spirit," in Ted Perry, ed., *Masterpieces of Modernist Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 125, and n. 36, p. 136. Evidence regarding Breton's dislike for *La Revue du Cinéma* stems from the publishing history surrounding the screenplay for Buñuel's *L'Âge d'Or*. It was published first by *La Revue du Cinéma*, rather than, as Breton wished, *La Révolution Surréaliste*.

³³ "Enquête," *Littérature*, N.S. no. 1 (March 1922), p. 1.

³⁴ "Enquête," *La Révolution Surréaliste*, No. 1 (December 1, 1924), p. 2.

³⁵ "Enquêtes," *La Révolution Surréaliste*, No. 1 (December 1, 1924), p. 31.

³⁶ Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 14.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* Trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 186, 194.

inherent negativity in “Is suicide a solution?” exchanged the preponderance of “resolution” for the “consequences of ideas”³⁹—what ultimately can be described as an abstract space for research on the often ambiguous limits of (social, moral, formal) knowledge and action.

By 1928, the questionnaire took a more explicit turn as a social-psychoanalytical practice when sessions were held to explore the sexual practices, mores, and preferences of Jacques Prévert, Paul Eluard, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, and many others, including the renowned film historian and former member of the Surrealist movement, Georges Sadoul.⁴⁰ While the form additionally took hold in the title of René Crevel’s 1929 episodic novel *Etés-vous fous?* (Are you crazy?), written six years before he committed suicide, the same year an enquête appeared in the second issue of the eponymous journal published by the counter-Surrealist group *Le Grand Jeu*. Penned by René Daumal, “Would you agree to sign the famous pact with the devil?” garnered responses from Crevel and Carlos Suarès.⁴¹ It also caught the attention of Breton, who critically remarked upon it in his second manifesto from 1930.⁴²

I must forgo a history of the fraught relationship between Breton and the members of *Le Grand Jeu*, but it is evident that their formulation of the questionnaire was intended to engage with Breton’s discursive, questioning logic even as they endeavored to disrupt its dominant control of the avant-garde field. Daumal went to some length to clarify that his question was as much about the endurance of religious concepts related to disembodied subjecthood (the soul; eternal life) as it was about signing a pact, entering into a formal agreement, making a wager: the epitome of the greatest game that defined the platform of action, production, and reception of *Le Grand Jeu* members. In the first issue, Roger Gilbert-Lecomte described their aim: “*Le Grand Jeu* is definitive; it isn’t played once. We wish to play it at every instant of our lives. It’s again to ‘he who loses wins.’ For it’s about losing yourself. We want to win. [...] Attitude: it is necessary to put one’s self in a state of complete receptivity, for this to be pure, to have made the void in one’s self.”⁴³

However, unlike “Is suicide a solution?” there is no particular war between morals and will going on in *Le Grand Jeu*’s devilish enquête.⁴⁴ Rather, it examined the limits of revolutionary thought, and, for Phil Powrie, the extent to which religious dogma and platitudes (e.g. “the famous pact with the devil”) in fact neutralized their own revolutionary potential.⁴⁵ While the project of *Le Grand Jeu*, according to Daumal, was to “demand a Revolution of Reality toward its source,” and was thus “the natural enemy of Homelands,

³⁹ *La Révolution Surréaliste* No. 2 (January 15, 1925), p. 8.

⁴⁰ Louis Aragon, Jacques Baron, Georges Sadoul, et. al., “Enquête sur la sexualité, deuxième séance,” unpublished manuscript (January 31, 1928),

http://www.andrebreton.fr/work/56600100600200?back_rql=Any%20X%20ORDERBY%20FTIRANK%28X%29%20DESC%20WHERE%20X%20has_text%20%22Sadoul%22&back_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.andrebreton.fr%2Fview%3F_fsb%3D1%26rql%3DSadoul%26subvid%3Dtsearch. (accessed July 2015). Sadoul also participated in the eleventh session that took place in January, 1931.

⁴¹ *Le Grand Jeu*, No. 2 (May 1929), No. 3 (October 1930), reprint in *L’Herne* No. 10 (Paris: L’Edition de L’Herne, n.d.), 85.

⁴² André Breton, “Second Manifesto of Surrealism,” in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 172.

⁴³ Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, “Avant-propos au premier numéro du *Grand Jeu*,” *Le Grand Jeu* No. 1, in *L’Herne*, p. 38.

⁴⁴ Cf. Marc Thivolet, “Présence du *Grand Jeu*,” in *L’Herne*, p. 29.

⁴⁵ Phil Powrie, *René Daumal: étude d’une obsession* (Geneva, Switzerland: Librairie Droz, 1990), 44.

imperialist States, the reigning classes, Religions, the Sorbonnes, the Academies,”⁴⁶ the enquête evoked religion as part of what Powrie calls *Le Grand Jeu*’s experimental metaphysics and “revolutionary Gnosticism.” I would call it both another attempt to circumvent Breton’s authority (in 1929 Breton openly criticized the “constant use” of the word “God” in texts by *Le Grand Jeu*),⁴⁷ and a critical research method into the “*terrible interdit*” (dreadful taboo; alt. trans. proscription, injunction). These were Breton’s words from the first Surrealist manifesto (1924) repeated by Crevel in his response to the *Le Grand Jeu*’s questionnaire: “Catechism, protocol, customs (*douanes*), entry tax (*octrois*), liturgy, cadaster and other diverse deviousness, as much spiritual as temporal [...] —it’s the Devil that awakens what André Breton calls the ‘dreadful taboo.’ [...] I see in the Devil, principle of disobedience toward current French jingoist and *religieuxard* mysticisms, the only instructor of fists and the soul.”⁴⁸

Although André Delons only began to publish in *Le Grand Jeu*’s third issue from 1930, hence after he developed *Du Cinéma*’s opening questionnaire, he was active early on in developing *Le Grand Jeu*’s approach, here again described by Gilbert-Lecomte: “[W]e do not constitute a literary group, but a union of men attached to the same research. This is our latest shared act: art, literature are for us only the means.”⁴⁹ Cinema was one of Delons’ central “means” through which he began to introduce his avant-garde research method to the traditional side of the film world, publishing three essays in *Cinéa-Ciné-Pour-Tous* in the spring of 1928. Along the course of these essays, a line of argumentation about the cinema, film aesthetics, and research begins to emerge. Initially, Delons treads lightly, offering a rather tentative, first critique of avant-garde and “pure” film style in light of Soviet film realism, which he argued was itself a “pure” cinema form for its comfortable manner of “living in the real.”⁵⁰ But as he grows more confident in an essay “Pour Plus de Franchise” (For More Candor), Delons forcefully lambasts conventional film criticism, arguing that it was high time to abandon the emphasis on film “technique,” and above all to stop attributing a film’s beauty to its formal originality or effectiveness: “For it [technique] is used today to defend too many wrong ideas.”⁵¹ Calling Epstein’s film style, for example, “society’s entertainment” (*divertissements mondains*), and deriding film critics who “stop half way” by distinguishing form from content —the least compromising and most acceptable approach, he argued— Delons claimed that “all or nothing is the only measure” in a world with both “too much and not enough” critical spirit aimed at the cinema.⁵² Film criticism, he subsequently argued in his last essay on “Comic Emotion” for Tedesco’s journal, was an opportunity to observe the “tumult” films introduced to the spectator’s customs and habits of mind.⁵³

⁴⁶ René Daumal, “Projet de presentation du Grand Jeu,” texte inédit, in *L’Herne*, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Michel Random, *Le Grand Jeu*, Vol. I (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1970), p. 45. Random supplies a thorough account of the meeting between the avant-gardes organized by Breton in 1929, where he made these remarks.

⁴⁸ René Crevel, “Enquête,” *Le Grand Jeu* no. 3, in *L’Herne*, p. 200.

⁴⁹ Gilbert-Lecomte, “Avant-propos,” *Le Grand Jeu* no. 1, in *L’Herne*, p. 39.

⁵⁰ André Delons, “Cinéma Pur et Cinéma Russe,” *Cinéa-Ciné-Pour-Tous* (March 15, 1928), in *Chroniques des Films Perdus*, ed. Alain and Odette Virmaux (Mortemart, France: Rougerie, 1995), 17-19.

⁵¹ André Delons, “Pour Plus de Franchise,” *Cinéa-Ciné-Pour-Tous* (May 1, 1928), in *Chroniques des Films Perdus*, p. 20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 21-22.

⁵³ André Delons, “L’Emotion Comique,” *Cinéa-Ciné-Pour-Tous* (June 1, 1928), in *Chroniques des Films Perdus*, p. 23.

Published just six months later, “Are you afraid of the cinema?” would be an attempt to explore just that: the receptive turmoil, the destruction of received ideas, and the inexplicable surges of unknown experience caused by the cinema. To have formulated this critical goal in the form of a question—a question that was “shaped by its experience, so as to catch up with the experience,” as Adorno wrote about the philosophical question—was likely one reason Delons emerged in Corti’s memory as “the philosopher, the thinker of *La Revue du Cinéma*.”⁵⁴ In the manner of Adorno, who asserted that to such questions “answers are not given, not made, not generated,” but were rather the “recoil of the unfolded transparent question itself,” Delons made it clear that he was not waiting for a simple response or answer. Rather, in Delons’ words, “I am asking you about your secret.”⁵⁵

Confessions: of Cinema and Fear

When *Du Cinéma* first addressed the public with Delons’ questionnaire, Delons, alongside others writing in *Du Cinéma*, as well as *Documents*, *Bifur*, *Variétés*, and other avant-garde journals, were all beginning to penetrate into the “dreadful taboos” limiting both traditional and avant-garde film criticism, theory, and also form. For, at this moment Delons found himself enmeshed in an avant-garde current of dialectical research—what *Le Grand Jeu* members would eventually conceive as a “Dialectic of Revolt,” and what Robert Aron (director of *Du Cinéma* beginning in the third issue) summed up as “the revenge of the concrete on the abstract, of personal human factors on artificial and collective mechanisms, whether born from sheer idealism or from the inverse idealism that makes up materialism.”⁵⁶ Although Aron’s comment was published in 1932, after the demise of *La Revue du Cinéma*, and after he became centrally involved in the Personalist movement and the journal *L’Ordre Nouveau*, his stance articulates the crux of the question “Are you afraid of the cinema?” insofar as it intended to reroute the idealism that pervaded both contemporary film criticism and theory, and the “artificial” conception of the film spectator. I thus understand *Du Cinéma*’s opening enquête as both a diagnostic procedure regarding contemporary film culture at large, and a foray into a negative, dialectical research method that further developed in subsequent years as oppositional Surrealist groups and leftist politics began to challenge Surrealism’s project as a mode of abstract, ideological or “identitarian” thinking. “The more relentlessly our identitarian thinking besets its object,” Adorno wrote, “the farther will it take us from the identity of the object.”⁵⁷

Exploring the identity of the cinema-object as a mutable, and uncontainable force was central to Delons’ project. He explained that in posing the question, “Are you afraid of the cinema,” he sought an understanding of the cinema neither as a well-known public establishment, nor as a mere cultural product that had been “emboldened by annoyance, horror, or jokes.” Nor was he interested in knowing anyone’s personal opinion about the

⁵⁴ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 63. José Corti, letter to Alain and Odette Virmaux (October 4, 1983), cited in *Chroniques des Films Perdus*, n. 1, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Delons, “Avez-Vous Peur du Cinéma?”, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Gilbert-Lecomte’s and Daumal’s “La Dialectique de la Révolte” was intended for the fourth, unpublished issue of *Le Grand Jeu*. Reprint in Michel Random, *Le Grand Jeu*, Vol. II (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1970), 51-60. Robert Aron, *Cahiers de revendications*, p. 836, as quoted in Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 122.

⁵⁷ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 149.

“future” of the cinema, the cinema’s “possibilities,” or what “remains to be done” with film. Above all, what did not interest Delons, or *Du Cinéma* for that matter, was generating further discussion about whether the cinema was an art. That question had dominated the “traditional variety” of film journals throughout the teens and twenties as they, alongside the film industry, strived to elevate and legitimize the cinema’s cultural and artistic status among the other arts and their publics. “I do not know the meaning of the word ‘art’ except as an instrumental, provisional form of destiny, desire, or a being’s magic,” Delons stated. Instead, he proposed the following definition of the cinema on the first page of the issue:

It will not be too soon to identify the cinema as a force, to recognize it as an act, to use it as a sign...Go on your way if you do not want to learn from it, know from it, live certain immediate manifestations of the spirit through it, for example chance; for example, memory, for example humor, for example the night. Finally, why aren’t you afraid... seeing that, above all, the cinema, in its nature as by its experiences, finds itself to be at the same time the place of the arbitrary and the inevitable?⁵⁸

If such a mode of inquiry made the reader feel too ill at ease, he suggested she consider the meaning of “cinematographic revelation,” or reflect on films that, through tragic, unexpected, derogatory, or surprising moments, left her feeling disturbed or uneasy.

Initially encouraging readers to mail in their “secrets,” Delons later emphasized that the questionnaire did not call for theoretical or simply instantaneous responses, but rather “confessions.”⁵⁹ On the one hand, Delons’ particular urging here suggests an intervention into the form of the questionnaire itself, one that contravened the form’s empirical premise with the risk or wager of a personal admission, quite possibly of guilt or shame (or even guilty pleasure). Insofar as the questionnaire positioned *Du Cinéma* as a contrived confessor of sorts, rather than simply producing a parody of the form this formulation strived to open up a space where cinematic reception—and subjective experience—was released from its idealist formation within an equally idealist construct of the cinema’s aesthetic and public realms. Public and private spheres are thus broken down in this paradigm, constituting a critical reversal whereby the cinema and the subject no longer maintain their reciprocal autonomy, but were redressed into a dialectical interrelationship. While Delons’ loftiest goal was certainly the liberation of both form and thought, his most basic aim in using the enquête, it seems, was to undermine the positivistic currents of his time that limited the range and expression of knowledge to the empiricist domain, and that consequently left film criticism and reception restricted by the myth of objectivity.

Thus, and on the other hand, Delons’ language and approach resonates with the practice of *Le Grand Jeu* that emphasized the negative poetics of Rimbaud, a singularly key figure for the group. “Since Rimbaud,” Gilbert-Lecomte wrote in the first issue of *Le Grand Jeu*, “all writers, all artists, who have some value for us—they will recognize themselves here— have they had any other goal than to destroy ‘Literature’ and ‘Art?’ In general, the work of all those spirits worthy of this name does it not reduce itself to the destruction of the idols True-Good-Beautiful (*Vrai-Bien-Beau*) and of everything that makes up the pseudo-reality upon which the hydrocephalic brains of certain latecomers still rests?”⁶⁰ Although the

⁵⁸ Delons, “Avez-Vous Peur du Cinéma?” reprint ed., p. 3.

⁵⁹ Delons, “Avez-Vous Peur du Cinéma?” *Du Cinéma*, No. 2. (February 1928), reprint ed., p. 61.

⁶⁰ Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, “La force des renoncements,” *Le Grand Jeu*, No. 1, in *L’Herne*, p. 47.

latter jab was unambiguously aimed at Bretonian Surrealism, I want to use these assertions to hear Delons' request for confessions in a Rimbaudian key. From his poem "Eternity:" "Sentinel soul/Let us whisper the *confession*/Of the night so void/And of the day on fire./From human approval,/From common impulses/Here you free yourself/And fly off as you will."⁶¹

As Carrie Noland points out, Rimbaud's oeuvre is replete with devices drawn from the confessional genre, both as parody and as a means to self-knowledge.⁶² But she also finds an important correlation between Rimbaud's confessional practice and Adorno's negative dialectics, whereby the latter is conceived as working in the confessional, lyrical vein, and as performing the "ruse" of linking philosophical inquiry to the intimate, but public mode, of confession.⁶³ Most important for the present study is how, for Noland, their confessional dialectics lead to "immanent critique," despite Rimbaud's and Adorno's different socio-historical contexts that necessarily inform how they expose the technological mediation, hence the heteronomy of their time.⁶⁴ Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* thus emerges as the most prescient philosophical mode for understanding avant-garde poetry as a "form of reflection—and a form of art—that would reverse philosophy's momentum, placing the subject in jeopardy but at the same time recalling this subject's essential mobility, its unstable nature."⁶⁵ Delons' questionnaire had a similar goal. By evoking the confessional mode in the context of cinematic reception, he asks readers to adopt, in Noland's words, "an artistic consciousness that confesses mediation (that 'asserts' a knowledge of its own 'inauthenticity') but seeks in this very confession a redefinition of the subject and a reconceptualization of that subject's relation to objective conditions."⁶⁶ But the question remains: how did readers respond to Delons' question, and did their responses mete out this underlying, philosophical imperative?

Among the first published responses was one by filmmaker Germaine Dulac, who wrote: "Afraid of the cinema...Why?... I have never been afraid of the future (of life) of unknown worlds....But the past (death)... of what we think we know...Abstract or concrete, the cinema, powerful *objectif*, perceives and records beyond our visual limits. I am not afraid of the cinema, but only of our pride in its place, and our idiotic routine."⁶⁷ "Idiotic routine," in this context refers to film exhibition and film programming, practices which had evolved in the nineteen teens and twenties in concert with the legitimization movement's investment in classical theater and, hence, classical receptive regimes.⁶⁸ René Clair, whose response was published alongside Dulac's, supported her position: "The world to which the screen opens, its arbitrary, its logic also, finally its poetry, and that's all that I demand of it, pleases me to such a point that it seems impossible to be afraid of it. Are you really that fearful? It's the other world that frightens me, the one which begins around the frame [...]"

⁶¹ My emphasis. Arthur Rimbaud, "Eternity," in *Rimbaud Complete Works, selected letters: a bilingual edition*, trans. Wallace Fowle (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 187. I have amended this translation: where Fowle translates "l'aveu" as "vow," I translate as "confession."

⁶² Carrie Noland, *Poetry at Stake: Lyric Aesthetics and the Challenge of Technology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 31-32.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84. See esp. p. 72-86.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Ellipses in the original. Germaine Dulac, response, *Du Cinéma*, No. 1, reprint ed., p. 4.

⁶⁸ See Wild, *The Parisian Avant-Garde*, esp. ch. 4.

Don't ask me for more about it. I am not of the temper to give up all of my secrets at once."⁶⁹

I would argue that, on a basic level, Dulac and Clair both missed the boat on this question, so to speak. That is, while they could affirm the life force provided by the cinema—its “poetry,” its perceptual capacities beyond the human—and while Dulac pointed her critique at the “objective” conditions of the cinema’s socio-cultural incarnation, they nevertheless could not abandon themselves to the “secretive,” confessional mode, and thus fell short of either a “redefinition of the subject,” or a revised sense of knowledge constituted by the mutable object of cinema. However implicitly, Dulac and Clair thereby rejected Delons’ avant-garde mode of inquiry that exchanged purely formal and narrative concerns, as well as those related to artistic quality and legitimacy, in order to probe the strictures governing the cinema’s normative relationship to the social and also material questions of human experience.

However, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, former Dadaist and editor of the journal *Bifur*, seemed to have grasped the aim of the questionnaire in his response, including Delons’ implicit critique of Surrealism *d’après* Le Grand Jeu. It is worth quoting at length:

If one of his own creations causes man to be afraid, it is of course the cinema. [...] The world surrounds our protective shell. We do not have any stronger desire than to cross this barrier in order to penetrate this universe [...]. The successive bankruptcies of all the astronomic attempts destined to break out of subjectivism and penetrate into the vicinity of the surreal universe has driven us to singular extremities. The smallest miracle clarified things for a moment.

But only a moment. For, in truth, a miracle that realizes itself isn’t a miracle. It shows only that we naturalize ourselves straight away. [...] [Miracles] are about satisfying oneself at little cost, and without a doubt the apparition of events that are contrary to every law such that we devise a law, would throw man into a hole of such hideous felicity that the human question would be liquidated in one blow.

Certainly, we don’t expect the cinema to lead us to such a point but it would be beautiful if it opened the first portholes onto the metaphysical sea, permitting us to tremble under the breath of unknown air.

The weapons that the cinema introduces into the interstices of the unknown makes signs appear for us, they are the presence of the animate behind the inanimate and the inanimate behind the animate, and the now (*maintenant*), as one pleases, of time.⁷⁰

To be clear, Ribemont-Dessaignes’s emphasis is not on miracles—neither the mysterious procedures of Surrealism nor the myths and fantasies of state religions that dissolved the concrete questions of the human experience in one fell swoop. If cinema had the capacity to mystify us with its magical, say, miraculous technology, it did so by providing a glimpse into a metaphysical domain that both freely circulated like lava flowing from Mount Etna, and

⁶⁹ René Clair, response, *Du Cinéma*, No. 1, reprint ed., p. 4.

⁷⁰ Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, response, *Du Cinéma*, No. 1, reprint ed., p. 4.

that could quite possibly “seize your throat in the corner of a wood.”⁷¹ While Ribemont-Dessaignes identified Chaplin’s and Man Ray’s films as immediately giving rise to fear, he also privileged the power of “those films whose names never come to me, but whose presence knocks on my door.” Even nameless, forgotten, or “lost” films—a concept Delons explored at length, provided access to a dialectical domain where “fantastic coincidences, the exceptional immensity of love [...] can finally sully the bureaucrat of the soul and the eye.” In this phrase lies a profound critique of the systems that pervaded the contemporary critical spirit, tempting it to categorize experience according to “objective conditions” and the laws of positivism. But even more, Ribemont-Dessaignes’s response accomplishes something far more than those from Dulac, Delluc, or even Robert Desnos, who also replied to the questionnaire: in conjuring “his own presence” on the screen not as an *image*, but as “the void of all that I do not know,” Ribemont-Dessaignes found a way to think against his own thought and being, what Adorno would suggest as one definition of dialectics.⁷² He also located “the limit point of knowledge” as a cinematic possibility— an ultimately productive if unfathomable negativity that could not be accessed using the channels of love, but that could be confessed through the vehicle of fear.

Although it is evident that Delons and *Du Cinéma*, in their choice of published responses, selectively attempted to wed their avant-garde film research to both the film community (Dulac, Clair, Jean Benoît-Lévy) and the literary avant-garde working contra Breton in 1928 (Desnos, Ribemont-Dessaignes, and Jules Supervielle), “Are you afraid of the cinema?” was short winded, ceasing after the second issue. By the third issue, while still named *Du Cinéma* but no longer published by Corti, the journal offered a “permanent inquiry” under the umbrella title “Le Cinéma et les Mœurs” (The Cinema and Customs; alt. trans. morals). At this moment, we can hear a different ring to Gallimard’s inaugural question in this series, one that takes on a strikingly more affirmative tone: “What have you learned at the cinema?”

A survey of the issues of *Du Cinéma/La Revue du Cinéma* through 1930 indeed offers a view of the progressive transformation of an explicitly avant-garde journal based in experimental research to one that was slightly more of the “traditional variety.” There is more research to be done about how Robert Aron’s directorship may have influenced the journal’s transformation, especially within the context of his wide-ranging political philosophy related to the Personalist and Non-Conformist movements developed in the early 1930s in collaboration with Arnaud Dandieu.⁷³ Insofar as Aron had ties to the journal *Esprit*, where Bazin published some of his first essays, it thus remains to be seen how the history of *La Revue du Cinéma* might contribute more insight into *Esprit*’s approach to cinematic research after 1932. Nevertheless, even as *La Revue du Cinéma* continued to publish on Soviet filmmaking, Dalí’s and Louis Buñuel’s *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), and from time to time included essays by Desnos, Soupault, Michel Leiris, Georg Grosz, Walter Ruttmann, and even Sigfried Kracauer, the more experimental discourses of the Corti years became fewer and further between as the journal increasingly became an organ of Gallimard and N.R.F. Gone were speculative essays on subjects such as “The Symbol of Blood” (Louis Chavance), or “Cinema and Love,” by Bernard Brunius, who preferred to write about what

⁷¹ Ribemont-Dessaignes’ reference to Etna is doubtless an homage to Jean Epstein’s 1926 book and meditation on the volcano in *Le Cinématographe vu de l’Etna* (Paris: Les Écrivains Réunis, 1926).

⁷² See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 24, and 141.

⁷³ On Dandieu and *Documents*, see Christian Roy, “Arnaud Dandieu and the Epistemology of *Documents*,” *Papers of Surrealism*, No. 7 (2007).

love was not, exchanging any definitive definition of love for eroticism: “I attach too much value to the things of Love so not to be moved too profoundly. You also know better than me the psychological danger of emotions with no outcome. A final spasm is necessary. Love or Death. No one can make me choose.”⁷⁴ Gone also were experimental visual arguments, such as the one by Brunius on post cards, “bad taste,” and “popular art,” an approach that would become ubiquitous in *Documents* and indicative of its singular style of material, philosophical, and humanistic research (Fig. 7, 8).⁷⁵



7. J. Bernard Brunius, “Le Cinéma et les Mœurs: La Carte Postale,” *Du Cinéma*, No. 3.



8. J. Bernard Brunius, “Le Cinéma et les Mœurs: La Carte Postale,” *Du Cinéma*, No. 3.

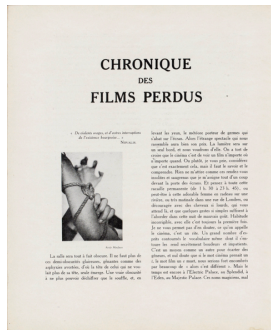
Perhaps more than anyone else, however, Delons should be regarded as the figure who imprinted the Corti brand “of cinema” with its haunting negativity, a practice Delons did not abandon even after the tides turned *La Revue du Cinéma* toward more solid critical ground. This is to say that Delons did not cease to investigate the cinema as a mutable, often formless entity, one that offered “violent storms, and other interruptions of bourgeois existence.” This was the epigraph by Novalis that preceded the second installation of his “Chronicle of Lost Films,” which was accompanied by an evocative photograph of bound arms and hands by fellow Grand Jeu participant, Artür Harfaux (Fig. 9).⁷⁶ This series of

⁷⁴ J. Bernard Brunius, “Le Cinéma et les Mœurs: Le Cinéma et L’Amour,” *Du Cinéma*, No. 1, reprint ed., p. 10-11.

⁷⁵ J. Bernard Brunius, “Le Cinéma et les Mœurs: La Carte Postale,” *Du Cinéma*, No. 3 (May 1929), reprint ed., p. 94-95.

⁷⁶ André Delons, “Chronique des films Perdus,” *Du Cinéma*, No. 2, reprint ed., p. 46.

articles published in the first three issues of *Du Cinéma* arguably premised its inquiry on the very idea of lostness, the inaccessible, and the fugitive areas of sensation and knowledge acquired before the screen. The lost film, he explained, was defined by his spectatorial attraction toward what was muddled, poorly done, and his absolute admiration of all things great and bizarre (“*toute grandeur insolite.*”)⁷⁷ Lost films were those forbidden by “art lovers” who valued the spectacular technique behind Abel Gance’s triple-screen epic *Napoleon* (1927, Films Abel Gance), and who applauded *Ben Hur* (1925, Fred Niblo, MGM) “using only their finger tips.”⁷⁸



9. André Delons, “Chronique des Films Perdus,” *Du Cinéma* No. 2. Photo by Artür Harfaux.

From Delons’ point of view, the more the cinema loses itself, which is to say, the more the cinema forgets to be “eternal,” gives itself over to “unexplainable love,” and revises bad and received ideas, the more the cinema productively facilitates spectatorial confusion and the posing of the following question: “Where am I?”⁷⁹ Lost films displaced spectators in a world they thought they knew. Such films also provided an encounter, he argued, with diverse hearts and bodies, and fear as much as hope. Finally, this cinema, the one Delons later probed in his “Chronicle of the Evil Eye” (*Chronique du Mauvais Oeil*), was a self-reflexive domain capable of a “disembodied” analysis of its own desires, including its abject, corrupt, and decadent principles that were perceptible not in the image of the beautiful stars or *vedettes*, but only in the ugly ones.⁸⁰ This cinema’s negative, plastic range was ultimately, and above all, nothing less than an “exercise in oblivion” (*l’oubli*).⁸¹ The motivating, mobilizing force of such an exercise in negativity should not be underestimated. For it alone could generate a confession about perhaps the greatest human fear of all: not simply the fear of death, but the fear of being forgotten.

⁷⁷ André Delons, “Chronique des films Perdus,” *Du Cinéma*, No. 1 (December 1928), reprint ed., p. 16.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

⁸⁰ André Delons, “Les Vedettes Laidies,” *La Revue Du Cinéma*, No. 23 (June 1931).

⁸¹ André Delons, “Chronique des films Perdus,” *Du Cinéma*, No. 3 (May 1929), reprint ed., p. 88.

